

GLOBAL LITERARY & ART ONLINE MAGAZINE

THE BLISSFUL PURSUIT



VOLUME 1, ISSUE 4
FOOD AND CULTURE



DECEMBER 2020

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*Special thanks to all my mentors and teachers for
encouraging me to take this pursuit on. I am blessed to
have you in my lives. - Anusha*

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear reader,

As we close the curtain on 2020, there's so much to contemplate and ponder over for all of us. Whether you are a teenager trying to cope with significant disruption in classroom based learning to now largely online, or a senior citizen who is confined away from seeing loved ones in person, our lives have been impacted in one way or the other.

The year 2020, despite the pandemic, has brought us together as humanity. It forces the question - what's more important to us than the humanity and the very planet we live on? Would the pandemic change how governments, people, and even companies collaborate for a common global benefit? Irrespective of our different views, I hope that the year 2020 has taught us to trust each other more and to be more tolerant to our fellow citizens' differing ideas, values, and beliefs. Our readers and contributors are ambassadors of this very idea. We welcome each other's thoughts and we embrace each other virtually through applauding our creations.

I hope we continue to build and strengthen our community and broaden our collective horizons. I look forward, as am sure all of you are as well, to a brighter 2021 that will make us stronger and more resilient. Enjoy reading the final issue of The Blissful Pursuit's Volume 1, thank you for all of our amazing contributors, supporters, and mentors. Looking forward to continuing along our journey in the near year. I wish you all a very happy holiday season! See you next year!

Anusha Bansal

Editor, The Blissful Pursuit



*Special thanks to
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NONFICTION

A Family's love of Liangpi

by Karen Yang

A Chinese dish of snowy translucent noodles in chilly, savory sauce, with cucumber and mianjin (gluten sponge), liangpi or “cold skin noodles” is a celebrated street food. When coupled with a roujiamo, a Chinese pork burger--perhaps the oldest, fattiest and most delectable hamburger in the world--you have Xi'an China's most iconic dish. My dad is from Xi'an, the long sought after capital in China's history. Springy and chewy, the liangpi were once used as a replacement for meat, which was rare. My dad recalls the many times when Nai Nai, his mom, would carefully craft a bowl of slurpy deliciousness.

Beloved for countless generations, my first taste of liangpi came from a trip to New York City with my dad. The restaurant, “Xi'an's Famous Foods,” smelled like spices and green onion. My dad was the proud waiter bringing the tray of pure delight: liangpi and roujiamo. He laid it in front of Kathy, my sister, and me, his eyes showing the pride and joy he had in sharing such a favorite dish with his daughters. I dug in, sending my plastic utensils in full fledged panic. The contrast between cold-cut heaven and aromatic meat left my tongue tingling. The sponge noodles cleaned the wonderful explosion in my mouth while the roujiamo's fatty meat did cartwheels, tumbling this way and that. It was heaven.

Heaven also was the ceramic bowl swimming with hand cut liangpi dripping with red chili oil, homemade in Xi'an China by Da Yi Nai Nai, my first great aunt.



Being around cousins that I hadn't seen in years, we were all piled in her house, feather fans in hand, without air conditioning but with love all around .

This was my extended clan. In America, I had always wondered why, during Christmastime, my friends would seemingly receive tens of thousands of presents: from aunts, uncles, and cousins galore. I'd ask Mom, where my many gifts were and Mom would smile enigmatically and reply that I would get them in China. Much like how my friends see their families every Christmas or Thanksgiving, as a first generation born Chinese American, my large family is back in China, their comfort and belief in me in the liangpi and the reassurance of seeing each other once again.

The drive from inner city Xi'an to the calm farmland village where Da Yi Nai Nai lived had been scenic with grape yards, mountains and the quiet simplicity of a village where neighbors were a stone throw away from each other. Every time we visited, we began a rotation between Da Yi Nai Nai's and Xiao Yi Nai Nai's house, my second great aunt.

We'd entered Da Yi Nai Nai's butternut yellow house, where she'd welcome us with a bowl of liangpi and we would be ordered to eat up. Into the courtyard, where cucumbers and grapes laced their tangled leafy webs above our heads, a garden of Eden where nothing was forbidden, we would sit on plastic stools and slurp.

Afterwards, we'd trot off to Xiao Yi Nai Nai's house (a two minute walk away) and be shown into a similar courtyard but with different relatives. We'd greet everyone, sometimes unsure of how we were related to them, but smiling all the same.



Liangpi

There, we would be met by her cavernous dark wok, and she handed us another tasty morsel to snack on. Finally, we'd return to Da Yi Nai Nai's house and take our afternoon nap. There were about seven kids on the iron bed and we'd fidget about, fussing until we drifted off to sleep. The liangpi of my Da Yi Nai Nai's house tasted like this "homecoming" experience. I have relished the chewiness and nostalgia every time we return to China and see that everyone is now a little older.

At home, I attempted to create liangpi on my own. Mom was the "expert in residence" this time, Nai Nai having taught her what to do. Although the noodles were glued together and took some chewing, and the chili oil was not homemade, my dad nonetheless dug in to my liangpi with the same fervor he did at Da Yi Ma's house, slurping madly.

Liangpi is a classical dish, as comforting as a bowl of mac and cheese, enjoyed by my family throughout time. And regardless of where you are and who made it, you always know to grab the chopsticks and ask for more hot sauce.

Karen: Linagpi: a classic red noodle dish has really been something I've loved for a long time which inspired me to write and reflect on this wonderful food that I love to share with most of my family members.

About the Author: Karen is a sophomore at West Windsor-Plainsboro High School South. She is an active member of her school's community, serving as the treasurer of National History Day club. Karen is passionate about writing as well, winning multiple awards through the Scholastic writing awards and many more. A lover of arts, humanities, speech, and writing, Karen aims to inspire her community and is excited for the opportunity to work at Blissful

JOKES AND JIAOZI

By Karen Yang



Even as I was growing up, it was undeniable to me that food was a constant centerpiece in my life. It was practically in my blood--the Chinese love to eat. We often greet one another with "want to get a bite?" and my family sometimes wonders aloud (during dinner, nonetheless) what tomorrow's breakfast will be. With food-obsessed people as my norm, I have surrounded myself with tasty morsels that fill me up with love. One of these foods has been the diverse dumpling. Dumplings or the idea of a wrapper around a tasty filling has captured the world: from Ravioli in Italy, turnovers in America, to empanadas in Mexico. For me, jiaozi, the Chinese edition, is my dumpling.

My first food memory centered around the jiaozi Lao Lao (my grandma) made. They were immaculate, a tender ball of pork with cabbage ribbons running through, surrounded by a skin of delicate flour. Lao Lao would always make jiaozi in the sunny, bright kitchen--chopsticks in her hands, wrapping balls of fleshy meat artisanally around their blanket of puffy dough. Juicy, they oozed their enticing perfume around the whole house as I, five or six, chubby, buck-toothed, and always dressed in Hello Kitty shirts, would wait by Lao Lao's side, chopsticks in hand, ready to chow down ten of them. I'd always try to help, offering to sample the raw meat. "Bu yao chi! Shi sheng de!" Lao Lao would always scold. Don't eat it, it's raw! I would squint up confusedly, too impatient to wait for the jiaozi to do their boiling ritual and then enter my overeager mouth.

Eventually, I would try making jiaozi myself. Lao Lao made folding them look so easy, even graceful, always ending up with a polished jiaozi. Mine, in comparison, looked wimpy and the filling was practically squirting out. They were unappetizing to say the least. Lao Lao gently soothed me, and smoothed out my curly mess, telling me I'd get better with practice. I would often nod and try not to look too disappointed.

No practice would allow me to achieve the rhythmic timbre of folding, sticking and filling that Lao Lao had perfected. She has done this ritual hundreds and hundreds of times-- on everyday occasions and whenever we don't know what to eat, we will immediately gravitate towards the soothing jiaozi. The freezer is chock full of them and whenever Lao Lao is going back to China, she prepares them in batches and tells Mom to heat them up whenever we are hungry. But jiaozi were for special occasions as well: Lao Lao had once said that "even when you are poor, you have to eat jiaozi during Chinese New Year." Her bold statement refers to the jiaozi's auspicious shape, which recalls gold ingots and fortune.



When cooked, jiaozi were not only a lucky symbol but a stabilizing presence on the table as well, a bit of Lao Lao and the hard life she had growing up in revolutionary China. It was something we rarely ever talked about but I knew Lao Lao's upbringing had taught her to save and hang on to the superstitions of fortune and jiaozi. She had grown up in the throes of fighting and government instability where food was not as plenty, and money was tight. With Mom being born near the end of the revolution, Lao Lao had to use creativity to stretch the shoestring budget, in order to feed the family. Lao Lao proudly recalls how she made the filling more cabbage than meat, vegetables being cheaper. "You couldn't even taste the difference," she said, winking. Indeed- the jiaozi she made were virtuous, and hardy inside, symbolizing the hard work it took for Lao Lao to raise Mom while working night shifts at a local school. She makes the same jiaozi for us today, never ceasing her constant care for Kathy, my sister, and me. I feel her love, support and strength in every bite I take as she repeats her jiaozi customs once again.



Jiaozi also stood for the visit we made back to China every two years to visit my dad's family. Nai Nai, my dad's mother, always greeted us in Xi'an, China, along with my uncle, aunt and cousins. We always went to Jiao Zi Yan, Dumpling Shop, to sample jiaozi in every shape and size imaginable. There were fish jiaozi with egg eyes, hazelnut jiaozi, jiaozi in the shape of monkeys, lotus flower jiaozi. We gathered around a large table, dipping vinegar and chili oil in delicate saucers, shoving heavenly ingots into our open mouths. At the end of a meal, we were served a steamy chicken broth and told to ladle jiaozi the size of our fingernails into our bowls. The number we got symbolized our fortune for the rest of the year; too often, one of us would spoon only soup into our bowls and the rest of the family reassured us no jiaozi meant no worries.

We'd laugh and joke with each other ("Are you sure that was a chicken jiaozi? It looked like a duck one to me...") and take our traditional picture in front of the restaurant's golden jiaozi statue. Although I don't see Nai Nai as often as I would like to, our visits to Jiao Zi Yan and the drool worthy jiaozi reminds me of her ceaseless support and hope for the best for us.



I was, and still am, in a way, a jiaozi myself: shaped and molded by Chinese hands, Mom and Lao Lao's experience behind me. I am living and thriving in America, but my roots are in Chinese culture, both of my grandma's history behind me. This intermingling of cultures, traditions, love and strength are as omnipresent every day as these jiaozi are on my dinner plate.

Karen - This piece, about Jiaozi (chinese dumplings) is really about my family's experience and tradition with different cultures and time periods. I really learned a lot about my grandparents through this food and I wanted to authentically represent that.

About the Author: Karen is a sophomore at West Windsor-Plainsboro High School South. She is an active member of her school's community, serving as the treasurer of National History Day club. Karen is passionate about writing as well, winning multiple awards through the Scholastic writing awards and many more.

Hands

By Alyssa Laze

She examined my father first, the son of hers whose weight always had embarrassed her. She patted her hands along the stomach that had lost weight for the first time in over a decade. He was so excited for her to see the transformation. She moved her hands along his waist, up to his chest, down to his hips, then around one thigh. "Exercise," she said in English broken enough to emphasize the "size" syllable.

Then she moved to me. This routine was nothing I hadn't felt before, but it still felt the same. Uncomfortable. She felt around my waist like sand stuck in your shoes after a day at the beach. She went around my hips like the scratchiness of your most expensive sweater. She grazed around my bust like the edge of a broken glass. "Better," she remarked, "but a bit more." And then she smiled, because she saw no wrong in this. Like getting a paper cut from gift wrap, it was something meant to be nice that wasn't.

Finally, she moved to my mother, which surprised all of us. My mother had never been examined in my lifetime. I could see my mother's face turn the slightest shade of pink as she sucked in any excess weight that might bring horror. There was a beaming grin from both of them when she had exclaimed, "Perfect!"

And then it was time for dinner.



About the Author: Alyssa is a part of the class of 2022 at Northern Highlands Regional High School. Her parents are immigrants from Albania, so she is a first-generation American. Besides writing, she love to read, listen and play music, and act.

This entry has received the Scholastic Art & Writing NJ Gold Key Award

The Ferocious Frog: A Fly's Testimony

By Ajitesh Nallapareddy

Why does this fly not fly over the pond? Bullfrog the Bully would be my demise. Of this guy, I am not fond. Crossing his path is not very wise. Big mistake. For goodness sake! I'll be in for a deadly surprise.

Too many lives are at stake. His long tongue lassoes a cricket. His cave of a mouth swallows a snake, This green monster is terribly wicked. He snaps up fish. So delish! He licks his lips. "That's the ticket!"

His appetite will not be denied. Of this watery domain he is the King. I cried one day when I spied Him devouring his own offspring. A cannibal. How tragical! A lamentation I must sing.

He doesn't think twice while munching mice. A scorpion only makes him burp. Gluttony is his heinous vice. Tadpoles and squirming worms he slurps. Chug-a-lug. Down that bug! Those unlucky birds will no longer chirp.

I am lucky to be left alive To tell the tale of the ferocious frog So all may take care and survive The tyranny of the Bully Bog.

All are ingestible, So digestible! There he awaits us on the log!



About the Author:

Ajitesh is in grade 7, in Princeton, New Jersey

Hourglass

Sadie Shang

A casual after school pick up
 Mother glances to the passenger's side
 and flashes me a grin hello
 A steady stream of time passing,
 Sand rushing out from the crack
 of the paper thin-transparent glass

My frantic hands
 try their best to stop
 the flow-

but to pause the passage of time
 is like asking the sun to go back a full rotation
 like a hungry dog, begging
 for a little scrap of bone

But it's all in vain-
 "Vanity, vanity, all is vanity"
 All for naught
 Lost time can never be salvaged
 Lost hearts will never be found



About the Author:

Sadie is a 8th grader in Princeton, NJ. She says, " she enjoys poetry as a way to express myself and my feelings creatively. Poetry is an outlet through which I can be honest, and I always appreciate the opportunity to share these thoughts and engage with other people's work."

Creative Expressions Award

Order in the Family

Alyssa Laze

I am the only. I am the only only child in my extended family. I received all the attention. All the money for my birthday, all the desserts, all the gifts brought over from Europe, all the jokes. The hugs, the kisses, the pinching of my chubby cheeks. All the looking, examining,

all the people telling me that I've gained a bit of weight, all of the people asking what I'm going to do when I'm older. Doctor? Architect? Lawyer? I'm the only, I have so many options. Engineer? Accountant? Something that pays well, surely. All the people telling me to put

a little bit of makeup on because I'm breaking

out. All the commands from my mom to stop wanting boy's clothes, for Christ's sake, because I'm not going to bring such shame to the family! And while I'm at it, to stop whistling because men don't like that. All the hushes to keep quiet, to

not speak too little because I'll seem rude but then to not speak too much because I'm a girl and that's not what nice girls do. Not to speak too softly because I can't seem shy, but not to speak too loudly because that's ugly. I'm ugly, I need to change that. All the expectations, because there is no one else and I need to prove that I am worthy, that my parents "raised me right", that I'm going to live

a good life in a job that pays well and marry
a breadwinner husband and we'll have two or three
kids so that they don't have to endure all that I did.
I am the only child, the only rule breaker, the only
to be yelled at and to yell back, the only one with an opinion.



About the Author:

Hi! My name is Alyssa Lazé and I'm part of the class of 2022 at Northern Highlands Regional High School. My parents are immigrants from Albania, so I am first-generation American. Besides writing, I love to read, listen and play music, and act. My favorite book is *The Book Thief* and my favorite movie is *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. I mainly write poetry and I take a lot of inspiration from the mix between being raised with American culture and having a family that immersed me into Albanian culture. I've won a few awards, such as the 2020 Governor's Award, third place from FDU, and a Gold Key from Scholastic. I hope you enjoy my pieces!

Author Spotlight

Ode to Prunes

By Farhan Mohammad

The wrinkled prunes wait.
Stinking triplets on my plate.
I'd rather eat snails.

Mother's bribery—
"One video for each prune."
No game worth this shame.

Mother's threat— "Open
Wide, or you can't go outside."
I'll just stay inside.

Mother's sense— "Prunes are
Loaded with Vitamin K."
Got my RDA.

They're just dried up plums,
I know. But my mouth is where
They refuse to go.

If I close my eyes
And then plug my nose...maybe
Down the hatch they'll go!

A swig of milk masks
The taste, but a burp bubble
Pops perfume of prunes.



About the Author: Farhan is a 10th grade student at Princeton Day School. His unpleasant experience as a child eating prunes inspired this poem. This entry has been awarded the Honorable Mention, 2020 Scholastic Art & Writing Awards

FICTION

I Wish I Loved Apples

by Zoha Arif



This is not a diary. Or maybe it is. I don't know.

July 1, 2019

Apples fascinate me. They are like the underappreciated heroes of an 11am snack, that cumbersome time when one is not hungry, but one is hungry enough to eat, yet eating Flamin' Hot Nacho Cheese Doritos is not the optimal thing to do and so, in this one specific circumstance, it is a crisp apple that will whip out its tasteless cape and say, "Here, human being, o' fellow living thing, I am here.

"Well, today, whilst eating my crispy apple at 11am, after soaking in too much pure oxygen, I made my mind to conduct an esteemed research project on the inquiry of apples because I think that there is something fascinating about one who takes an everyday object and then thirsts to learn more about that everyday object. For such a research inquiry, apples seemed like the best option for me considering that there are thousands of different types of apples on this giant rock yet I've only blessed my tongue with the taste of about 10 of them. And besides, I think that telling another inhabitant of the earth that I've eaten over a hundred different types of apples will add that flair of retro-city strangeness to my life that I relish for in this moment.

July 2, 2019:

Today, I rummaged through the fridge and lo, underneath frozen Costco pizza and toasted peanut butter pretzels, there was the last McIntosh apple of my food supply. After cradling the apple in my paws and then biting into its crunchy flesh, instead of sweetness, the tartness of this rascal apple slapped me like the guilt one feels when skipping Sunday school. The flesh of the apple was so unbearingly tart that I hoped the skin would provide me with the sweetness I craved, but after peeling the skin and eating it, much to my surprise and dismay, I found that the skin of the apple was underwhelmingly flavorless.

Aside from day 1 of the apple experiment, there is nothing much to report. I'd say today was just another boring Macintosh apple day. I suppose that the only remotely interesting thing happened at noon, when I saw outside that my neighbors were loitering on their front porch, smoking classic cigarettes and listening to generic upbeat pop music, the Katy Perry and Taylor Swift stuff that I love myself. I decided to humor them by venturing outside and taking a box of colored chalk and writing in my thickest boldest street-gang bubble letters "Hello fellow inhabitants of the earth!" I then filled a frisbee with water from my garden fountain and did a series of backflips and handstands and I ended the acrobatic masterpiece by flinging the water-filled frisbee in their direction. They laughed and went inside thinking to themselves, strange being that is.



July 3, 2019:

I bought a good ol' basket of one Granny Smith apple from the farmer's market this morning. The vendor looked at me when I asked for one apple and said, "Well, you know, if you're going to bake an apple pie, you should probably buy more than one apple." But I whipped out my lashes and blinked loudly and I said to him, "Excuse yourself sir, but I am a researcher conducting an experiment on the subject of apples as my independent variable and I do not need your 'supposed expertise' to interrupt my experimental processes."

And the vendor backed off, kind of offset by my tone (I guess) but back to the APPLE. Haha, that was kinda funny. Okay, the Granny Smith apple, the grandmother of all of lord's apples, is quite a syrupy delicious apple. I liked it much better compared to the dry crunchiness of the Macintosh apple. I think that all these years I've been off put by the neon greenish color of the apple, exerting itself to me as the alpha, awfully bold, but apples should not be judged by their color.

Today I also ventured to the edge of land, to the Jersey shore ocean. If God exists, the scene of ocean laughter is one of the things I thank him for.

July 4, 2019:

Today I ventured far into my mother's wardrobe to retrieve the Red Delicious apple I threw in it early this morning. The Taiwanese-Japanese girl who lives next door is quite beautiful with her tart straight textured black hair, hard jawline and lilac. I don't know her name. But when I saw her as I woke and said hi to the sun, knees rising to achieve that cardio exercise, I threw the Red Delicious (that I had stationed strategically on my nightstand last night to remind me of my experiment) into my mother's wardrobe (which so happened to be in my room) out of awe for the lady. But then, at 11am, I ventured to the fridge and lo, the apple was not to be found and it wasn't until after I had sat down for meditation that I remembered that the apple was in the closet and had to be fished out.

But anyway, on the subject of the experiment, the Red Delicious apple was sweet but had a mild flavor to it, like someone sliced an over-ripe melon and gifted me its syrupy and crisp goodness but extracted half of the flavors. I would much prefer good ol' Granny Smith over the Red Delicious but I don't mind it much.

July 5, 2019:

I saw the fireworks last night. They frightened me much. The red ones reminded me of exploding apples. I liked the green ones though. I've been liking a lot of green things lately. I had a gala apple today. It was alright. I saw the Taiwanese girl at the local high school football field, on the mile track route, where the fireworks were happening. I caught her name in the gentle whispers of the wind. I worry about God. Today is just one of those days when I worry about God.

July 7, 2019:

Ah, I don't want to go to hell, if it exists, but my people tell me that if I don't prostrate before the God of the east, of the west, of the north, and of the south, then I shall go to hell. I tell the people that I don't know if I believe in God but that I am still a good person. I don't know why I feel the need to say both of those things together. Perhaps it's because they tell me that God guides whom he wills and leads astray whom he wills and that I am clearly led astray and this makes me an evil person.

I forgot to eat an apple yesterday. So today I had a Fuji and a Honeycrisp apple. The apples made me drunk, they tasted so much like the fine wine I could never afford.

July 8, 2019: Today I wanted to do something crazy. Like brake my caps lock key so that caps lock can't be turned off. SO I BROKE MY CAPS LOCK KEY.

July 9, 2019: I am crazy. This apples thing is eccentirc, but stupid. Perhaps this is a memoir of a man going insane.

July 10, 2019:

The Taiwanese-Japanese girl, woman, was at the United Nations medical conference today. She said that she remembered me from the fireworks. I felt something warm, bubbling like sodapop fizz and pride. She has a beautiful smile, but I don't dare to profess myself to her because she makes me feel quite cringe, at times, and also I fear God more or rather, I fear the worldly consequences more. Adultery is a sin, I know this. I thought about God today too. An old man who broke his elbow in Tuesday evening golf in Kenilworth said that God and religion is just a thing contrived by humans themselves. And I asked him, then, to explain the theory of the universe to me. He told me that I was the doctor, the "scientific one," the one smart enough to use science as an explanation, what did he know about the roots of the universe.

I tried meditation again today. I sat on a Pokemon pikachu cushion and I tried to feel my body, let my heart drum to whatever I felt at the moment, and I couldn't do it. I couldn't stand it. So I went for the fridge and I chomped down a Ginger Gold apple and I loved it because of how mild it was, how gentle it was to my tongue. I respect the Ginger Gold for that because people are not gentle with me. People are never gentle, but I'm not gentle to people either so I shouldn't be saying much.

I slept on the floor after work. The floor was hard but silent. It calmed my inner wars. Appreciate the floor kids.

July 11, 2019:

I slapped the air out of my lungs today. At the hospital, I catapulted and back flipped and hand standed down the ward, pretending that I was batman. The families and the patients looked shocked and astonished. The nurses paused from shelving the birth certificate files and turned slowly to look at the google-eyed doctor, catapulting from the empty waiting room chairs, Hollywood sound effects echoing from his mouth to simulate the whooshing that comes with wind, blonde hair whipping like crispy fries. The janitor, Rabecca, slung her wet, dirtied mop like a Jedi lightsaber at the end of the ward and said to me, "Doctor, sir, is there a reason for you to be startling the patients as such?" And I said to her that everything was fine, that I felt great after my feat, that I've come to love that look of astonishment on people's faces because I bet they wish they could be as cool as me, as odd as me.

Today, I had a Braeburn apple. I found this apple to be wicked because it contained hints of spice, pear, nutmeg, and cinnamon -- what a combo of flavors! The look of the apple itself was also quite pleasing. It had that retro 1990s vibe to it, the yellow dissolving into the red, the green like cucumbers and watermelons, the inside white like Florida Retirement home clouds.



July 13, 2019:

I am going to troll the world. My dear fellow inhabitants of the earth will always hate me. God will always hate me. So I've come to the esteemed and well-respected conclusion that the best course of action is to troll and cancel them all.

Jersey man ate an apple. Jersey man ate an apple while standing on top of a school bus flooding with little Catholic school kids. Jersey man who terrorized Catholic school kids while eating an apple turns out to be a doctor. Jersey man ate a pink Pacific Rose apple with sweet and refreshing apple nectar dripping down in between his fingers like Godzilla's saliva after seeing a giant platter of fried shrimp.

July 14, 2019: Doubt persists even with atheism. I still wonder if God caused the big bang.

July 15, 2019: Jersey man is obsessed with how it feels to drown. Jersey man sat at the bottom of a swimming pool. Jersey man tries to experience all aspects of life by sitting at the bottom of a swimming people.

July 16, 2019:

The Taiwanese-Japanese girl and I had an Empire apple today. We sat on the slate-basalt steps of the music theory library, the earthy tangy smell of black milk coffee fuming from the Starbucks across the street, hugging our noses in a way such that we could barely taste the mild flavor of the Empire apple we cradled in our paws. I've always thought that she had black clown squid eyes. But observing them from a small distance, I've come to notice that she has eyes like soil. The earth silences around her, it is difficult to listen to the hymns of the earth with her body there. I wish I could tell you what the street looked like as we sat on those littered slate-basalt steps to the music theory library. Now this is just prosperous. I sound like a cringe Romeo in love! Love is stupid. But she is a friend.

July 17, 2019: Oh lord, God, let Jersey man live in peace.

July 25, 2019:

Jersey man tried meditation again today because Jersey man is trying to be gentle and calm with the earth and people but Jersey man can't be gentle. Jersey man disappeared for 9 days because Jersey man was confused. Jersey man signed up for a subscription at 24 hour Fitness. Maybe the sound of bare feet slapping a Commerical 2150 TR1200-DT treadmill will calm me. I think I feel the need to do stupid things because I have three fat rolls when I sit down. If I run three miles a day and lose 20 pounds, then God and the world will embrace me with open paws and see that I'm not an unrighteous pig who overeats.

I've been having Macintosh apples for a while. I pretend that they taste different each day by rubbing raw butter or cheese sweat or masala or whatever else I can loot from the pantry on them. Some days, I like them, and other days I throw them out for the gods of the backyard garden to eat and bless. But today, I had a Mutsu apple. I liked the Mutsu apple because I've kept it in the crack of the window sill to my drawing room for 3 months and it still hasn't decomposed. It's quite an inspiring story. Its ugly and yet it has this aggressive will to live. The Mutsu apple smelled like fresh laundry, it was sweet and tangy with flesh that bled at the bite and when I threw it in the microwave for experimental purposes, it maintained its shape very well. 10/10 for the Mutsu apple.

July 26, 2019: 2k19. I'm bored of this year.

July 27, 2019:

Dat gurrl is gud. I like dat girl. But luv is stooooopid. Like apples. I hate apples. Jersey man hates apples. Oh god, Jersey man is cringe.

July 28, 2019:

I have failed dear audience. My faith in God has shattered a thousand times over. The earth and the floor ran. I sit each day with an apple and I cannot bring my being to thank the earth for it and ponder about all the labor put forth to bring the apple to the brink of my tender lips. I try to pay attention to the most prosperous, strangest, things only to find that apples are hard, that apples don't matter in the massive scope of the universe. I am writing this at the bottom of a swimming pool, in the back corner of my kitchen pantry, in my mother's dated wardrobe.

July 29, 2019: I am very much tarnished.

Experimental Conclusion(s):

I hate apples. Courtesy of the music theory library and One Direction. I don't know what that means. Being eccentric is a vibe and I need a vibe.

About the Author:

Zoha Arif will graduate from the Academy for Information Technology in the spring of 2021. She lives in the lands of Union, New Jersey and melts away her free time breathing peanut butter, eating books, and drowning in questionable food science experiments. Her work has been published in or is forthcoming in Polyphony Lit, the Blue Marble Review, Parallax Literary, and others.

Sugar, Spice and everything nice

By Paridhi Bansal



I once heard someone say that they live to eat and not eat to live. Never have words resounded with me so deeply. Food, for the more privileged of the human race, has long stopped being a necessity and has become an art form. A means of expression, creativity, pleasure. Most importantly, food is a passageway to that part of our brain that houses both our fondest memories and the ones that still leave a sour taste in our mouths (pun intended).

All it takes is one whiff of lemongrass and I'm back in that dimly lit, backyard restaurant in Thailand, surrounded by my family, eating authentic Pad Thai and spicy red curry. The flavours of that curry helped established Thai as my favourite cuisine and even now when we enjoy Thai food in Asian restaurants, I'm taken back to my first international trip, back to Thailand and that winsome, niche eatery that set the bar impossibly high.

Similarly, it takes just a mention of chicken to remind me of that extremely chewy piece I was fed at 5 years old that put me off non-vegetarian food forever. It takes one bite of onion fritters and I'm back in Mumbai, sitting beside high glass windows on rainy days. One look at homemade pizza, burnt around the edges and I'm longing for the thin crust, stretchy cheese wonders of Italy.

It's fascinating to think about how much of a fundamental part food is of our cultures. How much nostalgia it brings, how many memories we associate with it, how much comfort it can give us. Indians are so deeply attached to our food, in fact, that we carry it in tightly packed boxes whenever we travel abroad, always keeping our eyes open for Indian restaurants even in a foreign nations.

As I write this, a bowl of steamy fried rice sits beside me and perhaps years down the line when I make this unchallenging dish for myself in a dormitory kitchen, I'll remember a humid night, the air conditioner humming and my fingers on the keyboard writing about food and what it means to me.

About the Author:

Paridhi is in grade 11 in New Delhi, India. She enjoys writing, sketching, and writing poems in her free time.

PERSONAL NARRATIVE

OHH...FOOD!!

By Iris Chen

When someone assumed that my tradition of cultured food are just dumplings, steamed stuffed buns and such, I literally had to command myself to keep calm and not fire up. I mean, I wouldn't blame them at all because those two delicious and fun to make foods possess a safe place in my heart. However, I wouldn't say they are my number one favorite food that I'd consume for every meal.



Food in general takes plenty of space in my soul. The creamy avocado spread evenly on a piece of toast, the smell of freshly baked cookies wafting into the living room, and oh, the cold smell of ice cream slightly pinching my nose. In my vision, these foods are like blocks of gold, glimmering in a picture that I stand in. When I get a whiff of any sort of nice smelling food, I suddenly feel that my soul becomes instantaneously filled with endless excitement and vulnerability to the pile of food that I constantly crave. I fantasize about food any chance I get, my dreams end with me waking up with drool sliding off my face from the constant watering of those wanted foods and cravings.

If someone ever inquiries about my favorite food, I'd reply, "Oh, food? You mean the word spelled F-O-O-D?" The person that asked me would be like, yes spelling nerd, when actually, I was a food nerd. I'd then shout to all the people in sight, "Food is a wonderful blessing! It nourishes my grief and cures your wounds!" Then I'd turn to the person that asked me about my favorite food and say, "I like all foods!"

About the Author:

Hello! My name is Iris Chen and I love to write! Whether it's personal narratives or poems, I love it all!! I have many friends and love singing, reading and playing the violin. Someday, I wish to start a charity to help kids meet their needs. I hope you all stay safe during this hard time! As Theodore

Roosevelt said, "Believe you're there, you are halfway there" I believe in you!

Iris is in 6th grade and lives in Austin, Texas.

The Arts Section

We are excited to announce the Arts section to our magazine!

We will highlight a special arts talent from around the world to introduce a unique and well known art to all.

If you have a talent to share, please email us! We will be happy to share it with our audience.

Featuring : Mural & Canvas Artist

Dallas Rey Wilkins



DALLAS REY WILKINS



Dallas painting a mural in Jersey City for Heroes of the World, a socially-engaging mural located at 1 Ocean Avenue in the Greenville neighborhood of Jersey City, depicts a wide and diverse range of trailblazing personalities and historical figures. This one-of-a-kind, 200-foot-wide, public work of art - the longest mural in Jersey City - was created by a hand-pick team of aspiring Jersey City artists through the Jersey City Summer Youth Mural Arts Program 2019.

<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/473534246/how-many-lives>

Bio

Dallas Rey Wilkins in the 9th grade and attends the Arts High School in Newark, NJ. His major and favorite course is visual arts. He lives in Newark with his family and has two brothers and a sister. He loves to paint on canvas and does Mural work occasionally.

Dallas has been featured in commercials, and has received recognition from various organizations for his work and contributions to the world of art.

Tell us a little bit about yourself.

My name is Dallas Rey Wilkins. I'm a local artist more known in Jersey City, NJ for my art galleries and the murals I have contributed to.

When did you start drawing or playing with colors?

I think I started drawing around the age 5 and then started adding color around the age 8 once I kinda found my style

What kind of artist would you classify yourself as?

A realistic/non-realistic and more cartoony in some sorts

What has been your best work so far?

I did a piece for a client and it was of her dog Bella and it went out of my comfort zone because I really don't do animal paintings but it came out great.

Many kids start a hobby and by the time they get to high school, they either can't find time to practice or lose their passion. What kept you going? How do you find the time to paint/draw/artwork?

Just me being bored and pushing myself to finish a project because there are times where I wanna drop it and move on to the next painting. I don't really find time to be honest but if you wanna find me painting it's mostly going to be on Saturdays in my bedroom in the shade of my room.

What are your other hobbies and interests?

I paint a lot! I try to make as many paintings as I can because it takes a long time for me to do one because I'm all about quality. I do like school and doing my homework and dealing with the relief of getting it all done on time gives me joy. I also try new things like coding and learning about new things in the world.

What's your favorite thing about artwork? And what is your least favorite thing?

My favorite thing is just seeing what comes about of my mind and on the canvas or paper and my least favorite thing is when it comes out how I wasn't expecting it to.

What gives you the strength to draw?

I think the rush and drive I get when I have a great idea and excitement to see it visually.

Who is your role model that you follow and look up to?

I really look up to Jean-Michel Basquiat who was a Brooklyn artist who came from nothing and went to this big abstract, funky, colorful artist. I look up to him because he had to push his way to get his name known and that's what I'm trying to do.

When do you do murals? When do you paint or draw on canvas?

I usually do murals in the summer where I have time on my hands because I never have anything planned. I paint on canvas about every weekend I have stacks of new canvases in my room!

Do you have a specific interest in painting Murals?

I'm not all about murals and I prefer to work on canvas because it just doesn't take me one try and my work is perfect. Recently I was selected to attend the Jersey City Summer Youth Mural Arts Program 2019 to paint the city's longest mural – called "Heroes of the World" in the Greenville section of Jersey City.

The report can be viewed here <https://jerseydigs.com/young-artists-will-tell-story-behind-jersey-citys-longest-mural-heroes-of-the-world/>

What art galleries has your work been displayed in?

I don't remember well but I did one when I was 12 in Philadelphia then I did another one at 14 in Newark for black art matters.

Do you charge your clients to do artwork for them?

Yes I do. I make custom paintings now so I charge more and I try to do the style the client wants so I can make it to their liking but sometimes they request for me just to do my regular type of style and artwork.

How has the pandemic affected you and what have you done to keep moving forward and stay motivated?

It actually has done me good because I have been able to get artwork done that I actually finished in years because I do online school

Who or what has been your biggest supporter in pursuing your passion?

My mom because she was the one pushing me to pursue it and not just hide it so no one can see my work.

All artists go through rejection and a period of time when they lose faith in themselves. Share a time when you were in that phase and what did you do?

To be honest it's kinda happening right now in this pandemic and there is really nothing you can do about it. It just takes time because it's just you telling yourself how do I show this and make it look good.

What do you think is the value of drawing for youth in a high school setting? What's the best thing about teaching art to young minds?

You get to learn from other people, certain techniques and new styles you've never tried to do before in a high school setting. Art really helps kids to find themselves and express what they're feeling even if it looks like nothing.

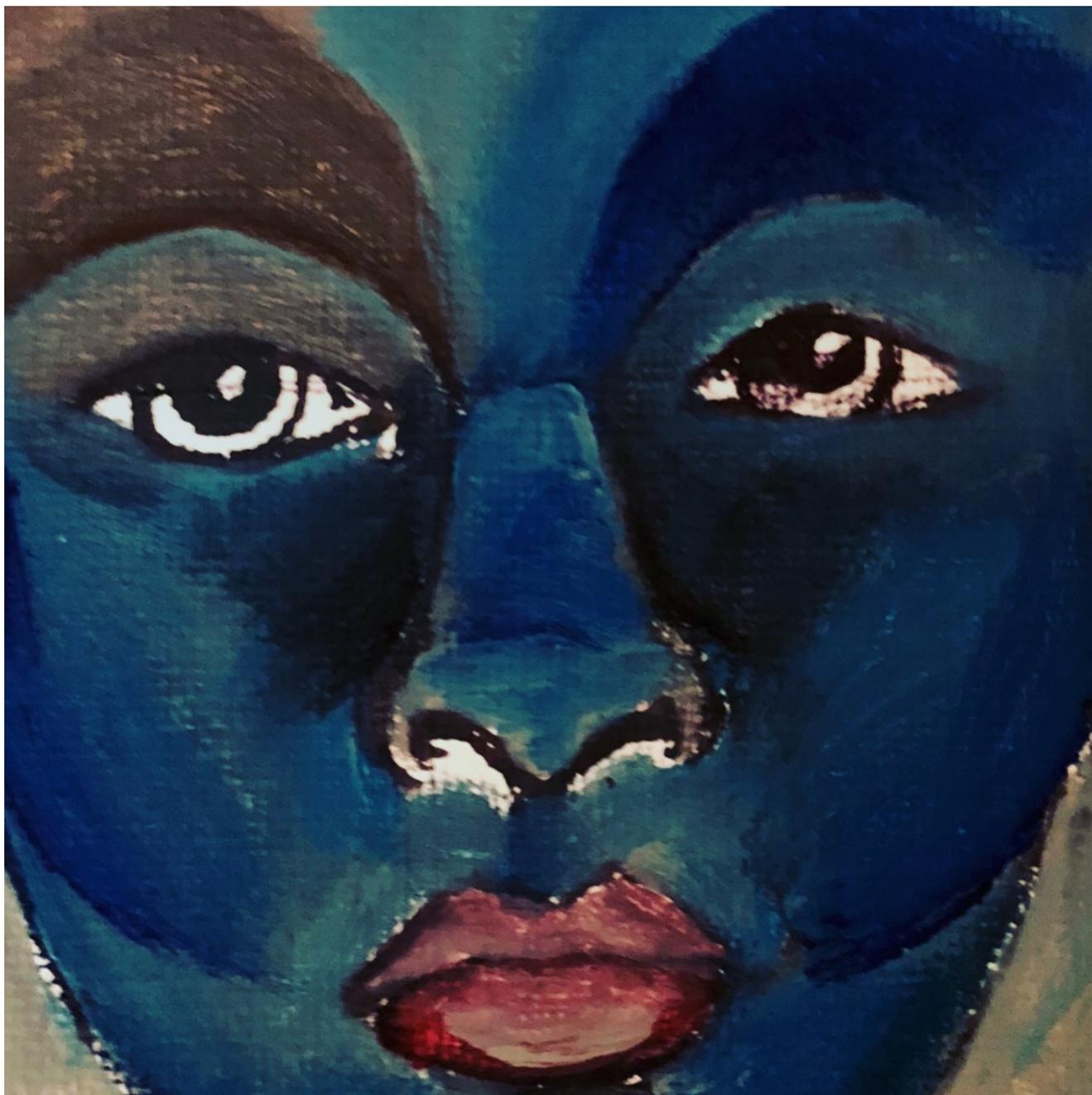
Have you been featured in any newspaper or social media? Tell us more!

I have been featured in commercials about art for teens and I have been on people's social media for art galleries. Some of my articles can be viewed here..

<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/473534246/how-many-lives>

<https://jerseydigs.com/young-artists-will-tell-story-behind-jersey-citys-longest-mural-heroes-of-the-world/>

<https://www.newjerseystage.com/articles/2019/11/13/jctc-gallery-showcases-greenville-mural-and-artists/>



What skills have you learned that will help you in your future as an artist?

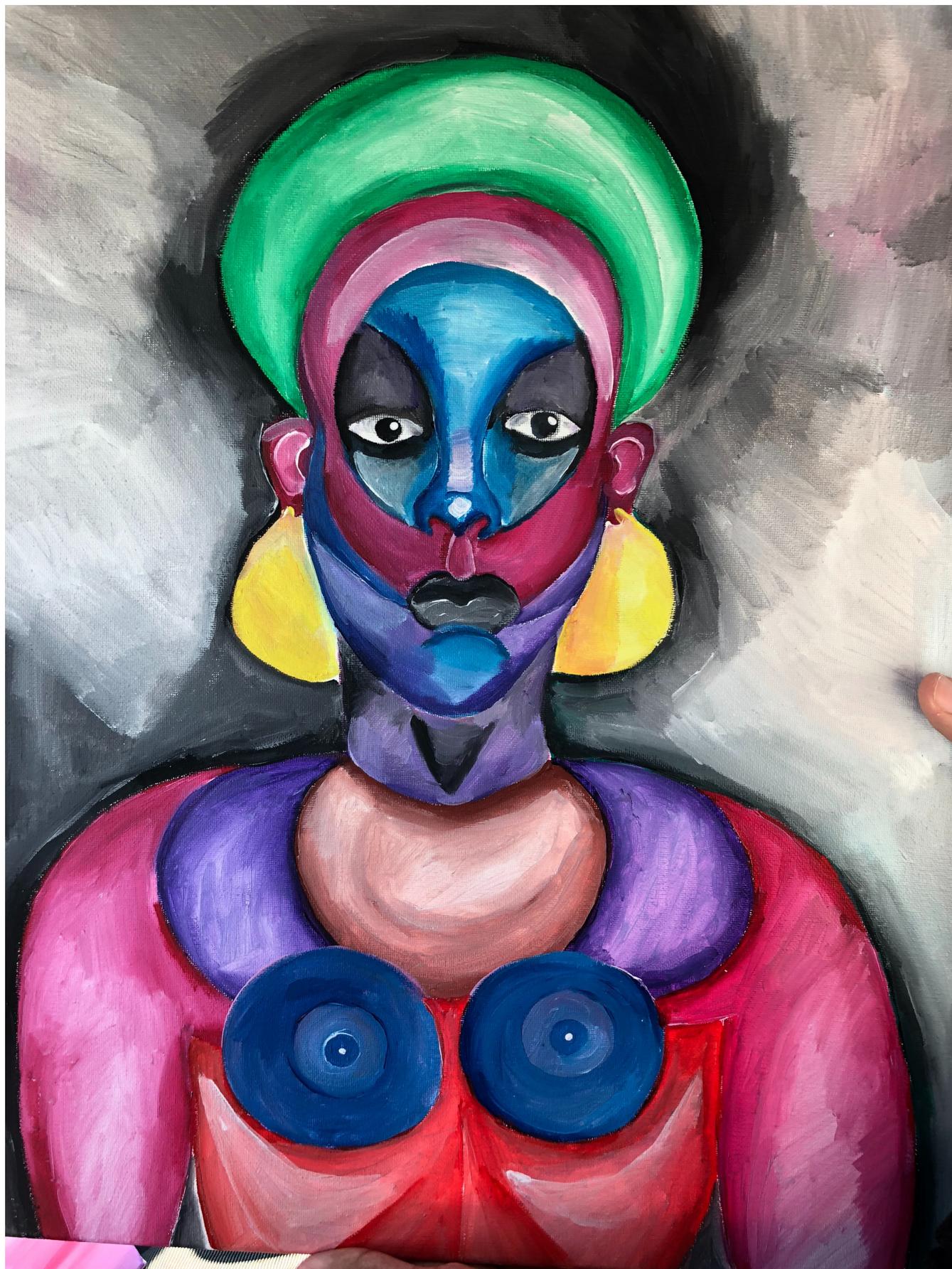
To take breaks! I learned this because sometimes I get so involved with painting that I avoid doing other important things. I get so sucked into seeing colors blend into each other and wanting to see my mind reflect on paper or canvas.

What is your dream college and what do you want to accomplish at college?

To be honest I'm not sure I never really thought of it because I think that I have to see where my art brings me. I wanna accomplish my growth in art. I wanna be able to know color compositions or ways to create textures etc.

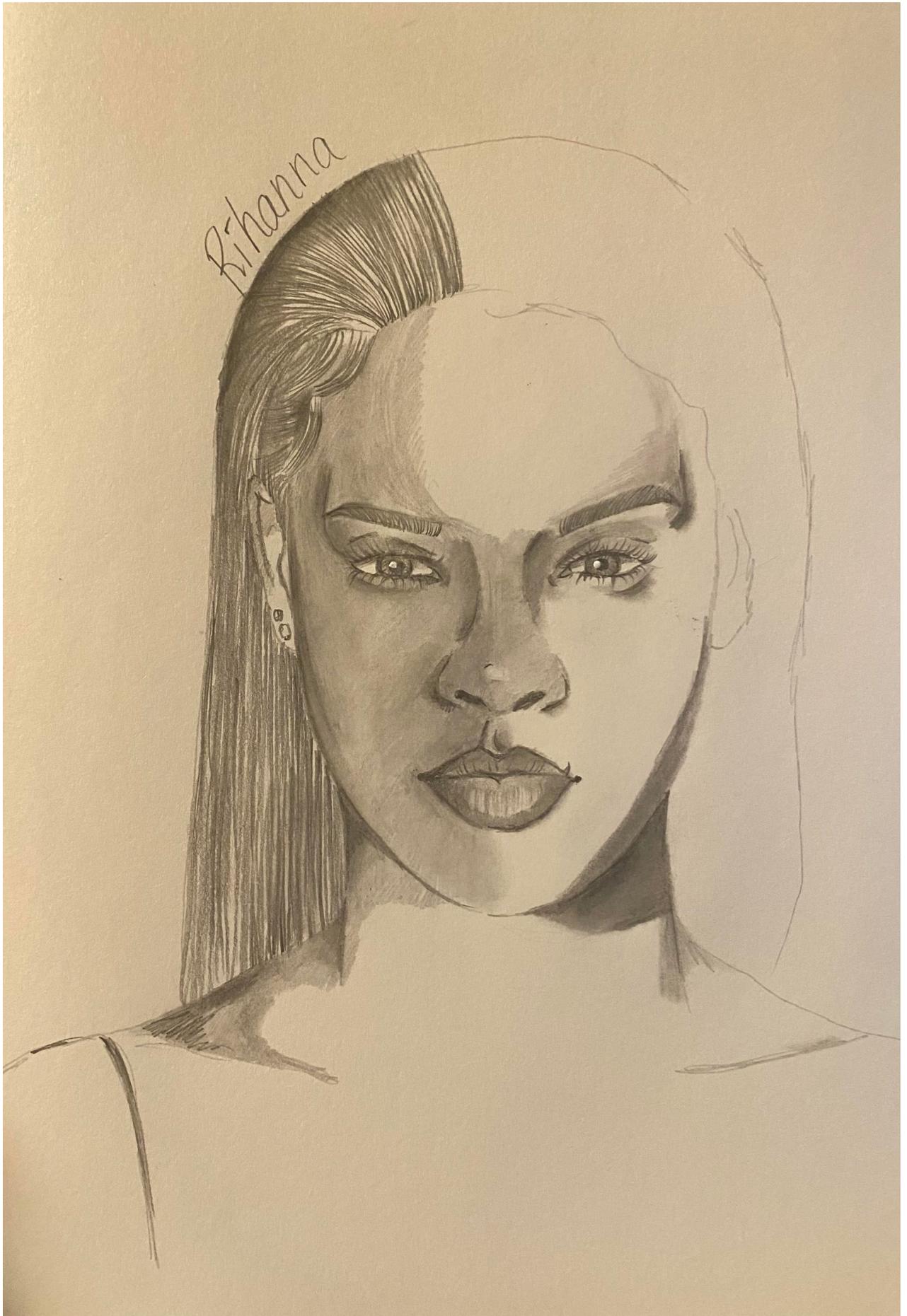
What else do you want to add to this article? Anything that comes from the heart and you want other inspiring artists to know!

That never stop doing your artwork even if someone says its not good or art its your unique style and that's what makes it stand out.





RISE UP



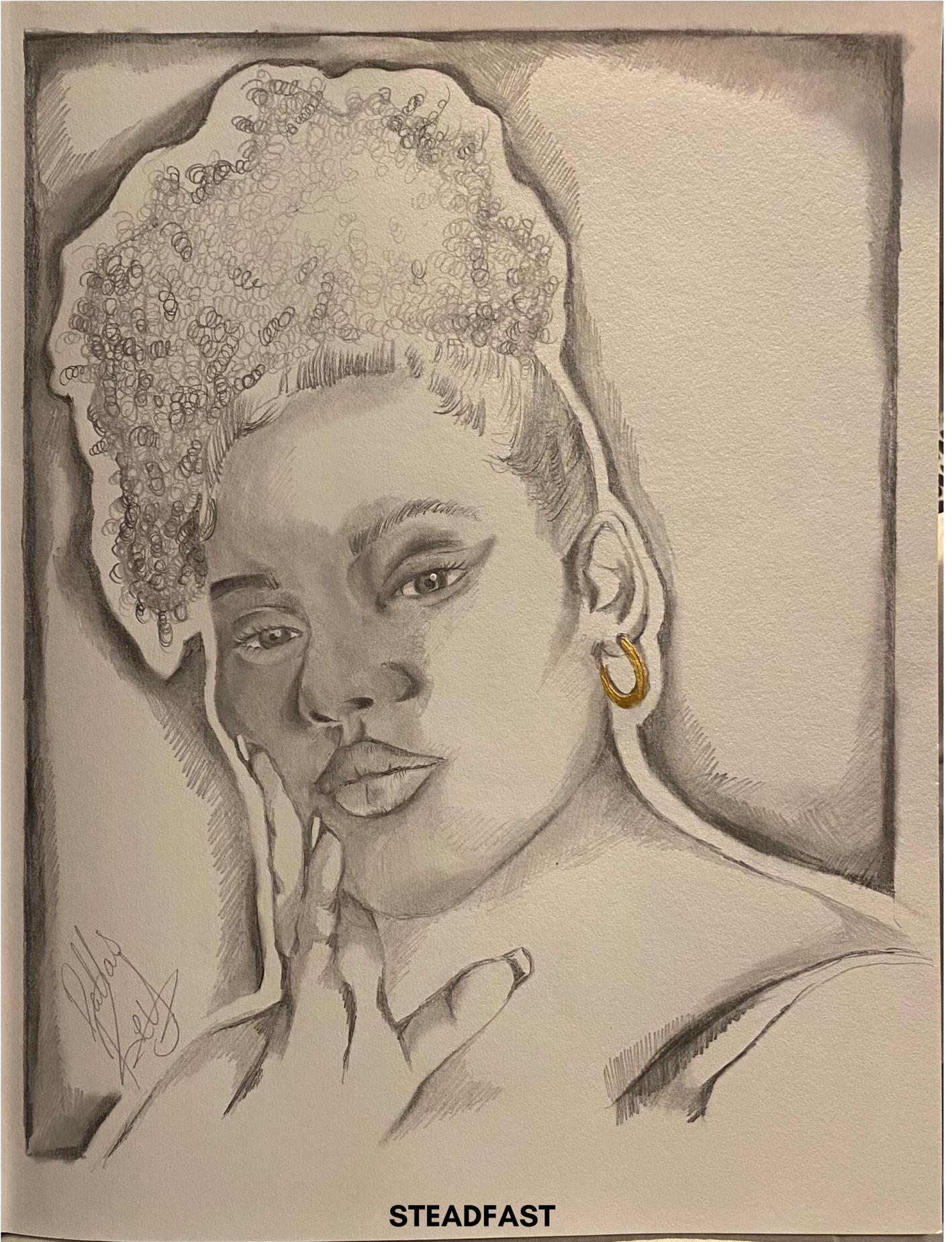
RIHANNA PORTRAIT





COSTUME PAINT OF A DOG NAMED BELLA





STEADFAST



This is a copy of someone else's work. I took inspiration from it and practiced it in my own drawings. - Dallas Rey Wilkins

BLISSFUL PURSUIT

OUR QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2020



MESSAGE FROM BLISSFUL US

Happy holidays everyone! Whether you are celebrating Christmas, Kwanzaa, Hanukkah or just enjoying the break and end of the year, the team at Blissful Pursuit wishes you all rest, safety, health, and happiness. We are so thankful that you guys continue to tune in and read our amazing digital magazines!

Our next Volume of magazine centers around the theme "Under representation and Diversity," to be published in Spring 2021. We all need to continue to discuss and mitigate these topics and we thank our contributors for addressing these social issues in creative and unseen ways.

As we near the new year, we encourage everyone to keep these issues in mind - our website and blog posts will feature many resources, so feel free to take a look! In addition, our blog posts and website are going to feature many more topics around self care, contributors, and wholesome thoughts, so please tune in.

We wish everyone well. Keep creating, inspiring and staying safe.

Regards,

Anusha Bansal

Editor, The Blissful Pursuit



Want something to read during break?



With most schools out, we hope you have time to check out our latest issue, Volume 1 Issue 3, about Food and Culture! Here's a sneak peak of what's inside (you can find the whole issue at <https://www.theblissfulpursuit.org/issue3>):

- Vegetarianism in different cultures
- Colorful poetry
- Short stories about hunger and discovery
- Cheese (yum!)
- Interviews with nutrition experts!
- Features of South Indian Classical Music
- And so much more!

Blissful Pursuit Talks With: To Her, From Us



Recently, Anusha Bansal, founder of Blissful Pursuit, had an eye opening chat with Karen Yang, social media director of To Her, From Us, a student-run organization aiming to encourage female youth empowerment through sharing experiences via an online platform. The “To Her, From Us” team seeks to inspire more passionate young women to partake in leadership initiatives, whether it be in the social sciences, humanities, STEM, art, etc. They had a lovely discussion on what young teens can do to help their communities, chase their dreams and speak up for themselves.

You can find their conversation at <https://www.toherfromus.org/interviews> and visit [toherfromus.org](https://www.toherfromus.org) to seek advice and donate to awesome charities!



WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE BLISSFUL PURSUIT?

We are wrapping up Our First Volume: Food & Culture by publishing its 4th issue during the Holidays! Look out for the announcement when it comes out.

We are looking for volunteers to take up blogging and write about current events amidst the pandemic. If you are personally affected by the pandemic, we want to hear from you!

Do you have a special talent that you would like to share with your peers? We are recruiting talent to be showcased in future editions. Please email us at editor@blissfulus.org for the opportunity to join the team.

THE BLISSFUL PURSUIT

Global online literary art magazine

Our **SECOND** collection - Fall 2020

Theme: **underrepresentation & diversity**

CALL FOR ENTRIES

If you are a student ages 13-24, you are invited to contribute your literary (or artistic) work in any genre or art for publication in the **second** volume of The Blissful Pursuit magazine. This is an online literary magazine with a mission to give voice to today's teens.

THEME: Share your writing and art that can relate to **underrepresentation** in life, different **fields, discrimination, racial gap, gender gap, diversity, inaccessibility...** Does your character feel misunderstood or outnumbered? Are you able to **portray** this type of feeling using words or art? How might you be able to portray **loneliness**, standing out from other people?

Our themes are completely up to student interpretation, you may use it to any extent! Following the theme is fully optional but of course, we recommend you try something new.

- Students may submit up to 3 pieces, each piece requires a separate student/parent information form and release form.
- Suggested (non)/fiction/prose length is 250-1000 words, poetry should be up to 50 lines.
- Writing should be submitted as either a Microsoft Word or Google Document.
- Artwork must be jpg/jpeg/png format, try for high resolution. If artwork is a sculpture or 3D piece, you may submit pictures of it.
- All submissions will be reviewed and organized by our editors.
- **Email your submissions and parent consent forms at editore@BlissfulUs.org**
- **Submissions will be accepted until December 30, 2020.**

[@magazineBlissfulPursuit](https://www.facebook.com/magazineBlissfulPursuit)



[@theblissfulpursuit](https://www.instagram.com/theblissfulpursuit)

Please contact editor@BlissfulUs.org with any questions or visit theblissfulpursuit.org for past issues!



Publication Opportunity for ages 13-24

Focuses on eliminating food
insecurity & diverse societal
issues, Promotes arts &
STEM education.

A forum for young voice, arts
and writing!

www.theblissfulpursuit.org



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GLOBAL LITERARY ART ONLINE MAGAZINE

THE BLISSFUL PURSUIT

"Blissful Us is proud to have funded a full-tuition scholarship for a student attending a Summer Creative Writing Intensive at The Writer's Circle. The student was selected for the scholarship by The Writer's Circle and the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers in part for excellence in the 2020 Scholastic Art & Writing Awards."

Daniel Embree

Director, National Programs
Alliance for Young Artists & Writers



VOLUME 1, ISSUE 4
FOOD AND CULTURE



DECEMBER 2020