

voices

A Publication of Write Local

Issue
2

write  local

Editor's Note

Welcome to the second issue of *Voices*, a publication of Write Local. Since our first program in 2014, we've served over 300 students through our innovative programming. Write Local supports the kids in our neighborhood by promoting literacy for at-risk youth. We supplied Language Arts teachers at Adelphoi Charter School with a literary magazine for every student. Students read the magazine as part of their English classes to learn about poetry, short story, and other genres and to be inspired to share their voices. Thank you for joining us in supporting literacy, creativity, and writing in our community.

Krista Sarraf, Founding Director, Write Local

Better World Writing Contest

The magazine you're holding contains writing from two sources: a writing contest for K-12 students and a call for submissions open to individuals of all ages. The theme is "A Better World." We sought fiction, poetry, and essays under 1,000 words that explore problems in the community and propose solutions to create a better world. The contest submissions are judged on originality, interpretation of the theme, and overall quality.

Contest Judges

Richard Blevins is a renowned poet, an editor, an award-winning teacher, and most recently a judge of Write Local's Better World Writing Contest. Not only is he the author of three collections of poems and nine chapbooks, but he has taught literature and poetry writing at the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg since 1978. An Ohio native, Dr. Blevins resides in western Pennsylvania.

Virginia Seatherton holds a Master's in English Literature from Virginia Commonwealth University. Virginia teaches writing and literature in one-on-one tutoring settings and is actively involved with various education initiatives, including Higher Achievement, where she works with middle school students to improve their writing, reading, and public speaking skills. She is a Litigation Specialist with a background in law and resides in Richmond, Virginia.

Krista Sarraf earned a Master's in English from James Madison University in 2014. She teaches writing and critical thinking at the university level, is the founding Director of Write Local, and teaches many of our workshops, including Academy for Writers and Entrepreneurs, Yoga & Writing, Stories about Home, and Poems & Paintings. She writes a column in the Laurel Mountain Post and is a freelance copy writer and blogger.

Write Local is an entrepreneurship and writing program that inspires young writers to think creatively and innovate locally.

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1901 Ligonier St., Suite C, Latrobe, PA 15650

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A Better World to Me

Ava Wheeler

Winner, K-5th Grade Category

A better world to me would be
A place to escape the reality
Of Harm
Abuse
And Misuse
For all that don't
Have a voice that they can use

Blind Future

Xavier Perry

Winner, 6th-8th Grade Category

Has anyone noticed how terrible life is; the awful wars that go on and deaths that occur. I mean, everyone might as well have a sign on them saying "I'm miserable." Now I could talk all day about the problems all around the world, but as a 13 year old I can't solve any of them. So, let's talk about how terrible my life is 'cause maybe that I can change.

My community is so underdeveloped that I can't believe I've survived here for almost a year now. Yeah, I'm kind of new here. My mom and I moved here eight months ago in October, but now it's May. The kids here are mean and make fun of me, but I have two friends who support me and help

me around. They accept me for my differences and that's all I could ask for. That's what this community needs. Everyone is judged everywhere you go. When I'm in the store with my mom, she always tells people to stop staring.

Right now I'm debating whether to get out of bed. It's school yet again, and I really don't want to go, especially since it's Monday. But, I know my mom will drag me out anyway. So, I guess I will. My house is kind of big considering the houses around us. It's two floors and one bathroom. The kitchen is blue and green with a small brown counter and my living room and dining room are green with some yellow to it and it has a brown couch. It's all kind of smooshed together. Now I walk to the bathroom; a shower always wakes me up. I mean, I have to get up at 5:00 so I can eat and escape my morning ridicule from the kids as I pass them on the streets. I really wish others would accept me for who I am. Now I'm dressed and my mom just left the room and is going to make me some breakfast. I have finally learned my way down the stairs into the kitchen, but sometimes I use my walking stick so I don't fall.

Breakfast was great; pancakes are my favorite along with scrambled eggs. I'm done and it's 5:30. My mom gives me my stuff and we head toward the door. Then as we walk I enjoy the silence and peace. My favorite part is the peace and not getting mocked. The walk is only two blocks away, but when getting ridiculed it feels like a mile. My mom rings the door bell and Mrs. Coal opens and welcomes us in. My mom leads me over to the counter in their small kitchen and Roan greets me.

"Hey, Reece." I follow the voice; then, I identify him and reply.

"Oh, hey Roan, how are you?"

We both don't talk much around our parents, or at least negatively. We just give basic conversation about school and tests and such, but then once we leave all we could talk about is how awful school was going to be. We are kind of pessimistic kids but it's 'cause we both get made fun of and I feel bad 'cause it's not Roan's fault; he's just a good friend. As we sit down on the bus, Ali comes over and sits over across from us. We usually sit at the front of the bus. The bus driver appreciated that we were quiet and he liked us the best. Kids were still making jokes about me in the back and I could hear.

"Oh no, I can't see my shirt!"

"I can't see! I must be stupid." To be honest, they were so ill-formed and stupid I didn't even bother. The bus stopped and me, Roan, and Ali got off first and headed for homeroom. The day is pretty usual and boring. I head to class, get mocked in class, but the one thing I know is that I was smarter than everyone in my class. Even the one above me. 7th and 8th grade was so easy, but I didn't want to leave my friends so pretended to do bad. As I walk down the hallway to English with Ali, I hear the laughs and snickers, and then a kid pushes me into a locker. That's when I lost it. I have never cried for being different. But no one has ever used physical force against me for it. That is when I started balling my eyes out and ran, but I ran into a locker so Ali helped me up and we headed to the nurse who also favored me unlike the kids or the teachers. But I was so fed up from all the mocking that even those jokes on the bus started to sting. Then I call my mom and ask her to pick me up. I hear my mom and I stand immediately and she walks me out of school as I start to tear up again.

I then tell my mom and she decides to help me start a campaign for not only my school but for my community about how people's differences are what make us unique. I stood up during our school's assembly the next day and it was quiet at first until the other kids who were victims of being different decided to stand with me. After the assembly, my mom and I focused on our community. We started calling families and hospitals about if they knew any kids with differences whether it was medical or just being a nerd. We wanted to show people that who we are isn't a flaw, but a gift we want to share with everyone. During this process I realized that me, a blind kid, was making a difference. I realized that one voice can change anything and that no matter what you face you can come through and make a difference.

Waldo

Gwen Lindberg

Winner, 9th-12th Grade Category

Call me Ishmael.

Okay, let me get one thing straight. This was not my idea. I am not a writer. I am not an artist. I am not anything creative. I have lived an average life. I have never been special. My grades are decent. My free time is spent playing video games, and I daydream in school about things that will never happen. I will go to college in the fall. Graduate. And live an ordinary life. I will retire. Spend my free time golfing and reminiscing my past while drinking lemonade on a porch. And then I will die. My family and a few friends will attend my funeral. And in a hundred years, no one will remember me. That sounds pretty good.

At least, it did, until I told her, and she looked at me as if I was the crazy one.

She started to laugh, and once she began, she couldn't stop. She told me to start this off with a reference to *Moby Dick*. She loves Melville's works; she said "Ishmael" would be a good name for me, since it rings with the traditional disappointment of a Jewish grandfather. It is like she is disappointed for me because I do not have the imagination to dream an exciting life.

She, on the other hand, dreams dreams worthy of any Renaissance painter or Victorian writer. Her head is always above the clouds as she muses the philosophical and intangible. She is an enigma. Her thoughts are wildly tangled, weaving around in her brain until something unexplored makes everything slow down.

One time, I was lying on my bed doing homework, as she sat on my desk, legs swinging, hands folding all my notes into paper airplanes and cranes and a bunch of other unrecognizable animals. Out of the blue, she told me that the first thing that comes out of someone's mouth is the way they were conditioned to think. What they say next defines who they are.

These things just erupt out of her, as if she couldn't keep them inside for another second. Her life has never been average, generic, predictable. She thinks differently; she contemplates ideas and images from angles foreign to the rest of us. One time, we were chasing each other around the

house, when she ran into my dog. She froze, and out of nowhere asked, “What if our pets think we hurt them on purpose when we trip because they don’t understand mistakes?”

She has always been extraordinary.

A couple of hours ago, she burst into my room and dragged my computer off my lap. Eyes dancing with light and mischief, she said, “Come on! I have an idea!” And though these words have precluded countless sticky situations, I still followed her into the cold, snowy night.

She lead me outside, barely pausing to let me put on my boots. She dragged me up the hill in my backyard, through the woods, into our meadow. She grabbed my hand and pulled me around our tree--the tree we named Waldo--going faster and faster until we tumbled into a pile of snow. Laughing, she said, “We have no idea who we are going to be. I could become a serial killer. You could become the world’s next Thoreau and inspire a generation. But trying to map out every second? That’s just a waste of time. And you will never be satisfied.”

Then she shoved snow in my face and told me to get my monotonous butt up the tree before the sky fell in and our destinies were lost forever.

We had been trying to climb to the top of the tree for years. The first time we made it, about three years ago, the joy and triumph on her face made every single scratch and scrape worth the struggle. We stared into the horizon, watching the clouds that seemed just out of reach. And I told her my truth: “This is the happiest I have ever been.”

She turned to me, the light of the sun in her eyes, and said, “This will not be the happiest you will ever be.”

It was at the top of the oak, on this snowy winter’s night, when she told me that she believed destinies can be challenged, but not changed. “Free will is an illusion, just like the rest of this world. You can doubt everything’s existence except your own consciousness. You think, therefore you are. I think, therefore I am. That’s it.”

I stared at her, and she turned away to gaze up into the stars. I couldn't imagine what she found up there; I saw spheres of burning gas that will one day explode and cease to be, but she saw something else. She has always found comfort in the sky.

After an interminable time, I left her and trudged back to my house to resume my futile attempt at creativity. I thought about how she seems to experience the world in technicolor while I only see black and white. She jumps from one thought to another, seeing each in vivid detail, while I muddle through my life, satisfied with the bare design.

As I hung my jacket on the back of my chair something small fell out of my pocket. I unfolded the tiny tree, careful not to rip the damp paper. Some of the ink smeared a little, but the three words were still clear.

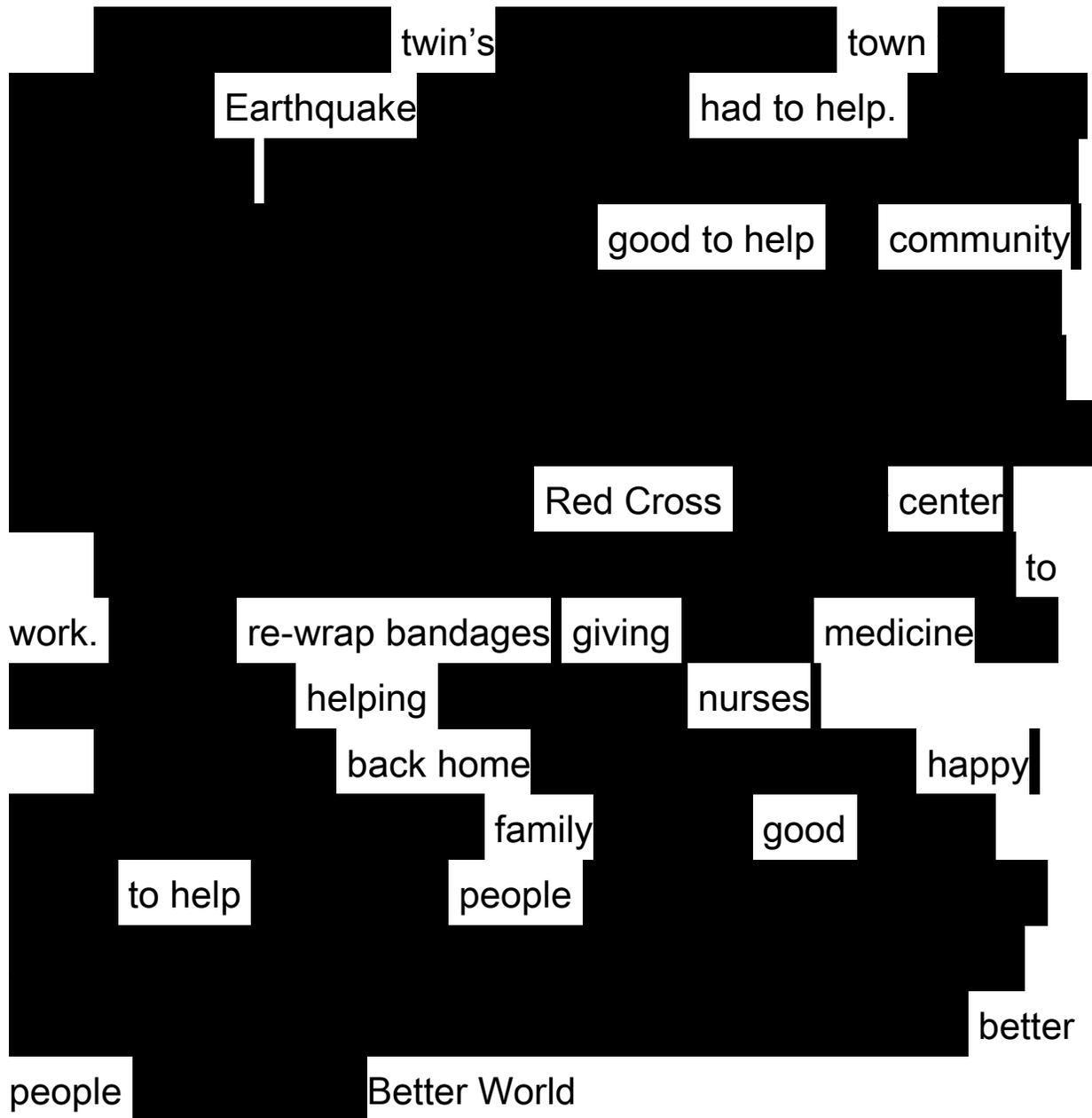
Write about me.

You have asked me to write about a better world. Well, let me be honest. There is no better world than one with her in it.

She challenges the unknown, embracing it instead of fearing it. She believes in contradictions: we choose our paths, yet they are chosen for us. She believes that religion is simply a way for humans to feel less alone in a universe we do not understand. She believes in tolerance, patience, and peace. She loves unconditionally. I wish I was more like her.

Helping the Community

Ella Williams



Another and Another

Ayden Kokaszka

One day there was a person named Garry. He was a very nice person. He woke up and looked outside and saw so much trash on the ground, so he went down his elevator to clean up the trash, so he did. Then, he looked outside the other day and saw more trash, so he picked it up then it did it again. Then people started noticing and when they had garbage on their property they started to clean it up and those people were happy with what they did. And Garry was happy with what he did to make the other people happy. I think a Better World should have more people working together in their town/city/environment to make the World a better place.

Painting A Wish

Sterling Cathey

I pulled my jacket collar higher as the wind bit at my face. “Hurry up, Jasmine!” my mom called. I sped up and jogged down the sidewalk. As I looked ahead, the huge sign with the menacing words: “Children’s Hospital” loomed over me. Gulp. I didn’t like the idea of watching my brother get his tonsils ripped out one bit. I sighed. I guess I’d have to make the best of it. Lost in my thoughts, I didn’t realize we were already at the fateful doors leading into the fearful Hospital.

I walked into the waiting room. It was clean and quiet. I looked around and saw a painting of sunflowers, and smiled. I loved paintings and art, so I studied the beautiful picture. But, interrupting my thinking, the nurse walked in. “James Harper” she called out. Then the nurse took us to the elevator.

When we arrived at room 212, the nurse asked me to stay outside, and I obeyed. I gave James a hug and watched him disappear into the room. After about 5 minutes I started to get restless, thinking about James past that closed door. But then I heard a whimper and a snuffle from a room at the far end of the hall and my curious side started to kick in.

I forgot about James and began creeping quietly down the hall to that mysterious door at the end of the hallway. The sobbing noise got louder. I opened the door just a crack and peered inside. A little girl, 6 or 7 years old, was sitting on a bed in a white room, and on a couch at the other end of the room was a lady that I assumed was her mother. The little girl was curled up, crying, and the mom looked like tears were about to spill from her eyes too. The mom looked up and said “Hello?” she could tell I looked a little scared, so she beckoned me right in and I cautiously stepped inside. I observed the room and realized there were a whole bunch of tubes, wires, and IVs connecting to the little girl on the bed. On the side table there was a stack of papers that said “Medical Report Results.” “Is everything okay?” I asked timidly. “No.” the mother answered. “Read these papers.”

I picked up the first paper on the stack, and the second I read it I gasped. It said that the little girl on the bed was named Isabelle Woodred and that she had a type of disease. The worst part that made me want to cry a whole ocean of tears was that she would most likely die in 1-2 months and there was nothing we could do to stop it. "I'm . . . I'm so sorry." I said. I knew that didn't sound very comforting, but that was all I could think of to say.

One title on a paper caught my eye. "Make a Wish." It was a foundation that granted kids who were sick and would most likely die soon, one wish. "Do you have a wish you want to make?" I said to Isabelle, trying to make her feel better. "I want to go to Egypt and see all the different sights like the pyramids, but it takes too long to get there," she answered. I thought about that, and as I was thinking I saw a vase of sunflowers on the side table. Suddenly a thought struck me like lightning. I made the connections in my head: Sunflowers . . . paintings . . . Make a Wish . . . Isabelle . . . Egypt . . . "Best idea ever! I'll be back in a little bit!" I shouted. I was logically figuring out my plan: If Isabelle couldn't get her wish then I could at least *try* to make half of it come true! Because she couldn't physically go to Egypt, then I would at least attempt to make her feel like her mind was there. I would draw a painting of different sights in Egypt and give it to her! At that moment, I felt exactly like a Fairy Godmother making a wish come true.

In a half an hour we were home and I was getting my oil paints and easel set up. I locked myself in my room and worked straight through lunch. Finally, I emerged from my room covered in paint from head to toe, but grinning from ear to ear. My work was complete. I knew Isabelle would absolutely love it. I grabbed my painting and told my mom to drive me back to the Hospital as fast as she could.

When we arrived, those big glass doors leading into the hospital didn't seem scary and fearful; they looked friendly and enticing. The nurse greeted us and took us back to Isabelle's room. I couldn't wait to see what Isabelle thought of my painting.

I took a deep breath and handed my painting of the Egyptian Pyramids to Isabelle. Her whole face lit up and she looked like I had just given her the best gift in the world. The expression on Isabelle's face was enough to make all my hard-work pay off, and my heart glowed enough to heat up the whole room. I looked over to Mrs. Woodred and she was sobbing quietly. Except, this time instead of tears of misery, they were tears of happiness and gratitude. She could only say two words: "Thank You," and I understood what she meant.

Suddenly I thought that this is what I want to do. Make a better world by granting children's wishes. I always want to be able to see kids' faces light up, like Isabelle's did. If kids, like Isabelle, could be happy, I knew that anyone could. I looked around and smiled the biggest smile in the universe because this is what I wanted to feel like all the time: PURE HAPPINESS.

I Don't Understand

By Ian Fox

I don't understand
Why people enjoy being mean.
Why the people we look up to are fighting hitting thugs
Why we laugh at the poor and bow down to the rich

But most of all,
Why people are my friends one day and my enemies the next.
Why we can walk away from something we know would be an easy fix
What can drive a person to do something?

What I understand most is
How to do math
How to catch fish
Why my parents want to keep me safe

One Big Problem

Elizabeth Dlugos

One big problem that I have encountered is world peace. People all over the world fight and have war. I personally don't think that fighting will help anything! I am encouraged by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to stand up for world peace. When I was in first grade, my mom ordered a book on Dr. King from Scholastic Book Company and after she read it to me, I cried. This year, in fifth grade, I did a presentation on him. I think he had such wonderful ideas about peace.

I have a couple of ways I believe that I could solve the problem of world peace. First, is to speak or preach about peace. Next, I could also be kind to everyone and teach younger kids the way to peace. For instance, if you babysit, show those kids right from wrong. You can be a good example to all around you. Most importantly, I think you can try for world peace by being the best person you can be. I think I could better myself by always giving 100% in sports, school clubs, and academics. I could also teach my kids (the ones I hope to someday have) to do their best always, even when it is hard. I could also avoid fighting with the three siblings I have when I am with them or mad at them. The same goes for my school peers.

To be the best person I can be I could be kind and generous to others. I think it is important to try not to get mad or say anything mean to anyone. Simply be nice and smile. If everyone in the world tried a little harder at these simple things there could be so much less fighting and sadness. The best thing to do is keep calm and live life on!

The Difference That Makes Us

Aiden Mellon

Better is only better because of worse.

Earth is a great planet because of the ones we don't have

Triceratops have three horns because there is a number two

Truth is here because of lies but with less lies there will be more truth to open our eyes

Right is our wrong and wrong is our right. Is it right to fight? Is it wrong to long?

Why are the greatest people in the world the ones who we hate?

Or is that they lead us to our own equal saint?

Roar goes the lion, squeak the mouse, giving each other their unique sound

Living in a utopia would take away all the good and the bad, and without the

Differences it would just be nothing.

A Better World would be the best because

there is still no best and the world will always change for the better

and the worse would diminish,

but still be left to protect the better in our world that makes itself

No Bullying Here!

Emery Kindel

There once was a kid named Alex, who was overweight, very short, and only 9 years old. He was held back in second grade and then was the oldest in third grade. Alex was always bullied because he wasn't smart; he was short and fat, but still, Alex was always nice. He always looked on the bright side of things.

One day, the kids Alex was with in second grade (who were now in fourth grade), surrounded him and made fun of him, saying bad words to him at recess. The recess guard came and told them to stop, but they didn't. Then, she told them, all of them, that they would get suspended if they didn't stop, so they did. Then they went somewhere else and talked about him. Alex was annoyed, but he was good at controlling his emotions.

The principal called Alex's parents in for a meeting and explained to them that it may be better for Alex to be homeschooled. Alex's parents agreed that homeschooling would be best for Alex.

Many years later, Alex graduated from high school and lost a lot of weight. He decided college was not for him, but took the classes needed to become a licensed Real Estate Agent.

One day, while out and about, Alex ran into Daniel, one of the fourth grade kids who bullied him. Daniel said he was sorry for all that he had said and done to Alex all those years ago. On another day, Alex saw Mark, another fourth grade bully, but Mark wasn't like Daniel. He continued to say mean things and bullied Alex for no reason at all. Thankfully, Daniel happened to be nearby and saw this; he stood up for Alex.

Alex and Daniel started to hang out together and became best friends. After about a year, Alex came up with an exciting idea! They should start a "No Bullying" program for the school that they had gone to. The program stressed the importance of standing up for friends and speaking out against bullies so that adults knew when it was happening and could put a stop to it. Eventually, every school in Western Pennsylvania adopted this program. It literally made every single adult and child harbor no hate for anyone!

The program was shown on TV and it eventually spread throughout the entire state! Barely anyone was mean anymore. Alex, the kid who was short and heavy and not smart, became tall, skinny, and smart and made a miracle happen! He went to the school where it all started and gave a speech to all of the kids at the school and everyone loved it! That is how Alex made almost everyone in Pennsylvania be kind to one another and eliminated bullying in school.

Love

Ani Ayers

Love

For

The

Homeless

Blind

Or

See

Care

For

The

Careless

No
Matter
What
You
See
In
Them
Make
A
Better
World
By
Showing
People
The
Better
World
They
Can
See
Too

A Dream Ago

Cassandra Smiley

We beat the street like kids
Once more into the cage
Of River Rat Stadium
How small it looks now

I look up and strain to see the stars
Rising above the pavement
Whose cracks ooze history
Comedic, tragic, mine.

Slanted houses sinking into coal seams
Hooded teens on the steps
Hiding out from their homes
In this confine invoke no pity

A dream ago, it was me
With ethereal reveries, concrete plans
Bravado,
Redemption,
Resolve
Came up from these streets and will again
And the world
Is waiting.

The Woman With Maps in Her Brain

John Frochio

"Life will flash before my eyes
So scattered and lost
I want to touch the other side."
-- "Map of the Problematique" by Muse

Shay Million grew up in a middle class family in the heart of America City, in a time when "middle class" meant you were just scraping by. Most of their income went to social programs and health care with little left for everyday expenses and little help from the Overseers.

Despite her many obstacles, however, she grew up to be a smart, beautiful, talented woman. She had long flowing golden hair, a lithe body and exuberance in her walk and talk. She developed a contrite heart and compassion for children. She worked hard, following her dream to eventually become a Teacher of History.

On her first day as a Teacher, they injected her with the Authorized Curriculum. It did not hurt, but neither was it a pleasant experience. She understood the need for standards in education as decreed by the Overseers, but she did not believe the injections were necessary.

However, she did not want to rock the boat, especially as a new Teacher.

For several years, she taught her students brilliantly from the Curriculum, because—contrary to the Rules—she included her own understanding when she imparted the Curriculum through the mindlinks. Of course, she didn't fully know how brilliantly she taught them, since her students were widely scattered throughout the city and all of them passed their classes as Equal Achievers, gradeless, all alike, popped out of cookie cutters. There was no individual feedback. There was no accountability except that the Teacher must regurgitate the Curriculum.

One day Shay grew ill. The Public Physicians surmised her Teaching injections had become corrupted. Since it was neither safe nor legal to remove them, they simply gave her medicine to quell the effects. Then they issued the official Authorization for her to return to work.

From that time on, work became more difficult for her. Her brain felt muddled, muddied like stagnant waters. Then one day she discovered strange maps floating around inside her brain. She became curious. Each day she picked a different map and followed it to its endpoint. All destinations ended in the future. Each map revealed a different future of hopelessness.

One day she decided to lead each of her students, one by one, down the varied roads of her mind maps. Her students, the best in their districts, full of inquisitiveness and challenge, were puzzled by what they saw.

Scratching his head, Alex said, "What is this, Ms. Million?"

"A crumbling building."

Squinting through a fog, Mahesh said, "And that? What is that?"

"A bridge collapsing."

"What's that over there?" said Zhao, nervously bouncing from one foot to the next.

"The sick overflowing the clinics."

"And there?" said Alejandra, staring blankly.

"The homeless flooding the streets."

Alex said, "Why are you showing us this, Ms. Million?"

"This is a future that needs hope. I bring them hope."

She took her students into the future. And left them there. To find their excellence.

The Shed — A Resurrection

Lois Manon

The tall evergreens planted by his father
sigh briefly,
then thump to the orange-needled earth.
Stripped of branches,
long trunks are sectioned into logs.
Sturdy chains barely subdue
the still-struggling wood.

The pungent smell
of newly-milled pine boards
whispers a tale of slaughter,
as a skeleton slowly rises
from the stacks of fresh lumber.

Measuring the placement of each nail,
the carpenter sheaths the building
with the still-bleeding planks,
and places a four-paned window
to capture the healing rays
of morning sun.

Attaching straight ribs
to their ridgepole spine,
he gravely tops the peak
with a ceremonial tree...
homage to the sacrifice
of his father's hand-placed seedlings.

Shrouding the roof first
in layers of black,
the builder hammers rows
of weathered cedar shakes into place,
echoing with their pattern
the tall gray-brown witness
of surrounding trees.

The sturdy roof sheds the pelting rain
like the layered boughs

of a living pine.
The carpenter stands inside...
and smiles.

A Meditation on Meditation

Leigh Pillegi

All you have to do is sit still.

So why is meditation so difficult?

This is how it usually goes for me: Sitting still, doing nothing. Okay, breathing, but nothing else. Okay, filtering out any thoughts that don't have to do with breathing. In, out. In, out. Slowly. Repeating a phrase in my mind, a two-syllable phrase that matches in, out. One syllable for In. One syllable for Out. People who practice a type of yoga called Kundalini use the syllables "Sat Nam." (Their meaning has to do with truth.) Sat. Nam. Sat. Nam. In. Out. Just breathe. I try it, and it seems to be working. But then, Sat Nam becomes Sat Nam don't forget to send that email and why are car horns honking outside.

Is it possible to fail at meditation? Is it failing or is it just part of the journey? And why am I doing this anyway?

I would like to be more focused. I would like to be more productive. That's why I want to meditate. The times that I've been able to block out random thoughts, I have understood what meditation can do for me. It's spring cleaning for my brain. Like bags of worn and outdated thoughts have been donated to Goodwill and the cobwebs in my brain closets have been swept away.

Meditating gives me energy. I can get all of those little annoying projects done, the ones that paw at the back of my consciousness like yappy little dogs. The thought of doing all those little projects overwhelms me when I can't focus, but when I can, I wonder why I let them get to me in the first place.

I've heard about the good things that meditation can do for veterans with PTSD, even the ones whose bodies are whole.

When meditation is working for me, in my mind I sometimes see colors that represent the amount of heat I am carrying in my body. Yellow equals calm, and that's my normal self. I always see at least some yellow. If I'm having an intense day, I'll see heat as bright orange or red. If the intensity has passed, the orange and red turn to dark red and then to black. Those colors dislodge and move

along the river of yellow calm until they disappear. Do I really see those colors? Since colors exist only in our minds (not in our eyes), I'm going to say that yes, I do see those colors.

What would happen if everyone in the world meditated at the same time for say, ten minutes? All of us just sitting quietly for ten minutes, eyes closed. Fighting everywhere would stop for ten minutes. Some peoples' physical or emotional pain might be relieved for ten minutes. Maybe we'd all focus a little bit better after that. (Just make sure that for those ten minutes, nobody is in the middle of sky diving, frying food or attempting to recite all of the digits of Pi. Also, I'd exclude anybody who happens to be giving birth at the time.)

I'm not sure I've ever meditated for a full ten minutes. It's a goal. I will try it. I'll sit and not think about it. I'll work harder at doing nothing.

Please Return

Virginia Seatherton

If lost. Please return. No name.

Please return. If lost. No number.

Pied Piper. If lost. Please return.

Acknowledgements

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Thank you to our readers, including the students at Adelphoi Charter School, for enjoying *Voices* literary magazine. We hope that reading this publication inspires you to think about how literature can change the world and prompts you to participate in social change.

Would you like to get involved with Write Local?

View our current programs on our website, www.writelocal.org, or contact Krista Sarraf at writelocal@gmail.com for more information. We offer workshops, homeschool groups, and internships in addition to our contest and publication.

Discussion Questions for Teachers and Students

Voices literary magazine is an excellent discussion tool for Language Arts settings and homeschool groups. Before you begin your discussion, read the magazine and consider what stood out for you. Which pieces did you like and why?

- 1) Some pieces in this magazine confront bullying, littering, poverty, and other issues. If you had to pick one of these issues to solve, which one would you choose and why?
- 2) What is the government's role (if any) in solving problems in our communities such as bullying, littering, poverty, and more? Conversely, what can you do as an individual to confront these issues?
- 3) What form of writing stands out to you and why (poetry, non-fiction essay, short story, or blackout poetry)? Try writing your own piece in this form.
- 4) How do writers and artists interact with world and community issues through their writing and artwork? How can these people help us to solve problems?
- 5) What is the role of reading literature like this in today's world? Is reading literature as important as learning STEM subjects, such as engineering and math? Why or why not?
- 6) One day, you will make choices about how to interact with the world through a career. How can you continue to serve your community while pursuing meaningful work?
- 7) What is the role of creativity in schools? What are some ways that schools can encourage creative thinking in students so we can continue to make the world a better place?
- 8) What's one thing you could do today to get involved in making your home, school, or town a better place? Brainstorm a few ideas and create an action plan that you can implement.
- 9) Meditation is the practice of training your mind to stay calm and focused. In "A Meditation on Meditation" the author asks "What would happen if everyone in the world meditated at the same time for say, ten minutes?" Discuss possible answers to this question. Try meditating for 1-3 minutes and discuss how you feel after.
- 10) "Helping the Community" is an example of "blackout poetry." In this form, the author cuts a page out of a book and crosses out words. The remaining words construct a poem. How does this poetry form influence your experience with the poem's content? How would the poem be different if it wasn't in blackout form?
- 11) In "The Difference That Makes Us," the author contemplates how our differences and disagreements make us better. He says "Living in a utopia would take away all the good and the bad, and without the Differences it would just be nothing." Do you agree with his statement? Why or why not?
- 12) In "The Woman With Maps In Her Brain," the author describes a dystopian world in which the teacher and students must follow an authorized curriculum. Discuss the similarities and differences between the fictional world in this story and the world we live in today. What do you notice?

Are you using *Voices* in your classroom? Contact Krista Sarraf for teaching tools, including additional questions, prompts, and resources.

writelocal@gmail.com | www.writelocal.org



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1901 Ligonier St., Suite C, Latrobe, PA 15650



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