

# Frozen Adolescence



*print issue volume two*

# Train of Salt Mag



**Manic Panic**  
by Olive Pitschner

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# NERD GARBO

by Sarah Lamodi



Like everyone my age, COVID-19 has made irreversible changes to my college experience. Any plans I had made for the end of the semester and the summer of 2020 were destroyed when we were thrown off campus. It was a whirlwind of insanity in so many ways, and, to top it all off, I was forced to finish my very first year of college from a place I would never have wanted to: my childhood bedroom.

While calling it a “childhood” bedroom seems to be a bit of an overstatement since I was only away from home for about six months, I immediately made this distinction upon leaving for college. The things in my bedroom back home represented who I was from elementary to high school and served as a final resting place for all the memories I had gathered across the years. This was where things were to be left behind. I wanted to start anew — the whole cliché of finding myself in the big city or whatever they say at the end of bad teen movies. Why would I want to bring the most embarrassing, cringeworthy and juvenile aspects of myself along? Well, thanks to COVID-19 and an astonishingly short amount of time in college, I didn’t get very far, as one might expect. I was absolutely terrified that after being quarantined back home I’d lose the miniscule amount of progress I had made ... and I was right. At school, I was slowly becoming the person I’d always wanted to be: someone seemingly unbothered, someone in-touch with anything and everything “cool.” Returning home meant starting all over again, but I eventually learned that this wasn’t necessarily a bad thing.

It’s damn hot in that room. Sweltering, actually, no matter what season. The walls are a dark purple which absorbs all the heat streaming through my west-facing window, especially as the sun sets. This exact feeling of sweaty stillness is one I can’t find anywhere else, which is why my

childhood bedroom was the only place I could relive my middle school years. It’s safe to say that many of us did a certain amount of regressing over quarantine, and I’m certainly no exception. When you’re trapped among things that used to define you, it’s nearly impossible to ignore them. With nothing left to do in my stuffy bedroom, I sifted through old books, photos, drawings and playlists, coming across so many things that I deemed absolutely embarrassing — things from middle school in particular. As I dug through piles and piles of a past me, the nagging heat served as a reminder that, though I wished that everything had changed, not much had. This room was where I watched anime in secret, only talking to one friend about it because it was widely uncool to like; this was where I poured over manga and graphic novels, never uttering a word about them outside of the space. These memories all came flooding back. I spent hours over quarantine reliving those days, laughing and cringing over the person I used to be. I tried to reassure myself it was only for nostalgic purposes, definitely not because I actually still enjoyed what used to embarrass me but that reassurance fell to the side when I caved and bought Hatsune Miku: Project DIVA MegaMix, a rhythm game using Vocaloid songs.

I’ve always been a music lover, so it’s not surprising that some of my favorite parts of watching anime back in middle school

Pulling the past me out of cryogenic freeze wasn't a bad thing, it actually changed the way I looked at the world for the better.

were the opening and ending theme songs. It was equally unsurprising to find, through my deep dive of my old YouTube playlists, that one name appeared more than any other: Hatsune Miku, an android singer also known as a Vocaloid.

Vocaloid is a software that synthesizes human-like vocals, and Hatsune Miku is a voicebank producers use to create or make covers of different songs. Each voicebank has a corresponding personification — Miku's instantly recognizable turquoise pigtails and matching tie being a prime example. Though you may not recognize the name or the figure, you've definitely heard her voice before. From her feature on Anamanaguchi's "Miku," to countless TikTok audios and trends, to opening for Lady Gaga in 2014, to being in the lineup for Coachella 2020, Hatsune Miku is by no means a small artist.

The Vocaloid phenomenon doesn't end there though.

There are dozens more voicebanks with their own representative mascots, Megurine Luka, Kaito, Meiko, and twins Kagamine Rin and Len to name a few. All of these characters were staples of my middle school playlists, and all of them appear in songs on Project DIVA MegaMix.

While Vocaloid had a large, dynamic (and sometimes terrifying) fanbase, most of my interaction with the fandom during its prime was through YouTube. Watching various music videos to the songs I loved — whether they be fan-animated or MMDs (3D dance renderings made using the software MikuMikuDance) — and learning as many lyrics as I could took up a ridiculous amount of my free time in middle school. But despite my fascination with holographic musical performances and how much time I spent listening to these songs, I could never let myself admit how much I enjoyed it to anyone. And how could I? Nowadays, a love for anime is seen as quirky and cool, somewhat glamorized and concerningly fetishized by e-girl and e-boy aesthetics, but being interested in Vocaloid meant the same thing as being into anime back in middle school: unequivocally cringe. And what do you do when something you enjoy is cringe? Push it down and force yourself to hate it. But, as I sat there in my childhood bedroom, sweating away any and all hydration, I finally let myself realize that I had never hated these things at all, and that pretending to hate my interests only meant I was hating who I was.

It's incredibly cliche, I am well aware, but there's no better way to put it. Being at home in that room reconciling with the past me I tried to kill only made me stare her in the face. I realized how much time I had wasted ignoring my interests, Vocaloid being one of them, and how much lost time I needed to make up for.

Pulling the past me out of cryogenic freeze wasn't a bad thing, it actually changed the way I looked at the world for the better. And while saying that a hologram of a 16 year-old android girl with long, turquoise pigtails and a leek changed my outlook on life sounds absolutely insane ... but a hologram of a 16 year-old android girl with turquoise pigtails and a leek changed my outlook on life. I not only live to do what I love, but to enjoy what the past me never had the courage to. For her, I destroy cringe culture with my bare hands.

### obsessive memories

by Suphawan Kanta



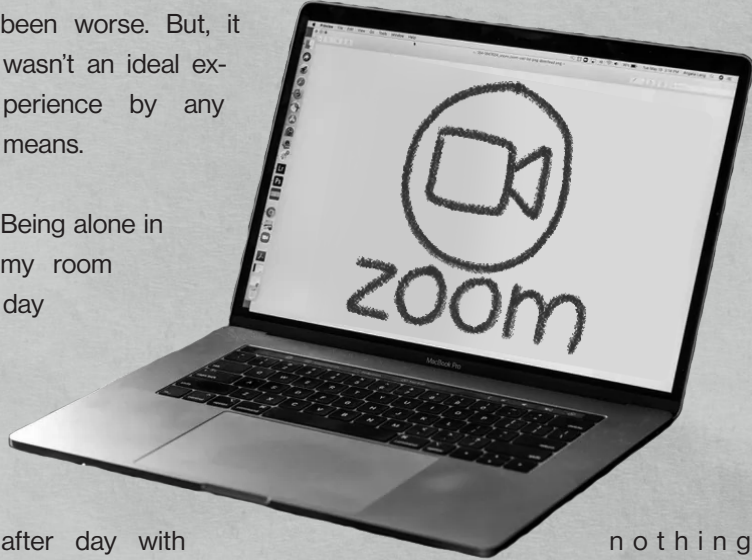


# PROUD

by Brandy Hernandez

Everyone's heard this a million times, and I'm here to say it once more: 2020 was a weird time. I spent the last quarter of my senior year indoors. I celebrated my 18th birthday — my official transition into adulthood — in my room, alone. And, to top it all off, I started (and completed) my freshman year of college on Zoom. To be honest, it wasn't that bad. Things could've been worse. But, it wasn't an ideal experience by any means.

Being alone in my room day



after day with nothing much to do made me become a bit more introspective. I was forced to think about my life — some of which I was happy to ponder on, other parts not so much. I'd like to believe that I grew a lot during this time of solitude; I know myself better now, I'm more aware of what I want and need. There are things I changed about myself that made me happier with myself, and there are things I look forward to changing.

One of my moments of enlightenment which, to be frank, I'm still working through, was finally accepting the fact that I would never please my parents.

My parents are immigrants. This may be a generalization, but I think most first-generation kids would agree that growing up in an immigrant household sucks. My parents immigrated from Mexico in their late teens/early 20s. They both experienced poverty and difficult childhoods. They always wanted something better, so they moved to sunny California in search of a better life and in pursuit of

the American Dream. They did achieve their dream, and as a result, my siblings and I inherited their dream.



I'm proud of my parents. I'm thankful for everything they've done for me. But damn do they drive me absolutely insane. They have high expectations for me, some of which are literally unachievable. I caught on to this at a very young age. I was labeled as a "smart kid" in my youth, so they expected me to continuously fulfill this "role." They always expected nothing but perfection from me: straight As, praise from teachers and participating in as many clubs as I could. It wasn't always that terrible. I liked being a good student. I enjoyed the swell of pride when being noticed for my hard work, and I genuinely enjoyed learning new things. But, for as long as I can remember, I was expected to do things that a child shouldn't really have to do. Being smart meant I was expected to take on the adult responsibilities my parents struggled with due to their language barrier and technological illiteracy. I called various companies to ask important government documents for them, when I didn't understand what the doctor and I eventually became the house-girl because I was the one that best technology worked.

Toward the end of high school and college, this burden got heavier. I wanted me to achieve something me pursuing a career in STEM and engineer or doctor. He was even more idea of me becoming an immigra-

I translated important government documents for them, when I didn't understand what the doctor and I eventually became the house-girl because I was the one that best technology worked. I faced criticism and helping "nuestra gente." But his dreams were not my reality.



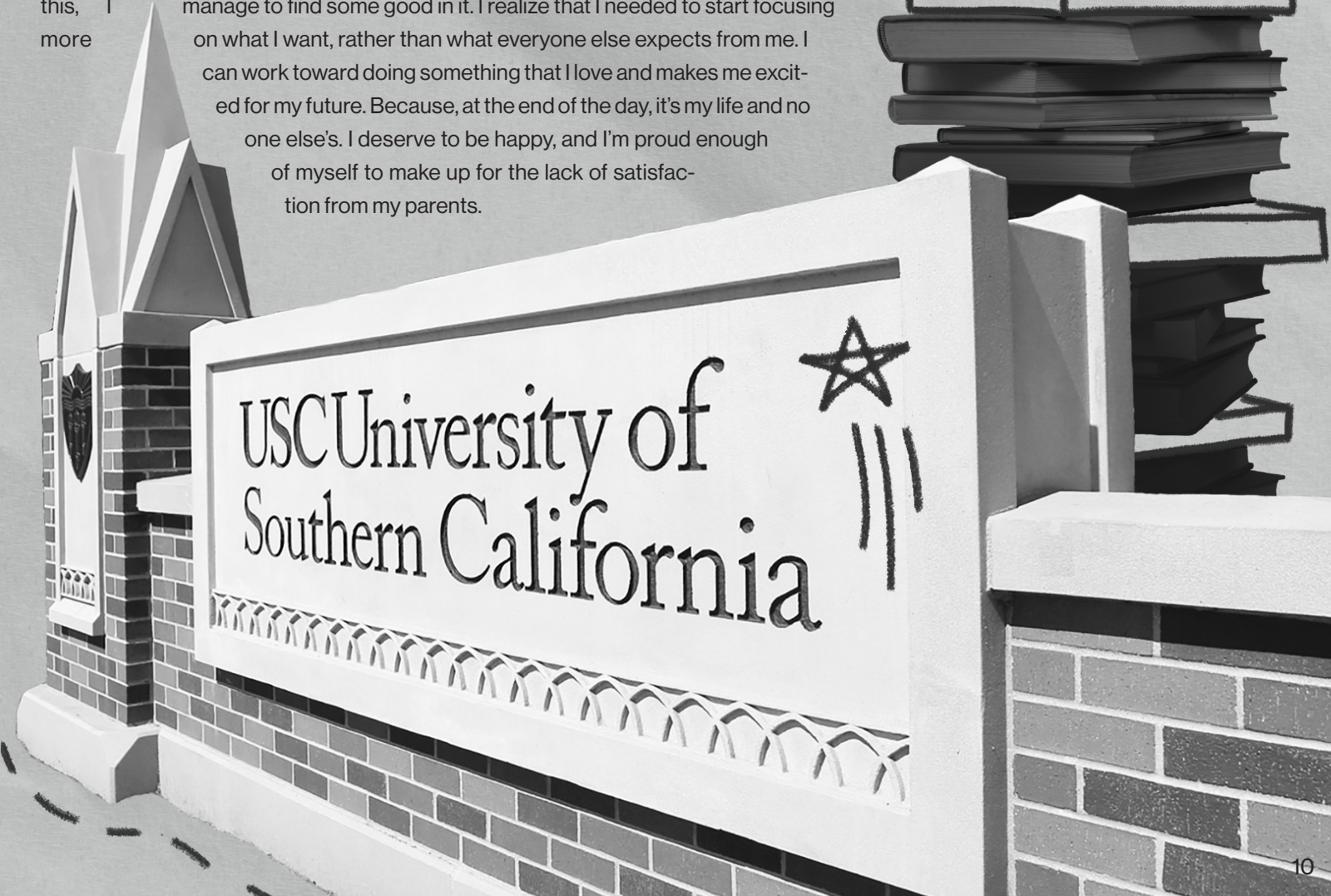
I didn't want to pursue those careers and I didn't have the intellectual capacity to do so. But, in his eyes, because I'm American, speak fluent English and received good grades in high school, it should've been a piece of cake for me.

The criticism I received from my parents when I shared my passion for writing and filmmaking took me by surprise. To say they hated the thought of me being a filmmaker would be an understatement. When they realized that I was really serious about this, they became even more upset and concerned. Even after I got into the University of Southern California as a screenwriting major, they weren't convinced that this was something real. My mom seemed happy for me, even though she didn't really understand how great this was for me. My father, on the other hand, didn't even react when I told him I was accepted into one of my dream schools. In fact, he didn't even believe I could make it in the first place, which was extremely painful. Salt was only added to the wound when we visited my university's campus for the first time during my freshman year and he told me that he still wished I would switch majors and study law instead.

When I reflected on all of the things my parents have said to me and about me behind my back, I finally realized that I would never be enough. Nothing I did and nothing I will do in the future will satisfy them. Coming to this realization sucked, to say the least. I've spent my whole life trying to make my parents proud just to realize that this goal was as impossible as the goals they set for me.

I always think about why they act this way. Is it really an immigrant parent thing? Maybe it's a Mexican thing. What if they just want to live vicariously through me? It could be one of those tough love situations. What if it's all of the above or none of the above at all? I don't know. And to be honest, I think that trying to understand them will drive me insane, so it's best for me to focus on healing myself instead. I try not to think about it too much.

I try to look on the bright side of things. Though it's hard to find a positive in a situation like this, I manage to find some good in it. I realize that I needed to start focusing on what I want, rather than what everyone else expects from me. I can work toward doing something that I love and makes me excited for my future. Because, at the end of the day, it's my life and no one else's. I deserve to be happy, and I'm proud enough of myself to make up for the lack of satisfaction from my parents.



## we learn about oscillatory motion by Allison Stein



i pinned ur zoom screen this afternoon  
because i'm trying to tell if u have freckles, or  
if the camera's grainy, or  
the lighting's bad,  
i don't remember what  
ur face looked like heat-sealed to the eyes.  
have we defined freckles yet, anyway?  
are they spanned gold or the up-close? is  
there still sun in ur part of town? do u go  
outside, and how does ur mask fit, does it  
leave space on ur cheeks for the uv at all?  
and do u sit beside a window during the day,  
are the freckles uneven cheek to cheek, if  
there are freckles at all? look  
i'm trying to say i'm aching, sometime in  
harder light i'm gonna split  
an apple for us sidebyside,  
i promise u this,

i promise

u this



starstruck  
by Margo Stein

in the shattered  
memories of  
old parking lot  
of schools

we  
never  
went to

tears  
tears

DARLING  
you are  
GLOWING

that I  
left on your  
bed sheets  
are turning into  
waxy stars

parent  
not all scars  
making me  
pink.

is loving  
yourself love?

atch the  
stars my  
drop  
hate

I see brand  
new constellation  
every time





You'll never believe what happened the other day. So, I'm sitting there with my old man. Just another Friday night. We put on a movie, you know, the old school ones he likes. I think it was "A Spot in the Sun" or something like that. We're watching the movie, eating some popcorn, when out of nowhere I start choking on my drink. Guess what he does. Nothing. This man, the father of my children, the love of my life, or so I thought, stares at me. Gawks at me. What kind of an idiot does that? There I am, coughing up a lung and between the tears forming in my eyes, I see the idiot on the screen is doing the same thing. His girl is drowning and he's just staring. Do they think we have gills under all this makeup? I sit down to see if that helps and I guess I sat on the remote because all of a sudden Kate Winslet is clutching a frozen Leonardo DiCaprio and I can breathe again. It feels like someone turned the air conditioner all the way up but at least I'm not drowning. Then, I look over and Jim is stiff as a board. He looks like something you'd find in the back of your freezer. I got out my hair dryer, the one we use to defrost the turkey on Thanksgiving, and there I am for a good hour or so before he begins to thaw.



## DEFROST YOUR MAN, HAIR DRYER OPTIONAL

by Maddie Katz



# Veggie Tales



**I**t's mid-August and I'm sitting on a grassy patch of campus. Settled onto a soft blanket, I look at my options. A carton full of raspberries. Some cheese and Ritz crackers. A bag full of potato chips. Devika is making herself a cracker-and-cheese sandwich. Ridwana is sipping on an iced latte. Just as I bite into a berry, my eyes open. I'm in my bed. Well, not my bed, but my sister's old bed in her old room that was hers before she stole my room when I went to college. I stare straight at the light purple wall. Sun streams through the open window. I cover my eyes with my arm. It was my second nap of a day well into four months of quarantine.

At this point, I was doing anything to pass time. I hear laughter outside. Huffing, I crawl up to close my window and peer down to see my mom and grandma tending to

their quarantine hobby: the garden. I slam my window shut and pull the covers above my head.

Before the pandemic, like many other college students, I had been living in an apartment with six friends. Independent or young or free or whatever. I came back home to a house full of five adults and one middle schooler. And I love my family, I do. But being in a house where it was lights out at 10 p.m., where breakfast was a requirement and where comments of "You have changed so much since college" were a daily occurrence? Well, I was pushed back in time.

Growing up with two working parents, my Ammamma (grandma) raised me from 9-5 p.m. every day until my mom and dad came home. Though she grew up in India, Ammamma had a knack for taking any foreign concept and making it immediately relevant to her life. (Once when I was watching "Keeping up with the Kardashians," she decided that she and her three sisters were practically the same family. She was Kim.) From birth to around eighth grade, Ammamma was a constant presence and caretaker in my life. As I grew older, my grandma began spending less and less time with us. Though we didn't drift apart, coming back from college to live at home while she was there was somewhat stifling.

Over time, it began to drive me a bit crazy. Out of love, Ammamma would fix my hair every time I was eating lunch. I would push her hands away. Out of kindness, she would make my favorite foods. I never felt like eating them. Out of hope, she would ask me and my sister to sing songs that she taught us years ago. I would say I forgot them. In the midst of my frustration with "feeling robbed" of a college life, I ignored it all.

Yet, despite being stuck at home, her knowledge was limitless and her energy boundless.

On the other hand, Ammamma was doing fine, maybe even the happiest I had ever seen her. How was she at such ease despite being locked at home all day?

The answer came in the midst of another "trying to nap" episode. Again, I heard Ammamma and my mom talk while gardening.

In fast Telugu, Ammamma said, "It's nice with everyone home. Now you all know what it feels like."

That's when I realized. Leaving India for months on end to help raise her grandkids in the U.S., Ammamma had already "quarantined" for a huge chunk of her life. She didn't have a driver's license, didn't really speak English and relied on my parents to go outside (depending on family outings). Yet, despite being stuck at home, her knowledge was limitless and her energy boundless.

Each day when I came back from school, there would be warm snacks waiting on the table. Each time a new baby was born in the family, she made it a point to knit sweaters to give them. When she couldn't read the knitting magazines, she would ask my mom to translate the instructions for her. When she wasn't doing all of that, she was the most charming storyteller, narrating my mom's childhood pranks, her favorite street foods in India and, of course, the latest American news. (Ammamma probably knows more about the Obamas than I do.) If she was in a really wild mood, eyes sparkling, she'd come over and bump my shoulder: "Let's get some curly fries and jalapeno poppers from Jack in the Box," she said in a whisper, so my mom wouldn't hear.

Lying in bed that night, I decided that instead of being frustrated by things I couldn't control, like a

pandemic, I would focus on what was right in front of me: Ammamma. How did she keep growing? How was she never worried about missing out? Well, it was with loads of projects.

One day, I was sitting at the dining table, frustrated at some coding homework. Suddenly, my laptop slammed shut. Ammamma now took the place of the screen.

"You're such a nerd. Come help me make pizza." Her bright blue sari only accentuated her sass.

"No, I have finals. I literally can't."

"It'll take your mind off things. Come

on. Let's see how things turn out."

So I did.

She had watched countless YouTube videos about how to make the pizza and homemade tomato sauce. The toppings, which she already recruited my mom to find, were laid out on the counter.

I will spend one hour helping her, I thought.

Twenty minutes in, I was annoyed that the dough wasn't rising as it should. Next, the oven wasn't preheating properly. Nothing was going according to my plan. Ammamma's reaction to it all: a shrug.





"It'll work out, don't worry. In the meantime, does this sauce have enough salt?"

Two hours later, my family was happily munching on Ammamma's first-ever attempt at pizza. She stood smirking in the corner. When I looked over, she winked.

On another particularly frustrating day, my mom and I just argued about me going back to college during the pandemic. I spent the day moping in my room, annoyed at the fact that COVID-19 happened, that other people I knew were going back to school, that it was cloudy outside, that the next door neighbor decided today was the day that he would play the piano (very loudly) for hours on end. Ammamma's project was to plant some zucchini and eggplant seeds in the garden. I pouted upstairs alone in my room. I heard laughter outside my window and felt my eyes tear up. The bond between my mom and grandma was so strong and close. The laughter stops and I hear Ammamma's voice.

"Mallikaaaa, dhaa (come)."

"I'm good."

"Dhaaaaaa. Now!" Ammamma says, still playful.

I slug outside and stop in surprise. Last time I came out here, there were a few plants and maybe a couple of weeds. Now, there were four beds worth of vegetables, greens and herbs. Every pot was overflowing with leaves. My mom is watering plants on the opposite end of the garden. I walk over to Ammamma.

"What happened? What's wrong?" she asks.

I shrug and look down at the plants. I'm not really sure how to put my feelings into words.

She crouches back down to tending the plants.

New zucchinis and eggplants were popping up everyday while the world was stagnant.

"The best way to water zucchinis is to touch the soil and make sure it's not too damp. If you press on it and liquid pools to the surface, you have over-watered. So skip watering for the next day."

We move from the zucchinis to the eggplants.

"Eggplants are delicate. Make sure to very gently tug on them once they are ripe. Here, try with this one." I pull on the shiny deep purple vegetable and it easily falls into my hand. I reach my hand to grab another eggplant.

"Not that one yet, it still needs a few more days." I look up to see my mom standing there. She smiles as she crouches next to me to examine the other eggplants.

"See, even though everything seems to be wrong right now, these vegetables still grow!" Ammamma exclaims as she drags me and my mom over to the radishes.

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Yes, my mom and I won't always agree. Yes, I may have missed out on college due to a pandemic, but throughout it all, those vegetables kept growing. New zucchinis and eggplants were popping up everyday while the world was stagnant.

And my grandma helped me realize that. How to make the most out of a situation that was out of my control. How to let go of this notion that I needed to be in control of my life. She navigates this world, accepting its ambiguity and chaos.

A year later, at least for the United States, we are coming into a new normalcy. My grandma is visiting my uncles in different states. I went back to school for the spring semester. Yet still, when I visit home and look out that bedroom window, I see my mom tending to the tomatoes, the zucchinis and the eggplants. A new addition is the mint leaves overflowing from the corners of the beds. Now, rather than Ammamma, my dad is out there with her. And, despite the changes in circumstances from last and this summer, the plants came back, still growing — regardless of a situation that was out of control. Just as Ammamma said.



### life is getting boring

by Tilly Bean Aldhous



11:11

# Television Friendships Didn't Prepare Me for a Pandemic

When I was a kid, I wanted a friendship like Carly, Sam and Freddy from “iCarly.” Thinking about it now, who wouldn’t? Living in a cool apartment, your friends dropping by every day, doing random dancing? The creators of that show built a friendship out of my wildest dreams. I remember as a kid being so excited to be a teenager. Then, when the time actually rolled around, I wasn’t thrilled.

For starters, I was no Carly Shay. Beyond that, there was no Sam or Freddie in my life. No Gibby hanging around the periphery. For the most part, I felt like I was on my own. Obviously, I had friends. But the friendship wasn’t what years of Nickelodeon and Disney Channel prepared me for. Instead, it felt lonely. There were days that no one texted me. Worse, there were days my friends chose to hang out with each other and exclude me. I did everything in my power to surround myself with people, expecting that I had to fall into the perfect friend group. I did band, I did theatre, I did dance, I did tennis. And comparing myself to the friendships I saw on my screen, I felt lonelier than ever.

When the COVID-19 pandemic first began, I was shattered. It felt like I had just gotten my life together. I had returned from a semester in Prague, Czech Republic, fully actualized, and had friends

who were happy to see me return. I hung out with the same people regularly, studying, going out to eat, living our lives not as single units, but as a group. I finally felt like I had done something right in my social life. At least by media standards, I had.

That is, until March 10.

I was visiting my friends Marcy and Katie’s apartment. Marcy and I had a competition to see who could eat a Fruit by the Foot without using their hands faster (in case you were wondering, I could). We were telling jokes and laughing and enjoying our movie-screen friendship when my university president sent the email saying that in-person classes were to be cancelled for the next month. The following week, I left the majority of my things in my dorm and went back home to Michigan. We didn’t know it then, but that announcement would be extended to the end of the school year.

No television show I watched, nor movie I watched prepared me for the pandemic. I mean, what would have? “Bubble Boy”? Under the direction of my parents, I spent the first three months of the pandemic inside. I saw my partner twice, and my best friend once. Both from 6 feet away.

The transition was devastating. I mean, I had finally experienced what I’d been spending years search-

ing for. Now, I was lucky if one of my friends from school texted me.

Wait, what? Make that make sense. They were my friends, right? My Sam, my Freddie? If they weren’t texting me, who was?

In hindsight, it’s pretty clear. But at the moment, I didn’t know what to be looking for, because I’d never been shown the kind of friendship I was experiencing: healthy, intimate and balanced friendships.

Growing up, the media I had been watching exposed me to exciting, upbeat, constantly “on” friendships as model relationships. People who hung out with each other all the time. People who only hung out with the same group of a few people. Quite frankly, codependent and socially restricted people. And seeing only this relationship modeled, I ended up gauging all my friendships on a skewed scale: not by how much someone cared about me, but how much time someone spent with me. In the process, I overlooked the value in my friends that had been a quiet constant no matter where I went in life.

## Our friendships aren’t like the ones we see on the screen, and that’s probably for the best.

When the world shut down, and I was locked inside, I wasn’t alone. It took me a moment to realize, but once the initial shock of lockdown sizzled off, I felt more loved than I ever had in my entire life.

Now that the world is opening up again, I’m challenging myself not to fall into old habits. My quarantine friends find themselves more busy than they did last summer. But rather than feel anxious, I feel glad. I might not catch them anymore with

a random FaceTime, but I know that they’ll return my text. Maybe not even that night, but eventually. Because our friendship isn’t based on proximity or frequency of conversation. It’s based on values, lived experiences and common aspirations.

Our friendships aren’t like the ones we see on the screen, and that’s probably for the best.

Looking back on my pre-pandemic years, I beat myself up for not meeting the unattainable expectations of television friendships. And in the process, I also burned out a lot of valuable friendships. I would be lying to myself if I tried to pretend like my desire to always hang out with someone didn’t burst into an ugly head of clinginess and overstaying my welcome. Over the past year, I’ve learned to better understand and respect my friends’ boundaries. I no longer take a missed call or a cancelled plan as an attack on myself or our friendship. I hardly even consider seeing my friends an essential element to a successful friendship.

I haven’t seen any pandemic-era movies or shows made quite yet. As boring as they might be, I hope a few crop up. I’m not particularly itching to watch a show about social distancing and mask wearing, but I’m eager to see a show highlighting the sort of friendships I learned to appreciate. The friendships that happen over hundreds of miles, over infrequent texts, and under no obligation than love and appreciation for the other person. That type of friendship wasn’t taught to me, and I spent years looking for the wrong type. Luckily, I’ve found it now. I had to learn what to look for first, though.

If you hadn’t thought of this kind of friendship before today, you now know what to look for. Chances are you probably already have one, maybe even a few, in your life. Take the time to appreciate them. You’ll never feel alone again. Not even during a pandemic.

# PANDEMIC PEN PALS

by Sheila Kiernan

June 7, 2020

S,

Hi. I hope this finds you in a better place than I am now. Are things "normal" again? Have we got a vaccine? Do we still have to wear masks? Are you happy?

Things aren't as bad as they were right in the beginning, but they're still pretty bad. I'm sure you remember, but March and April were probably the worst months of my life so far. Things went to shit pretty fast in February, and it felt like the whole world died along with me. I lost being near my friends, my independence, my chance to get out and get over the things that were hurting me. I still get sad about it for a few minutes every day and I still cry about it, but I try not to let it get me down too much. I hope that it doesn't make you sad at all anymore, and I hope that you're finding ways to make yourself smile.

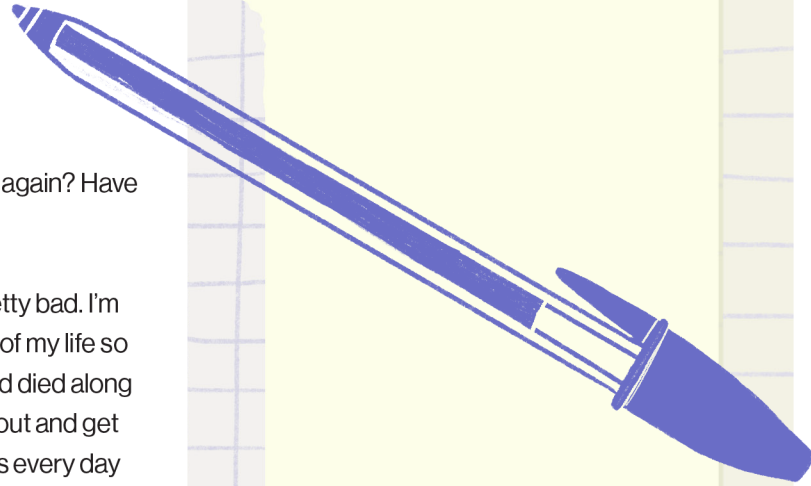
I have a really hard time accepting that things could go so wrong and be so dark. It feels personal and global all at once. I don't know if school will be online in the fall or not, and although I'm happy we've got a house in Queens now, I'm still really scared. Will college and life ever be the same? I'm genuinely terrified of losing the best years of my life to this virus. Please tell me you've had some good times and that this last year hasn't felt wasted.

There's a lot going on in the world right now, and not much of it is good. People are protesting out in the streets for Black Lives Matter, and the Minneapolis City Council announced it's disbanding its police force today in response to George Floyd's death. We're on the brink of real change. It's a combination of societal pressures and the veil of reality being lifted, but I think people are finally starting to see how broken this country really is. In all honesty, I feel like our country has failed us, and it's really disheartening. I think we're absolutely completely fucked. This is the first election I can vote in, so I've registered and I've been contributing to the Democratic campaign.

If this year so far has taught me anything, it's that your whole life can change in a second. I miss how happy I used to be, and in a matter of a month or so I lost pretty much everything I loved about the life I built for myself. My only wish is that it gets better, and I really do hope you've found happiness. If not, it's OK. We're going to keep going.

Wishing you the best,

Sheila from 2020



*can  
me*

June 7, 2021

S,

Hi, Sheila. You'd be happy to know that we do have a vaccine. Several, actually. I was part of the first 10% of Americans to receive the vaccine, do you believe that? And you thought we'd be one of the last. Masks are slowly phasing out, although I do wear mine most of the time. I feel weirdly naked without one. Things are slowly going back to "normal," and while things will never quite be the same, I guess that's OK. For one, maybe people will actually wash their hands every once in a while.

You'd be surprised at how well I'm doing now. A lot of the time I find I'm smiling to myself without really knowing why. Just cause. I don't think we've ever done that before. The whole world is slowly coming back alive. I realized how far we'd come when Cuomo announced that all New York State restrictions were lifted — there were fireworks as far as the eye could see.

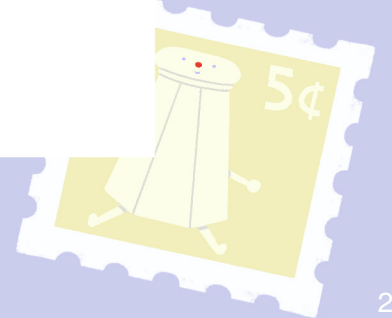
We're moving to a new college house now, after making a lot of great memories in the last one. Campus won't ever really be the same, but I still have all of my friends around me and we still find plenty of ways to have a good time. This last year was anything but wasted. I wouldn't trade it for another reality, I just wouldn't. I'll never say I'm grateful for the pandemic, but it's crazy to think about all of the things that would have never happened without it. I don't know if I'd be as wise or mature if I just continued on my way. Would I have learned anything that I know now?

The election was insane. You would have loved the drama of it all. It took DAYS for them to count all the votes. When it was over, people were singing in the streets. Winning feels good. Everything's far from "fixed," of course, but it was still worth celebrating. I think our generation has had a real wake-up call and we've recognized all the work we have to do. The future has always been ours, but the future is becoming the now.

If there's anything I've learned this year, it's that you and I are so much stronger than we know. We pulled ourselves through all of that with just us, and we made a new happiness — not a euphoria built on circumstances, but a way stronger contentment that comes from inside. You made great choices, you know. You did the right thing. I know how sad you were, and I wish I could be there, that I could travel back in time and tell you that everything's going to be OK. It's so much more OK than you could have imagined.

Thank you for everything.

Sheila from 2021



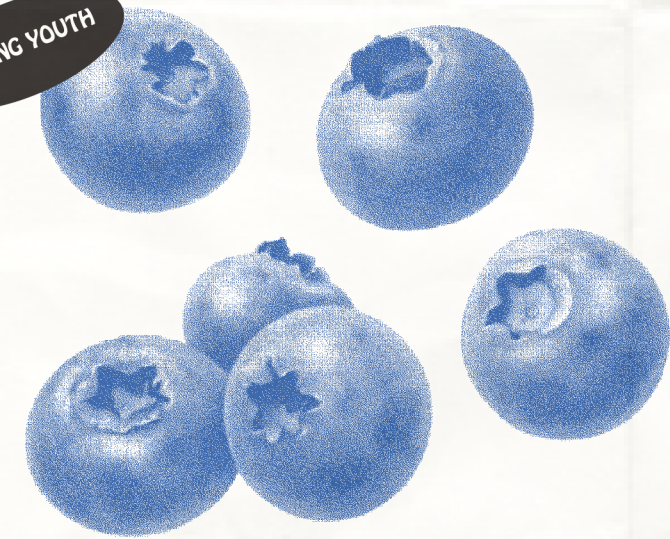
# Frozen Blueberries

by Yvonne Barajas

Churches  
by Taylor Webb

ive realized that i have  
to wake up and feel  
like im doing something  
extraordinary. im  
happiest when i have  
to make a difference,  
no matter how small. how  
do i get from where i  
am now to there? am i  
always going to be on  
this chase for  
something that i  
cant quite have?

WILTING YOUTH



Before bed, I set an alarm. Always. Even on the weekends. I sleep through the alarm. Again. It's the intent that matters, even if I never get up, I tell myself. At least I tried... right?

Groggy-eyed and numb, I pull the bones of my body like heavy boots that haven't seen daylight toward the kitchen. Have to eat, not hungry, but I know I have to eat. I make oatmeal again. Add some honey and open the freezer for some fruit. Stray tomatoes and bags of frozen fish fly out as if they were being held captive.

If I were them, I would fly away too.

With the hostages back in their stainless steel prison, the frozen blueberries lay forgotten under a layer of frost, along with get well wishes and unread text messages. With a half empty bowl in my hands, I find myself in my childhood bedroom, picking at fruitless oatmeal and mindlessly scouring the web for job postings.

My day is like every other; regretting and reminiscing on all the fun I was supposed to have in my youth. Longing for something that hasn't happened is exhausting.

DAYDREAM

COMFORT IN THE STATIC

I'm only 22. Chewing this oatmeal is exhausting, I should have let the water boil. Another regret.

At 3 p.m., I finally pull myself up and try to start the day. I make my bed, but the summer heat penetrates my bedroom walls and lulls me into another longing sleep. Bedsheets end up tucking the books and dirty clothes on the floor. I meant to sleep for 20 minutes, not eight hours.

It's fine, I'll wake up eventually.

The white box fan propping the window open rattles me awake at 10 p.m. Rolling over to my side, I stare out a window, but it's too dark to see anything. The only signs of life are the faint snores of my mother, three doors down, and the crickets outside serenading me. Occasionally the mosquito zapper hanging in the porch cuts through the noise, reminding me I'm still here.

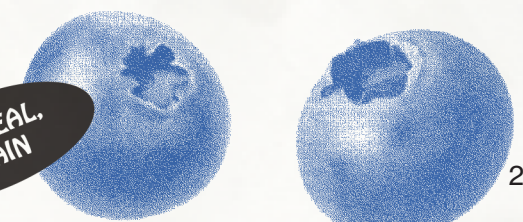
I'm in purgatory.

I dream of those moments in my life that electrified me. Good and bad. The time I cried in the washroom of the Louvre for the one who wronged me. A date with a stranger that ended with cheap beers, expensive cheese and ill-timed jokes. An argument with my parents about everything and nothing.

Struggling to find a signal, I find a sort of comfort in the static.

One day, I will wake up before the alarm and pick the frozen blueberries in the back of my mothers' freezer to add to my oatmeal.

OATMEAL, AGAIN





# MIRRORED SELVES

by Sophia Ortega

*Content notice: eating disorders, body image.*

“What do you see when you look at yourself in the mirror?” my doctor asked me. As a 10 year-old, I answered the only way I knew how: honestly.

“I SEE MYSELF.”

My doctor looked puzzled, expecting a different response from an underweight child. But it was the truth. At that age, the only reason why I was so skinny was a mix of genetics and a speedy metabolism. Regardless, my doctor told me to pack my meals with protein and gain 10 pounds in six months. She used big words to describe how some dancers struggle to eat enough, while others eat too much. She used scary statistics to tell me how I needed to gain weight or I could get seriously sick. Numbers swirled in my head like vanilla ice cream, mixing in my mind as I tried to imagine what the next few months would look like.

My mom was there to console me, taking notes on how she should prepare meals to help me gain weight. I began to cry, not worried about gaining weight, but about letting my doctor down. So I followed her orders and learned something about myself in the process: I loved food.

The following months were full of peanut butter protein shakes, turkey sandwiches and scrambled eggs. I loved dairy, specifically cheese and ice cream.

My favorite food was an In-N-Out double-double cheeseburger with regular fries and a vanilla shake. I had the biggest sweet tooth, craving chocolate chip cookies at all hours of the day. It ended up being quite the joy ride for my tastebuds, and a healthy one too. I was beyond proud of myself when I noticed I gained a few pounds. My mom wrote me a card to celebrate, drawing smiley faces and writing a big “you did it!” on the front.

But my dance “friends” would glare at me during ballet and make snide comments during snack break, as if the dance studio wasn’t already competitive enough. This competition in particular was who could eat “healthier,” but we were too young to realize how healthy looks different for everyone. I was insecure about being underweight, but they would tell me I was “lucky to be skinny.”

Nine years later, I am a sophomore in college at my dream school. I’m dancing 40 hours a week as I train to become a professional dancer. I have to cook for myself for the first time, since my mom’s cooking and the dining hall are no longer options. Having my own kitchen allows for complete freedom in how I buy, prepare and consume food. In the beginning, freedom feels liberating. But this freedom soon turns into a need to control my portions.

I need to control what goes into my body, whether it be less dairy, less carbs or ultimately less meals. I decide that being a dancer means obsessing over healthy eating, because maybe those comments from my dance “friends” nine years ago were right. I was “lucky to be skinny” and should keep it that way.

Being warned against eating disorders in the dance community, I was hyperaware that I was developing dangerous habits. I knew exactly what I was doing, but couldn’t stop because of my persistent addiction to pleasing people, like with my doctor years ago. But this time around, I was insistent on pleasing my dance instructors, who assessed our physical appearance as part of our dance grade. Although I’ve always been graded on my physical appearance, sophomore year felt strangely personal. I felt like my body was being analyzed from head to toe, that every time I didn’t measure up in class it was because of my figure, that my grades would suffer because of how I looked in the mirror.

The portion on my grade sheet titled “Appearance” would haunt me. It was the smallest part of my grade, but the biggest part of my insecurities. The two subcategories taunted me: “Attire/Grooming” and “Physique.” They were graded on a scale ranging from “Unsatisfactory” to “Excellent.” I would endlessly wonder about the criteria that determined the inconsistencies in grading, obsessing over what one teacher saw that the other didn’t. I read the page over and over, the words burning into my brain. I took their words as fact instead of opinion.

I cut cheese, removed vanilla ice cream and limited sugar. I felt guilty each time I felt full because I had been so deprived of satisfaction — it was foreign to my own body. I fed my mind with lies instead of with food. I would overwork my body even after a 12-hour dance day, holding planks and doing sit ups at 1 a.m., hoping to see results the next morning. I wanted a perfect body for perfect grades, but only now do I realize that perfection is an unattainable ideal that only perpetuated my disordered eating.

It took my mom’s home cooked meals, particularly her home-made lasagna and famous mac n cheese. It took ordering to-go from local restaurants, giving me the opportunity to support small businesses while rediscovering my sweet tooth. It took baking banana bread over Zoom with my friends, their laughter quieting my worries about the ingredients within the recipe. It took journaling about my past eating habits, nowhere to run from my thoughts while quarantined in my house for the summer. Removing myself from dance, even forcibly, helped me to see beyond the grade sheet and the mirror.

My childhood room is home to the mirror that has hung above my bed since the first day of kindergarten. This mirror reflects much more than just my body. It reflects a multitude of my past selves, of who I was and who I am. It reflects the battle that wages internally, but gives me a hope that I will win the war. It reflects how I am more than a dancer, that I can be confident in my own skin. It reflects how I will never be the same version of myself, that physical growth really is part of growing up. For once, I can look into this mirror and feel all of my past and present selves embracing.

The mirror will always be a struggle for me. I stare at it for up to six hours a day, fixing my arms or my legs or the position of my head. But the purpose of the mirror is to see what the audience sees, to enhance my artistry and stage presence. The mirror is not to tear myself apart. The mirror is not to compare myself to the dancer next to me. The mirror is not a reflection of my reality.

My reality is how I feel when I dance, not how I look. My body is not a representation of my talent. My body is meant to grow with me, to evolve while knowing perfection is a facade. So when I look in the mirror now, I have a different answer than when I was 10:

“I ACCEPT MYSELF.”

# Freezing

by Megan Muratore

Your ice cream is dripping on the ground. It's mixing in with the dirt underneath the swing and when you drag your feet across the ground you flinch as you feel the brief cold sensation on your toes. You got peanut butter Oreos because it's her favorite flavor. She got cookie monster because it's yours. The artificial blue food coloring has left a stain on her teeth. You can't help but smile every time you look at her.

You don't want to go home today. You had the perfect day. You went to the lake and lied out on the dock to get some sun and you only got burned a little bit, which is good for you, and you know that it'll turn into a tan within the next few days. You hope you get some new freckles across the bridge of your nose and your cheeks like she does. That's one of your favorite things about her. Along with her crooked smile and her soft hands that she calls her "big meaty claws." Her emerald green eyes too. Everything about her is your favorite thing about her.

*You don't want to go home today.*



You don't want to go home today. You want to go home with her and put the rest of your ice cream in the freezer so you can have it later. You want to sit out on the grass with her as the sun goes down and talk about all of the colors in the sky and maybe smoke a joint. She always rolls hers with crushed up rosebuds mixed in. You just think that it's a fun little quirk of hers, but she's fully convinced that it makes smoking smoother and the high better. You just think it tastes nice. And you like the colors.

Red is your favorite. Hers is yellow. That's why the two of you like to talk about the sunset because it always shows your two colors merging together. You want to hold her close. Merge into one being so you never have to be apart from her.

*You don't want to go home today.*

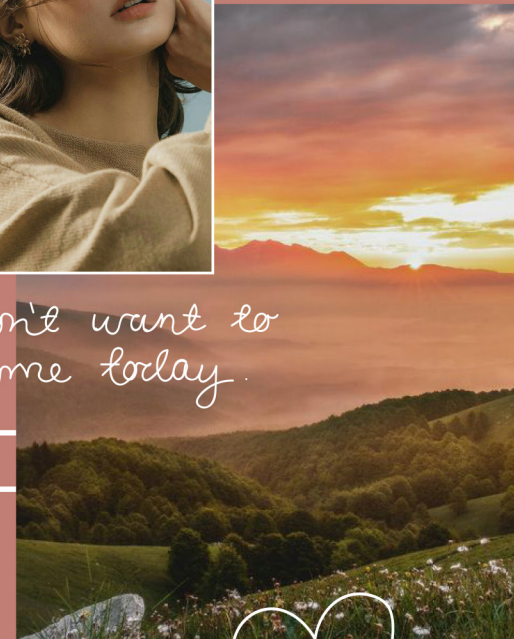


*You don't want to go home today.*

*You don't want to go home today.*



*You don't want to go home today.*



You got a tattoo last week. You want to explain it to her but you feel as if you can't fully tell her what it means to you. You tell her it's based off of your favorite movie-musical "Hedwig and the Angry Inch," the origin of love. Originally Plato's concept that people used to be big blobs with four arms and four legs and they were ripped apart and now they're looking for their other half, their soulmate. You didn't really believe in it until you met her, but you can't tell her that because she'll think it's cheesy. She'll think it's cheesy but you know that she'll understand too. Maybe she'll get one to match with you one day.

You don't want to go home today. You want to melt into a puddle beside her, you want someone to take a container and scoop the two of you up into it and put you into the freezer to freeze again so you're back to your original blob shape, four arms and four legs. That's a weird intrusive thought you had. But you wouldn't change your thought pattern at all. You kind of like the thought, no matter how bizarre it is. You want to be whole again.



But you don't get to go home with her. Your mom made you dinner and is expecting you to be home in time for "The Voice." You don't even like "The Voice" but you already spend all of your time with her and your mom is getting suspicious. Before you go, you squeeze her hand tight so you'll remember her touch. On your drive home you turn the air conditioner up as high as it goes, so you can pretend to freeze a little bit. You call her right when you get in the car and you sing "Blister in the Sun" to her and her big meaty claws.

*You don't want to go home today.*





# CRASHING every PARTY

the debut EP by ERASTE



## TRACK 01 *crashing every party*

You can never really know me  
Cause I don't really know me  
Breaking these bottles to clean up  
the mess in my head (*clean up the mess in my head*)  
All of these people  
That I've been and will be, every  
version seems to fuck up in the end  
(*every version seems to fuck up*)

All of my life  
I've been in the middle  
Blurring the lines  
So I don't have to apologize  
I don't want to apologize

Aren't we all just pretending?  
That the fun's never ending?  
I'm never saying sorry  
For crashing every party

Can't say I didn't warn ya  
About how this would end up  
You couldn't help it, you knew I'd be  
selfish again  
I always have a good time  
In the mask that I hide behind  
Hurt you to feel something, but it  
wasn't me that was there (*it wasn't me that was there*)

Crash your party, I'm gonna crash  
your party. (x4)

## TRACK 02

### WTGT DOWN? FEAT. CLOVER THE GIRL

(*Heard those people talkin' shit man?*) (*Are you OK? Are you fine?*)  
(UH UH)  
You don't know me like you think  
that you do OH  
Got a lot to say, won't you go away?  
Guess you never left town, what's  
that about OH  
Keep me on your mind, in all your  
free time

Runnin' and runnin' your mouth  
In circles all over the town  
I hope it helps you figure out  
What your problem is  
Sorry 'bout your issues  
Trippin' like it's LSD  
Hate me if you want  
What's that got to do with me?

Long time, since I've seen your  
face, love  
How ya feeling, are you OK?  
With the choice you made?  
Heard you dropped my name again,  
in the crowd I see your face  
I love me, I understand why you  
love me, love me

(*You should get that checked out*)  
(*Are you trippin' right now?*)

## RIGHT BACK WHERE YOU WANT ME

### TRACK 03

End up at your door  
Don't know what led me here, again  
Same girl as before  
We both want something else  
Pretend you love me

I remember the good times  
Can't remember the bad  
Every time you made me cry  
You made me laugh  
Used to live in the moment  
Then it all got too fast  
I forget it was broken  
Till I come back YEAH

Get me with those eyes  
One more time  
Can't see the truth  
I can't cut these ties  
Cross the line  
Right back to you  
Right back where we started  
Right back where you want me

Quicksand everytime it gets harder  
to leave, to leave  
Distance on my mind clearly  
it's what we need  
But we ignore it

One day it will  
be easier to  
see you.



## jealous TRACK 04

I know it's just a memory you can  
delete  
It could never come between you and  
me  
But when you bring up the past  
I can't stop  
Did your parents love her more than  
they love me?  
Are you still the topic of her poetry?  
All these questions that I ask  
I can't stop

If you dated her in seventh grade  
I still want to punch her face  
Maybe one day I'll drive by her place  
I might stop

It's fine, you're right  
I still get a little bit jealous  
I hold on so tight  
I still get a little bit jealous  
I wish I could not be jealous  
Want you to myself, like there's no one  
else  
I wish I didn't care so much  
I wish I was the only one

(Their names are Gena, and Kristy ...  
and Tori OH GOD Tori)  
To you the past has always been a  
simple thing  
It could never come between you and  
me  
She was just your first heartache  
Fuck all that  
If you saw her would you  
stop and say hello?  
I'll always be with you  
so we'll never know  
If it's a chance you  
would take  
Fuck all that.

## forbidden love TRACK 05

It started so harmless  
Now everybody's talking 'bout us  
Do they know?

Can't see you in public  
So you're my favorite secret  
Watch the cards unfold and the  
fire grow

Not leaving no matter what  
Don't need a reason  
I didn't know you'd become  
My only weakness

Fire burning in my, fire burning in  
my heart  
Can't get enough of  
Dancing in forbidden love  
Can't look you in the, can't look  
you in the eyes  
I can't get enough  
Dancing in forbidden love

My darling quit calling  
I thought we put this to rest  
Try to save yourself  
The rush is too much  
I wanna let go but I don't  
When you get too close then I feel  
the burn

Meet me in the dead of night  
Killing me for the last time  
Feel the heat when you arrive,  
every time.



# grief, time and nostalgia:

## The Vacuum of My Golden Years

by evie glen

Sixteen years-old, my 17th year of living. Already beyond the precipice of my high school "golden years," the favourite observation of middle-aged aunties no longer seemed a condescending reminder to check my teenage privilege, but a direct threat to the time I had. I know they meant well, but their warnings to make the most of a time unburdened by adult responsibilities bitterly echoed in my head like a victory brag of sorts. Their victory? The bygone freedom to dangle their legs from a sticky countertop in a random kitchen and talk dozily of metaphysical enigmas with the friend of a friend; to listen to music live, shrouded by sweat and stale beer and swear they made eye contact with the frontman; to spend friday afternoons romanticising their near future experiences without worrying if a second wave of a pandemic will finally drown them in the depths of isolation. I envied their experience of a freedom universally reserved for the teenage years and longed simply for time untampered by isolation, quarantine and distancing so as not to waste this time of adolescence.

Of course my perception of adolescence was, is and forever will be warped by John Hughes films and all their subsequent reproductions, but as I lay on my bedroom floor tracing dreams of my halcyon days in the carpet, no more could I resent a fucking pandemic than I could the condescending reminder that I should be having the time of my life. Watching the quick erosion of my teenage freedom I was angry – inconsolably so. It wasn't until later that I realised the most abject, excruciatingly wholehearted anger is not anger at all, but grief. Just as the elderly might resent the youth or the sick resent the healthy,

we grieve the things we lose and obscure that grief with anger. I'm no Freud, but I'd suppose the reason why may have something to do with control.

Of all the losses we grieve, we are angered most by the ones we never expected to lose, like losing a race because you tripped on the home straight.

You direct your rage at the grounds people for failing to maintain the track, at the trainer shop that sold you the wrong shoes, at the other athletes who knocked your balance, at the weather, at nature, at God, at yourself. At anything to avoid acknowledging the mercilessly uncontrollable fate of chance. It took a pandemic for me to realise that this powerlessness is the one universal grief. When the world was instantaneously paralysed, the pandemic became a global allegory for communal mourning. As we mourned the loss of our accustomed freedoms, we intrinsically mourned the loss of control over such freedoms. We earnestly depend upon this control, without it, each day becomes something uniform, something indistinct and atypical. So, when a virus stripped us of our control, our individual experiences were beaten into conformity. Of course it's true that the ways in which we experienced the pandemic were entirely individual. It is not lost on me that the fear of wasting my adolescence pales in comparison

to the arduous experiences of key workers, of those who lost their jobs and their homes and their loved ones. However, the fundamental experience of a pandemic, the powerlessness and coupling grief, though relative, was entirely intersectional.

For those of us who lacked the capabilities to rescue our power from the front lines, we were left with a unique predicament: borderless time to grieve.

Staring through blue shining screens, we searched for methods of ignoring our sorrow. In theory, it was easy. No social commitments, no school, no exams. Believing time heals all, we gratefully rejoiced in its newfound abundance. But it was not long before we realised that time is only a vessel for grief. The remedy exists in filling that time. Our borderless time to grieve was a unique predicament then, because how can one fill time when so much of it is consumed by the immovable experience of a pandemic? What a cruel irony it was that we had all the time in the world, but were compelled to spend it in mourning because we lacked the power to bury our grief in busyness. To do nothing while doing something, simultaneously.

I think that's why I was so angry in the beginning, why I mourned so emphatically for my adolescence. I felt like I was missing the last 10 minutes of my coming of age movie ... but because the cinema was closed. I had the time to "be a teenager," but I didn't have the freedom, nor did I have the power to control that freedom – a virus did. I think my grief was understandable, though I can't help but wonder if it would have existed had the pandemic not.

After all, I was mourning the loss of something nonexistent. Something that was never going to exist. Grief shines a rose coloured light over everything, and I was mourning a perfect "Sixteen Candles"-style experience of adolescence that I may never have experienced regardless of COVID. Nostalgia, I suppose, would be the name for it. I find some comfort in that: knowing that the grief I felt during the most unprecedented of times was something entirely ordinary.

Just as you might revel in the nostalgia of childhood naivety or the freedom of your 20s, I grew nostalgic for my teenage years as I was still experiencing them.

In a sense, those condescending aunties and I were one and the same, each of us grieving a romanticised adolescence. Each of us mourning lost time, longing to fill it better. I'm beginning to realise this longing was inevitable. Our memories will forever triumph reality. Whether that reality was filled with parties, new relationships and heartbreaks, or with Zoom calls, banana bread, and crocheting, time will always feel wasted. The best we can do is find something to fill this time before we begin to grieve its loss. I guess this is all just an inflated way of saying, "Live in the present," but if I didn't spend my time writing a thousand pretentious words just to conclude with a motivational quote, how else would I ignore the grief I feel for the vacuum of my golden years?





# THINKING IS EXPENSIVE

WILL DRAW  
4 FOOD

BY ALICIA  
ROSS

Another penny for your thoughts?  
They're getting too expensive now.  
We can't even afford to think,  
Because they never taught us how.

I wish I was creative.  
That I could have a thought inside my mind.  
To have a dream and make it,  
instead of watching other people do the things I always say I'll do  
Sitting in the dark alone and commenting on YouTube.

I wish was creative  
The way my friends keep telling me I am  
To see a fear, and brave it.

Until I can become the person that I have been pretending I am,  
It's a win when I get dressed and empty out my trash can.



# BLACK EXHAUST

by Kennedy Brooks

Content notice: racism, police brutality.

Much like most high schoolers in the United States, I started off thinking that the pandemic just meant an extra week of spring break. I was upset when it became clear that I was probably going to miss out on milestones like prom and graduation, but I did not mind having to prematurely end my senior year. I had never really liked school even though I was good at it and had a decent number of friends. This sentiment probably stems from the disconnect between myself and my peers, given that my existence as a Black female progressive is in complete opposition of my small predominantly white school's Southern Baptist ideals. Most of the kids I went to school with didn't take social distancing very seriously, so I spent most of my time at home by myself. I took up art, and even got into Tik Tok cooking trends, churning out concoctions like whipped coffee and homemade sour-dough bread. The first few weeks of lockdown were nice and mundane, but at the end of May, things took a disturbing turn.

During the pandemic, I was trapped inside of my house, watching my existence being debated away.

On May 25, 2020 police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on George Floyd's, an unarmed Black man, neck for nine minutes and 29 seconds, killing him. News of the murder quickly circulated through the news and social media. I don't remember when I first heard of George Floyd's death because I was honestly pretty desensitized to the constant brutalization of unarmed Black men by the police. There is nothing that sets George Floyd apart from the hundreds of other unarmed Black men fatally victimized by police brutality. The only thing that was different about George Floyd is that his death circulated on social media during a time where everyone had nothing to do other than be angry and opinionated. People quickly mobilized, taking to the streets to protest. The thought of protesting during a pandemic kind of stressed me out, and agonizing over whether or not my siblings would make it home safely after a day of protesting stressed me out even more.

Additionally, The protests inspired a full on social media lockdown. I couldn't tap through Instagram without being confronted with demo-

nizations of racism that used pretty fonts and cute clip art to get their message across. People from both sides of the issue were determined to "make their voices heard." I watched with a bittersweet mix of amusement and horror as my classmates "used their platforms" to speak on the issue. I'm sure you can just about guess what my conservative town's response to the tragedy was. Even though it wasn't surprising, there was something scary about my classmates revealing themselves to be bigots and racists. I specifically remember my breaking point stemming from the "All Lives Matter" crowd circulating a video of a Black conservative commentator condemning George Floyd and Black Lives Matter. They used this one person's words as a justification for their own prejudice, essentially reducing the entire Black perspective by using this figurehead as a monolith for Black voices. I wasn't quite sure what to make of the way that my classmates

chimed in on Black issues because I knew that they didn't know any Black people. And I knew that they didn't know any Black people because I was the Black people that they knew. They had given me the burden of forming their perspective of Blackness, and I was left to wonder what I had done to inform the views that they held of it.

A lack of awareness is part of the main problem with Instagram activism. Especially during the pandemic, it became trivial gossip to analyze who was posting what and how much they were posting. During the pandemic, I was trapped inside of my house watching my existence being debated away, but for a lot of people, the racial issues during the pandemic only meant making a few story posts and posting a black square. Without any further action, posting an infographic is completely performative. It says, "Hey! Look at me being totally not racist and self-aware! Aren't I a great ally to this cause?" It isn't worth anything to me as a Black person if Emily posts a story about racial equality and then pretends she doesn't hear when her white boyfriend Travis uses the N-word.



hey! Look at me being totally not racist + self-aware!

I faced a bit of backlash for not posting anything to my Instagram story because we were all supposed to "read the room" about the information that needed to be circulated. I didn't know how to verbalize that there was no reason for me to read the room because I was born in the room. I literally couldn't leave the room because everything my classmates were just finding out, I had known for years. I don't have to post an infographic that says that Black Lives Matter, I prove that by simply being Black and living a life. A lot of the radicalizations that occurred for white people over quarantine were ignited by things that Black people have been saying for years. Part of me feels like I should have a hand in educating the people around me because who better to teach them about racial inequality than a person in their life who is affected by it. On the other hand, I don't want to. Constantly being exposed to Black trauma is exhausting and mentally draining. There's something twisted about people (usually non-POC) who are willing to just post the murder of a person with a three word caption to show that they care. Watching videos of men that could easily be my brother or one of my friends being murdered is traumatizing, and people's excitement to post those videos and then let that be their entire form of support for a cause they claim to stand by is sick. I've bore the burden of racism my entire life and I am disgusted to watch people use it as a way to gain social clout.

If you actually want to help the Black Lives Matter movement (or really any social movement), there are so many things you can do past clicking a few buttons to make a story post. I understand some people's hesitation to join the protest line because of the pandemic, especially because I also shared that anxiety. If that is not possible for you, you still have the option to support the affected families directly. You can donate to different organizations (after doing your research) and look to Black social leaders who have willingly taken on the burden of educating the uneducated. You can make sure to vote in local elections and keep elected officials accountable for their actions. You can engage in mutual aid. Basically, what I'm saying is that there are so many things that can be done that are infinitely more important than sharing the same six story posts that all of your followers have already seen.

I'm not avoidant or disconnected from racial issues, I just have bore the burden of being Black for a white audience for so long in my life that I refuse to do it anymore. The pandemic was traumatizing for me not because of social decline or not getting to have my Disney Channel Original Movie moment where I walk in with my prom dress and everyone regrets not dating me in high school, it was traumatizing because of the inescapable reminders of the controversy of my racial identity. The isolation inside of a sphere of dehumanization that simultaneously served as the personal radicalization of ignorant people online stunted me emotionally. I felt stuck between a rock and a hard place. I couldn't leave my room, but even if I could, it didn't seem like it would be very safe for me to venture into the outside world. Time has distanced the public consciousness from Black Lives Matter, but unarmed Black men are still being brutalized and killed by the police, so all of the Instagram posts didn't really lead to anything conclusive. Despite that, performative activism still lives on. The focus has shifted from #StopAsianHate to Israel-Palestine to #SaveCuba. Each and every one of those issues is a serious problem that needs to be addressed, and yet, the extent to which people address it is merely to post a square to their story that they barely read. In the year 2021, we have so many resources available to us, and yet this is how we choose to uplift others? That doesn't make any sense. So, next time you go to put a pre-written and loosely researched statement on your story, try to come up with another way to help out a cause, especially one that doesn't alienate the members of the community that you're supposed to be helping.

So, next time you go to put a pre-written, loosely researched statement on your story, try to find another way to help a cause, especially one that doesn't *alienate* members of the community you're supposed to be helping.



will you rock the boat?  
by Kyleigh Gilbert





# The Cold That Remains

by Abi Lee

Michigan is a chilly state that appears to run on the extreme climate scales common to the regions beyond the west, a temperature range I've never been used to. Returning home from a year at a small midwest Christian college felt violent. I was lost. An astronaut crash landed and returned back to Earth. My face seemed to maintain a sense of stunted youth when I was reunited with my friends; young adults who had attended public colleges and lived lives that were "rebelliously" appropriate for our age. They spent their time at their colleges dancing, drinking and receiving a nonreligious education while I spent the second semester experiencing "Christian cabin fever," questioning if this would have to be the rest of my life, a chilly childish chastity. While COVID-19 has created a similar disconnect with many who were completely trapped at home for over a year, I want to face the state that lingers past any pandemic – the stagnation of queer youth within the church.

Religion and queerness have been perceived as vinegar and oil by the broader world because of the idea that they don't mix. But luckily for me, in my life, the two make the world's shittiest salad. Something comparable to a "closeted coleslaw" or

maybe a "celibacy caprese." Ignoring the fact that protestant religions can really be so incredibly gay (why do you care so much about a dude you've never meant, are you like, obsessed?) for most people, it is a straightforward equation that being born in the church and being born queer equals some form of angst, confusion or misery. In the Bible, homosexuality is mentioned by name (debatably) one time and discussed in six specific verses: Genesis 19:5, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 1 Timothy 1:10, and Romans 1:26-27. While the exact intent behind the meanings of these verses can be debated, ultimately what impacts the LGBTQ+ community more is how they are perceived and what they are commonly used for. So tragically, despite any intent, did you know it's really just a handful of words which have hatched the policies and sentiment that ultimately dismembers the chances of happiness for queer people everywhere? And despite changes from how churches outreach and preach, within the very doctrines that frame the foundation of their belief lies ideas that actively condemn and harm those who exist beyond the cis-het binary. While there are definitely accepting religions toward the idea of LGBTQ+ rights and queerness in general, I and many others are not a part of these organizations. It's difficult to just exist in these spaces, even while closeted, with the underlying reminder that there are constantly people surrounding you who wouldn't "agree" with what you are and who may harm you because of it (also, hear me out, sometimes your friends stuck in their colleges aren't asking for advice – we've all thought of plans to get out – but instead a chance to scream into infinity, an act of a fruitless fight back at this situation).

The college years are labelled a time of experimentation. It's an era of milestones and markings of growth from new experiences to reach a better understanding of one's identity. However, many of these token moments are taken from queer youth everywhere, often causing a delay in life experience and perceived "growth." How do you experiment, start relationships or change yourself when it is all viewed as a sin? While it is not impossible to do any of these things, it is emotionally difficult and risky when considering what may be on the line if exposed or brought to shame.

In the world of small Christian denominations, it is hard to tell if the queer kids get a happy ending. The only elders I know are the ones in our church. I and many of my fellow LGBTQ+ peers haven't met an out queer person in the church who isn't older than 20, making it nearly impossible to imagine what a life in adulthood is supposed to look like. In a dorm room, I hear my similarly closeted friend tell me something that stains my brain, "Gay people seem kind of fake." After returning home and starting to put this piece together, I followed up on that idea and asked them to explain it. They said, "Gay people seem fake because of my lack of exposure to queer people and normalized queer relationships. For years, the only place I interacted with queer people was Tumblr and other fandom spaces, which seemed to exist separately from my day-to-day reality. I couldn't acknowledge the queer people I met online as real because it meant acknowledging the way I interacted with my own sexuality and gender online as real." Trying to understand how to navigate your own identity as a young queer person in this religious environment is confusing, because there's rarely a figure to look up to. What is the outcome supposed to look like other than the martyr-complex palatable gays (for you non-church goers, think palatable like Pete Buttigieg, and "gay martyr" like acceptability politics) or a hushed story told by church parents of disappointment? There's a serious harm in having a lack of a community, and while many of these spaces can be located online, the absence of a real life support presence can be isolating and have lasting damage. As the rise of LGBTQ+ discourse on social media sites everywhere has proven, there is a serious difference between interacting with queer people through the internet verses it having a physical part of your life.

I'd feel like a liar to say there is a lesson to all of this, or even a decent conclusion. Each year that I have existed – because I have not truly lived – in this environment, I can feel myself eroding as a person. Perhaps it's the pressure of repression – taking whatever I'm made up of and condensing it to a hardened lump of coal – or maybe it's the jealousy. The frustration of living as a statue and watching people you grew up with, people who look just like you, just going through each day meeting all of the appropriate expectations that come with aging, without ever having to question that life could look like anything else. Witnessing paired off couples and the lack of weight their relationship carries. Seeing people live casually, tenderly, without a sense of upheld diligence. These are worlds inhabited with people who were made to live in them, where their biggest disappointment to others would never have to involve who they are and how they love. I'm a bitter person – I hate it because I cannot have it yet I covet it at the same time. Ultimately, I recognize that I'm not the only one who feels like this. As I remain and fester into something perhaps worse than what I started as, my impatience may choke me out before I get to the other side. But I'll try to wait. Learn patience in this parable that I've been either celestially or randomly placed in for the warmth of growth, for the heat blessed by movement and for the escape of stagnation.







histoplasmosis  
by rebecca judd

Germicide  
scrubs the stains out just fine  
the excretions reminds the city that this world is  
Biowaste in barest face  
and, in any event,  
they will be here tomorrow

you will be there tomorrow  
you tell yourself that  
Something has to be clean  
that time could be forgiving  
that it is worth a broken back when  
you will be there tomorrow

you settle for  
delusions  
fistfuls of fern and loam  
sticky floors — sweaty stalls  
conclusions  
with online graduation, we cannot trip and fall  
the livestream is tomorrow

you scrub the stains  
and neighbour cranes,  
with ear crooked toward  
reminders of routine  
eleven stories high  
his restless paws will tap tomorrow

we take it in for what it is  
and what it could have been

as back breaks, ears crook, we trip and fall  
feeling for the pulse, (still beats),

as drivellers, dropouts, dreamers  
drown again  
+ again  
in excretions  
in Germicide  
in the compulsory understanding that  
they will be there tomorrow.



dinner ring

by bria winfree

archer draws back bowstring  
line of fingers to elbow  
off flies another line  
chasing

a rabbit, or some thieving kid.

similarly, I hunt my own stony center.

what then, of my brother  
and his eyes darker than mine?  
will i ever speak to him, even just  
to say i buy jewelry that might  
recall him.

a dinner ring with a gold band,  
flat black signet.

if I could place the ring in his palm  
if he could just understand  
what i cannot gather myself to say  
to my own brother

someone I have watched toddle and sprint  
into personhood

will we ever press our foreheads  
together and cry

as we did watching dogs fight in the woods?

an arrow flown from archer  
who knows what of fear  
who wants to know what?

what of unsightly, slightly flat nose  
of brother to sister  
child to child







by MADELINE  
ENGLISH

- ★ 1. When we give each other books that we think the other will like and there are little annotations in the margins of the borrowed book.
- 2. When you say your hands are cold and the person next to you grabs your hands with both of theirs to warm you up.
- 3. When someone asks you if you need anything while they're in town.
- 4. When someone shares playlists or songs with you because they think you'll like them.
- 5. When someone leaves you the last piece of something.
- 6. When you're driving through a small town and someone waves at you, even if they don't know you.
- 7. When someone points out an animal or a baby they think the person they're with will think is cute.
- 8. When the sun is in someone's eyes and the other person moves to block the sun out of their face.
- 9. When you're short 50 cents and the cashier tells you not to worry about it.
- 10. When someone knows your coffee order before you even order it.
- 11. When strangers offer to take a large group's photo so no one is left out of the picture.

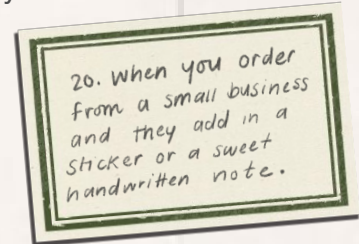


12. When you're hanging out with a group of friends and someone tells you to text them when you get home so they know you made it back safe.

- 13. Whenever people with periods offer tampons or pads to strangers who need them.
- 14. When girls give each other compliments. ♥
- 15. Whenever people bring you a small souvenir from some place they just visited.
- 16. When you see a stranger's face light up after they spot a dog on the street.



- 17. When someone prioritizes and loves their found family as much as their blood family.
- 18. When you're talking in a big group and other people talk over you but there's one person that focuses their attention on you so you know someone's listening.
- 19. When people compliment your tattoos.



- 21. When friends are so close that they can comfortably lean on each other in public, like resting their head on the other's shoulder when they're tired.
- 22. When coffee shops offer pup cups for free.
- 23. When people hold hands.
- 24. When people remind others to drink water so that they're not dehydrated.

- 25. When someone lets you shower before them so you get the hot water.
- 26. When someone remembers a small fact about you that you mentioned in passing and never expected them to remember.
- 27. When you catch a stranger jamming out in their car but they don't even notice you because they're so caught up in the music.

- 28. When someone is talking to you about what they're passionate about and you watch their soul light up.
- 29. When someone reminds you to unclench your jaw and drop your shoulders and you literally feel a weight you didn't know was there disappear.

- 30. When you have really long conversations with someone you love and lose track of time.
- 31. When someone tucks your tag back into your shirt because it was sticking out.

- 32. When people return their shopping carts to the correct spot.



- 33. When you get home late and find that your roommate/significant other/parent/other left the light on for you so you'd be able to get in safely.

- 34. When you're in the hallway at school and someone zips up your open backpack so you don't lose anything.

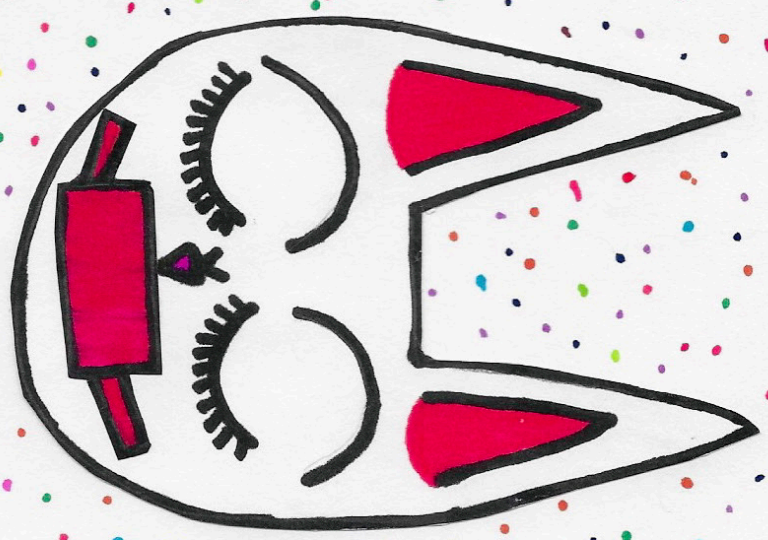
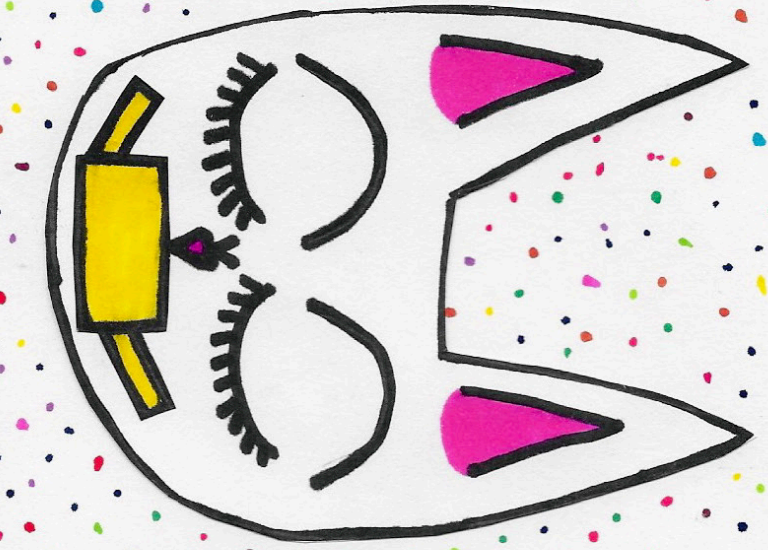


1514  
ARTEAGA ST.

WELCOME

WELCOME

THEY'RE COOL



WEAR A MASK,

Wear A Mask  
by Kat Kathleen



Social Distancing  
by Kat Kathleen

Kat Kathleen

# Credits!

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Also a very special

*Thank You*

to Fordham  
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Creative Practice  
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Kara Van Cleaf!



