

# Girl<sup>@</sup>Story

Created for girls ages 10-14 to encourage and inspire each other as they write the feature articles.

**Thanks to  
all of our  
writers!**

**NEW FEATURES**  
Loss, Love,  
& Equality



giving voice to authentic girl stories that matter >>>> Yearbook 2021

*When girls  
support each other,  
incredible things will happen.*







# Letter from the Editor

## YEARBOOK ISSUE 2021



**Cortney Donelson, co-founder**

Cortney owns vocem, LLC, a writing services business that offers editing, ghostwriting, and retreat facilitation to writers and storytellers of all levels.

She is passionate about providing platforms for everyone to give voice to stories that matter, especially girls with big ideas and compassionate hearts!

She is surrounded by the best husband ever, two incredible children, and a golden retriever named Lucas who doesn't know how to retrieve!

There is a famous saying by an anonymous source that says, "You have the power to say, "This is not how my story will end."

Words hold great power, but they hold infinitely more power when they are backed up by action or inspire others to change. If you don't like what's happening in your lives, girls, I bet there is at least a small portion of your circumstances you can change. Whether it be your friend group, your effort, your attitude, your opinion, your perspective . . . the list is long of what you do have control over. If you don't like the climate at your school, be a change-maker. Form a kindness task force. Run for student government, or pen an editorial for your school newspaper. Rally others with your words. It only takes one person to affect great change. Just ask Marie Curie, Amelia Earhart, or Rosa Parks.

Changing the ending of any of our life stories can be challenging, sometimes even feel impossible. But what we want to change and what we can change, we must change.

Having the power to say, "This is not how my story will end" is true in life, and it's true in our writing.

Yes! The same is true with our writing, both in the activity of writing and the products of our writing. If we don't like how something reads, we have the power to change it by working with the words and editing them. If we don't like our lack of confidence in our writing, we can change that, too, by learning more about writing through reading, finding mentors, utilizing our teachers, attending workshops, and practicing.

The point is this: if we don't like how our stories seem to be going or ending, we can change them.

As we publish our last issue of GirlStory magazine (at least for now), we hope you'll remember how seeing your words in print felt. We hope you'll keep striving to better your writing. And we hope you'll change the direction of your fictional stories and your lives if you don't like how they're going. We believe in you, girls!

If you ever want a writing coach or mentor or any kind of writing support, please send me an email: [cortney@cortneydonelson.com](mailto:cortney@cortneydonelson.com). I'd be happy to provide you with encouragement, direction, and information—whatever you need.

**Keep writing! Change YOUR world!**

*Cortney Donelson  
Co-Founder and Editor-in-Chief*

**Kerrie Boys, co-founder**

Kerrie co-owner of idesign2, inc has partnered alongside her husband, Jason, for 21 years, providing graphic design services to magazine publishers and businesses throughout the Charlotte area. With two amazing daughters of her own and a love of visual communication, she is thrilled to provide this space to empower girls to speak their minds and express their creativity. Bring on the GirlStories!



**Check us out:** [www.girlstorymag.com](http://www.girlstorymag.com)  
**Get social:** [@girlstorymag](https://www.instagram.com/girlstorymag)

### Advertising Inquiries

If you would like to learn more about sponsorships or advertising your business in GirlStory Magazine, please send us an inquiry email at [contact@girlstorymag.com](mailto:contact@girlstorymag.com).

*GirlStory is published seasonally, four times a year. The views, thoughts, and opinions expressed in the articles, quotes, and poems belong solely to the authors and not necessarily to GirlStory, LLC, its members, or other groups/sponsors.*

"I CAN SHAKE OFF EVERYTHING AS I WRITE.  
MY SORROWS DISAPPEAR, MY COURAGE IS REBORN."

ANNE FRANK



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## YEARBOOK 2021

Created for girls ages 10-14 to encourage and inspire each other as they write the feature articles.



*GirlStory* is a magazine that gives voice to authentic girl stories that matter. Broken into the categories of BRAIN, BODY, and HEART, the majority of *GirlStory* articles will be written by and for girls ages 10 to 14. Stories will be fiction or non-fiction and will serve one of three purposes—to encourage and inspire, to help girls feel a little less alone, or to express a passion, idea, or just cause, which other girls may want to join or act upon. All voices, all girls, are welcome to read (and write for) *GirlStory*!



### *brain*

education/learning • school • science • space • research • environment • politics • careers • languages • medicine • mental health • truth/lies • books



### *body*

nutrition • healthcare • growth • beauty • fitness • sports • personal hygiene • disabilities/special needs • sleep/rest • food/cooking



### *heart*

relationships/friendships • faith/religion • passions/causes • self-esteem • community/belonging • teamwork • feelings/emotions • communication • identity

**A Word from *GirlStory*:** “As a country, we are walking through change. With change comes big emotions, varying opinions, and many degrees of understanding. As we share these stories, quotes, and poems, we will not tolerate disrespectful comments or cyber bullying of any kind. The goal of *GirlStory* is to provide encouragement and grace for tween and teen authors, always remembering we are ALL learning. Let’s celebrate the courage of these authors who are giving voice to what matters to them. This generation can change the world!”



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# On Loss



ALLISON

age 12, from CA

It feels as if you are punched through like a hole puncher through paper. The pieces ripped from you are still somewhere. They exist maybe in another universe, or even in the past, a second ago, before this has all happened.






hat is loss? Loss is “the harm or privation resulting from losing or being separated from someone or something.” That is the definition of loss in the Merriam Webster dictionary. But really, does loss always have to be a bad thing? At the time, it can feel as if all that you have is being stripped away from you, your mind and heart left as hollow sunken holes where something used to be. An aching pulse that runs you through-and-through, shaking you from the top of your head to the tip of your toes, seemingly like it will last forever.

I lie in bed. It’s Christmas Eve. Like any other child, I am awake in hopes to shoot up when Santa crawls through that chimney, tiptoes over to the tree, and lays his presents down one by one. Maybe I can catch him! I think. Maybe he will take me away to a magical world, adding even more bliss to my life. But of course, sleep takes over the passions of a five-year-old.

In the morning, I run over to the tree to see all of my presents. I missed him! I look over at my parents, a huge smile plastered on my face. They seem unhappy. It’s Christmas, so I can’t think of a reason why. I turn back around and peel the wrapping paper off my new presents, not a care in the world besides finding out what lies under the sparkly paper, and certainly not what lies in my parents’ heads—the reason they are upset on the happiest day of the year.

After a day filled with my laughter and joy, I pull the warm blanket over my head and cuddle with my new toys. I had completely forgotten to ask why my parents seemed upset! It probably doesn’t matter.

The next morning, I wake up, ready to play with my new toys, or read a book, or draw, or do whatever the day holds. I grab a book and fall onto my mom’s couch. I can hardly focus, but I calm myself by dissecting the words in front of me. I am in *Land of Stories*, laughing through the woods with the main characters, Alex and Connor. Suddenly, BOOM! The evil queen pops out of the tree.

“Allison?” She doesn’t say this menacingly; it sounds as if she is crying. Then, I realize it’s not the evil queen. I close my book and look over to see my mom sitting on the edge of the couch. “Sweetie, there’s something I need to tell you. Yesterday, your brother . . .” She chokes on the words. I look at her, confused, my eyes pleading that what I think will be said isn’t true. Deep inside, I realize why my parents were not themselves yesterday. “Your brother Alex . . . he was driving to the beach to see his friends. His tire caught on the curb of the road, and . . . he was . . . he . . .” I look down, conflicted. I feel as if a punch has been thrown through my heart. The tears on my face feel like hot lava burning through my skin. My head pounds, and I wonder if the world has stopped, or just slowed to this one deafeningly quiet moment.

I close my eyes and try to escape back into my book.

I am skipping through the forest, when . . . BOOM! The queen pops out of the tree, her minions behind her.

Alex from the *Land of Stories* smiles at me, reassuringly. Her face changes from hers to Alex's, my brother's. Why do they have to have the same name? The tree's cracks and curves turn into agonized faces. They say my name. Anywhere I look, I am slowly dragged back to reality. When I am pulled through, it hits me like a bullet, the sound ringing in my ears. This is what loss must feel like. Sound like. A punch through the heart, hot lava burning the face, a pounding in the head. It feels as if you are punched through like a hole puncher through paper. The pieces ripped from you are still somewhere. They exist maybe in another universe, or even in the past, a second ago, before this has all happened.

However, those holes can never grow back. You cannot tape them back to the paper. You can try, but one day or the other, the glossy tape gets in the way of the space you have on that paper, of the beautiful

and imperfect expanding artwork that is your soul. All you can do is do your best to cope, to patch up those holes with new memories and experiences, to bring new people into your life. You can't try and distract yourself by throwing yourself back into another story, another piece of imagination. You have to deal with what is in front of you, no matter how painful it may be. There will always be tomorrow to doze off. Instead of making a story in your head to distract yourself from what is right in front of you, focus on expanding your piece of art. It works not by moving around the huge holes, or even the tiny scratches, but by building something new and wonderful above them, your memories as solid foundation.

I miss my brother, but I am finally finding my voice and the ability to talk about him. That is what loss means to me. Not the feeling of it, but what can come after . . . ○

Dear Allison,

Thank you for sharing your beautiful story with us. I am sorry to hear that you lost your big brother when you were five years old. I too have experienced a major loss. My sixteen-year-old daughter died nearly ten years ago from a rare heart disease called myocarditis.

While the journey of loss is unique to everyone, my heart expanded with a resounding "YES!" when I read these words in your story: "Does loss always have to be a bad thing?" My response to that is a resounding "NO," but many don't see it that way. In my experience through the death of my precious daughter, I have learned that if we open our hearts, we will see the grace and beauty that has blessed us as a result of our loss.

I also LOVED your use of metaphor to describe the feeling of loss and how you likened it to being "punched through like a hole puncher through paper," and that while the holes "can never grow back," one can "patch up those holes with new memories and experiences." Wow. This is simply beautiful and powerful writing, Allison.

I am honored to have this opportunity to respond to your story, and I want to thank you for imparting your wisdom with us.

You are gifted in many ways, and I encourage you to keep writing!

Blessings,  
Beth Knopik, author, mother





“Play”

with what makes you unique when you are writing. Your personal experience brings authenticity to your stories, poems or essays.



# The Sun AND THE SEED

The tear running down your face  
The wind blows your dress, the white lace

Sorrow, frustration breaks our minds  
Sometimes we see things that feel like something, our signs

Signs of love, future, past  
When memories fade, the best of our past

Silver and gold is all we want, but love and comfort is what we need  
Sometimes we need someone to push us to the right path, plant the right seed

They watered us and let the sun touch our petals, but never too long  
They watched us grow, dance, and sing the song

Now it is still not all perfect and kind  
But there are always the people to give you clouds and rest, and let your clock wind

When all grown they won't go away  
but you may find some other game to play

When you need it you can run back  
The love and kindness they will never lack

They watch and protect, give you advice  
They will stay quiet and let you live your personal life

You must remember that if you need and shoulder to cry on  
They will always give you their shoulder, and love, and of course the sun.



**ADDISON**

age 13, from MA



Addison,

Wow! From the moment I read your first poem, which your dad had posted online, I knew we needed your words in our girls' magazine. You were only eleven years old. The magazine had just be born, and your poetry enflamed my conviction to build this platform to give voice to girls' stories and poetry. I'm so glad you continued to submit your work over the past two years. You are gifted, and I hope and pray you continue to write poetry for the rest of your life. It will impact many, stirring feelings and thoughts that people need to feel and have. You'll spur change, my young friend. There is a profound strength and depth to your poetry that is needed in this world.

If you every need anything—encouragement, advice, a listening ear, a recommendation—please let me know. Your dad has my contact info. It seems he is a fan of your work, and now, I'm one of your biggest fans too.

Keep penning your heart, Addison!

Much love,

Cortney Donelson, co-founder and editor of GirlStory magazine, author,  
and owner and principal writer at vocem LLC.





# SO MANY

So many words can fit on a page,  
But nothing can ever fit in all of the rage,  
Of the people who want justice,  
But have to keep fighting.

So many pages can fit in a book,  
But none of them can give a big enough look,  
On how much the rights are needed for the  
house to stop burning.

So many books can fit on a shelf,  
But nothing can describe what was felt,  
Every time they didn't get the rights that were  
needed for them.

So many shelves can fit in a room,  
But nothing alone can ever consume,  
The memories of hard times for people of color.

So many rooms can fit in a house,  
But injustice can sneak by, quiet as a mouse,  
And take away rights from others, while unseen.

So many houses can fit on a block,  
But not enough people have a talk,  
To their kids, about how black people have rights,  
Like everyone else.



FAITH

age 12, from NC

So many blocks can fit in a town,  
But nothing can hide all of the frowns,  
From the people, needing their rights, needing justice.

So many towns can fit in a state,  
But nothing will ever clear the slate,  
Of the people who refuse to give them rights.

So many states can fit in a country,  
But nothing can make it so we can't see,  
The injustice that needs to be stopped.

So many countries can fit in a continent,  
But you don't need to be confident,  
To fight for justice, to fight with BLM.

7 continents fit in a world,  
But more people than that have had their thoughts swirled,  
Into thinking that BLM is the thing that's unjust.

There is only 1 you.  
So do whatever you can do,  
To change the way black people are treated.  
Committing to BLM, will get the rights that are needed.



---


*Faith,  
We are grateful that your words are written to encourage us toward a collective concern for our fellow humans who have been treated unfairly as a result of unjust public policies and private practices. Through your words, we hear a clarion call prompting us to do better—not just because we know better, but because when we put our minds to it, we CAN CREATE the society that loves every BODY well. There are many efforts, organizations, and people carving a path toward equity. Present in your creative expression is an urgency to join and support them. We can tell you believe that together, we can heal from wounds of injustice. I believe you!*



~ Dr. Lucretia Berry, founder of Brownicity: Many Hues, One Humanity and TEDx speaker, author, and educator







The following pages  
contain all of our stories  
from 2021. Here at  
GirlStory, we are grateful for  
the chance to showcase these  
accomplished writers in our  
yearbook issue.

# A DRESS CODE



SARA

age 14, from NC

# DILEMMA



Apparently, this outfit is  
much too distracting for the  
boys. They can't concentrate  
on their EOGs.

straps too skinny  
see through lace  
shorter than fingertips



# VIOLATIONS!

**She must cover up  
or go home.**



*This is Sara bravely addressing the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board about her views on unreasonable dress codes.*



i. I wanted to share the transcript of my speech at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board meeting on July 13th. While I was nervous to talk in front of the school board, I was surrounded by my family and that brought me some confidence. I hope my words inspire you to stand up for what you believe in.

.....  
“I wanted to talk about how sexist the dress code is in our schools—a dress code that singles out that girls should not be a distraction. I do believe we should have a dress code and keep clothes, like booty shorts and tube tops out of the professional [school] environment, but culture, body types, and budgets can only make room for certain things. Leggings, for example are pretty cheap and fit most body types, but our extra-large shirts have to cover every square inch of our butts, literally, or we are coded.

That’s a problem since not all body types are the same. We have a male teacher, who was reported for saying inappropriate things, like, “Some of you girls come into class dressing like you’re in a strip club” or

*“Let’s see which girls are naked today” while having other teachers and the school counselor laugh about it.*

“I’m glad I don’t have a daughter” and using the term “thottie” when referring to a female student’s outfit. Or others [teachers] start the morning saying—in front of the class—these exact words: “Let’s see which girls are naked today” while having other teachers and the school counselor laugh about it.

This is a huge problem! We had another teacher say, in front of the class, “Any girl wearing leggings stand up and turn around so we can see if you are in code,” then say “You and you go to the counselor.”

This is humiliating. It’s sexist and clearly harassment that creates a hostile learning environment. This was done right before EOGs [end of grade exams].

Boys are constantly sagging their pants and shorts below their butts with their underwear hanging out, but the quarter of an inch exposed butt crease [shown through leggings on girls] is the issue? \*I’ve included a picture of the outfit I was wearing this particular day of you would like to see.

My parents spoke with the middle school principal

about these issues, and she [the principal] was immediately defensive of the teachers, not [protecting] the students that were humiliated. \*The Zoom call was recorded so you can get a copy to see for yourself.

Finally, the dress code doesn’t allow for cultural or ethnic expectations. Do-rags, for example, that can protect an African American student’s hair or hairstyle are against the dress code. Do you allow for religious coverings but not functional? What’s the problem with banning something that has a function? I suggest that you have students and staff discuss the best course of action for the current and future dress code policies. Thank you.”

Since this board meeting, I have been interviewed by a local TV news crew. I hope change is coming. These policies are old-fashioned and sexist.

What change do you want to see in the world? ○

Dear Sara,

*It makes my heart so happy to see a young woman that sees injustices in the world and speaks out to make a difference.*

*I am so proud of the way you overcame your initial uncomfortableness and relied on the support of those that love you to speak to the school board on this topic. That takes so much courage that so many young people do not tap into.*

*I completely agree with you on this topic. Many times in this world, it seems that women are singled out for their sexuality in a way that men are not, and it is clearly starting at a very young age.*

*It is completely unacceptable for your teachers and counselors to not only refuse to stand up for you but to be the perpetrators by mocking and making girls feel singled out. It’s a humiliation that no one should have to feel and I’m so sorry that it was put on you and your classmates.*

*It’s easy to feel like you are the only one that cares when you are the first one to stand up for what is right, but I promise you, many of your classmates are grateful for your leadership.*

*Rules are put in place to help make us a civil society, but it is far too easy for those given the power of rule-making to abuse that power.*

*You have seemed to already sense when the time is right to push back on arbitrary rules. When a rule abuses, isolates, or disenfranchises a person or a group, that’s the time to push back. It is up to leaders like you to question and stand up to what is not right, and I’m so proud to see young women doing so.*

*My personal motto is “not the boss of me.” It’s a bit tongue in cheek but also something I take very seriously. I like to live my life my way and I don’t let others tell me that I shouldn’t. And I hope you will do the same. Life is full of paths mapped out by others that you could walk down.. I encourage you to continue to take your path that you are making for yourself. It’s not always the easiest answer, but it will always be the most rewarding. Adults don’t always get it right, even with the best intentions. Don’t be afraid to respectfully question authority. Believe it or not, adults can learn a lot from kids too!*

*Most importantly, never be afraid to stand up for what you believe in. Your impact could change the outcome, a life, and even the world. The possibilities of your positive reach are endless.*

Sincerely,

Juli Emmons, filmmaker, business leader, mother



# HOPE

*“When you do nothing you feel overwhelmed and powerless.  
But when you get involved you feel the sense of hope and  
accomplishment that comes from knowing you are working  
to make things better.”*

*- Maya Angelou*



# THE ROCKSTAR WRITERS' WORKSHOP WAS GR8



## PLAN B ISN'T ALWAYS SO BAD

I was so excited to go to California with my family. Our rental house had a pool with a waterfall, and we were going to spend a day in Disneyland. And then . . . COVID. The day my parents cancelled the trip, I felt rebellious. I was tempted to drive myself to the airport and get on the plane anyway. But I'm too young to drive so I would probably crash my mom's van and spend my vacation in the hospital instead.

Here I am, a few weeks later, trudging through the sand toward the still blue water of the bay. My rubber boots leave a footprint behind me in the sand. The taste of the sea air touches my tongue. I step into the water and feel a blast of cold through my rubber boots. Suddenly, I see the flash of a big orange crab as it strolls sideways next to my foot. I take my rake and slowly slide it through the soft, sandy floor. I pull it up out of the water to find a tan and brownish white clam called a cockle. I run my thumb over the hard ridges of its shell. I think to myself, "This plan B trip isn't so bad after all." Thunk! I drop the clam in the bucket. Suddenly, it hits me—I have to eat this thing?! ○



**BETHANY**

age 10, WA

Dear Bethany,

*I can only imagine your disappointment at having your vacation to California cancelled because of COVID. A getaway to the beach seems to pale in comparison to a pool with a waterfall and a day in Disneyland! You helped me to feel your frustration and understand the reasons for your rebellious thoughts.*

*I love the beach, so it was fun to walk with you through the sand, rake in hand to search for clams. I could see the blue of the water, taste the salty tang of the spray, feel the cold on your toes through your rubber boots, and hear the clam hitting the bottom of the bucket. You embraced Plan B and, even though the thought of eating the clam was disgusting, you found that a change in plans can actually be fun!*

*Please continue writing and using vivid words (like blast, slide, flash, Thunk!) to help your readers experience all that you are seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, and smelling. Keep up the good work!*

*Karen Poppen, retired English teacher and sometimes writer, Huntersville, NC*



On October 9th, three girl writers joined GirlStory co-founder and author, Cortney Donelson, for a writing workshop. The theme: Using Our Senses!

To break the ice, the girls compiled a short poem together using the names of paint colors. It was quite an interesting poem!

Then, we dove in to edit our individual pieces by deleting every 4th or 5th word and any -ly words. We learned about our senses and how to use all of them (sight, touch, sound, taste, and smell) to write engaging prose.

The girls set off to update their individual narratives with

everything they learned. And, friends, check these out!

(\*One girl writer decided to submit a different story, so check out Daniella's text story in this issue!)

GirlStory, through Cortney's writing services business, vocem LLC, is now offering 30-minute writing sessions for girls ages 10-16. You can schedule an after-school spot and get one-on-one help with creative writing assignments or simply improve basic creative writing skills.

Send us a message at [cortney@kortneydonelson.com](mailto:cortney@kortneydonelson.com) for more information.



# A WALK IN THE WOODS



SYDNEY

age 14, (during workshop, now 15), NC

I move the low branches out of the way, feeling the smooth leaves between my fingers, ducking as they swing back to whack me. I breathe in deeply, inhaling the scent of sap and nature. The leaves crinkle and crunch under my feet as I walk deeper into the woods.

I step over the roots that reach to my feet and steady myself against the rough bark of the trees. The river invades my senses as I get closer; first, I hear it, rushing and splashing against the rocks. Then I see it, the bubbles of the rapids. I take off my shoes and walk across the slippery rocks. I hop across the stones to the other side, tasting the water as it splashes up and against my lips, and I feel the mud squish between my toes.

The river quiets as I walk further away. The birds and the swaying of the trees fill the new absence of noise. A breeze lifts my hair off of my shoulders and shakes the leaves above me, causing them to cascade around me. As I trek further from the river, the trees thin out into a field, and deer graze in the sun. I sit down with them in the soft grass and enjoy the tranquility of my walk in the woods. ○

Dear Sydney,

*A walk in the woods is one of my favorite things to do, too, especially if it means spending some time near a lake or running water. I loved how you began with sweeping aside branches to clear your path and taking in the feel of the leaves, the smell of the trees, and the sound of leaves under your feet.*

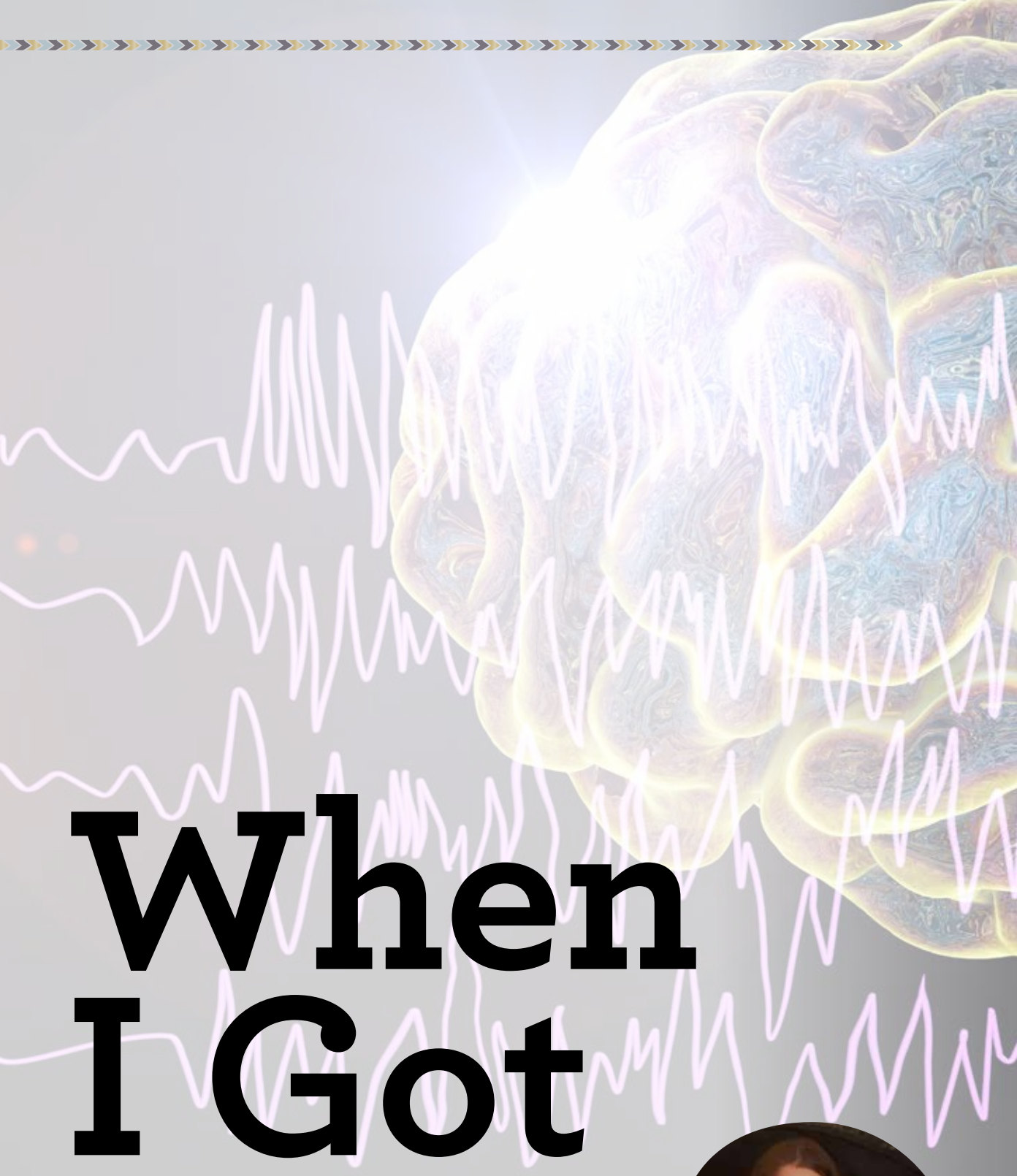
*Hearing the sound of the river before you arrived there increased my anticipation. I couldn't wait to wade in the water, balancing delicately on the slimy stones to the other side. You effectively used the senses of sight, taste, and touch as you made your way across.*

*I loved the way your journey slowed as you approached the meadow, taking time to take in the sounds of wind and birds, the feel of the breeze, and then the beautiful sight of the deer grazing. Here is a photo from our recent vacation in Yosemite National Park in California that I recently experienced:*

*Please continue writing and using the vivid verbs (like hop, squish, swaying, trek) that you employed to draw your reader into your experience. Well done!*

*Karen Poppen, retired English teacher and sometimes writer, Huntersville, NC*





# When I Got

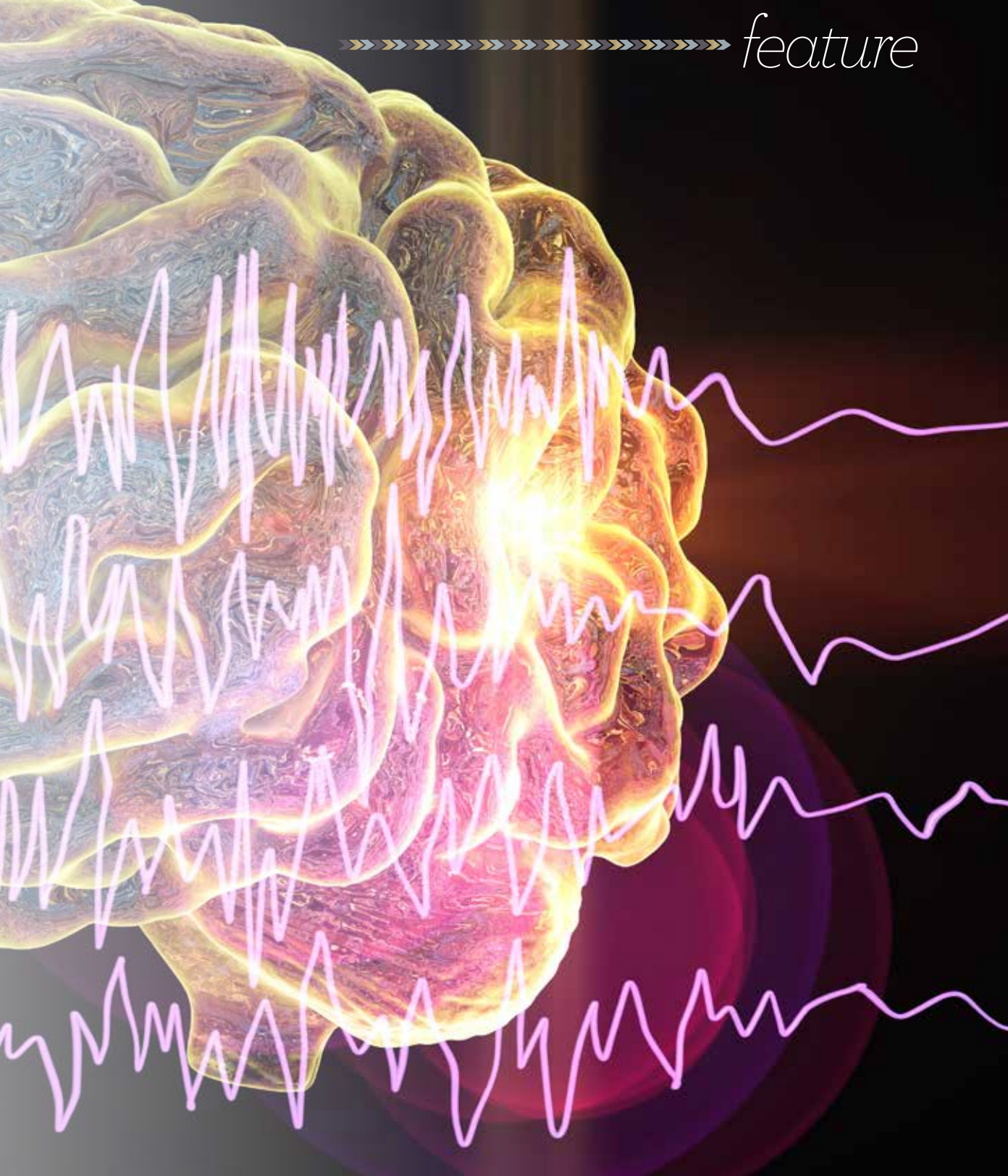
# DIAGNOSED



**JOHNALYN**

age 13, from WV





I got my diagnosis when I was seven years old in Myrtle Beach with my grandparents and uncle. The day started out with all of us eating breakfast together talking about what we wanted to do that day. Then, after we were done eating, we all decided to just relax some, so my grandmother and me decided to sit on the couch and watch some television. Suddenly, she asked me if I was okay. I was confused because I thought I was fine, but she said that

my face started shaking really badly. To be honest, I didn't know what she was talking about. The shaking happened a few more times so my grandparents rushed me to the hospital. While the doctors started working on me, my grandparents called my mom and dad to tell them what was going on. They said that they would be one their way.

It takes about six hours to get from my house to Myrtle Beach. I remember getting poked with a bunch of needles because they couldn't find a vein.

They ran so many tests I can't remember them all. I had been at the hospital for almost the whole day, and the shaking happened a few times while we were at the hospital. Every time they had to get blood, I would shake, and I passed out. Then, after a while, my parents and sister got there. It had been a long, hard day for my family and me.

There was always someone by my bedside, no matter if I was sleeping, awake, eating, or watching TV—someone was always there sitting with me. The doctors would come in and then leave and did that often. The doctors had realized after my labs and tests came back that I had seizures. This was surprising to my family but not shocking because my mom had seizures before, too.

The doctors wrote me a prescription for some medication, and we decided since it had been a hard day, we would rent some movies to watch together and went back to the place we were staying. It was 7 pm when we got back. We had been at the hospital for 8 hours. I was so exhausted, but my dad had to go get my medicine so I could start taking it. My parents started looking for a seizure doctor. The reason they were looking for a doctor is because the hospital said that I would need to find a doctor to watch out for my health.

After time spent looking, they found a doctor in Morgantown who was willing to help me. She said the first thing to do was a sleep study. A sleep study is where you go to a doctor's office and they put you

in a room that looks exactly like a bedroom. There are a bunch of machines in the room, and someone comes in and attaches cords to your head so the machines can monitor your brain. Then, you sleep all night and leave early the next morning.

Then, she scheduled an appointment to see me a few weeks after that. My family and I drove to Morgantown, West Virginia for my appointment. This was the first time I would meet her. She said I needed to get blood work and come back in 3 months. So we got blood work and went back. She told us that luckily my seizures were not grand mal seizures and that mine would eventually end right around the time I become a teenager.

For a while, we went every three months and got new medications. I was getting better so the appointments were moved back to every 6 months, and I only took 7 pills a day. Slowly, she started to back me off certain medications.

Finally, after a few years of care, she finally said that that there would only be a few more visits. This was sad because I liked her but good because that meant I was getting better. The next time I went back, she wanted to take me off my last pill and then ask me to come back six months later to make sure I was fine.

When we went back for the last time, she said at the next appointment that I didn't need to come back anymore. I was really excited and happy—but a little sad, too, that I don't get to see her anymore. ○

*Thank you Johnalyn for sharing your story. It sounds like you went through a difficult time, and I am so pleased you are now seizure-free. Your story is an inspiration to other teenagers with health problems. Six in every thousand children and teens have seizures, and nearly one in every four teens have a chronic health problem (one that lasts more than a few months). While no one can ever fully understand what you are going through, it helps to know you are not alone and that other people have been through similar issues and learned to live and thrive with their diagnosis.*

*It can be very scary and confusing when health issues begin. Having lots of tests done can be unpleasant, uncomfortable and a worrying, but it is worth pushing through so the medical team can give you an accurate diagnosis and find a treatment that works for you. It sounds like you got really good medical care and eventually found a doctor who you could trust and confide in—that's so important. You have to be able to talk to your doctor and feel that they are listening and really understanding what you tell them. You know your body better than anyone else so your honesty about how you are feeling can really help your doctor get your treatment perfected.*

*I hope your story will encourage other girls to see a doctor if they are worried about new or strange symptoms because no matter what is wrong, getting help earlier will mean the doctors can get you on the right treatment quickly. And if there's nothing wrong (which is often the case), you can stop worrying.*

*~Dr Leonaura Rhodes, Life Coach and Retired Pediatrician. MB, ChB, MPH*

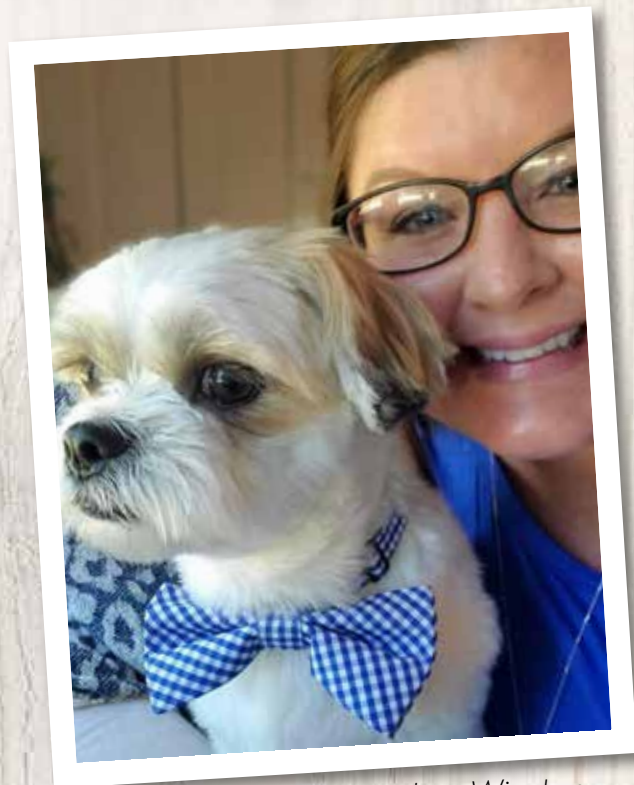




# WE APPRECIATE OUR EDUCATORS!

Here at GirlStory, we respect and thank all teachers for dedicating their time and efforts to our children. Melinda Fry is one of the best. She embraced GirlStory magazine and prompted her students to submit their work. And they did a bang-up job! On the following pages, you will see submissions from Illinois. Most of these girls are students of Melinda Fry. Here is more about her:

*Melinda Fry is a 7th grade English Language Arts and Reading teacher at United Jr. High School in Monmouth, IL. She received her bachelor's degree from Monmouth College and is currently in her 18th year of teaching. Her teaching experience includes 1st grade, 2nd grade, 5th grade, and she is in her 7th year of teaching 7th grade English Language Arts and Reading. Melinda works in a school district and community that has been highly supportive of her classroom initiatives. Because of this and her students' willingness to learn, she has accomplished an array of valuable educational and philanthropic activities. As a result, Melinda has been named the ROE 33 Excellence in Education Teacher of the Year, recognized as Warren County Area Chamber of Commerce Citizen of the Year, and inducted into the Alpha Omega Monmouth College Hall of Fame. Melinda is very passionate about being an educator. One of her most extensive drives is empowering her students to share their passions, experiences, and opinions through various means, including video creation, seminar discussions, blogging, and other forms of written expression, including poetry, narratives, and essays. Her ultimate goal of encouraging students' voices is to empower her students to ignite passions to increase their self-worth and support lifelong learning.*



Melinda Fry with her dog, Winston

*“So girls, don’t let anyone tell you you’re a failure, especially you. Don’t give your inner critic the satisfaction of thinking it’s right. It’s not. If you want to write and you do write, you’re a writer.”*

*~ GirlStory*





# brain

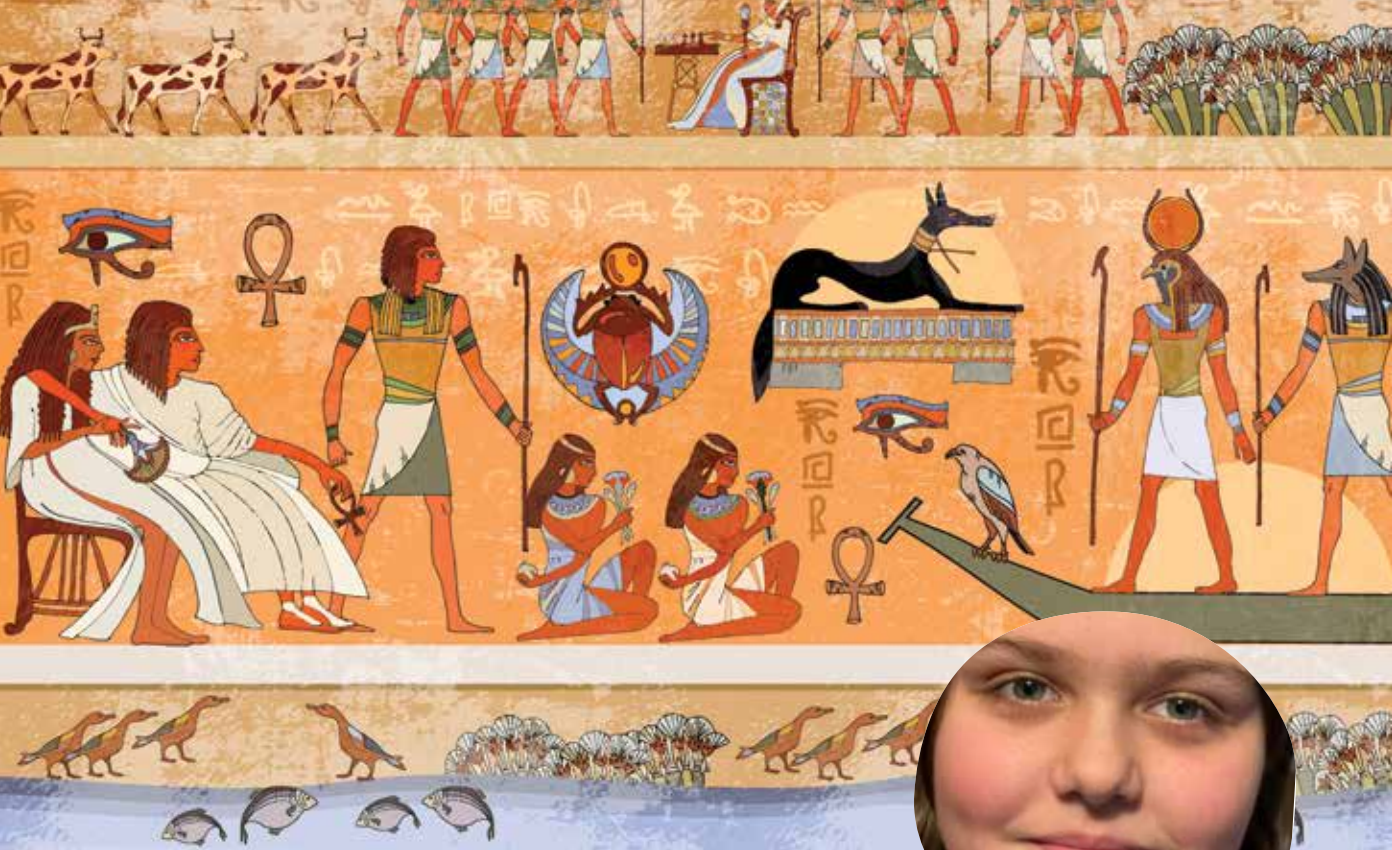
education/learning • school • science • space • research • environment • politics  
careers • languages • medicine • mental health • truth/lies • books



age 13, CA

## **Allah**

Allah is my god  
*Lailahailallah* is the meaning of there is no god but Allah  
Love for Allah  
Allah is the most merciful  
Hana is my name



ALTHEA

age 11, from VT

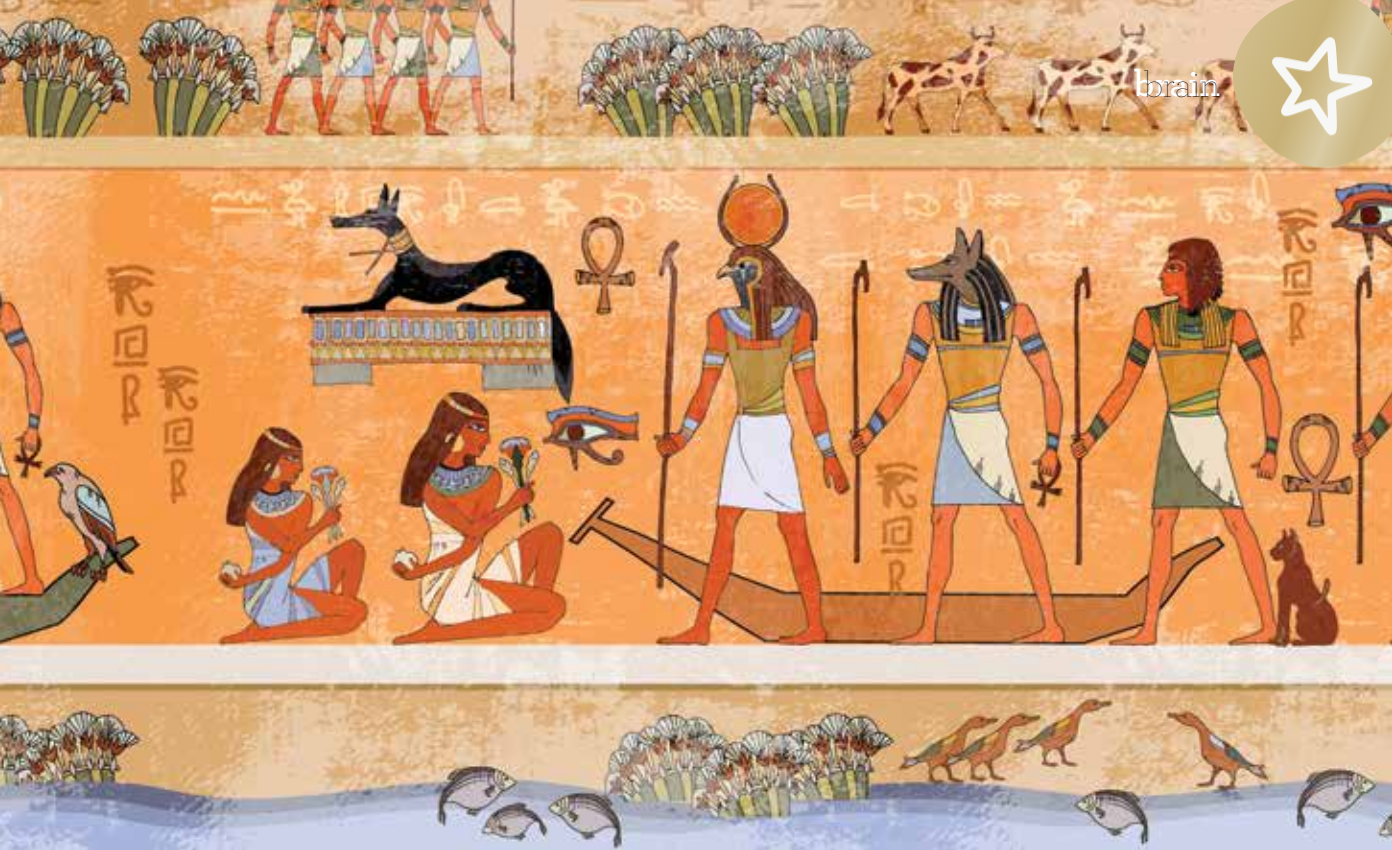
# HIEROGLYPHICS

# W

What if instead of writing with letters we wrote with pictures? If you think that it's crazy and we never wrote with pictures and never will, You're wrong. These pictures were the writing system in Ancient Egypt. The pictures were later called hieroglyphics. Hieroglyphics were really important to ancient Egyptians. Hieroglyphics were used in ancient tombs and on obelisks and in art work about 5,000 years ago.

There are not a lot of letters in our alphabet compared to the Egyptians. They used 600 characters in their alphabet. So people who wanted to write had to study for ten years! They were called scribes. After they studied the scribes could start to take jobs. The jobs were usually for business but some lucky scribe got to do jobs for the pharaohs and kings.

Pharaohs and kings were like gods to ancient Egyptians. Because of that, people believed that pharaohs and kings could talk to gods. Before they died or traveled to the underworld, they designed and authorized huge tombs for themselves. The tombs had hieroglyphics in them. Some of the messages took years to make. Some of the hieroglyphics were spells ensuring the pharaohs a safe passage to the underworld. One of the most



famous tombs, the pyramids of Giza, had hundreds of hieroglyphics. Those stone structures took decades to build because they had to be all done by hand. The pyramids had many treasures. Because of the treasure, most of the tombs were raided.

In conclusion, hieroglyphics were used for centuries to record business and to decorate artwork and buildings. They were the way to record what humans could not remember, such as business deals and contracts. That's why hieroglyphics were so important

to the ancient Egyptians. Without hieroglyphics the people of ancient Egyptians would be even more of a mystery. ○

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Dear Althea,

I really enjoyed reading your article about hieroglyphics! Well done!

You asked an extremely interesting question in your first paragraph: "What would it be like if we wrote with pictures?"

What a very intriguing question! So, what would it be like if we used pictures to write, send messages, communicate, instead of words? Can you imagine sending a letter? Reading the newspaper?

Or perhaps, a story on the internet? What about the license plate of a car that passes on the road? Or the menu at McDonalds? How about that size tag in the back of your shirt or pants? There are all kinds of things!

How would we do this?

I always think of words, like "who, when, why, what, and how," when generating writing ideas. Maybe this will be helpful for you, as well. They say "a picture is worth a thousand words."

What could you express in pictures better than with words?

I would love to read what you might create from this! I'm an artist and a writer, and I love and use both to express my thoughts and feelings, so your answer to this question has me very interested to read your response!

P.S. I added a little polar bear in a box for you to color if you like. 😊

~ Sincerely, Sherry West, artist and children's book author from Peru, Indiana





# Like Clockwork



t's time for bed. I set the alarm on my phone, run across my room, and leap into bed. I hold my breath. One Mississippi, two Mississippi—the alarm goes off. Good, it works! I turn it off and reset it, this time for the morning: 6:30 a.m.

The alarm has never failed me, but still, I test it every night. The reason for this quest? Science. There is a saying that our bodies perform like clockwork. No thought is needed to breathe, blink, or pump blood from heart to brain. I study genetics, and to me, the automated fail proof process is broken down into billions of foundational parts and combinations that have to come together just right for the body to function.

Bioinformatics is the science of collecting and analyzing complex biological data, such as genetic codes. When I take a look at any disease, I dive into a vast ocean of data that has been collected and stored in a number of enormous databases. The data is raw, unreadable to the naked eye. It takes skill and patience to get your code just right, to get it to dive into this ocean of tables and fractions and yes/no check marks, and come back with a meaningful answer. How often is this mutation present in this specific subset of patients? Can I assess the prognostic power of selected signatures?

I keep jumping between different fields. Is early detection the area of research and medicine I should focus on? After all, catching certain diseases—like cancer, for example—makes a huge difference for a patient's survival. Is it prevention? What if cancer or other diseases can be prevented through accurately predicting a person's predisposition to the disease and finding ways to stop its development altogether? This is already done for certain diseases through genetic sequencing, but this field is still growing. There are cool companies on the verge of groundbreaking discoveries—like the blood test called Galleri, which looks for DNA signatures—little bits of DNA that cancer cells naturally shed. This test can detect the DNA of fifty different cancers, possibly way before the tumor is detectable by other means.

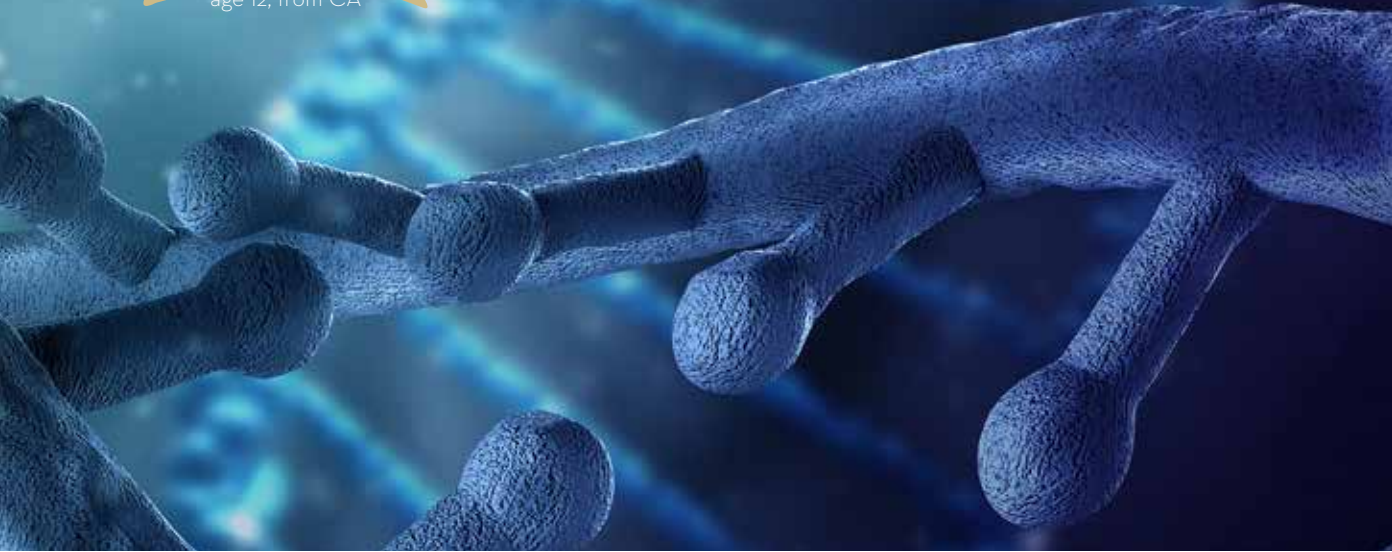
There is an endless pool of data waiting to be analyzed, explained, and put to use. I believe there are solutions to many diseases, which are currently deemed incurable. We need more eyes looking at the data, more hands coding, more brains validating the findings; so many lives depend on it. Human bodies run like clockwork, and I hope that my work will help people keep it that way as long as possible. Until then, even though my alarm clock hasn't failed me yet, I'll keep on checking. ○





**ALLISON**

age 12, from CA



Dear Alison,

I was immediately thrilled to see you embracing the world of a scientist in your daily life. My first reaction to what some may view as a double-check of your alarm clock—I recognized it as a “trust but verify” trait that is ideal for any future scientific endeavor. It is important to trust recognized peers but we should seek to learn and understand for ourselves too.

Don't worry now that you are undecided on what to focus on for your future career passion. Keep jumping to learn about different fields and go where your heart and mind take you. Early in my pharmaceutical career, I had a wonderful mentor who told me while we were troubleshooting a difficult process step for a monoclonal antibody (mAbs) based drug product that “Sometimes the solution is a little more art than science.” It became a lesson on dropping assumptions, stepping away from the datasets I had spent too much time reviewing, and giving myself space to pause and allow some creativity to flow. One's collective experiences in various areas of study can bring forth amazing solutions if we are open to it.

We stand at a brilliant crossroad where innovative technology will both enhance and protect human health. The next medical miracles are going to be powered by the convergence of science and engineering and digital technology. There is an immense need to have a pipeline of leadership in the life-sciences industry—whether medical research, pharmaceutical, and medical device industries—who are not only curious, critical thinkers but are also technology “bilingual.” Understanding the how and why behind the principles of “Big Data,” Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, and whatever the newest software/digital that becomes the next tech innovation will be a great investment for our futures.

My wish for you is to continue embracing your inner scientist and stay curious. Encourage all your friends to do the same. Be confident that you and other women like you, will be part of the amazing efforts that will make what was once unthinkable possible.

~All the Best, Michelle Ann Lemasters  
 Scientist/Chemical Engineer at Heart, Lover of Technology & Mechanic Pencils  
 Leader in the Pharmaceutical Industry  
 Proud Wife & Boy Mom





# Meet My Monster Friend,

**“WHY AM I ACTING  
LIKE THIS?  
WHAT’S WRONG  
WITH ME?”**

Those are some of the questions I have been asking myself for a year now, maybe my whole life. While the answers to those questions may seem impossible to find, there was actually an answer.

*I have obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and anxiety.* The day I was diagnosed in November of 2020, things began to fall into place.

My struggles became much clearer to me. The reason why I was always running late? My OCD. The reason why I felt I wasn't getting my homework done as efficiently as the rest of my friends? My OCD. And the list goes on.

While those issues may seem miniscule and small, OCD and anxiety can be pretty challenging monsters to defeat. But, in the end, I did.

Now, my OCD and anxiety didn't just disappear, I just learned how to manage it. It took some time, but I



# LUCY.



MIRABELLA

age 17, from NC

eventually did it. Looking back on it now, I feel so much stronger than I ever did before. If you recognize yourself within this article, maybe you have been diagnosed with a mental illness, or let's say you have some "monster friends" bothering you. Maybe you haven't had to deal with any monster friends. I'm hoping my story will help all of you feel comfortable finding help in order to find yourself. Because I know you can do it. Until then:

Meet my monster friend: *Her name is Lucy.*

Lucy is bratty, loud, and very, very annoying. She stopped me from doing many things I loved, as well as made me struggle with basic things like showering and changing my clothes. I know! I never would have thought those things would be such a challenge for me. But Lucy made sure they were.

Having OCD and anxiety can bring along something called "intrusive thoughts." For this article, we'll describe them as "our monster trying to make us fear things we don't have to fear." Or, in other cases, our monster can take a rational thought like: "If I don't focus in class, I won't do well." and turn it into a thought as blown out of proportion and repetitive as: "If I don't write down every single thing my teacher says I will not do well in this class and then my parents will get mad at me and then..." and the list goes on and on. Those thoughts are completely normal for someone with OCD and anxiety. Even if those thoughts are the scariest, strangest thoughts that are unlike you at all:

THEY ARE NORMAL. Here's why:

Everyone gets strange thoughts! The people who have OCD tend to have something my therapist calls "sticky minds." This means, someone without OCD would have a thought as strange and scary as someone with OCD, but if you have a "sticky mind" it lasts longer and may keep reappearing since we tend to bring attention to them, or worry about them. Personally, I had some extremely scary and strange thoughts. After therapy, they don't bother me as much. I'm able to let them pass and not read into them. I know you will be able to too.

Along with the intrusive thoughts, there is another part of OCD:

*Obsessions and compulsions.*

During the midst of everyone's favorite time, quarantine, I had one obsession that really bothered me: Making sure my hands were clean. I wanted to make sure my hands were clean to protect myself, but most importantly, my family. The obsession would constantly remind me I had to perform this action until I felt I had done it correctly: the compulsion of washing my hands. I would wash my hands pretty often, even over something silly, like I had soap on my hand that I didn't want to be there.

I'm sure you're wondering, "Soap is clean, isn't it?" Yes. Along with OCD making thoughts sticky, it doesn't listen to reason. Unlike you, who is so much



## People who have OCD tend to have something my therapist calls “sticky minds”

smarter than that little monster living in your head. They’ll end up quieting down eventually, because not only are you smarter than it is, you are stronger.

Today, I am able to do so many things I thought I would never be able to do. I have been playing piano, writing my own songs, driving myself places, (I have even been on the highway!! Not by myself yet, but I know that’s a challenge I will conquer soon!) and performing for audiences! Performing is something I didn’t know if I would ever do again, my anxiety felt too strong.

The same way I fought through these challenges, with help from others of course, I know you all will be able to do too. Whether they are big or small, I know all of you can do it. If you ever doubt yourself, just look at how far you’ve come up until now.

Something I like to do when I doubt myself is use

some of my favorite songs, books, TV shows, musicals, and movies to remind myself that I am not the only one who struggles. If my favorite characters can overcome their struggles, so can I.

OCD and anxiety can try to convince you that there is something wrong with you, that you aren’t good enough. A little quote from one of my favorite fictional characters, Wanda Maximoff from the Marvel Cinematic Universe, proves OCD, anxiety, or anything that tries to make you think that you are not good enough, is absolutely wrong.

She says, **“But I don’t need you to tell me who I am.”**

You know why?

Because according to another one of my favorite pieces of art, the Broadway musical Dear Evan Hansen, **“You’re you, and that’s enough.”** ○

Mirabella, thank you for sharing about your monster friend, Lucy. You are courageous! I’d love to share about Amy, and maybe between the two of us, girls can start to understand that they are not their monsters . . .

It’s not me. It’s my amygdala! This line is one of my favorites created by therapists. It captures all of our struggles to be who we really are and not be our amygdala, commonly called Amy.

That is what Bipolar, major depression, post-traumatic stress response, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), generalized anxiety disorder, and so many more diagnoses cause us to believe that we are our intrusive thoughts and subsequent behaviors.

Understanding what happens when Amy takes over is crucial to learning who we are and who we aren’t! Within your amygdala, you experience your emotions, and across our sympathetic system we experience trauma responses.

We have all heard of “fight or flight” where our brain helps us to know when we see a tiger that we need to fight or run (I strongly suggest you run!). But there is also fawn (think people-pleasing) and freeze (appearing calm but actually frozen in fear). These are four responses that intermingled with daily life, stress, and mental proclivities can take over resulting in us not knowing how to respond from a place of connection and social engagement, both of which live within your ventral vagal (your internal heaven). From your ventral vagal, we respond calmly and from a place of safe connection.

Our conditioned responses become our automatic responses; subsequently, we believe we are the intrusive thought, the critical voice, or the startled reaction. We believe we are the monster voice, and our authentic voice becomes muffled.

All of us benefit from being able to distinguish between an internal monster voice and our true self.

**As women, it is vital to have a voice.** Through psychotherapy, we can learn more about our amygdala and what life events or conditions resulted in our automatic, initial responses. Therapy and self-exploration is a powerful way to discover what might be covering who you really are. It takes great courage to identify any psychological/medical diagnosis, and that is to be applauded. And from there we can learn how to rewire Amy and be the dynamic, bold, and connected women we are meant to be.

~ Kim Honeycutt, MSW, LCSW, CCFC, LCAS and author of *But Your Mother Loves You*





Girls, you are so creative and super smart in your unique ways! We're continually impressed with your words—your quotes, your poems, and your stories!

*Check this out:*

*“Now we have entered . . . a life science revolution. Children who study digital coding will be joined by those who study genetic code.”*

*~ Walter Isaacson, Code Breaker*



I like this quote because I think bioinformatics is the future of medical breakthrough discoveries.

*~ Allison Moores, age 12, CA*

# The Situation of a Serious



# M

family and I were exploring and observing the fairgrounds in our Gator, looking at all of the different tractors and extensions. There were so many things to do, from playing with farming simulators, shopping the showcase tents, and my favorite, getting fluffy and tasty mini doughnuts! I could see many people from different backgrounds trying out all of the farming equipment being advertised at the show. I was as happy as a kid on a playground. But, of course, I had no idea what was coming . . .

Weewoo! A pearly white ambulance with blaring sirens blazed past us, leaving us confused. “What was that?” I rationally started. Immediately, we saw workers emerge from the ambulance. As we were rushing to the tent, the air felt tense. You could cut it with a pair of scissors. My dad quickly thundered into the building after leaving the rest of our family in the dust.

The rest of my family remained in the Gator. My eldest brother, Jack, quickly got bored and wanted to look at the exhibits, but my mom said that we needed to stay in the Gator and wait for my dad to return. My brother, Luke, stayed quiet while my thoughts raced. Where is dad at? Did anybody get hurt? What is going on?



# SCARE



KATHERYNE

age 12, from IL

Later, when my dad came out of the tent, he looked like he had seen a ghost. After he calmed down, we found out that someone that my father knew well had a heart attack. He was devastated and needed a chance to breathe before he started driving again. My dad then took all of us back to the tan camper where we were staying.

“Are you okay, Dad?” I asked him cautiously as we walked in the door.

He didn’t answer me. I was feeling gloomy as a result of seeing my father so upset. My dad then left to go back to the fairgrounds. When will he come back? What is going on? I wondered.

“I am confused,” I spat out with a sad face. I sat

down on the obsidian black couch and slumped as my mom sat down next to me.

“We all are,” my mom quietly responded, placing a hand on my back.

After a lot of patience that day, we later learned that my dad’s farming friend was going to be okay. I learned a valuable lesson at the fairgrounds that day. Parents have strong emotions just like we kids do; only they can hide them better. It made me more aware of my parents’ feelings on that particular day and also on this current day. This has helped me be more understanding of the problems that others may be going through. ○

Katheryne:

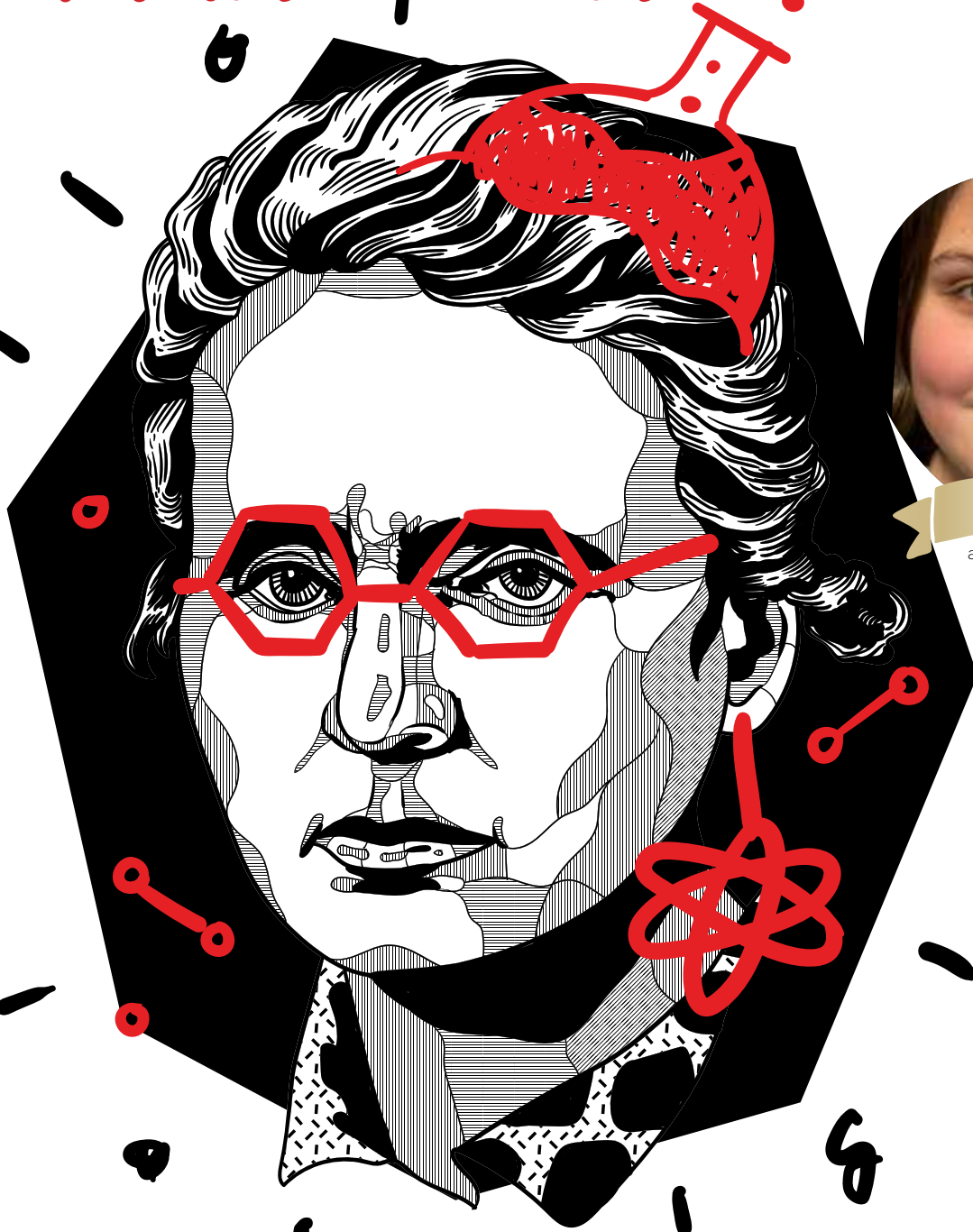
First, your love for those nearest and dearest to you is such a gift. While you and your family anticipated a fun day at the fairgrounds, a shocking situation surfaced that you never expected. Thankfully, your father’s friend survived the heart attack, but it didn’t make it any easier for you to see your father so upset. Realize that regardless of age, we are all vulnerable to “life happens,” and we all respond differently. Whether a health crisis, a job loss, a breakup in a relationship, or even getting a bad grade, we all experience hardships; however, we all display it in different ways.

In your case, for the first time, you saw your dad experience a scare, yet you also came away with a new perspective. As you mentioned in your well-written story, this has helped you to be “more understanding of the problems others may be going through.” If I may chime in, life is joy and, at times, challenging. It’s getting through the challenges that grow us and help us to appreciate all the joy.

~Linda Santavicca, writer, actress, and host of the weekly podcast, *Pressing Beyond*.



# MARIE CURIE'S LIFE



ALTHEA

age 10, from VT

IM

Marie Curie is one of the most famous women scientists. She made so many discoveries, such as periodic elements radium and polonium—all while working in a shed as her laboratory in Paris, France because she wasn't allowed in the other laboratories because she was a woman. She really changed the world!





Marie was the first person to win a Nobel Prize in two different fields of science.

When in her twenties, Marie enrolled at Sorbonne University and was accepted in 1891. Marie inherited Pierre's (her husband's) teaching chair at Sorbonne University in Paris when he died in a wagon accident in 1906 becoming their first female Professor. When Pierre was killed by a wagon, he was Marie Curie's scientific partner and husband. In all his lifetime, he never realized that radioactivity weakens you.

Marie won her first Nobel Prize in 1903 becoming the first woman to earn one. Marie and Pierre ground up and filtered other radioactive materials to find out which had radium. Marie won a second Nobel Prize in 1911 for her work with polonium and radium. When Marie won the first Nobel Prize in 1903, it was for physics. Marie was the first person to win a Nobel Prize in two different fields of science. Marie Curie worked with radioactivity, and even she coined the word. She did amazing scientific work.

In 1914, when France was invaded by Germany, Marie made cars with x-rays in them to find wounds in soldiers. It is estimated that over one million x-rays were done in World War One using Marie Curie's x-rays cars with her daughter Irene. Women volunteered to drive and use the x-ray cars.

The first woman to be honored for her achievements with her burial at the pantheon in Paris was Marie. Irene grew up to be a scientist like her parents and was the second woman to win a Nobel Prize; her second daughter, Eve, was a writer and lived to be 102.

Do you realize that Marie did all of that with people against her because she was a woman? But she pushed through anyway. She changed the world and is a role model for many. That is why I love Marie Curie. ○

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Dear Althea,

Although I have known of Marie Curie all my life, you have just taught me much more. Your excellent writing gives me a vivid picture of Marie and quite an emotional response. So many firsts she accomplished! Marie Curie must have been compelled by her curiosity and a strong passion for problem-solving in order to work through those barriers. Can you imagine having to do your school work in a shed because you weren't accepted by your peers? Can you imagine being the only girl in your future work place? Fortunately, we don't have to and I'm grateful to have many female scientists and engineers as colleagues. Of course, we face barriers and rejection but we can remember how Marie Curie pushed through and so can we. In fact we can use those negative feelings to fuel our determination to succeed and make a difference.

I expect that Marie Curie was shaped both by her God given thirst for knowledge as well as by experiences in early years. I know seeds were planted in my young life that led to me becoming a scientist. For example, I spent loads of time every week in nature and with animals as a girl, when I wasn't in school. My sixth-grade science teacher introduced me to the field of Geology, which amazed me. A high school teacher got me really excited about the applicability of physics and chemistry in our everyday lives. My mother's profession in natural resources and land use conservation may not have fascinated me when I was young, but it planted seeds. These seeds were watered later in college, which definitely directed me to my career in environmental science. Even though my mum passed away from illness when I was 15, her influence and direction lasted.

Althea, I hope that you always pay attention to what intrigues and inspires you. Thanks to your writing about Marie Curie, I am encouraged today to be more flexible, curious, and determined.

~Helen Corley, Principal Environmental Hydrogeologist, North Carolina



*"Empathy is seeing with the eyes of another,  
listening with the ears of another,  
and feeling with the heart of another."*

*Anonymous*



body

nutrition • healthcare • growth • beauty • fitness • sports • personal hygiene  
disabilities/special needs • sleep/rest • food/cooking

### ***This is my Somalia Life***

I'm an American Somali. I'm 11 in San Diego, California.  
My life is different, like really different. I'm a Somali.  
I live life a little different. I have to wear a scarf outdoors and on Zoom.  
The rest of my life is normal.  
Some things I have to do are:  
I have to pray 5 times a day.  
I read the Quran  
I eat different foods like sambuusa, xalwada, mufa, bur, and others.  
That sounds cool right? Yeah, it's cool. That is most of my life

AISHA

age 11, CA

# MIRROR, MIRROR





BRYNNE

age 14, from IL

Mirror, Mirror on the wall,  
My shoulders are too big;  
My eyes are too far apart;  
My face is too freckly;  
My body is too short;  
My legs are too muscular.

So many things I wish I could change,  
but . . .  
somewhere else, around the block,  
another girl looks in the mirror and says,

Mirror, Mirror on the wall,  
My shoulders are so weak;  
My eyes are too close;  
My face is ugly with pimples;  
My body's too tall;  
My legs are too skinny.

So many things I wish I could change.  
Value yourself because  
everyone is different;  
everyone is human.  
No one is perfect.

Cherish the love you can  
have for yourself. ○



Dear Beautiful You  
by Suzan' Stroud

*Beautiful, Beautiful reflection I see,  
Witnessing the greatness you are yet to be.*

*A focus on others may cause you to withdraw,  
But they envision you as a rose without wrinkle or flaw.*

*Your shoulders and eyes both play a major role,  
To stand firm in your purpose to achieve every goal.*

*Freckles are special, and your height and legs are just right,  
Self-love and self-acceptance make the future very bright.*

*What I'm about to say you'll think it's quite strange,  
You're amazing and smart with no need for change.*

*As for the girl around the corner who's feeling so blue,  
She's gazing her reflection comparing to beautiful You.*

*So, mirror mirror on this wall;  
I AM by far the most fairest of all.*

*This reflection I see makes me want to dance,  
I've researched my heart and am giving me a chance.*

*My life is amazing I'm seeing all that I can be;  
I'm not you, not her, or them; I can only be me.*

*Dear Beautiful You,  
I wrote this poem to remind you that you are confident,  
gorgeous, intelligent, kind, magnificent, successful, talented,  
victorious, and worthy. You Are!*

*~Suzan' Stroud, author, TEDx speaker,  
and "unapologetically me" advocate*



WHAT DO I  
HAVE TO GIVE?



MARY GRACE

age 13, from NC



Sometimes as a kid, it's hard to know what you can do to help others. Without a lot of resources, you might think that you can't make a big difference. There is one thing I've learned I can do to make someone feel cared for and normal. Donating my hair gives me the opportunity to give to others in a way that I can.

I donated my hair for the first time when I was 5 years old. And I just donated for the fourth time as a 13-year-old. Here are a few things I've learned:

1. There are many organizations where you can donate your hair. I prefer to donate my hair to the ones that provide the wigs free of cost. (Some charge the recipient.)
2. Wigs cost a lot of money to make. It is always good to donate monetarily with your hair donation if you

can. For example, you can do a lemonade stand and send your profits to help cover the cost of producing the wigs.

3. With so many organizations that accept donated hair, there are many different length minimums and other criteria. Some will let you donate as little as 8 inches (or more), while others prefer 12+ inches.
4. You can maximize your donation by putting your hair in 2-4 separate ponytails before having it cut.
5. One of the best parts about donating hair is that people notice your drastic haircut. It's fun to inspire others when I tell them why I cut so much of my hair.

Donating your hair might seem like a small way to give, but it can have a huge impact on a child that receives your donation. I hope you will consider joining me! ○

Dear Mary Grace,

Your words speak such truth: finding small ways to give can have a huge impact. That certainly rings true when it comes to donating hair.

The Angel Hair Foundation provides hair systems to children and teens suffering hair loss. And while every recipient is unique, each of them will tell you that experiencing hair loss is much more than a change in appearance.

Hair loss is a physical representation of the illness that has taken over their body. It is a visual queue to the world that says, "I am sick." Many struggle with loving themselves. They don't look like they used to or look the way they think a girl their age should look.

When a child or teen receives the gift of new hair, it represents so much more than just hair. It provides them a renewed sense of confidence and the courage they need to look in the mirror again. It gives them emotional strength to fight and get back to the person they want to be.

Thank you, Mary, for being such a wonderful example of how people of any age can find ways to make a difference in the lives of others. Keep up the good work!

Live Beautifully,

Jeannine Jones, executive director of Angel Hair Foundation





# Ode to Boxing





LESLIE

age 11, from IL

Dear boxing,  
 Thank you for making me mentally smarter and physically stronger.  
 Even when my body is tired and wants to give up,  
 you give me the mental strength to push myself to keep going.  
 Although my opponent tries to bring me down,  
 I will *never* give up.  
 I will *always* strive to rise to the top  
 like a helium-filled balloon reaching for the clouds.

Oh, boxing,  
 Thank you for the harsh lesson of showing me that not everything will go as planned.  
 Thanks to you, I now know that sometimes, things won't always go the way I think they will.  
 I will try to learn a lesson when this happens.  
 Both while I'm in the boxing ring and also in my everyday life.  
 Because of you, I've been given a chance to know how it feels to be proud of myself.  
 After a tough match, I pant to catch my breath, and my heart pounds to the same rhythm.  
 I smile with each inhale and exhale, knowing that I am better than the match before.

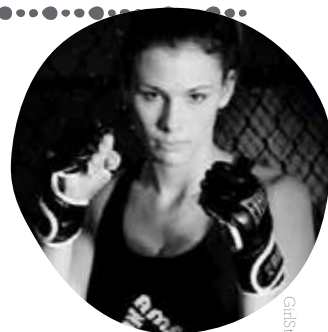
Oh, boxing,  
 Thank you for making me feel confident about myself and my abilities.  
 You make me brave when I have to make quick decisions.  
 Because of you, I know that it will benefit me to get to know my enemy.  
 There is no comparison to how it feels to win something that I've worked so hard for.  
 That is when I know it is all worth it.  
 You empower me.  
 Thank you, boxing. ○

Dear Leslie,

Your poem *Ode to Boxing* was written so well. I want to hang it above my desk. As a former Mixed Martial Arts fighter and a current publishing professional, I could relate closely with the words that you wrote to express your relationship with boxing, I could also relate to the benefits that this difficult yet rewarding sport has gifted you. I specially appreciate the themes of strength, adaptability, confidence, and bravery that you articulate in your work.

Just as you wrote, in my experiences too, the more I tested and pushed myself in my training and competition, the more prepared I was for other challenges in life, school, and work. Every lesson I learned in the ring applied to other areas of my life and helped me improve, grow, and live with more confidence. I encourage you to keep writing about your experiences in boxing and life—I am confident that you'll inspire others if you are willing to share the lessons you are learning!

~Bethany Marshall, publishing director and retired MMA fighter



# FROM HOOP HIGH



## TO ROCK BOTTOM

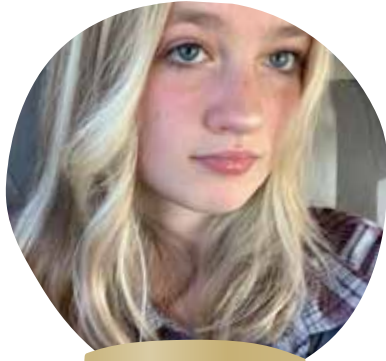
**M**y heart shattered into a million pieces, like a glass dropping to the floor. It felt like I was in a complete daze. However, the reality of my situation was very real. It all started when I asked my dad to go to my fifth-grade basketball game. It was my last home game of the season. So I texted my dad and asked if he wanted to come, and he immediately replied that he would. I was feeling as bright as the sun because I had not seen him in a long while.

When we were warming up before the game, I was more energetic than I had been for other games. There were not many people in the stands, but that did not matter because it was amazing to see my dad cheering me on. I had not felt such adrenaline pumping through my body while playing basketball before. In the end, our team won by one point, but in my mind, the day was a win no matter what.

After the game, my dad hugged me and proudly said, "Shelby, you did really great!" I asked hopefully, "Dad, can I come to spend the weekend with you?"

He seemed excited that I had asked and immediately replied, "Absolutely!"

My dad took me to get burgers and shakes at Steak 'n Shake, and then we went back to his house for the



SHELBY

age 13, from IL

night. When we got there, we relaxed, turned on music, and visited. All of a sudden, my dad mumbled, "I started drinking again."

If he does not stop, he is gonna overdue it again, I thought to myself. The silence between us was so quiet that you could hear a pin drop. I finally told him he should not be drinking, but deep down, I knew that he was addicted, so there wasn't anything that I could do.

We both wanted to move along to a different topic, so we decided to play Wii Sports Bowling. He also let me make iced coffee for us. You could smell the scent of the bitter coffee and creamer filling the house. The warm drink made me sleepy, and I eventually fell

asleep on the couch.

The following day, I woke up, and my dad made breakfast. He made eggs, crispy bacon, biscuits, and gravy. My favorite breakfast! We sat at the table and watched weird conspiracy theories on the TV while we ate. I felt the happiest I had ever been. After we ate, we looked for a movie to watch. My dad suggested that we watch a scary movie.

I replied, "Yes, we should!" However, the movie scared me so badly! My dad laughed every time that I jumped.

The movie ended, and I wanted to go home even though I was supposed to stay another night. I do not think he's gonna care, hopefully, I thought. In the end, my dad was okay that I went home a day early.

Not long after, my dad called me and said, "You should start coming over more in the summer," in a happy tone. I agreed that I should.

That would be the last time I talked to my dad . . . But, of course, I did not know that at the time.

Fast forward a couple of months, and it is May 21, 2020.

"Your dad is not gonna make it very much longer," my mom told me sadly. My thoughts raced, *What does she mean by that? What happened?* My mom continued, "His liver stopped working, and he could not get a new one because he is not sober."

I completely broke down. It felt as if my world was crumbling right before me.

The next day, my mom came to me while crying. "What is wrong?" I asked her.

She had told me that my dad had passed away. Oh no. *What am I gonna do without him?* I thought. I felt as empty as my water bottle after the last basketball game that he watched me play.

Although losing my dad was incredibly unfortunate, I learned never to take anything or anyone for granted. If you love someone, tell them and spend time with them. Even if you do not see them often, call them. I promise that you won't regret it. ○

Dear Shelby,

Thank you so much for sharing your story. It was very clear in your writing that you loved your dad very much. The fact that you already have been able to look back and see both the good and happy times, while recognizing the hard times, shows how mature you are at such a young age. This is something that even adults have a difficult time doing when faced with heartbreaking situations like this.

I am a family doctor, and often I take care of patients with addiction problems. I see how they suffer and how addiction not only effects their own bodies and minds, but how it also effects their entire family. I am so impressed at how clearly you were able to express the highs and lows of what it feels like to love someone very much who struggles with addiction.

Thank you for writing down your story and telling us some of the things you have learned through this difficult time in your life. I am so sorry that your dad passed away. No doubt, you were one of the brightest and happiest parts of his life. I think he would be so proud of you for sharing your story so that others can learn from it. What a great reminder you gave to us regarding the importance of showing love to those that are special to us and never taking anything or anyone for granted. Thanks for being so brave during such a hard season.

Yours Truly,  
Dawn Caviness, MD



# STANDING UP

## *for Yourself and Others*

By: Cindy,  
college student, NC



I am blind. I've learned I have to stand up for myself, so I have had to put together an advocacy plan.

### **ADVOCACY PLAN**

The first issue I've decided to focus on is technology. I decided to focus on that first because there is not enough accessibility in this world for blind people, or people with autism, or people who are deaf and can't hear. The problem I ran into this year is they put down Covid spots on the floor for people to stay 6 feet apart, and that is not accessible for me to know when I am getting too close to someone. I also can't tell which way to go on the signs that have been put up on campus and around towns to keep people away from others. In the stores, some aisles are one way only now and that is very different than before COVID-19. The other reason technology is important is so that I can write my papers to turn into my teachers for grades. This is the very first accessibility issue I had to address to participate in my college classes. At first, I had to figure out what I needed for class. I needed to talk to the accessibility office about if they had an audio format of the textbook, but they did not have the audio book. I had a typer read it to me or read it into a recording that I could listen to. When I wrote my papers, I would dictate to my typer and she would type what I said so that I could turn them in.

After a while, I started working with some interns to help with typing my dictation. I also started using my AIRA service to dictate my papers to. There are a lot of solutions we can come up with if you brainstorm.

One of the things that I have done is to contact the National Federation of the Blind to figure out who I should talk to join an advocacy group for college aged blind students to make sure campuses are accessible during the pandemic. They put me in touch with John Pare, the Director of Advocacy at NFB and I left him a message on his work and his cell phone. I want to get involved with their group to work with them on advocacy work to make colleges safer for blind students during the pandemic. Specifically, I signed up to attend the NFB December Dare to Be Remarkable training conference for blind people and the vocational rehab workers who support them. I will be able to advocate and be in discussions and talk to other vocational rehab workers and users and share my experiences and search for a solution. I would also like to attend the NFB Convention again this spring. I have attended in the past for several years, and the last two years I went to several events focused on advocacy. They have a blind student division which would be a great place for me to talk to other students and find out what is hard for them on their campuses, and what changes their campus has made to make it more accessible.



One of the things I can do later in my college career is to do an internship with the NFB. This is a summer internship opportunity and could keep me busy during the summer months. I want to learn more about it and whether it would be a great opportunity for me to do. I also would like to know will it count for my school internship? I will need to get a form for my supervisor to sign to see if my hours could be counted. I would like to do this because it would help me learn more about advocacy by working with a national advocacy group.

Thinking about 10 years after I graduate is hard to do for me. I don't usually think 10 years ahead. I think I might be a mom with a lot of kids, and if so, I will have to figure out how to take care of them as a blind mom. I think I will probably have to convince other people that I am capable of taking care of my children and this is not fair. I know other young moms who are blind and have done well taking care of their baby and child. I think I will be working as a DJ, and would like to work from home. I will need to advocate for myself to have access to what I need for work including a computer with voice over, my Polaris Mini, my iPhone with voice over, and my Aira service. I will need a driver to help me get to work and other places I need to go to like the grocery store, the library, shopping, out to meet friends, get coffee. Things like that.

I have advocated for myself many times, and I know how to help others advocate for themselves. I think I will be advocating for myself and others for the rest of my life. ○

Dear Cindy

*I understand your worry in finding quality job opportunities so that you can see a bright future for yourself and your family. This should be a fundamental right but it's not today. I've been in the recruitment technology space for over a decade and also see how hard it is for blind, low vision, deaf, and hard of hearing people to find work.*

*I'm part of a team of 30 people who are starting an initiative called Jobs for Humanity ([www.jobsforhumanity.com](http://www.jobsforhumanity.com)) to create a global movement of job creation for overlooked communities: the blind and visually impaired, the neurodivergent, single mothers, black leaders, refugees, and returning citizens from incarceration. We launched this in March with individual job sites for each cause we support. We'll have thousands of jobs from employers who have agreed to get trained and interview the most qualified candidates.*

*We've partnered with Lighthouse for the Blind, Be My Eyes, and Spectrum's center for accessibility to produce a training program for the blind and low vision that companies will take in order to make their jobs fully accessible to you. I recommend that you check out the website when it's live (URL will be [www.blind.jobs](http://www.blind.jobs)), and apply to jobs you're a fit for. We will be right here to constantly offer quality job opportunities and training for anyone with blindness or low vision.*

*Feel free to contact me with any questions, at any time. You can always reach us at [contact@jobsforhumanity.com](mailto:contact@jobsforhumanity.com).*

All the best,  
Roy Baladi, founder of Jobs for Humanity, Illinois





TAYLOR

age 12, from IL

# Setting the Barre High



looked out the car window and saw leaves falling from the trees and tall, window-filled buildings passing by. The sun was the brightest ever. I just knew that this was going to be the best day of my life!

I began dancing when I was around six-years-old, and it is my true passion. Whenever I dance I feel powerful and confident. I feel confident in my abilities so much that I feel like I can do



anything that I set my mind to. Dancing makes me feel free—like a hummingbird fluttering through the air on a sunny day. I began learning to dance with tap, jazz, and ballet classes. However, my favorite style of dance was always ballet. I have always dreamed of having pointe shoes just like the older girls. I knew that I needed to strengthen my ankles, calves, and each part of my leg in order to be ready for pointe. As I watched the older girls dance on pointe, I was inspired to increase my dance skills just like them. I had always dreamed of going on pointe.

One day, I came home from school, and my mom blurted out, “You got an exciting email from Miss Arlene, your dance teacher. The email said, “Taylor is going into pointe after this recital!”

I freaked out! I began panting, pacing back and forth, and squealing excitedly. Then I hesitantly exclaimed, “I will not be able to do pointe because unfortunately I am only nine years old, and when you start pointe you have to be ten years old or older.”

My mom explained, “After this recital, you will be ten years old.” A few months later, it was finally the big day for me to be fitted for

my pointe shoes. I woke up early, put my tights on, and put in my bun. The nearest ballet store was in Chicago, which was going to be close to a four-hour drive.

My family got into the car and started driving. We got some food, but when I got my food, I felt like I could hardly take even one bite because I was suddenly not hungry at all. My mom told me to try to eat something, so I did after a while.

After the food, my sister Kiley and I started to play a game on our mom’s phone, taking pictures and creating videos. We were having so much fun that I actually forgot how nervous I was—until my dad announced, “We are almost there!”

The pit in my stomach immediately came back. Although I was incredibly excited, I didn’t quite know what to expect. My nervousness washed over me like a tidal wave. Why am I so nervous? I wondered.

Before I knew it, we were in the ballet store, and a friendly lady greeted us and showed us to the back where all the pointe shoes were. I, along with my whole family, stopped in our tracks. We couldn’t believe our eyes. There had to be at least a thousand

pointe shoes in the room, and it felt like the walls were so tall and made completely of pointe shoes. We started to try on a few pairs without success. By the third pair, the friendly lady began making funny faces and said, “Those ones are not looking good on you at all, are they?” It felt like I was in there for hours upon hours. We tried a few more on, and we finally found the perfect pair. The moment felt as if it were too good to be true because I had waited for this day for six years!

Sniff, Sniff I smelled the pointe shoes, which is my favorite scent of all.

We went to the counter to pay, and they gave me ribbon, elastic, and a sewing kit. I felt relief roll off of my shoulders. I could breathe easy again because we had found the perfect pair. I could have screamed at the top of my lungs with joy.

When we got home, I put on my new pointe shoes and danced around my house. I did not want to take them off! I continue to dance every chance that I get to this day! Although my pointe shoes are on my feet, I feel as if I have wings while twisting, twirling, and swirling in them. ○

Taylor,

*What a wonderful story of getting your first pair of toe shoes! I remember that day just like you described, and for me it was 50 years ago! I started taking ballet when I was 9 and got my first pair of pointe shoes when I was 11.*

*Just like you, whenever I dance, I feel fearless and powerful. Isn’t that a wonderful feeling? No wonder we love every minute at the ballet barre . . . well, maybe not EVERY minute! I look forward each class to the freedom of moving across the floor, don’t you?*

*After I got my pointe shoes, my teacher said, “I will know you are ready for center work when I see your feet moving as if you have on ballet shoes.” I didn’t really understand what she meant until I broke in my first pair. (And that took a while!) To be able to run and leap and spin and be on pointe was a new level of dancing for me. I know you can relate! And I will say, after many hundreds of pointe shoes, I can sew on elastic and ribbons in a snap! You will get very good at it!! The lovely smell of the new shoe is just the best, isn’t it? It will always make me smile.*

*So, Taylor, I will tell you to continue doing what you love. That love will continue to grow as you do! And coming from a 61-year-old ballerina that still looks forward to a ballet class each week, keep flying like a hummingbird!*

~Nanette Watson, former dancer with Atlanta Ballet



# PROUD BLACK







# Muslim Girl

IQRAA

age 12, CA

I am a proud Black Muslim girl  
 I wonder when everyone will be treated equally  
 I hear people calling for help in China  
 I see that Muslim and Black people are treated wrong  
 I want to be treated just like everyone else  
 I am a proud Black Muslim girl

I pretend like I fit in  
 I feel good that I'm not abused  
 I touch my beautiful hijab  
 I worry that I might be killed  
 I cry that my people are being killed  
 I am a proud Black Muslim girl

I understand I'm not treated well  
 I say I'm happy  
 I dream that everyone will be equal  
 I try to fit in  
 I hope I'm not murdered like the others  
 I am a proud Black Muslim girl



Your poem is absolutely amazing! You are giving a powerful, much needed voice to everyone who has ever had an ambivalent thought about who they are in comparison to others. Whether Black or white, male or female, Muslim or Christian, young or old—EVERYONE has wondered whether they fit in. And it hurts to feel like we could be hurt or abused because of the thing that makes us a little different.

But I say to you dear Iqraa, to remember that our differences are a gift. The beautiful hijab you wear is adorning your greatest gift: that brave and beautiful mind. Your mind and the amazing thoughts you have shared have set you apart and will resonate in the hearts of anyone who has ever felt like the minority. You are not alone. I stand with you as a proud Black girl, who has grown into a proud Black woman, with 5 Black daughters to be proud, brave, and beautiful with you. We are better and stronger together! May the sense of pride you have for your Black skin and Muslim culture far outweigh any fears or thoughts that you should be otherwise. You don't have to fit in because you're already in. With this poem, you have sealed your position in a strong, elite group of intelligent thinkers who use their voice for the voiceless. You are in. I am with you, and I am proud of you.

With Love,  
 Dr. Melissa, advocate, author, and filmmaker in North Carolina

# comfy



## MEET BROOKE, AGE 17 AND ALREADY AN ENTREPRENEUR!

“All of us were home a lot more and unable to go to school and work. My family and I have a dog and two cats, and I would joke that we were turning into our pets—home all the time with no routine.

I want Girly Cat to provide products that are fun yet allow you to **feel comfortable** and **relaxed**. Sometimes, we all need to feel like my cat Bella —without a care in the world . . . even if just for a moment.” ~ Brooke, NC



*“The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.”  
(Eleanor Roosevelt)*



# heart

relationships/friendships • faith/religion • passions/causes • self-esteem  
community/belonging • teamwork • feelings/emotions • communication • identity

**ZEYNAB**  
age 11, CA

***Everyone Matters***

No one should be excluded  
Diversity is unique

Respectful  
Adore  
Creative  
Inspirational  
Successful  
Incredible  
Magnificent

# HOLIDAY Chat



DANIELLA

age 13, from NC

Hi! I am Jewish, and I wanted to share what my holiday is about and why we celebrate. So I wrote this short interaction between two fictional characters texting about the holidays. Their names are Scarlet and Ruth, and I hope you enjoy it!

S: Hey girl! U excited for Christmas??

R: Actually, I don't celebrate Christmas... I'm Jewish.

S: WHAT?!? 😞

S: Do you celebrate anything instead of X-mas?

R: Yeah! I actually celebrate Chanukkah!

S: What's that?

R: It's called the festival of lights. It's celebrated for 8 days & nights and each night we light a different number of candles on the menorah, one for each night! Some families give gifts because when Jews started to live in America and all these kids would get presents on Christmas, the Jewish kids felt left out. We make Latkes or potato pancakes and eat jelly donuts. We play dreidel and eat gelt or chocolate gold coins.

S: Sounds cool but y do u celebrate?

R: Well, we celebrate because of two miracles that happened a long time ago. The Jews and Greeks used to live together in harmony. But then a new king came to the throne and decided that the only religion allowed was the Greek religion and nothing else. All of the



Jew's stuff was destroyed and they were forced to learn Greek and everything else. Whenever the Jews were studying and Greeks were coming they quickly closed their books and started playing with a little top and chocolate gold, a dreidel, and gelt, so the Greeks would not take away their books.

S: That's where the Dreidel and gelt come from!

R: Yep!

R: Then a man and his 5 sons rallied up the Jews and they hid in a nearby cave outside of the town. The king's soldiers came and cornered them. The Jews went and fought and won the battle. That is the first miracle that we celebrate, that a tiny army beat a big trained army.

S: Wow! 🥰

R: The Jews went back to the temple but found out that the Greeks had destroyed it.

S: Oh no!

R: Trash was everywhere, things were destroyed and a dead pig was on the altar. They set out to find oil so they could light their menorah and start to clean. The only oil that was found was enough to last one day when it took 8 days to make new oil. They lit the menorah and here is where the second miracle happened. The tiny little bit of oil lasted for 8 days and nights long enough so the Jews could make more.

S: That's so cool! 🥰

R: And that is why we celebrate, for the two miracles that happened long ago.

S: Wow, your holiday is awesome! And I get the menorah candle lighting, and the dreidel and gelt but why the Latkes and jelly donuts?

R: We make Latkes and Jelly donuts because they are foods made with oil, to signify the oil that lasted for 8 days.

S: Cool! Thanks for telling me!

R: Yeah ofc! I'll make sure to get my mom to make you some Latkes next time you come to my house!

S: Yass!!

R: Ok bye girl

S: Bye!!

Daniella,

*You have done a brilliant job of creating connection with your story "Holiday Chat."*

*By presenting your story as if it were an iPhone chat between two girls, you essentially "Break the Fourth Wall"*

*by fusing the real world and imaginary world. In other words, as the reader, I feel like I'm reading my real world chats with my friends.*

*Why is this so arresting? Because it's approachable. There are no barriers between imagination, grammar, punctuation, and metaphors. It's simply fresh and honest communication.*

*I find this approach insightful since you are sharing a difficult conversation with your audience. Conversations about religion are one of those "taboo subjects." Religion is a theme filled with judgment and intimidation. You are brave to do this from the first-person perspective. I can sense the vulnerability in your narrator, applaud the courage, and relate to it.*

*When we come from different worlds—whether it be religion, gender, age, culture, or ability—people often enter our worlds with assumptions that create conflict and cause pain. Historically, being Jewish meant defending stereotypes before you could prove who you were. We find these chasms in all walks of life, and it takes devotion and a sense of responsibility to share our worlds. I see your devotion in the story you have written, and I encourage you to take responsibility through communicating in ways that get people's attention. There will be some that think you are amazing, and others that possibly humiliate you. All that matters is that you make a difference in one person's life.*

*I encourage to continue experimenting with the first-person perspective. It's a way to help others learn empathy, face fears, and offer models for overcoming them. It's also a way to understand your own values. By doing this, just like in your story, you create a fabric between friends. Only then, can you awaken one another.*

*With much connection,  
Leslie K. Barry, author of Newark Minutemen and executive producer of the upcoming film, Newark Minutemen, based on the book*





# I AM

I am a girl.  
I wonder if I'll grow taller.  
I hear the voices inside my head;  
I see the people out in the real world.  
I want to do art.

I am a girl.  
I pretend to be happy but . . .  
I feel broken inside.  
I touch life, but  
I worry I will die soon.  
I cry my pain out.

I am a girl.  
I understand who I am.  
I say I'm proud but I'm not.  
I dream to become big;  
I try my best.  
I hope I make someone proud.

I am a girl inside;  
I want my parents to accept who I am.  
But they can't seem to . . .  
I wish to be more social,  
But can't.  
I want what others have,  
but then I don't.

I am just a girl  
I am a girl  
who hurts.  
who cries,  
who feels pain;  
who seems okay but isn't.

I am a girl who has been through so much.  
I try to call out for help,  
but no one comes.  
I don't know if they will come,  
but I hope that they do.  
I am a girl who needs reassurance,  
who needs friends and family to be by my side.  
I am just a little girl . . .  
and a tired one too. ●



JOANNA

age 14, from NC

Dear Joanna,

You are courageous to share your heart through your poetry! You are a stunning writer, and I was able to catch such a clear glimpse into your life through your words.

Thank you for naming the ache and struggle of becoming a young woman so transparently! I imagine many of the young girls (and older girls for that matter) reading your poem will be able to resonate with many of your examples of longing to be seen, known, and loved. It's so easy to look around at what other people have or the way our culture defines success and think we have to fit into a certain mold. I must admit though, if we all were the same, we would have an extremely boring society.

I love that you are so in tune with your feelings and say what you think clearly. Expressing ourselves through creative outlets like writing and sharing our stories with people we trust are part of the path to healing. I encourage you and anyone else reading this to reach out to an adult you feel safe with to speak often with about the inner workings of your heart and how they show up in your life. You are a beautiful soul and the world needs YOU to shed light in the dark!



~ Meredith  
McDaniel,  
LCMHC, licensed  
counselor + author in  
Davidson, North Carolina

SUNSHINE  
YELLOW  
*is Joy*





ELLA

age 12, from IL

Sunshine yellow looks like a ray of sunshine beaming down at just the right angle to make the snowy Earth glisten.

Sunshine yellow sounds like toes tapping and hands clapping while a jazz song is played at a retirement home.

Sunshine yellow smells like excitement rushing through the air as the kids laugh while tumbling off their sleds at the bottom of a snowy hill.

Sunshine yellow tastes like the sweet flavor of warm, freshly baked gingerbread cookies.

Sunshine yellow feels like snuggling up with my dog near the crackling fireplace in our matching sweaters.

Sunshine yellow looks like a crooked smile made out of rocks on the newly built snowman that is outside.

Sunshine yellow sounds like the tea kettle whistling, signaling that the hot chocolate is almost ready.

Sunshine yellow smells like the aroma of a freshly baked goose in the oven.

Sunshine yellow tastes like a gentle snowflake landing on your tongue as it melts.

Sunshine yellow feels like the warmth of gathering around the Christmas tree with your family.

Sunshine yellow is joy!

Ella,


*This was a very awesome poem for me to experience. I read it quite a few times to capture the imagery you beautifully placed on every line. You demonstrate such a sense of awareness and appreciation for your life in your poem, and because of your work, I'm sure we all want to be "Sunshine Yellow." You taught us that "Sunshine Yellow" is also a warm and welcoming feeling that is like joy. In life, Joy can seem momentary at times; but in your work, you make us want to hold onto that feeling forever by reminiscing about the parts of life we love.*

*The most inspiring thing about your poem is how you vividly describe the feeling, taste, and smell of "Sunshine Yellow." You have a natural gift for painting pictures inside of the mind! As I read, I was able to taste all the things you mentioned, which allowed me to connect more with your poem. I celebrate your gift of creativity because you have used your gift to capture the beauty around you. In this world, we all need reminders of the warm feelings, the small beauties and the things we should be grateful for from time to time.*

*Continue to write with this spirit and energy; you will spread love and beauty to the world around you. Love can take us so far, especially when we are agents of change through our passion/poetry. This poem was a delightful experience, and I will always stop to recognize the "Sunshine Yellow" in my life. Thank you.*

*~Lackeeria Lewis, poet, sexual assault response advocate, brand developer, and talent manager in Pennsylvania*





# CLIFF

I'm a writer.  
It's something I enjoy doing,  
but it's not just writing physical poems and stories.

I enjoy having the power  
to write my own book.

In life, I love having the ability to control  
the outcome of each chapter.  
And each part of my life.

People come and go throughout my story.  
Some of those people made up the best chapters  
of my book.  
They also made up the worst.

In my story, I like to focus on the people that have  
been present in every single chapter . . .  
because no matter what the climax was,  
they never left.

They reminded me every page,  
in the book of my life,  
that they would be there for me.

They reminded me at every cliff hanger,  
when I wasn't sure where my story would lead me,  
whispering in my ear that I wouldn't face the  
uncertain alone . . .

that each new chapter would start with us.  
It would be me and them, always together,  
facing the cliff hangers.

This poem means a lot to me.  
Let me explain why—



# HANGERS



SYDNEY

age 14, from NC

Despite not causing a lot of drama myself,  
I could never evade friendship troubles.  
They followed me throughout middle school and  
the beginning of high school.

So I didn't have any friends that knew all about  
my troubles, that stuck with me to the end.  
They all walked off eventually.

But I did always have my mom and dad.  
No matter what friendship struggle I was going  
through, they were always there for me,  
and they always went through those hard times  
with me.

And they were better than any friends I could find  
at school.

*I want to dedicate this poem to my  
parents because I owe my whole to them.  
I am forever changed by everything I  
have been through but not because of the  
actual problem, but because of how my  
parents taught me to stand taller than  
my obstacles. Words can't express how  
thankful I am for them. I am blessed.*

*The love of writing has come to you at a very young age, Sydney. Your talent shines  
through your words. And at 14, you have definitely gained wisdom through your years.  
You are right—your parents want nothing but the best for you! Never forget that be-  
cause you are fast approaching a time when teenagers can lose sight of that.*

*The love of the story and your characters come through loud and clear in this poem.  
There is much power in the ability to tell a story, and you have it! Continue to cultivate  
your love of writing. Your poem makes me excited about future talent, those who will be  
writing the books that our children and grandchildren will be reading. Thank you for shar-  
ing your soul with us. I look forward to seeing your stories in print!*

*Best of success,  
Chris Howard, director of operations at Morgan James Publishing*



# Snakes, Coyotes, and *Superheroes*

“Moooooooooooo!” The cows went as I walked outside with the fruit snacks in hand that I earned from spelling the word summer right. “S-U-M-M-E-R,” I sang out loud as I walked. I was only five years old, and summer was such a hard word for me, but I was so happy to have my fruit snacks. The sky was blue, and it was a hot day in the countryside of our small town of Alexis, Illinois.

Every Sunday, we went to our grandparents’ house for lunch, and then we kids played outside. My cousins, Kinley and Meredith, were out playing house with me on this particular day. “I want to be the dog!” Kinley yelled.

“I want to be the mom!” I chimed in.

“Okay, I will be the kid,” Meredith sadly said. Kinley was so energetic, acting like a crazy dog. Meredith was calm and mainly was annoyed by Kinley. I was just happy to play with my cousins. We were into our game of playing house when we heard loud and frantic calls for help coming from the old house down the road.

Immediately, I had the idea of us being superheroes and saving the people who were calling for help. So we ran and grabbed my grandma’s dog, Duke, and quickly jogged down the road toward the house. However, when we arrived at the old house, we couldn’t see anyone. “Duke! Go, boy! Search!” I commanded. He started sniffing around and led us to a

shed filled with round hay bales. Someone is in there. I know it! I thought. We started climbing the bales. I could feel the ridged edges of the golden hay poking my palms and knees as I climbed. Once we finally got to the top, we saw my cousin, Riley.

Riley frantically exclaimed, “Coyotes are looking for us, and Landon got bit by a snake! He won’t wake up!”

My thoughts raced. Oh my gosh! This isn’t good. Maybe I should get more help. I suddenly felt like I could get sick. We sat there quietly hiding for a while, and then we heard a noise. My other cousin, Reed, poked down on us from the round bale and frantically said, “Coyotes are chasing me too, so I’m going to hide here with you.”

We sat hidden for what felt like a long time. Then I thought, maybe I should check if the coyotes are gone.

I checked, and they were gone. I ran to a nearby bush and hid with my cousins and the dog, Duke. After a while, we saw Riley running and screaming and Reed fell face-first on the ground. We needed to run for safety!

We ran and ran until we got to a shed, and I saw my brother, Landon. I ran over to him and shrieked, “Are you okay?”

He grumbled, “I got bit, and I don’t feel well.” I felt like my stomach was in a knot; I felt like I



EMERSON

age 13, from IL

couldn't breathe. What should I do? Should I get help? Yes, I should! I ran as fast as I could, leaving my cousins behind, and ran toward my grandparents' house. Duke sprinting with me toward the house, and I ran inside and yelled, "The boys need help! Snakes and coyotes are hurting them!"

My aunt, mom, grandma, and I jumped in the red car, and we sped as fast as a firetruck. Finally, we got to the old broken-down house, and all the adults got out of the cars and started yelling the boys' names. They all came running out smiling and mischievously giggling while pointing at our panicked faces. That's when I realized it was a prank. So many feelings hit me at once.

The adults told the boys to sit down. Then, they began lecturing them about how it wasn't okay to prank people like that and that they should feel terrible for scaring us.

After I calmed down, I wanted my cousins to know that I forgave them. So, I confidently announced with a smirk, "I still think we were superheroes and saved the day today!"

My cousins and I all learned a valuable lesson that day. It may be fun to play pranks on people, but it is only okay if the joke doesn't get carried away. Tricks usually start harmless. However, they can quickly escalate and cause hurt feelings. So before you prank, think! ○

Dear Emerson,

*As someone who has a deep fear of being pranked (as well as a fear of snakes), I loved and appreciated your story!*

*The joy that you have for writing is so clearly displayed in your story. It is evident through every intentionally chosen word your care and love for this story and the characters. Thank you for finding a fun and innovative way to get to the moral of the story. Stories like this make learning life's lessons so much easier. It reminded me of a modern Aesop fable—great work!*

*I love the details that you include in this story; it paints such a beautiful picture in the minds of your readers. You are very talented at creating imagery!*

*Keep writing! Your words help those around you to learn and grow. Way to be a positive influence on the world around you!*

*~ Love from one writer to another,*

*Olivia Swindler, author of Cynthia Starts a Band and Young Life leader in France*





I am

WONDERFUL, BEAUTIFUL, AMAZING, COURAGEOUS, STRONG, SMART



MARLEE

age 12, from NC



# M

any people struggle with looks and the latest trends and what they don't have. But that is not how God wants it to work. It always amazes me that our minds can tell us what we don't like about ourselves but what we do like about others.

I heard a story once about a woman who went to a doctor because she didn't like her appearance. The woman asked, "How can I lose weight?"

The doctor asked, "Well what do you want to look like? A model or something like that?"

She replied with "yes." The doctor took measurements of the woman's body and then told her to pick a model that she wanted to look like out of a magazine. The woman chose one and the doctor got the exact measurements of the lady on the magazine; his patient had almost the exact measurements as the lady in the magazine. The woman was so amazed at that fact.

This goes to show that we usually only look at our features that we don't like, and we only look at the good and perfect features of people in magazines. We

should all love ourselves just the way that we are. In life, being skinny is not going to take you anywhere; it is your personality and your true self that should determine who you really are. Don't try to impress someone and change your looks or personality. Let your true self always shine, and don't let ANYONE take it from you because you are the boss of that light, and you get to tell it when to shine brightest. And you can tell it when to dial back a bit.

God always wants us to know that he loves us, and it isn't always about looks. As he says, we are his masterpiece, and he made us in his image, and that is all that matters because that's all the proof we need to know that we are beautiful. God also says, "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight." (1 Peter 3:3-4)

I have one more thing to say, but you can't tell anyone else: **YOU'RE AMAZING! YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL! AND YOU ARE WONDERFULLY MADE!** ○

Marlee,

*You are absolutely right! Beauty is so much more than physical looks. Every person is created by God in his image, and there is no image of God that isn't beautiful.*

*God does not make mistakes. He creates everything with and for a purpose, and that truth applies to each of our lives. Although we live in a world that likes to tell us everything we don't have, God will never call us to do anything without giving us everything we need to succeed because God does not and cannot fail.*

*God creates all of us just the way we are for a reason. However, the world we live in doesn't see things the way God sees them and likes to try to convince us that we aren't good enough. Anything telling you that you aren't good enough, pretty enough, etc. is not the truth. We are all enough in God's eyes and there is nothing we can ever do to separate us from God's love for us.*

*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38-39 NIV*

*Keep shining your light! You are amazing, beautiful and wonderfully made, and nothing in this world has the power to say otherwise. You were made by God, and God is the only one who determines your value. God thinks you're valuable enough to sacrifice his Son's life for you and your value to him will never change. The darkness in this world will never change God's view of you because darkness has no power over God.*

*If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. Psalm 139:11-14 ESV*

*Thank you so much for sharing this powerful and very important message!*

God bless,

Emily Bernath, author of the "Broken Lenses" series, speaker, and advocate for sexual assault survivors, Utah



# FRIENDS

# ENEMIES

Friendships are short-lasting.  
I refuse to believe that  
Quality friendships are more superior to the quantity of friendships.  
I am positive that  
Everyone leaves eventually and deserts the bonds that once were.  
It is not true that  
I'll always have someone that is dedicated to being a loyal and faithful friend.  
I do not believe that  
My friends will remain by my side through anything and everything.  
I know that  
No one believes in my goals and dreams.  
It is impossible that  
My friends enjoy my unique, energetic personality.  
I firmly believe that  
No one is trustworthy enough to protect my heartfelt secrets.  
It is a devious lie that  
Friendships are as valuable as precious gold.

*(Now read it from the bottom to the top. Change your mindset, and it can change your life.)*





# DRSHIP



MYLAH

age 12, from IL

Mylah!

*Reading your two-in-one poem feels like the turning of an hourglass with your words sifting through me like the sands of time.*

*Poetry is already multi-dimensional in meaning and your creation adds a whole other level to its interpretation.*

*As your content and format beautifully reflects the yin and yang of friends and friendship.*

*Keep writing Mylah. Because your work highlights your natural cadence for poetic verse and the heart and soul of a poet.*

All my best,  
Michelle Kaplan  
Poet | Author | Playwright  
[www.BurstandFleurish.com](http://www.BurstandFleurish.com)





# H

igh above the fluffy clouds, I sat strapped into the B-25. The engine was as loud as a WW II bomb, and it was popping like popcorn. Excitement rushed through me, and I felt the cool wind in my hair. It brought me back to when I first flew in a plane. I was sitting in our blue van waiting for dance to start when my mom told me, “You have to miss dance on Saturday.”

I was alarmed that she had not thought to tell me sooner. I asked, “Why?!” but she told me that it was a surprise. I gave her an annoyed look, but dance was starting, so I had to leave.

Saturday was approaching, and I again asked why I had to miss dance.

“We are going on a once-in-a-lifetime plane ride!” she announced.

I was confused, “Okay?” My dad is a pilot. I understand that flying is exciting, but it isn’t anything new for me. The glitter isn’t so bright compared to people who haven’t flown before.

My mom looked at me. “You didn’t listen when I said once in a lifetime. We’re flying in a B-25.” That

caught my attention! She knew she had gotten my attention, so she elaborated: “It is a plane that was used in WW II You can crawl into the front and the tail gunners, get up and roam around the cabin.”

I began thinking more about how amazing this plane was going to be and less about how I would miss dance. I started spazzing out like crazy, waiting for the day to come!

The day arrived for this amazing airplane ride, and I woke up absolutely stoked. My dad woke me up nice and early. “Wake up,” he said. My body was still groggy from sleep, but I knew the day had finally come. I had gotten ready in a flash, and the next thing I knew, we were in the van heading to the airport.

When we arrived at the airport, we headed over to a tent where we got our “tickets” and discussed boring adult stuff. Then finally, after what seemed like forever, we were under the HUGE wing, listening to a history story about the plane. (Which, if I can add, was absolutely fascinating!) Before I knew it, I was buckled in and waiting for the plane to take off.

There was a window in the plane that was completely open with no glass or anything. Am I going to fall out or get sucked out? I worried. Finally, the



# LIFETIME PLANE RIDE



LILLIAN

age 13, from IL

engine sputtered to life, and the smell of burning gas filled my nose. We approached the runway . . .

The takeoff was beautiful! About a minute into the flight, we could unbuckle and roam around. The first thing I did was head into the tail gunner. I had to army crawl to get into it, and I could feel the cool metal under my clothes. Afterward, I headed up in the front gunner. It felt as if we were one million feet off of the ground. There was so much to see! The

front gunner was made entirely out of solid glass. I felt as if I could see the entire world below me.

Unfortunately, it was time to buckle back up so that we could land. We landed so smoothly that I could barely tell that we had touched down on the runway.

It was truly the best plane ride ever! It was an incredible feeling to fly in an aircraft that was a part of our history. I will never take this opportunity for granted. ○

Bravo, Lillian!

*I felt like I was with you in the North American B-25 Mitchell, famously flown by Doolittle's Raiders. The poem "High Flight" flashed through my mind when you wrote about fluffy clouds. Thank you for writing and sharing because truly, this is a once in a lifetime experience. Many of us retired US Air Force folks have not had this flight, and your story ignited in me historical stories and accomplishments of the US Army Air Corps (and makes me want to take a flight, like you). You are one blessed young lady. I like how you described the feel of the metal, the air, the glass; the sensation of the engine vibrations; and the smell of airplane fuel. Yes, you were flying in WWII history with a bird's eye view. Priceless. Well done, Lillian (and your parents for giving you this experience). I can't wait to read your next adventure—keep on writing!*

~Jacqueline Charsagua Garcia, Lt Col, USAF (Retired)  
US Air Force Academy Class of 1985 & Coauthor of *Marines Don't Cry*

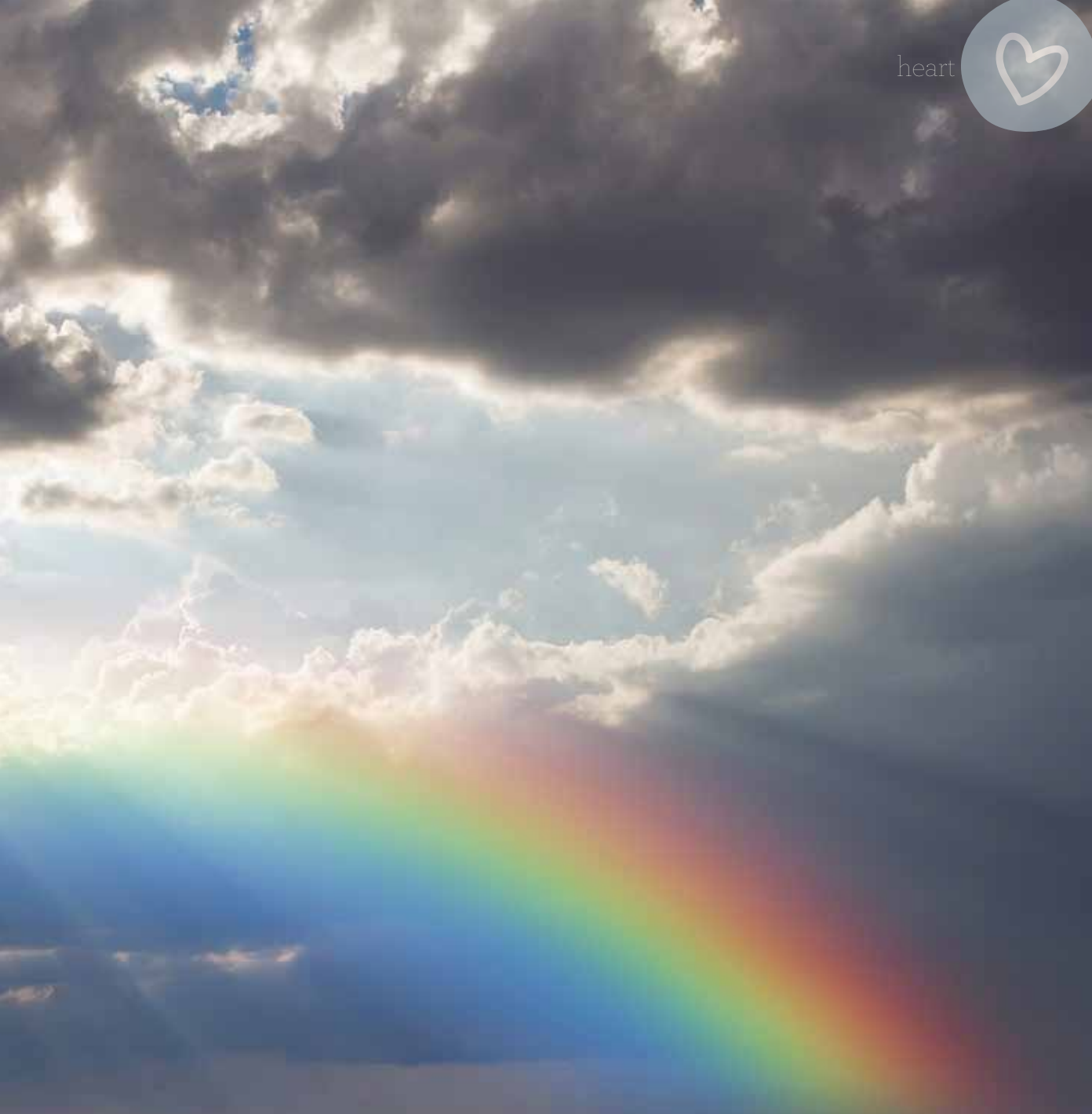


# Then Suddenly

RAMIA

age 12, CA

Outside the rain pours  
Inside my heart  
The clouds are black  
My feelings are grey  
I want to cry  
I let my tears fall  
I may never stop  
Then suddenly  
The sun shines beautifully  
Through the sun  
A rainbow light sun  
I manage to smile  
Blink back my tears  
Life must go on.  
Nothing can ever change



Ramia,

Wow, thank you for giving me and all the other girl/women writers permission to own our raw emotions and express it in such a honest way. I love how simple your poem is, yet it's beyond powerful. There will always be parts of our story throughout life that make us feel grey and want to cry. Sometimes we can blink back our tears, other times we can't and they just flow like a river. You gently reminded us it's okay to admit that and feel the emotions connected to it. If only I were as brave as you when I was 12 years-old! My words to you are to keep doing what you're doing. You are a "freedom writer," a beautiful young lady showing us how to freely express ourselves using a pen and paper so we can share stories that will inspire the next person.

Ramia, I appreciate you for sharing your poem with me!

—Nikki Gillis, writer, North Carolina



The Magic in  
You

By: Kaitley W.

*[submitted by a #girldad]*



Our daughter, Hailey, came home from school with a book she wrote (under the pseudonym “Kailey W”) for a girl in her class that has been getting bullied. The story was folded up to open like other books. It reads as follows:

*Have you ever been bullied or called stupid and dumb? Well, they don't know the magic in you. You should just ignore them when they say mean or bad things to you. You should not say bad things back to them. You should learn about yourself from your mom or dad and playing with nice friends. Think of what you can do to solve your problems. The magic in you is who are. Hope this book helped!*



About the Author: Kailey Willson wants to help people and has a kind heart. She helps people in need and is willing to have new friends. She loves doodling, and she tries hard to get things done. She loves soccer and running. She hopes this book can be helpful to others. ○

*Thank you, Hailey, for sharing your book with all of us. Your story is an inspiration to other young girls who are experiencing bullying. 49.8% of tweens (9 to 12 years old) said they experienced bullying at school, and 14.5% of tweens shared they experienced bullying online. (Patchin & Hinduja, 2020.) Girls have the highest number of bullying incidents, which include calling people names, spreading rumors, and excluding others. Girls who have been bullied state that it negatively impacted their feelings about themselves (69.1%), their friendships (31.9%), their physical health (13.1%), and their school-work (6.5%). (Patchin & Hinduja, 2020).*

*Hailey, what I loved about your story is that you emphasized the need for girls to learn about themselves from people who really care about them, including parents and the friends who have their backs. This is very true. Young girls develop opinions about themselves from the voices and actions they experience around them. If you are reading this now and you are experiencing bullying, you can do some of the action steps that Hailey mentioned above such as ignoring them and/or not responding to their comments. Many times, the bullying gets so bad, and you feel like it will never get better; in this case, the best action to take is to tell a school counselor, teacher, or parent. You should never have to endure bullying alone. Lastly, Hailey mentioned recognizing the magic in yourself.*

*GIRLS . . . each one of you has magic that no one else has. I believe in you. Others believe in you. Your magic is all the things that make you special such as your talents, your strengths, your dreams, your beauty, and your caring hearts!*

*~Donna Clark Love, International Bullying Expert, retired school teacher, bully consultant/presenter for schools and workplaces, B.S., L. C. D. C.; C.P.S.*



# Families





# families

NASREN

age 11, CA

Families are big  
And families are small  
Families are different, and we love them all.

Some have mothers;  
Some have fathers.  
Some have brothers,  
and some have sisters.

Family stays and friends come and go.  
We are thankful we will always be  
For all the memories we have  
throughout the years  
Full of laughter full of tears,  
We love family!!!

Dear Nasren,

When I was told that I will receive a poem from an 11-year-old, not for the shortest moment did I envision something this profound! How much wisdom is in this beautiful poem of yours! In the time of en masse stereotypes about everything (including families), your poem reminds us that family is so much more than just a construct. Family is about love, caring, creating a state of deep connection that weathers the ups and downs of life, and it can come in many different sizes, colors and shapes. Being able to see, feel and speak this truth is a gift. You certainly are a gift to your family and your poem is a gift to anyone who reads it!

Our society is lucky to have an inspiring, brave, love-spreading young woman such as you. In a world that changes with a remarkable speed, we need more reminders of what really matters in life. You have the awareness and you have the writing skills to effectively deliver those important messages. Keep writing, nurture that wonderful talent you've got, you have the power to be a change for good!

With all my heart,  
Senka Holzer, family lover, immigrant, heart researcher, Gratz, Austria



# THE WEIGHT



KATELYN

age 13, from IL

“Let’s go!” Emma happily exclaimed. The sky was painted with clouds, and it was about to rain. It was a cool summer day in April, and the end of third grade was approaching. The end-of-the-year field trip was to Wildlife Prairie Park. I sat down on the bus after Emma went on the inside of the seat. The bus smelled of excitement and smelly third-grade kids. “What do you wanna see?” Emma inquired. “Umm, goats!” I said. I figured I wouldn’t see goats,

but a girl can dream. BUMP! Emma and I got tossed in the air, startled and laughing. An hour or so went by, and we finally got to the park. The third-grade class stepped off the bus with a pep in their step. The aroma of grass and the rain that would soon fall was strong, and I could hear the birds chirping and kids talking.

“Quiet down, kids!” hollered Mrs. Moran, the other third-grade teacher.



# OF GRAVITY

“Look! Cows!” someone yelled after getting off the bus. “Those are actually buffalo,” my teacher Mrs. Shimm informed us. I was already getting a headache from the crowds of kids screaming, trying to talk over each other.

“Let’s go! Let’s go!” my chaperone, Randy, said. At one point in the adventure, Emma and I saw an empty cage, and we thought that the animal had escaped, but it turned out the animal just wasn’t in there. Thank goodness! There was a faint smell of manure when we were walking to see all the animals. We saw almost every species they had and went to the gift shop.

After the gift shop, we went to the park there. It was the destination where you go to regroup and get on the bus. There was a loooong slide there, and Emma ran over without hesitation. I sighed and followed her after putting our stuff with Randy as she sat down on a bench nearby. We slid down the slide a couple of times.

After going down the slide a couple of times, we saw it. The next GIANT playground. Our jaws touched the ground when we saw the numerous slides and climbing spots. There was also a fireman’s pole that you could slide down to. Emma KNEW I hated those and could not go down.

Nonetheless, she convinced me to go down. “Let’s go! It’ll be fine! Just hold on and then let go when you get to the bottom.”

Easier said than done. For me, at least. When I looked up at the towering pole ahead, I had a little anxiety attack to prepare a plan of how I was going

to land. My leg was shaking, and my stomach started to hurt. Count to ten, then let go. Just keep your feet straight. DON’T GO DOWN.

One nervous debate later, I got to the top, held on to the slick metal pole, took a deep breath, and went down. “OUCH!” I forgot how to move my body at the moment and fell directly on my tailbone.

What. An. Idiot. What happened? It went by so fast, I couldn’t remember. Maybe five feet up from the ground, I fell. There were around fifty other kids there, and since I’m cool like that, I didn’t cry or scream—just sat there in pain, biting my lip. Finally, Emma came over and asked, “Are you okay?”

“I’m doing great,” I responded sarcastically. “This is the best I’ve ever been in my life.”

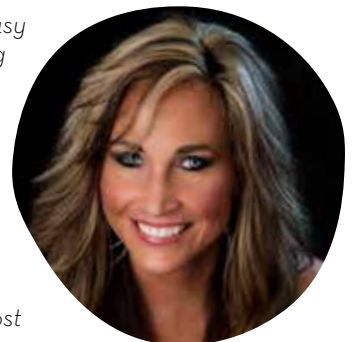
It took me almost two minutes to stand up and walk over to the closest bench. With each step, it started to hurt a little more.

“That was pretty stupid,” Emma told me with a grin on her face, trying to contain her laughter. I rolled my eyes and nodded my head in agreement.

Although I was young, I learned a lesson that I will take with me throughout my life, one of never letting friends decide my actions. Or peer pressure. I gave into peer pressure, doing something I did not want to do, and it did not go as planned. As I get older, there will be more people telling me to do things that I don’t want to do, and I want to have enough confidence to stand up for myself and say no. This is still a hard thing for many people, but we all need to have this skill. We are strong, independent young women who should stand up for what we believe in. ○

*This is such a powerful story and reminder to listen to that inner voice. It is so easy to get caught up and lose ourselves in a moment or during peer pressure. Saying no is sometimes the hardest thing to do but gives us the best rewards. There is a sense of self-worth that happens when we do what we know is right for ourselves. The older we get, the more that stance of self-assuredness becomes respected by our peers. It is hard to see that when we are younger, but the older version of yourself will thank you for it later. I would much rather have a moment of feeling left out than a lifetime of regret. Listen to the powerful inner voice. Be strong and brave to stand up for yourself, and the word ‘no’ can be the biggest gift you give to yourself.*

~ Amy Scruggs, bestselling author, media coach, recording artist, TV host





**SKYE**  
age 11, NJ

# HOLE

# AFTER HOLE



**Imagine you're falling down a hole.  
It never stops.  
Some people feel like they are falling down a hole.  
And it never stops.  
Because they don't believe in themselves.  
Everyone sometimes doesn't believe in themselves.  
Including me.**

**People try to help you but you don't listen.  
So you keep on falling down a hole.  
But you know you need to listen.  
So one day you start listening.  
And you start believing yourself.  
You start climbing up the hole.  
Then, you see a mountain.  
You climb up the mountain.  
So now you are on top of the world.**

**Moral of the story: Always believe in yourself!**

*Hello, Skye,*

*Right away, I love that you invite the reader to imagine and then alert them to what is happening. It puts them right in the place of thought that you want them to experience and brings empathy to the table.*

*By putting the reader in the shoes of the subject in your poem, you're directly allowing them the perspective to try to relate to others. This connection is aimed at the heart, thought by the mind, and sensed by the body. I believe it allows the perspective of what the power of belief can do. The lesson of knowing that you need to listen. You get their attention with your direction. This is strong work, my lady.*

*Well done, Skye.*

*—Paula Goodman (#PaulaG), columnist, author, word jedi poetess, Ontario, Canada*



# A DEER IN HEADLIGHTS



EMMA

age 13, from IL

**W** *hoosh!* The blustery wind tousled my hair as I walked around the square. It was Christmas-time, and there was a small-business Christmas fest in the small town of

Monmouth, Illinois. The lights were twinkling like fireflies on a summer night.

I was there with my mom, my Aunt Deedee, and my sister, Abby. It was pretty cold that evening—not below zero but still cold enough to make you shiver. Abby and I were walking ahead, and my mom and Deedee discussed what we should have for supper. “Well,” my mom said, “I should probably call Dan and

see if he needs anything.”

“Yeah, I should probably call Lance too,” my aunt added as she whipped out her phone.

My dad and uncle were farmers doing anhydrous at the moment.

For the time being, Abby was complaining, “I really didn’t want to come here in the first place, and now we have to take food halfway across the country.”

“It’ll only be to a field, and besides, you were just saying not ten minutes ago that you were going to die of hunger,” I announced to her, kind of annoyed. Both Deedee and my mom were off their phones by now. “Well,” my mom starts, “apparently we are going to have to take your dad to another field.”

“Lance would also appreciate some food as well,”



## “At least a ten-point buck ...”

Deedee said.

“Well, what does everybody want?” my mom asks all three of us.

After a great struggle, we finally decided to go to McDonald’s. We drove there, got our food, and were on the road to the field. Abby placed my food in the backseat. I rescued one fry that was about to fall into my seat. The juicy burger crunched in my mouth. As I finished my cheeseburger, we pulled up alongside a field. My dad hopped out of a truck and gets into the car.

“Hey guys,” he said. Deedee handed him a sack of food.

“Where do we need to go?” my mom asked.

“Well, maybe to the field that Lance is at, and then we can deliver both of us at the same time,” my dad said while dripping sauce from his fish sandwich. I handed him a napkin.

“Thanks,” he said while still dripping sauce from his mouth.

“Okay,” my mom said and took

off for the field while we finished up eating.

The car filled with silence. Our stomachs were full, and we were becoming more sleepy as the sky darkened.

Then suddenly . . . **WHAM!**

My mom let out a small yelp. My heart pounded in my chest. We’d come to a stop on the side of the road.

It took me a second to realize that my aunt was speaking, “Okay, everyone, it probably is still alive, so we need to be careful.”

My heart is still beating uncontrollably. “What,” I breathe, “was that?”

“A deer, I think,” my dad said, sounding just as shocked as I was. Then, my aunt and my dad got out to access the damage.

“How is it?” my mom asked.

“At least a ten-point buck,” Deedee nervously said.

“And definitely not just a scratch on the grill. I think the radiator may be broken,” my dad said.

“Well, um,” my mom said, still sounded very alarmed, “I guess we can go to your grandma’s house.”

As we turn around and get on the other side of the road, my heart started its drum routine once again. I know it must be bad when I can smell the scent of gas and smoke in the air.

In the end, my grandma and grandpa drove us home that night. Abby and I stood in the hall for a second before Abby went, “Well, it’s been an interesting night.”

“You can say that again,” I replied and went into my room and to try to fall asleep, but before I did, I couldn’t help thinking about the day.

I was so thankful that everyone was okay. It really made me realize that we shouldn’t take anything for granted. Anything can happen to anyone at any time. This experience really changed me for the better and helps me live life to the fullest. ○

Dear Emma,

You paint a really descriptive scene, and I can visualize the setting and characters as you and your mom, sister, and aunt decide on the details of the evening. You did a really excellent job using descriptive words and active verbs to tell your story, and you truly incorporated all five senses as you weaved your tale. Your conversation between the characters helps move the story swiftly along, and I was wondering what was going to happen next! Your story was relatable—picking up a parent for work, eating McDonald’s in the car and rescuing a fry—and while the surprise of hitting a deer was somewhat expected from the story title, I was not expecting a 10-point buck!

I love the fact that you were able to explain the event clearly and with vivid details, and then share with the reader your reflections about the incident and how it helped you realize that people shouldn’t take anything for granted. Hitting a deer, especially a large buck, can not only damage a car but can change the course of a person’s life forever. I’m glad you and your family were safe and that you wrote your story down to share with others. As writers, we have the power to use words to entertain and inform, and especially to make a positive impact on your reader. I know I will try not to take daily occurrences for granted anymore thanks to your story! Keep using your words to tell stories, whether those stories are real or fictionalized—there’s always a chance to change a life for the better! Keep writing about anything and everything; it’s your super power!

~ Anna Prokos, former editor for *Time for Kids*, children’s book author, and marketing executive



# comics!



**MAEVE**  
age 12, from NJ

## ADVENTURES OF



# Kate

Meet Kate! Kate is a smart, funny, brave, and sometimes mischievous young pup. Follow Kate on her many adventures and meet her friends and family along the way!

Kate goes for a car ride...

What we hear: \*Bark!\* Grrrr Ruff

What Kate hears: Yeah!!! Like my new collar? Meet at the park later?

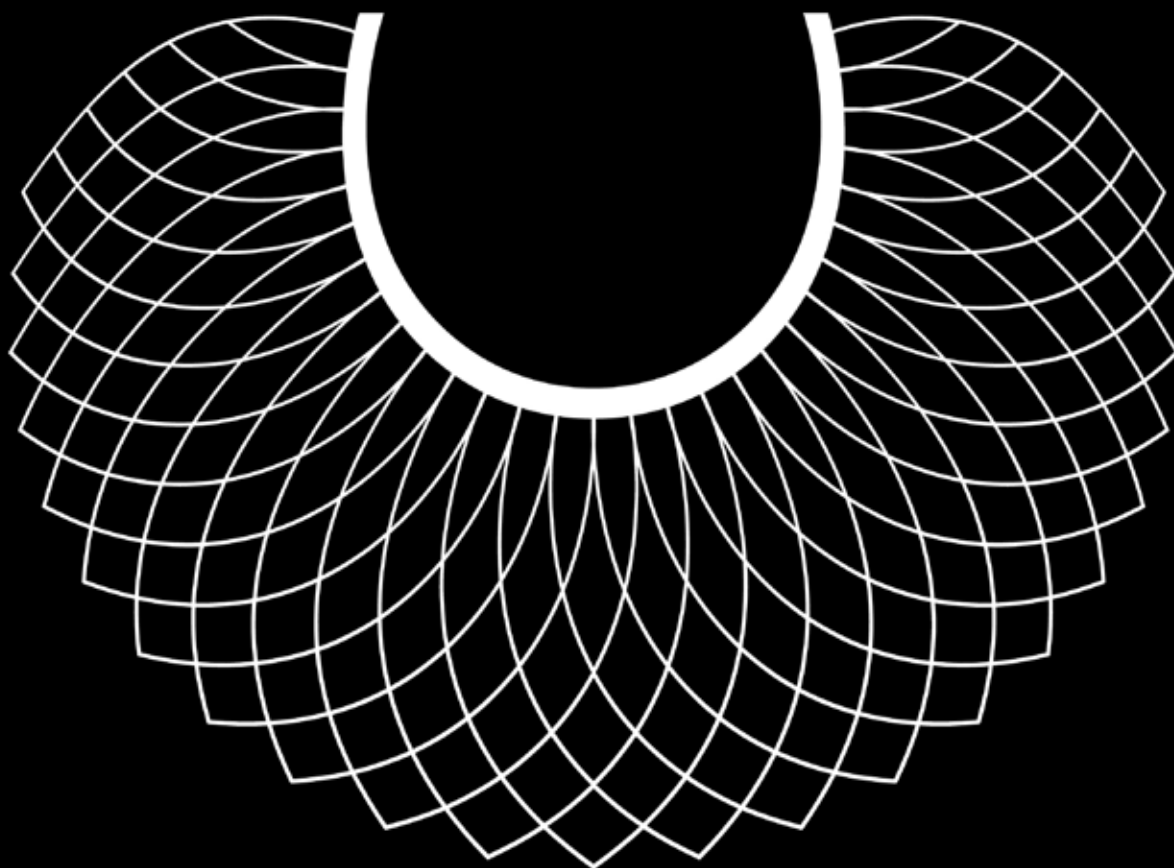
Maev





“SO OFTEN IN LIFE,  
THINGS THAT YOU REGARD AS AN IMPEDIMENT  
TURN OUT TO BE GREAT,  
GOOD FORTUNE.”

~ RUTH BADER GINSBURG





# Mirabella's Musings

My trip to New Jersey this summer to visit family was a huge accomplishment.

You're probably wondering why it was such a big deal, right?

The reason is because I really don't enjoy flying on planes. It is really scary for me! My anxiety becomes really difficult to manage. Because of my struggle with OCD and anxiety, which I wrote about in a separate article in this issue of GirlStory magazine, I was extra concerned. I thought my anxiety would stop me from being able to have a relaxing flight.

Despite my fears, I got on the plane, let my anxiety calm down, and was able to read my book and listen to music!!

Being able to not only fight anxiety, but to understand it, is extremely important.

Some ways I deal with anxiety are:

1. Understanding it WILL lessen over time.
2. If possible, get outside and take a walk.
3. Play some mindless games on my phone to calm down.

**You will ALWAYS find a way. I believe in you!**

*Girls!* **Want a chance to see your name in GirlStory magazine but don't have any ideas to write about?**

**Click to fill out this form for a chance to see your name (and answers) in the magazine!**

**Favorites Survey**

**Favorite song at the moment:**

**Favorite movie at the moment:**

**Favorite TV show at the moment:**

**Favorite book at the moment:**

**MY ANSWERS:**

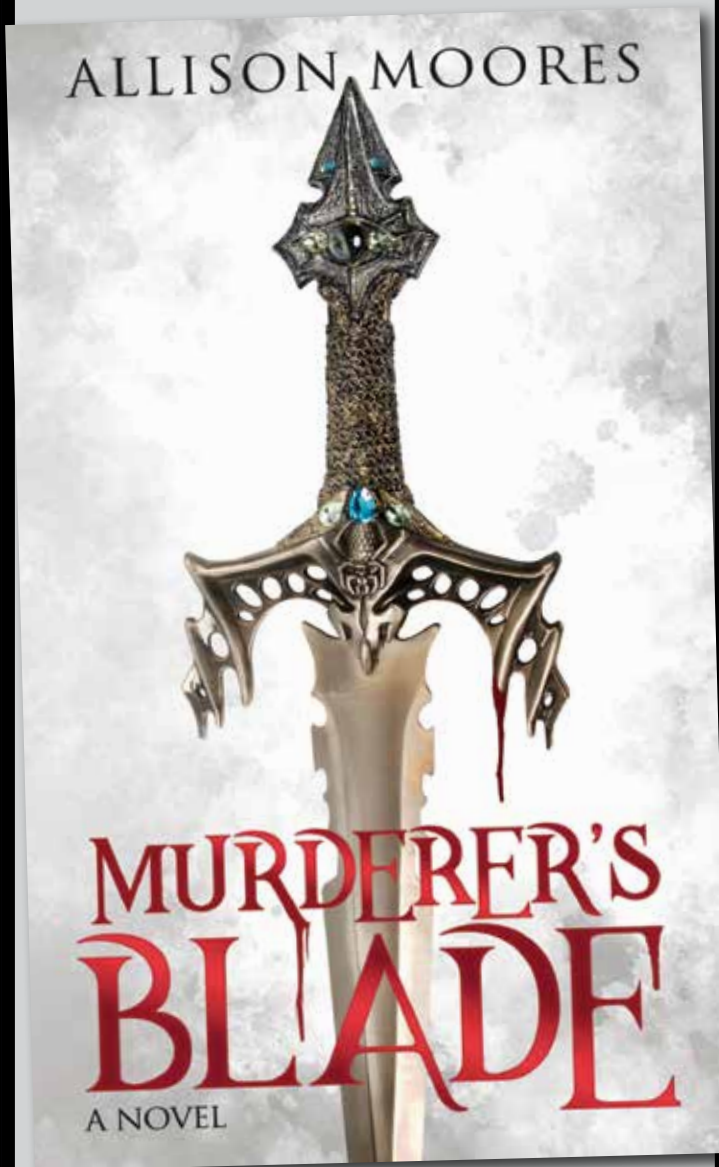
"Favorite Crime" by Olivia Rodrigo

La La Land

WandaVision

The Summer I Turned Pretty

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## Mirabella's Musings

As of right now, I have applied to six colleges, with even more applications to go. I am driving from three schools I just toured and going on to the last school of this trip. I remember touring all of the schools my older brother, Max, applied to. It does not feel like that long ago: five years.

Yeah, I know. The lovely *GIRLSTORY* readers currently reading this aren't anywhere near college application season. You might have just started your first year of high school or even your first year of middle school.

So why did I choose this topic to talk about? To show how easily you can turn stressful things into something fun and exciting. For years, I have been dreading completing college applications. Now, they are something I am so excited to do! How often do you get to submit all of the super unique talents and wonderful academic accomplishments you've done and hope the school will be a fit for you? I mean, you basically get to brag about yourself, and they are actually wanting to hear all about it!! No one will think you're rude!

So whatever you are working on, find a way to make it fun. **Find the joy in the little things, always.** If you are having trouble, feel free to contact me. Just tell me that you are from *GIRLSTORY* magazine. I'd love to encourage you! I love you all so much. ❤️

Contact Information: Email: [mirabella.petruzzi@gmail.com](mailto:mirabella.petruzzi@gmail.com) | Instagram: [@mirabella.petruzzi](https://www.instagram.com/mirabella.petruzzi)

## Girls!

### Thanks for responding to our Favorites Survey!

#### MIRABELLA'S ANSWERS:

- "Favorite Crime" by Olivia Rodrigo
- La La Land
- WandaVision
- The Summer I Turned Pretty

#### Braelyn's Favorites!

- Song: *Let's Go Fly a Kite from Mary Poppins*
- Movie: *Maleficent*
- TV show: *Lady Bug and Cat Noir*
- Book: *The Indian in the Cupboard*

#### Lacey's Favorites!

- Song: *Michelle - The Beatles*
- Movie: *Things Heard & Seen*
- TV show: *Gossip Girl*
- Book: *Little Women by Louisa May Alcott*

#### Leah's Favorites!

- Song: *Dance Monkey*
- Favorite TV: *Stranger Things*
- Book: *Dork Diary's by Rachel Renee Russell*

# The Wild Ride Comes to an End

I'll never forget when Kerrie Boys sent me the layout for *GirlStory's* first flipbook, the yearbook issue for 2020. I literally cried. She had captured my idea exactly as I had envisioned, even though I gave her nothing to go on except that I wanted to highlight girls' stories in a fun yet classy way. I stared at the photos of the writers from all over the world and their incredible words. Their stories and poems. We had done what we had set out to do: *give voice to girl stories that matter.*

Some girls wrote creative short stories or poems. Others wrote about a diagnosis or disability they experienced or currently live with. Many wrote about friendships and the struggles they've walked through as teens and pre-teens. And still others penned passionate pleas related to their just causes, from education rights for girls around the globe to civil rights here in the USA.

We have been so proud of all of the girl writers over these past two years. Ranging in age from ten to seventeen, they've sent us their stories from a far

away as the country of Colombia and even from a boat in the middle of the Great American Loop.

As I sat down to write this last note to our supporters and the girl writers, I cried again. While every good thing comes to an end at some point, I didn't expect the magazine to end so soon. However, I choose to look at all the positives. After all, they are numerous!

Some girls have found their voice; others have found mentors. Each one braved being published and learned how to stand up to share their story or idea. My prayer is that girls continue to know they are cherished, that their opinions and ideas matter. Individually and collectively, their voices are powerful.

Girls, may you continue to write. And certainly, continue to "be you." You are changing the world, one carefully placed word at a time!

Cortney

Everyone expresses themselves in different ways. Some draw. Some sing; some paint, and some write. There is no "right" way to share your vision. I am no writer, I design things to express myself. Cortney writes. I believe that words have universal power, and Cortney is one of the most powerful people I know. She uses words to heal, persuade, and encourage. When she came to me with this magazine idea, all I wanted to do was help make her vision a reality. I knew that this would be an amazing opportunity for girls and might inspire them on a path otherwise not taken.

The past two years have been a crazy time in our country. Girls across the country got to say their piece

through *GirlStory*. We saw them, heard their voices, and published them. That is some special stuff. These girls have impressed me beyond measure, and I thank them and our adult contributors for their time and passion that keeps them writing. The world needs all of you.

As I type through teary eyes, please know I will miss reading these stories, creating Cortney's vision, and designing a cool space for stories created by girls. I take solace in the fact that these fierce writers will keep up the good work.

Thanks for the wild ride.

Kerrie



# GirlStory

Created for girls ages 10-14 to encourage and inspire each other as they write the feature articles.

A Girl's Diagnosis

# GirlStory



I Am

Created for girls ages 10-14 to encourage and inspire each other as they write the feature articles.

giving voice to authentic girl stories that matter



# GirlStory

Rockstar Writers' Workshop

Holiday Chat  
Setting the Barre High  
Coyotes, Snakes & Superheroes

giving voice to authentic girl stories that matter >>>> Winter 2021



*If we merge*  
mercy with might,  
and might with right,  
then love  
**becomes our legacy**

~ Amanda Gorman

