

• 2022 LITERARY •

KISHWAUKEE COLLEGE



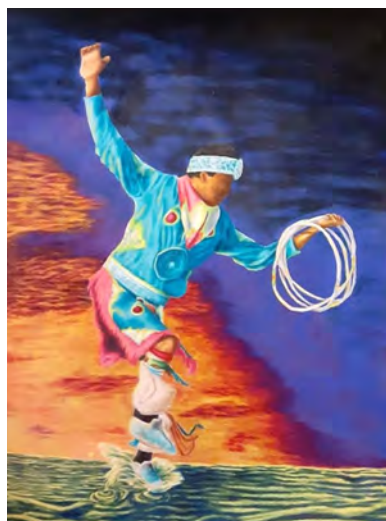
• & ARTS JOURNAL •

• KAMELIAN •



Realizing that educational institutions should encourage intellectual inquiry and being cognizant that we live in a pluralistic society, the following disclaimer is given.

The ideas and opinions expressed in *Kamelian* are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the attitude of the Board of Trustees, the administration, the faculty, or the staff of Kishwaukee College. Materials for *Kamelian* were submitted by students who have been enrolled in courses at Kishwaukee College during one or all of the previous three semesters. Outside jurors with professional credentials and knowledge in the respective fields reviewed all entries. The pieces selected for inclusion in *Kamelian* and the awards given were based on the jurors' opinions of their aesthetic merits.



*On the Cover*

**Belle Wellman**

*Clean Water is a Human Right*

First Place

**Two-Dimensional Art**

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# Jurors

## Literature

**Angie McHale**  
English Teacher

**Jessie Wolf**  
English Teacher

## Art

**Amy Rowan**  
Curator

**Maria Wilk**  
Artist

# Awards

## Literature

### Short Fiction

**First Place**  
**Sarah E. Scarpace**  
*There Is No God on the  
Surface of this Rock*

**Second Place**  
**Blaine Gilbert**  
*The Man at the Door*

**Third Place**  
**Blaine Gilbert**  
*Typhoeus*

### Poetry

**First Place**  
**Peter Skaret**  
*Mycelium*

**Second Place**  
**Sarah E. Scarpace**  
*Ambrosia*

**Third Place**  
**Dale Giebel**  
*Who to Be?*

Honorable Mentions

**Blaine Gilbert**  
*Atlas*

**Sarah E. Scarpace**  
*Scarecrow*

**Ava Rose Focht**  
*Monster*

**Blaine Gilbert**  
*The Walls*

**Ava Rose Focht**  
*Facing the Calls*

### Essay

**First Place**  
**Belle Wellman**  
*Poe's Life in His Work*

**Second Place**  
**Mohammad Mustafa**  
*Patience, Truthfulness, and  
Determination in 2020*

**Third Place**  
**Emily Koeppen Tischer**  
*My Dad and Harley*

## Art

### Special Recognition

**Outstanding Entry**  
**Ava Rose Focht**  
*Just Business*

### Photography & New Media

**First Place**  
**Ava Rose Focht**  
*Just Business*

**Second Place**  
**Ava Rose Focht**  
*Outside the Box*

**Third Place**  
**Emily Koeppen Tischer**  
*Sentinelle*

Honorable Mentions

**Tucker Hoffman**  
*Devoid*

**Kyla Rachas**  
*Laci*

**Abigail Orr**  
*Winter Travels*

**Mileyka Aguirre**  
*Quinn*

**Dale Giebel**  
*Goldenrod*

### Two-Dimensional

**First Place**  
**Belle Wellman**  
*Clean Water is a Human Right*

**Second Place**  
**Owen Polichnowski**  
*Dimebag Darrel*

**Third Place**  
**Belle Wellman**  
*A Portal to whERE!!!*

Honorable Mentions

**Amelia McCoy**  
*Helix Nebula*

**Michael Biebel**  
*American Alcoholism*

**Amelia McCoy**  
*The Playing Field*

**Ava Rose Focht**  
*Tangled*

### Three-Dimensional

**First Place**  
**Aurora Weber**  
*Percival, The Mimic Knight*



**Ava Rose Focht**  
*Just Business*  
First Place  
**Photography & New Media**

# Mycelium

i think this:

two people asleep in a bed together  
are as mushrooms in the same field  
roots, reaching across the earth  
of these white sheets  
heads swapping thoughts  
arms looped around one another  
communication;  
companionship in the soil  
spores as dreams, airborne  
near the sticky glow-in-the-dark stars  
on the ceiling  
can we grow to love just by sleeping near one another?  
is a root system simply one more language  
a green affection  
steeped in rain and mired in moisture  
hands held too tightly begin to bloom;  
feet in a fungus territory alert the whole forest.

**Peter Skaret**

First Place  
**Poetry**

# Poe's Life in His Work

Edgar A. Poe lived a life filled with death, grief, and alienation, which shows in his infamously melancholy works of fiction and poetry. He lived for only forty years, and many of his most popular works, such as “The Raven” and “The Fall of the House of Usher,” were written in the last ten years of his life. His exacting standards for literature and scathing reviews of fellow authors made him unpopular with his contemporaries, leading him to have few friends and much difficulty finding work to sustain himself and his immediate family. His life experiences and psyche heavily influenced his writings; therefore, knowledge of his history can contribute to a deeper understanding of his works.

Before biographical analysis can be conducted, an understanding of the biography in question must first be reached. Poe’s childhood was marked by affection from motherly figures and indifference from fatherly figures. This led him to seek “affection, approval, and sense of belonging” (Hutchinson 9) from women throughout his life, both in familial bonds and romantic. In his youth and early adulthood, Poe jumped from place to place – first an Enlightenment ideal university, next the army, and, finally, West Point, from which he left bankrupt and disinherited from his foster family. His poor prospects left families disinclined to allow him to court their daughters, and he suffered many romantic heartbreaks during his short life. These ill-fated loves, along with his two dead mother figures and dead wife (his cousin, Virginia), are likely the inspiration for many of the female characters in his stories and poems. It is greatly debated whether Poe’s death was an accident or a form of suicide, mostly because of the rapid decline of his mental health in 1849. Although his mental health did him no favours, Poe’s most productive years in terms of original fiction and poetry were in the last decade of his life.

The character of Lenore in “The Raven” is likely a representation of one of the dead women in Poe’s history; the poem itself appears to be an allegory of the process of grief. The titular raven itself is a symbolic manifestation of heartbreak – at times it even seems to be a type of reversed psychopomp. Its cry of “Nevermore” creates within the narrator first a sense of awe, then of confusion, then of debilitating sorrow due to the realization that Lenore will “nevermore” return to the land of the living. Poe’s loss of his mother in his early childhood may have caused him to develop unhealthy coping mechanisms and grieving methods. Therefore, this poem could be construed as an outlet for Poe’s own realization that he will never see his lost loved ones again. In this vein, the raven is attempting to guide the narrator to acceptance; however, the narrator rebukes the raven for “that lie [the raven’s] soul hath spoken” (“The Raven”). Due to the narrator’s refusal to accept Lenore’s death, his soul is perpetually crushed under the weight of his grief, and no “balm in Gilead” (“The Raven”) is ever found.

Poe’s mental instability, depressive attitudes, and mood swings all present themselves within Rodrick Usher in “The Fall of the House of Usher,” and, like many of his other works, the apparent death of a woman creates irreversible change within the other characters of the story. The house of Usher, one singular line of descent which ends with Madeline and Rodrick, seems to resemble Poe’s livelihood, in that all their eggs are in one basket, so to speak. Just as Poe had no self-fulfilling alternative to his poorly paying writing



career, the Ushers had no means of continuing their line, and so were doomed to an abrupt end. Rodrick Usher himself harbors “a mind from which darkness . . . poured forth . . . in one unceasing radiation of gloom” (“The Fall of the House of Usher” 365), a sentiment which Poe may have taken in some manner from his own mind. Additionally, Rodrick Usher resembles Poe in the way Madeline’s death affects him. His grief is all-encompassing, and his mind appears to inflict every form of guilt upon him for not recognizing that Madeline still lived. Poe also appears to project his own semblance of survivor’s guilt onto the ending scene between the two siblings, wherein Madeline seeks vengeance for her brother’s negligence; this may well be interpreted as an internal lesson to never forget the dead. This is the product of Poe’s own unwillingness to forget and let go of his past.

“The Black Cat,” written during the American temperance social movement, was one of the last works Poe wrote, and it creates a sense of self-reflection and condemnation of the soul. The narrator, who seems to be another quasi-stand-in for Poe, declares that “to-morrow I die, and to-day I would unburden my soul” (“The Black Cat” 550), which brings to mind the soon approaching death of the author in a very literal sense. The continual imagery of wrongdoing and retribution, cause and effect, and mind and soul creates an introspective view of the narrator, and, by extension, the author. Poe made many mistakes in his youth, often creating enemies in his fellow authors and alienating himself from his foster father. This “cause” led to the “effect” of not having any financial help or work during his times of need. Similarly, the narrator’s cruel actions against his cat led, not in action but in spirit, to the karmic loss of his home and worldly possessions. The narrator’s continuous attempts to flee the consequences of his actions only lead to more problems. The culminating scene, wherein the narrator’s attempts to wall away his sins backfires tremendously, inspires a sense of divine retribution for the narrator’s loss of empathy. This is only further emphasized by seeing how Poe’s similar spirit and attitude only created more and greater problems for him; in both cases, it ends the same: in misery and death.

Perhaps it is more accurate to say, in this case, that the works can be used to analyze the author, rather than the other way around. After all, the psyche of an artist is best expressed and viewed through their art. However, this oversimplifies the true nature of art and artist, or, in this case, Poe and his works. One is not fully derivative of the other; instead, they are intertwined, sometimes cleanly, sometimes in tangled knots, within each other. Just the same as Poe’s inner state of mind can be ascertained through his works, his works are developed within the context of Poe’s life. Therefore, although the author is dead, his works do not suffer from the death of the author.

**Belle Wellman**

First Place  
Essay





**Aurora Weber**  
*Percival, The Mimic Knight*

First Place  
Three-Dimensional Art





Owen Polichnowski  
*Dimebag Darrel*

Second Place  
Two-Dimensional Art

# There Is No God on the Surface of this Rock

In the year of our Lord, 2143, it was decided by no one in particular and everyone at once that the world had ended. The world had ended, and everyone and everything was dead. Over six million species of plants and animals had been declared extinct by the start of the century, and every single one that remained, including the depraved primates behind this twisted culling, were endangered. But by the time we noticed that the Garden of Eden was turning into a gallery of epitaphs, it was too late. The disease had spread and spread and spread, all the way from the ozone layer

to the very core of the Earth. That unstoppable impossibility infected everything it touched, its unending salvo of fire and flood, famine and blood, shrieking towers of water and air and dust, converging on predator and prey alike. Converging until predator became prey.

We were animals trapped in a cage of our own making, finally getting our fill of the torture we had so long wrought upon the planet. We were dying, and we were killing each other as we were forced to bear witness to the dominoes of apocalypse falling into place. We were being murdered to fulfill our promise of suicide. We tried to default, and so we were punished. From the very beginning, we were dying because we were deadly. And when the dying became the dead, the killers went mad.

One by one, the governing bodies of humanity lost control. Some were crushed under the weight of all the waste they couldn't dispose of, some choked on the ashes of their razed land. Some were hollowed out in both belly and coffer, and some drowned in the oceans we turned to acid. Some sank into the depths of the dirt, and some rusted and eroded into naught. But, without exception, all of them were taken down from the inside out as the being once known as the homo sapien began to change. The urbane became the animal, and hunger fueled their flames; the corpses died a cannibal, and thirst collapsed their veins. The humane became utterly intangible, and what remained was completely deranged.

We were frozen hearts and melted brains on broken ground and watery graves, and on and on and on we went, until all we had was pain. The burn of the wildfire and the sting of the wind. The bruises of a bludgeoning and the crushing of the waves. The splintering of absolutely everything and the ache of empty space.

We could not handle all that we had been to this world.

So in the year of no Lord, 2143, it was decided by no one in particular and everyone at once that the world had ended. The world had ended, and everyone and everything was dead, it just hadn't been buried yet. And in that last, echoing moment of sentience, we came to realize that we had long ago dug the grave; all that was left to do now was fill it.

At long last taking control of its own demise, the Apex Predator had Fate by the throat when nine small buttons were pushed, and the ungodly projectiles they detained came plummeting down to meet the Earth. With a flash and a bang reminiscent of that which forged it in the first place, the surface of our rock exploded into cleansing blue flame, what remained of the everyone and the everything utterly irradiated with the cold absolutism of the truth:

There was no other way out for the snake.

**Sarah E. Scarpace**

First Place  
Short Fiction

# The Walls

The walls around my heart are built so high,

I look up at them and all I can do is sigh,

Piece by piece I have built this great keep,

To protect myself and hide my secrets in the deep,

None have seen the wonders held inside,

But the walls defend me from a world so snide,

Years have passed since I have seen the light,

In my castle, only the darkness of the lonely night,

The vast solitude makes me shiver with cold,

The ghosts of my past wonder this stronghold,

The ramparts are unassailable, though some have tried,

They could not break the bricks of pain and pride,

I pray one day that someone will tear down the place,

And with them being the warmth of love and light of grace.

**Blaine Gilbert**

Honorable Mention

**Poetry**



Ava Rose Focht  
*Outside the Box*

Second Place  
Photography & New Media



**Belle Wellman**  
*Clean Water is a Human Right*

First Place  
Two-Dimensional Art



# Ambrosia

When time wasn't measured in years,  
Mortal life hadn't shed a tear,  
Gods made grave mistakes for the fear,  
Of letting their visions disappear.

We were made to be in their mirror,  
So we were built from clay so sheer,  
With our heads sculpted into spheres,  
To keep all our thoughts trapped up in here.

They didn't know the price they would pay,  
For all the beings they would create;  
What was built with love could be filled with hate.

The experiment lost control;  
Pulling our strings had gotten old,  
Once we'd ignored what we'd been told,  
And lost ourselves in a world of gore.

They lost faith in what they had borne,  
When they saw us break from our molds,  
Just to tear down each other's souls,  
So they left us in the man-made cold.

We didn't know the price we would pay,  
For all the torture, for all the pain;  
Strength is weakness that's led us astray.

We can't discern what we have lost,  
To the nectar of those false gods,  
That they're drinking in their grand hall,  
Spinning, dizzily mocking us all.

Higher than Olympus could fall,  
Their cloudy eyes & pounding thoughts,  
Their pouty mouths & drowning naughts,  
Are tuning out our prayers and our calls.

And now they've given us all away,  
Left with the Devil's fiery embrace,  
Swearing that the nightmares will end someday.

Passing the flask, passing the gun,  
They're shooting us down, one by one;  
Taking a sip, then starting to chug,  
Swallow all the sorrow, bottoms up.

It's hidden within all along,  
Persecution only evolves,  
Just like Father, just like his sons,  
That one bad apple ruined the bunch.

You know Gluttony's a deadly sin,  
But the ignorance is a blessing,  
Take away one, and you're left with nothing.

We can't say we know how you feel,  
When we're not sure you're even real,  
We know all the droplets in your goblets keep you busy,  
So our hectographed epitaphs will mark the vacancy.

**Sarah E. Scarpace**

**Second Place  
Poetry**

# Atlas

Atlas held the vault of sky,  
Since the beginning of time,  
Punished for his crime,  
Of choosing the tyrant's side.

A new king arose,  
To the Olympian throne,  
And incurred his wrath,  
Upon Atlas' back.

The Titan forever stood,  
In the far western wood,  
Holding the crushing weight,  
Of his immortal fate.

**Blaine Gilbert**

Honorable Mention

**Poetry**



**Emily Koeppen Tischer**  
*Sentinelle*

Third Place  
**Photography & New Media**

# Patience, Truthfulness, and Determination in 2020

Recent events related to the COVID-19 global pandemic have triggered unprecedented levels of stress, depression, and anxiety – particularly with middle- and working-class people. But even when we are not in the depths of a global pandemic, we all go through hard times and can often feel like we have come to dead ends in our lives. There is, however, always light at the end of the tunnel for those who seek it out. As such, I'd like to share my experiences in hopes of sparking some hope in you and perhaps guiding you down any dark tunnels you may find yourself in now or in the future.

2020 was one of the most challenging years of my life, not only because of COVID but other events that also impacted me emotionally. I dealt with a lousy boss, was kicked out of my apartment by my father, and then had a physical confrontation with a roommate. Unfortunately, just two months after that I was robbed at gunpoint by two men.

Yet, despite these challenging times, I learned the fruits of perseverance, patience, and resiliency. I learned to smile and be optimistic about whatever challenges life tosses at you because the tough experiences we go through develop us emotionally and intellectually and prepare us for future struggles.

The truth always prevails

I was thrilled to move from Pakistan to America permanently in 2018. Eager to work on my personal potential, I was looking for opportunities that would help me learn and grow. I have always been diligent and hardworking, and I strive to be the best version of myself in any task I undertake, but, due to my lack of experience working in the U.S., I had to look for low-paying jobs that would eventually lead to a higher wage. I was rejected by many places during my job search, and I believe it was primarily because I lacked the confidence to interact with others.

One sunny day I saw a gas station run by an Indian manager, and I decided to try my luck by applying there. When I expressed my interest in the job, I was told I could come in the next day to begin training. Things went well from there and I quickly learned the ropes of the position. Over time, however, I noticed the owner would often look at me in a disgruntled manner. I sensed negative vibes from him constantly, but I tried to ignore it and focus on being a good employee.

One day while working, he struck up a conversation with me about Pakistan, suggesting the country is economically weak and politically corrupt. I tried my best to ignore him, but then, in front of his other Indian employees, he continued to speak about how much better India is than Pakistan. It was then I realized why he always seemed angry with me. There is a long history of political animosity between India and Pakistan, dating back to when Pakistan split from India and became an independent nation.

The realization that he disliked me because of my home nation made me even more scared to stand up to him. Due to my lack of confidence, I was meticulous in my work and terrified of making any mistakes. I wanted to be perfect. When I cleaned the bathroom at the gas station, I ensured it was spotless. Yet my boss continued to mistreat me. Once, when he caught me making a small mistake, he threatened to fire me immediately. I was so upset that I went inside the bathroom and cried.

Although he was emotionally abusive, he used to give me food sometimes. I suspect it was to make him feel better about himself or to give the appearance to others that he was a nice guy to cover up the fact that he so often mistreated me. My schedule, for example, was different from all the other employees. I was the only one made to clean the whole gas station (a one-and-a-half-hour job) every day, and I even discovered he was paying me less than the other employees.

One week, I worked 10 additional hours, but I was not paid for them. When I asked him why I was not being paid what I was owed, he made an excuse about me not properly logging the hours in the margin of the logbook. I was shocked to hear this and sad that I had worked so hard all for nothing.

I realized that day I would have to stand up for myself, look for another job, or remain silent and continue to take his cruel treatment. It was not an easy decision. If I stood up for myself, I would likely be fired, but I suspected I was probably going to be fired soon anyway because there was this new guy going through training and he told me he was going to replace me.

I decided to apply to Dunkin Donuts and was happy when I was offered a job there. As it turned out, however, the manager of Dunkin Donuts was a friend of my abusive boss at the gas station. Encouraged by the new job offer, I summoned the courage to confront my abusive boss about paying me less. As always, he attempted to ignore me. When I raised my voice and told him he needed to start being fair, he called the Dunkin Donuts manager, put the phone on speaker mode, and said, "Listen to the kind of employee you're trying to hire."

I didn't let it deter me. I continued to speak with a lot of courage because I always had good intentions and worked hard. I said to him, "I will come next Thursday to pick up my pay. If you do not give me my money, I will complain to the relevant authorities."

When the day came for me to pick up the money he owed me, I was scared he would argue and say nasty things to me, so I asked the police to come with me and, luckily, they agreed. I received the money I was owed and that was the last time we saw each other.

I had been truthful, so Dunkin Donuts still wanted to hire me despite the phone call incident. I told my new manager the whole story, and he accepted me as an employee. I learned that you can cross any hurdle that impedes your growth when you have good intentions and are truthful.

*Your attitude determines your altitude* – Zig Ziglar

From there, things went well in my life for a time, until I got a call from my father telling me he needed a place to stay. I agreed to let him stay at the apartment I was renting. I have always been a good son and respectful to my father, even though he had a history of being emotionally abusive and manipulative to my mother.

Shortly after he moved in, I lost my job at Dunkin Donuts due to the pandemic and the cycle of my father's abusive behavior started up again. He called me names, tried to convince me the way he treated my mother was fair and that everyone who knew him adored him. I would not accept his lies because my mother taught me to always speak the truth no matter the consequences. Though I never raised my voice or talked back to him, I was crying on the inside and felt like I was emotionally drowning alone in my room.

I was hungry for days, very thirsty, and, at one point, I lost ten pounds in a week. I was emotionally blackmailed by my father; he would not give me his tax files – information I needed to get financial aid for my education. This really worried me because I want to use education as a tool to help others one day.

When things were at their worst, I recalled the time when Professor Matt, a teacher and mentor of mine, said, "You will one day be successful if you keep going and never stop. Always believe in yourself and your potential." This made me realize being in an abusive relationship and living with my father was detrimental to my physical and emotional health.

I prayed I would get some help with my situation, but the next day, my father talked badly towards me yet again and said negative things about my mother. In a calm voice, I told him, "I cannot accept this."

He became infuriated. "Why don't you leave the house?" he said. "Correct your behavior, or I will call the landlord to kick you out."

I decided at that moment to pack up my things and take a leap of faith. It took me two hours to sort out everything. I made sure this time to drink a lot of water while taking this massive action because I could not take the idea of being thirsty and hungry any longer.

For a while, I did not know where to go, but my two beloved friends, Lindsay and Steven, had said to me, "If you are ever in need, we are always just a call away."

I met Lindsay when I was working at a Target distribution center. She is a kind and compassionate woman. She always gleams with hope and is a true fighter. I also met her boyfriend, Steven, at the same center. Like Lindsay, he too has faced many challenges in life but has always been able to overcome and persevere.

I told them that I did not have a place to stay. They were hesitant to respond at first because they were about to leave for a road trip to Virginia. Luckily, I caught them before they left, and they said, "We trust you, Mohammad." They did not even ask me what happened; they just told me, "Here are the keys and all the food. You will feel warm, and we will be back soon."

When they came back, I continued to live at their place for another two weeks. They took care of me and were respectful of my privacy, even though I stayed in their living room.

My fall semester was going on, and I was trying to maintain an above 3.5 GPA, while dealing with all the work, pandemic, and family madness I was going through. While I was living with Steven and Lindsay, I was also looking for a new place to live, and I was having trouble. I got a bit agitated, but I told myself not to lose hope and keep striving because the universe works for those who dare to dream big.

One of the most challenging things a person can genuinely face is the choice to either stay in a toxic relationship or muster the courage to leave. I chose to leave the abusive relationship because I valued my life. In the process, I learned your true family and loved ones don't need to be blood-related.

*Patience is bitter, but the reward is sweet* – Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Despite my troubles, I still believed in myself and my goals of one day becoming a domestic violence attorney, politician, and a motivational speaker. After another week of looking for a place tirelessly, I met a landlord who said he was looking to sublet an apartment. At first, I was skeptical, but I was running out of time and did not want to make Lindsay and Steven uncomfortable by staying too long, so I took the room.

I was skeptical because the people who resided in the apartment were living in squalid conditions, while I'm an immaculate person. My Grandma once said, "You can't travel through a coal mine without getting dirty," and I've always believed that to be true.

*Continued on next page . . .*

## Patience, Truthfulness, and Determination in 2020 *(continued)*

That said, I successfully moved in to the house, and things went well at first because I was so happy to be living in an environment free from my father's toxicity.

Unfortunately, the apartment remained in terrible condition. There were always things like cups of alcohol and even drugs lying around. There were stains on the sinks, tissues on the floor, mountains of dirty dishes, and overflowing garbage cans. I was disgusted and asked my roommates to please clean their mess, but they did not bother.

I decided to be patient. I reminded myself that at least I was out of the toxic relationship with my father, so I should be grateful, but they were so squalid it felt like I was living with ten people, not just two. I thought maybe I could lead by example, so I cleaned the whole apartment thoroughly, including scrubbing the floors and washing their dishes. When I was done, everything looked spotless, and I felt so good. I told both my roommates, "Now we just need to maintain this cleanliness." Rather than support my efforts, they just laughed and called me silly before returning to their filthy ways.

Then, just like my old gas station manager, one of my roommates decided to attack my religion and home country. He said things like, "People will judge you when they find out you're a Muslim from Pakistan. Why is every Muslim a terrorist? You should feel ashamed."

I told him my religion and my mother had taught me to respect and treat people the same way you want to be treated. God loves people who treat others fairly and with love, compassion, and kindness. Each of us can aspire to be moral beings. We can recognize good and evil and choose to treat people with empathy and forgiveness. I told him these values bring me joy and happiness, but he said they were worthless.

In the days that followed, his racist attacks kept going. I was hurt and felt like saying bad things to him, but I told myself, this is the time to live my values by being patient and treating him with kindness. He may have been causing me hardship, but he was still a human being and deserving of respect. Patience is of no use if you do not smile.

Despite my efforts our arguments continued over the next two months, and one fight grew so heated that he struck me in the face. I immediately called the police and informed them about the incident. The police arrested my roommate and charged him with domestic violence based on the marks he'd left on my body. I felt terrible he had to go to jail, but I had no choice but to stand up for myself. There is no excuse for abuse, especially physical violence.

I went to court, spoke to the judge, and got a protection order against him because I feared he may retaliate once he got out of jail, but I also spoke to the prosecutor and asked him to go easy on him because I forgave his actions.

Through this experience I learned some people simply refuse to change and we should not waste time and energy trying to influence them. Rather, we should demonstrate patience with them while focusing on improving ourselves.

Abuse of any kind should not be tolerated; however, once we are safe and out of a toxic relationship, we should not hold grudges against the person who hurt us because, as Marcus Aurelius wrote in *Meditations*, "The best revenge is to not be like your enemy."

*One smile undoes 1,000 worries.* – An old Chinese proverb

Two more months went by, and then my landlord told me that the subletter needed his place back. I became worried I would once again be looking for a place to live, but my landlord told me someone was looking to sublet his apartment on the top floor. I was concerned this place might be the same as my current one, but I was wrong. When I saw my new place, it was so eye-opening that it felt like a miracle. The kitchen was maintained, there was no loud music, and the lounge was clean.

I was astonished and decided to move in immediately. I couldn't help but feel the sweetness of my new, clean home was a reward for the patience I had demonstrated throughout the bitter times earlier that year. Life does not stop and is full of ups and downs. We should not ever assume in any situation that life will be of comfort because the struggles and challenges are pivotal to evolving us into a better person.

I started to work at 3M, a shipping warehouse, as a part-time employee. My new supervisor, Eric, looked out for me. He would ask if I needed anything and if I was comfortable. I was happy because it was the complete opposite of my experience with my old cold-hearted manager at the gas station. Sometimes words of encouragement can mean a lot to someone, and I greatly appreciated Eric's kindness. You do not know what challenges people might be encountering in life, and kind words can go a long way to making a difference.

I needed to start cycling to my new job. It was painful at first because of difficult weather conditions and my legs being physically frail, but I took this new commute as a challenge. My regular routine was to wake up at 5am to get ready for work. I would skip breakfast, preferring to eat it on break once at work. Getting up early, skipping breakfast, and hopping on a bike wasn't the easiest way to start the day, but I knew it would get better over time as my legs strengthened and I became more accustomed to my new schedule.

One cold morning, I went outside to start my day. I felt tired because I had not slept well the night before. I jumped on my bicycle and pulled on the hat that protected my face from the crisp and chilly air. I started cycling on the pavement slowly. I knew I would reach work on time if I kept up with the same pace.

After 15 minutes of cycling, I noticed a bright red car parked in the darkness beside a gas station across the street. As I gazed at the car, two men jumped out and started racing towards me. At first, my mind was trying to comprehend in that split second what was happening, but I quickly realized something was wrong: the tall, lanky individual had a gun pointed towards me.

I immediately raised my hands and got off my bike to make it clear I wasn't hostile towards them. I had been mugged years before back in Pakistan when I was in my mid-teens and I had reacted with tears and terror. This time, I was intent to stay calm and not allow the situation to escalate through any actions on my part. Of course, I was scared, but I remained outwardly quiet in the face of that inner fear.

I was wearing my backpack at the time, and inside was my book, water bottle, AirPods, and some lotion. The tall guy took the bag from me, and then both of them patted me down. They took my phone and wallet and kept saying to give them everything I had. Honestly, I didn't have much to offer, so I decided to stay silent. After taking everything, they immediately ran back to their car and then took off.

I knew there was a police station only two blocks away so I decided to cycle there. Unfortunately, as soon as I got back on my bike, I realized one of the robbers had removed my bike chain. Unable to ride, I yelled for help and tried to stop passing cars, but no one came to my aid.

I was not wholly unlucky, however, because before too long I spotted a police car and was able to wave it down. I gave the police the details of what had happened, and they informed me, to my total shock, that a 110 mile per hour car chase was currently underway with the red car.

Eventually, the red car was stopped, and the men who had mugged me were arrested. One was found with my debit card and wallet, while my bag and phone were thrown from the car and during the chase and retrieve by the cops. When the police investigated the vehicle, they found a gun.

The men were charged with armed robbery, and the trial is still ongoing. Unfortunately, I have still not received my phone, backpack, or other bag contents back because they are being held as evidence for prosecution. But when I think of what could have happened, how badly things could have gone wrong, I realize losing my bag and phone was not such a big deal after all.

With this incident, I learned to stay calm when encountering adversity. It also taught me how our lives can end in a split second if things go wrong, so we should try to live in the moment, be our best version of ourselves, and not worry too much about the future.

#### In Closing

As we enter the second half of 2021, things look to be going back to normal, but there will always be challenges of some kind for all of us. I, therefore, hope you're able to implement some of the lessons I have shared with you in this essay so that you can have the better life you deserve. You have already come so far and been through so much, and I hope my story further galvanizes you to take action to achieve your true potential.

Through my experiences with my abusive boss at the gas station, I learned that you will have nothing to fear if you always speak the truth and have good intentions. I learned to smile through hard times, and as Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus said, "What is in your way becomes the way." Do not fret about your current circumstances, but rather focus on your end goal to be the best version of yourself, physically and emotionally.

I hope you learned that racism and prejudice are a big part of our society and that learning to stand up for yourself and others is important. No human being should be treated differently regardless of their beliefs and background.

By deciding to move away from my father, I learned the importance of breaking the cycle of abuse. We cannot change others, but we have the power to change our surroundings and ourselves. I urge you to escape from relationships where there isn't mutual respect because toxicity can deteriorate your strengths and wear you down emotionally.

Lastly, my armed robbery incident was frightening in retrospect, but, through it, I learned that when all options are taken from you, your only choice becomes believing in hope and optimism. As Buddha rightfully said, "Focus on believing in yourself." At the time of my armed robbery, I had no choice but to focus on being calm and doing as the robber said to save my life. Objects come and go, but your life does not so treat it as precious.

Sometimes we win, sometimes we lose, but if we can focus on the positive, treat others with kindness and empathy, and believe in ourselves, we can move through life with the confidence that we can and will prevail whatever comes our way.

**Mohammad Mustafa**

**Second Place  
Essay**



**Mileyka Aguirre**  
*Quinn*

Honorable Mention  
**Photography & New Media**



# Facing the Calls

Days like these revert me into past skin  
When I would sit and wonder  
How I pissed off the commoner again  
To ponder at the root of my scalp  
And dig my pride into something that really hurts  
Myself

She became whip-smart with her tongue  
Found new openings to old habits  
Created an entire vocabulary that she burned through her squared off  
Teeth  
curled her claws right into the rhythms of my breaths  
“I am you,” she says  
“What more could you ever ask for?”  
I tell her  
I wish it was tomorrow.

**Ava Rose Focht**

Honorable Mention  
**Poetry**

# The Man at the Door

On a cobblestone street in London, just north of Hyde Park, stands a simple, three-story house. It was old and had an English charm, built of brownish-red brick, with a steep slate roof, and a red painted door. Nothing remarkable had ever truly happened there: children were born and moved away, parties were held, arguments resounded, love was made, and mundane events occurred; history carried ever on outside its door. I fell in love with its simplicity and purchased it on a whim. It was the perfect place to live and love and to grow old, to watch my family prosper.

One brisk fall night, with the wind howling at the leaded window panes and the moon glowing softly, the chilling sound of “Knock, knock, knock” resounded through the corridors of the house. I arose from my bed of warmth and comfort, to peer out the window. I saw a man, shrouded in shadows, standing at my red-painted door. I looked about my home, wondering how I was the only inhabitant awakened by the thunderous knock of this imposer. I descended the staircase and flung wide the ancient oak door to look upon the midnight guest.

His face was hidden from view in the darkness of the night. He was tall and slender, wearing a trenchcoat and a homburg hat. He had a strange familiarity about him, though I knew for certain I had never laid eyes upon him before. He spoke to me with kindly civility, though it chilled me to the core, “It is your time... now follow me. A new journey awaits.” As he said these words, the street lamps began to dim, the bustle of the city went silent, and all else faded away into the oblivion of the night.

I do not know why, but as he said those words I was filled with inner peace and I decided to go with him. I walked through the aged threshold of that charming house, the place where my family had lived and loved and where I had grown old, to begin a new journey of an altogether different kind. I took one last look at the life I was leaving behind, “Goodbye...” I shut that red-painted door and followed the stranger down the darkening street into the unknown.

**Blaine Gilbert**

**Second Place  
Short Fiction**



**Belle Wellman**  
*A Portal to whERE!!!*

Third Place  
**Two-Dimensional Art**



**Dale Giebel**  
*Goldenrod*

Honorable Mention  
**Photography & New Media**

# Who to Be?

Who to be? Who to be?

So many options, just for me.

I could be a drummer, Boom, Boom, Booming down the street,

Or I could be a firefighter, helping everyone I meet.

With so many choices, how can I pick?

And what if my choice just doesn't stick?

I could be a singer, making people move,

Or I could be a painter, featured in the Louvre.

I do not know what job I like,

It's like I'm a mime at an open mic.

I'd like to try them all, I would.

But what if I'm just not any good?

Who to be? Who to be?

So many options, just for me.

I am a seed, my life is a tree,

So for now, I'll just be me!

**Dale Giebel**

Third Place

**Poetry**

# My Dad and Harley

The synchronized roar of engines, classic rock music muffled under gleeful hollering, a sense of community and brotherhood. All of these things about biking are missed by my motorcycle-deprived father. Though he hasn't been a part of the biker cult since it became too expensive to ride, he can still fondly remember those times when he was a rebel without a cause. Since the 1940s, there has been a culture surrounding those who choose to ride on two wheels rather than four. Considering my father started riding at 15 years old, I was intrigued by the experience he had among this group of leather-wearing men and women.

My sixty-year-old dad has a hard exterior, fine-tuned by the years of wrinkles carved across his forehead and brow. Since I was a little girl, his hair has always been covered by a baseball cap of either the Milwaukee Brewers or the Packers. An unchanging quirk that has left him with many gifted hats for birthdays and Christmases. I faintly remember riding on the back of his bike when I was definitely too young to be doing so. Watching the wind pull off his cap to his irritation and my laughter. He always acted seriously, but his childish sense of humor showed a different side to him. One of a boy who had not yet grown up.

Despite his demeanor, however, the brief sentences he spoke to me beforehand on the phone showed me another side of my dad. The side of him that had not had an interview in the past 13 years. So, on the day of our interview, I sat him down at his favorite sports bar with a beer to calm his nerves. The location was loud, with TVs blaring, and people yelling over each other, but my dad's shoulders were relaxed. A bar was a biker's second home after all.

"Opa had a motorcycle," My dad began speaking to me from across the bar stools "He drove it from Detroit to Chicago on the weekends to get to work."

My dad was born in Detroit in 61' and got his first motorcycle in 76'. A time when having a bike meant you were part of an "in" club and laws weren't as strict on who could ride. His first bike was a fixer-upper 1967 BSA Victor, and as he explained, he drove without a license. Driving his bike through the alleys in Lincolnwood, a suburb of Chicago. Cops didn't bother him and he could "Take them (the alleys) all the way to Michigan."

After we ordered our food, I pried further on these rides he used to take. Motorcycle runs can span miles, covering country roads, city streets, and dirt trails. Unlike a road trip in a car, the bikers who took part in these drives were exposed to the elements. A helmet and a sturdy pair of boots being their protection from wind, rain, and scorching heat. When asking my dad about his most memorable run, he responded without haste.

"Trip to Taos, New Mexico. There was a biker alley in the mountains. You know how you have to make hotel reservations? Well, I had one that made it clear to check in on time. Oh, was that a shitty ride" My dad huffed to himself and shook his head as he recounted the day.

When it was time to leave in the morning for the run, he was forced to face a downpour of storms here in Illinois. Driving through rain, which made his already heavy leather and denim dripping wet down to his socks. After the rainfall, Missouri then gave him humidity so hot his clothes dried and New Mexico greeted him with winds that blew his 400-pound bike over. When he finally reached the rally, by the mountains, it was snowing up there. As quoted by him, he was "getting all seasons." But this sort of hellish ride was not at all unfamiliar to bikers who make it their hobby to go across the country from meet to meet.

At these motorcycle enthusiasts' rallies, you make friends. And on a somber note, I asked my dad if he had had any of his fellow bikers pass from a motorcycle-related accident. Since that's all you hear about on the news. It was an uncomfortable question for me to ask, but he didn't seem bothered by it on the surface. His true emotions were unclear to me as they have always been, hidden within the alcohol he drank to cope.

"Well Ricky (my dad's sister) lost her son, and her former husband" He mumbled, taking a sip from the half-drunk beer in front of him. The food hadn't been served to us yet. This was probably a good thing considering my stomach sunk in "Ray went off the road and lost control. My nephew had a hit and run or something."

My dad stated this event didn't deter him from riding.

"You can't let it affect you. You feel a little bit smarter, but you can't drag on it otherwise it would make the riding less fun" he said with a sigh as his expression stayed unchanged. I understood what he was saying, but personally, the constant danger is what keeps me from driving a motorcycle myself. A biker is rarely the cause of an accident, with them being the victims of drunk drivers or texting teens every day. If it was up to my dad, he would make biker etiquette taught more thoroughly to people getting their regular license.

"Hey, you're sharing the road with these vehicles. You don't wanna follow them," He raised his voice a bit as he was getting a little heated "Give them their space".

The bartender came to fill our glasses and told us it would be a couple of minutes before the food was out, which gave me a time limit of when to end this interview. My dad seemed to be either enjoying it or somewhat withstanding it at the moment, so I began to pull together the bigger idea of what biker culture was. When he was just a young 20-something in the 80s, the culture was not as big. In my dad's words "People looked at it like it was a bad boys type of club. But then it became more popular, to where there was a business in selling bikes. It was not a bad boys club anymore, it was an anyone's club."

That being said, infamous biker gangs like the Hells Angels and the Bandidos still keep the dangerous image of the biker alive. And to the question of if their relevance keeps the reputation of motorcyclists a negative one, my dad told me with unflinching words that they are what they are—gangs.

"They usually don't bother public citizens. If there's gonna be a gang fight it's gang vs. gang. Yeah, a lot of people back in the day associated all bikers with people like that. But now everyone's buying bikes so it isn't like that no more" he said sternly.

Times have changed, and at the turn of the century, the amount of people taking an interest in motorcycles has skyrocketed. With new 15-year-olds, just like my dad in the 70s, riding their first Harley or Kawasaki. But while everyone else is out riding with their hair blowing in the wind, my dad sticks to driving around in his Chevy Malibu. Back in 2008, when the market was crashing, he had to sell his house and other things to get by. The motorcycle he owned was "an oil well that didn't produce oil" he said. It was an unfortunate but necessary sacrifice.

If he had the chance, my dad would go back to motorcycling to some degree. He would prefer to stay local as his body isn't so young anymore to withstand those grueling trips. Even though bikes are more comfortable these days, you're still dealing with the elements, riding fatigue, and bad drivers on the road. So for now, my dad, the biker, is just my dad, the welder. Not that the stories and lessons he teaches me about biking are any less exciting than the thought of one day riding with him. Just me, my dad, and Harley.

**Emily Koeppen Tischer**

Third Place  
Essay



**Abigail Orr**  
*Winter Travels*

Honorable Mention  
**Photography & New Media**





**Tucker Hoffman**

*Devoid*

Honorable Mention

**Photography & New Media**



**Kyla Rachas**  
*Laci*

Honorable Mention  
**Photography**

# Scarecrow:

A dark shadow loomed on the hilltop,  
Relishing in the quiet macabre,  
Waiting as the time stumbled along,  
Waiting 'till all the daylight was gone,  
Frozen in a cold that even the sun couldn't thaw.

The birds were a sure omen of death,  
The sovereign scavengers of the End,  
The scourge of all of those wretched men,  
Who made the accursed marionette,  
But those shining obsidian things were scared of it.

A child full of curiosity,  
Always chasing phantasmic sunbeams,  
And trying to pull their ghostly strings,  
Wanted the sentinel to be freed,  
Freed from its host, free to cast its shadow from its feet.

So when the light inside was burning low,  
The little one crawled out of her window,  
Anon began her sojourn up the knoll:  
Running amok and climbing alone, and,  
Were it not for the crickets, with her footsteps unknown.

Climbing so high that the air was thinning,  
Stare into the night, her eyes were brimming,  
Look up at the sky, the stars were spinning;

Calls carried to the man in the moon found him quivering,  
And the birds tried to warn her, but she was persisting,  
When she reached the peak to see, though her mind was slipping:

There was some poor puppet tied to a post,  
A worn burlap body riddled with holes,  
With those hollowed-out eyes gilded in kohl,  
And that jagged mouth sewn onto the cloth,  
Smiling down at the precious thing that's sure to be lost.

A flick of her wrist had its binds undone,  
A sweep of her arms and it no longer hung;  
She sketched a bow and laid it down on the earth,  
She bent her knees to get a closer look,

And then the scarecrow blinked.

**Sarah E. Scarpace**

Honorable Mention

**Poetry**

# Typhoeus

He rose forth from the darkness of the Pit, to claim the heavenly throne for himself. He was the destructive force that battered mankind and the bane of the gods that ruled them. None dared to stand before his dreadful frame or earn the ire of his gaze. He shook the earth, and disrupted the seas, the skies began to fall. Disaster befell the mortal men and the gods cowered in dreadful fear. He called to arms the monsters of the deep, preparing for the endless war; soon began the siege of the mountain of the gods.

The gods of men had fled away, casting down their laurel crowns. Only one remained, with courage and strength, to face the Devouring One. Day and night the fight did rage and the foundations of the earth trembled in malady. Fire scorched and lightning flashed in this battle of immortal wills. The god who stayed fought so great, but could not overcome and was hurled down, wounded by the feud. He refused to fail and returned again, to wreak havoc down upon his foe.

In the end, the Beast was beat and buried beneath a mountain peak. The immortals again took their heavenly seats and Zeus to be their king. The world was again set to rights and life carried ever on. It was said that in the end, Typhoeus will rise again.

**Blaine Gilbert**

Third Place

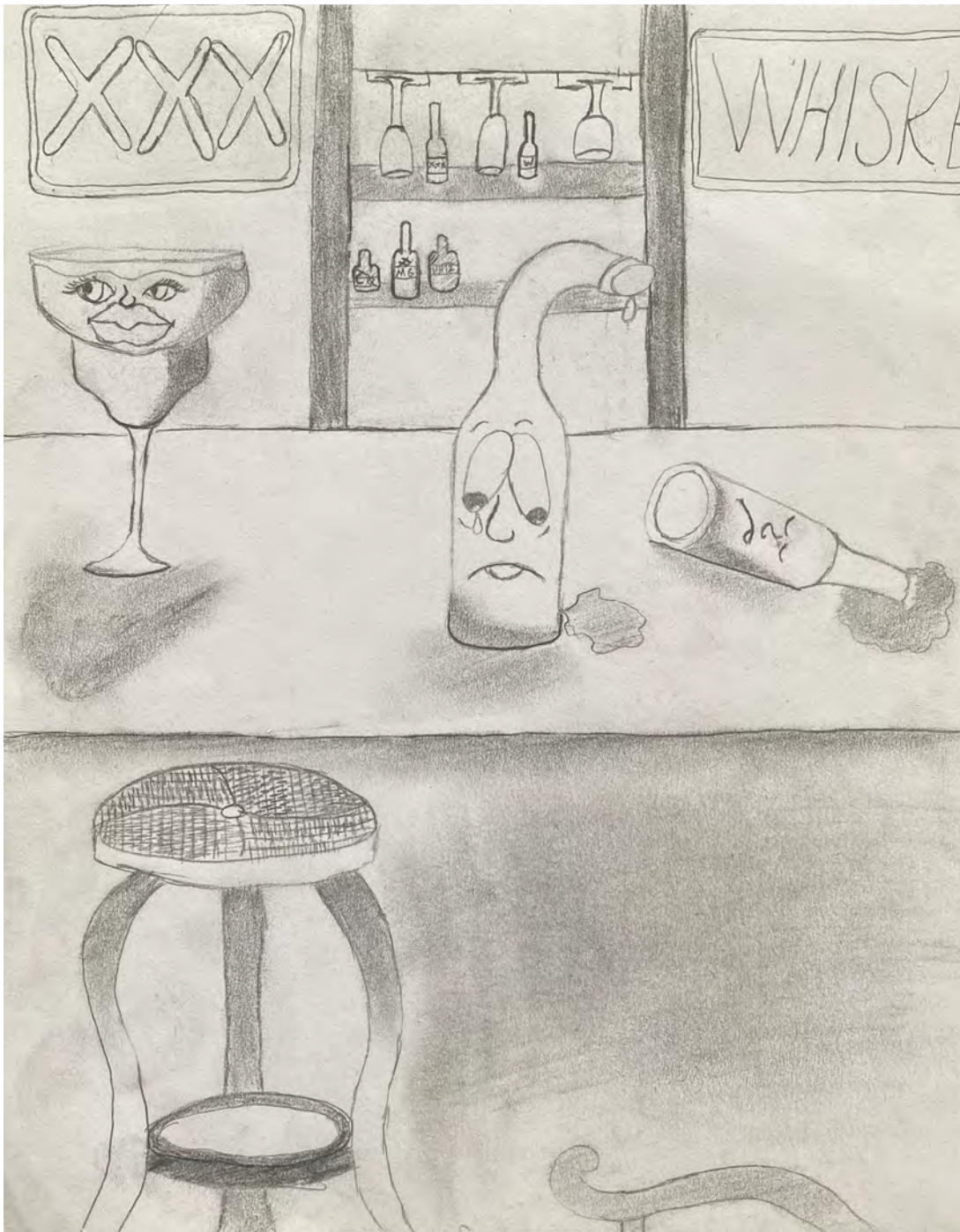
**Short Fiction**



**Amelia McCoy**

*The Playing Field*

Honorable Mention  
**Two-Dimensional Art**



**Michael Biebel**  
*American Alcoholism*

Honorable Mention  
**Two-Dimensional Art**

# Monster

I'm so terrifying

So uninviting

Perchance I feel the one crying

In my weighted palms

Slipped through fingers like silk

Obscure motivation locked in from

Trying to confining

I can filter the screams

Of the holy victims to discover

I cast heavy shadows

At the tips of their noses

Building glass structures around

My frail demons

Ticked time bombs

How much more can I consume

Pleads tired from my bleeding knees

Can't you see me?

Tears fuel flames

Chipped bones, under the chest

I'm going to lose control

**Ava Rose Focht**

Honorable Mention

**Poetry**



Ava Rose Focht  
*Tangled*

Honorable Mention  
Two-Dimensional Art





**Amelia McCoy**

*Helix Nebula*

Honorable Mention

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