

CYWR

CHICAGO YOUNG WRITERS REVIEW

BACK TO
SCHOOL 2022



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Back to School 2022

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Stargazing

By Leena Hwang
3rd Grade

At my friend's house, I joyfully built a small cushion with my friend to jump on from the top of the stairs. The more I jump, the more courage I get to go one more stair up, until I reach the top stair. I hesitate before I jump, but as I do, I feel like I am flying for a few seconds which felt great, before I land softly on the cushions. But as I climb up to tell my friend that it's okay, he says a wonderful idea. STARGAZING! I quickly go to the big trampoline and start jumping before my friends come to bring the pillows, blankets, telescopes, and binoculars. It feels as if it takes them an hour to bring them, but when they do, they bring a ton of good stuff. Then suddenly, the dog jumps on the trampoline. I feel scared when he comes to me, because he sometimes jumps on me, and he's as tall as me when he stands on his hind legs. But then, he gets out. I let out a sigh of relief. Then, we start setting up our stargazing spot. When we're done, we start stargazing.

“This was when the fun actually started.”

My friend's brother teaches us how to find the Big Dipper, and Corona Borealis. We see a few stars at the beginning, like the North Star, but as it gets darker, I see more stars. This was when the fun actually started. There were so many stars, I couldn't even find the Big Dipper, which was super easy to find. But when I used the binoculars, the stars seemed so shiny, and I said in amazement, “Wow. The binoculars make the stars so shiny!” With the binoculars, I could see the Big Dipper much more easily. It was like a secret weapon for stargazing. But that's when I see Corona Borealis. I jump up, and say sarcastically, “Ahh! Corona!” Then, I run around the trampoline, making everyone jump a little. Then I spot the lamps, which turn on and off when you open and close them. It

was so fascinating! It felt like we were actually camping out, which I really want/like to do. Then, I sit back down and decide to play telephone. One time, My friend switched it up a lot, so it didn't make sense. It was like, " Unicorns and cats jumping on clouds", but the switched version was, "Cats are good" or something. We all laughed a lot. It was so fun! But then, we had to go back home, because before, we played in the water. Which was so sad. I wanted to have, like, a sudden sleepover, but I couldn't. But I counted that as the funnest day of my life!

English Ivy

By Mena Shaw
4th Grade

Those climbing tendrils and dark green leaves
A shape I've come to recognize
Throughout our cities, streets, and hills...

I've noticed also,
What it does...
It climbs on walls and hides the ugly gray from views.
But the other thing is,
It's strangling, and it's deadly,
For trees.
The tall, proud, poor tree that standing there,
As ivy comes creeping along,
Growing swooping tendrils
Around their trunks.
It grows higher and higher,
Soon, it obscures the whole tree from sight.
And all that's left,
Is the lattice of ivy.

Those little ivy leaves,
They cover the tree and the tree's green leaves
Till the tree slowly starves to death,
In the embrace
Of the killer.

She and I

By Mena Shaw
4th Grade

I once had a dream,
Of piles and piles of fluffy whipped cream,
And another girl,
Dancing in a whirl.

I once had a thought,
About her.
It turned into a blue sky,
With pure white pegasi!
They had dove-like wings,
The best of all things.
And she was there,
Riding them in the fresh air.

“She held her hand out to me, and we went to a
world of wonders.”

I once had a wish that she existed in Art class.
The desks grew into magnificent oak trees,
And flowers grew in twos and threes.
And she was dancing in the shadowy light.
Her being the brightest light.

She held her hand out to me, and we went to a world of wonders.
She led me under,
And over things.
She showed me fresh, sweet smells,
The most gentle and ongoing breezes cannot bring.
Rainbows that have the most indescribably vibrant colors,
And places where it's always Summer.

With a cool breeze,
And me,
They were her secret places.
Her basins of never-ending sweet lemonade,
served by lovely, familiar faces.

We went to an island,
And the trees were draped with garlands.
The sands were whiter than the whitest freshest snow.
And the trees grew turquoise bows.

I did her hair,
And she did mine with a flair.
We looked quite silly,
Dancing around willy-nilly.

We went to the Garden of Giant Flowers,
With towering flowers.
We climbed the stems, and shot down the nectar tubes,
Took some nectar and heard some musicians,
Playing Jazz Blue.

“We went away.

What we did next made my day!”

She led me to a garden of Jasmine Flowers.

We harvested buckets of perfume and took showers,

In the perfume.

I found a house with two rooms.

Every little sound I made, made a BOOM!

We went away.

What we did next made my day!

We went to a palace,

Where everything was perfectly placed.

Blue gems, silver, and gold were in our room,

And if I thought hard,

My favorite music played with a Boom!

BABOOM!

We slept,

But when I woke up, I was in my house.

I couldn't accept...

But by my bed was a note,

Saying, “See you tomorrow night, love from Selene.”

See you, Selene!

Mess Up and Make Up

By Lindsay Gale
5th Grade

“Mom, do I have to look presentable?” I asked. My mother ruffled my hair, which successfully messed it up. “You know the answer, Lindsay.” she replied, a gentle smile creasing her face and crinkling the corners of her eyes. I tugged at the hem of my red, gold, and white dress. The shiny embroidery felt scratchy under my hands. As we boarded the bus that would take us to my grandma’s house, I felt nervousness and giddiness battling inside of me. All my cousins, second cousins, great aunts and uncles, aunts and uncles, and even distant relatives that I had never seen or heard of before were attending the gathering. What was the worst that could happen?

I sat at the table stiffly, trying not to slump or smile. I felt like I was suffocating. All my relatives looked so different, skin as white as a sheet, hair of a pure black, cut close to their head, or to the edge of their shoulders, glasses perched on the tips of their noses. Me, with my long, crazy brown hair and non-glasses and my awkward and clumsy nature was so, so, so different from them. It was hard to believe that we were even related. An uncomfortable smile wormed its way onto my face, and I tried to frown it off. However, as most people know, when you attempt to frown through a smile, your face contorts into a strange malfunction of the human race. It is not pretty. I sat there with the strange malfunction of the human race upon me and pushed through acquaintances, which went as smoothly as a cat and water. Most of it consisted of nervous chatter like “Oh Nianhua, your daughter looks so much like you!” or “I heard you started college, Tián Tián!” and “Thank you, Uncle!” I stayed quiet, trying to melt into the Chinese calligraphy wall art behind me. I doubt it worked, until the food came up and everyone turned their attention to it. I picked up a steaming fried dumpling, dripping with sauce, and shoved it into my mouth. Yum! A burst of flavors exploded on my tongue; the salty, sour sauce that puckered your lips, the warm, breadly taste of the dough, the crunch of the burnt areas

and the smoky taste of them, and the meaty, salty taste of the filling, bits of seasoning giving a pop here and there. Yum!

“Sometimes, you hate existing.”

I smiled, a genuine smile, then one of my uncles spoke to me. “So, Lindsay,” I had my mouth full, and I froze mid bite. Everyone turned to look at me. I felt a hot blush creep onto my cheeks, and I knew I was bright red. I didn’t know any of these people. It felt like talking to a horde of strangers. Expectant strangers, no less. Their eyes bore into me. I felt this tug to back away, a tug to turn away, a tug to run away. I couldn’t run away, though. I had to stay and wait it out. But I wanted so badly to hide. What was wrong with me? “So, Lindsay,” my uncle said again, “I haven’t seen you in a very long time. How have you been? I hear you’re doing swimming now.” I squeaked out an answer “Yep!” My voice, even to myself, sounded strained and jittery. My persistent uncle continued “So, what do you do in your spare time, Lindsay?” I wish he’d just talk to someone else. Couldn’t he see I was not very happy right now? But I had to answer. “I like eating.” I stammered. A wave of laughter rippled through the room. The heat in my cheeks was definitely present. I knew I probably looked like a sunburned lobster. “I-I mean that I eat.” I spluttered.

Sometimes, you hate existing.

Another wave of laughter rose from my relatives. My uncle chuckled. I started to sweat. His next words surprised me so much that even the beads of sweat on my forehead stopped moving. “You’re funny, Lindsay.” Me? Funny? If he had said an idiot, sure, but funny? My family nodded in agreement. I suddenly understood. I had been so worried that they were making fun of me, but they weren’t! Relief made me slump deep into my chair. I let out a long breath. A very long breath. I was an idiot, maybe, for thinking that they were laughing at me, but they had actually been laughing at me. Gosh, that was confusing.

We lapsed into a comfortable silence, and a relaxed feeling entered my body. Don’t get me wrong, everyone was still who they’d been several seconds ago, but a bond seemed to connect us. Possibly, the comfortable feeling was also pretty much due to the

fact that pleasantries were over. The very awkward pleasantries. That went as smoothly as a left-out turkey and an adventurous dog. As most of us know, the feeling of being able to hear one thing but not another is a quality that most people possess. I heard the sound of my cousins whispering about Harry Potter, but not the sound of my mom telling me to stay polite. That is why no one should blame me for bursting into speech. “I love Harry Potter too!” My cousins stared at me. In fact, everyone stared at me. Whoops. Then their faces broke into wide smiles, and they started chattering excitedly. I did too. We chattered and chattered and chattered and the adults talked, and I felt as home as I did with my own friends. I felt great. We played a board game that my cousin had brought, and OF COURSE I won! Actually, not really. But still.

Somehow, I was much more relaxed with my relatives than before. I had majorly messed up, and my kin had brushed it off. I slid my game piece forward, everybody gasping ohhhhhh! and grinned. My family chattered around me. Maybe we were related after all.

WNBA

By Stella Rydland
5th Grade

Lay-ups, 3-pointers, half-court shots, and dunking as the crowd goes wild. Twelve teams. Twelve head coaches. Each team at the most having twelve players, but all the players are women! When you first hear about the WNBA you want to learn it all, but there are some basics such as exciting history, famous players, and marvelous games.

“You get the feeling you can do anything.”

It all began on a warm spring day in the United States, by the NBA association that made dreams come true. In time, on April 24, 1996 the NBA founded the Women's National Basketball Association, more commonly known as the WNBA. After the founding of the WNBA, they kicked the season off with the 1996 WNBA draft. The first player signed was Sheryl Swoopes, who played for the Houston Comets. The Houston Comets also amazingly won the first WNBA playoffs. Every time you make a basket, the crowd goes wild with emotions. You get the feeling you can do anything. Well think about someone who gets that feeling 1000s of times a year. In time that person was the one the only Diana Taurasi, she is the leader in scoring throughout WNBA history. She plays for the Phoenix Mercury and has for the last 17 years!

Throughout WNBA history some players are so famous they're remembered for years, the top of all time Players! Most importantly, WNBA players have risen the reputation of the WNBA to what they are today. Got fans exited and jaw dropped to see them play, but the world has some favorite players and some famous ones. Many people throughout WNBA history have used me to get to where they are or were throughout history. Such as number one player Diana Taurasi, who plays for the Phoenix Mercury. She went to the Olympics of course and brought me with. The second but not as imported Tamika

Catchings, who played for the Indian Fever she won games with me. Number three Cynthia Cooper, played for the Houston Comets like 21 years ago! She now coaches for the Texas Southern Lady Tigers basketball team. Number four Maya Moore, who played for the Lynx's she went to the college of UConn. She started playing basketball when she was three years old! Number five Lisa Leslie, who played for the Los Angeles sparks. She was drafted in 1997.

“The exciting history, famous players, and amazing games...”

A few games are just so good, that you can't miss the match up. First of all the Seattle Storm, a off standing basketball team says there playoff record. The Seattle Storm won the playoffs twice in the last 5 years in 2018 and 2019. Their head coach Noelle Quinn, played for the Seattle Storm from 2007-2018. The Assistant coach Pokey Chatman, has coached basketball since 1992! During the last five years the Seattle Storm has only won the playoffs twice, but some other fantastic teams have won the other three times. In 2016, the Sparks won the WNBA all star, 8,719 people attended the game. In 2017, the lynx won the WNBA playoffs. In 2019, the Mystics won the playoffs.

Overall, these twelve teams, twelve head coaches, and twelve FEMALE players a team have made basketball complete with the WNBA. The exciting history, famous players, and amazing games are just part of what makes the WNBA great. Now when you go to a WNBA game, you know a more behind the exciting history.

Fairytale

By Nova Macknik-Conde
5th Grade

It's my life, it's a fresh new page
Just waiting to be written,
Don't need the Fairy Godmother
The knight in shining armor,
The king and queen,
A scaly dragon

Nor a magic wand
It's my story
It's my pen and paper
No preordained fate to lord over me
It's my turn to show the world
That my life is mine, goes by my word

"I will not wait around/For my happily ever after"

Can't you see, the only thing waiting for me
Is me
I've been sleeping for a hundred years
Just to know
What it's like to be alive
What it's like to be me
I will not wait around
For my happily ever after
The past is unchangeable, unbreakable
The future's not yet found
I will choose to live in now

Sammy the Zebra

By Isa Hasan
6th Grade

Once upon a time, there lived a boy named Christopher. He had flowing purple hair and always wore a sparkling pink shirt. He was born with purple hair. Everyone in his family had purple hair. He was also as short as a mouse. He was 12 years old and in sixth grade. Christopher was a quiet boy. He spoke so quietly that nobody could ever hear him.

Christopher lived in New York with his parents. His mom's name was Jenny and his dad was Charlie. He had a sister named Luna. Luna was 8 years old. They lived on Argument Street in a giant, brick house.

Christopher had a pet zebra named Sammy. Sammy had stripes, but his stripes were different than other zebras' stripes. His stripes were black and red. The black was a spooky closet at night. The red was as deep as blood.

“They wanted to take him home.”

Sammy was from a zoo in Capetown, South Africa. Once, when Christopher was ten years old, he and his family visited Africa on vacation. While they were there, they went to a zoo on Chooey Island. Suddenly, they saw Sammy. They wanted to take him home. He was so small and he was all alone without a family. His mother and father had been shot by hunters. They asked permission from the zoo to take Sammy back home. The zoo agreed.

Christopher liked to do fun things. One of his fun things was to play games. Mostly with Sammy. Christopher enjoyed playing hide and seek. He especially loved to play with remote control cars. Sammy enjoyed playing chase with Christopher. Sammy would say, “Can we play behind the trees?” Christopher would reply, “Sure!” Sammy

loved playing behind the trees in the backyard because he loved trees. They reminded him of his home in South Africa. He used to live in the plains with his parents before they were killed.

One time, Sammy and Christopher were playing tag when Christopher hit Sammy. Sammy got very mad at him. Then he started to turn the same shade of green as the grass. He started to look like The Hulk. Sammy hit a black and white soccer ball, and suddenly, he turned black and white again. Christopher had never seen Sammy turn green before. He felt confused.

One day, Christopher and Sammy were playing with a remote control car in the backyard. Christopher was steering his car while Sammy was standing in front of him. Suddenly, Christopher pressed hard on the remote control. The car then zoomed fast. Next, he drove the car towards Sammy.

But then suddenly, the car hit Sammy. “Pachoom!”

Sammy fell into the mud with a “splash!” Recently, it had rained and it had made a muddle puddle. Sammy became irate. That made him turn into an evil monster.

All of a sudden, he had monster power. He had the same as energy as The Hulk. Sammy the Monster had eyes that were as huge as the sun and a nose that was as shiny as a star. His mouth was blood red and filled with sharp teeth that could bite a person’s fingers off. He had a mischievous face that could scare any human being. He looked similar to a dinosaur, except that he was a zebra.

Christopher found a yawning broom in the pantry. It was a magical broom that could talk and yawn when it was sleepy. Christopher decided to use the broom to fight the sinister monster. He ran back into the backyard and stabbed Sammy with the broom as hard as he could. Sammy roared loudly because he had been injured. He had broken his butt. Christopher again stabbed him, this time as hard as a punch. Sammy collapsed on the floor and he was breathing deeply. He closed his eyes and died.

Then, Christopher walked slowly back into the house. Tears dropped down from his eyes. He cried for hours because his best friend is gone. Sammy was the greatest zebra

that had ever lived. He would play with Christopher for hours. He was so special. But now, he was gone.

Changes

By Audrey Martin
6th Grade

I stepped onto the front porch, and I saw the inside of the new door. Through the glass, there were boxes as well as a new living room, bedroom, and kitchen. I despised it all. I was not going to leave the house I had lived in my entire life! I touched the door handle and it felt so...new. I remembered coming home everyday from school and unlocking the same door handle over, and over. That one did not feel new, but this one did.

“Well? Are you going to open it or sit there like a zombie? What are you doing anyways? You are just staring at the door like you’ve seen a ghost or something,” my sister said annoyingly in her high-pitched voice.

I rolled my eyes and opened the door, and my sister ran around the room with a huge smile and wide eyes. It was clear she loved this new house.

“Isn’t this house so cool? I am so glad we moved,” my sister said as she tugged on my sweater.

*“Why would anyone want to leave the house we had lived in
for so long?”*

“Well, I’m not glad we moved,” I replied in a cold voice.

It was almost as if she had been given one million dollars, that was how excited she looked. I didn’t get it. *Why would anyone want to leave the house we had lived in for so long?* I asked myself.

I felt a tap on my shoulder, and my dad asked how I thought of the house, but I didn’t respond and crossed my arms. I just wanted to make sure that my parents knew

that I wanted to move back to our actual home. This house may have been pretty and spacious, but that did not mean I would enjoy it here more, like my parents had said I would.

I walked slowly to the kitchen as the floorboards under me screamed as if they knew I wouldn't like it here, and I knew this was correct.

My parents caught up to me in the kitchen, and so did my sister.

"Wow, now isn't this just marvelous?" my mom asked in awe as she slid her hands across the counter.

I really didn't understand what was so good about this home and what made them like it so much. I tapped my foot on the floor and played with my hair, wanting to get this tour over with.

My sister ran around the kitchen island in the middle. It was made of crystal white marble, and the lights above us were a warm brown color. I did not want to admit it, but this kitchen was probably the prettiest one I had ever seen.

"This kitchen is so cool!" my sister exclaimed as she ran past me.

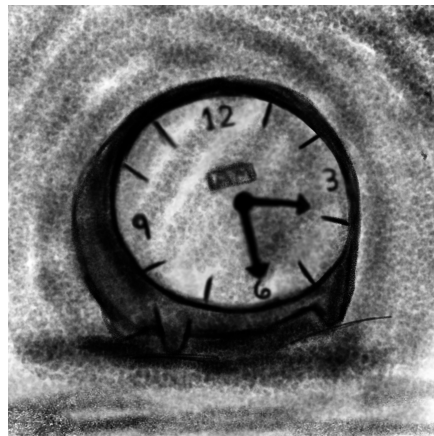
I agreed with her, but I didn't say anything. I mean, even though this kitchen was pretty cool, I still remained a little convinced that it still wasn't our actual home. I glanced to look at what my parents were doing and they were admiring the home. They were opening the cabinets and laughing and their smiles stretched from ear to ear.

My dad then asked if we would like to check out the backyard, and we agreed. When we got outside, I felt the cool breeze of wind hit my face. It was invigorating.

I took a look at the backyard and I could not believe what I was seeing. Even though it was very different from our old backyard, it looked so magical! A tall tree with yellow blossoms waved back and forth and the grass was such a bright green. My sister then ran past me and screamed with joy, and so I caught up with her too. Though I did not realize it, I was smiling.

The Widow in the Woods

By Kaleb Mooney
6th Grade



Chapter 1. The Entity

“What time is it?” I thought to myself, drenched in sweat. I looked at the clock, which read “3:30 A.M.” I suddenly froze. I sat there, motionless. It felt as if something was sitting behind me, staring into my soul. I felt the dip on my mattress, where I believed the person was. There was creaking, from my semi-old mattress.

When I gathered enough courage, I slowly turned around. My heart began beating faster and faster until I had made a full 180° turn. I let out the most genuine sigh of relief when I realized there was nothing behind me. The feeling of pure dread faded. This was my average night, ever since my encounter with the entity in the woods.

“Huh, ‘The Widow in the Woods,’ kind of has a
ring to it.”

The feeling had never left. I typically had nightmares of the ‘widow in the woods,’ as I had named it by its appearance. “Huh, ‘The Widow in the Woods,’ kind of has a ring to it,” I thought to myself. I looked back at the clock, which read “4:04 A.M.”

“Hurry up,” I said, tapping my foot. My mom was supposed to get off work at 4:00. She had been taking night shifts, ever since rent had been getting out of hand. My mom has been providing money ever since our dad ‘left.’ At least, that’s what mom said. They had divorced, and my mom won custody, which didn’t make much sense, my guess is that it’s just because of the custody system which tends to favor women.

She didn’t want to take care of me, not because she was a bad mom, but because she knew she couldn’t provide much. She only wanted custody so my dad couldn’t. She truly despises him. I visited my dad during breaks in school. My mom is a cashier at the gas station, and my dad is a brain surgeon. Lately, she had been talking more and more about giving custody over to my dad.

I don’t bring it up to him, because I don’t want him to get his hopes up, just to be let down. Then, I heard the door handle jiggle. “Finally,” I thought to myself. I heard the door opening, followed by footsteps. I hadn’t told anyone about my encounters with the ‘thing.’ It’s not like anyone would believe me. I constantly asked myself if I was going crazy, but I always shut it down, because how would I wake up with bruises? Why would I feel pressure on my chest at night? I layed down, pulled my blanket up, and went back to sleep.

Knock, knock, knock! “Hailee!” my mom yelled. I lifted my head from my pillow, feeling my dry mouth with my tongue. I wiped my eyes and threw my blanket behind me. I stood up, feeling the bare, cold wooden ground with my feet. My joints were stiff, making it incredibly uncomfortable to walk.

“I wanted to fit in.”

When I reached the doorway, I had to lean against the door frame for support. While I was leaning, I took the chance to lean over and pull the end of my pajama pants out from under my left foot. I paused for a moment, thinking to myself, “What am I doing here, again?” Ever since the ‘encounter,’ I’ve been forgetting stuff a lot. I don’t know if the two events are correlated, but if they’re not, it’s a strange coincidence.

I began changing into my school clothes. My outfit for the day included skinny jeans, a grey t-shirt, and Adidas shoes. I know, a regular, basic middle-school girl attire,

but I wanted to fit in. That was my problem. At my old school, we wore uniforms. Everyone was a mindless zombie. The principal told us what to think, what to wear, and how to act. That's why I love my new public school.

Once I was dressed, I headed out my bedroom door, into the kitchen. My mom had already left for work, she trusted me to take care of myself. I opened the cabinet and grabbed a cereal bar. After grabbing my book bag, I headed out the front door, locking it with my house key behind me.

Chapter 2. Go Stingers!

I walked down to my bus stop while leveraging my heavy book bag. I saw Harvey exiting his front door. He didn't lock it behind him, he never seemed to. Maybe his parents did. Him and the rest of our friend group are the ones who peer-pressured me into entering the woods. I'm not mad at Harvey, he was attempting to stop them. He went into the woods with me. I still question whether or not he saw the widow in the woods. I waited for him to catch up on the parallel side of the street. When I walk on a sidewalk, I never step on the cracks. I probably have some form of OCD, but I haven't been diagnosed. Harvey brought it up all the time, I still don't know if he was teasing or not.

When we made it to the bus stop, he walked across the street, making his way to my side of the street. Before anyone could say anything, the bus pulled up. We walked over to it. The doors elegantly swung open, followed by us entering.

When we got to school, everyone began flooding out where I nearly got knocked over by the current of people. After descending down the 3 short stairs, I headed for the building. As I was walking in, I took a moment to recognize the smell of car exhaust. It never really bothered me. While I stood there, the memories of last night poured back into my mind. As this occurs, memories of the widow in the woods and the foggy atmosphere of the forest came flashing into my mind. Then I blanked.

According to my friends, I began hyperventilating and passed out. I woke up in a hospital bed, hooked up to an I.V. My ears were ringing and my vision was blurry. I saw

the vague silhouette of a woman in a blue uniform. By the white block next to her shoulder, I could tell she had a nametag and was therefore a nurse.

“She’s awake!”

“She’s awake!” she called out to the other nurses and probably my mother. My mother. Where was she? Is she here? Is she at work? Either way, the calls of the nurse weren’t calls of surprise, like in movies, but rather just her saying something loudly.

Then I remembered what I had seen before I blacked out. I shivered. At this point I was going to contact someone to help, like an exorcist, or a priest, or a paranormal investigator. I knew they would believe me. If I asked my mom who to contact she would tell me to contact a therapist or psychiatrist.

“What are they doing in school?” I asked myself. Then all of a sudden Harvey entered the room. He stood there silently. When my vision came back, I saw him. “Harvey!” I yelled, causing my throat to ache. “Hey,” he said, shyly.

“Shouldn’t you be in school?” I asked him. “Pfft, no, I wanted to see you, and maybe not go to class,” he said. I chuckled. “Doesn’t our school play against the Tigers today?” I asked him. “Yeah,” he said, “sorry you have to miss it.” I don’t particularly like football, but I always love cheering on my team, the Stingers. Our mascot is a hornet. It always looked so aggressive in the posters. “It’s fine,” I responded.

“They record the games, I’m sure I can find a way to show you it,” Harvey said, attempting to satisfy me. “It’s really fine, I promise,” I reassured him. “Ok, if you’re sure,” he said. “I’m sure,” I said, smiling at him to show him I’m fine. “I have to go, I’m so sorry,” he told me, frowning at me. “That’s completely fine, bye!” I said waving at him as he walked out the door. “Bye!” I heard him yell back.

“How long will I stay here?” I thought to myself. For the first time, I looked at my arm which the I.V. was piercing. Chills ran down my spine as I saw it nearly completely purple. It was bruised everywhere. I pressed my arm against the cold, metal bed frame and it was completely sore, not to my surprise.

The nurse came in once again and said I would be able to leave in a few hours. She also said that the hospital had called my mother. “When?” I asked the nurse, whose name was Flora, as it read on her name tag. “A few hours ago,” she said, with a slightly concerned expression.

Just as she left I heard the voice of a woman who I knew was my mother screaming, “Where is my baby?!” “Oh, God,” I whispered as the sound of high heels clicking on the hard wooden floor drew everly closer.

The door flew open.

The Infinite Path

By Isla Rowney
6th Grade

Her loving embrace was an invitation to console me in my times of need. With perfect, sparkling white teeth, Reese's lovely smile brought a sense of jubilation to my dull life. A bubbly and exuberant laugh, guaranteed to make you grin. Lips, plump and voluptuous brushed past mine as my thumb delicately caressed her mouth. Walking under the glistening sun and vivid blue skies, hand in hand, her airy laugh filled the atmosphere with joy as the distant roar of an engine rapidly accelerated towards us. A fretful feeling boiled in my stomach as the vehicle came into view, coming closer, until it became too late and veered off of the road, aiming for her. Grief claws at my heart, thriving off of my sorrow, where dents and scars are etched. Why am I still alive if I have nothing to live for? Endless days pass, my life void of blissful events envisioned in our future, yet I cease to accept that she, the one I devoted my existence to, is gone.

“Grief claws at my heart, thriving off of my sorrow,
where dents and scars are etched.”

Portal to Rumba

By Seraphina Yim
6th Grade

It was a dark, windy night in the city of Rumba. Inside a grand apartment with beautiful wooden tile floors and smooth white paneled walls was a heated argument among two children in a luxurious living room. Except the City of Rumba didn't start in this apartment. There's much more history to this city than you'd think.

Going back just 26 years ago in 1996, people lived on earth. But one day, a very witty scientist named Dewin created a mysterious formula that created a portal to something indescribable at the age of just 17.

Some people believed that this portal was witchcraft, while others believed Dewin was from another planet. Nobody knew what this portal led to because immediately after Dewin made the portal, he was nowhere to be seen. Just a few days later, a rumor started about Dewin for his motivation to have gone into the portal.

A young boy with boxy glasses and big, adorable eyes claimed to be Dewin's friend. He told the news anchors that he watched Dewin go into the portal, but before Dewin went in he said "I hear my sister in the portal!" and then disappeared.

Many thought that this boy was lying and that he only said these things to seek attention because Dewin had no record of any living or present family.

After this incident, they called Dewin's portal the "Rumba". Scientists have tried to recreate this mysterious, secret formula that made the Rumba, but no one succeeded. Scientists believed that Dewin had help from a young child, and together they created this formula. They have not been able to figure out the exact formula, but they have figured out some things that went into the formula such as the magic words and potions. Words such as "Rumba" and "Broken register" were said as Dewin and

his sidekick threw in a broken cash register and other potions. After some time passed, this incident died down and eventually people stopped wondering about the Rumba.

Exactly 1 year after the Rumba incident, scientists discovered a huge and shocking planet in space. Astronauts from Earth had prepared for years for this exciting, new and upcoming space mission where they would go out to space and collect as much data as possible on every single planet in the solar system and report back to earth. This was a pretty long and risky trip, so this space trip would set a world record for the longest space trip ever. It was nerve wracking and exhilarating. When the adventure had begun, everything was going smoothly and according to plan for the next couple of months. After the astronauts had flown to almost every single planet, the scientists were finally observing their last planet. After the astronauts collected all their data on every planet, everybody in the spaceship was astonished to head back to earth.

“A new planet nobody knew about before, not too
far from Neptune!”

But an astronaut in the spaceship named Concord claimed to have seen another planet in the distance. It caught his attention because it was unlike any other random rock or planet in space. It was neon green and glowed through 2 holes for some unknown reason.

After getting reluctant consent from both the space team back on earth and his space and scientist buddies who were in disbelief, the space ship made one last stop to this new “planet”. The astronauts quickly zoomed through space and made it to this “planet.” It turns out that what Dewin saw was exactly what it was! A new planet nobody knew about before, not too far from Neptune! Everybody watching the live cams back on earth and in the space ship were in awe struck.

This planet was similar to earth's looks except for the obvious fact that it had a bright flashing neon green sky during the day and night and had both a sun and 9 moons! The planet had a breathable atmosphere too, along with earth's nature, buildings and everything already built in the world! The only thing that Earth had and this planet didn't have was multiple cities and a considerable amount of

technology. It looked as if they lacked technology in this world and that they only had one city that covered the whole world.

This discovery was truly taken by surprise to everyone in the universe, giving hope for what is to come in the future. The discovery of this world spread all across earth within the next few days like rapid fire until it was the new hot topic that nobody could stop talking about. Although nobody knew how or when this planet appeared, what most people wondered about was what the government would do with the planet. The next ten years consisted of careful observation and consideration. Finally, the government allowed the wealthy, courageous people to move away from earth to go live on the neon green planet they named “Gizem Bokamoso” to start a new, different and exciting life away from earth. Oddly enough, people decided to name the one city in Gizem Bokamoso “Rumba” in honor of Dewin.

Everything was great in The City of Rumba until people started to notice something odd about the sky. The 9th moon slowly faded away everyday until none of it would be left. People didn’t think too much of it until they started realizing that as the moon faded away, Rumba fell apart more. Once the 9th moon was halfway gone, Rumba was full of hatred, construction sites and suffering people. That’s when a realization hit all the people in Gizem Bokamoso: Once the moon faded away completely, so would their city.

Island Life
By Chloe Cheung
7th Grade

Island Life

Scene #1

Yuri: Phew! I finally finished putting up the decorations, Mom!

Yuri's Mom: Good! I'm going to prepare a cake for you!

The doorbell rings

Yuri: I'll get it, Mom!

Yuri opens the door.

Diana: Surprise, Yuri!

Yuna: Happy birthday!

Diana: We hadn't forgotten, in case you were wondering.

Yuri: (surprised) I thought you guys said you couldn't come. Anyways, thanks for coming! But, I don't see that you have any cake or pres-

Yuna: Well, we haven't really brought presents, but we were thinking about exploring! Remember that creepy basement you told us about? We were thinking maybe we could go in there with a flashlight and look for interesting stuff!

Yuri (unsurely): Umm, could we do something else? Like eating cake or something?

Yuna: C'mon, it'll be fun! I'll stay in front of you.

Yuri: Okay...

They grab a flashlight and go to the basement of Yuri's house.

Yuri (whispering): Are you sure it's safe around here?

Diana: Of course! It's just a baseme-

Yuna: Ooh! What's that?

They look up and see a thick musty red book laying on a shelf.

Yuna: I think it's a book! I wonder what it says? Maybe it's a diary of some sort from your ancestors, Yuri!

Diana: Open it! I want to see!

Yuri: (*nervous*) I don't know about that guys. I think we should just go back upstairs. My Mom said she would prepare a cake for me, or us. Since you guys came in at the last minute.

Yuna: What's the harm in opening a book? There might be secrets in there!

Yuna grabs the book from the shelf and carefully opens it. Suddenly, there is a bright flash of light from the book.

Yuri: What's happening?! I don't think books are supposed to do that!

There is a strong gust of wind. Then, everything goes white and when the light is gone, so are Yuna, Diana, and Yuri.

Scene #2

Yuri opens her eyes and finds herself sitting in an unfamiliar area. She looks around and sees Diana and Yuna sitting beside her.

Yuri: Diana, Yuna! What happened? Is this some sort of elaborate prank?

Diana: No, we just opened the book! We have no idea what happened!

They look around and observe the strange land. There are lots of trees and bushes and garbage. It is very quiet.

Yuri: Um. Maybe we should go look arou-

Yuna's stomach grumble interrupts Yuri.

Yuna: I'm hungry! I want food.

Diana: Yuna, we're in a crisis and all you want is food?

Yuna: Well, duh. Who wouldn't want food?

Diana scoffs and starts to look around the island.

Diana: Where are we even supposed to get food anyways? The trees and bushes don't have fruit growing, and I don't see any sort of creatures here.

Yuri: (panicked) What are we going to do?!? How will we get back?

Yuna: Calm down, Yuri, panicking won't help. For now maybe we should focus on finding some clues on how we got here. Oh! And find some food while we're at it.

Diana: Will you shut up and stop complaining about food?! It's driving me crazy!!
Anyways, we got here right after we opened that strange book, so maybe the book had something to do with it? Maybe it was like one of those Snortkey thingies from Harry Potter!

Yuna starts laughing.

Yuna: Two things; one, it's Portkey, and two, you haven't even read Harry Potter, have you? Anyways, let's stop talking about Harry Potter and go find some food!

Diana rolls her eyes.

Diana: You mean find a way to get home.

Yuna: (cheerfully) Food first! I love food, food, food, food and food!

Yuri & Diana: (both turn around to Yuna) OM MY GOD, WILL YOU SHUT UP AND STOP TALKING ABOUT FOOD FOR ONCE?!?!?!?

Yuna: Sheeeesh, take a chill pill guys.

Yuri: (smirking) If you really want food that bad Yuna, you should go and find some for us.

Diana nods in agreement.

Yuna: You guys should come with me then! The more the merrier!!

Diana: I swear I will murd-

Yuna: (sarcastically) Woah there, you can't be killing people.

Diana: (in a slightly irritated voice) Tch!

Yuri: Will you guys stop fighting?? Also, aren't we supposed to be panicking instead of arguing? How are you guys so chill about this?

Diana: Calm down. And if you really want to know why me and Yuna are so "chill" about this, it's because we always went camping to strange places like every summer since we were 8!

Yuri: Ohhhh! So you've been camping with Yuna for 6 years??

Diana: Yup!!

Yuna: Can you guys stop ignoring me? Let's find out what surprises the island has in

store for us!

The three friends explore the plants and trees. Suddenly, Yuri steps on something mushy.

Yuri: *(looks down in disgust)* Ewwww, is this the stuff that comes out of your butt after you eat large amounts of Taco Bell???

Yuna: *(laughs hysterically)* HAHAAHAHAHAHA!

Diana: *(concerned)* Are you okay? You sound like a psycho!

Yuna: I'm not okay, we haven't found any food yet!

The three friends try to clean the stuff off of Yuri's shoe with a large green leaf, and continue exploring.

Scene #3

Soon, the sun begins to set and the sky is getting darker.

Yuna: I want fooodood...

Diana (annoyed): Yuna, we don't have any clean water, let alone food! If you want some, then why don't you help us get some!

Yuri: Well, there's a lot of garbage around here, maybe we could find something to help us get food!

Diana: You mean like a fishing hook? I smell water somewhere that way.

Diana points in the distance.

Diana: Although I'm not quite sure anything could live in there, it smells dirty and polluted.

Yuri: I was thinking maybe we could make an ax, too! I saw some pieces of wood around here that we could probably chop up to make a fire to cook the fish that we might find.

Yuna: Well, who here is strong enough to chop wood? Probably not me, I'm weak and starved.

Diana: Me, of course! Did you forget that I work out in the gym?

Yuri: I agree, Diana's the most athletic out of all of us.

The three go together to find materials.

Yuna: OMG, guys I think I see something over there!

Diana: Then hurry up and run there! There might be stuff we can find

Yuri: (*anxious*) But, guys...What if it's something else like a scary monster, or a trap? We would be done for!

Yuna: Why would anything like that be here? I'll walk in front and Diana will walk behind you just in case something bad happens okay?

Yuri: Okay...

The three friends walk up to the huge pile.

Yuna: Wow, that's a huge heap of garbage! Time to go treasure hunting!

They dig through the pile.

Yuna: Look what I found! A pot!

Diana: It doesn't seem to have a lid, though. And it's really rusty.

Yuna: Look, this was all I could find! Let's see if you can find anything better!

After more searching and lots of arguments between Diana and Yuna, the only useful things the three can find are a long rope, some old, dusty tape, some grass, a few large hunks of wood, and some pieces of spinach.

Yuri: Maybe we could use the wood and rope to create an ax!

Yuna: We can make a fire, too. With the leftover wood pieces and maybe the grass.

Yuri, Yuna, and Diana create a wooden ax together and rub the leftover pieces of wood together to make a fire and put grass in it to fuel the fire.

Diana: What are we supposed to do with an old rusted pot without a lid??

Yuri: Um, maybe we could fill it with water from the river and purify it over the fire.

Yuna: Okay, so now we have to make a fishing hook! Diana, you stay here and watch the water.

Diana: Why me? It's not like there's anything that would steal or spill the water.

Yuna: Just watch the water. Me and Yuri will go to find materials to make a fishing hook.

About half an hour later, they find the right materials but they can't seem to figure out how to make the fishing hook. They decide to just wait for the water to finish purifying.

Yuna: I'm tired. Can we sleep and check on the water in the morning?

Diana: Hey, didn't you suggest that I watch the water, and now you want to sleep and ignore the water?

Yuri: Let's just sleep here, the land is soft in this spot like a bed.

Yuri points to an area about 3 feet away from the pot of water.

Yuna: Alright, let's sleep there.

Diana: I call the right side!

Scene #4

Diana sits up and yawns, looking at her friends. She shakes them awake.

Diana: Time to wake up!

Yuna: Diana, why do you always wake up so early? What time is it?

Yuna looks at her wrist as if checking a watch but remembers that she isn't wearing a watch. They are very thirsty, so they cup their hands and drink the water that they purified the night before.

Yuri: Alright, we should go look for ways we can get home. We can't live here forever.

Yuna: Don't forget to get me some food.

Diana: EWWW! It smells like fart in here!

Yuna: I don't care. I just want to get some food

The three walk about half a mile and they find a bush with berries. It is the only plant that has fruits on it.

Yuna: Food! Let's eat it!

Yuna goes to grab a handful of berries, but Yuri holds out a hand to stop her.

Yuri: They might be poisonous! Don't eat them. Guys, these berries look really white, I think it might be a similar berry to the poisonous Actea Phachypoda!

Yuna: What the hell? Where did all these scientific words come from? What is an "Actea Pachypoda"??? Honestly I don't really care, they are just berries.

Diana: Yeah Yuri, I think it's fine, 'cause if we don't eat them we might starve to death anyways.

Diana tries one of them.

Diana: They don't taste poisonous.

Yuri: Well... alright. But they look like white colored olives. I don't wanna eat them.

Can we just find something else?

Yuna: Stop being picky unless you want to die here.

The three eat all the berries on the bush ravenously. After they eat, they lie on the ground, full.

Yuna: It feels so good to eat!

Yuna pats her stomach.

Yuri: Wait... what's that?

Yuri points to a thick, musty, red book lying on the ground.

Diana: Wait, that's...

Yuna: The book! The one from your basement, Yuri! Maybe we should open it!

Yuri: Wait, how did it come here in the first place? I think that might be another trap

Diana: Stop being a wimp! This might be our only chance of getting back to our world!

Diana goes over and picks it up. Yuri and Yuna walk over and stand on either side of Diana.

Yuna: Open it!

Diana: Alright.

Yuri: WAIT DON'T OPEN THE BOO-

Yuna puts her hand over Yuri's mouth as Diana cautiously pulls open the delicate pages.

Yuri grabs Yuna's hand away.

Yuri: STOP DON'T OPEN IT, IT'S NOT A GOOD IDE-

Suddenly, there is a black flash of light, and Diana, Yuna and Yuri disappear from the island. All that is left is silence.

Scene #5

There is another bright white flash of light in Yuri's basement and when the light fades, Yuri, Yuna, and Diana are back.

Yuri's mom: Girls! You should come up now! I baked a surprise cake!

The three friends look at each other for a second. Then, they race to the stairs, pushing and laughing as they run to get the first slice of cake. It seems that no time has passed while they were in the book. Later, Yuna and Diana get ready to leave.

Diana: That was fun!

Yuna: What are you talking about? Being starved on an unknown island? I would call that torture.

Yuri, Yuna, and Diana all laugh.

Yuri: I think we can all agree to never explore my basement ever, ever, again!

Diana: I promise never to go to a basement or read a dusty red book ever again!

The three begin giggling again.

Black Injustice: Learn from the Past

By Xavier McKissic
7th Grade

“In the long run, justice finally must spring from a new moral climate.”

~ Martin Luther King Jr.

Black children are misled and misunderstood by outside forces every day. With generational curses and childhood trauma dating back to their first breath, they have little to no education on how to process strong feelings—causing minor inconveniences to pile up on each other. Meaning that when problems occur, they have no way to express their feelings other than anger. Trauma, mixed with firearms makes black children seem violent as opposed to misunderstood. Lack of resources results in the consistency of black poverty—ensuing in the abundance of gun violence in our society.

The education system is built to break upon the same people it claims to attend to. For black people, there are very few chances to break out of the generational cycle of poverty. In predominantly urban areas, there are very few opportunities for success. People that make it out of the cycle are considered extremely lucky, which says something about this environment as a whole. There are issues greater than the ones I’ve stated, but they also have solutions larger than I can comprehend. How do you change the mind of someone so fixated on hatred? How do you convince someone to change their beliefs of hostility towards a group of people? The answer lies in the future.

Once the human mind decides on a set of beliefs, it’s nearly impossible to change them, meaning the solution lies in the generation ahead of ourselves. A better environment for the next generation would consist of counseling, emotional advocacy, and *justice* for the countless lives and futures lost to gun violence. My hope is that the new moral climate of justice for my people lies in my generation and the ones to come.

Pain

By Ashley Young
7th Grade

I was a normal young 9-year-old girl when my mom introduced me to modeling. As any naive kid I agreed to do it. I was driven to a rehearsal where I was told that all I had to do was watch young child models walk up and down a studio's dance floor. So I did it with great interest. I admired them and I found myself wanting to be like them. I was told that it would make me more feminine and teach me how to be a lady. I wanted to be beautiful and I was encouraged to start by my teachers and other parents by promising me money and a carefree life, all I had to do was walk. Right?

Most definitely wrong, I wish I could have told little 9-year old me that. Unfortunately, time travel probably won't be invented until a few decades and 9-year old me signed my childhood away with a big grin on her face.

The first time that I walked into modeling lessons, my entire perspective of pageant life was immediately corrected. I thought I would be walking into a building full of opportunity and hope, but I stepped into a seemingly different world; The air conditioning was surprisingly even worse than the last studio and there were chinks in the floorboards. Surely this isn't the place where I would make it into Hollywood? I only found out myself that I would be walking for 5 hours on end with no breaks in unbearable heat that I could barely stand. How did anyone expect young children to become superstars without hydration, breaks, and all the while in 100-degree weather?

After only a week, my mother became obsessed. Anytime my mother and I had a conversation, the only thing she talked about was my weight, my height, my shoulders, how much or how little I ate, my tanned skin and tan lines from swimming, not wearing

“girls clothes”, and my posture. Once at the dinner table, my mom shot me a glare as I ate my dinner, and when I didn't stop she said, “How do you expect to be a model when you eat so much? Look at the other girls in your class!”

Everyday when I had a moment of silence, different possibilities, fears of judgment, and insecurities started to pile in the back of my head and with every new thought, my attitude worsened; lashing out at others who had done nothing wrong and being loud and obnoxious helped me ignore the faint truth that was itching at me.

As my first weeks went by, my performance began to suffer the physical toll of modeling, my feet and knees suffered in a type of pain I had never felt before. After rehearsals where I walked the entire lesson, I would take off my heels only to find the insides stained red. My heels and toes had blisters all over and blood casually dripped from scrapes in my skin before and after performances. I was barely able to stand outside of modeling let alone during long rehearsals, simply functioning now felt like such a difficult task. During PE at the end of the school day, I lagged behind in pain, while the rest of the class ran a mile across the field. The most I could bear to do was a little speed walking with an uncomfortable limp. Besides what I

was forced to partake in, I did nothing as much as I could in order to minimize the searing pain in my feet and legs. All my shoes all had a tint of blood on the insides.

This went on and the realization slowly crept into my brain; this was way more than I had bargained for. I didn't sign up for all the unbearable pain, I didn't agree for my family to turn on me, and I don't remember anyone saying that I would be this mentally drained. Oftentimes, I flushed these thoughts out of my head with empty promises that it would “get better,” that's what my teachers told me anyway, I saw them as kind people who had tried to nurture me through the tough world of modeling. Until one big show was announced.

As soon as they finally prodded me into the dressing room of the big show, I began to dread the pain I would face; the pain of judgment, physical exploitation, and false promises that I had been dealing with for weeks. From the moment I walked into

the rundown dressing room, I knew that mass amounts of pressure and makeup would soon overcome my day. I reluctantly sat down in a metal chair with nothing but a plastic water bottle as breakfast. My coach came up to me and asked if I had gained weight, another teacher wondered if I had been doing skincare and complained how I wouldn't fit in my dress. I wished they could hear their own words as I counted the loose ceiling tiles above me.

“None of the people around me seemed to really
care...”

My teachers who were once supportive and encouraging became desperate and devious. Somehow these people who were “teaching me” developed a complete lack of empathy. The only thing they saw was my terrible attitude and how much money they would continue to make from my mother if I won this competition and continued to succeed in modeling. As a distressed makeup artist aggressively put eyeliner on my eyes, condescending stares from my mother, my teachers, and the makeup artist burned into my face as I began to think. None of the people around me seemed to really care; they didn't care when I cried, or whenever my feet bled, they would belittle me if when I fell from the pain of continued rehearsing, and they definitely couldn't care less if I needed to take a drink of water or use the bathroom. The makeup artist finished applying eye shadow and started on the highlights as I noticed a faint sound from above me, and noticed one of the loose ceiling tiles losing its grip.

CRASH... THUNK!

Everything blacked out for a second from an overwhelming pain and there was a ringing in my ears. When everything came into focus someone had their hands on my shoulders and people were all around me yelling and waving their hands. I thought that I was bleeding and people were panicking and asking if I was okay. The only rational thing to panic about was my makeup, stained tears dripped down my face and ruined the rest of the foundation, they fell onto my outfit in small black splotches, and my eyes were swollen red. As I gasped for air, my mother and my teachers yelled at me to stop crying

and the makeup artist started to furiously rub my tears in a desperate attempt to save the makeup. My head was ringing from the pain but one thing seemed to hit me harder than that ceiling tile; these people didn't see me as a human, they seemed to see me as significantly less. I was a doll perhaps, someone they thought they could dress up and bend my limbs at will.

It was an awkward car ride home; my family kept trying to pry into me because all they wanted to talk about was the show, and how poorly it had gone for me and my teachers. When our car finally pulled into our parking lot, I ran downstairs and shut myself in the bathroom. I threw off the itchy dress and started to rip accessories out of my hair. How could they do this to me? How could anyone be so inhumane to a human, especially my own family. What even happened tonight; how could I have been so drunk on my own lies this entire time? My thoughts raced through my head, faster with every hairpin I pulled out my scalp. Without even waiting for the shower to get hot, I stripped and slammed the shower door behind me. I let the water run down my face, mixing with my tears as the water slowly heated until it began to burn my skin. The water tasted bitter, a combination of hair gel and spray and layers of makeup. I looked at my feet where blood from tonight was being washed away by the pouring water. Scars of popped blisters, scrapes, and various little cuts outlining where my shoes cut into my feet. I was in pain; the collection of the physical and mental suffering that we endure, and although it may have been the first time I felt it, I cried as I knew that this wouldn't be the last time.

The Miracle of Kindness

By Mayowa Funmilayo
8th Grade

Every word and everything about this story is true.

Although, there's a good chance that the judges reading this story will not believe me. That's why I was so hesitant towards writing this story. I was and still am afraid that the judges will dismiss it and laugh amongst themselves, but I cannot live a life of fear. You said I should write a story that makes me feel something, and for me, a story that provokes such emotions for me is a story that only I can tell; a story that matters to me. This is my story, or to be more specific, my father's.

We've all heard of the children in Africa who starve and suffer each day. My father was one of them. He grew up in Nigeria, and his father worked as a farmer. He lived through death, famine, and unspeakable pain, but he rose above all of it and earned a visa to the US. He borrowed money from multiple people, studied hard in school, and spent hours praying just so he could have children in the US and give me the childhood he never had. He did all of it for me.

So imagine how it felt when he received the news that he was going to be sent back to Nigeria.

After attending school in America for some time, my father wasn't able to make enough money to pay his tuition. The rule was that anyone who couldn't pay had to be deported. The amount of emotional pain my father went through cannot be described. After everything he did to get to where he was, he was going back to the suffering he was trying to escape. It was like a slap in the face. The devastation must have shown greatly on my father's face because after one of his classes, his professor asked him what was

bothering him. My father explained the entire predicament to him, and the professor said he would see what he could do.

Turns out, that professor could do a lot.

I don't know how he did it, but somehow, that professor pulled some strings that kept my father in the US and helped him pay his tuition. When my father told me this story, he said the professor was going through a divorce, so he understood the pain and could see it on my father's face.

“Whether you believe this or not, there is no denying that what my father's professor did was a miracle. It wasn't the only one.”

Now, I don't know if any of the people reading this story believe in God, but I do. I believe that God touched the heart of that professor and helped him see that my father needed help. Why, out of all the students that professor taught, why did he single out my father? Why was my father the one who was blessed with the miracle of kindness? My father prayed, and God delivered the answer through the golden heart of a university professor. Whether you believe this or not, there is no denying that what my father's professor did was a miracle. It wasn't the only one.

When my father was having trouble paying off school debt again, he went to meet up with someone who he hoped could help him. When he asked the man he met with to help him pay the debt, the man said my father had already met with him last year and got the majority of the debt paid.

My father never met with this man.

When my father checked his debt, he saw that it had been significantly reduced. He was confused, flabbergasted, and confused once again! How did the man meet with my father and pay the debt when my father never met with the man? When my father told me this story, he said God had sent an angel down to take the form of him and meet with the man to get the debt paid. To human ears, this entire story must seem ridiculous, right? You probably think, “Your father was probably pulling your chain, sweetheart.”

You're probably laughing inside your head right now. My father was not laughing when he told me this story. He was dead serious. My father did not make this story up because his lips are obligated to tell the truth. He would never lie to me. Never.

Whether it was God, whether it was an angel, or whether the man who paid my father's debt had somehow made up that meeting inside his head, there is no doubt that a miracle occurred in my father's life once again. I do not know the name of the man who paid my father's debt. I do not know the name of the angel who took the form of my father. I do not know the name of the professor who saved my father's future. I do not know their names, but I know them. I remember them by their deeds. I remember them by the ways they saved my father and saved me. They prevented a future in which I would labor before I eat and drink pollution-filled water like other underprivileged children in Nigeria. For as long as I live in this opportunity-blessed country, I will always remember these men for further strengthening my faith in the Lord and faith in the power of kindness.

So, do you believe it? Do you believe the stories I just shared with you? You may believe me, or you may think I'm insane and recommend me to a therapist. I don't ask for you to believe me or my stories. All I ask is that you pray for the people who did not experience the miracles my father experienced. I pray that these people will one day be blessed with a miracle that will change their lives and the lives of their children. Whether it's an angel imitating you during a meeting, or a kind teacher lending you a helping hand, everyone deserves to be blessed with a miracle of kindness, and everyone is responsible for giving miracles of kindness.

Because we all need a miracle in our lives.

Love

By Lizzie Sun
8th Grade

I interviewed my friends to see what they thought of first when I said the word “love”. Was it romantic, family, work, etc.? It was a overwhelming romance. Though, it’s most likely because my interviewee people were teenage girls.

Of course, I’m not saying I don’t think that too (I’ve been watching kdramas recently). But sometimes I feel like the word “love” is starting to be a term that is romance-themed. Because I feel the emotion “love”

I play tennis—and I love it. I love the courts’ texture, the lines, the net, the fuzz of the ball, the *bang* of the racket and the ball. The mental toughness you need to have, and the seemingly infinite opportunities to win.

I think I took it for granted, until I had a terrible day.

“But stepping onto the court seemed like I was
being baptized.”

I had a rough morning. Social and school worries tugged and grabbed onto me tightly as my day went on. It led to me snapping at my brother and a gloomy cloud breathing down my neck. It was also a sunny day—which doesn’t seem bad for most people, but I prefer rainy, cold, and dreary days.

Was it that my day was pretty bad? Was it that it seemed the tennis court seemed to have fixed its lighting? Or that I didn’t forget my airpods at home?

But stepping onto the court seemed like I was getting baptized.

When I had the racquet and ball, my mind went blank. Like a madman, I played. My thoughts were: ball, hit, beat him, win.

I like to write down my feelings to let out my emotions. Sometimes, I rip tissues.
But when I played tennis, I let them out.

Each ball and hit meant something.

An aggressive flat backhand down the line—why did she leave me and not wait for me? My thunder volley—why do I feel so left out?

A spinny and powerful crosscourt forehand—how come my teacher doesn't know my name after a year?

Approach shot—how could I have forgotten my hw?

Almost-ace-serve—A tree is more interesting than me, right?

I breathed and blinked.

I'm home.

In my bed. My lips, who had a growing crinkling on the bottom lip due to frowning, unfolded into a smile.



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