

# *Imaginary Gardens*





# DEDICATION & OPENING POEM

We have never written a dedication, but most of us have also never lived through a pandemic...there have been a lot of firsts this year. We, as the editors, believe this dedication needs to go to all of us hardworking students. We have overcome so much this year, and the fact that people still submitted to "Imaginary Gardens" meant we had to publish something for you all to enjoy. Thank you for your hard work this year; we know how hard it has been to balance and cope. So congratulations to us all, and a special congrats to all who have been published this year. We wish you all the best - enjoy this year's edition.

Sincerely,

Ashley Appo and Kathryn Van Winkle

Imaginary Gardens Editors



**O d e t o S c h o o l**  
A l y s s a F r a n c z a k

Dear school, I am sorry I complained about you,

I thought that you were only a prison  
designed to induce anxiety- over homework, tests, and essays.

It's as if I had loved only the breaks  
and not the day that made them so relieving.

Focused, Organized, Helpful,  
you are the supplier of inspiration,  
you're our occupation. When I understood  
I had never appreciated what I had access to,

I was filled with regret,

As if I had not recognized

the privilege of face-to-face education,  
but now I can see the purpose, the need for

interactive education-

stuck in Quarantine-

Missing a definitive schedule. O school,

take me back to your tiled hallways,  
you who has raised me, given me knowledge,

and who will send me off into the world

to make a name for myself.



Poetry is life distilled. –  
Gwendolyn Brooks

“It is a test [that] genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood.”  
– T.S. Eliot

# P o e t r y

Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin  
from emotion recollected in tranquility.  
– William Wordsworth

Poetry is a deal of joy and pain and wonder, with a dash of the dictionary.  
– Kahlil Gibran

**P o e m s**

**I n s p i r e d**

**b y**

**T h e**

**P o e t**

**X**



# **T h e M o r a l B a l a n c e o f E v e n t s**

N i c k C a r m e z i n M u n i z

Mas, você não é fácil

is a phrase I've heard my whole life.  
When I come home with 4 missing assignments:

Mas, você não é fácil.

When I take a while to do my chores, or when I don't scrub the dishes how I want them to:

Mas, você não é fácil

Sometimes it's a good thing,  
when I surprise them with good news or when I do well on my grades:

Mas, você não é fácil.

When my father's worries got a bit heavier,  
and it was all because of me,

because I had to get pneumonia and asthma,  
and they thought I would be miserable

or worse,  
that I would have an asthma attack,

so people began sending emails to my parents  
and even my school teachers sent them.

My Teachers, who under the smallest notice  
comforted us.

And Mãe helped me get through it,  
who said that was one of the scariest moments for her and my dad.

But instead of having an asthma attack, I came out nonchalant,  
as if nothing had happened

and then that phrase came up,  
in it's weird aura,

"Mas, você não é fácil"  
But you aren't easy.

# C o u c h - s i t t i n g

A n n i k a W e s t b e r g

This summer was made for couch-sitting  
and since it's a pandemic  
I was opening my eyes to something never seen before

I scoop out Netflix shows on my couch

Watching Criminal Minds with the BAU catching  
psychopaths, their profiles leading them to  
the killers bringing them to justice they say

Spencer James from All American  
as he tries to make a name for himself  
so he can get him and his family out of the hood

Watching a karate fight with punches  
coming hard from their fists  
playing inside on mats at the All Valley Tournament

Laughing at the Rooney family-Liv not included-  
with their daily entertaining lives with Karen  
yelling out "dropped a butt-bom of mom"

Shaking my head at Lola and Chelsea  
who are in the show Wanted as they try to  
escape from corrupted cops

and the story of how they survive:

"Oh shoot, they are coming"  
"You're my only friend"  
"Let's go somewhere safe to think"

As I keep watching these shows my mom  
tells me to do my summer work  
so I go to my desk,

To do schoolwork.

# **P e o p l e - M e e t i n g**

O l i v i a K e l l y

This fall was made for people-meeting  
And since it's a new school year in the middle of a pandemic,  
I'll (somehow) do just that.

I text the people I know at my new school.  
Do you know anyone in my classes?  
They didn't, but it doesn't matter anymore.

Among Us on FaceTime during our study halls,  
We crack jokes and poke fun at each other.  
We're close. School's good.

Want to go to the park later?

I stare at the house of a friend who,  
Well,  
Isn't much of a friend anymore.

I wonder what I would do if he called me.  
These thoughts -  
They fall away when I remember that I can see my newfound friends in

7

Short  
Days.

# **W h e n Y o u ' r e B o r n t o P a r e n t s W h o G e t D i v o r c e d**

Who both love you endlessly  
and would each give you the world if they could,  
you become the staple between papers.

Two sides of unconditional love.

One innocent, oblivious child.

Important forms asking for information about both your parents,  
mocking you straight in the face,  
reminding you that your family,  
which you would never change,  
is abnormal to its expectations.

**F r e n c h**

**P o e m s**

P o e m s F r o m M r . P a l m a c c i ' s  
F r e n c h 4 C l a s s

# P o è m e d e l a n a t u r e

S t e p h a n i e N y e m b o

L'arbre de pomme, le pommier  
Autour de ma maison il y avait un pommier  
Des jolies feuilles vertes et des pommes toutes roses  
Avec la pluie elles s'arrosent  
Enfin! Enfin!  
Dans ce pays avec des chaleurs sans fin  
Les branches mouillées  
Avec l'eau de la pluie qui a coulée  
Le beau soleil d'été se lève derrière mon arbre de pomme  
Je cueillais les belles pommes rouges de mon arbre  
Et j'en faisais de très bonnes tartes  
Je grimpe, je tombe, je pleure  
Je cueille, je mange,  
sous la chaleur  
Tristesse, joie, colère  
Cet arbre  
qui n'est plus qu'une mémoire  
d'hier

## L'océan

S o p h i e   Z e n k i n

Par une chaude journée d'été  
on entend les chuchotements  
de l'océan alors que ses vagues  
se brisent sur la côte.

J'imagine les poissons,  
les crabes et les requins qui  
nagent sous le bleu profond,  
vivant une vie qui est  
un mystère pour moi.

Une brise chaude traverse l'air  
au-dessus du sable mou,  
alors que je marche vers l'eau,  
mais l'eau est très froide à mes pieds.

Le froid ne me dérangeait pas  
quand j'étais petit,  
Mais maintenant, je choisis  
de rester sur le sable  
où il fait chaud.

## The ocean

S o p h i e   Z e n k i n

On a hot summer day  
One hears the whispers  
Of the ocean while the waves  
Break along the coast

I imagine fish,  
Crabs and sharks that  
Swim under the deep blue,  
Living a life which is  
A mystery to me.

A hot breeze flows through the air  
Above the soft sand,  
While I walk towards the water,  
But the water is very cold on my feet.

The cold didn't use to bother me  
When I was little,  
But now, I choose  
To stay on the sand  
Where it's hot.



# M u s i q u e   d e   l a   N a t u r e

## N i c k   M e r c e r

les rayons du soleil ont couru à une course  
avec de grands arbres à l'extérieur  
les arbres de l'amour qui ont atteint ci-dessus  
que Dieu avait glorifié

quand Dieu a fait les arbres pour l'ombre  
les arbres de la vie qui ont poussé  
il a placé des oiseaux qui ont chanté les mots  
ce que Jésus leur a enseigné

placé par Dieu dans un nénuphar  
une grenouille chantante ou deux  
dans le ciel, les grenouilles chantantes  
avant la fin de la journée

Dieu se fait entendre avec grenouille et oiseau  
ils chantent en air pour faire plaisir  
jumelé par beau temps  
autour des arbres ombragés



**A d d i t i o n a l**  
**P o e m s**

# “ I d i d n ’ t K n o w ” I m i t a t i o n

## A n o n y m o u s

I had always loved the ocean  
I didn't realize how much until I was at my darkest  
the only thing I could think of was sinking  
floating below the surface  
watching the creatures swim around me in the glorious rays of sunshine  
the ones that come down from the sky and pierce the water like spears of brightness  
and I knew that they weren't bothered by my being there  
they had seen stranger things in the ocean

I didn't know I loved myself  
I was annoying most of the time  
but every now and then I would say something hilarious or do something incredible  
and love who I had grown to be  
and as I continued growing I loved myself more and more  
becoming confident and knowing that I was worth just as much as anyone else

I didn't know I loved death  
not the dying part but the finality  
the idea that something in this world of constant change will always stay the same  
I respect that  
the knowing that we'll all be gone so why spend our time in misery  
or inflicting misery  
as so many people try to do for no reason at all

I didn't know I loved karma  
until I saw people get what they deserved  
but maybe I don't even love karma because I don't really believe it  
the best people have the worst things happen to them  
some of the worst people get away with what they do  
I think that everyone is tortured on the inside  
maybe by different things but still tortured  
I think everyone needs a hug

I didn't know I loved people  
until I met some amazing ones  
my best friend struggles with a lot but still manages to make me laugh and let me try to help  
my mom quit her job to raise me and my sisters and did pretty well  
my dad has imposter syndrome like me but managed to be very successful  
I wish I could tell my friends and my mom and my dad how much they mean to me  
and how proud I am of them  
but words aren't big enough  
but I still try

I didn't realize how many things I loved  
until I stared out into the world  
and saw them all around me  
without the stress or the distractions that the world is so full of

# U n p l a n n e d s t o r i e s

## K r y s o n i a T a v a r e s

What if I read you a story, that was just as unplanned as life? specifically my life but in third person

A book so unorganized the page 14 comes before 7

Or some tears are used to blend lines

Even smiles to tie a sentence

Our deepest fears masking the future of the page

Eraser marks that never quite get rid of the words because they're there forever

Just layers of tattered worn out pages

Even some of gold

Or possibly coal too

Your writing a book with an ending of a death date which is you

A pen that can't be felt, and ink that can't be spilled,

Even paper that can never fly in the wind

I live for a book of unknown possibilities

Yet some pages I turn back from being shot down by reality

Or the sudden butterflies flying off the pages from meeting someone who can love you in a way that you

don't understand or even as easy as a pitch being thrown at you from the mound at a softball game

Those teenage daring moments where you run and you can never be caught

Then you're grabbed by the arms of your mother and father telling you to go home they miss you

Being wrapped in a secure blanket of utter love

So for the pages, the worn, torn, burnt, ripped, stretched, bitten and squeezed

Thank you for an unfinished story, one life doesn't even have the conflict for

When you're writing leave in all the grammatical errors, and mismatched phrases

A story with no end

None like no other

A pen with no fear of mistakes after another

I won't be filling out the pages right

Because if I did I would be lying about who I really am

# **D a r k   a n d   B r i g h t**

Z e k a i   Z h a n g

Dark, all the world is bleak.  
Everyone stands in the  
deep, cold, ruthless valley;  
Never climb out.  
But people see the stars in the sky,  
it's the only light,  
only hope.  
Bright, all the world is lightsome.  
Everything shined under the  
great, warm, splendid sun;  
Never fade away.  
Then people see the shadows in the corner,  
it's the only murk,  
only evil.  
Darkness swallowed by light,  
Brightness covered by dark.



# **B o y h o o d**

A n t h o n y H a l l

I remember not caring much  
about how I looked,  
or what I wore,  
and whether or not it even remotely matched.

Nor did I care much for what others  
Thought about me.  
I had my people, and wasn't even aware of the  
presence of people  
not within my circle.

I also didn't care to realize  
that there's a world outside  
of my town, my neighborhood.

That's the beauty of being a child.  
You don't have to worry about anything  
that's outside of your own little world.

Everything you need is right at your fingertips.

# S o c i a l   D i s t a n c i n g

A l y s s a   F r a n c z a k

normalcy flourishes for the first time  
lockers have a tendency to jam  
you can dislike your order at a restaurant  
jumbled words create a new conversation  
the chemistry test will leave you stumped  
sleeping until noon will take you down  
Cheesecake Factory will wreak havoc by itself  
parties rage in all their excitement  
the world around us fills with noise  
adventures arise, excite, and pull you in  
loneliness dissolves and camaraderie walks in  
your extroversion opens its door



# H e a l i n g   b e i n g s

T o r i n   M a c D o n a l d

It's 2020 April 9  
I'm sitting in my room doing my  
Homework  
Heavy metal is blasting.  
I never knew I liked  
The drums being played fast as  
An AK47  
I don't like  
Comparing my favorite music to gunfire.

I never knew I liked OverKill so much  
Can someone who likes Deathbat more than Chaly  
Like them?  
I know A7X ripped off Chaly.  
It must be only my metalhead nature.

And yet I love A7X so much more  
Whether they go classic or prog metal  
Playing short anthemic songs  
Or thought-provoking masterpieces well over  
Six minutes  
I know I don't really like their early material  
I know their growly songs aren't the best  
I know it's slightly better than rap  
But not nearly as good as their newer songs  
I know I'm a relatively new fan and  
Some people really like the metalcore sound  
I know they are entitled to their opinions,  
though they are objectively wrong.

I didn't know I loved Iron Maiden  
Not until earlier this year  
Bruce Dickinson's voice very clearly  
oversinging  
Even later material is good, though not as much  
As classic Maiden  
I love Iron Maiden  
90s music not so much but 80s absolutely.  
Powerslave trumps Fear of the Dark any day.

# **T h e T i m e f o r a P o e m**

A l y s s a F r a n s a k

Now is not the time for a poem.  
Unfamiliar terms of anatomy float into my ears from my zoom call.  
The sky is sullen gray, the wind is howling in the trees.  
Now should not be the time for a poem.  
But I find myself entranced by the rustling treetops  
and wonder how I've never noticed how much they look like glitter.  
Bushels of leaves tumble from the trees and I am suddenly certain that now is the time for a poem.  
Yet, I can't look away for fear I'll never see something as beautiful.  
My eyes still glued to the window,  
the words stumble to the paper- not yet eloquent but desperate to be said.  
My class comes to an end  
as a particularly strong gust of wind shuffles the treetops.  
I have a thought, something metaphorical, but I can't spare the focus to decipher it.  
A mist of rain falls with the wind  
The world shifts in unison,  
and I notice that I am late for my class-  
but I do not care.  
Now is the time for a poem.



# **G l u e d   S h u t**

E m i l y   S i m m o n s

My notebook flies over my bed while I sleep—  
for it is the only time I allow it out of its cage,  
away from the structure of pens and pencils,  
and the blotches of scribbles in the corners.

But I must remember to shut the windows,  
that every night stare at the words on the wrinkled pages,  
with water stains from sleepless nights,  
crinkling with every flap,  
struggling to leap from the confinement  
and jump into the world,  
knowing nothing of its true nature of criticism.

So when the sun shines it lies still,  
glued shut, so naive,  
just waiting to be freed from the four walls of the room,  
but when the moonlight glimmers I can live my dreams in my mind,  
Unafraid.



A s y o u r e a d a b o o k  
y o u c a n e a s i l y g e t l o s t .  
L u k e R a m s a y

Sometimes through the  
texture of the cover  
and how it feels on your hands

or sometimes you can get lost  
in the way the words flow  
off the page

making you forget about  
all your problems and  
replacing them with a  
new and better  
reality.

This is all fantastic until  
you get sucked back into the  
real world and realize it was just a  
book

# U n t i t l e d

T o r i n M a c D o n a l d

The only emotion I ever feel  
Is what the beaver must feel:

Each stick must be placed with skill  
And utmost caution, sure not to fall.

Too far to the left, splash!  
Too far to the right, sploosh!  
Just in the middle, just right.  
Just right, everything falls.  
Everything falls in place, just a little left—  
Just a little left, the lodge is gone

Such is life,  
A game of Jenga stacked against you  
Everything we've built  
Two steps from ruin

But let it be known,  
The Beaver often prevails.

# H E I G H T

A l e x a n d r e H a n a n i a n

Looked up to from those who are younger, But contrary for those who are older;

Uplifting yet diminishing.

Standing tall and proud

I watch from above,

As the youthful generation

Takes on the appearance of ants.

I look down to those younger,

At the same time I myself am looked down upon, Making me think, will I ever reach the highest height?

But I've hardly been up here, high and sublime, Yet it feels like i've lost track of time,

While thoughts of reaching higher flood my mind.

Which stairs do we take?

Which path do we follow?

How do we climb, to reach the top?

Surely the day will come, but how will we know? Years hobble

Days come and go,

But will I ever grow?

We look into our future,

Not realizing the present is our key.

We wish to be on top,

But will this desire ever stop?



**I n t h e M o m e n t**  
**( B i l l y C o l l i n s I m i t a t i o n )**  
L i a n a W i n a n s

It was a day in June, all lawn and sky  
The kind in which you can sense the warmth  
from the second you wake up to the  
smell of bacon sizzling on the stove.

If the breeze was refreshing yet  
not strong enough to blow the soft sane  
and the inviting sea lapped lazily at ankles  
then the picture can hardly be improved.

I remember rousing myself from the  
picnic blanket in search of coolness,  
tucking a boogie board under my arm and  
gaiting toward the shoreline.

The waves, shimmering dark blue,  
then aqua green and finally foamy white,  
energized me as I raced out to meet them-  
in chest-deep already.

The day showed promise  
like hope perfectly manifested  
in the sun peeking over the horizon  
at the crack of dawn.

Later, bike rides with friends  
firepits, smores, and music await.  
If only time could forever be bottled up  
and you no longer have to fear these blessed  
moments slipping by, never to live through again.

But for now all I feel  
Is the spray of the ocean on my cheeks-  
The saltiness, sweet on my lips.

# **I n s a t i a b l e**

N a t a l i a K a y

I crave for that time of day  
when the clock grows tired  
and the cars don't pass by so frequently,  
because I know it is time  
for those lovely few hours of peace and relaxation.

Sleep tugs at my eyelids  
and drift off into my own little world-  
one of wishes, one of happiness,  
one of content.

Flying in the air,  
Past the bright spires of cities and open plains,  
I search in look for you-  
The one thing that makes this dream incomplete,

But I move along,  
Past the moment long ago,  
when you chose to let me go.

**A d i s t a n t N e i g h b o r**  
M a g g i e Y o r e

Here, still we sit  
In this proper slice of longitude  
Watching as each drop of rain dribbles down the car window  
Until it joins the rest,  
Forming a reflective pool, the sky's own mirror.  
Or, instead, we sit at the nook cozied up with a steaming cup of tea,  
Gazing out the back door as the  
Light of Earth dims and nightfall awakens.

Right now these scenes are specific to us  
Who remain in unison under the same blanket of night.

Over there they may be long asleep,  
Or maybe pouring a sticky maple glaze over a stack of pancakes.

Even then—  
experiencing the wonders of life in opposite time zones—  
We are one under the same universe,  
and galaxy, and planets, and stars.



# **C o n f i n e d**

M a r l i n e J e a n - M a r i e

Look up,  
Look down.

Look around,  
Don't make a sound.

Alter your hair so it looks like theirs,  
Bleach your skin so it can be deemed fair.

Shrink so they can grow,  
Ignore what you've seen & absorb what they say to know.

Forget your ancestors & drop what you believe,  
'cause adopting their views is something to achieve.

Stay in line and listen,  
Don't you dare try to speak up as your face is pressed against the concrete  
and the sun makes your split  
blood glisten.

Take the hits,  
Take the spits,  
Learn to patch your wounds like the generations before you have with  
your radically designated medical kit.

Ignore the pain,  
Hope for it to all go away.

Pretend that you're blind to it all 'cause ignorance is bliss,  
Pray that you're not another one of Eden's children blessed with Death's  
kiss.



# W h a t I L e a r n e d

## M s . B i l l i n g s ' E n g l i s h 2 M o d 1

Probability	Financial responsibility.	Vectors	Armenian Genocide
Advanced Algebra	Jake Anreu	French Revolution	How to write proofs
Square roots	Totalitarian Government	Nationalism	<i>Mask etiquette</i>
Formulas	Systems	Limits	<i>How to manage time</i>
PH	Joseph Stalin	Major key	<i>How to put my best into school work</i>
The Periodic Table of Elements	Propaganda	Minor key	<i>To use my own ideas</i>
Trenches	Military advances in technology	Tempo	<i>To manage school and softball</i>
Diction	Trench warfare	OP Docs	Trigonometry
Ethos	Spanish: parts of the face, parts of the body, preteriré tense verbs, things that have to do with the hospital and getting sick	How to balance a chemistry equation	<i>To manage projects</i>
Pathos	English: diction, how to f reewrite, vocab., Macbeth, syntax, literary terms, how to close read, thesis statements	Proofs	<i>To rely on sources</i>
Logos	Math: unit circles, The Pythagorean Theorem, trigonometric polynomials, binomials, trinomials, parot functions, Socahtoa song	How to write a better thesis	<i>To ask for help</i>
Ere and Ire verbs in Italian	Chemistry: stoichiometry, balancing equations, predicting reactions and percent yields, density labs, volume labs, mass labs	What "cultivate sacred idleness" means	<i>To stay focused</i>
Thesis Statements	Theology: Jesus, US prison systems, morality, the stop method, different types of worldviews, the gospel of Mark (and what it means), metaphors used in the Bible.	Poetry is not just all rhymes	Net ionics
The Words for the Seasons in Italian	<i>Overall: I cannot do online school -- wearing a mask 6 hrs a day stinks, but most importantly</i>	Area	Graphing functions
<i>I didn't realize what I had until I lost it.</i>	<i>ONLINE SCHOOL</i>	Macbeth	Spanish words
<i>I realized that I need school to be part of my daily life.</i>	<i>SUCKS.</i>	More Spanish	Simplifying radicals
<i>Until the pandemic, I didn't realize how unsanitary things really are.</i>	Complex numbers	<i>The unexpected can happen at any time</i>	Molar masses
Paragraph Writing	Absolute value functions	<i>Life doesn't always go your way</i>	<i>Go with the flow</i>
Macbeth	Interval notation	<i>Life can suck for long periods of time, but will get better</i>	<i>Online school stinks</i>
Balancing Chemical Equations	Vertex, domain, range, AOS, min, max value,	<i>We're growing up way too fast</i>	<i>Sitting at home isn't fun</i>
Area	Equations by completing square roots	<i>High school flies by</i>	Interval notation
Sound Devices	Simplifying radicals	<i>Never expect anything to go your way.</i>	<i>Knowing that I like to learn</i>
God	Special right triangles	<i>How to drive</i>	
<i>I wanted to stay at home until I realized that I couldn't leave.</i>	Quadratic word problems	<i>Everything happens for a reason.</i>	
Indefinite Articles	CCP	What Molar mass is	
Probability	Women in the military	Memorizing some of the periodic table	
Jesus	Mexican Revolution	What the Enlightenment is	
Poetry	Imperialism	What heliocentric and geocentric mean	
<i>School is actually fun.</i>	Industrial revolution	WWI	
Blending Quotes	Replacements	WWII	
Reading in Spanish	Mole conversion	People feel way too strongly about politics.	
Proofs	Atoms	Careful what you wish for because you just might get it.	
Theorems	Luke	Diction	
Sin, Cos, Tan	Matthew	Syntax	
Napoleon's Invasion of Russia	Mark	Figurative Language	
Stoichiometry	Parables	How to write a poem	
Preterite and Subjunctive	The Beatitudes	Chemical equations	
Phrases in Spanish	Passé composé	Limiting reactants	
Vocabulary	French vocabulary	Types of Chemical reactions	
Industrial Revolution	<i>Online school is hard.</i>	Area	
French Revolution		Sin, cos, tan	
Armenian Genocide		SAS, SSS, AAS, ASA	
Amplitude		Long March	
Amino Acids		Joseph Stalin	
Kohlberg's Laws of Moral Development		Kingdom of God	
Indirect Objects in French		The Beatitudes	
Consonance		The Sermon on the Mount	
Assonance		Gospels	
<i>Take nothing for granted.</i>		Reading Music	
Organizational skills		How the vaccine works	
<i>A "D" is not the end of the world.</i>		How to balance equations	
<i>Asking for help is okay.</i>		How to calm down during an anxiety attack	
		How to conjugate verbs in Italian	
		How to change the ending of a word in Italian	

**L i t e r a c y**

**N a r r a t i v e s**

“A literacy narrative is a personalized story of your relationship with language. Not only do literacy narratives discuss memories, but they also walk through a person’s discovery, trials and triumphs with reading, writing and speaking a language.”

I have always been a fan of reading. As a young kid, my favorite part of the day was climbing up into my bed, pulling up the dark, navy blue blankets up to my chin and listening. One of my parents, or even sometimes both, would sit at the foot of my bed and read me a story of my choice. Although I had a library of books, covering my back wall, I was a repetitive kid, always asking for the same stories. Some of my top weekly picks were *The Giving Tree*, *Curious George*, and any of the Golden books. But the tortuous wait of having to sit patiently for the clock to turn to seven so I could race up and jump into bed was horrible. So my mom solved the issue by getting me a record player, along with about fifty books on different records. I would sit in my room, long before I could even fathom how to read or write, just put on a record of one of my favorite books and stare into space, subconsciously taking it all in. Funny enough, I was on a fishing trip at 3 years old with my father and my uncle. We stopped at a Walmart to buy the tackle, and while I sat in the truck with my dad to wait, I read my first word. That's right, my first word I read was "Walmart." I can still remember the look on my father's face as he turned around astounded as I had just read that. Once I had started though, I was addicted, I couldn't get enough to read. I would sit in the car and read road signs, or my father's bills on the counter, or even the backs of food. I had plenty of time now while I waited to sit and read my favorite books, but the problem was they were getting easier and easier, that I could now recite them and barely had to flip the pages to tell the story. My mom went to go drop off some clothes at a local donation bin, and when she pulled down the slot, the book "Diary of a Wimpy Kid" fell out onto her. So she brought it home to me. Now I had a big book, with large words and I wasam only four, so I sat there for hours sounding it out till I got the hang of these tough words rolling off my tongue. Eventually, it was time for me to start school, and during school, I could walk over to the library and pick out any book I wanted, and this time I could take out as many as I'd like and return them when I was finished. The library fulfilled my reading appetite throughout elementary school and middle school, but as I reached high school I started reading the novels left behind at my Grandmother's house. I loved reading these old novels and I was able to remove myself from school and homework and stress and sit over her house indulged in JFK's assassination or on Twelve Oaks Manor with Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*. My favorite place now, to sit and read is on an armchair over her house, with the fire roaring, scanning through her library of old classics to lose myself in the fantasies or history of the characters.

- Liam Gilligan

The first book I have ever remembered reading is *The Witches* by Roald Dahl. The first time I “read” the book was when my mom decided that she wanted to read the novel to me sometime around December of 2009. I was 4 or 5 years old so I wasn't too advanced in my reading skills as of then. I remember sitting on my mom's lap in the living room in front of a small cozy fireplace to my mom's bed, nestled under the covers, giggling at the more humorous scenes. The experience is now nostalgic and precious to me so that whenever I see the book on my old bookshelf, I'm reminded of my childhood. I think all of Roald Dahl's books have a special place in my heart, I grew up reading his numerous novels with his exciting characters and make believe settings. I remember how I strived to be like Matilda and control objects with my mind, although I wasn't too keen on reading part of the package. I wanted to be like Sophie and meet a big friendly giant who could take me away from Belmont Massachusetts and to a magical land full of giants. I wanted to open a chocolate bar and find a golden ticket where I meet Willy Wonka and discover that I'm destined to own his chocolate factory. I was so invested in Roald Dahl's imaginary worlds and I'm pretty sure he's one of my biggest inspirations to maybe start reading and writing more often. As I got older, maybe around the age of 12 to 14, I started to read more advanced series such as the Harry Potter series, the Maze Runner series, and the Mysterious Benedict Society series. These series also helped me develop my obsession with magical/futuristic worlds. I remember reading those series non-stop, memorising the characters and feeling as though I myself lived in their very world. Like I was a part of those countless pages. As if I made an impact on their lives and wasn't just an observer. The stories made me come to the conclusion that I really enjoyed realistic fiction/fiction novels. The stories compelled me to read and helped me develop my love of books.

- Katy Choy

In 2008, when I was four years old, my family lived in a cozy family home located in the highlands of Lowell. Every night my siblings and I piled into my mom and dad's bed located at the top of the steep stairs ascending from the living room. Besides the fact that the bed was always warm and cozy, reading before bed would put all of us to sleep within fifty pages, including my mom. *Where the Wild Things Are* was my favorite book that my mom would read to my siblings and me. I was determined to be able to read it myself. Yes, I was a determined four-year-old. But before I could read by myself, my mom would read us books such as *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson*. Both my brother and sister are older than me so my mom would try to read books that all of us would be interested in, again including herself. My mom realized that I liked to read with her, or at least try to, so she wanted me to start with reading the *Biscuit* dog series, but again I was determined to read *Where the Wild Things Are*, and only that book. I don't know why I was so hooked on reading that book but it was a great gateway for me to learn how to read and helped me understand and read more complicated books like *Mercy Watson* and *Nate the Great*.

After I learned how to read, I read before bed, after school, during long car rides, and also with my mom and siblings because simply having their company was nice. A place I visited frequently was the library. Quiet and filled to the brim with books, it was a place that I could spend hours in. Back in Lowell, they had multiple libraries, but my mom would always take us to a small one in North Chelmsford near my grandparent's apartment so my grandmother could come with us too. The librarians were very nice and my mom didn't mind spending a lot of time there either. It didn't matter where I was, picking up a book was always an option in my free time.

My brother was particularly interested in non-fiction from a young age so by fourth grade after finally finishing the *Warrior cat* series by Erin Hunter, I picked up my first non-fiction book. I don't remember the name of the book but it had something to do with Martin Luther King Jr. because I did a project on him that year. That sparked my interest at the end of segregation and black history in America which I'm glad I learned about at a young age. From then on I read back and forth between fiction and nonfiction; it all depends on what subject or genre I'm interested in.

In middle school, I went through a period where I was interested in mysteries and adventure and I didn't read as much non-fiction. I read *Kathy Reichs Bones* series, the *Divergent* trilogy, the *Odyssey*, anything *Rick Riordan*, and much more. It wasn't until freshman year that I got back into non-fiction, but I'm glad that I've read so many of the classics. I find reading both fiction and nonfiction important because it's good to build onto your imagination while also informing yourself of what occurs in reality. I still read a wide variety of books because I like learning about different people's thoughts and ideas. I feel that this gives a reader a broader and more understanding perspective on life. Whether I was in the cozy warmth of my mom and dad's bed, holed up in the library, or simply in the comfort of my bed, books will always be my escape into someone else's thoughts, ideas, and perspective.

- Lydia Robert

The earliest memory I have of being read to and the first book I was able to read, was called "Mr. Brown Can Moo! Can You?" by Dr. Seuss. I used to curl up in my twin sized bed, under my purple flowered comforter, while my mom or dad read it to me. I remember how the way they talked changed when they read-- I thought of it as their "reading voice." The emphasis and expression they used for the words and phrases on the pages would change, just a little bit. I loved this book, and though I can't think of a single page in it now, I used to know the whole thing by heart.

In fact, I'd memorized it so well after hearing it read to me so many times, that I would just recite it as my parents carefully turned the worn but colorfully illustrated pages. I didn't have to look at the words to know what they said. This was how I learned to read: associating the words in my head with the words on the page in front of me. Eventually, I was able to read it by myself, and I needed to anyway because my younger siblings were born.

I don't remember this, but according to my mom, I'd read books like this a lot. One time, she walked by my room and heard me reading aloud to myself. "You know, Janie," she told me, "You can read the words and say them in your head, instead of with your mouth."

So there I was, at three years old, picking up "Mr. Brown Can Moo" off the filled up shelves of the toy room, and reading in my head. I thought this was genius-- I could just look at the page and know exactly what it said, and no one had to hear me speak to read it.

There are other picture books I remember reading later on. My grandmother had a beach house in Narragansett, Rhode Island, where my sisters and I spent every summer of our early childhoods. A very special part of these summer memories was coming home from hours in the blazing heat of the beach, scrubbing the sand and salt out of my hair turned blonde from the sun, and sitting down for lunch with my sisters and my grandmother. We would eat grilled cheese and Spaghetti-Os while perched on the shiny, black-painted dining room chairs that were way too tall for us (so much so my younger sister sat on a stack of dictionaries-- we only had one high chair), and she would read us a book about a black lab named Sally. She had countless of these picture books about Sally. There was one where she went to the beach, and another I remember where she took a shortcut down a snowy mountain. My sisters and I were only allowed in Grammy's room when we were picking out a Sally book we wanted to hear. She always kept her room bright and pristine, with blue and white decorations and the sun and fresh air coming through the windows that lead to the front yard's hydrangea bushes. There was always a salty hint in the air from the beach down the street, noticeable anywhere in the little beach town.

My three sisters and I would argue for a minute over which book we wanted to hear while we settled in for lunch, and eventually decide on one. As a toddler with an attention span as short as the walk back to the dining room, I found the pictures far more interesting than the words, with the bright colors the illustrations had and all the different kinds of animals in the story. At the time, I didn't understand how the words could be more important. But I would come to understand. I would start reading chapter books, then novels, and I would begin to love to read. I would pick up a book and enter a world I created in my head, all from my dad deciding to read me "Mr. Brown Can Moo" to help me fall asleep. Reading always made me happy, especially specific books, because of the association I gave them with happy memories and feelings.

- Jane Stephan

As a child, books were an important part of my life. For as long as I can remember, I was listening to books my parents read to me. The main gifts I received on birthdays or Christmas during my early childhood, specifically ages 0-5, were books. I received them from my aunts, uncles, cousins, parents, grandparents, and friends. I was able to build up a large collection which gave me a wide variety of stories to choose from. It is now nostalgic for me to look back on some of the titles of some of my favorites: *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, *Goodnight Moon*, *The Wonderful Things You Will Be*. These books remind me of times when everything felt right and I did not have to worry about anything in the world. They remind me of feeling safe and happy with my parents, not worrying about whether or not I passed that test earlier in the day. Although I had many books I favorited and enjoyed as a child, my favorite was *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* My parents read me this book so many times that I memorized it and recited it along with them as they were putting me to sleep. I remember loving the rhyming words and how every animal was able to see another new animal. I did not just enjoy books in my bed before sleep, though. I listened to stories and enjoyed these books wherever I could. I read outside during the summer, at my grandparents' houses, in the car, and sometimes even at the library. Whenever I was upset or sad, my parents would read me one of the many books I had in my supply, no matter where I was. My favorite place to read around this age, however, was my small pink chair in my living room. It made me feel safe, comforted, and comfortable while my parents repeated the same stories over and over again. Despite the stories never changing, I never got sick of them when I was in my pink chair. Eventually, I learned how to read and began enjoying stories on my own. I was no longer dependent on the adults around me to quench my craving for reading. I eventually got to reading more advanced books that were not for younger children or babies. Around the time I was in third grade, I read 4 books in 4 nights by Andrew Clements. I was obsessed with reading and could not get enough of the excitement the stories brought me. This love of reading still remains with me today.

- Julia Jamieson

Sitting in my blue-covered twin bed with his leg resting against the white sleigh-shaped bed frame is my father. It's seven o'clock in the evening and a small, curly-headed, blue-eyed toddler is staring at a thin picture book. The hard, yet ever-so-soft cover reads, "I'll Show You, Blue Kangaroo." Enamored with the bright colors and exciting geometric shapes that filled the pages, my eyes remained glued to the book for twenty minutes every night, like clockwork, almost.

When I was young, I, like most other children, was read to at bedtime. The reader would switch off between my mother and my father, and some nights it was both at a time. When I was fortunate enough to be graced by the company of both of my parents, all three of us would squish onto my bed, sandwiching the young Olivia with hugs and blankets. I would stare at the pages, not understanding the words, and listen to my parents slowly and gently tell me a story about a young girl and her best friend: a kangaroo. I began to memorize the words, and eventually the sentences, until I could recite the whole book without even laying a finger on my toddler-height bookshelf. Unfortunately, I was soon informed that memorization was different from reading. You can imagine my devastation (okay, not really - I still refused to accept the difference).

As time passed by, I began to sound out the words that once appeared foreign and incomprehensible. Finally, I was getting somewhere. I jumped from book to book; I was never satisfied with just the one. Or the two. Or the three. Soon, my mother deemed it appropriate for me to sign up for a library card.

I loved the library. I still do. I can still remember the faint smell of the partially-melted plastic covers that held the long-loved children's books together. I can still remember the comfort brought to me by chairs disguised as rainbow dinosaurs in the children's section. I can still remember my shaky cursive signature on my first ever library card.

I think that every time I was brought to the library, I met their book check-out limit. The kind and aging checkout-counter worker would remind me to bring my books back on time, and I always followed her instructions. I would never want to be in trouble in the magical place where they keep the books!

My reading obsession had begun, and, sometimes, on days when I was particularly bored, I would read all of the books I had just selected on the car ride home. My mother would encourage me to save them for later, but I never listened. I was simply a child in love with books.

- Olivia Kelly



# **T i n y   L o v e**

# **S t o r i e s   2 0 2 1**

Tiny Love Stories began as a challenge from the editors of The New York Times's popular Modern Love column: "What kind of love story can you share in two tweets, an Instagram caption or a Facebook post? Tell us a love story from your own life — happy or sad, capturing a moment or a lifetime — in no more than 100 words."

Now they publish these sometimes funny, sometimes heartbreaking, miniature reader stories weekly. Even though they're short, they have all the essential elements of great narrative storytelling: character, conflict, resolution and a universal message about love.

♡ I walk into a messy bedroom. My sister sits at her desk with her head down on her unfinished homework. She wallows in stress and depression, unmotivated to work, or eat, or lift her head. I'm not good with words, so instead I begin to clean. I make her bed. I pick her clothes up off the floor, fold them and put them away. I light her favorite candle and clean off her dresser. I stack up dirty dishes to bring downstairs, and I put away her paints and pencils. I don't speak, she doesn't either. She doesn't have to.

♡ "Do you want to be my valentine?" We're not dating, nor will we be. He's one of my best friends; the brother I never had. Yet, he doesn't think of us as just friends or siblings anymore. Do I say yes? Do I say no? Say something! "Uhm" is the best thing that comes to mind. Although embarrassed by my poor word choice, I send it. "Opened just now," Snapchat informs me. I nervously anticipate a response. Soon, I check for an answer, but I've been left on "open". I guess I'll be free this Valentine's Day.

♡ I don't get to see my best friend that much anymore after he started attending a boarding school in Maine for high school. We used to talk and see each other every week. This left me wondering every day, when will I see him again? When will we reunite? When can we hang out together? Until one day, during Christmas break, I heard my phone ring and a notification came up on the screen. I quickly picked it up, read the message, and my face lit up. The simple "yo" was all I needed to see.

♡ I would always watch the raindrops roll down the side of my window. The way they came together. Engulfed. Taken over. Indistinguishable as two separate units. Terrifying. I guess that relates back to everyone before you. I couldn't bear being seen as someone else, more extremely as part of a whole. And then there was you. You made me feel whole as is. You weren't insecure or controlling, you were entirely you. When we came together, it didn't feel damning. Together we didn't engulf one another, we supported, but never overtook, and I love you for that.

♡ "Goodnight" she said to me. My heart filled with warmth. Maybe a "gn" would've left me upset, but the full word -- that had to mean something. Such a small but vast meaning. The first time she had ever said it. Did she really care? Was this relationship the one? Thoughts were just flying in and out my mind. She's the one! I respond with a "goodnight" as I shut down my brain to rest. Little did I know months later she'd be typing that same phrase to me at night. But this time she said "gn" and I knew she's gone.

♡ We were always fighting. Never a day went by where I could finally breathe in the comforting silence of your absence. It never stopped even when I cried and pledged to change for you, for our future, for me. The pleading, the praying, and the pressure I dedicated to you never satiated your greed for perfection. You never comforted me even when I curled up like the baby in your arms in the photo of us I framed on my wall. And all you had to say to me was crammed into an apologetic bowl of cut up fruit. - Ann Phan

