



Horizons Fall 2017

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# Highlights

We decided, as a team, to examine the many borders and barriers that students approach and cross in their academic careers as well as in their lives away from school.

In the magazine you will find personal essays, profiles, and maybe even some helpful tips that spotlight a particular border that has been explored by our writers. These stories range from adventures of country hopping on a European vacation to leaping hurdles while living with a clinically diagnosed mental disorder.



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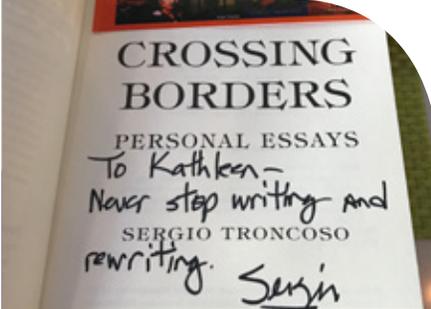
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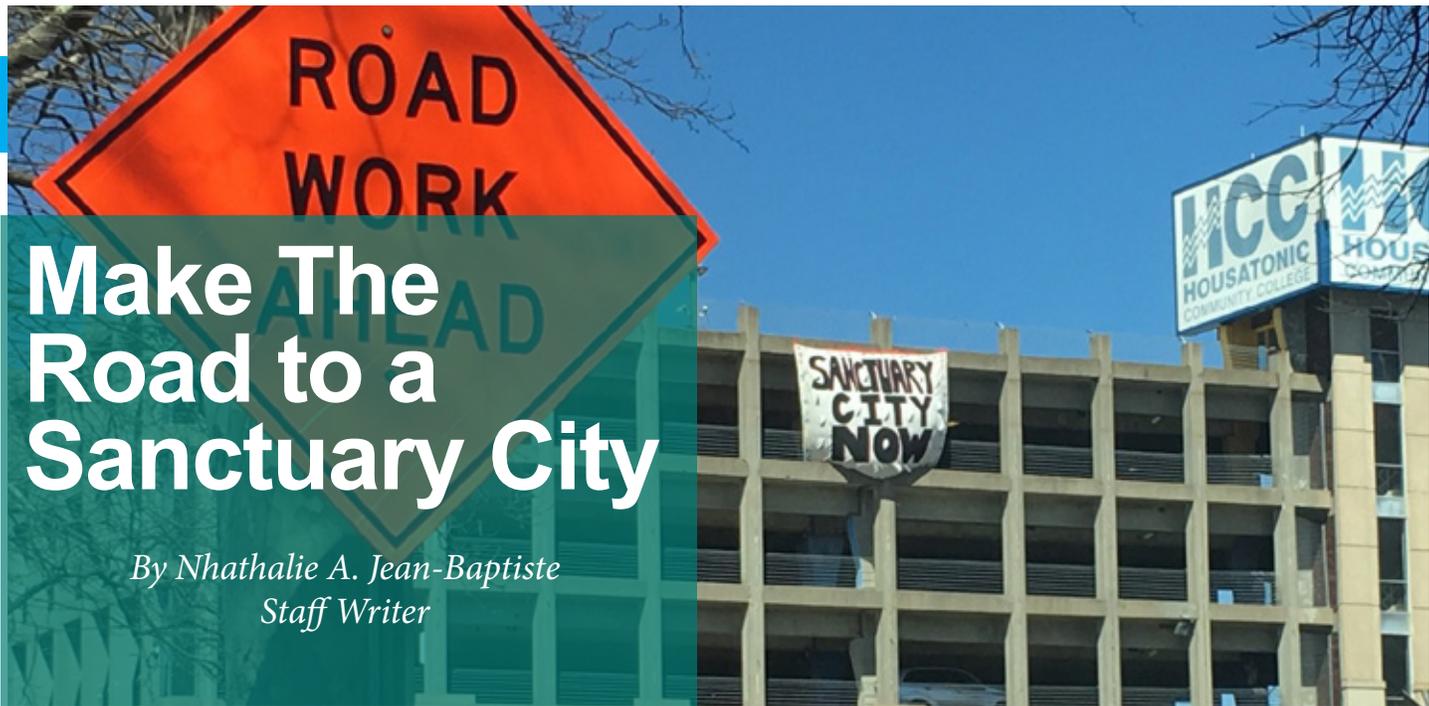
**Short Takes**

We dug deep to find the stories and we dug deeper to tell our own. From the entire staff of Horizons, we hope you enjoy!

# What's Inside

The staff of this semester's Horizons magazine elected to center our focus around award-winning author Sergio Troncoso's impactful visit to our college. Through the annual One Book One College event, Troncoso was invited to share a day with our school and discuss the themes and inspiration for his collection of essays: *Crossing Borders*

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# Make The Road to a Sanctuary City

*By Nhathalie A. Jean-Baptiste  
Staff Writer*

Many come here for freedom, for equality, for safety, and opportunities. What happens when their sanctuary is being threatened and they are the targets, feeling unsafe in their communities?

On March 20, at a Bridgeport City Council Meeting immigrants and vocal individuals voiced their fear for immigrants in Bridgeport, feeling that immigrants are targeted and not being able to feel the safety that they are to be given for themselves and their families.

Clyde Wilson, a concerned and passionate advocate,

suggested to City Council President Thomas McCarthy and the committee a resolution for immigration and immigrants, “Let them buy a work permit, whether its one year, five years, and when they get this right, then they can work at becoming a citizen if they want to become a citizen,” Wilson said.

Mike Murley, who works with Make The Road Connecticut, also spoke about the issues that immigrants face once coming to this country. He even claimed that for thirty “citizenship for granted.” He spoke to the council and began talking

about the need of Bridgeport becoming a Sanctuary City. “There are mothers and fathers, and children, and college students in this room who are living in fear every day of Immigration and Customs Enforcement knocking on their door,” said Murley. He proceeded to continue and speak of all the other members of Make The Road CT, and their advocacy. He also spoke of the compassion and fight of the members of MRCT. He told of their struggles and risks.

“They’re risking everything to make Bridgeport a safer and friendlier place,” Murley said. In accordance with the idea of

Bridgeport becoming a Sanctuary City, it would offer protection to immigrants that came to this country for reasons of their own recognizance.

He even gave a reality check scenario to the council about if local police began working closely with federal immigration offices, many families would face deportation and parents and children would go through separation. And, he believes that is not what needs to happen. "I see our community in them," he said, adding that we are all family, that Bridgeport is a family. "They are not just our friends and neighbors, they are our brothers and sisters," said Murley.

A native of Mexico, Alejandra Vasquez, who has been a resident of Bridgeport for 11 years, came here for a better life with her family. She gave her take on the need for Bridgeport to become a Sanctuary City to the council.

"We have been able to make a living for ourselves, we work hard to have a quality life, here in Bridgeport. My sons and daughters have taken root here, and this is a place they have always considered their home," Vasquez said.

She explained the hardships she and her husband had to face in recent weeks because of the hatred towards immigrants and refugees in recent immigration laws being placed. Her biggest fear is what will happen to her children if she and her husband were faced with trouble.

"We feel it's not fair we have to worry about our sons and daughters being placed in an orphanage," Vasquez said. She also claimed she and her husband has dedicated to and invested into Bridgeport, in hopes the city will repay in favor.

"Not my parents, but my grandparents, my uncles, aunts, and cousins, weren't born here; it's a scary feeling knowing your family

might not be here tomorrow," Crystal Aguirre, a volunteer with Make The Road CT, said.

Malaska Hernandez, another volunteer, expressed how great it would be if Bridgeport became a Sanctuary City.

Immigrants would feel safe, can call the cops if in need and be able to feel like they can live free. They feel just as impassioned as Mike Murley.

"And right now they do not feel safe, and as long as they don't feel safe I don't feel safe," Murley said, as he pleaded for Bridgeport to become a Sanctuary City.

Make The Road CT and their volunteers only want an equal life for the immigrants they help.

If you would like to show your support and help them voice for Bridgeport to be a Sanctuary City, you can join them at their organization at 850 State Street for meetings.

# Over Forty Countries Minus One

By Eric Vazquez  
Editor-in-Chief

Professor Paul Rogan likes to ask questions in class. It's unclear whether he is testing the knowledge of the room or if he has actually forgotten the answer. This may be part of his genius.

Unlike some history enthusiasts, the professor is a Western Civilization teacher who doesn't care about dates. His students likely won't be tested on what happened in the U.K. on April 23, 1564 or in Florence on May 3, 1469. But they will discuss Shakespeare's impact on the modern English language and how current world leaders might take a Machiavellian approach in decision making.

Though he would tell you that 1500 C.E. was possibly the most interesting time in history to live, listening to his story might make you wonder if he's right about that. "Congratulations. You have been selected to serve our great country." Rogan cannot remember if those were Lyndon B. Johnson's exact words in the generic letter he received signifying that he had been drafted to fight in the Vietnam War. He is positive, however, that "Congratulations" was the opening. As a young scholar in his 20's, Rogan had a ticket booked aboard the Queen Mary. He was taking a year off from school to work in Germany and begin a life of travel that would eventually set his feet on over 40 countries worldwide. LBJ's letter put a halt to that. "Number 21. My father thought it

was a good draft number. A draft makes people pay attention. There is a humanizing effect. People speak out more and investigate the intentions of our government when they are forced to serve it. I was paying attention. Most people didn't know where Vietnam was. That's a pretty expensive geography lesson," Rogan said. Paul "Moose" Evans, a former classmate of the professor, was a big, muscular, intimidating guy, the kind of guy no one tangled with. Professor Rogan learned that Moose Evans, who was twice his size, was killed in action in Vietnam after only a few weeks of being there.

The aspiring world traveler and pacifist now had to find any way out of being shipped off to this country. Otherwise, he knew he would be sent there to die. Though he was still technically property of the U.S. government, Professor Rogan got approved for deferment twice, allowing him to stay in the states for the time being. One deferment was as a teacher, and the other as a seminary student. The professor's father was a minister, and he was *for* the war in Vietnam. Upon learning that his son was not *for* the ministry or the war, it created tension.

"It started to cause a problem because my dad thought I was in seminary school to become a minister like him. I told him 'Dad that's not what this is. I'm here because of

the war," Rogan remembered.

When the professor was still just a teenager, a chance encounter between his father and another more famous minister would be influential in formulating his eventual views on the war.

The professor's father met Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Minneapolis in 1962. Ministers would get together and have a breakfast once a month. At one of those gatherings Dr. King spoke to them.

"My dad came home and he was so fired up. He went on about this amazing speaker that he had heard. A few days later he brought home a copy of *Stride Toward Freedom* for me. I don't know if my dad knew of Dr. King before that day, but I do know he was taken by him," Rogan said.

On April 4, 1967, one year before his assassination, Dr. King made a speech in New York City denouncing the war in Vietnam. The Professor read this speech in a newspaper and it reaffirmed his stance on the war. The 50-year anniversary of this speech was covered and reprinted in the *N.Y. Times*.

"If America's soul becomes totally poisoned, part of the autopsy must read 'Vietnam'," said Dr. King in an excerpt from his speech.

Luckily Rogan eventually got discharged without ever having to cross the war torn borders of Vietnam. Having freedom from the government's grasp suddenly opened up the world to him. As he

has said in class several times, for a man who loves to learn, there is no greater educator than travel.

The professor found a way to combine his love for exploration with his other passion, cycling.

“The best way to visit a foreign place is on a bicycle. You are directing your own movie. It’s coming at you over the handlebars,” Rogan said.

He is part owner of Thomson Bike Tours, a company headed by Peter Thomson, former professional biker and Professor Rogan’s long time friend. These overseas tours are not for novice bikers or even weekend warriors, and they often turn away customers or recommend other tour companies to bikers who are not consistently training.

picturesque views other than the biking itself, is the comradery. A climb in the mountains can take two to three hours. People, even complete strangers, become open and honest and begin to discuss the most intimate details of their life.

“It’s amazing how after an hour with people, they just open up. You’re going 5 or 6 miles an hour and you’re spinning and spinning and spinning. You stop to rest and you get stories. You’re both exhausted, you’re both sweating, and your defenses just drop away. Like war buddies in a trench. No topic is off limits,” he said.

He and his son will be going on a tour this summer together. His son said he wants to do it now while his father still can.

30-40 miles in the Pyrenees Mountains is still a challenge for most people half his age. Professor Rogan said he really feels good when someone is ready to quit and he pushes them through. Often they come to the end and thank him.

They find a strength they didn’t know they had. After all what can you learn about yourself from biking downhill?

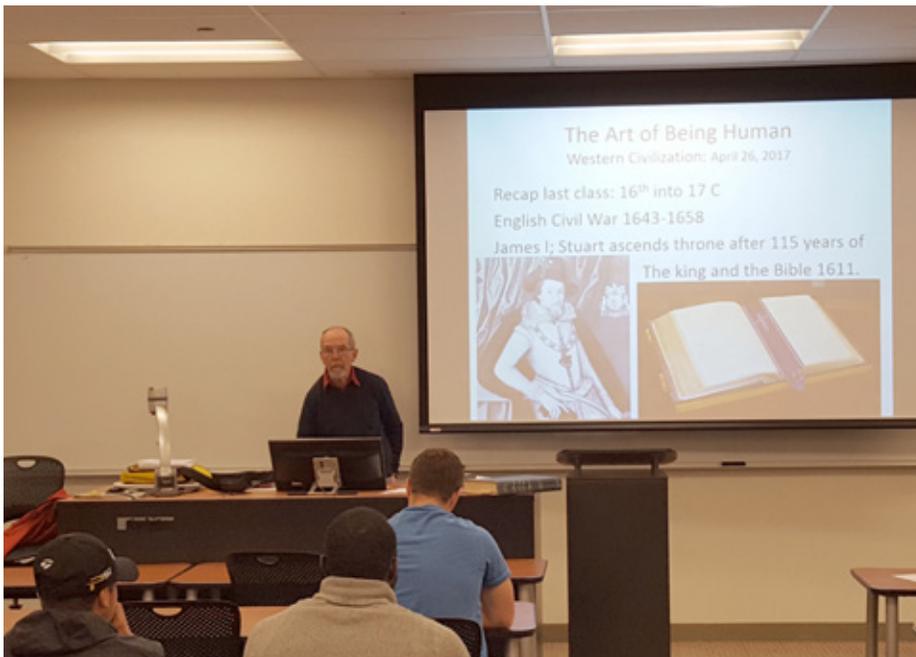
Professor Rogan continues to challenge himself and for the first time in 40 years, he began teaching in a college classroom again. His last teaching job was helping autistic students learn basic life skills.

“Housatonic has been a great step for me. It’s through the roof. I have plenty of old friends, but I get tired of talking to old people. I need stimulation and freshness. I get that from the students here,” he said.

The professor describes himself as a stumbler rather than a wizard. He’s a dabbler. This is why he says he studies history. There’s a little of everything, and once again the dates don’t matter. He wants his students to be able to understand why and how something happened rather than when it happened.

“By understanding history and being able to reference it, we learn how to support our opinion with some muscle,” Rogan said.

Weltanschauung is one of the first words you will hear in the professor’s class. It’s a philosophical image of the world and how humans relate to it; a worldview. If he were to sum it up in a sentence, I would say Professor Rogan’s Weltanschauung would read something like this. “Water writes history, history teaches the present, and the present is best viewed on two wheels.”



“You should be riding 120-150 miles per week before you take our tours. If you don’t there’s going to be tears. You’ll say Paul, I can’t anymore, and I’m going to say let’s rest for a bit, we got 40 more miles to go. Now get back on your bike.” What the professor loves most about the long tours through the

“My son said ‘What if you’re not able to soon?’ Well, that’s part of mortality. I’m getting to a point where their rides are just too big. 60-80 miles per day, I’m more of a 30-40 mile guy. I started dropping off when I passed 70, and I just don’t have the punch and the strength anymore,” he said.



# Making a

By Katie Selander  
Staff Writer

The first time I went to college, I failed hard. For me, I went to college because my mother told me to. I didn't really feel one particular way about it, it was just something that was expected of me. I'd go to some classes, but I skipped a lot of them. After passing some classes and failing others, I got overwhelmed and dropped out. My mom didn't say anything, but I knew she wanted me to go back. I couldn't get a good career without a degree, after all.

Yet, one thing that you never expect to happen to you is having a parent die. My mom's death was completely unexpected and came as a complete shock. For a long time I went through a huge depressive state; I was apathetic about everything. I didn't have the

energy to move much. Actually, I didn't even have the energy to feel sad. Eventually, I got tired of doing nothing and made the decision by myself to go



The first time I went to college, I failed hard.



back to college. This time around my perspective is a tad more mature. I'm doing things a bit differently. I try not to miss more than two classes a semester, and I pay attention in class. I'm doing my homework more frequently.

Like me, Jasmine Gooden, an HCC student, has come back with a changed perspective on school. "I went back to school to pursue an

education in nursing. I look at things now as seeing education as the only way out. I've noticed that my eyes are more open than my peers," she said. She's noticed that in comparison to her friends who have only been students and not taken a break, Gooden sees

# Comeback >

“what really matters in life as far as working, and what’s needed for survival, instead of worrying about material things.”

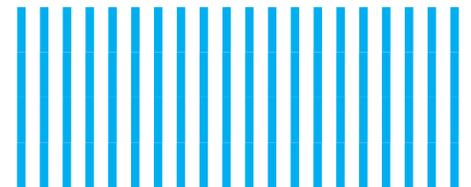
As a commuter school, HCC has a wide variety of students who attend. The classes don’t just occur in the morning and afternoon, but in the evening as to accommodate working students, like myself. Many of the students who take the classes are older students who work and are coming back to school after a long time, some with a new family dynamic.

In these classes, a lot of the students are unused to homework, studying, and working in a classroom environment. If they haven’t been to school in a long enough time, even the idea of an online class is odd. For myself, I was out of

college for a two years, so although it was a break it’s not as large a break as some of my peers. Another student in one of my classes came back to HCC after going to trade school and noticed that the classwork is different than she remembered. They have said that the way the classes are organized are different than she remembers, and she’s struggled with it.

But for others, the break was just what they needed to get on track! Perla Campos, HCC student who’s come back from a break, says on going back to school, “I’m grateful that I had this opportunity to do so... And some of the professors at HCC were very encouraging and taught me not only book lessons but life lessons as well. And I always appreciated that! When

I wanted to just give up they said no and helped give me that little push... it made me realize it doesn’t matter how long it takes but that you continue until the end when you get that degree and further that degree into another!”



# Housatonic Community College is On the Map

By Lisa McCree  
Contributing Writer

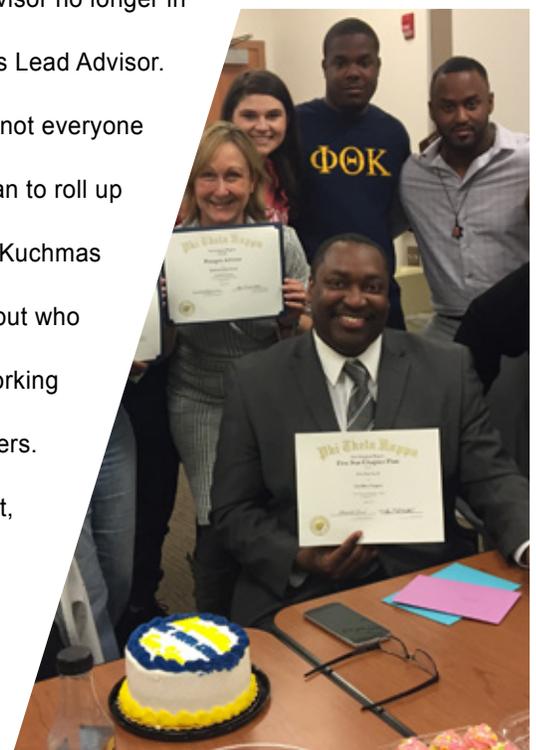
> “Housatonic Community College is on the map!” shouted Tulani Dail, President of New England’s Regional Alumni (NERA), as she pumped her fist in the air as the Master of Ceremonies at the New Hampshire Regional Conference Awards Ceremony held on March 11, 2017 at New Hampshire Technical Institute (NHTI). The entire New England Region of PTK members began to whoop, applaud, and finally give a standing ovation to give props to HCC’s Chi-Rho Chapter.

To understand the thunderous applause, accolades, and Tulani’s statement, we must rewind the tapes and start from the beginning.

If there ever was a rags-to-riches story Phi Theta Kappa’s Chi-Rho Chapter would be on the front cover. Who knew upon joining PTK we were walking into perhaps one of the most challenging opportunities of our college lives. Our chapter was sitting at a mere half-star, on probation and near expulsion. The chapter had gone through a major transition and with the old advisor no longer in place, Debbie Kuchmas was asked to undertake the role as Lead Advisor.

With all new students and advisors, the chapter grew in membership; however, not everyone was active within the chapter. With less than seven members the chapter began to roll up its sleeves and dig into the task of reaching for the first time ever, Five Stars. Kuchmas created a position for students who did not quite meet all of the requirements, but who had heart, passion and the willingness to learn, and challenge themselves working alongside PTK members.

There was much work to be done, with membership recruitment, Honors Project, researching objectives, thinking globally, and beginning a college project. There were deadlines, very late nights, group chats that resembled abbreviated essays that would make any English Professor cringe, laptops were brought





> on vacation and Spring/Winter breaks that were devoted solely to working on and completing PTK projects. <

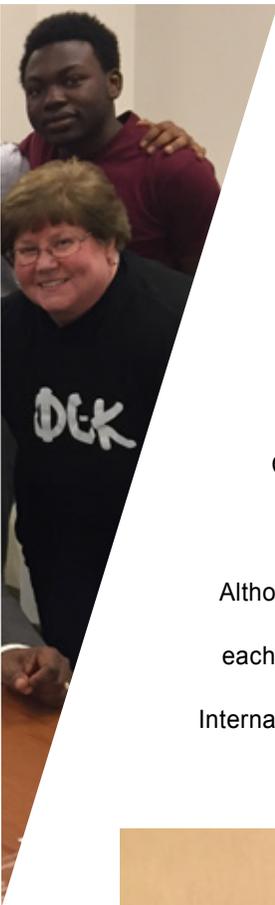
The projects were submitted to PTK Headquarters, and we waited. We speculated, we believed we knew the outcome, but no one wanted to speak too soon. Usually the results were emailed, or posted on the PTK website, but there was no news. We all tried not think about it, too much. Then on March 11th at the New England Regional Conference Award Ceremony before our regional peers, we were announced and awarded our Five Star completion certificate. There were hugs and tears and relief, “We did it.” We brought home a total of two PTK certificates and two trophies.

However, the journey was not over. It was now time to head to Nashville, TN to the Catalyst Academy International Conference to stand among our PTK peers from all over the world.

Housatonic, in full support of their PTK members’ hard work and accomplishments, paid for the entire trip for four PTK members to attend the International Conference in Nashville, TN. At the conference we learned vital information for chapter success, we were able to speak with other chapters and learn their recipes for success as well as share our tips.

Out of the 56 Chapters in the New England Region, Housatonic ranks in the top seven. Among our CSCU sister schools Asnuntuck Community College, Housatonic Community College and Middlesex Community College hold the top three spots in Connecticut for five-star completion. Our New England received “The Distinguished Region” award.

Although Chi-Rho did not take home any awards from International, there was a vow that took place within each one of us personally and as a team: We would push ourselves even farther and earn our way on that International stage. Our first goal was to earn our five-star status. Now we know we can accomplish that and now is the time to push the envelope into orbit. Get ready world “Here we come!”



# IS GOD FOR ME?

By Chanelle Mattis  
Staff Writer

God and I recently went through a rough breakup. We're good now, but our relationship was tested in a way it never had been before. I guess in some way you could say there was infidelity on my part. I brought someone else into our relationship. Doubt. And when she entered she held onto me and didn't let go. She made me feel confused and overwhelmed. I hated her, but at the same time I needed her in order for me to discover my beliefs.

When my mother decided to become a Christian I was five years old and unknowingly to me my life had taken a 180 turn into the other direction. No longer was I able to watch scary movies or dress up for Halloween; instead I had to attend Bible Study and Children's Church. I wasn't allowed to listen to music that didn't glorify God and my clothes could not be tight or revealing. My friends and I would always complain (we still do occasionally) about how strict the rules were.

Roshedra Palmer, my best friend and also a member at my church, says "The one thing that has annoyed me in the past is not being able to party with friends and listen to certain music. Not all secular music is bad and most of them have a great message to it." I can't tell you how many times we argued this point during members meeting at church. It's supposed to be a time when we voice our thoughts with our pastor, but it seemed like anything we said concerning the rules would be shut down immediately. Yet even then I didn't let that deter me from God. I accepted how my life was and ran with it.

Even throughout high school I had no problem with my faith. I mean sure there were times I went against my beliefs and went along with what my friends were doing. I'm not perfect and I don't believe any Christian is, but there was always a balance for me. If I was a worldly in school I would still attend church throughout the week, and in some way I felt God would understand the struggle of being a Christian while still trying to fit in with your friends.

I lived my double life all throughout high school and then mid last year I was given a writing assignment for my English 101 class. I decided to make my topic

about Islam. I did all my research and watched tons of videos that were related to my topic. And then I came across a video with a panel full of well known Muslims discussing their faith. One of them, Kabir Khan, a Hindi film director made a point that started my doubts. "I wish religion was something we were all allowed to choose when we were 21. The issue is we were all born into religions. We don't choose it" he says. That one comment made me question everything I was brought up on. What if I had it wrong? Is God even real? Would I have chosen to become Christian if I didn't grow up in the church? All these questions plagued my mind and made me feel guilty that I was even having these thoughts. I felt as if I was hurting God just by thinking this, yet I couldn't shake the thought that maybe if given the choice I wouldn't have decided to become a Christian.

God has always been in my life since the age of five. In some way He was the driving force behind everything I did and was not able to do. So the fact that I was even questioning God killed me. I didn't know who to talk to. I couldn't speak to my mom because I was afraid of what she would think. Quite frankly I knew that as soon as I told her the first thing she would do would be to drag me to church, and that was the last place I wanted to be. I had grown sick of it and I wanted out. For a few months after I watched that video I stopped going to church altogether. Any excuse I could come up with to get out of going I used. My mom would get mad at me and say that I was letting the devil win whenever I didn't go. Even my own friends from church would text me all the time asking if I was all right because they hadn't seen me in a while. It seemed like my absence made headlines all through church. I imagine if I was on a missing person flyer it would read: Chanelle Mattis, constant church goer, missing in action. Please call if you've seen her.

To say that I had wandered off my path with God would be an understatement. Even though I couldn't express it on the outside to those around me, in my heart I felt like I was done. The weird part was I felt like God was okay with it. No He didn't come down

from heaven and give me His blessing but I no longer felt that overwhelming guilt I used to feel when I started having these doubts. So naturally I believed because I didn't feel guilty anymore that meant God had given me His permission to walk away from Him



and discover my spirituality.

Starting a life without God was interesting. First of all I was living in secret because no one in my life knew that I was struggling with my faith to begin with. Then to top it off it was weird not having to follow teachings that I had instilled in me from a young age. I researched all different types of religions to see if I connected to any of them. But I didn't, every one of them felt wrong. I began to think maybe I had it wrong again, what if I wasn't meant to have a specific religious identity. It seemed like during that time I was more lost than ever.

It wasn't until I went to church again one Sunday that I began to discover who I was. In the short time since I had been given that English assignment I had only been to church a handful of times. And quite frankly every time I went I felt like I was losing my mind. I was disconnected and tired of the same routine I had been required to endure since the age of 5. Yet on that day while sitting in the second row I no longer felt that restlessness I had begun to feel months prior. I remember sitting there watching the praise and wor-

ship team singing lively Caribbean gospel music while the congregation danced and sang along. Everyone was alive with the music and gave off this radiance of joy while they danced together and moved to the beat of the island drums. The moderator, who gave her best effort to speak over the loud music, asked who was glad that they were followers of God. The crowd erupted with shouting and clapping as the music continued to play.

I had never felt more happy than I was in that moment watching them. It was in that moment that I began to remember everything God had done for me and that regardless of the questions in my mind Christianity was the only religion I had ever really felt connected to.

In those few months I realized my faith was something I needed to discover on my own. I once read a really great quote from an article called "I'm Doubting My Faith" by Jim Burns. He says "Doubting your faith is not necessarily a bad thing, either. In fact, it can lead to spiritual growth and maturity. It can be a time when you move from your family's faith to actually owning your beliefs in a deep and real way." I had to have those doubts in order for me to be solid in my beliefs today and although it was scary and confusing it was necessary and I'm grateful that I went through that.

I know now that just because you were brought up to believe a certain way doesn't necessarily mean that's what you should believe when you're older. Some people go through those doubts and decide to walk a different path, but in the case of Chanelle Mattis she decided on her own to follow the path she was given at 5 years old.

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***"To say that I had wandered off my path with God would be an understatement. Even though I couldn't express it on the outside to those around me, in my heart I felt like I was done."***

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*Photographs By Phelicia Wallace*

# A Letter to My Mother

By Iesha Brown  
Staff Writer

Dear Mom,

The late rapper Tupac once said in a song written for his mother, “There’s no way I can pay you back, but the plan is to show you that I understand.”

I swear it took me almost a week to write a sentence for this letter. Because how do I put into words how I feel about you? My very own guardian angel. My mom, how do I express my gratitude to someone like you? Now looking back I appreciate those times you said you loved me even though I wouldn’t say it back when we were mad at each other because you showed me that no matter what, you were always going to love me.

I’m writing you this letter because I feel like we have unfinished business. I have so much to tell you. I want you to know that I miss you, I love you, and I hope I’m making you proud. I feel like you died not knowing that I appreciate you and understand that everything you did was for my betterment.

About four years ago I had a dream about you. Shamyrah and the twins were in the dream too. I can remember this dream so vividly. We were on the east side near the new bus stop. I don’t know why we were outside because there was a huge tornado going on and we were right in the middle of it. I mean there were buses flying, the bridge started to collapse, so downtown began to flood. During this entire dream I stayed with cousins. We never got separated. But the scary part was when the bridge broke you got swept away into the ocean. You were gone and you didn’t come back.

I think that dream was a warning. Something or someone was telling me my life was about to be turned upside down and I was going to lose somebody important. And unfortunately it was true because the next day you died. And my world came crashing down.

When you died it happened so fast, I never seen it coming. You weren’t even sick. So when I found out you were in the hospital I didn’t bother to visit because I just knew you were coming home. And when I finally did come visit you. The day was perfect, and we never have perfect days. But on that day the sun was shining bright

through your room. The room was quiet and for about an hour. When it was time for the cheek and said you loved me. If time I would see you alive, I would've I would've told you I loved you or

During your funeral it was like I and everyone was moving in giving me hugs telling me they row with Kevin by my side. I just wanting the entire thing to I just kept looking at the big everything I knew was in there. because you died so suddenly.

Months after you passed, I drinking, smoking, just doing pain. It's like when you died the was all alone. But I got through it. through it. I always tell people the just get a little easier. Thinking about break down when I realize you aren't ple, since you've been gone it seems like I'm anymore. But when I see something that reminds I'm suddenly brought back to this earth and it shatters. My world is turned upside down again and it's like you've died a second time.

Since you've been gone I've gained a certain independence. I no longer wait for things to be handed to me. I go out and get it, mainly because I have to. Since you've been gone I have a greater appreciation towards you and admiration for you. You were really Superwoman.

Writing this letter has been one of the hardest things I had to do when it comes to. Because again I'm confirming your gone. Tears are literally falling down my face because again this week I've just been floating through life, trying to avoid the elephant in the room, which is your death.

Your daughter,  
Iesha Brown



peaceful. We barely talked. We just watched Maury me to say goodbye, you gave me a kiss on I would've known that would be the last stayed longer. I would've talked to you. hugged you longer.

wasn't even there. It's like everything slow motion. I remember people were sorry. I sat right in the front was grateful for that. I remember be over because during the funeral grey casket knowing my life and Cold, alone, and probably scared

suffered with depression. I started anything so I won't have to feel any world suddenly got smaller and I

To be honest with you, I'm still getting loss of you will never get better, it will your death always saddens me. I literally here on this earth with me. I always tell people floating through life. Like nothing can hurt me me of you or smell something that reminds me of you

me of you or smell something that reminds me of you

“*I just kept looking at the big grey casket knowing my life and everything I knew was in there.*”

# Depression Made Me

By Jenna Palermo  
Contributing Writer

It was a morning. Not morning enough to hear birds, but morning enough to still have the light come in through the window and create shapes in the dust swirling around the bedroom. I think we had just woken up, groggy and warm. Or maybe it was afternoon, after a nap. The light shines through the same window no matter where the sun is going. I know you don't remember.

It was hot in the room, I had one leg out from the covers. For some reason, we had made the decision to get up and go somewhere later. I was quiet, I felt heavy. I didn't have much to say. Depression had caught up with me that day, made me lazy, made me unresponsive and slow. I was glassy eyed. The air was heavy too, it was hard to breathe in there.

I wasn't really talking, mostly mumbling nonsense. I stare off in different directions for long, dragged out moments. Talking about it, it feels melodramatic, but this is why it's hard to talk about it in the first place.

"What is going on with you?" Your voice was cavernous, not in a deep way, but in a way that reverberated. I felt your soundwaves hit me, but they didn't bounce back towards you. I looked at you, stuck in some atmospheric daze. I said nothing, rolled over.

Obviously, this wasn't the first of these days, and it's not the last. This was before we had this understanding about Bad Days, about how sometimes there was nothing to be said. Of course, we lacked commu-

nication then. I could have easily just told you that I felt drained. But there was something about being emotionally vulnerable to me at that point, something that felt wrong and extreme. Why would I say anything when I could keep it to myself? Talking about "feelings" felt like being punched in the chest. You know the saying "Be shallow? Or go deep?" I go shallow with my feeling; it's better that way. It's embarrassing to have someone feel bad for you, it's just another thing to add to the never ending guilt for being a burden. It's still like this now, but it's different.

From under the covers, I spoke. "Nothing is going on," I mumbled. Much later, you would tell me how much that you hate how I talk from under blankets. However, I liked it. It let me talk without feeling too vulnerable. Who knew that the 700 thread count comforter we share was a coping mechanism? Talking face to face, holding eye contact, when we're usually barely two feet apart...I'm already an introvert. That was a recipe for disaster. For crying. I didn't do that. No thanks.

I felt your physical frustration from the other side of the bed. I peeked over the covers.

"You were fine earlier, and now it's like this. Why? It's like a rollercoaster," you moved your hands like a scale, balancing each palm with each other. "It's scary. Did I do something?"

It's bad enough when someone feels bad for you, and when they feel like it's their fault, it's worse. It

was enough to make me sit up. I didn't like the hand motions. My brain told me I was being a bother.

I sighed, exhausted. I looked at the poster of *The Scream* by Edvard Munch on the wall, and we both suffered in silence. It's funny that the poster showed more emotion than I could in the moment. I couldn't speak, I was physically unable to converse. The words I wanted to say were stuck in my throat, literally. I felt like I was choking. I said nothing, again. For the umpteenth time, I was silent. I didn't really know what had happened, and I didn't know why I was so upset. I just didn't feel good. I couldn't communicate that with you that day. My mouth and brain were not connected, it seemed like they had decided to take a break from each other. There was nothing, I gave you nothing, and I felt guilty about giving you nothing. I sat with my back against the wall, confused. Why were you so upset?

There are these things that you're so good at, that I'm not. One of these things is talking. You can talk to anyone, about anything. You're never afraid to share, but that's because you're never afraid. You have no idea what it means to be an introvert. You are loud, confident, and you do whatever you want. You dance to music in stores. I know this because I used to tell you to stop, that people were looking at us. You didn't care, and you still don't care. I remember when I started to dance too, but only a little bit. Only with you, and then by myself in the



grocery store, and then with anyone. It was after that day.

That morning, or afternoon, or whatever time of day it was, I think the realization of having someone with me through depression was obvious. The fact that my emotional state of being could upset someone so much was a slap in the face to me. I didn't know people cared so much. I wanted to tell you but I couldn't.

After I said nothing to you, we got in the car. It was silent, and then I finally spoke. It wasn't much, it wasn't a reason for why everything was the way it was. But I apologized. It was a step. It was the first step really, I don't think I had ever apologized for anything my depression had gotten me to do (or not do). But you understood, and you got it. And you've always gotten it really.

I was grateful. I don't think I've been that silent when I feel depressed. I don't think I've given anyone a silent treatment just

because I feel miserable. I refuse to give misery the company it wants. I don't want to alienate someone and make them upset. It's selfish. What's the point of spreading sadness? Seeing someone so upset over me, my own mental health, proved it to me. I couldn't do it again, at least, not like that.

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“Why would I say anything when I could keep it to myself? Talking about “feelings” felt like being punched in the chest.”

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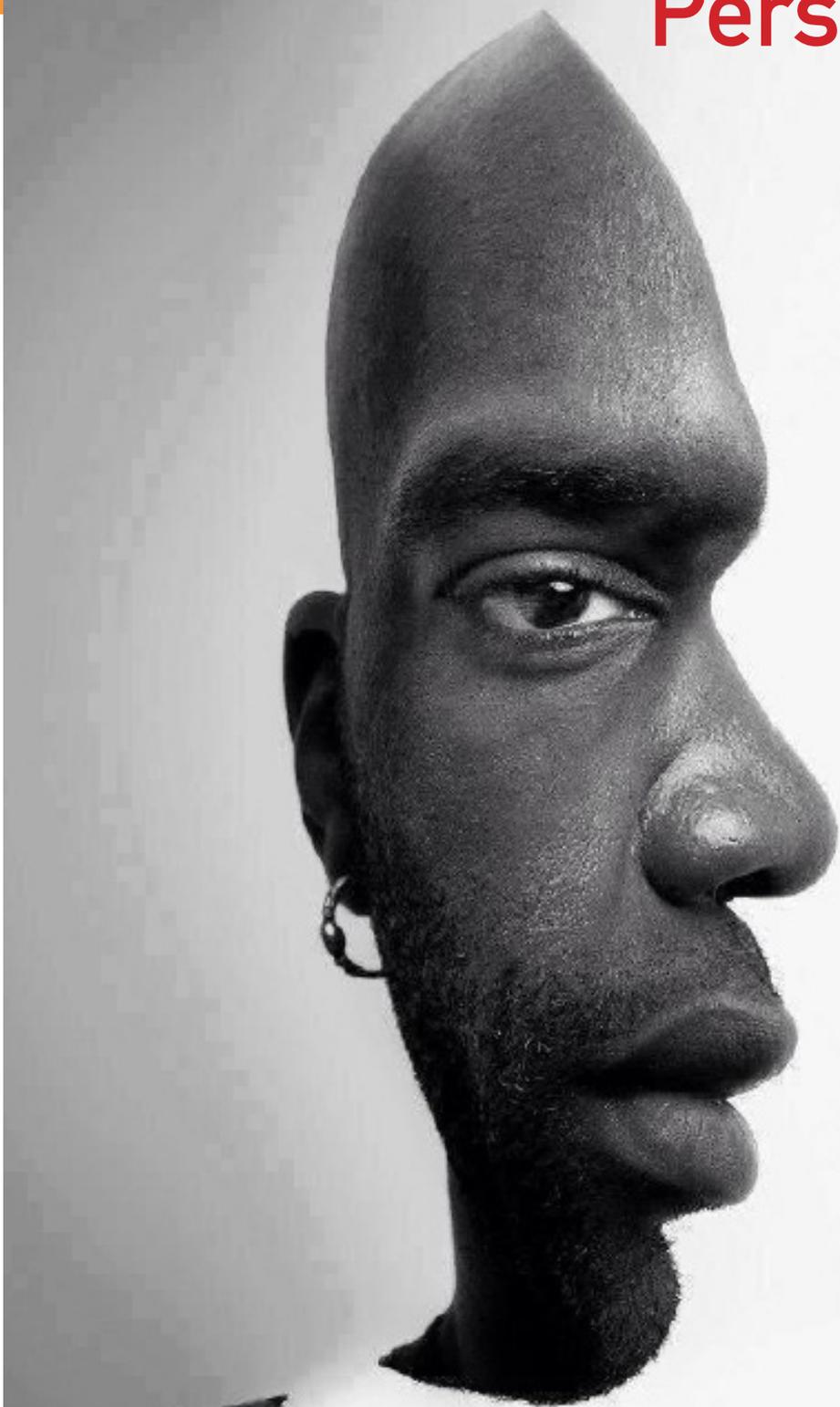
When I apologized, I felt better. I know you shouldn't have to apologize for being mentally ill, but I think that when you affect someone else's emotional state, it's warranted. I felt bad that day, and the bad had metastasized into so many different bad things for so many different reasons, that it got worse

and worse. That is, until I talked. I learned that talking would make it better, for me and for another person. It's easier for everyone, and it feels better to be understood than for to be estranged. Then, to my surprise, the situation had faded away. I addressed it, confronted the anxiety of being vulnerable, and the emotions faded. As if it was nothing. No big deal. The negative emotions that I drew from you were being left behind in the rearview mirror as we drove along. I couldn't help being shocked. My brain could not comprehend. What do you mean it's okay? Why aren't you still mad at me? What is this amicable tone? It wasn't normal to me for someone to forgive me, to disregard my mental illness in a way that was understanding, not ignore. It was weird. I expected yelling, I expected something way different than what had actually ensued.

Expecting the worst reaction from you was like waiting for a bomb to go off. It never did. It won't.



# Perspective



WHY DOES IT CHANGE?

# CHANGING PERSPECTIVES <

*By Samuel Rotini Jr.  
Contributing Writer*

Tragedy: a devastating necessity that can strike at a moment's notice, altering the outlook an individual may have of the world. As tragic as tragedies are, there is always something to be learned—a lesson if you will—that can be taken away from trying times and kept as a blunt reminder that life can't always follow the silly narrative of a Disney fairytale.

Now that's not to say that everybody should travel the highways of life pessimistically detached from the best things our hundred years have to offer. No, emotional detachment is too easy, and everybody must experience the bad days to truly appreciate the good ones, for what would good mean if bad ceased to exist? The same concept can be applied to death: what meaning would life truly bear if death was never met?

These were all questions I struggled to answer when tragedy abruptly crashed down on me, delivering a devastating blow to my life, my confidence, and my emotional stability. However, this did not deter my path to adulthood but rather prepared me further for the trials and tribulations that will be frequently met on the journey called life.

It all started during the early hours of a foggy September day. The evening prior, as the sun made its glistening descent toward the West Coast, I left my house for a night out with the squad, a night that was to consist of laughter and anything else 19-year-

old college students do to entertain themselves. Everything was normal and going according to plan.

This was my first semester in college following the gap year I took upon obtaining my high school diploma. I had spent the summer working for my cousin in Cape Cod, learning what it was like to be away from home, pay rent, and stand on my own two feet. Upon returning home, I was faced with a part-time college schedule, a new full-time job and was beyond eager to be starting the next chapter of my life. After a brief period of uncertainty and doubt about my future, I had the next 4 years of my life planned out, and nothing was to alter or abolish said plan. Or so I thought.

The day things changed was like any other day. The sun rose right on time, the birds chirped as they had always before, and of course, traffic on the northbound side of the Merritt Parkway was backed up all the way to exit 54. Everything seemed normal in the lives of so many, but things were far, so far from normal. At least to me.

As young kids, we look to our parents—whether the duo consist of the “traditional” one man and one woman, or two men like my parents—as a means of comfort and support, encouragement and drive. They pick their children up when they fall down, and push them right along. Perhaps the most difficult part of any child's life is the day a parent becomes dependent on them, an

> inevitable occurrence that is just as, if not more, difficult from the parent's point-of-view. This is exactly what occurred on that foggy September morning, when a deadly tumor had grown too large for Joe's skull to contain, causing irreversible damage that would permanently alter his motor functions.

The day that shit hit the fan was probably the most emotional. My biological father, Sam Sr, had frantically awoken me from a deep sleep at 3 a.m. to inform me that Joe had collapsed. The news was so abrupt, hitting me like a shot to the gut. I had to pinch myself just to prove that the nightmarish news I just received wasn't in fact the product of a bad dream that I had yet to awaken from. Upon entering my parent's bedroom, I initially thought Joe had suffered a stroke, as he lay on the floor, disoriented and unable to regain control over the left side of his body. Incidentally, and unknown to anyone at the time, a stroke would have been the best-case scenario. Soon enough an ambulance arrived, Joe was placed on a stretcher, and off we went. Upon arriving to the hospital, everything changed. Joe went into a terrifying medical episode: flailing his arms and blurting out gibberish. His eyes were moving rapidly, bloodshot and chillingly vacant. Doctors, nurses and medical students, of every specialty and practice, continuously entered and exited the room, testing for this and testing for that, asking questions about his medical history and so on. I was numb, frozen in place. It was an out-of-body experience watching my father hold Joe's, his life-partner of 47 years, hand, pleading

with him to hang on, reminding him of all the things they had yet to accomplish in their lifetime. I listened and listened, holding back tears and trying to stand firm. However, the gravity of this very real situation was beginning to sink in, and I quickly darted out of the room to break down in one of the hospital's corridors. As I lay there with my head buried between my knees, a kind nurse took notice of my distressed state and escorted me into the empty "family room" a few doors down from where I was squatting. She offered me a cup of ice water, which I didn't really want but accepted anyway, and attempted to comfort me with a few words of encouragement before heading off to help the next patient, or distressed loved one for that matter. She was kind, composed, and as reassuring as one can be in a situation of such uncertainty. After collecting my thoughts and gaining my composure, I joined my father in one of the corridors, where the ER's lead doctor proceeded to brief the two of us.

A couple days passed before the diagnosis was confirmed, and within a few weeks, Joe was back home. The following months would consist of simply "keeping him comfortable", however, the stage of denial that I had reached did not allow for me to accept the three-month prognosis Dr. Rezinkov, Joe's oncologist, had given him. Through every set back and every seizure, I acted as though the entire phenomenon was merely a minor bump in the road, and that life as we knew it before that September morning would eventually resume. That mind-frame certainly made Joe's final

*“As tragic as tragedies are, there is always something to be learned—a lesson if you will—that can be taken away from trying times and kept as a blunt reminder that life can’t always follow the silly narrative of a Disney fairytale.”*

months easier on me, however, he knew from his experience as a hospice nurse that Glioblastoma, the type of brain cancer that had plagued him, ended only one way. Following his passing, that was the thought that chewed me up for months: He knew the end was near on day one.

The tragedy of cancer delivered an enormity of pain and suffering into my family’s life. It damaged the confidence that I had built up, with the help and encouragement of Joe, for my studies in school. It altered my emotional state from the start of Joe’s illness, through his death and months beyond. It irreversibly changed the life I knew so well. However, through all the horrors and setbacks endured in those tragic months, I was able to learn some of life’s most precious lessons, lessons that teach us to appreciate the things that people so often take for granted, such as the emotional support that family provides in times of crisis, and the unconditional love between two individuals who spent 47 years building a life together. During the final months of his life, Joe and I would laugh together, cry together, encourage one another, and communicate with

each other. We had good days, and we had bad days. And although the bad days occurred more often than not, they made the good days more meaningful, teaching me to discover a bright side in even the darkest of situations. The notion of death took on an entirely new meaning for me as well. After the initial period of shock and adjustment following Joe’s death, I began viewing death very, very differently. Instead of mourning the loss, the most difficult aspect of death, I began celebrating Joe’s very existence, reflecting on the lessons he taught me, the love he showed me and the overall impact he had on my life. I was enlightened to the fact that his life would hold little value if he were immortal, for what is life without death? Meaningless.

However difficult the big pill of tragedy may be to swallow, it is a vital humanly occurrence that, one way or another, gives life meaning while providing the opportunity to find the good in what may initially appear bad, all it takes is a simple change of perspective.

# A New Age of Catholicism

By Kathleen Chaves  
Managing Editor

Traditional Catholicism has been a practice my whole life, until I got into my twenties.

I was baptized as a baby. My parents, sister, and I went to a Portuguese church in Bridgeport every Sunday. I went to religion classes every week, and had my First Holy Communion at age 7. When my parents got divorced, we moved in with my grandparents, and the practices got more traditional: church early every Sunday and on holidays, going to confession especially during Lent, praying before every meal; it was all common knowledge. When going to church, my sister and I could even repeat everything that the priest would say during mass. It was second nature.

For years we would go to church for the holidays, pray before every meal, watch movies like the Ten Commandments and Ben Hur (along with regular movies), and have the mindset that certain modern day controversies, such as abortion, were wrong. When I was going to have my confirmation at sixteen, the practices got more elaborate than before. We would have to go to mass every week, learn certain parts of the Bible, and go to the church for class and practice at night.

When I got my confirmation, I was slightly more religious, and kind of relieved. I felt more connected with the saint that I chose, but I was relieved that I was finished with my Catholic schooling. Then my sister

finished her confirmation a few years later and we were officially done with our Catholic schooling.

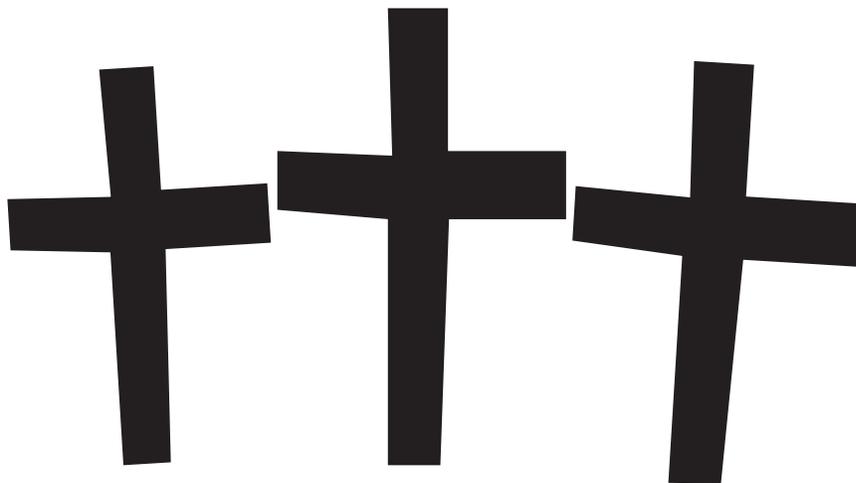
After my grandparents moved down south to Florida; my family practiced a much more relaxed version of Catholicism. We went to church for certain holidays, but my sister and I would work Sunday mornings instead of going to church.

We have different ideas about certain controversial topics than my grandmother has and have had in depth conversations about them with her. A couple of them are gay marriage, which we don't mention that often, but one that we have spoken about for hours is abortion. It was three of us against her, and she was immovable.

***“We will practice when we feel the need to, but we aren't as in depth with it as we were in the past.”***

There are some things that we do that still are related to our traditional Catholicism practice. We go to mass for Easter and Christmas and stay for the full mass. We practice Lent, we give up something from Ash Wednesday until Easter, and don't eat meat on Fridays during it. There are moments where we will pray if we feel we need to.

My mother, sister, and I are still in the process of crossing this religious border. We will practice when we feel the need to, but we aren't as in depth with it as we were in the past. Religion is fluid, and we know that, regardless of anything, God will always be there when we need to turn to Him.



# Beats Me Black & Blue

By Anonymous

*This article is a true story. To maintain the writer's and others' privacy, the names in this article have been changed.*

When I was younger, my parents never gave me “the talk.” I learned about sex in the 5th grade and in high school, but it was a little too late. On December 13th, 2010, my best friend and I were in my room, and he sexually assaulted me.

I remember getting home from school and ran to my room because I wanted to see all the gifts I had received on my birthday the day before. I asked my best friend Nelson to come over and he got there within 20 minutes. He was a tall boy wearing a black hoodie and blue jeans.

“What are you doing?” he asks me. I was blowing up the fire and ice condoms my friends got me for my birthday since we always make balloons out of them. “Are we going to use that?” he asked me.

At that moment I knew something was going through his mind but I thought since he was my best friend and we talked every day, he would not be thinking that.

And then, it happened....

Did this really just happen to me? Did Nelson really just do that? Who am I? Is this the kind of person I am? How could I have let him do that to me?

Days and days went by, and I brushed it off until two weeks later, I met a guy named Jorge, and we ended up having sex. Never did I speak to him again after he just had sex with me. Only a couple people

knew about Jorge and two knew about Nelson. I did not know how to even explain the situation with Nelson. I yet again felt used and I knew if I spoke about this to someone, especially one of his friends, they would not believe me.

I never felt so low in my life. I felt like a dirty slut and hearing those words come from others made me start believing it.

As time went on, I found myself not feeling worth anything. I wish I never existed. I fell apart. Why is this happening to me? Why can't I look at myself and love myself? Why am I here?

Even though I was thinking these things about myself, something was telling me I should not let this define me. I started going out more to parties, stopped doing shrugs, and lived my life by making the right decisions. I felt as if everyone was watching me, but I was not giving them what they wanted. I was pleasing myself, something I haven't done before.

Someone came into my life that changed my views. I felt like I had someone who accepted me for me and wouldn't take advantage. He knew everything. He knew about Nelson.

After him, I knew I was worth more. Not only was I already working on myself, but he boosted my self esteem. I felt worthy.

It took me time to open up to someone about it other than him.

I started going to therapy and at that moment I felt like I had to tell someone other than her, his best friend.

“Did Nelson ever tell you about him f\*\*\*\*\*g me?” I asked.

“Hahhaa you're lying, shut up,” his best friend said.

I did not let that hurt me.

Even though I was in therapy, I did not talk about this situation, but I finally did recently after seven years. I were talking about my sex life and I mentioned Nelson, and I could see my therapist's face in shock. “Why haven't you talked about this with anyone? Why now?”

Ever since, I could not stop thinking about Nelson. It took me seven years to forget about someone and now I feel like I see him every day even though I know he moved to New York.

I kept telling myself, “Nelson does not define yo. You are a glowing butterfly. No more black and blues.”

It took me seven years to realize that getting sexually assaulted does not define who you are. Just because something goes away does not mean it will not come back to haunt you but once it does, make sure you do not forget who you have become. Getting sexually assaulted might have beaten me black and blue, but now I am glowing, and I never felt so good.

# Hangers, Moth

> *Things You Find in a Closet for 200, Alex.* You can find hidden Christmas presents in a closet. You can find skeletons in a closet. You can find Narnia in a closet. And you can also find me in a closet. I am on one side filled with clothes pushing up against me, shallow breathing inhaling particles of dust, and all the pent up tension and fears I want to finally rid myself of. On the other side, there's my comfortable bed, fresh air coupled with the familiar smell of my room... and ass. Yeah, I said it. Ass. I'll explain.

You see, if you were to ask gangly, socially awkward high school me if he thought I would still be a virgin at this point of my life, he'd probably stutter out an "Of course not! H-H-He's the man! Guys--I mean, girls--are going to fall to his feet." If you were to tell him that I am, indeed, still a virgin, he'd probably smile it off and silently execute my murder in his head.

You can only put yourself out there to such an extent when the four walls that are housing your clothes and shoes are also housing your sexuality and, by extension, your V-Card. I wish I could say that my still being a virgin was a conscious decision and that I was artificially inseminated and am locked in a love triangle between my fiancée and baby daddy. Even then, I'd be getting *some* action! But we're not talking about *Jane the Virgin*, are we?

No, this one is all on me. It was a matter of thinking people would see me differently. Treat me differently. Hell, they could have even cut me off all together if they saw fit. And the tiny handful of boys who did play for the other team in my high school were either, taken, out of reach, or just plain catty.

Like my girl Kat (did you read her article? It's next to mine! Amazing, right?), we never did the deed in high school because we "never really dated anyone (in high school) and I wanted it to be with someone I was really comfortable with." She said it best: it was a lack of a decision. I feel your pain, girl, but I'll save that for later.

The only way I can really put it into perspective is when I turned 21. You turn 21 and literally every time you go out to eat, you get a drink. "May I see your ID?" Yes, you *can* see my ID. So here I am, clutching my V-Card for dear life, waiting to hand it in because I get asthma when I inhale too much dust and there's ass waiting for me on the other side. I have it, I want to cash it in. But there's something in my way. And I can't blame it on hangers and moth balls anymore. The only thing standing in my way is...well...myself.

But let's pretend that I step out of the closet and some babe is waiting for me on my bed. And we do the dirty. What happens after? Do I become the typical sexcrazed gay guy, obsessed with getting

# Balls, and Virginity

By Martin Fenicien  
Editor

some action every time I go out? You know us gay guys love sex. There are gloryholes in every gay bar bathroom, quiet as it's kept. Note the sarcasm in that last statement, but too many people truly believe this, as if we have nothing better to do.

Look, like any sexuality, there are those who go out on the hunt a lot more often than others, but for some reason the gay community has this weird thing about it being so hypersexual, being obsessed with sex. There are those who are straight who are just as obsessed, if not more so. What's more is that they have the ability to be more open about it without being condemned by society. At least, if you're a man, anyways (again, go read Kat's article to see what I mean!). No, I like to think I know myself enough to say I care too much about the relationships in my life to become the stereotype. To just move from bed to bed with no strings to keep me tied down just...doesn't sound like an option for me.

I think a lot of that has to do with pain. I think I heard Kat cringe. I won't plunge into the mechanics of gay sex, but I will say that pain is a definite factor for the first time, and I don't mean physical. While Kat was more concerned about the discomfort and effort that goes into sex, my lovey-dovey concerns lie on the emotional end of the spectrum. As in, all those fears that sit in the back of your head before, during, and after.

It's the idea that you'll latch on to them like a deep breath of fresh air, the experience meaning everything to you and absolutely nothing to them. When that reality hits you, could you survive that kind of pain? Would the experience even be worth it?

The questions all come back into play: Am I doing any of this right? Am I just another notch on a belt? Is this just a conquest? How does my body look?

How *does* my body look? If you find yourself critiquing every bone, stretch-mark, and scar, chances are you won't want to show your ankles around your partner, let alone all of your other business. No matter how many times your partner says how sexy and appealing you are, if you're not in the state of mind to see it in yourself, your legs are staying shut and the genie sits right in the bottle. Another hurdle to jump and another lock on the closet, goodie.

I'm trying to think of a way to end this article, but seeing as I'm a virgin, I really don't know how to *wrap it up*. So I'll say this: this whole virginity thing, not as a big deal as it's built up to be. Your closet may not be one of sexuality. It could be one of anxiety, traumas from the past, or just plain fear of rejection. But until you make that leap, all of the questions you have about the other side are left unanswered. It collects dust and it smells like moth balls. Open the door. See the view. And step out.

*I'll take Life After Virginity for 200, Alex.*

# “What, are you waiting until you’re married?”

*By Kathleen Chaves  
Managing Editor*

**H**onestly, I don’t mind being a virgin. I don’t put it on display. It’s not like I’m carrying around this big flashing neon sign saying, “VIRGIN: CURIOUS BUT ANXIOUS.” I only get nervous when I am in the heat of the moment. It’s something hidden, it isn’t by choice.

Virginity is a topic that I have spoken about in depth with my friends. We can go for hours talking about it. Yet when one of them lost her virginity, I felt no need to follow in her steps. It was just me thinking, “Okay congratulations?” As a young virgin, I don’t see it as something that I’m in a rush to lose. I have been asked more times than I can count if I’m purposely waiting until marriage to have sex. That’s not the case at all. In fact I’m waiting until I’m comfortable, with my partner and with myself.

Anxiety is always something that I’ve struggled with and it has carried over into any type of sexual moment I’m in. If I start to get uncomfortable, I freak out and jump away...not exactly the most attractive thing to do.

It’s not a priority, but it is a want. Like Martin (he’s the one that brought you to my article so welcome...and thank you Martin :)), he isn’t a virgin by choice. As he wrote, “Hell no! It just happened. I think it’s not being out. Not being out of the closet, and not putting myself out there.”

Having anxiety and being a virgin is difficult, but I don’t let it get me down. Yes, I do get very self-conscious about my body. I’m not that confident of a person. It even affects me just going to the beach in a bathing suit, I stay wrapped in a towel the entire time. One thing I know is that one day I will accept my body and will find someone that I’m comfortable with and...the deed will be done. Then I’ll ask myself, “Kathleen, what the hell were you so scared about?” Society views virgins as prudes who are waiting until marriage. I just see all virgins as something like unicorns, rare, but we’re sure there are others out there! There is nothing wrong with being a virgin, just like there is nothing wrong with being sexually active.

Lindsey Kovacs, a friend, said, “Being a woman who isn’t a virgin can sometimes be difficult as well because society puts pressure on you. When I got together with my boyfriend he was a virgin, and I wasn’t, and that made him paranoid wondering about how many other guys I had slept with.”

# No, I'm waiting until I'm comfortable.

It is noticeable that society puts pressure on women on a large variety of topics. Sex is one of these topics. If you didn't have sex you're a prude; if you do have sex you're a slut. The same goes with numbers; like Lindsey said her boyfriend was uncomfortable with her not being a virgin while he was, however she said, "When we took a break he had sex with other women and he said that was okay. Why wasn't it okay for me to have had sex before?"

Some men are cheered on for having sex and with multiple partners. Women, on the other hand, are shamed for it. An example of this is one that I told Martin, and he agreed. Back in high school basically the whole grade knew when someone lost their virginity, it was as if it was a rite of passage; the boys were praised and would brag about it, while some of the girls were shamed for losing it. I was never one to partake in these activities. I didn't care who slept with whom and I didn't want to be a part of it.

When college came around I didn't have any boyfriends and though I thought it would be nice I was in a confused state of mind at WestConn, it was when I was first diagnosed with depression and anxiety.

Around the time that I was transferring to Housy was when I got my first boyfriend and trying to be intimate made me terrified. I didn't like my body and I wouldn't let anything happen. That's when I would curse my anxieties to the high heavens, and ask myself continuously, "Why oh why did I have to stop everything?" Thankfully he was more than understanding and would just leave it at what I was comfortable with.

Over time I would still not be comfortable with things. If anything it would get worse! Fun, right? Wrong. I would get annoyed with myself because I wasn't ready for things. I just wanted to get it over with, but my body would extremely refuse.

Kelly Gallant, my best friend, said "The only thing stopping me from losing my virginity is, other than not having a boyfriend, the physical pain of losing it. Society has made women believe that losing your virginity is painful when it is supposed to be pleasurable."

There is a border that I have to cross, a hurdle if you will. It's all mental and emotional. Being a virgin in today's society is difficult, but I don't see it being a problem in the future. With time I will accept myself and love myself, how can I love someone and be comfortable with someone if I don't love and know myself first? Until then I will try and grow as an adult, find myself, do what I need to get done, and along the way I will meet someone who I am comfortable enough with to...lose it to.



# TUNNEL VISION

**By Ethan Goodrich**  
**Senior Staff Writer**



> Growing up in different households with my parents that weren't together was actually great. It's not upsetting to not see your parents together when that's all you know. I grew up my whole life with my parents separated. I lived in my mom's house and would visit my dad on the weekends.

Throughout my whole life my stepdad was in the picture. He did everything a biological dad would do for his son, but for some reason I always thought that he was out to get me my whole life. He was hard on me at times just like a dad should be.

When I was younger my real dad was looked at as the fun dad because we only did fun things like go to amusement parks and such. I would very rarely get reprimanded. When I was younger I didn't understand everything, so I only saw the good and the bad and never really appreciated what my stepdad was doing for me. He treated me like I was his real son and would do everything in his power to teach me from right and wrong. My dad

was doing the same thing, but at the time was not seen as the enforcer, so in my eyes it seemed better to be at his house.

As I grew older, my stepdad and I would butt heads more and more. He was hard on me, and that's all I saw at the time. If I did something wrong, I would get grounded or get my things taken away, so this just fueled the fire in my heart. I didn't want to be around him. I started to think that he was always out to get me. I thought he didn't want me to be there. I felt like he was always angry at me and whenever this would happen, I would just go with my dad for the weekend, and it



would all go away. I was carefree until Sunday night were I dreaded going back home to just start the cycle over again

High school didn't get any better. I lived in Naugatuck, but went to a tech school in Ansonia, so this meant I could just take the bus over to Shelton where my dad lived whenever I wanted. I realized that I started running away from my problems. Whenever things would go bad at home with whatever happened or went wrong, I would just run to my dad. By the time senior year hit, I was looking for a job in Naugatuck and couldn't find one. Eventually my dad would tell me a job opened in Shelton. I got the job and moved to Shelton.

I few months later I graduated from high school, and that's when life changed for me. I got a reality check. I got fired from my job and was broke. I didn't know what I was going to do with my life. I didn't do anything all summer and then last minute decided that I would start going to college. It was then that it hit me.

My stepdad was only hard on me because he wanted me to succeed. He helped me throughout my life and was always there for me to bail me out of tough situations. I couldn't thank him enough for teaching me these life lessons.

“Throughout my whole life my stepdad was in the picture. He did everything a biological dad would do for his son, but for some reason I always thought that he was out to get me my whole life. He was hard on me at times just like a dad should be.”

# Adulthood Sucks

By Lucas DeSouza  
Senior Staff Writer

When we were younger, we couldn't wait until we turned 21. That was the age where you are legal and you can really have some fun and go to places you couldn't go to before. Being 21, you're able to go to bars and clubs over 21. Also you can do many things on your own because you are considered an adult. But what caught me off guard was going into my mid twenties and how fast it came.

I felt like someone should've told me more about my mid twenties than hyping up the big 21. During this time many people have already graduated high school and some even received their master's degree. This age is when you SHOULD be getting into your career, according to society. Yet the majority of people aren't on track, including me, so it's tough watching people your age graduating before you and starting their careers.

This is also the time where your parents should start giving you hints about moving out. Mid twenties is when you really feel the pressure and you have to start living alone and being a full-time adult. The responsibilities are different when you get older and saving up money and finding your own place is a huge step. You will learn more about bills and being more independent without your parents watching over your mistakes.

Also, for many what you look for in a relationship can be different. During our party days that's when we used to act wild and be in and out of relationships that weren't really relationships. When turning the not-so-talked-about 25, most people decide you should start settling down and starting a life with someone else to potentially start a family.

It's a tough line to cross in all three stages, especially when you feel like you're behind on some of them. When it's time for you you will feel the pressure coming from all different angles. Just have to try to avoid that "adult conversation" with your parents for as long as you can.

# LIKE A NEWBORN FLOWER,

By Kaelin Baugh

Senior Staff Writer

Sometimes I feel like an amoral person for growing up, but it's simply not just growing up that I feel bad about...because everyone grows up. We have no control over that. It's more like growing up and away from the people that I love. I've always felt like an oddball around my family since the beginning of it all. I sit there and speak to them over the dinner tables or at the cookouts and I realize that I'm so different from them. My opinions, my perspective on life, my goals, my attitude, and my personality is very different from theirs. They accept my different way of thinking, but they still look at me like "Where did this girl come from?" Of course they don't hate me for it because they love me but it's still very unusual for them. I guess there's always that one weird relative in the family and it's me. I've always respected my family to the fullest even when I don't agree with them on everything. I will always respect them no matter how old I am, wherever I am on this planet, and whoever I become. For that reason being, I first started

becoming distant from my family because they would talk about things that weren't very favorable to me. They like to have conversations about certain things that are not in my best interest. For example, they're talking about a certain matter, then I come out and say, "Hey! I learned a new word in Greek." They'll look at me like I'm crazy for not encouraging their discussion. Stuff like that just makes me separate myself from them just a little and they label me as the "lost girl" for being the distant relative which I am. I'm not always with them the way they want me to be such as at casual family functions. To make things harder, I have a very time-consuming job that I dive into 35-40 hours a week. In addition, I am a full-time college student who needs to save time to study. Whenever I come around my older sister, she teases me and calls me "lost girl" and says that I live "a thousand miles away." My mom misses me around the house because I leave every day to do something. She's like "are you coming back home tonight Kaelin?" I'm like "no, I'm staying with my boyfriend, I love

you though, I'll see you tomorrow." This life transition to being my own person away from my family is not an easy process. The scary thing is that it's still going on and I'm currently trying to figure it all out. It's not something that goes away fast, it's something that makes you think hard. My family's characters' may have pushed me away a bit to begin with because I didn't want to surround myself with them too much knowing that I'm a disparate animal from them. At the same time, I want to surround myself with them because they are my loved ones, but not too much because I need space to grow and develop my own attitude on things. If I stay stuck in that same basket I've been since I was born, I won't grow to be my own person. I need to explore, get educated, and get exposed to so many opportunities this world has to offer me. Occasionally, I won't see some members from my family for weeks and whenever they see me, they jokingly berate me for not being around. I can't blame them though. I'm the one to blame. I'm barely around my family because I'm too



# I NEED TO BLOSSOM

“

If I stay stuck in that same basket I've been since I was born, I won't grow to be my own person. I need to explore, get educated, and get exposed to so many opportunities this world has to offer me.

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busy doing other things or with other people. I'm spending a great amount of time apart from them because I'm paying attention to my own life. I'm finding my true self. I'm getting myself together and preparing for the future. "My soul is somewhere out there amongst the stratosphere," I would say. I want to get it. Maybe by traveling around the world or whatever it is.

Growing up is scary. However, growing up away from your family is even scarier. But maybe growing up means getting away from your family, and sometimes it's inevitable. It's just something that has to happen. No matter what, I know my family will always love me even if I'm a thousand miles distant.

# > Love Jumps the Tallest Language Barriers,

He has a dementia clock. It's large, it's digital, and it tells him everything he needs to know about today. The time, the day of the month, the year, and most importantly whether it's a.m. or p.m.

The earliest memories of my grandfather are of a grizzled man with a permanent scowl, who seemed unable to talk to someone for more than three seconds without them bursting out laughing. I don't remember him ever smiling. His face always felt like sandpaper, so maybe it hurt when he lifted his cheeks, but he had this gift of extracting uncontrollable laughter from anyone within earshot, and he rarely needed more than a couple words.

My parents, grandparents, and so on until forever were all born in Puerto Rico. I was the first of my generation born here. My mom and dad however did not speak Spanish around the house, so I didn't learn much. It was the visits to my grandparents' house where I picked up whatever I know.

Those visits were frequent, and often the house was filled with 30 family members. My aunts were usually gossiping loudly or playing a game at the dining room table where my grandfather would be at the head reading a paper. Without fail, time and time again, my grandfather would quietly insert a few words of Spanish directly in the middle of all the English gossip, and suddenly the room would explode in laughter. I can remember them in still shots of different positions that signaled hysteria. One would be face down in folded arms shaking, another would have her head back howling at the moon, and another would be transitioning from laughs to coughs and back to laughs. Though he sent the room into a roar with three words, he would rarely crack a smile or even look up from his paper.

I never understood it, because I couldn't understand him. He got by with his English, and he knew enough to get his point across when he decided to speak it. But when

# Laughs Get Left Behind

By Eric Vazquez  
Editor-in-Chief

speaking Spanish he was the funniest man in whatever room he walked into, and he walked out of that room leaving people gasping for air.

I know a lot more Spanish today, but I was too late to catch a glimpse of my grandfather's wit. In fact before he lost his powers of speech I was able to decipher the last thing I remember him saying. He asked my mother, who was helping him buckle the belt on his pants, "Cuando fue que yo me hice un canto de mierda que no vale nada?" Roughly translated, "When did I turn into such a useless piece of shit?"

It bothers me. I love this man but I missed a massive chunk of who he was because of a language barrier. That wall was once permeable, but now it's made of iron and shoots higher into the sky with every minute that clicks away on his dementia clock. I'll never get to laugh at anything he says.

He can't speak anymore. He wakes up at 11 p.m. and begins to get dressed for the day. He is awoken at 2 p.m. by the strange amount of noise being made at this time of the night, and the unusually bright lights outside. I guess near the end, time is the only one left with a sense of humor, and it can be cruel.

In a talk with HCC students, at the One Book One College event, Sergio Troncoso spoke about being bilingual.

"Knowing more than one language can open so many doors. It can make you the smartest person in the room. Learning about other cultures helps us to grow and knowing the language of those cultures makes that process easier," Troncoso said.

My grandfather was funny. I know that, and I can hold onto that. I can't accurately categorize his humor. Maybe satiric, maybe anecdotal, maybe ironic, or hyperbolic. If I had to put money on it I would say he was deadpan. I'll never know for sure. I do know however that he loved me and I love him. That never needed translation.

# Welcome to my Tragedy

By *Nhathalie A. Jean-Baptiste*  
Staff Writer

When you are a child you would never imagine your parents would go through a divorce. When the stepparents come into the picture, whether it's months or years later, you enter the world of the unknown.

There are different flavors of stepparents, from the ones that will buy your love to the ones who are a lost cause.

If you happen to hit 21 with wonderful stepparents, good for you, but in my case, I had the stepmother from hell. At thirteen I never thought my life would become another Disney movie with a twist of fate.

Her name is M, and she was the ultimate justification of what made evil stepmothers in Disney movies seem so realistic. She was everything any child of divorce feared they will get.

She made it easy to hate her, which made me feel sorry for her daughter.

"How could someone filled with so much ugliness have a daughter so beautiful?" That was always in my head every time this woman would put me down, and her daughter would attempt to pick me up.

Since she was a hairdresser, she took it upon herself to do my hair when I was nine or ten. I specifically told her my

mother didn't want me to put perm in my hair. What she said to me set the ball rolling for me to never trust her.

"I don't give a damn about your mother," M said. Who says that to a child? Thanks to her and her idiocy she put adult perm in my hair and destroyed it. My shoulder length puffy hair was no longer there. It became this choppy dead hair and because she was such a witch she let my hair get worse instead of taking care of it.

After all that had happened I had moved to Bridgeport with my mother, but felt out of place so she sent me back to Brooklyn where for a year I had lived with an aunt. But because I wanted to live with my father, the following school year I lived with him and my evil ex-step horror.

I lived with them on East 32nd Street, known as the Caribbeans, because it was filled with the rainbow of the Caribbean's. It was here I contemplated suicide, due to depression caused by the Witch. She alone took a thirteen-year-old girl and broke her. I was so broken I didn't pass the eighth grade at St. Rose of Lima, which led to me being completely catatonic.

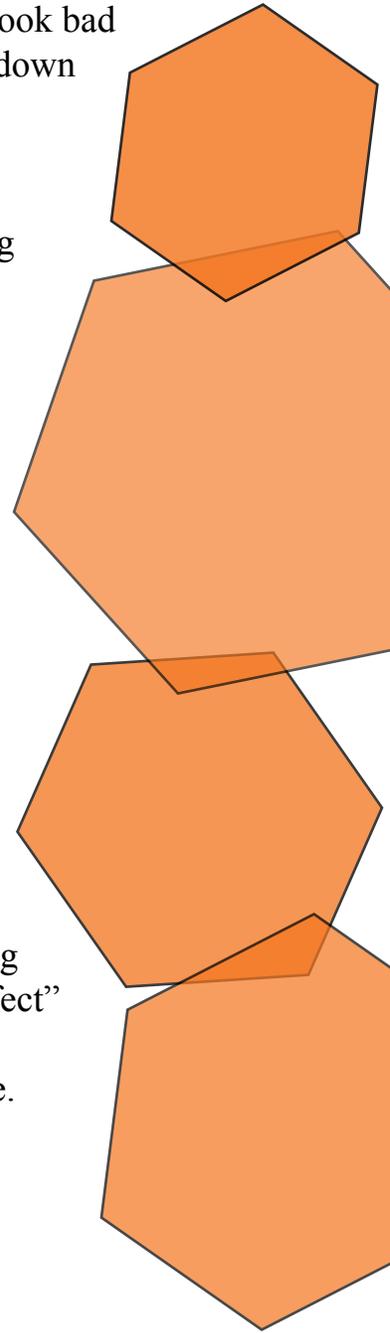
She was the main factor to my misery. She would occasionally have clients over at the house when she had an off day from the salon she worked at. She would verbally bash me to her clients and act as if I was not there and watching tv and I could hear her.



My aunt was also a client of hers. She felt so offended that she had defended me and gave her some words of her own. Because of that day, she made it her duty to make it a living hell for me and so I complimented her evilness with my annoyance. She had one rule: Do not go in her and my dad's room. I didn't listen. I was so much in pain in anger that somehow I made it my business to retaliate in my own way. It didn't work, because what happened next was the answer to her winning. The first time I tried to kill myself was after she had embarrassed me in front of her colleagues when I had to go with her somewhere. She bad mouthed me to her coworkers and I just acted as though the words she said didn't hurt me. I couldn't show her my weakness. I didn't want to let her win, but she kept on adding fuel to the fire. So much so that two days later I set a fire in my room and closed my bedroom door, stuffed a towel underneath it and shut my window and laid in my bed crying waiting for my death of smoke inhalation. Right when I started smelling the smoke coming up I fell asleep and awoke to an angry M. She was yelling at me, because there was a big black burn mark on the floor, but I just ignored her. I wanted to know why I was still alive and in misery still. Once she left my room I saw a cross appear in the burned spot, but I just ignored that too.

The next time I wanted to die was two months after my first suicide attempt. It was the worst day of my life. This person, again, embarrassed me in front of her clients and also tried to make me look bad in front of my friend J, who lived down the street from us.

When she said all those horrible things about me to my friend I felt embarrassed and that following night I called my mother and blantly started blaming her and my father for my misery, "If you and daddy just stayed together I wouldn't be in this much pain, you both do not care about me!" "I wish I was dead!" After I had my outburst that night my parents spoke to one another and decided that I was going to need counseling again. That following weekend was the longest it could've have ever been. She was home all weekend and, adding insult to injury, she kept on verbally abusing me and comparing me to her "perfect" daughter, E., who was five years older than me and was never home. I could see it in her eyes that she enjoyed breaking me, and that is what made me depressed and want to die the second time.



> This time I tried to drown myself in the bathtub. I was home alone and so I decided to lock the bathroom door and run the water in the tub. Once it was filled up I got in and put my head under the water, eyes closed and waiting for my breath to disappear. Nothing happened.

My last and third attempt happened to be two weeks later, I couldn't bear living with this woman's constant taunts, verbal abuse and embarrassments of me. So I took a knife to cut myself. The knife didn't even break my skin. As I was trying to cut myself I heard a voice and it was telling me, "You are who you are, and you are my child wanting death, will not give you life."

After I heard that I began to try to get better, but it was hard because of constant jabs M would hit me with.

Her taunting made me sad, depressed and it lowered my self-esteem. My self-esteem was so low I failed to concentrate in school and constantly bursting out in tears. There were also days I was a complete zombie. You would think going to counseling would've helped me, but it didn't. It's hard to try to recuperate and become a new you when a constant reminder of your pain is in your face everyday.

So I continued to get more depressed and as I sank into my abysmal end I started thinking. "What does it feel like to have a great stepparent?" was a question I asked myself. I always wondered if I was actually within reality. I felt as though I was in the twilight zone. I couldn't believe that I was really in a situation I had no control over.

After I had this horrible experience that led to my failing the eighth grade, I returned back to Bridgeport.

For years I have held resentment towards M, but just last year I finally forgave her. The only reason I chose to forgive her was because I learned from J that M has ended in the dumps. The only bad outcome of her punishment, was that her daughter, E had also ended with backlash.

That is why the Golden Rule is and always will be "Treat others the way you would want to be treated." Because karma always come in full circle.

She probably thought she broke me, but it will take more than what she did to me to end me.

I won, and she lost, as it should be. I am no longer that little girl, I am a grown young woman and aspiring my dreams.

# I Am My Own Border

By Julian Fountain  
Senior Staff Writer

> Growing up in a household with a single mom, everyone always expects the worst from you. Through the years, I hear people tell me, “You look just like your father,” or they’ll say, “Julian, don’t do that. You’re acting just like your dad.”

It’s like living in the shadow of a stranger. Many people would see this as a chance to give up and make an excuse, but I am different. I see this as my opportunity to show everyone who has a negative view of single parent households, what good can come from them.

I want to lead by example and shock many people. Every day I carry this chip on my shoulder that I work through, and even though I do not constantly think about it, all the quotes live in the back of my mind. I would not call this a border to cross but I compare it more to a trip. I am on the road to success and this weight I carry every day is my luggage. I could never understand why people would say something to me about a person I barely know is real. The hardest thing may be trying not to become someone you don’t know. I put pressure on myself to not be a quitter and to not give up on the people I care about. Many people have written stories about crossing borders, but it has become apparent to me

that I have not crossed mine yet. At one point, I was struggling with PTSD from an incident where my lungs collapsed so I had to see a professional and talk to her to avoid myself from experiencing “flare ups.” In these “flare ups” I would have I would feel myself struggling to breathe and within minutes my body would get completely numb. In the short three visits we had she told me I would experience these issues because of all the pressure I was putting on myself.

“At that point it may even be worse because I would feel the pressure of two parents looking at me not to fail, when in reality they probably would love me regardless of if I fail or not.”

I do not blame my absent father for the pressure I am feeling. In fact, I feel like even if he were in my life I would still be the same way. At that point it may even be worse because I would feel the pressure of two parents looking at me not to fail, when in reality they probably would love me regardless of if I fail or not. This is my life and these are the borders I face. My absent father is just an excuse for me to be overly harsh on myself and demand nearly the impossible out of my life. In the end the only border I need to overcome is me.

# Rock My World

By Lauren Pettinella  
Contributing Writer

My parents divorced when I was twelve years old, and, boy, did I believe that my world was rocked. I was slithering through middle school with two parents who absolutely hated each other, a brother who was too young and naïve to understand, and a severed family. Growing up no kid wanted to see their parents split up. In fact when I heard the news, I truly thought my world had ended. In the coming years, I spent half of my life with my dad and half with my mom. I lived out of a duffle bag and bounced between two houses every three days for as long as I can remember. I wouldn't say it was ideal, but I still had a life better than some, and so I learned to accept it and even embrace it.

When I was in eighth grade, my dad brought home this woman, a woman who I will admit I absolutely despised when I first met her. She was only thirteen years older than me, a young blonde in her 20's with questionable intentions with my father. She was a poor communicator, at times extremely timid, and didn't seem to have a grip on her own life, let alone my dad's. She was beautiful with tattoos all over, and bright blue eyes – you could say I was intimidated. As a teenager I wreaked absolute havoc on their relationship, and in hindsight I probably made their unconventional love stronger. I was stubborn, wretched, and downright rebellious. I was hard on her for the little things; I was opinionated and

outspoken. I never really took the time to get to know her on a deeper, personal level. And often would find myself in a situation where it was her against me, or maybe that was just in my mind. But in the end none of it mattered because they got married, a wedding in Key West, despite the thoughts and opinions of everyone around them.

As the years went, on I would say that my relationship with Pam gradually improved. She started to become more outspoken, joking, and loving. We had our moments, but I recognized that she really loved my dad, and I valued her place in his life. She was now openly affectionate with my brother and me, reassuring us that she thought of us as her own. She cooked us dinner, did the laundry, and put presents under the tree at Christmas time. To this day, I credit her with being one of the most thoughtful people I have ever known. And like a light switch goes off, one day I sat back and realized that despite what I thought was life altering at one point really wasn't that bad. I learned to accept and embrace her.

Less than a year ago I had settled myself into bed early knowing I had to be at work in the morning. I had decided to sleep at my mom's house that night for various reasons and without thinking twice nodded off into a deep

sleep. At about 10:30 that night my cell phone rang, and by some fate it was loud enough to wake me. It was my brother, who was home at my dad's. "Pam's in cardiac arrest, I need you to come here."

I thought that I heard him wrong, how could my perfectly healthy, perfectly young, step mother be dead? I asked a few more questions, threw on some clothes and raced to the hospital. I parked my car in the emergency

the doors and I jumped out. I spotted my dad walking from the second vehicle towards the ambulance and I ran towards him, the tears streaming endlessly down his face. "What happened?" I asked him, and he sobbed a quick story for me as I hugged him. The grip on this hug was tight enough to burst all of the air from my lungs. He laid his head on my shoulders and let his body's weight lay into me, weak at the knees with no more energy to



"As a teenager I wreaked absolute havoc on their relationship, and in hindsight I probably made their unconventional love stronger. I was stubborn, wretched and downright rebellious."



department parking lot, turned the ignition off and laid my head down on the steering wheel. Being an EMT, I knew what this phone call meant. I knew that I had beaten the ambulance to the hospital because something was very wrong. I knew that my brother got the term "cardiac arrest," from my dad who is a paramedic, who just had to do CPR on his own wife in his home. I knew that she was going to this particular hospital because she was not stable or viable enough to be transported elsewhere. I knew what all of this meant, and I laid my head down and prayed that there was some chance this was all a mistake.

I heard the sirens coming down the road, and sure enough it was an ambulance from my town followed by another emergency vehicle. I waited for the ambulance to park in front of

endure the next minutes, days or even hours. Like an aerial shot from the movies, where the camera spins upward and away from a scene, there we were standing at the back doors of the ambulance, watching our own friends (the paramedics) run a code on Pam as we stood there, capable of the job, yet helpless. Through the back windows we could see the CPR on her little body and we knew that they hadn't gotten a pulse back. The IV lines dangled amongst the cluster of various medications, equipment and people. A tube down her throat, a bag breathing for her, a mechanical heart beat were among the horrors observed. I grabbed my dad and dragged his hunched body aside, punched the code for the emergency departments' door and sat him down in the waiting room. More and more family and

friends were arriving to the hospital, and after what felt like an eternity the doctor came in and said “I’m afraid I’ve exhausted every possible option.” Time stood still for a moment, the sound of only crying was deafening, the emotion inconsolable. At 32 years old, there she was in a hospital bed, dead without a damn reason.

In the coming hours, even days, I was really angry. I didn’t understand how such a thing could happen, or better yet why it did happen. I struggle with the thought of “well what if I had been home,” even though I know it wouldn’t have changed the outcome. I questioned how the same God I prayed to that night could let such a thing happen. I thought about my brother and my dad, and wondered how many times the same people had to be “taught a lesson,” before it was someone else’s turn to hurt. My heart ached for her mom and dad who had just lost their only child, their legacy. I drove my dad home that night, dead set on the road ahead, I stared with only the hum of the engine to be heard. Had my world really just been rocked, again?

In the days since Pam’s death, which at this point is nearing a year, I have learned so much about myself and the world around me. To this day I carry guilt with me that I had been so awful to her when she was alive, and I now don’t have to opportunity to make it up to her. As the time went on with Pam I started to see her and love her for who she was, and not what I thought she was in my head. While I was convinced that I was mature before, her death played a huge

part in me *really* growing up. I have since made myself make a conscious effort to see people for who they really are, and not by what is on the surface. I like to believe that with every trial and tribulation we face there is a lesson to be learned, in short I learned that life is too short to be anything but genuine. I now choose to love and accept people in any and every form.

A teacher of mine once said “It’s not what you say to someone, but how you make them feel” and I’ve started to live by this. Pam’s death was a border for me because I choose to no longer judge books by their covers. I give everyone the benefit of the doubt, I wear my heart on my sleeve and I love openly and largely. And, most importantly as cliché as this sounds, I implement all of this into my everyday life because as this universe has shown me: life is too short. You really, never know when your last moment with someone will be so choose to do good and be good. So like every other curveball life has thrown me, even though I don’t agree with it, I have learned to accept her death. My tribute to her is using what she’s taught me since she left to clean my lenses on life, and use them to better myself.

# I Just Want a Reason for My Tears

By Kathleen Chaves  
Managing Editor

> Leaving work late at night, as I walked to my car I felt it boiling inside of me, a volcano of emotion ready to erupt. When I hit the cool summer air, the tears started to flow. I ran to my car, fumbled with my keys and slammed the car door. I didn't turn the car on. I just sat there staring at my steering wheel as the tears fell onto my dress pants. I searched through my car for a tissue box as my sobs got louder and the tears fell faster. I gave up looking for the tissues and I wiped my face with my hands. Time seemed to stop, as I was gasping for breath holding my arms and trying to will myself to stop scratching them. When the tears started to slow down, I looked in the mirror. I noticed how red my face had gotten and how my face and hair were covered in tears and sweat. I looked down at my phone to see texts from my mom and sister asking where I was and if I was okay. On the drive home I had the windows down to cool myself off. This wasn't anything new for me, but it still worried my mom and stepdad when I came home and my face was bright pink, and my nose was running from my tears.

Depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorders aren't beautiful or an excuse.

They are not some pretty girl or handsome guy sitting alone, sad at a table, while others are having fun. Having a breakdown isn't a person crying and someone immediately coming to their aid. It is crying yourself to sleep, but trying to do so quietly because you are afraid your family will wake up and hear you. It is sitting in the parking lot at work late at night, screaming and crying, finally releasing all of the pent up emotions that you

have been holding in for months. Depression is being invited to go out with your friends, laying on your bed for hours debating if you should even go, and then when you finally go you have the most fun you've had in years. It is the person you sit next to in class who you've always known as happy, helpful, carefree, and always having a smile on their face.

Mental disorders are not what the movies show you. They are not something that someone temporarily goes through and then they are magically cured toward the end. Mental disorders are real, more real than some people think, and everyone deals with them differently for their entire lives. People may not think that they are real or even a disorder, but they very much are. You don't have to have gone through a traumatic experience to develop a disorder, it can be something as simple as a chemical imbalance in your brain; that is how my own psychiatrist explained it to me.

So often people joke about how they are acting erratically because "they didn't take their medication." People romanticize having a mental disorder, whether they are doing so for attention is something that I do not understand. Mental disorders put people at a crossroads. There are times where I don't know what I should do, if I should go out. Sometimes I will just lay in my bed for hours with no motivation to get out of bed, to go to work or talk to people. I try and cross my own mental border each and every day of my life.

When I tell people about my mental disorders they are surprised, mostly because I don't seem like a person that would have such a disorder. I usually try to stay happy, helpful, and fun. I try to hide it and not let it take over my life. I tend to



being a good singer, and for the birthmarks on my lips. I never thought I was good enough and thought that the girls in my classroom or my dance class were making fun of me. When I was little I was bullied, and it was something that I became used to, until I went to a new school and people embraced the things that I was originally bullied for. However, there were still times where I would wonder if I was even worth being alive. All of this at a young age. I would have times when I would lock myself in my room and cry for no reason for hours. While I was very young I developed a nervous tick which when I got older I realized was my own version of physical self harm. I would scratch my arms red and raw and would end up drawing blood if I couldn't stop. This nervous tick is something that I have carried into adulthood.

It wasn't until I was eighteen that I went to my doctor, whom I have known my entire life, and he diagnosed me with moderate depression and anxiety. He told me that because he had known me for so long he noticed the changes that I have gone through. It wasn't just puberty, it was something deeper. I had gone from a happy little girl who would always smile at him and would look at him with big wondrous brown eyes, to a teenager who would barely talk and smile.

I would cry all of the time and question my self-worth. I would lock myself in my car when leaving work and just sit there and cry loudly for sometimes even an hour. That was when I knew I needed help. From there my doctor suggested that I see a psychiatrist.

On the day of my appointment I was so nervous, I didn't know what was going to happen. I sat down with a doctor and they properly diagnosed me with anxiety and depression. They matched me with a psychiatrist. After a few sessions I finally felt my disorder coming through and I was understanding it. I started to see my psychiatrist every Wednesday after school for about six months. I told her that a hobby of mine was writing creatively. I was told to tap into my love for writing and bring my disorder through to it to understand it. I promptly bought a journal, a Mickey Mouse one, and created characters of all of my feelings, I carried this journal with me everywhere. This was a time before Disney's Inside Out. Interesting-

keep it to myself and go about my daily life with work and school. I am going to school for something that I enjoy, and I keep my disorders at bay. There are times where they shine through a little, but I have learned to keep them in check. When I need to give myself time, I will try to relax my mind and clear my head. Sometimes I'll practice some slow breathing, I'll go for a long drive with my windows down and blasting my favorite music, or I'll even just make a cup of tea and breathe in the sweet, calming scent of it.

Depression and anxiety are things that I have dealt with my whole life without even noticing it. Growing up, even as a young child, I would have times where I would hate myself or wonder why I would get self-destructive thoughts. In elementary school I would be teased for having not the straightest teeth,

ly enough, the sadness that I personified looked a lot like the character Sadness from Inside Out. I found that personifying my feelings and writing everyday helped me whether it was journalistically or creatively.

I started to write more. It went from being a hobby to becoming a passion. I would start to write during positive moments of my life rather than the ones that would get me down. I would put down the date and explain the entire positive situation and would include a positive quote to end it with.

I wrote them as letters to my future self. Whenever I am feeling down I still look through that journal and I can't help but smile. It is a reminder that even when the world seems dark and gray it is just a bad moment, not a bad life. During that time period I was put on an antidepressant. I would take it at the

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same time every day and I was hoping it would help me feel better in some way. It actually made me feel worse. When I went back to my doctor they brought the dosage up to see if it would help. She told me it was normal for the medication to make patients feel worse at first.

A couple months later I stopped seeing my psychiatrist. I understand that they help people and I encourage anyone who needs to talk to a doctor, please do so. Don't hide behind your feelings. My choice to stop was a personal one. I felt that though it started to help a little it wasn't making my feelings change. I was still a person very against herself. I would still bring myself down, and I started to get more anxious. I even had very suicidal thoughts even though I knew I wouldn't do anything to harm myself.

I only had a couple of friends and never had a boyfriend so I didn't have many people that I could vent to and suicide wasn't something that I wanted to share with people. In my self-deprecating mind I thought that they wouldn't see it as a cry for help, I thought people would see it as a cry for attention.

There was a moment when I did feel on top of the world, my doctor even brought my diagnosis down from moderate to mild.

Then when I was twenty-two I was diagnosed with mild bipolar disorder, and my depression and anxiety were brought back up. This was a disorder that was difficult for me to grasp. I wasn't sure how I developed it. Due to my list of disorders I talked to my doctor for help about how to cope with it. I was put on an anxiety medication that I take twice a day now. It helps me calm myself down and reduces any anxiety that I would normally get for no reason. It was around this time that I found a new love for writing. I found the right people and have become amazing friends with them. They helped spark my creative interest again. Writing was originally just something I did to block my disorders. After a while I lost interest in writing and thought that I just had writer's block. I now know that it was actually my disorders that were blocking me from doing what I love. For a while I was lost and just going through the day to day. Now that I have grown older and have learned how to cope with my disorders I have found a way to help channel it into my writing, and use it as fuel to grow my writing interest. I have found a new self love and I am now going to school for something that I love. Something that is for me. I got rid of the toxic people in

my life, found a few new friends and kept some old ones who all love me for me, mentality and all. They are trustworthy people who I know will be there for me no matter what.

Don't hide your feelings. Do what you love; what makes you happy. If you love it it is worth something in the long run. Your story isn't over yet. If you are in pain and are thinking of suicide don't do it. There are so many things to live for. Seek help. There are always people around to help. Mental disorders are no joking matter. They are very real and so so scary, but no one is alone.

# Coloring in The Back

By *Emily Aquilino*  
*Editor*

Ever since I was a child, my mom would cry and I would comfort her. My mom didn't have an easy life, to think of it, neither did I... But she probably wouldn't think of that because she's too busy thinking about herself. Some people aren't meant to be parents; unfortunately they still are. This may sound harsh because it is.

I sit in the back of a crowded church hall, with the aroma of coffee and nicotine, using my rainbow crayons to color in my new coloring book. I look up, from the masterpiece I'm creating, as my mom begins to speak, "Hi, I'm Sheri, and I'm an alcoholic and an addict." The crowd responds with, "Hi Sheri!" and my mom continues speaking. Adding more to my masterpiece, I think about how popular my mom is. She has so many friends that are so interested in what she's saying.

Once she's done speaking, my brother and I join the circle. Holding my mom's and brother's hand, the group says in unity, "God grant me the serenity, to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Keep Coming."

The crowd breaks away, and men come up to my mom telling her how strong she is to be here with her children. "AJ, Is Mommy Su-

perman?" I whisper to my brother. He rolls his eyes as he responds, "No buttface, Mommy's not actually strong."

After my parents divorced, my mom had a lot of men in and out of her life. She was in recovery, so all of the men she got involved with came from Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.

Inevitably that's how she crossed paths with Joe, who became her second husband.

Joe was different, not only did he love my mom, but he loved my brother and I. For the first time in my life, even though it was short lived, I felt that I had the chance to really have a normal family.

Too bad life isn't a fairytale, and there's rarely happy endings.

Joe had neck problems that required surgery. After the surgery, he got prescribed strong painkillers and as a result became a completely different man. This once easy-going guy turned into a ticking time bomb who would explode at any given moment.

At the time, I had no idea that he had become addicted to the painkillers the doctor prescribed. He and my mom would fight all the time, and I was always the one trying to defuse the situation.

One day, Joe and my brother got into an altercation that resulted in Joe holding a knife to my broth-

er's throat. I cried and begged him to put the knife down. My mom watched silently from a distance, debating whose side she should take...

That day, Joe moved back home to his mom's house; a month later, he was found cold and blue on the couch. Never to be seen again. My mom would spend countless hours grieving, and I would always try and cheer her up, but nothing worked until another man, Tom, caught my mom's attention in the rooms of AA.

They dated for eight years, and he did a lot for my brother and I. Whenever we needed help, were in trouble, or just needed someone to talk he'd be there.

My mom, being sober for a long time, began sponsoring a friend. Her sponsee was like family to us, and would always be over our house. But she and Tom became awfully close, and he cheated on my mom, and left her for her sponsee.

I was trying my hardest to hold all of us together; until something so bad happened, that our fall was imminent; like pouring gasoline on a fire, things only worsened from here.

I suddenly became nauseous, as my brother and I, walked into the funeral home. Everyone froze and stared at us, debating whether or

# Of An AA Room



not they should express their condolences.

My brother whispers to me, “Em, I really can’t do this.”

I take a deep breath, as I reassure him,

“Yes you can, I’m right here. We’re in this together.”

I know I’m lying to him, I can’t do this either, but I have to stay strong for him because no one else will.

Kneeling at the casket, I look over to see my brother’s face begin to boil and tears fill his eyes. Immediately, he gets up and runs to the nearest exit, and I swiftly follow behind him. Tears come pouring out of him while lighting a cigarette.

“Why Tom?!” He says, as the anger rises inside him. Throwing his phone, and smashing it to bits.

“Calm down, you’re making a scene,” my mom says, walking up to us.

“How the F\*\*\* do you expect me to calm down when the closest person I ever had to a father just killed himself?” My brother replies, and I see the fury in his eyes. He rips his tie off, and begins to start punching the fence.

I begin to walk up to him while my mom says to me, “He needs to cut this out. I’m the one who should be upset.” I cannot believe this woman has no compassion for her own son. She always has to make

everything about herself. Since my mom is incapable of understanding that her son’s upset, I go up to my brother, and his tears explode on my shoulder.

When Tom killed himself, everyone lost it, besides me. My mom began drinking again to cope with her feelings, and my brother developed an addiction of his own. I had to stay strong because if I wasn’t, no one would be.

Picking my mom up, drunk, on the bathroom floor became a routine, along with her telling me how much I ruined her life. Most of the time, she didn’t even remember her cruel words the next morning.

When she wasn’t inebriated, she would cry to me, looking for pity. My mom woke me up one morning, a week before the fall semester started, telling me that she was moving to Florida in a month, and I had to figure out somewhere else to live because she was tired of being a parent... I just lost it.

“You were never a parent to me anyways! Good! Go! No one will miss you anyways!” I said.

“You and your brother suck the life out of me, and I’m done with it. Let your father be the parent for once,” she replied.

“I suck the life out of you?! You must be insane, do you realize how much bullshit you put me through, throughout the years?” I screamed.

“Poor Emily, has to grow up and be an adult. When I was twenty-one, I was living on my own and working full-time,” she sarcastically said.

“Times change! No one can get a good job without a degree these days. I’m trying to better myself, and all you do is try and bring me down,” I said, storming out the door. I knew I would never win this fight.

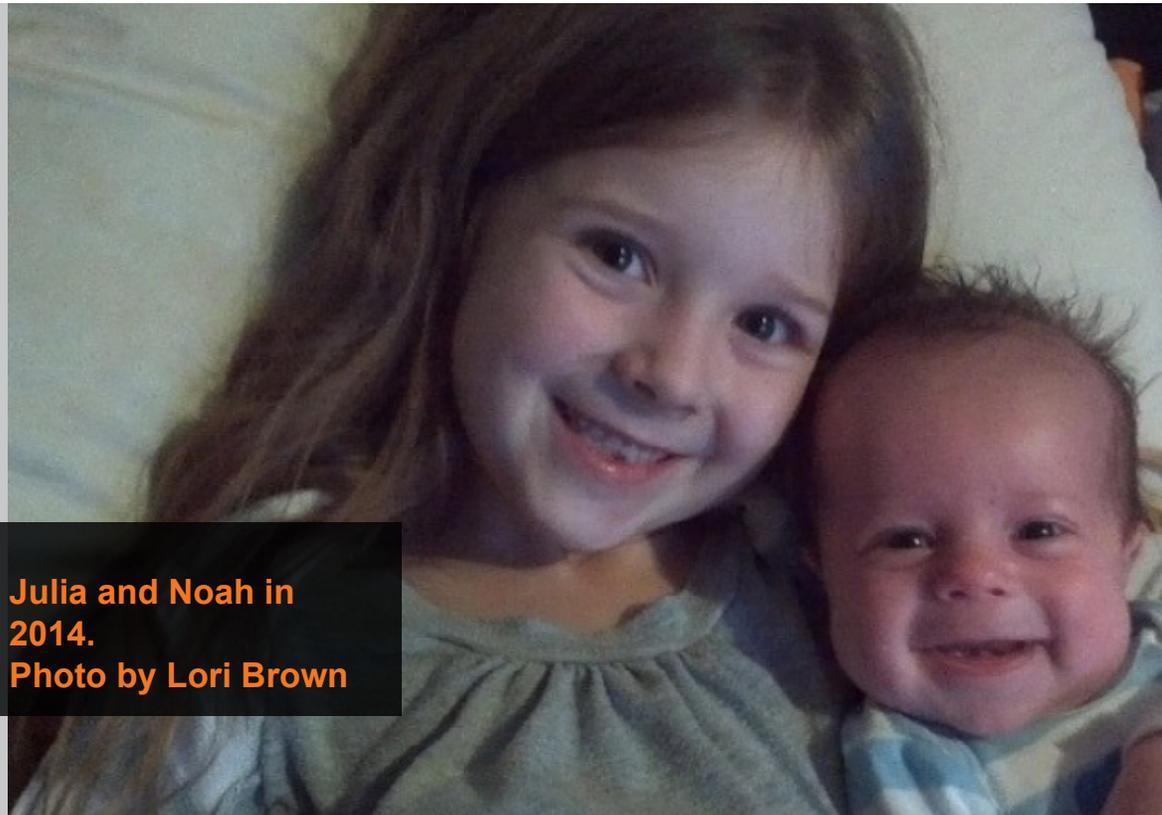
She never once considered that her daughter might need her to step up and be the parent, for once in her life. How much weight of hers I held, and I was starting to crumble; except, she never realized that, so I began to become apathetic.

I am tired of being the strong one. The one who has to hold other people together. I did not choose to be strong. I was forced to be strong because she couldn’t be. I have been asked to be the strong one my entire life, but what if I wanted to be weak for once? What if I needed a shoulder to cry on? Would she be there? Would she even notice? Or Care? I am so numb from having the pressure put on me throughout the years, that I doubt I would even be able to cry. The truth is; holding everyone up for so long has turned me into a robot. I used to be this empathetic girl; now, I just think everyone is pathetic.

# Ten Years At A Time

By Isabelle Brown  
Senior Staff Writer

**T**he way I see it, without borders to cross, life is at a standstill. With no new territory to conquer, we are sinking in the sand. As we mature, we outgrow the challenges that face us. As children we struggle with aches of adolescence, passing phases that seem to change like the seasons. We are so ready to grow, our minds soaking up new ideas every day. Self growth is tender and different for everyone. Each person finds their own way of life, and unique ways of keeping track of their time on Earth. Patterns naturally keep daily life as predictable as possible. We are conditioned to keep it clean and consistent. Every person has their own set of expectations and timelines for themselves. My sister says her life changes direction every six months. Since she became aware of this,



**Julia and Noah in 2014.**  
Photo by Lori Brown

she has mastered the art of change. Understanding the pace of your personal growth is key. In recently turning 20, it struck me that this marks my second decade on Earth. Decades have always been a big deal to me. In the groove of things, my life tends to dramatically change every ten years. We always celebrate things turning 10. Women cry when they turn 30. We treasure things that turn 50. On 100th birthdays, we treat things as

historic. Decades are huge milestones, and are so important to self image and growth. Even in nature, decades seem to matter. The Grand Canyon fills entirely with a misty fog approximately every 10 years, and it makes me wonder if this phenomenon is a total cleanse of the decade that has passed. Like the Grand Canyon, I am swept away with a refreshing, new aspect of life with each passing de-

cade. I seem to develop a different sense of self as I cross the border into each new decade of life. When I turned 10, I became very aware of the fact that I was growing up. All I had ever known was being the baby of the family until my sister Julia was born that year. She taught me how to be a role model and showed me responsibilities that, at 10, I never thought I would learn from a baby. Born on the day of my All-Star softball game, from day one, Julia was



a gift. From the very start I felt like it was my place to become her ultimate best friend. My older sisters influenced me greatly, and I wanted Julia to have someone special to look up to. As years pass, it seems unreal to watch Julia grow up before my eyes. It feels strange seeing her looking more like me every day.



**Julia blowing out the candles on her 10th birthday. Photo by emotional older sister (me)**

When Julia turned 10 I couldn't help but sail back in time to my own self celebrating my 10th birthday, feeling like I was getting so old.

Even more ambitious than me, Julia feels the same way I did. Being 10 has given her a new drive and direction in her life, because she has someone looking up to her now.

"I can't decide between being a doctor or the first woman president," Julia says all the time. Our nephew, Noah, sees Julia as more than future president, but a super hero.

When we built an addition on our house so Noah and our sister Jess could move back home, 10-year-old Julia took the role of aunt extremely seriously.

Julia's intelligence and kindness shine when she interacts with Noah. She transforms into a little mom, just like my mom used to say about me with baby Julia.

This change, at age 20, has only increased the love in my heart with Noah running around our house with a new golden retriever puppy, Charlie Brown, in the mix. I just wish our house had more than one bathroom.

Transitions are hard, but the support of family and friends



**Julia playing softball in 2016. Photo by Lori Brown**

lightens the load. This is my second year at HCC, and making decisions for my future is on my long list of priorities as I work part time at CVS and babysit every chance I get.

Rushing out of class at 3:20 to get home for Julia's school bus is my daily mission. Being Noah's godmother and aunt is a constant adventure with a 3-year-old boy. Walking Charlie and training her to fight her puppy instincts to chew every shoe in the world is the latest addition to my time spent in mom mode.

The border crossed from 19 to 20 is one that affects me everyday. I

still feel like such a kid, but being 20 feels so different. I feel bad when I act like a teenager, because I no longer have "-teen" trailing off the end of my age. It feels false that I could be this old when I still cry during the first five minutes of "Up."

The beautiful things and people that come into my life seem to work with the groove that flows through each passing day, and make me hopeful for the decades to come.

It makes me wonder what my third decade will bring. The river of fog that settles in the Grand Canyon, the natural phenome-

non, replenishes the earth with the cold, fresh air it bears. I love the idea of 10 years being wiped clean; a new start to life.

Turning 30 is far away, but I know when I get there I will think about how quickly time flies. For now, the borders to cross on the horizon are nothing but more to look forward to.



Julia and I in 2009.  
Photo by Lori Brown

# What If America Loved Black People As Much As They Love Black Culture?

By Iesha Brown, Staff Writer

I came across a quote that said, “Have you ever done a project and got a bad grade on it, but then someone else does the same thing and gets an A?” After reading that, I thought to myself, “Wow, that’s a perfect example of cultural appropriation.”

That very same day I saw a picture of a girl who looked like she was Spanish. She looked like she was ready to go hang out with her home girls. I say home girls because she was dressed like me, a girl from the hood. But when I realized who the person that was tagged in the picture was model Bella Hadid, I was livid. I wanted to know who was the photographer or creative director behind this shoot. Bella Hadid is a model who grew up rich. She probably never stepped foot in someone’s hood. So why is she dressed like Jenny from the block? Are girls from the hood good enough for people to bite off of their style, but not good enough to be featured in ad campaigns?

That will forever be the question lingering because celebrities like the Kardashians steal styles, and then the world thinks they just created something new, like the boxer braids frenzy. Even saying those words makes me want to suck my teeth and roll my eyes because they’re called French braids or corn rows. I would know because I’ve been getting them since I was a child. When I see these hairstyles that I’ve been getting for years all of a sudden become some new trend because some celebrity that has nothing to do with the culture is wearing them, I can’t help but be upset.

Some people that would argue that because people like Kim Kardashian West are married to black men that automatically makes them a part of black culture. Yet this doesn’t make them a part of black culture because they haven’t contributed anything to the black community.

Here’s the thing. I’m not just blaming the celebrities. The public is at fault too. They are the ones going crazy for these so-called trends. I was surprised when I saw there was a Kylie Jenner lip challenge on Instagram. According to The Washington Post, “The dangers of ‘plumping that pout’ ... After placing their lips into the shot glass, they suck the air out of the glass, creating friction.” This is what peo-

ple were doing to achieve a look that Kylie Jenner couldn’t even achieve naturally. Black women have been made fun of for years because of their full lips, and now people are paying money to have full lips. Should we be flattered or insulted? Or did the world just forget that they’ve teased little black girls for the same features they are paying money to get?

Chahyra Nixon, a student from HCC, was teased for having big lips, so when she sees celebrities like the Kardashians being praised for their big lips hits home for her. Throughout the years women of color have been criticized for having big butts, big lips, and dark skin, so they have a right to be personally offended when mainstream people like Kylie Jenner are being praised for her botched big lips and all of a sudden it’s a trend. Like we haven’t had big lips since birth. Did people all of a sudden forget the kids they used to tease because of those same features?

I just want celebrities and society in general to give us credit for something we’ve always had. Stop making money off our culture and all of a sudden calling it your own. In the words of Kendrick Lamar, “My DNA is not for imitation.” My culture, which is black culture should be celebrated like all the other cultures. You can do something as simple as just googling where something came from. Don’t just assume something like boxer braids is a new trend because magazines like Vogue or Seventeen said so. Do your research! And if you are a victim of cultural appropriation, don’t assume it’s being done on purpose. Start educating people so cultural appropriation won’t exist.



Illustration by Toni Fowler

# No Sports at School: A Student's Dream

By Carl Simpson  
Staff Writer

A typical day at HCC consists of going to class, hanging out in the student activities area, and hanging out in the cafeteria in between classes. Yes, we are all here to get an education. What else is there to do at HCC? What if we were able to incorporate a sports program for students? What about those student athletes that come out of high school who would love to play basketball, baseball, or even football but don't have the opportunity? What are the barriers holding our school back from bringing a sports program into our school?

As some of us know Gateway Community College has a basketball program for male and female students. Think about how it would feel coming to school knowing your school has a home game at The Bridgeport Arena, or a baseball game at Bluefish. How cool would it be to be able to sell tickets, raise money for our school or even selling sports apparel at the school store? One thing GCC has is a sports program already embedded into their school budget.

A budget? Sounds interesting which brings us to an unfortunate barrier that does not allow us to have a sports program. As Kelly Hope, Director of Student Activities, mentioned,

"There are not enough funds to incorporate a sports program at this time."

Many factors play a role in budget cuts in order to have a sports program.

"This leads to cutting positions at the college, raising tuition cost, there are already positions around campus that are not filled due to there not being enough funds for school," Hope added.

With there already being vacancy spots around campus, this brings us to another major barrier. "If we already do not have enough staff around campus who will run the sports program. We also have to worry about liability issues. Where will our games be held?"

But has there been an attempt made to have sports at school?

"We have met with third party organizations to see if there could be a partnership with the school but unfortunately we could not come up with an agreement," said Hope.

Students in the past have already tried to get school sports going. Unfortunately, nothing was able to be put together. Does that mean we give up? Absolutely not! We stick together to break those barriers and cross those borders to make a way to have a sports program at HCC.

*"There are not enough funds to incorporate a sports program at this time."*



# “Uber” Everywhere, Skrt Skrt <

By *Jailene Cuevas*  
Senior Staff Writer

**N**o matter how many times I tried putting money aside for a car, I always ended up spending it on either food, studying abroad, and credit cards. I never knew how to save money, but once I got a job waitressing, everything changed.

Whenever I decided to study abroad, I always asked myself, “was this really worth not buying a car for?” Of course it was, but being left out by your friends and hearing others say you have money for a trip but not a car really got to me.

Once I bought a red 2015 Fiat 500 in Long Island for \$9,000, I found myself driving everywhere and thanking god everyday for this opportunity. I finally got the car of my dreams and accomplished a milestone in my life.

Having two jobs, one in retail and another waitressing, and going to school had me stressed but I saw myself not going out as much. As soon as I bought my car, I noticed more and more people trying to become my “friend.”

I remember my friends wanted to

go to the bar and I asked everyone to give me five dollars. One person refused to give me five dollars and stopped talking to me since. We get so excited to get a car but there’s consequences as well.

Many students from the age of 18 to 25 try their best to fit in and will do anything possible for that to happen. Leaving high school and going into college, you realize not only do you have to be social to fit in, but having your own car is a big deal.

Once someone turns 16, nothing makes one happier than knowing you are old enough to drive. We go for our permit test which is on a computer and have 25 questions to answer but can only get three wrong to being able to pass. That’s not even the exciting part. It’s the fact that once you have this, you are able to get your license.

Even though this might sound stupid, it is very common for those who are not able to drive and have others use their time and gas, can ruin a friendship. Even if one does not ask for gas money, some expect it and if you do not give it to them,

they will make it a big deal, behind your back.

“I have lost two friendships due to car rides. Even when I’d offer them gas money or to buy them food, I think they forgot about that and kept telling others I was cheap,” says Meagan Silva, a General Studies major.

People do not understand that yes, the person driving the car might take you to your destination but you would expect something back. Whether it is them giving you a ride, gas money, or even buy you food, something helps. If you get nothing back, should you even do anything for them in the future?

Getting a car is such a big accomplishment in your life but once someone wants to kill your vibe about it, you feel like you were better off still asking for rides. But do not feel this way because you finally got what you wanted, so flaunt it!

## Just The Beginning

By Matthew Thibodeau  
Staff Writer

**A**fter long years of grinding out college credits and completing the stressful caffeine driven process you finally obtained that bachelor's degree. But what if I told you that was just the beginning. That the "new" college standard is actually receiving a master's degree. Debra Stewart, President of the Council of Graduate Schools, states "Several years ago it became very clear to us that master's education was moving very rapidly to become the entry degree in many professions." Going to grad school is the new hot trend among college students. The crossing point between bachelor's and master's.

## The Night that Pulled The Trigger

By Chanelle Mattis  
Staff Writer

**D**amn. Why did he have to say that? The event was the 1995 Source Awards aka the night rap took a step in the wrong direction. To clarify for some of you who may not know, during this time rap icon Tupac had just been shot and was serving a sentence in prison on a sexual assault charge. There were rumors going around that Biggie a former friend and another rap legend had something to do with it. It seemed like the rap world was on the edge of an all out war between the East and

West Coast. But it wasn't until Suge Knight owner of Death Row Records who had just signed Tupac to a contract went on stage and dissed P.Diddy, who owned Bad Boy, the label Biggie was signed to. After that night the public immediately took sides and the war had begun. Whatever was left of Tupac and Biggie's friendship had diminished and instead they hated each other until they died. Suge had said the words that crossed a line of a brotherhood that could have been solved but instead turned into hate.

# WHY THE DARK LORD WRITES

*By Emily Aquilino*  
*Editor*

> I write because it is the only way I can distinguish actual reality from the delusions in my head. The art of writing something down is my distinction between the two. If I do not write, how am I sure that an event actually occurred? Was it just a figment of my imagination? This is where why I write becomes confusing because normally writing is a mixture of both reality and imagination.

This is why I write... I love how two people can experience the same event, but perceive it so differently. If you asked both the people to write down what happened during the event, they would most likely write two completely different stories. Perceptions are all we know. No one person perceives life in the same way, so I feel that writing is the only way to understand how another person perceives life.

I want to say I write because I feel that I can help the world one day, but I'm not sure if I mean that. Even if I am writing to better the world, there will still be an underlying selfish act towards it... Maybe I write this amazing book one day, gain a ton of followers, start a cult, and have everyone drink the kool-aid. (I'm joking). Or maybe I write the book just so when I die at least I have something to show for it. I died, but my name remains.

Honestly, I write because it is the only way I am able to



## Drawing By Brenna Haggerty

actually express myself. My voice, humor, sarcasm, the fact that I care too much (even though I put on a false persona in my everyday life that I don't care at all) all is shown in my writing. I am not sure if I would be able to show all of those characteristics of myself at once, in any other way.



# GAMING WHILE BLACK

*By Kent Williams  
Contributing Writer*

I love video games, heck probably more than anyone, but with love comes very harsh criticism. I've been a gamer all my life since the day I was shown an SNES (Super Nintendo) by my uncle. I've been gaming ever since. And in all the years I've never realized how video games were doing certain things that went over my head.

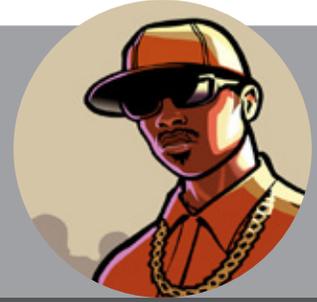
Just about all of the African-American protagonists in gaming carry some type of firearm, from Barret from Final Fantasy VII to Franklin from Grand Theft Auto V. Now all this could be a coincidence, all of this could be just my imagination. Of course there are characters that don't fall into that category like Dudley from

Street Fighter, who is a black character from the U.K. Now let me ask this. Who is the first black character you think of when you think of a black protagonist? Most people will say C.J from Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas or Barret from Final Fantasy VII, which is my point.

I'm a black gamer, a very rare breed if the videogame stereotypes are anything to go by. Being a black gamer made me think and act differently than most. Growing up in a not-so-good city I had to hide the fact that I was a gamer. Why? Because if you played anything other than Call of Duty or NBA2K then you would be ridiculed.

Now I know it's 2017 and the idea of hiding the fact that you're a gamer is crazy, but hey it happens. It wasn't until I was 24 that I realized that it wasn't a bad thing to be a





“ Just about all of the African-American protagonists in gaming carry some type of firearm, from Barret from Final Fantasy VII to Franklin from Grand Theft Auto V. ”

gamer; in fact it is pretty awesome if not expensive.

We just don't have that many black protagonists in the game world that young minorities can look up to. You may say "why would anyone look up to a made up person" when you live around people who you know for a fact are doing the wrong thing then what would you expect. Most of the protagonists we plays as in video games are white protagonists, which I have been doing for years and don't mind. Hell, one of my favorite protagonist of all time is Sora from Kingdom Hearts (who is a badass by the way). And Sora is just as white as they come, a blue eyed, blonde- haired young kid.

Now this whole idea could come from the way society presents black people or minorities in general. With shows cops and Atlanta housewives how would you expect someone outside looking in to react to that.

Many may feel that all minorities are bad people if they continue show the bad aspects of minorities. I know this are just video games and most people don't look at video games as thing more than an expensive kid's toy. Yet to many it's a life choice. As corny as this may sound, for many gamers it's the one thing that kept us out of trouble. So when we decide to look up to certain characters, we should have a decent set of heros or villains to look up to, no matter if they're white, black, green or yellow it shouldn't matter. But if the green kids don't have other green adults to look up to then what would they think of their own kind?



# HCC's One Book One College Crosses Paths with Author Sergio Troncoso

*By Eric Vazquez  
Editor-In-Chief*

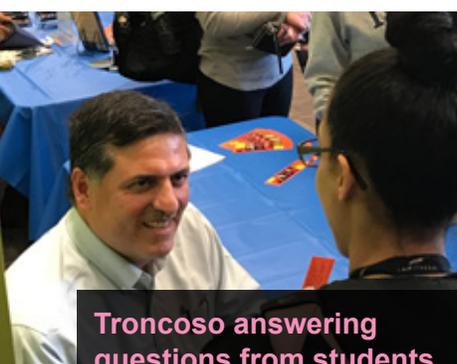
> From page one to the final sentence of any piece of literature, a theme is present. One or many themes in a text can be hidden or obvious, but they are always there, laid out by the author to convey a meaning or belief, an underlying message or even purpose for the story. The themes found in *Crossing Borders* mirror the values that make Sergio Troncoso who he is today; heritage, family, hard work, and of course, the manner in which one crosses the many borders in life.

different settings, over the course of one day. The first event took place early in a Beacon Hall classroom. Troncoso motioned for the students and staff in attendance to fill the empty seats in front, closest to him. Just because they were sitting far away did not make them safe, he said, and he can always spot the students trying to hide. He wanted people to engage, to ask questions, and hopefully relate in some way to the stories he would

other color to create it," Troncoso said, referring to the color of everyone's skin who lived in Isleta, the rough neighborhood in El Paso, Texas, where he was raised. Instead of high school football games, gang rumbles, (not unlike the one depicted in *The Outsiders*, Troncoso's favorite book) complete with chains and knives occurred outside his window every Friday night. His "tough as nails" abuelita killed two men who attempted to assault her. These were the dangerous surroundings that a self-described "fat kid" who liked to read would eventually trade for the pristinely kept campuses of the Ivy League.

"The biggest border I crossed was arriving at Harvard. It was like if I took you and I put you on Mars. I didn't even know where to eat, I just followed Fifteen hour days in the library, and always working harder than the person

Sergio Troncoso, award winning author of *Nature of Truth*, *From This Wicked Patch of Dust*, and *Crossing Borders*, accepted an invitation from HCC to be the subject of this year's One Book One College Event on Thursday, March 30. The annual event allows students and faculty to study a piece of literature and then interact with the writer in a series of talks and Q&A sessions, in three



**Troncoso answering questions from students at the book signing table. Photo by the author**

share with them. "The color brown is the most complex color in the spectrum, it needs every



next to him earned him two graduate degrees from Yale, then he would embark on his career as an author.

The stories of his schooling, his Mexican heritage, his complicated relationship with his father, his mother’s unwavering faith, and his wife’s fight with cancer are all explored in his collection of essays, *Crossing Borders*.

“When I was writing this book I wanted to translate those immigrant values that were good for me at Harvard. I started writing stories with moral questions and philosophical questions that combined these worlds,” Troncoso said.

HCC journalism student Kathleen Chaves read *Crossing Borders* and said she was fascinated with Troncoso’s story.

“I loved hearing about how much he loved his wife in his letters to his sons. He literally did

everything he could for her. Read the last paragraph on pg.55, you’ll get what I mean,” she said.

The afternoon talk, held in the Events Center of Beacon Hall, was crowded and would be followed by a book signing. Though this portion was more formal than the morning session, Troncoso still encouraged the audience to join in. It gave the feeling of being in a conversation rather than listening a lecture.

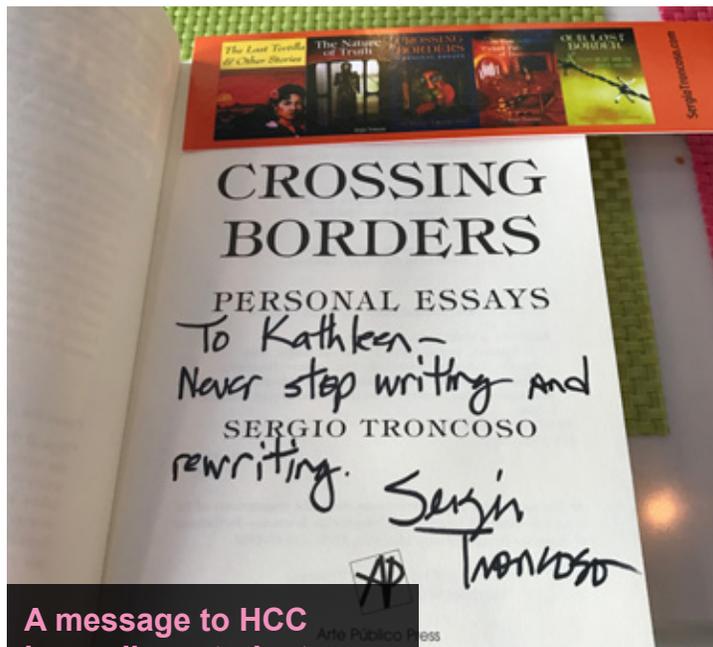
The most consistent theme throughout the afternoon talk was giving back. Troncoso stressed that whatever knowledge one gains in life it is his

or her responsibility to impart that knowledge in a manner that helps someone.

“The knowledge and the power you get you spread to your community. When you cross a border you don’t leave people behind, you help those people who are still back there,” said Troncoso.

The Q&A portion of the One Book One College afternoon event was regrettably cut short to allow enough time for the book signing. Many raised hands belonged to students who would not get to ask their questions to Troncoso, who was so eager to hear

from them that he asked the organizers for more time. He then encouraged students to meet him at the book signing table where he would speak to anyone who wanted to share their thoughts, even if they didn’t have a copy in hand.



**A message to HCC journalism student Kathleen Chaves from Troncoso**



# From Laughs to Shrieks: Jordan Peele's Crossing

By *Martin Fenicien*  
Editor

One of the most watched and controversial movies of 2017 was the racially-charged thriller, "Get Out." The dark comedy (no pun intended)

focuses on Chris Washington, a young black photographer in an interracial romance with his white girlfriend, Rose Armitage. We first meet the couple when he is

## Over for "Get Out" interiors

is slowly justified, but in ways that he would have never imagined.

Chris finds that Rose's parents, brother, and neighbors give him an uneasy feeling. All the

racism--with no white savior in sight--all the while tossing in brilliant motifs to be identified and discussed long after the credits are over. Silver spoons and teacups, the deer, and even the iconic cereal scene were all among them.

It's recommended that the film be viewed a second time, so the viewer can catch all the subtle yet poignant subliminal messages.

Critics and viewers alike were stunned to know "Get Out" came from comedian/actor Jordan Peele of MADtv and Key and Peele fame. This is the same 38-year-old comedian who has a hand in notable sketches such as "Obama's



One of the most watched and controversial movies of 2017 was the racially-charged thriller, "Get Out." The dark comedy (no pun intended) focuses on Chris Washington, a young black photographer in an interracial romance with his white girlfriend, Rose Armitage.



preparing to meet Rose's parents, Dean and Missy Armitage, for the weekend. Chris is understandably anxious, but from the moment he arrives at their estate, his hesitance

while, he puts together pieces to an unsettling mystery shrouded by smiles, community, and the upper middle-class. The film seamlessly executes a fulfilling story about

Anger Translator”, “White Zombies”, and the easily quotable “Substitute Teacher.”

“I had a front-row seat, obviously, in Key & Peele, realizing the power of sketch to help start and inform conversation,” Peele said in an interview with TheVerge.com. “I’m a true believer in story. I think when you just tell people to think, people tend to get resistant and defensive, and feel like you’re accusing them of not thinking.”

Despite the point made about the film being viewed multiple times, it only needs to be seen once to uncover the major message of the thriller as a whole: underhanded racists who swear they are anything but. It would have been easy for Chris to be confronted by backwoods Southerners, spewing slurs and hate at him. That way, the enemy would be someone viewers could detest from their first appearance.

But ultimately, the people Chris can’t seem to trust are the white liberals, which forces the viewers who sees themselves in the Armitages and their circle of friends,

to confront the attitudes and actions they share with them. Something to be addressed is the idea that there is no divide between the backwoods racists and the Armitages, only a simple flip of a coin. This acts a catalyst for yet another conversation about racism in America.

Or does it? African-American Literature Professor Chance commented that those would do well to see the movie would need to be brought in kicking and screaming. “They wouldn’t go see those films, it has nothing to do with them,” Chance says. “But the people who would go and see it are the people who don’t really need it.” Chance also commented on how the film isn’t going to necessarily change things in terms of racial conversations across the country, but more along the lines of the entertainment industry: filmmakers, actors, etc.

While the movie hasn’t single handedly solved racism or make audiences break out into singing Kumbaya, it has the entertainment aspect down packed. Only losing just 1% from it’s 100% rating on Rotten

Tomatoes weeks after its premiere, Get Out is a testament to show that good writing and storytelling can’t be restrained to comedy or horror. It can jump back and forth for all we care. It just needs to be good. And Get Out left viewers wanting back in.



# The Trip of a LIFETIME

By Gianni Sapienza  
Senior Staff Writer

In the summer of 2013, I endured a once-in-a-lifetime journey and traveled through three different European countries in three weeks; France, Italy and England. While there, I learned about the cultures of each country and the difference in how each of them lived versus how us Americans live.

First and foremost, beware of the pickpockets the next time you are traveling to Europe. My family and I were not fully prepared to keep all eyes out. When arriving to each country the first thing you will see are pickpockets on every corner and even waiting for you the second you step off of the train.

Currency is obviously different in Europe, and the euro is stronger than the American dollar, meaning it is worth more money there, which is another drawback for someone who loves to shop like myself.

You will notice when visiting that Europeans are more reserved than us Americans who tend to be much louder. While walking the streets, it is clear who are the tourists and who lives there. The ones that live there are very quiet and seem standoffish because they are probably tired of tourists coming up to them every minute asking for directions or help. They just want to go where they need to go and not be bothered. In addition, when out at stores, restaurants, etc. you will see

that the Europeans don't speak as much as the Americans and seem to be more appropriate.

I have come to the conclusion after traveling to Europe twice in the last couple of years, that America has the finest dining in the world. France and England were two countries that if you are a picky eater, it would be hard to find something you like to eat there. Even if your average cheeseburger is on the menu, it does not taste the same! Americans are so used to the different additives that our food carries and eating bigger portions, whereas in Europe you will see that the portions will not leave you full in the slightest bit.

Of course in Italy, you would think they have the best Italian food, but it is a complete difference from what we are used to with Italian-American food. Being a daughter of an Italian chef who learned how to cook in her grandmother's kitchen, this was something that shocked me. I wouldn't consider the food THAT bad but it would definitely take some getting used to.

The one food I loved out of all of Europe was the pizza in Italy, which again was not even close to being the same as American pizza. The pizza here was made with fresh mozzarella slices and instead of tomato sauce, it was topped with actual tomatoes straight from the garden--mouth-watering, I know.

As we were taking tours of

each country, I noticed one thing each country had in common which was that education is taken very seriously and is extremely difficult in Europe. The academic standard is much higher than in the United States. Students in middle school go to school six times a week and often don't get out until 5 p.m. You can tell how smart these Europeans are while visiting without even knowing about their strict education. The majority of them speak more than one language, unlike in America, where it is sometimes rare.

This trip was truly eye opening for me and something everyone should get to experience once in their life!



# You've Got Your Whole GPA **In Your Hands** <

*By Isabelle Brown*  
*Senior Staff Writer*

The transition from high school to college is a life changing one. We prepare ourselves for the idea that we are becoming adults, responsible for blazing our own paths, no longer controlled by our superiors in a high school setting.

Educationally, things get tougher. Courses get more challenging, less basic. College students have entered uncharted territory as the finish line of high school is crossed.

The difference between being a high school student and a successful college student is staying focused on your academic goals. There is no one to approach you if you're falling behind. In college, the constant support from your teachers goes away. It's not that they don't care if you pass or fail, but they expect you to be the one to care.

High school teachers make it a point to reach out to students that are falling behind or struggling. Tutors are always readily available and students can choose to leave their traditional class to learn one-on-one with the tutor if that fits their needs.

"When I was in high school, I missed a consecutive week of school," future HCC student Sonny Ruskin said. "When I came back, there was a tutor assigned to me waiting to help me catch up. I never had to go out of my way to find help in my classes."

The awakening of how different college is in this situation is one every student must find out on their own. It is a step we must take, learning how to ask for help as an adult.

Reaching out for help when you are struggling is not easy for everyone. For some, speaking up can make you feel vulnerable or scared.

Suffering from anxiety can make it even worse. For me, the sweats and the shakes and the feeling of

panic come on just as I'm approaching the office door of whoever's help I requested. Even advising help with the most pleasant man alive, Steve Mark, can give me a fluttery stomach.

Anxiety is the most common mental health diagnosis in college students. One in six students have it according to Boston Globe health and wellness journalist, Joel Brown. And these students suffer every day. It doesn't just subside because you're at school. For many, myself included, it only gets worse.

Overcoming personal obstacles like these are an everyday occurrence for a college student. Falling behind is easy to do. And it's all up to you to take control and refocus. Professors will not notice your silent suffering. You have to speak up to keep up.

Once a student enters college, the babysitting that teachers used to do vanishes. Professors will not remind a class full of adults to do their homework. They will not call your parents or email your advisor if they see you falling behind. They will just grade you accordingly.

In order to get help in HCC, you have to care enough to do it yourself. The doors to the tutoring center are always open. It just takes the courage to walk in the room and ask for help.

Kevin Fante, HCC graduate, is a math tutor here on campus. "We have over thirty tutors here everyday," he said. "Just waiting for students to come in and use their time productively."

The tutoring center has open availabilities throughout the entire day so students on any type of schedule can fit in a study session.

"We get a lot of students in here who need help," Fante said. "People who recognize that they need help and seek to find it are the ones who you know take pride in their education."

# > What it Means to Forgive

*By Meghan Brooks  
Staff Writer*

Forgiveness...it's a hard word to wrap your mind around. When someone thinks of forgiveness, they believe it is receiving a pardon from an action they did, or that they are forgiving someone else to make things better between them.

But forgiveness does not have to be either of these things. Forgiveness can just be accepting what once was, to accept what is now, and to relieve the person or persons of their actions.

Forgiveness can be for your own peace of mind.

"I forgive you" are some of the hardest words for people to come to, especially when you have to forgive someone who is not sorry. Many people, including me, struggle with the concept of forgiving someone you hate.

My father is one of the greatest people in my life, and I can't imagine anyone holding hatred for him, or saying the vile things I think about saying to someone in my life. There are some days when I see my father on the faces of those who make me angry, and as a result, I look at them with love instead of hate, and respond in the kindest way I can.

Instead of spewing toxic words that do nothing but make me look like a child, I respond with the best kindness I can, and speak to them as I would speak to my father. In many situations, I superimpose my father's face on theirs! With this, I tend to not hold onto anger as much, and can forgive a little easier.

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is an attribute of the strong." Only recently did I come to understand what Gandhi was saying.

Not too long ago, I had to learn what forgiveness was, and how to forgive. And through many months of holding onto my hatred and my anger, I think I've started to learn what it is to forgive.

There are times when I will be doing my homework, or watching TV, or having a conversation with someone and something will remind me of what I'm holding

onto, that I thought I had forgiven. I'll fill with anger, and sadness. The classic "Why did you do this to me, what's wrong with me, what did I do wrong, I hate you!" thoughts tumble uselessly through my mind. I've held onto my anger, my hatred, and my pain like it was a pin on my lapel. Everyone could see it, and everyone could feel it. But over a span of a few months, those feelings are fading. As Mandy Richardson has written, "Forgiveness comes easier with the passing of time."

My best friend Kerensa Higgins follows the same line of thinking, that forgiveness takes time and gets easier over time too. Many nights, she would be on the phone with me for hours, talking about the same things every time. That it's ok to not be ready to forgive, that it's ok to fall backwards in your efforts and be angry.

Kerensa told me one night "Sweetie, you act like you have to forgive her tomorrow and be over it, but that's not how things work. Forgiveness takes time and you will get there. You just have to roll with the punches." Several days and nights have been spent wondering why I can't get over things that were said and done. Several days and nights spend in tears and screaming "Why?!" when there was no real explanation...or closure. For the most part, I've struggled with why I can't let it go, and I'm still struggling.

Though I am still on a course of forgiveness, I have learned that everyone is human, and everyone makes mistakes, even if those mistakes can tear another person apart. I have also learned that it takes more energy to stay angry and hurt, than it does to forgive and move on.

For the most part, I have come to terms with the fact that my hatred is my own, just like the actions of others are their own.

Forgiveness can be difficult to reach, and letting go of an event in your life is even harder. Yet I have learned, and many others seek to learn as well, to never be defined by my past. It was a lesson, not a life sentence.

# No Time

*By Lucas DeSouza*  
Senior Staff Writer

The older we get the less time we have for ourselves. When I was 17, school was the only important thing I had to worry about. At the time I wasn't working, didn't have a job or any bills, and real life hadn't hit me yet. Now looking back, I noticed why schools would put a big emphasis on time management.

Now that I'm in my mid 20's, I feel like I barely have time for anything. During the week from the time I wake up to the time I go to sleep, I am moving around. I can't waste any time if I want to get things done on time. I'm either working out, at football practice, working, or doing school work. It's tough, but the only way I could really learn how to manage everything was to make mistakes and learn from them. Figuring out a way to turn assignments in on time became my main focus.

I had to find out a way to still keep my grades up, so I started doing homework and studying for test at work. Also sometimes to get my workout in, I would have to sacrifice beauty sleep and go to the gym late, or wake up earlier to get it done.

To help me get things done, I make sure I have a planner or mark things down on my phone. Just seeing things being crossed off, gives me motivation to keep going. The improvement of grades gives you the recognition and satisfaction that makes you want to keep going.

When you get older your priorities change, you take them more seriously than when you were a teen. My friends try to make plans, with me, during

the week like movies, happy hour, or just to hang out. Most, if not all the time, my answer is, "I can't". During the weekday, I focus on my priorities, and I tell my friends that I'm only free on weekends.

Some friends don't understand why I always deny their invitations, so they usually just stop asking me to go out. It sucks, but I'm always welcomed back with no hard feelings.

"I feel like you can make time but don't want to," My friend Joe Peppers said, Then I have other friends who are on the same path as me with busy schedules, and who are trying to chase whatever goals they have for themselves. Even though we don't get to hang out much, we still communicate on a daily basis. It can be lonely sometimes, but we are always there for each other to talk and keep each other in positive spirits.

I understand what he has going on and I don't want to slow him down. I am also a busy person and that's why we get along so well," my close friend, Junel Henry, said. I'm not perfect. I do still make mistakes like coming in late or doing homework last minute, but overall I manage for the most part.

# > What Now?

*By Kaelin Baugh  
Senior Staff Writer*

You've graduated from Housatonic and have your Associate's degree. How wonderful. You made it! Should you stop there or continue your education at a university? Did you ever think that far ahead? Did you already decide on what you want to do for the next phase of your life? Probably not, you just went with the flow. Now you are stuck figuring out what to do next in your life, a problem that some other people are dealing with as well.

You've approached this crossroads and are faced with two options, going to school or entering the full blown work force. No matter which road you take, you are not wrong. But one is always a slightly better option for you. School? Work? Travel the world? Or whatever else that you know out there that is not "bad," of course. That decision is up to you. No one can tell you what is right or tell you what to do. However, they can advise you of a more appropriate direction. The question is; how do you know?

Gina Ricco is a Graphic Design student at HCC. She's been here for three years and plans to transfer her credits to Southern Connecticut State University. She wants to further her education for job purposes. "Connecticut is so expensive to live in. You can't really make much money without a college degree," she says. She believes furthering your education is the best way to go.

Even without hearing Ricco's viewpoint on education, you can surmise that her belief in getting an education. Think about it, this economy, particularly the US economy, isn't getting any better. It's getting worse. Let's just put it bluntly. That doesn't mean that everyone should go to college. But perhaps, getting a college degree would be a clever choice considering the financial crisis this world is undergoing.

"It's always been my dream to become a social worker," says Samantha Sharp, first year student at HCC, planning to transfer to WCSU. "And I think education is important. If not, I'd probably be working

at McDonalds." There is no doubt that education is important. It opens your mind, eyes, and perspective on all or most things in life. In addition, it expands your knowledge so you're not a sleeping giant roaming the earth. It increases your chances of having higher position jobs that offer you above the bare minimum the lower end jobs are willing to pay. Don't get the wrong idea, there are people out there with no college experience or degree and have landed a high paying job.

You think to yourself, "I don't need college. I can find a good job without it." It is possible but it is not guaranteed. Just like how having a college degree is not guaranteed to find you a high positional job with superior salary. There are two sides of the argument. None are wrong because a person with a degree can have the same jobless luck as a person without a degree. But generally, it is safer to have a college degree than to have nothing. If you have a college degree/ vocational training and lose your high-end job, you have your degree to fall back on. The people with no college experience or degree wouldn't have anything to fall back on.

Haverford College graduate Curleen Elliott is a librarian at Housatonic. She's been working there for three years. Obtaining a degree in Haverford College in Pennsylvania, she then pursued her online degree from San Jose State University. "Students have done a semester or a year and gone off, I've seen them come back after a while because they realized the importance of that degree," says Elliott.

So if you are one of those people that are planning to resign from school to explore your other options; workforce, traveling around the world, for example., this might be you. "I always try to encourage people with that and see. It may seem that right now that other stuff is an option, but they always come back to this as a necessity of a degree to hire, even in the workforce...I just believe it's essential," Elliott admits. Overall, college is a smart choice, but it is not for

everyone. There is always the option to get certified at a college training program or vocational school; such as Practical Nursing, Patient Care Technician, Community Health Worker, National Certified Bookkeeper, Pharmacy Technician, CompTIA Security+ Certification. These are some of the many certification programs that HCC offers. You can get it as little as six weeks.

Not everyone is built to be in college for four

or more years. However, it is always good to have a little college background under your name whether it is a degree or certification. Either one is handy to have on resume and opens opportunity.

Why not take advantage of education? Get educated then go on to do other things. Education is waiting for you.



# Saving Lives and Saving Themselves

*By Chelsea Vogel  
Staff Writer*

Thank God for late Netflix binge nights because without it, I wouldn't have found my new favorite drama "The Night Shift." Among millions of others, I felt heartbroken when NBC's "Scrubs" ended back in 2009. Disclaimer: I do not consider that abomination med school premise Dave Franco nonsense season 9. "The Night Shift" combines elements from "Grey's Anatomy" and "Scrubs" and turns into its own brand. It's different in a sense, because half of the staff served in the U.S. military and are now combating forces at San Antonio Memorial Hospital. The main character TC Callahan is an ex-Army medic who suffers from PTSD and continually does whatever he can to save his patients' lives, even if it means breaking rules and risking lawsuits. His whole medical team backs him up because they are aware that he knows what's in the best interest for the patient. This show covers uncharted territory as far as showing graphic medical procedures and war flashbacks that TC, Drew, and Topher all witnessed when they served. Dr. Drew coming out will induce tears, as he realizes no one cares and loves him just the same. It's refreshing to see what the overnight crew at a hospital goes through. You feel their pain as they tell loved ones the bad news and their joys of putting it all on the line and watching it pay off.

# Who Said Going Natural Would Be Easy?

By Iesha Brown  
Staff Writer

When most people think about going natural, they think of it as being an easy process. But I got a chance to sit down and talk to a few naturalistas from HCC and around Connecticut. They can tell you going natural takes a lot of hard work and dedication.

Coming from someone who was used to putting chemicals, and different types of harmful products in their hair, going natural was a big transformation for a lot of people. But luckily the natural hair community is a big one, so you don't have to feel alone.

I recently did the big chop because I felt that my hair had a lot of heat damage due to always getting silk presses, which is basically flat ironing your hair. I literally went in front of my mirror one night and started cutting my hair. I don't think I even used the correct scissors. After that I went to my local barbershop, Good Looking, on Main Street in Bridgeport. My barber, Mickey, shaved my head and made everything nice and neat. My favorite go to hairstyles while my hair is growing back is box braids and wash n gos.

Depending on how much hair you have and how long you want your braids to be, box braids can take up to 2-6 hours to do, sometimes even longer. You may spend up to \$200 to get the hair style. When shopping for the hair, you can just go

to your local beauty supply store. When people do protective styles like box braids or wigs they tend to forget about their hair that's underneath their style of choice. Whenever I'm doing a protective style I still make sure I moisturize my



hair. And the good thing about it is that you don't have to use much product compared to if your hair wasn't in a protective style. A "Wash and Go" is when you wash and condition your hair, while making sure your hair is moisturized and just go. It seems pretty simple, but there is a lot that goes in it. I like to use the LCO method when doing my wash and go. LCO stands for liquid, conditioner and oil. The L stands for liquids like a leave-in conditioner. C

stands for Cream like my favorite product shea moisture style milk. Last but not least is the O, which stands for Oil. The oil is one of the most important part of the hair style because it will help seal in the moisture.

Imani Josie, a graduate student from Western Connecticut State University, has been natural almost her entire life, but she relaxed her hair in high school because she wanted straighter hair. When she enrolled into Western, she went back to being natural. Now years later Imani is living in Spain, and is realizing that living in another country may require changing up your hair routine. "My scalp has been very very dry," she says of her natural hair experience since living in Spain. Luckily they have great coconut oil, which is a staple product for a lot of people with natural hair.

"My hair went through major damage from dying my hair platinum blonde," says Naomi Gomez, a dear friend of mine and a student at HCC, of her reason for doing the big chop and embarking on the natural hair journey. Usually when someone does something new to their hair, they are met with compliments, but that wasn't the case for Naomi. Many people, including her mother, weren't happy with her choice to do the big Chop. Unfortunately this isn't uncommon. Many

# Big Chops, Protective Styles, and Everything About Going Natural

times when girls do the big chop and embark on their natural hair, they are made fun of by the people that are supposed to support them, like family. That's why when you do something dramatic like the big chop it's a hard process because you embark on the journey of self care and self love. And a lot of the times the journey isn't an easy one.

When going natural, it's important to have supportive people around and people who've gone through the same thing as you. If you know you don't have those type of people in your life, there are always groups online you can be apart of. Some of my favorites are the Mahogany Curls Healthy Hair Growth Challenge. It's a Facebook group that consists of over 10,000 members, females and males that are always there to answer any questions you have. I've learned so much like the type of hair I have, and which products are good, just from being in that group.



Other good groups are the Curly Girl Collective, which is an experiential marketing group that specializes in multi cultural beauty. The Curly Girl Collective

Group actually has a big natural hair festival in New York City every summer.



Having natural hair can be costly with the constant experimentation of products. But a good idea is to exchange products with friends and family because what may not work for you may work for others. Also it doesn't hurt to ask for samples and always be aware of the stores return policy. One of my favorite stores to buy my hair products from is Sally's Beauty Supply store. The great thing about them is they constantly are having sales and they just started selling mini versions on the hair products they already have, which is good to buy if you want to try the product out. I came across a quote that couldn't be more true it was, "Some people say that natural hair isn't for everyone, It's attached to your head! It don't get no more, 'For you' than that." So with that being said, good luck to everyone on their natural hair journey.

*Photos By Iesha Brown*



# Tips for Shifting from Summer Fun into Fall Focus

*By Gianni Sapienza  
Senior Staff Writer*

Whether you were having a relaxing or an eventful summer, it is always hard to get back into the swing of things and start the school season back up again. Summer leaves us without concern of research papers or projects that keep us up until 3 o'clock in the morning. Let's be honest. The summer months are all in all carefree. The transition between the summer and going back to school in the start of fall is always challenging.

Many of our peers deal with this uneasy feeling. Whether it be nervous, anxious, or overall overwhelmed, there are so many tips for going through this transition simply. "It is always hard for me to return back to school at the end of August while not having to worry about waking up early or having piles of homework waiting for me, but I have to suck it up and mentally prepare myself," says, Cynthia Guerra, HCC Civil Engineering student.

Some tips to ease the hardship of the summer to fall transition include:

- # 1. Start your sleep schedule two weeks before classes start.
- # 2. Plan what times you will have to eat lunch.
- # 3. Study, and have down time.
- # 4. Get your textbooks early and familiarize yourself with your fall curriculum.
- # 5. Check out your class syllabi to prepare yourself for what your professors will be expecting. Derek Seymour, 22, Penn State Sustainable Design student, says that at his school, Fall is by far the best semester.

"As a student coming from a community college at first, it is quite the adventure to progress from a small school to a four year university where you can get the full college experience. It isn't all academics, so the transition won't be as challenging," Seymour said. All things considered, don't stress yourself out

too much over the transition because we are all experiencing the same things. So ask a friend how they are dealing with it. Always remember, you are never alone.

# I Make Pour Decisions

*By Chelsea Vogel*  
Staff Writer

That pounding headache, that nauseating feeling in the pit of your stomach, those aching thoughts of the possible terrors of what you could have done the night before are just a few of the glorious side effects the lovely depressant lady alcohol has to offer. I have been beating around the bush for months on why I depended on the liquid courage in order to solve all of my woes. I had to really get inside of my psyche on how I let it get this bad. I never believed I was the type of person that depended on whiskey in order to have a good time.

Alas, here I am at a crossroads in my life. I'm 25 years old and I need to get my life in order. I was long overdue to rid my body of the toxins I was putting into it. I used alcohol as a coping mechanism of the constant inadequacy I felt every day. Stuck in a dead end job, balancing my daily tasks, trying to finish my degree at a later age than my friends; these were just some of the issues that were swirling around in my brain and I turned to the juice to deal with it.

Drinking always seemed like the destination, the ultimate end game, if not getting completely smashed and forgetting where I put my keys wasn't a factor that night, I deemed the night unsuccessful. Alas, I will try this again next weekend and achieve better results; my feisty little self wouldn't give up without a fight. I was determined to make this work.

It wasn't until I realized I was at a standstill in my life that I decided to pick up the slack and take the reins on this untamed horse. No one shoved their advice down my throat (thankfully). Maybe they didn't notice. Who knows? Even if they had said something,

I would've used every cliché in the book to get out of that awkward conversation and run away as fast as my stubby feet would take me. "I don't have the problem, you have the problem! Now go make yourself useful and fetch me a Mike's Hard!"

The point is, I had to make the choice for myself to put down the bottle and pick up the books. Stumbling into my day and falling on my face was not ideal in the grand scheme of things. Frankly, who loves having their face down in the toilet retching from the literal poison they ingested the night before? Sign me up for that attraction, please! And make it snappy!

Falling behind on my school work is where I had to put down the brakes. I work so hard for the money and I work hard for it honey. Failing would be unforgivable as far as I was concerned. It would be the equivalent of an avid sports fan watching his or her favorite football team fumble in the end zone on the game winning touchdown to win the Super Bowl.

The path to my drinking responsibly was not an easy one by any means, I don't know anyone who's under that impression that it is. My trick to fight off the alcoholic banshees was coming up with alternatives that preoccupied my mind and space with positive reinforcements. I found out that working out is a great one, feeling great and looking sexy is always a win-win. There's something so rewarding about seeing results when you step on the scale that makes turning down plans to meet your friends at the bar so worthwhile.

If you're not the active type and are looking for cheaper alternatives, read, read, read until your eyes



**Photos By  
Brandon Pounce**

are popping out of their sockets. Not only is it a good way to pass the time, it expands your knowledge and enhances your vocabulary. I take a book with me wherever I go now because I never know when I'll have a lull in between my day. It feels amazing getting so caught up in what's happening elsewhere. It really takes the heat off of whatever stress I'm feeling at the moment.

"What inspired me to immediately cut out all the toxins in my life was teaching myself about loving myself and self respect. For the past 24 years of my life, I have never taken my health into serious account and never taken full responsibility for my actions," said Samantha Weyant, 24, Nursing major.

Loving yourself is the only way you are going to curb your problem and travel down the path of least resistance. That's the one thing those who struggle tend to forget. I had to realize that I was worth something and had a lot to bring to the table whether I wanted to recognize it or not.

What happens more often than not is young adults in particular will aim to drink excessively to take the heat off of their problems even if it is temporary.

"People, lots of times, will reach for alcohol to destress their lives, but what they don't really think about is that it's just so easy to abuse, and then it can actually end up adding more stressors to their lives; there are consequences connected," said Housatonic's Disability Counselor Marilyn Wehr.

That is a crucial distinction that I had to take into consideration. Are my problems so bad that outdrinking and muffling the little voice in my head that tells me to cut back is the best way to handle my burdens? I will save you the painful mornings and late nights; it is not.

If you are combating the most grueling and enduring fight of your life, you need to reach out and talk to someone that supports you. I fortunately didn't let it get this far. Support groups are what's going to get you out of this slump. An addicted person must be willing to admit to their problems and confide in those who are non-drinkers themselves as well as those who are consciously aware of their history of drinking. Talking about feelings is important! Dr. Phil and Barney were right!

If some people feel that they are in too deep and the



people they hang out with are enabling them, addiction counselors specialize in this area and can recommend you to the appropriate support your situation deems suitable.

Every single person that inhabits this planet is fighting inner demons. Some have a better grasp of what's weighing them down than others. The difference between me and everyone else is, I'm in control of my destiny and my future and I have the power to alter the substances that were altering me.

Whatever battle you are facing, you are not alone. There is always someone out there that can pull you out of whatever hole you are stranded in. Don't let the environment, the people you surround yourself with, and fake motivation to enhancing your mood cloud your judgment on the positive changes that are awaiting you once you give in. Devote yourself to taking back your life again. Remember to never give in and never surrender! You are and have always been better than this!

I know that I had to hit rock bottom to scratch and claw my way back at the top again. I'm thankful for my struggles, because without them I wouldn't be where I am today. I wouldn't be doing a balancing act between work and school and still finding time for

what's important in my life. Spending time with my family and friends is the only thing that appeals to me. I strive to spend my time with them every day. I'm glad I got the rebellious and reckless experiences out of the way so I can continue improving myself. I could've been my own worst enemy, but I shut that ruthless, conniving witch up and keyed into what truly matters. I haven't looked back since.

# Horizons is Your Student-Powered Information Source!

## Who We Are

Horizons is student-powered: a student-led, student-produced media outlet for news and information of interest to HCC students, written by students for students.

## What We Do

We provide news, helpful advice about topics like health, success as a student, fashion, fitness, relationships, arts, music, and entertainment and more, updates on campus activities and events, profiles of HCC students, faculty, and staff, and personal essays and opinion pieces on a range of subjects.

## Where to Find Us

During the semester, we publish fresh new content regularly on our web site,  
<http://housatonichorizons.com>

It's easy to access and read on your computer, phone, or tablet, wherever you are, and whenever you have the time. We also publish a full-color print magazine at least a couple of times a year.

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On Facebook: Housatonic Horizons  
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