

English II Pieces

2016-2017

Secured

by Madeleine Hinson

I zip up my bag, the crisp r-r-r-r sound acting as a checkpoint for my emotions. That rip initiates disdain or excitement for each upcoming event. When my skating garment bag zips up, a wave of nervousness hits abruptly. My stomach twists and turns as I think about bright lights shining harshly on my shaky body. Visions of eyes tracing my every movement engulf my consciousness. The zip of my bag full of bedazzled dresses tells me it is show time. After a fleeting spring break trip to Mexico, the rip zipping my suitcase triggered disdain at having to come back home to twenty-degree weather.

I begin to pack, bringing my favorite soft long sleeves, a peasant blouse, various colors of denim, undergarments, and a couple of warm hoodies for softball practice. Wondering whether there is a toothbrush at dad's house, I bring one just in case. With not much room left in my blue-grey bag, I have to be wise when choosing shoes to bring. Zipping up my bag, I gaze blankly at my lifeless closet surrounded by light-lavender walls.

My room, occupied by stark white furniture, drowns out all color. My feet are cold to the touch in the dark room. Outside my window, flurries of snow fall, making me dizzy. My room becomes unrecognizable, the emptiest I had ever seen it. I no longer felt like my room was my room. I began to weirdly dread my departure. "I'll only be gone a short time," I told myself. A week: seven days, 168 hours, 10,080 minutes, 604,800 seconds. I zipped my bags, said goodbye to my mother, and took off in my car.

As soon as I pulled out of my driveway, sadness took over. I tried to ignore this feeling, thinking it was only my girly emotions getting the best of me. I felt discombobulated, wondering why I felt this way. I was not blue over leaving my mother, for it was nice not having to argue about the kitchen being messy or having left my shoes out. I was also thrilled to be staying with my dad in his delightful company, for I had not seen him all week.

I began to sob, the road becoming blurry. In this moment, I felt detached from everything. I often prefer to be alone; however, right now, that was the last thing I wanted to be. I realized all I wanted was to be surrounded. I wanted to have one room. I wanted a mom and dad to come home to every day. I did not want to be "une fille unique," like my French teacher called me. I wanted a sibling to look up to or look out for. I wanted another kid to go back and forth with me to mom and dad's house. I oddly wanted what most kids

Bold Minds

by Madeleine Hinson

When I skipped class a time or two, I knew that I was committing truancy. However, I really just did not care one bit. Once teens go through puberty, hormones make their once-docile minds moody, bothered, and rebellious. Breaking a kid off from childish, innocent selves, rebellion introduces a maturity that teens starve for. Although rebellion is disrespectful to parents, a kid needs to go through some form of disobedience to learn and possibly find out who she wants to be.

Young kids are interested in typical things: toys, cartoons, sweets, their friends. However, as one grows older, interests change quickly, sometimes with a goal of social acceptance. Fifteen-year-old sophomore, Paige Robnett, explains:

I started changing my interests as I was entering my teenage years because I knew I couldn't play with Barbie dolls my whole life... but I knew that things and also people were changing, so I had to change to protect myself. 1

Quitting figure skating, which was once my greatest passion, I noticed that my desire for social acceptance was partly to blame. Figure skating, to some of my peers, is a "wimpy" sport, made for girls who do not have any drive or are "babies." Many teens crave belonging, which is partially why I quit what was once "my life." Researcher from the University of Southern California, David Schwartz, explains:

... Popularity is a shared recognition among peers that a particular youth has achieved prestige, visibility, or high social status... Popularity is not viewed as an indicator of liking by peers but rather is seen as a reputational construct involving power and status in the group. 2

Once a teen is complacent about who she is, social decisions made in pursuit of acceptance

dread: siblings and more involvement with my parents.

My parents' separation was nothing new to me; however, I felt lonelier than ever and I did not know why. I pulled into my father's driveway and waited until the redness left my eyes. I walked up the stairs and was greeted by my dad's warm smile and hugs. I dug my face into his shoulder and held back tears. We then reminisced about our week apart, as I unzipped my bag to unpack my things.

Symbiosis

by Paige Robnett

Rickshaw driver Manoj Singh lives a very simple life in Kolkata Slum, India. He drives people around the city for a living, and lives in a hut covered in plastic tarp. Manoj finds his happiness not in money or frivolous luxuries but through face-to-face social interactions within his community. In the documentary, *Happy*, the directors traveled around the world in search of the world's happiest people. Singh tells them:

When I return home in the afternoon, my son is sitting in that tea shop and waiting for my return and when he calls out to me "BABA!" I am full of joy. When I see my child's face I feel very happy. I feel that I am not poor but the richest person.

Many people find their connections best through involving themselves, doing what they love, being social, being content with their lives, and living with the Buddhist mentality of "happiness being the path." People from many cultures are much happier than Americans are, because they feel a real connection within their communities. We are all truly connected beyond the typical American views of being "friends" on Facebook. We all turn to someone else to solve our problems, whatever they may be. I find myself relying on the one person I have the greatest connection with. The truth is that humans are not wired to be one hundred percent self-sufficient. I, for one, am only about twenty-five percent self-sufficient. We all need interactions, connections, and good relationships to remain healthy.

In the Bible, it all started with Adam and Eve; so according to Biblical teachings, we are all related. But depending on individual religious beliefs, there are many ways in which people can feel as if they are linked. About this original genealogy, Peter Ralph, Assistant Professor of Biological Sciences at the University of Southern California, says: At first, it does look like a tree, with the branches doubling every generation, but then pretty soon the branches start running into one another and it begins to resemble more of a web-like tapestry as distant cousins marry and share a set of grandparents. That means, although hardly anyone marries their cousin in Western Europe, many people are unwittingly marrying

help determine what is comfortable and uncomfortable.

Along with social acceptance comes peer pressure. Kids at young ages are told about negative peer pressure, in an attempt to boost their confidence to say "no" to someone who might be pressuring them. My confidence about this topic in my childhood years has drastically diminished since I've entered the high school realm. Saying "no" to a friend -- especially if you feel insecure about yourself around her -- is extremely difficult. Meeting new friends also can result in trying to impress them. Websites such as reachout.com explain what goes on inside the mind of an adolescent when he is being pressured:

Sometimes the pressure comes from you. Feeling different from a group can be hard. Sometimes this happens when people move to a new city or start a new school or job. This often means having to make new friends and fit into a new environment. To avoid feeling out of place, you might do things to make sure you feel like the rest of the group. When people feel unsure about themselves, they might be more likely to feel the effects of peer pressure. 3

When reacting to negative peer pressure, teens hope for a good outcome like a reputation boost or coming off "cool." However, a sense of guilt usually results in a negative feeling, which can open the eyes of teens in adverse ways. I have been pressured by peers to commit poor decisions: disobeying, staying out too late, going places I should not go. I decided making these unacceptable choices is not worth the baggage that comes with it, especially if I do not enjoy what I am doing. Being pressured in a negative way can teach a teens what they are and are not comfortable with, as they learn who they want to be.

Maturity usually comes with age. Teens naturally want more freedom. Since freedom comes with maturity and a sense of responsibility, teens try to grow up as fast as they can. Being the youngest of the family, I wish all of my older family members would treat me like one of them, which often frustrates me. I want to be treated seriously to fit in with the older crowd and to feel accepted. An older family member told me how she had tried to grow up way too fast to feel

their 30th cousin.

A paper published in 1999 by Joseph Chang, a statistician at Yale University, analyzed this genealogical tapestry mathematically and said that we all share a common ancestor. As we look back in time, the number of common ancestors of the living population increases until the point where "all individuals who have any descendants among the present-day individuals are actually ancestors of all present-day individuals." When marrying the love of your life, there's a great chance that you are forever committing yourself to approximately your thirteenth cousin. Since humans have not forever roamed this earth, we are all indubitably inbred.

Other living organisms also rely on social interactions: even the tiniest rodents rely on connection with their peers. Hamsters, on the other hand, do quite well without "companionship." Often, if kept in a cage with another unwanted hamster, they will engage in cannibalism. However, many animals are very connected through communication and their loyalty to a companion for their entire lives, relying on each other for their very survival. Through a complex underground root communication system, trees are also connected to and dependent on their neighbors. Researcher Peter Wohlleben writes:

On its own, a tree cannot establish a consistent local climate. It is at the mercy of wind and weather. But together, many trees create an ecosystem that moderates extremes of heat and cold, stores a great deal of water, and generates a great deal of humidity. And in this protected environment, trees can live to be very old. To get to this point, the community must remain intact no matter what. If every tree were looking out only for itself, then quite a few of them would never reach old age. Regular fatalities would result in many large gaps in the tree canopy, which would make it easier for storms to get inside the forest and uproot more trees. The heat of summer would reach the forest floor and dry it out. Every tree would suffer.

This social awareness, which trees acquire throughout their lives, all goes towards the survival of their "families." Wohlleben continues: "Why are trees such social beings? Why do they share food with their own species and sometimes even go so far as to nourish their competitors? The reasons are the same as for human communities: there are advantages to working together. A tree is not a forest."

Trees thrive on this mutual care because they have a slower time scale that we do. Each tree is an active member of its natural society, making for a happier and healthier ecosystem. Likewise, being an active member of and helping others in a deeply-linked human community fills people with understanding, compassion, and love.

Happiness does come from within. Humans generate happiness in

better about herself: "I drank during the beginning of my high school times because I wanted so badly to be like super cool and popular because I felt like I needed to be taken seriously. . . ."

Kids' recklessness often is thought to be caused by immaturity; however, sometimes the more the mature a teen, the more careless. Neurologists suggest that the brains of many teens who behave dangerously are simply maturing early: "Reckless behavior might in fact be a sign of adulthood. Some adults do risky things (speeding, drinking, having unprotected sex) quite commonly without causing great alarm." 4 Maturing quickly as an adolescent is sometimes risky, but activities that are new and exciting allow teens to take responsibility for their freedom.

As teens begin to mature, they crave being taken seriously. This desire for maturity temporarily makes teens think in irrational ways, causing bad decisions and rebellious actions. However, that very rebellion helps teens determine who they are and who they will be as young adults.

Endnotes

- 1 -- Robnett, Paige (student). The North Fork School. Interviewed on December 9, 2016
- 2 -- Schwartz, David. "Minds of Young Adolescents." June 2, 2013. Viewed February 10, 2017
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/surviving-your-childs-adolescence/200912/rebel-cause-rebellion-in-adolescence>
- 3 -- Hagar, Becca (editor). "Peer Pressure." March, 2014. Viewed February 10, 2017
<http://us.reachout.com/facts/factsheet/peer-pressure>
- 4 -- Epstein, Robert. "Are the Brains of Reckless Teen More Mature Than Those of Their Prudent Peers?" March, 23, 2016. Viewed February 10, 2017
<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/are-teens-who-behave-reck/>

concert with each other, not from inanimate objects that they prize so highly. The road to being happy begins by accepting what already is; by valuing the things that you can't change. And with that acceptance comes a personality that attracts others who help create lasting connections and relationships.

Endnotes

- 1 -- Belic, Roko (Director). 2011. Happy [Documentary] Wadi Rum Productions.
- 2 -- Ralph, Peter. Assistant Professor at University of Southern California
- 3 -- Chang, Joseph T. Recent Common Ancestors of All Present-Day Individuals. 1999.
- 4 -- iv Wohlleben, Peter Ralph. The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate – Discoveries From a Secret World. Greystone Books; Vancouver, BC: 2016.
<https://www.brainpickings.org/2016/09/26/the-hidden-life-of-trees-peter-wohlleben/>
- 5 -- Wohlleben, Peter Ralph. The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate – Discoveries From a Secret World. Greystone Books; Vancouver, BC: 2016.
<https://www.brainpickings.org/2016/09/26/the-hidden-life-of-trees-peter-wohlleben/>

Disguised Nature

by Tess Billmire

Walking up cold cement steps, my boots form footprints in the frosty landscape. At the top, an older gentleman pushes the glass door open in greeting. Frigid air disappears in seconds, and a fiery warmth passes over me. I can't tell if it's just the change in atmosphere, but a presence of serenity emerges. Another split second passes by -- I notice I'm a prominent unexpected visitor. Like a prodigious boulder cemented in rapids, my jagged edges exposed under this cobalt sky reveal me as the strange one. Does my peculiar invasion interrupt the scenery, or is there a disturbance in the people clumped around me? Hundreds of eyes glare at the absurdity that is me.

The Sacramento Room doors taunt everyone to walk straight ahead, luring us toward two male missionaries. Side by side they stand, blocking the room entrance like a wooden dam. Parents' bodies morph into ambitious frogs: eager to hop across mossy stones to the opposite side of the riverbed. Yet, their children's tadpole desires to play in the water below lead them astray. Mothers urge their children into the Sacramento Room. I follow behind. The missionaries greet everyone's extreme eagerness to get inside. As they introduce themselves, a vibe of peace and integrity radiates off them; its presence resonates in every adult. Their talk is short and sweet. I jolt into the room, slipping onto the chair nearest the exit.

Angst

by Tess Billmire

You're truly a burden -- don't you know?
I felt excitement, adrenaline. But you
had to take it away. Of course,
I'll admit my vainglorious attitude.
Nevertheless, that does not matter to you.
Instead of a light flutter,
you thrust hot uncomfortable feelings
down my spine. Yet, perchance
you're actually friend rather than foe,
with a strange way of showing support.
Your signals, full of guile, make me
insecure of my actions:
manipulating my feelings
into hostile attacks against the
outside world. You shape my mind
into believing the farfetched.
Perhaps this is protection.
Without your guidance, I may remain quixotic,
immature. Boundaries would cease
to exist; my pride
and boastfulness reflecting only a monster.
Perhaps without you I am nobody,
nothing. Yet. You
are just another part of me.

Earthy and Savory

by Paige Robnett

I lie on my stomach, draped over taupe-colored suede barstools. Spinning myself round and round, hypnotized by the spiraling travertine floor, I think about how nice grandma's house is. Still spinning, still dazed in my own little childish world, I hear an ear-piercing sound, like a lawn mower, that is quite familiar. Grandma says, "Drink up!" I dare not look up at the kitchen counter because I fear that I know what it is. Still draped over the barstool, I stop my spinning, and slowly lift my head, only to see a fresh glass mason jar full of foamy carrot juice.

Giving Grandma a blank stare, I climb up onto the barstool, dreading the moments to come. I slowly pick up the mason jar with a forced half-smile on my face, and notice that grandma has already finished hers. She tells me how good it is for me, but all I can think about is how much it

With each new adult walking past comes another probing question: "are you visiting?" "where do you live?" After quick explanations to the inviting adults, I become just another strand of grass in the field; anxiety is extinguished, and I dim into the backdrop. The Sacrament Meeting begins. Hymn books open to *God of Our Fathers, Whose Almighty Hand*. A sunny anthem fills the air; long-comers sing together -- tree roots connecting, becoming one united force.

The last notes reverberate as Brother Walker strides to the podium. His speech of devils at doorsteps and parents protecting their offspring contradicts the peaceful mood that was once there. Each new word resembles the rustling of strong winds blowing through trees. It's unpleasant but it's reality. The utopian background is now being blown apart by the ugly truth of imperfection. Adults follow this undertone; their eyes continuously gaze forward. Parents accept this dark atmosphere like it's nature's way. They no longer hold a child's innocence.

A young boy incessantly rocks back and forth in his chair. An older woman decides to play a game of hangman to calm his jitteriness. A few rows behind the podium, a young girl occupies herself with her mother's hair. Just sitting to her right is a father whose beard is being groomed by his daughter. The adults aren't distracted by their younglings; they multitask, continuing to listen to the front. Next to the podium a man sits on a bench, facing towards the crowd. Like an eagle stalking his prey, he views all of us young distracted children with a stern vigilant look, waiting to jump at any moment.

The depressing talk ends, and without command, people take out their hymn books. Like dark clouds suddenly floating away, the hymn finally returns the joyous mood. The Sacrament Meeting is over. Mothers allow their children to scramble out of the room. Families are no longer restrained as one unit. It's the beginning of independence for these children, as well as the end of their innocence. A majority of the adults realize their safe haven isn't perfect. But children still see the LDS Church like they present one of their own paintings: perfect in their eyes.

Self-Illustration

by Paige Robnett

Located in the desert behind the Boise airport, "The Tracks" hid Mike Robnett and his high school friends. There they would make a bonfire in a ravine where a train track bridge crossed overhead. Mike says:

We'd all go to this place called the tracks, behind the Boise airport, where we'd all get shit-faced around the bonfire. It was easy to hear when a train was coming from miles away, so we'd all hurry up the ravine and climb onto the bridge. On each side of the train-track

tastes like dirt. I think about giving it to the dog, Beau, but she'd see me. Taking big gulps of what is almost worse than cough syrup seems to take forever. I put down my glass and realize I am not even half finished. I try to focus on the sweetness of the carrots, but I can't shake off the overwhelming earth taste. Upon finishing my glass, she asks if I want seconds. A polite "no thank you" quickly escapes my lips.

As I scurry up the grand foyer stairs with my hands slapping against the steps like a wild animal, Beau follows with his collar clamoring around his white fluffy fur. Leaving grandma and her carrots behind, I run to Papa's penny jar in the bonus room. Putting coins in the slot, I twist the knob, and to my delight, out comes a handful of colorful M&M's. I plop on the floor and play with Legos while I munch on my M&M's, thinking about how lucky I am that it didn't have celery in it this time.

* * *

Now, upright like a lady, I sit on the leather barstool in grandma's new house, twisting the chair only side-to-side. I silently sit and watch as she pulls out her dull knives and a five-pound bag of carrots. The grinding sound of the juicer slowly lulls me into an uneasy memory. Carrot, after carrot, after carrot: the dread worsens as the smell grows stronger. That moment in grandma's old kitchen leisurely makes its way into my head with recollections of Beau, the M&M machine, and her old mason jars, which have all ceased to exist. Staring unfocused at the kitchen counter, the earthy smell of carrots plays a full film of my worst and best memory; then grandma's blurry, echoing voice lightly says: "Drink up!" She looks at me with the same smirk she gave me back then, when I was just a child.

Poignant Escape

by Madeleine Hinson

Currently, Alexa Hinson is celebrating Songkrah in Thailand: a countrywide, New Year's water fight. There is no mercy -- people on the streets soaked and giggling on end. The water is believed to cleanse and bring new beginnings. Gracefully, she rang in her thirties

there was a "walkway" that was about one foot wide. And we'd all stand there while a train rushing at sixty miles an hour came by. We'd lean over the edge of the bridge so we didn't get hit, hoping that there wasn't anything sticking out the side of the train to blow our heads off.

He recalls one of his friends trying to jump over the bonfire at the tracks, and accidentally jumping through the fire. Experiences like this "created who he is today." While this seems ludicrous, he has many tales like this, so his statement becomes believable.

Very few can say that they've grown up the way my dad did and ended up being the kind of man that he is now. His sarcastic wits shine through when he says: "I used to really like to go to my friend's house and do homework. We'd study all night, and sometimes we'd stop and read the Bible and drink root beer." While this was definitely not the case, deep down he was a hard-working kid who shaped himself into quite the character throughout his teenage years. He believes there's a fine line between living enough and living too much, even though he finds that he sometimes crossed that line. He does not wish to change any of the things he did: "You know, I think when you look back you wish you wouldn't have done that, or dated her, or made those decisions. But all those things create who you are today, and I would NOT want to change who I am today." Sometimes the things in life that seem to hold you back are often just a little push forward.

One day Mike's class had a substitute in Biology on a day when they'd be dissecting frogs. Sitting at his desk, he saw a frog fly right past his head and smash on the chalkboard. Soon frogs were flying all around the room, enraging the teacher. My dad and his best friend Rick were always getting into crazy mischevious situations like this. They were the dynamic duo: Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum. He does feel that the phrase "live while you're young" can sometimes be taken too seriously:

Today's youth is living too much -- there's no movers and shakers. Yes, it's okay to live while you're young, as I did, but there's no one who buckles down and gets shit done. If we all lived too much, the whole world would need a break.

Upon graduating from high school, with all his half-baked stories and memories in the past, Mike realized what life was really about, and what really needed to happen: "In my field, it was when I got out of high school that I realized how little high school taught you about what you needed to know to get by in real life." He doesn't wish he had buckled down more in high school, because in the real world, he knew that his actions in high school didn't really matter anymore. Though his high school career remained somewhat unsuccessful in the education department, he always had the drive to make something out of nothing to create a real living. He says:

I think part of it is the way you're raised, you follow the example of

two weeks ago in Cuba, and is planning next to move to Los Angeles to reach bigger opportunities for her filming career. Yes, thirty-year-old Alexa is living an adventure-filled life. However, her beginnings were far from ideal.

Alexa Hinson's childhood can be described in two words: difficult and layered. She lived in a variety of homes with different guardians, so during her childhood she endured a lack of proper parenting. She explains: "My story has a lot of chapters. I went a lot of places, met a lot of people, and lived in lots of places... I felt very bounced around." Alexa's parents were divorced when she was very young, so she always had a split home as a child: "I was raised by a single mom, had very sporadic visits with my dad, and we were very poor," she says. Hard drugs heavily influenced her mother when they lived in San Diego. Alexa was aware of her mother's addictions. Feeling angry and trapped, she wanted to have a normal relationship with the woman she was supposed to always be able to come to. Her younger sister, Emily, also lived with their mother. Alexa wanted to protect Emily from the darkness that she had not yet experienced: "I felt responsible for her," Alexa says, "like it was my job to protect her and make her breakfast in the morning. . . she was very naive because of her age."

Alexa's father lived across the country in South Carolina, so Alexa left her little sister and mother behind because she did not have proper care. She tried living with her father, but he chose his new wife over Alexa, since the two did not get along. Back in San Diego, she says, "I was in a big city that offered big trouble at such a young age, especially with no supervision. . . I got away with a lot." At this point, Alexa was raising Emily, so she decided to start working as much as possible: "I used my babysitting money to buy milk and cereal for us to have for breakfast." Her mother's drug abuse went downhill, and the three of them were evicted from their apartment. "My sister moved in with a friend, my mother was on the street, and I stayed with many different friends," Alexa recalls.

Officially on her own, Alexa had no money and no transportation whatsoever, making attending school almost impossible: "I would attempt to catch rides to school or to find a public bus. . . but it got too hard and too much for me, so I

your parents to start with, but so many of my friends they would go to school, go to this, and then sit there and send out applications to try and get a job, and when they got a good job they called that a success.

When he hit the ground running, he was already far ahead of his other friends, which was surprising because of the delinquent he was. He has a very strong belief in "education is not the only way." Mike explains:

When I got out of high school I looked at something that needed to be done and I went and made it happen. There's people that go out there and they makes stuff happen, and they get stuff done, and that does not require an education, or any kind of approval from anybody. You just make shit happen. If you wanna get a good job, sit down behind a desk, collect a decent salary your whole life and be somebody else's guinea pig, then yeah go to college. But if you wanna get rich, you gotta make stuff happen. I was a millionaire by twenty-six years old when my buddies were still in college. Your successes are what mentality you have. Are you out there to be a career guy, or are you gonna try and make something happen?

Unconsciously, pre-maturely my dad shaped himself into a hardworking, integrity- filled man who was out to help others and make a difference. He says: "Don't wait for somebody else to write your paycheck, create your paycheck." As a young man, Mike Robnett was nothing but hell on wheels. All the fun and trouble that he experienced in high school resulted in many life lessons that have given him a wonderful life with a blonde wife and two gnarly daughters, an adorable dog, and a successful company. Success can easily come from nothing.

Springtide

by Madeleine Hinson

In 1513, after developing settlements in Hispaniola, Ponce de Leon was encouraged by King Ferdinand to explore the new land, particularly what is now Florida. The Spanish explorer's secret plan was to discover the rumored "Fountain of Youth." He told no one of his intentions; however, the myth motivated his journey when Leon and his crew set eyes on Florida for the first time. During the height of his exploration, Ponce de Leon was approaching the age of thirty. Leon was obsessed with finding a secret cure to become youthful again.

Bitter winter nips at cold muscles, making the pressure higher. As the door opens to the large gym, a clear-stained wooden floor shines in harsh light. Old Spice and synthetic leather hijack the air with their hash aromas. Slowly, mindsets change: must impress, must be the best, must be, must be, must be. Men's basketball practice. Every practice resembles tryouts. Frivolous mistakes give

started to not go to school." After temporarily moving to Portland, Alexa moved back with her mom, who had begun a new job and found a new apartment. Right after moving in, the lights started shutting off, the cable shut off, there was a lack of food, and her mom had a terrible boyfriend. Alexa reenrolled herself into an alternative school, explaining, "I knew it was the right thing to do. . . I remember having to forge my mom's signature since I didn't know where she was half the time." Soon after that, she dropped out and stayed with a boyfriend. He was drug dealer; however, he took care of her and she found comfort in that: "I remember him asking if I needed anything from the store. . . and I said tampons. . . he handed me money and I was able to get tampons, razors, shampoo. . . I was excited. . ." After being bounced around by her mother another time, Alexa had had enough.

Living in this extremely unhealthy, unstable home was too much. Alexa called her aunt and uncle on her father's side, Jim and Roberta Hinson, for help. Numb, after a horrific childhood, she was given things that were never before accessible to her: doctors, dentists, and counseling. A life that seemed so luxurious became her reality: "We had so much food. . . I was so excited. I also got to drink a ton of milk which was a luxury to me because we never had it at my mom's." She was now a Junior in high school, and immensely behind as she started second semester. She was very cold in McCall, Idaho, and bitter about the kids at her school: "I dressed like a city girl with fishnets and so much makeup! Versus mountain kids wearing sweatshirts and jeans."

She eventually moved in with her aunt and uncle's son and his wife, Shane and Becky Hinson, who eventually became her mother and father. She slowly began to make friends, becoming social and attending all of the school events. Alexa's grades were always passing from this point forward as senior year approached: "This was the first time in all of my life that I wasn't the new girl walking in on the first day of school," she says. Because she had attended so many new schools, Alexa had learned how to make friends quickly, becoming the social butterfly she is today.

After graduating from high school, Alexa attended a few different community colleges, and

the reputation of a bad player, swapping out with the excess players. The best players always seem to be young men who intimidate elders, pressuring them to act like the youngest and best they can be.

Ponce de Leon never told the grantors of new ships about his idea to find the Fountain of Youth. He simply sailed to new islands to benefit the profitable new Spanish Empire. Men attend weekly basketball for physical benefits; with age, metabolism slows down and the appearance of a body becomes less flattering. However, they do not mention the feeling that playing gives them: a high, an addiction, their own Fountain of Youth.

Going to watch men's gym for basketball was not a first for me. Following my father on winter nights, I came to realize that going to the gym is a taste of adolescence for faded souls. My dad has played this game his whole life. He loves it and has always had confidence in his ability. However, as time goes on, he worries about not being like he used to be. Youth is constantly on the minds of these men. Talk of the "good 'ole days," reminiscing, and constant apologies for "getting old" fill the multipurpose room.

Men's basketball is a healthy pursuit of the youth that these men crave. Although their teenage daughters smirk, and turn embarrassed faces to the wall, it is the same Fountain of Youth that Ponce de Leon trekked in search of, right at the fingertips of their aging minds.

Fly Through by Paige Robnett

Falling. . . and crumpling, , ,
confused frondescence breaks from
topiary home-branches
dirtying the darkening paynes-laden
sky top.

Botanical blades dragging, abrading anemic selves
against sandpapered sidewalk ways to no
where, billowing up
cracked cement walls bearing barred
first floor windows.
Up a level or so's a male silhouette,
rising from a Georgian
wing chair. Gispert set
between index and middle,
Johnnie Walker
dangling from all five in a lowball glass.

Pacing, stopping, going, looking
down. Down two-three floors across

dreamed of going to the University of Oregon. She ended up at Boise State University, and her career began. Her new-found passion for skiing and kayaking also commenced. While at BSU, Alexa began waitressing, bartending, and was a "Red Bull Girl." Working for Red Bull helped her discover her passion for marketing: She explains, "I started really getting into the Action Sports Industry, and eventually I changed my major from marketing to communication."

She soon enrolled in the film program and fell in love. After hosting several film events, her reputation grew, and she received a call from director/producer Steve Fischer. She helped him host two major events, and was then contacted by producer Lindsay Dyer to help with a ski movie she had made, titled *Pretty Faces*. "We had so much chick power," Alexa says. "It was awesome! Ski films are my thing. I was able to go on tour with the movie and it did really well."

After Dyer's movie was made, Steve Fischer offered her a new job as production manager with his company on a Monday. By Thursday she was working for him in North Carolina:

"I went to places all over America. . . I was the first person licensed to kayak in Yosemite and film the experience. I proposed this idea to representatives with Jeep and got \$100,000 to do this cool project! I also went to Africa for six weeks to film sports action."

After living in North Carolina for about a year, bartending, working, and saving money, she decided it was time to come home to McCall. She missed holidays and not being able to spend time with family. Alexa is currently traveling across southeast Asia alone, immersing herself in the culture. Alexa's difficult, layered childhood has morphed her into a hard-working, independent adventure-seeker who makes friends everywhere she goes. "I'm overwhelmed with emotion," Alexa says. "So stoked, so proud, so nervous. . . one-way adventure commence! These are the good 'ole days!"

to a similar sandpaper sidewalk way leading to (the same) no where, stopping for no one but wind. Only then will they stop. And wait. For their next fluttering escape.

Existence

by Tess Billmire

From the start, moving to McCall was a mistake. As a young fifth grader I didn't fully understand how degrading the world is. The realization hit me right after my first coming-out experience. "Eww, that's disgusting," Sophia and Gracie yelled as they ran around in circles. The fact that I had a crush on their best friend wasn't the problem; it was just my sexuality. I brushed the reaction off by saying, "it's probably just a phase." That disaster made me aware that society has a difficult time understanding aliens like me.

Ever since Aristotle, the idea that humanity isn't the main cast in the cosmos has been frowned upon, yet also considered. Creatures who are seen as different, whether it be appearance, gender, sexual orientation, or race, have always been discriminated against. Aliens are no different. Their unknown diversity intrigues, yet also repels society. Hollywood changes aliens to appear humanoid instead of accepting exactly who they are. Astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson relates:

"... From an anatomical view, these creatures are practically indistinguishable from humans, yet they are supposed to have come from another planet. If anything is certain, it is that life elsewhere in the universe, intelligent or otherwise, will look at least as exotic as some of Earth's own life forms." 1

Extraterrestrials are always portrayed as violent creatures that want to tear humans apart. Just as the Spanish Conquistadors viewed Native Americans, humans see all aliens as destructive savages.

In an iconic scene from the 1979 movie, *Alien 2*, a smaller, pinker version of the lizard-like creatures bursts out of a crew member's chest as the alien race fights and kills the humans. This view, that beings who are not "normal" are dangerous, is not a new concept. For years throughout American history, people who were not straight white males have been discriminated against. People of color were segregated because of their different skin tones. Women were not allowed to vote because they were not men, and LGBT individuals were considered psychologically insane. Such demoralizing interpretations of alien beings occur before socially-powerful individuals have even met these strangers. Extraterrestrials are being stripped of their intrinsic beings, and

Roaring Silence

by Madeleine Hinson

Dazzled eyes wander
around seeming-complete silence;
phones 'buzz-buzz', lighting up.
Incessant communication,
never-ending updates.
A network larger than our imaginations
connected together,
one large cloud at the seams.
Drowned-out thoughts and messages
now delivered so seamlessly.

Dissent on screens, an unfortunate
back-and-forth, creating walls which
Frost would not be fond of.
*Bing-bing, buzz-buzz-, boink-boink, bounce-
bounce,*
new ruckus ricochets
politics, opinions, opposing views.
Walls created by electro-brains,
vigorously typing behind glass,
are not transparent:
each separate cloud of darkness
draping
over isolated shoulders.
Drowned out by the loudness
of a voiceless room, its only sound, 'tap-tap.'

Unconditional Hugs

by Tess Billmire

While driving down to Boise, McCall firefighter Freddy Van Middendorp arrived first to the scene of a fatality accident involving two teenagers who had both died. One of the teenagers faced down in the river, with long, black, curly hair floating in the water. Freddy's own brother had the same hair, and seeing the teen frightened him. Freddy recalls: "His friends asked me where Tyler was, which is my brother's name. So I was petrified to check on him." Freddy "felt lots of different emotions. I felt important while helping someone else. I felt sad for the families and angry at the kids for putting their lives at risk. I went through the five stages of grief."

No matter whom he's helping, Freddy feels a sense of responsibility to assist not only the

forced into a comparison with what they aren't: human.

The need to feel superior drives this continual degrading of contrasting individuals. Society is afraid of being conquered by a stronger and more advanced race. So the first idea that comes to mind when facing these enormous beasts is to fight them by outsmarting them. Power-hungry humans want to gain control over everything to feel like there is a reason for existence. For instance, scientists want to feel accomplished by their progress in moving society forward. In *Space being (don't forget to remember)/Curved*, poet e.e. cummings says: "LONG LIVE that Upwardlooking/Serene Illustrious and Beatific/Lord of Creation,MAN:" 3 cummings pushes the idea that scientists sometimes feel like they are superior to God. However, their unchecked scientific progress, creating inventions like the atomic bomb, causes society to move back rather than forward. Neil deGrasse Tyson shares: ". . . Suppose in fact intelligence has come to the galaxy. Who are we to then decide that we are intelligent? We define our intelligence. Of course we're intelligent because we define it." 4 The threat of some superior race makes people want to run and hide: super forms of intelligence ruin people's egos.

Superiority isn't the only reason for discrimination; religion also plays a vital role. Religions tend to be black and white, suggesting that Genesis myths such as Adam, Eve and the apple tree determine how humans must behave. Tradition is religion's main priority, so concepts like homosexuality seem to be not only stretch, but actually alien. Analyzing the results of a 2015 government poll, Douglas Main writes,

"The surveyors asked Americans who said smart aliens don't exist to explain why. Nearly two-thirds responded that it's because 'humans were created by God or another higher being,' and 31 percent chose the response that 'the Earth is unique – it is the only place capable of sustaining intelligent life.'" 5

The participants of the poll, who weren't specified to be religious, believe that aliens do exist but that they are not superior to humans. Even with people's egotistical belief that humans are the most advanced creatures in the universe, they still discriminate against humans when a group of individuals seems unusual.

Belief systems are an excuse to disregard the strange. Being transgender is frowned upon, and seen as a nonexistent trait in some faiths. Extraterrestrials and transgender people are each cryptic ideas. A lot of people find transgender issues strange and sometimes even sickening to understand. Desmond Meagley, a Bay Area teen, explains the journey through his gender transformation:

"I was talking to one of them over lunch and he said, 'You know it's weird that you're a girl and you hang out with us.' I was surprised. Then confused. Then hurt... And it was one the first moments I realized that my gender mattered to other people - - that the way I

victims, but also their families: "I feel like with all firefighters and EMTs there's a sense of duty to loved ones as a part of being a good caretaker. That's why I give business cards to families, to let them know I'm there for them if they need me." Freddy also tries to connect personally with all the families he meets. Although some people are just mean and rude, he tries his best to create a relationship, saying, "the most profound gift is having relationships with people." His core values center around helping others by, "opening doors, carrying groceries, or crossing the streets. I like to help strangers, even though sometimes it scares them."

Freddy's job as a firefighter captain and a paramedic isn't his only way of helping. He enjoys making people really uncomfortable to help pry them out of their comfort zones: "I don't always greet people with hugs, but I like to connect with people. I can see what they're feeling; see if they're uncomfortable so I try to force them out of their shell so they feel more comfortable with me." When Freddy was younger he was an introvert, so he helps others with the same insecurities. He says, "I used to be quiet and shy in high school. I was very insecure. I felt boring, like no one would want to talk to me. I wish, if I could go back to [visit the] middle school and high school Freddy I would tell him to, 'be confident in yourself. Worry less about what people think of you. You're God's creation which makes you great.'" Freddy wanted to change his own insecurities one day. He was tired of being a shy kid who was worried about what people thought of him. It was an exhausting process, and he was lonely at times, but he eventually became the sociable person he is now. As a result of his own past experiences, he tries to encourage other people to escape their comfort zones since, "I know the benefits of breaking through the protective layer." Yet, Freddy adds, "Realistically I still seek approval from others; even though I try to not let how other people view me affect how I act."

Freddy's greatest fear is not being practiced enough to help somebody. He's unselfish in that sense of being afraid for someone else's well-being while not being afraid of his own death: "I'm a Christian so I believe in an afterlife." Jokingly he adds, "I do have a fear of missing out." Freddy might not know where Buddhists go after death but he does like to think, "if you're a

experienced gender was not the way that other people thought about it." 6

The feelings of disgust towards queer individuals will eventually pan out, as they have for other discriminated groups. It will just take some time for society to accept every type of diversity.

It's been four years since the traumatic year of fifth grade and I have noticed each year society progressively is more accepting. With more advanced school classes I'm beginning to piece together that humans crave explanations for cryptic ideas. Society keeps turning its head away from diversity, but it's always curious enough to look back at it again.

Endnotes

- 1 -- deGrasse Tyson, Neil. "The Search for Life in the Universe." June 30, 2003. https://www.nasa.gov/vision/universe/starsgalaxies/search_life_1.html
- 2 -- Scott, Ridley (Director). 1997. *Alien* [Motion picture]. United Kingdom: 20th Century Fox.
- 3 -- cummings, e.e. Space being(don't forget to remember)/Curved. 1931. ll. 11-13.
- 4 -- deGrasse Tyson, Neil. "We Could all be Pets in An Elaborate Alien Zoo, Claims Neil Degrasse Tyson." Interviewed by James Temperton. June 28, 2016. <http://www.wired.co.uk/article/neil-degrasse-tyson-intelligent-alien-life>
- 5 -- Main, Douglas. "Most People Believe Intelligent Aliens Exist, Poll Says." Poll conducted by YouGov. September 29, 2015. <http://www.newsweek.com/most-people-believe-intelligent-aliens-exist-377965>
- 6 -- Meagley, Deasmond. "I'm Just Drawn This Way: An Illustrated Coming Out Story." October 11, 2016. <https://youthradio.org/journalism/outloud/im-just-drawn-this-way-an-illustrated-coming-out-story/>

Jasmine

by Paige Robnett

Eight-year-old Jasmine is sweet and brilliant. Though her shyness brings her to use a variety of comical facial expressions in place of words, her personality shines as she grows more comfortable. Her talents include cracking the Fibonacci code and writing whimsical poetry, which makes anyone smile. Her love for Writing Workshop at the North Fork School gushes out, as she says: "I love it there! I write poems that take me forever, but it's sad sometimes cause hi have no one to hang out with anymore." The young girl is not only a little genius, connecting ideas together through numbers and languages, but she also has a strong taste for art: "I like doing art at school, lots, and lots of art. I like painting the best." Jasmine has a

loving person, that's enough to get to heaven. Love is the greatest commandment." Freddy also claims that he is inspired by everyday people, "because they, in my eyes, are God's creation. Everyone is a unique snapshot of beauty of their own."

While Freddy sees himself as happy all of the time, he believes that actual pure happiness every single day is not a good thing. "How boring would that be?" Freddy asks. "Relationships don't get better without hardships. God refines us by trial. If you never knew sadness, you would never know the depth of your happiness." Freddy is inspired by the world around him. His values are clear: "Hard rule to follow, but put others first. Important part is to walk a mile in their shoes. You can be friends with anyone if you take the time to know one another in spite of beliefs."

Color of Crazy

by Paige Robnett

Talk enough sense and you'll lose your mind.
Rusted, broken latches, your ropes been cut (the cure)
Insanity proves you sane,
realizing what's in light, in dark:
that it's all blue, clear blue.
Gone mad. . .
the Hatter's real life, is ours too,
but born unto we are not. Most batty
they are, claimers of normality.
Let go, let nature take it, your sanity, this
paperweight on your brain.
Mankind: born blue
is to die blue, in the middle
is life's unrest, offering only colors.

True Colors

by Tess Billmire

Lengthy symmetrical hair,
draping over quiet shy eyes, hides
a missing identity. Doubtful of herself,
feeling some despise her: seeing a freak instead.
Disappearing from society's company;
desiring individual freedom.

spunky and spirited personality.

Other than academics, Jasmine enjoys the luxury of owning more than a dozen pets: "I have thirteen chickens, two horses, four cats, two dogs, and four fish. I have a donkey named Fanny that I also like to ride." She reflects on her life as "Very, very, good." All those animals keep her busy with feeding and clean up. Ice skating is also one of her many talents. She explains: "I love skating very, very much. It's important to me. I will ice skate until I'm very old and can't skate anymore." A bright-eyed, wise, athletic, young girl, Jasmine's hidden skills make her slightly mysterious.

Creative Mindset

by Tess Billmire

At first glance Paige Robnett seems small, but confident about bringing up anything that comes to mind. With all of her random asides about shows and funny posts she has seen on the internet, Paige's motives in life become clear: "I want to be successful, but in a way that most people don't describe; to be content with everything. I want to have a simple life in a nice cozy home with a lot of dogs and a husband. . . hopefully." Paige has always had an interest in art, "expressing what can't be put into words" by doodling on every piece of paper she receives. Paige dreams to work in the art field, such as by being an art director. If that doesn't work out, she plans on being an ice skating coach or a tattoo artist.

Paige's main fear in life is to feel a fake kind of happiness since, "I'll realize it's not the true kind of happiness and it will ruin me." Paige adds, "Happiness is just a side effect of something." She fears the feeling that most people strive to achieve, but she isn't afraid of death or that others are judging her appearance. On the outside Paige Robnett is random, sarcastic and tired all of the time, but deep down she is someone with great morals and artistic dreams awaiting her.

Glimmering Tears

by Madeleine Hinson

Depression so deep:
Caribbean eyes drip fresh spring rain.
Robust winds weep open
pages, delicate paper tarnished.
Thunder leaves spirit
vigorously struck.
Blood, sparkling cranberry,
drizzles the last moments of what once
was a nimble soul:

Three doubtful years. . . alone. Viewing
the growth of everyone around her. Judgment
and delusion finally reach a peak. She takes
action, cutting off a lost
individual, to uncover herself drowned in
thoughts. Long bunches of brown hair fall
to cold, unforgiving ground.

The poor soul blooms from a
cage of depressing moods.
New beginning for a handsome
girl, style flaunting bright: a newly-sprouted
rose.

Past judgment no longer matters
to the accepted inner self.

Think About the Animals

by Tess Billmire

An older male Maine Coon named Henry was very sweet and tame at first. My mom carried him into the playroom, since he was too heavy for me to hold. He was very enjoyable to play with, wanting lots of love and cuddles. After about ten minutes, we wanted to put him back into his cage to get out a different cat. He automatically knew what was going on, pulling his ears back like a wolf trying to protect its cubs.

Henry's back hunched up as he started to hiss. His tail twirled and twitched while he crouched in the corner. As my mom lifted him off the ground, his body twisted around, his paws scratching the air.

Over the summer, I volunteered at the McPaws Animal Shelter. My mother always had to come supervise me since I wasn't sixteen years old yet, but she was more interested in it than I was. I only spent time with the kittens and cats, given that dogs bark too loudly for my ears to handle. Before either of us could start volunteering, we had to attend a presentation so the workers there could show us around the shelter and prepare us for handling both the felines and the canines. Doors to every room prevented any of the animals from escaping. We needed to sign in every time we arrived, so they could keep a record of our time. About a week later, we received our plastic name badges and became official volunteers. I did not meet any other

a lost mind trekking through
deepening snow. Never satisfied;
harsh, cruel words stirring
reflections that disgust the troubled mind
heading to unnatural ending.
Drizzles upon the page
gleam gold beside a now-tranquil
corpse; Caribbean eyes no longer
drip tears.

Pocket Secrets

by Tess Billmire

Another sticker was plucked from its clear sheet and placed onto a white polka-dotted pink paper with a lime green capital "T" centered in the middle. It accompanied a multitude of other stickers, ranging from SpongeBob to glittery ice cream. My favorites were always the pictures that were attached to Christmas tags. Cutting off just the little pictures of pine trees or festive snowmen, I would stick them onto my new pink sticker sheet. I added this final sticker of a tiny snowflake, completing my new collection and my satisfaction.

I folded the two sides in towards the middle, repeating this step for the ends, and finally folding the whole paper in half, locking the stickers inside. I was fond of transferring decals onto paper that I found pretty, but not because I found these thin objects stunning to look at. Most weren't even sparkly, yet I made sure they were scrapbook quality. No, my sticker pages were a way to cope with my anxiety, a reason which ended up being altogether ironic.

My obsession started in fourth grade. Before school began, I would dress in my usual outfit: a polo shirt according to the day of the week, a pair of khaki pants, and a brown fake leather belt to tie the outfit altogether. Lastly I would slip my folded paper, with ragged creases on the sides from opening and closing it, into the right pocket of my khaki pants. After a quick walk from my backyard to Trailside Elementary School, I would attend Mrs. Brady's fourth grade class. The small folded paper stayed in my pocket throughout all eight school hours. I would never take it out to stare at the random explosion of stickers, because just the idea of looking at my creation infused me with anxiety. Still, my mind would be scatterbrained with anxiety if I hadn't placed the paper in my right pocket.

As Mrs. Brady called for a forty-minute free time in between English and math class, I would unzip the small pocket on top of my backpack that was meant to hold soda cans. Inside lay my Harry Potter Quidditch Lego figurine. I would fly Harry across the room on his plastic Nimbus 2000. Taking out my sticker packet wasn't a priority at the time. The atmosphere wasn't right; there were kids

volunteers except for a girl my age, who came in two times the whole summer I was there.

Since I was not yet fourteen, I could not get a paying job, but helping out with the cats was about as exciting as getting paid. After walking past the room full of howling, over-excited dogs, my mother and I trailed up a small set of stairs to reach the cat chamber. The smell of wet cat and dog filled the air every time a door opened. Before touching any cats, or in between choosing a new one, we had to wash our hands. The main room and kitchen area held the older cats in individual cages where they desperately meowed and stuck their paws out of the cage bars for attention. One room that always had a closed door contained the kittens, grouped by litter, who could only be played with in that room to ensure they would not pick up any illnesses from other areas. Each enclosure had an informational tag attached to the bars that contained the cat's name, age and gender. There was an enclosed area where only employees could enter since it held the very young kittens who needed to be vaccinated.

I was always very nervous about picking up a cat: I was afraid I was going to accidentally drop it or it was going to squirm out of my grasp. Luckily, none of these situations occurred. Once one of us picked a cat who we wanted to pet and play with, we took it out of its cage and into the playroom that had an outside patio and a door that easily shut on its own. There were always toys scattered across the floor, with a giant wooden wheel up against one of the walls. There was also a window where people could view the kittens. The younger felines were more entertained by the cat toys than by being picked up and petted; the older ones mostly wanted love. After one of the chosen cats was dropped onto the floor, it always needed to look around the area before it became comfortable. I attempted to lead some of the cats out onto the patio, but most of them were too scared by the traffic noise on the nearby highway. One time I was with a boy and his grandmother who were picking out a kitten they wanted to adopt. Another day I worked with the other volunteer girl.

One of my favorites was a tuxedo cat named Beamer, who was adopted shortly after I met him. He was very playful, yet he still liked to be cuddled, which I enjoyed. There was a tabby

left and right playing with wooden dominos or squishy plastic T-rexes. I was too afraid of my peers looking at my creation because I wanted to keep it as my secret; I felt like it was too strange to be presented to the world. However, if I felt really ambitious I would go alone into the sweaty-smelling, messy cubby room. In deep thought I would stare at the strange arrangement of stickers that brought me as much discomfort as not even having them with me at all.

I've always been an anxious person. Anxious is the perfect epithet to describe who I am. As a young naïve third grader, I was diagnosed as having selective mutism: the inability to speak in front of groups of people or adults. With this brief description following me around like a more-chilling shadow than my own, I became attached to paper. This light-pink colored paper was my own version of a therapy dog. Sitting in my metal desk with its fake wooden surface, an anxious conscience silenced me. My selective mutism didn't suspend me from interacting with other fourth graders, yet Mrs. Brady was always lurking in the background, and that's when my anxiety arose. My nerves around adults were so bad I realized I couldn't fight my way through the day alone. This small and overly-folded piece of paper brought the comfort I needed. These hidden stickers were my imaginary friend. They were always there for me and understood my emotions more than anyone else, but I kept them hidden from the outside world.

The paper was more of a novelty than anything; a collector's item meant to lie in my pocket for self-pride without being admired. I enjoyed having it in my pocket for a while, but once I walked back to my house, I noticed its tattered appearance. From placing new stickers inside and double checking to make sure everything was in its place, the sides began to tear, almost falling off. The outside was crackled like old paint. I threw the whole thing away to start anew with a differently-designed piece of paper and new stickers with grainy textures. Each new piece of paper was like a new beginning, and I needed lots of them to satisfy my anxious life.

Ironically, this short obsession traumatized me. I felt guilty and anxious about my own creations. These paper sheets were supposed to bring me comfort, and they did; but over time my mind became hindered by deep dread. A dark presence followed me with each step. I was obsessed with looking at my stickers all the time. As my obsession became a burden, I decided I didn't want to be controlled by paper, so I ended this torture game altogether.

Sometimes I still feel the urge to crawl back into old habits and start collecting stickers again. Yet, my past torment restrains me from permitting these actions. I still buy a few sheets of stickers as I did five years ago, but I don't dare become obsessed. I know the mental demons that come with my collections. I moved on from being obsessed with paper to people.

As a ninth grader, I revolve my world around others' actions,

named Buddy, suffering from *Feline Immunodeficiency Virus*, who had scars on his nose and a chipped ear. Due to his suffering from FIV he had a low, deep meow that made him sound very aggressive and non-friendly. This made me want to stay far away from him. With some encouragement from my mother, I ended up taking him out to the playroom where I found out he was actually a cat that just wanted to be loved and who was still waiting to be adopted. Encountering Buddy helped me realize once again that you should not judge a book by its cover.

To say the least, helping out in McPaws has taught me more about cats in general and has given me the opportunity to cuddle with some lovable ones. I ended up only bumping into one black cat who was aggressive and did not want to be out of her enclosure. I also learned that even cats should not be judged by their appearance. The animals seemed to enjoy being able to roam around, while I was able to relieve some of my stress. I began to be more relaxed when dealing with cats and not so anxious about making a mistake. McPaws turned out to be a valuable use of time during my overall boring summer.

Chick Power

by Madeleine Hinson

At first glance, Tess Billmire is small, shy, and academically-oriented. However, in conversation, she delivers many interesting and sometimes-unexpected thoughts. Tess' hunger for success is the cause of her remarkable motivation and achievement in school. She says, "The thought of being successful gets me through the stress. . . more opportunities will come later and I'll be happier." Her success in school is geared toward the amazing future she plans. Tess explains: "I want to get straight A's all through high school and get a full ride scholarship to Stanford or MIT to study astrophysics or be in the military." These top-tier schools will allow her to follow in the footsteps of exceptional scientists whom she admires. One day, she would love to be remembered for her own discoveries. Owls are her spirit animals, as she admires their characteristics: "I love owls. . . they're quiet but very wise and have a lot of knowledge, which I

especially of those I admire. I'm no longer secluded in the world of folded sticker paper, and I've made myself more present and vulnerable to the real world. My hidden stickers acted as my imaginary friend because even though my fourth grade self didn't realize it at the time, I'm extremely socially awkward.

Subconsciously, these stickers granted me the courage to talk to my peers more often. My stickers were like a raft, allowing my fourth grade self to float over shark-infested waters and breathe in any situation. In sixth grade, I finally accepted my uniqueness and submerged myself in the social middle school world, only wearing a life jacket. To this day, I just float on top of the social world's surface. My younger self had small folded pieces of paper providing me comfort, making me feel less insecure. Now I'm fourteen and I'm starting to face the world, but I'm still not completely ready.

My attachment to people is my new support system as I guide myself into deeper waters. However, I've learned it's impossible to control other people. My solution is creating imaginary stories in my head, usually while listening to music. Music offers the freedom to zap all of my insecurities away and make myself "cooler." I pretend all my new friends want to hang out with me outside of school. I've created a new type of torture, obsessing over conversations that I wish my crush would have with me. All of this makes me more comfortable with the skin I'm in. Too anxious to even talk with my own peers, my false depictions of friends help me feel like I'm in control of something dreadful. I imagine the worst situations that could happen so I'm not disappointed when something actually goes wrong.

I'm still a scared little kid who needs guidance when roaming the world. It may take years before I'm able to face the world alone, but these mental coping mechanisms help me deflect depression, and grasp this new realm one imaginary story at a time.

really like."

Chrysalis

by Tess Billmire

Different people trapped in a heavy hold,
hindering the paths they identify.
Acting just to be as they were told.

Slowly realizing that others are cold:
attempting to make each conform by
matching the norm and being controlled.

Trying to stand up tall, acting bold.
Struggling not to burst out and cry,
while others judge and deeply scold.

Pressure of the world starts to unfold:
discrimination, making one want to die.
Striving to cover up reality behind a blindfold.

So many of the abnormal try to remold - -
covering each self to qualify
under societies' expectations, which are old.

Finally accepting themselves from their
stronghold,
bursting out towards light like a butterfly.
Becoming their true self, before it was foretold.
Hoping the next generation will simply uphold.