

English II Pieces

2020-2021

Religious Struggles

by Sophia Ririe

I remember listening to my mom pray a few months before her passing. Sitting on the floor next to her, my twelve-year-old-sense did not fully understand why she was praying, or to whom, but I enjoyed being in her presence, nonetheless, as she mumbled a stream of words softly in Ukrainian. Her voice, hopeful and desperate, reached out to some unseen force in an attempt to save herself from what I now understand as a long, degrading exit out of this life. My undeveloped and frail opinions on belief never had any direction or foundation. I hadn't grown up in a religious household, but after her passing, I began wondering what my opinions were because everyone seemed to believe I had them. Growing up, I knew that my dad's side of the family was extremely religious, and that he himself had been raised in an intensely religion-based environment. My mom's parents were religious also, but their Russian Orthodox beliefs weren't explicitly enforced on her or her twin brother. My dad's experiences with religion had never been relevant to me until after my mom's death. His own memories from years as a religiously-conflicted individual have begun to help me understand.

My dad grew up in a strongly religious household, his parents having both been born and raised in the Mormon church. Along with his three brothers, two sisters, and my grandparents, my dad attended church each Sunday and adhered to all the requirements that were expected of him as a young Mormon boy. "Religion provided structure and discipline," my dad states, reflecting on his childhood. "It provided a framework for meaning in our lives and [religion] also provides communalism, which offers a sense of belonging...I learned many important life lessons belonging to a religious community."

However, he became skeptical and began questioning the church at seventeen years old. "I began to feel fractures in my faith," he describes. "This was a result of a concept called comparative mythology." As a result of his questioning, he would skip church meetings on Sundays to venture to other churches in hopes of experiencing other expressions of faith. Through observation and experience, he realized that "...faith, as well as God, were relative more than distinctive terms." This breakthrough led to a "crisis of faith" at age twenty-two. However, despite his deteriorating faith, my dad chose to serve a mission for two years. After attending Ricks College – now known as BYU Idaho in Rexburg, Idaho – for one year, he left, as many young Mormons do, at nineteen to live and serve their faith in a

Valley County

by Tristen Stoll

"McCall has changed so much in my time here." Marty Coulter at Coulter's Appliances was born and raised in this small Idaho town. He loves the outdoors. When he sees the changes in his small town over the past forty years, he goes out into the woods. It's a way of remembering the past: the same untouched, clean woods he roamed as a child. "McCall has grown from a small town to a huge tourist hotspot," Marty says. "I believe it is because of the growth of Boise." Through his affiliation with his appliance store, Marty visits many changing homes and experiences growth even closer. Rapid change is stressful to most people. Marty built his own log house by himself. He says it's what everyone used to do: cut the tree, chop the wood, take it to the sawmill. "They all used to be old log shacks," Marty says, "and now I service houses that are worth more than I even have."

Where Marty's house stands today, in the once-*virgin* fields and woods of Donnelly, subdivisions, cattle fields, and little to no woods have altered the valley. Even his local lake, Lake Cascade, has been dammed for irrigation, transforming a small river into a small lake. Now he says the lake is the highest he has ever seen. "The area where I live used to be trees and empty fields; now it is a huge subdivision of Donnelly. The lake used to be so much smaller too. I remember it being way smaller than it is today. If you go out near Sugarloaf Island, you can come across underwater buildings and foundations. Even the old main highway has moved and gone to dirt."

Marty does not feel too happy about the huge expansions of his valley home, but he has learned to cope and make his own profit off the expansion with his appliance store. Marty comments: "It gets me toys and pays the bills and allows me to go out and fish and hunt like I have done for decades." He sees the changes that are happening in his town, from subdivisions, to new lakes, to the demise of the old highway. Almost every physical attribute of Valley County has changed. All that is left are the rivers, and the mountains outside of his valley home. The wilderness provides an escape from reality for him, and always brings him back to his youth.

foreign country. My dad served his mission in Mexico City, Mexico. "This experience paradoxically both strengthened and weakened my faith," he states.

During his mission, he experienced several spiritual encounters, which only further complicated his relationship with religion. "I experienced a spiritual manifestation leading me to specific people I converted," he says. These occasions led him to feeling spiritual illumination, which contradicted his failing belief in the church and its teachings. He describes one of those experiences: "My companion and I were walking down the street, and I had a sudden feeling that I should knock on this one door. We did, and a lady dressed in black came out. Her husband had died a week earlier. She was spiritual and receptive to our message, and we managed to convert her and we baptized her in a river." Although his mission was meant to solely center around the LDS church, my dad continued his search for understanding religion through visiting other denominations. He explored many Catholic cathedrals, often speaking to the priests and the parishioners. Catholic architecture spiritually moved him, as did the sense of community, which paralleled that of his own church. "The symbols, stained glass windows, and the obvious depth of faith within the people who believed and visited these cathedrals was fascinating to me, because it so much resembled my own experience of visiting the temple with my family and church friends," he states.

Upon returning from his mission, my dad continued to harbor doubts within his faith. He was unable to find answers to his gnawing question within the church, and as a result, began seeking other sources. He took an interest in the classics, primarily emphasizing Ancient Greek literature. "There, I discovered, by contrast, a uniquely different belief system as well as profound differences in modes of worship and cherished values as compared to my Mormon-Christian upbringing," he explains. This insight led him to several authors, the significant ones being Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung. Through Campbell – whose life work treated the subject of comparative mythology – my dad learned that "symbols within mythology are often mistaken for concrete absolutes." Carl Jung, a Swiss author and psychologist, based his life work on analyzing belief and religion. Through Jung's work, my dad further learned the roles of mythological symbols in religion. "From these two authors, as well as others, I realized that religion is founded on mythological narratives that emanate from archetypal human instincts," he concludes.

Both during and since his mission, my dad has continued in his search of what religion truly is and why it is so significant. "I spoke with hundreds and hundreds of different types of people of various religious faiths. I have discovered that there was both truth in religion and religion in truth; truth was not exclusive in religion but rather relative," he says. Due to his religious inner conflicts and doubts as an LDS church member, my dad has been able to

Search for Adventure

by Sadie Berry

"Sailing brings me peace and is a way for my mind to take a break," says Steven Berry, 52, a businessman in rural Idaho. Sailing is Steve's yoga: a form of meditation that brings him immense happiness. The day Steve first went out on his friend's sailboat, thirty years ago, was the day he acquired a passion for the sport. After that, it's all he ever wanted to do. His real love for sailing came about when he was out on the water alone. Steve reflects, "I felt like I was in charge of my own destiny." Although he is incredibly outgoing, he always finds joy in being by himself, since sailing on his own really made him feel comfortable with being alone. This appreciation for solitude has helped him thrive through the harsh Covid-19 pandemic and quarantine while many people simply struggled.

Many of Steve's business techniques, as well as the way he treats others, stem from sailing adventures. "Sailing has made me self-sufficient and stronger," Steve says. "I know I can accomplish anything." Being alone on a sailboat forces a person to take care of himself and to learn how to solve difficult situations. Pushing through tough times while sailing has helped Steve through the hardships that come from owning a business. As the president of an online battery company called Battery-Universe, which he founded more than twenty years ago, he sells a wide variety of batteries to people all over the world, including supplying to the United States Military and occasionally NASA. Taking it easy and not worrying so much helps Steve dramatically in his day-to-day life. Whether dealing with customers or disciplining his children, he always finds a way to deescalate situations. Being on his boat has taught him patience and how to critically think through problems.

Steve's greatest aspiration is to sail around the world with his family. Recently, Steve bought a new Catalina 250 after not owning a sailboat for fifteen years. Now, he is able to once again enjoy his favorite activity practically anytime he wants. This new purchase greatly excites him as he looks forward to new adventures: "I can't wait to go out on the weekends with my daughters and teach them how to sail," Steve says. "It'll be great."

Sailing has changed Steven's life. Taking life for what it is and going with the flow helps him focus on what really matters. His passion has taught him to change his future and learn from past mistakes. Steve cannot wait to see what the future has in store for him: he is excited to take on new adventures.

develop a thorough and insightful view into religion and what it represents. His experiences as a young, conflicted missionary searching for religious enlightenment beyond his own church allowed him to perceive religion from a historical perspective and realize that religion is simply a reflection of human nature.

Four years after I sat listening to my mom praying from her armchair in the kitchen, I absorb my dad's endless stories about his struggles as a young man in the Mormon religion. While driving up to my sister's house in Portland, Oregon for Christmas this year, we had long conversations regarding his life in the church. Religion's purpose is often to explain life's big questions: what happens when we die? What is mortality? What is the purpose of our existence at all? The concept of religion is simply a way for people to gain comfort and a sense of guidance as they experience life's hardships and obstacles. This insight helped me realize that death is concrete and my reaction to it is subjective: I can either grieve the life I could have had or move on and grow from the struggle.

In the past, I have been exposed to a variety of religions and have learned to appreciate the communal values and structure they present. Religion has not given me an ultimate answer and the comfort I sought after the loss of my mom. Thus, this insight has led me to understand that religion is not the only answer. I can find peace and the ability to accept my grief outside of a religious structure. In the future I will most likely remain open-minded to all life experiences and acknowledge that growth, and my ability to accept my mom's death, can exist outside a religious system.

Garage Door

by Diesel Messenger

Cold glass wets my cheek. I lie, curled up, half on the top of my upper bunk bed and half-slumped onto the windowsill which rests just slightly lower than my mattress. Heat rapidly leaves my face, transferring into the glass. I wince. My breath comes gently, obscuring the glass, but I can still gaze, amazed, at myriad stars above. Somewhere in the night, those same stars twinkle upon my mother on her way home.

Headlight beams slide across the ceiling and down the wall of my bedroom. My heart leaps; my mother is coming home. I pull my ten-year-old self back onto the bed and wait with childish impatience, listening for the familiar groan of the garage door -- monotone and mechanical, shaking the entire house. It stops for a moment as my mother pulls her car inside, and then it repeats as the door closes behind her.

I arrange my numerous pillows into a throne and sit

A Day in France

by Sophie Ririe

On a sunny, clear-sky day in Paris, France, the Seine River sparkled in the morning breeze, promising another day of unexpected adventures and memories. Phillippe, a blonde, curly-haired boy, stood in a sweater next to Sadie, also six, in front of a large boat. Their parents stood behind them, preparing to board. This was a daily excursion, necessary to reach the other side of the river where most tourist attractions were located. "He would always ride this boat with me and call me pretty," Sadie recalls. They had first met on the boat, and it did not take long for their two families to begin travelling every day in one large group. Sadie eventually had to leave Paris, ultimately leaving Phillippe behind. Sadie says, "I truly thought we would see each other again," but as years passed, this belief proved false.

Since her time in Europe, Sadie has begun making plans about her future and what she hopes to experience as she continues her life after high school. Travelling Europe and around the world are long-term goals. However, reflecting on her academic goals, she says: "So I want to go to college and major in computer science at UC Berkeley." Her interest in computers first began as a child: "I've been interested in computers since I was little with my dad being in that field...all the jobs in that field are great and the income it provides is really good."

Sadie's passion and excitement for her future after high school only further indicate her dedication towards her goals. She describes: "I've always looked forward to going to college and travelling. Those have been things I've been wanting to do since I was little and it's crazy I'm going to be able to do it soon."

Diesel Messenger

by Oliver Keeffe

Diesel Messenger, a sophomore from New Meadows, Idaho, is a learning enthusiast. Diesel loves to learn, explore, and watch anime. Diesel is interested in Linguistics. He hopes to create a legacy through learning. "Learning makes me feel like I accomplished something," says Diesel. "It makes me feel powerful." His ability to learn helps him feel in control of the everlasting changes of his growing adolescence. Diesel's parents play a big part in his life. When Diesel was younger, his parents had him try Nordic skiing. "I hated it," he says. He felt like he was being forced into it. Diesel's connection to his mother has made him closer her. I "take after my mom," Diesel says. "She is my best

upon it with my blanket shielding me tightly against the winter air. My mother's footsteps sound in the stairwell, tired but gentle. Her foot mounts the last stair and she sighs there like she always does, dropping her bag and walking towards the bathroom. Her toothbrush buzzes, the sink runs, and my door finally opens to reveal her face. I smile. "Hi".

"Hi," she says. "How're you doing?"

"Good," I say. "I designed more plants for Plants Versus Zombies. I made a carrot cannon that goes through zombies and damages ones further down the line."

"That sounds awesome, Diesel."

"How was your yoga class?"

"It was great, though I got pissed at this one lady who wouldn't stop showing off. People just don't realize that contorting your body that way is really unhealthy. At one point, she was pulling her foot all the way to her head from behind, and when she got out of the pose, she winced with pain and clenched her hip." Stories like these baffle my young mind; it seems so pointless seeking recognition like that, especially when any informed person like my mother would instantly see the plea for attention for what it is.

I try to listen to the rest of my mother's story, but the tale of that girl troubles me. It makes me wonder what horrible force compelled her to act the way she did. Was she neglected? Was she spoiled? Does she have a mental disorder? It seems like there should be a clear answer, but my mother never spoke of that girl again, so I never learned why.

I fall asleep promising myself to remain humble and see what I'm doing through an objective lense. I couldn't bear the ignominy of being the flashy girl with a double hip replacement in her future.

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The years of my life and my body have lengthened and I now find refuge in the lower bunk with its queen-sized mattress. I am not content. I have no obligations and feel like never again leaving this room would be the best possible fate. Not that staying here would be very fulfilling, but it sounds less paralyzing than spending any significant amount of time in the real world. Like a mold that goes unnoticed until it has turned the house's skeleton to pulp, safety and comfort have gradually taken priority over humanity in my mind.

I think back on ninth grade, and reading Aldous Huxley's Brave New World. Right now, that dystopia seems like the best possible future for humanity. Sure, such a controlling societal structure would largely kill off deep thinking, but thinking has only let me more fully comprehend life's banality and despair. Splitting my time between simple, thoughtless work and ecstatic stimulation would at least be distracting enough to live relatively free of pain.

I sit and smile as I watch a flurry of glimpses into others' lives on my phone. My lethargy is short lived,

friend." His father, on the other hand, is where Diesel gets his looks. Although Diesel is tall and stinky with blonde hair, pretty much the same as his father, Diesel does not feel like he is living up to the example his father sets. Diesel's interest in Spanish and English classes has set him on a path toward linguistics. Diesel says he wants to "help people convey what they mean." Also, Diesel would like to travel the world, and through studying linguistics, he will be able to do that. He thinks it will be more practical to attend a smaller university, "to relax and be able to value my time." He is more than open to attending an exchange program overseas.

Gratification

by Sadie Berry

Everyone wishes for the secret to happiness, but obtaining that goal is different for each person. Sophia Rire, a fifteen-year-old McCall sophomore, reveals what gives her the most sense of gratification. "One thing I look forward to the most," she says, "is knowing in the future I will travel the world."

Sophia's proudest moment comes from having lived abroad. She reflects, "immersed in a different culture and completing school in Germany made me so proud of myself, feeling like I could do anything." Sophia finds that starting and completing small goals makes her feel content too. She says, "even doing small things, like cleaning my room, brings me joy." Discovering hobbies plays a major role in enjoying life. "My favorite thing to do is read," Sophie says. "It's like watching a movie in your head that you can take anywhere. It feels like a little escape from reality."

This year, organization has helped Sophie stay on top of her schoolwork, which allows her to do the hobbies she loves. "I've started making a checklist everyday," she mentions. "This helps me stay on track because I know what to expect and what should be expected of me." Organizing her life has helped Sophie not feel so much chaos and allows her to enjoy more of her hobbies. Happiness comes in many different forms; focusing on minor facets of each project makes every step more enjoyable for Sophia.

Post-Mortem

by Sophie Ririe

"Has anyone heard of the Chernobyl accident?" Our 9th grade science teacher, Mr. Daniels, enthusiastically scans bored, blank faces. I shift in my seat, anxiously waiting for someone else to raise their

however; suddenly, the low moan of the garage door, like that of some impossibly enormous and ancient beast, racks my nerves, making my heart pump and my brain scatter.

My heart pounding in my ears, my stomach tight, I drop my phone and scamper from my bed into the large room that serves as our living room, dining room, and kitchen. I surreptitiously put the remaining dishes into a high cupboard that I used to need a chair to just barely reach. As I slide my stack of plates in, my sigh fogs the assorted glasses that crowd the same shelf.

My brother bounds up the stairs, and I see his mischievous, tanned face and shoulder-length hair. He asks me what's up.

"Nothing," I tell him and make an exaggerated tough-guy sound while catching his slow-motion punch. We break character and laugh.

My dad is next up the stairs. He springs loudly upward and announces his arrival with his habitual karate kiai. He asks me what's up too.

"Just testing our nerves of steel and veins of testosterone," I reply. My dad laughs and pulls me into a hug. Then he and my brother run outside to "sesh," jumping on the trampoline.

Finally, my mother enters the kitchen, and my stomach clenches even tighter. She smiles slightly but I can't meet her eyes. We exchange greetings and she, like my brother and father, asks me how I'm doing. "Fine," I say flatly.

"Did you get any work done?" she asks. She never lets it rest for long. I make up a lie about a Spanish assignment I worked on and an essay I edited. "Nice," she notes reluctantly. I think she knows I'm lying but doesn't have the heart to call me out. She cares about me and wants me to succeed, and the problem is that I am neither able to ignore her concern nor meet her expectations: I feel obligated to succeed but horribly impotent at doing so.

I was always smart and interested in nearly everything, so like any mother would, she tried to guide me towards excellence. She was never demanding about it, but the subtext of our relationship was always that I would succeed, whatever that meant.

Now, I'm questioning whether success is even something I want. High-paying jobs sound a lot like school, with their endless supply of meaningless tasks and paperwork and thinking. Thinking hurts. I slouch to my room and collapse onto my bed. My mother says my room stinks, as is typical for teenagers, but I don't notice; I hardly ever notice smells. I lie there until light fades from the sky and the sounds of my family's activity recede.

I look up at the wooden underside of the top bunk, dotted with glow-in-the-dark stickers my brother has placed there like stars in a sky. The display blocks the high window in my room, and I realize sadly that I have probably spent more time looking at this array of plywood and plastic than

hand. For a transient moment, an internal conflict makes me hesitate before slowly raising my own.

"Ah yes, go ahead, Sophie," he nods. A few kids turn in their seats to glance back as I quickly think through what I want to say.

"Well, my mom was actually from Ukraine. She was a teenager when the accident happened and I'm pretty sure she was near it when the explosion occurred." I clear my throat and Mr. Daniel's surprised face encourages me to keep talking.

"She was telling me about it when I was younger. Apparently it was really bad and people who weren't even near the accident suffered a lot. One of her friends lost a brother, maybe it was her uncle, to radiation poisoning," I sink into my chair a little and Mr. Daniels begins asking questions, wondering what city she was in when it happened; if she herself had suffered any of the horrible consequences.

Suddenly, he says: "You know, I'd love to meet her. She sounds very interesting and that story is fascinating. It must be really amazing to hear her tell it." I nod my head and smile.

The classroom is suddenly completely silent. All side conversations have died and the kids in my class look at me as if expecting something to explode. They expect me to react to Mr. Daniel's mentioning my dead mom. I feel like bursting out laughing at the awkward situation, but choose to sink lower into my chair, my face burning.

Every once in a while, I meet another kid who has gone through a similar experience. I knew one guy who had lost his dad in an airplane crash and a girl whose parents both died in a car accident. One thing we all agree on is that we are comfortable talking about our experiences. They concur that people always tend to react the same way -- shocked faces and awkward stares -- which truly makes a conversation worse than the actual topic.

People's general beliefs about what it must be like to lose a parent at a young age are completely inaccurate. Death is an awkward and uncomfortable topic, one that people think will cause insufferable pain whenever mentioned. However, adults do not realize that it is actually a topic I like to discuss; one that I often find humorous, especially after the countless hilariously-awkward experiences I have had discussing it.

When my mom first died, I remember talking to a friend about her memorial, which I was helping my family plan. I shared my inner thoughts: "Honestly, it's so boring. I have to help organize all the guests and plan out what food is going to be served at what time and by whom." I pause and smile, wanting to make a joke about how convenient it would've been for her to just not die and cause me all these horribly dull hardships.

at the real night sky. Looking up into the night provides valuable context to my life. It reminds me that we are all connected, all our eyes raking across the same sea of bright pinpricks, so why don't I prioritize it? Is it really so difficult to stand up and peer out my window every night?

For some reason, I don't get up. I feel tethered down. It would be so easy. Just stand. Shouldn't the night owl watch the stars while his family lies to rest? My inability or unwillingness to stand up starts to weigh on me. If I can't do that, how can I do anything? The truth is, I can't, and I don't.

To escape my distressing circular thinking, I try to focus on the show I'm watching, but I can't fully ignore the feeling of ineptitude that permeates my mind. As midnight approaches, I gradually slip into an exhausted sleep, thankful that I can, for a few short hours, feel nothing at all.

The morning has me sweating beneath my heavy blanket. I perceive the familiar sensation of my body having been bashed repeatedly with a truncheon that most always accompanies waking up. For what seems like an hour, I lie there, and then, with labored movements, shift my blanket to the side and stand up.

The head rush that grips me almost makes me fall over, but I steady myself and squint at the daylight. I look out the window and see blue sky and green forest, all shrouded in the awkward haziness of late morning.

I missed my chance last night. The window is no longer a window. Instead of letting me gaze out, facilitating my connection to the world through the stars, the glass is now a mirror. It shows me only myself: smelly, muggy, and self-oppressed. I plop back down and sit on my bed for a minute, contemplating the sun, which drowns out the stars, those omnipresent orbs that bind us together, and beats down on only half the earth at once, leading me to forget that there are also people on the other side of this small world, gazing past dark windows into the unknown.

Teenage Years

by Tristen Stoll

The soccer ball rolls on over morning dew. Sarah kicks the ball into the goal, and the crowd goes wild with cheers. "It's just so thrilling," Sarah says. "I enjoy it and I love it." Sarah is an eleventh grader at McCall-Donnelly high school. An artist, soccer player, snowboarder, and musician, Sarah also loves the outdoors and playing sports. At the age of three she moved from Fresno, California to small resort town McCall, Idaho. "School up here is tough for me," the teen says. "I enjoy more creative and physical subjects such as soccer, playing music, and snowboarding."

"Wow. I'm so sorry. You must be so sad and tired, if you ever need help or just a shoulder to cry on please let me know. I'm always here for you, don't forget that." She looks at me with sorrowful eyes. I force myself to bite my tongue and nod sadly. She means well, but I can barely contain myself from bursting out laughing.

People generally never know how to react after someone's parent dies. Of course, some kids do not like to share their stories and relive certain memories, but most are open to talking about their experience. It is best when others are comfortable and don't avoid asking questions or laughing at dark jokes. Grief comes in many forms, and humor is one of them. When people try to talk to me about my mom's death, I tend to feel uncomfortable because rather than listening to what I have to say, they try to interpret my feelings and emotions.

When the memorial was still being planned, I had a chance to have a long conversation with my aunt while we were cleaning and preparing for my family to visit. "So, how you've been?" she asked, the calm and easygoing tone in her voice immediately putting me at ease.

"Oh, I've been better," I dragged out my sentence sarcastically, making her laugh. These types of conversations are very casual and normal, in contrast with the uptight avoidance that I usually encounter on this topic. It's relieving when I can make jokes and laugh without feeling like I will offend someone or cause someone else to feel uncomfortable about how I am dealing with my own grief. Everyone has a different experience with pain. Although I can relate to other kids whose parents have died, I can never truly relate.

Trust

by Sarah Morgan

My mom is yelling at me, once again, as she believes I have been acting irresponsible based on evidence of things I haven't even done. "Sarah, I can't believe you spent all day on your phone!" she exclaims, the exasperation quite evident in her words. She has just spent all day at work and come home stressed out and tired, so it isn't hard to understand her frustration. "Mom, I wasn't on it *all day*," I counter, already rolling my eyes at her attack. "I played the piano for like, an hour, and I hung out with the cat. And I read comic books. AND I listened to music." My mom sighs, looking at me with a slight frown. "Alright, well, obviously I can't police you, I'm just going to hope you're making the right choices. You always have your

Sarah loves to snowboard. She likes to go out whenever she has time; she's good, too. "I've been snowboarding for about seven years now. I have my dad to thank for that." Sarah says. "He taught me when I was young, around the fifth or sixth grade I believe."

"I'm more physically inclined. I hope to get a job at a national park one day as some kind of scientist." Sarah continues: "I'm still not exactly sure yet but I do plan to take a gap year as an exchange student. I hope to live in a town similar to McCall, but where the big city is more accessible for my needs." Sarah loves the outdoors. However, the benefit of being able to buy what she wants when she wants it is also something she desires to have when she is older.

Money Determines Worth

by Sadie Berry

The woman checking in wore an authentic mink coat and clutched a designer Louis Vuitton purse. Walking with dignity under frescoed ceilings in the Waldorf Astoria's open foyer, she held her head high, flaunting her accomplishments. Almost instantly, I felt as if I did not fit in. Multiple times during our stay in Rome, I thought: "*Man, I don't think I belong here. These people are a lot richer than my family is.*"

Money creates a sense of personal worth throughout the world. Although the United States is a free country, people still systematically group one another based on economic status. Even I affiliate myself with people whose families have similar incomes.

At parties, my wealthy friends respond to a location with: "Oh, that's where the poor neighborhood is. We can't go there because it's unsafe and dirty." But that "unsafe" neighborhood is filled with very nice families who are only struggling to make ends meet. Americans who make limited incomes have a much smaller selection of places to live compared to the choices for those who have higher-paying jobs. For instance, there is only a small percentage of low income housing, but many million dollar mansions, overlooking Beverly Hills. The impoverished have limited options, making it difficult to mingle with well-off families. The only time rich and poor interconnect with each other is when a housecleaner or cook works for a wealthy family, or when a celebrity helps the poor in order to boost her reputation. A celebrity and a homeless person are never close friends.

After a long day of being an orthopedic surgeon, a father comes home, and sets aside a percentage of his monthly income in an investment plan. His gradual investments build wealth, as they accumulate to create his family's abundant retirement. The rich often invest their

nose in that damn phone, I hate it!" She raises her voice as she goes on and on about how I spend too much time on devices, and how I should be finding other things to do with my time.

Personally, I don't understand what my mom is so upset about. Compared to the way things could be, I'd say I'm a pretty good kid. I don't go to parties, or drink, or do anything illegal. I'm always home by curfew and she always knows where I am and who I'm with. I've always been polite, respectful, and responsible for myself. Why is she so upset that I'd rather be spending my time looking at photos of 70's rock legends on Pinterest than participating in dirty gossip and drama, or involving myself in other shallow-minded situations?

Sometimes parents take their kids for granted. Of course, not every child is the same: kids run in different social circles, have different hobbies and responsibilities, and practice diverse routines based on their families' lives. However, most of them have one thing in common: parents distrust their judgment. Adults often dismiss children's opinions. Young and inexperienced, teenagers can't compete with the wisdom and expertise parents possess from having lived for so many years.

Kids do have some wisdom of their own, however. We are growing up in a new age. Teens today are being trained with new skills and ways of thinking that the older generation could never imagine. This fresh and modern way of viewing life may actually provide some advantage over the old "tried and true" methods of parenting used by their guardians. This is not to say that adults are powerless when it comes to authority over kids, however. Children's learning new ways of thinking and being more up-to-date with this ever-changing world means that parents must have slightly more trust in topics kids believe to be right and just.

In this new age, people from all over the world can connect through the internet, and I have made some of my best friends online. Parents are skeptical of the legitimacy of most of my "internet friends" however, and they often believe I am actually talking to creepy old men instead of actual teenagers. However, they underestimate my ability to recognize when someone is acting strange or making off-putting advancements towards me. I know my friends, just as well as I know the ones I speak to in real life, and they are all just vulnerable teenagers like me looking for someone who shares their interests and is willing to listen to them talk about their issues. Adults should know their kids well enough to be able to trust their judgment, especially when they are not as knowledgeable on the subject as their children.

Parents don't realize that having less confidence in their children could actually make them

earned income in various ways which compound their assets. They are able to be smart with their wealth.

We group ourselves based on similarities with other people because we assume we have more in common with someone like us. Everyone wants to feel relevant, so various cliques help us belong somewhere. Walking down the hall at my high school, the boys wearing varsity letter jackets and jerseys talk amongst themselves while the kid carrying a prodigious stack of books scurries to his next class. Rarely do these two groups of people choose to talk with one another. They have already, subconsciously, chosen who they hang out with based on similar interests.

Wealth does not have to determine who you are. We leave our ordinary cliques and wonder how we can all work together, regardless of where we come from. Breaking social standards can help society be closer. We are all the same species, after all.

Oliver

by Diesel Messenger

Oliver Keeffe, a sophomore hockey player, is still unsure of the exact path he will take in life. He enjoys the outdoors. When he was little, he used to alpine ski, but he quit that to pursue hockey and has been playing for the last eleven years. "I like the challenge," Oliver says. "Hockey helps me figure out things and pursue my goals. I'm really bad with people and hockey helps me with that." He finds great pleasure in hockey and loves its physicality. However, he does not intend to fight, having already quit football because he finds it too rough. Oliver says, "The other day, we were playing with a pretty big team. I got hit and fell, bruising my ribs. It hurt, but then it kinda didn't. Then, I got back and went and scored."

Oliver believes that happiness is more important than productivity, and says that school can be very deleterious to his mental health. Oliver says he might want to be a psychologist: "I'm really good at listening, except for in school; I like to see how people think and I've always thought about why they think that." He seeks authentic passion and satisfaction in whatever job he chooses. At the moment, Oliver has a very abstract plan for his future, "I eventually want to go to college," he says, "but right now I don't really have an idea of exactly what I want to do."

Oliver feels very lucky to have the parents he has. "My mom works really hard and my dad does too. When I talk about something I want to do, they will help me in any way they can." Oliver says that even when his family disagrees, they are good at moving past their fights. He says, "This morning, I said something to my dad I shouldn't have said and I apologized over text and he said he didn't even remember it." Oliver also respects how his parents have

more rebellious. All kids, especially teenagers, are somewhat hardwired to defy authority if they are being called out on or corrected for their behavior. Once the freedom of making their own decisions is removed, the motivation to do the right thing disappears, and a grudge against those who have restricted this choice takes its place. On countless days, I have been assigned a chore to do before the end of the evening, and just as I am about to go start it, one of my parents calls out from downstairs, "Sarah, you haven't unloaded the dishwasher yet, I need that done right now please." I groan and roll my eyes, frustrated that I have been yelled at just when I had been considering starting the task without being asked.

Without constant nagging from my parents, I might be more inspired to actually take accountability for things that need to be done around the house, or otherwise. As soon as I am not free to make my own choices, I immediately become less cooperative and more annoyed at the restriction of my freedoms. Trusting that children will complete their responsibilities without being watched over like hawks circling prey, would motivate teens to be responsible.

Children are more intelligent and aware than they might seem. Yes, parents play an extremely crucial role in guiding us to making the right choices in life, but at some point we have to learn to spread our wings slowly and take flight. Teaching a child proper values and preparing her for life is important, but such effort is wasted if she does not get a chance to test out these skills while she still has parents to help her change if things go wrong.

Keeping a kid sheltered until the time he goes out on his own could be setting him up to make some rash and unexpected decisions, when he is ultimately presented with immense amounts of freedom he has never had the opportunity to explore before. Last year, I started working for the Brundage Ski School teaching young kids how to snowboard. In one session, the boy I was instructing felt very uncooperative and frustrated; he obviously did not want to be in the lesson. Instead of forcing my authority and pressuring him into working intensely to improve his skills, I relaxed and was patient, going at an easy speed so as to not upset him more. I realized later that it was the influence of the way my parents taught me as a child that helped me make this choice.

Putting small amounts of trust in kids early will help them grow, and allow them to make mistakes while there is still time to correct them. Having freedom also makes kids feel responsible and trusted by their parents, which can strengthen relationships between them. So, instead of guilt-tripping kids into following strict orders around and outside of the house, trust that they are able

transcended their own conflicted childhoods. He says, "My parents' fathers were never really there for them. My mom never wanted that to happen to her children and even though she had that influence, she was never that way to me." Oliver is passionate about improving himself, overcoming obstacles, sports and the outdoors. While he does not yet know where precisely he is heading, he has no shortage of motivation to do good in the world.

Hunters as Conservationists

by Tristen Stoll

"HEY KID! Don't you have to be with an adult? Don't be so irresponsible and murder those animals!" Shocked, I whipped around to see a very angry lady as I carefully managed my shotgun barrel. "WATCH where you point that thing! You could have shot me dead right there! Where are your parents?"

"Sorry ma'am, I was watching my barrel."

"Don't you ma'am me young man!" "I saw you shoot those innocent birds out of the sky! Is that even legal?"

"Oh yes, it's duck season right now."

Walking away in rage, the lady screamed, "How heartless!"

Hunters make up the majority of members in leading groups for wildlife management and animal conservation. Like the woman I encountered at the lake, many non-hunters believe that hunters are simply ruthless killers who just kill for pleasure and hobby. In fact, hunters would much rather see wildlife populations flourish, because a healthy population fuels the hunters like myself and others who hunt them.

Hunters enjoy the ambient sounds of the woods and wildlife in natural environments. By creating and managing healthy habits, they get to keep hearing and living in the woods they enjoy. Many people do not realize how much of the environment that they love to listen to and walk through is created with the help of hunters. The National Deer Association (NDA) says, "We are hunters from all walks of life who share a passion for wild deer. We believe it is our responsibility to ensure the future of wild deer, wildlife habitat and hunting. As the authority on all things deer, we blend the art of hunting with the science of management to create better deer and better deer hunting."

Most ethical hunters kill to eat and enjoy the traditions of our past ways of hunter-gatherer mentality. "Many hunters enjoy the great outdoors while enjoying the past tradition of our forefathers," reports an Idaho Fish and Game article on its official webpage. "We set the rules and they help manage our wildlife populations." Hunters lead

to know right from wrong and relax the tight restrictions upheld "for their own good."

Boarding School

by Oliver Keeffe

In the movies on a normal high school day, you wake up and run outside to catch the bus. Somehow, those characters are always late. What if I told you it is possible to wake up, walk down your hall -- looking at your friends' doors remembering all the memories, good and bad -- then walk outside to breakfast with your friends? You can wake up around them, eat with them, and go to school with them.

People say that life creates an infinite loop throughout your world. When I left for boarding school, I created a new loop. Boarding school is an experience that some never have. When I left for boarding school I got a load of questions: "Aren't you going to miss your family?" "That's so far, what are you going to do if you get homesick?" Most of the questions reflected a fear of leaving friends and family behind. I've never been a person who is stuck with people; I'm just not a "people person." So, when I was asked those questions, I wasn't sure how to reply. I didn't want to say that I wouldn't miss anyone, but that's how I felt.

After a week at school, we only had one homesick kid leave after underestimating his own ability to go months before seeing his loved ones. Last year, my brother came up for a week to see if he liked the school. Instead of showing him around the school for a day like other schools do, we would have visitors stay the night also. He showed up for his "shadow day," ready to be exposed to the boarding school life and to new challenges. Yet, by the end of the day, he didn't want to be there. He told me much later that it wasn't the fact that he didn't like the school or the people in it; He simply couldn't last more than two days without my dad.

Even though I had known all of this about him, I still asked him if he would ever want to go to boarding school. To this day he still says, "no". My mom actually uses it as a way of threatening him. If he pisses her off, she says "SHAWNIGAN," which is the name of the boarding school I attended. So, my brother will calm down, because he doesn't want to go back.

the cause in protecting wildlife because, without sustainable populations, hunters are left with nothing.

Hunter-founded groups such as Ducks Unlimited, Ducks USA, Panthera, and the NDA preserve and expand wildlife habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife such as deer. Many people who enjoy the large populations of waterfowl, such as the woman at the lake, would be shocked to learn how hunters who manage and take care of the birds provide healthy, stable, ever-growing populations of waterfowl.

Following the ancient traditions of hunting, most hunters are taught that when they take care of Mother Nature and its animals, hunters will be rewarded with plentiful food. Hunters keep the cycle balanced, harvesting unhealthy populations, keeping predators in check, and restoring and even building new wildlife habitats for future generations.

Quack, phft phft phft. Ducks' wings whistle overhead. Thin crisps of air stutter at each wing beats. Hundreds of duck loft into the pond. "Wow look at all those ducks!" a little girl says as her family watches thousands of migrating birds enter the area. I spot a sign:

Thanks to our Sponsors: Ducks Unlimited

Inc.

Wildlife management area since 2019, housing fifty-five thousand waterfowl

Endnotes:

[-https://www.ducks.org/](https://www.ducks.org/)

[-https://www.deerassociation.com](https://www.deerassociation.com)

Ruts

by Diesel Messenger

Help me; fix me; tell me I'm so
incredibly dignified with an older man's air.
Still unscathed by cruel falling snow.

Give me your love and never let go,
even knowing that it will be strangling to bear.
Help me; fix me; tell me I'm so

delightful to dance with, enchantingly slow,
though my donkey-feet drag without any flare.
Still unscathed by cruel falling snow.

Take me to your rare places you show
only yourself, never before daring to share.
Help me; fix me; tell me I'm so

incredibly capable of staying below
the surface: love could never need air;
still unscathed by cruel falling snow.

Featherlight Death-grip

by Diesel Messenger

Fingers run with grimy sweat mixed with chalk;
throat parched from hours of toil. Eyes
pop. Teeth, muscles, concentration
clench. Joints
creak.

The scoured granite provides just
enough surface that the climber's chisel
fingers can maintain the hold that for the first time has
abandoned the assist of rope.
Move after move, the man continues,
holding his breath. Parched tissue coating his throat
throbs indignantly, pulling him
towards the matchstick trees below.
His grip tightens; he continues.

His perception then shifts left: a face
bare as the man's raw fingers.
His foot leads and spans the
unclimbable wall, securing a hold.
He is sideways. On a cliff.
Slowly, he creeps toward his foot.
He is a spider, his thorax now reaching
the tip of his precisely barbed foot.
Guarding his respiration for safety, he pulls himself
again
vertical. He exhales deeply as fireworks explode in his
chest.
He's bested it: the climax.
The height of tension. This
anticipated act of insanity
completed, done, no more to shatter him.
The only celebration he allows is a deep
intake of breath, and his trek continues.

But it is easy now.
He continues, steady yet hungry.
The summit shows itself as the climber
rounds a gradual protrusion. He can taste the top.
The motions of climbing flow beneath him like a river
and as his callused digits scrape the final ledge,
the weight of danger is suddenly lifted from him.
For a moment, he is free from his self-inflicted intertidal
zone
between the thrill of fresh air and the deep sleep of the
ocean's embrace.

Now I lie still by you, so damn tired of our show,
begging silently that you might answer my prayer:
help me; fix me; tell me I'm so
still unscathed by cruel falling snow.

Strive

by Sadie Berry

Seeking self-worth is a difficult challenge; pushing yourself to achieve worthy goals is even harder. Starting a new job, task, or school is incredibly intimidating. Even now, I find it difficult. I have an overwhelming urge to be the best, and when I cannot do so, it makes me feel discouraged. Starting by adjusting only a minor piece that is lacking helps me not become too overwhelmed by strenuous activities.

This summer I worked two jobs which pushed me outside of my comfort zone many times. One day, I had to deal with an unhappy customer who was complaining about some food she had been served the prior week, and wanted me to fix. Even though the situation was frustrating for both of us, I pushed myself to remain calm and work through the problem. Talking it out, we resolved the issue together, even though it made me uncomfortable. In the past, my parents would have helped, or I would have completely ignored the situation. When I resolved this complication, I felt more mature and independent. Pushing myself to resolve this mundane issue helped me realize what it is like to problem solve.

I learned so many skills from working. One evening, I was really tired and did not want to finish working on an event. The event was almost over and I just kept telling myself to be positive. I knew I could sleep as soon as I arrived home. Everyone else was also tired. I ultimately decided to make jokes so my co-workers could laugh, which resulted in all of us having a good time. Pushing myself to be positive worked out for everyone.

My summer work has taught me how to improve my attitude. I pushed myself outside of my comfort zone many times; doing so helped me become more independent and a better member of society. By setting small goals for myself, I was able to increase my abilities. I am proud of what I have done so far and am excited to see what good things I am capable of doing in the future. Focusing on myself and not on how others might view me has rewarded me in many ways. Pushing myself has made me happier, easier to get along with, and a better person.

First Flight

by Sophie Ririe

Looking around in panic, I try spotting the terminal numbers lining the airport walls. I begin darting around the oncoming stream of people, feeling isolated and alone; my cool and confident composure quickly dissipates. My dread continues to escalate, and my mind begins to race. *What if I miss my flight? What if I get stuck here in Chicago, Illinois?* Suddenly, I stop in my tracks. A sign only a few stores away flashes 3A comfortably, and I take a deep breath, realizing I have been holding it for what feels like hours. My composure begins to return, and I stride towards the seating area, collapsing onto a cool black leather chair.

I've flown plenty of times with my mom and dad, and sometimes even with my older siblings. This flight, however, differed from previous ones in every way possible. This time I was alone, flying from Chicago to Salt Lake City. When I had woken, I could barely contain my excitement. The feeling of independence and freedom filled me up, overflowing and bursting to prove itself.

Looking around, I examine the shops and restaurants surrounding the waiting area, and spot a quaint coffee-shop tucked away between Starbucks and an odd collection of tourist traps. I watch a group of teenagers walk by, laughing and talking among themselves. Behind them meanders a confused-looking man, stumbling around people and miscellaneous suitcases, concentrating hard on a map in his hands. Interesting people and odd sights are overwhelming, and I smile to myself. This adventure is going to be one that I hope not soon to forget.

Fearfulness

by Sarah Morgan

I am a very fearful and anxious person by nature. My mind is constantly making me worry, and I am always on edge, stressing about any possible number of things that could go wrong. It is not a conscious choice. I am unable to make my brain stop imagining scenarios in which something harmful will happen to the people or location I am near. In some way, all of my worries are related to suffering. Death, illness, injury, natural disasters, feeling alone; all of these thoughts make my mind race and my body tense. I wish that I were not so fearful of seemingly everything.

Anxiousness and overthinking are my biggest hangups, and I have yet to find a way to deal with them. Fear practically consumes my life. I think about

Dreams

by Sophie Ririe

Blinding morning lights stream through musty windows,
reach dark corners; graze night-swept shadows.
Like a sailboat on the horizon, deep sleep lazily drifts away,
each new day claiming passing night.
Desperation grasps old dreams, which
inevitably dissipate.
Reality settles.
Painful, sudden alarms stab cold morning air.
My mind awkwardly plunges back
into the empty room, falling from an eternally-high building,
never quite hitting solid ground.
An inept return to reality.

Waiting in Vain

by Diesel Messenger

I open my eyes, see the dull mud-stain of an evening, and
shut my entire body into its soft sheath called bed. I've
really just done everything as far as I can tell: the media has
been consumed, reeking of plasticky Hershey's chocolate;
my family is off my back, though the guilt from what I've
left half-finished festers in my cobwebbed mind, and I'm not
hungry or thirsty, although... another spoonful of peanut
butter wouldn't exactly taste bad.

I think, but nothing surfaces, save muddy ideas of things that
I might want to do. Each bare flicker of interest dies when I
think of how terribly flat doing each would be: watching the
next show on my list, learning Spanish, considering the
squirrels as they lose it and run around like the sugar-crazed
pieces of work that they are. A tsunami of wind crashes
through the window and scours my blanketed back. Though
it is pure, unadulterated life, I cringe away; life is *not* invited
to my birthday party.

As my mother walks into my room, I submerge myself
further into my marsh of sweaty memory foam. "Diesel, it's
a warm night and the wind is blowing. We should walk and
listen to the trees."

"Mmmmmm, I'ont really wannu," I mumble.
"Come on Diesel! It'll be so refreshing!"
"Mmmmgngng."

disasters nearly every second of every day. These
thoughts are unavoidable, but I wish that wasn't the
case. My mind creates a horrible and gruesome scenario
for every aspect of my life, which causes a lot of mental
strain. Even something as simple as sitting in class can
be turned into a shooter walking into the room, or the
fire alarm suddenly blaring and the entire student body
being forced to evacuate. I think up these unrealistic and
terrifying scenarios with no way to block them out. All
this fear builds up, until I become afraid of being afraid.
I worry that so much anxiety will place me in a cycle of
suffering, which is something I already fear. I don't wish
suffering on anyone, even myself, and the idea of
digging myself a hole deep enough that I would never
escape is absolutely terrifying.

I have realized that seeking a way to cope with this
crippling anxiety may make it less of a burden. My
anxiety seems absolutely hopeless; there seems to be no
way to lessen my fears. I have managed to overcome the
pressure of reaching out for help, and with the help of
my parents I have contacted some support networks
within the school and in the community. Taking these
actions are steps in the right direction. I hope to find
methods to help me cope or block out these horrible
anxieties that plague me every day. With the right
people giving me a helping hand, I should be able to
push through.

My Wilted Great Grandmother

by Diesel Messenger

As light grinds against the world,
clumping ash catches in uncaring wind;
here gather old and little, boys and girls:
it scares me to stare into family faces.

They say they loved you, but I was unsure.
I was wicked and frightened of your loving witch's
hands,
blue and veiny with distraught memories.
I could not help but flee while you cried for forgetting.

You always tried hard to remember my name,
and it saddened you so much when you inevitably
couldn't.
I was so young and disgusted by suffering;
I stood around awkwardly, avoiding your side at dinner.

I think back on the stories of your rugged commitment:
your determination to parent with skill and care.
That is a plan that I can endorse

“Diesel, under penalty of death, you must come and walk with your mother.”

I contemplate for a moment how painful it would actually be to have a guillotine tickle my neck at twenty miles per hour and then flop onto the floor and fumble into a haphazard assortment of clothing. I follow my mom downstairs and into the midsummer night.

The storm combs my hair into a Bon Jovi level hairdo and gravel creaks under our shoes like Bang Snaps on the fourth of July. Writhing air damns my compliance, battering all available space: mouth, eye sockets, ears, and the most vulnerable parts of my tender human skin. Cold, even on a warm night, it coats my body in clear oneness with all that would be separate. The foreign power of whooshing particles, diffusion’s tug, grips my body hair to attention with tension.

The world is violating and intrinsically whole. We walk in silence and listen to wind dance through the conifer crowns. Later, having returned to my bed, avoiding the damp area I occupied before, I feel sanguine not only for the snuffing of yet another day, but for the tomorrow that might come.

In the Undergrowth

by Diesel Messenger

Carving through heavy snow,
the mother bear presses forward,
looking for her den below.

Her footsteps startle a bluebird;
her nose perks up to take in icy air.
Her heavy presence leads still onward.

Layers of fat contain the life beneath her hair.
As two cubs clamber in her trail,
she remembers the place and marks it with her stare.

Beneath everything: wind, snow, and hail,
three hearts will beat too slow to move,
propelled by spring’s hope like wind in a sail.

Mother pads a circle around the groove,
licking her paws and children without haste.
She settles her cubs, cogent while smooth.

As powdered sugar coats the forest base,
and furry eyelids slowly slide shut,
the mother and children fold up like a case.

to improve my pathetic lack of grit.

Now I stand here while so many cry;
they’re planting your body on their childhood land.
It is plain that my mourning is untruthful:
guilt claws at the base of my chest.

Now that you are no more for this world,
I will not cry but stand thoughtfully,
not filtering life as pleasant, but full of toil.
I vow to some day to measure up to
your life and your work and your love.

Dirt Bikes

by Tristen Stoll

Dirt sprays everywhere as the rear tire spins up. Rubber tire treads grip and grind away loose ground. Deep screams hum as the engine spins the chain propelling the bike’s rider. Handles articulate the front tire, steering through a turn. Feet press brakes to slow the bike; eyes spot the end of each turn and the bike follows.

The back wheel aligns with the front as the throttle is twisted down. Soon the engine screams; it cannot spin gears any faster. Pulling in on the clutch, the rider frees the engine as his foot shifts into a higher gear. With the smoothest fingers, he releases the clutch. Teeth bite, gears catch, and the chain spins faster and faster. Tires grip the trail, closely followed by a rising wave of dirt, mud, and rock.

He eyes a jump. He stands up to gain the best control and perspective of his surroundings. The front tire goes airborne, soon followed by the back. Two hundred pounds of metal, rubber, and exhaust sail through warm summer air. He eyes the landing and teeters the bike to adjust his wheels and parallel the ground. *Touchdown.* He lands softly with a cloud of dirt rising around him, riding off to look for the next adventure.

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