

Connections

COLLEGE *of* SOUTHERN MARYLAND
Spring 2016 Literary Magazine

SPECIAL FEATURES IN THIS ISSUE

Maryland Writers' Association Award Winners and Young Writers' Showcase

Connections

COLLEGE *of* SOUTHERN MARYLAND
Spring 2016 Literary Magazine

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Baby Owl by *Diane Payne*

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Connections

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Never Associate Starry-Eyed Girls

Eliot Willenborg

Never associate starry-eyed girls with lunar cycles. She'll be gone before you can recreate the moon from the night you met and she'll leave a hole in your life that can't be filled with travelling and is only worsened by goodbyes. She'll write you anthems that can't get out of your head and why would you even want to? Everything will remind you of her. Little things like cappuccinos and churchyards because she once told you her mother made the best cappuccinos and churchyards were her safe haven.

Your life will feel like a sham and that birthmark on your thigh that she loved so much and thought was perfection? Yeah, that will start to feel like a curse that is branded into your skin, forever reminding you of that starry-eyed girl I warned you about.

Rosebud

Sherbie Carson

She never knew much of her mother,
even less I knew of her. My grandmother.
This leathered matriarch, introverted
within a deafened shell, feeble, bent.

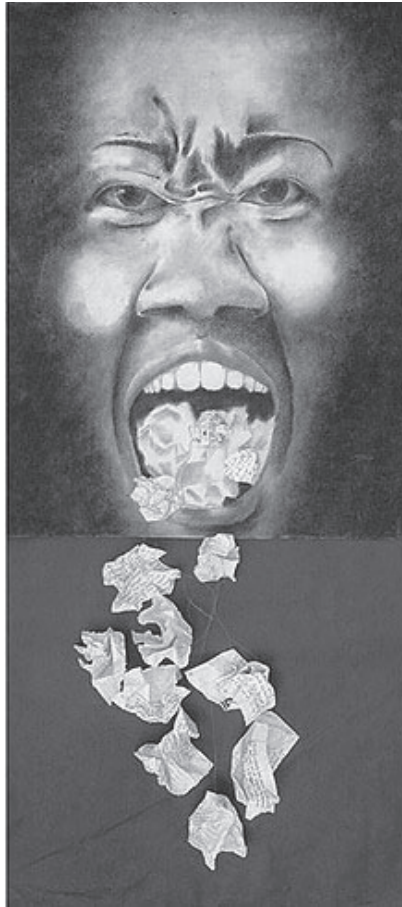
She kept her stories with her,
ashamed of the label, the stigma,
the tribal affiliation that yielded only pain.
Her home, the Black Hills, twice stolen,
once in occupation, twice in memory.

Fear stripped the dialect of the Earth from her lips,
her eyes only, hold the language of the River.
Vacant hole where others swell pride
in heritage, a flag, a Land, a People.

Fortress of secrets, she took with her the keys
to vaulted Truths locked and lost, forever.
Census takers requiring first and last name
stole the honor of Rosebud, a name earned,
and gave us only Jones, devoid of meaning.

She was not a Jones, nor am I.
My blood, it surges, with the rising Voices
of a misnamed people, yearning for release.
The unspoken Song of the weeping forest,
She stirs my soul beneath starlight.

At fireside, I hear Her, I see them, dancing,
and I cannot leave their company.
With every inch of hair, every tree ring
of experience, Her Song grows louder
within the carved amphitheater of my Spirit.



Words I Should Have Said by *Mikayla Chapman*

Imagination on Fire

Kathleen Jones

The rain had just let up, and yet the sky was still as dark as night. An electric train whizzed through a seemingly empty train yard, slowing down as it advanced; a shadowy figure darted toward the train. A man's foot hit a puddle soaking his Converse shoe and part of his right pants leg, as he dashed after the train. He tossed his bag into the cargo car, grabbed the hand rail and jumped into the car. He took a moment, in the dark car, to recline against the side and catch his breath. Safe—for now.

Eventually, he stood up and made his way toward the passenger section of the train. Maybe, if he was lucky, he could get something to eat. The dining car was lined on both sides with booths, where people sat eating and looking out the holographic windows at the scenery of their choice.

He sat down at the back booth, pulled up the holographic menu, and ordered a computer-generated, perfect meal that he didn't intend to pay for. He took a moment to look out the window, turning off the holograph, he preferred reality. The electric train was passing through what was once the country side, but the city was taking it over. Soon there would be no more empty fields.

All of a sudden a haggard looking man in a large trench coat flopped down in the seat across from him.

“Mind if I share the booth with ya mate?”

“No, I suppose not. Please go right ahead.”

“Wonderful! Me name's Art, I be a witch hunter. Can't let those nasty buggers keep over-running the world. Now can we? I've been on me feet all day tracking. What be your name mate?” This man was very comfortable identifying himself and his job. Something most people don't openly display. It peaked his curiosity.

“Roderick, Sir. I’m just a traveler. May I ask why you feel the need to hunt those with magic?”

“Well, it’s my job now, ya see. Also, magical folk aren’t needed any more and they damage the young ones’ minds.”

“How so?”

“Those people that has magic make young ones think things they ought not be thinking. I’ve been hunting them magic users since the law were created 30 years ago. Word in the city be that there, finally, be only one left. I hope to be the one that finds him, the joy of taking out that last user would be sweet.”

“You mean to tell me, Sir, that you have been killing magic users for over 30 years?!” Roderick was shocked, he knew the hunters were out there and he had intimate knowledge of how they’d operate, but he’d never met anyone who’d been hunting since the beginning of the law.

“Trained me kids too! Mind if I change the window? This month long rain is starting to depress me.”

Roderick shook his head motioning with a wave of his hand to the window. The hunter continued talking about his hunting exploits, while he changed the window to a forest scenery with animals hidden among the branches.

“Now, you don’t see much of those anymore.” Roderick was concerned with how comfortable the stranger was with sharing all this information. The hunter appeared to have no qualms conversing with a stranger and telling all his life stories.

Art knew who the gentleman sitting across from him was. This was Art’s target, and he couldn’t wait to take him out and finally be rid of all the magic users once and for all. The pay increase wouldn’t be so bad either.

Roderick’s food finally arrived, and he devoured it like the starved man he was. Art finally fell silent as he watched Roderick eat. If he had his way, this would be Roderick’s

last meal. Art had all his plans in place. He had predicted everything this man might do; after all he'd been dreaming of this day for a while now.

The electric train started slowing down, signaling a station pass through. The lights in the cabin suddenly shut off and the passengers in the dining car started panicking. Roderick leapt to his feet and ran toward the back to the train. Someone must be on to him; he had to get off this train.

Roderick made it back to the cargo car, took a quick glance at the surrounding outside area and jumped. He rolled across the ground, and back up to his feet, then took off running at full speed. The train continued on its course away from him as Roderick ran toward a line of abandoned buildings near the station. Footsteps pounded the ground behind him. Who was that? Was someone on the train chasing him? Was it Art? Could he be on to him? Roderick didn't have the time to think about it. He had to get away and hide somewhere.

Roderick noticed a door slightly open up ahead, he aimed for it. Once there he quickly ducked inside. He shut the door, and leaned his head against it. With a single thought he made his hand glow, and turned it into a flashlight. A high-pitched gasp sounded behind him, a scrambling sound followed echoing around, and a bag was placed over his head.

"Hey! What is going on?" he hollered out.

"Be quiet, magic user!" A deep voice scolded him, as hands shoved and pulled him forward; somewhere along the way Roderick lost his bag. The hands spun him around a couple of times before forcing him into a chair. A different pair of strong hands held his own and prevented him from moving. With a 'snick' he heard the electric locks bind his hands. Although he could not feel them, he knew that if he tried to pull his hands apart, electricity would shoot through his body, enough to knock him out. Electricity stopped his magic, he was effectively trapped.

“What are we going to do now?” a female’s voice asked.

“I don’t know! I didn’t expect him to be one of them!” A different male voice answered. His voice wasn’t quite as deep as the other man’s.

“Did you see his hand glow? It was amazing! Mister, can you do any other magic? Oh, please let him do more magic, Jessie,” a high-pitched female voice practically squealed.

“Please be quiet, and let us handle this,” the lower pitched male told her.

So far, Roderick distinguished four different voices, and the way they were echoing around, he guessed that he was in a small warehouse. If it wasn’t for the electricity in the bindings Roderick could probably have escaped.

“Can someone please tell me what you want with me?” Roderick asked as the electricity in the handcuffs turned off his hand; his pants were beginning to get uncomfortable and chaffing slightly.

“Jessie, can’t I just shoot him?” The first man asked.

“No, you need to control yourself. We need to hand him over to the authorities.”

“Oh, please, let’s not. Can’t we let him go?” the second female’s voice pleaded with the other. “Or better yet can we keep him?”

“Why don’t we give him a chance to speak for himself?” A fifth voice joined the conversation; this voice was also male and sounded older than the other two, deep and scratchy. Silence filled the room when he finished speaking.

“Sure, why not. But, we won’t remove the bag,” the man Roderick had been able to identify as Jessie told them. Roderick sighed, it was a chance to convince them about his side of the story. This was a chance that Roderick had only dreamed of having.

“Please, you have to let me go. Someone is chasing me and doesn’t want me to reach my goal; they don’t want me to speak.”

“Of course someone is chasing you. You are illegal; we should let them catch you. The world needs people like you to be gone,” the first man shouted out at him.

“Please be quiet! I decided we would let him talk, and I will be the one to question him.” Heavy footsteps echoed through the warehouse as one of the men walked to another section of the room. “Now, I’m guessing the guy chasing you is not a big problem for you. So, what is it they don’t want you to say? Why should we let you go instead of handing you over to be taken out?”

“Because...I...I have something you are lacking, something the whole world is lacking. What I have can’t be taught, bought or created through technology. It has to be fostered and nurtured; it needs to be coaxed into being and allowed to expand on its own.”

“What is it?” the elder female asked.

“Imagination.” he replied.

“Why do you think that imagination is so important; we have gotten along just fine without it.”

“Imagination is the key to life. Without it, humans are no better than the machines you surround yourselves with. I have imagination. I can see the world in ways no one today can. That is the real magic,” Roderick said; under the bag his eyes were watering.

“Would someone shut him up!” the man who continually voted for his death shouted; as he continued to speak his voice got closer, signaling he was walking back over. “He is blathering on about nonsense. ‘Imagination is the true magic’—what utter rubbish. It is a useless tool, a ploy to corrupt the minds of the young. The world has gotten by just fine without it for the past 30 years. The great technology has made it so that people like you have become obsolete.”

Roderick leaned forward in his seat. He may not be able to see his accusers but this might be his last chance to make a difference to tell them what nobody else was willing to.

“Don’t you see! That is not a good thing! Technology is over-running the world. If the human race is not careful, all forms of creativity and freedom will be extinguished. You claim that I am obsolete, but it is the whole of the human race that is becoming obsolete.” The sound of snickers filled the room.

“What do you mean?” This time the voice of the older female spoke interrupting anything else he was going to say. Roderick relaxed back into the chair and turned in the direction of her voice.

“Take a moment to consider your life. When you walk into a room in your house, the temperature regulates itself. Everything from your clothes to your food is chosen for you by a computer. They even tell you how you’re supposed to feel about everything from politics down to the computer-generated books, movies and music. Technology does it all. There is no room for independent thought and new ideas.”

“What is independent thought, and how do you work it?” The high pitched female’s voice asked. Roderick gasped, he was floored by the idea that she was under the impression that it was some form of technology that she needed to operate.

“The young ones aren’t even being encouraged to think or being taught their own history!”

“Technology is helping us. We no longer have to worry about human error or our own ignorance.” The opinionated man argued back. A rattling sound interrupted Roderick’s reply before it even started.

“We need to make a decision fast,” Jessie said. Muffled voices sounded to the right of Roderick’s position; he could hear Art’s voice among them. It was Art that had found him out on the electric train!

“Please, you have to let me go. Think of how different the world would be if they heard what I have to say,” Roderick gave one last plea.

“I don’t know Jessie. What he’s saying is starting to make sense. Maybe we should let him go. I am not in total agreement with what he is saying and I like my technology too much to give it up, but there are people in the world who need to hear this,” the deeper voiced female said as the sound of heels clicking on the floor came up behind him. Someone let out a sigh and the bag was pulled off his head. Roderick blinked in the sudden light.

“Undo the cuffs. How do we get out of here?” the man in front of him said. As the cuffs were being clicked off, a man came running over.

“You are letting him go! Ugh, fine,” the gentleman who greeted him said, “Boss, we got a problem. Hunters are here and they don’t look happy. Let’s hand over the magic user and get out of here.” This was the first man who Roderick had come into contact with.

“No, we’re in this now,” Jessie said.

“Alright, if you guys are serious about this, I think I can get us out of here.” Roderick stood up and walked toward Jessie. “I need everybody to hold hands.”

“What! Are you sure I can’t shoot him?” the stubborn man protested, while the young female immediately grabbed Roderick’s hand.

“Just do it. If we are going to be all in we need to try trusting him.” Jessie linked his hand with the young female. Soon the five of them stood in a circle, one of the men was still off to the side.

“You stubborn fool, get over here,” The oldest man said. The other man let out a growl but obeyed.

“Alright, I want each of you to close your eyes and picture a time in your life when you were safe and happy. It needs to be the happiest memory you can think of. Think back to your childhood when you were safe at home with your parents.” Roderick closed his eyes.

Around the circle the six men and women closed their eyes; mentally, each of them were back to the age of innocence, and peace and safety washed over the group as they stood there. A shimmering veil swept down, blocking them from the door the hunters were trying to break down. The young girl opened her eyes and gasped. Roderick also opened his eyes with a smile on his face.

“That should protect us, the protection veil takes your memories of safety and reflects that security like a shield. Come on it looks like there is a door back here.” Roderick broke the circle, ran toward back of the warehouse and into the alley. The sound of wood splintering as the doors finally gave sounded behind them as they raced down the alley. One of the men spotted a fire escape ladder and the six of them climbed up to the top of the building.

“With any luck,” Roderick said panting from the climb, “they’ll think we are still running around down there.”

“Now, what?” The young female asked recovering her breath and staring at the horizon. The rain stopped for the first time in months and as the sun began to peek out of the cloud, Roderick looked down at her upturned face, the hope for the future.

“Now, we try to save the world.”

To Hold

Gray Killen

A good hug is
hard to find. The girl to give it to
is just as hard. It's tight and taut
like the roof of a blanket fort in the living room.
It's clean and expected like a ritual of
affection not a rite of infatuation.
It's warm like hands in pockets
like my mom like the sun off the water.
It's saying 'love' to 'you', but words
are meaningless like currency to inflation.
It's right now, this moment matters, even when
Apart, be near.

It's the world's strongest men
how they pick up stones. Something to
prove. The pain of completion,
knowing all must end.
Hands wrap 'round careful
cause to slip would be selfish.
Starting from the fingers, the pull,
my chest pulls in, and back.
Reacts to her front.
Arms envelop, (love note folded tucked in an envelope)
I hold her, but at will she holds,
my will. Like carrying a load, it takes everything.
Then the Release.

Gratifying as picking up a heavy
stone or barbell, body pulses and warms.
Satisfying as affirmation
reciprocated seething maybe spiritual?
Codifying a friendship,
a goodbye, a welcome,
you're welcome near me.
Falsifying like this reality,
you're new and do not
know, let alone love me.
A good hug is hard to find.
The girl to give it to is just as hard.

The Destructiveness of Fear

Christion Madison

I heard tears fall from her eyes, felt the walls tremble, as the usual thumps erupted from the bedroom. The obnoxious screams, the brute moans, the helpless quakes, the disruptive music, intended to overbear the vituperative dialogue. I covered my ears, glued my eyes shut, forced my head into my pillow, but the noise wouldn't cease. It echoed clamorously through my tiny skull, evoking dread and despair. I smelled blood gush from her nose, the halls released a stench of iron, almost as if the floors were covered with pennies. The short bursts of retaliation she had were dismantled by a much more dominant force—something I was afraid I would become, partly because of the subjection to this behavior and secondly, the man who did this was my father. Someone I admired at a time in my life, a person I shared interest and characteristics with. None of which mattered as I heard my mother get pummeled countless times.

I was a boy, no older than 12, the noise would always frighten me to a halt, paralyzing my willingness to interfere, but tonight was different. Tonight I saw dad for what he truly was; by the time of my realization, Mom had almost given into his antics, luckily I hadn't. My 62-inch frame tiptoed seemingly to the kitchen, creeping past the closed door where my father had been ferociously beating Mom. I knew where he hid his weapon, on the bottom shelf inside of a white plastic cleaning bucket. The .22 Magnum felt cold and rigid in my palm; the design was so old the color was deteriorating, a blackish grey mark scurried across the side of the magnum. The grip was firm and weighty, blanketing my entire hand.

I inched back up the stairs closely to the ground until I arrived to the door. The music still stern and overpowering, my lips quivered, and my hands were sweating from the touch of the gun. I was crippled by the overwhelming burden of knowing what I planned on doing once the door opened. Yet still I encroached; the music was more obnoxious when the door flung open. My eyes scrambled, then finally focused on what I had been hearing for months. Dad paused, the sweat from his forehead froze as did my finger, which was planted firmly on the trigger. I should've shot him, but I hesitated; it was either the trepidation or I simply wanted an explanation. Mom began to cry; I held the gun above my chest, Dad said, "Put the gun down before somebody gets hurt."

I refused, words wouldn't crawl out of me, so I began to cry; I couldn't shoot him. Mom was almost egging me on with her eye contact, but I didn't. The music was still deafening, tuning out any background noise. I turned quickly to the closing sound of creaking stairs and shuffled feet, gun still abroad pointing straight. The officers saw me and opened fire.

I died.

If People Change Colors Like the Leaves in The Fall

Bill Buffington

If people change colors like the
leaves in the fall,
would the world still be so
black and white...
would it see me as a person or
would it still see me
as a person of color...
would it enslave the evergreen,
because it
never changes color...
would some colors still be
considered better than others...
would you continue to
stereotype, because of shapes or sizes...
would there be a sign reading,
orange on this side, yellow over there
and purple not allowed at all...
would it be fair to say, prejudice and racism
might still exist...
would it be fair to keep saying, that as long as we
 keep seeing color
we will not see the true beauty of each other at all...
even if people could change colors like the leaves in the fall...

Let

Michael Stenger

I keep meeting bald men,
and they keep giving me advice,
and it's always,
“Let your hair grow long,”
and before I can dismiss it as a joke,
they repeat,
“Let your hair grow long.”



December Light by *Eileen Abel*

CONNECTIONS SPECIAL FEATURE

Young Writers' Showcase

In February and March, Rachel Heinhorst sponsored an after-school creative writing club for students at Barstow Elementary School in Calvert County. The five participants, Sarai Brabble (3rd grade), Michael Johnson (3rd grade), Maia Nerby (5th grade), Justin Hawkins (5th grade), and Ema Heinhorst (5th grade), with their imaginative minds, crafted stories and poems that have the ability to enrich the lives of anyone who reads them.

Spring

*Sarai Renee Brabble
(3rd Grade)*

Spring is here,
it's finally here.
The flowers
can start blooming.
The sunny sun,
that sunny sun,
that sunny sun
can start shining.

Spring is fun,
it's really fun,
it's fun to be in the sun.

If you don't like spring,
you must like summer
but summer is kind-of a bummer.
you must like spring.
It has a spring fling.
I love spring.

CONNECTIONS SPECIAL FEATURE

Young Writers' Showcase

(continued)

Living in the Purple Mountain Majesties

Inspired by *My Side of the Mountain*

Michael Prescott Johnson

(3rd Grade)

Chapter 1

My Life as a City Citizen

Michael, Ethan, and Aiden all lived in the city. They were cousins and they all lived in a humongous room in an apartment. They hated it there. They always told their parents they were going to spray the city with a million bottles of perfume and complained to each other that it was trash town or it smelled like rotten scrambled eggs in an unflushed toilet because there were some toilets that had that. And they nicknamed that smell DISEASE and said it was contagious.

When they were at school, nobody thought that. Everyone loved the city. The only person who did think what they thought was a boy named Caden; he was their cousin too. Every time at recess they played a game called Toilet Trouble, where one person is contagious with the toilet disease and everyone ran while the infected person chased them. School was the best time for them.

(Now in my point of view that is not true. Home is the best. Now, if they had Papa Johns pizza, burgers, and fries that you could eat in class, I'd understand. But then something happened...)

Two days before summer break Michael said, "Guys I think we should run away."

"WHAT?!" the others asked. I said, "Michael said he thinks we should run away."

He said, "Guys, summer break is two days away and I am not using a toilet with the disease and I don't like the sound of the fourth grade teachers. OK? Caden, text your mom and tell her you're going to our house and we'll all pack." What they packed were chips, crackers, and tons of nonperishable things. That was their food supply until they learned to hunt and trap animals. When they were done packing, Caden sent a message to his mom telling her he was spending the night at the others' house. And then they remembered—MONEY! They got \$2,000 each! \$6,000 total! And, they remembered their iPods. When they were done packing, they stuffed their bags under their bed and went to sleep.

CONNECTIONS SPECIAL FEATURE

Young Writers' Showcase

(continued)

Upon A Windy Day

Maia Nerby

(5th Grade)

Once upon a windy day
up high sat a stick old and gray
he sat there feeling stuck and blue
quite actually there sat two
one sat old and gray and weak
the other sat green and new and pink
the old one said to the new
“I am old and gray and blue
listen up you must now know
you will one day be as black as a crow
so spend your life happy and free
but always remember you will be like me”
So the young one said, “Why must it be,
Why must I be as sad as thee?”
“Cause that is the way life goes
You might be loved no one knows.”
Then came the gust
The old stick was thrust
Down, down, down,
Down to the ground
He lay there for years and was kicked round and round
Until one day when an old friend fell to the ground

CONNECTIONS SPECIAL FEATURE
Young Writers' Showcase
(continued)

My Snowy Day

Justin Hawkins

(5th Grade)

When it snowed, I was happy
because I could finally start throwing
snowballs at people.

Last year my brother hit me
with a piece of ice
and I never could get him back,

but I sure got him back this time.
I threw a curve snowball
at him and hit him,
and his face was very cold
and he had a red mark.

I felt bad for a little,
but I got over it
and so did he.

CONNECTIONS SPECIAL FEATURE

Young Writers' Showcase

(continued)

Going Through

Ema Heinhorst

(5th Grade)

It's 6:15 a.m., and I'm on an adventure to St. Oobleck, where the rivers are always whitish-brown and sticky, which is sad, because all the goldfish get stuck ...

"Whoa whoa whoa, where'd you get that color from?" asked Anastasia.

"I got it from my imagination," said Dawn. Well, anyway, back to the story:

To get there, you have to go through the happy forest to where the trees always play, and on your way through the trees, make sure to play with them for a second, or they will get confused.

After that, you have to go under a bridge (watch out for the trolls because if you don't you might not have anymore toes). Go through the jungle where the marshmallows are painting the flowers yellow. Please don't mess them up or they might get yellow paint on their white fluffy skin. Go past the mushroom town.

Be careful to not...

"I know, I know..." step on the houses, or the little mushroom people," said Dawn and Anastasia.

Well, anyways, go past the mushrooms to see Peter Pan and Tinker Bell perform ...

“I’m telling you, Anastasia, watch out for the crowd, where there are sheep and cows,” said Dawn.

Go through the gingerbread house.

“Can I eat the candy?” asked Anastasia.

“No Way! Then you probably won’t make it to St. Oobleck.”

Go past the cloud houses.

“Can I ride the clouds?” asked Anastasia.

“Uhh, I tried that once and it didn’t end up well,” said Dawn.

After that, you have to go through a danger zone...

Dun dun dunnnnn! You have to go in a tunnel, but at a certain time. It has to be 5:45 p.m. If you don’t go at that time, there will be four consequences: 1. You will be three dimensional. 2. You will turn flat. 3. You will turn into a marshmallow. 4. You will eventually melt.

So, be careful, and look at the time. If you go at the wrong time, there is something to save you.

“What’s that?” asked Anastasia.

“It’s THE ROLLER COASTER!” said Dawn.

It’s up the mountain, where the snow flows with the river. In some areas there’s sand by the beach. There’s a different season everywhere you go or look.

“So the roller coaster?” asked Anastasia.

“Right,” said Dawn.

“You climb the mountain? Wouldn’t that be hard?” asked Anastasia.

“No,” said Dawn. “If you get lucky, magical steps appear, if your journey is going well.”

After that, you will end up by the french fries.

“Can I eat them?” asked Anastasia.

“I’m not sure, but you can try if you want,” said Dawn.

“Is there any food that you know I can eat?” asked Anastasia.

“I’m not sure,” said Dawn.

So, anyway, follow the arrows on some signs, but you have to find them because this is not an easy trip.

“What if I can’t find all the signs?” asked Anastasia.

“Then you don’t find the signs. You can still get there,” said Dawn.

“How?” said Anastasia.

You can go through a maze. It’s easy, but really hard! If you get lost, there are marshmallow buttons that bring down sticks, and if you grab them, you can teleport out.

“Let me guess, there’s going to be a unicorn or Pegasus to somewhere?” said Anastasia.

“Yep,” said Dawn.

Once you get out of the maze or follow all the signs, you’ll reach the unicorn. You will notice her by her beautiful rainbow hair. Then you get on the unicorn...

“How will I get on?” asked Anastasia.

You get on the Pegasus and fly onto the unicorn.

“When you try it, it’s really easy,” said Dawn.

When you get on the unicorn, you follow the path of rainbows. There are five rainbow paths. You follow the one with all the colors in order. The order is: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. After that, it will start raining skittles.

“Is there anything to protect me from getting hit?” asked Anastasia.

“Yes,” said Dawn. There are little umbrella hats that are made of donuts.”

“Will that work?” asked Anastasia.

“Sure, it is a magical land, afterall,” said Dawn.

Back to the story:

You get off the unicorn when you're away from the skittles. Then you go on top of a beautiful bridge.

"How will I know what bridge?" asked Anastasia.

"Trust me, you will just know," said Dawn.

When you are on the bridge and see the stars light up in the night sky, and you see the full moon shining on the navy blue water, you are in the right spot, in the heart of the city of St. Oobleck.

...And, the marshmallows painting the flowers yellow, turned out perfect.

The End.



CONNECTIONS SPECIAL FEATURE
Maryland Writers' Association
Young Writers' Contest Co-Winner
Category: College Fiction

**My Sappy, Cheesy,
Super Lame, and
Absolutely Perfect
Love Story**

Corrine Hickin

“I love you.”

How many stories have started this way? And why? I think it is because the first time someone tells you they love you, the world stops for a moment. Suddenly, only three words make up the beginning, middle, and end of the world. This immaculate human being sitting next to or across from or adjacent to you has swallowed two, three, maybe four times and decided that if they did not spit out these eight letters, the very breath that keeps them alive will stop flowing from mouth to lung.

I also think it is because although these three words are very literal, they have a million meanings tucked between their curves and spaces and straight lines. Some believe these words are spoken too soft, too crudely, too often. There is a finality in the words. Sometimes they seem to say, “You are mine, and I am yours. I never want to be without you.” This meaning can come from a mother. It can come from a brother, or a friend, or a daughter. They can come from a stranger,

although, admittedly, they will be absorbed with apprehension and wariness. Regardless of how they arrive, these words are beautiful and special.

I have heard a boy utter these words for the first time countless times. Pardon my apparent conceit; I don't mean to come off as an archetype of a woman men fall in love with. I simply mean to point out that the time I am about to reference was not cheapened by the stumbling tongues and awkward embraces before it. I do not believe that this admission of infatuation is a gimmick to convince a girl to climb in bed with you or share the television remote for once. I believe with all of my heart that if these words take up residence on the tip of the tongue, they deserve to be expelled with brilliant stupidity. If you love someone, for God's sake, tell them! Always tell them. Never hold back, or the hesitation will slowly rot and cause halitosis.

We were lying in my parents' front yard on the thirteenth of August, tangled up in each other on top of these awful, smelly, hay mats meant for days at the beach. We thought to use a blanket, but the ground was wet with dew. It was late enough in the evening that my neighbors had their porch lights turned out. The air had just enough of a chill that I could use it as an excuse to snuggle up even closer to his chest. Stars speckled an otherwise clear sky, and the moon smiled sideways. Crickets chirped, sprinklers sprinkled, and some far-off dog barked to a seemingly urgent tune. We were watching a meteor shower. We were not having very good luck.

Ten days prior, we had decided to be boyfriend and girlfriend. We met five years ago, became friends, and then became even better friends. We had a hard time deciding when exactly we stopped seeing each other as buddies and started wanting to make out behind tool sheds and porch swings.

The first shooting star flew by, and I giggled and pointed right to it. He did not see it in time and cursed at his poor

timing. I nuzzled his neck and took a deep breath. I thought about how good it felt to share this sappy moment with him.

“I think I might be falling in love with you,” I murmured, and I immediately felt embarrassed. Ten days in and I was already admitting the overwhelming adoration I had for him. Surely he would laugh it off. Surely he would tease me and we would forget this slip. Surely the next shooting star would come and rescue me from my embarrassment.

He said nothing for what felt like hours. He squeezed me affectionately, but it felt more like an acceptance of an unspoken apology than anything else. I scoured the sky, looking for any other excuse to wipe away my blunder with a new conversation. The quiet seeped through my clothes and made me itchier than the hay mat did.

He took a deep breath and I think I visibly flinched. Here it comes, I thought. The never-ending joke that would come from my stupid, trigger-happy tongue. I buried my head in his chest.

“I love you.”

What?

If my life were a musical, I would have broken into song. I would have done a dozen cartwheels and kissed a stranger on the cheek and stood with my arms outstretched on the edge of a mountain while the camera panned out to reveal a meadow full of purple flowers. I was euphoric. Most people feel this way after such a perfect sentence is directed at them.

I noticed he was shaking. I knew it wasn't from the cold: the shock of declaring such a powerful thing so soon must have sent him into a panic. Sure, I said that I thought I might be falling in love with him, but he admitted he was already there.

How long had he felt this way? If I had not said anything, would we be sitting here in this blissful silence, cogs and gears

whipping around and around at breakneck speeds in our heads? Ten days is a very short period of time to decide you love someone. But is it?

I looked up at him, and maybe it is because I am a writer, or maybe it is because I relish in romance, but I took this moment and memorized it. I remember how the right corner of his mouth clasped to his cheek a millimeter higher than the left, and the way he looked at me, his eyes full of fear, anticipation, and disbelief in his own admission. I remember the way his hand held mine so tight that it started to cramp. I remember how uncomfortable my legs felt on the stiff, prickly mat. I was cold. He was warm. It felt like a dream.

This feeling that I am failing to aptly describe is the very reason I implore anyone and everyone to share their love with those who deserve it. There is not a better feeling in the world than learning you make someone's sun shine a little brighter than it did before they met you. If you feel like a fool, so be it! Be a fool, and I promise, it will provide you with the greatest relief you have ever felt.

"I love you too," I said. We hugged, and shooting stars lit up the sky (I'm not even kidding, a shooting star passed by while this happened) and all felt right with the world. We were two idiots in love, watching our own love story unfold. An audience might have clapped.

As if in accordance with my previous musing, my sister barreled outside to join our date. She plopped down next to me and even went as far as to put her left hand on top of our joined hands.

"Hey guys! What's up?"

She knew exactly how obnoxious her interruption was, but she did not mind. She launched into an animated monologue about how gross we were for having such a cheesy date. We laughed with flushed cheeks and racing hearts.

Nothing could cheapen this perfect evening, not my sister, and not even my mother, when she came out and took up another space on our musty mats.

Love stories are overdone. They have gone from refreshing and hopeful to cliché and formulaic and back again. I love love stories because I love love. Not everyone feels the same way, but I wish everyone did. The world might be a happier place if more people knew they were loved.

The four of us stayed out for quite a while watching the meteor shower, and while my sister and my mother joked at our expense and clambered around to point out a shooting star or two, the two of us sat in blissful silence, happy to have each other to love.

CONNECTIONS SPECIAL FEATURE
Maryland Writers' Association
Young Writers' Contest Co-Winner
Category: College Fiction
(continued)

Talking with Pets

James Walls

I happen to be one of those people who talks to their pets as if they are humans. Dogs, in particular, are great to talk to because they just sit there and listen to you while you pet them for moral support. Sometimes, they will even talk back to you.

So, naturally, when I hear my cat meow at me one night, I meow back. As usual, she has a lot to say. Hannah, my dog, has gone to bed upstairs with Mom and Dad for the first time. Now it is Toastie's turn to come out. I pet her around her neck, then walk over to her food dish.

"There you go, Toastie," I say to her as I plop a can of chicken dinner into her dish. Toastie enjoys chicken dinner, so she digs right in.

As I walk back to the couch in the other room, I hear sharp, repetitive squeaks. "Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry, Squeaky!" I shout. I scramble to the fridge to grab some kale, then walk over to the table in the nearby room. Squeaky, our little guinea pig, is leaning on the door of her cage placed on top of this table. I fish some kale out of the bag I am holding, then present it to her, placing it on the fresh bedding beside her. She sniffs it apprehensively. "There you go. You happy now?" I say.

She's turning four this weekend, I think to myself. Squeaky was a Black Friday gift for the family. She was an excitable

animal, often running around her cage. She would let us know if she was not fed at dinner time. Whenever she got her kale, or a bowl of salad, or even some dry kibble, she would dash over to check it out. If there were tomatoes or cucumbers, she would dig them out and haul them to her house, as if to cherish the treat. She would always ask for more if she knew she would get some.

Tonight, however, she stares at the food and I. *She probably wants to eat in peace*, I think. “Good night, little guinea,” I say to her. Closing the cage door, I walk to my laptop in the living room. The fan is on despite the cold night, and I would rather be sheltered in my bed under my unusually thick covers. I haul my belongings upstairs to my room, and collapse into my bed.

Next morning, as I eat my breakfast, I glance inside Squeaky’s cage and see some green lying on the bedding. As I draw closer to investigate, I see the kale, as I placed it, untouched. *That’s weird*, I whisper to myself. Squeaky sees me and comes out of her sleep to greet me. Today, she looks a bit tired, as if she had a rough sleep. Her usually smooth fur is sticking up in a few places and she seems to be moving slower. “Hi, Squeaky,” I tell her. Reaching in to pet her, I touch her greasy fur. Hannah, happy to see me, jumps on my back. I have to close the cage door and turn around, getting a face full of kisses from the jubilant dog.

“Did you like sleeping upstairs last night?” I say to her. Mom is sitting nearby and she says, “You know, it was weird, but I figured it out.” On good days, Mom talks to us about the pets as if the words were coming from the pets themselves. On the days where she is home, she talks to the guinea pig and the dog. Squeaky likes to talk back to her on these days, but she stays silent, knowing Mom is talking to Hannah this time.

Looking at the time, I dismiss myself from the dog and guinea. Today, I have to go to Leonardtown. Saying my good-byes to the pets and my mother, I grab my keys and step

outside into the chilly, dreary November morning air.

A few days later is Thanksgiving. We have our annual family dinner today in Easton. This year, my mother has baked a creamy macaroni and cheese. The heavy amount of cooking makes Hannah drool. She does not normally drool, being a typically clean dog. Even so, I have to watch her, shouting “No” whenever she jumps up to the counter. She sniffs each of our bags curiously as we pack them, hoping there will be goodies for her. I fold up her crate while she watches. She knows when the crate is folded up, she gets to go on a car ride and meet people.

Toastie and Squeaky have to stay, unfortunately, since they do not do well with long trips. As I walk over to Squeaky’s cage with the bag of tomatoes, the kale from a couple days ago is still intact, but droopy and grimy from age. I take this out and replace it with two more leaves, as well as a couple tomatoes. Squeaky shambles out of her house and blandly sniffs the tomatoes. Her fur is even more spiky today, and she seems to be rather slow navigating the bedding. She shrinks back to her house without touching a single item.

We return Friday night. My brother and I am up after my parents have gone to bed. After feeding the cat, I look inside Squeaky’s cage, where both tomatoes remain untouched. She lifts her head and peers out of her house at me, but does not do much else. I offer her a tomato, with which she does nothing. I drop the tomato inside her house, hoping she will eat it while I am gone.

Tonight, my brother and I have agreed to sleep downstairs. While he plays Call of Duty on the Xbox, I creep upstairs and grab both our blankets. After a while, my brother turns off the Xbox and covers himself up on the couch. I do the same, listlessly watching a playlist of YouTube videos and thinking uneasily about my guinea pig, until I finally drift off to sleep, making a mental note to check on Squeaky in the morning.



Next morning, I wake up rather late. The rest of my family is up. My father and mother are watching television, while my brother plays a first-person shooter on the office computer. Black Friday was yesterday, and with it, Squeaky's fourth birthday. After breakfast, I walk over to the cage. There is no movement when I open the cage door, nor when I lift her house and move it to the side. Squeaky is lying on her side with her hind legs stretched out. She does not move or wake up when I pet her or try to roll her over. Inviting my mother to my side, I show her the lifeless animal.

Her expression melts. "She's gone," she says. We invite my father over to the cage and call my brother's name. Upon hearing the news, my brother bursts into tears. We huddle together while Hannah tries to push herself into the middle, unsure of what to do. Toastie, typically shy, pokes her head out from behind the couch to investigate the commotion.

We sit down, myself on the floor, my brother behind me on the couch. Hannah sniffs the lifeless guinea pig, hoping for movement, hoping to play. I tell her to stop, but I cannot prevent her from sniffing the body. Hannah flops onto the floor in a fit, as if she realizes the circumstances. Toastie, invisible to us, hides behind the couch once more. My mother and brother, red-rimmed from crying, begin to recount.

"Remember when we got her, and you named her Squeaky Horse, because she ate hay like a horse?" Mom tells him. I listen intently.

"Remember when she would squeak for dinner?" he says back.

"Yes, and she would be right there at the door to grab her cucumbers and tomatoes."

"Chris, remember when I took her out of the cage at my party, and she peed on one of my friends?" I say. We all laugh at this.

I grab a shoebox from my room and stuff some newspaper in it. I sprinkle some bedding on top and place the resting animal inside. I place all sorts of vegetables around her: tomatoes, celery, kale, carrots, and other goodies she likes. I take the box to the family room table, hesitating for several seconds in a silent prayer before finally placing it on the table.

My mother and father approach us while we sit in our living room. "It's time," Mom says. Dad grips a pair of shovels in his hand as we trudge through the lawn to a mound of dirt on the edge of the woods. The sky is tinged a featureless gray, the grass a dull brown tint. We stand together, Hannah included, as my brother plays an emotional elegy from his phone. Dad and I dig a hole while my brother and mother watch in grim silence. As I lower my box into the gaping maw of the earth, I say, "Good-bye, Squeaky Horse. We will miss you."

It is Sunday night. As usual, I am the last one awake. Hannah is asleep upstairs once more. I sit, playing RuneScape on my laptop. The only light in the room comes from my laptop, with tonight's sky providing none. Toastie jumps onto the arm of the couch. I hear her meow through my headphones and reach over to pet her. She rubs against my hand.

"Come here, let's get some food!" I tell her. I grab a random can from the pantry and place it in her food bowl. Tonight's dish is salmon and tuna. Toastie loves fish even more than chicken. As I watch her consume her meal, I cannot help but feel like I am forgetting something crucial. As I start to walk back to the living room, the thought hits me. "Oh my gosh, Squeaky, I forgot about you!" I say. The guinea pig's squeak is silent tonight, but I always feed her regardless.

As I turn my attention to the cage, I realize. There is no squeak to reply to my speech. Taking a deep, solemn breath, I turn off my laptop, clutching it as I lift myself into bed.

CONNECTIONS SPECIAL FEATURE
Maryland Writers' Association
Young Writers' Contest Winner
Category: High School Fiction

His Daughter

Alicia Brosco

Walking briskly home from school on a snowy Tuesday afternoon, I thought about what I would tell my father when I got in the house. He would question every detail, why my face always showed pain, anger, sadness, why my clothes were tattered, looking like they hadn't been washed in months. He would tell me things like, "Perk up. You act as if you lived in jail," and, "Go wash your clothes. You look like a homeless child." Unless you counted a tiny, run-down, hole-in-the-wall structure, as home, then I was homeless. My mother was never around. She died the day I was born, and my father, well, he was far from what they call a parent. Every day, he would sit on the forest green, stained couch in the front room, tipping back one drink after the other. He would just sit there and stare at the door until I got home. He was probably incapable of thinking about anything that actually mattered.

An icy cold gust of wind slapped my face, drawing me out of my thoughts. I had reached the street where my house was at this point. About halfway down the street, I stopped to look out at the busy city of New York, thinking about how different my life would be if my father actually cared. Maybe we would walk down there every once in a while. I turned, and began walking up to my door. I sighed heavily before turning

the knob to go in, mentally preparing for the interrogation I was about to endure. Stepping through the threshold, an all too familiar wave of fear mixed with guilt washed over me. Avoiding eye contact with my father, I attempted to make a run for it up to my room, but he caught me before I even made it to the steps.

“Where are you going?” he asked, sounding genuinely confused. “Don’t you want to spend time with your father?”

“I’d rather go jump off a cliff.” I thought to myself. Stopping in my tracks, I turned around slowly, scowling, but walked over to the couch anyways. If I had ignored him, there would’ve been unnecessary consequences. I plopped down on the couch, as far away from him as I could get without sitting on the floor. As I pulled a notebook from my book bag, my dad looked up. His face was contorted in a strange way, one eyebrow raised, a crooked smile, and still an angry, questioning look in his eyes. If this was his attempt at looking like he actually cared about my life, then he was failing tremendously. When I began writing, my father set down the bottle he was holding and inched closer to me. He had gotten so uncomfortably close, that my wrists started to tremble uncontrollably. I tried gathering up my things but the shaking would not allow me to do so.

“Let me help you,” my father insisted, reaching his arm out to grab my things from me.

“No thank you. I got it,” I said in a rushed, low tone.

“Come on,” he demanded under his breath, once more attempting to grab the notebook and the unorganized stack of papers out of my hands.

This escalated to the point where all that could be heard was a mix of words, being shot out like bullets. I sprang off the couch, ready to run out the door.

“Carrie, I am your father, it is my job to help you when you need it!” I heard him scream from behind me.

“Well I’m afraid you’re trying a little too hard!” I yelled back at him, pausing on my way towards the door. “I don’t want your help anyways.”

That sent him over the edge. He came flying towards me, grabbing me by my arms, pulling so hard I thought my shoulders might pop out of socket. Slamming me into the coffee table, he continued to scream in rage and embarrassment. The glass shattered beneath me, shards slicing my skin like a thousand miniature swords. Pain shot down the back of my neck as I picked a piece of glass out of my head. I sat in the middle of the floor, my head buried in my knees.

“What is your problem?!” he demanded. “When I try to help you, you take it! No questions! And you certainly don’t get up. I talk to you, you listen! I’m done putting up with your crap Carrie! Done! If your mother was alive, I would’ve disowned you by now. Let her deal with you. It never ends with you, does it? Now sit there. And don’t move!”

His words hit me like bullets, each one leaving me with a stinging pain in my chest. So there I sat on the cold floor, still folded up into a ball. Tears streaming down my face, I let my thoughts fester. There’s so many things I wish I could say to my father. But he wouldn’t listen anyway. He never cared and he never will. He keeps me as his outlet, an object to channel his anger into.

“Will it ever get better?” I would often ask myself. All my life, all I’ve heard was “You’re not good enough, and you never will be.” Every day, my father would tell me that I would never have any worth in this world unless I did everything that he wished for me to do. I would always question his grip on reality, as most of the things he told me to do were irrational, and would end in serious consequences.

Suddenly, there was a forceful crashing sound, followed by a heavy thud. Rushing into the kitchen, I found my father sprawled out on the white tile floor, lying in a sea

glass, shattered, and dirty kitchen utensils. I just stood there, staring with my mouth hanging open, but not in shock, or even fear. Only for a moment was I concerned. After seeing minimal blood trickling down my fathers' forehead, I thought about if it was serious enough to call an ambulance, but that thought quickly left my mind, and was replaced by my morbid thoughts.

"Serves you right. Should've happened a long time ago. Maybe it would've knocked some sense into you," I muttered out loud to my unconscious father.

A few hours later, I was perched on the bottom step of the stairs, a book bag full of clothes and some food I managed to gather from the kitchen, on my back, the house phone in my hand. I had been sitting there staring at it for at least 30 minutes now. If I called the number to have my father taken away, there would be no turning back. Despite everything he's said and done to me, he is still my father. I don't know if I could really turn him in to the cops. But then I remembered, "You'll never amount to anything," and that's what made my decision. I hit the send button with confidence, and waited for the other line to pick up.

"Hello, 911, what is your emergency?" the operator said clearly.

"Hello, my name is Carrie, I'd like to report my—" That's all I got in before my father was right behind me yelling.

"What do you think you're doing?!"

I whipped my head around, eyes going wide at the sight of my fathers' beet red face, and bulging vein.

"Miss, is everything ok?" the lady, still on the phone asked.

"Hold on," I whispered, not really directing it towards the lady, or my father.

A million things raced through my mind all at once. What was I going to do?

Involuntarily, I sprang up off the step, heading towards the door, ready to run. The door was locked though, and my violently shaking hands would not allow me to unlock it. I turned, looking to see what my father was going to do next. When I saw what he had in his hands, I realized that I should've pressed that call button sooner. There was still silence on both ends of the phone. I gripped the knob tightly, staring back into my fathers' angry face.

"Carrie. If you take one more step towards that door," my father warned intensely, pointing the black barrel of a handgun at my feet.

"I am no longer your slave!" I screamed right in his face, letting as much anger out as I could.

"That's it!" he yelled throwing his arms up. On the way down, his finger "slipped," and out shot the bullet, piercing a hole in my left shoulder. I fell to the ground, head pounding, my vision going fuzzy. The deafening sound of the trigger being pulled back, and the bullet being released, left a ringing in my ears, as I slipped in and out of consciousness. Everything was spinning, and I could hear faint sirens blaring in the background. After that, the world went black.

I woke up hours, maybe even days later, with a strange contraption on my shoulder, that went all the way down my arm. I looked up and saw a woman sitting in a chair in the corner of the room. She was watching the TV that was mounted to the pale blue wall of the hospital room. I studied her features. Her straight, brown hair, came to just above her shoulders, her eyes were a deep blue shade, and her tan skin told me that she didn't live around here. She looked awfully familiar, a lot like myself with her brown hair and blue eyes. She looked over at me, catching my gaze. She stared back at

me looking like she knew me from somewhere too, but not in a confused way. I could tell she knew who I was, and I felt I knew her too. I just couldn't place it.

"Carrie." she exhaled, sounding relieved. She walked over and sat at the foot of my bed, taking my hand. Not thinking, and puzzled about who this woman was, I blatantly asked her, "Who are you?"

"I'm your mother." she said with tears in her eyes. "I'm so sorry this happened to you."

I just stared with wide eyes. There were so many questions I had, but I didn't want to overwhelm her. Questions like "Where have you been all my life?" and "Why didn't you come for me sooner?" would overwhelm a person, especially in this situation. So instead, all I said was, "I thought you were dead."

"Is that what he told you?" she asked annoyed.

"Yeah," I replied, feeling sorry for her.

"What has she gone through?" I wondered.

We talked for hours, and she told me about how my father became involved in drinking when he found out that she was having a baby. He got angry at her, said it was her fault, and that he wanted nothing to do with a child. She explained that the day I was born, she had told her doctors that he became abusive, that she wanted to leave him, and take me with her. They had refused for her to take me with her, so she left on her own, vowing that she'd come back for me one day. She told me that she had moved back to Nebraska with her sister, and that she's been living there ever since. Up until now, she had heard nothing about how I was doing with my father, or even if I was still alive. Had the bullet been any lower, I wouldn't have been. She kept repeating how sorry she was about leaving me to fend for myself with such an irresponsible person, and for being so irresponsible herself.

"I forgive you." I said hugging her.

No matter what she did by leaving me, she saved me from a life of turmoil, and thanks to her, I now have a chance at happiness. Anything is better than having a chronic fear of the unknown living inside you.

“So, how does coming back to Nebraska with me sound? I’ll even teach you how to ride a horse once your shoulder gets better,” my mom asked.

“That sounds great,” I smiled, “I get out of the hospital on Friday.”

“I can’t wait,” my mom said excitedly, a big smile spreading across her face.

Out of everything I’ve learned through this experience, I think the most important thing is that no matter what you endure in life, it is your choice how you want to let it affect you. It’s time to put the past behind me, and take my experience as a blessing rather than a burden.

CONNECTIONS SPECIAL FEATURE
Maryland Writers' Association
Young Writers' Contest Winner
Category: College Poetry

Times Have Changed

Emily Smith

Oh how the times have changed
I can't look at a book without judging it
the colors that cover, the size, and even the shape
Can't even begin to explain the reasoning behind the judgments
I'm a kind person, there's no Regina George backhanded
compliments here
I accept those for who they are if they have the courage to show me
They say you need to be on the right side of history
but to be "right" or "correct" is determined by a majority
All of these ideas are drilled into our heads
before we can even comprehend what is being said

Oh how the times have changed
Where not fitting in to someone's norm causes us to feel dread
I see it all the time
Two girls in history class making fun of the girl across the room
just because she doesn't fit into anyone's mold her own person
If only we had more people like that
These two girls don't understand what it is to be your own person
I even heard about one of them getting mad because one day
they didn't match outfits like they planned
Clap it up everyone, conformity at its finest

Oh how the times have changed
It's no longer countries going to war with each other
It's now groups wanting control of what they've been denied
A terrorist group that commits obscene acts of violence because
demands weren't met
I Stand With Paris.
Planned attacks communicated through the messenger feature on
a PlayStation
What has technology done to us?

Oh how the times have changed
Technological advancements meant to connect us
Have brought us that much farther apart
It seems more interesting to be bored staring at a phone all day
Than to be out and about in the amazing world we call home
Rumi the mystic poet spoke of imaginative freedom
He wrote for everyone, not a one exempt
"Love kills us, but the lack of love eats away at us much faster"
If this so speaks the truth, then are we our own destroyers?
We are merely depriving ourselves of a basic need
You were supposed to advance us, not set us back
Way to go technology...

Oh how the times have changed
We're becoming fat, dumb, and happy
Making poor decisions and claiming "yolo"
Watching terrible things happen before our eyes
And either turning away or pulling out our phones
Instead of helping
What happened to giving the shirt off our backs?
To make time to kick back and relax?
Give me one good reason to not try to unplug humanity
Wait, you can't?
Oh... How the times have changed

Try to tell me I'm beautiful
I won't believe you
Compliment my skirt
I'll think you deceiving
Say 1,000 times you wish you had my body
I'll think you're crazy

Tall and skinny
Everyone's like "you should be a model"
And I just laugh it off
Small breasts, slim waist
Blemished skin, hairy arms
Need I go on?
Everyone's like "love yourself and your body"
How's that possible if everything targets people's insecurities?
I look in the mirror
Only imperfections are seen
The society I was born into constantly critiques
Every minuscule detail of the body and makes those "different"
feel like freaks

Since when are women thought of as objects?
Hmmm, let's see... Oh right, it's in most parts of history
Our importance came from our ability to bear children
but even then the boys were the valued ones
Now, the guy/girl actions are totally dealt with in double
standards
Guys can go out with their friends no problem
Girls it's "I need every detail of tonight before you MIGHT be
able to go"
Guys can wear shirts with half naked women on them
Girls get reprimanded for showing bare shoulders or leg above
the knee
Guys can 'get around' and be praised for it

Girls admit a small amount of promiscuity and she's labeled
a whore

Tell me, where's the disconnect?

You wonder why sometimes I'm shy?

Try hearing the whispers people say

Making fun of that which I cannot change

Look at those glasses, hasn't she heard of contacts?

Why yes I have and I've asked for them

But I didn't ask for lenses to be put on my face at 6 years old

Fast metabolism prevents me from gaining actual weight

So not much chance for building muscle

My face- healing from a bad reaction to keratin this summer

Completely broke out, I dreaded leaving the house

Make up made it seem worse

I felt so helpless

No one said anything when I was in public

But of course I saw their glances

Since when does it matter so much how I look to other people?

Yeah I have my insecurities

Name one person that doesn't

A new favorite quote of mine is

"It's none of my business what other people think of me"

Imagine if more people thought like this

Women wouldn't second-guess everything someone says
to them

Women would have more freedoms
should have more freedoms
could have more freedoms
but society says no

Try to tell me society can change

And I won't believe you.

CONNECTIONS SPECIAL FEATURE
Maryland Writers' Association
Young Writers' Contest Winner
Category: High School Poetry

Dream Land

Elmira Karimi

Why is it hard?
Why we just can't...?
We are a group just like a band.

Imagine as I say
Even if it's hard
A world full of happiness,
And no one says "cut".

Imagine a world where we can be free
Where privilege isn't ,
Money or power
I'm just being me.

Where you don't have to run
From your face
Or who you are
We can all be happy, every second can be fun.

Just imagine there's no tangle
No one cares about your race
Because we all see an angel.

Where the answer to unity,
Isn't the riot police
We aren't worried about war
Hate is replaced by love.

There is no Bomber or Shell
What's a Nuclear Weapon?
What's a Bomb?
And there's no reason to fail.

No kid would leave behind
Their life on a Land Mine
No one sees any fault
Just like we are all blind.

Just imagine we all are,
Free, forever free
We are painless
No one's heart is broken by a bar.

“Cetacean Stranding” isn't
The headline of the news
ISIS didn't kill anyone
Not just because they couldn't.

Imagine everyone's smiling
Because there's no reason to cry
Everyone has the right to be flying.

Imagine we all can love
There is no broken heart,
No one is starved
Because everyone is loved.

Imagine there is no murder
Why would we kill each other?
Where it is fiction and fable,
To be in jail, no, never.

Just imagine even if it's a crime
Even if your throat will be
Full of Kohl by saying it.

Imagine a world where
All the wars are being busy
By having ceasefire.

There is no king in the world
People all can be equal,
A grain should be divided
Between all the people.

Imagine there is no border
The whole world can be home,
We can say we are all human
There would be no rule or order.

Just imagine you can be
The interpretation for this dream,
We can all move for an inch
Just imagine everyone is happy.





The Less Traveled Road *by Mary Prather*

Orange Light

Mallory Haselberger

On the dimly lit street, she stands—
arms at her sides, orange light glows on her hair
unaware of her exposure in the dark.

The grass is still wet from the early rain:
green and brilliant, blowing in the gentle breeze
of the delicate winds of the early autumn evening.

A leaf crunches underfoot and reality returns,
the bright stars above and the damp pavement below,
her footsteps fall in a rhythm—quiet, bare, through the dusk.
The orange light returns to create an aura above her head,
heavenly thoughts dance, although her appearance is
uncertain

She is hopeful, certain—absolute.

The houses pass, overbearing and dark, looming far over
her head,
but yet, as each goes by, they suddenly appear much more
like home.

Backed with light, a smiling face emerges, a window to
the unknown
depths behind the walls—quiet, but resolute facades of
foreign lives.

On the dimly lit street, she strolls—
the night closes in, darkness surrounding the once familiar
scenes of light before the depth of the twilight.

The orange light grows brighter, illuminating the path
for her to continue through the night.

When I Hit Hot Water, I Become a Tea Bag

Rebecca Elbert

Recently, I have been having conversations with complete strangers. These conversations punch me straight in my limbic system, and then leave me with a better understanding of myself. It's almost like the world is full of these secret mind reading heroes. These people have the ability to randomly read my mind. These interactions happen to me at random times. For instance, I might be standing in a grocery store, or grabbing a cup of coffee at the local gas station, and then suddenly, out of nowhere, a person starts to talk to me. It is never out of malice, but it often leaves me breathless inside.

A couple years back, during a hot Southern Maryland summer, I was pumping gas for my car at a local gas station. I was standing there pumping the gas by hand because the self-fueling lever had broken. An old man pulled up to the pump next to me. He was driving a tan four-door sedan. He slowly crawled out and started to fuel it up. He was wearing cowboy boots, blue jeans and a beige cowboy hat. His face was covered in wrinkles; it looked like the skin itself held a lifetime of memories. I remember standing there unsure if I should start up an idle conversation. I could comment about the weather, or ask how his day was going. Ultimately, I decided to politely ignore him. Then, the old man started to talk to me.

He proceeded to tell me that I reminded him of his great grandmother. She had grown up in Oklahoma and had a rough life. However, she was strong and independent. As he was talking, I stood there listening. I was intrigued by everything this man was saying. He then proceeded to tell me a saying she used to always say, "A woman is like a teabag;

she never knows how strong she is until she hits hot water”. It was as if that saying was her life motto. I smiled and told the man to have a nice day once my car was finished fueling.

Once in my car, I started to actually process the conversation I had just been a part of. It was as if the man was an earthworm and had unearthed all the stress that currently rested in my brain. The fact was I had been stressed for weeks. My husband is an officer in the United States Navy and at that point in time we were waiting on orders that could move us across the United States, even maybe the world. It was the moving part that scared me. I didn't know where I was going to be living nor did I know how far I would be from my family. The littlest questions would send me over the edge. I was essentially an emotional monster, biting off the heads of innocent people who would ask me simple life questions.

Question's such as, where would I be living? Would I know anyone at my new location? Would I be able to come home for the upcoming holidays? I couldn't answer these simple questions. However, the conversation the old man had with me somehow reassured me that I would be fine. It seemed that even though I was currently in hot water, I was strong enough to survive it.

I believe the old wrinkly man possessed the ability to read my mind. Maybe the man didn't see the stress that had taken residence in my body. Maybe he was just referring to the way I was able to persevere through the fuel handle being broken, but, in that moment, that man became my hero. His words were able to reach inside me and fix the stress that puddled around in my brain. I now know when I hit hot water I become a teabag. Part of me may leak out; you might even see the emotion on my face. But, in the end I always survive.

Morning Glory

Kate Lassman

The name of the morning glory
glows like a sunrise when said.
Its leaves flow over the trellis,
a cascade of heart-shapes
eager to bask in early light.
And whether in rain or wind or fog or sun,
the celestial azure and white blooms
unfurl, rejoice in a new day
simply because it is
and they are here to experience it.



Untitled by *Liliana Zumbrun*

Conversation with a Tree

Sean Rada

Hello, my new-yet-old friend.
How is the new spring wind
Treating your weathered bark?
Do you miss the snow
Clinging desperately to your limbs?
Or the rains of Autumn
Quenching the thirst of your leaves?

Would you mind if I asked some questions?
No, I didn't think you would.
Do you remember what it was
To be a young sapling, growing your roots?
Were you ever stepped on?
Did it hurt?
Was it a man or a woman
That took it upon themselves
To assault such a beautiful
Child of Mother Nature?
Ah, a man, of course—too busy
With the toils of everyday
Life, to watch his footfalls
And take but a moment to
Savor the beginnings of such
An impressive tree—Oh, forgive me
I forgot to mention that
You are a very impressive tree

Your luminous figure sits before me
And I am sat between two beautiful girls
Yet I can't seem to take my eyes
Away from your moss-covered trunk
Even for a moment.

Tell me a story, please.
You must have so many,
Surely you can spare but one.
Tell me of the most beautiful day
You have ever witnessed.
What season was it in?
Do you want to go back, or
Do you revel at the sight of new sunrises?

Who am I? Excuse me,
I forgot that trivial detail.

I am naught but a mere observer.





In Flight by Diane Payne

Transistory

Olivia L. Outlaw

Prologue

A hauntingly dark sky gazed upon the thick forest below. Those woods had once been noble, once grand. The brilliant, green grasses, and joyous fauna had once aided in giving the land its heavenly mystique. For this place that had soothed the soul, fostered bonds, and given birth to mirthful memories was no longer

It had fallen.

The world gripped in the hooked talons of the one who now claimed it. This new master had turned the rivers viscous and red with blood, the soil brittle, and incapable of giving life, and the trees, whose branches once twisted towards the sky in direction of whimsical wonder for anyone who dared desire adventure now hung low, reaching the ground like desperate, broken limbs, begging for help, clinging onto anything living that may pass.

The ruler, the owner, the beast stepped through the sorrowful woodland in silence. Its equine nose and long, serpentine tongue scented the air, looking for traces of fear, sweat, and tears.

The signs of prey.

In the distance a twig snapped.

The beast's ears twitched and slowly moved in the direction of the sound. The muffled noises became clearer as it focused. The dead grass and deceased leaves crunched underfoot as the low hum of dust swirling in the wind filled the night. There were other noises, hushed and urgent.

“Is it still after us?”

“We have to keep moving!”

Voices.

The prey was communicating, discussing their options, and encouraging each other. They believed they had a chance, that the hunter was unaware, but they were wrong, so very wrong. It caused a feeling of dark satisfaction to burrow within the beast's chest. It knew exactly where they were, and it couldn't wait for the pleasurable high that would come from seeing their faces go from shock to horror, to resignation, and then the nothingness of death.

To the beast, there was something beautiful in the futile, last moments of another.

There was no need for more delay.

It was time to feast.

Rising on its haunches, the beast stared into a section of the forest and watched as the world appeared to twist and melt, oozing and collapsing onto itself. They were on the opposite end of the forest, but it would take only moments to warp the world and bring them closer. The beast was in complete control.

It always had been.

In silence, the beast took several, lazy steps forward, moving through the rift it had created before sitting beneath the trees as its quarry approached.

They would meet face on.

Its prey was human. Two males, one with dark skin and short, black hair. The other with flesh whiter than bone and blond hair that stood straight, reminding the creature of fangs.

The former had always been clever, observant, and cynical. It was of little surprise he was one of the last. The latter was clumsy, loud, jocular, and in the beast's eyes, stupid. He should have been devoured ages ago.

The beast could not help the amusement it felt that these two complete opposites would have to work together. They had never been close and a part of the creature dared to feel a little disappointed that they would not provide it with some humor. Perhaps the blond would crack a joke before his neck snapped.

“Stay close we don't know-”

There it was.

The transition.

Surprise, terror, but not resignation.

Not yet.



In the dark skinned man's eyes, there was fire behind that fear, for in his hands was the beast's treasure—a rusted scythe with a crooked, ancient snath.

The beast was perplexed, unsure of how one of its favorite things ended up in the possession of such a feeble creature.

“Are you scared, monster!?” The man asked in a booming voice as his comrade padded up beside him. “You should be, because tonight we get our revenge!”

He charged, aiming for the beast's belly, but with just a flick of its wrist the beast ripped through its opponent, sending him flying into a tree and a torrent of blood raining down onto the land.

The crimson liquid immediately vanished, getting absorbed into the vampiric ground.

“No!” The spike-haired man cried as he ran over to his convulsing friend's side. The beast went to collect its weapon as it heard the dying man utter a pain-filled “R-Run...” to his companion.

It was too late.

The beast had already wrapped its long tail around the ankle of its next target and had hoisted him into the air. Ignoring the screams of panic and pleas for release, the beast unhurriedly approached the bleeding man.

Now came the resignation, the defeat. The inferno in his eyes had dimmed to an ember and the beast couldn't have been more pleased. Gripping the scythe, the beast swung and the man's head fled from his neck.

Hunger moved the creature's legs now as it neared the body. It moved its mouth near the fallen, opened its jaws and paused. Ravenous, though it might have been, the beast did not want flesh. It wanted something better, something much more exquisite. The very essence of every living being.

Souls.

With a long, slow intake of breath, the beast began absorbing the bright, white cloud that emerged from the deceased. With souls came knowledge, and as its muscles tightened and strength grew the beast could recount every event from each of the soul's previous seventeen lives.

Soon the body was gone, there was no blood, no indent in the ground from where the man was slain—nothing, as though he had never existed.

“What did you do...? What did you do to him!?”

There was still one more.

Bringing the tail that was long enough to rival a tree's trunk close, the beast stared deeply into the eyes of the flailing human. “Did we mean nothing to you!? How could you do this to us!? We were your friends! Was it only some sick game!? We could have helped you get out of here, you-”

One bite was enough to silence him.

The beast slowly consumed the soul, but no matter how much it ate, the ever-occurring feeling of emptiness returned, gnawing at the space food should have filled.

Leave Behind

Teddi Custer

When all is past and all is forgotten,
what have I done in life
to leave behind a legacy?

Everyday things hide accomplishments.
You wake and go to work,
get paid, pay bills—
the loop of everyone's life,
a recycling bin of people
doing the same thing.

To view my life now,
do the things I've done
have meaning, or have they
been empty days of wasted space
draining my life?

Punch a new time clock
of goals to set
and start doing them
and be remembered
as the man
who never gave up.



Avian 2 by Karen Smith Hupp

plainly, a bird's eye view

morning's mist creeping
avian perched, awaiting
plein air artist scene

the prize not won

Randolph Bridgeman

at the windixie i stood in front of
the double gumball machines
with a nickel in my hand
hard earned for being a good boy
which had been burning a hole in my pocket
i must have the buck rogers secret decoder ring
i want to be a solar scout
i want to be in the strange world adventure club
part of the secret squadron
but i can't without the decoder ring
my classmates have the ring
& are passing notes back & forth
i'm sure they're talking about me
but in which one should i put my money
both are filled to the equal
there is nothing different between the two
& in all things being the same
both have the secret decoder ring
just pick one for christ sakes my mother says
shoving her s&h green stamps into her purse
i have to get home before your father
& get dinner on the stove
so i chose the one less used
its paint less chipped
its metal less dull
its glass less fingerprinted
then turned the crank with fingers crossed
& opened the cover slowly

to find there in a plastic bubble
a troll doll with blue don king hair
and mischief in its eyes
and a smirk on its face
and a hole between its legs where
the eraser on the end of my #2 pencil fit
& all through 4th grade it watched over
the writing into existence of my own worlds
& that has made
all of the difference



Nice to See You Again

Matt Alexander

I see you both walk through the door, between college students waiting for a drink.

The feelings are high, we're about to graduate.

People yelling, "Congratulations!" and "Happy Hundred Days!"

I watch as you both pass silently through the crowd, and no one else can see you.

I want to talk to you, tell people about you.

They'd think I was going crazy.

I'm standing at the bar with five close friends, ordering drinks while they're telling me about their classes.

People are playing pool, and shoving money into the jukebox. There's a Caps game on in the background.

The night moves on like this—after you order a drink, you talk, then order another, and move through the crowd.

Talk about classes, talk about our future.

Time is standing still at this moment.

I remember walking between mud huts with you both in-country, and then I think about our bars; the Beach Hut and Outrigger.

How I had to carry Benny home one night after too many drinks.

That seven mile walk back to the barracks.

Don't think I forgot about you, Mike, those long and angry
nights filled with sadness.
Throwing up in your truck, telling you to "get fucked."
Laughing about it the next day.

Standing here with people born the year Weezer's, Blue Album
came out.
With Green Day, and Soundgarden on my mind.
Happy for once.

Listening to the joyful shouts, of young adults now.
Who never had to see a child missing a leg.
Or a man shot in the face.

Never had to walk for miles in the heat, without enough food
to make it the days up mountains, and through villages.
Or wait in the dark for water while gunshots and explosions
were heard through the vast desert of time.
Never having to think about a friend taking another human's
life.

I can see you with your drinks now though, happy to see your
brother where he is.
I spent a long time being angry about your deaths.
But life is too long for that.

The journey is almost over boys, there's only a hundred days
left until graduation.
And the end of another chapter.
I can't wait to see you from the stage.
I can't wait to see you from the stage.



Unwind by Judy Angelheart

Contributors

EILEEN ABEL, CSM's vice president of the Division of Academic Affairs, is an avid reader and is fascinated with the interplay of substance and light, both in written word and visual image. She is also a collector of stones and wood.

MATT ALEXANDER and his work is being highlighted in *Connections* for the first time.

JUDY ANGELHEART lives in Southern Maryland where she writes poetry, blogs, and takes pictures when she remembers to, but mostly she lives in the moment. She hangs out with her best friend and husband, Dimitrios. They like to walk, bike, and volunteer in the community. Recently they were named most improved crew members for The Dee of St. Mary's.

SARAI RENEE BRABBLE is a third grader who recently participated in the Young Writers' Showcase.

RANDOLPH BRIDGEMAN is both a CSM and SMCM alumnus. He is the recipient of the Edward T. Lewis Poetry Prize and was a Lannan Fellow for the Folgers Shakespearian Theater 04-05 poetry reading series. His poems have been published in numerous poetry reviews and anthologies. He has four collections of poems, *South of Everywhere* (2005), *Mechanic on Duty* (2008), *The Odd Testament* (2013), and *The Poet Laureate of Cracker Town* (2015). His 5th collection of poems, *The Ugly American*, is forthcoming in March (2016).

ALICIA BROSCO is a freshman at Westlake High School.

BILL BUFFINGTON is a husband, a father, a student veteran (Navy), a member of Phi-Theta-Kappa, and co-founder and vice president of the CSM Veterans Organization. He is also founder and CEO of VConnections, Inc. He loves supporting and assisting CSM Student Veterans and the Veterans and families of the tri-county communities.

SHERBIE CARSON says that the greatest goal that she hopes to accomplish, during this lifetime, is to bring Joy to the heart of hervCreator, and to become a worthy steward of the beautiful children, devoted husband, loyal family members, and faithful friends that He has entrusted to her care.

MIKAYLA CHAPMAN comments about her art, “Words I Should’ve Said,” saying that she has always been a shy, introverted person and regrets not saying things when they needed to be said. “They tell you that when you keep things inside, they can hurt you or effect your mood. I started experiencing anger issues and slight depression,” she said. “So, I took up the offer of writing some things down, rather than saying them, and it helped a lot. The face shows the anger that was kept inside of me, as it spits out all the things I should’ve said.” This piece is made with compressed charcoal, vine charcoal, notebook paper, and fishing wire on white mat board.

TEDDI CUSTER says that her inspirations for writing come from her life and music. Most of the things she has written started out for just song lyrics. As time went on, she saw herself writing more and more, not just for songs. Now poetry and writing are a passion.

REBECCA ELBERT is a stay-at-home Navy wife who spends her days drinking iced coffee, roaming department stores, and walking her Chocolate Labrador Pax (short for Patuxent). She graduated from CSM in 2012. She then attended University of Maryland University College where she received a Bachelor of Arts in English. She currently lives between Maryland and Connecticut. When her husband is out at sea, Rebecca returns to Maryland to substitute teach and coaches field hockey at Thomas Stone High School. She is known for last-minute traveling and reading novels in record-breaking time.

MALLORY HASELBERGER is a junior at the Pennsylvania State University studying English. She graduated from CSM in 2016. She can usually be found with her fingers attached securely to a keyboard, singing along obnoxiously with the radio, or arguing about incorrect grammar usage with someone who doesn't know what they're getting themselves into.

JUSTIN HAWKINS is a fifth grader who recently participated in the Young Writers' Showcase.

EMA HEINHORST is a fifth grader who recently participated in the Young Writers' Showcase.

CORRINE HICKIN is a 20-year-old English major at CSM. She has been writing fiction and non-fiction stories for 15 years now, but this is her first time submitting any of her work to be published. She thinks telling stories is cathartic, and “can’t imagine finding this much joy in anything else.”

MICHAEL PRESCOTT JOHNSON is a third grader who recently participated in the Young Writers’ Showcase.

KATHLEEN JONES is the oldest of five and graduated from a homeschool setting. Currently, she is studying at CSM with the intent to graduate with an Elementary Education major. She enjoys reading and writing and plans to one day return to school for an English Literature degree. She wrote the short story, “Imagination on Fire,” for an English class and her professor suggested she submit it to the magazine.

ELMIRA KARIMI is a sophomore at McDonough High School. She grew up in a Persian family, so poetry has always been a big part of her life. But she started writing poems, in English when she was 13 years old. She thought it would be nice to be part of this contest, and share some of her poems with you.

GRAY KILLEN is an alumnus of the CSM class of 2013 and an alumnus of the Salisbury University class of 2015. He looks forward to teaching at the iARK English school in China in the not-so-distant future.

KATE LASSMAN is an adjunct instructor teaching English composition at CSM at the La Plata Campus and the Waldorf Center. She holds an MFA in poetry from George Mason University and lives in Waldorf with her husband and her very spoiled calico cat.

CHRISTION MADISON, 18 years of age, is an aspiring screenwriter and novelist who is working toward a BA in film. The short story within this spring's magazine is a part of a series of short stories that Christion is working on called "The Destructiveness." Christion began writing at a very young age of eight, and most recently, over the past five years, fell in love with literature and the artistic aspect of writing.

MAIA NERBY is a fifth grader who recently participated in the Young Writers' Showcase.

OLIVIA L. OUTLAW is a CSM student who loves writing "because of the freedom I get and the chance to make my imagination a reality."

DIANE PAYNE is a graduate of CSM and has earned two associate's degrees, two certificates, and three letters of recognition, one being in Photography. Throughout her journey at CSM, she received two scholarships: the Walter Grove II Memorial Scholarship and the Nyce Annual Scholarship. She currently works part-time for Mail, Distribution, and Fulfillment Services in the Marketing Department as the mail electronic support technician and is a photography assistant for the Community Relations Department. Outside of CSM, Diane has her own freelance work, Rising Star Photos. She would also like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has given her the confidence to pursue her photography passion.

MARY PRATHER is a college student who is currently pursuing a degree in English. She enjoys reading, writing, and using photography to capture images of the world around her.

SEAN RADA is an erudite young man with aspirations of being a high school English teacher. His love of English is about as old as his ability to read, and his love of poetry is only younger by a hair.

EMILY SMITH is 19 years old and in her second year at CSM. She uses poetry as a method to control her madness and it works as a great stress reliever.

KAREN SMITH HUPP, assistant vice president of Community Relations at CSM, has made Southern Maryland her home since 1982 when she began working with the *Maryland Independent* as its first copy editor and later as community editor. She has supported several Southern Maryland organizations, producing brochures, newsletters, photography, media releases and annual fund campaigns, as well as coordinating special events. An alumna of The Ohio State University, she earned her bachelor's degree in Journalism/Public Relations. She is anxious to ignite the next generation of PR professionals, and, in that vein, authors several blogs on PR topics, presents workshops and mentors students. A true believer of lifelong learning, she enjoys each new adventure—her most recent, learning the ropes of the backpack journalist.

MICHAEL STENGER is a student in Salisbury, Maryland, writing incessantly, thinking maybe a few of her words ought to be allowed some open air under a fresh set of eyes.

JAMES WALLS is a 21-year-old sophomore at CSM. He grew up reading a variety of literature, ranging from mythology to biography. James hopes to earn his English degree from CSM and transfer to University of Maryland for further studies. In his free time, James enjoys listening to and mixing electronic music.

ELIOT WILLENBORG was born and raised here in St. Mary's County. He started writing around 3rd or 4th grade. In 8th grade his teacher entered a piece of his in the county fair. That piece won 2nd place. More recently, he's been focusing on poetry and fiction based on the LGBT community. He is a transman and writes primarily based off his experiences gained from that.

LILIANA ZUMBRUN is a sophomore at CSM and an aspiring elementary teacher. Painting is an unforgettable memory of the time she lost her uncle three years ago and her grandma the following week and half.



Connections

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