



HEAD *to* HAND

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WARNING OF MATURE CONTENT IN SOME STORIES

Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader,

You know what they say about hindsight, and this particular year is one in which we might think of reflecting a tiny bit. Of course, there are all sorts of new things being planned for the second decade of the millenium--new tech gadgets, phone apps, and cars that will actually be autonomous. In short, we'll embark on our big dreams but we'll glance back from time to time to make sure we're headed in the right direction.

In this 2020 issue our contributors are glancing back and moving forward at the same time. From musings on past decisions and stories of future plans, we've gotten into the spirit of this year's theme. Also, fully in the spirit of this theme, we have a new feature for this issue--translated poems--where transliterations of past poems have had new life breathed into them by our contributors. So, feel free to browse this gallery of stories, poems, essays and visuals. They're in that rare space where you can see what's ahead while you're thinking of the past. We appreciate you taking the time to read our 2020 issues of Head 2 Hand.

Enjoy,
Azizat Danmole
Managing Editor of Head 2 Hand



“Sunset” Makyla Green

A Guide to Raising the Dead

Emily Vincent

To bring someone back from the dead, you will want to start with a backpack. The road to hell is quite long and exhausting, and you will have to make the trip alone. Fill your backpack with a length of hemp rope, several days' worth of food and water (non-perishable), something pretty, and a bag of Milk-Bones from the grocery store down the road. Do not skimp on the Milk-Bones. Buy the largest bag of the largest treats.

To reach the road to hell, you will have to get a ride. Step into the street and stick out your left thumb. Specifically your left. The right will summon an angel, who will not take you where you need to go. The third taxi to pull up will be the correct one.

Step inside and sit in the middle. The seats on both sides will be empty. Sit in the middle anyway. Ask the driver his name. He will say Orpheus. If he says anything else, exit the taxi immediately, abandon the backpack, and walk home without looking back.

If he says his name is Orpheus, ask him to take you to Eurydice. A single tear will slip down his cheek before he nods and pulls away from the curb. You will suddenly notice a small black dog beside you. Feel free to stroke it, but do not offer it one of the treats.

Speak to the driver about anything that you wish, so long as it is not love. He will answer in monosyllables. Do not be discouraged. He is not spoken to often, and he has become out of practice. His favor will aid you in your task. The driver will stop beside a ring of toadstools. This is called a fairy ring. This is also your last chance to turn back. The driver will take you home if you wish. He does not desire to see others make his mistake.

If you wish to move forward, pet the dog one last time and step into the fairy ring. Be sure to have the backpack with you.

Nothing will happen when you step into the ring at first. Do not step out, if you value your feet attached to your body. Instead, eat some of your food, being sure to save some. Then lay down and fall asleep.

The time is different for everyone. The ground will move down and carry you down with it. You will awaken in a twilight world. You will be on a cobblestone road. Do not wonder how you are standing. It is best to leave the wondering to those who will fail. The road to hell is not a place to wonder.

You will be alone on the road. Do not eat or drink. Do not sleep. Walk until you can no longer feel your feet. Your surroundings will not change. You will feel as if you are walking in place. Ignore this. It is the evil one trying to make you turn around. Dear God, do not turn around.

When you feel as if you may fall, look slightly to the left. The road will move with your gaze. You will see a house ahead, only about ten feet away. You will be able to approach it. Go and knock upon the door.

A woman will open it to answer. Ignore the decaying half of her face. She is Hel, the Norse queen of the dead. Do not disrespect her. Kneel before her and ask her for her favor. Call her Lady Hel. She will appreciate this. Offer her the pretty thing in your backpack. No one has brought her a present in a very long time. She will offer you a favor. Reply that you would like to speak with Osiris.

Her face will twist with disdain - the different gods do not often get along - but she will hand you a single golden coin. Take it and thank her profusely. Then go on your way.

In twenty minutes, during which several millennia will pass, you will reach a river. This river will be deep and churning, a dark murky gray flow. Do not touch the water. This is the River Styx. The water will burn your flesh from your bones like acid.

Ask the ferryman to take you across. He will ask for payment. Offer him the coin. He will bite it to ensure its authenticity, and in doing so he will taste Hel's blessing upon it. He will take you across without speaking any further. Try to ignore the wailing of the mourning dead on the boat with you.

Osiris will be in the largest hall. He is the blue man upon the golden throne, flanked by two beautiful women. The one with the white wings is Isis. Avoid looking into her eyes. She is beautiful, but treacherous. Beside her is Nephthys, goddess of the river. Offer her a smile. She is a valuable ally. Address the man upon the throne as Lord Osiris. Tell him that you would like to bring back a soul. He will tell you that you must pass his dog. If you pass the dog, you may try to reclaim your spirit. No one has ever passed the dog.

Open your backpack and take out the bag of Milk-Bones. Approach the side hallway tentatively, treats first. You will be greeted by the dog. The dog is not a dog.

Her name is Ammit, and she is part lion, part crocodile, and part hippo. Upend the bag of Milk-Bones at her feet. Dash past her as she devours them and pray she does not choose your soul instead.

If you pass Ammit successfully, you will be in the fields of the dead. These resemble simple, empty fields, flocked with wandering spirits. Roam among them slowly. You will find the one you seek. Fear not. They mean you no harm.

Your spirit will not know their name. They will have no memories. They have not eaten or slept since their death. Approach them slowly. They are afraid.

They will ask if they know you. Tell them yes. They will ask their name. Give it to them, but only the first. Their smile will be the warmest thing you have seen since starting upon the road to hell.

They will ask if they know you. Tell them yes. They will ask their name. Give it to them, but only the first. Their smile will be the warmest thing you have seen since starting upon the road to hell.

Ask them if they would like to go home. They will most likely say yes. If they say no, there is nothing to be done about it. Depart peacefully. If they say yes, bind their wrist to yours with the length of hemp. Caution them not to turn back. You both must obey this advice.

Lead them back to the throne room. Ammit will be gone. So will Osiris. Kneel before Nephthys and ask her for her blessing. She will ask you if you have anything in exchange. Offer her one of your bottles of water. There is no pure water in the land of the dead. She will weep with joy. She will then present you with a golden talisman in the shape of her sacred bird, the kite. Take it gratefully and wear it upon your free wrist. The ferryman will see it and take you back free of charge.

Return to the river. Lift your wrist when the ferryman asks for payment. You will have another silent ride across. It will be peaceful. At least here, no one will risk angering Nephthys.

Step off the boat and back onto the road to hell. Lead your spirit behind you. They are tired. Do not push them to walk faster.

You will pass Hel's home. Do not stop. Do not look back. She will call to you. She will make you many offers. Pay her no mind. She is no longer your friend.

You will hear growling. Angry spirits will whisper in your ears. Monsters from every afterlife will threaten you. They dare not touch you because of the talisman, so long as you do not turn around. Do not turn around.

When you reach the end of the road, kneel and take your spirit's hand. Lift the wrist holding the talisman to the sky. The world will seem to spin very quickly. Your eyes will be veiled in blackness. When the darkness lifts, you will be in the center of the fairy ring, your spirit still bound to your wrist.

Remain in the fairy ring. Help your spirit to breathe. They will not remember how, at first. They will then panic. Rub their shoulders and instruct them to breathe. They will remember how before anything can happen.

They will be so tired they can hardly stand. Make them eat and drink before you let them sleep. You may sleep too, if you wish, but do not wake them until they wake on their own. When they do, it is safe to exit the fairy ring. The presence of the fae has faded, along with the last remnants of magic. It is now only a circle of mushrooms. Leave it undisturbed for some hiker to gawk at and walk to the edge of the woods with your spirit.

The taxi driver will be waiting. He will smile at the sight of your spirit, albeit a little bitterly. Tell him Eurydice says hello. He will smile wider and take you home.

Do not tell your spirit how they died. It will only sadden them. Do not hurry them to remember. They will soon enough. And do not neglect them. Your driver can tell you that not many get a second chance.



"Mosaic" Anonymous

Floaters

Nicholas Allen Wittenauer

Today I will outline exactly how to stay in the middle. The example that I will use is high school, since it expresses the interworking of society on a much more exaggerated and sped up timeline. The middle is defined by myself as such: Not popular, and not a loser.

Firstly, you must know within yourself that you don't want to be a popular kid. A popular kid is defined by me as such: A kid who has achieved popular support of his peers through various means. If you are on the fence, consider these examples

1. It's a lot of work.

You have to keep up appearances, go to parties, go to events, talk to people you hate, and man, it's not worth the time.

2. What is the profit?

For all the work put in, what do you get out? Scholarships and ties at best. Is it worth the work?

3. You may have to sacrifice yourself

In order to keep up appearances, you may have to act unlike yourself, and cause cognitive dissonance in your private life. Who are you by the end of it all?

Secondly, you have to be determined not to be a loser. A loser is defined by me as such: A kid who has not/will not/ shall not achieve popular support of his peers. If you are on the fence, consider these examples

1. No satisfaction.

You don't have to keep up appearances, sure, but you don't do much. Without anything to tag your name on, you end up without a true sense of self-worth.

2. There is no profit.

For all the work you haven't put in, well you know the saying. You get out what you put in.

3. The you you are isn't worth sacrificing.

The popular kid has a personality, though fake it may be.
You, as a true loser, have no true worth to what you do.
You have no potential. What have you to sacrifice?

Thirdly, you have to have an example, a measure, of what your middle is. If you are confused by the terminology of, "Middle", I shall define it. Middle: Equally distant from the extreme or limits. Here are some signs of a person who's in the middle.

1. They work as much as needed.

The middle person need not keep up appearances. They can if they want, but a true middle doesn't. They work at what they want to work at, and normally do it well, but they don't do it to excess.

2. They have a pure profit.

Since the middle works as much as needed, their profit is exactly what they aim for. Scholarships, ties, jobs, they get out whatever they had put in.

3. They don't sacrifice.

A middle doesn't sacrifice themselves for their position. They rotate themselves around their work, and since they do it well, they don't have to sacrifice themselves to maintain their position.

Fourth, find your work. One you find a measure for your "middle", you need to find what you're good at, or at the least what you truly enjoy. Work at it, don't model yourself after others, do it yourself.

Fifth, to be a true middle, you must not let your reputation affect who you are. If people perceive you to be a loser, so what? Your work is something and has worth. If people think you're popular, so what? You got there from work, and from work shall you be.

Sixth, and this is the hardest bit, to be a middle, you must avoid drama at all costs. I don't mean it in this way, "OMG I just hate drama, I just avoid it. :D". Here's some examples of situations in

1. Talk to everyone equally.

You don't prioritize the popular kids, you don't hang with the losers. You primarily hang out with your friends. (Which don't actually affect your popularity).

2. Never choose a side.

The exception to this rule is your friends, always watch for them. Those outside of your friend group, loser or popular, never take a side unless IT IS CRYSTAL CLEAR that one party is in the wrong.

3. Go out of your way to be nice.

No one can truly hate a nice person. But, if you're naturally nice you tend to go by the wayside for popularity. To be popular, you must be nice, but not all the time. To be a loser, you can't be outwardly nice.



"Pink" Anonymous

Angie and Wallace

Adam Harbison

It was called a black-tie event, but they never said anything about the color of the dresses. Pastel oranges, brilliant greens, and placid blues shown between ebony jackets like supernovae in deep space. Leather shoe soles clicked in a carefree cadence as cameras flashed. Spring formal had gone just as planned.

On the outskirts of the dance floor, two bare feet dragged across the linoleum, the fringes of a silken black dress following closely behind. She opened her clutch, looking everywhere and nowhere at once, and pulled out the phone. The screen illuminated her face: soft and pale, contrasted by the bold scarlet enveloping her lips. 11:50, the digits reflected on her lenses. The makings of a frown quickly turned to a smirk as she locked the screen and dropped it back into the bag and clinched it shut, feeling a tap on her shoulder. She turned, taking longer than usual to look from his scuffed wingtips to the tobacco-brown curls atop his head.

“Uh, hiya, Angie,” he stammered out with a shaky, crooked smile.

“Hello, Wallace,” she replied, looking away.

“Have you filled out the application yet?”

“I really don’t want to think about it.”

“Do you want to dance?”

Her eyes widened. “What?”

“I figured it could take your mind off things.”

“Yeah, so could a trip to the underworld, but you don’t see me buying a ticket.”

Wallace’s cheeks apply a natural rouge as his lip begins to tremble. “Sorry.” He started to turn away when she grabbed his arm.

“Wally, wait,” she spoke slowly. A sigh escaped from her lungs. “What the heck. You can’t mess up a waltz.”

A smile fanned across his face as he offered his arm.

“Watch your hands,” she said. “I can still beat you up.”



"Path" Anonymous

Chess Board

Juliana Pettis

Who are you to me? Who am I to you?
Grandmaster, amateur, or a patzer?
Your double attack rendered me anew.
Blitz! My knight, my capture; your move, dear sir.
Tactics, tempo, threat; not to forfeit yet.
My heart is not en prise in this forced game,
But doubled rooks you took, so my heart let.
Your fear of sudden death wrought the endgame.
My king I brought to the board, but you shrank.
Time delay, two ply, touch move; you refused.
Your heart cried, “Zugzwang!” – in my chair, I sank.
You resigned, decreeing the loss excused.
A blunder – your move to capitulate,
For on this chessboard, you played a Fool’s Mate!



"Cuticle" Anonymous

Joan D'Arc

Adam Harbison

Slender maid,
Dark blade held aloft,
Scratching the rosette background,
Holding her in place.

She's trapped,
Not free to come or go,
Held by fate and paint against the canvas,
Death is as in life.

Immortalized in cage-like paint,
Robes flowing into unmoving folds,
A statue of a woman,
Pinned and trapped,

A martyr of a revolution none believed in,
Chased by a cold and distant God,
Into a fate of flames and embers,
Piled upon crumbling burning wood.

Trapped by God, by her army, by the ropes,
And by the paint,
Caged like a pet bird,
Hopping for the amusement of ones far above her head.

Just nineteen when they pronounced a heretic,
Nineteen now, in another millennia,
Poised stiff and firm and perfect against a canvas,
Caged forever.



“Part” Anonymous

Maid of New Orleans

Adam Harbison

Ice in her eyes

Fire from her head

Men to be led

men to be dead

Gauntlets from steel

and iron are made

Clutching her arms

while she clutches the blade

Velvet surrounding

of earth and of mud

colored to rust

with the staining of blood

Rounded by darkness

she pleads to the light

that He from above

set her purpose to flight



“Seat” Anonymous

I Like Pink and Blue

Brooke Kalous

I first learned what the word “gay” meant at 14. It wasn’t that I was surrounded by homophobes, it was just that I was surrounded by other people who either didn’t know what it meant, or didn’t care. I can’t remember the exact instance someone explained it to me. It was just that in one memory of being 13 I didn’t know, and then one memory of being 15 I did. I probably learned what bisexual meant around the same time, as half of the friends I had then were bi.

I had never really been exposed to the word “gay” so I had never really had the opportunity to decide if that applied to me. By the time I heard it, I already knew I liked boys. I’d had a boyfriend. I’d had crushes on guys. I was straight.

But bi? That word was trickier to dispel.

I was straight. I had to be. I liked guys. I wanted to get married to a guy and have kids and just be normal. I, the cartoon-obsessed teenage girl who couldn’t help but pair off two guys in every story she wrote, wanted to be normal. Straight as a stick. Straight as a board. Straight as... a straight... thing.

Then one night, the prosecution submitted a piece of evidence to the court that the defense was not prepared for: “I’ve had crushes on girls too.”

In middle school, I had liked this one girl in my group of friends more than the other. I’d invited her over to a pool party and caught myself staring at her. I dismissed it. I was just jealous that she was pretty. She was just nicer than my other friends. She just lived closer, so I spent more time with her. But when she

had told us who she had a crush on, I felt a twinge of jealousy. Or maybe regret. But not what you're supposed to feel when your friend tells you her crush in middle school. You're supposed to feel happiness, and the urge to get them to kiss ASAP.

What clinched it for me, though, was that I realized I had a crush on one of my current friends. Who was a girl. I had a crush on a girl.

Maybe I'm making this sound like too fast a process. I lost sleep over this. 'I'm a Catholic.' I thought. 'I'm straight. I have to be.' Even though I had bi friends around me, I was scared of my feelings. Maybe that's just par for the course for teens, but the being bi part probably isn't.

But eventually I accepted it.

I came out to my friends first at my Halloween party, 2017. They reacted how you'd expect. "Hell yeah!" "That's fantastic!" "Haha I guess there are only two straight friends now!" "Yes! We are corrupting you all with the gay™!"

I was scared to come out to my parents though. They are both conservatives, but deep down I knew they'd be fine with it. They loved me. They'd love me no matter what.

But I also knew they wouldn't be fine with it. They'd still love me, but they would wish I was straight. They would not wish the discrimination and awkwardness of being gay or bi or whatever on me.

I tried dropping subtle hints. When I got to pick a prize at the arcade, I picked a rainbow stuffed animal. I commented on how cute a couple Poe and Finn would be in Star Wars Episode VII. I asked "hypothetical questions" about how they would feel if I was gay.

I accepted my female friend's invitation to prom. I commented on how much I wanted to see Love, Simon.

My mom picked up on these and asked questions, but I denied it and gripped the knob of the closet door a little tighter.

But then I went to see Love, Simon and in the parking lot, my mom said to me, "I feel like you took me to this movie for a reason."

And I came out.

She reacted how I expected, but she also did something very different. She said, "I just want you to have a great love story." "Would you be disappointed if that love story ended up being with a girl?" "...I want to say no. But I don't know. I just want you to be happy."

And yeah, maybe I cried a little, but it was just such a rush of relief and fear and adrenaline all at once. I felt like I was dreaming. It surely couldn't be real. My dad's reaction was completely different than what I had imagined. I sat him down and said, "I have something important to tell you." "Okay," he said. "I'm bi." "Okay." "Okay, nice talk."

I flung the closet door wide open, drinking in the sunlight. It felt weird, since I'd only known what the word "bi" meant for four years, and only figured out I was one a few months ago.

But in a way, I'd been in that closet all my life because there was never a name for those feelings or a reason for those stares. I had a name for it and I had people who loved me not just in spite of it but with it. Yeah, it's a label. Labels divide and conquer us, but the

labels we have no choice but to carry and the ones we want to carry are two different things.

In a way, those crazy pastors and parents were right. We do choose to be gay. But we don't choose who we fall in love with.

We choose to be okay with that.



"Trail" Anonymous

The Arrow

Nicholas Allen Wittenauer

Life is fine these days. If I'm going to be honest, I feel as though I'm an arrow. Fired from a bow of great craftsmanship, and aimed by an expert marksman. The arrow itself is suspended, high up in the flight-path of its target. It's suspended such that you can't quite discern if it will make its mark or not. The arrow itself, I'd imagine, would feel a flurry of emotion. Suspense, because the arrow is waiting for the sudden jolt of hitting a target. Anxiety, because what will the arrow do to be ready for the target? Will the arrow be ready for the target, or will it shatter upon impact? Futility, because it can only fly haplessly toward its target, without a will of its own. The arrow just has to trust the make of the bow, the skill of the archer, and in its own path; if it's to hit the target.

I like to believe that we all hope we were successful in our high school days. We all passed, and so we feel we have crafted for ourselves a foundation in which to build up the rest of our lives. This is my bow, it is made of everything I learned in my years of schooling. For me it was to take as many skilled classes as possible; shop, culinary, sewing, Spanish, all to make my bow. I wanted my bow to be useful, but now the aim had to be set, so I set my aim toward the trades. This is my target, it is my aspirations, my goals, my life. My target now is to work on the factory floor to make the conveyors run, but that might not be what I hit. Now that I'm on the home stretch at college, I feel suspended, holding my breath for what may come next.

More and more I find myself in a mode of suspense, building in on itself. In middle-school it was all suspense for high school. In high school, suspense for college. Now in college, suspense for the real world. I know the next target is there for me to hit, but it always feels like a smaller and farther target than the one I can reach. Will my education, work experience, and aptitude be enough to make it when I get there? I can only hope that my target is the one I want to hit.

Another part of me wonders if all the formal education in the world is enough to get me by in a real job on the floor. It's one thing to learn about your career, it's another to actually put it into practice. Then again, that's if I get the job, because what if I don't? Every single plan I have right now has it as a given that everything goes smoothly, and I get a job. I know it's pessimistic, but it's happened before. I apply for jobs, I never hear back and am out of a job for months on end.

As it stands, right now I wish I could do more, be more, earn more. As it stands right now, I have to wait in the arc of the arrow. Suspended high and far away from my target, at least it seems that way. Each day I go to work, and eat the same food I do every day, and go to class, and go to sleep. I talk with the same people about the same thing every day. Can a person be blamed for feeling so small and futile?

Things aren't all doom and gloom for the arrow though, you have to remember that the arrow can always be picked up and re-used. I feel confident in myself and in my foundations, what I have learned, and my career path of choice. It's up to me to utilize and acknowledge the opportunities given to me, because if I don't no one will. Even if I don't make it where I want to end up, I can always try someplace or somewhere else. Even if my bow may be cracked, or my aim isn't the best, I can always try again.



"Weights" Anonymous

Talk Me Down

Mikalyn Hart

At the bottom of the stairs to the right, in the storage room behind the witch hazel and castile oil, there is a bottle of vodka. Above the cabinet in the kitchen, where the oils are kept, sits a chilled wine cooler set to the temperature of fifty-four degrees, in which preserves a bottle of whisky and two accompanying bottles of wine.

See, my mother and father aren't the type of people who drink for fun. They used to be for sure, and my extended family, they are definitely a bunch of heavy drinkers. In fact, they're known for it. But now, when you see my mother with a full glass of liquor, you know that there is something wrong. And so I've been conditioned.

Now I know you meant well, and you were only concerned and that was the point of your text, but you didn't understand. Nor did you know, all sides of the story, but what you heard was enough and so you told me exactly what you thought about it. I knew that nothing I said would ever change your mind because you had picked your side. You had picked it almost twenty years ago when you got down on one knee and later declared your love in front of many witnesses. There was no changing your side after that –and don't get me wrong, I completely respect that- but you still don't know the whole situation because you aren't here. But with the short spoken things we had exchanged, you had said every single unspoken thing, and I don't think you realize it. Lazy. Worthless. Hateful. Selfish. Heartless. You had said it all. Things you have told me my entire life, and that was enough.

I was aware of the fall. I had felt it many times before in the pit of my stomach. In these times of seeming betrayal, it is easy to believe the lies that I've been told my entire life. And so, I eyed those deceitful bottles of liquid that promised fulfillment. Validation. Solutions. I knew they were filled with empty promises, and I think everyone who is in pain knows that before they even pour their first drink. But I don't care because deep down I think all of us have that small glimmer of hope that it might- just might- fill that emptiness inside us. Even if it's just for a moment, but still it leaves us feeling even emptier than we did before; before we poured that first drink. So please, talk me down, before I do something stupid.



“Bright” Makyla Green

A Two-Edged Sword

Juliana Pettis

“You hold that tongue of yours!” Growing up, my mother always said this to me when I would smartly voice my opinion on something. She would take me aside and always tell me, “That tongue of yours is a weapon and you need to learn to control it,” or “One day that tongue of yours is going to get you into big trouble.”

At the age of seven, these warnings never meant anything to me. It usually came after I would get into a fight with my brother and say something mean to him or answer back to my mother in a tone she did not approve of. In my mind, my mom just wanted me to be quiet and not voice my opinion. My freedom was being obstructed. Though her words angered me at the time, I realized shortly after this episode on the lower level of our New Jersey house, what my mom really meant.

My brother and I rode the bus to school from Bayville to Toms River each morning. It was never a fun ride as I never cared for school. Constantly moving and being the new kid always held its list of pros and cons. Bullies, teachers allowing you to be bullied, and more bullies never was a pleasant experience. New school meant new bullies. No matter how large or small the school was, it was all the same.

It was towards the end of the year and I was becoming accustomed to the abuse given on the bus rides. Maybe it was the spring air, maybe I had just had enough of the nonsense, or maybe my mother’s many warnings caused me to “rebel.” Whatever it was, something changed in me that day.

We went to board the bus in the giant schoolyard. Yellow was blinding as not a single spot was left open by the buses. Over 900 kids in the grade school and over 250 in the high school, commuting from all over New Jersey, for the only Catholic school in the area was a madhouse. As small children, it was very easy to board the wrong bus as sometimes your bus did not manage to squeeze into its designated spot thanks to other greedy bus drivers. On top of it, whether you had friends on your bus or siblings, you all usually were separated as classes were multiple. There were so many kids exiting at once it was like the state fair with how many people were all heading in one direction. Even more tantalizing, I was always on the smaller side growing up, which was an advantage to squeeze in-between people, but not to see where one was going.

This day after school it felt particularly crowded. I am not sure why, but it did. I remember heading towards where my bus was supposed to be and going a bit too far. I hopped onto the wrong bus, realized my mistake as I saw the driver, and headed back off. Wandering around as the buses failed to be in their designated spots, I happened upon a bit of a squabble. Being too short, I did not realize right away what was going on or who was involved. Seeing they were blocking my way to head where I needed to go, I just walked right into the middle of it since I had to get home.

That was when I realized who was involved. R.J., my brother's friend from our bus, was being bullied by three girls. They were fifth graders, like my brother, and R.J. was in fourth grade. He was very quiet and always put up with these girls as they rode our bus too. Throughout the entire year, they would call him names like 'Hot Dog' because he was white and tease him by taking his stuff. On the bus, nobody messed with them because they were mean to everybody. They would trip up us younger girls and say mean things. Recognizing this reoccurring scenario, I was annoyed. Worse than that, I was angry.

R.J. was the only nice person to my brother and I on our bus. I often told them to leave him alone, but I was just a second grader. So no one would listen to me. Out here, with tons of people around, surely someone would do something! Spectators and bus drivers just sat there doing nothing as they shoved R.J. to the ground, ganged up on him, took his backpack, and started calling him names. I have no idea what came over me, but I, a second grader, headed up to the ring leader of the three and shoved her. Stunned she looked down at me.

“Leave him alone!”

“What are you going to do about? You’re just a little girl!” She said to me laughing and her two friends joined in.

R.J. scampered away at this point, leaving me alone to face the three of them. I blew up. I cannot remember what I said I was going to do about it. My mother’s warning about my tongue rang in my ears as a crowd began to gather around us. This older girl shoved me to the ground, but instead of staying there I hopped back up.

“You need to stop calling R.J. names and be nicer to people!” I yelled at her.

“Like hell, I need to listen to you! You’re not my mother!” Then, she shoved me again.

Well, those were not the words to say to me because that immediately gave me words to speak. I shoved her back, got up on my tip toes to try and stand face to face, and pointed at her, mimicking my mother and I’s discussions about sharp tongues.

“No I am not, but you know what, “Those who live by the sword die by the sword!”

“What is that supposed to mean?” She asked appearing a bit frightened.

“It’s from the Bible. Jesus said it.”

“I-it ain’t in the Bible.” She said stammering.

“Yes, it is because my Mom said it is. She also says that the tongue is a like a two-edged sword and let me tell you, if you don’t shape up and start being nice to people it will come back to kill you.”

After that, she backed down. To this day, I am not sure what exactly did it, but towards the middle of our bus ride she approached me. I made her apologize to R.J. and she considered me her friend after that. I was the “cool second grader” to her because I stood up to her. She left R.J. alone for the rest of the year; although, he was not happy that I stood up for him since I was a girl.

Needless to say, my Mom was proud of me for sticking up for the right thing. However, she did explain to me that it is not the tongue that is a two-edged sword, but the truth. In my innocence, I had not followed my mom’s warnings the way I felt she presented them at the time, which was to be silent. It was not until I got older that I understood what she meant.

My mother was raised with the saying, “If you don’t have something nice to say, don’t say anything at all.” However, due to her warnings and influence, I learned to temper my words over time realizing that it was not the cutting things I could say that would silence people, but the truth. That was the lesson she was trying to convey.

Gradually, I began to learn to hold my tongue when necessary, but also to speak when necessary. So now instead of my tongue being a weapon that would potentially get me “into big trouble,” it frees me to brandish the two-edged sword of truth with my words.

Looking back, I think I saw a bit of myself in that fifth grade girl. She had been bullied for being African American most of her life. I had been bullied for being the new kid with glasses all of mine. I did not want to become a bully like her and she did not like herself because of it. So instead of using my anger to hurt people like she did, I began using it to protect and help others. Throughout the years of being bullied after this event, it has been tempting to mistreat people in retaliation, but I have truly seen that my mom’s quote from the Bible was correct: “the truth is a two-edged sword which pierces the hearts of men (Heb 4:12).” When spoken with a firm, but kind tongue, the truth convicts both the heart of the wielder and the recipient.

Contributors Bios



Adam Harbison

Adam Harbison is a Music Technology student at SWIC. He is a Belleville native and enjoys spending time with friends and family along with helping in his church. After graduation, Adam plans to continue his music education and ultimately pursue a career in songwriting and teaching music to others.



Emily Vincent

Emily Vincent is a short story, sketch, play, and novel writer located in Belleville, Illinois. She is a Running Start student dually enrolled in Mascoutah High School and Southwestern Illinois College and plans to attend a four-year institution next year. She dreams of seeing the plays she writes performed and of becoming a sketch writer and cast member for Saturday Night Live, as well as finishing and publishing her novel. In her free time, she loves to work with her horse and work on her writing. This is her first publication.



Juliana Pettis

Juliana Pettis graduated from Southwestern Illinois College in Fall 2018 with an Associate in Arts. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor's in English with a minor in history at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Juliana began writing stories and poetry at the age of twelve. Her goal is to meld together her love of both writing and history as she strives to better herself.



Brooke Kalous

Brooke Kalous is a 19-year-old Computer Science major and Creative Writing minor. She writes every day with no plan to stop. She also enjoys drawing and hopes to one day make animated works. She and her girlfriend will celebrate their two-year anniversary in May.



Nicholas A. Wittenauer ---

Nicholas A. Wittenauer is a SWIC student who loves to write, and work with technological systems. When he is not working, he's reading nonfiction, studying history, and pondering the meaning, and events, of life.



Makyla Green ---

Makyla Green is a running start student and budding graphic designer who likes to drawing on her tablet, watching anime and reading. She also loves making robots and engaging in robotics competitions, and her pet Hamster, Napolea.

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