

Girl[@]Story

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

**Rockstar
Writers'
Workshop**

Holiday Chat

**Setting the
Barre High**

**Coyotes, Snakes &
Superheroes**



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

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

—GirlStory







Letter from the Editor



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!

Always work hard enough to bet on yourself, and when you do, don't feel bad about it.

In middle school, my friend Diana and I decided to ignore all expectations and run for student government. If victorious, Diana would be president, and I'd be vice president of the student body. We were not expected to win. You see, we were running against a couple of the "more popular" kids. Diana and I hung out in the "smart (nerdy?), responsible (nerdy?), and girl-next-door (I like to think kind)" crowd.

Nonetheless, we forged ahead, creating our posters and hanging them on the walls then crafting our big speech. And what a creative speech it was! Don't laugh at how I'm dating us, but we incorporated popular TV shows of the time into our plea for votes. Some of the lines that may or may not have made it into our speech were:

- "We're the A-Team; vote for us!"
- "This speech won't last 60 Minutes, but we'll serve you for the whole year!"
- "Who's the Boss? We won't know until you decide."
- "We're living in A Different World, and we aim to incorporate changes that matter to us."

The big speech and election day came . . . but Diana wasn't there! She had succumbed to chicken pox! On a rainy day in a musty-smelling auditorium, I was forced to get on a stage in front of hundreds of people and give our speech solo. With shaking hands and wobbly knees, I did it. And our classmates loved it! They went wild (in my memories, at least) with applause. The time to vote came, and I checked the box on the card of my choice and dropped it into the box in the school's lunch room, relieved the whole ordeal was finally over.

When the results came back, I learned a lesson I've never forgotten (three decades later!): Always work hard enough to bet on yourself, and when you do, don't feel bad about it.

You see, Diana and I lost by two votes. One would have been made up had Diana not been sick. The other would have been made up if I hadn't voted for the "popular" pair. That's right! I believed that voting for Diana and myself was a selfish move, so I didn't check the box next to our names. Even though we had worked hard; even though our speech was amaze-balls, and even though we deserved it, my misguided guilt left us in second place.

Girls, you're worth it. If you work hard and deserve it, bet (vote) on yourselves. Choose you without regret. Submit your writing. Try out for the team. Aim for your lofty goals, and when they're right in front of you, accept them and cherish them. Always . . .

Cortney
Co-Founder and Editor-in-Chief



Kerrie Boys, co-founder

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

Check us out: www.girlstorymag.com
Get social: @girlstorymag

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Winter 2021

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



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



brain

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



body

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



heart

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

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

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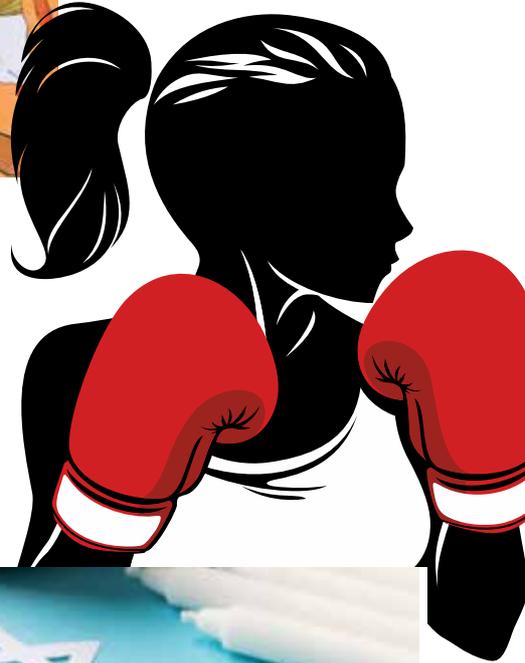
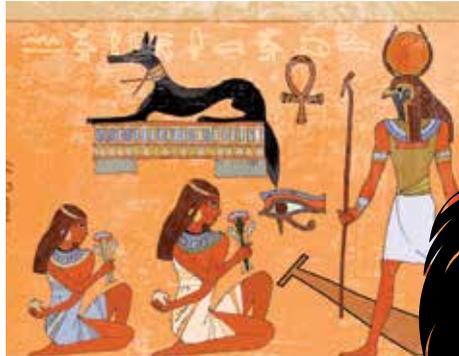
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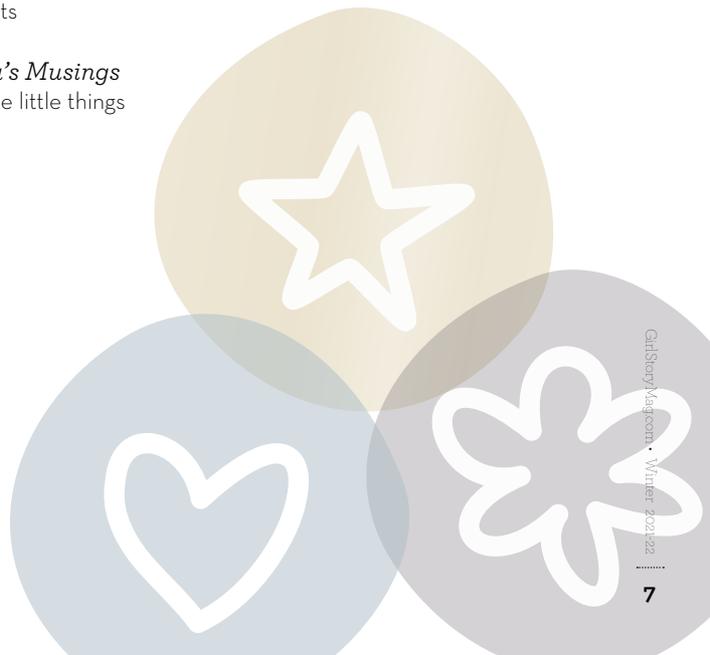
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THE ROCKSTAR WRITERS' WORKSHOP WAS GR8



PLAN B ISN'T ALWAYS SO BAD

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

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



BETHANY

age 10, WA

Dear Bethany,

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

The girls set off to update their individual narratives with

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

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

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

Send us a message at cortney@kortneydonelson.com for more information.



A WALK IN THE WOODS



SYDNEY

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

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

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

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

Dear Sydney,

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

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

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

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

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

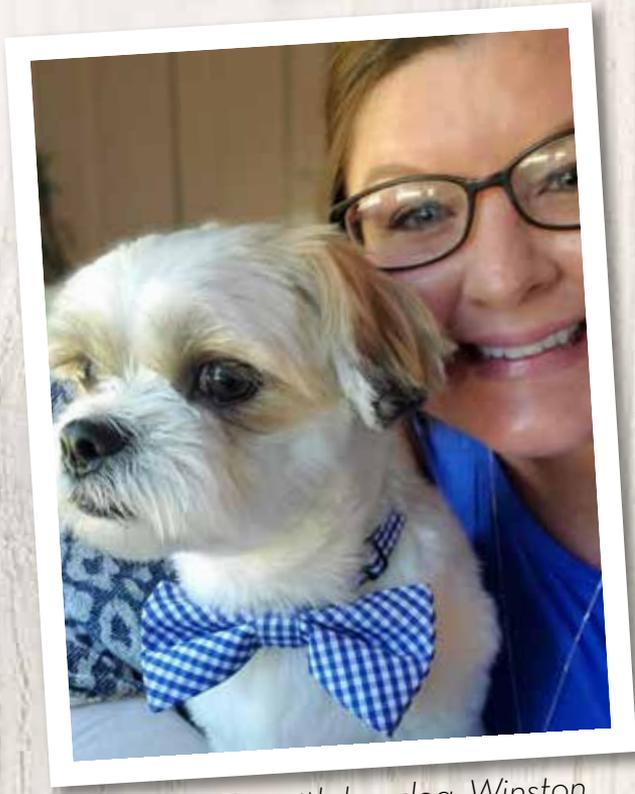




WE APPRECIATE OUR EDUCATORS!

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

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



Melinda Fry with her dog, Winston



brain

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



*Your words control your life, your progress, your results,
even your mental and physical health. You cannot talk
(or write) like a failure and expect to be successful.*



*Germany Kent
Broadcast journalist and author*

The Situation of a Serious



M

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

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

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



SCARE



KATHERYNE

age 12, from IL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Katheryne:

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

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

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





ALTHEA

age 11, from VT

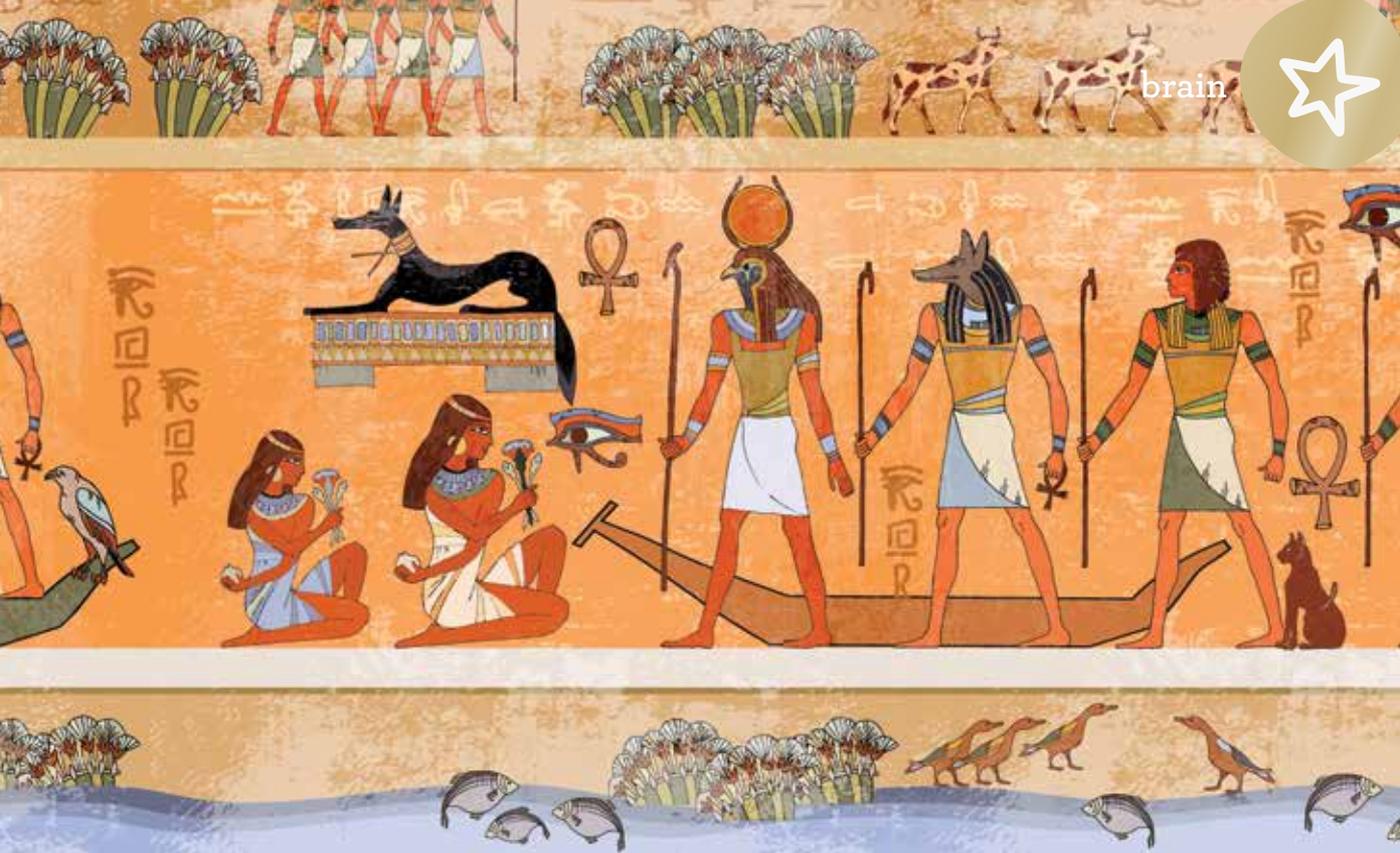
HIEROGLYPHICS

W

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

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

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



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

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

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

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Dear Althea,

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

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

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

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

How would we do this?

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

What could you express in pictures better than with words?

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

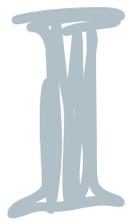
P.S. I added a little polar bear in a box for you to color if you like. 😊

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





Like Clockwork



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

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

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

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

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



ALLISON

age 12, from CA



Dear Alison,

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

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

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

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

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





“Feeling
beautiful

has nothing
to do with what
you look like.”

– *Emma Watson*



body

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

Photographed by Rosalie O'Connor



"Being a dancer is special in many ways. To be a dancer it takes mental toughness, grit, dedication and intelligence. To be in a studio working on your craft is so special. Enjoy every moment and have faith in yourself!"

~Johanna Snyder Butow

*Former professional ballet dancer,
featured front and center in Gala Performance.*





LESLIE

age 11, from IL

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

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

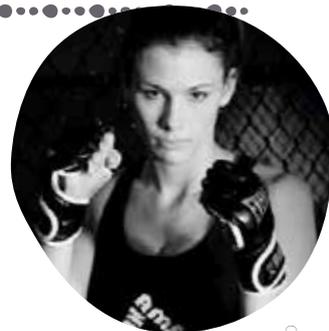
Oh, boxing,
 Thank you for making me feel confident about myself and my abilities.
 You make me brave when I have to make quick decisions.
 Because of you, I know that it will benefit me to get to know my enemy.
 There is no comparison to how it feels to win something that I've worked so hard for.
 That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

Dear Leslie,

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

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

~Bethany Marshall, publishing director and retired MMA fighter

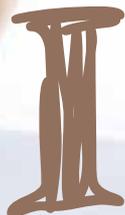




TAYLOR

age 12, from IL

Setting the Barre High



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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Taylor,

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

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

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

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

~Nanette Watson, former dancer with Atlanta Ballet



MIRROR, MIRROR





BRYNNE

age 14, from IL

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

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

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

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

Cherish the love you can
have for yourself. ○



Dear Beautiful You
by Suzan' Stroud

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FROM HOOP HIGH



TO ROCK BOTTOM

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

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

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

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

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



SHELBY

age 13, from IL

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

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

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

asleep on the couch.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dear Shelby,

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

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

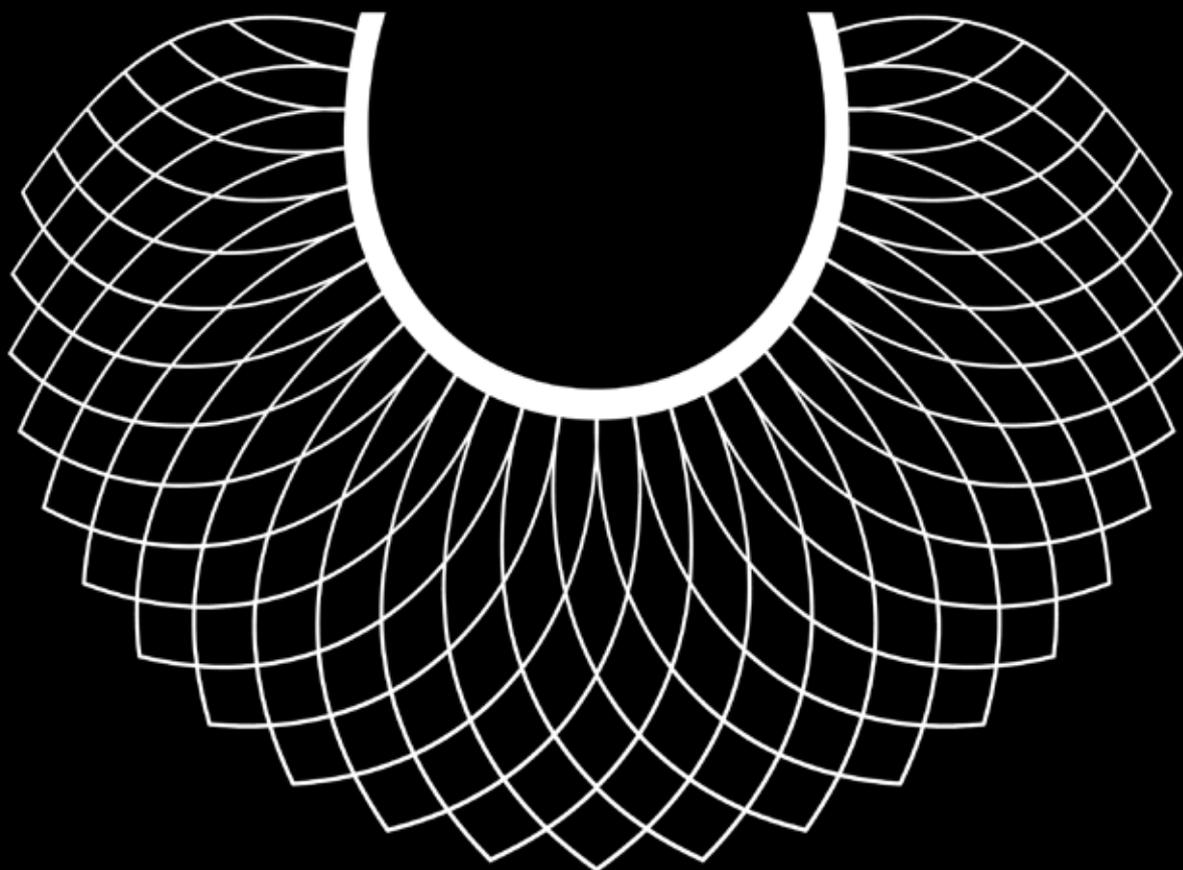
Thank you for writing down your story and telling us some of the things you have learned through this difficult time in your life. I am so sorry that your dad passed away. No doubt, you were one of the brightest and happiest parts of his life. I think he would be so proud of you for sharing your story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

Yours Truly,
Dawn Caviness, MD



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

~ RUTH BADER GINSBURG





heart

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

“Give thanks for what you are now,
and keep fighting for what you want to be tomorrow.”

~ Fernanda Miramontes-Landeros

HOLIDAY Chat



DANIELLA

age 13, from NC

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

S: Hey girl! U excited for Christmas??

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

S: WHAT?!? 😞

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

R: Yeah! I actually celebrate Chanukkah!

S: What's that?

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

S: Sounds cool but y do u celebrate?

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



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

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

R: Yep!

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

S: Wow! 🥰

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

S: Oh no!

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

S: That's so cool! 🥰

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

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

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

S: Cool! Thanks for telling me!

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

S: Yass!!

R: Ok bye girl

S: Bye!!

Daniella,

You have done a brilliant job of creating connection with your story "Holiday Chat." By presenting your story as if it were an iPhone chat between two girls, you essentially "Break the Fourth Wall" by fusing the real world and imaginary world. In other words, as the reader, I feel like I'm reading my real world chats with my friends.



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

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

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

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

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



SUNSHINE
YELLOW
is Joy



ELLA

age 12, from IL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sunshine yellow is joy!

Ella,

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

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

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

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



Snakes, Coyotes, and *Superheroes*

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

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

“I want to be the mom!” I chimed in.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



EMERSON

age 13, from IL

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

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

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

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

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

Dear Emerson,

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

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

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

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

~ Love from one writer to another,

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



FRIENDS

ENEMIES

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

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



DRSHP



MYLAH

age 12, from IL

Mylah!

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

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

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

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

*All my best,
Michelle Kaplan
Poet | Author | Playwright
www.BurstandFleurish.com*





H

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

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

Saturday was approaching, and I again asked why I had to miss dance. “We are going on a once-in-a-lifetime plane ride!” she announced.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



LIFETIME PLANE RIDE



LILLIAN

age 13, from IL

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

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

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

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

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

Bravo, Lillian!

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

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



The Magic in
You

By: Kaitley W.

[submitted by a #girldad]



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

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



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

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

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

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

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



THE WEIGHT



KATELYN

age 13, from IL

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

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

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



OF GRAVITY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



A DEER IN HEADLIGHTS



EMMA

age 13, from IL

Whoosh! The blustery wind tousled my hair as I walked around the square. It was Christmas-time, and there was a small-business Christmas fest in the small town of Monmouth, Illinois. The lights were twinkling like fireflies on a summer night.

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

see if he needs anything.”

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

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

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

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

“Lance would also appreciate some food as well,”



“At least a ten-point buck ...”

Deedee said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Okay,” my mom said and took

off for the field while we finished up eating.

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

Then suddenly . . . **WHAM!**

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

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

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

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

“How is it?” my mom asked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dear Emma,

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

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

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



comic!



MAEVE
age 12, from NJ

ADVENTURES OF



Kate

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

Kate do you want to go outside?

2 minutes later

Maeve



Mirabella's Musings

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

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

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

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

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Girls!

Thanks for responding to our Favorites Survey!

MIRABELLA'S ANSWERS:

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

Braelyn's Favorites!

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

Lacey's Favorites!

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

Leah's Favorites!

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



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