

GLOBAL LITERARY & ART ONLINE MAGAZINE

# *THE BLISSFUL PURSUIT*



VOLUME 1, ISSUE 3  
FOOD AND CULTURE



NOVEMBER 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,

We continue to be amazed at your creativity and ingenuity of expression in so many forms. It's what makes Blissful Pursuit, a special adventure each time we publish our new issue. In our current issue, which is our third one, we have created an "Arts Section" - dedicated to performing and visual arts.

Our mission to provide creative freedom to today's youth in expressing their views on what matters to them has never been more important. Blissful Pursuit has and will always serve as a forum that is for the youth and by the youth. We hope that our readers and contributors continue to shower us with their time and support. We thank you for all the effort and encouraging words you have shared with us.

Another community we want to say our heartiest thanks are the frontline workers across the world. These frontline workers kept us going despite the global lockdown. Our sincere thanks and best wishes to these frontline workers and their families.

The holiday season is upon us. It's no secret that this holiday season will be unlike any in the past but I hope you are able to enjoy a safe and fun filled Holiday season with your friends and families.

Anusha Bansal  
Editor, The Blissful Pursuit



*Special thanks to  
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# NONFICTION

## The Big Table

By Margaux Citrin



The smoky warm smell of barbeque chicken was floating all throughout the house. My dad was cooking on his Green Egg And the smell was delightful. My mom and I were roasting vegetables and boiling pasta. The big brown dining table was set with seven placemats. My siblings were playing a game in the living room while waiting for dinner. I looked at the small white table that was once used for dinner, but now was filled with home cooked, delicious food, which made me think of how much has changed because of the Coronavirus.

Previously, every night at 5:45 my mom's voice squeaked on the intercom signaling that dinner was ready.

"Joe, Margaux, Will, Gabby, and Claudia come down for dinner!"

After her call a loud chorus of footsteps went running down the back stairs. I joined them in the kitchen and watched as my mom took the big foil food trays from the oven. My starving siblings took their plates and rushed up to the stove. I looked at the big food trays full of crispy chicken and creamy mac and cheese.

"Hey mom, maybe we could try making dinner for once. I mean it doesn't look very hard." I said as I was shoveling mac and cheese on my plate.

"Oh honey, it's not that it's hard, I just don't have enough time to cook with all you monkeys having

different schedules and plans. G.E. Brown is so convenient because they make such good food and they deliver." My mom replied.

I took my plate and sat down thinking about the weekend. My father always went to Boston during the school week, so I didn't get to see him until the weekend. On the weekends we had family dinners and sat at the big dining table, but during the week the table was used for random books and homework.

"So Claudia, how was your day?" My mom asked my older sister who was too focused on her phone to answer.

"Huh?" She said, barely looking up from her phone.

Claudia was in high school meaning she had more important stuff to do than talk to her family.

"Oh good." She replied as she looked up at the table for a second and then moved her gaze back to her phone.

So Will, how was soccer practice?" My mom asked my younger brother.

"It was fine, but can Ben come over tomorrow for a play date?" Will asked.

"I don't know, Will, Joe has baseball and Gabby has ballet so I don't have time to have Ben over."

"But Mom!" Will pleaded.

My mom gave him the look that made him stop talking and focus on his dinner. "Joe, where are you going? We just sat down." My mom asked.

"I already ate and I have a big Spanish test tomorrow so I need to study." Joe replied as he was running towards the stairs.

"Hey mom can a couple people come over this weekend?" Claudia asked.

"Who do you want to invite?" My mom questioned. "Oh you know Cam, Jack, Will, Zach, and Pippa. They can leave by 10:30." My sister said trying to convince my mom.

"I don't know honey, we will talk about it later." My mom replied. My mom's face was always stressed and worried.

My thoughts were disrupted from a chorus of laughter coming from my family and my father announcing, "The chicken is done!" I moved my gaze to my hungry siblings gathering to take food from the small table, plates in hand.

"Margaux watch the pasta!" My mom yelled at me, pointing to the pasta pot that was about to bubble over.

My vivid daydream had distracted me from the pasta I was cooking. I quickly ran over and dumped the pot of pasta into a strainer in the sink. I finally tried making the special pasta that my grandma always called Jewish Spaghetti. I pulled out a bowl from the cabinet and poured the pasta into the bowl, then I brought it to the table with the other delicious food.

"Watch out guys, the chickens really hot." My dad said as he carefully carried a plate of steaming hot chicken to the table. We all grabbed plates and started filling them up with food.

"Dad I made Grandma's spaghetti!" I said.

"Oh you did, it looks very good! Grandma would be so proud." My dad replied, as the rest of my family gathered around the big table.

Sitting at the table with my whole family felt so different from how dinners used to be when dad was away at work. My mom was eating her food with a happy smile on her face.

“So Will, Joe, do you guys want to go fishing tomorrow at Byram Lake? I bought more bait.” My dad said.

“Yesss!” Will yelled, “I have been wanting to go fishing for so long!” “Sure, I guess I’ll come.” Said Joe as he brushed his hair to the side.

“Okay everyone we are going on a family walk on Sunday.” My mom announced, “And I don’t want to hear complaints.”

Claudia and Joe were about to protest, but then stopped because they knew they had to go on the walk.

“So daddy, are you staying home forever?” Gabby asked, changing the subject.

“Well sweetheart not forever. Right now it’s not safe to travel, but when airports open and the virus is under control I will go back to Boston,” My dad replied.

“I don’t want you to leave!” Gabby said.

I felt the same way because I didn’t want him to leave although I want life to return to normal so I can go to school and see my friends.

Even though the coronavirus has been a terrible thing, it has brought my family closer together. I hope even after quarantine we still will have family dinners with homemade food and time spent together at the big table.



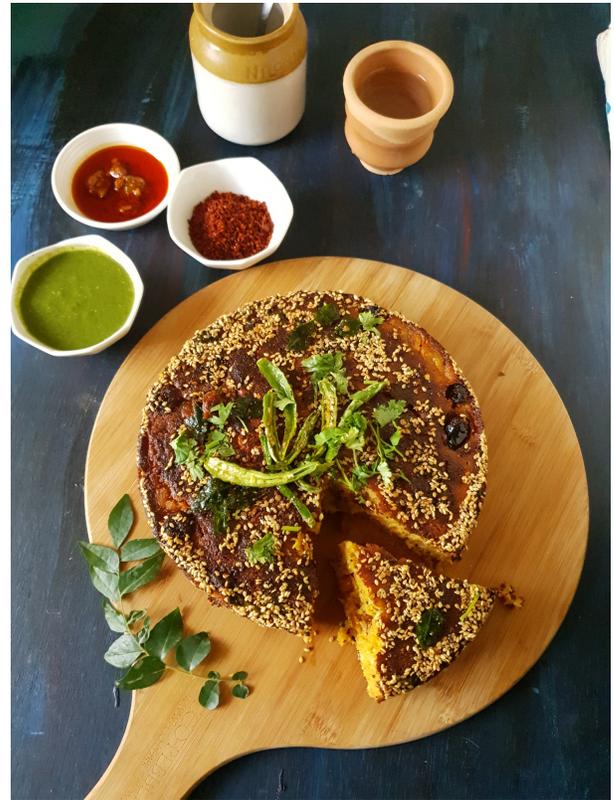
*About the Author: Margaux is an eleven year old student going into 7th grade. According to her, “I have wanted to be a writer since I was little, and I am passionate about all types of writing from poetry to realistic fiction. I live in Bedford, New York with my large, loving and loud family that includes many animals. I was inspired to write this story thinking about how much. I love cooking and spending time with my family.”*

# Vegetarianism in my culture

by Krish Patel

Imagine eating Gujarati Handvo, the embodiment of spice and flavor. A vegetable cake cooked delicately with a special lentil flour topped with peanuts, Handvo invites eaters to indulge in its unique texture and rich flavors of the many masalas included in its preparation. Handvo is just one example of the many complicated traditional Hindu-Indian dishes prepared in my household.

Many aspects of Indian Gujarati cuisine make it unique because Hindu food is intertwined with ethics, religion, and preserving the welfare of both animals and the environment. In fact, these interrelated concerns are crucial for any vegetarian, particularly in the context of traditional cultural practices.



**Handvo**



Since I can recall, I've been taught that food mirrors my cultural identity and Gujarati traditions. For example, I am a first-generation American, and my parents from the Indian state of Gujarat, where women, until recently, have traditionally done the cooking and taking care of children while men earn money and perform tedious grunt work. Therefore, the shifting distribution of labor in cooking reflects the changing attitudes and norms of modern culture, specifically in food preparation. Another tradition practiced by my family is Diwali, also dubbed "The Festival of Lights". During this celebratory time, special sweets and authentic higher-end cuisine are made as offerings to various gods. After the Pooja (rituals to God lasting three hours), people share their neatly prepared delicacies to enrich the sensory experiences of members in our community. The influx of high-quality food portrays a festive and mutually shared day. In this way, food reflects one's cultural beliefs and identity while acting as the glue that binds people together.



## Indian spices

Nutrition greatly affects the traditional Indian diet, which sensitizes people to make healthful decisions portrayed in the foods they eat. Many Indians only eat plant-based diets (almost 20%-42% of Indians are fully vegetarians, while many are intermittent plant eaters) partially because a plant-based diet is perceived to be healthy. Since many Indians avoid meat, they look for alternative protein sources, which are healthier than meat in many cases. Our comprehensive diet consists of a variety of beans, lentils, and even an "Indian style" egg.

Another aspect of a standard Indian diet is the different varieties of vegetables. Because vegetables on their own may not be desirable, Indians add a plethora of spices, each with their own medicinal and nutritional properties. These nutritional substitutes give Indian food its great taste. For instance, in every Indian state, there are many variations of the food pekora, each with different flavors. In Gujarat, pakora is called golden bhajia, a fried potato inside a flatbread. It's less greasy, more exquisite than a french fry, and is cooked in vegetable oil.

Not only does nutrition affect the food in Indian culture, but ethics and religion also play a crucial role. For example, people think that animals are in pain when being consumed and killed, which constitutes an ethical choice to show empathy toward their suffering. Not only is animal cruelty the reason why many people become vegetarian and vegan, but also because they acknowledge the fact that fast food corporations are cutting down rainforests for building slaughterhouses and animal pastures.

The animal pastures (the waiting rooms of death) are there to fatten animals for the purpose of being efficiently packaged and then transported to be eaten. If the rainforests like the Amazon become decimated, the amount of oxygen will decrease and increase the number of carbon emissions, which may lead to a catastrophic collapse of global ecological systems. Therefore, vegetarians' ethical choices intersect important, relevant global issues.

Religion also plays an important role in the ethics of food. The most prominent religion is Hinduism (80% of the population). Hinduism teaches ahimsa or the idea of non-violence and karma (what goes around comes around). These two teachings in Hinduism show that Hindus refrain from killing animals and fear they will have to suffer in their next life. Another main religion in India is Islam (15% of the population). Islam approves of only Halal meat, which is made when the animal is given a swift, painless death rather than a slow grueling one.





Being one of the few vegetarians in the United States among a culture that glorifies meat raises meaningful critical questions in my mind about society at large. When I pass by a highway billboard marketing how McDonald's meat is 'fresh' and can make one 'happy,' I find it fairly questionable that people believe in these notions. For instance, slaughtering sick cows, which live only three years as opposed to the normal 20 of healthy cows, is harmful to consumers. In fact, I learned that animals experiencing pain and stress before being killed release toxic hormones, which end up in its meat.

These hormones can cause unwanted diseases and complications over time. Not only does corporate America mask the horrible effects of its meat supply chain, but it also uses animal cruelty to extract more profit from their morbid endeavors.

For example, I learned that school food providers also serve their food in prisons, and providing these institutions with cheap meals comes at a tremendous cost. Additionally, hens are crammed in cages, each one given approximately less than a sheet of paper's worth of space.

Chickens have their beaks burned off without painkillers and are thrown into cages with no care whatsoever. These jaw-dropping facts show only a few elements of the meat industry's horrors, serving as a daily reminder that my dietary choices have wide-reaching consequences.

Ultimately, ethics, nutrition, and religion affect the food I eat, which mirrors my Indian heritage. The vegetarian food choices of my culture affect me and the world because they help animals and the environment, adhering to ideas of non-violence and ahimsa. In today's context, my vegetarian diet choice has inspired many realizations, the most important being the interconnectedness of every living being.

*About the Author: Krish is in 7th grade in Parsippany, New Jersey. He likes to play the violin and tennis. He explored vegetarianism after reading the book "Chew on This".*

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# POETRY

## Evening View From The Second Story

by Sadie Shang

Try to search through the gaps in the night  
I always thought  
The stars are broken light.

Neon is the mood falling in the night sky,  
I don't know how to pine,  
Always thinking the night is wrapped up in happiness  
Maybe only you know-  
Night is the helpless compromise of the sun.

Wandering on the edge of darkness,  
Feeling blessed at the view from my small window  
Street lamps and cars in the twilight  
emit shades of orange light  
shining like a tiger's eyes.

Maybe there is no legend in the dark night,  
But darkness can be romantic.

Among the shadows of the night,  
Loneliness hovers heavy in the air  
like a magnified phantom.

A song of music, melodious  
the evening's everlasting flowing rhythm  
never changes, never stops,  
So sitting several stories up,  
waiting, watching in the dark  
enjoying the endless and exotic  
pleasantries unique to night

About the Author:

Sadie is a 9th grader in Princeton, NJ. She says, "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."

# A Fight Against Hunger

By Laura Freeman

Hunger rages all around  
In shelters and homes  
Some is contained  
While some bellies growl nonstop

Some cultures have food to spare  
Others have far too little  
We can all help fight hunger  
To help those in need

Each country has dishes that stand out  
Such as fast food  
Italy holds pizza and pasta,  
India, famed egg roast

Poverty drives hunger,  
Hunger asks to be fed  
Beggars can't be choosers  
In this fight for food

Food is hoarded in pandemics  
Like Covid-19 now  
Canned goods are gone really quick  
Along with imperishable goods

Many people use social media  
Lots joke about tofu  
Since most don't like it  
Tofu shelves are staying full

Everyone needs food to like  
Why don't we just share evenly  
Many cuisines define our cultures  
But so few make the mark

Mexican, Asian, Indian, Tex-Mex,  
Just to name a few  
Japanese and Mediterranean come too  
We have a whole slew

People enjoy special dishes  
Some don't want to try  
No one should go hungry  
But unfortunately, some do

Help us fight the brewing hunger  
That rages across all lands  
Millions will be thankful  
we feed the hungry meals

*About the Author:*

*Laura is a 12-year old writer hailing from Colorado, where she lives with her family, two cats, and a dog. She was inspired to write this piece from experiencing the Covid-19 pandemic struggle and her dog sitting by the table begging for human food.*

## Author Spotlight: Emily Greene

### True Poverty



True poverty has nothing to do  
with money, riches, food or fame  
True poverty is the lack of friends and family  
the ones who see faults and love you just the  
same

the perpetual battle for green government  
paper  
is that which drains all life away  
constantly searching, the endless quest  
to find ecstasy in wealth, it's quite cliché

So, gather your friends,  
loved ones, and family near  
And if you hold on tight  
the ghost of true impoverishment might steer  
clear

But here is a slice of advice  
That I hope will shepherd you on your way:  
A family member or friend is worth so much  
more  
Than a mountain of gold any day

About the Author: Emily Greene is a 14 year old home schooled student from Carrollton Virginia. She sings at her church and is captain of her soccer team. She is exploring poetry as a creative experience.

# Creative Expressions Award

## Yaelin Hough

### Slices of Life



About the Author:  
Yaelin is in grade 9 in Wyckoff, New Jersey. She wanted to write this poem because she really enjoys both writing poetry and eating food! She's had the opportunity to write a poem about food from each place and how they brought her back to the places she used to live.

Bold, pungent, acrid,  
Odor slicing through the air  
Like the vengeance of a grieving man  
Alone with his enemy  
And a sharp, bitter sword.  
But why is this man's enemy  
A small and unassuming fruit?

The allure of a grand magician,  
A man's deft hands slice through the fruit.  
A child covers her nose with her small hands,  
intrigued, yet she stays away.  
But slowly,  
over two years,  
The smell becomes wired within her.  
And now, the smell of a durian  
Carries her across the oceans  
To first grade,  
To Singapore.

But our journey is not over yet.  
Another delicacy,  
Thick, green, creamy.  
A subtly sweet smell,  
It's a century old Danish recipe.  
The aroma is heaven  
To a hungry and impatient child

And when the girl finally  
Picks up her spoon,  
The taste is so familiar

Yet so forgotten,  
And so, so good.  
But the soup is only half the allure.  
A couple minutes away,  
A small Danish town.

The girl begs her mom  
For a souvenir, a fragile little trinket.  
It's Solvang,  
Her favorite place to stop  
On a trip down the California coast.

Far away from the Golden State,  
A child watches in awe,  
A man stretches a sticky, white dough,  
Kneading it, molding it,  
Until thousands of fine strands  
Slip deftly through his fingers,  
Like bright silk tears  
Falling from the eyes of an angel.

The girl is starstruck.  
She bites into the finished candy,  
A rolled up rectangle of the sweet silk,  
To find a sweet, nutty surprise in the middle,  
Tasting like a glutinous heaven.  
Around are bustling people,  
The honking of cars,  
Bright and colorful city lights.  
Nighttime,  
When Myeongdong, Korea comes to life.

Sitting back, the girl remembers, reminisces.  
Thoughts of food bringing her across oceans.  
Bringing her back to her friends, her childhood.  
But that is only a taste of her journey yet to come.

# Visits with Ammi

By Farhan Mohammad

Visits with Ammi  
Cuddles and kisses, her soft  
Hijab brushing cheeks.

She spices the rice  
With cumin and cardamom,  
And a hint of mint.

She guards her secret  
Recipes, her chicken soup,  
Her lamb biryani.

She serves Thanksgiving  
American style, turkey  
With mashed potatoes.

Give her tulip bulbs,  
She'll plant them near Italian  
Eggplant, tomatoes.

Sunny days, she'll stay  
Outdoors, power-walking trails  
Of the neighborhood.

Indoors, we'll catch her  
Watching Olympic swimming,  
Hyderabad news.

She wakes before birds,  
Kneels to pray five times daily,  
Goes to sleep by nine.

On Christmas, we wear  
Red in family photos,  
Don her knitted hats.

Her home remedies  
Cool our burns, soothe our rashes.  
Herbs to the rescue.

"You must become doctors!"  
She bids my brother and me.  
Of course, we concur.



About the Author: Farhan is a 10th grade student at Princeton Day School. His inspiration for this poem was to honor and cherish his grandma on her birthday.



Dad's recipe is the one for me  
 My taste buds just know  
 How he does it is a mystery  
 The secret formula he will not show  
 My Grandma  
 My Grandpa  
 In India the treasure stow

Now pull out the ladle  
 And a foot-wide frying pan  
 Two tablespoons of oil enable  
 Batter's cooking without the fan  
 Stick-free  
 Burn-free  
 Flip without flopping, I can

Potato masala is warming, waiting  
 Dondakaya chutney too  
 Place dosas on the plates for folding  
 For family serve dollops two  
 Bending  
 Wrapping  
 Our treats for me and you

#### Fun facts about Dosa:

A dose/dosai is a rice pancake, originating from South India, made from a fermented batter predominantly consisting of lentils and rice. Dosa is the Anglicized name of a variety of South Indian names for the dish, for example dosai in Tamil, dose in Kannada dosa in Malayalam. It is somewhat similar to a crepe in appearance, although savoury flavours are generally emphasized (sweet variants also exist). Its main ingredients are rice and black gram, ground together in a fine, smooth batter with a dash of salt, then fermented. Dosas are a common dish in South Indian cuisine, but have become popular all over the Indian subcontinent in recent times. Traditionally, dosas are served hot along with chutney and in recent times sambar. Other accompaniments include chutney powder (a fine groundnut and lentil powder).

About the Author: Ajitesh is in Grade 8, and he resides in Princeton, NJ.

# FICTION

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## The Restart

By Raghav Patil

In the beginning, the universe was doomed to follow a pattern; one that takes place in a solar system. Now, this solar system was special. It was the location of a very important event. When all of the planets of this solar system aligned, disaster struck. The universe ended itself and started over. Each time, the solar system gained a new planet and it would restart, as simple as pouring water out of a glass and refilling it. The leftover water is the system, but not the planets. The planets represent the fluidness of the drops of water. They're gone. But when the glass is refilled, it comes back.

The person who created the universe decided to keep living creatures in the solar system to have them document what happens around them. The only problem; life cannot survive the restart. What if I told you that I created the universe. And that this solar system is the one that causes the restart.

Granted, you may call me crazy. But I tell no lies. You might be calling me God. But my real name is \*\*\*\*\*//-' ;+;/:: but you can't pronounce that, so, God is okay. You may have so many questions. And I have many answers. But for the sake of time, I will only give the important ones. For starters, yes, I made the cycle or "restart". You might be mad, but I have a good reason. You see, happiness is something I created. But only a limited amount of it so that it becomes special. I created an infinite amount of sorrow. Throughout your current universe, you will use all of the happiness in the universe. There is no point in a universe without happiness. Why? Because I love you, and anything I do is because I do. But this is too much for you to handle, so let me explain through one of your own kind's eyes.

John woke up this morning just like any other. He had gotten dressed and was ready for school. His parents were on vacation, so things were a bit odd without them at home. He brushed his teeth, changed, and had breakfast. He headed out, looking at his brother one more time. John's brother, Michael, was only five years old. He should be going to school, but today he has a holiday, so he's staying at home. As John walked to school, he thought of how his parents are probably on the flight home right now. He might have thought that he could get away with not going to school, but did the right thing. John is in the ninth grade, so his parents would find out anyways. He walked into class and saw that the entire class was in horror as they ran around the room. John asked one of them what was happening. What he told John made him laugh.

"You're telling me that the world is going to end today?"

"Yes!" the kid was barely able to get the words out. John pulled out his phone and saw at least twenty notifications about the end. He saw a video instructing people to get into a plane as the Earth will shrink in size, causing mass destruction around the world. If you're on a plane, then you could survive. John immediately thought of his brother and ran home. He wasn't alone. He saw other students, parents, and children running. Just as John reached halfway there, an earthquake struck. John didn't care and kept running. Just as he turned the corner to his house, a building under construction was starting to fall towards their house.

John hurriedly pushed the door open, grabbed Michael, who was crying in the corner, and ran out of the house. Just as they left the house, the building crashed into it, causing the debris to fly everywhere. John decided to use their parents' car to get to the airport and found that drawer the holding their car keys was not ten feet away, on its side as their house was destroyed. He pulled open the drawer and found the keys. He strapped Michael in the front seat and got in. He was able to get them to the airport in one piece but almost got hit three times along the way. He got himself and Michael out of the car and ran past an empty security room to a random terminal. It was the last minute before the end.

9:00 AM. This is it, he thought. He and Michael ran into the terminal. They made it just in time, as the door shut behind them. But the door for the aircraft was already shutting before they got in. So without thinking, John pushed Michael in. The door shut and the plane took off, blasting John away and into the wall. He got up and stared at the aircraft as it flew away, rising high in altitude. It went white, and then straight black. John woke up and looked at me.

"Where am I?" asked John. "Classic line," I thought.

"I'm not going to try to explain, but I'm God," I said. The surprise on John's face was amusing, but I got that a lot.

"Did I die?" John asked.



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"Well, of course, you died. But that doesn't mean it's over for you." I said hopefully.

"I know, heaven," said John gloomily. I laughed.

"No, no, not heaven. Your next life." I said hysterically.

"The Hindus were right!" exclaimed John.

"All religions are right in their way," I said knowledgeably. John sat there in silence.

"Is my brother okay?" John finally asked. I wish that he hadn't asked that. I sigh, nodding my head. "My parents?" I nod again.

"Your world did not end. Instead, the entire universe ended." I said casually. I don't think the way I said it, nor what I said helped him. "All of the planets in your solar system shrank because they will remain in the next universe, instead of me having to create new planets in the universe which will dictate the fate of the universe. Nothing survived. Not even you." John's face was as blank as the face of a planet. I felt horrible.

"So, this isn't a punishment for global warming?" asked John indifferently. I looked at him as if he seriously wanted me to answer that question.

"Did I not just say that I love you?" I asked.

"Even after what we did?" asked John inquiringly.

"Yes," I said blankly.

"Then why did it have to end?" asked John

"So you can be happy," I said. I have to admit, John's inquiring is making even me question my own decision.

"How can I be happy knowing that my parents, my brother, and all of my friends, they all died," asked John, looking down. There wasn't much to look down at, just white.

"You'll be happy in your next life," I said as I started walking. John followed.

"But why remove it all in the first place?" he asked curiously.

"You see, happiness is limited," I explained. "You are using up all of the happiness."

"Why not make it infinite?" asked John. This time he desperately wanted to know the answer. The weight of this conversation is taking its toll on John. I could damage his soul if I keep this up.

"Because then, it won't be special," I said. I need to be careful with my words.

"Where are you taking me?" he asked. He doesn't know that this whole world is but a figment of my imagination. I would like to keep it that way for his sake.

"Nowhere, I just want to talk," I said.

"Really?" John asked. Wonderful. He's questioning my every move. And this is why I rarely ever have conversations with people.

"Well...you'll see," I say as we stop at a ridge. I created this ridge for this conversation. I knew that this conversation was going to happen. And I know exactly what he's going to say. "Beautiful, isn't it?"

"That's what I was going to say," said John. I know that. I sighed as I looked at him. I won't see him for another 85,000 or so years. His soul is so special.

"There. The new universe is complete." I say very sadly. "And yes, you will leave now."

"Two questions before I leave if you don't mind," said John. His innocence radiates throughout him.

"Go ahead." I still know the questions and answers, but I'll let him speak.

"What is the meaning of life?" asked John. Here we go again.

"To be happy," I say, for the millionth time. I remember speaking to him in the past. He would always ask this question.

"But how can... how can we be happy like this? Constantly dying over and over again?" John asked. People don't change, even though reincarnation happens.



"You just... you just wouldn't understand. You didn't understand when I attempted to explain to you in your other lives, and you wouldn't understand even now." I say. John looks at me, confused. His soul is damaged, but nothing that 85,000 years can't fix. Ah, this will be his tenth life. He gets immortality this time. I smile with joy. I remember to add that. 85,000 years of happiness for you. He deserves this so much. This is just special treatment for John. I only speak to him. I am waiting for the day where John's soul has matured and I can allow him to keep his memories. I have to slowly give him his memories back to him so it wouldn't be too quick. My fingers glow blue and I touch John's head. This will allow him to remember his name in his next life. After all, he will be the first soul, and he will be immortal.

"Now, you've asked all of your questions." and off I sent John, off to his next life. A better life. And now, I create a new planet to add.

"Maybe a lava world would look nice," I say to myself. And with a snap of my fingers, the new universe began.



#### About the Author:

Raghav is a 12 year old boy living in Jersey City, NJ. He was inspired to write this piece about hearing many stories of the punishments of Gods (mostly Greek) and decided that may be he could put his own twist on it. Raghav is a recipient of 2020 NJ Scholastic Writing Award and Honorable Mention for his work.

## The Evolution Of The Evil Ants

By Iris Gu



I type furiously on my computer, my books and clothes strewn all over my bedroom floor. Nothing can get me out of my room until I finish my project, I think. That is until the lovely smell of my family's traditional curry with rice floats into my room. Every part of the dish could be detected, from the meat to the potatoes to the slightly over baked rice. It is as if the smell is demanding me to emerge from my filthy room and get a mouthwatering dish of my family's traditional curry with rice with sesame. I toss the computer off of my legs and bolt down the stairs. When I arrive at the dining table, I don't even have to ask if it is my great grandmother's traditional curry with rice. The dish of pungent curry rice and sesame stands before me. I thank my grandmother first, which is a tradition we follow, and I quickly sit down to eat.

As I look over my plate, I quickly assess what I can accept, and what I will not allow to slide down my throat, which is something I have done since I was super young. If I dislike a piece of food on my plate, I squint at it and pick it off immediately. And because this is a traditional dish that I eat all the time, I know before I even look at the dish that there are a handful of sesame weirdoes sprinkled all over the rice. Yes, the dish is one of my favorites but I can still find flaws in all meals. The sesame seeds are the troublemakers in this dish.

In my opinion, the sesame seeds just look like evil ants crawling over my rice. Without any of my parents or grandparents seeing, I pick off every single sesame seed and hide them in a napkin, which I throw away without another thought. It doesn't matter. I think. It's just food. It isn't like food is hard to get. We have too many sesame seeds anyway. And with that thought, I pick off the last evil ant off my rice and throw it in the trashcan. I begin to eat what I like.

As I watch the news and munch on the delectable and traditional dish, which is a lot better now that the sesame seeds have been picked off, I hear a reporter talk about the millions of lost jobs due to the virus. I look up from my bowl, as I take in the horrifying scene on the screen. Hundreds of children and their families are hungry and unable to buy food due to the pandemic. In one city, there were so many needy families to feed that volunteers who were providing food for these families had no food left to distribute even when there were still many families waiting.

The reporter then displays a video of a snaking line of people all waiting for their share of food. In the end of the line, all there was left were turnips and onions, but eventually, they even ran out of those! So, the volunteers sadly reject the rest of the hundreds of hungry families, who have been waiting for so long. I turned back down to my dish of steaming rice and curry, heaping almost off of my plate. I think about how for every meal of the day, breakfast, lunch and dinner, my Hello Kitty plate is filled with a different type of food. I think about all the meals when my mom made two different types of foods just so I could choose the one I liked, and she froze the rest.



The news goes on, showing us the abandoned farms and closed factories. Although many grocery stores were open, many families couldn't afford to buy food. Desperate families had to turn to charity to help them stay alive and fed. My eyes drop back down to the pastel pink bowl I had chosen on my birthday. Even after multiple mouthfuls, the heaps of curry, potato bits and carrots were heaping and over filling my bowl still! Suddenly, my sister starts whining and crossing her arms, glaring at my mother.

"No. I told you, I don't like carrots. in. my. CURRY!" While I look at her in shock and then in disgust, my mom's face only show's sympathy.

"Oh-uh...That's okay honey, I'll extract them right now from your bowl." My mom sighs, as she tries to think of a food plan.

"Hey Emily, after dinner I can give you three scoops of ice cream instead of two. My sister looks happier, so I shoot her a horrible look. How can she be so picky when so many other people in the world are starving, and eating bits of turnips just to stay alive? How can she be so selfish? I try to eat my curry in peace, but then I think of myself. The question does not need to be asked. I am even more of a monster than my sister. I look back at the trashcan behind me where I had nonchalantly threw away a handful of sesame seeds. I literally threw food away, because I didn't like it. I have always thought that when I grew up, and I had my own children, I'd make them the same dish, but with no evil ants, as I called them. But now I ask myself if that even makes sense. The sesame seeds are food, whether I think they taste good or not, so I decide I will keep my great grandma's dish the way it is, and not change anything about it. Instead, I should probably change the way I think about food, and appreciate my grandmother's curry with rice dish in its original form, even with the evil ants crawling on top.



About the Author: Iris is 12 years old. She says, "Like most people my age, I have always taken each meal I eat for granted. Living in a well fed household, I have never really understood the problem of hunger. However, since the Covid-19 pandemic destroyed so many business, making it difficult for families to buy food, I have become more aware of the problem, and alot more appreciative of the food my family provides for me."

## Cheese makes the world go round

By Amber Yu



What comes to mind when thinking of cheese? Often we will envision a mouth-watering alphabetical assortment of cheeses—asiago, brie, camembert, cheddar, farmer’s, feta, gruyere, parmesan, ricotta, romano... just to name a few. Identifying all these cheeses indicates how integral cheese is to cultures across the globe, even if we may not realize it.

For instance, in America many common idioms include the word “cheese”. People may refer to their boss as the “big cheese”. Or after watching an over-the-top cliché movie, we may describe it as “cheesy”. When we have our photos taken, the photographer will urge us to “say ‘cheese’”. Without us ever realizing it, cheese has risen to become one of the most prized and esteemed gustatory inventions ever.

The celebrated American painter Bob Ross once stated, “There are no mistakes, only happy accidents.” Believe it or not, cheese was created by accident. Let’s go back in time to thousands of years ago in the Fertile Crescent. The rise of agriculture led Neolithic peoples to domesticate sheep and goats for their milk. For convenience, the milk was often stored in leathered sheep and goat stomach pouches. However, when these pouches were left in the heat, the milk began to sour and its lactic acid caused the milk to separate into clumps and liquid.

When Neolithic peoples discovered this, they drained the liquid or whey and ate the leftover clumps or curds alone or as a soft spreadable paste. Thus, the first cheese was created.

Cheese gave Neolithic peoples a significant survival advantage. As we know now, milk is rich in all sorts of proteins, fats, lactose, and minerals that are nutritious for the body.

Back then, though many human stomachs had not yet adapted to digest lactose, cheese had much less lactose so humans could tolerate it. Cheese became a staple of ancient peoples' diets because it could be preserved and stockpiled, ensuring that essential nutrients could be obtained during famines and long winters. Its ability to remain edible even after a long time, led cheese to become the world's first 'superfood'.

After the discovery and subsequent 'invention' or cultivation of cheese, the popularity of cheese exploded. Rising civilizations began to perfect the art of cheese and wholly adopted cheese as one of their own distinguishing characteristics. The most notable among these civilizations was Sumeria, later known as Babylonia. The Sumerians developed a system of writing known as cuneiform, which was written down on clay tablets. Some of the tablets unearthed by archaeologists today contain detailed descriptions of how to make cheese.

In addition, the Babylonians adored their cheese so much that even their gods sang erotic love songs to each other with innuendos about cheese. Before long, cheese was used all over the world for religious purposes. For example, Sumerian religious sacrifices, Hindu religious symbols, and Egyptian religious symbols, all contained connections to cheese. Furthermore, there is even evidence that cheese was used at Stonehenge in ancient Britain. Cheese has been celebrated for millennia the world over, and it continues to be popular today.

*About the Author: Amber Yu is in grade 10 and resides in Princeton, NJ.*

Over the years, many trends dominate one day, but diminish the next. Interestingly, cheese has never gone out of style, instead, only evolving with the passage of time. Cheese has changed to something far beyond a survival tool. In fact, it has become an art form, a daily ritual, and a nearly universal cultural identity. For example, the French even offer a cheese plate at every meal. A wide variety of cheeses to choose from exists today because of the medieval Benedictine monks in feudal Europe who messed around with molds. Viola, they had all different kinds of blue cheese, from Stilton to Gorgonzola! Lactic acid bacteria, milk solids and salt are the ingredients that go into a successful cheese.

Synergistically, certain wines taste better when paired with certain cheeses. Without cheese, popular classic comfort foods like mac and cheese wouldn't even exist. Imagine how disappointed all those kids would be to not grow up with such a rich, yet simple, dish. Ironically, cheese is so popular that even dairy-free vegans crave it. Luckily, technology is so advanced that we can make milkless cheese to satisfy the vegans. Now everyone can share in the wonders of cheese.

Whether we appreciate it or not, we are all united in our immense love of cheese. Our lives would be so unimaginably different without it. Symbolically, our cultures are collectively gathered around a fondue pot, dipping our bread cubes into the melted cheese, sharing a strong bonding moment. All that we love about cheese wouldn't be here today had someone not accidentally let their milk spoil. Next time you eat a piece of cheese, don't forget the serendipity of how it was made.

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# EXPERT CORNER: MICHELLE JANSEN



Michelle Jansen is a Community Cancer Control Specialist at Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey.

She designs and develops educational programming for communities throughout NJ on cancer prevention and screening strategies.

## **Bio**

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Michelle also hosts workshops and informational sessions on nutrition and its role in cancer prevention and health promotion. Michelle holds a Master of Science degree in Nutrition from Montclair State University as well as a Master of Arts in Teaching from Monmouth University. She serves as an adjunct professor of nutrition and has taught courses on applied community nutrition, the management of nutrition programs and the dynamics of food and society.

Michelle is known by many as the "pink paddler" for her unique pink kayak and paddles throughout the state. She is an avid hiker and is passionate about improving food security and healthy food access for everyone.

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**Tell us about your background in nutrition, sciences, food bank of NJ, and now at Rutgers.**

I started my career in mental health counseling 19 years ago where I worked at group homes and provided intensive community case management services to those with a severe and persistent mental illness. I enjoyed working with this diverse group of individuals throughout college and in the early years of my career. I also loved the teaching aspect of these positions as I had worked with individuals that had been in the back wards of our state psychiatric facilities from their teen and early adult years. Many of these individuals had been hospitalized for 20+ years and needed to learn skills related to banking, food preparation, grocery shopping and everyday activities of daily living.

After working in the field for four years, I decided that it was time to take my skill set to a new level and I pursued a Master of Arts in Teaching at Monmouth University while working full-time in the mental health field. I graduated summa cum laude and was thrilled to take the next steps in my career journey. After graduating, I worked at Morristown Medical Center for nearly six years providing home-based services to families that had a young child between birth and the age of 3 with a developmental delay or disability.



I loved working with the families and will never forget all of the beautiful children that I had the honor of serving. In my third year of this position, I saw the power of nutrition to dramatically transform the developmental trajectory of one of the little guys I had worked with. I became passionate about nutrition and would read every nutrition book that I could get my hands on during my lunch breaks and free time. I attended grand rounds on health and nutrition at the hospital and spent hours in the hospital library reading peer-reviewed academic journals on nutrition.

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I never thought I would pursue another degree as I was busy paying off student loans from my undergraduate and graduate degrees. But a door had opened up and I needed to walk through it. I applied to the Master of Science program at Montclair University and was accepted. Many of my colleagues were skeptical about how I would integrate my degrees in sociology, psychology and teaching with nutrition. I didn't have an answer, but knew that this was a road that I needed to travel.

I was even more blessed because the hospital covered a large part of tuition remission for my nutrition degree and I was awarded a \$7500 scholarship from the Executive Women's Committee of New Jersey to complete the degree. When the grant program I had worked for at the hospital finished, I had just completed my degree. I had no idea where I would land next until I found the perfect position in nutrition at Rutgers Cooperative Extension.

A few months after I graduated, I was offered a position as a Program Supervisor for a nutrition education program at Rutgers. I truly loved every aspect of this job, especially the ability to create cross-sector partnerships to create healthier food environments in our communities through policy change as well as increase access to healthy food. I was also offered a position to start a year-long diabetes education program with a local hospital system which ran successfully for four years. During this time, I was also offered the opportunity to serve as an adjunct professor of nutrition at Montclair State University. I currently work as an adjunct professor and it's hard to believe that I'm going into my third academic year already!

If you asked me five years ago what I would be doing professionally, I could never have imagined that I would have worked at a food bank. Since many of my work positions have grant-funded, budgetary constraints sometimes cause disruptions and hard stops to these programs. This is what happened with my position at Rutgers and I was suddenly faced with finding a new job.

A week after our program at Rutgers ended, I found myself a new work home as Director of Outreach & Youth Education at CFBNJ. It was an honor working with youth all over the state to learn more about how they wanted to get involved, what types of programming and volunteer opportunities most appealed to different age groups as well as designing and implementing service-oriented programs that would deeply impact the lives of those in our communities, especially those that are most vulnerable to food insecurity.

I had a blast with our youth and I felt like we were on top of the world with the incredible programs that we designed and developed. I was with the food bank for two years when I was offered a position to be part of a newly formed outreach and education team at Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey.

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## **When and why did you start working with CFBNJ? What did you learn about food insecurity and hunger by working there?**

I started working with CFBNJ in October 2017 and was no stranger to it! In my first position with Rutgers, we ran a food pantry in Paterson and we were one of the food bank's partnering agencies. We held weekly food distributions and the need was very high in Paterson. It tugged at your heart to see children so excited to receive bags of food to hold a family over for the weekend. Children shouldn't have to be excited about having a healthy plate of food to eat.

Food security should be a basic human right and not a privilege. As humans, this is the first need that must be satisfied for proper growth and survival. We want a country where everyone is thriving and not simply surviving from one meal to the next. We cannot progress as a country without a universal right to healthy food access for all.

Food insecurity is a very ugly reality in our country, even more so with the disruptions in our economy due to the current pandemic. COVID-19 has cast the spotlight on the widespread levels of food insecurity that so many people face in every single community in every single state. It has also highlighted the fact that children are the most food insecure population in our country today. This simply shouldn't be. We live in a country where there is more than enough food to feed everyone healthfully. The problem lies with access and distribution.



## **What's the best thing about teaching about hunger awareness to young minds?**

I always think of schooling and higher education as shaping a worldview by teaching students how to critically analyze situations and develop solutions. My generation has failed to solve the hunger issue in our country and in our world and it will be up to this next generation of young minds to address the different issues in agriculture, food production, economic access and institutional practices and policies to eradicate the hunger problem once and for all. It can be done and must be done as access to healthy food is a fundamental human right.

Teaching hunger awareness to students has been a joy and gift to me! Students are so ingenious and I love harnessing the collective power of a student group to make long-lasting changes in our communities. I'm a firm believer that this type of education should be part of our core curriculum in the school setting. It has been truly awesome to see the programs and solutions to address hunger developed from small student groups of 10 to 50 students. It would be incredible to see this power harnessed at a larger level with thousands of students. It's so important to teach students to find and use their voice as each voice is capable of changing the world for the better. As Margaret Mead mentioned, it only takes a small group of citizens to change the world. Students are the force of change in our world today.



### **What's your favorite thing about volunteering? And what is your least favorite thing?**

I truly love serving others! The power of volunteering is that it fills up your bucket while making someone else's day brighter. After all, isn't this what we are all here for? To make someone else's path in life easier by lightening burdens and lifting souls? I'm not a morning person, so I would have to say that my least favorite thing is waking up with the sun to get ready to serve.



### **What do you think is the value of writing for young people in diverse situations?**

Writing has the power to make an indelible impression in people's minds. Diverse viewpoints, journeys and life paths need to be shared as we learn from one another and ultimately become better versions of ourselves through this process.

Writing is essential in generating awareness of different issues and uniting everyone together for change. Writing can be inspirational or it can be used to generate a dissatisfaction about an issue where people can unite together to demand positive change in our society.

Writing is a form of history that can help propel the human experience forward, rather than backwards. We have to understand our past to make the necessary changes that we want to see in the future.

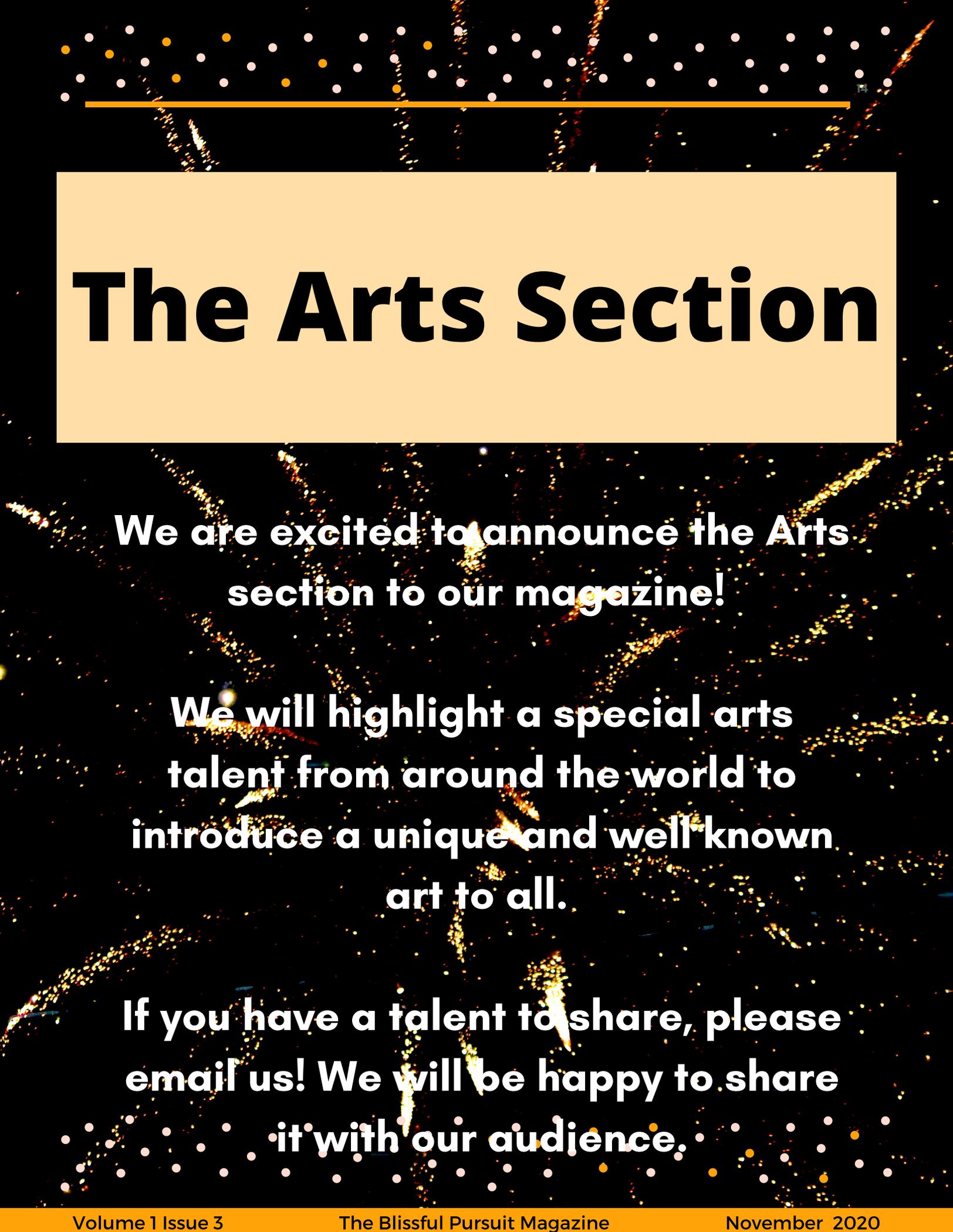
I love reading because it exposes me to different perspectives, life experiences and different versions of the collective conscious. It shapes how you view and understand the world around you and your place within it.



### **Can writing make any impact in reducing food insecurity and hunger?**

110%. Writing can make all the impact. Social media posts, tag lines with hunger facts, books about the realities and experiences of hunger in our communities can bring attention to the issues that drive hunger to direct funding, manpower and resources to solve the social and economic drivers of food insecurity.

Teen voices need to be heard when it comes to the hunger problem and the impact that it has for teens and youth throughout our country and the world.



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# 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

# South Indian Classical Music:

# CARNATIC

## Rachana Murali Narayanan

*Carnatic* music owes its name to the Sanskrit term Karnāṭaka Sangītam which denotes “traditional” or “codified” music. The corresponding Tamil concept is known as Tamil Isai.

These terms are used by scholars upholding the “classical” credentials and establish the “scientific” moorings of traditional music. Besides Sanskrit and Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam have long been used for song lyrics.

Whatever one’s personal background and aspirations may be, Carnatic music remains a quest for undiluted aesthetic experience (*rasa*).



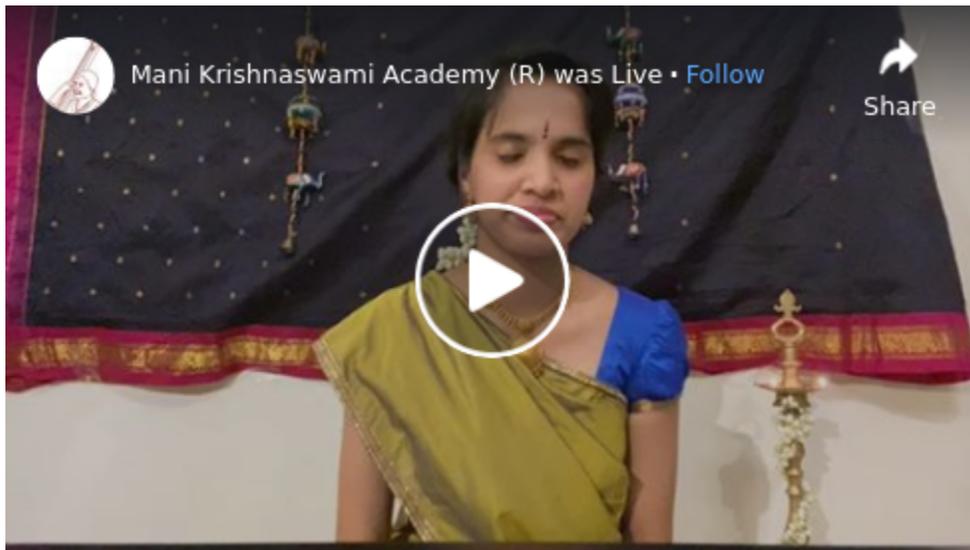
**Rachana in a performance**

*Rachana Murali Narayanan* is currently an electrical engineering student at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She was born and raised in Singapore, and has been learning the art of Carnatic since she was 8 years old.

She has performed many times including, Esplanade, a very prestigious location in Singapore, for a ticketed concert with two other very advanced musicians. We had the honor of interviewing her and share her experience about the wonderful South Indian music traced back to prehistoric times.

### When did you start singing? Tell us a little bit about yourself.

I have been singing forever! Mom and dad bought a microphone for me when I was around 6 because they saw that I liked to sing "It's the time to disco", a hindi bollywood movie song from a film called "Kal Ho Na Ho". They wanted to formalize it a little, and make me a little more acquainted with the roots I came from as well. Both my parents were in households where they were exposed to a lot of Carnatic music. My mother learnt Veena and Vocal for around 10 years, and my grandfather, who had great musical taste, wanted to make my father learn Mridangam as a young child. My dad currently learns violin, so I have a partner for musical banter at home now. I think it was only natural that they wanted me to learn the art form.



*Three basic concepts are essential for daily practice as well as proper appreciation: rāga (tuneful rendition with minute intervals and rich in embellishments), tāla (rhythmic order marked by mathematical precision), and bhāva (expression of thoughts and emotions).*

I have been learning Carnatic Music since I was 8, and I also had a brief stint with Hindustani Music, another kind of Indian classical music for a while, and a bit of violin to help refine my sense of pitch as well. The first few years with Carnatic music is definitely grueling because you won't like what you sing, but now, even when you know that you are barely a drop in this musical ocean, I think I started to like what I sing a little more. I am currently a disciple of Dr. Sri Renganatha Sharma sir, and I have been previously under the tutelage of Sri Delhi V. Muthukumar sir, and various gurus in the Singapore Indian Fine Arts Society as a young child.

### What kind of singer would you classify yourself as?

I think I would like to classify myself as a soulful singer. I feel like I may sometimes miss out on some details technically, but I like my music to have a lot of heart in it, and try to have a heart to heart conversation with an audience through music.

## What has been your best performance so far?

None of my performances to be honest! I feel in music and art in general, we are never really completely happy with the performances that we give because we notice that there is a lot of scope for improvement, and we are always on this path of trying to better ourselves. We tend to be a little harsh about it. Because, the process matters more than the outcome in music to me, I am happy with the process, and that's all that matters.



**Rachana in a performance**

**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 practice?**

This is a great question that I feel I don't have the answer to. I am very far from perfect on this matter. I try to keep listening to some form of Carnatic music even if I am not practicing it because you are right. You do lose interest if you don't. It's happened to me in the past. Once you get back to practicing after a long time, your voice feels rusty, and you don't even feel like you want to hear yourself.

Especially during my 12th grade IB exams, it was a horrible feeling. But, I felt my parents, unlike most parents these days, are very supportive of my extracurricular pursuits. They have loved seeing new facets of me emerge, and have enjoyed listening to me fantasize about the dream destinations I want to perform in, or the cricket commentator boxes I want to be a part of, or just the number of activities that I want to organize at a large scale. When you have that kind of support, there is no reason why you shouldn't practice and keep yourself in the loop.

### **What's the best thing about teaching singing to young minds?**

I think a young mind is not just a person who is young, but also someone who is young in this musical pursuit, if you know what I mean. Singing to my dad, and mom, and my friends is quite amazing because you feel like you are showing them the beauty of carnatic music, and at the same time you are receiving appreciation for the work you put into it. It's exceptionally hard to explain carnatic music to someone who has never heard of it through words : you might say jazz improvisation, etc. Singing to them just allows them to experience what it is and saves you a lot of time!

### **What's your favorite thing about singing? And what is your least favorite thing?**

It's a state of bliss. It's a high when you get a pattern right. It's an adrenaline rush when you are frightfully scared whether your notes are going to land correctly. It's the roller coaster ride that you enjoy in your practice space and a concert scene. When you sound good, it's even better. I don't think I dislike anything about music now. When I was younger, I would have given you a list of things that I hated, but it all sort of went away with time as I became 'wiser' if you would put it.



*Music was cultivated by nobility and common people alike. A mere glance at India's literary heritage, including poetry, drama, mythology and scholarly texts, reveals an ongoing quest for new ideas.*

### **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?**

This is something that comes rolling around every once in a while in every field that you are a part of. It stems from the environment you are in, the state of mind that you are in and probably even workload is to blame.

But, yes the National Indian Music Competition is one of the prestigious competitions that Singapore hosts triennially. I participated in 2011 when I was quite bad to be honest. I still came home thinking I should have been selected for the final because I was just ludicrously confident about winning every thing that came my way even though I was below average.

A little more sobre Rachana took part in 2014, where there was quite a lot of effort put in, and I thought making the final was definitely easy but winning from there is challenging. I didn't get through. A part of me still thinks I deserved a spot in the final in 2014, but when you are not your best self, circumstances can play up, and make it difficult for you because I simply wasn't the best in the lot.

After 2 failed attempts, I started thinking that this seems a little like an elusive dream to even qualify let alone win, pretty much like how in Cricket, South Africa views the World Cup at this point. We are obviously dealing at a much lower scale with respect to me, but yeah superstitious thoughts start clouding your judgement, but well, all you can do is to keep faith in the process, and pray that the rest works accordingly. I did, and it sort of worked. The only thing I feel like I did differently was enjoy what I sang a little more, and not think about that adrenaline rush I wanted to experience when I won. I entered two categories this time to insulate myself from the possibility of not qualifying. I won one, and was a top 4 finalist in the other, so the insulation strategy worked!

### **What do you think is the value of singing for youth in a college setting?**

This is a lot of fun to be honest. So, back in Singapore, I think one of the biggest issues I faced was that there were few people in my age group who would be extremely passionate about it. Singapore is a bigger Vatican city, so this is understandable. But, coming to the United States, it's been incredible to see the passion in people for music. Just engaging in conversation, and opening yourself up to the talent people have is inspiring.



I am part of Pitt Sangeet, a University of Pittsburgh, and Carnegie Mellon University organization that promotes Indian classical music. Over the summer, I spearheaded a virtual concert fundraiser for the BLM movement across 3 days where we got around 8 south asian classical organizations together, and raised funds. We raised around 6000 dollars after matching! This was a big deal for us as an organization as we hadn't taken up anything to this scale yet. It was satisfying when we could get this working!

### **Can singing make any impact in the real world? Please give an example that today's youth can relate to.**

A little backstory is my parents wanted me to become a doctor. They just thought it was natural for a musician like me to consider that path. But, I feel like impact is not limited to a profession, and you can create impact anywhere as long as you are passionate about it.

I have seen so many fundraisers, and charities work towards this mission. Teaching music to people, and enabling music to be a force for change is definitely something that is on the cards, but while I am swamped with a crazy workload, I try to ponder about these ideas during the holidays. I don't really like this categorization and compartmentalization that I involuntarily tend to do, but I feel with more heads thinking about this, we can make quicker progress towards this shared goal.

### **Have you been featured in a concert? Tell us more!**

Yes, a few! One that was definitely very memorable was when I sang in Esplanade, a very prestigious location in Singapore, for a ticketed concert with two other very advanced musicians. They were a lot older, wiser, and more experienced than me. It was an amazing opportunity, and a gruelling experience because I had a lot of submission deadlines, exams, and track and field commitments when I was transitioning from 11th grade to 12th grade. But, I learnt so much from that experience, and I am really grateful for such an opportunity!

### **What skills have you learned that will help you in your singing future? Will you pursue a career in arts in future along with your engineering major?**

Music teaches you a lot about worrying less in general. I know after that long jabber about worrying about whether I am landing the right notes, this is an unsubstantiated claim, but I will explain this. Music is an expanded journey across life. Even when you have dips/ time off from it, you can always resume and you can keep making progress with no pressure of time etc. It teaches you a lot about keeping the idea that we are specs on a landscape, and teaches you to respect the trajectory that it takes you in.

I am still a wild dreamer where I want to pursue a career in a lot of different things, probably even combine a few and create this balance of occupations that I am happy with.

### **How has the pandemic affected your vocal practice? Were you able to continue with your performances?**

Just like how the December Margazhi season in Chennai draws music lovers, and musicians from different parts of the world together, I feel quarantining has brought rasikas (spectators) and musicians into the bubble of facebook lives, and zoom concerts. Currently that bubble is bursting with more musical content than ever before. I know pages coordinate time zones across the globe so that they can maximize viewership. It's been a fascinating story of how facebook pages have been the new blooming substitutes for sabhas (concert venues)

When lockdown was at its peak, where even 3-4 people could not get together, we were merging videos with our co-artists. I meddled a lot with imovie and audacity this summer much more than I would have ever done, so this was certainly the stage to upskill. I do feel that a lot of the spontaneity was sapped away because imovie can't give you the thrill of the mridangist or violinist picking up that particular phrase with acuity. There is a lot more camaraderie in a live-setup that is hard to find as opposed to when you are merging videos.

Definitely! I am still a wild dreamer where I want to pursue a career in a lot of different things, probably even combine a few and create this balance of occupations that I am happy with.

**ANNOUNCING**

# The Blissful Pursuit Scholarship

**For creative writing**



One week of full  
scholarship to  
talented writers to  
writing intensive summer  
camps

**ELIGIBILITY IS DETERMINED BY THE  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF BASED ON ENTRIES  
RECEIVED**

**FUNDED BY THE BLISSFUL US FOUNDATION**

**[WWW.BLISSFULUS.ORG](http://WWW.BLISSFULUS.ORG)**

Blissful Us, our 501(c)3 nonprofit organization's mission is to share the love for education, STEM, arts and writing to our youth. Our mission is to offer scholarships to fresh voices through the medium of magazine entries. This was possible due to generous donations from our community, and we look forward to receiving more donations to create more opportunities.

***"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**

# 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](mailto:editore@BlissfulUs.org)**
- **Submissions will be accepted until December 30, 2020.**

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



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

Please contact [editor@BlissfulUs.org](mailto:editor@BlissfulUs.org) with any questions or visit [theblissfulpursuit.org](https://theblissfulpursuit.org) for past issues!

FALL 2020 THEME



# UNDER- REPRESENTATION & DIVERSITY

CALL FOR ENTRIES

[www.theblissfulpursuit.org](http://www.theblissfulpursuit.org)

*Share your writing and art  
that can relate to  
underrepresentation in life,  
diversity in different fields,  
discrimination, racial gap,  
gender gap, inaccessibility...*



@blissfulus



@theblissfulpursuit

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GLOBAL LITERARY ART ONLINE MAGAZINE

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VOLUME 1, ISSUE 3  
FOOD AND CULTURE



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