

TELLING OUR STORY

A PEN In The Community Anthology
Fairfax High School
Freda Mohr Multipurpose Center
Fall 2017

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FAIRFAX HIGH SCHOOL &
FREDA MOHR MULTIPURPOSE CENTER
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LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA
FALL 2017

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Cut out poetry is made by the Freda Mohr students.

FORWARDS

LOVE THESE KIDS. Like seriously, love them. They're smart and energetic. But, should they care about a middle-aged dude reading poetry to them? You just have to expect them to reject this. Except these kids, they don't. They're kind even in their restlessness. They're respectful even when they're puzzled. And they're honest, but not to be mean, just because, why not be? And they sit and listen, even as I butcher the lingo in Luis Urrea's "The White Girl" or as we read from Victoria Chang's *The Boss*. Or when Chiwan Choi stops by and reads from *The Yellow House*. And when they read to each other from Billy Burgos' *Eulogy to an Unknown Tree*. And they spontaneously applaud for me and for each other. And they read their own poems and their own stories. Some so enthusiastic they're falling out of their seats, and some so reticent but no less brilliant. Stories about being from LA and growing up here, and also being from somewhere else, and also about going somewhere else, in the U.S. or the world or the beyond. Stories about being a stranger in a strange land, and hating it, or loving it; losing your way, or finding your way. Stories about the journey. And stories about the destination.

—Peter H.Z. Hsu
PEN In The Community Teaching Artist
Fairfax High School, Fall 2017

THIS WAS MY third time as a PEN In The Community Teaching Artist and the students never cease to amaze me with their dedication, warmth, humor, and wisdom. It's odd teaching students older than myself—they've lived a lot more life than I have and I was raised to respect and defer to my elders. What could I possibly teach them? On the page, we responded to published work with stories of our own, sometimes looking to the past and sometimes more concerned with what was happening in our daily lives.

By sharing their words and vulnerability, these writers allowed me into their worlds. I am forever grateful for this gift.

When viewing some of the work of the Fairfax High School students, my students were impressed with their imaginative personas, moving poetry, and insightful social commentary. "Wow, they're only 15?" one asked. This interaction reminded me that we each have something to bring to the table, despite and sometimes because of age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, language, or other perceived differences.

My hope is that readers of this anthology will have the same opportunity I had to glimpse the souls of a diverse group of Americans, generations apart.

—*Shawna Kenney*
PEN In The Community Teaching Artist
Freda Mohr Multipurpose Center, Fall 2017

AND THE NEW
NO LONGER HAVE TO BE
INVISIBLE
USE YOUR VOICE
YOU ARE MIRACULOUS
Say this : I AM part of
SO MUCH MORE

CALIFORNIA



INGLEWOOD

De'Jon Greene

INGLEWOOD WASN'T AS GREAT as I wished it was, but I could see through all the gangs, shootings, drugs, and fights, and see the beautiful things about it. First off, I had been living with my grandma for most of my lifetime. Then what really topped it off was the fact that my grandma had a park right across the street from her house that I soon enough fell in love with. Since the age of six, I loved going to that park. It was full of fun loving memories. I remember all the 1v1's my brother and I had when hooping and how much I would often lose and cry about it.

But I will continue to talk about the park in a while, I need to sum up my story about Inglewood in general. Well, like I said earlier, I had lived in Inglewood for a majority of my lifetime, but what I really enjoyed was my school experience. My middle school, Wilder's Prep, had some fun and messed up moments at times. At Wilder's Prep is where I met the guy I considered like my brother. We shared some very funny moments together throughout my lifetime.

Like I said, during another story of mine, he was my friend who let me have his Green Arrow action figure. I loved that toy with all my heart, so when I lost it, I almost began to start crying. Now originally, I decided not to tell him about it, and I lied. Now I know you think that it's wrong to lie to a person I considered like my brother, but I felt if I told him the truth, it would mess up our friendship. So, I told him my other friend, Jaylen, lost the toy, and he was very angry...

To be continued...

WORLD'S GREATEST WEATHER

Alexis Morejon

IN LOS ANGELES, trying to find a better home, a bigger and better home in a good neighborhood. Our home is tiny, surrounded by gangs, drug dealers, and robbed two times. After my parents' hard work, we can finally afford a new home. Somewhere that will be huge, safe, and give us a better life. After looking at twenty-three houses, we find the perfect house. Our agent tells us, so we get into our car and drive an hour to that house. It is what we are looking for, two floors, four bedrooms, and two bathrooms. Space for my parents, my younger sister and my older brother. Finally, a room for myself with peace for thirteen-year-old Henry.

If I were to move to that house, I would get into a better school. Have more friends and the respect I deserve. As a thirteen-year-old boy, things can be really hard sometimes, and I wish things could be easier. Things would change a lot if we have the opportunity to move.

Here in 1995, it's a living hell on our block. My dad was nearly shot, my mom was almost kidnapped, and my little sister is scared to go outside. My block is a warzone, my door even has a bullet hole, but thank goodness no one was hurt.

After two weeks, we find out that the perfect home is no longer an option... That was really our only hope, but it was blown. As three years pass by, things have changed in my life. I've lost my father due to a shooting, but gang violence is fading. My dad was shot by some ruthless gang members. It is very hard without him. Especially with my mom just working, we are poor now. We used most of our savings that were going to be used to buy that one house three years ago.

Overall, things are different in school, too. Now, I'm in high school and a teacher's pet. I took an opportunity for a scholarship recently.

As two more years pass by, I get an email the week before graduation. I applied for many colleges and I got accepted to Harvard. This is literally the happiest day of my life, I never imagined nothing like this would ever happen. As I wake up on the day of my graduation, I eat a good breakfast and put on my cap and gown as I arrive at my school. I am shaking and waiting to receive my diploma. After all of it is over, my friends and I go over to a restaurant and celebrate.

After a month, I pack my things, ready to fly to Massachusetts. Hard work really pays off, after all I went through. Things can be extremely hard, but in the end, your dream will become a reality. There shouldn't be any give-ups or doubts, all it takes is time and effort.

HOLLYWOOD

Jackeline Carolina Vega

HERE IN MY HOMETOWN in Iowa, I have been looking for someone I can love for my whole life. So, I'm going on a mission to Los Angeles, where all the famous celebrities are, and there are a lot of people, so I can find my one true love.

I get in my car and drive to the airport to catch my flight. Twelve hours later, I get off my flight and rent a car to go to Hollywood. On my way over there, I open the windows of the car and feel all the fresh cold air as it goes through my hair. Passing by many amazing places show me how different everything is than back home.

I go to my new apartment building. I'll be staying for a while. It's nice being in LA. There are many people on the streets and people in their cars. It's so different from Iowa, where everything is like lonely and sad.

When I arrive at my new apartment building, I park my car in the underground garage. As I enter my home, thinking about finding my true love, I bump into this random guy.

"Hey, watch where you are going next time," he angrily yells at me.

"I'm sorry. I wasn't looking where I was going," I say.

As he walks off, I enter my new home. I see everything is amazing. I walk to my bedroom and enter my bathroom and start taking a shower. As I leave my shower and wrap myself with the towel, that's when I hear a knock at the door.

I open the door to see the guy I bumped into on my way over here.

"Hello," I say.

"Um, I just wanted to say sorry for my rudeness," he says with a serious look.

"It's alright," I smile.

“Um, also, you’re just in a towel,” he says with a bit of pink on his face.

“Oh, sorry about that. I just got out of the shower,” I say as I grab my towel so it won’t fall.

“Oh, my name is Jackson Smith.”

“Nice to meet you, Jackson. My name is Hani. I’m sorry we had to meet under these circumstances,” I say.

“It’s fine. Just happy that we are on good terms,” he says.

I notice he is staring at my chest.

“Hey, buddy. My eyes are up here,” I say as I point to my eyes.

“I don’t know why, but since I bumped into you, I couldn’t stop looking for you,” he confessed. “It’s like love at first sight.” He looked at me with his eyes, “What I’m trying to say is, I love you, and would you go out with me?” He yelled this with a really bright red face.

“I would love that,” I say, and give him a kiss on the cheek and close the door.

LOS ANGELES

Holland Taylor

LOS ANGELES IS A BIG CITY in Southern California.

There are lots of big events that go on out here.

Los Angeles can be very hot at times.

Also, it can be very cold.

Los Angeles gets a lot of visitors.

Los Angeles also has lots of good things for people.

Certain parts of Los Angeles have lots of opportunities for people.

Many people love Los Angeles.

Los Angeles has also had lots of killings.

KOREATOWN

Janelle Ramos

RINA ALWAYS THOUGHT she had a decent life. She had good parents, good grades, and good friends, but she knew there was something wrong. But she could not quite put her finger on it. Until one day, she figured out exactly what it was. The smoke from cigarettes, the people, and the noise. It was where she lived in Koreatown. For her whole life, since she was born, she never paid much attention to these problems, but living here so long made everything bland.

She was 14 and wanted to move somewhere else. She tried to encourage her parents to move to another place but to no luck. They still denied her request. On the other hand, her parents thought that where they lived was great. For example, the food, the nice people, and the cute little stores. Yet the only thoughts Rina had about Koreatown were negative.

“No, we are not going to move anytime soon, Rina,” her mother said, annoyed and bluntly.

Rina would always ask her mom or dad about moving out of the smoky area. But the answer was always a simple “no.”

“Think about it, Rina. If we move out, you would not be able to see your friends often, or be as close to your school.” Rina’s father looked at her, into her eyes. She thought about what he said when getting into bed.

“Maybe he’s right,” she thought to herself. “I’ve been living here forever, but I am pretty sure that I would miss living here,” she thought before falling asleep.

TRIP TO THE STAPLES CENTER

Erik Valenzuela

WHEN YOU WALK through those doors and through the metal detectors, the air conditioner hits you right in the face. You can hear the fans cheering, and the workers trying to sell merch at their concession stands.

As you walk to your seats on the second floor, you notice that there's a newborn baby, so you try to stay away from your seats as much as possible, so you go to the luxurious freezing bathrooms so that by the time you go to your seats, the baby won't be there, but guess what... he's still there.

You start to walk down the cement stairs and sit down on the fluffy comfortable chairs and start to watch the game. Suddenly the baby starts to wince and then later during halftime the baby starts to cry and cry and cry until you can't take it no more. So you get up from your seats and start to exit the building and find some seats outside and watch it on the Jumbotron.

After the game is finished, we all start to get in our cars and go our separate ways.

THE LA ZOO

Eric Santiago

I'M GOING TO TALK about the LA Zoo. The LA Zoo is a very nice place. When you enter there, all you hear is many animals making noise, which makes it exciting to go see them. The weather depends on what time of year you go.

The trainer must leave the zoo because of an animal. The animal didn't want to be trained. The trainer's name was Pancho. Pancho was attacked and hurt by the animal. The manager blamed Pancho for what happened. Pancho apologized to the manager. The manager didn't listen to him, and Pancho was fired.

After Pancho was fired, he tried to get another job, but he couldn't get another job. He became homeless. When he was homeless, he met a woman who was nice to him. She helped him. She got him a place to live. Then she helped find him a new job. His new job was not at a zoo. It was not as an animal trainer. It was a job in an office building.

THE TIME I LOST MY KEYS WAS THE WORST

Derrick Williams

THE TIME I LOST my keys was the worst

I was on my way to the Grove

with my friend and we were in a Uber

When we got to the Grove we rushed out

to go meet up with my friends and to see a movie

After the movie

I noticed my keys were gone

THE CORRECT SANDWICH

Hector Cervantes

WHEN I WALK INSIDE the doors, I smell french fries and bacon. My mouth begins to water because I can almost taste what I am smelling. So, then I go to order, but everything looks so good. I decide to get the Fat Jerry, which is sixteen dollars. As I am walking to order, I pull out my wallet and see that I have no money. So, I ask if I am able to pay them later.

They firmly say, “No, come back when you have enough money, kid.”

So, I leave, go home, and get more money, and then go back to the restaurant. I order the sandwich and go to eat it at one of their tables. As I am unwrapping the sandwich, I see that there isn’t any chicken or french fries. So, I go to complain. Soon after I tell them, I am able to get the correct sandwich.

ENGINEERS FOR A JOB

Jerry Saavedra

THE PLACE THAT I'M WRITING about is Los Angeles. Also, the sights that are in LA are a lot of tall buildings. What I like about LA is that there are a lot of places you can go to and explore the city a little.

There are a lot of people and workers that are looking for jobs. Some of the workers leave their jobs to find jobs that pay them more money than their original jobs that they used to work at. Some of the workers are engineers. These engineers can leave to the job that they worked for and get a job that will pay them more money.

One of the engineers that is looking for a job is named Eric. Eric is looking for a job as an engineer because that was what he studied in college. Also, that is the only thing that he is good at.

At his old job, he was only getting paid \$20 an hour. Since he was only getting paid that much, he left that job and went looking for a job that can pay him more than \$20 an hour. He's been looking for a job so long that he gets so tired of looking. In his mind, he's like, "Just stop looking for a job."

Then he finds a guy that works as an engineer, and Eric asks him, "Excuse me. I'm looking for a job as an engineer."

The man says, "Sure, come work with me."

The next day, Eric goes to his first day at work, and he loves working there. The money that he is getting paid is \$40 an hour. Then Eric stays there his whole life, working there, and he never leaves this job.

STORY

Richard Mendez

THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES is a very populated city in California. Due to this, you will find a diversity of people but not just in culture, also personality wise. Some people are very kind, but some people are rude, mean, and disrespectful, like bullies for example. It also depends where in Los Angeles you live, since it is a big place, some areas are different. Although some areas are pretty bad, it is called “The City of Angels” for a reason. And that is exactly what a young boy named Bobby from Ireland has in mind.

Bobby is a foreigner from Ireland who is living the challenge of moving from one place to another. The two places are very different, so his challenge is to fit in with the population. He is very different from the people in the city of Los Angeles. In LA there are gangsters, and regular looking people like Hispanics, blacks, whites, and Asians, but not many people from Ireland. Bobby has orange hair. He is very pale, and he speaks in a heavy accent, which is going to make it hard for him to communicate with Americans. So, it will take some time. It will also take him some time to make new friends and be noticed by a good amount of people.

For high school, 14-year-old Bobby will attend Fairfax High School, which is a very popular school in a very popular area. It is also one of the best high schools in Los Angeles. So, when the first day of school comes around, he becomes very nervous, not knowing what is going to happen. Right away, stepping on campus, he becomes very uncomfortable as people keep looking at him very confusedly. People are like, “What the hell is this kid doing here?” Right away he feels very sorry for himself. But then he thinks about not feeling sorry for himself, but to just stay motivated to prove himself against these people, the he belongs with the population.

So, for this first week, he is just trying to fit in and make new

friends, but he is unsuccessful. Actually, he fails pretty bad as he is getting bullied and is being made fun of for the way he is. He is a loner all the time, and he finds it really boring. So, he is finding a way to stand out, so he thinks to himself, why not try out for the basketball team. He has been playing basketball for a while now. He is not very good, but he finds it fun, so he thinks to himself, why not try standing out through a sport. He is also very smart, and he thinks maybe the coaches can appreciate that. Two weeks before tryouts, he is just practicing basketball for two hours straight after school so he can get better, and he is also taking care of his school work.

Two weeks pass by and basketball tryouts come around, and Bobby starts to struggle. His lack of playing experience starts to kick in, and he doesn't know how to do many of the drills, and to make it all worse, he is lost the whole time. He is definitely not one of the best, skill wise. He underperforms, and he doesn't stand out, which was his goal.

Three weeks later, cuts come around. He checks the list to see if his name is there. Sadly, his name is not on the list. He is very disappointed to see he didn't make the cut after he worked so hard, practiced and prepared really hard. He didn't get nothing out of basketball, so that was it for him there.

Bobby is very smart though. So, he thinks of a new idea. His idea is to catch up with the new generation. So, he does some research on today's trends and how to get girls, and this significant thing comes to mind. He knows he has a to look good. So, he knows all of the good clothing brands and lines that will make him look good and attract girls. He is already part of a wealthy family, and he has a 4.0 GPA. And two things girls like about guys are that they are smart and wealthy. So, at least Bobby has those two things on him to give him a head start. Another thing that really attracts girls are good clothes.

So, that is Bobby's new goal, looking good for people. There are many stores in the area of his school with the best clothes. So,

it will be easy for him to get the best clothes available. Right away he starts wearing all the clothes he bought, and he instantly gets attention. Right away he starts getting new friends, and more girls get attracted to him. He suddenly goes from being the new kid that nobody knows, that people think is weird, and that doesn't fit in, to becoming one of the most popular kids at school. A few months later, he gets his first girlfriend and becomes very happy, and a few months pass, but he starts to feel a certain unhappiness as his popularity rises.

Bobby suddenly notices that they don't want to be his friend because of the way he is, but rather because of his popularity, and soon he becomes very unhappy and feels like this is not the lifestyle for him. He misses being his normal self. He is doing things for others and not for himself, and that kind of hurts him. So, he lets all those people go. He also stops wearing all the flashy clothes and all the nice shoes. He does also lose his fame, but he is okay just being himself. People do start to hate on him, but he just tells them to stop chasing people for popularity and just be yourself.

Bobby ends up graduating from Fairfax High School and going to UCLA, and from there he becomes a lawyer. He goes on to get a wife and have kids, living a happy life and having a successful career helping win many cases and becoming well-known through one of his passions and not for pretending to be someone he isn't. Bobby lived through a life lesson, and that is to always be yourself. Always follow your dreams and don't ever let someone cause you to change.

GETTING AWAY

Jerry Solomon

I LIKE TO BE at the
beach if it's at least 80 degrees.
But it has to be about 10 pm
And I have to have a lounge or
beach chair.
I don't want any sand on me.
Not one drop of sand...
And I have to be facing the ocean or
close to it. And be there for at least 3 hours
and with someone.
Unfortunately I have to
bring my illness to the beach, too.

ALMOST / Every year, They EFFECT

a challenge TO improve MORE

CHOICES FOR ALL people

Asya

AMERICA

trash culture **rushin**

hard

AS MY

BODY

ALERTED

LOST

CAN'T QUIT

WANTING IT
SO MUCH

Phil Tarley

LIVING

Jerry Solomon

THE RENT CONTROL LAWS are not stringent enough. Rents in Southern California are at least 30% more than they should be. So, for many, including myself, it is either overspend \$200 to \$300 per month or be homeless.

Do economic courses say to overspend? Seminars can no longer tell people to “live within their means.” How ludicrous!

This leaves me less for groceries, co-payments, and savings.

I’m on a waiting list for senior housing, but I don’t really want to move, though I may have no choice.

Having a roommate would help, but it would have to be Miss America.

THE SALESMAN

Atom Gomez

MY STORY STARTS IN LA with this working man at his house on the weekend. It's Sunday morning, and he is awake with the lights off, and the sun providing light as he is watching football. The Eagles game is on. He is an Eagles fan. He was a little kid when his dad first showed him football. When he was 8 years old, he used to have a Terrell Owens jersey, when Terrell Owens first started playing for the Eagles.

He is watching the game while lying on his couch eating potato chips and rooting for his team to win. He lives in a small house that he barely affords. He works as a salesman at a company that sells office supplies. He can't afford to hang out with his friends on the weekend, but he's learned to live with the stuff that he has.

He's watching the game, and suddenly he gets a call from work.

"I need you to fly to Philadelphia for the whole weekend for sales calls," his boss tells him.

He accepts this offer as he knows his favorite team is playing there next week.

"Okay, I'll be happy to go" he says

"Thank you," his boss says, all relieved.

He goes to NFL.com and goes and buys Eagle's tickets. It's a good thing that they are playing at home otherwise his plans would've been all messed up.

He goes back to the watching the game. Later on the Eagles go on to win against the Chargers 26-24. After that he doesn't really do anything other than watching other games. Then when all the other games are over, he makes himself some dinner, takes a shower and goes to sleep. But he's hyped up to go see his favorite team play at their stadium. He finally falls asleep.

He wakes before his alarm clock rings by just two minutes. He

puts on a suit and tie, brushes his teeth, puts on deodorant and goes to his car and leaves. He drives a black BMW 328i. He is driving on the freeway. He finally makes it to work, walks in to work, and his boss tells him that he leaves at 12 a.m. to catch his plane. He has time to do some work. It finally reaches 12 a.m., and he leaves to go to the airport, gets on his plane, and leaves.

He gets to Philadelphia around 5 p.m. He checks in to his hotel. He goes to get pizza, goes back to his room, watches TV, takes a shower, and falls asleep knowing that he has a sale to close in the morning.

He goes to the sales meeting to negotiate a deal for them. They don't know if it's the right move for them to do. They tell him that they'll think about it. He goes to his next meeting, and he goes for his sales pitch, and they accept it, and he's got them. He goes to another one. They do business, and they say yes. He's going in and out of meetings. His meetings are taking longer than usual. He might not make it to his game, but he's trying his best. He's finally finished, and he's taking a Uber back to his hotel, and he's in the Uber with the Eagle's Quarterback Carson Wentz. He's all surprised, and he looks at Carson Wentz.

"You're Carson Wentz! Oh, my God!" he says excitedly.

"Yeah, are you a fan?" Carson Wentz says.

"I've been a fan of the Eagles since I was 8 years old. I'm coming to the game on Sunday," he says.

"Thanks, man, for the support. It means a lot to me," Carson Wentz says.

They're back to the hotel.

"Can I get a picture with you?" he says.

"Sure," Carson Wentz says.

They get out of the car and take a picture together. He goes back to his room and goes to sleep.

The next morning, he is ready to go to the game. He goes to the game, and he is outside the stadium. He goes to the store in the

ATOM GOMEZ

stadium and buys a Carson Wentz Jersey. He comes out right as the game starts. The Eagles are playing the Cardinals, and he is having fun. The Eagles end up winning that game 7-34. When the game ends, he leaves the stadium, and he goes to the airport and flies all the way home, and he is happy that he finally got to see his favorite team play in their stadium.

The End

A SMALL TOWN WITH BIG PROBLEMS

Derrick Williams

A young African American man lived in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The young man has never left his house. He has always had things brought to him by his assistant. One day the man was waiting for his assistant to come and bring him food, but she didn't show up. The man decided to go into town and get his own food. When the man got into town, he noticed a bunch of old buildings, but what really got his attention was all the confederate flags.

The man said to himself, "I need to get my food and get out of here fast."

The man went to a little restaurant and ordered his food. While waiting for it to arrive, he noticed a big white redneck man abusing a lady. Without knowing the situation, the man got up and asked the man to please leave the lady alone.

The white man quickly responded with, "Who do you think you're talking to? Negro!"

That was when things got physical. The African American man quickly threw a right hook at the redneck and laid him flat on the ground.

Then the African American man said, "Watch who you call negro."

The white man, barely breathing replied with, "This isn't the last you will see of me, negro!"

Twenty minutes later the man arrived at his house to see his windows broken, his roof covered in toilet paper, and big letters on the front of his house that read, "Get Out Negro!"

The man went inside to see his pictures smashed and his furniture taken. The first thing the man tried to do was call the police, but when he picked up the phone and dialed 911 the telephone line dropped. Soon after, the man heard gunshots followed by track

noises, and they were closing in on his location fast!

The man hid inside his broken-down house and peeked out the window to see ten men come out of the back of jeeps wearing white sheets over their faces. The man soon realized that the man he punched was in a gang called the Ku Klux Klan!

The redneck lifted up his sheet and said, "I told you that wasn't going to be the last you saw of me!"

The redneck let out an ugly laugh and shot a few more rounds out of his gun and yelled, "Let's get him, boys!"

They started coming over to the house, and the African American man took off running through the back of his house, and he eventually made it into the woods. He stopped running to catch his breath, and when he turned around he saw the KKK closing in on his location. The man hid behind a nearby tree and started to pray. A few moments later, his assistant flew in a helicopter and saved him.

In the helicopter, the man said, "What took you so long?"

They both started laughing. The man asked where was she taking him, and she responded with, "We're going to Los Angeles, California."

After she said that, the man smiled and went to sleep.

The End

I'VE LOST TRUST

Olaraiche “Ola” Obiekea

I'VE LOST TRUST. Let me clarify. I've lost trust in people who should be keeping me safe. Specifically, the police or army, any type of security detail. On the news, we see so many cases of police brutality. The victims are usually people of color, and the predators? White people. As a black individual, it's hard to trust people against my kind. But, not only have I seen it on TV. I've witnessed it first hand. Twice. My uncle, who was shot and killed as he walked to his car in a church's parking lot. The army men who shot him claimed they thought he was a threat, ha. My brother who was pulled over and beaten with a baton because of a broken headlight. The police claim he lunged at them. His dashcam says otherwise. Did they get justice? Nope. Not one bit.

DEAR U.S.A.

Cheezy-weezy!?!

DEAR U.S.A.,

How is it ever possible that we are allowed to own weapons and possess guns and ammunition to protect ourselves but we are now having to consume toxic animals and water polluted with pesticides like Round-up and even Agent Orange, steroids, antibiotics, etc.

Why are our seeds now patented? Why is it illegal to own pure non-GMO non-patented ones? Why is our soil so very bad that alfalfa will dig 60-feet down for nutrients?

TEXAS

Lanaisja Brown

TEXAS IS FULL of lots of excitement, very hot and humid, and also sticky. In Texas, you sometimes will do a lot of driving to get to certain places. The food there is really good. Wataburger is the spot...

Their chicken strips and coffee shakes are the best. Those chicken strips were just getting good when this girl walked in that I hated so much from elementary school, and I am wondering how and why she is in Texas. She is the most annoying of all, and I do not need her interrupting my chicken strip eating. So, I creep... well, at least I try. She spots me and for some reason she says, "Hey, I remember you, but from where?"

And I try and say, "Ooooh no, I don't know you."

She denies and says, "Ahhhh, India."

And I say, "Huh? How did you know?"

She says, "ELEMENTARY," in her annoying voice... and here we go.

She goes on and on and on, and we end up there all night until closing time. Sadly, my chicken strips are cold, not to mention I do not like eating in front of people, and if I choose to, why here? And I really, really dislike cold food. It has an egregious taste. If only I can escape from her. She acts as if she has no darn life. I end up having to take her home, and that drive feels like forever, but it really is not. We get to her house, and she is still chopping it up like there is no tomorrow. So, I fake call myself and say, "It's an emergency. I have to go!"

She goes, "Can I come with you?"

"Nooooooo!" I yell, and drive away and hope to never ever see her again.

DADDY'S LITTLE GIRL

Lanaisja Brown

DADDY'S LITTLE GIRL

who lives in her
own little world.
Who wears big curls.
She rocks fresh J's &
gets straight A's.
Tenacious. Gullible.
She's happy as
can be. Like a
baby with a bottle.
Smart as a genie
in a bottle. Words
like a clock that
tic-toc. With the
energy she don't
stop.

LESSONS UNLEARNED

Cheezy-weezy!?!

I WAS ALWAYS the perfect person—after all, I was “a lady.” I earned my allowance for not swearing and/or talking back. In fact, I didn’t even know I could, thus never did make that mistake. I was plunked into visual poise, social graces, etiquette, and manners classes along with my modeling school’s curriculum. They even taught us how to suck popcorn, making it less noisy. They taught us how to slide into a vehicle whilst wearing a mini-skirt or micro mini.

Unfortunately I wasn’t important enough to have a Bat Mitzvah. Only boys got Bar Mitzvahs back then. I was always taught to order the cheapest item on the menu because men paid the tabs. I was taught to not give the correct answer, especially if I knew it, because “men don’t like smart women.”

I was taught not to be good or win at any sports when playing with boys, because “they don’t like to lose.” I was taught how to dress for men’s approval. I was taught how to appear shorter, since “men don’t like women taller than they are,” especially at a dance (but unfortunately I couldn’t hide my big clumsy feet).

RESPONSE PIECE TO RACHEL KANN'S POEM "TO THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE YOU"

Barbara Hurvitz

TO MY PARENTS:

Thank you for instilling in me the virtues, teachings, customs, and
knowledge about my
heritage. It hasn't always been easy to follow all of the intricacies of
Judaism in a culture
that doesn't always understand why some of our things are different
from theirs. Many of
our beliefs are intertwined.

The sad thing is that today's generation doesn't want to follow cus-
toms, but instead
wants to assimilate because it's easier.

ADVENTURE

Leo Salazar

This story is about someone going on an adventure. There was a kid on a basketball team, and they were really good. They were winning all their games, so they had to travel to play somewhere far across the world. So, the whole team of fourteen year olds and their coach went. The parents were not allowed to go. The team had to go on an adventure, leaving home, and when they were on the plane, they were thinking about having fun, but at the same time, missing home.

They got to the hotel, and it was one hotel with six beds, and there were twelve kids, so each bed had to have two kids, and they had to share a bathroom. The coach did not tell the parents or the players where they were going, so it could be a surprise. He ended up telling them they were at “Las Vegas.” They were so happy and amazed.

Their games in the tournament were not until another week, so they could relax and have fun. So, every morning they would eat breakfast, practice basketball in the gym, get in the pool that was in the hotel, and then relax.

After a week, it was time for the biggest basketball tournament of the year. The winner of the tournament would receive \$100,000. They won the first, second, and third games. After, they went to go eat dinner.

The kid and two other players went outside to use the bathroom, and they got lost. So, they had twenty-four hours to find the rest of the group. If they could not find the rest of the group, the next game would start. Also, it was even worse because all of their phones had ran out of batteries, so there was no way to contact them. So, they had to ask people for their phones, and finally they found somebody that lent them their phone.

They ended up finding the group. It was good because they were

the three best players. After that, none of the boys were allowed to leave without a coach.

Getting back to the games, they were single elimination. So, if they lost, they were out of the tournament. Their first game back was a game winner. So, after they celebrated and went to a fancy restaurant, and the bill came out to \$624.27. The coach had to pay that, but they were lucky because the hotel was free. It was free because the people who invited them to the tournament was the same company that paid for the hotel.

There were four teams left, so only two games left, and they needed to win to be champions. They won the game that they needed to win to go to the championship. It was their last game. Winner take all, but it was an adventure getting there. It was an adventure because the bus broke down. So, they had to walk and climb many times.

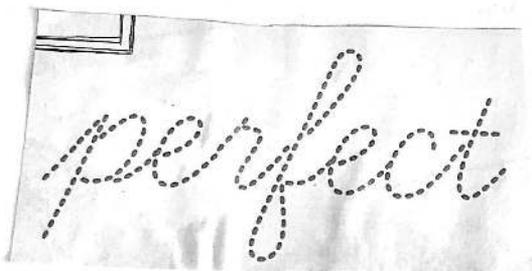
In the final game, they were losing by twenty points with five minutes left, but they came back and won. They were now announced champions and were congratulated by their parents when they got home.

A SMALL DETAIL

James H. Collins

SCRATCH THAT when I lived in Texas
I found a cat and
named it Goldy Goldy was a baby
when we found it but a couple days later it ran
away and two weeks later it came
back and Goldy
looked horrible we barely recognized
him or her I don't remember
but from time to
time I think about how Goldy
is doing God forbid she or
he is dead I live in California now things are way different
watching grownups play dominoes
while eating soul
food family dancing and having fun
but when I wake up
I'm back to reality loud trains, buses,
planes, and old cars the smell of weed coming
through my window every morning no need for an alarm

WHY DID THEY
SAY
THAT
NOBODY'S



I WAS PERFECT
50
YEARS
AGO

THE WORLD

THE CALL THAT DEATH BROUGHT

Ivy Sienna Cruz

NOVEMBER 7, 1916

Today is the first day at sea on my voyage. The ship is heading for the Americas from Spain, my birthplace. I'm terrified to leave my beloved homeland. The sea was glistening like diamonds in the radiant light of the sun. The sunset looked ever so lovely. The colors of orange, pink, and red were blending so unblemished.

"My lady, it's time to return to your quarters," a crew member told me.

"Alright, thank you," I replied with a smile.

As I sat in my room, I was recollecting memories about the life I once had. My mother and father always did the best that they could. As of now, I am 16 years old. Both of my parents died of over-exhaustion. They were both working three jobs just to buy food, keep the house, and support me. I couldn't bear to stay in a place where I couldn't do anything to help them. I loved them both very much.

November 8, 1916

I woke up to complete silence. I forgot I wasn't home anymore. I put on a silk dress. It was blue and was my mother's. It was one of the few things I took with me. I went to the deck and took a deep breath.

"Good morning, Captain Henry," I said.

"Good morning, Isabella," the captain replied with a smile.

"Thank you, for letting me on your ship. I want to go places my parents dreamed of going to. I'm living the adventure for them and hoping they will be right there with me," I said while looking down.

"Once again, I'm sorry for your loss. Luis, I mean, your father, was a great man, and your mother was just as great. They wouldn't

want you to be sad. They will always be with you, and they would be so proud of you,” he replied.

“Thank you, Captain Henry,” I replied.

I walked to the far end of the deck and just stared at the water for what seemed like hours. For the first time, I paid attention to my reflection. My brown-black straight hair reminded me of my mother. My greenish-hazel eyes reminded me of my dad. My button nose came from my father, and my big red lips came from my mom. Although I have both of them when I look at myself, I feel like I’m alone.

November 9, 1916

We finally arrived in America. My new adventure has finally begun. Are you watching, mom and dad? Well, here we go.

OFF TO CUBA

December Rose Slaughter

"MAMA WHERE'S MY DRESS," I cried throwing another black shirt over my shoulder. I can't miss this. I can't miss my dumb prom over a dumb dress.

"You're not looking in the right place, Mercy. Because if you were, you'd see it's been on your bed the past twenty minutes."

I turned around to the dark red dress that sparkled in the little light. I had a glowing in my room by my fairy lights. I swiftly picked up the dress and rushed to the bathroom. I stripped down and threw on the dress. I sprayed abuela's chamomile, lavender, and vanilla perfume. That ended up fumigating the room intensely.

Mama fixed my hair up into an adorable bun, and we were off. Off to my prom with Jake. Jake and I have been dating since 8th grade, and it's absolutely insane that he ended up being my prom date even after five years.

It took us a good ten minutes to find parking, so I put on my red heels. I nearly ran off before mama broke down. I should have expected it. I sighed and got back in the car.

"Mama, it's fine."

She stared at me, her eyes nearly more red than my dress. "I don't want to take this from you, your grades, your school, your boytoy."

She tried laughing at the last part, but she only started sobbing.

Grandpa got sick, and he wanted us to take his home and live there. He lives (and soon to be "lived") in Cuba. We had to leave Hollywood anyway, since pops was coming to town, and mama didn't want me dealing with drama.

I kissed her goodbye and left.

Prom was a little too fantastic. Everyone gave me a goodbye note that was at least a page long. Jake got me a crown with real diamonds... he's too much.

I honestly couldn't sleep that night. I told mama I was staying at Jake's, and she approved since she trusted me not to run off and leave this problem all to her.

We got in his yellow Ferrari. It was his uncle's, but he drives it so much you think it was his.

"31 Flavors?" Jake asked, eyeing down the abandoned 31 Flavors store. It was the meet up for us and all our friends. They were throwing a goodbye party there. It was obvious.

"Why not?" I smiled as he was already driving into the parking lot.

Jake ran out of the car and went to my side. He opened my door and with his pearly whites, he smiled brightly and said, "Madam."

I stepped out, one leg at a time. This is going to kill me later, the thought of this, why did he have to be so perfect?

As we walked, the icy cold wind hit me hard. My teeth started chattering like skeleton's bones. Swoosh. Jake threw on his suit jacket over my head. I usually joke and "Hey, my hair!" but I peeked out and laughed. He opened the door for me and followed behind me as I walked in.

"Shhh, she's here," I heard someone whisper to someone else, giggling.

"You guys," I laughed and flicked on the light. I was expecting my three best friends, Anne, Alex, and Jamie.

"No," I whispered and threw my hand on my mouth.

My brother Jerick had been in the hospital for six months, and my mom didn't want me to see him in the state he was in. He was 26 years old, but we always had a tight bond. He was in a wheelchair, but he looked fine. How could I leave now?

"JJ," I whispered, cracks in my throat making it hard to say anything. He stood up.

"Hold up," Jake called out in shock and clung onto my arm in fear. "Is he dead?"

Ann popped up and looked at Jake and gave him a stank-eye.

He gave me a look of fear because of my brother and Ann.

Jerick laughed, “No, I’m not dead, idiot. I just worked hard to walk for you, Mercy.”

My eyes teared up, and a tear twinkled on my nose. I ran, and I didn’t hesitate to jump onto him, wrapping my legs around him. Jerick made a loud grunt and started closing his eyes tightly. When they opened, Jerick was crying.

I couldn’t tell if it was by pain or from my presence, but I honestly could care less, not right then.

“We were so close to leaving you,” I cried out into his embrace, getting down.

Jerick looked at me, “I’m not leaving, and you’re not staying.”

Jerick said this so plainly, like he prepared this. I backed up a bit to check if there was a hint of mockery on his face. NOTHING.

“You’re kidding, you gotta be,” I whispered angrily.

I walked back enough that his response would be softly heard, soft enough that when he said he wasn’t kidding, I could pretend he was joking.

“Mercedes, look. Jasmine needs me here, and I can’t take the baby on a plane without Jasmine saying I’m a bad father to allow a baby such as Johnnie to be on a plane that can crash any minute. Also, don’t forget I’m scared of flying. So, with or without Jasmine’s thoughts, Johnnie and I wouldn’t go.”

Okay, he stated his case, a case that, if it were a rock, I’d throw in his face over and over again.

“I can’t just stay here with you, Jerick. I can’t. I can’t be without you. I lost Celi. I’m not leaving you,” I whispered, but I soon felt rage throughout my blood. “You know I was only four years older than Celi before she passed, but she saw me as an ancient god, just like everyone that left her that day. You want me to leave you?”

The room was dead silent. Jerick was in tears. I know how much he loved Celi. I probably shouldn’t have brought her up. Alex and

Jamie (aka my friends) were standing next to Ann, behind a flipped white rectangular table.

“Yeah, just leave mama also, because I have so much room in my house for you and money and food, right?!” Jerick yelled, walking my way. He huffed in my face with disgust as he reached my area of the room. “You selfish brat, you only thought about yourself, huh?”

My blood boiled, and my heart started to hurt.

“You know what? Look who’s talking! You left Celi, your youngest sister that was dying from cancer to go to your ugly girlfriend. Right when the cab got there, you ran off on us. Celi died with nobody there but me. Not you, not mama, not papa. No one but me, because I’m so incredibly selfish. You know what? I hope stupid Johnnie DIES!” I yelled at him, spitting a little. I said that... And Jerick slapped me for it.

A gasp fell through the room, and Jake ran my way screaming, “What is wrong with you, psychopath? Oh my god.”

Jake looked into my eyes in sympathy. I fell into his arms sobbing. I didn’t mean to say that. It was just that I was stressed and upset. I continued to sob for another 15 to 20 minutes. When I finally calmed down, Jerick was gone. We just left in silence, me and Jake, hand in hand, nothing but goodbyes and car door slams.

“Mercy, get the last box for me please, darling,” yelled mama from outside.

She was loading a box called “Cecilia’s Stuff” while talking to CC (my “Cousin Christopher”) and CC’s husband Drew. I rolled my eyes in a joking manner and got it. I walked out with the brown box that had large sharpie writing stating that it was a box of my old toys. I walked toward the truck and loaded the box in and stepped back a bit. Mama and I decided anything that didn’t fit in our suitcase wouldn’t leave with us.

We donated practically everything to Goodwill, where CC was working at, so he decided he’d pay us \$800 for all the stuff we

handed over. Mama just accepted it straight up. Oh well.

“Mercy, go close the door, love,” mama asked, laughing from a joke Drew made.

I nodded my head and walked over with the keys jingling in my hand. I looked in the house. I looked practically naked, like we just stripped it in public, and we depressed it. I sighed and locked the door. *Goodbye, home.*

I ran back over to mama and the rest. I gave Drew and CC a hug and got in the passenger seat. Mom repeated what I did. She got in the front and drove off.

When you leave home, it almost feels fake. You feel like you’re just going to the store, but this store will never let you leave it. I sighed and rested my head on the window. As I did so, there was Jerick and his wife Jasmine and his son Johnnie. I would feel bad not telling mama.

“Mama, look,” I whispered.

She looked to my window and gasped, “Oh, my! Is that Jerick? Now?”

She parked the car and started to run. I just stayed inside and watched her say hi and hug everyone. Mama told them I was in the car and how they should say hi. That it’s been too long. Blah blah blah. I smiled, but Jasmine seemed saddened by it. He told her. Jerick told her. I turned forward again, waiting for mama to get in.

I laid my head against the window once more but closed my eyes and cried. I loved her. She was sweet and amazing. She would throw me the best birthday parties, and Johnnie made my life complete. I would never say anything like that. But I did.

Jake thinks my brother is a jerk, but he probably thinks I’m worse. Ann, Jamie, and Alex all looked at me with disgust before we parted.

“I just want to get there already,” I whispered to myself.

I wanted to get far away from here. Slowly, I started to get tired, and I fell asleep.

We got on the plane, and then we were gone, never going home. When we arrived, mama and me rushed to the front of the plane. It was so pretty. Maybe I could convince mama to let us stay in Miami instead of Cuba. A man ran over and said hi, hugging mama. I looked confused, and they noticed.

“You don’t remember Uncle Gilbert? My brother?” Mama laughed.

I shook my head.

He smiled and put a hand out for me to shake. “Well, last time we met was when you were only 5, so it’s understandable.”

He seemed so sweet. Maybe he could help convince mama to let us stay here, which wasn’t likely since grandpa needed us to take his house.

“Gloria, I have bad news,” Gilbert instantly said after I started to lose interest in him.

“Oh, no! It’s papa!” Mama covered her mouth, fear across her face.

“Sort of. Shirley took the house. She convinced him.”

I felt the world just drop. We left everything for nothing. I just lost my brothers love and his family’s love for nothing. And Jake, I broke his heart, for nothing. My eyes started to water in anger, and I could tell mama was the same, just more tense.

“SO, since she is older, she got it, huh? She’s the oldest. She gets everything.” Mama’s fists were clenched tighter than I have ever seen.

Gilbert started to rub her back. “I know how you feel. I yelled at her and papa. But I got her to spend all that glorious money. She has a light blue and white mansion for... dun dun dun... You guys!”

Gilbert smiled brightly, but it was obvious he was still mad.

I smiled, “Really.” I wanted to lighten the moment a little bit.

Gilbert smiled, “Yep, just get in the red Mini Cooper, madam, and we will be off.”

He opened the door for us. He grabbed our suitcases, so we

DECEMBER ROSE SLAUGHTER

know it's fine. I looked out the window and smiled, "Everything will be fine."

Mama looked at me and nodded her head with a grin.

Yeah, I have a chance for something better, something new.

I'm ready for a new life.

The End

UKRAINE HOTEL

Evelyn Prilutsky

MY DAD IS FROM Ukraine, and last summer I went to see a city in Ukraine called Kiev, to see family and how life there is in general. When I got there in the morning, it was windy but sunny, and the weather was perfect. As I walked around, I saw a lot of rude people, just how they talk and stare at you, but my dad told me right away to get used to it because they just aren't happy with their lives. Some reasons are because for them food is expensive, and it's hard to get jobs.

When we arrived at our family hotel that my uncle owns, we entered and the floor was all cracked. As I was walking, loud cracking noises were made. We got to the front desk and the lady signed us all in and gave us our room keys. My brother and I walked up the big tall stairs, and my parents were behind us with the luggage. We entered the room, and it was magical. It had a soda bar and a bar with candy and so much more. The best thing was it was all free, and my uncle said eat and drink how much you want. You should have seen my face. I was probably the happiest child on earth.

Then my dad found a newspaper, and I guess it was very old because it was dusty and crumbly, and it said *zdes umirila devachka vete comnati*, which in Russian means, in this hotel room a lady died. She was the victim of sexual assault and had been held hostage in the room for five months. My mom looked at my dad, and my dad looked at my mom. I looked at my brother, and my brother looked at me. We were shocked that this crime happened, and that my uncle didn't tell us anything about it.

The same day, at night around 9:00 p.m., my brother and I were getting ready for bed while my parents wanted to ask my uncle about what we saw in the newspaper, but I told them not to because I didn't want my uncle to feel bad, nor did I want him to remember the past.

Boom, oh my God, I woke up with a blink of an eye. I saw red blood pouring down the windows and the walls. I was thinking to myself, this can't be real, that it's all because of thinking, and it's just a dream, until I saw that same lady from the newspaper standing in front of me. I yelled really loud, but my parents didn't wake up. I felt nervous and scared. She kept trying to show me something, but whenever she would get a chance there was something bothering her. Afterwards, some guy appeared and killed her. The lady was dead. That was it. I didn't see her for the rest of the night.

Morning came, and I decided not to tell my parents what I saw, to keep it to myself because I thought it was just a way for showing me what happened to the lady, and it was special because no one else saw. I felt it was a way of the lady telling me to be careful in life, so it was a good life lesson for me.

THE ESCAPE TO PARADISE

Kelsey Perez

I OPENED MY EYES and felt freshened up by the cool air from the A.C. compared to the humid and heated air of Cancun!

“Unbelievable! We are on a beautiful island called Isla Mujeres, in Cancun!” I told myself while I stretched and reached my toes.

I looked towards my brother’s bed, and he was still asleep. I then saw my mom standing in front of the mirror straightening her hair. Next, I noticed that my dad wasn’t in the hotel room...

“Good morning, baby. Are you excited to explore this tiny cute island?” Mom smiled as she straightened the last strands of her hair.

“I really am so excited! Around what time will we leave?”

“Well, it’s 7:48 right now, and dad went for a walk looking for a restaurant where we can eat breakfast.”

Mom put the straightener down and went over to wake up my brother. All I heard was my brother’s groan, I shook my head and smiled, “Come on, Isaac, we’re on an island! Get up...”

“Mm... Just a few more minutes.” As he turned to the opposite side of the bed.

At that time, I was ready to head out and explore with my family. About fifteen minutes passed by, and my brother was putting his shoes on. My mom was adding the final touches of her makeup. I was sitting on my bed looking out the small window, getting a slight view of the buildings, thinking about how blessed I was to go on these family trips that will forever be in my heart.

A few moments later, my dad came in and had a nice smile on his face and said, “Wow, it’s hot outside, but I found this nice restaurant! Come on, let’s go!”

We all headed out in excitement, and I closed the door behind us.

TRAVELING

Jenny Lee

THERE IS A GIRL. Her name is Joy. She is 20 years old, and when she was a kid, she had a dream to travel around the world by herself, and that dream is going to happen right now. Joy lives in Los Angeles, and she has only lived in Los Angeles. Her parents agreed on her decision of traveling alone because that is her dream, and now she is of legal age to travel alone. Her first destination is going to be London. When Joy was a kid, she wanted to go to London because London is a beautiful city. Joy is going to leave tomorrow, so she is packing her bag.

It is already the next day, and Joy and her parents are driving to the airport. She and her parents are really nervous because this is the first time she is traveling alone. When they arrive at the airport, they are saying goodbye to each other.

“Bye,” says Joy.

“Bye, and call us when you arrive,” say her parents.

Joy finally arrives in London. When she arrives, there are many people in the airport. Joy is now going to a hotel she reserved earlier. Joy is going to stay in London for about two weeks.

The first week, she goes to many famous places, and she takes a lot of pictures of the places she goes to. The same thing happens the second week.

It is now the day Joy has to go back. She is kind of sad that she has to go back, but she is also happy that she gets to see her parents again. As Joy is riding the plane, she thinks she should travel more often, but next time with her parents.

GUATEMALA AND LOS ANGELES

Katherine Ramirez

RACHEL, HER LIFE was divided by two places. Those two places were Guatemala and Los Angeles. Los Angeles was where she lived her everyday life since she has been a child. So basically, her entire life is in LA. While in Guatemala she only went for vacations and special events. For her, Guatemala was the best place. It was where she left everything and everyone behind including her problems. She would forget about them for a certain time. She would do anything to get out of Los Angeles. She wanted to meet new people and see different places. She was so bored of everything and everyone.

She did everything that was in her hands to get out of Los Angeles. Rachel got the highest grades and GPA possible. She didn't go to college though. After graduating high school, she decided to pursue a nursing career, which was very short. After, she noticed she already had a job that paid her enough money to have a perfect economic living. She worked three years straight for Kaiser Permanente, known a lot in LA because of its great service. After those three years, she realized she had raised enough money to finally move out of Los Angeles. "Oh my God, yes. I can finally leave," she thought.

She always kept a notebook with the states that she wanted to move to, but first she had to go visit them to see how great they were and see if there were any jobs available for her. Rachel went to a plane ticket agency.

"Yes, how may I help you?" said Marvin the agency worker.

"I would like to purchase a plane ticket to Miami with Delta airlines," she smiled.

"The cheapest is \$670 which is a round trip for a whole week. The seating would be middle class. Will that be okay, ma'am?"

"Oh yes, that would be perfect!" she blushed when she realized she had yelled.

So, she paid the ticket and started packing to leave the next day, Tuesday, April 24th, 2024. That same night she went quickly to Forever 21 and Sephora for a last minute shopping. When she got home she started looking at tripadvisor.com for a hotel room for the best fit for her. “Ooohh,” she murmured to herself after she had found the perfect hotel.

She was so nervous. It was already Tuesday the 24th. She was double checking her bag to check if she had everything with her. Her flight was at exactly at 1:00 a.m., so she left home at 7:00 p.m.. She got to LAX at approximately 8:17. Everything was going perfect. They helped her out with her luggage. She went to turn it in and just kept her personal bag with her. Before she realized it when she was drinking her Starbucks coffee she heard, “Passengers with destination to Miami enter through door number seven.” So she went ready with her flight ticket and passport ready on hand.

“Oh my god, finally I’m getting out of this place,” she said with a huge smile on her face. When she was stepping inside the airplane already the girl receiving the tickets stopped her.

“Ma’am, ummm I’m afraid to tell you your plane ticket is not valid.”

When Rachel heard that she got emotional.

“Whaa..at?”she said with her eyes already watery.

“Whoever sold you this plane ticket committed a fraud, sorry you are going to have to get out this plane. Next!”

Mad and frustrated the next day Rachel went to look for the agency and for her amusement she saw a sign that read “Sold for Lease.” Her heart dropped. Rachel had no words. She left disappointed.

“Till the next three years,” she murmured while she started crying.

THE BEACH

Zacchaeus Edwards

MY SETTING IS the beach. It smells like faint fish and salt water. I hear water crashing together. The water feels good.

The beach here is dirty as hell.

The water in Jamaica is not dirty.

Living as a Jamaican is cool. You learn Jamaican patois. There's yummy food and the music is lively. Jamaicans most favorite food is jerk chicken, curry goat, and saltfish, although I don't like saltfish

DEAR TOILET

Cheezy-weezy!?!

DEAR TOILET,

What will it take to make people aware that when they take pills and vitamins that they are mostly unassimilated and unabsorbed by their bodies, so literally get flushed down the drain?

I've even now discovered that so many are on psycho-meds and anti-depressants that here in Los Angeles, California people get traces of them in their water supply, minus a doctor's prescription. These are also swept into the ocean.

Dear Ocean,

What have the human beings done to you?

Whatever on earth gave them the idea to dump their recyclables into you, let alone their toxins, oils, poisons, and even medicines?

Birds swoop down while they're airborne, thinking they're prey, then ingest them and die from dehydration.

Fish eat them separately and when eating other creatures and vegetation that have already been contaminated.

CHEEZY-WEEZY!?!

We now have congregations of these dumps that clump together,
cutely called “garbage
reefs.” Please tell us how these horrendous occurrences came to be?

Thanx,
Always & All Ways,

Concerned Cheezy-weezy!?!

FAITH

Jocelyn V. Montes

Argentina is located in South America and is the largest country in South America. A lot of tourists come to Buenos Aires because of its diversity and natural beauty. Jadon, an American tourist, was walking in the street, *baja un cambio* (relaxing) after a heavy rain at night in Buenos Aires. He noticed that he was not alone because around him there were a lot of Argentinos doing different activities. Some teenagers were wearing the national team jersey and playing soccer on the sidewalk.

On the other side of the street, he could perceive some music coming up, and he realized that there were some musicians playing a kind of music that was hard to describe because it was really unique. This music sounded romantic and elegant at the same time. A couple started dancing from the music coming up from the musicians. Jadon asked a lady next to him what type of music this was, and she told him it was the tango.

Jadon kept watching the couple, and he realized that they were dressed really elegantly as well. The woman was wearing a very sexy black dress along with gold high heels, while the guy was very formal, wearing a black suit along with a red rose in his teeth. At this time, Jadon was very impressed by all of this beauty.

He kept walking down the street, and he was ready to go back to his hotel, but he smelled something that he could not describe at that time, but he kept following the smell. Finally, he reached the end of this smell, and he ended up at this restaurant where they were selling empanadas and other Argentine plates. He realized that it was pretty late now, and that he had to go back because he was going back to California the next morning.

Jadon was married and his wife was a professor at UCLA, but she was doing some research in Columbia. By this time, they had

been together for a long time, and she was pregnant. So, she called him early during the morning, saying that she did not feel that well. Jadon felt worried, and he flew right away to Columbia. While he was flying to Columbia, something unexpected happened.

It was raining and a strong thunder pulled down the plane. The first thing that came up to his mind was his wife. Basically, he did not care about what was going on in that moment. The only thing that gave him power to stay alive was the fact that we would become a father and that finally his dreams would come true.

After passing out for 15 minutes because he got hit really bad, Jadon woke up and when he opened his eyes, the only thing that he could see was trees and grass. He realized that he was somewhere in the Amazon. He was pretty scared and freaked out, looking around for more survivors. There were no more people alive, besides him. The sounds made by the animals scared him as well, and he felt weak because he was a guy from a city, so he did not have any experience with survival. Jadon put his hands behind his neck, and he thought, “OH GOD! Why me... Why me... What did I do wrong?”

He got tired of crying, and he finally sat down next to a big tree. While he was sitting down, Jadon was making up a plan for surviving. Back in Columbia, his wife was at her apartment waiting for his call saying he was already in Bogota, but he was taking too long. She decided to turn on the TV in order to stop thinking about him. She was watching TV. By then breaking news appeared saying that a plane flying from Argentina to Columbia was pulled down by a thunder. They were saying that there were not any survivors at all. She cried really bad, and during that day, she gave birth.

After a year, an Indian tribe found Jadon and helped him. It was already too late. He was by now out of his mind. Jadon’s wife decided to give their baby away, and she moved on. She left to Italy, while Jadon kept murmuring, “baby, baby, love.” Nobody could understand him. He kept living under his tiny world, and every day, he was losing more and more touch with reality.

BEYOND

BLEU

December Rose Slaughter

MY HAIR IS BLEU

& so is the sky
the world is bleu from up up high
I can be bleu
when alone in my room

My abuelita's eyes are green
& that's alright with me
because when I wash my hair
it will slowly turn
green

THE EXTRA SPECIAL GIFT

Cheezy-weezy!?!

Hark! My eyes are gazing upon the most exquisite flowering rose...
As I bend over, it smells ever soooo fragrant and delicious to my
eager and greedy nose.

The velvety flower's petals feel smooth and quite delicate on my
exploring fingertips.

They are even as soft as fresh-churned butter when I slide them
across my pouting lips.

I must grasp its thorn-bearing life-supporting stem very gently, as I
twirl it in my hand
round and round. Then I marvel at and stroke the aptly-defined
veins in its leaves as I
sneakily pluck my neighbor's precious treasure from the ground—for
you!

THE SMELL OF FLOWERS

Ivy Sienna Cruz

The smell of flowers was in the air.
All around me flowers were in bloom.
Flowers were a reminder of the person I lost.
The once colorful field was now black and white,

and it felt like time had frozen.
Everything was colorful.
The voice of the person I lost ringing in my head.
The ringing of the church bell was yelling someone had died.

The breathing of the person I lost always haunts me,
but my biggest regret is not saying good bye.



WALKERS

Bilguun Gombodorj

THE PLACE IS MONGOLIA. It's a nice sunny day. When you walk on the grass, a fresh breeze hits you; you can see the nice blue sky with white clouds. You can see the forest. The sight is amazing. You can hear the wind blowing in the trees. The snow there is amazing, it's so white and there is so much snow. It goes up to your thighs.

Orgil is 17 and loves it in Mongolia, the nature, the breeze, everything about it. One day his mom and dad are talking about something, but he doesn't really care or pay attention. Then, before he knows it, his mom leaves for America and his dad for Korea. So, he is left with his grandparents. The boy doesn't know how to express his feelings, but he knows his parents will come back.

He is still happy living with his grandparents, they are sweet, kind, fun, and loving. That night, he goes to sleep and wakes up because he keeps hearing voices inside his head. The voices aren't stopping. They keep telling him to go to the forest. So, he runs all the way to the middle of the forest. Usually he would know his way, but this is the middle of the forest, and usually he would only go a bit into the forest. Orgil is lost, and the voices inside his head are gone. He knows it is a big forest, and it is getting dark, so he starts looking for shelter.

Orgil finds a cave that looks good for a shelter, so he goes inside. He discovers that there are old writings on the wall. They are of a different language but not just any different language but an ancient one. On one side, there are these drawings of dead people like skeletons with blue eyes. He keeps walking through the cave and the ground underneath him collapses. He falls down and lands next to this sword that is in the stone. He gets up and looks at the sword.

"Should I try to pull it out?" he says to himself.

He decides to try and pull the sword out. When he does, a blue

light starts glowing underneath the sword. He has done it. He pulls the sword out, then all of a sudden, the cave starts breaking down, so he runs out as fast as he can. The cave completely breaks down.

Somehow, the sword guides Orgil's way home. After he comes home, his grandparents see him with the sword.

"Where did you get that sword?!" says Grandpa Toyo.

"There was this cave," Orgil says.

"That cave was supposed to be hidden and never to be gone in again! If you pulled out the sword, that means the walkers are coming for us!" says Grandpa Toyo.

Suddenly the windows start breaking. The doors start breaking down.

"It's the walkers," Grandpa Toyo says.

Grandpa Toyo and Orgil rush down to a secure room. There in that room he has two guns and ammunition made out of walker stone. Walkers can only be killed by walker stone, which is the same material as Orgil's sword is made of. The walkers break down the door, and Grandpa Toyo and Orgil defend themselves as long as they can, but the ammunition for the guns don't last long. So, Grandpa Toyo grabs a knife and stabs a walker, but it gets stuck and he gets bit.

Grandpa quickly turns into a walker.

Orgil turns around saying, "Grandpa?!"

Then a walker bites Orgil from behind, and he falls on the floor dripping in grief, thinking about his family. Orgil turns into a walker.

Then suddenly Orgil wakes up realizing it is only a nightmare.

Then his grandpa comes in his room, and Orgil shouts, "You have no idea what I just—"

He realizes Grandpa Toyo has blue eyes. Orgil shakes in fear, crying while he lets the walker bite him.

DEAR FLASH HENRIGUEZ

Jocelyn V. Montes

IT HAD BEEN a long time
since we talked. Let me tell you
that I really miss you: I miss those days
when I used to come home and you were there behind the door
waiting for me.

I do not really get it
why my mom gave you away.
You were basically the only person
that ever paid attention to what I was saying
I had a big attachment on you.
I think
it's going to be really hard
for me to get over this.

I still recall
our first memory
Don't you remember that day
that I took you to the beach
and I could see a big smile on your face
which gave me the vibe
that you were having fun that day
You do not know
how much I love you.
You do not know
how much I miss you
little white snowflake.

CHANGES

Jerry Solomon

AGING IS ONE of my issues.

My lady friends said that George Clooney was better looking than me.

The Olympics continue to use young people.

I can do anything a young person can do outside of S.E.X.

Sometimes it's a combination of aging and other things...

THE HOMELESS SEPTUAGENARIAN

Cheezy-weezy!?!

THE HOPES, wishes, and dreams I once had that mattered
Are now crushed, demolished, and shattered
From my hippocampus they have vanished, been cast about,
Passed around like hand-me-downs, battered and worn
From my guts—serrated, torn, and forlorn

From all the tears shed, my eyes are drenched
My body's spirit is sooooo weak, it's literally benched
My energy levels are soooo sporadic and dubious,
It's seldom quenched.

I compare myself to a female salmon
Swimming upstream to die

Some people say that here on planet Earth “all the world's a stage.”
I personally now have nothing but rage
Because I feel like a wounded, injured animal in a cage.
Since I am unable to gauge
This thing I'm experiencing and facing called old age,
For which each's book's chapter, meditation, and affirmation flips a
new page.

Whenever I hear of another fellow baby boomer either dying, having
a disease, or
requiring surgery or a hospital stay,
I absolutely hate to see my precious senior citizens' world behaving
and
Functioning and crumbling in this horrible way.

CHEEZY-WEEZY!?!

Although I'm still alive—I'm always and all ways me, myself, & I.

My heart is rapidly heating since my body's ferociously competing.
Tickets are no on sale for exclusive front-row box office seating
To view the vicious fight and exciting nasty beating

GREED

Blake Hildebrandt

A MOTHER and her five-year-old daughter lived in a rundown apartment building hoping that their lives would change for the better. For months, Lauren's mother had been working seven days a week, overtime every day, hoping that she could earn enough money to finally move out and make her daughter's life better.

For dinner, they had ready-made lasagna and sink water. Halfway through the meal a thump on the door enticed her mother to go to the door and look through the dirty peephole. Nobody was there, but there was a black suitcase with a white note on top. Lauren's mom read it.

It said, "Hello, Nicky. I know you are in a very bad financial place and are certain you want to change your life. Will you use the money for your daughter or yourself? Think about it."

She thought about the note and opened the case. Inside were 300 stacks of \$100 bills. Immediately she slammed the case shut and didn't say anything to her daughter.

That night they didn't sleep together. Lauren was forced to sleep in the kitchen, instead of with her mother on the moldy, smelly mattress in the empty abyss of a living room. Lauren loved her mother but didn't know the soul crushing truth of greed that her mother had.

For the next two days Nicky didn't come home. Twenty years went by and Lauren never heard back from her mother. But it wasn't all bad because Lauren was adopted by a wealthy family and went to medical school and became a wealthy doctor.

MARS

Valor Lopez

MARS, a barren planet. No trees, no water, no resources, just dirt and mountains for as far as the eye could see. There was no smell or taste, as humans have to wear a spacesuit to survive. All that could be heard was the wind blowing across the vast horizon. If there was no wind, the whole planet would be silent. Nothing lived on Mars except a colony of Martians that have made a home on the planet long before humans were able to travel to it. There was no evidence recorded of them because the drones that were sent to explore never came back. The Martians were extremely hostile and territorial to anything that they came in contact with.

Captain Matthew Smeager, an astronaut for NASA who has been sent to space countless times, has been sent to the planet to explore and gather data to see if Mars was habitable for humans when they run out of resources on Earth. Unknowing of the hostile Martians that colonized the planet, Captain Smeager went on a solo mission. NASA launched his ship into space, but the thrusters stopped working when his ship exited the atmosphere and he was floating. He knew he had to fix the problem if he wanted to get anywhere, including home. He sat and thought for a while. He finally thought of a solution. He attached a cord to his spacesuit from his ship and went around to the thrusters to see what the problem was. He figured out that there were a couple of bolts loose, so he tightened them and noticed there wasn't anything else wrong with them. He went back to the ship by pulling on the cord attached to the inside of the ship and turned the thrusters on. He continued his journey to Mars. Once Captain Smeager landed on the desolate planet, he saw nothing but dirt and rocky hills for miles. The Martians haven't colonized the entire planet just yet. He set up basecamp because he planned to be there for a while. That unfortunately took him the whole day to do.

He went inside to contact NASA to let them know that he landed safely. He went to sleep promising that he would go explore the next day.

When the sun rose, he went to explore. He came to the top of a mountain and saw the Martian colonization in the distance. At first, he thought that it was just more mountains, but he wasn't sure. He knew it was too far to travel in a single day, so he just let himself believe that it was just more mountains. That night he went to bed with the thought that what he saw was something other than just mountains bothering him. He told himself that he would go back and explore.

The next day, he went back to the hill where he saw the sight that confused him. It still just looked like more mountains. So, he thought that he was just seeing things. He decided to continue his journey and collect more data.

The Martians, however, saw his ship enter the planet's atmosphere and touchdown on the surface of their planet. Curious of what just landed, they sent a group to see what was there. It took multiple days for them to get there, but when they did, it was night and one of the Martians went on the roof of Smeager's basecamp. Smeager thought that the Martian walking on the roof was just the wind blowing rocks. But it got louder and closer, and he got worried. So, he put his spacesuit on and went outside to check it out. But he saw something that he couldn't believe. A group of Martians surrounding his basecamp. Scared to death, he tried to fight back, but the Martian that was on top of the basecamp jumped on him and knocked him out.

When Smeager woke up, he seemed to be in a throne room. He rubbed his eyes to make sure that he wasn't seeing things again and noticed that it was real. A Martian walked out of a door with two others and sat on the throne. They looked like frogs on two legs. The emperor was a big fat frog that could barely walk. The emperor stared at him for a while and told his guards to take him to the prison

cells. Captain Smeager tried to fight back, but he could only move a little because he was still wounded from when he got attacked. The Martians violently dragged him into one of the cells and left him there.

Three days passed, and he was supposed to be home two days ago. He knew that he wasn't going to survive, but he wouldn't die without taking them with him. He configured his breathing device into a bomb and set it off. NASA was able to see all of this through the spacesuit's camera and saw that he was no longer with them.

There is now a memorial on Earth for Captain Smeager's heroism, and Mars is now occupied by humans.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

LANAISJA BROWN is a Black, Belizean, and Indian writer who was born in Los Angeles. What she writes depends on her mood. She does drill and step. She attends Fairfax High, where she is a member of the Black Student Union.

HECTOR CERVANTES lives in Hollywood, California. He writes about anything. He goes to Fairfax High School. The things that matter to him are family and football.

JAMES COLLINS is a Los Angeles-based writer by way of Houston, TX. He is in the 9th grade at Fairfax High School. He likes making music and biting his nails.

IVY SIENNA CRUZ has always lived in Los Angeles. She loves to write suspense and horror stories, but considers herself horrible at poetry. She's a freshman at Fairfax High and enjoys anime and manga. She has two cats and one dog and likes singing, drawing, writing stories, and gaming.

ZACCHAEUS EDWARDS is a poet from LA. He's a student at Fairfax High School. He's in DJ Academy, Just Keep Livin', and the high rollers skateboard club. He loves to read, play videogames, work on cars, fix things, skateboard, and eat. He can't swim.

BILGUUN GOMBODORJ is from Mongolia. He writes short stories and goes to Fairfax High School where he is a freshman. He currently lives in Los Angeles. He practices Muay Thai, training three days a week.

DE'JON GREENE is from Inglewood, CA. He writes horror stories and comic books. He's a member of the Fairfax High School basketball team. He's really tall. He says, "God Bless America because we really need it." He's going to the NBA, year 2022.

BLAKE HILDEBRANDT is from Las Vegas. He doesn't write that much, but when he does, it is fiction stories. He's a freshman at Fairfax High, and he likes airsoft and tennis.

BARBARA HURVITZ lives in Los Angeles with her husband. She has three sons and one daughter-in-law. Since her retirement from teaching, Barbara has joined many classes and enjoys participating in them.

JENNY LEE is a 9th grader at Fairfax High School. She is from Los Angeles. She has two older siblings. She likes to eat and to sleep.

VALOR LOPEZ is a short story writer from Los Angeles, where he currently resides. He's in the 9th grade at Fairfax High School. Family is one of the most important things in his life. He also likes to play basketball.

RICHARD MENDEZ is a Mexican-American writer, born and raised in Los Angeles. His stories are about characters facing challenges. A freshman at Fairfax High, he loves basketball and plays on the froshoph team. In his free time, he likes to lay in bed and relax while watching YouTube videos.

JOCELYN MONTES was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina and currently lives in West Hollywood, CA. She writes love stories and is a senior at Fairfax High School. He first love is her dog, Flash, who is like a son to her and whom she wouldn't change for anything.

ALEXIS MOREJON is an action and suspense writer from Los Angeles, CA. He is a freshman at Fairfax High and enjoys music and swimming.

OLARAICHE "OLA" OBIEKEA is Nigerian and Australian, though she lives in Los Angeles, where she was born and raised. She writes about family and personal experiences. She is a member of Star 17 at Fairfax High. Ola lives with her two brothers, two sisters, and her cat Milo. Her little brother has special needs. He is her favorite.

KELSEY PEREZ lives in Los Angeles. She is from Mexico and Guatemala. She writes about her personal life and sometimes fictional stories. She is a 9th grader at Fairfax High where she runs on the cross country team. She is a marathoner, having ran the LA Marathon as an 8th grader with Students Run L.A. She plans to join the track team next semester. As you can tell, she loves to run!

EVELYN PRILUTSKY is a Los Angeles-based writer that writes about life. She's in the 9th grade at Fairfax High and isn't in any clubs or on any teams. She's known as a nice person with a good sense of humor.

KATHERINE RAMIREZ is a Los Angeles writer who likes to write sad stories. She's a student at Fairfax High and plays on a soccer team, though not the school team.

JANELLE RAMOS is a poet from Koreatown. She likes to write poetry that might confuse people. At school, her grades are average, sometimes above average. She's not in any clubs or on any teams, and she draws and she sleeps, two things that she dearly enjoys.

JERRY SAAVEDRA writes short stories. He's from Mexico and currently lives in Los Angeles, where he attends Fairfax High. He plays for the club team Academicos, and his favorite subject at school is bio.

LEO SALAZAR lives in and is from Los Angeles, CA. He writes about sports, journeys, and adventures. He's a ninth grader at Fairfax High and likes to play sports, videogames, and to watch NBA and MLB games.

ERIC SANTIAGO is a Mexican-American short story writer. He is a member of the Fairfax High soccer team. A fan of sports in general, Eric's favorite team is F.C. Barcelona.

DECEMBER ROSE SLAUGHTER is from Hollywood, CA and now lives in Mid-City LA. She started writing in the third grade, and continues to write every day. Horror and romance are her favorite genres. She attends Fairfax High where she is involved in dance, drama, and film. December lives with her grandparents, her cat, and her rabbit.

JERRY SOLOMON is a writer, singer, dancer, comic, consumer activist, and honorary sexologist.

HOLLAND TAYLOR is from Los Angeles and writes short stories. She goes to Fairfax High School, where she is member of the track team. Holland loves pets, hanging with friends, and being with family.

ERIK VALENZUELA is from Los Angeles. He is in the 9th grade at Fairfax High School, where he plays for the baseball team. He writes short stories that relate to sports.

JACKELINE CAROLINA VEGA lives in Los Angeles. She writes love stories, anything love related, and poetry. She goes to Fairfax High School, where she is a freshman. Her family consists of her mom, dad, sisters, and her nephew. She's a very funny person, very goofy, and she's a fan of anime.

CHEEZY-WEEZY!?! is a native Californian and has lived in Los Angeles for over 50 years. She is computer illiterate and has been living a homeless existence since 2015: She is now 70 years old. Her name has been registered for affordable senior housing for eight years. At eligibility interviews, she has eagerly and readily proven that she can guarantee the rent, has reliable co-signers, and has exhibited more than 20 impressive letters of recommendation from highly respected professionals, celebrities, friends, and charity organization members. Unfortunately, her low credit rating is the only reason why she gets refused. She would like to thank Arnie and Linda Mednick for the sanity, her family for the love, Freda Mohr and Jewish Family Services for the support, PEN Center USA for the protection, and Shawna Kenney.

DERRICK WILLIAMS is from and currently lives in Los Angeles. Derrick enjoys writing love stories, poems, and tales of horror. He is a freshman at Fairfax High School where he hopes to make the football team next year. He loves going out with his friends and constantly tries to be a great leader for them.

Since 1995, PEN In The Community (PITC) has proudly published the written work of thousands of talented youth. PITC sends professional writers into classrooms to teach creative writing residencies, in which students learn about contemporary authors and different literary genres and develop a body of creative writing work. The resulting PITC anthologies are windows into students' lives—their struggles, hopes, and the collective experiences of their generation. PITC is part of PEN Center USA's mission to stimulate and maintain interest in the written word, to foster a vital literary culture, and to defend freedom of expression.

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