



Owls at Night

Artist Name: Marissa Lin

Age: 11

Grade: 6

Town of Residence: Vienna

Name of School: Yanshun Sui Studio

**Children's & Teens'
Connection 2021**

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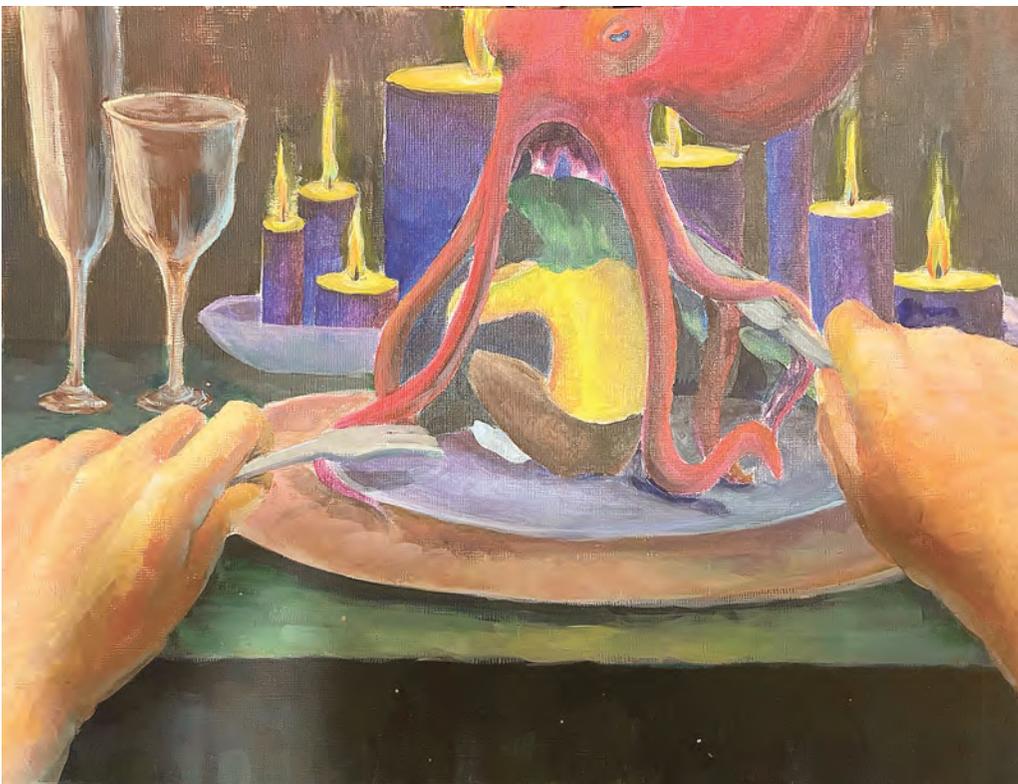


The Postman

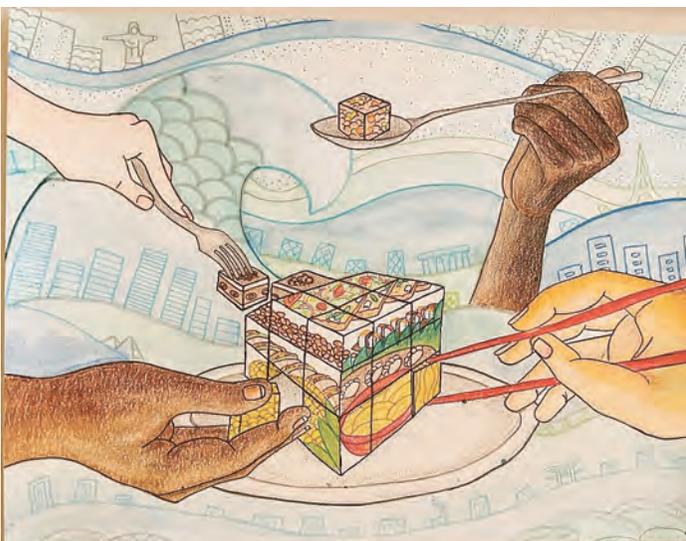


Polluted Age

Name: Anxin Ye
 Age: 17
 Grade: 12
 Town of Residence: Vienna
 Name of the School: James Madison High School
 Name of Teacher: Brandy Carter
 Town of School Location: Vienna



Mind Anatomy



"A Shared Meal with Friends" - By Cathy Huang of Langley High School

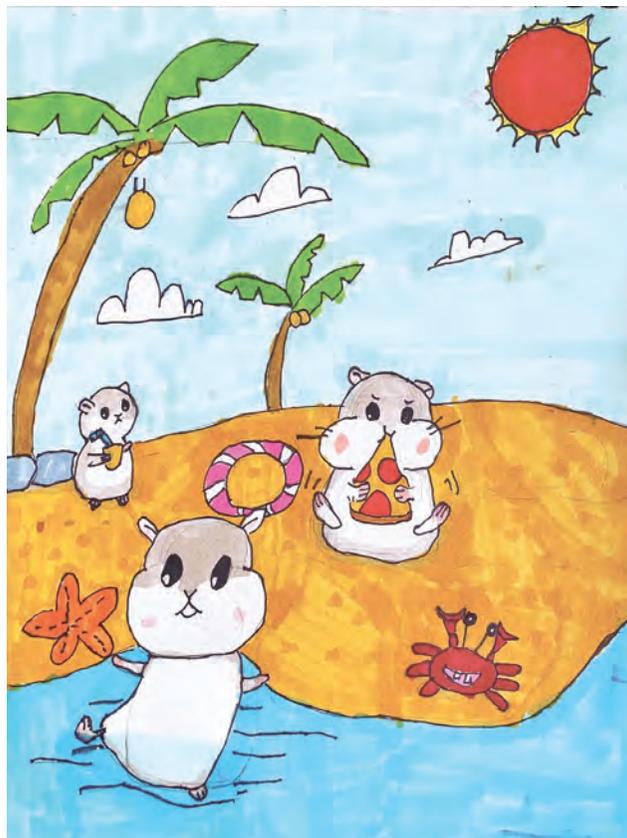
Grade 9

Name: Cathy Huang
 Age: 15
 Grade: 9
 Town of residence: McLean
 School: Langley High School
 Art teacher: Yanshun Sui
 Town of school: McLean

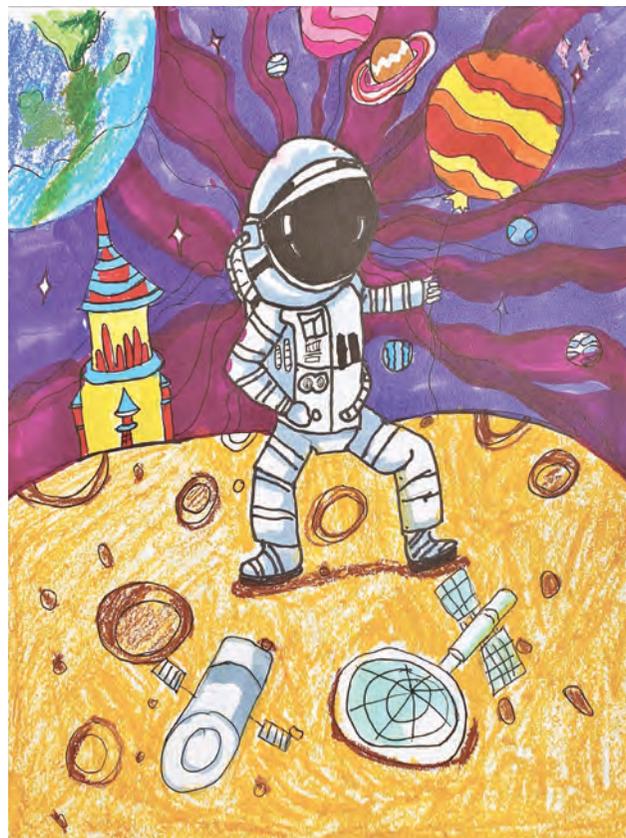


Artwork caption:
 Wonderful Seasons!
 Student's name:
 Samhita Athreya
 Age: 8 yrs
 Grade: 3rd
 Name of School:
 Colvin Run Elementary School
 Town of residence:
 Vienna, VA
 Art Teacher: Yanshun Sui

2021 CHILDREN'S AND TEENS' CONNECTION



Name: Zac Lee
Age: 8
Grade: 3rd Grade
Town of Residence: McLean
Teacher Name: Ms. Zhai Art Studio
Artwork Title: Even Hamsters Need a Vacation



Name: Zoe Lee
Age: 9
Grade: 4th Grade
Town of Residence: McLean
Teacher Name: Ms. Zhai Art Studio
Artwork Title: Moonwalk in Space



Student: Oriana Sun, 12, 7th grade
Town of Resident: Oakton
School: Thoreau Middle School, 2505 Cedar Lane, Vienna, VA 22180
Art Teacher: Yanshun Shi

Welcome to our 2021 Children's Connection sections. While submissions were still short of the pre-pandemic avalanche of children's and teens' art and writing, in 2021 students have delivered a delightful, sometimes unusual, panoply of expression. I've enjoyed the art and writing as we've downloaded it over many many hours in the last two weeks. And I hope you will also.

You can find digital copies of the papers, including the Children's and Teens' Connection at <http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/PDFs/>. The papers should be posted by Thursday, Dec. 16. We deliver tens of thousands of papers to homes, businesses, public libraries and community centers, plus thousands more in email and digital. We will print extra copies, and restock at libraries and community centers. But also feel free to print out pages from the PDFs or take a digital copy to a photo center to print out larger, high resolution copies of your child's art if you desire many copies.

It feels like a small, or not so small,

miracle to have made it to the end of 2021 and be looking forward into the New Year. The pandemic has been a bear, financially and otherwise. Revenue plummeted at the beginning in 2020. More recently we have seen the return of advertising for events and Grand Openings. Some beloved advertisers have stayed the course supporting us throughout, and many more have done what they can. Revenue is still short of our greatly curtailed costs.

At the end of 2020, we didn't have any idea how we would keep going. But our readers responded overwhelmingly to our Go Fund Me, bringing us within reach of our goal of \$50,000. PPP funding, "forgivable loans," made our survival possible. Now we are still hoping for a grant from Rebuild Virginia to help get us into 2022.

We applied almost a year ago, but it seems possible that our application might be reviewed while there is still money in the fund.

I think we can be characterized as pathological optimists. While there are forces out there that could make it impossible for us to keep going, we continue to push forward. While I have said this a few times without yet making it happen, keep your eyes open for our membership drive, which would hope for readers, sources and community members who would be interested in supporting us on a monthly basis.

One of the magical elements that helped us get this far was the presence on our staff of an international journalism legend,

Kemal Kurspahic, who served as managing editor and guiding light for decades. Kemal died tragically and unexpectedly this fall, having a stroke after minor surgery. We miss him daily. Keeping everything going has been harder since. You can read Kemal's obituary here: <http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/news/2021/sep/22/courage-journalism/>

We haven't done everything we aspire to do, we always aspire to greater community service. But we do know that the community is better off for Local Media Connection continuing to publish.

Now that we've told you how we're doing (ha!), let us know how you are doing, what you think about the state of our communities.

Thank you.

— MARY KIMM,
 KIMM.MARY@GMAIL.COM



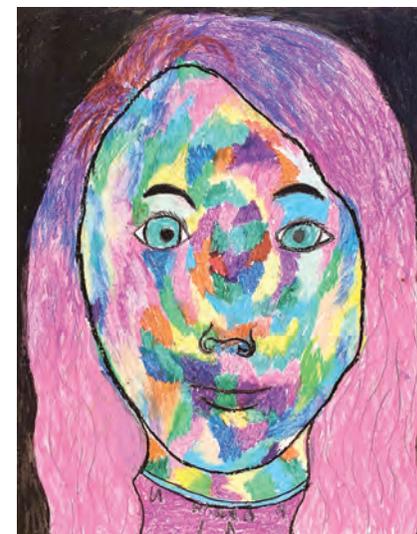
Luming LeGrand, 1st



Marc Zbarcea, 3rd



Rosie Jay K

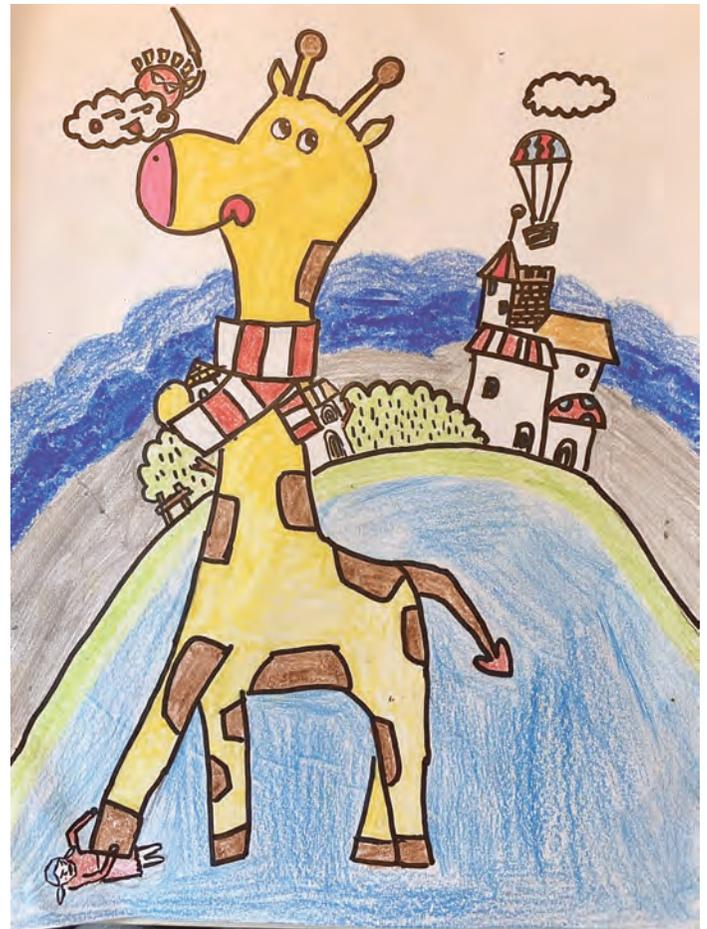


Uliana Zolotareva, 3rd

CHILDREN'S AND TEENS' CONNECTION



Rylee Liang, 8, Mclean, 3rd Grade, Kent Gardens Elementary School
Name of Teacher: Ms.Sui (Yan's art studio)
Artwork Title: Magical Carousel



Bradley Hanning Wang, 10, Vienna, Grade 5, Spring Hill elementary school, McLean



Ocean Awareness, Marissa Lin, 11, Vienna Grade 6, Yanshun Sui Studio, Vienna



Owls at Night, Marissa Lin, 11, Vienna Grade 6, Yanshun Sui Studio, Vienna



The Biology Lesson, Yuenshing Ye, Vienna, 12, Grade 6, Flint Hill Elementary School, Vienna
Name of Teacher: Sarah McAlister

"I got an idea of my poem from the quote 'Be the rainbow in someone else's cloud' - Maya Angelou"

POEM BY IAN KIM

Rainbow in a cloud

Be the light to the very dark
Be the hope to the hopeless
Be the shelter to the weary
Be the color to the blind
Be the love to the scorned
Be the courage to the fearful
Be the voice that speaks out to the world
Be the reason why someone is living today
Be the rainbow in everyone's cloud

COOPER MIDDLE SCHOOL

The Last Time

EMMA AMOS
12, 7TH GRADE
MCLEAN
MRS. BOVENZI, COOPER MIDDLE
SCHOOL

It was March 12, 2020. At the time I was oblivious to what was going to happen to my 5th grade class and the world. As I started to walk to school, on what I thought was a normal day, I kicked a single rock the whole way while singing a tune I heard on the radio. When I reach my fifth grade homeroom class I walk in as my friends greet me with a smile. As I sit in my seat I see the teachers nervously talking. I couldn't hear the chatter but I knew something was up. As I walk over to my teacher after almost tripping over a computer cord I ask "Is everything okay?"

"Oh, everything is alright," she tells me. I accept the answer and become less concerned as I open my computer to start on my morning work. An article is recommended to read. "Covid is rapidly spreading in Schools in Virginia" as I start to read my brain starts hurting. "Sickness" "Quarantining" "Pandemic" it all started sounding like the spanish flu. Before I could show my friend it was time to switch classes.

I walked into the dimly lit science classroom, taught by Ms. Smith. As I sit down in my wobbly chair I start on my workbooks, but even before I flip the page, the teacher sighs and says with a worrisome voice, "Look, if we have to go home for a while, don't worry about your workbook or any work." As I look around the room I see my confused peers. We have never seen our teacher scared and unsure as now. Then I see my teacher turn her head towards the board so as not to show her students her pain, I realize that things are really not good.

At lunch I talk to my friend, at the time I didn't know that would be the last time I would talk to them. During music we could see the teacher's face so we could understand how to sing, I didn't know that was the last time I would see someone's face. At the end of the day I gave my friend a hug, I would have never guessed that I would never hug a friend again. I never knew it was the last time. March 12, 2020 was the last time my life was normal.

The Recent Years

SHAE TU
13 YEARS OLD, 8TH GRADE
GREAT FALLS
MRS. BOVENZI, COOPER MIDDLE
SCHOOL

It's been almost two years since the first Covid-19 case landed in America. Along with that, some other things appeared too. Social distancing? Get used to it. Wearing masks? Deal with it. Online learning? You'll survive. Slowly but surely, people have gotten used to it. Covid-19 has and will continue to indefinitely impact people around the world.

Children in the future will look back to these years and think it's history. They might complain about wearing masks, but here's what I would tell them, "It's just a mask. When I was your age, I had to wear a mask every day just so I wouldn't die." If they asked me what my life was like, I would tell them about how scary seeing new cases pop up online was like.

Of course, each cloud has a silver lining. Covid is no different. Many people have taken the extra time to learn a new hobby. Personally, I've had time to build some jigsaw puzzles at home. Maybe you've experimented with weird and wondrous flavors while cooking, or dove into that book that has been sitting on your shelf for the past 5 years. The pandemic has given me time to take a break and given me the opportunity to do the things I enjoy.

Hopefully, the pandemic ends soon, wrapping up that chapter in our lives. We could go back to what we were doing 2 years ago, before this nightmare started. Even though Coronavirus will never leave us completely, I look forward to when it's over. When we'll finally be free.

Small Act of Kindness

WINNIE EMERICK
(12) 7TH GRADE
VIENNA
MRS. BOVENZI, COOPER MIDDLE
SCHOOL

Until the first day of 7th grade I had never said the pledge of allegiance. I had no reason to, seeing as I have lived abroad since I was 2 years old. When the loud speaker said "Please stand for the Pledge of Allegiance" I froze, then followed everyone by standing up. My face was probably red because while everyone else recited a pledge they had known for years, I stood awkwardly with my hand over my heart.

Later in the same class every student filled out a form about themselves. In a section labeled "Is there anything else I should know about you?" I added that I didn't know the Pledge of Allegiance. I expected that our history teacher wouldn't read that until much later and even then wouldn't do anything about it.

I was wrong, and shocked when, twenty minutes later, he stood up and inconspicuously slipped me a note while shuffling past my desk. I unfolded it to find the pledge of allegiance written out with a nice note on the bottom.

I went home that night and read it over and over again. By the next morning I stood up with everyone else and said the pledge of allegiance quietly but clearly with my hand over my heart.

This act of kindness warmed my heart in a way I will never forget. The fact that he spent a little extra time and effort to help me changed my day and gave me a sense that people cared. Remember all it takes is one act of kindness to change the world.

SEE COOPER MIDDLE SCHOOL,
PAGE 6

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CHILDREN'S AND TEENS' CONNECTION



Name: Michael Hanchao Wang
Age: 15
Grade: 10
Resident: Vienna
School: Thomas Jefferson High School of Science and Technology
School town: Alexandria
Art teacher: Jayne Matricardi

Student: Ryan Chun
Age: 15
Grade: Freshman, 9th Grade
Town of Residence: Vienna
Teacher: Bridget Donoghue
School: McLean High School
Town Of School: McLean

polluted, disgraced, destined

the murky water soiled and tainted
the arid land parched and abandoned
the lifeless ocean wailing in pain
the indignant waves crashing in frustration

the earth is weeping into the vast ocean
the clouds screaming in pain more than ever
the trees begging for water as they burn away
but more than that
is the weeping of the people
the begging of the people
the screaming of the people
who are in pain more than ever

this is an abomination
unfair to the less fortunate
unjust to the planet
we need to help
those in need
those without water
otherwise
they might perish
and we are to blame
after all
in the dark, murky, ocean
we all sink together



Sophia Lin, from McLean/Falls Church, Va., will compete as a Division Finalist in the Music Teachers National Association, Southern Division Junior Piano Competition.

Virginia Piano Player Sophia Lin is a Division Finalist in the MTNA Junior Piano Competition

A freshman at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, Sophia Lin is a three-time MTNA State Winner and Division Finalist. She has won numerous national and international competitions. In 2021, she won the First Place for International Young Artist Piano Competition (IYAPC), Robert-Spencer Concerto Competition, Gertrude Brown Concerto Competition; International Music Competition Rome Grand Prize Virtuoso and Gold Medal for Seattle International Piano Festival (SIPF) Virtuoso Artists '21. She was also the winner of Ylda Novik Concerto Competition and a Semifinalist for Lang Lang International Piano Competition.

Lin loves music and enjoys serving the community through performing. At age 12, Lin had her concerto debut with Amadeus Orchestra as the piano soloist.

She is an active volunteer performer in many Community Centers, including the REACH at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Young Artist Piano Musicale at George Mason University, the National Institute of Health's Hospital, and senior homes in Maryland and Virginia. During the epidemic, she performed online for elders, patients and medical staffs. Her music recording CDs were distributed to patients and elders across the country.

In addition to her passion in music, Lin is an avid reader and math competitor. She has won awards in the American Mathematics Competition and Gold Medals in national/international math competitions.

The winner of the division competition will compete in the National Finals which will be a video round this year. National Finalists will be announced in mid-January.

The three-tiered MTNA competitions begin at the state level. Winners of each State Competition advance to the Division Competition. Division winners then proceed to the National Competition Finals.

To receive more information about the MTNA National Competitions, including competition rules and applications please contact MTNA national headquarters at (888) 512-5278, mtnanet@mtna.org or visit the website at www.mtna.org.

Music Teachers National Association is a nonprofit organization comprised of 17,000 independent and collegiate music teachers committed to advancing the value of music study and music making to society and to supporting the professionalism of music teachers. Founded in 1876, Music Teachers National Association is the oldest professional music association in the United States.

COOPER MIDDLE SCHOOL

Eight Years

CLARE RASO

12 YEARS OLD, 7TH GRADE

MCLEAN

MRS. BOVENZI, COOPER MIDDLE SCHOOL

8 years ago....

I was backstage, behind the curtains, listening to Christmas music. Loud jumps shake the stage, and the chatter of the audience sets a joyful and exciting mood for my dance friends and me. I watched the old-

er dancers move across the stage gracefully and in a smooth manner. The older dancers portrayed different dolls of all diverse countries and morals. They danced in an addicting way to upbeat and cheerful music. "I want to be the Chinese doll one day," I thought to myself.

"Come on girls, get ready to go on stage!"

I packed up my lunch and fixed my makeup. I was nervous and antsy as I got ready to go on the stage for the first time in my life. Cramped, I saved myself a spot in line. All of my friends and I lined up to get ready

to dance. Suddenly, our music started playing. As I walked under the bright lights that shone onto my face, I struggled to look upon the audience to find my family. Confused and scared, I danced in a dainty and fluid way. I danced as if it would be the last time I ever experienced something like this. Little did I know, I would experience situations like these for the next several years.

Throughout the next eight years, I trained as hard as I could, so I could eventually be as powerful and skilled as kids who were older than me. I looked up to the older students

when I danced at the same show every year. Always wanting to become a doll in the annual Christmas show my teacher put on, I practiced over 400 weeks perfecting my ballet, tap, and jazz skills.

During the COVID-19 pandemic this year, I finally got my chance to become the Chinese doll. I finally got a solo, just like I had dreamt of eight years ago. I always had little faith in myself that I would be able to dance as the doll I dreamed of becoming.

SEE COOPER MIDDLE SCHOOL, PAGE 7
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COOPER MIDDLE SCHOOL

FROM PAGE 6

Constant rehearsals have led me to one distinct conclusion. As long as I try and put my best foot forward, I can do anything I put my mind to.

My Family's Tradition

KRISTEN HAN
13 - GRADE 7
MCLEAN, VA
MRS. BOVENZI, COOPER MIDDLE
SCHOOL

The warm, savory scent of homemade dumplings fills the air on the day before a new year. My family and I wrap each dumpling with delicacy and control, carefully packing them with pork filling. After wrapping each dumpling we set them aside on a metal tray, and get started wrapping the next. The dumplings are identical in size, shape, and color. They sit in three, straight rows, as if they were little soldiers standing in formation. One-by-one, they enter bubbling hot water, soon to become a delicious meal and a symbol of reunion for me and my family.

Every year, my family and I celebrate a holiday on the first day of the lunar calendar, which is called Chinese New Year. This holiday celebrates the beginning of the new year and the start of spring. On Chinese New Year's Eve, it's traditional for us to make and eat dumplings together before midnight. We also eat other common Chinese foods including fish and spring rolls.

My mom and dad brought Chinese New Year from their family cultures in China to America. Since we can't see our relatives that live in China, we chat with them on the phone, wishing them a great holiday and a fabulous year. Chinese New Year is important to me because it is a time for my family to reunite, connect, reflect on the past year, and think about what we can work on for the upcoming year. I'm always looking forward to this traditional celebration.

Lost in a Transition

JADE WOOSLEY-ANDERSON
12 AND 7TH GRADE
VIENNA
MRS. BOVENZI, COOPER MIDDLE
SCHOOL

Covid-19 crept up on me, on my life. The lockdown hit me even though I knew it was coming. My ragged hair, always in tangles, with my bright, blonde hair covering my face, you would never think things could get this bad. I
WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

felt as though I had no source connecting to the outside world. I had no source of contact.

Online school was a benefit. Staying safe while I can still see my friends, perfect right? Wrong. Seeing their blurred pixelated face on a computer screen and not seeing them in person was not a fix.

I told myself I was seeing my friends, people! Apparently, I didn't repeat it enough. If I were to think of my current life, lights around me would fail along with my mental state. I could only hear my thoughts and muffled cries inside echoing in an endless pit I managed to trip and fall into. I was going insane.

I felt isolated, without a way out of this pit and only a sliver of light to offer hope to help my lost consciousness. That one streak of beaming light helped me realize perseverance is important to have in your skill set.

The pandemic didn't stop my friends from spending time together. I realized that you can be safe, but at the same time have fun, even in matters of a global catastrophe. Communication is difficult with bigger things clouding your vision, and sometimes you have to be the first to start talking.

What Are You?

SHANTI VARADARAJAN
12 YEARS OLD 7TH GRADE
GREAT FALLS
MRS. BOVENZI, COOPER MIDDLE
SCHOOL

What are you? Three simple words forming a simple question, one to which I can't seem to find an answer for. I was born and raised here in the United States, but I know that's not what they're after. What they truly mean is, why does my skin look like that?

I'm neither Indian nor American, I'm neither dark nor light. I'm neither one nor the other; I'm both and I'm proud of it, because my ethnicity has no bearing on my identity. If you just got to know me instead of asking that one simple question, you'd find that there's a lot more to me than what the question implies.

That question, although it may seem innocent, implies that there's something wrong or out of the norm about the subject of the matter. When the reality is that the subject is human just like the rest of us so please if there is any human decency left in this world, just stop.

Pandemic Problems

JASON WU
7TH GRADE, AGE 12
GREAT FALLS, VA
MRS. BOVENZI, COOPER MIDDLE
SCHOOL

During the first month of the pandemic, life was great; no school, video games, so much free time. Everything you could ever ask for. Right? Well, not exactly. Soon things became boring, a life devoid of social and human interaction.

Pre-pandemic, I had never really thought of how much friendship meant to me, but lockdown finally gave me a time to reflect and think. It gave me many new opportunities to discover and get into different, unique hobbies, but most importantly, it provided me with more family time. While the pandemic was a horrible thing, it gave many of us more time outside enjoying the weather and more time with our closest loved ones.

When I finally came back to school after 2 years, I was overjoyed to finally see my friends and classmates again. I hadn't realized how much I had missed them, and everything else in my old routine, and that is something I would never take for granted again.

Overall, if I could give one piece of advice to anyone, it would be to value and cherish everything you have. For during the pandemic, I learned just how much I valued the small things. From the short walk to the bus stop to the exciting ring of the dismissal bell, I missed them all.

A World With No Hugs

LEAH HUMMEL
13, 7TH GRADE
VIENNA
LEAH HUMMEL COOPER MIDDLE
SCHOOL

A world with no laughter, no joy, no hugs. Hugs make you feel happy and safe, the feeling of knowing that you are loved and safe. That is hugging.

What is a world with no hugs? It is the feeling that you're all alone in the middle of nowhere, with no one, and nothing.

That was the situation for most of the world and especially the United States. Having to transition from a normal life, when you would hug someone to no hug at all. It's like you were trapped in your room and you couldn't go out. You had nothing to do but to

SEE COOPER MIDDLE SCHOOL,
PAGE 11

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now.



VDH VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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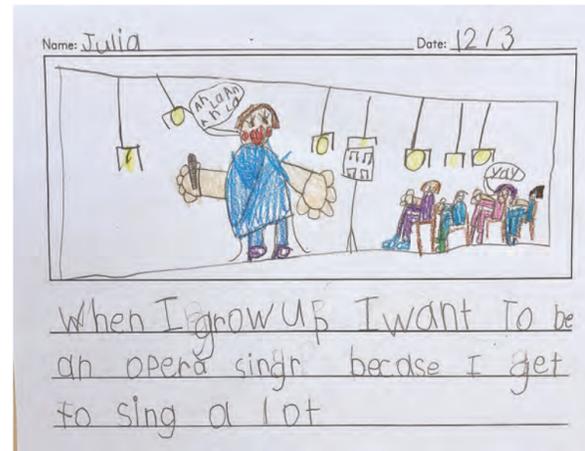


@vaccinatevirginia

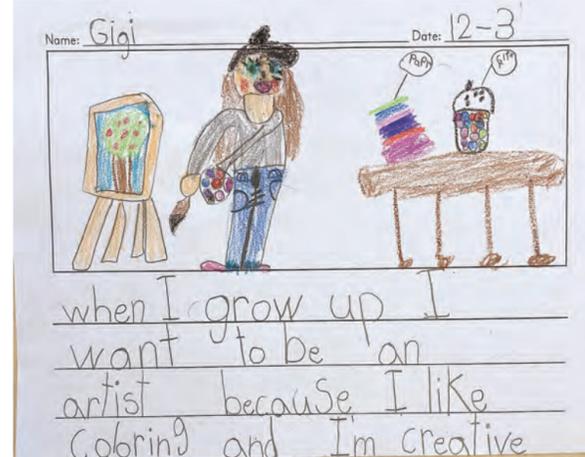
Protect the ones you love,
get vaccinated
now.

VDH VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

HAYCOCK ELEMENTARY



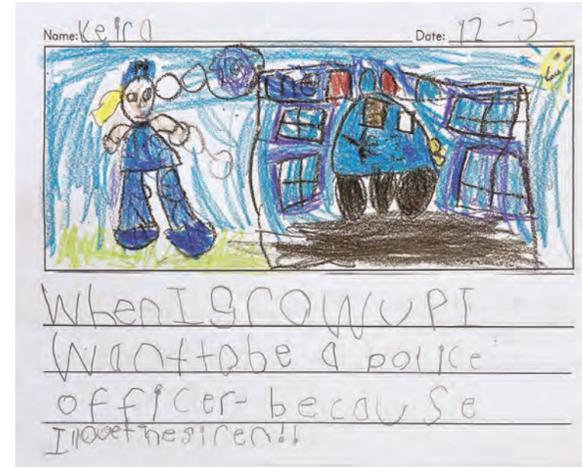
Julia Kruger, Kindergarten at Haycock Elementary, Falls Church. Her teacher is Leah Yoo. The artist / author is 5 years old



Gigi Quinn, Kindergarten at Haycock Elementary, Falls Church. Her teacher is Leah Yoo. The artist / author is 5 years old



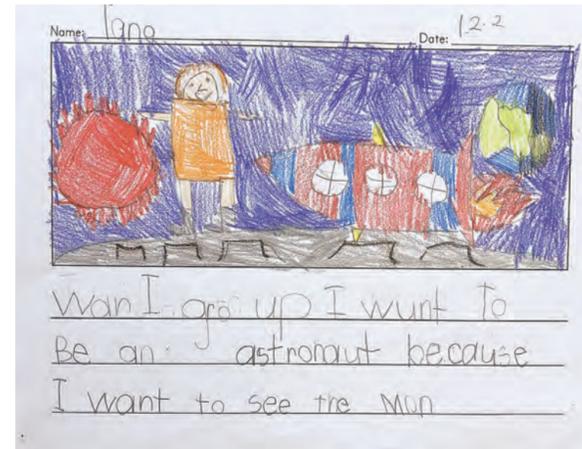
"My Favorite Time after School" by Ella Huang, 6, Grade 1, Laurel Ridge Elementary, Vienna



Keira Maguire, Kindergarten at Haycock Elementary, Falls Church. Her teacher is Leah Yoo. The artist / author is 5 years old
*The text reads- "When I grow up I want to be a police officer because I love the siren!!"



Colt Sweeny, Kindergarten at Haycock Elementary, Falls Church. His teacher is Leah Yoo. The artist / author is 6 years old
*The text reads: "When I grow up I want to be a football player."



Tang Guo, Kindergarten at Haycock Elementary, Falls Church. Her teacher is Leah Yoo. The artist / author is 5 years old!
*The text reads- "When I grow up I want to be an astronaut because I want to see the moon."



Clara Liang, 2nd grade



Andrew Zhu, 4th grade



Nadia Ahmad, 6th grade



Nikitha Rajesh, 6th grade



Emma Ford, Kindergarten

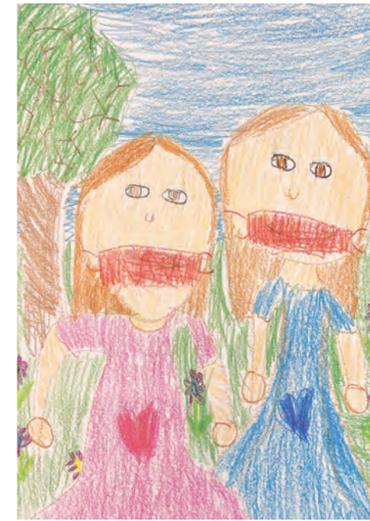


Ainsley Fath (Grade 3)

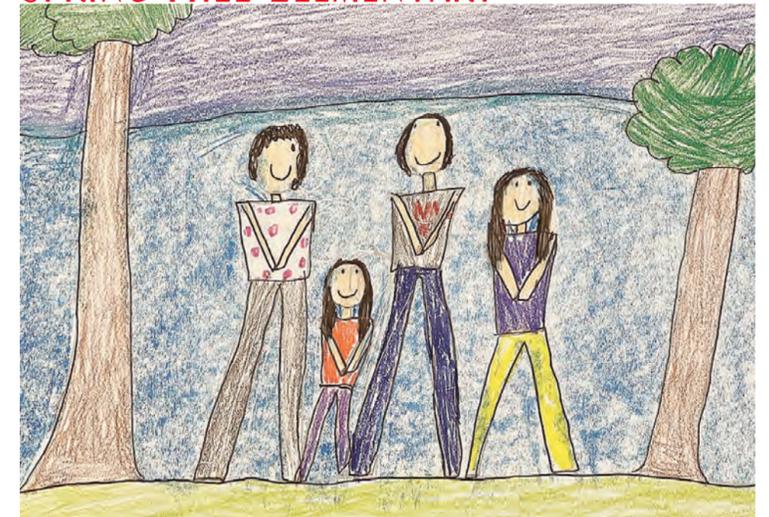


Kaylee Yin (grade 1)

SPRING HILL ELEMENTARY



Clara Chen



Katie Lee



Ella Chan



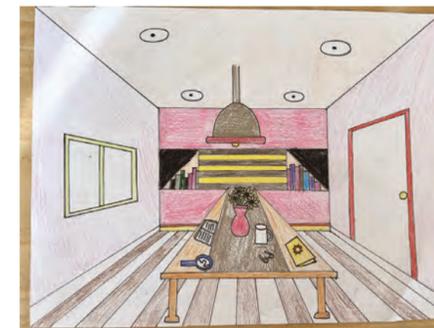
Liam Holden



Nadia Naji



Olivia Townend



Emma Tao (Grade 6)



Liam Lim (Kindergarten)



Maddy Ross (Grade 4)

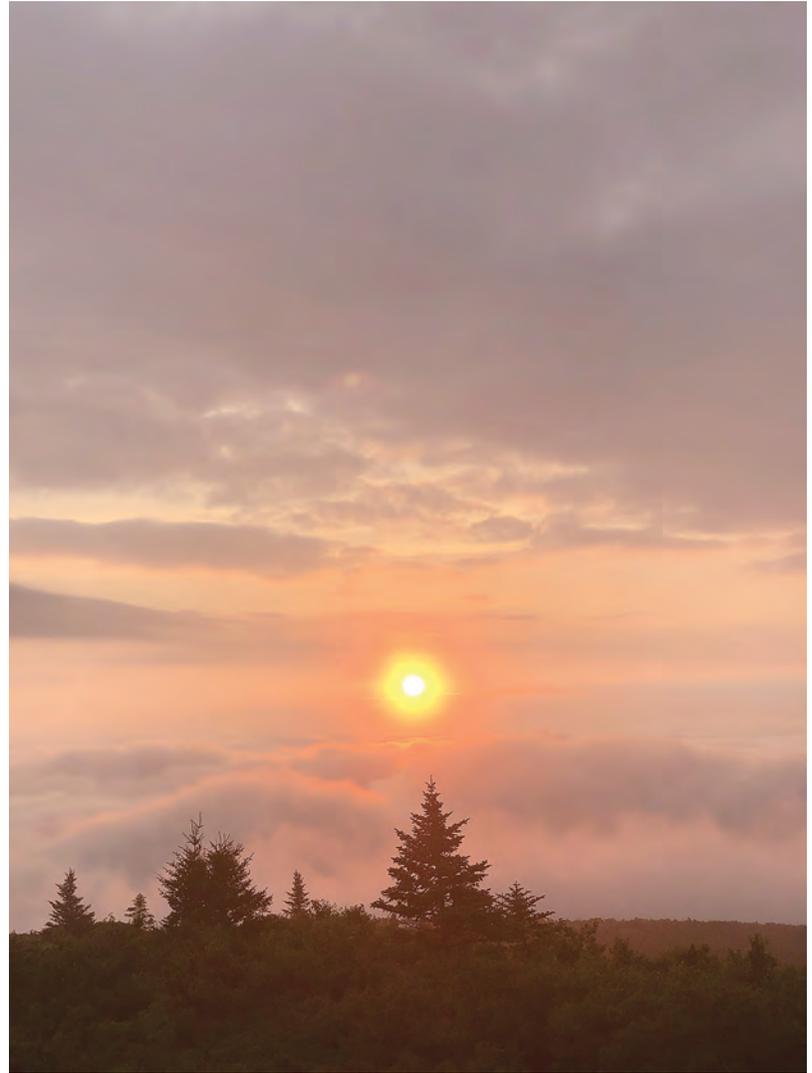


Vasilisa Parshina (grade 5)

MCLEAN HIGH SCHOOL



Maddie Lewin: 11th grade, Falls Church



Maddie Lewin: 10th grade, Vienna



Parth Sahasrabudhe: 12th grade, McLean



Liz Nedelescu

COOPER MIDDLE SCHOOL

FROM PAGE 7

stare out the window and gaze at the sun shining down on the grass right after it rained. The grass would be glistening with the beautiful rain drops with the reflection of the sun shining down. Pressure was on many families, citizens, and individuals to stay safe.

When school started everything changed. People were trying to figure out how to get kids back to school so their parents wouldn't be annoyed with them at the end of the day. When in person learning finally came, joy in kids eyes lit up like fireworks. Shooting up into the air and exploding with joy. Finally they were able to see their friends again. They could have the childhood that they deserve. That doesn't mean that the U.S could be the way it used to be before covid. Kids still had to take precautions and be distant around others. Their family had to put trust in their child's school and have hope that their kid won't get covid.

Lessons From Quarantine

DILLON FITZPATRICK
AGE 12, 7TH GRADE
MCLEAN, VA
MRS. BOVENZI, COOPER MIDDLE SCHOOL

Have you learned any lessons from the pandemic? One lesson that I learned from the pandemic is to think about more than just yourself. With the devastating global effects of the coronavirus, we saw how bad it could get if a mutant virus was introduced into today's modern world. We saw COVID-19 wreak terrible havoc on the human race, and we will never forget the effects that it has on us.

At this point, COVID is a fact of life, but during quarantine, we would see some people wearing masks and think, Should we do that? We still had no idea when, or if, this madness would end. Nobody had or has any idea when, or if things would go back to "normal", and all we can think about were the potential consequences on ourselves instead of the world, instead of our friends, and sometimes even instead of our family. But at times like the pandemic, it is human instinct to think only about ourselves, which is okay sometimes. But because of quarantine, we learned to look at the bigger picture, which is valuable to all of us. We saw the numbers of deaths on the news, we heard about how our grandparents and our parents could be affected, and we saw that there is more than just ourselves.

Now, I'm not saying that the effects of the pandemic were positive. We lost so many people, and

we lost parts of ourselves, too. But we need to prevent that, whether it is by wearing a mask, staying socially distant, or getting our children and grandparents vaccinated. Even though the times are tough, we can get through them.

Past, Present, and Future Me

NOOR SAMARAH
13, 8TH GRADE
GREAT FALLS
MRS. BOVENZI, COOPER MIDDLE SCHOOL

Imagining the future has always been a habit of mine. Sometimes I would imagine far away things like college, but other times, I would think about closer events, such as life after COVID-19.

I can imagine myself in the future, reading my kids a bedtime story on the night before the first day of school. One of them would ask about quarantine and I would answer. I would answer with the confidence that I gained from 2021.

"COVID-19 was a virus that forced people to change the way they live. It made people have to hide in the safety of their homes just so they could protect their family. That's what my entire family had to do, actually, that's what everyone had to do."

"When school started, the only way that I could meet my teachers was when I was looking at my laptop. We had something called 'Zoom' which allowed me to call my teachers and still see their faces. I spent one year using Zoom so that I could learn," I will explain to my child.

"Then in 2021, my next year of school started. COVID-19 was not as bad as it used to be, and I was allowed to go to normal school! The only bad thing is that I had to wear a mask which protected me from any disease. Even though everyone in school had to cover half of their face, I still made many friends, just like you will on your first day of school!" I will say to my kid.

Even though my middle school life was tough in the beginning, I pushed through and now I am confident, happy, and ready for more obstacles.

To end my conversation with my child, I will say the most important thing I have learned from middle school, "Always remember that we need to keep moving forward, even if the road is bumpy."

SEE COOPER MIDDLE SCHOOL,
PAGE 14



Public Notice

Updated weight limits on Virginia bridges and culverts

In accord with state and federal law, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) has imposed new or changed existing weight restrictions and installed new signage indicating the updated weight restrictions on the following bridges and culverts (structures) in Virginia within the last 30 days.

Jurisdiction	Structure ID	Route	Structure Name	Structure	Posted Date
MONTGOMERY	12355	787	DRY VALLEY RD./ROUTE 787	MEADOW CREEK	10/28/2021
DINWIDDIE	6063	631	CLAIRBORNE RD.	HATCHER RUN	10/23/2021
CARROLL	4640	620	FOREST OAK RD./ROUTE 620	CROOKED CREEK	10/22/2021
SCOTT	16924	796	GILLENWATER LOOP	BIG MOCCASIN CREEK	10/20/2021
LUNENBURG	11609	626	DOUBLE BRIDGES RD.	LEDBETTER CREEK	10/12/2021

The list above is not a comprehensive list of all structures with weight restrictions in the Commonwealth, but shows only structures that have new or changed weight restrictions within the last 30 days. The list contains only basic structure identification and location information and the date the new or changed weight restriction and signage became effective.

For a full listing of all bridge and culvert weight restrictions with detailed information about specific structures, including location data and actual weight limits, visit <https://www.virginiadot.org> and navigate to Info Center/Trucking Resources. This page references a posted structures report and a GIS map tool that contain detailed information about restricted structures in Virginia. To receive email notifications regarding new or updated weight restrictions for structures statewide, complete the sign-up form on the web page.

Notices regarding bridges and culverts with new or updated weight restrictions are published monthly by VDOT. For additional information or questions, please contact, haulingpermits@vdot.virginia.gov.

The Virginia Department of Transportation is committed to ensuring that no person is excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any of its programs or activities on the basis of race, color, or national origin, as protected by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. If you need further information on VDOT's Title VI Program or special assistance for persons with disabilities or limited English proficiency, please contact the Virginia Department of Transportation's Title VI Program Specialist at 804-786-2730.

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Cellists Amiliya Smith, Michael Dzwonczyk, and Nicolas Kristensen of the Langley Philharmonic Orchestra perform Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Strings.



The Langley Concert Orchestra performs *Once Upon a December*, from *Anastasia*, with clips of the animated film projected in the background.

An Evening in Moscow

Langley High School Orchestra presents *Russian Winter Dreams*

BY ERIKA LI
SENIOR, LANGLEY HS

On Tuesday, Dec. 7, the Langley High School Orchestra took the stage for an evening of Russian Winter Dreams, showcasing the vibrant music of Russia. Audience members were transported to places in Russia far and wide, from the idyllic countryside to the ballrooms of the historic Winter Palace. The Symphonic Orchestra, comprised of junior and senior musicians, opened the night with *March Slav* by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky, a nationalistic and poetic piece written about the Serbian-Ottoman War. Next came *Waltz No. 2*, written by Dmitri Shostakovich, a Soviet-era piece with a haunting main melody, and the *Dance of the Tumblers*, an excerpt from Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's opera, *The Snow Maiden*.

The freshman and sophomore players of the Concert Orchestra continued the lively tunes with *Postcards from Russia*, a compilation of Russian folk songs, arranged by Carrie Lane Gruselle. The next piece was Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*, an overture based on Shakespeare's iconic play, rich in storytelling and imagery.

A standout from the night was the rendition of *Once Upon a December*, arranged by Bob Cerulli, the well-loved main theme of the Disney film *Anastasia*. During the piece, clips of the animation were projected on the stage, creating an immersive experience for audience members. Michael Dzwonczyk, a junior cellist in the Philharmonic Orchestra commented, "It was interesting to see the



The Langley Philharmonic Orchestra plays *A Mad Russian Christmas*, in a festive and energetic end to the concert.

wide variety of Russian music played by the different groups."

Finally, the Philharmonic Orchestra began their performance, starting with the *Waltz and Tema Russo* movements of Tchaikovsky's *Serenade for Strings*. They then closed off the night on a high note, performing *Mad Russian's Christmas*, an arrangement of melodies by the Trans-Siberian Orchestra of Tchaikovsky's classic ballet, the *Nutcracker*. The piece had an added bit of modern flair, with electric bass, guitar, and drums all accompanying the orchestra.

The Langley Orchestra showcased many facets of the lively music of Russia, from nationalistic marches to dances to well-known melodies with a modern twist. Yet it wasn't just music that infused Russian culture into the evening. Orchestra members ate Russian *piroshkis* during the pre-concert banquet

and student pianists performed pieces by the likes of Prokofiev and Rachmaninoff at the reception. Student speakers seamlessly wove between performances, providing background and commentary on each piece. Many orchestra members and students in Langley's flagship Russian language program introduced themselves and recited poetry in Russian, some even dressed in traditional attire.

"I think it was really cool that Russian culture was incorporated into our concert," said Megan Faust, a senior violinist in the Symphonic Orchestra. "I learned about the music and also their language and history."

The sense of warmth and community was strong at the concert, especially with a tribute to former Spring Hill Elementary School orchestra teacher Ruth Donahue. Donahue taught at the Langley feeder school for over

PHOTOS BY JEN DZWONCZYK



Senior violinist Daewa Zaheer of the Langley Symphonic Orchestra wears traditional Russian clothing as she provides historical background on Russian composers and their music.

three decades, inspiring thousands of students to continue in the strings program, before recently retiring. Spring Hill graduates in Langley's orchestra performed under Donahue's conducting one last time with *Irish Washerwoman*, one of Donahue's orchestra traditions, where students warm up with a catchy tune at progressively faster speeds.

Langley Orchestra's concerts aim to inspire, entertain, and unite. Students and audience members alike were whisked away into the magical world of *Russian Winter Dreams*, making for both a festive and captivating evening of music

Langley Choral Department Celebrates Return of Renaissance Feaste

The Langley High School Choral Department celebrated the return of the hopefully-back-to-annual Renaissance Feaste last Friday and Saturday, Dec. 3 and 4 to a sold-out crowd. This Langley tradition is a highlight of the performance calendar, so bringing it back (with some Covid adjustments) has brought joy to many, perhaps the performers most of all, whose enthusiasm showed in every word and note.

Tickets were limited to 124 fortunate guests per night, masked when not eating, and the event sold out quickly. The performance was lauded by one attendee, a former professional musician, as “professional quality with the enthusiasm that only teens could provide.” Several of the solo turns were so beautiful that they brought tears to eyes – and not just those of the singer’s parents.

The journey back to Merrie Olde England featured the 18-member Langley Madrigals Choir, singing over 25 festive, seasonal songs in a variety of languages in addition to several traditional Madrigals

songs, all of which involve intricate inter-linked parts, sung without accompaniment. It also included performers from other choirs, including over 30 students in Treble, Select Treble, Concert Choir, and the Cooper Middle School Choir, serenading the audience with their beautiful renditions of a range of carols.

In addition, 8 Minstrels from other choirs, 6 talented Pages, and 2 jesters entertained the crowd. Songs performed ranged from popular holiday carols like “Deck the Halls,” “Good King Wenceslas” and “We Wish You a Merry Christmas,” to the festive “Masters in This Hall.”

All of the performers were dressed in bright and beautiful traditional Renaissance costumes, with the very 2021 addition of masks when not on stage. “Langley Halle” was decorated as a Medieval Castle for the holiday season, and the whole event was designed to be period-appropriate, from the jesters to the joking performers, dialogue both suggesting and explaining songs, and plenty of food. The “Book on Curtasye” was read via scroll, admonishing guests not to “wype their greezy fingers on theyre beardes” or to otherwise “disgust theyre table companions.” After the “traditional” parade of the Wassail bowl, the Boar’s Head (luckily not a real boar’s head), and then the



Shouts of “Wassail” were heard throughout the Halle as the Madrigals toasted to all and sundry.



PHOTOS BY BLAKE TIPPENS PHOTOGRAPHY OF GREAT FALLS



Dr. Lambert with the graduating seniors of the Madrigals.



The Minstrels provided beautiful carols as the audience entered the Halle as well as between courses.



The Pages kept the event moving with their smiles and antics.

Flaming Figgie Pudding (luckily not actually flaming), the feast was served. Guests enjoyed individually covered plates of Boston Market sliced turkey, mashed potatoes, broccoli, and apple pie (affectionately referred to by the performers as “Figgie Pudding.”)

This was a particularly special time to bring back The Feaste, as it is the 20th year that the Langley Choirs have been led by Dr. Mac L. Lambert, Jr. Dr. Lambert commented, “When I think about this year’s Renaissance Feaste, I am overwhelmed at the leadership skills and dedication shown by all the students in the choir department, as well as the support shown by the parents to put on such a huge event. After a year with no live performances, I was very worried that it might

not happen, but everyone pulled together and worked really hard to make it a highlight of the school year!”

Langley Choral Guild President Kim Buckingham, in her eighth consecutive year as a choir parent, has this to say about “Doc” Lambert. “I have seen Doc’s dedication to the kids and the program first hand over the years. My twin girls, Sarah and Emily, who graduated in 2018, and my son Mike who will graduate in the spring took choir with Doc all through high school. Between them all, they have experienced and enjoyed all six choirs offered at Langley. His choirs consistently receive superior ratings in competitions and continue to wow at performances. On the Spring trip to France in 2016, the mayor of a small town (Honfleur) that host-

ed a performance even gave him a key to the town. The Renaissance Feaste that Doc brought to Langley is evidence of his commitment and hard work and how he inspires his students to do the same. As a parent of a senior, it was wonderful to bring back Feaste, and it was extra special that it was Doc’s 20th.”

Langley Senior Alexander Rubin sings Dr. Lambert’s praises (pun intended.) “During virtual school, Doc took time out of class to individually ask each of us how we were doing and try to help everyone have a little stress as possible. He cares about every member, which is part of why Doc somehow produces a product that is far greater than the sum of its parts. While there is certainly no lack of talent in Langley Choir, a choir cannot be great without every member. Doc creates such a feeling of camaraderie and unity among the choirs, and it brings everyone closer together both inside and outside of class. There is a reason the Langley Choir trophy case is running out of room, and that reason is Doc Lambert. He has kept the program alive, welcoming, rewarding, exciting, and unbelievably successful for 20 years.”

The excellent teaching, talent and camaraderie showed during the Renaissance Feaste. What a wonderful event.

My Voice

ELLA ZHANG

13 yrs. old, Grade 8

GREAT FALLS
MRS. BOVENZI, COOPER MIDDLE
SCHOOL

I always had trouble talking in front of people. Something about it would make my hands shake uncontrollably, my face turn a ruby red, and my voice retreat into a whisper.

In the sixth grade, I had to give a speech for a school event. It was my first time speaking in front of a large audience. I repeated my speech over and over: in front of my mirror, to my family, and in my head.

But even with so much practice, on that dreaded day, I couldn't calm my rapidly beating heart. My sweaty hands grabbed the microphone. The audience grew quiet, the only sound being worries buzzing around in my head.

A huge lump started to form in my throat. I was going to give up, about to throw the microphone on the ground and sprint off the stage in tears. Suddenly, I heard a voice in the audience cheer, "You can do it!"

With this short but compelling reassurance, I finally relaxed and a tiny smile spread across my face. My inhibitions ebbed and I began my memorized part. As I heard my voice, I found that it wasn't shaky like before, but confident and clear. After I finished and walked off the stage, the warm applause from the audience filled me with an incomparable feeling of deep pride.

Throughout my life, I had to be brave before. When I put on my braces, when I tried cliff-jumping, even when I stood up to a bully. However, my most courageous moment wasn't any of them. It was having the faith in myself to speak up.

With a kind stranger's support, I found my voice. You have a voice too, a powerful weapon, and you have the courage in you to use it.

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PHOTO BY SABRINA ANWAH/COURTESY MCLEAN COMMUNITY CENTER

David Siegel (left seated) experiencing the virtual reality of “Traveling While Black” as Daniel Singh (right standing), MCC Executive Director provides guidance.

Exploring Black America Past and Present

Virtual Reality experience of “Traveling While Black” at McLean Community Center.

BY DAVID SIEGEL
THE CONNECTION

In a one-of-a-kind Virtual Reality experience, participants will not be passive onlookers in their immersion into 360° footage of events and conversations of “Traveling While Black.”

“Traveling While Black” is an intimate 20 minute experience connecting the past to current times.

It all begins when patrons don headsets and Virtual Reality (VR) gear while seated at a replica of DC’s famous Ben’s Chili Bowl that has been fabricated and set in the McLean Community Center lobby. Soon events of decades in the past and of the right now, both tragic and uplifting, unfold.

Directed by Academy Award recipient Roger Ross Williams, “Traveling While Black” melds VR technology and art with powerful, palpable social justice issues. “We are proud to present this first virtual reality exhibit in our center and will be hosting several discussions to help us consider the different questions this exhibit raises,” said Daniel Singh, McLean Community Center Executive Director.

“As we near Martin Luther King Day and Black History Month events, we hope our patrons will take the time to come learn with us and become change agents in creating the world that Dr. King envisioned in his ‘I Have a Dream’ speech.” added Singh.

The deeply moving production depicts dangers and difficulties that African Americans have had to navigate. Some of the VR experience that will be witnessed

include sitting at the back of bus while traveling through the segregated South. Viewers learn about the “Green Book” that helped answer questions such as will there be a place for Black people to eat or go to the bathroom?

There are profound conversations of Civil Rights activist Courtland Cox and Ben’s Chili Bowl co-founder Virginia Ali as they sit across a small table at Ben’s Chili Bowl. Or the intense, heartbreaking, soft-spoken words of Samaria Rice, mother of young son Tamir who was killed by police.

As for the title; “Traveling While black” it is “a term people use to illustrate that in America when you are Black and you are going from point A to point B, you are always at risk.” said Williams.

In heartfelt closing remarks, Dranesville District Supervisor John Foust and Fairfax County Executive Bryan Hill spoke of the powerful, essential message of “Traveling While Black” that McLean Community Center participants can bear witness to.

WHERE AND WHEN: Virtual Reality Experience “Traveling While Black” at McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Avenue, McLean, Virginia 22101. On exhibit in McLean Community Center’s lobby from Friday, Dec. 15, 2021 to Saturday, Feb. 12, 2022. Free. Patrons can sign up for hour-long appointments Wednesday through Saturday, Noon to 8 p.m. and Sundays, Noon to 6 p.m. For detailed information visit www.mcleancenter.org. Note: Masks are required at the McLean Community Center.

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Indulge Me And/or Indulge Me



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Give me whatever I want and/or let me be however I want. I have cancer and if you don’t like it? Raspberries. I remember what a friend told me soon after I was diagnosed with cancer: “It’s all about you now, Kenny.” And it’s friendly advice I’ve shared/passed on to other newly cancer “diagnosees.” And it’s always been received with such appreciation as if newly diagnosed cancer patients need a sort of permission to be more concerned about themselves than about others.

For many, it’s a bit of an unnatural position: to concern yourself with yourself. But I must tell you, when that hammer is dropped that you’ve been diagnosed with cancer, your world shrinks. It’s almost impossible to think of anything else. You just don’t know if something you do or don’t do will affect your cancer/life expectancy. And so, cancer becomes the center of your universe. Moreover, you wonder if what you normally do: eat, drink, be happy, be sad, really matters to the outcome of your treatment.

I mean, it’s not as if there’s a dos and don’ts handbook for newly diagnosed cancer patients with easy-to-follow instructions for who to call/where to go for who knows what. And since you’ve been diagnosed with an extremely serious disease, you just as soon not get your homework assignments wrong. When your life is snatched away and/or your world is turned inside out/upside down, you really don’t want to be the cause of your own demise. For cancer, there’s hardly any guarantees. Survival is a long way from six-hour chemotherapy sessions every three weeks and scans every three months. Being a cancer patient is very hands-on – by you and/or the medical staff, so you must pay attention. To say your life might depend on it might be a bit much but it’s not totally wrong. Once you get diagnosed into the cancer world, everything about your health seems to lead to the oncology department.

Having to deal with this unexpected/new centrality in your life, a life which, depending on the type and staging of your cancer, you may be in danger, is scary as hell. And if that’s the case, the disease may very well be in control and this ongoing fear/angst is the axis upon which your world now turns. Every action, reaction, “proaction,” is taken in the context of your having cancer. What it all means, what it all does, if and when you have to do it again or not, are all definite maybes. Your oncologist becomes your new best friend. You hang on his/her every word. To think that a person you had never previously met is now in charge of your life requires an acceptance of reality, possibly a grim reality, for which there may be no escape and worse, requires total compliance.

You bet I require kid gloves. You bet I require a wide berth. You bet I require anything my heart desires because learning from oncologist that you have a “terminal” diagnosis, is about as unsettling as it gets. Any port in a storm you might say? Heck, how about any port no matter the weather? If Bette Davis were alive today and had been a cancer patient, she might update her famous lament: “Being diagnosed with cancer ain’t no place for sissies.”

Kenny Lourie is an Advertising Representative for The Potomac Almanac & The Connection Newspapers.



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