

Girl[@]Story

*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 >>>> 2020-2021





Be Strong
Be Fierce
Be You





Letter from the Editor

As I watch girls give voice to their authentic stories that matter, reading their heartfelt articles and poems, I can't help but sit in awe of how we arrived here. As we like to do in this publication, I'm going to share a story—the tale of the birth of GirlStory magazine.

In 2019, as I scrolled down my Facebook feed, I came across side-by-side magazine covers. A graphic designer had taken a popular teen magazine and flipped the narrative. On the original cover was a girl with heavy makeup, perfectly styled hair, and the copy titles advertised how-tos, such as “Wake Up Pretty,” “Your Dream Hair,” and “My First Kiss.” The graphic designer had been appalled by the messages the magazine was sending and proposed a new cover. The redesigned cover image sported an athlete holding a soccer ball under her arm with her hair perched in a ponytail. The new article titles read: “Girls Doing Good,” “Wake up Hungry? Eat Healthy Foods,” “Your Dream Career,” and “My First Miss: How to Bounce Back.” As the story goes, the graphic designer sent her redesign to the magazine and requested more authenticity and less vanity; the answer, whether it was through silence or a blatant rejection, was no.

I shared the Facebook post and typed out, “If I had time, I'd do this,” meaning I'd create a magazine that inspires, educates, and encourages authenticity and boasts meaningful articles. I closed my laptop, and I walked away. As I did, an overwhelming thought/feeling hit, and an inner voice asked, “Time? Is that the only reason?” As a woman of faith, I acknowledged God's question but then attempted to ignore it by running from the idea for months. But I couldn't let go of it. I spoke to several people and begged them all to tell me it was a bad idea. No one did.

For many reasons that I'll share in future issues, I knew I wanted to publish a magazine for girls that incorporated storytelling, authenticity, inspiration, and acceptance. I knew I wanted it to be available to all girls, no matter their backgrounds, values, ethnicities, socio-economic positions, or spiritual beliefs. And I knew the audience I wanted to target: middle school. (More on why this age range pulls at my heart in later issues.) So here we are. I say we because it takes a village to publish a magazine, and I couldn't have done it without the partnership of co-founder and graphic designer Kerrie Boys. This endeavor takes audacity, risk, creativity, and faith.

For now, it's a labor of love as we publish online. In the future, we see a print magazine, one distributed throughout school systems and wherever else girls journey. We can't do any of it without, first, the girls' stories.

So, keep writing girlfriends. Your stories matter—all of them. And we can't do it without girl families, encouraging and reminding us this magazine is needed. GirlStory shows tweens and early teens who can rest in who they are and embrace who they are becoming, understanding in spades that they're cherished and accepted—no matter how they look, what they feel, or what they believe.

Cortney Donelson
Co-Founder and Editor-in-Chief



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!

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

Get social: @girlstorymag

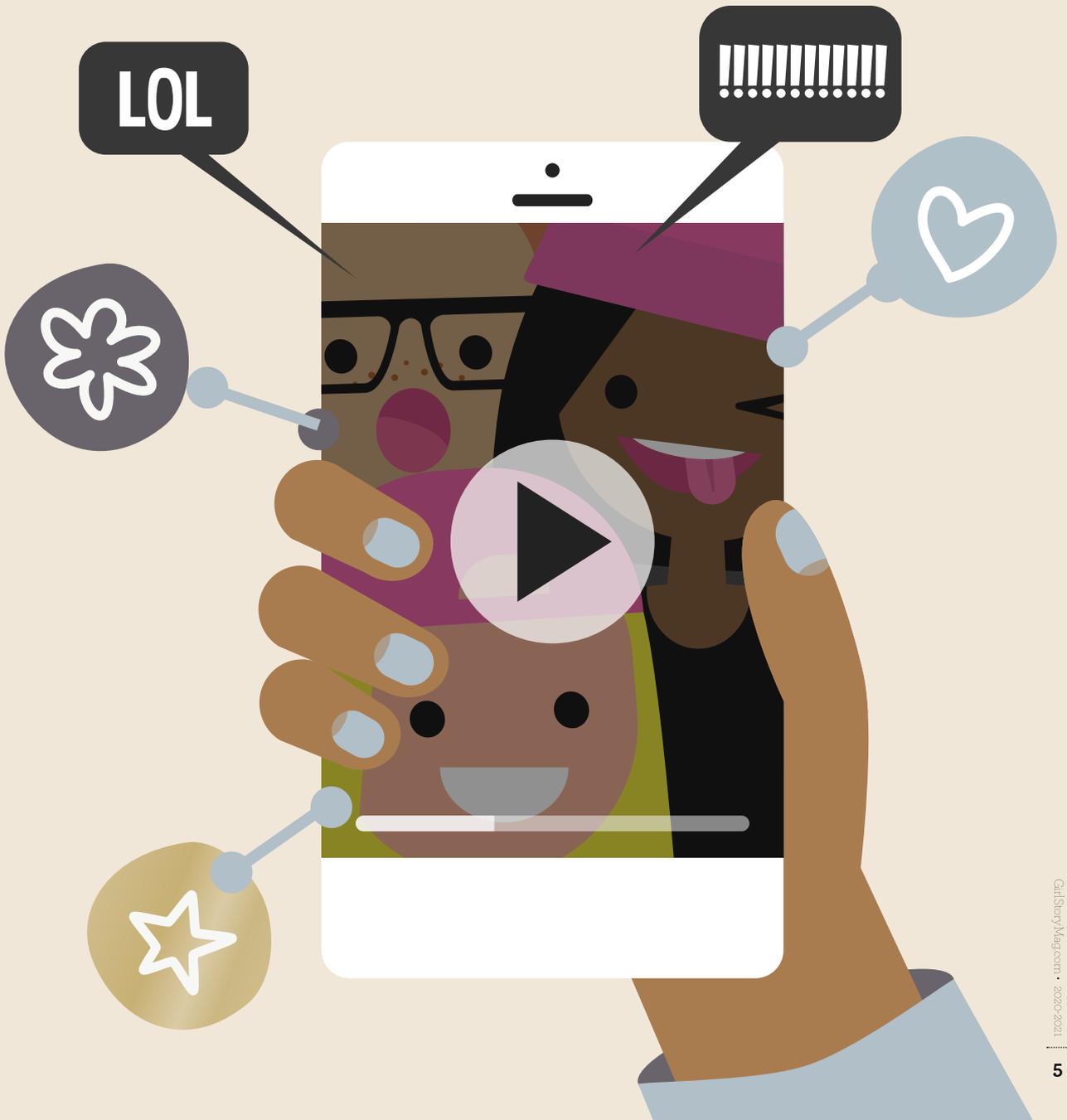
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contents

May 2020 » March 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!”

“Every girl needs her voice heard. This magazine is finally a chance. I think this magazine will give me an opportunity to speak out about things I care for and make my mark on the world.”



SOFIA

age 10, from NC

MAY 2020

10 » Feature:
Whose Opinions Matter Anyway?

13 » Poem:
Gone Away

14 » Brain:
Speak Out

16 » Body:
The Positive Effects of Middle School Sports

18 » Heart:
Cotton Candy Clouds



JULY 2020

23 » Feature:
Basketball

24 » Body:
The Small Choices

27 » Body:
Beauty Comes in Many Forms

28 » Heart:
Putting the Puzzle Back Together

30 » Heart:
The Earth's Army

34 » Brain:
God's Gift

36 » Brain:
Doing Big Things for yourself

SEPT 2020

42 » Feature:
Life On a Boat

44 » Brain:
Light Up the World

46 » Brain:
Clean Up the World

48 » Body:
Interview With a Totally Rad Girl

50 » Body:
Why Mountain Biking is the Perfect COVID-19 Sport

52 » Heart:
The Dawn of Sunsets

55 » Heart:
RINGS A Short Story



JAN 2021

74 » Feature:
Cameron's Shoes

76 » Brain:
The Fantabulous Tale of a Real-Life Secret Agent

80 » Brain:
Journal #7: Letter to Past Self

82 » Body:
Alora's Fable

84 » Heart:
The Last Candle

86 » Heart:
One Gift



MAR 2021

90 » Feature:
Press Play

91 » Feature:
I am

92 » Brain:
Be Kind and Love Yourself

93 » Brain:
Open A Book

94 » Body:
Somali Muslim Black

95 » Body:
You Never Know

96 » Body:
The Color of Skin

98 » Brain:
The Fantabulous Tale of a Real-Life Secret Agent - Part 2

100 » Heart:
Who Gave Them Permission ...

101 » Heart:
Pieces Of Me

102 » Heart:
Why?

104 » From the Founders:
2020-2021 ... A Wild Ride



56 » COMICS!
The Adventures of Kate

I LIKE TO PUSH MY BODY TO DO MORE THAN I THOUGHT I COULD.



IT
MAKES
ME
FEEL
STRONG.



ZOE, AGE 11, NC





MAY 2020
➔

Whose Opinions Matter ANYWAY?



SYDNEY

age 13, from NC



oward the end of 4th grade, I got the news that my best friend would be going to a school closer to her

house. Now, my friend and I were very close friends. We had other friends, but they were more like acquaintances. We did everything we could together. If she was out sick for the day, I didn't know who to hang out with because I always hung out with her.

She was very special to me, and I still talk with her today. I met her in 2nd grade when she was new to the school and in the beginning, she was very shy, but I got to know her and we got really close. She was always there for me if I needed her, and she was very funny and kind to me. I couldn't have asked for a better friend. So you can imagine how it felt when I found out she wasn't coming back after 4th grade.

It was hard for me when she left because once I moved into fifth grade, I didn't really have anyone to hang out with. My best friend had left, and it felt like I was in a completely new school. I hadn't really spent a lot of time with the





other girls in my class, so I didn't know them that well. It took me a while to make the friends that I still have today, but the first girl I got to know (let's call her Sophie) was very rude and self-centered. I had several problems with her at the beginning of the school year. So I started branching out and met another girl in my class (we'll call her Harper). We were really good friends for a while, and we spent a lot of time together too. I started to think that she would be the friend that I would hang with.

After a while, she started to drift away and separate herself into this bubble where she thought she was perfect and judged everyone, and she kind of became part of the popular group. She started being a little rude to me and excluding me from things. So I moved on from her and met the group of friends that I have to this day. Every now and then, I would catch the two girls (Sophie and Harper) giving me looks of disgust and sometimes talking about me behind my

back, but I didn't care. I had found a group of really good friends.

I knew that there were still more friend troubles in the future, but I didn't have to worry about

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She started being a little rude to me and excluding me from things. So I moved on from her and met the group of friends that I have to this day.

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it because I had a big group of friends instead of just one really good friend. If one friend left school or started to be mean or cause problems, I could hang out with another friend. And every time I caught those girls looking at me that way I just thought to myself, "Let them think that. Who

are they to judge me? What makes them so perfect? What gives them the power to critique me and who I'm friends with and how I live my life?" So I didn't do anything about the side-glances and the judgmental looks. I just ignored them. Why let them tear away your confidence when you haven't done anything wrong?

You don't need to let their looks and their whispers make you hang your head and avoid the attention. Be confident and brave, and if you do anything about it, don't avoid the attention, learn to live with it and embrace it. If they give you a negative look, give them a smile. Even though they might try to tear you down, that doesn't give you the right to try to tear them down. Those girls didn't have a right to treat me the way they did, so what gives me the right to treat them poorly? And who cares what they think anyway? They only opinions that should matter are those of the people that matter the most to you. ○



ADDISON

age 11, from NC

Gone away

No School, No Friends, Everything is a change
No high fives, or pass by's. Everything is strange.

More family time and walks
More crafts like painting rocks

No movies, restaurants or stores
More writing, reading, and chores

More happy dogs, and jumpy cats
More sighs, time, and giving pats

More and more people falling
More and more people calling

No scurrying
More Worrying

More scaring, but the best, more caring



Speak OUT



BRENNA

age 13, from MI



I am Malala Yousafzai, and I was born in 1997. The Taliban moved into my valley when I was 12 years old. I adore my mom and dad. My father is an activist, and I am going to be just like him. I don't like that the Taliban is bombing the female schools. So I'm going to speak up and be the voice of the girls. I don't care what it takes. I know they have killed the people that speak out, but they haven't killed a young girl.

I have given speeches now for 1 year.

I'm going on a field trip and am sitting next to my bestie, Moniba. A man has stepped out in front of the bus and is asking if this is my dad's school bus. The driver says, "Yes, it is." Another man jumps on the bus holding a gun and asking, "Who is Malala?" Everyone, of course, looks at me. I squeeze Moniba's hand and everything goes black.

I wake up in a room with my whole body numb. I ask a nurse where I am, and she says Birmingham, England. I was shot in the head. Wow, I have never been outside of Pakistan. I figure out I've been in a coma for 3 years, and two other people were shot by accident when they were aiming for me.

It has been 7 years since I was shot. And I have built a fund for girls who have no education and have continued my work of speaking out and have no plan to stop.



“someone risked a life for 320 million girls to get an education”

I read Malala’s book when I was 12 years old. And I was surprised and confused. I didn’t know why my parents didn’t tell me about this and was surprised that people would do this—kill someone for going to school or watching certain TV channels. I know I didn’t want to live like that, so I decided to raise money and speak out. I have asked people to donate to the malalafund.org. It was so meaningful to me, and I was so angry someone would do that to a person. Please know that someone risked a life for 320 million girls to get an education. Here’s a poem by Martin Niemöller called “First They Came . . .” that I think represents what’s happening in the world:

*First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out
because I was not a communist;*

*Then they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out
because I was not a socialist;*

*Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out
because I was not a trade unionist;*

*Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out
because I was not a Jew;*

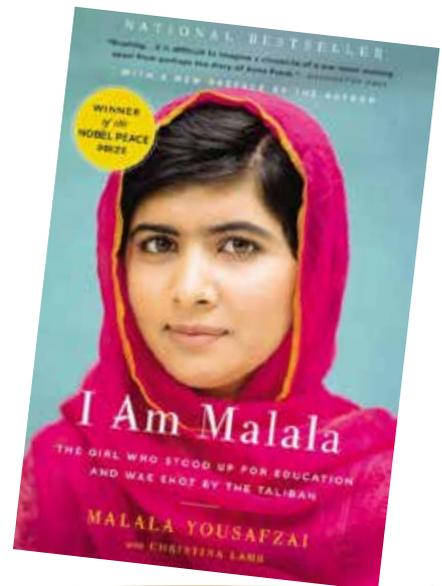
*Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak out
for me.*

Brenna,

Wow! I love your response to Malala’s book. Thank you for sharing!! I read about Malala’s story a few years ago and was moved as well. Your perspective encourages me as a teacher! I agree that education is important, but I know that it is also taken for granted at times. I believe we are lucky to live in a country where education is a fundamental right, not a privilege. It breaks my heart when I see kids not doing their best in school or complaining about going to school. In many countries around the world, education is not an option for some children based on gender (like Malala). In other countries, education is not an option because it is expensive and families have to decide between sending their children to school or feeding them! I think what you’re doing is brave. Using your anger to encourage others to do good is inspiring.

The quote you included at the end of your article is so powerful. I’m proud of you for speaking out and doing something you’re passionate about! It’s easier to stay quiet than it is to speak out, especially when you don’t know what others will think about your reaction. I believe that when others see you courageously speaking out against this injustice it will create a ripple effect. Just like when you throw a rock into water and the ripples spread, I believe your courage will encourage them to do the same. Just imagine if we all found something unjust to speak out about! Our world would be a better place. I believe this world is already a better place because of what you’re doing with your voice. Keep it up girlfriend!

—Mrs. Sarah Greene, 4th & 5th Grade Teacher, NC



Want to know more?
malalafund.org





THE POSITIVE

EFFECTS OF

Middle School Sports



ELLA GRACE

age 12, from NC

Being on a middle school sports team can be a rewarding experience. I really enjoyed being a part of my school's tennis team this year. It was something I will always remember. I learned many valuable things throughout the season.

For one, you can start great relationships with the people on your team. You can really get to know the people and may even

become best friends. Normally, sixth graders are not allowed to play for our school's sports teams. This year, they made an exception because there weren't enough players. I was excited but also a little nervous because I didn't know anyone on the team. Luckily, after I made the team, I realized there were actually some girls I knew. I feel like during the season, I became better friends with the girls I knew, and I also built really good relationships with new girls, and we are still friends today.

Another reason that being a part of a team is so great is that a workout will always be at practice waiting for you. I had practice twice a week and matches twice a week, so I was constantly working out. Staying in shape is super important. It makes people better players and better people. I did a ton of exercising during the sports season, and I still try to do a lot of the exercises now. I think that it helps me stay good at a sport if I keep practicing and exercising, even if the season is over.



Time management is another important skill to be picked up when playing a sport in middle school because you have to manage schoolwork, practice, and you still want some free time. Time management was definitely the hardest part of being on the team. I always had to be on top of my schoolwork to make sure I could still get some free time. Another reason why being on a middle school team is so fantastic is because you can really get involved at your school. Throughout the season, our team was on the school announcements weekly. We also had a pep rally at the end of the season where our entire team was celebrated in front of the entire school.

Another great thing about being a part of a middle school sports team is that you can meet people from other grades at your



“... older girls on the team were able to give me some great advice about what to expect in the upcoming grades.”

school. This was great for me because the older girls on the team were able to give me some great advice about what to expect in the upcoming grades.

Communication can also be built through playing a sport. You have to talk with your teammates so you can work together. An experience I had with this was when I was on the court, and it was game point. All my teammate had to do was get her serve in. We had

a talk about where she should aim her shot and not to be nervous. We ended up winning the game!

The most important thing I gained from being a part of the team was self-confidence. Being a part of the team made me feel included and special. During one game, I needed to win my serve to win the match. I was incredibly nervous, but with the cheers from the stands I got the confidence and ended up winning. That really helped me mentally prepare to play doubles. By winning my two matches, we were able to win against the other team.

Being a part of a team is so much fun. It really is a great experience and should be shared with everybody. I had a really great time playing on my school's tennis team and highly recommend it to people to try out for a sports team at their school. ○

I was a tennis player, too. I picked up my first racket when I was eight, and I didn't put it down until my last match during the New York State Collegiate Tournament as a senior in college.

Tennis was my sport. My jam. I used to play for hours at a time as often as I had the time. During the summers, I hung out at the tennis club where my parents were members, looking for people to hit balls with me. Sometimes those people would be adults. Sometimes they were kids my age. It didn't matter to me.

I wasn't planning on writing an article for this issue, but when I saw Ella Grace's "BODY" article about tennis, I just had to weigh in.

Tennis was one of the best parts of my school years. I think Ella Grace nailed every positive aspect of being a part of a sports team. My favorite reason she mentioned was about belonging. Even when I didn't feel like I belonged in other groups at middle school and even early high school and when I first arrived at college, I knew I belonged on the tennis team. The camaraderie of having a common goal, and spending so much time together in pursuit of that goal, built lasting friendships. I knew I was accepted no matter what, and sometimes, that's the most important need we have as girls. Am I right?

On the courts, I could be myself. I didn't have to pretend. Actually, I could not have pretended, even if I had tried. Playing a sport or pushing your body to its physical limits alongside teammates brings out honesty, authenticity, and grit. Yes, we built a community of grit (and stinky socks).

Growing up can be hard. (I know! I've done it!) Playing tennis helped me release some of the stress caused by schoolwork, relationships, and the unwanted drama that seemed to follow me around. I could smack that serve as hard as I wanted, and somehow, I felt better!

I had to give up tennis after college. Too many hours on the court (seriously—many hours per day, nearly every day) left me with a wrist injury that two surgeries couldn't fix. Trust me, I tried. I miss tennis dearly.

But guess what? I am still friends with one of the girls I met while playing tennis all those years ago. We've always lived in different states (now Texas and North Carolina), but we've stayed in touch through text and social media and visit each other as much as possible. She's now a doctor (maybe she could have fixed my wrist!), and I hope she'll write an article for GirlStory some day soon.

Ella Grace is right. Even if it's not tennis, playing a sport (or exercising and staying active) is an important part of being our best selves.

Thank you, Ella Grace, for writing for GirlStory. Rock on, tennis sister!
—Cortney Donelson, Co-Founder, GirlStory magazine

COTTON CANDY



ANNA BETH

age 13, from NC

Songs trickled through my ears, their distant, playful melodies luring us to their source. “Come on, we’re close!” I grinned and followed the current of a giggling mass of girls toward the red-and-white tents of the state fair. Above our heads, the quickly sinking sun looked like a golden splash of brilliant paint. And behind us, following hesitantly, was Nadia Crutchsaw.

She had transferred to our school a few months ago, in the middle of the year. The groups had been established, so she floated between temporary friends like a stranded refugee. And nobody wanted to take her in. She eventually drifted over to our group, and none of us really had the heart to kick her out. But Julianne had

decided that today would be the day. Today, we were going to rid the girls of the pest at our heels.

Making sure nobody was looking, I glanced back at the pest in question. She didn’t look like too much of a threat. She looked . . . lonely. Her eyes were downcast, trying to avoid being noticed and labeled unwanted once more.

I sank backward through the group until I was at the back end and alongside her. I wanted to say something to put laughter in those hopeless eyes. I wanted to say anything I could to make her feel less alone. When words didn’t come, I forced them out.

“Nadia, right? We don’t talk much.” She shook her head, not saying anything. I prodded the conversation further. “I think your hair looks like the last traces of orange in a sunset-soaked sky.” She looked up in shock.

“That . . . that was beautiful,” she murmured.

I shrugged. “I like thinking in metaphors. There’s nothing in life that can’t be compared to something else.” Nadia considered that for a moment.

“Anyway, I wanted to let you know that the girls want to kick you out of the group officially later today. They all share the same brain, so if one wants to do something, the rest will follow.” She seemed sad but not surprised, familiar with the feeling of rejection.

“And you? Do you share the same brain they do?” she asked. I smiled sadly.

“I disagree with the idea, to be honest. You seem nice, and I’m surprised you haven’t found some permanent friends here yet.” Nadia smiled for the first time.

“Really? Thanks, that means



clouds

“I like thinking in metaphors. There’s nothing in life that can’t be compared to something else.”

a lot.” I noticed by that point we were drifting farther and farther away from the rest of the group and decided to run with it.

“Do you want to get some cotton candy?” I asked, gesturing to a brightly colored stand. “The smell of sugar is drawing me in like a

trap.” We both giggled and hurried down the path.

“What’s your name again?” She asked as we stood in line.

“Carmen Sansbury,” I replied.

“And I can pay for your cotton candy.” We talked and ordered cotton candy and talked more between

bites. Right as we were finishing, Nadia pointed up to the sky. I followed her gaze to the soft clouds tinted pink by the beginnings of dusk.

“Look,” she said. “They’re cotton candy clouds.” And so I sat there, staring up at the sky with my new friend. ○

Dear Anna Beth,

Wow, what bravery your heroine showed! That is exactly what it takes to get through relationships in middle school. Kindness, bravery and empathy. So many times, young girls who are attempting to fit in don’t treat others the way they want to be treated. They stop thinking about how powerful words are and how easy it is to spread a little kindness. They think that one special friend group is worth making someone feel less than. The truth is, we all want to belong, fit in, have someone to laugh with, eat lunch with, and smile at in the hallways. And this is what all of us deserve. So, I commend all of you who are trying to show a little bravery every day by spreading kindness in your schools. It is brave to wave, to smile, and even to say hi to someone you might not normally speak to. It is not worth trying to fit in at someone else’s expense. It is bravery to not go along with the plan someone creates to make someone feel embarrassed or put down. It is bravery to not participate in the gossip about someone else. Thank you for the bravery in your story, and hopefully it inspires girls everywhere to stop and think about the power they have every day to make others feel loved and special.

Way to go! –Dana Horne, LCSW (Family Counselor), NC





"Keep your face
to the sun
and you will never
see the shadows."

~ Helen Keller

BASKETBALL



The ball, the hoop, the court, the shoes
 The crowd cheering loudly, never any boos.
 The sounds of shoes squeaking,
 The tick of the clock,
 The feeling of letting you go,
 And you come straight back to me
 With a hard bang on the court,
 I look down and there you are,
 Sitting peacefully between my hands,
 Ready to do it over and over again.
 The swish of the basketball,
 The sound of the whistle that ends it all
 Fouls are called, travels, carries, and techs, too.
 As time flies by, the excitement grows.
 The crowd on their feet as the last shot goes,
 And at the end of it all, hands are shook.
 And the winners will look back at the game they took.



Scarlett,

I absolutely loved this poem and how therapeutic basketball is for you. The way you described dribbling is so accurate. The ability to let go of the ball, knowing it always comes right back to you in the same spot, is so reassuring and builds confidence in you. Ball handling can become boring and repetitive, but you've managed to turn it into a peaceful, sacred, and mindful experience. Everyone, take notes from Scarlett—you should dribble with intentionality and purpose, and she most definitely demonstrates the power in that.

Also, reading your poem brought back all the feels. I felt like I was on the court playing again in front of an energizing crowd. I felt the rush of adrenaline and competitiveness run through my blood again. You created so much imagery that your words gave me chills and brought back nostalgia, joy, and reflection. Thank you for this gift.

Your words remind me of how much appreciation I have for the game that has allowed me to experience life to the fullest. An orange basketball has given me so many amazing opportunities to travel the world, positively impact the lives of countless individuals, and become a better person. I am so grateful for that and for you.

Thank you for creating this work of art. The world needs your contributions because they matter. You matter. I am so proud of you. Keep writing. Keep shining. Keep doing whatever brings you peace and love.

With abundant love,

Kelsey Domiana

Author of Help My Husband Is Hardly Home and former pro basketball player



ELOISE

age 13, from MI

The Small Choices

Helplessness is one of the worst possible feelings. Knowing something is amiss but having no ability to act upon it leaves you feeling powerless. I first experienced the full weight of this feeling around a year ago.

My family and I were at my grandparent's house in Wisconsin. They were hosting a party for friends and relatives from all over the country in honor of their 25th anniversary. It was at that party that I was served a gluten-containing grilled cheese sandwich. I have celiac disease, an autoimmune condition. Anytime I ingest gluten (a protein found in wheat, barley, rye, and on occasion contaminated oats, the villi lining my small intestine die, and I become

violently sick. After eating the grilled cheese, I spent the whole night vomiting profusely, too exhausted to even lift my head from the pillow.

Eating dinner the following day, I had only begun to feel like myself again. Suddenly a shout rose from the kitchen, "Don't eat the bread! Don't eat the bread!" The table froze as these words were spoken. I looked down and knew exactly what had happened. For the second day in a row, the bread I had just eaten was wheat bread. As soon as I registered what had happened, all my senses were amplified. I felt so much in so little time. I could smell the remaining food in the kitchen that had yet to be brought out. I could feel the tablecloth beneath my fingers in a different way, but most of all, it was my emotions that had spiked. I was already so drained of all my energy from the torturous night

before, I didn't know what to do or feel. But sitting there, at that table, I told myself there was a decision to be made. I could freak myself out by imagining worst possible outcomes. This would mean getting worked up for the next four hours until the gluten reached my small intestine when I would begin to experience symptoms. Or I could calmly accept the facts and come up with a solution to deal with them. I chose the latter.

I stood up from the table and feeling as helpless as I have ever felt before, went to fetch the necessities for the night to come. Because we caught the mistake early, my mother went to a local pharmacy to get activated charcoal. The charcoal soaks up anything and everything within the stomach. That prevents the small intestine from recognizing the harmful gluten. We had never used it before, as we had never had



any reason to, so I didn't know what the results were going to be.

I sat in bed watching a movie that I can't remember anything about, knowing that I never wanted to feel this way again. Helpless. Having done everything we could, I fell asleep, expecting to be woken later by the exhausting symptoms, but they never came. Because my grandmother caught the mistake regarding food, my mom got the activated charcoal so quickly, and I had chosen to stay calm, I didn't get sick. Although I was physically all right, I will always remember the helplessness that first washed over me when I was told I had unknowingly eaten gluten. So when I feel utterly helpless, I remember that there will always be some way to help, even if it's not what I might have imagined. Sometimes, the best thing we can do is to stay calm and collected. ○

I know that managing celiac disease can be so frustrating and even a little scary. It is hard to avoid food that contains gluten, and it seems to hide everywhere! I bet it's especially difficult to get your friends and family to understand your diet and how bad ingesting gluten can make you feel. And, no one likes the feeling of being sick, that's for sure! When I work with celiac kids, I encourage them to create a celiac toolbox, a little kit that can help make it easier to manage. I have them fill it with recipes, food substitute ideas, safe brand names, and any handouts that I give them. But, I think that you found the best tool of all—POWER! You managed to dig deep and find your inner strength. You took a really scary situation where you felt helpless and found a solution while maintaining a positive attitude. Your knowledge, courage, and strength became your Power Tool, and you now can handle anything. Way to go, Eloise! I think that you are one tough cookie (gluten-free, of course!).
—Jen Ranalli, RDN, LDN, CSP, pediatric dietitian, Philadelphia, PA





“Imperfection is beauty, madness is genius, and it’s better to be absolutely ridiculous than absolutely boring.”
—Marilyn Monroe

This quote spoke to me. I like it because it talks about how being flawed is beautiful, and it is better to just be yourself than to try to worry about being like anybody else. I find I am anxious at times, and feel afraid of getting stuck and unable to get out of a problem, or not be able to do something just right. This is more because I don’t want to let others down. I am learning to not be afraid to fail.



HANNAH

age 12, from VA



Beauty Comes in Many Forms



ASHLYN

age 13, from NC

Beauty...

Beauty comes in many forms.

But what exactly makes something beautiful?

Is it the way we look?

Or the way we feel?

When you look in the mirror and stare into the face you deem ugly,

Your perception is warped,

Causing you to no longer believe that you are truly beautiful.

But if you tell yourself every day,

“I am worthy,”

“I am strong,”

“I am beautiful,”

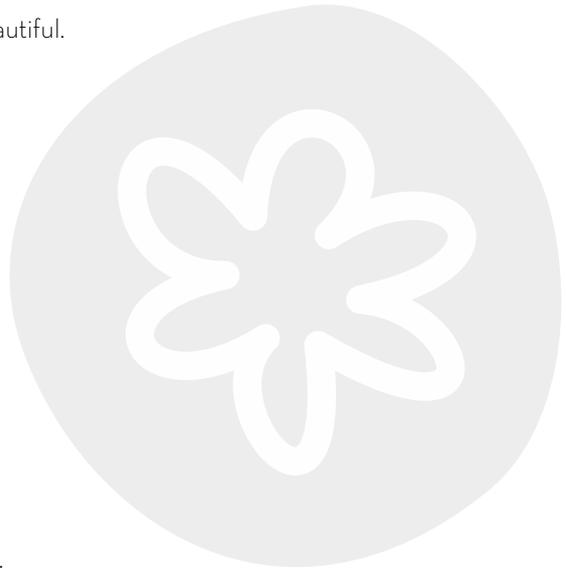
“I am perfect just the way I am,”

Then maybe,

we can all realize

that beauty is us,

And then the mirror will finally show us our true selves.



What a powerful practice you've discovered— choosing daily to speak truth over yourself, honoring the flawless work of art that is your created being! Yes, we are beauty. Our true identity was never meant to be masked by the lies of our culture that say we're not enough. Recognizing our worth is a pivotal point of revelation on the journey to knowing the truth of who we are. Perhaps owning our own beauty is the first step in being able to see the beauty in every other human we encounter. I'm grateful for this thoughtful poem, a reminder that we are each the fulfillment of a desire for something beautiful on this earth!

Love,

*Tia McNelly, speaker, author, and founder & director
of Collected (podcast and workshops)*





MARLEE

age 11, from NC

Putting the Puzzle Back TOGETHER

I have seen the video of George Floyd, and I felt both mad and sad because it was such a careless act by a police officer. I saw that there was an African American male being handcuffed and put to the ground on his stomach, and then a Caucasian police officer knelt on his neck with his knee. After a few minutes, Mr. Floyd said he couldn't breathe and even told the police officer, "I can't breathe," but I guess the police officer thought he was faking it, so he didn't move. A few minutes later, Mr. Floyd was knocked unconscious. Then multiple people said to check his pulse, but the careless police officer didn't. This unfortunately led to Mr. Floyd's death. George Floyd wasn't resisting arrest, and he was not being violent. There were other police officers, and they just stood there. Anyone who puts on a badge or police uniform and swears that they will protect their community and doesn't is cruel.

A few days later, when I saw

my parents watching the news, there were lots of protestors, police officers, and looters. One of the reporters said that the protestors were fighting for BLM, which means Black Lives Matter, and they were fighting and hurting Caucasian police officers. Why wouldn't black lives matter . . . or white or blue or green people's lives? It is not right to go against people just because of their skin color.

I wonder what people would do if I was a police officer? I am half Caucasian and half African American.

Most police officers are innocent and help fight against the evil in this world by protecting the places they live in. I feel like evil is being brought back by the fighting and looting after these police officers worked so hard to protect us, but now the streets are being destroyed. Some people have even started fires. By destroying things and starting fires, the looters are making it harder for the homeless in these areas, and it is already hard enough for them. It seems like everyone who is looting has a monster inside them, and that

monster is taking control of them. It scares me.

All the looters are acting like childish fools. It is like they have blocked out everything good that they have learned and turned to evil and stealing. They are teaching kids like me that it is OK to steal. They are teaching kids like me that it is OK to go against people with differently colored skin. They are also teaching us kids that it is OK to throw stuff at each other. On May 29, 2020, a flying projectile was thrown by a protestor and hit a police officer in the head and broke his skull. What if that was someone in your family? How would that make you feel? Please stop making our world look like trash. We ALL know we can do so much better.

Think of what God sees! He sees all of us as one color. He sees us as one community, and He sees us as one big family. He doesn't see us separated by our skin color. God's heart is like a puzzle. You may ask, "How?" Well, God's heart is like a puzzle because it can be broken and taken away, and it can be put



Right now, pieces are being taken away because of looters stealing and breaking stuff and because of all these people going against other people that aren't their same skin color.

back together. Right now, pieces are being taken away because of looters stealing and breaking stuff and because of all these people going against other people that aren't their same skin color. We can put his heart back together by helping each other and loving EVERYONE.

And that is what we want to do. We do not want to break God's heart by doing bad/evil, but we want to put it all back together by doing something good, such as picking up trash at your community park or being friends with all types of people, no matter what they look like. I

choose my friends because of what is in their hearts. What's in yours?

I am 11 years old, and I know I have a voice, and I will not stay silent. I will share my voice with others, and that is what ALL of us should do to help make this better. ○

I want to first say thank you for the opportunity to hear your heart through your writing. Writing is a wonderful way of managing your thoughts and emotions by expressing them in a way that is helpful, especially in difficult times while moving forward. It also gives others, who may be different than you, a chance to hear your personal view and background of who you are and how you see the world. As I read your story, I feel your concern during these current times of chaos and confusion. It is evident in your article that you have good leadership qualities and values by offering solutions toward positive change and the importance of modeling God's love for others.

I really like your title, "Putting the Puzzle Back Together" and how you compared it to God's heart. A great writer challenges and inspires you to think of ways that can make a difference in your life or someone else's life. Your writing inspired me to seek God's word, and I found this verse. It says in John, 13:34 (NKJ), "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another." We can choose how we respond. As a child of God, we have God's divine love deposited in our inner being. We can allow that divine love inside us to respond and put back those pieces that heal us and make us whole.

By having a voice and responding rather reacting with violence or harsh words, we develop great communication skills for leadership. We need good leaders like you that truly make a difference. I want to encourage you to share your voice with others, one that empowers change.

Thank you for being bold, tenacious and loving. Much love to you,
Kimberly Owen, Licensed mental health therapist,
Eagle Women Rising, Davidson, NC



THE EARTH'S ARMY



GINNY

age 12, from NC

M

y name is Ginny, and I want to talk about a few things that I feel

strongly about. The problems that I am concerned with are things like deforestation, pollution, and climate change.

When I first heard that animals could go extinct, I was immediately angry. When I heard about the things that helped, and that it was mostly human interaction, I wanted to help stop it. But is there anything kids, or anyone, can do?

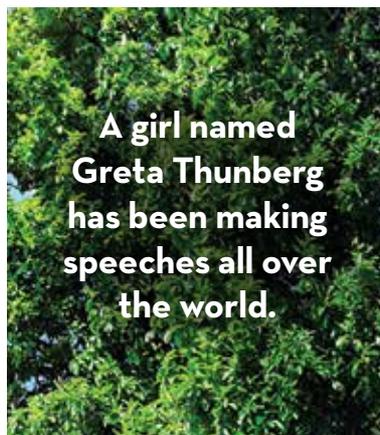


Let's start with the enormous amount of deforestation. Right now, almost 42 million trees are cut down a day. The paper that you wrote on in the last week took part in that amount. Think about how many trees are cut down in one week, and I am not going to be the one counting the weeks, years, even millennia that came before.

Trees are living things that we share this earth with. Most of you are probably wondering why I even bring it up. Plants, as you know, are just brainless things that do nothing but sit around and take up space. Right? Wrong! Plants are actually very interesting. They somehow know up and down, left and right. They provide oxygen and take carbon dioxide, which right now is clogging the atmosphere and melting the ice caps because there aren't enough plants and too many humans and machines. It is the reason we didn't have much snow this year. The plants know to spread their seeds far and wide. They even sometimes have wars between plants (not that often)! Plants are fascinating and, most likely, even smarter than we had ever imagined.

The problem just grows when

you think about pollution. The animals we love are dying because of the pollution that we put into the atmosphere. Ice is melting because of holes in the atmosphere where harmful light rays are getting through to our icy poles. When the poles are melting, it kills off penguins and polar bears and other animals that live on the ice. If we don't take action, these amazing animals could be extinct very soon.



Children all over the world are realizing that some of our leaders are not fixing the things that need to be righted. This is when we realize that it is up to kids to open their eyes. The challenge is that children have been told that we need to

leave things like this to the adults. But it's our future that's being ruined, and we should be allowed to fix it.

A girl named Greta Thunberg has been making speeches all over the world. She is from Sweden and has been talking about climate change for about two years now. She is around seventeen years old and is already doing things that many of our leaders refuse to do. She has been one of the many people I look up to. One girl has changed the thoughts of many people. Think about if there were many more people like her!

Many children have been thinking about ways that they can help. Many have been doing marches past the White House and down main streets. You can join them as well! Kids of all ages can do it. One thing that I have been doing is writing letters to companies asking them to stop burning fossil fuels and informing them of my concerns. One letter will not help, though. We need thousands of letters for that to work. This is something you can help with even stuck at home behind a desk!

Help me fix our future!

Our Earth needs an army! ○

Dear Ginny,

It is so encouraging to see your passion for a healthy environment! We all need clean air and water to survive and thrive. We all need the natural ecosystems to work well, so they can provide these things as well as food, shelter, oxygen, and a stable climate. Because many of the problems you mention have been caused by humans, humans must take responsibility to address them.

And indeed, as you say, children and young people around the world can make a difference. Your enthusiasm, energy, and challenging questions can help—so don't wait for the adults! Kids can change their own actions and certainly ask leaders in their families, communities, countries, and the world to do things that help our environment. I know of executives who have improved sustainability in their companies because their own children asked them how they were helping the earth. Our government reps at city, state and federal levels do read letters we send to them, and they pay attention to events organized by youth and others. For example, one of two recent peaceful rallies in Durham, NC about racial injustice were led by middle-schoolers, the other by college students—and the leaders are listening.

For any of you wondering what you can do that can have the most impact, talk with scientists, get the facts and data, and join up with inter-generational efforts. With a combination of youth (energy, enthusiasm, good questions) and elders (experience, wisdom, connections), we can do this! We will continue to strive toward environmental justice and toward healthy ecosystems for people and for the creatures with whom we share this planet.

—Alison Eagle, Scientist, Environmental Defense Fund, NC



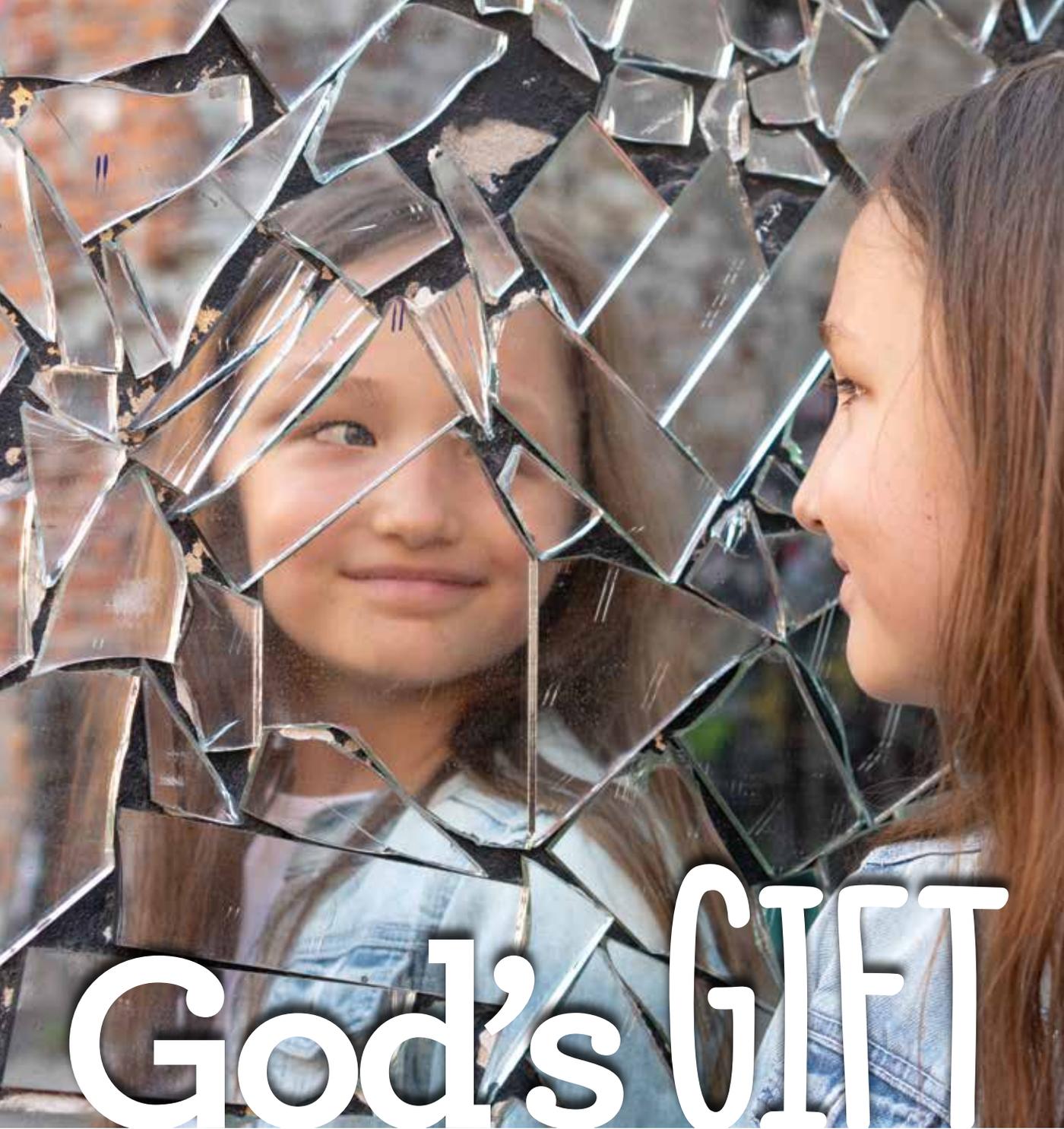


SOFIA

age 10, from NC

“One day me and my family got in the car. Before we went in the car, my mom asked me to put on a white shirt and jeans. During the ride I asked my mom where we were going, and she said, ‘We are going to a march.’”

And I said, ‘For what?’ And she told me we were gonna fight for the equality of Black people. When we started the march, I suddenly felt so empowered and courageous to fight for what I believed in. And it felt even more special because I am a Latina, and sometimes, we are overlooked. So standing up for others felt like I was standing up for myself . . . and the world.



God's GIFT



SARA

age 13, from NC

When you look in the mirror, what or who do you see? Judging

yourself and the things you do can sometimes be easy to do. I know it is for me. However, we are not alone.

Just about everyone you meet judges themselves harshly. Our friends do it, even the most popular people in school do it. This can be hard to believe sometimes

because, on the outside, their lives might look picture-perfect. However, nearly everyone we meet struggles with the same thing . . . comparison. In the age of social media and photo filters, comparing is so easy to do! We judge ourselves by the number of “likes” we get or don’t get. We judge ourselves why what someone has and we don’t. We can even look at ourselves more negatively because we don’t have as many followers.



**“WHEN YOU LOOK IN THE MIRROR, SEE THE GIFT YOU ARE,
AND REALIZE THAT THERE IS ONLY ONE YOU!”**

Sometimes, you might ask yourself, “How come their life is so much better than mine?” or “What can I do to be more like her?” And honestly, no one’s life is perfect and you can’t be JUST like everyone else so what’s the point in trying to be someone you’re not? Especially when what we get to see isn’t actually the full picture. Believe me, I get it. I understand what it’s like to constantly be comparing your clothes, looks, life, followers, social media likes, and friends to other people. It’s hard and it’s tiring.

Although, one specific thing has helped me get through these struggles: God’s word.

Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” You may be wondering what this means for you. Well, it simply means that God has created us in His own way, in His own image, and He wants us to know that.

Think about it like this: God is the potter, and we are the clay. God made millions of pots.

Even though there are so many, they are all so different. On the outside and inside. One can be rough and one can be smooth. One can be wide and one can be thin. The potter’s fingerprints are in different spots of the clay, therefore, the pot is different from the one next to it.

Something more relatable to think about would be a gift. God’s gift. We are God’s gift! He has made each and every one of us with deep thought, and He is so happy to give us to the world, but sometimes the thing we do most is point out the bad about that gift. God doesn’t wish this for us, just like we wouldn’t wish for our best friend to point out the things she doesn’t like about the gift we thoughtfully made her for her birthday.

As I come close, it’s important to restate the point I really hope you will understand: You are God’s beautiful gift. Try not to act or feel like you have to be anyone else other than yourself. When you look in the mirror, see the gift you are, and realize that there is only one you! You are a priceless! ●

Dear Sara,

What an important truth for all of us to be reminded of—that God loves us individually and uniquely. I often tell people that God does not do cookie cutters . . . he did not intend for each person to look alike, think alike, have the same ideas or beliefs, or enjoy the same talents and abilities. We serve a God who is creative, and one of the places that is best displayed is in humanity. You are the only you, which means that there will never be a person again with your exact unique blends of personality, experience, sense of humor, gifting, and perspectives. One of the greatest lessons we can all learn is that comparison is the thief of contentment. When we spend all of our time and energy comparing who we are to others around us, we rob ourselves of the joy of learning to be happy with who we are and celebrate the unique way that God made us! You were created for a unique purpose that only you can fill in this world. Seek his plan for your life and your divine design and live it to its fullest!

—Christie Love, Lead Pastor and author, Springfield, MO





SINCLAIR

age 13, from NC

Do Big Things FOR YOURSELF



Everyone has bad habits—biting their nails, over-thinking, or even picking a scab. Mine was following my friend around . . . not in an annoying or a stalker way but in a way to avoid being alone.

For example, a close friend and I had to pick a class. I was so excited to try a baking class. But she wanted to do sketching. I felt that if I chose the class I wanted, she would make new, better friends in the sketching class, and then we wouldn't have anything in common anymore, and have nothing to

talk about.

I was afraid of being lonely in my class. I was afraid of needing to meet new people. For me, making friends was not a hard thing, but it wasn't all that easy either. I allowed my anxiety to take over, and I decided to follow my friend to the sketching class that she elected to take. I picked the classes she picked, which caused me to miss out on the things I wanted to do. I just didn't want to be lonely. I thought that being like someone else would make me feel better about myself. But it did not. I just got sad and angry.

I knew my friend didn't care what class I took. She always went with her first choice. It did not occur to her to choose something that was important to me. Unlike me, she did not make what I wanted to do her priority. When it was time to pick a new class, I wanted to try baking this time, but she was satisfied with her choice. She said it was okay if I took baking without her, but I really wanted to follow her. Even though I really wanted to take the baking course, I refused to. And like a dog on a leash, I just followed right after her, feeling angry like it was her fault. We



never got to do anything I wanted to do, and it caused many arguments between us!

I learned that I had believed the lie that I don't matter—that what is important to me is not worthwhile. I followed someone around instead of doing what I wanted to do for fear of being lonely. I believed the lie that disregarding myself was going to make me feel better and happier. But it really didn't. All I needed to do was do what was important to me. But I didn't know that then. So I kept going on, not realizing the pointless drama I was creating. The bond I tried to help create, I was now pulling apart.

So if I had to go back, I would make a big change. I would pick the class I want to take. I would attempt to make new friends. And if making new friends didn't go the way I hoped, I would always have my friend as a friend. When someone is really a friend, nothing about her looks or personality, or what you like or don't like, will end your friendship. You're really going to regret not doing big things for yourself.

I am 13-year-old, rising 8th grader. I live with my dad, mom, and two younger sisters in NC. I love spending time with my friends and fashion design. ●

.....

What great insight you have Sinclair! You are looking back at your situation, regretting the decisions you made and are seeing what you can do better next time. Next time, you will surely decide for yourself and take the class you want! So many of us "pleasers" don't have the insight you have at your age and spend many years making decisions to please others rather than doing what will make us fulfilled and happy. I have done this many, many times and it always left me empty and regretful. Never give over your power of choice to others.

Enjoying our friends and wanting to be with them is different than aligning ourselves with what we think will make others happy and denying our true desires and ending up bitter. We cannot find fulfillment in others, we have to find it deep within. In the end, others respect us more when we make our own choices regardless of the outcome.

Sometimes, we will have to be brave and stand alone. Fawning after others never brings true joy and denying ourselves will keep us from growing into who we should be. This lesson will serve you well. Great job with seeing what happened and determining to make different choices next time around. You are growing!

*—Beth McHoul, retired CPM midwife,
co-founder of Heartline Ministries-Haiti and former director of Heartline Maternity Center.*



Creativity is
contagious,
pass it on.

~Albert Einstein





“Don’t wait for someone else to affirm your identity and strength. Let the truth rise up inside of you that you are worthy, you are strong, you are capable, and you are loved.

A girl who knows her worth can climb the highest mountains—with a smile on her face.”

~ Annabelle, age 17, CO



Annabelle is a teenage author whose first book was recently picked up by a publishing house in New York. We asked her to provide some encouragement to our girl writers.



BACK TO SCHOOL



BRAELYN

age 11, from NC

“ Back to school is sad and exciting. It’s sad because I’m changing schools and will miss my friends. It’s exciting because I have new school supplies, and I won’t be bored any more. I will meet new friends. And I’ll like going into school half the time and staying home half the time. If you’re starting a new school, be brave!”



SEPTEMBER 2020



Girl Doing LIFE ON A BOAT



MARY GRACE

age 13, from
somewhere on
the water

A lot of kids are working remotely for school this year, and I'm no exception. But in my case, my school is REALLY remote. I'm living on a boat!

In May, my family and I moved onto a boat full-time and began traveling around America's Great Loop. Our journey took us up the East Coast and through the New York Canal System. Now

we're in the Great Lakes, and we'll eventually come down the rivers and end up in the Gulf of Mexico. To complete the Great Loop, we will return to where we started in South Georgia.

Everyone asks me what it's like to live on a boat. That's a really hard question to answer because every day is different. Some days, we explore new places. Other days, we travel by boat. And some days are even a lot like being in



a regular home because we have to do school work or chores. Every once in a while we do all of those things!

Living on a boat can be a little bit of a challenge, but it's really cool, too. Here are my three favorite things about our life on our boat:

First, I love how there is so much marine biology involved. As long as I can remember I have dreamed of becoming a marine biologist (Thank you, Shark Week!) Now, this experience is slowly turning that dream into reality. My little brother likes to fish, and I have documented every animal he has caught (grass and the boat don't count). I can't wait to see how this experience will enhance my career.

I also enjoy seeing new places. Although it is sometimes odd to wake up and have to think about where I am, I love the variety. Travel is really a passion for my entire family. Exploring the different cities is educational and exciting. This summer we went to Jamestown, which was very special for me because I'd studied Jamestown in History the year before. To see it in person is something I won't forget.

And last, I like to spend time with my family. I will admit it's hard to be with each other 24/7 in a small space. Also, we do sometimes argue over little things, like who moved something on the boat or who is making too much noise in the morning (both of those are always my little brother!) Nonetheless, I love it because of all the great memories we make together.

Sometimes, I miss seeing my friends and neighbors. Or I miss my yard and having a big bedroom. But when I think about all of the experiences I've gained, it outweighs anything I miss. We've made new boat friends, and I almost always have a place to swim.

You can keep up with our family's adventures on our social media, @momwithamap, or on our website where we post blogs about all the fun things we get to do: www.MomWithAMap.com.. ●

Mary Grace,

The opportunity you have now to embrace change every day will change the way you see the world for the rest of your life. You see how people are different and the same from one town to the next, you foresee this as an opportunity for your future instead of an obstacle to a "normal" life, and you are embracing that truly being home is carried within yourself. You have your priorities set in the right direction, wherever the water takes you.

You are so far ahead of where I was at when I was your age. My dad was a professional fishing guide, so I spent my summers on a boat. I was always so focused on what my friends were doing and what I was missing out on. I know I missed much of the wonder, learning, and quality family time you are absorbing.

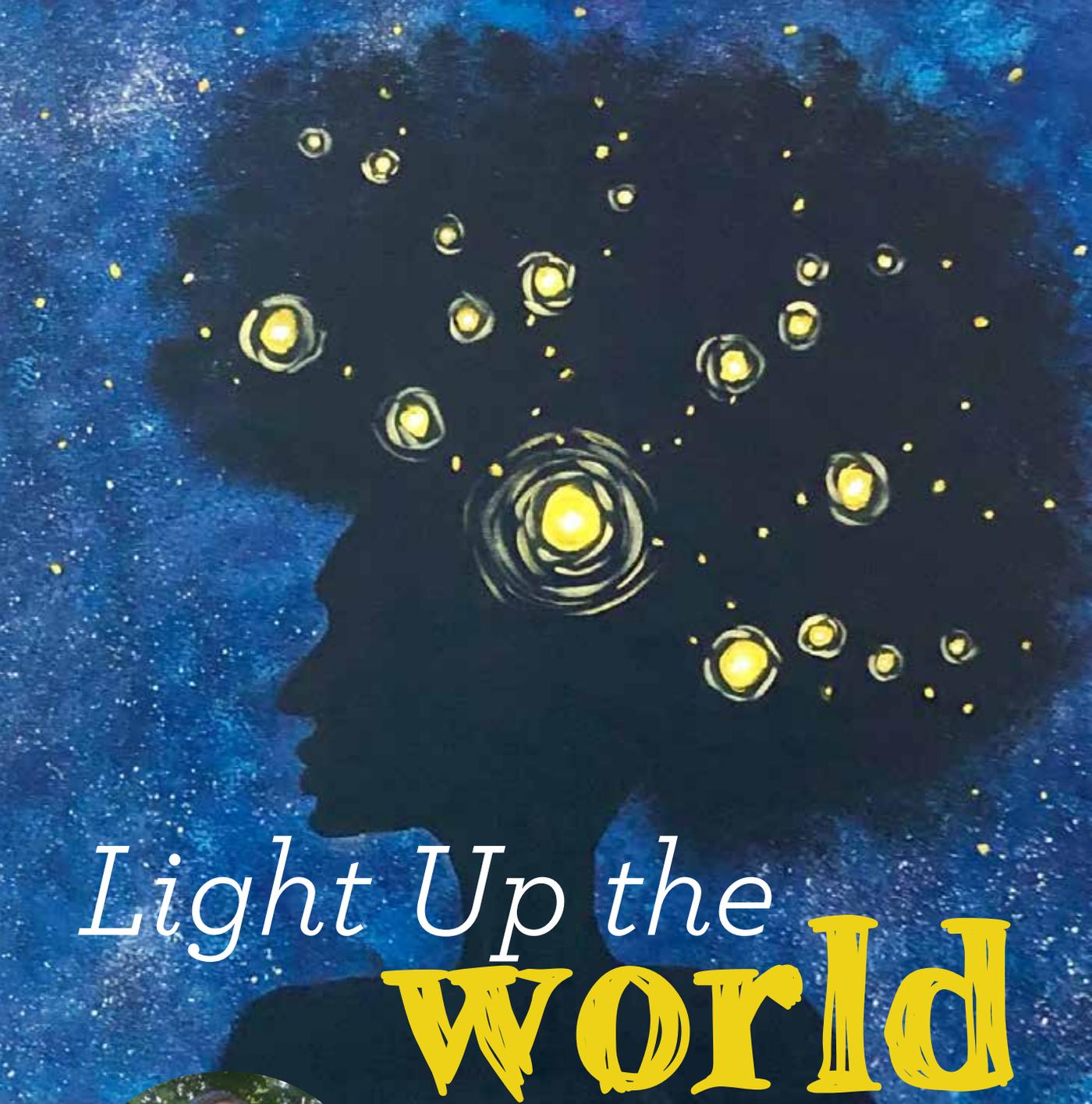
Always remember how experiences that build us can be a source of empathy. When we see the world from a different view, we can understand how others might, too. I can't wait to see you being consulted during Shark Week as a marine biologist with extensive expertise in that field!

And make lots of noise when you can; girls can be noisy, too!

—Katherine Young, Professional Creative and author, best known for her globally viral Girl's Life meme, calling out gender bias in media and her new book How to Discuss Politics Online.



**GirlStory thanks Katherine Young. Her meme referenced above was the first nudge that led to the idea of creating GirlStory magazine.*



Light Up the world



CHLOE

age 11, from NC

H

i, my name is Chloe. I am eleven years old, and I love to read and write. That is why I was so excited to get the opportunity to write for *GirlStory* magazine.

My article is inspired by Ruby Bridges. Ruby Bridges was the first Black girl to integrate an all-white school in the 1960s. Have you ever felt like people think you can't do something just because you're a

girl? I've felt that way before.

I love to read. Most times, I read books that people think are above my reading comprehension level. I was homeschooled for most of my life, so my mom would let me read whatever I was ready for. When I went to public school, they put me in whatever reading level they thought I was ready for, but I knew it wasn't challenging enough for me. I am also very interested in things like science, engineering, and building. Sometimes, people think girls can't do stuff like that.

Here's a little more about Ruby



Bridges. In 1960, she and two other girls of the same race were chosen to integrate in an all-white public school. Ruby's parents were the only ones to send their daughter. The other parents were too scared to send their children because of the threats being made toward Black people in those days. Ruby was in a class by herself because the other white families didn't want their children near her. Every morning when she walked into school, she had to be escorted by officers because there would be crowds of people yelling cruel things. Someone even threatened to poison her school lunch, which caused her to stop eating anything that wasn't packaged. All the teachers refused to work with her except for one, Barbara Henry.

Ms. Henry believed in Ruby, which allowed her to focus on her love for education and learning instead of focusing on the obstacles that were set up to make her fail. I learned from this story that having someone who believes in you can help you achieve anything. Just like Ruby, throughout my years of education, I've had two people who have believed in me. They are my mom, who was my homeschool teacher, and Mrs. Foshee, who was my third-grade public school teacher. Mrs. Foshee would

allow me to borrow books from her personal home library based on my interest level, not the suggested reading level. Because of their encouragement, I now have the confidence to do things I am passionate about. Remember, you can do anything you put your mind to.

The painting is one I did and was inspired by my article. ○



Dear Chloe,

First, I want to say that I love your painting! When I see all the lightbulbs you have painted in the girl's head, it remind me of all the ideas that a girl can possible have. I am also excited to read that you understand the importance of having others encourage us in our goals and dreams. It can be scary at times to pursue our goals when it feels that we are alone. When we know that we have one person cheering us on, it gives us courage to continue following our dreams.

Reading your article about your love of books and Ruby Bridges has made me think about my time in elementary school. I loved learning, like you do, when I was your age, and it started with my Kindergarten teacher named Mrs. Dijols. I love learning so much that I decided to work at a university. I have been here for fifteen years. Also, I received a Master's degree in Education while working at the university in 2015. It is a degree one receives after graduating from a four-year college or university. It was a special moment in my life because Mrs. Dijols attended my graduation (see above).

I wondered how Ruby Bridges must have felt being the only Black child attending an all-white elementary school. I have Ruby Bridges's book that she wrote about her experiences called, *Through My Eyes*. Ruby was six years old. It must have been scary for her to attend school every day during a time that some people did not like the idea of integration. I am so happy that Ruby had her mother and Ms. Henry for support during an important moment in American history. I am happy that you have your mother and Mrs. Forshee in your life to help you with your education. Education gives us choices and allows us to explore different possibilities we can consider. I appreciate you and your passion for learning. Don't stop. If you are interested in science and engineering, then go for it. Light up the world and shine bright. You can count on me, too!

Love,

Kimberly Sakil, M.Ed, Administrator at Temple University, Philadelphia, PA





LILA

age 10, from MI



AVA

age 14, from MI

CLEAN UP THE WORLD

LILA:

Water pollution is a huge problem in our oceans and lakes. Many kids don't think they can do anything to help. But you can do a lot to help the environment!

Large cruise ships are dumping millions of pieces of trash in the ocean each year. You can reach out to big organizations and the government and ask them to force cruise ships to stop this tragedy.

And when you leave your plastic water bottles on the beach, you are putting harmful chemicals in the ocean waters where beautiful sea creatures live. Pick up your trash and other people's trash off the beach and recycle it.

If we all do our part to help, our waters will be clean and healthy again.

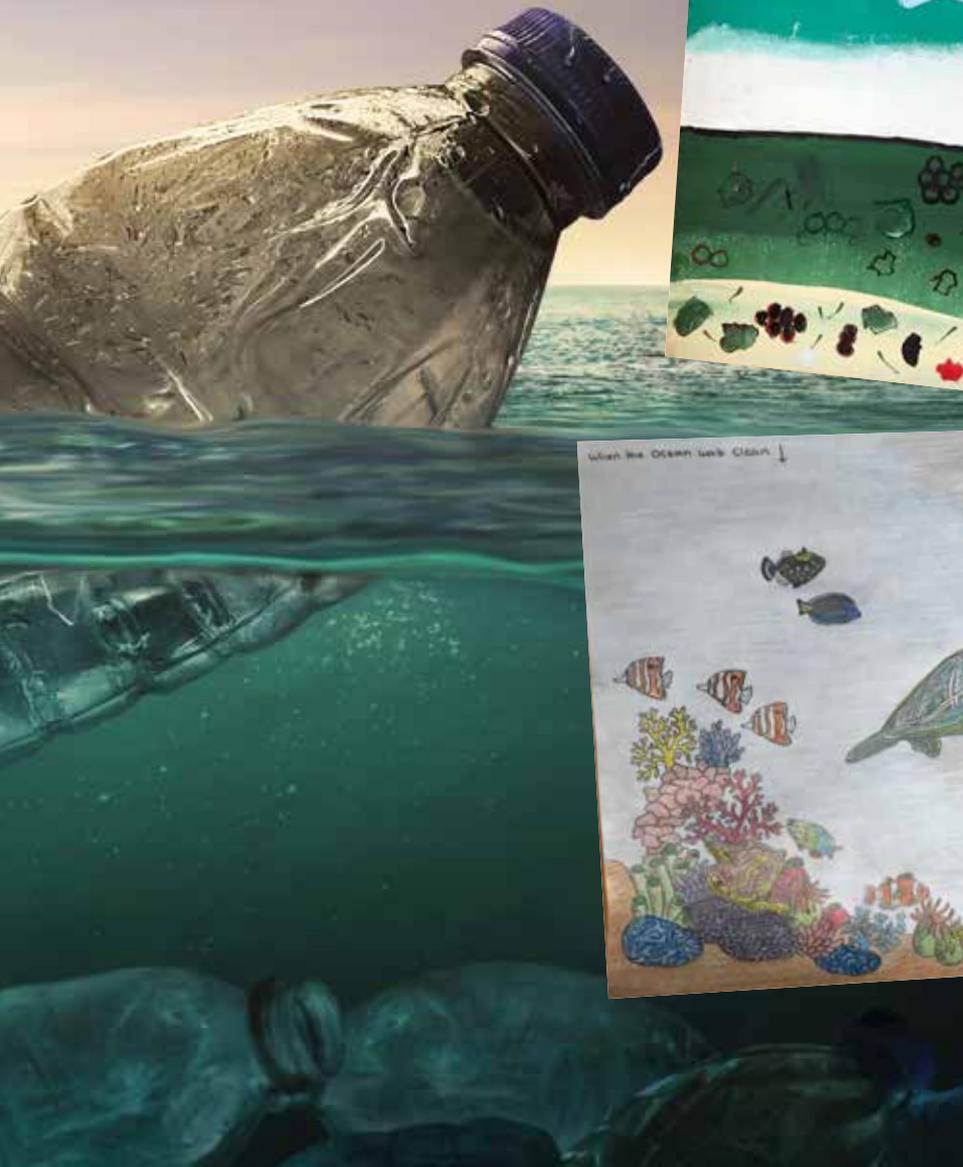
AVA:

Every time you leave a piece of trash somewhere, first think of the damage you'll do. Now that little action turned into a big deal.

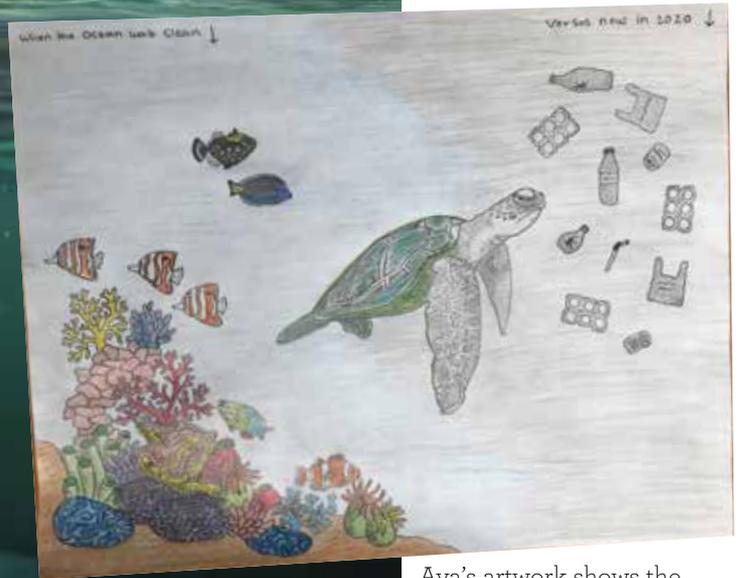
It's simple. That trash you're about to leave outside will cross an animal off the healthy, living list.

One day, if we don't work to stop the damage we're doing, Earth will be ruined—all because we didn't care enough about the future to change our bad behaviors.

Don't forget that when you leave that piece of trash in nature, it doesn't just disappear!



Lila's artwork compares Earth's oceans in 1920 and in 2020.



Ava's artwork shows the vibrant colors and creatures of our ocean without trash and compares it to the dull and dying ocean ecosystem created by dumping trash.

Thematically, I thought it was neat how both Ava and Lila linked their artwork together to show the degradation of bodies of water over time. I found the gradient from a colorful healthy ocean to one that is gray and lifeless alarming and illustrative of the state of our planet. To paraphrase from Paul Hawken's book, *The Ecology of Commerce*, humans have evolved to avoid the thought of waste. Industrial society parallels this behavior. To be clear, this mirroring of human behavior does not excuse big corporations for their decisions, especially when it comes at the expense of other people's health. When we dispose of industrial waste, we put it in someone else's environment.

Both girls touch on the idea that trash does simply not disappear but stays in the environment. I would like to take this message a step further. Even when we do pick up our trash, it ends up in the ocean. We operate in a system that is linear, or one where products are not recycled or waste is not designed to be part of the natural biological cycle. I would encourage everyone to look at circular waste and circular economies as they learn more about the waste cycle.

—Margaux Escutin, Environmental activist, Durham, NC



An Interview with a

TOTALLY RAD GIRL



TATUM

age 13, from CO

GirlStory: You're part of a mountain bike team. Why did you choose to get involved in mountain biking?

Tatum: I am a part of The Cycle Effect, which is an amazing program that gives girls the opportunity to ride crazy fun mountain biking trails and teaches the girls how to become polite, strong, smart, and kind women. I have been mountain biking for a majority of my life, and it is something that I am very passionate about, as well as something that my family does all the time. Riding with The Cycle Effect has made riding much more enjoyable because I get to ride with hardcore girls my age. All the girls on the team are so nice and encouraging, which always helps when you are finishing a hard ride.

GirlStory: Would you consider yourself to be more of a shy person or an outgoing person?

Tatum: I would consider myself more of an outgoing person because I do like making friends and meeting new people. The Cycle Effect has definitely helped me in that department. By having to interact with new girls on the team, I have become much more comfortable talking to new people.

GirlStory: Tell us about the kind of friendships you've built on the team. What makes someone a good friend?

Tatum: There are so many sweet girls on the team, and I have made many friendships with girls that I would've normally been scared to talk to. I have also strengthened many previous friendships. I have met some of my best friends through the team. Having good friends is something that is very important to me. If someone is a good friend, they are caring and kind but even more importantly, encouraging and like me for me. I see a lot of that on the team, which

makes riding even more fun.

GirlStory: Is there someone who you think looks up to you? Who is it, and what do you think they look up to you about?

Tatum: I personally look up to so many people older and younger than me but someone that I think looks up to me is one of my very, very good friends, Carla Hahn. Clara and I meet in 6th grade, and we are now in 8th grade together. Our friendship has grown so much through The Cycle Effect, especially. I definitely look up to her about so many things, but I also know that she looks up to me as well. I have been riding for much longer than her, and I think that is something that she looks up to me about. She always asks me for tips and how she can get better on the technical sections of the trails. Carla has become a fantastic rider over the short period of time that we have been on the team together. When we are riding together and seeing each other grow and make mistakes . . . that is what makes our friendship even more spectacular and close.

GirlStory: We love that answer. Being real and having the freedom to make mistakes and grow a friendship is awesome! How would you describe the perfect day?

Tatum: My perfect day would consist of many activities for sure. I would spend lots of time with my family and friends. We would go and do something that we all enjoy such as, riding our bikes, going to the lake, and playing games. We would eat our favorite foods—mine would be sushi. In the evening, we would watch movies and spend more time together.

GirlStory: If you could snap your fingers and fix one problem in the world, which issue would you instantly fix?



“ *There are so many things that I would love to fix in the world but if I had to choose one it would be equality for all races and genders.* ”



Tatum: There are so many things that I would love to fix in the world but if I had to choose one it would be equality for all races and genders. The Cycle Effect has taught me to stand up and fight for what I believe in so that would be the first thing that I would do.

GirlStory: What is the most difficult thing in your life right now?

Tatum: The most difficult thing in my life right now would have to be school. I normally don't struggle very much with school, but this year, it is so different and there is a lot to get used to with the COVID Protocol.

GirlStory: We don't think you're alone in that school struggle! What made you laugh today?

Tatum: Today, my dad made me laugh when he picked me up from a long day at school and having to wear a mask. All my friends also made me laugh today, which is always a good thing.

GirlStory: Do you want to share anything else with our readers?

Tatum: Thank you to The Cycle Effect for being such a huge part of my life. I couldn't ask for a better team

GirlStory: Thank YOU, Tatum. You are a rock star! ○

WHY MOUNTAIN BIKING is the

PERFECT COVID-19 SPORT



D

uring the Covid-19 pandemic, many team sports have been canceled because there is no way to safely play contact sports, such as soccer, football, basketball, and many others without putting yourself and others at risk.

However, mountain biking could be the exception, and here's why:

First of all, mountain biking isn't necessarily a team sport. You don't need to shove other players or make contact with the same playing ball that multiple other kids have touched. You can easily train and practice alone; you don't even need a mountain in some cases. For example, fine techniques and skills can be refined in everything from a skate park to a sidewalk curb.

Second, it is difficult not to social distance on a mountain bike. Being at least six feet apart is almost an unspoken rule, even without a pandemic. This enables basic safety precautions. If you're riding on someone's tail, and they wipe out, the chances of you avoiding the wreck and preventing a multiple-person wipe out are slim. It is easier to social distance on a mountain bike than it is off of one.

Thirdly, even with races being canceled, it is still

easy to mountain bike. You just have to get on and start biking. You can bike in just about any weather, terrain, or temperature—that is, if you're tough and committed enough.

I personally play a lot of sports, but mountain biking is one of the few that I've been able to continue. Soccer leagues in my town are closed, so I can't play soccer. Because there are no soccer games, I can't referee them like I usually do. COVID-19 canceled the end of ski season for me, and rock climbing (in a gym) isn't really an option. Touching the same handholds as hundreds of other people? No thanks.

Mountain biking has continued to be a readily available sport for me, and I've never been as committed to it as I am now that I don't have much else to do. My fitness has been better than ever thanks to the regular weekly biking I've been doing, and it is just an overall great activity to participate in. ○



INDICA

age 13, from CO



KATE

age 13, from NC

“

On Instagram and Tik Tok, you always see girls with “ideal bodies.” It is important to remember that not everything is how it seems. You can’t compare yourself to what you see online because there is no such thing as a perfect body.

All bodies are beautiful!

Always be confident, and remember that girls support girls!

”

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way we view, play and engage with others in sport. Indica makes an excellent case for mountain biking in terms of a sport that people can engage in with relative ease in terms of physical distancing, while at the same time maintaining a level of competition that is comfortable for the individual’s level of expertise. Biking or cycling can also be enjoyed by adaptive athletes as well, of fitness in both a physical and mental sense. Perhaps now, more than ever, it is important to focus on the mental fitness aspect. The mere action of preparing to ride and stepping outside into the fresh air can be extremely therapeutic. And as Indica mentioned, the fact you can mountain bike in all types of weather certainly makes this sport activity appealing to many. Perhaps there are some who feel mountain biking to be intimidating or requiring some higher level of expertise. While I am certain that is true for the most elite riders, I feel Indica has also illustrated that mountain biking is an activity that can be enjoyed at many levels on various terrain while still offering the opportunity to distance as needed. This furthermore makes mountain biking a great activity to try in pandemic times.

Indica’s analysis of mountain biking is on target and illustrates many common themes in sport and life. Communication, commitment, and the ability to maintain active physical and mental fitness, especially in challenging times.

—Lori Okimura, Executive Board Member at Angel City Sports, Los Angeles, CA



THE DAWN OF

SUNSETS



It seems that change has become our new constant, uncertainty our new reality. Never had I thought that such basic things would be taken away from us. From the day we are born, the first show of affection comes from a kiss, a hug, a smile; those aspects are integral to our communal identity as humans. They seemed to be something so rooted in society that nothing had the power to take them away. And then the storm came.

Now the only opportunity I get to appreciate the wind on my face, the rustling leaves, the dewdrops on the flower petals, is when I walk my dog.

As I continue along the never-changing route, a man runs past me, also enjoying the taste of normality that the outside provides. I smile, but strangely, I get no response. On the other side of the street, I spot a fellow classmate and smile, yet once again, I receive the same eerie stillness as a response. My face

became a sauna, with the protective mask trapping all of the heat and bringing out the sticky sweat. Suddenly, as I wiggle my face to ease the itchiness, I feel my eyes crinkling, and it hits me. My smile was hidden. The salutatory gesture that I used as a simple show of compassion seemed to be trapped behind bars, prisoner to the invisible beast that put the world to a halt. I had never reflected upon the power of a smile, what it communicates, how it connects us to others and makes our community tighter. Now, we are only left with the shadow of a smile, our scrunched eyes. We hope it is enough to show people around us we care, we are present, and we wish we could say our usual hellos with a smile. They say that eyes are the gateway to the soul, but I have realized that smiles are the keys that truly open that tunnel.

I am proud to consider myself a veteran of change. Having lived in five countries and moving on to my sixth, change is familiar—at least I thought it was. Joining a call with my friends, I

am met with suspicious silence and cryptic looks.

“What’s wrong?” I ask, waiting to uncover the joke that was undoubtedly the foundation of my friends’ strange gazes.

“I’m leaving,” my friend says. Out of our closely-knit group of three, two of us were moving to different countries at the same time.

Confused, I respond, “Yeah, I know. Are you starting to feel the ‘ending’ jitters?”

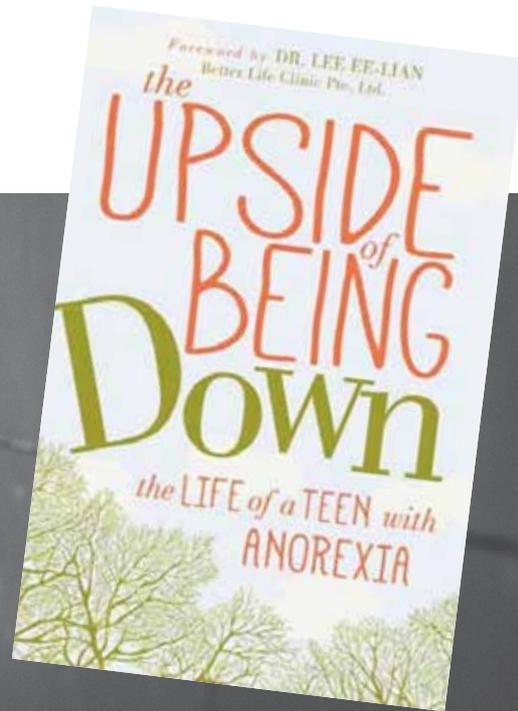
“No, you don’t get it,” she retorts. “I’m leaving in two weeks.” The same silence I was greeted with now takes over once again.

“My parents bought the first airplane ticket they could find. We don’t know when they are going to close international borders, and we can’t risk being stuck here.” I remember earlier that day the interminable phone calls my parents made, trying to figure out a way to get to our next destination. Moving had always been a challenge. However, it had never been such an intricate puzzle in which one had to strategically place the pieces



CAROLINA

age 15 from U.S.
Military Base in
Colombia



according to the opening of international borders, flights, and personal safety.

“We aren’t going to see each other again, are we?” No response. I didn’t need one.

Endings can be new beginnings; but sometimes, they are merely endings, and that’s what this was. I wished I could go and hug her, tell her how grateful I was for her friendship in person, but the strict quarantine imposed by the government was the ultimate dead-end. I wasn’t prepared for craving an inevitable goodbye and not being able

to have it. We run from change, from roadblocks, from dead ends, but I needed the closure, the hugs, the “I love yous,” and the “we will meet agains.”

This year has been one full of transforming hellos and good-byes. We have all been forced to reflect on what we have but don’t appreciate, on what we have lost but not let go, on what has changed but will stay with us forever. Nevertheless, we have come together, created strong bonds of empathy and understanding. From appreciating the newfound heroes, the essential

front-line workers, to sitting together mindfully at the dining table as a family, we, too, have evolved. That evolution and eagerness to take care of our loved ones is something that will never be taken away from us, no matter the battles we have to fight. ○

**Carolina is a published author! Her book, The Upside of Being Down: The Life of a Teen with Anorexia, which she wrote when she first became a teenager, was released by Morgan James Publishing in June 2020. It’s available at your favorite bookstore.*

I loved reading this reflection, I can feel the emotion and pain you are feeling! Each time we move, I always say “see you later” to friends I have made with the hope that this isn’t goodbye, and one day our paths will cross again. But sometimes, as you know, “see you later” is actually “goodbye,” and it is so hard. As a military family, each summer seems to be full of see you laters. Full of hugs and sometimes tears and last minute memories. And this year, it has felt as if we have been cheated. So many friends I saw in February have now moved on to the next assignment without the ability to gather together again.

It has been hard for me, but for my kids, it is even harder. I have always wondered how they see the world on the side of each move or goodbye of friends, and hearing your story reminds me that the emotions I feel are not so different from that of my children. Thank you for sharing your experience. It reminds me how hard saying goodbye is, not only on me but my kids as well.

—Amanda Huffman, Women of the Military Podcast, former Air Force officer, Fairfax, VA (DC area)





MCKENNA

age 11 from MO

RINGS

A SHORT STORY



In the blazing hot Georgia heat, you could barely hear the banging of a hammer on a large oak tree named Rings.



“HEY! What are you doing?!” Thomas belted angrily.

“Mama told me to hang up these trespassing signs, what does it look like?” The girl chimed mischievously.

“But this is MY tree. If anything, you’re the one trespassing!” Thomas thundered.

The girl sighed and said, annoyed, “Fine, whatever. Have your stupid tree! I’ll go find another.”

The crickets were chirping as loud as they possibly could, and the night sky looked as if it were flooded with moonlight and fog. Everything was covered with darkness, when all of a sudden . . . the large oak dropped one of its bright red autumn leaves. Thomas was left thinking of his tree that silent night.

“I love you, Rings,” Thomas pondered.

Then one of Rings’s leaves blew in. It was her way of communicating. The chickens were clucking loudly as the bright morning sun made everything glow.

“Thomas! Go grab your stuff from that tree of yours,” Thomas’s dad demanded.

“What—why?” Thomas gulped with a heavy heart.

Thomas ran through the golden wheat, and with each step he took, the wheat slapped his leg; it hurt but he was worried about his best friend. Finally, the endless slapping had stopped. His leg was as red as a tomato. Now it was just grass. The grass was bright green and had not been mowed in for what seemed like forever. The cows grazed as if they were in slo-mo, and the horses whined as Thomas walked by; they were all startled by the mechanic chainsaw’s sound.

“Wait! What are you doing to Rings!?” Thomas shouted at his neighbor.

“You blind or somein’, son? I’m cuttin’ down this here tree, so watch out!” His neighbor grunted.

“No!” Thomas screamed so loudly that some of his neighbors mistook him as a mountain lion.

A tear of Thomas’s dropped on the stump, he looked around wondering if anybody was there. No one was there—not one person, animal, or thing.

The large oak’s trunk lay there, looking dead. Thomas ran over and hugged the dead tree and sobbed on the trunk.

The trunk of Rings was gone; they used it all for firewood, and all that was left was her stump. Thomas had no friends except Rings. Rings was his one and only, and now she was gone. No Rings, treehouse, or friends. Thomas was all alone now with nothing to do, so he counted her rings. Seventy-two years. She was stuck, motionless for seventy-two years.

“Well . . . at least you finally earned your name, and on the bright side, we’re still together,” Thomas whispered with tears in his bright green eyes.

One of Rings’s bright red leaves fell from where she used to stand. It was a sign that not only will her spirit always be with him, but she would always be there for him and love him with all her sappy heart. His bright green eyes once again filled with tears and fell onto the stump.

With each tear he shed came another leaf. ○

Dear McKenna,

You have shared a real and emotionally-raw story with your readers! Your description of friendship pulls at our heart-strings and makes us realize what true, devoted friendship looks like. Not only have you painted a vivid picture with your colorful descriptions, but you’ve narrated a plot that is beautifully transparent. I love how your story ends with a beckon of hope, thus indicating that true friendship is never really lost . . . there is always the ghost of memories and companionship lingering in the midst of our present circumstances. Your writing is remarkable, and I encourage you to continue with your natural inclination toward plot development that you’ve so wonderfully cultivated at such a young age. Who knows! Maybe one day, I’ll be reading a New York Times bestseller of yours!

—T.E. Price, Author of *Love’s True Colors* and *Take Flight*, heading to Australia



comics!

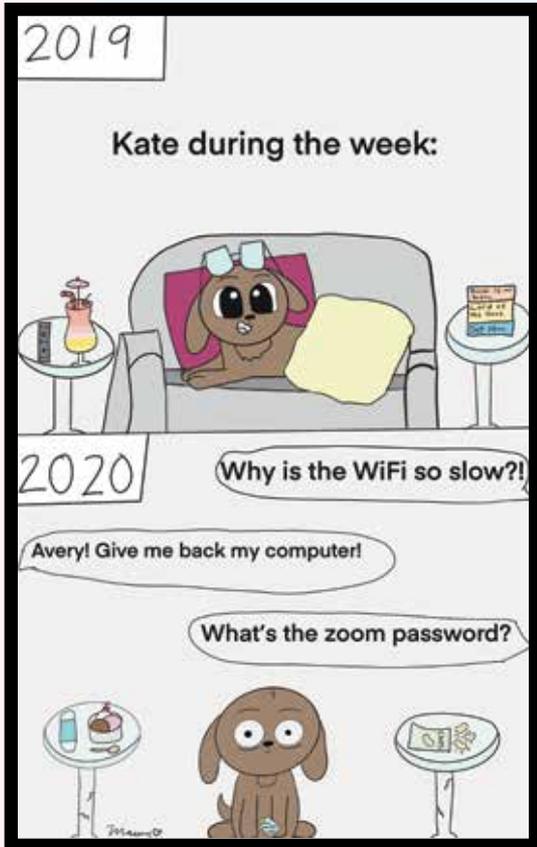
ADVENTURES OF



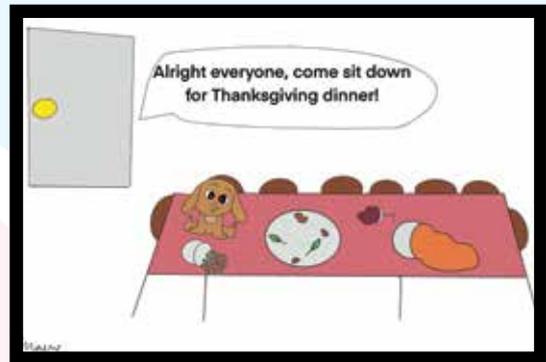
Kate

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!

Quarantine Kate!



Kate couldn't wait...LOL!

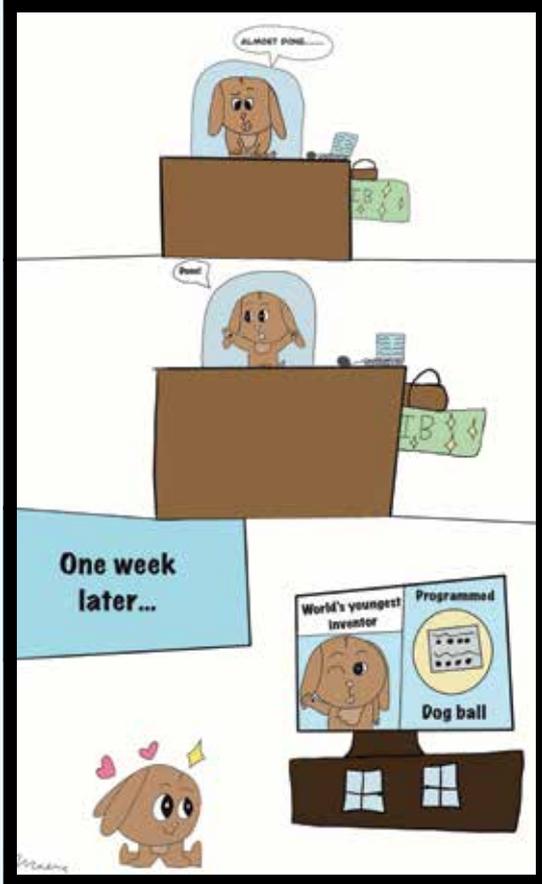




MAEVE

age 11, from NJ

An Inventive Pup



Happy New Year Kate!

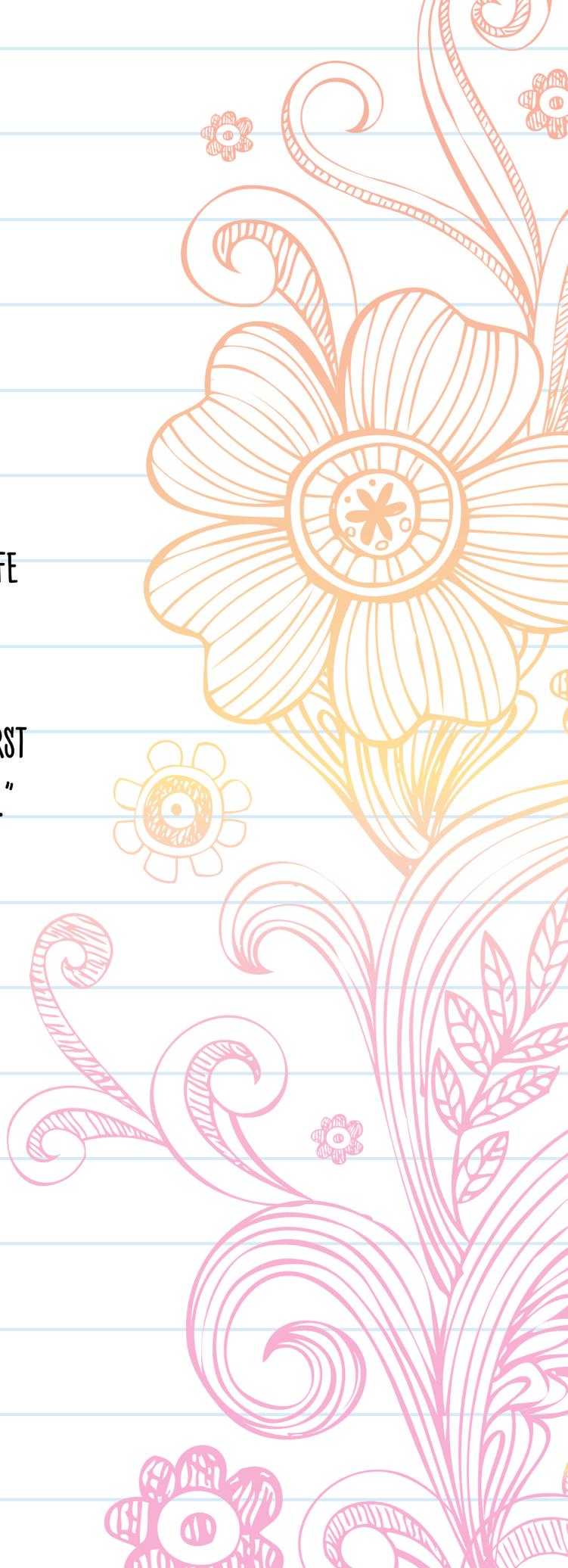


Meet Kate's Friends



"AND BY THE WAY, EVERYTHING IN LIFE
IS WRITABLE ABOUT IF YOU HAVE THE
OUTGOING GUTS TO DO IT, AND THE
IMAGINATION TO IMPROVISE. THE WORST
ENEMY TO CREATIVITY IS SELF-DOUBT."

~ SYLVIA PLATH



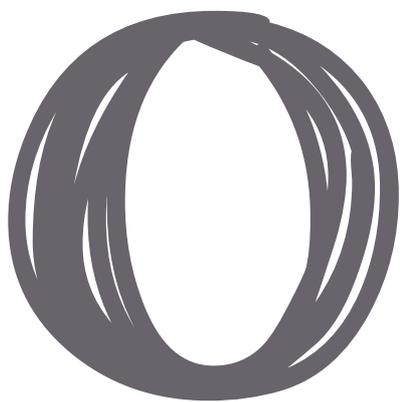


NOVEMBER 2020





My STORY



n June 1, 2005, a new story was born in Los Angeles. No, it wasn't by Stephen King or J.K. Rowling. It belonged to me, Jacqueline Marie. My story is not one thing. It is my struggles, my triumphs, and my passion for leadership.

Chapter One: Phoenix, Arizona

The Thanksgiving sun set; my adoring mother put six-month-old me snug into bed. As she gave my older sister Lexi a bath, she heard a weird noise coming from my room. When she entered, she saw me seizing in agony. Panicked, she raced me to Phoenix Children's Hospital. That's where we received the dreadful news: I was born with epilepsy. A night of terror ruined a day of thanks.



JACKIE

age 15, from CA

javelin shot put discus

Chapter Two: Years of Sports, Hospital Visits, Medication, and Seizures

From the time I stepped on my first soccer field at three, the adrenaline from being on any type of field kept me going. It was the only place where it did not matter what was wrong with me, I could still play. And I was great at it. Every goal scored or basket shot kept me sane. But through it all, my

mom worried how much time was left. When I was eight years old, I learned that I was eligible for brain surgery to end my seizures. I was too excited to care about the risks or how long I wouldn't be able to play sports because I knew that I would finally be a normal kid.

On January 24, 2014 at UCLA hospital, I endured nine hours of intense brain surgery. With five days post surgery behind me,

over 100 staples, and one heck of a swollen face, it was time for a check up. The doctor told me to lift my right side. I did. He told me to lift my left. I tried and tried, but it felt like a bowling ball was on it. The doctor said it was still a little swollen—it didn't seem serious. Ten days post surgery, at home, staples removed, my mom realized something was wrong. The left side of my face had swollen and I

couldn't move it; I was immediately driven to the hospital. Several tests later, results showed I had suffered a stroke. My world went dark, and my motivation to do anything halted. I now had weakness and tremors on the left side of my body.

My dream of being a professional athlete slipped through my fingers. But I was determined to fight.

Chapter Three: A Time of Greatness

Although I was still not as good as I used to be two years post surgery, I had relearned to play all my favorite sports and adapt to my new life. My struggle to get back to sports was hard. It was like you were teaching a baby to walk again, but as an eight-year-old. The stares and looks didn't bother me because I wanted to be back on the field. But it wasn't the same. Everyone was better than me. I felt weak and insecure. Watching the 2016 Olympics, I saw an ad of

I knew there were
many kids like me
whose love of sports
was stripped away
in a blink of an eye.
I wanted to
support them.

disabled athletes playing sports. I thought, "Those are people like me." For the first time in years, I didn't feel alone. In January of 2017, I went to my first ever para track and field clinic and discovered javelin, shot put, and discus. For the past three years, I've played adaptive sports and set two national records in track and field.

Chapter Four: Being a Good Community Member

I knew there were many kids like me whose love of sports was stripped away in a blink of an eye. I wanted to support them. I am now a track and field coach at my old middle school and a student ambassador for Angel City Sports, a sports organization for disabled children. I teach other Paralympic athletes, like Willie, how to throw the javelin. Willie was outside in front of his house in Inglewood when he was shot by a drive-by shooter and paralyzed from the waist down. Now, he and I speak together about how our disabilities are blessings in disguise. We may have one less ability than other kids, but we can still change the world.

I am still writing my story, working to get onto the Summer 2021 Para Junior World Championships Team and preparing for my sophomore year. I hope to overcome all the obstacles I face in life and show I can always beat the odds. ●

Dear Jackie,

Thank you for sharing your amazing story of acceptance, belief, challenge, engagement, and resilience! All of which it sounds like you have decided to "play forward" to inspire others!

As you wrote so eloquently, the biggest value in sport participation is using it to "figure yourself out"—what makes you tick, what gets you engaged and challenged, and what makes you feel empowered and happy. Your story reminds all of us that our outcomes—be it in athletics, academics, music, theatre, arts, or relationships—are driven by and impacted by how we think about ourselves and our situations.

In working with elite and pro athletes to have empowering sport experiences where their outcomes match their capabilities, we find that it is literally only a 3% difference in performance between the athlete who wins the gold medal at the Olympic games and the athlete who does not make the team. Usually, the person who rises to the top is the one who can identify the actions, thoughts and behaviors that contribute to their positive results and you, Jackie, have done just that, developing a solid foundation of emotional skills upon which all of your athletic, academic and mentoring talents will continue to blossom!

Jackie, while I can't promise you that "figuring yourself out" guarantees you will make the Junior World Championship Team, I can tell you that it gives you the best chance while allowing you to continue to fully enjoy and embrace that process. Keep being you :) (and let me know when you make the team!).

Warmly, Caroline Silby, Ph.D., internationally recognized sports psychologist and author of *Games Girls Play: Understanding and Guiding Young Female Athletes*, Maryland





CARTER

age 11, from NC

What I love about the holiday season is doing all the Christmas traditions, like hanging ornaments and having baking day with my Grandma, sisters, and cousins. Also, it is very fun to give gifts to people that mean a lot to me! One of the best parts of Christmas is being together with my family and friends and making new memories!! I love Christmas Eve when I always have traditions with other extended family members. And making Christmas cards that say, "Merry Christmas and have a Happy New Year!"



WORDS MATTER: A SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Shavon sat next to me in 7th-grade English. She wore Guess jeans, sweaters with shoulder pads, and designer perfume. She was popular. I was not. I was the new girl who couldn't figure out what to do with her curly hair and hadn't saved up enough babysitting money for trendy clothes.

Shavon groaned when Mr. McKinnon, our English teacher, assigned an essay. When he announced we would be reading it aloud to the class, she fell out of her chair in agony while the class laughed at her antics. I pretended to be annoyed but was secretly excited. I had something to say.

That night, I went home and wrote about how strange and wonderful it had been to move from the suburbs of Detroit, Michigan to our small Alaskan town.

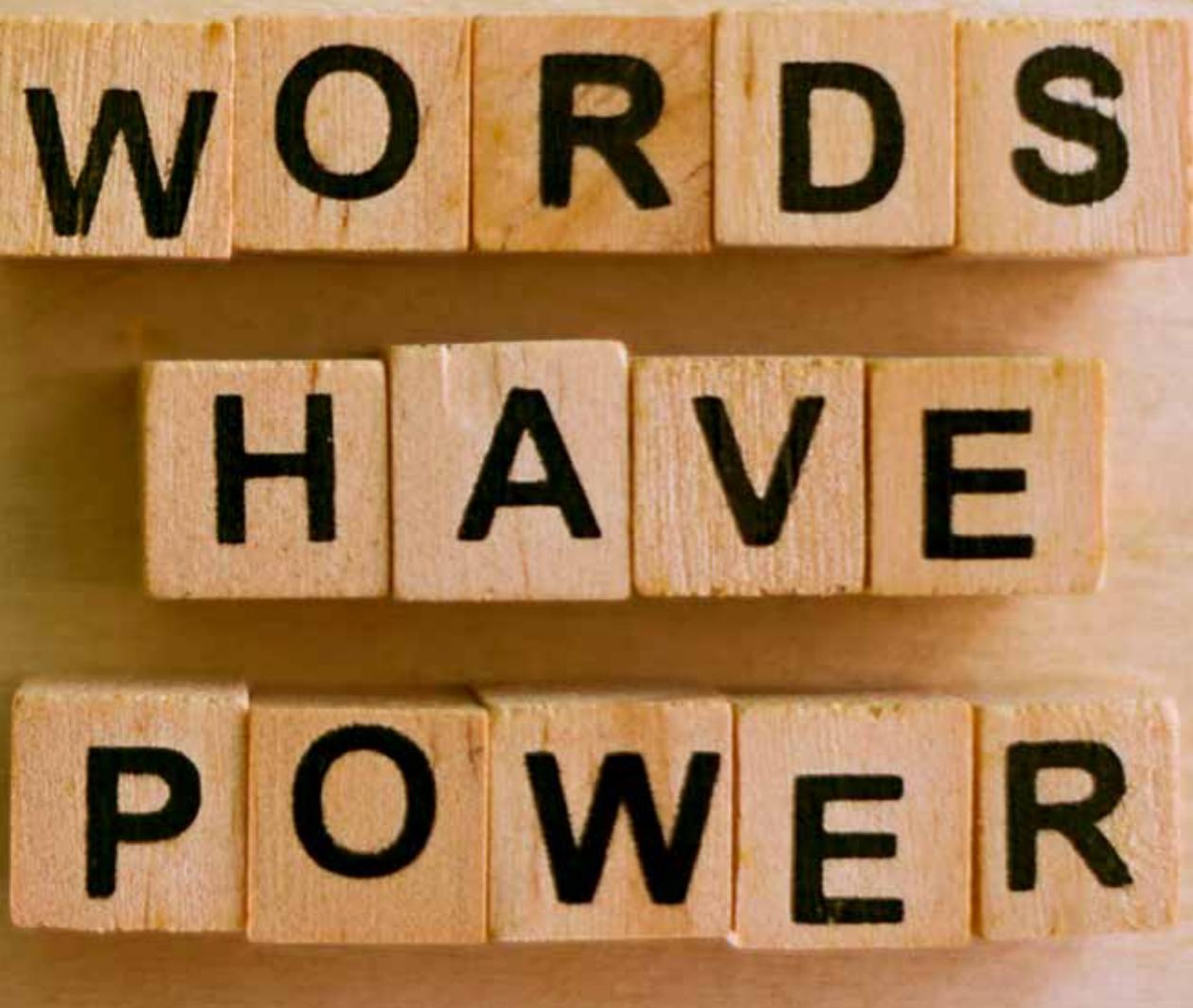
A few days later, I sat in front of the class on a small metal stool and pondered aloud at the marvel of snowcapped mountains, wide open spaces, and enormous moose. As I made my way back to my seat, Mr. McKinnon stood. "Raise your hand if you think Kim should keep writing," he instructed. Every hand went up. In that moment, my life pivoted. I was good at something. I was special. To this day, I stand amazed at how

a teacher changed my life with one sentence.

Despite my best efforts—even though I eventually rocked 80s hair and shoulder pads—I never did get Shavon's attention. But when that teacher gave me a peek at the talent I had to offer the world, I needed Shavon's attention a little bit less.

— Kimberly,
writing
coach in
Washington
State





Hiding the tremble in my hands with exaggerated movements, I turned in my 9th-grade AP English creative writing assignment by slapping it into the bin on the corner of the teacher's metal desk. Grammar had always come easy, and I loved to read. At age fourteen, if you had asked me what my dream job was, authoring books would have come just behind "being a marine biologist." But I figured writing, as a career, was fantasy. To be holed up, sipping hot drinks, and writing for hours on end while surrounded by books . . . well, that was too dreamy to even consider.

A few days later, my teacher handed my short story back to me. C+. I had a couple of points taken off for comma placements. Most of the deductions rested solely

on writing style and content. My heart wilted. After class, I shuffled up to her desk to ask about the mediocre grade.

"You're great with grammar . . . you're just not a writer," came my teacher's justification.

Her words planted themselves in my brain and later grew into weeds called limiting beliefs. For the rest of my school career, I steered into the sciences, trying to forget about writing. Every time I started to write a story or wrote the opening paragraph of a novel, those words reverberated in my mind. "You're just not a writer."

It wasn't until my thirties when I penned my first book. Today, I ghostwrite others' books. I've completed five in total, and I'm working on my sixth. Six books, including one that landed in a

best-seller category.

It took me decades to shed the negative label someone else had stuck on me. Girls, don't let people tell you what you can and can't do, who you can be and who you can't possibly become. Don't accept others' assessments of your skills or dreams and allow them to morph into limiting beliefs that prevent you from doing what you're meant to do.

Keep writing. You never know where it will take you!

— Cortney,
co-founder of
GirlStory and
a ghostwriter
in North
Carolina





WHAT IS A VETERAN?

The stereotype people often think of when they think of a military service member is a man. Men are the ones we have been taught to believe fight our wars. But that stereotype has been wrong for years and as the role of women increase in the US military the world, we need to rethink our idea of veteran.

Women have served formally in the U.S. military as far back as World War I, and while their role was often limited to nurses and secretaries, a little research about the history of military women will lead you to discover the Hello Girls, the Women Air Force Service Pilots, and the brave nurses who received Purple Hearts during Vietnam. The role and scope of women has continued to evolve rapidly with the

onset of the Global War on Terror in Afghanistan and Iraq. As the combat lines blurred, women were pushed out to the front lines and as Special Ops teams realized they couldn't reach half of the population because of their gender. Women were then attached to Infantry and Special Operations Units to reach this hidden population.

Military women have always been a volunteer service, and yet women willingly stepped up to fill the roles open to them. Even today, women are still not included in the military draft as only males are required to register on their 18th birthdays. But women continue to step up, break barriers, and change the world for the generation that follows them.

In 2010, I deployed to Afghanistan attached to an Infantry unit. At the time, I didn't realize the importance of my role. But because of me and thousands



“

One life is all we have and we live it as we believe in living it. But to sacrifice what you are and to live without belief, that is a fate more terrible than dying.

Joan of Arc

”

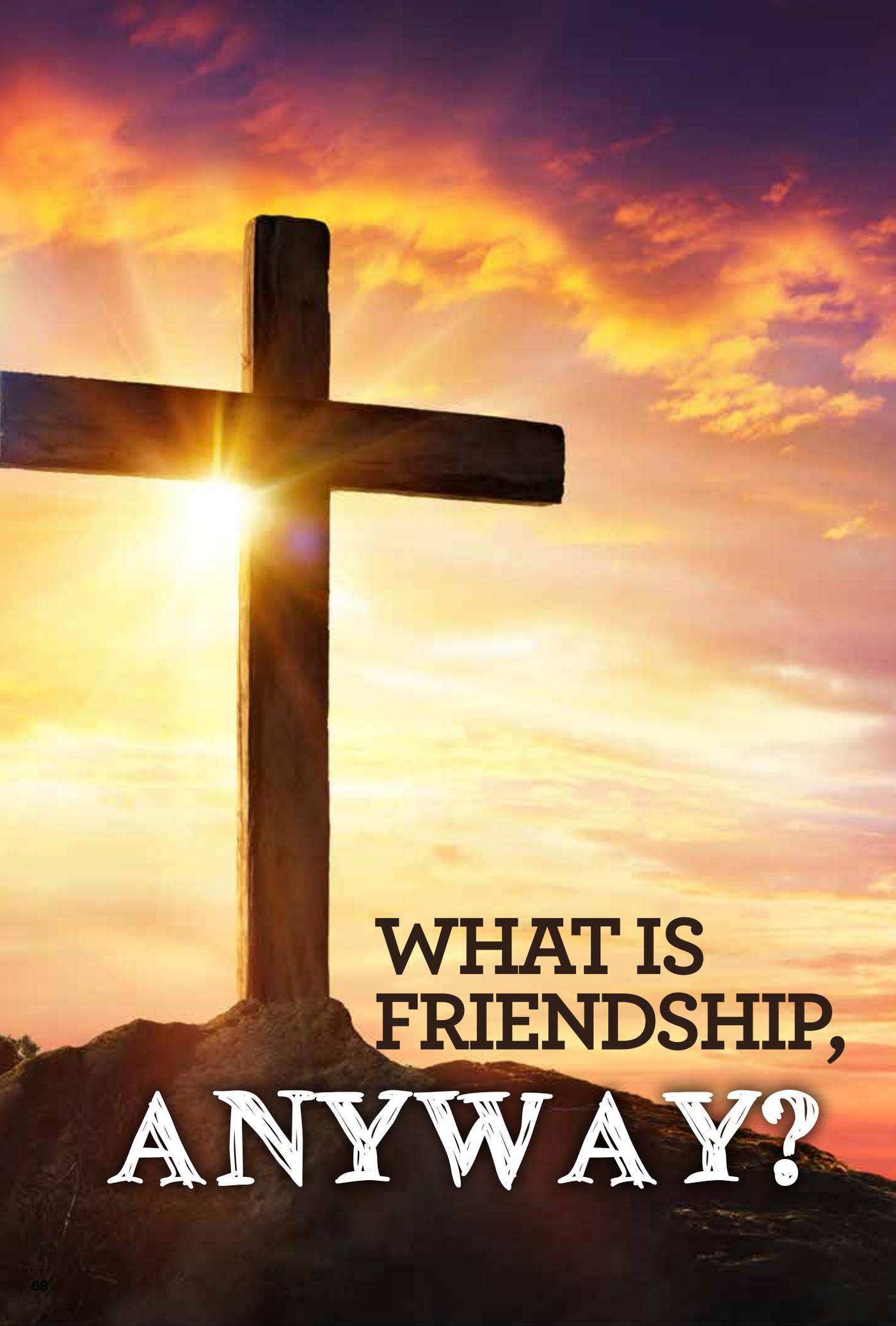
of other women being willing to serve alongside Infantry men, now all jobs in the military are open to women, and this one change will be a catalyst for positive change for women in the military.

So, the next time you think of a veteran make sure to include women in your reflection. Because women are a crucial and important part of the U.S. military that are often forgotten. But their stories are remarkable, and the impact they are making today, even after they hang up their uniforms, continues to change the world. Please, don't forget the women who blazed a trail, opening up more opportunities for you no matter where your career takes you.

Are you interested in learning more about military women? Check out *Women of the Military Podcast* to hear real stories of military women, past and present.

—*Amanda Huffman, Podcaster and Author of Women of the Military* ○





**WHAT IS
FRIENDSHIP,**

ANYWAY?



ISRAEL

age 14 from GA

As the daughter of two missionaries, I drifted from place to place, spending a few years in Bosnia, then a few months in America. I remember coming to Atlanta on furlough and seeing old friends; people I hadn't talked to in years. There was always an awkward exchange at the beginning. We had both changed so much that we didn't even know who the other person was anymore. We'd each moved on and made new friends. Sometimes we'd grown apart. Other times, I'd come back to Atlanta, not even remembering who my friend was. And that got me wondering: "What is a friend?"

"Can I have a friend and not even know who she is?" Here, in America, a "friend" is pretty much anyone you hang out with; anyone you can have fun with. "Friends" come and go, and only the best ones stay with you. When I lived overseas, though, I learned to think differently. In Bosnia, a "friend" was hard to find. "Friends" were the people in your "inner circle." You were with them all the time. You had

to commit to being their friend. Their choices influenced yours. Because of that belief, I felt I had to commit to whomever I wanted to be my friend. But that was impossible. How could I be there for my friends all the time if I kept being tossed between America and Bosnia? I became confused. Which view was right? What was a "friend?" I didn't know the answer.

So I decided I didn't need friends. I flitted from person to person so I wouldn't have to commit. I didn't want to spend too much time with someone who would influence me in a negative way, so I barely spent time with them at all. I viewed many people I interacted with as "acquaintances" because I couldn't imagine having to be there for them every day. I still felt the need for a friend, though. I felt left out when others talked about their friends or asked me: "Have you made any good friends, yet?" I remembered all the friends that had moved away from me or that I had moved away from. Everyone seemed to have a "perfect friend." Why couldn't I?

But all that time, I was waiting for that "perfect friend," I forgot I already had one. And I

still do. I have a friend who is so committed to me that he died for me. And he's ready to forgive me when I'm not committed to him. I have a friend who will make me a better person, so I can help others. How could I have forgotten him? I still don't have everything figured out; I'm not perfect, but I do know something for sure. I am called to love everyone no matter who they are. To be a good friend to everyone, even my enemies. And if I'm a citizen of Heaven, it doesn't matter where I am, either. Now, more than ever, I need that assurance. In a time when I can't physically go to school and make friends, I am forced to rely on the one friend who is always there. To let him into my "inner circle" and let him influence me. But, when I think about it, is that really a bad thing? ○

You are so right, Israel! I loved reading your thoughts because I have learned the same lesson as a missionary. God is a true friend who will never leave you nor forsake you.

I've learned that you don't have to belong to a certain group or clique to fit in. God assures us that we are children of God and that He is our father. He sticks closer than a brother!

Even if there are seasons where we walk into a place alone, we are never alone. He is with us, and He always goes before us.

Another thing I have learned over the years is to pray for the friends that I need in each season. God hears our prayers and knows the desires of our hearts, and he will bring the right people into our lives at the right times. But even then, He is still the truest friend that you will ever have!

Continue being a light to those around you. I know God is watching you and He is proud!

—Maritza Hernandez, Founder/Director Children's Impact Network, based in Florida





SUMMER Rein

Every summer, I spend my time mucking out stalls, shoveling gravel, and scrubbing horse troughs.

It's hard work, but the reward is amazing. I get to ride and groom and love the horses at Crystal Creek Stables. It is the best part of my summer.

I have been obsessed with horses for years. They are majestic, playful, and intelligent

creatures. The horses at the stable I go to are well trained for new riders. But that doesn't always make them easy to work with. Sometimes they test you. If you aren't sitting with the right posture or walking fast enough when leading a horse, they can think they are the leaders. They may try to graze and leave the trail or even nip you to get your attention.

Horses are like people; they have their own personalities. When you spend time with a

horse, you create a bond and friendship with them. You have to trust the horse you're riding, and they have to trust you to lead them. A rider is responsible for the horse's wellbeing. You have to groom them, and pick their hooves, apply their medicine, and make sure you keep the gates secured so they can't get out. It can be a challenge, especially when you are a newbie, but it is a lot of fun. I look forward to summer camp at the stables every year.



ALI

age 11 from NC

“Barn life also teaches you a lot of important skills that don’t have anything to do with horses.”

Barn life also teaches you a lot of important skills that don’t have anything to do with horses. We have to work as a team to take care of the horses and help other riders. You always need to keep a “barn voice” so that you don’t startle the horses; it helps you learn to control yourself, especially when you see a spider in your helmet or a snake in the tack room! And it teaches you to enjoy working hard physically and how to appreciate technology-free days. Some days, the weather can be bad or you can be having a bad day for any other reason, but everything looks brighter when you get a chance to saddle up.

There is nothing better than spending your summer at a stable. I hope everyone gets a chance to experience some time around horses. ○

Dear Ali,

What an inspiring story! As someone who totally freaked out the last (and only) time I rode a horse, you make me want to give it another try.

I love how you share that while working with horses is fun, it can be a lot of hard work, too, and I agree that working hard often makes the reward even better. I’ve found that to be true more times in my life than I can count. I’ve also found that while rewards are pretty great, the best prize of all is feeling proud of yourself for a job well done.

I also think it’s really powerful how caring for horses has taught you about gratitude, teamwork, responsibility, and so many other important life skills. Like caring for horses, life can be challenging sometimes—it can test you, trick you, and yes, sometimes even leave a surprise spider in your helmet (!!!)—but if you keep those skills close, I have no doubt that you’ll rise to each and every challenge that comes your way.

Keep on riding (and writing), Ali, and thanks for encouraging me to get back on a horse!

—Abby Cooper, author of several middle-grade books,
former teacher and librarian, and cupcake lover



BEAUTIFUL GIRL YOU CAN DO
ANYTHING YOU PUT YOUR MIND TO.

BLACKCITYGIRL



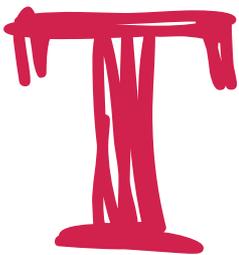


JANUARY





Cameron's SHOES



There was a girl named Cameron. She grew up in a huge family. Growing up in a huge family was tough, being that no one really saw her for who she was. This made her feel things like depression, loneliness, and rage.

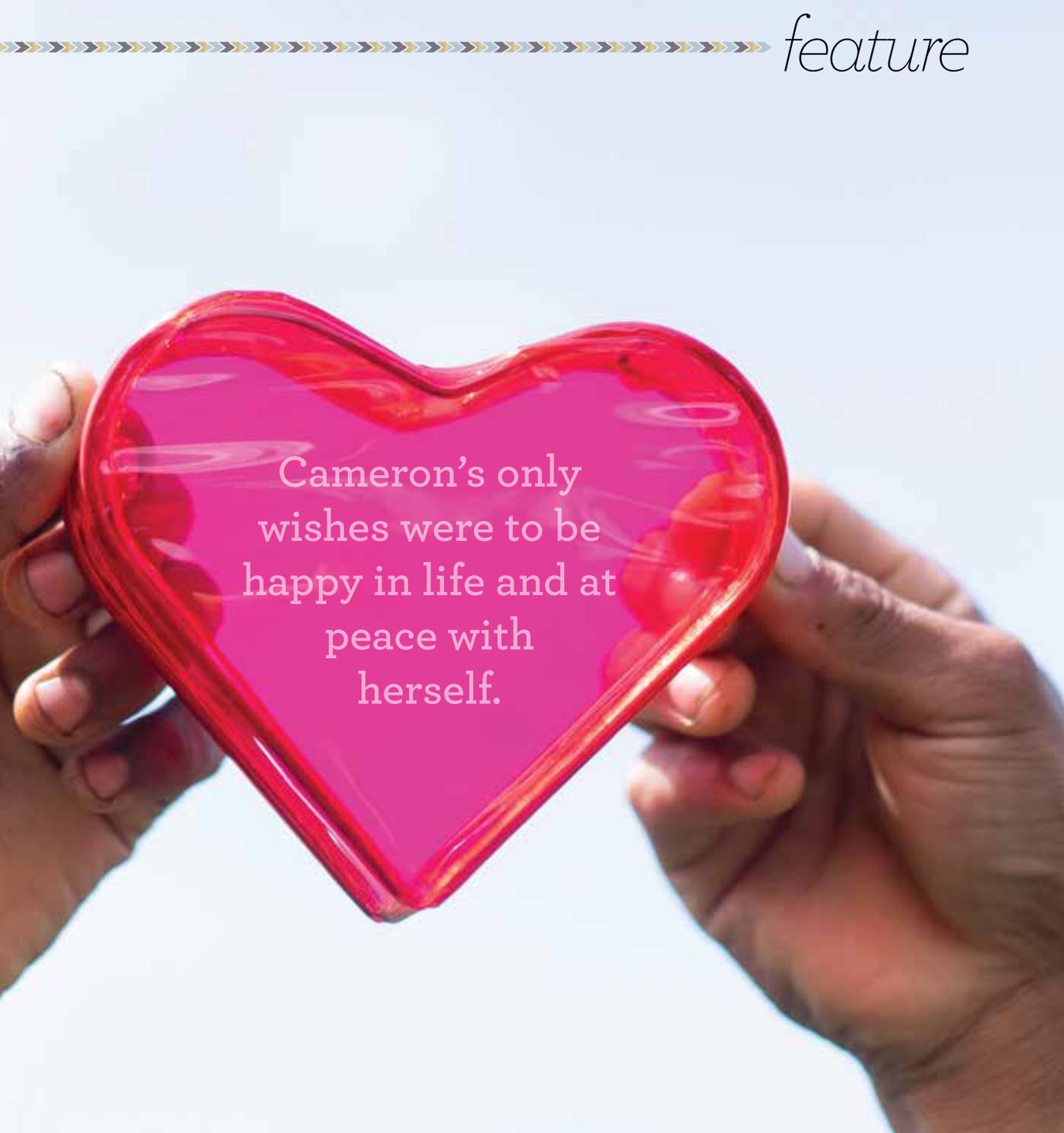
Cameron wanted help, but she never knew how to go about saying it. Everyone always thought she was this interestingly smart and happy girl. The truth was she hadn't been happy in a long time. With all the family drama, the pressure

placed on her, and the passing of her friend, it was hard for her to keep putting on a smile for everyone.

She wouldn't let words define her because she knew the only word that truly described her was strong. In spite of everything, she managed to persevere every day to make sure she got where she wanted to go in life. All she wanted was to grow up and give herself the life she'd always wanted.

Every day got harder, and she struggled more than the last day, but she kept aiming for something better for herself. Cameron's only wishes were to be happy in life and at peace with herself.

And isn't that all everybody really wants? ●



Cameron's only
wishes were to be
happy in life and at
peace with
herself.

.....

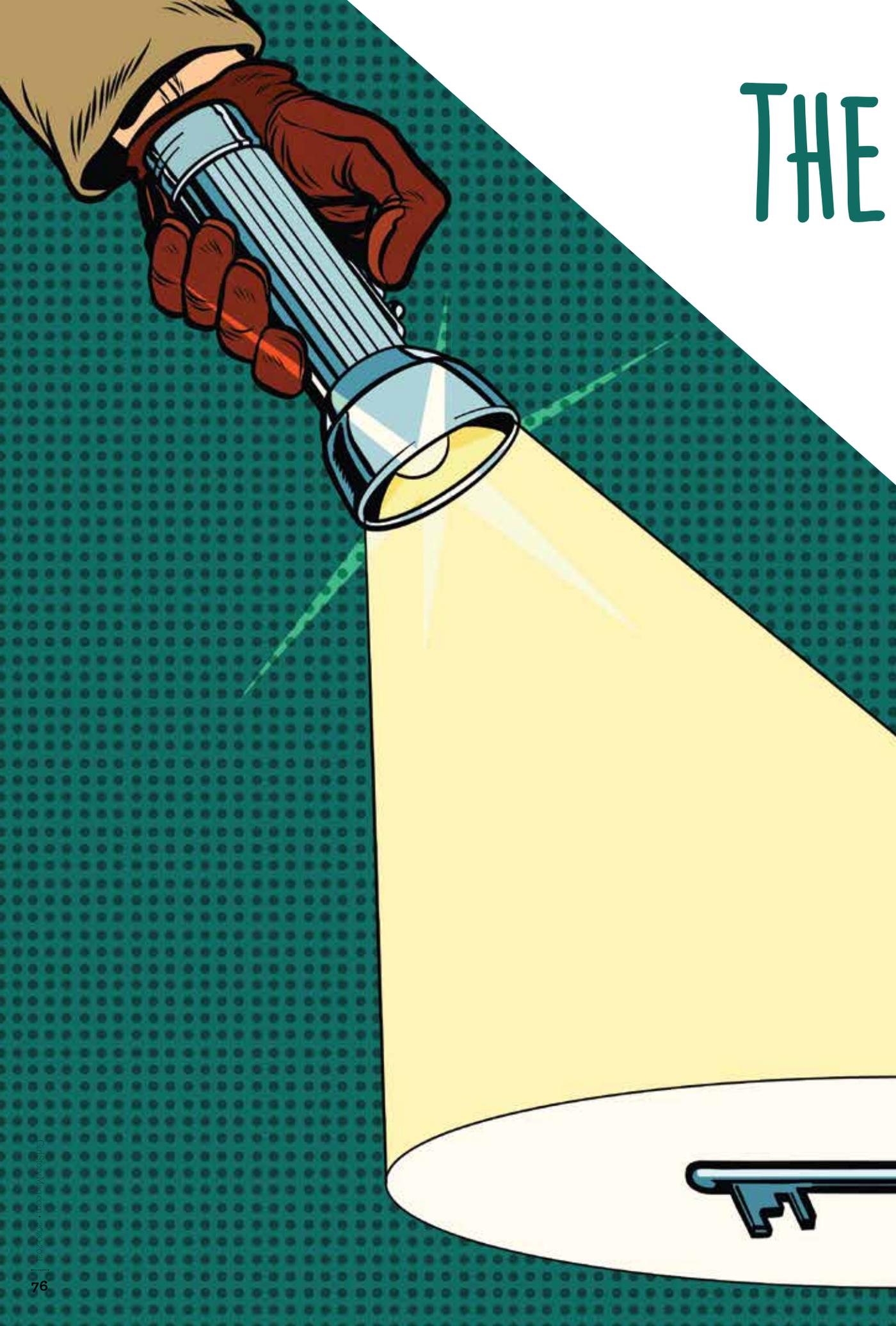
I've watched my niece (a beautiful chocolate morsel) mature from afar. She was born into her world of the unknown and feeling alone, like me. Feeling at times, as I did as a young boy. I, too, grew up dreaming of being somewhere else and being someone else. However, the difference between us—and what she doesn't know is—she has done so much more at age fourteen than I did, and the path before her has a bright light in the middle of the tunnel with sunshine at the end. I'm so proud!

Your uncle,
Bo-Dean Sanders

**Bo-Dean is the author of a new book release, Race Against . . . Against Race.*



THE





FANTABULOUS TALE

OF A REAL-LIFE SECRET AGENT



SKYLAR

age 16, VA

F

or as long as Mia could remember, she'd wanted to be a secret agent. She'd grown up watching men and women going in and out of a secret society's headquarters, which was right here in her little middle-of-nowhere town that seemed like it should never get any action. That's probably why they chose it, she mused. No one would ever think to look here for America's most secretive and successful crime-fighting organization. No one would think to look here for anything, really. Just some cows. And a quaint homemade ice cream shop.

The Bureau for the Apprehending of Ruthless Fugitives was by far the coolest secret organization she'd ever heard about. They were always doing something clandestine, like dressing up in disguises or laying stakeouts or talking into their fancy earpieces while wearing suits and sunglasses and surreptitiously looking over their shoulders.

On her thirteenth birthday the day before, her mom had pronounced her old enough to get her first job.

Mia had been so excited. She could finally work at the Bureau! So now, here she was, standing in front of a bored secretary in the lobby of

On her thirteenth birthday the day before, her mom had pronounced her old enough to get her first job.

B.A.R.F. headquarters. She so desperately wanted to work there that it must have shown on her face, but all the secretary said was “Name and complaint” in the most uninterested tone Mia had ever heard. She decided not to be put off by the lack of welcoming fanfare.

“I’m not here to report anything,” she said with a practiced smile.

The secretary raised one eyebrow, his face still devoid of emotion. “We aren’t offering summer camps anymore, miss.”

Mia forced herself to be unoffended. “I’m aware,” she told him. She’d gone to every summer camp they offered and remembered being devastated when they were shut down. “I’m applying to be an operative.”

The secretary’s eyes widened in surprise, and for a split second, Mia thought he was going to shake her hand like they do in the movies. Applaud her for being so faithful to B.A.R.F., never once wanting to be a princess or an artist or a firefighter or whatever else it was that normal girls wanted to be when they grew up.

Then he burst out laughing.

Mia’s cheeks heated. Why was he laughing? It was summertime. Surely job applicants were nothing unusual.

When he calmed down enough to speak, the secretary said, “You’re a little young to work here, miss. Don’t you think it’s a bit too much action for a twelve-year-old?”

Mia glared. “I’m thirteen,” she said through gritted teeth.

“Let me make this easy for you,” he said, smiling that fake smile that grown-ups use to make kids do what they want them to. “Why don’t you go home and

play with your dolls? Girls your age love dolls.” He sat back in his chair, folding his arms. “Leave the real work to the grown-ups.”

Mia could tell she wasn’t going to get anywhere with him. Wrapping her arms around herself, she said stiffly, “I’m sorry for wasting your time, sir,” and left.

She stood outside, blinking in the sunlight and fuming. She couldn’t believe he’d been so flippant. She just wanted a job, for crying out loud. Was that so wrong?

She remained undeterred, of course. She was just frustrated the secretary would treat a promising agent with such disdain.

She was right outside her house now, and she had planned to go inside and get a glass of lemonade while she pondered her next steps, but something stopped her. It was just a feeling, really, that something wasn’t right.

There was an alley behind her backyard, between the neighborhood and a shopping mall, and there were people back there. They were talking in low voices.

Mia sat quietly by her back fence to listen.

“... sure tonight is the best time?” she heard one of them hiss. “They’re having a gala. It seems rude to steal from them on the night of a party.”

“That’s why we have to move tonight!” said the other. “The gala is the perfect distraction. All the enemies will be in one room, away from us and their hidden vault. They’ll never know!”

They said more, but they’d left Mia’s hearing range. She sat in her backyard, stunned.

The gala was at the Bureau. She’d overheard a plot to rob B.A.R.F.!

To Be Continued ○

Skylar is a happy and positive girl who chooses to think of others before herself. She is incredibly creative and takes time to bring her ideas to life. Skylar has not had the easiest childhood and has experienced hardship and several relocations; however, she always looks at the bright side of her situation and maintains a rosy outlook on life. She cares deeply for others and provides encouragement when needed, a hug when wanted, and a friend to anyone who wants one. She is motivated by her desire to help others and be a change agent for good in the world. Skylar, you are an amazing woman and I am so proud of who you have become!

~Pete (a.k.a. Dad)



THE BEST WRITERS
USE WORDS TO HELP
READERS FEEL THE STORY
WITH ALL OF THEIR SENSES—
TASTE, TOUCH, SOUND, SIGHT, AND SMELL—
AND ALL OF THEIR EMOTIONS.

~ GIRLSTORY



JOURNAL #7:

LETTER TO PAST SELF

By: Cindy,
college student, NC

Dear Younger Cindy,

When I was young it was hard for me to become a braille reader. Schools would always say that I would not be a braille reader, but I am a good braille reader now. So don't worry, life will get better as you try and try and try. The teachers would always try to push me to read and read and read, but the staff at the school would always say that she is not going to be a braille reader or be able to keep up on grade level. And that's not true. I was learning and learning as I went, and so are you! People might not think that you are smart as a braille reader, but I am smart as a braille reader, and you will get there! You will find your way to overcome those issues. I did and I've done really well. You can get strong. Be a strong reader. Be a strong advocate for yourself. Let people know what you need, like I do now.

Some of the things that happened to me when I was younger were: I had a hearing loss and I got a lot of ear infections. I had to be hospital homebound; I had a lot of surgeries on my ears; I had to have lots of medicine for my ears, and I had to be very careful with my ears and know what to do and what not to do to cause more ear infections. But as I got older, I grew out of a lot of those ear infections and now I just get them once in a while, and they are easy to treat. I do really, really, really well with my ears now, and one day you will too! I had permanent t-tubes placed, and I have hearing aids as well. I can hear very well with my hearing aids, and one day you will, too!

Don't give up. Keep trying as hard as you can. And don't let yourself down if somebody tries to knock you down. If somebody tries to knock your faith away, try to hold onto your faith. Don't let your community of blind people down. Help your blind community be able to do what they want. Don't be scared . . . because when I came to college I was doing really well at the beginning of the year with all my classes, but when it came close to the end of the semester I started going downhill with my grades. I do not want that to happen to you ever.

Right now I am missing a lot of journal entries in

my FYE class, and I have four zeros on them. I do not want that to happen to my younger self at all when you get older. I want you to strive and get all As and make sure that you are staying on track as always. I want you to know that you can believe in yourself and to not let that happen and try your hardest to keep your grades up and talk to your teachers about how you can get extra credit to bring your grades up or how you can get your work turned in.

Most importantly, ask for help when you need it. It was hard for me to ask for help because I wanted to do it independently and work with interns to get it done. But what I am seeing is that it is not working well to get things done because I am not managing my time well to get my homework done. I am not looking at my assignments to see what I need to be doing to make sure it gets turned in on time. I do not have enough time each week with my interns to do my work without needing to ask my family for help, too. I do not want that to ever happen to my younger self.

I wish that I had learned how to type when I was younger so that I could get my college homework done on time. But that did not happen when I was younger. I wish that could happen for you when you are young so that you can have all good grades. I think it would help you if you ask for help and learn how to type your work so that you can type your own journal entries. Make sure your teachers know how to teach you and that you can learn things. You are so independent and strong and brave and smart. Your teachers should be smart, too, and should know how to teach a blind child to type. They did not know how to teach me to type. I hope that can happen for you. I wish that this could have all happened back then for me, but for me it was hard to learn how to type.

And my teachers didn't believe that I would ever attend college, but now my teachers believe that I do belong here. So know that can happen to you. Don't let anyone ever make you feel down. One day your teachers will know that you can make it to college, and you will be there to learn. Another thing is no



one ever taught me to write journal entries or papers. Most college kids learned it in middle and high school. My teachers did not teach that to me because they did not think I would go to college. You should learn how to write papers now so you are ready for college. I have faith in you to learn this younger so that college can be successful and easier for you. It is going to be a little hard for you because you have to ask for a lot of accommodations, and sometimes your braille teachers won't know how to help you or how to use technology to teach you how to be successful for college. You should talk to other blind professionals who know how to use technology to be successful. You should talk to other blind students, too. You should go to the Colorado Center for the Blind when you are young—in middle school. I went there when I was in my senior year of high school. You should

go much younger and spend summers there during middle and high school. It is so much fun, and you will learn a lot. The braille teachers there are very helpful. They will teach you how to learn more contractions and the technology teacher will teach you to type. You'll learn how to travel, how to cook, how to clean, how to manage your budget, and how to find a job. You'll learn all these things from blind adults who are living this life, and living it very good!

So remember, there are a lot of things that you can do. Keep trying and keep fighting and don't listen when someone tells you that you can't do something. You can! And you are confident. And in the year 2020, I was very confident, and you will be (in 2021), too! It will be your freshman year of college, and if you get the help you need from your teachers now, you will make it all the way through college! ○

Dear Cindy,

You are an inspiring, strong, confident, and capable young woman. You should be so proud of your accomplishments! As the mother of a child with vision and hearing loss, I know well the struggles you have faced throughout your life. It is challenging to grow up in a very visual world without having the support needed to navigate it easily. Your perseverance throughout your earlier academic years has served you well and helped you become a strong and independent self-advocate. Knowing how to advocate for yourself is so important and it sounds like you have mastered that skill.

It is wonderful to see that you are so positive and encouraging to your younger self. Having a positive attitude and strong determination to succeed will take you far in life. Knowing how to read and write braille is also a very valuable skill. It allows you to be able to learn and communicate with those around you. Being an accomplished braille reader and writer can also contribute to your ability to assist others who have vision loss. Your skills and abilities are valuable assets that can serve you well in the future. Continue to work hard and strive to do your best! You've already proven that you can accomplish so much and that is something to be proud of!

Sincerely,

Jessica Chamness, Mother of an inspiring, strong, confident, and capable young man





Alora's Fable

A

few weeks ago, I was asked to do a big essay on any topic that I chose. I picked “tobacco products and how they affect your health.” I learned about the many horrors that happen to our bodies and how people don’t care what tobacco products do to them but

are more concerned about how they make them feel.

When I was researching, I figured out that one cigarette produces 7,000 chemicals in its smoke. In addition, many people die from simply inhaling the smoke, even when they aren’t the actual smokers or vapers. Vaping (also called e-cigarettes) is a newer invention from the tobacco industries. E-cigarettes can be disguised as USB cards and have about 800 flavors, and to some people, they are a lot more fashionable.

The start of the fable, featuring Alora

When Alora was younger, about thirteen years ago, they lit their first cigarette out of peer pressure. Almost all of Alora’s friends were smoking and vaping at a party. So, Alora said something along the lines of, “Oh well, it’s only one. It won’t make me addicted.” After that day, Alora kept on smoking, telling herself the same lie that every teenager tells themselves—that they’re able to quit any time they want.

The truth is that the first time a tobacco product touches your lips, depending on what product you use and even if only for a couple of minutes or hours, the nicotine goes into your blood system. Alora is one out of millions of kids who made this mistake. With more use, Alora became breathless more quickly during gym class. But Alora kept on telling that lie that they could quit, just to avoid the realization that they were addicted to e-cigarettes. Alora’s friends



BRENNA

age 14, from MI

“helped out” by teaching Alora how to sneak e-cigarettes (shaped like a USBs) into school.

Along with taking that first puff and becoming breathless during PE, Alora lost friends. Alora’s best friend, Gregory, had a dislike for tobacco products, but Alora couldn’t help but to keep vaping. After some time, Alora started to hang out with other vapers and smokers and Alora’s friendship with Gregory slowly grew distant because of Alora’s vaping.

When Alora went to college, it got worse, and Alora noticed the longer they vaped the more nicotine they needed in the e-cigarette. When Alora tried to quit, Alora had to pay for a therapist, a support group, and gum, and it all cost a lot of money. It cost so much, Alora decided that even though they were probably going to get diseases from all the chemicals, poisons, and toxins they were putting in their body, Alora would continue to vape because it was cheaper. Then, when Alora was invited to a friends’ wedding, Alora had to go outside during the dinner to fulfill the craving for nicotine and tobacco. Alora missed out on a lot of things because of an addiction to tobacco.

End of fable

So many people are like Alora. No matter what tobacco product people use, they lose their friends because they miss out on things to fill the craving. There are 443,000 people who die each year from cigarettes. That’s more than AIDS, alcohol, illegal drug use, homicide, suicide, and motor vehicle crashes combined!!! This is a very important subject, and doctors and specialists recommend not making the same mistake that Alora and so many other people make. If you want to smoke or vape, just sit with the decision and wait for a bit. Then, consider all the problems you will have if you pick up that cigarette or e-cigarette. No good comes from saying yes and being addicted to these products.

I hope you learned something from the article. If you ever consider smoking, your friends and family hope you make the right choice by saying *no*. ○

Brenna,

Your story about tobacco is quite remarkable. You have seamlessly woven in information about the public health concerns associated with tobacco consumption with a personal narrative documenting the implications of smoking for Alora. Through your story, you document how these powerful companies are able to leverage peer pressure and camouflaging of their packaging (e.g., e-cigarette products disguised as USB drives) to increase addiction among younger generations. Alora unfortunately succumbed to these temptations and increasingly missed out in a lot of the joys of youth. Successful public health campaigns, as noted by Bill Gates in his work through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, are most effective when they are personalized. Instead of telling people simply “the numbers”, you have instinctively chosen to rely on a personal narrative – Alora’s story.

Brenna, I believe you too have a distinct personal narrative.

Grounded: You not only recognize the injustices in this world, but are motivated to shine a light on them and address them. Many people recognize the need for “Tikkun olam”, translated as repair this world. Few take on this task. You are among them.

Inspiration: Simply put, you inspire others. You inspire others to join you in making this world a better place. While many of us wish to have such a gift; unfortunately, many of us are not so lucky.

Strength: You have an inner strength to achieve almost anything. I am speaking directly to your spiritual and emotional strength.



Trust your strength, trust your vision, and continue to inspire us.
Donny, (Brenna’s Dad)



THE LAST CANDLE

Today is Lucy's birthday. Now Lucy is a very young girl, about seven years of age. She deserves better than what she got.

8:00 p.m. October 13, Friday.

Lucy was just brushing her hair when she heard a sound. "Probably nothing," she thought to herself. Then, she got in bed. Her homework tonight was to read for thirty minutes. It was very dark in her room that night. So Lucy's mother gave her three small but bright candles.

8:10 p.m.

Ten minutes have passed. Creak, creak, creak. "Just the mice," Lucy thought. One candle went out. Lu-

cy's shutter doors started to open and close from the storm outside.

8:20 p.m.

Another ten minutes passed, and another candle blew out. Vivid scratching was heard at her door. Lucy didn't think much of it; "Just a cat . . ."

8:30 p.m.

Down to the last candle. Yellow eyes appear, staring from Lucy's closet.

One month later . . .

Missing posters are up. ○



MCKENNA

age 12 from MO

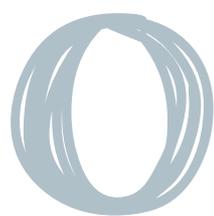
Oooh! What a chilling ending! I'm a big believer in great stories having great endings, and this one got to me! It works so well for a couple reasons. One, it has a clear beginning, middle, and end. Two, McKenna has given us a countdown in the form of the candles. Thanks to the setup in the opening, we know that something bad is going to happen to Lucy by the time this is over. As the candles start going out one by one, we anticipate her impending doom, even if she remains oblivious to the danger.

But what is most chilling, perhaps, isn't that the threat ends up being supernatural or monstrous but that the end result is something most of us have seen every day—a child who has gone missing for unexplained reasons. We've all seen the Missing Posters before; we've received the Amber Alerts. That choice takes the story out of the imagination of the reader and plants it firmly into the real world, forcing us to confront a very real terror that exists today. Terrific work.



Chris Baker, Filmmaker based in North Carolina

ONE GIFT



One gift. This one gift was decorated with a candy cane and simply read, “To Katelyn.” For nearly a month, my dad talked about this special gift and how much I would love it. The anticipation was building more and more as the days on my Christmas advent calendar were becoming fewer and fewer. I dreamed of what could possibly be inside the wrapped box. It was medium in size and square in shape and not very heavy. I couldn’t for the life of me figure what it could be.

Just one gift.

Finally, it was Christmas morning and it was time to open that one gift! It started off as an ordinary Christmas day. I woke up, and I was eager to open presents! For a couple weeks, I’d been thinking about this one present under the tree that my dad picked out. He always comes up with the best ideas, so I just wanted to open that particular gift, especially since he’d been saying I would love it.

We opened all the other presents, and there was just one left—the one my dad picked out. I didn’t know what to expect, but I opened the gift, and it



KATELYN

age 13 from NC

was an Apple watch box! I was excited because an Apple watch was on my list but confused because he said I would never guess what it was. My parents were acting suspicious, so I opened the box, thinking it would be my mom's old phone or something. Inside the box was a stuffed dog with a collar and a cardboard heart tag. I was still confused, and my parents said, "You're getting the puppy you wanted!"

I thought they were kidding around, saying that as a joke, but I read the tag, and they told me I was getting a cavapoo. Shock just completely went through my body, and I could not keep my emotion in! I was so excited, especially since my parents said I was not going to get a dog. Not only that, it was the breed I really wanted. I opened my card, and my dad told me everything.

I was still in complete shock and could not stop the tears from coming down. For the rest of the day, I could not stop talking about getting a puppy, and I planned a whole list of notes to prepare for the puppy I probably won't get until March or April.

Through this whole thing, I really saw that God is listening. He knew I wanted this puppy and even though it took months, and I thought I would never get a puppy, he found a good time and had a great plan. Be patient! God is always listening, and whatever you're praying about might not happen right then and there. But some day, it will.

I can't wait to welcome our new family member! ○

.....

Katelyn,

Hey buddy!

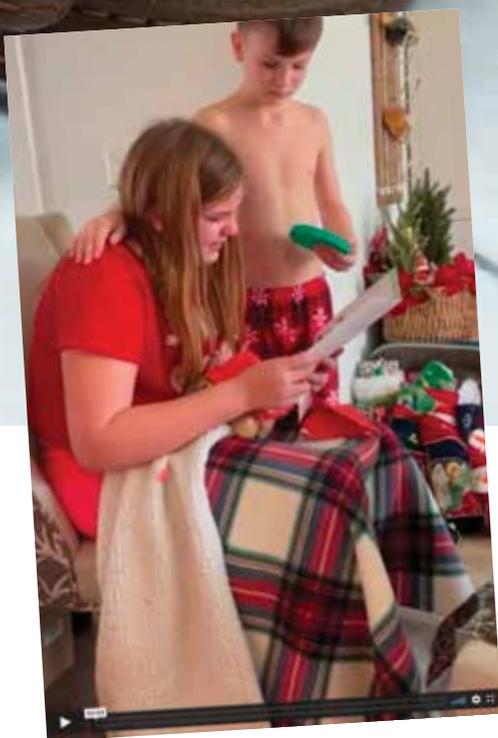
It's super cool that you were vulnerable enough to share such a cool story from your life.

When I was 13, I remember wishing a similar wish for a pup and got one! Her name was Bandit, and she became one of my closest "friends" for the next season of my life.

Dogs are so cool, right?! They don't judge what you're wearing and always greet you with slobber when you come home.

I'm proud to see the young woman you're becoming and love seeing the uplifting way you brighten the world around you.

~Youth Pastor Mike



Need caption here, screenshot of the video when she found out about her gift.

Poetry



“To me, art begets art.
Painting feeds the eye just as poetry feeds the ear,
which is to say that both feed the soul.”

~Susan Vreeland

Many of the poems on the following pages come from one particular school in San Diego, California. Jaime Morgan (above) is a teacher who advocated for her students, many of them from immigrant or refugee families, to get their poetry published. We loved partnering with Iftin Charter School (ICS) for this issue, a school founded to provide students with a caring centered education (T-K8) that involves members of students' families and communities as partners in the circle of education, both inside and outside of the classrooms. In addition, ICS accepts that every person has something to contribute to society as a whole as well as to the task at hand.

Thank you, Jaime, for believing in the power of poetry and, for that matter, the power of words! Your students made our issue better!



MUSLIM

Most kind to people

Unites everyone

Spreads peace

Loves others

Is always treating others the same

Makes people feel welcome

~ Aisha, age 11, CA



MARCH 2021



PRESS **Play**

PLAY

I feel like our life is on pause.

CH022 SP7

Like donating without any cause.

Or singing a sad, sad song.

Or running a track miles and miles long.

I try to keep the feelings inside my head.

And just try to get some sleep and go to bed.

I wake up every day feeling good.

Just like any day I would

Then I realize life is on pause.

001001001 183



ADDISON

age 12, MA

Addison,

This poem says what so many of us have felt during the long year of Covid-19 restrictions. We're all waiting for the life we knew to resume, and to go back to everything we loved doing before. I love how the poem also shows the very human trait of getting used to a frustrating situation, and taking it almost as normal, until we remember it's not. Great job!

—Anne Leigh Parrish, award-winning writer & poet, Olympia, Washington.



I AM

SAGAL

age 12, CA

Hi Sagal,

*I am Sami
We are practically sisters
We are practically family
A little older but I am reflection of
you.*

*When I was younger I too
used to worry about the future.
But I stopped worrying
and started focusing on the
present.*

You sound very pleasant.

*Continue to be polite
and continue to be kind.
In this life you will find
that you have a lot to dis-
cover
Learn and uncover.*

*New York is the Big Apple
but there are other fruits to see.
When you are older you can travel
overseas
and enjoy sun, sand and sea.*

*There is no need to pretend to be a princess
cos you are a queen.
There is no need to worry about future
and places you haven't been.*

*To have a good life
you must continue to surround yourself with good.
Maybe in the future you will go to New York
and leave your neighbourhood.*

*Continue to be polite
and continue to be kind.
In this life you will find
that you have a lot to discover
Learn and uncover.*

—Sami Rhymes,
spoken word poet
and author, London, UK



**I am Sagal
I am polite and kind**

**I wonder about my future
I hear a horse cry
I see New York
I want to have a good life
I am polite and kind**

**I pretend I am a princess
I feel a great place above me
I touch the summer grass
I worry about my future
I am polite and kind**



Be Kind

SUAD

age 12, CA

AND LOVE YOURSELF

Be kind

Never give up

Love one another

Keep on trying

Don't let people judge who you are

Keep on working hard

Don't let them bully you

You can do anything if you work hard

Some people can be a bully, but you
don't have to be like them

Don't cheat who you are

Love yourself



Suad,

Your poem is full of encouragement and love. The message in your poem is so powerful. I am sure that this poem will give strength and encouragement to those that read it.

Keep writing, Suad. Well done to you!

~ Annette Moseley, writer and spoken word poet, Ontario, Canada



Open a Book

SALMA

age 11, CA

Open a book

And you will find

People can be kind.

Open a book

And you can be

Anything you want to be.

Open your eyes

And you will see

Red lights and sidewalks.

Look around

There are people here to stay
and help you.

Salma,

My name is Kemet, and I am a woman who lives in Charlotte, NC. I love your poem and how you expressed the love you have for traveling through a book that will take you away to other places and imagined the freedom to be and do all that you want.

Salma, know that you have the ability to do whatever you decide to do and be whomever you decide to be outside of the books.

Always remember that knowledge is not power, applied knowledge is power. Whatever you are wanting and willing to learn, and doing that which you learn, it will take you very far. Never stop writing, being creative, and dreaming.

Keep applying yourself to that which you love and grow and blossom. There is no ceiling or horizon; you can go as far and as high as you want in your life.

You have such great talent in your writing. Keep using it to inspire others, and if you wish, let it take you to places you never thought you'd go.

Salma, you can do anything your heart desires by learning and using that knowledge.

You're an inspiration that will continue to bloom wherever you are!

~ Kemet, agent at NY Life Insurance Company, Charlotte, NC





Somali Muslim Black

IKRAN
age 12, CA



Smile
Original
Myself
Amazing
Loyal
Intelligent

Muslims are nice
Ultimate
Strong
Leadership
Inspiring
Motivation

Be kind
Love and never hate
Accept everyone, no matter their skin color
Care for Black Lives Matter as well
Kindness will always win against rudeness

Ikran,

*You are SEEN...
... not merely looked upon, but
acknowledged and SEEN.*

*You are HEARD...
... not just an audible sound, but intently
listened to and HEARD*

You are powerful beyond measure.

*... with the wind at your back...
you fiercely, gracefully take flight while
giving others permission to trust their wings...*

*To fly above the hate and instead let love
dominate.*

*No matter your skin or tone or color, LOVE
will always be in order. Black lives have
always mattered... Not only when it's
plastered all over social media.*

Each of us plays an important part.

*Creatively crafted and uniquely designed,
no greater words uttered held true...*

*There's never been nor will
there ever be anyone
just like you.*

*Boundless
Blessings,*



*~ Shamyra Parker,
Founder + Chief Well-Being
Officer at Shamyra | Born Boundless,
Charlotte, North Carolina*

YOU NEVER KNOW



AMINA

age 13, CA

Each morning, I wake up and
eat breakfast

Then I feel the wind and the
beautiful sun rising.

Then I go on Zoom,

where my amazing teachers
teach me something new
everyday

I like playing with my siblings
and friends.

I feel so blessed having an
amazing family, friends, and
teachers.

But sometimes, I think about
the poor who don't even have a
meal a day

Or don't have a place to live, or
don't even have a pillow to lay
their head on

I hope, one of these days,
people can help one another up

and not judge people unless
they're in someone's shoes

You never know what that
person is going through.

Amina,

Poetry becomes interesting if you can make it relevant. This then requires great imagination, not just the probity to understand what the poet is trying to say, but more of a deep connection of the reader to the message conveyed. The expression of your yearnings in this poem is brief and sincere. You offer simple truths that run deep in our cultural and economic mainstreams—inequalities exacerbated in our society. I applaud you for being able to offer gratitude and to sympathize with those who have less.

~ Ayo Gutierrez, Boo Coach | Founder, GMGA Publishing, Philippines





The Color of Skin

KHADIJA

age 11, CA



The color of skin does not define anyone
Melanin is a gift and people are ashamed

People disgrace Black features like lips,
and end up paying for them

If frizzy/curly hair intimidates you,
why then end up getting perms?

Numerous Black people get killed

You walk into a store,
the first thing you will see

is dirty looks and people thinking you
have the intention to steal

All because of the color of skin.

Khadija,

Wow! You are an amazing writer, and your poem was powerful! I am so proud of you! I love that you wrote about a topic that is so important and relatable. Your poem is the reality for many African Americans. You are absolutely right—melanin is a gift. Always remember, we are all unique and special in our own way. Embrace who you are, inside and out! You are a brave, beautiful, and magnificent young lady. I want to encourage you to keep writing! You are so gifted, and your writing is advanced for your age. Continue to believe in yourself, and don't be afraid to let your light shine!

Love,

~ Charlene Goddard, Children's author of Magnificent Macie!, Franklinville, New Jersey





be inspired

THE FANTABULOUS TALE

OF A REAL-LIFE SECRET AGENT - *PART 2*



photo by Samantha Huftaker

SKYLAR

age 16, VA

Mia was in her bedroom, pondering what had occurred. Just a few minutes before, she had overheard two men plotting to rob B.A.R.F. during the gala tonight. She wasn't sure

what to do about it, but she knew she had to do something. She could a) tell the Bureau what she'd overheard and hope they would believe her (unlikely), b) tell her parents and hope they didn't think it was a prank, or c) try to stop them herself.

The likelihood of the first two options' success was dismal, so she decided the third one was her only hope.

She started strategizing. The Bureau had given a tour of the facility to every summer camp, so she knew the layout. Now all she needed was a plan to stop them. Alone.

Then she grinned. She knew exactly what to do.

No one noticed the petite woman in the slightly-too-casual yellow dress at the gala that night, but she noticed them. She noticed the chubby family who brought their dogs, the woman who sat alone in a corner, the agents in their uniforms, and the two shifty-looking men in second-hand suits whispering to each other from the sidelines. They seemed to be observing everyone, too. As the gala progressed, not much seemed to be happening. Some danced, the children ran around and chased the little dogs, the two men stayed put. Mia tugged at her dress self-consciously as the hours progressed. Maybe she'd been wrong about this.

Then, a few minutes before midnight, the two men slipped away through a backdoor. Mia followed them.

She stayed far behind them so they wouldn't notice her, ducking into doorways and behind cleaning carts whenever they looked back. The further they got from the gala, the more relaxed they got. Soon Mia didn't have to hide at all.

She could tell by the way they kept referencing a map that they didn't know where they were going, and by the direction they chose, they were headed for the money vault. It was time to put her plan into action. Mia found a cleaning smock in a closet. Pulling it on over her dress, she ran after the burglars. Mia found a cleaning smock in a closet. Pulling it on over her dress, she ran after the burglars.

"Excuse me, sirs," she said loudly when she neared them. "You're going the wrong way."

They started and turned to her, but their panic turned to amusement when they saw her.

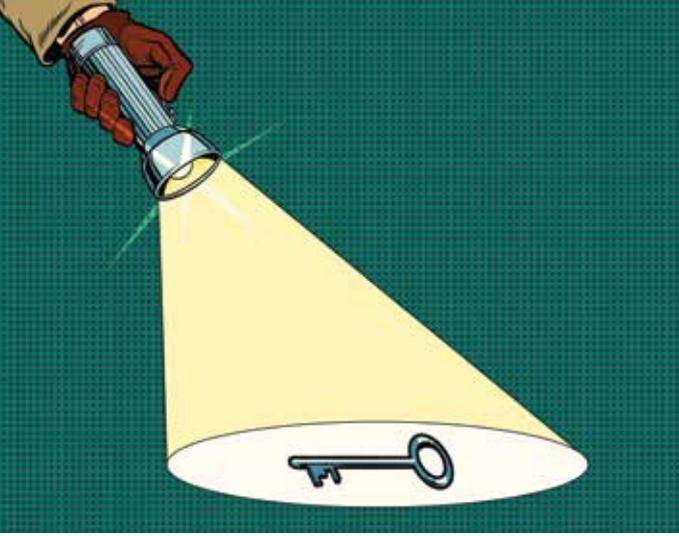
"Girl," said the taller one, leaning down to her level, "go back to the party. This is no place for you."

Mia's heart was pounding, but she forced herself to act nonchalantly. She rolled her eyes. "Please, the gala's boring. I'd rather help you steal from the Bureau." She smiled at their shock. "Of course, if you'd rather, I can go tell them your plans."

"They wouldn't listen to you," scoffed the shorter, broader one, but his eyes showed uncertainty.

Mia raised an eyebrow. "I wouldn't be so sure." He was right, but he didn't need to know that. She cleared her throat. "And, anyway, you're going to the wrong vault."

"No, we're not. The map clearly says—"



“You really think that they would release an accurate map of the facility to the public?” Mia giggled, trying to ignore her racing pulse. “They’re not that dumb.”

That quieted them. Finally, one said, “If we give you a small cut of what we steal, will you show us where the real vault is?”

“Of course.” Mia turned and led them back the way they’d come. She knew this building like the back of her hand.

Hoping to confuse them, she led them on a zig-zagging path that frequently cut back on itself. Finally, she stopped in front of a vault that looked similar to the one they’d been headed to.

“Here we are.”

They pushed her aside, setting up their tools to open the door. For seemingly incompetent people, they had highly competent tools. The door opened in no time. Then, just as Mia had hoped, they went inside.

Mia shut the door to the empty vault before they had time to figure out what was going on. She heard a shout of “Wait, where’s our money?” but the lock was already in place.

When B.A.R.F. found them three hours later, they were impressed to learn that they’d been caught by a young woman. Only days later, B.A.R.F. was clamoring to get Mia to work for them.

So, in the end, Mia’s dream came true: she was a secret agent. ○

Skylar,

I loved reading Part I of *The Fantabulous Tale of a Real-Life Secret Agent, Skylar*, and I was excited to realize the positive outcome of Part II. I. Was. Not. Disappointed!

I can totally relate to the main character, Mia, and I imagine many others can as well.

For one, Mia was grossly underestimated. Second, she was determined not to quit, regardless of the odds. Lastly, she was going to find a way to be successful despite being mocked and made fun of because she had a job to do, even if she wasn’t the obvious choice to do it.

I found Mia to be tenacious, secure in who she was, determined, and relentless in her pursuit to live out her dream of working at B.A.R.F.—and brave as she stopped a crime in the making, all by herself. Most of these traits are things I did not have at her age and, as an adult, traits I still strive for.

When Mia went in to apply at B.A.R.F., the secretary’s response to her being too young reminded me of my favorite story in the Old Testament— the story of how King David came into his position of power and influence.

Directed by God, the prophet Samuel went to Bethlehem to find a future King—one who God had anointed. When Samuel got there, he asked David’s father, Jesse, to bring out his sons since God told Samuel His anointed one was there. Jesse did as he was asked but left out one massive detail: his youngest son David, who was tending to sheep.

When Samuel saw one of Jesse’s sons, Eliab, due to his size and stature, he thought for sure he was the one who was chosen by God. However, God said something that I wish Mia had been told: “Don’t judge by his appearance or height for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” And man, did Mia have heart!!

King David went on to be one of the greatest Kings Israel has ever known. If there was a Part III to your story, Skylar, I imagine Mia would become the greatest agent B.A.R.F. has ever known as well.

To me, the moral to your wonderful story wasn’t that Mia captured the bad guys but that she pushed through and didn’t give up when challenged. She believed in herself and wasn’t going to let anyone’s opinion of her keep her from what she was called to do.

No matter our gender, background, age, or stage-of-life differences, we should all have the traits Mia possessed. Imagine what we could all accomplish if we did?

Great job, Skylar. Please don’t stop writing—we all need to hear what you have to say.

~ Melanie, writer and youth ministry leader, Huntersville, North Carolina





WHO GAVE THEM PERMISSION...

Who gave them permission to look down on someone just because the color of their skin is different?

Why is it that Black people get treated differently than a white people?

We never chose to be this way. All we ask is to have equality and that future generations can live in peace.

We just want a world of peace and harmony.

We don't want their legacy to go to waste, like Martin Luther King Jr, Rosa Parks, Harriet Tubman, and so many more.

I know there's some days when they just want to give up, but they kept going and risked their lives for our generation.

We have to keep the legacy going for the next generation and not let what they've done for us go to waste.



Dear Selma,

Thank you for being bold enough to ask the question "Who Gave Them Permission?" Keep asking questions, demanding answers to the questions that will allow us to get closer to a nation of peace and harmony. You are right: we must continue to build the legacy that so many have created before us. You are gifted and talented, just like your ancestors before you. At age 11, you are already walking confidently in your light, using your words to tell stories of our past and present fight for justice. Keep writing and daring to speak up for what is right; your words have the power to inspire so many.

You are uniquely made; your melanin is magical. Your beauty is skin deep, your true power lies within. Never stop loving the queen you see staring back at you in the mirror.

Go bravely into your next chapter, be free and be bold in this moment and every moment after. You will cross paths with many, some will go, and some will stay, embrace the change around you, you will learn to find your way.

With love and light,

Kamaria Delaney,
writer and
author of *Soul PWR: A Poetry Anthology*,
North Carolina



PIECES OF ME

MARYAMA

age 12, CA

The life of a Black person is full of fear.

Fear that they will die young, fear that they will never be able to succeed.

The reason they have that fear is because of all their Black brothers and Black sisters that have died before their eyes

George Floyd

Breonna Taylor

Emmett Till

and many others.

Their families mourn their loss, fight for justice, and just want to avenge them, but no.

Now Black people are just puzzles being picked off piece by piece, becoming unfinished.

The people being killed are Black, but yet the reason they are killed is they are scary.

The calls being made to the police is that someone is scared or intimidated by them, but yet the Black person ends up getting killed in the end.

People should not be killed for the color of their skin alone, because another person was scared of them.

Dear Maryama,

Thank you for being brave enough to use your voice to tell a story through your beautiful poem, "Pieces of Me." I admire your confidence to speak up about the struggle and fear that have unfortunately plagued our culture and our people for hundreds of years. At age twelve, you have already begun to recognize the true power of your words. We are counting on you to keep shining your light, let your words be the power to fuel all of your many magnificent dreams! You will accomplish many great things, shaking the world to bring about change.

Don't forget to laugh and dance and sing out loud along the way, learn to find the joy in every single day. God has a special purpose for your life, always know that you are never alone on your journey.

Never be afraid to soar, for there is freedom in the leap. Sometimes it may feel scary to get outside of your comfort zone, but never be afraid to try. Keep climbing to new levels, keep soaring to new heights, show gratitude along the journey and never dim your light. I can't wait to read more of your beautiful poetry, you have power in your pen...never put it down.

With love and light,

Kamaria Delaney, writer and author of *Soul PWR: A Poetry Anthology*, North Carolina





Why?



SYDNEY

age 14 from NC

Why can't I stand up and say,
This is wrong
Because the rest of the world is
blind to the fact
That it isn't right.
The problems that they have creat-
ed in this world
Call to them
But they are deaf to its thunderous
voice

Why can't I solve the issue of
why we are viewed differently,
Based on the color of our skin?
The never-ending problem
The equation that has no answer key

Why is it that the world is blind to
many problems,
But somehow,
They can still see the slightly dark-
er shade of someone's skin
And immediately brand them
Different
And immediately brand themselves
superior

A title that can never be shaken
A brand that will never leave
A tattoo that cannot be erased
And people have to live with it
Even when they have done nothing
to deserve these
shackles that we clamp onto their
wrists

And here, I will answer the question
That we all wonder today,
Why?

A simple question that seems to
have a simple answer
And it does
But the journey to find it could
topple cities in its wake,
Even a whole country,
Why does the world see what they
think benefits them?
But when they are presented with
an ounce of responsibility,
they turn a cold shoulder to those
in need
and to things that need to be
changed

Why?
Because it is easier to pretend
nothing is wrong
than try to solve a problem and fail
No one handles failure easily
It can be a burden that weighs on
your soul
Chains that drag you down
When you try to get back up

The question
Why?
Can be answered very simply
Why?

Because failure stands in our way
to success
And no one wants to face it
But let me tell you this:
Failing is a part of success
You cannot succeed without failing
And we cannot succeed alone
If we work together
If we hesitate to turn our back on
the world
If we try



If we stop and look failure right in
the eyes and say,
I'm
Not
Afraid
of you.

If we say that as a whole,
As a community,
As one United Front,
then we can succeed
Because we can be stronger than
failure
If we stand together failure doesn't
stand a chance
And you can look back on failure
And you won't have to be afraid
Because you will have conquered it

And the question
Why?
Will be answered
When someone asks
Why?

You can say
Because I succeeded
Because I conquered failure
Because I woke from my trance and
Heard the booming voice of the
deteriorating
World that we live in
And I reached out a hand
And helped it back to its feet
Because I saw the problems in the
world, and
Instead of turning away,
I ran toward them.

And I didn't fail
because I didn't do it alone
We did it together,
and failure wasn't an option
And the question
Why?
Will no longer be an obstacle that
you have to face;
It will no longer be a mountain that
you have to climb;
It will no longer be a burden;
It will no longer be chains dragging
you down to the bottom of the
ocean,
Muffling your voice
Because you have spoken up
and broken the chains that linked
you to the crowd.

You will have swum to the top of
the ocean
and handed your bonds over to
failure
so that they may drag it to the
bottom,
So failure can be muffled
And the question
Why?
Will become a distant memory
An asking of the past,
An asking that received its answer
And with failure chained to the
bottom of the ocean
There isn't anything you can't do,
As a united front
As one voice
Fighting for one cause

Failure will start to ask the question
Why?
because failure is alone.
Failure doesn't have the power of a
team
And failure has been beaten
After its long rein that struck fear
and doubt in so many people
It has been overthrown
And cast aside
Without another thought
Because Failure can win the battle
But it will never win the war

Why? Is no longer our problem
It becomes failures problem
An asking that failure will never
answer on its own.
Victory is more powerful than
Failure

Why? You ask?
Because Victory is a team and Fail-
ure is one person
And one person cannot defeat a
united country.

.....

*Sydney, through your ach-
ingly beautiful sentiments that
took shape into poetic verse you
beseechingly ask why.*

*As poetry is the experience of
us. A storyteller of our hearts and
imaginings that captures uni-
versal themes through personal
circumstance.*

*Since poetry transports us to
that intuitive dwelling within that
does know the answer and some-
times changes the question.*

*And through someone else's
story, we get a greater sense of
our own. A few words, arranged in
a certain order, can change the
world.*

Our world. Your world.

*And when all else fails dear
Sydney, follow the Full Moon.*

*I ran by the glow
of the moon
in the predawn.
It followed me
down each street,
the warmth of its presence
welcoming against the backdrop
of the cold, still air
in the lonely, dark hours.
I asked the moon for help,
knowing it could relate
to the cyclical nature
of my need to know,
and at the end of my run,
when the sun was just peeking
through the horizon,
it dawned on me
that the sweet moon
was the answer all along.*

Michelle J.
Kaplan
©2020



Michelle
J. Kaplan,
The
Corporate Poet,
author, and founder of Burst
and Fluerish, New Jersey

.....

2020-2021 ...

A Wild Ride

W

hen we first set our eyes on developing and publishing a magazine, we were a few weeks ahead of a global shutdown due to a raging pandemic. We were able to

hold our first focus group of girls and their parents in person . . . but not the second. We turned to digital surveys as the world shut down. Most people would not have dreamed of starting a new business in the middle of this crazy year. We are not most people, and we learned how to adjust, figuring out the steps we needed to make to move forward to gift this platform to the girls.

And we're so glad we did! Did you read these stories and poems? Did you see the artwork? One word comes to mind—phenomenal.

This is what we discovered during this wild ride, GirlStory's "year one" in publication:

Tween and young teen girls do have voices they want to share.

Tween and young teen girls can write.

They can expertly express their hearts and ideas, sometimes better than adults.

These girls are passionate, purposed, and wise. And we stand in awe of their courage, commitment, and prose.

To you girl writers, thank you. Thank you for trusting in this space to communicate your stories. Thank you for being bold and authentic. Thank you for forgoing cultural expectations that sometimes say you're only interested in the latest trends but, instead, showing the world that you think deeply and love out loud. Your ideas and messages are worthy. They are published!

Keep writing. Keep pursuing your dreams. Keep being you.

Through this wild ride, we have grown to love you.

And we'll keep loving you as we continue our journey together.

Courtney & Kerrie



@GirlStory

giving voice to authentic girl stories that matter

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

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