

# FRESH THOUGHTS

FALL 2024



Collected Writings from  
Lasell University First Year Writing Students

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## Introduction

It is a pleasure to present this collection of essays to you as a celebration of the great writing that Lasell University students undertake in our WRT101 College Writing Course. What you have before you is a collection that represents some of the best of what our students have achieved, and like all good writing, it is the result of great creativity, careful revision, and above all else, strong passion.

Students entering into their first year of college are stepping into a new world of ideas, perspectives, and debates with which they are eager to engage. It is our pleasure as instructors to get to play a small role as the guides into that world and assist students in building and honing their skills across one or two semesters. This collection shows what that process can reveal: strong beliefs, stirring stories, and captivating language. All of these pieces were composed in students' first months, weeks, and even days as members of our community, and we celebrate them for the works of art they are and the bravery that it took to create them.

All first-year students who were enrolled in WRT 101 in the Fall of 2024 were invited to contribute to this volume. From the array of fantastic work submitted, we have curated this collection that shows the range of what our students produce in our classes. From this group, we have further selected four essays, listed first in this volume, to receive awards.

While this is first and foremost a celebration of student writing, these projects were all guided and nurtured by a set of compassionate and dedicated writing instructors. To that end, we would like to thank Michelle Niestepski, Annie Ou, Sara Large, Alex Saint-Widow, Debbie Mael, Staci Halt, Matt Boyle, Phoebe Roberts, and Emmaley Silva for their work. Our students are better for having spent time in your classrooms.

Now please, sit back, relax, and enjoy some writing that you won't soon forget.

Greg Cass

Director of the Writing Program

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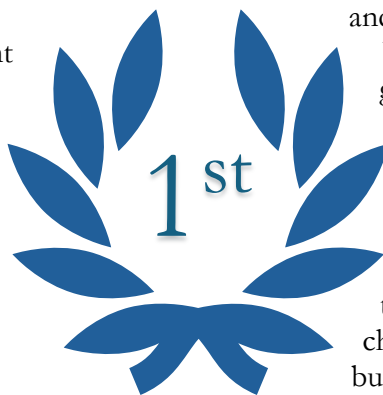
# First Year Writing First Place Winner: The “Break” Through

By  
Carson Tucker

For as long as I can remember, you’ve always loved being a student athlete. You were surrounded by them, by the culture. It was all you knew. Mom and dad were very successful student-athletes, and your big sister followed right in their footsteps. Mom was a three-sport MVP in high school and went on to play field hockey in college while pursuing education, and Dad was 8 points away from 1000 points in basketball during a time when there was no 3-point line. He was also All-State in both soccer and baseball but unfortunately had to give up his college basketball career to pay for college.

The apple didn't fall far from the tree with Lydia, as she was an accomplished gymnast, valedictorian of her class, as well as an All-State field hockey and lacrosse player. She went on to Dartmouth to pursue education and cycling. All of them possessed admirable drive, and it was something you always looked up to – your dad especially. As many little boys do, you clung to these idols and aspired to be just like them. From a very young age, you were involved in sports year-round. You took the most rigorous classes, pushing your abilities because that’s what you were supposed to do.

When you come home from school, dad would be in his office, working, drenched in sweat because he just got back from a workout. Mom would be flying around the kitchen whipping up dinner, still wearing the clothes she just worked out in as well. Your sister would be in her room, reading, writing,



and working away, building a resume beyond impressive. So, as you grew up, you adopted this mindset and saw a lot of success at a young age. But it was different then.

Yes, you won countless all-tourney's, MVP's, tournament championships, and other accolades, but what I remember most from those days were the failures. The time in third grade when you crumpled up in a ball on the court after you missed a buzzer beater to win the tournament championship. Boy, dad was mad at you. Or the time you were so anxious to go to school for a test that you threw up and couldn't go in second grade (the test was on multiplication with 7's). And don't think I forgot about the time you would fake an injury in youth sports because you couldn't handle the pressure or the expectations. Your relationship with discipline and hard work was extremely flawed. In all honesty, it was sick. I remember you throwing trophies across your room because you thought you didn't deserve them. I remember being forced to see a therapist for anxiety. I remember it all. You were so focused on being great that you were never able to stop and ask why. Why do you want to be successful in what you do? With no purpose other than because you were supposed to, all you thought about was what would happen if you *didn't* succeed and all the people you would disappoint. Fortunately for you, your sophomore year football experience would change the way you viewed your aspirations forever.

“You ready for this bro?” Rowan said loudly over Eminem’s “Lose Yourself” blasting at

max volume in Laconia High School's run-down locker room. Not a single locker was fully intact – red and grey paint was chipping everywhere, hinges rusted and broken on every bent door, and the smell of sweat and mold wafted through every corner.

Nonetheless, the cramped locker-room buzzed with excitement.

With a sigh, you lied back, “Ready as I’ll ever be” through a smile, knowing you didn’t get a wink of sleep the night before. For some reason, you were dreading this game. A familiar feeling of deep angst had set in. Thankfully, Rowan was too preoccupied with his own anxiety and excitement to see the dark circles under your eyes.

As he started picking the decals on his helmet, he shot out, “Good. After the game you’re coming over. Full breakdown.”

“Sounds good man” you replied as you met his handshake. This eased your mind momentarily, since you always loved going to Rowan’s. But moments later, Coach Rod’s whistle signifying the assemblance of the team ended this daydream. It was go time.

Rod screamed at us to fire us up for a few minutes before we marched up to the field, but all he ever did was make you nervous. The same old kid who would break down under any stress was itching to come out as anxiety clawed its way up the back of your neck and into the pit of your stomach. Through your peripheral vision, you saw your entire extended family sitting in the bleachers in a mob of red and white. Cousins, uncles, siblings – everyone. Dad had his phone out, recording you as you jogged onto the field and started warmups. Opening day. Your heart rate sped up. So many people counting on *me*, quarterback of one of the most historic football teams in New Hampshire, all at the

age of 15. I didn’t even have my driver’s license yet.

These thoughts of incompetence took over your mind. All the work you did to make your family proud left your mind, that space replaced by thoughts of failure. You couldn’t help but think to yourself, *this isn’t fun*. Warm-ups flew by, and before you knew it you were in the middle of pregame huddle.

You cleared your throat and spoke, “This is it boys. Let’s go show these guys how we roll down here in Laconia. There isn’t another group of guys I’d rather go to war with. Let’s go! Sachems on three.”

“One, two, three, Sachems!” my teammates answered in unison. You couldn’t let your teammates see you rattled. Almost as soon as it came on, your fake tough demeanor washed off as you jogged out to your spot on kick return. Your pretend excitement fabricated to please your team was replaced by trepidation.

It was finally time. In an effort to calm down, you took a second to take it all in. A chilling fall breeze swept through the stadium as the blinding lights illuminated a sea of green and silver helmets. The sound of whistles and cheers surrounded you, and the smell of fried food hovered over the stadium like a fog. You felt your heart pounding in your chest while you breathed heavily, your breath visible on this chilly night. You couldn’t feel any part of your body – pure adrenaline coursed through your veins. Your heart rose to your throat as you waited for the ball to soar through the air. But something still just didn’t feel right. The excitement you knew you should feel just wasn’t there. Only fear. The referee puffed his cheeks and emptied his lungs into the whistle.

“Ready on my left??” the kicker shouted.

“Ready!” the Monadnock Huskies shouted back, piercing the cloud of noise from the peanut gallery.

“Ready on my right??”

“Ready!”

Seemingly in slow motion, the kicker bounded to the ball, swung his foot, and sent the ball to the sky. You sent a prayer, pleading with some greater power that it wasn't coming your way. Your prayer wasn't answered. You began to stagger your feet at the 10-yard line, making your best effort to move your feet and get under the ball. Before you knew it, the ball hit your chest. After fumbling with it for a second, you took off down the middle of the field with one goal – survive.

Even after all of the hard work you put into the off season, you were scared shitless. Green helmets swarmed you and broke through lines of protection before you could even scan the field to find a seam. Out of the corner of your eye, you saw a green helmet dive on the ground slightly to your left. In reaction, you jumped, hoping to hurdle him and shoot the gap his absence just created. Both feet set hard into the earth, your body loaded like a spring. However, when you went to takeoff, you didn't move an inch, as if your feet were set in concrete up to your ankles. You look down to assess to find a 200-pound hog of a man wrapped around your ankles, as if his life depended on it. You looked up to see if you had time to escape, but it was too late. Flying towards you is a 225-pound linebacker, shoulders already lowered, and arms prepped to pop, wrap, and twist. With no other option, you closed your eyes and braced for impact.

The 225-pound backer crushed all 150 pounds of you and twisted you to the right, while the 200-pound ankle biter holds you

steady to the earth. Your legs feel unnatural and a panic washed over you as your body twisted and fell to the turf. Before you even had a chance to feel this panic in its entirety, a loud, crisp *SNAP* interrupts the crunching and crashing of pads. Both Huskies involved in the tackle immediately back off as their tensed complexions fade into shock as the buzz of the crowd died down.

“Get up!” Coach Rod bellowed from the sideline. Terrified of failing him and everyone yet again, fear brought you to your feet. With Rowan's help, you hobbled to the sideline and sat down on the trainer's bench. The crowd had died.

Through gritted teeth, Coach Rod barked, “The fuck is going on? Let's go, we need you out there to run this drive” as he hustled over to the bench.

Avoiding eye contact, you answered “Coach, I can't go.”

“What do you mean you can't go??” Rod yelled back, visibly exasperated.

“Coach,” you started, swallowing the knot in your throat, “my ankle's fucked.”

Rod looked down at your ankle, then at you for a good three seconds with eyes full of frustration and disappointment before he turned around and called up the backup quarterback to lead the drive. Your heart was broken. The adrenaline wore off after a minute, as the words your trainer was trying to say to you started to resonate.

“...when I do this? How about thi – oh no.” Pain shot up your leg, radiating from your left ankle. You looked down in shock at your foot, now disconnected and dangling off your leg. You'd been injured before, but never like this. The stakes were never this high. A new,

unfamiliar emotion swelled inside of you like a tsunami wave awaiting its crash. But you couldn't crash here, not in front of the whole city. Not in front of your little brother and all the younger kids who looked up to you. Not in front of your family. You bit the side of your cheek as the trainer wheeled you past the entire sideline, watching you in silence. You waived off the ambulance and had the trainer take you to the family car to avoid further attention.

Once you finally made it to the car, you waited for both parents to close their doors, then completely broke down. The wave crashed. Streams of tears rolled down your face as you screamed and punched the back of the seat until your knuckles bruised.

"Why me Dad? Why me?? Nobody worked harder, nobody cares more than me? Why does this always happen to me?" You sobbed, looking for your dad to console me. He always had an answer, some words to ground you.

After thinking about it for a good minute, he solemnly replied, "I don't know, son." A tear rolled down his face as he turned around and started the car. Mom put a hand over her mouth to hide her anguish and looked away quickly, but you knew. The only sound on the way to the emergency room was you, hiccupping for air in between sobs.

Six hours of pain later, you were finally seen, just for the doctors to tell you what you already knew. Your season was over. This wasn't the first time, either. Your freshman basketball season was over to a broken toe, lacrosse season to a broken thumb, and football season to covid. Sophomore season was beginning to look like the same thing. Yet again, you had failed to meet expectations. All your coaches began to quit on you and lose touch, partly because you were closed off, but

partly because they didn't think you could stay healthy. At the ripe age of 15, you entered a deep depression. Your identity as an athlete was in total jeopardy.

"Hey honey" mom said softly as she walked into your room. 2 weeks had passed since the injury. Every day felt like Groundhog Day – waking up in the same cast, hoping yesterday was a dream. You hadn't left the house, besides going to and from school.

"Hey" I answered her lifelessly.

Mom put on a smile and said lightly, "You eat dinner?"

"Yeah" I lied. The floorboards creaked in a louder fashion, indicating the approach of Dad.

Dad leaned through the doorway and said softly, "Hey buddy, how you feelin'?"

I stared at the floor and replied, "Alright" in the same lifeless fashion.

Dad looked at mom, gathered some courage, and said "Hey, we made a few calls and got you into some therapy next week so you can start working towards being one hundred percent for basketball." He was very careful with his tone, focused entirely on not setting me off.

I fought back a tear and mumbled, "Yeah, we'll see."

Your parents looked at each other despairingly and left the room, leaving basketball sign-ups on your desk.

That night, you did not sleep. You hobbled around your room, looking at pictures with old teams, trophies, awards, and other paraphernalia from years past. You were

looking for closure. There was every reason to give up sports. Mentally and physically, you couldn't sustain it. But something deep down didn't let you. Hours passed with a pen in your hand, just staring at those basketball sign-ups. At some point that night, you decided you couldn't quit. You couldn't give up competition and everything you grew to love. Not because of the bad things your friends and family would say and think, but because you *needed* sports in your life because *you* loved them. Not because mom or dad loved them for you – *you* loved athletic competition with your whole heart and how it completed your life, and you always will. The next morning, on no sleep, you crutched down the stairs with a new sense of self. It was early, around 5:30, and only mom was up.

“Hey mom, you have a sec?” you said softly, still unable to avoid making her jump. Her neck snapped to me.

With nothing but care in her voice, she replied, “Honey, you scared me! Of course, what’s up?”

You stared at her for a second, then through a slight smile you said, “I’ll do it.”

She looked at you confused, then her complexion shifted to deep relief and joy. “2 o’clock today. I’ll call you out before school gets out so we can get there on time”

“Thank you, mom,” you said as you embraced her, hiding my face before she could see the tear run down it. You felt her face muscles smile against my cheek, then you quickly wiped your face and gimped back up the steps to get ready for school.

Hardly a month later, you were basically back. You’d watch football practice, go to the gym

for rehab, do your homework, and repeat every day. Finally, you were able to sift through the negativity that surrounded you, like a lion through tall grass. Schedule, discipline, and routine became your best friends, but it was different now. Every time you went to the gym with the goal of getting back to one hundred percent, it was you who pushed you, not the ideas you put in other people’s heads for yourself. This enlightenment changed the future of your career as a student athlete forever.

Now, I am an Academic All-American, 3 sport All-State college athlete and more, all things I never thought I would be able to say. But the recognition and opportunity were just icing on the cake. The real prize was finding pure joy in what I do for the first time. I look forward to getting better and chasing greatness every day. It fulfills my spirit and makes me whole – it's who I am. My whole life has purpose now. The love I have for what I do spreads to all the other aspects of my life, grounding me in purpose. Success has been the biproduct; I almost don't even care about it. I am forever thankful for that fateful night under the lights, and for you. Without you looking inward and finding who you really are in a time when you easily could've thrown in the towel, I would be a shell of myself, always wondering what could've been.

You made all the difference.

*Carson Tucker is an Exercise Science major. He is from Laconia, New Hampshire, and loves chocolate milk.*

First Year Writing Second Place Winner:  
The Freedom of the Ocean  
By  
Clementine Burns

My family and I have stayed in Dennis, Cape Cod every summer since I was a baby. We would go to the beach almost everyday, rain or shine. As young children, me and my younger sister, Violet, thought this concept was fun and exciting; we were always on an adventure. My parents would pack up our mid-size car early before the sun even rose, and drive down the sandy roads towards the cluster of beaches. My family of four would bicker over which beach to settle at, spot which parking lots were full or not, and calm our hungry morning anger. As we would climb out of the car, we were always silenced away by the salty smell, the heavy air, and the warm breeze blowing across our faces. The sun would be gooey and soft in the sky, melting into the ripples of calm dawn waves. This would invariably be my favorite kind of weather for the rest of my life, although beyond my awareness at the time. To us little ones, the ocean was full of endless possibilities. We could walk up and down the shoreline, collecting precious stones, small or large, rough or smooth. We could chase the seagulls, bury our feet in the sand, eat homemade sandwiches, and explore the tide pools. The world was our oyster, only at the beach.

One visit down the Cape, a couple days before turning 7, my parents decided we would visit Nauset Beach, which is a part of

the National Seashore of Cape Cod. Nauset was the first non-bayside beach my parents had taken us to, meaning we were swimming directly in the Atlantic. Sometimes I would pretend I could see Africa, or if the waves were shadowy out by the horizon line, I would swear to my parents I saw dolphins.

The weather forecast was muggy heat with a side of spitting rain and gray clouds filled in the sky, leaving no room for sun. My dad and I loved to swim and climb rocks, while my mom and sister liked to stay under the umbrella and nap. Although the temperature was still hot, the water was frigidly cold. My dad would always prefer to wear a wetsuit, which he brought along with us to Nauset Beach that day. My mom laughed at him from her laid back beach chair as he zipped up, so I copied her because I thought he looked silly. My dad rolled his eyes, murmuring, "You'll see," and led me towards the edge of the water. When my small feet felt the first sting of the ocean-side sweep over them, I squealed out in pain. My dad chuckled by my side. I took a deep breath and looked out over the water, which looked like an obstacle of amusement. Rolling dense waves, swirling white caps; I should've been terrified, especially as a remarkably tiny kid. But I wasn't scared away from the height of these waves. They looked like one big roller coaster ride. Although I deathly hated roller



coasters, these waves were something I knew I could tackle and enjoy the second I could become comfortable.

“Dad, I can't go in!” I remember saying this over and over again, tightly holding onto my dad's hand. These were the biggest and most dangerous looking waves I had ever seen, yet I was eager to swim within them. This beach was nothing compared to the calm, shallow water of the bayside Cape Cod beaches that I was used to. My mom and Violet got up and walked closer to the water as my dad broke free from my grasp and dove head first through the big waves. I giggled as the splash hit my face. My dad popped up out of the waves and said, “We should've bought Clementine a wetsuit!” But I shook my head and edged deeper in the water. My foot slipped because there was a drop off of sand a little past shoreline.

My dad lunged towards me, catching my fall.

“It's deep!” I screamed, looking back at my mom. My curls were now a little wet, and smeared over my forehead. After the drop in my stomach faded away, I was overcome with giggles, giddy with eagerness. I was smiling while my mom was wearing her nervous face. My dad grabbed my hand steady and asked me if I was ready to go swimming. I nodded enthusiastically, and we waited for the next wave to come. In the blink of an eye, a wave came quickly towards us, rising higher than my dad's height. In a flash, I was forcefully pulled under, but my dad never let go of my hand. I remember in the short time that I was under the wave, I opened my eyes and saw the waves swirling around me. I was completely enveloped. I saw the white sky from under a

thick layer of water. I luckily held my mouth closed as I was tossed around helplessly, until I felt a tug on my arm. My mom was running towards us as my dad pulled me up and out of the water, but I screamed, “I wanna go back in! I wanna go back in!” Violet almost switched her opinion on the ocean's terror, due to her slight fear.

I felt exhilarated. I knew then and there that I loved the ocean more than life itself. This experience was better than anything I've experienced. For years after, I craved that same passion and energy. I tried to match it by going to the same beach year after year, lusting after dangerous waves. Most days, the flag on the lifeguard pole signaled swimmers were safe to enter, but on purple flag days, I could sit and watch the angry ocean live out its best life. On days that the waves were less thrashing, I would submerge myself head first, opening my eyes wide underwater as I went. I would float on my back, puffing my cheeks out, bobbing over the subtle waves, and squinting my eyes at the sun. I would accidentally swallow the salty water while blowing bubbles across the surface. I would spend long hours in the water until my fingers would prune and shrink. I was given the nickname of “fish,” passed down from my dad. And sometimes I would remember how young I was, exploring the coastline beaches. I would pretend I could see Africa, or if the waves were shadowy out by the horizon line, I would swear to my parents I saw dolphins.

Like my dad, I was the swimmer in the family, just as he was in his family growing up. I followed in his footsteps by attending the swim team in middle school, and even took half a course in lifeguard training, although he

stayed longer than I did in both opportunities. He was, in my eyes, unique for taking up swimming as a sport. I would always hear about my friends' dads playing soccer or football, the more classic, mainstream sports. Anything to do with water fascinated me when I was younger. So I always brag about my dad's reputation, even if it didn't get him far.

As I got older, I found ways to expand my interest in the beach. I would drive myself to beaches closer to home, such as Salisbury or Gloucester, which would harbor huge waves at certain times of day depending on the tide. I would bring a book and sit on my beach towel in solitude. I would say to myself, "I'll be here all day." I would never get bored, I would never feel like I needed to be somewhere else; I was at peace. Despite how often my family would tell me I spoke too loud or too fast, tell me I needed to cool down, or tell me I needed to breathe, I was always in a calming trance by the ocean without anyone's pressure or nagging. Down on the Cape, I would beg my parents to drive with me to more ocean-side beaches, such as Marconi or Coast Guard, or any part of Cape Cod's National Seashore. I would spy for sharks, my new favorite animal. The excitement would come in a variety of rushes. I would feel as if I was chasing waves early in the morning driving east down the highway, because if I was late they'd be gone. Or I would feel that if I moved slower, the waves would spring up by the time I arrived.

More than ever, I remember these early moments at the beach with my dad, especially with his failing health. Three years ago, the doctors suspected something was failing in his

brain, but nobody knew what the source was. A few months ago, after changing doctors and connecting the symptoms, we finally got an answer: diagnosis of MSA, a rare incurable brain disease. As heavy a weight this is on our family, I've learned to continue pursuing activities that I love, to keep my head up, and to always keep a positive attitude. The beach will always hold a special place in my heart because it brings me back in time to moments of happiness, childhood, and health within my small family.

I was obsessed with the self-determination, independence, and fun that the beach would bring me, so I made time to visit more often than I should. From a very young age, I was always told to keep what makes you happy; don't ever let it go. To me, the ocean will always be a magical place. I continue to practice this in my everyday life. The freedom that came along with the beach all stemmed from this one memory with my dad. I will always appreciate him for giving me this experience, and one I hope to hold onto for eternity. I would wish to live up to my nickname and swim endlessly in the sea. Just like my childhood memories, where every young girl was in awe of the mystery mermaids, I could see myself swimming for hours under the sunlit, sparkling waters.

*Clementine Burns is a Fashion Merchandising and Management major. She is from Littleton, Massachusetts. She loves the beach and sustainable fashion.*

First Year Writing Third Place Winner:  
Retirement Home Blues

By  
Caitlin Callahan

I started my journey in the world of retirement homes in 2022. I was hired as a dining server at Rivercourt Residences in Groton, Massachusetts at the beginning of my junior year. I was not passionate about serving the elderly, but the opportunity presented itself when my friend who worked at the retirement home recommended me. I vividly remember my first day: I had my orientation the week prior, so I knew where to go. I headed to the kitchen and met my new manager, Jess. She was the one of the head cooks. She gave me a tour of the kitchen and introduced me to my trainer. She walked me through what we would be doing that first night. I would shadow her as she showed me the ropes.

Dinner started at 5:30. The first residents entered our section and sat down. Their shuffling gait reminded me of my grandfather the instant I saw them: their hunched backs, canes, and thin white hair. Their wardrobes emulated my grandfather's to a T: leather and denim bomber jackets, news caps, flannel shirts, and corduroy pants. He would always wear layers upon layers of these clothes. He would always keep sticks of Extra spearmint gum in the pocket of his bomber jackets. He would slip some to me behind my mom's back when I was a little kid. He would hold a finger to his wrinkled lips, his crow's feet crinkling beside his eyes with the joy of our hidden indulgence. My grandparents live in Pismo Beach, California. They moved there before I was born. I grew up on the West Coast in Washington, so visiting them was easy enough by plane. But in 2012, we moved back to Massachusetts where my parents had



both grown up. This meant that visits would be few and farther between. As a kid, I didn't understand that my grandfather would only get older and that I didn't have all the time in the world with him. He started to show signs of dementia when I reached my teens. He became slower mentally and physically. He would forget small things like which drawer to put the silverware in, mixing up my sister's and mine's names, and calling my mother her late sister's name. He would also walk and talk slower, shuffling around the house.

When I got more comfortable after my first day at work, I learned more about the residents. Most of the residents I served had Alzheimer's disease, like my grandfather. Some were better off than others. Our dining room was split into two areas, one for the "independent living" residents and one for the "assisted living" residents. The independent residents only needed a small amount of care. They were responsible for their apartments and were not assigned a nurse like the assisted living residents. The assisted living residents needed a more hands-on approach. Lots of them were in wheelchairs and had later-stage dementia. Although it was more difficult, I preferred serving the residents in the assisted living dining room. I had to take extra care and time with their orders. Most of the residents had a hard time reading and ordered off the menu very slowly, and most had bad hearing so I would have to repeat myself again and again. To some that may have been frustrating, but I did not mind. My grandfather had trouble recalling words and phrases and it hurt to see my grandmother be

so impatient with him. I would always try my best to help him when I visited, so I paid the same kindness to the residents. I remember when one of my favorite residents, Pat, forgot the word for ketchup. We went back and forth for a few minutes trying to figure out what she wanted. The other residents at the table were throwing in suggestions like, "Apple sauce!" and "Gravy!" We eventually concluded that she wanted ketchup, and by that time I was very behind on all my other tables. Even so, it felt worth it to be able to help her. It felt important to take the extra time to express the care I felt for all the residents. But not all my coworkers felt the same.

Each shift, after dinner, we all received a break. We all grabbed a plate from the kitchen and leftovers from that night. We ate together in the private dining room and talked about the night. I usually kept to myself around this time in my life, so I paid close attention to what the other girls were saying, lingering outside the conversation. I caught a trend very early on. My coworkers loathed the residents, calling them stupid and slow behind their backs. They would whine about them not ordering fast enough or forgetting what they ordered. In their defense, they were only there for a job, not because it was their passion. But so was I. I grew to care for the residents and respect their struggles as I did for my grandfather. I knew how to operate around their delayed mental faculties and used my knowledge to make the most of their dining experience. It frustrated me to see the blatant disrespect and cruelty some of my coworkers bestowed upon the kindest of residents. Eventually, the conditions of that retirement home became too much. My manager and coworkers were difficult and rude, and many of my favorite residents had passed. I quit before Christmas.

As the years passed, my grandfather's condition was worsening. When we visited my grandparents in California the week of Christmas, I realized how far he had declined since I had last seen him. His shuffling gait had worsened. He never picked his feet up off the ground. His back curved in a permanent hunch. His Parkinson's had worsened too. He shook when holding things in his hands and moving them around. But the thing I noticed the most was his declined mental faculties. He had trouble holding conversations with my family and me. His mind seemed clouded, he was forgetful and confused. My grandmother, on the other hand, was in perfect health. She was the same age as him. They were born 1 day apart on June 15th and June 16th in 1943. She had some troubles with her heart, but her brain was in tip-top shape.

My grandfather's and grandmother's dynamic had shifted as well. She would get impatient with him very easily, and snap at him when he didn't hear her or understand her. It was difficult to be around. It was stressful to hear her get mad at her husband because of something he couldn't control. But I felt sympathy for her. I could not imagine turning from a wife to a babysitter in a matter of years and watching someone you love start to change so drastically. If it was torture for me, it was hell for her.

After my job at Rivercourt ended, I searched for work for a while. I babysat for a few families until I landed a job at my local Ninety-Nine Restaurant in May of 2023. Focused on my new job, I did not think of the retirement home. I didn't speak to my grandparents all that often. I worked there my entire senior year and throughout this summer.

The transition to college brought me back to retirement homes. I needed an on-campus job. On my tours of Lasell, one of my tour

guides mentioned Lasell Village. They noted the opportunity for careers there and how close it was. I applied in early summer and was hired in August. Despite the mental hardships of Rivercourt, I was excited to go back into that work environment, considering my new manager seemed more cooperative than my old one. I was hopeful to see how it would turn out.

Soon after my interview and my hiring, my dad got sick. Early in August, he was having dizzy spells that resulted in him dropping and breaking plates and mugs. His symptoms developed and he displayed similar symptoms to those of my grandfather when his dementia worsened. It came on so fast that it could not be Alzheimer's, but I worried I may be losing my father sooner than I thought. A neurologist diagnosed my father with encephalitis, swelling of the brain, that resulted in faciobrachial dystonic seizures. My family still does not know the cause of his encephalitis, but he is getting treatment and his condition is improving. Knowing that he was not headed down the same route as my grandfather quite yet provided some relief, but the stress of his sickness, getting ready for school, and my job at home weighed on top of me. I spent all my time either working or worrying about him. Recently, I discovered some gray hairs that sprouted from the mind-boggling stress that weighed on my shoulders during those weeks.

To make matters worse, my grandfather was sick as well. He had contracted COVID and he was in the ICU. My mother told my sister and me a few weeks before I moved in. Then the week before I started my new job at Lasell Village, my grandfather passed away. He passed in his sleep after not being able to take his dementia medication during his time in the hospital. The sickness and lack of medicine exhausted his mind and body. He held on for so long and I am so proud of him. I regret not

being able to see him one last time before he went.

The transition to a new job is always difficult. What made this especially difficult is that I held on to the habit of seeing my grandparents in all the residents that I served. There is a resident who laughs exactly like my grandmother. All the residents whose hands shake and have a difficult time ordering their meals remind me of my late grandfather. These constant reminders of my late grandfather get distracting and heavy on my mind. I make simple mistakes like forgetting to ring in an entree or not putting dressing on the side like a resident asked for.

Since the first week, my job has gotten easier. It's been a few weeks since my grandfather died and interacting with the residents no longer feels like rubbing salt in the wound. I'm comfortable in my position at Lasell Village. I am getting to know my coworkers and am more friendly with my managers. My dad is getting better with his treatment. He's not heading in the same direction as my grandfather anytime soon.

What I've learned over the past few years is that serving the elderly is not easy. And it has been significantly harder the past few months with my father's condition and my grandfather's death. Associating the residents with them is a habit that will never go away, but it will hurt less in time. Now, seeing my grandfather in the residents I serve makes me smile. It is bittersweet, now that he is gone, but I can be there for the residents at Lasell Village when I could not be there for him.

*Caitlin Callaban is a Communications Major. She is from Groton, MA, and writes for the 1851 Chronicle.*

First Year Writing Honorable Mention:  
ECHRC  
By  
C’Nya Desir

**en•thral•ling**

*adjective*

capturing and holding one’s attention; fascinating.

Nathan is kind and pure. He has a glow that truly reels you in and keeps you in place, leaving you curious to know more, eager even. He’s simply joyous, and *oh*, his smile is to die for...I mean...as often as he sports his smile, you’d think there’s definitely something wrong with the dude or that it’s some facade of his, but he truly is just a bundle of genuine joy, and that grin of his can light up a room...I mean, just think of the grumpiest person you know – someone who gets annoyed with unsolicited smiles and positivity for some odd reason – I guarantee you that he could effortlessly make them smile without having to say a word; that’s how contagious his smile is. Every time his heart-shaped lips pull back into a gummy smile as he exchanges, I genuinely think life is worth living for so much more. His kind, kind eyes, so *there*, yet so far. His hair – so fluffy and full of life. He was to me what any girl would declare their prince charming.

**cour•age**

*noun*

the ability to do something that frightens one.

- strength in the face of pain or grief.

This summer, I excitedly decided to join a Leadership Academy for a second time. Usually, you go through the academy two to three times before becoming an *ELF*, which in simple terms means a middle-ground helper between students and teachers, but because

I’m enrolled in my first year of college, I skipped over going through the academy as a student meaning I only had one year of experience under my belt while transitioning to become an *ELF*. Through my role, I got to know more of the staff members, many teachers, and some surprisingly just a couple of years older than me. That’s when and where I met Nathan.

Toward the end of the Academy, the coordinator taught a lesson with three takeaways that deeply resonated with me at the time.

**Star Thoughts:**

- One act of courage stretches your comfort zone in all directions.
- Don’t wait to communicate.
- Every time you think you’re being rejected from something good, you are actually being redirected to something better.

The coordinator’s story antidote was from his own experience in which he had a crush on the new girl in his town for years but never built up the courage to confess his feelings and ask her out on a date, and all the while, he coward away, he also had to involuntarily play matchmaker between her and a few of his friends growing up, even in college. He never gathered up the bravery to make his move toward her until the day she called and asked him to play the Saxophone at her wedding, and by then, it’d already been too late. He’s happily married to a fantastic woman now, but his childhood crush will always be a missed opportunity for the unknown. Hearing this story for the second time truly inspired

me to grow a pair and step up to my *own* feelings that day.

The coordinator gave all staff and students the opportunity to write a letter to someone in our lives that we wanted to reach out to, whether that be a family member, a friend, an enemy, or even that special someone that we really wanted to get to know some more as he put it. I saw this as the perfect sign and chance to write away what I'd been feeling every day since I correctly met him.

## hope

*noun*

a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen.

*verb*

want something to happen or be the case.

The world claws into her eyes with a haze much farther than familiar. The room is lit with daylight digging its way through her bedroom's window blinds, and it is warm with mid-July summer heat as the scene before her chocolate orbs twists and turns into a coherent view.

On her bed, she lies, her melanin-rich skin basking in the creeping sun.

The first thing she does upon waking up is check her phone's notifications. As she blows her dark brown curls out of her face, she scrolls through the flood of messages and notifications from different social media apps; she's surprised to see a text received from an unsaved number one hour ago.

She immediately took a screenshot to savor the moment she had anticipated all week at exactly 2:04 PM.

As she turned onto her stomach to get comfortable, she turned the brightness of her iPhone 14 Pro up and began to read the message before her.

*“Nya, that letter meant so much to me I can't even begin to tell you. I know I didn't get to truly know you this week but in the short time I did get to know you I could tell that you were an a...”*

She immediately felt her heart rate pick up, and her lips pulled into a smile that held more excitement than she could fathom. The message was off to a good start from what she could read from her notification bar, which made her feel nervous yet excited for the rest of the text. Because of how self-aware she is, she decides not to open the message just yet and instead gives herself a few minutes to fully wake up and calm down. In all honesty, she had actually forgotten about the whole letter situation after arriving home that morning, so this felt like a pleasant surprise, kind of like when you forget to take money out of your pockets and find it after washing and drying a load of clothes.

At 2:10 PM, she took a deep breath and decided that enough time had passed, and she should probably get it over with, as she had unintentionally had him on *delivered* for a couple of hours.

## rejection

*noun*

the dismissing or refusing of a proposal, idea, etc.

- the spurning of a person's affections.

She tapped on the message notification, and before she could begin reading from the top of the text, her eyes grazed over the bottom of it, where some keywords and phrases told her exactly where the message would be going.

*“...I don't think I'm ready...as a friend...But...”*

These were all dead giveaways, and all she needed to read to feel her heart sink and

optimism falter. The light and hope she once held in her heart quickly disintegrated.

*“Nya, that letter meant so much to me I can't even begin to tell you. I know I didn't get to truly know you this week but in the short time I did get to know you I could tell that you were an awesome person that this academy needs to have around. I went through a lot emotionally this week and honestly, I don't think I'm ready to have feelings like that for anyone right now. But you really are an attractive, incredible person and in the future, maybe we'll look back at this text as the start of something special. But for now, I would love to get to know you as a friend”*

As she read through the message with a heavy heart, she felt a sense of relief overall. His words contorted in the crevices of her brain, quickly settling until she could *feel* them. Sure, her face felt hot and swollen with embarrassment because she knew that he knew just how she felt about him, and that level of exposure was something she wasn't exactly comfortable with as she was a fairly reserved person who didn't enjoy practicing vulnerability, especially with people she barely knew.

She felt a fleeting sense of confusion as to *why* he was rejecting her, which made her feel unwanted and channeled unresolved insecurities. However, as she consumed his statements of reassurance about her looks and personality, this disgusting snowball of negative feelings morphed into flattery. As his hint that they had potential for the future set in, her disappointment was replaced with contentment and slight hope.

After rereading the message a few times and analyzing it in her own way, she turned her phone off and took a moment to let it sink in and assess it all she could. She opened her notes app and started to draft a response of

her own. She settled on it and sent it at 2:32 PM.

2:32 PM

*Hey, Nathan! I'm extremely grateful for your response and I understand how you're feeling. I'd be delighted to get to know you better in a more friendly manner before anything else. Thank you so much!!*

2:34 PM

*No, thank you so much!!*

They mutually hearted each other's iMessage texts.

**con•tent**

*adjective*

in a state of peaceful happiness.

*verb*

*satisfy (someone).*

*noun*

1. a state of satisfaction.

Rejection isn't an easy pill to swallow. Dramatically, it's kind of like you build up the courage to rip your heart out of your chest with your bare hands and offer it to someone you look up to and wish to be connected to just to have it inspected by them and returned to you. From there, you begin to think, which morphs into this disgusting monster of *over*-thinking, wondering if you did something wrong, wondering if you said something wrong, wondering if they think you're weird or boring, wondering if you're not pretty enough for them, and why they just won't accept you as the love of their life. The brain's funny in that way; it'll always provide you with negative thoughts to feed off, questioning even the most secure parts of an individual. What about you isn't compelling enough for

them to want to spend the rest of their days in this life alongside you? Why are you not worthy of their love?

Up until Sunday, July 14th, 2024, at 12:50 PM, I had never, in my life, been rejected by a person. Sure, the occasional “No!” when impulsively asking my mom and dad if I could stay the night at my cousin’s house when we were simply over for the holidays or family get-togethers was one thing. At least I could turn those into yeses with the power of numbers or my impressive negotiation skills. I could *not* turn a “No” from a man I was crushing on all summer into a “Yes.” I mean, that would just be an entirely other conversation of consent and self-respect to have with myself and perhaps a counselor – It wasn’t in my nature to push boundaries and people into loving, wanting, or accepting me anyway. I’m a Leo — I don’t care if you don’t believe in zodiac signs; they’re fun and accurate sometimes! — I have always been ultimately confident and prideful yet humble, so I feel like those traits of mine truly played their roles as best as possible in terms of protecting my ego throughout this moment.

As smooth and minor as the experience was, I found myself dwelling on it for a few days afterward, and each time I remembered it, I picked up on different factors that fueled my self-reflection. I learned from this exchange about myself, what I feel about myself, how I wish to be perceived, and how I’ve grown over the years in the sense of self-control and reaction to my pride and ego being hurt. I’m currently at a point in my life where I feel comfortable with how I look and confident in my appearance. I know I look good to myself, my friends, and strangers of all genders and backgrounds. I knew that if I was going to be rejected, it wouldn’t be based on my beauty and would entirely be on substance...if it *were*

to be due to my appearance, it’d be more racial than objective. Some may find it strange, but I definitely compare myself to potential partners in terms of looks, so while this man is absolutely beautiful, cute even, he wasn’t better looking than me, which is how I like it because as confident as I am, confidence fluctuates and making sure I’m more attractive than my partner in the most unmalicious way possible boosts my self-esteem in ways one couldn’t imagine.

If this were to occur years ago, I can’t lie and say I wouldn’t be filled with rage and sorrow. I’d probably respond with a mean paragraph and backtrack on my offer in foul language so that I could make myself feel better by tearing him down to the level I felt he’d pushed me down to or reply with a text so minimal it’d be classified as a simple acknowledgment that I received his text, not that I received his message. Then again, a few years ago, I wouldn’t even have had the bravery and ability to put my pride aside to approach a man first., but overall, I can look back on it and truly be satisfied and content with how well I processed my emotions and made the choice to be proactive instead of reactive in my response to the romantic rejection.

Offering your heart and sharing your feelings with someone in hopes that they’ll share their life with you is a gamble that strong people make. I guess I can say I’m grateful I have good taste in people, and my heart was gently returned with care.

*C’Nya (Nya) Desir is a Journalism major. She is from Boston, MA; her zodiac sign is a Leo sun, moon, and rising. She is also a K-Pop enthusiast who enjoys attending concerts and trying different foods.*

First Year Writing Honorable Mention:  
RAIL Project  
By  
Ava Marfoglio

This Instagram post by CeraVe is claiming that their Acne Control line of products will help reinforce the skin barrier and target the root cause of acne. The goal of this post by CeraVe is to make the viewer feel informed on the benefits of using this product line and convince them to purchase it. They do this by going into detail about specific active ingredients in the products like salicylic acid that will target the root cause of acne. If the viewer feels informed on the ingredients inside the products they will be more inclined to purchase it. The intended audience for this post is people who may be struggling with acne. This covers a large demographic of people regardless of age, race, sexual orientation, and gender. Because the product in this post is specifically for acne prone skin it leads the viewer to the conclusion that the product is specifically for skin types similar to theirs.

One way this post uses Ethos to establish credibility is by stating that the speaker presenting the information is a board-certified dermatologist by the name of Dr. Casale. By adding his Instagram handle in the comment section of the post they make it easy for the viewer to do further research on the credibility of the speaker. Dr. Casale is also dressed in scrubs and a white lab coat making it appear as though he is well qualified to give information on the product. He is presenting the information in a confident but calm manner conveying that he is well versed in the details of the product.

One way this post utilizes pathos is by ensuring that the viewer knows they are not alone in their struggles with acne. The first thing the post states is “If you are just starting to experience acne, remember that it’s the most common skin condition that we treat in the United States and you’re not alone.” (cerave 2024). Starting the video with a comment like that helps to create a safe space between the viewer and the company. It tells the viewer that they are not the only ones who struggle with acne and that it is actually a struggle that is quite common in the United States today, building a sense of comfortability for the viewer. These feelings in turn allow the viewer to feel better about themselves because they know that they struggle with something that is actually common.

This post also uses several aspects of logos to appeal to the viewer. One way both causation and deductive reasoning are shown in this post is when Dr. Casale says “A benzoyl peroxide cleanser or a salicylic acid cleanser like the cerave acne control cleanser are crucial to fighting the root cause of acne and penetrating down deep into the pores to keep them clean.” (cerave 2024). This post is stating that a benzoyl peroxide or salicylic acid cleanser will help keep pores clean and fight the root cause of acne. Since this cerave product contains salicylic acid it will in turn help fight acne.

This Instagram post by cerave provides a convincing argument that their acne control

cleanser and gel work effectively to fight the root cause of acne and keep pores clean. This post uses tactics from Ethos, Pathos, and Logos to effectively convince the viewer that this line of products is beneficial for the quality of their skin.

This piece is an opinion editorial written by Caitlyn Martyn and posted on *skincare.com* by L'OREAL. This news source claims that CeraVe's acne control cleanser "penetrates pores to clear most breakouts and blackheads, and helps prevent new acne blemishes from forming" (Martyn, 2022). Martyn's goal is to convince the reader to purchase this product by making them feel informed on the ingredients it contains and the benefits it brings to acne prone skin. Martyn mentions that she received a sample of the product, courtesy of the brand, which may lead to a bias. The intended audience for this news source is people who struggle with acne prone skin, covering a large demographic of people regardless of age, race, and gender. Because Martyn is positively reviewing a product that is specifically for acne prone skin it leads the reader to believe that this product will be beneficial for people who struggle with acne.

Caitlyn Martyn is a writer and editor for beauty and fashion publications like *Byrdie*, *InStyle*, *WhoWhatWear*, *Mindbodygreen*, *Well + Good*, and *USA Today*. She has tested and reviewed many different beauty products, thus giving her experience in finding good quality and well priced merchandise. Because she does not share these experiences in her article it is hard for the viewer to gauge whether or not she has strong credibility. Despite her not describing her qualifications in the article she shares positive personal experiences with the

product which may guide the reader to feel that she is trustworthy.

Martyn has two main sections of this article, one describing the ingredients and benefits of CeraVe's acne control cleanser, and the other sharing her daily routine with this cleanser. Sharing her personal routine and experience with the cleanser helps the reader trust that the benefits of the product are real. There are a few fallacies of pathos used in the article, one of them being false association. Martyn briefly mentions that she uses the CeraVe acne control cream twice daily but also uses prescribed acne topicals at night which may contribute to the improvement in her skin clarity.

Another fallacy she uses in the article is the bandwagon appeal. She does this in the very beginning of the article stating "there's no wonder the brand has gone viral on TikTok so many times." (Martyn, 2022). This may make the reader feel as though the brand has more credibility because it became viral among people on social media. When Martyn shares her own struggles with acne it may allow the reader to feel better about their own personal struggle with skin issues.

Martyn does a good job using a few different techniques in logos to support the claims made by the news source. One of them being causation; she uses this technique when describing the ingredients within CeraVe's cleanser and relating those ingredients to improvements in skin quality. An example of this is when she says "On top of that, the formula, which is infused with three essential ceramides and niacinamide, helps keep the skin soft, smooth, and hydrated, and helps

improve the look of pores.”(Martyn, 2022). Another example of a technique used is inductive reasoning. Because Martyn explains the ingredients in CeraVe’s cleanser and then goes on to explain how those specific ingredients benefit the skin, it leads the reader to the conclusion that CeraVe’s cleanser will improve skin quality because it contains ingredients that improve skin clarity.

Although this news source does not have a strong use of Ethos it heavily relies on Logos and Pathos to provide a convincing argument to the audience that CeraVe’s acne control cleanser is a good product to purchase. This news source also supports the claims made in CeraVe’s social media post.

In the peer-reviewed journal article “From Breakouts to Bargains: Strategies for Patient-Centered, Cost-effective Acne Care” the author's goal is to find treatments for acne that are both effective and affordable. They have found that for mild to moderate acne, using a combination of topical treatments is often necessary. The authors state that “fixed-dose combination adapalene-BPO and clindamycin-BPO are highly cost effective options for most patients” (Shields and Barbieri, 2023, E28). For moderate to severe acne, treatments like doxycycline or hormonal therapy, such as birth control, are very affordable options (Shields and Barbieri, 2023). While isotretinoin is often recommended for very severe or scarring acne (Shields and Barbieri, 2023). This article encourages readers to understand the importance of acne care and inform them of various cost effective acne treatment options. By informing the readers it allows them to

build their confidence when choosing an acne treatment option.

The technical terminology suggests that the article is aimed towards dermatologists who work in the field of acne treatment, most likely people with an educated background in healthcare. The audience could also be geared toward people with a general interest in healthcare, specifically people looking to learn more about affordable and effective acne treatment options.

This peer-reviewed journal article was written by Ali Shields and John S. Barbieri. Dr. Barbieri comes from the Department of Dermatology at Brigham and Women’s Hospital and Harvard Medical School in Boston, Massachusetts. This background gives the author very strong credibility which may make the information they share more convincing to the reader. It is noted that the other author, Ali Shields has no conflict of interest. In order to make sure that what they publish is true, the authors go through a peer-review process with other professionals in their field. Because the authors use clinical studies and evidence based research it furthers their credibility.

Since this article focuses on giving research-based information, it uses neutral and professional language to avoid strong appeals to emotion. Despite this, one emotion this article may appeal to is trust, because the authors give honest feedback on cost-effective acne treatment options instead of trying to convince the readers to purchase more expensive alternatives.

This journal article makes great use of logical evidence to support their claims about acne

treatment options. One of the most common techniques used in this article is statistics. It heavily relies on research studies, using percentages and a graph to provide information on acne care.

This article also uses the definition portion of SICDADS when describing different treatment options and their effectiveness. This deepens the reader's understanding of the treatment and allows them to make more informed decisions. Additionally the article uses analogy to compare similar treatment options to find their affordability and effectiveness.

The article “From Breakouts to Bargains: Strategies for patient-Centered, Cost-effective Acne Care” gives valuable and credible information on affordable and effective acne treatment options. The authors give well-supported recommendations on acne treatment options for any severity of acne by using credible research. Their use of logical techniques like statistics and definitions strengthen their credibility. The article appeals to trust in order to allow readers to make informed decisions on acne treatment. Ultimately the author's goal of providing information on affordable and effective acne treatments is achieved.

The social media post, news article, and peer-reviewed journal article all review affordable and effective acne treatment options. The social media post is an Instagram ad promoting CeraVe’s Acne Control Cleanser and Gel, the news article is an opinion editorial reviewing CeraVe’s Acne Control Cleanser, and the peer-reviewed journal article discusses various affordable and effective acne

treatment options. In terms of ethos, both the social media post and the peer-reviewed journal article feature speakers with a background in dermatology, whereas the writer of the news article only has experience reviewing beauty products. For pathos, the news source and peer-reviewed journal article build trust to persuade the readers to consider cheaper acne treatment options, whereas the social media post focuses on making the viewer feel comforted in their journey with acne. Lastly, for logos, the social media post and news source both describe ingredients in CeraVe’s Acne Control Cleanser and their benefits for skin quality, while the peer review journal article focuses more on graphs and percentages.

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## Accidental Success

By  
Jaelyn Affsa

This was it. My first test in AP Chemistry. I took Honors Chemistry the year before and found it super easy. I really enjoyed chemistry and I was passionate about it. I knew I wanted to study science in college, so AP Chemistry seemed like a good idea. The first few classes were rough, my teacher was harsh and at times aggressive. The material was difficult and the work was never ending. Luckily I had friends in the class who were amazing at chemistry, if I had a hard time with something they would help me out. I knew the first test would be difficult so I actually studied for it. I've never been good at studying but I studied for hours for this test. It was finally time to put my knowledge to work. The test was difficult. Surprisingly the multiple choice was the hardest part. After the test I walked out feeling significantly less confident. I still had hope that I did well, but I definitely didn't get an A.

Within a week my teacher had graded all of the tests. She had told us before that she offered test corrections for all of her tests so I knew even if I didn't do great I could get back some credit. Before she handed out the tests she told us that she was disappointed. She had us all last year and she thought we were up to the challenge but apparently we weren't. I felt a pit forming in my stomach. What if I had done awfully? What if this year was significantly harder than the year before? I anxiously awaited my test to see how I had done. If I did poorly on this test, was science really the best career path for me? Was I really up to the challenge? She handed me my paper and kept walking. I was almost too scared to look at it. I finally mustered up the courage to

check the grade. I got 32%! Not only did I do poorly but I failed! I failed the test. I hadn't ever failed a test before. Sure I failed assignments and even quizzes but never a test. What did this mean? Was I good enough for AP Chemistry? I thought I was but maybe not.

After class I asked all my friends how they did on the test. Almost all of my friends had also failed; although, none so spectacularly as me. My friends who did pass did so with C's and D's, hardly flying colors. I felt a bit better knowing it wasn't just me who struggled, but why did I struggle the most? In Honors I was one of the best in the class, yet in AP I was already falling behind. All I could think was how would I be able to handle this in college if I couldn't even do it in high school? I really thought that science was what I wanted to do in life. I took AP Chem because I loved science and truly wanted to pursue it as a career.

This one failure sent me into a spiral. I didn't do test corrections because it didn't feel worth it. If I couldn't do it right the first time would I really do better the second time? After that test everything seemed bleak. I was no longer excited about science. In fact I started to hate it. Every time I thought about chemistry my stomach churned and my palms got sweaty. Even just going to class felt like walking through the gates of hell. I tried to keep up but I continued to fail. After each failure I felt more and more discouraged. Once I had failed a few tests I finally gave up. Why should I put in my best effort if I was just going to keep failing? I stopped trying on the homework, instead looking up the answers or

asking my friends how to do it. I stopped studying for quizzes and tests. And I kept failing. My teacher told me that she knew I could do better. She had seen what I could do if I just applied myself. She wanted to know why all of a sudden I couldn't do hard things. I wanted to know that too. I continued to wonder if science was truly for me. I had dedicated so much of my time and effort towards science, just for it to blow up in my face. I had other interests, but nothing else truly made me feel alive like science did. For me science used to be the most exciting part of my life, but now it was as boring as watching paint dry.

At this point in my life I was starting to care about what I wore. I started to experiment with fashion and found that many people enjoyed my sense of style. When I was younger I was incredibly passionate about fashion. I loved every aspect of it. I would spend hours drawing designs and practicing how to sew. When I was eight I taught myself to sew. I had seen my grandmother do it countless times and little eight year old me was filled with a can-do attitude. The first time I sewed anything it was a plastic bag. I mean I was eight. I didn't have money for fabric and my parents weren't going to buy it for me. I started by practicing a basic stitch. Once I got better at that I tried my hand at sewing actual fabric. The first thing I made was a small pillow for my dad for fathers day. Looking back, it was horribly constructed and nearly falling apart. But when I made it it was my crowning joy. The feeling of making something yourself is indescribable. It's freeing and joyful and passionate. I lost this passion for so long, and I wish I remembered it sooner. With my newfound failure in science I started to channel my passion back into fashion and sewing.

I became the head costumer for my school's theater department. This was a truly incredible experience and it helped me to figure out

what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. I started spending a lot of my free time working on sewing. I started to hone my skills to better serve my reinvigorated passion. I started to actually use my sewing machine and all the assorted fabric scraps I had collected over the years. The first piece I was proud of making for my school's theater was the Mad Hatter's jacket. I had spent countless hours hand sewing that jacket until I was happy with the result. Once it was done I felt proud. Right in front of me was something that I had made. Something that would be useful to other people and truly help make the show more interesting. This made me feel good about myself, the opposite of how science had begun to make me feel. Sewing and designing was also something that made me happy. I started to get into fashion much more as well. I spent a while putting together the perfect outfit for any given day. I would wake up two hours before school started just so I could start getting my outfit together. I started to make clothes for myself. This was infinitely harder than just making costume pieces. Most of my costuming work was alterations and anything that wasn't didn't need to have perfect construction.

I had finally found something I was truly passionate about. When senior year started I knew I wanted to study fashion design in school, not science. This was somewhat unexpected to many people. Some people seemed shocked with the dramatic shift in passion, but the people who knew me well knew I would be much happier with fashion versus science. I picked out every single costume for my senior play. And in my opinion they looked great. Costuming was something I truly enjoyed and I met some amazing people. I may not have been as dedicated to it as I was if I had done better in AP Chem.

I then decided to begin the biggest sewing project I had ever attempted. I was going to

make my prom dress. The year before I had altered a dress to become my prom dress but I hadn't done anything this intense. I first started out by researching all about the process of making a dress. I had already decided that I wanted to design it and that I would use draping instead of patterns. I learned how to drape and certain other skills I would need. I then set about making the actual design. I started out by sketching what I wanted to make. I went through several designs before I decided what I wanted. I then bought the materials I would need including fabric. I wasn't sure what fabric I wanted to use or even what color I wanted. As I was shopping around I was drawn to two fabrics, they were the same color just different textures. They were both a gorgeous light blue that reminded me of Cinderella. I bought both and brought them home excitedly. I started draping. I didn't totally know what I was doing so I just kind of went for it. As I was designing I ran into quite a few issues but I did my best to work around them. I started making the bodice first, which is the top part of the dress. As I was working on it I started to change direction, which ended up working out pretty good. The whole process went somewhat smoothly, but I enjoyed it nonetheless. I was so happy with the final product and I was excited to wear it to prom. Everyone who saw me at prom couldn't

believe that I had made my dress. They loved it and I even won prom princess! I had finally found something I truly enjoyed.

I used to think that science was what I was passionate about, that I wanted to do it for the rest of my life. My struggles in AP Chem showed me that that path wasn't for me. At the time it seemed like the end of the world. I was being confronted with the harsh reality that I wasn't actually as good at science as I thought I was. I was discovering that science wasn't my true passion. This experience helped me to find my true passion. I thought that nothing good would come with my failures in AP Chem but I learned a lot about myself. This was truly a moment of growth for me, even though it felt like a step backwards. In all honesty I wouldn't be where I am today if I hadn't failed that test in AP Chem. Instead I would likely be going to school pursuing science. I would probably be unhappy, overworked and stressed. I wouldn't be fulfilled following that path. I feel much more fulfilled on the path I am on now. This failure ended up bringing me much more joy and success in the future. So even though past me would be shocked to hear this, I'm happy I failed those tests.

# A New Politic Era

## By Baylee Bianchi

The year of 2024, despite not even being over yet, has been chaotic in its culture. From assassination attempts to world wars, from culturally significant albums to complete celebrity breakdowns, this year has certainly kept us all on our toes, and firmly glued to social media. This means we're consuming overwhelming amounts of information that we're absorbing and comprehending at record speed in order to keep up with this rapidly changing cultural climate. However, this muddles what information in that tidal wave of links and headlines is credible, valuable, and honest. What defines credibility anymore, with all of the websites, ads, articles, and sources competing for your attention and belief? Are they preying on our naivety, since we've become accustomed to trusting what we see on the Internet? Which genre of sources is the most trustworthy? This genre report will break down some of these concepts, because deciphering which information you trust is crucial, especially in this current climate. This report will do this by examining social media's connectivity-based approach of informational delivery in comparison to magazines, newspapers, and academic journals, which are all often more lengthy and challenging, but undoubtedly more credible and well-supported.

No one with any sense of this year's culture will debate that two of the most popular topics this year have been Taylor Swift, and the upcoming election between former President Donald Trump, and Vice President Kamala Harris. But the connection between the two was unexpected. On September 10th, 2024, after the debate between the candidates, Taylor Swift uploaded a photo of herself, alongside her cat, to Instagram. No one who looked at this outtake shot from her *Time* Person of the Year photoshoot would have

any idea of the weight the caption would hold. Days prior, former President Donald Trump had taken to Twitter to repost an AI generated video of Swift endorsing him, and his running mate, JD Vance, in this year's upcoming election. With much of the current pop culture climate being dominated by Swift's music, and her massively successful *Eras Tour*, her political standing was the talk of social media for days. This post was her response. She firmly shut down the notion of her voting for the former President, and instead, endorsed Kamala Harris and her running mate, Tim Walz. She also acknowledged the fears around AI, and how, "The simplest way to combat misinformation is with the truth." (Swift, 2024). Swift concluded the post by encouraging readers to do their own research, and ensure, especially for first time voters, that they are registered to vote. She also provided links for registering to vote and information about voting early in her Instagram Story. With nothing but an Instagram post, Taylor Swift had officially become a component of our country's biggest election.

The first literary genre to be delved into is a newspaper, with this one being titled, "Did Taylor Swift's Kamala Harris endorsement drive voter registration in Indiana?" (Colombo, 2024). This article was published by the *Indianapolis Star* newspaper, which has been in operation for over one hundred years, since 1903, and is the state's largest newspaper. This alone gives the article support in its credibility, being published in an esteemed, albeit less widely-known newspaper. The author of the article is Hayleigh Colombo, who is the senior government accountability reporter of the *Star*, and has worked for several other newspapers, including but not limited to, the *Indianapolis Business Journal* and the

Lafayette Journal & Courier. She also has degrees in both political science and journalism, giving her a quality background to speak on topics such as these (Hayleigh Colombo, n.d.). The article enhances its credibility by including information from an independent, and well-known source. Colombo states, "Swift's Instagram endorsement of Harris after Sept. 10's presidential debate is credited with driving more than 400,000 people to visit Vote.org in 24 hours. In Indiana, there was a confirmed bump in voter registration in the immediate aftermath of Swift's post, according to the organization, which is a nonprofit that doesn't endorse or oppose any political candidate or party. Vote.org registered 1,092 voters in Indiana in the 48 hours after Swift posted, according to the site, a "considerable spike compared to the prior 48 hours, during which Vote.org registered 782 in Indiana." (Colombo, 2024). These outside sources being quoted adds a layer of reliability to the article, and supports its overall point very clearly.

The design of this newspaper stands out in comparison to the astute but visually uninteresting academic journal, and the more typically seen images in the magazine, both of which will be covered later in this genre report. This digitized version of the newspaper includes a video compilation of photos of Taylor performing in Indiana throughout the years. There is also a more extensive photo gallery with up to fifty-four photos at the end of the article. With the oldest photo dating back to 2007, it's clear that Swift's presence has been a highlight in the community. The video and photo gallery are visually appealing and personal, clearly connecting the article's content to its associated location and audience. Due to the newspaper being tied to a specific location, unlike the magazine and academic journal, the design elements are able to be tailored directly to the distinctive and unique content of the article itself. This individualized connection of

the newspaper's content to its design is rivaled only by the magazine, which will be covered next.

The magazine that will be addressed in this genre report is an article published in *Time*, entitled, "How Kamala Harris Knocked Donald Trump Off Course" (Bennett et al., 2024). This article has three authors, Brian Bennett, Eric Cortelessa, and Phillip Elliott. Bennett is the Senior White House correspondent of *Time* magazine, with Elliott and Cortelessa being a senior correspondent, and a staff writer with political specialties respectively. This brings together a team of qualified writers, alongside a well-known and credible source. *Time* magazine was first published in 1923, and was the first weekly magazine in the country. It is known for being a justifiable, trustworthy, and typically bipartisan publication. It maintains a general sense of professionalism, there are quips embedded throughout that aim to engage the reader more than the typical news article, in this case, to mock certain actions of the former President. It is witty, and flows very nicely for the reader to absorb. It also breaks the concepts of political climate down clearly, so it is easily understood even for individuals who aren't frequently engaged in politics. A good example of these slightly comical but content rich statements would be, "After a July on offense, the campaign spent August on defense, explaining away Vance's past statements about "childless cat ladies" and clumsily making amends with Republican Governor Brian Kemp of Georgia, just weeks after Trump bashed him for not backing the baseless claims that the former President really won the 2020 election." (Bennett et al., 2024). This publication proves to be both credible and dense in content, while also maintaining the reader's attention in an engaging way, a facet the academic journal later addressed struggles with.

*Time* is known for its unique, distinctive, and powerful covers. These covers can even make editions that cover major cultural events more valuable to be resold after they become sold out or the issue is discontinued. The design of the magazine has several photos embedded into the paragraphs, with each being powerful, and tying in clearly to the article's overarching point. However, the standout was clearly the cover that had been created for this issue of the magazine, featuring former President Trump, wearing his signature campaign Make America Great Again hat, attempting to back a golf cart upwards on the hill of a golf course, with the words "In Trouble." above. The tire tracks ingrained into the sand demonstrate that he will inevitably slide back down that hill again. This illustrates what the author of this article feels Trump is doing to his political career with his actions in a funny and clever way, incorporating his widely-known affinity for golf. It's a metaphorical representation of slowly trudging and pulling yourself upward, only to cause yourself to fall again due to your own poor choices. The authors are insinuating that every time Trump gains some ground in this race, he inevitably sabotages himself with his own ignorance. This is the perfect example of an attention-grabbing political cartoon, providing commentary that aligns with the values of the article. It draws potential readers in, and gives them a relative idea of the tone the article will take on. This distinctive blend of professionalism and comical engagement sets the style apart from the other genres explored in this report.

An academic journal is the third type of literary genre that will be covered. These journals are written for specific purposes of study, by credible authors that typically include scholars, specialists, and professors, and they must be peer-reviewed. The academic journal that will be explored here is entitled, "Donald Trump: Aggressive Rhetoric and Political Violence" (Nacos et al., 2020),

and it was composed by Brigitte L. Nacos, Robert Y. Shapiro, and Yaeli Bloch-Elkon, and published into the academic journal collection, *Perspectives on Terrorism*. This collection was published by the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, which is an independent organization dedicated to countering things like violent extremism, while supporting human rights, and rules of law. This publication information supports the journal being credible and accurate. Further cementing the journal's credibility are the author's credentials. Nacos is a political scientist and teaches journalism at Columbia University, with her specializations being terrorism and counterterrorism, and mass media, public opinion, and decision-making. Shapiro is a published author on similar topics previously, such as co-authoring "The Oxford Handbook of American Public Opinion and the Media", the Wallace S. Sayre Professor of Government and International and Public Affairs at Columbia University, and at the time of publication, was the President of The Academy of Political Science. Bloch-Elkon is a Senior Lecturer and Assistant Professor of Communication and Political Science at Bar Ilan University. She is also an Associate Research Scholar at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA), and at the Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy (ISERP). These extensive and applicable credentials further signify the article's credibility, even more so when you consider how many sources the journal uses. The notes section cites ninety-six different additives to the journal. This demonstrates the author's willingness to do more research on top of what they clearly already know based on their personal specializations, which adds to credibility (Nacos et al., 2020, p.gs 21-25).

The style of academic journals are extensively professional and scholarly, and this journal is no exception. However, the word choices and phrasing used help the journal remain accessible to readers who aren't as well-versed

in this type of literary genre. The abstract of this academic journal states, “There was a rise in bullying incidents in schools against minority students. Assuming that aggressive rhetoric by influential political leaders affect their supporters’ words and deeds, we examined Trump’s online and offline hate speech, the rhetorical reactions of his followers, and the violent consequences suffered by their declared enemies. We found that contrary to an old children’s rhyme (“Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me”) Trump’s aggressive, divisive, and dehumanizing language was seconded by his followers and inflicted directly or indirectly psychological and physical harm to Trump’s declared enemies.” (Nacos et al., 2020, p.2). This phrasing is interesting in order to grab readers attention, but remains professional, fluid, and complex in its content. This academic and topic-specialized style differentiates it from the more casual and ever-changing topic style of the newspaper and magazine covered previously in this genre report.

Finally, the social media source that started this media spiral, Taylor Swift’s Instagram post, can be considered a literary genre all in itself. It’s lengthy for a caption on social media, but Swift is known for her distinctive writing style, in which one of the defining characteristics is that she frequently writes paragraphs of considerable length. The post feels authentically written from Swift herself, while maintaining a firm tone and clear distribution of information, the words remain kind and hopeful towards the future. Swift has also been outspoken about her political views in the past, particularly since the 2016 election, so a post of this nature does not seem out of the ordinary or character, providing credibility that the information came directly from the source. The post is personal, as if she’s speaking to the readers themselves, trying to set the story straight. Aside from its medium of being a social post

rather than a more lengthy article or journal, the writing style and tone both make this genre’s written content memorable.

The photo chosen for this post is powerful, the aforementioned outtake a shot from Swift’s Person of the Year photoshoot that had been published by *Time* magazine earlier in 2024. The photo features Swift and her cat, both looking towards the camera with a striking stare. There is relatively no background or other distractions from the two of them, with Swift’s clothing being a simple black shirt in order to make both her and her cat the focal point of the photo. Initially, this photo is clearly beautiful, but seems completely disconnected from the content of the post. It’s only when considering the sign off that Swift ended the post with that her underlying intentions behind the photo choice come to light. She states, “With love and hope, Taylor Swift, Childless Cat Lady” (Swift, 2024). This is, of course, a reference to the comment made by current Vice Presidential candidate, JD Vance, made in 2021, when he referred to the women running our country, including current Presidential candidate, Vice President Kamala Harris, as, “childless cat ladies”. This witty hidden message has consistent similarities to the *Time* article cover, standing by and supporting the overall tone of the post while including engaging commentary with very few words.

In summation, we cannot exist in the modern age without the use of technology, the internet, and social media, but the innate human nature to question the things we are told, and further investigate the information we are given, is one that should be honed in on now more than ever. This isn’t to say all social media is distrustful, simply that it should be explored before our faith and trust is put into any person, trend, or company. However, you must take into account all of the elements of the sources you find and how

they relate to one another. A magazine may contain incredibly complex language, but cite no sources or credible experts on the topic at hand, while a journal may have no engaging titles or design components, but could contain tons of rich and in-depth informational content. The combination of rhetorical choices made by the author or authors of the source being identified will develop a better picture for readers to decide whether or not they believe the source is truly credible. Misinformation is a growing issue in our current societal climate, and being able to protect yourself from it the best you can is crucial. The best way to do this is to investigate your sources thoroughly, and like the well known phrase so many children in this modern age heard growing up, “Don’t believe everything you read on the Internet!”

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## A Little Bit of Nothing

By  
Aidan Colella

Nothing makes up a life. The people in the hallways. The quiet walks in the streetlight. The rumbling of the bus. The flurried footsteps. Everything is normal all the time. Fall, Winter, Spring or Summer. Yesterday is tomorrow. Same people, same places. High school never really worked too well for me. Best friends, and lunch breaks. Fake friends in high places. Peaceful little moments surrounded by screeching distractions. Walking to the bus stop in the cold bitter morning. Getting on the bus to meet the same tired faces. Getting off the bus to shamble towards my morning classes. Talking to my best friends about being aimless in life while I wait for the bell. My best friends were Sam, Tyler, Micheal, and Billy. We've been close for forever. Forever only lasts so long, but I try to enjoy it while I can.

"How's things?" I say,

"Same shit", they reply.

"What are you guys doing after school?"

"Nothing. What about you?"

Different people have the same struggles. Sam stays out of the drama, Tyler does too. Billy is reserved and rarely talks to people he doesn't know, Sam does too. Michael became jaded and gray from having to put on a persona for so long, I did too. Everyone has their own little variation of the same story you've already heard. To go your own path is to go the same path people like you have. There are always people like you, around you. Everything is normal all the time. I tell Micheal that I'm depressed, he says "me too". I tell Sam that I don't know what I'm doing in life, he says "me too". I scribble down notes for my bio-tech class, hoping I remember everything for next week's test. Doing lab work with

thoughts of sleeping in bed. At the end of class I draw doodles and rest my head. "Now even though that was a time I hated from day one" I can't help but remember it with a strange fuzzy fondness. A kind of washed up film grain coats my memories of high school. It's like the pain turns into nostalgia. I go to music class trying to get lost in my work. The beats of the drums put me in a trance not unlike my morning ride to school. Before I know it class ends, and I wait by the entrance for Sam, Tyler, and Billy after school with baited breath. Watching people who are watching me. Wandering aimlessly trapped in a fishbowl. Seeing them round the corner, we walk to the car talking about the same people, same places, same problems. We sing songs together as we drive to see the same sights we've been seeing all our lives. At some point I must let go, stop reliving the groundhog days. It seems everyday is just the same as tomorrow. Work becomes an obsession you're not really obsessed with. I must stop being "Lost In Yesterday". A dreamy rhythm with nostalgic resonance. It's a song that goes on with no booming moments or big highlights. It comes and goes much like the days of life itself. Almost in a wave-like pattern. The vocals themselves remind me of how people speak in memories. Me and Micheal would drive to the mall revisiting the same stores we grew up going to. Finding that the same old media grows older an inch a year. The days never seem to change. We cry and laugh. We walk and talk for hours, about anything and everything. Driving home to play the same games and talk about the same sorrows we share each night.

"What's the point?" I say,

"I don't even know myself," Michael replied.

I go to bed wishing I could change. The covers embrace me with a hold that keeps me comfortable in misery. If only I wasn't so dull. If only I talked more. If only. "If they call you, embrace them." The song feels almost like a comforting nightmare in a way. Like a repetitive and slow burning version of hell. However when you listen to the lyrics, they tell you to take chances in life. If you want to escape the same day everyday, you must reach out, you have to get comfortable being uncomfortable, no matter how much anxiety or depression hold you back. You have to try. Surrendering to the system only makes you another particle of sand in the desert of life. Which is depicted in the cover of the song itself. I think a lot of my high school experience was hiding who I was in favor of fitting into the mold that other people made for me. I only really started enjoying myself for who I was after high school ended. I started wearing what I liked, and I let myself be happy with my imperfections. I think in a way I still miss those times though, hanging out with my friends every day after school is something I think I took for granted. Tyler's little rants to me about obscure media shit I don't care about. Going over to Sam's house to play Halo and eat whatever his family was having. Casually talking to Billy before our

morning classes, making little jokes and references that only we would find funny. Sitting in Michael's car late at night talking about what was going on with our lives. I remember after graduation I was more exhausted than anything else. It was four years of constantly playing a character for people I resented, and the only breaks I had were in my friend group. They were everything to me. I didn't have to pretend to be happy, I didn't have to say I was fine when I wasn't. If I had that same attitude with the other people I talked to in high school I probably wouldn't have been as miserable. "What was I ever afraid of? Why did I worry?" That lyric in particular always stuck with me. I've always cared too much. I can't break out of the everlasting cycle that is life. Maybe that's not the point. Maybe we should try to ignore the forever repeating cycle of nothing. Nothing makes up a life.

*Aidan Colella is a Graphic Design major with a minor in photography. He is from Newton, MA and an amateur singer/guitar player.*

# The Act of Questioning and Answering

By  
Meg Collins

Sometimes I feel like not having a 20/20 vision allows me to appreciate everything in an in-depth way sometimes overlooked by others. Being born with a cataract in my right eye didn't give me a choice but to adapt. My family thought everything was normal with me because "that's just Meghan". I did not know anything about my eye, it was normal to me. It was all I knew growing up and was just something that made me special compared to my siblings.

When coming out of my room at any moment, someone else was in the hallway. When walking to use the bathroom the light was always on, and the door was always shut. One day I had a revelation, I was only 6 but I realized I will never have a moment to myself. I had to use the bathroom, and my older brother William (7 years old) decided this was the perfect time to take a nice long shower. So, in return, I sat outside the bathroom door and began the line of who claimed the bathroom next. Behind me was my younger Haley (4 years old) who was equally as pissed off as me. She rolled her eyes and sat down screaming "How much longer can you take Will!" Causing my mom to scream "Will hurry the f-ck up!" Will answered by turning the shower off, to which my other older brother Talon (7 years old) came out of his room with his towel on ready to take a shower. When he saw the line, he asked to go in front to which Haley and I quickly responded with "No back on the time!" Then just when it was finally my turn my two younger sisters Arden (4 years old) and Mia (2 years old) quickly ran into the bathroom claiming it was an "emergency". In return for that, I broke down into tears on the verge of peeing my pants. I did not pee my pants but when I did go to the bathroom, I realized I will never be alone, and I must take some initiative in life. I want to stand up for

myself and be independent instead of crying and waiting for the bathroom. This perspective memory haunts me to this day and has helped play a role in shaping me into who I am today and in how I handle/handle most situations by showing me that I must stand up for myself but also realize some people are not always out to get me. My two youngest sisters had an idea that I was waiting for the bathroom, but they didn't cut me just to make a personal attack on me. They went in front of me because they needed to not because they wanted to mess with me that day.

My eyes were preventing me from seeing, so I had surgery to correct it. Now leaving me with contact lenses I will have to wear for the rest of my life, glasses, constant eye tests, long doctor's appointments, and eye therapy. I used to have to patch my good eye to make the other stronger and my mom would constantly chase me around the house to put the contact lenses in. I would run away because I simply did not want the lenses in, and our conversations would usually go as my mom said.

"Meghan Anna get over here right now!" and I would run away with a little laugh saying.

"Only if you can catch me!"

"Meghan this is not a joke come here right now! Or else"

Eventually, I would take a shameful march over, tilt my head up and she would put the lenses in my right eye for me. Looking back, I now realize how hard this could have been as a mother, knowing your child is not as able as others. My heart almost aches because I know she would never want to chase me around to put this lens in and she would just want me to

not have to wear it. Most of my siblings on the other hand took this as a chance to pounce on me if I never went to my mom. My brothers particularly loved doing this. They were much taller and stronger than little me. As you can guess where this is going, they simply didn't care about making me very durable, which later did help down the road in sports. In the moment I sure was mad though because no matter how hard I fought the lenses were something so constant in my life, and after many years I realized they only chased after me not because they wanted to beat me up, but because they cared about me more than I knew.

Before the first day of school, we went through the same fiasco about the lenses but eventually, she had gotten me to sit still without help from my brothers. We then piled into the car with my siblings. Shoulder to shoulder with backpacks on our laps making the car so cramped that once the doors were shut, we all didn't seem to need seatbelts due to how tight the car was, but we still put them on away. After everyone was buckled, we took a quick 3-minute drive down the road to the John E. Burke Elementary School.

When my mom and dad dropped me off at the front of the building I walked in with my two older brothers. They were very quick to ditch me, so I had to find my way to my classroom by a teacher who saw me standing in the lobby. As I walked into the classroom, my hair in braids, my little square glasses on my face, and a backpack too big and heavy for me to carry, but most importantly, a huge smile on my face. Now I know you think I'm going to go on and tell a story about how mean kids are, but it was the opposite. I walked into the classroom with bright colors everywhere, small tables shaped like hexagons, name tags, and little cubbies. The smell of crayons engulfed the room as well as the sound of kids crying due to their parents. They were all crying as if someone had eaten

the last French fry or were simply saying no to wanting something. It startled me as I was confused. Growing up seeing my siblings, cousins, and other relatives go to school I thought this was supposed to be exciting, but I guess not based on all the kids losing it and holding onto their parents for dear life. So, I immediately got myself out of that storm and sat down next to the only girl who did not seem to be in complete tragedy and started talking to her, her name was Lauren Boyle. Lauren had one younger sister and was adopted from China as a baby. She did not know any Chinese or who her birth parents were, but she knew she had a younger sister who was also adopted by her adoptive parents. What stuck to me was how funny she was. She laughed at jokes I made, and I laughed with her. Some of the other kids looked at us like we were insane for not crying over our parents leaving us, but we were to focus on showing each other our new folders (mine with dolphins, hers with pandas) and school supplies. We got so lost in the conversation that we did not even realize the silence in the classroom. All the tears had stopped (finally), backpacks were not being zippered, and the teacher was about to begin her lesson.

The teacher shortly began teaching after and in all honesty, I do not remember that lesson, but I do remember a little boy (John Taylor) coming up to Lauren and I am proceeding to ask, "What the hell is wrong with your eyes?" This kind of caught me off guard as I did not think anything was wrong with Lauren and I's eyes but before I could process it Lauren simply explained we are both Asian. I am not Asian, which I said to Lauren later that day (to which she apologized, and we had a good laugh), but the way she handled the situation showed me how not everything is a personal attack on someone. In addition, not many people mean to offend but are curious. Curiosity is something people cannot control and is something out of my control. Leading

me to be very comfortable with myself and being able to explain to people the situation with my eye. Realizing that my eyes were not normal, and people were just curious, not meaning to offend most of that time. Lauren taught me that lesson that day and even though Lauren and I no longer talk. I still carry the lesson she taught to me to this day without even realizing it. I do not think she is aware of how her small act of innocence affected and altered my young brain. As your family can only tell you so much but people outside of your family can tell you stuff more indirectly. By social cues or even silly statements like what Lauren said. Taking back to the idea that not everything is an attack but just plain curiosity.

Furthermore, making me more comfortable in my own skin by realizing people are not always out to get me. Overcoming that sense of not being normal and like all the other kids at school. Which was and still is hard to grasp, but I must remember it is part of my life and cannot get rid of it. Meaning I just must live with it and always adapt. No matter in school, work, sports, or later in life. It is something people will always ask about and always wonder about once noticed and I am ok with that. Not everything is a personal attack on me. As everything can be subject to change, this is something I cannot change and will not change with my morals. People are different in each their own way and people cannot change that.

My eyes do not have 20/20 vision and have shown me throughout all parts of my life

small lessons taught to me through my classmates, friends, parents, and siblings. They have shown me how to have an open mind and treat others with kindness and respect. Knowing that people are curious and not always rude. Now when asked I simply answer with a smile on my face, and I do not take offense. Even in scenarios of a teammate spreading rumors about my eye to other students and teammate I realized she was only curious. Curious about how I was ok with living like this, she was never truly out to get me she just did not understand, and just like my old friend Lauren Boyle, I responded positively towards her correcting my teammate in a positive and understanding light. Most at the moment would not have chosen to do so, but I am a firm believer in how unavoidable curiosity is in human life. It is better to be embraced than escalated. There is nothing I can change in my life and fate is fate, but I can control my actions and how I react. Everything is always in everyone's control and what many choose to do with their lives is their choice, but I have chosen to always have a smile and an open mind towards any aspect of my life.

*Meghan Collins is a freshman cybersecurity major at Lasell University. The narrative is a personal story from my childhood that helped shape me into who I am today. Thank you for taking the time to read my paper.*

## Hello Streets of London

By  
Aria Conti

The London Tube makes absolutely no sense. There are different platforms for every stop and an endless stream of tunnels with smaller ones attached. The Tube is like the never-ending, ever-changing maze in Harry Potter in the Goblet of Fire, basically a death trap. My hatred and utter disdain for the tube started back in April of this year.

My mum, a woman with smile lines, short brown hair, and a head and a half shorter than my six-foot self, always takes me on yearly trips for my birthday instead of having parties or gifts. Since I was also graduating, we decided to go to the one place we had always wanted to go: the great city of romance and fashion, Paris! My only thought was, "This is the coolest thing ever!"

Surprisingly, as an amazing gift, my stepdad, Rob, had gotten us bullet train tickets to London for a day. The day started nice and easy, with us making it to the bullet train on time with no problems, but it was a roller coaster of incidents from then on. We arrived in London and took pictures with some of the signs, my mum in her long tan coat and striped sweater, me in my cropped leather jacket and cargo pants. We hit the streets, going to eat a British breakfast sandwich full of ham and cheesy goodness. When we were eating, we checked our phones as one does while eating, only to discover, surprise, surprise, we needed a different sim card for London than the one we had for Paris. The sim card was needed to access anything on our phones, including maps of London, the bus schedule, and tube information. This was beyond frustrating because it made it so hard to get to places and communicate with each other and our families. We ended up deciding not to get another sim opting to forgo communication with everyone. This was the

start of the many incidents before we arrived back to the safety of our homey Paris Airbnb.

We spent the day looking at different sites like the London Eye, The Tower Bridge, and the Palace Guards. When lunch rolled around, the rain poured hard, like rocks on our backs. My mum and I were drenched like sewer rats, and my once curly hair had grown to resemble that of a brushed-out poodle, and her hair was sticking to her forehead, like a soggy rat and we needed to find a bathroom fast. We looked for the better part of half an hour because there just weren't any. We checked multiple places and nowhere seemed to have a bathroom. The entire time, we were laughing like deranged hyenas for no particular reason at all, it was just one of those moments when we couldn't stop laughing, for that half an hour we were, feeding off each other's craziness. We finally found a cafe full of people because it had once again started raining cats and dogs. The bathrooms were small and kind of dirty. We had to buy food from the cafe, and only after that, would we be able to utilize the loo. The food, a slice of chocolate cake tasted slightly bitter in a bad way, like biting into a chunk of straight baking soda. My little sister baked better, which was surprising because we were in England, but, while eating, we met this sweet, little old couple. The woman was on the shorter side with shoulder-length gray hair. Her husband had a slightly hunched back and wore a flannel coat. They talked to us about the English countryside and their careers in the military. It was interesting to hear them talk about their personal experiences and my mom was able to relate to them, because of her time in the Marines. It made me feel like it's a small world after all if we can relate to someone who lives all around the world in the London Countryside. After leaving the cafe, we took a

boat tour with a speaker who made jokes like The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel, passing under bridges where Londoners waved and shouted greetings at us, making us giggle like little girls getting candy in a candy store.

The day, however, came to a screeching halt with no Bangers and Mash because we had to hurry back for the bullet train. We hopped on a big red bus to a nearby train station. The driver, then, proceeded to drive in circles, around and around like a merry-go-round. This kickstarted my mum's panic, about missing our train, back to Paris, we had to get to the bullet train station fast to go through the border police and make it back. Which resulted in her having a grim look on her face and flipping through the map we had found earlier. She may have been pissed but she controlled her facial expression of the initial panic, smiling and using her extremely joyful, overly polite "phone voice". She firmly told him after trying to work out which way he was going to just let us off on the side of the road and run to the stop. The driver did not seem pleased with us, shaking his head as we got off the bus. We ran as fast as lightning down to the Tube and bought tickets for the train. Then we proceeded to run around like blind mice looking for cheese to find it, asking for directions, and going to three different terminals all the while becoming more and more sweaty, with our hearts pounding and our blood pumping. Of course, we needed to take this train to get to the bullet train back to Paris or else Goodbye Paris Airbnb, hello streets of London.

My mom's dark brown eyes at that point had become red around the edges from tearing up, and I was biting my lower lip to help control my laughter while thinking "fuck, we look absolutely crazy," but I held it in not wanting to risk my mother's wrath. I know it was a horrible situation but for some reason, I just couldn't stop even when my mum was telling me to. She and I went from one side of the

station to the other, back and forth, like a yo-yo trying to find the right place to be. Very quickly running out of breath, we could almost taste the stale, mildewy underground air. The signs around us seemed to blur into a confusing mess.

Finally, we found someone who could tell us where to go. The short, slightly chubby, older Indian man even drew a little map on a napkin, and let me just say that map was needed, it was like our version of Jack Sparrow's compass pointing us to the thing we wanted most. But similarly to Jack's compass, it wasn't perfect and it took us a minute to figure it out. At long last my mum and I got on the right train back to our little Paris Airbnb. My mum's normally bright and smiley face at that point was red with anxiety and tears and my hands were shaking from laughter or anxiety, I don't know, but we were laughing, and I mean laughing, to the point of our stomachs hurting. The stares we got from the shriveled, raisin-looking old ladies next to us on the train were full-blown "get off my lawn" kind of stares. If looks could kill theirs would have buried us six feet under. Honestly though, at that moment I did not care. My mum and I were laughing and having fun, and yes, we were "those tourists" but in that moment I felt at peace even though I have always hated attention and getting looks from other people. I think I felt that way because I was with my mum and had the chance to be together in an amazing place with no worrying about anything else besides eating delicious food and dressing stunningly, but even in bad situations she has a way of making me feel happy. Though I could still feel people looking at us, my mum crumbled into more laughter by joking about us "being those crazy, uncontrollable, American tourists who need to be more civilized."

It made me realize that even if you are in a tough place, especially one that could land you stranded in a foreign country with little to no

money and no place to stay, you must laugh it off. Sometimes, mostly after the problem is solved, you can't do anything but laugh. Sometimes, you just need to stay in the moment and not stress about every little thing, something which I sometimes struggle with doing.

My mom and I have been through a lot and looking back on it even when we were experiencing rough situations we always survived by laughing our way through. Even if we were talking about the most serious, depressing topic, she would try so hard to find a way to get a giggle out of our mouths or if not even just smile on our lips. Being surrounded by that energy my whole life changed my perspective on how the way we handle things can change how we view and live our lives. I always try to make my friends and those around me laugh whenever I can, and I am usually their go-to person for advice because I give the way my mom would have, which is with humor. Seeing my mom always being positive even through the negative made me more resilient. It always made me

think, "Wow, my mum is so strong." Seeing her made me feel empowered even in the worst times and I want to be like her. I hope to keep making people laugh like my mom does.

Even though people often complain about the loud, noisy, and annoying tourists, I will always just think that the tourists are trying to get through something by laughing and smiling about whatever they are going through. I was able to get through those moments because of my mum. If I had to go through that situation again, I would if it was with my mum, but I don't think I could have gone through that situation with anyone else. She is forever my best friend and the best crazy tourist a girl could ask for.

*Aria Conti is a Journalism major with later plans to get a Master's in Communications. She is from Chesapeake, Virginia. She is originally from Rhode Island and she has a dragon tattoo.*

Cycle  
By  
Gabrielle Gagnon

I spent a lot of my childhood trapped in my head. Curled up in empty corners, staring down my nose at the book in my hand. I hated recess and friendship bracelets. I dreaded going to birthday parties and making phone calls. But still, more than anything, I despised the isolation. When I think of it now, I can still feel disgust swirling around inside my stomach, eating away at my insides like acid. I remember the fear and nausea that plagued me every time I opened my mouth to speak. I was nearly ready to give up speaking altogether. The words would inevitably get caught in my throat, and for two years, I fell into a spell of silence—like a monk or a religious fanatic, except I was a twelve-year-old girl. My lips remained sealed shut, as if they had been bound together using super glue. No matter how much I tried, I couldn't pry them open. I couldn't make the feeling go away. It festered inside me like infection in an open wound. I could never understand why my brain worked the way it did. Often, I pondered it, wracking my mind for answers. I wanted someone to blame, someone to bear the weight of my suffering, going so far as to question whether I had been cursed by a higher power, condemning me to a life of loneliness.

Despite my general distrust of religion, I often found myself perched on my throne of sequin throw pillows and bubblegum pink blankets, praying. I stared at the ceiling and pleaded with God to wake up as someone else. Of course, this never happened. Each day, I woke

up just as I had the day before. Back then, I walked through the world like a ghost, an outsider peeking in through a glass window pane. I watched as children danced down the sidewalk, tugging roughly at their mother's chubby, manicured fingers. Elderly couples brushed past me. Shiny, red and white Macy's bags hung from their stick figure arms, and I feared they would snap under the dead weight. Even the comfortable walls of my dance studio had been corrupted, tainted by a girl whose name I can barely recall. She had commented on it, I remember—my silence. Closing my eyes, I can still see the rough outline of her pink, pudgy face. She had looked at me, all those years ago, glossy lips curled up in a cartoon smirk. Even then, it felt malicious, like she was a lion stalking her prey. "Why don't you speak?" The words spilled from her lips so easily, so effortlessly, that my stomach clenched with jealousy. I wanted to crawl out of my skin. I wanted to pounce on her like a rabid animal, ripping at her flesh and pulling at her brassy, fake blonde hair. I could yank it right from the root; I was close enough. I could just reach out and— She interrupted my thoughts, opening her mouth again. "Hello?" she said, as if it were a question, staring at me like I was stupid, as though she thought I hadn't heard her.

"Seriously, why don't you talk?" she persisted.

"I don't know," came my internal answer. *I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.* I stayed silent. I opened my mouth to speak, then

closed it again, faltering like a fish out of water.

I don't remember how we moved on or how Miss Nicki, our ballet instructor, redirected us. Memory is funny like that, remembering the worst but leaving spotty places where there should be resolution. Bits and pieces of my early teenage years are forgotten. Maybe they lie dormant somewhere in the back of my mind; maybe not. Perhaps, they're forever lost to me, and maybe that's for the better. Still, I can't help but wish I had those memories, especially when my friends trade stories from our middle school years.

“Do you remember her?”

“Do you remember him?”

I almost never do. Maybe I never knew these people they speak about at all, but I can't help but think that I probably did. I could have sat next to them in algebra; I might have silently slipped them my biology answers under the desk. The truth is, I'll never know. Faces and names from this time are lost to me. They slip through the cracks in my memory like sand through splayed fingers. I might have known them, but I know for certain that they never knew me at all.

I know now that this perceived defect or lack of connection between my body and mind is called anxiety. For me, mental health is cyclical. Just when I think it will never get better and that I am doomed, there comes improvement—like light flowing in through the crack of the cupboard where I've found myself locked inside. Though this period of my life affected me, I've managed to climb

out of that hole. I kept spinning and spinning until, finally, I emerged, ready to fight my anxiety instead of wallowing in it. I worked on it tirelessly, patching up the hole I've had since childhood—the hole that burned right through the middle of me. The vast, empty void that seemed impossible to fill, I've filled with people and places that make it seem less bottomless.

Nonetheless, my path to self-improvement wasn't easy. I seemed to slam into every obstacle, stumbling over my own feet and pleading for them to stay steady on my quest forward. I scoured the internet for any advice I could find, discovering hundreds of articles promoting various exercises and activities designed to ease anxiety. For some, I've heard it helps to imagine being someone else. Whether it's a trusted friend or a global superstar like Rihanna, the goal is to fully mimic how that person would behave. They become a shadow of sorts, channeling their idol's easy confidence and charisma. For me, I started approaching conversation as a game—a tactic I still use today, though now I find it more entertaining than anything else. I've discovered that I enjoy having the upper hand in social interactions. Conversation can be surprisingly simple, almost formulaic. I invite someone to speak, compliment them, and bare my teeth in a smile as they inevitably blush under the praise. Sometimes, I lie—easy, mindless statements made just to push myself.

“I love your top!”

“Those earrings are gorgeous!”

No one could ever know it's not the truth. These sugary sweet lies slip off my tongue with a newfound ease, and I've found that speech is more freeing than I ever imagined it could be. Words hold incredible power, and the ability to shape them to get what I want is even more addicting.

In fact, a lot of the time I feel as if I can't shut up. Subconsciously, it might be some deep rooted fear that if I do, I might forget how to speak again. More plainly, I think that I just have a lot of thoughts, many of which have been bubbling beneath the surface for years.

My dad teases me; he says "Gabrielle, you can't have the whole world."

But I want it. I want to experience everything. I want to live in New York and Los Angeles. I want to lounge on balconies in Milan and host dinner parties in Paris. To me, these dreams feel tangible. I can almost taste the richness of the charcuterie I'd politely push past my lips, hear the spark of intrigue in the voice of whoever is sitting across from me. In my mind, it's an easy conversation. I am fresh and clean. I am more human than I have ever been, unguarded, free from my old anger.

"Tell me more!" my audience would demand. I would respond with fervor. "If you insist."

I imagine my voice would be light and excited, my eyes sparkling and my cheeks perhaps a bit too red—rosy from the warmth of the room and the fine French wine. The Earth feels vast and undiscovered. I'm tempted by airplanes and cinema, chasing the knowledge that there's more out there for me to have. There are countless people I've yet to meet and

countless thoughts lurking in the corners of my mind, begging to take physical form. Whether it be through writing or any other art form, I long for an audience to understand me. I still yearn for the sense of connection that eluded me in childhood.

Now, when I feel, I do it completely. My emotions are big and loud. If they were objects, they would take up all the space on their shelf. My thoughts crackle like electricity flowing through a live wire. I hate the quiet of an empty bedroom or a particularly echoey hallway. I love concerts held in clubs and dancing with my friends. I crave the flashing lights and the thumping bass. On multiple occasions, I've found myself standing in the middle of the crowd, letting my eyes slip shut.

You can feel the sweat and perspiration dripping from the bodies brushing against you. You can hear the guitarist shredding on his instrument and the singer belting out the lyrics to the song he believes might just catapult him to stardom. The people surrounding me feel alive and real, completely unlike the fake, plastic peers from my childhood.

Still, even with my anxiety left in the past, the cycle continues. My battle with mental health is not something that will ever completely disappear. The human brain is tricky like that, always fooling you, always one step ahead. Like I said, it's cyclical. Sometimes I fall into silence like it's second nature, almost instinctual. It's all too easy to slip away and let my eyes unfocus, unblinking and unseeing. Sometimes, it's only when I find myself caught, bleeding between the jaws of the wolf,

that I realize I've deviated from my path and veered off course. But now, I trust that I'll keep spinning and spinning, emerging for air once more.

*Gabrielle Gagnon is a Fashion Media and Marketing major. She is from Peabody, MA and danced competitively for 11 years.*

## Beyond the Beat

By

Lica Ineza

On a warm dawn evening, my father and I sat outside our home, watching the birds dance in the sky, their soft chirps blending with the fading light. It was one of those peaceful moments where everything seemed to slow down, and the world felt just right. Out of the blue, my father played a song—"*We Are the World*," written by Michael Jackson. Instantly, the upbeat rhythm caught my attention, and without thinking, I started moving to the beat trying to entertain him as I always did. In my mind, songs had always been just fun background noise, perfect for dancing, but nothing more. Little did I know, this song carried a message far more profound than the beats I enjoyed.

When I sat there trying to think of what the chorus of the song meant, my seven year old was not sure at that time. Well it is just a song that has nothing to do with me. I turned to my left, and saw how my father was not in the same universe I was in right then. The song took no longer than just a blink of an eye to come to its chorus. It was my first time listening to my father sing in a tone that seemed so weak. Wait, what was I not hearing yet from the song?— I did not want to interfere with his feelings, but my heart ached as soon as the chorus popped in my ears: "We are the world, we are the children, we are the ones who make a brighter day, so let's start giving." Suddenly, my mind was somewhere else, a place where my heart was aching as if I had just run a marathon; the sky looked dark, birds were silent, and clouds were falling. Right then, a powerful reminder that every one of us has a role to play came. Whether it's through small acts of kindness or larger contributions, we have the power to create a better world.

I was just seven years old but old enough to notice what was happening around me. They taught us about kindness and loving one another at school, yet the same teachers beat us whenever they felt like it. It went beyond simple punishment—sometimes, it felt more like torture. That is what I thought back then. Each morning, as I got ready, my father would turn on the radio, wanting to know what was happening in the world—and he still does. Back then, I would listen to reports of crime and violence both in our country and abroad. "What was missing was love," I would think almost instinctively before the question fully formed.

I was not sure if it was really that hard for people to love others, but at least I knew respect was something I could give to everyone, just as my parents had always taught me. I distinctly recall the words, "Send them your heart so they know that someone cares, and their lives will be stronger and free." It felt like the antidote to the cruelty and indifference that pervaded my world. Even as a child, I grasped the profound truth that a small act of kindness or a simple display of care could wield significant power in a harsh and unforgiving world.

As I continued to get older, I had to learn more from school. The first time I heard that there had been two world wars, it broke my heart. I always wished we could live in a world without war or conflict, but some classmates said that a world without drama would be worthless. I did not understand what they meant then, not realizing how much movies and media could influence people's perspectives. A song I had heard as a child meant everything I am now, shaping my belief that love is the one thing we need to live fully

and peacefully in this world. I often pray for love because I feel that, without it, peace is impossible.

I wanted to share the song that had changed my perspective on love with everyone, to help them see how mighty kindness and compassion can be. However, as I grew, I realized that only some see things from the same angle. Despite our differences, I held

onto the belief that love can unite us and bring true peace, even if not everyone can see it.

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## Music to my Culture

By

Masha Kozlov

I was always surrounded by my culture growing up. Seeing my immigrant grandparents every weekend their culture was present. In their home we would watch cartoons like *Каждый который живёт на крыше* (Carson, who lived on the roof) or *Ну погоди* (curse you rabbit). We would also eat culture food like latkes. My grandparents both speaking in their native language for the parts I could understand while speaking English whenever I would tilt my head in confusion. Though one of my favorites parts of our culture was music.

Watching older videos of concerts, I grin when I see Филипп Киркоров (Philip Kervoriva, Famous Singer) in bright yellow and red feathers, looking like a phoenix, even with the grainy recording. He would be swaying around while singing. I would be bouncing on and off the couch as if it were a trampoline and with my lack of Russian, trying to sing along while sounding like gibberish. My grandma started teasing me about how much I enjoyed his music. I would play along with her shenanigans, pretending to dramatically faint every time I would hear his name. We ended up giggling together. It was my way to understand the culture they wanted to keep around, even though outdated, grainy CDs.

Once I got older, I became more interest with newest indie horror game being released instead of those “old, grainy” cartoons. With my changing interest I also had stopped going to my grandparents as often. Two days a weekend became one day a weekend, then into a coupe hour a weekend, then the occasionally meeting up. As the time with my grandparents slipped, so did the small bit of culture that I had. Once swimming in a big

ocean of our language turned into small dips of ponds.

Then, my mom ended up getting a new kind of TV cable box. This cable allows for real live shows, movies and other programs that go through the Russian TV network. While my interest wasn't peaked at first, it slowly intriguing me when my mom started watching Russian singing competition shows. Ever heard of *Masked singer* or *The Voice*? They had those shows but in their own version. Well, the one competition I loved the most was *100*. Seeing all these ordinary people go up to a large wall of experts with blank straight face in the music industry with blank straight faces and seeing the transformation into bright smiles and twinkling eyes was a delight! Watching a harmonious singing of the wall of expert with this one person, causing a sole voice into a choir of people together.

This show introduced me to so many songs. While there were songs from many languages (Italian, Spanish, English and of course Russian to name a few) the ones that caught my attention was Russian folk music and Russian songs from older movies. The folk is deep, loud, full of life and natural sound. Think of it as a hypnotizing whale song. Those songs have beautiful harmonies and are a deeply embedded part of our culture which I wish I was enlightened too sooner. The movie songs are whimsical and each having its own deeper meaning. One of my favorite songs from the movie, *Служебный роман* (*Office Romance*), talks about the important of having gratitude to each season, which reflects the specific movie's deeper meaning to have gratitude for everything you get, even if you might not enjoy it. Each song has depth and life to them which causes me to cherish their specific tone.

Now every Friday night my mom and I watch the new episode of 100 with me wrapped in the living room blanket and singing along with my mother if I knew the song. I would listen to the critics of the judges while starting to fully understand them. Sometimes my mom and I would bicker over scores while other times we are crying to heart filled songs.

When I saw my grandparents, I would shock them because not only did I understand them better after watching those shows and movies, but my words were cleaner and more understandable. Once, I had said “Странно”

(Strange) to my grandmother and she giggle. I tilted my head, and she explained “Masha that is an abnormal word to know. Out of all words you could have learned you learned a barely used word, so it just caught me off guard that’s all”. I got such a warm fuzzy feeling from this and told her thank you. This was my connection back to them, and the culture that they can experience through me once again.

# Rhetorical Analysis

By

Freddie Matthis

The rise of Charli XCX's *Brat* album has garnered the singer immeasurable success, coupled of course with plenty of controversy surrounding the composition and content of the album. The album was released during the height of the "Indie Sleaze" revival during summer 2024, a movement which glorified wild and reckless behavior during a time where life feels uncontrollable, an idea which the *Brat* album portrayed exceptionally well. The album also saw popularity for its versatility, with the lyrics showing a wide range of emotion and turmoil, all done over different club beats. Though perhaps what made the album most famous was its instantly recognizable branding, consisting of the color neon green and a simple black "arial" font, which was pasted over countless pieces of merchandise.

Of course, any piece of work garnering as much attention as *Brat* is bound to illicit some criticism. Many people criticized the "trashy" nature of the album's lyrics, deeming them as demeaning and unpleasant. Others took issue with the repetitive instrumentals found in many of the songs on the album, or the low-effort design of the album cover and its subsequent merchandise. This of course spawned a nation-wide discussion of the album, and whether or not *Brat* was a well-produced or generally "good" album. Some critics, like Meaghan Garvey, praised the album for its presentation of serious topics through a "party girl" lense, whereas critics like Darlsei claimed the album was unlistenable and unbearably repetitive. In my opinion, Meaghan Garvey presents a stronger argument in favor of the *Brat* album, mainly due to the indepth research presented, the detailed look at each of the songs on the track list, and the

professional language used.

Garvey's review makes an especially strong case for the artistic value of the *Brat* album through its use of research and exposition to explain the decisions Charli made. Garvey describes the influences for *Brat* as, "An homage to French dance music of the late '90s and 2000s, from the euphoric filter house of Crydamoure and Roulé to Ed Banger's heavy metal disco, *BRAT* delivers." (Garvey, 2024, pg. 2). *Brat* is a very sonically complex, and at times overwhelming, piece of work. As a result, it can be difficult for new listeners of Charli XCX to understand the vision or decisions made, especially if it's a listener's first time delving into genres like hyperpop or house music. Garvey's presentation of an extensive list of the references used in creating the album helps to not only explain the decisions that Charli made, but also to give readers other artists to listen to and research for themselves, as a way to better cultivate their understanding of the *Brat* album. If a listener can cross-reference some older, and in some cases more palatable, pieces of media like Crydamoure or Ed Banger while listening to *Brat* it creates a greater sense of understanding for the listener, and in turn helps that listener to understand Garvey's argument better. Garvey's decision to add a list of references is a great strength to her Ethos, as it makes her feel much more cultured and knowledgeable on the music industry as a whole, rather than just focusing in on one piece of music.

In addition to the references for *Brat*, Garvey provides exceptional reasoning as to why past decisions in Charli's music career and personal life led up to the creation of *Brat*. Garvey

writes, “It’s also a reaction, as Charli’s records tend to be: to the focus-grouped monotony of playlist-fodder pop, the tedium of our current “authenticity” obsession, and to her previous album, 2022’s *Crash*, which posed the question: ‘What might it sound like if I *did* sell out?’” (Garvey, 2024, pg. 1). Garvey’s inclusion of Charli’s personal thoughts and ideas when creating *Brat* strengthens her Pathos, as it endears the readers to Charli by giving them a sense of understanding to her creative process, and a sense of empathy for her personal challenges.

Garvey’s inclusion of Charli’s opinions on the monotony of modern-day pop is a widely shared sentiment by many people who feel drawn to the indie sleaze revival, and helps further strengthen Garvey’s argument by creating a sense of agreement between the reader and Charli. Feeling seen, or at the very least understood, by any piece of media is especially important, especially for songwriters, as it’s how they establish that connection with their fanbase. Garvey’s use of Pathos through explaining Charli’s creative process serves as a major strength to her argument, and further endears Charli to the listeners of the *Brat* album.

Darlsei’s review of *Brat* also includes evidence of his research into Charli’s past work, however it fails to utilize this research in a way that justifies his review of the album. Darlsei writes, “...but after listening to some of her other work, I think I finally see the appeal behind BRAT. It’s definitely the best thing she has ever made, though there isn’t any competition there considering the other two Charli albums I’ve listened to I gave genuine 0s.” (Darlsei 2024 pg. 1) Darlsei’s disdain for Charli’s past work serves as the extent to which he elaborates on his research prior to reviewing the *Brat* album. While this does give evidence that he has given time to Charli’s work outside of *Brat*, the way he phrases it

serves as a detriment to his Ethos. Rather than elaborating on what specifically caused his negative opinion on Charli’s past albums, or even naming which albums he had listened to, he simply disregards her past work as a “zero”, and promptly moves on to his next idea. Additionally, his failure to connect any of Charli’s past work to the *Brat* album feels like a missed opportunity, especially since much of her work is interlaced with similar ideals and struggles that are relevant from album to album. Darlsei’s use of research as a whole is rather self-focused, and is not applied to the *Brat* album in a way that gives any insight into Charli’s thought process, or even the music industry as a whole, which serves as a detriment to his Ethos.

Shifting focus, Garvey strengthens her argument through her in-depth look at each of the songs on the track list, explaining how each track offers a different emotion or beat which strengthens *Brat*’s overall appeal. Through her thoughts on the song “‘Rewind,’ a love letter to MySpace-era naivety, is served up in ditzzy spoken word somewhere between Uffie’s ‘Pop the

Glock’ and *The Teaches of Peaches*. Charli reprises the affect on ‘Girl, so confusing,’” (Garvey 2024 pg. 3), Garvey displays a brief but valuable insight on each song on the album, smoothly transitioning from track to track. This in-depth look at each track strengthens Garvey’s Logos, as it helps to explain her argument in favor of *Brat* through discussing each of the smaller pieces that compose the album at length. Additionally, *Brat*’s tracks are pretty varied in subject matter, so it’s important to discuss each aspect of the track list, as each song brings something entirely different to the album. After all, each song in an album plays a different role in the listening experience, and explaining how each of those attributes to a positive listening experience, rather than making a general

statement about the album, presents a stronger argument.

Darlsei's review also offers an in-depth look at each track, where he gives decently varied opinions on each track, but even the positive reviews come with malicious jabs at Charli herself. Darlsei writes, "The production is bouncy and has a push-pull unlike pretty much any other EDM I've ever laid my ears on, the autotune is tasteful and not overdone (for once in her damned career), and the chorus is catchy as all hell." (Darlsei 2024 pg. 1). Darlsei's use of "for once in her damned career" present a clear lack of separation between the art and artist, and immediately shows his bias against Charli XCX. This undercuts his Ethos by making him seem bitter and hateful towards Charli, without any real reason for doing so. It also takes focus away from the album itself, and brings in a kind of out-of-left-field opinion about Charli as a person rather than the content of her music. These negative jabs from Darlsei make his argument seem biased and a little unprofessional, given how out of place and at times malicious the comments are. Additionally, the negative jabs seem to cloud Darlsei's judgement, as he even works them into the songs he likes, preventing him from truly praising any aspect of *Brat*.

Garvey's review discusses *Brat* with an educated and professional tone, which, regardless of content, is important when talking about any body of work. Garvey writes, "The imperial streak continues on its follow-up, "Club classics," over whose stripped-down bounce she declares her intentions to dance to her own tracks all night." (Garvey 2024 pg. 2). The song Garvey writes about, "Club Classics" is an admittedly simple and slightly vapid song about going to the club, drinking excessively, and dancing. However, Garvey still treats the song with the same level of respect and professionalism

when discussing it. Garvey's tone throughout the review is remarkably professional and objective, only critiquing the content of *Brat*, rather than

Charli herself, which is a credit to Garvey's Ethos. Her ability to discuss a song with somewhat "inappropriate" content while remaining professional and keeping an educated tone is commendable, as some reviewers could easily treat the song with equally unprofessional language, rather than respectfully discussing the actual lyrical content of the song.

While it does not make an argument entirely invalid to use profanity, Darlsei's use of crude language feels misplaced and unnecessary when talking about *Brat*. Darlsei writes, "While the occasional pure club moments fuck hard, and there are amazing songs on the project in the front end + 365, there just is nowhere near enough substance to justify the scores I've seen this album receive." (Darlsei 2024 pg. 1). Darlsei saying that the pure club moments "fuck hard", while certainly accurately expressing his feelings towards the album, undercuts the otherwise well-constructed and logical claims he makes regarding the songs on *Brat*. Profanity does not render an argument entirely invalid, but the manner in which "fuck hard" was shoehorned into this otherwise professional sentence feels unnecessary, and also creates a sense of casualness and unprofessionalism to the album review as a whole. Once again, this serves as a detriment to Darlsei's Ethos, not only because it takes away from the professionalism of his writing, but also shows his inability to properly convey tone in a sentence, due to the lack of balance in his writing between unnecessary profanity and genuinely well-written insight.

To conclude, Meaghan Garvey's review of the *Brat* album by Charli XCX makes a much stronger argument than Darlsei's review, due

to the use of research into Charli's past musical endeavors and personal life, the detailed overlook at each song on the album, and the overall professional tone and language used. In a time where more risqué and profane topics in artwork are more prevalent than ever, it's important to be able to debate these topics respectfully and thoughtfully, rather than disregarding these works as "inappropriate" or "trashy". While Charli

XCX's *Brat* is glorification of a somewhat reckless and vapid lifestyle, it's also an exploration of the need for escapism and fun in an unsure and scary modern era, which some people might not understand through a quick, ill-informed glance at the album.

# Menendez Brothers' Future Freedom

By  
Sophie Peek

## Part 1: Social Media

Lyle Menendez and Erik Menendez have recently debated whether they are victims of a flawed justice system or victims of their actions. Kim Kardashian, an aspiring lawyer and well-known public figure, recently used her platform to discuss this topic. She expresses that everyone is a product of their environment and alludes to this explaining the brother's actions. By using ethos, pathos, and logos, she attempts to persuade readers into believing they deserve to be freed. Her influential lifestyle may cloud readers' opinions but she uses literary appeals to combat it.

This post claims that the Menendez brothers should be proven innocent and freed. Kim Kardashian used ethos, pathos, and logos to persuade viewers to sympathize with the brothers.

She targets viewers who feel their case is biased and unfair. Kim stands for Lyle Menendez and Erik Menendez and believes their story should be re-evaluated. She was intelligent enough to use her platform, 360 million followers, to spread a message. Her following base is prominently Gen-Z and women from the ages of 18-34. She does not directly address any demographics within her post as she uses "we" to generalize her message. This post appeared on my feed because I follow Kim on Instagram and because I have been researching and watching the Menendez brothers documentary.

Kim Kardashian (2024) establishes credibility for herself by ending the post description with "The entirety of my essay on the Menendez Brothers is on the link in my bio or at @nbcnews". This shows that her statement was published by a credible and well-known news source. This relates to her claim because Kim states "It's time for the Menendez brothers to be freed." (2024). As well, she argues that people would not say they are the same person they were when they were eighteen. She attempts to establish more credibility by relating to her statement and responding with "I know I'm not!" (Kim Kardashian 2024) within the post. Her confidence can lead readers into further believing that she has an understanding of growth and bettering yourself as a person over time.

Kim clearly states that time changes people. She aims for people who value change to defend this post because it engages them the most. Additionally, her concise sentence framing builds emotion and contributes to the message. She uses a persuasive tone to appeal to the reader's sensitivity and empathy; Thus, the audience is made to question what they know about the Menendez brothers' case and trial. Kim Kardashian (2024) closes her post by saying "You think you know the story of Lyle and Erik Menendez. I certainly thought I did.". This leads readers to have doubt, minus her loyal followers who will believe anything she posts and says.

Kim uses logos throughout her short paragraph by elaborating on the idea of *being a product of your environment*. Because of her tone and use of logical proof, she's able to convince readers that Lyle and Erik Menendez deserve to be released from prison. Kim Kardashian uses deductive reasoning to address the key idea of redefining yourself with time. This method is effective because it connects readers and allows them to foster empathy for the situation; Therefore, people will favor the brother's innocence.

## Part 2: News Article

Kim Kardashian recently posted an Instagram post containing a short bio of the Menendez brothers. The black and white photo of Erik and Lyle Menendez was just a plug for her to mention her essay uploaded on NBCnews.com. She makes multiple arguments with pathos, logos, and egos within this. Her literary devices help readers grasp the magnitude of this case and reflect on their trial.

Kim Kardashian's essay, "Kim Kardashian says it's time for the Menendez brothers to be freed", was uploaded on NBC's website on October 3rd, 2024. The purpose of this piece is to urge people to reconsider the fairness of the trial. With the use of literary devices, it is obvious where she stands. This is an opinion editorial because Kim displays bias in Erik and Lyle's favor. She uses ethos in hopes of gaining credibility and trusting readers. Furthermore, she uses pathos to help readers feel sympathy and logos to make readers reevaluate the Menendez brother's case. Kardashian tries to gain the support of her followers and others from this article because

it will benefit the brothers for their possible release.

Kim Kardashian has 359 million followers on Instagram which is where she posted information about her essay. She wanted to reach a younger demographic because her platform is a majority of teenagers and young adults. As well, using a national news outlet allows her to reach other demographics apart from her following. Due to her general tone, it is clear there is not a super specific target audience. She uses language like "we", "I", and "you" to generalize her message to the readers. Because she is being direct, this news source essay can be read by anyone and they'll have the ability to sympathize.

Kim Kardashian is the author of this piece; she is a well-known public figure, influencer, and advocate for justice reformation. There are multiple ways she establishes ethos within her essay. She states, "I have spent time with Lyle and Erik, they are not monsters." Kardashian (2024), continues, "In prison, they both have exemplary disciplinary records. They have earned multiple college degrees, worked as caregivers..., and been mentors in college programs." She explains all the qualifications and achievements the brothers have made in their time incarcerated. As she validates herself, she also works on creating a trusting image of Erik and Lyle. Kim further elaborates on the matured individuals by explaining a conversation between her and a guard; he simply describes how comfortable he'd be if the brothers were his neighbors. As a reader, hearing claims like this makes it easier to trust Kim as she fights for people's sympathy. Moreover, she uploaded her essay to NBC News with high hopes of establishing

and gaining the reader's trust. NBC is a mainstream source for people to read the newest headlines. They are known for leaning left and posting credible stories. Kim used the reputation to help establish her credibility, although she is not their lawyer, because it will benefit Erik and Lyle once, hopefully, given a re-trial and released.

The story of Erik and Lyle Menendez is controversial and heart-wrenching. Kim Kardashian uses this to her advantage while explaining the truth of the brother's horrors and why their trial was unjust. The beginning and end of her essay use inclusive language like “we” to bring readers closer to the situation and build an emotional connection. After elaborating on the case, Kim Kardashian closes her essay by saying “We owe it to those little boys who lost their childhoods, who never had a chance to be heard, helped, or saved.”. The audience is made to feel sorry for their situation, which then will provoke motivation to help make a difference. Kim Kardashian touches on sensitive situations and subjects so readers relate or sympathize with what Erik and Lyle Menendez endured.

With the brother's case being such a heavy topic, Kim Kardashian must have a well-structured essay that provides facts and reasoning for readers to better understand. Kim Kardashian (2024) explains “We are all products of our experiences. They shape who we were, who we are, and who we will be.”. This statement appeals to readers because it uses inclusive language which invites readers to feel the emotional hold a childhood can have on someone. By doing this, she can

establish an overall theme through this personal essay. Kim Kardashian does a good job of elaborating on her statements with pathos because she encrypts each argument with logos as well.

### Part 3: Peer-Reviewed Journal Article

Between three different sources, Kim Kardashians' argument to give Erik and Lyle Menendez a fair retrial is backed up by reasonable evidence. “Murder in the Family: The Menendez Brothers” is a peer-reviewed article, a part of “Victim and Offenders”, by Ann Mulvey, Amelia Fournier, and Tereasa Donahue in 2006. This article defines a premeditated and self-defense verdict concerning the Menedez brothers case. Both Mulvey et al., and Kardashian raise the question “*Should sexual trauma be a mitigating factor?*”; their question is left for readers to use their compassion and reasoning because of the literary techniques, ethos, pathos, and logos.

Erik and Lyle Menendez were found guilty of two counts of first-degree murder on March 20, 1996. The jury and judge decided that the murder was planned and the brothers deserved a life in prison. Mulvey et al. (2006), touches on the childhood traumas both had to face. This article covers sections that contain information on “critical review of related research”, “ethical considerations”, “forensic implications”, and “discussion of outcomes”. The authors first elaborate on the brothers’ suffering and how it connects to their actions. Mulvey et al. (2006), explained what goes into consideration when declaring a verdict to be an act of self-defense or premeditated. By doing so it allows readers to gather logical

information to decide what they believe to be true.

“Murder in the Family: The Menendez Brothers” is part of a larger peer-reviewed journal called “Victims and Offenders”. This journal is described in the abstract as “an opportunity for researchers to publish articles that examine victimization and offending topics from a variety”. This journal is constructed by many professors and graduates who studied criminology, justice studies, or psychology. That said, this journal article's intended audience would be legal scholars, lawyers, students, or graduates of criminal justice, and psychology. It is also possible those interested in the Menendez brothers case can find this article, but they'd need to gain access to it. The demographic for readers would be those in college or graduated because the language requires a higher education level.

The main authors are Mulvey, Fournier, and Donahue, all associated with Boston College. This article was published by the Taylor and Francis Group, which is known for publishing professional and academic pieces. They ensure the honesty of every piece published by having a well-constructed peer review system. Also, the Taylor and Francis Group ensures all of those who are building and reviewing understand the company's ethics and standards. Throughout the writing, credit is given to all the references studied to produce this journal article. The framework of this article establishes credibility by defining each section and following up with facts and information. Furthermore, having simple sentence lead-ins and in-text citations shows readers that the research was well constructed

and the facts are resourced by other highly established scholars.

The one main use of pathos in this article is when discussing the traumas both boys suffered from. Language was used to express the severity of their childhood experiences, and the crimes they committed. Depending on what section, the language was biased towards one side. In the case it was biased towards the brother's argument, Mulvey et al., (2006), would state things like “childhood experiences are known to have consequences on into adulthood” and “after years of sexual, psychological, and physical abuse they were afraid for their own lives”.

By explaining the causation of Erik and Lyle Menendez's actions, the authors can grab readers' compassion because everyone understands how childhood affects the person one becomes. On the other hand, if the argument wanted to prove the prosecutors right, it would mention the “abuse excuse”. This tactic was meant to invalidate the horrendous situation of torture the boys endured for the majority of their lives and combat the juror's emotions. Disabling their ability to feel compassion and turn that into disgust was a commonly used strategy. This article allows readers to form their own opinions because pathos is used in both arguments to defend and prosecute Erik and Lyle Menendez.

Each section in this article contains arguments and information that is defended with logoi. At the beginning of the editorial, Mulvey uses a statistic to build a foundation for her argument; “As many as 16 percent of men in

the United States experience childhood sexual abuse, leading to immediate as well as long-term consequences (Molnar et al., 2001)”.

With this being the introduction to the author's topic it allows readers to accept the fact abuse will bring ongoing struggles to victims' future lives. By using causation, the authors establish an obvious connection between Erik and Lyles's childhoods and their actions and outcomes. Mulvey et al., (2006), stated “It is known that incestuous activity, as well as childhood sexual abuse, in general leads to an increased incidence of psychopathology” and “The study reveals that the traumatic experience of childhood sexual abuse can ultimately impair the psychological functioning of the victim long-term.”. Elaborating on the cause and effect makes it hard for readers to dispute the argument.

#### Part 4: Presentation

Kim Kardashian's Instagram post, personal essay ‘Kim Kardashian says it’s time for the Menendez brothers to be freed’, and Ann Mulvey, et al. ‘Murder in the Family: The Menendez Brothers’ all address Erik and Lyle Menendez's actions. All three sources use ethos, pathos, and logos. Between Kardashians' post and article, there is slight ethos, but Mulvey, et al. article displays more points defining her credibility. The emotional appeal was typically used when discussing the horrors both Erik and Lyle Menendez suffered from while growing up. All articles

use logical techniques to poke at the reader's heartstrings and provide facts to validate claims.

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Be Aware  
By  
Macayla Plante

*Please Note: This story contains details of harassment that may be triggering to some readers.*

Stepping foot into the empty, messy restaurant unknowing of who to ask if they were hiring, then from across the room, I hear an echoing deep voice who welcomes me with a firm handshake and a smile. Later I learned his name is John, a tall graying 60 year old man and the owner and only chef. As we sit down for an on-the-spot interview he is more interested in who I am as a person, asking about my favorite food, what town I live in, if I do sports, more specific personal questions rather than information about my job history and background. After chatting for a moment, in all confidence John looks me in the eyes and says, "Can you start tomorrow?" Quickly thinking of ways to say no; not having paperwork filled out, I have work tomorrow at my other job, every reason doesn't matter to him. Finally, I broke, I uttered yes, I can start tomorrow at 6:30am.

Day one I optimistically walk in and it's just him and me for now. Hour two he gives me a \$2 raise, and with a surprised look on my face I say "thank you this is highly appreciated". This entire time I think this was small talk just to start up a conversation when the kitchen got quiet and boring. "I love your eyes", "How long is your hair?", "Let me see your hair down later" I never thought anything of it then. Why should I?

Now it's day two. We started prep for the morning by turning on all the equipment. As I started to cut all the fruit, he realized we had no more pineapples for the fruit salad. He sent me to the grocery store for three

pineapples; he gave me \$40 and let me keep the change.

I come back with the pineapples and the day goes by normally, until he stops me while I am in the middle of an order and tells me that he has a bonus for me. A bonus? It's my second day, on top of the \$2 raise and the \$20 change. As he cautiously gives me the money, I think to myself that it wouldn't be more than \$20. I look down into my hand and see a crumpled up \$100 bill! Why? I ask and his answer is that I have a lot of potential and he thinks I will go far in life with my skill and attitude. Thanks, I say as HE HUGS ME. Personally I am not a physical person meaning I don't like or go in for hugs, a handshake at most for me. That hug made me stop and almost made me want to hide, in a way of wanting to be left alone. It's now nearing the end of the day when it's time to close and clean up, a woman shows up and she introduces herself as John's wife, Jenn. She is a considerate and friendly person who seems to be a pleasant person to work with. It's 2:00 pm. John is leaving to go home to Fall River, about 2 hours away. As he is getting ready to leave, he calls me over to hug me goodbye. I awkwardly side-hug him, and he tells me that wasn't a good enough hug. We hug again, and as I go to walk away, he gives me an unwanted goodbye kiss on the cheek. When he finally goes to his car I run to the bathroom in disbelief of why he would ever think that was ok, my boss of 2 days is kissing me goodbye? I say in question to myself

looking in the bathroom mirror. While Jenn is here to clean alone, I decided to help her clean and tidy up the kitchen because it only felt right. As I was rapidly taking out the trash, seeing bugs on the floor scurrying around, the very few words Jenn said to me throughout my time there was that John “really liked” me. I found it odd since it's only my second shift, but I responded in a way that I was thankful for the compliment.

Good morning, it's day three. “I was just thinking about you. I missed you” is the first thing he says to me. Throughout the day as I was trying to work on the line with tickets rolling in, he'd try to hold my hand and him making me repeat him in his ear made me uncomfortable. I even thought that he saw me as vulnerable and gullible. I gave him a look, but he continued. He tells me I make his heart pound out of his chest. I started to wonder, but still I never said anything. The same comments continue for another shift but now it's day five and the comments are getting worse, talking about how he would want to see me out of work, like my soccer games. Which I found odd since that would be time consuming and out of the way because he lives over an hour away. He knew what high school I went to so when it came to our home games I was worried he would show up and sit at the empty bleachers. He'd mention my necklace I wore at the time with the letter C on it for my, at the time boyfriend, when I told him the meaning of the initial, he would tell me that he was going to win, attempting to convince me how he is better than him. Why would a 60-year-old man be saying this to me especially knowing my age is under 18. John also brought up that he does real estate

and how if I ever needed housing to ask specifically him, “I would do anything you ask me” he would tell me on more than one occasion. I'm now beyond suspicious but haven't fully put the pieces together seeing that this could be terrible. The next day this is the day I realize this isn't normal behavior.

Day six was a quiet morning just him and I and he started up a conversation asking if I would like to ever go to Canada, it's a beautiful place to visit. I give a dry response thinking that will help but it does the opposite he later starts pinching my side asking if I liked it. As I'm working on carefully cutting the vegetables he tries to hold my hand on the line. Comments of him wanting to see me with less clothes on, he sees the uncomfortable look I have on my face and the distance I am giving him, so he lures me in by giving me another bonus of \$150. The shift is over and as I sit in my car it hits me like a ton of bricks, the realization of what is happening in only 6 days, 50 hours of working. What would happen if I never put things together? So many thoughts go through my head, but I have learned an incredible amount from this experience that I would never think would happen. Learning how to say no in a serious, stern way is important and now I need to enforce it and try not to be so nice when I don't want something. Trust is a huge part of life, but you must understand when trust is broken and why. People are tricky and will try their best to get all of your trust towards them so you would never think of any poor treatment that could be going on towards yourself or others around you. Being worried that someone won't like you or will be upset at you for saying how you feel about what

they are doing that you disagree with shouldn't be a reality but for me I always want people to think the best of me, so I'll go with the flow with most situations. In this day and age, you always have to be aware and stay alert.

To take action in this situation, what I did was immediately told my mom my suspicions and how I am starting to think it's getting too far and how everyday it is getting worse with the comments and how it began to gradually get physical. Of course hearing this from your child as a parent must be difficult and shocking so she needed the rest of the day to process what I am telling her in a panicked voice of realization. When I started to truly think it through and say all he has done out loud is when I was stunned and couldn't believe that it was all true, it all started to add up. From the silence of that night I knew my mom was worried, frightened, and sickened, since the only written information he had of mine was my address and phone number. I sent John a last minute text saying I cannot come into work in the morning, but in the afternoon my mom and I would like to come and look over paperwork that he was supposedly "working on". The following day rolls around and my nerves are through the roof. We drove to the restaurant, it was loud, busy, and stuffy. We find a seat and patiently wait for a waitress who never came because of how short staffed it was. My mom, who is on her last nerve, practically can see steam coming out of her ears, tells me to find John, NOW. I go into the boiling kitchen and John is too busy to talk but Jenn will be here soon. Now my mom is over it, she is done. We go back to the car and as I am driving away I see

John standing outside waving us down. I point out that he is right there and my mom goes and has a stern talk with him. I have the car door ajar so I can listen, I am invested in what she will announce. All was good until John started to defend himself and make the situation not how it seems to my mom. Calling him out in front of his own restaurant, exposing him for his words. Raising of my moms voice made John give a snarky apology as he wrote my final check on the spot. As he handed the check, she handed the uniform. Finally we drift off in the car on our way to the police station.

This police station got me anxious and nervous, not a car in the parking lot, nobody when we walked in, and the subtle high pitched ring from the silence. Uneasy, I start writing my complaint down along with my information when a police officer strolls through the door. Scared to talk about my experience my mom looks at me to speak up to the cop. Stuttering and quiet I say everything, in detail, and how poorly it made me feel. The police officer who is in awe cant believe what has been happening just down the road. Disgusted, he gets another police officer to hear this story and to go over what should happen. The second officer walks through the door and listens. No other complaints have been made against John so it was suggested to just have his name written down as a complaint for if unfortunately this happens again and someone complains about the same guy.

It's now one year from that incident and this summer the same situation happened with two other girls. They had the same experience as me and one did end up going to the police

about it. Not sure what actions the police did towards John or his restaurant but I do see frequent posts coming from the restaurants social media and how they are still urgently hiring and in dire need of staff. I hope the police went over to speak with John to put some sense into him about how he is acting towards young girls. I never would want this to happen to anyone else and especially if they didn't realize it in time, who knows what he is capable of doing or what his overall goal was with only hiring young girls for him to work with and cross the line.

When I hear “could it have been prevented?” It makes me feel as if it was my fault. Which is far from the case, and although there could have been measures of avoidance there were very few directions to go to be protected. For this being the instance, there was nothing done on my end that praised his doings to make him act the way did. This should have never happened in the first place and it is disturbing that it did, in such a short amount of time. Directly after this event I wished it never happened, it did change me as a person for both the better and for worse. This made me a stronger person in the long run but for months after, I was scared. I dragged on trying to find another job in fear the same issue would occur although I have had great experiences with my past jobs. The one bad job I had exposure to overshadowed every other job and volunteering I had done because of the dramatic effect and fear it had on me, one bad experience won over the 6 good jobs I was involved in. I dreaded moving forward because I felt stuck and so unknowing of what's around me. I never had an instance where “stranger danger” was in

fact true, and although I worked with him it was a little amount of time where he was unknown to me. I am such a people pleaser and want everyone to enjoy my presence (which clearly John did) but the major issue with that is saying and meaning the word no. I believe that John did see me as young and weak so he thought he could take advantage of me, I need to stop going along with things and what scares me the most is if I never caught on with what he was doing to me.

This was all about the moment of realization for me and unfortunately not everyone gets that so soon. I am so grateful for the resources I have around me like the helpful and available police officers who listened, cared, and took action with my complaint towards John. Before this happened I had not a clue or suspension of this, I have never had anything close like that happen to me and I don't hear about it often on Cape Cod. During my time working there which again was only 6 shifts, 50 hours, so much had happened and it was all so fast. Felt so sudden but it was all in slow motion. Unknowing of what he was attempting to do but what I did feel was the bribery happening with the constant luring of the bonuses, over \$250 in a few days to counteract the wrong that was happening. After this experience the way I feel would be relieved that I did tell someone I trusted and took immediate action when I knew what was starting to happen towards me. I handled myself well and did what needed to be done quickly, where I didn't let this slide or just shrug my shoulders at. This was a serious situation and I like to think I did good in this bad. The overall message I want

you to get from reading this is to always be aware.

*Macayla Plante is a Marketing major with a minor in entrepreneurship. She is from Cape Cod, MA,*

*went to culinary high school, and ran a functioning small business in the food industry as a project.*

## Bees and Flowers

By  
Katty Rolffe

I took my seat next to the same girl who I'd been sitting next to all year. She had dark shoulder-length hair, braces, and glasses that reminded me of my own. She was incredibly smart too, making every concept or idea seem easy. Her name is Sammy, and somehow, we always ended up sitting together: just the two of us at a table. It was rare for either of us to strike up a conversation with the other, as we were both extremely shy kids and would much rather keep our heads down. I'm not sure what changed, if anything, but as we sat together day after day we became somewhat like friends. What I realize now is that stupid math class which I hated and that dumb seating chart would bring me something I'd find nowhere else.

We started high school together in a big brand new school, and we had been best friends since that math class back in seventh grade. We shared multiple classes, as we were both high achievers and honors students. It was nice being able to face something new with someone I was familiar with. My courage built up day after day and every little block seemed to fall in place for my future. Sammy and I would talk all day and hang out after school in the town center, and this helped me breeze through the first two semesters. I had managed to keep school and my free time balanced. But just like a storm rolling in, things began to change for me. Years of problems that I ignored and trauma endured piled up until it was too much for me to handle. Every day slowly became more and more of a struggle, and I was hurting myself mentally and physically. I cut people off, as I didn't want anyone to see what I was doing to myself, especially Sammy. I couldn't bring myself to admit what was happening, and so every cut on my body and every missed day of

school was explained away into nothing. By the end of freshman year, I had fallen so badly into these habits and behaviors that I believed I was too far gone to receive help, so I never asked for it.

Things only got worse when sophomore year came around. That summer, I had a bad falling out with someone I loved and I lost another friend to suicide. After all that I had been through, I couldn't fight anymore. I had been in sophomore year for only a month before I was rushed to the hospital in critical condition after a serious suicide attempt. I don't remember falling to the ground, I don't remember vomiting pills all over the floor, and I don't remember my parents' begging to get me into the car. But what I do remember is my mother's weepy eyes as I was loaded into the large MedFlight ambulance, in the middle of the night, to be taken to Boston. I laid in the ICU for over a week before I was transferred to yet another hospital.

Sammy was the only one who recognized my absence at school, and she reached out day after day to try and find me. She finally got through to the hospital phone and I could talk to her, but I didn't have the guts to tell her what happened. She understood without a word, and we would talk every free time we shared. She was always soft in the way she spoke and I found that to be a comfort. When I didn't feel like talking, she would tell me about what new crazy thing was happening at school. It was calming to listen to her, both for her gentle voice and the feeling I got that I wasn't isolated. She called for the whole four months I was there. Four months of individual therapy, group therapy, DBT, CBT, expressional art, quarantines, emergencies, restrictions, good days and horrible days. Yet,

she still sent me letters and cards every holiday or special occasion, filling me in on what I was missing and gently reminding me that I was enough. Reminding me that no matter what, I could always talk to her, and that everything would be fine. In a letter she sent me around New Year's, she wrote:

“I hope you're doing good . . . I'm glad we've been able to talk. I've definitely missed seeing you! I know I'm bad at talking, but if you ever want to talk about anything I'm here.”

When I thanked her for her genuine kind words, she would say that she “wasn't good with words,” and that “it's what any good friend would do.” Those four months were some of the worst in my life, but the constant reassurance that I was not alone, and that I had a home, helped me more than anyone knew.

Later, I was transferred yet again to a different hospital, but this one was a long-term residential facility. I would end up staying there for nine months. I had more freedom than I did at the last hospital; that along with the stress of moving led to some tough crisis situations in the beginning. I was in a completely new environment with nobody that I knew, and I felt isolated. I was miserable, and my emotions were all thrown around into a pile of sludge as I tried to adjust to my new setting. Still, Sammy got the new number and would wish me well at my new place and tell me that she missed me. She never panicked when I told her I was in the emergency room three times that week, or that I had 39 stitches and glue across both my arms. She always wished and hoped that I would get better. In the first letter she sent me since the move, she wrote:

“I hope you're doing well at your new place. I've missed seeing you, but I'm glad you're getting better. You really don't need to thank me, of course I'll be here for you, and talking to you makes me feel better, too (despite my

horrible conversation skills) . . . I hope I can see you soon and if you need anything, I'm here.”

Her soft tone and comforting words helped me settle down in my new environment. I focused on myself, and truly, in those nine months I did get better. I made the best of my recovery and outshined everyone's expectations. I connected with people and engaged in treatment. I gained my confidence back, and along with that came my mental health. Slowly but surely, I had crawled my way out of that hell. I started receiving home passes and overnight sleepaways, to get myself adjusted to being home again. And after almost 14 months of rigorous treatment, severe restrictions, and mental battles I had finally come out victorious. I was ready to leave the hospital for good and put my struggles behind me. However, mental health can be a chronic issue, as was the case for me. And as such your illnesses never truly leave you, but I learned to be okay with that. That was the last lesson I learned in the hospital.

In the half hour before I left, I talked to Sammy. I'm sure nothing I said made any sense, but I told her I was coming home. Forever.

I gave my last hugs to the other kids and staff in my unit. I knew it was going to be hard leaving the people who had grown to feel like family, people who had helped me get my life back. I knew there was a lot of heartache ahead but the achievement of going home carried me through. I ran outside, through the pouring rain, and threw the last of my belongings into my mom's car.

I couldn't quite grasp the fact that this was it, this was the last time I'd ever be here. The rain felt like a fitting end to a dramatic movie, and as I got soaked standing in front of the building, my clinician came to say goodbye. I thanked him for all he had done, because he had genuinely helped me make my future

secure and safe. I hopped in the car before he could see me cry and together my mother and I started driving home, through the pitch black night and dark puddles.

Sammy and I met up in our town center for the first time in almost two years. I had taken a few months to adjust to being home, but I knew that I had to go and see her. I thought that without having seen each other in person for so long, it would be awkward and that maybe we had drifted apart. But Sammy is the kind of person that no matter how much time passes, you can meet up and it feels like no time passed at all. We walked around the town just like we did in middle school, shooting the breeze and laughing. After that, it truly felt like I had made it home.

While I had switched schools, I still fulfilled the requirements to graduate from my first high school, where Sammy still attended. We met back up during graduation, and while I was in a terrible mood, Sammy managed to brighten my day nonetheless. She made me forget about all of the things I was upset about, and made me focus on all that we had accomplished. Truthfully, it was hard to see everyone I had grown up with not recognize me and it had upset me to see that Sammy had become close friends with others since I went away. I knew it was ridiculous, as I had done the same, but honestly at that moment my head swirled with mixed emotions. Still, I made it through graduation and together we threw our caps in the air and promised to meet before college.

And so we did; we met up yet again in the same town center on the same bench. She was

flying to New York the next day for school, while I was staying here in Massachusetts. It was hard knowing that this would be the last time I would see her for a while, as we'd always just been a short drive away since we met. However, I knew that we'd still be close no matter where we were. I had realized that even though I was jealous at graduation, none of it mattered. Nothing was going to break our bond. Sammy had done so much for me, she had shown me love when I was in a place where it was hard to accept. She stayed with me during the days where I pushed her away. She had never stopped caring no matter what I went through and always made me feel like I was enough. I was never met with judgment, only kindness and understanding. My problems were never too much for her; I was never a burden.

The sun started to set as we watched, knowing that it was time to go. I smiled as we said our goodbyes, and as I left I felt relieved. No matter what state we're in, what school, in or out of the hospital, we'll always have that connection. In my life, I've never met anyone else like her, no one else shares that bond with me. I know year after year, just like spring, we'll find each other. Just as much as bees love flowers, the flowers love bees.

*Katty Rolfe is a Forensics major at Lasell University. She is from Carlisle, MA and has a great passion for school and learning.*

# Bullying the Black Sheep

By

Karla Rosado

Since I was a kid I have always felt like a freak, an outcast. I never fit in anywhere, except maybe when I used to play volleyball in middle school. When in elementary school everybody bullied me for being fat. Every time when I was entering the hallways some of the kids, especially boys started to say out loud “there comes mrs. piggy” or “make room, a Mack truck is about to pass.” They always made me feel so bad about myself. I was 5 when everything started. I didn’t understand why kids at school made fun of me. Why was I fat? I always eat my fruit and vegetables. I never understand. My mom always said I was pretty and that they were just jealous or sometimes told me that they just liked me so much that they were mean to me.

The worst part was that one of my bullies was my older brother. Instead of protecting me, he made fun of me with his friends. Feeling rejected by everyone. Including one of the persons that was supposed to protect me. He just laughed at every joke thrown at me. That made me so angry. Even sad most of the time. I stopped complaining to my mom about the way my brother and his friends bullied me, calling me all kinds of names like Mrs. Piggy from the Muppets, pig, ugly pig. Their favorite one, ugly fat pig. I was a little girl who loved to spread kindness and love to everybody. But with every year of bullying that little girl went disappearing until one day there was nothing left.

This little girl tried every diet in her life like water fasting, low carb meals, corn flakes diet was pretty popular back then. She played sports, did exercise every day to try to lose those extra pounds that put a target on her back. To be likable in the eyes of others. She thought that maybe if she lost those few extra pounds, life was going to be better, kids

would be more accepting of her presence and maybe, just maybe, she would fit in. In a world full of prejudice, in the ignorant minds of people who don't think if a person has a medical condition. They just target anybody for their appearance.

After so many years of being mistreated and fighting back. Engrossing in so many diets that didn’t work. I succumb into the arms of a condition called bulimia. In a year of provoking my own vomit after eating, I had lost more than 50 pounds and looked great thanks to being in a volleyball team and having muscle mass and good shape and curves in all the right places. People started complimenting my physique while on vacation. But just as I started middle school, the same bullies started all over again. There was always something wrong with me. Maybe it was my flat chest, or the fact that I didn't use enough make up to impress boys. Or that I ignored them and tried to make them feel like I no longer care. Every day they find a way to have something to say.

I had to be hospitalized because of my bulimia which got worse with the bullying. I didn't eat as much, and my stomach no longer could hold any food down. On Thanksgiving day we were at home and had dinner. That day I started vomiting as soon as I swallowed my first bite of food which was a piece of roasted turkey and potato salad. Mom thought I got food poisoning so she took me to the hospital. We were waiting for the labs and I was administered some medication for nausea and vomits. The nurse connected me to a couple of clear IV bags, because I was extremely dehydrated. The doctor came and started to talk to my mom about eating disorders. She was confused and looked at me with pity in her eyes. One of the things I hated the most.

The doctor asked “ Karla, do you provoke your own vomit?” I didn't have the courage to look him in the eye and my mom started saying “No, she even eats well. Right?” I was so embarrassed, But at the end I knew I had to seek help. So I tell the truth in front of the doctor. My mom was hysterical and I could see the anger in her big brown eyes. So, we had the diagnosis of an eating disorder called bulimia and anemia. The doctor recommended psychological therapy and a nutritionist to help me with my disorder.

On our way home I was quiet, I knew mom was mad but at the same time she was trying to find the adequate words to talk to me. I saw that instead of going home she took me to a special spot near the ocean called “Las Croabas” and I knew I had to prepare myself for the conversation. Every time she went to this spot meant that there was something bothering her and she needed to have a really deep, meaningful talk or just sit down on a rock and just relax while looking at the ocean. When we got to the spot mom got out of the car like a lighting bolt. She sat down on one of the big rocks by the shore and started looking far to the ocean. Eventually I sat down by her side, the ocean looked so blue, the waves were not aggressive, they flowed with the salty breeze and broke a little in the rocks. It was a calm and serene view.

My thoughts were interrupted when my mom started asking “In what way did I fail you?” She held my cold hand in her warm one. And I look at her with tears in my eyes. And with a heavy heart, I answered her. “You failed me when I let you know how I felt every time I was bullied and you were so engrossed in your computer, playing games, that you didn't even care what I was talking about. Or just dismiss me by saying they were mean because they like me or they were in love with me.” My tears started to flow with every ounce of feeling I had in the moment. “ You and our family failed me when those who were

supposed to protect me, didn't.” Mom hugged me while we both cried. “I'm so sorry,” she said. “I didn't think I was causing you so much pain, I didn't know you were having such a rough time.” Mom helped me, every time I ate and she followed me everywhere just to make sure I didn't go to the bathroom to puke. She never pushed me to eat more than I could, and tried to find me healthy choices of food. I had professional help to deal with it. I went to a psychiatrist and nutritionist who helped me by making a healthy diet plan based on my necessities and interests and giving me tips and pointers on how to deal with my bulimia. Everything was a long, hard and difficult process. Even though they helped me with the bulimia, the damage was long done. And it didn't take that much time for mom to go back to her ways.

Back in school nothing changed. I had a couple of friends, one of them a girl I have always considered like my sister. The guy that I had a crush on reciprocated my feelings but guess what? He didn't have the balls to be with me because even though I had lost a lot of weight, I was still the same fat girl thanks to the freaking stereotype of beauty. To be beautiful you had to be skinny, a flat stomach, round glutes, thick thighs was a bonus, round and uplifted breasts. Clear skin, Hair always well done. He was more preoccupied with what people would think of him than his own feelings. He used to be so nice while with me, he treated me like a princess. He always called me to see how I was, accompanied me while walking home from school and from time to time he held my hand and stole a kiss or two. But when people were around it was like a hot and cold kind of situation. He never made fun of me but he treated me like I was just another one of the bunch. That is what hurt the most. People made me think that because of my weight I wasn't enough. I knew I deserved much more. I deserved better.

I started working on myself by trying to accept my body, living a little bit more by going out with friends and even my sister and cousins, making friends and trying the best I can to ignore the comments and the bullying. Time passed by and everybody moved on and some got married, had kids, and even grew up as a person and changed their mind sets. Even I got married and had my own family. But what always stayed in my mind was how people used to see me. And after having my kids and gaining a lot of weight again, something in me shifted. If I walked around a group of people and they started laughing or they looked at me, my brain always goes high wire telling me that they were laughing because of me I get tense, my heart beats are irregular and sometimes I sweat or feel suffocated. Are they making fun of my body? My physique? Is the story repeating again?

I never told my husband this was happening to me. I used to be a really sociable person who loved to make friends and talk to everybody. It never mattered the age, nationality, physique or anything. If I saw you had a good vibe, I was definitely going to talk to you and make a friendship.

All this changed and I started to seclude myself. I can't remember when I was truly happy. I can't remember when I was truly me, and this frustrates me to the core. I think I let all those people since my infancy dim my light or take my light away. I let my mind be so disturbed by what everybody else thought of me that currently, I can't find my way back to what I was, or what I am. After all these years of fighting my social anxiety and secluding myself from others and fighting against obesity. I went and sought help from professionals. I went through years of nutritionist advice, psychologist and finally went through weight loss surgery to help me, as a tool to lose weight. I wanted to be happy with my body.

Currently I have lost more than 100 pounds in a year with bariatric surgery as a tool, diet and a lot of exercise. But now, I have another problem. Every time I look in the mirror I see the same women of years ago that weigh 250+ pounds. And sometimes all I can see is my loose skin. Without thinking of all the hard work I have to put in, all the tears and fakeness that has cost me. I know, you have to be thinking fakeness? Yes, fakeness. Faking in front of everybody I am a happy person, faking I'm okay with my body, faking I'm radiating light and happiness. I have always heard people saying "fake it till you make it". Well in this case it doesn't help.

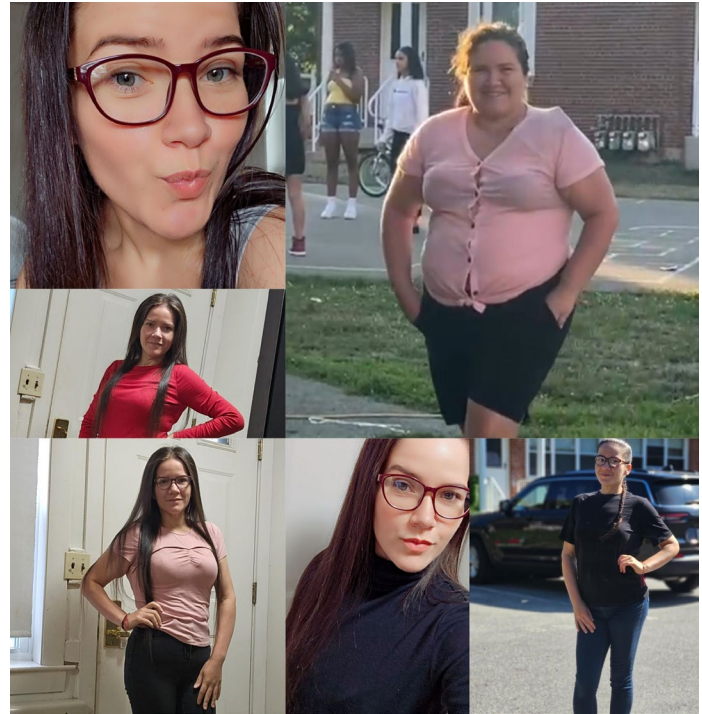
You can't fake happiness, you can't fake being good. Because any time given is going to come back to bite you in the ass. Make you realize you can't live like that. Grabbing my loose skin unconsciously because I feel like this is not the body I'm meant to be in. I have tried all in me to feel like I belong in my own skin. But is that true? Have I? Have I truly tried everything? The answer is no. I realized I haven't tried to find myself again. To find that vibrating light, hope, happiness that I know lays deep inside of me.

Have you ever heard of the word self love? Well, that's what I'm trying to learn how to do. Love myself again. Learn how to love my body, my soul and everything I have to bring to this life and world. It's a long journey that I'm learning to navigate. In the meanwhile, learning to do new things that might nurture my soul. Like riding a motorcycle and being able to learn to control the adrenaline, freedom and peace that riding gives me. The biker community has taught me a lot of unification and loyalty. Plus I found a group that's more like family and I have learned to love them. They have grown on me. They don't judge me, they have never made me feel less. I have created bonds that I never thought I could create again. I'm learning how to trust others and myself.

Where am I going with all this? I'm learning how to regain the confidence I once had. Or even maybe gain a new confidence, who knows? Learning to love myself again is a journey. A long and tedious journey especially while still having anxiety. But the first step has already been taken. Now we just wait to see how life treats me and how I learn to treat myself because there is a saying that says "If you don't love yourself, how do you expect others to love you, the way you are supposed to be loved."

If you are feeling like I did please know that you are not alone. Don't let yourself think because a person who is always smiling is happy. We never know what's going on in the life of people. Be kind. A little bit of kindness toward someone might be the highlight of their day. If we show our kids how to be kind, and we as a parent or simply family, listen when they have something to say and not just make excuses for them to tolerate when they are being mistreated maybe then and just then we can break this chain.

I don't want any of my kids to feel the same way I have felt. Putting it in words. I felt



uncomfortable, sad, grossed by my own reflection, less. These are horrible feelings and I don't want anybody close to me to feel them in the first person. I want them to feel loved, cherished, and to feel kindness from others. I want them to feel that no matter where they go they belong. I want them to spread positivity, kindness and good vibes everywhere they go.

Seek professional help if needed, don't feel ashamed of it. Sometimes we need someone out of your family nucleus with whom you can talk and receive advice.

So please be more kind to others and to yourself. Love your own person and never let others take your light away.

*My name is Karla Rosado. I'm naturally from Puerto Rico residing in Salem MA. My major is Health Science. An interesting fact about me I would say is that I'm a giver and I like to see people around me happy and progressing. I like to give advice and be there for those who needs me.*

# Death Becomes Us.

By  
Morgan Sandler

It wasn't like we didn't know it was coming, but death is always a surprise. My grandfather died on April 9th, 2024. I found out that morning right after my father got off the phone with his sister who broke the news. His sister, my aunt Wendy, was in Florida visiting my grandfather in his last months. He had always wanted to retire to Florida when he got old, and when my Aunt Judy and Uncle Jimmy moved there, his want got stronger. He and my Nana Susan went down to rent a condo near where my aunt and uncle lived, but they were in the hospital more than anything. My grandfather was diagnosed with cancer in early 2023 and it was looking up for him before he passed.

He spent his last days telling stories like he always would, singing, and drumming his hands on anything he could reach from the hospital bed. My brother, my cousins, and I called him Papa. He was full of joy and made sure he told us all that he loved us and was proud of us. He was convinced I was going to be a police officer whenever I told him my dream was to be in the FBI. He always made light of the dark and sang whatever was on his mind to remind us that he was in a band. I loved him and my dream has expanded to make him proud by getting into the FBI.

My grandfather and I didn't have an unusually special relationship or anything. He loved me and I loved him, and I couldn't have asked for a better grandfather. He lived in Maine, so he couldn't come down to visit us in Massachusetts very often, but we went up to see him whenever we could. He called me Granddaughter, which doesn't seem like a special nickname, but it was to me. On our last visit to Maine, he wanted to buy me a Lasell University sweatshirt and handed my dad a 20-dollar bill. I bought a grey zip-up

hoodie that I didn't like at first because I was in a bad mood when my dad made me put it on and send a picture to my grandfather.

I'm so glad I didn't return it for a new one, because the last text my dad has from him is Papa telling him, Excellent!! Congratulations!! How awesomely cool!! She makes that look awesome!! Papa is very proud!

He was old but still liked to believe he was young in the way he wanted to go on the lake and talk the day away. It was difficult to watch him grow into his disease. He lost his hair and so much weight. Looking back at old pictures where he was at his happiest, and then looking at the more recent ones towards the end of his life, there are such stark differences it is hard to imagine. He is still smiling as much as he could in those last pictures, surrounded by family like he always wanted. He never seemed unhappy, even when he would talk about his medical issues and his anger towards them, he made his grandchildren aware that he was glad we were with him. Being able to see someone in such pain and make sure the people around him knew that they were the joy in his life, made me open my eyes to all kinds of positivity and empathy I could be sharing in the world. Any chance he got, he made sure to remind us that we, his family, were the reason he was still there.

It was a Tuesday morning around 7:30 when I was filling up my water bottle and getting ready for school. My dad drove me in the mornings before heading off to work, I was never a morning person, but he was always chatty, so I usually responded to him with boring, one-word answers. The house was quiet; my mother and grandmother getting on with their days, my brother was still sleeping,

my cat was somewhere hiding, and my dog was lying around waiting to be let out. When I was finished getting water, I turned around to see my dad getting off the phone standing frozen in the middle of the kitchen. He does this sometimes and just goes on his phone forgetting he was supposed to be doing something, and since I was behind him, I didn't think anything of it. I walked around him to put my water bottle in my backpack, and when I turned back around, he was still there looking at me.

He told me in a gloomy, empty voice, "My dad just died."

I was frozen, too. He usually called him Papa when talking to me or my brother, and "my dad" when recalling enjoyable stories. The only time I've heard his voice sound so sad is when he told us Papa had cancer. I've never seen his face look so lost before or even heard him so entirely heartbroken.

"Dad I'm so sorry," It was all I could think of saying, and he didn't have a reply. I got my legs to move, and I wandered into the bathroom to finish getting ready. I absently stared at myself in the mirror while fixing my hair, wondering how I was meant to carry on with my day so casually. I didn't cry. My dad didn't either. I gathered my things and at 7:40 we got into the car.

The ride to school was silent other than the radio playing faintly in the background, and even our goodbyes once we reached my school were short. We said goodbye but there was no "Have a good day" or "I'll see you later," because we were both in shock.

My day at school was boring as usual, but I couldn't bring myself to have light conversations with my friends like we normally do in the mornings. I stood there waiting for us to go our separate ways, and

that's the way my day continued. I didn't tell any of my friends because I didn't want to be coddled or fawned over. Plus, the news was so fresh I couldn't even think about the fact that it was real. I got texts from my mother and grandmother saying that they were there for me, and they were sorry.

I texted my Nana Susan apologizing for her loss, I'm so sorry about Papa passing. I'm thinking of you, love you. She was his wife and my dad's stepmom, if I was having a hard time with the news, I couldn't imagine how she was feeling.

The week after was difficult but eventually life moved on, and I had to follow suit. The feelings never faded, and they'll never go away; they just pushed into the back of my mind and came out whenever they felt like it. I had things to do and grades to look out for, so I carried on.

Weeks went by and in May we went to his funeral in Maine, at a church he frequented. It was depressing, as any funeral would be, and there were lovely speeches from my aunts and uncles. The church was filled with people in Papa's life; family, friends, everyone. I didn't cry at the service or the rest of my family's speeches until my dad went up. Up until his speech, I had never seen my father cry. He didn't have a strong opening, choking up immediately after explaining that he didn't have anything prepared. My mom told me that he had known for a while that he was going to give a speech, but he couldn't figure out what to say. It was his father; I couldn't even think about anything happening to mine.

My aunt Wendy went up to try and comfort him through this, but he waved her off, saying that he was fine and took some deep breaths. He mostly talked about time, and how we can never get enough of it. He talked a little about his father through his eyes, and his childhood

growing up with divorced parents. There were a few, wet laughs through tears, and a lot of tissues being heard around the room.

One of the things that I have remembered to this day was him saying, “For me, the journey wasn’t the important part, it was where we got. The journey was long and rough, but the end was important.”

This struck me in a way because me and my dad have always had a good relationship. But there was a time in my prime teenage years, around 14-16 during the pandemic, when I decided to be a little bit rude. I was not the kindest person to my father, and I had no reason for it. I know it hurt him, and I’ve never truly apologized for that, because how do I? I’ve tried to be kinder and spend more time with him, especially since after my grandfather died, I realized that we truly never have enough time.

My childhood consisted of my dad making me laugh, taking me places, showing me new things, and teaching me how to live. My mother was there too, and she played a massive role in who I am today because she’s my mother and I’m her daughter. But this is about my dad, and who he shaped me to be. He’s probably the most social person I’ve ever met, talking to literally anyone he sees about anything he can think of. I, personally, am not a fan of speaking at all and am a lot like my mom in the sense that I would rather keep my peace. But I do find myself reaching out to strangers more often as I get older, knowing that it’s polite because my dad does it.

My dad is kindhearted and loving. He is a man, and I have learned that they have a harder time expressing that affection. But I’ve always known. I think he helped my brother express his love, too, because my brother is one of the best gift-givers I know, and that’s how he shows it. My dad bought me the toys

I asked for and always made sure we had enough of anything we could need. He wants us to live lavish lives because he didn’t get to growing up, and it’s not like we’re rich or anything, but he doesn’t want us to know that struggle as he did. He’s never explicitly said this, but I knew.

He has always given with all his heart, and never expects anything in return other than a “thank you.” I try to do the same; I like to give more than receive, and I like people to know I care without me telling them. I got that from him.

As a child I saw him always laughing, smiling, telling stories, playing around, and simply making our childhood sparkle. If I had a bad day at school, I would tell him about it, and he would listen. If I needed a laugh, I could always count on him. Really, anything positive that a person could be I have learned from him.

On that day, seeing him cry made me realize that I missed that. I missed not having to think about the sad parts of life and being oblivious to the end of it. I missed seeing him as only happy and smiling, not stressed and down. All the things I missed about my childhood were returning to my memories in full swing. At that moment I couldn’t remember the last time I acted so childlike, because I’d been trying to become more mature as I was gearing up for adulthood.

The only other time past Papa’s funeral that I saw my father cry was when we held a celebration of life for him in Massachusetts. He gave another speech that he prepared some thoughts for and cried again. I didn’t cry this time, I just stood in the back of a once again crowded church, next to my mom, with watery eyes and smiled. I smiled not because I made it without crying, but because I realized what it would be like to die. I knew then that

death was not as horror-filled as it was made out to seem in the movies I watched as a child, but it was full of love. It was full of people laughing at the stories being told about you. Full of heartbreak because someone's parent, sibling, friend, or regular customer just died. Full of songs that people remembered you loving. Full of the stars shining brighter over your grave.

I see and hear things around me that remind me of my grandfather all the time; Maine, horses, lakes, leeches, the song "Maine" by Noah Kahan, Jello, my father. None of these things mean anything crazy, just that the thought of my grandfather is alive. Being alive and being dead are the same because you're remembered. There is nothing you can do to stay alive forever, but you can do anything you want before you die: write a novel, create art, be a model, steal a street sign, high-five a stranger, love, hate, cry, laugh, live.

All these things are things that my father taught me. He taught me to laugh, to love, to cry, to breathe, to stand up for myself and others, to act out, to know when to stop, to care. I'm reminded of him everywhere I go, too. Just because he is still alive and healthy doesn't mean I stop thinking about him or my childhood. I miss my childhood every day. It means I'm closer to staring at a blank piece of paper while trying to write a speech for a funeral I don't want to think about.

Being at my grandfather's funeral and seeing my dad cry for the first time was life-changing, not only because it made me realize that death is truly inevitable, but because it made me mourn for my childhood.

*Morgan Sandler is a first-year student at Lasell University majoring in forensic science. She is from Hingham, MA and hopes to do lab work for crime scenes after graduation.*

## Not Just Anyone

By  
Mieka Schaffer

Even before I enter the classroom, I can hear the crying. I take a deep breath. It's not even eight in the morning, *I woke up early and chose to be here.* I imagine the other 7<sup>th</sup> graders are still at home or on the bus. *It feels good to do something important.* I remind myself of this as I open the door. Noah's teacher is scrambling around the classroom trying to set up for the other children's arrival. Her hair is frazzled and there are bags under her eyes. Breakfast is already set up on the horseshoe-shaped table. Most of the kids will only eat the muffins, others will only eat the banana, and some won't eat anything at all. Noah's teacher gives me a polite smile.

"Good morning, Mieka," I can barely hear her over Noah's tears.

"Good morning, is Noah?"

"He's not feeling well this morning," she interrupted, "Of course, his parents still put him on the bus."

"Oh," I bend down on my knees and give Noah my best smile, "Are you feeling a little sick this morning?" I ask softly. He puts his hands on my arm and pulls, still whimpering. "Let's start by getting your coat off."

As I take off his jacket the stench of vomit overcomes me. Remnants of breakfast stick to his brown cheeks and his dark curls look more disheveled than usual. I look over at the teacher. She's busy pulling off the lid to the water table. I think about commenting on the smell, but quickly brush off the idea. *She doesn't care.* Noah is still in his pajamas. He looks at me, tears still falling. A lump forms in the back of my throat. *She doesn't care.*

He walks over to his teacher. She brushes her hands on her short apron and groans. He

reaches his arms up. Instead of picking him up she reaches for his communication binder. She opens it to the page with a small picture of someone being held. She points to the picture. He is still crying, reaching up to her.

She takes the picture off the Velcro. "Up," she prompts. He doesn't look at the picture. His cries grow louder. Then he stops. He turns around and looks at me. I look at the teacher.

"You can't pick him up unless he asks with his cards or sign language, it's the only way he'll learn," she says walking away.

I stare at where she was standing, Noah stares too. My chest grows heavy. Eventually he drags himself over to my side. He reaches up to me. I open his binder and hand him the picture. He throws it on the floor. I sign up, but all he does is cry. The teacher's words repeat in my head. *You can't pick him up.* The banging in my chest intensifies. *You can't pick him up.*

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I rub my eyes. The tears are dry now, but my cheeks are still stained. The smell of hospital suffocates me. I breathe a shaky breath, crossing my arms over my chest. We are still waiting for a room to be cleaned for us. No one seems to be in a rush. *This is such a waste of time.* The paramedic is still talking to Ms. Boadu, the guidance counselor from my middle school. My heart aches for my mom to be here. *How long could it take her to get to the ER?*

"So, Mieka, what do you want to be when you grow up?" the paramedic says to get my mind off the situation. A question. The question I was asked countless times as a kid. I

contemplate the options. When I was little, I wanted to be a mom. But come to find out that isn't a job, I've settled on the next best thing.

"A preschool teacher," My voice shakes a bit. *I love kids, but teachers don't earn the same respect as other jobs.*

Ms. Boadu turns to me, surprise and something else lighting up her face, "I didn't know that."

The paramedic's walkie-talkie goes off, "Well, it was nice to meet you Mieka," His smile is warm and genuine, "You're going to be an amazing teacher one day," he declares as he walks away.

As I sit on a hospital bed, still waiting for my mom to arrive, I look at Ms. Boadu. She appears to be writing an email on her phone. Once the email is finished, she looks up at me and smiles. Not the sympathetic and worried smile I've been getting all day, a different kind of smile. "Good News, Mieka," she chirps. "Everything's all set." I raise my eyebrows. "On Monday, you'll start volunteering at Room 106!"

Ms. Boadu explains how Room 106 is a special education preschool downstairs from our middle school. She suggests that since I want to be a preschool teacher, I can start my mornings there.

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"Doesn't it annoy you?" My friend asks, "The crying?"

"No, you get used to it," I reply, unbothered.

"I just don't understand it. Sure, they're cute in theory, but the crying," she scoffs.

"Well, I don't know what to tell you," I say, "I'm good at it."

"Well, I think anyone could do it."

*Anyone?*

I think back to those times when I've known just what to do when a baby is crying, or a toddler misses their mom. I think about all of the compliments parents have given me. And I think about the sense of pride and joy I feel whenever I'm pushing the stroller or holding a small hand while we cross the street. I picture myself as an adult. And in every scenario, I come up with, I work with kids. Not just "Anyone" feels that way.

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My head is pounding. I can hear the other children walking down the hallway. *Don't pick him up.* Noah is at my feet reaching up to me, tears falling down his face. *It's the only way he'll learn.* I glance over at Noah's teacher. She's busy. I look down at Noah. *He won't learn anything right now.* I pick him up. I hold him tight. The crying stops and his whole body relaxes. He rests his head on my shoulder and tears form in my eyes.

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As a teacher you never know how kids will show up to school, what has happened the night before and what will happen when they arrive home. When Noah came in sick that day, I knew he needed me. I didn't care that his parents shouldn't have sent him to school or that giving him what he needed wasn't part of his communication plan. I knew he wasn't going to be able to communicate the ways his teachers wanted him to. People don't learn when they are dysregulated. I followed my gut and don't regret it. At the end of the day, anyone can sit in a classroom full of children and teach them something. But it takes a special kind of person to calm down when children aren't. It takes a special kind of person to show every day with a positive attitude and a smile. Not just anyone can see a child struggling and figure out what they need.

*Mieka Schaffer is an Early Education major. They are from Cambridge, MA and loves to crochet.*

# RAIL Project: Views on Online Dating By Allison Schuberg

## Part 1: Social Media

For this project I only had one choice for where to look for an ad. Instagram. I scrolled until I came across some posts to choose from and decided on an ad for an app that is incredibly controversial as to whether it works or not, Tinder. There are many mixed feelings about dating sites such as this one and some say it worked great while some didn't find who they were looking for, but whether or not it works the company wants people using it. The video depicts two young adults standing in the rain together in an open field with what they say appearing as text bubbles. One word each, 'sup'. Then they approach and hold hands while "It Starts with a Swipe" (Tinder, 2024, 0:06) appears on the screen in pink. This post is saying that you will find love in a romance movie style and that it will be easy.

This Tinder post's purpose is to tell its audience that they can find love easily on their app. Tinder's goal with this post is to get people to subscribe to the app. They want the viewer to feel like they need the kind of romance that they advertised. They want people to think that this is a realistic standard that they want/need and that it is easy to obtain. The company gains money through subscription plans and in-app features. Advertising unrealistic standards and expectations will mean that people who get the app will keep using it to achieve this which gets the company more money.

When I told my mom that I would be using this ad for the project she was surprised that it came up on my feed so I explained to her why I'm the audience they market towards. At the end of the video there's some information written under the motto in small words for a second. I took a photo so I could read it and saw that in order to use the site you must be eighteen or older.

Which is me which you can tell from my post of my birthday cake with 18 on it earlier this year. The age range is also shown in the actors they used who appear to be around my age. They also obviously target single people. When people appear in my posts it is clearly labeled that they are my friends or family and other than those my posts are just me. Social media's algorithm recognizes me as a single young adult, exactly the type of person they target. When you're a teen or young adult being in a relationship is one of those societal social pressures. Many people want to start dating and fast or at least show that they are attempting to be in a couple. Therefore they are the type of person Tinder will target.

The post's credibility or its use of ethos is difficult to identify. One thing that establishes its credibility is the blue checkmark next to the company's name which means that they are verified. To be verified means that Instagram has established that the profile is a real presence. Meaning this was set up and run by a part of the company like it says it is. This is believable as it is a real and legitimate

company but the likelihood of success is still up in the air.

This post is full of pathos as this app was made with the thought of being appealing to emotions, specifically loneliness. So that's exactly what the ad does. As I stated earlier they advertise movie "like" couples created easily. The company is trying to appeal to loneliness, love, and eagerness. Basically quick and easy romance with just one word, "Sup." (Tinder, 2024, 0:03). By doing this the company is using the fallacy of using emotion without support of logic. Depending on the person this video can make people feel either good or bad. It can make them feel hope that they can find love and/or comfort knowing they are not the only one that needs help searching. On the other hand they can feel self-conscious about their status as a single person and/or self-conscious or frustrated at not finding love on the app as easily as advertised.

I have honestly not been able to find that much logos in this post. The only thing that was really logical was the statistical numbers listed in the small words at the end of the video that I mentioned earlier: "Tinder is available in 190+ countries and 40+ languages. Must be 18+." (Tinder, 2024, 0:06). The number of countries it is available in informs the viewer that it is a widespread company which might encourage them to give it a try. The eighteen or older indicates that it is not a fun app for kids, it is an app for people looking to make actual connections. However there is a fallacy in this ad, hasty generalization. The statement that I keep coming back to while analyzing this post is that you can meet the love of your life easily, a

very broad statement based on data that they won't even show us.

This Tinder post is not convincing, especially if you are comfortable in your single status. If you are scrolling through Instagram and you come across this you will most likely just keep scrolling after only a quick glance. This ad will only work on people who are specifically looking for it. The day after choosing this post for my assignment I came across two other posts from the company with the same premise. They are clearly trying to attract people by hoping that they will change their minds after seeing the ad multiple times but again the only people who will pay attention are the people who already decided to download it.

## Part 2: News

For the next part of the RAIL project I've found a news article that informs its readers about facts in the argument on whether or not dating apps actually work and if they're bad for people. This news article titled 'the science isn't there' by Laura Spinney, and published by *Guardian News & Media* on April 28, 2024, was written after a class-action lawsuit was filed against multiple dating app company owners, accusing them of having predatory business practices. The main issue is that the creators do everything to keep the users absorbed in it and don't show the public any evidence of it being as effective as they advertise.

This news article claims that the companies behind matchmaking applications aren't transparent enough with their data to be trusted as being effective. Also the addictive nature, and other aspects of these apps,

definitely require improvement. The goal of this article is to raise the viewer's awareness of the potentially risky methods used in these apps while also bringing to the viewers attention that there is a new and better version of these apps in development. I am not sure what the writer stands to gain but am curious of their relationship with the creator of this possibly improved app as this would help attract customers to the app. These customers, and the audience of this article, are mostly singles ages 18 to about 40 and in the countries the apps are available in. Many of these people may have been drawn in and played, or aren't aware they are being played, by the unethical strategies used by these businesses.

Since there are a lot of unethical and not credible companies and sources out there in order to establish this article's credibility Spinney references and includes information from several specialists in related fields. At the beginning and end the news article discusses a sociologist from Stanford University, Rosenfeld, who is attempting to make his own dating app with more transparency in it. Spinney (2024) establishes her ethos even more by writing an argument from the opposing side which reduces bias: "ultimately, suggests Rosenfeld, dating apps generate several million relationships a year in the US alone, leading to rate them a net social positive". Referencing this and showing non bias increases the article's credibility because it seems more trustworthy as there is no petty slander. The author recognizes that dating apps seem to be here to stay and tells of ways to improve them to be better for people. This

is a good balance between opposing sides while still making the point known.

To establish pathos the author has looked into several online forums that are filled with people's experiences with dating apps. Of the negative accounts that were recorded, one stuck out particularly, "she swiped through more than 40,000 profiles and did not end up in a relationship" (Spinney, 2024). This is appealing to the audience's sympathy and in a way fear. The reader may realize how much time they have truly spent on devices, doing exactly that or something else, which will make them feel bad about themselves. It is subtle fear mongering, but it is still there. You may once again think of how much time you're spending on technology, worry about all the time you've wasted, and begin to grow anxious of your own constant failures in the online dating scene.

Addiction isn't in the article as just a way to provoke emotions. There are examples of logos that provide proof of the real issue of addictiveness in online dating, an issue that you might not have thought was a potential problem before. After spending 15 years studying slot machine players in Vegas anthropologist Schüll finds similarities in behavior of people using dating apps: "gamblers talk about this as the thing that they become addicted to—to the point where winning a jackpot irritates them because it stops the flow of the game" (Schüll as cited by Spinney, 2024). Dating apps have become less of a way to find people and more like an addictive online game you spend hours drawn into. The woman mentioned in the previous paragraph spent 2,000 hours, 12 weeks, on the app. This analogy between gambling/online

games and dating apps reveals the true addictiveness of matchmaking applications.

In conclusion the facts and information throughout this article combined with its credibility makes this news article very convincing to the target audience. This article refutes the claim of the Tinder post by drawing attention to the lack of logic and transparency shown in the ad.

Although it does throw support behind the making of a supposedly improved app, it is mainly using the article to bring awareness to the fact that these companies have not given us any data to suggest that there is actual scientific data backing up Tinder and other apps.

### Part 3: Peer-Reviewed Journal

The peer-reviewed journal that was chosen as the 3rd part of the RAIL project is called, 'Never-married single adults' experiences with online dating websites and mobile applications: A qualitative content analysis'. This journal is from *new media & society* and is written by Katarzyna Adamczyk, Kamil Janowicz, and Marta Mrozowicz-Wrońska. The study that was conducted started out as examining Polish adult's lives with singlehood and evolved into a study of how these adults viewed the use of dating services, negative or positive, and whether or not they use them.

At the end of the study the authors discovered the importance of how personal characteristics can affect activity on dating websites. They also support the idea that understanding the good or bad quality of dating services can't be limited to the skills or lack of skills in this technology. To

summarize, many factors can affect a person's success rate on dating apps and how they view them. The audience for this journal would be doctors and students researching the same topic.

The authors of this journal show ethos by revealing the limitations of the study. They not only state how in this type of study a person can be influenced by a number of individual factors but also how this specific country affects the study: "the Polish context appears to have a strong potential to affect the phenomenon of singlehood, thereby contributing to a negative perception of single individuals (Janicka and Szymczak, 2019)" (Adamczyk et al., 2022). It is clearly stated that being single is something that is frowned upon in Poland. This fact will make the participants of the study feel pressure to find a match and fast. It can impact the study in multiple ways including people approving of dating apps because they are able to get a partner easily and fulfill a social requirement. Or it may be the opposite with people disapproving of these apps because they don't work as easy as advertised.

Reading the author biographies at the end helped demonstrate the authors' qualifications. Adamczyk has a PhD and is a professor at the Faculty of Psychology and Cognitive Science, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poland. Janowicz is a PhD student at the same school and he specializes in developmental and narrative psychology. Mrozowicz-Wrońska, PhD, is a postdoctoral fellow at the same school and her research interests include singlehood, psychotherapy, clinical psychology, and cognitive psychology. All 3 are working on a 5-year project funded

by the National Science Centre, investigating singlehood in the perspective of vague loss theory.

The journal pointing out that in Poland being in a couple was socially encouraged is evidence for credibility is also evidence of pathos. These social expectations can lead to strong and negative emotions for example, “a strong desire to have a partner and remaining single despite one’s desire to be otherwise has been suggested to contribute to ambiguity, distress, anxiety, blame, guilt, sadness, and immobilization (Jackson, 2018)” (Adamczyk et al., 2022). The journal is trying to appeal to these emotions, make the readers think about if they had ever felt these emotions. Also make the viewers feel concerned for those who have and make them want to help.

To demonstrate logos inductive reasoning and statistics were used while conducting this study such as how many of the participants shared the same or a similar opinion about whether or not they found dating apps helpful. In the results of this study the researchers discovered four themes with the answers given to them such as: “identified from the statements of 19 participants and reflects the participants’ personal experiences that involved several difficulties and failures faced when using dating websites and apps” (Adamczyk et al., 2022). They identified a common feeling felt by 19 out of 30 of the participants and also used this strategy of pointing out these agreements several more times.

In conclusion, the results of the study seem a bit ambiguous. Not leaning one way or another but stating several different and

similar opinions on the matter. It can be seen as similar and supporting the news article in how they both state information about both sides of the argument. The parts of the journal that state quotes from people who view dating apps in a good light and have had a positive outcome supports the statement made by the social media post. So while the social media post focuses on the good image of these apps in order to promote it, the news article and peer-reviewed journal both stick to facts and real life personal accounts.

#### Part 4: Comparison and Conclusion

In my presentation I compared the purpose, audience, ethos, pathos, and logos of my three media sources. What I discovered, and basically knew starting out, is that the Tinder ad is primarily pathos and has little to none logic. I also revealed in the presentation what I know is true and what is false. The truth is that the social media post appealing to both negative and positive emotions and the company behind it isn’t transparent enough with data to be proven scientific. The second point in that sentence comes from the news article I looked at which shows information from positive and negative aspects of the app but mainly says that current dating apps can employ unethical business methods. Not to mention they are becoming addictive.

The peer-reviewed journal I looked at appealed to both sides of the story. Quotes from the participants of the study revealed a variety of opinions ranging from being in support of these apps to being against them. This journal acts as the middle ground between the other two sources saying how people view dating apps and their success rate

on them can be influenced by numerous factors such as social pressure, where you live, personal preferences, etc. So in conclusion, while there is essentially no logic behind dating apps, results will vary meaning not only do you have a chance at both success and failure but tests on this topic remain inconclusive.

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Breaking Free:  
A Journey of Faith, Self-Acceptance, and Resilience  
By  
Jashawn Spencer

I sat on the corner of my bed, staring at the packed bag on the floor. The air was thick with the weight of every judgment, every argument. I can still hear her aging voice ringing sharply in my ears: “You’re ungrateful. After all the things I’ve done for you.”

I moved to the United States with my older brother when I was four years old; we originally came from Jamaica. We fled to the United States with our grandmother because our father was murdered, and we were going to be next. Since I was four years old, I never really grasped the idea of what my mom or dad even looked like. By the age of eight, a few memories surfaced, like fragments being pieced together—not of life before moving, but of the faces of the so-called family I did have.

My brother and I grew up with our grandmother in Worcester, MA, but we never really talked to our real mothers back in Jamaica because our grandmother always insisted that we should wait until we were older and wiser. Growing up with our grandmother wasn’t all bad, of course; she showed us how to navigate a world full of selfish and rude people. Even so, I never really felt love from my grandmother. Yes, she would feed us, clothe us, and make sure we went to school, but it always came with sharp criticism, reminding us how we were ungrateful and didn’t deserve her love.

I can say that my brother had a stronger bond with our grandmother because they would always hang out in the living room, laughing and chatting, while I stayed in my room feeling like an outsider. I just never felt connected to anyone other than my brother. My grandmother was the type of woman who dressed with precision, always in a modest dress with the scent of roses. Her voice wasn’t just sharp but loud—even on the days she wasn’t angry. Her words felt like they were cutting through the air. She had a way of calling out my name in our language, “Patois,” with raised intonations that made me feel like I was a disappointment just by existing. “You nuh see how yuh useless?” she said, almost casually, but her words were weighted like a punishment. When she was dissatisfied, she didn’t need to say much. A particular narrowing of her eyes and her lips pressed together—almost as if they weren’t there—was enough. It wasn’t just her words; it was her way of making me feel small, as if disobedience was a sin. There was always the weight of expectation in the household, and if you didn’t live up to those values, you were considered unrighteous.

Once I was in middle school, I began having an identity crisis with my sexuality. I had close friends and, of course, my brother, but I never thought of saying anything. “Maybe it’s just a phase,” I told myself, “and it will pass.” My grandmother was very religious—or at least that’s what she claimed—but she made it clear

that acting on my feelings would lead to trouble. I didn't really know God well, but I knew Him enough to know that "being gay is a sin," and I just felt disappointed in myself for being attracted to the same sex.

I joined the football team my sophomore year because my brother was on it, hoping it would distract me from my grandmother's constant judgment. That's where I met Daniel Chery, the head football coach at North High. I would tell him about what was going on at home, and he gave me a space to be myself. He told me I shouldn't be ashamed of my sexuality. Going into my junior year of high school, I decided to come out to myself. In the process, I met a boy named Sam. He was a transfer student, and I thought he was cute, so I became friends with him—not knowing that our friendship would change my life. He was very sweet and honest, and he knew I was gay, but it didn't faze him at all. We hung out almost every day after school as another escape from my grandma's judgment. I opened up to him about what was going on in my household, and he was always supportive.

Even with these escapes, I still felt lost. The pressure from my grandma only got worse. I prayed to God every day, asking Him, "Why was I born this way?" and "Why am I not normal?" I cried myself to sleep every night, thinking maybe I should end it all so she wouldn't have to deal with me. Then maybe she would be happy.

An incident happened with my brother and my grandma that resulted in him getting kicked out of the house. I didn't know how to react or what to think. Later that week, he

texted me that he was doing well and staying with Daniel Chery, who took him in as his own and helped him. I was glad he was okay, but now I was left alone to face my manipulative grandmother. Those couple of years drained me mentally and physically. I couldn't do it anymore. I prayed consistently for change, but it seemed as if my prayers weren't being answered—or so I thought. Suicide felt like the only solution to me, but something inside me told me to hold on, so I listened.

My grandmother and I argued daily about minor issues that could have been solved with a conversation—such as why I didn't cook dinner or why I didn't clean the house. The truth was, I was too busy. I had schoolwork and a job, but I still made sure to do what I could, like washing dishes, sweeping and mopping the floor, and keeping my room clean. I remember coming home from school and going straight to work or hiding in my room to avoid her.

One day, my grandmother and I got into a big argument, which led me to call my brother and tell him I couldn't do it anymore. He suggested I move in with Mr. Chery, but I didn't want to feel like a burden to anyone. That night, a voice urged me to go, so I packed my things and told my brother to pick me up. At the time, there was room for me at Mr. Chery's house since my brother had recently moved out. I was warmly welcomed by Ms. Chery and their two kids, but I already knew them a little from football season.

Living with Mr. Chery felt so different. I was surrounded by people who cared for me and loved me for who I was. The atmosphere in

their home was nothing like what I was used to. The house was filled with warmth—from Ms. Chery’s cooking to the laughter echoing throughout the living room. There were family dinners—not just eating, but sharing what we did during the day and what we hoped to accomplish. I felt comfortable.

I’ve been living there since October of last year, and now I think of them as my dad and mom. I realized all those prayers I prayed eventually got answered. All I needed was patience and faith that things would get better. College always seemed out of reach when I was living with my grandmother. Now, I’m grateful to have this opportunity, with God’s help. Even when things are tough, stay strong and keep your head up. Remember, it’s a process you will get through. Put your faith in God’s hands and hold on tight.

Today, I look back and realize everything I’ve been through was a phase to help me become

a better person. I connected with God more through reading my Bible, and having a relationship with Him helped me start to love myself for who I am. Yes, sometimes I still have wandering thoughts like “Being gay is a sin,” but if you focus on that too much, you won’t see your potential. Just love yourself, don’t worry about the things you can’t change, and try to help others while strengthening your faith. I forgive my grandmother, of course, because God said we shouldn’t hold any malice in our hearts. Although I forgave her, I chose not to speak to her. My experience changed my worldview and shaped how I interact with others. I always strive to treat people with respect and guide them as God guided me.

## Finding My Religion

By

Tia Spenlinhauer

My whole world was sitting in front of me in a box. A wooden box, the color of aged wood, lined with gold around the lid. A beautiful glaze over the wood made it shine like the sun had hit it just right. Yet, as I stared at the wooden box, my stomach flipped, and my skin became hot—burning hot. I couldn't look at the stupid box anymore, but I couldn't look away either. My whole world—my person—was in there. Her ashes were all that remained. I brushed away my tears with a quick, swift movement of my hand as my mind returned to the present. The music from the celebration of life came back, and the hum of voices surrounded me again. I turned back toward my family gathered in one spot, something my grandmother had always wanted; along with going to heaven. I had told myself during her final months that she was going to heaven, the place she believed in. So, why couldn't I allow myself to believe that she was there, peacefully watching down on me?

It was early November, and snow hadn't covered the ground yet. A day after my grandma's celebration, I sat up in my room alone, thinking about her. My family wasn't very religious; nor did we talk about faith. I had only gone to church once in my life and it was a dreadful experience. In those last few months, faith wasn't a thought that crossed my mind. But after her passing, I wasn't sure what to believe. All I knew was her ashes sat in the wooden box, the perfect wooden box. Was her soul with me, or had it found the land above? I held my knees to my chest; my skin felt raw, and my nails were picked off

from stress. The question gnawed at me, lingering as the tears dried on my cheeks while the night dragged on.

Each day that passed, my emotions grew louder, like a constant ringing in my ears. I tried everything; I even resorted to praying at night. My rough, old carpet scraped against my knees as I lifted my head toward the ceiling, eyes clenched so tightly I'd get a headache. I begged God—or whoever was truly up there, if anyone—to look down on me to help me get through the pain in my chest. Yet each night I was met with silence, still alone in my dark and cold room. Each morning, my chest felt heavier, like something was holding me back from accepting what was right in front of me, just out of arm's reach. I had never thought about religion this much, but these days I regretted not looking into or asking more about it. My mother noticed the change; she could see it in my eyes. She told me, "They no longer hold that sparkle that makes you, you." Whenever she asked what was wrong, I lied for reasons I couldn't explain anymore. Maybe because, in my mind, I felt it easier to keep this to myself instead of opening up to someone who could've helped me.

Even though my mother could see right through my lies, it wasn't her comments about my lost sparkle or the bags under my eyes from the sleepless nights that hurt the most. What strung was my little brother, the baby of the family, someone I've always protected. Cole was five years younger than me, with boyish charm and a cute smile that would

brighten anyone's day. The words he told me just a week or two after my grandma's celebration of life, stayed with me engraved in my brain for the rest of my life. "She's okay. Now it's your turn to be okay" I didn't understand at first, the words just made me infuriated. A rage that consumed my whole body. How the hell could I just be okay after losing her? How do I know she's okay? Why am I listening to what a little kid had to say? The horrible rage took control of my mind; the aching sadness was no longer there, just pure rage. I lashed out at everyone. Nothing was right, nothing could please me. My father and I exchanged nothing but screams and yells that echoed through the house. We were the only ones you could hear. But, no matter how loud I got, life still went on without her.

My room was no longer cold, dark, and silent. It was the opposite—it was hot, loud, and angry. The walls around me seemed to close in, pulsing with rage. I wasn't sure why I was angry all the time, or who I was angry at. I felt rage toward myself for not believing in anything, toward my grandma for passing, and toward Cole because his logic somehow made sense, though I didn't want to hear it yet. Each day felt the same. I wasn't as talkative as I once was but I still made sure to act okay. smiling as I pass a friend in the hall, down the distant and tight hallway of a school I no longer fit into. The flickering for a far-off light, in a place that no longer felt the same. Being angry all the time was exhausting; it drained me in every way. My body felt lifeless.

I had never been so tired in my life. Anger was slowly killing me, chipping away at who I was. Instead of lying to those around me, I lied to myself. I told myself I believed. I

believed there was a higher power, that I could reconnect or finally connect with religion, that I could let myself believe she went to heaven. I told myself God would help me if I honestly believed, so I made a deal with the 'scary man' above. I sat down on my floor, forcing myself to breathe. Instead of looking up, I looked down. I clutched my sweaty hands as soft tears rolled down my hot cheeks, whispering to myself "If I believe in you, then you have to change something about how I'm living." I began to bargain with God, and I started to tell this greater power that because he took someone I loved, he had to give me something back. My room was no longer burning hot, it was just dull now—light blue walls turned gray. I told myself it was just the way it's always felt. For a while, I convinced myself I was happy again. But each time I sat down to 'pray', telling myself God was here to help me. I could feel a piece of my heart falling off. A part of me knew I was lying, that I still didn't believe in him. After lying to myself and to people around me, I hit my breaking point. The point where your skin hurts, your mind isn't your own, the point you hit when you could no longer take all the emotions you felt. I screamed—not just in my head but out loud.

I let myself breathe; I let myself listen to the words of my little brother—that she was okay, that she was where she needed to be. My grandmother, the person who shaped me, the woman who always told me to be myself, was okay. She could be in heaven or her soul could be with me. It didn't matter—that was what I started to understand. It didn't matter what I felt; it was what she believed in. If she believed in heaven, then I wanted to let her go

there in her mind. I didn't have to agree or understand it either. The only thing that mattered was that she was okay when she passed. Wise words from a 12-year-old kid, but he was right; she was okay—better than she ever was during her last few months. Now there was no longer that eerie feeling that followed her around. The last few months of her life were the worst part, her body became more fragile, and her house was no longer as clean as it once was. There was no longer that scary shadow of cancer that made her look over her shoulder twice. She no longer had to fear that this was the last time she would look at her kids or her grandkids. She was finally at peace again, and now it was my turn. My body started to heal all the damage that I had done to myself from the weeks of agonizing pain. My heart started to form again; there was no longer the screaming or noises in my head. I finally became okay with her being gone and being okay with the fact that I still didn't believe in God or any other religion.

The 5 stages of grief, that was what I went through. I didn't even think about it at the time, but looking back I wish I had known everything I felt about losing her was normal. I had to go through all 5 stages to be okay. Denial—telling myself that she didn't go to heaven and all that was left of her was just her ashes, there was so much more of her left—her words, her touch—all of it was still here in the

absence of her presence. Depression, the emotion that took over my life, controlled how I acted and felt. Angry—I spent so much time trying to blame someone for how I felt or the fact that she was gone. It wasn't on anyone, it was her time. Bargaining—I convinced myself believe that heaven did exist and that I did believe in something. I told myself I believed in something that only hurt me. Acceptance—it took a long time to get to this point, but everything I went through to finally accept that she was gone, made me into who I am today. I no longer lied to myself or my parents about how I felt about my beliefs. I came to understand why others believed and allowed my grandmother to go to heaven in her mind. For me, however, I let her live on in different ways. She was always with me not because she was watching me from heaven, but because I carried her rings with me, and I got to wear the clothes that I got from her. All the words of wisdom that she told me. That's how I became okay with her being gone knowing she wasn't gone forever if I let her live on through me and with me.

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## The Path I Never Dared to Take

By  
Kanano Takai

アメリカの大学を視野に入れてるって言ったらどう？」

(What would you say if I told you I was thinking about going to an American University?)

It was a lively night, with my brother home from America filling the house with laughter and conversation. I sat on the living room sofa, staring at my laptop screen, while my brother sat next to me. On my screen was the homepage of an American university.

「無いでしょ。」 (Nah, don't.)

My brother replied without hesitation. He had been living in America for seven years and was studying in his junior year of university, so his words carried more weight than anyone else's. I kept scrolling through the homepage in silence. I knew he was right—that he was speaking from experience, and that his words came from a place of concern. But still...

Just a year ago, my desk was stacked with thick math workbooks, their page filled with formulas and calculations. I would lower my eyes to the next problem, the tip of my mechanical pencil trembling slightly in my hand. The study room at my cram school was silent, the only sound being the steady ticking of the clock. Back then, I was just focusing on solving the problems in front of me, because I enjoyed it, and I thought that was the obvious path to my future. But that winter, a chance visit to a certain place would be a big opportunity in my life.

Around the end of autumn, I visited a fashion school in Tokyo, hoping for a change of pace. The moment I stepped inside, I was blown away. The glass entrance, the large screen showing the latest fashion show, and the sounds of sewing machines—it felt like stepping into a movie set. Listening to the instructors, I was drawn deeper into this world.

For someone like me, who wasn't good at design or particularly interested in making clothes, it was the first time I found the field I wanted to work in. But Japanese universities didn't offer programs specializing in fashion business or marketing. As I researched more, I discovered that American universities had well-developed programs in it. However, the thought of studying in English was hard, I couldn't help but wonder, *Can someone not good at English really do this?*

That's when I came across an audition program to discover the next-generation idol group. It showed young people my age facing challenges and fighting to achieve their dreams. Some had never danced before but worked hard to improve, while others overcame language barriers to chase their goals. Watching them, I was very inspired and I thought, *Why am I giving up before I've even tried?*

Thus, I decided to go to America. On the plane, I felt a mix of nervousness and excitement I had never experienced before. After landing, I stood in line for immigration. All around me, I could hear people speaking

English. My heart was pounding louder than usual.

“Next.”

I handed my passport to the officer, he spoke to me so quickly. My mind went blank. I couldn't catch anything he was saying.

“Sorry?”

I asked over and over again, but I still didn't understand. Fortunately, the officer rephrased the question for me.

“Oh! —.”

I answered, flustered. The officer looked through my documents, expression unchanging, before stamping my passport and handing it back to me. As I walked out of the booth in a hurry, I broke out in a sweat.

I thought, *I really can't speak English at all*, feeling the reality sink in. But this was only the beginning.

With my brother's help, I somehow managed to make it to my first day of class. But as soon as the class started, the professor's words came crashing over me like waves. I couldn't understand anything again. I even started to doubt whether it was really English. Even simple conversations felt like exams. Things I thought I could do were completely beyond me, and every time reality hit me. I found myself thinking, *Maybe I can't do this after all*. By the end of summer, the excitement I had felt on the plane had disappeared along with the heat of the season.

I had completely lost sight of my original goal. Until then, even when things were hard, I could keep going because I had something

clear to aim for. But now, that purpose had faded away, feeling empty and confused. It was then that my father sent me these messages.

“It's too early to give up. Try everything you can, and if it still doesn't work out, you can come home.”

His messages reminded me of the faces of the members from the audition show I watched. And I remember how their energy had kept me going. Thinking of them now gave me strength once again. I decided to struggle just a little longer.

Once, I decided to place myself in a new environment.

Time passed, and the trees outside my window stood bare, their branches started to be lightly covered with snow. I took a deep breath and pulled my coat tighter.

Gradually, the changes came little by little. My ears slowly adjusted, and classes that had once sounded like meaningless noise started to make sense. Conversations, though short and simple, began to flow more naturally. Assignments were still challenging, especially when many questions required reasoning or opinions. This was something I wasn't accustomed to, but over time, I learned that it was okay not to aim for perfection. I began focusing on what I could do, discovering the importance of pacing myself.

The educational environment in America was completely different from what I was used to in Japan. In Japan, students often take a passive role, listening to professors and taking

notes. But in America, you're expected to think for yourself. Having your own opinions is normal, and I was surprised by how different the assignments were. At first, I felt lost and confused. However, as I adapted to expressing my thoughts, I began reflecting more deeply on my opinions. I realized that education here wasn't just about absorbing information—it was about developing my own perspective. This unfamiliar approach was hard but refreshing. At times, I even started to enjoy this new way of learning.

These small successes, step by step, helped build my confidence.

Now I think that I can understand why my brother said "Nah, don't." That's why I want to hold on to those words and the serious expression on his face. Someday, I want to look back and tell both myself and my brother, "It was all worth it." After all, even now, he still says, "Come back home anytime," in a tone that makes me wonder if he is joking or serious!

# Rhetorical Analysis

By

Emma Toomey

As cell phone use becomes more common, it has sparked debate around whether students should be allowed to have their phones in school. Some believe that allowing students to have their phones will tempt them to use it and they will be too distracted to do their work. Others believe that phones can be used for learning activities in the classroom, keeping students engaged in their work and learning more than they would without their phones. By examining the rhetoric of two opinion sources on different sides of the debate, we can decide what the best course of action is with cell phone bans. The first source is an article published in the newspaper *Education Week*, titled “Why School Cellphone Bans are a Bad Idea” written by Brandon Cardet-Hernandez. He argues that cell phones can be used to enhance learning based on what he saw during his time as an educator. The second source, titled “Cell Phones have no Place in the Classroom” was written by Patrick Danz on the website *We Are Teachers*. Danz also has experience as an educator and argues that phones are a distraction that prevents students from learning. Of these sources, Cardet-Hernandez is more persuasive because of his clear argument, use of pathos and logos, and analytical style.

Cardet-Hernandez (2024) is more persuasive by having a clear argument with multiple pieces of evidence to back it up. Throughout his article, he shows the results of research and what he has seen happen with cell phones in multiple school districts. Toward the beginning of his article, he argues that “we are turning away from technology at the exact moment when we could and should be leaning into it” (Cardet-Hernandez, 2024). By stating this, he is clearly telling the reader his side on this topic and that his article will be in support of allowing cell phones in schools.

This statement draws in the reader, as they have to continue reading the article to find out what Cardet-Hernandez means. This is also a side of the issue that is not written about as much, as most are in favor of banning phones in schools, so the reader is more drawn in as this argument is something they do not see as often. The article ends with the lines “barring the ability to ensure state-of-the-art, 1-1 technology in every school, we need every tool in our toolbox. To take smartphones away under present conditions is nothing short of a fool’s errand” (Cardet-Hernandez, 2024). By addressing his position again with some of his evidence, he makes his argument feel more complete and informed. This allows the reader to remember the main takeaway from the article and see why it is important to know, which makes Cardet-Hernandez more convincing.

Danz’s (2022) argument is stated in the first paragraph of his article, but it is less persuasive because it was formed only from his own experiences. He argues that schools should be putting firmer policies in place to prevent the use of cell phones while in school. By providing this early on, he previews what his article is going to focus on. However, the evidence he provides is only from his personal experience and sounds like he is complaining about cell phone use rather than advocating for their ban. This not only makes his argument less convincing but also makes the reader question if he is fully informed on his topic. In the beginning of his argument he states, “it’s alarming how many won’t reciprocate a greeting or didn’t hear my greeting because of their earbuds. It’s bad. And if teaching wasn’t already hard enough, this exacerbates everything” (Danz, 2022). This evidence doesn’t convince the reader that phones are preventing students from

learning, which is one of the main points of Danz's article. By saying this, he is complaining about his personal frustrations with cell phones rather than addressing why it is bad for the students. He also has a weaker conclusion, simply stating that "removing the phones is a step in the right direction. We all need that" (Danz, 2022). He doesn't revisit the evidence he provided in his article the way that Cardet-Hernandez (2024) did, making his argument feel less developed. It makes it harder for the reader to see what the biggest takeaways are, and they are less likely to be persuaded by Danz's article. Cardet-Hernandez was able to build on his argument and have a more convincing conclusion, while Danz is just restating his original claim.

Cardet-Hernandez (2024) effectively uses pathos to appeal to the reader's emotions, making them more likely to side with him as they feel sympathy for the students. He wants them to feel sympathy for the students so that they will be more open to his opinion. One example of pathos is, "parents and students alike are troubled by well-documented impacts on students' mental health, their capacity to remain engaged during class, and struggles to focus for long stretches of time without task switching" (Cardet-Hernandez, 2024). This makes the reader feel pity for the students who are struggling, allowing Cardet-Hernandez to offer his suggestion of how to fix the problem. He is able to connect the pity they feel into his argument that schools should use phones for education, because students struggle to stay off of them anyway. By using pathos, Cardet-Hernandez is able to gain more support for his argument, whereas Danz (2022) is less persuasive when he uses pathos.

Danz (2022) uses pathos to show how bad phone usage has become but does not connect it as much to his argument. He mostly tries to make the reader feel the anger he feels over this problem and see how sad it

is that teenagers are constantly using their phones. An example of this is, "it's sad that students can't go 56 minutes without checking Twitter, Instagram, or TikTok. They can't have their devices on their person and self-regulate. They just can't. Sadly, many adults can't either" (Danz, 2022). He is appealing to emotions to make the reader feel sympathy for the teacher and students, which he tries to use to support his argument. This would be more effective if Danz had studied in other classrooms because the information he provides can only be generalized to his specific class. His emotions stand out more because of this, making it more difficult for the reader to determine if this is really a problem or if this is just his anger about the topic. Since Cardet-Hernandez (2024) saw this across multiple classes, the reader feels greater pity because they know this is a struggle for a larger number of students. More readers are likely to side with the author who makes them pity the struggle of a larger group of students, rather than the author who makes them feel anger towards a small section of students.

Cardet-Hernandez's (2024) use of logos makes his writing more persuasive as it uses statistics of research results to prove his argument. These statistics showed the crisis that students are currently in and their access to the tools that could help them. An example of this is when Cardet-Hernandez recognizes that his solution of providing students with their own state-of-the-art devices would not work, but "over 95 percent of teens own or have access to a smartphone – a near-universal reality for youth even of different socioeconomic backgrounds" (Cardet-Hernandez, 2024). Even though this does not relate to whether phones should be banned or not, he is able to connect it to his argument that technology can enhance learning. Since this is something that almost all students have readily available to them, he believes it is in their best interest to use cell phones since many schools won't be able to provide

students with their own devices. By providing research with his own insights, Cardet-Hernandez is able to use logos to appeal to the reader's logic.

Danz (2022) establishes logos by stating what he believes is in the best interest of students, but he does not have proper evidence to back it up. He focuses on trying to convince the reader through his own experiences, even though they might not be the same for everyone. He uses logos in lines such as "I believe we're at the point now where a school-wide ban on phones is the best option" and "eliminating the phones entirely would do wonders for students" (Danz, 2022). He appeals to the reader's logic by providing what he believes is the best course of action based on what he has seen in the classroom. He relies solely on his personal experiences to shape his argument rather than finding evidence to back it up, when his experiences can't be generalized to every classroom in the U.S. Cardet-Hernandez (2024) was able to connect different research to his work, taking his argument a step further than Danz as he saw the effects of cell phones in multiple different classrooms rather than just the one he taught in.

The style of Cardet-Hernandez's (2024) article was one of the most influential parts, with the tone making his argument more persuasive than Danz's (2022). Cardet-Hernandez takes on a thoughtful, analytical tone, which strengthens his argument. It makes the reader believe he has researched this topic thoroughly and has extensive knowledge of this problem. This is seen in sentences like, "individual districts are enthusiastic about 1-1 computing and digital innovations for instruction, citing greater student engagement and collaboration that boost learning" (Cardet-Hernandez, 2024). Cardet-Hernandez would not be able to make a claim like this if he did not research the impacts of cell phones in multiple schools. He can make these

statements because he has the research to back him up, whereas Danz's argument is based solely on his experience in the classroom. Cardet-Hernandez also limits his emotions in his writing, which makes his opinion feel as if it is formed by data he collected rather than his own thoughts on the topic.

Danz's (2022) tone comes off annoyed and angry, making his argument feel more emotional than factual. While this helps show his passion about the topic, it also takes away how persuasive his argument is. This can be seen in lines such as, "I didn't enter this profession to police phones, nor did I ever think I'd be vying for students' attention the way I am now" (Danz, 2022). By saying this, Danz was trying to tell the reader how bad the problem of cell phones in the classroom is and how it is affecting him as an educator. He wants them to understand how difficult it is to keep students' attention because of their phones and attempts to use this to build up his argument. While using this tone throughout his opinion gets his point across, it makes it seem as if his argument is based more on how he feels about the topic and not what will be best for the student. Cardet-Hernandez was able to limit his emotions in his article, making the reader believe his opinion was formed after doing extensive research, rather than just his own experiences.

By comparing Cardet-Hernandez and Danz's articles, we see that Cardet-Hernandez's article is more effective in persuading the reader. He is able to shift a reader's opinion using rhetorical skills where Danz is not as strong. By stating a clear argument, effectively using pathos and logos, and using an analytical tone, Cardet-Hernandez made his writing more impactful and memorable. While both authors have firsthand experience in this topic, it is important to note that they are a small part of the bigger picture. Their experiences are not true for the entire

population, even if their arguments are well crafted. They use rhetorical devices to persuade the reader, and just because one is more persuasive it does not mean it is always the right side. Opinions on such important topics should be shaped through much more research, as this topic is something that will impact many.

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