

“If I’m not for myself,
who will be for me? If
I’m only for myself,
what am I? And if not
now, then when?”
– Pirkei Avot



Creative Writing Chapbook

Session Two
2019

Notes from the Editor

This summer, 6 Points Creative Arts Academy added a creative writing major comprised of passionate wordsmiths from both Bonim and Olim. These majors constructed narrative works, exploring dialogue, exposition, and scene, before crafting their final pieces all of which centered around the theme of the summer, which comes from Pirkei Avot: “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, then when?”

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“Stargirl and the Moon” exemplifies the camp theme, “If I’m only for myself, what am I?” Emily has been alone her whole life with only the stars for comfort, so she is only for herself. She wants to be a human on Earth, but she is not one. And after some thinking, Emily realizes that she is not truly a stargirl. She is desperately trying to figure out what she is.

Stargirl and the Moon by Jessie S. Age: 15

My legs dangle limply as my eyelids close like a lens protector over my camera eyes. Everything goes dark, but my vision is imprinted with bursts of light from the star that I live on. Being a stargirl, I am as lonely as someone who has been locked in solitary confinement forever. Except that is not true. At least that person knows family and friends outside of confinement. Even alone, people on Earth are seen.

The stars are visible from Earth, and while people look up, I look down. Dreams of life on Earth, even while I am nodding off, are a steady pulse in my mind. Each breath I take is a hope of inhaling the aroma of freshly cut grass or the salty sea. Every beat of my heart is that of a timpani, but I may never have the chance to touch one. Humans want to keep living; time is a gift to them. For me, each second is a dull thud of a reminder that my life is endless, but its endlessness will be spent alone. Sometimes I wonder if the universe is meaning to torment me by giving me the body and mind of a human without allowing me the life of one. I am connected to Earth and its people, but they feel nothing towards me. People on Earth appreciate stars, but they will never get to see a girl on one. I wonder if they would even appreciate me for who I am if they could meet me.

I dream about the stars. As they are my home this is natural, but in this dream, I am looking up. It is nighttime in a park I have never seen before. A girl runs towards me.

“I’m Sally! What’s your name?” she asks, her words rushing and tumbling out of her mouth. I smile.

“I’m Emily. Do you like it?” I had named myself Emily after realizing that humans have names. One day, I had seen a toddler with a toothy grin run up to her father.

“Emily!” her father had said with a voice brimming with joy. They had both looked so happy. Maybe I can have that someday.

Sally, in my dream, says she likes my name before promptly asking if I want to look through her telescope.

“It was a birthday present from my Uncle Tommy who loves me and has a lot of money so it’s really nice,” she says, her words continuing to be said like there would be consequences if Sally were too slow. Her eyes are sparkling with joy and anticipation for my response.

I smile and take Sally’s warm soft hand, and she brings me to her telescope. I feel bubbly as a thrill races through me, my nervous excitement at the front of my mind.

“Here,” she boasts as if it was her own accomplishment. The telescope’s glossy surface glistens under the night sky and its black color complements the night. I peer through it and see a kaleidoscope of stars and planets. It is breathtaking.

“Where do you live? Who are your parents?” Though innocent questions, my pulse blasts off of its landing. I cannot tell Sally that I live on stars and was born from light. My chest is being tightened by a rubber band of anxiety. I do not know what to do.

I wake up to my home. Sally is gone and her wonderful shiny telescope has left with her. I can still feel her palm on mine, gravity pushing us down as we walked. That world is gone now. I am back alone and helpless in a vast universe of things nothing like me. More than anything, I want to go back. It does not matter if I need to figure out the most reasonable way of answering Sally. Living on Earth as happily as my namesake is all I have ever wanted.

“Stargirl?” A voice, though not deep in pitch, seems to fill up everything around me in a low vibrato. I jump. No dream could feel so real, but the only person who knows about me in the vast, inanimate space is myself.

“Child, look up.” The voice is softer now, more feathery than the rumble it was earlier. My mind is racing. I am not alone.

I cautiously look up, careful not to let my hopes fly too high. All of my life, I have been thinking existence would forever be lonely. Maybe that was never true. This is my chance to feel connected to someone who can see me too. My life could be taking an incredible turn.

I look around, crestfallen. The only things I can see are more stars and Earth and its moon. My hopes had soared too high. There would never be a friend for me, but who can blame me for wishing? As I look down, a tear drops off my cheek and sizzles when it hits my star. That will never happen again.

“I can’t blame you for missing me.” The voice was back. I try to ignore the sound of my torturous imagination. “After all, I am just the moon.”

I freeze. The moon can talk and is like me? Laughter bubbles out of me; my imagination is absurd.

"If you are the moon," I say, my voice projecting across space. "Why are you talking to me?"

"Stargirl, I know what it is like to be alone. I am the moon, after all," the moon says sincerely. It is strange, but I am slowly putting my toes in the water of belief. Maybe this is not all in my head. Maybe I am not insane after all.

"Stargirl –"

"My name is Emily," I say with conviction. The kick of my voice makes me realize that Emily is my name. I may be born from the stars, but I dream of Earth enough to be able to realize now that I am no stargirl.

"Very well. You may call me Moon."

"How do you know about me?" I pause, and then a red hot thought enters my head. "And why did you let me believe I was alone?" My last question escapes my lips in a tone mixed with anger and frustration. Why would Moon leave me alone for so long? My whole life I have had no companion besides the nothingness surrounding me. And the whole time, Moon was here.

"I did not know about you, Emily. All that I can assume is that you hop stars. Is that correct?" the Moon asks.

How do they know?

"Otherwise, I would have seen you. You must have jumped on to a star near me."

"My stars die occasionally. I try not to get attached. I just move on," I say, trying to believe myself. When my first star died, I toppled into space, completely alone. That was when I realized that I am literally, as well as metaphorically, drawn to the stars. Being pulled feels like a gut punch immediately followed by a slingshot ride before slamming into a new star. This experience is why I try to star hop before my star dies. Yet it still feels like a fist in my stomach, just one wearing a softer glove, to make me remember what I am leaving behind.

Moon is silent. I cannot stand the quiet right now, after waiting my whole life to talk to someone, I do not want a second of noiselessness.

"How do you live, Moon?" I ask as wonder fills my voice. I am becoming genuinely interested in Moon's story. It is difficult not to wonder what it is like being stuck in orbit, one big body of bouldering mass with nothing to do but sit and be pulled along.

"If you must know, things are different now."

"What do you mean?" I ask.

"Astronauts come to space now, and I am their destination." Moon's words turn solemn with a tangy tone of bitterness. I cannot imagine that in the slightest.

"What does it feel like, having people take advantage of you like that? Do you experience it physically?" I want to know, but I am nervous about how Moon might respond.

The universe seems to stiffen as Moon says, "Each step on my surface is like an explosion of pins and needles. Every time something or someone enters my space, even if I am not touched, it brings on claustrophobia. I don't know if these are problems with my physical being or..." the rest goes unspoken. Moon sees a possibility that their yearning for a more meaningful interaction with the humans causes their problems.

It hits me. "Wait, you get to be with humans. Maybe I can too!" My hopes become a planet of their own as I see that there may be a chance for me to interact with the beings I so yearn to be with.

"Emily, that is not a good idea."

"Maybe I can ride on a dying star! If it is close to Earth with no other stars around, there will be nothing pulling me back. Then I can fall to Earth!"

"This is the life we were given. We are both children of outer space, and we have to accept it. It's hard, Emily, I know, but you need to come to terms with it or your life will be miserable," Moon says, their voice laced with pity. That is not true. There has to be a way.

"That isn't fair! Why do you get to see people and I don't?" I say, my voice catching and breaking.

"Because you have something I don't: freedom." Moon pauses to hear my reaction.

"What do you mean?" I ask in a slightly more collected voice.

"Freedom is as much of a gift as life itself. You get to roam the universe, moving from star to star. You can see the world in its full beauty without being trapped there. I, on the other hand, am stuck in orbit around Earth for eternity until I die. Your life is limitless. Make the most of it," Moon's voice becomes more confident as if their esteem is climbing a flight of stairs.

"I don't feel free, Moon. I am lonely up here. Until now, I thought I was alone. Thoughts of humans are clogging my head even now." I begin to understand Moon's point though.

"You are not alone, Emily. People gaze at the stars for comfort."

When they look up, they hope that there is someone like you in space because people don't want to be alone. They don't know of you, exactly, but they think of who you are constantly. You are a dream for humans, Emily. Don't ever forget that."

It is comforting to listen to Moon's opinions, but abandoning the mindset that I have always needed to survive will be difficult.

"Thank you, Moon," I say as a warmth spreads through me that seems to diffuse through the atmosphere.

Moon must sense it too because their voice is a kindling campfire. "You're welcome, Emily."

I feel an emotion that I have never experienced; this is the first time I have felt truly seen. I smile, but it drops in a split second as I feel a familiar tug. Tears well up in my eyes, but I fight them back.

"Moon, I have to go." It was always going to be a matter of time before I had to star hop again. "I'm sorry."

"Go, Emily. And remember what I said. You can come and visit some time if you want." Moon's voice lifted at the end. This was my farewell. With a sigh I close my eyes. I would never forget.

* * *

The girl is gone, but maybe I helped her. All of my existence has been spent alone. I hoped that I was alone because no one should live like I do. But Emily exists, and I wanted to save her from grief. For the longest time, all I wanted was purpose beyond my form. Humans took that away from me. Emily gave me hope.

If Emily is happier now, then so am I. I was given a chance to help her, and I never thought I would even get that. And I think she changed her mind about her life. Maybe I can be helpful and something more than *the* moon. Maybe I have worth after all.

My story connects to the theme because Ellie was all alone without her stuffed animals and felt lonely. But if Ellie is all alone and can't find someone or something for her, who will be for her?

The Frenemie by Melina W. Age: 9

Rrrrrriipp!!

"Hahaha!" Cackles the evil voice of Ellie, the three year old toddler who destroys toys.

"Noooo!" Exclaims George the stuffed animal's Mom.

As the war goes on between the small, innocent stuffed animals versus the big cruel toddler, four other stuffed animals watch the injustice. It is like the colonists fighting against the ruling, strong British.

One was an avocado named Ally who is about to turn into guacamole, a banana named Bella, an ape named Abe, and a pigeon named Pasta. Bella was the "leader" and always liked to bring everyone together.

Bella takes a step out but slides back in due to the pulling of her so called "leg" by Ally.

"Don't get into trouble, you're going to turn into a strawberry banana smoothie along with Stella who is about to be smooshed."

Bella sighed.

"THIS IS INJUSTICE!" Ally sighs.

"Uuuuh, guys?" questions Pasta.

"What, we don't have time for ideas right now," answers Abe.

"But y'all we can run away."

Everyone's mouth opens, even people's mouths from outside of the closet in which the banana, the avocado, the pigeon, and the ape were hiding.

The four friends sneak out of the closet and up on the windowsill. They stare out at the dirty, wet, crowded streets of New York City. Then they see a pigeon who was barely touched by a car but flew away just in time. Ally, Abe, and Bella turn their heads to Pasta who has his hand on his heart and his beak wide open.

Then they feel a tug at their legs and then feel nothing below their feet.

"Oh no! We're doomed," moans Abe.

Ellie the toddler enemy is behind them. Ellie drops Pasta, Ally, and Abe, but puts Bella up and towards her mouth.

“Bananananana. Yum.”

Closer, closer, closer, and then – “Ellie! Come downstairs! Supper’s ready!” Calls Ellie’s mom from downstairs. Ellie drops Bella.

“Okay Mama, Coming down da staiws!”

As soon as the door shuts all the stuffed animals cheer. But Pasta is still thinking about that pigeon.

“Uhhhm, on second thought, let’s just stay here instead of leaving,” says Pasta the pigeon. But his friends are already climbing out the window.

Pasta sighs. “They can go, I’m staying.” Then he hears crying and looks to where George is in the “stuffspital”.

“Uhhhm, on second thought, I think I’ll just go with them.” As Pasta looks back everyone is either hiding or hurt. Ellie’s room is empty, other than a picture of her dad lying on the floor. There is a tear stain on it and in pen is written – R.I.P.

Pasta looks back and jumps. Then it just occurs to him that stuffed pigeons don’t fly. As Pasta is falling he looks to his right and sees Bella, Ally, and Abe using the fire escape. *Ob*, Pasta thinks. He lands with a thud and his friends catch up to him.

“Dude, are you awake?” asks Abe the ape. Pasta shrugs.

“SO, let’s go!” Exclaims Bella. They all see big flashing lights that say “Broadway.”

“Hey guys! It says Yawdoarb! Let’s go check that out!” Bella the banana yells.

“Shhhssshhhh,” whisper-yells Ally. The four friends take a step inside the building and they feel well...a crowd. They take a step into a big room with rows of chairs and a stage.

“Ooooh,” they exclaim.

“Pardon me are you Aaron Burr, sir,” says the actor up on stage.

“Y’all, we’re watching Hamilton on Yawdaorb,” exclaims Bella.

Back at 935 Southern Street, Ellie runs upstairs in a rush to play with her stuffed animals. But when she opens the door, none of them are there. Ellie slumps down on her bed. Suddenly Ellie becomes mad and feels a urge to punch her stuffed animals in frustration, but no one is there. Ellie hops off her bed and picks up the picture of her dad. She sits down on the floor.

“Since Dad is all gone and since Mommy has to work on college with Big Sissy Sydney and now all my stuffies are gone, who will be with me?” Ellie places down the picture and walks to her sister’s room.

“Hi Big Sissy Sydney,” says Ellie in a small voice. Sydney looks over her shoulder, her silky golden hair flipping.

“Hi little Bellie Ellie,” says Sydney and tickles Ellie’s stomach. Ellie giggles.

“Ellie, I’m leaving for college in two days! I’m gonna miss you.”

“Yeah, me too,” answers Ellie. Then it comes to Ellie that there’s nothing Sydney can do. So Ellie turns around and goes back to her room.

Meanwhile, Bella, Abe, Ally, and Pasta are all roughed up.

“Hey honey, I see bright colors up ahead,” says a lady with her daughter. Abe, Ally, and Bella jump to the side as the lady gets closer.

“Pssst, Pasta, get over here,” whispers Bella.

“Trust me on this one, y’all,” answers Pasta. Pasta hops to where the other pigeons are and starts pecking at the ground.

“Ooooooh! I know, he’s trying to get food for us because we’re gonna be here till the winter. Like evaporation or something,” says Abe.

Everyone sighs.

“First of all, Pasta is trying to blend in with the other pigeons and second of all it’s called hibernation,” explains Bella.

Abe shrugs, “I know that,” he says.

Then the lady walks past them. “Eh, maybe not,” says the lady.

Pasta the pigeon hops back to Ally the avocado, Bella the banana, and Abe the ape.

The four friends kept walking and passed a toddler playground. The toddler has a name tag saying, ‘Hello, my name is Maya.’ Maya is playing with four smiling toys. No one speaks. They stare and take a break to get some rest.

“Guys, that thing with the kid taught me something,” says Ally. “I wonder where Ellie will be without us, I mean everyone else is gone. Ellie’s going through tough times,” says Ally. “So...I think we should go back.” Everyone looks at each other and then nods.

“Alright then, let’s go, we’ve got an enemy to become friends with,” exclaims Ally. The friends walk to their real home together.

As they hop up the steps of 935 Southern street, they feel a feeling of being home. They dash into the house and hop up the stairs. Then they go right into Ellie’s room. Ellie slumps on to her bed and notices the stuffed animals in the corner of her eye.

“You guys are back!! Oh, how I missed you,” Ellie cried. All the friends smiled. They were never leaving home again. But something

wasn't right. Sydney wasn't there. Then outside of the window had Penn signs. Sydney had gone to Penn.

Epilogue

"Sweetheart, this was my old room when I was little," says thirty-eight year old Ellie with her three year old daughter Molly.

"Ooooh! Mama you have stuffies."

Ellie chuckled and then picked up her animals. "Yeah, that's right. I went through a lot of things with them when I was your age!" exclaims Ellie.

Molly smiles. "Avocado, Banana, Pigeon, and an ape! Oooh ooh ah ah," imitates Molly. Then out from behind Bella peeks a green, unripe Banana named Georgia.

"Mama, she's tiny like me," says Georgia.

Bella nods, "You know, your aunt Ellie used to be that age," answers Bella. "And no matter what, the stuffed animals will always be the friends of three year old or thirty-eight year old Ellie."

The End

In camp we have a theme, if I'm not for myself who will be for me? If I'm only for myself what am I? and if not now when? we were told to connect our piece to the theme of camp. If you don't want a spoiler then read this after you read my story. I used the line, If I'm not for myself, who will be for me? In my story Quinn chooses to not go with Logan to protect themselves from danger. They have no clue who Logan is even after they introduce themselves. This was a choice that Quinn had to make to protect themselves.

Tower by Ash T. Age: 16

Logan stood in the square one early Sunday morning. The sun was shining like thousands of topaz stones. The smell of freshly baked gold brown bread consumed their sense. This was one of their favorite places in the world. They liked to come to the market to escape the dank, mossy castle walls. They picked up their pastries from their dad's favorite bakery. They started to walk home when their cloudful imagination was interrupted by a soul shattering scream.

"No, please, I didn't do anything," said a voice that sounded like their throat was being ripped out. Logan immediately turned, drawn to the voice. When they saw the face of the voice, the whole world seemed to stop. They had never seen a face of pure perfection like that in their entire life. Their eyes glittered like fiery sapphires. They had fair skin and their hair was like a meadow of perfect blonde curls. Logan's mind was dragged back to reality when they saw the mysterious face thrown into a wagon like a sack of potatoes by three tall masked men. Suddenly, the square seemed monochrome. The sun behind a dull cloud, the harmonies of the chorus of voices in the streets had turned into whispers and pointing.

* * *

"Where are you taking me?" Quinn said, they heard their voice echo in the hollow walls of the wagon.

No answer.

"Why am I even here?" Quinn tried again.

No answer.

They heard murmurs from the front of the wagon.

"Is it ready?"

"...tower..."

The cacophony of words began to spiral through their head. They were alone. They felt the wheels of the wagon on every single ditch and rock. The hard, wet floor below them. They could feel the panic in their throat closing. They began to hyperventilate. Their world faded to black.

* * *

Logan turned the rusty doorknob on their brother's bedroom door, they pushed it open.

"Boo," Logan said, startling their brother.

"Hey, you made me spill my tea all over my shirt," Jonah said, sounding annoyed.

"I have something really important to tell you," they said, ignoring what he said.

"What is so important that you felt that starting with scaring me was so necessary?" Jonah asked.

"I met, well met isn't the correct word. I more saw them in the market getting taken by Dad's henchmen. But that is beside the point," Logan said, struggling through their words. "Whoever it was that was getting taken, they were so beautiful and clearly did nothing to deserve this."

"Okay, hang on, so you are just going to assume Dad wrongfully arrested someone?" Jonah asked.

"Well...yes...no...yes, Jonah, listen. I could just tell that something was off."

"Logan you have no proof, I just don't believe you, I'm sorry. I'm glad you fell in love but it didn't have to be with a prisoner."

"They're not a prisoner, well they are but they shouldn't be. You know what? I'm leaving, thank you for your NOT help."

* * *

Quinn woke up to a musky, dank bag being pulled off their head. They opened their eyes and struggled to adjust to the bright candlelit room. They realized where they were and felt their chest tighten. They looked around the room. There was one tiny window on the wall and one extremely secured door with seven bars on it. The room was round. There was one person standing by the door with a mask over their head.

"Excuse me, where am I?" Quinn asked.

"Tower," the voice said.

"Why am I here?" Quinn asked.

"We are holding you here until the execution," the voice said.

"I'm sorry, did you say execution? What did I do?" Quinn asked, fear filling their voice.

"I am not at liberty to answer that," the voice said.

"Why not?" they asked.

"I am not at liberty to answer that."

"I didn't do anything. I shouldn't be here, let me out," they said at a volume that could shatter glass.

* * *

"Logan, I keep telling you, you shouldn't go. It's dangerous," Jonah said in concern for his sibling.

"I have to, this person was wrongfully accused of something they didn't do and the execution shouldn't happen," Logan said as they saddled their horse. Their horse was dark and strong.

"Logan please, I'm begging you, Dad does things for a reason. Just trust his judgement," Jonah begged.

"You cannot stop me, I'm sorry Jonah," Logan said as they pulled themselves on to their horse. As Logan rode off they wondered what they were even getting into. The wind rushed past their dirty blonde hair. They could feel the piercing air against their skin like thousands of rose thorns. The sun was beating down on them like a cool summer day. Nothing was in their way.

* * *

As the days seemed to get longer and longer Quinn lost all hope of getting out of the tower. The walls of the tower became increasingly narrower as Quinn began to lose their sanity. All of a sudden they heard a horse outside of the tower. They ran to the window slipping on the cold stone floor below them. They saw someone who looked royal. Their palms got sweaty and their heart began to increase in speed. *Is this it? Am I gonna die today?* They thought. They dropped down, their kneecaps slamming against the floor. Their eyes were hot and filled with the salty terror of what was to come.

* * *

Logan attached their horse on the edge of the tower. The tower was tall. Thousands of stones stacked on top of each other. There were stones sticking out of the tower acting as stairs to a big black chained iron door. Moss covered the tower. Logan walked up the stairs. When they were at the door they banged on it.

"Please open up," they said with urgency. "This is Logan, I am here to take the prisoner."

An eye hold opened up and the guard spoke, "Logan, but the execution isn't today."

"I am fully aware. I order you to let me in right now," Logan said. The door opened and there it was again, the face of pure perfection.

* * *

"Get away from me," Quinn said as fear filled their voice.

"I'm going to be taking the prisoner, my father's orders," Logan said to the guard.

“As you wish your majesty,” the guard said. Logan grabbed Quinn’s hand and attempted to pull them out of the tower.

“Get off of me,” Quinn said.

“I’m sorry, I should probably introduce myself,” Logan said. “My name is Logan. I am not here to kill you. I am here to do the exact opposite.”

“Um...my name is Quinn, what did I do? Why am I locked up here?” Quinn asked.

“My father...Jeremy may you please excuse us for a moment?” Logan ordered. The guard nodded and left the tower. “My father locked you up here to keep you here until the execution day. Supposedly he killed your parents when you were four because of a secret that your parents found out. My father thinks that you know the secret so he wants you dead.”

“I don’t know any secret about anything so thanks for opening the door for me. I’m out of here,” Quinn said walking out the door.

“Wait, I just saved you,” Logan said, running after Quinn.

“You can’t just expect me to want to go with you, I don’t even know you,” Quinn said.

“But I went out of my way to save someone as beautiful as you,” Logan said.

“Are you serious? Did you just see me get taken and fall in love with me and that’s your reasoning for saving me? I’m out of here. Don’t follow me,” Quinn said with disgust.

“Wait...” Logan said as their heart shattered. They fell to the ground, boiling tears streaming from their eyes. “No...”

The End

This connects to the theme because Gemma is for herself. Gemma is all about self-defense.

Loving My Lone Wolf by Nell Z. Age: 11

Click, clack, click, clack; the sound of my shiny black shoes hitting the floor on the way to the principal’s office, a place that I call home. My red skirt gently brushes my knees. I am *never* afraid of the principal. My eyes are dry. My steps are steady and I feel relaxed. I arrive at the door to the principal’s office.

“Miss Gemma Northings.”

Oh boy, here we go again. I look to my side. James Caraway, the person I hate most in this world. He winks at me. I want to punch him. I sit in one of the old wood chairs, it creaks as I sit.

“Northings,” the principal barks. “You punched poor James on the basketball court. This behavior is inexcusable. Can you explain your actions?”

“I punched him because he was trying to kiss me, and, and, and...”

[It was too late for Gemma as she was committed to doing something she *wouldn’t* regret.]

The car ride home is silent, although I can tell my mother is upset. I don’t feel bad, as the pamphlet says I should. “What to do after harming another student” is the title. I roll my eyes but keep on reading: “If you harm another student you should think about what you did and how you are going to apologize to the one you hurt.” I could never say sorry to James. It would be impossible. “While you are suspended, you need to write a letter to the person you hurt and be sure to make sure the feelings in it are real! Remember, the only way to get rid of an enemy is to make them your friend!” Wrong. The only way to get rid of an enemy is to kill them or make them afraid of you.

“Gemma, we’re home,” my mom’s cheerful voice says. I swing my heavy school bag over my shoulder and hear the crinkling of my white school shirt in my ear. I skip up the steps to my house. I knock on the door and immediately my Ima opens the door, an understanding look on her soft face.

“I’m sorry,” I say under my breath. Ima pats my back and ushers me inside.

“Hello Stella!” I lean down and go to meet the face of my fifteen year old huskie named Stella. Her breath smells like rotting eggs but I don’t mind too much.

“Dinner is ready!” The sweet aroma of freshly baked challah fills my senses. I hang up my backpack and rush to the dining room for dinner. Warm candle light dimly lights the room. I head into the kitchen to get a delicious Shabbat meal. I grab some salad made from the garden, a heap of tender chicken and a cup of grape juice. I bring my meal into the dining room, the soft clicks of Stella’s claws on the wooden floor following me. I sit in the soft upholstered seat of the dining chairs and wait for my parents to join me. The small wooden table with only four chairs sits in front of me. I gently place my blue dinner plate on to the table.

Stella hops on to the unused chair and was for table scraps. Mom and Ima both sit and place their plates on to the table. After a blessing is said over the bread and juice Mom slices the challah and we begin to eat.

I lift my fork to take a bite, but then Mom begins, “Gemma, there is nothing to be ashamed of. You defended yourself and we have no reason to punish you.”

I was stunned! “Really! I would have thought you would be angry!”

“You stood up for yourself and we admire you for that.” Ima seemed to giggle as she spoke.

[After that, the Northing’s dinner was pleasant, soon it was bedtime.]

After dinner I trudge up the stairs for bedtime. I open one of my dresser drawers to pick some of my fleece pajamas. I pick up the soft fabric and head to my bathroom. I shut the door and look in the mirror. Taking my hand, I pull out my hair tie, letting my long milk chocolate hair fall to my lower back. I look into the mirror and question the face that stares back; light brown eyes, soft pink lips, smooth pale skin, fuzzy eyebrows.

I snap out of my trance and begin to change. I slip off my long red skirt and undo the buttons on my top. After I pull on my fluffy purple pajamas and I brush my teeth I head back to bed. After I’m under the covers my foot hits something hard. I wrap my toes around it and pull it towards me. It is a magazine, “Sixth Grade Dream,” is the title.

I instantly remember what it is. The first words make my soul heave. “Hot Topics! How to make your crush like you back. Cutest new

pop stars. What to wear. How to do your makeup!”

“Eeeew!” I say a little too loudly and Mom comes to check on me. I shove the magazine under my blanket and pinch my eyes closed praying that Mom will go away.

[Seconds turned to moments. Moments turned to hours. And soon Gemma is fast asleep.]

In the morning I wake up to a slimy warm tongue cascading up and down my face!

“Stella!” I say. My eyes slowly blink open. Stella jumps off of my bed as she sees I am in fact awake. I am tempted to look inside the teen trash heap that sits by my side so I open the magazine to find a note peeking out of one of the pages.

I yank out the note and read it: “Here Gum-Yumz, read this and hopefully your boy gland will start working! Lovez Aminah!”

Aminah, that name reels in memories like a fishing line reeling in a smelly boot. Aminah, my ex-friend. We were friends until the sleepover. Aminah used to invite me to sleepovers with the whole class. It got to a point where we all decided to play truth or dare. Of course, James asked me if I wanted him. I said I wanted him less than I wanted the plague. He shrugged and the night went on.

It was about midnight when I felt a hand on my chest. My eyes shot open to see James’s eerie face. I grabbed the back of his neck. He thought I was going to kiss him so he pursed his lips and closed his eyes. I slammed his face into the sharpest corner on a nightstand. He screamed and woke everyone up so that they could see me hitting the back of his head with this very magazine. I remember the startled wails of my classmates. I remember seeing James’s shocked expression while blood slowly trickled from a cut on his head. The world was silent for me. I smiled and felt a deep dark part of me relax.

Amirah was yelling at me with tears bursting out of her eyes. I didn’t hear what she said, all I heard was my heart beating inside my chest. I snapped back into reality as Amirah’s parents shot into the room. I sat with my legs crossed and my face expressionless. Amirah’s father went to help James, who was now violently bawling. Amirah’s mother was yelling for everyone to get out of the room. Something small hit my foot, a bead from my necklace. It had snapped during the commotion but that wasn’t my main issue. My main issue was dealing with Amirah’s mom.

I snapped out of my flashback and went downstairs for breakfast,

awaiting today.

Warm buttermilk pancakes filled my empty stomach as my parents and I tell odd jokes at breakfast.

“What’s black and white and red all over?”

When no one guesses I spill the answer, “Stella!” Instantly we all look at Stella, who found her way into the strawberry jam.

“Stella! You’re gonna need a bath!”

To Be Continued...

What would happen in the book is that Gemma would go back to school. Some major things would be that halfway through the story Stella would die, causing some pretty major stuff to happen. James would try to follow Gemma home and then blackmail her about how she would have one of his kids for every time she hurt/ignored him. The story would end with James getting expelled.

*My narrative connects to Rabbi Hillel’s quote because my character struggles to find herself. “If I’m not for myself who will be for me?” My character decides to leave her home to find herself, in part because she’s scared of her sexuality. “If I am only for myself, what am I?” Towards the end of my narrative my character realizes that she wants to belong; to have a home, a family and someone to love. “And if not now, then when?” My character doesn’t wait. She leaves home because she needs to. When she realizes that it’s time to go back home she doesn’t hold out, she goes. **The Journey** utilizes this summer’s theme as it describes the main character’s mental path.*

The Journey by Alana G. Age: 16

1. Road Trip

Verse 1

It’s time to go
I just can’t stay
Been falling in valleys below
I need a new day

My life in two bags
Hair swings as I grab the keys
The engine lags
I feel as if I’ve been stung by a bee

Chorus

I don’t know who I am
Or who I want to be
I need a change
To move and feel free
The sun rises in the east
And sets in the west
While I’ve been stationary

Bridge

The sun rises in the east
And sets in the west
While I’ve been stationary

Verse 2

I put more stress on the gas
And speed along the highway
Due north, approaching fast
Onwards to where the mountains lay

My arms become weak
Eyelids weighted with stones
I leave the car, find a place to sleep
An ancient weariness settled in my bones

Chorus/Bridge

Verse 3

The sun's gift of light disturbs my slumber
Time to continue my travels
Days of my past blended together
I blink and my life unravels

It's time to go
I just can't stay
Been falling in valleys below
I need a new day

Bridge

2. Grandfather Mountain, North Carolina

Verse 1

Come closer and let me whisper in your ear
Only if you dare
My children will pray on your fears
While you breathe my sharp freshly picked apple air

Twigs snap as you come to me
Leaves rustle, branches break
My wind whispers "flee"
As my bears begin to wake

Chorus

You climb higher and higher
All the way to my peak
I am the Grandfather
But you can't stay in my home
Daughter, you should be scared
Stranger, do you really dare?

Verse 2

My terrain tries to test you
You struggle yet advance
I don't understand what you do
As your feet climb and dance

"Enough!" I want to scream
You don't know what lies ahead
I tense, rise higher, scared of what I can be
Yet you lie down, I become your bed

Chorus

Bridge

Please don't run from me
I am the Grandfather
I don't WANT to hurt you
So maybe I'll allow you in
For tonight

Outro

I want you to leave
But I wish you would stay

3. We'll Go Where We Dream

My alarm rings and it's time to leave my bed of leaves
Always moving forward
Trying not to look back
I get in the car, drive so far, leave the land of tar

I pass exit after exit
Mountain disappearing in the distance
Only slightly homesick
I choose exit 3, you're waiting for me, I don't miss my family

I had stopped for food
But you offer your hand
Innocent eyes convince me to let you stay
I smile from ear to ear, you want to be here, I need someone near

We're the same, you and me
Two girls on the run
Scared of what we can be
Striving to learn, to discern, and to burn

You're escaping your father
I'm wary of love
We're both lonely wanderers
Running away, to start a new day, together we lay

Where to next?
Neither of us know
We'll go where we dream
Roads will wind, your words are kind, meaning we'll find

4. Dancing in the Rain

Gravel crunches beneath the wheels
As we pull up to the cliff
Overlooking the iridescent sea

I'll remember a blanket with red and white checks
Wicker baskets containing sandwiches and fruit
I can taste the salt of peanut butter
And the warm welcome of sunbaked peaches

The sun looms over us
Surrounded by swirling clouds of black and gray
As we look out over the ledge
The sea thrashing under an invisible stampede

The first drops reach us
Cold and unforgiving
Offering us a choice
Should we remain or should we run?
I think I'm so sick of running
All the constant change
That I'll decide to stay

The heavens open
Water pouring down on us
With it the salty tang of the sea
Our feet move out from under us
And we begin to dance

The steady rhythm of the rain
And our gleeful shouts
Set the tempo and melody
I'll remember the way
You offer me your hand
Outstretched and inviting

I want to love
To feel as warm as cookies straight out of the oven
To have someone unconditionally

Waiting for me

I'll remember the way we waltzed
Around the soggy cliff top
Overlooking the dark gray sea
Shoes cold and muddy
Staring into the other's passionate eyes
Dancing in the rain

5. Is She Mine?

We park the car, pay for our spot
Nails bite into my palms
As she guides me
Into her city

Nothing is still
People shout for attention
As they head to their destination
A man plays "What a Wonderful World" on a saxophone

The scent of people living close together
Like a six-pack of soda
Permeates the air

One squeeze of the hand
Brings me back
To her

I've spent so long running
From who I really am
Am I done?
I'm not yet weary
Should I continue to fight?

She takes me to her favorite
Thrift store
We find a vintage leather jacket
And an 80's prom dress

We take off through the streets
Hand in hand
Laughter on our lips
I can see the looks she gives me
Ever since the cliff

Do I return them?
Do I want to?
She's warm like a fresh cup of coffee

An oasis in the middle of the Sahara
But she's not for me

We stop in front of a fountain
Water flowing non-stop
She takes my hands
Meets my eyes
Her lips envelope mine
And I don't mind

6. Mama, I'm coming Home

Verse 1

I'm no longer scared
I've climbed mountains
And danced in the rain
I know who I am
There's no one I'd rather be

So now I turn to the place I left
When my house didn't feel like a home
And the sun never shone
I know who I am
There's no one I'd rather be

Chorus

This is to those I left
Behind
Those I abandoned
Because I was scared
Mama, I'm coming home
I know who I am
There's no one I'd rather be

Verse 2

You decide to come with me
Because you've not yet reached
The conclusion of your journey
That's okay
I know who I am
There's no one I'd rather be

Chorus/Bridge

Verse 3

I'm greeted by warmth as the door opens
And breathe in the scent of brownies in the oven
My sister screams
Ear-piercing

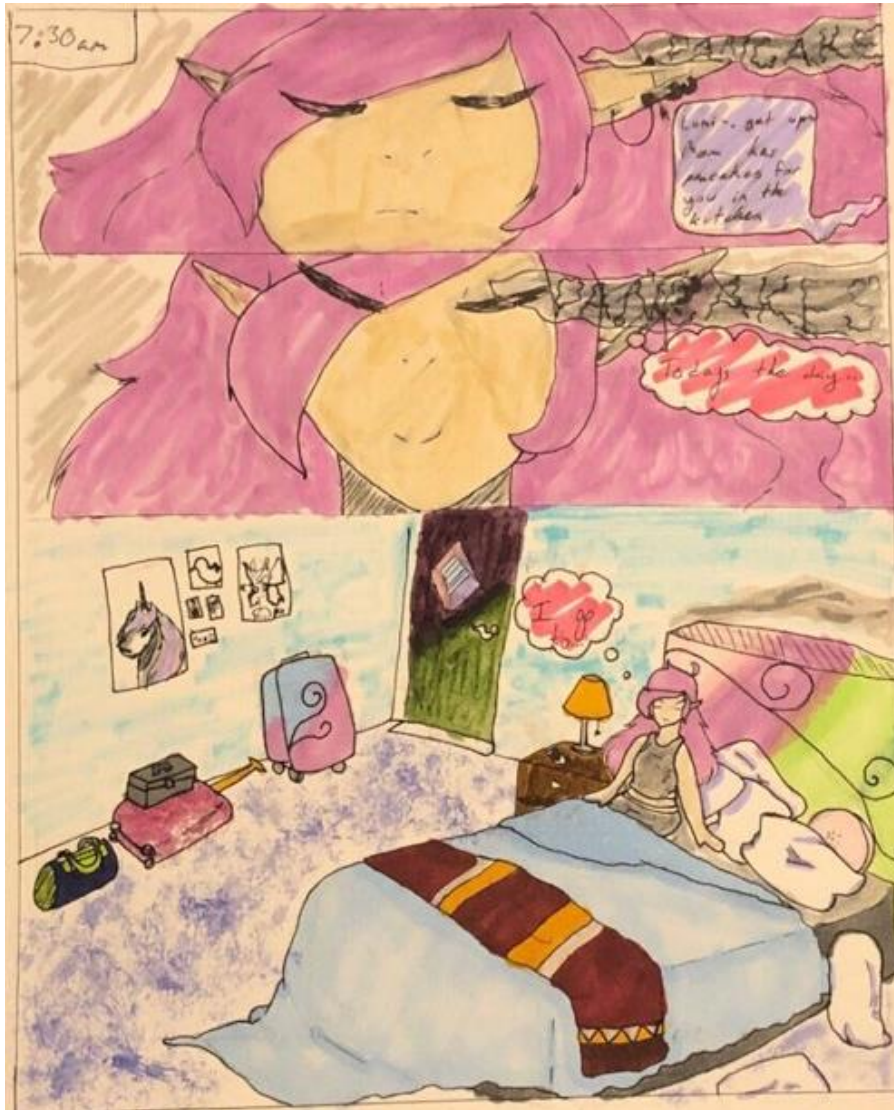
As I come in
That's okay
I'm home

Bridge/Outro

I know who I am
There's no one I'd rather be

One of the characters that fits with the theme is Lyra. The sentence she fits with, because she's not only for herself, is, "if I'm not for myself, who will be for me?" She cares enough about her sister and is consistently worrying about her and making sure her sister is always okay and organized.

Malady Rogue by Galit M. Age: 11



"Lumi, get up," Lyra cooed in an attempt to wake up her sister. "Mom has pancakes for you in the kitchen."

"Today's the day," Lumi thought. "I go to...CRYSTENELA ACADEMY!!!!" Lumi shouted as she jumped out of bed in excitement. Then, realized she had said it out loud.

"I know you're excited Lumi, but dad is still sleeping and we have to go!" Lyra exclaimed, walking into Lumi's room.

As Lumi jumped out of bed she shouted, "Why didn't you wake me up earlier?! I'm gonna miss Conner and Yui and the train!!"

Lyra was getting annoyed. “Not my fault. Mom tried multiple times,” Lyra exclaimed.

“GET OUT SO I CAN GET DRESSED,” Lumi shouted and tried to get out of the tangle of her blankets, almost falling off her bed.

Lumi mumbled, “I’m gonna be late because Mom and Lyra…”

Lyra yelled from downstairs, “HURRY UP OR I’LL EAT YOUR PANCAKES!!”

Lumi scream-growled, “YOU WOULDN’T DARE.”

“WATCH ME!” Lyra yelled.

As soon as Lumi heard those words she got dressed at sonic speed, got her luggage, ran down the stairs, packed her carry-on, and ran into the kitchen with her practice battle hammer, eyes on fire (literally, she has fire powers).

“Lumi, no weapons in the kitchen!” Lumi’s mom shouted.

“Sorry Mom,” Lumi said apologetically.

Lyra cut in, “Eat your pancakes and grab your bags cause we have to go,” Lyra said frantically.

“Sorry,” Lumi said with a mouthful of pancakes.

“Bye Mama, see you tomorrow!” Lumi said.

“Bye Mama,” Lyra said.

“Bye girls. I’ll see you tomorrow. Dad should already be there but you most likely won’t see him till tomorrow,” Lumi’s mom exclaimed.

“Okay, bye!” Lumi said cheerfully.

“Mmmm, these taste like brioche fresh out of the oven! And it’s fluffy!” Lumi said as they walked out of the door.

End of Chapter/Prologue

Spoiler Alert: Parker and Ellie join the search team for personal reasons, neither initially set out to find Daniel to bring him home. Parker wants to have a friend for himself and Ellie wants to disappear. They both embody the second part of the theme, “If I’m only for myself, what am I?” because they are too concentrated on themselves. Sammie represents the third part of the theme, “If not now, then when?” because they decide to take action instead of waiting for authorities.

Finding Daniel by Charlie R. Age: 16

Daniel Mamilla

I wake up in pitch black, my mouth gagged. The only sound is muffled talking and laughing, though it seems to be coming from all directions. Everything is unfamiliar. My night light is not in the corner. Those are not my parents’ voices. I scream and my body starts to convulse uncontrollably, my legs kicking the infinite emptiness, sometimes making contact with something hollow and plastic I cannot see. Its “thump” adds to the orchestra of the muffled talking, rolling tires, and the screaming inside my head. Every instrument rises to a crescendo as a bump in the road causes my head to hit something and I fall back into unconsciousness.

* * *

Sammie Willows

I’d like to say that I put on a good façade. I dyed my hair blue to stand out. The bright colors I wear – my glasses as yellow as the sun and my sunflower dress – put out a false sense of happiness. I tell jokes in class to make people laugh. I keep up with the modern trends – Buddhism, meditation, freckles, vegetarianism; I even rescued three ferrets. I make a joke “rescue” is a strong word – that I just went into a store and gave money and that later, I rescued some ice cream (it’s not even my joke – thanks Jim Gaffigan). People laugh, which makes me feel better, but it is only temporary. Only I know what I’ve seen, what I’ve done, what I feel. Only I was with Daniel that day.

* * *

Parker Harrell

I hop onto the bus with the same intention as always – just make a friend. That’s how I met Will last year, before he moved away.

I find someone sitting alone who looks nice.

“Hey, is this seat taken?” I say. She shuffles her books around and shakes her head. As I sit down, I look at the label on her backpack: Ellie.

“Do you mind if I sit in the window seat? I just love to look outside at the moving trees,” I say. She nods.

“So, first week huh? Fresh-meat,” I chuckle and gently punch her on the shoulder. That always got Will to laugh.

“Oh, yeah, I guess,” she says and starts to look for something in her bag.

“I’m Parker, I’m a sophomore, so I know all about fresh-meat.” I punch her again. Unamused, she pulls out her earbuds. I’m losing her.

“You got to watch out for the Trevor gang. They’re seniors now and they think they rule the world.”

“Look, I don’t plan to spend much time with the Trevor gang or whatever. I just want to go through high school unremarkably. And right now, I just want to listen to my music in peace and quiet. Please? Thank you.” She puts her earbuds back in.

But I can’t just lose her that easily. So I wait a little bit, then I tell her everything she needs to know. I tell her about the lunch hall and my corner table – she can eat there if she’d like – and my homeroom last year and Mrs. Howell’s English class and the horror stories from Mrs. Hunt’s class and I look up and she’s gone. I tried.

* * *

Ellie White

“As some of you may know, there is a situation regarding one of our students.” A pause. A clearing of a throat. “Daniel Mamilla is not with us.” Another pause. If anyone needs help going through this, our guidance counselors and I are always open to you.”

The assembly hall murmurs and I look at Daniel’s mother, her body drained of color and tears, and the officer, looking especially solemn.

I wonder what it’s like for Daniel in the unknown. Quiet. Alone. These thoughts travel with me as I walk down the hall of the bland high

school, the walls the same pale vomit color of the cold metallic lockers. It is eerily quiet – even the seniors whisper instead of yelling everything they say. I see a sign about a student search team and my thoughts turn back to him. Does he wonder if people miss him? Sometimes I wonder that. If I disappeared, would anyone notice?

* * *

Sammie Willows

Guilt weighed me down like an anvil on my ankle when the principal said that. She was looking at me – I know she was. Thirty minutes later I am still drowning in guilt. It is slowly replacing every blood cell in me.

I made a poster. That night, the night I will never forget, that night I couldn’t sleep. It was my fault. It should’ve been me that was taken. I needed to do something. Not the police. Me.

I have been too anxious to put it up. Do I want other students’ help? Will it tear down my façade? But it was the principal’s address that made me put them up. So now, I sit in the hallway watching my sign, when a girl walks up to it. She stands there for a little bit, says something to herself, and walks away.

* * *

Parker Harrell

The principal’s words hang with me as I leave the assembly hall for class. The poor kid. I can’t imagine what it’s like for him – scared half to death and no one knows where you are and *you* don’t know where you are and you don’t know what’s going to happen to you and you might die but you don’t know and it’s probably dark and your hands are tied and there are masked henchmen in a room with one swinging lightbulb like the movies and it’s chilly like an icebox and your heart is beating so fast it’s not in your chest anymore and you can’t talk to anyone in the outside world – I can’t imagine it.

As I walk down the hall, something catches my eye. A girl is looking at a poster. Ellie. Friend. When she walks away, I see it is a poster for Daniel – a student search group. Maybe if I help find him, Daniel would be my friend. Then I’ll have two.

* * *

Ellie White

I decide to join the search group. I'm not sure why. I walk to the student center and instantly regret it. Parker is already there blabbing their head off to the poor nervous kid sitting at the table. I sit down and Parker shifts the stream of words towards me. I pay no attention. The nervous one is, I learn, Sammie, whose face is somehow serious and expressionless at the same time. It's just us. Great. What a rag-tag group we are: a lonely chatterbox, a *very* serious and nervous leader, and a girl who just wants to disappear.

Parker is saying something about relating to Daniel because they both know what it's like to be alone – will they ever shut up? – when Sammie finally starts the meeting. Thank God. Let's go find a disappeared boy. Maybe I'll disappear too.

To be continued...

If I were to continue writing this story, the search would be begin and they *might* find Daniel.

I chose "if not now, then when?" to relate to my story because if the kids hadn't come the Arts Mentos wouldn't have defeated the Sports Mentors.

Arts Mentos and Noy by Serenity R. Age: 10

Raquel: whatever she creates will come alive

H.C.: Whatever she writes comes true

Izzie: When he sings he can hypnotize people

Meri: Whoever she dances around she can read their mind and look through their "files"

Ron: Can put people to sleep with his instruments

Eli: Can talk to people from the past

Cass: Can physically control people

Noy: Sidekick

* * *

It all started six months ago, when all the Arts Mentos were having creamy non-dairy mashed potatoes. We were all about to pour the heavy brown (like chocolate) gravy on to our mashed potatoes when we got an alert that Sports was up to no good, AGAIN! So we suited up. I got my camera and my black leather skirt and my flowy shirt.

Raquel took apart her easel and asked me to get her kit of acrylic paint and paint brushes, so I ran to the supply closet and grabbed them. Then Ron asked me to go get his mini keyboard, so once again I quickly ran to the supply closet and got the mini keyboard and gave it to Ron. He didn't even say thank you! Anyway we got into our mento shaped van.

We went to the first place we thought of, the tennis courts. *Dun, dun dun...*

There we found Tan. He could hit a tennis ball and it turned into a fire ball. We ducked down behind a prickly mint green bush. I guess Tan saw us and the next thing I knew a fire ball was coming right at us. So we ducked out from behind what was the mint green bush. Ron quickly pulled out his mini keyboard and played "We Will Rock You" and before Tan could even launch another ball he was fast asleep.

Then we decided to go to the field where we found Sam. She could kick a soccer ball and it turned into a tornado. We quickly distracted Sam so Eli could talk to a former weather controller. She said to have Cass have Sam put away all the soccer balls and lock them away where she couldn't find them.

So while they did that I decided to take a picture of Tan. I accidentally moved it to the "s" setting and I took a picture. I saw a milky

“ghost” be absorbed with my camera. I looked at the picture, and it all came back to me. Tan was my friend, suddenly my hands got clammy. I had a cold sweat dripping down my face. I used to work for Sports, I thought they were good guys.

I felt two arms grab me. It was J and G, wait, I remembered that I used to be partners with J and G. I figured out that if my camera could do what it just did then theirs could too!

As J and G pulled me away H.C. came and wrote on the only piece of paper from 1550. (She has to use this paper or else what she writes won't come true). H.C. wrote, “J and G disappear and arrive in a cold dark place.” So that's what happened.

As we were walking back I showed H.C. the picture of Tan and explained that I bumped it to the “s” setting and the milky white “ghost” thing flew into my camera.

I looked at H.C. and her eyes got so big she said to me, “No one has had that power for centuries.”

Then I said, “That must mean that J and G don't have the same power.”

“Oh, you never know Noy, your Great Great Great Great Grandmother's power was taken away by a man named Joseph. He absorbed the power and I think J and G might be related to him. It is a big possibility.”

We walked back and told the others. Their eyes got big too. Maybe now they would pay attention to me. We went to the basketball court where we discovered Ben. When he spun a basketball on his finger it created a tornado!

Rachel quickly pulled out her easel and assembled it, then she got out a canvas and painted the tornado. It had only moved a little bit when Ben put another basketball on his other hand.

Meri started to dance around him to find a way to make it stop, but the tornado was too strong.

Izzie started to sing, but the tornado was too thick to go through.

Right then, all the kids walked in and all the dance kids started dancing around the tornado.

The vocal kids started singing.

Instrumental music got out their instruments and played.

The tornado stopped.

Ben was about to pick up the basketball, but I quickly pulled out my camera and took his soul. I decided to try something. I pulled out my laptop and wrote Ben, Sam, and Tan new souls. I took a picture of it and

double clicked the picture button twice and it returned the new soul I wrote. I did that to Sam and Tan too.

All the Arts Mentos apologized and said that they would never treat anyone wrong again.

The End