Maggie Marsh, 6th Grade, Reston, Aldrin Elementary School, Mr. Baybrook.
Warmest Wishes for a Joyous Holiday Season and Happy New Year!

124 Whittier Circle, Falls Church
*GEORGEUS* 4BR/2.5BA townhouse on 3 finished levels in sought-after Whittier Park! The beautiful main level features a spacious living room with plantation shutters, separate dining area, and cozy family room adjacent to the kitchen with a gas fireplace. Gourmet kitchen includes granite countertops, ample storage space, and pantry. Large primary bedroom on the second level with sitting area, plus 2 walk-in closets, primary bath with soaking tub and frameless shower. 2nd bedroom or office with built-in shelves. The top level has 2 spacious bedrooms, hall bathroom, and laundry room. Private back patio and 2-car garage. FCC Schools!

2236 Highland Avenue, Falls Church
*BREATHTAKING* 3BR/2 full BA brick rambler on 2 finished levels—nestled in NATURE! Convenient to everything! Moments to West Falls Church Metro, this updated & meticulously maintained home features new paint, new LVP on the lower lvl. Lovely hardwoods on the main level; inviting living & dining rooms; fabulous natural light throughout the main level. Primary BR suite includes full bathroom, nicely sized additional BRs, LL with recreation room, den/office and access to garage, plus laundry room. Private backyard with shed. Haycock, Longfellow and McLean Schools!

1313 Merrie Ridge Road, McLean
*STUNNING COLONIAL* nestled on a private cul-de-sac in the coveted Dogwoods at Langley. This inviting home offers approximately 4800 sf, with 6 BR, 3BA, and 2 half BA. The gourmet kitchen features breakfast bar, ample cabinet storage, and eat-in breakfast area w/ skylight and deck. Primary BR w/ separate dressing area with tons of storage and ensuite; upper level has 4 add’l spacious BR’s with BA w/ soaking tub and luxury shower. LL features a large rec room w/ fireplace, 6th BR w/ spacious BA, and access to 2 car garage. Beautifully landscaped property with private expansive flagstone patio. McLean HS pyramid!

6631 Tucker Avenue
McLean 22101
$1,824,750

1562 Forest Villa Ln
McLean, 22101
$1,550,000

2336 N. Oak Street
Falls Church, 22046
$2,000,000

1639 Macon Street
McLean, 22101
$2,215,000

2204 Beacon Lane
Falls Church, 22043
$1,795,000

Curious what your home is worth? Call to chat with JD and Ed today!
The art and writing of Fairfax students is always a bright spot. We offer many thanks to the art teachers who guided these artists and compiled the art to appear here. You can find the other Children’s and Teens’ editions by going to http://www.connectionnewspapers.com/PDFs/ and then scrolling down to Children’s. Thanks for reading.

Now the Connection will be on a break until after the New Year, with our next publication appearing the week of Jan. 10.

In the meantime contact us, for advertising, contact debunk@connectionnewspapers.com or sales@connectionnewspapers.com. For the newsroom, contact editors@connectionnewspapers.com.

Welcome to the Children’s and Teens’ Connection 2023

Symanski, Homeschool, Great Falls, Artwork Title: “Remembering 2023”

Anthony Huang, 11, Grade 5, Vienna, Future of Space, color pencil, Louise Archer ES / Yun’s Art Studio, Vienna, Art Teacher: Yanshun Sui

Zac Lee, 10, 5th Grade, McLean, Kent Gardens Elementary School, McLean Artwork Title: Donut

Evelyn Kim, 15, Grade 10, Vienna, Food, Painting, James Madison High School, Allison Gong teacher at NYSA

Creative 3D Artwork: My Bricks Piano

Zac Lee, 10, 5th Grade, McLean, Kent Gardens Elementary School, McLean
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A New Year Deserves a New Chapter

Children's and Teens' Connection

Angelina Lin, 12, Vienna, Grade 7, Basis Independent School, Yan's Art School “Landscape”

Angelina Lin, 12, Vienna, Grade 7, Basis Independent School, Yan’s Art School “Drawing Friends”

Angelina Lin, 12, Vienna, Grade 7, Basis Independent School, Yan’s Art School “Dream Backyard”

Iris Xie, Grade 8, 13 years old, Vienna Mrs. Bovenzi, Cooper Middle School “Soaring to the Skies” The seagull soars away into the distant, but beautiful ocean landscape. This is one of many other beautiful scenes in nature.

Zoe Lee, 11, 6th Grade, McLean, Kent Gardens Elementary School, McLean Creative 3D Artwork: Balletino

Iris Xie, Grade 8, 13 years old, Vienna Mrs. Bovenzi, Cooper Middle School “Soaring to the Skies” The seagull soars away into the distant, but beautiful ocean landscape. This is one of many other beautiful scenes in nature.

Zoe Lee, 11, 6th Grade, McLean, Kent Gardens Elementary School, McLean Creative 3D Artwork: Balletino

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Zoe Lee, 11, 6th Grade, McLean, Kent Gardens Elementary School, McLean Creative 3D Artwork: Balletino
Meeting Wonder Woman
Siena Nguyen, 12, 7th Grade, McLean

Have you ever met a celebrity? Did you know that celebrity? Imagine meeting a celebrity at a young age and thinking, who is this lady? Or why is she talking to me? They expect you to know who they are since they’re famous but you view them as a complete stranger and have no clue who you’re talking to.

The winter season prevented me from playing outside which left me bored most of the time. Instead, I enjoyed going to the store and helping my dad as well as playing with my Uncle’s German Shepherd. Since Christmas was right around the corner, the store was packed!

I remembered a lady with long, wavy, dark hair walking into the store, but before she had the chance to reach the counter, she was swarmed by fans who were desperate for selfies and autographs. At that time I was only six and wasn’t familiar with many celebrities.

She introduced herself and told us her name was Lynda Carter. My dad seemed to know who she was. On the other hand, for me, that name didn’t ring a bell. She asked me if I knew who she was. I knew it would be rude if I didn’t reply so I just shook my head.

Since I didn’t know who Lynda Carter was, she educated me on which movies she starred in and a little bit about her background. She told me she was the original superhero Wonder Woman in the TV series! Lynda Carter also told me that she won Miss World USA in 1972. I hadn’t watched Wonder Woman before, but I surely was familiar with the character! I ended up taking a picture with her which became a keepsake of my first encounter with a celebrity.

Goodbye Chile, Hello America
Antonia Brenner, 12, 7th Grade, McLean

Since I was little, my dad has always talked about how much he would love to live in the US and I never cared about that because I learned English in kindergarten, and I thought it would be fun to have more friends there. I remember my dad saying, “Les gustaria irnos a vivir a estados unidos?” Which I always answered with the same thing “Me da lo mismo”.

On June 16, 2022, my parents gave me some news that would change my life. The first thing that came to my mind when they said to me that we are moving was, “Se que esto no le va a gustar a la Maida (my sister),” for some reason.

I said goodbye to my family, and friends, and on August 30th, 2022 I had my last day of school in Chile. I didn’t even know what to feel that day, it was really weird. And finally on September 5th, 2022 I had to say goodbye, and leave. Everyone’s eyes were watery at the airport with my family, but there was no way back.

When I stepped on the airplane, I was already missing them, but I had to do it, it’s not like it is my decision anyways. At 3:06 (exactly), I landed in DCA. Once I got my bags, I went outside and it was weird. The air was wet, and the sun was really bright. I got into my mom’s best friend’s car and went to her house.

Until now, I have learned that changes sometimes can be good and are worth the try. Also, you have to be open-minded and be open to try new things like places, meet new people, try new food, and more.

My Experience
Neel Jain, 13, Grade 8, Great Falls

Before I sat down on the soft, cool leather seat, I was struck by a sudden wave of nervousness. But now was not the time to back out.

I quickly gathered my nerves, and walked on to the stage, my steps echoing in the intricate Weill Hall. I looked at the audience, and I saw 200 people sitting in the hall, watching intently, and it was there that it hit me: I was playing at THE Carnegie Hall.

Filled with adrenaline, I sat down and began the great saga of Mozart’s greatest piece.

When my fingers danced over the keys, all my previous emotions disappeared. As Rondo Alla Turca filled the sounds of the Hall, I began to realize a sense of peace, a sense of exactly where I was. I thought, “No matter what, I have worked to get here, and I will show the audience why I am here today.”
December 20-26, 2023

Emma Yuan, 10 years old, 5th grade, City of Fairfax
Mosaic Elementary School, Vienna, Mr. Guzman, Art Teacher

Emma Yuan, Roaming Giant

Emma Yuan, Exploring the Future

Emma Yuan, Carnivorous Plant

Emma Yuan, Space Station

Sonia Cupala, 13 years old, 8th grade, Vienna
Mrs. Bovenzi, Cooper Middle School
“Standing Up Tall”

On this beautiful summer morning, these cone-flowers proudly stand up tall, showing off their natural beauty with pink petals and orange seeds standing out against the green stems. Rather than the petals flat out or up, these petals are pointed downwards, perfectly exposing the striking orange seeds in the center of the flower. These flowers are one of nature’s most beautiful artwork, nothing else looks like it!

Imaani Haque, 13, 8th, Great Falls
Mrs. Bovenzi, Cooper Middle School
“Fighting For Her Voice”

Raising her placard, Salma Qureshi (8th) was fighting for a spot to speak. At the second annual Model UN conference in Basis Independent School, she was representing Channing E. Phillips, who was a civil rights activist during the 1950s.

Photo by Alexa Kondilas, 8th, Great Falls
Mrs. Bovenzi, Cooper Middle School

TWO LIGHTS IN ONE INVESTIGATIVELY, Kate Wash turns on her black flash on her phone by the fire pit. Kate celebrated her birthday on Sept. 16 surrounded by friends and family around a bonfire. As friends and family stuck marshmallows in the pit and assembled their s'mores, Kate was more worried about her marshmallow, taking out her phone as a light source to see if she had burned it.

Kyler Liang, 12, Grade 7, McLean, Homeschool
Peach Blossom, Traditional Chinese Painting

Kyler Liang, 12, Grade 7, McLean, Homeschool
Glutinous Rice Dumpling, Traditional Chinese Painting

Emma Yuan, Traditional Chinese Painting
My Experience

I began to play louder and with passion, and the octaves were heard in every corner, the chords filled the air, the melody washed over the ears of everyone in the audience, the bass was shaking the gigantic, crystal chandeliers, and they glinted under their new light.

As I began to start playing the ending, I began to feel Mozart’s great vigor, his mind-set to go out with a bang, and never to give up.

When the last chord echoed through the hall, the audience was silent. Then...

There was a clap.

And another.

And another.

Until the hands of the audience were heard in every wall of the stage.

Faced by this applause, I stood still for a moment, then bowed. But as I looked up, a pair of eyes caught my eye. I looked closely, and there was my mother, sitting alongside my father and my little brother, all looking at me with the most proud expressions on their faces.

I felt a sudden urge of thankfulness for everything my family had done to keep my dream alive.

I smiled, and exited the stage with happiness and belief.

I just played piano at Carnegie Hall!

Self Respect

Stella Thompson, 12, 7th grade, Vienna

Self respect lets us practice respecting others. If you can’t take care of yourself, you definitely can’t take care of other people. How can someone care for others without caring for themselves? You need to respect others, right? Then why not respect yourself? You shove your feelings down but encourage others to let it all out. Others might say it’s putting your friends first. I say it’s disrespecting yourself.

Back when I was in sixth grade, I noticed that all my other friends would wear makeup to school. I wanted to be like everyone else and started wearing mascara to school as well. Eventually I started wearing eyeliner, blush, and concealer. I felt better about myself as if I was showing my true self. No one pointed out or noticed the change.

They never treated me differently. I was still the same person. I started wearing makeup for myself because I wanted to, because I chose to. You should not have to change who you are to be liked. People didn’t think of me as any more or less of a person than before. I’m still me, just wearing mascara now.

Beauty standards constantly change. At least at one point in time on earth, your features would have made you be considered as the most beautiful person in the world. One thing might be considered “on trend” now, but it’s going to be out of style next year. You should embrace your features, because they are what make you beautiful.

When you look in the mirror, don’t point out your flaws, point out the things that make you different and unique. Look at pictures of yourself from kindergarten or when you were younger. Remember that they are beautiful and they are you, and you don’t have to change a thing to be pretty.

A Lesson I Learned by Art

Thomas Incule, 12, Grade 7, McLean

Have you ever thought something is hard because someone said it was? When people say something is hard, it may not necessarily be hard to you. Trust yourself. I thought watercolor painting was really hard and a lot of people still say it’s hard to learn. I abandoned watercolor after trying it once because it was hard, at first. But I tried again and quickly got adept at it.

Watercolor is hard because if you want to fix something, you have to do it quickly while the water hasn’t dried. Then you have to wait even longer until the paper is fully dry or else you’ll ruin your work. The water is already drying and if you put your brush back on it, it will rub part of the paper off. It’s sometimes really annoying.

Watercolor is still my favorite form of art. I learned that I can do a lot more if I put my mind to it. I love art because it lets me make anything I want. My writing is similar to my watercolor paintings. I think that writing is challenging at first. I even criticize the final product, but I know that I did a satisfactory job in the end, way better than I think.

I jumped onto my computer while the leaves outside were falling with shades of orange and brown. All the magnificent paintings I wished I could complete stared back at me. The sounds of clicking begin as I search the web. Oh! Perfect. A step by step painting website.

I pulled out a paint brush and some acrylics that had long been forgotten in a dark bin. My brushes swish across the surface of the white canvas. Color covers the bleak background and I’m swept into another world.

How easy this is when I thought I would never be able to do this. With some practice and a lot of time, I might be able to do it. One day paint one of those images staring back at me. But when I do, it will be the creation I made, the one I thought I could never do.

The Truth

Wade Cai, 12, 7th grade, McLean

Do you dislike school? My 5th grade self would immediately say, “Yes!” to that question.

However, throughout elementary school, I always hated showing up to school no matter what day it was. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, doesn’t matter, they were all dreadful.

The loud chattering of elementary schoolers absorbed into my ear each time I entered that front door, the dim yellow lighting and posters all over the school trying to make it seem like a better place.

How I study for hours upon hours for tests just for an 87% to be shoved into your face. The disappointment and shame of being handed that sheet of paper. Envy the students who barely study and get a higher score.
The Great Space Light Race!
by Adrian Yambing
6th Grade
Aldrin Elementary
Mr. O’Day’s Class

We have one goal this Christmas Eve,
To have astronauts see us from space.
But our next-door neighbors want to get noticed first,
So let us all call it a race!

The neighbors grab their bright lights from their roof.
We grab lights from our garage.
So we decided to get revenge,
But us parents were eating Christmas bolo-gna.

Today is the day I’ve been dreading all year.
I grumbled in my head as I slowly drifted off to sleep.

I heard one of the people yell.
Only a little bit left, I thought as some of the plates started to disappear.
One by one they were to be washed.
One by one I started to regain feeling in my legs.
It was finally over,
One by one they went to be washed.

Thanksgiving.
I saw that the cooking had started,
and fell.

I could feel the decorations being strung around and on top of me,
I could almost taste the mashed potatoes,

We lit all of our lights up,
and took our mini decorative penguins as

The best part was that after they left.

We were also quite surprised!
A few minutes later it seemed as though we could see the sun by looking
at our house.

So we decided to get revenge,

And even though neither of us won,

I did want to be stained with gravy or dozed with ice water.

We invited them over to dinner,
And on plates.

We were also quite surprised!
A few minutes later it seemed as though we could see the sun by looking
at our house.

We invited them over to dinner,
And I made some pumpkin pie.

“Dessert time!” I heard one of the people yell.
Only a little bit left, I thought as some of the plates started to disappear.

I heard one of the people yell.
Only a little bit left, I thought as some of the plates started to disappear.

I smelled the gravy being mixed up,
I could feel the decorations being strung around and on top of me,
I could almost taste the mashed potatoes,

We invited them over to dinner,
And made some pumpkin pie.

We invited them over to dinner,
And made some pumpkin pie.

I could almost taste the mashed potatoes,
I could feel the decorations being strung around and on top of me,
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I could almost taste the mashed potatoes,

I heard one of the people yell.
Only a little bit left, I thought as some of the plates started to disappear.

I smelled the gravy being mixed up,
I could feel the decorations being strung around and on top of me,
I could almost taste the mashed potatoes,
But then when he was in the middle of the Macarena He turned around. And saw all the meat. And then he saw the dead, frozen, turkey in the freezer. He finally realized: He was in the meat section. He stopped gobbling. He stopped celebrating. Ted needed to get out of there. And fast. He started making his way to the door but then a man walked into the room. He had an evil smile on his face. He said, “Hello, dinner.” That did not sound like something happy. Or good, And definitely not something a turkey wants to hear on Thanksgiving. Ted backed up but then realized he was already against the wall. He started looking around the room for ways to escape Mr. Evil here. And then he saw a three-footish tall countertop that didn’t have any dead meat on it. Ted had never been able to fly very high. He could never seem to flap his wings hard enough. He didn’t know if he could make it all the way up there. But it looked like he had no choice. Mr. Evil was closing in on him. He took a deep breath. One, Two, Three, ... JUMP! Ted took the highest leap he has ever made, and flapped his wings as hard as he could and... He made it! He lept onto the counter without any dead meat on it and dodged Mr. Evil’s attempt to grab him by the leg. He raced out of there as fast as he could and never returned again. He waddled back into his forest and finally, Ted was safe at last.

THE END!

Thanksgiving Dinner
By Austin Ford
6th Grade
Mr. O’Day’s Class
Aldrin Elementary

Mashed potatoes
And steaming, hot gravy. It’s really a sight.
To be seen
As the turkey
Is freed from
its prison
In the oven.
And the gravy
Is poured into
A shiny and Festive gravy boat
Mashed potatoes
Are scooped
And shoved
Into hungry mouths
Stuffing is served
And rolls are passed
It’s really Rad.

The Christmas Trap
By Avery Salcedo
6th Grade
Mr. O’Day’s Class
Aldrin Elementary

Hi! Hi! Ho! Going down the chimney, All covered in snow, With all the presents Tied up in a bow. I see the goodbyes Lying on the table
Ahh! The cookies!
Then I look down
And I see a note.
“Let’s see what they wrote,” I say quietly.

NOTE:
Hey Santa
I know this is lame,
But how did you get into
Our house
When your belly is so, well...
Big and jolly?
And, sorry for being greedy
Because I don’t want to make a scene,
I think I earned one
With everything that I’ve done. I know you’re reading my letter now, And you might be thinking how Do I know that you’re reading? Just check under this table. See me wavering?

BOO! Boo!
There is no one here?
Nothing in sight.
Santa is just gone
And all is clear.

“It’s going to take more than that to catch me!
— Merry Christmas!”
-Santa

Flowers
By Eliana Frey

Pretty or ugly
Big or small
Fat petals or skinny petals
In a tree or a pot
Dead or alive
Eaten or not eaten
Wrinkly or smooth
Nectar or no nectar
It all depends
If you’re stepped on them or not...

Children’s and Teens’ Connection
Aldrin Elementary School
Reston, VA,
Fairfax County Public Schools
From Page 8
That have been crying to see the light of day
Out from the crusty attic.
Getting them out.
Only to realize
That the games are too dirty and broken to play.

We came down from the attic,
Sleepy and tired.
We dozed off to sleep
Like koalas
Cuddled up in our beds.
I dreamt about this moment.
“Until next time”
I said while I slumbered.

Ted the Terrified Turkey
by Amaya Garcia-Gettmann
6th Grade
Mr. O’Day’s Class
Aldrin Elementary

Ted the Turkey takes the time of Thanksgiving terrifyingly. All because of Tod the Tender Tast -
Thanksgiving terrifically terrifyingly.

Our story begins in a forest.
A forest with a turkey.
And celebrating

It was November 23rd.
And guess what?
A forest with a turkey.

And this is how it began.
A horrible day.
Like, a terrible,
I’m not even joking.
A horrible day.

This turkey was having
Getting them out,
That the games are too dirty and

And eventually he ran into
He is a total scaredy-cat.)

So he kept running.
He had reached the end.
He had reached the wall.

But thanksgiving family reunions
Only to realize
That have been crying to see the

Ted barely dodged the attack of a

And fast.
He started making his way to the door
And then he saw
A three-footish tall countertop
That didn’t have any dead meat on it.

He turned around.
Out from the crusty attic.
Getting them out.
Only to realize
That the games are too dirty and broken to play.

It all depends
If you’re stepped on them or not...
The Court Of Hypocrites

I match appearance and stereotype
And bring them to my court to judge
Jury of uncertainty doubts the findings
Only for a new witness of fallacy to come
And reaffirm the disgrace and inequity
With no mercy and no heed to justice
I strike the hammer down with flippant resolve

By Student: Ryan Chun
Age: 17
Grade: Junior, 11th Grade
Town of Residence: Vienna

Laura Yang, 12, Grade 7, Oakton
Plant Topia, acrylic on canvas
Sui Art Studio, Vienna, Va, Yan Sui, art teacher

Nora Yuan
8 years old
3rd grade
City of Fairfax
Mosaic Elementary School, Vienna
Ms. Kwon, Art Teacher

"The Court Of Hypocrites" by Student
"The Giant" by Nora Yuan, 8 years old, 3rd grade
"My Library" by Nora Yuan, 8 years old, 3rd grade
"Living in Space" by Nora Yuan, 8 years old, 3rd grade
The Truth

Instead of giving up and becoming an apathetic student, I knew I could do better.

I plodded all the looks I was given each time I asked a question, even with the uneasy feeling each time I raised my hand, I knew nothing would change if I didn’t.

After 5 years of dreadful school, I finally realized the truth. School is not just 6 hours of prison, the truth is, it matters a lot. Before I knew it, I subconsciously started asking for assistance from the teacher. I saw the drastic improvement of my grade. Which is when I realized the truth is, school isn’t that bad of a place, as long as you do what you are supposed to, and ask for help when you need it, and it will work out.

My Tradition: Dumpling Making

Diane Lu, 12, 7th Grade, Great Falls, VA

Today, my family and I are making dumplings, Chinese style to be specific. My mom and I first drove to our local Asian grocery store. Walking up the old, broken asphalt, my mom and I entered the cold, air conditioned store. With the intention of buying three specific things, we arrived home with them: ground pork, green beans, and dumpling wrappers.

Starting the preparation, we pour some cold sink water into a small metal bowl, we have the first step done. Afterwards, we unbox our ingredients. Washing the green beans with ice cold water, I cut them with a sharp cleaver. Then, we get a large metal bowl, and throw in our beans, ground pork, a bit of sesame oil, and a spoon or two of soy sauce. While I’m mixing up the ingredients, my mom starts grabbing black plastic trays that we will later put all of our dumplings that are ready to boil on.

Finishing up the filling, I call my dad down to start the process of making the dumplings themselves. I take one dumpling wrapper, take a small spoonful of the filling, and put it in the middle of the wrapper. Next, I fold it in half, then I take the two bottom edges facing me, and connect them. After we make all of the dumplings, my dad goes to set up the table, getting chopsticks and bowls for everyone. Once my mom thinks that we have made enough, we start the boiling process. Pouring a tray at a time, my mom easily slides all the dumplings into the boiling hot water.

Not just an event to make yummy, delicious dumplings, making dumplings is also an event to bond, catch up, and have fun. Does your family have an event similar to mine?

Equality for Clothes

Emma Hindley, 12, 7th Grade, McLean

When boys walk into school, do they ever consider what they are wearing that day? What others may think, or if they’d get punished for wearing it? No. Well, I once walked into my school, not caring about what I was wearing because I didn’t think it mattered, but apparently, it did.

It was the beginning of kindergartners. I had quickly thrown on an outfit the morning of, a yellow shirt with black shorts decorated with stripes. However, there was a huge problem with what I was wearing. My sleeves were under 3 fingers wide.

As a kindergartener, I didn’t give my sleeve length a second thought. Unfortunately, my teacher, Mrs. Hayden, wasn’t happy about my lack of shoulder coverage. She headed over to me and handed me a jacket she was carrying. I stared at her, confused. Why did she hand me a random jacket?

“You should wear a jacket,” she explained, “Cover your shoulders with the jacket.”

Confused, I slowly slipped the sleeves of the coat onto my arms. I kept it on until recess came. As I walked outside, I felt the heat sear down on me. It was unbearable to wear the jacket. So I took it off. It should be fine, right? It was 90 degrees. They couldn’t expect me to actually wear a jacket in this heat?

For the first few minutes of recess, everything seemed to be fine. Until Mrs. Hayden stormed over to me.

“Where is your jacket?” she asked. I tried to respond, but she interrupted me, continuing to respond me.

I never wore short sleeves that year, afraid I’d be yelled at again. That day, I realized that girls will be judged no matter how they are, whether they’re a full-grown woman or a five-year-old girl.

Birthday Party Fun

Melina Markakos, 13 and 7th Grade, McLean

I would have never thought that one day I would be laying on the grass in my best friend’s backyard with everyone crowded around me wondering if I was ok. I could feel my face turning bright red with fear and pain at the same time. I was crying harder than I ever have, trying to stop the tears from rolling down my eyes at the same time. Earlier that day, I had been at my friend Anabel’s house for her birthday party. We had all come from school because all of my friends were there and we rode the bus together.

Once we got to Anabel’s house, we all put on our swimsuits and went outside to play on her playground and run through her sprinklers in her backyard. We had all run through the sprinklers multiple times until our legs got so tired we couldn’t feel them anymore. After that, we went to the playground in the backyard and played on it. We all went straight to the monkey bars and lined up in a straight line. Everyone was told to dry off with a towel before so that you wouldn’t slip and fall. But little me in my pig tails and big smile on my face the whole time grinning from ear to ear, I didn’t listen.
Birthday Party Fun

Once it was my turn to go on the monkey bars and the girl before me had just crossed. I got on the ladder and put my hands on the first bar. I was using all of my strength in my tiny arms, still knowing I was soaking wet. But, I nev- er thought anything of it. I kept going, and going, until I got to the middle of the monkey bars. My right hand slipped off. I was using all of my might to pull myself back up. But it wasn’t enough.

Before I knew it, My left hand was start- ing to slip too. I was more scared than ever. I began to start falling and then I hit the grass head first. I could hear the gatp from the parents sitting on the porch and the gatp from my friends still in line for the monkey bars after me. I cried harder than EVERY. Everyone came running to me and my friends ran up to me as well. My friend Emma’s mom was a nurse, so she did help me a little bit. She picked me up and carried me to a pool chair on the porch. She began just as she suspected, I was looking at Emma’s mom talking through the phone, still with tears building up in my eyes. Then it hit me. I have never felt more embarrassed in my life.

Allergies

Madison Carey
12 years old-7th grade, Vienna

It’s an exciting day for me. I’m going to get rid of one of the worst things in my life…if I pass. I was ready for my peanut challenge. I was going to eat one of my allergies on purpose under surveillance of professional doctors to see if I am still allergic or not. Today, I’m facing my fear. I rode with my mom to the doctor’s of- fice. I looked out the window the whole time, waiting for the building to appear. I could feel my heart beating through- out my whole body! I didn’t realize just how nerve racking this could be. My mind flooded with possibilities. What if you’re still deadly allergic and die? What if the epi-pen doesn’t work? I brushed off these thoughts when I saw the office in the distance.

When my mom and I walked in, we walked past multiple police officers and security guards on the way to the eleva- tor. One foot after the other, we walked in and waited. The elevator dinged as we got to our floor and I could tell which room I was going to be in for the next couple of hours. It was on the left side of the hall, with two big chairs that had paper covering them. It had windows for walls and you could see through them from the spot we were standing.

We walked in and was immediately greeted by the doctor, who I assumed would be watching over me. I sat down on the farthest chair from the door and waited. I was nervous. He gave me and my mom the run-down and told us what I would be doing. I would be eating one half of a Reese’s Pieces in the span of about two hours and then I would wait another two hours to see if I have a de- layed reaction. Finally, we started.

The first cup had only one Reese’s Piece in it, and it tasted horrible. I assumed that it would be the same for all the other pieces, too. The second cup came about five to ten minutes after, and this time, it had two. The process kept repeating itself: three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, twenty, twenty five, until I ate a hundred overall, and we were done. They all just tasted gross but I kept feeling anything. I went quiet in thought and was ready to wait another two hours in the room.

Two hours later, a small smile spread across my face as a different doctor came through the tall, narrow door with a cer- tificate. He said that I had passed and I was no longer allergic to peanuts. My mom smiled, too, but something seemed off. She kept looking over at me, as if something was wrong with me when she was the one staring at me. When we were just about to accept the certificate on the doctor’s clipboard, my mom interrupted. “Wait,” she said. “Just a little bit longer.”

She rolled up the sleeves of my long- sleeved shirt and just as she suspected, there were hives spread across both of my arms. Of course there were hives. Hives are just annoying little itchy bumps that warn the person of something that they were allergic to, or, if it’s just been scratched too much. But I didn’t scratch my arm at all. I looked at myself in the camera of my mom’s phone, and my cheeks were red. That never happens unless I’m really hot, nervous, or having an allergic reaction.

As time went by, the hives kept grow- ing and growing across my body, reaching my legs and other body parts. The doctors got a black sharpie and outlined them to see if they would continue grow- ing. Sure enough, they did. The doctors and my mom recommended an epi-pen, but I wanted anything but that. Imagine a giant needle with a sharp point and a big, yellow, medicine label that’s meant to stab through a pain. Obviously, I refused. Eventually, I was forced to agree when I went to the bathroom and saw the hives everywhere. They were joining together and growing even more, until I became one giant hive.

I was still scared, and the doctors could see that, so they offered me an al- ternative. A tiny little needle that would go into my arm, with the same medicine. My mom said I should try the epi-pen, so I would know what it would feel like for future use, but there was no chance I was going to do that. The little shot didn’t feel as bad as I thought it would, although there was a sore feeling when I tried to move my arm. My frown grew bigger when the doctor ripped my cer- tificate up and threw it in the trash. I wanted that certificate, and I’m going to get it one day, whether it’s for peanuts or another allergy.

I learned a lot of things that day, and I thought about them on the car ride back home. I thought about how I was still fine, even though I was scared, and how I still was determined to get rid of this. In the end, even though it might not be the same. I felt a tiny smile sprout, as I knew I was going to be fine in the end.
Enjoy an evening of music with the elegant interior of historic Old Town Hall (3999 University Drive) in Fairfax City. Doors open at 7:30 p.m. and performances begin promptly and run from October to April. Admission is free. Visit www.fairfaxva.gov/parks/rec/ cultural-alrts.

SCHEDULE

April 5: Francesca Hurst – Solo Piano April 19: Sylvan Waters Duo – Harp/Brass

enjoy an evening of music show-

THURSDAY/DEC. 28

The Old Firehouse Center Winter Break Trip: Ice @Gaylord National WinterFest. 8 a.m.-6 p.m. Join us for some holiday fun as we do some gingerbread decorating, ice skating, tubing, ice bumper cars and more. A signed waiver is required to participate. Participation to all activities and a BBQ lunch is included in the fee. Bring additional money for snacks and souvenirs as desired.

DISCOVER THE JOY OF THE HOLIDAYS IN A FUN WAY

Embrace the magic of the season with the Fairfax County Park Authority. Enjoy the company of your family and community at any of our festive activities and events throughout the holiday season.

IONA Holiday Concert

Friday, Dec. 22. Spots available 1:45 p.m. to 3:15 p.m. and 6-8 p.m. $15

One of the top-rated pan-Celtic groups in the world treats its audience to high-energy entertainment featuring Scottish fiddling, percussion and vocals. Refreshments served in the 18th century kitchen. Puppet Show at Frying Pan Farm Park Friday, Dec. 29. Spots available 10:15-11 a.m. and 12:15-1:30 p.m. $15

Join Master Puppeteer Bob Brown in a jolly, fun-filled romp through a winter wonderland as his delightful, trick marionettes perform incredible feats of skill and daring that will leave your young audience shouting with laughter! Fun and fantasy, mirth and merriment, giggles and amazement all mixed together to the sound of your favorite holiday music! He will be retiring after 60 years, so come and enjoy his final performance. To find out more, or to register for programs, visit the Park Authority on the Parks website.

SUNDAY/DEC. 31

‘Noon Year’s Eve’ Event. 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. At Town of Vienna and Cedar Park Shopping Center, 260 Cedar Lane, Vienna. Town of Vienna in partnership with Cedar Park Shop-

ing Center will host a daytime celebration for family and kids to ring in the “noon” year as we say goodbye to 2023 and celebrate the arrival of 2024. This family-friendly event features a top artist market, live music, games, giveaways, face painting, crafts, and a noon countdown celebration. Some activities will take place under a heated tent. Free. Rain or Shine.
New Year’s Eve Musical Theater Performance – The Who’s Tommy Sunday, Dec. 31, 8 p.m., Workhouse Arts Center Based on the iconic 1969 rock concept album, The Who’s Tommy is an exhilarating story of hope, healing and the human spirit. The story of the pinball-playing boy who triumphs over his adversities has inspired and amazed audiences for more than 40 years. The New Year’s Eve show includes a post-performance reception with mid-night champagne. Tickets $50, Building W3 Theater. See the website for ticket prices for additional dates and times. Show runs through Feb 11. Fridays and Saturdays 8 p.m. and Sundays 2 p.m.

New Year’s Eve Comedy Show with Antoine Scott – Sunday, Dec. 31, 8 p.m. The Workhouse Arts Center presents, in collaboration with Rahmef Mostafa-vi, a special New Year’s Eve comedy celebration. Time to laugh off 2023 and bring in 2024 with an abundance of joy! Join headliner Antoine Scott and a host of other hilarious comics for a one-show-only New Year’s Eve comedy event. Tickets are $50; $60 front row reserved seats. McGuire-Woods Gallery in building W16.

SUNDAY/DEC. 31
First Night Alexandria, known as the largest family-friendly and affordable New Year’s Eve festival of music and more event in the region, returns with its day into night of celebration showcasing performing arts throughout Old Town. The annual event (in its 29th year) will feature a variety of activities, activations, dance parties, live music and more. The festivities kick off at 2:00 p.m. and conclude at midnight as thousands welcome in the New Year. A tradition that started in 1994, First Night Alexandria has become a staple in the region to bring in the New Year as an affordable event filled with a lineup of entertainment and activities. Proceeds from the event supports Alexandria’s middle and high school students’ activities with a musical background in choir, orchestra, and band.

New Year’s Eve at The Workhouse Arts Center – First Night Alexandria will also host an abbreviated encore display of the New Year’s fireworks at midnight on the waterfront.

Fun Hunt - Add adventure, exploration, and education to the last day of the year! After 5 years, the Fun Hunt returns with new ways to enjoy an afternoon in Old Town Alexandria. Ticketed guests have the opportunity to turn a day of Fun and entertainment into potential prize winnings. The adventure concludes at the Block Party at Market Square just prior to the Twilight Fireworks.

Daytime Block Party – Join us at Market Square from 4 – 6 p.m. for a time of music, a “Cool Day Happy New Year” demonstration and special fun just prior to the new Twilight fireworks display.

For more information visit www.firstnightalexandria.org.

SATURDAY/JAN. 6
Furia Flamenco “Navidad Flamencos”, 7 p.m. At Mclean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Join MCC for its 3rd Annual Winter Black Party. Participants will enjoy entertainment, games, food and a wide variety of outdoor amusements, crafts and more.

A Complete Whiff

By KENNETH H. LOURIE

As a longtime married man, I can speak to the various responsibilities that one another has to help nurture/maintain the framework that “Keeps Hope Afloat,” to invoke Jesse Jackson – not of control, that our relationship needs to thrive. For my wife Dina and I, as it pertains to the subject matter at hand/inner workings of our marriage, one very clear delineation exists: Dina handles the social, I handle the business/money. Sometimes however, the team can be on different tracks (as my later father would always joke, even with the best of intentions). Getting the tracks to coalesce into one takes patience, courage, conviction, and most importantly, accommodation.

And it is in this context that I prepare you readers for something specifically to do with years truly. What I am about to divulge is 100% my fault. Being responsible for the business/money side of the marriage means that I am expected to be organized concerning how much money is coming in, and most importantly, how much is going out, and most often, when pay or play options are flirtatious/prudent. Meaning, I know how much money is due when certain relatively important bills arrive. In addition to the monthly recurring obligations, this also means I am to be aware of the uses due less frequently (quarterly, semi-annually, and of course, annually). And then there’s other category of bills which require not so much payment as they do require a renewal. The renewal that I refer to is for our health insurance, a special health insurance that because of means and/or seriousness of condition (cancer qualifies) enables me to not incur any costs for drugs, co-pays, co-insurance etc. As you might imagine for a cancer patient nearing his 15th year under the proverbial gun so to speak, there are regular/curing costs associated with my care and now no time to decide care options based on money/ability to pay, instead of what the doctor recommends. Simply stated: my life might very well be at stake, certainly it might be at risk. And yet, this is exactly what I did. I completely forgot to submit our annual renewal due Sept. 1st for an Oct. 1-1st restart date. It didn’t hit me until I went to check in with the receptionist for the PET scan I had scheduled for Nov. 2nd that my ticker had stopped ticking. I was off part of this story being the anxiety about the results and all I wrote about in the column entitled, “Uncertainty.” “Go-pay due!” I just signed up for this in September.” I said. That’s when I was told that my plan had expired in Sept. because I hadn’t renewed it for the “23-24 year. I was off by three months or so. I totally missed the deadline. I don’t doubt the health insurance for not reminding me. Nor do I think Dina should have said something. This was me, totally. There’s no more important business in a family than its health insurance, particularly when one of its payors/covered individuals has been diagnosed originally with a terminal cancer. I mean it was not exactly the kind of thing that goes away on its own. Often, when it goes away, it takes the patient with it. Moreover, as a licensed insurance agent, I am aware of the costs and consequences of regrettably one’s insurance responsibilities. And yet I am not in a position to advise as I was, there’s plenty of news stories and articles available online about deviating decisions that some families have had to make between rent, food, and buying drugs needed to keep them alive. And when the receipt/estimate advised me of my plighting my hope for my participation in it, I should say, it was the farthest thing from my mind. I was not thinking at all about having to renew/re-up at all. Not that I thought for second that it was an automatic extension (I knew it wasn’t). It was just as we used to say in the back yard, whiffle bat in the self-renewing kind of coverage(I knew it wasn’t). It was all. Not that I thought for second that it was an automatic extension (I knew it wasn’t). It was just as we used to say in the back yard, whiffle bat in all. Not that I thought for second that it was an automatic extension (I knew it wasn’t). It was all. Not that I thought for second that it was an automatic extension (I knew it wasn’t). It was all. Not that I thought for second that it was an automatic extension (I knew it wasn’t). It was all. Not that I thought for second that it was an automatic extension (I knew it wasn’t). It was all.