



Slow Down

Amelia Van Driesche, Burlington, VT

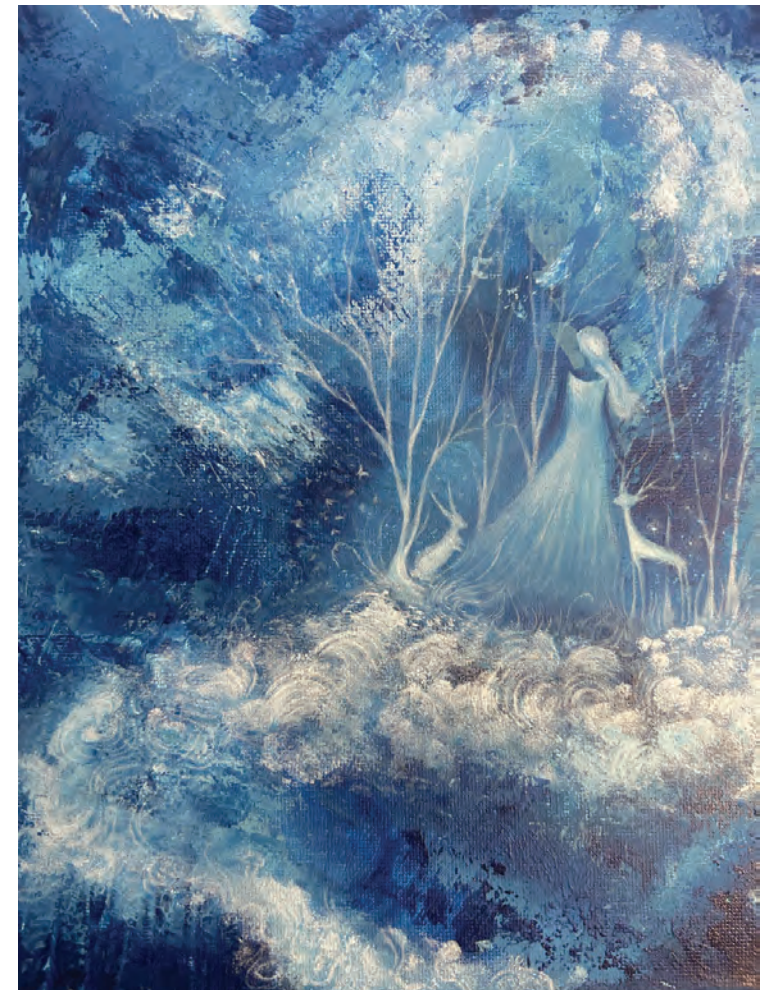
You have walked past thousands of things today
and did not stop to see them.
The quality of the early light.
The sound of rain and an old rusty door hanging loose.
You were moving too quickly to receive them.

Slow your eyes down.
Catch that fraction of life that always goes unnoticed.
Pick up trash on the roadside,
sit still and watch the shadows move across the ground.
Find joy in the little things.
Take a breath,
slow down.

Anthology 17 Young Writers Project

Anthology 17

Young Writers Project





"Bridge," Chloe Deliso, Stow, MA

About Young Writers Project

2026 marks the 20th year of Young Writers Project, a time to celebrate and reflect on the many young writers and artists who have been part of our creative community over the years. It is deeply gratifying to hear from current and past members about the profound impact of Young Writers Project (YWP) on their lives as artists and people.

Teenagers find a home on our website, *youngwritersproject.org*, where they post their work, connect with each other, and get published. Most members of our community are from Vermont and other New England states, but we welcome youth from across the U.S. and other countries. Our generous supporters, listed on pages 62 and 63, help us provide all programming free of charge.

Anthology 17 showcases the range of writing and visual art submitted to YWP from August 2025 until August 2026. The opinion section, starting on page 47, includes selections from The Tomorrow Project, our civic engagement initiative exploring human rights, democracy, the environment, AI, and other compelling issues of our time.

The writers and artists published in this book are filled with wisdom, imagination, and the courage to share what they're thinking, observing, and discovering. They are the heart and hope that has carried YWP forward since 2006.

—The YWP Editorial Team



"Wishing," Isla Segal, Woodstock, VT

WRITERS and VISUAL ARTISTS

Aiden Baker	48, 52	Henry Menke.....	42, 51
Abigail Balon.....	47	Sela Morgenstein Fuerst.....	7, 49
Madeline Borowitz	23	Wyatt Moyer.....	36
Sophia Brooks.....	35, 58	Turiya Narendra.....	35
Campbell Clarke.....	17	Teddy Owens	11
Esther Crandall.....	43	Cole Pally.....	19, 40
Lila Crowley	46	Stella Peterson	39
Dylan Delano.....	50	Lydia Plant	45
Chloe Deliso	2, 57	Christopher Porte	34
Rigney Deliso.....	29	Sana Ramkumar	28, 38
Abigail Doubleday.....	33	Delfina Rejmankova.....	58
Isabella Doubleday.....	30	Chevy Rembert.....	27, 29
Cora Dunne	34	Isla Segal	4, 8, 14, 21, 37, 51
Ghulam Fizza.....	56	Christian Sent	17, 44
Ursa Goldenrose.....	55, 61	Oliver Shanholtzer	60
Magnus Grace	15, 22	Poppy Shattuck.....	24
Phoebe Gresham.....	12, 13, 45	Zehwah Sheikh	54
James Haugh.....	21	Galya Siegel-Bromberg.....	16, 54
Sophie Heidemann	14	Maelyn Slavik	28
Will Helms	6, 24	Alden Smith.....	28
Shira Hertzberg	Front cover, 20	Shalev Smokler.....	52
Gemma Hoag	10, 53	Carly Stone	44
Eli Hoopengardner.....	46, 49	Isla Stowell.....	11, 30
Jordan Kramer	8	Nina Stroup	9, 18
Marshall Lascelles	6	Evvi Tower-Pierce	41, 50
Anna Li.....	59	Abigail Ulager.....	33
Astrid Longstreth	12	Amelia Van Driesche	Back cover, 42
Eva Lord	32	Elianna Venables Vogel.....	19
Audrey Lozano.....	31, 32	Gretchen Wertlieb	16
Sienna Mardy.....	58	Adeline White.....	48
Georgia Marshall.....	59	Miles Witters	23



"Digital Art For a Theoretical Album Cover,"
Marshall Lascelles, Shelburne, VT

Fall In

Will Helms, Hardwick, VT

Past the burning day,
at bedtime when I shrug off sleep,
when I've got school the next morning,
and I shouldn't be here,

I sit down and press play,
and the noise starts, and the colors fly up around me,
and cities erect and destroy themselves as the songs start and end.

I fall in.
I fall in deep.

Teaching Poetry

Sela Morgenstein Fuerst, South Burlington, VT

And yeah, the world is horrible and people are awful
and we are all going to die,
but I am teaching a boy in my class
to write poetry,
and his face is soft while he bends
and writes, thoughtful even, and he tells me
he's never done anything like this before
and he isn't sure how to start.

And yeah,
I know middle school boys, and most of them would die
before sitting with me and putting pencil
to paper to mind,
but I tell him to start with his claim

like an essay,

only hidden
in layers of flowery language he doesn't yet see how to write.
Like a metaphor? he asks, and I laugh,
because yes,
but also poetry is so infinitely complicated and contradictory
that my answer could also be no,
that every poem you read is actually the barest form of truth
that we know,
that we are all simply stars,
and cells, and roaring voids of nothingness far older than our
minds,
and that you could live a thousand lives
and yet keep coming back to the same line.
But I can't tell him this. I don't know why. It feels
at once too simple and too otherworldly
to give to him now,
when the only thing he's got down is *the bells begin to chime*.
So, we'll start there.
And maybe, with time.

Delicious

Isla Segal, Woodstock, VT

Delicious is the way summer tastes, salt water, lake water, strawberry stains. It's bathing suits soaking through shorts, and ice cream soaking through cones. Ice cream we both forgot to eat because it was so delicious, because the moment was so sweet.

I was just sitting there, watching the sunset but really watching you. Your hair down, waving with the wind, and light bouncing off it, making it golden. You're so golden. You were talking, and your mouth was moving fast like it used to, before you thought so much. God, I sound like your mother's birthday cards. I was hearing your words, really the sound of them, like no one was listening, or you didn't care.

It was so delicious. So pretty, so golden. I forgot to eat my chocolate ice cream, and anyway, after you eat the sprinkles, it really doesn't taste as good, so it's fine, don't feel bad. It was all so sweet.

The sun set and the moon rose and the stars started whispering.

It was so delicious, our wet shorts, and a blanket we shared when it got cold, and the fresh red juice that I could taste on my tongue from hours before. And there was an unfinished ice cream cone, and a conversation we finally had.

Smile

Jordan Kramer, Hinesburg, VT

The last thing that brought a smile to my lips was a school hallway interaction. A girl who I'd never seen before passed me and gave me the biggest smile. It quite literally felt like sunlight seeping to my core. Even when she had passed by, there was still a trace of a smile on my face. And that reminded me of something.

When I was little, I used to play a game with my sister when we would take our bicycles around Burlington. The game went like this: Each person who would smile back at us on the bike path was worth one point, and we would compete to get the most points. We would smile hugely until our face muscles felt tight. I remember how much my own smile and my sister's would tint my day with joy. What a beautiful time.



"Queens," Nina Stroup, Parkville, MD

What Our World Could Be

Nina Stroup, Parkville, MD

In a chaotic world
of eight billion people,
each hidden away
in their own
separate lives,
be remembered for
being the person
who brings others joy,
who makes people smile,
who can brighten someone's
day in the blink
of an eye.
Be remembered
for being *a great person*.

Plovers of Popham

Gemma Hoag, West Bath, ME

The sand dunes of Popham were once bustling with Piping Plovers. Ropes reserved large sections of sand for the birds as they settled down in Maine for the springtime. Signs informed beachgoers of their endangerment and asked to give them room and respect, a simple ask as there was plenty more beach for the people to enjoy. That was before the storm.

The erosion was gradual after that, but the dunes were gone. Completely. A sharp drop-off onto a slim line of sand is all that remains of the beach. I wonder what those Plovers thought, as they returned the spring after the storm to nestle down into the soft, buttery sand, creating a small hole and laying their eggs, to watch the adorable and fluffy chicks emerge from them and view the glorious beach for the first time. What did they think when they saw the ravaged mess, once so smooth and soft, where many of them were hatched themselves?

Last summer, after the storm the previous winter, I encountered one of these little birds. There's an island at Popham, and you can cross over to it at low tide when the water pulls back and leaves a smooth trail. After the storm, however, you now have to cross a precarious river that divides the little beach and the island area.

I had just crossed and was standing on the smooth sand before the island when I heard the chirping. It was loud, persistent, and needy. I found the source — a small, white and gray fella with bright orange legs that he waddled on — and couldn't take my eyes away from him. I called him Angus.

Angus was a baby, and I imagined his chirps could've been interpreted as, *Mama! Dada! Food! Food!* However, he wasn't much smaller than his parents who flew over to him every now and again to temporarily stop his chirping with a worm or some kind of yucky beach bug. He slowly trailed behind them from the sand, demanding more, and I later learned that Plover parents lead their babies to food. It was hilarious and sad.

I thought about how Angus would probably be on his own soon, considering his size. I wondered where the family stayed when the tides got high, since the dunes were gone. I supposed they could sit on the island, but they looked as if they'd be swept away with the powerful wind, especially funny little Angus. Where would he go when he was all on his own? Who would protect him from seagulls and lead him to his food?

I don't know what happened to Angus, but I really hope he's alive and well somewhere. I haven't seen a Plover at Popham in a while, which might be for the best. The beach almost completely disappears at high tide, and the erosion has only worsened. This beautiful beach has been mutilated and almost ruined for humans and animals alike.

Still, it is beautiful. Popham is beautiful, Angus and his patient, doting parents are beautiful, the sea is beautiful, Earth is beautiful.

What a lovely thing it would be, to open your infant eyes on the beach like a Plover, to have the first thing you ever see be a blue wave, the first thing you hear a rushing tide, as you watch soundly from the dunes.

The Cosmic Expanse

Teddy Owens, Essex, VT

I have always been fascinated by space and all it encompasses. I don't know exactly why, maybe because of the unknown and wanting to understand it, thus making it known. Or maybe because whenever I look up at the starry night sky, I wonder what might be out there.

Whatever the reason, I love space. I wonder what other planets outside our solar system might look like. I think about how we are but one small planet among millions, billions, in our galaxy, and our galaxy is but one among millions and quite possibly millions more than that.

I think about all of this, how small we are in comparison to everything else. But that doesn't mean we don't matter. In fact, that means we matter more than we think. The fact that we are even here is a miracle in and of itself. And that we are able to understand that idea is another miracle on top of that.

We live in a cosmic expanse that is ever growing out of our reach. And that's okay. Here on Earth, there are thousands of beautiful things to experience, right here on this pale blue dot.



"Sea Goddess," Isla Stowell, Grand Isle, VT

Hope

Astrid Longstreth, West Bolton, VT

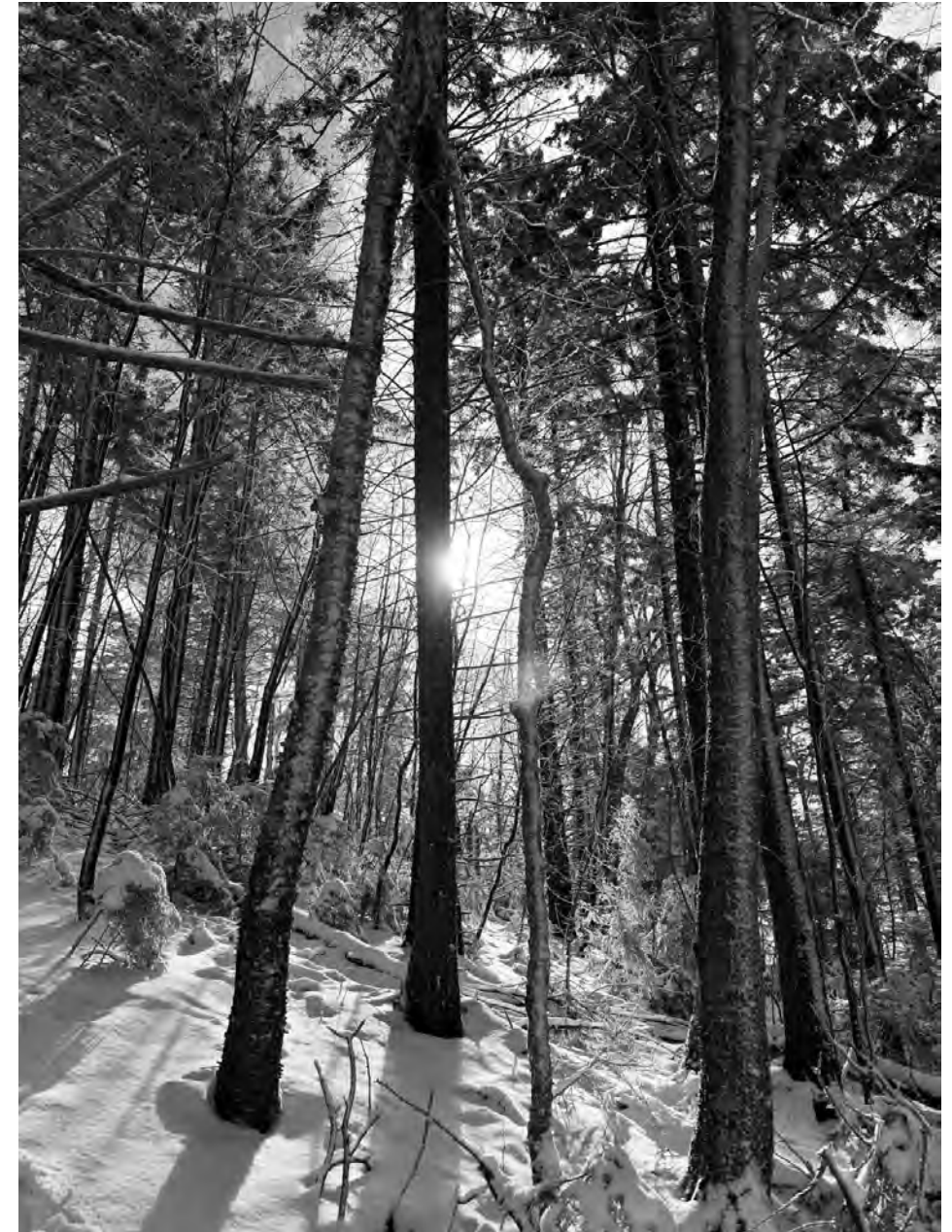
We have pushed it to the edges,
the boundaries of itself.
Yet, the trees do not flee.
They stand strong,
where they have for millennia,
even as skyscrapers take their place,
right next door.
They keep going, growing.
And so do we.
Some may call it foolishness to stand
forevermore
even as danger creeps towards them,
is upon them.
Others may call it bravery.
I say,
It is hope.
And it is unwillingness
to sacrifice the things we love.

In The Face of Change

Phoebe Gresham, Huntington, VT

And when the sun lingers on the snow
and the moon instates itself over the dark
horizon,
when the trees reach, grasping,
when the wind curls in on itself, pleading,
when a raging stream wears at stiff
pavement,
the world asks: "Who am I?"

And it pleads, though the world has never
pleaded before.
It lingers, as thunder rolls and stone walls
crumble,
just to hear its own voice echoed back;
for the world has only known its own
existence,
and there is no answer to the question
but the singularity of everything.
But it raises its voice anyway,
because there is no other thing to do,
because even the world is not inevitable.



"Cold & Bright," Phoebe Gresham, Huntington, VT

What Once Was

Sophie Heidemann, Southold, NY

We lie tired,
bundled up in puffers and scarves,
on the pleather seats of the bus that feels
like home.

You rummage through your red lunchbox,
unpacking each item carefully,
announcing to everyone what's inside,
making us laugh,
only to throw it away.

You open the window,
allowing the cold to rush in,
chilling our faces and turning our cheeks
frosty pink.

We laugh as each baby carrot
and quarter of a sandwich
tumbles to the rushing road below.

We toss Starburst wrappers behind the
last seat,

watching them pile up
and get neglected by the janitor.

Sweet elementary adrenaline
feels like real rebellion.

The bus becomes a haven,
a relic of childhood,
a place of fun in the dark of dawn
and in the golden light of an autumn
afternoon.

In the dead of dusk
today I yearn,
close my eyes and just pretend
that I once more
will rest my head on my backpack
and borrow your headphones,
listening to music that only you like.
But it's okay.

Because on the bus,
nothing is wrong with the world.

Rumbling away from a childhood dream
went Bus 34.



"The Genny," Isla Segal, Woodstock, VT

Inconsistently Consistent

Magnus Grace, Burlington, VT

He never remembers his homework,
lying half-finished in the bottom of his
backpack.

Or the sheet music tucked deep into
his dark instrument case, desperately in
need of practicing for a rather important
concert.

He always shows up 20 minutes early or
10 minutes late, seldom arriving exactly at
the right time.

And yet, without fail, he always starts a
race with two aglets tucked under his
bright green shoelaces on one foot, while
only a single end is protected on the other
foot.

He leaves important assignments
untouched until the night they are due,
struggling to get them done in that final
hour, and sometimes they don't.

Occasionally he lies awake in bed,
feeling lost and hopeless, waiting for his
problems to fix themselves.

Of course, they won't.

As his mind drifts off in the windowless
building they call a school, he wonders
what his purpose in life could be, hoping
it will eventually reveal itself to him.
However, maybe it shouldn't.

So he finds things to anchor himself.

Little things, that remain consistent in
defiance of the storm of inconsistencies
that our first two decades herald.

Little things like the way silvery mist
rolls across the lake on a dewy morning,
creeping over the calm ripples like a
feather twirling softly in a light breeze.

Or how the sun rises each day without
fail, over the top of the horizon, be it
snow-capped mountains higher up than
a tree dare grow, or the vast ocean, with
white crests upon the brow of each wave,
the light bathing the land in morning's
first golden light.

These quiet beauties of nature become
subtle reminders that not everything
needs to be mapped out and catalogued,
reminders that above all else: Life goes
on.

So maybe, as he takes in each wonder
during a long run by himself, the
consistent inconsistencies can be made
up to be resolved.

Maybe that homework can be finished,
the music practiced, the bell ringing
as he walks through the door, feeling
certain that whatever life has in store for
him, good or bad, he will love it all the
same.

Ode to the Simply Whimsical and the Unnecessarily Dramatic

Gretchen Wertlieb, South Burlington, VT

Ode to those that make life into gold
that bring us some sparkle as we grow
old.

Ode to the places, friends, and small
things
to which credit's unequal to the joy that
they bring.

Uproariously laughing in a too-quiet
room
or dancing a tango with the red kitchen
broom.

The rush of arriving in the nick of time
to catch what is gone in the blink of an
eye.

Ode to the fails, the crashes, the burns,
and ode to whomever they might be
concerned.

Ode to friends, old and new, who you'll
never let go.

Ode to kindness to all, even ones you
don't know.

Ode to novels and stories and
handwritten verses,
long, run-on titles and believing in curses.
Ode to the feelings of heartache and loss.
Ode to humanity with all of its faults.

Cheers! to the drama, the flair, the
hurrahs,
the fainting couches, glitter, and
decorative bras,
to all the outrageous, exciting, and new,
and to far too much confidence in
everything you do.



"Let's Go Fly a Kite,"
Galya Siegel-Bromberg, Thetford, VT



"Midday Respite," Christian Sent, Tiburon, CA

Those Who Love Life

Campbell Clarke, Colchester, VT

Life is meant to be lived fully and
completely.

You need to commit. Fully.

You aren't meant to dip one toe in from
the edge.

You're meant to dive in with no
hesitation,
no "what ifs."

The people who do that are the ones
who make every day thrilling,
who care so much with their whole heart
about life and those who live it

that they are willing to risk their whole
heart

to make yours a little lighter.

These are the people you can count on
to send you a hug
wrapped up in little glitters of their love
any time you need it.

You might not even notice when they lift
the weight,
but the next time you turn inwards to
confront it,
it will be missing.

These are the people who together
find a way to share their immense love for
the world
with everyone.



"Ferris Wheel," Nina Stroup, Parkville, MD



"Racing the Waves," Elianna Venables Vogel, Ferrisburgh, VT



"Brotherly Friendship," Cole Pally, New York, NY

The Painting

James Haugh, Lake Oswego, OR

My idea came to me, carried with the voice of the wind. I was young. It was many years ago. It was just an image at first. A painting of rough, rushed strokes. A thousand ideas colliding on canvas. A canvas I carried with me, an image I painted over. Constantly. It changed every single day. I would adjust a color. I would add a new stroke. I would mix hues. As I grew, it grew with me. From the dull brown of autumn leaves to the saturated smile of summer honeydew. I took this painting with me. Tucked it away in the calluses of my mind. On my journey, I found other paintings. I stole from them small snippets, collaging them into my own. Eventually, the painting resembled nothing of its infant form; even its skeleton differed. It no longer lay flat but was mountainous with all the layers of pigment I had placed across its surface. That original painting is still with me. I hung it on the wall of my room. I admire it sometimes. I notice every adjustment, every revision. Then I pull out the newest version from between my heart and my soul. I take a paintbrush, and I add another new stroke.



"Vase Study," Shira Hertzberg, West Haven, VT



"Board and Batten," Isla Segal, Woodstock, VT



"Frozen Cliff," Magnus Grace, Burlington, VT

You, As the Snow Was Melting

Madeline Borowitz, Etna, NH

The snow was melting
when you talked to me,
when they talked to you,
when we stood with them
and their thinning perfume,
their black backpacks,
their straightened hair,
their plans of the ride home.
We stood, and were color
among the gray.



"Frozen Lighthouse," Miles Witters, Richmond, VT



"Divided," Poppy Shattuck, Guildhall, VT

River

Will Helms, Hardwick, VT

Rivers shine when nobody is looking at them. My friend and I knew that once, when we were small. We were too young to be sneaking out of our houses, younger than most are when they begin sneaking out — maybe 8 or 9 at the oldest. She'd appear in my yard and shine her flashlight through my window so that I'd know she was there, and then, I'd tiptoe down the stairs and out the front door. The night air changed my body. The night was a different world then.

We'd walk down to the river. It was a thin, dirty, brown thing, maybe two feet across in the widest places. It was not deep at all. Even as little child people, it only ran up to our ankles.

The thin, dirty, brown river ran through a thin, dirty, brown forest, whose floor was constantly covered with greasy, trampled leaves despite all the trees being somehow naked all year long. A string of telephone poles with lights on the top made any stars totally invisible, so that the moon was a lonely pebble in a dull, bright sky. But it was not like that. It was not really like that at all.

When you are a child, the cosmos does not quite understand what to make of you. It sees you, and it understands that you are there, but it cannot control you like it can control adults. When you are a child, you can hide in places the cosmos cannot find you. And my friend and I had found one such place.

There was a large, abandoned building, just a giant, concrete chunk, really, with a hole in it, on the other side of the river from where we lived. The hole is the important part there. We'd hop over the water and stifle our giggles, and when we came to the hole, my friend would get onto my shoulders and hoist herself up into the hole. Once secured in the hole, she would lean down and hoist me up. Then we would both flatten ourselves against the concrete and shut our eyes very tight.

When our eyes had been shut so tightly that our temples hurt and we could see all those colorful squiggles that you see when you close your eyes too tight, my friend would say, "Are you ready?" And I would say, "I am ready."

And we would both count down from three, and when we got to zero, we'd catch the cosmos by surprise and open our eyes very fast, and for a fraction of a fraction of a moment, we saw the way the river truly was.

It was wide and rushing and dangerous. It was made out of light, and it shot itself upward into the star-blanketed sky and bounced itself off the lush, mint green trees. The forest was vast and noisy, and all the little animals danced and played because they did not know we were watching. We were blissful nothing — part of everything.

Then the cosmos caught onto our trick, and everything became thin and dirty and brown again. We could never get the river to show itself twice. After we saw the magic once, we went home. But as we went, we talked. I do not remember what we talked about. Things of magic, I suppose. Things that children talk about. Things that fall into cracks and crevasses when you become 13 or so.

We did this most nights until we were 11 and 12. My parents became concerned about my difficulty getting up in time for school and sent me to a therapist, but they could never figure out what was wrong. I don't remember purposefully hiding that I'd been sneaking out. I don't know what my story was. It was a long time ago.

I do remember that it became harder for me to see my friend's flashlight when she would shine it in my window. She actually stopped coming for a while because I wouldn't wake up. Still, every now and then, I would slip down the stairs and vanish into the childish night world again. We'd walk down the street under cover of dark, giggling like we always did. I remember noticing that I was taller than her. I didn't like that.

We talked about different things than we did before. They must have been less magical than before, because I remember them better. We talked about which boys she liked, what had happened at school that day, and why it was important. I only remember one specific conversation.

(continued)

"I saw you get pushed down in P.E.," she said. I was petrified that she had seen it. I didn't think anybody had.

"What?"

"Johnny Hill did it."

"What about it?"

"Why didn't you push him back?"

"I don't know," I said. I did know: It was because he would have pushed me back way harder, and I would have cried.

That is where the memory of the conversation dissolves. I remember the rest of the night: I remember the night being very, very ugly, and I remember the river being shallower and dirtier than it had ever been until we climbed into the hole in the rock (by this point, my friend had to struggle greatly to pull me up) and squeezing our eyes shut, and tricking the cosmos into showing us the true light of the river again.

It was just as beautiful as it always was. Light shot everywhere, and the animals called and chased each other, and we were alone in the world. Nothing was faded yet.

A week after her 13th birthday and two weeks after mine, my friend told me that she was moving to Nevada. Nevada was very far away. I was sure I would never see her again. I'm not sure that I ever have seen her again. We tried to sneak out to the river one more time before she left. I was too heavy for her to lift into the hole.



"Edge of Eternity," Chevy Rembert, Alburgh, VT

The Direction in Which Hope Floats

Maelyn Slavik, Burlington, VT

To me, God is the
direction in which our hearts
forever reach, where
the wildflowers planted
in our veins look to in
order to see the sun, where
the trail of hope
leads to; we
are the undeniable truth that
beauty exists because we
forever seek the reason for
which there is life, the
pinnacle of perfection that
isn't quite perfect, and
to me, religion is the
universal search
for love; we
all wish to be here
for a reason, and
we want to grow the wildflowers
in our hearts, and
we eternally seek the bond
unbreakable by the stars: the
comfort of knowing why
you are here and
what you are meant to do.
To me, God is the
love that binds us to hope and
to one another.



"Into the Waves," Alden Smith, Norwich, VT

Bird of Blue

Sana Ramkumar, Los Gatos, CA

Little bird of blue outside my window,
keep singing.
Every morning through the glass,
a song echoes into my sleep.
Don't stop.
All I need is that sweet, melodious tune
that drips like honey into my fragile heart.
To wake up at dawn,
a tiny tune, rays of pink sun, and a quiet
earth —
this is all I need in this loud, loud life.
A tiny creature
is capable of such euphoria.
So, how are we not?
We make everything
so large, so unnecessary, so unneeded.
At what point do we even desire such
meaning?
Keep going.
Even the birds know joy and sorrow
before we do.
Their short lives
are made of meaning and duty.
So, little bird of blue,
take rest on the branches.
Let your feathers
be ruffled by the breeze.
And sing till the very end.



"Mid-July," Rigney Deliso, Stow, MA

To Give Love

Chevy Rembert, Alburgh, VT

Never regret the love that you've given,
even when it hurt.
It will always make its way back to you,
maybe in another person,
another time,
another circumstance.
But as long as you love, it will always
come back to you.

Glistening Like a Water Droplet

Isla Stowell, Grand Isle, VT

It was like innocence, how we used to watch movies when it was thundering until the power went out, got grass stains on our kneecaps, and rolled down hills to pass the time, splashed in that one puddle that always formed in our driveway since it was the deepest, and hoped the water would stay till winter so it could freeze over. Even through bleary eyes and food-covered smiles, life seemed bigger, longer, like time went on and on and there was only ever the present. Now we can only see through calendars and due dates, waking up to alarms that warn us that our precious time is fleeting, as if we only had so much we could spare. Where did all that whimsy go? That peacefulness, only the feeling of the sun and the wind and the velvety flowers in our palms. When did everything suddenly have meaning? Why should it? Can a puddle not just be a puddle, a smile just a smile? Can we not just dance and sing and laugh and live every day without fear of tomorrow? When we are grown and free, I hope to see you in the rain, glistening like a water droplet, the only tears in your eyes ones of happiness, and together, we'll jump in puddles and wear filthy clothes and smile because this is life, the only one we get, and it will be ours.

Daffodil (A Pantoum)

Isabella C. Doubleday, Hanover, NH

I used to look at the world with glasses,
a clear cover obscuring all that hate and
pain. I used to be cheerful before I took
off my shades to look at the darkness
behind the golden sun.

A clear cover obscuring all that hate and
pain grew like roots down deep into the
soils of my veins, to look at the darkness
behind the golden sun without getting
blinded by your reflection: impossible.

Grew like roots down deep into the soils
of my veins, the belief that I was a raven,
surrounded by black, without getting
blinded by your reflection: impossible to
do when surrounded by glittering, lying
stars.

The belief that I was a raven, surrounded
by black, studded my life — as a perennial
spring daughter, impossible to do when
surrounded by glittering, lying stars; all
the galaxy does is deceive you.

Studded my life — as a perennial spring
daughter, reciting William Wordsworth
to survive the strife. All the galaxy does is
deceive you: they pretend they are family,
but I learnt it was a ruse.

I used to look at the world with
glasses; now I see it clear like sunny
foliage waiting to die from sorrow and
starvation as I finally rise up, a flower in
the weeds.



"Time Travel," Audrey Lozano, Long Beach, CA

The Meaning of Life

Eva Lord, Putney, VT

So, you want to talk about the meaning of life?

There are many people telling you what your life should mean. More importantly what your time should be, because what is life except time and consciousness?

Some people say your time is money. Some say it is time to be as happy as you can, or maybe as successful as you can. I think that the desire for meaning is a byproduct of consciousness.

I think that the lines the frost makes on my window in the morning are magnificent, and we only have so many days to observe them.

17

Audrey Lozano, Long Beach, CA

The breeze smells of salt and I'm crying over someone I don't know. The birds have quieted but my mind won't. Unlike them, the nest that is my mind has some sticks out of place. I'd like to fix them, but I fear adjusting one will cause it all to collapse.

The fan drones on all day while I sit and listen to a podcast telling stories of lives endlessly intriguing. Through the window I hear someone plucking a chord and the neighbor's tree has bloomed across the alley and I should be doing *something*. Suddenly it is 6 p.m., and there is no longer time for something, and I've let another day slip by.

I told myself I would research some colleges in depth before the weekend but as the deadline creeps closer I know I will have broken another promise to myself. But nothing feels real right now, yet it's so painfully vivid the colors hurt my eyes. Can't I go back to that time when I was 7 and felt so tall being the same height as the leather armchair?

You Are Not a Number

Abigail Ulager, Hinesburg, VT

Just so you know,
you are not a number,
you are not a digit out of 10
or a rating,
you are not a GPA
and you are not what you got on the SAT,
you are not a 1500-meter time
or a percentile
or a rank.

You
are not
a number.

You cannot be defined by a total on a scale.
Your worth cannot be measured in inches,
and a symbol on a paper does not decide
your importance
because
you are so much more than a number.

You are the light that shines behind your eyes.
You are a source of beauty and love.
You are a heart that beats
and lungs that breathe.
And I am positive you are someone
who really matters.

So, please,
let neither grades nor seconds
nor inches nor pounds
nor anything else
take away from your infinite value.

Different at Night

Abigail Doubleday, Hanover, NH

Things sound different at midnight.
The dark is so much lighter,
the noises so much louder.
Every creak causes a jump.
Every movement causes a flinch.
Opening and closing doors is like
dropping a heavy book in a library.

Things feel so much different at 1 in the morning,
sitting alone in the dark,
a slight detachment from daytime life.
The moon is in the dark sky,
the stars sparkling,
no longer hidden by the sun's brightness.

Things work differently at 2 a.m.
A feeling of tiredness is behind the eyes.
The body's bones ache, energy depleted.
The mind is foggy, thoughts running wild,
making perfect sense and none at all,
a dreamlike state that tiredness confirms
isn't real.

Things are different at 3 in the morning.
Whispers shout,
lights burn bright as the sun,
pitch black is colorful.
The air holds a mystical quality,
but if you take a second
to stop, and look, and listen,
everything is exactly the same.

In the Desert

Cora Dunne, Hartland, VT

The new year comes in,
with bursts of light across the city scape,
like a flock of birds rising
from the ashes of Phoenix's horizon.

We, and the cacti, watch the fireworks
and cheer,
and it begins to rain.

We climb down the mountain and I
comment
on the new year's dreary, drenched
arrival,
but she says that in the desert,
rain is a good sign.

And when I get home where the roads
are slick
and the news pours in,
I pretend I'm in the desert
where gray skies mean something bright
and green is on its way.

It's just pretend, though;
it's freezing cold outside.

An Autumn After You

Christopher Porte, Maina, Guam

You'd lived through your autumn
before I met you.

Your feet rustling faded leaves,
your hand gracing ancient barks,
your eyes learning the name of clouds I
never got to learn.

You left before my own season changed;
you'd
entered your winter just as I met you.

And there you stand, with
your skin glistening under the crest of
hail-fallen skies,
your hair, hoar with ice, as silky as a
spider's web;
and you, oh my goodness, you —

Your glow under the aurora lights; you,
melting the snow, moving
towards the spring.

And still, still, I am
far behind you.

I began in autumn
after I met you.

Colored in orange hues, I
saw the leaves fall behind me, falling in
my shadow; I
breathed in, the air dampening my lungs;
I watched you, I watched your dimmed
light, distant.

And as I began,
I missed a you I never knew.

The Man with the Wide-Brimmed Hat

Turiya Narendra, Los Gatos, CA

Every summer, up until I was 11, I used
to walk to this little bodega a few blocks
down. I never bought anything; I had to
be back home for lunch, anyway.

There was this nice man. He was
homeless, I think. He'd never even told
me his name, but every so often, I gave
him a few dollars. The man just smiled
and sang me a song in return.

Once, after I gently laid a five-dollar bill
in his wide-brimmed hat, he spoke to me.

"Thanks, kid," he rasped. "Y'know, I can
see the hunger in your eyes. You want to
be something great."

He paused for a moment. "When you're
older, people are gonna tell you to be a
fire. Feed yourself on your hunger and
burn bright 'n' quick. Do yourself one
better. Be the sun."

He rubbed his temple. "Y'know what I
mean, right, kid?"

I didn't. "Yes, Mister," I replied.

He shot me a tired smile and returned to
his cup of coffee. I haven't seen him since.



"An Unspoken Story," Sophia Brooks, Westford, VT

Earl: A Truck's Lament

Wyatt Moyer, Starksboro, VT

They called me Earl. Not “the truck,” not “the old Tacoma,” but Earl. That name was chosen because it was a fitting name for an old, retired man. And it was the name of the ghost that haunted the Lincoln General Store. A good name, if a bit stereotypical.

I rolled off the line in 2011. Black paint shining, 4.0-liter V6 rumbling like fresh thunder. I had an owner for a few years, who used me lightly, and then, in 2015, I was sold to Glynn. From the first time Glynn shut my door, hauled a bedload of wood, and pulled a trailer, I knew the kind of life I was in for.

Work? Oh, we worked. We hauled wood. We towed trailers. We went cross country — twice — with a camper. We pulled logs; we were the counterweight on a tree Glynn was felling. That line attached to my front bumper would pull the tree right over onto my cab.

Glynn never cleaned me. Not properly. He said the mud was character, the scratches were evidence of a job well done, and the rust was earned. Ten years of rust. Winters in salt, summers in dirt and rain. He'd kick my tires like he was checking a horse's teeth. My frame and rocker panels groaned more than he did — and that's saying something, given that Glynn is a slightly overweight retiree. “Was a furniture man, till my chest fell in my drawers,” he'd quip.

And then came Wyatt.

Wyatt learned how to drive in me, and he was different. The kid had respect. When Glynn handed him my keys, it was like being adopted by someone who reads to their dog. Wyatt's father performed over \$2,000 in maintenance on me, got me in tip-top shape, even if my end was already in sight.

He called me Earl, too. But softer, not as harsh this time. He didn't treat me like a beast of burden — he drove me like he had somewhere to be, but that destination wouldn't disappear if he was late. Put 15,000 miles on me in one year. Took me for long, late-night drives just to clear his head. Would sit in my cab and ponder life's deepest theological questions. Once sat in my cab and cried for three hours. I didn't ask why. Trucks don't pry. I just let him sit.

But I was tired. More than tired — I was rotted through. I was nearing 275,000 miles. My rocker panels and cab corners were practically gone. Inspection time came, with bad news: “Too far gone. ”The words hit harder than a tailgate on a downhill slope.



“Stockpile,” Isla Segal, Woodstock, VT

I saw Wyatt's behavior shift after his father rendered the verdict. His hand hesitated on the ignition, he took every drive slower, more deliberate. Like he was saying goodbye, without saying it. Once, he let me sit for three days. I roared to life, coughing and spitting smoke that had built up. I was a daily driver, not a sitter. Wyatt wanted desperately for me not to sit. I didn't want to sit.

Glynn sold him a newer model, Kermit, a smug little 2012 in forest green without a ding to his name. Kermit still had leaf springs. Still had his self-esteem. I don't blame the guy; he was born with a clean frame and a southern accent. But he doesn't know the work like I do. He hasn't dragged cords of firewood through mud so thick it'll eat your tires. He hasn't hauled two tons of wood pellets in his bed. Kermit is a good truck, but I was Wyatt's first.

I don't know where I'll go next. Maybe a scrapyard. Maybe to some teenager who'll fix me up long enough to get me to 300,000 miles. Either way, I got no regrets in life.

I was Earl. I did my job. I got Wyatt where he needed to go, even when I had no business still running. That's enough for any old truck.



"A Pink Moon," Sana Ramkumar, Los Gatos, CA

I Spent \$30 on Ramen That Gave Me Food Poisoning

Stella Peterson, Eureka, MT

The way that people talk and write about college made me think I knew what I was in for. But it's a Wednesday night in April, and I've finished all my homework for the day, so I'm in a restaurant alone. The air smells like the chlorine they probably use to wipe and clean their tables and a fishy crispness I know to be imitation crab. (I'm not an amateur. Unless they're all huddled around an oven in the back, I'm the only Asian person here. None of this is authentic.)

Missoula likes its LED lighting. And indie trumpets. And vegan leather. I miss Eureka, I guess, with its creeks and sticks and the tall, blue mountains that fling tinkling bursts of hot, sweet summer wind into the valley. But I mostly miss my family and being able to drive a car. Walks through the city, though, are the next best thing.

There's a guy at the bar who looks like Charles Wright. Speaking of people who wrote about college. "College Days," one of my favorite poems, has given me absolutely no faith.

Another guy has one of his knees bent over the other at a weird angle. I'm leaving lip gloss residue on the straw, and I can taste it if I focus, touch the plastic with my tongue and let it sit there, chemical bitterness a mixed-up chaser for Coke.

The two people next to me are on their first date, I think. The man — if you could call him that, his beard almost as scraggly as his faded, fraying jeans — is talking incessantly about himself, and the woman giggles, compensating to carry her weight. I can't, in good conscience, say that she's enjoying herself, but maybe she is. Maybe I'm the one with too much to think about, not enough to say.

I shouldn't have gone out tonight. There are 22 days left in April, and I only have about \$60 left of my \$270. But I have the money. And what can you do?

I swipe my card.

Sweetness That Melts

Cole Pally, New York, NY

There's a quiet beauty
in the things you know won't last,
moments already fading
even while you're inside them.

Like a perfect cheeseburger
and a good New York Knicks game on the
TV,
sitting beside your dad on the couch,
both of you pretending the season might
finally mean something,
laughing at the same missed shots
and talking during commercials
about everything and nothing.

Or a melting ice cream cone
on a burning summer afternoon,
sticky sweetness running down your
hands
while you stand beside your nana
who wipes your fingers with a napkin
and tells you to slow down
even though the sun is already winning.

Or the wild splash of cannonballs
into a hotel pool on vacation,
your cousins shouting,
water flying everywhere,

the future still wide open then,
before time and distance
quietly turned all of you
into strangers.

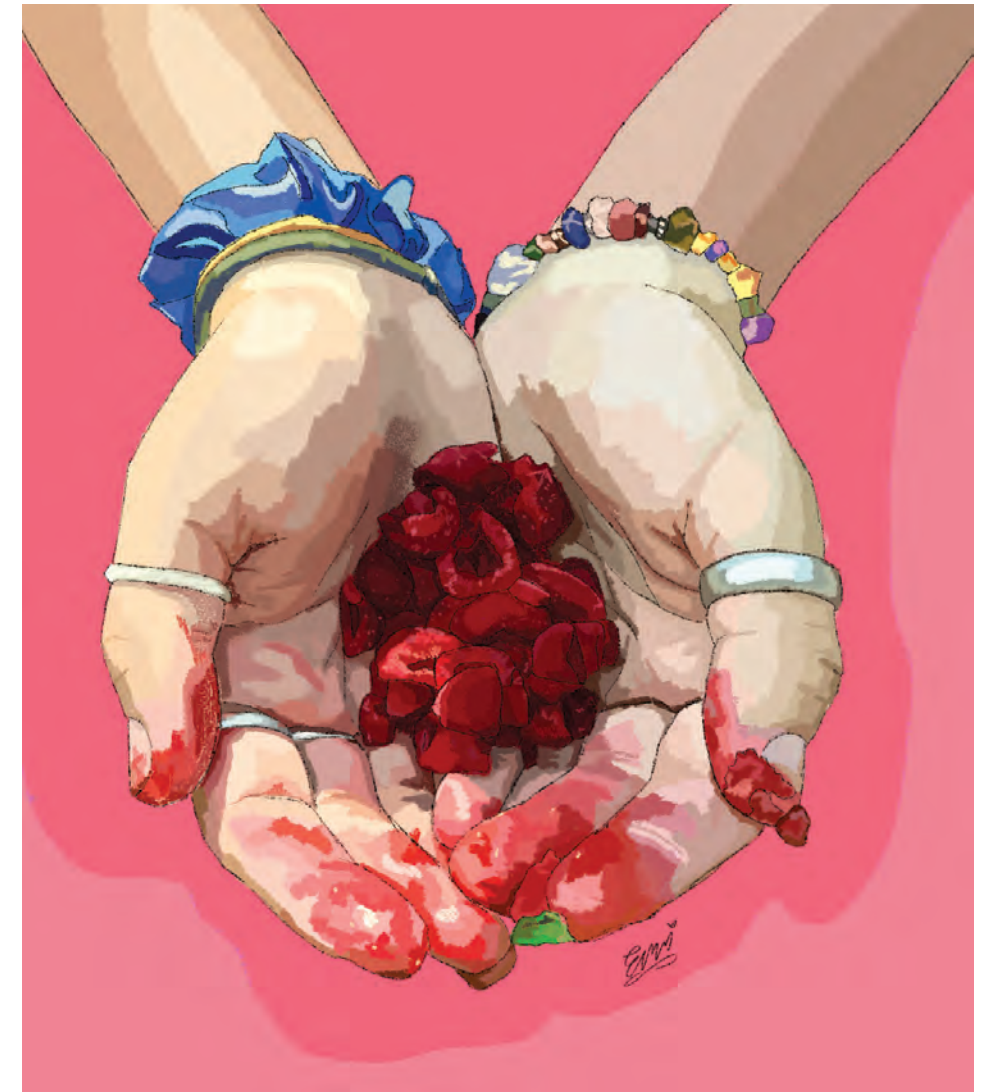
Or that last awkward conversation
with your great-grandmother,
the one where you didn't know what to
say,
where the room felt too quiet
and her voice too fragile,
and you thought there would be
another visit,
another story,
another chance to listen.

There's beauty in those moments
because they are already leaving.

Because the burger gets eaten,
the ice cream melts,
the pool empties,
the game ends,
the voices fade into memory.

And only later do you realize
the real sweetness of it all —

that you were there
while it was happening,
holding something brief and ordinary
that time would never give back.



"The Sweetness Stains," Ewvi Tower-Pierce, East Burke, VT

A Rising Sun So Ordinary

Henry Menke, Huntington, VT

This day was not heralded with fanfare.
No great celebration marked its moments
of birdsong and humanity.
Only simple recognition graced its moments,
without pomp or glowing praise.
An ordinary daybreak,
but a magical one all the same.



"Maine," Amelia Van Driesche, Burlington, VT



"Let's Be Still," Esther Crandall, Decatur, IN



"Library of Congress," Carly Stone, Springfield, VT



"Two Worlds Collide," Christian Sent, Tiburon, CA



"The Sea (Has Always Loved the Sky)," Phoebe Gresham, Huntington, VT

Teaching Kids Stillness

Lydia Plant, Enterprise, AL

Children sit by the water,
eyes trained on that peach-ripe sun,
the wind's ripples on silk.

They sit and they are quiet —
those kids who let their feet run fast and
free,
who let words drip like Popsicle-melt,
they learn, here, to stop and to sit
alongside friends that are like fireflies
in memories distant and they keep
coming
back and back again each year and they
sit
on those wooden benches

with a fire a few feet in front of them
and we are one voice as we sing and we
know —

This place — this life — is fireflies floating
over water
and sweet gum trees
and kayaking to the sound of distant
chatter
and eating together at round tables,
strangers already family less than a week
in.

And that's what makes us come back
again —
older now.
Because we know:
This is how to teach our young to watch
the sun set.

OPINION & COMMENTARY

The Tomorrow Project

Selections from The Tomorrow Project, YWP's civic engagement initiative in which young writers and artists share their perspectives on America and the issues of our time



"Voices from Downtown," Eli Hoopengardner, Arlington, VA



"Speaking in One Voice," Lila Crowley, North Middlesex, VT

*Photos taken at No Kings rallies Oct. 18, 2025;
top in Washington, D.C., bottom in Montpelier, VT*



Crossing Familiar Waters: Artist's Statement

Abigail Balon, Pantton, VT

This was a painting project I did for the No Kings event on March 28, 2026, based on the famous "Washington Crossing the Delaware" (1851) by Emanuel Leutze, but with modern-day advocates replacing the soldiers on the boat. I consider all these people to be heroes. They have my utmost respect. Left to right: Sen. Bernie Sanders, Bad Bunny, Rep. Becca Balint, Zohran Mamdani, Stephen Colbert, Bruce Springsteen, Heather Cox Richardson, Don Lemon, Taylor Swift, Barack Obama, Jimmy Kimmel, Lin-Manuel Miranda.



“Pathway to the Heavens,” Aiden Baker, Hardwick, VT

New Forest

Adeline White, Pittsford, VT

In the forest of all things new,
our mother says there is no food.
The rabbits are gone,
the squirrels are too.
All that’s left are the big, brown bears,
all comfortable in their dens.
They have taken all the food,

not to eat it, but to sell it.
In the forest of all things new,
Mother says she’ll get us food.
We wonder how she will.
If not from here, then where?
She comes back with a mouse,
a small one for us three.
We have to share the mouse,
for the bears have decided
this is how it has to be.

Letter to Our Daughters

Eli Hoopengardner, Arlington, VA

I think I know why aliens haven’t visited us. They’re definitely watching with rapt attention, waiting to see how we climb the highest wall humanity built for ourselves in the past half century.

I’d like to think they’ve been watching our progress for longer than they’d like to admit, from the 13th Amendment to the 19th, from the Civil Rights Act to the ADA, from *Roe v. Wade* to *Obergefell v. Hodges*, from 2016 to 2024, silently praying for a woman to take up the torch — not the throne — and show the world what we’re made of, and what we can do when there is no one left to judge us.

We create life from our breasts to our hips to our ovaries to our minds; we’ve created every person who has ever lived. Einstein was intelligent, Galileo was revolutionary, Washington was a visionary, but women gave birth to them all, yet it’s only been 105 years since our voices could be recognized by the government.

So, join me in a prayer with the entities watching over us and praying over our future so we will be able to tell our daughters the story of humanity: “Hope will always triumph over fear so long as no one knows hate, and love is the only word in the dictionary.”

250

Sela Morgenstein Fuerst, South Burlington, VT

Two hundred and fifty words to celebrate the 250th is a little more patriotic than I’d like to write, but I am sitting in probably the most American place I can get to, which is a cabin on the edge of Joe’s Pond, reeking of woodsmoke and echoes of days gone by. Red, white, and blue everywhere, draped from boats, docks, porches, painted on children’s faces as they watch the Fourth of July explode in the evening air. Sometimes I wish this is what people were talking about when they say they love their country, are proud of their predecessors. Not the bloodstains on the flag but the way it ripples slightly in the morning wind. And on that note, I’ve just stepped out of our room here in the cabin and the beauty of the pond is undeniable. It laps against the motorboats like a tamed sort of monster. And the sun keeps peeking out from behind its cloud, peeking out and ducking back again and the water darkens with promise. That’s what I mean when I say patriotism. The light and the water and the light. I hope the Founding Fathers had even so much as a thought of the rest of their world when they put it into words. Even if the ink washed off, I’d like to think they watched the magnolias as I do now, with terribly enraptured eyes. America is a beautiful word when you plant her and do nothing but watch her grow.

Quiet Isn't Consent

Evvi Tower-Pierce, East Burke, VT

I learned
life, liberty,
the pursuit of happiness,
before I learned
how often a promise
can hesitate.

No one mentioned
how often you'd have to prove
you deserved the words.

I've learned on my own
there are places
where I soften my voice,
where I let people assume
something easier about me.

It works
and that makes me angry
in a quiet way.

No one taught me that part
of the experiment.

I don't think the Declaration lied.
I think it promised too soon,
before it understood
how selective belief can be.

Equality sounds simple
until you ask
who gets to move through a room
unchallenged.

Liberty feels clean
until it depends
on who's watching.

Happiness
is the strangest part,
something you're told to chase
but never slow down for.

Maybe the experiment isn't failing,
maybe it's just honest
about what it still refuses
to give freely.

I want to believe
those words were written
for breath,
for bodies,
for voices like mine.

No one told me
they might not be.

Down the Street

Dylan Delano, St. Paul, MN

I walked down the street,
the streets I once used to know,
filled with regrets and heavy with burdens
of what once happened here.

I walked down the street,
a block or so down,
and I stood and watched the wreckage
caused by a destroyer
as it seeped over everywhere we once
used to know.

In English, We Read Walt Whitman and Langston Hughes

Isla Segal, Woodstock, VT

We read poems on printed white sheets
in English class,
color them with highlights,
and words like freedom
are covered in pink.

And a hundred years ago
people wrote for freedom
that they could taste on the tips of their
tongues,
and then they grew up,
and soon they were able to swallow it
and feed it to their children.

I know from Venn diagrams
of Walt Whitman and Langston Hughes
that history moves forward;
some begin singing
and everyone else will fight to get a voice,
a place in the chorus,
and someday they will have it.

It's not supposed to go like this.
We're already singing;
you can't take us away.

We're singing this song
and it's messy and no one knows the
rhythm,
like prayers at Hanukkah.
But you're not supposed to take us away
now that we're here.

The song's supposed to get louder,
prouder.

Instead, we're trying to sing as we read headlines in notifications on our friend's phone who subscribes to The New York Times, *ICE granted more powers, Minnesotan murdered in the streets.*

And we have to remember
the America we're singing for,
the Americans we're singing for.



"A Tiny Political Zine," Henry Menke, Huntington, VT



“The View,” Aiden Baker, Hardwick, VT

Patriot

Shalev Smokler, New York, NY

I am a patriot and a proud American, and nothing will change that.
 I will never cease to believe in the idea of America and the potential this nation holds —
 no matter how many thugs are unleashed on their neighbors,
 no matter how many cowardly politicians try to hide the growing pains that come with
 progress,
 no matter how many more presidents defy the Constitution that is America,
 no matter how much shame is brought upon the American name and idea,
 no matter how many more years you and I, America, must endure.
 Not for a second will I lose my pride,
 not in the institution that is now, but in the idea that is America.

The Pursuit

Gemma Hoag, West Bath, ME

I am happy. I sit beside my dad in his Subaru, listening to one of the Spotify playlists he loves to create. Bruce Springsteen sings “Born to Run” and I never noticed how great the song is.

I am happy because I have a loving family, and a home, and three cats. I am happy because I have friends, a best friend, and I actually *like* school. I am happy because I am creative, and have the freedom to make art.

Yes, there are many places in the world where I wouldn’t have these things, where I wouldn’t be happy. For that, I am grateful to be here.

But given the choice, I wouldn’t choose to live in America.

I wouldn’t choose to live in a place that views health care as a privilege rather than a human right. I wouldn’t choose to live in a place that views the frequent murder of children as a small price to pay for the right to bear arms. I wouldn’t choose to live in a place with a disgusting history of slavery and racism, the effects of which still linger. I wouldn’t choose to live in a place where the minimum wage is \$7.25 an hour in 2026. I wouldn’t choose to live in a place that embraces blatant fascism again and again. I wouldn’t choose to live in a place that always picks profit over humanity, greed over justice, billionaires over the working class.

Bruce sings about running away from a simple, working class life, and wanting something more, feeling trapped and forced to struggle through life. That’s the case for most Americans, that discontent with this country, this system, this crushing feeling.

Yes, many of us are happy. Many of us have families and friends and hopes and dreams, even if we’re barely scraping by. But is that enough? Is that true happiness? Is that freedom? If the bills and the paychecks and the debt and the fear and all the things you know you’ll never be able to do even though you want to, *so badly*, are always nagging at the back of your mind — is *that* true happiness?

I am happy, but I am not content. I won’t be content until change comes, and I won’t accept this system until it is transformed, by and for people like you and me. I won’t be content until this country gets over its fear of “communism” and starts *helping its people*. I won’t be content until racists are punished and minorities are lifted up and supported. I won’t be content until every family, every person has the freedom to live a quality life, do the things they dream of doing, and be *happy*.

Is that so much to ask?

Foreigner

Zehwah Sheikh, Katy, TX

I'm Kashmiri.
I understand the language but don't
speak it,
which sometimes makes me feel like a
fraud.
But when I visit Kashmir,
there's this warm feeling inside my chest
that blossoms slowly; like my smile,
it takes time to form.
It's a different feeling from *home* home,
my house in America,
which is also beautiful.
Because this feeling's unique.
When I'm in Kashmir,
I feel loved.
Nobody is banging red, white, and blue
drums at me
on the way to the mosque
and telling me to go back to my country.
And pretty much everyone I see on the
street
looks just like me.
I look like them.
I eat the food.
I love the food!
But I avoid conversation.
I feel like a kind of observer.
But that's fine.
For me,
Kashmir will always be
a place to remind me of where I come
from
and that there are people who love me.
And that makes me feel just about as
Kashmiri
as I actually am.

Pride Is a Funny Thing

Galya Siegel-Bromberg, Thetford, VT

Pride is a funny thing.
I'm proud of the accomplishments
of Rosa Parks and Ruth Bader Ginsburg.
I'm proud of the Americans
who aren't afraid of change.
I'm proud of those
who put themselves in others' shoes.
But for every time I'm proud,
I remember where I am.
And isn't pride a funny thing?
Because then I feel ashamed
we've had 250 years to improve,
45 presidents who had the power to
change,
and some did,
but sometimes I feel like we're rewinding.
What life are we trying to live?
What liberty are we reaching for?
What happiness are we pursuing?
Are we trying to live a life
full of discrimination and hate?
Are we reaching for liberty
that is a lie?
Are we pursuing happiness
for only certain people,
certain races, genders, beliefs, and
ethnicities?
Who's going to tell the children
who celebrate the 4th of July
that pride is a funny thing?
And although 250 is a big number,
it's hard to celebrate
when accomplishments are followed by
failure,
and steps forward are followed by leaps
back.
I'm proud of the steps forward we've
taken
in these 250 years.
But I'm appalled and ashamed
by all the leaps back.
Isn't pride a funny thing?



What We Hold: Artist Statement

Ursa Goldenrose, Hardwick, VT

If this world is just one beating heart, we each have the responsibility to hold it and care for it. The heart is made for healing, and when we follow the flow of blood, we see our connectedness. In our collective heart, there is a steady stream of possibility and change. Even for the pieces of ourselves that feel irreparable.

A Very Quiet Room

Ghulam Fizza, Williamsburg, VA

A house stands by the ocean. A house so big it leans to the side a little. And in this house, there is a lot of noise. In every room you will find different types of noises, each story distinctively unique. But this very big house has a very big problem.

If you were to visit a friend in the basement, you would hear babies crying and guns being shot, and thin, starving children begging. They make noises and plead, and every once in awhile, they will be heard, and outrage will break out in the other stories, the ones up above. They will wonder what they can do to help, and pledge promises to do so, but soon they will forget, for they have problems too.

In the ground story, there is always yelling. Yelling about how there is not enough food, and how will they possibly survive when they can't even afford the gas to get the food, and also crying. Lots of crying, but done silently so as not to look too different from the stories above.

In the middle, you will hear lots of sighs. Sighing about how the protests aren't working and how they feel invisible. Sighs heard every morning when they wake up at six, and sighs heard every evening when the dinner portions get smaller and smaller, but at least they're surviving.

As you go higher, you start to hear a different sound, laughter. You can hear joy and champagne glasses clinking together and the music made by the ones who climbed the stairs from the bottom, their past lives and the people below forgotten. You can hear tiny complaints about how the steak is just a tad bit overcooked, and how the stock market took a dip that morning.

And at the very top of the house, a single room stands. This room is made out of marble, with gold accents embedded. One lonely man lives here, in this very quiet room. We forget who put him at the top, and people from all stories reminisce about a time when he wasn't there, and of those who came before him. The ones who would occasionally take trips down to the basement and say something. These trips had some effects, but this lonely man wishes to erase the effects. He hopes to silence the stories he finds insignificant and deems them the root of evil.

But deep down, this man is scared, because once the people below learn how short the stairs connecting them really are, and they regularly start crossing and helping, the supports of his shaky, marble room will break and fall off into the ocean. It is only a matter of time.



"Backyard Garden," Chloe Deliso, Stow, MA

The Worst Part

Sophia Brooks, Westford, VT

The worst part is everything's fake. I don't know what's *really* real anymore.

Writing used to be about expressing yourself through your words, now it's about who can write using the biggest words. Photography used to be about capturing a precious moment in your life, and now it's about what looks the best. School used to be about learning, now it's just about grades.

We use AI, not to learn, not to get better, but to pretend we are the best. We are smart enough to create AI, but dumb enough to depend on it.

What Happened to Us?

Delfina Rejmankova, Davis, CA

Who decided it would be a good idea to create the very robots we all said we feared would take over the world? What even is this "Artificial Intelligence" that pretends to be something it has no right to be? Where did it come from and where are the regulations we so desperately need to keep it in check? When will it be gone, or more realistically, when will we pass the point of no turning back? Why does it feel like there's nothing to be done and everyone's already surrendered to the villain no one saw coming? What happened to us?



"Category," Sienna Mardy, Hempstead, NY



"Bird," Anna Li, Los Altos, CA

New England Girl Experiences Midwest

Georgia Marshall, Marblehead, MA

The bird calls in Iowa City border on obsessive. Their twisted throats gain vigor with every call, each gasping breath of wind. They are louder than the birds at home, as is the wind.

In Massachusetts, in my small town by the sea, there isn't as much breeze. It is stifled by narrowness. There is no room for wind to rip through, only tight streets, brittle from years of sun-baking, and taut from the girthy legs of pastel houses hugging into the earth. You look out, and there is no clear horizon. It is pockmarked with church silhouettes and stacked houses and chimneys coughing into the sky. My town is imprinted on my heart, but it has become tainted by years of overuse, tired feet on demolished pavement, lilting sea salt on the rocks by the freezing water, familiar faces gone rusty.

Here, in the middle of the country, everything feels open. The streets gape like chasms, huge gray rivers of concrete that render approaching cars into shimmering beetles. Green is everywhere, in the behemoth trees that hug the city's peripheries, in the grassy knolls at the feet of the university, between slabs of pavement and in the distant rolls of field. The buildings are unapologetically rectangular, and there is a kind of assurance in their solidity. Above it all remains the wind. It cuts the city open, like a chest sliced so you can see the beating heart, the town's gold-glinting capitol dome.



"Where the Light Leads You," Oliver Shanholtzer, West Rutland, VT

Change in the Air

Ursa Goldenrose, Hardwick, VT

If there is one true thing,
it must be that there is a change in the air.
A deep rumbling, awakening, even for those who
won't say a thing.
It crawls through us, follows us from
doorstep to rooftop, where,
there, a flag in our hands we've painted portraying our courage —
weeping in the wind, change is never subverted.

How then, can the world feel so still?

Eyes walking by violence, hostility fired between
innocent and innocence.
Hollowed trust in leaders that leave dust, the rest waiting in the haze, placidly,
watching all the clenched fists rise and the dotted lines tighten,
the clock moves around the wrist.
The hands refuse to listen.

But there's a run in the suit on the body of the beast —
white poppies blooming in breast pockets of the nation and
while the clockwork we disrupt will
cry and call of chaos, full dismantling constructs a new rhythm. Rising,
these corrosive strands have begun unfurling.

It all shifts.

Like a spool we will unravel, but following the line we are guided,
if there is one true thing,
the wind within us has confided —

There must be a warmth in the sunrise, for now
we can feel it bursting, even through closed eyes.

THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS DONORS

Foundations and Businesses

The Alchemist Foundation
 A Revolutionary Press
 Bari & Peter Dreissigacker Philanthropy
 Foley Services/MKF Properties
 Hannaford Bloomin' 4 Good
 The Rona Jaffe Foundation
 Karma Bird House
 The M & T Charitable Foundation
 The George W. Mergens Foundation
 The Philip and Patricia Muck Charitable Foundation
 National Life Group/Employee Match
 The Oakland Foundation
 Onion River Press
 Paramount Gives/Employee Match
 Physician's Computer Company
 Queen City Printers
 Town Fair Tire Foundation Fund
 Vermont Arts Council
 Vermont Children's Trust Foundation
 Vermont Community Foundation
 Vermont Electric Power Co.
 Vermont Humanities
 Vermont Mutual Insurance Group
 Vermont Public
 VTDigger.org
 Voice Over Vermont
 The WaterWheel Foundation

The publication of *Anthology 17* was made possible by a grant from


 George W. Mergens Foundation

Thank you to the YWP Board: Jacques Bailly, Erin Bundock, Giovanna Di Paolo Jager, Kathy Folley (record keeper), Aimee Picchi (vice-president), Hillary Read (president), Shannon Ripp, and Doreen Wright (treasurer).

Individuals

Bonnie Acker and John Davis	Gale Hurd
Cathy and William Aikman	Mary Catherine Jones
Janice Almey	Meg Kenny
Caroline Anderson	Joseph Kiefer and Amy Goodman
Erin Anderson	Kiefer
Catharine Andrews	Kathleen Kusiak
Peter Anthony	Emily Lev
Brendan Bailey	Deborah Lowe
Jacques Bailly and Leslyn Hall	Martha Maksym
Sean Balon	Michael Mathon
Jeanne Barron Lynch	Valerie McDonald
Dennis Boggs and Jane Kleinsinger	Carol McGough
Kathleen Brooks	Katharine Morgan
Sean Brown and Laura Filkins	Deena Murphy
Carol Budliger	Anna Niemiec
Ruth Casey	Edward Owens
Theo Clark	Andrew Palmer
Anne Cramer	Bobbe Pennington
Knox Cummin	Aimee Picchi
Jack and Vicky Cupp	Bernard and Nancy Picchi
Harold and Kimberly Dauerman	JT and Sarah Pierson
Staige Davis	Ellen Read
Marydale DeBor	Hillary Read
Giovanna Di Paolo Jager	Patricia Reed
Susan Dinitz	Helen Reid
Ian Eatock	Smidgie Reid and Michael McMillin
Ellen and Joseph Fallon	Jeanne Ripp
Andrew Folley and Julianne	Shannon Ripp
Hummelberg	Daryn Rybicki
Cris and Kathy Folley	Lisa Schamberg and Patrick Robins
Patricia Fontaine	Bill and Kate Schubart
Barbara Frankowski	Margaret Skinner
Valerie Gardner	Carol and Irving Smokler
Joanne Gerson	Barbara Sorce
Mary Glass	Stephanie Spencer
Anna and Matt Grady	Will Sutherland
Gerald Greenbach	Susan Thomas
Joan Grundhauser	Dana and Marc vanderHeyden
Madeline Hankins	Joseph Varghese
Edith C. Hawksworth Trust	John Vincent
Cheryl and Edward Heneveld	Erin and Mitch Wertlieb
Becky Holt	Leslie Williams
Noel Howe	Our kind anonymous friends



YWP IS ...

Young Writers Project (YWP) is a community built from poets and photographers, visionaries and idealists, people with big dreams and bigger hearts. YWP is a place where you can express yourself and find others who feel the same, a place where you can pour out your heart and soul, and people will see you for you. This place gives us opportunities, friends, new ideas, inspiration, tips, and advice, and just anything we need to grow as a person. YWP is a community, but it is also a second home.

— Aiden Baker, Hardwick, VT

YWP has been such an amazing thing for me; it is what has turned me into a writer, and I will always be grateful for all the ways it has helped me grow. I have connected with so many other teen poets because of it, been inspired every time I open the site, and have felt my dreams broaden.

— Maelyn Slavik, Burlington, VT

YWP is an awesome way to get inspired, read amazing work by other teens, possibly win prizes or get published, and even get book recommendations. I wish I'd heard about it sooner, because it has given me so much more enthusiasm and inspiration to write and create! I love commenting on others' creations, and everyone is so kind and supportive to each other, which is hard to find online. Thank you to everyone at YWP for creating such a cool space.

— Gemma Hoag, West Bath, ME

Thank you, Young Writers Project, for this beautiful opportunity, where we can express ourselves and have support from others and not worry about being judged because we all care about this. Thank you for showing us that this generation still writes, reads, draws, and is creative — for fun. Thank you, Young Writers Project, for a community where even if we don't know each other, we can find connections and work through the hard times together.

— Elianna Venables Vogel, Ferrisburgh, VT

Young Writers Project is, to put it simply, my life. It is so much more than just a social media site or a place to get published. It's a community of writers and artists who don't know anything more about each other than usernames and shared affinities for poetry, essays, photography, or painting, and yet still manage to have real, affirming connections with each other past societal and location-related boundaries. Being able to put literally anything you've written into a kind, supportive space like this site is both a relief from the harshness of much of our lives as teens and a wide opportunity for growth. The Tomorrow Project, started by YWP in 2025, gives teens like me a chance to share our beliefs and fight for our own tomorrows. Through the Tomorrow Project, I've strengthened the political side of my writing and gained more information about how to view the rapidly changing world I'm growing up in — all by reading and writing poetry and essays and making art! The humanities are more important than ever right now, and Young Writers Project is a perfect place to grow your voice.

— Sela Morgenstein Fuerst, South Burlington, VT