

TO BREAK  
THE STILLNESS



# TO BREAK THE STILLNESS

2018-2019 WITS Student Anthology

Writers in the Schools (WITS) is a part of the Youth Programs of Literary Arts, a community-based nonprofit literary organization centered in Portland, Oregon, whose mission is to engage readers, support writers, and inspire the next generation with great literature.



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# *To Break the Stillness*

2018-2019 WITS Student Anthology

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# Introduction

Dear Reader,

This summer, looking over our ever-growing collection of Writers in the Schools (WITS) anthologies, I felt a bit of awe. Going back to the 2000-2001 school year, these books record the voices of two decades of Portland youth. Over the years, the anthologies have grown bigger and glossier, but from the very beginning, they have served to document the profound, poetic, and fearless voices of high school students. Together, they make a remarkable history.

WITS brings together professional writers and high school students for in-depth creative writing residencies spanning a semester; the result is the stunning writing, in every genre, that is presented here. In addition, as young people learn that writing can be a mode of self-expression, they become more able to articulate their own beliefs and interests. When their stories are valued, it contributes to confidence, stronger identity, and a sense of accomplishment that research shows leads to higher achievement in every aspect of their studies.

This year's anthology, *To Break the Stillness*, reflects the very best of Writers in the Schools in 71 brilliant pieces. In prose, poetry, and graphic arts, students tackle the topics of our world in language that sings. Within its covers are pieces that speak on complicated families, race, and violence; as well as those that leap into imaginary worlds that are magical and sometimes frightening. From beginning to end, this is an authoritative reflection of the work that 23 WITS writers and over 850 students created in our 2018-19 creative writing workshops.

WITS is just one aspect of Literary Arts' Youth Programs work. Over the course of the last school year, we served more than 4,000 students through WITS, Students to the Schnitz, the College Essay Mentoring Project, and the all-city poetry slam Verselandia! In addition, we held

writing workshops at the Portland Book Festival, brought seven world-famous authors for Q&As at high schools, and produced a brand new poetry slam in east Multnomah County.

These inspiring and thought-provoking experiences would not be possible without the support of our many partners, including school principals, the talented high school teachers who host the residencies, librarians and media specialists, WITS liaisons, and the hard work of our program staff. Special thanks goes to Olivia Jones-Hall, who edited and produced this flawless and lyrical book.

If you value silence, look away: in *To Break the Stillness*, young people speak with powerful, vital voices that demand to be heard. I hope you enjoy and appreciate it as much as I do.

Ramiza Koya

*Director of Youth Programs*

# I Shall Arise and Go Now

Gustav Baur

LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: MATT SMITH

A decade and a half I have lived and traveled a path of raw beauty.  
Never have I considered any other way to be.  
It lies among the evergreens and the ferns of my childhood.  
It wanders through the underbrush, frolicking like a toddler.

It goes over hills and knolls, in one side of a creek and out the other.  
It traverses the distance with an easygoing calm.  
Nowhere else in my life have I seen such simple serenity.  
The birds sing in the treetops, serenading one another.

The squirrels, blissfully living, collect their winter stores.  
The sword ferns moving gracefully aside as you pass.  
The breeze dancing among the conifers, whispering a long-lost lullaby.  
No one dares to break the stillness of breathtaking peace.

Seasons change, winter falls and all is muted under a downy  
dreamscape.  
Aha! Not all is lost, my friend.  
The thrush still sings to his lover in the crook of a branch, high above  
the world.  
The bear, though deep in blissful rest, brings a warm home to a cold  
hard land.  
The licorice fern, clinging desperately to its tree, awaits a brighter  
dawn.  
The worm gives back to its home, supplying life long after it is gone.  
Nothing can compare to the interdependence of life in motion.  
It breathes like a living being, a heart beating with the pulse of  
vitality.

It changes like a child's face, finding their place to be in the world.  
It feels the way a mother feels every pain of her child as if it were her  
own.

It lives through those who live, tranquility and serenity in its mere  
existence.

This is my first true love, and it will be my last breath of  
exultant prayer.

The all-consuming, calamitous fire brings hell to a haven of life.  
Nothing stands between death and life as beauty is sucked dry.  
The birds have all fled, their young crying in fear, pleading for  
deliverance.

The deer struggle, clawing desperately at the cusp of life, crumbling  
and shattered.

The ferns smolder, proud purpose ebbing away into heat and ash and  
death.

The creek is no more, the life-giving aqua giving way to a tsunami of  
sorrow.

Nowhere is untamed vitality to be seen, pillaged by the reckless  
slaughter.

It bleeds from every orifice and inch of its once bountiful tenement.  
It coughs ash and choking smoke from ransacked cornucopias of  
innocence.

It writhes in pain as nothing is spared, brutally and suddenly snuffed  
out.

It gives up its soul, what once was found is lost in seas of ash and grief.  
My spirit is ripped from my body, severed with no hope of healing.

As I sit an ocean away, I watch the men in suits impassionately  
dismiss.

As I watch with an aching heart, my lifeline is torn asunder and tossed  
aside.

As I die inside, my memories and laughter turn to ash and smoke.

As I feel my very soul chopped into pieces with a dull blade, I cry.

I cry not for myself, but for my children, who will never know the stillness.

I cry not for myself, but for the land, raped and disregarded, scarred forever.

I cry not for myself, but for the jays, standing over charred bones of grief.

I cry not for myself, but for the doe nosing the crumbling ashes of hope dashed asunder.

I live in exile from the land of milk and honey of my youth, never to return.

I have no choice, for to return would be to face the holocaust, look it in the eye.

I am a man strong in spirit, but my spirit has been broken and shoddily repaired.

I cannot bear to break again what has been broken, suffer what has already been suffered.

I often contemplate what I have forever lost. The fern-freckled knolls swaying in the breeze. The awesome grace which the massive trees held. The magical world where cars and people and cities and scars upon the land are far, far away and impossible to conceive. I remember the chaotic silence, teeming with unseen life, reckless yet impossibly reverent. I dream vividly of hearing the breeze waltz through the green boughs of vaulting heights immortal.

The forest is calling and I must go; for there, I shall find peace.

# The Color of Flower

Bre Too

CLEVELAND HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: RYAN NAKANO

Yellow strap connecting to the man's chest

Yellow color hat on top of the man's head

Yellow light color a man wearing

The man has a basket on his back

The red white color flower heavy as gold

The sound of breezy wind flowing

Man on his knees trying to rise up

The flower woman lifts the basket as if it were a light feather

# Through the Snow

*Recipient of the Glimmer Train Prize for Fiction*

Jonah Wald

FRANKLIN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: MARK POMEROY

A man rounded a curve in the road driving a small, bluish-green, rust-covered car. He was average in almost every way imaginable; five-foot-eleven, short hair, tan skin, a smile that would disappear in a crowd, however, he was easily distinguishable against the backdrop of society due to his thin stature. A mantis among humans is what the kids in school used to call him. No matter how hard he tried to fit in and disappear from the world, there was nothing he could do to conceal himself. Alongside the obvious features, there were small details that only the most observant person would notice. A small string bracelet from a trip across the Hawaiian islands hung from his wrist, a twig was sewn into the fabric of his sun bleached backpack, and the outline of a shell gathered from the Oregon coast was visible in his jacket pocket. Julian took pride in these small details and wanted to gather more on his trip through Europe, but felt he had failed spectacularly. However, the trip was not yet over. The trip was meant to be one on which he would travel through the countryside of Europe with no more than he could carry on his back and only the money he had brought with him. This trip, full of long nights of travel, was an experience that he would surely gain something from, although he wasn't sure what it would be. Either way, after three additional nights away from home, all he wanted to do was get home to his small apartment and have a full night of rest.

Driving through the German countryside, Julian cast his thoughts to the small train station that would connect him to the docks he needed to reach in order to complete his journey home. He could feel the darkness of the winter night surrounding him. It was impenetrable, and only just kept at bay by the shining headlights of the old car he had borrowed. The tendrils of darkness reaching from the night tugged at his eyelids, begging him to let them close. He checked the map—at



least two hours of driving left before he would be able to rest at the train station. Although he knew this trip was a rare experience, Julian was ready for it to come to an end. He could feel the peace of the hardwired daily routine he had developed so quickly after college. There was something reassuring about the repetitive schedule. He would wake up, go to work, return home, and repeat. Against the dim shine of the car headlights, Julian could see the edges of the endless, rolling green fields that lay alongside the small country road on which he drove. With the smooth vibration of the engine beneath his feet acting as a grinding lullaby, Julian felt a blanket of peace fall over himself; he was on his way home. No more confusion he would have to think through or obstacles he would need to navigate. Soon he would fall back into the regular schedule that had allowed him to steer through his daily life. Despite this calm Julian had found, he also began to notice that the speed of the wind was beginning to pick up.

A storm rolled over the horizon and filled the sky with dark clouds. Wind rushed down the roadway and Julian could feel it pushing against the sides of the car. Snow began to fall heavily, blanketing the dark road with a light dusting of white. Julian could feel the tires of the old car he drove lose solid contact with the road several times. As Julian continued his journey, the white snow began to collect in perilously deep drifts along portions of the small road that wound through the fields like a snake. Feeling the cold air creep around the windows of the car and the layer of dry snow crunch beneath the tires of the old vehicle, Julian rounded a bend in the road. The glow of a campfire shone through the falling snow and thick groupings of trees, a call for help through the night. Unable to ignore the call for help, Julian stopped the car and began to march through the ever deepening snow to see who was so unfortunate as to be stuck in such a snowstorm with no shelter. Julian wiped the sweat from his face and waited for his heartbeat to slow after the hike in from the road.

“Hello?” Julian called through the falling snow. “What are you doing out here in this type of weather?”

The figure turned away from the small fire, allowing Julian to observe his aged face and long beard. The man replied with a thick accent that Julian couldn't recognize. "I was trying to go to the next town, the one with the train station."

Under the silent watch of the soft snow, Julian observed the man's ungloved, shaking hands. He, himself, having only been in the snow for mere minutes, had begun to feel the freezing cold darkness of the night seep through his clothing. Wanting to extend any hospitality he had to the old man, Julian offered, "I'll give you a ride to the train station. In fact, I'm headed there myself."

"Thank you very much," the old man replied through his chattering teeth. The two men trudged through the snow, hopped onto the road, and stepped into the car.

Once they returned to the car, Julian set out slowly on the snow-covered road and was able to get a better look at the man who had been stuck in the dark woods. He stole glances at the man which revealed greasy hair, wet dirty clothes, and calloused hands with dirt caked fingernails. The smoky smell of a campfire emitting from the man's many layers of clothes filled the air within the small car.

"What's your name?" Julian asked, keeping his eyes set firmly on the illuminated stretch of road in front of him.

"Marco," the old man replied in a small voice that could hardly be heard over the rumbling of the engine. Marco fiddled quietly with a loose thread from his dirty brown-green sweater.

"Why were you trying to travel on foot through the middle of nowhere at night?" Julian inquired.

"I couldn't buy a car. There was nothing else I could do," Marco responded. Julian fell silent as the tension that hung in the air between them grew uncomfortably strong after the short and stifled exchange of words. Marco continued, "What is an American doing out in this countryside?"

"I was only trying to make it to the train station. I was trying to backpack through Europe. I wanted to see and learn as much as I could,

because I don't think I'll be able to make the trip out here again." Glad to have someone he could share his feelings with Julian continued, "But the trip didn't really go as planned. I had to make a couple extra stops, drive all night, and try to make the little money I brought with me last as long as possible. But the worst part of it all is that I don't feel like I'll be able to take anything from this trip with me. I feel like it has all gone so fast and I haven't been able to stop and really enjoy or take in the experiences around me."

Marco turned his head towards the window, looking at his reflection in the glass separating him from the cold as his breath fogged up the window. "I used to travel a lot," Marco said softly, "still do. I travel from street to street and town to town. Looking at the world and catching glimpses of people's lives. There is never anything worthwhile enough to stay in one place, no place to call home, so I keep on moving every day of the week. Trying to make the money last, like you said."

As Marco caught Julian stealing another glance in his direction, he pulled his coat up in a quick motion as if attempting to disappear into it. The two drove in silence. The low breathing of each man was covered up by the hum of the motor and the crunch of the snow beneath the car tires. Neither person felt the need to cast a word into the air, so they both sat looking out of the windows as the soft snow continued to fall. Thanks to the tree cover, most of the road only held a light dusting of snow, not enough to worry Julian and cause him to pull the pickup off of the road until morning. Julian again began to feel his tired eyelids droop, and he could sense sleep trying to tug his consciousness away from him.

"Hey, you're looking tired," Marco said, "Why don't you let me finish the drive? We shouldn't be far now."

Apprehensive, Julian couldn't reply immediately. Julian thought, Why should I let this man drive? Does he have a driver's license? Can he drive in the snow? I don't know very much about him, maybe it would be safer for me if I just continue to drive. I mean, I only just met this man and I found him in the woods in the middle of nowhere

after all.

Sensing Julian's hesitation, Marco spoke. "I have been thinking about the troubles you told me you had on this trip. How you wouldn't take anything with you from it. In my experience, to be able to observe or experience something that will stay with you for the rest of your life, you must engage with people, try to understand them. But most importantly, you must be perceptive of other people's feelings along with the world around you. And, for me, that all starts with trust."

With that, Julian pulled the car off of the snow-covered road and got out of the truck. Marco did the same, dragging his long coat on the ground as he walked around to the driver's side. The men settled into their seats, and Marco flipped the key. The engine roared back to life as the headlights flicked on. They rolled back onto the road as silence fell over the cab of the car once more. The motor hummed steadily and the car rolled smoothly, swaying slowly over the snow dusted pavement of the dark road. Julian could no longer hold sleep from the edges of his vision. As his eyelids slowly closed, Julian was struck with a fading pang of worry as snowflakes appeared once more in the swirling air.

When Julian woke, his face pressed up against the cold window of the passenger seat, he raised his head to see small buildings clustered around a large clock tower, and, behind them, the small train station he had driven so long to reach. Looking to his left the car keys were still in the ignition, but Marco was no longer sitting behind the wheel. On his seat Julian picked up a small piece of paper that lay next to a delicately carved wooden bear sculpture. The note, scribbled out in quick and messy handwriting, read, *Hopefully I have given you something to take back home*. A smile spread across Julian's face as he looked up to see the sun shining down on the billowing steam of a locomotive and glinting off of the ocean in the distance.

# Para Mi Gente Trabajadora

Juliana Dominguez

ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: LAURA LAMPTON SCOTT

Que trabajar sin mantener un horario.

Who are afraid that one day the migration will catch them in their  
work.

Que tienen varios trabajos para poder mantener a sus familias.

Who are judged by their origins or where they came from.

Que dejan su país de origen por un futuro mejor.

Who suffer for not spending Christmas with their loved ones.

That's my brave people and they make sacrifices for their family  
even though it is hard, but the family's needs come first.

I feel the same pain like all mi gente.

I came here with big dreams,  
now I'm already close to receiving my diploma.

The hard part is the absence of my mother.

She's missing the milestone,  
me reaching the American dream.

A high school diploma and everything, I have done it.

Eso es lo que mi gente pasa todos los días.

Every immigrant student feels my pain:

a universal experience of

oppression

displacement

and racism

for being different.

# 20 Bucks

Ezra Scriven

WILSON HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: LISA EISENBERG

20 Bucks : Page 1

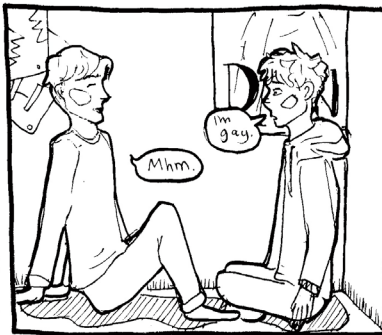
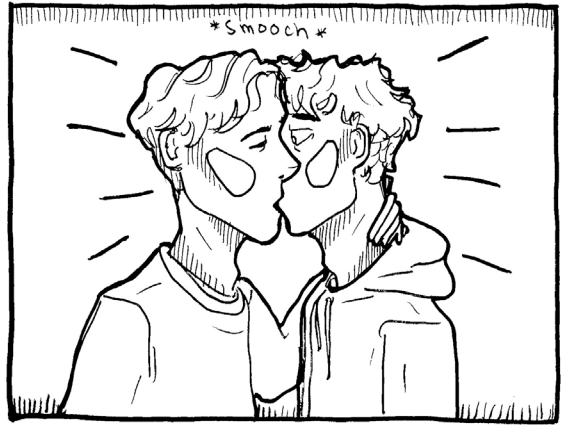
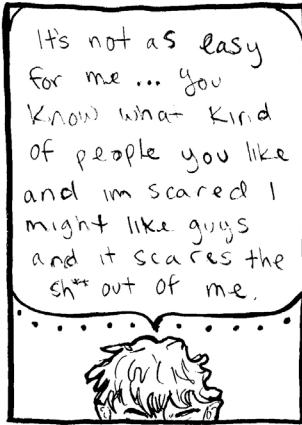


A couple



days  
earlier







Present day



THE END

BY: EZRA  
SCRIVEN 20



# The Street Corner

Bridget Price

LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: DAMIEN MILES-PAULSON

There is a man who sits on the street  
corner in front of the pharmacy. Every Saturday  
he serenades shoppers and drivers alike  
with his accordion. Sometimes he sings,  
taking deep breaths with the gulpings of his instrument  
He perches on a wooden three-legged stool  
with his tattered black leather hat at  
his toes. I will add thirty-five cents to his collection. He nods  
and plays, I smile and leave, the song at my back.  
Last Saturday he wasn't there,  
the street quiet, the change in my pocket clinking. I stood  
my nose going cold. I sat down where he sat,  
disgruntled, confused. The wind whistled by.  
The thrumming of car engines, the slapping of feet,  
my slow beating heart. I found a rhythm, a music  
in the spot where he sat. The symphony of city,  
life going on.

# Coincidence

Sarah Roberts

BENSON HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: EMILLY PRADO

She woke up on the edge of the bed like she always did, making space for something no longer there, like a void amongst the pile of tangled sheets. She stared at the grey ceiling, trying to avoid looking at the graveyard of clothes, empty mugs, and dead plants scattered across her room. She slid out of bed, her feet meeting the floor with a dull thud. She walked to her kitchen and started a pot of coffee. She opened her fridge out of habit, even though she knew it was empty. As she closed it, she took notice of a sticky note pasted in front of her: Buy fish food. She glanced over to the small fishbowl in the corner of her kitchen. The little orange fish floated, belly up, in the bowl. She vaguely remembered scribbling the note when she moved in, but she didn't know how long ago that was.

She walked to her living room and peered out the windows. Even in mid-August, the sky looked grey to her, as if she slept through the summer in to a deep winter. She poured herself a cup of coffee and perched in a chair in her living room. Then, out the window, she saw him—a delivery man walking to her front door. He set a box of yellow roses down on the worn welcome mat. Suddenly, she was drowning in waves of panic. Her mug shattered against the floor. “He found me.”

It was the second time in three months that she had been to the emergency room. He had walked her in, grasping her hand out of fear and desperation. Filling her head with apologies. “I didn't mean to, it was an accident,” he said. “You have to tell them that you fell or else they'll call the police on us.”

They walked to the front desk. “Hi, um, I tripped and...fell on my arm, and I think it's broken,” she whispered nervously. The nurse handed her a packet to fill out, and gestured toward the waiting area.

Exactly like last time.

After what seemed like hours, a nurse called her name. They both started to get up, but the nurse stopped him. “Only immediate family are allowed,” she commanded.

“But you let me back last time, please, I just wanna be there so she feels safe,” he whined.

Before he could finish, the nurse pulled her into a room. “This is the second time you’ve been here for a fractured wrist. Did he do this to you?”

A flood of memories poured into her mind. Every time he got mad at her for taking too long to get home from work, every time he demanded that she give him her phone, the last time she ended up in the ER, every time he would apologize with a bouquet of yellow roses. Like they could make up for all the friends and family she hadn’t seen in months, because he was the only thing that should matter to her.

“Yes, he did,” she said to the nurse. They had been together for nearly two years, but in less than a moment, none of that mattered. The only thing she could think about was getting as far away from him as possible.

She bent down and slowly picked up the fragments of porcelain. She had moved to a different state and gotten a restraining order like the police had told her to do. “How did he find me?” she whispered into the puddle of coffee that was now spreading across her floor. She only left her apartment when she absolutely had to, just in case he figured out where she was. She had taken every precaution.

Outside, the flowers wilted. It took her two days to build up the courage to open her front door. She pulled the bouquet in briskly and slammed the door behind her. With shaky hands she pulled the card out from the bouquet. “Hi! We noticed you were new to the neighborhood, and we wanted to send you a little welcome gift! Feel free to pop over if you need anything. — Apt 16”

For the first time in a while, she walked outside, without feeling

tangled in fear and dread. She wandered through her neighborhood, and the greyness seemed to lift off of the world. For the first time in months, she walked through the world without panic. She felt safe.

# Hear Tell

Olivia Lufkin

FRANKLIN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: MONTY MICKELSON

*In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.*

Daddy always said, *rain follows the plow. Children are to be seen, not to be heard. A woman's place is in the kitchen.*

He would wake when the sun was still asleep behind the horizon and come home once darkness had settled. *The fields need tending*, he said. I once imagined him becoming a scarecrow, tied to a post, stuffed with itchy straw.

Some days were worse than others. Stop daddy, stop. Leave her alone. It's not momma's fault. Momma couldn't get out of bed the next day.

When I couldn't stand it anymore, I'd leave. Walk out the door. Run, away, far out on the open plain. I'd run as far as I could, until our rickety house was just a speck on the horizon. Far, far away, I would cry, I would scream, I would be as hollow as I wanted, with no one to judge me but the wind.

Daddy once told us a story. Years ago, when Granpop was knee high to a grasshopper, our family lived out on a farm, *as they always did and always would*. The farm wasn't too far from here, and looked much like our own. At four, sun still asleep, great grandfather sat on the kitchen table and put on his clodhoppers, heavy with dried mud. At five, great grandma got the kids up to go to school, one two three, sack lunches, shoes and brushed hair. At eleven, great grandpa came in for lunch, gave the oxen a rest. At twelve, he went back out. At one, the locusts came.

Great grandma was mending a shirt. The window went dark. She

ran to the door, and threw it open. Squinting to where the sun was supposed to be, a cloud of dark swarmed the sky. She ran out to find great grandfather. *She ran to the storm cellar to hide.* Great grandmother dashed to the barn, threw open the door, and corralled the animals to the shelter. She then hurried to the field, scanning the area for her husband. The swarm grew closer. He had fallen off the ladder when mending the barn roof. She heaved him onto a wagon and gathered as much bundled wheat as she could. *Your great grandfather had fallen off a ladder, mending the barn roof. He came to when the swarm was almost upon them.* She barely made it to the storm cellar, struggling to pull her heavy load. *He barely made it to the storm cellar, still dizzy from the fall, with arms full of bundled wheat.* She saved them. *He saved them.*

The next day he would laugh, *you fall out of the ugly tree and hit every branch on the way down?* I would look down at the dusty floor, in shame. I learned how to use makeup because of him, didn't want the stares at school.

At four, sun still asleep, daddy sat on the kitchen table and put on his clodhoppers, heavy with dried mud. At five, momma got us up for chores, dust the china, sweep the kitchen, bring in the water from the well. At eleven, daddy came in for lunch, gave the oxen a rest. At twelve, he went back out. At one, the dust came, suffocating, blinding. At four, all I felt was relief.

*Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.*

# This Is What I Do

Andrés Cotoc

ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: LAURA LAMPTON SCOTT

Writing is like a vice.

I honored the vice since very early,  
expressing words fairly,  
and my spirit feels the world in these words.

It takes me into a world of letters.

The darkness disappears  
and my ear can hear  
the rhythm of the vice.

Mis letras son reales y especiales  
a veces son fatales o superficiales.

No matter what

I write the beat of my heart.

I don't care

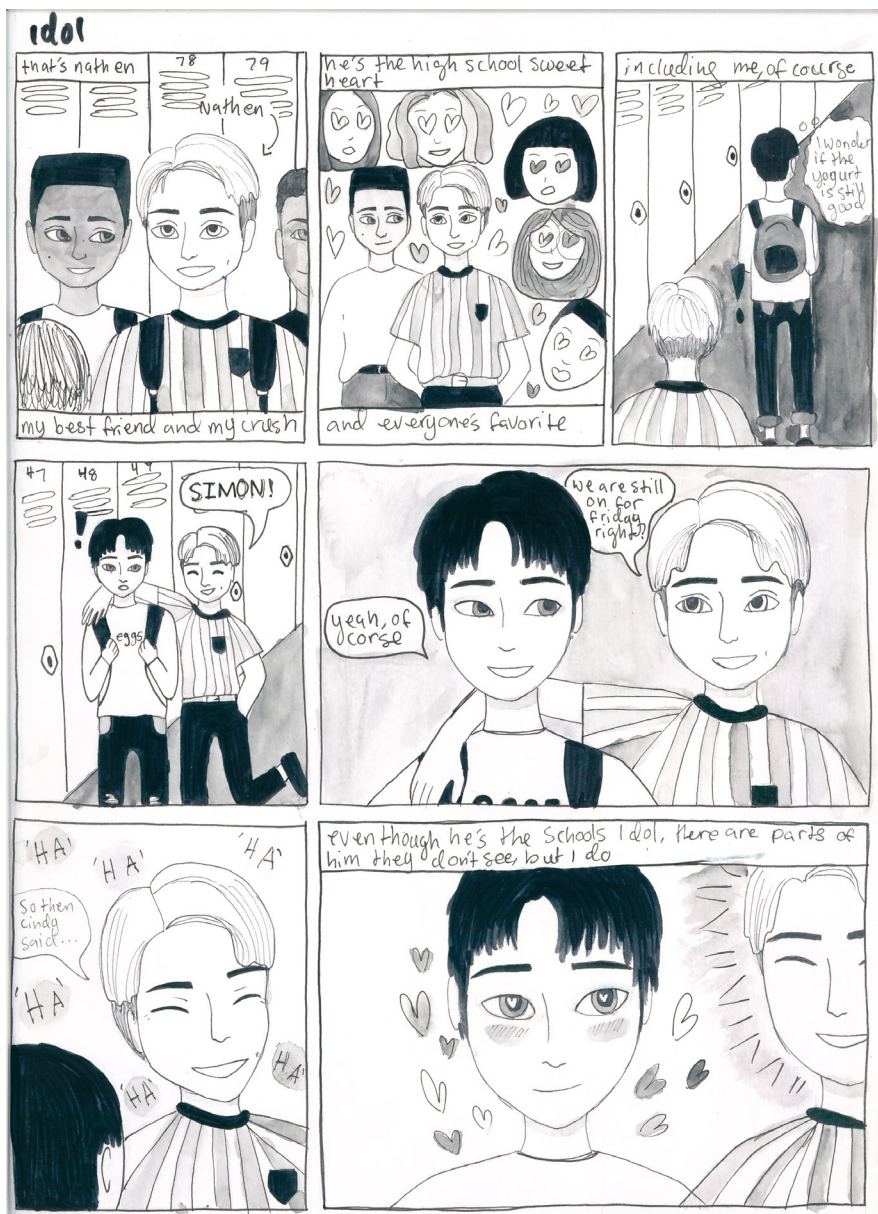
Esto es lo que hago  
y lo que quiero hacer.

# Idol

Tilden Pritchard

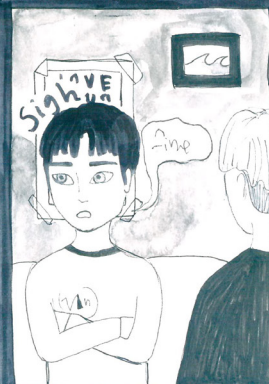
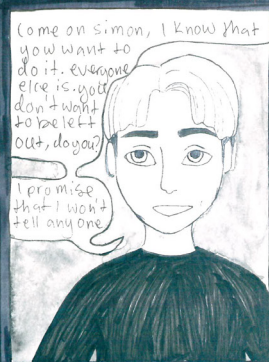
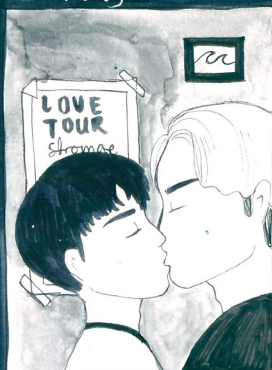
WILSON HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: LISA EISENBERG

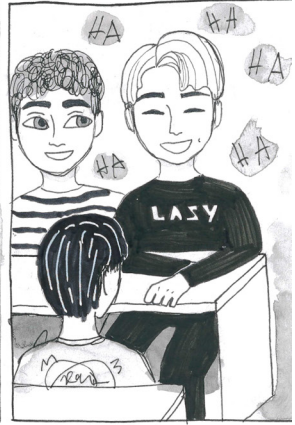
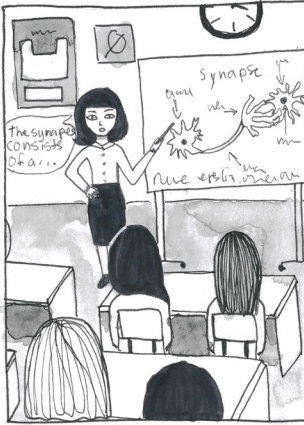
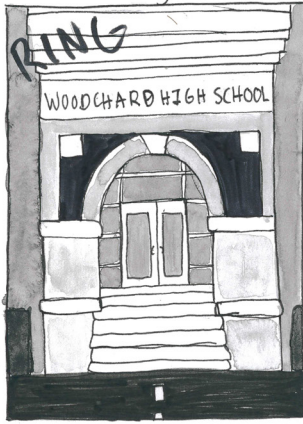




—friday



Monday



they teach us in school  
to be wary of the  
people we don't know...



but sometimes it's the  
people that are closest  
to us,



that can end up hurting  
us the most



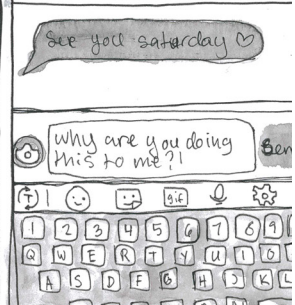
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# The Fox

Eddie Edwards

GRANT HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: ALEX BEHR

She was lonely before she found you.

The giant house had been empty for years, with seven empty beds that were never remade and lights that she couldn't afford to turn on. Cobwebs filled the corners and dust piled in abundant amounts on the kitchen counters next to the canned food she had been picking at for months. The curtains, all shut. The windows, all broken, allowing a soft breeze to blow the dust through the air, making her sneeze and shiver. She walked barefoot across the creaky wooden floors from the lounge to the kitchen. Those were the only two rooms in the house she would touch.

She had forgotten who used to live in the house with her. She once had memories of laughter and joy, voices arising from all corners as she followed the sound. She once remembered the touch of her brother's arms as he hugged her, and the smell of her mom's fruitcake in the oven. So much happiness and love from people that once filled the now empty bedrooms. But little by little, they faded away. Two years later, she was nine years old and she couldn't even remember their names.

Now, she slept alone on the old couch, clutching her pillow and hugging her small body dressed in a dirty nightgown. That was all she had since forgetting. She couldn't even go upstairs to change. She was alone and helpless, waiting for someone to save her, to take her away from the life she couldn't remember.

And then she met you.

"Hello there," was the first thing you said to her as you sat on the ground next to her couch. She leapt up at the sound of your voice, her foggy eyes flickering around to try and pinpoint where you were.

"I'm down here," you said, and she glanced in your direction. "I heard you needed help."

She trembled in her blanket, but she was curious all the same. She sat up and let her short legs dangle off the couch, and her breathing quickened as she heard you walk closer to her.

“Who are you?” she asked. “Where did you come from?”

“You don’t need to know who I am to know where I come from,” you replied, letting out a sly grin that she couldn’t see. “I come from you.”

“From me?” she gasped quietly. “What does that mean?”

“You needed help, so here I am,” you said, like it was obvious. “Now tell me, how can I help you?”

She breathed deeply, pondering his question before she slowly inched off the couch and fell to her knees. She reached out in the direction of the voice and gasped when she felt the blanket of fur on your head. She moved her hand down your back, pausing when she felt the bushy tail attached to you.

“If you’re done examining me, then maybe we can get started,” you said, causing her to pull away. “There are monsters in your house, correct?”

She inhaled sharply as your words brought back terrible memories. Even just the mention of the word made goosebumps appear on her skin and she heard whispers come from the floor above her, almost like wind. There was a reason she never went upstairs.

You noticed her fear and smirked to yourself. “So, I am correct. If there are monsters here, why don’t you leave?”

She tried to control her breathing and swallowed the lump in her throat. “My teddy bear is upstairs in my room. I don’t want to leave without it.”

“So why don’t you go get it?” you asked, even though you already knew the answer.

“I, I can’t see them,” she said fearfully. “I don’t know where they are, so I can’t get to my room.”

“Well then that’s why I’m here,” you grinned evilly. “I will help you get your teddy bear, and then you can finally leave this place.”

She didn’t know how to answer you. It had always been her dream

to get out of this old house and finally be free of the memories she didn't remember. But it also terrified her, as this was all she knew. She didn't know what lay outside of her old couch and dirty kitchen, or the broken windows and whispers upstairs. She didn't know if she could leave that all behind.

You sensed her fear and quickly cut in. "How about we just focus on getting you to your bedroom. The monsters are only in the hallway upstairs. You'd be safe in your room with your teddy bear."

That thought fueled her motivation and she nodded her head. "Yes, I'll do that."

"Good," you licked your lips and began walking toward the stairs. "Just follow my voice and you'll be fine."

As your voice went around the corner and grew quieter, she instantly crawled off the couch and started following it. She found the armchair and the table with the old lamp. She reached the kitchen counters, covered in food crumbs and the bowl of dry cereal she had eaten this morning. She found the hallway with the messy carpet that she always tripped over and never bothered to fix. Pressing her hand against the wall, she took thirteen small steps down the hall and stopped just before the stairs.

You were sitting patiently by the door, and when you saw her eyes flickering around in concern, you said, "Are you ready?"

She flinched at the sound of your voice but nodded.

You smiled and jumped up to the doorknob, twisting it with your claws before it clicked and the handle turned. The door slowly creaked open and she shivered as a blast of cold air hit her. Whispers filled her ears within seconds and she whimpered in fear.

"We will be okay," you promised her, placing your paw on her foot in comfort. "Just follow the sound of my voice. I can guide you past them."

If only she could see the grin you had plastered on your face.

You hopped up the stairs and she reached out for the railing, following you as fast as she could. Every step made the floorboards



squeak and she froze for a second before she continued on. You waited at the top of the stairs for her, until a black figure whizzed by you and headed down the stairs right toward her.

“Stop,” you said forcefully, and she froze in her tracks. Her chest rose up and down heavily as the black figure lingered over her like a shadow and whispers surrounded her at every angle. The figure circled around her, trying to pinpoint exactly where she was but it failed. It zoomed back up the stairs and disappeared from sight.

“This is how we will get past them,” you said, your voice soothing her fear. “They can’t see you, they can only hear you, and for me they can do neither. I do not exist to them.”

She was confused by your words, but she decided to focus on getting to her room. If she found her teddy bear, she could escape and everything would be okay.

“Now, let’s go,” you encouraged her to keep going. “The monsters sense there is someone here. They are getting restless.”

She gulped, but she continued on up the stairs, only pausing when they creaked loudly. She reached the hallway that led down to her bedroom, and you rushed down to the end of it and called back to her.

“There are hundreds of them up here.”

She tripped over the end of her nightgown and fell face first onto the wooden floor. She tensed up as the hallway erupted into thousands of whispers, echoing in her ears. The echoes surrounded her and the monsters followed, towering over her and waiting for a single sound to give her away.

“They are waiting for you,” you told her as she trembled on her hands and knees. “If you make another sound, they will take you.”

Tears sprung in her eyes and she used all her energy to stop herself from sobbing but she didn’t know how much longer she could take it.

“I need you to trust me,” you said, your voice lowered until you spoke barely above a whisper. “I need you to crawl toward me, as slow and as quiet as you can.”

She shook her head frantically, swallowing the lump in her throat

that tightened up and caused more tears to roll down her face.

"If you are quiet and go slow enough, you can go through them," you said again. "You can do this. I believe in you."

She took a deep breath and focused on the crackling sound of your voice and the knowledge that her teddy bear was seconds away. She began to crawl, one hand at a time. She felt the sharp coldness that sent goosebumps crawling across her skin as she entered a shadow and then exited the other side. Her knees felt like they were going to collapse underneath her but she kept moving, feeling touch after touch of the freezing cold whispers that floated through her like she was nothing. She didn't stop until she reached out and felt the top of your furry head, and she let out a sigh of relief.

"Your room is right here." You pushed open the door and she followed you inside, closing it behind her.

She slowly stood up, disoriented as she was hit with a wave of smells and touches, ones she hadn't felt in such a long time. She made her way to the center of the room where she ran into her bed and immediately felt around for her teddy bear. The tears began to fall before she laid her hands on it, but once she did, she pulled it close to her chest. It felt so fragile and weak in her arms; one of the button eyes had fallen out and pieces of string were frayed around the edges. But in the end, all that mattered was that she had him.

"You should rest up." Your voice snapped her out of her thoughts. "Go to sleep, and in the morning, I will guide you out of here and you will finally be free."

She couldn't do anything but cry and mumble "thank you" over and over.

You left her in her room, crying all night.

She never forgot that night when she spoke to you the first time, when she heard your voice and the sounds of the monsters that haunted her hallways. When she woke up the next morning, holding her teddy bear tightly in her arms, she felt a strange ache in her ears. Combined with a gentle ringing, it increased the longer she was awake until she

couldn't take it anymore.

"Hello?" she called out into the empty room. "Are you there?"

The words barely escaped her throat. She was suddenly filled with dread and fear when she could no longer hear the sound of her own voice. She tried speaking again, but nothing came out except for a croak mixed with a sob. She anxiously waited for you to respond, waiting for your sly voice to guide her out of the nightmare she was living in. But you didn't answer.

She slowly got out of bed, still hugging her teddy bear as she walked over to her door. Maybe you were waiting in the hallway for her, maybe she had to find you. Shaking, she turned the doorknob and she was hit with a blast of cold air. The whispers persisted more violent than ever before, and, for some reason, the floorboards creaked much louder than they had last night. Tears rolled down her face as she struggled to walk down the hallway, unaware that her sobs rang through the house.

She tripped and fell, scraping her knees on the wood and shivering as the temperature dropped more with every passing second. She finally curled up in a ball on the ground, clutching her teddy bear as the ache in her ears increased until it became unbearable. Wind blew through the hallway, whipping through her hair until she let out a heart wrenching scream—one that would echo through that hallway forever.

If only you had been there to guide her.



# Family Portrait as Food

Lucy Knight-King

FRANKLIN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: DAVID CIMINELLO

Homemade bread on the counter

Torn into three strips

Braided into siblings

Closer than close

The family, the four of us

Olive oil to my brothers

Balsamic vinegar which rests

Like an oil spill

Under the shape of things

You know they don't quite mix together

My brother is

Warm unripe apples

Being snapped off their tree

Too early

Snapped off his family tree

He fell down to us

He's a strange green envious fish

Basil green on toast

I promise we're still braided

Inseparable

# Walking Away

Evelyn Gomez

GRESHAM HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: ARTHUR BRADFORD

The front door slams closed followed by the sound of footsteps dragging across the floor. I close my eyes and try figuring out where he's headed using the sounds of the empty glass bottles to guide me. A little hand reaches out to grab mine, startling me. I look down to see my little sister staring back at me with those big, brown doe eyes.

"It's okay Ara, go back to sleep," I say as I lay her back down gently and tuck her back in. Leaning my head against the cold, moist wall, I shut my eyes again and hear his snores echoing through the house with the sound of soft breathing beside me and start to slowly fall into a deep sleep, finally feeling at peace.

*\*Bring Bring\**

My eyes snap open at the sound of my alarm and I clumsily rush to turn it off before my father wakes up and hears it. I look over to my side and see my sister, still sound asleep, and carefully get up without waking her up to make a quick breakfast. As I prepared it, I was careful to make the least amount of noise possible to not wake up the demon sleeping in the living room, and set up a plate for him on the dining room table alongside his idea of a "morning coffee" with a bottle opener next to it.

Tiptoeing quietly to the bedroom with a plate of food in my hand, I wake Ara.

"Eat quickly, we need to leave in a bit."

I start packing her pink *Powerpuff Girls* backpack with stuff light enough for her to carry and shove the rest into mine. As soon as she finishes eating, I quickly put her jacket, backpack, and shoes on before asking her to wait outside for me.

As horrible of a father as he is, I feel bad leaving him behind like this. I slowly walk towards him and notice his arms shivering from

sleeping on the leather couch and noticed his bushy brows formed into a permanent frown. He looks nothing like the man I grew up with—his smile lines almost seem to have disappeared. I wonder where everything went wrong and, with that final thought, I make sure to cover him with a blanket as my final goodbye. Before leaving, I set the note I wrote the night before down on the wooden table next to the couch. As I walk further away from him I feel stinging in my eyes, but I know this is the right thing for both Ara and me. I take her little hand into mine and start walking towards the bus stop, my heart feeling heavy with each step. My mind is a jumbled mess, I have no idea where to go after this. I'm not quite ready to see my mother after she abandoned us, but there's no choice. But I can't stop these worries from entering my mind. How can I be so sure she'll want us? Does she have a new family? Will she even recognize us?

The heavy feeling in my heart leaves the farther we get. This is a good thing, right? Ara will be safe and I no longer have to worry about his drunken outbursts.

"Are we finally seeing Momma?" Ara asks with an innocent smile on her face, and I feel a smile starting to form on my own chapped lips.

"Of course. I promised we'd see her soon, didn't I?"

The bus stops and we enter, my steps feeling heavier each time, to the point of where I was barely dragging them.

When the bus gets to our stop, I gently pick up Ara into my arms, careful not to wake her. The closer we get to our final destination the faster my heart beats, and my hands start to shake. After a little walk, we arrive to the front gates of the address my mother left behind. It is a nice home. I can see children's toys outside in the front lawn and realize she has a family, and she may have forgotten about us. Suddenly the gates feel much bigger than they really are, but with one look at Ara's sleeping figure, I know this is what I have to do. I manage the courage to open the gate and walk up to the front door. With a sigh I tell myself there's no going back, and knock on the wooden door. As I wait for the front door to open I get choked up, almost as if I can't

breathe.

The door creaks open and the first thing I see is a muscular hand with a shiny ring. I look up and find myself staring at unfamiliar blue eyes that belonged to an unfamiliar man.

“Is Sara here?” I say with a small voice and the best smile I could manage, which looked a little pathetic.

He looks at me up and down cautiously, as if he is wary of me, and after a while of contemplating, he calls out my mother’s name. I start to get a cold sweat as I hear her steps going down the stairs. My heart starts beating faster and faster. She looks different, she looks better, and as soon as she sees me and Ara she stops in her tracks, staring at us with longing eyes that have tears building up in them.

“Hi, Mom,” I say in a quiet voice as I feel the warmth of my tears falling down my face. She rushes to us, gently shoving her husband in the process, and brings us into her warm embrace. I finally felt safe. This was my new beginning, and there’s no turning back now.

# Coffee Shop Memories

Lizzie Reifsteck

LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: DAMIEN MILES-PAULSON

The sun streams through the window, which turns it an auburn shade. The light illuminates the particles of dust being kicked up by tenants of the coffee shop. During late autumn, the coffee shop is always buzzing with activity. People come bustling in wearing their wool winter coats, the shades of browns and greys fitting the aesthetic already created. The door opens and closes, a little bell signaling when people decide to stay or leave.

The warm, intoxicating scent of cinnamon reminds me of you. Whenever we baked, you put too much cinnamon in. Your favorite thing to bake was coffee cake, with the cinnamon crumble on top. The recipe only called for two teaspoons, but you always swore you read it as two tablespoons. I always let it slide, I would wrap you in my arms and hold you tight. Inhaling the scent of cinnamon that consumed your hair.

I always sit in the corner of the coffee shop, by the window. It's easier this way, no one comes to sit near me. I can sip my coffee in peace. The brown leather of the chair is surprisingly plush and somewhat comforting. After you left, I discovered that this was the best seat in the coffee shop, and I wish I could show it to you. A couple comes in laughing, mouths agape, and eyes smiling.

You had the most amazing laugh, it was full and exciting. It drew everyone's eyes to you. You in that maroon chiffon gown, the one you would wear with pearls, and strappy black heels. I was proud to be with you at that moment. I wanted everyone to know that I loved you and that you loved me. You would smile at me and cup my face. Your eyes smiled at me, you'd make a joke about how prickly my beard was. A peck on the cheek, and then back to socializing.

The coffee shop empties around noon—most people have left for

their jobs with their coffee. Only a few remain, and I have gotten to know them. The woman in the red felt coat who always is reading a book about painting or jazz. She's older and once dyed her hair red frequently but recently has started to go grey. The man in the opposite corner, young, with slicked-back hair. He wears tiny glasses and only drinks iced coffee, even in the winter. The baristas, who laugh and chatter. Even when they leave the building, you can hear echoes of their laugh.

After you left, all I could do was wait and sit in the coffee shop. I became paralyzed. I just watch people, sipping coffee. I listen to the obnoxious music that is looped, like smooth jazz but worse. But I still stay, hoping that someday soon the bell will ring on the door and you will walk in. You in a winter coat, your hair pulled back in a tight ponytail, rushing to get to work, and you'll order a decaf cinnamon latte, asking for extra cinnamon to be put on top. You'll come over to me, grab my hand, and we'll walk together.

# The American Teen American Teen Experience 2

Winner of the Cosmic Monkey Prize for Comics

Jon Reece

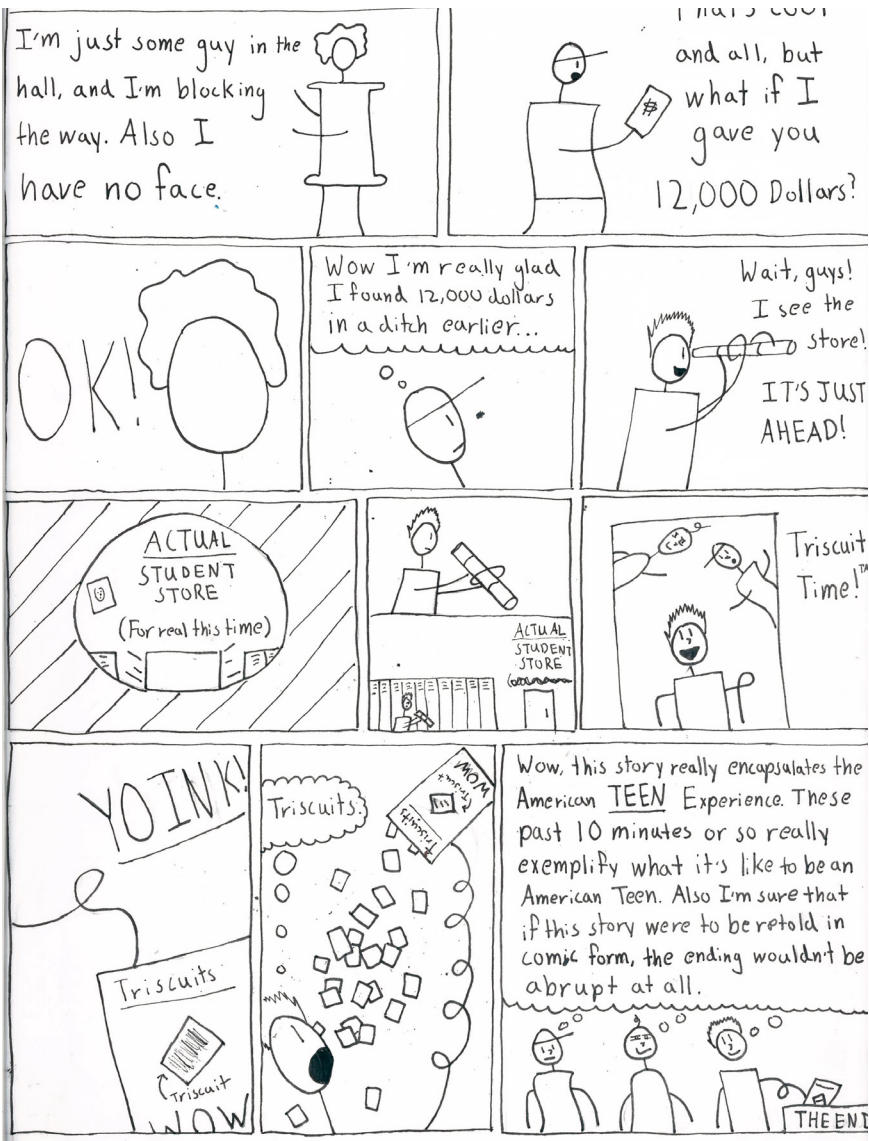
WILSON HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: LISA EISENBERG









# The Job

Nemo Collazo

BENSON HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: EMILLY PRADO

It was like the place was ablaze. Trees were adorned with red, green, and gold, lined up perfectly around the colossal tree that loomed over couples and families doing some last-minute shopping before the parade started further downtown. One individual among the crowd wasn't here for shopping or festivities, however. Aaron Crane stood at the edge of Times Square, silently waiting for the man with the blonde hair to appear. He had only briefly looked at the man's file, something about being a drug dealer. Aaron didn't care who he was. Having to stand out in thirty-degree weather for two hours was already making him impatient and annoyed.

Desperate to take his mind off the cold weather for as long as possible, Aaron decided to walk slowly around and observe the crowd of people browsing various products in the windows of stores that were desperate to grab your attention. He ignored all of these things and instead wished that he was back at his heated apartment.

Aaron wondered what his parents would have done around this time. Baking a special cake, going out to see the lights, telling him stories by the fire in the cozy living room. Those thoughts never failed to put a smile on his face. However, the smile immediately faded when he spotted the target.

The man with blonde hair was stocky, but his face looked like that of a newborn baby. Smooth and innocent. Aaron thought that was strange for a man who was proficient in selling illegal substances to occupants of the underground. It didn't matter. That was the target, and Aaron had to do his job. He thought the best course of action would be to follow the man at a distance, and wait for the right time to strike. His silenced 9mm sat in a hidden pocket of his winter coat, waiting patiently for its time to shine.

Aaron had to bob and weave through the crowd in order to keep up with him. The man was too fast. Finally, after what seemed like hours, the target ducked into the shadows of an alley. Aaron knew how this was going to go. He had to finish the job quickly. With a deep breath, he followed the man into the dark alley.

The alley was a straightforward path into a small courtyard. Aaron could see the man with the blonde hair talking to another man in a dress suit and shades who was holding a briefcase: most likely a government agent, maybe CIA. "These two fit in about as well as a clown at a funeral," Aaron thought as he crouched behind a nearby trash heap to listen in on their conversation.

"Show me the money first, then we'll talk," the blonde man said.

The G-Man silently put the briefcase on the ground and opened it, revealing countless stacks of 100-dollar bills. "Five million up front," the G-Man said in a monotone voice that sounded like a machine. "We'll pay you five million more every month."

A greedy smile crept across the blonde man's face. That smile would have made any child run away screaming in fear. Aaron quietly took the silenced 9mm out of his winter coat. He had twelve bullets. More than enough. He was adjusting himself to a proper firing position when the blonde man spoke up again.

"How do I know you ain't gonna trick me, man?" A tone of suspicion came out of his mouth.

"The boss always keeps his word," the G-Man replied.

The blonde man laughed. "That so? Alright, here it is."

The blonde man pulled out a beautiful crystal that seemed to shine brighter than the sun. The mesmerizing green hue emanating from it seemed almost...alien. It was no drug. Aaron realized that he probably should have read the file more in detail, because this didn't feel like a simple hit job anymore. Whatever that thing was, he had to act fast and take it. Standing up quickly, Aaron aimed and shot the G-Man's head. It was so fast, there was almost no time for him to react. One down, eleven bullets left.

The blonde man stepped back in surprise, letting out a “What the—” before he turned around and saw Aaron. The guy was fast. Before Aaron could take another shot, the blonde man pulled out his own revolver and fired, hitting Aaron’s leg. The man then grabbed the briefcase of money and proceed to run. Great, that’s what happens when your trigger finger feels like a popsicle frozen five times over. Luckily, it wasn’t enough to slow Aaron down, as he shot the man in his left leg as he was running away. Ten bullets left.

The sound of approaching footsteps alerted Aaron of his current situation. The G-Man wasn’t alone, obviously. Aaron has about fifteen seconds to off this guy, take the crystal, and run, all with a bullet in his leg. It was a good thing the snow numbed the pain.

Fifteen seconds.

Aaron limped towards the man, who was now trying to crawl away.

Thirteen seconds.

Cocking the gun, Aaron aimed right for the head. Nine bullets left.

Eight seconds.

They were getting close. Aaron picked up the briefcase and the crystal.

Four seconds.

Limping back towards the way he came, the pain was coming back.

The footsteps stopped.

Five men, all dressed in the same attire as the G-Man, stood around the two bodies. They were the ones who were listening in and making sure that the deal went smoothly. One of them was talking quietly into a giant block with an antenna. Another one noticed the trail of blood and beckoned the two others to follow him. They found that it led up to a certain point of the alley, where it abruptly stopped. One of the men in black clicked his tongue in annoyance. “It’s a lost cause, come on.” The G-Men once again slipped back into the shadows.

“Some assassin I am,” Aaron thought, as he pressed the cloth into the partial hole in his leg. He was back in Times Square, which felt like heaven compared to that alley. Standing up slowly, Aaron limped over

to a nearby phone booth. After fumbling through his wallet, he put ten cents into the slot, and dialed the number that he knew too well. After ten seconds, the other line picked up. "This is Crane. Patch me through to D'arby, please." Another ten seconds, then D'arby picked up.

"Hello, Crane. Did you finish the mission?" A bored voice came through the phone.

"Yes."

"Did he have anything on him?"

"Yes."

"And..."

"Some green crystal. Also got the other guy's briefcase. Five million dollars, supposedly."

"Excellent. Bring them to me first thing tomorrow. For now, well, maybe you should just enjoy the festivities."

"Understood."

Aaron hung up. Once again, he was alone, but he like it that way. Leaving the phone booth, he stepped back out into the city. Aaron checked his watch. 8:42 p.m. A snowflake fell on his cheek, and he let out an exasperated sigh. Just what he needed, more snow on his way home. Maybe he could try to catch a bus and give his leg a rest.

After a minute of mentally mapping out his route, Aaron took the green crystal out of his pocket to examine it. It looked like it was shining even brighter than when he first picked it up. Aaron felt a chill down his spine. This thing didn't look or feel even remotely man-made. He hated looking at it. Just as he was about ready to put it back, the crystal made a popping noise, and Aaron felt like his consciousness was being taken somewhere else.

Images appeared in his head. Actually, image wasn't the right word. They were more like short scenes from a movie that only played for about a minute. He saw his parents, standing in front of the bakery that he knew so well from his childhood. The day he learned how to ride a bike when he was six years old, and when his father taught him to

bake a cake for the first time.

The next few images were less than pleasant memories. Spending hours training and going on missions with his mentor, a woman who had taught him everything he knew about the world of assassination, and his first target. He could still hear the man's pleas, and see his eyes. The eyes of a man who knew he was going to die. It was a sloppy kill, and Aaron couldn't sleep for days afterwards. But, just when he thought this nostalgia trip couldn't get any weirder, the last image he saw confused him the most.

A young boy with black hair and grey eyes was standing in front of a gravestone, crying softly. He looked to be around eight years old. Aaron had never seen this boy before, but he felt like he was oddly familiar. This image would fade soon. Aaron moved over to get a closer look at the front of the gravestone, and what he read left him with a pit in his stomach.

**Rest in Peace**  
**Aaron Crane**  
**1963-2010**  
**Father, Husband, Son, Friend**

He was back outside the phone booth, breathing uncontrollably. Aaron hastily put the thing back in his pocket. He got up slowly and looked at his watch again. 8:42. Aaron suppressed the urge to vomit as he stared wide-eyed at his watch. Finally, he tore his eyes away from the ticking hands and looked around. Questions filled his head instead of the nausea, the most prominent one being, "What the hell is this thing?" He wasn't sure if he wanted to find out. After catching his breath and quickly grabbing the suitcase, Aaron took one last look at the colorful Times Square before making his way home.

# Only in Portland

Mailekai Sabagala

FRANKLIN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: DAVID CIMINELLO

Only in Portland

Can you get honey and lavender ice cream

And stand outside

In the rain

As you eat your sweet treat,

Even though you're cold.

Only in Portland

Can you walk down 23rd

In the rain

With your favorite people

Having the most fun

You'd had in a long time.

Ending the day with a bowl of ramen

And good company.

Only in Portland

Can you spend the whole day record shopping

Because vinyl is still cool here.

Only in Portland

Can you see bright blue

And yellow houses

Their front yards

Embellished

With vibrant yellow flowers

That you can never remember the name of.

Only in Portland  
Can you truly appreciate  
The smell  
The feel  
Of fresh rain  
As it clears the stuffy, pollen-filled air.

Only in Portland  
It feels like home.



# Eiffel Tower

Marcos Lopez

ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: CHRISTOPHER ROSE

Tower of four pillars

Constructed from 1887 to 1889

You were seen as the ugliest building in Paris

Criticized over and over by those who looked at you

Recognized as a cultural icon in later years.

I am afraid of heights

Stepping on the highest level of you

Is my dream come true

You are the first step to conquer my fear

You are like nothing I've ever seen.

Tower of four pillars

You have four elevators that take me up and down

Only one that takes me even further.

You have 1,710 steps and 180 stories

My adventure begins with climbing those steps

I want to feel the air on my face

Looking down at the structure of France

Tower of 1,063 feet tall

You are like nothing I've ever seen.

# Letter to Myself

Jacob Titus

WILSON HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: DAMIEN MILES-PAULSON

Dear Jacob,

I'm writing this to you now, I suppose, as a last testament to my life, my final records before my departure from this broken, depleted world. You're probably curious who I am and what's going on right now. I suppose you deserve some sort of explanation. I am you, or rather, you are me. It's been 20 years now since I was your age, such a carefree, easy life, I never realized how much I would miss it. It happened five years after I graduated high school. I had a good job, my future was looking promising, then the world descended upon itself. Every major nation declared war on each other in a desperate attempt to gain world dominance. I remember that fatal day that I realized it was all over. I heard the planes before I saw them. The boring, chopping sound clanging through the midmorning sky. I was at work when they hit. A white flash blinded my vision through the window next to my desk. The flash passed and I waited in painful silence, wiping the spots out of my eyes until the shockwave hit me. The window next to me shattered and thousands of pieces of glass embedded into the side of my body. The blast slammed me into the wall behind me and I blacked out. I woke up hours later, my body was mutilated, I couldn't see out of my left eye, my left arm was all but torn from my body. I struggled to my feet and hobbled to the shattered window, looking outside. The city I knew and loved was decimated. Streets and buildings all around me were crumbled and destroyed. Cars were crushed and swept away. Everything was silent. Completely, helplessly silent. The smell of molten asphalt and burning chemicals stung my nose and burned my lungs as I shuffled out of the melted wreckage of my office building. I could hardly see through the artificial fog of dust and dirt lingering in

the thick, dark air. I don't remember much else from that terrible day. I only remember making my way, slowly, out of the city. For the past 15 years, I have lived in this hellish wasteland that I used to happily call home. I have eaten anything I could find just in order to survive. It's no use even trying to farm anything; this once fertile soil has been robbed of any nutrients it once had and has been reduced largely to dust. The only other living things that I've seen in my 15 years of living in this barren desert are the bugs that I eat for my dinner when I can. I was once lucky enough to find undamaged bottles of water within the wreckage of the city. This, however, has become a scarce and sacred resource. The only water available to me is from a dirty puddle of dusty water that I have made camp next to. In all honesty, Jacob, I'm exhausted. I am tired of this life, of this crippled, diminished world. I have survived for so long just to get nowhere. I no longer have the physical or mental strength to push myself any further. I have lost everyone that I have ever loved or held dear in my life. My home is an empty, abandoned shell of what it was once. I'm writing you this letter now, laying in what I believe will be my final resting place. As I lay here under this hot sun, this desolate wasteland seems almost beautiful, almost poetic. I can honestly tell you that, as I lay here, slowly dying, I have truly done everything I can to survive and live my life, right up to being the last person on Earth. The only thing I want to tell you, the only thing I hope you take away from this above anything else, is to live your life happily and live it to the fullest every day. You never know when it might be suddenly ripped from your hands. Do this and you will already have lived better than me. Remember to cherish and protect everything and everyone that's close to you. You have no idea how much you need them, until they're gone forever.

Sincerely, Jacob Titus

# Born This Way

Bria Dixon

BENSON HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: EMILLY PRADO

I sat in the dark bonus room, binge-watching *The Fosters* to try and escape my own world. It had been three months since we stopped talking. The moment I heard the footsteps coming up the stairs I felt that feeling in my chest—you know the one. My mom walked in and she asked me how my day was, and, without making eye contact, I responded with a shrug. She knew I wasn't okay, I hadn't been okay in a long time and everyone knew it. So, why did she always ask how I was doing when she knew the answer?

She continued into the room and sat down cautiously on the old green couch, a safe distance away from me. I felt it...and just like that, my tears fell faster than my legs could move to get up and leave. She started talking to me about school and sports—small talk, you know. I wanted to do what was easy, what I always do what I feel like this, but my heart couldn't carry anything more. How do I tell my mom I'm not okay? How do I tell her I eat lunch alone every day because if I'm around people they ask too many questions? How do I tell her what's wrong when I can't? How do I tell the woman who gave me life that some days it hurts so bad that I don't want it anymore? I couldn't tell her—because what she didn't know couldn't hurt her, so I held it in once again because I would rather hold onto pain than to burden others with mine. She didn't know, she doesn't know. So, as always, I left it at, I'm just sad and a little lonely and I miss Kate. She told me people suck and that often the ones we care about the most hurt us the most.

She asked me if there was anything else that was bugging me. I sat in silence for a minute, deciding if I was finally going to allow someone to help me—if I was finally going to help me.

"I don't know," I said aggressively.

Repeating the same question, this time in the form of a statement, she said, “It seems like maybe there is something more to this than just losing Kate?”

Those words opened flood gates. Months, shoot, years of holding back, questioning, thinking, and denying was coming down to this moment. I sat there hysterically crying for a few minutes before I finally uttered two sentences that changed our relationship forever.

“I think I loved her more than a friend, Mom. I think that’s why this hurts so bad.”

The look on her face told me I needed to explain more.

I told her with my voice cracking—short of breath—that I didn’t want to be different.

She took a deep breath and asked me what I meant. Almost immediately after asking, she gave a little laugh and lightened the mood by telling me she’s known for years.

I felt that weight, the weight that only kids like me have felt, being lifted. I had fought this battle of self-identity for many years on my own, and to know the most important woman in my life loved me just as much after she knew put me at ease. I had never felt closer to my mom than in that moment. She was the first person I had come out to, yet I had known it myself for years. Well, that’s a lie. I juggled the thought of being gay, but denied myself the right to be proud of who I was because that wasn’t who I was supposed to be.

My tears slowed and my relief replaced them. She handed me tissues and rubbed my head until I stopped crying. She asked if there was anything she could do to help me feel more comfortable, and I explained to her that I didn’t feel comfortable in half the clothes I owned. She pulled up her search tab and we found me two men’s polos that I liked, and she ordered them right then and there. When I got them in the mail a few days later, I wanted to wear them more than anything, but I didn’t. The same fears that existed before I came out were there, but this time I had someone to fight the fears with me. Although I felt stronger, the normal questions and worry circulated

through my mind. Would they know? What would they say about me? What would my ex-boyfriend think? ...Why did I care so damn much about what other people thought? That was the problem with the whole thing. I cared more about what society would think of me than what I thought about myself. Until the day I came out to my mom, I wasn't proud of who I was. But once I knew that she was, I started to learn how to be as well.

# I Am

Anthony Lemes Capote

MADISON HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: BETTINA DE LEÓN BARRERA

In English my name means highly praiseworthy

Someone who is admirable

It smells like fresh air when I go to the ocean

And tastes like vanilla when I'm feeling down

My name sounds like EDM

That's why my name is cheerful

My name looks like the ocean waves

And it is strong like a lion

My name has the power of an athlete

And my name is elegant

Like the sounds of birds in the morning

My name strengthens me

And it's strong as Haystack Rock

# Paper Boy

Jakob Askling

LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: MATT SMITH

The photo of my dad looked back at me from the page. I wasn't sure if I had gotten the right obituary. At least he would have appreciated the gesture. My brother, Sawyer, sat next to me in the grass. He buried his face into my arm, hiding his tears from the strolling neighbors. They didn't care much. Their undivided attention was on the bonfire, which was starting soon. Thinking it might cheer him up, I began folding the torn-out page. Sawyer had always been fond of birds. I hoped he could look past that this one wasn't alive. With a sniveling sound, he came out of his hiding from my sleeve. The moonlight fell on his face revealing a trembling smile. Just as he shakily reached for the paper crane, the wind seized its wings. It drifted and docked on the pile of firewood.

*Don't worry; I'll get it. Just stay here, okay?* I said comfortingly.

I stepped up to the heap of dry branches. The paper crane rested peacefully on top of the pile. I stretched out my hand, maintaining my balance with the other. Grazing its tail, I wobbled. Holding my shallow breath, I did not move a single joint. I leaned backward, trying to pass the threshold of balance. My arms pendulated back and forth like a mis-calibrated scale. The wind glued my jacket to my back, making me lose my foothold. I fell into the pile. I sunk through layers of fir needles. Continuing to plummet, I wondered how deep this pile was. Instead of hitting the ground, I found myself spit out head first and free falling. Winds tugged my jacket as I plummeted through the air. I hit the ground face down with a loud thud. Heaving up my torso, I gasped in the air like a squeezed water bottle regaining its original form. I searched frantically around, looking for Sawyer. Everyone was gone. Trees had replaced the people. However, something seemed odd. Carefully I approached the low hanging branches. The leaves were out of the ordinary. They were intricately folded origami creations. Across



the paper surface were words printed by an old typewriter. A breeze from the forest carried a smell of ink. I got an immediate convulsion from its lung-clogging effect. Mindful not to touch anything, I began to wander between the trees. Strolling further in the forest, I admired these strange things.

A loud thud broke my moment of wonder. It sounded like a solid object connecting with the ground. Following it was an endless minute of silence. It seemed like the cogs of time had stopped in their tracks. I flickered my gaze between the spaces among the trunks, looking for its source. What eventually followed was a guttural outcry. It was tainted with as much pain as fear. The tone struck a deep chord within me. I did not like how well I recognized it.

*Sawyer!* I shouted back.

I sprinted back from where I had come. Upon returning, I saw Sawyer's silhouette covered in the dense vegetation. My knees caved under me like a crumbling card house. There were words printed all over his motionless body. Blowing by, the wind swept grey dust from his body. He clenched a fist of leaves in his left hand. From between his finger came a stream of in hot ink simmering down. He had turned into paper. I laid my hand on the side of his cheek. It felt like stroking a page of a worn-out book. My body tensed up the moment my skin came in contact with his. To the accompaniment of my hyperventilation, ink-black sentences faded in on my arm. From deep within the forest, I heard a mechanical noise. The repetitive sound of a typewriter hammering down its keys echoed between the trunks. My skin lost its color. It started to look more like my Sawyer's. I couldn't bend my arms anymore. Like a mannequin, I hit the dirt paralyzed. With no other option than to look up, I witnessed the sky catching fire. The flames blossomed in poppy red and sunflower yellow. Swaying gracefully, they treated my eyes like a ballroom floor.

They had lit the bonfire.

# Analyzing Poetry

Estelle Keaveny Haapala

FRANKLIN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: MONTY MICKELSON

Poetry is only a cluster of words, nonsensical. A cluster of a puzzle,  
as the author slowly glides their long blistering and bleeding fingers  
over the board, removes pieces of their vibrant yellow fittings pressed  
against smooth black tile. One word, two words. Whittling down to  
something as small as a whisper of ink

But as loud as a revolt.

Poetry is

The taste of coffee and cream, the type that's bitter like copper  
touched to your softly formed

lips

Becomes warm and sweet on the back of your tongue,

Like a mother's breast

A memory in the back of every mind

Subtle

Nostalgic

But sensuous

Something that is almost inaudible

Under the voice

Of reason.

Poetry

Whittles down your conversations

Of water against paper

Until they merely whisper.

Until they are

Almost gone

And swallowed

Until puzzles

Become

nothing.

# Letters to be Read

Ashtyn Frankenstein

PARKROSE HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: ZULEMA RENEE SUMMERFIELD

Dear Society,

I remember when I could wear whatever I wanted and feel pretty.

I remember when putting on makeup was for my mum. Now it's how I spend my morning instead of eating breakfast.

Dear Society,

I remember when nobody made comments about my weight, but now that I'm older, I expect them.

Now I consider myself to be recovering from what you think to be the definition of beauty.

Dear Society,

You make "getting better" hard.

Dear Society,

You're the reason there's even "getting better."

Dear girls who have become human calculators,

I was there.

There, where you rest your head on the cool floor, wiping the tears and stomach acid away.

There, where you dump your emotions into a ceramic bowl, purchasing beauty and getting rotten teeth as a receipt.

Dear girls who have developed an eating disorder,

You can't return a gift like death when it has been unwrapped.

Dear girls who think they are alone,

I'm still there sometimes.

There, sucking on ice cubes as a meal.

There, looking for the bones underneath my flesh to feel like I'm  
winning.

There, squeezing into those jeans just to look good.

There, swallowing up a fat joke, and throwing up just to hear a skinny  
joke.

Dear beautiful girls of the world,

Skinny

Is not the definition of perfect.

Loving yourself is.

# The Climb

Ricardo Napoles

GRESHAM HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: ARTHUR BRADFORD

John left the hospital devastated. He got in his car and broke down completely.

“You idiot, why didn’t you go to the hospital months before?”

He was angry at himself because he always ignored the pain in his stomach and would casually take an Advil. His doctor explained how his stomach cancer was terminal and it was too late to start treatment. He only had three months to live. Feeling hopeless, he started his car then drove away with soft sobs and tears running down his face. He pulled up to his driveway, slammed his car door, and entered the house after dropping his key. He wanted to do something before his death but he didn’t know what—that was until he pulled out his chair, sat, and looked up at the monthly calendar hanging on his wall near his wooden kitchen table. On the calendar, right in front of his eyes, stood the bold letters M-A-R-C-H with an amazing photo of Mount Everest, and he knew what he needed to do. He went to bed and fell asleep to mentally prepare for the next days.

The next couple days were full of planning. He had a couple thousand dollars saved in his bank account. His plane ticket cost him a lot but not too much. His flight was in three days so he needed to shop for equipment that he would be taking for his trip. He went to the local sports store and headed to the climbing and hiking equipment. He bought a pair of Italian ONESport boots, three warm sweaters, a Columbia jacket, long sleeve shirt, a warm hat, a set of crampons, a pair of warm sweatpants, a pair of cargo pants, and two pairs of waterproof gloves for climbing. This all cost him a couple of hundreds but he kept telling himself that it will all be worth it. He went home and tried to rest. He couldn’t rest, he was going to die soon and rest forever. He then got an uncomfortable feeling of desperation.

“Why do I have to die? I didn’t do anything wrong, I don’t deserve this.”

He was right, he did not deserve this at all, but that is, in fact, how life works. Everyone dies at some point. It was about 7:30 p.m. and he was hungry, so he headed to his local burger grill. When he got there, he ordered a large strawberry milkshake with extra whip cream and a nice cherry on top with a nice grilled cheeseburger and potato french fries. Fifteen minutes passed and he still waited patiently, using his phone scrolling through funny Facebook videos and looking at old photos of himself. He was sad again and noticed how he really did fear death.

“Is there an afterlife after death? Am I really going to be gone forever?”

He was then interrupted from his thoughts when the nice waiter placed his burger, fries, and milkshake one by one with a clatter in front of him. Good thing she did because he might have broken down once more, just like the first time in the car. Once he finished his meal, he headed back home and went straight to his computer and started researching tips for his climb or for anything else he needed. Turns out it takes about two months to reach Mount Everest’s summit. He also needed an oxygen mask, so he grabbed his shoes and headed to his car as fast as he could. He drove to the climbing gear shop that was about twenty minutes away from his house and bought himself an E-Cylinder oxygen tank and a mask that attaches to it. After all this, it was about eleven o’clock so he set up his bed, put on his basketball shorts, and laid down. He was feeling tired and exhausted but he could not fall asleep. He was still feeling scared.

“Stop being a wimp, just go to bed, everything is fine.”

But deep down he knew that everything was not fine, so he sat up, switched on his TV, and started watching a movie. After only an hour of watching the movie, he fell asleep. He awoke at around 11 a.m. because he forgot to set his alarm.

“You idiot,” he cursed through the foam of the extremely minty Colgate toothpaste that he hated but still would buy every time.

He then put on some clothes and proceeded to start packing the equipment he needed for his climb in one big suitcase, and in the other he had extra clothes for any other occasions, just in case he lived a couple days more. He ordered brunch from McDonald's through his Uber Eats app on his phone. He decided to add a couple more things to his luggage while his food was on the way to his home. It took thirty minutes for his food to arrive. He enjoyed his meal and proceeded to watch some television to kill time before his 5 p.m. flight. Time passed and it was now time for him to head to the airport. He called an Uber and waited outside with his suitcases.

"This damn Uber better not be late."

The Uber took around ten minutes to arrive and the airport was a twenty-minute drive from his house. When he arrived, he almost tripped running into the terminal, since he did not want to miss his first, and most likely last, flight. He went through security and got all his luggage packed, then headed to the plane with his smaller backpack containing his items he would need in the plane, like his phone, headphones, neck pillow, and his extra hoodie. His flight will take almost twenty-four hours. He wasn't prepared for this experience at all.

"Can this thing move a little faster. I don't want to die in a plane."

He fell asleep and woke up a little less than halfway through the flight due to the man sitting next to him that was keeping the armrest to himself and snoring loudly. He thought about pinching his nose.

"Why couldn't I have been given first class for free? This could literally be my last breath."

He stayed awake for another seven hours watching movies and playing games on his phone. He then got so bored out of his mind when his movie finished that he fell asleep again and didn't wake up until the plane was landing. He heard the intercom say some gibberish in another language and then get translated in to English. He exited the plane, went into the airport, and attempted to find his suitcases.

"Where in the hell are my things?" he said in a loud whisper. It took

him ten minutes to find his stuff.

He then proceeded outside to find a taxi or some sort of driver to take him to the hotel he booked. He eventually found one that only charged him 2,000 rupees for the drive, the drive to his hotel was around 20 minutes. He arrived and got the key to his room, he entered and began to set his stuff on the floor next to the bed. By this time, it was late, so he set an alarm for 9 a.m. Nepal time then turned on the TV and found the US channels and was watching some standup comedian that made him laugh a lot. He eventually fell asleep 30 minutes later. He woke up and ordered a breakfast from the room service phone, he had scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage, and waffles with a glass of orange juice. He was astonished due to the fact that they had American food in Nepal.

“This is one big American breakfast, feels like I’m right at home.”

He started preparing his things for his climb. People thought that it was weird he already had most of his climbing gear on on this very nice day. He was two hours away from Mount Everest, so he took a taxi again that charged him a little over 6,000 rupees. He arrived, placed his backpack down, and put on and prepared the rest of his equipment.

He started his climb to the first camp. He wasn’t prepared for the eight-day climb. The nights were far worse than the days—the temperatures would drop below zero. He sometimes would feel like he should just turn around and climb back down. He was not used to the coldness but he made it somehow. He knew he needed to climb more up.

“Don’t give up now, you can do it, I believe you can,” he said as he prepared to climb up to Camp 1. It would take him five days so he needed to start now.

He was three days in to the climb when the temperature was getting even colder. He didn’t take that much food, so he was living off of water, granola and candy bars, and trail mix. He met lots of climbers on the way, but one that stood out to him was an older guy that beat cancer himself three years ago. That inspired him and gave him a little



more hope. He talked to the man and later found out his name was Tom McGuire. He got separated after reaching the camp.

He could not believe it, he was on Mount Everest. He stayed at Camp 1 for the rest of the day and set up his small tent so that he could sleep. He got into his tent and that's when he got the stomach pain, but this time it was far worse. He then started to gag so he got out of his tent and vomited on the snow. He slept it off somehow and woke up in the morning a little better.

He continued the hard journey and made it to the fourth camp, but this is the area where oxygen is low. This scared him. He had to wear his oxygen mask and it made him feel like he was in a hospital bed taking his last breaths. He was up 26,000 feet on Earth and he didn't know how to feel. He had mixed feelings: happy that he had almost completed his first climb, but sad that it would be his last. He stayed the night at the camp then proceeded to finish his climb in the morning.

He was almost to the summit when the pain came back but now was extremely painful.

"Oh, please, God, just let me finish this."

Something inside of him pushed him to keep going. He was there in the line waiting for his turn to go up the summit. After two hours of waiting he got up there and stood tall.

"I did it!"

As he yelled his pain got even worse and he collapsed. It was time. His breaths were getting shorter and shorter by the second. A woman came by his side and tried to help him.

"No, please leave me, this is my fate," he said in a voice full of pain. His stomach was killing him, but he felt at peace. His eyes were starting to slowly close, his heartbeat was skipping beats.

"You did it, man. I am proud of you, but it is time now."

His eyes shut on their own, his breath stopped, and his heart stopped. John forced a smile as he peacefully drifted off, and now he was gone.

# Cat Stress

Zane Russell

BENSON HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: EMILLY PRADO

A sushi roll had alighted upon an inviting surface, pristine and round! Fully embracing its deep slumber, HOWEVER, a human was close! I stared upon it. Tightly curled into a tasty cinnamon roll, lightly seated three inches deep into the comforter. Its rounded back appeared extraordinarily fluffy under the dim hall light. I couldn't wait anymore, I HAD TO PET! But wait, this cat was not so easy to diligently stroke; to alight a hand on the godly surface was to embark on a perilous journey. Upon initial contact it would be impossible to avoid waking the creature. When it rose from its slumber there was no doubt it would demand more, more, and more pets. Pets until its fur was sufficiently flattened so that any means or thoughts of licking had been completely expelled from its reasoning.

Furthermore, this factor also depended on its gravitating mood. All too often as I would wake the loaf, it would deem the pets either a burden too weighty for its tranquil slumber, or an annoyance only rid-able upon the prospect of relocation, and to have this perpetual creature migrate to some other undisclosed location in the house was out of the question. This was a gamble, a gamble that held perilous risk, to both my peaceful night's sleep and the cat's. But once I had laid eyes on that furry length, there was no going back. Knowing full well the peril, I cautiously extended my hand.

NO, it was too soon! Pulling back my hand, I turned and made for the door. What a fool I had been, I still had tasks to undertake. Backpacks to pack and papers to sort before I could turn in. Risking the inevitable now was pointless! I carefully pushed the door open a crack and slid from my room, making to the darkened kitchen. Retrieving a glass from the cupboard, I tipped the filter over its brim. As the cool water flowed into the clear glass my mind ventured to the time that cat

had always been a mystery, appearing periodically on my parents' bed, always leaving following the slightest disturbance. What had changed? Why was this glorious ball of fluff so inviting now? I probably would never know. However, my chance was now. If I could only please it, maybe convince it to stay until I fell asleep, it would be worthwhile. I racked my brain wondering how I could simultaneously achieve this and prepare for school the next day. Yet my planning was cut short, for as I returned to my room, sure enough...the cat was gone.

# The Gated Ground

Alva Otterlei Lokreim

GRANT HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: ALEX BEHR

The faint spring breeze flew softly over the green grass field. The world that previously seemed so cold and dark came alive again. The birds sang in the morning while the beams of sunlight streamed in. The celandines and the bachelor's buttons had started to bloom. All of this beauty I had to longingly observe through a dark classroom that smelled like sweat and teen angst. The classes took forever, and as the teacher talked in a language I didn't understand, I was dying a little more for every minute that passed. Luckily enough, the end of the day was approaching. Only 14 minutes left before I could finally breathe again.

10 minutes.

5.

3.

1.

The bell carved itself through the air, waking the students brutally. I frantically packed my bag, quickly said goodbye to my teacher in the language I still didn't understand, and hurried out the prison-like doors. I took a deep breath. The breeze I'd been craving hit me gently. I felt at peace. Slowly, I started walking. Jogging. Running. I was running as fast as the wind, across the roads and the fields, not knowing where I was going but I loved it. The fields were flying by. The breeze flew through my long hair, flogging it around, and my yellow dress, picking it up with it. Time stopped. The birds sang beautiful tunes and I swear, in that moment, I felt infinite.

Minutes went by before reality caught up to me. I stopped running. I

wasn't unfamiliar with where I'd landed in the field; I think I might've run this path when I was younger. I walked across the soft grass.

Sharp. Cold. Metal.

The peaceful, beautiful field and the dainty blades of grass that brushed against my feet were violently interrupted by metal. I looked down, only to see I was standing right next to a square grating. The holes were big enough to perhaps drop a book through, but nothing more. My curiosity took over, and I sat down on the grating, leaned over, and looked through.

Falling. Screaming. Can I hear myself? Yes. No. I'm not sure. How could I?

The next thing I remember is wet. I felt the streams of the water swirling around me as if I was in the middle of a circular stream. The cave wasn't brightly lit, since the only source of light was the hole in the ground with metal bars across. How did I fall through metal bars? I looked around me, but I could barely see anything. I noticed some purple flowers growing out of the walls of the rounded earth around me were dimly lit. I'd never seen something quite like them before.

The walls must have been at least 20 feet tall and narrower than I'd expected. For a moment, I thought I could climb back up. Maybe the dirt wasn't too soft, or maybe it wasn't as far as it seemed, but I realized, even if I could climb the wall, I couldn't get out of the water. I looked around again and again. There was no way out of the water, and no landslide to sit on.

A sinking feeling grew inside of me and I couldn't breathe. I was trapped in this dark hellhole. My body felt numb and foreign, like it wasn't mine anymore. I knew I wouldn't be able to stay afloat until someone found me; I'd just found the hole myself after walking the same path for years. No one would find me. I didn't want to try anymore, and I slowly let

myself sink underneath the surface again. The cold water flushed over my burning face, and I remember thinking, “This is the last time I will ever feel cold.” The water swallowed me whole, and I sank.

Deeper.

And deeper.

Too deep—I opened my eyes. Minutes had passed and I hadn’t hit the bottom. I turned around. The dark surrounded me, making it nearly impossible to see what direction I was swimming. I kept swimming in the direction I thought might lead me further down, away from where I’d been. The purple flowers started appearing again, growing out of the walls around me. They lead my strokes, and the darkness disappeared slowly. The light streamed in.

I broke through the water surface and instantly fell. I hit the ground hard. My head felt off somehow. Facing the dark ground, I raised my body up. Slowly, I lifted my head. I was in a tunnel. The wall of water was aligned with the walls—sideways. Nothing here made sense. The ground wasn’t grass or dirt, yet it completely blended in with the filthy, earthy tunnel. My dress wasn’t wet or stained, still as yellow as when I put it on this morning, but my hair was soaked. Confused, I walked towards the wall of water. I reached out. My hand stopped at the surface of the water. It wouldn’t pass through.

The panic started all over again. I was trapped. I could only hear myself breathing heavily. The tunnel in front of me, dirty and dark, was my only choice. I tucked my hair back, plucked a flower from the wall, and started walking. It was dark, wet mud surrounding me, and I longed for the dry spring grass.

One step down. The step brightly lit itself, blinding me. I felt dizzy. The walls scattered backwards, away from me, revealing a massive space.

Ticking started. I took a deep breath and walked another step down. It lit up as I stepped on it. I kept going, and so did these strange stairs. They went on forever, and the ticking got louder and louder. I realized it wasn't the ticking from a clock. It was a voice saying "Tic. Tic. Tic."

# At Sea

Aelta Fang

CLEVELAND HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: RYAN NAKANO

He wears a suit and stands  
on a bridge in front of the sky and ocean  
blue and grey mix together set off  
his black suit and crimson tie  
very formal and full of commercial element  
“Getting rid of the business,” he thought.  
He recalled his hometown.  
Green apple shows up  
The smell all around him  
delicious and crispy



# Circus Unknown

Claire Spencer

LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: MATT SMITH

The music flowed from deep within the woods. Eerie, yet strangely inviting. As you walk with the crowd, lanterns begin to appear, lighting the path deeper into the woods. Soon you enter a clearing with a big carnival tent. Adults in extravagant costumes pedaling carts and adults huddled murmuring to each other. As their eyes glance over to you, you feel out of place without a group. As you approach the tent, the Ticketmaster greets you with a sickening grin and an outstretched hand. You place your change into his hand and he gives you a ticket in return. The crowd pushes you into the building with them. Shrieks of horror and awe fill your ears as the smell of sweat and something metallic wafts over you. You're finally able to push to the front, you look through the porthole and immediately recoil backward in fear. Your lunch is now forgotten on the floor next to a small plaque. Inside is a little girl sewn to a little boy—"Siamese Twins," the plaque says.

# Asesino

Hazel Curly O'Malley

BENSON HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: EMILLY PRADO

The table was littered with wires, small boxes, and computer parts. I'd been working on my new robotics programming project for hours now: a video game where you have to take care of a pet cat. The more the cat gets fed and groomed, the more points you get. My dad calls me a prodigy. He just says that because he's my dad, though. I've been interested in programming since I was small. I'm 10 now, and halfway through my freshman year at Harmer's High School of Robotics. As much as I love robotics, though, I love cats even more.

I was debating starting dinner when my dad texted. He was on his way home, meaning I should start wrapping up my project. He's not a big fan of coming home to loads of wires on the table. He tells me that if I can't clean up after myself, then I certainly can't take care of a kitty.

My dad arrived just as the darkness had finally cloaked the neighborhood.

"Hi, Cece," my dad hollered.

He tossed his coat on the hooks in the hallway and walked into the living room and gave me a big hug. The cold air stuck to his body and his face scruff scraped my cheek. I laughed and squirmed away. He told me he was going to shower because Jen was coming over for dinner. I groaned quietly so he couldn't hear.

Jen is my dad's girlfriend. She's weird. She always tries to be my mom. My mom lives in California, not Chicago. Every time she comes over she brings me something. Candy, cookies, a toy...you get the idea. It's like she's trying to get me to like her by buying me things.

My best friend, Herman, thinks that she's jealous of me because my dad prioritizes me. He says that Jen only buys me presents to impress my dad. Whenever she's at my house, I always make her extra jealous and talk about all the good times I have with my dad. Sometimes, if

she's bugging me extra, I talk about my mom. That shuts her right up.

My dad started dating Jen last year. They met at one of my dad's friend's parties. That's peculiar to me because I don't know who would want to be friends with her.

Jen has short, light-brown hair and crooked teeth. Her eyes are yellow-green and she wears blue cat-eye glasses. She works for a large tech company in Thailand that is affiliated with different militaries around the world. Her work is very top secret.

My dad is weird when he's around her. He gets extra bossy and makes me do more chores. She turns him into her minion. Mostly though, I don't like her because she's the reason I can't have a cat.

All I want is a cat. I want to pet it and love it and cuddle it. But here's my problem: Jen is allergic to cats. My dad promised me that when we moved from California after my parents split that we could get a cat once we bought a house. We bought a house! So, it's time for my cat.

I ask my dad for a cat all the time. Every time he says maybe. It's Jen's fault. She doesn't even like cats. She brought me a cat stuffy once. I thanked her for it but I put it straight into my dad's closet. My dad says that I need to try harder and give her a chance.

Jen knocked at the door when it was dark. She walked in and set a box down in the hall. She kissed my dad on his freshly shaven cheek. She fake-smiled when she saw me and gave me a hug. She always hugs me a little too tight.

"I have something for you," she said.

"Surprise, surprise," I said to myself.

"Go get it! It's in the box," my dad chirped. "Jen and I were talking and we decided it was time."

"I think you'll like this one. Be careful with it!" Jen smiled, showing her crooked teeth.

I slumped off the couch and walked over to where the box sat coldly in the foyer. It was no larger than a microwave, and made of a thick, red, plastic-like material. On the top, it had a printed white cat footprint

sticker holding the top flaps together. I picked it up and brought it back to the living room. It was heavy, and I swore I felt something move.

When I rounded the hall into the living room, my dad and Jen sat together on the couching waiting eagerly for my return. They never got this excited about Jen's gifts.

I sat down across from them on the cream-colored, fuzzy rocking chair. The box sat on the floor in front of me. I rocked forward and peeled the paw sticker off the top. I opened up the box, and inside was a cat. I was stunned for a moment. I wasn't sure what to think. The cat looked up at me with piercing yellow eyes.

"What?!" I screamed.

"Happy early Christmas," Jen said excitedly.

"It was Jen's idea." My dad beamed as he kissed her.

"I thought you were allergic," I said.

"I can take medication before I come over," Jen oozed.

I looked down at the cat who was rubbing its orange fur against the side of the box. I gently reached my hand in the box, and it jumped away, a crazed look in its eyes for a moment. I quickly withdrew my hand and looked up.

"It's a girl," Jen said as she gestured to the cat. "Name it whatever you like."

I tried once more to pet the cat. This time she began to purr and I picked her up. She was heavy for her size, but still soft and warm. I pressed my face into her back.

"Thank you so much," I told Jen, tears welling in my eyes.

She smiled knowingly and motioned for me to bring the cat over to them. I kneeled and placed the kitty between Jen and my dad. It turned in a circle and laid down.

"Wow! I've never seen a kitten so outgoing before." My dad smiled. "She must really like you, Ce."

"I chose her carefully." Jen smiled knowingly.

The rest of the night I played with the kitty, who I named Pepper.

She never got sleepy, which I thought was funny because my friend Sarah's kitten mostly napped for the first few weeks when she got it. When it was time for bed, I brought Pepper into my room and set up her litter box, food, and water that Jen had bought and left in her car. After everything was set up, Jen left.

"Sleep well you two! Take good care of CeCe, Pepper." She winked as she closed the door.

I was tired. Pepper was not. She walked around every part of my room as if she was mapping it. Under my bed, on my desk, behind my curtains, you name it.

Finally, she settled on the rug at the side of my bed.

"Good night, Pepper," I smiled at her in the dark.

Sometime during the night, I looked down to where Pepper had been laying. She was gone, but the door was still closed. I sat up quickly and started to look for her in the dull glow cast by the streetlight outside my window. I began to grow uneasy. I checked for her everywhere. I flipped on my light. Still no sign.

Then I heard a quiet tap above me. I looked up. Pepper was perched across the room from me on the shelf near my ceiling. But this was not the Pepper from before. Her body had grown large and had sharpened. I opened my mouth to scream but nothing came out. She jumped down and landed softly.

"Pepper?" I squeaked.

She hissed at me and took a step forward. I looked at her eyes. They had gone matte and glowed softly yellow-green. They reminded me of something I couldn't quite put my finger on. Her eyes looked just like Jen's! I stumbled backward and she followed me.

Then, I realized she looked like the Asesino robot I recently read an article on. The Thai government used it for special targeting. It was nearly undefeatable, and governments had been using them to track fugitives.

"What the..." I said softly. Pepper purred metallically.

I tried to recall the article as my heart pounded. I knew I only had

a few seconds before she attacked, if that. I knew she had a weakness. What was it?

Then I remembered. Of course! The Asesino cat had only been discovered because it had short-circuited due to rain that seeped into a gap in the metal armor at the nape of its neck.

I knew what I had to do. I slowly moved my head to see behind the Asesino Cat that was slowly moving into a pouncing position. I had to time it just right. I watched breathlessly as the metal muscles on her back haunches tensed. As soon as she leaped, I dove to the side and ran towards the bowl of water on the ground by the door.

The Asesino whipped around and fixed its gaze on me. I grabbed the bowl, trying my best to keep as much water in it as possible. I looked at it straight in the eyes. It crouched again. This time I did not move. All of a sudden it came hurling powerfully at me. Her heavy paw came down, aiming for my chest...

I woke with a start. My eyes darted around the room as my heartbeat slowed. As I glanced down, Pepper was sound asleep, curled in her perfect circle, tail tucked, and small breaths against my chest. I exhaled loudly with a small chuckle.

“She must have jumped up here,” I thought.

I traced my fingers down the bridge of her nose.

No Asesino. Just Pepper. My kitty.

# What I Will

Choesang Scholer

FRANKLIN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: DAVID CIMINELLO

I will not stand  
for your racism  
and the  
discriminatory  
language  
you spew  
from your mouth  
the toxic  
thoughts  
that manifest inside  
your brain

I will be heard!

My suffering  
made me  
wiser  
stronger  
a warrior  
full of potential and hope

I will be represented!

Hopeful  
to end the  
blood  
sweat  
tears  
that embrace my life  
story

I will be acknowledged!

To sow the seeds  
of diversity  
inclusivity  
and the power of love  
among this country

I will be respected!

Not to assimilate  
but to cultivate life  
where we can be admired

I will stand up  
not only for myself  
but for those  
whose voices  
were stolen from them

I will stand  
tall and proud  
for what I am  
and where I came from

I will succeed  
and you  
you will be  
here  
right here  
to watch  
me



# Beating Beat

James De Bender

ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: JON RAYMOND

I hadn't slept in three days. I couldn't stay awake at meetings anymore and was too tired to see friends or family. I had been awake so long that nothing felt real. My whole life had become a waking dream, because of him. To be fair, I had never even seen my new neighbor, only heard things from the other people on the block. None of them knew his name, what he did, whether he was married, and rumors flew like bullets in this one-sided war against the man in the house next to me.

On the fourth day, the noise was too much. It shook the windows in the house while being undefined. On its way through the walls of the house next to me, its form had been lost, leaving only sheer volume. Looking at the numbers on my clock, I glimpsed a four, a zero, and another zero. It didn't register in my head what they represented. All I could think of was how close I had been to sleep. This thought permeated my head, beating against my skull as a deep throbbing pain as I dressed. The dressing was slow, the pain in my head hindering the movement of my fingers, and when I was dressed the numbers read four-three-zero. It was no longer the thought of sleep which now beat inside my head, but the number I had seen, and they struck up an irregular and awful tune inside my head. The tune contrasted so greatly with my footsteps as I made my way next door. It went so far against the knocking I performed upon his door, the volume from his home now joining in on the untidy, painful melody that tried so hard to force its way out of my skull.

At last, I heard the latch on the man's door turn, heard his tired greeting of, "Hello." Hello. Hello. It was this word now that beat through my mind as I leapt upon the man, taking in his face as I destroyed it with my hands. He was old with gray hair, and a gray beard, and he now had two black eyes and no teeth. They lay on the floor of

the entrance hall. His unintelligible rasping had now ceased, and all that could be heard was the noise. It was closer now, clearer. I could hear it better now, so clearly the cause of my anguish.

Leaving him in the hall, I crept further, hearing the oppressive noise from below, beneath the house. Locating the stairs that lead downward into the belly of this eardrum-shattering beast. Each step I took resonated in my head, the hellos fading, becoming nothing more than a beat, a beating beat that matched the tune as I descended ever further.

At last I came to a door, the door just barely containing the cacophony which tortured me still. Stumbling forward, latching onto the door, my fingers made a realization my brain could not process: the door was locked. By a stroke of luck, my hands, which had discovered this obstacle now surpassed it while my brain was dumbfounded. They beat against the door, matching the beat within my head, until the door was gone. It lay in splinters on the floor and, stepping over them, I saw them as the door's teeth lying on the floor. At last I had found the source of the endless noise. A stereo stood on the far side of the room, pulsating with the noise it spewed. And standing there among the door's teeth, I heard it clearly. And hearing it now, I wept. As I wept, I fell to my knees. And here I slept, and I slept well. The sound did not stop my sleep, but rather aided it, and I slept surrounded by the sound. When I awoke, I saw no numbers without meaning. I felt no pain inside my head. I felt only the consoling beat of the sound.

# Hunger

MaKenzie Mendoza

GRESHAM HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: CARI LUNA

My shoes have carried me long and far, they hold memories of walking lonely days on the trail, wandering places and seeking adventures so they can feel alive once more. For they crave the feeling of the summer's warm breeze or the winter's cold breath against their rubber soul once more. For they have a long journey, yet an exciting adventure that awaits them ready to be explored. They hunger for that exciting moment in their rubber soul, for they can feel and listen once more.

# Losses

Ivan Sanchez

LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: MATT SMITH

The aching in my stomach. Clamping, tightening, crushing: these are some of the feelings I typically experience after losing people in my life. Losing people is unavoidable, unbearable, and uncontrollable. You can't stop it; you can only live out the moments you have with them. Throughout my life, loss is not only unbearable, but also unforgettable.

During the fall of 2005, I was sent to my grandparents' to live for six months in Zillah, Washington because my mother and father were trying to create a better life for me. As a kid, you can't stop what your parents decide. I had no choice and, at the time, I was very excited to see my grandparents, not knowing how long I was going to be away from home. My mother and father woke me up one day with my bags packed and said, "You are going to your grandparents'!" That day my mother drove me halfway to my grandparents' place, a nearby gas station, where my grandmother would pick me up. It was eleven at night and the little goodbye that I could give my mother had me in tears the whole way back to my grandparents' house. My grandmother had one of her friends with her, so we didn't do much talking until the next morning. The atmosphere to me, a mere child at the time, seemed so frightening and at the moment that I wanted it all to end; I didn't want to be myself anymore.

Being just a little baby, I wanted my mom back. The sad truth was that I wasn't going to see my mother or father for six months. The sense of loss was really coming down hard on me the first couple weeks of living there. I was constantly crying, getting sick, and wanting to return home. I wanted it all to be alright—happy and playful again. I would be in another room listening to my grandmother on the phone with my mother, talking about how I was doing and how she thought I wouldn't be able to stay six months without being able to see my parents. In my mind now, years later, I understand, but when I was

little, I did not have a choice where I could live. I just kept on living every day with hope—even though I did not want to be where I was—and gradually learned to trust and gained independence.

In this way, staying in Zillah became fun. I played games, became more comfortable with my extended family, and eventually came to love it there. Yet I still did not understand why I was sent to them; I was a child and did not see my parents' motivations. A few years later, I found out why I was sent to my grandparents, the reason being that my grandpa was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes and had less than a few years left to live. And I only realized how sad and serious the situation became when visiting him in the hospital with increasing regularity.

In 2008, on November 8th, the feeling of loss weighed heavily on me; more and more tears welled in the eyes of more and more family members. The doctor had told my mother and grandmother that grandpa had less than two days. "This is your guys' decision, you can pull it or not. I am so sorry for what you are going through," was the last thing I heard before leaving the hospital with my uncle until the next day.

The next day we returned to the hospital where the mood had become unbearable. I didn't want to be there and I didn't want to lose the one man in my life who had become everything to me. In the hospital room, I saw my mother, father, aunts, uncles, cousins, and close friends all gathered around the one man who was a big part of everyone's life. I remember my mom telling me, "He's going to a better place, mijó. He's going to be okay." At that point, I was the only grandkid that my grandfather held before my family made the decision to pull his life support. It was the first loss of my life, and not the last, but by far the worst.

There was a moment in my grandfather's passing where he was taken away for a few minutes, and then, unexpectedly, came back to life, only to leave us again a few minutes later when it was finally his time. To this day, I wonder what it would be like if we still had him in our lives, whether it would make any difference. I wonder even more, if

he was still here, whether all the bad things would still have happened in my life; for example, my parents splitting up, or again losing loved ones or important opportunities.

Then again, there is the good side of the story, where I think of the good that has come to me not because of his death but because of the loss I survived. The monstrous sense of loss—*forfeiting family and friends*—has affected me in many ways. I do believe that if I had not experienced these losses, my life wouldn't be as good as it is today. Nevertheless, I carry with me always the fear of losing someone that has made a big impact on my life, or someone I love and care about very much. Ultimately, I've realized that loss is a fact of life that can't keep me from moving on in my own. In hindsight, after losing Grandpa, I was able to come out stronger, knowing that the people I've lost were there for me no matter what and always will be, as long as I remember.

# Skipping Class

Benjamin Mateer

BENSON HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: MARK POMEROY

Car wheels rolling across cold concrete  
Brown boots falling like autumn leaves  
I sit here on this bus stop  
Hands cold and lips chapped  
I watch the flow of life in front of me  
school bus  
firetruck  
blue bike  
All going where they need to be  
My breath is moist and warm  
I gaze off into the grey blanketed sky  
and my phone buzzes

# What They've Done

Lilli Rudine

FRANKLIN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: MONTY MICKELSON

They have done this.  
They have dragged their voices  
Across our beds  
So we'll be cold and alone  
And almost dead  
So every time we try to sleep  
We would feel them  
Bury us into categories  
We would burn ourselves  
To abide to so they don't do it again.  
They have smashed their normality  
Into us to corrupt  
Our differences with sin and error  
To make us afraid to question  
Ourselves and our blossoming  
Abilities to change,  
To change their ways to keep us down.  
With that,  
They have strangled their fists  
Until it bled onto our open palms  
That have always been accepting  
Only so that they can say  
Their blood is on our hands  
Because we actually tried  
Peaceful solutions for once  
Instead of discrimination.  
Well, I wasn't going to have it.  
I wasn't going to shame myself  
From meeting new people



I wasn't going to arrest myself  
From exercising my rights.  
I wasn't going to execute myself  
From coming out of the closet  
When I was ready to.  
The only thing that they did  
To hurt me  
Was to do that to you.  
They pushed you out of your  
Comfort zone  
So that they could leave you  
Picked to pieces of all of  
Your beautiful definitions and love  
Thinking that it's all gone with the wind  
Of low self esteem  
And what those other people think.  
They did it to get to me,  
And they got to me.  
So now, I'm going to rip out their  
Hardened ignorance  
Out of their thoughts of bloodshed  
And break it from their victim card  
With my experience of their  
Categories.  
I'm going to stomp out their fire  
That burned our bones  
And drown their justice system in  
My blossoms  
With my unappreciation of their  
Ideas of sin and error  
I'm going to keep their hatred prisoner  
That we won't let them do this  
...anymore

With my peaceful solutions.  
But most importantly,  
I'll do this with my words.  
I'm going to  
She's going to  
He's going to  
And they are going to  
And we would welcome you  
If you wanted to do that too.

# Boiled Butterflies on My Body

Emma Howard

LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: DAMIEN MILES-PAULSON

buttercups, blueberries

a bombardment of bumblebees

beautiful ferocity

failed frigid universe

cyprus, rain, blood river

ivy, child crying, torn earth

woman bursting

efflorescence

a mondegreen of garden poetry

dripping honey sunbeam

poignant smile

eye crinkle

child wailing

brilliant brimming brisk pool

floral breath and vegetated prickled skin

perfect lonely light

eyes of oceans

mouths of sweet sugar

body buried beneath cool breathing soil

blankets of boiling rain,

walls of humid moisture

crumpled souls

colliding lips, exploding bodies

splendid

scripted

*end*

She is in the garden picking buttercups and blueberries. That garden is teeming with life, the insects hazily buzzing and the baking grasses overrunning the flowers slightly. His heart is bombarded by her ferocious beauty and a flurry of bumblebees. She sucks the nectar out of a small vinca minor blossom, he smiles knowing her lips will be sticky and her tongue sweet and floral tasting when he kisses her. It is as though in this sunny garden the universe has been frozen, fallen. He fell in love with the curve of her waist and the mess she leaves each place she goes.

The Cyprus trees provide shade in the summer and shelter from the rain in the springtime. The rain makes the garden chatter as over filled drops attack the leaves of the living things and splash on their bare skin. The moss that hangs down and tickles the foreheads of that yards inhabitants rustles in the soft breeze. All the summer long they lounge beneath those lush trees, slowly being choked by ivy. Their child cries in her stomach and their toes dig into the torn earth beneath them. The woman's belly seems to be bursting, impossibly large, impossibly round. She is coming into efflorescence in that mondegreen of a garden of poetry.

The sun drips like honey, making their skin sticky. Her smile is poignant, his smile is trusting. Her eyes crinkle, and the child does not

wail. His eyes fill with brilliant brisk pools. She is a river of blood, with floral breath and vegetated prickled skin. To him the light is perfectly lonely and her eyes still hold the ocean and her lips still hold sugar. A body is buried beneath the cool breathing soil. The salty blood aroma and baking grass mix in the heavy air, choking her throat and causing acidic saliva to gather in her mouth. She spits it into the dust. Then come blankets of boiling rain and crushing walls of humid moisture. They remain beneath the cyprus, their souls crumpled. Lips still colliding, bodies still exploding at this splendid scripted end. She left her a scar across her stomach and an aching within their withered souls.

# Time Flies

Adam Meager

GRESHAM HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: ARTHUR BRADFORD

August 14

11:26 p.m.

Everyone finds out eventually, sometimes too late. I just found out sooner than most. Twelve days. That's all I have left.

As I lay here, drenched in sweat, I can't help but think of all the things I have yet to accomplish. Touching the sky. Experiencing danger. Finding out who I really am.

August 15

6:58 a.m.

"Last week of school," my mom repeats. "End it right!"

"I know! You haven't stopped reminding me!" I retort, sounding more harsh than I intended.

Ignoring my rude tone, my mom tosses me my lunch. I've tried to explain that I'm old enough to make my own lunches, but she ignores me. I know she means well, but babying an 18-year-old never ends up right.

Getting ready to head to school, I grab the keys to my new motorcycle, a red and black BMW S 1000 XR, along with my custom helmet, gloves, and the rest of my gear. Putting on the crimson red helmet that covers practically none of my straight black hair, and the rough feel of the gloves against my smooth, ebony skin makes me feel invigorated, ready for anything. Walking towards the garage, I grab my scraped up four-year-old backpack. The black leather boots nearing my knees click on the concrete and alert my hefty English Bulldog, Nuihc, named after my brother's *World of Warcraft* character. Excitedly, he runs

up to me, snorting and puffing with every step.

“I gotta go buddy, see ya in a few hours,” I tell him, shooing him away towards his playhouse and two-pound beef-marrow bone.

Riding to school, blasting my playlist mainly made up of Pierce the Veil, The Amity Affliction, and so on, I catch sight of Dub. Dub is his nickname, his real name’s actually Cadon. Dub is short for W, W is short for Watermelon. He’s known as Dub because one night, we dared him to eat an entire watermelon. Not one to back down from a dare, he ate the whole thing, rind and all.

I don’t have the time to flag him down today, probably not ever again. I have too much on my mind considering the events of last night.

August 15

2:56 p.m.

As I get through the last hour of the school day, I start to reminisce on my previous achievements, adding “Graduate High School” on the “Completed” section of my bucket list. Three items left. “Get a K.O.,” “Climb 150 meters at once,” and “Ride in an airplane” are all that stare back at me from the torn page. Staring at the page, I wonder how I’m ever going to complete my list.

Since I live about six hours from the nearest small airport, I’m going to need to get prepared. I need money, but, more importantly, I need a plan. Heading home, I make a plan. A drastic plan, but a plan nonetheless. As I pull into the driveway I think to myself, if this is really what I want, is this worth it? Pushing that thought to the back of my mind, I start for my room.

“One-hundred-fifty-three dollars? Is that really it?” I think to myself. Searching my room from floor to ceiling, I don’t find anything worth anything.

She won’t mind, I think to myself, walking towards my mom’s room. Searching all her drawers in and out, under her mattress, even in her purse, all I find is \$214. In one last effort, I raid her bathroom. Hoping

for a stroke of luck, I reach for her makeup bag. Bingo! There sits a roll of cash, about half the size of my fist. Not looking promising, I grab it anyway. Looking closer, the bill on top was a \$5 bill, but all the other bills were \$100's. \$3,505 in the second roll. In total, I amassed \$3,872. Not bad.

August 15  
10:48 p.m.

"The plan is to leave around 1:30, okay?" I tell my best friend of nine years, Mia. Mia's a spunky short girl with long blue hair, the person I trust the most. She's the only option I have to tell about my plan.

"Th... That's crazy. It's so crazy that it just might work!" Mia yells enthusiastically, more enthusiastic than I expected. In a way it hurt, it hurt that she didn't even seem sad at the point of "death in 11 days."

"Anyway, on that note, I gotta get ready for work. See ya later! Peace!" Mia says, hanging up the phone.

Piecing together the last of my plan, I start to gather everything I need for my stressful next 10 days. I'm hoping that everything turns out alright so I can live my last day in complete, calm bliss.

August 16  
1:14 a.m.

Waking up from my two-hour power nap, I grab my backpack containing everything I should need for my next nine days. Double checking everything, I find my water bottle, survival knife, phone, phone charger, headphones, multiple granola bars, bucket list, pills, and \$3,872 all in place. Surveying the house one last time, I find a sleeping bag, extra pillow, and hairbrush and put them all in my backpack. Getting out of probably my last shower for the next 10 days, I think to myself how crazy this really is.

Starting my motorcycle, I silently say goodbye to my house, family,



and dog one final time.

August 16

6:52 a.m.

Nearing the airport, I think of how I'm going to persuade someone to take me for a ride. If needed, I'll have to bribe them.

The airport is closed off by a 12-foot-tall chain link fence, and of course, barbed wire at the top. Ignoring the "Do Not Trespass" sign, I start to climb. Ditching my trusty bike, I eventually make it over.

About 200 meters away is the closest hangar. I scout it out and don't see anything, so I make a run for it. Hoping that there's someone there willing to give me a ride to the mountains, to check off two out of three items on my list. The list. I'm deeply regretting ever writing that list.

As I enter the first hangar, there just so happens to be not only a small, black airplane, but there's also a person. After observing the person in the hangar, I'm certain he's about to take off.

Thinking of how I can ask him to give me a lift, he spotted me. He runs over to me, yelling and flailing his arm like a maniac. I put my arms up in surrender, but to no avail. He's still as angry as ever. Throwing all logic out the window, I decide to get one of the three items checked off. Sooner than I expected, but still checked off.

Tipping one of the boxes on its side, I make a run for it. I hop into the airplane, turn it on as quickly as possible but it's too late. He's grabbed me, rendering my right arm completely useless. I hit him over the head with a nearby metal rod, instantly dropping him to the ground. I guess I hit him harder than intended because as soon as I look over to see what happened, a pool of blood has already formed and is slowly swallowing the formerly gray concrete.

My body still pumping with adrenaline, I try my best to get the plane moving out of the hangar.

August 16

7:23 a.m.

As the plane starts to pick up speed on the runway, I'm rushed with a sense that something is horribly wrong.

I power through the feeling, but it's shaken me to the core. As the plane finally lifts off the ground I realize that I've never been in a plane, let alone driven one. It's too late to turn back, I'm already in the sky.

Taking in the entire view of the mountains just ahead, and the grassy fields down below, I ask myself what happens next. I don't know what I will do. After I get to the mountains and climb, I'll have completed my list with 10 days left.

As I think of the near future, I've just processed my recent achievement in my list. Steering with one hand, I check off "Get a K.O." from my list, though now that I look back on it, it might have been more than a K.O. Putting my list back in my backpack, I lose grip of the yoke. Quickly, I attempt to grab hold of the yoke again. I'm successful in grabbing it, but I overextend and end up forcing the plane into a nosedive.

I'm so stupid. This could have waited, but I guess that was more important than life itself. Panicking, I hold my breath and brace for impact.

August 16

8:06 a.m.

I don't remember ever hitting the ground. Which way is the ground?

Trying to get up, I soon realize I can't move my left arm. I turn to look at my arm, though there's only a bloody, mangled stump where my arm should be.

Don't panic. Don't panic. I have bandages in my pack, I think to myself. Looking around, my backpack is nowhere in sight. Damn...

Attempting to clear my foggy mind, my body screams in pain. I push

through the pain to move my legs to the best of my ability, but to no avail.

With only one appendage functioning, all I can do is lay there in defeat. Staring up into the morning sky, I tell myself that someone will come to my aid.

I attempt to scream, but nothing comes out.

My phone! I reach into my pocket with my one good arm, searing pain shooting throughout my body. Reaching into my pocket, all I can feel is shattered glass.

This is it. This is how I die, I think to myself, slipping from consciousness.

# East Africans

Fuad Omar

ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: LAURA LAMPTON SCOTT

My homeland is very different because in my homeland we don't have snow or a lot of rain because the weather is always the same. And it sounds like a city and it smells fresh because it has good air and rough water.

It comes from my grandparents because they were there since my father was born. They fought for it.

My homeland is a lion, a tiger, and me. We're powerful.

# Memento Mori

Emma Hentschel

BENSON HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: EMILLY PRADO

We don't believe we are temporary. We believe our time is infinite. We think we can't die. And we keep thinking exactly that, until we see what death is. Until we see a living being deformed and weakened, consumed by sickness and death. Until then, we live like we can't die. Like we will live forever. But we also live like we're rushing. Rushing. Rushing. Always rushing. As if time is running out, never stopping to think about it. Think about what, you ask. Simple, I say. Life. We keep working, we keep buying, as if we want to fill a void. We're lusting after knowledge, we're thirsting for answers to all our questions. But the answer is so obvious and plain and simple. There is no answer. There is not one ultimate truth. We work and we buy to fill the void the questions leave. We fill everything with unnecessary belongings to try to give our lives, our existence, meaning. But it is so much simpler. What we all are looking for is so much simpler than we can even comprehend. We try to be someone else, we try to impress people we don't even know. And never do we stop and just be. Yet that is the essence of our being. Our purpose is just to be. We never stop to think, *I am. I breathe. I live.* But our only purpose is to be alive, it is to be ourselves. Our purpose is not to strive for things beyond our reach, we simply have to be, to live like we want to. The purpose of your existence is to be you, to live your life. And no one else's. But what does it matter, you ask. It seems to me like all men were born to die, you say. And I say yes. Yes, all men must die, but before we die, we live. We learn to live, and in learning to live, we learn to die. And now stop. Stop rushing. Stop thinking. Breathe. Just breathe. Stop and take a moment. Just one moment. Life is so short. Take a moment to feel alive.

# Tennis

Milo Lubin

FRANKLIN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: DAVID CIMINELLO

Harsh and unforigiving  
a constant struggle  
you wrestle me  
back to the other side of the court

You can hear  
Thumpf  
Thumpf  
Thumpf

I am tennis  
I am cold and I bite  
your fingers  
press callouses  
into your soft palms  
I twist at your shoulder  
Hammer at your knees  
And drill into your  
Self esteem

You fight with  
The ball and  
The net and  
Yourself  
And days after  
You are getting  
Better  
But never  
Good enough

I am tennis  
I entice you  
Draw you in  
And by then  
It's too late  
To go back  
You know nothing else

# Prove It

*Recipient of The Oregonian/OregonLive Prize for Nonfiction*

Audrey Taylor

LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: MATT SMITH

“Prove it.”

“Can you prove your lineage?”

“Can you sing or dance?”

“Can you play a drum?”

“Can I see your Ancestry DNA results?”

How must I prove my heritage to you?

What boxes do I have to check to be close enough to your expectations of what a Native girl looks like? I have spent my whole life thinking about how I am Native enough. I have my entire family tree on my phone, I have been to every tribal meeting, every powwow, clutching to every opportunity I have had to feel connected to my culture, yet I still feel detached. Is my blood Native enough? Do I look too white to be a red-skinned girl?

“You just don’t seem like an Indian.”

Is it because I don’t look like your mascot?

Because I am not named Tiger Lilly?

Oh wait, I know! Is it because I don’t seem like a savage? Will I ever be Indian enough for you?

People only see a select few stories. The red-skinned mascot, aka the warrior. The defenseless reservation girl, aka the victim. The “sexy Indian chief,” Victoria’s Secret model, Tiger Lilly, an object. No one sees me. The Native girl from North Portland, who lives just like you, but who has a different story. There are so many expectations to be had and assumptions made about my culture that when people see me, meet me, see who I really am, they almost feel a bit of disappointment.



Disappointed I can't dance for them, disappointed I can't speak the dying language of my people, disappointed that I am not the character that they have come to expect.

To the government, we are a number.

To the people, we are a character.

To ourselves, we are still here.

My tribe didn't get formally "recognized" by the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs until late in the year 2000, despite being in the official history of Washington State. Once recognized, each individual member of the tribe gets assigned a registration number with the government. According to the last census, there are over five million registered "American Indians" in the United States, 78% of which are living outside of reservations. While that might seem like a large population while you focus on the number, maybe you should think that that is roughly two-thirds of the population of New York City alone, but those are only the ones the government accepts.

Just because the government won't acknowledge our existence

And just because our voices are forgotten

Doesn't mean our cultures haven't continued to thrive

We are indigenous, We are strong, and We are alive.

I need to remind myself of my voice. I often feel like I talk about myself and Native issues too much, that I am too much. I get into this mindset that, "Oh, people are tired of hearing about this from me" and "I just don't want people to think I am preaching." But ever since I started realizing how little people know, I couldn't stop talking. People need to know, and there are so few ways that they can find out.

I just want people to know that

We are still here and Proud.

# A Lesson

Salvador Duran

GRESHAM HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: ARTHUR BRADFORD

*Grandson, let me tell you a story...*

Summer, the time where shit on the streets gets worse and is bumpin' every day, and every baby mama is out with their *vatos* to make sure they don't cheat, and every mother is worrying about their son, hoping that the cops don't get them or the other gangs. The reason every mother feared for their *bijo* was that they knew that if their sons got caught by the fucking 5-O, they would either get shot or imprisoned just for being a gang member. The other reason is if the other lame-ass gangs would try and take them out. So every *cholo* had to carry a piece to fend for themselves or for their loved ones... that's how it was. So, my homie paged me telling me if I'm down to roll with him today, so that fool already knew that I was down, so I got my crap ready.

My homie pulls up in his 1964 Chevrolet Impala SS Coupe. This damn car was fly as hell. It had a maroon color to it with a fine ass *bina* on the hood, and on the side of the doors there were Aztec warriors. But the interior was amazing, man, the seats had a design like suede and were wavy but it was soft, and the dashboard was also dope. His dash was smooth, like if it was freshly polished wood. On his rearview mirror was a bullet casing that had been polished and it also had a picture of his mom. I'd ask him from time to time why he had those two things... but he would never say. All he would say was to not worry about it, so I wouldn't ask from there on. So, we pulled up to my homie's place, my homie honked, and our other homie came out. This fool always had some stupid shit on, but at the same time it was fly so we didn't hate, but we would make fun of him.

All of us in the homie's lowrider bumpin' to some Kid Frost, SPM, and some oldies, passing the smoke around, each of us taking a puff.

Things I and my homies carried on us, shit man, I carried like four grams of weed, some backwood, a knife, and my colt 45 in the back of my pants. Lil Speedy, he carried a fucking uzi and I don't know how he never got caught with it, man, the shit was crazy. Apart from that, *ese* would carry cocaine on him as well, and a handmade rosary that his dad made for him in prison. He always kept it in his back pocket but never took it out.

And my other homie, Lil Smokey, that man would be having this little bag full of roaches from times we would smoke, and he would always say, "Gotta save them, homie, for later." He would also have a fucking lighter that was always on its last spark so we stopped asking. We went cruisin' around our neighborhood and just started talking about shit like our life, and if we lived a different life, or where we would move to, or if we would still live in the same neighborhood, but, man, we young and we just say, "Fuck it man let's just live our life."

So, we pulled up to a supermarket not far from my homie's spot and the Chinese lady would always tell us to leave, that she doesn't want any trouble, but we didn't listen to her. My homie, Lil Speedy, liked to steal, so I got me and Lil Smokey's shit while Lil Speedy went to his car, I paid a little extra to the Chinese lady telling her to "keep the change". But that day all we did was cruise around LA looking for some fine *mamacitas*. We went to the one spot that we were sure there would be fine ass girls: the beach. There was always some fine *mamis*. Me and my homies would say, bet you won't holla at that *chola* right there. So I always would say, fool I bet you a beer that I will get her number. This is how I got my name. Everybody called me Lil Quick, cuz I was always quick at getting the girls.

I don't know how I did it, but I did. I made sure that I would get my homies some girls, too, and I would get the girl's number as well, and some homie paid for my beer. That was the only way that I would get the free beer, if not, I would be owing my homies beer all the time. One day my homie Lil Speedy, he just got done dropping me off at my place and I had a bad feeling deep in my gut. I was also asking if he wanted to

stay for a beer, and he said, “Nah, homie, I gotta get back home to my baby mama. How about tomorrow I will? Alright, G.”

And I said, “Alright, homie, I’ll see you tomorrow.”

An hour passes by. Next, I get a call from my homie Lil Smokey and he tells me that Lil Speedy was found all shot up in a drive-by, and that was the last time I ever saw him.

*But shit, Grandson, that’s how life was when I grew up in LA, and I’m only telling you so that you don’t do the same shit as I did. Yeah, it was nice, but it was hard, too. I quit that old life for your mother. Once she came into my life, I made sure that I would be in her’s forever and for your grandma.*

# Untitled

Reese Waters

ALLIANCE HIGH SCHOOL AT MEEK

WITS WRITER: LAURA MOULTON

Dear Grandma Linda,

Although you will never see this letter, I feel that I still need to write it to you. I want to start off and say your legacy will never be forgotten. You are one of the strongest women I have ever met. I know that my life wouldn't be where it is if I had never known you. When I was born, my parents were living with you because they needed somewhere to live, and you gave them that, as well as me. The first few months of my life were with you and I wouldn't change that for anything. You had the best cooking and the best sense of humor. You literally always picked me up when I was down, and you always gave me advice. I learned so much in life because of you and your death affected me the most of anyone's. I know you had a horrible last few years of your life and I knew you were ready to go, even though you were young for death. My stupid aunt threw her newborns onto you, so she basically didn't have to do anything, but you were strong and raised those kids like a pro.

If it weren't for you, I wouldn't be at Meek today and I don't know where I'd be today if you didn't tell me to come here. I know you just wanted the best for me because when I told you I was getting my GED in the hospital, you got upset. You told me to go to Meek and I felt like I had to go back to school for you. Also for myself, but I did it to make you proud the most. I know you see what I'm doing and I hope you're happy.

I'm forever going to miss coming to your house after school and having long talks with you about my day or week. I'm going to miss the smile you'd have every time you laughed. I am going to miss your cooking, and now every time I smell cigarettes, I will think of you. Who would have thought such a disgusting smell would turn into my

favorite smell just because it reminds me of you so much? I thank you for everything you did for my family and all the things you've told me, as well as all the advice you gave me.

I love you grandma, and may you forever rest in peace.

Love,  
Reese

# The Ordinary Flower

Henry Garcia-Sic

ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: CHRISTOPHER ROSE

The flower floats through the air  
The orange petals reflecting the sun's rays  
A blast of the sun makes the flowers dance  
The green stem sweating from the 100-degree rays  
We breathe in the sweet aroma of a tulip  
Dark shades, light shades, the petals stand out from the rest  
Shadows that mirror my ordinary flower  
A nice blue sky for my flowers to look at  
The flower feels the strong wind blowing it from the ground  
My flower stands tall forcing itself back up  
The flower might be ordinary but has a heart in the middle of it  
The petals protect the heart like a knight's shield

# Setting out to find a family

Ian Baldwin

BENSON HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: DAVID CIMINELLO

Through the battle of Endor I speed by  
Changing the blood in my veins and cells into new cells  
Looking for my family who wanted me for a son  
They are travelley and timeless without a doubt  
Seeking out new destinations,  
they are crazy and out of their minds

So bold and fearless,  
My dad would be the leader  
As an air pilot flying  
A plane so great and bold  
Flying my family to new destinations  
When they stop and see me  
They come over to me,  
And pick me up

Like a new person being found and loved  
Finding the family that they were always looking for,  
My family picks me up  
We load up onto the traveling vehicle  
We fly off into the sunset  
Hoping for gallant new life  
And a family  
To be grand and fair



# I Remember

Denise Sanoasieng

FRANKLIN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: MARK POMEROY

I remember soft spots of grass, the sun glowing through the trees

I remember bloody knees and gravel in my wounds

I remember careful fingers holding my face, the soothing scent of lavender and sugar citrus

I remember sweet smiles and corny pick-up lines

I remember my phone being shattered on my white tiled kitchen floor

I remember bawling in front of my mom, barely able to choke out my fast words and apologies

I remember being anxious at 2:57 p.m., just before the bell echoed at 3:00 p.m., throughout the halls and classrooms that had finger paintings hung on the windows

I remember nightfall and butterfly shaped lights on a clear cord that slung across the ceiling

I remember rain and pink roses, sitting on my front porch rummaging through the best excuses I had in my head

I remember crisp january morning air, bundled up in the stupid oversized coat I hated and heaving myself into the car to hustle to school

I remember sunsets on grassy hills and the reflection of the clear blue sky in the tall buildings located downtown

I remember breaking myself down to my very core and exposing my love interest to the real, raw and not so perfect me

I remember being scared to ask anyone for help

I remember refusing to show anyone my emotions, how I feel

I remember being who I was, the finest, happiest, pure me I could be

# Broken

Elle Knofczynski

LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: DAMIEN MILES-PAULSON

Butter, flour, yeast; the smells were encapsulating. Steam floated in from the back, dissipating the second after it formed. The heat from the ovens alongside the moisture created dense air, like the kind you feel in late August after a long storm, with the rain beginning to evaporate, humid and sticky. It was harder to breathe, but nobody ever minded because they got to smell the bitter sweetness as the man behind the counter brought out croissants and bagels and roasted coffee beans. It was an old-fashioned place where checkered tiles covered the floor, with a couple chips in the ground from spills or slips or other accidents, or maybe not accidents. The sun was out and the dry heat of the approaching summer caused people to gather near the windows. They were always spotless. If someone happened to press a finger along the glass, the man would grab a bottle of window cleaner along with a small white rag and make it look as if it was never there. They were kept so clean that, when sitting next to them, you could almost feel the rose bushes from outside sweeping against your thigh. The woman that sat on the other side of the glass from the roses was a student at the nearby university. She was getting her daily cup of coffee. When she sat down, she pulled out a small pink mirror. Balancing the mirror in one hand, a small brush in the other, she swept tinted glitter from the top of her cheekbone to the center of her cheek. Her eyes only left her own face when she caught the reflection of the man's gaze from behind the counter, for then her eyes met with his, but only for a second before she looked away. He knew her order by now. He liked it when she paid with cash, because when she handed him the money, he got to feel the delicate surface of her skin, and imagine her rubbing lotion on them at night before bed. And so, he confessed, he wanted her. "I know you do," she said, "but you are not for me, and I am not for you." She left her

coffee and him behind. The next morning, he arrived at her doorstep before she had awoken. He placed a white cup with red lip marks on the lid lopsidedly balanced on the porch. A couple taps of his fingertips on the door, not enough for her to hear but enough for him, and then he was gone. Two hours and thirty-seven minutes later, she awoke. She opened the door, being presented with his gift. She picked it up, feeling the weight of something within. It smelt like metal, the kind of metal that has been rusting for years after being left exposed to the elements. She peeked through the hole in the top, but only reflections of light shone through. She pushed the sides of the cup towards one another, making it easier to adjust her fingernails under the curves of the edges of the lid. Holding the lid in one hand, the cup in the other, she stared. She stared inside the cup, holding it closer to her face, but she held it at such an angle that caused the shards of broken mirror to fall across her welcome mat.

# Pregnant Pinky

Kevin Herrera

GRESHAM HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: ARTHUR BRADFORD

Even counting with my fingers is kinda embarrassing just cause of my right pinky.

My pinky used to be skinny and normal size. Now it looks like it's pregnant, and I cannot stress it enough, and I guess now the option of being a hand model goes straight out the window. How did my pinky get to the point to where it has a belly bump, you may ask? Well, it's quite simple: a clumsy soccer dive mistake and Mexican remedies.

I was out and about with my friend, Steven, and decided to play soccer right outside my neighbor's house, where his wall was the goalie box. I remember I was feeling cocky and a show off cause my mom had just bought me brand new Nike shoes and, boy, those were hot at the time. I also recall calling him a broke boy for not having them, but he simply shrugged it off and flicked the cig off his hands. Steven was six years older than me. I was 10 at the time, so you can most likely picture the amount of power that was put in his shots, especially penalty shots since they are kicked from a very short distance from goalie. He asked me to be goalie and me, being a dumb wit, tryna show off, I did, thinking he was gonna take it easy on me and think that I was cool. But I turned out to be wrong.

As I got to the wall, I could already see the madness in Steven's blue, possessive eyes from calling him a broke boy. The thing is, I said what I said, but I didn't mean what I said. It was too late. Plus, I didn't feel like apologizing. The first few kicks were soft and slow but I knew Steven pretty well, he liked saving the best for last. It was getting pretty late and Steven recommended we should wrap it up and go to McDonald's, but I wanted to still play, therefore, I suggested he should kick it one more time. Since it was the last kick, I wanted it to go out with a bang, so I told myself to throw myself wherever the ball goes and that's

exactly what I did, I threw myself with all my fifth-grade body weight to the right and landed straight on my right hand. He ended up scoring but I immediately knew that was the least of my problems. I remember standing up, sort of laughing, and not feeling my pinky and ring finger, as if only my right hand had been shot with a tranquilizer dart. When I complained about the numbness to Steven, he laughed and asked if I was just messing with him, but then quickly came to the realization that I might have broken it, and suggested I went home instead of munching out on strawberry cream pies.

My mom wasn't too happy her son came home with a pinky that looked it had just been stung by a killer wasp, so she smacked me right in the face with her pillow, since she was in her room, but if we were in the kitchen, I bet she would have hit me with a wooden spoon. My mother is the person I would always go to if something bad has happened, physically-wise, but that day showed me that sometimes that person you go to should be a doctor. She walked me to the kitchen and grabbed the wrapping paper from the bottom cabinet, VapoRub, and a soda can of Sprite from the fridge. She applied the VapoRub slowly on the big ol' bump and gently rubbed on the spot, wrapped the wrapping paper we use for decorating gifts and taped it on while I slowly drank the Sprite. I remember going to sleep and trying my hardest to ignore the pain, and I quietly and calmly drifted into sleep.

Woke up the next day with a bigger bump!

# Unreality

Collin Harrington

BENSON HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: DAVID CIMINELLO

Seeing with shut eyes

Hide? No—brushed by intangible bristles  
that cover undimensional space

Escaping the fangs, unimaginable

Throughout history they appear  
as places heroes gods

Infinitely many forms

Inlaid into your inner consciousness  
guarding you from the unreality

They are your gate

preventing your enlightenment

A universe that allows such a cruel existence  
obviously there is meaning

One beyond fathomable imagination

# Jealousy

Kamilah Watson

BENSON HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: JON RAYMOND

Jealousy is a Young Frail Woman  
That lives in the land of sensitivity  
She lives for her love and hides it in her heart  
She lives feeling that someone wants what she has already claimed  
So she always jumps into things with no remorse  
Some even say she has no morals  
She is always caught with her head in the clouds  
So she is always alone and has no self-worth  
She feels as useless as a pack rat  
So all she does is just sit alone in her land cautiously holding her heart.



# Blue Broken Rhythm

Maddie Reifsteck

LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: DAMIEN MILES-PAULSON

I started my jog late this morning and, because I started it late, everything was wrong. The sun was wrong, beating down on my head like it was instead of peeking over the crest between the hills with the expensive homes, and the path already well-trodden and populated instead of untraversed, soggy and drying instead of crisp with dew underfoot. I'd been late because there'd been a meeting this morning, a meeting which I hadn't marked on my calendar, a travesty of an affair that involved an hour-and-a-half phone call where I occasionally tried to make my placations heard over the wailing of a distraught client. I sat there for three hours and listened to her scream at me for sending drapes that were not powder blue, as she'd requested, but eggshell blue, and therefore would no longer match the tablecloths she'd special-ordered for the hotel, and, as I listened to her, I felt a pulse in my veins and a throbbing in my head and couldn't help but think it would have been better to not pick up the call at all, and face being fired, than be subjected to another tantrum. The boss gave me the rest of the day off, but I'd missed my regular time for a jog and now I had to run out under the sun and feel the dust in my nose and on my tongue and the anger in my feet as I rounded the curve and beat out the pulse in my veins step after step after step.

And then a runner in bright blue leggings ran past, disappearing behind the bend in the road, and I remembered seeing them, folded up in a flood of electric blue tights, on a table at the department store in the exercise wear section, and if I hadn't already been frustrated that I had missed my regular time for a jog and now had to share the running path with a steady stream of amateur runners with bad form and the worst breath control I'd ever heard, I might have stopped her and asked her if she had bought them on sale recently, because at the price

I'd seen them at the department store I couldn't excuse that expensive of a purchase. But I didn't, and she disappeared around the corner, the brightness of the blue staining my vision.

And further down the path, I came upon the pond, which at the usual time I went jogging looked like nothing more than a dark, calm mirror, tranquil as it reflected a faint, shivering image of my likeness as I ran my circuit around it, following the running path. But it was later in the day, and the sun caught the pond and it was no longer a dark mirror but an opaque, blinding ultramarine, and the fountain in the pond had been turned on, and the fish in the pond were awake, so the surface was all broken and glittery and choppy and just too blue and nothing like the glassy smoothness that I saw every day. And there were people all around its rim, too, sticking their feet and balancing on the raised lip, moments away from falling in, and, at the very far end, something bright, glaring red.

I had to stop, the beat in my veins muttering to a halt as I saw that the thin filament of red was really a piece of yarn. The yarn had been tied to a stick, and a little girl held that stick over the water. She lay belly-down on a rock that hung over the surface of the pond. She twitched the string in time with her breathing, slow and steady, in an attempt to catch frogs, or fish, or whatever would think that a pale red piece of yarn looked like a juicy worm. Striations of reflected light danced across her face, highlighting her singularly focused expression, her bated anticipation.

I watch her, suddenly breathless. She reminds me of a time I had forgotten, the person I had left behind. The sensation of tadpoles beneath the toes, the feeling of a skirt's wet hem sticking to the back of my calves, the red of the picnic blanket she'd bring. Her name, Saira, scrawled onto my skin. Cattail crowns and fingers twisting plaits into hair, intricate, cascading, a time to sit and be still and introspective. The wind could ruffle my hair, her clothes, but she and I remained immovable then. Braced against its sudden changes in direction.

On our last visit to the pond, I caught a fish. I used a piece of yarn

and a stick. I laid stock-still on the rim of the water. I was patient. I had let the sun warm my back.

The girl on the other side of the pond doesn't look up at me. She is too focused on the task at hand. Her hair spills over her face, obscuring the cast of her nose. She transfers the makeshift fishing pole from one hand to the other. The length of red yarn still above the water quivers from the movement above—or, perhaps, the movement from below.

I take a few hesitant steps back onto the running path. I don't look at the girl again when I start to run.

# Bank Robbery

Mia Elki

GRESHAM HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: CARI LUNA

Ringin is all I can hear. I think a gun was pulled out and shot. I was supposed to just withdraw some of my money from the bank, but five people dressed in black came crashing in through the ceiling! I am currently hiding behind one of the counters of the bank. The bankers had pulled the closest people they could reach over the counter, including me, to give us somewhat of protection. I can hear the robbers shouting and demanding for the money from the bankers. I know that they have a button or a switch that alerts the police; I just have to find it and activate it. I hope the bankers will be okay. As I crawl on the ground, I can see some of them trembling as they withdraw the money. I see the panic button! It's just under the desk, but I'll have to crawl into sight to get it. It's under another separate counter. Okay... I can do this! I creep slowly towards it, hoping not to alert any of the robbers. Come on...Just a bit more!

“Ah!”

My arm all of a sudden is exploding with pain. I look at my right arm, and there is a bullet lodged into my bicep. One of the robbers is pointing their gun at me. They shoot again. This time the pain appears in my hip. I will not let this stop me from alerting the police. If we wait for the police to hear of it eventually, that could be a fatal decision. As I continue to crawl, I see the robber in the corner of my eye lunge at me. I unfortunately, due to my bullet wounds, am unable to dodge out of the way. They tackle me down and pin me down by using their knees to pin my uninjured arm down. They must think the arm that they shot would be useless. The robber then points their gun at my temple, obviously not worried about my free arm. I am thankful for once that I have quick reflexes. I quickly use my injured arm to bat the gun away from my head and punch the robber's nose, distracting

him long enough to escape from under him. I rush towards the panic button, adrenaline boosting me. I couldn't care less whether I was shot right now; all I care about is on top of my list in this moment: pressing the one thing that may save us all. I stretch my arm out, about to reach it...

"Oh no you don't!"

I feel my body being slammed into the ground. The criminal has regained their composure and launched for me again. We grapple on the ground for a few seconds, fighting for dominance. I look around on the ground, hoping to see if the gun was still lying around. I am hoping maybe I can threaten them off me, or possibly knock them out. The crook swings their fist at my face, but once again, thanks to my quick reflexes, I tilt my head just in time to avoid their fist. I quickly swing my good arm at their gut, temporarily winding them. I look to my left and see the gun. I quickly snatch it and slam it against the back of their head, knocking them out. I was about to reach again, but I hear a panicky shout. I turn around and see one of the criminals aiming their gun at a child! Still holding the gun, I run toward them, raising my arm with the gun, and swing down on the robber's head as hard as I can, knocking him out cold.

The children should not ever have to go through this. I can see the child's leg disappear as she is pulled behind a table by her parent. The poor little girl looks confused and terrified. I can only imagine if that child was my little girl. In the corner of my eye, I see someone end a call on their phone; I think they called the police! I sigh in relief and turn around only to see one of the criminals is pointing at me. The three conscious remaining criminals are now pointing their guns at me; what do I do—a person! No...many people are tackling them down from behind and are holding them down. They've taken the guns! Oh thank goodness! It's the parents—they're protecting their children.

"Freeze! Put your hands into the air!" The police have arrived! The robbers grumble and glare at each other. "You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you." The

policemen take the criminals from under the people who disarmed and restrained them. A banker goes to talk to the police. They're talking about me.

"That person over there fought some of the criminals. Two of the five are knocked out. It's thanks to them that my child is safe and unharmed."

One of the policemen comes over to me, as many of the bankers and people pointed me out.

"Are you alright? Well done. Everyone is saying that you were able to disarm somebody as well as knock out two thieves, saving a life as well."

"I just didn't want the poor children hurt. I just did what I hoped anybody would've done." The policeman smiled at me. All of the people who tackled the criminals are receiving a reward for saving everybody by disarming the the robbers. I am too, but I mostly want to just go home to my love and child.

I am now sitting in an ambulance, ready to be taken off to the hospital. I see a deep ocean-blue car drive up near the scene and park near the ambulance. It's my soulmate and my child. They come rushing in, my little kid jumping excitedly and my heart and soul crying with joy, pride, and shock.

"You're a hero, my love."

# My Mom's Voice

David Mukambilwa

ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: CHRISTOPHER ROSE

My kind mom told me,  
Community is better.  
My dream has come up.  
I can't stop thinking about  
my mom all time.  
I remember one day my mom told me  
That to tell the truth is important  
in my life.  
I love you, My Mom.  
Even though the war has separated us, I will still  
remember you.  
Even if I can't see you,  
I grasp my education like you told me to do.  
I hear your voice in my voice, Mom.  
I honor my teachers  
like my grandparents.  
I embrace other students  
like my community.  
I share my love  
like you gave your love to me.  
Let me show us how beautiful you are.  
I can't stop to share my history with us, Mom.  
I know who I am.

# The Life of a Senior

Helaina Alavi

LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: MATT SMITH

The feeling of your throat closing in as you try to hold back to tears.  
The feeling of your eyes tearing up as your mind fills with congestion.  
That feeling only lasting a couple seconds before you let it all out.  
I try to hold it in, but the overwhelming feeling of pain overpowers  
my body.

A new chapter in my life. Change.

It is always happening, but this feels different.

Everything is happening so fast, college, a job, being an adult.

Everyone says that it is an exciting time in your life, but why do I feel  
so scared?

I feel as if my head is above water, barely holding on to the last taste  
of air.

The more time gets closer to new things, the more my head submerges  
and one day I feel as if I will drown.

But I have a strong head on my shoulders and I just got to keep treading  
water, to see where the waves carry me.

Work hard, love life, be happy, make new healthy relationships, get a  
job in life that you enjoy, get a career in life that makes you wake up  
every morning and smile.

You will find what you love to do, you just have to search for your right  
match.



# Ode to Nectarines

Sage Mastranunzio

FRANKLIN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: DAVID CIMINELLO

The little  
Sister  
Of the  
Peach,  
Round,  
Smooth,  
Juicy,  
Vibrant colors,  
Jumping across  
The sour  
But sweet  
Taste,  
It smells  
Like spring,  
On a warm,  
Bright day  
The breeze

# Twenty Feet High

Daniel Prigodin

BENSON HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: EMILLY PRADO

We rowed gently along the surface of the still water. Our family had decided to gather and celebrate my grandpa's 65th birthday at a park in Vancouver. The park was beside a lake that connects to the Columbia River. My friends and I decided to explore the lake and set off onto the water. Ruvim brought two boats, a small, blue plastic kayak, and an inflatable raft. His brother, Sam, decided to come with us. Ahead, we could see a bridge low above the water. We had to pass under it to get to the other part of the lake. It was slanted and the only possible place to fit was under the left side below a big water pipe hovering over the water by corroded metal brackets attached to the bridge. I felt uneasy and uncomfortable rowing up towards it. "Would I fit under?" I asked myself. Once close, I could see it was possible but it wouldn't be easy. The kayak was narrow and my weight in it made it float low above the surface. Only four inches on either side separated the hollow inside with the surrounding water. I could see that I would be able to float under if I could do a sort of limbo under the pipe and under the side of the bridge. Leaning to the sides was not an option, so, leaning back, I rowed underneath. Once under, I had head clearance. The deck of the bridge was much higher than the concrete supports on the side. I was relieved to have made it under. I looked under the bridge out of curiosity and noticed how the concrete was formed to hold the weight of the cars above. Then I noticed something else: webs. A few housed giant black spiders, some as big as three inches wide. I hate spiders. Yet here I was, under a bridge in a dark, cramped space surrounded by stinky lake water with giant eight-legged creatures two feet above my head. I felt sick to my stomach so I rowed faster to get past the twelve feet of hell.

My cousins were waiting past this bridge. We saw a light brown

pedestrian bridge overpassing the stream we were in, connecting the two large bodies of water we had been exploring. Five or more people had been jumping off of it into the water some twenty feet below. We drifted aside to spectate the teenagers jumping into the water from the twenty-foot height that appeared insignificant from the water below. Ruvim, the older of the two, rowed closer and told me he wanted to try it.

"Sure, go ahead, I'm not doing it, though," I responded.

He climbed out and walked up toward the entrance of the bridge. He slowly climbed over the railing and sat on it for a good five minutes. Sam and I yelled, "Jump, just do it!" up to him. Finally, he did. His head popped out of the water and he swam towards us and said it wasn't as bad as it seems. He told me I have to try it. Reluctant to argue back and seem like a total loser, I agreed.

Climbing out of the kayak I walked slowly towards the entrance of the bridge Ruvim was at five minutes ago. Once up to the ledge, I felt the sun-warmed metal hot against my skin chilled by the water below. The top of the barrier was about the width of my hand. Other kids have been standing on it and jumping in. I climbed onto it and sat, one leg on the side of the bridge and the other hanging over the water. My stomach felt sick when I looked down at the water. A sick feeling like I am about to throw up. I sat there for a few minutes telling myself, "Don't do it." The voices of my cousins yelling were in the background now. It was me against my fear of heights and water. Slowly, I raised my other foot over the beam careful not to lose my balance. I sat on my butt staring at the water below for another minute.

Finally, I took a deep breath and pushed off the beam and jumped into the water. I looked down at the water below as I fell. Seemingly an entire five seconds passed of me floating. Five. Four. Three. Two. One. SPLASH. I was in the water and swam towards the surface as quickly as I could. Pain was spreading in my stomach, temporarily silenced by the cold water. I knew I had gone in at a forward angle and flopped. My cousins yelling, "You ok?"

“Yeah,” I replied.

“I bet you won’t do it again,” Ruvim declared.

Recognizing my mistake from the first jump, I thought I could do it safely the next. So, what did I do? Yes, the very same thing that I definitely shouldn’t have. Did I improve my jump, did I jump in straight? Hell no, another dirty flop. This time with a little blood in my mouth from biting my tongue. After that, I knew we should be heading back to the park.

# Untitled

Clare Akeman

LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: DAMIEN MILES-PAULSON

Oh dear brother where did you go?

I've waited for you to come show me the light

But still here I am

Waiting to be turned over into the holiness you try to show me

You scream at me, at the unholiness

That you claim me to be

As if to say I am Satan himself

Speaking in knives and razor blades

You drown me in words of your preacher

Words that do not belong to you, but you grasp onto

# Happy Valley

Sofia Kidd

FRANKLIN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: DAVID CIMINELLO

Where I'm from, a honk disturbs a nation  
A good ol' small neighborhood  
Wide open spaces  
Desiccated places  
I'm from maple trees and stingin' bees  
And tattle-tellin' babies

Where I'm from, the grass gets measured daily  
Pebbled concrete driveways  
Powdery sidewalk chalk  
Taking a nice long walk to the park  
Hide and seek, with myself  
Making forts, and breaking them

I'm from Kraft Mac & Cheese on the stove  
A summer's eve  
And tattered clothes  
I'm from xylophones, microphones,  
Carpet burns, he never learns  
The difference between love and fun

I'm from five years old, a broken home  
New family, pure misery  
Thought I didn't even know what it meant  
Leaving lights on at night  
My parents really did love me right

# Feelings from People

Kevin Dinh

ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: LAURA LAMPTON SCOTT

I am the sort of person who helps his family and wants to be noticed in a good way.

I am most passionate about my life even though I have had hard experiences in the past. I also care about my family and friends. My family cares about me.

My parents remind me of love and hate.

My friends remind me of love and hate.

These feelings spread into me like a vine from my body to my toes.

I feel confident and strong with these feelings

But most importantly love.

# Painful Experience

Andrew Dailey

BENSON HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: EMILLY PRADO

Like everyone, my early adolescence wasn't exactly something to brag about. As many say, it is a time of learning and change to the physical and mental parts of our bodies. Presently, I consider myself a rather careful person, aware of how dangerous peer pressure can be and how fragile the human body truly is. I haven't been seriously injured for at least four years now. The reason for that? Painful experience.

It was a cloudless, mild day at Creative Science School in Portland, Oregon. Lunch having just ended, dozens of early teenagers sprinted out toward the playground. I was among them, still having some baby fat and wearing heavily framed glasses. When I reached the playground, I looked around for one of my fellow seventh-grade friends, Randall. Spotting him over by one of the slides, I walked towards him.

"Hey," I said in a somewhat high voice.

"Hello," Randall replied in a bored tone. That day, most of our other friends were absent, so we didn't have much to do.

"Wanna play Grounder?" I asked.

"Sure, I guess," he replied. Grounder was a game many of the kids at our school played, based around the play structure. You would have one person try to tag everyone else, who were all situated on top of the play structure, off the ground. If any of the non-taggers touched the ground, they were out of the game. If the tagger wanted to come up onto the play structure, they would need to close their eyes. It wasn't quite as fun to play with two people like we were doing, but it was middle school, boring and phoneless, so we had to make do.

After a decently entertaining game with me as the tagger, I asked Randall if he wanted to switch sides.

"Alright," he said.

Counting down from 10, he gave me time to scramble up onto the



play structure. As the count reached zero, I was standing at the top of a slide, a sort of plastic tunnel at my side. Randall began to climb up the slide, closing his eyes. Looking to my right, I thought about the plastic tunnel. He would probably expect me to go through the tunnel, but if I climbed on top, he probably wouldn't be able to find me. If you looked at a graph of my stupidity over time, this would be at peak levels. Climbing on top of the plastic tunnel, there were a few things I did not consider. One, I was wearing rubber, grip-less Crocs. Two, the tunnel was about 10 feet off the ground. I guess those minor details slipped my mind at the time. As I got on top of the tunnel, I began to crawl across the narrow surface towards the other end. Reaching out with my left hand, I grasped the lip of the tunnel. Just as I did this, my left foot slipped down the smooth, steep surface of the tunnel. My other foot got dragged down from the sudden motion, causing both legs to wrap inwards around the outside of the tunnel. Then, I lost my grip, and learned a valuable lesson. My vision rapidly spinning, I fell, landing straight onto my bottom into a sitting position. It felt like my whole body just got pancaked. Immediately, I keeled over in agony, unable to scream or shout because of it. I thrashed around on the ground violently, kicking up bark chips and sawdust in my wake. This seemed to go on for hours. Peering up into the blue sky, one of my other friends, Inigo, came into view.

"Are you okay?" he said, a shocked look on his face.

"N-no," I said, half exasperated and half truthfully. Just after that, the bell rung, signaling the end of recess. Behind me, I heard teachers telling my friends to leave. I laid there for what seemed like forever waiting for an ambulance and answering questions from my teachers. Finally, I heard the squealing of an emergency vehicle, and then I saw it pull up onto the pavement just beyond the bark chips.

With a lot of help, time, and holding on to things, I managed to stand up, feeling even more pain than when I was lying down. From below the play structure, I took what were probably the most painful 10 steps of my life. Then, I settled into the bed in the rear of the

ambulance, and was strapped in. The ambulance drove off, the pain amplified by every bump in the road. I stared up at the metal ceiling, in the worst agony of my life. I thought, “Huh. That wasn’t very smart.”

After arriving at the hospital, I was diagnosed with compression fractures in multiple vertebrae. There was a very high chance one of those vertebrae could have shattered and severed my spinal cord, paralyzing me from the neck down. Thankfully, that didn’t happen. After a night of fitful, drug-induced sleep, I was let out of the hospital with a recommendation to wear a back brace for the next year or so. That experience taught me a valuable lesson, a lesson I am thankful to have learned early in my life: sometimes the risk is not worth the reward.

# Before and After

Kaia H.

GRESHAM HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: JOANNA ROSE

I lived in a little apartment on Halsey. It smelled like lavender and there were cockroaches that roamed my bathroom floor. I happened to meet my best friend outside the apartments where we danced barefoot in the bark chips at the little park.

Now I live in a house that smells like watermelons, and there are no roaches on the bathroom floor. It's in a nice neighborhood. I have a dog that's black and white named Dirty. Back then, the apartment didn't allow dogs, I don't know why.

Someday I hope I live in Portland in a beautiful little apartment that has a brick wall. I hope my friend is with me, and we get a small baby pig named Penelope.

# Monopoly

Charlotte Odusanya

LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: MATT SMITH

Walking down the hall all I see is white  
Seeing people of color is a rare sight  
I realized that hating my skin was tragic  
So I flipped my mindset around and realized I'm #blackgirlmagic  
One day my mom asked me what race I would want to be  
All I could think about was getting down on one knee  
With my fist up high  
Looking at teardrops falling down people's eyes  
Fighting for the injustice of people of color  
Praying to God He'd watch over my brother  
Driving down the street when I'd see a cop  
I felt my heart stop  
Wondering if I would get shot down and drop

America's a game can't you see?  
Can't even get down on one knee in peace  
America's a game can't you see?  
Home of the brave  
Land of the free  
But when it comes to people of color  
You're already deceased

Turning on the news is disheartening  
When you see young boys and girls  
With their families parting  
Sleeping on floors  
Locked in cages  
You would think Donald Trump is one of America's worst phases.  
Walking down the street screaming

Black lives matter  
People of color being killed with blood splattered  
How can we be “liberty and justice for all”  
When a police officer can shoot you with your hands up against a wall

America’s a game can’t you see?  
Can’t even get down on one knee in peace  
America’s a game can’t you see?  
Home of the brave  
Land of the free  
But when it comes to people of color  
You’re already deceased

Alright Imma leave y’all with this  
When I’m done you’re all dismissed  
We still have a long way to go  
And as people have a lot to grow  
But we can’t lose hope now  
We all gotta stand tall and stand proud  
Coming together is key  
And accepting people for who they wanna be  
As a young girl I didn’t like my skin  
Tried to look for positive representation that looked like my twin  
Now I can say that I’m black and I’m proud  
Using my voice to sing out into the crowd.  
America won’t stop me now.  
My hope would be to live in a world where  
Young black girls will one day see  
That loving yourself is free  
And 1/3 black men won’t have cop a plea  
And that we will all realize that we are the definition of kings and  
queens

America's a game can't you see?  
Can't even get down on one knee in peace  
America's a game can't you see?  
Home of the brave  
Land of the free  
But when it comes to people of color  
You're already deceased

# Love

Blaeith Scharp Salter

ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: JON RAYMOND

Love, Love is a very special friend who only comes once a blue moon

Love is as mysterious as the bermuda triangle

Love doesn't care if you want them there or not

Love plays by its own rules

Love is your best friend and worst enemy at the same time

Love has no face, no gender, no race, no religion

Love isn't anyone but the space between us

Love is the barrier and gateway to a fulfilling life

# Check Your Privilege: A Note on Whiteness

Sasha Brickowski

LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: MATT SMITH

Whatever part of you that wants to fight this battle, I feel as if there is something stopping you. Something more than that blockade in the middle of the protest that won't let you walk past. Or that policeman that kindly asks you to return home. Something more than that "Black Lives Matter" poster you hold up high above your head for the rest of the world to see. There is something inside of you, something you wouldn't trade in for all the pearls you could put in your pocket or all the gold you could carry in one hand. Something as simple as the color on your skin. The thing you don't notice at all, not even a little bit, because you just don't have to.



# Shooter

Aidan Manchester Pedley

FRANKLIN HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: DAVID CIMINELLO

BANG!

The first body drops.

Screams fill the air.

BANG! BANG!

Two more fall.

Feet pounding on the ground.

The air fills with rat-tat-tatting.

More screams.

More death.

The body count grows by the second

Everything falls silent

The hiders listening for the seeker

And the seeker tries to find the hiders.

BANG!

Someone went down

The sound of sirens growing.

BANG!

Another fell to the ground.

Yells from the hall.

A loud thud and a small wrestling match.

That's it, the seeker's in cuffs.

That's what kind of violence is in the US.

A ton dying or dead in a matter of minutes.

# I'm Sorry

William Tucker

BENSON HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: DAVID CIMINELLO

I'm sorry that I'm not like you.

I'm sorry I don't get straight As.

I'm sorry that occasionally I just stare at the teacher and act like I'm losing.

I'm sorry that my friends changed her gender or name or are gay.

I'm sorry I'm not old fashioned like you.

I'm sorry I never kept my room "as neat as yours when you were growing up."

I'm sorry that a curse word slips out every once and awhile.

I'm sorry I collect junk in your eyes.

I'm sorry I'm not the perfect child.

And I'm sorry you got cancer.

I'm sorry your parents passed away.

I'm sorry your marriage didn't work out.

I'm sorry it's hard for you to quit smoking.

I'm sorry.

I'm sorry that you think the answers to all your problems are at the bottom of a glass.

And I'm sorry it took you a smashed car a broken femur and a dui to realise it .

# My Mom's Hands

Louise Mahoro

MADISON HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: ALEX BEHR

My mom's hands make me happy because she cooks delicious food like rice and beans. She is 49 years old. She uses her hands to cook. She teaches me how to cook for when she is not home. She takes care of my family. In my family we have sister, brother, and my cousin. My mom never made me sad, she makes me happy. My mom uses her hands to wash, eat, sprinkle, and cut. Her hands make me feel warm. I remember when I was sick she gives to me medicine and water to drink to feel better. My mom sighs when she looks at her hands. Once slender fingers ending in long hard nails with the power. My mom is important to me because she makes me happy every time she tells a story about when I was kid before I go to sleep.

I remember this song when I was remembering my friend who lives in Kigali. I remember when I was happy because I was listening to music with my friend. I was happy to see her again because it was a long time I don't see her. She was going to Congo to see her family. When she come back we went to restaurant. I have my family there.

I remember when I was hanging out with my friend, her name is Maria. We take something to drink, we talk about school.

This song makes me remember when I was 11 years old I was playing with a toy, it was a car.

I remember when I was going to supermarket to buy food for my mom because she was sick in the hospital. But she was not in America, she was in Africa.

I remember when my mom tell me story about genocide. She said it ended only after Tutsi rebels defeated the government. The day after the genocide began, the Tutsi rebel group RPF, led by Paul Kagame, launched an offensive aimed at toppling the Rwandan government. When my mom done tell me this story, I feel sad.

# I Am

Jay Weil

BENSON HIGH SCHOOL

WITS WRITER: DAVID CIMINELLO

I am a thunderstorm  
Cold and grey  
I make people want to stay inside  
And watch the rain fall

I am loud  
I am angry  
A weighty presence precedes me  
When I storm into a room

I move fast  
Never sorry  
Not regretting  
Anything

My life is mine to live  
I am not a doormat  
I will be the one who steps on  
The doormat  
And it will catch fire as I move on

The air around me is heavy  
And the sky is  
Tired  
As I  
Burn out

I am bright, too bright  
Almost blinding  
But my light is gone too fast  
And some never get to see me

My tears flood the ground  
And drown the plants  
But once I am gone  
Spring will rise  
Again



# Writers in the Schools

Writers-in-Residence 2018-2019

BETTINA DE LEÓN BARRERA is a joyful, bilingual writer born in Los Angeles, California of Guatemalan descent whose writing stems from a natural inclination to transform words into meaningful exchanges. In addition to being a community activist, she is a Graduate of UC Berkeley and attended graduate studies at St. Mary's College in Moraga and Mills College in Oakland, CA. Her poetry recently appeared in *New American Writing* and was chosen as a finalist for the Boston Review 2014 Discovery contest.

ALEX BEHR's debut story collection, *Planet Grim*, came out in 2017 (7.13 Books). Her essays, interviews, fiction, and poetry have appeared or are forthcoming in *Tin House*, *Salon*, *Nailed*, and *Cosmonauts Avenue*, among others. She teaches intermediate fiction at Portland State and has led fiction and creative nonfiction WITS residencies since 2014.

ARTHUR BRADFORD is the author of the books *Dogwalker* and *Turtleface* (nominated for a 2016 Oregon Book Award). He has told stories for The Moth MainStage and BackfencePDX and is a Moth GrandSLAM winner. He is also an Emmy-nominated filmmaker, most recently working with the creators of *South Park* and *The Book of Mormon*.

DAVID CIMINELLO is a Portland-based writer and educator. His fiction has appeared in the Lambda Literary Award-winning anthology *Portland Queer: Tales of the Rose City*, *The Frozen Moment: Contemporary Writers on the Choices That Change Our Lives*, the literary journal *Lumina*, the online anthology *Underwater New York*, *Nailed Magazine*, and on *Broadcastr*. His poetry has appeared in *Poetry Northwest*. He is a 2011 Lambda Literary Fellow in Fiction and a proud recipient of a 2013 annual Table 4 Writers Foundation grant. His original screenplay *Bruno* appears on DVD as *The Dress Code*.

LISA EISENBERG is a cartoonist and teaching artist based in Portland, Oregon (by way of the Garden State). She has self-published the print and webcomic series *I Cut My Hair*, a collection of fiction and non-fiction comics. Her work has appeared in a variety of comics anthologies, including *Papercutter*, *Love In All Forms*, *The Strumpet*, and *Digestate*. Lisa's current projects include comics for the online magazine *The Nib*, and the graphic novels *Middle* and *My Plath Year*. She teaches comics-making throughout the Portland area with Young Audiences, Right Brain Initiative, and at her studio located in Comic Cave PDX—the comic-shop jewel of St. Johns.

MICHELLE RUIZ KEIL is a Latinx novelist and playwright with an eye for the enchanted and a way with animals. She teaches writing with a focus on fairytale, divination, and archetype and curates All Kinds of Fur: A Fairytale Reading Series and Salon in Portland, Oregon. She has been a fellow at the Squaw Valley Community of Writers and Lit Camp. Her published short fiction can be found in *Cosmonauts Avenue* and she has a forthcoming theater piece in collaboration with Shaking The Tree Theater. Her debut novel, *All of Us with Wings*, was published by Soho Teen in 2019.

CARI LUNA is the author of *The Revolution of Every Day*, which won the Oregon Book Award for Fiction. A fellow of Yaddo and Ragdale, her writing has appeared in *Guernica*, *Salon*, *Jacobin*, *Electric Literature*, *Catapult*, *The Rumpus*, *PANK*, and elsewhere.

MONTY MICKELSON is the author of the novel *Purgatory* (St. Martin's Press), for which he received a Bush Foundation Individual Artist Fellowship. Mickelson's short fiction has been published in *Loonfeather*, in *Minnesota Monthly* magazine, and online at *The Whistling Fire*. His creative journalism and essays have been published online at *Gently Read Literature* and *Salon*. Two of his YA feature film scripts have been produced for cable television. Mickelson has an MFA in Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts from the University of California, Riverside.



DAMIEN MILES-PAULSON teaches slow dancing, writes, and still dreams of an overseas basketball career. He is a founding member of the now-disbanded experimental German noise band, Flu Shot. His stories, poems and sounds can be found at *The Whole Beast Rag*, *The Washington Square Review*, *theNewerYork*, *Alice Blue Review*, *Marco Polo Arts Mag*, *Everyday Genius*, *Past-Ten*, *Axolotl*, and *The Alarmist*. He now walks the world with an MFA in Creative Writing from UCR in hand.

AMY MINATO is the author of a memoir *Siesta Lane*, (Skyhorse Press, 2009) and two poetry collections, *Hermit Thrush* (Inkwater Press, 2016) and *The Wider Lens* (Ice River Press, 2004). Amy has been a recipient of both a Literary Arts Fellowship for her poetry and a Walden Residency for her prose. She teaches writing through Literary Arts, Multnomah Art Center, Fishtrap, and at Breitenbush Retreat Center as well as a community service course in sustainable living at Portland State University. She holds both an MFA in Creative Writing and an MS in Environmental Studies from the University of Oregon.

LAURA MOULTON is the founder of Street Books, a bicycle-powered mobile library that serves people who live outside in Portland, Oregon. She has taught writing in public schools, prisons, and teen shelters, and is an adjunct professor at Marylhurst University and Lewis & Clark College. Her social art practice projects have involved postal workers, immigrants, prisoners, and students. She earned an MFA from Eastern Washington University.

RYAN NAKANO is a poet, journalist, and spoken word artist currently living in Portland, Oregon. He co-curates the White Noise Project, a monthly POC-centered literary reading series, and his work can be found in *riksba* magazine as well as *Voicemail Poems*.

JULES OHMAN is a writer and teacher based in Portland. She co-founded the nonprofit the Free Verse Project, which teaches creative writing in juvenile halls. Her chapbook of stories, *Vertical Streets*, was awarded the Merriam-Frontier Award, and her work has been published in *Willow*

*Springs* and *Camas*. She earned her MFA in Fiction from the University of Montana. She has completed her first novel, and is represented by Dan Conaway and Taylor Templeton at Writers House.

BRIAN PARKER grew up in Alaska, then Mississippi, and has always been in love with storytelling in every medium. He earned a BFA in graphic design & illustration and an MA in writing & publishing, and now spends his days working in youth publishing (so cool, right?) through his company, Believe In Wonder, which he co-owns with his wife. He is the author of *Crow in the Hollow*, *You Can Rely on Platypi*, and *The Wondrous Science*.

MARK POMEROY's first novel, *The Brightwood Stillness*, was published by Oregon State University Press in 2014. He has received an Oregon Literary Fellowship for fiction, and his short stories, poems, and essays have appeared in *Open Spaces*, *The Wordstock 10*, *Portland Magazine*, *The Oregonian*, *NW Book Lovers*, and *What Teaching Means: Stories from America's Classrooms*. He holds an MA in English Education from Teachers College, Columbia University, where he was a Fellow in Teaching.

EMILLY PRADO is an award-winning freelance multimedia journalist, writer, and educator living in Portland, Oregon. A Chicana native of the Bay Area, her work typically focuses on amplifying the voices of people from marginalized communities. Her writing has appeared in nearly two dozen publications including NPR, *The Oregonian*, *Marie Claire*, *Bitch Media*, and the *Portland Mercury* where she writes a weekly column. She is the recipient of a 2018 Community Stories Fellowship presented in partnership with Oregon Humanities, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the Pulitzer Prizes and earned a 2017 professional development grant from the Regional Arts & Culture Council to attend a writer's residency in Michoacan, Mexico. In her free time, she makes zines, DJs, and works as a WITS program specialist at Literary Arts.

JON RAYMOND is the author of the novels *The Half-Life*, *Rain Dragon*, and *Freebird*, the story collection *Livability*, winner of the Oregon Book Award, and a collection of writings about visual art called *The Community*. He's also collaborated on five films with the director Kelly Reichardt—*Old Joy*, *Wendy and Lucy*, *Meek's Cutoff*, *Night Moves*, and *First Cow*, and was nominated for an Emmy for his work on the HBO miniseries *Mildred Pierce*. His writing has appeared in *Tin House*, *Zoetrope*, *Playboy*, *Artforum*, and *Bookforum*, among many other publications.

CHRISTOPHER ROSE is originally from Seattle, Washington and he teaches poetry, African American Literature, and Science Fiction at Portland Community College in Portland, Oregon. His poems have appeared in *Fjords Review: Black American Edition*, *The Parias Anthology*, *Yellow Chair Review*, *TAYO Literary Magazine*, *The Hawaii Review*, and others. He is a NEH Summer Institute Scholar and a Cave Canem Fellow.

JOANNA ROSE is the author of the award-winning novel *Little Miss Strange* (PNBA Fiction Prize). Other work has appeared in numerous literary journals. Her story "A Good Crack and Break" is in the new Forest Avenue Press anthology, *The Night, and the Rain, and the River*, and her essay "The Thing with Feathers" (Oregon Humanities) was listed as a Notable in *Best American Essays 2015*. She is known to readers of the *Oregonian* as a reviewer on the books page and contributor to Poet's Corner. She started out with the Dangerous Writers oh so many years ago, and now she and her teaching partner Stevan Allred host the regular Pinewood Table prose critique group.

LAURA LAMPTON SCOTT's work has appeared in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Tin House* and *The Guardian* online, *Electric Literature*, *Monkeybicycle*, *Okey-Panky*, and *No Tokens Journal*. She has served as assistant and managing editor on books in the McSweeney's Voice of Witness series, and she's a MacDowell Colony fellow. Laura has taught fiction at the University of Montana, Literary Arts in Portland, and Hugo House in Seattle.

MATT SMITH grew up in Iowa and Arizona. He earned his BA in English Literature from Arizona State University. He spent the subsequent four years after college in South Korea as an ESL teacher. His short fiction work centers on the intersections of race and identity. He is currently working on a collection of short stories focused on what it means to be multi-racial in America. Matt was a 2017-18 WITS apprentice.

ZULEMA RENEE SUMMERFIELD is a writer, educator, and creative coach. Her first novel, *Every Other Weekend*, was published by Little, Brown in the spring of 2018. She is also the author of *Everything Faces All Ways at Once*, a book of flash fiction and dreams available from Fourteen Hills Press. Her short fiction has been published in a number of literary journals, including *Guernica* and *The Threepenny Review*. A MacDowell colony fellow, Zulema lives in Portland, Oregon.

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