

Middle Georgia State University
Presents

KNIGHT WRITERS



2025

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FOREWORD

In 2025, Middle Georgia State University students Alana Day and Sidney Dempsey led Wes Young’s Bleckley County High School freshman Honors English students in discussing and writing about a selection of poems that included Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Haunted Palace” and Edgar Guest’s “Keep Going.” Dr. Mary Christian, Dr. John Murphy, and Professor Marina Spears also led instructional groups. Ann Williams—Assistant Director of Library Services for the Cochran, Dublin, and Eastman campuses—presented on library services the BCHS students could expect to encounter at the institutions of higher learning they will attend after graduation. For the second year in a row, we had beautiful weather that allowed us to participate in an outdoor writing marathon. Sidney Dempsey created this digital anthology of BCHS student writing under my direction. Knight Writers provides exciting experiential learning opportunities for MGA English and Professional Writing students and is the highlight of my academic year. I am so pleased to lead such a valuable and rewarding project, and I hope you enjoy reading this collection of pieces written by talented, college-bound high school writers.

Lorraine Dubuisson

Professor of English

April 2025

POETRY

Lebron

By Mason Graham

So big so strong
As beautiful as a bird's morning song
His beard so perfect so long
Oh how I long for him
I hope he does the same
For I show up to every game
Sitting in the front row
Waiting for him to show
When he does I become free of any sorrow
He runs out on the court
Looking opposite of short
As he glares to the seats
He makes my heart skip all beats
I feel as if I will die
Because he is such a cutie pie
I sit and stare as he dunks

Boy oh boy he's such a hunk
I could do it all day
But the clock will dwindle
As Lebron flees the court
My heart begins to thwart
No more Lebron
No more happiness
All that remains is my emptiness

Goldfish

By Austin Smith

The water is where I'm from, the plastic bag was first to come
Everyday I look through the glass, pondering about the very last
I swam till I was forced, I was taken with no remorse
My body was sore as I swam till I was captured
Captured with no escape I went away so I couldn't be use for bait
This life was never fair, all I ever did was glare
As the lively fish passed by I wondered if I dared
When these facts surfaced I really never care
As the net came upon the water in this glass cage
I darted away so I could escape
No matter how fast I moved the net was always there
I darted all around like the fast and agile hare
No matter the vastness of the cage there was never a way to escape
The net had gotten me with no doubt
With nothing else I could do I layed and pout
The net lowered me within a bag

I peered out and saw an old hag
This hag tossed me within a van
This hag had a husband who was an old man
These creatures watched me swim in circles in my bag
Until I took a smack, the object of this pain
Never really had the brain
As the hag held the bag she poured out the water
I swam with determination to escape but the struggle was in vain
I was in the hands of my enemy, I was counting down the days
This life was pitiful in my bowl
All I could do was grow old
My outlook into my pitiful life was hazed
If only I could look on the bright side of things
I always looked at the bad side of my life
Never heed this advice
Life may be looking down
But look for a way to turn it around
I have ran from life, turn to it and fight
Since I have ran from life
All I do now is swim in circles in a bowl
As time grows old

My life without fear would have made me bold

But now my gold is growing dull

Nothing for me now but to wait for my soul

To leave me and grow a new

The Strength of an Ox

By Edwynn Wallace

The ox on the farm was one of strongest of things
Before the time of the combine and the farming machines
It could pull and pull for hours each day
'Til the ropes 'round its neck would wither and fray
The farmer relied on the ox to keep working
If the ox were to stop it was the farmer he was irking
So the ox would keep working in fear of his life
He knew nothing else but struggle and strife
For how could he know of a better hour
When all he could do was work, sleep, and cower
Because no matter his strength the ox was afraid
Of the life he would have without the one he had already made
"He was made for tugging, no other words about it.
The choice had been made, his life was devoted"
These words were seeded in his mind since his birth
His whole life spent not knowing what an ox... could be worth
He keep in his mind these lies 'til he died
The strength of the ox t'was only... on the outside.

Prose

The Dreams We Don't Chase

By Zoey Adams

Dreams are something everyone has, will have, or has had at some point in their life. Dreams motivate us and often shape us into the humans we will become. Dreams can be big or small. They can even be simple or complex. The hard but realistic truth is not everyone will accomplish their dreams. Sometimes it's the fear of being different that holds us back. We are scared we will not be accepted by society if we are different from everyone else. Maybe we often just let time pass us by and before we know it we run out of time to accomplish this dream. When we do this our dreams often die away and leave us with the void of regret. By not chasing your dreams, you will be left with the "what if," questions. You may ask yourself, "What if I could have been happier?", or "What if I could have lived a life with more value?" The only way to not be left with this emptiness is to chase the dream in your heart. If we don't chase our dreams then we don't even give them an opportunity to happen. Chasing dreams gives us a sense of purpose. If we chase our dreams we never know what might come of it. The outcome may be even better than you expected it to be. Even if the outcome isn't what you wanted it to be, at least you know you took the chance and

will have no regrets. By chasing your dreams, you will have no “what if,” questions, regrets, or emptiness in your heart. This will make you a unique and special person. This is because everyone has dreams, but not everyone will take the actions needed to accomplish them.

Palaces

By William Arnold

When you picture a palace what do you see? When I picture a palace I see a huge cathedral with stained windows, a steeple that reaches to the sky and on the very top is a flag. When I think of palaces, I also think of the people who lived there: kings, queens, princes and princesses; royalty. When I think about royals I don't think of anything medieval, I think of Bleckley County; the Royals. It's weird how different words have such a different meaning to different people. When someone in Europe hears the word royals they will probably think of princes and queens but when I hear that word the exact opposite of princes and queens pops into my head. I think of the students of bleckley county. If the students of bleckley are royals and royals are royalty and royalty lives in palaces then then my school is a kingdom which is weird to think about because of how different it is from a kingdom.

If school is a kingdom then what are sports? Are they friendly competitions between kingdoms to strengthen relations or are they battles

defending our castle and attacking the others. It is a wonderful thing to wonder about, but whether you're wondering what other people are wondering or wondering about dinosaurs with feathers or about how a palace makes your school a kingdom. It's an important thing to wonder about because if I didn't wonder about a palace then I would have never seen my school as a kingdom and if Thomas Edison didn't wonder about a better way to make light then we never would have had the lightbulb.

Creativity

By Elliott Austin

Creativity is a spectrum. The amount of creativity a person can have varies from one person to another. I tend to think of creativity like water, some bodies of water are full of life, and some are just still and blank. You never really know how deep the water goes until you traverse those areas and discover what was once hidden. I used to think that my creative mind was almost equivalent to a puddle. Bland, specific, and lacking any sort of diversity. Any musical I was a part of, trying new instruments, or even clubs, everything just felt bland to me, or I just wasn't proud of anything I did. To me, my work felt like it didn't have any real significance or importance; it was kind of just there. I have realized recently that there is more to that than what I thought before. Almost no one is just born with talent, you have to work for it. Like water, you can't just start out as an ocean, before anything else, you would always be a puddle.

Effort

By Raídan Black

Deferring dreams is an easy or hard thing to do depending on how important you believe your dream is. On one hand, you can defer a dream that you never really meant to have very quickly and easily. One example of this would be that dream you had as a toddler of being an astronaut or an architect. Deferring dreams is not necessarily a bad thing, but some people see it as such. People change, and with that change comes different opinions, opportunities, and views. When you dreamt of being an astronaut, you didn't know what kind of training you needed, how much it would cost, or even about other things you could do. It's not bad that you don't want to be an astronaut anymore, it just means that you've been exposed to the outside world and have come up with a different opinion. Giving up on obtainable dreams too quickly, though, can be bad for you. Something like "I want a 90 in my class". If you don't try to obtain that dream, or goal, and just give up on it because you think it's impossible to obtain, then you should either set lower expectations for yourself, or just

try harder. Some people believe that they are putting in all the effort they can, when really they are not putting enough. They end up telling themselves that something is impossible and lowering their expectations for no reason other than it seems unattainable. Effort will take you farther than talent, it can really take you anywhere, you just have to try. That's the part that gets some people. They don't really want to try, or they want to, they just won't. It angers some when some people say they're trying as hard as they can when they aren't. Moral of the story, put in effort and don't lie about putting in effort.

Tale of the Deepwoken

(Ch. 12)

By Sydney Bullows

“I don’t understand,” Senshi stated. “Why are you sparing me? I attacked you first.” Zero looked down at Senshi, whose wounds from the prior battle restricted his ability to stand.

“I’m sparing you because everyone deserves mercy. Even bounty-hunting filth like you don’t deserve to die like this,” Zero replied. He sheathed his dagger and reached a hand out to attempt to help Senshi off of the ground.

“I... What do I..?” Senshi had never offered, much less been offered mercy before. Due to his lack of familiarity with this concept, his brain shut down as he was unsure of how to properly respond. Senshi finally managed to get a question out in response to Zero’s kindness. “I mean no disrespect, but you and I both know that I have nowhere else to go. I’m bound by contract to the Knives of Eylis, remember? I’m cursed to forever be a bounty hunter.”

“Well, you could explore this island - Erisia, I think? - with me! Considering your job, I assume you travel a lot, but do you ever take time to appreciate the beauty of different locations?” Senshi was shocked. He hadn’t given a single thought about it before, but suddenly, he realized that even between contracts, he would subconsciously ignore the scenery. As Senshi was processing this realization, Zero drew nearby ether and chanted three different characters in Celestial Sign, and a spark flew from his palm upon the chant’s completion. The spark grew to a large ball of flame, inhabiting the space between Zero and Senshi. “Don’t worry,” Zero reassured, “it’s a simple healing technique. Graceful Flame. It will soothe your injuries.” Though Senshi wasn’t entirely convinced, he sensed no malevolence in the explanation. He reached an arm into the flame, and retrieved it in a repaired state. Seeing this, Senshi crawled (he was still unable to walk) into the flame, allowing its light to consume his injuries. He returned with no visible signs that a fight had ever happened in the first place.

“Thank you, I.. I’m so sorry for attacking you earlier, and-”

“It’s alright, okay? And to further answer your question, wasn’t Astra able to break his contract and escape the Knives? I’ll help you to do so if you need it. Do you trust me?” Senshi thought for a moment.

“Where were you headed?”

Tale of the Deepwoken

(Ch. 13)

By Sydney Bullows

“I’m not sure,” Zero replied. “Let’s find out.” They traveled across the island of Erisia, with Zero playing an old song on his violin, and Senshi in awe of every little sight, venturing around for somewhere to rest after the prior battle. They eventually settled for sitting beneath a tree, across from what appeared to be a little camp.

“Hey Zero,” Senshi began to ask. “Where did you learn to use Flamecharm like that?” “What do you mean?”

“I mean your flames not only burn brighter, but a completely different color from everyone else’s flames.” Zero had never really thought about it, but as he conjured a small spark above his hand, he realized his flames burned closer to red than the common orange of Flamecharm magic.

“Look, don’t tell this to anyone else, okay? Sometimes, when I dream, I find myself in a fiery hellscape, with a male Tiran before me. Every time, he looks me up and down, gives a warm, welcoming smile, and begins to train me in Flamecharm - though he calls it my ‘inner flame’.”

“A soul link? How interesting. Do you have a history of Tirans in your family tree, Zero?” Astra replied.

“HOLY NAVAE HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN THERE?!” Zero never realized that Astra had traveled with them, and was startled by the sudden appearance.

Astra responded, “I’ve been following you both the whole time, I just haven’t bothered to talk until now, but would you mind answering the question?”

“No, no history of any Tirans present in my family. I have no idea who he is,” Zero answered. Astra whispered something to Senshi, whose eyes widened in response to whatever the information was. Zero barely caught the name “Pleeksty” in Astra’s words. Although he’d never heard that name before, it felt oddly familiar to Zero. As he tried to think back to where he’d heard that, his eyelids became heavy and fell shut as he drifted off to sleep.

The Apocalypse has Its Toll

By Presley Daniel

The lights in New York City don't shine anymore, they just flicker out from time to time and leave an overwhelming sense of dullness behind. In their absence, the quiet tranquility of the now-ghost-town morphs into an eerie atmosphere. The dreams that once came alive here are now prematurely laid to rest in stone graves.

The people, once lively and plentiful, now accompany the dreams and bury themselves until their choking on rotten soil filled with deferred hopes. The dirt stuffs their lungs and their organs until they are nothing more than a lifeless corpse in an open grave.

The skyscrapers are no longer friends with the clouds, instead they lay with the dirt in mass piles of rubble.

The sharp shards of glass that once were windows stretch across the asphalt that was once much too busy with growling engines of cars to bother with glass. I remember a time when the windows once held views of the sparkling city, showcasing skyscrapers and sunsets that seemed to melt like an ombre candle in the autumn light.

The statue of liberty, once standing brave and tall in all her glory, now is beheaded. The roundness that once was her head is now lost to the waves. The carved green face now rests below depths of arctic blue waters, perhaps for eternity. Nobody will think to save the symbolic statue, because nobody can even think to save themselves.

The sky is no longer clear and blue, instead it has adopted no color at all. Gray looms over the city, even when clouds don't obstruct the view of the sky. The sun, however, shines in a painful glow that reflects and creates dancing illusions along the few walls still standing tall.

There is no life here. The city represents any other. Everything is so full of absolutely nothing, yet the hollowness of everything that was is an overbearing acknowledgement in the back of any living man's mind.

Nothing can live here anymore.

What is Life Without Hope

By Layna Davis

Hope, something we all have whether we want it or not. Somewhat like dreams it drives us. Even though it is just a feeling it can mean more than that, it can be all we have to keep us going.

A wife is waiting, waiting for a call, a letter, anything. With all of life going on around her trying to bring her down in despair she still has it, hoping that he will come back. That it will be worth the wait to be able to embrace him again. With destruction and war about unknowing of what has happened and no way to interfere. Her hope is what keeps her going at her lowest when she feels she can't continue. It is hope that saves her from drowning.

All around us hope can be felt in the smallest situations or the largest. Through it all the outcome can be magnificent or not, it is unknown to us. In this scenario all of the wife's waiting paid off, her husband will return from the war and they will continue their lives happily. What would she have done without it, she could have spiralled or moved on. We should all relish hope to give us reassurance or to work towards something. Hope is

what humans need to help us live, without it we wouldn't know how to handle things.

It can also be killed either by others or by ourselves. Doubt that it will never happen, but deep down it is always there waiting to be rekindled. Even the smallest thing can light it, it could be evidence or just comfort. Whatever it is, Hope is never lost. Life without hope would be like life without friends. Nothing there to lift you up or be there to support you. If anyone ever comes into contact with a situation with no power in it, just remember to hope because that can be the only thing we have. What do we have to lose if we have hope on our side, What would life be without it?

Deferred Dreams

By Kensley Duffey

When you are growing up, you want to conquer the world, do the things no one else has done before - be different. You want to carry out your passion of being an astronaut, the next minute you want to be an olympian, your dreams have no limits, or so it feels. Your parents never dull your sparkle because they want you to flourish and achieve past the stars. Then you start to grow up and tell your “friends” about your so-called dreams, and they tear you down making you believe you can't do it. You move on and decide you are going to look at more realistic jobs and try to make more realistic goals for yourself. You soon learn that your “big dreams” don't seem so easy to achieve anymore, you start to struggle in school, fall behind in classes, and have no motivation. Your spark slowly dies. The dreams that once were, are now just a distant thought. When you go through life you realize that wanting to get into the best school, taking the hardest classes, being the top of your class, will never be your reality if you do not work towards it. One day, you realize you cannot let other people's

opinions affect your own, pleasing people with what they want is never going to help you in the long run. You are the only one that can direct your path, not letting others' negative words or “tear downs” so to speak render your mind to achieve what YOU want. Your path slowly goes back to how it used to be, striving to be everything people said you couldn't, proving everyone wrong, directing your own path. The dreams you had as a little girl are slowly becoming your reality, leaving no stone unturned, applying yourself in all areas of your life to become the woman you always dreamed of.

My Childhood

By Caleb Foskey

From the beginning of my existence to the time I am writing this paper, I would say that I have had a very interesting childhood. My childhood has been a rollercoaster ride consisting of turns, twists, and ups and downs. I have experienced many different kinds of emotions along the journey to this point in time. Many different factors have made my life exciting and extremely challenging in the past. Moving to different states and playing sports have the biggest impacts on my life so far.

Firstly, living in four different states throughout my childhood has greatly influenced my life. The four states I have lived in were Georgia, New York, Kansas, and Virginia. I was born in Georgia, but quickly moved to Buffalo because of my dad's job as part of an insurance agency. As a result, I was never close to my other relatives like other people I knew. The only time I would get calls from my relatives in Georgia is when it was my birthday, or whenever I would do something great. However, I got to see some wonderful locations in these areas. For example, since we were close

to Canada in New York, we would get to see the outstanding view of Niagara Falls. Niagara Falls was a huge waterfall consisting of boats in which you could travel on to get a better view. Another way to see these falls better was to pay a small fee of twenty-five cent so you could use their custom binoculars. Finally, you could just look at it normally and still see it in all its glory. Niagara Falls is just a small example of how moving away from relatives influenced my life.

Next, playing sports has always been a part of my childhood no matter where I have lived. The two main sports I play are baseball and football. Because I play two sports, I really haven't had any time to do anything else. For example, I would never be able to go to my brother's band concert because there would always be a football game that day. Another example would be me being late to church on wednesday because of baseball practice. Although it's hard for me to find time, I would rather it be this way. Ever since I was five years old, my passion for sports has only grown. I now take weight training at school so I can improve my performance in baseball and football. I wouldn't give up anything for sports, so taking that away from me would be devastating not only towards me now, but also my past self.

In conclusion, moving away and sports are a huge factor in my life. Moving away kept me from my relatives, but I have been able to see some exciting places such as Niagara Falls. Sports have always been a thing for me and that will never change no matter where I go. I now currently live in Georgia. If I ever had to move again, I would hope it would be an exciting adventure as all the previous ones.

Celestial's Vow

By Ian Foskey

Demetrius wakes up to the sound of a bell's toll. He needs to move today as he is a nomad. He decides to head towards castle light today. Once he gets to the campsite he feels a great presence nearby and wants to investigate. He found what appears to be an angel. It was quite large, had pale skin and six wings. The aura it gave off was unlike anything demetrius had ever encountered but the aura was fading every second.

It appeared to be writhing in pain. Demetrius rushed over to it and saw that the being appeared to have broken its legs. He used his ironsing powers to help heal its legs and also conjure a cane as he did not have the resources or time to fully heal it on hand. The being thanked him and looked at him. It had rings where its eyes would have been and the eye sockets were completely smoothed over. It was also dressed in something similar to traditional clothing in a city Demetrius had visited (It Wasn't quite the same but it looked like a kimono and haori) The clothing was lavishly patterned and appeared to be well made.

It stood up and Demetrius handed it the cane. It thanked him once more and at that moment Demetrius realized that the being there before him was a celestial, one of the people of the stars. Demetrius took the celestial back to his camp to further tend to its wounds. Once they arrived the celestial gave demetrius the grave news that demetrius could never have healed its wounds however the celestial was willing to give demetrius a gift for attempting to save It. It offered to make a dying vow.

The celestial offered to give up its life so that Demetrius could grow ever stronger. The reward would be in the form of a blade that could cut even the soul it would also allow demetrius to perceive and interact with the soul along with giving him even greater physical power then he had already and ether mastery. The ether mastery gained from this would allow Demetrius even greater mastery of every attunement not just ironsing, Demetrius's innate attunement.

Demetrius accepted the vow and the celestial began to chant in its language the celestial within a few moments began to lose its wings as they receded into its body. its body grew skinnier and taller the edges of its body grew sharper and suddenly the chanting came to a stop and there before

him lied the sword Demetrius would name this blade the Celestial's vow in honor of the celestial that made it.

The sword was longer than Demetrius was tall and abnormally wide; it was a massive greatsword with the sharpest edge Demetrius had ever laid his eyes upon. He grabbed the Celestial's vow and brought it outside the campsite. He took a swing at a large boulder and it was cut clean in half. He had not even been close enough to hit the boulder as if the blade sent forth a slash of ether. He recalled something the celestial had said to him: this blade can cut the soul itself. He also recalled something the celestial said on their journey to the campsite. If one had enough willpower they would be able to split their soul into three equal pieces and obtain the oath soulbreaker.

Demetrius earlier in his life obtained something known as murmur ardour which allows him to enhance his attacks for a brief amount of time. There are however two other Murmurs, this being Murmur Tacet and Murmur Rhythm. The former gives a person the ability to become completely invisible to any one not near them, the latter gives the ability to track people and their vitality at that moment. Normally a person can only receive one of these murmurs however there are those select few who can acquire all of them.

So with Demetrius's newfound power removed his soul from his body temporarily and took his newly acquired blade and cut his soul into three equal pieces when he first started cutting he felt an incredibly sharp pain throughout his entire body however he persisted once he was done he put the three pieces of his soul back and gained a new power the oath soulbreaker.

He felt a strange power surge through his body and he gained a new yet oddly familiar power he gained the other two murmurs tacet and rhythm and his existing murmur he felt he had much more control over as if he could manifest in other ways other than just as an enhancement to existing power.

Demetrius suddenly felt an unfamiliar presence near his campsite. He used his newfound power of murmur rhythm to find what the presence came from. He saw what appeared to be a vesparian one of the newly born races from the canticlysm. It was a strong and seemingly hostile person who was chasing someone much weaker than it. So Demetrius rushed to the aid of the weaker person as he did not want bloodshed near his campsite unless it was a fair fight. When he got there he saw that the vesparian was about to finish off the other who appeared to be a celtor, same as Demetrius, and Demetrius wanted even less the killing of his kinfolk.

Demetrius used his newfound power of murmur tacet to become imperceivable to the vesparian. He rushed up behind it and punched it hard in the side. The vesparian was sent flying into a wall, its weapon flung from its hand and the vesparian holding its side in pain. Demetrius could have hit it harder but he wanted to test his new weapon so he healed the vesparian and the celtor who appeared to be quite young still an adult but twenty-three at most.

As Demetrius was standing there with the young celtor the vesparian got up and grabbed its weapon. Demetrius seeing this invited it to get the first hit. it picked up its weapon, a straight dagger with an incredibly sharp edge. It then rushed Demetrius with its dagger. It hit Demetrius as it ran by. When the dagger hit Demetrius there was a loud metal clang. The vesparian stopped and turned to look at Demetrius but to its surprise there was no damage and the spot where the dagger had hit seemed to be covered in metal wh

Demetrius then used murmur ardour ,he felt his control over it increase when he became a soulbreaker, so with his newfound control manifested it into a slash partly inspired by his sword slash of ether but not of ether but of ardour it almost hit the vesparian who had never seen anything like it before. The slash of ardour continued forth for a long ways

until it crashed into a wall and made a large gash in the rock. The vesparian tried to rush at Demetrius again but when he got close to Demetrius his feet got trapped. It looked down and saw iron wrapped around its feet.

The vesparian then realized what was causing this his foe was an ironsinger ,the most adept at ironsing he had ever faced. Demetrius took a better hold of his sword and looked at the vesparian who was pleading for its life. Demetrius walked up to the vesparian slowly ,still pleading for its life, and readied his blade. He took his blade and cut the vesparian in half from shoulder to hip, its armor and body not even resisting the blade's impossible sharpness. The vesparian hadn't died yet so Demetrius put the vesparian out of its misery.

He went back to the celtor and asked where he lived if he lived in the depths and the celtor said yes that he was a novice diver. but asked how Demetrius was able to live here as any other who wasn't a diver shouldn't be able to survive down here for long, much less live here as your sanity will drain and you will lose yourself to the drowned gods. Demetrius's answer was that he wasn't quite sure but that perhaps the drowned god Yun'Shul keeper of hearts was fond of Demetrius.

So Demetrius took the young diver back to castle light and told Claris Lilfend, though only being thirteen years old, was still one of the strongest divers, of what happened. Claris thanked Demetrius and made a joke about how many favors they owed him. After he left castle light. He went back to his campsite and after finishing the campsite chores went to sleep because this was a long day and he had much to think on.

Bart

By Tyce Garrett

There once was a seagull named Bart. Bart was always the biggest and meanest seagull around. He flew all around the world, stopping to bully every seagull smaller than him. He would steal their food, and destroy their homes. He was a wanted seagull, but the bird-police could never restrain him because he was just too strong. The only friends Bart had were the pirates who did not care about Bart's crimes.

One day Bart was flying over a beach, and he noticed a group of small birds flying around the water. Bart immediately started thinking about how he could terrorize the group of birds. He started flying lower, staring intently at the golden sand. Just when he was about to torpedo into the middle of birds, he was hit. Bart immediately started spiraling rapidly to the ground. Bart could not make out anything that was happening around him at the speed he was falling. All he could think about was how much it would hurt when the sand hit him.

Bart woke up, but it wasn't on the beach that he was attacked on. It was a dark cave. Bart realized that there was no light to be seen from the outside, just the artificial illumination hanging from the roof of the cave. Bart was in bird prison. He couldn't believe it. His worst nightmares had come true. Bart cried out hoping someone could hear him, but nobody answered.

After hours of waiting Bart saw someone. A small bluejay. He called out to the bird for food. The little jay walked to the fridge, and grabbed some crumbs for Bart. Bart watched intently as the little bird walked closer and closer to him. Waiting for the perfect moment to strike. The little bird got within inches of the cell, and Bart flapped his wings as hard as he could in the cramped space. The little bird flew backwards tumbling in the air. Bart's plan had worked when the keys flew out of the bird's pocket. Bart grabbed the keys. He unlocked the cell door, and started sneaking around the cave. Eventually he found a button, and he pressed it. A large door opened. Bart started flapping his wings, and took off into the sunset.

Delectable Dreams

By Stella Greene

The sweet symphony of fresh, sizzling delicacies floated throughout the room. The orchestra was accompanied by the potent, but delightful, aroma of caramelized garlic. Claudia danced with herself, full of delight and her senses felt alive. She closed her eyes to picture the taste of her creation. Maybe it would be savory, with a hint of spice. Or the garlic and carrots would bring a sweet undertone to the mixture. However the stew turned out, Claudia knew her one special ingredient would ensure its flavor was delicious. Her love, time, and patience for the culinary arts. Claudia tasted her stew, grinning with satisfaction. Flavor fireworks began popping on her tongue, each ingredient exploding together in perfect harmony. She was almost convinced it was the finest stew she had ever tasted. Claudia was completely and utterly enraptured by her artistic culinary formation. She hoisted her pot from the burner and plopped it onto a cold, steel industrial table.

“When are you ever going to realize your dreams are just dreams?” A hearty voice called from the service window.

Claudia surveyed her dull surroundings, wanting to be swept away into her fantasy again. The checkered tile floor was fading and cracking, needing to be replaced. Botched grease stains lined the walls, and were accompanied by a fading apricot wall color.

“It’s rush hour, Claudia. Grab your order pad and get out here!” He beckoned again.

She clicked off the stove, untied her apron, and shuffled through the rusty swinging door.

Squirrel and Mockingbird

By Stella Greene

I'm quite hungry, and I'm ready for lunch. My stomach feels like the fight between the squirrel and the mockingbird above us. My hand also hurts. I am a little concerned about the revision and publication aspect of this camp, as I don't have much quality writing. The only pieces I have gathered are my thoughts as they wash over me. I am wondering if the squirrel and the mockingbird once loved each other. Maybe it's a lovers to enemies situation. I think the bird's greed overpowered its love, and he started to take food from the squirrel. Although the squirrel probably still loves the bird, she has to defend the supply of food so her family will survive. How tragic would that storyline be? I felt inclined to make the bird a villain because he's been portrayed as a hero all day. We even read a poem about the bird symbolizing peace and hope. I couldn't let the bird have an overpowered ego. Although I am not the villain of this story, the bird and I share a common feeling. Hunger. I am quite hungry. Their fighting has ceased, and honestly, I'm hoping the squirrel won. I would encourage the squirrel because she has to feed her family. Imagine the grief she would have to work through because of the mockingbird's greed. How upsetting. I hope she has a happy ending.

Dream On

By Lucy Herrington

Dreams are goals, a future, and it's where success begins. Dreams do not come easy, and it is a lot of work to accomplish a dream. One of my biggest dreams or goals is being valedictorian. This has been a goal of mine since being in the sixth grade. Although I am naturally good at school, I still have to make sacrifices to fight for the seat at the top of my class. One thing that has helped me keep my grades high is using my time wisely. Whenever I have a lot of homework and chores I make a priority list. I put my biggest priority first, the next second, and so on. This helps me stay ahead and is much less stressful. The people around me also have a big impact on my goals. My parents have always pushed me to be the best in whatever I am doing. High grades have always been the expectation from my parents. This has pushed me harder from a young age to do the best I can.

Another goal of mine is to one day be my own boss. To clarify, I would like to work my way up to being a part owner or fully owning a business or company. I am not sure what I want to do out of college, but I do know that

I want to have the freedoms of an owner. Something that is going to help me get there is getting a good degree. I would like to go to a big university and a good graduate school. My parents both are partners in their separate businesses. They both work very hard and had to work hard to get there. Seeing them have the freedom of being at all of my brothers and my matches, meetings, etc., has made me want to be able to do the same thing. Although I do not know what the future holds, these are some of my big dreams.

The Other One Left

By Karoleigh Hummer

Drowning is a weird thing.

Some say it's a terrifying thing to go through. You're thrashing around, fighting for a gasp of air as darkness clouds your vision. Others say it's a peaceful experience to behold. The water cradles you in your final moments, and in the end, it just feels as if you're going to sleep.

I believe it's both.

You struggle for your life, scared out of your mind, water rushing into your lungs through your mouth, gaping open in a muffled, bubbly scream. But after a while, when you start to lose strength, you feel a sense of peace. A sense of clarity. You accept that you will die, and enjoy your final moments, comforted in a liquid embrace.

Then, there's the third option- eternal rage.

As I rose out of bed, I saw the rain outside, pattering against my bedroom window. This kind of weather always relaxed me, even now, despite the change in lifestyle. The only difference being I now have to hide this interest; a real shame, I miss being able to play in the muddy fields.

I pulled myself free from the covers, and went to the bathroom to shower and change. The line of neatly placed skin products, hair products, and dental care were all left in place, as they always were. I had to start using them to keep up my appearance; still, it feels weird to do this everyday. They aren't my things, yet it feels so good to have them. Maybe because I know I wouldn't have these even if I begged for the cheapest item. I guess the thought comforts me every time I have to use them.

I turned the shower on, and began washing my hair, humming a song my school choir began to sing. I'm not sure the name of it, but it is beautiful nonetheless. I see Maria out of the corner of my eye, reflecting off of the tiles. If it weren't for her bloated face and her screaming, I would have thought it was my weird, warped reflection.

"You think you can get away with this?!" Maria shrieked. "You won't, you know you won't!"

I don't answer her. I finished not too long after, and I stepped out of the shower, wrapping a towel around my body to dry myself off. I began doing the skin care routine that I have had to practice so hard to perfect, to make sure that it was just as she had done it before. It wasn't too difficult once you got the hang of it.

As I started brushing out my hair, I could hear Mom calling my new name from the stairs. "Maria, honey! Breakfast is ready!"

"Coming, Mom!" I shout back. I also had to grow used to that too-being called Maria. I miss my old name, Michelle. But, this is the new identity I have assumed for myself until I can get out, and travel far, far away from anyone here.

I get dressed, and do a light jog down the stairs. Mom and Dad are waiting for me, with faces stretched out into abnormally large smiles. It's almost as if they forgot what happened at all last month. But I knew they wouldn't forget; Mom was all too happy, and Dad's face was as real as mermaids.

"Did you sleep well, sweetie?" Dad asked, patting my shoulder. He used to call me that in my normal life, and I guess he moved it on to my new

life as well. I wish he didn't have to be sad for me, but I know he's going to get better soon.

"I slept well." I replied, smiling. Maria's way of speaking was so proper, it was almost painful for me to speak that way. But I know it's for a good reason- it's all for a good reason.

Mom handed me a plate of pancakes, a favorite of Michelle and Maria. But she wouldn't have made me any if she knew her sweet angel baby was gone. "Strawberry and banana, just how you like them." She said, brushing a strand of hair out of my face.

I nodded, and sat down at the table. With all of this smiling, I was surprised my mouth didn't fall off. I began eating; the pancakes were delicious, I'll give Mom a point for that.

"So, I was thinking that we should go out and have a daddy-daughter day. How does that sound?" Dad asked.

"Sounds fun. Where do you want to go?" I asked him, dabbing my mouth with a napkin.

"Wherever you want to, baby." Dad replied, smiling.

My heart felt like it got stabbed. I wish I was Michelle, so I could go to all of my favorite stores that I knew I wouldn't have time for any other day. But I wasn't Michelle- I was Maria.

Dad and I got our shoes on a couple minutes after breakfast was over, and Mom gave me a kiss goodbye. She never did that for Michelle, only Maria; the most Michelle got was a side hug. We ran to the car, and got in before we were completely soaked. We laughed at how messy we looked now, and Dad pulled out of the driveway.

“So, where should our first stop be?” He asked me.

“Could we... could we go to GameStop?”

Dad looked at me with a surprised face. “But I thought you didn’t live video games.”

“Well... I want to do stuff my sister did, you know?”

I was clearly a professional liar, because Dad took the answer and drove to GameStop. I picked things I knew would align more so with my sister’s taste- Sims 4 and a Hello Kitty stuffed animal. It was still pretty awesome; I got to sneakily browse Resident Evil Village and Bendy and The Dark Revival, so it wasn’t a total bust.

As I got into the car, I noticed Dad looked sad. “Dad?” I said. “You okay?”

Dad sighed. “I... I miss your sister, Maria. I miss her a lot.”

I almost cried. I wanted to scream, to tell him it was me, but I couldn’t do that. Not now, anyway. “I know... I miss her too.”

Dad hugged me. “I know you do. I know you quarreled a lot, but I knew you still loved her.”

I wanted to tell him quite the opposite. But Maria always kept the perfect image, so I had to, too. “Mhm...”

Dad sat upright again, taking a big deep breath. “How about we get some coffee?” He asked, smiling. But something in his eyes looked different... he didn’t look at me like he was sad. He looked at me like he knew something.

I panicked a little bit. Did I mess up? I glanced outside, and saw Maria staring through the window with a nasty grin on her face; she thought the same thing too, that the whole ruse would blow over.

But nothing came of it. Dad just drove to the coffee shop, without another word. But that look was still in his eyes; I can't explain it, but it's there.

Maybe it doesn't need to be explained, though. Maybe it's just better to not admit the truth, because the lies are better. I stepped out of the car with my Dad, ignoring Maria's screeching as she came to the same conclusion as I did.

"I'll kill you! If you ever go back to the beach, I'll kill you!"

I didn't answer. The whole 'fake Maria' ruse was on purpose, but I knew that the death was an accident. She should've left me alone, then I wouldn't have to push her.

Surprisingly, after that convo with Dad, I feel like I resurfaced.

Big Dreams

By Ava Jenkins

Everyone has dreams in life. No, not the kind of dreams that you have when you are asleep. I'm talking about the kind of dreams that you work toward and set goals for. There are many different things I dream of doing or having one day. But there is one dream that I will never let go of, and that is to play professional basketball in the WNBA. I have so many goals I want and need to accomplish in order to make this dream come true. I still have seven more years of school left including college, and I want to make those seven years worth living. Meaning not only must I get in the gym and work on my craft almost everyday, but I also must juggle all of the other things that are going on in my life. For example, in school, in order to continue to play basketball, I have to keep my grades up. I have to know how to put my school work first even before basketball, because without good grades no college will accept me no matter how great I am at basketball.

Right now as a ninth grader I play school ball, AAU ball and I go to school everyday of the week. Did I mention that both of my siblings play sports, so I'm also running to their games every five seconds on weekdays and weekends. I have high A's in all of my classes, and am planning on keeping it that way. Because I am good with juggling everything, whenever I ask my parents to go to the gym when we have free time, they don't hesitate to call my trainer and get me in the gym. Because of the motivation to make this dream come true, for school ball I made first team all region, which means I was one of the top players in my region. Next year and the two years after that, I plan on getting region player of the year.

After I graduate high school I want to have a full ride scholarship to a D1 school For basketball. My preferred pathway would be to go play for Dawn Staley at the university of South Carolina. But if not, I want to play at one of the top D1 schools in the United States. After I have accomplished all the goals, like I have mentioned before, I want to go play in the WNBA. Hopefully throughout the rest of my high school years, I keep wanting to work toward the goal I have had since I was little. The only way I will get to where I wanna be in life is by pushing myself harder and harder everyday and ignore the distractions, and that's what I plan on doing.

Who Are We?

By Josh Knox

Who are we really? All of us are changed by something; film, literature, the people we are around (read *One Story*, *Building by Wes Young*. It'll tell you the same). I can tell you from experience. In *One Act*, when onstage, you can't be yourself. You have to fully be your character (if you want to win). You have to pour yourself into a mold if you wish to succeed. Another example. I, personally, am very different from how I was in elementary/middle school. I, at first, just tried to fit in as myself, but the people of Cochran are very different from the people of Valdosta. The move from there to here messed me up a bit, and I closed myself off to people for a while. Eventually, I did come around. Personally, it'd be pretty hard to stay shut off from people you've been with for years. I digress. The point is, we all change based on what goes on around us. However, if you aren't careful, you might look in the mirror one day, and not recognize who's looking back at you.

Music Feeds the Soul

By Makya Menges

Whether you enjoy music or not, it is ingrained into our everyday lives. There's rarely a day you may not hear it. That is, unless you're going out of your way to avoid it. Although that's a possibility, why would anyone want that? To avoid such a beautiful art might as well be considered a crime. Music comes in many forms when presented—so many other artists, genres, and albums. There's so much diversity; there's no reason for any person to feel bored when there's so much to explore.

For some, music provides something for them emotionally. The music works as a sort of filler for something they don't think they feel. Perhaps even a bolster for the feelings that already reside in their head. Music can provide sadness, anger, regret, happiness, and much more. It may make you feel deeper than you did or even change your perspective on certain situations. For others, maybe they would like a fun tune to turn on any time they need it. No one needs a reason to listen to music, it's always there no matter the situation.

Music can define someone's personality or maybe even be the exact opposite of them. Music can help us figure out our feelings. Help us situate our minds. Music is there when others may not be. It may help you focus or maybe even drive you off track. Music is there for so many possible situations and is used in so many different ways.

It truly is an art, poetry. No matter the song or artist, the album or studio, music is there for people. A love for music is buried in everyone. Whether that love is not far from the surface or deep in the crevices of one's heart, it lingers there.

What Once Goes

By Ricky Morales

Calico cats were always my favorite, maybe that's racism against cats now that I think about it. But any cat always made me smile. Thinking about walks down the street, schools of cats in the crevices of lawns and houses. They all seemed so different. Some cats were more plump, and others were slender. I always worried about those.

I also have a cat at home; a ginger, what a disadvantage for the poor guy, talkative, not so small kitty. He's my favorite cat now, not gingers, just him. To be frank, I would probably be a dog person if I didn't have this one kitty, he just looks funny! I look at him sometimes and wonder what he feels, and I wonder what he thinks, probably a whole lot of nothing. He's an indoor cat, but he loves going outside, even if it's not in his best interest. One vet bill later, and he was practically a prisoner inside a home with plenty of food and toys. He always cries out about this. I never understand why, but in the same vein, I am no cat.

He always has that look in his eyes about the outside world. Maybe I relate to it just a bit, and I always let him out for a stroll. He always bolts out when I open the door for him.

“Seriously, this cat must hate me,” I always think to myself.

I look outside too. I wonder about how my ideas of greater places compare to Kitty's, his name, a great one if i'm being honest. Though I don't think I have the same look in my eyes as he does. I myself wonder if I will ever come back in the same way that Kitty always comes back.. Though I'm not so sure if Kitty comes back because he loves us, or because he loves the food we give him. In my mind, he loves me and only me. That is why he comes back.

Common Denominator

By Jed Ledbetter

Both of the other boys were very hopeful, and so was I. Probably more so than them. But now that I'm thinking about it now, it's pretty funny. She did the exact same thing to all of us. She would act like she was in love for about two weeks, and then out of nowhere break things off. I felt awful about it until I found out it really wasn't my fault, and that I wasn't unique.

It was a Friday night about two weeks after things went the way things go. I got a phone call that confirmed my sneaking suspicion. There was another man involved. I felt stupid for thinking she would leave out of nowhere to be alone. I hung up and cursed into the air. He was my friend, and he was closer than a brother to me. I couldn't imagine him doing something like this. I decided that night that I would have to fight him. The weekend passed, and Monday reared its dreadful head. The clock spun round to 11:30 and I watched him come down the hallway. I had this conversation all planned out in my head. I'd start by telling him how close he was to me, then I'd tell him I knew about them, then I'd tell him to pick a

time and a place by Friday. And so he walked down the hall, and I pulled him aside into the dressing room.

I started the talk exactly as planned, "You're closer than a brother to me, you're like family to me, really."

"That means a lot." He replied

"I know you've liked her for a while now, but I spoke up first--"

"Yeah, uh, we're not a thing anymore."

"What?- Well I don't really care about that anymore. It's just that I spoke up first and you knew about it. You didn't back off, so now--"

"I didn't know about yall, really I didn't, and if I did I would have let it be. But she told me herself not to get any ideas about yall."

"Wait, so-so when did she start talking to you?"

"Valentines day."

"Hmm. That checks out. So she stopped talking to you as well?"

"Yeah, I mean it was this whole thing over the weekend. She just said she felt lost or something. She acted like she was in love for about two weeks there and then... well... just kinda stopped out of nowhere."

"You know, that's the exact same thing that happened to me. That's the same thing that happened to _____ as well!"

"Yeah. Whole thing kinda sucks."

"Well I think I feel a little bit better now. I don't really know. That seems to happen pretty often... I was so ready to fight you man." I said laughing

Then he laughed too. Just then the door handle turned and swung open. Ms. Greer stood there. "Y'all come on to the classroom. I don't want y'all to make a habit out of this." And so we went and talked and laughed.

Oftentimes we blame ourselves for things out of our control, and if we go about fixing these issues in the wrong way without a little bit of reason and thoughtful conversation with people in the same boat, we could wind up worse than where we started. That is the story of the common denominator.

Drowning

By Rylee Soles

“HHHHHHHH!!!” I go up and eagerly say to my favorite person in the whole entire world.

“Oh,heyy,” says Brady. He is the best person ever. I have no idea what I would do without him. He's been acting a little off recently, but he says that he's just tired. “How's your day going?” I say to him with a huge smile on my face. “ It's been okay, nothing special,” he says with a tiny grin. “ Well my day has been fantastic. I passed my geometry test, and honestly that made my day, but seeing you is just the cherry on top.” I said. “Well I'll call you when I get home okay?” said Brady avoiding eye contact. “Okay! Sounds good, just call me whenever you want!” I say very excitedly.

As soon as I got home, I rushed to do my chores. I hope he calls me earlier than he usually does today. Whenever I'm not with him, I don't feel anything. I only feel a heavy weight on my chest. It feels like I'm drowning, and he is my only source of fresh air. I needed a distraction while I waited

for him to call hoping it would lessen the weight. My dog was begging me to take her on a walk, so that's what I did while I waited for the call.

I had just gotten back from a two hour walk, and I still haven't received a call. I didn't want to text and bother him in case he was busy. I sit on my bed staring at the ceiling fan. It turned slowly and my eyes naturally followed it. I thought about every time Brady had ever made me die laughing. The only time I could think of is when we were only a few months into our relationship and we saw a stray cat, and it came up to us wanting to be pet and Brady flipped out. He was lightly screaming like a little girl. I was laughing so hard I started to cry a little bit. I finally snapped out of my trance of thinking when things were better in our relationship, and my phone rang.

"Hey we need to have a really serious talk," said Brady. It sounds like he has been crying.

"Okay," I say nervously. "I am really sorry to do this, because I love you so much, but our relationship isn't working for me anymore. This is not your fault at all, and I don't want you to think that. I met someone new a few weeks ago, and I really like her. You will still forever be my first love, and I'm sorry to leave you like this." "Okay if that's how you feel that's fine. I

don't have anything to add, so if you're done I guess this is goodbye. " I said coldly.

Immediately after I hung up I burst out in tears. I feel floods of tears streaming down my cheeks. I couldn't breathe. I was frantically gasping for air. The weight on my chest had immediately grown ten times in size. This is it, I'm finally drowning. I had lost my breath of fresh air.

Reporting From Ukraine

By Aaron Warnock

Andriy watched as another drone flew off into the distance. He was a veteran who had fought since the early days of the war. An attack was coming. He held his rifle ready to fire. A HIMARS streaked across the sky. A muffled boom rang out, shaking the ground with it. An APC in the distance burst into flames. Artillery started up. Troops in other sections of the trench started firing. Soon he began fighting. After a long fight they were ordered to retreat. Andriy volunteered to cover their retreat. Eventually Andriy was the last Ukrainian in the trench. As he began to retreat he ran into several Russian soldiers. Andriy fired first and dove for cover in the empty trench. The Russians did the same. Andriy poked up above the trench and shot a few shots at the Russians, who promptly retreated. The Russians left a man to cover the retreat. Andriy quickly crept closer to the Russian, who occasionally shot off into Andriy's general direction. When Andriy was four yards away he popped up and shot, killing the enemy. Andriy saw the Russians getting away; he chased after them shooting as he ran. A drone pulled up next to him and gave a sort of nod before flying

ahead and blowing up. The Russians were knocked to the ground, but before Andriy could catch them, an explosion blew Andriy to the ground. Another explosion occurred then another and another. Artillery started firing on both Russians and Andriy. He dove into a crater and peered out just as another explosion blew up where the Russians were. The artillery fire slowed and eventually stopped. Andriy walked back to friendly lines. It was a rare moment of silence. He looked out at the burnt vehicles, abandoned trenches, and fire crackling. He hoped that some day the war would end, Putin be dethroned, and his country would finally get the chance to prosper. Something blew up behind him, knocking him forward a little ways. Andriy snapped out of his thoughts and realized he should get a move on.

Only Two Exits

By Alice Warren

Cassandra heard the bell in the distance, and she knew it was time to go back home. Yet she couldn't. She was trapped underground. While she was walking back to the village from the nearby woods she felt the ground sink beneath her. There was the sound of a gigantic CRASH, and she fell about fifteen feet underground. She had been stuck there not too long, but she had good reason to worry. It was already late by the time she fell, and the only light in the room was the red, orange and yellow streaks created by the sun that was quickly disappearing. If she stayed down there for a little while longer she would not only be stuck underground, but blind as well. Unfortunately she knew there was going to be a new moon that night.

Panic filled her chest. She had only two exits and one of them was the hole that she fell through, but it was impossible to climb. The other was a tunnel that was scarcely large enough for her to crawl through. Just the

thought of going through a tunnel that small made her lungs feel like she was running out of air.

She looked behind her hoping to see a better exit. Her heart stopped. Her legs shook. She let out a horrible scream.

In front of her was the fossilized skeleton of a dragon.

Photographs from Event

