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Introduction by David Hopen ('12), Editor-in-Chief

The perspective of the Modern-Orthodox high school student is unique and dynamic. Today, we balance Torah ideals with elite secular aspirations, religious growth with intellectual maturation. Our lives and thoughts are deep, profound and complex. And it is time for the world to listen.

Creative Writing is a gift. It lifts us out of the confines of our own life and allows our imagination to thrive. Writing is a means of interpreting the world, one meaningful word, effulgent adjective and metaphor at a time. It is a means of using our voices, shouting to the masses, whispering to the reader, expressing light and darkness, life and death, meaning and emptiness. Through writing, we study the heritage of our Judaism, the pages of literature, the stories of mythology, and the tenets of philosophy. We can free our minds, breathe life into empty pages, paint the world with words, engage our intellect and deepest emotions. When we write, we are heard.

Now, the literary culture in WYHS has been reborn. The student body has demonstrated poignant bravery, passion and depth in their willingness to share their writing and catalyze this reemergence. I must thank my Assistant Editors Jessica Hopen ('13), Darren Jacoby ('13) and Elyse Tripp ('14) for all of their hard work and contributions. Lastly, I particularly thank Mrs. Susan Patterson for her experienced guidance, support and ideas throughout the entire journey. Without them, such beauty would not be possible.

As a lover of the written word, it is my sincere honor and pleasure to reintroduce the WYHS Literary Journal. I only hope that this Journal leaves behind a lasting legacy of writers in WYHS.

It is time for a WYHS literary renaissance.

David Hopen
Grade 12

Regenesis

I stood naked and I was not ashamed.
I traveled to Eden
To bring her home.
I chased shadows that
Slithered with glinting teeth yet
Will bite at heels no more.
My apple is on the ground.

I wrestled the angel
The flame of the ever turning
Sword set fire to the trees
So that the darkness
Burned and the fruit
Laid untouched.
I cannot remember the men
Who have journeyed here before me,
Only she, the sound of her
Eyes closing and my heavens tearing
You gave her to be with me.
I am not the first man
But I will be the last
So I bury her in the grounds
East of Eden.

And those who eat of the Tree
Shall surely die forever
Lest I, too, must
Blink lidless eyes at eternity.
I fill flesh in its place and
Uproot His garden
I tasted knowledge and spat it out.
We were taken from the ground,
Together we will return to dust.
She gave me of the tree
So I ate.

Andrew Wald
Grade 12

My Journey to Becoming Who I Am Now

“15 minutes until take off. Make your way to the loading zone immediately.”

Based on Mark’s reaction, the announcement on the intercom system could have been fifteen minutes until the tsunami or until a herd of hungry lions attacks the base. Mark was scared-- scared as hell.

“Come on man, let’s go,” screamed Jeff, as he came running into the bathroom, where he knew his best friend would be. Mark took his head out of the toilet only enough to say, “I can’t. I can’t. I can’t,” with the third cry summoning a couple tears.

Jeff was doing all he could to help get Mark out of the bathroom and onto the plane. He knew that without this, there was no way Mark would ever become the Marine he had been dreaming about since childhood. This was their 7th month on the Semper Fi San Diego base, but it felt like their 70th. These two men--privates to be exact-- spent quite a few hours learning about each other: their families, friends, upbringings, and especially girlfriends. One late Sunday night, Jeff learned that Mark had grown up in a broken home. His father was out of the picture and his mother was working way too much to support her three kids. The cousins, uncles, teachers: no one was worth looking up to.

What kept Mark going as a teenager was his next-door neighbor. The man worked his heart out to provide for his family. The man always made sure his sons stayed off the streets and that his daughters didn’t turn into the girls on the corner. The man came home every Friday with flowers for his wife, whom everyone knew he loved more than anything else. The man had one leg and one arm. As Mark got older he would sometimes have conversations with him. Mark would stop over to watch the game, to join their barbeque, and after a while, just to shoot the breeze. He had wondered all his life how the man keeps everything in his life together while being disabled and living in a neighborhood full of distractions. Finally, Mark mustered up enough courage to ask his neighbor, who by now was Mark’s mentor, how his body had become this way. The man answered with four words, “I was a Marine.” After that, Mark knew what he had to do.

Jeff didn’t want to remind Mark about this; he thought it would put too much pressure on his fragile friend and send him into complete shock. Still, he knew it was necessary, so he didn’t hold back. “Mark, think about your future, who you want to be, who you’ve always wanted to be like-- be strong.”

Instantaneously Mark felt differently, like converts’ mindsets after they officially accept another religion. At that second, he knew he was going to leave the bathroom and get on that plane. Giving him a second to wipe away his tears and clear his throat, he asked, “Have you ever jumped out of plane before?” Mark didn’t even bother to listen to Jeff’s answer. His life had just changed forever. No more giving up. He was ready for this challenge.

Bracha Brauser
Grade 11

I Am Home

I am what I am
I am a melody of six million voices
Screaming for tomorrow
I am a dream of 2,000 years
Prayed for every day
I am the heart of a nation
Beating like one drum—united
I am the pain of yesterday
And the hopes of tomorrow
I am what I am

I am a safety zone
Trespassed every day
I am a crown
Shattered and broken
I am a promise
Please believe in me
I am a book
Each grain of dirt a lesson
I am what I am

I am the blending of colors
Green uniforms, black hats and bloodstained soil
I am a mirror of your heart
Find yourself in me
I am the fruit of your labor
The product of your love
I am the mosaic of a fragmented people
I am home

Darren Jacoby
Grade 11

Murphy's Law

So much expected, so much to do,
Unable to hear the sweet song of help around you.
Head forward, trucking strong, with a linebacker's vengeance,
Denying the wisp of avail, the weight feels tremendous.
Trapped in a vase, water pouring in,
Unable to grab an edge, water rising to your chin.
Shards of icy water, burning
Down your spine,
Blistering unmercifully, wearing out your shine.
A lagging moaning, from deep down within,
As the journey for inspiration, jades the innate sense
Of inner beauty required to hang in.
Until one day:
She sees--

She sees that the sky is only dark
So that the sun can shine tomorrow.
She knows that those who left,
Did not belong,
And that those who did not believe,
Were heretics of her great dedication,
To progress without shame,
All along cupping the great flame that desired
To burn without oppression
Free of their shackles,
With the right to dance the night away by the flames.
But alas, the day has not come
The sky remains dark, they have still left, the water's still bitter,
Solely, in order to spite her.

Elliot Danis
Grade 12

Play That Funky Music, White Boy

The piano seemed miles away as he rose from his seat and bade farewell to his parents. The crowd turned in unison to observe the timid 6th grader as he wiped the perspiration off his forehead and began the walk of a lifetime. Sam's heartbeat was dangerously irregular as he noticed the intimidating eyes of every parent and child peering into his soul and rummaging through his innermost fears. His outfit: a newly purchased blue polo that scratched the back of his neck and a pair of old, inherited khakis that dropped down past his sneakers -- reassuring him of the chance of falling every step of the way. His mission: to dazzle the crowd with his remarkable control of the piano and demonstrate incredible musical skills, all while his parents smiled ostentatiously in the back row. A mission only for elite 6th grade pianists. Every kid seems to remember his or her first piano recital, despite striving daily to erase the memory. As Sam took his first steps, he strained his vision and locked on to familiar faces in the crowd to help him relax. His grandparents were there, and of course, they were smiling radiantly at him with their thumbs up and cameras at the ready. They were the grandparents who smiled persistently at their grandchildren, no matter what kind of cacophonous noise was being conjured up from the piano bench. His buddies from school were also there, but only because they had to, as they themselves were sweating bullets in preparation for their own performances. Sam approached the piano cautiously; his teacher patted his back and whispered "go get 'em tiger," a phrase uttered to every individual who risks complete embarrassment as they place themselves in front of the piano. Motor system failing, palms trembling, Sam gawkily sat down at the bench. His blood seemed to be rushing from his head to his stomach as he forced a swallow down his throat and prepared for the impossible.

"La Bamba" was the first song he was planning on playing. The rhythm was upbeat and would garner some foot tapping and hand clapping from the audience. Well, at least that was the plan. Sam started by missing the first two chords, then skipping the next few. But by the time the chorus came around, the notes were flowing perfectly and the rhythm burst into motion. Air rushed rapidly back in to Sam's lungs as he began to listen to the music rather than concentrate vigorously on the music sheet before him, and Sam loved what he heard. The music relaxed his body and sent him to a haven of comfort and control, a place where musical chords become the servant, and the pianist the master. Everything was going well as Sam's fingers danced rapidly across the piano and his arms swayed frantically while the crowd shouted encouragement in the background. The dexterity of his hands was awe-inspiring, as the white and black keys seemed to be engulfed by his commanding coordination. Thoughts of Mozart and Beethoven scampered through his mind while he imagined himself on the stage of Carnegie Hall, impressing that crowd with the same adroitness and rhythm.

The song ended with a wonderful conclusion that brought the crowd to their feet. Applause filled the incommensurable room as a smile spread across Sam's astounded face, all the while his parents sat ostentatiously in the back row, just as planned. His

grandparents began to cry as they stumbled with the camera and only managed to take a few blurry pictures of the beautiful scene. His buddies from school were now sweating even more because they understood that the bar of expectation was now raised significantly higher. The piano teacher, filled with pride, thanked the heavens that the first student called up was able to put on such a show, therefore ensuring his pay for a little while longer. The spotlight however, was on Sam, who was eager to begin his next song. For he was just getting started.

Eram Zaghi
Grade 12

My Cloud

It was a Monday morning, August 31st, around 7am – the first day of school. I was in the delightful and sheltered company of my bed with beautiful aromas sneaking through my window as the sun rose. I lay there as I childishly wondered the possible dialogues the birds could be having or the games the squirrels might be playing as they mischievously chased after each other. I was in paradise as I laid in my soft refuge, which I imagined to be a cloud, lifted in the sky, far from civilizations corrupted hands, and up with the innocent beings that resided in the heavens. However, even in the comfort of my cloud, I must never forget-- all good must come to an end. As the violent and ominous sound of the beating alarm clock threw me from my illustrious cloud and altered it to harsh steel. The alarm clock. The worst invention ever. I instantly attempted to locate the alarm clock hoping to hit the snooze button and gather another few minutes of priceless bliss. As I noted before, all good things must end and as I turned to return to my haven, I heard the screeching of my mom ordering me to prepare myself prior to the arrival of the menacing Bus. I lay in bed a few more minutes, quickly searching for excuses to stay in my relaxed sanctuary: maybe a fever, a cold, or some type of sickness-- after all it was the first day of school. I subsequently gave up on the excuses when I realized the pointlessness in doing so and decided to prepare for school. I departed from my bed to the restroom and took on the burdensome and seemingly meaningless task of brushing my teeth. I made sure to do a thorough job as I brushed the left side and then the right side and then flossed- hoping to let an adequate amount of time to pass in order to avoid school. I then turned to brushing my hair, making sure to get every strand down. While doing so, I pondered the purpose for brushing my hair and teeth for they will only just get filthy and dirty once again. I am called out of the bathroom by my older brother as he mocks my lengthy visit to the bathroom- calling me a girl. Since I was aware that my brother isn't exactly patient, I chose not to start up and left him with the bathroom. I then slowly dressed, slowly put on my socks, slowly picked out a shirt and pants, slowly put on my sneakers- double knotting them just in case, and the whole time staring at my beckoning bed. I suddenly hear my mom calling me to run outside to face the horrid, the unpleasant Bus. At the sound of that word, Bus, I trembled as I recalled the atrocious reminiscences that I have had there. As I leisurely walked outside, I immediately recognize many alterations. The birds seemed to disappear. The squirrels seemed to disappear. And most notably I realized that along with them my sanctuary would also be gone for a while. I then hear the shriek of a horn in the distance- I felt a tremor throughout my body. And all of the sudden, the sky that was once blue, turned gray. The birds- once singing, screamed. The squirrels- once playing, fought. The Bus in the distance slithered closer like the Serpent in the Garden of Eden. It began to slow down, wobbling like an old witch. As it approached, the possibility of dropping my schoolbag and sprinting crossed my mind. But I stood there- strong but weak, brave but scared, ready but unprepared. The Bus stopped in front of me, as though prepared to engage in a

fight. The door opens trying to suck me in. I stood there. I knew that if I took a step it would be walking into a trap. Nevertheless, possessed, I took the first step in. I immediately noticed the stench. The stench had a corrupt and caveat smell to it. The smell brought the horrid memories back, which I would be forced to endure once again. I heard the wails of my classmates. The wails that have haunted me for so many years. I disregarded them. I walked down the aisle of the bus, a brave soldier, ignoring the countless remarks made by my classmates. I felt as though I was being ambushed on both sides, waiting only for the right moment to attack me. It was all against one. They were the predators. I was their prey. I began to quiver, as I could not find a seat. The quicker I could find a seat, the quicker I could avoid humiliation. I finally sat in a filthy seat, a temporary shield as I rendered it. And only then, as I sat peacefully did I feel the huge burden instantly lifted from upon me. I put my head down attempting to avoid recognition. It was all over I thought with a sigh of relief.

Just then, I feel a sticky substance on my forehead. I pulled it down and realized that it was gum! I finally acknowledged my surroundings and my classmates around me. They were encircling me like vultures around a carcass. Waiting for my response. I knew then that all my hopes of going under the radar and escaping their attacks was finished, done, finito! When I did not give them a response, they continued. I then felt the spit in my hair, the water down my shirt, the taunts- everything from the previous year, which I hated so much, returned. Right then, as though it could not have gotten worse, the Bus then grunts at me and closes its doors- my last chance to escape my nightmares evaporated. Before departing, I try to capture a quick glance of my room. But their taunts and corruptness began to blind me. A darkness began to envelop my haven. My cloud.

Jessica Hopen
Grade 11

Feathered Glory

Without hesitation,
He had transformed into a covetous man
Who could snag the possessions of others
And depart without a trace of guilt.
Because, alone, in the darkness of night—
He could.
There was something rather peculiar in his demeanor.
The masses feared him and swore on his name—
Aggressive husbands and fathers abhorred him:
And hoped that he would soon be caught,
This desire haunted them in their sleeps,
More forceful with each passing night,
Sucked them of their chivalry and rendered them impotent
That surreptitiously they longed for an escape—
To be free of him
And his taunting that drove them to madness.
Elders prayed that God
Not show the face of this man
So that they should not die
With his reflection
Stamped upon their faces as their last glimpse of life.
Therefore, he smirked with contentment,
Society's tears of trepidation
Triumphantly filled his empty heart.
From the Mount
Tears became his purpose,
Prancing, cackling, as mothers and children
Shrieked in his presence.
Behind them, sneaking about, his manner frightening,
He caressed their horror

He maimed her,
As he tore apart her soul,
She lay helpless against his strength
His touch stung her skin and pulverized her dreams.
Immersed in his evils,
Violently hurled onto the ground.
Her innocence effaced,
As numbness surmounted her,
She stared blankly into his piercing dagger eyes.
Satisfied, ascended,

His departing glance taunting and revolting,
He left her to lie in bitter isolation,
To face the darkness.

She lay basking in the heat
And watched as the buoyant seagulls filled the sky,
Like a thousand ships upon the sea
Amassing to form a cloud-like facade.
Skin caressed by sun
And tickled with its warm embrace.
She heard silence as seductive as a Siren's call,
Envelop her soul and carry her on a cloud of serenity.
Waves crashed upon the shore,
Capturing the silver shells
And inviting them to join their dance back to the sea again.
She submerged her foot in a ditch of sand,
Her heel exposed—
A mound of sizzling soil.
The peaceful breeze
That cools the piercing heat
A mystical gift—
Allowing blissful slumber

Kelley Tripp
Grade 11

I Am a Story

I am a story.
I am what I am.
I am a child. I am a product of love. I am a creation of life. I am growing, living.
I am what I am. I am a sad story. I am a life which is forgotten. I am pain, hurt caused by
those who seek to destroy my nation.
I am a dark abyss, deep and consuming.
I am what I am. I am half a heart. I am shaped by despair, left desolate in a life
with no father.
I am what I am. I am what is left in the wake of terror.
I am fearful of the other side. I am God's tears. I am lacking and therefore, I am
despairing. I am fragile.
I am sensitive because I am missing what others have.
I am what I am. I am a nightmare, scary and unknown. I am unexpected, because what I
go through is not ordinary. I am incomplete. I am alive, when I
live half a life.

I am what I am.
I am defiance. I am strength. I am fearless in the face of terror.
I am what I am. I am a piece of a history, because I am
one story of my country.
I am mature, despite my immaturity. I am relied upon.
I am what I am. I am hope. I am the sun
because God shines for me. I am better than expected. I am loved, because I am a part of
a people who are united.
I am what I am.
I am the tear on the edge of the flag of blue and white.
I am what I am. I am a purpose. I am watched over. I am a mission. I am a task because I
have my life to live, and Abba's to finish.
I am what I am. I am determined, because I carry the souls on earth and
his soul in heaven. I am alive to not let them prevail.
I am the victor. I am alive.
I am who I am.

Nikki Charlap
Grade 12

Space Exploration

My piano sits quietly, undisturbed, waiting to be played—
Its capabilities are endless.
Black like midnight, the glossy moonlight surface of the instrument shimmers;
The keys are stars that glimmer through the darkness.

As I prepare to play, adrenaline rushes through my body.
My fingers trace the keys and a melody naturally forms.
A certain stiffness overtakes me—
Placing me in the proper position.

I find myself lost in the music like a child lost in a candy store.
The notes are drawn as my foot thumps on the pedal below.
Everything I feel is expressed through my music—
My emotions temporarily leaving my body.

The keys feel like plastic, causing my fingers to slip as they glide across.
My heart increasingly races as each song progresses and I become
Engrossed in the melody—
Hoping that this moment will never end.
Playing well does not require skill, playing well requires passion.

I play classical, I play pop, I play jazz—all equally entertaining to my ears.
Sometimes I recreate the masterpiece of another, but other times I
Compose my own Mona Lisa.
I am only a beginner in the world of music like an infant first
Introduced to the concept of speech.
Such joy has never encompassed me before— truly allowing me to express
Myself and vent my troubles.

Everything inspires me to continue playing;
Though eventually the time comes that I must leave that starry sky and
Return to Earth—
Looking forward to when I will resume.

Aaron Zimmerman
Grade 11

End World Hunger

The young boy lies crippled in the sand
His emaciated body
Cries out for nourishment
With relentless aching and throes
He is helpless
He cannot function much longer
His hope embarks on a journey
Only to follow a desolate path
Ending with the key to his demise:
Indifference.
His frame is a living skeleton, frowned upon by society.
Deemed useless to the world, none recognize
His invisible yet prodigious potential
Swimming throughout his profound essence.
Slowly and painfully, he deteriorates into the dust of the earth.
His body dominates his thoughts.
He must disregard his cerebral prowess
In order to preserve his physicality.
A crust of bread is life to the fading child.
Conditions worsen.
The once healthy bones are reduced
To feeble twigs - visible past his dry, barren skin,
Ready to snap into oblivion at a moment's instruction.
The young boy is now an animal.
He destroys all but one thought.
Food.
The smell of something edible would be a
Heavenly chimera to the distraught youngling.
Anguish is now unbearable.
Anguish is now inevitable.
Anguish is now everything.
He waits out his last days, praying for the pain to cease
Allowing him to wither away into the void
Of absolute blitheness.
He is a shadow of the prideful individual he once was.
That was the past.
Time becomes a burden.
He longs for it to rewind, to remove his hurting, both physical and mental.
His final moments enter a slowly occurring time period.
He laughs weakly as he is relinquished from the elements of his corporeality.
With pureness, he is pulled into the grasp of ethereality.
He is gone without a trace of ever being.

David Hopen
Grade 12

Forty Nights

And the days of man
Shall be a hundred and twenty years
Before the Flood—
But not for me.
They say a cancer floods my body
Tears ravage my passage towards Hayflick's Limit,
My voyage shortened by a rogue cell's
Ill-advised attempt at immortality,
Telomerase rejuvenating depleted
Length, while paired chromosomes line up
Two by two,
Destroying the host
In their dash towards eternity.
Voices Babble and Towers crumble from the heavens,
The ship is blotted out from under
The sky.

Cells comb the
Depths East of Eden,
Children playing
God,
To live forever deathless,
Their dangling bodies arc,
Ankles
Dipped in the waters of
Immortality.
They too have soared
Too close to the sun.

And I have not slept for
Forty nights, listening to the
Rain falling closer and closer
Thinking of you
I despair at the dove's return
Standing watch as the waters of Noah
Rise,
Rivulets streaming, entwining like a double helix,
Treading in the deluge, floating
In the blood that belongs to the soul of man
But is mine no more for
I am stretched somewhere over the mountains
Hidden beneath the

Fountains of the deep.

I would trade the remnants of my
Darkness for one last glimpse
Into the light of your eyes,
Your iris reflecting the broken
Promises of scattered rainbows;
But I, I must go and build my
Ark.

Seth Fisher
Grade 11

Laceration

From the depths of my despair
A mind that manifests from the abyss of my solitude
A soul eclipsed by the darkness of turpitude
A body rampaged for its physicality
A life penetrated by despondency
Oblivion

From the depths of her despair
Introspection clouded by the seclusion from humanity
Morale stripped by the desertion of her dearest
Dismayed by the expropriation of her shadow
Innocence obstructed by the traumas of my being
Aloneness

Family disunited by an era of calamity
Misfortune led by a life of affliction
Scarred by the rememory of hell
The past confined indefinitely in our hearts
Enslavement

Elyse Tripp
Grade 10

Strength

Why do bad things happen to good people? Why does God punish us for things we never commit? Why is life so difficult sometimes? In an instant, our lives can change. Our lives can transform into something we never thought could it could. Change; a change could be for the better, or a destructive unwanted change that can destroy our lives. Life is fleeting, a mere grain in the sand of time. How can we leave our footprints behind if God never allows us that chance, if our opportunities are stolen from us, if we just do not have any time left.

Lying in my bed, I ponder these questions. How can I be faced with two months until I am underground, left behind, forgotten, alone? How can this deathly, deep, destructive disease be consuming my body, dictating my every move? I was created to be more powerful than it. I was supposed to be able to live life so I could see my family grow. I was created to live, not to die. Life is sacred; it is not supposed to be scarred by a fight I have no chance of winning, a fight for which I have not been training. How can I go from running with my child in the park to being helpless, chained to my bed, dying?

My days of hell started with my routine visit to my doctor and one simple sentence: “You have cancer.”

After he spoke, all I can remember is him mouthing words: everything went silent. Everything went black. Everything was ruined. The life that I had planned for myself slipped away with those three simple words, placed together in a simple sentence, signifying devastation and distress.

I could not address the doctor for he was now a vicious monster that would take my future from before me; I arose and, without flinching, heading straight for the exit, doing anything I could to try to escape this hell that would consume me. I forced myself not to cry, not to shed a tear. I knew that my rivers of sorrow must be saved and not be wasted, because my tears, like change, could signify my deepest pains or my brightest joys. I must save them for my darkest days, when all I have left are my tears, when they are my only comfort.

My drive home felt like it was in a foreign country. Everything I looked at was blurry, nothing in my life was clear anymore. The clarity that I had always taken for granted was being clouded by my diagnosis, the diagnosis of stage four-breast cancer. How could I have been so naïve to not feel it, to not recognize something was wrong? Why did I think I was so strong, strong enough to not get a mammogram, strong enough to go to that appointment alone, strong enough to get through cancer? I would never forgive myself for being stupid, thinking that I was invincible, impervious to anything. I would have the guilt of my hubris rest upon my shoulders for the remainder of my life.

How was I supposed to tell my child, my husband, my parents? What was I supposed to say, “Your mommy is going to die soon- Get ready!” This would be one of the hardest challenges for me. To look into my girl’s big sky-blue eyes and tell her to cherish every day left with her mommy because her mommy is in a fight for her life and she may not win. Was I supposed to tell her that her mommy will not be able to watch her grow up, to graduate from college, or to walk her down the aisle. Was my daughter

supposed to know that at every milestone that she will come across her mommy would not be there to give her a hug, give her a kiss, or tell her that everything will be fine? Was I supposed to just tell her that? Was I supposed to allow that to be my child's future? Why did I feel so helpless, trapped in my body, trapped in my life, with no escape?

Why did You let this happen to me? I have been good. I have never stolen, killed, or cheated. I have never disobeyed You, and I have never disobeyed my family. I guess all of those times in which I knelt down, feeling that there was nothing else to do besides pray to and ask for Your help have led me to this place in my life, where Your presence is most invisible.

Sruli Fixler

Grade 11

I Am What I Am

I am celestial, innocent untouched

A seraphic blessing from above

Mesmerizing enchanting kaleidoscope eyes the bluish-steel of a midwinter sky.

Going Through Changes

I am what I am

A rambunctious recalcitrant adolescent

A spirited indomitable force in society

I am a diffused bomb unable to explode

Raging water blocked and confined, dammed by society

I am the trapped fool you will regret keeping in the dark

I am what I am

I am dilapidated and I am abandoned and I am being hunted by Death

So I am fleeing, fleeing through the woods

I am decrepit and relenting and Custer on his last stand

A withered rose

I am a firework that will never flare through the sky

I am squandered, immobilized, and killed

Extinguished and forgotten

I am the aborted fetus that will never be born
When potential faces neglect
I am shame and regret
And another misfired bullet in life's consuming trenches
I am a rocket bound for the moon
Destroyed upon lift off
My demolished pieces descending from the smoke-filled sky
I am the peaches pickled in a jar
The reflection behind the mirror
The monster in the closet
I am the steel safe you wish you could unlock
But will remain forever shut
I am what I am
Unexploited, departed, worthless,
Evanescent and irretrievable
I am What I am

Joseph Hostyk
Grade 10

The Quantum Concept of Poetry

Words
flow like light, not in defined infinitesimal
steps of energy but in a stream of continuous
matter, wavelike, their power
measured from the origin
to the crest or trough,
repetition reflecting their energy,
equaling
light's speed in a vacuum; though

if matter
is simply specific
amounts of energy,
a quantum, nothing
existing in between, alone, the only
defined point,
is a poem just

words that are particles, limited – simply
landmarks? Poetry's power is unrestricted, infinite
passions connecting seemingly isolated
expressions. As prisms separate
white light into a plethora of colors, all belonging
to a unique light frequency and wavelength,
capable of being

Viewed separately, so poetry
Diffracts, reflects, refracts
Its continuous
Spectrum of semantics, sounds
harmonizing to the pulse of photons
emitting finite eternities, erratic conveyors
of shimmering memories.

Kira Dennis
Grade 10

Circle of Life

Pain. Confusion. Speechlessness. These are the many thoughts going through my mind since I found out about my cousin's death this past morning. I feel as if someone came and cut off a chunk of my heart. I feel empty. I feel like I am sleeping and someone needs to awaken me from this horrible nightmare. How is it possible that he is gone? How is it possible that he was here yesterday and not today? How is it possible that my aunt had four kids just a few hours ago and three now? It just does not make sense! My cousin. My friend. My Ilan. Sitting here at my kitchen table- my mind unable to comprehend what happened. Sitting here at my kitchen table- tears streaming down my face. Although I know there is no one to blame and it is not my fault, but I can't help but feel guilty for having all my siblings while my cousins no longer do. I can't understand why this happened or why God did this to me and my family, but I am continuously being told that everything happens for a reason despite our understanding of it. Why? I just want to know why. Why my cousin? I know he is in a better place. I know he is with God. I know he would not want me to be sad. But I cannot help it. Among many people's comforting words were the words of a rabbi who said, "God gathers a group of souls in heaven and says: He needs a soul to go down to earth and do an extremely important mission. However, there is one catch. The soul will not live a long life. Ilan clearly put all his selfishness aside and took the mission upon himself." Sometimes that makes me feel better. Sometimes it makes me feel like he was a hero for doing that. But other times I feel like it is so unfair to the rest of us left down here on Earth with all this pain and suffering. I try not to cry. I try to think of all the happy memories we had together. I fail sometimes. It also sometimes helps to think about the thousands of people that showed up at the funeral--there were almost as many people there than at the giving of the Torah. I sit down and think about his beautiful smile, his magnetic personality and upbeat persona, and I wonder how I am going to be able to move on without him. 24 years old. 24 year olds aren't meant to die. A 24 year old is meant to have fun, and get married, and start a family. Unfortunately, my cousin lost that opportunity. I am sleeping, eating, and working just to get through the day, but it feels pointless. I feel sad that I will not be able to watch him excel in everything he does. I feel sad I won't be able to attend his wedding. I just can't believe it: he's dead, gone, buried. I feel sad he isn't here anymore. I miss him. I love him. I will never forget him.

Mollie Markowitz
Grade 10

Homeless

I like to write. I'm afraid that if I stay put too long, I'll grow lazy or weak or perhaps even vulnerable to my own thoughts. When I write my mind is a clear shallow pond of mostly purified salt water, calm and consisting of no depth aside from the few remaining salty memories I warily struggle to remove from my pond. When I write, I am cleansed of the past – no salty memories lurking, waiting to be reflected upon. My memories vanish from my head as the words hit the paper. When I write, I am overcome with a feeling of self-accomplishment, that I am successful. When I write, I don't need the most intricate environment for an idea to spark in my brain. The scenic beauty of Central Park is enough.

I am no ordinary intelligent woman. Yes, I know I am intelligent. I read whatever I can get my hands on and write whenever I find a piece of paper. My intelligence comes naturally though, I'm proud to admit. If it weren't innate, I'd be no smarter than the average football fan, which is not saying much. I never went to school, never had any classmates to play with, never learned from another my ABCs. Yet, if it weren't for the way I am forced to dress, one would never guess my occupation, given my brains. Despite my pride and intellect, I must force myself to do what I hate the most every day. Beg.

“She wants a dollar, dear,” I heard the woman say.

“Tell her we're all out of cash. She should learn to depend on herself and not on others,” he responded.

“She should get herself a job,” the woman whispered back to him.

I overhear conversations like this all the time. Through my experiences, I have discovered how people can be judgmental, and how they are quick to assume that it's simple for a person to get back on his or her own two feet. Many assume that it's our fault for falling down in the first place. Homeless people everywhere suffer, and though people may not know the reasoning behind our lack of a home, they continue to make assumptions. No one wonders about the talents or thoughts we may have. No one cares. People just assume. Assumptions and judgments are the core of human cruelty. Hiding behind those false assumptions, lies one's truth. My reality is based on my mother's mistake.

At only fifteen, my mother became pregnant with me. My grandparents essentially disowned my mother, kicking her out of the house for good. Meanwhile my father refused to accept me as his child. This left my mother truly alone in the world for nine months, in the streets. She gave birth in a convenience shop, and from that moment on, she was no longer alone. She had me.

My mother was a kind woman and smart too. Despite being forced to sleep on park benches, cook soup under bridges, and camp out in alleys, my mother cared for me in the best way she could. For instance, we only stayed in lit alleys. My mother made sure we never stepped foot in a dark one since those were filled with dangerous homeless men. My mother loved me. She read to me in the park from magazines and books we found left behind on the ground or on benches. She knew I enjoyed literature and wanted me to pursue my creativity by writing as well.

“One day you’ll be a bright, famous author,” she would tell me, “and you’ll make something of yourself.” She wanted me to do something great with my life, since she was unable to do so with her own.

“Why me?” I would ask her.

“Because you have a mother who will support you forever,” she would reassure me. At that moment, I would gaze up at my mother with adoring eyes and feel lucky, confident. I was determined to be an author. I’m still trying.

Talia Mamann
Grade 10

Kaleidoscope

Discovering a new toy,
Kaleidoskope.
Lackluster, nondescript at first
fueling the desire to abandon it,
but overcoming it.
Squinting my eye through the tiny glass lens,
looking into another world.
A magical, extraordinary world.
Filled with an array of multicolored patterns.
with every click,
with every turn,
change is inevitable
change is unpredictable.

David Hopen
Grade 12

Virtue of Sin (Excerpt)

The wasteland was his, his alone. Michael trudged through muddied dreams, unflinching in the storm. The rain was dark and stained his chic shoes so that they began to fade. His hair, once too cautiously gelled to perfection, was sprayed with tiny needles. Draped in careful riches and broken affluence, he slowly limped towards the stream before him. Now, conscious of the waves softly whispering, Michael strained his ears to listen to the sounds that had drawn him back to the water. He held the pages of his book to his breast...

They decided to take the subway home. Her phone was still ringing but they were laughing. They ascended cold stairs in Penn station. It was dark, so Michael held her hand tightly and blindly led her through the snaking masses. When they reached the final step, light spilled onto them so that Michael caught a glimpse of her face. Her phone rang again and, before Michael could object, she answered.

Marissa stopped walking. "That was the hospital. Kendra passed away." She was pulled backwards, down into the Underworld, sucked in by faceless crowds. Michael reached out to grab her. He shouted her name, but she was crying. She shook her head and closed her eyes.

"I have to go," she said in an inaudible whisper. Then Michael stood alone. She did not turn to flash screaming, unsettled eyes. Michael began to walk against the crowds of the Manhattan streets, his novel in hand. She was gone, and it was night. He sat down and tried to cry. He was Orpheus, the wide-eyed dreamer, finally left alone.

Black rivulets streamed freely down his proud, handsome cheeks.

Suddenly, Michael ran. He ran past hordes of withering parasites, through swarms of garish, dying men. Everything was nothing, so he hurried towards the void. His was a world of the hopelessly incommunicable, and Michael ran from all the broken men.

He ran back towards the water in Central Park. The air was suffocating and cold and the night was fleeting, so he made his way to the stream in the shadows of New York.

The darkness was unquiet. His world was ice and he was frightened by the silence. Because he was a writer, he saw the words that were not there. And that was all he had left, unwritten words, ghosts of perfect silence and devastating harmony.

When he reached the water, he took out his latest novel that Marissa had given him. She had traced his name onto the cover in golden ink. A testament to the generations.

With trembling fingertips, he tore pages, neatly ripping the corners from the backbone of the book.

Basked in unholy darkness, staring at bottomless water, he held the pages of his writing in his palms defiantly. The writer did not shiver in the wind. He crushed the words of his life into fragments, scattering the molten ashes. He cast them into the depths of the sea, for whatever falls into the deep is lost forever.