Front Cover

“Quarantine”

Monmouth County Arts MS
Art Photography Class Collaboration

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grade 7
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Middlesex County

Izabella Patrizio
grade 12
Howell HS
Monmouth County

"Moon"
Chloe Widmer
grade 11
Monroe Twp HS
Middlesex County

Liliana Petro
grade 8
Edgar MS
Middlesex County
Refrigerator Waste

What vibrant hues, and such glistening skin
Eating through the glossy shell, to the core
What a waste it will be, dumped in the bin.

Mindless greed shows its true self at the store
Taking, taking more than what will be chewed
Leaving the oozing, brown bruised fruity gore.

Sinking into the plastic glass, that food
Pushed only further into the cold, black depths.
Grown, shipped, paid for, only to rot. It’s rude.

This is a fate the fruit simply accepts.
Thrown away, to the land dumps. What a waste.
Conserve, protect, plan, be mindful. Take steps.

Annashae Davis
grade 8
Edgar MS
Middlesex County

Francesca Tienken
grade 6
Spring Lake Heights ES
Monmouth County
ESCAPE

Mathew sat back in the kitchen, kicked his legs up onto the shabby, stained table, looking at the bowl of stew next to his feet very, very closely. Then he sharply kicked the steaming bowl off the table, sending it careening to the ground. The shatter seemed to echo in the small apartment, food splattering across the red carpet. Zach and his trembling mom, sitting on the floor next to him, both jerked at the sound. Zach’s mom clenched him tighter before crawling around the chair to the shards.

*Stain number 27.* Zach was keeping count in his head, sitting on the floor next to Mathew with his trembling mom. Another stain, and the maroon carpet would be more brown than red.

Suddenly, Mathew took his legs down from the table, sprang up, and knocked his chair back. He grabbed Zach’s hair, tugging sharply up and separating him from his mom. Zach was still focused on trying to hold back his screams of pain, shuddering, as his dad threw him to the side. He slammed against the wall and screamed as he slid down, feeling a bursting pain in his skull. *What is wrong with Mathew?* He had never been this bad before.

His mom sat in the same place as before, with her face in her hands, shaking. Mathew turned around to glare at her, before whacking his hand at her face. Zach heard a loud crack and started crying, unable to hold his tears back. Mathew gave him a look, too, but turned away and stalked off to the bedroom instead of going after him the second time.

Zach’s mom smiled sadly at him, but he could see her eye swelling up as she slowly picked herself off the floor, and followed his dad into their bedroom. Zach curled up, wanting simply to disappear. And as everything became blurry and dark, the only thought on his mind was escape.
Alexandra Burke
grade 8
Ocean Twp IS
Monmouth County

Giovanna Rivera
grade 9
Manalapan HS
Monmouth County
PROM APPLICATION

‘Click! “Phew, I’m finally done with my college applications to Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, Yale, Columbia, MIT, and UNC,” I thought with exhaustion. While all my friends were at the senior prom, I was in my room at 12 am, finishing my application essays. It wasn't so bad, missing prom I mean. I had my own prom with my quiet Mozart music and my buffet of crunchy chips and my fruity juicy red Hawaiian punch. I also have to finish publishing my own book about the study of the Bermuda triangle for my college resume. You know aside from prom, college options are more important.

Let me tell you something about me, I’m valedictorian of my class which doesn’t make me very popular among high school’s society. You might have guessed that I didn't have a date to prom because of my “nerdy” appearance or whatever that means. I have a million texts from my very few friends from the chess club like “Where are you?”, “You’re missing out”, or “What the heck are you thinking”. Chess club is completely made out of boys because all the girls care to do during meetings on Friday after school is shopping at the mall. My mom is very mad at me for not experiencing dress shopping and hair styling like other moms would be doing. My dad is a marine biologist with a major from Harvard so he doesn’t really care if I’m missing prom because he didn’t go to it either. They all don’t understand that a night only school function is nothing compared to your future which my dad completely does.

I went to bed around 1:45 after checking every single grammatical error on my applications. My head went on my irresistible pillow and automatically went to dream land or should say nightmare landia. There were most of the schools I have applied for, mascots like John Harvard, Tim the beaver, and even the unofficial mascot of Stanford, Stanford tree. They were all creepily chanting in unison, “You will never be good enough for our schools so buzz off your fantasies”, while swirling into the Bermuda Triangle.

The next week I got the college responses back. I opened the first one from Harvard and it read “Ally, you have been...”

Ariana Mera
grade 7
Hillside Avenue School
Union County
Aspyn Lee
grade 9
Dayton HS
Union County

Adriana Pereira
grade 7
Kumpf MS
Union County
BUDDHA

Suburbs turn into mountaintops,  
And the sky becomes 10 shades of green.  
When Buddha is your best friend, your soul becomes light.  
And your world resonates with the Buddha’s laugh.  
Darkness doesn’t survive in a place my man has walked,  
Even the shadows in your room vanish when he comes.  
Like an echoing cave he has shadows of his own,  
But he shines like the light at the end.  
It’s either his flat-top or his crown chakra  
That floats on his soft, smiling face.  
And it’s either a joke or scriptures of wisdom  
That he would bestow on to you.  
The world really does change in the Buddha’s light,  
The earth turns to fire and the sky flows like water.  
Upside down in a balanced way.  
Perfect, booming, thunderous, harmony.  
Rainstorms in the forest are Buddha’s true soul,  
And rather than legend he exists as a friend.

Rory McKim  
grade 12  
Woodbridge HS  
Middlesex County
TEARS OF JOY

Do you think the tears I am shedding for them are the same as the tears they shed for themselves or for the ones we lost? Do you think the way I slowly and mysteriously touch the walls of the museum, others touch in an exact way but with a different feeling? Whether it's similar to mine or not?

So many thoughts can race through a person’s head as they stand in the middle of a horrifying but yet remarkable place such as the Holocaust Museum in the heart of Battery Park, New York. You see people and they see you. People surround you. All different types of people. People who are white, people who are black, people who are Jewish, or people who are Catholic. Looking back now at my time there, I cannot help but really focus on why people were there. It couldn’t have been just to learn. People have to go into that place and that situation already knowing a lot. Or at least knowing a little. What happens to those who don’t know and who aren’t prepared for what lies ahead of them?

Although I wonder why others went there and can’t make up my mind on why I know why I went there. I walked in and already felt a heavyweight around me. I was petrified of what I would see because already strutting into the exhibit I saw a lot. I pulled my jacket around my body and attempted to click my high heels quieter down the street, but then it appeared. I slowly made my way to it, not admiring it, but just... gazing. I don’t know what my gaze was. It wasn’t in amusement, at all. It was not even close to amusement. Anyone who gazes at it in amusement should be talked to, and talked to sternly.

I could not stare at it in amusement for it was a cargo cart. The carts were Jewish, or Gypsies, or whoever was unapproved by the German power were. They were stuffed in and locked in, being forced to stay there like they were some circus animals waiting to perform. It was as if they were not human. They were the bottom of society. That is what truly made me sick that entire museum walk. The fact that people were not labeled as people. The fact that kids like me could not be kids. The fact that couples like my mother and father could not be couples. All they were was property or prisoners. That is the most utterly despicable and depressing thing I’ve ever heard. No, that is second to the most despicable thing I’ve heard. The first is that people believed it, and followed it, and joined that gross movement and still join it to this day.
I wore headphones to hear about stories in the exhibit. I saw the tables and desks. Desks of ex-Nazi leaders and tables of once-living and functioning Jewish people. I saw the bunks. The bunks where people may have attempted to sleep after a day of horror then awoke to restart the monstrosities but realized the person beside them was no longer living and breathing. All of them made me squint my eyes and tremble a bit. I would step back and try to look away. The stories... the people... it all made me miss a beat, made me hunch over just a tad and forced me to move on.

When I saw the map of Auschwitz I held back a gasp. It was there, in the back of my throat crawling up. I managed to just muffle it. It was the size of my town. My hometown Hazlet may have been smaller than Auschwitz actually. It was massive. Every chunk of the camp had a certain job. Parts killed, parts tortured, parts were just parts. My mother was four attractions behind me when I had reached the Auschwitz map/replica. I had to just stare at it. My eyes just wandered. To see huts that looked smaller than a garage be called homes, no those things were never homes, to be called or looked at as a place people could sleep and use restrooms was gag-worthy.

I felt my heart slowly breaking the more I looked and the more I bounced among the thoughts that were similar to my key thought which was how could someone do such a thing? Every exhibit was harder but when I saw the outside, when I saw the sun again, I felt a dark cloud over my head being slowly pushed over by the sun I just glanced at. I was out. I was changed. I was moved and I would never be the same.

I asked before if all people’s tears were the same. I asked hoping they would be. Now, I ask hoping they would not be. People are different and that is what is great about the world. That is what also led the Holocaust into action. But, the difference is, if there are too many people who are different no one can control us. Now I am proud to cry differently than everyone else in the museum. Now I am proud to be different. Why? Cause being different is everything the Nazi following despised. Showing them they would never rise or hurt us again, is what makes me cry tears of joy.

Olivia Devaney
grade 7
Hazlet MS
Monmouth County
Aurelia Tiongson
grade 12
Plainfield HS
Union County

Nicole Papay
grade 11
Neptune HS
Monmouth County

“Ole Yellow”
Raegan Morton
grade 7
Shrewsbury Borough School
Monmouth County

Yaniv Dehri
grade 12
Marlboro HS
Monmouth County
Underwater
The hair of the young woman
Floated around her
As she
Emerged.

Back and forth, go the strokes on the canvas
A beautiful abstract
Marking of a whole.
Realistic, but not.

Turquoise and midnight purple.
They play more into this picture
Than most really realize.
The sunlight,
Distorted by the pool,
Reflects off of her
Sunkissed skin
In bold strokes, unrecognizable to the normal eye,
As paint marks.

Streaks
Of white
On blue
On the pale of this woman’s skin.
Chocolate brown hair
Licking the water,
As the droplets
Drip
Off of her face.
Spherical bubbles trickle from between her lips as she
holds on to her breath
Her face breaks the surface.

Her hair grows heavy.
And she can breathe again.

Juliet Felice
grade 7
Wall IS
Monmouth County
Lin Li  
grade 11  
JP Stevens HS  
Middlesex County

Justine Samson  
grade 12  
North Brunswick Twp HS  
Middlesex County
I persistently tap my pen on the desk that I’ve been stuck sitting at for hours on end. Who knew that college is actually like this? It’s lectures, lectures, lectures and not to mention I haven’t been to a single one of the “amazing” frat parties. Leaning back in my chair to stretch, I try to be silent but my seat has different intentions as its old metal mechanics creak. Of course, the noise sounds like nails against a chalkboard as the room becomes dead silent. I shrink back into my chair and hide my face in my hands as I feel the eyes of others on me. My professor calls our attention back to the front of the room, so I finally look up and see nothing but the backs of heads to me. I let out a quiet sigh of relief and go back to taking my notes in my scrawny spiral notebook from the dollar store. I’m grateful that I have a whole box of them back at my apartment; it’s barely through the first semester and this one is already almost full. I take my time as I dot each of my “i’s” with a small heart, watching the ink flow from the tip of my gel pen. It may be completely childish, but I’ve learned to enjoy the small things in life. I think it’s ironic that I find hearts throughout my notes since I’ve never had much love in general throughout my life. Not from my peers, my own mother, and especially not for myself. I despised everything about myself in high school, and to be honest, I still do, but not to the extreme that it used to be. I had the belief that I could change my entire life in a warped sense, I still have traces of that train of thought, yet I don’t encourage it and no longer expect much of myself. At one point in my life, I became consumed by all the negativity and loneliness that composed my existence. It was like a gaping black hole in my galaxy that would devour everything that was in my atmosphere until nothing was left but me, and I willingly gave in. It’s still present although I’m numb to it since it’s existed all my life; it’s like I’ve adapted to it and accepted it. It’s right then that I finally drag myself out of my notes that I’ve been absentmindedly jotting down and notice everyone packing up around me. So, I follow their lead and do the same, tossing my red mess of curls to one side then slinging my bag over the opposite shoulder.

My Irish heritage is clear to anyone who lays eyes on me, I look like a literal leprechaun. With my red hair, emerald eyes, and spattering of freckles across every square inch of my pale skin. When I leave the building, I’m met by the brisk autumn air, so I move quickly as I walk to my apartment that’s a couple blocks off campus. I struggle to pull out my keys to unlock my door, but somehow I manage. The first thing I do is throw my bag down on my
mustard-yellow couch. I try to avoid looking at the stains on the fabric, which I have been meaning to clean for over a month now. I’ve been given so much work and been so preoccupied with my studies that everything else has gone off of my radar. This studio apartment is such a mess it looks nothing like the day that I first came to look at it when it was left pretty much spotless from the old owners.

My skin prickles as I feel an urge to clean all this up although I know I have to get my work done first. I start searching through my bag for my notes and any other papers I need. When I have them all, I set them down on my bed and decide to grab some snacks from my kitchen as well. I have had a headache since the end of class, but it’s beginning to escalate, and I guess it must be from all the stress, along with not eating anything but an apple. I scour through my pantry then fridge, when I’m satisfied, I return to my bed with a family size bag of chips and a pint of strawberry ice cream. I begin to chow down on the chips, and before I know it, I’ve eaten over half of the bag’s contents. I was going to eat and work, but instead I was scrolling through my phone. Procrastinating as I usually do to avoid acknowledging the fact that how I perform in college will probably determine my future. I open my notebook and groan not just because now I have to get down to it, but also since I’m not feeling so great.

My stomach aches and my head begins to pound, the throbbing starts at my temple then radiates out across my forehead. Some might be concerned or see doctors when it comes to migraines, but I’ve always had them as long as I can remember. I used to complain to my mom and she would just hand me a bottle of painkillers then tell me to suck it up. Now it’s almost as normal as breathing for me; I just ignore it and often it will be like background noise to my hectic life. Although this time is different, I notice that my body is vibrating and I begin to feel drowsy. I’m reminded of the times when I was little and I would watch TV late at night.

The later it got in the night, the more my eyelids would droop, but, of course, I would always fight to stay awake. Yet right now I’m not as motivated to battle my body as I used to be. My eyes flutter shut and I open them again so I can move everything off my bed, but it’s a failed effort. The last thing I do is briefly look at my phone and the time reads 5:16 pm. Collapsing back into my sheets, I succumb to the heavy pull of what I assume must be sleep.

Evelyn Kunycky
grade 9
Wall HS
Monmouth County
Catalina Manrique
grade 7
Henry Hudson Regional School
Monmouth County

Yusuf Samra
grade 8
Sandburg MS
Middlesex County
ECHOING EMBRACE
The seeds of poetry have always been within me
For my every moment has been illuminated by song:
The quiet burning force
To create a smile or a heartbeat
The thing finally filling the empty car
Speaking idiosyncrasies my dad will understand
Gifting me a spirit to understand
And, of course, a spirit to understand me:
To teach me the pains of hearts breaking
And the shaky voice of a lonesome man
Twenty years before my own birth.
Voices creating a sort of love
And countries of sound I can only imagine.
A silent screaming companion to hold my hand
While I battle with this world’s own cruelty
To create my tears and wipe them away.
I know a piece of me resides
In every song I have ever heard
And as seconds rush by I remain
In their endless echoing arms.

Aaron Puerzer
grade 12
Metuchen HS
Middlesex County
GRAFFITI

I stare straight at the wall
I rarely see this kind of art outside the cities
Graffiti
Someday I will decorate a wall of my own
With permission, of course

Chinese characters far at the side
Hidden from the unsuspecting eye

Every inch if this wall has been transformed
It’s hard to imagine what it looked like before
I look closer at the mantis
Someone wrote a single word
Tokyo

Moyosore Ogunkoya
grade 6
Gaurdineer MS
Union County
HAPPY FEELINGS

Joy is a sweet thing, a God given thing
It is beautiful, flavorful like honey

Like a gorgeous wildflower, slowly outgrowing all emotions
It makes things sweet and sunny, bright and magnificent

Things like friendships, love, and bonds form when true happiness is around
Sadly many, many people do not know this feeling

It is like that of the warmth of a mother
And the sunshine that beams from a sweet, innocent child

Quite indescribable, yet so easily taken for granted
For those who have tasted it, they will tell you it tastes like candy

No, better than that, ever so natural, ever so sincere, organic
Happiness is more than just a feeling
It's a state of being...

Daniela Villacorta
grade 11
Clark HS
Union County
Eric Velasco  
grade 12  
Perth Amboy HS  
Middlesex County

Ekaterina Kraus  
grade 8  
Sayreville MS  
Middlesex County
Sasha Harris
grade 11
Middletown HS South
Monmouth County

Dhruv Rungta
grade 10
Stevens HS
Middlesex County
CONFUSED AND CONFLICTED

My heart is racing. My breaths turn into gasps, I feel like a fish out of water. Beads of moisture are forming on my forehead. I can actually feel my world breaking apart like a million shattered mirrors. My room is in ruins, my things scattered on the floor, spilling out of my drawers. I am in a panic. Black spots are appearing in my eyes and I feel dizzy, my legs go weak, and my head feels heavy. The shoebox that I had hidden in the depths of my closet now lies open on my bed. A small voice in my head whispers maybe, maybe she won’t care, maybe she’ll just love me. But she won’t, there’s no point in it, hope. Her perfect daughter, has been exposed, now she sees me as I really am.

The letters are scattered across my floor, many ripped into shreds. I remember the first time Amelia passed me a note. It was in eighth grade, a Thursday afternoon. I was listening to the teacher intently. Then, I felt a delicate poke on my left thigh, so gentle that I almost didn’t register it, but something inside me told me to turn around, and be discreet about it. I rotated my body and cast my eyes downward to where I had felt that sweet touch, my eyes fell on a piece of paper folded more times than I previously though possible. My heart fluttered. I plucked the tiny square out of her hands, and for a brief moment my fingers brushed hers and my heart burst into flames, all at once I felt a longing that was so strong, I could have kissed her right there, in the middle of the classroom.

Talulah Whelan
grade 6
Gaudineer MS
Union County
Athena George
grade 8
Monroe Twp MS
Middlesex County

Ashley Moreira
grade 6
South Amboy MS
Middlesex County
Middlesex County Arts MS
Visual Arts—3D Class Collaboration

Elizabeth Abu-Bakarr, Ishika Agarwal, Izabella Connolly, Shreeya Gupta,
Ekaterina Kraus, Clover Long, Anvitha Rajasekhar
Dedication

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