



Scholar Voices

Spring 2021
Retrospective Edition



A small, stylized signature logo in the bottom right corner of the image, likely representing the author or publisher.

Preparing for the Future
By Joel J., Class of 2005

INTRODUCTION

Scholar Voices: 2021

ret ro spec tive (noun). Showing the growth, over time, of a person skilled at a particular task or occupation.

To our Scholars, other students and supporters, and all the members of the Pathways Family:

Welcome to this Retrospective Edition of *Scholar Voices*, the Literary Magazine of Pathways to College.

Over the years, *Scholar Voices* has come to represent an impressive collection of the ideas and creative endeavors of the younger members of the Pathways to College Family. We thought this would be a good time to invite alumni to participate - as authors, and to share their thoughts about their Pathways experience.

We hope and expect that all our Scholars, present and former, will keep dreaming, turning those dreams into realities and igniting the ambitions of those following. We are your cheerleaders! Remember: **If you can dream it, you can do it.**

Judith Berry Griffin
President, Pathways to College

Cover photo: Alumnus Joel J. took this photo in March 2021, while walking with his son to see an eagle nesting site. "Suddenly, something moved in my peripheral vision," Joel writes. "I swung my camera around and started snapping photos and within seconds [the eagle] was gone! Thankfully, I had all of my gear and my camera settings in place. What a reminder that only when I prepare ahead of time am I ready for such opportunities."



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WINNER - PHOTO JOURNALISM

Childhood

Gabrielle S., Grade 10



to you this doll is just a doll
to me this is my childhood
i dont know her origins now that im old
but i remember dressing her , talking to her , and taking her everywhere
i went
when i look at her i see memories
where every day was at ease
when life was simpler
but now she sits in my closet
with other memories like her
to you this is a doll
but to me this is my childhood

WINNER - ESSAY

Indoctrination: A Result of the System

Jalen L., Grade 10

I was indoctrinated, not into a belief, but a system. A system that was supposed to be rehabilitating, but instead it was indoctrinating. To some going back to jail is going back to hell. But the brainwashing that you experience from the system has you believing jail is going back home to see old friends.

'Life is for living' is my motto, but my life is not your life.

My life is three inch wide bars and solid concrete walls and a bunk bed with a stranger on the bottom and me on the top. You stroll free while I walk shackled. On the outside nothing is normal; there's no one telling me when to wake up or when to sleep. It's like, while I was out I longed for this place. It's like this place is imprinted on me. As if I was stripped of my life and its norms and given this other life. Given another position and when I'm back out there I feel lost. I'm in the same world with nothing and nobody. So I resort to what's familiar and what's normal and what's normal takes me home, where I am **institutionalized**.

WINNER - PHOTO

What Inspires Me

Isabella G., Grade 10



I saw this image while walking my dog around sunset. I just had to take a picture of the way the sun made the sidewalk glow and put an orange tone on the house and trees.

WINNER - POETRY

What If?

Michale G., Grade 10

What if George was never killed?

What if Colin Kaepernick never kneeled?

What if Emmett Till never went south?

What if the lie never came out her mouth?

What if Martin never dreamed?

What America's promise was redeemed?

What if Ruby didn't integrate?

What if children never learned to hate?

What if Tulsa never burned?

What if history's America was learned?

What if Ali never achieved?

What if "I'm Black" was never believed?

What if ships never sailed?

What if slavery never prevailed?

What if Africa was never colonized?

What if people of all faiths were recognized?

HONORABLE MENTION - POETRY

Stuck

(A poem about how I was changed by COVID)

Rebeca L., Grade 10

At first I was content.
No school, no work.
Late nights
No sleep.

Yet,
I was not content.
No friends.
No leaving my house.
Stuck.

However, everything changed
Once I began
Trying new things.
New music.
New clothes.
New ways of thinking.

Now, I am more content than ever.
Yes, I was stuck.
But now, I've been liberated.
Because now
I am me.

HONORABLE MENTION - PHOTO JOURNALISM

The Light at the End of My Tunnel

Hervly P., Grade 12



Here it comes
The light at my tunnel
Here it comes, so close

What a year
A year of peaks and valleys
Who would've known

Who could have foreseen
Who could have foreseen the graduating class of 2021
Graduating now

But here it comes
Here comes my light
The light ushering me into my new chapter of life

HONORABLE MENTION - POETRY

Ode to Love

Francisca H., Grade 11

Love is hurt
Love is broken
So much pain
So much depression
So much hate
Much is destroyed
Much is damaged
There is no hope.
Love is positive
Love is great
Love is patient
Love is kind
Love is a suffix
Love is an edge.
We give out love
We keep love
We show love
Music is love
We manage love
We care for love
The coldest part of the wind is love
The ocean is love
It does not boast
It does not keep wrong
It is not evil.
We all need love in our lives
The Joy is our Strength
We keep the joy moving
We keep the faith
There is always happiness at the end
Don't give up now
We hope for the better days to come
So much is forgotten
So much is gained
We bring the brightening stars of light
We bring the brightening mood.
Love is a round clock which goes around
Love is a diary
Love is a history of life
Love is a gateway
Love is a wonderful moment.



HONORABLE MENTION - ESSAY

Into the Unknown

Lauren P., Grade 12

Walking around the local bookstore for what seemed to be forever, the glimmer from a laminated novel whose title was upside down caught my eye.

"But what if we're wrong?" it read.

After reading the blurb inside, I began to ponder the question, what if everything that we knew to be true was actually wrong? What if the theories of gravity and existence as we know them are wrong?

At this point, I was going down a rabbit hole of conspiracy theories. This piqued my interest because, in today's modern world, we are so sure of every fact we come upon. Everything around us is undoubtedly true and there is a plethora of information to back up what we say.

Yet, even with all of this information, we can still be wrong. That slight chance of uncertainty opened my mind to the world of pending gravitational theories. Just the thought of not believing in a lie perplexed me in such a way that it drove me to explore these ideas with my physics teacher when we would debate certain ideologies throughout the year. Entering into the unknown and going beyond boundaries has been a skill that I will forever carry.

HONORABLE MENTION - POETRY

Transformation

Aliana D., Grade 12

Goodbye to the person I used to be.
Gone with the winds of change.
It took a lot of time and mistakes,
But I've finally realized
That a transformation needed to take place.

Much like a caterpillar,
I have waited in my cocoon.
Waited for the right time to break free.
What I didn't notice is that my transparent wings
Were always right beside me.

Although I'll still be the same at heart,
It's due time that I evolve
Past the me that will depart.
It could be just what I need
To reach the potential that's gone long untapped.
So here's to new beginnings,
And to what's made it possible to achieve them.

Fleeting Times

Angelica G., Grade 10

One day you wake up, and find that the biggest pain is the heart
That dreamy child becomes pragmatic
Those naive fights turn to storms
That grated knee becomes a broken heart
That simple cry becomes something continuous

As adults, the urge to return from the beginning overflows
That smell of warm coffee, prevails in your sense of smell
The longing to be a child reigns
Grandparent hugging is now required
But time goes by and the clock hands don't come back

Life becomes a train,
And suddenly, every moment becomes another memory
The spontaneous laugh is kept inside a picture frame
Living intensely is forgotten in the past
And tiredness is only remembered at work

Money becomes your priority
Your mansion is just another acquisition
The crowded closet, is the child screaming into the adult soul
But you insist on saying that you are prepared

Something that was a dream, becomes a nightmare
After all, that child was not prepared
Living day after day has been forgotten
The child's heart is still present in the adult heart
But the child is no longer required

Suddenly, the child arrives and saves you from the evil of the world
Grudge is replaced by forgiveness
Ingenuity changes your greed
The soul is heard
Time starts to be lived

Don't be in a constant hurry
Time goes by and the minutes don't come back
Friends go but affection is eternal
The memories are kept forever
But the moments are fleeting

Don't stop smiling when you don't cry
To forgive whoever judges you
To love those who defame you
And to be your best version every day
Remember to learn from your mistakes
And wherever you go,
May your heart be there

Running doesn't always mean going forward
Smiling doesn't always mean happiness
Just like crying doesn't always mean sadness
But love is similar in all ways

May the child never stop living inside you
May the child inside you not dominate you
May the years be cautious
May life be your friend
May the soul be heard
And that time is not just fleeting

Shoes

Hamaborsta E., Grade 10



I was inspired to draw and paint this because of my godmother....

My godmother and I were close and spoke about a variety of topics. She died at the end of February which was the saddest time of my life. A week after her funeral in March, my brother and I had an arts and crafts day to help us heal from that tragic day. I drew this picture to represent the girly girl topics we used to talk about and to give me something to remember her.

Alumna Lauren M.

Class of 2008

College: University of Virginia - 2012

Grad School: Tufts University - 2014

Doctorate: University of Virginia Curry School of Education - 2019

Current Position: Assistant Professor of Educational Psychology, Ball State University

She's an award-winning assistant professor of educational psychology, who after earning a doctorate in research policy and teaching, specializes in African-American child development at a university in Indiana.

"I lean into being close in age to my students," says M.. "I listen to some of the same music my students listen to and sometimes I tell them, 'let's apply some current song lyrics to theory.'" Her university recently named her its Outstanding Teacher of the Year for 2020-21.



"There weren't many black girls in my high school," M. says. In my English courses, characters in the literature didn't look or sound like me, so being involved in Pathways, a program with people like me in mind, was invaluable."

M. wasn't entirely sure institutions of higher learning would value her gifts. "I was not a good test-taker," she says. "But through Pathways, I learned test scores are only one evaluation metric. I learned about writing and crafting my personal statement. And the Pathways materials made me feel special. It was counter to the messages I was getting at school. I truly credit Pathways for dreaming alongside me and even dreaming bigger dreams than I had for myself."

"Pathways tells you that you have many talents and gifts and encourages you to make of them what you can," M. says. "Pathways doesn't look to 'fix' students who are 'broken; it works with kids to pursue their passions to go to college, stay there and then continue their success."

Untitled Memoir

Denisse V., Grade 10

I remember when I was younger I was quiet in class, I was kind of shy and I wouldn't really talk to a lot of people because it didn't interest me. I look back and see how much I've changed since then. Now I'm more talkative and active. When I was younger, I didn't like my curly hair because I thought it was ugly. I wanted straight hair because most of the students in my school had straight hair and let their hair down. I'd always brush and tie my hair back every day for school or just to go outside. The only time I would let my hair down is when I would straighten it. The first time I let my hair down was when I was in 7th grade. I don't know why I did it, but I'm glad I did because I don't think I would have in the future. Since then, I have been learning how to style it. I've dyed my hair about four times since 6th grade and last November during quarantine, I cut my hair until I couldn't even tie it because it was damaged. Now my hair is growing and I see my natural hair color coming in slowly. I realized how much I have grown and how I got out of my comfort zone.

Since the quarantine, we all had to stay home, not able to physically go to school, or be in physical contact with a lot of people. Many students and I have been doing online learning. I personally like online learning more than physically going to school because I am more organized since all the assignments and work are on Google Classroom and say when the due date of the assignment is. I don't really get distracted because I'm comfortable sitting on my bed and relaxed. And I'm in the same room everyday so I get tired of looking at my room. But I don't like that I don't get to see or interact with my friends or other students while on online learning. During online school I realized that I can't sit with certain friends in some classes because they distract me from my work, but I still love them. We always make each other laugh which is a problem when I'm trying to complete school work in school. After years of deciding what I want to be, I'm pretty sure that I want to become a nurse. I have been looking into it and colleges that I can go to that have nursing programs. I have learned that I like learning about what and why things happen to the body and how to treat symptoms.

Waterfall

Leslie J., Grade 9



Being in a pandemic isn't so great. Many plans were ruined but getting away from the city on nature walks can be cool and fun.

Alumnus **Isaac P.**, Class of 2012
BA, College of Wooster, 2017
Masters, Ohio Christian University, 2021
Current Position: Software Developer, Columbus, Ohio

Introduction

In the previous year of quarantine, I am sure many of us had those moments of reflection on the existential crisis where we question whether our lives have meaning, purpose, or value. For me, my moments of reflection came while reading the obituaries of those who passed from Covid-19. In an attempt to honor the lives lost, my city added spotlight pieces to the local paper. These spotlight pieces consist of an obituary of the individual and an entire section dedicated to talking about the hobbies, likes, and favorite things of the deceased. As I read those spotlights, I was amazed at how fulfilled some of the lives described seemed to be. From these spotlights, I would question if I was leading a fulfilling life, one that is valuable and has meaning, before I ultimately aimed to answer the question of "How one lives a fulfilling life." So, when approaching the question of how one lives a fulfilling life, I am asking what things make the life lived fulfilling? After much reflection and examination, I found that fulfilling lives had three key components in common: Intentionality, Pursuit of a Life Project, and Mentorship.

Intentionality

The first component I believe that is necessary to leading a fulfilled life is to live it intentionally. Some lives are not lived beyond the state of mere existence, finding comfort in devoting themselves to inactivity or waiting for actions to occur around them instead of being the spark for those actions. Those are lives that are lived organically. Lives that are lived intentionally are geared towards plans and goals and, if possible, the pursuit of one's dreams.

Life Project

Many of us define ourselves by what we do. Likewise, we also gauge how meaningful or fulfilled our lives are by our occupation, for better or worse. However, as I read the spotlight on the Covid-19 victims, I noticed that their occupations were never mentioned. Instead, the focus was on their passions and the goals they pursued. Thus, I believe that a fulfilled life is one spent in the exploration of projects while being dedicated to a life project. Projects can be defined as the activities that one is committed to. These could be thought of as

activities like hobbies or small-scale tasks that are undertaken, and even occupations. However, the life that is fulfilling consists of having and actively engaging in a life project. A life Project is the activity that the life lived is dedicated towards, the project that defines the life. The life project ought to be the conscious realization of one's plans and/or goals. For example, I would argue that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s project (occupation) was that of a Minister. However, his life project was to ensure that marginalized people obtained the same rights and privileges "guaranteed" to all men under the constitution. If Dr. King was just a minister and in pursuit of nothing more than that, it would be hard to argue that that the life lived was fulfilled. That is not to say a life dedicated to ministry is not valuable, but a life dedicated strictly to an occupation devoid of a life project or exploration of other projects/passions is not fulfilled.

Mentorship

The final component and perhaps the most important to living a fulfilled life is mentorship. When I say mentorship, I am not exclusively speaking of the act of influencing or guiding a mentee. While I do expect those things, mentorship here refers to helping others be the best versions of themselves that they can be by facilitating and cultivating the exploration of their projects/passions. Additionally, we ought to help each other discover our passions/projects by providing access to, or creating, a safe space where projects can be explored. For example, if you know somebody is interested in art, and you have the capacity to provide a means for them to explore that passion, then it will be your obligation to do so. It is not enough that you are living intentionally and are dedicated to a life project; you must also provide a means for others to do the same.

Conclusion

So, how do we lead fulfilled lives? I would say that a life that is fulfilled is lived intentionally, where we explore our passions while dedicating ourselves to a life project. But, most importantly, we mentor others and give them the space and support needed to experiment with different projects/passions.

Alumna Coral O.
Class of 2017
College: Yale University

It seemed that Pathways alumna Coral O. was living the dream: a young woman of color studying at Yale—after turning down other Ivy League schools – and a prestigious consulting firm offer of a six-figure salary to leave school early.

But Coral turned down the offer; deciding Instead to finish her studies, focus on her passions, and live what she considers an authentic life. Coral’s courageous choice may well have been inspired by lessons she says her Pathways teachers reinforced after she started thinking about what colleges she might want to attend: “Keep an open mind.”



Coral says her Pathways mentors taught her and her fellow Scholars the importance of exploring options once they were in college. In her junior year, Coral chose studying in Spain over Argentina to refine her Spanish language skills. Then, after Coral returned and found COVID-affected education draining, she took a semester off.

“There’s pressure to finish college in four years and a stereotype that if you don’t, you won’t finish, or that you’re just prolonging the process,” Coral says. “I knew that my college education wasn’t finished.”

Early in her college career, Coral took only courses relating to her political science major. But Coral’s interest in writing and entrepreneurship currently has her interested in becoming a dramatic TV writer.

Coral now chases her passions. And as a Pathways alumna, she offers this advice to younger Scholars: “Once you’re in college, be open to where life will take you. It helps to be open-minded and think about what will help you have a good quality of life.”

Resilience, Resourcefulness, Rigidity

Alumnus Jaevon L., Class of 2019

Sophomore attending Rutgers University, Newark, NJ

This past year reminded me intensely of my days in Pathways to College. Many reading this statement will see the comparison between the disastrous year, 2020, and a program that accomplished so much for kids - including myself - strange. This past year, no matter where you were in life, there were disturbances due to the pandemic that threw off academic and career plans. This sense of uncertainty was something that all Pathways Scholars experienced at least once on their turbulent trail through high school.

During my time in Pathways answers were not given but earned through an individual research assignment, some activity, or going to the horse's mouth on a college campus. The answer was not the final hurdle most of the time. There were general issues relating to the parameters or qualification of a particular university or group. When criteria are brought into the question, it is common sense to see where you stand. Human nature seeks to improve and standards give a benchmark. Pathways was a community that allowed me to get used to leaning into discomfort and measuring where I stood and how long the road ahead was for me. This changed my visceral response towards uncomfortable situations. Thinking back on the skills hammered into me by Pathways, the list is endless, and the only clear thing is that the Pathways experience was essential for my success despite the state of the world.

One Art Response

Ayomide A., Grade 12

The art of losing is hard to master
How about your parents' trust?
The loss of my parents' trust isn't hard to master?
Feeling like a bastard everyday
Feeling I am not good enough,
Isn't hard to master?
I have tried everything to regain my parents' trust
I have showed my best self
But losing their trust felt like disaster.
The art of losing is hard to master?

How about the loss of a friend? Huh
The loss of a friend is hard to master
She was just with me last week.
We had fun at the mall,
Park and even travelled to other states for shopping.
Terrible things happen, terrible things happened to her
I lost her to an accident, an accident which impacted my life
terribly
"Don't tell me that is not a disaster"
I have felt lonely
Ever since she was in the hospital,
Alone and isolated from the rest of the world.
So, tell me is the act of losing hard to master.
The act of losing isn't hard to master

In search of a better life I lost my country.
My home, cousins, siblings.
And you say that is not hard to master?
Everyday thinking about all the fun I had back home.
The pain, the memories and the experience is still in my head
Losing this isn't hard to master.
The art of losing isn't hard to master

You talk about the loss of a watch, door keys, and your mother
But have you ever lost your sight to see them?
The loss of vision in my left eye has felt like disaster
Due to a terrible incident caused by mother,
She wanted to hit me with a cane but accidentally hit my left
eye.
Since then I have noticed that my sight in my left eye has reduced.

After all this can you still tell me that the act of losing isn't hard to
master?
Even you felt the impact of your loss,
And you know that the harder the loss, the harder it is to master.
You can't master all losses but try to get over them by time.
It might feel like a disaster at the moment but it will definitely
pass or not
Depending on the type of person you are.

A Chance to Be Free

Derreyen H., Grade 12

There's always a chance to be free
A moment where you can let your hair down and it traces the wind
A moment where the air is no longer affected
There's always a chance to be free,
To run wild in an open field
To feel the cool breeze against your skin
To let the grass run between your toes
There's always a chance to be free,
Take this opportunity
Place your flag on the moon.
There's always a chance to be free.

Girl of My Dreams

Alumnus Joel J. Class of 2005
BA, Education, Western Michigan University
Computer/Technology Teacher, Benton Harbor, MI

To Charlynn

Verse 1

My dreams are made of many things
All of the colors to life they bring
Almost just like the ones that make
You seem to be the one to take
From nothing to spectacular
That's how it always seems to work
You move from deep inside my head
And then right next to me instead
I know this may sound crazy
But I think I just met my lady
I saw you in my dreams
And I think maybe
She's the one for me
Yeah you're the one for me

Chorus

At night when I fall asleep
I drift into a dream
What I see is just so sweet
I think I know just what it means

Such a pretty face
Makes my heart just race
Seems I already know
Who she is and she just glows
The girl of my dreams is you
You know

Verse 2

Now that we are together
I mix up memories and dreams
I want to be with you forever
And to me it really seems

If you exist in two places
One in my dream and
one in real life
Instead of one
I see two smiling faces
My dream girl My real girl
My soon to be wife

Bridge

The girl of my dreams has dark hair
She's never still when in a chair
She likes movies that do not scare
She loves it when I'm always there
Her touch is gentle and she is caring
She doesn't mind my constant staring
And her smile is always shining,
When I see it I am flying

Verse 3

It's easy to see now
That you are the only one for me
I don't know how
I'd go without you you're all I need
And if I know
That there is one thing
That I really want
It's because I know
That, yes, you are the only one
Now you should know that
You are the one my dream
That just comes to show you that
Some things they are what they seem

Dear Ms. Bishop

Fatimoh L., Grade 11

Dear Ms. Bishop

The art of losing is hard to master.
In order to learn you have to lose,
If you don't lose you may not gain,
And life itself is about losing and gaining.

The art of losing is hard to master.
Having to move to another continent is losing and gaining,
Lost my childhood memories,
Another continent talking about its own memory but can't relate, kids
Talking about their childhood memories and all you can do is listen and
See the difference from your own in your head.
Life is about losing and gaining.

The art of losing is hard to master
One more year into college, moved to another continent,
Got better education, better opportunities,
Back in first year of high school,
Friends graduating and telling you they are off to college and you
remember
That even though they are in college now, you are most likely going to
finish college before them because they always go on strike that slows
down their education.
Life is about losing and gaining.

The art of losing is hard to master
Things happen that you think slows down your life but it's actually
better
Than having fast growth with no meaning.
If you do not lose you can Not gain.

Alumna Chelsea O.

Class of 2013

College: Spelman College- 2017

Grad School: Kansas State University - 2019

Currently Pursuing Doctorate: University of Minnesota Twin Cities

This Pathways to College alumna graduated from her Arkansas high school as class salutatorian. She's pleased with the colorful trajectory her life has since taken.

As a Pathways Scholar, Chelsea joined the U.S. Navy Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC), and saw herself eventually having a Naval career. Although she earned an ROTC college scholarship, an injury at college eventually ruled out that choice. Because she loved biology, a career in medicine then seemed all set. So how did Chelsea end up a college professor who can expertly explain parallels between British Gothic literature and African-American popular culture? Pathways helped Chelsea realize in high school that she could maximize and exercise her options and passions once she got to college.



"Pathways teachers were really helpful," Chelsea says. "We had journals and wrote about what we really wanted to do. I had a passion for reading and writing." And although initially she chose to major in biology, Chelsea completed her master's degree in English and currently is enrolled in a Ph.D. program.

As a Scholar, Chelsea enjoyed the familial bonds she developed with her Pathways peers and teachers and offers strong advice for today's Pathways Scholars.

"Take advantage of the mentorship that's offered," says Chelsea, who herself mentored younger Pathways Scholars at her Arkansas high school after graduation.

"Ask questions," Chelsea continues. "Often, there's struggle before success, so have your mentors explain how they got where they are, and ask about life decisions they made. Pathways inspired me to think critically and ask questions of anyone and everyone."

Eyes

Alumna Valerie V., Class of 2020
Freshman attending Rutgers University, Newark, NJ

Bright like a fire
They scream out in fury,
but all she can hear is the
click click click
of fingers across the keyboard.

Desperate and afraid,
They call on old friend.

Not a cloud in the sky
or a drift in the air,
but a deep fog rushes her senses.

Heavy and thick,
a distraction in her lenses.
The fog refusing to move.

She rips off her glasses with frustration and haste,
Pausing to take deep breaths.

And just when they think she's ready to listen,
The click click click of her fingers continues.

Desperate and afraid
they will themselves to shut.
The dark engulfing her stubbornness.

Inside the void, the screaming is silenced
Water replacing the flames.

When they are finally ready to open,
droplets crowd along her lash line.

A last symbol of hope within their struggle.
She finally understands what they have been trying to say.

Bright screens and long hours,
Cups of coffee to push away the pain.

Her eyes can no longer take it.
Today, they need their rest.

Beauty

Gabrielle G., Grade 11



There is always beauty somewhere. In the midst of weeds
and isolation, the flower was still able to grow.

My Club Experience

Victoria B., Grade 12

My club experience at the Boys and Girls Club, Salvation Army Ironbound, Newark, NJ is priceless! I cannot remember a day going by from my younger years that did not consist of going to the Club. This was not just an "after school program" as many others would say, but it was also having a safe space to study while my parents were at work. It was the place to go to meet friends, hang out in the teen center, where we would share laughter and tears; a place to create memories as we joined youth groups and formed new experiences, and, of course, a place where we could get together and plan special projects that would help the community, such as volunteering when they needed us most.

I have been a member of my Boys and Girls Club for over twelve great years. Throughout these years I have established and created new friendships. The club not only was there for me as I made it through the confusing years of middle school, but through high school as well, one of the most challenging experiences in most teenagers' lives. As many of my childhood friends grew up, and created new habits that would affect them and their future, I knew I could always go to my safe space to get away from all of it. Like many other teenagers, the peer pressure was there and always will be, but luckily my mentors have taught me ways to kindly decline and even encourage those same friends to leave their bad habits behind and do good instead. I lost some of those friends along the way, but was blessed with the blossoming of so many new friendships that shared similar views as me.

Twice a year our club puts on musicals that bring hundreds of community people together. The Z Club performing arts group is respected in the community and has given many less fortunate children the opportunity to know what it feels like to be on the road to stardom. I am part of that club. I often was the backstage manager making sure performers were ready to go on stage, microphones cued, and costumes on the right way. In the end, Mrs. Zee never failed to thank her crew with a cast party. Mrs. Zee, who is also my mentor, spends all of her time making sure each child feels special in one way or another. She

finds a talent in everyone and then just polishes it up for them, resulting in pure magic. I want to be selfless some day like her and want to give children the same as she gave me and many others - the chance to dream!

I always tried to get involved in all the wonderful programs our club has to offer. I was a member of the Torch Club, the Keystone Club, a Girl Scout troop member/leader, a member of the Image Makers Photography, and a member of the Zclub. Being a member of these clubs has instilled in me good character traits, good citizenship skills, and healthy habits that will last a lifetime. I strongly believe that the club and all it has to offer has changed many lives and has given many opportunities to the children who dare to dream. Thank you Boys and Girls Club for believing in me. Thank you Boys and Girls Club for all the opportunities. Thank you Boys and Girls Club for giving me a place to belong. Thank you Boys and Girls Club for fulfilling your promise to every kid, every club, every day.

A Letter to My Future Self

Alumni Courtney C., Class of 2014

College: California State University East Bay, Hayward, CA. - 2018

Grad School: Holy Names University, Oakland, CA - 2021

Current Position: Operations Specialist for a
Non-Profit Youth Employment Program

Dear Future Courtney,

I believe in divine timing, so I am sure if you are reading this, you need to hear everything written within this letter. Times may feel uncertain and even scary, but you have to power through and carry on. It is ok to feel fearful, acknowledge that, and allow yourself to sit with those emotions. If there is one thing that you know, it is that patience is key and with time, things will align. You have **survived** bullying, your parents' divorce, the racial and mental trauma of the education system, and a pandemic, all while juggling work and school. While you are strong and often take on the weight of the world, I encourage you to seek help from loved ones, I know you don't like to, but it is ok to be vulnerable. In fact, being vulnerable is one of the greatest measures of **strength**. Open yourself up to love, especially self-love. Throughout this journey of life, you have gone on a journey of self-exploration, and that is an everlasting trip. Despite the barriers you have and will face, know that you are strong, beautiful, and capable of anything you put your mind to. By now, I am sure you are flourishing in the mental health field, learning to heal while abolishing systemic barriers. While I know you are happy and grateful for your success, it is important to remember to cherish and thank those who were in your corner along the way. Such supporting voices like your family, beloved teachers, Pathways to College, and your own will, who have all contributed to who you are today. It can be difficult to see the light at the end of the tunnel when distractions such as fog and hidden doors are blocking the path. Try to keep your mind focused on the light and tackle each barrier as you come across it. Continue to love and learn



who you are and who you want to be in this world, because that type of knowledge is infinite. Take in everything and always leave something, that is how we understand humanity. You grew up in a country, in a world, where you seem like you are always going against the grain - a rebel. Stay true to that. Society, peers, family, might try to steer you away, try to get you to conform, but stay true to what your heart knows. You were placed on this Earth for many reasons. As you read this letter, reflect on the past, but most importantly, cherish what the future could hold. As a young, Black woman, it is vital to remind yourself AND others that you matter, you are smart, you are confident, you are beautiful, AND most importantly, can do anything they can do but BETTER. I do yearn for a better place, as I know this world will never be perfect. Do what you can to make the world a safer place for you and everyone else. This will not be the first letter and surely not the last, do not hesitate to take the moments to stop, process, and remind your future self about everything you have done and more. I love you!

With love,
2021 Courtney

The Unity in My Community

Lauren P., East Side High School, Grade 12

Unity. All crave it, yet many lack it. In my community this trait is exceptionally prevalent due to the fact that we always bond together. Whether it be for a jubilant moment or a tragic one, as a city, we never fail to come together to lift each other up. Growing up in a Latino community, it was common seeing families struggle with income issues. With these issues came the birth of many nonprofits in my city. Many of them are run by community members to ensure that everybody has a meal at the end of the day. It truly does take a village, and being able to partake in this village has taught me the essence of humility.

The Life Changing Thesis

Alumna Krystal J., Class of 2020

Sophomore attending College of the Ozarks, Point Lookout, MO

The sun peaked over the horizon, illuminating the quiet land where healthy crops grew; Small wooden houses stood, and cattle grazed. The date is October 30, 1517, and you live in Europe as a poor farmer. You awake and get up in a hurry to start the day. You planned to go to church this morning because you were so busy you have not gone in months. You were taught to honor and respect the Catholic Church since you were a young child. The church was so important to you that you gave money to it so that God would forgive your sins even though you had scarcely enough money to live on. These payments were known as indulgences. Now you hastily walk down the dirt road towards town, eager to see the beloved cathedral and the holy priest once again. Soon you arrive; at last, it has been too many weeks. You have never been away from confession for so long! Unfortunately, you know that you've sinned since the last time you came to the church, and you remorsefully confess everything to the priest.

"When was the last time you said you paid for indulgences?" the priest inquires, after you finish telling your sins.

"A few months ago," you answer quietly, looking at the ground. "I just got so busy."

"That is a lot of sins," the priest mumbles, rubbing his chin.

Then he tells you the price of the indulgence, and the number's so high your jaw drops.

"Sir, I'm just a poor farmer!" you try to explain. "If I sell my house and all my other possessions, I still could not afford to pay this!"

"Niccolo de Vigo told me you stole his horse as well" the priest added.

Shocked and confused, you tell the priest that you had no part in stealing the horse and that you did not even know that it was stolen! The priest turns to walk away.

"I'm sorry, but it is what it is. You have committed many sins," he says.

A few minutes later, you find yourself sitting against a boulder underneath the shade of some trees in front of the church, speechless, devastated, and perplexed. Nothing made sense. You had been falsely accused. Didn't God know you did not steal that horse? How were you going to pay for the indulgence? The foundation of your life was

crushed and nothing seemed to matter. It was not likely that God would ever forgive you... or if He was even real. With these thoughts in mind and without any motivation to move on, you eventually drift to sleep.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

You wake up abruptly. It is morning. You rub your eyes and spot the cause of the noise. In the early morning mist, a monk is standing in front of the church door, a hammer in one hand. He steps away from the door, stares at the large rectangular paper he had nailed on it, then turns and quickly strides away, disappearing into the fog.

Curious, you get up and walk towards the note. After reading it you can hardly believe your eyes. It said that salvation was not reached through indulgences, but by faith and divine grace only! Could it really be true?

Suddenly you feel relieved and revived, like a withering plant in a hot dry land who had been given fresh cool water.

Yes!!! It must be true!

You decide that moment to follow the monk who had placed a list of ninety-five errors the church needed to correct, in plain sight, on the massive front door of the Church at Wittenberg! This list, or "The 95 Theses," a crucial part of the Protestant Reformation, had changed your life and would soon change life for millions!

Author's note:

Though this story takes place centuries ago, its truthful message still applies today. The bottom line is that even in life's most devastating, shocking events, God's goodness revives and gives joy to those who seek Him. When you realize there's nothing you can do to earn God's forgiveness, but that God forgives freely, NOT EVEN A PANDEMIC CAN KEEP YOU IN THE DUMPS.

After all, this life is temporary, but true LIFE with God is eternal.

AmeriKKKa (Tale of Two Nations)

Alumnus Isaac P., Class of 2012

BA, College of Wooster, 2017

Masters, Ohio Christian University, 2021

Current Position: Software Developer, Columbus, Ohio

She shines like the sun was never yellow.

Skin was filled with life, but her heart was mellow.

Her beautiful eyes that seemed to reflect the echoes of my gaze,

Has me caught in her trance as I am caught back in my own hellos.

At a glance she had a body that went back like perfect 80's women
retro,

Or should I say go back like how hair grows.

HER PROMISE!

Her promise, was like that kite that you can never let go,

Because her words will attack the heart until it echoes a bellow into
the clouds.

Her name was America....

With all due respect her name can be AmeriKKKa.

Because, sometimes when she calls my name

Oxygen escapes my trembling lips with a knee,

And all I can whimper is I.... can't.... breathe.....

But AmeriKKKa smiles.

She smiles while her protectors serve her justices.

She smiles while her protectors serve her just us.

But America smiles and alters the mood that I am in.

We have something natural...an organic chemistry and I am her carbon.

But when AmeriKKKa smiles I try to break those bonds.

But when America smiles, I am the proton to her electron,

And like a globe that spins on an axis I told her and the world we won't
need one.

Because I will defend her promise sharper than axes, harder than nails,
hotter than the sun Engulfed in a supernatural eternal fire.

This breath will last forever.

It will inspire the stars to shine and align with big dippers,

And pump love into your cardiac before AmeriKKKa **arrests** kisses from
your lips.

Her name was America. Her name was Hope.

Change

Ahdrianna W., Grade 10



This picture represents how I have changed since I was a child. As a baby I was a happy, smiley person, but as I got older, I started to get really mean and stubborn. As a teenager I got back to being a happy, smiling person. I realized that being stubborn and having a bad attitude was not going to get me far in life, so I changed so that I can have a better future.

Leading Fulfilled Lives

2020

Alumni Kalynn H., Class of 2019
Wait-listed at Tricoci University
Currently works at Amazon, Indianapolis, IN

In the beginning
I thought 2020 was an exciting year
But all it really was just a year of fear
A year full of tears
And everyone screaming that the end is near
And that if you're not right with God you better because he's about to
be here

But let's stop, reminisce and rewind it like a playback
January 2020 I was in college wishin' that I could lay back
But I knew I couldn't because I had to get my payback
For all the things people said in high school way back

March 2020 we got kicked out of school
They said it's a deadly virus out and everyone started acting a fool
Now we have online school
Which is cool
But it made me drool
It made me appreciate the time I was actually in school

On the news all you hear is people dying and people crying
Mass bodies being burned
Like man what you lying
I never thought that I would live to see the day
All I could do was pray for my family everyday

April 2020 I'm on orders with the national guard
I had to drop out of all my 7 nursing classes
But it was cool because I knew I was going to go far
July 2020 is when things started to get crazy
My sergeant took advantage of me
And I could've had a baby
I felt so sick
I didn't even feel like a lady
But what's crazy
Is that I didn't even react
Months later I'm trying to figure out how I can get my life back on
track
Because nothing feels like it's intact

But let's go back to the situation
I drowned myself with so much work
Just so that I didn't have to face it
And I hate it
I hate that I did that
I should've realized I was slowly losing myself and I needed to get my
life back

August September October man these months flying
I'm still on orders with the national guard
And focusing on my business
Just so that I can keep from crying
And thinking about dying

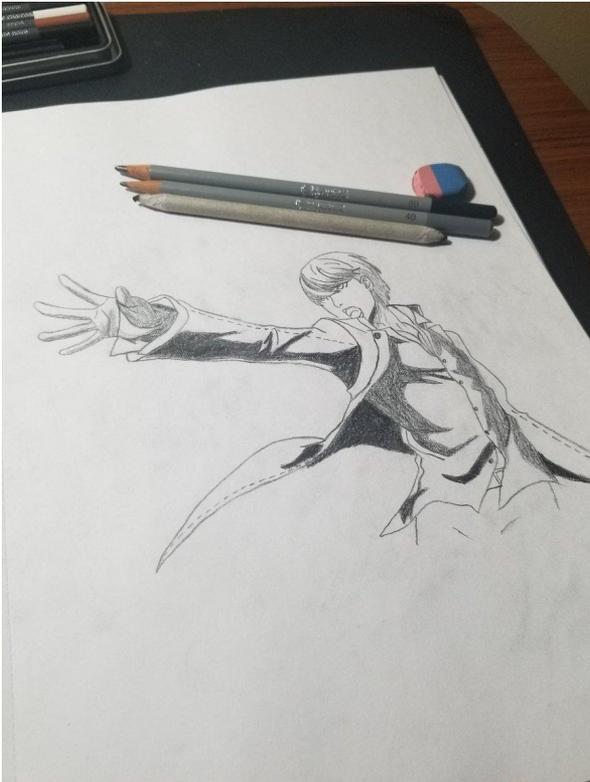
December 2020 is here and it's my birthday
Covid ruined my plans
So, I couldn't hang with my friends
I still had a good time
But all things must come to an end
I don't know how far my happiness will extend
Because when I'm alone
It feels like I descend
Into a world full of darkness
And I swear I can't win

A year full of pain, A year with no gain
At least that's what I thought
One thing I didn't realize is how hard I fought
Yes, even though 2020 was the worst year of my life
It gave me an even bigger reason to fight
In the midst of it all, I never gave up on myself
I even reached out and got help, with no help

2020 made me appreciate the smaller things
The people I meet, different experiences, my whole life
I was walking through a tunnel of darkness and now I think I see the
light
New car, new apartment, thriving business
I see it all
With the support from those who love me
I know I can stand tall
I don't know if who's reading this is into astrology
But I'm a Capricorn
Hard working, dedicated, ambitious and all

Reach Out for the Truth

Brian J., Grade 11



The character named YU, from the game Persona 4 which is all about managing time, is screaming out in this drawing. In a way, I relate to him. I have so much to do in my junior year of high school that finding purpose in what I do is necessary. Finding this truth is how I manage my time efficiently.

Alumnus Denzel S., Jr. Class of 2019
Associates Degree: Essex County College - 2021
College: Plans to attend Felician University in fall 2021

Denzel S. Jr.'s surname belies his physical stature — at 6-foot-6, he plays center for his college's basketball team. And while he's not yet famous, Denzel shares a first name with an African-American actor who is. Likewise, this Pathways alumnus has a dual passion - helping everyday people avoid getting taken advantage of financially, and guiding them in thriving in the stock market.

Denzel won a basketball scholarship to college, and credits his time as a Pathways Scholar for helping him navigate his educational path.

"Pathways had a step-by-step plan to help kids better themselves and find which college they'd like to go to," says Denzel. "Pathways teachers really helped me expand my knowledge and decide which colleges I should persist in applying to."

A Scholar in the grade below his pushed him to apply. "She told me how Pathways helps students with the college admissions process," Denzel says, "making it really simple to understand. Pathways also taught me about public speaking. We always had to present on topics during the sessions and share our opinions."



Denzel's two closest high school friends were also Pathways Scholars and he says the bond the three of them forged during those sessions has been unbreakable. Scholars' camaraderie, Denzel says, is a feature of the Pathways program.

"Life is too dark, hard, and unforgiving to be alone in the world," Denzel says. "My advice to Pathways Scholars: It's hard to find something you're passionate about, but if you find it, be committed. If you ever lose that energy, find friends in the program who can help motivate you and push you, as my two friends in the program did for me."

Don't Be Ungrateful

Mariana S., Grade 10



This was the view I had for three weeks when I was quarantined in February with COVID.

I was stressed with everything, especially with my health. Seeing my friends on screen and talking to my parents made it better but was not enough. Now when I look through my window, I realize I am very grateful for everything, especially for beating the virus.

I now know not to take anything for granted.

The Life of Another

Toni G., Grade 9

The night of the rumble is quite hazy; all I saw purple - that purple Royals jacket and I attacked. He got what was coming to him. If I had stopped to think, I might have noticed he was young. Even if he was just a kid he should've known what he signed up for when he decided to put that jacket on. He decided to claim and wear that title proudly. I didn't care about the person attached to the jacket. I only cared about the title he so proudly paraded around in; it's naive to think that you won't get hurt or threatened wearing a gang's title. Quite frankly I feel no guilt because this is the life I chose and this is the life he chose. If he wasn't smart enough to realize the dangers that would come with gang life then, oh well.

Maybe I saw him walking down the street before, which could be why I hesitated at first. But when I saw that jacket all I saw was purple. He was just a kid. I checked my surroundings to make sure there weren't any witnesses around, and then I struck. I pushed the blade into his right side under his rib cage. And slashed away as I saw the blood pour from his wound, and I hurriedly walked away.

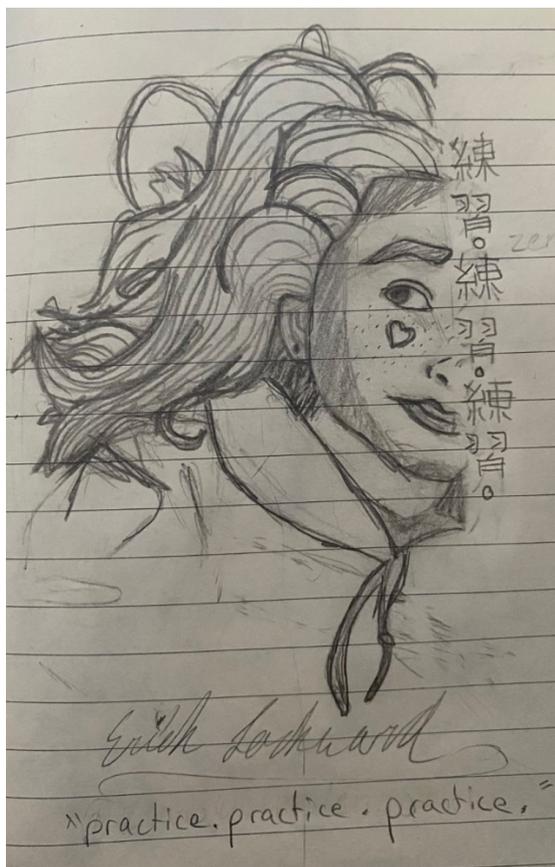
I took his life because this is the life I chose in order to survive. I killed him because I had to. If my members found out that I walked past a royal and didn't do anything they would be livid. I don't want to receive consequences over something so stupid. I guess he didn't realize this life is not a game.

Honestly, I feel nothing for him; I feel a little bad about his family since he was so young. I actually found out his age after I killed him. I'm mad that I might go to jail for his murder when initially I didn't intend on killing him; I just wanted to hurt him a little. I didn't think the rain would inhibit people from actually helping him. Or maybe it was the fact that he was a royal that scared them off. Either way, I don't care.

I found out about Andy's death later that week when the cops came to my house and asked me a few questions. Apparently I wasn't as careful as I thought because someone saw my face when I ran away. So I'm supposed to go to court on the charge of his murder, hopefully my lawyer can win the case, but I killed someone so I'll have to pay the consequences sooner or later.

Practice. Practice. Practice.

Erick L., Grade 8



Talent is overrated; practice is not. Over time, I've honed my talent.

There's No Night Light Like the Moon

Krystal J., Associate Scholar Alumna, Class of 2020
Sophomore attending College of the Ozarks, Point Lookout, MO

There's no night light like the moon
A white circle set in a black sky
From dark to dim it illuminates my room
Nature's solid, silent, glowing balloon

It fades in the sunrise
And disappears at noon
But brightens in late afternoon
And shines all night through

The light from my window
Kisses my pillow
Its sunshine in a tablespoon
There's no night light like the moon

Going through Pain Is Not Easy

Francisca H., Grade 11





By Derreyen H., Grade 12

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