

Prelude:

What *matters*? This deceptively complex question has served as a guide for the 10th grade this semester. We've gone to Concord, MA to ask why people from 90 countries have traveled thousands of miles to visit Walden Pond. We've read essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau to explore nonconformity, connection to nature, intuition, confidence, free thought and wildness and then asked: Do these ideas matter? We've read books whose main characters have committed themselves to lives of action in service of their beliefs and asked: Does action matter, or is it enough to believe? And, we've turned inward, with each student asking: What matters to me? What actions do I want to take?

The aim of this study was for students to take risks, to explore society and culture, to reflect on who they are and what they value, and to know themselves a little better by the end than when they started. Using NPR's *This I Believe* series as a model, students each crafted a narrative with the direction that they must write about a meaningful belief in an authentic voice, and revise as many times as necessary to meet these goals. The next step was for each student to stand behind their belief in a public setting: this anthology. Please enjoy!

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The Climb, the Sky, and the River

by Kate

I imagine myself on a cold, narrow, stone ledge perched fifty feet above roaring white waters of a ferocious river. Above me is a fifty-foot ascension towards a beautiful blue sky, but the rocks that surround me are harsh and unforgiving. It would be the same distance to stumble and fall, as it would be to reach above me and climb my way out. I can't hold on for much longer and thus my two options become plain and clear. I have the option of simply letting go and relinquishing myself to gravity so that I descend effortlessly downward. My muscles will be spared the torment of climbing and for that brief moment, I will have no pain. Or, I could reach above me and find a handhold, pulling myself up towards safety one clutch at a time. However, this will be grueling and

there's a high chance I'll fall regardless. The question is whether I will fall now and save myself the suffering or take the arduous chance.

I believe in reaching high, finding my handhold, and heaving myself up towards higher ground.

My life is a series of canyons. It's a series of decisions to progress or to turn back. If I've found myself in a dispute, I have the choice of either dwelling in my antagonism until my inevitable decline, or addressing the issue so I can move on to a resolution.

I know that the only way to make it out of this canyon is to make progress. If I break off my grip and allow myself to fall into a perpetual state of hostility and anger, the malignant, ravenous monster of a river would tear my body apart. It would leave me for dead to decompose in an oblivion of what can only be described as anti-progress. But, change will come if I grasp the rocks above my head and attempt to resolve the conflict. I'll be able to move forward.

I am fully aware that although my clutches are determined, they are imperfect. However, no matter how many times I relapse, I will always be higher than I would be were I to submit entirely to the gravity of reality. I am the only one who can fight my battles. I am the only one who can move myself forward. It's my canyon, my fall, my climb, and my progress.

Shadows Sight

by Adri

I stared up at the wall. It was dark, gray, lasting forever across my room, even consuming the hallway. These are the summer nights I remember the most. The darkness hides everything that gives me comfort, isolating me with only a soft blanket to shield myself. Nights like these are when I believe in the moon, even though it may be surrounded by threatening clouds. I slowly curl my fingers around the top of my bed frame, and pull myself up. I look out my skylight. All the house lights have been turned off, but the moon's light remains. It caresses trunks of trees and pricks the tips of roof tops. It is my one sense of reassurance that someone will watch me on nights like this, my guardian.

When I was little I used to wake up really early. It would often still be dark, but I loved saying goodbye to the moon, and watching the sun lazily get ready for the new day. I remember hoping that night would return soon, waking my guardian up with it. I would often wonder where the moon goes to lay its head, and if it finds comfort there too. I would wonder if it ever got scared of the shadows, and who was there to protect it.

Now when I look up at the moon, I feel sorry for it. To wake up every night only to look upon our darkest secrets. How many secrets the moon must know. It sits there in its perch seeing what we write, the words we say when no one is there, the tears we cry that we're embarrassed to claim, and all the things we're most ashamed of. It carry's around all the knowledge of the crimes we commit when the shadows are there to hide us. And it will never tell a soul.

I feel known when I look up at the moon. It knows the sides of me I hide from the world, so for that reason I seek refuge in it. It's a relief to know that the moon will never desert me, that it will never be disappointed, that it's something in this world I can trust. That is why I believe in the moon.

Life's Random Surprises

by Zoe V

I believe in erotic, loud, frantic spontaneity. I believe in this because it keeps me entranced by life's random surprises. I am enthralled by life and its suddenness. So many happenings occur that are undetermined. Some places encourage the happenings. This pond in the middle of nowhere is something that I know is real, for I was there.

I decided to spontaneously jump into this pond, whilst the sky seemed to be cursed by an impending rainstorm. Once submerged, I finally felt alive and rambunctious. Free to unshackle myself from my quiet, distorted persona. One leap had suddenly changed my perspective of the world. Immersed for less than 10 seconds, I

was captivated by the turmoil of fantastical surroundings. Underneath, the pond is reed filled, with colorful fish, shining with dizzying power as they spin and twist. Clouds of dust swirl around me and my hair splayed out with a life of its own. Who would have thought that such a bland, dull area could be engulfed in such alluring satisfaction? Brightly colored fish were a refreshing sight for eyes which had previously been captive by a dull, cloud-filled day.

My spontaneous act of jumping in murky, uncharted water taught me how life can still thrive and live, even when everything seems halted by monotony and somberness. Believing in a more exciting place is what makes possibilities come true. Spontaneity keeps me enticed. Always looking forward to something, even if I don't know what it is; this lifts my spirits on days when I feel hopeless and depressed. Without spontaneity, I have no unpredictable anticipation.

Once again on dry land, I hung my attire on a helpful tree branch. I was glad to see that the clouds had parted to reveal a cyan colored sky, a bright sun, and chirping blue-jays. And I thought it was going to rain. The heavy air and sky, tinged black and overcast, made this a plausible thought. Although that day acted impromptu to my wishes, I had the power to change the outcome. The weather was pleasant; the sky was a genial shade of blue.

I believe that spontaneity plays a role in our lives and we have to embrace the bad, boring parts in life to experience the great unpremeditated ones that may be slight, but can make a difference in how we perceive our days.

Drawing

by Paige

I believe in drawing. For me it's an outlet for most things that I dare not say or can't form into writing. It's just easier to draw them. It's really quite comforting to come home after the chaos of school, and find a quiet spot to escape from this world and into my sketch book.

As a child I would spend most my time at my grandparents' house. My grandfather was a painter and my grandmother was into knitting, so my love for art started there more than anywhere else. My interest in drawing came later but, my journey into art began with sculpting. I don't remember how but, a small pack of Sculpey Modeling Clay came into my possession one day. Soon after, I

had created a small army of creatures and my talent became known throughout my family and a close group of friends. That phase didn't last and ended at the beginning of middle school.

I always drew strange, stupid little doodles on the sides of my work and I still do that to an extent . My friends and I would pass the paper around and each one of us would add more to the drawing as it went around. The end result would usually be something I can't even begin to describe, or it would be a comic-like scene with our characters interacting with one another. My friends were and still are a big influence on me. They got me to start drawing even though I wasn't too thrilled with starting on a new medium of art.

My interest in drawing really took off when one of my cousins let me look through her sketch book while she was visiting with the family. It blew my mind looking through that book; I had only known of inside-the-line coloring books and incoherent doodlings on the sides of my work. I didn't know you could draw and color you own pictures and be serious about it. Later I managed to acquire my own sketch book and began the long road of practice. Like any other subject whether it be writing, or another artistic medium, it's always good to keep the things you started with and look back on them and reflect on how far you've come.

To me drawing is a lot more personal than any other expressive tool I've tried. When I draw I feel like I can better express how I feel and put more emotion into the drawing without pushing myself.

Drawing is an amazing outlet for me it seems to come more naturally than anything else I've tried, where I'd be pushing myself

too hard and end up with nothing. Though my skill is nowhere near where I want it to be, I still enjoy working at it and improving the things I don't like and developing my own style. It's going to take a long time before I can say that I'm happy with where my drawings are in terms of skill, but when that day comes I know I've done all I can. Until then, I believe in drawing.

I believe in faeries.

I believe that change is essential.

I believe that humans are the most dangerous and evil beings who exist.

I believe in angels.

I believe in being flexible.

I believe all people are innocent, even people who make bad mistakes.

I believe that I am a COWBOY!

I believe in equality.

I believe in being excessive.

I believe in the pursuit of happiness.

I believe that just because you can does not mean you have to.

I believe in being.

I believe the world teaches you as much as you want to learn.

I believe that we were doomed from the start.

I believe in love at first sight.

Sustaining Rivers

by Kyla

I believe in the power of compliments. The way compliments affect you, how one can save your entire day. “There’s a red spot on my nose...”

“Really?”

“Oh honey I didn’t notice.”

“I can’t see it.”

“You look fine.”

A tingle, a warmth, an unbelievable amount of gratitude, a smile, and my day continues. The happiness a compliment sends through me, well, what else is there to say other than it's my therapy, my remedy, my drug. I wish I had a self-esteem, or an ounce of confidence, but I don't. I depend on this flattery. Maybe I'm selfish, but if my selfishness lets me survive a day then let it be.

I had entered this summer at one of my lowest points. I was broken-down, run to the ground, and scared. My mom thought that a Counselor In Training program would help, and reluctantly I agreed. It's really amazing what some new faces and a driven personality can do when you get them together. Most people have never made me feel more loved, appreciated and needed than the counselors. They could see I was a hard worker and would shower me with compliments. On a day when nothing was going my way, my fellow CIT's weren't working with me, and there was going to be a wedding party; the camp had to be spotless. When I was trying to do it all and I couldn't, Matt my counselor told me, "Kyla, at staff meetings we all agree, you're the best CIT period." I was flooded with relief, and with something I had not had in a long time: confidence.

Compliments don't have to be direct. A thing most people never see. Most of them aren't 'I like this about you' or 'your clothing or hair or whatever is awesome'. Compliments can be passive, even actions. The best one I've ever had the pleasure of receiving, came in the form of a boy. At camp, I was called into the office. Facing me was the Camp director, my counselor and my favorite counselor. Twelve heart beats and I was told, "Kyla, you're no longer a CIT. Starting tomorrow you will be an aid to John, one of the Cherokees." This flattering remark ran through me like every

river runs through the earth, sustaining and reviving me permanently. They trusted me with a child, a severely autistic child. He was a boy who saw everything profound in the world, yet saw nothing at the same time. He was my charge, and if I failed he would get kicked out of camp, or worse, he would be harmed.

If compliments have the power to revive me and give me hope, then they must have the power to give everyone these things. Yes, I believe in the power of compliments. I believe in their devastating ability to help people through a day, month or year. I believe that you can live without a self-esteem, so long as others carry one for you.

Au Natural

by Hannah

Have you ever bee home alone for a long time? I'm not talking about just one or two hours, but for one or more days? If you have, then have you ever just taken off whatever you were wearing and sat down or continued whatever you were doing? If you haven't then maybe I'm just strange. But whether I'm strange or normal, I still believe in being nude.

By now you probably know more about me than you would care to know, but it's true. Being nude is fun, not to mention awkward when your parents get home. I really don't see what's wrong with being naked. We are born naked, we take showers naked and we have sex naked.

As a young child I would run around the house with my sisters, bare. No one ever told me it was wrong to be naked in private. I guess they thought it was a phase and I would grow out of it, but I didn't. I still do it, just when I'm home alone and sometimes if there's a good tune on the radio, I'll dance in the nude.

The most recent time I was naked was when my cousin graduated from college. He was offering to take all of his family out to lunch. My mom gave me the option to stay home, so I did. It was raining out so I did not want to go outside. I sat around with nothing to do but watch T.V, go on the computer, and be naked. And that's exactly what I did for awhile, until cars started to drive down the street. I felt like I was being watched, but I wasn't. I still put on my clothes. Who knew when my family would get home? That would be awkward for them to come home and see me in my "birthday suit."

I wonder how being nude became socially unacceptable. When humans started out, we were nude. Of course there are some who say that there are just some people you just don't want to see naked. But if you think about it if we all were just naked, no one would have a problem with it. We would have all seen everything there is to see on a person. There is nothing wrong with the human body; it's like art.

I can't see that in the near future everyone will go out in public nude. I hope that society would get over their "phobia" of the bare human figure. I hope people can just accept the human body for what it is. I want people to get over the fact that the human body does things that are just strange. I'm not trying to tell people that they need to be nude more often, but if that's what you get out of

this then go right ahead. I'll just go on with my life believing in being nude.

My Revelation

by Alex

Life is considered by most people to be short, so why not live it to the best you possibly can? I believe that during your life you should be as happy as your mind lets you. Of course everyone has a bad day, but if you really think about it, why would you want to spend even a minute of your life stressing when there are so many possibilities. Think of something that makes you happy, like music, friends, a book or whatever. Appreciate those things.

Like everyone, I've had days when I felt down but I can now much more easily change those instances into a good day by the thought of living life as happily as I can. I imagine a life where I'm almost

always content and though I have not achieved that, this thought process lets me get as close as I can to it.

Each and every individual in the world has at least one thing they know can make them happy. That one thing is one of the most important in the world, and people should appreciate it and not take it for granted.

This has been a revelation for me, a very important one that I plan to keep with me till the day I die. I believe that I, and every other single human being, should believe this as well and live by it.

I believe in innuendos.

I believe in sharing rather than spending money.

I believe that anybody could lose all mental control.

I believe in exaggeration.

I believe in self-expression.

I believe in a cool breeze.

I believe in always being happy.

I believe in arguing when you know you're wrong and you continue!

I believe in having an open mind.

I believe in challenging your beliefs.

I believe in bromosexual love.

I believe people can change.

I believe that Elliot Smith was one of the best singer/songwriters to live.

I believe everything has a place.

I believe in words.

Stress Released Limb by Limb

by Daemon

I believe in playing Xbox daily; it is very essential for me to play everyday. Xbox helps me through the good and the bad times. It relieves stress that I have, or releases my feelings that I just don't feel like sharing with others. Stress is of abundance in my life and Xbox has always been there.

A normal day for me is full of chaos and outbursts of hate. My day starts with the usual battle of my dad being too loud getting ready for work and possibly waking up my younger brother. Finally he leaves and then there is a yell up the stairs thinking I am sleeping when really I am already ready to go. I head out the door with my first bit of happiness at hand: my coffee! I deal with the annoyance

of the usual school day, which sadly leads to the usual hectic ride home where the bus driver never knows where he is going. Finally, I enter my house which I know is just as crap as ever. Instantly I walk into the outburst of my mom debating divorcing my current step-dad. I stand there and act like a listener when really I am just getting irritated. Finally, it is all over and I am allowed into the room of freedom, my room.

I open the door and the light shines perfectly through the window onto the Xbox. I quickly kick my shoes off in different directions as I close the door. Moving only ever so slightly, I lay my backpack onto the bed. Finally, the final stretch, I can see the finish line! I am here. I sit down turn on the Xbox and *BLOOP!* 20 friends are on. I quickly gather a party of my favorite friends. Cevere Kane and Amazing321 are the only two that I really trust. We all joined a game and started instantly killing as a team. As we splatter the enemy to bits, my stressed is released limb by limb. While annihilating the enemy, we all chat about our days and the things that happened. We spend the night that way and by the time I lay down, everything is all better again for the day.

This is one of the many stories I have from Xbox. It truly is my helper in every single way. Without Xbox I wouldn't be the person I am today. Who knows if I would even be here? I believe playing Xbox daily helps the soul.

Scaredy Cat

by Renee

Have you ever just wanted to run away? Run from all your fears and never come back? I felt this feeling for the first time when I was six. I was mad one day because my mom put me in a time out for eating sweets before dinner, so at that moment, I decided it was time to run away. I was only in 1st grade, cut me some slack here. I packed some toys into my Barbie suitcase and made my way to the front door. Now I know what you're thinking: you actually ran away when you were just six? But the truth is, I was and still am gutless, so I opened the front door and closed it, just so my family would think I actually left, then hid inside the closet. Seconds later, my mom called my name. I always answer when people call my name, even in situations like this. I guess it's just a reflex to me. I

answered, and that was that; my first rebellious move of my childhood was hiding in a closet. But hey, I believe being a scaredy cat is just who I am.

Things didn't really change as I got older. In fourth grade I made my second rebellious move: I watched a horror film that was rated PG-13. This was a pretty big deal for me because at the time I was only nine. The movie was called *The Ring* and was about a killer who comes out of TV's to murder people. Well, there was a little problem with that. During this time, I had a broken collarbone and was stuck sleeping downstairs alone in the dark because I couldn't walk up the stairs. So, I would sit there with my eyes open, just hoping that creepy girl from *The Ring* wouldn't jump out from somewhere and kill me. To top it off, I was sleeping right in front of the TV. Go figure.

Now you may be wondering, why I believe in being a scaredy cat. I believe this because I don't think fear is a bad thing. I believe it's what makes us human. If we were all fearless, we might as well be superman. I believe in some ways fear shapes us as individuals. I mean, we all have things we are scared of. I will admit I have a lot, but I guess that's just me.

I don't think I will ever be able to lose half of my fears. Even the silly ones like elevators are stuck to me like glue and I accept that. I know all of these fears make up who I am. I will continue keeping my TV on a sleep timer so the girl from *The Ring* doesn't come out of it, and still scream bloody murder when the tiniest bee comes within four feet of me. I can't help it, so I embrace it. I believe in being a scaredy cat.

Too Tired to Talk, but Not Too Tired to Play

by Troy

Playing frisbee drills down to my core and lets all my determination rush up into powerful being. When I play, I play hard, and with the goal of bettering myself. Nothing is perfect. Nothing is above critique. I want the world from myself and more. When my body moans and groans, I placate it with Frisbee. It dulls all the pain it had left, and promises success.

That first day I gripped a plastic disc, it was so enthralling. I was bad, worse than worse, but it only gave me greater drive. When those wild, long haired eighth graders explained how to play I finally saw it as much more than the chaotic cluster of ten-year-

olds. I saw the grace and prowess of those enormous models of ultimate frisbee. The sport is glorious.

The trials left so much more impact than the triumphs. The games where I couldn't get there fast enough, couldn't hit the right spot, couldn't make the perfect move, were carved into me much more deeply than the games where everything went well. The scars were a reminder that nothing could be over until I had fixed those marks. The memories that stand out so strongly are those of great challenge. One time in particular: a hard game fought, with no rest for my complaining body. I was needed and I knew it. What was there to do but play? Nothing.

So I played. I played so hard I could only play. The space between points, where the teams line up on the end zone line, is usually a nice break. This memorable battle was far from that. In a happy, easy game where we sit pretty, we chat about this or that in those little pauses between playing. This time was different. I was too tired to talk. It took too much energy; it seemed like I couldn't function in that time at all. Only when the disc was released did my energy come back. Frisbee rejuvenated me; it brought it all back.

Too tired to talk, but not too tired to play. Such a strange anomaly, but it was the truth. Every part of my body only cared about the game; it let me get lost in it all. It called up the deep energy that commanded my base actions. Frisbee makes me stronger, brings my best out and pushes me forward.

It'll Happen—Maybe

by Joe

I can't think of a time in my life where I had a revelation and decided that realism is the key to life. I think it was more of a gradual thing. In fact, I didn't even realize that I believed in realism until fairly recently. All I know is that realism is what I understand and connect with best. I don't connect to emotional responses as deeply as I do to a good, solid, realistic answer.

Realism to me is thinking things through. It's simply saying: "Yes. That is a good idea. Now, will it work?" It's thinking about the specifics, and the mechanics of the idea and seeing if it's practical. I believe realism is something everyone should practice. It's healthy to look at the world as it is, and not what you wish it to be.

Even if you do it for only a moment, I can guarantee you will get results and broaden your horizons. There is an inherent danger in being a realist though. If you look at the world as it is for long enough, it will drive you mad. You have to find a way to shut off your brain for a while, and let your hair down. Relaxing is just as important as working.

I also believe in a Utopia. It can happen. In fact, it probably will happen. But it will not come about by simple Idealism, although that is important. Everything has a time and place, but realism transcends time and space. There is no serious situation in which realism would not help.

Dreams are important, and they have a special place, but so does reality; we cannot ignore the past or present. They teach us, they shows us others' mistakes so that we don't have to make them. Realism is a mindset, and an essential role in society. Many people argue over which is better, idealism or realism; it's a yin and yang type thing. I say they are both important. We need your dreamers, but we also need your dream builders. We need realism to have a better reality.

I believe in Realism because that is the only way we will ever reach a Utopia.

I believe that emotions are adaptable to everything.

I believe in mercy.

I believe that all can and should make the world a better place.

I believe in standing up for change.

I believe that one can do anything, but one doesn't usually choose to do anything.

I believe that people are generally good.

I believe in respect.

I believe in HUGS!

I believe loneliness is the worst form of pain.

I believe that big words are very annoying.

I believe in sarcasm.

I believe you should question everything.

I believe that I am the center.

I believe it's okay to randomly burst out singing.

I believe that people need to live on a farm.

I believe that eyes are the gateway to the true person.

Love is Not a Toaster

by Allison

What is love? Some claim it to be nothing more than a chemical reaction in the brain, meant to help us procreate. This statement exists because we, as humans can be very pompous and like to think that anything that *our* species can't prove the existence of isn't really there. What an arrogant statement! In a way, it's like denying the existence of electricity. *I* can't go into the science of how my toaster works, but I can still pop in a bagel and burn it to a crisp. However, even though I don't know how electricity works, *some* people do, so many cynics and scientists would disregard that statement, completely ignoring the fact that there very well *could* be forces too big for even us all-knowing humans to explain.

My beliefs are not so smug. I feel that there is such a thing as real love, or “true love” for all those romantics, but that it isn’t perfect and doesn’t always last forever, or promise happiness. Don’t get me wrong, my friends, siblings, and everyone else I’ve established a close relationship with make me very happy. But, they also make me want to lock them in a closet for several hours on end. Once you begin to experience real love, don't be surprised when you're no longer puking rainbows and butterflies.

When I was fourteen, I had first gotten into a relationship, and I thought that it was perfect. My boyfriend and I were completely inseparable. We never fought, there was PDA *everywhere*, a real “we’re perfect for each other” sort of attitude. It was disgusting. After a while, we started opening up to one another, therefore openly fighting and yelling out profanities. I was devastated before I realized that this was how it was supposed to be. I love my sister, my best friend, my brother, but I still have moments where the very sound of them is like a mosquito buzzing by my ear; I still yell at them, and break off means of communication with them. Why should it be any different in romantic relationships? Of course, at some point, the relationship ended, but that didn't change anything. Despite the fact that we hadn't worked out, I loved him at one point.

So be warned. The cute, sticky “I’ll love you forever,” crap when you first get together is what I would call “puppy love” and it disappears as quickly as it comes. That mind-numbing, bipolar, sometimes-joyous-and-sometimes-the-equivalent-of-bamboo-splinters-under-your-fingernails is the real love that I believe in, and it can go away, too. It’s not a chemical reaction, and it’s not

some magical promise of happiness. It's just what the title says it is.
Real.

Together in Music and Peace

by Raven

We walk down a dark alley way. A rush of adrenaline goes through my body. When I open the door, I'm whoever I want to be. As my friends and I anxiously step down the long corridor, the music gets louder. Finally we get to the hall. I push the heavy steel door open. A bright green light shines in my face, blinding me, from the hundreds of wildly dancing, colorful figures flailing without ego.

This is a place where I can be free, where I can experience life at its fullest. An overwhelming amount of happiness pumps throughout my body and I become the music; it takes me places I've never been. Each note strikes my brain with a color and a new

movement. Time stops, and I lose the sense that I am an individual and become the entire crowd; I'm entranced by the loud beat which controls my movements.

This place where I lose myself is called a rave. A rave is when people get together and celebrate life with music at a spiritual level. Most people see raves as just a bunch of people taking drugs; for some people that is part of the experience, but there is another side to a rave that most don't see. It's a place where I can be myself and let go of the stress in my life.

There is something about many people getting together and being a community that just puts me on cloud nine. A rave brings people together in music and peace. For me a rave or concert symbolizes a community and a community is the only way for there to be peace.

My sense of rave culture has shifted from the party experience to the community. The celebration of life is created by people getting together dancing, laughing, smiling, singing, and enjoying each other. When people relate to each other, the vibe is peaceful. They take that peaceful vibe out into the world. I believe in the peaceful community created by raves.

This Is Not Easy

by Adri

Writing an *I Believe* is not easy. I start writing about love, former friendships, what I find important; then, all these things change. It's like a chocolate cake in the fridge, I think it will always be there but then people eat away at it. Each time I think I believe something I find exceptions, contradictions, a huge bite out of my chocolate cake.

We all remember the cootie stage. A long time ago when girls were convinced guys were gross, and guys returned the thought; I was sure I would believe that forever. I would be purely disgusted at the thought of getting married to a man forever, and if I ever kissed a man other than my dad, I would get a terrible disease.

That belief, of course like most, disappeared. Starting with Nate, then Chris, then Adam, then Dom, then Cori, and many more. Let's just say I haven't believed that for a while.

I also used to believe there was a monster in my room that only appeared at night. He always stayed on the same wall and was the same menacing gray, until I decided that if he was gonna eat me he needed some encouragement. I got out of bed, and stood in front of him, daring him to take a bite, but he didn't move. I decided I would put my hand in his mouth; then my hand just hit the wall. That night I named my monster Shadow.

A lot of my perspectives changed in 8th grade. Before middle school, I was told the hardest part would be finding my crowd, but the true challenge of middle school is not getting drowned in the wave of drama.

That year, or at least at the beginning of that year, I believed that people could change if they wanted to. I learned that wasn't true from one of my best friends. He was sweet, funny, and understanding. He never told me that he was also a closet druggie, drinker, and an emotionally unstable jerk. That's when I started to believe that people's habits are the only things that ever change.

I also stopped believing that I could trust every guy my age that I met that year. That mindset changed after I met Nick. He was the first to compromise my trust when he asked, "How much do you cost?" and pulled a condom out of his pocket. I'm still afraid of him after 2 years and I'm now more careful about who I trust.

I didn't hold on to a lot of my beliefs until the end of 8th grade, and I doubt I'll hold on to many of my beliefs until the end of high school. That is why I believe that over the course of my life, my beliefs will change almost or even more often than my pant size, based on my experiences. But, life's a ride and I went into it knowing I would be roughed up a bit.

The Difference between Being Alive and Living

by Kristian

I believe the reason to live is to have fun. I believe in hanging out with friends, playing a pick up game of Frisbee, and spending a day snowboarding. I approach every day looking for chances to make friends and have fun. This has made my life very enjoyable, but I didn't always live like this; it took me a while to figure out what was important to me.

During the past few years I have been reflecting on life and on myself. It started in 8th grade when I came to Four Rivers Charter Public School. As I changed schools I was shocked at how different the social culture was. In Frontier Regional School there was a very clear set of groups. I knew the people I belonged with

and I stuck with them. I did have a lot of friends, but it was a small amount compared to the 250 kids in my class.

When I came to Four Rivers it was a complete change. Instead of having a ton of small groups it was like having a big family. Everybody knew each other and we were all friends to some degree. Kids in Four Rivers were more loving than kids in Frontier. For example if I gave everybody I knew in Frontier a hug everyday they would think I was weird, but this was normal at Four Rivers. This change was a bit of a shock at first, but I grew to love it.

The change in the community made me think of things in a new way. I began to look at how community affected me. As time went on my thoughts evolved from to how community can form someone to how society and culture can influence the way you think. Whenever I found time through the year I would let my mind wander. At the end of 8th grade I began to look into how I was being affected. I had to question if I wanted to conform to culture's expectations or find who I wanted to be.

When I went into 9th grade I was sure that I would be happier being myself. First I had to find who I was, and to do this I had to see how deeply society affected me. The more I examined how I lived the more my thoughts became pessimistic. I kept reaching the realization that human achievements mean nothing. In the long run and all we are doing is surviving for as long as we can. I also realized that society has us wasting our lives by forcing goals that are not are own, on us. When I reflected on what I viewed as important, I noticed I used to be obsessed with obtaining good grades so I could go to a good college. This is simply what society wants me to do it's not what I wanted.

For a while it seemed that life was pointless because I would ultimately do nothing of any true importance. But one day I noticed that if I thought this way I would be no better than the other people that waste their lives. In my time thinking I lost sight of my goal of finding myself. I had to look at what mattered to me and what I wanted to achieve. When it came down to it I noticed that all I want in life is to have fun, make friends and be a good person. Everyday after that I have tried to live by this ideal and I think I have done this to the best of my ability.

I believe in having a theme song.

I believe that art is a form of salvation.

I believe in being outrageous.

I believe that the way you treat your friends shows who you really are.

I believe in repetition.

I believe in repetition.

I believe in improvement for the sake of improvement.

I believe in awkward elbows.

I believe nature can equalize society.

I believe in relaxation.

I believe in Metal.

I believe that real love does not promise complete happiness.

I believe in ghosts.

I believe in Shakespeare!

I believe in nonconformity.

I believe I am part of something bigger than myself.

An Honest Perception

by Evan

Life is a long and encumbering experience and through life, a person's mind and perception are molded. Through life, people should live with the most open minded and honest perception possible. I believe in open-minded exploration. What this concept means to me is that I can think about all the elements that make up my life, and have an honest and sincere understanding of what that is to me. Life is such a long, busy experience in this world that it has become almost impossible for people to take the time to understand the role of everything that is involved in their lives.

The reason why I am so interested in this is because I have found that my own life became so much simpler and easygoing by

thinking of who I am now and what I expect myself to be. It taught me how my conscious was sometimes a place to think about problems. I found that I could easily assess a problem and solve it without having it become too over-encumbering. A lot of my spare time now is spent just thinking along with music and letting my mind wander where it pleases.

Some people, however, think that what I am talking about means nothing and all of it may be a random thought. I would have to disagree. Just because they have not found their lives to be so cluttered, doesn't mean they shouldn't at least think more in depth and have an honest explanation for everything they think of or see. People underestimate how comforting an unbroken thought train can be. Those random and in-depth thoughts that occur when unfocused, those are the ones that define yourself. I would encourage anyone to find out what expansive thoughts linger among their everyday mindset.

With each long and enduring thought, people can find out their true nature and intentions. It's about defining how you really feel about the small things and learning your own level of interest. Sometimes having these thoughts will calm your mind and ease your worry. It's giving more attention to your inner conscious and exercising your gift of thought while exploring the inner working of your mind.

Memories

by Gabby

Everything I've been through makes me who I am. All my memories, good or bad, have changed me in different ways. Embarrassing moments, laughs with my friends and mistakes I've made all contribute equally to my past, and influence how I act, which is why I strongly believe in memories. Nothing is more personal or important to me than the memories I have, because really they are who I am. Those moments that stand out in my mind, like a picture or comment someone makes, are so significant to me I wouldn't trade them for the world.

The fondest childhood memories I can recall are those spent with Danielle. We did the stupidest, funnest, weirdest stuff and they're

some of the best times I've had. One time in first grade we decided to make an entire city out of paper on the tables in class, including a rocket ship. Strangely this led us to make a fishing pole out of paper and we pretended to go fishing in the trash using chewed gum as the hook/lure; remembering this never fails to make me laugh. These moments that happened long ago, while they seem insignificant to others, are really special to me particularly because I've stayed close friends with Danielle all this time. Eating leaves we found in the woods next to the playground, burying a demonic Spongebob so it wouldn't kill us in our sleep, or catching bees in plastic containers and shaking them up to make them mad and running like crazy.

Some of my more recent memories influence me more directly. Becoming friends with Carin and Sierra has definitely changed me, and I've only known them for a few years. Carin's loud personality has rubbed off on me, and our time spent together has challenged me to become a more confident and outspoken individual. I can fondly look back on our days loitering in Bart's for hours, eating French fries while talking about our lives, and sitting through lectures about sex and drugs from Sierra's mom, laughing all the while.

Lessons I've learned in school and in life that will stay with me, people I've known places I've been and things I've done are the memories that make up my life and my personality. I wouldn't be the person I am today without my past experiences.

Up We Go

by Emily B

Breathe. One more step. Up. Almost there. A little further.

I take one more step, and put one foot in front of the other. I balance, and hold the rocks, looking up to the next ridge. I left about two hours ago, just to get out of the city. To forget everything. At first my thoughts were everywhere, now I'm just inebriated with the art of climbing. I ran the trail to this point, and now I have to climb. All of my attention goes into not falling, because nothing else really matters right now, I just can't fall.

And there is the top. Just over the next set, a little out of reach. I find the footholds, and push myself up a little higher 'til I can grab the base of the next ridge.

I finally reach the top and look out over the ledge. It's amazing that I made it this far, but I'm away from the chaos, and that's all that matters.

I believe in climbing. Climbing until I can't breathe. Until I think I heart might burst. Going until the only thing I have to think about is how to get up the next ridge. When the world becomes too much, find a mountain, go in the woods. Walk, hike, run, climb, until you can't remember what made you leave the city, until all you can think of is being you and getting up the cliffs, or over the hills. I do anything to get away from the ground. When I reach the top and look out over everything I've left behind, the world starts to make sense. When I realize I can hide in the woods, and no one can find me, I relax. In the woods, feelings of abandonment and regret fade. All heated words start to cool, and the built up anxiety I manage to keep under control on the ground breaks and melts into nothing.

From the top of a mountain, I can't hear the city. The traffic, the people, all the chaos. All I hear is my own labored breathing, still shaking from the climb, and my heart beating in my ears. When I find my breath, I can hear the birds singing, telling me exactly what I need to hear.

I believe that climbing can make everything go away. It can make you forget about being civil, and putting on a smile for show, and

just make you human. It can make you be exactly what you are,
and show you what you're trying to be.

I climb until I can't go anymore, until I have nowhere else to
explore, until my hands are numb from holding the rock, and the
scrapes and bruises have faded, waiting to come back with the next
cliff. I believe in climbing to forget, climbing to hide, and run
away. Going to think, to change. To manage the world. No matter
what happens, no matter where I am, I'll climb, and hike to leave
everyone behind, if only for so long. It fixes all the things that I
can't fix, it's my healing, and it's my quiet. And for all of this, I
believe in climbing.

My Addiction

by Calvin

I believe attention is a damaging addiction. Like drugs, alcohol, sex, food, and media one thirsts for attention, and although its effects are different the consequences can be equally destructive. I crave it, more than any other pleasure ever presented to me in my short life. For some unknown reason I feel the need to express myself in a way that alerts others of my existence, to get them to recognize me as a point of interest. The difference between me and many other people though, is that I recognize and don't act upon it.

I think the reasoning for attention's disastrous effects is pretty straight forward. The way I see it is no one can know for sure if their true personality will get them any social attention. So in order

to obtain what they want they throw away their individuality and put on a play each day where no one ever gets to meet the writer behind it. As long as they have this stubborn desire others will never discover who they really are.

I see it all around me in my peers. It can be as basic and harmless as wearing a funny hat to get laughs or as blatant as screaming while leaping down the hallway. I have even seen it get to the point where people don't even care if it is positive attention anymore, they just do what they have to in order to get it. I've seen them just straight up insult people or annoy them until that person finally decides it would be beneficial to take the time to shut them up. How this lust is most commonly seen is just in everyday conversation. A person especially addicted to attention will at some point realize that the interaction between two or more people is in no way relative to them. With some sort of spontaneous action they either aggressively insert themselves verbally or show off some sort of physical display to distract the crowd from their previous engagements.

I find that realization of this addiction in myself and others really shapes my way of socially thinking and interacting. I feel that my exchange with classmates is more meaningful when I am not trying to make them think I am some sort of exotic person by making up a ridiculous weekend story. I listen to others more; I accept that I don't deserve any more attention than them. Sometimes I can even break through and experience who they truly are and bask in what they have to offer to the world as an individual.

I know no matter how I try I will never escape my addiction. Today's social environment is too largely based on this idea that it would be suicide to attempt a boycott. Even as I write this paper

somewhere in the back of my mind is a selfish thought that I'm going to get attention from peers or teachers when it is read. This thought tortures me because I can't take my work seriously when all I really want out of it is acknowledgment. Thankfully this is a real belief of mine, and not some attempt to satisfy my unyielding desire, but still I hope to someday get past my cravings and be able to express myself completely to others without any fear of what I might become.

I believe in introspection.

I believe in the power of words.

I believe in spreading optimistic vibes.

I believe in team love.

I believe success is defined by contentedness.

I believe that meat should be hunted, not processed.

I believe that everything we consider to be fantasy is real.

I believe in the paranormal.

I believe in using herbs to heal.

I believe everyone is entitled to one dorky sweater.

I believe in those who never stop believing.

I believe in English accents.

I believe in staying up late on a school night to watch and sing along to Repo!

I believe in fate.

I believe in dialogue between both soulmates and enemies.

I believe that happiness is a choice.

Before We're Rotting Corpses

by Izzy

I suppose there's a tragic incident in my childhood that contributed to my enjoyment of the brutal, life-mauling statements of which I am so fond. Yet, at this point in my existence, its relevance is next to none. All I can honestly say is that I believe in being bitter and cynical. I believe in looking at the glass and seeing it half empty, not half full, in being flat out honest that no, I'm sorry but Santa really doesn't exist, and yes, the cookie does still count even though you ate it standing. Brutal honesty mixes with a desire to say something most won't. I believe in congratulating that lady on her pregnancy, when really, I'm perfectly aware she isn't. I don't listen when people tell me true love exists, and I giggle a little when they say life is worth it. They try and tell me what we do

now, before we're rotting corpses in the ground, actually might mean something, and although the concept is laughable, I smile and nod.

It isn't relevant to their lives that I take the pamphlet they handed me, quote it to whoever happens to be near, and then trash it when it ceases to be funny. I don't have to take the packet, but I do, if only to see their reactions. Religious pamphlets are the worst. Or, I should say the best. Any and all guilt I hold for laughing is reimbursed by the look on their face; by their incoherent screeching about me burning in Hell. Which, might I add, probably doesn't exist.

So, if Hell probably doesn't exist, Heaven probably doesn't either. I think that the fish our crew attempts to save should be allowed to die, be eaten, squished, flushed, or otherwise put out of its misery. Stating thus doesn't get me much. All I gain for my efforts are horrified looks and gasps; fervent arguments against allowing the poor thing salvation from its small enclosed prison, and the turtles that munch away on it. If they really loved the critter, they'd let it go.

Another pastime of mine—one that I love—is telling that couple they don't really love each other. Their relationship is bound to burn in the end anyway, and mentioning that society has no way to save us and we're all doomed regardless is just a bonus. The doom and gloom is one of my favorites. Call it rude, a lack of manners, or a sick obsession with hurting others, but whatever you call it won't change that I, without any shame or remorse, believe in being bitter and cynical.

Dinosaur Skin

by Emily T

In all “realistic” depictions of dinosaurs, they have a thick, rough, and dull colored layer of skin; but have people ever actually seen this skin? If all we ever find of these massive beasts are the bones – then how can the paleontologists, scientists, and fact driven smart-people possibly know what their skin looks like? Here the human race realizes, but largely refuses to accept, the limits of our knowledge and understanding. How can we be so certain that dinosaurs even have skin? They could have been loosely connected skeletons with tiny organs on the inside (however unlikely). They could have easily had feathers, or fur, or those spiky things that cover sea urchins. Why not a furry dinosaur? A long haired brontosaurus like an overgrown, stretched out golden retriever.

Assuming that dinosaurs have skin like humans have thus far imagined, why do we always depict them as drab, gray, black, beige, brown and maybe (if they're super lucky!) a bland olive green. My dinosaurs are furry all over with teal and orange stripes. Occasionally along comes a yellow one, and even less frequently they are that really deep blue you can only find on fish and in L.L. Bean catalogs.

To be honest, there may be very little worth in asking about the color of dinosaur skin. People will never know and that specific knowledge doesn't have a large affect, or any affect, on our everyday lives. The importance, the significance in asking these questions is that they dangle the limits of human information and technology in front of us like a nice carrot on a string. These vague, basic questions, the ones with no answers, are the most important ones to ask. They help us to define our existence and purpose by forcing us to decide what we trust, what we don't need to trust because it doesn't matter, and what we can never know.

What happens to us when we die? What is life? Are our souls a part of our bodies or are our bodies merely the machine for the soul? Does our life have a purpose? What is good and bad? Is anyone capable of being a complete individual? Are humans animals? Is reality real? Can people ever exist outside of the body? What is in a hot dog? Are we controlled by a supreme being, or are we each the only living thing in the world? Who are we while we are alive, does it change in death? And why does it matter?

I'm fairly certain that I personally, will never be able to answer any of these questions, but that won't make me abandon them. One of the only things I have realized in my 15 years so far, is that I truly don't need to know; I am completely satisfied with striped dinosaur skin. Most people try to forget these questions because humans seem to have a never

ending love of explaining everything in terms of digits, percentages and molecules, but the world is more beautiful and much less understood than what people can find in a textbook.

We all know so little, but most people struggle to accept their own lack of understanding; they smother it with “factual realities” and cultural norms. I believe that the world is overbearingly complicated and uncertain, and if I were to ignore this uncertainty I would be forced into a completely false life. I don’t know what is good or bad, if I am well meaning or selfish, if things are beautiful or horrendous. But I do know that this uncertainty will shape and affect me, it will trouble and aggravate me, it will inspire and comfort me, but I will never be able to overpower it. I will be left asking: what color is dinosaur skin?

Homeopathic Therapy

by Kevin

I believe in breaking things to release anger. There are few things better, to me, than taking a crowbar to anything and messing it up royally. Oh no, I forgot my paper at school! Go grab a box of apples and pummel the living hell out of a picnic table until the applesauce resulting from the beating could feed a family. It takes everything that I'm furious at into one thing I am bashing the life out of. It's like I'm hurting the idea I'm so worked up over even though I'm just breaking the most useless and cheap piece of crap I can get my hands onto.

Breaking things when you're angry is an amazingly therapeutic process as you can remove excess stress from annoying or

pressuring elements. Now I'm throwing out all of those papers I had to finish over the weekend but were "just practice" violently against the wall. I'll just take that tiny gourd I have on a shelf at home and pretend that it is the angering element antagonizing me so. The intensity just gets the adrenaline pumping through my veins every time. It slows the swing of my crowbar as it makes contact with the decaying wood, spraying disgusting rot all over the room splattering on my skin. Shouting and screaming with Static-X blaring in the background; this is my therapy. After a quick breather for a drink of water, I proceed to mutilate the decrepit workbench.

Better break a bench and be scolded than to kill someone violently and go to jail for life. There are so many possibilities for things to break as long as I own them and I don't value them at more than 5 dollars. To break is to release tension. To expel the rage that threatens to consume me. After diverting my wrath I can go on living normally until the next time I go to a self-mandated therapy.

This became me because if I allow my anger to fester and grow I find the quality of my life rapidly declines. It ruins me and my normal demeanor. Friendliness becomes alien and strange to me as I focus on only one thing: my rage. The cold, hard intensity of destruction brings me back to reality and my true self. After the beatings cease and the fallout settles the smoldering anger and rage have left me.

The Masquerade Craze

by Henri

I was innocently playing ultimate Frisbee with my friends when a car pulled up parallel with the field, where we were playing. There were people in the car, and they asked us if a boy named Henri was there. Everyone looked at me but I told the people in the car “No”, but they still persisted. They asked me my name, but I replied “I am Ozrik Xavier!” in a Slovak accent. They gave up and drove away. My friends laughed and congratulated me on my impromptu alias. Later, near dark, one of my friends asked me if there was a real Ozrik Xavier. I told them that he was the second cousin of Harvey the rabbit. I had conjured him out of thin air. Jokingly, they asked me who I was now. I said I had no clue because in truth I didn't.

Successful disguises give me this adrenaline rush that we phantoms crave. To know that without my disguise people would have known who I was and made assumptions with that information alone. But to fool the system, that feels terrific. There are many other people like me who could live with a disguise all their life we are the phantoms of our era.

I believe in disguises, not the kind that I would wear during Halloween but masks that protect me. These false identities are more than what you look like. They are who you are pretending to be. To feel free of all ties, nobody knows you but most importantly nobody judges you. That is what makes me believe in masquerades more and more. I absolutely despise being judged. I hate the look in people's eyes when they meet someone they disagree with. The look it self gives it away, saying "Who are you to disagree with me". Don't get me wrong some people are amazing at masking this look but in today's world the look always is there. So people create facades for themselves to dissuade other people of judging them and to hopefully persuade the other person's mind that they actually agree with them when in reality they are just as loathing or jealous.

Everybody has done this at least once in his or her lifetime. They have created an alias that suits them for the time being. This can range from typing a random email address to making a fake name in order to sign up for something on the internet. I improvise constantly so making disguises is extremely easy for me. I can always seem to think up a new and exciting name for myself whenever the need arises. I love disguises. They complete me.

Without them, I would be a lifeless identity stuck with 7 billion other people.

I am currently living out my life as a Henri Hardina-Blanchette, a confused person who has trouble blending in. My other identities include, Charlie, Twitch, and my most recent achievement, Samuel, but I am still thinking of who I am going to be next.

I believe in Greek Mythology.

I believe that wisdom is more important than knowledge.

I believe in music and creativity (and Jimmy Page).

I believe in the colors orange, blue, and yellow.

I believe in miracles.

I believe in the right to choose.

I believe in daydreaming.

I believe in never looking back.

I believe in manual labor

I believe in solitude

I believe that clocks are fascinating

I believe that war is good

I believe racism will not last

I believe in sitting on kitchen floors

I believe in aliens

I believe parents are actually trying to help

I believe the senses are fascinating

You're Doing it Wrong

by Jeremy

I've failed over and over and over again in my life and that is why I succeed. – Michael Jordan

Personal talents are the things that you're good at without much practice, or sometimes no practice at all, the things that you're naturally good at. If it takes you a ridiculous amount of time to master something, then you're probably not built to do it in the first place. You can dedicate a few hours into figuring something out but if you find yourself not getting any better at it after a few weeks, then you probably need something else to do. There's no reason to go out of your way to try to be awesome at everything if all those things don't come to you naturally.

People seem to be fixated on the idea that if they just put hours of time into something, “just like the pros do,” that they’ll magically become good at that thing. These kind of people need to have a poster on the nearest wall to their bed, so every morning they can wake up to see the big bold letters that say “YOU’RE DOING IT WRONG..” People are born to do what they do best. When you find out what you’re best at, all you need to do is stick with it. Some people don’t want to settle with just being “good” at something, they want to be GOD-LIKE at it, which is an unreasonable goal. As long as you can realize what you can and cannot do, and you can dedicate yourself to your personal talents, you’ll be fine. If you stay with one thing for a long time, and learn from your mistakes, you should be pretty good at it.

The best way to find out what your best talents are is to try everything. I’ve tried drawing, playing music, making comics, and all sorts of other things, and the one thing that I realized I was good at was playing sports. It’s not the only thing I can do but I’m better at it than most other things. I found this out because I didn’t have to think when I played a game, I could just react. The other things I tried to do took a lot of thought and extra effort, but I could play games in gym class without having to think of ideas on what to do next.

People try to act like they’re amazing at something when they’re actually completely lost. You’re not letting anybody down if you’re not amazing at it, so it’s nothing to worry about. Just be happy with what talents you’re given because you’re going to be stuck with them for a long time.

A Place For Me

by Kaethe

The Chicken Coop is a one room school house on a beautiful working farm. That little school fills me with a warm contented feeling of love. My life started in that place and every inch of soil and weathered wood is soaked with memories. The drive from my house every morning built me up with expectation and the school days flooded me with joy and wonder and finally the concept that education is more than tests and grades; it's a love of understanding and working until you collapse laughing.

The community at Maggie's farm was caring and supportive. When I needed someone they were always there for me . My thirteen classmates were my family and our teacher Theresa was

our inspiration. We had long debates about politics, religion and what to cook for lunch. The student farmers who lived in the house where my role models. I would spend an afternoon with Anna and Grace the seventeen year old twins talking about alternative schooling and farming, and where they were going to collage next year. I found that I could get along with anyone on the farm. I could chase Maya, one of our teacher's daughters, around a field, or sit in a tree and talk with Annie, Fiona and Jacob, or play Football with Mike, Lily and Tom, or help the farmer Patch move the sheep, or sit alone and read a book by the woodstove. To feel free to do what I want and be who I want to be is the greatest gift anyone has ever given me.

I believe my love of learning blossomed on Maggie's farm. We were given the freedom to explore and we took it. Me and three others from my graduating class were set loose with math books and the general instruction to "find me if you can't figure it out" We worked our way through. Every new concept was something to poked and prodded until it made sense. Than the feeling of accomplishment and pride would push us even harder. Everything we did was charged with this energy. We found a sheep skeleton, cleaned it and put it together during lunch to show our science teacher the next day. We wrote papers on what we were passionate about and created utopias with constitutions, cultures and economies. I became very self motivated, hard working and confident. All of this I did with such excitement, never once stopping to think, "This is just school; it's not my whole world."

During my time at the Chicken Coop I was given the freedom to find and explore what I felt was important or interesting. I come across some of the things that to this day resonate with me. I was

given something close to free reign over my education but there were always people ready to help or encourage. My excitement was mirrored all around me on my classmates and teachers and friends faces. When I dove into ideas they would be there holding out their hands so I could pull them in after me. We celebrated each other and learned from one another. The ability to share your love and passion for something makes it all the more worth while to pursue. On that farm I felt completely at home with myself. Everyone needs a place like that. I believe these memories and feelings will stay with me forever and give me the strength I need to be who I am.

Curiosity

by Jess

I believe in

Curiosity.

I need to know,

With this monstrous yearning

How does this world work?

And what will I learn?

Will I, myself, with nothing to loose,

See all that I can and all that I choose
(Without missing out on other things too)
From up into Russia
And down to Peru,
What life is about, and is it all true?
I am curious
And I'll tell you why
I just like to try things, that I've never tried.
When it comes to experience, I'm not very shy.
I know life is boring... When innocence dies.
People are interesting
Very much so.
People like Joe or Moe or Henry David Thoreau.
I like to see what they do,
how they act, what they eat, or how they shampoo.
All people are different and I love that the most,
To be a doctor, or a fireman, or just a good host

To have a character that is uniquely you
Is something so special and important to pursue.
And I'm curious to see what people are about,
Because I'd like to befriend them without any doubt.
If I were lost in a desert
Staring death in the eye,
And happened to notice,
A full grown cactus
To understand my water supply,
With my bare naked tongue
Scale the barbed crackled skin
Find out what it feels like,
and then do it again?
Maybe, in my eyes, one never does know,
Unless one does try.
To be curious is to be smart,
Because asking and trying

Is where one must start.
If I always ask questions and try brand new things,
I can rejoice in the simple joy that life brings
I can't learn much, without wanting more
Wanting to know how, to explain and to explore
So I live as a curious, small, little kid
Knowing people won't know as much as I did.
It sometimes is bad if gone too far,
Because words that aren't said
Are words to leave scars?
You might want to know
About your friend's infected big toe.
Why does it swell, and puss? And leave a smell that's quite robust
If it is poked?
Will the goo from inside get my carpet all soaked?
One must do so, to figure it out
And deal with the consequences that come about.

Strangers don't like us curious brats

They don't like that we question; and they lay it down flat

Something's are meant to be unknown; and I understand that.

So here on this chair thinking, I sat.

Sometimes curiosity

Might kill the cat.

On the Road

by Bryan

As I cruise down the hill with the trees and wildlife behind me, I feel the breeze upon my face. Cycling is an easy way for me to lose myself, because I am with no one but myself. I wake up early, put on my gear and I'm off and on the road. When I am on the road, I don't really think of where I am because that would kill the thrill and the wonder of where I am. I believe in cycling.

I enjoy biking. I catch "slip-streams," flying in the pressure released from the vehicle in front of me. I use less energy to keep myself moving because I am following in the stream's path. For me cycling can be relaxing but also somewhat stressful. It can be relaxing because it takes a while to get to the speed that feels

comfortable. At that speed, I can watch things pass by. It can be stressful because I have to be careful that I don't get hit by a car that doesn't see me and because it takes a lot of effort to remain in the slip stream.

Sometimes I ask myself whether it's really worth the trouble of worrying if I have enough pressure in my tires, or if my bike is correctly aligned, or if I have a route to follow. Finally I come to the conclusion that it is. I check the alignment of my bike before I climb on and think about all the different trails in Ashfield that I can take. There is the trail to the D.A.R in Goshen, and then there are the trails that lead into downtown Ashfield.

My interest struck after the 2009 Tour de France, and I watched how hard the competitors struggled to climb the hardest and, by far, the steepest mountain in all of France called Mount Von Tux. Someday I hope that my passion for cycling will lead me to the Tour de France. For me, this would not only be a major feat but also an honor to be representing Ashfield in one of the most watched events on the television. Racing can be a way for me to truly show that I am capable of going all the way to the Tour de France or even the Tour de Gala. To me these events are a huge motivator; seeing races unfold in my mind enables me to be even more competitive.

When I am in a bad mood, I just let the wind take the pressure off my shoulders; when I return home, I feel a whole lot better. When I am in a horrendous mood, I will ride a few miles, but when I am in a good mood, then I travel all over the place, and explore new trails that I haven't noticed before. Sometimes my bad mood turns into a good mood and I travel very far.

I have a friend named Russ who sometimes joins on my rides. We go to the D.A.R for a while and then race back home. I enjoy racing him back home because he and I are members of the same club called the Northampton Cycling Club. Sometimes we have club races, so we train for races while just having fun.

I believe in cycling. It allows me to enjoy the fresh mountainous air, the wind blowing in my face, the smell of the wildlife, and it allows me to be alone with my thoughts as I ride along the road. Cycling keeps me fit and lean, it puts me at ease and, even though I get tired, it's worth the effort.

I believe in memories

I believe computers help a lot

I believe that the future is bright

I believe in love at first sight

I believe in gum

I believe in mix-matched socks

I believe that there will always be one person who will mean more to you than anyone else.

I believe in really big sweatshirts

I believe in confiding in people

I believe that there is someone who knows you better than you know yourself

I believe in hole punching things

I believe the fault finder will find faults

I believe in optimism

I believe in laughter

I believe in slippers, PJs and hot chocolate

I believe in used book stores

Laughter is No Funny Business

by Zach

I believe in laughter. To me this little action that is so common in most days of our lives is much more important than it appears. It jumps forth in the face of something “funny.” But for everyone this humorous something is different. Some jokes just aren’t worth laughing at, but others have you completely under their control, as you freak out in front of your confused friend.

One of these things that causes my personal sense of humor to react is death. It isn’t like I’m making fun of the dead person; but instead, accepting that the victim passed on to wherever dead people go. I really don’t care if this action happens to be offensive.

Usually, who ever I laughed in front of happens to join me with a few chuckles anyways. It's like this action is contagious.

Sometimes we even concentrate into little clusters with the main goal of spreading this hilarious epidemic. This puts everybody included in a completely natural state. In such a place, they are spewing forth words of merriment, not worrying about anything. There lacks those opinions and ideals of others that are typically feared. And everyone's natural self over throws their opinion-conscious imposter, only to leave a joyous soul. Sadly, this event only takes place once or twice per day. Everybody laughs and jokes for a few minutes, something threatens the chance for it to continue and everyone stops abruptly, overcome with awkward feelings. I like to think of these feelings as one's donning of the costume by which everybody knows them just before they reenter the social environment.

But what if this state laughter puts us all in was the socially accepted mentality? Well, I think that everything would go just swimmingly. For, in that state no one is truly offended by anything, because they can just laugh at all of it. I'm not saying that nothing would be taken seriously though. In fact, if one can think about something serious in such a way that it causes laughter, I believe they are looking beyond the intended meaning of such a statement. Whatever the other was trying to convey was too easily understood, that in an act of having already comprehended what was said, one looks beyond it to discover an alternative meaning which happens to carry humor.

Once I further understood laughter, and its many abilities I started to use it to bring out the giggles of others. There is no greater experience than laughing with your peers. You are all on the same

page in such a state and act as you truly want to. But to do such things, you have to be willing to cast aside your costume.

FriENDship

by Meredith

The first day of playgroup you usually meet someone about your size playing in the sandbox with you. Then before you know it you both are having birthday parties, long phone conversations and sleepovers. But eventually the movie has to end because not all friendships last forever.

By age three I thought I had met my best friend Taylor, We immediately became inseparable. We would always spend our time telling people that we were sisters, just so we could seem that close. We would steal our parents video cameras to make silly movies. Then there were times where we would chat on the phone for so long we would never get our homework done. And then there

were times where we fought, sometimes I didn't even know if we were going to be friends again, but we always ended up getting back to the way things were.

When sixth grade rolled around I began to think of how it was going to be a year from then. I wondered if we were going to still be friends, but Taylor promised we always would be. We became even closer than we had been in the whole 10 years we had known each other that year. But the last day of sixth grade happened so fast. For I knew it was the last time we would ever run through the hallways of the library. Snatching the teacher's candy when she wasn't looking, I knew this was the last time we would get locked in the milk freezer in the cafeteria, or pass notes to each other that said swears just so we could seem at least a little cool. This was it.

Summer we spent every day together, but that quickly ended. The first day of 7th grade came, and it had felt like someone was taking my inside organs out and tossing them out on the ground. I felt so empty, I had no one and things only got worse from there. Taylor had met friends right away and so did I, but it was different. She didn't call as much and we rarely had sleepovers. After a while I guess she just forgot, and as did I. But it was upsetting to look at such a great friendship and then had to watch it disintegrate. It's like watching a painting that someone worked so long on get ripped to pieces. And then without anyone to take the time to glue it back together. I believe that it's rare that friendships stay forever. People do move on, and I guess it doesn't really matter how long you know someone, they still can decide to leave and forget you even ever existed.

So the painting was never repaired, and it probably never will be. From time to time I think about Taylor, and what she's like right

now. I wonder if she would steal her parent's video camera, or pass notes to me, or maybe even just sit in a milk freezer with me. That would be okay.

A Warm Voice in the Darkness

by Troy

Hugs are the voice in my darkness that tells me it's all going to be fine. They beam at me in my darkest hours, but they also make the good times even better. They can comfort me in one powerful way and they can also wrap me up in layers of love and affection. A condolence as a friend. A greeting overflowing with emotion. The expression is such a simple physical bond between people.

When I'm at a loss for words I can announce my feelings much better by clutching someone. Instead of awkward words I find that my emotions simply bubble up and overflow into the next warm heart beside me if I hug them. Good hugs are always worth giving and receiving. They're able to show the true blue of my ocean

rather than the oily glop that washes up on beaches for the world to judge. They show the core and just as no two people are the same, no two hugs are quite identical. There are urgent hugs full of need, warm hugs full of joy, and then there are those hugs that are just for the sake of having someone close to me.

My grandma always looked forward to my hugs. Every time I embraced her, she would say “Ooh, you give such good hugs!” It embarrassed me, just as it would if she pinched my cheek and told me I was, “so cute!” Even so, that never cooled the heat in my heart when I put my my arms around my grandma and gave her a great hug. Every Family Thanksgiving and Christmas, already filled with glowing hearts, was kindled and came to a close with a hug between me and my Grammy. It didn’t really become a tradition, less formal, but every time I hugged my grandmother she told me I gave the best hugs.

Only a few years ago did I realize this gift with more people than just my grandmother. I began to hug the people around me more and more and as I did, I got more and more comfortable with my friends and myself. I could see a part of myself shining through that I hadn’t ever seen before. It was something I never noticed, but now it sent blazing heat through me, and of course I had to share it. I share it with everyone I can. I want the love that’s in me to rejuvenate those around me so they shine. This epiphany showed me something wonderful, glorious, something that fit right into my heart.

Hugs make a bad day turn around to where a smile lights up my face. Hugs can reassure someone that it’ll okay without uttering a single breath. No awkward words, nothing shallow or common, just pure comfort. Holding someone in my arms can tell them I

love them without the clichés. A true hug never gets old or boring, but each is a gift to me. I'm utterly dependent. Each one I receive builds on the last; it fills me up, bringing the sunlight to the cold morning.

No matter what happens, I'll never stop hugging. I'll let my emotions be known, the wonderful and dreadful. I won't ever let a pinch on my cheek stop me from being so cute.

Resting a Head on another's Shoulder

by Will

As most of my life goes I always have people that I can rely on if I was ever in need of some help or comfort. There is always someone bringing me back up to where I originally was or a better place, always knowing what to say and at the right times, and they are always there whenever I need it, and still be there no matter what.

Usually, I'd gain new people I could rely on through long engaging trials of friendship, these people were the new people that I could talk to when I needed to. People that would help me, shelter me, and well, generally act like another parent or guardian. A time when I was truly glad that I had a friend like that, was when there

was an argument about school going on in my house. I felt unhappy, and needed time to think about what I was going to say and get ready for when I was confronted with my mother because I was at my father's house the week the argument started. So I called a Kris up because originally I was just going to stay with him and his family for the weekend but I decided to see if I could stay longer, and they were nice enough to let me stay for a few more days.

Two of my friends talked to me during the time of when my parents split up over something that happened in my house. At that point everything was just zooming by me at an incredible rate. As time went on I kept getting more and more depressed. But luckily for me because of their amazingness, they were always there no matter the circumstance. Had it not been for them, I would have been way, way farther down in the ditches then I was. Without them to rely on, I can honestly say that I would be a totally different person then I am today.

So many times this has happened to me, and each time there was always someone there to help me get back up on my feet, and look into the light, and see that there is still tomorrow. I know that the days will get lighter as they go, that you will never be left alone. Whenever I would talk to those people about it, or anything in general, even light talk, like "How are you?" or "What are you doing?" Knowing they were curious, on how I was and what was going on with me, gave me an intense feeling of comfort and happiness that was indescribable, and so amazing that I was so lucky to feel that way, which kept through all the tough times they were there and even now when things are going smoothly. Thanks

to them I have that feeling of being comforted, and able to turn to someone when things go array.

I believe in self respect

I believe eating and drinking things out of the container is okay

I believe in mental health days

I believe in forgiveness

I believe that food can be therapeutic

I believe Britney Spears needs a friend

I believe in making a fool of yourself

I believe in smelly markers

I believe in magic

I believe tradition is important

I believe there is happiness everywhere, you just have to look

I believe that people don't need to be thanked for doing kind things

I believe that emotions make life worth living

I believe in stripes and polka dots

I believe that "broken families" aren't so broken

I believe that fads are overrated

I believe that some friends are addictive

My Definition of Success

by Colman

Do you really think that because you have wealth, it means that you are successful? You can have all the most expensive cars, a mansion, and be the king of the world but still feel like there's something missing. Because even if you're rich and powerful, the only real thing that defines your success is how content you are.

There are many people who spend their life working hard just so they can have money and be happy. They go to college and pull their hair out so they can get a good job, and a big house. Then once they have all that they want more. So they work even harder to get promotions and such, but still want more. Some people just can't seem to be satisfied with what they have. I believe that if

you're comfortable with what you have, than you don't really need anything else.

I think that in some cases, it's more appealing to be homeless and poor than to live a wealthy life. If I was homeless and poor but still happy and content with how things were going, it would without a doubt be a better life than if I had a wealthy and materialistic one that wasn't satisfying enough.

Pretty much my only life goal is to be content with where I am. I'm not saying that I wouldn't like being rich. I'm just saying that it is more important to me to be happy, and money doesn't really play a part in that. If I can be satisfied without working a lot, then I'm not going to work a lot, why should I? Some things are going to be essential to be comfortable, but once I'm happy, I'm pretty much set. This is why I'm going to live my life doing the things I want to, and in doing that I will succeed.

Under Water

by Zoe C-G

Just because I'm not a plant, doesn't mean I can't appreciate rain. And I do, I believe in it—mostly in big showers. I relish that any-time-of-day shadow it casts, and waking up to an almost silence (the deep drum roll). Pounding on pavement, tapping the trees, seeping into our roof and perishing. Every form knows how to caress my spirit. The sound, uneven and constantly fresh, navigates straight to my core. If I'm inside, I trace its path, gazing out the windowpanes into a marbled world: puddled streets, mudpie driveways, billowing neighbors. I could probably watch the quieted interactions all day. But if I resist staring from a distance and find myself standing vulnerably under the sky, my only obvious reply is to gasp for the scent of a swimming earth. I

slow down one sense at a time.

There is something pleasantly undemanding about “gloomy” weather—if you don’t mind the damp, or fret over attire. For me, it justifies repose and makes any trifle of action appear noble. This doesn’t mean that rain serves the lazy well, but rather that if allowed, it bestows a restful time upon everyone: be calm in knowing that the crops are quenched, that you don’t have to go to the carwash after all, that you are reminded to see a movie at last. Rain thrusts realizations upon us, but mostly good ones. It is a force that whispers and shouts simultaneously.

There are plenty of people who find wet weather a total inconvenience; after all, unlike sunshine, it does not allow for non-frizzy hair, super stylish shoes, and driving without paying much attention. But not all things involving such warmth are frivolous, and after a while, we all begin to miss the sun. Maybe I simply have continued an all too human pattern in my weathery pursuits: a desire for the rarer things. Even so, I do not believe that puts my enthusiasm into question.

I have spent many good days beneath bursting clouds. I have gardened leisurely—almost blindly, thrown Frisbees—or attempted to do so, and of course, danced. In any instance, I’m pleased brush away the delightful mist that accumulates on my cheeks. Rain makes me feel balanced—safe and daring at the same instant. It’s definitely better accompanied by weekends and soup, but in any circumstances, I prefer it.

Snap Shot

by Sierra

I've been sitting at this desk looking out my window for over an hour just trying to think of something to write this about. I'm thinking about big important beliefs, but nothing that I really want to write about, nothing that's really important to my life. Other people believe in world peace, or God, but none of those are things that I usually think about. I guess I just don't like to think about the big things much.

But every time I see a squirrel run past, or when I notice the leaves have a different tint to them, or when I finally figure out that my chair can spin, I smile and laugh. These are the kinds of things I

like to think about. The little things. I believe in loving the little things.

Laughing is a small thing that most people don't even think about. But laughing is something I do every day, because it's important to me. I don't keep tabs on every time I giggle; I don't need to because to me laughing shows happiness, and being happy is really the only way I want to live my life.

Watching a helpless lady bug crash into the light over and over again, I wonder if it's actually trying to accomplish something. Maybe some day that tiny ladybug is going to do big things in this world. And I'll be able to say that I saw that ladybug before it became a huge deal to anybody else. But for right now, this one bug is just going to keep ramming itself into a solid surface.

Just because this ladybug is 2 cm long doesn't mean it has no purpose in life. To me it's more interesting than the big complicated things other people think about. It's just simple and to the point.

We go through everyday doing a million and one things and by the end of the day, probably don't even remember half the things we did, because we feel they won't make a difference in the bigger picture. But the big picture isn't always the most important. Sometimes just a snap shot of a zebra in the middle of the road can make you see what you've been too blind to see in the first place. Anything that makes you smile is worth remembering.

It's Okay to Cry

by Carin

I am an emotional person. I love my emotions—the magic of happiness, the lull of depression—because it is all so real. I realize that it is not strange for a teenager to have emotions, but for me it's different: I show mine. Tears and smiles are as natural as hello and goodbye. Letting people know how I feel with light, exuberance, and passion, that is how I have chosen to live.

What is the use of emotions if they are not shown? We live once, and in order for me to be happy, I cannot let myself hide my thoughts and feelings, so I live believing in energetic expression of emotion. I know it sounds complicated, but really it's just being me. I don't know how to explain it, because I don't think about it; it's

just something I do. When I watch a movie and something shockingly sad happens, I pause the movie and run to my brothers room, trying to sob the story out so that he may share my pain. Sadly, it has come to the point where he no longer cares; he knows its a movie and he just continues with his work as I cry. But I don't let it phase me; I still run into his room with all the excitement of a child, and I sob like a grieving widow, every time.

Once my English teacher and a few of us were talking about learning to drive. I stated that I didn't want to learn and how pointless I thought it would be. Ms. Ambuter turned to me and playing on my weaknesses, asked, "What if there was a Shakespeare convention and no one would drive you?" I burst into tears. Hot, lumpy, tears. The scene played out in my head: looking for a someone to drive me, asking the parents and being denied, asking the brother and being denied, then sitting alone, while other, lucky people get to enjoy the labors of my most loved poet. Friends tried to calm me. Soothing tones of "Carin, its not real" sneaked into my head, but to no effect. The crying and sobbing hardly let me breathe.

The fact that a hypothetical question made me break down and cry tells me that my emotions are not what makes me, *me*, showing them does—being proud of my feelings. When I think about it I am proud of my life; I am proud of my feelings, and proud of the fact that I can share them. When I cry, every cell in my body cries, and that doesn't scare me. When I laugh, the hair on the back of my neck smiles, and that fills me with joy. I cannot imagine how I would be with all my feelings bottled up. Being neutral is a crime. Not caring is the worst thing you can do for yourself, so I avoid it. I remind myself that it's ok to be all of who you are, to show it. I

am not a partial person, I am not a partial anything, so I am not going to pretend that I am something that I'm not; I am going to let my whole self live.

Once Upon a Time...

by Ashley

I run through the forest, trying to get away from my killer. The trees grow thicker. I'm trapped, and there's no escape... What do I want to happen next? My daydream can go anywhere and it won't matter if it ever ends. My own stories trap me inside and they become my life. That is why I believe in daydreaming.

Good, bad, sad or happy, no matter what I choose I still wish it were real. My dreams are a million times more entertaining than my real life. They have action, adventure, romance, and everything in between. I want to disappear into them so I can live an adventure and endure things no one has ever endured. I don't want

to live like any normal person. I want to live like a heroine in a fantasy.

My dreams influence how I think, what I write, and what I tell my friends. They made me want to be a writer so I could share my stories with everyone in the world. I never want my imagination to change. It makes me who I am and it crafts my life. Even when I'm acting out my dreams, without ever meaning to, I'm living in them. Some may say I'm still playing make believe. I won't deny it. I believe I am, but only because I so desperately want to live in my daydreams.

In some dreams I am an elf hidden with a human face. My race was banned from the world millions of years ago. If humans ever knew I exist, I would be executed and my race would die out. I don't truly live here. My parents are not who they seem and I am nothing to you. My best friend is a cat who only takes that shape to live. Humans are barbaric to us. We used to live peacefully but that was before it all happened...

In others I am a wizard living in England during the medieval period. I was born into a normal family there, but for some reason I was different. I could do things no else could. I didn't know how I did them, it just sort of happened. No one knew I could do magic but there were times when I used my powers without meaning to. My anger would stack up inside of me. I couldn't control it. The townsfolk were getting suspicious and I was becoming more and more afraid of myself. I didn't know what to do, so I fled...

I could continue my stories, and I will some day, but for now I'll keep them to myself. People don't have to understand me. I'm fine

with that. I believe in daydreaming and I think all of my dreams should come true.

I believe in trust

I believe you can't be friends with someone unless you respect them

I believe in redemption

I believe saving yourself

I believe in God

I believe in staying up late talking to the one you love

I believe in imaginary friends

I believe in taking pictures

I believe in the healing power of love

I believe it is good to get out of your comfort zone—even if it's scary

I believe in addiction

I believe in hugs

I believe America still has integrity

I believe in hot chocolate on snow days

I believe every moment counts