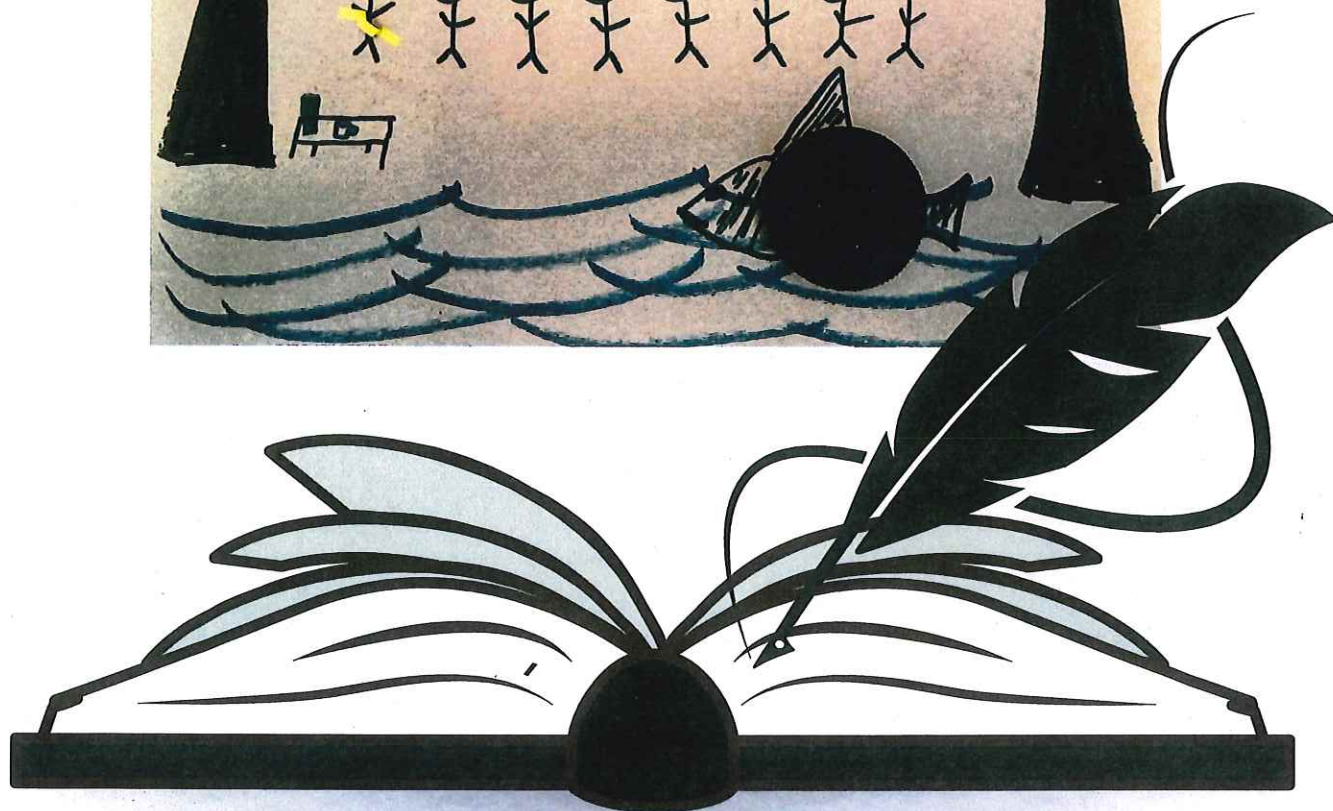
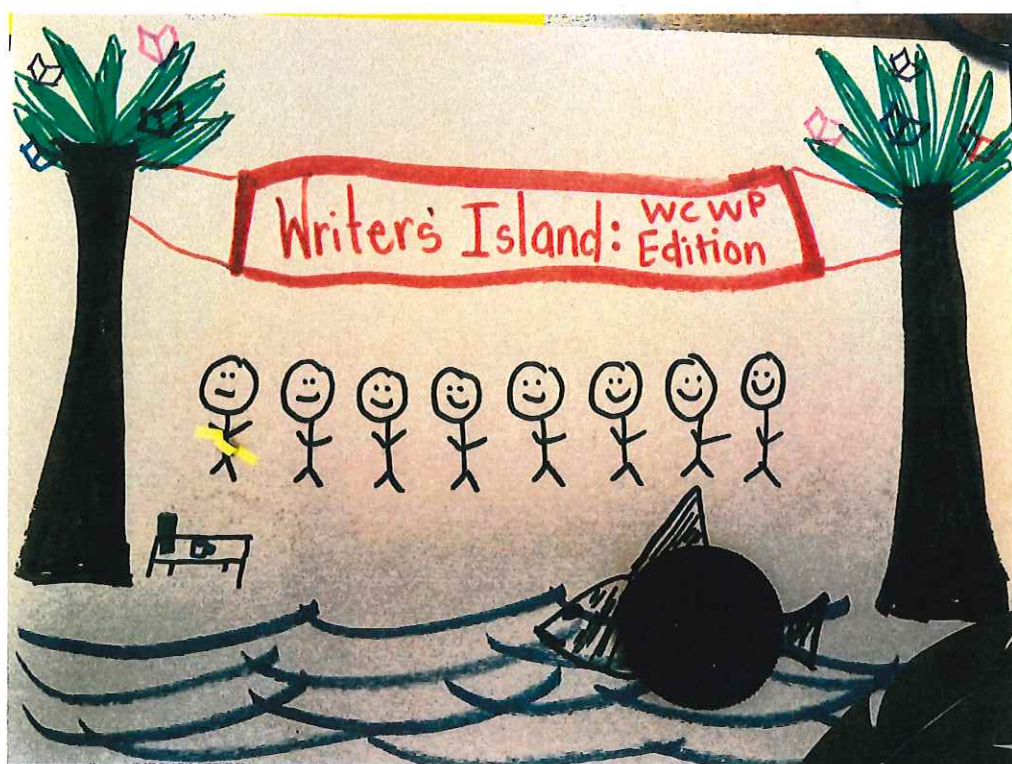


West Chester Writing Project

SUMMER INSTITUTE

2023





2023 Institute Class

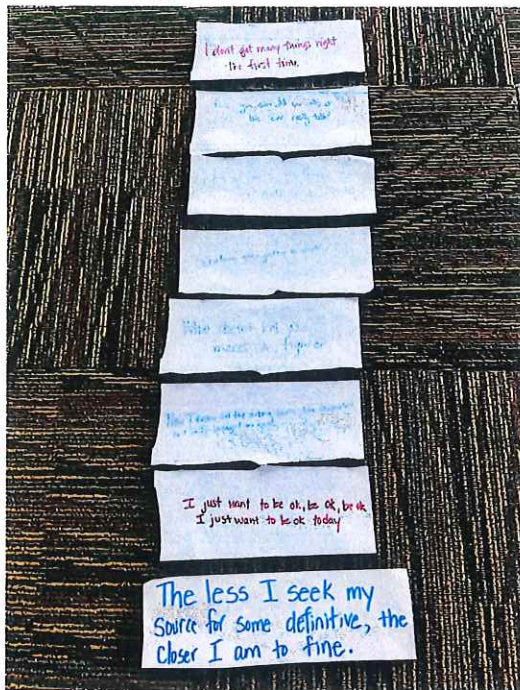
Dear Sharks,

Welcome to Writers' Island: WCWP Edition, where a group of teachers came together to learn in a conference room- and what a time we had!. While Chat GPT gave us a start to this letter, some human editing and revising was required on our part. Our time together flew faster than a shark chasing its prey! We learned so much about each other as teachers and as humans. There was both literal and figurative spilling of the tea.

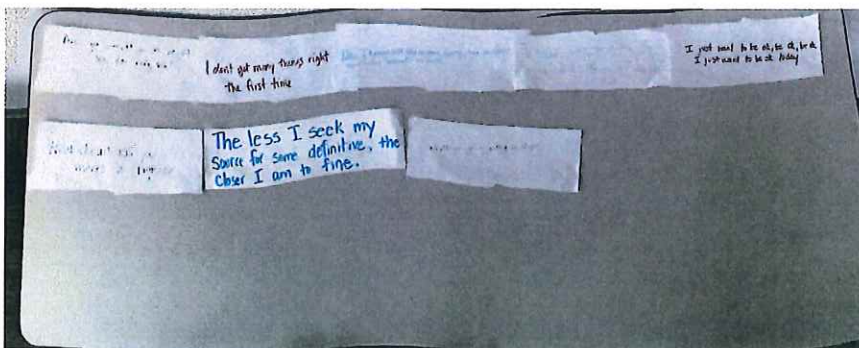
This small but mighty group bonded in a way that really showed through in the thoughtful way you included each other's interests in your demo presentations. You laughed and learned and grew so much in just two weeks. This institute Love Story ended too soon, but we will remember it All Too Well. Take that Shark Energy into your new school year.

Love,
Pauline and Jen

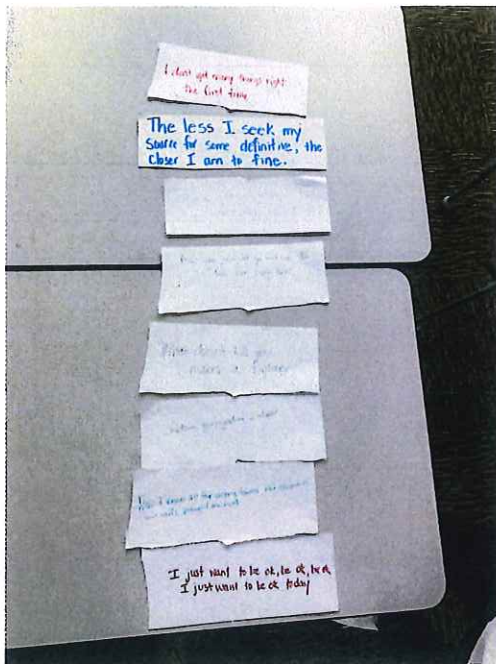
Found Poetry, Four Ways



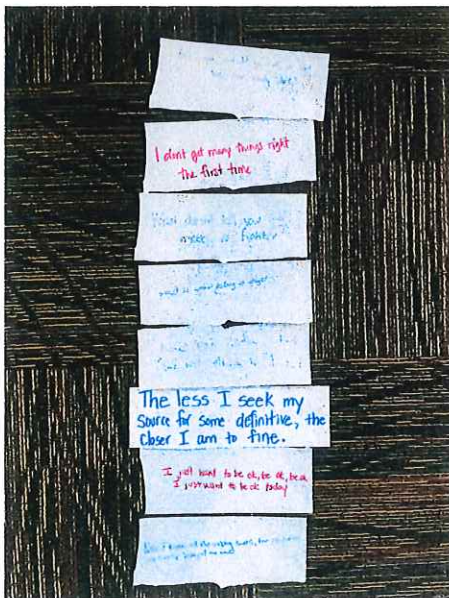
Pauline & Dian



Jen & Laura



Alex & Katy



Lauren and John



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WCWP Soundtracks

Install App

#	Title	Album	Date added	
1	Closer to Fine Indigo Girls	Indigo Girls (Expanded Edition)	3 days ago	4:01
2	The Luckiest Ben Folds	Rockin' The Suburbs	3 days ago	4:25
3	Skylight Pinegrove	Skylight	3 days ago	4:19
4	Pyramid Song Radiohead	Amnesiac	3 days ago	4:48
5	Stronger Britney Spears	Oops!... I Did It Again	3 days ago	3:23
6	Stronger (What Doesn't Kill You) Kelly Clarkson	Stronger (Deluxe Version)	3 days ago	3:41
7	Stronger Kanye West	Graduation	3 days ago	5:12
8	State Lines Novo Amor	Birthplace	3 days ago	3:28
9	Be OK Ingrid Michaelson	Be OK	3 days ago	2:28

0:40 3:13

Alex Del Giudice

Dear baseball,

To be honest, and I mean this with no hyperbole, I don't know where I would be without you. The journey that I have been on with you for the past 20-plus years has been a wild one. So many memories & moments were made involving you, especially ones with my brother and my dad. Many tears, smiles, laughs and journeys, you were there. From the moment, I felt the seams run off my fingers and I heard the pop of the mitt, I was hooked on you. You framed an identity that I am proud of. From the little league fields at Walker to the turf field at Archbishop Carroll where we played for Cabrini, my growth as a person and player I owe in large part to you. There are so many memories that involve you, but not directly. I met my best friend through you and my life changed because I was somewhat alright at throwing you or hitting you. I missed so many parties and experiences when I was little because of you, but I wouldn't change a thing. The reason why I chose you is because you are a culmination of all the hard work that paid off in this journey and what set up the next phase of my life. You are somewhat like writing, you may fail (you will) but the moments in which it clicks, man, there's no better feeling.

Sincerely,

Alex Del Giudice

Realization

By: Alex Del Giudice

Teaching is a job no one can truly understand unless you're in it. There have been many a nights, many conversations within earshot of mine who blow off teaching as this easy, stress-free job with summers off and in an essence, glorified babysitting. What they don't see is the countless amount of hours outside of work educators put in just on a day to day basis. Even more so when those many nights I lie awake, my face illuminated by the infinite scroll of Twitter, watching as the inevitable "lets bash teacher" brigade comes out full stop in the form of so called "keyboard warriors".

As the school year comes to a close, the rush to input final grades in is most of what clouds my burnt out mind. The other half, however, is taking time to reflect on what I had hope (do hope?) the impact I have on my student's lives. Even more so I lie awake, because of a couple words a student said to me as he left my classroom for the last time this year, thinking we had built a relationship:

"I learned nothing from this class all year. It was a participation grade".

They say in this profession you can't take things like that personally, especially from a 130 pound soaking wet 15 year old teenager who clearly doesn't know just how to say "thank You". But, I think what I am realizing now is that I wouldn't be who I am as a teacher if I didn't take things in the profession personally. I care about this kids above all else, and it is what truly drives me every single day, so to not take things like that to heart, I would feel as if I am doing a disservice in the job and what it means to be a teacher. With that, I also learned a very valuable

lesson. There are going to be kids who hate you, hate English or both. On the other side of the coin, there are going to be kids who need you and from what my colleague told me the other day:

“That one student who needs you is worth a thousand assholes”

And as I write this overlooking my class who works on their own reflection on the year, I learn to take the good with the bad and to hone in on the kids who well and truly need me and teachers alike, because, after all, those are the kids I lose sleep over. They are magic, and it takes teacher like me, like many out in the world, to find it, bolster it and let the rest of the world see what those students cannot.

Getting Lost

By Lauren Ferguson

Picture it. Florence, July 2000. My group of fellow Pitt in Italy students was not as devoted to history as I, so a walk to the English Cemetery or the Cimitero degli Inglesi to see the final resting place of one of the greatest expatriate communities in history was not on their list of “to-dos” during our semester there. This was not significantly troubling to me as I much preferred a solitary walk to one inundated with useless babble of the young and superficial. Cemeteries, especially old ones, are a favorite walking place of mine. Each headstone contains forgotten tales resting under it. At my most content, I am a consumer of stories.

After paying what would seem a ridiculous amount of money now to access the internet in a small cafe, my quest could finally begin. I started off with four pages of printed mapquest directions in hand. Memory has faded for the walk to the cemetery, but the cemetery itself has not. The space is contained by a gated fence within a brick wall and charming Italian streets around the Piazzale Donatello which makes the cemetery appear as an island in the middle of the city. Italian drivers zoom around as if to keep those contained within its walls in their place. Though drawn to the notable burials, the grave that sticks out the most in my memory is the one of infant Florence named for the city in which she spent her brief life. I still wonder who her parents were and if, when, and why they chose to leave her behind in a strange land. She still haunts me.

My curiosity peaked by this small adventure. I decided to continue to walk but, this time, without a destination. When in Florence, the most important identifier in location is the Arno River. So, I would be brave and cross it. Once across the river, the bustling city turned quiet. Birds could be heard chirping. Neighborhood cats sauntered on their daily routes. I passed

beautiful, stately, Italian homes with climbing flowers and iron gates. There was something so exciting about seeing lives being lived in my temporary city. There were no tourists here. These homes were inhabited by actual Florentines. It was exhilarating to wonder what their daily lives were like. What stories were going on behind those gates?

As my mind created story after story about the people, my body continued walking as if disconnected from the rest of me. It took quite a while to realize that my wandering had not stopped to reveal any familiar landmarks or streets and that my desire to lose myself in the city had, in fact, gotten me lost.

The incline of the sidewalk was getting continuously steeper. The sounds of the city becoming quieter. The day was getting hotter. My mouth was getting dryer by the minute. The humidity was getting higher, and I could feel the frizz in my hair growing as I moved towards the end of what seemed to be nowhere. I was senza water, map, method of communication, and possibly common sense. The once comforting cover of mature trees began to feel suffocating. I was sure I would be lost forever in this spot, one of the many expats to expire in this city. I was convinced my story might end there. Should I have turned back? Probably. That would have been the intelligent choice, but I was young and naive. So, I carried on for what I was sure was hours.

Suddenly, as if by magic, the trees backed away from the street and the noise level returned to bustling. Into view came tourists, buses, and vendors selling keepsakes. And just past them, was the entire city of Florence in panorama from the Piazzale Michelangelo. I had left the cemetery wondering about Florence and here she was laid out in front of me in all her glory. Had little Florence's parents seen this view and knew she'd be safe here? I certainly hoped so. I woke up that morning hoping the day would allow my imagination to explore stories that had ended and had found my own story instead.

The journey felt epic in proportions. In my memory the last twenty-three years, it has been. Google maps assures me now that it would take thirty-four minutes to walk, so it is not quite as substantial as I remember it in distance. But, the day will never be replicated in my lifetime as it was the moment I discovered not all who wander are lost.

Storymatic Story by Lauren Ferguson
Revised Using Feedback from chatGPT

The air was hot with anticipation. Lining the sidewalk, camping chairs filled with festooned adults waving flags flashing red, white and blue and toddlers in wagons dripping rainbows of popsicles down chubby arms. The bubble of conversation ebbing and flowing as the battery operated fans and spray bottles relieved the heat. Brief breaths of cool air wafting past the sweaty necks and faces of excited observers. The street itself was silent as if forgetting its purpose - a wide open space made for movement empty.

A solitary fellow in a uniform of golf shirt and khaki shorts stepped out of a van. The side plastered with a verdant scene of manicured lawn. He knocked on doors despite the throng of people in the street. Each knock went unanswered. He would simply turn and walk dejectedly down the stoop to the next door as if the repetition of the act would yield a different result at the next house. There was a job to be done, and it was getting done whether he enjoyed it or not. He was ignored by the crowd as if the doors did not belong to them. The only being to acknowledge his presence was a scraggly orange tabby cat with a green collar. Incensed by his presence on her street, she began to follow the solitary fellow from door to door. As each door went unanswered, she judged him silently from the top step. Her silence added to the increasing depression of failure he felt. As each door went unanswered, she waited on the top step insulting him with the swish of her tail.

Finally, the solitary fellow had some luck. A door opened and the tabby cat walked through, surprising the elderly lady who had not been expecting guests. "Get out of my house you dirty beast!" she screamed. The solitary man finally spoke . . .

Laura's Narrative

Catch and Release

"And what a time it was

It was...

A time of innocence

A time of confidences

Long ago, it must be

I have a photograph

Preserve your memories

They're all that's left you."

"Bookends", Simon and Garfunkel

I was never good at playing the long game. Or any game, really. I try to keep my eye on the ball while anticipating what's coming next, so I can get ahead of it. But I am really all raw nerves; you can see right through me. It's odd then, that I was in the moment on Tuesday night which began over wheat spaghetti and meat sauce. He had just come in from a long day at the farm, and would join me at the table. We are rarely alone these days, so tonight was a bonus.

He flits here and there— parkouring onto one counter, then pivoting to the table top, then high fiving the doorway, spinning and kicking his heels together as he jumps straight up into the air from a squatted position. "Mom, can you do that? Try, C'mon Mom. Just try." His hands are dirty, his arms dusty, his jeans oil stained, and his faded baseball cap pulled low; his white-blond curls peek out at nape and ears. Striking cornflower eyes pop out of his tanned face. I can't believe he is my prize. Instead of peppering him with questions, for once, I listen.

He's not sold on the farm yet. He tells me he won't wear their shirt because he has to purchase it; he really won't wear it because this new place is not home yet and might not ever be. His heart lies with the old farm where he worked since he got his working papers at fourteen. He shares the facts: his coworkers are cool. He's included in the after-hours bonfires. The mechanics

yard is a mess. The tractors are ancient—unairconditioned and open messing with his asthma. They could run things more efficiently, he tells me. He's trying to understand their system, and he's watching. He's observing his boss—"a whiz at numbers", but he misses the auction, misses seeing his farmer buddies—the old-timers. I am proud of his knowledge and work ethic. The conversation meanders to his wondering aloud how he'll ever buy a house. Am I going to kick him out? (I almost spit out my Diet Coke. Of course not!) With earnestness, he asks how people work all day and then come home and make dinner? And, if they have kids, how do they spend time with them? I stifle my chuckles—"I know, right?" His original plan of purchasing a rental property is off the table because, he realizes, he will also need a house to live in. I hear an unfamiliar sadness in his voice; he thinks he is "behind" and has to catch up.

I gently lob, "Are you interested in buying a house with JoJo? Do you think you want to get married?"

Bashfully, he sends back an emphatic: "No! I am not ready to get married, Ma. Jeez. Why'd you have to ask me that?"

A strange gulf opens up from safe, narrow waters. We both sense the depth. He is not ready for this new current, and neither am I. Leaning his chest low across the table, he reaches for me; his paw-like hand grips mine. He looks me in the eyes with love, sadness, and the gravity of this rare and heavy-for-a-moment-moment. He squeezes my hand and bleats, "Mom...Mom... Mom". And like that, he jumps up and out the garage door. I recognize this invitation and follow.

We skip through the dark garage out into the driveway while it is still daylight. The sky is like a pastel watercolor; each orangey-pink striation fading into purple into deep blue. We haven't done this in a couple years, but when he tosses me the volleyball, it's like no time has

passed: we are in sync again. Back and forth, we throw the ball...overhand, underhand, behind the back, under the leg.

Release: he is three and we are wide legged on the floor in the upstairs oversized room rolling the red and white polka-dotted ball back and forth while his infant brother napped.

Catch: the purple-swirl supermarket ball bounces off the bricks at the old house.

Release: Our leather mitts cushion the smack of the cradled baseballs.

Catch: "Remember the scooters? Original *and* electric? You found freedom on the streets."

Release: "Here are the car-keys. Be careful."

Catch: "I will! Love you, Mom."

Release: "I want to buy you a new mattress. You are too old to be sleeping on a slant!"

Catch: "You're nuts, Ma. That's so adult. I'll buy one when I'm good and ready to buy my own!"

The sky grows darker, and the black and white ball blends in with this inky night. It is elusive; I have trouble seeing to catch it. He's tricky. When he lets go, he spins the ball so it hits the driveway just in front of me then, *snap*, it boomerangs back making an uncertain game for me.

"My bad!" We laugh and apologize. Despite our mistakes, we find a new rhythm that builds to his last hurl of the night— a powerful kick sending the ball far away and deep into the neighbor's yard. He's showing me what he can do. Like a gazelle, he leaps effortlessly across the field as a black bat flitters up and down across the layers of lavender and pink bursting with life in the garden between us. The night smells like childhood. Like truth: crisp, hopeful, and real. I

see his five year old mosquito bitten legs racing around the grass, his long blond hair, his endless energy.

He sends the ball back, soaring and slamming into the knock-out roses, the bubble gum petals stunned and scattering. He bounds across the divide to fetch it amid thistle and pachysandra. "Ma," he surrenders, "I'm tired and gotta go to bed." I follow him back into the garage where he sits to take off his boots. "Good game," he affirms, lifting his chin from his laces as I move for the door and turn back. His blue eyes lock mine, and there is a pause: I sense he doesn't want this to be an uncomfortable moment. But he also wants me to know he loves me. Two things can be true at the same time, I'll think later.

I hesitate. My thumb presses the spring, and I step up and into the shadowy house, but I look over my shoulder to face him...one foot in, the other on the step. He suddenly cries, "Aw Mom", and I spring back to him, holding him awkwardly around his torso, my head tucked in his chest. I bury myself inside of him, my tears catching and burning in my throat. After a moment, he pulls away -too big, but really not-for this affection-but I hold on, and so does he. This fiddly embrace lasts for just a minute, but I feel him...the Stephen at 1, at 5, at 8, at 11, at 15, and the Stephen now. All of him is here, and yet so am I-the little me, the one at 6 who remembers a campfire, an autoharp, "Kumbaya", and Ghost in the Graveyard. The me at 7 in the silk-screened Donnie and Marie t-shirt and red Keds, catching lightning bugs and swinging on the gate. The little me who didn't yet know her son but who felt the same tenderness and lasting-forever innocence he felt. Feels. We are both here- like concentric rings of the same tree; slice this moment open and you'll see them starting small and expanding over the years. We are both there in the shared tree. He senses this truth too.

This letting go doesn't happen quickly. I turn to open the door in front of me, and he turns to his boots. A couple minutes later, as he heads upstairs to another room, he tosses "Night, Mom. I love you."

Release.

Letting Go of These Two Weeks

Swirl Poem

Laura Griffith



My hand gives me a hand
When I need it.
If it was my right, it would hold my pen,
But the left
Secures my journal,
Holding it open
While I compose.
One could say it is not left behind.
This left is an anchor
Offering security
As it keeps
The blank pages open—
Not closed.
Palm up to receive new energy from this group.
Palm down to ground.
Leaving my hand print on this special space
As others leave theirs on my heart.

“Home”
Dian McKinney

Home. We're all searching for, reaching for, a life that makes us feel like we're at home. Or we've arrived home. Or we're on our way home. Aren't we? Maybe that's just me. I very much value safety and security, and my actions prove her right. Choosing a college, accepting my first full-time job, moving into my first apartment, making (and losing) friends, meeting (and breaking up) with love interests. Given a bit of perspective, I realize almost all of my decisions have been motivated by a desire to gain security, a feeling of safety in my life, and to finally feel at home in my own skin. Home isn't just a place, though; it is also a feeling you get from being a part of a community, tiny or large, where you feel accepted. I've been lucky to live a joyous life in my adulthood, surrounded by people who make me feel like home. Teaching has also become a part of my life that feels like home, and making kids feel like they're at home in my classroom is the most meaningful purpose I have.

I began as a baby teacher striving to attain an image of the educator who I wanted to become. I was inspired by someone who made me feel at home in their classroom. I still remember how Mrs. Burke instilled a sense of self-belief in myself that no one had expressed to me before. I told Mrs. Burke about anything and everything that was going on in my life.. Dawn Burke was the first adult who made me feel like I didn't have anything to hide, which is why she made me feel at home most of all. I was determined to become a “home-maker” like Mrs. Burke: the teacher who is exceedingly compassionate, has fun with, and celebrates alongside kids as they grow. When I told Mrs. Burke about my first job as a teacher, I would argue she was even more excited than I was. As stereotypical as it sounds, I found myself spending unending hours decorating the classroom, unable to bottle my excitement and anticipation for the coming school year, and for a “new me” who would hopefully end up exactly like Mrs. Burke. Entering the precipice of my career, I was committed to make a home for the kids in my little classroom community.

I felt so lucky to return to a school where I spent my early elementary years:the Kennett Consolidated School District. I loved the teachers, I loved the community, and I still talked to my old friends from third grade. As a 1st grader, I clutched onto the “home” I had at Greenwood Elementary, my real home contrasted greatly. Much of my childhood in Chadds Ford is a blur, but what remains in my memory are blurred images of bruises, empty liquor bottles, and angry adults. Navigating unpredictability was made more difficult whilst raising my little brother, who greatly missed the feelings of “home” from the past. Our teachers were very thoughtful, but would have had no idea of the turmoil occurring outside of the confines of the safe school campus. We were quiet kids who followed the rules, but the teachers at Greenwood would never know that they were the home we needed. Moving away from Kennett Square, I both left home and arrived home, finally reconnecting with my mom, who, for many years, struggled to regain custody. Returning to Kennett as a teacher gave me the chance to give back to a community that was stable and loving when I needed a home the most.

As a new teacher at Kennett Middle School, I was humbled by how much I did NOT know and wasn't prepared for. Life as a teacher seemed safe: dependable income, supportive environments, and a purpose-driven life. An important lesson I learned was that in order to feel more at home in your own skin, you must inevitably try new things and risk feeling unsafe, or “homeless.” Just a broke college graduate with way too much student debt, I hopped from AirBnB to AirBnB my first few months of

teaching, happening upon pests and living with a house full of guys. It was almost like I was on an episode of *PUNK'D* while guest-starring as Jess in *New Girl*.

Just as I had found a home at Kennett before, I did it again. Hours away from my family and friends, I had to rely on my own intuition to guide me home. Overtime, as I gained more experience, connected with great mentors, discovered a teaching style that was both receptive to students and reflective of authenticity and genuinity, I began to weave together the image I had been striving toward with a new vision of who I was becoming. Teachers who thrive in education *MUST* at some point, sooner or later, abandon the desire to attain the definition of great teaching that was formulated before one stepped foot into the classroom. I began to trust my own intuition as a teacher in my third year of my career by creating my own definition of success. Mrs. Burke was a great inspiration for my success, but, with time, my own teaching style began to blossom. I had fun, took risks, tried so many new approaches, and attended a LOT of great professional development (thanks, Pauline!). In addition, I created great relationships with my kids. We laughed until we cried, shared our love of books, and trusted each other. Isn't that the best part of teaching? Kids talked to me when they had troubles with their friends or at home. We collaborated with the Guidance department and families to get services for students who needed support in their struggles. I felt like I was making a difference, I was appreciated, I was at home.

One Friday night, after a long week of teaching on the precipice of May, the second to last month of school, teachers gathered for a much-needed happy hour at my best friend Tamara's house. Cheese, wine, beer, and appetizers were shared, along with a combination of laughs and eye-rolls as we contemplated the stress of the coming months: PSSA state testing, final grades, comments, parent-teacher conferences, oh my!

Almost out of nowhere and in complete synchrony, phones began to buzz with a whirlwind of notifications ringing through the air. We all received a shocking email blast: one of our very own Kennett Middle School students had passed away. Not included in the message was any identifiable information about the student. Utter shock was the first response, evidenced by the incessant silence and eyes glancing back and forth the screen and each other. Then the chatter began.

Who is it?

Were they a student whom everyone knew?

Was there a car accident?

Who was absent today? Were they absent in your class, too?

Let's call Jenna. Maybe it was a mental health incident.

It can't be one of mine.

It can't be one of mine.

It can't be one of mine. Can it?

At some point, one of the teachers learned that it had not been an accident at all, but instead a case of homicide and suicide.

I thought to myself, *"What are the chances? Impossible."* These things don't happen to my kids. They were happy, helpful, selfless, and full of life everyday. They smiled at me and each other in the hallway and they said thank you every day at the end of class. Even kids who struggled the most always greeted

every teacher and exuded kindness in every interaction. In addition, I had had no negative interactions with families this year. Not even one incident or report had waved any red flags about potential dangers or concerns.

I'm sure not it's not one of mine. I'm absolutely positive.

In my certainty, I took a deep breath, already preparing to console a teacher around me who could, at any moment, receive the news no teacher would ever imagine they would receive. Moments, minutes, and almost an hour ticked by without any new notifications. We were incessantly searching local news websites for more updates, but none arrived.

The first person to get a phone call was T-----. Her phone buzzed in her pocket and she gasped the words, *"It's L-----."* Her eyes went blank and her breath hushed completely. *"No,"* she stuttered. *"No, it can't be him. That doesn't make any sense. That can't be him. He was so small and helpless. This isn't right. What happened?"* The phone call ended shortly after and Tamara began sobbing between gasps of air.

I taught two students named ---- that year, and they were extremely smart, conscientious, kind, fun-loving kids, and both Honors students at that. *"It couldn't be either of them,"* I thought to myself. *"This kind of thing wouldn't happen to either of my kids."* I was wrong.

I asked Tamara the full name of the student, and I felt as if I was hit with a large, loaded train. Words rushed out of my mouth faster than I could comprehend: *"It can't be him. This has to be a mistake. That makes no sense. Him? What? Are you sure? This can't be happening. Are you sure?"* My mind was racing, my fingers began tingling, and my head began to feel light. It was almost like my body felt numb, kind of like I was in a dream. I started to wonder if I was.

Soon enough, my phone began buzzing as well. I quickly said goodbye to my co-workers, ran to my car, and returned the phone call. I don't remember the entire conversation, but I remember feeling so helpless and stupid. As my principals broke the news to me, which I had already known, my breath shortened and I felt like I was hyperventilating.

How could this have gone completely under my radar? Wouldn't I be the first to suspect? Why didn't I detect it?

I still think about ---- all of the time. He reminds me so much of myself when I was a student at Greenwood. He worked hard, was so humble, and always put others before himself. He made KMS proud because of his commitment to kindness and friendship. There will always be a part of me that believes that, if I had been more present or thoughtful or careful or "nosey" I would have been able to prevent this from happening.

"Trust is a Butterfly"

Dian McKinney

Trust is a delicate butterfly gracefully and without care floating out of a crumbling building. She has endured the beautiful Spring with blooming wildflowers; scorching Summer devoid of moisture or nectar; windy Fall following scenic roads, pretending it is a bird fluttering past wheezing cars; long Winter mornings nestled in a crevasse between branches in a wooded forest. She is ever-evolving, at once introspective and flamboyant. She admires the colors adorned on other bugs and animal creatures and, to her surprise, glances back at her own wings to discover she wears colors she's not seen before. She allows difficult feelings and a safe hostile whilst flying against the wind of storms. She sometimes follows paved roads, heavily traveled by those she admires, but welcomes a drafty breeze to entice a new direction. She is at once innocent and lived, child-like and wise.

Never Settle
by Katy Mills

Dating these days is hard. The apps often feel like a chore, and I have to coach myself into finding the line between being too picky and staying open to something that might surprise me. It's annoying. The conversations are typically small talk: "how's your week going?" or "any fun plans for the weekend?" and sometimes that turns into drinks, but sometimes it just fizzles because I don't have the energy to keep asking perfunctory questions and neither does the other person. Sometimes I truly wonder why I'm doing it. Sometimes I've taken month-long breaks. But ultimately, I know I want a family one day, and I'd like a partner alongside me for that journey. So here I am.

A few years ago, I went through a terrible breakup. Terrible. We were engaged, so the breakup was messy and hurtful and has required lots of therapy for me to process. As a result, I didn't date for quite some time. Prior to that, I never really dated; I've been a serial relationship girl since I was in high school. When I felt ready to "get back out there", I had no idea where to start or what to do. My friend Caroline had met her boyfriend using an app and she encouraged me to try a few- Bumble and Hinge. She helped me set up my profile and showed me the ropes, and I was off to the races. Or rather, she was. I definitely allowed her to swipe for me AND start most conversations for me in the early days.

The first guy I hit it off with was named Sean. We exchanged numbers and texted for a week or two before deciding to go get drinks. Sean and I landed on a happy hour at Victory in Kennett that upcoming week. The night before the date, - my first date in about 10 years, mind you - Victory exploded. The place caught fire and literally exploded. Burnt to the ground. Was the universe trying to send me some kind of omen about re-entering the dating world?

We switched locations and the date was fine. Nothing special. There was not another. The next time, I decided I would go into the date without so much texting ahead of time- maybe that was what I had done wrong. Maybe I needed to go into the date with less information to keep my expectations at bay and give us more to talk about. So my next date, a few weeks later, was with Tommy, who I had only superficially chatted with for a few days on the app.

This was also a terrible idea. I learned very quickly that I should maybe get to know someone at least a little bit through the apps before going out with them. Tommy began the date by asking me about dating during COVID, which was normal for the time, but then relayed that he had a condition that kept him from wearing a mask called "I don't give a fuck". K great, I thought. The conversation continued in a strangely combative way the entire time we were there with

him trying to rile me up politically. When we talked about books, he made a point to say he saw I'd read *How to be an Antiracist* because it was in a picture I'd used on my profile. When I turned the conversation towards our jobs, he shared with me his issues about public schools and CRT. Eventually, he asked how I felt about guns and shared that he was carrying at that moment, in the PJ Whelihan's we were at. And, in case I was worried, he had another rifle in the car "just in case", at which point I spilled my beer and wondered what the hell I was doing there.

Over the years, I've had a few others stick out, though thankfully none were quite as whacky as Tommy. There was Andrew, who continued to give me high-fives throughout dinner (every time he agreed with me on something he gave me a high-five). There was Dom, who told me South Park trivia for 30 minutes before I was able to flag down a waitress and ask for the check. There was Mike, who casually mentioned after a great evening together that he does cocaine frequently. There have been a lot of mediocre dates with nice guys who just didn't do it for me. There have been a few dates where I was excited and thought maybe it could turn into something, but then he didn't feel the same. I've even been in a "situationship", a term I learned after the fact but fit perfectly.

I've also learned all about "ghosts" and "hauntings". (Who knew so much vocabulary would come with this new venture?) Some ghosts disappear while we're chatting- all of a sudden, they simply stop responding. I admit, I have been guilty of doing this. It's not great. Some ghosts disappear after the date happens; I've been left hanging after sending a text saying I had a good time. Once, I was fully stood up- the guy just never showed. If these guys then try to text later, apparently that's the haunting.

One guy, Zach, haunted me. He was the one who stood me up, but when he reached back out a few months after the fact, I gave him the benefit of the doubt. We hit it off again and we texted for a few weeks, making plans for a Saturday that we were both free. The week leading up to it, I was nervous- he had stood me up last time, after all. But throughout the week I checked with him. On Tuesday, I asked if he was still free. On Thursday, I mentioned some ideas I had for our day. On Friday, I said, "can't wait to see you tomorrow!", to which he responded, "me either!". When Saturday rolled around, I texted him at 11:30-ish to ask what his ETA might be. Nothing. At 2:30, I texted and asked if everything was okay... Nothing. He ghosted AGAIN. I could not believe it.

Through all of this disappointment, I have learned a lot about myself. I know what I want and what I'm worth. I've come to give myself more credit for the things I am able to do by and for myself. While of course it would be nice at times to have someone to share the mortgage payment or help with dinner, I'm proud of my achievements as a single, independent woman.

But I've also learned I have a really good village by my side already. I don't lack support or love. I have friends who make sure I return from each date safely and verify that I haven't been turned into a lampshade. They meet me out for dinners, drinks, movies. We take trips together. They're there for me when I need them, showing me that even without a partner, I'm never alone.

In the Attic
Inspired by *Armchair Expert with Dax Shepard*
by Katy Mills

Host

The messiness of being a human:
Being open to
Any questions,
Chatting about vulnerabilities and
Letting me into your heart.
We jumped right in!
We didn't
Ask ourselves, why?
We have to share our truths or
Someone else might tell the story.
If not me,
Who understands a messy past?
Open to baring it all,
Chatting to someone
Ready to be interviewed
On the couch,
Sitting in the attic.

Guest

Sitting in the attic
On the couch,
Ready to be interviewed.
Chatting to someone
Open to baring it all,
Who understands a messy past.
If not me,
Someone else might tell the story.
We have to share our truths or
Ask ourselves why
We didn't.
We jumped right in,
Letting me into your heart,
Chatting about vulnerabilities and
Any questions;
Being open to
The messiness of being a human.

“Levitation”
John Sweeney

*You should see. There's a place I want to take you. When the train comes, I will hold
you 'cause you blow my mind...*

Dark clouds loom over Charm City, but a moment of serenity overtakes Charles Village. The autumn wind rattles leaves from their trees, and I watch them cycle under my feet as I walk, careful not to slip. Every front porch is a waterfall, rain cascading down concrete steps, each tributary feeding the growing downhill river of 33rd Street. Droplets of water cling to the brim of my hat before falling into the procession.

The pale white light of Union Memorial Hospital seeps into the mist. The building's bright signs illuminate half-sentences in the puddles below, and my eyes strain to string together words I can decipher through the ripples. Baltimore is a city of found poetry.

*On the bridge levitating 'cause we want to, when the unknown will surround you...
there is no right time. There is no right time...*

Time moves more slowly on afternoons like these. The treetops' mosaic of oranges and yellows faded weeks earlier, leaving a no-man's-land down the center of the street. After seasons of shrouding itself, the neighborhood can see all and be seen by all. Here, there is nowhere to hide. In time, the flowers will bloom again, and the birds will return to their perches. But will my place be saved for me?

*The branches of the trees, they will hang lower now. You will grow too quick, then you
will get over it...*

The pace of my steps steadies as I reach the red brick of campus. Everything familiar still feels strange to me. How many times have I walked through the same archway, past the same set of granite stairs? How many sunsets have I seen reflected off the tower of Gilman Hall? How different am I today from the person who traveled this path the first time? My bones ache from the growing pains.

There's a place I want to take you, when the unknown will surround you...

"I Am From..."

John Sweeney

I am from lightning illuminating the shadows of Austrian mountains,
from instruments' strings, strummed, plucked, and bowed.

I am from throwing Jason Kelce a Bud Light during the Super Bowl parade,
from Joel Embiid's MVP season and Kawhi's buzzer beater.

I am from long stories about places I have never thought to visit,
from poems about emotions I have never experienced.

I am from the rhododendrons in my parents' garden,
the dark purple at the peak of their powers.

I am from the long shadow of mental health battles
and the courage to seek out help in the fight.

I am from, "When Irish eyes are smiling, they are usually up to something,"
from, "Worse things have happened to better people,"
from, "You always did the best with what you had."

I am from vanilla and cinnamon candles wafting through my bedroom
during an afternoon thunderstorm in the summertime.

I am from celebrating the small victories
and learning to let go of the rest.

I AM FROM...



I AM FROM



"A moment on the lips, forever on the hips" and
"You are what you eat."
From Blubber and the Truffle Shuffle

FROM

Seventeen Magazine and YM
From Victoria's Secret models and Kate Moss's
ribcage
From the Abercrombie Aesthetic and sizes too
small.



I AM FROM



being measured for costumes in front of the
whole class
and fear of wearing a bikini in public
From the Freshman 15 and fat jokes as
punchlines

FROM

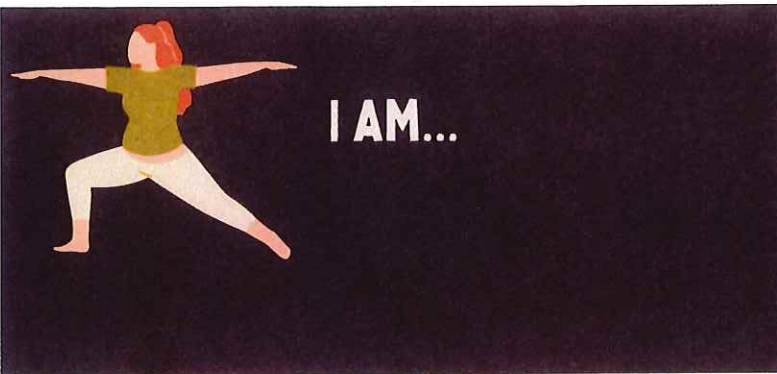
puking in the bathroom at lunch
and binge drinking after fasting all
day
From six is a plus size and BMI
registers as obese.



I AM FROM

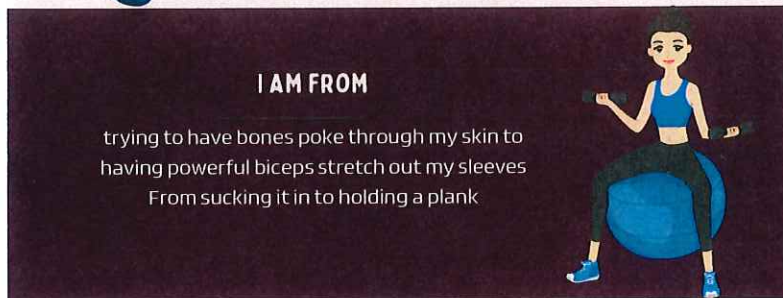


Thigh gap aspirations and if I were thinner I
would be married with children by now.
From Weight Watchers and scale shame
from point calculation and self-loathing



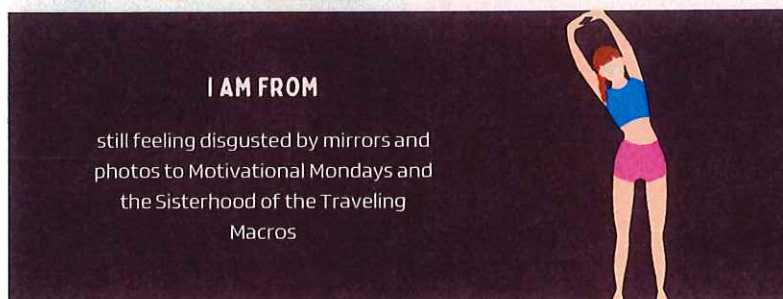
FROM

Burn and B3 and a still-evolving journey
from wanting to be skinny to wanting to be
strong



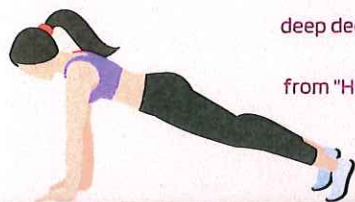
FROM

binging and barfing to crunches and kettlebells
From the weight of the scale to the weight of the
dumbbell



FROM

deep deconditioning and deconstructing years
of brainwashing
from "How does this serve me?" and "How will I
feel tomorrow?"






because where I am from is not where I am going

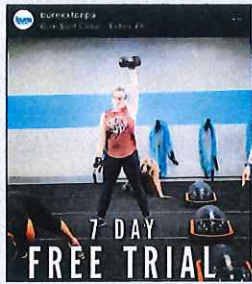
By: Jen Greene



Six Reasons You Should Join My Cult

Burn Boot Camp is more than just a gym. It's an ethos. It's a community. It's a cult.

Evidence	Reasoning
	<p>Burn is a Community.</p> <p>While numerous camps are offered each day, you will likely find the group that becomes your people. They are the ones that you see each day. They support you and encourage you to keep going. You start to develop friendships that transcend the gym. Suddenly there are group chats and happy hours and book swaps. These people who started as strangers turn into the family you didn't even know you needed but now you can't live without.</p>
	<p>At Burn you can be yourself- even if yourself is a weirdo.</p> <p>Burn embraces you for who you are. You want to dress up for camp? We love a theme week. The protocol calls for a T-Rex finisher? You better believe costumes will be involved. There is no judgement, only laughter and joy.</p>
	<p>Burn pushes you beyond what you thought was possible.</p> <p>If you've lived comfortably in the 5-10 pound weight world, or no weights at all, Burn will slowly build you up until you're using a 100 pound dumbbell for squats. You won't drop it on your foot or fall over from the weight and after 8 reps, you actually feel like you could do two more. It's some kind of magical sorcery that happens!</p>



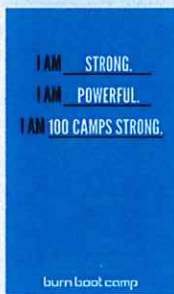
Burn can help you conquer goals

Do you want muscles? More stamina? To just feel like a complete beast lifting heavy weights? Burn has a variety of weights and will offer little challenges to help keep you on track and motivated. Suddenly things you felt like were out of reach for you become easier and you can track and see visible progress.



At Burn, dancing is encouraged as active recovery.

Burn offers excellent playlists during the workout, ranging from 80s classics to 90s boy bands to hardcore rock and early 2000s hip-hop. The music really helps you get through the workout with an upbeat attitude and keeps you in the zone. Of course, dancing is always encouraged between sets or stations.



Burn improves your mental as well as physical health

As Elle Woods once said, "Exercise gives you endorphins. Endorphins make you happy. Happy people just don't shoot their husbands. They just don't." As much as Burn will help you with your physical health, it can also help with your mental health. Your workout gives you a break from the reality of the world. If you're an early bird, the workout can help get your head right for the day ahead.

No, thank you.

- **Inspired by our 'Writing Down the Bones' freewrite**
- **By Pauline Schmidt**

Banning books.
Banning history.

No, thank you.

Moms of Liberty taking over education.
Religious ideas in *public* schools.

No, thank you.

Questioning teachers.
Questioning students.

No, thank you.

Attacking public education.
Cutting funding.

No, thank you.

Bigger class sizes.
Smaller rooms.

No, thank you.

Standardized test-focused.
Scripted curriculum.

No, thank you.

Limiting curriculum.
Capping passion.

No, thank you!

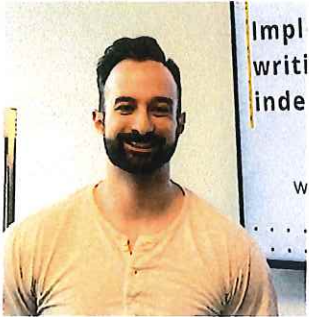


Once Upon a Time, Season 7 Episode 20
"Is This Henry Mills?"

(talking about college)		
Regina	Teen Henry	Adult Henry
It's your last first day of school; just give me this & you'll never have to do this again.	(Henry reluctantly allows her to mark the doorway with his height as she writes '12th Grade' in sharpie marker.)	
I know you think I treat you like a child.		
You're not my little boy anymore.		
	I'm from the real world.	
If he remembers who he is, He'll believe again.	Maybe I should consider other options.	
I've been thinking Maybe your future is outside of Storybrooke.	Mom - I thought you didn't want me to leave home.	

Oh, I don't! But...being a parent Also means learning to let go.	Really?	
I just want you to be happy. Even if that means going away.	Thanks mom.	
(reviewing college acceptances)		
You got into every school you applied to. I'm so proud.	Thanks mom. My essays. I couldn't write about being kidnapped in Neverland, or how I met my first girlfriend in Camelot... They didn't accept the 'real' Henry Mills. If I go out there & keep lying, I won't be me. Maybe I'm better off staying at home. What do I do?	
Henry, I wish I could tell you to stay here and never grow up. But, you've already grown up.		

And the only person who can tell you what to do is you.		
(Seattle...years ahead)		
You grew up. You left home. You went on amazing adventures.		
(Henry, on the phone with himself in the past)		
	<p>(Young Henry)</p> <p>To be honest.... I'm having doubts. It's hard letting go of this place.</p>	<p>(Adult Henry)</p> <p>Is this Henry Mills? It's your graduation. I just called to congratulate you. So, what's next?</p> <p>Believe me, I know. Give you a piece of advice? Home isn't a place. It's the people in it. AND, they will always be with you.</p>
(After the phone conversation with himself)		
You seem different. What's changed?	I wasn't honest about wanting to leave. Change is hard. The unknown is scary.	
But, now it's not?	Oh, no. Still terrifying.	

	<p>But I know home isn't a place. It's the people you love. And even when I'm not in Storybrooke, Storybrooke will always be with me.</p> <p>(In a letter to his mom):</p> <p>Sometimes, you have to leave home. You've been there for so long, you don't know who or what you'll be outside. Then, you realize...</p> <p>Every experience Every trial Every moment Has shaped you and you take that place with you.</p> <p>No matter where you go next.</p>	
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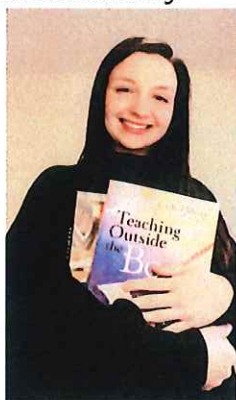
Participant	Bio
<p data-bbox="241 336 470 367">Alex DelGiudice</p> 	<p data-bbox="568 336 1377 800">Alex is going into his fifth year of teaching and his third year of teaching English at Upper Merion Area High School in King of Prussia. Alex is currently pursuing his master's in English at West Chester. In his free time, Alex spends his time at the gym, playing video games or overthinking about something that doesn't need much thought to begin with. If you ever see Alex out and about, there's a 50% chance it might not be Alex, it could be someone masquerading as him in the form of an evil doppelganger.</p>
<p data-bbox="241 840 479 871">Lauren Ferguson</p> 	<p data-bbox="568 840 1377 1304">Lauren is entering her seventeenth year of teaching English at the secondary level and her fifth year at Kennett High School. After finishing her undergraduate and masters degrees at the University of Pittsburgh, she headed back to Chester County to teach at her alma mater, Coatesville Area High School. Lauren loves to read, foster kittens, cook, do yoga, and since joining the WCWP loves podcasts and now sees herself as a writer. She is "the luckiest" to have her husband, Vinnie, and children, Anna and Gideon.</p>
<p data-bbox="241 1344 402 1375">Jen Greene</p> 	<p data-bbox="568 1344 1377 1713">Jen is the WCWP assistant director and co-facilitator of the summer institute. She is currently a second grade teacher in the West Chester Area School District, heading into her twentieth year of teaching. Since completing her doctorate at Widener University, she has dabbled in higher ed as an adjunct professor. In her spare time, Jen likes to dance, workout in her cult at Burn Boot Camp, and hike with her two Dalmatians, Murphy and Maeve.</p>

Laura Griffith



In her first life, Laura taught at Upper Darby High School and Delaware County Community College. She is a veteran teacher currently teaching story, empathy, and writing via language art and theater at The Concept School in Westtown. She enjoys yoga, reading, music, and movies and hanging out with her two boys and husband.

Dian McKinney



Dian McKinney is a middle-turned-high school English teacher who is finishing up her Masters of Arts in English Literature this summer, concluding the epic journey participating in the NWP Summer Writing Institute. She enjoys spending time helping kids strengthen their identity and confidence in themselves as readers and writers. Dian loves to travel, track sharks, and listen to podcasts.

Katy Mills



Katy is going into her 10th year of teaching at Avon Grove High School in Southern Chester County. She holds a Master's of Science in Transformative Education and Social Change, as well as a certificate in Educational Technology. Outside of teaching, she enjoys running, reading, and watching reality TV- specifically *Love Island* and *The Bachelor*. She also engages in rage journaling.

Pauline Schmidt

Pauline is the Director of the WCWP and a Professor of English Education at West Chester University. She is



heading into her 29th year as an educator this fall. She published her first book *Reimagining Literacies in the Digital Age: Multimodal Strategies to Teach with Technology* with her amazing colleague, Matthew Kruger-Ross.

John Sweeney



John is entering his first year teaching English at Penncrest High School in Media. He spent five years working in political and government communications before pursuing his passion for poetry in the classroom. In his free time, he loves to play music, watch David Lynch movies, and get strung along by Philly sports teams year after year.