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Children's & Teens' Connection 2023



Maggie Marsh, 6th Grade, Reston, Aldrin Elementary School, Mr. Baybrook.

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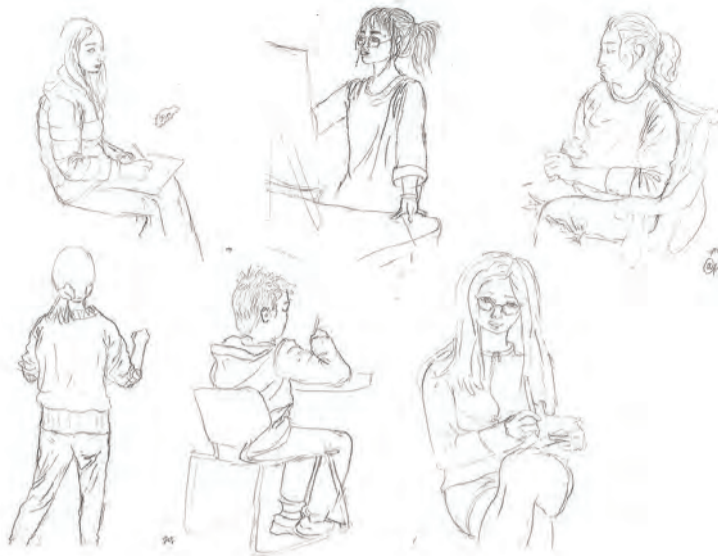
CHILDREN'S AND TEENS' CONNECTION



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



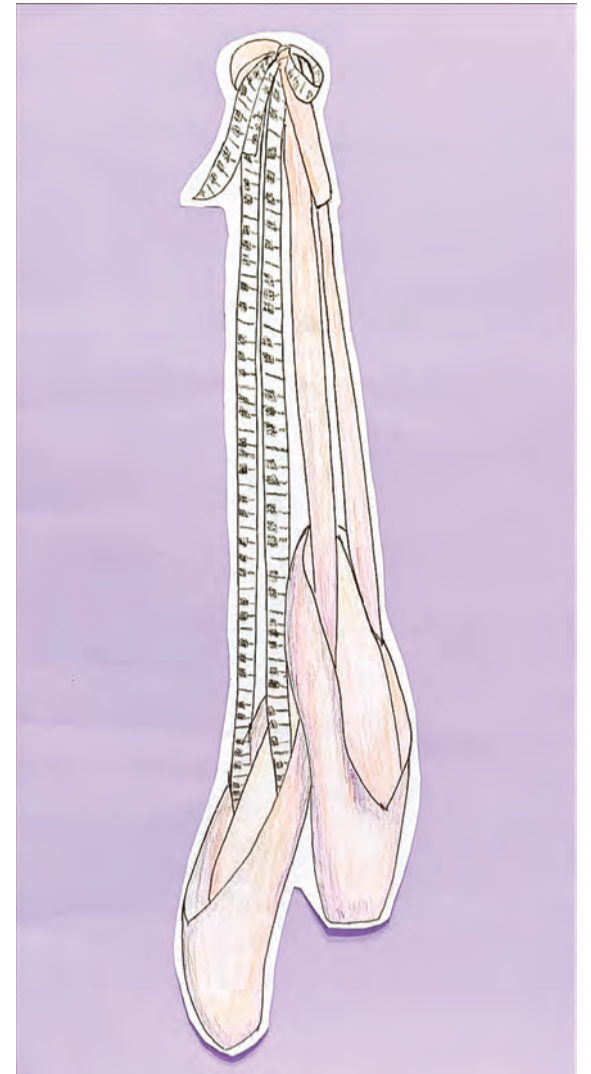
Angelina Lin, 12, Vienna, Grade 7, Basis Independent School, Yan's Art School "Dream Backyard"



Angelina Lin, 12, Vienna, Grade 7, Basis Independent School, Yan's Art School "Drawing Friends"



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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Essays from Cooper Middle School
MRS. BOVENZI

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."

SEE MY EXPERIENCE, PAGE 7

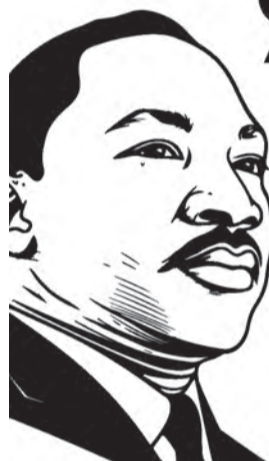


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CHILDREN'S AND TEENS' CONNECTION



Emma Yuan, Roaming Giant



Emma Yuan, Carnivorous Plant

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



Emma Yuan, Exploring the Future



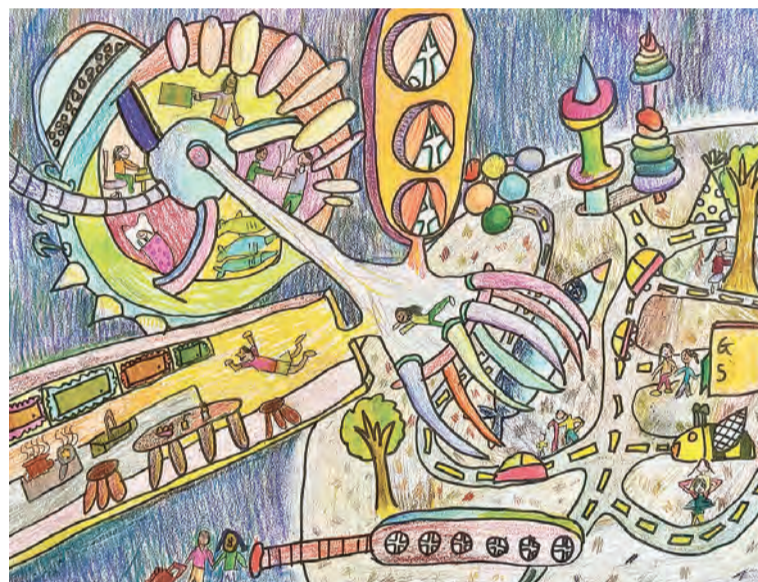
Sonia Cupala, 13 years old, 8th grade, Vienna
Mrs. Bovenzi, Cooper Middle School
"Standing Up Tall"

On this beautiful summer morning, these coneflowers 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.



Emma Yuan, Space Station



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



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 smores, Kate was more worried about her marshmallow, taking out her phone as a light source to see if she had burned it.

Essays from Cooper Middle School
MRS. BOVENZI

My Experience

FROM PAGE 5

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 disbelief.

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 make-up 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

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beautiful and they are you, and you don't have to change a thing to be pretty.

A Lesson I Learned by Art

THOMAS INGULLI, 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 page 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 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-ing the students who barely study and get a higher score.

SEE THE TRUTH, PAGE 11

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CHILDREN'S AND TEENS' CONNECTION

Aldrin Elementary School, Reston, VA,
Fairfax County Public Schools



Claire Cox, 1st Grade, Reston, Aldrin Elementary School, Mr. Baybrook.



Parker Whelan, 5th Grade, Reston, Aldrin Elementary School, Mr. Baybrook.



Maggie Marsh, 6th Grade, Reston, Aldrin Elementary School, Mr. Baybrook.



Sofia Dawson, Age 9, Grade 4, Reston, Aldrin Elementary School, Mr. Coraggio.



Yesli Cruz Cruz, Age 9, Grade 4, Reston, Aldrin Elementary School, Mr. Coraggio.



Colette Healy, 2nd Grade, Reston, Aldrin Elementary School, Mr. Baybrook.

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.
While we were lighting the snowman up,
Our neighbors began to sabotage!

Their kids went to steal our tiny roof lights,
and took our mini decorative penguins as well.

So we decided to get revenge,
opportunity struck when the kids tripped and fell!

We grabbed their inflatable Santa Claus and placed it on our yard,
we ripped our stolen lights off their roof,
and their little glowing cards!

Those selfish neighbors came back to our yard
and stole our precious tree.
But we eventually retaliated,
And stole it back and their glowing bee!
We lit all of our lights up,
the beaten neighbors were all mesmerized,
the race had finally ended,

We were also quite surprised!

A few minutes later it seemed
as though we could see the sun by looking at our house,
But I noticed our neighbors house was darker than space,
I realized everything has gone south.

My kids were jumping with all their joy,
But I was melancholy.
So, I went and gave all our lights to our neighbors.
And they were all so jolly!

We invited them over to dinner,
And I made some pumpkin pie.
They thought of this all so beautiful
I thought they might just cry!

The kids filled their faces with pie,
but us parents were eating Christmas Bologna.
The best part was that after they left.
It started snowing slowly!

And even though neither of us won,
We sure did have some great memories.
Maybe next year, let's just do it together,
No competition for centuries!

I'm a Table with Tons of Turkey!

by AJ Bowen

6th Grade
Mr. O'Day's Class
Aldrin Elementary

Today is the day I've been dreading all year.

Thanksgiving.
I saw that the cooking had started,
I heard pots and pans clanging and clattering,

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,
and saw the people running around me trying to clean up
the mess before the meal.

I started to dread, more and more, the torture known as dinner time.
Oh, it would be the worst I just knew it.

My legs started to tremble, my top started to feel mighty sore.

I didn't want to be stained with gravy or doused with ice water.
Especially not on my brand new tablecloth, I had just put it on!

Tick tock.
Tick tock.
Tick tock.

It was time for dinner,
I got ready like a weightlifter preparing for a competition.

One by one the plates buried me so I could no longer see.

I split weight between two legs then switched to the others.

I could hear laughs and clinks of silverware on plates.

I heard one of the kids say that the turkey turned their tummies.

There was banging,
some gravy spilled,
some turkey fell down under me,
the dog tickled me trying to get to it.

"Dessert time!" 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 went to be washed.
One by one I started to regain feeling in my legs.

It was finally over,
I was free. I barely got spilled on but still,
Why can't they just have thanksgiving at Grandma's?

I grumbled in my head as I slowly drifted off to sleep.

Monkeying Around at Night

by Alysha Guju

6th Grade
Mr. O'Day's Class
Aldrin Elementary

Gathered together on a big comfy couch by the fire,
We huddle like a group of penguins.

Chopping, clomping, and cheering
We watch a movie,
Eating our favorite snacks,
And mom and dad share their stories,
like little kids would with their friends.

We drink hot chocolate,
Giving everyone brown mustaches.
Laughing at each other,
Like hyenas might.

Searching for the pile of dusty old games,
Like mischievous racoons

SEE ALDRIN, PAGE 9

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 terrifically terrifyingly. All because of Tod the Tender Tasting Turkey. You see, Tod was terribly taken by a trespasser. He... Well, the name tells the tale.

Our story begins in a forest.
A forest with a turkey.
A forest with a turkey who hates November 23rd.
And guess what?
It was November 23rd.
This turkey was having
A horrible day.
I'm not even joking.
Like, a terrible,
horrible,
worst-day-of-his-life kinda day.
And this is how it began.
As I told you, he was strutting along in his forest.
And then he heard a rustle from some bushes.
And then...
Pounce!
Ted barely dodged the attack of a bobcat!
He took one look at that animal and sprinted.
Now, Ted was too busy sprinting away from definite death that he didn't realize where he was going!

He ran to the end of the forest, across the street, and into the grocery store!
But he didn't stop there.
Nope.
You see,
Ted is a very determined turkey. (That's just another way of saying he is a total scaredy-cat.)
So he kept running.
And eventually he ran into some random room.
He didn't have time to read the sign because I mean,
Would you?
And then he stopped.
He had reached the wall.
He had reached the end.
He turned around to face his death but there was only one problem.
The coyote wasn't there.
He must've given up!
YESSS!
He was finally safe.
He started gobbling and celebrating

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 leapt 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,
FINALLY,
Ted was safe at last.

THE END!

Thanksgiving Dinner

By Austin Ford
6th Grade
Mr. O'Day's Class
Aldrin Elementary

Thanksgiving
Is a holiday to give thanks
For the good we have
In the world today.
But thanksgiving family reunions
Are a time to get together
And see family.

My family
Spends Thanksgiving
Just eating a turkey
And crunching
A crispy collection
Of crops
Like green beans

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 shoveled
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

Ho! Ho! Ho!
Going down the chimney,
All covered in snow,
With all the presents
Tied up in a bow.
I see the goodies
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,
But please give me a present.
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 waving?

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

"I will get you next year!"

Flowers

By Elliana Frey

Pretty or ugly
Big or small
Tall or short
Fat petals or skinny petals

Dead or alive
Eaten or not eaten
Wrinkly or smooth
Nectar or no nectar

It all depends
If you've stepped on them
or
not...

Here's the deal.
You switch. You save.



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CHILDREN'S AND TEENS' CONNECTION



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

POEM

TEACHER: MICHAEL ENOS
SCHOOL: MCLEAN HIGH SCHOOL

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



"The Giant" by Nora Yuan, 8 years old, 3rd grade



"Kitchen Time" by Nora Yuan, 8 years old, 3rd grade

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



"My Library" by Nora Yuan, 8 years old, 3rd grade



"Living in Space" by Nora Yuan, 8 years old, 3rd grade

CHILDREN'S AND TEENS' CONNECTION

Essays from Cooper Middle School
MRS. BOVENZI

The Truth

FROM PAGE 7

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 up 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?

Perspective

JAVI GARZA, AGE 13, 7TH GRADE, MCLEAN/MRS.

Have you ever wondered how other people see things or how they imagine you? Well, I have, a lot of times, and it gave me a new way of thinking.

Perspective is something everyone needs to understand. No matter the way you look at something, everyone else is either going to have the same opinion or the opposite. We might see someone as mean just by their appearance or what they're wearing, but inside they might be kind and compassionate. Some people have different characteristics that they choose to live with, and that is their way.

We cannot judge someone from the way they have lived their life or the way they live it currently. They might have gone to jail once or twice, but they may have learned their lesson from going to jail. We may judge a picture that is black and white differently from

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color, and that's okay. All of us need to remember that there will always be someone who sees things differently than others and that might be a gift to some.

Everyone needs to learn how to see from a different perspective and that's the way we should live. As Abraham Lincoln once said, "We can complain that rose bushes have thorns or rejoice because thorn bushes have roses."

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 kindergarten. 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?

"Your shoulder straps are too short.," she explained, "Cover your shoulders up 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 reprimand 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 old 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 pigtails and big smile on my face the whole time grinning from ear to ear, I didn't listen.

SEE BIRTHDAY PARTY FUN, PAGE 12

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**Old Firehouse Center,
Winter Break Trips**

Visit oldfirehouse.org to register.

**Hershey's Chocolate World
Thursday, Dec. 21, 8 a.m.-6 p.m.**

**"Aquaman" Day
Tuesday, Dec. 26, 8 a.m.- 6 p.m.**

**Indoor Trampoline
Wednesday, Dec. 27, 8 a.m.-6 p.m.**

**Ice @ Gaylord National Winter Event
Thursday, Dec. 28, 8 a.m.-6 p.m.**

**Uptown Alley
Friday, Dec. 29, 8 a.m.-6 p.m.**

DEC
21

DEC
26

DEC
27

DEC
28

DEC
29

DEC
21

Presented by The Alden

**Performing Arts Movie
Thursday, Dec. 21, 1 p.m.**

Free admission

DEC
22,
24-25

**Closing Notice
Christmas Eve and Christmas Day**

Closing at noon, Friday, Dec. 22.
Closed Sunday, Dec. 24 and
Monday, Dec. 25

JAN
6

Presented by The Alden

**Furia Flamenca
"Navidad Flamenca"
Saturday, Jan. 6, 7 p.m.**



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CHILDREN'S AND TEENS' CONNECTION



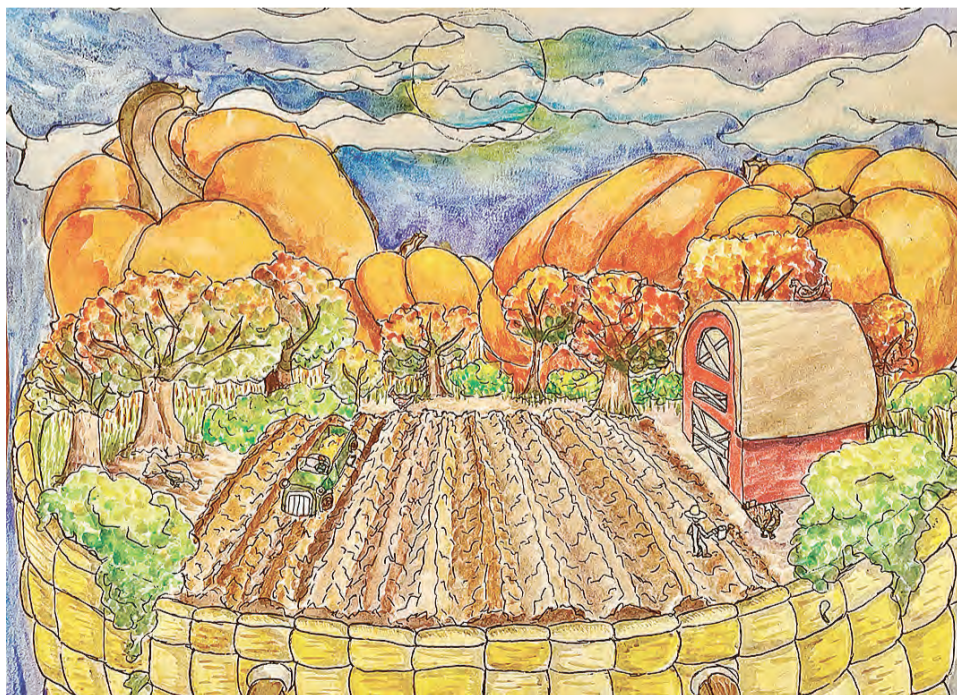
Rylee Liang, 10, Grade 5, McLean, Homeschool
"Panda on the bamboo,"
Traditional Chinese Painting



Rylee Liang, 10, Grade 5, McLean, Homeschool
"Watermelon,"
Traditional Chinese Painting



Marissa Lin, 13, Grade 8, Kilmer Middle School, Vienna
"Recycle Awareness"
Yanshun Sui Studio, Vienna



Marissa Lin, 13, Grade 8, Vienna
"Moonlight Pumpkin Patch"
Mixed Watercolor Paint and pencils
Yanshun Sui Art Studio, Vienna

Birthday Party Fun

FROM PAGE 11

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 never 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 starting 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 gasp from the parents sitting on the porch and the gasp from my friends still in line for the monkey bars after me. I cried harder than EVER. 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 to call my mom. 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 office. I looked out the window the whole time, waiting for the building to appear. I could feel my heart beating throughout 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 elevator. 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 hundred Reese's Pieces in the span of about two hours and then I would wait another two hours to see if I have a delayed reaction. Finally, we started.

Essays from Cooper Middle School
MRS. BOVENZI

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 didn't feel 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 certificate. 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-sleeve 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 growing 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 growing. 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 pair of jeans. 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 alternative. 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 certificate 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 the "trophy" 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.

ENTERTAINMENT

HOT WHEELS

CHAMPION EXPERIENCE

Hot Wheels Champion Experience, a new interactive event with immersive digital and physical play, has opened at Tysons Corner Center for a limited time. The Hot Wheels Champion Experience is a 16,000-square-foot experience for the whole family based on Hot Wheels brand that has been influencing car culture for 55 years. Combining cutting-edge technology and innovative design, SEE Touring Exhibitions Inc. has tapped the XSpace platform developed by Smart Entertainment Ltd to power this new attraction. XSpace combines immersive video projection and “phygital” systems that control sound, light, video, and personalized interaction into one experience that can react and change in the blink of an eye. Visit hotwheelschampion.com

ONGOING

Bull Run Festival of Lights. At 7700 Bull Run Drive, Centreville. Drive through 2.5 miles of festive light displays. Open from now until just past New Year’s Day. Drive the festival route from the comfort of your car; turn off your headlights and follow the magical glow. Hours are Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Holidays from 5:30-10 p.m.; Monday to Thursday 5:30-9:30 p.m.

NOV 9 TO DEC. 24

Photo with Santa. At Tysons Corner Center. Lower Level – Fashion Court/Nordstrom Wing. Mon.-Sat. 10 a.m. – 8 p.m. / Sun. 11 a.m. – 7 p.m. Tysons Corner Center’s Santa Claus will arrive on November 9th, and be available for photos and personal time daily through December 24th.

STARTING NOW

Sip & Stroll. At Tysons Corner Center, McLean. Shopping with a Twist will be in effect daily during center hours (10 a.m.-9 p.m. Mon.-Sat. /11 a.m.-7 p.m. Sun.), although individual restaurant hours may vary. Adult beverages must be in a logo’d disposable cup provided by the restaurant where the drink was purchased. Only alcoholic beverages purchased from participating restaurants may be taken outside the restaurant and into the shopping center. No outside alcohol is permitted.

WEDNESDAYS THROUGH SATURDAYS

Tours Aboard Tall Ship Providence and Sen. John Warner Maritime Heritage Center. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. At Alexandria’s Waterfront Park, 1A Prince Street, Alexandria. Guests of all ages are recruited into the Continental Navy aboard Tall Ship Providence with legendary Captain John Paul Jones. Recruits are assigned jobs on the ship, learn where they will work and live, how to load a cannon, etc... Tours conclude in the Naval History Theatre with a film about the ship. The Heritage center is a floating museum on the Alexandria waterfront. Visit <https://tallshipprovidence.org/>

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SCHEDULE

January 5: Baltimore Composers Forum – Modern
January 19: Navy Band Wind Quintet – Classical
February 2: Kadencia – Puerto Rican Orchestra (part of the Chocolate Lovers Festival!)
February 16: Matt Trkula – Classical Guitar
March 8: Mandoleers – Mandolin and Guitar Orchestra
March 22: James & Victor – Jazz Duo/Steel Pan
April 5: Francesca Hurst – Solo Piano
April 19: Sylvan Waters Duo – Harp/Brass

NOV. 3 TO FEB. 4

Eleanor Mahin Thorp: Metopic Ridge. At Tephra ICA at Signature. Tephra Institute of Contemporary Art (Tephra ICA) presents Metopic Ridge, a solo exhibition by artist Eleanor Mahin Thorp. Thorp’s paintings take us on an immersive site visit to examine the Blue Ridge Mountains exploring stability and change, the seen and the hidden within rocks. Through her discerning gaze rocks are more than geological entities; Instead, they metamorphose into vessels of history and human connection. Drawing inspiration from the fascinating transformations depicted in Persian miniatures, Thorp traces the hidden figures and forms in the rocks. Her paintings reveal the duality of rocks’ existence as both a firm witness to time and a medium for that which is intangible.

DEC. 7-31

“Quilters.” At 1st Stage, 1524 Spring Hill Road, Tysons. Thursdays at 7:30 p.m., Fridays at 8 p.m., Saturdays at 2 and 8 p.m., Sundays at 2 p.m. Set on the American frontier, this moving musical tells the story of a group of women who come together to create a quilt that reflects their shared history, struggles, and triumphs. Visit www.1ststage.org or call 703-854-1856.

DEC. 7 TO FEB. 17

McLean Project for the Arts’ Winter Exhibitions. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. McLean Project for the Arts will open its winter exhibitions—Moving Beyond Beauty: Reverence and Reclamation (Emerson Gallery) and To March is to Love: Weavings by Janel Leppin (Atrium Gallery)—on December 7, 2023. Both shows will run through February 17, 2024, with an Opening Exhibition Reception on Thursday, December 7, 2023 from 7-9 p.m. Bringing together five artists—Adjoa Jackson Burrows, Jacqui Crocetta, Maggie Gourlay, June Linowitz, and Elzbieta Sikorska—Moving Beyond Beauty features work that is at once aesthetically pleasing and philosophi-



The McLean Project for the Arts’ Winter Exhibitions will run now through Feb. 17, 2024 at the McLean Community Center.

cally compelling.

WEDNESDAY/DEC. 20

Old Firehouse Center, Winter Break Trip to Dave & Buster’s. 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Eat, drink, and play games! Dave and Buster’s offers one of the best dining and entertainment experiences around. Buffet lunch and a \$25 game card with unlimited arcade game play are included. Bring additional money for ticketed arcade games as desired.

WEDNESDAY/DEC. 20

Longest Night Service of Worship. 7:30 p.m. At Lewinsville Presbyterian Church 1724 Chain Bridge Road, McLean. If you have experienced loss in the last year all the holiday festivities can make your grief even more poignant. Grieving the loss of a loved one or coming to terms with so much loss happening in our world will be centered in this worship service. This service will intertwine music with scripture, candlelight and reflection. This event is free and open to the public, and all are welcome!

THURSDAY/DEC. 21

The Old Firehouse Winter Break Trip: Hershey’s Chocolate World. 8 a.m.-6 p.m. Enter a chocolate utopia at Hershey’s Chocolate World as we create our own Hershey Bar, become an official Hershey Tasterologist in the taste lab, try to solve the 4D Chocolate Mystery and hop on the trolley as we stroll down Hershey’s Candyland Lane to see more than five million holiday lights. Admission to all activities and lunch is included in the fee. Participants are required to bring at least \$20 for dinner. Bring additional money for snacks and souvenirs as desired.

FRIDAY/DEC. 22

Virginia National Ballet’s The Nutcracker. 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. At Capital One Hall, Tysons Corner. Don’t miss VNB’s new Nutcracker! You’ll love the new characters including The Rat King, The Nutcracker, the Chinese Lion, and many new costumes for Flowers, Mice, and more. You’ll also see gorgeous new backdrops that are 30 x 50 feet with legs (matching side curtains) and borders across the top, and

many new props and scenery. Much of the choreography has also been upgraded to match all of the new scenery, sets, and costumes.

SUNDAY/DEC. 24

Christmas Eve Service. 11 a.m. At Lewinsville Presbyterian Church, 1724 Chain Bridge Road, McLean. The youth and young choirs will present “The Light Before Christmas,” featuring the music from the Joseph Martin musical. Enjoy cocoa and cookies before and following the service and feel the warmth of Christmas. This event is free and open to the public, and all are welcome!

The traditional Candlelight Communion Christmas Eve service will begin at 6:30 p.m. and will feature a baroque orchestra and the Chancel Choir performing Johann Sebastian Bach’s “Wachet Auf” Cantata. The service of worship featuring beautiful music of the season will begin at 7:00 pm.

If you want a different kind of Christmas Eve service, perhaps you would like to come to our Jazz Christmas Eve service which begins with festive music at 9:15 p.m. This service, also a candlelight communion service, will feature a jazz quartet and our young adult alumni choir.

TUESDAY/DEC. 26

The Old Firehouse Center Winter Break Trip: “Aquaman” Day. 8 a.m.- 6 p.m. Arthur Curry is back patrolling the land and seas. Join us as we watch Aquaman 2.” Prior to the movie, we’ll play some laser tag and get some lunch. A signed waiver is required to participate. Lunch, laser tag games and a movie ticket are included in the fee.

WEDNESDAY/DEC. 27
The Old Firehouse Center Winter Break Trip: Indoor Trampoline. 8 a.m.-6 p.m. They’ll be heading to one of the most unique trampoline parks in the area. With the opportunity for casual jumping, testing your bouncing dodgeball skills or your ninja abilities, this trip has something for everyone. A signed waiver is required to participate. Lunch and admission are included in the fee. Appropriate exercise clothing required.

THURSDAY/DEC. 28
The Old Firehouse Center Winter Break Trip: Ice @ Gaylord National Winter Event. 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. Admission 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 PARK

Embrace the magic of the season with the Fairfax County Park Authority. Enjoy the company of friends, family and community at any of our festive activities

and events throughout the holiday season.

IONA Holiday Concert
Friday, Dec. 29. Spots available 1-1:45 p.m., 2:15-3 p.m. or 3:15-4 p.m., Sully Historic Site, \$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. or 11:30 a.m.-12:15 p.m., Frying Pan Farm Park, \$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-plus years, so come and enjoy his final performance. To find out more, or to register for programs, visit the Seasonal Events in 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 Shopping 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 pop-up artisan 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.

HOLIDAY HAPPENINGS AT THE WORKHOUSE ARTS CENTER

The Workhouse Arts Center will present several holiday events and activities in November and December for visitors to give back to the community, shop for holiday gifts, attend performances, take a class, and more. For more information, visit workhousearts.org.

SEE ENTERTAINMENT, PAGE 15

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First Night Alexandria takes place on Sunday, Dec. 31, 2023 in Old Town Alexandria.

FROM PAGE 13

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 midnight champagne. Tickets \$50. Building W-3 Theater. See the website for ticket prices for additional dates and times. Show runs through Feb 11. Fridays and Saturdays 8 pm and Sundays, 2 pm.

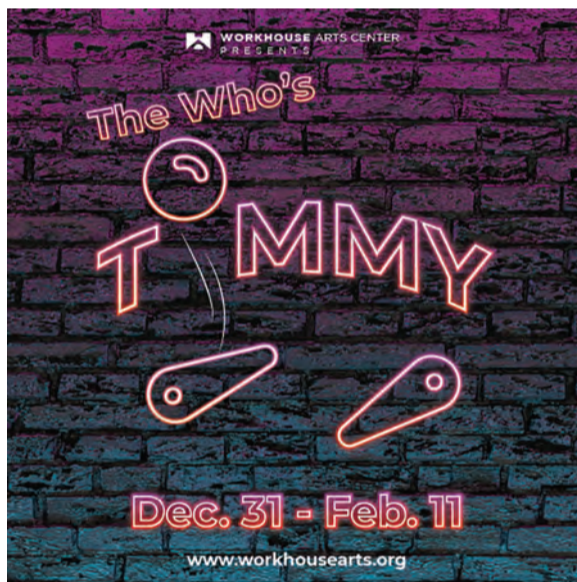
New Year's Eve Comedy Show with Antoine Scott – Sunday, Dec. 31, 8 pm
The Workhouse Arts Center presents, in collaboration with Rahmein Mostafavi, a special New Year's Eve comedy celebration. Time to laugh off 2023 and bring in 2024 with an abundance of joy! Join headliner Antoine Scott and a host of 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. In locations around Old Town Alexandria. 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 this Year:
Twilight Fireworks - This year's celebration will feature a twilight fireworks display at 6 p.m.

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The Who's Tommy will appear at Workhouse Arts Center on Sunday, Dec. 31, 2023.

on Alexandria's waterfront geared to families who want to enjoy the show with their kids and loved ones. First Night Alexandria will also still 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 Happy New Year” demonstration and special fun just prior to the new Twilight fireworks display.

For more information visit www.firstnightalexandria.org.

THURSDAY/JAN. 4

Foreign Language Film, “Kon-Tiki.” 1 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Norway, Denmark, Germany,

Sweden, United Kingdom. Directed by Joachim Rønning and Espen Sandberg. Shown in Norwegian with English subtitles. A dramatized story of Thor Heyerdahl and his Kon-Tiki expedition of 1947. Heyerdahl, an ethnographer and explorer who was convinced that the Polynesian islands were colonized by pre-Columbian South Americans, sets out to prove his thesis by sailing on a balsa wood raft from Peru to the South Pacific. Rated PG-13. Oscar and Golden Globe award nominee.

SATURDAY/JAN. 6

Winter Block Party. 1-4 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Join MCC for its 3rd Annual Winter Block Party. Participants will enjoy entertainment, games, food and a wide variety of outdoor amusements, crafts and more.

SATURDAY/JAN. 6

Furia Flamenca “Nevada Flamenca”. 7 p.m. At McLean Community Center, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. Come celebrate the holidays the Spanish way by commemorating Día de Reyes (Epiphany). This festive program will take you on a journey of some of the merriest holiday traditions as celebrated in Spain and Puerto Rico. Enjoy an evening of Spanish holiday music and song (villancicos) alongside flamenco dancing.

FRIDAY/JAN. 12

The Yale Spizzwinks Perform. 7:30 p.m. at St. Luke's Catholic Church, 7001 Georgetown Pike, McLean. America's oldest underclassman a cappella group featuring local Langley High School alumnus Tavian Jones, will be performing. Since their founding in 1914, the Spizzwinks have released several dozen albums and performed around the globe, bringing their diverse repertoire of over 600 arrangements everywhere from local New Haven elementary schools, to concert halls including The Kennedy Center and Carnegie Hall, special events, businesses, and universities. Every year they take an international tour, most recently to Ecuador, Chile, New Zealand, South Africa, and they are headed to Asia next summer. Check out their website: www.spizzwinks.com or follow them on Instagram @spizzwink. Tickets \$15 adult, \$10 child/student can be purchased on spizzwinks.ticketbud.com or at the door.

A Complete Whiff



By KENNETH B. 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 Alive,” to invoke Jesse Jackson – out of context, that any 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 twain can be on different twacks (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.

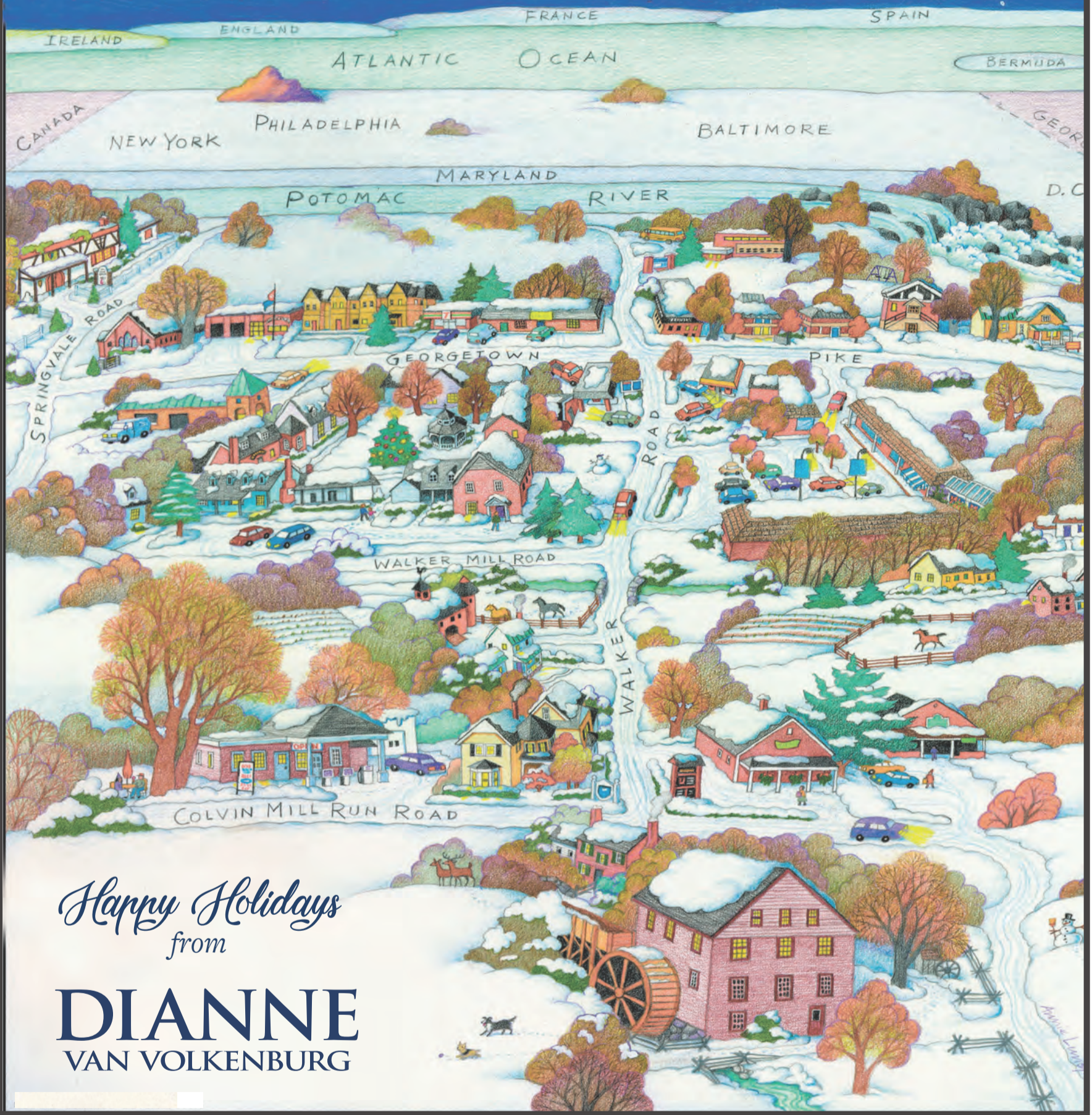
And it was in this context that I prepare you readers for something specifically to do with yours truly. What I am about to divulge is/was 100% my fault. Being responsible for the business/money side of the marriage means that I am expected to be organized concerning how much money is coming in, and most importantly, how much is going out, and moreover, when pay or play options are feasible/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'm to be aware of the ones due less frequently (quarterly, semiannually, 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 now 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 et cetera. As you might imagine for a cancer patient nearing his 15th year under the proverbial gun so to speak, there are regular/recurring costs associated with my care and now is 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 1-ish for an Oct. 1-ish 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. 27 that I was told I had a co-pay due. (The other part of this story being the anxiety about the results and all I wrote about in the column entitled: “Uncertainty.”) “Co-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 begrudge the health insurance for not reminding me. Nor do I think Dina should have said something. This was on 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 “terminal” cancer. I mean cancer is 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 former insurance broker, I am aware of the costs and consequences of neglecting one's insurance responsibilities. And if one is not an experienced agent as I was, there's plenty of news stories and articles available online about devastating decisions that some families have had to make between rent, food, and buying drugs needed to keep them alive. And when the receptionist advised me of my plan's expiration (or my participation in it, I should say), it was the furthest thing from my mind. I was not thinking at all about having to renew/re-apply at all. Not that I thought for second that it was an automatic self-renewing kind of coverage (I knew it wasn't). It was just as we used to say in the back yard, whiffle bat in hand after missing the whiffle ball: “a complete whiff.”

It's not exactly a total disaster, I/we still have health insurance, And I can re-apply for this special plan at any time; I will just have incurred unnecessary expenses in the interim. Hopefully, there won't be too many cancer-related decisions that cost us money until I'm able to re-qualify (it's hardly guaranteed). I just hope that Dina stays in her lane and doesn't veer from the social lane into my business lane. I never really planned it this way. I tried in the early days of our marriage to never make the decisions without consulting the manual (my wife). However, over time and over wrought, it became clear to me that since she was minding her business, I should be minding mine, except her business was social; mine was business – with some potential real world consequences, unfortunately.

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

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