Halloween Pumpkin
Design by Georgia Martin, 12, of Great Falls, Grade 7
Art Teacher: Nadene Wright

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March 13, 2020

The morning of March 13 started almost the same as any other Friday in 2020. Something was different, though. Maybe we could all sense the news we would find out later that day. It was a weird feeling, like being close to figuring out some sort of mystery. Yet I still couldn’t have guessed what would happen by the end of the day, let alone what would happen for the entire year.

I sat at my desk in my sixth grade classroom as the afternoon sun shone through the blinds. I couldn’t believe my ears when I heard my teacher’s composed but anxious voice informing our class that our school would be shut down for two weeks. My whole class was looking around the room, most of them with the same worried, apprehensive look as me: How big of an impact could Covid have on us?

If I could talk to my younger self, all I could do would be to tell her of the upcoming months. But would I even want to do that? Distill fear and confirm the worst to my already-stressed self on March 13?

If I really did get a chance to talk to my younger self, all I could do would be to tell her of the upcoming months. But would I even want to do that? Distill fear and confirm the worst to my already-stressed self on March 13?

If I really did get a chance to talk to my younger self, I would warn her: To be careful, wear a mask, and be prepared to face multiple cancellations and ruined plans. I would ask her to help out: Maybe sew masks, or donate hand sanitizer, because I wish I could’ve done more in the first few months of quarantine. But lastly, I would tell her to be brave. To remember that this next year will be hard, but to keep my head up. And most importantly, I would tell her that I would survive 2020.

— Paige A. Poulos, Grade 7, Teacher: Lindsay Bovenzi

COVID-19

As a drop of red pigment
Turns a bucket of water into a red river
A single case of COVID-19
Turns the whole world upside down
Like a bird trapped in a cage
Like a hamster running on a wheel
We feel hopeless and lonely
We talk to ourselves in the mirror
We wear mask to hide our fears
We scream silently for help
But
There’s a light at the end of the tunnel
Peace and calm are waiting for us
Let’s pray and hope
Changing tears into laughter
No matter what happens
We will find our way
We will survive

— Ina Chung, 17, of McLean, Junior at Bishop O’Connell High School in Arlington.

Tons of Feelings

In memory of my aunt who passed away a couple months ago.

By Cassandra Kuebler/McLean/Grade 6

All of these feelings, trapping me
And they’re always the opposite of glee
Lonely, sad, broken, mad
Why are people sick?
Why do people die?
Does God somehow pick?
Why do I cry?
Are they really gone?
Why can’t I go?
Why can’t we just respawn?
Having feelings doesn’t make me grow
Or do they?
Is it bad?
Stay, just please stay
It’s a broken down want-ad
Asking me to realize reality
But all these emotions make me beastly
I can’t control them, or myself
I wish I could toss ’em back on the shelf
ABORT! When they attack, for everything I lack
So support me when I crack, and then take me back
But I got tons of feelings, and somehow I survive
Yeah, I got tons of feelings, and it makes me thrive

Christmas

It’s not about the things around you
or where you might be.
Christmas is all about family.
Eggnog, ham, turkey, anything on a platter
none of those things matter.
Family and friends are what are important.
Not the presents galore
all spread out on the floor.
That’s what Christmas is for.

— Zuleika Patterson, McLean, Grade 3, Spring Hill Elementary, Teacher: Mrs. Boswell
**Children's & Teens' Connection**

**Spring Hill Elementary**

My Gingerbread House, by Raina Ailani, KG, Spring Hill Elementary School, Teacher Ms. Gore Ashe.

Best Friends, by Jaya Bali of McLean, Grade 5, Spring Hill Elementary, Teacher: Samantha Fitzsimmons.

Half Full, by Grace Fitzgerald of McLean, Age: 12, Grade: 6, Spring Hill Elementary, Art Teacher: Dorothy Moon.

By Shveta Sunkar, McLean, Age: 12, Grade: 6, Spring Hill Elementary, Teacher: Cecilia Smith

By Noor Naffa, 8, McLean, Grade 3, Spring Hill Elementary, Teacher: Nicole Boswell

By Swara Chaudhari, 8, Spring Hill Elementary, McLean

By My Gingerbread House, by Raina Ailani, KG, Spring Hill Elementary School, Teacher Ms. Gore Ashe.

Best Friends, by Jaya Bali of McLean, Grade 5, Spring Hill Elementary, Teacher: Samantha Fitzsimmons.

Who Am I: Present – "I Love to Hang with My BFFs" Collage by Grade 6 Student Jaya Bali

Who Am I: Present – "My present is me sitting at my laptop while the world turns behind me," Collage by Grade 6 Student Casey Abbott

**Cunningham Park Elementary**

Wish You Were Here: California, Postcard Collage by Grade 3 Student Maria De Luigi

Who Am I: Present – "I Love to Hang with My BFFs" Collage by Grade 6 Student Brook Somerville

Who Am I: Present – “My present is me sitting at my laptop while the world turns behind me,” Collage by Grade 6 Student Casey Abbott
Merry Christmas

“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

The pages of the Connection (including the Alexandria Gazette Packet, the Mount Vernon Gazette, the Potomac Almanac and the Centre View) are usually full of holiday spirit, beginning before Thanksgiving. While in this, the year of COVID, the year 2020, a year like no other, the holidays have been muted in so many ways. Still we have celebrated help for the needy whose numbers have expanded with the pandemic; collecting toys and warm coats for children who might not otherwise receive them; holiday celebrations, concerts and performances via Zoom; socially distanced Santa, tree lightings; stories of giving; the Virtual Nutcracker; and more.

And still, Christmas is about the birth of Jesus Christ. Whether you believe the Christmas story literally or in spirit, you know it is the story of joy, hope and love, with the promise of redemption. In this holiday of 2020, like no other as we keep saying, we need the Christmas story in whatever way we can access it.

Christmas is also about embracing the teachings of Jesus: to love thy neighbor as thyself; to help the needy; to feed the hungry and clothe the poor; to care for those who are sick; to invite and welcome strangers; to treat others as you would have them treat you. These teachings have deep meaning and consequence for us right now.

Matthew 7:12:
“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.”

Matthew 25:35-40:
“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

Whether you embrace the Christmas story literally or in spirit, it is the story of joy, hope and love, with the promise of redemption.

SO SHARE the verse relating the birth of Jesus from the Bible, Luke 2: 4-19:

“And Joseph and Mary also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David,) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

“...and there were in the same country, shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. ...”

For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

— Mary Kimm
mkimm@connectionnewspapers.com

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The World Will Never be the Same

I stood in this very spot, four years earlier, grasping my mother’s hand, watching the bustling city. People rushed around me. My attention shifted to the crowded street. Colors flew by, and I could smell the scent of fast food trucks, ones that were lined up on the sides of the street, the street that was home to the first black president in US history.

As I stand in that very spot today, I see the bright flash of this distant memory; I look around me. I see a few stands selling t-shirts, hats, flags, all marked with the same slogan. The streets are strikingly bare, and the only colors here are the bright yellow letters that have been painted onto the tarred, black street. The letters that go up the street to the fence that marks the edge of the president’s home, a new president who helped inspire these words.

Those letters spell a statement that not just the president needs to hear. They spell the injustice that George Floyd experienced, and countless others. They were painted onto this street for most of the worldwide shut down. Proof that the world is still fighting for just, free, equal lives, even in the face of a widespread disease that has wiped out 2 million of the world’s population.

This disease is new, scary, and is happening now. So, no, there are not going to be busy crowded streets for a long time, the grocery store might not have enough supplies, and the world will never be the same. But that does not mean we can stop fighting for what’s right. Each person only has around 70 years to live at best. We need to make sure everyone can live those years in equality, making sure that George Floyd’s death is not in vain, that these painted words are more than just a slogan on a t-shirt or a hat. We have to fight for what is right, and always remember that Black Lives Matter.

— Zosia Henryson-Gibbs, 12, of Springfield, Grade 7, Cooper Middle

The Day Everything Changed

I look outside my window; rain pouring, grey unfriendly clouds swept across the gloomy sky. I wake up and get ready for school in a rush because I slept in, like always.

As I arrive at the bus stop, I see a peak of yellow through the dark green evergreen trees. It’s the bus. I hop onto the bus and I am greeted by my bus driver. She has platinum blonde hair and wears purple glasses and somehow all the kids on the bus had a perfectly shiny smile on their face. I find it very shocking how she hasn’t quit her job yet even though she drives a bus with the most annoying first graders I have ever met.

I end up getting to school as the school bell rings loud enough to damage your eardrums and the morning announcements blast through the long, boring, hallway. After five dreadful periods go by, it’s finally the end of the day.

When I walk into the gym I see students from all different ages and backgrounds lined up with their backpacks in 8 different single-file lines, anxiously waiting to leave school.

When I get onto the bus, I hear everyone talk about some sort-of virus called the coronavirus and how it might cancel school for a couple of weeks.

I don’t know a lot about it but I think to myself that it probably won’t matter and even if we did get school off it will only be for two weeks and then we will be back. I mean how bad could this COVID-19 virus be? It’s not like it will be the end of the world.

66 million COVID-19 cases, over eight months in quarantine, and more than 1 million 500 deaths later, I regret saying those words.

— Sarah Bade, 12, of Great Falls, Grade 7, Cooper Middle
2020: A Year of Patience, Change, and Endurance

2020 has been a year of firsts. A year of ups, and many many downs. We have witnessed history in the making. We have made our voices heard. We have persevered through all the hardships. We have shown that humanity is strong when we come together as one. This is a year of patience, change, and endurance.

As students in a virtual learning climate, we mainly have one goal, to succeed in an online environment. This can be challenging, from the technical difficulties to the eye strain. But we have been patient throughout this virtual year. We have learned to tolerate minor setbacks and use other resources to achieve our goals. 2020 will always be remembered as a year of bad things, but it will also be remembered as a year of change. People took to the streets, created hashtags, and made their voices heard. They stood up for their rights and other’s rights. So while this year may bring some unpleasant memories to mind, it also has the scars of change and justice.

Endurance. This is an important trait. A trait that, until now, most people didn’t have. It is the core of our resistance to quitting during this pandemic. It’s what’s holding our boredom, pain, and sadness, and keeps it from bursting into the world. Yet, it’s hard to imagine us surviving without it. Without this trait, we wouldn’t have been as productive as we were. We would have just sat around sulking, instead of using this time to solve problems, like creating a vaccine. If this pandemic has shown us anything it is that if you want something done, you have to do it yourself.

While 2020 hasn’t been the best year, we certainly learned a lot. We learned how patience has helped us succeed not only in online learning but in the outside world too. We learned that if you keep fighting for change your voice will eventually be heard. And most importantly, we learned that endurance helps us solve problems during hard times. So even if you want this year to finally end, we should still remember all the lessons that we learned this year.

— Ismael Ahmed, 13, of Reston, Grade 7, Cooper Middle

Family Time

Let’s face it. The coronavirus has ruined all of our lives.

Okay, okay. Maybe I’m exaggerating, but what I do know is that COVID-19 has flipped my world upside-down.

One day I’m hunched over a tiny desk in my sixth-grade classroom, excitedly chatting with my friends, and the next day I’m stuck at home for who knows how long.

However, there has been one silver lining of being in quarantine: I get to spend more time with my family.

Ever since my sister started high school and got burdened with an overwhelming amount of homework and after-school activities, I haven’t been able to watch a single movie with my family during the busy school year.

Well, that’s one thing that has completely changed in 2020. Now, during the weekends, I spend my time snuggling with my family on the plush couch in our cozy living room, streaming immersive TV shows.

If there’s one lesson you learn from reading this, it’s to spend all the time you can with your loved ones. Especially in uncertain times like these, because any minute could be the last.

— Sophie Li, 12, Grade 7, Cooper Middle
Family Hikes

The coronavirus has changed the way we do things dramatically, forcing a quarantine in many areas, which can lead to unexpected traditions. In the early spring and well into the summer my family had been cooped up in the house and it was driving us all crazy, so we started to do things to remedy that.

For example, my mother, brother, and I took long hikes in the woods behind our home. It was so beautiful and serene, with the flourishing trees swaying gently as we walked down the well-trodden trails, and there was practically no one else out there.

I distinctly remember one occasion when we stumbled down a hidden and somewhat treacherous path leading up a rocky incline. Boulders jutted out from the side and brambles clambered over each other to reach onto the trees above, giving us an uncomfortable but energizing trek. We then turned a corner which led to an awe-inspiring and magnificent vista soaring above the Potomac river far below.

There was a small bench there, so we all took a moment to stop and savor the view. It was an unforgettably experience that was very tranquil and refreshing, especially after being stuck up indoors for a while.

— Dylan Love Thomas, 13, Grade 7, Cooper Middle Vienna Elementary School

Artwork submitted by Vienna Elementary School Art Teacher Katie Aiken

“Local Landcape” by Charlotte Melchior, Age: 8, Grade: 2, Vienna ES

“We All Bleed the Same,” by Habeeba Kassem, Age 12, Grade 8, Langston Hughes Middle School, Reston, Teacher: Mary Dolmat

“A Dot Could be a Monster” by David Kharitonashvili, Age: 12, Grade: 6, Vienna ES

“Peter Pan and Tinkerbell” by Caitie Pendleton, Age: 11, Grade: 6th, Vienna ES

“Two Snowmen on Pond,” by Aanya Bhatia, Grade 3, Lemon Road Elementary School Art Teacher Cheryl Bearss

“Scarecrow,” by Aadith Eadhara, Grade 3, Lemon Road Elementary, Art Teacher Cheryl Bearss

“Snowman flying,” by Mary Bareis, Grade 3, Lemon Road Elementary School Art Teacher Cheryl Bearss

“A Snowman with a Tree,” by Aaradhya Menon, Grade 3, Lemon Road Elementary School Art Teacher Cheryl Bearss

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END RACISM

Black Lives Matter

We Must Be

We All Bleed the Same Colour

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**Calendrier**

**Tysons Corner Center Holiday Plans**

Santa is back! (Now through Dec. 24)

Careful consideration has been given to the Santa set to ensure that they are both healthy and magical to meet the moment. Santa will be seated a distance from his guests to maintain a healthful distance, with a physical barrier to prevent young guests from trying to sit on Santa’s lap. Santa and his young visitors will wear masks and maintain a healthful distance, in a contactless visit and photo experience fully re-designed to meet the moment.

Grinch’s Grotto (Now thru Dec. 31).

Located on Level 2 next to A Christmas to Remember. Guests will meet The Grinch and interact with him right in his cave, as well as pose for a photo. Admission includes a free 6x6” printed photo with a playful Grinch catchphrase. With over 20 sayings to choose from, guests can customize their own Grinch holiday memory. Admission also gets you a collectible Grinch ornament. Each ticket allows admission for up to 5 guests to meet the Grinch as a group. This ticket secures your individual time to meet the Grinch and experience his cave. Social distancing and mask usage will be in accordance with local and mall regulations.

**Now thru the holidays**

Santa at Springfield Town Center.

Santa and his reindeer have arrived at Springfield Town Center to kick-off the holiday season. In an effort to create touchless experiences and accommodate varying levels of visitor comfort, Santa will be available at Springfield Town Center via numerous experiences and offerings: Picture with Santa; Virtual Experience; Family Pet Photos on Mondays; Family Photos and visits with Santa. Reservations are required for all Santa and photo offerings.

**Dec. 18 to Jan. 4**

*NatureScape: Narratives* Chinese Brushpainting

9 a.m. to 9 p.m. At Reston Community Center Hunters Woods, 2310 Colts Neck Road, Reston. Offering a break from the pandemic, 67 brushpaintings by Tracie Griffith Tso are on exhibit at Reston Community Center Hunters Woods through January 4 offering a 6,000-year-old Chinese artform in a nature-based display.

**Dec. 20 to 30**

*A Winter Star* Encore Stage & Studio is making spirits bright this season by offering a unique theatrical experience outdoors in the comfort of your car in the parking lot of Temple Rodef Shalom (2100 Westmoreland St., Falls Church). Performances dates are December 20, 21, 22, 23, 27, 28, 29, and 30. Showtimes begin every 15 minutes between 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. and 2:30 – 4:30 p.m. All entry tickets must be purchased in advance. Entry tickets are Pay-What-You-Can donations, starting at $5. Ticket proceeds from A Winter Star will be donated to the Arlington Food Assistance Center and Encore’s Theatre for All! Fund which provides scholarships and outreach programs. Tickets are available online at www.encorestage.org. To learn more, visit www.templerodefshalom.org.
But it's the future I'm worried about. still die from my underlying disease: cancer. I care and feeding I need, I may survive covid but not too distant future, but if I don't receive the may very well be inoculated against covid in the seems counterproductive - or short sighted. I it for the people responsible for their wellbeing Giving the vaccine to the patient but denying friends or caregivers) entrusted to care for them. are dependent on the health of people (family, patients' health and welfare - to varying degrees, circumstances/patients like me where the cancer recipient process. Presumably, there are lots of reality or am I just cruising for a verbal bruising? Bradshaw (Sarah Jessica Parker) from "Sex and ones and twos inoculated? (I sound like Carrie straining? Will the proximity of other non-inocu- other host susceptible enough to keep the virus to move on, so to speak and find some not inoculated as well, will it in fact enable the qualified/fortunate to receive a shot or two, are other people living in the home of an individual wide herd-type immunity. That being said, if nearly unlimited numbers of people who need shelves, of vaccines, but there does seem to be there's not an unlimited supply - on or off the gotten his shot?), I'm just wondering. Granted, t to them unprotected? I'm not asking for special leaving those closest (literally and figuratively) most at risk, how do you accomplish that while I'm also curious if there's any discretion in the vaccinations earlier on in the schedule than they have otherwise been eligible? Or is the demand too great, given the worldwide pandemic, which I imagine it is. If the plan is to minimize the risk for those most at risk, how do you accomplish that while while leaving those closest (literally and figuratively) to them unprotected? I'm not asking for special treatment or dispensation from the Pope (has he gotten his shot?), I'm just wondering. Granted, there's not an unlimited supply - on or off the shelves, of vaccines, but there does seem to be nearly unlimited numbers of people who need to be vaccinated to accomplish a sort of world-wide herd-type immunity. That being said, if other people living in the home of an individual qualified/fortunate to receive a shot or two, are not inoculated as well, will it in fact enable the virus to move on, so to speak and find some other host susceptible enough to keep the virus straining? Will the proximity of other non-inocu- lated people defeat the purpose of getting the tier ones and two inoculated? It sound like Carrie Bradshaw (Sarah Jessica Parker) from "Sex and the City" sounding out one of her columns.) I don't mean to be paranoid; I'm just won- dering/theorizing if my fear is at all founded in reality or am I just cruising for a verbal bruising? I'm also curious if there's any discretion in the recipient process. Presumably, there are lots of circumstances/patients like me where the cancer patients' health and welfare - to varying degrees, are dependent on the health of people (family, friends or caregivers) entrusted to care for them. Giving the vaccine to the patient but denying it for the people responsible for their wellbeing seems counterproductive - or short sighted. I may very well be inoculated against covid in the not too distant future, but if I don't receive the care and feeding I need, I may survive covid but still die from my underlying disease: cancer. I understand there's no perfect solution at present. But it's the future I'm worried about.

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