

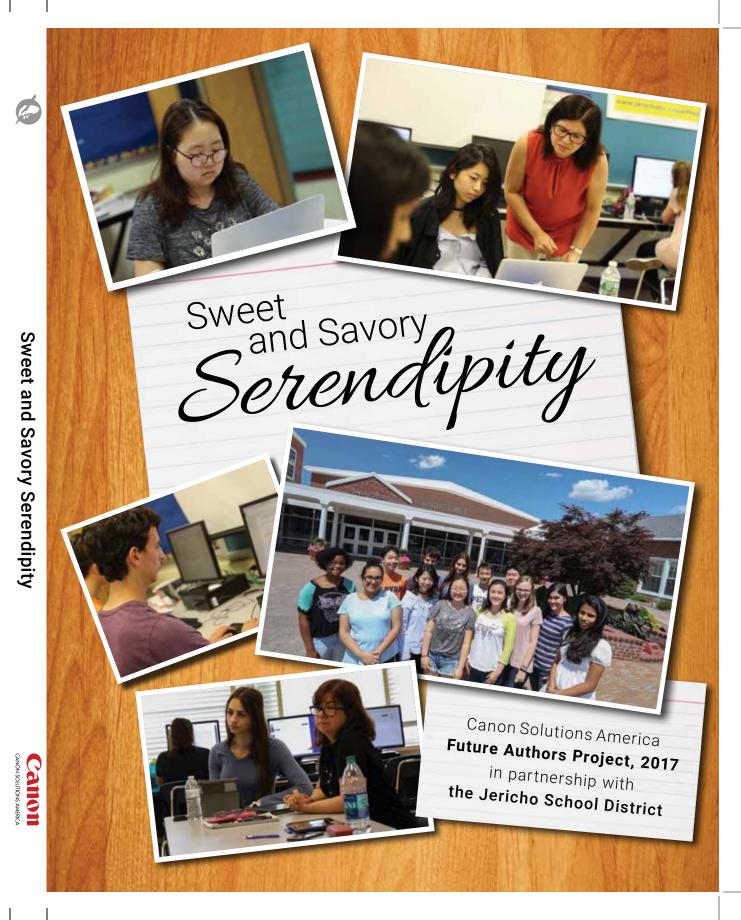
Big dreams start small. This is especially true when it comes to fueling the futures of young authors. The Canon Solutions America Future Authors Project, a free program offered in partnership with the School District of Palm Beach County, was created 11 years ago to help inspire students with a passion for writing. Canon Solutions America's dream of expanding the Future Authors Project came true when the Jericho School District became the first school in New York to participate in the program.

The project's summer workshop provides students with insight into the process of writing, editing, and digitally publishing books through instruction by certified teachers, interactions with Canon experts, and insight from local published authors. Canon cameras and instructional classes are also shared with students and faculty to provide vivid photography to accompany their writing.

Throughout the workshop, students work on crafting poems, essays, and short stories to polish their writing, editing, story development, and critical thinking skills. Each student's work is compiled and digitally printed and bound into book form using Canon printing technology.

Canon Solutions America, Inc., a Canon U.S.A. Company, provides leading enterprise, production, and large format printing solutions, supported by exceptional professional service offerings. Visit csa.canon.com.





All Photos in this book taken with Canon EOS 5D Mark IV. Printed using Canon Digital Technology at Digital Lizard NJ, an LSC Communications Company.

Jericho School District Jericho, New York 11753



National School of Excellence United States Department of Education

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A Special Thank You

The Canon Future Authors Project at Jericho High School was possible due to the continuous support from our Jericho Board of Education. The process began over a year ago with Victor Manuel introducing an idea about working with Canon. Thank you to Hank, Ben, Barbara, and John for always supporting our students to achieve new heights. The students in this workshop participated in an inspiring writing community in collaboration with their teachers. The opportunity for students to create this book is how we are preparing students to be "future ready." Extra thanks to Suzanne Valenza for amplifying student voice and modeling how we are all learners.

Dr. Daniel Salzman

Foreward

I'm very much a planner, an organizer. But it's life's serendipities that remind me that sometimes the best experiences are those not sought after—for instance this collaboration with Canon Solutions America. I was simply delighted when presented with the opportunity to lead a writing workshop for colleagues and students who all view themselves as writers. We came together for four summer days and shared ourselves, our relationships to food, and of course our writing. We composed poetry, memoir, and still life photography. Thanks to Canon, we used very high-tech equipment to help bring our inner visions to a more powerful fruition.

My choice of food as a theme for our workshop came from my own love of the food memoir genre, my admiration for its heroine, MFK Fisher, and my experiences teaching it to young people in my creative writing classes. This genre has a unique ability to release the struggle, beauty, and essence of our experiences. When we look at our lives through food, we examine what makes us human, and this shared humanity deepens our unity.

On behalf of our group, I invite you to relish the works in this book. We hope they inspire you to create your own works of food art and literature, and to always, as MFK Fisher said, "pay attention to our appetites."

Suzanne Valenza

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Susan Baek

"Dreams and dedication are a powerful combination."
-William Longgood

Born in Bayside, Queens, Susan spent most of her childhood in the bright and bustling city. After eight years of residing in Queens, Susan and her family decided to move to the suburbs of Long Island: Jericho. Throughout her life, Susan has encountered various cultures, food and languages, and learned to develop a sense of appreciation for all people and their ways of living.

Susan Baek is a high school writer and an avid advocate for human rights. She started her writing career in elementary school from writing simple travel journals to developing storylines for her fictional characters. Recently, Susan began to take a deeper interest in human rights and social entrepreneurship, and aspires to study in those fields in college possibly launching her own non-profit organization. Outside of academics, Susan has performed in world-renowned concert halls such as Carnegie Hall, due to her dedication to cello performance.



Birthday Memoir

Birthdays are a time of celebration for any household, in any country around the world. Although the means of celebrating or maybe even holding a party differ, food is one thing that encompasses birthdays for all types of families, big or small. Growing up in a Korean household situated in the suburbs of New York brought a sometimes chaotic clash between two opposing cultures: Eastern and Western.

My mom immigrated from South Korea a year before I was born. First being introduced to my dad through a mutual friend, they had their first conversation through the phone, scrambling to say their greetings in fear of phone bills piling up. My dad on the other hand, moved to the United States when he was a junior in high school. He was always the one accustomed to the culture, able to speak English quite fluently, and effectively establishing his own workforce and his business.

It was always difficult for my mom to assimilate into the American culture; struggling and clawing at the cultural and language barriers, asking me or my dad for definitions or phrases. Her method of keeping familiar culture in the house was learning how to cook

Korean meals, or making sure that my sister and I were fluent in Korean so that we would be able to communicate in both countries. And it was also her way of making sure that she wasn't as lonely.

When I was younger, it was always my grandparents who took me around to places, and since I lived with them, Korean naturally became my first language and culture even though I was born in the States. Thus, birthdays were always celebrated "biculturally" – a word that I created to describe my family. In Korea, it is a tradition to eat seaweed soup on your birthday; it's supposed to symbolize moving up and gaining another year worth of maturity and experience apparently. And since we live in the United States, both my parents and my grandparents struggled to hold on to traditions and culture despite society's wishes for them to assimilate into becoming "Americanized."

Perhaps the combination of blowing out rainbow-colored wax candles and slurping our hot bowls of soup derived from our oddly placed situation. While rejecting our "Asian" side caused criticism to arise, letting go of our "American" side brought upon confusion and disgust as well. It was a lose-lose situation. I was a foreigner on both sides.

Every night during the birthday of any family member, we always have a bowl of hot, steaming seaweed soup with a shiny surface of sesame oil and a cake with a bunch of candles waiting to be devoured. We would say a quick "Happy Birthday" in Korean and first gulp down the soupy goodness, digging up a spoonful of steaming, hot white rice. Then, when the tables were all cleared and the candles all lit, we sing "Happy Birthday" in both Korean and English, keeping the main melody line for both.

Biculturalism was always a part of me, and this strange tradition every birthday defined who I was. An Asian American female student living in the suburbs of Long Island, trying to establish my place in society without throwing away either one of my lifestyles.

There are times when I want the soup to disappear, and there are also times when I just want to mush the cake into tiny blobs, and there are times where I just want both to go away. Embracing the fact that I was different from most of my friends because I was "too Asian" and that I was "too American" for the people in Korea was a hard concept that I had to swallow. Whole. No time to digest. No time to accept.

As an Asian American, I always frowned upon canned kimchi or food that I didn't consider to be Korean enough, something that I can rationally conclude is flawed reasoning. But the fact that it wasn't homemade and it didn't have the same taste that my mom and my grandma always made, turned me off in restaurants and supermarkets, even if we were at a Korean one. And eating American products in Korean supermarkets or even in the streets of Korea was frowned upon by my sister and me, knowing that the authentic taste of a juicy, steaming cheeseburger will never be replicated anywhere else.

Maybe being "authentic" isn't always the answer, and maybe people like me—stuck in between both cultures—don't necessarily have to choose either one. It's okay to be in between, it's okay to not be "authentic" and it's definitely okay to enjoy the best of both worlds especially if you're caught in the middle.



Banana Essay

Maybe there isn't such thing as fate. Maybe it's just opportunities that are handed to us and the way we utilize them that create our lives. Or then again, our lives could have been established for us before we even began to live them. An unknown magical string that connects us to our end, and all we're doing is pulling ourselves closer.

Fate is a subjective character, something that can be believed or forgotten. Fate as a noun is defined as "the development of events beyond a person's control, regarded as determined by a supernatural power," and as a verb it is defined as being "destined to happen, turn out, or act in a particular way." Love is also described as fate, with many people believing in soulmates and that their appearance into our lives is not a mere coincidence, but rather a planned-out fact.

Bananas already have their fate determined from the start and when they are picked by the farmers off of the fields, they are pretty much bound to what we call "fate." Grown in the fields under South American climate, they're cultivated in hot, humid and sweaty farms. It is grown in bunches, every individual piece holding on to one another, and it is only a matter of time until they are ripped from their branches and tossed in a truck to be shipped elsewhere, maybe to Florida, California or even New York.

And it is only a matter of time when the truck starts gassing the bananas, trying desperately to keep them ripe, but not too extreme that consumers and supermarkets won't purchase them. That was their purpose. To be purchased, to be sold, and to be eaten. From a banana's perspective, fate exists for them – as their fate is to be picked, shipped, sold and eaten.

The bananas are then stacked on top of each other in the fruit section of every supermarket, next to the pineapples and the mangos. Distraught and in defeat they just lie there until customers, one by one, rummage through them and pick what they deem to be the visually pleasing; one that they think will taste the best.

Now, I do not very much believe in predestination, although that thought has crossed my mind more than a few times. Maybe we do have our fates planned out, and maybe whatever we do in life won't change or affect the outcome. But then again, maybe we do have a choice. A choice to thrive, a choice to not accept our fate, a choice to jump out of that truck and onto a new road where our destination won't be the supermarket. After all, that's what makes us human and not a banana.

"We have become makers of our fate when we have ceased to pose as its prophets."

-Karl Popper

Ode to Ice Cream

Ice cream galore, a tasty delight When someone takes mine, I don't back down without a fight Oh ice cream, so creamy and fine

Vanilla, Chocolate, Strawberry Everyone has their preference The sweet taste makes everyone merry Ice cream – a dessert of excellence

The tune of the truck
Driving down the street
Makes me want to grab a buck
And it pulls me to my feet

After a long hot summer day
When it's the cold delight I miss
All I want to do is stay
At home where the ice cream carton is

The creamy delight calls me
Follows me and seduces me
Luring me to its yummy goodness
I think I just ate another carton, oh my goodness!

Sweet, creamy and tasty galore
Oh ice cream, what have I been waiting for
With your colorful exterior and sweet interior
I hold you a place in my heart, superior



Nadine Bouler

"Life is a banquet and most poor suckers are starving to death."

-Mame Dennis

As a writer, artist, and educator, I ultimately see myself as a builder, whether it is crafting the narratives I hear in my mind, illustrating the surreal images depicting nature's battle with mankind, or helping students fan the flames of their own creative spirits. With degrees in art history and in English literature, I've blogged about my passion for art, literature, architecture, food and the Hudson Valley over the past nine years: boulerdesigngroup.blogspot.com. A secret Anglophile, I look forward to rainy days when I can read long books with big words, drink endless cups of Earl Grey tea, and binge on PBS period dramas. Then at night, go out and dance on table tops in Parisian cafes.



Our Daily Bread

Sitting at the parish desk, I positioned the rotating fan directly on the back of my neck and wiped the sweat from my eyes. It had to be the hottest day of the year. That summer I had taken an extra job handing out groceries in a church's food pantry to help with graduate school tuition. A sleepy jewel of a church surrounded by woods and a creek, it was the perfect summer job since the food pantry was busy only twice a month when welfare rations were exhausted.

Taking out my wallet, I picked up the phone to call the local library. When the front door opened, I abandoned my post to see who it was. In front of me was a large man, one of the largest I had ever seen, about thirty-five years old, out of breath, and sweating profusely. Dressed in a threadbare tee-shirt, his bloated stomach protruded over his dirty pants. Having walked quite a distance from the other side of the tracks, he stood in the hallway trying to catch his breath. Assuming he was here for food, I went to get my file box.

"May I have your name and address?" I asked as I handed him a brown paper sack for food.

"Warren Little, 1206 Smith Avenue."

I jotted down the information and sent the man into the office to begin collecting food. "Help yourself. I've got some bread in the other room, and I'll get you a glass of water." I gestured to the canned vegetables and boxes of uncooked spaghetti.

When I returned from the kitchen juggling a frozen loaf of bread, a plastic cup of water and a small daily prayer book, I noticed something was amiss. Mr. Little's bag was already jam-packed, and not with the usual items of a person trying to fill his cupboard. He had stuffed it to the top with bags of potato chips. I thought it odd, but handed him the cup of water, placing the bread and small book on top of the loaded bag. He shuffled his feet uncomfortably.

"Do you know where I can get bus fare?" he mumbled, keeping his eyes on the floor.

"Well, I'll give it to you. How much is it?" I looked for my wallet which I had left by the phone. It was gone.

"Oh, no, that's okay. I can walk." Holding his bag, Mr. Little turned to leave.

"Mr. Little, have you seen my wallet? It was right here."

"No, I don't know where your wallet is." He began to walk toward the door.

Hands on hips, I became annoyed. "Mr. Little, I can't let you leave until I find my wallet." My eyes flashed to the packed bag. "I need to repack your groceries."

"No, that's okay." Mr. Little clutched the bag to his chest.

Indignation flowed through my veins: he had my wallet. I began to follow him out the door.

"Sir, please let me repack your groceries."

Throwing his plastic cup of water to the ground, he held fast to his bag and began to run. I chased him until I caught him around the back of the building. "Mr. Little, if you need the money, I'll give it to you. Just give me the wallet back."

"I didn't take your wallet."

"If you didn't take my wallet, please, let me repack your bag. It's now torn."

He turned and tried to run again. I reached out to the paper bag and in one motion, ripped it open. Out tumbled the loaf of bread, the prayer book, the chips. For a moment, I panicked. Maybe he hadn't stolen the wallet after all. Maybe I had chased a man for absolutely no reason. And then it fell. My wallet hit the ground with a thud.

I bent down to pick it up. As I began to stand, all I could see was a large fist headed for my face. The force of the blow knocked me to the ground, and I landed in a tangle of bushes and poison ivy. My heart stopped.

Finding myself behind the isolated building, with woods to my left and a man looming above me. I knew it was time to move.

I grabbed the wallet and ran. I locked myself in the parish office and dialed the phone: 9-1-1. An automated message said all lines were busy. Now terrified, I climbed under the desk and dialed again. As I waited on hold, every horror movie where an arm bursts through a window came to mind.

After an eternity, the police arrived. The officer wiped his brow as he took down the details. "Don't they have an air conditioner here?" he asked as droplets of perspiration fell from his face. "The detectives at the fifth precinct will call you."

The head detective was taking my case.

I sat uneasily at his desk as he alternated between typing my statement and smoking a cigarette. My face was swollen from the punch I took, the inside of my mouth chewed up from its impact. My arms were covered with scratches and a growing rash from the poison ivy. "I took your case because I hate it when a woman gets hit." After a few taps on the keys, the detective asked, "By the way, how much was in the wallet?"

"Fifteen dollars and two subway tokens." I risked my life for a pittance.

"Turns out the guy gave you his real name and address. That's a crack house. We looked him up in our records: three pages of prior arrests. Luckily he didn't break your jaw." He took another look at his paperwork. "We've got a line-up for you."

The next day, they arrested Warren Little. He confessed he was at the church and that a nice lady gave him a glass of water. That must have been me. Then he heard the choppers, so he ran for the fox hole. He was chased by the enemy and punched him in the face. That must have been me, too.

The detectives weren't buying this wartime flashback, and he was charged with robbery.

The following Sunday, I attended church services. The elderly congregation patted me on the back, proud of my "moxie." Unfortunately, they planned to close the food pantry, shipping all of their canned goods to another one across town. I would be kept on to answer phones.

During service I clutched my husband's hand, thankful to be next to him. I looked around the church at all the faces there and I was thankful for them, too. As light shone through the stained glass window, I knelt on the floor and began to pray. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses. . .

I began to cry, not for me, not for the church, but for a man I didn't know: Warren Little. I wept not for my moxie or for risking my life for fifteen dollars, but for the compassion and forgiveness I felt for a man so desperate with poverty that he would rob those who tried to help him.



Mamaw's Mandarin Orange Cake

In my world, cakes come from bakeries. Why make what you can readily purchase freshly made around the block? I even love the thin, red and white striped string wrapped around the crisp white box. But when I married a Southerner, that changed. In his world, cakes came from the oven, and with an admirable frequency. Jim often waxed nostalgically about the endless stream of cakes waiting on the countertops of his family's kitchens. From church bake sales to trips home from college, baking a cake was an act of affection, and evidently the women in his family made it a labor of love. But it was Jim's grandmother's Mandarin orange cake which loomed large in his heart. It was the cake she would make especially for him that always said, "You are home; you are loved."

The first time I tried to make it, Jim was turning thirty. Perusing the yellowed copy of the recipe in Mamaw's perfect handwritten cursive, I figured, "How hard can this be?"

Needless to say, I was not burdened by experience. I gathered all the necessary ingredients and dove in. Unfortunately, I didn't have a hand mixer. Undaunted, I ran all of the ingredients through the blender and popped the pans in the preheated oven. As I watched it bake through the tiny oven window, I realized something was amiss. Instead of a golden fluffy cake, I had two flat, deflated pancakes whose consistency was closer to flan than cake. With time running out, I was determined to forge ahead. To compensate, I sculpted a cake out of the icing and hoped he wouldn't notice.

The moment of reckoning arrived when Jim came in. "Oh wow," he said. "You've made Mamaw's Mandarin orange cake!" I beamed as I lit the candles and began to sing Happy Birthday. Sadly, midsong the candles began to list to the side like drunken tourists on Bourbon Street. As Jim cut the cake, he realized the first inch was only icing, until he finally hit the dense rubber texture of the actual cake. He looked at me quizzically and with a bit of effort, served us each a slice. "It tastes just like Mamaw's cake!" he enthused. Fortunately I was cute and we were newlyweds, so all was right with the world anyway.

The second time, Jim was turning forty. I figured it had been a while and I assumed I had learned something about baking over the course of ten years, though in retrospect, I had done nothing to validate this expectation. Once again, I broke out the yellowed recipe, briefly wondering if Mamaw had put a curse on me, being a Yankee. I checked and double checked the ingredients. I had the hand mixer. I knew enough not to use a blender this time. I was doing quite well.

However, while I was baking my masterpiece, I received a phone call and forgot to set the timer. Mid-conversation, I began to smell something. When the smoke alarm went off, I abruptly hung up and bolted for the kitchen. Yet again, what was to be a golden fluffy surface was instead more like the bottom of an ash tray. I burnt the cake. Scraping off the crispy surface, I reached for the icing to compensate for my baking failure. Perhaps there was some truth to Mamaw's curse.

When fifty rolled around, I knew my limitations. I was not a baker. I enlisted an expert, home economics teacher Janine Rodriguez. Janine looked over Mamaw's handwritten recipe with the intensity of a person dismantling a bomb. "Ok, here's how I would modify it so that you might actually be successful." She changed a couple of details (he'd never

know the difference, she assured me) and, recognizing my ineptitude, decided that instead of a full cake, she had me bake cupcakes with cream filling, and of course, icing.

I left nothing to chance. With both children now by my side, I became an army sergeant directing the troops. "Ollie, hand me the measuring spoons. Jackson, you mix the wet ingredients." By hook or by crook, I was going to beat Mamaw at her own game.

As people gathered on our deck for Jim's fiftieth birthday party, I gently placed each precious cupcake on the silver platter and held my breath. Carrying them out to the awaiting guests, it was the guest of honor I wanted to please. I wanted to tell him he was home. I wanted to tell him he was loved. And damn it, I wanted to make that recipe if it was the last cake I ever baked! As everyone pulled the wrappers off the golden cupcakes, ooo-ing and ahhhh-ing over their sweet and fluffy deliciousness, I breathed a sigh of relief. This round was a success. As Jim grabbed a second cupcake from the silver platter, he put his arm around me and kissed my cheek. "Who said you can't bake?" Mamaw had lifted the curse and blessed this cake.

Ode To Cheese

An ode to you, my darling cheese, I'll have some more, if you please.
Blue, brie, mozzarella, and cheddar,
Nothing makes a sandwich better.
Your salty love fills my soul,
To eat some more is the ultimate goal.
Like Eve who gave up Paradise,
I indulge in cheese, not once, but twice.
You tempt me with your moldy ways;
Seduce me with a desire that stays.
Lingering on my tongue and on my hips,
To the cheese department, I make many trips.
Name the place and just say when,
Someday soon I'll indulge again.



Caroline Chen

Caroline Chen is an aspiring writer and scientist born and raised in New York. Ever since she was little, Caroline has loved to ride horses, synchronize swim, and sing in the shower. She has been writing for as long as she can remember, and has had many attempts writing and composing songs on the piano once she found out that her favorite singer started her career as a poet! When she's not writing or researching in the lab, you can find her reading, practicing American Sign Language, watching TED Talks, planning events for the Student Council, or indulging in her new-found interest in photography! She enjoys volunteering, mingling with new friends, taking part in community endeavors, and serving as the first official Student Representative to her school district's Board of Education. Caroline plans to maintain all of her current passions in the future, as well as spend time on new hobbies, including painting, dancing, and acting.



Serial Cereal Schtick

7:30 am. Monday morning. I wake up. Brush my teeth. Wash my face. Get dressed. Come downstairs.

7:51 am. I'm hungry. And I need energy. I take a bowl out of the cabinet and look into the cereal cabinet and see a tower of sugary, sugary sweetness. I've always wondered how these delicious treats were approved as breakfast cereals. But, of course, who's complaining?

7:55 am. So many choices, so little time. How am I supposed to choose just one of these desirable, delectable, delicious delicacies in front of me? How am I supposed to pick one and let the others down? What am I going to do? My first big decision of the day—will

it shape my entire week, or better yet, my entire future? Looking up and down, back and forth, imagining the diabetes-causing crunch of Honey Smacks, the "cholesterol-lowering" effects of the honey-coated Cheerios, or the distinctive taste of the dehydrated fruit of Special K Red Berries. How do I choose one and not make the others feel left out?

"It's just cereal," remarks my sister disparagingly. "It's not like it has feelings."

"Oh no, she didn't!" screams Cinnamon Toast Crunch, the spiciest cereal on the rack. "Who is she to say we ain't got feelings?"

"Yeah, what's her problem? With a closed mind like that, no wonder she only likes you, Smacks," smirks Puffins.

As Honey Smacks prepares to beat down Puffins into literal dust, Cheerios has no choice but to step in.

"Woah, woah. Everyone, relax, calm down, and don't get your cardboard in a fold. It's ok. I mean, how would she know what we were thinking? Anyway, if we keep fighting like this, the humans will just be disappointed that we're all crushed to powder, and they won't eat us anymore! Look, one's choosing right now, so everyone stay quiet."

I look and search for the one. What will satisfy my craving for a sugar rush today? My heart is pounding. I can hear my own breathing.

7:59 am. I rush. I search. I look.

"He's right," says the Charms. "But even if we weren't crushed, the human would choose us anyway."

"You're not as lucky as you think, you know?" defends Oatmeal Squares. "Why do any of you deserve to be chosen? You don't even deserve to be part of a balanced breakfast, you big old box of diabetes!"

Organic Cluster Flakes has been quiet this whole time, but now that Squares has joined the fight, she decides to chip in.

"Squares is right! You aren't even breakfast material!"

All the Charms gasp. "You shut your flaky box right now! You know what?" Hourglass looks around at his fellow marshmallows. His glare shows what he is about to throw at Cluster Flakes.

No, Cheerios deplores through his desperate O-shaped eyes, you can't.

Ignoring the honey-covered wise man, Hourglass begins to move his sugar-crusted lips, whispering, "You... you... you..." He looks around once again.

"You don't even taste good!"

Tears emerge and spread as fast as a deluge across Flakes, nearly washing all of her cocoa dust off. But before she could say anything back, a rush of wind caught all of the cereals' attention.

My arm reaches out quickly. I've decided. On the red-colored box portraying the happiest leprechaun I've ever seen in my life. I can feel the sugary marshmallows and over-sweetened oat cereal assault my senses already. My fingers brush the box.

"Hm," comments Hourglass snidely, "I guess we are as lucky as we think."

I open the top and pick up the box.

All of the Charms cheer, and the eyes of the other cereals widen with horror.

"Hurry up! We're going to be late!" My sister laces up her sneakers and throws her backpack across her shoulder.

I begin to pour, and marshmallows among oats fly out of the plastic wrapping, ignoring my sister's urgency. What's the big deal? She is such an overreactor.

Clink! Clunk! Bits and pieces of cereal hit the white ceramic bowl one by one. I purposely take my time.

Finally, I decide to look up at the clock.

8:11 am.

Immediately, the box falls out of my hand, leaving the marshmallows to drop violently onto the floor. All feelings of passion for my cereal are washed away by my sense of fear and anxiety of being late for school. How tragic, I know. But it cannot be helped.

I leave the box and rush to grab a granola bar on the table, stepping into my shoes and grabbing my bag as I run out of the house.

"Hahaha! I guess you are as lucky as you deserve to be." Cinnamon Toast Crunch shrieks with laughter, as the other cereals are his backup singers, hooting and giggling.

But as they celebrate, they don't realize shade is being thrown right back at them.

For inside the human's hand, the granola bar smirks. "Celebrating? What are they doing that for?

"GRANOLA BARS RULE!"

My Beef Noodle Soup

"Zhe ge wei dao bu tai dui," my grandmother remarked on the taste of the prized specialty dish of Taiwan—niu rou mian, or beef noodle soup—that, according to her, had gone awry in a kiosk of the da pai dang, or food court, in Flushing.

The naïve New York native I was could never distinguish between a bowl of Taiwanese beef noodle soup that was "absolutely delectable," according to my mother, or one that lacked a certain spice or was comprised of way too much beef and not enough tendon. Why? I ruminated as a little girl. They all taste the same to me.

I've been eating beef noodle soup ever since I can remember, but I never really appreciated the savory broth or the melt-in-your-mouth beef chunks and *especially* not that dash of coriander that garnished the finished product. As a child, the long, bland noodles were my favorite part of *niu rou mian*.

To a five-year-old girl, the sweet sound of the molding of an off-white colored lump of dough into thousands of never-ending, flexible, thin strands of noodles was mesmerizing. Smack! Slap! The cook would roll out the dough by hand and pick up the soft log at both ends, continuously stretching it out, folding it in half, then stretching and folding over and over again, with the occasional hypnotizingly oscillating toss of the white-colored wonder of floury string—the Asian version of the coveted pizza toss. As the white flour dust settled, the beautiful waterfall of hand-pulled noodles, each seemingly drawn like silk from the hands of the master chef, would be revealed and dropped into an oversized pot of boiling water, and after a quick dip, pulled out and delicately placed into a large white plastic bowl, with savory soup poured over the white-haired angels, corrupting them to the dark yet tasty ways of the beef broth. Chunks of meat, with tenderness visible in the way they fall apart mid-way in the air, dunk into the magical pool of no return with a light splash! sinking deep within the bowl, and resurfacing just enough for us to bear witness to their presence, like a scoop of ice cream in a root beer float.

"Qi shi yi hao, ni de niu rou mian hao le!" Customer number 71, your beef noodle soup is ready!

I lived in Flushing for nearly half of my life, so most of my memories as a child were made eating beef noodle soup. If you aren't familiar, Flushing is essentially the Chinatown of Queens, except most of the people speak Mandarin instead of Cantonese, and beef noodle soup can be found on essentially any street in the borough. Before Chinese classes and after piano lessons, my mother would bring me and my sister to indulge in white plastic bowls of hot beef noodle soup right from the pot.

Still, even though—or perhaps, because—I had experienced so many different bowls of beef noodle soup, they all tasted the *same* to me, and frankly (though of course I would never admit this to my family), I was getting tired of this cultural meal.

When my parents notified me and my sister that we were moving to Long Island near the end of elementary school, I don't recall being heavy-hearted. I had watched many movies in which children rebelled when they found out they were leaving everything they knew, running into their homes and slamming bedroom doors, but I always felt like that was such an overreaction.

I was excited. I wanted to stop eating beef noodle soup and to instead gain new experiences and immerse myself in the *American* culture. So I did.

I relished the fact of no more Chinese school and an actual grassy garden with flowers and trees and little animals and even a tiny inflatable pool instead of the cemented backyard and front yard in the townhouse I had previously lived in. I quickly got used to the clean, fresh air in my community, so much purer than the atmosphere in Flushing, polluted by running car engines and possibly even more by the smoke of ubiquitous kebab stands. I could literally play "in the streets" of my community with neighbors my age, something I had seen only on TV screens, and eat genuine American food—pizza, burgers, potato chips—at their houses for dinner.

But, I was surprised: the grass looked greener on the other side, literally, but figuratively, it was not. After a few months, I began to miss my old home, my old friends, my old lifestyle. Sure, we did occasionally have Chinese take-out for dinner, but the Americanized Chinese food from the restaurants near our new house wasn't enough. Sure, we still celebrated Chinese New Year with red envelopes and *qipaos*, but it wasn't as elaborate anymore because we no longer lived near people of similar cultures. And the grocery

stores on Long Island didn't have the right ingredients for the authentic Chinese taste. My family actually started to eat *regular* ice cream, instead of the low-fat, frozen milk we were used to. *So Western*, I thought ironically as a second-generation immigrant to the United States who at that time had never even been to Asia.

I began to miss my friends from Chinese school and the strangely warm, murky water at the Boys' Club where I used to take swimming lessons. I began to miss late nights at my Chinese after-school program where I stayed to finish my homework and study while my parents worked. I began to miss true Chinese cuisine.

Yet, I was learning so much about being an American.

American culture is beach parties and the Super Bowl. It's pop music and innovation in science and technology. For me, it's also the whole fish and chicken (yes, with the heads attached) served at the Chinese New Year party my great-uncle hosts each year, and dragon boat races during the Duanwu Festival. It's Converse and American Eagle Outfitters, but it's also calligraphy on red scrolls and sky lanterns. American culture is patriotism and allegiance to the flag, but it's also appreciation of a family with such diverse traditions and values. It is everything I am, and everything I have become.

Ballad to Burgers

You there, across the room snuggled in another woman's arms, Come into my hands.
Right. This. Instant.

Bring your hot, succulent, savory self filled with juicy, dark, little secrets hidden by the creaminess of melted cheese embedded into your skin, wrapped in the fresh taste of red tomato, the clean blanket of leafy lettuce, the overlay of eye-watering onion.

I ordered you to get yourself over here.
With those buns.
Oh, those crispy buns
that soak up the sweet tang
of ketchup and pickle juice
to balance the saltiness that is you.
A sesame seed-encrusted shield
to protect the plump, vulnerable flesh inside you.

As you near, I overhear the crunch of your deep-fried sidekick, enchanted by the sizzling of your brawn, providing a scent of safety and security.

You arrive at the table, leaving the woman's arms. What are you? Fast food, yet fancy. The entire food pyramid within two buns. A full meal in one oversized bite. A mystery to me that I never want to solve.



Thomas Chen

"Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow."

- Melody Beattie

Thomas Chen is a diligent sixteen-year-old boy from Jericho, New York who loves to read, write, and learn new things. He has always had a passion for writing, as he loves to share his thoughts and ideas with others. He has experience in writing, as he is a contributor of Nothin' But Nets of Fansided.com (Brooklyn Nets). He has also received awards for science essay competitions, such as an Honorable Mention in the 2016 Dupont Challenge. He is a hard worker with a very strong drive to do his best in everything that he does. He plans to major in business when he attends college, specializing in marketing or finance. He hopes to someday build a successful business and create an organization that helps provide food, education, and other resources for people living in poverty.



Midnight Scramble

When I was twelve, I couldn't cook at all. Sure, I knew how to use the microwave and stove to heat up food, but to actually combine different ingredients and cook something? No. I was like a baby, always needing someone, usually my mother or grandmother, to make me food. But this all changed on one hot summer night when I cooked something myself. I combined different ingredients to create a masterpiece. That masterpiece was scrambled eggs.

It was around midnight, with everyone fast asleep after a long day. While I was pretty tired myself, I couldn't manage to sleep with an empty stomach that was growling as loud as my father's snoring (which is very loud). So I slugged myself down the stairs like a zombie and went into the kitchen. I tiredly opened the cabinet. There was a jar of Planters nuts that I was allergic to, veggie fries which I absolutely hate, and a variety of Chinese foods that I didn't want to try as I couldn't even read their labels. Disappointed with what I saw, I shuffled my way to the refrigerator. I opened the door and alas, I saw... nothing. Well, basically nothing. There was some milk, yogurt, and some eggs. I thought to myself, "Well,

I'm lactose intolerant, so no yogurt for me. Eggs? Well, my mom is not awake right now to make them. Now what? What if I try scrambling some eggs myself? There's nothing else to eat. so it's worth a shot."

I grabbed my phone and looked up how to make scrambled eggs. I clicked the first suggestion that popped up and read the ingredients. It was simply just eggs, a bit of salt, butter, and some water. I then went on to the directions, which seemed pretty simple as well. So I then took the pan, placed the milky yellow butter on the frying pan, and heated it on the stove. I then added a few tablespoons of water into the butter. After the mixture melted into a puddle of mess, I cracked open the fragile egg and poured the yolk into the pan. One minute passed by, nothing happened. Thinking that I did something wrong, I reread the directions. After confirming with the directions that I did everything correctly, I checked the pan again. The mixture started to harden! I put my fork in the mixture and pressed it. It was like a bouncy ball, as my fork bounced off of it every time I lightly tapped it. When it looked to be about finished, I scraped every bit of the spongy substance onto my plate.

I set the plate onto the table and was about to take my first bite. Then, I remembered. I forgot to add the salt! I sprinkled some of the crystal salt onto my steaming eggs. Alas, my very own meal was complete. Proud of my accomplishment, I took a quick picture of the scrumptious scrambled eggs to serve as a memory of the first meal I ever truly made, and then I took my first bite. The wonderful, hardy taste exploded in my water-filled mouth. While they tasted the same as any other scrambled eggs that my mother would have made, these felt different. This was because the gratifying satisfaction of making it myself made me appreciate every single bite more, therefore making it in my mind, taste better than any other scrambled eggs I had ever eaten.

While it may seem silly to think that the first day I made scrambled eggs was very important to me, it truly was, as it had long-lasting positive implications on my life. The one main takeaway I got from it was learning to try to do things on my own. It helps being more independent, as I don't have to rely on someone else for my own needs. It also saves other people the time and hassle of helping someone else do something for them. And with that, I have learned to do things on my own, from learning to cook other foods to sometimes going to the supermarket by myself. Making that one steamy plate of scrambled eggs has had a domino effect in helping me become more independent and mature.

Ode to Rice

Rice tastes really nice.

No it doesn't taste like dice, and it most certainly doesn't taste like mice.

Rice at times may look like lice. However, it looks kinda nice.

I was chilling with my friends, eating Italian ice Then it hit me, I remembered yesterday I ate some rice I went to a restaurant and I got some with my mom who is quite overnice and we both love rice.

They were going out of business, so they had to overprice their rice But after lots of complaints that had to go and reprice their rice So what happened after? Well, an underpriced rice.

So what's the question? Can this situation be considered a vice?

My family and I love rice as you can tell
From my grandma to my dad to me
The love for rice has been passed down from generation to generation
So when we finish our first bowl of warm, fluffy rice
We want seconds, so we put our other plans on ice.



Allison D'Antonio

Her name is Allison, but she only responds to Allie. Her dreams were to have her name in lights by the time she was sixteen next to Bernadette Peters on some famous Broadway stage. When her dancing shoes were replaced for basketball sneakers at the age of ten, she had a feeling she needed to invest her talents elsewhere. Currently, she is a self-proclaimed, but readily agreed upon, rock star English/Special Education teacher who likes to destroy karaoke stages across the country. Hailing from Massapequa, New York, she first tried her hand at writing when she wrote a curse word on her childhood kitchen set. After spending a week in punishment, she grabbed a pen and allowed her emotions to flow through her in a more appropriate manner. She hopes you enjoy her writing, but quite frankly, couldn't care less because she has too much self-love to let the feelings of peasants faze her.

Confessions of a Bad Italian

The majority of the people in my life live to eat. They revel in the opportunity to try a new restaurant or anticipate the moment a new dish they've never tried is delivered to the table. I've never been that person, and quite frankly, am baffled by them. I fall into the small and ever-shrinking category of people who solely eat to live. I don't try new places very often, and I have a one-new-food-a-year policy. Don't ask me to try your scrumptious steak because you assume it will change my life... I've hit my yearly quota already. Don't coerce me into trying the chicken you baked, and then after it is in my mouth and slowly making its way to my belly, chuckle and say, "That wasn't chicken, it was alligator!" I can guarantee that not only will I kick you in the shins, but I will probably never trust you again, let alone sit down for a meal with you. When I enter a restaurant, there are normally two, maybe three items on the menu I could order, but most likely have to alter to fit my fickle palate. These include, and are limited to: chicken, plain and preferably burnt; chicken caesar salad, dressing on the side; eggplant parmesan, without the cheese and sauce on the side; or pizza, but I take the cheese off because I'm lactose intolerant. Do you want to invite me to dinner yet?

I've been called "The Worst Italian on the Planet" because of my peculiar eating habits, and vividly remember my mother making a separate meal for me every night because I wouldn't eat what was on the menu that evening. Vividly remember? Who am I kidding? She still does that for me and I'm in my 30s. When I was much younger, my holiday dinners were re-heated Burger King my mother got for me the day before or a bowl of plain Cheerios. Both of my arms covered these dishes like a soldier shielding a child from an exploding bomb, in hopes I would avoid the splashes from their juicy crab legs. I often felt like a lieutenant at war, hunkering down in a bunker to protect my troops from the imminent threat, which in this case was melted butter from the crab legs. When I was eight, much to my chagrin, my troops were invaded and crab juices and butter landed on my delicious and salty french fries. Christmas dinner was over for me. I raised my white flag and bitterly surrendered to the opposition. My unfortunate defeat begs me to ask, "Why are people okay working for their food?" I recall many a Christmas Eve that my mother or brother would have wound marks from trying to crack open the shell of a crab

to enjoy a piece of meat the size of a nickel. That sounds like an awful lot of effort with little reward. Give me a drive-thru or a cereal box any day.

Instead of picky, I prefer to call myself an aesthetic eater; if the food doesn't look good, I won't eat it. What looks good to me is simple, plain, burnt and bloody hell, should not be touching another food on the plate. I cannot tell you when this aversion to colorful, complex food began, nor why I have accepted this as my life, but quite frankly, I think it makes me unique. What I lack in food options, I wholeheartedly make up for in personality. Luckily, my picky palate hasn't kept me from enjoying the excitement that surrounds food. The loud talkers at a restaurant, the one-on-one time you get sharing a meal with a loved one, the bread basket, which is by far my favorite part of any restaurant, and most importantly, the laughs shared with family at the dinner table.

With a large extended family, our table is always decorated with enough food to feed a small army. It's at that long table where we all have the opportunity to tell what we're thankful for, to make fun of one another for a stupid comment, to engage new friends or significant others who have been valiant enough to join us, to have one too many drinks, to play Heads Up or Trivial Pursuit and pit our knowledge against one another. It's where my dad and uncles got so drunk off of spiked espresso that they started a family song, "Apples, peaches, pumpkin-pie/Uncle Mario is drunk and so am I!" It's the theater seats where I forced others to watch my dance routines to Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen songs dressed in whatever old dance costumes I could find. It's at that same table where I finally worked up the courage to come out to my father at thirty years old, and where, in my moment of sadness, my mother held my hand and resurrected a relationship that I feared was gone forever. It was where my brother and sister-in-law shared news of another child. It was here we all held hands and prayed for my cousin Todd who passed away so suddenly last year. If I had been focused on the actual food at the table, I may have missed the best parts of sitting around it with my family. I may have never gotten the strength to live my truth and release the secrets that had been eating away at me.

These are the memories that satiate me when I think about food. It's not what I eat which defines or shapes me; it's the people at the table. Food is what brings them to it, but it's the stories, the connection and the memories that keep us there. The moments shared around that table fill my soul with enough sustenance to keep me well-fed for a lifetime and provide the nourishment that will forever fill my heart.



Orange Angels

Italian families have many traditions when it comes to food. The lasagna, pasta, prosciutto, the Feast of the Seven Fishes on Christmas Eve, the argument over if it's called sauce or gravy. Go ahead, text your Italian friend and ask her which term her family used. In my Italian family, we hold true to many of those traditions, and our tables are always overflowing with way too much food and far too many options. But, my Italian family also has allowed another culinary delight to swim upstream into our hearts and satisfy our bellies. It's the fish that I begged to eat on Christmas Eve. Whether it is the green bag that my grandma always had in her lazy Susan; the blue and orange bags that stocked the pantry on North Oak Street; or the red and purple packages that poked their fins out on Eastern Parkway, Pepperidge Farm Goldfish have remained a staple in our family for as long as I can remember.

Grandpa had diabetes, so Grandma was very conscious of the snacks she had in the house. You needed to eat breakfast before you went to Grandma and Grandpa Stearns' house because you would be stuck with fruit, unsalted Saltine crackers (which are disgusting) and dry chicken. But encased in a golden box, which released harmonious angels upon its opening, was a fresh bag of parmesan goldfish.

Your heart sank when one of your hungry cousins got there first and left you crumbs, which happened frequently in a family of nine grandkids. But let's face it, this fear was short-lived because Grandma always had another bag downstairs in the cellar where she kept enough food to keep the small town of Stratford fed until the end of time. Whenever my cousin Melissa would come over, we took our goldfish with us to the little beach nestled on the end of Laurel Street where we would watch the sunset and share stories from our school days. When her brother Matt got a bag of goldfish in his Easter basket, and I stole it from him and ate the bag in its entirety, you would've thought the world was ending; the kid didn't talk to me for a week until I re-stocked his supply. Matt's reaction is a true testament to how much goldfish mean to my family.

My relationship with goldfish may have started in Stratford, Connecticut, but it has lasted for thirty-two years. With the smell of crayons, glue, Play-Doh and accidents of the newly potty trained, my favorite time of both pre-k and kindergarten was snack time! I ran to my chair, opened my napkin and anxiously awaited for Ms. Witty or Ms. Joanna to fill my heart and, subsequently, my belly with these orange gifts from heaven, distributed from the oversized carton that I always begged my mother to buy. I learned to savor every bite of my "fishies" (a nickname that caught on in my toddler years) and often snuck a few from the kids to my left and right while they were otherwise occupied picking their noses; I couldn't get enough.

In middle school, I would rush to my best friend's house, brazenly opening her snack cabinet in search of the silver bag packed with love from BJ's. There was something more exotic about those fish than the ones in the regular white bags. Airy, salty, crunchy, they had me addicted. So much so, that when I was in middle school and we had to translate a commercial from English to Spanish, you can bet your gills, I chose the goldfish commercial. The abysmal eighth grade translation still plays over in my mind occasionally. "Yo amo el pez porque su asi deliciosos, tengo ir a pescar." Of course I gave an Oscar

worthy performance in our cinematic masterpiece. Throughout my youth, whenever a friend would have a party and it was my turn to bring the snacks, it was a given that I would show up with a bag of Pepperidge Farm Rainbow Goldfish. Even now, at thirty-two while my friends have moved on to brie and hummus, the only snack I have to offer my guests are goldfish, which still give me the same nostalgic feeling as they did in middle school

Even though the imaginative people at Pepperidge Farm are constantly looking for new and novel ways to keep their products relevant adding revolutionary flavors such as: Xplosive Pizza, Vanilla Cupcake, Smores, Honey Mustard or Fudge Brownie, my heart will forever reside with the O.G. goldfish flavors. And you know what? All of my cousins still eat goldfish, too. I bet if you went to any of their homes right now, you would find various bags of goldfish in their snack cabinets. It's just something that has been ingrained in us from our late grandmother. Although she scoffed at our affinity for goldfish, my grandmother was a wise woman, who was sure to keep the pantry stocked, even though that ultimately led to numerous jabs about our growing bellies.

After Grandma Stearns passed away, I wanted to celebrate her impact on my life by getting a "Love" tattoo in her handwriting on my left wrist; the side of her body that Parkinson's first began to steal. Today as I open a fresh bag of goldfish, I see that tattoo and I know those angels I release sing the joy of my grandmother's love in every handful I devour.



Before I Go

God?

I'm not ready yet
I haven't had my last meal
I was told that
Before you go, you get
To eat whatever you want
So...this is it
Italian Bread
Warm
Crispy
Fresh out of the oven
Italian Bread
Save your
White

Wonder Bread

I've had that

I want you

Warm

Crispy

Fresh out of the oven

Italian Bread

The flaky

Crunchy

Melts in your mouth

Treat

You are everything

I have ever wanted

In a meal, in a treat

In a delicacy

When I mix you with

Olive oil, salt, pepper

Crushed red pepper

Grated cheese

I take you for a dip

In the oil pool

I dip you so gingerly

As if I'm sticking

 $\ \, \text{My foot in freezing cold water} \\$

But sometimes

I dunk you aggressively

To soak up all of the juices

And am tantalized

By the way your colors change

And you absorb

The love

I have created

Му

Heart

Smiles

Му

Eyes

Are elated

Му

Belly

Does back flips

Over you

Warm

Crispy

Fresh out of the oven

Italian bread



Larry Ding

"If I were two-faced, would I be wearing this one?"
-Abraham Lincoln

Larry Ding is a high schooler who is still wondering if he should have used a Dumbledore quote instead. He was born on January 12, 2002, arguably, the best day in the world. When he's not sleeping, he's reading, writing, playing video games, maintaining homeostasis, playing the piano, practicing his clarinet, eating, and last and probably least, studying. He assures you that if you Google him, you will not find him. When he grows up, he hopes to work somewhere in the law field or media. He likes writing because it is a great way to express your ideas even if they are never seen. You've already wasted some time reading this so why not check out some of his work too?



"Noodles stand for fortune and long life. That's why we eat it on our birthdays."

That's my mom. She's very serious about Chinese culture and superstitions. Not that I complain. Her noodles are delicious.

My mom is the only cook in the family. Skinny, average in height, and very serious about her ways. I never really had any problems with that. After all, I was just a seven-year-old obediently eating anything in front of me. I remember the small red jar she would take out from the refrigerator, and using a small spoon, scoop out a tiny bit of spicy flavoring to add to the dish. Of course, I was kept away from that because I was the youngest in the family and possessed the weakest resistance to spicy food. The me right now would shyly admit that they were right, but the me back then would assure you that I was great with

spicy food while downing a cup of water to douse the raging fire inside my mouth. Face red as Elmo's...uh... fur? Hair?

The thing is, as I grew up, these noodles never changed. Despite often containing different ingredients inside, it always tasted the same. Knowing that these noodles would not disappoint my taste buds, I would constantly be excited when I heard the ringing of the bronze bell my mom kept with a kangaroo figure as a handle in the corner of the kitchen and be the first at the table.

A few years later, my parents had decided to move to Jericho to provide a better education for my brother and me. My brother was heading to start middle school and I, to fourth grade. Even at a different location, different house, different environment, the culture of my family never changed. My parents were still kind of strict, and the noodles kept coming. When there was an extended weekend, I knew that my mouth would reunite with heaven again. The slurps of noodles with a spoonful of soup created a loving warmth that would flow down my throat and into my awaiting stomach, while my eyes delved into the beautiful view of the flowers in the atrium my mom worked so hard to decorate.

Problem is, I betrayed that very feeling. After growing tired of only tasting my mom's cooking, I decided that I wanted to try others. Every time we went to a restaurant that served noodles, I would order a bowl. Unfortunately, they just weren't as savory as the ambrosial taste of my mom's. Don't get me wrong, they were delectable, but they didn't feature that crucial warm feeling. Why was I trying to find competition for my mom's noodles? I don't know. I was a teenager. Rebelling was my nature. When restaurants didn't succeed, I followed rumors to the legend called instant noodles or ramen. Problem was, my mom was a health freak. She holds what she reads from some random Chinese news website or something her friends shared with her very importantly. When she heard about the earthquake in Japan and the failures of the nuclear plants, I was weaned off of Japanese snacks. So basically, every time I asked her for this mythical but seriously unhealthy stuff, she would launch into a lecture "educating" me about all the "poisons" contained in it. I was always kept at home, so I was unable to buy any for myself. It was frustrating, but I knew that she only wanted the best for me.

It wasn't until ninth grade during track that I would taste something similar. On the last meet that I had participated in, I found out they were selling food in the cafeteria. I don't

remember what school it was held in, and I only remember one of the events I took part in which was the 400m hurdles. After my events I ran in with a group of my friends and pointed at the box of cup noodles just lying there. In disbelief, they asked if I ever had them before and I replied with a no. They questioned if I had ever been alone at home without food, and my response was the same.

And that's when I realized how lucky I was. I never had to eat instant noodles, ramen, or cup noodles because my mom had always provided food for me. Even when they weren't home, there would always be something lying on the white kitchen table for me to consume.

But I still wanted to try the cup noodles. I handed over a one dollar bill to the volunteer cashier and grabbed a cup. After intensely reading the instructions, I placed the chalice under a container and filled it with hot water. After waiting a minute, I dug in with the white plastic fork I was holding.

To this day, I still remember being slightly disappointed. It tasted... regular. Not that good, but it wasn't bad either. What did I expect? It was some cheap one dollar cup containing some random ingredients. But being kept away from these, my expectations had grown to an embarrassing size and it all fell after the first forkful.

When I look back to these memories, I realize that although I had simply dismissed the warm bowl of homemade noodles as a simple meal, it had always returned me to when I was just seven years old. Tests, homework, expectations, and pressure would all melt away like the noodles I stuffed in my mouth. The "shell" expanding over me that grew as time passed would disappear like the soup in my bowl. My mom would still say the same speech every birthday, and even though I never believed the outrageously random superstitions my mom believed in, the noodles never disappointed.

Ode to Root Beer

You might be a soda, but the others can't compare To you, the legendary drink that we call root beer Such a divine taste, you should be called ambrosia

At a quick glance you might just look like Coke
But you are the one who catches my eye
When I walk by the soda machines
Robbing me of the dollar bills that I had just exchanged for a 20

Why are you called root beer if you taste better than any beer?

Those who don't know of you, debate your worth Even melted gold doesn't come close to your glow

You are the satisfying cool breeze during spring and fall The soft snow during winter, and the ocean during summer The light raindrops dancing on my tongue With a powerful flavor to rule my taste buds

How long I can resist you is always a mystery But my resolve to ignore you always becomes history

You are my energy drink during a track meet And also the lazy beverage when I'm at home

But although you are great, a king needs his crown United with ice cream, all shall bow down



Maria Grafas

Growing up in a Greek family, I am no stranger to the power of one's voice being heard. Writing is an outlet which allows me to convey my thoughts and my voice to others. I've always loved it; English in general. When I'm not reading or writing, you can find me on my couch binge-watching movies, babysitting my little cousins, or at the diner eating enormous amounts of cheesecake with my sister. I've recently learned how to crochet and have started the ritual of working on my scarves at track meets. Regardless of my grandmother-like ways, you may also find me spending time with my friends at the pool or at my house.



Unwrapping Christmas

The crispness of December hit, bringing with it an air of serenity. Cookies and milk at hand, engulfed in a big, fluffy blanket, I'd sit up on my couch watching ABC Family's 25 Days of Christmas movie countdown.

I remember my mother bringing home clementines every Christmas. It was likely because they were in season, but having them became something like a tradition to me. I'd grab two clementines and get back to the warmth of my blanket. The sharp citrus scent would guide me through my movie repertoire. Harry Potter, Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, Home Alone; I'd watch them all, and then I'd watch them again, anticipating Christmas Day like it was my job.

Waking up on the most exciting morning of the year was always a treat. Not only were there stacks of presents Santa brought, but he'd left his mark at my living room fireplace as well. Of the dozen cookies I'd set out for him the night before, barely any were left. "Santa was really hungry from delivering all those gifts," my mother would tell me as I smiled back at her. Christmas was always my favorite holiday.

But then something happened. One Christmas Eve, I was rummaging through some things in my mother's closet at a meager attempt to see if I could find any hidden gifts, when I came across some wrapping paper. Shining and bright red like Rudolph's nose, it glistened even in the dimly-lit closet. *Pretty*, I thought, and didn't pay it much attention after that, my mind still set on finding my present. After much unrewarded searching, I decided to abandon my mission and help myself to some hot cocoa.

The next morning, elation clouded my vision. My sister, Joanna, and I made our way into my parents' bedroom jumping on the bed until their sleepy eyes opened and they dragged their feet into the living room with us. They always insisted upon being awake to take pictures when we opened our gifts.

I had just found my way to a huge stack of books tied up with string when, out of the corner of my eye, I saw it—shiny red wrapping paper. I walked over to it, curious to read the sticker marking who gifted me this present. Just as I feared, the words "From: Santa" were written neatly along the line.

My suspicions grew further when I talked to my cousin, Dimitri. He was one year my elder and therefore the superior mind of us both. As we were munching on some chocolate chip cookies in his basement, he opened up a world of unwanted possibilities to me with a single question. "Maria," he began, "how do you think Santa Claus is able to travel around the entire universe in one night bringing gifts to every single person?" He had a point. Eventually, I confronted my mother.

Oh No, Tomato!

One day I was talking with a friend when I was hit with a topic I thought would never end

A tomato is not a vegetable, he said In response I shook my head

I told him that fruits are sweet
At least all had been that I'd come to eat

But he knocked down my argumental tower When he said passion fruit is sour

I knew that my next point was valid You would never put a tomato in fruit salad

For a second my comment took him aback But then he commenced his second attack

All fruits have seeds, he began I had heard this thought and wasn't a fan

If he was kidding I couldn't tell "So is zucchini a fruit as well?"

On and on this nonsense went Until we were able to circumvent

We agreed after much thought A tomato is a fruit, And it is not



Patricia Gulitti

I have always been a lover of words—devouring books and filling my little spiral notebooks with stories and songs when I was a little girl. Choosing to major in English and Literature as an undergraduate student of what was then SUNY Binghamton was an easy decision, and I soon discovered that teaching was my passion. I have recently completed my twenty-fourth year as a high school English teacher, and I am still inspired and excited when writing and working with young people. While balancing the world of writing and grading papers is always a challenge, my heart still returns to this medium of expression that helps me to record my life's journey. During this Canon workshop centered on food, I found that each piece I composed somehow returned to a memory of my family, particularly my mother. I dedicate the entries that I have written for this book to her.



Tea and Independence

My mother still makes the best cup of tea. After forty years now, I am more than capable of making tea on my own, but for some reason, whenever I am at my parents' house and the topic of having tea comes up, I still prefer that my mother prepare it. She boils the water, and even when the kettle begins to whistle—first like a light whining whisper, then a full blown blare—she lowers the temperature on the stovetop, letting the water settle a bit before pouring it into the mug. She places the tea bag in the mug first, so the hot water can penetrate the filter paper and soak up its contents. Then she sets the timer for four minutes to let it steep and brew. Once the timer sounds its repetitive succession of beeps, she removes the tea bag, and the magic begins: she adds a tablespoon of honey and another of lemon juice, stirring with love and affection. I have watched her measurements and have mimicked her over the years when making tea for myself, but no matter what, tea just always tastes better if it's been brewed and poured by Mom.

My first associations of drinking tea probably go back to being sick when I was younger. Tea could help cure a cold, or sometimes an ailing tummy, and my mother would encourage me to drink it while it was hot, so I'd reap all the benefits, especially the steam to help me breathe. We drank tea after dinner, especially on cold nights in the winter. It was a way to warm the senses and fill the belly. Growing up, in the name of conservation and saving money, we would often share a tea bag, and I never minded. It was like I was invited to take a taste of my mother's world, or to share a sip of the same treatment that my older sister received

Whenever someone asks me if I am a coffee or tea drinker, the answer is always easy—tea. Don't get me wrong—I love the aroma of coffee and its taste when sweetened with enough sugar and milk. But it's the simplicity of tea that fuels my life. When I went away to college, besides my new Smith Corona typewriter, cassette tapes, and photographs, the other most important item I packed along with me was my sister's hand-me-down hot pot, so I could boil water and make tea. I purchased the box of Lipton plain black tea in its largest amount of 100 bags per box sealed in plastic wrap. This was supposed to last me throughout the year if not longer. I packed it away in a cardboard box along with peanut butter, honey, Domino sugar packs, and the powdery Coffee Mate that didn't require being refrigerated. Most of these condiments were clearly dedicated to the creation of a soothing cup of tea.

And of course the other things to pack away were mugs for drinking tea. I had to take the mug that was mine from home—Snoopy of course was on it; in fact, I had two different mugs of Snoopy. I also remember that my friend Pilar had bought me a mug for my birthday which was right before I left for college. It was tan with a picture of bears on it that said something about friendship, and it even had an extra piece to serve as a cover to keep the tea warm. All of these mugs were wrapped in tissue paper and packed away for my move to Binghamton. When I would make a cup of tea there as a student, those mugs would bring me back home to my kitchen table, or allow a short visit with my good friend who was now hundreds of miles away in Chicago.

Drinking tea became a ritual for me during my time away at college. If I knew I had to stay up late to study for an exam the next day, I would brew a cup of tea. If I was feeling under the weather or suffering from a cold, I would brew a cup of tea. If I had a paper to finish

writing, I would brew a cup of tea. Sometimes I would come back after ten or eleven at night from the library, chilled by the frigid winter air on my walk to the dorm, and I knew a nice hot cup of tea would soon warm me up. My Snoopy mug of Lipton tea was my constant companion through the seasons of those years. It would sit there at the edge of the table in our dorm lounge as I pored over the pages of my textbook and notes. It would cozy up on my desk in my room as I would ready myself to type the final copy of an essay for an English class. Or it would silently keep me company on the coffee table in our suite, watching Days of Our Lives or the latest episode of Oprah with me if no one else was around. My mug of tea was also my clock. I would sip it slowly, knowing that seconds and minutes had passed by the time I reached the bottom of the cup. A half hour sitcom could be consumed with one cup of tea. A short study break of fifteen minutes could allow for gulps or quick sips for a burst of energy. A deep conversation after midnight could require a whole pot of tea. My life became measured in cups of tea.

I also associate my friends from those years with cups of tea. My suitemates and friends would often take turns boiling water in the communal hot pot, brewing cups for each other. I remember being a little under the weather and studying for a test on *The Merchant of Venice* in the study room of Cleveland Hall's basement when my suitemate Tracey brought me a hot cup of tea. It was darker in color than usual, and when I sipped it, there was a distinct difference in taste. It was a bit more bitter and rich in flavor than I was used to. I realized then that she hadn't sweetened it since she wasn't sure how I liked my tea. However, her kind gesture was so touching that I drank it as it was—black. And strangely enough, to this day I can no longer put sugar in my tea. Her care and concern in making that cup for me sweetened it enough.

And through those years my world of tea expanded—I soon learned that there was more to tea than black Lipton. I soon fell in love with flavored and herbal teas. The floral citrus aroma of Earl Grey became my favorite, and all it needed was just a little splash of milk to do it justice. I soon learned the benefits of drinking mint or chamomile tea if I wasn't feeling well and needed to soothe a troubled stomach. I've had many long talks with good friends into the wee hours of the morning, chatting over a cup of tea. Sometimes our tears of grief would run down our cheeks, mixing with the tea as we raised the mugs to our lips, but we could swallow the sadness, for the tea and our company soothed it.

Sometimes our laughter would erupt mid gulp, causing one of us to spit the tea across the room in a fine spray, causing the room to explode into a fit of giggles. During my senior year my friend Mark would often make a spot of tea and then play his guitar or sing, and I would love to harmonize along. And a cup of tea always went well with the waffles or crumb cake that Debbie would make for breakfast when I would stay the night on Schubert Street. Yes, tea found a way to warm those days of my youth.

As I grew older and moved out into my first apartment, it was a must that I buy a tea kettle. Lots of shopping needed to be done that summer, and naturally a trip to Ikea to furnish my home was a necessity at that age. Who would have thought that when I was in the ground level where odds and ends such as plates, glasses, and vases are available, my mother found a tea kettle? She insisted that I buy this one because it had the contraption on the black spout to make noise when the water boiled. Those few years I had lived at home again while getting my bearings, earning my master's degree and embarking on my career as a teacher, were not always easy. It was hard to go back home to a place with rules when I had been used to my freedom, and one of my mother's pet peeves was that whenever I boiled water at home on the stove, I would never notice that the water was boiling. She often chided that my lack of awareness in this area would cause me to set the house on fire. Hence, I conceded to buying the bargain kettle at Ikea.

And so my rite of passage as an adult in my first apartment was to make that first cup of tea to christen the place. I filled the kettle with water, and placed it on the stovetop, making the flame high for the water to eventually boil. As I went about my business unpacking boxes and making room for things, I was startled by a noise emanating from the kitchen. It first sounded like a tortured mosquito, buzzing at a high-pitch, but then the noise expanded, breaking off into harmonic and then discordant chords, growing to such a crescendo that it soon sounded as if a train was barreling through my apartment.

No, I didn't go to lower the flame just yet. I reached for the telephone instead and called my mother. When I heard her voice answer, I said, "Hello, do you hear this?" and held the earpiece of the phone up to the kettle in its full blare of an alarm. "I'm surprised you can't hear this from your house!" I added. Of course we started laughing about this powerful kettle, so as I finally lowered the flame to ease its painful squeal, I noted, "No, Mom, I don't think I will ever have a problem in noticing that the water is boiled with this kettle!"

Drinking tea continues to be a ritual in my life. Drinking tea continues to soothe my sadness, keep me company, and heal my woes. For my thirtieth birthday my friend Gerry bought me a teapot and matching cup—white china decorated with a spray of blue flowers, with the month of August printed on the saucer. My first mentor as an English teacher, Gerry told me, "Make a pot of tea before you sit down to grade a set of papers. It will make the work so much easier to bear" And it did

I still measure time in cups of tea. I can usually grade five to seven essays during one cup of tea. I can read the morning headlines from the paper with an occasional article or two during my first cup of tea for the day. I can sip a cup of lavender or chamomile tea for half an hour after coming home from a yoga class or a long day, allowing it to soothe and bring a sense of quiet to my being. I spend time in my office writing for at least an hour, making my reward a nice cup of tea.

Over the years I have continued to expand my interests in tea, becoming a fan of the warming essence of chai tea, or the medicinal Yogi teas that help me to "breathe easy" or bring my "stomach ease." I've recently begun to dabble more in green and detox teas and feel the health benefits from them. I have also taken to drinking loose teas thanks to Teavana and the many mugs that come with strainers to aid in this process. Friends and family gift me with the grace of tea, and I have quite a collection now. And even though my mother still makes the best cup of tea, it pleases me when I introduce her to new flavors that she enjoys—mandarin orange green tea or peppermint bark. I am still blessed to have those moments when my mother and I can sit down on a Sunday afternoon to our cups of tea.

Just last summer I finally became a homeowner, and when packing up my belongings, that same loud tea kettle of twenty years came along with me. It's not that I can't afford a new one, or that there aren't more aesthetically pleasing ones I may prefer in my kitchen. It's what this kettle represents—my first taste of independence. Each time it blares its obnoxious warning that the water is ready, I still laugh and think of my mother's concern that I would never hear it.

So that stainless steel tea kettle with the black handle and spout still sits upon my stove, and when I was mostly settled last summer, I made my signature cup of tea to christen my apartment. Sitting in the sunshine on my balcony overlooking the bay, I took a sip and knew that I was home.



Ode to Lasagna

You are a special occasion, a source of nourishment and love consumed in a room filled with warmth and chiming with laughter.

Mom would lovingly shape you into a meal Over the course of two days. She would fuel your bloodstream, Your sauce, sprinkling basil and oregano Into a life stream of tomatoes that bubbled over soft sheets of semolina pasta. She would decorate the landscape With clouds of milky ricotta cheese And lace each layer with slices of mozzarella All cut by hand.

Mom would always make at least two pans, and when I was older, she would let me help In building you—
Layers upon layers of pasta, sauce, and cheese, Placing you into a womb of warmth Giving you time to expand, marinate, and cultivate your many flavors into one wondrous meal.

You could never be taken out
Until the edges of the pasta were browned,
Slightly burnt for a crisp and crunchy bite.
All five of us would beg for a piece from a corner,
And even though there were only four corners to a pan,
She found a way to satisfy us all.



Mellene Hederian

When I was a child, my family was invited to my aunt's house for a party. I decided to dazzle my drunk Armenian relatives with a nursery rhyme I'd memorized—and edited. And so I earned a name for myself as an entertaining storyteller quite young when I'd decided to punctuate the story of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" with the F-bomb. Apparently, my embellishments to the classic fairy tale were appreciated because I received a memorable and animated reaction. While I've always loved reading, I feel like I've always been a writer. My colleagues and friends—and perhaps especially my husband—would probably jest that's because I can't shut up. I like to think it's more because I'm a storyteller at heart, with the soul of a poet. I've lived in New York all my life and have been teaching English for twenty years. I currently live in Farmingdale with my lovable husband, and my even more lovable cats. And a swear jar passed down from my Italian mother.



There's Nothing Like a Sunset

"Don't say that about yourself," said the overworked farmer. "You can be anything you want to be." As he uttered his cliché, intended as genuine encouragement, he wiped the hard-earned sweat from his brow and looked on with proud exasperation at the final few crates being loaded onto the back of the truck.

"But look at me," the little red one squealed. "I'm red and round—I'm gonna end up in a salad! And what's worse—in an unfinished salad, drowning in a pool of oil. Oh, no—what if it's ranch? That's gonna be me—rolling around in a pool of unfinished ranch. Death by dressing."

"You really need to stop," said the pear-shaped yellow one. "At least you *look* like a tomato. No one even knows what I am. I'm like the smallest, most awkwardly shaped pumpkin."

"That's nothing!" another one screamed. "I'll probably end up in a sauce! Pureed to smithereens—that'll be the way I go!"

"Don't be morbid!" another shouted.

The farmer intervened. "Don't think of this as an end; it's a beginning!" Fighting back his tears, he continued. "You are all beautiful and valuable in your own way, and there's nothing wrong with being part of a nice garden salad or a sauce."

"Oh, here we go," the orange one huffed.

"What if I don't want to leave? What if I want to stay right here with you?" one demanded from the basket.

It never gets any easier, the farmer thought. He put forth a strong face and told his beautiful babies they would be alright, as he has done for over twenty years. "You know you can't," he managed to communicate. "You're a sunset."

Somewhere on Long Island, a middle-aged woman is planning a party. Tomatoes are inevitably on her shopping list every single time she hosts. But it's actually not the party she relishes: it's the prepping.

The hours before.

The hours before any party you'll find her with the colander and the cutting board. Equipped with a sharp knife and some toothpicks, she ponders her options. Her hands are wet. The music is on and she's in the kitchen—thinking of her guests and what they would like to eat. She pairs foods carefully with plates and platters that suit them. The ritual of making dishes that will satisfy is the real party. It's all in the hours before. She wakes up in the morning imagining what she might serve.

She thinks out the napkins, plates, serving utensils; setting the table outside, and the buffet table on the porch. She wants everything to look special for the big reveal: when guests arrive to see what awaits them—an inviting cheese platter, bowtie pasta with feta cheese and spinach, perhaps a sangria, and her tomatoes in something as incredible as the star.

When she walks by the tomatoes in the supermarket or better yet—if she makes the drive to a farmstand out east like she's done today, so many ideas pop into her head. As she

surveys her assortment, she thinks, "What will I do with these beautiful babies?" She can slice them or dress them. A great appetizer: refreshing, versatile, beautiful. Bursting with flavor.

It was a humid day in August in Southampton. She and her husband took a drive and pulled the car over once she spotted a quaint little farmstand.

"This is perfect," she exclaimed. "Let's look here." She and her husband approached the stand which donned chalkboards proudly advertising, "Corn, squash, cucumbers, zucchini, and tomatoes." Baskets upon baskets were filled to the rim with different colored and shaped fresh vegetables, cut flowers, and ripe fruit. The farmer bent down to lift his final crate of tomatoes to load on the back of a truck, as the woman stopped him.

Her eyes landed on the overflowing basket at his feet. "Excuse me sir, are those tomatoes?"

"Why, yes," he replied with a grunt from the morning's over-exertion. "How are you fine folks today?"

"Very well. How are you?" she replied. "Those are beautiful. How much for the whole basket?"

Her husband looked on. "Wow, look at those beauties! Nothing like a really good tomato."

Roma, big beef, cherry, campari, and if you are so lucky: heirloom. Can anyone possibly fathom how many generations of grandmothers all over the world have rendered tomatoes into sauce? Not always round and not always red: the warm orange, the sunny yellow. They come black, purple, rainbow, and believe it or not—striped.

A slice of a beefsteak tomato on a turkey sandwich with mayo and a dash of pepper. Mouth-watering salsas and creamy guacamole. A slice or two on a juicy cheeseburger. Or her famous Caprese salad with its fresh basil, mozzarella cheese, drizzled with olive oil, salt, and pepper.

"Should I put you beauties in a sauce?"

Silence.

"Or maybe just pair you with onions, drizzled with balsamic vinegar and some salt?"

She waits, almost to hear their voices, and then she knows.

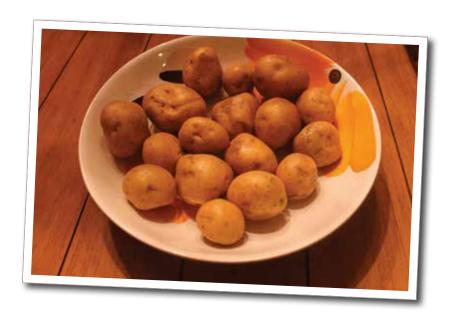
Once all finished in the kitchen, it was soon time to greet her guests at the door.

"Wow! Look at all these beautiful dishes," one guest exclaims! "Ooooh... You made your bruschetta!"

And at that moment, all the fear and apprehension of what the future would hold was gone. Every little sweet one that once lived on a farm, and travelled so far in a basket, graced someone's table in a memorable, flavorful dish.

"I was just talking about your bruschetta the other day," a guest admitted. "There's nothing like it!"

And with that, the woman who worked with care for hours glowed, and said, "Thank you; it's easy. You just need really good tomatoes."



Al Fresco

My parents' house had a large backyard with a patio, some grass, an enormous tree in the center, and hot pink azalea bushes along the perimeter. The large tree was adorned with one swing which my father had fixed there on the largest branch when I was a child. The yard was fenced in, and our dog, like a frantic security guard, had run so often from one side of our home to the other, that he'd carved out a huge, permanent "U" in the lawn surrounding the house. A round, wooden picnic table that had wheels and a hole for an umbrella, sat reliably, feet from our barbecue. The yard was shady, mostly—and private, like a sanctuary. The table sat on the humble concrete patio, but the wheels provided options. As the large tree aged, we'd drive and park that table under its branches for respite from the late afternoon rays. Or, if it was a day for which Long Island waited for the sun to break through the clouds, we'd wheel the table into the sunshine. I remember my father sanding and re-painting that table several times throughout my formative years.

My parents instilled in me from a young age that eating outside was somehow more special, and I have to agree. The most vivid and joyful food memories I can recall with ease seem to be in summer months.

Sure, there are plenty of memories one can recall regarding winter: baking sugar cookies, banana-nut muffins, or chocolate brownies filling not only the kitchen with a sweet aroma of home, but also with a warmth, as the enticing, inviting scent of sweetness permeates each room.

Fall, as well, certainly conjures certain foods to which I feel an attachment, I suppose hearty soups and casseroles used to combat that certain familiar chill that September ushers in. Assembling a lasagna that is shared for days; ordering Chinese food on hectic evenings; chopping and peeling potatoes for my husband's favorite: mashed. Yes, there are plenty of cold-month memories I cherish regarding food, but the food memory I can't seem to shake is eating in the yard.

So many special days of my life were spent in that yard, sitting around that table. Countless birthday parties, including my sweet sixteen. Pre-prom, post-beach day, and my father's sixty-ninth surprise birthday party which he thought was for my brother.

Whatever the meal, whether it was take-out from Martino's, pizza and a home-made salad, or my mother's cooking, taking it outside changed it entirely.

Stepping outside elevated the entire meal, the entire experience, making it event-worthy. Once the food was ready, my mom would look at it and I can still hear her voice surveying the family, 'Should we eat outside?" This query was often followed by the resounding, "Hell yeah, let's eat outside!" Decision made.

Like a well-oiled machine, we'd leap into action. Everyone would grab something: plates, napkins, utensils, serving spoons, a drink to be shared, glasses, and we'd exit the back door to dine at the red wooden table in the shade.

Juicy steak on the barbecue that my father proudly marinated in a can of Sprite, corn on the cob wrapped in aluminum foil, and French fries. Sabrett hot dogs with sauerkraut which my mother swore were better than Nathan's and Oscar Mayer's. A store-bought

rotisserie chicken, with pork fried rice on the side. Tuna fish and egg salad sandwiches with tasty trimmings like bread and butter pickles, romaine lettuce and beefsteak tomatoes. Always a green salad of some kind: that was my job. I liked the work of chopping the onions, tearing the lettuce, slicing the cucumber, shaving a carrot. And I still do. A colorful fresh cornucopia assembled in minutes. My contribution.

We'd all gather a seat and place down what we'd carried. Four curved benches, not individual chairs, accompanied our table, amplifying the fun-factor. My mother would grab main food items. I'd reach for the Good Seasons dressing and whatever sides she'd prepared at the stove like her rice and red beans.

This was my parents' house—where the cold beverage was Coke, the hot one coffee. My father would shout, "What's everyone want to drink?" and we'd respond with our preferred flavors of soda. And my brother was useful as a gopher, running back in to grab anything we may have forgotten. A few more napkins or the A.1. Steak Sauce we could picture in the kitchen and needed someone to fetch. An outdoor dining experience thrown together in an instant.

But, of course, we didn't always make the decision to dine al fresco. As often as we'd turn to eating outside after a day spent at the beach, I can also recall my mother spitting at the idea. Some meals were just too much, some evenings were just too hectic. Sometimes we just wanted to eat.

"I'm not lugging all this shit outside," she'd bark. The pot of rice on the stove just too heavy to imagine carrying. The platter of broccoli, for which some people like butter, some salt, some lemon, therefore all of those flavorings would need to be at arm's reach. "It's just too much stuff! Let's just eat in the kitchen."

It may have been a great suggestion, but sometimes you were shot down by the CEO of the kitchen.

Yes, some summer meals were "just" eaten inside at the kitchen table: a rectangle butcher block with four chairs. Standard, ordinary, typical.

So, what was it about eating outside that my parents so adored and I loved instantly, too? What lured us out there? Was it the food itself that dictated the decision? Was it the enormous tree and its plentiful branches protectively reaching over our heads? Was it the lovely, once-in-a-while breeze? Was it the whiffs of neighborhood barbecues? Was it the fact that by not being in a room we expressed ourselves more fully? Or was it by rendering the yard a room, we focused on one another more? Perhaps it was much more pragmatic than all of this. Perhaps our penchant for eating outside was actually born out of the necessity to appease our dog? Perhaps it was all of these things and more.

Forever running and barking in the yard, etching his U-shaped track around the perimeter of the house, Waggles, my childhood dog, my first pet, was overjoyed when we ate outside.

From my dog's point of view this must have felt like having his favorite people visiting him in his world. Throughout our meal, my dog would punctuate his backyard sprints with table scraps and socializing. From our point of view, if we didn't eat outside, we'd have to endure his scratches to come in at the back door. Sure, we could let him in, but somehow it wasn't the same. Our misbehaved, ADHD-inflicted, begging, slobbering, salivating dog was a major factor in what lured us out the back door. But was it the only one?

All I know is my childhood is filled with late afternoon summer meals that started with all of us grabbing something and stepping outside.

"I'm throwing the steaks on, Hon."

"Okay, be right out. Are there napkins on the table?"

"It got a little cooler out. Look at Mom's azaleas! Yeah, I brought 'em out."

"Come here, Wags! Good boy! Good boy, Wags!"

"I want diet ginger ale!"

"Do we have any cream soda left?"

"Ugh, how do you drink that?"

"Shut up, it's awesome!"

"Be nice. You feel that breeze?"

"The steaks are almost ready. Hey Darin, go grab the A.1."

"I'm on it!"

I put some salad in my plate and passed the bowl to my mother. My brother was chucking a tennis ball around with the dog.

"So, Mel—do you have plans tomorrow? What do you want to do?" she asked.

I glanced at my brother and said, "This."



Ode to Crab Legs

A bright orange and glistening glow—there's no such thing as "too much." Sultry with steam, prickly, and pointy to the touch.

Takes skill and patience to crack and release the fresh and juicy meat not for every day: a festive and celebratory treat!

When you have lemon, salt, and butter, who needs cake?

You're far better than lobster, than steak.

Wrestling with the legs to devour each delicate bite if drawn butter is wrong, I don't want to be right.

And after the messy gorging is over, I actually want more,

And a wet-nap, and a shower, and to vacuum the floor.



Nolani Kennedy-White

I'm Nolani Kennedy-White and if you're reading over my name more than once trying to pronounce it, don't bother. I've gotten everything from Molani to Nalany to Noloni. It honestly doesn't bother me anymore. Anyway, I was born in Knoxville, Tennessee and moved to Long Island when I was around six years old (and no, I don't have a southern accent. I got a few too many questions about that when I moved). Being a quiet, awkward, self-conscious teenage girl, writing has become an important outlet for me and I find myself enjoying myself whenever I find the free time to do so. Which isn't often (oh, high school, you obnoxious, anxiety-causing burden). I started writing poetry in fifth grade, and after receiving some praise from my teacher, my parents, and my grandparents that I felt I didn't really deserve, I cracked under the peer pressure and continued writing for the sole purpose of making them happy and meeting their expectations (I mean, I write more so for my own benefit nowadays, but that's basically what happened). I'm a junior at Jericho High School, and when I'm not occupying my time with homework or Netflix or hibernating in my room for hours on end until food becomes necessary, I like to read, play tennis (occasionally), break into my friend's backyard to swim in her pool, and do track and field. And no, I don't actually run. I throw discus, shot put, hammer, and (sometimes) weight throw. My passion for writing has lead me to join Peqasus, my school's creative writing magazine, where I've met a lot of (intimidatingly good) writers and gotten inspiration to create some of my favorite projects. I really hope to go into some field of journalism or become a published author when I'm older, and I can't wait to see where my love for this takes me.



Warm Welcome

Sugar, butter, flour, eggs, vanilla....

Mix, blend, crack, pour....

"Can you grab this?"

"Can you hold that?"

"Should I use this or this?"

"Would you stop that?"

The usual banter makes its way through the kitchen as two sisters try to make one batch of cookies two different ways, and not so secretly wonder why they decided to make them together in the first place.

The Kitchen Master comes down the stairs. Now they've done it.

"Can't you two do anything together that doesn't worsen my hearing? If you're going to have these ready before your brother comes home then you'll have to move faster. And stop shouting!"

"Yes, Mom."

Beep, beep, beep.

"Timer's done!"

A cookie sheet is placed in the heated prison and the door is closed. The prisoners must bake while the guards await release time.

"Anything else we can help with?"

"Well, actually..."

Tick, tock, tick, tock, tick...

Prisoners are forgotten as guards tend to other matters.

Chicken is prepared and pork is roasted.

Lasagna baked, salad tossed, bread cut.

Beep, beep, beep, beep.

"They're ready!"

A cookie sheet is pulled from its confines and laid gently on the stovetop.

Melted chocolate, crisp edges, light yet firm center. The prisoners seem to have behaved properly. A complex mixture of individuals has been brought together for our glorious portrait, our timely photograph of a cherished taste.

Knock, knock, knock.

"He's here!"

A stampede of voices, a tangle of running legs, an open door, a familiar face and open arms. Greetings are given, hugs are exchanged, everyone is led back into the warm surroundings and inviting scents of the kitchen.

Our plate of sugary memories is brought to the front and held out to the familiar stranger who has entered the sacred arms of his home

"Welcome home, big brother!"

A smile greets me in thanks.

.....

Tick, tock, tick, tock, tick...

The guards lurk near the granite countertops once more.

Their taller bodies lean on the table, their longer arms reach across for the chance to cause any sort of mischief, their now crinkled eyes tell the stories of inevitable age and continuous laughter.

Beep, beep, beep.

"They're ready."

"It's about time!"

"I can't wait."

A cookie sheet is pulled from the heated prison and laid gently on the stovetop. Melted chocolate, crisp edges, light yet firm center. A new and perfect batch meets waiting mouths. Giddy, middle-aged children, who no longer need their mother to do all the complicated cooking procedures for them, gaze upon their beloved creation with fondness. The smell is intoxicating and the nostalgia is overwhelming.

"The same as always, right big brother?"

A watery smile greets me in acknowledgment.

"Yeah, I love the original."

Old habits die hard, I guess.

Thanksgiving Habits

Another Thanksgiving dinner at my aunt's house and another night of horribly hidden anxiety and sweat stains on a nice new shirt. Don't get me wrong, I don't have a problem with my family or the holiday, but every year turns out to be the same nerve-racking situation. I usually don't see many people from my mom's side of the family more than three times a year, so I often have a lot of trouble remembering faces, names, and my connections to other people in my family. The claustrophobic atmosphere and need to meet social standards leaves me feeling lost, socially awkward, and afraid to interact with the people I'm supposed to be the closest to. My saving graces are my mom, dad, older sister and brother, and cousin. But all of them always go off to converse with members of their appropriate age group. Parents talk with the grown-ups, and the "adults" (more like mid and early twenty-year-olds) joke around and play videogames with other youngish adults and older teenagers. That's not to say that they leave me out of conversation, it's just that I can't always relate to them and I normally don't talk very much anyway, so I end up just watching and listening from one seat over. Though all the members of our close-knit clan do their best to include me, I always get a small internal sense of being unknowingly left out of the loop. But I can make peace with my silent, observatory position in this circle of people.

One thing that both connects and somewhat separates me from everyone else is the food; the hot, just prepared, family-approved meal that awaits us on the long table in buffet fashion. After the family prayer, as said at almost all our family gatherings where food is involved, everyone lines up single file and awaits their turn to partake in the homemade goodness of a "traditional" American and Jamaican Thanksgiving: a large, golden turkey with thin skin and juicy meat, a just-soaked ham with a succulent pink hue, Pillsbury crescent rolls that are always light brown and wonderfully soft, hot pulled pork in a deep brown sauce contrasting to the bright silver aluminum tray, crispy fried plantain cooked perfectly to a yellowish-brown color, a delicious mess of yellow-green ackee and saltfish scrambled together like a jungle of overflowing vegetation, steaming rice and beans with murky green stems of seasoning poking out on occasion, the white mountain

of mashed potatoes right next to the bright orange platter of cooked sweet potatoes, the constant supply of bubbly and satisfying sparkling cider meant to get me drunk on sugar. The warm, inviting feelings of a sizable family gathering surround me and wrap me in their open arms. I sit between my kind uncles and aunts and my talkative siblings and cousins, and although I may not always be talking, the constant laughter and playful banter around me makes me feel welcome, included, and loved.

Despite this, the one part of this friendly meeting of plastic cups and paper plates and smiling faces and boisterous chuckles that makes me feel separated is my lack of courage to try more foods and to eat more than half a plate. Despite the numerous trays filled to the edges with delectable choices, the most I ever get is some slices of ham and turkey, a few rolls, and a repeatedly filled cup of cider. I've always been an irritatingly picky eater, a curse upon my personality that is the literal definition of the saying "old habits die hard." Because of this, I limit myself on the expansive list of appetizing indulgences that come with the Jamaican culture, much to the disappointment of my family and myself. So with my almost empty plate and still slightly hungry stomach, I sit silently observing the ones I can't help but love and be slightly jealous of, smiling and laughing along without holding back. I suppose one upside to not eating much is the ability to laugh harder at my sister's antics and my brother's quips at my cousins without worrying about choking on something. Looking on the bright side and being surrounded by those I love the most in life keeps me feeling full and a little less alone.

I may not eat much, I may not stack my plate high with the food our moms and aunts took hours and days to prepare especially for this night, and I may be a complete contradiction to the known tradition of stuffing yourself silly on Thanksgiving Day, but I savor my modest choices. The turkey's flawless, white meat is a familiar comfort food to me, and the savory meat of the juice-soaked ham has a slightly sweet flavor to it, proving to be a welcome gift upon my taste buds. The crescent rolls remain gracefully fluffy, like perfectly shaped clouds, with a slightly crunchy outer shell. The cider, with its deep purple pigment and hundreds of miniscule bubbles, tastes sweet and tantalizing, and will certainly induce a few belches after several sips.

Each food choice produces a totally new flavor that temporarily satisfies my hunger. Each bite and each sip is a moment I relish in the expansive times of my muteness, bringing a feeling of solace to my moments of loneliness. But those moments don't last long because there's still room on my plate for more; because there's still an understanding family sitting on all sides of me, coaxing me to speak up whenever I'm ready. My selections, much like my moments of open conversation, are minimal, but I enjoy what I can get to the fullest extent, simply basking in this rich environment that I will always be thankful for.

Ode to Shirley Temples

Beautifully bright pink or dangerously deep red
With or without fresh cherries for added fun
The crimson grenadine falls gracefully into the clear ginger ale
Which is greeted with small hands and a grateful smile
Shirley Temple, my childhood friend

The crystalline ice cubes clink in the tall glass And the straw floats on the swarming bubbles Sweet flavor assaults the taste buds As carbon dioxide burns the nose Shirley Temple, my lively accomplice

The people talk and laugh and shout
As we sit together in joyous celebration
I remain quiet and delightfully observe
And silently enjoy the company of my elixir
Shirley Temple, my sugary companion

You were my savior upon the calm sea
Bringing me glee as we sailed monotonously
I was content to sit alone and drink
The days away as we sailed away
Shirley Temple, my gracious rescuer

I make a few of my own some days
Just for the heck of it, just for the memories
A casual day has suddenly turned more pleasurable
A moment of tranquility within the loud dynamics of life
Shirley Temple, my satisfying meditation



Anchita Khurana

Of my sixteen years on Earth, I've spent the last ten reading avidly and the last three struggling to write. For the other seven years, I repeatedly cursed the action of writing as I massaged my cramped hands. Then, through a stroke of inspiration, I decided I wanted to make people cry with words.

I began writing, but felt much too concerned with the way my sentences appeared to others. I only ever made myself cry. Now, uncaring of anybody else's opinion (mostly), I feel I'm one step closer to achieving my great lifelong goal.

I write every day, and savor every step of the process. I currently live on Long Island, and am a senior in Jericho High School. The torture of schoolwork forced me to find solace in the meaning and feeling of words, and I'm always looking to improve my own style. I adore writing words as much as I find happiness in reading them. Despite my past aggression, I don't actually write to make people cry anymore, but instead bring joy to myself and those around me. I hope you enjoy my humble pieces of work and definitely feel free to send your tears to the school's address!



Always the Chopsticks

It's funny how an entire month can be framed within two large meals; thirty-five days, and two meals. That's all it took.

Of course, there were the dozen meals in between; some of them small, some of them unpleasant, and those that were snuck in so hastily before the first night's dinner and after the last day's lunch.

South Korea is known for its food: bibimbap, gimbap, tteokboki, and its revolutionary bab burger, only to name a few. But I didn't go there for the cuisine; I went there for the axion: a completely theoretical elementary particle that is postulated to exist in extension to the Standard Model of physics. Basically, I went to search for dark matter.

Sounds pretty heavy, but the first dinner our student group of twenty-five had together was full of laughter and trying to memorize one another's names and countries of origin.

We struggled with the chopsticks, and some of us ended up using forks. Our day had been full of lectures and trying not to let the jet lag get the best of us. That dinner was trying new foods that we couldn't find in America or Turkey or Thailand. It was a hello to Korea; to the KUSP program; to intensive research. It was hello to new friends and exciting experiences.

That greeting was followed by ramen. Lots of ramen. Ramen for lunch, ramen for dinner, ramen during a movie, ramen in the middle of writing a progress report due in exactly ten hours. I was experimental at first, but then I was stubbornly set on only consuming Shin Ramen. Even the, and I quote, spiciest ramen in the world, didn't seem all that spicy to me. So why not settle on the noodles I knew and loved?

My friends, who could eat nothing but halal meat, had settled with dining on a cheesy ramen for the majority of their time there. I had attempted vegetarianism several months before, but I knew it wouldn't pass in South Korea. The majority of the cuisine contains meat or animal products. My job was to go in blind, and eat whatever my über picky taste buds would permit me.

My friend's birthday on the seventh of July was my first Korean barbecue—and we traveled outside of campus for it. The rain cleared up halfway through our walk and we decided to make a happy birthday video; we sang the song in parts, in each of our respective native languages. We started off and wrapped up in English, since it was the language we all used to communicate.

It ended up looking absolutely ridiculous, but that was okay. Then there was tteokboki—I was too picky to try it until two weeks later, when four of my friends and I stayed up until four in the morning, playing truth or dare, but having it only be truth or truth, because a dare would entail cleaning up the mess we'd made. Our midnight delivery of chicken happened on a whim after spotting EXO on TV for the first time— seeing them on a screen larger than my computer doesn't happen in America.

Speaking of EXO: they gave me my first taste of energy drink, in Seoul. They had their own brand of energy drink, and I bought an entire pack, because it's EXO; it has to taste good. Sadly, even angels can't do more than sweeten caffeine and delay its staggering effects. Seoul's Insadong brought some solace, though, with its famous "Poop Cafe"

which served chocolate and red-bean stuffed pastries. I ate them thinking they were shaped like honeycombs.

Busan arrived with its famous fish market, which I could barely bear to pass through, much less eat at. Instead, four of us basically hiked up a mountain, stopping at the top for pictures, and then promptly making our way down, pausing for coffee along the way. We met with the rest of our friends, and, after the beach, dined on hot pot. This was the first night I ever spent in a hostel; it was called the Popcorn Hostel, and was colorfully and lovingly decorated for its guests. I left the next morning for Daejeon, and spent the rest of the day with my roommate. We dined on ramen and ice cream, and then later made a walk to the smoothie shop, discussing religion and faith.

Our days at the lab brought lunches outside of Munji Campus, once we bored of the cafeteria—its little shop and odd smell. We trekked to a little place that sold bab burgers and slushies. There was writing on the walls, tables, and even on the napkin dispensers, where I discovered someone had engraved EXO's logo.

Then we discovered choco-pies—green tea flavored choco-pies—in the apartments they'd transferred us to three weeks in, and that was our flat's new obsession. Then came the maple flavored cookies, which we survived on through the night before our final report was due. I tried green tea, in an attempt to achieve a caffeine rush, but found it too bitter for my taste.

There were the two meals with our three-man research group's mentor—more Korean barbecue and discussions over physics, living in Korea, and the fact that we ordered too much food. These happened on the nights we stayed in the lab too late, and had plans to stay even longer. Our mentor was diligent, kind, and wise, and despite our odd hours and minor scientific progress, we always felt pleasantly accomplished.

And, finally, the last meal, the last lunch, the last buffet. We all ate too much, and couldn't digest the thought that we may never see each other again. The discussion was there, but it was languid—there was one final day for us, and we wanted to make it last. We took our last picture and gave our closing statements.

That wasn't to say there was no more food after that. In fact, there was *bingsoo* in Daejeon's Sky Road, and me accidentally turning it to mush trying to create the right

texture, thus rendering it inedible. That brought the ridiculous pictures trying to poke fun at my pathetic antics.

My last day in South Korea I spent traveling between Seoul and Incheon, with my two overweight suitcases. I'd planned a trip to a restaurant and cafe, but could only make the cafe, where I ended up unknowingly meeting a Korean idol, who bought me boba tea. The sugar of it sweetened my despondency into melancholy, and in the airport, I finally said goodbye to my friends. I finally said goodbye to cute Korean stationery and cheap music albums. I said goodbye to Korean cuisine: to ramen, and bibimbap, and Korean fried chicken, and chopsticks—always the chopsticks. I felt I could never use forks again.



Subway

You're really a foot long now After that class-action lawsuit I can say that I'm glad Because your bread, your greens, your cheese They're all so savory

You taste like
Childhood
Long trips
Hot car, and cool sun
Food? The children are hungry
Burger King? McDonalds? Chick-fil-A?
No, no, and definitely not
Subway's what we need

Warm golden bread wrapped around Teriyaki chicken Layered in American cheese A Japanese-American fusion But it tastes pure Indian After a dozen years of consumption By an Indian family with

Four little ones Who hate Anything green But will eat a Subway with no complaint at all Except that it ended too quickly and

Passionately You are a love affair of sweet onion sauce And vinegar Mellow black olives and fiery jalapeños Coming together to form a

Family Mine is always finding our way back to you, some way We adore you, Subway



Fahtima Khwaja

"The one who falls and gets up is so much stronger than the one who never fell."

-Unknown

I'm a seventeen-year-old student at Jericho High School, an academically competitive community of students. Being in such an environment, it is essential to remember the idea that perfection in anything in life is unrealistic and unnecessary. When I first began writing, I had no real interest in it because I wasn't any good, but not until I wrote and wrote and wrote, and constantly made and fixed my mistakes, did writing become gratifying and filled me with satisfaction. Though I still fall during this journey, I've finally learned that each slip-up only further invigorates my pieces that much more.



It's My Food

For as long as I can remember, I was always different from my peers. In every way, that is: how I interpreted things, the way I spoke, what I wore, and what I ate. This can probably be attributed to the fact that there weren't many students of Uzbek/Afghan descent, or those who actually practiced those cultures. For the most part, school, in all my years, was generally made up of Caucasians, African Americans, and eastern and southern Asians—three groups of people I couldn't always relate to. Though I was able to become friends with these students, I couldn't really be like them: I didn't have endless amounts of playdates, I wasn't allowed to attend any and every party I was invited to, I didn't shop at the same stores as most of the other girls did because the clothes didn't really match who I was, no one coincidentally had the same name as me in the entire school, and my family and I didn't go out to a restaurant or order in for every meal. And, because nearly everyone at school did things that I didn't, or didn't do things that I did, it sometimes made

me feel out of place, like the black sheep in a herd of cloudy white ones. It actually vexed me in elementary school and middle school. I wanted to be like them! I guess I wanted to be not me. And when classmates brought attention to how "weird" it was to be unlike them through their rude comments and facial expressions, it made me even more inclined to try to change myself and my ways.

There was one specific incident I can vividly remember that really stung me. I was probably in the first grade, and for some reason, I was sitting at the same lunch table as this girl who'd always pick on me. Mom had packed me homemade food, as she did every day. I believe it was rice, chicken, and definitely okra. It wasn't cooked the same way as restaurants do, obviously, but the way Grandma does; its sauce was as golden-orange as a summer sunset, which was the same color as the tender chicken, accompanied by white, soft rice, and this green, slug-like slimy thing...okra. Because I had eaten it before and already knew that it had a divine taste, I wasn't really fazed by its appearance, but I had expected that first graders, who only knew sandwiches and pasta, were going to react. I was right.

As I was self-consciously eating, aware that students around me would be disgusted by such a disgraceful mixture, my eyes met with my bully's. She twisted her face the way you would if you were at the zoo and caught one of the horses going to the bathroom.

"Ew! What is that?" she exclaimed.

Oh my gosh, it happened. She pointed out my alien substance in aversion. People were going to associate me with gross food, and being weird, and being dirty, and...

"It's my food..." I whispered a second before I burst out crying.

Later that day, I went home and informed my mom of the horrifying event, who, in turn, told her mom. My grandma yelled at her daughter for sending "our" food with me to school, and to send sandwiches instead. She apologized to me and promised to never send such meals again.

It was times like this that caused me to eat with my bag sitting directly in front of my lunches, like kofta kabob, for example: a mocha colored oval of juicy, tender beef;

a heavenly dish, really, but, like my other meals, it was *different*, so it was something to be self-conscious about, embarrassed of, and ashamed for.

Smelling like homemade food was another concern of mine. Because all of our meals are so full of different savory spices that eventually bubble into one, the odor is rather strong, but it's not repulsive as one may believe it would be; it's mouthwatering. It's the type of smell that makes you get out of your bed as you're watching Netflix just so you could go downstairs and ask Mom what she's making and how long it's going to take until it's ready to be devoured. Who wouldn't want to smell as attractive as that?! I know who: someone who doesn't want to be labeled as "the kid who reeks"; someone who doesn't want to be the cause of a peer saying "Ugh, where is that smell coming from?!" as they sourly crinkle up their face; someone who wants to fit in. That's why whenever my mom would begin to whip something delicious up, which was basically always, I'd turn on the stove's fan to the strongest option and lock myself in my room until the traces of her cooking were completely eliminated.

Years passed and, thankfully, so did my peers' immaturity, as well as my own self-consciousness. I began to eat without hiding behind anything, and without the lid of the container half covering my lunch. And, yeah, others smelled it, but they finally realized that that smell was delicious. When they'd peek over to see the source of that aroma, I'd willingly turn the Thermos towards them, and they would normally respond with, "Wow, delicious!" or "Ooh!" even if it didn't look so appealing. I started to not care anymore. It's my food, it's my culture...and it is me.

The Love of My Life: An Ode to Chocolate Chip Cookies

Oh, Crisp and Chewy Chocolate Chip Cookies... You were born in 1930, and are almost a century my senior, but my heart doesn't seem to want anything but you.

Your wrinkled, sun-kissed skin is unbelievably attractive to me, and those dark, round beauty marks that trace your body just drive me absolutely crazy.

I can never have enough of you.

When I see you, it means our efforts on the snowman outside must pause. When I see you, it means your best friend, milk, is going to stop by for a visit. When I see you, it means laughter will fill the air as liquid chocolate oozes onto the table.

When I see you, it means warmth. When I see you, it means comfort. When I see you, it means happiness.

You initiated my favorite hobby of creating exquisite delicacies. For that gift, I could never repay you except to keep loving you.

Oh, Crisp and Chewy Chocolate Chip Cookies...



Asher Lipman

"Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing."

-Ben Franklin

At the age of seven, I knew I was going to be a spy. It was a good plan, well thought out and perfectly conceived. I had the gear (a vial of invisible ink and a pair of cool glasses), the spy name (the Smasher), and a kick-butt attitude to match.

At the age of eleven, everything changed. At that point, I learned that I was destined to be a thief. I practiced my sneaking skills, kept a careful watch for security cameras, and started devising my next groundbreaking heist.

Then I discovered writing, and realized that I could be both, or neither, or anything in between.

So this is my story, born of a high schooler with too many words and too much time. Sixteen years old, old enough to drive but still young enough to appreciate it. I enjoy beating my dad at tennis, eating ice cream sundaes, and doing things to prove they can be done. Ever since I can remember I've loved the perfect echoing *ringing* sensation of a sentence done right.

I hope you feel the same.

Enjoy,

Asher Lipman



Breaking Bread

It was funny in a way, that these men should break bread together. After all the battles they had fought, all the wars they had waged and all the knives they had wielded, it just seemed sort of anticlimactic. This was a meeting of Titans, of thunder and lightning and honor, where the very heavens should open up to reveal delicacies and delights beyond imagining.

But they were old, and the sun was shining, so bread would do.

As the timer dinged, and the crust began to settle, James Renard reached over to open the oven door. Long ago this might have revealed a baked Alaska, or a seared filet mignon, or something wholly his own to be unveiled before the eyes of millions. But those times had long since passed, and now he reached in to pull out a few slices of fresh bread. And yet, where once he had performed on a stage the size of the globe, his hands trembled

now where they had not before. Not because he was old, mind you. Despite his years his strength was undiminished, and his hair had settled into the distinguished salt and pepper of old men who know they are young. And yet...

James Renard's hands shook, and he glanced nervously at his guest to see if he had noticed.

If he had, Brandon Albatross was either too kind or too guarded to say so. His hands moved in steady, familiar motions, cutting mozzarella and slicing tomatoes into thick, even slices. Once he had done this before the eyes of entire continents, flourishing his blade in front of presidents, movie stars, celebrities of every type and breed. But that was long ago, and now he practiced his craft in an old cabin in the woods. He glanced up, and saw that same look of nostalgia flash in his foe's eyes. But then it was gone, and their eyes turned back to the work at hand, to the cutting and the cleaning and the art.

They brought their dishes to the table, piling simple delicacy on top of simple masterpiece. They took their places, one opposite the other, and sat down carefully, as if watching the other for any sudden moves. And once these concerns would have been warranted. Surges of anger, attacks of fury, or, even worse, calm composure paired with poisoned chalices were all once commonplace. But those times had gone, as all times must, and the men took their seats without incident. Smiling at the novelty of this, James raised his glass to toast. "It's been a while, Brandon."

Brandon's lips quirked in wry amusement and he raised his glass to match. "Aye, that it has." They sat back in their chairs and drank deeply, the air heavy with the weight of simple truths spoken by old men. They tore their bread into small pieces, scooping up delicate morsels and silently noting the hundreds of flavors other men would miss. Ah, they each thought. So that's how he does it.

"I used to hate you, you know," said James after the time for silence had passed. It wasn't a declaration or a dare but simply a statement, as one might remark on the weather or the loss of a wedding ring.

"I know," replied Brandon. "And I hated you. Do you have any idea how many times I tried to kill you?" His shoulders relaxed slightly, as if he had been bearing a great weight all along and was only now beginning to breathe again.

"Not as many as I must have." They smiled then, remembering old sabotages, and ate the food that the other had made.

"Do you remember why?" Brandon asked. "Maybe it's the old age, but for the life of me I can't seem to recall."

"Oh money, I think. Or was it fame? Jealousy for sure." And once these things had been so important. They had waged war for views, for ratings, for the simple satisfaction of proving, of *knowing* that they were the best. Their dishes had grown more and more complex as their methods of attack had grown more and more vicious. The world had been their battleground, and whole countries had been reduced to spectators in the face of their competition. At that time, the possibility of them being on the same continent would have been impossible, much less in the same room.

And then it happened.

They never could figure out exactly when it started. It was a slow awakening, as are all things when the sun is shining and the heart grows older. They had burned and they had hated and they had whittled away at each other until they saw not bitter opposites or sworn enemies, but equals. True equals. They had woken up one morning to find themselves trapped in a world of frozen meals and take out, and it had broken their hearts. They had looked at themselves, the last true masters of their craft, and realized they couldn't fight the man in the mirror any longer.

Then again, perhaps the truth is much simpler, as some truths are. Perhaps the old, being wiser than the young, are simply less passionate. Perhaps they are softer, their hearts less inclined towards violent rivalries and more given to calm lunches and afternoon talks.

But something in those eyes makes me think I had it right the first time. It was a spark, a glimmer, something dancing with manic glee at each calm affirmation. These were not the hearts of men who cared too little, but too much.

At some point over the course of the afternoon, the men paused, not so much by conscious decision but rather by instinct. They reflected, remembering those old fires and bitter hatreds. They remembered the betrayals and the losses and the victories and they thought that possibly, just possibly, this was all a trick, one last ploy to win it all.

They looked into the other's eyes and saw their own thoughts mirrored there. They nodded, and none needed to speak to make his thoughts known. Yes, yes we did. We hated and we betrayed and we cooked and we fought and we burned, oh how we burned, and I thank you for that, truly. But that was then and this is now, and the sun is shining and the nights are long, so let us be friends.

On an old porch in a cabin in the woods, two friends broke bread together.

And it was breathtaking.

Where's the Magic?

I always thought that Scottish accents must be fake. Not in any way I could prove, of course, it wasn't a conspiracy or anything. I just didn't think it was possible to have an entire nation filled with Sean Connery soundalikes. It astounded me, as if at any moment one might walk into the local market and find Dr. No buying milk.

That, I suppose, was the first lesson I learned that summer. Not that plane rides take forever or that European air smells different or the wonders of the European drinking age, but that tucked away in the north of Britain, there is a nation entirely populated by James Bond clones.

But it is the second lesson that inspired this story. And for that reason, I suppose I should begin not on the plane or at the airport or even at the hotel, but at the Rosehip Pub tucked away somewhere along the dimly lit streets of Edinburgh.

Now, the UK isn't like the rest of Europe. You don't pick up a menu and expect to find any exotic delicacies or anything. I mean, it's the UK, you're lucky if you find something that isn't boiled or fried: a bit like the US, really. So as I scanned the menu with a nervous eye, I couldn't help but notice the hidden gem lurking in that little pub—Haggis!

Ah haggis, how can I describe such a dish? Well, haggis is a bit like the color yellow I suppose, or rainy mornings or cold soup: you either love it or you hate it. The national dish of Scotland for as long as there's been one, it's made from the discarded organs of a sheep (lungs, hearts, the like) mixed with seasoning and grains, and boiled inside the sheep's stomach for some three hours, like a great big meat-lover's porridge.

That's another thing about haggis, it's best to not ask too many questions.

I remarked on its presence, and my family responded with polite interest and the slow babble of conversation, but something was wrong. Somewhere inside me I felt this great... stirring, something gathering deep within my gut. It spoke of legends, of all those who struck a deal somewhere along the moor and were never heard from again. It spoke of half-remembered tales, of those who bled for a flag or hunted for a city, of those who

saw things too terrible and too wondrous to name, of those who felt a calling and donned the word adventurer. All these stories were being summoned, called and rallied and measured one by one.

And they demanded haggis.

I scanned the menu and settled on my choice, the haggis topped Rosehip burger. My family looked at me in surprise, but only my father held my gaze. Something in his eyes mirrored my own, and in that moment I like to think he understood—not completely or totally or even vaguely, but enough. He nodded, and I breathed a little easier.

When our food finally came, I was reduced to sheer worship, a disciple at the foot of his temple. It was a monster. I could try describing it in terms of shape or size or color, but that's really the only word that even comes close to describing the dish that sat in front of me. It was a burger, true, but only so far as Everest is a small hill. Piled high with onions and lettuce and pure awe-inspiring meatiness, I gasped in anticipation of the awesome task awaiting me.

I took a bite, haggis and all, and felt...nothing. For the life of me I couldn't recall that sense of daring adventure. I mean sure, there was a something extra to that burger. A bit of oakiness, perhaps. A sense of oats and earth and just a hint of spice. But this was haggis, the meal of lore. A dish of farmers and warriors and blacksmiths, of a time when the map ended where the sun met the water and dragons roamed in unclaimed lands. Sure, I wasn't expecting a heavenly chorus or a burst of dragon fire or anything half so dramatic, but surely there should have been something.

Shouldn't there have?

Maybe you can't taste it on the first bite, I reassured myself. Maybe if I take another taste, I'll find it.

I lifted the burger once more to my lips, and took a bigger bite this time. No more taste tests, this was a full on chomp. Haggis spewed everywhere and the entire assembly nearly collapsed from the weight of my disappointment. *Nothing! Where the hell is it?* My mom quirked her eyebrow, but shook her head after a moment and turned back to my father and his lecture on Scottish whiskey.

I think it was three or so bites later that the thought first occurred to me. I brushed it off at first, ignoring it because it couldn't possibly be the case, it just couldn't. I'll find it on the next bite, I told myself. Or the next. But it wasn't until that last taste, when the juices ran like blood down my face and the last morsel of elusive haggis had disappeared that I began to understand, giving words to that unspeakable and unshakeable realization.

Maybe, I shuddered, maybe there isn't anything special. No mystery ingredient or storybook history or blood-drenched past but simply a collection of sheep-bits turned into a burger topping. Like repurposing an old tinker's workshop to make Nike shoes, history made commercial.

"How's the burger?" my father asked, perhaps noticing that his comparison of malt vs grain scotch had not enraptured the whole table. I smiled then, and it was a new smile, an unfamiliar one

Now in all my years as a storyteller, in all my years of putting pen to paper and thoughts to words, I've yet to come up with any story half as good as that of a smile. Within a smile there lie a thousand little tales, a thousand small victories and a thousand tiny tragedies. A smile holds loss and joy and valor and pain and all those little lies we tell ourselves at night to keep us sane.

In short, a smile is a secret, and here's what this one had to say.

It spoke of nostalgia, of final goodbyes and the *clinks* of last toasts and those long, silent pauses at the end of a song. It spoke of forgotten dreams, of pots of gold and buried treasure all those dangers we once laughed at and now fear. It spoke of acceptance, and that terrified me.

And yet, I could feel a little twinkle dancing in the corner of my eye: a twinkle of glee, of mirth, of...hope. The hope that this final goodbye wouldn't be so final, that one toast would lead to another, and another, and another until the night remained forever young. That tomorrow we will run a little faster, reach a little further, laugh a little harder, and there we will find a pot of gold and the knowledge that it was all worth it. The smile stretched at my face, pulling unfamiliar muscles and raising a riot of emotion. I raised my glass to my lips as I considered the question.

"It's good, I suppose, but it could be better."

Somehow, it felt like a promise.

Grilled Cheese

I don't understand you. Then again, maybe that's not the point.

After all, even your bread is a testament to your divinity, promising sweeter treasures inside buttered crusts.

It's as if God Himself has positioned the heavens just to bathe you in light.

You glisten, glitter, glow: drawing every pair of eyes in the room towards me as I take that first bite.

You are experimentation personified. I've spent hundreds of hours discovering your many virtues, throwing in thousands of ingredients and waiting with baited breath to see what comes out. You are a crucible, into which individual parts disappear and all that emerges is one, beautiful whole.

But ultimately that's not the point. Because despite your fame, your fortune, your all-encompassing celebrity, you're an enigma. You have no definition, no end, no beginning, simply you. You wear cheese like a mask, but millions of possibilities hide behind that wicked smile. Chicken, pickles, mushrooms, even apples have entered your golden embrace and become something more...so much more.

And that is why I love you, grilled cheese. Not because of the way your glistening triangles just wait to be devoured, or how your patriotic squares wait to greet me, but because of your very essence.

Grilled cheese, you are a mystery, and for that I thank you.



Swati Madankumar

Swati (pronounce her last name. I dare you!) is a little more than the average teenage girl. She was born in Brooklyn seventeen years ago and currently resides on Long Island. Even though surviving high school mainly consisted of a balancing act, one thing that has remained pretty steady in her life is the axis around which it revolves: food. So, you could say that Swati becoming a Canon Future Author was somethin' like destiny.

Formerly placed into ESL in pre-K and nudged out of higher-level reading groups in grade school, Swati has now taken up a passion for expressing herself through public speaking, dancing, and writing. She is not yet certain about what her future holds but what she *does* know is that a future without writing is akin to dinner without dessert. And who doesn't have room for dessert?



Spices

1st Generation

Don't worry, even as you find yourself thrust into married life—estranged from the caress of your mother and the toothy grins of your best girlfriends—you will find us whether you like it or not. In the folds of the faded sari that you had to exchange your brown uniform for, between the plaits of your hair, suspended in the coconut oil you moisten your scalp with, and nestled in your molars, rudely interrupting the fleshy taste of the mango whose pit you sucked clean like a dry rack of lamb or the pale green rind of a watermelon. Hours after the silver plates and cups are washed and dried, our combined taste will linger and rudely interrupt your reading of those small Krishna comic books, the 8:00 news, or the romance serial that you claim to find horrifying but actually really enjoy.

We'll motivate you as your arms flex and veins pulse when you are leavening banana bread or spinning paper dosas like a DJ. We'll proudly watch as you wrap your grand silk sari around you, position a bindi on your forehead, and rattle your wrists to adjust your bangles to attend a fancy dinner for the police department and twine elbows with your deputy chief husband. You may think nothing of us and underestimate our influence—garnishing and sprinkling us in imbalanced proportions. But we know. We always know. Even when your mother reprimands you for incorrectly following her recipe, your friends begin rumors about you out of jealousy, and your husband leaves before breakfast and comes late past your supper, we are always there.

2nd Generation

When the kids are playing between the mangrove trees, the crickets chirp in the dark, and the mosquitoes land on the shiny tarmac of your skin, you absentmindedly scoop us up and run us through your fingers. We cherish adding some flavor to the monotony of this small village. We understand when you pack us up and shut our tin because money's tight and four kids are four too many mouths to feed. Basmati rice and rubbery vegetables, day in and day out. No rich, buttery ghee, sweet *ladoos*, or fried *pakoras*.

We sit and watch as you and another couple sit cross-legged on banana leaves in a stuccoed house with a wooden swing, discussing an arrangement between your youngest and a young doctor from the States. We feel as much pride as you, able to raise an older daughter who competes for the best of her class like Anne of Green Gables and eventually exchanges fragrant garlands and fastens a gold *thali* around a young boy's neck. You stand behind her in front of a mirror, fastening the folds of the snug fabric with safety pins—her back torso visible—and then smudging red or white turmeric powder on her hair part or as a dot on her forehead. You know she's the good one, and you tuck small pouches of us into her brown duffel as she departs to the States after applying for her visa. We keep her baby company—whirlpooling in sugarcane juice and studding her *kulfi*—as you agree to watch her. We despair, right along with you, the prospect of us never ever being tossed into a pan, pot, or griddle.

3rd Generation

But as predicted, she tries valiantly. We grudgingly comply with being purchased in small, zip-locked bags, thrown into a cart beneath the jet-black hair dye and Fair & Lovely cream instead of being bargained over with a street seller and earning our rightful respect. We tolerate being laden onto a spoon and steered toward a baby's grubby mouth who's too busy shaping little earthworms out of the dough, your daughter cajoling her, "If you really love me, you'll eat this." Anything to continue the tradition, we tell ourselves.

We appreciate the consideration of being in a chutney or sambar, but are disgruntled being hand-mixed with some starchy white rice or wheaty microwaved *chapatis*. We get packed into lunch tins, only to get stuffed into the cafeteria's garbage and given up for a friend's other half of PB&J or Lunchables. We shudder at her older one's feminist rhetoric, recited whenever asked to prepare dinner. Our aroma disperses and intermingles out of the split-level's chimney, earning the wrinkled noses of other neighbors in the suburbs. Your daughter persists, spending half a Saturday making that exotic, textured *biriyani*, paper *dosas*, or *idlis* that non-Indians and Indians alike crave, but her daughter will brazenly opt for turkey sandwiches and Kraft.

We can trace a genealogy of being depended on, to bravely being preserved, to being trashed outright. No longer do we clamor for attention like we used to, we instead rejoice when even one of us is pinched up and dusted onto a dish.

The After-school Snack That Never Was

I used to idolize the characters in the fiction books that I checked out from the local library and their scenic bus routes home to small porcelain plates waiting for them with moist, steaming chocolate chip cookies fresh out of the oven. It would be astutely placed beside a cup of cold milk and a Post-it with the smiley reassurance that Mom will return within an hour. But as one must know, what happens in fiction stays in fiction—it doesn't heave itself out of the pages and slip into reality. With two working parents, your best bet is a quick phone call to confirm that you weren't abducted, and before you manage to respond, an abrupt dial-tone as you realize they hung up as soon as you answered. Or nowadays, with the latest and greatest smartphone widgets, a text replying with "I can't talk now" or "Can I call you back?" The significance of this and the appreciation it warranted was lost on me, just as how to set the oven to "Bake" was.

In middle school, I would complain about my mom not sporting yoga pants, not coaching a travel soccer team, not having an after-school playdate scheduled for me with a different person every day of the week, the inconvenience of riding a yellow school bus that also happened to seat my fictional friends, and the normative plea I would make to a poor doubles partner or student in my SAT prep class for a ride home. It got to the point when my mom scheduled an appointment with my guidance counselor, worrying why her soon-to-be teen couldn't comprehend the sacrifice behind the taxes for the very school she attended, the insurance for her life, or the looming tuition to advance her education.

Rather than going home directly after school, it was arranged that I would get off at the stop sign outside the community center in my neighborhood and sip a Horizon chocolate milk while studying my vocab flash cards (yet more preferably playing Temple Run). I would envision PB&J sandwiches cut into triangles and without the crusts in place of the seasoned tilapia between challah bread my mom made for me early in the morning. Not fully realizing her love, I would forget to appreciate the Thanksgiving party in my first grade class when my mom painstakingly brought in a tray of the glistening, syrupy, sticky spheres of goodness called *gulab jamun*, the sacks of candy my mom would buy in bulk from the nearest wholesale retailer for every Halloween, and the hearty spread my mom would prepare for real Thanksgiving. My fourteenth birthday party had a "breakfast-for-

lunch", complete with a menu and my mom filling "orders" for golden pancakes, waffles, and crêpes.

Last summer, while idly propping my feet up in her office after my nearby internship, I leapt up when my mom turned the key and announced she was done seeing her patients. We traversed the LED-lit hallway, my mom bending down to a stroller to coo to her patient's baby whom she had pointed out in a grainy sonogram not a year earlier, and also proudly verifying to her technicians that I indeed was her daughter when they called out, "Bye Dr. Madankumar! Oh my god, is that your daughter? You're twins!"

Soon, after reclining my passenger seat as far back as it could go in traffic for forty-five minutes and woefully pleading to my mom to cut her grand round of Bluetooth conversations with her sisters short so I could tune in to Ryan Seacrest, we arrived home. I crumpled onto the sofa, the cushions exhaling with me and my legs fatigued like putty after sitting down at a lab bench for a few hours.

Dazed and confused, I opened my eyes to the sounds of closet doors shutting and light switches turning off. I then struggled to lift my head like a tortoise poking its head out of its shell and groaned, "Seriously, what are you doing, Amma?"

Clad in sweats and Nikes, she grabbed her car keys off the rack and informed me, "I'm going to work out, stop by Costco, and finalize the guest list and invitations for the recital. Don't worry, I'll return in time to make dinner for you and video-record the steps you learn in dance class."

This time, I sat fully upright, awed. "How do you have this much energy for everything?"

She smirked and replied, "Now you see what I do every day."

From Gerber's formula to Tang to venti caramel iced latté, my mom has always been that dependable packet of Splenda. After repeatedly being probed as to what I would like for dinner, I can't help but ask her why she cares more about my wellbeing than I do, and for the address of where I can get this much maternal compassion. It's amazing how one who subsisted on the same white rice and mushy vegetables day after day in south India—meat of any kind being a luxury—can have the capacity for such selflessness and empathy. So, I resolved to unzip myself out of my brattiness, realize what was right in front of me, and overlook not having a couple Chips Ahoy awaiting me after school.

Ode to Cereal

Crunchy like popcorn, sweet like honey All that I crave is you in my tummy

You hog the whole bowl I'm horrified of sloshing you onto the flo' Yellow, brown, tan, and white Your taste keeps me awake at night

I still get ravenous within an hour
But eating something else makes me sour
I don't enjoy betraying you with Cocoa Puffs, Lucky Charms, or Kellogg
Though I refuse to eat you when you're a sog

Don't you ever run out on me I wake up at five to eat you, don't you see? Raisins, almonds, berries, and chocolate try to wreck you But don't worry, baby. Mama will protect you

Corn, rice flour, sugar, and caramel color God please don't call my mother No newspaper, no homework, no book, no TV It's really only you and me

You make me so cheeri-o Oh how I adore my cereal



Heather McGee

I have been an English teacher at Jericho High School for almost ten years. My students are my most favorite aspect of the job—they make me laugh, and sometimes cry, and teach me something about myself each year.

If I didn't love my job so much, I would have quit years ago to stay home with my family. I am married to the most handsome man in the world, Steven, and together we have three beautiful children. William, Noah, and Juliet are the heart of my world.

Those who know me call me an old lady because I love to knit, drink tea, and most importantly, stay at home reading books. I loved this workshop because it gave me the time and space to nurture my own writing and share pieces of myself.





Banana Sandwiches

Banana and toast. Not two of the most exhilarating ingredients, but my mom could make magic with them.

Two slices of bread—the white kind, before the era of whole wheat and whole grain—toasted until they were golden brown without too much crunch. Smears of warm butter—soft because we always had "counter butter," butter left out so it was ready at a moment's notice. Thinly sliced banana—layered just so. Together they could accomplish anything.

My mom made banana sandwiches all times of day and for all kinds of reasons. She would bring you a banana sandwich in bed when you were feeling too ill to leave the room. She would make two or three for you on a Saturday morning when you were enjoying the lazy start of a childhood day. She would greet you at the door with one after a long day of school. In our kitchen, the heart of our family, my mom showed her love for us through her cooking. While she gave us so many delicious meals, my favorite was always the humble, unassuming banana sandwich.

And yet, as much as they were a staple of my childhood, banana sandwiches faded from my day to day life as time passed: when I went to college, I lacked a toaster; when I began to teach, I lacked time; when I began my married life, I lacked a husband willing to tolerate "counter butter." And so they became something removed, part of a different time.

The day my father died, we all returned to that childhood kitchen. Sudden, unexpected, shocking—I never anticipated his death.

Only hours before, in the darkness of the five a.m. hour, the phone rang. And I remember the words that took my father from me, so unreal, so intangible, so crippling. My mind was unable to process or accept it, and yet on a primal level I was already internalizing it, struggling to breathe through my gasping sobs. In the midst of that agonizing fog, I searched for a beacon—my parents' home. When I arrived, I sat on the lawn, incapable of entering the house, of entering a world that no longer held him. I remained there until my brother gathered me up and took me inside—we would face this new world holding on to one another.

So much of that day is blurred and hazy; it slips and slides out of my grasp. But there are moments that slow and still, that become signifiers of my grief. Touching his worn wallet, my mom's hands holding his wedding ring, the sunshine gathering softly around us. Our kitchen stood witness to the noise and silence of our grief.

The day wore on, and we had to concern ourselves with the realities of life: phone calls, arrangements, food. But I turned pale at the thought of any food, nothing offered comfort, everything delivered certainty—and, somehow, betrayal. My family began to worry about my lack of eating, fixating on it as the one thing in the world they could solve. They couldn't save my father, but they could care for me. In the midst of all the discussion and coercion, my brother slipped quietly away and busied himself at the counter. He brought to the table what he knew in his heart I needed, what would give me comfort and sustenance. He brought to me a lifeline—a banana sandwich.

Grief is a strange companion. It is an intangible ache and a physical sickening. It is soft in a moment of distant music notes and furious in a found photograph. It is an undercurrent in daily small unshared moments and a drowning in missed milestones. It becomes a shadow, a presence, a void.

It would be untrue to say that there aren't moments when that old familiar grief rises up and chokes me. I experience that panic again and that crushing ache for someone forever out of my reach. In those seconds, minutes, hours, it can be hard to find meaning in life's heartaches, it can be hard to find something to hold onto. And yet, you slowly find your way back to breathing, back to living, back to eating banana sandwiches.



Nancy Rasmussen

"The moment you doubt whether you can fly, you cease forever to be able to do it."

-F.M. Barrie

Ever since she was a little girl, she always knew she wanted to be a teacher. Helping and inspiring others to reach their greatest potential was something that always intrigued her. Nancy always had a passion for the English language. Her childhood was spent reading books and making her family sit on the living room couch, while she stood in front of them and read *Peter Pan*. But somehow this didn't make her realize that teaching English was what she wanted to do for the rest of her life—until this year. She explored the English Language and everything it has to offer and fell in love.

Nancy is a very organized person, so it is no surprise that she loves writing. She sees writing as a form of art in which you get to spill your thoughts onto a piece of paper and somehow organize them until they start to make sense to her. Writing is her love, her stress-reliever, and her therapy, and she is forever grateful for it. Writing has taught her that it is okay to make mistakes, but the moment you doubt yourself is when you will never accomplish anything.



Savor the Memories

I knew from the second they walked in that something was not right. Their forced smiles, their troubled eyes. I looked up at the clock in the stone-cold cafeteria. 3:30? Shouldn't they be at work? They never pick me up from after school this early.

"Nancy, your parents are here," said one of the women who watched over us.

I slowly stood up from my warm seat, but suddenly my body felt cold. Leaving my warm chocolate chip cookies on the chilled table, I sauntered toward them. I didn't want them to think that I knew something was wrong—and quite frankly—I didn't want to admit to

myself that something was wrong. So, I stuck a smile on my face, and happily skipped to the car. I collapsed into the dark gray seat in the back, and as soon as I was settled in, my mom gently turned her body towards me—her eyes bloodshot red. "Nancy, Poppy isn't with us anymore," she said as she tried to hold back her tears.

I sat there in silence.

A lump quickly formed in my throat.

One single tear slowly dripped from my eye.

This morning's memories raced through my mind like a film strip.

However, all I could manage to get out was, "Oh."

I hated crying in front of people, even my own family. I wanted to pretend that I was okay. I wanted to pretend that his passing didn't affect me. I wanted to pretend that this was just a terrifying nightmare.

We pulled up to my grandparents' peach colored house, and I followed my parents inside like a lost soul with little hope. Everyone was there. My poor grandma standing lifeless in the kitchen, my uncle paralyzed on the stool below the rack of various spices, and my brother—eyes fixed onto the floor—like the angel of death staring at its next victim.

I tried to hold myself together. I really tried. But...I just couldn't. This morning played in my head over and over again.

"Never forget me Nancy."

"Never forget me Nancy."

"Never forget me Nancy."

It's almost like he knew that those were the final words he would ever say to me.

My eyes filled up, and all of a sudden a stream of never-ending tears ran down my face. I ran towards my mom, and suddenly all the memories flooded in.

Eating to my heart's desire in "Grandma's 24-hour Diner." The warm, soft pastries melting in my mouth, as we watched Disney Channel together. The never-ending yellow clouds of eggs on top of warm, buttery bread entering my mouth, while laughing and talking about the adventures that lay ahead.

The warm, fluffy pancakes with the mountain of creamy butter on top he brought home for me whenever I had a fever.

The savory, salty chips and popcorn he and I devoured while watching 101 Dalmatians on that stormy Friday night when I begged my parents to let me stay longer.

The salty, steaming, pink kielbasa on the counter at every holiday dinner to keep his Polish heritage alive.

Grandma's "special" iced tea poured into small Friendly's cups that somehow always magically appeared in the cabinets. Two cups always sat beside Poppy and me as we battled it out to see who would win Connect Four, keeping score on a piece of paper.

Now this paper is no longer with me, but with him forever. Beneath the ground it will stay, where the items that sparked my memory were born. The memory of him and the foods we shared will stay in my heart, and his final three words "Never Forget Me" will reside with me forever.



Love Never Perishes

"True love never dies," people say.

When two people exchange their eternal circles of love,

the bond they form lasts forever. I never truly believed in this—until I witnessed it for myself.

It's the year 2017.

The local fifties-themed diner is packed with all kinds.

Two young girls are glued to the corner booth on their phones.

A family of four is seated at the center table, enjoying a nice dinner.

Everyone at the diner seems to be in company—except one person.

On a tall silver stool at the end of the bar,

an elderly man is sat dressed in a clean white shirt and a crisp leather jacket to match.

Heart pounding.

Hands sweating.

Constantly looking at the clock to his right,

then anxiously whipping his head towards the door on his left.

A glass of milk is set in front of him.

Two straws.

One for him.

One for her.

Cookies surround the milk jar in a circle.

From the bright red door at the front of the diner, a woman ambles in.

Dressed in a bright red skirt covered in white polka dots,

with a "World's Best Grandma" shirt on top.

She does not have the heels to match, but rather clunky black sneakers.

Her extra limp, used to help her walk, matches her shoes.

She goes to sit down on the stool next to the man.

They happily share the milk, and laugh at each other.

"Can't Help Falling in Love" slowly drifts

through the cool air of the diner.

The couple lock eyes, and smile—like they did for the first time

in that diner sixty years ago.

Ode to Dr. Pepper

Oh my beloved Dr. Pepper.

My love for you grows every day.

Just like my belly right before I weigh.

Your delightful, delicious taste makes my taste buds crazy.

Without you, life just wouldn't be tasty.

Oh my beloved Dr. Pepper.
Drinking your heavenly holy goodness with all my meals, you sure do sweep me off my heels.
Your eye-catching crimson exterior sure does make you superior.

Oh my beloved Dr. Pepper.

Drinking you in the hot sun sure made me dizzy, but it was quite worth that fizzy.

Whenever I am down, you are always around.

Dr. Pepper, I will love you forever.



Jerry Romano

Jerry Romano has been an English teacher for twenty-eight years. A third generation Italian-American, he considers overcooked pasta a culinary disgrace.



Casatiello

My grandfather, Ciro Romano, immigrated to America from Torre del Greco, a little town outside of Naples, Italy in 1922, and he brought with him a tradition that continues to this day. It is a tradition that is closely tied to the celebration of Easter, and it is one that ties our far-flung family together. That tradition is making and eating casatiello. Casatiello is bread that is made with lard, salami, and bacon. (Never mind the health considerations; we eat it only once a year.)

Growing up, I heard the word pronounced as "casateel," and that is how I pronounced it. A few years ago, I decided to find out if anyone else made this wonderful bread for Easter. I Googled "casateel" and found nothing. I played with the spelling until, lo and behold, there it was—"casatiello." I learned that making casatiello for Easter is well known in the region around Naples, and I even found an article about it in *The New York Times*. At home and with family, it is still called "casateel" because that is how my grandfather pronounced it in his Neapolitan dialect, but when I talk about it with people outside of my family it is "casatiello"

My memories of making casatiello go as far back as I can remember. As a child, I watched my father cut the fragrant salami and the marbled bacon into bite-sized chunks. I watched my mother as she dusted the kitchen table with flour before rolling the dough into a rough square. I watched as she greased the surface of the dough with the lard then spread the salami and bacon evenly, and finally sprinkled black pepper liberally over everything. She folded the dough in half and then repeated the process. When two layers were completed, my mother formed the dough into a circle then placed it in a pan to rise before baking.

The smell of casatiello baking is warm and delicious. It is the smell of freshly baked bread and crispy fried bacon. It is the smell of Easter.

After I married, I started making the casatiello on my own, and when my children came along, they learned how to make it, too. Recently, my younger daughter and her boyfriend prepared casatiello for our Easter celebration. Standing there and watching them roll the dough, I realized that our family tradition will endure, and that one day a new generation of my family will make and eat our special Easter bread.



Dr. Daniel Salzman

Dr. Daniel Salzman is the Curriculum Associate of English Language Arts, K-12 for the Jericho School District. In addition to epicurean interests, he is a science fiction enthusiast, and has been exploring the impact of graphic novels on young readers. Bikram yoga, tennis, and skiing support a mindful balance as a lifelong learner.

Bread and Cheese

Natural food stores are commonplace in most cities across America. Organic and farm-to-table is in vogue. Billion-dollar supermarket chains are being bought by online retailers to deliver fresh bread and stinky cheese right to your door by your friendly neighborhood drone. In 1985, my mother owned and operated a "health food" store called *Provisions*. We sold dried fruit and nuts, coffee by the pound, unpasteurized imported cheeses, and fresh baked bread. For seven years, I grew up in the store stocking shelves, baking croissants and rye loaves, and tasting smelly cheese.

The appreciation for bread and cheese was nurtured through my father's appetite and grew as my own understanding for this dynamic duo was cultivated over time. Bread and cheese represent some of my core memories as a child. My parents would host monthly dinners and an array of cheeses was always a centerpiece at the tail end of each of these nights. The variety would contain different consistencies (soft, creamy, crumbly, and flaky) and intense flavors (smoky, earthy, and foul). My siblings and I were always encouraged to try them all and never shy away from the smelliest sample; extra points granted if you ate the rind.

As I traveled as a young man, bread and cheese were always in my backpack. Not only was it easy to carry, but it provided the sustenance necessary to keep moving. A baguette is actually designed for the modern traveler; adaptable and utilitarian, with more than enough energy built in. The addition of a small block of cheese with any loaf of bread can be the difference between one more mile of walking, one more museum or church tour, or a simple excuse to sit down right where you are and watch the people go by.

The procurement of favorite cheeses can be calculated (like my father's visits to Fairway anytime we crossed 125th St.) or random serendipity. Regardless of how cheese is found, I can't deny the power it holds over my stomach. So much so, that the hunger has been passed down to my children. My daughter will taste any kind of cheese, and some of her favorites are similar to foot stink. This culinary bond will certainly lead to many future meals together, but what is also guaranteed are the memories that link our familial generations like the layers of ash in our favorite goat cheese.

My father never had the opportunity to eat bread and cheese with my children. I remember a dinner at my mother's house years after my father passed away that still included some of the original couples from the monthly dinner group. My daughter was only three years old, but was an open-minded epicure, and so the personal cheese plates highlighting three different cheeses evoked an edible painter's pallet. At the center of the table, two bread baskets held slices of a French baguette and a roughly cut olive loaf. Each plate contained a goat cheese, a creamy cow's milk cheese, and a harder cow's milk that would become one of her all-time favorites. My daughter didn't understand why the wedges of cheese were so small, as if we were being deprived of normal portions. The guests were stunned at how she sat so quiet, content with each taste stronger and more pronounced than the next.

In 2014, an animated children's movie entitled *The Boxtrolls* portrayed a social elite called "White Hats" that celebrated cheese tasting as the zenith of culinary experiences. The villain in the movie was dangerous, grotesque, and ruthless, but all he really wanted was a yummy seat at the cheese table. Aside from the trolls living side-by-side humans in this story, the inherent desire for cheese is very real and relatable. Recently, a video was posted by CNN's Great Big Story (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOq6FEu12bs) series showcasing a man in Zasavica, Serbia who makes cheese from donkey milk. Due to the rarity and difficulty of this cheese process, a pound of this cheese sells for \$500 and claims to be delicious, with nutty and earthy tones.

The smell of baked bread brings me immediate peace. Most of my memories of the *Provisions* bakery return to the seedless rye. A fresh rye is crusty on the outside and spongy soft on the inside. This was the constant at our home, after school, on the weekends. Usually toasted when paired with cheese, the seedless rye was traditional, nourishing my family and offering a link between our culture and our means. For my parents, it was sacrilege to eat sliced bread from a factory loaded with preservatives even if the fresh loaf would only last a day or two before going stale. As kids, we were trained to seek out flavor and experience food as a human connection. These connections are reinforced by my children's meandering through our local farmer's market as their own memories are linked through smell, taste, and smile.

Bread and Cheese

Simple extravagance beyond wonder and craft
Rosemary baked in, with a creamy truffle goat
Crusty shell hiding pillows of doughy flesh
An aftertaste of pungent earth, hay, or spice
Bakers and Mongers set up shops or stalls
Morning fresh juxtaposed with months of aging
Intoxicating mix of rye, semolina, sourdough or seed and
Funky, toe-jammy, "Are you sure that's edible?" rotten runniness
Basic construction for mid-day picnic
Bourgeois cheese carts for post-dessert epicures
Staples traversing social boundaries



Casey Snyder

Casey Snyder is an eighth grade English teacher at Jericho Middle School. She has two children, ages five and seven. She is passionate about her family, her subject matter, teaching young people, reading, exploring activities that take her out of her comfort zone, and... sushi!



Ode to Hawaii Salmon

Oh, Hawaii salmon
Your presence beckons me
How I wait in intense anticipation
For that special occasion
When we will be united once again.

Your flavor knows no limits!
Your beauty—flawless.
You are prepared with the deepest care
And I will never, even lay my lips on you,
my love
Without taking in your immense perfection.

You are rolled around sliced kani salad A party of colors, orange, pink, green, yellow Sweet mango peeks out from your perfect shell Come content your craving!

You dazzle placed atop a thinly sliced cucumber Looking regal amongst the other sushi appetizers Who can only look upon you with sheer envy For your flawless state

And who could blame them?
For you are the sushi queen
Dressed with a dollop of red tobiko
Added for that perfect touch

You are a visual delight
Looking all fancy
with your unique design,
Of undulating waves of spicy mayo
And resting in your special brown sauce

Before our coupling I share your sheer splendor With my company And quietly, graciously thank the talented sushi chefs Who understand just how special you are

I position the chopsticks
Your chariot to my mouth
And gently grasp you,
careful not to drop you, or let a valuable morsel
Dare drop from your carriage

I allow you to lather yourself in brown sauce Ooooh, that mysterious brown sauce Slightly sweet yet never sugary It is the ideal husband for you

The tiny bowl of soy sauce
Eagerly awaits your arrival
As you take a dip
Just a slight splash
For just the right amount of saltiness
To complement your already perfect state

There is an explosion of flavor
As I take a bite
You melt like butter in my mouth
The mango dances sweetly
As it combines with your fresh taste
Lingering around slices of kani salad

A little slice of heaven When we come together Sheer magnificence



Suzanne Valenza

This collaboration with Canon Solutions America helped revive my writing life, and for that I am truly grateful. I so enjoyed working with such a wonderful group of students and teachers who came together to share themselves through their writing. I have been an English teacher and educational consultant for over thirty years. I love what I do every day, and when my students demonstrate excitement for learning and self-expression, I am fulfilled and fortified. Thanks, 2017 Jericho Canon Participants, for doing just that.





Quest for Quenelle

After I read MFK Fisher's *The Gastronomical Me*, I hungered to visit Dijon where she spent formative years learning about French food and coming into herself as a woman. I wanted to make a pilgrimage of sorts—visit the town, find the street on which she lived, take my photo in front of her apartment. She was my kind of woman—ahead of her time, clear thinker, wonderful writer, and a visionary. After all, she invented the food memoir. Then I saw an Anthony Bourdain episode about the great chefs who hail from Lyon. I wanted to eat in their restaurants and visit the Paul Bocuse Institute. So I did my research, added a jaunt through the Loire Valley, and booked a trip to France with my sister.

We visited specific restaurants just to have their specialty dishes that I had read about—Lyonnaise salad and paté stuffed pastry in Daniel et Denise, macarons at In Cuisine, Sancerre wine, mustard from the Maille flagship store in Dijon. We spent Easter Sunday in a medieval mountain village at their annual festival where for a nominal fee, we each bought a glass and then walked among stone structures, sometimes underground, to taste sixteen different vintners' wines.

But it was the pike quenelle that caused me to take notice. As I sipped my initial glass of wine in the Café Comptoir Abel in Lyon, a wave of confidence overcame me. I had what

others thought a rather far out, nutty idea to make a culinary trip to France all because of a female writer. But I did it. The quenelle on my plate was luscious—golden yellow in color, perfectly shaped like a very oversized egg, soft and creamy in texture with a delicate buttery sauce. After my first taste, I realized that I made a dream my reality. I was so far from home and my routine suburban existence, seated in a lovely old wood-paneled bouchon enjoying a dish that I fantasized about experiencing in this particular place. And here I was. By the time we were served dessert, I wondered what else I could do.

The more experiences my sister and I had in France that spring, the more I felt like the Little Blue Engine repeating "I knew I could. I knew I could" while coasting down the mountain. And if I could, then what else? Teach a new course, start an alternative high school, learn to bake flourless chocolate cake, embroider a pillow, produce a documentary?

That question "What else could I do?" stayed with me for the rest of the trip. It opened me up and brought back to life something that lay dormant in me for many years. I had shut down in my second marriage. I sacrificed myself in order to make a pleasant home for my children and my stepchildren. I had convinced myself that it was a small price to pay for the sake of these kids who each had already suffered through one divorce. But the children weren't really children anymore, and we all knew that nothing was actually blending in this blended family.

It was clear when I returned home that things were different. The fault line had expanded, my marriage experienced a tectonic shift that broke us. We were divorced within two years of that trip. Now I live in New York City where I have access to more culinary delights than can be eaten in a lifetime. I travel with friends, and my sister, and my twenty-something-year-old children. We go to Europe, the western US, and up and down the East Coast. I've taken on new courses to teach, learned to embroider, found my voice again. I'm standing on more solid ground.

I know I'm not done shifting. Some days I feel a minor tremor, others a full on earthquake. Frightening at times, but significant. Those dormant parts of myself have resurfaced up through the displacement, and the rumbling has caused me to pay more attention which is exactly the advice MFK Fisher gave us. "We would all be better people if we paid attention to our appetites," she wrote. My quest for quenelle supports her truth. It took a culinary journey for me to begin my personal one, and what I know for sure now is that I am certain to keep paying attention.

An Early Experience with Writing

It was February in my second grade classroom. My teacher had us making Valentine's Day cards for our parents. I had lovingly decorated my pink construction paper with red hearts, and I distinctly recall doilies glued with the precision of my eight-year-old fingers. I was into it. This was going to be my best card yet. When I began composing my message for the inside of the card, I hit a snag. I wanted to express my love for *both* of my parents. But I didn't know how to spell the word that came to mind. I had heard the word often, but had never seen it in print. So the little Queens Italian girl who I was approached the teacher's desk and asked her, "How do you spell youse?" since I wanted to write "I love youse guys."

Now I loved my second grade teacher, too. I adored her in fact. She is the reason I am a teacher today. She tried to, but could not suppress a giggle. "Oh, Suzanne," she said smiling, "youse is not a word. Just use you—it works for one or more than one person."

I was slightly embarrassed, but not too much and that is why this experience remains with me. I remember smiling too. She made her correction light-hearted, and was endearing about it. She didn't try to shame me in any way. She simply made a matter-of-fact correction with kindness that she then turned into a mini grammar lesson for all the other working class kids in the room. We all said youse. Our parents all said youse. So many of the kids in that room nodded their heads with the understanding of this newfound knowledge, and erased and corrected their "I love youse guys" greetings.

No, I was not ashamed; a tribute to my teacher for how instead, she helped make me feel special. I had been given access that morning. I came to understand something crucial about being literate, correct, and educated. Perhaps even a bit more than my parents. I had gained some footing, some small sense of empowerment. And I liked it.



Marguerite Wang

In all that I've ever written, 99% (a generously rounded down number) of my characters suffer. It hadn't been decided to spite anyone. Everything just...happened. Volunteering at Nassau University Medical Center eases my guilt—no, I'm not that horrible of a person. Did I come off too strong? I probably did. Hi, my name is Marguerite. I'm sixteen years old and a senior in Jericho High School, New York. I volunteer because I enjoy helping people, not because I feel the need to repent. Other than telling stories and pursuing my passions, I run to feel healthy (and to eat more, making up for the calories I burn), lovingly mock my friends on a day-to-day basis, and diligently study for a stable and relatively sane job. If I'm not doing any of that, I'm probably sleeping or watching YouTube videos—just kidding, not really.

Taking a Bite of Life

It's the sort of memory one could never entirely call to mind: blurred faces, indistinguishable voices, muted background, blank pauses, and vivid moments of color and emotion. Pieces missing from the puzzle but complete enough with shaky lines drawn to connect everything together. A six-year-old—plump cheeks the same cherry red of her dress—stuttering in broken Chinese: me. I clutched fistfuls of colorful *renminbi*, or Chinese currency for those who don't know, to my chest.

Where I was, how I got there—I'm not sure. Considering what a challenge I had been as a child, I probably ran off at the slightest opening of freedom. My nose acted as my guide, and hunger pangs encouraged me to wander through food stalls. One in particular caught my eye: the rows upon of rows of adorable bunny cream puffs. The vendor made an impression through kindliness rather than a striking physical feature, which is how I identify people now. I held out my hands, trading bills for food. I remember the weight of two—not one—pastries placed in my palm. For a perfect three of cream puffs, the vendor said. I, evidently, was the third.

I didn't think much of it then, oblivious to the fact the vendor had given me one cream puff for free. My attention span was infamously short for everything but food. I opened my mouth wide and bit the bunny ears off the cream puff. Filling splattered everywhere. Experience dictates starting from the bottom, but as a six-year-old, I was more of an enthusiast instead of an expert when it came to eating dessert.

There, the memory fizzles out.

Following the timeline of encounters, I did not have another cream puff for many years. In the summer of 2015, I spotted a store in the Beijing Capital International Airport. At any other place, I might've missed it, but airports in China never cease to fascinate me with their sleek stores, glazed grounds, and wide windows. Heading towards the brightly-colored kiosk plastered with pictures of various pastries, I smiled and waved to catch the attention of the person behind the counter. I didn't verbalize much. I pressed my finger against a picture on the menu, nodding and shaking my head as answers to each question.

Unlike bold, unabashed six-year-old me, I hesitated to converse in Chinese to anyone but family. Chinese is a tonal language and requires precise nuances for pronunciation, but I had little finesse. The words would seem to rise smooth in my throat, but fall, whining and nasally, in stutters and stumbles. When I received the pastry, I finally spoke and thanked the woman. She seemed startled to hear my voice, and I unconsciously shrunk back, as if the cream puff would shield me.

Its smell was faint, delicious. Biting into the pastry as I searched for my family, I reveled in the crust's firm but flaky exterior. Something about the flecks of black falling onto the wrapper made the taste sweeter. I detected the taste of cocoa and chocolate, but the rich inside of vanilla dominated, coating my tongue. I found it hard to swallow the creamy filling. The last bite slid down my throat, and my stomach roiled.

The third time I ate a cream puff, Flushing bustled around me with its characteristic screeches of tires and honks of drivers piercing the air. While the cashier spoke in Chinese, I answered in English, gesturing to the honey-tinted pastries piled behind the rounded glass panel. I leafed through the bill but paused, distracted by a chef poking his head out of the rear door and beckoning to the cashier. Their conversation stretched out long enough for me to recount—once, twice, thrice, and even a fourth time. Returning to the counter, the cashier, still wrapping the cream puff, smiled apologetically. Her eyes crinkled, curving into a crescent moon-like shape. She bit her lip, hesitating before mentioning that the chef said I reminded him of a cream puff. The smile pinned onto my face automatically, and I thanked her, sitting at the table nearest to the door.

The words echoed in my mind. Nine years, and uncannily similar comments. It hadn't seemed particularly outlandish to hear as a child. But now?

I sunk my teeth into the dessert, chewing but barely tasting the flavor. Did some code exist between bakers where one would say, "Oh, that one looks like an éclair," and another would nod sagely and say, "Absolutely." Being compared to a cream puff wasn't an insult—probably. Still, cute came with my childhood, not with present-day me.

The sugary filling lingered and soured in the back of my throat. Looking for reasons left me in a darker mood than I wanted. Instead of taking another bite, I stared at the cream puff. It would've been perfectly whole, except for one bite. Filling oozed onto the napkin,

and I tamped down my grimace. I stood and cast a glance to the counter, ensuring nobody saw me toss the mostly-uneaten cream puff into the trash can.

My fourth—an unlucky number according to Chinese superstition—came from a shop in New York City. I smiled at the cashier, accepting the black box of pastries. Our exchange consisted entirely of English. It wasn't until I sat on the train that I took a cream puff. Reasoning that the filling appeared excessive, I split the pastry in half. It wobbled upside down, white chocolate mousse seeping into the napkin. I wrinkled my nose and averted my gaze to the pale golden underbelly contrasting with its green craquelin coating.

How did I resemble a cream puff? Why? Did the two who compared me to a cream puff see something I can't? What would that mean for me?

I stared, waiting for an epiphany of sorts. A few seconds passed. I reached out, took a bite, and then set the pastry back down on the napkin. Chewing, I stared some more. Still, no light bulb flashed.

Even now, as I write this memoir and compile my memories, the light bulb remains dim. The answer might not be there for me to find. Sure, at an occasion, I'll wonder about it, but I can't shuffle through the heads of those two people like an open deck of cards. I wonder if it's just me projecting myself onto the cream puff, seeing the dissonance between the filling and the crust as the inability to reconcile two parts of myself. Then again, I might be reading too deeply into it. I'd like to say that this is the ironic crux, looking for an answer even when one might not exist. I'd like to say that this is human endurance, trying to do what I can't for the chance that one day I'll be able to. It is, in some way. As amusing as it would be, cream puffs did not exactly lead me to this conclusion. However, it is one reminder—and a delicious one at that—of the many complexities of life.



Two Wrongs Don't Make a Right

Inhaling the unsavory mix of coffee and heat-and-serve food, Blake questioned his life choices. Usually the café galvanized him into finishing homework, particularly the single-spaced, double-digit-paged essays. Though, without a double espresso to metaphorically tape his eyes open, he heard the siren call of sleep.

"Blake."

He didn't flag down the barista calling his name right away. Instead, he stared at the screen of his laptop. Squiggly lines and "SOS" filled the last half of the page. Though his paper appeared non-salvageable, he trusted his ability to sham his way into earning

at least a low A or high B. College—the so-called best period of life—owed him a full refund with student loans and all, plus interest.

"Is there a Blake?"

The voice rang with odd familiarity. Memories shuffled into place like a clutter of snapshots—choruses over cheap candy, smiles over scuffed shoes. He pressed save and looked right.

"Sorry. Right here—Noire?" Further words eluded him, scattering into a game of hide-and-seek—childhood attested to the fact he had always been a terrible seeker. Heat radiated against his palm, though he couldn't remember taking the drink. Hazelnut filled the air.

She hadn't changed, eyes sharp and grin crooked.

"Blake!" This time, recognition softened her voice. "I would hug you, but I'm wearing the first attempt to make your drink."

He huffed out a laugh. "For you—exceptions can be made."

"You know how to make a girl feel special." She laughed and leaned over the counter, her arms resting around him for a second. "I can't believe you didn't keep in touch."

Settling back into his seat, he quirked an eyebrow. "It took you hours on end to reply—sometimes days."

"At least I replied." She pouted. Paired with her widened eyes, the expression reminded him of the time she roped him into making a thousand origami cranes with her.

"Your phone number changed," he pointed out. "Did you forget everyone's number?"

She shrugged, reaching up to smooth the strands falling from her ponytail. "I never remembered yours in the first place."

Though he scoffed, he couldn't help a smile. "It's a miracle you passed physics when you can't even remember seven numbers."

Twirling a strap of her apron, she matched his expression. "What happened to your knight in shining armor attitude?" She regarded him from underneath long lashes. "You certainly look the part now."

His fingers curled and uncurled around the cup, pressing against the cardboard holder. "Sorry?" He set the drink on the counter but picked it up a moment later. Coffee sloshed, bubbling through the lid's small opening in foamy liquid and wispy smoke.

In the background, the activity rose to a peak that meant rush hour. He stepped aside to let in a brood of freshmen and moved to stand near the counter. "We should meet up sometime," he said, "when you aren't busy."

"We should." She twisted around to pick up drinks from the growing line, lifting two and reading the names aloud. Setting them onto the counter, she grabbed another. Almost as an afterthought, she waved her free hand. "Bye, stranger."

"See you later." He shifted his belongings aside for two sleep-deprived students. After a second of contemplation, he stuffed his papers and laptop into his backpack and stood. The crowd at the counter wouldn't help his concentration, and at times like this, few people occupied the booths.

In his peripheral vision, blurred by his quick strides, he caught sight of one of the odd photographs the café owner enjoyed putting up. A sunflower blooming from an egg? The image stayed in his mind, even as he took out his laptop and notebook and debated whether he should drink the coffee in a swallow or savor it in sips. He chose neither, pushing the cup aside.

The chime of the door sounded one minute after another until it didn't, and the window's golden glint began fading to tinted oranges and pinks.

"Working hard?"

Jolting, he looked up from his laptop. "Your shift is over?"

Noire winked. "You could say that." Taking the seat across from him, she grinned. "Thought I might keep you from breaking the backspace button."

As she shifted around to find a comfortable position, he couldn't stop taking glances at her. Typing his last sentence, he asked, "How've you been? Your family?"

"All I can vouch for is that my parents' growth rate of gray hair decreased exponentially after I left. Yours?"

"Doing well enough." He rested his chin on his upturned palm, counting down with his other hand. "Mom's been traveling the world, sending postcards when she isn't saving lives. Dad—well, still doing what lawyers do. And the youngest of the bunch is finally a year from college."

"Ah, the Charleton family that works around the clock."

He shrugged and couldn't bring himself to say more. He didn't mention how the tick-tock of the clock seemed amplified, rhythmic cracks even amidst chattering neighbors and passersby. He didn't mention the divorce, marked by the rows of his mother's teeth like she forgot how to smile and the bones of his father's frame even though he consumed reports after documents after notes. He, most of all, didn't mention his brother, whom Blake Skyped every month or so, painted ashen with shadows hammered underneath his eyes, framed by artificial lights that crept from open doors into the dark hallway, and propped in a house—too quiet and too empty.

"Remember," he began, voice louder than intended. Noire's head jerked toward him, and he coughed. "Remember your obsession with kites?" He smiled at her scoff. "Kites got stuck in trees, on houses, off to who-knows-where. Even when your dad refused to buy anymore, you went on to buy one."

"That kite was like our child." He raised an eyebrow at that, and she kicked him under the table. "Don't give me that look. It sucked up all our allowance money."

"Sacrifices were made," he said, mock-solemn. Saving money caused them to give up their weekly habit of flipping a quarter into a nearby wishing well.

"Reminiscing makes me feel old." Laying her head on her arms, eyes creased, she still reflected the cheerful face in his memories. A certain Noire Vogel, six years old with a golden wreath of flowers, asking if he was lonely and if he wanted to fly kites with her.

Blake didn't respond, then, because he hadn't realized he was—hadn't recognized the hole in his heart until that strange little girl found her place in it. "But they were good times."

"They were."

When her gaze went to the sky, his followed. Black already swallowed the last wisps of sunlight, and the light of the moon and stars peered inside the café. "Would you jump?" A pause. She clarified. "If you were somewhere high, would you be tempted to jump?"

He hesitated, unable to understand the furrow to her brows. A serious question? A hypothetical? "No," he said. "Not really."

A sigh seemed to exhale from somewhere deep inside her. "I suppose not."

The air between them emptied. He toyed with his coffee, turning it in his hands. He blurted out, "How's school?" and winced.

"It's okay." Her shoulders lifted in a shrug. "Double-majoring in business and psych suits me." She paused before continuing in a rush, eyes bright and cheeks rosy. "You know, I never really wanted to be a surgeon. It's only—we always thought I was good at fixing what needed to be fixed."

"You were," he said and smiled, but the gesture fell short—hollow. A tremor drew his fingertips to the creases of his palm, nails digging into flesh. He meant it; he did.

She scrutinized him, eyes dark—murky like the water in a well. "You—" The cadence of her voice cracked like the crisp crunch of an egg before its yolk slid out. "What's that supposed to mean?" Each emphasis, gritted teeth cutting the syllables short—they hurt.

What he didn't ask: "Why?"

After all, he had always known Noire.

It didn't take much to summarize their childhood—during day, they flitted between doors thirty paces apart, and during night, they pressed their faces against the window screens until little red squares appeared. Their lives paralleled, forever side-by-side, until they turned away from each other. His fingers laced around the cup of coffee: now cold. He

could only remember the moments when time never seemed to run out. Instead, he asked, "How did you know that was what you wanted?"

"I didn't—still don't." Trailing off, she toyed her phone before setting it onto the table and stood. "I'm going to order something. You want?"

He declined.

The moment she sat across him again, she continued speaking. "You're right. I was good at fixing things. But that wasn't enough." She pursed her lips, as if unsure what words to say next.

"You always seemed so sure that you'd be a surgeon."

She laughed. "As children, don't we all believe our dreams will come true? But in the end, when our decisions are made, we don't view the world like we did years ago."

"But you've always looked at the truth—at everything," he gestured, limbs weighted, "like you wanted it to be beautiful."

"Everyone—everything—has beauty, but nothing's better for it." Her uneven smirk tugged a memory to the forefront of his mind.

The wind carried their well-earned kite into a mulberry tree. When they managed to tug it free, they saw the kite had been torn in nine places. Noire hadn't cried—didn't do anything—until she turned to him. She must've seen something in his face because she hurried both him and the kite into the house, rummaging through the cabinet until she found a box of Band-Aids. He could still hear her voice lilting like a lullaby, punctured by the rustle of fabric and peel of wrappers. He watched her cover each rip, but he realized, he had never caught sight of the kite again.

"Noire," he said, suddenly—disjointed, disconnected. "Has someone ever loved you, and you thought, someday, you could love them—even if it was a bad idea?"

She considered his words. "Yeah. You."

"I don't—"

"I know," she interrupted. "Rather, it's a certain idea of me, isn't it? But the ground under my feet—whatever stability it should've provided, I've lost. I keep moving, but I'm not willing to step onto a pedestal. It's the perfect place to fall—or hang."

When the underlying meaning registered, he could feel the ache in his chest as if someone placed a weight in it. The barista called her name, and she rose, sliding from the booth and walking to the counter. Getting the drink took a matter of seconds; however, he could tell something shifted between the two of them by the time she returned. The leather of the seat creaked and whined

She pushed a cup to him. "Here—tea. Your coffee's cold."

Steam from the tea filled his lungs, and the winter days with her returned. Once, during winter, he stopped and watched her run again, her black braid waving until the snowy bank swallowed her whole.

She hadn't looked back once.

In an effort to ground himself in the present, he shifted his gaze from her to the photograph hanging on the café's far right wall. A sunflower didn't bloom from the egg, he realized. The proportions didn't appear quite right. Unlike before, as well, he saw the jagged edges of the egg shells.

"Blake" Noire. She said his name a second time—softer.

Finally, he said, "I missed you."

For some reason, he couldn't help but smile when she shook her head. "Life isn't about chasing after the echoes of the past."

Air rushed a quarter way into his lungs, but it lasted him the years of silence between them. They huddled in opposite corners of the tiny booth, and he wondered if she too was remembering how they used to be best friends and asking why it stopped.

She leaned forward, head cocked. "I can hear your thoughts from over here."

They were only inches apart.

Things have changed. The words caught in his throat, so he didn't voice them. But he kept thinking them, over and over again—at the light of stars in her eyes, of the yellowed thousand origami cranes in his dusty attic, for the rusted coins in forgotten wells.

Things have changed, Noire.

She smiled, one corner lifting slower than the other. Now, somehow, he could no longer align the lopsided curve of her mouth to the one in his memories.



Alex Q. Xu

"Little by little, one travels far."
-Spanish/Mexican Proverb

Though Alex was born in New Haven, Connecticut, he spent much of his memorable childhood years in the mild Alpharetta suburbs, just north of Atlanta. Afterwards, he relocated to Shanghai, China and stayed there for five years before returning stateside, where he now lives on Long Island, New York. During these years, he has also traveled to countries including Singapore, Malaysia, and Australia. As a writer, Alex feels that his varied experiences have greatly contributed to his work.

Being interested in technology his entire life, Alex aspires to study engineering in college, although he also has an odd knack for history and philosophy. Outside of academics and writing, he's also a published landscape and outdoor photographer who can often be found hiking and traveling.

Peach Pie

Underneath that crispy shell, Lies a hidden citadel; Beneath its crust, that sacred seal, My fork digs in with great zeal.

As I chew through that golden treasure, The hearty peaches bring great pleasure. For it comes direct from the bakery; At the heart, it's rich and flavory;

But let's not forget its proper adornment; Adding whipped cream is just as important! Pure and frosty, it's just as sweet. This combination is hard to beat!





Future Authors Project

The Canon Solutions America Future Authors Project is a compelling example of the extraordinary impact that digital book printing technology is having on the industry. With intelligent digital presses, book printers and publishers can replace costly, time-consuming production techniques with a focused digital model that eliminates the issues of obsolete shelf inventory, costly overruns, or returns. It also allows book printers and publishers to expand market opportunity, reduce costs, and achieve a competitive edge.

Students

- Work on writing poems, essays, short stories, and story development while polishing writing and critical thinking skills.
- Work in peer editing groups with other students to share writing and reap the benefit of feedback from fellow writers.
- Have a professional headshot taken and printed with their biographies in the final published book.
- Participate in an official book release and signing in the fall where they will see their digitally published books for the first time.

Press Release

Canon Solutions America's Future Authors Project Releases Ninth Published Book

November 24, 2014

Hosts book signing event for young authors

MELVILLE, N.Y., November 24, 2014 – Canon Solutions America, Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of Canon U.S.A., Inc., today unveiled "From Rough Drafts to Masterpieces", the ninth published book written by student participants of the Future Authors Project, a program for budding young writers offered through a public-private partnership between Canon Solutions America and the School District of Palm Beach County, Florida.

About 50 middle and high school students from throughout Palm Beach County spent eight days this past summer in a writing workshop taught by licensed language arts teachers from the district: Nicole Adamo and Katrina Sapp Holder, who teach at Don Estridge Middle School in Boca Raton; and Cartheda Mann, who retired from Glades Community Central High School last year.

More than 450 students have benefited from this program since it began. It was created to help students learn about the processes of writing, editing, and digitally publishing books. The writing workshop was held at both Don Estridge Middle School in Boca Raton and Glades Central High School, where students participated via distant learning technology. Published authors who donated their time to share experiences and writing tips included Jennifer Tormo, managing editor of Gulfstream Media Group; Zelda Benjamin, who penned the "Love by Chocolate" series of books; Steve Alten, who has published nine novels, starting with "MEG: A Novel of Deep Terror"; and poet Dwight Stewart. The Lawrence Sanders Foundation provided a grant to underwrite the teachers' salaries.

"Public-private collaborations like this one help our students learn the skills they need to be successful," said Boca Raton Commissioner Scott Singer. "Thank you, Palm Beach County Schools and Canon Solutions America, for making this wonderful program possible."

School District of Palm Beach County Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Kathy Wetsell added, "There's no limit to what can be accomplished when we work together for the good of our children. Through the Future Authors program, students have an invaluable opportunity to expand their educational experience and pursue their passions for writing."

"With so much new technology, many publishers are looking for a variety of ways to bring their content to the public, and the printed book is still a very significant part of that mix," said Eric Hawkinson, director, Marketing, Production Print Solutions division of Canon Solutions America. "We're very proud to put our digital print expertise to work these past nine years to help young writers pursue their dreams of becoming published authors."

For more information about how to support Canon Solutions America's Future Authors Project, contact the Executive Director of the Education Foundation of Palm Beach County, Mary Kay Murray, at murraymk@palmbeach.k12.fl.us.

Press Release

Future Author's Program Commemorates Aspiring Writers with its Tenth Published Book

November 18, 2015

Tenth anniversary of the community enrichment program celebrates Palm Beach County student authors

Canon Solutions America's Future Authors Project Commemorates Aspiring Writers with its Tenth Published Book

MELVILLE, N.Y., November 18, 2015 – Canon Solutions America, Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of Canon U.S.A., Inc., today announced that it unveiled its tenth published book written by student participants of the Future Authors Project, a uniquely beneficial program for young aspiring writers offered through a public-private partnership between Canon Solutions America and the School District of Palm Beach County, Florida. Aptly titled "Words", the newest edition was unveiled during the tenth anniversary of the Future Authors Project and convened at the city of Boca Raton Spanish River Library. The celebratory event was highlighted by a book signing by the talented young authors.

This year's inspiring event brought together middle and high school students throughout Palm Beach County and even included select readings from some of the newly published authors. Esteemed members from the county and school district, including Boca Raton's Deputy Mayor Robert Weinroth, spoke as well with passion and admiration for a group of students so committed to their craft.

"This is the most inspiring time of the work year for me," said Eric Hawkinson, senior director, Marketing, Production Print Solutions, Canon Solutions America. "To be involved in this program with such great people who stay so dedicated to education, and to see these students push themselves and potentially begin their careers as touted authors, is really something special that Canon is privileged to be a part of."

Earlier in the year, over 50 students from Palm Beach County spent eight days in a writing workshop taught by licensed language arts teachers from the district: Nicole Adamo and

Katrina Sapp Holder, who teach at Don Estridge Middle School in Boca Raton; Cartheda Mann, who has taught language arts at Glades Central Community High School for 16 years; and Diana Fedderman, director of Secondary Education in Palm Beach County. Since the inception of the program, more than 500 students have become solidified published authors, with some going on to professional careers with publications like the Huffington Post and Cosmopolitan.

"Fostering an appreciation for writing and further developing the writing skills of our dynamic and talented students is something I am undoubtedly committed to along with our great team," said Fedderman. There is no limit to what these students can accomplish. I am pleased to work with a team that truly values the written word and its resounding impact."

Through the tireless efforts of educators like Fedderman, aspiring authors have benefited from the comprehensive workshop that each year includes presentations from noteworthy published authors who donate their time to share firsthand experiences and insightful writing tips. The 2015 edition of the program included poet Dwight Stewart, author of two thought-provoking books of poetry; Zelda Benjamin, a pediatric nurse and writer with a fervent passion for storytelling; Bob Forbes, author of three books of poetry for children, including "Beast Friends Forever!", Animal Lovers in Rhyme, published in 2013; Brian Bandell, novelist and award-winning business journalist for the South Florida Business Journal; and Ilana Jacqueline, author of the award-winning health blog, Let's Feel Better, and participant of the inaugural Young Authors workshop.

School District of Palm Beach County Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Karen Whetsell added, "Programs like this would not be possible without the students, their families, and a group of individuals who inherently understand that education, of any kind, is paramount to sustained success. These new authors furthermore prove that this country's young minds are fully aware of the impact their imaginations and words can have on society."

Ten years ago, the Future Authors Project began as a community outreach program by Canon Solutions America's predecessor, Océ North America. Designed to stimulate young minds and inspire middle and high school students to consider careers in writing and publishing, the program has grown exponentially over the last decade and continues to embody what an effective and goodwill public-private collaboration can be.

"Thanks to great partners and likeminded people interested in helping the students of today shape tomorrow, the Future Authors Project is poised to grow even further in the next ten years," added Hawkinson. "We are very much excited to see just how far this great program can go and to watch the young students continue their growth as published authors."

