

The New Xanadu

2024-2025



*Artwork courtesy of Mia Eshleman



Table of Contents

Letter from the Editors.....	5
Jess Himmelberg.....	5
Morgan Craig.....	5
Written Pieces.....	6
Balli-Avelar, Giovanna.....	6
Arise.....	6
Bednar, Embrie *Norris High School.....	6
Pieces of my Childhood.....	6
Elwood, Aidan *Norris High School.....	11
Tinted in Rose.....	11
Maligo, Pedro *Faculty.....	16
A true Halloween Story.....	16
Pedersen, Tasha.....	18
It's Okay to Try Again - To the third grader that changed my life, Thank you.....	18
Prauner, Anna.....	21
The Last Out.....	21
Ramsey, Emma.....	24
La La Land; Mia's Auditions.....	24
Musical Chairs Showdown.....	25
Poor Professionalism.....	27
Rape In Relationships.....	28
Steps to Success.....	30
Ramey, Madison.....	33
A Perfect Angel: The Respectable Life of David Willhoite.....	33
Rejano Candau, Luis.....	33
The Importance of Mental Health for the Student- Athletes.....	33
The Importance of the Coaches in a Team's Success.....	34
Rose, Chloe.....	35
The Prettiest Star.....	35
Ruiz, Laura.....	37
Echos of a Dying World.....	37
I'll meet you somewhere in between.....	37
Schmitz, Hannah.....	38



a chance to be lost.....	38
Collage.....	38
I Like Pretty Words.....	39
It Does Not Matter.....	40
Sweeny, Jenna.....	41
Johnson, Thure.....	42
Emotions, Lessons, Cycles.....	42
Johnson, Joshua *Faculty.....	47
Change Time.....	47
Day by Day.....	48
Father Like You.....	48
Gone Home.....	49
The Porch.....	49
Johnson, Quincey.....	49
Wright, Brianna.....	50
Firewatch.....	50
Graduation.....	50
letterfrmranger.....	50
Zubieni, Ella.....	51
the greatest symphony of the hottest snowy day there ever was.....	51
Mixed Pieces.....	56
Marr, Drue.....	56
Hello, My Name Is [Redacted].....	56
Wright, Brianna.....	57
grandfalloon.....	57
Art & Photography Pieces.....	58
Arroyo, Abbi.....	58
Distorted.....	58
Van Gogh Vanitas.....	59
Halloween at Grandma's.....	59
Bugs.....	60
Big Blue.....	60
Broccoli.....	60
Castaneda, Giovanni.....	61
Cristiano Ronaldo Sports Poster.....	61
Zoro Panel.....	61



BOOK JACKET GODFATHER.....	61
Eshleman, Mia.....	62
Motel Medium: Acrylic.....	62
Estill, Sydney.....	63
Avinyl.....	63
Halliburton, Eric.....	65
Mother Earth Is Beautiful.....	65
Koenig, Elenna.....	67
Little Sis Hits The Big Leagues.....	67
Huzzah.....	67
A Brother's Embrace.....	68
Game Time.....	68
Pure Bliss.....	69
Last Hurrah.....	69
Peace at Home (unfinished).....	70
Mercurio, Brooklyn.....	71
Smith, William T. VII (Chanel Surfer).....	74
Sotomayor, Bridgette.....	76
Light of the Lamb / Linocut Print.....	76
Mystical Eight / Linocut Print.....	76
Evolution / Ink.....	76
New Life / Etching.....	76
Multiverse / Collage.....	77
Series 1 / Monoprint & Ink.....	78
Series 3 / Monoprint & Ink.....	78
Renewal / Oil on Canvas.....	79
Vanitas / Oil on Canvas.....	79
Tadlock, Jakob.....	80
Vesely, Brianna.....	83



Letter from the Editors

Jess Himmelberg

The first thing I'm going to do is thank all the contributors for submitting their pieces. I know I say this every year, but this year has genuinely been my favorite batch of submissions. Mostly it's because I have seen writers grow and change over the years. And as they write about all of their lasts, I get to reminisce about how this is also my last. But I am really grateful for all of those who gave me the trust to be able to put their pieces together into such a wonderful collection. It takes a lot of courage to put something that is so much a part of you into the hands of a person you do not know that well, and hope they make the magazine at least look okay to do your piece justice. Thanks to the Writing Center and the magazine for being the best jobs ever. I also want to take the time to thank the English and the Psychology Departments here at Doane, for treating me so wonderfully over the years and giving me the advice I have needed to get through. I also want to thank Nancy Murphy and Lisa Wells for literally always having a smile on their face and making Doane such a better place with just their presence. You two have shaped my senior year in ways that I cannot imagine due to your kindness. #peaceout

Morgan Craig

I could fill up the other half of this page with a heartwarming cliché about how sad I am to leave this campus, but I'd rather end this hand-in-hand with those I love. It has been such a pleasure to read all of your stories and marvel at your artwork. You give me the motivation and courage to write my own stories and produce my own art, no longer fearful or for the sake of others, just out of pure love. Being an editor the past two years and working alongside Jess has been such a pleasure. To Phil, Jeremy, Brad, and Melanie, thank you for helping me find my voice and for always believing in me – you are truly what makes Doane “home.” To all of my beautiful Gamma girls, continue to live unapologetically, pushing boundaries and living so loudly – my love for you is infinite. To Ella Miranda and Elenna Marie, I wouldn't have wanted to start and end my college career with anyone else – you are my muses. Not a goodbye; see you later.



Written Pieces

Balli-Avelar, Giovanna

Arise

My beloved child, breathe deep, and arise.

I will walk with you and you will not grow weary.

There is beauty and power in your step.

You will walk in mercy, and speak in proverbs.

You will know my name, and mine will be known to you.

You will mount up, up and over the trees, with wings like eagles—powerful wings.

Arise and take flight, for you were made to fly.

Bednar, Embrie *Norris High School
Pieces of my Childhood

While scanning the expectant faces around the table awaiting the Christmas feast, she couldn't shake the knot in the pit of her stomach. Someone was missing. Like a puzzle with one lost piece, the absence of her grandpa brought incompleteness to the celebration. She missed him extremely. As conversation droned on around her, she noticed with a pang in her heart all the differences. The smell of his old flannel was gone, replaced by the scent of clean linen. The head of the table was now occupied by her dad. Thoughts drifted back to four years ago and her grandpa's bigger than life personality. His jokes and comments would make the whole family laugh or his habit of dumping a boat load of pepper on potatoes or eggs and saying it was "dirt." Playing the domino game Moon, he always partnered with her dad. The game was a

staple in the house during holidays. A faint smile crossed her face as she remembered the obvious way he invited to convey to his partner what domino he had in his hand. Eyes lighted with a mischievous twinkle, he would cover one set of numbers and push the domino slowly forward indicating the number of the double he had. This Christmas they played Moon and there was an odd number of people. Her grandpa wasn't there to round out the partners. A group of three instead of two pairs of partners. All these memories plagued her mind as she sat at the dinner table. As everyone devoured the food, she found herself without an appetite. While she picked at her food and gazed out the window, she noticed the windmill cut in half buried in the landscape. Her dad had cut it in half to be a lawn decoration. Looking at the old rusty windmill, she couldn't help but think of the shiny white one on her grandparents farm. Her mind continued to wander back in time....

Anticipation rises as we make the turn to go on the dusty, gravel road. As I view the ginormous windmill from the distance, the three blades slicing through the air, I know very well the sound of the machinery and wind whistling. Each mile closer increases the windmill's size and I know we have almost arrived. Waving in the wind, the flag in the front yard welcomes me along with the giant rocks in a long pile along the driveway. As I make my way inside the garage, grandma's colorful rugs create a path from the door outside to the entrance into the house. Once inside, I wander to the kitchen window, peer out across the



gravel road to the main farm and see the windmill slowly turning, the old house where my mom grew up and now the hired hands live, the barn, the silos, and all of the buildings. Dropping my bag off in my room, I race across the gravel road to the farm. Walking past the metal buildings to the shop, I can hear the wind whistling through the trees. The wind stirs up the dirt into little clouds of dust only for them to settle seconds later. As I meander to the shop, I make a clicking sound and several cats come up to me wanting attention. The cats follow me all the way up to the concrete slab in front of the shop.

Standing in front of the door to the shop I have to think for a second of the code. Sometimes I forget and need to call my mom but today I enter after thinking for a second. To open the grey door I lean on it a little bit for it to open. After bumping it with my shoulder, it flies open. The smell of farming equipment overtakes my senses. I hear cats eating from the old rusted pan on one of the tool benches. Today the oil pit, as we call it, is open. One of the tractors is parked over it waiting for an oil change. As I view inside the pit I see the paint chipped white stairs covered in splats of black. On the floor of the pit are tipped over cans. Sometimes kittens get stuck in the bottom and we have to open it up and get them. In the past I was scared of the pit. I wouldn't go anywhere near it. Sometimes my grandpa would pretend to shove me over which startled me. My dad would just stand there and laugh. I glance away from the pit and around the shop. All the machinery is pushed to the sides and the tractors are in the middle. Everytime I walk into the shop there is something different. But every time it feels and

smells the same, just like coming home. I walk around the pit and head to the noise of the pressure washer. As I walk over my grandpa comes zooming up to me on his motorized scooter. He smiles and says, "Are you ready to get to work?" Reality of our 8 hour drive to Carpenter, South Dakota crashes over me like a wave of sadness. We aren't here to just visit. We are here to clean out the farm buildings for auction.

Walking up the stairs from the basement to the kitchen, I know this is the day. This is the day we clean out the buildings. At the counter I eat a breakfast of strizel and a glass of orange juice. After I eat my breakfast, my brother Lewis and I hop in the small UTV. As we are driving we hear the crash of objects being tossed. We follow the sound and come up to one of the machinery buildings. I hop out of the UTV and see my dad dragging the metal sliding door aside to reveal the small metallic building filled with junk. This is the shed where my brother and I played house for hours. In the corner sat an old table. Lewis makes a joke of how broken it is. He's not wrong, the legs were all uneven. To make it stable for our play table, we had shoved random things under the legs. The chairs, if you could call them that, varied. There was an old rusted milk stool, a wooden stump, and a rusty folding chair. As we clean out the building I find the old tin tea cups which had served as our dinnerware. In my mind's eye, I see my cousins, Lewis, and I sitting at the table, drinking our imaginary beverages. Along the teacups, I also find some of the tin pals we used for random storage. It could be trash, bolts, or anything else that sparked our attention. To others it might just look like junk but to me I see my childhood. I see



hours of playing and make believe. After cleaning out that building, we put part of my childhood in boxes never to be seen again. Leaving it behind we walk over to the next building.

Before I can process the memories, we stride into the next huge building. The smell of dust and rust overtakes me. As I take in my surroundings, my gaze falls across the row of four wheelers and UTVs and like a movie in my mind, memories overtake me. Memories of wind blowing through my hair, the smell of fresh snow, fresh cut grass, and mud race through my mind. As kids, the cousins would chase each other around taking sharp turns around buildings and riding wild in the harvested fields. Laughter drifted through the wind along with the dust clouds we left behind us. With age came the privilege of driving down the gravel road with not a care in the world. As I come back to present time, my smile is quickly overshadowed by the fact everything is going to be sold. Everything. From out of nowhere I hear myself start to protest and plead, "Let's just keep at least one." My grandpa beats me to it, telling me he is giving us the red four wheeler and hunter green UTV for our acreage. With a mixture of excitement and sadness, I relish the gift - a piece of my childhood preserved. Images of riding them in my own pasture cross my mind, but it is hard to admit we will never ride them at the farm again.

Before anyone could notice her melancholy, she excused herself from the table. With tears in her eyes, she walked down to the south shed. The day was challenging and she was overwhelmed. What is she supposed to do? She missed how things used to be. Maybe she feels alone and replaced by her friends. Maybe

she misses the relationship she had two months ago but is now gone. Maybe she just feels alone. With all of these thoughts plaguing her mind, she headed to the shed. Heaving the white sliding door to the shed open, she hopped on the red four wheeler and backed it out onto the grass. Putting it in drive she swiftly drove to the path that cut through the pasture. Wind blowing through her hair brought her back to the days when she would drive this same four wheeler in a different pasture with different wind blowing her hair behind. Driving it reminded her of a time when she was truly happy. After driving a couple laps around the pasture, she headed back to the house and entered the laundry room. Taking off her muck boots she looked up to see the rags hanging from the old rusty pitchfork heads. The pitchforks were a part of her mom's childhood. Feeding hay to the cattle and laying it down for the pigs. Her mom had acquired them from the rows of old parts and tools laying on the side of one of the buildings. Again her mind slipped into the past.

Right across from the shop was a building that held the combine and some tractors. Old shelves made out of metal rods and a mixture of moldy plywood and old planks bend with the burden of a lifetime of items grandpa collected. As I walk through the shelves, I can barely see the wood because it is covered in random parts. As a kid these shelves were like a treasure chest. Every time we came to grandpa and grandma's there was some new but old item on the shelves. Treasure to be found! An old cup. A broken ratchet. A half of an axle. A can of nails or chains. Picking up an old dented tin plate brings back memories of when I first found it and wanted to take it home. My parents said no because I can always come back



to the farm and see it. I toss the tin plate into the box. It felt like I was throwing away part of my childhood, leaving it to be forgotten. Looking around at the dozens of shelves, I see memories it contains and the ones I will someday forget. All of the old memories were going to either be sold or thrown in the burn pile.

After I fill the boxes on the pallet full of the objects overflowing on the metal shelves my grandpa drives the tractor over and lifts the pallet. I hop in the UTV to follow him to the burn pile. On the way there, I find my parents cleaning out a different building. I stop to help. After a while, grandpa comes by with the tractor. We start to fill the tractor with a load of old tires, moldy plywood, broken parts, and other random odds and ends. After dozens of trips back and forth the burn pit wasn't a pit anymore, it was an overflowing pile. A pile of memories. I pause thinking about the near future.

At the end of our stay my dad will take diesel and pour it around the gigantic pile. We will stand back as he lights it. Flames will increase as the wind picks up the oxygen to feed the fire. The black smoke will pour from the pile and light the night. The smell of burning rubber accompanying the billows of smoke will lift into the air like a smoke signal. I will gaze up with sadness watching my childhood memories literally going up in smoke. With a shake of my head to dispel the disturbing images in my mind, I turn back to the present and the growing pile in the pit to the business at hand - continuing to clean out the buildings.

A short walk from the burn pit is the last building to purge. Walking into the dark, dusty building, I find it hard to see because the lights above are flickering

and sunlight doesn't reach the back of the building. Tasked with moving old wooden crates I start flipping them over and grabbing them. As I pick one up, a mouse darts out and into the corner. With a gasp, I drop the crate. There could be mice anywhere: drawers, boxes, or dead in a pile of dust. It felt like I was breathing dust. Every time I move something a cloud of the dust blows into my face causing me to cough. In the dusty haze, on the opposite side of the shed, I see dozens of shelves covered in cobwebs, parts, tools, and random treasures. Scanning the shelves, I see something that sparks my interest. I brush the cobwebs and dust aside to see an old green box. It's not bright green like grass, more of a dusty green which reminds me of moss. I open it with curiosity only to be disappointed with the lack of its contents. With a deep breath I close the box and tuck it in a safe place to ensure it comes home with me because I know I can't let it be tossed in the burn pile.

After she returned to the house, it seemed best to distract herself with one of her favorite pastimes - baking. As she opened the green box which she had made into a recipe box and pulled out the strizel recipe. Her gaze shifted as she fondly looked at the recipe box. Taped on top was a blank recipe card with colored pencil flowers drawn. On the side of the box she had written "from grandpa's farm". Every time she pulled out the recipe box she saw her 4th grade handwriting. She imagined her younger self in the recipes she wrote when she was young with all the spelling mistakes and the loopy font. She looked at the most recent recipe she wrote. The handwriting was different now, not as loopy but more structured. The lack of spelling mistakes and crossed out wrong



words is like a time capsule of the years she's grown up and how she's changed. The recipes inside hold memories of where she first ate the food or the first time she made it. The years since she found it have flown by but filling the box with recipes felt like yesterday. She turned her attention back to the strizel recipe.

After the strizel was baked and cooling on the counter, she helped her mom pull out glass dishes. To some it might look like just fancy dishes but to her they were so much more. The glasses with colored mistletoe on top only used at Christmas time reminded her of the time her second cousin dropped one and it shattered on the tile floor. The plates with intricate designs on the bottom were never used and only got to look at. The tradition of using little glasses every holiday to drink sparkling grape juice. The memories of each dish cascaded over as she looked at the counter scattered with glassware. All these dishes formerly had a different home. More memories spill over in her mind like a glass overflowing with water.

Our day is finally finished. Everything is ready for the auction tomorrow. As we relax in the living room watching TV after supper, I survey the hutch in the dining room. The amount of glassware and dishes grandma has is crazy. Through the crystal glass of the hutch doors, I see the glasses all lined up in perfect rows. The plates are neatly stacked or probed up for display. I slowly tiptoe over and sink to the floor on my knees. In one of the drawers, I find the china tea set. Nostalgia washes over me as I remember pretending water is tea and daintily drinking out of the tiny cups, eating cookies, and imagining I was having tea with Princess Diana. I remember feeling proud when my

grandma let me play with them. It showed how much she loved and trusted me because she truly adored that tea set. After sliding the drawer shut, I announce to the family I'm tired and head to bed hoping sleep will come quickly.

Morning dawns and with it a sinking feeling, today is the day. The auction. Neighbors and strangers arrive to bid on what they see as a good deal and I see it as a collection of grandpa's life. All the machines, objects, and tools will be sold and never seen again. All the memories the objects hold are going to be sold to someone who doesn't know the story behind the object. Everything on the farm has a memory attached to it. After the auction grandpa and grandma will move to live by us. Sadness washes over me as I realize we won't have the visits to South Dakota. No more tacos I can only purchase in the small town nearby. No more school auctions at Thanksgiving, coon hunting, or eating Sunday brunch at the restaurant in town. Once they move we'll never smell the rust and grease of the shop, race around on the UTV or saunter out to the garden to pick produce for supper. With a sigh, I realize watching the farm auction is hard but driving away and leaving it behind is harder.

With a call from her mom to play board games with the family, she snapped back to the present. Although she enjoyed Christmas at home, she still missed Christmas at the farm and visiting at other times of year. .Going hunting in the fields, searching for kittens in the loft of the barn, or feeling the wind through her hair as she drove the UTV through the field freely, She missed the smell of the fresh cut hay, or the soft sound of the cartoons in the living room when she woke up. Even after four years she still remembers her grandpa so



vividly. The way he would eat vanilla ice cream with honey. The Cabelas where he went every time they were in town. The plaid shirts that varied in colors and designs. The old black and white TV shows she grew up watching with him. The way he would fly on his scooter in the shop. All of these things are so vivid in her memory but that's what they are, a memory. Even though her grandpa was gone, he lived on in the Pepsi shirt he gave her, the pickup he gave her parents, the spoon with the sharpened end to eat grapefruit, the red tractor sitting in her shop at home, or the chicken house he helped her family build. Her grandpa may be gone but all the remembrances he left behind provided portions of her childhood which fit together as part of her own life story. With an air of wonder, she realized those pieces of her childhood paired with current experiences and future memories yet to be made, would connect to all the pieces of her life together. With a smile, she hurried to join the family to create the next memory piece.

Elwood, Aidan *Norris High School Tinted in Rose

I stand up tall in front of the audience. The room is dingy and dark, the smell of polyester lingers in the air from the suits, and my hands feel the familiar cardboard dryness of having touched my black visual aids. I'm the first speaker in this round, meaning I have to deliver my speech before anyone else. Visual aids behind me, and the eyes of an audience in front of me, I begin with little to no hesitation, "Come one, come all! Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls! Step right up and take your seats, and be prepared for... for..." be prepared for what? Can I not remember? No no no no no this can't be

happening right now. Not in my senior year, not as the first one to go in the round! Eventually, I found my footing, "for the biggest, most bone-rattling, awe-inspiring..." the speech continues on, but not my mind. What an awful first impression for the judge. This competition has just started and I'm already off to a horrible first impression, it's over for me. Despite the redness of my face, I keep my composure and maintain eye contact with the audience, until my eyes fixate more intensely on the judge of the round. Brunette hair, brown eyes, a small stubble on his chin. He seemed focused, which made sense, given how this was a Speech tournament, but something about him just felt... off. I just didn't like him, and he was giving me a weirdly nervous feeling; something I just didn't understand. It's whatever, I had better things to worry about.

It was all whatever. That was my third round, and as expected, I had completely bombed it. I did not make finals that day, and I watched everyone else get recognized for their performance in the awards ceremony, as I boarded the bus home with nothing. I rode that bus home in silence; I had just gotten done delivering six speeches in the span of six hours, and nothing could be more exhausting than that. Though eventually, I would come home, step into the house and... nothing. Emptiness. Lights were dark and shut off, but the window blinds were open and welcoming. The living room TV was on, blaring the sound of children's television shows, but nobody was there to watch it. The only one at the door to greet me was my dog, a German Shepherd named Stu, but that was likely just his usual check for intruders. I swatted his wet, prying nose away from



my nice and clean suit, as I unlaced my shiny dress shoes to take them off. As I go into the basement, step, by step. by step, by step, the noise of heavy iron and a second TV get louder. The basement is the exact opposite of the upstairs living room. My dad and brother are working out together, and the TV plays whatever sports rerun they're watching this time. Despite their heavy lifting going on, the basement is clean, as per usual, with the golden carpet shining from the lights and the couches having nothing but pillows and dog hair. My brother looks over to me and greets me by saying, "hey ***** how'd it go?" he swears, which gets a simple, equally offensive, finger gesture out of me.

I walk into my room and close my door, muffling out the sounds of my dad talking to my brother about his language. This room is a stark contrast from the previous. Papers from almost 4 months ago litter the floor, and dust bunnies become dust snakes full of dog hair on the edges of the room. The desk in the corner of the room is flooded with college letters, junk mail, magazines; all opened despite claiming, "I'll get to them" The flood is big enough that it overflows onto the floor. Four blankets reside on the chair, only to all be shoved to the side to just use the best one, a blanket with a raccoon pattern on one side, and rocketships on another. I open up my laptop to work on one of my hobbies: my modification of *Lawn of the Dead 2*... but... where'd the flashdrive go? I could've sworn it was plugged into my computer, so why is it not...? Ugh, my sister must've been moseying around in my room again. I had to find that flashdrive, though, it had four months of progress on it. My thoughts would end there, however, as a

familiar "ba-bong" notification sound from my phone made me put my face to the sky in annoyance. Giving my phone some terrible side-eye, I read the email notification.

"University of _____ wants you!"

"Dan, did you forget about _____?"

"Don't forget to fill out those scholarship applications!"

"Dan, come visit _____!"

It's college stuff, of course it's college stuff, it's *always* college stuff! Just another email added to my ever-growing stockpile of unread college junk mail. I put my phone on the charger and lay it on the desk a tad forcefully, and made a huff towards my closet in search of that flashdrive. As if not burdened enough, my vision had been blinded by the coats and suits hanging in my closet, further aggravating me. I frustratingly pushed aside the coat hangers and started digging through feet-smelling Cross Country shoes, dress shoes, wrinkled up clothes, all being tossed aside in an attempt to uncover the flashdrive. Instead, however, it was something greater. A drawer, one covered in dust and buried by the unused clothing, making it become completely forgotten and pushed aside like a joker card. Curious, I slid the drawer open. I was washed by a wave of colorful plastic figurines, some pristine and some beat up. My body became jammed, and my mind felt the need to reboot itself for a minute. Registering myself in the world again, my hand moved to pick up one of the figures; a skeletal dog. It's whatever, I have better things to worry about.

My brother and I sit on the floor next to our bunk bed. The floor is littered



with my empty Dr. Pepper cans, along with used dirty plates, but that one is courtesy of my brother. Our school bags rest lazily on the wall, being completely closed shut. Besides it lays a small toy race track, with diecast toy cars beside and on it. On the wall of the room is the large television, covered in children's handprints and wet wipe markings. The TV, as expected, resides on a TV stand, which itself contains all sorts of video game consoles: the Nintendo Wii, an old school Playstation 2, and of course, an Xbox 360. This Xbox had several markings on it, scuffed from several sessions of playtime. One, however, may say that it is not scuffed, it is loved. Plugged into the console is a large, tangly wire, connected to a mysterious glowing object. The wire extends so far that the object is on a nearby shelf instead of the TV stand, as that's the only place that any room was accounted for. Excitedly, I placed a small figurine, a skeletal dog, on the glowing object. Suddenly, the television lit up in a burst of light, as the undead skeleton dog came to life on the screen, becoming part of the game we were playing.

"Danny, you always pick that character!" My brother complains, as he picks out his own figurine from the box.

Not taking my eyes off the screen, I tell him, "because he's my first favorite, Omar, why should I change if I don't want to?"

As my brother puts his character, a boxing robot, on the glowing object, the same thing happens. The TV lights up and the character becomes part of the game we were playing. "Danny, 'first favorite' isn't a word, it's just favorite" Omar retorts.

"Whatever, let's just continue the game already" I say, to which my brother

obliges. Together, we sped through the levels of the game, bashing through enemies, knowing exactly where secrets were, skipping all the cutscenes. Occasionally, we would take figurines off the glowing base, known as the portal, to put a different one into the game instead.

As the two of us complete yet another level, my brother looks at me, "do you think we'll ever get bored of this game?" He asks.

"Probably not" I reply, "There's gonna be a new one coming out in November, we can get it from Santa. In that one you can make your own guys in the game, it's so cool!" As I continued describing the game to my brother, my dad walked into the room.

"Ok boys, find a stopping point" He sighs, having it be late at night.

I paused the game, "yeah... ok..."

My brother pauses the game, "just five more minutes..."

My dad takes the controller out of my hands and pauses the game again, "boys, it's a Sunday, you have school tomorrow, you know how your mom will be if you stay up this late"

I think about my mom, who's putting our sister, Marly, to bed in the room next to us. "Ok..." I say sadly.

"Can you help me brush my teeth dad?" Omar asks. Dad agrees and helps get my brother around for bed. Meanwhile I'm a big kid, and I don't need help getting ready for bed. I put my pajamas on and brush my teeth, before soon climbing into the top bunk of our bunk bed. My brother follows me on the bottom bunk soon afterward. Being in control of the night light, he chooses to keep it on for a while, "Hey Danny" I hear him ask, "Do you think we'll ever get bored of Sealanders?"

"No we won't Omar, I already told you" I replied, not even attempting to fall asleep. "There's a new one coming out for Christmas and we'll have that one to play"

"Oh yeah... what's that about again?" He asks me, but I had better things to worry about.

My eyes suddenly darted around the room, and refamiliarized myself with my own safe space. I felt as if a jolt of serotonin had streamed through my body. I looked at the skeleton dog figurine in my hands, then back in the box, where a boxing robot sat just underneath the character I had just picked up, "that one was always his favorite" I said to myself. I slumped down where I sat, now forgetting entirely about the flashdrive, and exclusively focused on digging through the box of figurines. Names would come to my head one after another, each hunk of plastic unlocking another memory I wasn't aware I had. I took an examination of the final one in the box, I never thought I would see these again. As I drop the last figure back in its rightful place, a shining flash of silver catches my eye. Underneath the clutter of papers in my room, I spot a lonely flashdrive, "How did this...? Whatever" I pick up the flashdrive, ignoring my previous task, and walk over to stick it into my computer. Cursedly, it seems as though every time I sit at this computer, my phone just wants to start buzzing again. It's different from last time, however, as a simple "ding" indicates a text message, not another spam college email. I take a quick peek at my phone, it's from my dad.

The text reads, "Hey buddy, we're going to be having a family meeting in the living room, we're going to talk about you and Omar's behavior towards each other" I let out a long, exasperated, yet

in-audible sigh out of my nose. I'm not leaving this room. I will not leave this room. I open up the files on my flashdrive and begin to work on the hobby I've been itching to do all day. Continuing to modify and work with my version of *Lawn of the Dead 2*, a game I've been obsessed with since I was nine years old. This passion project has been on my mind all day and for the last four months. Testing just to double check to see if the mod is still functioning, the game loads, title screen is right in front of my eyes... and the text from my dad in the corner... but I have better things to worry about.

I find myself sitting in front of a black tablet. It's covered in smudge-marks and fingerprints, and I'm sitting on the top bunk of my bed. In the center of the room, my brother plays a football-based video game on the TV, but which version of the game I could not tell. The tablet starts to load up a game: *Lawn of the Dead 2*. I stare intently at the screen, waiting for the progress bar to finish. Ninety-seven percent finished... now ninety-eight... ninety-nine...! One hundred! I jump up from my spot on the floor, rushing to the living room, "Dad, dad! I wanna show you something!" I shouted, being out of breath by the time I got to his chair.

My dad paused the TV and looked at me, "What's up buddy?" "Check out this new update, it's super cool!" I said, feeling the need to show him everything new about the game, this enemy does this, this level has that, everything.

"That's really neat buddy" he told me.

"So, you'll remember that right?" I asked him



He paused, having to think for a second, "Yep, it slows enemies down but it can't hurt them"

"Haha! You got it!" I say, before running back to my room. My dad chuckles a little, before unpausing the TV and going back to his show. It didn't bother me, I had better things to worry about.

As I continue gazing at the title screen, my mouse hovers over the "play" button. My eyes avert the screen, however, choosing to focus on a different screen instead. My eyes flash from my phone, to my laptop, then back to my phone, then back to my laptop again, and finally... the X button in the top right corner. I close the tab, and close the laptop. Putting my phone in my pocket, I step outside of my bedroom door.

My family all looks me dead in the eyes, as if I'm the most interesting thing they've seen in years. My dad gestures to the seat in between him and my brother, "sit down buddy" he says. Eyes focused on the ground, I walk over and sit at my seat, attention fixated on the floor. My dad sighs before he speaks, "So, we wanted to speak to the two of you about your behavior towards each other"

"We know," Omar coldly replies.

Dad rubs his forehead with his palm, sighing again, "it's just... you boys have known each other for literally your whole lives, eighteen and sixteen years, and we just don't know why you kids can't get along"

"What's going to happen when we die in the future?" My mom interjects. She's met with more silence from me and Omar, "Are you two just never going to see or speak to each other again? Is that what I get to think about on my deathbed?"

Omar continues to look away. I keep myself fixated on the floor. It's my dad's turn to speak again, "We just.. We don't know why it's this way. What's stopping you boys from getting along?"

At that moment, I didn't know what came over me, but I felt the need to stand up and shout, "You think I don't want a relationship with my brother!? Do you know how much I think about and reflect on the times when we could get along!?" I tried to keep my composure but it was no use, my voice had become shaky, and I could feel the first stream of a salty tear stream down my cheek, "All the time I think about how much better it was back then, and how much things just suck now!" I pause, breathing heavily as my parents and brother look at me in shock, "Whatever, I have better things to worry about, I'm going to my room!"

In a panic, I run towards my room like I've done time and time again, but the voice of my mom stops me, "Dan please stay out here..." she says softly.

"Why should I?" I cry, "I'm an eighteen year old, standing up and crying in front of his family and making a scene of myself. It's pathetic, isn't it?"

"Do you think adults don't cry?" My mom asks, taking me aback, "When your father told me about how you two were acting earlier I sat in the bathroom and sobbed, thinking I was a failure because you boys couldn't get along" I could hear mom's voice get shakier, I felt like running away in shame, "And everytime I wanna see you, Dan, I feel like I'm just being rushed out of your room. Taking senior photos with you was one of my favorite memories with you... because I know I don't have many of those left to have..."

A tear runs down my mom's face, as I begin choking up, "I liked the senior



photos too mom..." I run into her arms and just hug her, crying like a newborn baby. She hugs me tight, as I hug her tighter. I feel like my brother and dad may have been feeling awkward, but I didn't care, I had better things to worry about.

In a classroom full of highschool students, all wearing suits, I sit at the very front of the room. A student stands up in the middle of the room, setting up black visual aids behind himself. He turns around and begins speaking with little to no hesitation, "Come one, come all! Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls! Step right up and take your seats, and be prepared for... for..." there it was: a memory slip. I could tell what was happening, I've seen it many times before. The speaker looked panicked, but eventually found his footing again, "for the biggest, most bone-rattling, awe-inspiring..." the speech continues on, but likely not his mind. I watched him grow more fixated on me, I could tell he was worried about having a bad first impression. Maybe, he didn't even know what he was worried about, and maybe, it wasn't as bad as he thought. I've been in his space before, the fear of the present just sucking, the looming haunting of the rose-tinted past. All of it can be troublesome to handle, but it always turns out ok in the end. Sometimes, just maybe, there's better things to worry about.

Maligo, Pedro *Faculty

A true Halloween Story

Thank you for inviting me to this year's Scary Showcase. I'm happy to be among so many gifted storytellers and I hope my story won't detract from the overall quality of the great tales shared here tonight. But please allow me to read

my story because if I focus on reading I won't choke up from all the emotion it triggers in me. Even reading it I'll be covered in goose bumps for its spookiness.

The fact is that before I ever set foot on the Doane campus I already knew it like the back of my hand. When I came for my campus interview it was like I had been here all along—I could recognize and name the places, I would know how to go from point a to point b, I'd even know the shortcuts! This is because at my previous job I had a colleague who was a Doane grad and Doane was all he would talk about. After graduation he went on to education and could have tried for a job at Doane but eventually moved down south to follow his wife. We all know people who have this passion and love for their alma mater—this guy's love and passion for Doane was off the charts. He would talk about his days at Doane every chance he had: classes, buildings, lake, beautiful campus, springtime flowers, the traditions, favorite people, and on and on. We developed a strong friendship and were always together. And he was a good man, too—that's one of the reasons I liked him so much.

As a matter of fact, at the small university where we worked, people called him Gooder Jeff. They called us Good Pedro and Gooder Jeff. For whatever reason I've always been called good but I don't think of myself that way. When it came to Jeff, though, there was no doubt at all: the guy was beyond gooder—it was just his nature. People would always remember how they only saw us fighting once, when we were at a university picnic on the beach and got into a shoving match. There was this little kid who was caught in the undertow and



was being carried away from the shore. Both Jeff and I jumped in the ocean and rescued him. I grew up in Rio and Jeff grew up in Minnesota: you know, water... no big deal to us. So we're swimming back to the beach with the kid and I wanted Jeff to be the one walking out of the ocean with him. I wanted Jeff to get all the credit. Jeff felt the same way about me. He wanted me to come ashore carrying the kid, and as a result even before reaching the sand we got into this fight, which was the only time he and I fought. We actually sort of forgot about the kid and the rip current started sweeping him away again, but by then a couple of lifeguards had swum out after us and picked the kid up.

That was the only time Jeff and I had some type of dispute, and it was for a good reason. Not even when he worked to make sure I didn't get the promotion I deserved I felt we weren't friends. I knew he wanted the promotion too, so I was fine with him torpedoing my candidacy. He wanted something good for himself. He was a good man. We often say someone is good because of the good they do out in the world, but we forget that they have the right to be good to themselves, too, especially if they are good people like Jeff was. So I was OK with how the situation turned out and we continued to be close friends. Actually, that situation was what made me go job hunting, which ultimately resulted in my coming to Doane. Had I received the promotion at the other place, I would have no reason to go looking for a new job. And it turned out the new job was at Doane. When I came up for the interview, Jeff was crazy happy: later I told him how it was like I already knew the place thanks to his stories, and how I think that gave

me a big advantage. Then I received the job offer and he was ecstatic: more than vicariously, now he'd be able to "live Doane" through me. He'd come visit. He'd fulfill his dream of being at Doane again. This was a great thing. We were both very happy.

At the old place they threw a big farewell party for me, a big barbecue like they do in the south. And that's when things that were going so well started to go wrong. Jeff was eating a chicken thigh and swallowed a piece of that very thin, longish bone that runs down the side of the chicken's leg bone. It is thin as a needle and totally unnecessary because that strong leg bone is right there already—that thing is certainly a leftover from the days when chicken were fish and evolution hasn't caught up yet. Jeff swallowed a piece of it and it pierced his glottis. We noticed something was wrong because his voice suddenly became weird, but what happened too was that the very thin piece of bone also pinned open his epiglottis. So he kept saying "I'm fine! I'm fine!" but he wasn't, because food was going into his larynx. We took him to the hospital when he collapsed and they saved his life, but by then he had all this fluid and debris in his lungs and in a couple of days that mess had become a major infection and that's what he was going to die from: he was developing a killer sepsis.

The doctors saw it coming. They told us. They told Jeff. Jeff's wife was in Africa; she worked for a QNGO on peace projects. We wanted her to come home right away, but Jeff told us no. He was such an incredibly good person. What difference will it make, he asked, compared to the difference she can be making in Africa? Leave her there. That



alone is an amazing story. So I sat by him and saw my dear, dear friend go. I remember his last words. I leaned over to hear him say very faintly “And I don’t even like dark meat.” Which I knew to be true. I don’t like dark meat either. But Jeff was such a good person that he was eating a thigh in order to leave more white meat for other folks. One week after my farewell party, he passed. So, at the end of that summer I came to Doane with this incredible bittersweetness: the pain of losing my dear friend but at the same time the comfort of knowing that, in a way, I’m a surrogate for his dream of being here.

And now comes the part I’ve never told anyone to this day, the story that keeps me up at night and gives me chills when I walk through campus during the day. I’ve been keeping this story a secret for six years!

It was during Homecoming of my first year here. My wife and I came to campus to enjoy the festivities, spent the day here, and after the fireworks we headed to the parking lot by the Auditorium. There were almost no cars left, and it was pretty dark. As we walked to our car, we saw this thing appear out of nowhere, and it was a man’s figure, and it was Jeff standing in front of us. I can’t begin to tell you my fear. A whitish, translucent Jeff right there, not really blocking the way but for all purposes blocking the way. If you’ve never seen a ghost, pray you never do. It is absolutely terrifying. “Hi, Pedro,” he said. “I’m so happy you are here for me! Promise me you’ll be here forever.” I was just frozen in place—I was dizzy, I had no blood running, I was about to faint. Then I heard my wife say “Hi, Jeff. He will. And it’s nice to see you again.” She was so calm! He turned to

her—I remember it was a very odd turn; it was like one part of that gauzy figure turned but the head turned a lot more slowly, almost like trying to find where to look with those hollow eyes that had this weak glow. “Hi, Cynthia,” he said. “Good to see you, too. I’m happy all went well for you in Africa.” And with that he floated away and vanished right into the Auditorium wall. My knees buckled. I sat on the curb, shaking and then crying. Cynthia put an arm around my shoulders, took one of my hands and tried to calm me down. “Why are you like this? There’s nothing to be afraid of! It was just Jeff, your friend!” she said. “But he’s been dead for months!” I said. “So what?” Cynthia said. “Why are you so afraid? Wasn’t Jeff the goodest person you know?” I muttered a “Yes” through my sobbing. “Then there’s nothing to be afraid of,” said Cynthia. “But he’s been dead for months!” I managed to repeat. “It doesn’t matter,” Cynthia said. “The fact that someone is dead doesn’t change their nature... You have nothing to be afraid of—c’mon, get up and let’s go home.” I could barely raise myself, so she helped me up and half-carried me to the car.

“I’m lucky to have you,” I said on the drive home. “Leave the rearview mirror alone,” she said. “Stop looking at the back seat. There’s nothing there. Keep your eyes on the road. A deer can jump out in front of us anytime. And I’m lucky to have you, too.”

Pedersen, Tasha

It’s Okay to Try Again - To the third grader that changed my life, Thank you

I believe that every single person has a voice, rather you choose to listen is



entirely up to you. I believe that every person that you come across in your life is there for a reason. They are there to teach you something that you didn't know that you needed, they are there to help you celebrate your success. They are the ones who see you at your worst, and also at your best. They are the ones who watch, listen, and observe the person that you are. They are the people that need YOU in THEIR life. This is what education has taught me, in particular one third grade student that I had the absolute honor to teach, and learn from.

The first day that I showed up to her school, I was warned. I was warned that she was a new student and she “was trouble.” She would get very angry, would not want to do work, and it seemed that no one was too excited to work with her. Due to the way I was brought up, I was. I saw this as an opportunity! We were both new to this school, and I was honestly a little nervous to be working in a school that was way bigger than I was used to. I couldn't help but wonder what she looked like, what her story was, and who she really was. I had a feeling that it was nothing like the labels that were being placed on her.

I remember waiting in the classroom watching all of the students walk into the classroom and wondering who was who. I watched and waited to meet her. As everyone put their things away, and made their way to their desk, I began looking at nametags and trying to match their face to their names so I could make sure that I would greet them correctly. Just seconds before the final bell rang signalling the start of the day, the last group of students walked in. I had turned my back for a minute to help a student with a jacket, and when I turned

around, there she was. Lo-and behold, she had a name. No labels, a name. A name that I will not forget for the rest of my life.

Throughout the semester there were a whole lot of ups and downs, and I learned quite a bit. This was a child who had been to five different schools by the start of her third grade year. She was in a military family, and her mom was active in the service. She really liked getting the morning snack, and loved to offer me some of hers. She loved math, but hated reading. She made a few friends but was kind of reserved. I am assuming she kept her guard up because she was never in one place for too long. She didn't like people to ask her if she needed help, but she loved to help people. She loved to talk, but felt like no one listened to her. She was a very happy child, but would experience big emotions. There were days of frustrations, and there were days full of success. There were some adults that she enjoyed being around, and there were others not so much.

As an aspiring educator, part of the process is to get observed by your professors in order for them to assess what/ how you are doing. The day that I learned the most, was the day that I wanted to give up, and it just so happened to be on the day of my final observation of my first semester of junior year.

The day started off rough for this student, it was the end of the semester, it was cold outside, and the ponytail that she used to hold back her dreadlocks broke on her way to school. Her homework folder was left at home, and to be honest, she was not having it. I greeted her just like I had done every day that I was there throughout the semester, and she walked straight past me and right on



into the room. That pretty much summed up how the rest of the day went for us, that was until art. I had promised her that I would go with her to one of her art classes, and it just so happened to fall on the day of my observation. We got to art, and she was for what seemed like the first time in forever, happy to be at school, and to work on her project. The time flew by, and before I knew it, it was minutes away from being observed, and minutes away from one of the most stressful times in my short teaching career.

The art teacher announced in front of the whole class that this student needed to start cleaning up. Which was fine. The problem though was that everyone else was able to continue to work for that five minutes. She sat in the back, and watched as everyone continued to work. As you can imagine, this did not go well for her. She began to get worked up, and before I could talk to her, the teacher sent her out of the classroom and was told to go to a different room. I quickly followed her out to make sure that she was okay, but also to make sure that she was going to the right place. I caught up to her, and she was able to tell me where she was supposed to go. Come to find out, the room number she was supposed to go to was not real, it did not exist, and we found ourselves in the lowest level of the school. We stopped by the windows and she broke down. "It's not fair that I don't get to work the full time, it's not fair that I tried to say I could work until everyone else cleans up. I don't like it here. I miss my old school. The teachers there listened to me. You are the only one here who cares about me." The last words tore at my heart. I sat down on the floor next to her, and we talked for a few minutes, and to be honest, I was afraid I

was going to have to call someone because nothing that I was saying was helping, and the clock was ticking closer and closer to when I was getting observed.

We finally made progress, and just as we were walking up the many flights of stairs, my professor greeted us at the top of the first flight. My CT had sent her to look for me in case I needed help, or this student was hurting me. I was frustrated. Frustrated that I didn't get to start the lesson on time, frustrated that they still were thinking about this student as a problem child, and honestly overwhelmed with how negative the day had been. All three of us walked back to the classroom, and the second I opened the door, it was time for me to teach the lesson. I did it... but as I was teaching, the student broke down again, and was very near being sent out of the classroom to a safe room. What felt like a lifetime ended up only being forty-five minutes.

I received the feedback from my cooperating teacher and my professor, and they were all really good. In my head though, I had failed. Feeling defeated, I went back to my desk to hopefully get at least a minute of calm before the next lesson, and here came the student. Despite having a breakdown, she was able to tell me exactly what my lesson was about, and even mentioned the part she liked. How was she able to do this? I still do not know to this day. She then proceeded to tell me that she was frustrated. It was probably unprofessional, but I agreed with her and said that I was also feeling that way. Her response to that was one that was far beyond her years.

She replied, "it's okay, I liked your lesson. You know, you can always try



again.” I didn’t know what to say, or how to reply. For some reason, those words hit me. Suddenly nothing was as bad as it seemed.

I responded, “If I can try again, so can you. Tomorrow can be a better day. For both of us.”

The following day, and for the remainder of my time at her school, we tried again. At the end of the semester, when it was time for me to say my goodbyes, and to move onto the next school. She was my hardest goodbye. We all did an activity as a class where we went around the room and wrote kind/encouraging words on a piece of paper for each other. She did not get to participate.... She had gotten in trouble in a previous class, and was not able to come back until after lunch. I ended up writing her a relatively long note thanking her for all of her progress, and thanking her for being such a great human and teacher. I was able to read her that note in the hallway before she entered the classroom. As I read, she cried, tears streamed down her face, and by the end of it, I was crying too. She gave me the biggest hug, and didn’t want to let go. When I went in to tell the rest of the students goodbye, and to grab my things, my heart was feeling full, and I was leaving knowing that these students were going to do so many great things. I gathered my things and just as I got myself together and was walking down the stairs, I heard someone shouting wait, wait, wait, don’t leave yet. I turned around, and there she was. Holding a purple sticky note.

“This is for you! Thank you for believing in me!” She said as she went in for another hug. There it was, a waterfall of tears from both of us. The note read “We believe in you!”

That is why I choose to believe. I believe in the good of others. I believe that if you choose to listen, your world just might be changed. I believe that the people in your life can change and impact you for the better. I believe every person has a story that deserves to be heard. I believe that even on the days where you want to walk away from it all, when you want to give up. You try again, and again.

Prauner, Anna

The Last Out

I know it will come on a day in May. Time is fleeting to the point where if I truly wanted to, which I absolutely do not, I could sit and count down days on a calendar.

I would like to say that it would be on a crisp spring afternoon, the kind that is made for a ball game to be played outside. Where the wind is barely there as to not affect the play of the game, and the grass is a pristine shade of green. Yet, given the past four years as evidence of college softball weather, there’s no way to predict what will happen.

The game will still be the same though. My cleats will dig into the dirt. The bat will still swing the same way it has since I first picked it up all those years ago. The leather glove that has been formed perfectly around my hand will accompany me in the outfield. Cheers will be yelled only like softball players can. Seven innings will be played until the last out is recorded.

But then, the game will be over.

We will huddle one last time. Coach will say words that are probably inspirational and heartfelt but that I likely will not be able to recall verbatim in the next four years.



I suppose the one thing that will remain constant no matter the outcome is walking into the dugout for the last time and putting away my things.

See, I have a habit of forgetting where I set my stuff in the dugout regardless of our assigned cubbies or the uniform helmets on the floor our coaches make us organize. I'll spend several minutes just trying to find my equipment.

My bat will be at the end of the dugout, which I will collect first. I cannot lie, it is probably my pride and joy. At this point I swing a 34 inch bat. It is a light baby blue bat that is end loaded and double barreled but one piece. For someone without the knowledge of softball bats, that meaning would be lost. But for me, this bat is special. It is composite power.

It is also a far cry from the bat I first picked up over a decade ago. I am surprised that aluminum bat was able to hit anything. But, when I picked it up for the first time and stepped into the box with that pink and purple bat, I had all the confidence in the world.

I still remember my dad tossing me wiffle balls in the front yard before I was too big and too good so my mom made us go somewhere else lest I break a window. He patiently pitched me the ball over and over again, me whiffing on most of my swings. It did not matter because I had that bat.

I stuff the bat away in my bag before I get the urge to swing it one last time and throw my helmet in there too. My batting gloves have fallen on the ground in the process, so I go to pick them up.

I have had many iterations of batting gloves over the years. When I got really mad at myself after hitting

sometimes I would take them off so aggressively they would tear. These ones are still intact, if you ignore the sweaty smell that emanates off of them and that they are no longer the crisp white color they once were.

My teammates certainly were not able to ignore the smell. Not that I blame them, my batting gloves are terrible. I would say I could not wash them because they would shrink, which is partly true. But really, I was a bit superstitious.

Why would I want to wash something that was a testament to all the hours upon hours of time I have spent in the cages? Evidence over the years of the work put in. Now all I have left of it are these smelly, slightly damp batting gloves.

I go to collect my glove, which is still on the field sitting up in the grass. This is something I take pride in. Sometimes what you see in softball gloves is that players do not take care of them. It creates what we call a "pancake glove" where it looks like someone flattened it with their car. Not my glove though.

Since I got it freshman year, I have taken care to shape it and care for it so that it is still as beautiful as the day I was given it.

The chestnut brown leather is still as supple and gorgeous from all the glove conditioners I have worked into it. The lacing is a little loose now but that is to be expected after playing fifty plus games in four months. Even the stitching on the branding still looks new; the white letters spelling Nokona.

As far as gloves go, Nokonas are some of the best in the game. When I was in middle school and wanting a new glove it was of course the kind I wanted. My dad told me no and that kind of glove was reserved for college softball players.



I take my beloved Nokona and put the softballs I have kept for the past four years of college ball in its webbing to hold the shape. Then I place it in my softball bag and zip it up.

While zipping it up, I notice that the smaller pockets have come undone. As I go to close them, I notice a small toy cow inside.

There's really nothing special about this cow. It is a miniature little figure of a red and white Minecraft cow. I found it lying in the dirt years ago after an all star game when I was fourteen.

All star games were the best because you got to just play with a bunch of random people. The day I found the cow we had demolished our opponents in both games on a sunny Saturday in the middle of nowhere Nebraska. My teammates and I were waiting to go get ice cream like we did to celebrate often at that age when I saw the toy cow. I picked it up because I thought it might be nice to remember the day somehow and have not gotten rid of it since.

I still do not even think about taking it out of my bag. I just place it back in its home in my softball bag and zip it shut.

Now comes the last part. The one I have been dreading the most. I need to take off my cleats.

I have worn metal cleats since I was fourteen years old. In softball, this is the age you are allowed to start wearing them. Before that you have to wear gross molded cleats. I envied the older girls who could wear them.

The thing about metal cleats is that they make the most melodic sound when you walk in them.

Sure, I think they are better when you are playing on a real dirt field as far as

running goes, and they sure help a lot getting a grip while pop up sliding. As an outfielder, I prefer them in the grass to molded cleats. Yet, my absolute favorite thing about metal cleats is the way they sound when you walk across cement in them.

Most parents do not like when their child walks across cement in their nearly hundred dollar cleats. Overtime, it is like their money is grinding away. I cannot help the urge to walk in them one last time. To hear the melodious click-clack sound of the cleats as the metal meets the pavement.

Unfortunately, the dugout does not have the kind of surface to make that optimal sound. So, I take my cleats off one by one. For some reason, I actually bother to untie the laces. Usually, I would just take them off and shove them in my bag.

This time, I strategically untie each lace and shake out all the dirt at the bottom of the soles. I place them both gently in the bottom compartment of my bag.

Suddenly, there is nothing more to put away. I wonder if there is something else to do, but I know deep down there is not. No more innings to play. Nothing left to do. No loose ends to tie up. The inevitable has happened, and I must get out of the dugout.

So I grab my things, putting one arm through each strap of my bag until it fits on both my shoulders.

I know my parents will be waiting for me in the stands. There will be pictures to smile for and words of encouragement exchanged. Maybe there will even be ice cream.

I start to walk out of the dugout. Amazingly, I notice that the sky is still blue. The sun still hangs in the sky



shining, not giving in to setting quite yet. Putting one foot in front of the other, I walk out of the dugout and off the field.

Ramsey, Emma

La La Land; Mia's Auditions

La La Land (2016) directed by Damien Chazelle is a musical movie that utilizes color and costume design to show the characters' personalities and emotions. This makes the film and characters subconsciously easier to understand and sympathize with. There are so many hidden meanings in the film's costume design. One of the main characters, Mia, played by Emma Stone, is an aspiring actress in LA living with her three friends trying to find her big break. Although the movie is not solely about her acting career the director makes certain choices to show where she is comfortable and where she isn't. He uses her clothing, environment, and body language to convey her personality and what she wants.

In her first on-screen interview, she wears a blue puffy snow coat that doesn't compliment her body, her skin, or her hair color. It washes her out and takes away from her beauty making her hair look muddy instead of the fiery red it is when she's happy and confident. This shows that the interview is probably not going to go well. This is layered over black slacks and a white t-shirt. Then when she leaves she gets on an elevator with two other red-haired girls. They are wearing the exact same white shirt and black pants as her emphasizing the oversaturation in the acting industry. The building and room she was in were very bland and white not really matching her bright and perky personality. In a short

highlight of the next few unsuccessful auditions, they pair together some odd color combinations. First, she is dressed in teal scrubs, and behind her is a bright yellow wall. The color combination in addition to her red hair is jarring and doesn't look like a good fit. She is probably uncertain about even wanting this role. Next, she is wearing a navy blue police uniform and in front of a red wall. The wall takes the attention away from Mia because it's such a bright color and she's in dark clothes. This could mean that she would get too absorbed into the role or she would lose herself in the process of making this film. In the last audition in the montage, she is wearing a red leather jacket in front of a bright green wall. She is auditioning for a mean teacher who justifies it as telling the hard truth. The green backdrop may symbolize the inner conflict she would have with the character should she get the role because she is not mean or blunt. This possibly highlights a deeper misalignment with her true self fighting between giving up and following her dreams. At her call back for the teacher role she is hesitant to start, fixating on everything the casting manager is doing. She is back in the red leather jacket but this time there is a white wall behind her. This could show a possible disconnect between her and the character she is trying to portray and she gets shut down by the director after the first line.

She wrote her own one-woman play and in it, she is dressed in a pin-striped black and white pantsuit and then a white t-shirt and a black skirt. She has given up on her main dream of making it big and is settling on something smaller, then she just gives up altogether. She is told that a casting agent came to



her show and loved it. This gives more credibility to the audition and gives her more hope for success. In her final interview in the movie, she is wearing a baby blue sweater and blue jeans. The lighter, less vibrant colors show that she has grown up, but she still has hope for the future and is still the creative, joyful, and hopeful girl at heart. The rooms in the building she goes into also have more color and seem more welcoming and open than the previous locations. The director seems kind and open-minded, unlike the ones before. The curtain behind her is a dark blue-green complimenting her red hair, and because she is dressed in lighter colors she is the focal point of the scene. This is the first audition where she looks like she belongs there and like she is confident in herself and her abilities for the first time. This is the first time we see her connect with an audition and be truly proud of her effort. This is also the first time anyone comes with her to the audition showing her that she is not alone in her journey.

By mixing color, costume, and narrative, *La La Land* not only captures the emotional highs and lows of its characters but also brings the audience closer on a subconscious level. The attention to color and what looks best on the actress to express to the audience what is good for her and what might not be a good fit. When a character is in a color that washes them out or doesn't match their surroundings they look uncomfortable and out of place. When a character is in colors and clothes that compliment their skin tone, hair color, and surroundings, they appear confident and like they belong in the place that they are.

Musical Chairs Showdown

To start, every summer since third grade I've gone to a week-long church summer camp. Churches from all over Nebraska, and even other states, come together to compete, but more importantly, learn and grow in their faith. Churches are put on one of six teams and we play games during the day to earn points along with other little side tasks to do in our free time. My church won my junior year, knocking an Omaha church out of its winning streak. This year we wanted to win again and everyone else wanted to dethrone us. The whole week we were doing pretty well but were stuck in second for most of it. Then, at the final team standing announcement on Thursday night, they told us that we were in a tie for first place. This was the first time that had ever happened in the very long history of the camp.

The tiebreaker was musical chairs. My team was green, and the other team was blue. The rules: don't pull a chair out from underneath someone, keep walking until the music stops, don't cut around people, and don't be a sore loser. They told each team to send three girls and three guys, and I was one of the girls sent out. Twelve people and ten chairs started the game. The six teams, each with close to 100 people, were surrounding us like a mosh pit, a few were cheering for us, and the rest were cheering for the other team. After the first round, my team lost two people; 4 vs 6. We told each other, "No problem, not a great start, but we're not out of the race yet." They took away two chairs and the music started. They clarify further that we have to keep a steady pace, we can't touch the chairs until the music stops, and we have to fully face forward while walking. The music



stopped, and they lost two people; 4 vs 4. They took away two more chairs, the music started and we continued walking. As I was walking, I was trying to focus on the music, but the sound of people around us was deafening. The music stopped, they lost one, we lost one; 3 vs 3. They took away just one chair this time. The music resumed, and we started walking. Each round felt longer than the last. I was dizzy at that point but I had to keep going. All I could think was, "I can't let my team down." The music stopped, and they lost one; 3 vs 2. They took away another two chairs, there were three guys and two girls. The music started so we walked, they told us to walk the other way to balance it out or something, so we were all struggling to readjust to the direction. The music stopped, we lost one, they lost one; 2 vs 1.

They took away two chairs, so here was only one left. There were two guys, and one girl, which was me. The music started, and we continued walking. It was harder that round to keep a steady pace because there was a point in time where we weren't able to sit on the chair because of the backrest, so to make up for it we just kept walking faster. Another factor was the guy behind me was breathing down my neck, pushing me to go faster. I could barely see anything other than the chair and could only hear the music and my heartbeat as I got more and more exhausted. I felt the pressure from everyone watching, I felt like a fish in a bowl. In my head, the music was going for ten minutes, but I think because it was the same song the whole time it was only three. Either way, I was about to fall over because all I had been doing for the past 15 minutes was walking in a circle that periodically got smaller. I was behind

the chair, the music stopped, my teammate sat down, and the other guy sat on the edge of the chair trying to push him off. The crowd roared, but all I could think to do was wrap my arms around my teammate and the chair to keep him on it because we were so close to winning. After the initial excitement when the music stopped, the room went dead silent and the people in charge conversed about who they thought won. Everyone was on the edge of their seats and I was fighting to keep him on the chair.

People crowded around us before an official winner was named. It felt like ages before I finally heard over the sound system, "Your musical chairs and, more importantly, 2024 camp champions are the..... Green Gators!" My whole team ran to me and my teammate to celebrate and my friends from other teams ran to me as well. A few of us seniors started crying because first, our hard work paid off, but more importantly, the announcement meant that the week was over, and so was senior year. We said a good job to the other team to make sure we weren't sore winners and continued our celebration.

Throughout these 30 minutes, all I could think about was how we had to win. Although winning does feel good, it made me look back on all the years we didn't. Those past years were full of blame and resentment towards someone who just tried their best but was competing against someone better in that aspect of the competition. It made me that much more grateful for the experience and the amazing people I got to celebrate with. Because even if we didn't win a game or activity during the week we congratulated each other and held our heads high because it was now in the past and we



had to keep looking forward. The unity within the team I felt at the very end was unmatched to anything else I have ever been a part of.

Poor Professionalism

When at a football game, most people go to have fun and drink if they are old enough. Others are there to work, whether in the stadium at concessions, coaching, officiating, or walking around tailgates advertising their department at the school. For the latter, there is a level of professionalism that is expected not only from the university but also from the families they are talking to. Even though Doane is a wet campus, faculty should not consume alcohol while working. Doane staff should behave professionally when advertising for the university.

When families go to games, they don't expect to be approached by a university employee who claims to be working, but then asks them for a drink, hangs around only their tailgate, and engages in inappropriate topics of conversation, such as their divorce and where they lost their virginity, with their underage child. What can make this situation worse is if that employee sticks around when they are clearly intruding. In the Doane University Faculty Handbook page 40 subsection 4.9.6.1 (dismissals) for adequate cause, it is stated that "Dismissal for "adequate cause" shall include..... substantial and manifest neglect of duty, and personal misconduct which substantially impairs the individual's fulfillment of their institutional responsibilities." If a faculty member is at a sporting event to advertise their department, especially if it's a DEI department, they should not be drinking alcohol, even though they are in an area

where it is allowed. When this goes unnoticed, that faculty member continues this behavior, becoming intoxicated and therefore unable to fulfill their duties. If they don't get caught or reprimanded they will continue this behavior further neglecting their duties and impairing their institutional responsibilities. This should give probable cause for the university to take action, according to the faculty handbook.

Some reasons this behavior needs to be stopped as soon as possible are that there are families of current students at the games who might feel uncertain about their children staying at the school if these are the people the university is paying to advertise their institution. There could also be recruits and their families at these events who are experiencing the campus and environment for the first time and it is not a good look if faculty are drunk at these events. This behavior can also make the current students feel unsafe with the people who are supposed to be there to help them, they might not feel that they can count on that particular faculty member if they see them drunk at a football game. The people who work at universities are supposed to be held to a higher standard than the students at public events, especially if they are being paid to be there. When someone is behaving unprofessionally when working it gives bystanders the impression that they don't take their job seriously or their job isn't worth what they are being paid. Either way, if the staff member holding the position doesn't respect it, why should the students respect that person as an administrator or someone who they are supposed to go to for advice?



One solution to this issue is to have all staff working at an event go around in groups of two or three, like a buddy system. This provides accountability for all staff in the group so that they can do their job effectively and not feel the need to drink to make the day go by faster. This can be especially helpful if a staff member has already been caught drinking while working and is being given another chance. It will structure something they may have viewed as just time to have fun and destress. A different solution that gives faculty a chance to succeed on their own is to clearly state before an event what their task is and what will happen if they are caught participating in activities clearly outlined as inappropriate in their contract, or verbally stated by a supervisor.

Now, some may argue that if there's alcohol allowed on certain parts of campus and that's where a staff member is partaking in that certain behavior, and they are above the legal drinking age in the United States it doesn't matter because they are an adult and they can make their own decisions. This isn't necessarily true because all staff members agree to the terms in the Doane Faculty Handbook, which again states that a staff member can be released for an adequate cause such as neglect of duties. When someone is drinking most of the time they are trying not to think about work so if they are drinking while working at a public event they are most likely going to push aside what they're supposed to be doing and just try to have a good time. This is a clear neglect of duties. When a person signs a contract or agrees to the conditions in an employee handbook, they lose the right to make all of their own decisions. When they are

working they have to do what is expected. If they do something that they know is not going to be taken lightly by their boss, they should face the consequences.

If this issue goes unchecked, faculty can get away with doing whatever they want while working and representing the school, making the students feel unsafe and leading them to transfer or drop out, losing the university money and dissuading future students who hear about this inappropriate behavior. No one who holds a position of power in a company wants to hear that their employees are making people uncomfortable at public events, but this issue is magnified when the company is a university like Doane, and the people being made uncomfortable are students, their families, and prospective students. When people in power at the university don't take action against this behavior they are making the problem worse by enabling their employees to continue making the university an unsafe place for students, families, and even other faculty members.

Resources:

Doane University Faculty Handbook
2024_25_Final_Faculty_HB.pdf

Rape In Relationships

Sexual assault within relationships is a very real issue that gets dismissed too often. About 41% of women and almost 26% of men report a sexual assault in a romantic relationship. Sexual assault is defined as forcing or attempting to force a partner to take part in a sex act, sexual touching, or a non-physical sexual event when the partner does not or cannot consent. This can be attained by physical violence such as hitting or punching or



psychological aggression which is the use of verbal and non-verbal communication with an intent to harm a partner mentally or emotionally or to exert control over the partner. CDC (2024) Most cases go unreported or unprosecuted because people falsely believe that being in a relationship is guaranteed consent. This belief holds victims in a constant state of fear of their partner keeping them from seeking help. Sexual assault has become a controversial topic in the U.S. so victims often feel alone and like they can't go to anyone for help, especially if it was their romantic partner. However, suppose people in relationships have a strong support system other than their partner to whom they feel confident talking. In that case, they can build up the strength to leave the situation to get help and make sure no one ever falls victim to their assaulter. Making sure people are educated on the concept of consent will greatly decrease the number of people in long-term sexually abusive relationships and it will help outsiders detect the signs of abuse.

Consent is a clear and consistent "yes" from both parties. If consent has to be forced, manipulated, or threatened, it is not valid consent. If one person is intoxicated their consent is automatically invalid because they are not in a fully coherent state of mind, the same goes for if one person is asleep, unconscious, or deceased. To quote a popular consent education video, sleeping people don't want tea. If one person says "Well if you don't have sex with me then you just don't love me" they are manipulating the other and if the latter gives in it is not actual consent. If a person is adamant about not doing anything sexual, but the other touches them sensually to try to convince

them to change their mind that is, again, manipulating them and is not real consent if they get it. Holding back certain aspects of the relationship in return for not getting what they want is also manipulation and, therefore, not true consent. A person could also give their consent before but in the moment they could change their mind and take it away, this is completely okay, and their partner should not get mad if this happens. If a partner does not respect boundaries set, gets mad when plans change, or constantly needs to have their way they likely either don't know or don't care what consent is and they should not be in a relationship.

Common effects of sexual assault are injury, PTSD symptoms, safety concerns, needing help from law enforcement, and missing at least one day of work or school. Because this affects workplaces and schools, some ways to educate the public more effectively are having mandatory training in job offices, explaining in depth what consent is and isn't in, say, a high school health class, and advertising it on social media. This can be done by groups like the CAPE Program that is active on campus here at Doane. Students here at Doane have to take a mandatory CAPE course freshman year and athletes have to take two a semester so the university is doing a very good job at making sure its students are safe and aware of what should happen. This program should be considered in schools across the nation, especially with the increasing number of students being sexually assaulted every year. When people in workplaces and schools feel safe and are educated on topics like consent, performance and morale will be consistent across the board and fewer



people will feel isolated by their past experiences. If employers, school staff, and non-profit rape education organizations take these steps to educate those that they interact with it will save so many people from having to endure the assault and the long-term aftereffects.

Resources:

CDC: About intimate partner violence. (2024). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/intimate-partner-violence/about/index.html>

Steps to Success

When most people think of dance teachers they think of an old lady yelling at her students, or Abby Lee Miller from Dance Moms. Either way, they think of a toxic, body-shaming person who can't let kids be kids. Most dance teachers, however, are not like this. They want their students to be the best, but they also want the best for their students. A truly good teacher won't put one student on a pedestal, body shame any student, or criticize something a student can't fix. Diana Brooks, who has been teaching dance all over the country for over 20 years said, "I work with all ages at all levels and I teach the basics on how to move depending on what style it is. But we don't just teach dance, it's also discipline, behavior, how to be a good human, and how that can transition into professional jobs, no matter what they decide to do." She now teaches dance at Inspire Dance Complex (Formerly Piccoli Dance Theatre) and college courses at Nebraska Wesleyan University. There are life skills that dancers learn, we have to be able to improvise and adapt if something

goes wrong and be ok if what we did wasn't our best.

Most people think that being a dance teacher is all fun all the time, when in reality it's just as tiring, if not more, than "normal" jobs where you sit at a desk all day. "They think it's just like playing, they don't realize how hard it is to dance." For all jobs, if you don't want to work you still have to, but it's especially hard for dance teachers because sometimes they can't see the fruits of their labor immediately, there are no boxes they can check off to see whether they had a good day or a bad day. But Diana said, "There is nothing I can do other than show up, but usually when I walk in the door I'm like 'Oh, these kids like being here' and they put me in a good mood." If she has a deadline to finish choreography for a dance but is having a mental block, the impending stress of the deadline can add to it and make the problem last longer. Diana works through mental blocks in choreography by stepping away and doing something else, or watching dances by other people. This takes her mind off of the stress and stops her from getting frustrated with herself and making the issue worse. She said that the most mentally taxing part of being a dance teacher is having 30+ kids in a class and they all have different personalities and reasons for being there. Some students want to be social and others want to dance, and mediating that so they can have fun but still learn and dance is hard.

Teaching dance isn't just about choreographing and teaching new fun tricks. Dance teachers must remember that their students are still human and, most of the time, still kids and figuring out who they are. When teaching a class of students, each person learns



differently, some students can apply a correction by just hearing what they need to do and visualizing it, some need to see someone else do it to fully understand what it looks like, and most people need to have the teacher physically move their body to what it's supposed to be. I have used this myself when teaching little kids because they don't know how to exactly mimic what I'm doing. Once a teacher knows the best way to correct a student, each rehearsal and polishing session becomes so much more fruitful for the student. However, even if the teacher knows how a certain student learns, everyone has bad days and in dance, it can seem so much bigger than yourself. If the student isn't hitting their turns the way they usually do it can feel like the whole world is crumbling in on itself because it usually is so easy. When this happens it is very easy to get frustrated, so they want to try again and again, but now they are frantic and nothing good is coming from the repetition. When this happens, the teacher may decide that it's best to take a break to work on something else, get a drink, or have a chat to see if there's something else going on in their life that could be the root of the issue. Diana has used this technique countless times with me. Sometimes students give up before they even get to class and say that they're hurt, or sick, and need to sit out. "Most of the time the teacher can tell if there's something wrong, or if they just aren't in the mood that day, but sometimes the best thing to do is let them lie because they'll see their friends laughing and having fun and it will make them remember they like to dance. She doesn't question if a student is injured because if they actually are she doesn't want to push them too far and make it

worse. However, if the student is under the age of 9 it is most likely in everyone's best interest that they participate in the class, how I see it as a teacher is that it builds character so they can push through those hard days when they're older, and most of the time the little kids aren't doing anything in class that would cause an injury. The slump usually comes to a chunk of older dancers all at once in the middle of a semester when there haven't been any holiday breaks in a while and everyone's getting tired mentally and physically." She uses the same tactic if a student is getting frustrated and sits and talks with the group to lighten the mood, or she knows that dancing is going to make them feel better in the long run.

When thinking about her relationship with her students, it's not strictly student-teacher all the time she needs to be able to have a semi-intimate relationship with their students in order for them to trust what they are being given, but if she's too friendly she won't get the respect she needs to run her class smoothly. There is a balance to be made because if a teacher shows more interest in one student over another that can create favoritism and possibly resentment towards the student, even though they aren't doing anything to cause it. Diana says she does not believe in favoritism and aims to give each student the same amount of attention as long as they respect her and her time. There are times, though, when one student in particular needs more attention because they aren't getting a skill the way they want to and they are getting frustrated. How Diana handles this is by watching and giving exact details on what to fix and reminding them that greatness comes with hard work. Building a relationship with



students isn't the only step in them trusting a teacher, they have to be able to explain in some detail what they are expecting or show it to the students, whether it's a video or the teacher doing it themselves. They have to understand the process before she lets them fully try whatever the skill is so they don't get hurt, she can let them use tumbling mats in case something does go wrong, but ultimately she again reminds them that it probably won't happen the first time and the only way it will is through repetition.

When working in the dance industry for a long time, you get to work with some pretty big names, and maybe even have some students become those big names. "A lot of times that's what keeps me motivated to keep going into the same situations every day. It gets me out of my norm seeing other people who are out in the world of dance. It remotivates me to teach with energy and not think it's 'just another dance class'" Being in Lincoln Nebraska, there aren't many opportunities to work with award-winning choreographers so the few opportunities Diana gets, she grabs on and makes sure to get the most out of the experience, even after it's over. When students make it to Broadway or become professional commercial dancers the teachers feel proud and lucky to be a part of their life because most of the time the students realize they wouldn't be where they are without them. "Realistically it's just really cool to see that you contributed to that."

Addendum

Google Gemini: 5 Life Skills Learned Through Dance | CPYB

ChatGPT:

<https://dancersforum.com/dance-teacher-career-information>

Perplexity.ai: What I Really Teach as a Dance Educator ... | Shannon Dooling Dances

I used the same prompt with all three websites and made sure it was clear and concise. I asked for three different real links to three different real websites that describe what it's like to be a dance teacher. Gemini didn't initially give me the links even though I specifically asked for them so I had to ask it for the links to the websites it referenced. Chat gave me an overview of each website and included the link after, Perplexity gave me two websites that have videos and other resources to help someone become a dance teacher which is not what I asked for. I only used one prompt, except when I had to ask Gemini for links, but for the most part, they all gave me what I asked for the first time. To check if they were factually accurate I went to the websites and looked at who wrote them and if they came from actual dance teachers and studio owners who have been doing it for a really long time. I compared information from the sources to what Diana said in our interview, my personal experience, and what I've heard from many other dance teachers that I have had. I did not use any of the information provided by AI because I feel that it was not necessary for the bettering of the essay. I think that everything gathered in the interview along with my experience covered everything and adding the other sources would make the essay redundant and just add to the length not the quality of the essay.



Ramey, Madison

A Perfect Angel: The Respectable Life of David Willhoite

In 2023, The CDC estimates that 81,083 people died from opioid related overdoses. While this number is a decrease from its 2022 reported stat, it's clear that the United States' opioid epidemic is still an ongoing battle that has no end in sight. Yet, while this disease, that is addiction, claims new victims day-in and day-out, society rarely, if ever, offers a helping hand to those who need it the most, addicts.

In 2023, my cousin, David Willhoite, lost his almost 30-year-long battle with addiction. However, out of embarrassment and disappointment, my family chose not only to hide his death, but refused to memorialize his life in any way shape or form.

This story is not one that details his struggle with addiction, nor is it one that talks about our cherished memories together. I knew very little about David. His life was one that was purposefully separated from my own, out of fear that his disease was contagious. In fact, if you were to ask his parents about his life, they would describe it as a waste of what was their "miracle child."

With the hope that his soul has finally found peace, here is his deserving obitarty, one that eliminates any evidence of addiction or a life that had succumbed to one, allowing anyone to see that his life was one full of passion:

David James Willhoite, passed away unexpectedly on May 12, 2023, at his childhood home in Oak Forest, Illinois. Born on September 8, 1976, to Judith and James Willhoite, David was their only child. Due to his parent's highly active

careers, he grew up under the loving care of his uncle Dennis and aunt Tena Johnson, alongside their youngest daughter, Kelly Ramey.

David was described by his family as a gentle soul with a quiet demeanor and a heart deeply connected to nature. His aunt Tena fondly remembers him as "a perfect angel" – a description that those outside his family would concur.

David became an alumni of Chicago Christian High School in 1994, after attending Oak Lawn's Christian schools since the age of 3. He briefly attended DeVry Institute before finding his true calling in landscaping. His professional life included multiple forms of employment at a variety of local landscaping companies, which he held onto for almost his whole life.

Those who knew David remembered him as someone who, though introverted, treasured meaningful moments with family and friends. Yet, his connection to nature was more than a profession – it was a fundamental piece of his true identity.

David is survived by his parents Judith and James Willhoite, his aunt Tena, and his cousin Kelly Ramey. His parents refrained from hosting any type of memorial service, deciding to cremant his remains almost immediately. Following his cremation, his parents spread his ashes along Indiana's various state parks—allowing him to forever rest in peace among his first true love, nature.

Rejano Candau, Luis

The Importance of Mental Health for the Student- Athletes

Nowadays, mental health and preparation are of huge importance in sports. In the past, this was irrelevant for



every athlete or coach and often seen as an excuse. Today, the value of mental health is widely accepted. Each mind and each person are different, and of course, everyone needs something different and prepared in a totally distinct way. This is not only significant in the professional sports world; college athletes also need strong minds.

A healthy mind and preparation include many different things for a student-athlete. The main point is balancing academic and athletic life. On one hand, you need to be responsible for classes, assignments, and exams, and on the other hand, you must continue developing as an athlete, making great strides in training, games, and gym workouts. Techniques like time management, responsibility, mindfulness, and goal-setting will be fundamental for achieving this key idea.

Secondly, confidence is the next most essential thing for a healthy mind in a student-athlete. Everyone needs to build and develop great confidence to achieve the balance necessary for being a successful student-athlete at every university in the country. Confidence in yourself is not built overnight; a process is necessary to start seeing results and achievements. Each individual will have a different way to take that path, but I highly recommend stopping for a moment, thinking about this, and giving this topic the attention it deserves.

In conclusion, it is impossible to underestimate the significance of preparation and mental health for student-athletes. Success on and off the field depends on cultivating a robust and fit mindset as the challenges of juggling academic obligations and physical performance increase. Student-athletes

can establish a routine that supports their goals without compromising their well-being by implementing strategies like time management, mindfulness, and goal-setting.

The Importance of the Coaches in a Team's Success

A team's success involves and combines many things and an essential factor is the team's coach. I am not referring only to the head coach, who is the main character. I want to include all the members of a team's coaching staff and give them the importance that we often forget, because nowadays in the professional leagues, semi-professional leagues, or for example in college here in the U.S., the vast majority of teams have a coaching staff. Apart from this point, the important question here is: How much significance should a coach get for a team's success? There are some crucial points to measure the significance that a coach should get for a team's success:

Firstly, strategy and tactics: A well-structured system can elevate a team, even with average players. Nowadays, strategy and tactics have taken on enormous importance in all sports, especially in competition. In the past, this factor was hardly taken into account by the coaches of different teams. Today's technical teams spend hours and hours in the office preparing tactics and strategies for different matches or competitions.

Secondly, locker room management: this is the hardest one to achieve as a coach because inside a team there are a lot of different personalities that may clash with each other or with the coach's personality. So, everyone knows that it is a really difficult task to



keep everyone happy and hooked in the competition.

Thirdly, player development: Some coaches directly influence the growth of young players and have a huge impact on their performance, and during their future careers. Nevertheless, this does not only happens to young players, there are a lot of players with a long history of experience, and new coaches come in and change the way they act, play, and even think.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that the influence of a coach on a team's success is huge and I emphasize again that it is not only the head coach, it is the entire team that works every day with him. In general, for a team to be successful, there are many factors to take into account, but the one who directs everything and is the most responsible is the head coach.

Rose, Chloe

The Prettiest Star

The AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s dramatically impacted the public perception of the LGBTQ+ community. What was fear and misunderstanding turned into a gain of awareness of their struggles and rights, or lack thereof. As time has progressed, the discussion of the AIDS crisis has once again decreased, and as a product of a public school system, the lack of education on such topics subconsciously resurfaces prejudicial ideologies simply because students aren't given the tools to learn about them.

The Prettiest Star by Carter Sickels puts a fictional perspective on the struggles the LGBTQ+ community faced during the AIDS crisis, and the time in general. The main character, Brian, who

grew up in a picture-perfect, religious home, moved to New York City hoping to gain the freedom his small town did not offer. Due to his AIDS diagnosis, his health plummets and he returns to his small town in Ohio. By doing this, he receives no end of hate from his community, and even though he did his best to keep himself a secret, some of the people he thought he could trust ended up being the ones who dehumanized him, and his rights.

Throughout reading the nonfiction book, I was able to grasp a point of view of what it was like to be a victim of AIDS directly and indirectly. From the point of view of Jess, Brian's sister, the reader can see how the day-to-day lives of AIDS patients were affected. In the pool scene, the rumors about Brian had already been spread and his diagnosis had been inferred. However, what was meant to be an innocent dip into a public pool was portrayed as if a killer whale plunged into a school of innocent fish. Pool manager Wanda demands Brian to exit the water by verbally insulting him: "You can't be in there, infecting the water" (Sickels, 145.) Wanda's word choices suggest that by Brian being in the water, AIDS can be transmitted to other members of the community. Everyone has the right to use public spaces, as there was no rule that AIDS patients could not be involved in normal activities. However, the lack of education in the period, and this scene specifically, allows the reader to identify that people did not even fully understand how AIDS was contracted. HIV/AIDS is transmitted through direct contact with bodily fluids, HIV/AIDS can not be shared through air, water, saliva, or physical contact. Annie, Brian's friend, proved the false perception of avenues of



contraction. When Josh Clay was confronting Brian and trying to “save him” (Sickels, 126) Annie was introduced to Josh and fearlessly “put a protective hand on my (Brian’s) knee-” (Sickels, 126) and insulted the ignorance of Josh by directly proving that you can not be harmed by the touch of a victim. Since society, fictional and nonfictional, was not properly educated on the epidemic, it seemed as if even the sight of an AIDS patient made people fearful of contracting the disease.

During the 80s in healthcare environments, patients seeking help were often confined in different rooms or were even refused treatment. Caregivers and providers thought that through casual contact, they could be exposed to the disease. Fear of contracting AIDS was so high that patients were neglected in the hospitals. Homophobia in society was so normalized at the time, that the well-being of these humans was set aside because these patients loved differently than what was “normal.” Reading the fictional text emphasizes the dehumanizing of patients in the flawed healthcare system when Sickels writes: “Another f-slur taking up a bed space” (Sickels, 4.) Through this part in the text, the reader understands that healthcare workers do not care if you are a man, woman, or human. If you were gay, you were none of the above. Healthcare workers didn’t care about saving lives, they cared about prolonging the lives of those who subconsciously shortened others.

On top of the differences in human rights, members of the LGBTQ+ community experienced social and political consequences. During the period of the rise of the AIDS epidemic,

President Ronald Reagan was in office. Nonfictionally, Mike Sisco was a gay man who had AIDS and received public harassment and hate for swimming in his public pool. Sadly, Mike Sisco passed away on August 4, 1994. The Reagan Administration didn’t speak much about the AIDS epidemic, but in 1982 in an interview, Larry Speakes was asked if the president had anything to say regarding the AIDS epidemic to which he responded: “AIDS? I haven’t gotten anything yet.” Later in the interview after being questioned about banning mouth-to-mouth kissing, he says “I don’t get paid enough. Is there anything else we need to do here?” (German Lopez, 2016.) Essentially, the Reagan administration’s lack of education on the epidemic caused them to overlook the issue.

Fictionally, in *The Prettiest Star*, during the interview with Brian and Naomi, Brian tries to address that “The Reagan administration could care less” (Sickels, 199) because “It’s gay men dying, and drug addicts, and black people” (Sickels, 199.) Brian is cut off from continuing to speak about the political aspect of the epidemic when Naomi interrupts: “Let’s not get into politics” (Sickels, 199.) Society didn’t care what the Reagan administration was doing about the AIDS epidemic, partly because most of society didn’t want them to. It was believed that gay people, or people with “the gay plague” were sinners, and should be terminated from society. Touching back on the pool scene on page 145, members of the community wanted gay people imprisoned, simply because they loved differently.

When reading fictional texts that touch on the real hardships of the LGBTQ+ community through the 1980s

and 1990s, readers can get a closer insight into what families, communities, and patients experienced daily. Members of the LGBTQ+ community had little to no ability to advocate for themselves. Still, by reading these texts and educating young adults, we can be more knowledgeable and continue to make changes. Over time, as society has begun to understand the truth behind the disease, the stigma behind the AIDS epidemic has been able to shift. Previously in a world of discrimination where AIDS patients had little to no care, they can now gain access to many resources and treatment options. Reading fictional texts not only teaches readers about the AIDS epidemic as a whole but allows readers to sympathize with the victims of the past and for LGBTQ+ members today. Although there has been growth in the rights of the LGBTQ+ community, there is still work to be done. According to data released by the Human Rights Campaign, “more than 1 in every 5 hate crimes is motivated by anti-LGBTQ+ bias” (Delphine Luneau, 2024.) For as long as anyone can remember, LGBTQ+ members have been discriminated against and violated, simply because they choose to love who they love. Until society can allow everyone to live and love the way they please, why should anyone?

Ruiz, Laura

Echos of a Dying World

A fevered Earth, her breath now ragged gasps,

Melting glaciers, weeping, silent clasps.

Once vibrant forests, now skeletal frames,

A haunting echo of forgotten names.

The oceans rise, a bitter, salty tear,
Swallowing shores, where life once held
so dear.

Storms rage, a fury without end,

A twisted dance, the world we can't
defend.

The cries of creatures, lost in the fray,

A symphony of pain, fading away.

A burning sun, a relentless glare,

A future scorched, where hope seems
rare.

We watch, our hands tied, a helpless
plight,

As our home withers, consumed by night.

A silent scream, a choked, desperate plea,

Can we not heal, can we not see?

This Earth, our mother, a wounded soul,

A painful mirror, reflecting our toll.

In the ashes of change, a lesson lies,

To mend the wounds, before the planet
dies.

I'll meet you somewhere in between
Beyond the clouds, where stars ignite,

A grandparent's soul, in endless light,

Though miles apart, a connection true,

A love that lives, in me and you.



I reach for you, on wings of thought,
A love unspoken, yet dearly caught,
In every breath, your memory stays,
A guiding star, though life's darkest days.

Schmitz, Hannah

a chance to be lost
what happens when the author sets down
the pen before the story is realized?

when characters are left to rot on a desk
frozen in time, yet aging all the while
does the knight's sword clatter to the
floor?

or is it stuck in position as rigor mortis
sets in?

does he know

that his story is incomplete?

that there is more in store,
something to miss?

does he? does he?

what happens to a love that never has a
chance to be lost?

no dragon breathes its fire, no princess
leaves her tower, no blades clash and
spark with power?

does our hero wrinkle with age, with no
wisdom to accompany his sagging skin?
does he rot and

fester, or stay beautiful forever?

is he a supernova, dying all at once in a
burst of brilliance, or does he fizzle out?

does he know that he lost the ability to
lose?

Collage

Did you know? Did you hear?

You are not real!

What a beautiful thing, not to be real, not
to be a

Human person.

I am not real either, as none of us are.

Do you want to know what I am?

I am the CDs lining my bookshelf

And stickers on the player

I am the clink-clink-clink of necklaces like
windchimes around my throat

Silver, never gold

I am the vintage flush of a polaroid
picture with Sharpie text scrawled onto
the bottom

I am wanderlust for midwest roads and
stardust veins and knives for a tongue

I am a collage, the concept of a person in
your periphery

I am a product, but I am a product that
has been worn down and mended with
time

An artist's rendition of a person that
cannot be fully realized

What are your pieces and parts,



Two-dimensional thing you are?
Are you too much or not enough or both
at once?
Shiny gloss or gritty matte?
What are you?
What products have you allowed to form
your identity?
I Like Pretty Words
I like pretty words
I like the feeling of hope they give me
The connection I feel with the people
before me
That beauty is not luxury
But human nature
We have always loved crystals
And sunsets
And looking into the eyes of a lover

I like pretty words
I like seeing them sprawled on a page
Or hearing the way they linger on the
tongue
On the lips
I like the way they make me feel smart
I get to preen under the attention like a
lovely little bird
When someone tells me my words are
pretty

I love an opportunity to preen
When there are so few reasons to

I like pretty words
I feel safe in them
A pleasant hiding place, a mask and a
home
At the very same time
Those two things seem mutually exclusive
But they are not
My mask is my home
I live in my protection, I live in my little
hermit crab shell
It may not fit but I found it and it is mine.

I like pretty words
They may be vapid and vain and silly
But not to me
Never to me
Perhaps that is because I am those things
I am just a superficial young lady
Makeup and crystals and lace
But there is profundity in joy

I like pretty words
I like that poetry means something



Even if it simply an acknowledgement of
the fact that there is beauty

There is beauty

It is there and it is important

It means something, even if it seems like
nothing

Never in life will there be no light

Even if our languages die out

And us with them

Our words will always be carved into the
stones

Into the mouths of caves hidden under
the waterfalls

I like pretty words

It Does Not Matter
Sometimes I am sitting at a table

That looks like a tower

My seat is lower and my voice is little

I am the dust bunny in the corner

I am the plastic seat in a maze of metal

I am a mouse where the men are rats

They scurry through the subway

I scurry through my words

Sometimes the rats take pity

Poor thing, all wide eyed in her

Little, little chair

Little mouse can do nothing but scurry
and squeak

Little girl does not belong in the sea of
metal

Little, little, little.

The mouse is sick of the word little

The mouse is sick of plastic chairs

But I tell them, I say

“It Does Not Matter”

In my little mouse dreams

I am bigger than the rats

I am not little, I do not squeak

I am the towering table over cowering
rats

I pluck them in the air and I set them in
my old seat

There are scratches in the plastic.

They are in a pile

Rat king

Writhing while I watch

My smile is wicked and pretty and sadistic
and gentle

I sharpened my teeth on nail files and
mouse traps

I lean down at the little rat friends

And I hiss in their faces

I tell them, I say



"It Does Not Matter"

But even as I watch them scratch up my
chair

At the kiddy table

I shoot down my own monster

I shake myself out of my sleep

What a silly dream.

I wake up in my plastic chair

I shake myself away.

And I tell the monster on the hill,

The little mouse

I tell her, I say

"It Does Not Matter"

Sweeny, Jenna

It's crazy how something with 4 paws and
a tail that can't even talk can be a place
that you call home.

A place I call home.

Or *called* home.

In the worst times of my life, she was
always there for me. From yelling in the
house and body image issues that come
with the middle school years to being left
out by friends and having problems with
boys, she was the one thing that could
always make me feel better.

She was always shoving her nose under
my arm and licking my face because she
knew I was sad before a single tear even
fell from my eyes.
She could tell.

She was smart like that.

Border collies are the smartest breed, but
I think she was the smartest one there
was (sure, call it biased).

She always knew what I needed.

We were attached at the hip.

She didn't mind if I blared my music in the
car, so long as I rolled down the window
for her to stick her head out.

She didn't mind if I took my hand away
from petting her to eat as long as I snuck
her a piece of whatever I was having.

She is a part of all my best memories.

She is also a part of all my worst ones,
because whenever I was going through it,
she was right there by my side.

Unfortunately, this isn't the case anymore.
Because her being gone has sent me
straight into the absolute worst time of
my life, and this time I don't have her to
lean on and cheer me up,

I have her toys to snuggle up to at night,
her inked paw print hanging in my room,
and pictures of her overflowing my
camera roll; but this doesn't make up for
all of the time I wish I still had with her.

I will never be able to run my hands
through her fur again.

Or scratch her belly.

Or kiss her head.

Or hold her paw.

And those were my favorite things to do.

I won't ever get another picture of her
smiling or another video of her playing in
the snow.

I can't sleep anymore.

I lay awake and dread the next time I go
home.



When I get out of my truck, she is not going to come running up to me with her tail wagging.

My best friend won't be there to greet me anymore.

Fortunately, I do believe that dogs go to heaven and that I will see her again.

This is practically the only thing keeping me going right now, although I wish that time would come a whole lot sooner.

I know I shouldn't think like this, but I am filled with regret for all of the times I sat with her and chose to be on my phone rather than absorbing every precious moment we got to spend together.

Every time I chose to leave the house to go do something with friends rather than hanging out with her.

I am even starting to regret my decision to go to school in Nebraska, because that took away so much time I could've spent with her.

Instead, I should be thinking of all the times I laid on the floor with her, so happy to be in that moment.

All of the times she laid in bed with me and took up my half and I didn't mind one bit.

All of the naps that we took together when we were too tired to do anything else.

I will hold onto these moments and memories forever, and I don't think I will ever stop hurting in her absence.

I never thought the day would come that I would have to say goodbye to my best friend (how naive of me).

When it did come, sounds came out of me that I didn't think I was capable of making.

And now there is a huge hole in my heart that can never be filled again.

But all I can do is be grateful that I had a dog that loved me so much that I am feeling this much pain without her.

I loved her for her entire life, with all of my being, and I will miss her for the rest of mine, more than I ever thought was humanly possible.

Johnson, Thure

Emotions, Lessons, Cycles

My hands chilled with the brisk November breeze. I was standing in the park next to a library, across from me was a woman. A girl, so philosophical and beautiful, and yet, somewhat somber. She wore a black sweatshirt, and a pair of gray sweatpants. Her black hair curled around her face, and glasses focused her both brown and green eyes. Her nose was slightly pink as she spoke to me.

"Grief is beautiful. Autumn is beautiful. Life, death, hope, grief, stagnant - words are beautiful"

It puzzled me. I couldn't really understand how she could see everything as beautiful. She spoke in her firm, yet soft voice. She spoke about how every person is beautiful. Even those who make mistakes, even those who have done unspeakable things, even those who have harmed her, are beautiful. It befuddled me. I thought of hope as kind of something to look forward to, and grief as something to avoid as a sin. It kind of forced me to remember when I was happy to be through pain. Through sorrow. Through grief.

The first real thing that comes through my mind is wrestling for me. Wrestling, while a sport about skill and



stamina, is more about heart and about drive. Inevitably, a wrestler will end up in a position where they have reached their breaking point, and they hit the wall where they feel that they cannot go any longer. They can't push through. Somehow, they gather their thoughts, focus their wills, and push on through pain. Through hardship. It's astounding. I think about the pain I went through, every single day. Sometimes I loved it. Sometimes I hated every second of it. After I lost my final match of my high school career, I gazed into the stands, my eyes kind of glazed over. Eventually, once my legs took me to the tunnel underneath the arena, the concrete cold underneath my shoes, my glazed eyes moistened. I was proud of the effort that I put in, but also disappointed. I had my last chance, tried my hardest, and it didn't work out. I thought that was my last shot at going to wrestle, and part of me thought I was okay with that. Months and months go by, and that thought still lingered. Then, I got offered to wrestle in college. It made me realize that I had the opportunity to keep going. To keep trying. Even in an environment where I clearly was outmatched and frankly terrible, I joined anyway. It was like I craved hardship. I didn't care if I won or I lost. For me, it mattered whether or not I tried. Whether or not I craved the pain and the effort that comes with an environment of personal hardship and challenge.

The relative hardship of wrestling was insignificant to the inescapable haunted house of horrors that still hurts me to my core. Obsessive Compulsive Disorder was so much pain for me. It was an unbelievable task that even today I am so proud of how I was able to overcome even the majority of it. It started as a slow

tide, just crashing into the cliff that is my brain. However, it only took one larger wave to break down my entire way of thinking. My brain split into two parts. One part of the logical brain was who I was. The other, an irrational part of me that forced me to do things just to feel okay. If I didn't make sure I listened to the dictator, I could cause problems for other people. Even though I knew it was impossible-that biology didn't allow for such a thing to be possible-my brain still warred with me, forcing me to remedy my anxiety. Most of the time, this took place in the form of hand-washing. I would stand in front of the kitchen sink, water splashing, swirling down the drain. My eyes darted from my hands, red and bleeding from every pore, to the backyard. I don't remember if it was lush green, a snowy landscape, or dreary as I was feeling. It was like I was stuck in my own personal cell that I didn't own the keys to. Each time, I would try and get some recreational time, by doing exactly what OCD was telling me to do. Pump some soap. Make sure that there were suds. Lather up all the way up to your elbows, ensuring that there was no skin missing from the soap. Double wash my hands in particular, and don't forget to clean underneath each fingernail, because heaven knows what could happen if something escaped. Just when I thought I escaped, I would touch the faucet handle to turn off the water - I forget to use a cloth or something. And thus the cycle would begin anew. This was my day. Avoiding the thoughts that would hurt me, and trying to find solace wherever I could. I was running away. I kept running and running and running, hoping that it would get better on its own. That the pain would just disappear. It didn't.



After a night in only a patient gown in the hospital, constantly watched, I was transferred into an inpatient mental facility. It was a cage to a singing songbird, wanting to be free but barred from freedom. It would turn out to be one of the most hated things that I would ever go through, but probably a necessary one too. The walls there were colorful if I remember right. Toys and bright colors everywhere. The workers always wore sunshines on their faces. Still, the facade could not blind me from being claustrophobic. Still, it was a place where I learned one of the most important lessons for any hard thing.. They told me that the only way that I could overcome OCD is by doing exactly the opposite of what it was telling me to do. It wouldn't even completely deal with it, make it go away. It would still be there lurking forever. It was the hardest thing that I ever did. Every single time, you would have to do just the smallest things just to try and take an inch of ground against the civil war inside your head. Instead of washing for 45 minutes, just a short 30 minute time limit to force oneself to feel clean. Over time and trials. Months and months after setting foot in that mental hospital, and some medication on top, I felt that I could finally be safe from responsibility.

Responsibility was always something that I still feel like is important to me today. I make it an important part of my life to be there when I say I am going to be. That I am a man of my word and that I am someone people can trust. I feel like I have a responsibility to be the best person that I can be for anyone I know, and even strangers. I mean, when I first got to school, some random girl got mad at me prior to orientation. I still don't

know her name. I anguished over this, and felt like it was my responsibility to apologize and make things right when I didn't even know what I did wrong. And that is what I did. I apologized and said, "I'm sorry." It just represents how much responsibility I enforce upon myself to be on good terms with everybody. With OCD, I had a responsibility of not affecting others, and so I would go over and over preventing possibilities. Additionally, I would need consent over and over for the dumbest of things. "Is it ok if I touch you? Is it okay if I put my dirty clothes there?" Even still, I still have some sort of OCD, not about my sort of contamination, but just making sure things are okay. In wrestling, I ask over and over sometimes if this is how I am supposed to do a certain move, even though I know in my heart of hearts that it is right. It's just asking stupid questions to confirm that I am okay. It's like I have a responsibility to do others correctly.

I guess that it all kind of circles back to how we handle conflict and hardship. I kind of knew I should love hardship and pain before this. I mean, we talked about it in my creative writing class earlier this semester. A story isn't created with everything going perfectly. A story is created through conflict. I still am really appreciative of my OCD and of my trip to the mental ward. I am still really appreciative that I can be a part of wrestling, and that I wrestled in high school. Those experiences shaped me into who I am today. Without the pain that I went through there, I don't know if I would be able to understand what other people are going through and emphasize with them. Those hardships made me appreciate the current times, and the times where I wasn't under an affliction of



some sort hampering every move that I made. It also allows me to respect that when I have difficulties, that they are circular. That eventually there will be a time that the pain is gone and there is peace, and soon after peace war will come knocking again. Obsessive Compulsive disorder gave me the formula to live in times of war. Is it pretty? No. Am I alive? Yes.

She continued talking on the way back to the dorm. I was walking just a short half-step behind her, on the right. She spoke about how she wanted to give everyone a bit of love in their lives. Her hair kind of fluttered a bit in the wind. A bit of hope, and knowledge that they were beautiful, just the way that they were. Her words, still clear in the brisk chill,

“My mother really wants me to publish my book. I never really got to speak my mind, but I want people to know they are loved.”

My mind unrounded time again. To a time where I was a kid. My parents had recently divorced, and I was splitting time between my Mom’s house and my Dad’s. My Mom’s house felt like heaven, where my body and my spirit could roam free. My mother, later in life, told me that she did that on purpose, granting me a reprieve from what I thought was a piece of living hell. She purposely gave me no rules, and upheld my disrespect to her to give me a place to be free. I still do thank her for that, because I don’t know where I would be without that. My father’s house isn’t what you would really expect from a place where you cannot speak. It wasn’t like I was going to be whipped or punished for speaking my mind. It was more like I was never right no matter what I tried to say. My father was a very logical person. A logical person so much

so that it almost voided any facet that emotion played into making any sort of situation. Hours upon hours of time I spent just looking straight ahead, biting my tongue. A hole in my stomach would always open up, sucking up more and more of my patience and liberty. It felt that the moment I voiced any sort of disagreement, it would just extend the disagreement. It was less of a disagreement and more of a one-sided talkdown. There would be nothing that I could do once I got into those situations. I would just have to shut up and take it. It was like I had to walk on eggshells everywhere I went around my father. I just had to censor myself, and never could be myself.

The hardest part about being with my father wasn’t that he was ever innately trying to make me feel awful. He still cared about me, loved me, and gave me the love that you would want from a parent. And yet, it still felt like I couldn’t be myself. I still love him, but I still don’t like to be around him. I miss the times where we could just love and be allowed to be ourselves.

I guess what the difference was that we differed in how much emotions mattered. Emotions make up human beings. Yes, it may be all the experiences we’ve been through, or the knowledge that we gained, but how are we any different from a computer then? Humans are unique because it is the combination of emotions and of logic. Taking out the emotional element, even in situations where being logical seems like the only approach, takes the human out of humanity. I just kind of wished that I could be loved and be myself. That I could feel wanted for the person I was. That I



could act free, instead of burying my true self whenever I was around my dad.

The burst of inspiration I got from philosophy brought me back to her dorm room. On the right side of the rectangular space, some yellow lights fluttered down the wall. Photos hung, along with hand-drawn pictures, among those stars. Sheets covered the bed that hung underneath those stars, with various knick-knacks arrayed on the desk that acted as the head of her bed. I sat in a rickety chair the school gave us on the empty desk on the left. As the memories of earlier flowed in, my hands flickering across the keyboard. My fingers pounded on the keys one after the other, much louder than they ever needed to be.

I have this weird thing that I do whenever I type. While my fingers dance, my gaze kind of wanders. It looks to the walls, the floors, but primarily, it was her face. Her face, that even though she sees beauty in every single person, she can't see the beauty in herself. I feel like when I see her my heart beats a little bit faster, and the brain's thoughts just crash and burn with the sight. Right now, I am certain I love her for who she is.

Love is a kind of cycle. There are times when you meet somebody new. You go through those beginning phases of love all over again. You get to know them, and life is bliss. Then, it seems to sour like milk, and you either have to remake the same relationship, or you break up and start all over again. However, I think that those sourings also make the relationship stronger if you can get through it. She kind of put it like this.

"A relationship will always have its ups and downs. The important thing is to be willing to work together to solve the problem together."

My first girlfriend was not someone who I thought it would be. I thought of her as just a friend. She was just somebody I could talk to. Then, she asked me out to homecoming. I didn't really have anybody to go with, and yeah, she was cute, so I went. It took a really long time for us to actually start dating, but once we did, we texted every day, and were able to speak our hearts to each other. Support each other when we had issues, and go to each other's sporting events. We would go over to each others' houses, find a cushion to lay down on, and watch the screen's pixels flicker from vibrant colors to gray. Those times were the good ones, when we were happy all the time.

The issue was when problems arose. I felt like I was not really good enough for her. She would ask me over and over again to change my ways. I would try for a little bit, forget to focus on that important piece, and then by 3 months later, the issue was popping back up again. Those times of happiness and conflict happened over time, like the hands of the clock.

That relationship taught me a lot. It first taught me what I was good at. I was good at listening. I was good at being there for somebody, and giving my honest opinion about something. Her day would go poorly, and I could just sit there, my ears holding onto every word she said, contemplating those phrases, and then giving some peace of mind to her that would help her through her day. I was also pretty good about standing around boundaries. I asked for permission, I waited for confirmation, and stopped if I didn't receive it. Almost to a point where I got yelled at for not taking any chances.



Still, I wouldn't have it any other way. My mother raised a good man.

More importantly, I learned some things from my failures. I learned that I take on a larger load than I expected. I learned that I have issues that I didn't know affected my behavior, and that I didn't have very good self reflection. I couldn't tell when something was eating me up inside or if I thought it was just a problem to be solved. Additionally, I found that I sucked at communicating. Yes, listening is a part of communicating, but it was hard for me to say exactly what I wanted to say, when to speak, and when to not speak. It was also a mistake in my communication to tell her what my expectations were. Our expectations differed, and so it made it difficult for me and her to get along. We eventually left off somewhat amicably.

Yes, there are times when you are single and you are taken, but I think that seeing relationships as just a cycle that never changes is somewhat false. Perhaps, she didn't mean it to be just the same every single time, but I think what is important is to learn from each of those downtimes. From the failures in my relationship, I learned where my faults were, and going into the next one, I'll work that much harder to make sure that I don't do the same thing again. When you work towards improving yourself, those depressions in the cycle come less often and less severe.

That's why I think it is so important to have conflict. To have issues and to put yourself into situations where you can improve. From my first relationship, I learned about communication. From my father, how to control myself and to choose my words wisely. From wrestling, grit and

determination. From OCD, learning to overcome things you absolutely do not want to do. All of the low points in the cycle that has been my life has led me to become a better person.

The final thing that I want to leave off with is that my hardships and my experiences are what makes up who I am today. Love. Heartbreak. Pain. Sorrow. Joy. When I started to write this story, I would try and give a snippet of what OCD was like to me. I could have gone on and on about what that felt like, but it didn't feel right. I don't know if it was because even though I was writing about a part of my story, it wasn't **my** story. Yes, obsessive compulsive disorder and the responsibility I had with it is a big part of my story, but it wasn't all of it. It leaves out the people I love, and the other experiences that make up who I am. Even as I am writing this I don't know if that would've made a more cohesive and understandable story. Maybe that story would be better for a different reader other than me. I still even feel this story doesn't describe my entire life. I'm leaving out my family, my hobbies, and my entire personality, but this story feels like one I can just sit down and write. It's a story that when I imagine that girl's face in my mind, I can know that my difficulties mattered.

Johnson, Joshua *Faculty

Change Time

I look at my notebook

flipping

through the pages

looking



at the dates and
wishing
I could flip back through time.

I look at the dates and
remember
when everything was normal and
miss
the days when there was no end in sight.

I write in my notebook
and usually
writing
gives me a sense of control

but I can't write backwards
and I can't
change time.

Day by Day
I said we'd take it

day by day

but it wasn't true

because I didn't take it

day by day

I acted like we had forever.

But

day by day

I learned

we didn't.

And now, here we are

alone

without you

taking it

day by day.

And it sucks

cause now I know

day by day

goes on for what feels like

forever.

Father Like You

He rode around on a dusty road

his hat blowing in the wind

and he'd look across the old corral

just another day to him.

"I just ride around and help folks,

it's simple, but it's true,"

then he'd nod his brim and smile

before riding off into the dune.



He was my Dad,
the best of all the men.
He rode around and helped folks
until he met his end.

Now his legacy rests upon me
it's simple, but it's true
I would not be who I am today
without a Father like you.

Gone Home
Fields showered in time
following the setting sun,
Father has gone home.

The Porch
I sit on the porch now
taking in the scenery
but it's not the same
it's more pensive
more reserved
sombre
and thoughtful.

I sit on the porch now
thinking about my childhood
when we'd sit here
you and I

together forever playing the color game
"I spy with my little eye"
except I'm not so little now
and I spy the empty spot where you used
to be.

I sit on the porch now
missing you.

Johnson, Quincey
I feel like I am constantly growing,

When will I finally bloom?

Perhaps I am a young oak tree,

Adding rings to my strong trunk each
year,

Roots deepening in quiet, unseen places,

Building strength in the wind and
sunlight,

Waiting for the right moment to stretch
out and reach to the sky.

Or maybe I am a perennial,

Alive each year, reborn and renewed,

Blooming again in seasons of change,

Petals unfolding in the warmth of the sun,

Each bloom a reminder

That growth is not always grand,

But the subtle, steady beauty of returning
each year.



Am I blooming now,

Or just still growing?

Wright, Brianna

Firewatch

Ferns and fauna, birds and bees

I sit and tell my stories to the trees

Roadkill and maggots, vines, and vultures

Each traveler offers insight into new
cultures.

Wind and rain, smoke and ash

A whole forest can be destroyed in a flash.

Tower and radio, badge and shoes

Constantly having to choose.

Hearths derive from fire too.

Graduation

Do the people on the movie screen

know the ending of the scene?

Does it come as a surprise

when they say their goodbyes?

Or was it all foreseen?

How do they unpack

that final fade to black?

When the speeches are done,

and the credits have begun,

do they want it all back?

letterfrmranger

The world didn't end in a fiery blaze or
giant explosion. It was cold and quiet. A
slow dread that crept forward until you
only realized, in retrospect, that there
was no return.

We call this new world "the wasteland."
Very dystopian, eh? There's nothing
wasteful about it though.

Sure, it was violent at first. But after a few
months of shooting strangers and never
staying in any place too long you get tired.
You forget the lyrics to your favorite song,
the taste of a homecooked meal, and a
moment of peaceful relaxation.

So, we moved on. The following is a brief
guide to navigating the wasteland.

1. Respect the Wilderness

After so much dead we don't need more.
Plus, the National Parks Service is one of
the few government agencies that
survived. There are no more fees to get
into the parks, but you still have to
respect the rules.

I work in a fire watch tower. I always
wanted to, but my fear of heights kept me
on the ground. I've had enough fear for a
lifetime, no point in anymore. There are
not many natural fires since the
temperature leveled out. Man-made ones
are always a risk. Most of the job is
watching the horizon, directing lost
travelers, and tracking the animals.

2. Travel Light



Gasoline goes stale after two years and aviation fuel lasts a little longer, but both ran dry quickly. Biking, skating, or walking are fine for cities, but wagons are for the wasteland.

Gut out the useless innards of a car, hitch up some horses, and you're golden. Boat-homes and RVs have also gotten popular. The end of the world puts your possessions in perspective. It's best to travel light.

3. Tune on in

Art came back before the power did. Boredom can be a real cause of death in the wasteland. So, there was a second renaissance of sorts.

Several organizations and individuals run traveling libraries and trade shops. There's a drive-in theatre north of Shenandoah where people donate cd's.

Best of all, someone, or a group of someones, patched up and powered on the radio towers. There are fourteen whole stations of content.

Word of advice - unless you're a baseball fan don't try station eight. We don't even have baseball in the wasteland.

I try to make the best of everything. In a way, the wasteland reminds me of a wildfire. Sometimes you need to burn everything down to build something. Anyway, I hope this helps.

See you around.

Zubieni, Ella

the greatest symphony of the hottest snowy day there ever was

i looked out my window at the snowflakes falling to the ground.

it was winter after all, and the earth had been cold.

desolate.

empty.

cruel.

but today was not cold.

in fact, the heat was shocking.

i looked out into the horizon, the light of the sunset blinding me,

the sky lit up with millions of oranges and yellow and reds.

it was too bright.

but i sat there and i stared out at it,

although i was starting to sweat and the air was starting to turn sour.

i took in a few deep breaths, wondering what i could possibly do,

what thought could possibly cross my mind in a moment like this.

the only thing i could picture was a child.

a child playing a violin.

that child was me.

i hadn't truly played in years.

but as i looked out my window,



the sweat on my brow now formulating
into endless streams of tears
down a stony face that was too warm,
all i wanted to do was find it.
my beautiful violin.
so i quickly ran over, although it was
painful,
and pulled it out of the closet,
not caring about the boxes and bags and
clothes and trinkets
that fell noisily to the ground in the
process.
they didn't matter anymore.
i grabbed a picture of my mother, and
propped it up on the window sill.
she always used to love it when i played.
she always scolded me for giving it up.
and so i looked out my window,
the snow piling up,
the sky obliterating my eyes,
the heat becoming almost unbearable,
and i opened my window.
the one thing they told me not to.
i opened my window and i began to play.
it was slow, painful really, at first.
but even though my knuckles were being
blistered and burned,
i started to play the most beautiful
melody.

i'd never heard it before.
it was brand new.
i was the greatest composer in the world
and i had only just figured it out.
but it didn't matter now.
so i looked out my window and i played
the violin for my mother.
and just when i thought i couldn't bear it
anymore,
the snow was too high,
the heat was too hot,
and my lungs could not rest,
i heard the sound coming from down the
street.
it was a cello.
someone else had opened their window
and started to compose.
the notes, though far away, seemed to
perfectly work their way into my song.
and suddenly, i could hear a trumpet from
the house across the street.
a flute from down the way.
a tuba and a clarinet from the couple who
lived behind me.
i started hearing drums
and oboes
and violas.
i began to hear the bass.
the piccolo.



the french horn.
i heard cymbals
and triangles
and banjos
and guitars.
i heard pianos
and trombones
and bassoons
and harps.
people were playing
in their homes.
on their roofs.
in the streets.
i could hear them down the block.
from the cities.
over the mountains.
i heard them from miles away,
states away,
countries away,
over the oceans.
and people were dancing in the streets
and sobbing
and screaming
and laughing.
we were all playing the world's most
beautiful symphony.

the greatest piece of work, never to be
heard again for the rest of time.
despite it all, everyone had decided to
open their windows and enjoy the view.
and as i looked out my window,
and the heat became utterly unbearable,
and the snow seemed to cover the entire
world,
the last thing that could be heard was a
voice,
piercing through the unspeakable pain.
just one melody.
one melody that we all seemed to just
know
to complete the symphony of the hottest
snowy day there ever was.
and we all sang.
i sang to my mother,
who i could no longer see.
i sang for the children i would never know
and the wife i would never have.
i sang for the animals,
and the forests,
and the mountains,
and the rain.
and finally, i sang for that little kid i once
was,
holding a violin, looking out my window.



for it was not sunset and there was no
snow.
and the ash started filling my lungs,
and the heat started surrounding my soul.
singeing the body that was once mine,
turning the violin in my hands to dust.
and yet, i could still hear the music.
for the greatest symphony of all,
the best piece of music the universe will
ever hear,
happened on the final day of the world.
humanity died with a beautiful melody
still ringing around the heavens,
bouncing around the stars,
filling every empty corner of the universe.
yes, we had caused our own demise,
our hatred clouded our judgement,
our wars stomped out our hope
and our bombs ended our existence,
but we also fought one last time.
not against, but for each other.
a fight not only to be remembered,
but to be heard, just once,
not for the evil monsters we had all
seemed to become,
but for the beautiful,
stupid,

chaotic
wonderful
beings we were.
or could have been.
ones who weren't just meant
to fight and kill,
but to sing and dance.
and so earlier that day,
i sat there and i looked out my window,
not because i wanted to stare death
straight in the eye,
but because i wanted him to hear us.
because although we accepted our fate,
we would not go gently into that dark
night.
no, we played
and we danced
and we screamed
and we sobbed
and we sung
until our lungs were full,
and our souls were ready.
the greatest symphony ever made was
played on the hottest snowy day there
ever was.
the most beautiful symphony of souls
came together



to let out one final battlecry to the
universe,
the final note resounding sweetly
as we ourselves ascended to the stars.

and you know what?
i think we were heard.



Mixed Pieces

Marr, Drue

Hello, My Name Is [Redacted]



Wright, Brianna
grandfalloon



Art & Photography Pieces

Arroyo, Abbi



Distorted



Van Gogh Vanitas



Halloween at Grandma's

Bugs



Broccoli



Big Blue



Castaneda, Giovanni



Cristiano Ronaldo Sports Poster



Zoro Panel



BOOK JACKET GODFATHER



Eshleman, Mia

Motel Medium: Acrylic

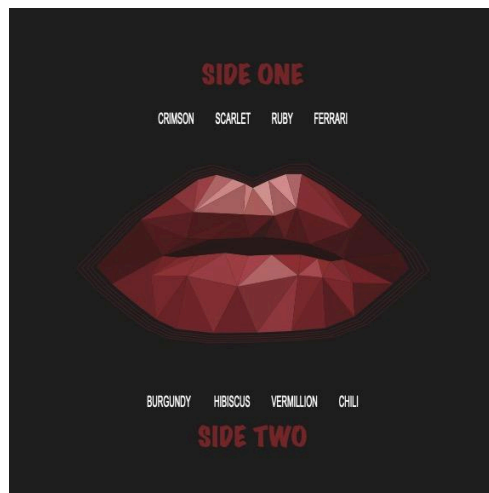
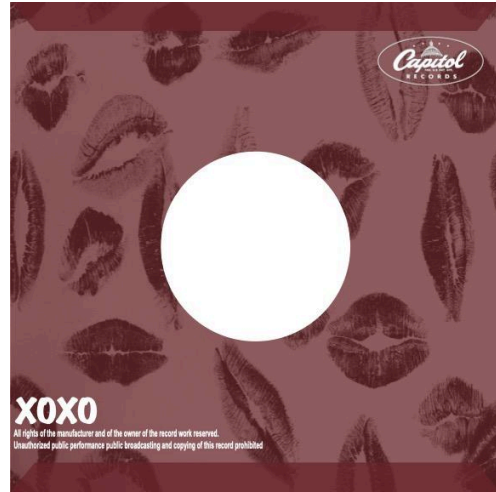
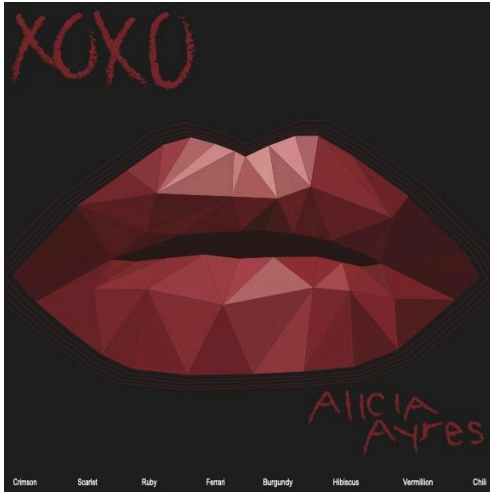


Estill, Sydney
Avinyl



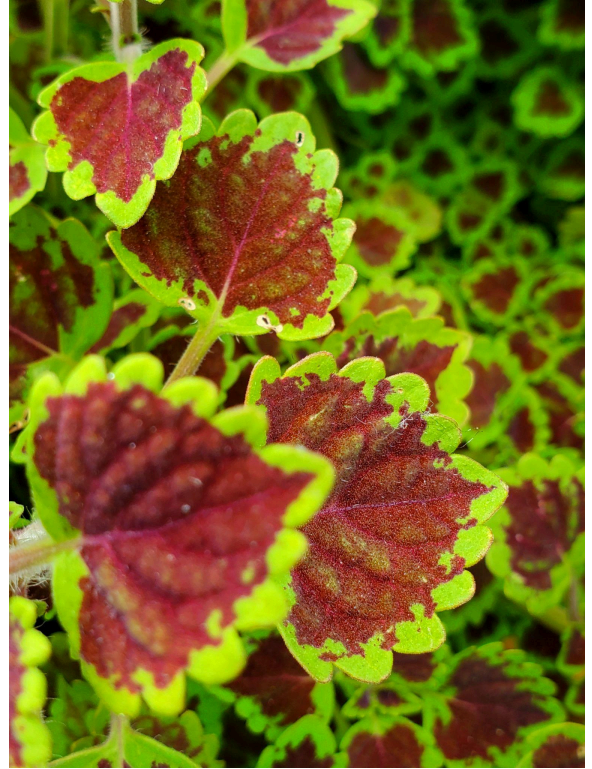
I created these vinyl covers in Intro to Graphic Design. All of the information on it is completely imaginative however it is cohesive to the design. I imagined that the album was of punk pop genre and the artist was a young rebellious woman. She wrote most of her songs about heartbreak and wanting to rebel against her parents. I chose the color palette to be on a grayscale while bringing bright pops of red to portray her anger and frustrations toward life.





Halliburton, Eric
Mother Earth Is Beautiful





Koenig, Elenna



Little Sis Hits The Big Leagues



Huzzah



A Brother's Embrace



Game Time



Pure Bliss

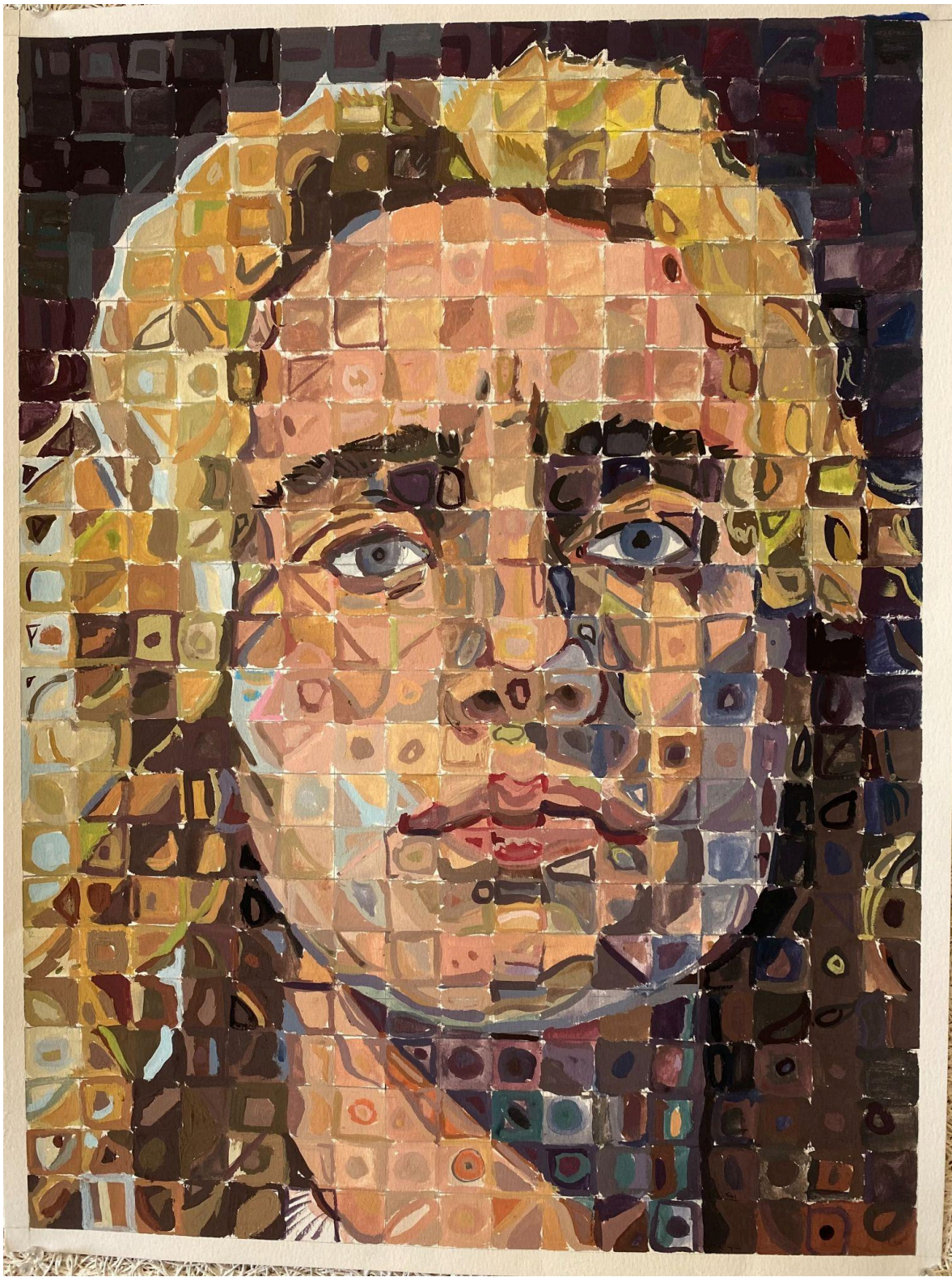


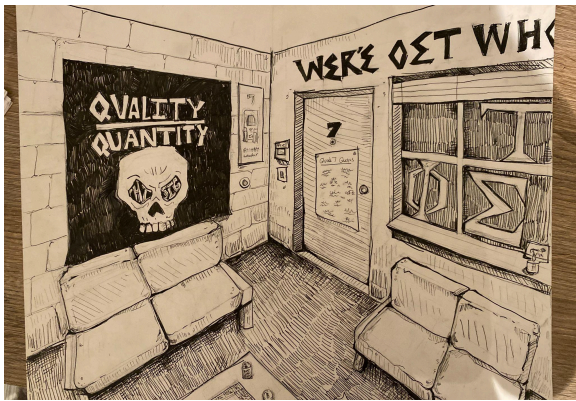
Last Hurrah

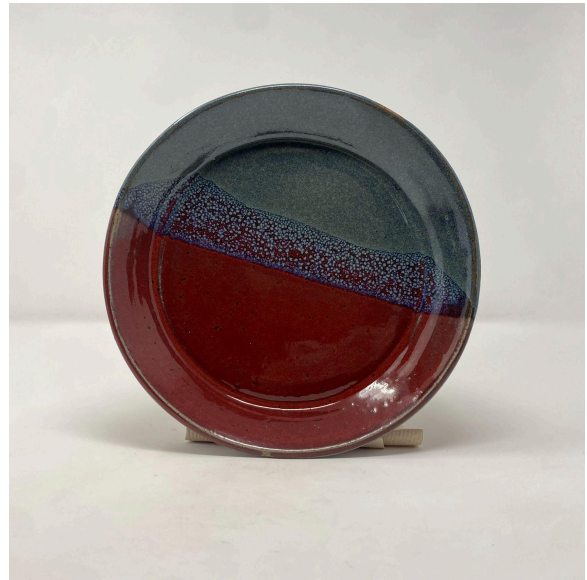
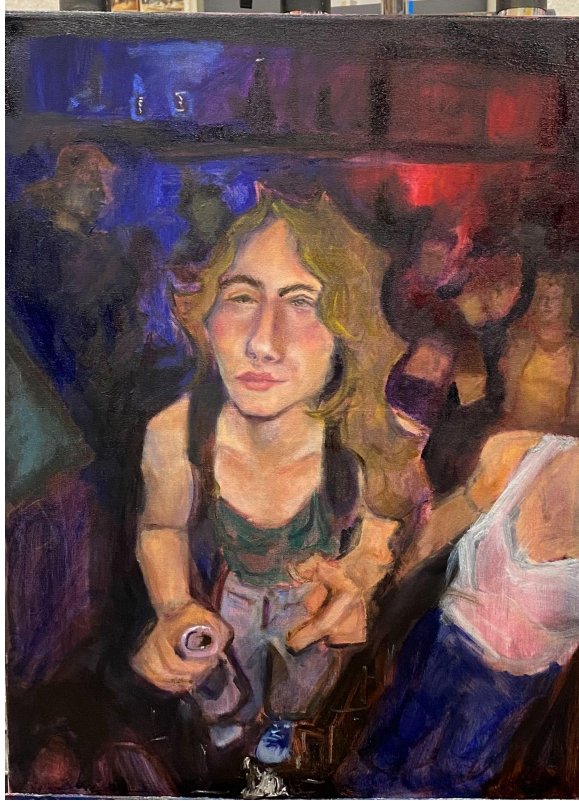
Peace at Home (unfinished)



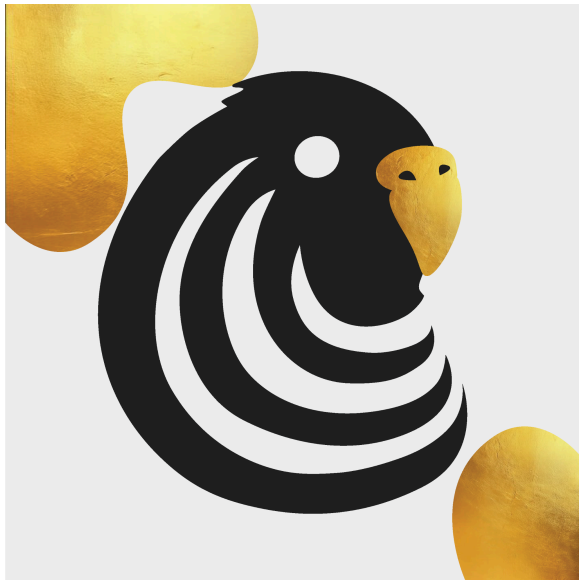
Mercurio, Brooklyn







Smith, William T. VII (Chanel Surfer)





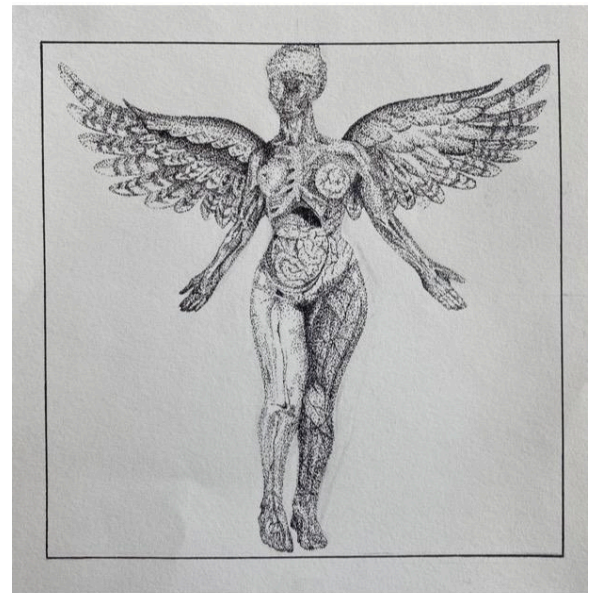
Candables



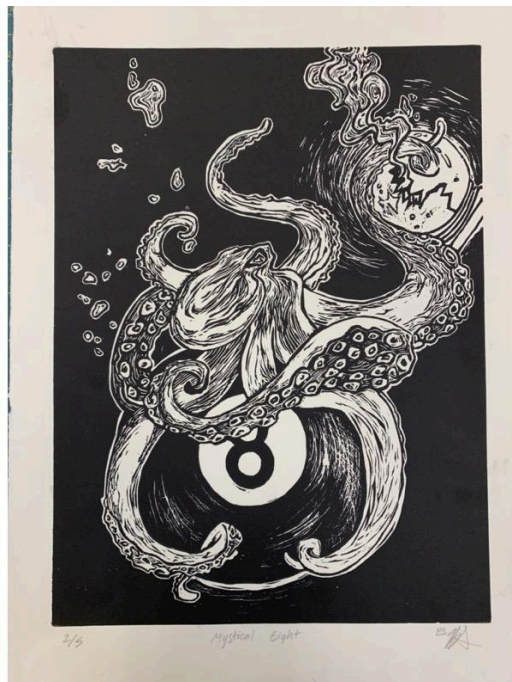
Sotomayor, Bridgette



Light of the Lamb / Linocut Print



Evolution / Ink



Mystical Eight / Linocut Print



New Life / Etching



Multiverse / Collage



Series 1 / Monoprint & Ink



Series 3 / Monoprint & Ink



Series 2 / Monoprint & Ink



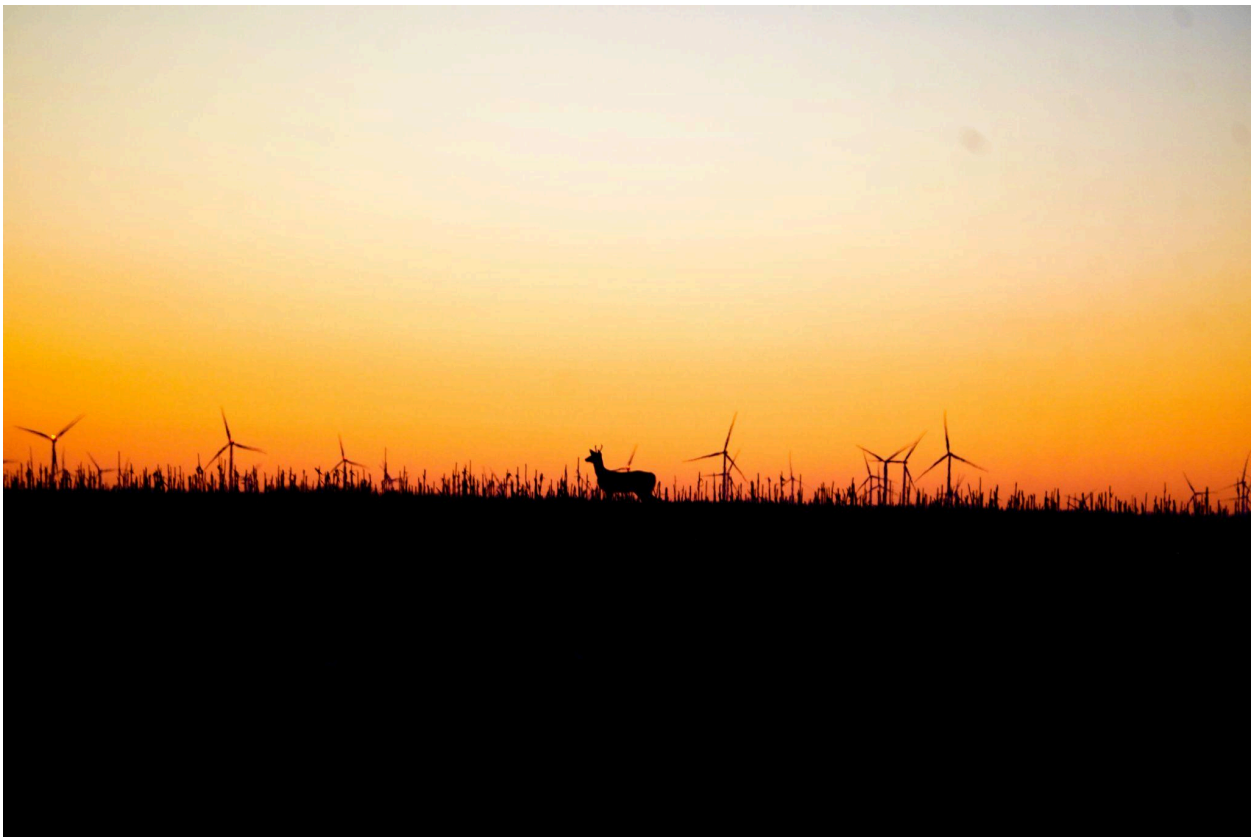
Renewal / Oil on Canvas

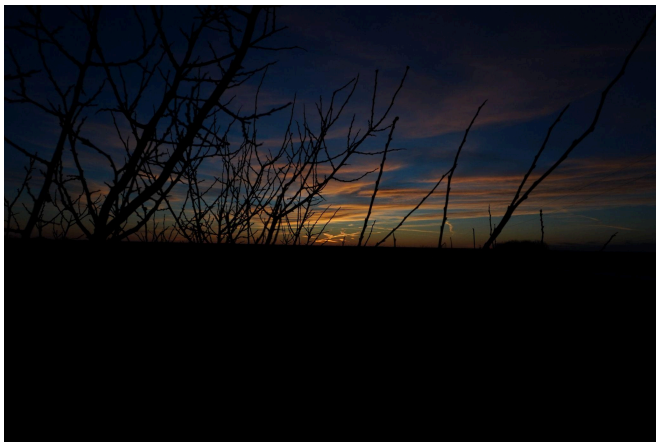


Vanitas / Oil on Canvas

Tadlock, Jakob







Vesely, Brianna





Brianna Vegely
PHOTOGRAPHY



Brianna Vegely
PHOTOGRAPHY



