

Why you'll stay there with her

You wrote a poem about a tree.
You wrote a poem and wrapped yourself in a shelter of leaves, crafted sunbeams from nothing but syllables arranged in patterns like the mosaic of faces you can't place into proper pictures. You've always found such comfort in colorful lies that lie like art across your lonely eyes, aching, imagining ivy and stories stretching to the edges of your hands, your lungs drowning in silver and words you think you can breathe, because stories cannot leave you. But there never was a tree. Instead you stand in the silhouette of a ghost, at most a cut corpse, a place in the snow where no one needs your answers. You can see the footprints (her footprints), footprints of years. They are silhouettes, too. She came here at 12, her body too small for the sadness that clawed at her chest and crawled across her skin, leaving lines only she saw... came here when all she wanted to do was break. But instead she ran, because running was breaking without the blood. She came at 14

to breathe more than monotony, to fall into the trees and the Earth and the sky and this place that will stay as she fades away into the wind. At 16, she stumbled into these woods while green shoots pushed through the earth, and for the first time watered them with memories that slipped from the cracks as she peeled back her scars, exposing the truths she so carefully buried, digging nails into dirt (instead of her skin). She came here in cold, soaked sneakers. She came here singing and screaming, traded salt for the stars in her eyes. She came here empty. She left behind expectations (hers, theirs, and was there a difference?), filled herself with a world too vast for these lies and truths and aches to matter. She came here again, again. Again. She came here because trees ask nothing of you but peace. And now.

Five years, like a photo reel tumbling through your mind, feet walking a path they have memorized, one more time. The thorns (and you) have grown up, but the cold hasn't changed the stump of a tree that was dead when you got here, a place to rest. You can feel the footsteps of that girl, quiet, questioning. You want to wrap her 12-year-old body up in your arms, tell her the stories she needs to hear, promise that tomorrow was better, tomorrow wasn't lonely, tomorrow she won't want to break. You want to comfort your 12-year-old ghost. But she's gone, gone, and now you can only hold yourself and repeat the stories that fall like silver and sunbeams onto your face. There is only you. There was only ever you.

– AURORA SHARP, 17, MORETOWN



YOUNG WRITERS PROJECT

Young Writers Project's mission is to inspire, mentor, publish, and promote young writers and artists. We select the best writing from hundreds of submissions to our website, youngwritersproject.org, for publication in this newspaper and with other Vermont media partners, and in our monthly digital magazine and annual anthology. This week, we present *General Writing* responses.



SHARING THE VOICES OF YOUNG VERMONTERS ON THE ISSUES THAT SHAPE THEIR LIVES

America's sunrise

For many, the inauguration of President Joe Biden has been seen as a close on an era of chaos. No longer does the man ruling our country use derogatory terms toward women and immigrants. No longer do the ever-climbing temperatures and warnings of scientists go ignored and dismissed by a man who sees nothing but a price tag. No longer does the man in charge spread nothing but lies to feed his ego, further sickening the minds of an ever-growing population of the easily misled.

However, to think that a simple switch from one white man to another is all that it takes to end this plague of suffering and injustice would be just as ignorant as to believe the lies of former President Donald Trump. The Trump era did not end when he left the White House. Millions and millions of Americans still idolize this man. America is not identified merely by the beliefs of the current executive branch, but rather the values of the country's population as a whole. President Biden wishes for nothing more than to unite this country, but the divide between Democrats and Republicans and Trump supporters is a deep and constantly widening gap that cannot be mended only through legislation. The problems with this country are sewn deep into its existence.

We are a country that is built on entitlement. What began with the mass genocide of Indigenous peoples by European colonizers was followed by the Civil War between abolitionists and white landowners fighting to keep their Black slaves. Most recently now, an angry mob (of white people), armed with guns and malicious intent, attempted to murder the sacred practice of our democracy simply because they didn't get their way.

The divide in our country runs much deeper than any laws put in place by our leaders. It stems from the way we view our country and the history we've come from. To support America blindly is to choose the side of the oppressors. The timeframe for the acceptability of indifference is coming to a close, and those who truly know America realize that the principles of our Constitution continue to be an aspiration, not a reality. "Freedom and justice for all" has not arrived yet.

Perhaps the inauguration of President Biden is a small step in the right direction, but this era of darkness is yet to draw a close. The sun will not rise until every citizen of this country accepts how our troubled past still runs rampant through our present society. The sun will not rise until equity has been distributed and equality has been achieved. Only then will the sun rise, only then may we bask in the newfound pride of being the United States of America.

– MADELEINE CONNERY, 15, SHELBURNE

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Thank you!

PHOTO OF THE WEEK



SOPHIE FREEBERN, 11, RICHMOND

When?

Wait.
Why?
Patience.
No.
Why?
Long enough.
Okay, peace.
When?
Someday.
Now.
Wait.
No.
Fine, then.
Really?
Maybe.
What!
Someday.
Now.
Wait a bit.
Justice, now.
Eh. You can wait.
We will not wait.
But...
No justice, no peace.
Whatever.
Stop! Justice!
Fine.
No more hate.
Okay.
When do we get peace?
Now.
Finally.
Yes, finally.

– JESSIE TORNABE, 13, BURLINGTON

Adrenaline

My restless knee bounces up and down, up and down, trying to control the adrenaline pumping through my veins, my natural instincts telling me that this is scary. I need to fight or run away but I'm in class, I can't attack the teacher or run out of the room, so instead my knee goes up and down. My fingers play invisible piano keys, just trying to release this unneeded energy. The boy on my right and the girl on the other side of the room, their knees bounce too. Up and down, up and down, adrenaline in our veins, coming out through our feet in a blur of movement, the syncopated rhythm of our three tapping feet a symphony of anxiety.

– GRACE KAFFERLIN, 15, WILLISTON

A palace of words

Scissors of light cut through the paper walls of our house. They zigzag across the floor and force folded shadows to emerge. Cutouts of snowflakes rain down from the sky and come to melt in puddles of words at our feet. The air crinkles with the briskness of a crumpled-up piece of newspaper being tossed into the fireplace. I watch the world through my ink-stained window and wonder at the printed lines that have built up our home.

– ANNIKA GRUBER, 16, CHARLOTTE

Boat

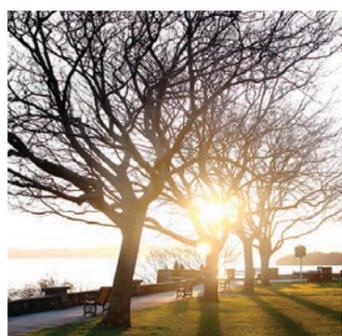
Tilda rowed a paper boat into the deep and endless sea, with a tangerine hat and blueberry coat, but at least the trip was free. She folded the newspaper to make the boat, lining the bottom and sides with tape, and took it out to test the float, while all the swimmers did was gape. But still she persisted to sail the sea... Now, let's all take a vote: How long will Tilda's voyage be in her folded newspaper boat?

– AVA ROHRBAUGH, 15, CHARLOTTE

Jellyfish

A ghost of a creature rises from the black. Its spectral fringes ripple with movement. Speckles of light glisten from its edges. Its milky frills flow and dance with the current. More drift up beside it, each gaudier than the last. Their transparent bodies beam in the moonlight. Twinkling jellies as far as the eye can see. Their tendrils gumming all in an electric bubble. A stinging snare of alluring beauty in which there is no escape.

– GRACIE CLARK, 17, FLETCHER



- Create an ode to a tree in writing or visual art
- Cash prizes and publication
- Submissions due: Feb. 28, 2021
- Details: Go to youngwritersproject.org/trees

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"The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now." – Chinese Proverb