Anthology 9

Young Writers Project
Dedication to Young Writers Project  
Founder Geoff Gevalt

Young Writers Project owes its vitality to many generous people, but this book is dedicated to the one individual who invented it, persuaded others that it could work, and saw it through at every step of the way for a remarkable 12-year run.

Geoff Gevalt is a newspaperman at heart – Young Writers Project actually began as a monthly series in the Burlington Free Press, where he was managing editor – and, like every good journalist, he is energized by the power of words. He understands their ability to inspire and shape lives, and as he built up Young Writers Project, he never lost sight of his belief that young people in their formative years could tap into the magic of writing, and from there, live richer lives, bend the arc of their own life stories and contribute to a better world.

Geoff is stepping down this year from full-time duties as executive director, but will continue to contribute in many ways, and his ideals are written into the DNA of our organization. Geoff has touched countless lives. Below is a small sample of his impact on YWPers, past and present:

Thank you for teaching this kid from the middle of nowhere that there are people in the world who want to hear the stories floating around in her head.

– REBECCA VALLEY, NORTHAMPTON, MASS.

Without you, MGMC wouldn’t be a thing. Thank you for the music-filled car rides, the stories you’ve shared and the time you’ve taken to listen.

– KIRAN QAQAR, SOUTH BURLINGTON, MUSLIM GIRLS MAKING CHANGE (MGMC)

I think about you all, and the site, constantly. It wasn’t a fleeting or ‘stepping stone’ thing for me – it was my life, carved me straight out of stone, shaped me completely! I wish I could thank you enough, Geoff, but never, ever could I.

– KATY TURNER, NEW YORK CITY

I felt less emotion upon graduating from high school than I did upon hearing that you’d be moving on from YWP, and that as a soon-to-be adult I might be forced to move on, too. You and YWP have been there for me since I was 12 and just in the early days of my writing journey.

– ELLA STAATS, BURLINGTON

Young Writers Project very genuinely shifted the course of my life. I don’t know how I could ever thank you for what you have done for me – and given to me.

– ANNA RUTENBECK, WASHINGTON, D.C.
About Young Writers Project

At Young Writers Project, we create a safe and respectful community for middle- and high-school students to discover the power of writing. By learning to write, young people gain the ability to express themselves clearly, think creatively and discover who they are – a process that can be life-changing in both their personal and professional lives. We are rooted in Vermont, and welcome young writers, artists and photographers from everywhere to experience our website, publications and special events.

OUR PROGRAMS

• Youngwritersproject.org is the heartbeat of our mission, providing daily writing challenges, positive feedback and a sense of community. For many of our writers, especially those living in rural and remote areas, our website is a lifeline to people like themselves who want to explore the world of writing, ideas and creativity.

• Special gatherings, workshops and after-school events bring young people together to learn more about the art of writing and performance. YWP’s Schools Project provides teachers their own classroom websites, support and writing residencies. Our youth-led Voices for Change project works to celebrate differences and promote understanding through spoken word events and community outreach.

• “The Voice” gives affirmation to the works of young writers and photographers in a beautiful, monthly, online magazine.

• The Anthology Series publishes outstanding poems, stories and images in an annual, high-quality book format.


• Live performance events in the Burlington area include SoundCheck at Burlington City Arts, Poetry Riot at Arts Riot, Voices of Color Showcase at the Lamp Shop, Poetry Experience at Fletcher Free Library and a Youth Speaker Series at Clemmons Family Farm in Charlotte.
About Anthology 9

Young Writers Project believes that one of the most joyful aspects of writing is to see your work published in print, on good paper, with beautiful photography, fine design, and quality binding fashioned to last. With Anthology 9, we continue our tradition of rewarding some of the best work of the past year with the sense of permanence that only a published volume can achieve.

The writers, photographers and artists published in Anthology 9 are drawn from about 10,000 submissions made to youngwritersproject.org from June 2017 to July 2018. It has been a tumultuous time in the history of our country, and events that roiled the nation inevitably made their way onto youngwritersproject.org. Young people, as you will see in the pages that follow, grappled with some of the most pressing issues of our day – the fate of immigrants, the rights of minorities, the dignity of women, school shootings – and their words are a testament to an informed, engaged generation. It is gratifying that these young people turn to Young Writers Project as a safe space and meaningful platform to share their voices at such a critical time in their lives and our history.

Writing, of course, encompasses the full spectrum of human experience, and along with dark and complex pieces, this book includes poems and stories full of imagination, sunshine and sheer delight. With many of our writers and artists based in Vermont, it seems only right that the natural world of this beautiful state appears frequently in our collection. And, as always in our anthologies, young people wonder who they really are, as childhood slips away and adulthood beckons.

We hope you enjoy this anthology, and hope it contains, for you, an idea, an image, a turn of phrase, something that resonates after you close the book.

THE EDITORIAL TEAM: Susan Reid, Anna Forsythe, Shannon Ripp, Kathy Folley, William Anderson, Rajnii Eddins, Andrea Gray (design) and Alan Schillhammer (Queen City Printers).

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SPECIAL THANKS also to our fellow nonprofit partners and YWP friends, including the YWP Board led by Chair Kathy Folley, Arts Riot, Burlington City Arts, Burlington Telecom, Champlain College, Clemmons Family Farm, Flying Pig Bookstore, Flynn Center for Performing Arts, Karma Birdhouse, King Street Center, Maglianero’s, My Brother’s Keeper, Nutty Steph’s, Peace & Justice Center, Phoenix Books, Regional Educational Television Network (RETN), Shelburne Farms, Teresa Davis Studio, University of Vermont, Vermont College of Fine Arts, Vermont Folklife Center, Vermont Learning for the Future, Vermont Stage Company, VSAC, and Vermont libraries, schools and media, including newspapers, VPR.net and VTDigger.org.
The Beautiful Inevitable
Eden Anne Bauer, Hanover, NH

How beautifully the brush of existence sweeps across the broad canvas of the sky, leaving streaks of color in compliance with the whispered wish of watching eyes.

Raising a harmonious symphony, the birds cradle joy and sadness in song; as ink-black darkness spreads infinitely, light slips from the sky, but not for too long.

I catch my reflection in the window and watch the twinkling stars dance in my eyes.

I can’t stay for long — I wish I could, though, for I know all too soon the sun will rise.

I slip into a dream world of a kind, as shadows and light weave all through my mind.

Hands
Neelie Markley, Burlington

Look at your hands. They are twin moons orbiting around you, with objects gravitating toward them and flying away.

Note the geography of them: the mountain range of knuckles that rises from clenched fists, the valleys between the tall, branchless fingers, the creased riverbeds etched through your palms.

Look closer. Observe the whorls on your fingertips, the subtle beat of your blood as it courses through your wrists, the white edges of bone stretching the limits of your skin. There’s a whole rainbow bleeding out from your hands — soft, blue-green veins, reddened fingernails, violet scars.

Look again. See the cuticles you’ve ripped ragged with time, the slits of your fingernail tips, the collection of rashes and bruises and calluses you’ve collected without noticing.

Without noticing.

You don’t notice hands, do you? Look at them. They’re alien, perfectly coordinated, fluttering around you, preening you, protecting you.

Since birth, bones have shifted into place. They could’ve been whale flippers or bat wings; you could’ve been born to fly, but you’re not flying. You’re assigning life to your hands so you can think about more important things, so while they juggle and paddle and sketch and dance, you can be hammering away at six dozen different ideas and not crack any of them open.

And now you don’t notice anything. You swallow instead of tasting, you sing without hearing, you praise yourself, thinking you’ll be better at life the next time you live it. Maybe then, you’ll have time to be happy.

Maybe then, you’ll notice your hands.

The Beautiful Inevitable
Abigayle Domingue, St. Albans

Her lipstick prints onto the white ceramic, creating a collage of red against the white gloss. The ripples in her lips magnify the texture of the stain, highlighting the matte white coat. Over and over again she kisses the rim, darkening the first coat and shadowing the white, establishing a trim of red-blossomed flowers. She paints them delicately to match the vines of gold growing from the base. A masterpiece of tender sips.

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Temporary
Taylor Lavigne, St. Albans

You were temporary, a slow-moving butterfly flying across my yard, staying for the prettiest flowers, the open, beating sun, the long grass. But you didn’t stay through the rain, the thunder — or even a slight breeze.
It’s Cold Tonight
Ben Stoll, Georgia

I take us to our spot, the one that is marked loosely with ancient mossy rocks.
You sit down on a log while I prepare a fire.
It’s a wonderful mess.
I throw together wet logs and green branches.
I have no newspaper, and my lighter is in the car.
I clash rocks together in hopes for a spark, and instead find blood when I smash my ring finger.
There is no flame produced, so I sit down next to you, utterly defeated and fuming.
But I feel your fingers crawl over and around my flannel as you draw yourself under my arm, telling me that I am enough to keep you warm.

The One They Fear
Javan Nichols, Burlington

I am the one they fear.
They see me from afar, but are scared to come near... cross the street just to stay clear.
They stereotype me as a thug, don’t ever want to show me love.
I am the one they fear.
My skin’s as dark as the asphalt.
Their fear has me thinking, “It’s all my fault!”
Is my hair too long? Are my pants too low?
Can I not be trusted if my skin’s not as white as snow?
I am the one they fear.
I reach for my I.D., but before I can, the guns shots blind me.
Shot without explanation...
Is this the way we live in a so-called free nation?
I am the one they fear.

Cages
Alexandra Contreras-Montesano, Burlington

I want my mother at night – when I wake up and my arms are uncurled from her neck and I can no longer feel her face pressed against mine, and when they tell me to be still, but tell her to move away.
I want my mother at night – when I reach out, but all I find are bars.
I want my mother at night – when someone who is only two years older tries to wipe my tears but I know that if their cage is as cold as mine, then they are not company but a captive.
I want my mother at night – when I have finally learned how to live in the dark, but they thrust me into the light of release, and the sweet taste of untainted air is sullied by the lack of those whose arms I was torn from, right here, just days before.
I want my mother at night – when I reach out and still feel bars. Even if they are taken away, I know I will never be able to sleep alone again.
Valentine's Day, 2018
Ella Staats, Burlington

When you told your mom you loved her before you caught the bus this morning, you meant it in the way a teenager means it when they kiss their mother on the cheek, cereal on their breath, backpack on their shoulder, head in a million places. You meant it in the way that assumes you will see her that evening after track practice, in the way that assumes you will seal the day with another I love you before you turn out the light.

When you told your mom you loved her at 2:21 PM on February 14, 2018, with saliva choking in your throat, you meant it in the way you could never mean anything else in your life. You meant it as an apology and a cry for help and a plea for her to hold you like she did when you were little, and the monsters in your dreams were stuck in your head. Mom, the monsters are real this time, I swear it. They’re real and they’re just around the corner. They’re real and their teeth are bullets that bite the backs of friends who did not have time to tell their mothers they loved them. They’re real and I’m so, so scared.

I love you.
You can’t hear over the scream of your heartbeat.
You can’t feel over the heat of blood in your veins.
You can’t see behind the black spots in your eyes.
I love you.
You are sorry for everything you ever did wrong.
You are repenting for every sin you might have committed.
You are praying to every god you didn’t think you believed in.
I love you.
You are penning eulogies for the words you never said.
You are penning eulogies for the life you never lived.
You are penning eulogies for your classmates in the next room over.
I love you, Mom.
And I mean it this time.
I mean it as the Valentine’s Day card I didn’t write you, as the consolation for missing dinner last night, as the apology for every time I took for granted that I’d have another chance to say it.
The monsters found out where I go when I’m awake, Mom, and this time you’re not here to fend them off.

I love you, too.
Is everything okay?

Candlelight
Shayle Dery-Roystan, Newbury

Look closer, past the satellites of space, past the refracted blue light of Earth’s atmosphere, toward the Northern Hemisphere, the United States, farther down into New York, its largest city.
Fly through the glistening, rain-soaked streets, filled to the brim with people – their eyes hollow, lifeless.
A turn left, right, right, left, to a small alleyway.
You’re so close, you must see me now. Come closer.
Down the alley to a small window where a candle’s flame dances.
Here I am. I’m with a little boy who is afraid of the dark, but I am his protection against the evils of darkness.

Creator
Holly Margulius, South Burlington

The little boy sits in the seat across from me on the yellow school bus. He has a skateboard spread across his lap, and five pens shoved into his pocket. He reaches for one and they tumble out. He puts them back in, but keeps one to doodle on a massive, worn sketchbook filled with white paper. I’ve seen him wear the same beaten khaki pants, scuffed white shoes and speckled green sweater every single day – from June through December. This boy is a creator. You can just tell. He’s giving to the world, even though I suspect that all it ever seems to do is take from him.

Sofia Hall, Essex Junction
Nothing to Say
Lucy Glueck, Hanover, NH

The morning was crisp and cold. Fall had just begun. Laura was bundled tightly in her sweater. Her ears were numb and cold, but the rest of her was cozy. She carried a suitcase, pressed tightly against her chest. She could hear her own heartbeat echoing through the metal clasps. The bus stop was still a couple blocks away, but the blue line shuttle was leaving in only a couple of minutes, so she decided to cut through an alleyway to get where she was going a bit faster.

At the end of the alley, silhouetted against the clear blue sky, she saw a shape she thought she recognized: a tall, slim man, underdressed for the weather in a light synthetic jacket but standing straight, not appearing cold. His hair was buzzed short, cropped even closer to his scalp than Laura’s was. He was facing away from her, but even from the back she noticed a familiar bobbling to his stride.

Her old friend! As little kids they had been inseparable, but it had been a long time since they had been close, and a couple of years ago she’d lost track of him altogether. But now, here he was, standing in front of her, just a few meters away. He hadn’t noticed her yet, but all Laura would have to do would be to hold up a hand and call his name and he would see her, and they could talk again at last.

Laura never would have thought that she would lose touch with him in the first place. As children, they would splash in puddles, hold hands, play new games and invent machines that they would never build. There had been whispered jokes of marriage. But Laura had never wanted to marry him – never wanted to marry anyone, never wanted to be anything more than friends. Even as a little kid, she had known that someday she would marry a faceless man and the sleepovers with her male friends would have to stop because he would be jealous. She didn’t want that, at the time, but she figured that someday she would grow up and mature and be okay with the idea.

Now she was almost 30 and hadn’t warmed to the concept at all. Even at 5 or 6 she’d understood. Everyone likes a tomboy, until she turns 12 or 15 and doesn’t outgrow it properly. There was an expiration date on her style, her friendships, the way she played and talked, the shoes she wore. But she hadn’t expired; she’d grown and bloomed. And here was her former friend, standing just in front of her. He hadn’t changed, but there had never been any pressure for him to change. The only thing that had changed was that he had stopped talking to her. The dreams they’d had since they were tiny, about a friendship that would last forever and never leave, had now faded.

She approached him in the narrowness of the alleyway, so close that she could hear him breathing, and kept her eyes straight ahead as she passed.

They had nothing to say to each other.

One Stormy Eve
Emily Trage, Thetford

The hour presents itself in shades of gray, rusted leaves replacing the blossoms of May.
My footsteps crunch against gravel and stone
as I tiredly wend my way home.

The rain wastes no time in tumbling down,
collecting on flowers and soaking the town,
clinging to shoes, then socks, then bare feet
as I follow the lonely street.

I watch in wonder as the river swells,
and fat droplets sing like tinkling bells.
The sky darkens fast and I quicken my pace
through pastures of Queen Anne’s lace.

But sadly, all good things must come to an end,
and I audibly sigh as I come round the bend.
I peer through the haze – my house is in sight,
a reprieve from this stormy night.

I rejoice in the last few drops of the rain,
quite out of breath, but surely still sane.
I stumble onto the sunken wood porch
before lightning strikes like a torch.

Approaching the threshold I knock on the door,
dripping wet puddles all over the floor.
And I suddenly realize, a laugh in my throat,
that I am not wearing a raincoat.

Stardust
Sophie Dauerman, Shelburne

It’s snowing.
Large pieces of iridescent glitter are sifting down through the woven cap of charcoal and papery clouds. Powdered sugar dusting a flat, dry pancake. It’s as if a giant grabbed the world in its monstrous hands and shook it with bottomless will, until the glitter of the stars traced its way down to Earth. I look down at my paper. Nucleosynthesis. Quarks. To hydrogen, to helium, to carbon, to oxygen. My eyes find the window. Somewhere out there, a very long time ago, a star exploded, and its dust held a secret recipe for snow. As I stare out the window of my biology classroom, just a piece of glitter in comparison to an all-encompassing universe, I witness the stars falling down to Earth.
Peace and Rage
Janet McIntosh Barkdoll, East Shoreham

Peace. There are pieces of peace scattered across the hills, thrown in corners with abandoned spider webs and forgotten for decades. Those pieces of peace do not deteriorate. They only wait patiently. Observant eyes and carefully attuned ears can pick them out, track them down, gently pick them up and blow the cobwebs away, returning happiness, laughter, sunlight, trees, companions to the world. Peace reincarnated piece by piece.

Peace is red like a ruby. It burns through everything in its way, trailing hot coals and lifeless ashes in its wake.

Rage is red like a ruby. It burns through everything in its way, trailing hot coals and lifeless ashes in its wake. Rage.

These four letters are weighed down by so much emotion. Clenched fists/ gritted teeth/ furrowed brows/ tight face. Rage bubbles up inside me like water boiling over the edges of the pot, spilling and leaping from its rim, to fizz, hiss and spit on the burner below. Spit. Hiss. Spit.

The violent crackles and pops echo among themselves like shattering glass, again and again and again. The pot has boiled dry. It is silent now. The hiss and fuss are gone. The pot still stands on the ignited burner, its bottom scouring, baking, cracking, the aluminum overheating, silently. The water no longer boils out of control, but the heat remains and damages. Rage still destroys.

Origami Wolf
Nora Wootten, Cornwall

I saw your eyes first. You had a little bit of gray behind them. Your eyebrows strung together, and your forehead knit itself into a scarf. I think it would be orange. You said, “This is for me?” as if you were surprised that someone would take the time to make something for you.

I said, “Yes, it’s for you (silly)” Your scarf unraveled quite quickly. You kind of bit your lip before you smiled. It was a small smile. It was only a tiny bit of light let in through the blinds.

Wondering Loudly
Will Kimber, East Corinth

I wonder why the sky is blue… All this time I never knew why the sky is blue. Clouds dot the sky like puffy white ships sailing to distant lands, commandeered by Captain Wind. A crazed skipper, Wind is, ramming the other ships with impunity. For when the boats collide, they sink into each other like ghosts, harming not the crew nor the vessel. Peacefully, they slip out of each other’s intimate presence and go their separate ways.

Why is the sky so blue? All this time I never knew why the sky is blue. Could the sky be blue because - “Um, Will,” my mother interjects, “the sky is blue because the atmosphere scatters the most visible blue light. That is why the sky appears blue to us.” Oh. I guess I was wondering loudly.

Aly Katon, Essex Junction
Fairy Wings
Iris Robert, South Burlington

Oh, how we wish to be five years old again, before stress, sorrow, PopSockets and Snapchat began, when all we knew were fairy wings, sparkly, pink and magical, before we knew too well of broken hearts and lost friends, when we thought that nothing could break us, that we could fly. Oh, how we wish to be five years old again.

Dare
Shannon MacDonald, Sheldon

March 24, 2018 – Montpelier, Vermont
For the first time, I felt it rise up within me. Without hesitation, without shame, without fear. My own voice – crawling out of my larynx and escaping out of my mouth, begrudgingly pulling itself along, weak from the journey, but persevering. For the first time, it demanded to be heard, not asking for permission – but instead taking a seat on my tongue and resting its head on my lips, showing its face and bearing its scars from being told what it could not say, and what it should not say. It enveloped itself in the sun and joined with the thousands of other voices in filling the air with vibrations. First you see us, the people. Now you hear our voices, now you feel our voices. And, oh, they taunt you with inspiration, they unnerve you with education, and they dare you to ignore them.

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The In-Between
Lila Woodard, Burlington

It is in the in-between that
I live;
the unknown and
unrecognized reverie
that consumes and spits me out
every day.

Delaney Harrison, Essex Junction

Caleb Brott, Essex Junction

Marlie Smith, Essex Junction
Electric Galaxy
Shyloh Wonder-Maez, Barre

City floating in the black, inky sky,
I see you as I fly by.
Each light adds to the galaxy
of stories and lives.
I imagine jumping into
the darkness, forever falling up
into the night sky reflected below.
Maybe it’s an ocean with
strange creatures busy flowing
with the undertow.
I’m a space traveler observing without
really seeing,
but I can still feel each being,
pockets of life shown by lights.

Teeming night, do you see me add
to your sky as you add to mine?
Awe inspiring, spread out
like beautiful coral,
or a crack in the earth
with shining stardust showing through.
I want to reach out and dip my
fingers into the land,
touching each light.
We cannot be only a blight.
There is a peace to the chaos as you
watch from afar.
It used to be a miracle to see the world
from the sky.
Beauty tends to be lost on us after
the miracle has ended.
Sky, inky black,
floating city.

For Summer
Francesca Richard, St. Albans

It’s the heavy air,
the parched grass’s thirst
quenched,
the dog napping sprawled on a
weathered deck.
It’s dirt collecting on bare feet.
It’s slivers on your palms and pollen in
your nose,
the whine of insects and the distant
chuckle of farm equipment.
senses melded together because,
which one is which?
I’m stuck in the lull of it,
and I wouldn’t change a thing.

Her Sister’s Sea Glass
Sophie Usherwood, Hanover, NH

She smashes the pieces of her sister’s sea
glass onto the ground,
multitudes of colors like sugar thrown
into her eyes,
she, rocking backward and forward in
anticipation to show her sister
how many more pieces of sea glass she
will have now.
Flyer Wall
William Keeton, Burlington

A massive board covers the wall, plastered with flyers: music festivals, job opportunities, internships, services, products. They all compete for space and attention, piled on top of each other, a sea of choice that blends together into a jumbled, incoherent mess of words.

Jim stares blankly at the wall. In each colorful paper, he sees visions of things he could become. Each one holds a parallel universe with a person who is better than he is. What group will he join? Who does he want to be? He feels that if he stares at this wall, a sheet of advertisements, the answer will come to him.

The Crack
Lindsey Carbee, Newbury

Soft moonlight cast a luminous glow on the freshly fallen snow. Sitting on the edge of the windowsill, I watched each snowflake develop, drifting slowly downward... winding, curling, until it reached the mound of white. Silently, the green grass was covered in a layer of snow. I felt connected to each snowflake, knowing each turn it would make, storing each pattern in my memory. It was a tradition, admiring the first snowfall from the comfort of the windowsill. The long crack, reaching diagonally from one end of the window to the other, reminded me that the cold brings hardships. The faded gray staining, almost white where I rested, encompassed memories from previous snowfalls. This year was different, however. There were once two of us admiring the snowfall yearly. The hardships of winter, taking a life, cracking a window. This year it was only me watching, remembering, hoping that she would emerge from the snow and stay here forever... to watch the snow fall.

What If?
Jillian Sherwin, Rochester

When I was little, the boys in my class would huddle together and start talking about the most random things. What if, they would say, a snail roller skated down a mountain, and then fell into a huge pool of chocolate? What if there was a robot who jumped on a trampoline and flew all the way to Mars? When I was little, this annoyed me. I thought it was stupid, ridiculous and never going to happen.

Now I realize that the world needs these what-if people. I’m a what-if person, and I don’t want to live in a world without what-ifs.
**Janitor**
Fiona Goodman, Brattleboro

Rushing to the bathroom
at the beginning of jazz band,
I passed by the janitor
mopping underneath the stairs.
At his feet was a pile
of folded-up paper plates, garbage.
He wore a blue jumpsuit
and had a balding, liver-spotted head.
His face was droopy,
like a basset hound’s.
I wanted to smile at him –
but I’m not so good
at smiling at strangers.
He stopped mopping when I got close,
drew over to the side so I could pass.
I was ashamed
of my confident walk toward him,
the way I didn’t pay attention
and didn’t notice him until then.
I wanted to tell him to keep mopping –
or at least give him
that tiny little token of a smile
to let him know that I could care.
But as I drew near,
my face froze; my legs kept walking.
I passed by and left him there mopping –
he, just another sad man
cleaning up other people’s messes,
and I, just another girl
who didn’t care.

**New Friend**
Samantha Aikman, Richmond

I met you last week.
We were quiet
and lonely
and only had the courage to smile,
skipping rocks
and occasionally wading into the ocean.
I want to remember it forever.
The way
I met you,
the way you looked at me,
the way the ocean curved
into the horizon
and disappeared.
I want to remember forever how I met
you
and when I first saw you smile
and how you sang.
I want to remember not knowing you
and then, suddenly,
changing.

**Schizo**
Sara Young, Sheldon

I wish I had known you
before the darkness crept in,
before the voices whispered,
before the demons lurked in every corner.
Kind, compassionate, caring,
all manner of “C” sounds to describe you
then.
They describe you now, still,
only changed,
only not.

It first manifested as
ceaseless, complex, cacophonous.
Your diary read, “I can’t take this,”
and you hit your mother with a wrench,
or so you thought.
Meal time was spent on the porch,
alone.
Inside the house, siblings laughed.
Inside your head, something laughed,
too.
Aunty took one look and said it,
a cruel, careless word,
the word of a trained nurse:
“Schizophrenia.”
Dad was scared to death.
You were three years older than him.
What if he caught the loony gene too?
Oh God, what if they all did?

A trip to Ohio was supposed to set you straight.
You came back curved and crooked,
babbling about love you found in the woods,
some beautiful girl in the woods.

They describe it like a rollercoaster.
You go up and up and up,
and just when you’re on the top –
darling!
You crash down faster than you can imagine.
Forty-seven years of the same
rollercoaster is tiring.

And now,
your boisterous, booming laugh
echoes in Martha’s Kitchen,
a shared joke between you and a friend
nobody else can see.

Society shuns you,
deems you unimportant.
You can’t work, you can’t provide.
You stare at me on the street
and I turn my face away.
I’m sorry.
You did not deserve that.

You are so different.
I’m sorry I was scared.
I didn’t know you then.
I still don’t know you now.

Coughs rack your body.
You have the grin and wide eyes
of someone who has seen too much,
and heard too much
and felt too much.

I try to piece together what I can.
There’s so much history,
gaps in the stories.
I crave understanding
so I can commemorate you.
How to Lose Your Name

Narges Anzali, Weybridge

You lose your name
in a language that gives your name
vowels like curdled milk.
You lose your name
after hearing all the variations
that are not your name.
You lose your name
in the eyes of new teachers or substitutes,
in that moment they cringe
when they see your name
at the top of the list.
You lose your name
when you meet new people,
and your heart falls
because you don’t even care
to explain to them how to say it
anymore.
You lose your name
when everybody calls you
by the other name,
the wrong name,
the one that haunts you all day long,
lurking even in the shadows
until you want to shout:
“That’s not my name!”
You lose your name
when your friends
correct the substitutes,
because you don’t even care enough
to correct them anymore.
You lose your name
after you start to introduce yourself
with their name for you,
the wrong one.
You lose your name
when you start calling yourself
by the wrong name.

Reverie for a Wednesday Morning

Elliott Austin, Jericho

There is too much nothing today,
a pale ambiguity
slurping up emotions for a snack.
It packs my tongue in chalk
and devours me with a grin.
The sky brims with emptiness.
If you look closely, it’s overflowing,
copious and slippery,
steeping the ground in a blank page.
A monochromatic froth
envelops my toes.
Walking home, I look down
to see if they’re still moving
and I can’t seem to understand
why the snow falls
if only to melt on my shoulder.

Blur

Isa Blankenbaker, Rutland

Countryside passes in a blur;
the bus rattles some more
as I sit, no longer sure which
shooting I am grieving for.
Massachusetts?
Connecticut?
Kentucky?
Florida?
There have been so many
that I just don’t know.
Names, faces, dates,
injuries and fatalities.
They all pass in a blur.
New lives cut short
by the sharp pang
of yet another shot,
as we circle round
in this horrific revolving door.
“Thoughts and prayers.”
Comments fire off
in rapid succession.
Hindsight and foresight merge
as we stumble toward a scene,
identical to the one
we claim to have left behind.
Cleverly we dodge the talk
of one massacre
to throw ourselves
right into the next one.
For we live in a country
where the lives of my peers and me
are not worth passing legislation for,
a country where our deaths
are an acceptable price to pay.
The bus rattles on,
and I blink back tears,
not sure whether I’m crying
over the past, the present,
or all those yet to come.
Hidden Messages
Naomi Brightman, Cornwall

Among those jumbled thoughts, the endless ideas crammed down on the fewest pages possible in one notebook or another, the twisted plot of my narrative, or the rhythmic poems I write, there are hidden messages.

A warning, a disguised true story, a hint...at anything really.

Maybe I take a misleading route to try to tell you how I really feel.

Maybe I paint a picture of what we should be, crying out for help, persuasion in every word.

Maybe you need a little something that will lift your head, something that will make you laugh, something that reminds you I'm here.

Maybe I have been taken to a place far away, beyond what's in front of us, that inspires a message - underlying, steady, unreadable for some - but still there.

With a drop of inspiration, I hit the ground running, and I build a new world, one with mystery, thrill, beauty - something that I am able to give to you.

You might not see it at first, but it's always there - my hidden message.

Temple
Gabby Chisamore, Vernon

My body might be a temple, but I am the god it was built for. So don't tell me how to decorate my altar.
Don't tell me how to run my religion.
Don't tell me how to recite my prayers.
Don't tell me the verses from my bible.
Don't tell me the gods that I am supposed to like and the ones I am not.
Do not tell me that other people can use my temple how they want without my consent.
Don't tell me, the god of myself, that my temple is not perfect the way it is.
Don't tell me that my temple could be a few jeans sizes smaller.
Don't tell me that my temple is too wide or too narrow.
Don't tell me that my temple is too tall or too short.
Don't tell me that my temple is too flashy or too covered up.
Don't tell me that my temple has too many piercings.
Don't tell me that my temple's hair is weird.
And don't tell me that my temple does not need all that makeup.
For a god does as she pleases with her temple.
And those who wish to worship it, are welcome inside it.

All the Ideas Are Taken
Luke Michael, Burlington

All the ideas are taken and I don't know what I should write. Being one inch tall and a giant awakens? Or maybe the power of flight?

No, it's been done; I've seen it before! To steal their ideas would be theft. I'm sitting here with an empty page, but there are simply no ideas left!

You see, Hollywood knows what it's doing - rebooting an old film or just making a sequel. And if that doesn't work ‘cause they need some green, who's to stop them from making a prequel?

But I don't want to do that. I want to be new! To make something fresh and exciting.

If I had been born a hundred years in the past, I'd have so many ideas for my writing!

Then my 6-year-old bro says, "Wouldn't it be cool – the story of an outer space hen?" And I look at my page, start writing things down, realizing what a big fool I have been.

On Facing My College Applications
Rachel Fickes, Peacham

I am growing on my own in a forest full of growers. They jostle at my elbows, crying pleas to distant stars, swaying and touching for desperate support. Twigs meet branches meet trunks in crowding harmony rife with hopes. The twisting arms call me ever higher. Down on the ground the moss slithers - stretching, curling, creeping. The roots snatch at my ankles and caress my stilled toes with promises of strength far below the earth. I stand on my own, pulled above, cajoled below, and I am growing sideways.
I Believe There is More Than Us
Alaena Hunt, Stowe

There's a field near my house that holds something big: secrets and history and knowledge, and everything that is unknown to me. In the winter, a soft coat of snow covers it like a fluffy blanket, making it look like an endless spread of white. In the spring, bright yellow daisies grow from the ground, eager to blow in the wind. I long to run through them and lie with them. In the summer, wildflowers spring from the ground, growing up toward the sun as if they long to be let free from the confines of the soil. In the fall, the leaves float from the trees and cover the field with browns, yellows and reds, signaling the start of winter.

On special days, the sun shines down as if it were casting a spell. The field glistens and glows like this is its moment to shine. Yet, no matter how much beauty the field is holding, people drive by—they're too busy and caught up in their own lives to notice.

But I notice.

I notice when the daisies bloom. I notice when the leaves fall. I notice when the deer graze in the field. I notice when the frogs make the journey from the field to the stream, crossing the road on their way. I notice when the frogs get hit by cars because people don’t notice them, too caught up in their lives.

I notice. And so does the field. It sits and watches.

We are all so caught up in our own lives that we often miss all the beautiful things in the world. Humans have been on this planet for 200,000 years, but the Earth has been cycling from winter into spring, spring into summer, summer into fall and fall into winter for nearly four and a half billion years. There is so much knowledge and power hidden where we will never find it, yet we walk around as if we own the Earth. We are all so small, yet we act so big.

I believe that a field holds more knowledge than I ever will. I believe that the sky has more power than the whole human race combined. I believe that we are just short-time visitors on a planet that is mightier than us all. I believe that when you look at how small we are, all the little things in life are so insignificant. I believe we are small and we have to be at peace with that. I believe in the cycle of the seasons for it is consistent. I believe that no matter how hard we try, the human race will not be around forever.

We are one small dot in a bigger plan. We are not the greatest power on Earth; the Earth itself is.

I believe there is more to life than the little problems we face in our day-to-day, yet we all get so caught up in them. I believe in stopping to watch for little frogs crossing the road. I believe in noticing the beauty in a field. I believe in not getting too focused on yourself and what you want. I believe there is more to life than our problems, yet we let them define us.

I believe there is more to life than us.

If I Die in a School Shooting
Hailey Chase, Hinesburg

If I die in a school shooting, politicize my death.
Fight for our safety.
Turn my funeral into a protest.
If I die in a school shooting, I will never play sports again.
My goals, my hopes, my dreams will all come to an end.
If I die in a school shooting, battle until students and teachers are safe.
Don’t let my death become a statistic.
Help kids go to school unafraid.
If I die in a school shooting, I will never become a doctor.
I will never graduate high school, and my parents will no longer have a daughter.
If I die in a school shooting, my little brother will become an only child.
Fight for all the lost lives, and make change be required.
If I die in a school shooting, turn my ashes into a book and write the story of how my life should have looked.
If I die in a school shooting, deliver my heart to the NRA – because those people are heartless and I was a child they could have saved.
If I die in a school shooting, my family will be in pain.
Give them a hug, and turn the hurt into change.
If I die in a school shooting, please let me be the last.

Run Free
Nicolina Czekaj, St. Albans

I sit on the branch, feeling the rough bark of the old oak tree bite at my legs. The cool, misty air kisses my skin, as the leaves whisper secrets to one another in a language that only they understand. The golden fur of my retriever glistens in the pale sunlight. The sun just peaks through the tangle of forest trees up ahead, casting a warm glow, bathing the backyard in velvety hues of yellow and red. I pick at the tree bark before swinging my feet over the branch, letting myself down onto soft, damp grass. My dog pants, greeting me with a childlike enthusiasm, her tail wagging as her wet tongue licks my face. I grab a stick, holding it tight. Her chocolate eyes widen in anticipation. “Ready?” I say, pulling my arm back. The stick catapults across the lawn. Dirt sprays in every direction as my loyal companion tears up the earth and runs free.
Welcome Muslim Girls Making Change (Hawa Adam, Burlington; Lena Ginawi, South Burlington; Balkisa Omar, Burlington; Kiran Waqar, South Burlington)

Lady Liberty: Welcome, welcome. Child, your mother is calling you. Come mix into this melting pot. We invite the flavor, the culture, the warmth. Come to the land of the free, to the home of the brave.

Chorus: Whose land is this? How far does your freedom go back? Do you know the names of the tribes whose land you stand on? Who decides who stands here?


Chorus: Let me tell you. I fought hard for my freedom. My children are dead. My mother is dead. My father is dead. My family is dead.

Solo: I am alone. I cannot breathe. Tell me, who is truly welcome here? Lady Liberty, teach us again.

Lady Liberty: I am still teaching for the waves, the currents of people washing onto my beaches.

Chorus: Do you mean the pollution? We are trash. We take up too much space. No one speaks up for us. We are the immigrants who stole your jobs, who built your jobs. Oh, how you forget history. You turned away Jewish refugees and sent them back to Europe, sent them back to the camps they had run from. But they were so close, waiting on the beaches of Florida, full of hope. America would save them. You would save them. But we are a threat, aren’t we? That justifies it, right? We are spies, a danger to national security. We were, we are... scary, dangerous, foreign. But aren’t we all your children?

Lady Liberty: It is time to make amends. Chorus (knocking): We’re still here.

Welcome

I am still prepared for the waves, the currents of people washing onto my beaches.

Chorus: Do you mean the pollution? We are trash. We take up too much space. No one speaks up for us. We are the immigrants who stole your jobs, who built your jobs. Oh, how you forget history. You turned away Jewish refugees and sent them back to Europe, sent them back to the camps they had run from. But they were so close, waiting on the beaches of Florida, full of hope. America would save them. You would save them. But we are a threat, aren’t we? That justifies it, right? We are spies, a danger to national security. We were, we are... scary, dangerous, foreign. But aren’t we all your children?

Lady Liberty: It is time to make amends. Chorus (knocking): We’re still here.

Everything

Hugo Crainich, Burlington

I am the one who wants to know everything… Does the universe end, or does it go on forever? Does it stop at one point? Possibly, however… Where? When? There’s always more space on the other side of everything – a whole different place! Does life really end? Is that all, are you done? Or do you start a new life out on the sun? Do you go to Valhalla, heaven or hell? Do you lie there unconscious in your long, skinny cell? Will time go on forever? Will it ever end? Is anything impossible or just too hard to comprehend? Is magic real? Will we ever go to Mars? Will we live on another planet? Or will we go all the way to the stars? I am the one who … has all the questions, but none of the answers.
Artisan Textiles
Hazel Civalier, Burlington

I’m obsessed with words, with scratching mental letters into threaded blue jeans and squeaky wooden table tops, and barren midnight swaths of bed sheets soaked in ink. My cloth is woven on a mental loom, frameworks of English threaded with fine threads of phrases, each spun of intertwining tufts of verbiage dyed to minute vibrancy by the arrangement of 26 simple shapes. The cloth often likens to a photograph of realization, broken down to pixels and numbered quantities of red, green and blue. It is a conceptualization, a pinch of the world. The visual cloth is of symmetrical water or geometric fire – a language of paradoxical symbolism, existing in the Duat of expression, at once sliding in and out of focus with Earth. Music is woven of many materials, of flowing vibrations which conjure engraved images of sporadic movement – a soaring dance of invisible energy. To be all this, the loom is half ghost and the weaver blindfolded. Yet language is different than cloth, not woven to the beat of a metronome but in a flurry of disjointed green ink and sun-bleached chalk, of harmonicas and lawn clippings.

Words gush from their cartridges, their torn limbs, whirling in pastel dust and metallic chords, to settle all around me like motes of the sun.

Beauty Standards
Gamana Haji, Burlington

You got me bent if you think I will take, “You’re pretty for a dark-skinned girl,” as a compliment. My fellow black girls – we are beautiful with or without their confirmation. And not just beautiful for dark-skinned girls. They just cannot yet handle the beautiful curls of our hair, the way our skin glows in the sun naturally, or the way our hips move to the sweet sound of our ancestors’ drum beats. Our self-acceptance is more than enough. Don’t ever let them make you feel as if we need to live up to their expectations – that we have to be like them, look like them, act like them. We’ve got our own kind of magic. We’re pretty. And not just for dark-skinned girls.

To the Mice in My Wall
Hope Reeve, Wolcott

Hello, mice. It’s midnight and I’d like to sleep, but you’re running, scampering in my walls. Could you sleep, please? I’d like to. Do you hear me, mice? Can you hear the long nights of tears, the yelling that is whispered? I think you, mice, know me better than my parents do. You hear me even if you don’t talk back. ‘Hello, mice’ Thank you for living here even if you don’t sleep when I want to.
The Sky and the Stars
Kelly Daigle, Bradford

The car door slams behind me as I step out onto the driveway. The brisk air flows around me, flipping my hair this way and that. “You can go inside; I’ll be there in a second.” I tell my mom as she sees me walk toward the backyard. She nods and leaves the outdoor light on.

We’ve been through this before. I have a fascination with the sky. Whether it be day or night, the sky has always been there. It has never left and never will. I like looking at the clouds, at the beautiful warm hues the sun makes on them. So many marvelous things come from it. I like the day sky, with the blue that can’t be replicated anywhere else – not even by that wall paint named after it – with the white, fluffy clouds strewn all around, like someone had a pillow fight and didn’t clean up their mess. But more than that, I like the night sky. There is a special kind of quietness, a kind of beauty that few appreciate. That’s why, when I leave the car, I go into my backyard, slipping and skidding on the driveway by the dim light of the porch. I’ve been waiting for this moment ever since I noticed the sky on the ride home. As I stand in my half-acre backyard, I crane my neck back to look, and am greeted with thousands of faint little stars, dotting the blackness like freckles on a giant face, welcoming me back after a long journey home.

The moon is at the center of it all, an eye of incandescent light surrounded by smaller ones. They all look so close, like I could reach out with my hands and touch them, grasp them between my fingers and toss them back into the air. I get caught up in them, their brightness holding my eyes, and nothing else seems to matter. That’s why I don’t hear the small black-and-white creature approach behind me. In that moment, I realize that skunks might also like the night sky, and don’t like anyone else looking at it, either.

Would You?
Dan Gregory, St. Albans

Would you (if you do not mind and if it’s not too much trouble) walk with me awhile? We can go anywhere you like (or nowhere in particular if that were to please you better). Maybe we can stop for a coffee or browse through the bookstore (or just walk quietly side by side), if you would not mind.
I. Moved:
I am moved by poetry –
sometimes slammed against the walls,
tossed up and down, side to side, to and fro.
The adrenaline is
spine-tingling,
heart-stopping,
hair-raising.
I feel the flow of poetry,
the words coming together,
unified, but divided, too –
unified so every word connects,
and divided so every word has its own
meaning.
So every word has its own story.

II. Broken:
I am broken by poetry.
Touched, tapped.
My heart breaks,
implodes,
explodes
into thousands of irreparable,
irreplaceable
bits and shards,
over and over.
"Be careful," they say. "Glass hurts!"
I know it hurts.
My heart hurts, too.
But I would rather have my heart
broken by poetry, anyway,
even though I have to glue it back
together.
It always falls apart.

III. Caged:
I am held captive by poetry.
It's my little world here,
within the words and emotions.
Is this heaven?

“Hello, is anyone there?”
But sometimes I get lonely,
even surrounded by my own thoughts
and feelings:
of happiness,
of sadness,
of hopes,
of fears.
It's a small, small world after all.

IV. Occupied:
I am occupied by poetry.
Other people keep souvenirs.
I keep words instead,
like a security blanket.
I collect poetry, too –
sometimes sentences and phrases and
fragments.
Sometimes thoughts and ideas and
figments of thoughts and ideas,
and thoughts that will be turned into
ideas,
and ideas that will be turned back into
thoughts.
I collect people's stories, impressions and
expressions
so that their stories
will turn into other stories
that will inspire other stories.
I collect
like a magpie gathering its trinkets and
treasures in its nest.
One man's trash is another's treasure.
I turn their trash into my treasure,
their old into my new,
twisting and turning it for myself.
I guess I am selfish in that way.
If we are who we are because of what
we have,
then I guess I am rich … but just in
words and ideas.
Anyway,
life is short.

There is no time to leave the important
words unsaid
because those words will vanish –
dissolve into nothing and everything,
folding inside-out,
reverting to mere remnants of thought.
And all the words that I gather and all
the words that I write
will be gone.

V. Called:
I am called by poetry.
I need to let go of my pent-up feelings,
the feelings that are shoved down
and stored away to deal with at a later
time,
like the tuna sandwich that turns up
after going missing two months prior.
I need to take the bull by its horns.

No…
I need to grab the bull by its horns,
because taking it would risk letting it go.
And I can’t let it go…
I need to let my pen touch the paper.
I need to put the sword to the throat,
confront the problem,
or else
I will feel
like I am hanging off the edge of a cliff.
One slip,
one fault,
one mistake
would misplace me
and knock me over the edge,
even though I can change words and
alter meanings.
It's too bad I can’t turn back time.
A New Student Named Peace
Julia Grisomore, St. Albans

In hallways, where the vulgar words and sharp glares outweigh the sweet hum of chatter - in the classrooms, where rumors spread like wildfire and petty gossip is shared like pencils - this is where peace can find a permanent home.

Remove the arrogant facade and replace it with a friendly gesture that welcomes a guest like the mat laid by your front door.

Wipe the angry resting-face from your gloss-stained pout and paint on a smile with that new lip lacquer.

Tell Kara in third period French her floral top makes her ice-blue eyes pop, and wish your old chemistry partner good luck in his track meet on Sunday.

Spread peace, as thick as your skin must be to survive the cruelty of society.

Spread peace, as loudly as the rock band playing in the headphones of the kid that walks alone with his head down.

Spread peace, with your paintbrush dipped in the hopeful wishes of a better tomorrow and coated with the cheerful smiles that will soon cover the walls.

Of Stars and Streetlamps
Tess LaLonde, South Burlington

The universe is upside down. The lights of the city - so bright, so dazzling - glow below me as I float over the breeze. The galaxy lies beneath, not overhead. Above, the inky blackness reigns, dripping down between the buildings, running through the streets, engulfing all but the brightest of lights. Some lights twinkle, some stand still. And some zoom past, hurrying off to nowhere. Like comets. Or shooting stars. I make no wish, have nothing to wish for.

I'm in no hurry. I have nowhere to be. A speck of light holds no office hours, needs no days off, has no strict schedule. No schedule at all. Unlike this city, I am calm. Unlike this city, I am quiet. All sounds are distant. They echo within me, yet leave no lasting effect. I am free, floating on the breeze, my thoughts mirroring its easy flow. I look at the twinkling lights beneath and the empty heavens above. The stars were plucked from the sky and dropped inside the streetlamps. The balance has been shifted. The universe is upside down.
Hello, It’s Me
Serena Hanrahan, Randolph

“Hello,
it’s me.
I’m new here.
Can you show me around?”
“Hello,
it’s m—
Don’t walk away!”
“Hello,
it’s me.
Can I sit with you at—
No? Oh, that’s cool too …”

“Hello,
it’s me.
Will you be my lab partner?
Oh, you’re already with Zack?
No biggie.”
“Hello,
it’s me.
Would you be able to give me the homework?
I wasn’t here yesterday.
… Or not, that’s okay,
that works too.”
“Hello,
it’s me.”
“Hi! I’m Josephine!”

Wondering and Remembering
Hazel Green, Montpelier

When I see a new friend, I wonder how long I will know them for. I wonder if I will remember them.
I wonder if their smiles will always be in my mind and if their laughter will echo in my ears forever. If I will look back at the times when we splashed in the river, the lake, the pool, with water droplets flying. If I will look back and see the sleepovers we had. The giggling, hiding, laughing. If I will remember the secrets we kept. The crushes, jealousy, hatred.
I wonder if I will remember the long stories we told around big fires, with marshmallows and chocolate plastered on our faces. If I will remember the eye rolls and the plotting we exchanged about the most horrid teachers, and how we could defeat them.
I wonder if I will remember our talks about the latest fashions, and if the newest clothing trends looked nice on us. If I will remember our last fights. The crying, sobbing, whispers. The arguments, yelling, lies.
I will probably regret most of it, but as the saying goes … yesterday is the past, tomorrow is the future and today is a gift. That’s why it’s called the present.
The Roof
Juni Cleary, Burlington

I watch as the sunlight dips behind the greenish-gold mountains, trying to ignore the responsibilities tugging at the back of my mind.
I am hypnotized by the roof of my garage, but I am not looking at it.
I am staring at it without purpose, just resting my eyes on a not-too-bright, mesmerizing surface, dotted with bumps.
I am thinking.
When I am thinking deep thoughts, like what will happen when I die, or what will happen when the sun explodes, it is best not to bother me.

I will not listen. I'm drowning in my mind.
Please do not save me.
I watch the darkness creep over the garage.
It is not a bad darkness, but a reminder: a go-inside-it's-getting-dark type of darkness.
But I do not listen to the lack of light creeping over the garage.
I am thinking; darkness does not bother me.
When I am thinking lighter thoughts, like if I could live on Mars, or what homework is due tomorrow, it is best not to bother me there, either.
For I will not listen to you – I am thinking. Let me be free.

A Maiden’s Tale
Elizabeth Hardt, Canaan, NH

What sleeps below, I do not know.
The water is still and murky deep.
No current now, my thoughts are slow – like the monster that lies asleep.
A treacherous rock slips beneath my shoe
and sets the waters dancing, streaked.
The great eyes will open very soon, and I shall find out what sleeps beneath.
A great stir from out beyond the lake –
I take a step back, afraid of it –
of what sleeps beneath and is now awake.

My knees are shaking. I must sit.
A head arises from the waves and tosses down droplets gleaming.
It turns and regards me with eyes like caves.
I find that I am screaming.
It opens its mouth; out comes a plume of black and fiery, smoky doom.
I am burnt to a crisp; I cannot speak.
The monster's breath! Oh, how it reeks.
So now you know this tale of woe –
of how a maiden fair and true wanted to know what slept below and is now a monster’s chew.

Livia Ball, Essex Junction
Quiz: Are You a Dreamer or a Believer?

Faith Holzhammer, Orwell

1. People might describe you as…
   a. Artistic! You have a knack for putting an idea to paper.
   b. Strong-willed. Nobody can tell you what to think!
   c. Quiet. You keep mostly to yourself and your thoughts.
   d. Popular! People love the way you have faith in everyone.

2. You like songs that…
   a. Provoke thoughts.
   b. Have strong, powerful lyrics.
   c. Talk about a better world.
   d. Help you describe who you are and what you believe in.

3. Where do you go when you want to be alone?
   a. My room, where I have my iPod and my notebooks. Writing stories and listening to music helps me think.
   b. Somewhere high above the ground where I can see the world that mankind has made its own. It’s inspiring, really.
   c. Somewhere I can see the stars above me.
   d. I don’t like being alone much. I’m usually living life to the max with my friends!

4. Someone you loved and trusted has supposedly lied or let you down. What is going through your mind?
   a. I wonder when it all went wrong. We were so close… or so I thought.
   b. It’s a misunderstanding. I know it was. They would never do anything like that to me.
   c. I don’t really feel like getting all worked up about it. I’ll just have to let it all go and not let them ruin me. I’d rather dwell on other things.
   d. I still love them. I know I can find it in my heart to forgive.

5. (Final question!) What word appeals to you the most?
   a. Love
   b. Faith
   c. Peace
   d. Hope

ANSWERS:
Mostly A’s or C’s: Don’t stop dreaming, dreamer!
Mostly B’s or D’s: Keep on believing, believer!

Hair

Elizabeth Magnan, Fairfield

Thank you for telling me that by the time I reached high school I’d start straightening my hair. It made me refuse to for years, simply out of spite. It made me compliment every curl I saw because I was determined to love my hair and make every girl love hers. Thank you for not loving my hair; you made me love it, even if it was just out of spite for a while.

Zoe Maxwell, Burlington
To an Immigrant
Greta Hardy-Mittell, East Middlebury

When you roll your R’s
does it feel like your words
have wings?
And does the letter eñe
slide off your tongue
like ice cream in the heat
that I imagine you grew up with,
and do you miss it?

What is the difference to you
between refugee and immigrant?
And when I ask you
where you’re from,
what will you answer –
or do those words
sound dissonant,
like hopscotch
on a scalding hot blacktop?

Does your last name
provide a clue to your identity?
(And in parentheses,
how does it feel
when we make assumptions?
Because I’m already sorry.)

Does vulnerable mean
the same thing to everyone?
Should I call you Latin-O,
or do you prefer if I use -A or -X,
which displaces the vowels
like a child’s body
in a full bathtub?

What did it mean
for you to have a black president,
and are you afraid of walls,
and how can a document –
a piece of paper as light as air –
have so much weight?

What does diversity really mean,
and does English taste wrong
on your tongue,
and are the blues contagious
across cultures?
Because I wish I could play
like Paquito D’Rivera plays,
like Gloria Estefan raps,
like my man Lin-Manuel dances,
like my skirt was a mushroom cloud of
fabric
and my hair was a river of black
that never stopped flowing.

Do you have a hunger to go back,
or have you landed on the moon
where you always wanted to live?
What distinguishes each island?
Because on the map
they are drops of blood that
stained my white sheet
when I was 5 and woke up
with my nose running red –
but back to you.

Do you remember the pilgrims
and how they came on the Mayflower,
because you came in May,
and was your journey just as hard?
At least in the 1600s
there was no barbed wire
or border patrol,
and the only customs
were smothered
by smallpox blankets.
Did they ever call you barbarian?

The Father said the meek
shall inherit
but the Fathers said the court
shall reign Supreme,
and until O’Connor
that meant men,
and until Sotomayor
that meant
not you.

It took an amendment
to set the precedent –
will it take another
to drop the deficit?

I have one more question
to clear the obfuscation,
and no, it is not,
What is your name?
or, Why are you here?
It is, Who are you –
who are you and who is your father,
your grandmother
and your little sister
you’ve never known?

Yes, you heard me right:
Who are you?
And how does it feel
to be
you?

Girls Who Walk Alone at Night
Courtney McDermott, Charlotte

Church Street is lit up tonight.
“It’s only a few blocks to where
Dad said he parked the car,”
I try to reassure myself.
I wave goodbye to my friends,
still eating ice cream inside;
the sugar haze of happiness
has begun to wear off.
Is that the rustle of my
backpack on my shoulders,
or is someone behind me?
It’s just my backpack.
Stupid, stupid, stupid.
Everyone knows girls shouldn’t
walk alone at night.
I pass strange men in coats,
my eyes downcast.
Every time I pass another girl, I think,
“How far away will she have to be
to not hear me scream?”
Stupid, stupid, stupid.
I should have asked a friend to walk
with me.
I take my phone out,
pretend to text someone.
Look, I could call 911 in a second.
Nope. It’s dead.
Stupid, stupid, stupid.
I should have borrowed a charger.
Someone is yelling far away.
I’m so close to the car,
a minute more maybe.
Stupid. Stupid. Stupid.
Everyone knows what happens
to girls who walk alone at right.
Waterfalls
Adelle MacDowell, Johnson

Dappled sun that finds its way through the leaves and branches
draws patterns on my arms, and it is a funny kind of quiet here, the sound
muffled by the rushing waterfalls.
A little chill creeps up my legs and arms and I almost, almost give in to the shiver.
Toes curl against the slick, moss-black rock. Here, a shard of glass from
a beer bottle someone smashed; some idiot found their way into this sanctuary.
Letting my towel fall from my shoulders,
I take a tiny step forward,
deep, black water, cliff undercut and waterfalls tumbling down above.
A log lies across one of the falls – I walked it once, slick and terrifying, but
only to show off.
Now, voices drift to me over the dull sound of the falls, friends coming.
I got here first, ran all the way along the narrow path to be the first one in,
and now, they're here.
Better jump, and fast,
body contradicts me, no, no, no, too cold,
but mind over matter and
a gasp escapes my lips but is cut off as I plunge under.
Body in a straight line, deep, until
my toes touch the bottom and my hands
search frantically for a rock to carry up –
not too small
but not too large to swim upward with,
either.
Got one, and kick hard, head pounding,
chest aching from holding my breath,
break the surface finally,
laughing, swim to the edge.
Now they're here – moms with packed lunches and towels,
little kids who squeal with delight
and my friends, hesitating a little, but one
by one they jump to join me,
and some of them scream at the cold,
but soon the water feels perfect – we could stay in all day.

Flaming City
Elizabeth Martell, Essex Junction

There was a darkness
filling the air in their lungs.
Yet every time they exhaled,
they released columns of light
into the night sky above them.
Great smoke stacks spewed
silver plumes into the distance,
smoke hanging low
in the rich, dark sky,
flaming flecks of light contrasted
against the limitless horizon.
The city was a vast, intricate
labyrinth of tiny lights –
golden man-made stars
burning like embers,
fallen from the sun.
It was as if somebody
had taken a fistful of glitter
and blew it across the city,
watching as it fell to Earth,
shimmering and sparkling brightly
with gold and white light.
I sat above all of it,
the ground below me
alive with dazzling light.
Roads twisted and snaked
through the maze of buildings.
Everywhere I looked,
millions of shining lights
sprawled beneath me,
gleaming brilliantly,
flickering passionately.
In each gleaming light,
I could see thousands of souls
burning brightly.
By themselves,
the light in their soul
would never be enough
for the entire city.
Alone, they were just
small, insignificant specks
in a seemingly endless city.
But together,
as one collective glow,
the city was made
of beautiful light.

Seen in Roanoke
Avery McLean, St. George

Today I saw three children,
they were not much younger than I am
– 16, or maybe 17 years old –
sleeping under an old concrete bridge.
Their shoes lay haphazardly next to
them,
the soles of their tired feet grimy and bare.
I thought of how hard, how unforgiving
the stone must feel beneath their heads.
Then I walked
in clean shoes and socks
into an art museum
to sit leisurely and look at paintings,
to sip some tea and write in my new
notebook.
But no matter how hard I stared at oil
on canvas,
brush strokes in oranges and pinks,
all I could see was the dirty, gray
pavement,
a heavy feeling of guilt
and tired heads resting
in a quiet admission of defeat.
Casual Racism With a Side of Language-based Angst

Lonna Neidig, St. Albans

I was sitting among tiny, green blades of grass, listening to a chaotic symphony of loudspeakers and bubbling voices.

I was sitting under a rosy sky with golden light carefully separating the fluffy cotton clouds.

My twisted fingers picked at the green and tore it apart, watching its string split and fall under my harsh grip.

I heard you.
I heard you speak in your best worst English.

I heard you.
I was right there.
I was right there when I heard you speak in your best worst English.

I was right there.
I know you didn’t think much of it at the time, but years of insults flooded back to me in that instant.
I wish they came presented on a silver platter labeled in neat cursive so I could pick how to remember and how to frame being “Chinese”

I frame Chinese as an insult against my olive skin, against my eyes, against my 8-year-old self’s inability to say the letter “R,” against my 5-year-old self’s love for pandas, against my 16-year-old self’s appreciation for Chinese culture.

I frame my Chinese as an insult because people asked me how I can see, because people think my employers are my parents, because people think I’m “too aggressive,” because people think I’m “too white.”

I frame my Chinese as an insult because saying “hello” in Mandarin feels like trying to say “mirror” in the fourth grade while people coaxed my mouth to form a proper “R” all over again, because saying, “How are you?” in Mandarin feels like evenings before dinner working on saying my “R’s” and crying, because saying, “You’re welcome” in Mandarin feels like crying in front of my seventh-grade teachers over my vandalized homework and binder.

I was there when you boiled my culture down to a combination dinner of General Tso’s chicken, pork fried rice and an egg roll, with a side of “broken” English and extra fortune cookies.

I was there when you dealt one of many blows with a dull axe to my long forgotten family tree.

I felt every thwack, starting at my bruised hip bones and reverberating to my palpitating heart.

It Was Already 6:30 AM

Maria Sage, Bradford

She was lying in bed; it was 6:30 AM.

She had stayed up all night again until it was 6:30 AM.

Worries still clouded her head, and it was only 6:30 AM.

She believed she’d be able to sleep then, but it was already 6:30 AM.

Illustration – Abrie Howe, Stowe; Photo – Kelly Holt
Piano Man
Maisie Newbury, Weybridge

He spoke about the news stories, but it was in a different sort of way, making unspeakable tragedies a little easier to say. Children are dying in their schools. People are fighting in the streets. We hear about it every day but never ask what’s behind the scenes. Schools were ravaged by bullets as he played along and sang, and his honeyed voice could be heard from miles and miles away. “One man’s trash is another man’s treasure, one man’s treasure is another man’s pain, one man’s pain is another man’s pleasure. And so it goes on that way…” He wore his treasures on his left wrist, bracelets tied up with found stones and string. His right hand he used to create his music, unburdened by heavy stone rings. He said his left hand was for decoration – for protecting and for holding. His right hand, though, was for calluses – for playing, for writing, for working. And every night he told us stories of his life before the war: before gay marriage, before civil rights, before all that’s worth fighting for. He sang songs from the chain gangs. He sang jazz, he sang blues, and for a moment we forgot who we were listening to. A man who knew everything, who fell down and still flew.

A man who, in the face of adversity, never strayed from the truth. We called him the “Piano Man,” a name that made him smile. His aged and tired eyes would light up, piercing through their wire-rimmed borders. His lips would curl at the corners in a manner almost juvenile. He told us that we were the future, that the world would be ours in a while. He was a man with so much love inside it burst through his fingertips, spilling out onto the keyboard with nothing to hide. He played all kinds of music about how he couldn’t see the color of his eyes… his years living in oppression… his life after his mother died… about life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The world, he said, was losing herself. Today she grows weak from hearing our cry. and before we reduce her further, we must examine what’s inside. What’s behind the scenes of these horrible things? What is wrong? What does it mean? Sitting at his keyboard, he looks for the answers alongside us.

Fairy Tales
Rebecca Orten, Middlebury

They called her Rose, Briar Rose. But when she bloomed, they cowered. She raised her voice, her petals to the sun, stained scarlet much more than her lips. So they put her to sleep. They called her Sunshine, and swathed her in golden curls. But when she shone, their eyes blistered, and when she burned, they couldn’t see through the smoke. So they locked her in a tower. They called her Beauty, captivated by her outward projection of grace. Her beauty was what blinded them to the nebula of a mind inside her. So they shunned her for her uniqueness. They called her Sugar, skin as rich and deep as chocolate. Got through life working twice as hard as any of them, and succeeded through flavors of triumph and tears of salt. So they told her she’d never make it. They called her Glass, but she was only fragile, never breakable – even through losing everything and walking on shards, she bore the pain and held up her head. So they reduced her to ashes and abuse. They called her Harmony, with a song as thunderous as the sea, each note crashing onto them like waves onto the shore. And every ocean storm stopped to listen. So they took away her voice.

For You
Anna Phelps, Wolcott

To the tiresome eyes and worried faces, stuffed together in the smallest of places. To the flowers that grow around our feet, and the contemplating heads admitting defeat. To the beautiful people who live in this world, and the tapping of fingers and hair being twirled. To the ones who may worry about their complexion, and the ones who don’t care that much for affection. To the brave civilians and the ones who are fighting, and the ones who are bored that make things exciting. To the ones who show up when others won’t, this poem’s for you and the ones who don’t.
Another Way to Fly
Leo Powers, Richmond

Rain drizzles down, leaving everything soaked, stained, darkened by thunderclouds.

The air is thick, so thick that life slows down, chilled to brittle bones.

The fluorescent bulb flickers, casting hollow light on thin pages and cold silence over the empty room.

On days like this I stop to feel, letting the cold rain into my soul so that it might always be with me.

Gray clouds weigh down the sky and I’m only closer to flying.

A Mother’s Love
Sarah Immel, Yakima, WA

In all this world, there is one thing I know for sure – the feel of your palm against mine, cradling my fingers as a rosebud carefully cradles her delicate center.

I am too old now for hugs and kisses and I no longer fit in your lap, but I will never outgrow the softness of your palm (weathered though it may be).

Your fingers are my anchor in a stormy sea, your wrist the humble nest to which my hand must return night after night after night. Until the stars fall away and the seas disappear, your arms will remain my home.

I know there must be a day when the rose’s petals wither and fall, but for now, please hold my hand just a little longer.

I need you, you know.

Night Drives
Megan Knudsen, South Burlington

Headlights skim the landscape, showing off Night’s shy, rolling figure. The speakers drip with soft enthusiasm, surrounding eager ears as Night settles down.

The velvety yellow on the road reflects into my eyes, causing my eyelids to dance as they shut out the bright lines – only wanting to see the black of Night, only wanting to see the music’s colors scrawled across the dashboard.

A sense of serenity blankets me, and my mind fills with melodies as the miles tick by.

The darkness shivers as the bass shakes, bouncing off the cold glass. The Night trembles as the treble drowns into the leather seats.

The harmonies slow and the wheels accelerate, gnawing on the road, spitting back rubber and lost lyrics. The voices falter, rhythms smooth into silence, and the movement slows to a stop.

I reach a familiar street and find my way back home.

Train Song II
Julia Scott, St. Albans

The trains linger over my shoulder at night, their calls ringing out in the dark.

The trains have been there for me.

I listen for the trains at night when they are awake in the shadows and the cold.

They sing to pass the time from one town to the next.

I like to think the trains sing old bluegrass ballads.

I have heard the trains cry. It was a loud and mournful sound, a passionate lament.

And I wondered, half awake, what they were saying, and what weighed on their souls.

What does it mean that I live in a world where trains can cry?
The Nature of Thought

Riely Amerosa, Underhill

There’s a large rock wall a few hundred yards behind my house. The climb is hard, full of thorns and sharp rocks, but the view from the top is well worth it. I climb.

Halfway up I look out on my home, my yard, the trees. In the distance, I can see the great mountain of Vermont, the one larger than the rest: Mansfield. At the top of the rock wall there is a boulder. We sit in silence, the mountain and I, wondering what the other is thinking.

I can see far. I see the trees that cover the mountain, the snow that covers the trees, the sunlight that covers it all. I’ve always wondered if we can see wind. When there is a tornado, we just see the dust and debris that the wind picks up, but do we see the wind itself? I see the wind move the trees, but I struggle to see the wind move itself. It rushes by my face, filling my senses for a brief moment and closing me off from the world. That moment can last minutes, or seconds; it depends on my state of mind.

I look down at my hands, rough and dirty from the climb. I wipe them on my jeans and then shove them down into the warmth and safety of my pockets. Taking a deep breath, I feel my body sucking in the cold mixture of nitrogen and oxygen around me. It warms it up, changes it and puts something else back into the world.

I close my eyes and listen. The best way to describe the sound is a culmination of life: birds, leaves, wind, people, animals, insects. I sense them all putting forth their own sounds and auras. Even the silent stones hold energy, lying dormant since their creation. It may never be used, but energy will always be stored there.

I think about thought and the act of thinking. My neurons fire, allowing me to think about neurons firing. Wild.

I start the climb down the rock face, guided by the footholds and handholds I’ve been using for years. They are familiar to me and me alone. Maybe someday someone else will become familiar with this rock face – its crevices, its cracks. I wonder how long it will take before this happens, for someone else to discover what this rock face has shown me. Two years? Twenty? Never?

What if I am the first and last person to find himself atop this rock wall? What if someone was here before me? What if, some time ago, someone found themselves atop this rock ledge, and they thought my exact thoughts? Did they also wonder if there would ever be another soul to know these handholds, know these footholds?

I lower myself down the stone wall, farther and farther from the top, the bottom approaching.

That’s the thing about life: With every regression, there is progression, may it be good or bad.
Underneath everything, what if you’re just like me?  
— adalet

I don’t think other families keep their green cards in the car just in case they’re pulled over by ICE.  
— Nightheart

Sometimes the most beautiful things aren’t even real, like the glimmer on the mermaid’s tale I saw when the glittering emerald waves crested.  
— Hannah Campbell

This planet needs humans as much as humans need tails.  
— Marina2020

I think maybe I should have...  
— lila woodard

Even if you’re only a few moments late, you miss the boat. A small mistake, yet the boat sails on without you, and you are helpless, with no way of catching it. And suddenly, you’re left behind.  
— Harper the Lee

Do you ever get that feeling that someone you love just isn’t there anymore? Yeah, me, too...  
— Nicole Jasmin

If you extend your head to the sky and whisper thank you, the sun will light up your face with grace.  
— sophie.d

Wipe your smile from my lips.  
— Drift

Last night was lit, and I wrote a poem about it. The moon was blood red, and there was heat lightning overhead. The fireflies flashed. The birds dashed. This is a true story. The night was full of glory.  
— You know who

We cleaned up the kitchen, the floor and the dining room table, only to prepare dinner, wear our shoes inside, and spread out our homework once more.  
— jbird18

A swing in the sun is the best place to read the letter you find in the mailbox.  
— H20.hollym

The time has come. For what? Who knows? To take a leap of faith, maybe. To fly.  
— BloodMoon825

I have to face the dragon.  
— Rovva

We’re not the kind of ghosts you think we are.  
— Love to write

If I fell for you, you would take my heart and say, “You never had a chance.”  
— Rubber Soul

Are we still ourselves if we restrict our every behavior to make us like ourselves better? And which is us—the one held back or the one doing the holding back?  
— Fiona Ella

My bus hurries past flags at half mast, and I can’t help but wonder if they’re there for California, Santa Fe, Georgia or Indiana.  
— Icarus Blackmore

Like speaking to a butterfly, or shouting at a moth, all you can do is make sounds I don’t understand, and all I can do is listen.  
— Michmich

If I shudder – 10 more dead kids.  
— SilverGoose

Don’t we all love the little hunks of metal that claim to rearrange our teeth?  
— Anna P.

Ticks and fleas are the bouncers of the woods.  
— sburnse

I’ve gone from wanting to own a cupcake shop to wanting to be an FBI agent. Is this growing up?  
— piper

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How to Fix Your Problems

Anna Testorf, Hanover, MI

Find your problem
Grab it by the tail
Talk some sense into it