



Phoenix Rising

Neoteric Magazine

Letter from the Editors

Dear Readers,

For over three months, *Neoteric Magazine* has been designing this magazine issue in hopes to offer a creative outlet for River Ridge High School faculty and students. Despite a whole year of nothing but Zoom meetings, *Neoteric Magazine* still managed to release two publications. We can proudly say that this has been a very productive year for the magazine and we look forward to creating more in the future.

Our previous publication, 2020 Year in Review, gave River Ridge students the chance to reflect on 2020 and its significant events. With a new year comes new possibilities and from the ashes, we shall rise. To represent this transition into the next chapter of our lives, *Neoteric Magazine* members and staff have chosen the mighty phoenix; it is with much pride that we present the Spring publication: Phoenix Rising.

Our greatest efforts have been put in, attempting to reflect the skillful artistry of literature and imagery the students at River Ridge High School possess. It is worth noting that this all would not have been made possible were it not for our esteemed sponsor Mrs. Mandarino and digital publisher Mr. Carlson along with select members from the Yearbook Staff especially Ariel Treepala who designed our cover art and logo.

Readers: *Neoteric Magazine* thanks you for opening this publication and we look forward to creating more in the future!



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Wrath of Nature

by Vaylea Ly, 12th

We are born from her dust,
A reckoned force is she
To give life and take it
Just as easily

As easily to breathe,
as it is to choke on
the suffocating air
Man's fire brings upon

A fire that stings her eyes
So cruel she starts to cry
Tears of bitter acid
which becomes a lye

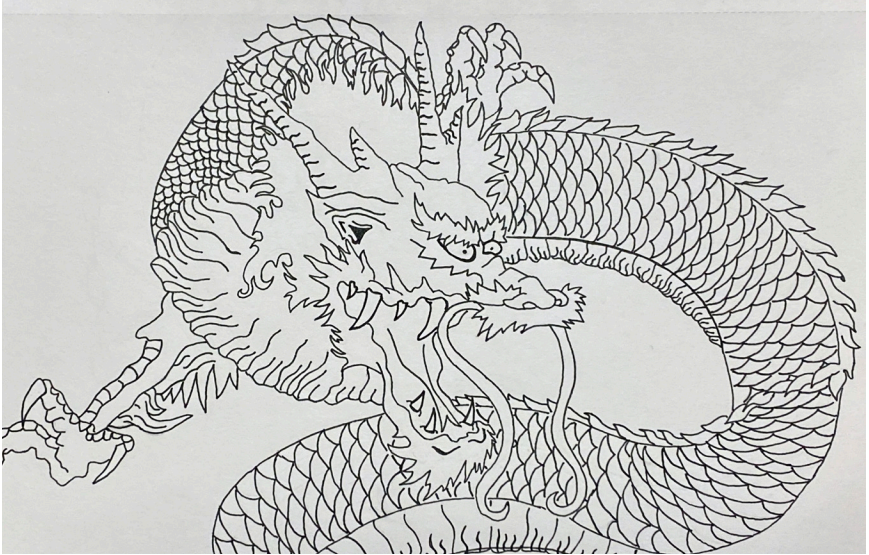
Lye that cleanses man's sins
And with it, her beauty
That begins to wane with
Abject mutiny

From her dust, we are born
Though nurturing as she
From her flames of fury
We'll burn just as easily



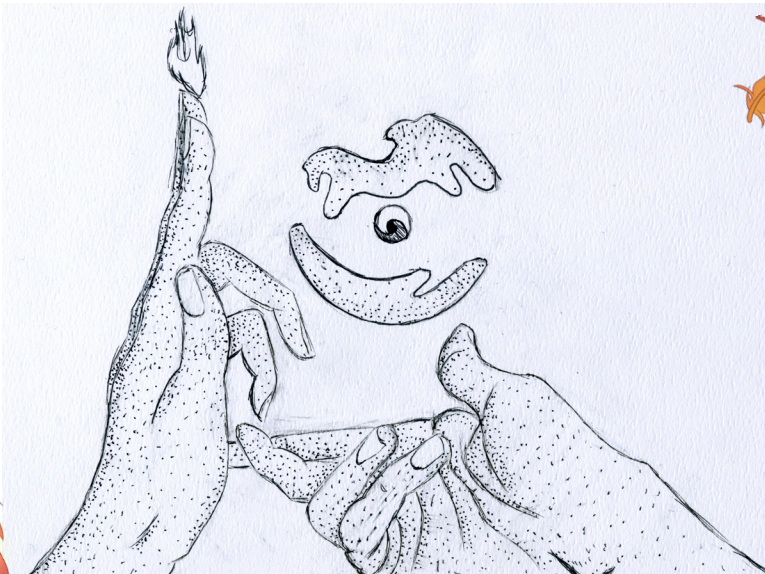
Dragon

by Blake Hofacker, 11th



Flame

by Horatio Hardin, 12th



Big Shoes

by James Vest, 12th



I heard the voice again.
That voice that could calm an army before a war,
Or stir a beast into a mindless frenzy.
Why does it visit in the most peaceful times?
It's as if the wind was just strung out with words.
Why must it speak the way it does?
It tells of the right thing.
What is the border of right and wrong?
What is the use of calming an army if they're going to die anyway?
Your voice has always been warm and lively but
Now it's cold and robotic without any love.
The voice of someone that's always there,
The voice that people can trust
With a smile that puts everyone at ease.
Why can't I replicate that?
Why can't I just be like you, Mom?
Is it because I always wear a fake smile and hide myself? Why
must I be this way?
The voice can tell me the right path,
Maybe that's the meaning of the voice.
But the dead can only tell you so much, I guess.
So, I'll do my best to follow those big shoes you left me.



Undecided

by Sophia McKeever, 10th



The window is open,
As blinds raise to the horizon line
When new dawn approaches.

Rain settles on the windows,
To watch life unfold.
And to feel the warmth of her light
That shines unabashedly in her room.

Her melancholy voice
Weaved into song,
Echoes through the empty room,
With lyrics embedded but unspoken.

Her disconsolate feelings,
Or even those of anger rise,
And she does not know where to place them,
Because of their unclear origins.

She cannot fully adapt to her home,
Because she knows she has to ping pong
Between the new and the old,
And the fury of the guardian that stands
Imposingly at the gate.

Perhaps it's the fact
That she realized her mask
Of indifference to hide the pain,
And the absence so she could hide,
Made her the easiest to boot.



And he could celebrate,
By jumping up and down,
And throwing a party,
Because it just so happened,
She wanted to fly anyway.

Perhaps that fury surfaces
From the fact that this girl
Wants to be independent from the person
Who has been emotionally cruel,
But cannot cut the final tie.



She is free from her chains,
But is she going from one cage to another,
Especially when it is painfully aware
How easily she can be forgotten and replaced?

Is it the hormones?
Is it her brain?
Is it her heart?
Is it simply confusion
And overthinking?

Maybe she really is independent,
But so out of place that she can't see it.



Outside of her head,
There is a world
With green grass
Flourishing on the other side.

Once the chrysanthemum petals fall
Fruitful rest will seek the exhausted,
And happiness will spread
Like the white ballerina tufts
Of dandelions gone errant.

Jackpot

by Mrs. Jessica Mandarino, Staff

I found my tongue again
and when I spoke
out roars a swarm of butterflies
darting into a forest of writers' minds
leaving bits of diaphanous wings
to flutter before curious eyes

I hope all my writers breathe in
a slot machine of words
and exhale triple moonbeam poems
that once were my lucky meteors
flung into the universe
by a slingshot of hope.



Grab hold of your sky
and shake it for your moment
dropping metaphors, allusions
as sweet precipitation
falling into unplugged ears
of your own timid audience,
begging for your next big payout.



Leaf In Water

by Niko Figueroa, 11th



Walk in the Woods

by Dakota Osarczuk, 9th



Many people think that being in the middle is the best place to be when it comes to being a sibling. As the middle child, I can tell you that it is absolutely horrible. I am always forgotten and overlooked because my parents are always worrying about their “eldest daughter” or their “little baby boy.” I was the forgotten daughter that was left at the store countless times. None of that changed when I found the Maple Street house, but my outlook on being stuck in the middle did.



It was a muggy July afternoon. Mom was putting my youngest sibling, Ian, down for a nap, and my older sister, Nova, was at the mall with her friends.

“Mom! I am going into the woods for a bit!” I called out.

“Hush, Jade. You are going to wake up the baby,” my mom said, whispering. She had no regard for what I had said earlier, so I took that as an “ok.”

I grabbed my phone, portable charger, a blanket, three bottles of Pepsi, snacks, and two miles of fishing line, which I shoved into my backpack. Our back yard is miles and miles of woods. There is a small, 4-foot stream of water that runs about a mile back, and I have never ventured past there; Mom and Dad don’t care if I go, but I have never felt the need until today. I was tired of picnics by the stream; I wanted an adventure. Little did I know... it was an adventure that I was going to get.

I got to the stream and threw my bag over to the other side. It stuck the landing. I backed up a few feet and ran as fast as I could to the edge of the water. With the grace of a houseplant, I hurled myself over the stream and landed right

in the mud next to my bag, which was already in better shape than I was. "Eh, a little mud will never hurt anyone." I thought to myself. As I gathered myself up, I pulled the fishing line out of my bag. I had planned to use it as a way to get back home. I tied the line securely to a tree and held the roll in my hand as I walked.

I had walked all of two steps before I heard a breathy voice shout, "Jade! Wait!"

I was startled at first, but I quickly realized that it was only Missy. Missy was 15 and a middle child, just like me, yet she only had brothers. We have lived next to each other since birth and have been best friends ever since.

"I saw you... run into the woods...so I grabbed food... and water... and ran after you." Missy said, trying to catch her breath.

"Ok, well, I am going on an adventure past the stream, and you can come if you want." I announced as if it hadn't been obvious.

I didn't think she would want to come since she wasn't a very adventurous person. She was hesitant at first, but after I threatened to leave her alone, she trailed right along the side of me.

After walking for about 15 minutes, Missy brought a small rusty bench to my attention. We decided to sit on the bench to rest for a bit. As I threw my bag down, I was startled by the sound of a shatter. When I looked in the bag, I saw that one of the Pepsi bottles had broken.

"How did the bottle break?" Missy asked.



With the same question in my mind, I shuffled around in the thick layer of leaves that coated the ground like a blanket. To my and Missy's surprise, under the layer of leaves laid a metal pole with a sign at the top. The sign read... "Maple St."



"Where is Maple Street?" I said aloud.

We dug around more in the leaves and ended up uncovering a gravel road. The road was not very wide, and it seemed that we were at the end of it.

"Should we follow it?" Missy asked.

"Why wouldn't we?" I replied.



The road seemed to go on for ages. I had run out of fishing line about 10 minutes back. Just as we were about to turn back, I saw something that changed my life forever. From where we were, it looked like a mansion. It had to be at least three stories high. We ran as fast as we could to get a better look. A few moments later, we were right in front of it: The Maple Street House.

It was oddly beautiful. The light pink walls were cracked and chipping. The roof was missing many tiles, and part of it looked sunken in. And the rocking chair that was sitting on the front porch looked as if it hadn't been sat on in at least 100 years. Still, it was the most beautiful thing we had ever seen. I don't know why or what compelled us to do this, but we ended up standing right at the front door, ready to enter our newly found treasure.

"Should we knock?" Missy asked.



I looked at her with disappointment. "Why would we knock? No one has obviously lived here for at least a century."



She glared at me, angered.

I grabbed the door handle and, with much hesitation, opened the door. Despite the outside of the house, the inside of the house looked as if time had not been able to reach it. The blue, floral wallpaper looked as bright as the day it had been put up. And the furniture looked like they had been pulled straight out of the '30s! I was frozen in shock. Missy looked at me and squealed. We didn't ask ourselves any of the questions that we should have like...Why was the house so perfect on the inside? What happened to the people who lived here? Where did the road lead to further? Why is there a road and house in the middle of the woods? We were just so excited to have an escape from our normal lives that we weren't worried about anything else.



Later as we got back to our own houses, we swore not to tell a single soul about the house. We both kept that promise. Missy and I went to that house at least once a week. We would bring food from home and eventually we even brought a TV from Missy's bedroom. This went on until we went off to college. Each week we would get to escape our lives of chaos and live our dreams. And our parents didn't pay much attention to us, so they never questioned where we were.

During the first time Missy and I were home from college, we decided to go back to the house. Once we got there, we were shocked to find nothing but more trees. The house was gone. The forest looked as if it was completely untouched. We immediately dug around in the leaves to look for the road, and we uncovered nothing but dirt. What had happened to the house where we spent all of our time at for the past 7 years? We never truly figured out what happened to the Maple Street House, and I don't think we ever will.



Memory Locket

by Sophia McKeever, 10th



Dead Roses

by Alicia Sears, 12th

The roses you gave me had died, just like the feelings. The lies came out, and the truth unfolded. I wash away the words you've spoken. The petals have slowly fallen on the table. The roses have died, and the vase became empty.

-dead roses

Monarch Butterfly

by Victoria Senior, 10th



One Weary Night

by Tristin Triana, 11th

Sitting on my empty porch
My engulfed cabin bathes in the moonlight
Creating a small pocket of land that I call my own
Where I see the man.

Far to the edge of my land
Encased with the dark that I thought I owned.
I cry out to the man with a shopping bag in hand.
No man travels past though their aching life
To reach my salvation.



I try to call out to him, my words seem not to escape.
Unbothered, unmoved, his haunting slender nature.
I enter the haven that I call my home.
Pushing out thoughts of the man.

The man with the shopping bag in hand.
I sit in warm cabin glow.
Feeling itchy, I know his eyes gaze
Outside where the man can come to me.

May my worst fear come to be?
The eerie unworldly creature this man seems.
Will this be the last night people will think of me?
He'll be the one to hear my last words as he sees through
my eyes



Silence Stretched

by Mrs. Barbara Dukeman, Staff

The silence stretched across the distant years
Such echoes deep into the chalice heart
The brilliant chasm deep with painful fears
As each one, sacred, disappeared apart

Connected in dimensions colored bright
Each photo captures the detailed drop
Of faces, places, times that filled with light
The moments sparked before their lives were stopped

Reflections filed in delicate contrast
The memories of a lifetime now complete
Kaleidoscope of pictures sharp and fast
Emotions falling, happiness replete

As she looks on, the silence starts to grow
Erasing distant lives she yearned to know



Within & Without

by Mrs. Amanda Walter, Class of 2020 Sponsor
and Former Staff







Unhappiest Place on Earth

by Jonas Adams, 9th

The tires grind against the asphalt; every U-turn and stop seems to make my organs shift. The sun's transparent yellow rays shine through the windows, heating up the place while illuminating the small dust particles that calmly float around as they please. Every wrong direction, every moment of traffic, every gas station that passes us by, and every single sketchy, low-budget tourist trap someone spots bring a massive argument that consists of nothing but screaming, overlapping crying, and irrelevant arguments about something from six months ago. In these fights, my mom screams with full rage, my sister cries her crocodile tears for undeserved sympathy, and my dad sits behind the wheel slumped over, trying to mask his tears. Despite this happening a lot, I sit in my seat with my head resting against the hot leather. The sun shines on my drowsy eyelids, comforting me with the warm feeling as I drift off to sleep.



I wake up and look around to see that my family is fighting once again. I looked around some more to see something other than my family screaming like angry chimps and noticed that we were finally parked at our destination. I alert my parents, who were, for some reason, unaware that we arrived. We got out of the car and took in the sights, only to realize that this trip was not what I thought it would be. Before we even began our trip, my parents told me we would be going to Six Flags for vacation. Though we were technically at Six Flags, it was the old abandoned Six Flags destroyed by Katrina and was never restored.

"Hey, Dad, why are we here?" my sister asks in her fake baby voice, also known as the "I'm cute, so worship me" voice.

My dad turned to look at my sister, and with one gesture to the trunk of the car, we knew what he was planning. My dad, wanting to have a nice time with family, thought it

would be a good idea to drive to Louisiana, drive to New Orleans, go to the abandoned Six Flags that was devastated by a hurricane, and use a crowbar to get in and see the stuff that remains of the park, even though it was illegal. Though I would be up for this type of thing on any other occasion, I was worn out by all the screaming and yelling I had endured while in the car, and I was against breaking the law for something I didn't even want to do at that time. But because I didn't want him to feel like he wasted all our time, we hopped the fence and began our little voyage into the abandoned amusement park.

As I walked through, I got an eerie sense of dread, but for reasons I didn't expect. The place was creepy and had a lot of bugs. Still, the thing that unnerved me was the thought that someone grew up with this place and someone had fun times here. Someone cherished this place for all the great memories and experiences it brought, and I felt like intruding this place was way more than it seemed. This place had a life that ended; it served its purpose till the day it died and having it, and all the great memories lay to rest, felt like a good way to honor what it did for people. By intruding, I have disrespected the park and the people that loved this place by exploiting its downfall for my own enjoyment. We continued further, passing by decaying attractions that were dirty and covered in plant life, colorful buildings with graffiti and moss, signs and posters that were faded and broken, large looping coaster tracks that looked fine from a distance but were creaking and structurally unsound, decorations that gave this park life were now rusted and defaced, and the streets were completely empty and unkempt, giving the sad realization that this place was truly dead.

"Hey, how about we check out the inside of a building? I bet there's some cool stuff in there!" my dad says with glee.

"I feel like these buildings could collapse at any minute. What if it collapses and traps us?" my mom says sternly.

My dad observes the building for a quick minute. "It doesn't



look that bad. If it were so unsafe, it would've collapsed by now."



Despite my dislike of the trip and my constant uneasy feelings, I actually wanted to see what was inside these buildings. No matter what was in there, ghosts, creepy Cajuns, gators, violent squatters, or absolutely nothing, I wanted to know.

"Don't worry, mom, it's fine." I gesture to my mother, giving her a smile to show her I really wanted to do this.

After a while of smiling and gesturing in an awkward and repetitive manner, my mother finally broke down and agreed to go in, on the condition that my little sister had to be carried by my dad. We went in and looked around the same stuff, but it felt more intrusive. I felt like it would be easier to get me while indoors, like the memories could manifest as a being to make me pay for my careless intrusion on someone's favorite park.

We spent a while checking out all the buildings we had access to until we arrived at the last one. The building was the same as the rest, same colorful walls, same water damage, same vines, same mold; nothing truly stood out about the building. We went inside and looked around to see the same mold, same debris, same clown statues, and the same stuff we've seen throughout our journey.

I turned to my dad. "Can we go? This is the last building, and it's just the same stuff."

"Sure, but let's rest for a second. My back is killing me," my dad says in a strained voice. He gives my little sister to my mother and leans on a wall. Suddenly, the walls begin to crack, the creaking of the building stabbed my eardrums. The building began to collapse, and instead of running, my mom yells at my dad.

"What are you doing? Get off the wall! You're gonna kill us all!" she shrieked.

"That's just the building creaking like it would usually. It's not because I'm leaning on a wall," he replied.



“Hey, can we please do this later? We need to get out of here before this building falls,” I say, but I get no response, not even any demands to make me shut up when the grownups are talking. My sister began to cry, and my mom put her down. Now, it was like we were in the car again, my sister crying, my mom raging, my dad leaning against the wall trying to keep calm, and I was quiet once again, but at this point, I had enough of this.

“SHUT THE HELL UP!” I screamed with pure rage; rage I’d held in this whole time. My family turns to me in shock, frozen in place.

“What are you guys doing? This isn’t the time for this fighting; we need to get out of here before we die. Don’t you people understand how stupid this is? I’m 90% sure that our lives are far more valuable than winning a stupid argument.” I stop, and the room falls silent as if not even the room was sure what to do.

“What do you know? Dad says the building isn’t gonna collapse, and mom said that dad needed to be yelled at because he’s being unsafe,” my sister says, with the same baby voice but with a snarky know-it-all tone.

“WHAT DO I KNOW?! The building is literally falling apart! Didn’t you notice the falling debris, you stupid little jerk?” I yelled.

“Hey, we don’t talk to people that way,” my mom chimed in.

I kick the wall and curse out loud. Only after I finally calm down do I look at my family once again and realize what I had just done. The wall that I kicked began to crack more. The building shook with fury, and larger chunks of debris crashed onto the ground. The last thing we saw was a large chunk of debris above our heads. The worst part was we were right next to the exit; if we wanted, we could’ve taken one big step, and then we’d be fine, but that was too much work for my family somehow.



Pair of Vans

by Victoria Senior, 10th



Cause and Effect

by Avery Lane, 12th

When you launch a rock off a cliff, where does it go?
Does it relocate and fall to the base of a mountain, blending
in almost seamlessly with others?
Or is it rather tossed at such a distance that it crashes into a
car?

Maybe, if there happened to be the given opportunity of luck
or doom,

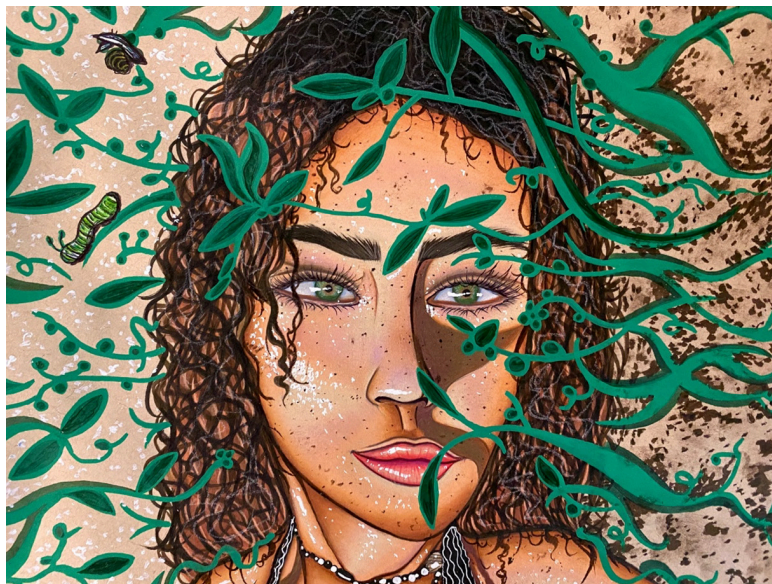
The rock would catapult itself into someone,
Cracking open their skull with a small knock on their forehead.
Maybe the wind was a little too strong that day, leaving
sorrow in its midst.

Or maybe the wind blew just enough to carry the favored
chance of no tomorrow.

But at that point, it wouldn't matter much, would it?
Because regardless, a launch of a rock resulted in the loss of
a choice.

Girl with Ivy

by Jessica Johnson, 10th



Never-Ending Adolescence

by Maddy Deremer, 10th

I would sit, staring at the blank canvas.
Sitting here living out these years
That I will one day be telling stories about;
Will you still be there?
Or will you be a ghost locked in my memories
With no address or phone number?
Will our Friday nights just stay in my head
Or will you still come with me sometimes?
What will I do with all of our Polaroids and gifts one day?
Will they go in a box up in my attic of my future home?
You have been painting up a masterpiece for years.
One day you'll put down your brushes and paints.
Leaving a beautiful picture on the canvas, permanently stained,



But your work is finished.
We'll take a good, long look at it
Then get up and leave.
I'll hang yours in my room
If you promise to hang mine in yours.
I might even tell people about it.
Tell them about all the hard work and dedication
That went into this emulsion you made.
How different will our narrative be in 20 years from now?
Maybe we'll start our own lives separately.
Or maybe we will both have our dreams come true.
Will I be in New York every Saturday night
While you're saving lives?
Will I be writing all week while you're becoming
Everything you said you would be?
Maybe I'll look back on us, up in my room with Swift &
Springsteen on,
Daydreaming about our future.
Maybe I'll laugh when I go through our old texts
When we were so excited about a dumb boy.
We really don't know what's bound to happen,
But we can try to make this never-ending adolescence last
As long as we can.



Hand to Sky

by Niko Figueroa, 11th



Becoming A Gym Rat

by Mrs. Barbara Dukeman, Staff



If you'd asked me how I learned to love exercise, I would have laughed hysterically and, after wiping the tears away, I'd have slapped you upside your head. Me? EXERCISE? Surely you must be joking. You wouldn't catch me running even if I were on fire. Exercise is for those other people who are already more fit than humanly possible and look good in spandex. Exercise is for those who don't mind sweating like a pig, grimacing like they're giving birth, and grunting like a Neanderthal. Walking on a treadmill is like a rat on the exercise wheel; pointless, useless expenditures of energy.

Let's go back in time to find where I started to hate exercise. My dad thought it would be a great way to make friends if I were part of a softball team in my 5th-grade year. He decided to coach, so he had me running bases. I despised every Saturday morning I spent out there on the field; I should have been home watching the Pink Panther and Bugs Bunny. Instead, I'm wearing a maroon uniform, including those demon stirrup socks that were irritating. A baseball cap that made my hair sweat and never kept the sun out of my eyes. Squinting, I'd go up to bat; the other team would move in and chatter, and I'd strikeout every time, no hand-eye coordination whatsoever. And then I'd go to the outfield, the side where no one ever hit. I'd focus on a dandelion patch or an anthill each time I'd go out until it was our turn to bat. It was hot, muggy, and itchy with that polyester. I hated every moment of it.

Present-day: why have I had a membership to the local gym for so many years that my number has only two digits when current members are being assigned four-digit numbers? Automatic payments, that's why. Every month whoosh, there goes another automatic payment. I stopped noticing. I always felt guilty; I've been paying for several years and have gone fewer times than I should. I first signed up when my doctor mentioned that a gym was opening up in my area; I thought

it would make him happy if I joined. I didn't realize I had to, you know, actually go work out. I might have gone more often if some compassionate trainer or desk attendant called me personally and said, "Hey, we haven't seen you this week. Is everything ok? We'd love to have you back. We have free appetizers today."

Family Fitness was a nice gym. It opened with about twenty treadmills, elliptical machines, stair steppers, resistance machines, and free weights. Now there are so many more machines and torture devices. There's also a room for classes, a room for isometrics and measuring, cycling, and a daycare. My son needed to take PE as part of his high school graduation requirements, so I asked for a run-through of what having a personal trainer for him entailed. I had a note from my doctor stating that my son was cleared for physical activity. It was a very thorough process, explained by a young, eager trainer with good credentials. And then I saw the price list.

Oh.

My.

God.

HOW MUCH?



Then I had to make a simple choice. Do I pay what was essentially another CAR PAYMENT, or do I continue to watch my son and myself get fatter and fatter? Hmmm. DING! We have a winner. Sign us up, Rob. For a whole year. Yes, really. Hope you have patience. We just bought you. Hope you're ready. My son was his focus, and I just followed what he was doing. It was a twofer.

While Rob was completing the initial measurements and assessments, I just moseyed on over to the treadmill. Seems painless enough. I got on, plugged in my headphones, and spent the better part of five minutes trying to figure out how to change the channel on the TV attached to the machine. Once I got THAT figured out (that is very important, you know), I pressed the button and started walking. Very slowly at first, maybe 2.0 mph. Whew! Twenty minutes went



by, and I was done for the day. I felt quite successful in keeping my heart rate up. Then I noticed the little chart on the treadmill that tells me what my heart rate should be for my age. I'm doing wonderfully for a woman of 90.

But I'm not 90.

I wasn't even 50 yet.



That was Day One. Since that day, I have amassed an impressive collection of Dry-fit shirts, workout pants, 3 iPods with 13 playlists, an iPhone with Spotify, and my Beats. Again, all of this is VERY important in the gym routine. You can't work out if you have the wrong music. And my bottle of SmartWater. Can't be so bourgeoisie that I bring an actual bottle of Sam's Choice water. I also have super expensive sneakers, which I bought in the hope that they would keep me going to the gym on a regular basis. I had to walk the walk.

Working out, though, is real work, hard, sweaty, repetitive work.

Trainers come and go, and I had a new one named Carrie (Stephen King fans, raise your hands). We started on the upper body. I can do this; how hard can it be? Look, a rep of 12. No sweat. Wait...what are you doing over there? What are you doing with that semi wheel? Is that extra weight? Why are you putting it on the bar? OMG, I feel like I'm lifting a bag of horse food over my head. Twelve more times? Kill me now. WHY TWELVE? Five is a nice number, too. I lifted, I pushed, I bent this way and that. At times we were in the grunting area, and I felt ashamed of my portly body. I stayed focused on my task at hand so we could finish there and move on. As long as I get my gold star sticker when I'm done, I know I'm making progress.

However, Carrie neglected to tell me about the next day and having T-rex arms; I couldn't even pump the sanitizer bottle or lift the classroom phone. This is going to be a long, strenuous journey.



The Circle of Time

by Mrs. Barbara Dukeman, Staff



Fast; the circle has no beginning, no end,
my friend I tell you – there is if care
is taken to note the mark a mistaken spark
within the melted miles that go
round the sound the echoes of time
sublime – a spot that differs in composition,
a transcription of position from silver
to gold, of stories untold that unfold
around the edge of the abyss of nothing,
nothingness.

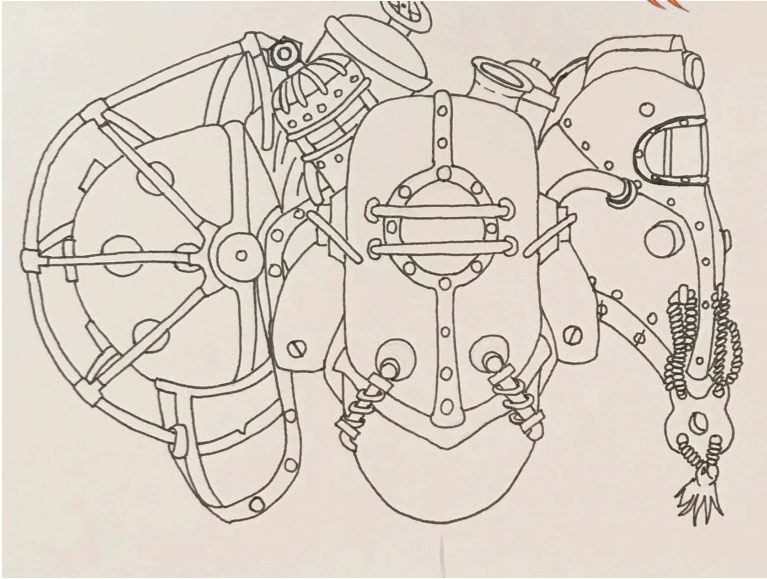
The circle touches every direction, each
inflection of the passing, from past to
present to future, casting doubt
aside inside the pathway taken
never forsaken, from then until now.

Now the circle ends, portends closure;
instead, the circle unwinds
bending the binding ties that keep it strong
unknown, a mobius strip alone for the future
to diving keeping in line with the Creator
as I, the spectator, watch it glow,
watch it grow with mystery
into the history of the past.



Steampunk

by Blake Hofacker, 11th



A Night in UFO Town

by Blake Hofacker, 11th



I had remembered when Sam and I were at school that some guys had dared us to stay a night in the abandoned neighborhood. I had to cut the chain-link fence and trek through some thick bushes and concrete walls with Sam; it was already almost night as Sam ran ahead to reach the houses where we would be staying. I walked over to the campsite where the two of us were staying, and I could see Sam through the window of the abandoned house. The house was strange; it was like an oval but had weird cuts in the windows' sides. Everyone always called them UFO houses. I walked over and up into the place and pushed the door open. I could see Sam getting the house ready for our stay, and I glanced over at him as I shut the door and walked into



the house. It had a musty smell and grime-covered the whole house outside as if the house had been purposely sprayed in it. The inside wasn't terrible; Sam had fixed up the place and made the inside decent for living.



"The place is all spiffed up!" Sam exclaimed in a prideful tone as if he had converted a cardboard box into a mansion. I shake my head and get ready for the night of fun and messing around as I pick where to sit my sleeping bag for the night. As I choose my spot, I can see Sam prepping the stove for dinner for tonight's feast. As he lays down two cans of ravioli and gets ready to clean and make sure the furnace is working. He starts to clean it and inspect the inside while I pull the musty curtains down and get ready for our sleepover. He had gotten the stove working and places the cans on top, and as they heat, he starts humming a song as if he were a housewife.

"What are you doing?" I say, confused yet trying not to laugh at his funny behavior.

"Why, making dinner, sweetie," Sam states in a motherly tone with his hands on his hips. I laugh and shake my head; Sam always was a joker. I start unpacking and getting out some items we may need. The sun had just left from view, and pitch-black starts to cover the area as we sit and feast on our meal.



"Hope it isn't hot," Sam says again in his parenting tone. I glance over, smiling as I almost dropped the can from laughing at Sam and his funny business so I grip the warm can tightly. We finished our food and laid down as we had planned to tell some scary stories. Sam gets the flashlight. As he is about to begin, I hear a knock on the side of our house. I look over to the door that I had locked, which I was glad I did; the lock barely had turned, but it was enough to keep the door

closed. Sam and I are dead quiet as we know it's probably a cop- as this is a restricted area, and we shouldn't be in these abandoned homes. We sit and wait; Sam and I figure that the cop will leave after figuring out the door is locked, and there isn't any noise inside. I thought maybe he wouldn't even try the handle as he might just be poking around. Then a noise starts; it's loud at first, then it turned into an ear-pricing scrape as I can hear metal scraping and a sheering sound. It sounded like something scratching the outside. Sam and I look at each other in shock. I'm lost, I have no words. Sam can't even wipe the horror off his face, and we both know that something isn't right.



"It's probably just a wild animal," Sam says as he starts to dig deeper into his sleeping bag. Sam pulls out his pocket knife, and I smack my head as I know a three-inch blade isn't going to save us. We look over at where we hear the scraping, and suddenly, it stops. The noise is gone, and there is only dead silence as Sam and I look at each other. We look over to where the scratching had come from and see a taller than a normal man. Or so I had thought, as I could only see something partial, a large shadow that resembled a human. Nothing happens, and the shadow is gone. I can feel sweat pool down my face. I look over at Sam. He seems a bit shaken, and I can tell that while his theory about an animal may have been possible, it isn't now.

"M-Maybe it's gone," Sam peeps out. I lay as stiff as a board. I can feel the sweat now trailing down my armpits. Suddenly, I hear an enormous roar, and the house is shaking as whatever is out there is ramming the outer frame. The whole house rattles, and I think it's going to come apart; I shut my eyes and hope that it doesn't. I start to come to terms with my death when it stops, and suddenly everything goes back to silence. I finally open my eyes, looking at the dark ceiling. I look around. I can see the shadow is gone now. I look over

at Sam. He is practically missing the color from his face, he looks as if a vampire had sucked the life right out of him. We both laid there hoping whatever it was had left; It had turned out to be a mistake, we shouldn't have taken that dare. Sam gets up and starts to saunter over to the window to pull back the musty curtain. I look at him and give a mouthed "no" and shake my head, but he doesn't listen. He inches closer and closer. The outside is dead silent, and I can't see the outside shadow from the light. Sam wants to know what exactly it is, and I can't stop him; I start to sweat more as he finally reaches the window. He opens the curtain an inch and immediately runs back to his sleeping bag. I can see the horrifying shock on his face. I am confused as to why; then I look back at the window as I see something shade the glass. I see a leathery hand dive in laced with claws and mutilated flesh; the dark made it hard to see anything. I thought I was going to throw up my heart, then lungs, and the rest of my insides.

The hand clawed at the sides of the inside, trying to catch something, if anything. The hand dives back out, and we hear the most ear-piercing screech as it angrily comes out empty-handed. We lay down and hope and pray it doesn't try the door. After a while, we doze off, and in the morning, we pack up. Sam and I are quiet as we want to get out of there. We pack up and unlock the doors, and then head out into the sunshine. We walk over and see the house's side with significant claw marks and blood painted in them. We only ever found a ripped bloody cop hat. After that, Sam and I agreed on never going back.





Spring

by Sophia McKeever, 10th



City Nights

by Emily Oates, 9th



"It's always fun to play a game with you," the young girl said with a cheery voice. Her gray eyes glittering with raw joy. A playful smile spread across her face, exposing big white teeth. The girl's hair straight blond hair was up in a ponytail. But despite her cheerful demeanor I knew if I did not play along, I would end up like the others.

"I sure hope so," I said while putting up the fake cheerful mask, keeping up the happy and playful act. "You know, you

never told me your name.”



“Oh, I’m sorry! It’s Melody,” she said, clapping her hands erratically.

“Well, Melody, do you want to play some hide and seek?”

“Of course! It’s my favorite game!” the little girl squeals.

“You count to twenty then and I’ll hide,” I say.

“Okay,” the girl giggles, turns around, and covers her eyes, “one, two, three...”

As soon as she started counting, I began running. I climbed the basement stairs, nearly tripping when I reached an open room. Frantically began to look around, trying to find a good place to hide. It has already been twenty-five seconds since she started counting. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a wooden wardrobe. Before I could have second thoughts, I ran towards it. I ripped the door open and climbed inside. Softly, I closed the door and curled into a tight ball. I put a hand over my mouth, trying to quiet my heavy breathing. I could hear nothing but my own hammering heartbeat and quick, heavy breaths. The quiet surrounding me was severely unnerving. Where was she? It should’ve been twenty seconds by now. You would figure she would be creating a ruckus trying to locate me. Although that was apparently not how Melody planned to go about this.

The silence seemed to go on forever. Fear beginning to latch its talons even further into my skin. The small, closed space seemed to be crushing me, squeezing the air out of my lungs. My nails dug into my palms, drawing droplets of blood. I began to focus on the pain so it could distract me from my fear. That is when it hit me. Grief wrapped around my heart and squeezed mercilessly. I began to see my friends’ faces flash behind my eyelids. They were smiling and happy until the image changed, showing me their dead, ruined bodies. A sob began to work its way up my throat, drawing out a choked sound. My eyes widened as I realized my potential life-ending mistake. I began to look around frantically while trying to stay quiet when I saw it: my best friend’s, Connie, hair clip. The memories from just a few hours ago began to make themselves known behind my closed

eyes....

Connie giggled beside me as she clutched her boyfriend's, Jackson, arm.



"I can't believe we are actually going to contact spirits tonight," she says.

"Technically, we are just playing with an Ouija board in an old, abandoned house," Jackson commented before continuing, "that doesn't mean we'll actually encounter a spirit."

"Doesn't mean we won't."

"Spirits and demons are fake. Everyone knows that."

"You just assume that since you've never seen one, there is no proof they don't exist."

"There isn't proof they do."

Sighing, I gently opened the old cabin doors. This cabin belonged to my Uncle Pedro whose mysterious death was ruled as a suicide a few months ago. Ever since his death, I had noticed weird things had started happening when I was home alone: things being moved from where they were placed seconds before, or weird bangs and sounds of footsteps. So, when I told Jackson and Connie about this, they suggested we go to my uncle's house to try and contact my Uncle Pedro. I agreed without hesitation even though I had a feeling I would regret this. Even now, as I entered the cabin, I could sense something could go terribly wrong. I was snatched out of my thoughts when I heard Connie sneeze.

"Why is it so dusty in here?" she asked as she looked around.

"No one is around to take care of the house I guess," I said while picking up an old photo of my family before continuing, "my mother is considering putting the place up for sale."

"I would too if I owned the place," Jackson scoffed as he sat down on a dusty couch. He began to set up the Ouija board.

Tears silently dripped down my cheeks as I reached up to wipe them. I idly twirled the hair clip between my fingers. The

silence was suffocating as I waited to hear Melody's footsteps. I looked down again at the hair clip and saw a tiny, dried spot of what looked like blood.

The little girl's body seemed to slowly solidify as she smiled at us. Her steely gray eyes analyzing us from head to toe. She looked around 9 or 10 and had a strong playful glow. Her small, plump lips slowly turned into a somewhat feral smile.

"Hello everyone," her high-pitched cheery voice sang, "thank you for summoning me."

Everyone's eyes widened as she walked towards Jackson. Her small hand reached out and grasped his shoulder. Jackson, being the impulsive person he is, grabbed her wrist and glared at her. The strange little girl's eyes seemed to harden with what could have been rage.



"Let go of me."

"No."



The girl tensed and began to glow. My body moved on its own as it ducked behind the couch, seemingly knowing what was going to happen. It was then that a large bright light filled the area. When it finally seemed to fade, is when I opened my eyes. Slowly and cautiously, I rose from my hiding place and scanned the area around me. Everything seemed to be in place until I saw the bloody pile of clothes on the ground. Tears welled up in the corner of my eyes as realization set in. I was about to release a sob when I felt someone lightly tap my shoulders. I turned and looked at the smiling girl.

My hand was covering my mouth, trying to stop the relentless waves of grief-filled sobs. I need to calm myself and stop making noise before Melody comes close to this room. It was only when I heard someone humming "Hayloft" that I finally became silent. She was here. I could see her shadow move around the room, her form briefly appearing in the gap of the wardrobe. Finally, after a few minutes, her footsteps and humming faded away. Relief flooded over me in waves and my body finally began to relax. It was then that it happened. Suddenly, the wardrobe doors burst open. Pure, terrifying shock

filled my body as I stared at the little girl in front of me. Melody smiled at me then started giggling. Horrifying glee filled her gaze as she opened her mouth to speak.

“It’s always fun to play a game with you.”



Common Cold

by Tristin Triana, 11th

Time in the wasteland doesn’t exist; the ones who are alive are racing for survival. The strong can pass the air’s venomous grip. These victors are the ones of the wandering, the drifters, those who aren’t afraid of what the real world looks like. I’ve been out here long enough for my memories to feel like the haze up that covers the sun but still manages to seep through. Everywhere I travel, this vast empty land is with the one I truly know, my companion, Ali, an Emperor War hog, who helped me survive all this time. Often people fear her size, and her tough leathery skin and fangs are great for protection against my enemies. She’s the first thing I remember. I do not remember why I started this long journey, my childhood, or where I grew up. Regardless I remember that I had a purpose. I have this feeling, an emptiness; I have traveled this land long enough never to need a map, to know the sandy ruins until, now, I feel it’s pointless to dwell on my unknown longing.

It can be torture out here during the chilling nights, hearing the howling of the beasts, the pitch-black sky, where I can only use my lantern and wits to guide me. In the day, heat radiates off the ground and the yellow hue beams down. I can feel it in my stomach, feeling it eat itself as my throat and lips are chapped. The rubber mask restricts my breath. Not too far in the distance, a wall of rolling dust creeps upon me, swallowing everything in its path. The sun is unbearable while sweat drips down my face and back.

The roaring waves of dust steadily close in. I lead Ali away from the horror that is doomed to fulfill its wish. Waves



start to crash closer and closer as we run faster. As practiced, I grab the handle tightly and tuck my body close to her. The sand takes us in and pushes against the fighting force to try not to become part of the storm. My mask's goggles tint with the dust and sand becoming disoriented, leading her to march forward.



As I passed the storm, an oh-so-familiar towering, slick black cube awaits in front of me blocks the view. *Oh no, it can't be*, I thought, could have sworn this wasn't here before; they are known as The Finders. The folks who want the why and how to seek answers refuge to these metal kingdoms of oil and coal. Holding onto the hope that the ones they believe to be prophets are true. Taunting and humiliating, The Drifters that they say are weak. The structure is a giant cube and is somehow can still have a perfect reflection despite the forever storms. Inside, the cities run far down into the earth filled with pipes connecting the city. It's much bigger than the ones I have seen in the past. As usual, I stand back from the building as another room slowly appears like the structure grew it out. A plethora of hooded figures swarm out of the perfectly fitted door that slid out from the ground.

They march in a single file line like an old ant colony, circling me, following the man in the lead. Unlike the others, his hood is down, showing his glass gas mask attached to his face, pointing to their kingdoms rifles. I put my hands up, slowly hopping off Ali.

"What shall you offer?" the man's voice vibrates through the mask. His hand is lightly fiddling with the trigger.

I slowly take out the small vial of water soiled by the forever storms.

His eyes stay on Ali as he speaks, "You find this to be an even trade?" I stared back at him so he understood my answer.

"I see, fortunately, we see something of value." He gestures to his men pulling Ali, unable to do anything; I watch as they take her back with them. I hear her scream as my

feet want to run into a death wish. They rip her from me.
“Welcome to our blessed city.”



Blue Butterfly

by Victoria Senior, 10th



What Is Your Name?

by Jamye Lynn Cardello-Peters, 12th



Red Converse. A pair of red Converse and a pale girl was all I needed apparently to start this craze. A normal day I tried telling myself. A normal day would be going to the studio with my camera around my neck, turned off, and not being ready to shoot at any time before practice. I couldn't help but become obsessed, as my brothers say, with this girl with the



pink hair, pale complexion, and red Converse. They call it an obsession, but I call it art as a photographer.

Photography can be both beautiful and disgusting, depending on how it is used. Some people like to capture the beauty of life and the art of people, while others use photography for more inappropriate actions. It's as simple as a click but also extremely difficult. Getting the angles, the model, the list goes on and on. But you are not an ordinary model. You are not an ordinary stranger I met on Highway-19 at a gas station. You are so much more.

So, I ask of thee; what is your name? What is your passion, the flame within you that inspires you to take action every day? I want to hear your story. I want to hear your voice, not just the "excuse me" when we accidentally bump into each other at school or the "thank you" when I helped get something off the top shelf in the supermarket. I want to know the real reason you didn't give up. Miss Mysterious, you and I both know that I've seen you around town with a short-sleeve shirt. Those are definitely not "cat scratches," nor will they ever be. Samuel, my brother of 20, has dealt with this before, and it went unnoticed. It will not go unnoticed here because I don't want you experiencing his fate. I don't care where you come from or how you identify; speak yourself. Find a voice for that soul in your mortal prison and find a name that fits.

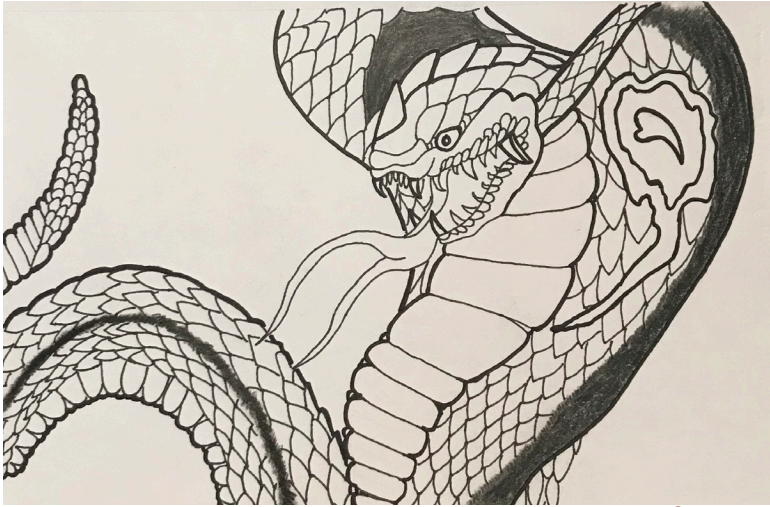
I am Cameron Jovino. I am seventeen years old, mostly Italian with a little bit of German, and I'm from New York. I live here in Florida, and I have been since I was five. I've been in a hip-hop dance troupe for nine years now. I enjoy performing for others, and it's something I want to do for the rest of my life. I know that someday I will make it. That a performer-to-be will look up to me and say that I believe in them. That's why I haven't given up. I am CJ of Bulletproof.

So, I ask you, what is your name?



Cobra

by Blake Hofacker, 11th



Longing to Breathe

by Mrs. Barbara Dukeman



Breathing, seething with fear
As tears hidden, unbidden in the
Recesses of our hearts
We move about, living without our
Loved ones, always the fear of being near
The plague that crossed the giant blue
The vector of a specter in our sight
As we scatter in the presence of others

Hermits in our own homes, permitting none
To pass, we live our lives knowing

Those who never had a chance.
Such happenstance it is to see
No break in the clouds as forbidden crowds
Dream of what they might be

sadly



The corner bends our future depends
On what we do know
Can we open our eyes to the rules
We despise, and live to see another day?

Leaf on Asphalt

by Niko Figueroa, 11th





The Light on the Road

by James Vest, 12th

The light of streetlamps guide the car
As we glide across the road to midnight Gently we sing along to
the metal soundtrack As time seems to disappear
Why do I have this unsettling feeling
As we talk and sing?
This friendly ride I've been fearing
Fearing like the sun fears the moon
He tells me his case, asks me to lend an ear, An ear that had
been lent to him since I was young. He tells me things he thinks
is wrong
Some of the things I have done wrong Things that I don't regret
But wish hadn't happened
I stare at the dazzling building
Like New Vegas's beauty
The lights on the building seemed to dance
Making the man's soft cement words
Harden into gentle bullets
Bullets that seem more like duds
But they seem to awaken two people
People fighting for the same spot in a body
A body they do not own.
One wants to regress into a younger being
Stay ignorant and arrogant
While the other wants to regress into a villain
Stay driven and angry
The body seems to deny either entry
As it listens to the man talk
About his life and regrets
How a man should act and portray himself
I do believe he's on to something
Though I don't think he has it right
Right to the letter
I feel as though my regret might be





How I've chosen to explain myself
How I chose to lie some lies
How I couldn't explain my reasoning
Though I promise to get better

These two souls who think they're both right
Are both truly wrong
Nothing in there seems to be this absolute.
They are truly the same side of the coins I flip
The only way to grow from this point on is to
Change into a new soul that combines the two
Though I might fail and fall in the dazzling streets
But I have to pick myself up and fight my way
Through the toxic alleyways
To find my path to freedom.

Image of Lamp

by Niko Figueroa, 11th



Life Goes On

by Aleksa Demby, 9th



Some say life is easy,
They mustn't have lived it,
It's full of heartbreak and pain,
But still, life goes on.

It can start out quite easy,
You're born with a purpose,
Your world has begun,
And still, life goes on.

Your youth is exciting,
New places, new people,
But it can quickly turn,
And still, life goes on.



Your teen years are hard,
You learn to adjust,
More good things have changed,
But still, life goes on.

Time for adulthood,
Many years have passed,
It isn't much better,
But still, life goes on.



You meet a new person,
Who you take to like,
You love and you marry,
And still, life goes on.

You begin to worry,
About feeding your spouse,
You'll have more mouths to feed,
But still, life goes on.



Some years have passed now,
The world is still cruel,
Your job is getting hard,
But still, life goes on.



Your love has grown cold,
It's drifting away,
It's hard to move forward,
But still, life goes on.



Your world is burning,
Your world is coming down,
Time now moves slower,
But still, life goes on.

You stand at the edge,
Of the tallest building,
Mind racing with thoughts,
But still, life goes on.

You slowly back away,
Tears filling your eyes,
You want it to end,
But still, life goes on.



Please, keep on fighting.
Life will get better,
It will mend itself.
These feelings you have,
Will soon go away.
You'll find your peace soon,
Life will go on.



Writer's Block

by James Vest, 12th

Times have changed,
We used to stand by a fire,
A talk about wondrous adventures,
Thrilling stories of heroes and villains,
Stories that had morals and themes,
But the tradition is fading,
We can't seem to stay.

So, we advance to pen and paper,
Where mistakes are made,
Where the author is known.
We keep journals,
Make books and
Form this legacy for ourselves.
But we can't stop this advancement
Of nature or
Of time.

We move to
shiny monitors,
We find mistakes,
We continue to make and create.
Though it seems we hit walls
Of things, we can't see,
It often feels like all the good ideas are taken.
Spun into their neatly woven bows
In fancy boxes but,
We can't worry we must continue.
Life has multiple tries and multiple mistakes,
We fly and we fall,
We get rejected and we pick ourselves up.
Writing is a lovely thing we think of,
We take for granted the mistakes we make for these
grand mess-ups that can't be fixed.



But all we have to do is tap our backspace,
Grab our white out, erasers, or crumble up the white sheet
of paper,
To create the stories of the endless ideas
I know we can make.



