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# Tell Your Story



# Community Project

Summer Reading 2024

# About the Tell You Story Community Project

PLEASE NOTE: THIS COPY OF THE TELL YOUR STORY PROJECT INCLUDES SUBMISSIONS FROM ALL AGES OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS. TO DOWNLOAD A COPY OF THE PROJECT THAT ONLY INCLUDES THE AGES 0-18 SUBMISSIONS PLEASE VISIT [FARMLIB.ORG/TELL-YOUR-STORY](http://FARMLIB.ORG/TELL-YOUR-STORY).

Summer Reading is an annual program for all ages at Farmington Community Library (FCL) that encourages our community to connect through a love of reading and stories. During the 2024 program, we set out to celebrate not only the stories we read, but also the power of telling our own stories! Throughout the summer, community members of all ages submitted personal stories from their own life. This booklet is a compilation of those submissions.

We hope that you enjoy reading through the stories your neighbors submitted and that it serves as a reminder that all of us have a story worth sharing!

The Library provided three prompts to inspire community members when thinking about the experiences they have had that could be good stories to share:

## **Adventure Awaits: Tell us about an adventure that you have been on**

What defines an adventure? That is for you to tell us! Adventures come in all shapes and sizes, from the mundane to the extraordinary. Some adventures happen on the way to the grocery store, others take place on daring adventures to new states or even other countries. Was the adventure planned? Or did you stumble upon it? Share the thrills, the unexpected turns, and the memories with us!

## **Celebrating Connections: Tell us about someone that you care about**

Who holds a special place in your heart? Perhaps it's a grandparent who ignited your passion for creativity, a best friend or sibling whose qualities inspire you, or your spouse with whom you've shared cherished memories. Dive into the stories of the remarkable individuals who have shaped your life.

## **Life Lessons: Tell us about the most important lesson you have learned in life so far**

Life is the best teacher! Reflect on your journey and share a valuable lesson you have learned. What pivotal moment reshaped your perspective? Was it a difficult or easy lesson to learn? Do you wish you had learned it some other way? Maybe someone else in our community is in the middle of learning the exact same thing.

*The stories in this booklet are organized alphabetically by the author's first name. All anonymous submissions are grouped together. If the author submitted their age and a title for their story, this information is included.*

*The Library reserved the right to decline stories that were defamatory or not in the community spirit of the Tell Your Story project. Viewpoints and experiences in this booklet are solely those of the authors and do not represent the Library's stance on any topic.*

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## **Aaliyah Dungy, Age 14**

### **Untitled**

One time when I was five or six I wanted to go to the neighbors house at my old house but my dad said no and he fell asleep. But being a five or six year-old I didn't really care what he said at the time so I went over the fence, just when I was about to jump off something pull the fence and hang over the fence with my shirt frightened I started yelling for help. Two dogs ran up to me and started barking alerting their owner, which was my neighbor. Soon after I was let down and my neighbor called my dad. I knew I was going to be in a lot of trouble even with him smiling I knew I would be in trouble. So when I got home, I got grounded for like 10 minutes and then after that, he just kind of forgot but yeah.

## **Aidan**

### **Untitled**

Once upon a time I went to Cedar Point. On the way there I listened to a play away called House of Robots. At Cedar Point, I went on the Iron Dragon, Wild Mouse, Gemini, Blue Streak and a lot of other rides it was so fun.

## **Alexandria Peratsakis, Age 15**

### **Untitled**

My mother embodies everything that I love, that I enjoy, and that I hold close to my heart. She holds the love of 1000 of the most lovable things all into one heart and she can convert all that love into one kiss or one hug. She is my hero amongst all heroes, like my umbrella in the rain. Her voice always gives me timeless advice whenever I doubt myself and my abilities even if she isn't next to me. My mother is my tree and I am her branch. I am the branch she gave nutrients to and kept strong while teaching me to flourish in this world. Through her, I gained my wings to fly.

What my mother knowingly or unknowingly set on me was the love of my homeland. She was born here but she grew up in Palestine. Through her, she showed me the best of the world and taught me how to respect it. She embodies the love of my homeland and has always instilled in me to be a proud Palestinian. I love to always say when I don't understand something, "Sorry, English is my second language" as a joke around my friends, but there is some truth in that statement. When I was young my mother taught me the beautiful language Arabic first but over time I forgot a lot of it, unfortunately. My mother is my homeland. She is my base in life and without her, I would be a goner.

My mother was named after her aunt who was a very strong woman. My great-aunt was 9 when her mother died. From the age of 9, she raised her 3 siblings. My mother is just as strong as her aunt. To me, my mother represents all the strong Palestinian women from the past, the present, and the future. My mother never fails to stand up for justice when she sees injustices occur no matter the repercussions. I know that if anything bad ever happens to me or my siblings, we can always count on her to protect us.

I am forever grateful to my mother for nurturing me into becoming what I am today. I can never thank her enough for having my back countless times, driving me to endless soccer events, igniting my dreams, and giving me the courage to even write this story about her. I love you.

## Alicia Renea Jones

### The Blood of My Fathers

I still remember the summer I met my grandfather the late great Lewis-Moorer Jones and my gracious, virtuous yet powerfully God fearing grandmother Rebecca Hale-Jones in Wilcox County, Alabama. It was the blistering hot summer of 1965 where there were no air conditioners, ice coolers invented, yet there was a fresh cool breeze of hope in the air as those who believed in freedom stood resolute not to quit until it came. That summer air was crisp with hope of change, victory and fearless determination to guarantee Civil Rights and democracy for Americans of African descent. Paradoxically predicted by the 16th Street Baptist Church KKK bombing assassination of 4 little girls in Birmingham, Alabama. The massive Civil Rights March on Washington, the November 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Black folk seemed more determined than ever in 1964 when Freedom Summer came with the Mississippi voter registration drive where activists were met with violence and intimidation. Then came the televised broadcast of "Bloody Sunday" when the uncloned KKK in the form of law enforcement beat Jon Lewis and youth activists as they attempted to cross the Edmond's Pettis Bridge from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama... The series of other protests even my Auntie Nellie Mae Dinkins left her family in Akron, Ohio to participate in. Then came the assassination of Viola Liuzzo and two young men by an FBI Klan informant and others who bled and died to secure the voting rights for African Americans in Alabama. Then On July 2, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Civil Rights of 1964. Momma tried her best to shield us from the harsh reality of racism in America but I can remember it like it was yesterday.

I was six years old my and daddy Albert S. Jones was the Vice President of the Highland Park, Michigan NAACP and a union steward at General Motors for the UAW. It was just a few years earlier in 1963 Daddy defied the entire NAACP Detroit and Highland Park branch leadership by refusing to boycott Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's June 1963 Detroit march down Woodward Avenue. I remember like it was yesterday Daddy telling the Highland Park, NAACP branch officers, "They could have his title because they were on the wrong side of history. If they didn't march with Dr. King that his children were going to march in their place". And we did just that, Buster Browns and all. As history goes, Daddy was correct. Organized by Reverend C. Franklin, Aretha Franklin's father that historic Detroit march become the largest Civil Rights gathering in the world: a preamble to the March on Washington and the 1st time Dr. King would deliver his infamous "I Have a Dream" speech.

So anyway there we were Daddy, Momma, my oldest sister Rhonda age 8, me, my little brother Albert Jr. (Tony) age 4 and my baby sister Monica almost 11 months old, but not walking yet, all embarking on a road trip from our home in Highland Park, Michigan to visit my grandparents in Wilcox County, Alabama: The place where PBS said was a place where there was slavery like no other. The long drive was filled with excitement. Momma packed a huge basket of bologna sandwiches, boiled eggs, Vienna sausages, sardines, saltine crackers and more. Going down south for me was like the book the Librarian read on the Adventures of Uncle Tom's Cabin and Daniel Boone. Only our adventure had a few strange happenings as we exited Ohio and crossed what Momma and Daddy called the Mason Dixie line, South.

Although his professional baseball career was short-lived due to an injury, my daddy was a hometown hero. Early on Grandma Becky and Granddaddy Lewis sent Daddy up north to live with his older brother when he was 9 years old to escape the harsh reality of Alabama racism and so he could get a good education. Raised by his brother Theodore and educated in Pittsburg Public Schools Daddy excelled in math, science and engineering classes. However before he

left Wilcox County as a boy one of his uncles, who played in the Negro Baseball league in Wilcox County, taught Daddy how to count the threads on a baseball to know just where and when to hit the ball to knock it out of the park. Daddy out-rivaled his classmates in sports in Pittsburg Public Schools and was drafted by the Pittsburgh Pirates fresh out of high school. Word of my daddy going the major leagues was in all the papers and had spread throughout Wilcox County in Dad's hometown and years later in the newspaper wedding announcement in my mom's hometown in Dublin Georgia as well. Most of them didn't know Daddy sustained a career ending injury early in his pro career. After his injury, Daddy later founded the baseball program at Edward Waters College in Jacksonville, Florida, where he met and married my mom, and where three of us were born.

This was Daddy's first time back home since starting his family, and we were driving a flashy new car to show his folks how well he was doing. Almost there, Momma told Daddy she had run out of milk for my baby sister Monica. Daddy stopped at a restaurant, and we got out while Mom took us to the bathroom. On our way out, Daddy led us back to the car, and Mommy asked if she could buy some milk for the baby. The waitress gave her the milk but yelled at her to take it, get out, and not to ever come back again! We drove in silence until Daddy announced, "We're entering Wilcox County." I eagerly looked out the window and saw 30 or more white wooden crosses vertically lined up evenly as we crossed the county line. I remember thinking that was a strange place to put a graveyard. But those weren't grave markers - they were Klan crosses, alerting everyone that we were in KKK territory. Afternoon, KKK territory. Little did we know that we would soon discover what it meant? Grandfather Lewis, now a retired schoolteacher, stood tall with a cowboy hat and overalls behind a large mule as he plowed the vegetable garden in front. His face was glistening in the sunlight from afar as we drove up the clay road to the house where Grandmother Rebecca stood smiling, welcoming us with open arms. Born and raised in the city, I had never seen farm animals other than in the book *Old McDonald Had a Farm*. As soon as Daddy got the luggage in, I asked if I could go outside. I made a beeline, face down, ran along the side of the house, headed for the barn. I ran headfirst into the leg of Granddaddy Lewis. Never having been introduced, he extended his hand and said, "Hi, hi, hi gal, hi." There he was this man with a strong constitution and cold hard gun in his right-side pocket. Without saying a word, I made a U-turn and took off running making a beeline back into the house. I found out later, my granddaddy and his kinfolks were revered legends in Wilcox County feared and respected by Blacks and the Klan.... And for good reason.

## **Amelia Imirie, Age 9**

### **Untitled**

Last week I went to Cedar Point. When I went to Cedar Point last week I went for the first time. The first ride I went on was the Iron Dragon. I really liked it but the drop at the start scared Lou and Aidan. Because of that we went on some smaller rides next. When we went on the Wild Mouse the cart we were in turned us so we were backwards and there were some sharp turns. Aidan and me really liked that ride and we felt it was time to step it up. We went on the Blue Streak next. The first time I rode it I was scared and I wouldn't let go of my mom's hand. The second time I rode it I rode with Aidan and I put my hands up and I rose up out of my seat a bit. Next my brother Aidan rode the Gemini while I rode the Pipe Scream. When the Pipe Scream was over it was one minute until the park closed so I had to sprint to get in line for the Gemini. At first on the big drop but then I wasn't scared and I put my hands up.



## Andrew, Age 6

### Untitled

We went to Seneca Caverns. We went 100 feet deep under the ground. We saw stuff that was left in the cave like a comb, bottom of a shoe, and some bottles.

## Anita Wagoner

### Untitled

My big adventure has been the changes and challenges in my life. It's easy to be tossed around but more importantly is what foundation am I standing on. Can I stand strong through the winds and hail. I took a small adventure to the River Front Park in Detroit, for a moment in time, where the comfortable sunny day provided nourishment for this poem. Detroit Riverfront Poem. 10.7.23 by Anita LABYRINTH Thorn in flesh Flesh wounded Oh, the guidance to remove. Oh where is my regeneration? Walking, Pausing, To my center, It's center, The world center, The universe center, Focus, All else gone. The whirring boats, The nearby waves, The gentle breeze upon the flesh, The waving plants, The warmth so welcomed, PEACE Resetting, Restoring faith, Resetting mind, Restoring confidence, Now Regenerated. A Purpose Calming steps Lightness Joy Completeness No need to get..But need to give. Give to self by saying, "I FEEL GREAT!" Give to others by saying, "I appreciate you!" OR "Thank you, Have a great day!"

## Ann Lucas, Age 61

### Bittersweet Celebration of a Connection with my Dad

This Father's Day of 2024 is the 8th one I no longer have a father to celebrate with. As I reflect on this, I am comforted knowing due to memories I am able to celebrate my dad in spirit today. And of all of the moments I remember, two have made the most impact on who I am and where my life has led me.

My dad and I have always been close, but it wasn't until I confessed to him how unhappy I was in my marriage and thinking of divorce, that our relationship changed. We were standing in his backyard as I talked about some of the things I was experiencing at the time with my husband. It was a really vulnerable moment for me because I had never revealed to anyone the turmoil I was living with. My dad listened, a serious expression on his face, contemplating every word I was saying. After I finished, he adjusted his stance, giving himself a moment to take it all in. He responded with something that I have never shared with anyone until now. He told me he had at one point thought of divorcing my mom, then proceeded to tell me the reasons why he chose to stay, reminding me that some of those reasons applied in my marriage as well. I agreed, thanking him with a hug, but still not convinced in my heart that staying was the best thing.

A week later, I discovered confirmation my husband was having an affair, calling my parents to let them know I was filing for divorce, strongly advocating for myself by saying 'you won't be able to talk me out of it.' There were a few uncomfortable moments of silence then my dad replied, 'I understand.' Even today, those words still make me tear up remembering not only the relief I felt of knowing I wouldn't be facing this decision alone but also that he truly understood and wasn't just saying those words to make me feel better.



That same year, my youngest son had enlisted in the Army, leaving for 10 weeks of boot camp at Fort Jackson South Carolina, one week after he graduated from high school. When my dad heard I was planning on driving myself there for my son's graduation, he approached me with an alternative.

We were relaxing in his family room after just finishing dinner. I was on the couch with my mom, who was sitting to the right of me while my dad was sitting in his chair to the left of me. He casually leaned towards me, placing both hands on his knees, looking me in the eye, saying, 'Your mother and I were talking about this and we decided we would like to go with you. We can take our car. And we would like to pay for the entire trip.' I looked at him with astonishment, then immediately burst out crying as my dad moved onto the couch and both my parents enveloped me in a huge hug. That trip was the best and last one my dad took with me. Because I kept it a secret, my son was super surprised when he realized his grandma then his papa, who he was super close to, had also come to celebrate his accomplishments. Let me say, the trip home was the best because my son got to share his experiences with not only my mom and me, but more importantly his papa, a veteran, who had served in the Navy.

As time went on, I was able to give back to my dad what he had so unselfishly given to me. In 2016, he had not been feeling well, admitting to my mom one night that maybe she should take him to the emergency room. It was there he was diagnosed with pneumonia. As his symptoms got better, at few days later he was sent home with antibiotics. Because my parents lived in a two story home and my dad was pretty weak, a hospital bed was delivered and set up in his living room along with a portable toilet, oxygen and a future plan for in home therapy.

I stayed with them that weekend, sleeping on the couch so if my dad needed anything I could immediately help, while my mom got some much needed rest. Our roles ultimately reversed as I helped him throughout the night get to the toilet, wiping his bottom when he finished, making sure he had water to drink, moving him to more comfortable positions and just being there, as he had done for me.

It was early morning when he woke me up asking for something to drink. As I brought it over, I opened the curtains so he could see his yard, filled with trees, and instead of grass, trillium vines and flowers covering the ground. As he turned from the view, he looked right into my eyes, and said, 'How did you learn to do this?' I said, 'Do what?' He replied, 'Take care of me.' I mentioned being a mom helped but also I believed providing care is part of what being a family member is all about. That conversation was one of the last ones I had with my dad, as 2 days later, his pneumonia got worse and he was taken back to the hospital.

My mom and I visited him every day, sitting hours in his room, being present as his body slowly gave in as death encroached upon him. Fortunately, my dad was still mentally aware and able to voice his wish to choose 'comfort only' instead of being taken to the ICU unit as suggested by the doctor. One thing we weren't able to grant was his wish to die at home. By that time, we were wary he would end up dying while being transported.

For 8 days, my mom and I faithfully visited, as we witnessed his body shutting down, his voice disappearing, and nurses religiously administering meds to keep him pain free.

On the 9th day, Friday, June 17, I woke up feeling in a deep funk. One of such deep sorrow it was

hard to articulate as I had only felt like this once before in my life. I ended up calling off work, being able to pick up my mom much earlier so we could visit my dad. When we arrived, I found a wheelchair for her as she wasn't feeling so good either. As we passed the gift shop, I noticed a sign in the window with the words 'BE HAPPY.' I mumbled to myself, I don't feel like being happy at all.

When we arrived to my dad's room, my mom went over to him as I sat in a chair near the door. Soon the chaplain came in. She spoke to my mom but was interrupted when a nurse came by to also speak to mom. While that conversation went on, the chaplain kneeled in front me, touching my knee, asking how I was feeling. I told her about waking up in a funk, which was quite unusual as I consider myself a very positive person. I wasn't sure why I felt like this. She replied, 'Maybe eventually you'll find out.' Then she asked to say a prayer, which I graciously accepted. My mom and I stayed for the rest of the day, sitting mostly silent, as we observed death getting nearer and nearer. At that point, my dad was noncommunicative. My mom also choose to have the oxygen removed as it was determined by hospital personnel, death was imminent.

The next day, Saturday June 18, I escorted my mom to my brothers home to attend his marriage to his second wife. I would have rather spent the time sitting with my dad but my mom was so full of anguish that she couldn't drive herself, letting me know she really needed to experience some moments of happiness. We left a couple of hours later to head up to the hospital while my youngest son followed us in his car. When we arrived to my dad's room, there was a sign on the door instructing us to stop at the nurses station before entering. We did, as they let us know there were no significant changes from the day before and we could enter his room.

My dad was laying very still, hardly breathing. My mom immediately rushed to his side, speaking words in his ear of love and reassurance as I stood at the bottom of his bed, lightly rubbing his cold feet, while my son watched. When my mom finished, I moved to my dads side, reciting his favorite Bible verse, Psalm 23, the Lord is my Shepherd. When I looked up, my mom was holding my son as he sobbed. We left a few minutes later.

As we were driving home, my cellphone rang. When I answered a man identified himself as the doctor taking care of my dad, asking if we were driving as he thought it best if we pulled over because he had some news. I asked him if my dad had died and he said yes. It was 9:45 pm on June 18, 2016, one day before Father's Day.

Because the church my dad attended was booked, he was finally laid to rest on June 30. And even though life went on, like it does, and grief subsided, there are days, like today, when I can't help but miss my dad. Eventually, I realized the funk I experienced the day before he died, was a premonition of what was to come. It was almost as if due to our strong connection, my dad was alerting me as he slowly slipped away.

This brings to mind the conversation I once had with my dad about dying. Years before either one of us could even fathom death taking hold. He revealed that he never felt close enough to anyone, even his own parents, that he couldn't imagine a connection being present after death. I told him, I believed death can take a body, but one thing it can't take is love. And because of the love we had for each other, our connection would continue long after one of us was gone. This is something I also remind my mom about, when she brings up how much she misses my dad.

I believe my dad now knows the connection he never imagined, is alive and well. Throughout

the years, I have experienced many times I knew he was still hanging around, watching over me. These moments have lessened as time has gone on, but I still get glimmers of occasional signs, that he is ok and is spiritually hovering whenever his spirit has the inclination to.

So on this Father's Day 2024, even though I am sad and a tad resentful of not having my dad here on earth, I am also appreciative of not only the two moments that greatly impacted my life, but the other memories I am able to recall of the years we had together.

Because even though death sucks, it can never kill love. Even though death changes us, it can never steal the connection we have with our loved ones. Even though death wounds, it can never remove the healing powers of love. And even though death is part of life, it can never steal memories that help those of us left behind, to live on.

Happy Father's Day Dad.

I miss you.

I love you.

And I hope someday we are able to see each other again.

Love,

Ann Marie

## **Ann Lucas, Age 61**

### **Celebrating Connection with Nonhumans**

Even though the prompt is geared toward human connections, I think sometimes the most important and long-lasting connections we have are those we have with non-humans, aka our pets. So here's my story about 4 of them.

It was right before my son left for boot camp, in 2012, his beloved furry companion, Cody, who was 4 years old, unexpectedly died in his arms, of what we suspect was a heart attack, a heart condition never discovered at visits to the vet. It was an event that literally broke my son's heart. He was 18 years old at the time, had never had a close relationship with a pet nor had experienced death of a beloved pet. When it initially happened, he sobbed so hard and long I wasn't sure what to do to console him. That week, we kept Cody's body in a box, in our garage, as we traveled from pet cemetery to pet cemetery, seeing which one would be the best place to lay Cody to rest. The grief was so overwhelming, my son wasn't able to make a decision. Because I was going through a divorce, the house had been put up for sale, so my son wasn't too keen on burying Cody in our backyard. Instead, my son took Cody's body to a vet where he was cremated along with other beloved pets, then buried in a community grave. Soon after my son left for boot camp, returning in August for a couple of weeks, then departing to go to college.

In the beginning of summer, my beloved furry companion, Tigger, was diagnosed with kidney disease. The treatment was subcutaneous fluids, contained in a bag, trailing a line, ending in a large needle. It was decided to give this treatment at home, instead of weekly visits to the vet.

Now, I am not too keen on needles of any kind when used to take blood or inject vaccines. As a child, I would see a needle and start screaming. Yeah, I know a bit of a drama queen for sure. Thankfully I no longer have that reaction but I didn't know if I could 'nurse' my cat through this procedure. The vet was very good at showing me how to stab the needle in the fatty part of my

cat's neck, assuring me that my cat was not being harmed. So I decided to give it a try. Eventually I got the hang of it, and Tigger did too. The hard part was keeping him still enough so the bag could empty. But he gradually accepted this was for his own good, not as something to torment him.

However, after Cody died, Tigger became quite depressed, wandering through the house, loudly meowing, as he looked for his friend. I kept continuing the treatment but eventually Tigger began projectile vomiting, which gradually got worse over time. Looking back I believe losing his friend caused his kidney disease to flare, making the treatment to be less effective. As a result, I stopped the treatment, knowing it could be the demise of Tigger's life.

For two weeks, Tigger was like a kitten again, running through the house, jumping all over the cat tree, purring, sleeping contently at night, eating well and enjoying life. Soon after, his disease abruptly took over, causing him to lose weight. I was awoken one morning, from him clawing the side of my bed. At first I rolled over to go back to sleep. But he kept doing it. When I looked at him to see what was wrong, I noticed his collar had gotten caught in his mouth, where he wasn't able to meow or close his jaw. I immediately hopped out of bed, carefully releasing the mechanism on his collar and making sure he was able to close his mouth, noticing if it was painful or if anything was broken. Everything seemed fine but soon after his health took an abrupt turn for the worst. It got so bad one morning I found him curled up on the couch. When I went near him, he lifted his head and cried. As I picked him up, I discovered a huge wet spot underneath him, realizing he had peed. When I put him down to clean the spot, I found out he wasn't able to walk to his litter box. Instead he stumbled, then collapsed on the floor. Within twenty-four hours, I made the agonizing decision to get him euthanized. Thankfully my older son went along too. I held Tigger, sobbing as the vet administered the shot as Tigger died in my arms. After giving us a minute, the vet asked if we would like them to make a clay paper weight with Tigger's pawprints. I nodded yes. They carefully lifted his dead body, taking him from us to honor the request. Within minutes they came back, handing us the paperweight, with a casket box containing Tigger, who was wrapped in a blanket. When we got home, my son dug a grave in our yard while I looked on, then we both put Tigger in the ground. My son gently added dirt to fill in the hole and piled stones on top so other animals wouldn't dig it up. I said a few words then we walked back into the house.

My year was certainly not getting better due to my husband antagonizing me about the divorce, putting my home up for sale, and losing these two precious creatures. Despite it all, my youngest son kept pestering me to adopt another cat. Once he learned Tigger had died, he insisted on coming home for the weekend and going with me to the shelter to just 'look'. One week after Tigger died, that's exactly what we did.

As we were driving, my son asked, 'Mom, what happens if we find one?' At that moment, my intuition poked me, with a premonition that we were not going home without a cat. I replied, 'Well, we'll just have to see because right now I don't know how I can afford it.' An excuse I was making due to my financial circumstances because I didn't want to get his hopes up nor did I feel ready to have another pet so soon after losing one.

The first shelter we stopped at there were quite a few older cats available for adoption, but all the kittens had been taken, waiting to be transported to their new homes. My son had his heart set on adopting a kitten, so we left, traveling to another shelter.

When we arrived, we were shown to the area where all the cats were. The same scenario seemed to be true here as well. My son was quite disappointed, as I reminded him the next time he came home we could look again. As we were leaving, he noticed a bottom crate we hadn't

seen before. We both bent down, finding three kittens, 2 gray ones, one which was a bit larger than the other, and a black one. The larger gray kitten and black kitten were sleeping next to each other near the front of the crate. At the back was the smaller gray kitten, sitting on a mini trampoline, getting ready to pounce on the two cat-nappers. A note on the crate indicated the black one had been adopted but not the two gray ones.

We found an attendant, requesting a room so we could interact with the two gray kitties. We were told the female was named Venus and the male was named Vince and they were brother and sister. I parked myself on the floor while my son sat in the chair. Vince wasn't too happy being on the floor so my son picked him up, as Vince settled in his lap. Venus, on the other hand, was crazy, running all over the room, playing with the toys. Occasionally she would stop to sneeze or cough, but that didn't seem to stop her energy. In the meantime, Vince watched from his high perch, from time to time also sneezing. After a while, Venus, powered down, coming to sit right against my leg, purring like mad. Her motor was so loud, it echoed off the room's walls.

The attendant returned, asking how it was going. I let her know it was going great but was a bit concerned about both of them sneezing and Venus coughing. She told us she was going to take them to the vet to get checked out. And with that, she gathered both of them up, letting us know she would return to keep us posted on the diagnosis.

Once she left, I looked at my son, then burst out crying. Because of the emotional rollercoaster of ending my marriage, I wasn't too sure about where I was going to be living or what my future financial situation would be. But my intuition poked me again, hard this time as I looked at my son uttering as tears steamed down my face, 'I'm not sure how I'm going to afford them, but I can't let them go.' My son, surprised, replied, 'Mom, are you sure?' 'Yes', I said, wiping my tears. 'Ok, let's go get them,' my son answered as he gleefully jumped from the chair.

As it turned out, we weren't able to take them home that day as it was verified both of them had respiratory infections. Instead, I paid the adoption fee, and agreed to come back in a couple of days to retrieve the newest members of my household. On the way home, we stopped at a pet store. My son volunteered to buy toys and other things for them to play with. Because we decided their names didn't quite fit their personalities we ended up renaming them Madeline and Montgomery, affectionately nicknamed Maddie and Monty. Names they have adapted quite well too and which definitely fit who they have revealed themselves to be as they have grown. After two days, I picked up the two kitties. It was only after I put them in my car, I frantically remembered we had not purchased any cat food. To keep them secure the vet had put both of them in a box-like carrier with breathing holes, of which Maddie was meowing and frantically scratching to get out of. I stopped at the pet store apologizing to them for leaving them in the car, made sure the carrier was secure, then rushed to grab food and get out as quickly as I could.

Once we got home, I let them out in my bedroom, making sure the door was closed so they could get acclimated to being in a different environment. Needless to say, I didn't sleep a wink that night as both of them gallivanted throughout the room, jumping on the bed, speeding on and over me, running under the dresser, skidding across the floors, and having the time of their lives exploring.

About a week or so after that, my son returned home so we could let them loose throughout the entire house. At first they were cautious, as their world had exponentially expanded. Monty ended up getting brave and running up the six-foot cat tree of which my son immediately took him down, telling me not to let him do that again because he's 'way too little.' However, there



was no holding Monty back and to this day, he continues to have fun jumping on and off the cat tree. Eventually they both got used to living in a much bigger space. Since then I've moved three times to smaller spaces, which has definitely caused a temporary upheaval as I have learned cats aren't happy with drastic changes. Nevertheless, they have both eventually settled into each new home and acclimated quite well to their new surroundings.

It's hard to believe these two lovely creatures have been part of my life for 12 years. They have been wonderful companions as I navigated my way to restarting my life after my divorce. Every day I come home, they greet me at the door. Now I know it's because they are looking to be fed, but nonetheless, it makes me feel so good knowing these two beings are awaiting my return.

As they have aged, they have certainly slowed down but have continued with their daily antics of following me in the bathroom, kissing each other then slapping each other, getting zoomies at unexpected moments, following me to bed and cuddling and making me laugh out loud. They also have some of the funniest expressions, especially Maddie. She sometimes gets moody, which is quite evident in her facial expressions. She looks terribly evil and ready to attack. Monty is my happy go lucky guy and rarely displays a scowl, unless Maddie irritates him, when she's moody or during her times of jealousy.

We have definitely gotten into a routine and I can sense whenever they need something, whether it's food they prefer, or wanting to be held, or if they need more water, because I neglected to notice the side of the dish they prefer to drink from is empty. And yes, they are spoiled. However, I have established myself as tiger mama so when they are being mean to each other or doing something they know they shouldn't, I have ways to make them listen and act appropriately. At least most of the time!

These two, as some cats can be, occasionally exhibit finickiness. But I get it. As a human, there are certain things I am finicky about as well so this doesn't bother me. Besides, the joy they have brought in my life far outweighs their preferences as well as the beautiful scratch marks they have left on my furniture, despite the numerous scratching posts and other devices I have throughout my home.

The only thing neither of them enjoy and I get a bit nervous about is when it's time for their weekly manicures. Maddie hates it so much, she growls. Now she's also deaf, so she can't hear me when I say, 'Stop it.' But she knows I'm not backing down by the slight pressure I put on her paw when I extend her claws. If Monty watches, when it's his turn, he reacts by mewling and frantically pulling his paw away. Since I use a nail clipper meant for humans, a tip my sister gave me, I have never nicked them or cut them too deep. But I am cautious because I know it's something they hate and I want to make sure they don't bite my hand off!

I think the most important connection I have experienced with these two is the bond that has been created. It is so amazing that two non-humans could bring so much peace, joy and gratefulness into my life. The bond that has developed is definitely unique. As they age, I cherish each day we have because I know when the time comes to let them go, it will almost be as heartbreaking as when my son lost his Cody.

Which brings me back to that day in 2012, when these two were adopted. Something I didn't think I was ready for, but my heart persuaded me to do. Even though the death of a pet is so hard, I believe the love we shared is still around to give out. Although, in actuality, it's not the ones we find to adopt that need love the most, it's us humans. And it's Madeline and Montgomery who have brought not only love, but laughter, in my life again, which has helped me thrive in the place I am in now.

I believe connections with humans can be great and not so great. Connections with non-humans, however, are the best and the ones I find that provide the most unconditional love and acceptance. And as humans, that's all any of us want so we can live our lives out loud, with no apologies for who we are.

## **Ann Lucas, Age 61**

### **From a Toxic Relationship to an Adventure Continually Unfolding**

At 18, during my first year of college, I met a man, 9 years older on a Christian retreat. It wasn't love at first sight but the fairy tale I retained in my mind, of the 'knight in shining armor' who swoops in on his white horse and 'rescues the maiden in distress', was definitely a factor in moving forward in the relationship. Not that I was necessarily in distress other than having low self-esteem, no confidence, and impressed by an older man who was showering attention on me. So, despite my father's concerns over the situation, we began dating.

At first this man wooed me by engaging in and paying for things I wanted to do like ice skating, eating at my favorite places, and telling me sweet things which bolstered my confidence. He didn't even cringe when I vomited all over the sidewalk outside a Chinese restaurant we had just finished eating at. He also volunteered to pick me up and drive me to the 2nd Christian retreat that was lasting an entire weekend. It was there his real personality started to be revealed.

On the second night of the retreat, we had a dinner with the rest of the group. All of us were either watching a magic show put on from one of the other participants or relaxing. I was at a table half watching the magic show playing solitaire. This man I had come to know a little bit more about on our drive, wandered over asking if I had ever played 52 card pickup. Now in those days I was extremely naïve, answering 'No.' He asked if he could use my cards to show me. I handed them over as he began shuffling them. Suddenly, he flipped all of them right at my face, laughing hysterically as they flew on my lap, and the table. I just sat there, mute from the shock of what he had done. As he turned to see my reaction, he immediately quit laughing, picking up all the cards in a pile to give them back to me. Since I wasn't as in tune with my intuition as I am now, I didn't walk away. Not did I say anything about it, when my mom asked how things went. Instead I answered, 'The retreat was great and we plan on seeing each other again.'

Three months later, after some heavy kissing in his car, he turned to me and said, 'I love you.' Even though I knew, deep down, I didn't feel the same way, I repeated it back so his feelings wouldn't get hurt. Looking back, my first realization of being a full-fledged people pleaser.

His real personality continued to show itself bit by bit. The next incident occurred when he was driving us to our destination and sped around a corner. As he turned, I quickly grabbed onto the handlebar above the glove compartment to steady myself. Once the turn was completed, I pulled my hand away, realizing the handlebar had come with it. I was shocked, quickly turning to the man who had become my boyfriend, showing him what had happened while profusely apologizing. In response, he totally went off, screaming over and over, 'WHAT DID YOU DO?' He found a safe spot to pull over as he looked at the damage, making sure to let me know that I was at fault. After that I learned to never touch that handlebar again, no matter how fast he was driving.

A few weeks later, he let me know he was traveling to Japan, with his mother, to visit her relatives and would be gone for a month. During that time, because we didn't have cell phones,



we exchanged letters and cards. His sentiments were full of lavish words of how much he missed me. Surprisingly, I missed him too. Upon his return, we once again fell into a very comfortable routine, as the incidents at the retreat and the car were filed away with excuses for his behavior.

Since I was in college, I had a lot of classes to study for. So he would come over to my parents house, have dinner then sit with me in their living room, watching tv while I poured over my books. Every once in a while we would steal a kiss or two, being careful to listen for my mom who would periodically check in to see if we needed anything. He seemed super supportive, never complaining, even after knowing I still had a semester left after we got married. For two years, everything was calm with no further incidents of hurtful behavior.

However, his nice demeanor took a turn once our first son was born. We had discussed having me continue my career or staying home. Because he made more money than I did and both of us weren't keen on having someone else raise our son, we agreed I would stay home. But I think his and my expectations of what this would entail were quite different based on reality.

My oldest was constantly hungry, and because I was breastfeeding, it was challenging to even take a shower and get dressed, let alone keep my son and myself nourished. As a result, there were many times my husband would come home from work, where the house was cluttered, the sink was full of dishes, no dinner ready as I sat nursing my son, still in my pajamas. Over time a fuse was lit, as my husband sarcastically inquired, 'What did you do all day because I noticed nothing seems to be cleaned up.' I tried to explain about my day but instead of listening, he proceeded to the bedroom to change, raising his voice to ask, 'What's for dinner?' Yet, never once did he chose to help.

As my son grew, I started leaving him with his dad so I could have some girls nights out. There was a Tupperware party at a neighbor's house, about 5 minutes away, that I wanted to attend, making sure it was ok with him if I went. He was all for it. I left him the number just in case there was an emergency. An hour after being at the party my neighbor let me know my husband was on the line. When I answered, he appeared to be in a panic, letting me know that something was really wrong with our son because he wouldn't quit crying. I told him I would be right home, apologizing for leaving early. When I got home, my son was laughing with his dad. I stood there perplexed questioning why I was called. My husband replied, 'Oh, he's fine now.' This happened a few more times until I got wise. The next trip I took was with my sister to Frankenmuth. I told my husband where we were going but did not leave any contact information. As a result, my son was just fine when I returned and my trip was great with no unnecessary interruptions. Although I did eventually find out, my husband let my son, who at the time was 2 years old, watch a Chucky movie with him. That ended up in us having a full blown fight. But my son never watched another movie like that until he got older.

Six years later, we welcomed another son while at the same time my husband's chaotic behavior grew. The kids and I loved to sleep in on the weekend. As it turns out, all three of us were night owls, especially when school was out in the summer months. We loved spending time together watching movies way past the witching hour of midnight causing them to sleep in rather than rise before the sun did. So I took the opportunity to do the same. However, my husband was not too agreeable with this.

Friday night, he would set his alarm, letting me know it was so he could get up early and finish the list of things he would repeatedly tell me he had to do. Yet, when his alarm went off, he wouldn't immediately shut it off and get up. Instead he would continually hit the snooze button

until I got angry, raising my voice when asking him to shut it off. He would turn off the alarm, loudly opening and shutting the dresser drawers to get his clothes, then stomping to the bathroom to get his day started. Eventually I would fall back asleep.

Soon I would be startled awake hearing loud noises from the kitchen as pots and pans were being clattered together. I would lay in bed looking at the ceiling debating whether to stay put or just get up. Getting up won out every time. So I would go to the family room, put on the tv, get in the recliner, and wrap a blanket around myself, getting as comfortable as possible. My husband would cheerily be eating breakfast at the dining room table, while he once again reiterated his tasks for the day, speaking loudly over the noise of the tv. After he finished eating, he went out to the garage, to begin his first task, changing the oil in both of our cars or gearing up to cut the lawn or doing other outside work.

Within 10 minutes, he would be at the door, yelling 'I need someone to hand me some paper towels.' This would be repeated, with the yelling getting louder until he got a response, occurring every time he needed a paper towel, no matter how many he was initially given. Now you may ask why he didn't just get them himself or even take them with him. Being, raised in a Japanese household, he believed in never, and I mean NEVER wearing shoes in the house. Eventually, his yelling would wake up both kids who joined me, positioning themselves on the couch, looking at me bleary eyed, uttering, 'What does dad want now?' After his tasks were completed, my husband, would remove his shoes, come in, wash his hands as he noticed all three of us were up and announce, 'I'm going to go take a nap.' It got to the point, that I would just get up when he got up, but instead of hanging around the house, I would put my shoes on and take off for a long walk.

On Sundays, instead of working in the garage, he would cook breakfast for all of us. A great thing because his scrambled eggs were perfection! However, instead of quietly making the meal, he would bang pots and pans together while slamming cupboard doors until once again he had woken all of us up.

As the years went on and the kids grew, the behavior got worse. The intimacy in our relationship stopped as his criticism towards all of us heightened. During that time I lost 60 pounds. As I was packing what I called my big girl clothes, to give away, he asked what I was doing. When I told him, his response was, 'What if you get fat again?'

That same year, I arrived home from work, noticing the driveway had not been shoveled due to the recent snow. After I pulled in the garage, and got out of my car, I grabbed a shovel and began cleaning the drive. My husband popped out asking what I was doing. He mentioned he was going to wake up my youngest from his nap so he could help. I let him know that wasn't necessary as I was fine doing it by myself. When I got half way down the drive, my youngest came out of the house, stomping his way towards me. When I asked what was wrong, he quickly moved his way past, running. Before I knew he was half way down the street. I quickly threw the shovel onto the lawn, got in my car, and went after him.

I caught up with him, rolled down my window, asking him to stop. A block later he did, crouching over, as tears rolled down his face. When he looked up, I begged him to get in the car. He eventually did, screaming that my husband had called the police to report my youngest attacked him. I was shocked as I tried staying calm as I asked my son to explain what happened. My son told me, his dad tried waking him up by nudging his shoulder. When my son shrugged him off, his dad sat on him. It was then my son pushed him off, causing my husband to fall onto the coffee table, then on the floor, resulting in hurting his knee, which he had had surgery on

several months before. We didn't go back to the house but drove around for a while talking. When I mentioned I was going to file for divorce, my son said, 'No mom. That will make it worse.' This police report stayed on my son's record until he requested it to be expunged by a judge so he could enter the Army. Thankfully it was expunged. The one regret I have is not going back to face the police and letting them know it was my husband who caused the incident.

A couple years after that, my husband was diagnosed with prostate cancer and elected to have his prostate removed. The priest who had married us was now stationed at the Catholic church we attended. After mass, we stopped to chat with him, asking if he would be willing to say a blessing over my husband. Immediately he agreed to do it on the spot. The blessing was beautiful, offering hope for the future. As we left, the priest asked us to let him know how the surgery went. Once my husband was home and able to function on his own, I returned to work. Once I got home, my husband mentioned he had called the priest and they had a long chat, and that maybe we could invite him over for dinner. I agreed, calling the priest to extend the invitation. However, when I identified myself, his friendliness became very standoffish, letting me know he was pretty tied up to accept an invitation. I hung up, letting my husband know the priest wasn't available. My husband just shrugged it off.

Months before our 25th Anniversary, my husband and I discussed options to celebrate, including inviting the whole family. Since he knew my favorite spot was Cross in the Woods, he suggested we renew our vows there. When I mentioned that would seem far for my older parents to drive he suggested we rent a limousine for them and pay for gas and lodging for other family members. A few days later, he indicated he had spoken to the priest up there who was willing to officiate our ceremony. I got more and more excited as we talked. A couple months before our anniversary, I brought it up again, suggesting we make arrangements.

He said, 'I don't think that's a great idea.'

'Why?', I asked.

'Well I've been thinking and the cost is going to be quite big,' he responded.

'Ok, well we don't have to have family. We could just go ourselves.'

'No', he said. 'I just don't want to go that far.'

Instead we ended up at the Dearborn Inn, going to Greenfield Village to look at a car display. The whole day I tried not showing my disappointment. However, that somewhat diminished when we arrived at our hotel, to discover they had upgraded our room, at no extra charge, providing champagne with chocolate covered strawberries in our room. Despite not having intimacy in a long time, I still packed a beautiful piece of lingerie, hoping this would put a spark back in. Unfortunately, after I made several attempts to initiate contact, my husband rolled his back to me, as far as he could get to his side of the king sized bed and fell asleep. I laid awake, tears running down my face, as the realization my marriage was slowly dying kicked in.

As the marriage continued, not only was I discovering my husband was telling lies to cover up stuff but communication between us was slowly becoming nil. I ended up totally shutting down because every time I started to talk about my day after he finished talking about his, he either walked away or said, 'Are you done yet?' Yet no one outside our relationship suspected anything was wrong with our marriage.

It was only after I was diagnosed with breast cancer, opting for a mastectomy that I accepted

it was time to file for a divorce. During that time, I begged my husband to look at what I thought was now a deformed part of my body. He finally did, briefly glancing at my wound, then abruptly turning away, saying 'It's not that bad.' When I was able to shower, I sobbed, knowing things were not going to change, finally coming to grips that the marriage was over, making the decision to file for divorce after my youngest was out of college.

Well, as they say, once you put something out in the Universe, things ultimately happen whether you are ready or not. Five months after my surgery, I discovered my husband was having an affair. I noticed signs beforehand but never had solid proof. That day, I told him to pack his bags and get out. He never fully admitted to it, instead telling me, with crocodile tears in his eyes, that he had a problem and was going to see a therapist about it. I responded, 'I'm filing for divorce.'

The official filing date of the divorce papers was what would have been our 27th wedding anniversary. I knew despite fearing of what the future would hold, I needed to get out. Thankfully, at that time, both of our kids were adults so child support wasn't an issue. The following year, on my 50th birthday, the divorce was final and my adventure as a single woman, on my own, began.

Flash forward to today, where I continue to be happily divorced. Next year I will not only celebrate 62 years of being alive but also 12 years of being divorced. And yes, I did say celebrate because even though divorce is traumatic, it can end up being an exciting venture into the unknown, despite the loss and the fear. And the adventure of rediscovering the who of self is a grand one for sure.

Through a lot of self-compassion, self-discovery, self-therapy, working on the baggage within I no longer want or need, facing my demons, and opening my heart and soul to the process of healing I have become a much better person, found my voice, and become the woman I was meant to be.

As for the comment about me getting fat again? I did, regaining all the weight I had lost. But, even though that comment weighed on me as I looked at myself in the mirror, I realized I loved myself more than ever, no matter how I looked or what I weighed, resulting in me throwing out my bathroom scale, buying some new clothes and accepting who I was, fat and all.

Six months after the divorce, I had reconstructive surgery and transitioned to a new job. Since then, I've transitioned to other jobs, soon to start a new one, because I've learned not to make excuses anymore to stay in a situation that may be financially comfortable but is sabotaging my mental health.

I also moved from the house we shared, currently residing after my third move in a very comfortable apartment that is well within my budget and close to work and my mom, whom I support with giving care.

The same year I filed for divorce, my adventure included adopting two cats, a brother and sister who still reside with me. They have been my lifeline in spreading joy, bringing laughter back into my life and providing cuddles.

As for my kids, the youngest, due to another incident between him and his dad, has chosen to not have any more contact with his dad. However, my oldest still does. I am grateful both still have contact with me, especially after admitting to myself, then apologizing to them about the emotional abuse I caused in their younger years. To this day, I'm not sure if they ever received an

apology from their dad and have never asked. I know I haven't and don't expect to.

And my ex? Well he began a new adventure of his own, by getting engaged 10 months after the divorce was final, acquiring an annulment so he could remarry in the Catholic church. I only see him at events which involve our kids. Other than that, I don't engage with him.

As to my ongoing adventure? It's been amazing and challenging and life altering and a place I never thought I'd be in. Not only that but the person I've become is so far from who I was it's astounding and humbling at the same time. Yet it is something I do not regret because the peace, and most importantly the self-love that has resulted is the best part of starting over.

And the people pleasing? No more. I consider myself a former, recovered people pleaser living life on my own terms, not feeling guilty for saying no and being wholeheartedly me without worrying about what others think.

Even though I also don't regret getting married, due to my two sons, divorce has freed me to blossom in ways I only wished for in my life, allowing me to find the strength within to overcome when life kicks my butt to the curb as well as realize endings are just places to begin new adventures that the future is anxiously waiting for me to walk into.

As Robin Williams, as Peter Pan, in the movie Hook, stated, 'To live..to live would be an awfully big adventure.' And as it turns out, it is and continues to be.

## **Ann Lucas, Age 61**

### **Life Lessons Quitting My Job During Covid Taught Me**

There is a quote that says:

"Do it scared. If you don't, you'll never do it. If you wait for the perfect time, the perfect time will never come. Make it the perfect time."

A life changing lesson, along with several others, I learned when I quit my job in June 2020, in the midst of a pandemic, when everything was mostly shut down, cities became desolate, malls and restaurants were closing, many were losing their jobs, deaths were being reported daily, and people were locked away behind closed doors as high levels of anxiety towards the unknown became the norm.

It was in the beginning of March that year, when things were drastically shifting as the pandemic swiftly made its way into Michigan. I was a receptionist and main shipping person, at a large automotive supplier, and was quickly coming up to celebrating my 2-year anniversary.

As Human Resources set guidelines for dealing with this unexpected global interference of life, I noticed other departments being granted permission to pack up their work stuff and work from home, a concept at the time that most employers frowned upon. However, there were a few stragglers being told they had to stay behind to run the office, including myself. Then on March 23, Governor Whitmer, implemented the 'stay home, stay safe' executive order. Immediately after hearing that announcement, I called my manager, letting her know I would no longer be working from the office, but would be following the state's orders. She was not happy at my decision but after conferring with the Human Resources director, agreed to let me work from home.

That same day, I packed up my stuff, said goodbye to my fellow employees and began a new



adventure working from home. At the time I lived in an apartment with 2 bedrooms, separated by an open living space, with a small dining area, which became the perfect spot to set up my home office. It was also nice because every day I had a view of nature from my patio doors. Admittedly at first, it was weird waking up and having only steps to get to work, especially since my drive everyday was between 1-1 ½ hours to work and the same to get home, with travel time sometimes being longer depending on the weather or traffic conditions. However, it didn't take long to settle in, gradually loving the fact of not only zero travel time but also not having constant interruptions throughout my workday. I felt super productive, arising most days at 5 a.m., tackling work stuff at 6 a.m., resulting in finishing most of my daily tasks by 8 or 9 a.m., allowing much needed time to engage in some trainings to help me learn more about shipping procedures and processes in relation to hazardous materials. I also loved not having to get dressed but wearing my comfy clothes or staying in my pajamas. Another plus? My two kitty roommates loved having me home, to give them attention as requested. Unfortunately, this experience caused my little female roommate to develop separation anxiety which she still exhibits now and again.

As time went on, my mental health and spirit grew from not feeling in a funk all the time to glowing. I started not dreading Sunday nights, as my blues over Monday mornings, dissipated. My authentic personality showed its face again as the 'mask' I used to act corporate, fell to the wayside. I was finally feeling accomplished even as my workload was increasing, since things were getting finished and not continually shuffled around to other days. I felt motivated and eager to dive in, allowing me to handle mundane tasks and unexpected hiccups in my day with ease. My sleep patterns changed and I was no longer waking up in the middle of the night thinking of things I missed or things I needed to get done ASAP. My energy levels were up as well, allowing me to become more efficient and organized in prioritizing my day. And despite weekly zoom meetings with my manager, her micromanaging style of leading others, was curbed, taking a bunch of pressure off my shoulders.

As time went on, I felt having an office area within view 24/7 was beginning to interfere with my personal space and time. So I ended up moving some stuff around in my storage closet, making space to put my home office in there. And it worked out great! At the end of each work day, I not only shut down my computer, but was able to shut the door, leaving work behind, never thinking about it again until the next morning.

Another great thing about working from home was having the time to finally catch up on reading books on my TBR list. One of those books happened to be *Untamed* by Glennon Doyle. This book was the defining thing helping me to make a decision, one I had been debating for a while, to quit, regardless of the circumstances the world was facing.

Fast forward 5 weeks later when I received a phone call from an employee in accounting, letting me know their department had been told to stay hunkered down at home until at least September, and possibly through the end of the year. Shortly after that call, an on-site employee, who had become a friend, called to ask me if the request was made for me to return to work, would I? He later shared with me that he was in a meeting where this was being debated, of which my manager was all for it, despite his recommendations that my being in the office was not necessary to keep the business running.

Exactly a week later, my manager called me, at 3:45 p.m., fifteen minutes before my day was ending, to inform me that I was expected to return to work the following Monday. After hearing her tell me the reasons why, I replied that I wasn't sure if I agreed, of which she answered, 'If you don't return, I'll have to find someone to replace you.'

At that time, I had been working from home for 7 weeks, being productive, never refusing work, and letting my manager know about the training classes I was taking. But reading *Untamed* helped me rethink not only my career choice but my life choices. And for days after reading that book I kept thinking about some of things Glennon so aptly put as she maneuvered her way through life, its challenges and decisions she made that others frowned upon. The part of the book that totally resonated with me was the opening chapter when she talked about the cheetah being let go, only to end up once again caged, to not live its most authentic life as a wild being, running free.

Plus being told, in not-so-subtle words, that if I didn't return, I would no longer have a job, opened my eyes to the realization that staying in corporate would mean being confined by the politics and chained to a fake environment, which would continue to stifle my authentic self, forcing it to eventually die instead of being free. One week after having my job threatened, I gave my 2-week notice, choosing to be let go, befriending my fear with courage I didn't know I possessed until the moment the company door closed behind me and I ran into the unknown.

Fast forward today, June 8, 2024, as I write this and reflect on the lessons I learned from that experience-

1. Don't put off reading books on your TBR list. You never know where the words they contain can help in making decisions leading to life changing moments. My TBR list is continually being added to, but I don't let it get so large that I end up putting off reading those books anymore. And even though I am glad bookstores are once again thriving, using my library to place books on hold is a great way to not only get new books for free but also to stay within my budget.
2. Trust your heart to sway the doubts lodged in your mind. Sometimes that is all it takes to take a leap of faith, arriving in places you never imagined, resulting in the person you always wished to be. That being said, before I quit my job, I did do a deep dive into how it would affect my finances as well as if this was feasible based on my lifestyle. In the end, despite my savings, my finances did take a slight hit, but I don't regret leaping or following my heart.
3. Listen hard to your intuition. Especially when its voice persistently nags you to make a decision. It is a voice you can trust 100% and will never steer you wrong. This one has been hard because I've always had excuses for not trusting it, until recently, when an event occurred, weeks after my intuition warned me about it. As a result, I ended up responding to the event with calm instead of anger.
4. Ignore other's opinions on what you should be pursuing in your life. Yes, I got perplexing looks and 'sound' advice from those who thought I was crazy for quitting my job. But if I had listened to them, I would have never built the life I have nor taken the leap nor faced my fears. It's all relative and sometimes what's wrong for others doesn't mean it's not right for us and our life.
5. Being a people pleaser has always been the route I have taken. Now? I identify as a former people pleaser. Going down the path of risk, was scary as hell, because I did not have another job lined up and at that point, chaos reigned everywhere. But because I wasn't intimidated by what I would face in the future, I knew pleasing myself, first and foremost, and saying no to corporate nonsense, was the best decision I needed to ensure a life of peacefulness.
6. No matter what your circumstance or finances, extend a hand to help and inspire others. During the pandemic, my mom was 92 years old, and not keen at all to leaving her home.



I ended up grocery shopping for her, taking her to get vaccinated, an experience that was quite different, and when the lockdown was slowly lifted, taking her to various doctor's appointments. To this day, we occasionally reminisce of how different her life would have been if she had been in an assisted living complex. We both doubt she would have lived and thrived to be a sassy 96 years old.

7. Rules are made to be broken, so make sure to break a few, just don't break those that could get you arrested! I had always been told never to quit a job without having another one to go to. Well, I did it. And guess what? Despite the hit on my finances, which wasn't devastating, nothing else was wrecked by havoc. In fact, because businesses were not hiring, I was able to have 9 months off, eventually realizing how wonderful it was to put a hold on my life from work and career. The best part? In December, I quit applying for jobs. Instead I focused my worries on journaling, putting up Christmas decorations, taping Christmas shows, and cuddling with my cats fully enjoying the season. Then in January, I allowed my worries to flood my soul and restarted the hunt for a new job.

8. The biggest lesson learned? Nothing in life is perfect. The pandemic certainly proved that. So instead of wishing for better things, take action when opportunity knocks. Open the door wide, so you don't stumble on the way out and greet it with open arms, then run towards whatever is waiting in the future.

I not only thrived when I quit my job during a chaotic time, but I also have thrived through breast cancer, divorce and continue to thrive through whatever life doles out. As a result, if I never faced my fears in this experience as well as others, I would be stagnant with regrets.

Based on my 61 years of life experiences, I wholeheartedly believe things always work out. Not necessarily according to my plans, but often better. As long as I'm willing to follow my heart, trust my intuition, listen to my voice, inspire others, celebrate and be grateful for the moments I have, keep reading and don't wait for that perfect moment in order to soar to greater things. As Glennon Doyle is famous for saying, 'WE CAN DO HARD THINGS.' And sometimes all it takes is an open heart, a willing spirit, a trusting soul, courage to befriend fear and a leap of faith in order to experience pivotal life-changing moments.

## **Anonymous**

### **Untitled**

Once when I was playing with my friends in school. Then a boy came up to me and asked to play with us but I said "No! You look so different." Then he went home then one my told me "Why did him go? It's okay to be different. Everyone is different in their own way." And that's how I learned my important life lesson.

## **Anonymous**

### **Untitled**

To always be kind to others. Always listen to others. Respect your elders.

## Anonymous

### Untitled

I care about my family a lot. They have been with me my whole life. They have helped me in my highs and lows. The time when I got a good score on my test or when I got a bad score on my test. My family has shaped me to the amazing person I am. This is why I care about my family.

## Anonymous

### Untitled

Going to the park with his friend.

## Anonymous

### Untitled

ON my birthday I had COVID and on my birthday everyone had cake other then me!

## Anonymous

### Untitled

Every Christmas my family and I eat cheese fondue. My mom makes sour dough bread and cuts it up then she melts the cheese and adds a little bit of wine. Usually we dip the bread in the cheese. Then we eat!

## Anonymous

### Untitled

Every family has their own special traditions. Maybe you order BBQ ribs every Christmas Eve. Maybe every Christmas someone gets a turn receiving this year's "prank gift". Maybe after Thanksgiving dinner you like to sit outside the local convenience store with a coffee and dessert to share with a loved one. For my family, our special tradition was called "Circus Day". My grandpa was an avid circus fan from the time he was young. He got straight to work collecting unused materials to craft his very own miniature circus model. By the time he had a family of his own, the display was large enough to take up an entire backyard. Dozens of freestanding tents filled with carved animals that flapped their ears, trapeze artists that twirled, cotton candy vendors hard at work, and so much more. Every year on "Circus Day" my extended family would gather early in the morning to set up the display. Family and friends from near and far would come by to admire our work and the craftsmanship that went into it. Similar to a real circus that just comes to town for a single day, by nightfall we would have everything packed up and ready for next year's event. I'm so honored to have been a part of making my grandpa's dream come true for many years. Not only did "Circus Day" bring joy to my family and I, but every single person that came by to attend. Cherish your family traditions, and have fun creating new ones to pass on.

## **AV, Age 24**

### **Untitled**

People sometimes spend their whole lives searching for their purpose. As you get older, existentialism creeps in, usually through an unfulfilling career or relationships. Or sometimes just questioning creation. The common man fears oblivion. We want to make something out of the crazy chances that ended us up in living. It's a haunting kind of pressure- how do you figure it out? What we're here for- where's the answer hidden?

The most important life lesson I've learned is that the purpose of life is to simply live.

I have learned that for me, two of the most important things are to love and create, they both lend to each other and complement each other beautifully. I think it is of utmost importance to love to the greatest of your abilities. Try your best not to resist the passage of time and live through it rather than survive. Every second is filled with love, freedom, and happiness if you let it.

## **Ayla Durig, Age 6**

### **Untitled**

We drove to NY from MI. It was a long journey but we went through it. We made sure to pack a lot of food and water. Me and my sister and brother made sure to get some sleep on the ride too. We saw lots of animals on the ride there like cows and horses and we even saw farms. We drove through Pennsylvania and saw the Pocono Mountains!

## **Bree, Age 38, and Evie Schwartz, Age 6**

### **Untitled**

A while ago we went on a family adventure. First, we boarded an airplane to Boston. When we got there we met up with family to celebrate Auntie Hindy Day becoming a Rabbi. Next, we visited the big park called the Boston Commons. They have lots of pretty trees from all over the world, we took a ride on a swan boat, and found the "make way for ducklings" sculpture from our favorite book. Last, we had a perfect family beach day together on Plum Island. The piping plover were nesting, and the water was chilly but fun to play in.

## **Candis E.**

### **Only My Sister**

"Why do I hear people laughing in the grocery store? What is so funny?"

"Those people in that booth are having too much fun. What is their deal?"

These are things I imagine people must say after encountering the "noise" my friend and I inevitably make whenever we're together. My BFF. My bestest sis. My "sister." We are both in our late 30s, but that means nothing to two women who can't help but burst out laughing at just one glance at each other because we know.

"I tell my husband, and he doesn't get it. Only my sister understands me!" ...Something we often tell each other when video chatting on our phones. Like the things we notice that are ridiculous,

outrageous, irritating, or amazing. "If only my sister were here, we would both laugh/cringe/groan/gasp! I'll tell her about it when we talk again, unless I forget." Short term memory is another thing we laugh about.

A big topic of our conversations (and source of laughter): how I, the easily startled one, have been "scared" lately. Example: Letting out a big, "Ahhhh!" because I opened the bathroom door one night to discover a "creature" on the floor. It was a towel. I lost one of my nine lives over a towel (it must have fallen off the hook on the door at some point). Or how my sister, the perpetrator of freak-outs, scares her husband just by silently being present in a room without him noticing. She does that to everyone. All. The. Time.

And no, we don't just talk about or relate in areas of the lighter moments in life, but that is where we find strength and happiness. The irony of the little things that invite us into a refreshing release of joy. Like remembering when we walked into the restroom together at a restaurant to discover it was only for one person... hence the one toilet. Can you say, "Awkward!?" Also, "Who's leaving? Because you see the situation here!"

I'm proud to be one of the crazy women laughing in the public restroom because it means I have a best friend who understands me. For that, she will forever be called my "sister."

## **Dark Angel Star Spiritual**

### **Untitled**

Before COVID, when I was 36 years old, I started transitioning from female to male. I grew facial hair and developed a beard. I shaved my head. I had special surgery. My voice changed because I started taking weekly hormone medication. I changed my pronouns from she/her/hers to he/him/his. Some friends and family were supportive. Other friends and family were not supportive. This was a hard time in my life. But transitioning was my decision, not anyone else's. It was a hard decision to go through this for myself and my family because I was raised as a daughter but I realized I wanted to be a son.

I learned some lessons because of my transition. I gained new friends with people who understand that I'm not alone because there are other people like me going through the same decisions and transitions. I learned this when I met my gender therapist who helped me realize I was male on the inside. When I first met my therapist I was wearing male clothes and carrying a pink purse. He asked me if I ever felt gender fluid. It was the first time I heard about gender fluid. I became confident with my new identity and new self when my mom bought me men's clothing and I kept my female clothing. I started mixing it up by wearing both male and female clothes in my neighborhood where everyone knows me and loves me for who I am. Mixing things up made me happier and confident as a gender fluid male and made me stronger in my faith. In my neighborhood, some days I feel like wearing men's clothing and sometimes I wear female clothing. What I choose to wear depends on my personality.

I soon learned to be cautious when I tell people my story because in my old neighborhood, before I transitioned, I told a neighbor that I am no longer going to be female. I said, "I'm going to be male. I want you to respect that." They said, "No. It is wrong to go through with that decision." They said, "I will get a preacher and pray the gayness out of you." They made me scared and angry when they said, "I'll give you my phone number so I can take you somewhere and get you fixed."

My anger taught me to be extra careful what I say about my journey and who I tell about my journey. For example, when I go outside of my neighborhood I wear male clothing because I don't know if they will accept me or not. I am very careful about what I say, where I am, and who is around me.

I also learned that it is important to have an extended family, like my therapist, people at Affirmations in Ferndale, my church home, and my new doctor's office Be Well Medical Center in Berkeley.

I'm happy my parents, aunts, uncles, and brothers support me and love me for who I am. Before I told them about my new gender identity, I was afraid they weren't going to be supportive. I was afraid they wouldn't accept me for who I really am. I have a lot of friends going through transition and their families are not supportive. Some of my friends have been kicked out.

I'm telling my story to help other people know that they are not alone. They can live their dream. They need to find their extended family. Here are some links that can help: [goaffirmations.org](http://goaffirmations.org), [translife.org](http://translife.org), [thetrevorproject.org](http://thetrevorproject.org), [ruthelliscenter.org](http://ruthelliscenter.org), [lgbtdetroit.org](http://lgbtdetroit.org). Love is love all the time every day.

## **Dityaa, Age 8**

### **Untitled**

I care about my mom because she inspires me and she does all of the house work like doing the laundry, making the shopping list, cooks food, cleans the house like vacuuming, and she helps me with my homework and she takes good care of me and my brother. She plans the trips we go and spends time together. She helps me and my brother read books. Me and my mom has a special connection between us.

## **Emmy Washefski, Age 4, and Michelle Croal, Age 35**

### **Untitled**

(While the contents are the story are fictitious, the setting of the story-telling is true)

Emmy, Mama and Daddy are sitting at the patio table in the backyard, eating dinner and enjoying the early summer evening.

Emmy "Mama tell me a story!"

Mama " What kind of story Emmy?"

"A Princess Emmy and Princess Vivian story. With a monster. A friendly one, not a mean one".

"OK, here we go. Once upon a time, there were two castles next to each other. In one castle lived a little girl named Princess Emmy and in the other castle lived a little girl named Princess Vivian. They liked to go on adventures together. One day Princess Emmy and Princess Vivian got on their horses - what are their horses' names?"

"Emmy and Margaret"

"Ok. So Princess Emmy got on her horse, Emmy-the-Horse, and Princess Vivian got on her horse

Margaret. They went clippy-cloppy, clippy-cloppy over the fields, clippy-cloppy, clippy-cloppy past the villages, clippy-cloppy, clippy-cloppy over the bridge and clippy-cloppy, clippy-cloppy through the forest until they came to a cave. Princess Emmy and Princess Vivian peeked inside the cave and they saw two huge furry feet, and a big furry snout, and two furry ears and lots of sharp teeth! It was a monster! Snore, Snore, Snore! And they said 'Ahhhhhhh a cave monster!!'

"No, not a mean one, a friendly one!" "Right right, a friendly one. So then the monster woke up and said 'Wait, I'm a friendly monster! I won't eat you! Look, I already ate breakfast - you can see my dishes are over there because I haven't cleaned them up yet. Do you want to play a game?' So Princess Emmy, Princess Vivian and the cave monster played some games. They played Yahtzee, and they played hopscotch and they played checkers."

"Let's go to Elsa's castle"

"Ok, so Princess Emmy and Princess Vivian asked the cave monster - wait, what's the cave monster's name?" "Emmy!"

"No, we already have Princess Emmy and Emmy-the-Horse. That's too confusing if the monster's name is Emmy too. Pick a different name"

"Emmy."

"What about Lulabelle?"

"Okay."

"Alright, so Princess Emmy and Princess Vivian asked Lulabelle the Cave Monster if she wanted to continue on their adventure with them and go visit Queen Elsa. So Princess Emmy got on Emmy-the-Horse and Princess Vivian got on Margaret-the-Horse and Lulabelle didn't have a horse so she walked. And they went clippy-cloppy, clippy-cloppy through the forest and clippy-cloppy up the mountain until they came to a huge palace made of ice."

"Make it a Mean Elsa"

"No, I don't like the stories where Elsa is mean. How about a Nice Elsa?"

"Okay"

"So Princess Emmy, Princess Vivian and Lulabelle the Cave Monster knocked on the door to Queen Elsa's palace. Queen Elsa opened the door and said, 'Hello Emmy and Vivian! And who's your new friend?' and Lulabelle curtsied and said 'My name's Lulabelle the Cave Monster'. And Queen Elsa said, 'Why Lulabelle, where'd you learn such good manners?' and Lulabelle said, 'Well I went to Good Manners School of course!' 'Amazing!' said Queen Elsa. 'What would you girls like to play?'"

"Roller-skates!"

"Roller-skates?! Wow okay! So Queen Elsa magicked everyone some roller-skates and they all roller-skated around the ballroom."

"No, ice-skates!"

"What? They already have roller-skates! So anyway, after they were all done roller-skating, I mean ice-skating, Queen Elsa made everyone pancakes with syrup for lunch. By then, it was

getting pretty late, so it was time for everyone to go home. Princess Emmy got on Emmy-the-Horse, Princess Vivian got on Margeret-the-Horse and Lulabelle walked, and they all went clippy-cloppy down the mountain back to Lulabelle's cave. And Emmy said 'Bye Lulabelle, thanks for playing with us today, see you tomorrow!' and Lulabelle said 'Bye Princess Emmy!'. And Princess Emmy and Princess Vivian and their horses went clippy-cloppy back through the forest, clippy-cloppy back over the bridge, clippy-cloppy back past the villages, clippy-cloppy back over the fields to their castles. And Princess Emmy said, ' Bye Vivian, see you tomorrow!' and Princess Vivian said, 'Bye Emmy!'. And both princesses went home to their castles and had dinner and went to bed. The End"

Daddy, "Wow, what a great story!"

Emmy, "Tell another story!!"

Mama *\*inhales\**

## **Evelyn Lenda, Age 11**

### **Untitled**

When I was 6 my parents got a divorce. That led me to being stressed out for awhile. I was a couch potato. I wasn't trying to do anything, at least not in school. It wasn't until I failed a test that I started trying. No matter how hard it was I studied and studied. Now I am going into 6th grade and I realized that no matter how hard life is you always have room for improvement. If you are having a bad day or a good day, you can always make it better by trying your best!

## **Evie Schwartz, Age 6**

### **Untitled**

My Grandmother Bubby

- She is kind
- She makes me noodles
- She sings me songs

My Grandfather Zaidé

- He is sweet and kind
- He plays with me
- He has lots of love to share

## **Evie, Age 6, and Tutu Schwartz, Grandmother**

### **Untitled**

Personal space is like a big hula-hoop between a friend. When you see the hula-hoop you also feel it and so your other friend sees it too.



## **Freyja, Age 5**

### **Untitled**

My dog Lola lives in Dowagiac with my Papa and Nano. Lola is the best dog ever. She is so white, cuddly, and only likes when I feed her. She is special because she loves me and I love her. Cute, cute, cute! I love her so much, she is the best doggy.

## **Hajerah Arif, Age 27**

### **Untitled**

An important lesson I have learned in my 27 years of life can be summed up in a few words: "This too shall pass." I have learned this lesson through tough times and enjoyable times. I have had the privilege and blessing of being in an 8 year relationship, completing a rigorous Physician Associate Masters degree, and carrying, birthing, and parenting two young boys. These are all blessings that come with hardships, and for me personally, the hardest one has been becoming a mother. At times, life has been unimaginably difficult, such as undergoing labor and delivery without any medications, or feeling immensely lonely and yet completely overstimulated as I care for a needy infant and energetic toddler on my own at home. In the moment, it certainly feels like I will not make it out of this circumstance. Yet, each time, I have found that if I take a deep breath, and slowly work my way through whatever I am dealing with, I will inevitably make it out. And each time I successfully overcome a hardship, I gain more strength and more skills to tackle what is to come. There is another perspective to this life lesson as well. It applies just as equally to good times as it does to difficult times. So in moments where my relationship with my spouse feels perfect and I feel loved and give love freely, I remind myself that there will be a time that my husband and I may be at odds with one another and struggle to stay connected. It keeps me humble and grounded, and reminds me not to take anything for granted. It also allows me to safely store these happy memories in a place in my mind where I can retrieve them during the hard times, as a reminder that this relationship, and in a broader sense, this life, is something worth fighting for. And finally, for me personally as a Muslim, this lesson reminds me that this entire life shall soon pass, and what will remain is my deeds and my soul, and for that I strive to live on this earth as a humble, gracious servant of God.

## **Ignatius, Age 5**

### **Untitled**

I went to the Heritage Park Nature Center with my mom and sister. I played with the camping toys in the Nature Center. I also read some pictures that described some animals. I played in the boat with my sister. I played with the flower stacking toys and the blocks. We also went on the story walk together. We read about the alphabet and trails. We had fun together.

## **Jennifer Cobbina-Dungy, Age 42**

### **Untitled**

My husband and I went to Philadelphia for a conference that I was in. We decided to also rent a car to drive to Washington DC to go to the Smithsonian museum. This trip was a disaster from beginning to end. First, even though I found a car rental 5 to 10 minutes away when we got an

Uber it took us to the rental place. That was about 25 minutes away when we arrived. There was no car in my husband's name eating though he ordered it. He came to find out that he reserved the car for a different day. My husband wanted to rent an electric vehicle thinking that it would be cheaper. Well, when we drove to Washington DC, there is no place to park. After looking for a parking spot for nearly an hour he dropped me and my baby off to the museum. He went to go find parking and he parked over 2 miles away. He had to walk to the museum and when he arrived, he realized he was at the wrong museum and couldn't find me. He finally found me and when he did, there was 30 minutes before The museum closed. He was so tired and upset that he didn't even want to explore the museum. We walked two hours back to the car where you parked. Even though he thought he was at a charging station to charge the car, the car barely charged when we arrived. So we decided to go to Walmart and walk around for an hour and a half to charge the car. When we got back, the car still barely charged. My husband didn't know how to work this and fail to realize that there are different voltages to charge the car. We spent another hour trying to figure out how to charge the car and calling customer service. We went to a McDonald's, which was A supercharger. We waited there for an hour for the card to charge before traveling three more hours back to Philly from Washington. When we arrived and tried to return the car, the car rental was closed and we couldn't return it because it was after midnight. The next day, my husband goes to return the vehicle and they charge us more money because the vehicle was not. Even though we wanted to get rid of the car the day before we couldn't and what my husband thought would be cheap and electric vehicle ended up being really expensive. We had a horrible trip.

## **Jennifer Schiffer, Age 48**

### **Untitled**

I wish I'd learned how important it is to share how much people mean, in some other way than to lose my best friend to cancer in 2016. Steve always told everyone I was his best friend, but I didn't realize he was mine-- I never said that to him-- until he was sick and dying. We define our relationships in life as we choose, and with such love, but sometimes you really don't know just how good you have it until you lose it. Such a cliché... I know Steve knew I loved him. I hope somewhere he still does. My partner says I will be 90 and I'll have days where I think about Steve, and miss him. Yes.

## **Jovidhamanoj, Age 11**

### **Cedar Point**

Me and my family, friends went to Cedar Point. Me and my friends was so happy we went water park. First we went to a swimming pool it's not normal we can go in that river ride.

## **Kayra, Age 6**

### **Untitled**

That I learned in life is compassion is so great once I been mean to some people and I think that compassion is the best one because if you be mean they will be mean back.

## **Kelly Harrison, Age 44**

### **Untitled**

My Mom always took me to the library as a kid, bought me a new book when out shopping, and always made sure I had money for the scholastic book fairs. I remember those feelings of joy with new books. As a Mom now myself, I try to surround my son with books. I love doing to the summer reading program with him.

## **Kelsey Carpenter, Age 35**

### **Untitled**

My neighbor Carole is one of the best neighbors I've ever had. When my son was born 3 weeks early, she offered to watch our dog while we acclimated to having a baby in the NICU. She drove me to the NICU, brought us delicious home-cooked food, and showed empathy. When our son came home, she continued to take care of our dog for a few days while we adjusted to having a newborn. As our son grew older, she brought him fun books periodically to get him into reading and he now LOVES to read. The books from Carole are some of his favorites. He especially loves *Flitter Flutter Butterfly*. For his first birthday, Carole made our son a special custom Pac-man cake, cupcakes, and smash cake. The cakes turned out beautiful and they were so tasty! Carole continues to help watch our dog on a weekly basis and when we go out of town. Our dog loves her family and always has a blast at their house. Whenever we pick up our dog, we catch up on life with Carole and her partner. We exchange stories, laugh about funny events, and support each other when there are sad updates. Whenever I have a problem or concern, I know our neighbor Carole will do what she can to help. She truly is a wonderful, caring, altruistic neighbor.

## **Kiema, Age 10**

### **Untitled**

One day I was at a roller coaster place. They had a zip line, rollercoaster, go karts, and a drop tower. I went on the drop tower with my mom. We went to the ticket place and bought the tickets. We waited in line then I saw a sign that said dune drop 125 feet tall. Finally we got on it goes up slowly, then down fast we screamed so loud. It was so fun and so scary. When we got off my mom was shaking so much she couldn't put her phone in her purse. But I was skipping around. She hated it a lot. And she said she would never go on ever ever ever ever again.

## **Lena, Age 7**

### **Untitled**

I went to a roller coaster place. There was a zipline, drop tower, and a roller coaster. I went on the zipline with my sister. You go up then stay up high for a second. Then you go down. I was happy and scared.

## **Lily Harris, Age 4**

### **Untitled**

I went on a school field trip. I went with my mom. We went to a barn. We took a hayride to a pumpkin patch. I picked my own Halloween pumpkin. We made apple cider and got to drink it.

## **Lincoln Smith, Age 5**

### **Untitled**

Hi, my name is Lincoln Smith and I am five years old. I want to tell you about two people that hold a special place in my heart. They are my best friends, and their name are Henry and Stella. Henry is four and will be five in July and Stella is six. I met Henry at pre-school and Stella is his sister. Our parents are best friends, so we spend a lot of time together. Some of the things that we do together are, go to the park, go to Lifetime to the pool, do crafts and watch movies. We also love to eat treats together. Last weekend we had a BBQ and a water party, and it was a lot of fun. One of my favorite things that we have done together is go on vacation to Florida. We went to the beach, played in the pool and went exploring on special walks with our Dads. I love Henry and Stella because they are nice, they are funny, and they care about me when I am sad or sick. I love them so much and I hope we stay friends forever.

## **Manjari Ravikumar, Age 7**

### **Untitled**

One day I went to Disney World. I went for so much rides. And one day on Wednesday we were about to go to the pool. Well we didn't go. One day we went and saw many Disney princesses and characters. And before that day I got a watch and a autograph book. And I also got a Elsa stuffy. And with the autograph book all characters signed it. And my parents made a printout of the photos we took with them. We also had a background picture. One day I went for a boat ride it was fun. After the boat ride we were walking and then my parents stopped in some place and I kept walking and I got lost. I was near the zoo I started crying and zoo keeper was near me and I was staying near the zoo keeper for few minutes and then my mom came and got me. I learned a lesson from this that we have to stay always near our parents.

## **Marcia Ploski, Age 70**

### **The Dirtiest Doorbell**

My Grandma Emmy lives in a very tall building. It is so tall that sometimes the top gets lost in the clouds. My Grandma Emmy is my great-grandmother. When I first heard this I was so confused. My regular grandma is the greatest grandma how could this one be greater? Oh boy, I though I'm in for a real treat. Well I think this grandma is not as great as my regular grandma because she can't run and play like my regular grandma can. I'll just call her Grandma Emmy. She likes that better anyway. She said great grandma makes her sound old. I told her "But you are old." She said lets keep that a secret. I think that will be hard because it says so on her face. I see my Grandma Emmy every week because my regular grandma always wants to check on her. I don't mind checking on her because she gives me hugs and cookies. She loves me, it's something I just know. My Grandma Emmy tells me funny stories about when she was a little girl. They are

the same stories but I don't mind because she tells them different every time. I tell her she missed a part in the story and she asks me to fill it in. I'm always glad to do that. She has a story about a cow that chased her and how she used to ask the chickens to get up so she could get their eggs. One time, my mom and I went to visit Grandma Emmy. I ran ahead of my mom to the apartment, my mom yelled to me to push the doorbell. "I don't know which one it is" She answered "Sure you do, it's the dirty one." I looked up and down at all the door bells. Some were cleaning and shining and some were broken. But one was so dirty. I pressed it and Grandma Emmy answered "Who's there" I said "It's me Victoria" and she said "Victoria are you all by yourself" "No but I found your doorbell all by myself and mom and I went in."

When we got up to my great grandma's apartment she said "I didn't know you could read" I said "I can't but I can find the dirtiest doorbell on the panel" "Oh" she gasped "I never see that doorbell downstairs, I didn't know it was dirty. Perhaps you will wash it for me." "Oh no" I said I would never be able to find your doorbell if it was the same as the others. My mom said "It's dirty because so many people come to see you and press your doorbell" Grandma Emmy said "The dirtier the better then."

## **Margaret Suminski**

### **Beaver Island**

My husband and I shared a few adventures. I have a fear of boats. I broke down and we went to Charlevoix, Beaver Island. There were 300 residents on the Island. We went to two museums. There was a beautiful lighthouse. They had bikes. You could take a plane ride back to the island. There were 5-8-foot swells. They had a restaurant. Overall, I would give it a 3.5 rating.

## **Margaret Suminski**

### **Causes of Bullying**

I learned many valuable lessons throughout my life. This subject bothered me for many years. I could not understand why I was bullied. The incident occurred during my high school years. There were three high school girls who bullied me daily. The name calling was horrendous.

It was a difficult lesson to learn. I discussed the subject with my mother. I read a book on bullying. The pivotal moment that reshaped my perspective was when I heard a knock at the door. Surprise, the girls came to apologize. I was too hurt to speak with them. Time teaches us a lesson.

In a bullying situation use your mouth. Do not blame yourself. Bulling has escalated to terrible extremes. It was a very difficult lesson to learn. I wished the teachers would discuss in their classes. It is still occurring and has escalated to people killing themselves.

I hope people will read this story.

## **Margaret Suminski**

### **A Heart Full of Joy Love and Kindness**

My mother Florence passed in 2007.

She was married to my father Bert for several years.

She was a stay at home mother for Margaret and Patricia.

She helped me and my sister with our homework. Her patience was exemplary.

Mom did not attend college. She had excellent writing skills.

Words to describe her were sweet, considering, and caring.

My sister wanted to get her master's degree. Mom went to work and made enough money. Patricia got her master's degree.

My mother was raised by my grandmother. My grandfather was not in her life.

We did have our disagreements. Love conquers all.

The strangest thing that happened was in my bedroom went off every night at 6 PM was she saying I made it over okay.

Mother, we miss you and appreciate everything you did. You took excellent care of Dad.

## **Margaret Suminski**

### **Truth or Lies**

I worked in many offices as a temporary and full time office worker. I will tell you about some of the lessons I learned.

Manpower placed me in a transcription position for 2 weeks.

I was placed in the position because the young lady who had the job was too far behind in her work. She thought I was taking her position. The temporary agency wanted to talk to her. The day they came out she did not show.

It was a very valuable lesson. I relayed the story to her boss. I assume she spoke with her. I did my job expertly. If you perform the job well, you satisfy the boss, the company and yourself.

The pivotal moment that shaped my perspective was when her boss told me she understood manpower contracted me for other assignments.

It was an easy lesson for me to learn. I enjoyed the position. I hope the young lady starts to do things differently.

## **Margaret Suminski**

### **Work for Temple Israel**

I did all phases of office work for many years.

I was contacted by manpower to be a temporary for 1 week at Temple Israel. My position duties included all facets of office work. I had two weeks to try to locate a secretary at Temple Israel. I talked to many ladies. I asked their typing speed. The need to work with the Rabbi. I needed the Rabbi to dictate a letter and have the young lady transcribe the letter. The unique thing is she was not Jewish. She knew an abundance of information about Judaism. The Rabbi was thrilled to get the job for him. I would have loved the position. I helped somebody who needed a job. How rewarding.



## Melina Peratsakis, Age 15

### Propaganda

What is propaganda? It is something that influences opinions, and not always for the greater good.

Propaganda is little half-truths and lies all mixed together to create something...horrible. Because propaganda is not ever a good thing for the people or thing it is targeting. Case in point... Palestine.

You're hearing a lot about Palestine, specifically the little strip of land called Gaza. 26 miles long and 5 miles wide, home to more than 2 million people, Gaza is one of the most densely populated places on the planet.

Let's talk about the real Palestine, not the one that's been marred by propaganda that the news likes spitting out lately.

I am a Palestinian. My family is from a town just outside of Jerusalem that literally borders the West Bank. In fact, this town-known as Beit Hanina-is divided by the illegal border wall that separates the West Bank from the current state of Israel.

A few years ago, my family and I visited Palestine. Palestine is an amazing place, filled with natural wonders and beautiful architecture that collides with each other in the old city of Jerusalem, home of a melting pot of culture and the three Abrahamic religions, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism.

The old city is rich with beauty and culture. Walking into its walls is like stepping away from the modern world. Stalls are filled with fascinating items to buy. Walk past one stall and you can see an intricately crafted pyramid of spices, the alternating colors of each "step" aesthetically pleasing to the eye. Walk past another and you'll see alluring rugs and tapestries. Another stall will show you beautiful jewelry and golden tea sets. Still another will draw you to it because of the amazing smells from the ka'ak, a type of bread shaped like a large hoop; the hummus, artfully designed into a pleasing pattern of olive oil and spices; and falafel, fresh brown patties just off the fryer. The only thing that spoils the atmosphere are the soldiers that are everywhere, breathing down your neck and pointing their rifles at anyone they want. We used to eat ka'ak, falafel, and hummus every day for breakfast, stuffing our faces until we couldn't eat more.

Jericho, the oldest city in the world. A cable car took us up to the mountain, where a restaurant awaited us on the cliff to serve us delicious traditional Palestinian food. A literal hole in the side of the mountain sold us jewelry and beautiful thobes, which are traditional gowns with intricate designs weaved into them. Each design has a deeper meaning, not just random decorations to add at whim.

The Dead Sea and the Mediterranean Sea couldn't be more different. One, the Dead Sea, is saltier than anything you could imagine. There is so much salt it's impossible to sink, instead you float buoyant and can read a book if you wanted to. The Dead Sea is also boiling hot. This is not a sea that you go to for a refreshing swim. This sea is more famous for the clay that's there, clay that's rich in minerals and good for your skin. The Mediterranean Sea, however, is cold and refreshing, especially since the weather was on average 115 degrees during our stay. There were so many jellyfish! Little light blue creatures that floated along, stinging the unsuspecting swimmer, namely me.

And the people. My goodness, the people there were so generous and kind! We visited a mosque called Nabi Musa, believed to be the final resting place of Prophet Moses, and the Bedouins there refused to let us leave without first giving us something to eat and drink after a long day in Jericho. They even had camels that we rode.

There is so much more to this story than I could ever fit here. I could talk about the scenery, the miles and miles of olive groves at risk of deforestation by the Israeli military. I could talk about the fig and plum trees, of the miles of oasis-like countryside.

One thing I learned when I was there, though, was that the public image, the propaganda that most of the rest of the world knows, is so far from the truth that I can only blink in utter shock every time I hear yet another lie on the news. I cannot understand how Palestine and Palestinians can be reduced to violence and war. I simply cannot fathom how people can be complacent when Palestinians struggle under a brutal occupation.

So the next time you hear something on the news, ask yourself: does this seem sensationalized? Could this very well not be true? This is the only way we can avoid falling for untrue narratives and deceiving propaganda.

## **Merrick, Age 7**

### **Zoo**

I liked when I went to the zoo. Cuz I got to see the poler bear. It was the best to see the polar bear!

## **Michelle Croal, Age 35**

### **Putting Down Roots in Farmington Hills, MI**

In 2019, I was pregnant and commuting from Auburn Hills to Dearborn every day. Some people enjoy an hour-plus commute each way, but I'm not one of them! The less time I have to spend in a car the better. Plus with a baby on the way, our current house wasn't going to cut it. We started looking for houses halfway-ish between Kris' job in Auburn Hills and mine in Dearborn. Royal Oak and Ferndale had small houses and small lot sizes with high prices. Southfield was okay but we didn't find anything we loved. When we found our house in Farmington Hills, we knew it was just what we were looking for - room to grow, a highly ranked school district, access to major roadways, and best of all - green space in the backyard! It took us two months of nightmare back and forth with mortgage approvals due to my immigration status, but we finally moved in on a frigid Veteran's Day. Luckily, being pregnant, I was given full authority to delegate tasks like carrying boxes and re-painting.

COVID put a damper on getting involved in the community. We were home, struggling to balance two full-time remote jobs and childcare for a 10-week-old baby without outside help. My connection with others consisted of taking my baby for a daily hour-long walk in her stroller and chatting with Howard, a neighbor caring for his elderly father. Another neighbor consistently walked his dog (and smoked a cigar) at the same time that I was walking my daughter. I still see him around now and then, and wonder if he remembers that baby girl when he sees my feisty daughter running down the street.

I used the social media app “Peanut” to meet other new moms. You can filter by location and age/number of children to find possible matches – aka Tinder for Moms. One evening I met up with a woman for a walk on OCC campus. She was an anti-masker and had her huge German Shepherd off-leash. Needless to say, we didn’t click. I met another woman who has a daughter close in age to mine and we eventually became good friends. My daughter is now between the ages of her two girls. Devastatingly, she had just moved from Farmington Hills to Ann Arbor when we met, but we are still in touch often and spend time together when our hectic modern schedules allow.

In the spring of 2021, I signed us up for a CSA (community supported agriculture) box from Beaverland Farms, which meant a weekly trip to the farmer’s market to pick it up. I loved getting to know the farmers, if not by name, at least by face and their produce. The CSA box was awesome but over-ambitious for a family of three consisting of two that don’t eat vegetables. I would frantically try to eat any remaining contents on Friday night (or Saturday morning!) before Saturday’s pick-up. It’s become such a joy each Spring to get back to the market and see familiar faces and buy fresh, local produce after the long winter. That summer, Emmy was also old enough to take to the neighborhood playground, which meant finally meeting other neighbors with young kids, getting invited to background birthday parties and slowly building connections.

We started spending a fair amount of time at the Hawk. I enrolled Emmy in Swimfants at 19 months, squeaking her into the 6-18 month group. Most other parents had young babies, and here my toddler kept me on my toes climbing out of the pool every chance she got. Fall of 2022 I took a series of handbuilding ceramics classes, returning to a lifelong love of pottery and art. It was so joyous at Art on the Grand the following summer, reconnecting with both teachers and other class participants – selling their art and enjoying the fair. Tumble Bunnies gave Emmy a chance to bounce off the walls at the center instead of at home, and gave me the chance to connect with other neighborhood and daycare parents. My efforts at preschool art and culture exposure consisted of taking Emmy to the Little Mermaid youth theatre production, the Nutcracker and her little friends’ ballet recitals. Thankfully the price commitment was low, for when attention spans waned.

I’ve always been a bookworm and library kid. Farmington Community Library has become a much frequented third space – something about it being free and close-by makes it an easy option for a quick, low-key outing with a kid. Normally we hang at the 12 Mile branch, but head downtown (“The Castle Library”) occasionally for a change of scene. The staff are always welcoming and the programming is fantastic. I’ve attended various storytimes, Move Your Bodies, parenting workshops, adult craft activities, and the monthly writer’s group that is a highlight in my schedule. I love that the group attracts writers aged teen to senior, sharing their stories, poetry and lived experiences.

Heritage Park is another of our favorite spots – the perfect combination of trails for nature loving parents and playground/splash pad for the kids. One June evening had my child playing happily with the other children in the golden evening light, poplar fuzz drifting on the breeze. As an only child, she luckily has a knack for making new friends wherever she goes! There are often multiple languages around us – Chinese, Arabic, Spanish, Hindi and others I can’t identify. Last year at the Summer Solstice Celebration we went for tractor rides, had smores & painted rocks with our neighbor friends. One evening I biked down on my own and enjoyed Stars in the Park. Christmas Eve 2023 was very foggy but mild, and we spotted a Barred Owl just off the trail, wet and blinking sleepily on a tree branch. We called it our Lucky Christmas Owl. Give me a walk in the

woods over a crowded mall any day!

I spent much of my early life moving internationally, as my family followed my dad's mining career around the world. My brother and I were born in South Africa and emigrated to Canada when I was five. We spent three years in Papua New Guinea, a year in boarding school in Australia for me, and then my high school years in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. All that moving kept things interesting – there were always new places to see – but it made it hard to ever feel like home. By the time I got settled and made friends, it was time to pack up again. I returned to Ontario for university, with the family joining from Trinidad about a year later. My college years were fun but nomadic – school and work terms alternating every four months, taking me all over the province to various small towns and sketchy student housing arrangements. Plus, it was minimalist – my possessions limited to what could be transported back and forth in Mom's Toyota Corolla.

I got my first full-time job in Sarnia, Ontario and lived there for almost 7 years, including a riverfront apartment in the same building as a college classmate, and my first house minutes from Lake Huron. I was involved in the curling and ultimate frisbee communities but it still didn't feel permanent. In a small town, you're either a born-and-raised-here or an outsider. Most of my friends were also from out of town, and while we had a fun group for a while, many of us have since moved on to other locales as career opportunities arose.

I moved to Auburn Hills in December 2017 to marry my husband Kris (who I met playing ultimate in Sarnia!) and complete a graduate degree at Oakland University. College the second time around was different; I was way less involved than in my undergrad. I tried a few on-campus clubs but found it hard to relate to students 10 years younger than myself. I was either in the lab doing research work, grading undergraduate exams, or at home with the hubby. Outside of the Mall and Palace, Auburn Hills didn't have much going on. We were always going somewhere else – downtown Rochester, Clarkston, Lake Orion for things to do or places to eat. But it was Kris' starter house and close to both his work and OU, so it was convenient, even if the kitchen was small and the neighborhood less than ideal.

One of the many things I love about Farmington Hills is the "established-ness" of the town but how it still maintains a welcoming feel. My young neighbor moved back into her childhood home after putting her dad in a care facility. Another neighbor bought a house on our street because her parents still live in her childhood home a few houses down. I found out a coworker has lived his whole life in Farmington, as have his parents, and his kids are growing up here with friends they've known since childhood. But it doesn't feel stagnant or exclusionary the way other places I've lived have – it feels welcoming and vibrant. We're hoping for more young families on our street as houses turn over from the original owners.

Every so often, typically after a school shooting or other incident in the news with a gun, we talk about moving (back) to Sarnia, or maybe Windsor. But escapism doesn't solve gun control problems. Plus, the taxes and cost of living in Canada are high, the job market is tight, and I've worked too hard to build connections here in the community to pack up and leave. Job opportunities in Boston or San Diego sound tempting, but not at the expense of starting over. I want to put down roots here in Farmington Hills, build the kind of life for my daughter where she can say things like, "We've been friends since we were three!", and not always be an outsider on the edge of things. And anyway, I've bought way too much stuff from Art on the Grand over the years to pack it all up and move.

## **Michelle, Age 52**

### **Untitled**

One of my big adventures happened when I was 25 years old. I joined the United States Army Reserves. I wanted purpose and excitement. I was challenged both physically and mentally to be the best form of myself. I learned combat skill, lifesaving techniques and teamwork. When I returned home after training, I was placed in a unit to serve the remainder of my time. One day, I received a letter informing me that my unit may get called into active duty. Fear fell upon me, and I prayed for strength. Afterward, I felt peace come upon me. God's power gave me the courage to accept my orders and to fight for freedom. My unit was not selected to go into battle. That day, I gained more respect for all of my fellow service men who paid the ultimate sacrifice for the people in this country. I was willing in the past, and I am still willing to fight for our freedom. I can honestly say that I am proud to be an American.

## **Mitchell, Age 5**

### **Untitled**

I had a trip to the park and played with the people at the park. Fun.

## **Moukthika, Age 9**

### **Untitled**

Imagine if you had an awesome adventure every day! That would be really fun, right? Well, I have a small adventure every day and it is so adventurous. Me and my family go to parks, walking trails, bike rides, water parks, and more outdoor fun stuff. If you're wondering "what about indoor activities?", then, that would count as a big adventure. We might go to these fun places in winter or when we're really bored. We go to trips in state or out of state too. Those happen often at summer when the weather is in medium temperature. I don't know where we are going as a big adventure this summer but I'm sure it will be fun!

## **Nadiyah, Age 9**

### **Untitled**

If you lied you can be in trouble. I lied one time I got in trouble. But I do not lied. It can get you in big trouble. That is why I do not lied.

## **Nathan H., Age 2**

### **Untitled**

My Nana hold a special place in my heart. When I wake up I want to FaceTime my Nana. When we get ready to go somewhere, I believe that we are going to Nana's house. When Nana is talking to my parents or siblings, I interrupt because I want Nana's full attention. When Nana is on FaceTime, I take her everywhere And show her my dinosaurs and cars. I love my Nana.

## **Nina, Age 6**

### **Untitled**

Family. My family is the best family. 1 boy 1 girl (me) 1 man 1 woman. Oh yeah and 1 dog. 100 stuffies that they buy me. There's another person I'm writing about. Her name is Fiona. She's my little Elsa. She is the most bestest friend in the whole world. Family is the craziest family ever. So family is the best company. Fiona she taught me how to do this: you only get 1 pencil and you fling the pencil side to side and back and forth and back it's hard I can't do it. The end wait I don't want it to end.

## **Nolan, Age 9**

### **Untitled**

I love going Up North to Camp Daggett it was awesome the only downside about the camp is swimmer's itch. They had swimming, canoeing, sailing, taco tuesday, tie-die tuesday pizza on Thursday for dinner pancakes for breakfast on Friday and a cookout for dinner and the BEST PART IS NO PARENTS

## **Philip, Age 15 Months**

### **Untitled**

When I was 14 months old, my parents took me on a kayaking trip I won't soon forget! First we packed up the plug-in, hybrid Chrysler minivan named Hamton with our tandem kayak, paddles, life jackets, sunscreen, hats, and other gear. We met up with Ms. Jamie at a playground. Mom fed me a peanut butter and jelly sandwich while Dad and Ms. Jamie drove Hamton to the end destination. I climbed a ramp at the playground. The slides were too big and scary for me! Dad and Ms. Jamie came back. Mom put my sunscreen and life jacket on. I didn't like the feeling of wearing the tight life jacket. Mom and Dad pushed the kayak down a metal kayak shoot and into the river! Mom didn't help to push the kayak much because she was carrying me. Ms. Jamie pushed her red kayak all by herself. Mom got into the kayak first and then I joined her. Dad came on last and pushed us away from the dock. Off we went! On our trip down the Clinton River, we saw a Great Blue Heron, egrets, turtles, a Belted Kingfisher, and fish. Mom played with me while Dad paddled the big blue kayak. The kayak had some holes I enjoyed poking water through. I wanted to crawl up on the bow but Mom kept holding me back. Eventually, I got bored with playing with Mom so I went to visit Dad in the back. Ms. Jamie was going a lot faster than us. Zip zip zoom! After a while with Dad, I got bored with Dad so I went back up to Mom and peeked over the side of the kayak. Woah! Splash, splash, splash the water! So fun! Mom looked away for one second, and, while she did, I decided to take a DIP! I dove into the Clinton River, head first. Mom reacted very quickly and grabbed me. My life jacket did it's job and I floated to the surface. I was no longer happy and my diaper weighed at least as much as me. Thankfully, we were close to our destination. We reached our muddy exit point and got out of the kayak. What an adventure!



## **Raina Cranson, Age 11**

### **Untitled**

One time when I was 7 years old, I was going to go to sleep away camp with my friend Nora. I was so excited. We were all packed up and ready to go but then we got an email. The email said someone got Covid. They had to close the camp for the rest of the summer because of that. We were so upset that we couldn't go so we planned a camp out. We had it at Nora's house and there was so many people. Not only was there Nora and I, but there was also Nora's sister, Clara, Nora's brother, Henry, My sisters, Sona and Shaila, their friends, Grace, Larkin, and Sully. We did a slip 'n slide and it was so fun. We all had tents to sleep in. Nora and I got bored and decided to watch a movie inside. We fell asleep. Meanwhile Clara and Shaila decided to go on the neighbors trampoline. They have permission to go on their trampoline, but it was two am! They see something moving in the shadows. They get really scared so they decide to run in the house. The thing was, they didn't know we were there. They run into the house screaming, "Cereal Killer! Cereal Killer!" We wake up. Nora starts freaking out. I did not understand what was happening. At this point Grace and Sona were also awake so they came inside the house. Meanwhile the boys are fast asleep. We are all freaking out. Someone asks what time it is so Clara looks at her phone. 3:00am Friday the 13th. This is when I started freaking out. Nora's house has a living room with all windows so we could see everything outside which made it scarier. I saw the reflection of myself and thought it was an actual person outside so I screamed! Shaila told us to try to go sleep in Nora's room. They have bunk beds and I was on the top right next to the window that was open. Nora fell asleep so I went back into the living room. The older kids decided to go back into their tent to get their sleeping supplies. They run as fast as they could and came back. Grace realized she dropped her pillow so she back for it but she swears she saw a person inside their tent when she went back. Finally morning came and we told our parents and the Boys the story. We found the "person" we were seeing was an umbrella blowing in the wind. That was one of the craziest moments ever.

## **Rowan, Age 4**

### **Untitled**

I went on the go karts and the sand dunes. I felt so happy. I was with my grandma, Pa, Mom, Dad, Kiera and Lena. I went on the lighthouse.

## **Ruthie**

### **Untitled**

My cat is the one I care about he is fat and fluffy, he is really nice. He is 5 ½ years old, and I picked him from the pet shop! His name is Master Peanut. And I got him when I was 6. I got him and he was so happy that when I touch him he was purring. He is light and dark brown. I like to use him as a pillow because he takes mine so I use him. And I pet him a lot and I call him "My Prince" because he is a boy and he is like my son and he is the kind of food. He like to eat a lot. He like to cuddle with me. We get a blanket to snuggle. We watch Scooby Doo together. I love him with my heart to soul. Yes I do.

## Sashvika Sridhar, Age 8

### Untitled

Do you know who a friend is? A friend is someone who shares kindness and is a helping hand! In 2024, when I was in second grade, I had a friend who is nice and generous. She was no ordinary friend! Her name is Aaliyah.

One fine day, our class went out for an extra recess, everyone was overjoyed! Some were playing tag, and some were playing on the monkey bars while I had the plan of playing on the slide, so I dashed to the slide and grabbed onto the slide's edge. But Tanya who was playing tag wanted to go down the slide because she wanted to go hide, so no one would tag her. But instead of asking me to get off, she shoved me down. I was screaming and sliding down with fright ...AAAAAAAH...But then I saw a purple fluffy jacket flying into the slide and I remembered that Aaliyah was wearing a purple fluffy jacket that morning. Anyway, I climbed out by tugging onto the jacket. When I reached up, I saw Aaliyah's grinning face. When recess was over everyone was out of steam and I hugged Aaliyah as tight as I could! And that one story explains why I care about Aaliyah so much!!

## Sashvika Sridhar, Age 8

### Untitled

Have you ever been on an adventure?! It is really thrilling and exciting!!!! I've been on one too! And it was really mysterious!!! One day we were collecting trash from the enclosed playground because it was Earth Day! But for some reason my friend Aadya raced over to a bush that was behind us. I turned over to see if she was alright but instead of a smile she froze, and her face was in horror! I quickly told the other girls who were: Aaliyah, Dawthlei and Tanya, we raced to Aadya "what's wrong" I asked while I was swishing my way so I could find what she was shocked about. Suddenly out of nowhere ...QUACK... I kept swishing even though I heard that sound. By the time I was almost finished we had to go to class. Two days passed by. The next day at recess I went straight to the bush where I was swishing and started doing the same thing, but this time I finished before recess was over and I saw a duck!!! "Maybe it's a mama duck laying eggs" Tanya said, "maybe I said" but recess was over before Tanya or me could say another word. The following day at recess I saw everyone crowded near the bush, when I went there, I didn't see a duck instead there were splattered eggs everywhere I thought maybe a critter like a rabbit or a bird who knows what it could have been? And that was my adventure that has been waiting for me!!

## **Sheraagvi Sheimanth, Age 6**

### **The Family Trip**

One day my family was going to Canada. We had to go in a very long tunnel to cross Michigan to Canada! In Canada, there were new sights and smells. First we went to a hotel and booked a room to stay in. There were shops in the hotel, and on a wall they had stuck jars with real types of jelly beans inside! Then we got in our car to visit Niagara Falls! Then we ate dinner and slept. The next day we went to a shop called IHOP and ate breakfast. I ate pancakes! Then we went to Niagara Falls. There I saw white birds! Then we went in a lift. The lift took us underground! There was a tunnel! When we reached the end, we saw Niagara Falls! Then we came back and ate ice-cream! Mine was like a popsicle! Then we went to a place and saw a cartoon of the ice age! Then we were in the ice age! (The pretend ice age.) Snow fell from the walls! (That was soap). Raindrops fell heavily! (That was water). Then all that was done. Then we ate pizza and slept.

## **Shiseida Beeler, Age 43**

### **Untitled**

A lesson that I learned was the value of helping my daughter develop self-love – an admiration and appreciation of oneself. My eight-year-old daughter and I discuss the value of her voice and how to use it to speak up for herself, ask questions, and ask for help. I've seen her self-confidence blossom overtime as a result. When dining out, she informs the server of her order and will ask for ingredients not to be added to her meal. If we are in a store searching for a product, she will search for an employee and ask where to locate it. Lastly, if she doesn't understand how to solve a problem, she will not hesitate to ask for help. Through my conversations with her, I have learned the value of my voice and am using it to speak up for myself.

## **Silas Harrison, Age 8**

### **Untitled**

We just got to Pennsylvania a few days ago. So far I'm having fun. Today we are going to Willow tree for ice cream. Tomorrow we are going to the beach. We will have a lot of fun. The end.

## **Sophia, Age 7**

### **Untitled**

2 people I care about is Alice and Elliot. They are my cousins. I like to play with them.

## **Toby, Age 4 ½**

### **Untitled**

At school I learned how to do addition. It is fun!

## Tom Corcoran

### Living with Grandma

Grandma's garden was on her front porch,  
six feet wide and the length of a house.  
Giant ferns reach from porcelain pots.  
Bright porch chairs ring a cozy spot.  
Hanging flowers, cascades of growth,  
each blossom holds new seeds of hope.  
She tended the plants with expertise.  
I tried the water can and watered our knees.  
A laugh and a hug, she collected me close.  
God's love in her arms surrounded us both.  
Each day at ten she called us to tea.  
Grownups with cups, but just juice for me.  
I often hid among the ferns.  
Where I crouched, she easily discerned.  
I would jump out. Fern fronds erupt.  
She never failed to gather me up.  
Since her death, I am still seeking,  
for our own lost little Eden.

(I lived with my grandparents at the end of WWII, with my mother and brother, at 6 Orange St, Charleston S.C..)

## Ursula R. Murray, Age 83

### President Abraham Lincoln and Me

On my 80th birthday, which fell on Father's Day, Sunday, June 20, 2021, Vince and I were in Washington, D.C. to celebrate the occasion. We had scouted out the hotel with a rooftop cocktail bar the day before, even decided that we could drive into the city rather than take the Metro from NOVA (Northern Virginia). When we arrived on Sunday in mid-afternoon, the gentleman who staffed the front door remembered we had been there on Saturday and greeted us warmly. He learned that we were there to celebrate my 80th, and escorted us up to the second story lobby where he treated us to flutes of champagne! That was an auspicious beginning to our celebration.

We took our flutes to the rooftop bar and found seats in the shade that had us facing the U.S. Capitol and just 45 degrees to its left, the Washington Monument. It was a beautifully bright sunny afternoon and the nation's iconic landmarks were breathtaking. We ordered a couple hors d'ouvres and basked in the delight of being alive, enjoying each other's company, the champagne and the nibbles. As we gazed at the sight, I said to Vince: "This is the city in which I was born." And he responded: "Exactly where was Providence Hospital in 1941?" I said: "I have no idea. Why don't you take out your brain and find out." To which he fetched his iPhone and began googling to quickly learn that it had been at 2nd and D Streets S.E., D.C. - not far from where we were! So we decided to finish our repast and take a drive to that spot.

Now, let's backtrack a few years, like say, to 1993 or maybe it was 1995, when I was insured through the university where I was working, and the doctor I was seeing was associated with

Providence Hospital in Michigan. Remembering that I had been born in one of their hospitals, I was interested in the historical display at the hospital branch where I had annual tests taken. I learned a bit about the work that the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul were involved with throughout the country. I did not learn much about their beginnings in the field. So, eventually, I researched them further and learned an amazing set of facts.

First and foremost, in early 1861 or late 1860, President Abraham Lincoln petitioned the Daughters of Charity in Maryland to establish a hospital for the citizens of the District of Columbia because there was none to service the citizens of the capital of the United States of America. They accepted and opened the doors of the Nicholson mansion on June 10, 1861. At first, Mrs. Nicholson rented the building to the Sisters, which would become a 408 bed hospital, until the Sisters eventually bought it. I was surprised to learn these facts, and proud to know that I was born in the hospital our most famous American President had personally requested. We also learned that by the 1950s it had been remodeled and upgraded to keep up with modern procedures and regulations to the point where it could no longer continue to be improved. So, rather than close the old building, tear it down and rebuild, shutting down services to their constituents, they bought a larger property in NE D.C., built a large and modern hospital, taking three years to do that, and opened the doors to it the same day they closed the doors to the Nicholson location, thus never losing a day of service to the residents of the Capital. We knew we would not see the original building, but wanted to see where Providence Hospital had first stood.

Learning these facts made us eager to find its original location. It was easy enough to find. We parked and walked what now is a lovely community park. As the sun began to set we observed people enjoying many aspects of the park: sitting around on lawn chairs, communing with nature or each other, playing ball, walking their dog. It was a peaceful scene. It took us a while to find the historical marker we figured should be somewhere. And as Vince began to take my picture sitting on it, neighbors passed and offered to take pictures of both of us together with the historical marker.

One neighbor, a gentleman in his senior years, told us that when he and his family moved to the neighborhood in the early 1970s, there was still some rubble from the demolition of the old building. He continued, if we were interested, he had salvaged a couple architectural pieces which he had in his garden, if we wanted to see them... So we followed him to a lovely street of older homes with full front gardens and looked at the pieces he had salvaged.

Then he turned to me and said he had something to give me. He went into his home and brought me a book that he and another gentleman had edited for President Abraham Lincoln's bicentennial, *Abraham Lincoln and the End of Slavery in the District of Columbia*.

I was flabbergasted! And once I had read the book I was utterly amazed that I had never learned that prior to the Civil War, President Lincoln had petitioned the Congress to free the slaves in the capital of the United States. The Congress agreed and drew up a procedure and a "price list" for purchase of men, women and children. The slaves were bought from their owners and given their freedom! President Lincoln then asked the Congress to do the very same for the slaves of the South. The Congress refused. That would have encumbered the fairly new nation with a huge debt. And so we went to war instead. And we know how that turned out.

Capitol Hill became "Bloody Hill" just six weeks after Providence Hospital was opened, their facilities stretched to its limits with the wounded from North and South, the hospital gardens becoming an outdoor hospital. And the nation underwent a four-year Civil War, according to

The American Battlefield Trust: over 10,500 military engagements from Vermont to New Mexico Territory of which 50 were major battles, and 1.5 million casualties! Not to mention the following disaster of Reconstruction when we abandoned the freed slaves to life on their own (or left to work for their former owners at meager wages which they were often cheated out of) without any assistance from a government who had promised them "40 acres and a mule". No wonder there has been a cry for "reparations" since 1783.

I must confess that I had never heard of reparations for African Americans until Barack Obama was selected to be the Democratic candidate on June 7, 2008 and I was so excited that I had to share it with someone immediately, so I ran to my neighbors, an older African American couple who lived across the street from us. We talked for a little while and then Beatrice began to talk about reparations. I didn't have a clue. My two years of high school in the U.S. (1957-1959) only covered a government course and the world history I had freshman year in college was way too general. Even my 10 years at Rutgers College Educational Opportunity Program for financially disadvantaged students of which a minimum of 50% had to be students of color, I had never heard the word "reparations" nor was the concept ever in conversations. Even-ing the educational divide was paramount at that time, but financial or comparable reparations was a totally new concept for me in 2021.

Fast forward almost two and a half years and I see a segment of Chris Hayes on MSNBC one evening in February 2024, where he and Trymaine Lee, an MSNBC much awarded reporter, are going bananas over Trymaine's latest podcast, "Into America: Uncounted Millions" and he mentions President Abraham Lincoln's 1860 freeing of the District of Columbia's slaves! He has interviewed descendants of a free African American, Gabriel Coakley, who had bought his family (his wife, 5 children and his sister) from slavery prior to 1860, but due to the fact that he did not take the next step to obtain their "free papers", he was able to claim them as his slaves and receive, what I call "reimbursement for their purchase" from the U.S. government. That in itself is incredible but the most important piece is that the money received allowed this family to begin free life with a nest egg, a way to improve themselves by investing in Coakley's oyster business, become educated and invest in future endeavors. This is an example of what could have been possible for all freed slaves if Reconstruction had not been decimated by President Andrew Jackson. The millions of freed slaves who remained poor and uneducated could have been productive citizens of the U.S. from the beginning of their freedom. Instead, we all suffer the tragedy of so much poverty among our fellow citizens which continues the prejudices of times past.

So, I come full circle, in admiration for President Abraham Lincoln and the good he attempted to do for our nation on several occasions. And the serendipity of my association to him by having been born in the hospital he envisioned for the citizens of D.C. and that by returning to see where it had been located, learned so much more than he had attempted, and which is still of current concern to me and so many of my fellow citizens.



## Yumna During, Age 8

### Untitled

We drove to NY from MI. It was a long journey but we went through it. We made sure to pack a lot of food and water. Me and my sister and brother made sure to get some sleep on the ride too. We saw lots of animals on the ride there like cows and horses and we even saw farms. We drove through Pennsylvania and saw the Pocono Mountains!

## Zaid Zafar, Age 3

### Untitled

This summer I went to Spain and Morocco with my parents. I had a lot of fun. My favorite part was eating ice cream and riding a camel. It was a fun adventure.

## Zakariya Alavi, Age 11

### Courage

Rain, Wind, Chaos. My fingers slipped, sweat drizzling down my neck as I gasped for breath in the darkness around. My hair was matted down to the point where my head looked flat. My eyes were bare, staring straight ahead at the thousands of feet below us.

*Yesterday...*

"I don't want to!"

"There's not an option," replied my uncle, despite my pleas of fear. If I had not been worrying too much, I would be playing with my cousins Noah and Ayan. We were visiting them at their new house, located in sunny El Salvador, for the first time. Why I was fretting was because we were about to climb one of the biggest active volcanoes in the world just the next day. Its name was Santa Ana, and it was thousands of feet tall. That night, I went to sleep with a lot on my mind. I'm not set up for this, I thought. Little did I know, I was. Maybe.

*Climbing the mountain...*

We had to drive to the start of the trail and that was already an upwards drive. Then we hiked a bit to the visitors station, used the bathroom, ate a bit of fruit, and started. The first bit was literally a hike through the woods. A bit of fear brushed off me. Then it started to get rocky. We seemed a bit high yet the sides of the path went down in more of a slant than a straight down ledge. There were lots of shrubs on the side of the path and I was mostly enjoying the climb. But I had only seen 10% of what was really in store.

*Around three quarters to the top...*

Sweat lathered on my skin as we stretched ourselves to the limit. Hot sun beated down on my neck. Then the humidity came, followed by the clouds. Splash! Rain slapped the ground as my cousins put on their coats and we learned that, just like the last few days, my mom underestimated the rain. What was just a sunny day was now a 10-year old drenching downpour. However, I still kept a positive attitude as I continued to climb more viciously than ever. But it wasn't my most vicious. It was some time later that the real climbing started.

### *Higher up the mountain...*

As more rain came down the path was so narrow it was a wonder that there were no railings. Because right beside me was a drop of who knows how many feet. The towns below looked so small and if a person in that cluster of houses had come out, they would have looked like dots. So I started to ponder about the gloomy surroundings. Not only was it raining hard, it was now so foggy that it was hard to tell which was worse, the rain and fog or the narrow path and view of the thousands of feet below us. And because I was experiencing both, my mind was going into turbo mode. It was like for every foot high we were, a distress signal came into my mind. But every thought that came into my mind was responded to as this: blank...

### *A few ominously frightening moments later...*

A boy crouched against the mountainside staring horrified at his surroundings. He was crying very quietly, and his mind seemed to be blank. I would suggest that the laughter and talk of everyone and everything else seemed either muted or muffled led to him. The stern cries of his mother telling his father to help him up. The laughter of his sister and cousins. None seemed relevant to him. And looking at his cousins, we are reminded of a funny thing. How we feel about others' thoughts. The last thing you want is to be embarrassed in front of people you know. The boy got up, wiping his tears, using the support of his father; not wanting anyone to see his devastating state.

I couldn't hold my dad's hand forever. I slowly let go, and started climbing. The rest was history. Eating popsicles from a seller on the top of Santa Ana. Experiencing the warmth of the sun drying our bodies on the way back down. I named my story Courage. I had courage. We all can. A helping hand helps. Cousins help (even if it means being slightly embarrassed). And inspiration helps. Hopefully this will be an inspiration. Inspiration to have, well, courage.

