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**Spring 2015**  
**Volume XX**  
**Blue Optics**

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**AIRING OUR**  
**DIRTY LAUNDRY**



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**A LITERARY MAGAZINE**  
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# The Sea

Looking out at the world I once roamed  
The breeze by the sea makes the water choppy  
Hear the roar of the waves crashing on the sand floor  
Salt mists from the air blow into my lair  
A gust of sand hits my lifeless face; it fills me up with its bland taste.

*Tyler Micek, 12*

## Old Man and the Sea

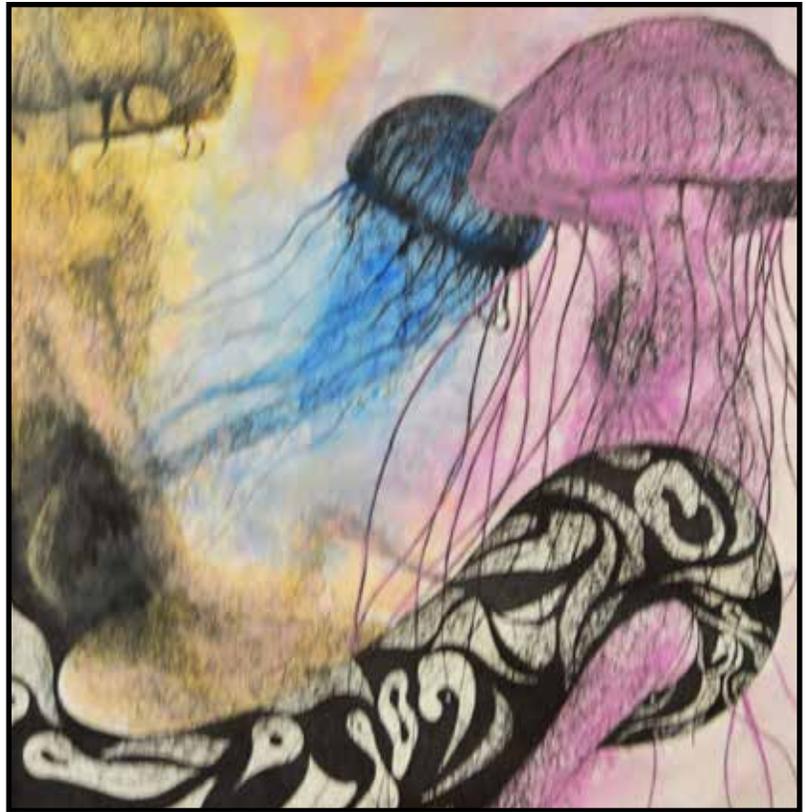
Oh star of the heavens,  
How I curse thee  
You bring me life  
As well as misery

Oh creature of the abyss,  
How I loathe thee  
You spark my hope  
As well as misery

Oh scavengers of the underworld  
How I detest the  
You douse my pride  
And consume me.

Oh cluster of aliens  
How I ponder thee  
You support my life  
But criticize me

*Graham Merten, 11*



*Andrew Hellmueller, 11*

# THE MYSTICS OF THE MISTY MOUNTAIN TOP

I was walking one day along the shore  
Just doing my best to ignore  
The busybody urban masses  
Designer jeans and dark sunglasses  
Looking for escape from it all  
Find some grave into which I can fall

But then I heard a sound that did ring  
Inside my head that changed everything

*The mystics of the misty mountain top  
Will come down and raise you up  
Above the Earth and above Heaven's door  
Those life-eating worms will bug you no more.*

A summit erupted from the ground beside me  
I knew I was to climb up that mountain quickly  
Ethereal and unending was that sound  
I wanted to know if it ever could be found  
It continued to echo in my hollow brain  
I could hear it over and over, again and again

*The mystics of the misty mountain top  
Will come down and raise you up  
Above the Earth and above Heaven's door  
Those life-eating worms will bug you no more.*



*Tyler Urbina, 10*

I reached the top but was shocked to see  
There was nothing up there at all for me  
All I saw was empty air and disappointment  
A joker's box with a fool's enchantment  
Just a single sentence could be read  
No man is mightier than his fountainhead

*The mystics of the misty mountain top  
Will come down and raise you up  
Above the Earth and above Heaven's door  
Those life-eating worms will bug you no more.*

*Peter Schaefer, 11*

# The Tunnel

**You charge on in;  
There is no light.  
Suddenly you feel  
A bit of fright.**

**You may aimlessly walk,  
Or you'll march with a purpose.  
Maybe you'll stop to talk,  
Or maybe you won't stop at all.**

**As you walk, you'll hit the bumps;  
You'll get scratched, but the tears will dry.  
You will bleed, you will hurt,  
You will stop and want to cry.**



**You need to continue the trail,  
Get back in the fight.  
Follow this tunnel  
Until you reach the light.**

*David Rice, 11*

*Maxx Ruth,  
future Colonel*



# Living the Midwestern life

## Refrain

Momma's takin care of the kids  
Daddy's fixing leaky pipes  
Buddy, I'm stuck just here  
Living the Midwestern life

## Verse 1

Sit on down  
At the kitchen table  
Break out the rye bread  
Turn on the game

## Refrain

Momma's takin care of the kids  
Daddy's fixing leaky pipes  
Buddy, I'm stuck just here  
Living the Midwestern life

## Verse 2

Walk down the streets  
Tilt your hat  
Everybody knows everybody  
Just sit back and relax

## Bridge

Love your neighbor as yourself  
That's the only rule  
Treat people with respect  
Don't be a tool

## Refrain

Momma's takin care of the kids  
Daddy's fixing leaky pipes  
Buddy, I'm just here  
Loving my Midwestern life

*Graham Merten, 11*



# CAINTUCK COONHOUNDS

Growing up in the Ozarks from the age of ten  
 My dream was to own a pair of coonhounds to hunt with  
 But my family was poor and couldn't afford any dogs  
 So I worked my ass off for two years working countless jobs  
 I managed to scrap together fifty bucks  
 And made my way down to ol' CainTuck  
 Where two redbones were for sale for twenty a piece  
 So I picked them up and spent the leftover money on my family  
 The walk back was long so I spent the night in the woods  
 But when I got home I trained them to the best coon dogs you could ask for  
 We spent countless hours in the woods at night  
 We killed many coons and tanned many hides  
 Until that hunt when Old Dan picked the wrong fight  
 With a massive cougar and lost his life  
 I was heartbroken and buried him behind the shed  
 But Little Ann couldn't take the pain and began to lose her head  
 She wouldn't eat and wouldn't sleep  
 And she curled up where her brother was buried deep  
 I found her the next morning lying dead on his grave  
 But that is where the red fern grows up to this day  
 (Based upon *Where The Red Fern Grows*)

*Brady Baeten, 12*

## Ode to Goldilocks

Here comes Goldilocks  
 Here comes Goldilocks  
 Walking through the woods  
 Deep in the forest she stumbled upon a stranger's house  
 She barged on in quiet as a mouse.

She made herself at home  
 Ate some porridge left on the stove  
 It wasn't too hot, not too cold, not too thick, or covered in mold.

Then she needed to take a seat  
 Stealing the porridge had her beat  
 So she popped a squat in the smallest chair  
 Heard a POP! A BOOM! And it exploded in mid-air!

The fall made her weep  
 So she decided to go to sleep  
 A few hours later she was woken up  
 By a family of bears that were all fed up.

The bears roared, the girl screamed  
 It was the end of Goldilocks it seemed  
 She jumped out the window and ran back home  
 Never again would she roam the woods alone.

*Tyler Micek, 12*

*Brady Baeten, 12*

*Kurt Stegman, 12*



## *Filling the Valley with a Mighty Sound*

Before there were Colonel Crazies, there was the all male Cov Cath Cheer Squad. Brother Tom Pieper, SM., a 1963 graduate of Covington Catholic and member of the team, combined the *Spirit That Will Not Die* with the Marianist ideal of *to Jesus through Mary*, and became a Marianist Brother. On November 1, 2014, he celebrated 50 years as a Brother and renewed his vows as a Marianist. He continues to lead others to Christ as a campus minister and leader of the Appalachian Summer Outreach at the University of Dayton.

Over his years as a Marianist brother, Brother Tom, or BT, as he is called by most who know him, also followed his vocation as a teacher at Marian-Purcell, and the Director of Novices for the Marianist Order at Mount St. John in Dayton. Tom Pieper, the second son of Lee Pieper, class of 1936, was inspired by the strong Marianist values that were the core at the foundation of CCHS founded in

1925 and run by the brothers of the Society of Mary through the 1970's. In April of his senior year, Tom, and two of his friends were considering joining the Society of Mary. By graduation, he was the only one still planning to enter the novitiate, and in his distinct optimistic manner, his response to the 50 year celebration was, "Well, I'm still here."

While still teaching and coaching, Brothers no longer have a physical presence at CCH in 2014; all Colonels must remember their roots. Brother Tom summarizes the Marianist Mission; "Jesus Christ, Son of God becomes the Son of Mary for others. [We] get to do Mary's mission of continuing to bring Jesus to others.....there's a sense that no matter where [we] go, no matter what [we] do, [we] can always bring Christ to other people. It doesn't sound like a whole lot, the possibilities and creativity involved with that always makes [us] think about how we can incarnate Jesus in our world today."



*Mrs. Judy Pieper, Parent*

So as all you Colonels rally round, you should not forget all those who have filled the valley with not only a mighty sound but also the ideas that have brought Covington Catholic High School to its present successes. Let us know that being a Colonel is being a Colonel for life. Let us all retain the same school pride that Brother Tom felt as he was introduced at his recognition reception: "the boy from Covington did good... once a Colonel always a Colonel." Congratulations to Brother Tom Pieper, SM, and his Pieper family of Colonels: Tim Pieper, '61, Ken Pieper, '66, Mike Pieper, '71, John Pieper '14, and Joe Pieper '15, who celebrated with him.

### *Joseph Pieper, 12*

*Griffin Lamb, 10*



*Kurt Stegman, 12*

# RESPECTING VETERANS

(an excerpt)

Len Bloomfield joined the Marine Corps in 1939. He served for our country all over the world, and he was off the coast of Sicily when he watched the dive-bombing of Talamba Hospital Ship by enemy planes. This ship was used to treat and evacuate personnel.



Len returned to the UK in 1943 with a large fleet to fight for our country at D-Day. He was a gunner on the HMS Mauritius and provided support for the ship's landing on Sword Beach. Len witnessed the devastation of D-Day and watched as planes provided air support to the soldiers below. Len is a hero, and his courage allowed him to earn six campaign stars.

We lose personal stories as veterans die every day, so we need to listen to them to develop a greater understanding of what war is really like. Len Bloomfield was willing to risk his life for our great country on one of the bloodiest days in our nation's history. Len's story and other stories about things like Normandy Invasion depict the horrible things veterans have endured to protect us. Many veterans cannot sleep at night due to these memories, so their lives are still affected by the things that they have done in the past for the United States.



*Jacob Blom, 10*

Our nation's history and future was carved out by the veterans. They are the reason the United States is still standing strong. They risked their lives to save our lives and also to preserve our lifestyle. For that, we should be truly grateful. There are an estimated 21 million veterans living in the United States. If you know a veteran or if you just see a veteran, you should thank them for all that they have done in making this country strong.

*Benny Gerdes, 10*

## USA (Living in America)

What are you living life for?  
For the sake of living or for the sake of fulfillment?  
Is life about serving others, or is it about serving yourself?

(Chorus)  
Turning lovers into servers  
Turning pride into shame  
Is life a bicycle or a cycle?  
Are you a servant or a master?  
Are you a follower or a leader?  
I'll tell you what you are  
I'll tell you how you live  
You live American

(Chorus)  
Turning lovers into servers  
Turning pride into shame  
Is life a bicycle or a cycle?  
Does life move on, or does it go in a cycle?

Are you a vehicle or a driver?  
Are you a quitter or a striver?  
Are you a hater or a hated?

I'll tell you what you are  
I'll tell you how you live  
You live American

(Chorus)  
Turning lovers into servers  
Turning pride into shame  
Is life a bicycle or a cycle?  
Does life move on, or does it go in a cycle?  
I'll tell you what you are  
I'll tell you how you live  
You're American

*Jim Ott, 12*

Jeans  
Light Regular  
Permanent Press

**“Reality leaves a lot to the imagination.”**

**John Lennon**

# PERMANENT PRESS:

scientific, objective, controlled, logical, lasting

## Snow

Untouched snow

The untroubled and formless white piles grow

What they'll become: no one knows

If it stays in the shade it remains the same

But if it roams out into the sun: the flawless forms redone

It'll melt away or turn to ice

And once it changes, it can't be undone.

*Tyler Micek, 12*

## Rainbow

Here comes glum

Glum is near

Beauty bows

Beauty appears

Here comes sorrow

Sorrow is here

Happiness melts away pain and tears

*Graham Merten, 11*

Kurt Stegman, 12



*Nick Flesch, 10*

# *Is American News Media Bias Beneficial to Voters?*

Today in America, news media plays a huge part in influencing voters' opinions. Both the information presented to voters and the context in which it is presented can cause voter to make decisions for whom not to vote into office. Media outlets who are known to be politically affiliated with a certain party can certainly present news in such a way to persuade, or make an attempt thereof, the reader or watcher in order to cast a more positive or negative impression on a certain person or party. Although this practice is far more subtle than it was at the time of the United States' founding, it is still prevalent, to a lesser extent. The First Amendment does protect the right of the media outlet to express information freely and does allow them to affiliate themselves with a certain party. Despite this, the affiliation of news stations and posts with parties may have more negative side effects than positive.

Many people would argue that certain news media outlets are supported by a certain political party, and many of these allegations are true, in some cases. Just a few examples are *The Huffington Post's* reputation for their affiliation with the Democratic Party (Keating 2014), and *Fox News* is thought to be a predominantly right-winged corporation; this is so perhaps because many of their contributors, such as Rush Limbaugh and Sarah Palin are known to be conservative. The problem with news stations and outlets having political affiliations with certain parties and people is that some shows, articles, and comments may present news in a biased or distorted way, even though that particular piece of news would be better served if it had been presented objectively without bias. One example of bias can be found in an article written by a *Huffington Post* contributor, Lisa Keating, titled "Mom Takes on Fox News over Network's Reporting of LGBT Rights, Gender Non-Conforming Youth." The title of this article gives the impression that the reader is about to read a report concerning a suit against *Fox News* when, in fact, the entire article is the author's accusation of *Fox* for being biased, and even spreading lies and "targeting a vulnerable population" (Keating 2014) in regards to confusing LGBT minors. After reading the article, I found myself confused and uneducated on the actual case after which the article was entitled. Keating writes about fighting "reckless and irresponsible reporting," but does her article not confuse and mislead as well?

This type of bias in the news media not only affects the opinions of readers in an unfair and confusing way, but also can be carried over to the opinions of voters. If news outlets do not present news objectively, voters and viewers cannot properly assess the situations themselves and form their own opinions. An example of unfair presentation of news in a biased manner is the reporting style of Rush Limbaugh, who often goes so far as to present liberal politicians as weak or selfish. One example is an article written by Limbaugh entitled "Jose Rodriguez Hits Back: Obama Doesn't Have the Fortitude and Courage to Take Prisoners," when in reality, his own presentation of news information is very heavily biased and opinionated.

For these reasons news media outlets should try not to affiliate themselves with any certain political party. Political affiliations often lead to biased reports and presentation of information, which can cause confusion to readers and viewers, and influence their opinions. The opinions of voters should be made by the voters, not news media.

*Aidan Donaghy, 10*



Art III Students

# Lollipops and Dandelions

*Why do they stare at me?*

*I'm just eating my lollipop*

*As I sit on the ground surrounded by dandelions.*

*What's so weird about a grown man sitting on the ground?*

*My suit ironed neatly and not a stain on them.*

*Just a thirty-year old man enjoying his sucker amidst the flowers.*

**David Rice, 11**



**Griffin Lamb, 10**

# Words

EXPRESSIONS.

EXPRESSIONS.

YOU DEFINE OUR UPBRINGING,  
PROBLEMS, AND DARKEST OBSES-  
SIONS.

SUP.

YO.

HOWDY.

BRO!

SWEET

SICK.

SWAG.

NO.

EXPRESSIONS.

EXPRESSIONS.

WHY DO YOU EVEN APPLY TO  
OUR GENERATION.

**Graham Merten, 11**



**Kevin Sommers, 12**

# Elton John Does Not Disappoint

February 27<sup>th</sup> was an exciting day for Cincinnati because, not only was it Friday, but Elton John was in town for his concert at US Bank Arena.

Elton John was in town for his “All the Hits” tour, making his first appearance in Cincinnati since 2005. In another, previous appearance in 2001, he performed with fellow superstar musician, Billy Joel, but this Elton John outing was highly regarded as the most anticipated Elton John concert in Cincinnati history.

I, personally understood the hype and excitement leading up to the concert and was online to purchase tickets the very second that they went on sale. Tickets for the event were of three different prices, \$39 for upper deck, \$79 for lower level, and \$129 for floor seats. Unfortunately for many Elton John fans, several tickets had been purchased in advance, making upper deck seats \$100 or more, and some floor seats in the thousands, but because of his highly devoted fan base, the concert sold out in less than 3 days.

For me, being at the concert was an experience that I will never forget. Elton John has the kind of personality that is extremely likeable, whether one finds his music pleasing or not. He never has anything but a smile on his face, which is why I believe he is one of the most popular and successful musicians in rock and pop history. His concerts are not typical or traditional: musician playing, going through the motions, and not bringing any excitement, rather, Elton John brings his crowds into the concert, making it undeniably entertaining. After every song, he makes it a point to get out of his seat, pump up the crowd, and explain to them the meaning behind his next song and why it was either vital to his success, or why it was so amusing for those who listened to it.

Aside from the concert experience with Elton John, his style of music veers off of the usual, mainstream path that musicians of his generation typically followed. Elton John, with his talented lyricist, Bernie Taupin, have made names for themselves by writing songs that truly connect with their listeners. The way that their partnership works is Bernie Taupin writes lyrics and then gives them to Elton John, who writes the music to accompany the lyrics. Unlike the majority of bands and duos of their generation, Taupin and Elton John have never separated or let the fame and fortune get the best of them, which is one of the many reasons their music has remained so popular.

Being named “All the Hits” tour, Elton John and his band performed the best of the songs that they have compiled over the course of their long history. Songs performed included “Your Song,” “Bennie and the Jets,” “Candle in the Wind,” “Tiny Dancer,” “Levon,” and the ever popular “Rocket Man.” During the concert, Elton John took a short break to explain to the crowd that 2015 is the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the release of the group’s groundbreaking album, “*Yellow Brick Road*,” an album that included a handful of their hits, such as “Bennie and the Jets,” “Candle in the Wind,” and “Goodbye Yellow Brick Road.”

One of Elton John’s less popular, but strongest and most meaningful songs, “Mona Lisa and Mad Hatters,” was dedicated to a fan who was celebrating her 40<sup>th</sup> birthday on the night of the concert, coincidental with the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the release of his album “*Yellow Brick Road*.” Following the completion of his performance, Elton John pulled the woman out of the crowd and brought her on stage to take a picture with her and autograph the poster she had brought to the concert.

Elton John and his band left the stage for ten minutes before returning to play their encore, “Crocodile Rock.” Upon hearing the song, the crowd erupted in applause and cheer. The choice of song was certainly special and was very fitting for the finale of the concert.

This year’s concert will stay with me forever and was a truly incredible experience. I anticipate the return of Elton John and his band, and I, along with everyone in attendance of this year’s concert, will be ecstatic to attend his next performance in the Queen City.

**Noah Helbling, 12**



**Kurt Stegman, 12, Graphic**

**Nolan Merten, 9**

# “He’s Scared, He’s Shakin...”

It was a Tuesday night down at Covington Catholic High School, and the Varsity Basketball Colonels were just about to play against the Eagles from Chaminade Julienne, a high school located near Dayton, Ohio. It had been a back and forth game for a while, until the Colonels began to pull away. Once the Colonels were up fourteen with about three minutes to go, Chaminade Julienne’s JV basketball team, sitting in the stands just watching the game, stood up and began to chant over and over again, “He’s scared, he’s shakin, he know he ain’t gon make it!” With the Crazies in attendance, leader CJ Moellering saw this cheer as a way to bolster the Colonel Crazies’ ability to affect opponents during their free throws.

By the time the regional tournament rolled around, the cheer had been practiced until perfection. Every student in the section would jump up and down, flailing their arms, all the while screaming at the top of their lungs, “He’s scared, he’s shakin, he know

he ain’t gon make it!” Well, it turns out that this cheer that we got from a JV basketball team from Ohio during a quiet Tuesday night Varsity basketball game held opposing teams to 39% from the free throw line during the regional tournament. During the Newport Central Catholic semifinal game, a player even air-balled a free throw. When his coach asked him how he could miss so bad, he said, “That cheer really gets in your head.” As well, while down four in the state tournament, Scott County guard Trent Gilbert – who was a 90% free throw shooter and had made 26 consecutive free throws – missed two one-and-one free throws late while the Crazies were chanting the infamous cheer, which helped the Colonels rally back to win a state championship, their first.

Now, the Colonel Crazies cannot be mentioned without including the “He’s scared, he’s shakin,” cheer. During games, not only do the Cra-

zies chant it, but now middle school kids, as well as adults, chant along with the Colonel Crazies in order to add that much more pressure to the opponents at the line. Now, the phrase has taken form in t-shirts and even a copyright. Thank you, Chaminade Julienne, for giving us one of our best cheers yet. Go Colonels.

*Bo Schuh, 12*



*Mr. Wayne Limer, Parent*



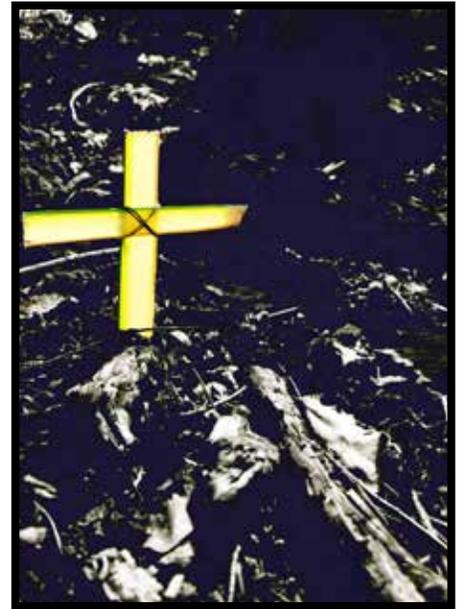
*David Weller, 10*



# The Better Claim

One traveler, telling this with a sigh,  
Looked down as far as one traveler could.  
Two roads, just as fair, and both worn  
Really about the same, had been trodden black.  
That morning, equally lay, two roads in a yellow wood;  
They were grassy, and both wanted wear.  
One traveler, with a sigh, took the road less traveled by,  
And doubted if he should ever look back.

*(derived from The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost)*  
*David Rice, 11*



*Graham Merten, 11*

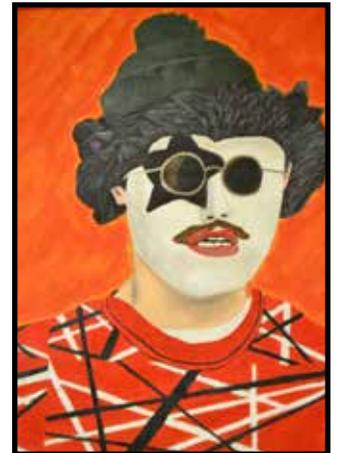
# In the Jaws of the Calculator

**(an excerpt)**

Pain! Searing pain shot through my hand, worse than I had ever experienced in my life. It took me a few seconds to realize what had happened. When I finally came to my senses I WAS SCREAMING OUT LOUD. Perhaps only those in the classroom could see me, but everyone in the school could hear me. At first it occurred to me to simply slide it out, the intended way. That did not work, since my skin was obstructing the pieces. Most students around me had no idea why I was screaming, as it only looked like I was holding a calculator. I let go of it to demonstrate that it was pinching my hand. Now the students were yelling at me to give it one strong pull. I decided that that was the best course of action. I counted to three and then pulled the calculator away from my hand while pulling my hand in the opposite direction. Even this was to no avail.

After what seemed like an eternity, the teacher grabbed a screwdriver and maneuvered it in between the calculator and its cover. From this position he was able to pry the pieces apart. I was free. Once the students realized what had happened to me, everyone, including our teacher, shared a good laugh from which I was excluded. Some may have been embarrassed or upset at the on-lookers for finding enjoyment in my anguish, but I was just happy to be free from the calculator's evil jaws. I looked down at my hand at the area that had been trapped. I saw that the part that had been trapped was now almost in the shape of a ball, while only connected by a thin strip of skin. The school day was concluded shortly after, and life went on. Over the years my body may have healed, but that day changed me forever, for I fought the calculator, and lived to tell the tale.

*Jake Kunkel, 10*



*Danny Curk, 10*

# Light Among Shadows

(a children's story)

Once upon a time, there was a land of shadows that lived under a giant light bulb.

The whole town was made of shadows.

The buildings were made of shadows.

The pets were made of shadows.

The kids were made of shadows.

The parents were made of shadows.

One day a stranger walked into the town of shadows. He was not a shadow but instead, a light.

The light man was tired from his long trip and wanted to find a place to rest.

The shadows did not like the newcomer because he was different and would not give him a bed to sleep in.

After a whole day of looking with no results, the light man sat up against a tree on the outskirts of town.

"Why doesn't anyone help me?" He whimpered to himself.

Weeks past and the shadows of the town lived their happy lives while the light man lay under the tree alone.

One day, there was a shadow festival in the town square. The shadows talked, laughed, and played. The light man watched the festival from a distance, wishing he could join in the fun.

All of a sudden, the town flickered and went black. Everything in the town disappeared and screams came from the dark.

"Help! Where is everyone?" One man yelled. "The light bulb went out!"

Cried another, "We are all doomed!"

The voice of a little girl emerged among the panic, "Hey! What's that over there?"

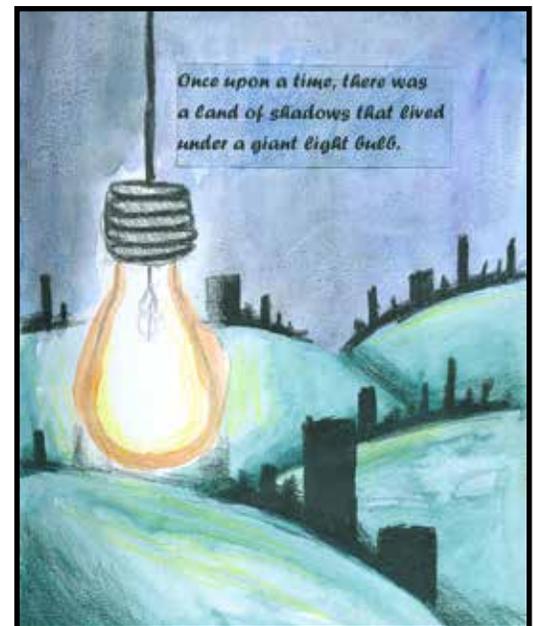
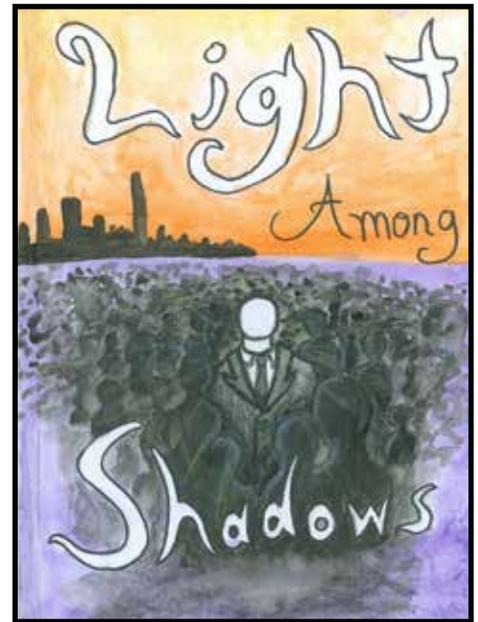
The heads of the shadows turned until they saw a small light in the distance. It was the light man!

"We are sorry light man. We were wrong to exclude you just because you are different. Will you forgive us?"

The light man sat there thinking until an idea came across his mind.

"I forgive you," he said, "And I think I have an answer for your problem."

The light man ran to the square, climbed up the ladder, and unscrewed the light bulb. He stuck his head into the socket and blinked his eyes. The whole town was immersed in light and the shadows cheered for the light man.



**Graham Merten, 11, story**  
**Adam Wagner, 12, artwork**

# GO NORTHWEST, YOUNG SCOUT

(AN EXCERPT)



*Mrs. Diane Ruth, Faculty*

This summer, 2014, I traveled across a sizable bite of the American pie: from Kentucky to Wyoming and South Dakota and all the way back again. As I stood and photographed each of the iconic monuments of these states, and as much of the scenery as I could get my iPhone to, I reminisced on everything it took to get here and imagined what could possibly be next. ....Fast forward through the morning haze and plump dewdrops clinging to our legs, and we were on our way to Jewel Cave National Monument, thought to be much larger than even Mammoth Cave. After assembling tables made from salvaged and recycled materials, we entered the cave. An elevator that dwarfed even the giants among us carried us hundreds of feet below the earth. We passed through crevices that stretched up almost to the surface, an inverted fracture in the earth. The caverns rose and fell, and at times we crossed narrow steel bridges that spanned underground gorges. Then, I paused precisely at the point at which I was deeper under the earth than the Statue of Liberty is tall, and smiled, just thinking what it took as a Boy Scout to make this happen.

*Joe Gray, 10*

## EVERY STAR

A SONG

Give in vain

The thoughtful endure the pain

Weary from playing the game

No longer feels the flame

Again it's begun

Every star, a setting sun

Apathy; worse than hurt

Takes a hit in pursuit of comfort

Awake hardly in mind

Abandons hope in love to find

Again it's begun

Every star, a setting sun

A first look from her to him

A future now looked not grim

His heart once held captive

Was now free for him to give

A new life begun

Every star, a new dawned sun



*Mrs. Diane Ruth, Faculty*



*Jake Fischer, 11*

*Jared Flood, 12*

# JAMES WALKER

(AN EXCERPT)

Though I didn't know it, headed toward me coming down the street was my salvation. Reverend Francis Matthews, the priest at St. John the Evangelist Church just two blocks east, stopped to see if he could help. When he saw my tears, he immediately took Jack in one hand, and my hand in his other. He led me to his church, through the doors and into his own place of living. He made me sit on his bed, and took Jack to check the donations for something he could eat.

As I sat there thinking, I realized that there was no way I could take care of both myself and my infant brother.



Nick Shea, 12

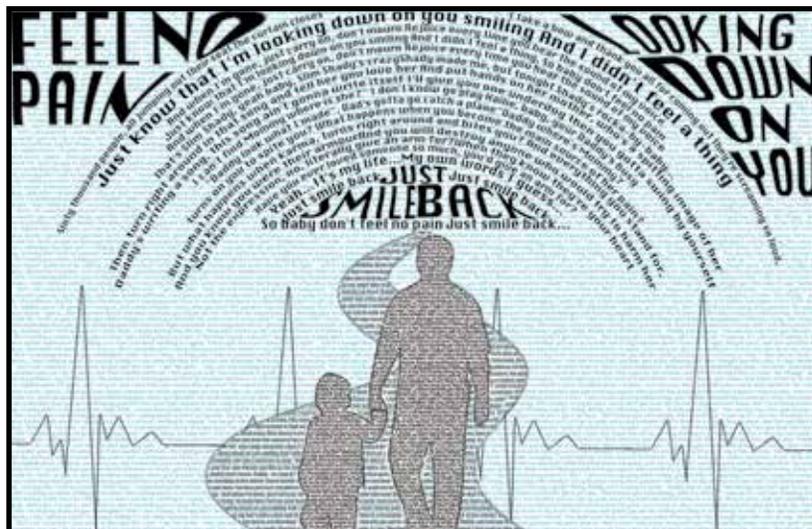
I had to get away. The reverend reentered the room carrying Jack as well as a prepackaged sandwich for me and some kind of mushy baby food for him. While I sat eating, the reverend asked me what happened. I told him the story of the last month of my life. Near the end, I burst back into tears, the weight of the world dropping on to my shoulders. After laying Jack on the floor to nap, he spoke to me. He told me of God's plan, and how in his goodness, he would see me through this ordeal. I didn't listen much, as my mind was struggling with all of my new found problems. When he finished speaking, he stood up, gripped my shoulder, and left the room.

After he was gone, I looked at Jack for the first time since being led off the street. He was sleeping peacefully. How easy it must be for him. His biggest problem was finding something to fill his tiny stomach. It was then and there that I made the hardest decision of my life. I kissed him on the forehead, whispered a goodbye and exited the room. I found myself in the church. I made my way across the room, through the doors and out into the streets of Chicago. I walked down the street without back.

Telling you this story now, I am 26 years old. I now live in the same suburb of Chicago that I did before moving into the city. I have a job at the bank, much like my father did. I am leading a stable life. I have not seen Jack since the day that I left him in that church. Though I will never forget him or the reverend, I think it was best for everyone.

I think that this weekend I will go into the city to see an old friend at the St. John the Evangelist Church. But then again, perhaps it's best if I don't.

*Mark Briede, 10*



*Trevor Bosley, 11*

# THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR VETERANS

Often today the term hero is depicted as a man wearing a cape. Reconsider this and ask yourself “What importance do these figures serve?” A real American hero does not wear a cape. A real American hero wears dog tags. Veterans are monumental figures for our nation’s past and future because they are the inspiration and role model to citizens and young soldiers, their brave stories impact our media, and they have shown us how to honor our nation and understand war.

If we do not pay attention to our veterans, we would start to drift further and further away from respecting our military and even thinking less about our armed forces in general. Our veterans are important resources as they serve as role models for future soldiers, and they keep our society in touch with the military lifestyle through interviews, news stories, and books. They automatically stand out because war is an experience like no other. As heroes of our nation, it is encouraging to see organizations or even a normal person show his appreciation to veterans by buying a meal, or even simply acknowledging them. Recognizing veterans’ sacrifice for our nation is the best way to show them that we appreciate what they have done. Veterans are perfect examples of those who have accepted the challenge of putting their lives

on the line for the sake of others. They deserve our recognition. Without recognition, they would be ashamed and have no reason to say they served. They give themselves something to be proud of and give us something to be thankful for.

The impact veterans have on our media is substantial. Their stories are eccentric, thrilling, and often discussed. Some are even turned into movies. *The Lone Survivor* is a good example, and this particular story received a lot of attention. Based off of actual events, *The Lone Survivor* stands for itself. A soldier is abandoned during a mission to locate a Taliban leader when his squad of four men is ambushed. The film shows the soldiers’ courageous efforts to survive as they fight for each other. When the last man is left alone, he does not surrender himself. Later, a villager encounters him and takes him to safety, allowing him to be rescued. It is amazing how enlisting in the army could change a life in many different ways, both good and bad. Ordinary lives are made extraordinary. Incorporating veterans into our media is a humbling experience. If the media ignored our

veterans, they would not get noticed at all nor receive the attention they deserve. The media reminds everyone that veterans voluntarily made a substantial sacrifice, signing up for something that could change their lives forever. If veterans continue to appear in media, the respect for them will continue to grow which may inspire more Americans to serve.

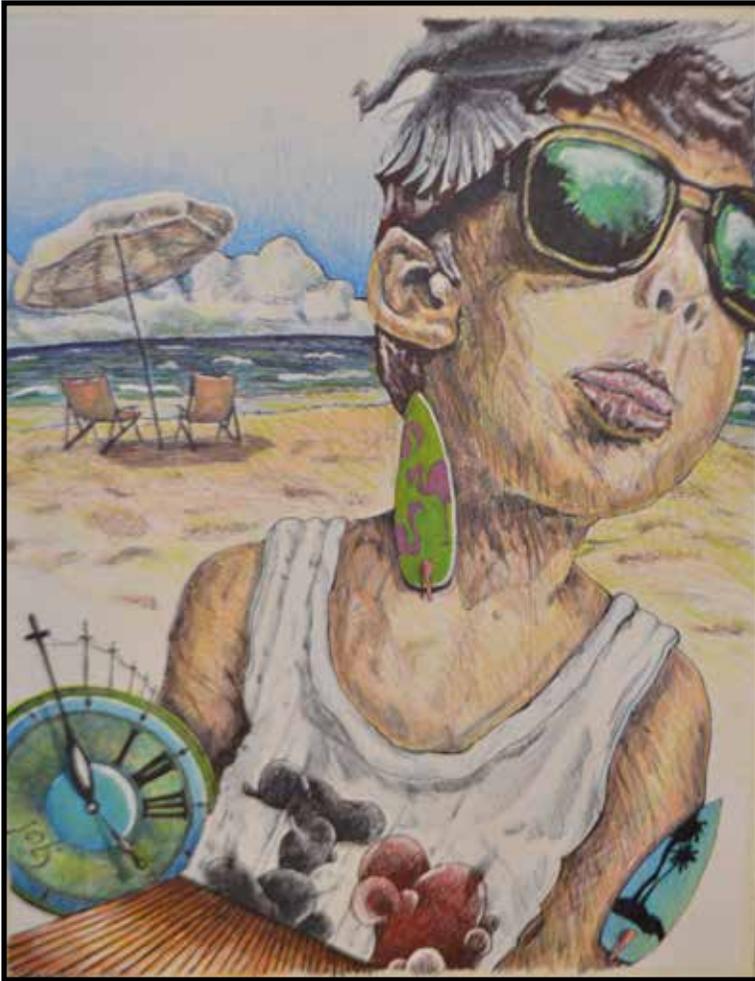
Showing respect for a veteran can go a long way. Veterans ultimately teach one big lesson – how to respect our nation. As our patriotic hero and role model, a veteran serves his country and people with honor. Hearing a veteran’s story can change our outlook on war affairs; it can teach us to respect our nation’s past, to understand that times of war are bad times. When we hear a veteran depict the situation he was in during Vietnam, we start to think more about what actually happened. Ultimately, we pity that he endured that. Instead of reading about wars in our textbooks, we go beyond that and hear first-hand from someone who actually experienced it which provides more details and makes the story more personal. After interviewing a veteran, we walk away with more respect for him or her, and for our nation, for our veterans are serving for the sake of America.

As a society, we should continue to pay tribute to veterans. Because of our veterans, people are inspired to serve, our media pays more attention to those who serve and have served, and we earn more respect for our nation. Not showing appreciation for our veterans causes our past to fade away and our future opportunities to vanish.

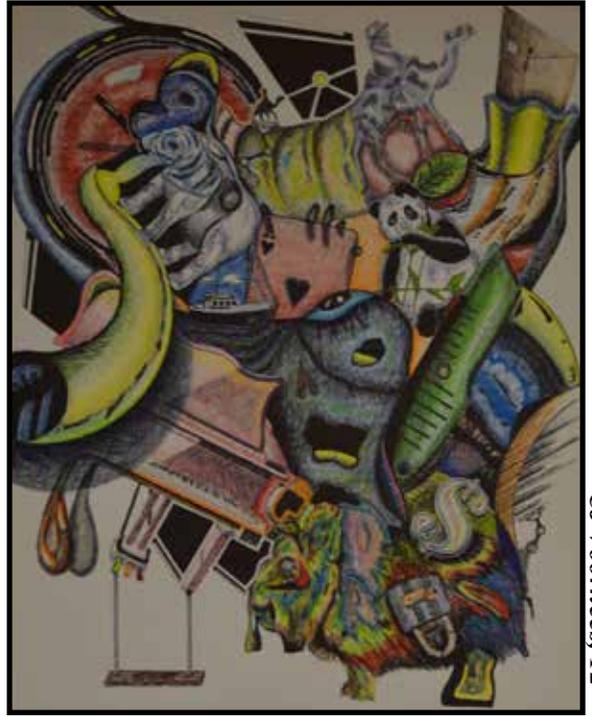
*Noah Birrer, 10*



*Mr. Joe Fischer, Staff*



*CJ Voorhees, 12*



*CJ Voorhees, 12*



*Quinn Foltz, 9*



*Josh Hildreth, 11*



*Evan Bowman, 10*

# DARKS:

deep, nebulous, shadowy, somber

Kurt Stegman, 12

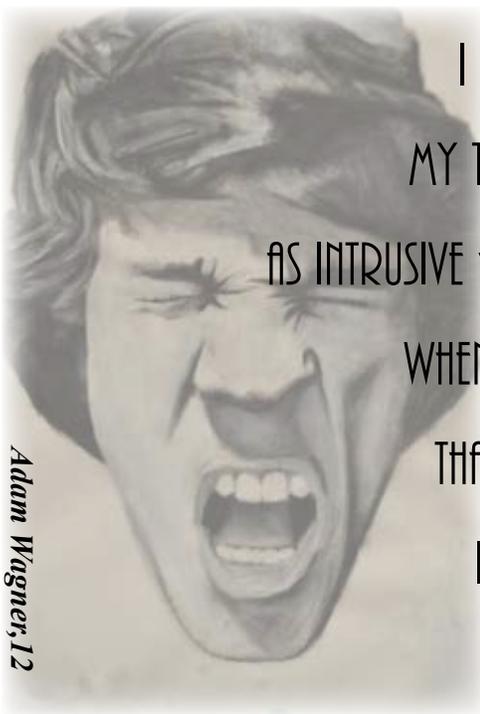
**“They can only come to the morning through the shadows.”**

**J.R.R. Tolkien,  
*The Two Towers***

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## I Awake in Fright



Adam Wagner, 12

I WAS IN MY ROOM LYING IN MY BED  
MY THOUGHTS PURSUED AS MY MIND ENSUED  
AS INTRUSIVE AS MY THOUGHTS CAN BE MY ANXIETY NEVER FLEES  
WHEN I AWAKE IN THE NIGHT I AWAKE IN FRIGHT  
THAT THE FLIGHT OF WHICH MY LIFE WRITES  
IN WHICH THE STRING THAT HOLDS ME  
WILL BREAK AND FALL INTO THE LAKE

*Jim Ott, 12*

# ALREADY DEAD

Winston Smith being controlled  
By a totalitarian dictatorship  
Led by Big Brother; he leads more like an authoritative mother  
I'll teach you the Party's ways  
Our Goal is to take your conscience and mind away.

Forget about the past, they change it in the present  
Can't be wrong, our hold on the future is strong  
We'll impose our ways, you'll never get away.  
Want to make up your own mind? Can't do that: it's thought crime.

They'll take you away, for your crimes you must pay  
Learn to deny your senses, or you'll be erased from existence  
Learn to love Big Brother, or we'll send you 6 feet under  
You'll certainly feel blundered; don't worry, it's just your body and mind **being sundered.**

Deny your humanity and forget about emotion  
Big Brother's got it all planned out; just accept the preconceived notions  
It hurts to be sane and forced into insanity  
Just drink the victory gin, and the pain'll go away

You'll certainly give in, even the adamant always do  
Just accept the principals of INGSOC and we won't mess with you  
Forget about capitalism, that prosperity was just a hoax  
Remember to deny the evidence of your eyes, or it'll surely bring about **your demise.**

Try to find love; that simply won't due  
Anyone but Big Brother and the thought police will capture you  
You may think you're safe, but that's just an illusion  
If you think you can escape: your living in delusion.

There's no escaping our wrath, you'll spend your entire life in our grasp  
Just remember this: ignorance is bliss  
And since everyone gives us trust, we'll be around till the world becomes dust!

(Inspired by 1984)

*Tyler Micek, 12*



*Drake Ficke, 12*

*Skylar Koch, 12*



## FREEDOM

The bird is not free  
Its wings are clipped  
He is filled with rage  
His feet are tied  
A nightmare it sings  
From behind the bars  
It claims a fearful scream  
When the breeze blows  
The rage it sings is tied to the nightmare  
The bird screams for freedom

*Samuel Kathman, 12*



*Kurt Stegman, 12*

# Falling Apart

**Noah Birrer, 10**



I'm sitting with a frozen brisk in the air  
With snowflakes drifting in the black.  
You told me to meet you where we first met,  
Where the light now fades into the dark.  
My life was dedicated to you,  
Spending my days to see that smile,  
And now I'm all alone and afraid  
In a place where I can't be saved.

## Refrain

Do you see me standing over here?  
All alone in the dark!  
I will scream your name  
Until you stab me in the back!  
All my tears, and all my life,  
I've laid my heart out on the line.  
And now I'm here, and all I see  
Is my heart fallin' apart.

As I bleed out in the ice,  
My broken heart lying on the ground,  
I'll scream and shout till the end is near  
And then I'll fade into the dark.

## Instrumental Piece

Yeah!  
I'm screaming on the ground!  
Nothing I gave was good enough,  
Nothing I did ever made the cut!  
"You're dead to me!"?  
I was always dead to you!  
All the lying and the conniving and  
Nothing I did ever made me worth it to you!



**Mark Ryan, 12**

## Refrain

**David Rice, 11**

# We Wish We Were Young

I am weak compared to the drug  
What can I say to help?  
I know the feeling when you can't look up  
I've had to deal with that myself

So how do we get to be so far  
From the things we love?  
Sad to see a boy's love for the water  
Be replaced by a drug

Feeling free with no rules in the water  
But even fish eventually drown

**Will Breen, 10**



**Skyler Koch, 12**

# Elah

They had been moving for some time now. Vin Montago had actually made a note of it, directing a few passive-aggressive comments to his comrades. He would mention things like, "I wonder if we would move faster if we got rid of some dead weight," or, "I'm so glad that we're okay with just flying around in *any* ship." Pei and Ricky, his companions on the ship, had caught on some time ago, but they knew Vin was mostly a good guy, and they both realized everyone was just as sick of travelling. Some were just a bit more vocal about it.

"I should've just run away from the empire, instead of being their little errand boy," mumbled Vin, directed at no one in particular. If anything had been constant in his life, it was pity and regret. Vin looked the type, too. He had greasy brown hair and a small frame, his face mostly pointing to the ground in a non-confrontational way.

"Bitching about it isn't going to fix a damn thing," hollered Ricky from the engine room. His ears were as good as he was brash. He had the brawn to back up his blunt and offensive manner, wide set shoulders, a barrel chest, and a don't-fuck-with-me glare that only ever exists in prisoners and security guards. Ricky fell into the former category.

Ricky, Pei, and Vin all sat in the pilot's room, occasionally checking the monitors, mostly thinking of nothing. They each wore the official blue jumpsuit and black combat boots and the unofficial mood of complete and total boredom uniform to workers of the empire.

At first, the trio had kept busy through cards and conversation, but they all grew bored after the three months. All that remained was a clamoring silence. The ship groaned and creaked, especially the engine, but the three voyagers remained completely silent, trying to see which one could ignore the other two the most.

"What's done is done, Vin. Only the fool worries about what they can't change," finally piped up Pei. She was a tiny thing, reflective and pensive. Most of the time, she would just hide under her black bangs, oblivious to the world around her. These were the first words she had uttered that day. Occasionally, weeks would go by without a word passing from her lips.

"Let's just do something. C'mon guys, how about another game of poker," Vin finally offered.

"Fuck that. I think the same 20 bucks has been floating between us for the last million games," shot back Ricky.

"You know, we've talked a lot, about nearly every part of each other's lives." Pei apparently was going for a new record in words spoken at once. "But I don't think I've heard what religion you follow. Can we talk about it?"

"A: You don't just start a conversation with 'Oh boy, what do you lads think of religion!' And B: It's not fucking happening." Ricky was off. "Nothing fruitful has ever been gained from a conversation on religion. All's it does is breed conflict and create grudges. I'd rather talk fucking politics than religion."

Vin's face scrunched up at this. "Religion isn't that bad. What about the good it has done?"

"I never said religion was bad, just the discussion of it."

The room had been tense there for a second, with Ricky's outburst, but the hostility was now gone, only to be replaced by the familiar boredom that had always pervaded the pilot's cabin. None of them could ever offer an explanation for why it was called the pilot's cabin. The ship was completely controlled by a computer hosted at the Empire's Exploratory Facility. There, instructions, commands, and news were sent to exploratory ships owned by the empire, whose express goal was finding heavenly bodies suitable for human life. It was a rather boring occupation, but not many got into the space-exploration game with a lot of other options available to them.

"I'm not going to just let this fizzle down, I've been meaning to ask for a while now," Pei said after a few more minutes of silence. Their conversations always had long pauses. "Ricky, you obviously have some strong opinions on religion. Whose camp do you stand in?"

"If we must talk about it, can we first agree to keep it civil?" he replied.

"Says the guy who just got off an impassioned monologue on the 'dangers of religion,'" Vin teased.

Ricky sighed. "I'm an atheist," he finally replied. "Organized religion has always seemed too limiting, and if the people that tell me I'm going to hell end up in heaven, I'm sure as shit glad I'm taking the elevator down."

"Not really the best reasoning, there," Vin said.

"Well, it's a good thing that's not my only fucking reason. I don't believe for a metric fuck-ton of reasons, I just like to start with the organized religion bit. You could fill entire fucking books with arguments for and against, but the top reason for me is how shit the world is. A good god wouldn't let all his creations kill each other for the scraps he's decided to toss at them." The look Ricky had just then was the look of a man who knows he's right, but would give anything to be wrong. He shed it quickly, resuming the shape of a brazen man ready to fight the world.

Yet another silence, even more uncomfortable than the last.

"You're a hard act to follow, Ricky, but I guess I'll go next," Pei said light-heartedly. "The best word for my beliefs is probably pantheist. In my eyes, God is everything. He is a she who's also an it. He is the sheep and the wolf that eats the sheep. Me and you, us and them. Religion fails when it tries to define God, unaware that they themselves are God. Divinity and the universe are just the same word pronounced differently."

"To be brutally honest, that sounds dumb as hell," taunted Ricky, after a few moments of contemplation. "Why even call it divinity? What's even godly about it?"

Pei was unfazed, evidently hearing much of this not for the first time. "What about you, Vin? Are you religious?"

*(continued)*

Vin hesitated, then began, "I was raised a Baptist, and I guess I still am, but I hardly say I'm religious."  
"Why?"

"Dunno. I was never really into it, even early on. I liked the concept of being a part of something big and important, but I never really felt like I belonged." He laughed. "I guess 'dunno' sums up most of my feeling and stances about God."

The steel and glass ship continued on through the cold and apathetic vacuum of space. The passenger's conversation soon sputtered out like a dying engine, with Ricky telling them both they were being idiots and Pei, uncharacteristically, telling him where he could shove it. They all left for their respective bunks, each given something new to think about.

Hours later, they had all assembled back in the pilot's cabin. Vin was still moping about, but the other two didn't seem to take notice. They had built their own little worlds where they spent most of their time. The monitor displayed the nearest planet, a little icy planet called Elah, named by a rather insignificant astronomer during the Bronze Age of Exploration, where the empire was just begging its domination of the galaxy and interstellar travel was crude and inefficient. As a matter of fact, this would be the first and only planet named by that insignificant astronomer. For the rest of his days after his discovery, he made great claims of visions where prickly devils and angels pure as snow raged in a never-ending strife. He died alone and afraid.

A few more hours passed, and the ship arrived at Elah. Standard protocol when approaching a foreign planet was to first test conditions with a bot. The trio were now preparing the bot for some "Exploratory Surface Excursion," as it was called by the empire. They called it space-lunking, or at least Vin did. He was never known for his wit.

Elah was cold and desolate, far from any star, but this sort of destination was rather routine for the Explorers. Vin had always laughed at the term. The word "explorers" conjures up images of noble men, gallantly roaming the seas on great big clipper ships, with strong chins and charisma enough to captain a whole band of rambunctious scallywags. Space-Explorers were little more than maintenance men and women, kept on board just to tend to the engine and computer. The pay wasn't very good, and Explorers would be gone for years on end with very little contact to friends and family. Most people who ended up Explorers were forced into the role.

Vin was just a victim of circumstance, drafted on to the program when not enough people had volunteered in the town he had drifted in to. The local offices figured that no one would miss the scrawny vagabond, and just signed him up as if he were a citizen of the town.

Ricky was a "reformed" criminal, and didn't have the widest selection of jobs. As a matter of fact, Exploring was on the better side of jobs offered to people like him. He got along well enough with his companions and enjoyed life outside of mainstream society. He could do as he pleased on the ship without persecution from any government or individual. Explorer ships weren't regulated too heavily by the empire and acted as a safe haven for many social unwanted.

Pei was a bit of a mystery. From what the other two gathered, she didn't have much of reason at all to take such a shit job. Maybe she just enjoyed the work. It certainly had enough solitude and that seemed to suit her.

The bot, a rather ugly thing that had always repulsed Vin (he always thought it was some perverse cross between a crab and a retarded robot) was centered on the deployment hatch, ready to be dropped onto the planet.

Although the team was typically very easy-going and non-committal, they knew that accidents happened to the ill-prepared. They acted like a well-oiled machine when the time came for teamwork.

"Alright, everything looks good. Release the crawler," called Ricky over the intercom.

"Releasing," answered Vin.

Again, Ricky's voice pierced the air, pregnant with command. "Are we still good, Pei?"

"Looks like it," she answered, scanning the monitor for any potential problems. "Wait, wait. It looks like it landed safely, but got caught on something on the surface."

"What's it caught on, then?" Ricky demanded.

"I can't really see anything in its way, but all the systems are up. Maybe something's gunking up the legs?" The legs were infamous for breaking, digging too deep into the ground, not digging deep enough, or getting caught in whatever unpleasanties inhabited the surface of dead planets. Regardless, the crawler was stuck, and each of the Explorers knew what had to happen next.

"Anyone up for a bit of sleep walking?" Ricky asked, knowing no one would be.

There were few things that actually ever go wrong on an empire ship, and even then, most issues are solved by a simple patch downloaded off an empire server or clean the part of the engine that's malfunctioning. However, some issues are much harder to control, none more so than a broken bot. The sad reality is one of those odd-looking drones ranks above the simple space Explorer in terms of what the empire cares about. When a bot malfunctions, an Explorer must go out to where it lands and manually fix it. Explorers call it sleep walking because of the high mortality rate and the fact that the suit won't protect you too long from the frigidness. The unlucky get frozen standing up, looking peacefully asleep, and float around until they're pulled backed in. Most have died by then, and thawing achieves almost nothing. Not only does sleep walking require technical know-how, but finesse and a willingness to risk a life. All three of the empire Explorers were trained for it, and all three Explorers were not eager to do it.

"Play a game of poker for it?" offered Vin's nasally voice before all hell broke loose.

It was a very unpleasant affair, with many exchanges of "fuck you" and "over my corpse" going around, but in the end, Ricky relented. Whether it be from a sense of comradery or just lack of reflection on the risk was anyone's guess.

They began to suit him up, Vin and Pei making unnecessary adjustments just to feel like they were helping. "Little tight around the sides," he said with a tense smile. "If I'm gonna do this, I better look good while doing it."

*(continued)*

Vin tried to flash him a reassuring grin, but it was strained, and came out more depressing than anything.

After a few more minutes of awkward banter and checks to the atmo-suit, Ricky was ready to depart. The plan was to dangle him over the planet, have him solve the problem with the bot, and haul him back in before the cold claimed him. They opened the deployment hatch, and let in the inky blackness of space. Following in the footsteps of the bot, Ricky fell through the same exit, tethered to the ship with a fiber cord.

Vin and Pei passed the minutes by with bated breath. The farther Ricky got from the ship, the worse his connection with the radio became. Vin figured it had to do with the planet somehow screwing up their tech, the inner pessimist telling him he won't even hear Ricky die. Hovering above the planet, Vin could only guess exactly what was going on down there. The faint flickering of the radio continued. It droned on and on, just static with the intelligible and irregular patterns of Ricky's speech. Time passed. More time passed. Then, nothing. The radio had stopped altogether.

30 seconds after that, Pei and Vin had decided something was wrong. When they pulled on the tether, it remained tense, like it was anchored to a planet. By 5 minutes, a decision had been made to go down after Ricky. By 15 minutes, Pei was ready to go. She had volunteered, saying she was next in command after Ricky, and Vin didn't need any more reason.

A horrible sense of Déjà vu afflicted the reaming pair of Explorers, with a similar awkward banter, a similar series of checks, and a similar departure. He felt like a coward, letting one of his only two friends within a couple light years go on alone to try and save the other. Pei had descended to the surface below, and Vin was alone in the ship, knowing Pei dangled somewhere beneath him. Again, the static on the radio was too much to discern any speech, but it was still somewhat reassuring to hear it crackle and stutter. Again, minutes went by, passed with the stuttering of the handheld radio. Suddenly it stopped. Full blown panic chased the anxiety that had been building up. Both of his comrades now were down on this mysterious Elah, most likely dead. Actually, he didn't quite think they were dead. Both of the cords connecting them to him were still tense, pulled by some enigmatic force.

20 minutes of steeling his frayed nerves. 25 minutes to don the third atmo-suit, taking extra time because his limbs were trembling. He was ready to go.

Vin punched the red release button, tied his tether to the interior of the ship, looked down for a second (just a second), and jumped.

Outer space seized him like cold water claiming a man who just dived in. Air was forced into his lungs from the oxygen tank strapped to his back. The tank took CO2 that he expelled and turned it to oxygen. Vin was disgusted by the thought of recycled air. Down he went, traveling with the rope, toward the surface. Elah had no atmosphere, so the surface was just as cold as the space he had been in.

The surface of Elah was a frigid and desolate wasteland, with nothing but icy expanse in every direction. Because of this, he spotted the bot rather quickly. He approached it, with nothing but his pounding heartbeat to accompany him. The bot appeared intact, but it now was somehow cleaner, less repulsive than before. It was like someone had redesigned it just for Vin's sake, to make sure he wasn't too terrified.

Vin was too anxious to worry himself with such minor details. He looked around for footprints, but found none. Not knowing what to do, and on the verge of calling it and going back up to the ship like the meek man he was, he heard a rumble. Distant at first, it rose in strength and definition till it began to shake Vin, in a physical way, but also in a way he couldn't as easily describe. It increased in magnitude many times over, knocking Vin to his knees. It kept on building and building with no crescendo in sight. Vin was so filled with absolute and overpowering fear, he had to scream, but no sound escaped his lips. His eyes closed. His body tensed. Then, nothing. He opened his eyes once more, and observed the rather peculiar scene right in front of his eyes. Vin was calm now. Ricky and Pei were floating, with their fiber tethers embedded deeply inside their bodies and shining intensely. The other end of the tether disappeared into the planet itself. They looked at him in unison, and smiled. The scene around him morphed until he found himself in the midst of a room, white as ivory. Vin couldn't tell where his skin ended and the air began.

A figure occupied the center of the far wall. Vin couldn't decide what shape it was and believed that it couldn't either. It morphed itself like the twilight morphs shadows, like time morphs a caterpillar. It finally decided on a shape, that of a man. This newborn man looked a bit like everyone Vin had ever come across, with an impassionate brutality like it hurt to even exist and solid white eyes that perceived all, from the tips of Vin's greasy hair, to the ends of his steel-toed combat boots.

The man continued impassionedly staring at Vin, not making any further move.

Vin had just lost his newfound serenity and replaced it with a terrible case of the shakes. Vin muttered silly nothings to himself, before he finally decided to speak.

"Um... Hello," he finally managed.

*Hello.*

"Would you mind explaining what's going on?" he whispered meekly, like a lost boy asking his father for help.

*You are talking to me.*

"And, you are....?"

*I am who I am.*

The man's mouth never moved, and no sound was heard. It was like the thought was just tossed into Vin's head, without much consideration in the way of language. They weren't words Vin perceived, they were more primal, akin to instincts or strongly held beliefs.

Vin finally found a bit of courage hiding somewhere in his gut. "What the hell do you mean?" Vin whined.

*I mean what I said.*

*(continued)*

Vin was far from satisfied by this answer, but he didn't want to risk offending the thing, so he pursued it no further. It finally came to him that what he was speaking to was best described by the word divine. The man smiled at this thought. Vin couldn't decide if he had come to the realization or was lead there.

"What are you doing here?" Although Vin realized talking wasn't necessary, he liked the semblance of control that came with speech. Maybe he couldn't choose his thoughts, but he could choose his words.

*This is where I am supposed to be right now.*

"According to who?"

*According to the way it was, the way it is, and the way it will always be.*

"That doesn't make any sense! You're here because you want to be, I found you because you wanted me to! Right?" demanded Vin.

*I will show you.*

Suddenly, Vin was stuffed with knowledge, feeling, perception, all at the hands of God till the point where he would give anything to just let his mind pop. He saw, no, he *felt* two tiny atoms bump, and then more, expansions, growth, settlement, life, multiplication, evolution, all up until he saw himself in the ship hours ago. Vin began to wonder about how much control he had over anything, even his life itself.

*This is where I had to be in this moment. This is where you had to be in this moment.*

They were back in the room, except Vin looked at himself in the middle of the wall. He felt all the knowledge in the universe course through his brains. It was too much, all the misery and joy, strife and success, happening over countless civilizations in countless times of countless places to countless things. Realization of what it is to be God dawned on him. He screamed again, this time out of empowerment, threw all of his rage into a punch aimed at the Vin he saw, and blacked out.

His first conscious feeling was cold, his first thought was *I'm fucking freezing*. Ricky and Pei mothered over him like a hen tending to her egg. They were still on the surface of Elah with Vin on the ground and Ricky and Pei fearing the worst.

Vin could feel terrible pain in his left eye and his fist, so much so that he couldn't help but moan. He could only open his right eye. He saw Ricky and Pei cheering at his awakening. He was happy too for a second, but then realized something was off. Inside both of them he could just make out the outline of a vile, red, and thorny creature and another white and immaculate. The two things fought and struggled, and where they met, he could see his friends. He then lost consciousness yet again. Ricky toggled the winch that would pull their tethers up, and ascended back up the ship with Vin in his arms and Pei following right behind them.

The crew was back on the ship. A few days had passed.

"I don't know what happened!" Vin said.

"Vin, we're not mad or anything, just worried. Stop being so defensive. We just have to fill out this form and we're done. Ok?" Pei cooed, stroking his arm reassuringly, trying to calm him down.

"We've been over this! I already told you that I don't know!" Vin did know. He remembered exactly what transpired on that unforgiving rock, though he never admit it. He now saw a divine battle raging in both of his friends all day long, a red demon and white angel fighting inside them, fighting inside himself. He had spectacular visions of the end and the beginning. He would never admit any of this to Pei and Ricky.

The two had spent a good amount of time explaining what happened, what *they* believed happened. Pei said that Ricky was fully awake the whole time, it was just the radio acting up. He said Pei came down and helped him with the bot. Then, Vin came down, touched the surface, looked at his friends, and fainted.

Vin never tried to explain to them what went on, what he *knew* happened. He had chosen to go with amnesia, so he would never reveal himself to be the nutter Ricky and Pei would think he was.

"So I'll just put down you can't recall?" Pei said, pointing at the form.

"Sure, whatever. So we're done here?" Vin asked, not making eye contact and already getting up to walk away.

She looked at him with worry, still fearing he suffered from whatever happened to him on the surface. She watched him walk away, wanting to ask how he was doing. Pei wanted to tell him that he could talk to her or Ricky if he needed to.

The ship continued on through the blackness of space. They were on their way to the next planet. Vin sat in his room silently. He looked at the world in a completely new way, in terms of the divine instead of those concerns of mortal kind. Only he knew what had happened on Elah, and that was good enough.

*Peter Schaefer, 11*

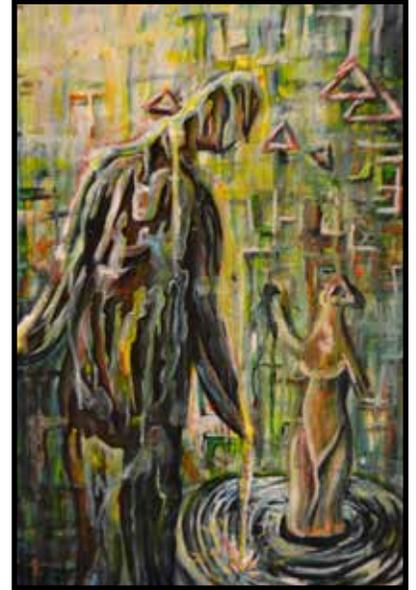
*Image by David Weller, 10*

# Gentle Sway

His ring was bright against his purpled hand,  
His swaying gentle in the pollen haze  
Inside that old tobacco barn, and  
He wore a burlap sack to hide his face.  
We looked around for where he hid his car –  
Nothing. He must have walked three miles or more.  
He must have cared to hide himself this far  
Out here. His toes just grazed the dirt-packed floor.  
The flies had swarmed his crotch and mask and chest.  
The wind that made him sway just barely soughed.  
I called the cops. They took care of the rest.  
I think he'd wish he'd hid much better now.  
At night I sometimes see his wedding band  
And take some care to not quite understand.



*Jacob Rohling, 10*



*Ryan Arlinghaus, 12*

*Kevin Crush, Alumnus*

# One Day

So long as these thoughts pollute your mind,  
you will never know peace.  
No matter how you wash the grime,  
the filth muffles your screams.  
But you see sunlight over the horizon.  
“One day,” you pray.  
But it’s so much easier to flirt with a handgun.  
One day I pray you have the strength to say,  
“I no longer stay where darkness lays.”  
One day the knife will no longer kiss your wrist,  
the whispering gun will seal its lips,  
and the pain you feel will cease to exist.  
One day.

*A.J. Skubak, Alumnus*



*Nick Shea, 12*

## The Lone Servant

He thought I was gone, I was not.  
My companions left for the festival, I stayed.  
He left orders to stay, I did.  
They went down into the catacombs, I followed.  
Talked, they did, of Amontillado, I listened.  
The Amontillado! I knew nothing of that.  
A Mason he was, I was a Catholic.  
The master chained him, I watched.  
Bricks and laughter, I was fearful.  
The master turned to me, I ran.  
He returned from the catacombs, I was there.  
The master asked of the festival, I said it was delightful.

*Matthew Franxman, 10*

*Christian VanDusen, 12*

# HEADHUNTERS

AN EXCERPT

Dead people. I play with them, paint them pretty colors and bring them into existence. Before the Ordinance, I used to call myself a magician, turning living people into dead people in just a blink of an eye.

The FBI called me Michael Ross, murderous swine with a one-million dollar bounty. The APA started labeling me as insane and impossible to reconcile with; they also branded me with a million dollar bounty. The media took to calling me the Million-Dollar Man for my startlingly high bounties, but the pedestrians kept it simple. They just called me by my stage name: Magic Mike.

Years ago, I was taken by agents in Bermuda after a well-planned sting operation to capture me in the midst of a cartel deal. It was beautifully-staged – the entire thing was executed in under ten minutes. Worthy of an applause – if I were not the one being taken, of course. They took me in, and I was sentenced for life without parole in the Carter Maximum Security Center in Albany, New York.

Time went on as I lay alone in my padded cell. Not once had I been given the chance to walk outside. Never had I been granted a conversation with a fellow prisoner - not until a man named Thomas Kitt proposed the Kitt Acts in Congress, Kitt, a huge supporter of shrinking down the number of prisons in the country to free up law enforcement to tackle the populace, managed to circulate three bills through Capitol Hill that ended up changing my life forever.

*David Rice, 11*

# THE DEPTHS

AN EXCERPT

*November 7, 4056. Day 1. My name is Philip Vincent. I'm a scientist, biologist and geologist, and I've just been exiled from my home planet Earth, for alleged "crimes against humanity." I was given a ship from a spacecraft manufacturer called Horizon Corporations. The ship can go a top speed of 20 light years per minute. I haven't left the Milky Way yet, but I may be the first to do so. My goal is to hopefully discover a planet fit for human conditions and colonization. If I achieve this goal, I will be allowed to set foot on Earth again. Other than that, I'm left out here alone in the darkness of space. So far I'm about 42,300 light years away from earth. This is second day alone and I haven't experienced any signs of mental instability. They supplied this ship with sedatives in a dispenser that I'm supposed to take for that purpose. I have to inject myself on a daily basis to keep my mind in order. The drug supplies the brain with high levels of dopamine and norepinephrine. This is the first time I'm ever going to admit this, but I've done some questionable things - things that I'm not proud of. My goal midway through life was to find a solution for humanity - a cure for the suffering of my planet. That's all I wanted. The people I experimented on were rapists, molesters, murderers and overall sadistic individuals. They were nothing but a burden on humanity. I was putting them to use. I was giving them a purpose. I was going to save everyone, but here I am exiled into space for my apparent "crimes against humanity." My goal right now is to redeem myself. End Log 1.*

*Jim Ott, 12*

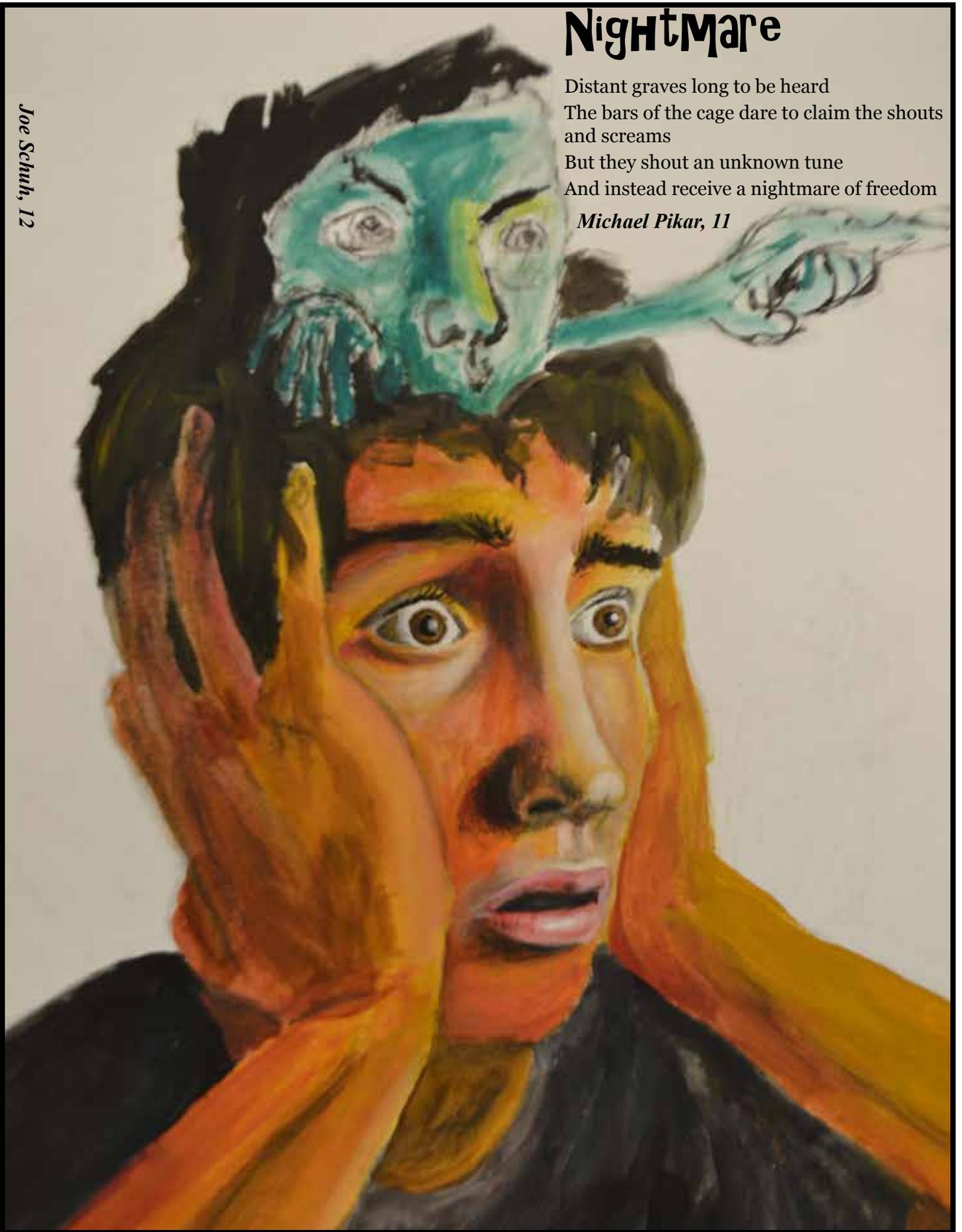
*Kurt Stegman, 12, Sketch*

# Nightmare

Distant graves long to be heard  
The bars of the cage dare to claim the shouts  
and screams  
But they shout an unknown tune  
And instead receive a nightmare of freedom

*Michael Pikar, 11*

*Joe Schuh, 12*



# ALL WILL REMAIN QUIET ON THE FRONT

Nations nipped at each other's heels  
Like dogs who taunt their enemies with the love of war  
A call to arms, was the cry  
A cry I answered with naïve and childish ambition

The barriers of my courage fell  
Like the comrades around me who fall  
Into the concave earth that soon becomes their graves  
I only find my courage again  
When my eyes beheld that fatherly man

I look to him for comfort  
And in the jaws of hell he gives me what I need  
In a way he is my butterfly  
Always calm and commanding  
He spreads his wings around me  
And leads me to better and safer places

But the exterminators of the world  
Took my precious butterfly away from me  
And now I am lost  
Like the poor bastards of society

I roam the dying fields  
One by one the empty spaces around the fire grow  
More numerous than I would care to count  
I know that sooner than later  
My time will come  
Like the unwanted runt  
And all will remain quiet  
On the western front

*Michael Pikar, 11*



*Nick Shea, 12*



*Skyler Koch, 12*



*Andy Krykendall, 10*



# GIVE US BARABBAS!

AN EXCERPT FROM A SHORT WORK OF RELIGIOUS FICTION

Good Friday, the end of Lent and the saddest day of the church year, always concluded with a passion play. Always. The young kids would get dressed up in surprisingly accurate robes and sandals and act out the story of Jesus being condemned and crucified. Over the years, our passion play had gained a reputation for having the highest production value around. As it turned out, one of the old geezers in the congregation owned a theater production company back in his prime. Not only did he finance the entire play, he brought in professional makeup and effects studios to bring the play to life.

I suppose the high expectations are what made everyone so complacent when the shit hit the fan. The kids were in the middle of the passion play, attempting to convince Pontius Pilate and Herod to send Jesus to crucifixion, when things took an unexpected turn. “Whom shall I set free?” A tall boy with dirty blonde hair asked the robed crowd of children.

As one, they lifted their fists in the air and chanted, “Barabbas! Give us Barabbas!” They had rehearsed for months and not a single voice was out of place. Then, inexplicably, Barabbas walked out of the sacristy and climbed atop the altar.

A few of the parents and grandparents gasped at first, at the sight of such dirty sandals marring the wooden altar, but they thought it was part of the passion play.

It took nearly half a minute for the collective audience to realize that this Barabbas wasn’t a child in Hollywood makeup. Pastor slowly rose from his seat in the first pew and lifted a hand toward the man. When Barabbas spoke, everyone knew beyond a doubt that he was *the* Barabbas.

“Thank you,” Barabbas said loudly in Hebrew. With magic reminiscent of Pentecost, everyone in the church knew that he was speaking Hebrew and yet could understand. Pastor screamed and fell to his knees.

“I have come to herald the arrival of the Lord!” Barabbas shouted at the top of his lungs. I didn’t know what to do so I cowered down between the pews with everyone else. A few people grabbed their bibles and whispered the Lord’s Prayer, but most of us just peered over the wooden seats and wondered what would happen next.

I had learned in Sunday School that the rapture, the return of the dead and living Christians to heaven, would happen *after* the Time of Tribulation and the millennium of peace on Earth. I guess that our translation was a little off, because almost every member of the church vanished in the blink of an eye when Barabbas clapped his hands.

At once, all of the believers, presumably throughout the entire world, ascended. My jaw nearly hit the floor. I looked all around, but the only other person I saw was the grizzled Vietnam vet who played the organ and had an ongoing affair with one of the Spanish maids that cleaned the church.

*Mr. Stuart Thaman, Faculty*

*Kurt Stegman, 12,  
Sketch*

# God's Country

## A Song

It seems like you have to carry a gun everywhere you go  
To protect your back from men white and black  
Who want to steal your soul



*Noah Birrer, 10*

And I know that's not what God wanted  
Guns were made to take huntin'  
So take your son, your daughter, or wife, and keep the tradition  
alive

Head out to God's country  
Out where no one else would go  
Make the best memories that you won't forget when you get old  
You'll have the best time of your life  
With the people you love and help you survive  
Head on out to God's country

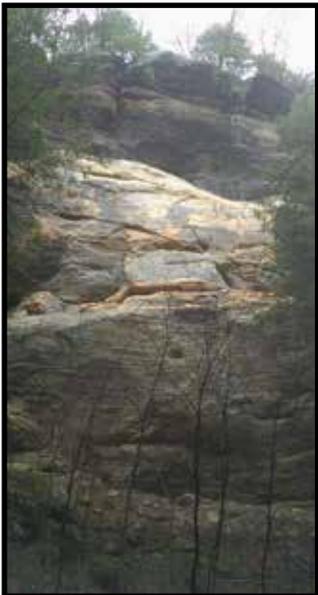
Sit in the stand with your little man from the time he can walk  
Then later that night build a fire at your campsite  
Sit around and talk

Then that crisp, cold morning  
When your little man shoots his first deer  
Is a memory that you won't forget for the rest of your years

Head out to God's country  
Out where no one else would go  
Make the best memories that you won't forget when you get old  
You'll have the best time of your life  
With the people you love and help you survive  
Head on out to God's country  
Yeah, God's country

Make memories that you won't forget  
Escape reality for a little bit  
Only in God's country

*Brady Baeten, 12*



# WHO IS HE?

Who is he?  
That man on the pier,  
With a fresh suit and corsage to match?  
Most say he is but a legend – a myth,  
To murder in cold blood and serve for the enemy.

Who is that man?  
Whose parties take on the Saturday night lights;  
Extravagant enough to bring freshly grown fruit, but  
Intelligent enough to possess a library comparable to none?  
The man is but a shadow in the light,  
A whisper in the wind,  
Like a phantom searching for repentance.

Who is he?  
That man on the pier,  
Whose shadow is overcast  
By that deep shade of green?

*David Rice, 11*



*Noah Birrer, 10*



## Reflections of a WWI Soldier

I hide beneath the battlefield. I hide from the bullets and shells. I escape death for another moment. Beside me and all around lay my less fortunate brothers. I hide in fear of the enemy-- in fear of their constant shower of bullets—in fear of their charging forces. Alone in my hole, I wait for the right moment to retreat. I am stranded in No Man's Land, and I yearn to be reunited with my brothers. In war, men act out of terror. A man finds no reason to kill. It becomes his nature, his impulse. Killing occurs without second thought.



*Mark Ryan, 12*

And so it happened. A charging enemy soldier leaped into my hole for shelter where my blade pierced his chest. Immediately, I am repulsed by my actions. No longer am I alone. I sit with a man I wish I had never met, a man whom I did not want to kill. Had this happened again, I would have restrained myself. But I live in fear, the constant fear of the bullets flying and the sights of the dead men all around me. War has shown me what little value men are. Yet as I sit with my victim, the victim of a man's own fear, I realize this man is just like me.

Beneath the uniform and beside the rifle, a man had a duty beyond the battlefield he is sentenced to. We leave families and friends expecting us, but we are here, killing without reason, only killing because we don't have another choice. How could any man on this field be my enemy? I've no intention to kill a man. This war has betrayed me. We all live for a higher cause; however, this cause destroys the life of many, on and off the battlefield. Husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers are all lost, lost in a wasteland of pure peril. Hell enacts upon all of us for it is not a man's nature to kill strangers without thinking. Men are transformed permanently into beings that can no longer understand what it feels like to love and to be loved.

*Noah Birrer, 10*

# A Tribute to the Catcher



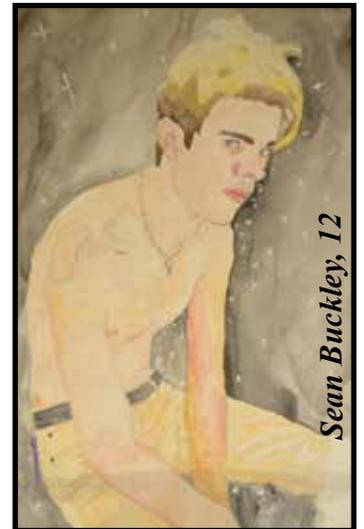
*Kurt Stegman, 12*

If a body see a body  
Holden might be that guy  
If you write "fuck you"  
Holden just might cry

Throw back a few high balls  
Step off a curb to a never-ending fall  
Old Ackley kid, obnoxious as shit  
Stradlater would knock his ass out in one hit

Whether he's Holden or Jim Steele  
That old hunting hat is all he cares to feel  
Ol' Phoebe can't get enough of the carousel  
Her smile is all that makes Holden well

*Jared Flood, 12*



*Sean Buckley, 12*

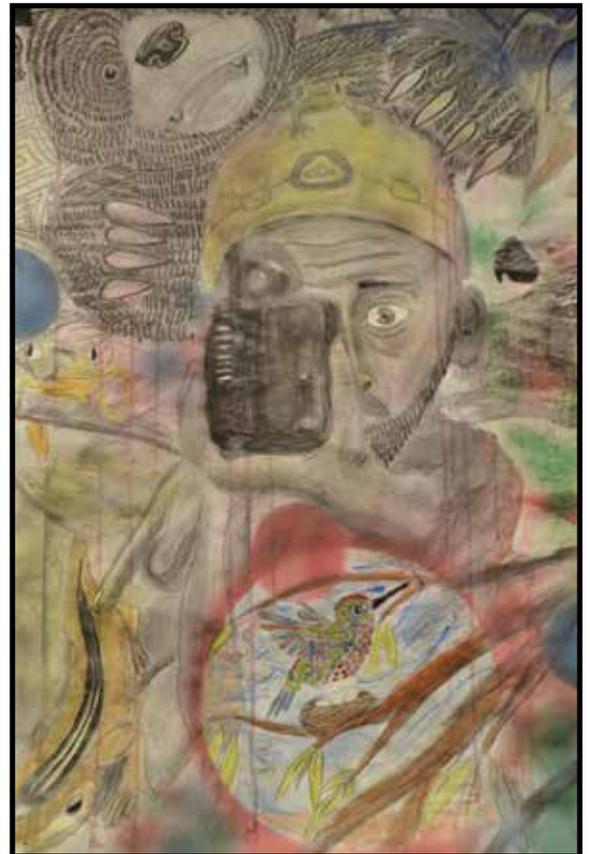
## Lies

Children are being taught horrible things  
Santa is a fat ole man  
We are saying it is okay to be obese  
Ho-Ho-Ho  
It is okay to treat women like objects  
Cupid shows them  
That it is okay to wear diapers as grown-ups  
Bunnies don't give out eggs  
Babies aren't dropped off by storks  
Fairies don't pick up their damn teeth  
They would be lost as adults  
Thank God Peter Pan keeps them young

*Samuel Kathman, 12*



*Joe Suetholtz, 10*



*Luke Rolfsen, 11*

# Dear Diary,

June 7

Today is the day I look forward to the most. For the past 6 years on my birthday, my parents have taken my sister and me down to the land where my father grew up. It was a beautiful farm with plenty of trees and a lake to swim in. We would take the camper with us and stay the night. We spent the evenings swimming together, climbing trees, and having dinner around a campfire. Dad would tell us about the times he had down here when he was growing up. When Grandpa passed away he gave the land to my dad since he was an only child. I can hardly remember my grandpa. My older sister Andrea remembers that he was the smartest and funniest man, just like my dad. He flew in WWII, and afterwards he taught at the university. Dad went there to study engineering. There he met our mom. They married, and soon after dad got a job as a designer at a motor company. Mom became a pharmacist. She retired last summer because the place closed, and Dad got promoted. My mom would always tell me, "Freddy, your daddy is such a smart guy. I want you to grow up and be just like him." I always loved it when my mom would tell me that I'm just like my dad. She knows that I'm going to grow up and be just like him. Seeing my parents together really makes me happy. They're the best parents I could ask for. Life is as happy as it could be.

October 12

I feel like something has happened. Mom didn't cook dinner tonight. I found her in her bedroom with the door shut. Dad arrived home late from work, after we went to bed. When I woke up in the morning dad was already at work, and we found mom on the phone in the kitchen. She was talking very quietly and in a serious tone. She didn't even look up when we walked by her into the living room. Looking for a way to brighten my mood, I spent the day fishing with my friends. Later in the evening when I got home, dinner was on the table and Dad was home early. He had bought it from the market. We began eating where nobody said anything for a while. We sat eating in silence as I waited to hear something from my parents. Eventually, Mom took a deep breath and spoke. She said, trembling, "At the doctor's a few days ago, they found a spot on my brain. They say it's growing too fast to control. I don't know what's going to happen next."

"It's important that during this we stay together as a family. Your mother is going to need all the help that she can get," said Dad.

I was bewildered. I set down my fork and stared at my plate. Something this horrific was happening to a family like ours. I couldn't believe it! I wondered how things would change now. I sure hope things can stay the way they are. I don't want anything really bad to happen.

November 23

I don't think Dad has a job anymore. It looks like mom is getting worse. More and more medicines are being brought home every day. Doctors are in and out of the house to check on Mom since it is too dangerous to drive her to the hospital. Dad's becoming a wreck. He's stopped talking as much as he used to, he won't play catch with me, and he doesn't read the Bible to us every night anymore. I've noticed Andrea change too. I stopped seeing her friends around our house like they always were. She started wearing different clothes. Her attitude towards me changed. She didn't like talking to Mom and Dad. She always seems so angry and anxious. She was never home either. I feel like I'm the only one here.

January 5

Mom passed away just before Christmas. Dad wrecked his car last week and spent the night in jail. I found that out when a police officer called early in the morning. Andrea hasn't been in the house at all lately. Her old friends said they haven't seen her either. When can everything be normal again? I want this nightmare to end.

5 years later

A lot has happened since I last wrote. Dad became an alcoholic. Andrea has a drug addiction. It's sickening seeing this happen to them. I never imagined I would see my own father and sister dealing with these terrible addictions. The two people whom I looked up to the most in my life are now bad examples. They're not themselves anymore. They're consumed by what consumes them. I'm glad I've been able to manage by myself and still look after them. Mom told me I would grow up and be just like Dad. With my family that has fallen apart, I'm the one that's going to try to make the best out of it.

*Noah Birrer, 10*

# Pants on Fire

## Verse 1:

You're jeans burn ablaze  
When you stare into my gaze  
And tell me that you love me  
You tell me that you love me

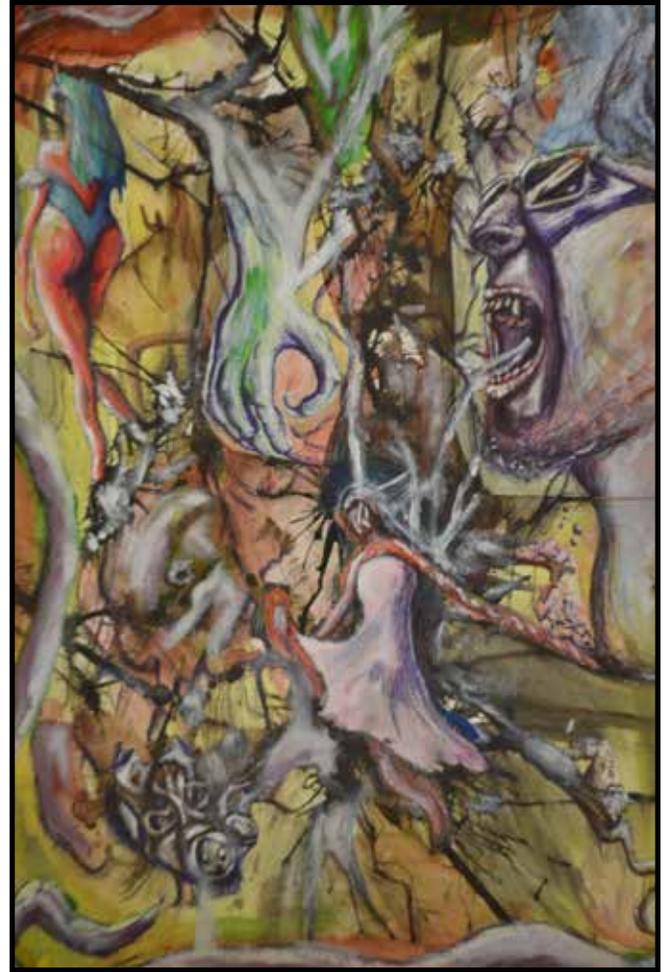
## Verse 2:

I can see right through your makeup  
So don't tell me that you love us  
You're lying to me baby  
You've been lying to me baby

## Refrain:

I'm sick of this  
I'm sick of you  
Would it hurt  
If you just told the truth  
It's getting rather old  
And I'm getting really tired  
That you're a liar, liar, pants on fire

*Nick Shea, 12*



*Nick Shea, 12*

## Verse 3:

I take it in bad taste  
When you say that I'm two-faced  
I always see you with another man  
I never ever seen to be that man

## Refrain:

I'm sick of this  
I'm sick of you  
Would it hurt  
If you just told the truth  
It's getting rather old  
And I'm getting really tired  
That you're a liar, liar, pants on fire

*David Rice, 11*



# Stormy Winds

A life without worry is easy to do  
The things that you wanted, I got them for you  
Will-less child, you know who I am  
You know I won't let you fall through my hands

Stormy winds, couldn't blow me away  
Stormy, stormy winds, couldn't blow me away

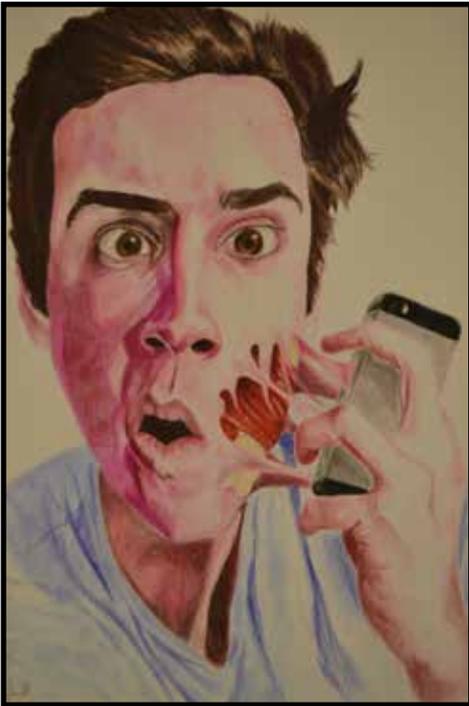
I saw you fall into silent pain  
Those things that you wanted didn't stay the same  
No traveling winds or harsh lines  
Could make me feel hatred or treat you unkind

Stormy winds, couldn't blow me away  
Stormy, stormy winds, couldn't blow me away

I know I gave you the life of your dreams  
We have our freedom, but are bound by your time  
Hope has been taken, crying over lines  
We'll be together, after we've died.

Stormy winds, couldn't blow me away  
Stormy, stormy winds, couldn't blow me away.

*Tyler Micek, 12*



*Peter Ward, 11*

## SERVICE

**Fire up to the hills, pick up your feet and let's go  
Head for the hills and pick up steel on your way  
And when you find them in your sight  
Fire at will, waste no time**

**Line up your shot, carefully  
Just like training, in real life  
An oblivious target  
An oblivious bullet**

**And there with his life goes something else  
My own innocence**

*Will Breen, 10*



*Joe Schuh, 12*

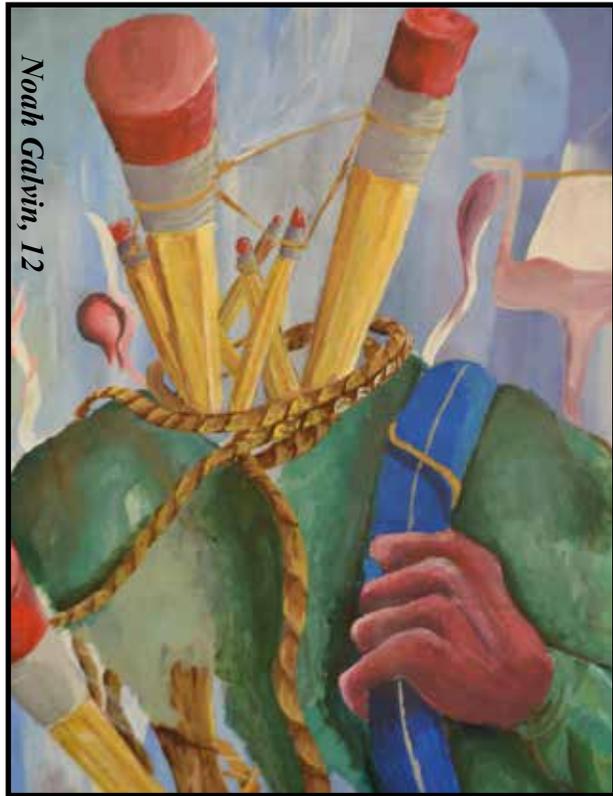
Welcome to the beautiful

Game of...

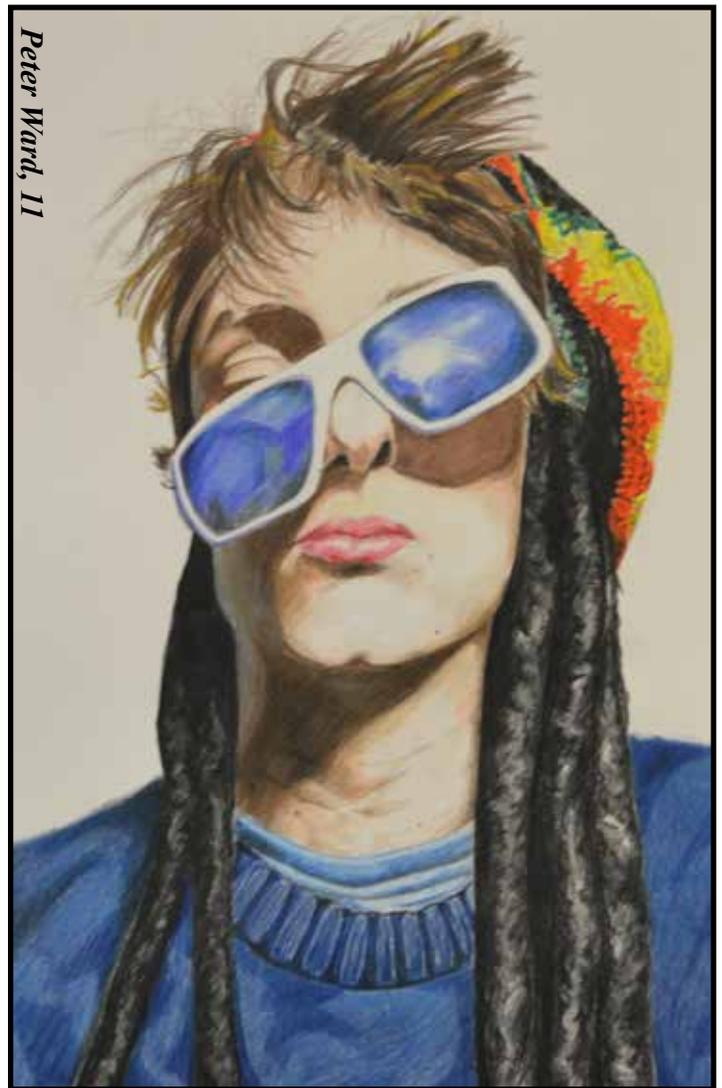
LIFE

It's pretty amazing when you think about it. We are ALIVE! We have Life! For me, it is that burning zeal to continue every day to be better than the last. I've made plenty of mistakes but one of the most beautiful things about humanity is that we are able to change. I believe in having the most positive outlook possible. I was asked the other day why ~~we~~ I never get mad? I immediately replied that I do get mad, but I don't often act on my frustration because when I am upset about something, I play out a scene in my head where I am acting mad as I look from afar at that person so I choose not to be him. By understanding my potential for evil, it ~~has~~ has helped me realize how much better it is to be kind and a good-person

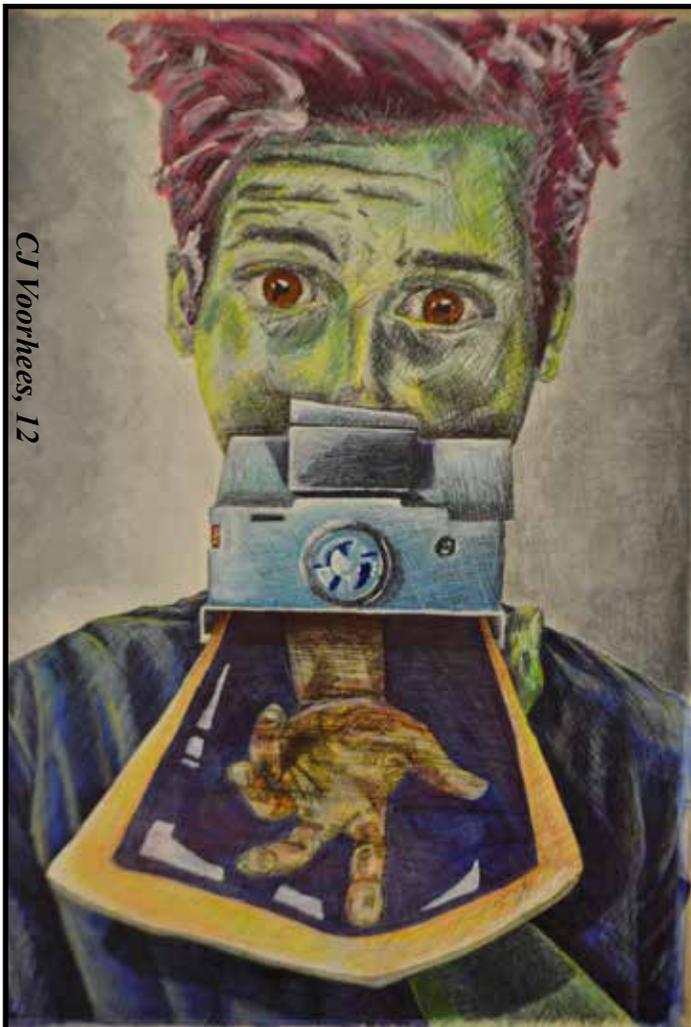
Kurt Stegman, 12



Noah Galvin, 12



Peter Ward, 11



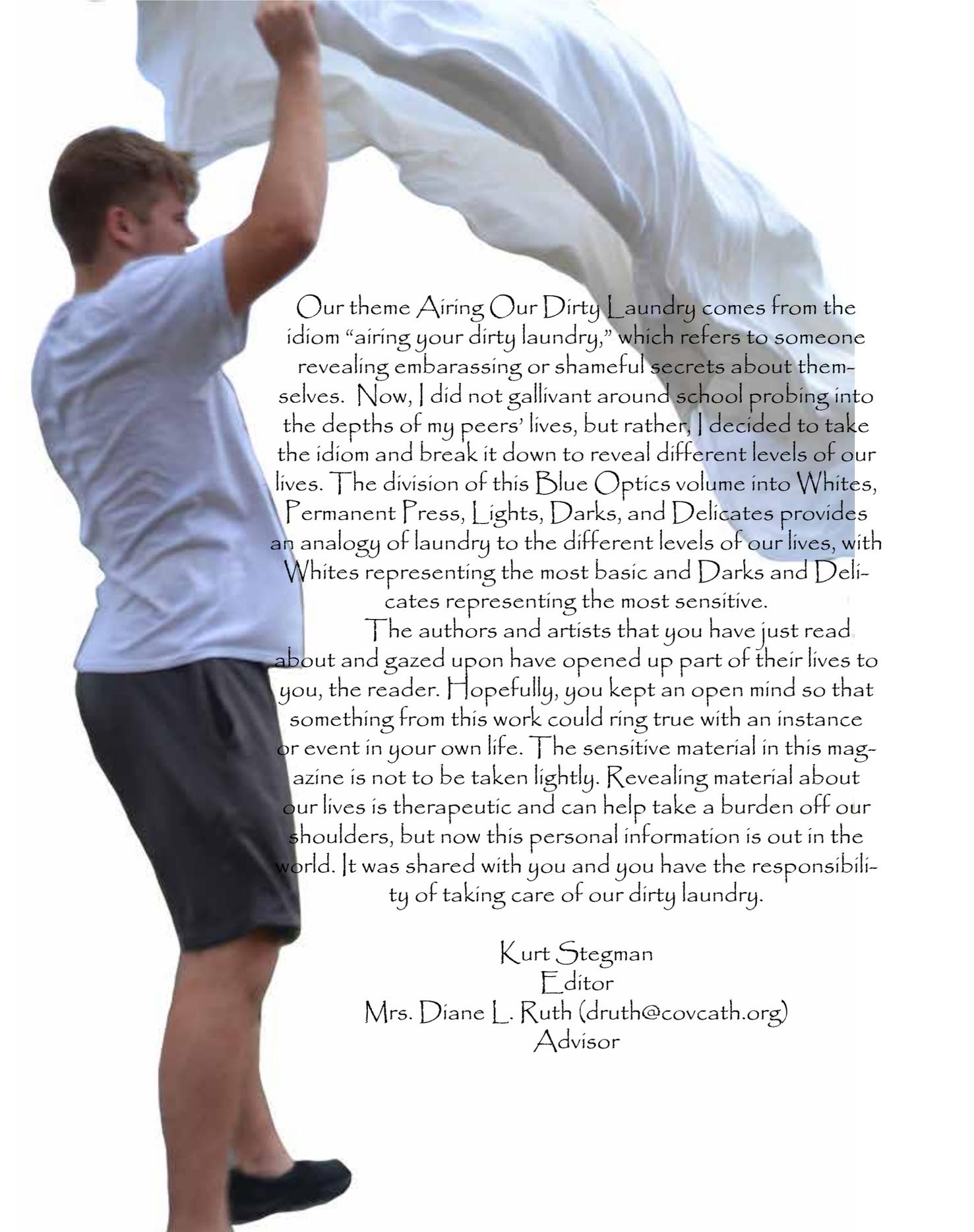
CJ Voorhees, 12



Mrs. Diane Ruth, Faculty

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Our theme *Airing Our Dirty Laundry* comes from the idiom “airing your dirty laundry,” which refers to someone revealing embarrassing or shameful secrets about themselves. Now, I did not gallivant around school probing into the depths of my peers’ lives, but rather, I decided to take the idiom and break it down to reveal different levels of our lives. The division of this *Blue Optics* volume into Whites, Permanent Press, Lights, Darks, and Delicates provides an analogy of laundry to the different levels of our lives, with Whites representing the most basic and Darks and Delicates representing the most sensitive.

The authors and artists that you have just read about and gazed upon have opened up part of their lives to you, the reader. Hopefully, you kept an open mind so that something from this work could ring true with an instance or event in your own life. The sensitive material in this magazine is not to be taken lightly. Revealing material about our lives is therapeutic and can help take a burden off our shoulders, but now this personal information is out in the world. It was shared with you and you have the responsibility of taking care of our dirty laundry.

Kurt Stegman  
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Advisor



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