

Impulse.

Impulse is a literary and arts magazine. It is produced by a club that meets weekly and aims to showcase the talents of the student body.

Identity

The theme for this year's publication is Identity. It encapsulates the identity not only of the many authors and artists, but of the magazine itself. We, as a club, seek to grow Impulse's identity as a substantial presence in the school, and as a creative outlet for all those willing and wanting to express themselves. This year's publication is a gateway for future issues and contributors.

Contact Us

Blind Brook High School
840 King Street
Rye Brook , NY 10573

Email: impulse@blindbrook.org

Website: <https://www.bbhsimpulse.weebly.com>

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The Booth

By Mackenzie Drangel

I peer into the auditorium and see the audience settle into their seats,
clutching their “playbills.”

The anticipation kicks in.

Gloriously unaware of what they are about to see.

“Places!”

“Break a leg!”

I slip into the sound booth,
a stuffy room lit by
one dim blue light,
and shut the the real world out behind me.

My focus is on what’s in front of me:

The cast. The crew. The stage. The show.

I slip my headset on,
which feels all too comfortable.

I enter the world of the play,
now under my control as I call the show.

I take a deep breath.

I just tell myself to focus,

house to half,

curtain open,

I just have to be

Here.



Masquerade by Chloe Ng

From Where I Stand

By Carly Kabot

From where I stand I see beyond to where Green ends,
Barren begins, Bombs blare. To where Silence surrounds
souls surrendering to an enemy they cannot see, An enemy
who bleeds the blood of themselves.

From where I stand I ask myself Why it is not me Who was forced to
flee To run
miles and miles and miles and miles more, From my family, From my
home,
From all I have ever known, From the only Identity I ever had. That it
is not me
who has had nine lives, When I wished it would all end. When I
could Bear no
more, See no more Speak no more—

That it was not me who had to leave With nothing other
than the knowledge that to stay meant to
Choose death, But to feel as if death still chose me,
And that luck never would. Alive alone, An orphan of
oppression, ostracized, From everything but the
hopeless hope that brought me here.

Living with the fear that nobody will ever find
me, That I will never know And that they will
never care From where I stand.

The Bubble

By Julia Morlino

An isolating canvas withholding our motives,
Impervious, unaffected by things out of reach—
Differences, excursions, even proposes—
As we stick to status quo, our side of the breach.

Talk is never kept unsaid,
The past engraved in the present,
Neighbors on corners nodding a head
Asking if your Florida trip was pleasant.

Pop!
Uncovered, exposed, yet to be discovered—
Defined into a world of truth and grace,
Almost feeling out of place.

No second guessing or skepticism seen,
Or sameness, frivolousness, and anything in between.
Reaching over our side of the breach
And forgetting about the trip to beach.

Confinement begone with the wave of a wand
Like a magician making doves disappear,
Unpredictability evident at every corner
As the bubble is anything but near.

Déjà Vu

By Agustin Otero

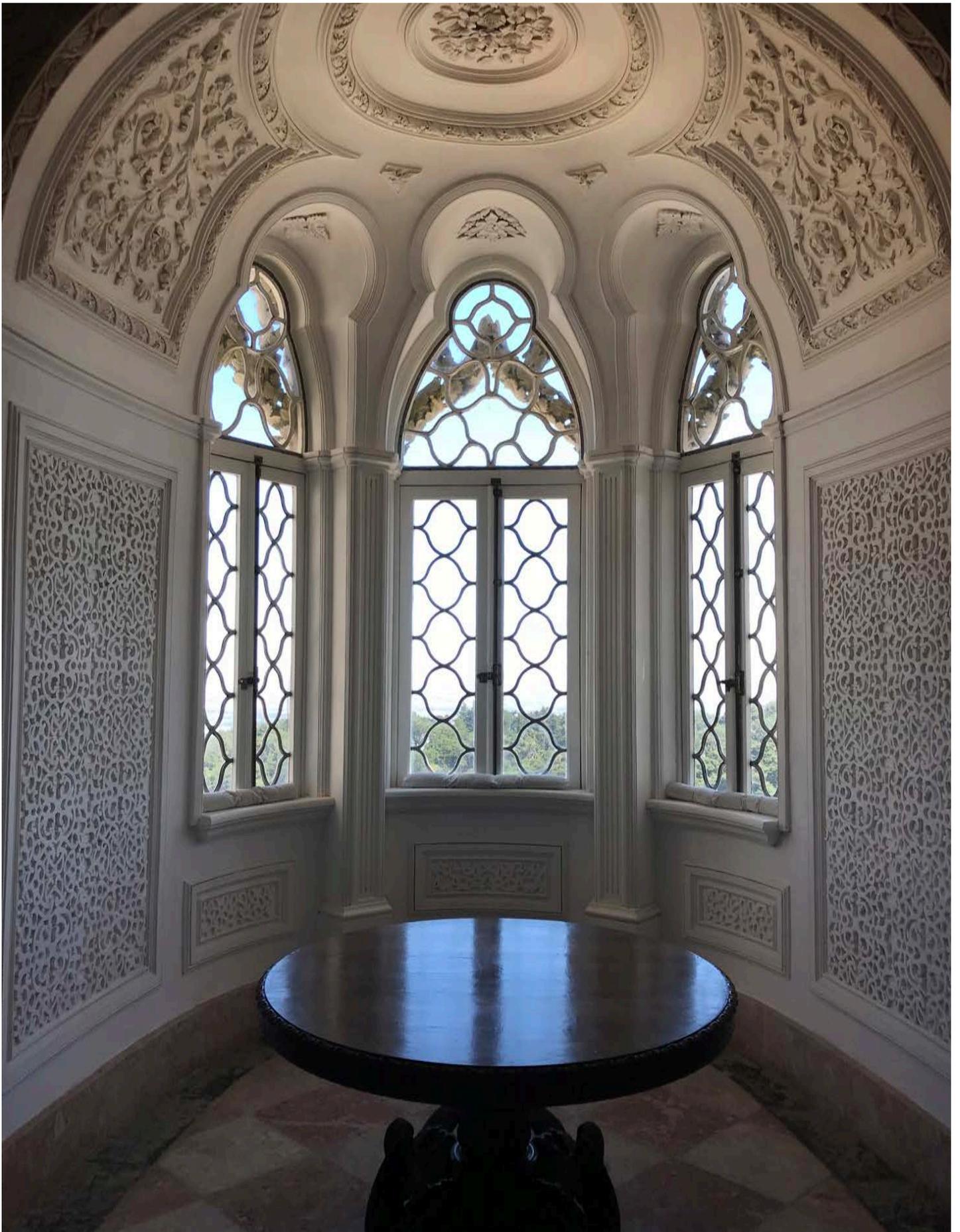
You've been here, I know it,
Said I to me inside my brain,
But only for a second split,
Then pieces scattering like grain.

I feel I know how knowing feels,
Like solid ground or quasi-sound
That rings in ear or supports my heel—
Was it the other way around?

A remembrance of a memory
That draws me to an altered time—
An ancient golden prophecy
That fell in place just like this rhyme.

How horrible the travel back,
Unsure of what was when
And where there was a lack.
Do I even miss it then?

If joy were not short-lived
Would we ever know it?
You've been here, you know it,
Said it to me inside my brain.



Losing My Heritage

By Emily Faustino

Not many people know that I am Portuguese. I guess that is one of the signs that I am losing my heritage. Compared to my other grandparents, my grandpa was the only one born in another country. My grandpa, Ismael Faustino, and his eight brothers and sisters were born in Santa Eufémia, Leiria, Portugal. Our family still has a house and land there that we stay at every time we go visit.

In Portugal, many years ago, children would only go to school until they are ten years old. The teachers at my grandpa's school approached my great-grandparents and said that Ismael needs to continue his studies because he is much more advanced. So he went into the seminary and continued to learn. He traveled all around the world, finally settling in the United States where his education helped him succeed. I have a distinct memory, when I was about four years old, of hearing my grandpa speak Portuguese for the first time. My mom said it was likely when we were celebrating his 60th birthday at a Portuguese restaurant in Newark, New Jersey. It stood out as something unusual and I was trying to understand how he could do that and what he was saying!

My dad was born in the Bronx, New York which, at the time, had a substantial Portuguese-Italian population. Despite this, my grandpa never taught my dad or his brothers how to speak Portuguese. Many of my cousins have learned to speak Portuguese, and because of this I often feel left out. I understand a lot of it because I have learned Spanish in school, but in Canada, my cousins are learning Portuguese at their schools or in France my cousins go to Portugal every summer to be with their grandparents and enroll in a Portuguese summer camp. The continuation of language and traditions are more attainable to carry on when one has greater access to them and a belief in doing so. Even though America prides itself on its cultural diversity, that diversity eventually seems to adapt to American norms.

My dad and his brothers later moved to Tenafly, New Jersey and still never learned their dad's language, but because they were near family, they embraced the big eating and dinner etiquette of the Portuguese. I went to Portugal this summer and the first night we arrived we went over to my Uncle Ismael's house for a feast. We started with appetizers while watching the World Cup finals, then moved into their garage which had four tables set up in a row for the forty family and friends that came for dinner and dessert. We sat there for hours talking and enjoying each other's company. One could say my lack of language is made up for by my appetite.

In this current climate, I believe it is essential to embrace one's heritage, moreover, the different languages that are inherited. When I travel outside of the United States, to Spanish speaking countries, I have tried to practice what I learn in school, but when they realize I speak English they switch and I lose the opportunity to practice. Everywhere one goes in Europe, waiters, cashiers, and passersby all speak English. English is becoming such a universal language and past heritages are being lost.

I love traveling to Portugal. The reason could be the country itself and how anywhere one goes one always feels welcomed since the locals are so friendly and inviting. I always feel at home when we stay at our house and visit with family. No matter where one goes, whether it is Porto or Lisboa or Algarve or Alentejo, each place displays historic landmarks and buildings, and often with modern twists. There is one restaurant, in Lisboa, where they transformed an old monastery into a beautiful restaurant. We still enjoyed the original architecture, their menu quite new with tasty meats and seafood. Either way, whenever I travel there, I have always had a great time.

Bottles

By Bryan Wei

As a child I peered into the glass bottle
Which held the 4 inch by 6 inch ship
Suspended on a small wooden peg

Now 6 feet 4, I peer into a glass bottle
Holding 80 proof vodka,
But this time, no peg to support it

The 3rd grader who saw the ship saw the high seas
The treasure island with gold, swords and glory
He heard the crash of waves in his head and echos of his laughter
around the room
Joy and jubilation running and bouncing,
Marking each corner of the room as their own

Yet my waves crash
and washed ashore is the body of my best friend
And that island of red sand offered nothing but condolences and “I’m
sorrys”
No pirate swords, just a kitchen knife

My waves crash and I get the stench of alcohol,
Bitter and burning, not salty like the sea
My corners begin to cave and the darkness follows
The sounds shift from the rhythm of the waves
To the thump of my body and the beach music shifts
Shifts to the sound of sirens

My sun has set, the blue waters turning jet black
Arms open, accepting me, accepting my end
A future dreamt from a bottle with a 4 inch by 6 inch ship
Only to be closed by a bottle at 6 feet, 4 inches tall

No one will look in and see the saves, the light, the future
Because my bottle is empty, nothing, dead.



Photograph by Josh Prince



It's Not About What Happens to You in Life, It's About How You React

By Amanda Weinberg

"I don't want to do it," I murmured.

I peered six feet down to see nothing but a thin blue mat waiting to catch my fall. I'm already two weeks into my summer dance training and I've yet to improve.

"Amanda! Come on. I don't have time for games. You've had your aerial for months and you're still not pointing your left foot! Starting from a high surface will give you more time to react in the air."

A fear-driven magnetic attraction forced my eyes back down to the mat. Did it get thinner? I tried to pick my eyes up, but the more I resisted, the more I was hypnotized by the taunting thought of plummeting to the ground.

I shouldn't be feeling this way. I'm a dancer, I'm supposed to make everything look easy. What am I so afraid of? Getting hurt? Failure?

"I don't know what's taking you so long, but you have ten seconds before I drop this and move on," my coach said.

Her words hit me like a knockout punch.

Embarrassed and full of self-doubt, I knew I just had to go for it.

The next thing I knew I was on the ground, holding my knee, writhing in pain. I finally pointed my left foot, but the height gave me so much momentum that I landed straight on a hyperextended leg.

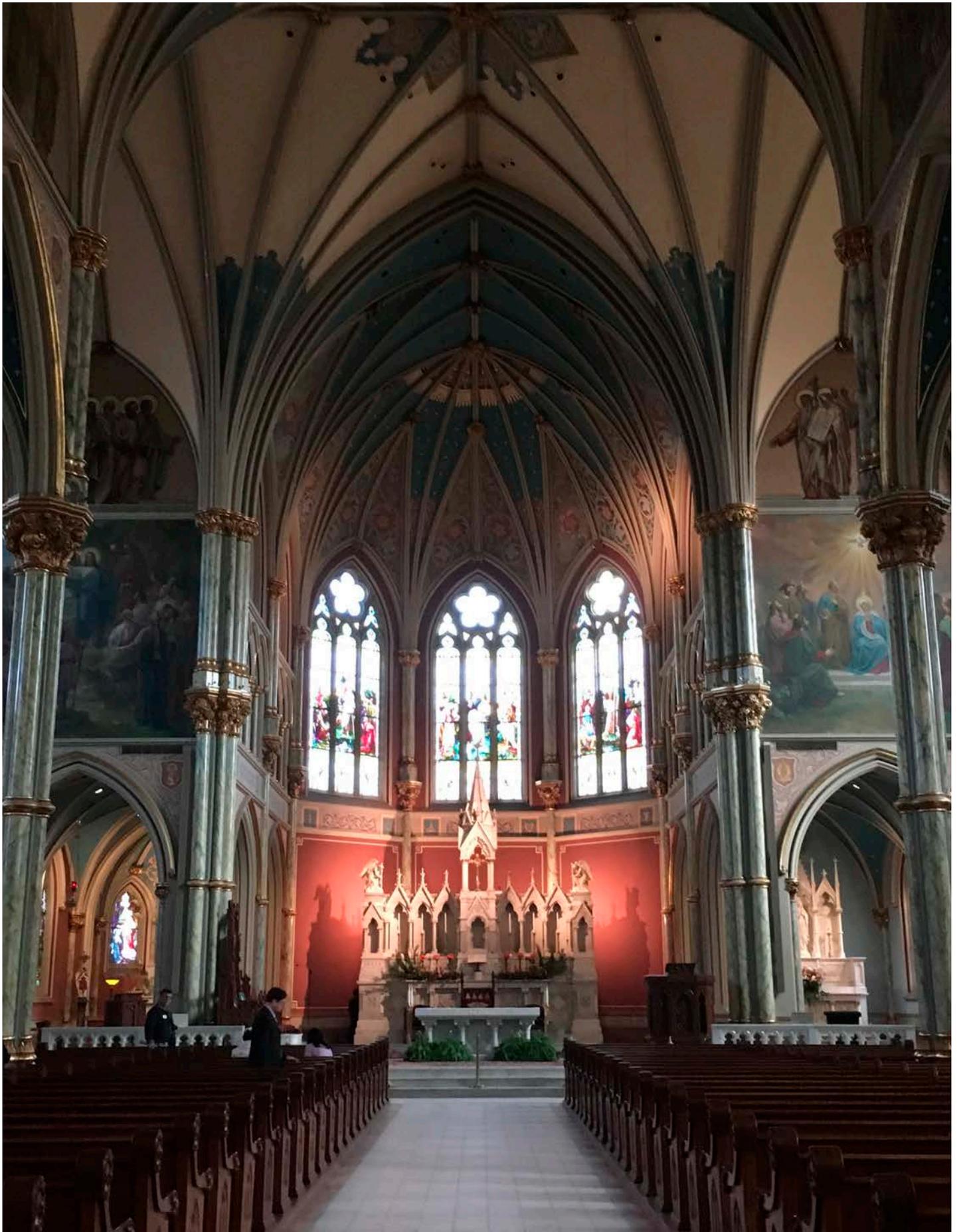
I had torn my ACL. I had a torn meniscus. I had a broken leg, a broken heart.

My MRI results resound like a reoccurring dream.

I remember each individual, interminable, anxiety building second. I heard the doctor's deep raspy voice utter the word "surgery" and with that, every door of opportunity slam shut. I'm never going to be able to dance again.

I lay awake one night wondering what I did to deserve this pain. I justified the way I was feeling by telling myself that bouncing back from such an injury would be impossible. Yet, one day, I said it out loud. I'm never going to dance again? I could hear the pessimism in my own voice. In that moment, I realized that an injury does not hold my fate; I do. It was in that exact moment, at age twelve, that I discovered my motivation, my mantra, my life motto. It was at that exact moment I realized that life is not about what happens to you, it is about how you react. This motto carried me through a two-year recovery process that no one, not even my own doctor, thought was possible. A voice in my head told me to stop throwing a pity party. It was that same voice that got me out of bed and pushed me through countless hours of physical therapy.

I look back on my experiences four years later and am finally able to laugh. How could I have ever thought about giving up? I am now a part of the Senior Elite Company at The Edge of Dance and currently hold two dance titles from The National Dance Showcase and Dancer's Incorporation. I am finally able to reflect on my challenging, yet gratifying journey of recovery with a smile, rather than tears. For this, I am forever grateful.



Church

By Alisa Mejia

Please be seated,
Into the wooden bench
Grasping the written works of human vices
In the youngest of hands.
I gladly rose for the gospel,
Because I knew all the words
Though I lacked the ability to conceptualize
Who it was I was truly singing for.
Again, please be seated.

The wood of the bench began to age,
And so did I.
Why my faith must be confined within
Those four walls;
When all the daylight shined through
The colored pains?
Beyond developed thought.

Exposure to a world of sins
Caused discomfort upon the bench.
I sat corrupted by corruption;
A corrupted mind
A corrupted heart
A corrupted soul.

Stained glass windows became a mind
stained
With the permanent ink of questioning.
A heart stained with hatred
A heart stained with jealousy.
Broken bread became a broken soul
Exposed to pain
Suffering
Water turned to wine
And wine turned to liquor
To Remember
To Forget.

Still I stay seated,
As I did as a child,
While faith like the forbidden fruit
Out of reach
Is lost within the Garden of Adolescence.
To be lost.
To be found.

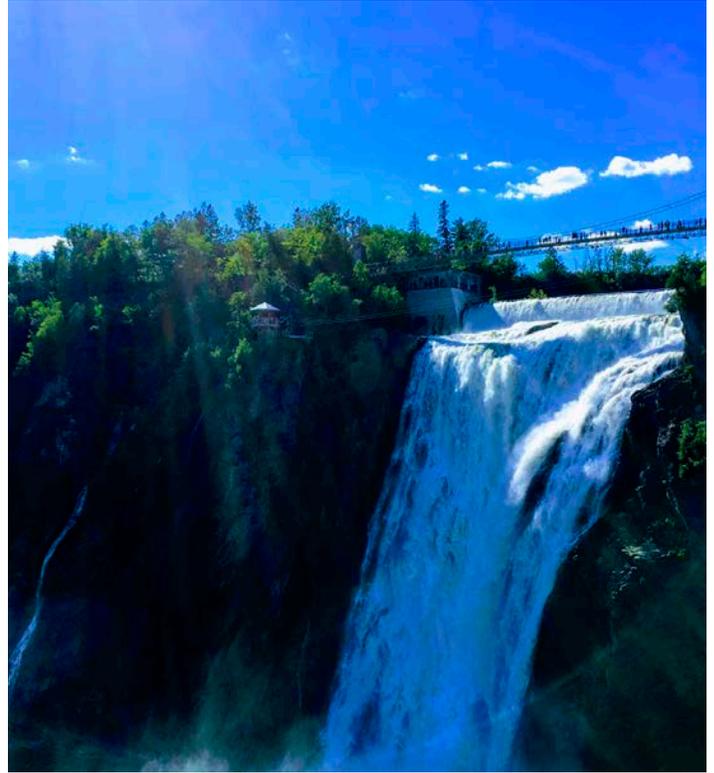
Dreamer

By Komal Samrow

The mind of a fourth grader isn't what one would call complex.
I mean come on, at that point we'd done five years of Spanish and still couldn't speak beyond "hello" or "it's sunny" but it's funny -
You'd think they'd understand at least the English escaping their lips, that they'd have a hold on the language they've been raised on...
- and yet it too is spoken in weathered fragments, seemingly impossible to piece together.
You'd think that a fourth grader would see some daily familiar unfamiliarity and go about their day as normal.
You'd hope they wouldn't spout unknowing hate from their unknowing tongues.
I couldn't fathom them asking my sister if my mahogany skinned grandfather was going to blow up our school,
but like I said - the mind of a fourth grader is not so complex.

We are immigrants.
Cleaning ladies and repairmen and babysitters,
we forge a living in polishing up the rough edges of your lives.
Run your businesses ground up only to run ourselves ragged through mud,
soil and scathe our hands on jagged rocks in the mines that produce your diamond,
cash flow in the chasms that swallow us whole to feed your gluttonous pride
as we struggle to fill our dinner tables.
We survive on the scraps of a nation that welcomes us into borders but casts us out of communities,
promises of a better life drowning out the impending sacrifice,
flashy signs and blinding lights cover up the piercing truth:
the American Dream is a nightmare for people of color.

The ideals aren't complex, of course.
It's the unspoken word,
the lesson that needs no teaching -



Photograph by Arnav Mohapatra

simple enough that even fourth graders understands it.
They say
stand in line with us as brothers and sisters as long as the camera runs and always
stand for the pledge to a flag that doesn't even belong to you,
ideals that don't resonate in the
beat of your heart 'cause if you can't echo our drum then we'll just
beat you into submission until you realize you can't beat us in this game of blend and become, find a way to rise as
smoke to pollute our pristine air
with your ruinous
fires of revolution.
They screech
- know that instigation of thought too alien shall be doused, prayers paid for in the salty tears
of your fruitless servitude,
a blackened forest standing to serve a painful reminder that you will never belong here.

But we do belong here, not as the dirt beneath your feet but the roots of the trees that form the treetop fabric that knits this ecosystem together.
Don't tell me to sit down,
don't tell me to stop simmering,
I am boiling like this so called 'melting pot' of a nation that burns us with the heat of a nonexistent equality is not an option
equality is a guarantee left unfulfilled by faulty legislation,
a people that meet our beards with bullets, turbans with taunts, beliefs with beatings and abuses.
No don't tell me to be quiet because the hatred isn't quiet, the screams aren't quiet,
and the bullets are so loud they've made you deaf to the rounds fired in the air,
fired at us

My grandfather is the one taking bombs out of the ground as you hurl accusations like grenades at the turban on his head, the skin on his body, the lines tracing his face that tell a story you never bothered to read,
why?

Because it was a just joke, it wasn't a big deal, and it's never a big deal until the stink of bodies at the border, corpses in your streets suffocates you, until you choke on the ash of your own indifference.

The state of this nation is not complex, but that doesn't mean that it isn't flawed.

You talk of building walls. But who's going to build them for you?

Even a fourth grader could understand that a facade such as this is surely bound to crumble.



Within Reach by Komal Samrow

The Rainbow After the Rain

By Alyssa Schwartz

This was my life now: a perpetual revolving door between the doctor's office and school. Sometimes I close my eyes and pray that when I open them, the unceasing whirlwind of pain will be gone. Months on end were filled with doctor appointments, probing needles, and nights as infinite as the number of stars in the sky. No one knew what was wrong. That terrified me the most. To cope with my situation, I locked all my volatile emotions up in a box. I hid behind a facade; all I wanted to do was cry, sleep, then cry again. Every day I languished through the same routine: wake up, go to school, leave early, take a nap, repeat. I thought nothing could be worse than this tiresome cycle played on a loop, but I was wrong. An avalanche of anxiety and agony turned a nuisance into complete debilitation. By mid-April, I was out of school entirely, with vertiginous headaches, excruciating body aches, and still no diagnosis.

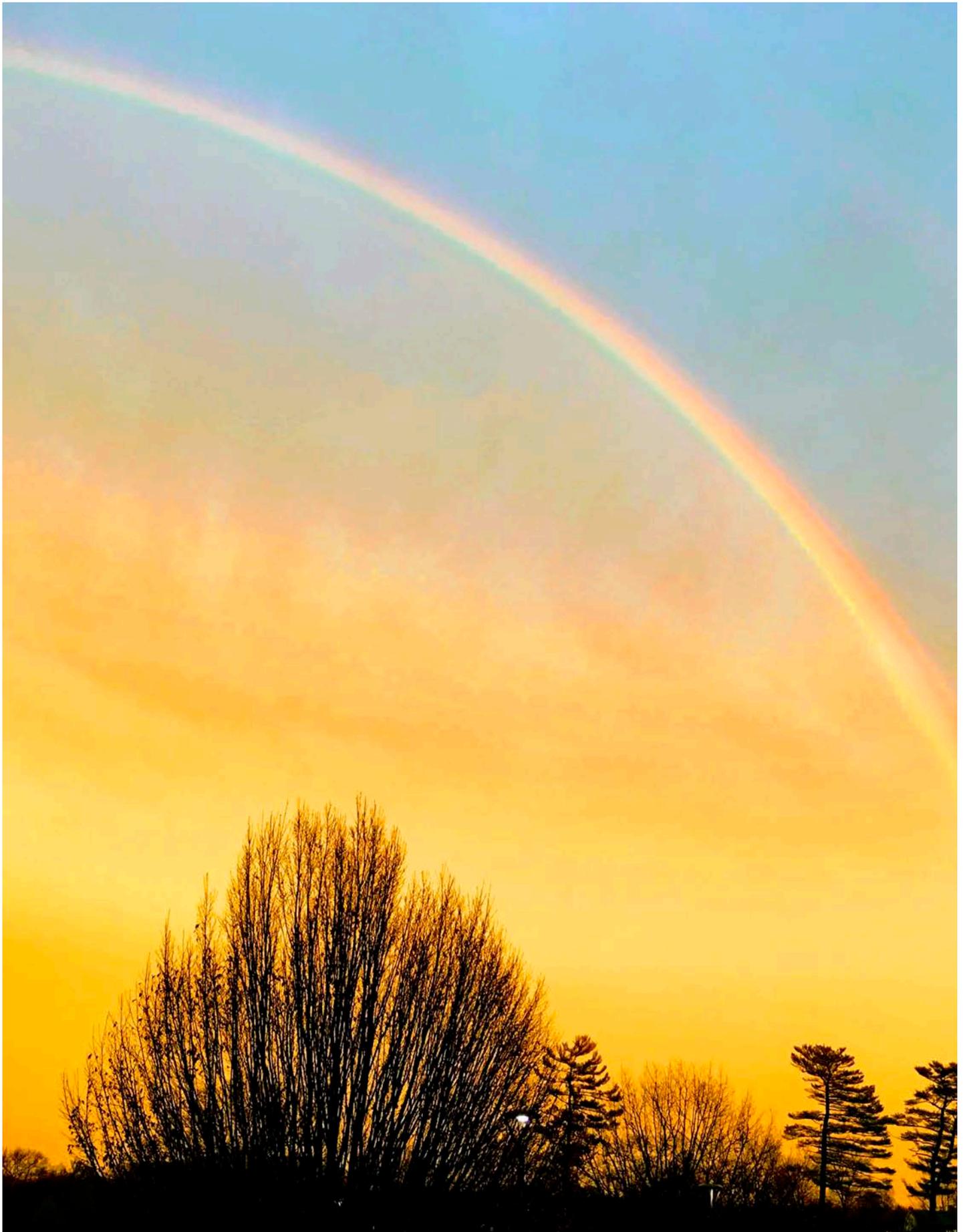
Eventually, my rheumatologist gave me the answer I was looking for: I have fibromyalgia, a chronic pain disorder that causes widespread musculoskeletal pain and, in some cases, nauseating headaches. It was great to finally have a diagnosis and treatment plan, but it was also daunting to know that only I could decide whether or not I would get better. Would I let my illness control me or would I take control of my illness?

I thought that after finding out the origin of my illness I would miraculously be freed from the pounding and pulsing pain. However, week after week, I still could not push myself to get up. It was as if one hundred pound weights were shackled to my arms and legs, restraining me to my bed. In my head, there was a violent war going on, as if between an angel and a devil. The angel was telling me to get out of bed and show my illness who was boss. The devil was telling me that I would never get better and that there was no point in trying. Just when it seemed like the devil had won, my Mom walked into my room, ripped off my covers, pulled up my blinds, and told me something that will stick with me for the rest of

my life: "Alyssa, God only gives you what you can handle." No longer could I continue to stay in this state of limbo.

I made the conscious decision to confront my malady, push through the pain, and look towards the future. There would be no more idly laying in bed and drowning in my lugubrious sobs. I took all my doctor's suggestions—yoga, cognitive therapy, aerobic workouts. In my first few weeks, all I could focus on was the searing flames that surged through my body as my legs and arms pumped simultaneously on the elliptical. The unabating strain that erupted throughout my body almost seemed like too much to handle. But gradually, I started to feel better. I finally felt my muscles contract, and for the first time in awhile, I felt at peace with my body; I felt invigorated. It was as if the rainstorm had finally subsided, and the kaleidoscopic rainbow had finally reappeared. I now had the perspective I needed to rise above the constant pain and struggles that I had been dealing with for months, and perhaps will have to endure for the rest of my life. No longer the poor sick girl who was imprisoned by her own illness, I am the girl who took initiative, the girl who said to her illness, "You cannot control me anymore. You may be a part of me, but I am the only one who will ever be in charge of my future."

I have finally unshackled myself from the oppressive chains that prevented me from taking control of my life. I have finally learned that I have the strength and grit to persevere through formidable plights. I have finally surmounted my deep despondency and learned to keep faith even in times of bewilderment and disquietude. I will carry the valuable lessons I have learned throughout this arduous situation and help others to discover that they too have the fortitude to prevail over their struggles and take control of their life, because God only gives you what you can handle.





Photograph by Hannah Marasa

Among the Roses

By Hannah Smith

Growing beneath the roses,
Animated and bright,
A seedling emerges from the nurturing soil
Among the dandelions below.
She yearns to leave the garden's ground
And leave her past behind her.
She hopes to peer beyond the garden,
And discover nature's every intricacy.
Once she leaves the earth she can reach for the stars
And finally fulfill her destiny.

Young and sheltered,
She does not know what lies in her future,
Past the simple soil she has always known.
Yet, as her stem lengthens and her
petals begin to bloom their unique shape,
She awaits her looming destination.

Finally, with time, she lays
Among the luscious roses
She has always looked up to.
But the roses prick the innocent flower.
Suddenly, she misses the
Simple dandelions below.



Photograph by Hannah Marasa

Mending the World: A Great-Grandmother's Legacy

By Abe Baker-Butler

In September of fourth grade, my great-grandma Ruth died. Grandma Ruth played an essential part in my childhood. I remember her asking me deep questions about the model towns I used to create as a kid, not just about the aesthetics, but about who the toy people were and what their lives were like. I remember helping Grandma Ruth prepare for Passover seders while hearing stories of her life experiences and experiencing the strong sulfurous smell of boiled eggs. And I remember the delectable, sweet coffee cake, which I could never get enough of, that she used to make for my birthday. But most of all, I remember Grandma Ruth as a kind, selfless person, always playing with me, talking with me, and listening to me genuinely in a way that other adults did not. In Judaism, one of the most important responsibilities of all humans is tikkun olam, which means “world fixing,” and Grandma Ruth inculcated that value in me. When she died, my ensuing sadness spurred me to figure out who I was and what my purpose was in life. I couldn't decide what the right answers were, but in my grief, I reaffirmed for myself that working to improve the world, as Grandma Ruth did, was something I really wanted to do.

I had seen in Grandma Ruth's life the fulfillment she received from engaging in work that helped others. I also saw the serious problems facing the world, including war, poverty, hunger, and illiteracy. During the time I was mourning Grandma Ruth's death, I felt a stronger and stronger desire to address these challenges.

After Grandma Ruth passed away, I started volunteering as a server at St. Peter's Soup Kitchen in Port Chester. The clients at the soup kitchen, who often come in dirty clothes, practically sagging with the weight of poverty, face many challenges including homelessness, drug addiction, domestic abuse, and unemployment. When I serve the clients, I know I am playing a small part in addressing the problems of

our world, and that makes me feel fulfilled. One day, while serving, I remembered how much I loved Grandma Ruth's coffee cake. Although the clients at the soup kitchen do not have the luxury of coffee cake, I felt empowered giving them food that would physically and spiritually nourish them, at least to some extent, the way the coffee cake nourished me.

Last February, I visited my grandparents in Florida. There, I read in the news, watched on TV, and saw on social media as the survivors of the Parkland shooting brought national awareness to gun safety. One day, as we were driving on the highway, I looked to my right and saw a building that looked eerily familiar: it was Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, the site of the shooting. The next night, as I sat on the couch with my grandparents watching Parkland student Cameron Kasky interrogate Florida Senator Marco Rubio, I thought about the same issues I had pondered after Grandma Ruth's death: how could I play a role in addressing this problem? How could I make good on my self-declaration to improve the world? How could I live the values of tikkun olam that were so important to Grandma Ruth and my ancestors?

When I returned to school, I decided to answer these questions by working with other students to plan a school walkout in support of gun safety. While planning the walkout, I felt energized in a way I hadn't before. Unlike the school projects I had completed and the tests I had studied for, planning the walkout gave me a sense of purpose and meaning. It made me feel I was living the world-repairing values I cherished, rather than just declaring them. I collaborated with many different leaders to organize the walkout, and I became a founding member of the Westchester Student Coalition Against Gun Violence (WSCAGV), through which I continue to organize gun safety forums with politicians. Today, I feel energized when I sit down with elected officials through WSCAGV, knowing that I have the attention of people who can effect tangible change on gun violence.

Often, I wear a T-shirt to school that says Repair the World. I have received mocking comments about the shirt, but I fully believe its message. No matter what anyone says, I will focus my actions on improving the world, enriching the lives of others, and living the values of tikkun olam. Of that, I know, Grandma Ruth would be proud.



Photograph by Arnav Mohapatra

Delicious Imperfection

By Aliza Kibel

I take my first bite of the soft gingerbread, vanilla icing, and crunchy chocolate candy. The sweet, spicy, and nostalgic flavor washes over me like a wave. I close my eyes and I can picture my great-grandmother — my Urma — smiling at me. Warmth consumes me as if she is giving me a hug from beyond. This Hanukkah gingerbread house is more than just cookies, icing, and candy; it is my perfect imperfection.

Every Hanukkah, when my family and I make a gingerbread house, it always gets messy — and I know this year will be no different. Tacky icing will coat our fingers, gingerbread crumbs will cover our clothing, and spilled snow caps and Reese's Pieces will speckle the tablecloth. As hard as we may try to make the house look perfect, it will inevitably end up with a tilted door, some disheveled gingerbread men, and a roof covered in a jumble of candy and icing. Yet, instead of focusing on the imperfections of the house, we will enjoy the sweetness of the icing and candy, and the hint of spice in the gingerbread. Somehow, the more messy and imperfect the house looks, the more delicious it tastes.

When eating a gingerbread house, my family and I are immediately connected to my Urma. The sweetness reminds us of our loving memories of her, and the hint of spice reminds us of the many challenging obstacles she had to overcome in her life. The imperfections of the gingerbread house are also a reminder that some things do not always go as planned, but still turn out delicious. My Urma's life certainly had its imperfections, but it was perfect in its own way.

As a child, my Urma used to eat a Hanukkah gingerbread house every year with her family. Fleeing the Holocaust, she was forced to leave Germany and travel alone, by boat, to the United States at the age of 16. Now that I am almost 16, I have an even greater appreciation for her courage. While I am lucky to be in a country where I feel safe, my Urma was not as lucky.

As a teenager, she lived in fear for her own life in the only place she had ever called home. Alone, she fearlessly left behind her home and everything she knew to seek shelter in a foreign country. She brought with her traditions from Germany and a house made of gingerbread, and with them, built a home for my family that would last for generations to come.

My Urma, invariably strong and unafraid, was the rock of my family. Regardless of her many hardships, she remained positive and optimistic. She served as a inspiration to all of us, and a constant reminder that life's imperfections and unknowns should be accepted, rather than feared. Losing my Urma in 2010 was one of the most trying moments in my life. I can still remember how deeply devastated I was when I found out she had passed away. It is always extremely difficult to lose someone you love so dearly, especially when they are your role model. While my Urma may no longer be here physically, her memory still lives on in the hearts and minds of my family and me. Any way in which we can connect ourselves to her helps us preserve her memory and honor her life.

The more imperfect our gingerbread houses look, the more perfect they really are because the imperfections are what keep us connected. The imperfections tell the story of my Urma, hold my memories of her, and represent her struggles. The imperfections are the inevitable bumps in the road, the challenging obstacles, and the trying moments we all experience in life. The imperfections are what define us.

I believe in gingerbread houses because they are important to me, and they were important to my Urma. They symbolize my Urma's perfectly imperfect life and create an everlasting connection between us. Gingerbread houses represent the deliciousness that can come from imperfection.



Photograph by Aliza Kibel



Photograph by Arnav Mohapatra

Almost There

By Malena Otero

Late nights filled with textbooks and equations
Sluggishly trying to finish just one more assignment.
Praying to anyone who might listen for a reprieve,
for just one day to sleep for hours on end for

A pillow to wipe away those dark smudges
under my eyes, that not even makeup can cover.
Because Here there is no sleep, no day off, not one
minute where school comes second.

There is all different. There is a gleaming palace with
Tall brass pillars and large glass windows.
There has never ending meadows with pillows made of
Soft flowers and a breeze that lulls and comforts.

But There is too far. It is worlds away. Besides,
Who would be able to lug that 80 pound backpack anywhere
anyway?
So There is a pipe dream, a late night fantasy. It is the
Green light shining across the water that keeps me dreaming.

In the meantime, my life is a waiting game. Waiting to get
There, waiting
To breathe, waiting to take that burdensome backpack off and
Begin to float, to fly, to be happy. And when I finally get There
I'll let everyone know.

If I ever get there,
I'll let anyone know.

A Bridge with No Destination

By Sabrina Vuong

When I was a child, I painted the Chinese flag, a warm red background sprinkled with golden stars, and the American flag, with its bold red stripes, bright blue box, and glittering white stars. At home, red was the importance of hard work and respect. In school, red was the importance of friendship and collaboration. Society distributed the remaining colors in separate boxes labeled “Asian” and “American.”

As an American, I am expected to have near-perfect English, be personable, and be involved in my community. I consider myself fortunate to have learned English with the common American accent. Recently, my uncle lost his job. When my parents asked how job-searching was going, he responded, “Well, a few companies called me for a phone interview, but ended up turning me down. One company asked me to meet face-to-face, and after I was finished, the interviewer said to me, ‘Your skill set is exactly what we need, but I had a little bit of trouble understanding you.’ I bet if they had to speak Chinese, I would have trouble understanding them, too.”

I am a first-generation Chinese-American. All of my relatives have accents when they speak English, and as a result, are treated differently by the rest of America. The unfortunate state of the situation is that, in America, it is a struggle to survive without English. Someone may speak five different languages, but if none of them are English, they will never succeed in the States.

My parents began reading to me at a very young age, telling me, “The two most important skills you need are Math and English. Everything in the world involves math, and everything in America involves English.” They wanted to make sure I never experienced the struggles they went through trying to communicate with broken, heavily accented English. Yet, even with a minimal accent and a good grasp of English, I have gone to stores and restaurants where the employees will speak very slowly, as if they aren’t sure I know enough basic vocabulary to understand them. If I take even a second to think, they jump to the conclusion that what they’ve said was too advanced, and begin fumbling to rearrange what they’ve said in “simpler terms.”

As an Asian, I am expected to have top-notch grades and only find joy in studying. When I obtain those grades, I am neither applauded nor congratulated; it is expected of me. People think, “She is Asian, so obviously she has good grades.” When I fail to achieve, I am criticized, and no longer considered “normal.” They say everybody makes mistakes, but my mistakes are not valid, because “Aren’t you always studying? What happened?”

Expectations follow me wherever I go. Colleges go through a great number of similar profiles every year: Asian, straight-A student, full marks on standardized tests, and high-ranking musical achievements. They only accept a certain number of a demographic, so if you’re Asian, you have to be the best of the best. By being born a race, I have fallen under the Terms and Conditions of that race, and am subject to evaluation as to how I fit in to the rest of “my kind.”

It is a stereotype that Asians are forced to study like machinery because their parents have pre-set a goal for them. In reality, the difference lies in the dream. American children are often told, “Be whatever you want to be.” Asian children, however, grow up with filial piety, having respect for one’s parents, elders, and ancestors. It becomes very important to make one’s parents proud and to support them when they grow old as a thank-you for raising them. My mother always told me, “I don’t tell you to study for my own success. I tell you to study so that you will find happiness in your future. I would rather you struggle now, when I can help you, rather than you struggle later in life, and I am no longer here.”

So here I am, struggling to balance my pre-colored boxes. I dream of a life where these barriers are broken down and I live submerged in a new palette, where the shades are formed not to hurt me, but to help me. Even when my mother crosses to her own world, I will fight to color the hearts of all the way she did mine. I will redesign the canvas and create a new landscape, if not for me, then for the future of all Asian-Americans.



Photograph by Chloe Ng

Yet

By Tess O'Brien

Here
The conversation sounds the same
A Mad Libs so predictable
It shouldn't even be put in print
Surprises aren't surprises
Because this victory has been plotted
Years in advance
Month by month
I see another person
Put faith in wings of
Feathers and wax
And leap
They expect Yet to catch them

But Yet is not an expectation
It looks like one
The quick half glances
Exchanged across hallways
Eyes sly like they know something I don't
It sounds like one
Nervous laughter
After my mom repeats
For the billionth time
That wow—doctors make so much money
You should really become a doctor
It feels like one
The prickly
Sting because I know somebody's looking at me
The tumble of nerves at the base of my gut
Yet is not an expectation

Yet is unforgiving a
Whispered threat
That refuses nuance
Yet cannot stay quiet
It rumbles
It falls
Yet is a weed that burrows
Deep into my chest
The bruises I notice too late

The slow creep of forgot
When I want to remember
Yet doesn't need to try to
Push me off my feet
Because you can boil a frog alive
If you give it time
To get used to the flame
And today, I'm on fire

Yet tells me it's sorry
Sickly-sweet voice another chain around my
Throat
Yet summons lightning
Out of the sky
Yanking on my legs to hold itself steady
My heartbeat stutters and swells
Panicking because
We're running out of oxygen
Yet is the blood leaking
Through my parted lips
As I struggle for
One
Last
Breath

Here
The conversation sounds the same
A Mad Libs so predictable
It shouldn't even be put in print
Every day
I see another leap
Sure that they'll fly
Sure that they'll soar
Sure that Yet will catch them
To think I had the gall to laugh

It's my turn to jump
And I don't even have Yet
To pretend
To believe in

Impulse Club Members

President: Adam Weiss

Vice President: Adena Kibel

Head Editor: Sabrina Vuong

Secretary: Sabrina Schwartzman

Club Advisor: Dr. Kenyon

Josh Brown

Hannah Marasa

Chloe Ng

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Josh Prince

Komal Samrow

Lindsay Schwartzman

Alyssa Schwartz

Contributors

Writing

Abe Baker-Butler

Mackenzie Drangel

Emily Faustino

Carly Kabot

Aliza Kibel

Alisa Mejia

Julia Morlino

Tess O'Brien

Agustin Otero

Malena Otero

Komal Samrow

Hannah Smith

Alyssa Schwartz

Sabrina Vuong

Bryan Wei

Amanda Weinberg

Art and Photography

Aliza Kibel

Josh Prince

Hannah Marasa

Arnav Mohapatra

Chloe Ng

Komal Samrow

2019
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