

Playing records on the moon

At night, I dream of what the days will be, of the place I will take when I am not fearing every mistake. The cloudy nights where stars remain hidden, I take on these fearful dreams and untangle the strings of my every thought. However, when the stars rise from the depths of the hills, and the moon is no longer an all-encompassing surface but a spiral from which all light finds a purpose, it is then from the safety of my bed that I wind up the curtains. I am bound to stay awake, to watch the sky dissipate and fade as the morning eve rears its head. But before the freckled darkness leaves, I find traces of hope in the constellations and pretend that I too have a place in the sky. I'd slow dance with you on the moon to records too sweet to be true, and sing softly, "Whether together or apart, you'll have my heart," to a person not yet known. To someone all the love songs tell me I'll call home. I'll be dreaming, somewhere deep in the sky... But pretend as I might, at the end of the night, I will slowly fall back to Earth. Since birth, I have crawled this land, and till death I walk on borrowed steps. No matter how hard I try, I always fall back to sleep before the morning heat arrives. And my thoughts twist as my sheets tangle, limbs in a scramble. I wake up to an empty space feeling tingles lacing up my legs from dancing dreams fabricated in a haze. The time between asleep and awake, I am captured in that lovely place. Where I know not that I am only dreaming of the moon, of the records too sweet to be true. And when reality comes knocking, I answer it churlishly, hoping for it to leave before I get to the door. It has immaculate patience and never minds waiting, but the smile slowly fades as I wade through my day. Memories of adventures gain distance, and my idealistic world becomes hidden. If only the clouds covered up the stars, my curtains would have never opened. My dreams would be fragments of nightmares pieced together, and reality knocking on my door would be a welcomed visitor. At least then I would not be struck with disappointment, but then again, I have no choice in the matter, no reign over my unconscious thought because, either way, when the night drifts back into the atmosphere, I'll be waiting for you to fly me to the moon, or to plague me with worry. Let there be joy or fear, and above all else, let the melody play on.

– MARIA BEAULIEU, 15, MILTON

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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 responses to the challenges, *Nice. End a poem or story with this inspiring quote from late author Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.: "If this isn't nice, I don't know what is."*; and *General Writing*.

PHOTO OF THE WEEK



KOKO DANDO, 13, NORTH FERRISBURGH

I am from potatoes

I am from paper and ink, from Swiffer WetJets and tearless shampoo. I am from a calm house on a calm street that jests at sanity, as a wolf in sheep's clothing masquerades as safe. I am from petals and sea-tumbled glass. I am from spinning stories like silk, and from a river called denial. From Samarah and Elisabeth and "The Berenstain Bears." I am from the liars and the lovers. From "put your hand down, you've answered enough" and "you're fine." I am from blue wax dripping down tapered candles, and the tarnished brass of the menorah, and from pinesap trickling onto unexpected fingers. I'm from Colorado, Poland, and from honey and tea. From the people who made a fake country, Ruritania, with a fake position, a fake ambassador, and a fake newspaper, to sneak into the Nuremberg trials and spy a bit of justice, the journal running out of a broom shack and the boy left hiding under a porch as the masked man waltzed away whistling. I am from farmers and drinkers and laborers and strong girls and swimmers and fishermen and large laughing meals and jokes and low rates of literacy, and potatoes. I am from serious conversation and politics and university degrees and hidden legacies and sons whom their fathers could never love and writers and poets and actors and singers and liars and storytellers and cooks and the wrong sort of women, and potatoes. I am from potatoes, mostly.

– ZOE BERNSTEIN, 15, JERICHO

Vermont summer morning

First summer morning. You wake up half-sweating, but feeling fresh. You change into shorts for the first time, and walk outside. You sit on the porch, the sun bright and shining in your face. It feels nice. Not nice, but actually nice. Really nice. You are sitting alone on your porch. The birds tweet. The cardinals. The blue jays. The red-winged blackbirds. The crows and the gold finches. It feels warm. Well, warmer than a spring morning. The grass wet. The birds chirping. The odd warmness, sitting alone. "It this isn't nice, I don't know what is."

– LUCY HAAS, 11, SOUTH BURLINGTON

Corn tortillas: An adulthood

This afternoon, I toasted corn tortillas in a pan until they burned my fingertips. They were hot, crisped on the outside and soft in the middle, spotted brown like a bruised banana. It was strangely liberating: me, standing on the linoleum and toasting my own tortillas. It was my fingers that burned, my hands that shook the pan and shuffled the hot tortilla onto a plate. Lately my present has been dedicated to my future: a list of boxes to check, dates to write down, things to do and thoughts to think. The past is a wall, rushing up behind, but so is the future; I'm caught between. Two planes slamming, the Symplegades clashing closed. A bird guided Jason; who guides me? Yesterday, my father taught me how to toast corn tortillas in a pan. Carefully lift the edge to check for the color of bruised banana. Shake the pan to flip the flatbread. Keep your arm loose, like the breath before a meningitis inoculation. If the past is a wall, then it's made of glass, impossible to breach, but transparent enough to see through. My past is a bird, and only the tail feathers are trapped. Its wings are knowledge, and its speed— I suppose its speed would be freedom.

– NORA GAUTSCH, 17, JERICHO

Writer's block

I want to write. And yet here I am, deleting the same line over and over, and over. It feels like sometimes, words simply... flow from us. And the other times, words come to a stop. We can't control it. Maybe others can. I can't. It's something so uncontrollable, yet so unnoticeable. When the words flow, writing is so simple. I have a friend who says she can't write. I have multiple friends like that, who spend hours on a small haiku because they can't break that dam that stops the flow of thoughts and words and everything in between. The dam can be repaired, of course. But sometimes, once broken and rebuilt, it's easier to break again. I had a teacher who I felt broke that dam for me. I feel like anyone can have it broken, it just has to be using the right tools. For some people, that's staring at a screen for three hours until the stress of failing kicks in. For others, it's performing with mediocre writing skills until someone breaks that dam, and the words can finally flow.

– RUTH KNOX, 12, ESSEX JCT.



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

Prompt:

If you could speed up the process of evolution, what characteristic would you gift mankind? How would it benefit the human race?

If I could make a single change...

If I could make a single change to humanity, I would change the way some see others. All the divisions are tearing us apart, destroying our world, killing the animals, killing people. But if we could only look past our petty arguments and personal grudges, we would see the beauty in life and existence. We would stop hurting each other and unite for once in history. And if one adaptation could do this much, if I could make a single change, a single choice, I know what I would do.

– SOPHIE MORTON, 11, HINESBURG

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Thank you!

A field of dandelions

I like to imagine myself in a field full of dandelions, sweet perfume filling the air I breathe. Soft, gentle petals of comfort tickling my face. The sun shining, for even the sun loves the weeds, and we all know the sun is not always as friendly as it seems. But it likes dandelions – or it is trying to outshine them. Either way, it will never outshine these golden-haired lions. Because it all comes back to the field of dandelions. A laugh is around me, embracing me, a smile pouring over my face like a spilled can of paint, and I drift to sleep with the protection of a million fierce yellow lions.

– LILY MEYER, 12, MONTPELIER

Twelve

Side by side with me on a blanket beneath the stars. No moon around, so they glow brighter than before. I miss our midnight chats, our lively banter. Our minds connected but separated by this small black rectangle, and miles and feet and meters and people. But when the clock strikes 12, when Cinderella hurries back to her carriage, we come out to our keyboards, anticipating the fun that always follows. We aren't good. We aren't bad. We are living under the stars. The night may be dark and monsters might be roaming, but we don't need light. The monsters leave us alone. We don't need halos to be holy. We just need to be lying side by side on a blanket, looking up at the stars.

– MOLLY MARINO, 12, HINESBURG