

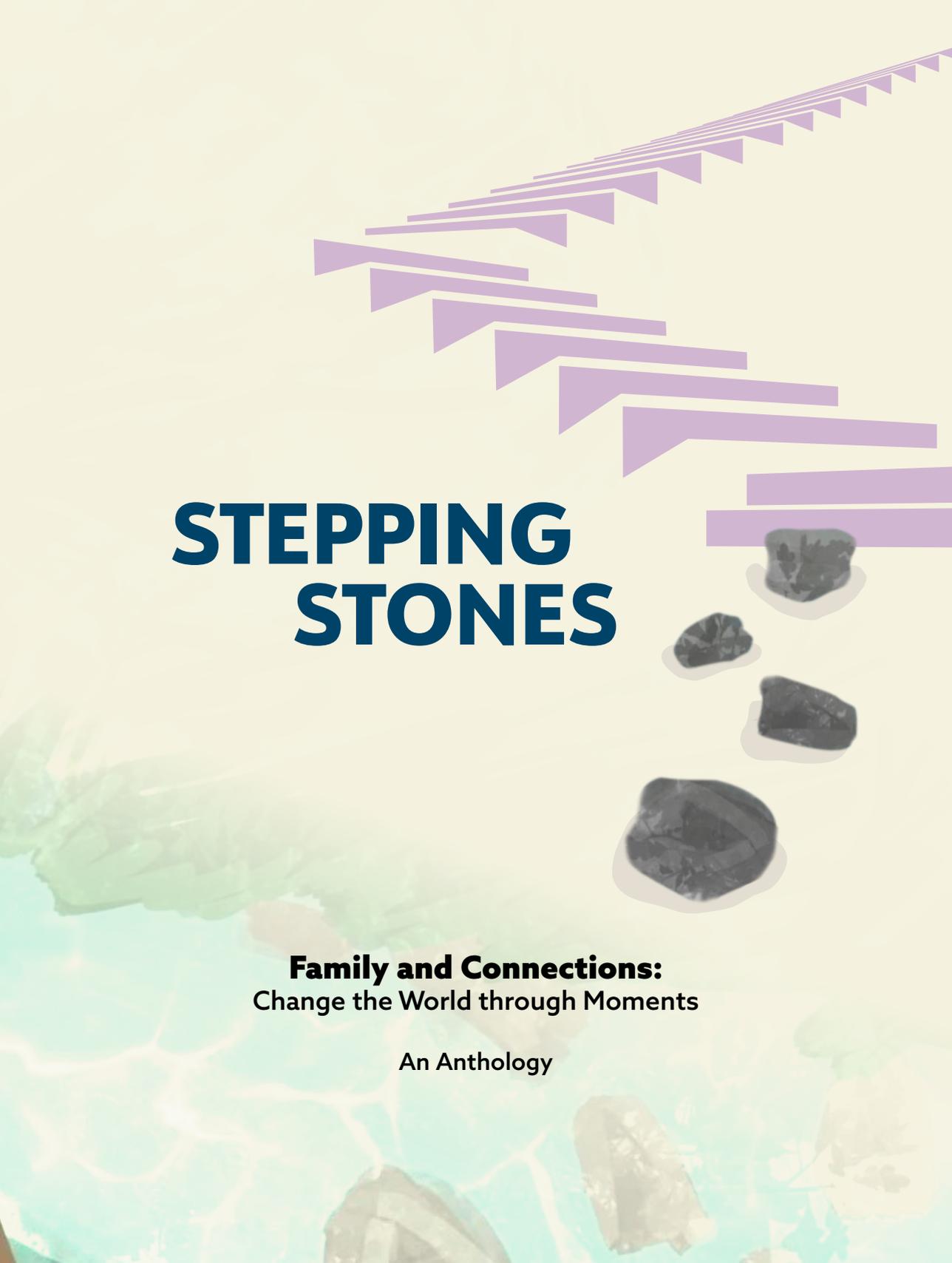
A series of purple, stepped lines that create a staircase effect, ascending from the bottom right towards the top right of the page.

STEPPING STONES

A series of five dark, irregularly shaped stones arranged in a descending staircase pattern from the top right towards the bottom left.

Family and Connections:
Change the World through Moments

An Anthology

The background features a light green and yellow gradient. At the bottom, there is a faint, artistic illustration of water with several stepping stones protruding from it.

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Foreword

The world has entered a new phase, life as we know it has changed. Yet it is through these “unprecedented times” that a “new normal” has emerged. As we grapple with these changes, students from The Ponds High School’s Creative Writers Guild have come together to face these new challenges. They have identified that it is through family and connections that we can enable change – change brought about by moments together, change that brings about relationships.

The time that these students have spent together becomes the stepping stones for their transformation. Some steps are small and only require a nudge, whilst other steps are leaps of confidence and faith. Every step bringing them closer to themselves. Afternoons spent in the library, connections made, working together as a team; we would like to share their visions.

Rosylne Caro and Jennifer Voukelatos (Teachers)

From the Principal

It is a pleasure to write the foreword for the second anthology for The Ponds High School.

It is fitting that this winter holidays I was due to return to the small country town I spent three years in. A place where moments shaped and changed my world, where connections with people and places made me part of who I am today. In the car heading off I wondered what I would see? However, due to “stay at home rules” the journey was cut short and we returned home. There are many such reflections in this anthology of the interrupted world of 2020-21 and its impact on individuals. There are also some moments of stability, including the love of parents and the awe and power of Nature. I particularly enjoyed reading the short “Moments” fragments.

Congratulations to all the poets and authors who have contributed and I hope you look back fondly on the time spent creating these memories.

Thank you to the dedicated English teachers, Librarians and the Creative Writers guild for making “*Stepping Stones 2021*” possible.

Jenny Weal, Principal
The Ponds High School



About WestWords

WestWords is Western Sydney's Literature Development Organisation. We provide pathways of opportunity for the development of Western Sydney voices through innovative literature and related arts programs. We believe literacy, self-expression and creativity changes lives and communities. WestWords is committed to providing an environment where the stories of the communities of Western Sydney and the places they come from are celebrated. The guiding philosophy of WestWords is a belief that the unique perspectives and stories of the Western Sydney area deserve to be celebrated, developed in literature and shared with a wider audience.

We believe that engagement with reading and writing allows young people in particular to develop their imagination, gives voice to their stories and experiences, hones skills in written expression and illustration, and sets them on a trajectory for life. With a focus on literature, we deliver residencies, fellowships, workshops, performances, presentations and publications. Our partners include teachers, schools, universities, community and arts organisations.

WestWords would like to thank The Ponds High School, its principal Jennifer Weal, Miriam Kelly, and the two teachers who kept the group on task, Rosylne Caro and Jennifer Voukelatos. We would also like to acknowledge Sailor Studios, who always do such a great job for us, as well as Margaret Redrup-May and the team at Blacktown City Libraries.

Finally, thank you to the students, whose enthusiasm, inspiration and dedication led to the book you now hold.

WestWords is proudly supported by



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At ACU, we offer a welcoming environment for everyone. We stand for meaningful education, vital research, and life-changing community engagement.

It has been such a privilege to work with the young writers of The Ponds Writers Guild again. I love it when young people write with passion, and I especially enjoy seeing them come to their writing with eyes, minds and hearts open. There are very few pieces of writing by anyone that are perfect, very few that cannot be improved with guidance and humility, and it is this that I enjoy most about working with the young writers from The Ponds. They are keen to improve and learn, whilst remaining confident enough in what they want to say to stand up for their story in the face of misdirected critique. The poet ali whitelock, who worked with the Guild for a double lesson during Literacy Week, said this: "What a gorgeous bunch of kids, and so talented! These students showed remarkable maturity in both the quality of their writing and their willingness to give themselves over to the magic of poetry. The poems they produced during the workshop reflected their extraordinary ability and confidence to dig deep inside themselves and write."

Thank you to the school, in particular the teachers and staff who commit their time to guiding these young writers, and the students themselves for being so enthusiastic. These skills will stay with you into adulthood, and you will find yourself drawing on them when you least expect it. Congratulations and well done.

Writer, James Roy



James Roy is an author and musician from the Blue Mountains. He has published over 35 books for young people, several of which have won or been nominated for major literary awards, including *One Thousand Hills* (with Noël Zihabamwe), which won the NSW Premier's History Prize and the NSW Premier's Literary award, and *Town*, which won the NSW Premier's Literary Award and was nominated for the prestigious German Youth Literature Prize. He has written libretti and songs about killer whales, Henry Lawson and exploding canines, he holds a Masters in Creative Writing from the University of Sydney, and works for WestWords as producer.

FAMILY

THE BIRTH GIVER

BY GIOVANNA

She is a teacher,
she loves teaching

She is a chef,
she loves cooking

She is a listener,
she loves listening

She is a hand,
she loves helping

She is the fire,
she loves fiercely

She is the heart,
she loves loving

She is a mother,
she loves you

she is the
fire she
loves fiercely

starlights flying
over your head

MEMORIES

BY KINGA

Curly brown locks, green eyes as sweet as prickly pears,
the blue suede shoes that their father wore,
the brown-paper package that always tore.
The hot summers and the cold lemonade
that would bite your tongue.
The dark nights with the starlights flying
over your head, and the laughs thrown into
the air without a worry in the world.
The whispering of rumours and stories
while a firefly circles the tent.
It runs in the family, all the memories do.

THE IN-BETWEEN

BY MELODY

With the gush of wind, the doors welcomed her in. Warm, dew-dropped mornings. Hints of fruits on the point of ripeness. The familiar mix of earthiness and sweetness. She was back...

A young girl wrapped her arms around the back of a middle-aged man, whose hands were full of clinking bottles.

"Dad!" she yelled. "I got you!"

"Aha, where were you, kiddo?" he said with a gentle voice.

Her finger pointed at the wooden table behind the shelf.

"I was smelling all the bottles there. My nose has gone funny," she said, sulking. Before the middle-aged man could turn around, he was interrupted by the sound of the wind chimes.

Her eyes focused on the same wooden table in her memory as her face formed a bitter smile. There were no changes made; the store was the same as ever, like the cruelty of time had no effect. It stood just out of the bustling city with nosy roads, in the corner of a street only residents could find. Inside, the walls were still sealed with a glossless layer of cream, one side decorated with the words *c'est la vie*, and the other with meaningless drawings. The plain bottles of perfume still claimed their space on the touching tables and shelves. The same antique leather armchairs rested near the counter. She had spent her first twelve years here, the years of happiness that only turned into hatred and anger towards the middle-aged man in her memory.

Her father.

FATHER

BY DHYANASAI

When we are happy, we forget
When we are pained, we throw our fists
His love is unconditional
He places us on his shoulders,
So we can see the world in its glory
Even if he wallows in the mud beneath
Yet we condition our love to him
He cannot possibly be above the stress and work
That ails us!
He fills our world
But we don't let him in ours,
I wonder what father is doing now

ONE COMPLAINT

BY MELODY

The mornings where tears fall
The pain. The break. The hurt
The right way, full of mess
The wrong way, full of delight
The many words spoken
No sweet sounds, only bitterness remains
The bluntness is what you catch
Nothing else matters after that
Begging for forgiveness, yet half is not sincere
What could have gone so wrong
One tantrum, one complaint and one fight
But we are too much in pain
One personality, two individuals
This is what we are

remember?
When does one
begin to first
take in the

ABCDGHIJK?

BY DHYANASAI

When does one begin to first remember? When does one begin to first take in the boisterous sounds of happiness or feel the gentle caress of the wind? Mine is a very faint memory. One that I have to rack through every nook and cranny of my mind to find. I close my eyes, reminiscing the warmth of my first memory.

"ABCDGHIJK—"

"Where did the E and F go?" my mum laughed, cradling me to her warm chest. I snuggled in, wanting to stay there.

"Come on, do it one more time."

"Amma, this is the fifth time!" I exclaimed in her warmth, refusing to come out.

"Hey, it is never about how many times you do work but with how much of your heart you put into it. Come on my darling; you can do it."

SISTERS?

BY NATALYA

My first memory was when I was supposed to be asleep but my sister and I kept whispering and telling each other stories. We had a very small room that we shared, and our beds were on the opposite sides of the walls but not very far apart.

We had to talk loud enough for each other to hear but soft enough that our parents didn't. The living room was right next to our room because it was a small house so our parents could hear us.

Then, I don't remember what was said but whatever it was, it was really funny. We both started laughing. I remember hearing someone get up and start walking. I remember scrambling into a random sleeping pose trying to stop laughing and hoping I wouldn't get caught.

LOLO AND LOLA

BY GIOVANNA

I am six years old. I am getting my hair done where my aunties get theirs done, at my Lolo and Lola's house. I am sitting in front of the big mirror, and I am getting bangs! But Lola does not just cut it like normal. She has this technique. Very straight, no uneven strands of hair. The secret is that she is using a ruler. A ruler! To measure out my hair and cut it in a perfect line. Another great day with Lolo and Lola.

I am eight years old. It is already noon and I am just getting breakfast. I can smell the *chamorado* downstairs in the kitchen. I am walking on our wooden stairs, counting each step. I love the mornings here in Lolo and Lola's house, it is always so magical. Like Disneyland! We are currently eating *chamorado* and then I will play princess parties with my cousin and sisters. I zoom from one room to the other. Lolo always makes us crack up with his silly jokes and funny-looking moustache. While Lola makes us feel satisfied with all the delicious treats she is always giving us and her signature red lipstick. Another great day with Lolo and Lola.

I am ten years old. My favourite time of the year has come. Christmas! Getting ready to munch these pancakes. So excited to have some fun and party all night. I put on this red dress, feeling like I am eight all over again. Heading to church, but before that, Lola gives us face powder to reduce the shininess of our faces. We sing our praises and smile at everyone. Christmas at church always feels different – the songs, the decorations, the overall feeling. It gives me so much joy and happiness. Back here at home and now getting ready for the party my great-grandmother always hosts. Tons of food, presents and presentations at her house. The theme

this year is Hawaiian. I put on my Hawaiian outfit. I get in her massive vintage house and sit and wait for my cousins. Their parents are walking in, so I rush outside and greet them. The party is starting, all the guests are here, now it is munching time! I am in line while scooping rice onto my plate and immediately skip in front of the line to get *lechon*. I told the guy who slices the *lechon* to give me as much skin as possible. So far, the night is going great, but now it is time to perform! This year it is time for my little sister to shine. I stand in front of her while we start dancing to the song from Lilo and Stitch. It is almost midnight time for *manito manita* and games! The prizes and gifts I am getting are astonishing. After a few hours, it is getting late, time for us to head home. Another great day with Lolo and Lola.

I am twelve years old. I am moving to Australia in a year! And my birthday is coming up pretty soon. I want to host my last birthday party somewhere other than Jollibee, so Lolo and Lola have decided to host my party at a Chinese restaurant. I am in the car with Lolo and Lola, driving to the mall to buy a dress for my birthday. I get into the mall, the first thing that comes to my mind is PINK PINK PINK! I turn my head and immediately fall in love with these three dresses. Lola does not want to buy three dresses for one occasion. I need to choose one that is perfect. It has now been hours of fitting and looking. I decided to go with a dress that is pink, elegant and with beads on the neck. We are now driving back home. I cannot wait to wear this dress for my birthday! Another great day with Lolo and Lola.

it is always
so magical

NOSTALGIA

BY SAMANYA

My first memory was on my first birthday. I remember it was a Mickey Mouse themed party, and I was wearing a pretty, fluffy pink dress. I remember my grandfather was lifting me up and showing me to my other cousin that was the same age as me. Next to the cake was this plastic pink lotus that made small sparklers on the spot. At the time I didn't have much hair, I was nearly bald. It was in a huge party hall with more than five hundred people there. I was on the stage with my parents with the spotlight on me. I was cutting the Mickey Mouse birthday cake. I remember being held by my great grandmother and I started crying because I thought she looked scary. My innocence at this moment makes me nostalgic.

*i was wearing a
pretty fluffy pink dress*



FAR AWAY

BY NATALYA

I was running far away,
Would I run off the edge someday?
I got lost in your eyes,
Would I ever lose my mind?
And I am hiding from the world,
Will you convince me otherwise?
I guess we'll never know,
Will we ever know?

You show me the shining light,
Will I take the cover off my eyes?
My fears are coming to life,
But will you shield me from the night?
You make me feel so brave,
Will you show me the light today?
You lead me to the world,
What will I see today?

I never knew the world would be this great,
Golden rays and cotton clouds,
Pink ombré into a purple night,
Even the grass is dyed,
The sky will never be the same,

I was running far away,
But I have found my place,
I was hiding from the world,
You showed me the light,
And I guess we now know,
Now we know,
My fears have disappeared to the light,
You made me feel so brave,
Even the night has the moon to shine light,
You lead me to the world,
And now I never want to stray away.

*a friend that
always cares
young joyful*

FIRST COMPANION

BY NIKKI

Soft brown teddy bear
A friend that always cares
Young joyful baby boy
Whose best friend is a toy
Imagination is colourful and wild
They both sat on a sturdy wooden bridge tile
Fluffy, soft, and cuddly his teddy bear sat
They talked all day long, more chats after chats
Teaching his friend, the wonders of the world he has just started
The best companion for a child's life, they're never parted
His hair matched his fur, both silky and clean
Their friendship, nothing getting in between
Both with hearts as pure as gold
From the stories the teddy bear is told
Adventures and journeys they go on together
Friends till the end, always and forever

KEEP ME 4 EVA

BY GIOVANNA

Every
Chance with you
Always
Keeps me happy

Even
Clouds of rain
Are unable to
Kill my mood

Every
Coming day with you
Always
Kindles me in love

Even
Confusing thoughts

Are unable to
Keep up with my emotions

IDK

BY SRISTI

The train swept along the jagged edges of the Australian coast; windows pulled down as the mellow air playfully twirled my unkempt hair. A warm feeling made its way up from my stomach through my chest and to my face where it remained, reminiscent in my wide smile stretching ear to ear. Even a breath of the salty ocean air gave me a sense of pure joy. Inside the carriage were four other children, two of whom I knew and the other two avoiding my eyes.

Chatting eagerly amongst themselves were my two younger sisters, who had never been in such a wonderful vehicle before. The other two were looking at me rather strangely. As though I had never gotten the memo that train rides were meant to be nothing but a dreary mode of transport which was to be avoided at every opportunity. But the refreshing breeze and picturesque views allowed me to think otherwise.

My mind blank to the destination, enjoying the journey greatly, the train continued to ride across the Australian coast.

ISN'T HEAVEN, IT'S HELL

BY GIOVANNA

Red roses, sweet chocolates
You call me and tell me I'm yours
But it sounds nothing but shallow
Who would I be if I wasn't yours?

I thought love was pleasant
I thought being "loved" was special
It isn't romantic nor attractive
It is nothing but a fantasy

I gave all of me to you
But you kept it all
Gave you all of my affection
and attention

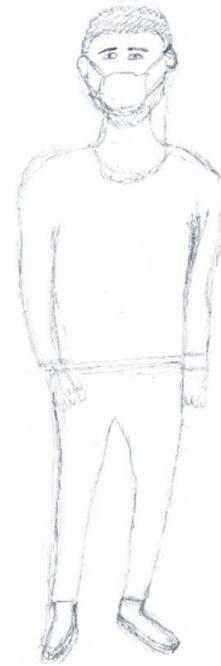
It doesn't feel sweet
'Cause I'm with you but I miss me
Turns out losing yourself in someone
isn't Heaven, it's Hell

who would
I get if I
hours

TEN BRAIN CELLS

BY NIKKI

A group of friends, wild as wild could be
Connected through talents and weirdness, we guarantee
There was me, the mother hen, the one who was always confident
Lorane, the colourful artist, the one who sings consistent
Ari, the athletic one, the caring one who you can always go to
Rahman, the hotheaded one, the one who jokingly insults you
Chi, the "quiet" one, the one who you can trust
Potter, the street smart one, the one whose facts are always discussed
Lewisa, the short one, the one who can always make you laugh
Owie, the tall one, as tall as a giraffe
Yacob, the missing one, the one who was never around
Tristan, the weirdest one, the one whose mind should not be allowed
A group of friends, wild as wild could be
Connected through talents and weirdness, we will always be



THE NEW NORMAL

BY HEER

ILLUSTRATION BY ROHAN

We cautiously walked the streets, our faces covered with unbearable masks and, as we took each breath, we felt the discomfort and the feeling of distance. As time went by, we all adjusted to the new outcomes and to what the world had fallen for. However, we all feared the day that would come, the day we revealed our faces as we now found comfort in our home and underneath the sheets of our beds and the stress that once grew upon us had finally left. Now we roamed around the city with our identities hidden and distance pushing us to our own corners and our own world which we had yet to explore. It was the new normal which we all had started to like and it was the new normal which we couldn't bear to leave behind.

UNNOTICED

BY KINGA

A cool autumn afternoon in the usually lively park, the middle of the sixteenth day of this month. Trees were now matching the brownish shades of her hair, and the grass fit in with the dull green of her eyes. She gently wandered around the area, like the clouds did along the sky. The wind was busy ushering leaves onto the footpath, and her mind was focused on organising her mess of thoughts.

Today was not a special day. In fact, it was quite ordinary. The sun shone on, the planet still turned, and time wouldn't stop sprinting. People always focused on the little things just to make them memorable. People would always make such a big deal of everything, except her. It didn't matter if she was unique or even if she was exactly like everybody else. Nobody would notice her, as if she were that one date on a calendar everyone would forget. And then they would all act surprised. They would all beg for forgiveness; they would try to apologise for being forgetful.

Though then it would be too late, and the young woman wouldn't be reading her book on that lonely bench beside the old oak. And by then the birds will have flown away from their nest, leaving it to rot and fall. Until one day, spring will come again, days reading, days spent like clouds, days no longer unnoticed.

WONDERLAND

BY GIOVANNA

Come with me and let us explore
the place that has it all
Potions that make you grow tall,
Smiles of the Cheshire cat
Tea parties down the road,
mad hatters, white rabbits with clocks

They say it's strange
but it's just unfamiliar
This world where we can be free
of judgement and guilt
Not sure if this is real
or if it's all just a dream

If this was a dream
memories I will keep
It breaks my heart to leave
Time to wake up from this dream
Just the two of us
In a world that is *Wonderland*

collecting my emotions
started writing

TO MY DEAREST

BY GIOVANNA

ILLUSTRATION BY GILLIAN

"Dear dearest"

The smell of the fresh blank paper
I thought to myself
You might be happier
2,409 miles away from me

I stared at a half moon
Collecting my emotions
I started writing

"Hello, how are you?"
To help you find your response
This feeling evoked pleasant memories
On that fresh, blank paper
2,409 miles away can introduce worries

Every time I cook
I get *déjà vu*
Wishing I'll cook for two



"Do you get *déjà vu*?"

When you lie on the left side of the bed
When you watch the movies I pretend I like
When you listen to Ed Sheeran's "Thinking Out Loud"
2,409 miles away can fade memories

It was 11:09 at night
I left half the page blank
Flashbacks from September 24 made me half-awake

C H A N G E

DIFFERENT

BY MIA

As years have passed and the world has grown,
Us as humans have expanded all that we know,
What the world was known to be,
Is no longer how it is seen,
Hours spent playing with Barbie dolls,
Now fade to a monster staring back
Wondering "where did I go wrong?"
Poking and pinching and wishing we could change
What makes us not all the same
Hours spent on Instagram,
Comparing and stressing over every kilogram.
And yet we all seem to forget
That our flaws make us different,
And nothing like the rest.

humans have
expanded all
that we know.

SOULMATES

BY HANNAH

They talk about soulmates
People connected through distance
Through time
Always finding each other
Because when the earth was created
The stars aligned
Creating a cosmic reaction
Binding two souls together
And creating an everlasting connection
A connection that could withstand anything
A connection that could never ever be broken
Yet, here I stand
A broken heart in my hands
Echoes of our memories fading
The sound of your voice silenced
The feeling of your touch forgotten
The sight of your smile buried in the depths of my mind
And a soul torn in half
If we were bound by our souls will I find you again?
In a different place?
A different time?
A different reality?
Or will I forever be wondering of the one meant to be?

*ways finding
each other*

BOSS

BY GIOVANNA

I used to despise your rules
I slam the door
I stomp my feet
I fuel up with anger
Not knowing how you feel

I say you're cruel
Because you care for my attitude

I say you're rude
Because you care for my safety

I say you're too strict
Because you care for my future

I say you're harsh
Because you care about my values

Turns out after all
You would open the door
You would help me tie my shoes
Your strength is indescribable
Now I know how to feel

THE END

BY NATALYA
ILLUSTRATION BY ROHAN



The breeze smells more of ash than sweet flowers. Beneath my weight the twigs and branches disintegrate. A breeze swirls by and when I pat my head my fingers are covered with black grainy substances falling from the trees. The sky still has a grey cast trapping any light from coming in.

My eyes start to prickle, and I can no longer tell if the tears are from the pain in my heart or my eyes. As I stare into a field of lifelessness, the goosebumps crawl up my arms and legs, maybe from the cold or maybe from disbelief. I want to shut my eyes and block my ears just like when I was a kid, to hide from this dark world. But when I was younger, my problems were consistent with not being able to take Willow to my grandmother's house, not standing in front of the broken place that I used to call home.

Below my feet I see shards of broken glass that reveal shining streaks down my cheeks. Then I see the world is full of darkness, flames erupting, and I hear yelling, but I can barely hear what they are saying over the top of Willow's cries. My body is running without being able to see because my eyes are cast with pain, but my mind wants to run in the house. My mind

wants to hold Willow's paw and comfort her through the flames. My mind wants to run into my parents' arms instead of saying my goodbyes. All I can do is block my ears and close my eyes like a kid but instead of the world blurring it comes to life even more.

I open my eyes and it takes a moment to adjust to the world. I wish to see my parents smiling at my drawing of Willow but those memories are clouded in my mind and replaced by the nightmares. Now I can only hope that they are smiling down to me as I try to continue without them.

I venture through the house and protect my face with my mask. Walking through the rubble feels like I am walking through a house, not a home. Scanning the rubble my eyes are temporarily blinded by the light reflecting off of the silver. I bend down and pick up the two silver rings, covered in dust, but I'd have recognised them from anywhere. Wedding rings.

Walking further on I can see through the house to the backyard. Once I am in the backyard my thoughts are only focused on Willow, but I can't find any remaining objects. I remember our long walks to the cliff and without hesitation my legs burn as I sprint through the ash, through the trees. The branches break under my touch and tint me with ash by the time I have found the cliff.

As I peer over, I hear a call that makes everything seem right again.

"Woof."

shone
onto her
ce,
er day
eing
ed in
walls,

NORMAL

BY AMEERAH

The sun's rays shone down onto her face,
Another day of being trapped in these walls,
This confined space,
Where she would bore herself with hours of just
laying around.

With the stress of school,
But no motivation to do anything.

She opened Instagram,
Looking at the "perfect" people.
"Why can't I look like them?" she wondered.
"Why can't I be perfect?"

Society has changed.
Everything anyone does is judged.
"Why is she wearing that?"
"Why is he crying?"
"Why do they look like that?"
And as horrible as it seems,
It is the new normal.

TIME HEALS ALL WOUNDS

BY SAMANYA

The mellow wind hitting my bare knees
As time passes by these mellow trees do not age
Though my personality takes a big hit
In a good or bad way it is up to you to judge
Oh how these trends pass by
My heart will remain the same
No matter if we have had to cover our mouths in the past
My voice will always stay the same
One day I will realise
He wasn't worth it
No one is worth it
You are in charge of your own happiness and nothing else
You too will realise this one day

THE ROOM

BY JULIANA

The birds would chirp and fly through the sky. The wind would blow the delicate leaves hanging on to the trees. Small bugs and beetles would be found everywhere marking their territory or scurrying for cover. Freedom is granted upon nature, there is no reason not to; why would we trap something meant to be free?

I am trapped, the walls surrounding me bind me to this place. The room is an okay size but not big enough to be able to run through fields. The floor is light brown, but it isn't filled with small insects. A statue is decorated with ceramic flowers, and I want nothing more than to pluck a rose out of a bush just to breathe in its scent. Clouds are delicately painted, hiding in different spots, but there are no clouds wanting to hang out in these four walls.

The world is constantly moving day by day, *tick, tick, tick*. I shut my blinds and close my door trying to block out everything. I don't want to see the world as a happy place when I can't walk outside and breathe in the fresh air, allowing it to fill my lungs.

I can feel my shoulders slump more every day, as my vision slowly becomes blurred, and another drop touches my computer keyboard. I forget half my teachers' names, I want to reach out to them, write a message, explain how I feel, maybe ask for help. When I open up a message I can't type anything. There are many thoughts in my head, part of me wants to scream and shout; I shouldn't have to teach myself the schoolwork. Yet, I am told to be patient because "I don't know what they are going through." But my question would be, do they know what I am going through?

The rooms I am trapped by, also trap many more things in this room. The screaming and shouting of the ones I love most, if I leave my room for a brief moment, I realise the walls are not filled with the fresh air I desire. I can see how my room is polluted with random clothes on the floor and all sorts of books spread out. There is absolutely nothing I can do about it, except some days I open my window and hear the birds chirp, because they remind me that one day, I will be free again. Free to move, free to explore and discover who I want to be.

I don't do anything except stare into the distance and think about all the fun times I've had with my friends. We would go everywhere together, we would read and talk about almost all the topics you could think of. I don't know if I will be able to do that again.

Now, when I turn my phone on, the screen only shows the time.

stare into the
distance
and think
about all

(NO TITLE)

BY NATALYA

Distant world
Hidden world,
Beyond the brick wall,
Skyscraper buildings disguised by clouds of pollution,
Fighter planes patrolling the sky,
Lone child staring at the abyss,

Light reflecting off wet walls,
Light lighting up a forgotten land,
Awakening a lost life

Colour is drained,
Just as life was,
All that remains is a glimmer of hope.

*fighter planes
patrolling the sky*

MY FAVOURITE MAPLE TREE

BY NATALYA

The sultry breeze rustles through the green leaves of my favourite maple tree
As we lay on the grass beneath and I point out the cloud I say reminds me of him
His laugh radiates brighter than the sun in the sky
That day the air smells of pretty flowers, ice-cream and the sea.

The last yellow-tinged leaf falls to the ground of my favourite maple tree
As we jump on piles of fallen leaves, our hands sticky from caramel apples
The look in his eyes seems distracted and confused
That day the air smells of pumpkin, cinnamon and tea.

The milky white snow covers the branches of my favourite maple tree
As I make snow angels, alone,
The spot beside me empty, where he should be
That day the air smells of salty tears, gingerbread and hot coffee.

The first leaf of the season grows on my favourite maple tree
As the bees buzz and the flowers blossom,
As I find comfort sitting in the grass looking up at the cloud that reminds me of him
That day the air smells of freshly-cut grass, flowers and honey.

NEVER THEIRS TO BEGIN WITH

BY JULIANA

Her cheeks were the same colour as the flower in my hand,
She held light that not even the sun could,
Perhaps that's why on this day the sky has darkened because her light is no longer present,
I wish I was there to witness her by my side for many more years to come,
I wish her hands were touching mine rather than a wet stem,
How can someone lose something that was never theirs to begin with,
The petals drop one by one, as the flower wilts,
The snow slowly covers the red petals,
Much like that day when the dirt covered her forever, trapping me from seeing her again

THIS IS THE DAY

BY NIKKI

The day that everyone dreamt of, a day of freedom with no masks
Going out on the trains or buses without it having to be a tough task
The comfort of my own home and the warmth of my bed
I feared the day I would have to face the world again instead
Isolation had got me thinking that these days would never end
The quiet streets filled my ears
Pondering how many more years
The new normal I suppose, as my youth disappears

ATYPICALITY

BY KINGA

Deserts of isolation,
are what homes have become.
Filled with those lonely people,
all hiding in fear of the danger
spreading outside.

Stranded out in seas of seclusion,
floating away from those we love.
Feeling like we're drowning in stress,
unable to breathe, yet the surface of
the mask is attempting to keep us safe.

Protecting ourselves from a
world we could once explore.
Every stranger, a new risk,
a threat, a possible carrier of
that deadly ailment.

Constantly panic-stricken, paranoid,
That's normal for us nowadays.
Barely able to focus with the masses
of cautions at every place we look.

An empty spot is present
in everyone's heart,
a void left behind after people
abandoned each other
in the midst of this widespread storm.

*of her face, as
at how beautiful
could be*

SPLIT

BY DHAVAL

I looked at every part of her face, astonished at how beautiful one could be. Her silky hair smelt like a meadow and her eyes glistened like a crystal. I was blessed to have my love right beside me and I knew I would want to be with her for the rest of my life. I whispered into her ear, "I love you", but she continued to be engrossed at the reflection of cerulean water, unbothered by what I had just said. An icy shiver went down my spine and the sweat trickled down my cheeks, but I clenched my fist and took out the ostentatious ring and kneeled on the gritty sand. "Will you marry me?" I asked. Tears began to shed down her face, although there was yet no reply.

Kneeling in hope and curiosity waiting for an answer I remembered all the times we had enjoyed together. We had laughter, joy, and excitement, she was caring, supportive and trustworthy. I could not imagine a life without her. She completed me. She was there for my ups and downs and always pushed me to do more. I can still feel her hand slowly caressing my face, I would look up at her and she would be looking at me with a charming smile which made my day. She decided my hope. I looked into her eyes and saw the guilt trembling through her body. She shook her head side to side in displeasure and devastation. Rain shattered down and the wind blew her away.

REMEMBERING

BY GIOVANNA

The sun setting down on a Sunday afternoon
I lay under the big arched tree in our backyard
The feeling of the warm sunbeam in June
Something I do not recognise hits me hard
As my eyes open, there I am, not in the dune
But in a field of poppies, it is like art
Red poppies, like blood or Georgie's balloon
This place it warms my heart
But I know I need to go soon
As my loved ones, I am apart
The wind is as strong as a typhoon
It is blowing my dainty red dress made by Mrs. Bonaparte
Speaking of my dress, I miss my Italian spoon
It was a gift, from my mother-in-law who is from Orte
From afar you can hear the summer tanagers sing a tune
They tweet the lullaby my mum used to sing by heart
I want to go and see the garden where the chrysanthemums bloom
The flowers and tunes make me reminisce from the start
Where I am on the line, to walk to the fume
This is for you, for him, for me and for everyone. To restart.

CRAZY COVID

BY KINSEY

Always social distancing
Enduring home schooling
Getting hard tasks
And wearing masks
Talking to friends
they get messages I send
I did a coding course
Because of my parent's force
others are affected
my family is protected
I lacked accessibility
And I stayed out of the city
Always staring at my computer screen
Because the world was just mean
I hate isolation
It causes devastation
People lifted restrictions
There were contradictions
COVID's all around the world
Millions of people died
But others are alright
They have symptoms of a cold
That's what I've been told

*always staring
at my computer*

PROS VS CONS

BY KRISHA

Sanitisers, face masks, isolation, family long gone, all is lost except hope. Every day, we wake up from our bed to expect something different, something that can change this pandemic from a minus to a plus. Every day we call our friends never knowing when we will see them again, every day we rub our hands with sanitiser until they are full of chemicals, and keep our mouth covered with masks forgetting what we all looked like. The words "hugs" and "kisses" seem weird, as if they never existed. The dim light from the sun slowly diminishes day by day as our closest relatives seem far away. Zoom, messages and calls are our only path of communication. Watching the news every day is like watching a bomb erupt in the middle of the most populated places. Though, this is normal, sanitisers, face masks, isolation, family long gone is all normal now. The only one thing we have left is slowly diminishing. If we can't fix it we have to adapt to it.

At first, online learning felt fun but now we all want to go back to school and that is something no student would ever say. Students pretending to freeze so they can skip subjects, others complaining they can't hear the teacher, all of us passing our mid-year tests without attending them. Lessened outdoor play and going to the park is an arduous task. Reading virtual books and trying to find the code for every meeting. Teachers give extra homework "to keep us busy". Endless drawn games from chalk outside every driveway.

At dinner parents ask "Do you think things are going to get better?" instead of "How was your day?" Scrolling through Instagram, politicians try to calm our society and keep everyone hopeful that things will get better. There is no fixing the problem, getting used to it and admitting that this is really happening is our only way to get around. Residents in every city, state, and country and continents are fighting for boxes of vaccines but this is all normal.

Despite the negativity, there has been some positivity. Spending time with family, making pizza with your dad (that "accidentally" gets burned). The tickles your older sister gives you or the big warm and comfy hugs you earn. The money you have saved and earned from the extra chores. Online art gallery tours and endless online lessons, it has been a fun experience I have to admit. Maybe getting used to this isn't such a bad thing. Working together to stop this pandemic and raising money for charity is a worthy cause. The extra load of chores and extra money from it.

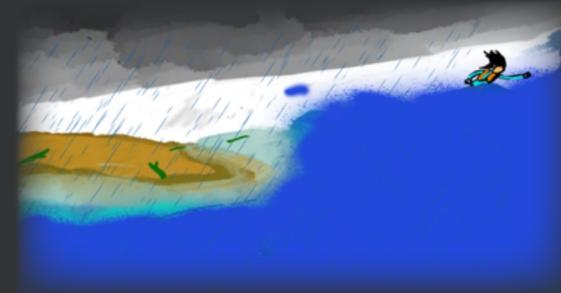
For recreation we are experimenting with new recipes and inventing new games. Brownies, cakes, popsicles and confections seem to be our everyday meals. Budget finally gets balanced and saving money is easier. Bond between siblings and parents gets more connected as the day goes by. Oh... maybe the new normal isn't too bad.

reading virtual books and trying to
find the code for

THE WORLD

BY HANNAH

A human's touch cradling the future of humanity.
Fingerprints remaining long after; destruction left behind.
Its broken fragments held together like puzzle pieces,
Fixed but not forever,
The world is in their hands.



THE PULLING TIDE

BY KRISHA
ILLUSTRATION BY KANUSH

The sea rolls to shore
Carrying tons of seaweed and shells
Splashing, splashing and splashing
The cold wet "thing"
Tickles my feet and as it waves at me it traps me inside
I try to swim ashore
But, oh who knows, can I survive?
Just ask a wild cat can it swim
Or a duck if it can fly
That is the connection between me and swimming

The rip pulls me in
Like my mum giving me a hug
Just not as comforting
I know I can swim
I have to believe in myself
I have to prove I can save my drowning self

THE W O R L D

*all I see
as the flowers
bloom and
wake up*

REALITY

BY SRISTI

The blue sky envelops me,
As I crane my head up,
Cushiony clouds are all I see,
As the flowers bloom and start to wake up,
The grass beneath my feet
The playful wind that twirls my hair
The birds that never stop to tweet,
The sweeter-than-candy air
Then a car swoops by me
So does a gush of methane.
I'm kicked back to reality.
This small patch of beauty is keeping me sane.
But soon it will be flattened.
Soon it will be grey.
If only this place could remain unthreatened.
But now I know nature has been cast away.
I look down, at the barren ground.
No sweet light breeze
No tweeting birds, not even a sound
Oh, how this world was ruined, with such ease.

NATURE'S PRESENCE

BY JULIANA

Leaves flow through the wind,
Along with the silent whispers,
Which are only known to a few,

Chirps and squeaks fill the air,
If you try to listen to the wind,
You will never be able to hear ladybugs fly,

The colours of the wings can be seen,
The yellow colours show themselves in many ways,
Through the sun's presence in our lives,

Although you may see red flow through the air,
You can see it when two people meet,
The glistening in their eyes is unmistakable,

The easiest thing to see is the darkness,
The shadows lingering,
The dark alleyways,

I have learned to see beauty through nature,
Listened to stories kept hidden,
Spotted shadows which lurk,

To my only friend the wind,
Thank you

JUST A NORMAL DAY

BY FIONA

Just a normal day
Wake up, eat breakfast and get ready
Just a normal day
Pack bag. Don't forget keys.
Just a normal day
Hold them properly
Just a normal day
Don't put your earphones in
Just a normal day
Be aware of your surroundings and always look behind you
Just a normal day
Don't be late to work
Just a normal day
Those aren't my footsteps
Just a normal day
Stay in populated areas and walk near security cameras
Just a normal day
The elbow is the sharpest part of the body
Just a normal day
This is my stop
Just a normal day
They've been behind me for a while now
Just a normal day
It's getting late. Should I go straight home?
Just a normal day
I don't want to walk home
Just a normal day
Maybe I should call an Uber?
Just a normal day
They're looking at me weirdly
Just a normal day
It's dark here, just get home
Why is this a normal day?

this is my stop

IMPRESSION

BY NATALYA

Tight curls fall out of her messy bun, drawing my eyes to her chocolate brown eyes. The light complements her olive, more so, golden skin. The crease in her forehead and eyebrows shows her confusion. Whilst the furious pounding of her pen symbolises the frustration towards her textbook.

DEAR NATURE

BY AMEERAH

Dear Nature,
With your luscious green plains,
With your blossoming flowers,
And your range of scenery,
Like heaven on earth.
Dear Nature,
Your beauty is so divine,
Animals within your reach,
From birds to lions.
Dear Nature,
Miles of tiny grains of sand,
Waves crashing down,
Mountains covered in green,
Desert sand pouring through fingers,
And ice too cold to touch,
No doubt a magnificent sight.
Dear Nature,
Your radiant sense of tranquillity,
Makes us feel peaceful and calm

*lights flying
your head*

AUTUMN LEAVES FALL

BY MIA

As the weather becomes colder
And leaves turn all sorts of colours
We feel a gentle, cool autumn breeze
We wrap up in jackets and gloves and boots
Ready for jumping in piles of leaves
With the sound and image of a blazing crackling fire
And the warm hot chocolate that touches our frosty lips
Sinking into piles of blankets wrapped up in our beds
We know that Autumn has started
But that is not what we know Autumn to be
At least, not for us
Yes, the weather does become colder weird for our blazing hot land
But the leaves stay green, and they don't fall off of trees
As we walk, we feel an almost winter breeze
We don't wrap up in gloves and boots,
Rather shorts and a tee shirt and a jacket instead
We don't experience the joy of jumping in colourful leaves
Or the sound and image of a crackling fire at ease
We wrap up at night when the weather is coldest
But that's what Autumn is to me

THE OUTSIDE WORLD

BY KINSEY

ILLUSTRATION BY ROHAN

When I look at a tree
It is more mature than me
It is really beautiful
Everyone else thought it was cool
It is big and tall
But its leaves go in the fall
It also looks very skinny
and far away from the city
I would like others to see
This wonderful tree

I look at the little birdy
They are very wordy
They look amazing
I can't stop gazing
I hear them chirp often
It's impossible to stop em'
They are lovely creatures
They should be featured
As they fly away
They still look amazing even from far away



DAYDREAMING

BY HANNAH

Daydreaming.
Daydreaming of smooth sailing to the white pearly gates of heaven.
Of the breeze flowing through my hair,
Of the cotton silvery clouds above.
Of the half-and-half sunrise colours of pink and orange.
Daydreaming again.

MOMENTS

BY MELODY

SEASONS

Remember her summer, remember his winter.

SENSES

The touch, the scent, the familiarity.

REINCARNATION

Tears fell, and the clock rewinds.

BY MIA

SHADOWS

Floorboards creak, what lurks above? Shadows.

PHOBIA

Caution in footsteps, afraid to fall.

BY NATALYA

FADED

Warm hands, cold stares, distant thoughts.

BY JULIANA

WAR

Sounds and laughter, gunshots, then silence.

BY SAMANYA

MESSED-UP ME

Trip and laugh. Kiss and cry.

BY KINSEY

CLASSMATES

Some nice
Some mean
All together

FOOD

Cheery food
Delicious dessert
Buttons snap

DOGS

Very furry
Super cute
Really evil

cheery
delicious
dessert
buttons

bedtime stories lessons learnt

BY HANNAH

MEMORIES

Burning we were, as our flame.

LIFE

The beginning, there is no end.

SEPARATION

You're the sun, I'm the moon.

MORAL

Bedtime stories; lessons learnt; mistakes repeated.

COLOUR PALLET

Cry in grey; Bleed in technicolor.

BY NIKKI

DISGUISE

A mask in front of all emotions.

PRESENT

I was there, physically, not mentally.

READING

Hated the world, escaped through books.

ROSES

Sweet roses, thorns hidden but ready.

BY GIOVANNA

ALIKE

Like the sun, she can shine.

PRETENDER

Her foolish words hide her insecurities.

BLACK MAGIC

He always doubted magic, until her.

STEPPING STONES

BY CREATIVE WRITERS GUILD
ILLUSTRATION BY GILLIAN

Laughter, Pies and Titles
Shared moments in an empty library
Rapidly thinking
Pen to paper, fingers to keys
Time turned into words
Spitting out pieces

T
H
E
M
late nights
Quiet parties every afternoon
And then I had nothing
Nothing to write
We are the S
T
E
P
P
I
N
G
stones.

