

*Baltimore City College 2020-2021*

# ECHOS

## *Magazine*

*Poetry, Art, Fiction, and Must-Reads from City's Literary Minds*

## **2020: The Student Perceptive**

**What We Really Think About  
Online Learning**

**Real Talk: Expressing Our  
Emotions**

**Take A Look: Powerful  
Artwork & Poetry**

**Amplifying The  
Voices Of The  
Unheard**

**Hopeful About  
New Beginnings**

**#AloneTogether**

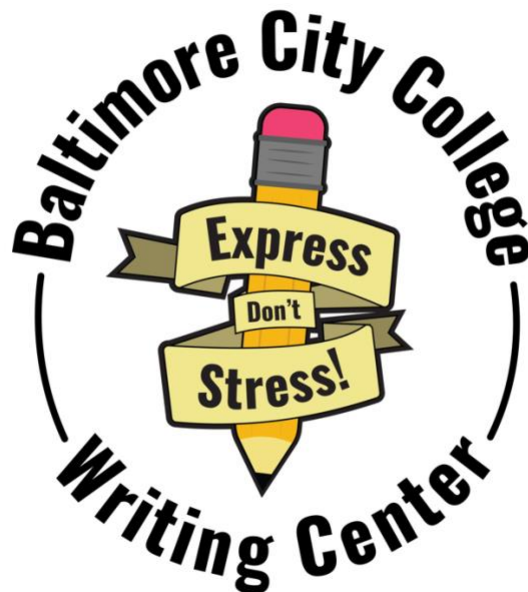


## Letter from the Editors

Students of Baltimore City College,

This magazine is designed to give students an outlet where they can freely express themselves about significant issues, whether it be through poems, short stories, or artwork. The past year has been a challenging time for not just the students but everyone around the world. That is why we have decided that the theme of this year's magazine will be **#AloneTogether**. The original purpose of the hashtag was to promote staying home to reduce COVID, but in this case, it symbolizes unity despite being apart from each other. We may be going through our own struggles but we are also making a valiant effort to move forward together. From the worldwide shutdown to global protests, students have been at the forefront of it all. Many of you may feel like you have no voice or outlet during this time, but ELM will provide just that for students. These students have channeled their inner artist, poet, songwriter, and have expressed all their emotions in a healthy way. Like these students, we encourage you to be bold and inspire others in your everyday life.

Stay Safe and Be Well,  
The Writing Center



***Tori King***  
**The Cycle**

Everyday there's a new face on murder ink  
Another funeral, Another memorial to paint  
We're at war with each other, because war is what we learned  
Another broken heart, another lit candle burned  
For so many years our pain has been covered with white lies  
We're angry because they pretend to not hear our cries  
But label us as violent, when in reality they're committing the crime  
Another innocent man making up for lost time  
We protest to be heard, but it seems our screams aren't loud enough  
They always acknowledge the bad, but for the good they aren't proud  
So there's just another funeral & things blow over like a pile of dust  
Afraid of the ones whose job is to protect us, so who can we really trust  
They're tryna get rid of us because of their fear for us  
And no they don't care for us  
So we gotta care for each other, be there for our brothers  
So that one day there'll be one less crying mother.



Photo Credit: Devin Allen

*Take it Off*  
**Tyler Lewis**

It blinds you so you can't see

TAKE IT OFF

there's too much happening for you to be this oblivious

Now if I snatch it off you will see that everything this country wrote was a lie

1776 a lie cause if this is it  $2+2=6$

Equal has never been a word to describe my people

1865 the chains were just a formality

You didn't have to see it you heard it

Like an annoying child tapping a pencil

That cry

Now I know you heard that

You must wanna peek through there like a nosey old lady

That cry

That's us being sick and tired of being sick and tired

They control our household

1936 the lab rat housing

We gotta keep them all together

1965 that welfare check still ain't hit cause I don't want a fatherless child

You need to take that off lady I'm trying to show you

The 13th amendment ain't mean nothing

The people that killed us are still killing

They're just not in white sheets now they're in blue uniforms

What you stand for means nothing

that balance beam of equality in your hand means nothing

Cause I don't see it

Where's our justice

The people that you stand for are the ones that let Black men die just for selling a loose cigarette

The people you stand for let cops go free on paid administrative leave

The people you stand for kill Black women for being in their own household

The people you stand for are scared of us when they're the ones with the most power

The people you stand for with a blindfold on and that balance beam in your hand are the reason America is the land of the slaves

IF YOU'RE REALLY ABOUT IT KNEEL DOWN WITH US AND TAKE THAT  
BLINDFOLD OFF

## *Thoughts*

**Jayla Boykin**

I have black hair brown eyes  
A lot of woman in my thighs  
I have long arms to reach my goals  
I hope this police officer doesn't take my soul.  
Before I leave the world I want the people to know  
That I am human just like the rest, I shouldn't get treated like  
I am less.

Why do I scare you?  
Is it my melanin?  
Is it my height?  
What is it that gives you so much fright?  
I have a smile that brightens up like the sun  
My momma tells me don't ever run  
Why can't we all just love one another?  
Why do people judge me by my skin?  
Why do people put me in this stereotype?  
Where did it seem like I had to blend in?

Officer stop thinking about the color I am  
Think about who I am inside  
Look deep into my brown eyes  
Think about how I am someone's daughter  
Think about how I am my daddy's pride  
Please don't let me die.  
I beg of you  
I just want to live past 25.  
(and) as I am thinking about this it's tears coming  
Out my eyes but it also brings me joy because I  
Wouldn't wish to be anyone else  
So let me ask you again Mr. Officer  
What do you see?

\*BANG\*



*The Weight of The World*  
Safiyyah Collick



This image represents the restriction on Black freedom not just in America but all over the world. We are always chained down and having to prove to everyone else that we matter, even on our own land. The fist represents Black power and the chain around the earth is showing how the acceptance of Black power is prohibited or not wanted. Another interpretation can be the world is weighted down, cannot be improved because they won't accept Black freedom. 2020 has brought to light a lot of racism and discrimination that has been overlooked for so many years because some people like to say, "why would I care it doesn't affect me". We cannot overlook the countless lives that have been lost or those who have been done wrong by the ones that are supposed to protect us. If all lives matter why don't we start acting like it.

*Designer Mud*  
**Tyanna Anderson**

Today was the absolute most terrifying day ever  
And don't try to convince me that I'm being overdramatic  
5 airhead girls walking down the road to get slushies  
Drinking those was like borrowing happiness from the next day  
We didn't take our regular path down the road for some daring reason  
We decided to be adventurous and take a new path  
I felt so uneasy, something didn't feel right  
I was drowning into a completely different wave of thoughts clashing together  
I finally get pulled out from the wave and back into reality of laughter,  
cigarette smoke and junkies laying on the sidewalk  
We're almost there, it was like I was seeing the light flash before my eyes  
"BANG, BANG, BANG!"  
Unlike white people standing around in a horror film  
I did not hesitate to run for my life as well as my friends  
We ran the opposite direction we came from  
We ran in an alley which felt like a mud maze  
There were only two options  
run through the mud with no shoes or run through the mud with no shoes  
There was no chance of us running back and being met with a 'shooter'  
So we did what we had to do  
Walking home barefoot with mud all the way up to our shins like  
High end boots  
As we were heading back home, we looked like clowns the way we met a carnival of people  
But little did they know those high end mud boots paved the way to another day.



Photo Credit: Devin Allen

*Untitled*

**Wesley Dixon**

A city full of wrongdoings  
A city full of shootings  
A city being looked upon by others as being in ruins  
A city known for abandoned buildings  
For being poverty stricken  
And for its rampant killings  
Take a wrong turn and wind up in the wrong area  
Your friends and family will be at your burial  
Many try to break the cycle  
The cycle of murder  
The cycle of violence  
The cycle of hatred  
Many fail to do so and the battle of trying to break the cycle  
Instead turns into a battle for survival  
This is Baltimore  
A place of hate  
A place of murder  
A place of survival  
But we still call it home



Photo Credit: Community Architect Daily Blog



*All Day and all Night*  
**Ty'Shera Gill**

All day and all night

If you had all day and night to explain your life, how would that sound?

Would you talk about where you come from and how at night there is not a soul in sight?

Or how at every streetlight there are balloons in sight.

WAIT.

Don't stop at this red light

Because it's night.

On this corner messing with money is like messing with a monster.

Is it because money is a dead president or because too much money can get you killed?

All day and all night

Means light does not stay.

Because dark has to have its way.

That's when my people have to survive to stay.

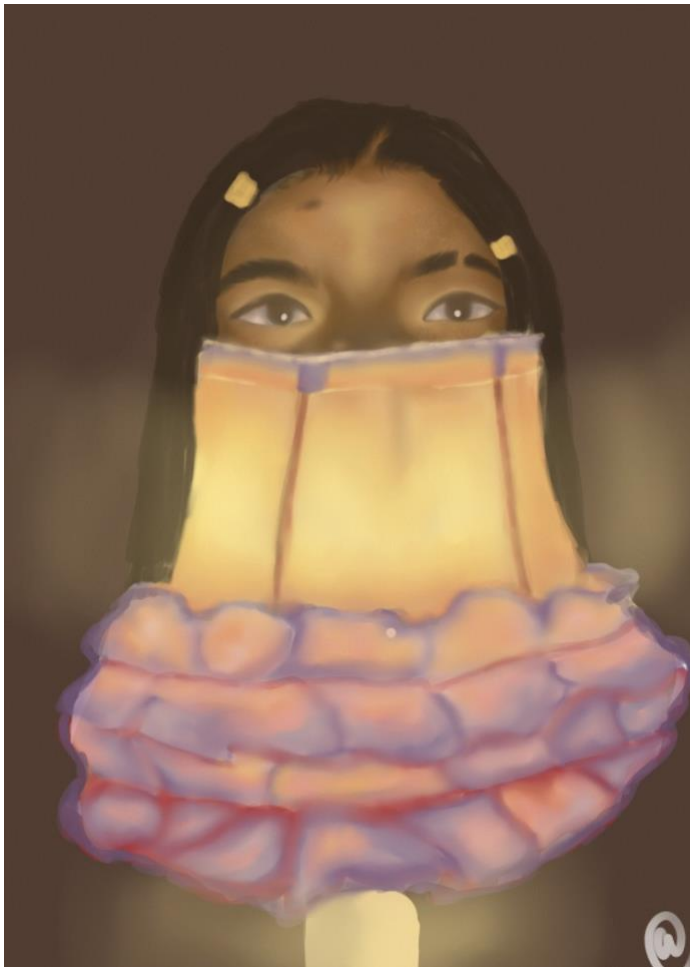


Photo Credit: Aniek Davis

***Growing up in Baltimore***  
**Ny'shea Smith**

At almost every corner in Baltimore you are guaranteed to find either a liquor store, chicken spot, Chinese carry-out or corner store. And once you turn that corner you can find a group of guys with unlicensed guns selling drugs to minors while kids are outside running around with friends. Those who live in the city have become accustomed to this destructive lifestyle. Since I was a young girl I have seen firsthand what the streets of Baltimore can do; they can either make or break you. When I was thirteen, I saw someone very close to me go from a naive individual who knew nothing but family to someone who always hung outside with the wrong crowd. Around the age of eighteen his dad was incarcerated and because he no longer had his father around to tell him right from wrong, the streets got into his head and he began to make poor decisions that later landed him in jail. I remember overhearing his mom say, "He's not my sweet little boy anymore. The streets got to him." This is typically the case for Black boys who are growing up and trying to find where they fit in at. So a lot of women spend their time worrying and trying their best to protect their Black sons, uncles, nephews and cousins from the dangerous streets of Baltimore. But those boys out in the streets didn't ask for the life that was handed to them, a lot of them grew up around guns, gangs and illegal drugs. Many of them grew up with their fathers in and out of their lives. Some grew up with that uncle, older cousin or nephew who was into the streets so that's all they knew. They were born into that life. And because a lot of them grew up in that toxic environment, they figured that that was all they could ever be. Like that was the life they were destined to live.

I am the second oldest of seven. I have two brothers, three sisters and am expecting another sibling. Although I have many sisters, I have always been more fearful for my brothers because I know what the streets can do and I know how easy it is to get sucked in. And I know what you may be thinking: how are they not aware of the warnings if they see what goes on every day? Well to know the game you must first learn the plays. In other words although they see what happens, they aren't on the inside. They don't know what it's really like in the streets because they haven't been exposed to that vicious world; they are innocent. I am willing to do everything to protect their innocence and guide them in the right direction even though I am still learning myself. I am used to being the one to guide and lookout for my siblings. All the responsibilities were passed down to me. Every time I turn around, everyone is telling me to "stay focused in school, be the leader for your siblings, be strong, be responsible and watch out for your siblings". So for the longest time, I was scared to make a mistake. Scared of the backlash I would get from people if I didn't live up to their expectations. Scared of the judgement and side eye I would get if I didn't do what was expected of me. For the longest time, I felt a weight on my shoulders. Now you may be thinking: why hold on to something that is weighing you down? Why not just let the responsibilities go? Well since I have seen what Baltimore can do, I have decided to not give up on my brothers and their future. Whether they decide to stay or leave the city I will continue to guide them because I don't want them to slip into the streets.

Although I am here for my siblings no matter what, I am scared of my biggest fear coming true. I am afraid that I will be too busy trying to protect them that I forget that they have to go through life on their own and learn from their mistakes. I am afraid that I won't be there to catch them when they fall and to reassure them. I am afraid that if they get off track, I won't be able to guide them in the right direction. But life is about trial and error, so all I can do is hope for the best and prepare for the worst. Because that's what it means to live in Baltimore

**21216**

**Destiny Davis**

The fresh smell of marijuana  
Old houses that have aged along with neighbors  
And peace that only exists inside.

Clear night skies  
Carried with the roar of gunfire  
Police cars racing down the street  
News casts of another shot and killed Malcolm X  
Wonder who's next?

My part of town would be  
D-Day on Tuesday  
Payday on Wednesday,  
World War 1 on Saturday  
& Iraq on Sunday

I usually fantasize about a future, a  
Future where ain't no bullets bustin thru alley ways  
We gots to stop all of dis killin

I'm willin to live



Photo Credit: Baltimore Sun

*Teapot*

**Jailen Randolph**

I am sleepy

No

I am tired

I am tired of planning a future with

Doubt in my mind that I may not live to pursue it

Tired of being scared to run a red light or make a wrong turn

For fear that I'll have to encounter someone of law

I am tired of being tired until I pick up my Chamomile tea

And I think

Can I really be mad?

Is it sad that I'm not surprised

Because from a day to day basis this is what I'm seeing in my eyes

Getting harder and harder to realize and understand

That this war is never over

They just turned the fire down so the water wouldn't boil so fast

But it's been too long

The fire is slowly rising

More of us are dying

And we can't keep relying on our leader for guidance

Such a fixated mind so focused on making us "great" again

But can't help himself to cheat the journey that we've struggled on

We want you to know we're done,

So we shriek, day and night

But now it is too hot, and they can't hear for our shrieks have gone on too long

Will they turn the fire down or is it too late?

Has the water boiled out and our life means nothing but a continuous cycle of what we could've been rather than what we should be

Can you hear our shriek?

or must you be blinded by no relation to the life that we've lived.

*Untitled*  
Irma Caguana



My painting depicts the unity of the Black community specifically this past year, hence the man and woman holding hands. This refers to the Black Lives Matter protests and uprisings all over the world. The police officer has a gun drawn because it is his first instinct, he claims to fear for his life when he actually doesn't see what he is looking at. He is faceless, having only question marks as eyes, symbolizing how America has shaped police officers to see people of color, based on fear and prejudice.



***Burnt Rubber***  
**Timothy Bethea**

the love that we shared  
to each other  
but the hate that grew us apart  
from one another  
burnt rubber  
not knowing what consequences  
come with your color  
and hoping tomorrow  
they don't take your brother  
burnt rubber

listening to those red  
screams  
and  
blue cries  
you watch that purple team to kill time

screaming,  
running,  
shooting  
dying  
tears to fill up a tub from ma crying  
living life with eyes watching  
watching your son grow up mindless  
is the rubber not burnt enough



Photo Credit: Devin Allen

*Untitled*

**Katiera Wilson**

My city knows love, my city knows peace,  
especially when you see the police car roaming through your streets,  
my city knows joy, my city knows protest,  
But try telling that to the twins who died seven years apart who got buried apart  
from one another  
My city knows guns, my city knows violence  
Honestly I feel as though my city needs guidance  
Someone to point them away from the violence  
No more parents dying, children crying  
Think about the pain you're causing and not the vengeance  
No more pain, no more bloodshed.

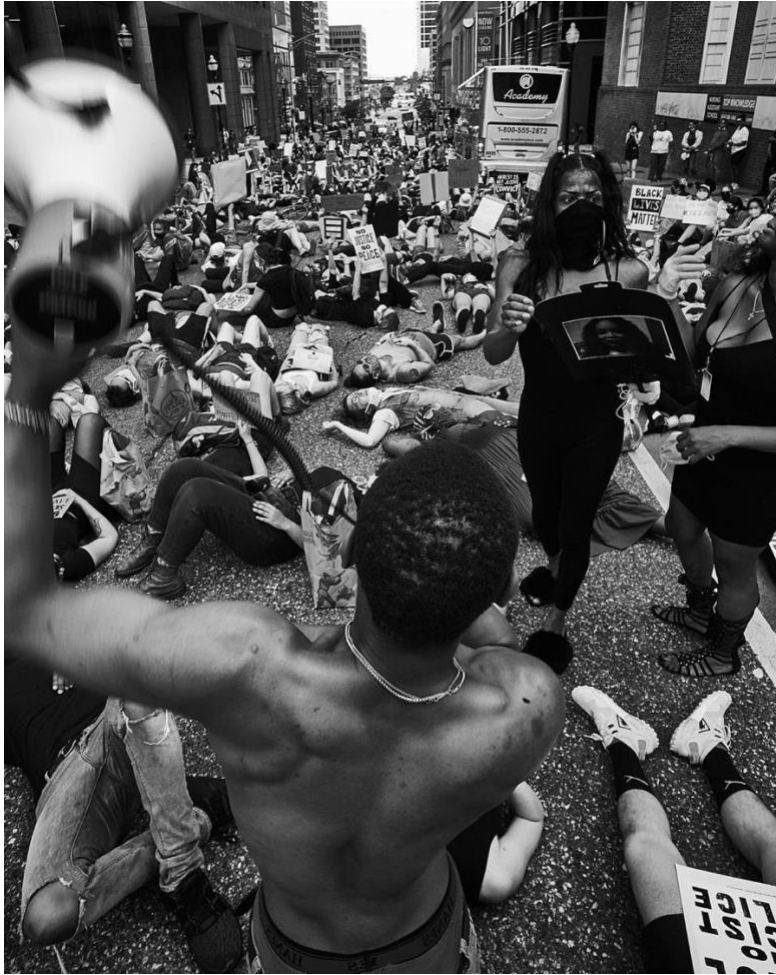


Photo Credit: Devin Allen

## *Untitled*

### **Donte Code**

I always thought I could be a superhero when I got older, I could protect people within seconds. I would be strong, fast, intelligent, and never show fear. I would never shed a tear because I would be too strong. I was just a kid with silly dreams I guess. I know I never could have magical powers or be faster than the flash and he isn't even real. The next best thing was to be a police officer. I could save people and not hurt them. I could make people smile and take away sadness by enforcing safety. We all need superheroes; we need somebody who is always there to save the day. Police officers are real right? They save people no matter what and never be selfish? And I thought I could be one of the best ones -- fast, smart, and the community would love me to death. I would meet the president, he would shake my hand, and put a gold medal around my neck, just like they do in cartoons and movies. I would be a model for all citizens. Shoot I would deserve to be written about in the bible. No matter what it was, I would do it just to put a smile on anyone's face. Need a cat saved from a tree? I would be your guy. No clown for your birthday? I'd be your guy. A murder happened? I'll bring justice for the family. The little mind in me even wanted some people to be after me like in the batman movies. I would even want cops to be jealous of me, not in the "I will kill you and sabotage you" kind of way, but they would envy me for being a role model known all over the world. They could never be me. I guess I shouldn't dream so big for a Black kid. At the time I never saw Black superheroes in movies, shows, or cartoons. So maybe I dreamt so big because I wanted to be the first one. Who knew the people I wanted to be would destroy my dreams and would become the only thing I feared and still actually do.

I'm the oldest out of 3. I have a sister on my dad's side and two brothers on my mom's side, I am the youngest when it comes with all of us together because my sister is older than me. I always had to be the responsible one. It was always my job to protect my siblings and my mom of course. My dad always said I was the man of the house when he was gone. Even when my dad and mom divorced he said it was a job I had to do. He always told me about the bad things that happened in the world. He told me how the world will treat me because of who I am. I never understood what he meant, but I always presented myself as strong because that's what I was supposed to be. Who would protect my mom and sister if I was gone? Who would my little brothers look up to. I know it doesn't make sense, but those thoughts always lingered in my mind

when I was younger. I was always terrified of leaving my family or me being the cause of their sadness; I was a superhero. I was never afraid of horror movies or spiders or anything. June 16, 2010 was when I learned my fear and my whole life changed. I remember the day like it was yesterday. You know how your day starts off like a movie. The sun is beaming on your face and it wakes you up, you get ready, your parents tell you we're going out. Well that's how my day started, but sadly it's not how it ended. We headed towards the Harbor or downtown Baltimore around 2:00 P.M from what I can remember. My dad took me and my two little brothers out to get some fresh air. My dad was always smiling and happy. I truly hoped to be like him one day. A *Real Man* who could protect his family from everything. We went to The Cheesecake Factory and ate outside. I don't remember what I got, but I know it had to be good. We walked back to the car and thinking back I wish we just sat down for a little longer. I wish we walked around the water and talked more. We made it to the car, laughed and smiled ear to ear. As we were driving a police car was following us and of course I didn't think anything of it, until my dad pulled over and told my brothers and I to keep still and that was the first time I ever saw fear on my dad's face. The cops came to the window and another on my side. Two officers pulled my dad out of the car and pushed him against the car, I could feel the vibrations in the car. I remember the officers reaching for their gun and my dad beggingly saying "my kids are in the car, please don't do this". I saw my dad cry for the first time and I was so angry because I couldn't do anything to help him. I couldn't be a superhero. The officers made my brother and I get out of the car. They put handcuffs on my brothers and told me to call someone. I immediately called my mom and she rushed to get us. They let her take the car and we drove to our grandma's house. "Grandma will know what to do guys, just hold on". We found out he got pulled over because his taillight was broken. We went through that terrifying event because of a *taillight*.

"He who truly overcomes his fears will truly be free". I read this quote from time to time and I wonder if I will ever be free. I am scared that if we didn't beg the police to stop, I wouldn't have a dad. I would have no one to look up to. Sometimes I get scared when I see cops. I get scared for my brothers. I am 18 years old now and I still haven't conquered my fear and, in the times we're living in now, I don't think I ever will.

## *The Dream*

**Tariq Jernigan**

When a Black Brother's doing great, they find the need to look for a Black brother's pain, isn't that an ironic thing, while still trying to establish the idea of a Black brother's pain, provoking and installing the Black man's brain with unrealistic things, while still trying to sell the finer things, praying on his dreams to succeed as bad as he wants to breath, using the Black man's wishes and dreams against him to establish what they need. Passing a blind eye to the things that would actually help them succeed, pulling their head underwater until they can't breathe, while filling a check that would only help them to continue to succeed.



Photo Credit: Rob Dobi



*Kayla Sims*  
**One for Sorrow**

strange fruit, strange fruit!  
the bellman cries,  
strange fruit, abound! but not from vines  
they lie in the dust and grime, and flood  
the gutters!  
black and brown bodies, stained darker  
with ink and mud and blood  
of brothers and fathers and sisters and  
mothers  
what a torturous seed, this wicked tree  
has birthed a cycle of hate  
from hate  
to hate  
for hate  
with love!  
the white man's burden is slackened,  
remember, black boy, black girl,  
you're as light as a feather,  
as light as an angel so don't be afraid --  
when you fly.



Photo Credit: Karen Tarlton

***Recognize her?***

**Ny'Shea Smith**

I am me; I am not her  
I am me; I am not her  
I look in the mirror and say these words aloud  
But these words do not change the way I see myself

The younger me would not worry about the next “hot trends”  
Back then all I wanted to do was play hide and seek with my friends  
The younger me would not worry about seeking validation from society  
Because my childhood games were the escape from reality

Nowadays all I seem to worry about is how others see me  
No matter how loud I scream no one seems to hear me  
It's as if I am searching for my self-worth in others, that don't know a thing about me  
So I hide my unwanted scars with filters to be set free  
From society's opinions about me

Growing up in a city that wants you to have the body of a model  
In a way I feel the need to follow  
They say leaders show up ready to lead  
But how do you lead with no role model?

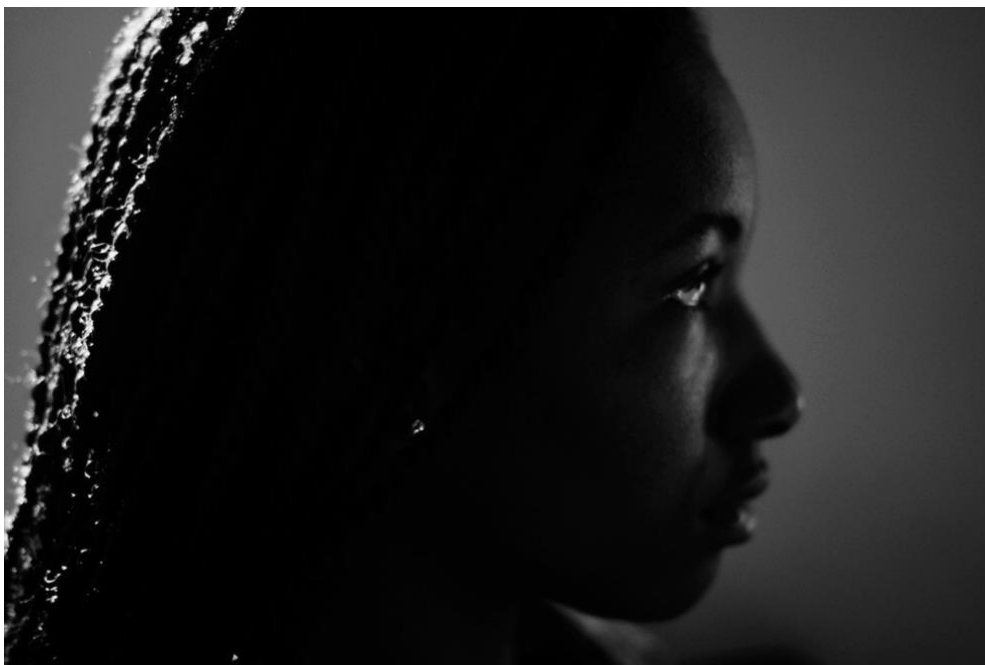


Photo Credit: Medium

## *Models*

### **Kendra Bryant**

the prettiest girl in the world,  
hides her face and keeps her mouth tight.  
the slimmest model falls asleep starving,  
wishing she had an appetite.

every filter she places on her face,  
covers an unwanted feature.  
pimples fade, but the scars he leaves  
only cause her to cut deeper.

the curviest woman prays to find a guy who will love her right .  
instead of someone who'll only look her way  
when her jeans are a size too tight.

after untying the corsets and organ crushing waist trainers,  
she sits up to count her views and likes.  
but alone at night , when she can't sleep tight  
there's not a viewer in sight.

as she bends and tears, stumbles over fears and pressured to take pictures in her underwear,  
she covers every single fear with the glows  
of glitz and glamour here and there.

her face could cause the blind to stare,  
if only her mother would have cared.  
to show her to be more than just a pretty face,  
and not to remember to pick up a man's dinner plate.

with every like and every follow, all of the mistakes she's made have followed.  
millions of people watching you,  
and still you feel like no one's there for you?  
I tell you this, all to say, do you still hope to be a model one day?

*You're (I'm) My Muse*

**Frances Baptiste**

You're the one who keeps me going  
The one who guides my brush strokes  
Gives me watercolors  
& holds my head above it when I choke  
You're a blank canvas  
A lined piece of paper  
A familiar texture  
That I can fold in my pocket for later  
You're a slab of dark clay  
Moldable & Everchanging  
You're a colorful vase  
Even when the paint chips your beauty is never waning  
You're my Mona Lisa  
Strict artist, the only color I will choose  
People never sit still during portraits  
So I became my own muse



Photo Credit: Shesha Ayurveda

*Silence In The Air*  
**Shaquille Mullings**

The Pandemic caused a nationwide shutdown  
Resources are limited  
People aren't able to afford monthly expenses  
Outside contact is prohibited

Silence in the air

The Quarantine kept us in isolation  
Seemingly safe and away from the virus  
Mortality rate closing in at 2%  
A desire for normalcy inspires us

Silence in the air

The year is officially over  
A new dawn of 2021 is here  
Finally got that adventure behind us  
Surprisingly, a new event draws nearer

Silence in the air

The Home of The Brave and Land of The Free  
Had people across the world shook  
Storming the US Capitol  
Going down in the History books

Turmoil is everywhere.

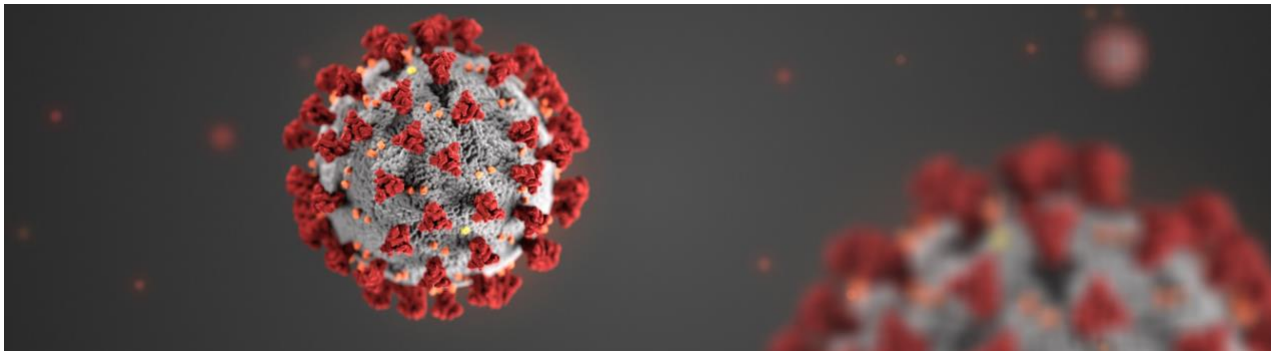


Photo Credit: CDC



## *D.C.'s Comics*

**Tre Fowlkes**

District of Confusion, designated collusion  
District of Corruption, death of proper discussion  
Democracy of Confederates, hypocrisy's their emblem  
Ballad votes overcast the innocent lives taken

Displayed and counted to the world I knew  
Decision of the corrupt president to see it from a worm's eye view  
The hate you give never fitted in the life  
Of the faulty check, which results in death  
Or simply sleeping to be seen as a felony or a misdemeanor  
I must've missed the meaning and I haven't seen the difference

Between storming the capitol and sleeping peacefully  
Or driving with some old tags on a plate, so easily  
D.C. dips carelessly, does it carefully, and didn't care  
Sat in silence as the violent nights filled the city air

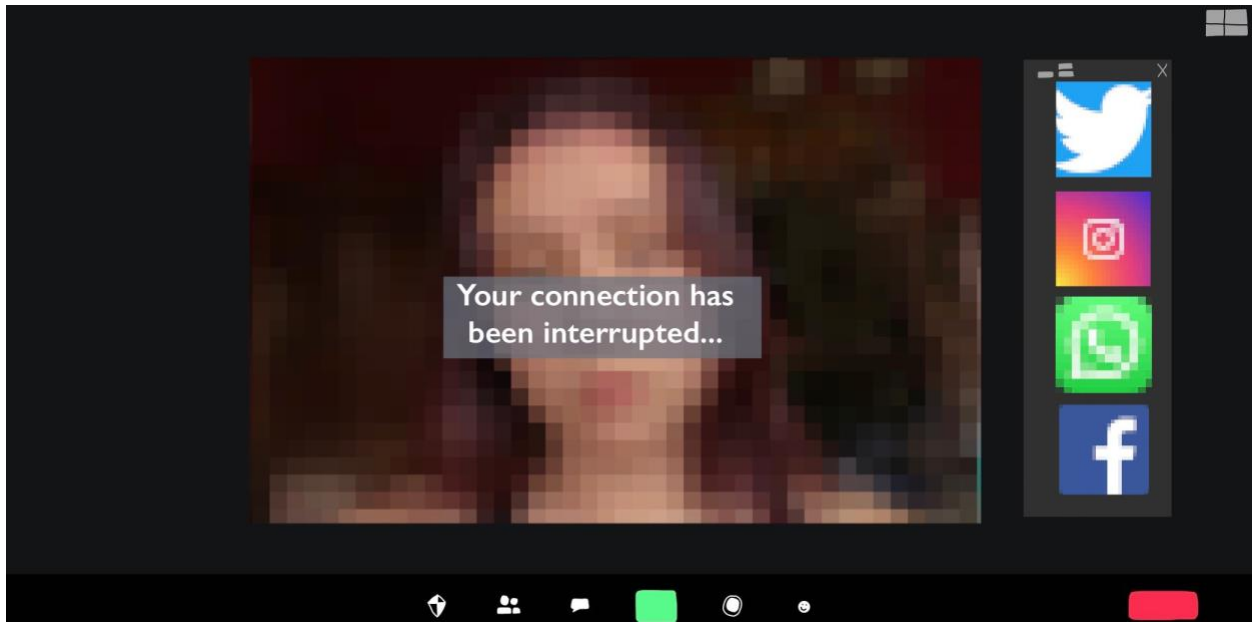
Took several hours to fly from LAX to Ronald Reagan  
But 8 minutes and 46 seconds would tell them stay there  
The storytellers stay stagnant unless a death's unveiled  
The only good D.C. from D.C. is Dave Chapelle

## The District's Comedy



Photo Credit: Sebastian Portillo

*Interrupted Connection*  
Anna Rashkin



This artwork is intended to be a commentary on the COVID-19 quarantine experience. It is designed to resemble a virtual meeting platform, which is a view that has very recently become a daily reality. Though this has been the reality for many, I can only speak to my own experience, which is why I used my own face in the artwork. The pixilation is intended to represent the disconnect that is felt through online communication. Without in-person connections, so much communication is lost, and it is challenging to feel whole. In addition to this, there is an especially intense pressure put on social media in a time without in-person communication. I have found it extremely challenging to maintain healthy relationships through social media platforms while simultaneously staying mentally healthy. Just like my own image, the other 'participants' in the call (social media) are pixelated. The intent here is to illustrate the disconnect felt when your only communication options are digital. I titled this artwork "Interrupted Connection." The pandemic began very suddenly, and it has continued for an entire year. It has felt as though our entire lives have been uprooted and disconnected, and this artwork intends to convey that reality through a relatable and relevant format.

## *Untitled*

### **Arizona Fischvogt**

The beginning of quarantine was really hard because I couldn't be with my family. We couldn't travel without the risk of someone getting sick. The most difficult change was not being able to be with my grandparents. We would see them very often and be able to do fun activities together. They are over 65 so they're more prone to having worse symptoms. We couldn't risk them getting sick so we had to find other ways to keep in contact while also having fun.

A couple years ago my grandmother was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer. During COVID we could not risk at all getting her sick. She was going through chemo which made her immune system very weak. Before COVID we had a lot of day trips with my cousins. She said she enjoyed taking us to the beach, the zoo, museums and new parks. One of my favorite things we did was going to her house the first Friday of every month to have shabbat dinner with my whole family. She enjoyed cooking for everyone and being able to all get together every month.

While we were there for dinner, my brother and cousins always went down to the basement to play on the Nintendo switch or we would make up a game to play. We were down there until someone called us up for dinner. We all went to the table; I could always get an idea of what was for dinner by the smell of the kitchen. My favorite dinners were always the brisket my grandmother made. We would first say the prayers and then we would pass the food around the table so everyone could get a little bit of everything.

When COVID started we had to stop having shabbat dinner at her house. We didn't go on as many day trips because things started to close down and we couldn't have dinners as a family anymore. Luckily we found other ways to stay in contact. We knew we were going to miss all holidays this year so we set up zoom meetings so we could all celebrate together on screens. She still really wanted to make dinner for everyone. All day the day before she cooked all the food for my household family and my cousins/uncle and aunt. At the end of the day she drove to our houses to deliver the food. We gave her some of our desserts in exchange. She said, "pretending we still did holidays together and making meals and bringing them over, we had meals together apart but the same meal." I loved when she would bring her cooking so it still felt normal.

Hanukkah was my favorite holiday we had together this year. On the third night she came to our house to light the candles. It was a pleasant surprise because I didn't realize I would get to see her during Hanukkah. I was very happy to see her during the holidays. We brought the menorah outside so we could light the candles together. She was at our house for a short time but I was still really glad we got to see her. The next night we got onto a zoom meeting with my whole family and we all played an online game called "Jack box." We played on our phones and answered questions about each other. It was a way to feel closer during the holidays.

Every year we would all go to Deep Creek Lake for a week during the summer. We would rent a house, a boat and enjoy activities together. This year was different. We knew that my grandmother was doing really well so decided to go. We had to limit almost everything we did. We couldn't go out to eat, we couldn't go to the arcade and racetrack and we could not do any activities. All that we could do was rent a boat and do things in the house and yard. Putting these agreements into place made sure there wasn't a high risk of anyone getting sick.

Now that she has both doses of the vaccine we are able to do more with her. We can start getting back into what we were doing before COVID hit. We can go back to going on day trips. We just started having shabbat dinner at her house this month. It feels really good to be able to have some sort of normal now that I know she won't get sick.

*Dear Angel*  
**Kyla Smith**

Dear Angel,

I've become lazy, I've become lost, and shameful. I long to be in the place that I once was. So strip away the parasite that feeds on my dignity or the self-loathing that visits every so often. Yank me away from the lingering depression that hardly left ever since you flew away. Wash away the pain that is sewn into my skin. Pluck away those threads and make me whole again. Lend me your hand so I can feel the touch that is not meant to be touched. Cross over to the mortal realm and relieve me of my agony. Strip me of the grief and remind me of our joy. Promise me that you'll be here in spirit with me forevermore. Stay with me until the end of time and I'll promise that I'll never forget you. Therefore, in my eyes you are in fact, immortal. I wish things didn't have to be this way but I'm hopeful that we'll meet again another day. I'll never forget 2020, or the suffering that it caused you... but people always said that Heaven takes the best of us. So, live up there in peace but don't forget to visit me.

Goodbye, my love  
Your Princess

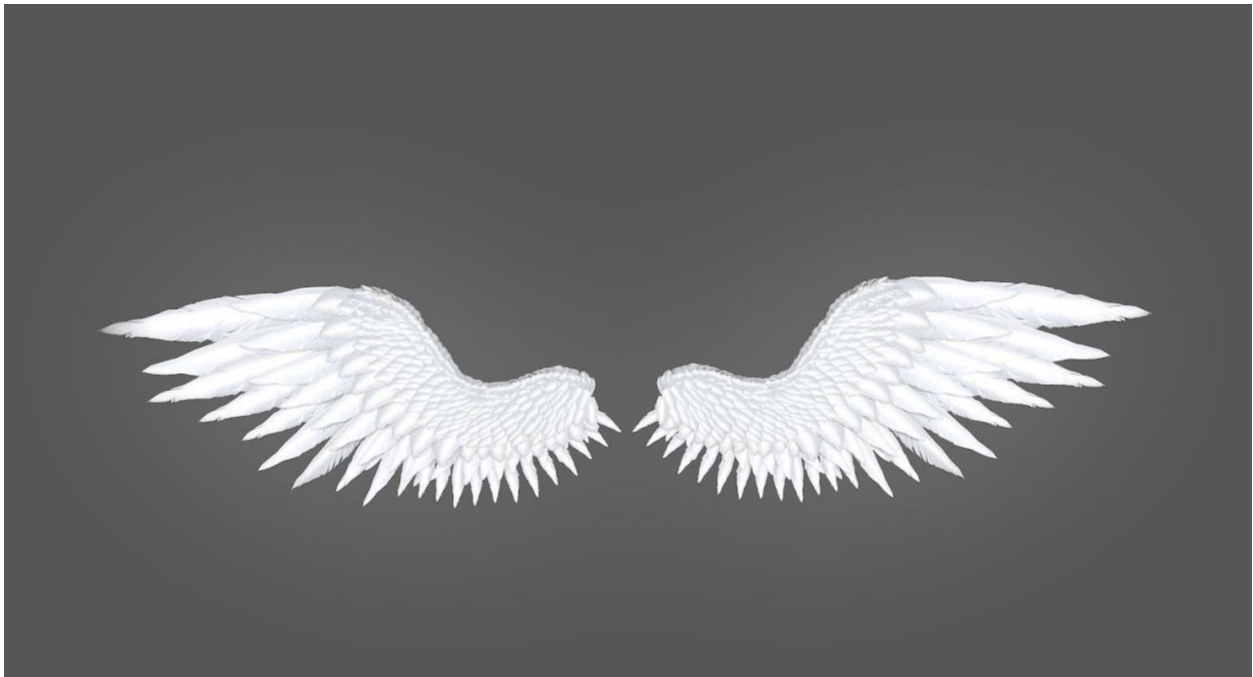


Photo Credit: Unknown

**Pandemic Poetry**  
**Sam Wake**

***Just Wear a Mask***

Wear a mask outside  
Please just wash your hands  
It's not difficult

***Pizza Hut Doesn't Care About Your Theories***

The Democrats are  
Making COVID up, I know  
Because Trump said so

***Bad Style Choices***

If I have to see  
One more American flag mask  
I'm going to cry



Photo Credit: Lehigh Valley Health Network

***What The Pandemic Has Taught us About Baltimore City and Its Children***  
**Lillian Imhoff**

The Coronavirus Pandemic came as a catalyst to an issue long waiting to blow up in American politics, the divide between the two major political parties. You would be delusional to say that line in the sand wasn't already rotting into the earth long before the first case of coronavirus here was discovered. However the insurgence of a new breed of politician and a global crisis, it's no surprise to anyone that the crack between the two sides splintered deeper into the earth.

The American Federal Government's inability to handle the coronavirus pandemic, allowing it to spiral out of control, sent a ripple effect to every jurisdiction of local government in each of the fifty states, including our home, Baltimore.

So when our governor made the decision to move school online, it brought up many bitter sentiments that unfortunately most parents of Baltimore City Public School students are all too familiar with.

Because the thing you have to understand about BCPSS is that they are so much more than a school system for so many people.

The citizens of Baltimore come from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds that have divided our city for decades. From redlining to the war on drugs disproportionately affecting the Black and POC communities, it's no surprise to anyone living in this city that economics are so diverse.

So many BCPS students rely on school for meals, and parents who work full time or have more than one job rely on schools for childcare.

Every year we cycle around the same arguments come the snowy season, is this weather enough to cancel schools? And every year the same parents and students who use BCPS as a resource, as well as an education, plead with North Avenue to continue with the school day.

But the arrival of Covid-19 brought along a new set of challenges. Schools were inevitably going to be closed for many months, if not a year, leaving thousands without the crutch they used to get them through the year.

North Avenue provided meal sites to try to ease the burden on the families who relied upon them so much. However, childcare was still something that was tricky to address. You can't set up a daycare for K-8 students in a pandemic, and BCPS had never been the type to even create them on a snow day. So what's the solution?

There's no easy way to solve this problem, in fact, with the pandemic seeming to approach a new end, it doesn't seem worth it to struggle over a solution. However, it does reveal that BCPS needs reform.

As I mentioned before, this isn't a new issue or problem that is solved by meal sites. The one good thing about this pandemic is we learned that our failing public education system is trying so hard to keep its head above water, but with no life vest on the way, it's fading fast.



BCPS has been overlooked by Maryland's local government for so long, and Governor Hogan's multi-million dollar budget cut just poured salt on an already gaping wound.

What this pandemic has taught us is that the children of Baltimore City are so brave, strong, and resilient a deserve a school system that can stand on its own two feet, one that doesn't crumble when some white man in a tie decides a casino is more important than paying for the education of the future generation.

What the pandemic has taught us is that schools are Baltimore's most precious resource to promote social mobility among the lower class.

What this pandemic has taught us is that we need to create a fail-safe, so that when something goes wrong that crutch is still standing strong and can be leaned on by so many families who BCPSS means so much more to them than a k-12 education. What this pandemic has taught us is that the children of Baltimore City deserve so much more than what they are getting.



Photo Credit: Baltimore City

*The Cycle*  
**Erica Latta**

We wake. We rise and roll to our laptop.  
We wake to work. We wake to cry and pray that we are mute.  
That our camera cannot be seen, and our voices unheard.  
We wake to grades. We wake to scream and be unheard.  
How great it must be to scream with your mouth closed?  
How great it must be to scream with your mouth covered?  
To scream while their ears bend to another.  
They wake. They rise and roll to their phone.  
They wish to not wake. Still they wake.  
They wake to grades they cannot show  
They wake to fear and ignorance.  
They cough, she fears.  
She fears for her life. Her work, her grades.  
Her family, her friends. She cries. Tears of fear.  
Tears of pain. She is left behind. She is left to survive alone.  
She wakes to be judged. She wakes to sleep.  
She crawls another day. Yay! To crawl for grades, while the world is at a hold.  
It's okay, we won't hear you. They won't hear you. But I hear you.  
He jumps. He leaps and twirls. He wakes. He rises and rolls to his computer.  
He sleeps, he rests. They call. He screams, unheard.  
We. They. She and he. We are the unheard. We wake.

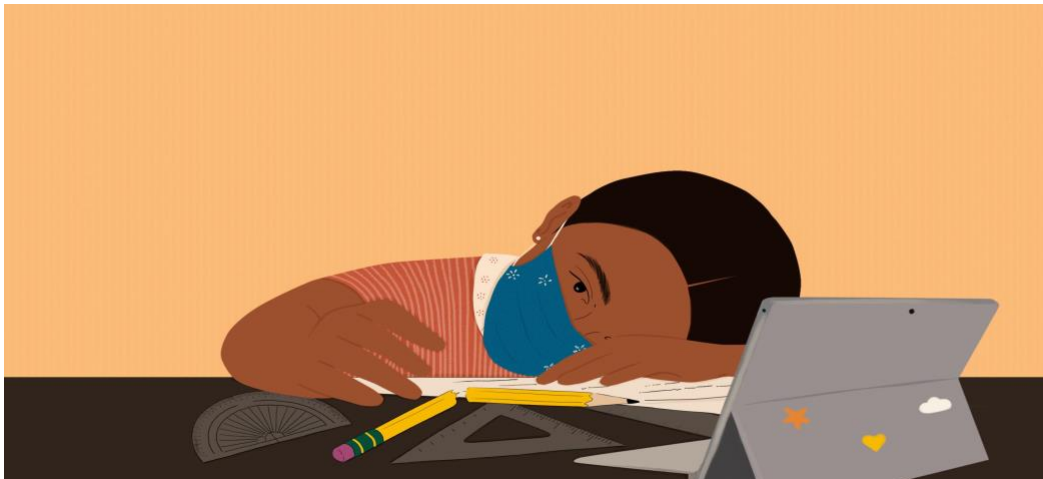


Photo Credit: Ojima Abalaka

## *Changes*

**Kyla Estes**

Through the pandemic, many relationships have been tested. You can see who your real friends are versus your school friends, test the strength of your family and friendships, and see the foundation for your relationships and decipher if they're good for you or not. Quarantine for me just confirmed what I already knew as well as taught me how to show people how much they mean to me and build the communication skills I lacked. The main relationships that have been tested are the relationships with my mother and my closest friends.

The relationship with my mother before the pandemic was great. She is and was my best friend and my favorite person to be around. After being forced with each other for the majority of the time things were a little different. We had to adjust and learned that you need time apart to be able to miss each other and not be annoyed or tired of their company. We realized that distance was actually what we needed to get through. We try to go out every once in a while to give each other space and it helps. Now we talk more and feel closer to each other almost how it was before quarantine.

Another relationship that has been tested is my relationship with my friends. Something that I have always struggled with is keeping in contact with people and showing affection. Some of my friends accepted that I'm bad at it and others expressed that they wanted me to work on it which I did. Before now I would always just hang out with my friends, cook for them, invite them places, bring them to family gatherings and things like that and that became my love language. With the pandemic that was almost impossible for me to do. I had to learn to check up on them more regularly, communicate with them more than I used to, open up to them or update them about my life, express how much they mean to me, plan things for the future with them and more. This was super hard but necessary to keep and build stronger relationships. One moment specifically that I realized I was doing better was a few weeks ago when my friends and I decided to go out. That was our first outing in months and we wanted to go skating and have a sleepover afterward at my house. When we met up it was as if nothing had changed. Like we had been around each other already recently. The chemistry, the laughs, and everything showed me that what I was doing was working. I wasn't surprised that our friendship was the same considering we had been friends since elementary school, it just reassured me that no matter what I know who my real friends are and to appreciate them.

Another relationship where I maintained a connection across distance was with my grandmother. Me and my grandmother have been getting closer over the last few years. Having lunch dates, cooking together, inviting her to my events and having sleepovers. Us spending time together was her break from school (she's back in college) and my break from school and my home life. Since quarantine started I only see her once every two months or so. In the beginning since she's older I tried not to come around her so I would do "drive by" visits. I would bring her flowers, food, sometimes I would just come by to say hey and make her day. This was hard but better than nothing. Knowing that those small gestures made her happy made me happy so it was

good enough for me. Throughout the whole year we've been texting, calling, she sends be cards on the holidays and she sends me money every few months to let me know she's thinking of me. Now we see each other more often even though it's still less than it was pre-quarantine. My family has been having small gatherings (we're staying safe, of course), I stay the night when she has a light school week, and we bring each other gifts. One moment that really stuck out to me and made me realize how sweet she is and how lucky I am to have her was when she paid for my class ring. Over the summer I told my mom I would go half on my class ring or even pay for the whole ring since she already does so much for me. My grandmother decided to pay for the ring all by herself and I am so grateful. She is always selfless and giving when it comes to me and I try to return the favor as much as possible because I know she won't be here forever. This also made me feel closer to her because she knew how much the ring meant to me and that made it even more special.

Overall I feel that quarantine has helped me become a better person to the people I love and to appreciate them more. It also made it clear what my relationships revolved around. The people I called my friends in school are "school friends" because we don't talk outside of school. Our relationships started and ended by having to be in the same place but there's nothing wrong with that. My true friendships are stronger. After overcoming something like this on top of other challenges previously faced I can confidently say we're likely to overcome anything together. And for my family, I feel closer to them now more than ever knowing that even in times like this they make me a priority and love me unconditionally.



Photo Credit: RTE



*Untitled*  
**Roger Gonzalez**

Aunts chatting on a leather couch  
Uncles outside drinking beers  
The oldest cousins are locked upstairs  
in a room with food and drinks  
The youngest are running around the house  
playing tag and breaking almost  
The old wood floors yelling as they get ran over  
We get called down to eat  
First the little ones at 6  
Then the oldest at 7  
The uncles eat at 8  
The aunts eat at 9  
They serve all of us so they end up  
eating after everyone  
After dinner we sit and talk  
The guys play dominos  
The women play Loteria  
Even the babies separate  
At the end of the day it really is  
seeing how close we all are to each other



Photo Credit: Pinterest

## ***My Mother's Parents***

**Andrea Calderon**

I was raised in a Mexican-Honduran household. So growing up, I had basically the best of both worlds. My childhood was full of bright colors and sunny days with glass soda drinks, so I can never complain about the way I was raised. You will also never catch me complaining about my heritage and my culture, just because I love it and embrace it so much. Although, I do recognize that growing up, I was influenced more by my Mexican heritage. My mother can say she raised my siblings and I equally with her family and my father's, but I'd say it's not true.

My father's immediate family are in the States, so I spent a lot of time with them growing up. Half of my mother's immediate family is in Honduras, so I wasn't really influenced by them as much as my father's family. To this day, I have only met my father's parents in person. I have never met my mother's parents. I would say this is due to the fact that my mother also really didn't grow up with her parents, so her connection with them isn't as strong as my father's connection with his parents.

My mother was raised by her grandparents and her Godmother. All the stories I heard about her childhood didn't at all include her parents or siblings, simply because she wasn't raised with them. It's really sad if you think about it and I know that there were days where she wished she had a connection with them as strong as her other sisters.

So, since I knew about these stories growing up, I never really tried to form a connection with my Honduran grandparents. It was just something I never really wanted to do because in my mind, they left my mother and they basically only used her when they needed something. So, I never called them on purpose or I never spoke for more than five minutes with them because I believed that they didn't deserve my time with them. I always tried to avoid being near the phone when they called because I knew my mother would try to pass the phone to me, and as I look back on it, I am so disappointed in myself for ever feeling this way especially since I didn't know the whole story.

My mother rarely talked about her childhood, so when she did, I was all ears. There was a specific time where my cousins and I were in the kitchen with my mother and her sister just talking. We did this all the time just to look back on old memories.

My mother was going on about her teenage years and how she was such a *peleonera*. This means my mother was not a good kid, she was always arguing at school and she almost got expelled once. My mother goes on and on about her life with her Godmother and at this time, my older cousin was asking questions about if my grandparents said anything about this? Or if my grandmother knew about my mother breaking a girl's arm.

My mother's answer is very simple and almost sad. She said, "No".



My Abuela Maria and my grandfather didn't know about how rebellious my mother was simply because they really weren't in her life.

Months later, I asked her about her childhood. Not only because I had to do it for school, but also it was out of curiosity. I'm going to be honest and say that she didn't say much. She talked highly about her grandmother and her Godmother but avoided the topic of her father. She also talked highly about her mother, which surprised me to a high extent. You know, why would you praise the woman who was supposed to raise you, but failed to do so?

In fact, I waited for her to get her coffee just to ask this similar question.

"Do you forgive your parents for not being in your life for fifteen years?" I noticed her thinking carefully and the furrow of her brows.

"Yes, I do," she responded.

"But why?" I just couldn't grasp onto how she could forgive them for leaving her out of their lives.

"They're my parents." That's really all she said. She forgave them a long time ago because they're her parents.

That really had me thinking. Surely, if my mother could forgive her parents for throwing her out to my great grandmother and to her Godmother, then I could say forgive them for not being there for my mother? It hurt me a lot to think that my mother didn't have the connection with her mother the way I have with my mother. It took me a long time to realize that the whole story will arrive to me when my mother decides it's time, but for now, I can't live my life without talking with my grandparents.

So, over the drafts and interviews, I started talking with my grandparents in Honduras more. I realized that it wasn't even my job to forgive them, it was my mother's. So if she forgave them, then I had to go along with it. Honestly, it was one of the best decisions I ever made. My connection with them isn't big yet, but it's growing every day. I am trying to maintain this small connection with phone calls, a simple "hello" now and then, and always sending *saludos* through family in Honduras. I know that my abuelos and I are at a physical distance, but the emotional distance is getting shorter every day. Hopefully, one day I will see them in person, but for now, talking with them through a signal is enough.



Photo Credit: Jason Hoppe

*Happiness*  
Kris Case



My piece shows that even though we are far apart from one another, we can still be together with our family and friends. Through this piece, four different sections were created in order to show the four different ways that we can communicate and be with one another. The first one shows a girl talking to her friends through facetime, the second one depicts a grandmother having her birthday with her family and friends on zoom, the third shows two boys playing at the playground while being six feet apart and having masks on, and the fourth shows a family during lockdown giving each other comfort and safety. Since we are not able to actually be with our friends and family as much as we would like to, our bonds may have grown weaker or our communication may have decreased over time. However, we can still be together through technology or taking extra safety precautions. Although we may not be together physically, we are never truly separated from our loved ones.

***Over the Phone***  
**Camila CaleroArgueta**

In times of chaos, we find ourselves and blossom.

My mother, Carmen was born into a home with limited resources and shared everything with her eight siblings. Although she wasn't born into a rich house her relationship with her older sister was charming and beautiful one. They would do everything together, from picking up water in the mornings, to picking cherries in the afternoon to dressing the same from head to toe and being called twins. In 1979, the Civil War started in El Salvador, and my mother decided to flee to the capital and provided for herself. She would visit her sister from time to time. Then my mom got married and had my sister and her contact with her sister became limited.

During early 2003, my dad lost his job due corruption from the former President at the time. My dad was devastated and hurt by the outcome of losing his job and saw that there were limited opportunities in El Salvador for them. My parents decided it would be best to leave their home country, family and friends and immigrate to the United States.

Once my mom arrived in the United States my mom describes some of the challenges that she faced during her first months. She experienced language barriers and that limited the way she got around and interacted with people. She barely got to talk with her family back at home. She said "it was really hard for me because there wasn't the technology there is now. It was really expensive calling to El Salvador for the both of us so because of this we rarely ever talked". My older sister described her memories of this time too, she explained that they would use these cards called "Boss" that you could buy at local Latinx stores. These cards would allow for 5 to 10 minute long conversations. Their conversations would be short and incoherent because the signal was always bad.

My mom has always been slow on technology advancements but in 2018 she finally got the app called Whatsapp. This completely changed the way that she began to interact with people back home, especially with her older sister. She began to rebuild her relationship with her older sister by talking about their parents and their parent's wellbeing. In 2016, their father died and a year later their mother died from a broken heart. This situation brought them together in their difficult time of pain. It was a combination of grief and looking to be closer to her family, my aunt also decided it was time to come to the United States. She currently lives in Colorado with her son, daughter and their families plus her husband.

Although my aunt was closer to my mom than ever before, my mom feared losing days off of work. That's the thing about my mom she has an insane work ethic and never wants to let anyone down. She sees missing days off as inconvenience for others and always wants to provide for her family. But as the distance got shorter, their relationship continued to blossom. They would constantly talk about people in their hometown or their siblings being up to no-good. Sometimes, you would hear them talk and say, "do you remember" and would go on a tangent. And from time to time, I would hear them talk about meeting up but it always felt like a distance dream.

Then 2020 happened. We all know that it was an awful year and in one way or another we were all affected by it. During the lockdown, my mom was finally able to put things into perspective. She finally realized that work wasn't everything and that it was okay to take some days off. So in the summer of 2020, my mom was able to see her sister for the first time in 17 years. Ironic that in a time of loss and uncertainty, my mom was able to be closer to her sister.

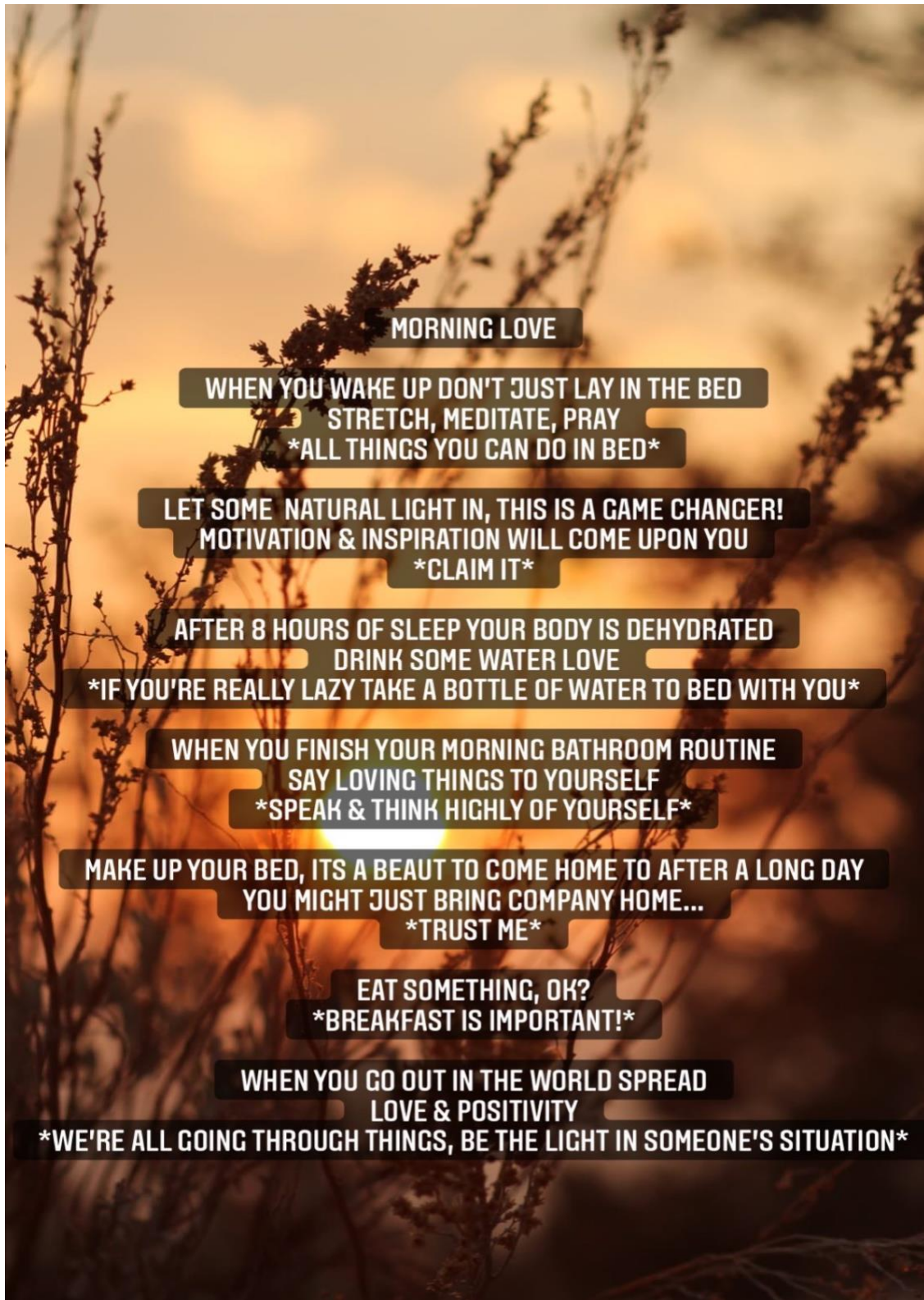
The day she saw, her sister for the first was magical. Throughout the whole time at the Airport everything felt like a dream and unreal. My mom got quieter and quieter throughout the ride, I can't begin to imagine the feelings and butterflies my mom must have felt that day. We finally landed at the Denver airport and after figuring out the location and pickup spot, everything that followed made it all worth it. My aunt came running out of the car with her arms wide open. Throughout the whole ride my mom and my aunt hugged each other. She said, "I can't really find the words to describe but it felt as if something that was missing was being returned to me once again."



Photo Credit: Future of Sourcing



*Morning Love*  
Dontavia Ward



**MORNING LOVE**

**WHEN YOU WAKE UP DON'T JUST LAY IN THE BED  
STRETCH, MEDITATE, PRAY  
\*ALL THINGS YOU CAN DO IN BED\***

**LET SOME NATURAL LIGHT IN, THIS IS A GAME CHANGER!  
MOTIVATION & INSPIRATION WILL COME UPON YOU  
\*CLAIM IT\***

**AFTER 8 HOURS OF SLEEP YOUR BODY IS DEHYDRATED  
DRINK SOME WATER LOVE  
\*IF YOU'RE REALLY LAZY TAKE A BOTTLE OF WATER TO BED WITH YOU\***

**WHEN YOU FINISH YOUR MORNING BATHROOM ROUTINE  
SAY LOVING THINGS TO YOURSELF  
\*SPEAK & THINK HIGHLY OF YOURSELF\***

**MAKE UP YOUR BED, ITS A BEAUT TO COME HOME TO AFTER A LONG DAY  
YOU MIGHT JUST BRING COMPANY HOME...  
\*TRUST ME\***

**EAT SOMETHING, OK?  
\*BREAKFAST IS IMPORTANT!\***

**WHEN YOU GO OUT IN THE WORLD SPREAD  
LOVE & POSITIVITY  
\*WE'RE ALL GOING THROUGH THINGS, BE THE LIGHT IN SOMEONE'S SITUATION\***