



The Mirror

First Edition

Foreword from the Editor-in-Chief

Welcome to “The Mirror” Magazine. The title signifies how the magazine reflects the literary and artistic works the students of St. Francis High School wish to publish. The theme of the first edition is “New Beginnings.” Life provides us all with new beginnings. Some we can see, such as the bloom of a flower. Others are hidden in our hectic lives such as the beauty of a sunset. The magazine itself is a new addition to the St. Francis community. The members of the magazine invite you to take a moment to explore the new beginnings in our lives and yours.

Club Founder and President,
Brooke Aprea

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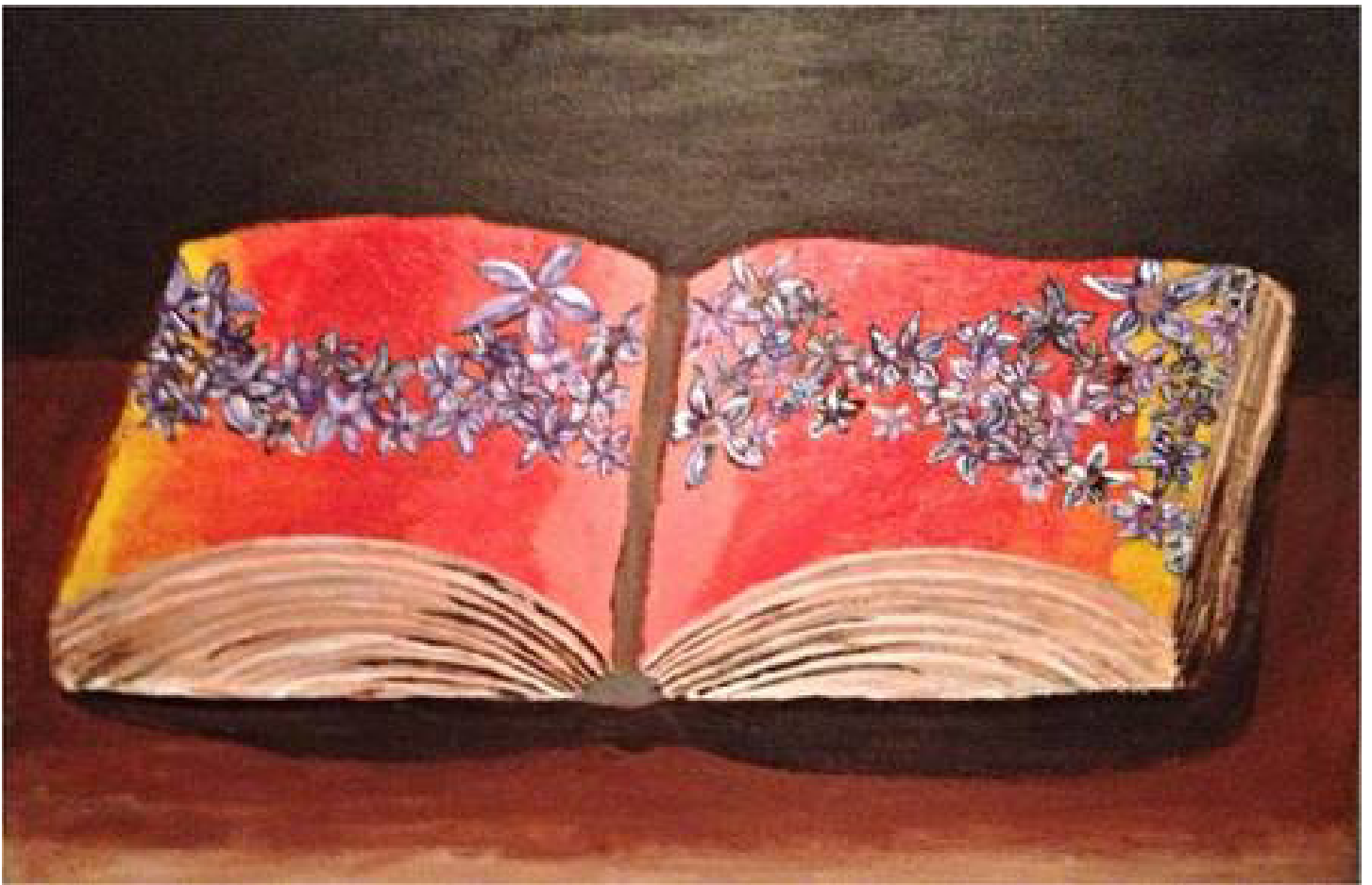
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Do Not Call It Sky

Rebecca Nicholes

Look up through the walls,
And see,
God's finger paintings
Displayed in full.
Luminescent impressions streaked
Across this rugged canvas,
Cut out of
New York sky scrapers
And the slender fingers of
Palm leaves.
Cut and recut,
At a billion different angles,
To look and be
All it could
For all the souls who needed it.
That rich thrill of blue
Expanding over the oaks
To the pale gentle motherhood
Draped across the easy wind.
A faceless expression,
For the fact that each
Of the billions that enter us
Is unique.
So do not call
The pulsing orange
Surging over the dawn
And the whisper of gold
Slipping over throngs of grass
And the towering earthshaking mass
Of grey stuffed upon grey
The same.
This force, treacherous,
Compassionate, glorious,
Has no name.
So do not call it "sky".



“Growing Knowledge”
Chelsea Franklin

Soon There Will Be Light

Carleen Tse

Last weekend, my grandmother invited me over to her house for breakfast. I found it peculiar and out of the ordinary, especially considering the fact that we have never been very close. After breakfast, when the sun was at its highest, we went outside and sat on her porch. She asked me how everything was going in my life.

I told her about how I am considering going to college abroad in Brazil. I also told her that I was afraid to go abroad because I won't know anyone. I might feel abandoned and scared while I'm there. She then told me that she has the perfect story for me. She began to tell me about a hard decision she once had to make.

When she was 19 years old, she stood tall at only 4' 9", and had a baby bump that made her look like she was going to topple over. With the smell of freedom lingering under her nose, she knew that moving to America would be the best thing for her and her soon-to-be son. She told me about how the following few months of her life would be the scariest, most daring time she ever experienced.

She also told me that it would be the ultimate test of her faith and love. Leaving her family in China was brave, courageous, and heartbreaking for her. She paused the story, reached into her pocket, and pulled out a golden yellow necklace. "Yellow is China's lucky color," she exclaimed. Holding the necklace in her hand, she then proceeded to tell me that her mother slipped the necklace over her head right before my grand-

parents' ship set off to America. The necklace never came off until her new life in America had been secured.

Traveling with her was my grandfather. Unfortunately, my grandmother said that my grandfather's parents weren't as loving and supportive as hers. This made it hard for him to make the final decision of leaving. She said that even though it was hard, she knew he would come because he would do anything for his new and expecting wife.

She then told me about her complications and struggles with being pregnant on the ship. Sea sickness mixed with morning sickness was not desirable. There were many nights when she couldn't sleep, and she remembers not being able to see her own hands because she was blinded by the darkness. During those nights, she would dream about her new address, new friends, and new experiences. This kept her motivated and excited.

After one long month, their ship docked in San Francisco, California. "I stood on the edge of the dock and looked out as far as I could, thinking I had a chance of seeing China.

I had no clue how far from home I was," she continued. "Think about how you might have felt."

I told my grandmother that I would have felt lost. She nodded her head and looked out towards the distance. "That's exactly how it was. But I was not afraid. I was ready."

Only a week after they arrived to America, they received their first letter. It was from the bank, telling them that they would accept their loan. My grandmother told me that once she read it, she knew things would be okay. She said that they lived in a crowded apartment with another young Chinese couple. All

was well until the day she went into labor. She gave birth to a strong baby boy. She told me that the newborn was very loud and hard for a young couple to control in such a small apartment. My grandmother felt bad for the other couple and knew that they needed to find a new place to call home.

Searching for a new home was hard considering the fact that they only had a small amount of money to spare. She said that my grandfather looked for a job in the medical field and finally landed an internship at a dental office. He walked to the office every morning and made minimum wage for the first year of working. She said that with time, he had the dental skills as if he attended a dental school. The doctor then decided to full time hire my grandfather to work in his office.

She told me that as time continued, she missed her family even more than ever. Her life now relied on her husband, her faith, and her new baby boy. She said, “Even though the transition to America was not easy, in the end, my freedom and new family made it all worth it.”

After she concluded the story, she unclenched the yellow gold necklace and gently put it over my head. Placing it so that the medallion was laying on top of my heart. She said, “I know that you will make the right decisions in your life. Don’t be afraid, courage will lead you to places you dream of.”

As I headed back home, I thought about how I shouldn’t be afraid to travel and study abroad in Brazil. Even though I will miss my family, the sacrifice will be well worth it in the end. The experiences I have will be priceless. I cannot be afraid. I have to live with courage and faith. Just as my grandmother did.



“The Color in the Gray”
Caila Pedroncelli



“Fantasy”
Kendall Cecchettini

Patricia McCormick

An Interview by Brooke Aprea

Patricia McCormick, a two-time National Book Award finalist, is the author of five critically acclaimed novels: *Never Fall Down*, a novel based on the true story of an 11-year-old boy who survived the Killing Fields of Cambodia by playing music; *Purple Heart*, a suspenseful psychological novel that explores the killing of a 10-year-old boy in Iraq; *Sold*, a deeply moving account of sexual trafficking; *My Brother's Keeper*, a realistic view of teenage substance abuse; and *Cut*, an intimate portrait of one girl's struggle with self-injury.

McCormick grew up in central Pennsylvania, went to Catholic grade school, high school, then Rosemont College. She worked as an assistant press secretary to the Governor of Pennsylvania from 1974-1978, and then went to the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. McCormick worked as a reporter for daily newspapers, and went into magazine journalism where she wrote book and movie reviews. McCormick studied fiction writing at The New School in New York City and went on to publish critically acclaimed books for young adults.

I first met Patricia McCormick at her home in Manhattan on December 21, 2009. Before I left, she gave me a copy of her then most recent book, *Sold*. Our families have stayed in touch ever since. I am fortunate to know Patricia McCormick and to share my interview with her. This interview was conducted by phone on July 16, 2013.

What first made you realize you wanted to be a writer?

You know, I think I wanted to be a writer ever since I was a little kid and I used to sneak up to this spot that we had over our garage. There was this little false attic and I used to sit up there with notebooks and pens and write really bad stories and really bad plays and I would make my little sisters act out in the plays. So it was a way for me to escape from what was going on in my home. I think that was part of it. And for me to express myself in a really joyous, free, and unstructured way as opposed to what you do in school, which is, you know, directed at structures. My parents were really practical people and didn't encourage me to become a writer. I think it was because they were concerned it was an unsteady way to make a living. So, I think that's why I went into journalism because I thought here's a way I can be a writer and make a steady living, be attached to a newspaper, be with other people, and not try to make up stories on my own.

What did you do to prepare to be a writer?

I don't know if I was as conscious about preparing to be a writer, I was just following what I loved, which was to read everything, to read widely, and to read things that were beyond my age level, things that were outside my normal pace, anything I could find. So I think reading was the main thing. Experimenting with my own forms of writing, whether it was, you know, writing for the school paper, or writing things to celebrate the different holidays. Even for a while I wrote prayers for my

parish. And they published one or two and that was such a rush. I think that, first of all someone thought that it was good enough to accept and then print on paper and hand out to a whole community. I think that was when I first saw myself as a writer.

Which writers and books are your favorites?

I have a couple favorites; Carson McCullers is one of my favorites. She wrote this wonderful book called *A Member of the Wedding*.

It's very weird but it's about this sort of odd, eccentric, very imaginative girl stuck in a small town in the south and her big brother comes back to town and announces he's getting married and she thinks she's in the wedding and she thinks she's gonna be taken away from this little boring town of hers to go off into the wide world with her brother and the bride. And she's just so off in her imagining. What it's really about, it's about longing for a bigger world outside her hometown. So, I love that book. I love *This Boy's Life: A Memoir* by Tobias Wolff. I think those are my two favorites.

You're well known for writing books aimed at young adults, so how did you come to decide to write for young adults?

Well, the first effort that I made at getting published was a story about a girl who self injures and it was based on a story that I had seen in a newspaper. And I was really intrigued with why someone would want to hurt themselves. We're all built to

avoid pain, so what kind of mindset do you have to be in to actually inflict pain on yourself? And so, I followed my curiosity about that experience and since it is something that's done mainly by teenage girls, it felt like that was the right audience for the story and then I realized I love teenagers! A lot of people don't like teenagers, and you get the impression in our society that people want to sell things to teenagers but people want them out of sight and want them to be less unruly. And I just think that whole period of teenage life is so inherently dramatic, exciting, confusing, depressing, it's just all such intense feelings. And you're making big decisions about what your life is going to be like. So, that's what drew me to it, that and the fact that teenage readers really respond. Adult readers are kind of lazy when they respond back, oh I didn't like the dialogue here or blah blah there. Teenagers, they dig it. If you haven't captured their imagination in the first ten pages, forget it. Give them a million distractions and they're going to be gone. So it keeps you as a writer at the top of your game to make sure everything you're writing really counts. And I just find it really satisfying.

In the book Never Fall Down, it's about 11-year-old Arn Chorn-Pond and his suffering and survival at the hands of Khmer Rouge. What made you decide to write this book?

I met Arn and saw that he was really burning to tell his story. But that when he told it, it was so traumatic for him that it was almost he became that 11-year-old all over again; he would cry, he would forget things, he would jump around from one part

of the story to another, and it really didn't help organize the story in a coherent and chronological way. And I think if the books have anything in common, they're all about ordinary kids under extraordinary pressure doing extraordinary things. And Arn really fits that description to the max. He survived, not just because of his music but because he took chances. He was kind, you know? Because he remained decent, he kept his humanity throughout the horrible experience. And I just found his story very inspiring.

Your portrayal of Arn is really compelling and you're able to really get inside Arn's mind. What helps you to write in such a compelling fashion?

Hmm, that's a really great question. I think I imagine sometimes writing the way I do, in first person, is almost like acting. I pretend I am Arn for the hours of the day that I'm doing that work. And even though I didn't have the same experiences, nothing even close, to what he went through, I think being a good writer is about having empathy. It's equal parts imagination and empathy. I guess in my case it's also research. I got a lot of research, a lot of facts about that period in history. And I interviewed him a lot, so I put that all together in a stew where you pick out the most vivid details. You really try to imagine what that 15-year-old or what that 11-year-old was feeling. Not what I imagine as an adult looking at that, but how confusing that would be and how bewildering it would be to be in those circumstances and try to capture that for the reader.

Could you tell us about your research and writing process?

I always do a lot of research. I think that comes from being a former journalist. I feel much more comfortable creating a story that I can hang on with some research. But most of the time I put the research away and let the rest of the story come from my imagination.

For *Cut*, I tried to remember what it was like when I was 15 and when I was lonely and I was angry and I was confused and didn't really have the words for what I was going through. So I didn't cut myself but I do remember what it was like to be that kind of kid.

With Arn's story, and with *Sold*, it involved asking him a lot of difficult questions or asking the girls in the brothels difficult questions. So, when we've been through something traumatic, we often speak in generalities or block out the parts that were really painful. And to make a story come to life, it's the details that you need. So, I had to be both gentle and forceful in terms of asking both of those people to kind of tell me some of the worst of what they went through. And know when to back off, know when to push a little bit further, and I think in the end that pushing helps the story teller to get rid of a lot of that detail, a lot of those memories that are still in the recesses of their minds that are troubling them but haven't come out yet. And once they get it out to a witness, to somebody who is writing it down and someone who thinks it's really important, they can let go of that.

Could you tell us about your next project?

I wish I could! I've really been struggling with what's going to be my next project. Right now I would say that the thing I'm most attracted to is the story about the slave revolt in Haiti in 1791. The slaves there overthrew their white masters and set up their own country. And it was the only time in recorded history that slaves overthrew their masters and established a nation. I think it's a fascinating story and one that Haiti could really use to hear again. Because there's been so much bad news about Haiti. You know, Haiti was a shining beckon of liberty. They abolished slavery in 1791 well before, you know, we didn't abolish slavery until the 1860s. I feel like too many stories about slavery are about oppression and not enough of them are about the urgency that the slaves had, the individuality that they kept alive.

What advice would you give a high school girl who wants to write?

Well, to do exactly what you're doing, to read as much as you can, to reach out to writers, to find out about the craft. I think the biggest thing I would suggest is to become comfortable with silence. You know, to turn off your iPhones, your iPad, your i-everything! And be comfortable with nothing and to see what your imagination gives you in that really quiet time. I think what we're watching and receiving, and texting, the outside stimulation; it shuts down our own imagination. And if

we are quiet, it's very interesting to see what your brain cooks up.

Patti, thank you again. When you are next on the west coast, I would like to invite you to speak to the St. Francis High School student body. We have a lot of talented writers I know would love to meet you and continue this conversation.



“On the Steps”
Bailey Jones

Feast

Thomas Dewey

Drink tonight, and eat your fill, for tomorrow cannot be foretold
And yesterday is but a memory of today.
The young lovers' innocent embrace
Frowned upon by elders—holding hands—as they walk beside their
youthful counterparts.
How selfish it is to claim love for one's own and otherwise deem it
ludicrous frivolity.
Strange dreams haunt a conscious mind:
Pleasure, pain; Inclusion, isolation; Laughter, longing.
To bear in your arms but one night,
Only when you wake was it ever just a pillow.
The human warmth beside you:
The selfless Gift;
The endless Wonder;
Rapture.
When far from home the heart stays warm.
The memory of her embrace encompasses.
Such beauty borne witness to
Parallels unknown.
Eyes, smile, hair—it all returns in an inopportune rush of memory
Always like the first time.
A wonderful pain that fills the spirit.
Hands that speak louder than words.
Drink tonight, and eat your fill, for tomorrow cannot be foretold.
And yesterday is but a memory of today.

Humanitatis

Rebecca Nicholes

I bind our love to these crippled forms,
These stagnant breaths that rush us through the moon's blank gaze.
We ring to bear the song of truth in flesh
Our lives' devotion thrust upon our eyes
To see the single Man,
Made beyond existence,
Beyond eternity to weep the shredded tears
Of lives and lives
Devoured into wombs and graves
Endowed with change to make the past endeared.
I see the echoes,
Rhythms coursing iridescent past the sun
To wrap embraces perfect as the dawn,
As lovers' oneness tracing souls in flesh,
Kissing scars to stars,
That burn more beautifully than pain
And cast the darkness farther
Than the day has seen before.
I see the push and pull,
The hands seducing time to write their names,
Endless mirrors,
Bright reflections of the memories lost and loved.
I see a desperate wholeness
Present in this timeless awe
And even as I write
I feel a distant hand
Through all of time and space
Reach out for mine
And through this bond
We laugh.



“Calm Before the Storm”
Kendall Cecchetti



“Narrowing Alley”
Bailey Jones



“The Phoenix’s Death”
Bailey Aguilar

All Grown Up Now

Allie Frew

And it was in the days of our youth
That we were free.
There was not a care in the world
And we could breathe.
We had no limitations;
Our imaginations could run wild.
But, today, there are inhibitions.
We're no longer a child.
We have rules,
And we have strictures,
And we don't have a say.
It wasn't like the pictures.
We thought growing up was glamorous,
But see, it isn't so.
Why couldn't we just stay us?
How could we not know?
Let's take a moment
And just remember
What it was like to be free,
What life was like being free.



“Sunset in Florida”
Stephanie Miranda

New Age

Rebecca Nicholes

What has become of blue skies and grass
Oh, they Burn, Burn, Burn
and then reaped from the ruins
The tests and camaros and ipads
Daffodils, I want flowers
A new age, they said.
And yet flowers bloom in sidewalk cracks
And billboards paint the sunset skies,
The tremulous glory of sunlight,
With geico and walmart and budlite.
Burn that holiest of holies,
And burn the children and burn the smiles
And burn, burn the moon,
Then burn all that remains.
In a hundred thousand million years
We'll still regret the daffodils.

Glad You Held on Longer

Kelly Esparza

Gossip, lies, exclusion—
why did all this start?
Glaring eyes, evil smirks,
mean whispers as you pass,
catty girls, loss of friends,
stomach tied in knots,
a push, a shove, a broken heart—
nothing is off limits.

White knuckles, fists clenched—
will it ever end?
Just hold on a little longer;
refuse to let them win.

New school, different girls—
will it be the same?
Friendly faces, warm hellos,
a hug when you are down,
smiling, talking, laughing—
this place feels like home!
Fists unclenched, heart unlocked—
God's gifts come rushing out:

friendship, love, compassion,
a smile that never ends.

Standing up, speaking out,
doing what feels right,
express yourself, lend a hand,
include, uplift, rejoice!

Like a tree, withstood the storm,
emerging ever stronger,
a lifetime left of fruit to bear,
glad you held on longer.



“Hope”
Lacey McCormick

Waking Up

Madison Harris

Waking up that Monday morning, I could already tell that that day was going to be crap. Crap to the tenth power. Don't ask me how, I just knew. Call it a gut feeling. But maybe it had to do with the fact that my alarm clock went off fifteen minutes late and I almost missed my bus to school.

Needless to say, my mother was not happy. But neither was my head, which had met the hard, cold floor in a battle that shook the heavens of our attic to the hell that was my little brother's room down stairs.

Anyways, I'm on the bus, I'm halfway to school, halfway to first period, when I decided to check my backpack to make sure that I had all my homework. Something that I didn't do when I haphazardly shoved all my papers and books from my desk into my bag all the while eating my burnt toast with no hands, trying not to drop it. Again.

But I digress. Anyway, there I am, halfway to school, and halfway to geometry, and I realized that I left half my homework at home. Oh man. I could already see that conversation going.

"Miss Danelia, could you please explain to me why you don't have your book work with you today in my class?"

"Ah, well, um...you see—"

"No, I don't see. Raise your voice, dear. The class can't hear you when you mumble like that. Now, you were just explaining your reason for not doing your assigned homework over the

weekend?”

“I did do it! I just left it at home! You see, my alarm went off late and I almost missed my bus. I was kind of in a hurry, ya know?”

I groaned, letting my still sore head lean against the cool window, trying to ignore the noise of children around me, dreading the day ahead. But suddenly, a thought hit me square in the face.

Wait! I still have time! I can at least start to redo my geometry homework.

I whipped out my math textbook, a piece of paper, and a pencil and got to work, scribbling down the problems and struggling to find the missing angle and track down that ever elusive x .

But alas, the yellow bus pulled into the gray entrance of the equally grey, brick building that was my school for the next two and a half years. As I worked as quickly as I ever had, teenagers of varied sizes, colors, and worth exited cars, buses, and bikes and made their various ways into the dreaded example of architecture.

Suppressing a groan, I quickly shoved all the tools I had taken out of my bag back into the bag and trooped out of the bus, through the quicksand of people, and barely escaped with my life out the other side of the tall, spiked gates.

“Another day. Oh joy.”

First period: Geometry with Mrs. Apothem, the devil incarnate. A short, grizzled old lady who was quite fond of smacking the white board with her metal meter stick, the sound like a

gunshot, especially when practically first thing in the morning.

That block of horror started out exactly as I thought it would. Me, frantically trying to finish the homework assignment even though I knew it was hopeless. Mrs. Demon had assigned work over the regular two-day weekend as if it was Christmas break. People chatted it up around me, turning my desk space into a chimpanzee cage. On sugar high. One particular girl looked like the child of a macaw, with just as much racket and destruction. She was practically throwing herself at one of the male species in the classroom, much to my annoyance; it was very distracting. Not to mention disturbing.

Just as I was considering ‘politely’ asking for her to *shut up*, a gunshot sounded in the room. Everyone jumped, panicking until they realized that it was just Mrs. Demon, whacking her ruler against the white board like a madwoman, which she was. As I predicted earlier, she did make more of a fool out of me in front of the whole class, yes, even parrot-girl. Not like she noticed.

Second period: Physical Science with Mrs. Chem. That’s not her real name, I forgot her real name after a while and it’s really awkward to ask someone’s (a teacher’s) name after about two months. And I never asked someone else her name either. Still very awkward. So I gave her a nickname: Mrs. Chem. I never called her that to her face though, just Ms. C, which is okay, because her name does start with a ‘C.’

I get to class, class starts, and all is well, until, yep. New assignment, new project due by Friday. New that in itself was fine; I liked projects. But it was one of those homework assignments

that the teacher came up with at 11 o' clock the night before, conveniently forgetting that her students have five other classes that give out homework the size of a dinner plate as well... One of those.

Oh man. But what can I do? I actually want to go to college, unlike some parrot girls painting her nails that I know. So rest of the class period was spent working on some boring project that almost made my head hit the desk a few times.

Third period: English. One of my personal favorites, because science and math weren't really my thing, in case you haven't noticed.

And guess what. Yeah, you guessed right. Maybe. Mrs. Meson, a short woman with an equally short temper comes up to me right after class starts and tells me, in front of everyone, how I have been assigned to a new group for our new, you guessed it, assignment. Strange. I didn't recall our class even being assigned an *assignment*. So I raised my head with the question balancing on my tongue.

Head shot, immediately. "No time for questions, today is a short day, short classes, so snap to it! March!"

Well then. I proceeded to find my 'new' teammates, because apparently, something happened that it was not aware of. Not the first time.

But the first time to be paired with parrot girl and someone who looked like was her new boyfriend, and didn't want to be there at the same time. Poor guy.

"Hi! So, did you hear what our essay is about? Totally insane, as if she expects us to write about that. Am I right? Of course I

am, right sweetie? So, do I know you? But that doesn't matter. We can get to know each other great with this writing thing Mrs. Crazy gave us. I really don't want to do this, I have no time. I'm so busy. But you aren't, I'm sure. After all, people who have no social lives are never busy. So I'm trusting you do take care of this, okay? Oh, did you catch what Mrs. Crazy just said, I think it was something important..."

Kill. Me. Now.

Fourth period: World History. Mr. Binns. How do I describe Mr. Binns? Average height, very skinny (it can't be healthy, I swear), old, and with the type of voice that can turn the most interesting subject into historical politics of some puny tribe no one has ever heard of in the bowels of some long forgotten mountains in Canada. Or something.

So yeah, nothing happened there, which was par for the course. Fine with me, but I wasn't able to catch up on much needed sleep because Mr. Binns read my mind and set me right in front. Oh man.

Lunch next. *Finally.*

But by the time I got to the lunch line, it was already at least two hundred feet long. Probably more. 'Why were you late for lunch?' You ask. Why thank you for caring. Have you ever been stuck in the hallway behind the group of people who have to walk in an impenetrable wall and decide to walk so slowly... Yeah. I was trapped.

So after a very long time, I finally get my food and fight my way to my table, where I usually sit with my group for friends. Unfortunately, they all have the same English class

the same period and that particular class went on a trip to the local theater for a play.

#foreveralone.

I looked down at my lunch and nearly gagged. Meatloaf. Cafeteria meatloaf. Nasty. So, as I bring my carton of chocolate to my mouth to take a sip, someone bumps into me from behind and down it goes, right on to the bottom of my shirt and soaking my already soggy meatloaf.

Defeated sigh. No lunch for me.

But luckily, my next class was P.E. and I had an extra shirt in my locker. Unluckily, the locker room was freezing that day. Even though it was, like, 85 degrees outside.

And then, yes, then, the gym teacher says that usual activities are cancelled, in favor of a run. A two-mile run. Please note, whoever you are, I am not an athletic person. I can run a mile in about 8-9 minutes, tops. And only if I'm pushing it and my gym teacher is running behind me, threatening me with more laps if I don't run faster.

Needless to say, by my last block, Art, I was sore in places I didn't know you could be sore from just running.

Sixth period: Art. I thanked whatever higher power was listening to my troubles that day.

Only for them to receive my angry, silent curses in some form of a twisted thank you.

Some idiot, I don't even know *who*, at that point, had spilled their cup of acrylic-filled water all over my painting that I had *painstakingly* crafted, stroke by stroke.

Another defeated sigh. Just end it already. This day, I

mean.

Thankfully, the class ended soon after that and I escaped to the bus, where I sat in the back to avoid an attack of bad luck from my blind spot. Good call; the ride went without trouble, well, for me anyways. The driver missed some poor guy's house.

Twice. I don't even know.

I finally got home and started to mentally prepare myself for the homework ahead of me. At least I could eat some ice cream while doing it.

I opened the door and took one step in, only to twist out of the way as my little brother came shooting full force out of the doorway. I watched him run down the walkway, across the driveway, and to our neighbor's house, which was also his best friend's house.

He knocked frantically against the door and as soon as it swung open, he darted inside and slammed it shut.

What the...

Shrugging, I step inside. And immediately wanted to follow my brother to safety.

They say that friends are the family that you choose. And I've always thought that if that was true, then isn't family the friends you're stuck with?

Yes. Inside that living room was the most horrid thing I had ever seen. My cousins.

I fell to my knees and bowed my head, done. Finished. No more. My cousins on my mother's side were four years younger than me, one year older than my brother. The twins, John and

Michaela. John always reminded me of a male version of parrot girl. Overly bubbly and trying to be a punk and rebel, but it never really worked.

Michaela was a nerd, not that I have anything against nerds. In fact, most of my friends and my best friend was a nerd. But she was just too smart for her own good. Every time they come over, something electronic of mine gets dissected, destroyed, and put back together. But it's never the same. I swear, that's the only reason why she goes along with these stupid, random, not even full family reunion that her parents put on was that she ran out of things to direct and needed to destroy some of my stuff.

So, after some very awkward small talk, just as I swear my feet have gone numb, I was able to escape to sweet safety. My room. I locked my door and tossed my stuff on to my bed when I see the clock. 8:15pm.

Oh man.

After quickly doing my math and knowing that I got most of the problems wrong and not caring, I looked at the clock again. 8:43pm. I still had history notes to organize and a physics project to start.

No. You can leave the note organizing for fourth period tomorrow. Not like Mr. Binns is going to notice. looked at the science pamphlet that Mrs. Chem gave and sighed before pushing it away.

No. No more. I refuse. Please, I beg of you.

I got changed into pajamas and was about to turn out the lights foursome much needed Zzz, when the door opened,

revealing my father, Michaela, and John.

What now?

And so my day ended with me sleepily threatening my cousins not to touch anything as I grab my blanket, pillow, and iPod, and park my rear on the couch downstairs, trying to ignore the feelings of uneasiness from leaving my cousins in my room unattended.

I let out one final sigh and shoved my pillow over my head, blocking out thoughts about my cousins, thoughts about school, and thoughts about all that stupid homework so I could sleep.

Tomorrow would be better. I would be prepared and get my homework done and actually get parrot girl to do her share of the project.

After all, each day was a new beginning.

Right?



“Awe-Inspiring”
Lacey McCormick

You
A Photo Essay
Gabriela Riegos



This story was written in and inspired by the streets of
San Francisco.



I-80 West: You did it. You made it through the week. You are officially on your way out of your hot hometown and into the breezy city. While basking in the comfortable silence of the car, you take some time to reflect. Silence is the world's best medicine. The sun is high and is full of energy that is being poured out on to you.



Holloway Avenue: You made it. You conquered the bustling pedestrians, the slender cyclists and the scarce parking. Now for something completely different. You can do this. Be social for once in your life. But the thing is you don't really have to, one bus ride away is a familiar face. One bus ride in the city. By yourself? By yourself. You can't do this. No, you decide to challenge yourself and as clouds begin to fill the sky, the sun makes his descent into the ocean waving goodbye with his last blinding gleams.



The Village: You take a stand. You remove yourself from a potentially horrible night and venture alone. Drunken bodies and slurred words aren't what you describe as fun. Though sometimes you think you are alone in that idea, you force yourself to calmly and kindly excuse yourself from this party. You remind them that maybe next time, but since your brother is in town as well, you want to spend some time with him. You are scared. This is taking you to the very edge of your comfort zone. Doubt continues to flood your mind. As you make the trek to the top of campus, the ambiance changes. The sky is completely covered by clouds that block the warmth and light that you know.



The 28 Bus: You wait. You can never really be alone on the streets of San Francisco. There are others waiting at the bus stop and cars racing down the hill. Nervous as you may be, it could be worse. One bus stands between proving you to yourself and that one bus is late. As you see the bus rolling down the hill towards the station, the steady beat of your heart begins to quicken and you start to overheat. The wind tries to surround you, but the doors of the bus quickly spring open and a wave of man-made drop in temperature hits your face. This is the make or break moment. You could still potentially run back and tell them you changed your mind, but no, you enter the bus and that's that. The sun finishes his route into the sea; he leaves the clouds to own the sky.



Fillmore Street: You calm down and you observe. The real wait has begun. You open your mind to the fact that everyone on this bus has his or her own joys, worries, talents and insecurities. You think about how everyone surrounding you is also afraid of something, hates something, and is waiting for something. This leads you to realize that most of the pain you make yourself believe is really just thoughts. You break down your wall and you meet a man who sees with his ears and smells like posh bakery. He tells you his past and thanks you for your kindness before leaving the bus. The air conditioning is keeping you cool, but you're sweating. The sunset isn't really a sunset at all, but an om-bré of blues.



Noriega Street: You panic. As the battery percentage quickly lowers, you begin to lose hope. Stops come and go, as do the people, but nothing you see is familiar and you have no fall back plan. You hope to the Lord Almighty that you can do this and your eyes gaze to the windows. Though the air remains chill, you can't seem to. The windows give a view of the darkening night sky. The blur of people, cars, and buildings make your head ache.



Geary Boulevard: You leave. Two steps down and to the corner. The third leg of the self proclaimed challenge. It's a straight shot now. You begin to cool down and you begin to amp up. With the remaining two percent, you face north and begin to walk. The anxious energy is transferred from your heart to your feet as your steps turn into strides. The black sky isn't being overpowered by the clouds anymore; the white nothings begin to break allowing a new type of light to dominate the sky. The stars came out to play. Glistening and glowing, they shine although people ignore them for the light they get from their own hand.



17th Street: You smile. You are heading in the right direction. You realize how many blocks you are going to walk and you get excited. This is what happiness feels like. Pure, unfiltered emotion fuels your body and you walk. You did it. You question why this was such a challenge, and then you remember that you're not there yet. You can't wait to see your brother and you keep that on your mind instead of the constant eye contact of strangers. Some of the dark clouds are still present though most are slowly moving south, and the air is more forgiving now.



10th Street: You are inspired. You absorb the energy from the air around and you photograph anything and everything. You remember you are in one of the most beautiful cities in the world and you shoot. You want to remember this feeling. You take advantage of it; you haven't felt it for a while now. What is left of the wispy clouds begin to disappear and the moon shows up in full view.



6th Street: You are confident.



4th Street: You won. You beat yourself. You challenged yourself and you are proud. You finally made it to the street sign that states 4th street. The florescent lights that you dread so much as a photograph are now the greatest presence to you. The bright green letters spell out the destination, which you thought you would never make it to. You are glad you are more afraid of others than you are of yourself. You have missed him before, but finally seeing his smiling face has never been so comforting until now. The water has never tasted so sweet and the laughter has never been so real. You walk back down the street you now own and although it has moved on now, the moon is shining so bright for you.