The Pirates' Hook

THE SENIOR ISSUE





Until we meet again...

ART BY TULA WINTON

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Class of '26: Where it all began

Dear Class of 2026,

As your final year at Riverside High School ends, it's impossible not to look back at where it all began: Fall 2022.

Four years ago, you walked into high school carrying backpacks, AirPods, Stanley cups (or at least the beginnings of the obsession), and probably listening to Taylor Swift's Midnights on repeat. You entered high school during a world that was finally reopening, reconnecting, and redefining itself.

Movie theaters were packed for Top Gun: Maverick and Black Panther: Wakanda Forever. Social media was filled with dances, trends, and "core" aesthetics that seemed to change weekly. The world watched history unfold as technology, music, fashion, and culture transformed almost overnight. It was the beginning of your RHS era, and what an era it has been.

Since then, you've grown through every spirit week, football game, pep rally, late-night study session, homecoming, and unforgettable hallway moments. You turned ordinary days into memories that will last long after graduation caps hit the air. You learned resilience, adapted to change, supported one another, and created a class identity completely your own.

This senior class has truly lived through "the eras." From viral TikTok trends to unforgettable school moments, you balanced humor, heart, and determination every step of the way. Whether you were making playlists for every mood or capturing memories through Snapchat streaks, you built a high school experience future classes will look up to.

But what makes the Class of 2026 unforgettable is not simply the trends you followed or the moments you shared, it is the influence you leave behind.



Every generation leaves its mark on the world in different ways. Some are remembered for innovation. Others for resilience. Others for the way they changed how people think, lead, create, and care for one another.

Your class carries that kind of power.

Not power measured by popularity, followers, or attention, but the kind of power found in character, compassion, and courage. The power to lift others up. The power to bring energy into a room, kindness into difficult moments, and hope into uncertain times. The power to shape what comes next simply by the way you choose to live.

You are graduating in a time when the world needs thoughtful leaders, creative minds, and people willing to make a difference more than ever before. And if your years at RHS have proven anything, it is that this class is more than capable of rising to that challenge.

Now, as you prepare for graduation, remember this: trends fade, songs change, and apps come and go, but the friendships, lessons, and memories from RHS will stay with you forever. More importantly, the impact you have on others, the encouragement you gave, the laughter you shared, the example you set will continue long after these hallways are behind you.

Class of 2026, your story is just beginning.

Keep chasing dreams, taking chances, and creating moments worth remembering. Stay curious. Stay compassionate. Stay true to yourselves. And never underestimate the influence you carry into every room, every opportunity, and every future you step into.

No matter where life takes you next, you will always be part of the RHS family.

Here's to the class that made their high school years unforgettable, and to the generation that now has the power to shape the future.

With pride and best wishes,

Principal Dr. Woods-Weeks

Clase de '26: Donde todo empezó

Estimada Clase del 2026,

Al finalizar su último año en Riverside High School, es imposible no mirar atrás hacia dónde todo comenzó: En el otoño del 2022.

Hace cuatro años, entraron a la escuela secundaria cargando mochilas, AirPods, termos Stanley (o al menos comenzando esa obsesión), y probablemente escuchando "Midnights" de Taylor Swift en repetición. Ingresaron a la preparatoria en un mundo que finalmente se estaba reabriendo, reconectando y redefiniendo.

Los cines estaban llenos con Top Gun: Maverick y Black Panther: Wakanda Forever. Las redes sociales estaban repletas de bailes, tendencias y estéticas "core" que parecían cambiar cada semana. El mundo fue testigo de cómo la historia se desarrollaba mientras la tecnología, la música, la moda y la cultura se transforman casi de la noche a la mañana. Fue el comienzo de su era en RHS, y qué tan inolvidable ha sido.

Desde entonces, han crecido a través de cada semana de espíritu, partidos de fútbol americano, pep rallies, sesiones de estudio nocturnas, bailes de homecoming y momentos inolvidables en los pasillos. Convirtieron días ordinarios en recuerdos que permanecerán mucho después de que los birretes de graduación vuelen por los aires. Aprendieron resiliencia, se adaptaron al cambio, se apoyaron mutuamente y crearon una identidad de clase completamente propia.

Esta clase Senior realmente ha vivido a través de "las eras". Desde tendencias virales de TikTok hasta momentos escolares inolvidables, equilibraron humor, corazón y determinación en cada paso del camino. Ya fuera creando playlists para cada estado de ánimo o capturando recuerdos a través de streaks de Snapchat, construyeron una experiencia de preparatoria que inspirará a las clases futuras.

Pero lo que hace inolvidable a la Clase del 2026 no son simplemente las tendencias que siguieron o los momentos que compartieron, sino la influencia que dejan atrás.

Cada generación deja su huella en el mundo de diferentes maneras. Algunas son recordadas por su innovación. Otras por su resiliencia. Otras por la forma en que cambiaron cómo las personas piensan, lideran, crean y se cuidan entre sí.

Su clase lleva ese tipo de poder.

No un poder medido por popularidad, seguidores o atención, sino el tipo de poder que se encuentra en el carácter, la compasión y el valor. El poder de levantar a otros. El poder de traer energía a una sala, amabilidad a los momentos difíciles y esperanza a tiempos inciertos. El poder de dar forma a lo que viene simplemente por la manera en que eligen vivir.

Se gradúan en un momento en el que el mundo necesita más que nunca líderes reflexivos, mentes creativas y personas dispuestas a marcar la diferencia. Y si sus años en RHS han demostrado algo, es que esta clase es más que capaz de afrontar ese desafío.

Ahora, mientras se preparan para la graduación, recuerden esto: las tendencias pasan, las canciones cambian y las aplicaciones desaparecen, pero las amistades, lecciones y recuerdos de RHS permanecerán con ustedes para siempre. Más importante aún, el impacto que tienen en los demás el apoyo que dieron, las risas que compartieron, el ejemplo que establecieron continuará mucho después de que estos pasillos queden atrás.

Clase del 2026, su historia apenas comienza.

Sigan persiguiendo sus sueños, tomando riesgos y creando momentos dignos de recordar. Manténganse curiosos. Manténganse compasivos. Manténganse fieles a ustedes mismos. Y nunca subestimen la influencia que llevan a cada habitación, cada oportunidad y cada futuro al que entren.

No importa a dónde los lleve la vida, siempre serán parte de la familia de RHS.

Brindemos por la clase que hizo inolvidables sus años de preparatoria y por la generación que ahora tiene el poder de dar forma al futuro.

Con orgullo y los mejores deseos,

Directora Dra. Woods-Weeks

WILLS

I, Isabelle Abadie, hearby leave my rolling chair in Mrs. Godfrey's room to Aidan Cone.

I, Mareli Abraham-Gonzalez, hereby leave Mr. Kemp's red couch to his ESL students.

I, Alex Abrams-Garrett, hereby leave my single remaining pencil to Zack and all my tennis grip tape to Jake (maybe he'll learn to grip his rackets without me).

I, Réa Agborbesong, hereby leave my alto notes to Kamryn Washington and my JROTC strength and leadership to Alexa Romero.

I, Delia Aguilar, hereby leave showing up to Rapids at 8:05 on the dot to Kiwi Void.

I, Nailah Bolden, hereby leave leading the Altos to Annie Sanderlin and my lucky cheer shoe to Kenzie Garrett.

I, Sam Bowers, hereby leave the baseball team to Callum Page.

I, Axel Cai-Aveni, hereby leave Annie Sanderlin my title of Best Rapid, Ben Davis my alpha leader aura, and Tuff Luna all my emotes.

I, Sylvester Capron, hereby leave the position of Costume Assistant to Gretchen Karnowski.

I, Joseph Carnes, hereby leave my theater room couch seat left to me by Jake Foraker to Melanie Arcos Andrade.

I, Chandler Cates, hereby leave Taj Harrell a pair of headphones & a mute button so you can watch football, basketball, TikTok, and reels in peace.

I, Federica Cedeno, hereby leave my tech deck building kit to Will Gray.

I, Noam Cohen, hereby leave my all-white, ready to be painted parking spot to Lior Cohen.

I, Rhys Cohoon, hereby leave the Cohoon legacy to my brother Ethan to carry on for the next 3 years.

I, Ana Coreas, hereby leave my memories to all of my friends.

I, Junie Cranford, hereby leave Noah Larkins *ruff*.

I, Sebastian Cruz, hereby leave #16 on the men's lacrosse team to Carson Collins.

I, Lilly Dean, hearby leave my parking spot to Draegan Hucknall.

I, Stephanie Diaz, leave my women cut wrestling singlet to Sawyer Betts.

I, Ryan Dippolito, hereby leave my right arm's UCL to Jesse May.

I, Jessie Bird Earles, hereby leave my motivational school spirit to inspire others at Riverside.

I, Saul Gonzalez, hereby leave absolutely nothing to everyone.

I, Shana Gordon, hearby leave my churros to chief daddy leader and nattie bo baddie.

I, Milo Graber, hereby leave Math Club to Iain conditional on the fact he participates in the 14 hour math competition.

I, Conrad Hamel, hearby leave my honey hole at the pond to William Gray.

I, DJ Hernandez, hereby leave a 2 Euro coin I found in the senior lot to Jason Noble and half my car to Ryan Carol.

I, Nelson Kerr-Ritchie, hereby leave my height to Ian Phillips.

I, Taylor Kowalsky, hereby leave the rights and ownership of my property that is still left at Riverside. I also leave the use of my name to be used in good fortune only.

I, Melanie Koweek, hereby leave my sanity and the ability to remember to flip the calendar every month to Dr Gold.

I, Saeed Lobbad, hearby leave my Canon camcorder to Thomas Kwon and my lunch pass to Melanie Andrade.

I, Yimi Lopez, hereby leave my tardies to Eleizer Torres.

I, Maya Makarushka-Napp, hereby leave my parking spot and my questionable college advice to Sophie Chorosevic.

I, Nile Mangum, hereby leave my sweaty volleyball pads to Eden Mangum.

I, David May, hereby leave Sam Sipe the aura of all trombonists in this school, past and present.

I, Joseph McFarland, hereby leave my shoes to Romeo, and my necklace to Javion.

I, Brandan Miller, hereby leave Matthew McKinney access to Trumpet 1 since he thinks he's better than me!

I, Beckett Millet, hereby leave my Scotty Cameron putter to Spencer Watcher.

I, Aubrey Mitchell, herby leave my cap and goggles to Isla Heit.

I, Rebecca Mitchell, hereby leave Mira Riffer my extremely overstuffed music folder. May you finally find peace being able clean it out.

I, Bailey Neunkirchner, hereby leave laJordan Richmond My 1st squadron commander staff position in ROTC.

I, Ezra Norberg, hereby leave my wrestling singlet to Sawyer Betts.

I, Elodie Page, hereby leave my parking spot and good grades to Callum Page, and my weekly mileage and captain duties to Baylis Healy and Izzy Halpern.

I, Amina Palmer, hearby leave shelving books in the library to Savnnah Clarke!

I, Luis Rios, hereby leave my good memories with all the JROTC cadets and they will remember for who I was while I were in school.

I, Valentina Serrano, hereby leave being Mrs. Boliek's human pitch pipe to Adrian Juarez and the literary magazine to Viridian Morrow and Ellie Everett.

I, Ben Slade, hereby leave my role as tech baker to Owen Herbert-Rehder and my Voodoo Grape Monster Energy collection to River Cutrara.

I, AJ Smith, hearby leave techs against insanity and the craziness of tech theater to Skyler Boyles and River Cutrara.

I, Juleah Somers, hereby leave being captain of the softball team to Paris Chavis.

I, Simon Transue, hearby leave my photography contract to Ethan Kowalsky and my wealth, fortune, and ball knowledge to Ian Philips.

I, Magnolia Trogdon, hereby leave Marlon Trogdon the keys to my car. Please keep the Jacob Black bumper sticker on.

I, Tula Winton, hereby leave my seat on the soccer bus to Izzy and Jocelyn.



CLICK CLACK

By: Isabelle Abadie

The moment I get a new journalism assignment, my body moves on instinct.

I flip open my hot pink chromebook, covered in stickers that tell my story: my future college, a life-changing trip to Ecuador, photos of my closest friends, and my fingers find the keys.

It's been that way for four years.

Freshman year, I typed out my plan. Four years, mapped down to the detail: clubs to join, scores to hit, a future to build. I opened a Google Doc and made it official.

I threw out all my other hobbies and passions in the pursuit of successfully completing my plan.

One year later, I typed my way into my first big clubs and hardest classes. Then I typed through six AP classes, applications to prestigious summer programs and the earliest drafts of college essays. Finally, I typed my Common App login what felt like a thousand times and sent out 18 college applications.

For four years, I shaped myself into the ideal applicant: driven, focused and passionate. The problem was, somewhere in all that typing, I lost the things I was passionate about.

I stopped reading for fun. I stepped back from field hockey. Other hobbies I can't even remember due to neglect. I had been too busy building a version of myself for admissions officers that I forgot to keep being myself.

In the end, I typed my passions away, word by word.

Now, on the other side of it all, I find myself sitting in an unfamiliar quiet. No checklist. No deadline. Just me and a blinking cursor.

So I'm starting over, slowly. I've started reading books not because a teacher assigned them but because they sound interesting to me and I've pushed myself to not just go for runs but enjoy them.

The click clack used to be the sound of chasing something. Now I'm just trying to figure out what enjoying life sounds like.



SIZZLE

By Nico Jordan

One day in creative writing, my friends and I watched Black Mirror instead of actually doing anything. I don't remember what episode it was or what we were supposed to be doing that day, but I do remember sitting there and realizing that was one of the few classes I actually wanted to be in.

Everything I remember about high school is smaller and less organized than I thought it would be. Conversations that didn't seem important at the time with people who grew to be some of my closest friends. Listening to a song on repeat and accidentally tying it to a whole stretch of my life. Standing in the crowd of a concert before the music even started, everyone standing and waiting for the same thing before the lights fade.

There wound up being classes that mattered more than I would have expected, mostly the ones that felt like you were there because you wanted to be, not because you had to. I don't remember much from calculus, but I do remember walking the halls in the middle of journalism looking for someone to interview, or sitting in creative writing listening to people read stories they actually cared about writing.

Most of the moments that end up mattering to you won't announce themselves while they're happening.

I think that's the main thing I'll take with me leaving high school. Most of the moments that end up mattering to you won't announce themselves while they're happening. They'll just feel normal until one you look back and realize how much that moment mattered to you.

I always thought the things I'd remember from high school would be the obvious stuff. Finals, projects, whatever milestones you might have achieved, but most of what actually stuck was the opposite.

SHOUT OUTS

Isabelle Abadie: Shout out to Mrs. Godfrey for encouraging me to run long distances and always giving me a place to eat lunch.

Mareli Abraham-Gonzalez: Shout out to Mr. Kemp for being the hangout spot in school for FC these last 4 years.

Alex Abrams-Garrett: Shout out Mrs. Simpson for being so kind and enthusiastic about teaching.

Réa Agborbesong: Shout to MSgt McPherson for being an amazing mentor!

Delia Aguilar: Shout out to Mr. C for putting up with my "senioritis" junior year.

Cameron Aho: Shout out Mr. Kemp for letting me play board games in class.

Georgi Armstrong: Shout out to Mr Hayes, best English teacher ever!

Grace Arrington: Shout out Ms. Fitz for being the best hair stylist ever.

Nailah Bolden: Shout out to Mrs. Boliek for being the most motivating, supportive, and loving teacher.

Sam Bowers: Shout out to Lucas Setji for being a great guy

Axel Cai-Aveni: Shout out to Ms. Brady for always having elite coms and Ms. Simpson for putting up with silliness.

Sylvester Capron: Shout out to my favorite teachers, Ms. Taylor and Mr. Holley, for making Riverside truly feel like home.

Joseph Carnes: Shout out to Mr. B for being a wonderful French teacher and making his class a joy to take. Also shout out to Mr. Smith for making me a better writer.

Chandler Cates: Shout out to Ms. Fitz, for being my unpaid therapist, helping me with various projects, and giving me coloring sheets when I finished my work.

Federica Cedeno: Shout out to Mrs. Claudia for proving me right that Ecuador has the best ceviche and NOT Peru.

Xionna Clark-Felix: Shout out to Mrs.Webley for being the best and most welcoming teacher in my 2 years here at Riverside

Noam Cohen: Shout out to Ms. Prater for always letting me go talk to her during 4th period even when Ms. Minnick said no.

Rhys Cohoon: Shout out to Mrs. Erin for always being amazing.

Junie Cranford: Shout out to Mrs. Prater for making me like English.

Sebastian Cruz: Shout out to Ms. Minnick for letting me chill in her room.

Lilly Dean: Shout out to Ms. Stevens for letting me hang in her classroom all the time!

Stephanie Diaz Mendoza: Shout out to Dr.Okun for always catching me when I tried to leave from lunch freshman + sophomore year.

JessieBird Earles: Shout out to Mrs. Matheson for being an excellent art teacher.

Saul Gonzalez: Thank you Ms. Pulliam for letting me be a TA.

Shana Gordon: Shout out to my Wake Med goats- Alana Annabel and Holland!

Milo Graber: Shout out to Dr. Okun for being the GOAT.

Conrad Hamel: Shout out to Mr. C for being the most understanding teacher under the sun.

JP Hanczaryk: Shout out to Mr. Oakley for teaching me for three years.

DJ Hernandez: Shout out to Dr. Okun for being chill like that.

Nelson Kerr-Ritchie: Shout out to Ms. Brady for being a good teacher and a great neighbor!

Henry Kingston: Shout out Mrs. Boliek for making me lock in.

Taylor Kowalsky: Shout out to Mr. Nevola for being so cool and awesome that I accidentally called him bro.

Melanie Koweek: Shout out to Dr Gold for being the only reason the library hasn't been reduced to shambles.

Saeed Lobbad: Shout out to Mr. Smith for helping me be more confident in my speaking abilities, showing me his awesome music collections and making me have a habit to open a chip bag upside down :)

Yimi Lopez: Shout out to Mrs.Boliek for being the best chorus teacher that could ever exist!

Geshem Lorensen: Shout out to Ms. Bourquin for being an amazing teacher and helping me to have an amazing foundation for math.

Nile Mangum: Shout out to Ms.Fitz, Ms.Watson and Ms.Brady for being the best teachers ever.

David May: Shout out to Ms. Boliek, Mr. Mann and Ms. Moore, for most of the good music I've learned so far.

Joseph McFarland: Shout out to Mr Kemp for always being nice and keeping everything awesome.

Brandan Miller: Shout out Dr. Okun and Ms. McCoy for being the best APs at Riverside!

Beckett Millet: Shout out to Mr. Hayes for always coming to class energetic and happy to teach.

Rebecca Mitchell: Shout out to Mrs. Allman for being the GOAT, letting me sing really really loudly and for letting me do Uquizzes during my TA period.

Aubrey Mitchell: Shout out to Ms. Minnick for always putting up with our nonsense in AP Psych!

Madina Momin: Mr. Seifert, thank you for always being kind to me and for answering all of my questions so carefully. I truly appreciate all of your help and support.

BaileyNeunkirchner: Shout out to Mr. Dibble for being a great teacher.

Ezra Norberg: Shout out Ms. Brady for elite comms!

Rory O'Connor: Shout out to Mr. Nguyen for having a class I had 3 different tutors for and still couldn't pass.

Elodie Page: Shout out to Mr. Nevola for introducing me to the best sandwich combo and helping me fulfill my NHS hours #iykyk

Amina Palmer: Shout out to Ms. Stevens for the popcorn.

Talia Posner: Shout out to Mr. Nguyen for reminding us that we've never fought in a war.

Luis Rios: Shout out to Major Bond and Msgt McPherson for being great leaders. I'm glad I got to meet them.

Valentina Serrano-Gonzalez: Shout out to Mrs. Boliek, Mr. B, Mr. Varela, Mr. Smith, Ms. Allman and Ms. Brady for being great teachers! And shout out to Dr. Okun for being cool.

Ben Slade: Shout out to Mr. Dibble, Ms. Chestnut, and Mr. Kemp for keeping me sane through my associate's degree (and laughing at my jokes about my college classmates).

AJ Smith: Shout out to Mr. Holley for always leaving the shop door open.

Juleah Somers: Shout out to Ms. Prater for making sure I don't vape!

Eric Spells: Shout out to Mr. Mellon and my old teacher, Ms. Thompson, for being the best teachers ever.

Saul Stein: Shout out Dr. Okun for being the goat and always mogging.

Simon Transue: Shoutout Mr. Daniel Ernest Kemp for being a day 1 and buying me lunch at Elmo's.

Jonah Weiss: Shout out to Mr. Nevola for being so consistent.

Tula Winton: Shout out to Ms. Prater for making me love writing again.

Austin Wymore: Shout out to Mr. Christopher for being a boss.

QUOTES

Isabelle Abadie: "Celsius is always the answer."

Mareli Abraham-Gonzalez: “Always believe in yourself and your dreams. You have the key hiding in plain sight…” -FLat7

Alex Abrams-Garrett: I think, therefore I am. I think..."

Réa Agborbesong: "The journey is usually the part you remember anyways." -Miley Cyrus

Delia Aguilar: "Join chorus."

Cameron Aho: "Went to the zoo. The goats asked how I escaped." -Instagram Reels

Georgi Armstrong: "This was nothing like Twilight."

Grace Arrington: “Don’t do anything stupid until I get back.” -Steve Rogers

Nailah Bolden: “Today is where your book begins, the rest is still unwritten.” -Natasha Bedingfield

Olive Bridgers: “It’s the possibility of having a dream come true that makes life interesting.” -The Alchemist

Axel Cai-Aveni: "Put it on Sahur."

Sylvester Capron: "In a rich man's house there is no place to spit but his face." -Diogenes of Sinope

Joseph Carnes: A wise quote is forgotten, but a stupid quote is remembered for a lifetime."

Chandler Cates: “How can I? You’re taking all the stupid with you.” -Bucky Barnes

Federica Cedeno: “We have nothing to lose, nothing to gain, nothing we desire anymore, except to make your lives into a work of art.” -Lana Del Rey

Xionna Clark-Felix: "And sometimes, once in awhile, you’ll be eating breakfast and you’ll go: GET ME OUTTA HERE."

Noam Cohen: "#believe." -Christopher Mayshack

Rhys Cohoon: “When we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better too.” -The Alchemist

Ana Coreas Vargas: "Sometimes life will give you more opportunities."

Junie Cranford: "Don’t crease the crocs."

Sebastian Cruz: “To the non-believers, the under achievers, the tweet and deleters, you make me sick to my stomach fam.” -Drake

Lilly Dean: "Who else here feels like they have no idea what they are doing?" -George O'Malley

Abigail Deskins: Exodus 14:14

Stephanie Diaz Mendoza: "When I walk past a ring camera it says motion detected."

Ryan Dippolito: “He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how.” -Friedrich Nietzsche

JessieBird Earles: "If you try hard, you will find success in your path."

Jahaira Escobar: “People change and things go wrong, but just remember life goes on.” -Mac Miller

Saul Gonzalez: "KA-CHOW!" -Lightning McQueen

Shana Gordon: “Something awesome.” -Nelson Kerr-Ritchie

Milo Graber: "Keep the main thing, the main thing." -Dr. Woods-Weeks

Alex Gray: “Ricky? Remember, the field mouse is fast, but the owl sees at night.” -Talladega Nights

Conrad Hamel: "A crooked tree lives its own life, but a straight one gets turned into wood."

Megan Hammett: "Birds are awesome, and everyone needs to know that."

JP Hanczaryk: "Smiling through it all! Can’t believe this is my life!" -LeBron James

Micah Harris: "Touse squid or bouse mogger?"

DJ Hernandez: "That's what I've been saying for centuries, maybe millennia."

Nelson Kerr-Ritchie: “A winner is a dreamer who never gives up.” -Nelson Mandela

Henry Kingston: "Early is on time."

Graham Kingston: “The enemy of a good plan is the dream of a perfect one.” -Clausewitz

Taylor Kowalsky: "I'd rather be rock climbing."

Melanie Koweek: “With great power…comes great need to take a nap. Wake me up later.” -Rick Riordan

Saeed Lobbad: "What you're not changing, you're choosing." -Laurie Buchanan

Yimi Lopez: “En este mundo, todo se puede lograr, Dios por delante el nos va a guiar.” -Hermanos Espinoza

Geshem Lorensen: "It wasn't what it weren't."

Maya Makarushka-Napp: "We're all travelling through time together, every day of our lives. All we can do is do our best to relish this remarkable ride." -About Time

Nile Mangum: "Dedicate your heart" -Levi Ackerman

David May: "Perhaps the real high school were the friends we made along the way."

Joseph McFarland: "No matter how many times life knocks you down, always stand back up and keep trying." -Rocky

Izabella Miller: "Monsters University here I come!"

Brandan Miller: “You forget a thousand things every day. Make sure I’m not one of them.“ -Michael De Santa, Grand Theft Auto 5

Beckett Millet: “The only thing really worth chasing is a dream.” -Drake

Rebecca Mitchell: "And here's to the fools who dream, crazy as they may seem. Here's to the hearts that break. Here's to the mess we make." -La La Land

Aubrey Mitchell: “I live for the nights that I can't remember, with the people that I won't forget.” -Drake

Madina Momin: "Dream big. Work hard. Stay focused."

Bailey Neunkirchner: "The best views come after the hardest climbs."

Ezra Norberg: "My life is so awesome."

Rory O’Connor: “Whatever you do don’t eat lunch alone.” -Riley O’Connor

Amina Palmer: "A bottle of ketchup, and a bag of chips."

Talia Posner: “Subtlety is a waste of time. Fortune favors the flirtatious.” -Mackenzie Lee

Nellie Purdy: "To be ballin, you have to b-all-in."

Luis Rios: “Your life is your story, and the adventure ahead of you is the journey to fulfill your own purpose and potential." - Kerry Washington

Rhys Roberts: "Give a man a lift, and he will get to school on time; teach a man to drive, and he will not come to class."

Larry Salto-Hernandez: "Always be you. Don't change for others to stay with you."

Jasper Schmid: "I wish I’d scrolled more reels.”

Valentina Serrano-Gonzalez: “Love and success, always in that order. It's that simple AND that difficult.” -Fred Rogers

Ben Slade: "What and how much had I lost by trying to do only what was expected of me instead of what I myself had wished to do?" -Ralph Ellison

AJ Smith: "Today you are defeated but what will you become tomorrow?" -Haikyu

Juleah Somers: "Bam! What?" - Maddie Rooney

Eric Spells: "Love is not what you say. Love is what you do 100%." -John Hagee

Saul Stein: “Travel as far as you can as much as you can.” -Anthony Bourdain

Simon Transue: "Someday you'll find friends who won't ever leave you. No matter who you are, ain't nobody in this world born to be alone." -Eiichiro Oda

Magnolia Trogdon: "Twilight, again. Another ending. No matter how perfect the day is, it always has to end." -Edward Cullen

Jonah Weiss: "You are what you think; you become what you think; what you think becomes reality." -Phil Hellmuth Jr.

Tula Winton: "It’s barbecue chicken from here."

Austin Wymore: "I'm just trying to touch the real but it's plastic, fake." -Benjamin Reichwald



KABOOM

By Nellie Purdy

It's only the first quarter and I can already tell my voice will be completely gone tomorrow.

The bleachers shake from the thunderous sound of the cannon firing and the cheers of the student section.

“Touchdownnnnn Pirates!”

Adorned in glitter and purple face paint, I take a deep breath, turn to face the crowd, and ignore the strain on my vocal cords as I erupt into full-volume call-and-response.

“Give me an R...”

Three days before I started ninth grade, I got my first taste of Friday Night Lights. Following Riverside’s open house, I sat down at the top of the bleachers with a cluster of sort-of-friends that I knew from middle school. I wished the girls I didn't recognize would introduce themselves to me because I was so nervous I didn't think I could do it first. Filled with a mix of naive optimism and utter dread, I left the game early with my mom and wondered if this was what high school would be like.

For a while, it was.

I had a clear vision of what my life at Riverside would look like; who my friends would be, what classes I’d take, the clubs I’d join. I couldn't stomach straying from the path I thought was perfect.

I wanted to stick with what seemed simple, the people that were familiar, the classes that were easy. I tried to avoid it, but trying to be in control rather than genuine wasn't a sacrifice I could keep making. Choosing to avoid anything that might convolute my vision meant I was missing out on so much.

So I diverged from my plan. I made conversation with classmates I didn’t talk to before. I joined the tennis and swim teams. I attended Student Government meetings and ran for leadership. I realized how much I love writing for The Hook.

I was awkward. It was uncomfortable, but it got easier as I got involved. And it was absolutely worth it.

If I had stuck by what felt uncomplicated and familiar, I would still be sitting quietly in a group of people I was too nervous to be myself around. I would be taking classes that didn't challenge me. I wouldn't become a team captain or class president. I would have missed out on the jokes, friends, games, and memories that made up my time at Riverside.

This fall, I’ll move down the road to UNC and face another change. But I won't get caught up in what I think college will be like instead of enjoying what it actually is. I hope I’ll have friendships and experiences just as meaningful as those I’ve had here. And I hope Cookout runs hit the same after getting a little too hype for yet another football team that I don't see win much.



SENIOR SPOTLIGHTS

THE JACK OF ALL TRADES

By Taj Harrell

Participating in activities like fencing and ROTC doesn't leave much time for anything else for most students.

But Pola Huchwajda manages to do both, while pursuing a career in neuroscience plus attending UNC Chapel Hill in the fall.

Huchwajda suffers from a condition called Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS), a chronic disorder of the autonomic nervous system that causes a rapid heart rate.

Some of the symptoms of POTS are dizziness, fainting, palpitations, severe fatigue, brain fog, headaches and nausea.

However, Huchwajda never let it affect her. Instead, it inspired her to study neuroscience to help others someday.

"If I pursue neuroscience I can probably help people like me in the future," Huchwajda said.

English teacher Mira Prater described Huchwajda as a model student.

"She was an excellent writer," Prater said. "Great thinker. Brought new ideas to her writing that I had not experienced from other students in previous classes.

"I just really enjoyed having her in the room. When I learned she fenced I was surprised. It's just such a cool fact to learn about a kid," Prater said.

Fencing is also one of Huchwajda's biggest passions.

"I've been fencing since the age of nine," she said.

Huchwajda's dad was an Olympian for the German national team in the 1996 Olympics. After he finished his fencing career, he started a fencing club.

This club is the reason Huchwajda started fencing.

"I've gotten pretty good," she said.

Huchwajda also joined ROTC after her brother, Marcel, was part of it for four years.

"It's kind of like footsteps," she said. "I found it really fun. I met my best friends there and I love it."

Huchwajda will be attending UNC Chapel Hill in the fall.

"I'm looking forward to all the new friends I'm going to make," she said. "All the new experiences, meeting new people."

THE CONDUCTOR

Brandan Miller is leaving the band to hit the road

By Paris Chavis



Growing up riding city buses helped inspire senior Brandan Miller.

"We used to catch the bus a lot when I was a kid, so that probably did something," Miller said.

After graduation, Miller plans to pursue work as a city bus operator, potentially with GoDurham.

"It was always something I wanted to do ever since I was a little kid, " Miller said.

Miller said his passion for driving has only grown over time. In addition to school, he has delivery jobs, including DoorDash and Domino's.

"That does help, gaining work experience as a driver," Miller said.

To become a city bus operator, Miller plans to earn a commercial drivers license (CDL) with a passenger endorsement after graduation.

Outside of his future career goals, Miller said one of the most meaningful parts of high school experiences has been Riverside's band program.

"I'm gonna miss the band a lot when I graduate," Miller said. "It's probably been my favorite part."

Miller has participated in band since his freshman year. Playing the trumpet since middle school as well as part of symphonic. He has remained involved through several changes with the program.

Band Director Steven Mann said Miller's commitment and leadership made a strong impact on the marching band, especially during his senior year.

"He was a leader of the band," Mann said. "He did a lot to take initiative without me prompting him."

According to Mann, Miller helped organize responsibilities for football games and communicated regularly with both students and staff.

"He absolutely was committed." Mann said. "He gave us some strong leadership this past season."

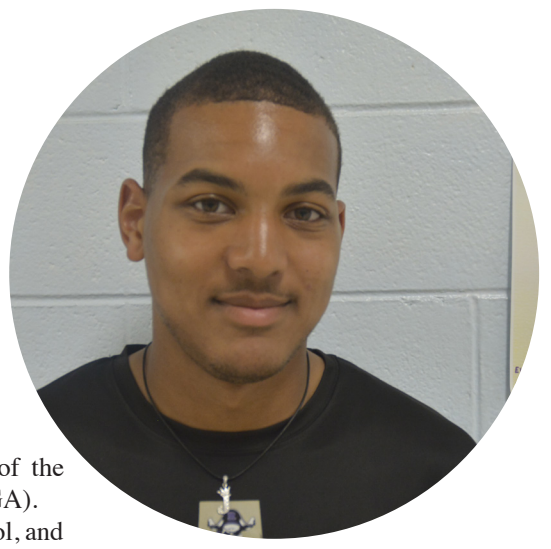
Mann added that MIller's enthusiasm remained consistent throughout his years in the program even as the band transitioned from competitive marching style to a more college-style atmosphere.

"Whoever's next is going to have to pick up where he left off," Mann said. "He will be missed."

MR. EXTRACURRICULAR

Jason Noble does it all

By Will Gray



Senior Jason Noble has balanced different extracurriculars like SGA, lacrosse and ROTC during his four busy years at Riverside.

"I wanted to help improve the school overall," he said.

Noble said that these high school experiences helped him grow and mature, but ROTC helped him become a leader..

"ROTC was one of the reasons I grew into the person I am now compared to four years ago," he said.

He also is a prominent member of the Student Government Association (SGA).

"I wanted to help improve the school, and I thought student government was the best way I could do that."

Noble joined the lacrosse team his sophomore year after being inspired by a TV show.

He said it was a very fun experience, though he wished he joined earlier.

"Over the past three years I have watched Jason build relationships with his teammates and improve drastically to the point where he started every game for us his senior year," said lacrosse coach Lucas Beauchaine. "The determination to lean into his discomfort and learn to excel in something new is what makes Jason special."

Noble intends to major in political science, then attend law school.



THE SINGER

Delia Aguilar was born to perform

By Yohana Flores

Delia Aguilar's journey through high school has been one fully immersed in the arts.

One of the most important things in Aguliar's life is singing. She sang in her church choir at Iglesia Bautista la Fe at five years old and later joined chorus programs throughout middle and high school.

"I'm pretty sure I came out of the womb singing," Aguilar joked. "My mom sings, my sister sings, my whole family, we're all very musically inclined, and we all just love to sing. So, it's always just kind of been with me.

"It's just kind of been what's defined me as a person," she said. "It's really helped me find myself."

She credits both Alicia Jones, her chorus teacher at Carrington Middle School, and Riverside chorus teacher, Jill Boliek, for helping her grow as a performer and as a person.

"[Boliek] has always been in my corner," Aguilar said. "I wouldn't be doing any of this if it wasn't for her."

Although she had sung in choir for most of her life, she never expected theater to become such an important part of who she is.

During her freshman year, Boliek encouraged her to audition for Shrek the Musical. Even though she had never acted before, Aguilar decided to take the chance and got an ensemble role.

"I was mostly nervous, because I had never done anything like that," said Aguilar.

Since then, Aguilar has become a more confident performer, starring in multiple productions and as the lead in both The Wizard of Oz and Mary Poppins.

"It was so much responsibility," she said. "I was so nervous, but it was so much fun to have that fun with the character."

Her most recent role as Mary Poppins became one of her favorite roles because of the character's playful spirit and meaningful values.

"I just related so much to [Mary Poppins'] values and morals," Aguilar said. "I feel like I learned so much from that character because the whole story is just so beautiful, and there's just so much good to relate to."

Aside from performing arts, Aguilar played JV volleyball during her freshman and sophomore years before joining the varsity field hockey team as an upperclassman.

"[The field hockey team] is just so accepting and welcoming .It's another family, basically," she said.

Balancing theater, chorus, sports, work, school, friends, and family has been part of the struggle.

"If you find someone that can do it perfectly, tell them to come to me," Aguilar said. "I feel like it's really just a learning process."

As graduation approaches, Aguilar hopes theater and chorus will always remain part of her life, even if she is still figuring out what path she wants to pursue in college at UNC-Greensboro.

"Whether it's on the side or it is my whole career, I never want to just completely drop it," she said. "It's been such a big part of my life that I can't imagine myself not doing it."

For incoming freshmen, Aguilar encourages students to get involved in the arts and not be afraid to express themselves.

"You don't get another experience like high school again," she said. "Do something fun. Whether it's chorus, theater, band, orchestra, journalism, do something in the arts. Don't be afraid to just be yourself."



THE BUILDER

Connor Lloyd is aiming for the stars

By Jason Iwara

'Looking to the stars' is a phrase usually used metaphorically, but for senior Connor Lloyd it's become very real.

Lloyd has been interested in aerospace engineering since the sixth grade at Discovery Charter School. As the first class of sixth grade students to ever attend Discovery, their engineering program was underdeveloped.

"They didn't have a whole lot of money to work with," said Lloyd, "so most of the time we were just building with Legos and that kind of stuff."

Although the program was unfocused, one teacher in particular stood out to Lloyd.

"Mr. Davis gave a feeling of freedom that other teachers didn't," said Lloyd. "He knew what he was talking about."

Davis, an engineering teacher at Discovery, had a specialized understanding of automotive and mechanical engineering and was able to answer all of Lloyd's questions.

"I didn't feel like I had to just ask him questions about mechanical engineering," said Lloyd. "I could ask my other stuff and he'd be able to answer them."

Although originally coming to Riverside for the aerospace engineering class, Lloyd attributes his growth in engineering as a whole to the Project Lead the Way program.

"This is the best I'm going to find in Durham," said Lloyd. "I learned a lot of other important stuff."

Lloyd hopes to someday work for a large space program, building rockets and rovers.

Lloyd is committed to the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, particularly because of its strong engineering program. North Carolina State was his top choice, but he's satisfied with Tennessee's commitment to the program.

"They're pouring so much money into their programs, much more than State's doing," said Lloyd, "I think right now State's ranked higher, but Tennessee is rising."



THE SOON-TO-BE EMT

By Levi Brown

Senior Rhys Cohoon is practicing to become an emergency medical technician (EMT) after high school.

Cohoon has many interests. He was a goalkeeper on the varsity men's soccer team and likes cooking and outside of school.

But he said it was athletic trainer Erin Samuels who inspired him to become an EMTafter he took sports med one and two with her.

"Being around her so much and seeing how she's been helping others all the time, I think that really piqued my interest," said Cohoon. "I want to be able to help people as much as she does."

Cohoon also pointed out that his uncle is a flight nurse with the US Air Force, which also gave him some insight into the profession.

Cohoon is already on the way to becoming certified, as he has already taken a Durham Tech class as suggested by his mom. Plus, he has passed his certification exam, so all he needs is to wait until he is 18 so he can begin to apply for jobs.

In addition to driving ambulances, EMTs provide life saving measures at the scene of the medical emergency. If the situation is severe, they bring them to the hospital for further treatment.

"[Helping people] is one of the things that I still try to do just in small things during the day," he said.

Outside of EMT work, Cohoon plans to keep playing soccer.

While his time playing for Riverside is done, he reminisced about his time on the team,

"I don't really know where I'd be without [my teammates]," he said. "I think just the relationship I've built with my them, and the same with some of the coaches have really helped me out."

He specifically called out fellow seniors Liam Gergen and Noah Wenzlik as teammates.

"[I'm] so glad to have met through this team," he said, "They've been so amazing."

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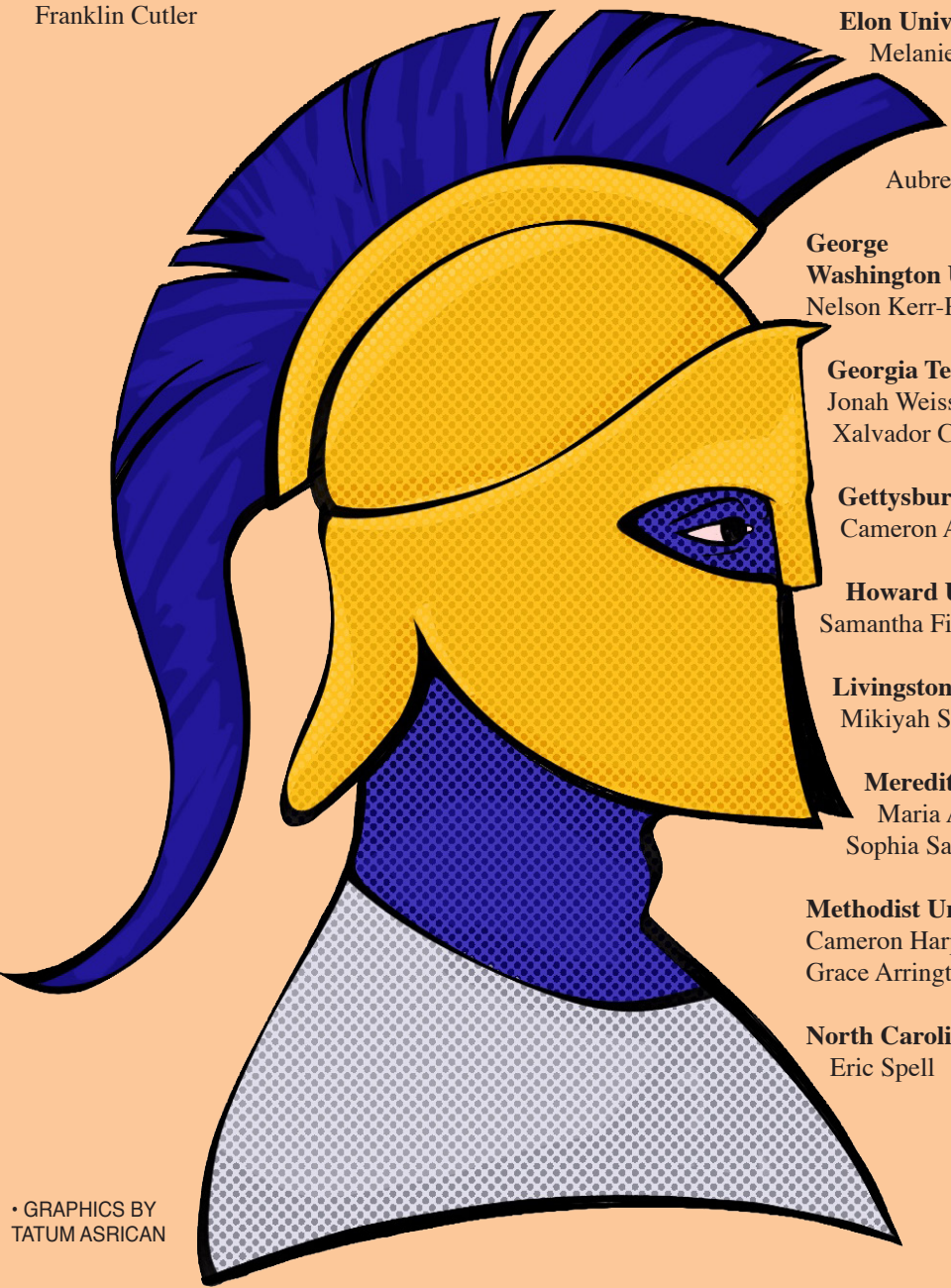



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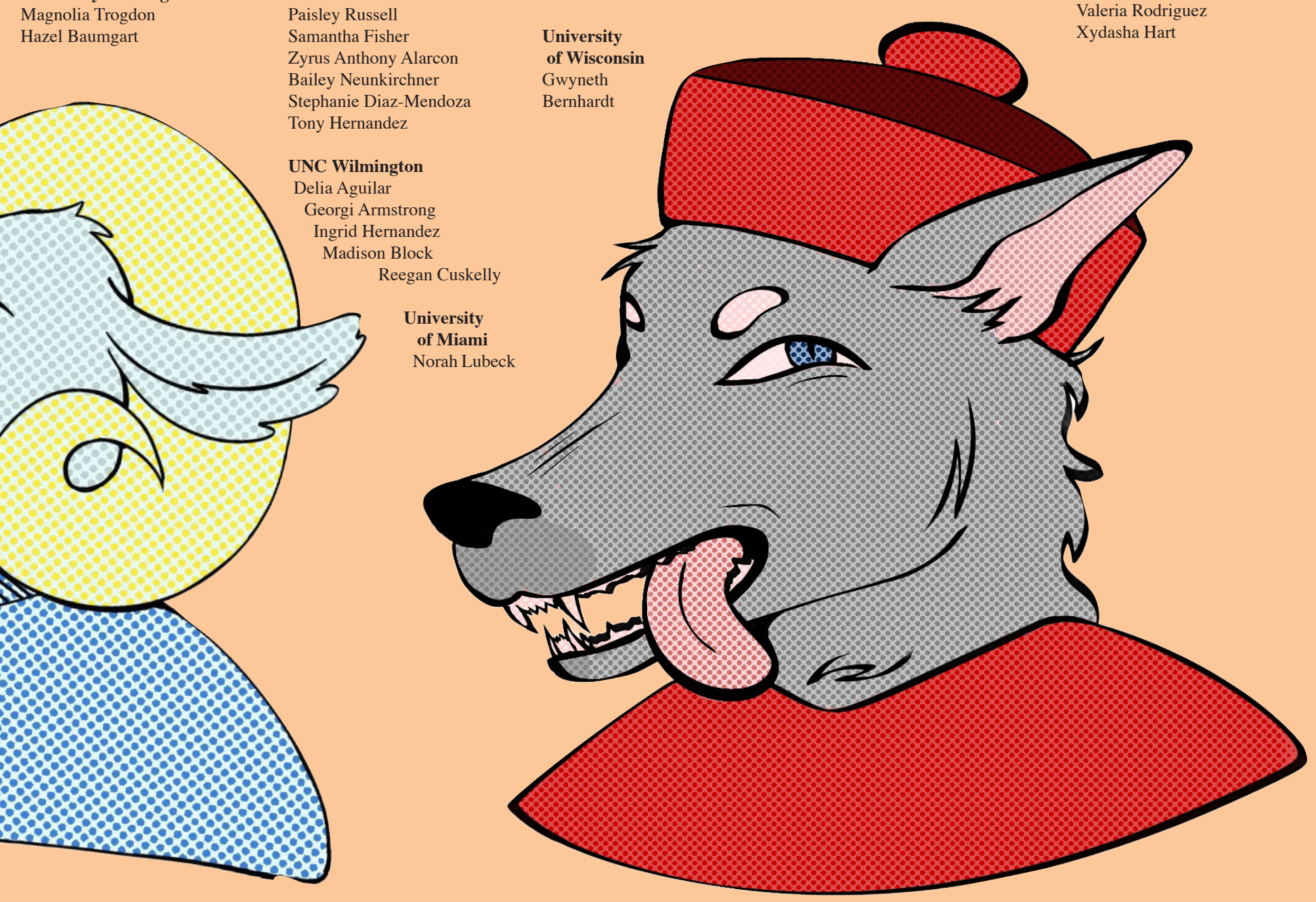




CLICK

By Saeed Lobbad

My parents say to me sometimes that I was stuck in the wrong generation.

They think I should've gone to high school in the 90's. Waking up in the morning, I put on my baggy Levi jeans, air max 97s and a white shirt. I listen to music from a playlist I made, then burn it onto a CD. With LL Cool J and Tupac playing, I use my Canon camcorder to record moments I want to remember.

I saved enough money from an internship last year to buy the camcorder and have filled tapes with footage of boys nights out meetups, cars and coffee, Morrisville meets, senior sign off and Riverside football games.

The music and vlogs I listen to now will help me reminisce about the good times I had in high school, being with my friends and messing around in the junior lot. I wish I would have had the camcorder sooner, like during engineering field trips, riding the roller coasters and watching Jay Cranford hide inside the top bus compartment, scaring the heck out of the teachers.

Or in Mr Oakley's POE class, doing the marble sorter and seeing my friends sing the Dune theme just for a couple points of extra credit.

Back then, lunch was actually good. I had enough time to mess around, playing frisbee and eating at the junior lot with my friends. We'd show off our cars, thinking they are like the Ferraris of the lot.

School was stressful, but what kept me going was my friends and keeping busy. I packed my schedule with my robotics, taekwondo and track teams, and clubs like TSA.

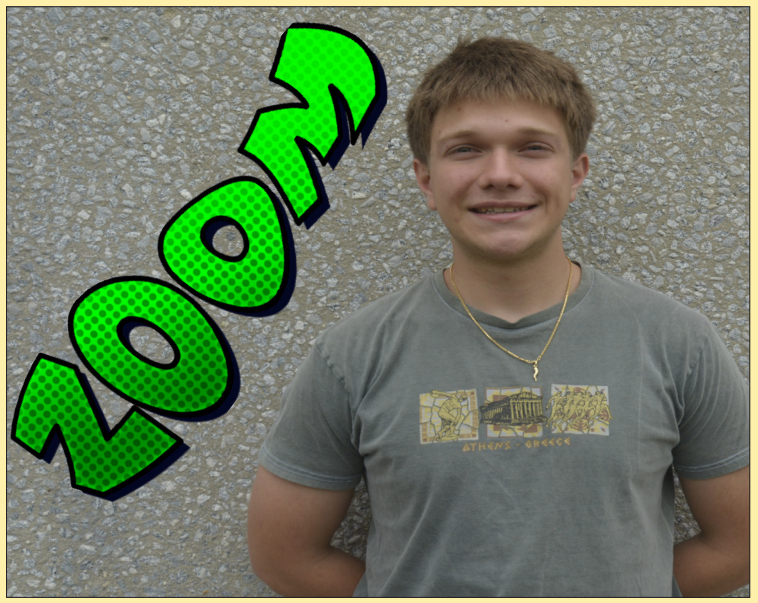
There were classes that I genuinely enjoyed, too. One was my speech class with Mr. Smith. What made it special was being able to practice my public speaking, which helped me to not only be more confident in speaking to others, but also just be confident in general. I also enjoyed the international snack days where he would get different flavored chips from different countries. My favorite one was the squid bbq flavor.

Mr. Stallings also was fascinating, telling his stories about surveying and his company that he used to have.

I liked learning about circuits, soldering, and building my date of birth circuit board in Mr. Stallings' digital electronics, and in his civil engineering class building my Arabian-style house.

When I started high school four years ago, I wanted to learn as much as possible and make a lot of friends. Looking back, I not only made a lot of cool memories but also met a lot of people, and gained a lot of connections.

I will forever cherish all the moments I had with my friends and continue to use my camcorder to document my next chapter of college.



ZOOM

By Conrad Hamel

Ever since I watched the movie Cars as a young kid I have been obsessed with them.

From around the age of four to 15, I spent a good amount of my free time going to car meets, watching Top Gear and doing research into what would be the best introductory car to get me into the hobby.

The day before my first day of high school, during orientation, I was overwhelmed. The size of the building, all of the people, teachers, and location, everything was new and foreign to me.

At first, the fresh setting intrigued me, and I was able to easily immerse myself. Over time, the rose-tinted glasses started to fade, and what was once this fresh and exciting experience started to become one with my monotonous daily routine.

To be quite frank, I never really found school that enjoyable. There are definitely classes I have enjoyed, but they have been fewer and farther apart than I had wished. I tried to stay as disciplined as possible, and that did help bring my grades up, and on paper, solved most of my problems. But being disciplined didn't leave me feeling fulfilled. Being disciplined is doing something because you have to do it, not because you want to. Not because you enjoy it, but because you're forcing yourself to.

Discipline has its time and place, but its time is not 24/7, 365.

I needed to find something I was passionate about, that I could obsess over. Something that would challenge me, that would test me. Something that would captivate my full and undivided attention and effort.

Finally, my years and years of research, YouTube videos, and car meets have finally paid off and has ultimatly brought me to the point I am at today. All of this learning without even touching a wrench gave me the confidence to dive straight into the deep end and purchase my own project car.

I was able to explore my hobby and ended up fully rebuilding the engine transmission in my own project/drift car.

Having something that I was passionate about helped ground me during my four years at Riverside. Having to learn how to make time for myself amongst all of the chaos of having school work, a job, and running track and cross country has taught me how to have balance in my life, and I will keep honing and using this skill for the rest of it.



SINCE

By Nelson Kerr-Ritchie

Dear Lebron,

This is my 234,591st letter to you, and my last of my high school career. Wow, this is really it. Just like your career, it could really be almost over.

Crazy how I need to finish this column tonight, and how you are playing OKC tonight. I'm sure the refs will be totally fair to you…

When I was in elementary school, after some behavioral problems on my part, a counselor recommended to me that I write "fake letters." These letters would help me write down my thoughts and organize myself. I ignored this counselor's advice until high school. In high school, I added more and more things to my life, from my interest in politics to challenging classes. Each day, I found myself floating, day to day, from assignment to assignment, event to event.

So, I got an old composition notebook, and started writing. Obviously, who else could I write to but Lebron James? Four rings, four MVPs, and more points than anybody who ever played the game of basketball. He also came back from a 3-1 deficit against the greatest team ever assembled, in the NBA finals. MJ never did that.

By writing these letters to Lebron (none of which I ever sent), I was able to, no matter the day, get a clear picture of my day, and what I've achieved.

In these letters, I could say whatever I wanted, without fear of censorship or consequence. I work in two worlds of lies and deception, those being retail and politics.

These letters allowed me to be true to myself and how I felt, no matter who I interacted with each day or what occurred.

These letters have kept me on track in getting to the biggest thing after high school: college. By sitting down and wording out what I did that day, I had the tools to improve the next day towards my ultimate goal of applying for and getting into the nine colleges I applied to.

It seems weird to say, but one of the things I'll miss most in this next chapter of my life is these letters. I've decided to stop doing them in college, not because I don't like them, but instead because of what these letters have given me. These letters have given me a mental day to day clarity that no longer necessitates what these letters were written for in the first place.

As a person who dreams of changing the world with the education I have received and will receive, it seems suitable to be humble in my conclusion of this column. So thanks, Lebron, for getting me through high school.



• PHOTOS BY KALISSA EVERETT



HICCUP

By Violet Davis

The stereotype of high school extends further than the yellow school buses, homework filled nights and Friday football games. "Hiccup" is the word that comes to my mind when I think of the inevitable lows that come with high school.

My volleyball junior year I dove in ready for new challenges, not expecting one that threatened to end my junior season of volleyball.

In early September I was called up to the office by a DPS social worker. I was told neither of my coaches would be coming to practice today. In fact, they wouldn't be returning ever again.

I was one of the only players who knew our season would be completely flipped upside down, and conference play started in three days.

Even though the social worker joined me at practice to help break the news, the feeling of helplessness loomed in the air as we were told it might be possible the rest of our season would be suspended.

Presented with the biggest "hiccup" yet in my high school career, I knew my mindset had to shift. So I matured quickly.

My leadership position evolved from innocent fun into a responsibility to help our team rebuild. I reminded my teammates that we were more than this crisis, and strength became my motto for the rest of the season.

Even with more hiccups - two girls quitting, forfeiting our first conference game, and our equipment disappearing - we stayed strong.

We rebuilt with little, facilitated our own practices, coached our own games with the help of parents, and slowly but surely came back to life.

A new head coach was finally hired, we raised enough money for new and improved equipment, and our spark returned on the court.

This year, our team finished third in our conference with a better record this season than in the last 10 years of the program.

To the underclassmen reading this: However high your ego is coming in, expect to be immediately humbled by the bad experiences coming your way, but know that even the biggest hiccups can be overcome with strength.

Even the biggest hiccups can be overcome with strength.



BANG

By Elodie Page

BANG! The starter gun goes off, and I watch my teammates sprint off the line.

I looked down at my boot, then hobbled towards the next area to cheer them on.

At the finishing stretch, my teammates' grit, pain, and perseverance showed plainly on their faces, and I had to look away.

After battling a stress fracture and continuous injuries in 2023 and 2024, I missed many races and practices. I felt like I was falling behind, unable to be with the team and achieve the goals I set for myself.

I wanted so badly to support my teammates without feeling heavy with envy, and if I admitted it, anger. As crazy as it sounds, all I wanted was to feel their pain - the pain of racing, the sense of relief and accomplishment after crossing the finish line, and every moment in between.

I fell in love with running because it was a way to prove to myself I could be uncomfortable, set goals, and work hard to reach them. Running is unforgiving. You can go to bed early, stretch, hydrate, fuel properly, have great workouts, but on race day, progress is never guaranteed. You have to take risks, make hard decisions, and trust that you can hold on.

As I saw my teammates circle up and celebrate, clapping, smiling, lying on the ground in complete exhaustion, I couldn't shake the feeling that I was missing a huge part of myself.

I had to be patient. The one quality I don't possess was the only quality I had to count on in order to come back healthy and injury-free. The weeks and months that followed, I spent hours on the elliptical, lifting weights, and swimming. When I finally progressed to running, only a minute at a time, I realized how much I missed the routes around my house, my teammates, and running freely.

I missed the simplicity of tying up my shoes and going for a run. I made a promise to myself that once I was healthy, I wouldn't take that for granted.

Junior year, I was back - running longer and faster than I ever had. I came to each practice being grateful, running alongside my teammates, laughing at dumb jokes, exploring new routes. I regained my confidence, and my fear that my setback meant I would never be as good as I could have been went away.

These races were a testament to myself, but they were not how I defined myself as a runner. Showing up and embracing each run, knowing there was a time it was the only thing that mattered, allowed me to challenge myself without the pressure to perform.

Savoring each moment I could stride pain-free allowed me to see the beauty in other parts of my life, too.

As I begin the massive transition ahead, I've realized all of these challenges allowed me to come out more grateful for small wins - a sunny day, a good run, answering a Delta Math question correctly on the first attempt, the ability to sit down and enjoy a moment being bored - to prepare for the most exciting moments ahead.



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Katherine & Andy Ball
Ed Balleisen
Katherine Barton
Jason Barton
Wendy Barze
Jennifer Beauchamp
Kamal Bennoune
Jennifer Bibb
Pamela Blair
Rhema Bland
Mary Boatwright
Karen Brown
Kevin Brown
Keith Brown
Cathleen Bury
Louise Butler
Donna & Lloyd Butler
Colleen Butler
Gary Butler
Vonyee Carrington
Gavin Cartwright
Steven Castro Delcid
Otto Cedeno
Francesca Cedeno
Kim Chapman
Eric Chapman
Deirdre Chapman
Gwen Chapman
Bentley Cheatham
Tony Christopher
Elinor Coates
Margeva Cole
Merry Davis
Sandra Davis
Deborah Dobbins
Anisha Downey
Jocelyn Fernandez
Lupita Flores
Adam & Mollie Flowe
Beth Flynn
Vail Gardner
Erin Gasch
Edwin Gatewood
Renee Gerardo
Liam Gergen
Amy Gillie
Tom Giroux
Tara Gladwell
Sally Gray
Kaaren Green
Julia Gunto
William Hager
Dana Haine
Sean Hamel
Michael & Linda Hamel
Joseph Harre
Sampson Harrell
Mitchell Heflin
Judi Hegler
Jillian Helton
Addi Hernandez
Celia Herrera
Bethany Howell
Paul Hrusovsky
Cynthia Hughey
Andrew Janiak
Isaac Janiak Stein
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Jim Key
Maria-Elena Kolovos
Justin Laidlaw
Barbra Laird
Erik Lindquist
Kristin Linton
Aaron Lubeck
Dennis Lubeck
Julie Lubeck-Hofer
Beau Marshall
Manek Mathur
Carolyn Mcallaster
Tyler Mclean
Leonardo Murphy
Patrick Nalley
Joe Neff
John O'Connor
Paul O'Connor
Andy Ozment
Susan Ozment
Caroline Ozment
Jay Page
Brandi Pegram
Rachel Posner
Avan Prindiville
Douglas Purdy
Teresa Purdy
Sarah Reckhow
Michael Reckhow
Laura Richman
Lea Roark
Jerry Robinson
Danielle Robinson
Gerard & Teresa Robinson
Katie Robinson
Matthew Michael Robinson
Vilma Roldan Lazo
Vaughn Schermerhorn
Michael Setji
Marie Sherr
Rebecca Smullin
Julie Solo
Tamara Somers
Jerry Trott
Steve "The OG" Unruhe
Terri Utz
Brett Valley
Nehir Volkan
Michael & Ruth Walsh
Evelyn Walters
Jennifer Weaver
Silver Wevill
David Wevill
Morgan Whithaus
Meyers
Patty Wild
Laurie & Matt Williamson
Tim Williamson II
Pam Winton
Charles & De An Winton
Tyler Winton
Raymond Winton
Scott Winton
Tim & Dianne Wooldridge
Austin Wymore
Farrell Wymore
Bryan Wymore
Georgiana Wymore
In memory of Lenny May



By Federica Cedeno

One moment, I was navigating the hallways of my charter school the next, I was stepping into the world of Riverside. I joined the Riverside community late, but that "flash" of a transition changed my trajectory in the best way possible.

Leaving a charter school for a public one is usually described as a horror story. You expect to wander the halls feeling left out, but for me, the transition wasn't about being new. It was about a reunion.

Many of the friends I had known since middle school had already transferred to Riverside years prior. While I spent my underclassman years in a small, curated bubble where I felt like I couldn't fully be myself, they were already building a life here.

When I finally made the leap after hours of convincing my parents, who were afraid I'd get lost in such a "big place" I was starting over, yet I was terrified they wouldn't recognize me. I told my mom I was simply bored of the same thirty faces and needed a bigger world. That fear of being forgotten finally disappeared the second I walked into the journalism room. Seeing those familiar faces welcome me.

The most immediate difference I noticed at Riverside was the diversity. At my old school, the social circles were fixed and everyone felt the same. At Riverside, the student body is a true community. I saw this clearly during Hispanic Heritage Night, organized by Mrs. Ballon. Seeing students bring their families to celebrate their roots with music and laughter made me realize how much I had been missing.

I quickly realized how much I loved having friends from all different walks of life. I guarantee if I had come to this school with a negative outlook, it would have gone a lot differently.

Looking back, I realize that the "flash" wasn't just the speed of the change. It was the moment the lights finally came on, showing me that the "bigger world" I asked for was exactly where I was meant to be.

FLASH (pero en Español)

Por Federica Cedeno

En un momento, estaba recorriendo los pasillos de mi escuela chárter al siguiente; estaba entrando al mundo de Riverside. Me uní a la comunidad de Riverside tarde, pero ese "flash" de transición cambió mi trayectoria de la mejor manera posible.

Dejar una escuela chárter por una pública suele describirse como una historia de terror. Uno espera vagar por los pasillos sintiéndose excluido, pero para mí, la transición no se trató de ser la "nueva". Se trató de un reencuentro. Muchos de los amigos que conocía desde la secundaria ya se habían trasladado a Riverside años antes. Mientras yo pasaba mis primeros años de preparatoria en una burbuja pequeña y cuidada donde sentía que no podía ser yo misma por completo, ellos ya estaban construyendo una vida aquí.

Cuando finalmente di el salto después de horas convenciendo a mis padres, quienes temían que me perdiera en un lugar tan "grande", sentí que estaba empezando de cero. Sin embargo, me aterraba que no me reconocieran. Le dije a mi mamá que simplemente estaba aburrida de ver las mismas treinta caras y que necesitaba un mundo más amplio. Ese miedo a ser olvidada desapareció en el segundo en que entré al salón de periodismo y vi esos rostros familiares dándome la bienvenida.

La diferencia más inmediata que noté en Riverside fue la diversidad. En mi antigua escuela, los círculos sociales eran fijos y todos parecían iguales. En Riverside, el cuerpo estudiantil es una verdadera comunidad. Lo vi claramente durante la Noche de la Herencia Hispana, organizada por la Sra. Ballón. Ver a los estudiantes traer a sus familias para celebrar sus raíces con música y risas me hizo darme cuenta de todo lo que me había estado perdiendo. Rápidamente comprendí cuánto me gustaba tener amigos de todos los ámbitos de la vida. Garantizo que, si hubiera llegado a esta escuela con una actitud negativa, todo habría sido muy diferente.

Al mirar atrás, me doy cuenta de que el "flash" no fue solo la rapidez del cambio. Fue el momento en que las luces finalmente se encendieron, mostrándome que ese "mundo más grande" que tanto pedía era exactamente donde debía estar.



By Rory O'Connor

My alarm goes off at 7:30 am… time for another day of high school.

I'm exhausted. I put on tan cargo pants and my navy Ithaca College sweatshirt (awful, I know).

Nine o' clock rolls around and my sister still hasn't woken up. I get her out of bed and we rush to the car. Our seven-minute drive down Cole Mill to school takes just three.

My stomach turns as soon as we pull into the school parking lot, as it does every single morning.

Freshman year is rough. I pull out my phone and go to the screen shot of my class schedule. Yesterday I got lost and was late to class because I couldn't remember my room number.

I feel like I'm stuck on repeat. I walk through the white halls, drown out my instructors with Drake in my headphones. As my homework piles up, there is no end to high school in sight. But little moments, like having friends to eat lunch with, give me hope.

Field hockey practice gives me something to look forward to. The field smells of freshly mowed grass and the sun is shining. My shins are pale, a result of my shinguard tan.

Maybe school won't be so bad, I think on the drive home. Maybe it will fly by.

WHOOSH.

When I wake up the next morning I am exhausted again, even though I didn't have to get up until 10. The house is quiet and empty. It isn't my sister running late this morning. It's me.

My NC State pennant hangs over my nightstand.

I throw on sweatpants and a t-shirt and grab my backpack that's resting against the closet door in my room. My purple cap and gown hang above it.

I have 30 minutes until I have to leave to make it to Ms. Allman's econ class on time. It's the last credit I need to graduate.

The drive is 3 minutes long, just like it was 3 years ago. The girls I call my best friends now were people I wasn't speaking to freshman year. We take my car to lunch every day. It smells of perfume and leftover food and is scattered with all of my friends' clothes and papers from our graduation meeting.

I go home after just two classes at school (thank you, Durham Tech). I drive the same car as my sister did 3 years ago. My house is the same home, but the driveway doesn't hold my parents and siblings' cars. Instead it is lined with cars of work crews and boxes as my parents prepare to sell the house and move to Vermont.

The past four years have been anything but easy and simple. The anxiety my sweet, 14-year-old self felt over who I would eat lunch with and if I would be able to find my classes has been replaced four years later with anxiety over trying to enjoy my last summer with all of my friends.

My advice to underclassmen? Stop waiting for what comes next all the time, enjoy the moment you're in because the next day you might just be waking up next to your cap and gown.



By Chandler Cates

Going into high school, I always heard, "Don't expect to exit high school with the friends you entered with."

I prepared for the worst. I always thought my friends and I would get into an argument of some sort and have a big falling out, leading to us never speaking to each other again until our class reunion.

Fortunately, that was not the case. I'm still best friends with my classmates from elementary school, middle school and, of course, high school.

I met my oldest friend, Javion, in first grade at Hillandale Elementary School. We became best friends almost immediately, as many kids do, and we decided one day on the playground that we would always be in each other's lives, no matter what, and we've done that.

I met Dashae in fourth grade. We became friends when we'd go back and forth on which was better, Marvel or DC, and still be able to laugh and get along afterward. I think the choice is obvious…it's Marvel, but that's besides the point.

In middle school, I met two of my best friends on the same day and at the same time. I met Grace and Georgi in the Carrington Middle School girls' locker room after walking the track for one period.

At the time, I had an Avengers: Endgame phone case and Avengers folders. Grace had just fallen in love with Marvel the summer before school started, and we bonded immediately. Georgi and I both have very similar personalities and goofed off almost every day after.

After this day, we spent every day together. We'd pick each other as partners, walk the track together, play volleyball, basically everything you could do in a gym class.

I've made good friends at Riverside, too. I met my friend Reá freshman year, in world history. She was pretty quiet and reserved, and I'm big on making sure everyone feels comfortable in the same space. We've had a class together almost every year of high school, so of course we grew closer over time.

The same thing happened with another one of my friends. I met Nellie in freshman year as well. We both took intro to journalism and had various partner assignments together. During sophomore year, we had the same first and second period and would walk to and from class together. Now, we've been in the same class throughout all of high school, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

Making new friends and keeping friendships have been extremely important to me. You have to remember to focus on the people, not the places, and that even though you're separate, you'll always be together.

Now that college is about to start, I try my hardest to remember that fact, even though I'll be about two hours away from each of my friends, they're just a phone call away.



By Saul Janiak Stein

I think people get so caught up in their routine that they slowly become more and more exhausted. The thing that kept me most excited through junior year was finding ways to romanticize every aspect of my day, and more often than not the things I focused on were almost entirely mundane.

While I believe it to be true myself, most people with whom I've spoken on the matter don't believe their pessimism. Or rather, when asked most people would say that they are optimistic or overall in a good mood more times than not. But this isn't about that. It's about not feeling shame in caring for cliche things, like enjoying the breeze or noticing the birdsong.

Letting yourself be more excited is the best way to beat school burnout. The can opener cafe and the durham library could both attest to this on my behalf. The can opener has an upper deck area where you can bring both your coffee and your computer. Most evenings not only is the cafe quiet but almost no one is on the upper deck at all. What might be a small thing to most is make a big deal to myself, bringing myself to relish moments as simple as being able to study outside with my coffee.

But it's not just about what you do after school is let out. In fact becoming enamored with the school day itself is both a harder and more rewarding task. Most days if it is nice enough outside my second period class is allowed to go outside for work. As long as the screen glare isn't too bad, that third part of the second period is often the highlight of my day and it only is so because I let it be that way. I've come to let myself love the work I do in journalism .

Part of the reason I can love doing my work is by changing my scenery to working outside. This way you're not spending all your time working in homogenous spaces. Being outside in almost every weather surely beats the staredown caused from harsh fluorescent lights of school and my bedroom.

While I'm not exactly enjoying things that other people are entirely missing out on, by embracing such optimism and excitement each day I can promise you everything becomes a lot better.

By Tula Winton



Ring.

I am fourteen. My alarm goes off later than I am used to. I break three years of tradition by waking at 7:45.

Underestimated and overambitious, I do not hesitate as I walk through the double doors of high school for the first time.

Taking a deep breath, I inhale a new smell, different from the hallways of my middle school.

I am yet to adjust to the scent. I am yet to adjust to everything.

Ring.

I am fifteen. I answer the phone with my heart beating too fast. In that split second of silence before conversation begins, there are infinite possibilities of where the next moment could go.

As soon as someone speaks, the possibilities disappear, and I am stuck in a conversation that feels like going backwards.

Ring.

I am sixteen. The clock runs out while I am hunched over, nose just inches above question fifty-five, two hands threaded through my hair.

The nerves have not gone to rest even after the exam is done, and pressure hangs thick and hot like August air.

A mantra floats in the back of my mind, constantly whispering a loop of anxieties about college, test scores, and grades.

I am now seventeen, spending my days in the same school, with the same backpack, the same car, the same number on my uniform.

Everything is simple for the last time, and the simplicity of it makes the future feel even more hollow.

I am gutted, I am scraped raw, and I have given four years of my youth to a cement building that does not give back.

If the exchange involves time I cannot get back, is it an exchange, or is it a sacrifice? Exchange implies give-and-take, it implies balance. Sacrifice implies loss.

For four years, I have let the three pulse ring of an intercom bell dictate my life. The rings tell us to stay, leave, wait, and we obey it with a numbing Pavlovian devotion.

It was hot that first August. It will be hot when I leave in June. There is something cathartic about how I will still wait for the bell even as I listen to it ring for the last time.

And when the final bell does ring, I will exit the same way I entered: anxious for the future, unfaltering despite it.





By Austin Wymore

I'm a fan of the theory that our universe is a four dimensional object—three dimensions and time.

The past and future might just be on the other side of some invisible wall we can't reach. The consequence of this is that our world as humans is based on this narrow view we have of our existence. Each of our lives is just a sliver of some larger picture.

The beauty in that limitation is that through art and expression, we can celebrate our separate experiences in a relatable and impactful way.

I was digging through my attic in 2022 when I uncovered something I didn't know I needed. It was an old camera my family used to take photos with. My dad found it useless because his smartphone can take higher quality photos, but practical or not, I took the camera and began shooting anyway.

There's something special about holding an object made specifically for capturing photos. My phone is there when I need to take a quick snapshot, but holding the camera tells me to stop and look around—to take in the moment and find something worth preserving.

Looking back on the memories I've captured from the past four years—landscapes of far away mountains, blurry photos from parties, or stills of plants and insects from walks—is like seeing into a window through that fourth dimension. I'm able to go back to the person I was in the moment, remember what I saw, smelled, and felt behind the frame.

I cherish each one of my photos regardless of their content—simply because I know it was me behind the camera who chose to take the shot.



By Norah Lubeck

I always noticed my mood shift when the clouds rolled and covered the sky. I would struggle to fall asleep when thunder rumbled and struggle to wake up when the sky was dark grey.

In the summer before my senior year, I went to the Bay Area to tour Berkeley. San Francisco was covered in a thick layer of fog. I was driving up roads in the Berkeley Hills for a hike with my aunt, feeling drained by the weather.

But something started to change as we went up. The fog grew thicker as we got closer, until it slowly began to disappear altogether. I looked behind me to see we had passed the clouds, and above us sat a crisp, blue sky, not a cloud in sight. I couldn't help but smile.

Last month, I went on a backpacking trip with my friends. Our plan was to cover 13 miles in three days. The first day, everything went well. The second day, the clouds started rolling in as we hiked up and up, trying to get to the peak of our route. Somewhere along the way, we took a wrong turn, an unfortunate mistake that cost us a few extra miles and hours. On the trek back to our original spot, hungry and tired, it started to rain.

Drip by drip, then all at once.

I pulled on my rain jacket, looked at the ground, and walked.

On and on, I repeated numbers or song lyrics in my head to pass the time, to find a distraction from being now hungry, tired, wet, and cold.

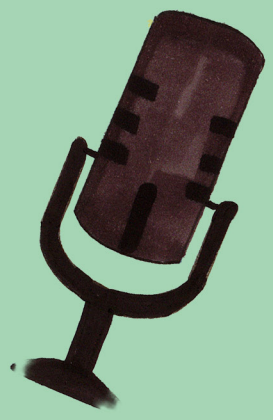
Eventually, we got back to the trail we needed to be on. We boiled some water, made some mac and cheese, and walked on.

The trail took us to mountaintops overlooking larger mountain ranges shrouded in fog. As we climbed onto rocks and looked out at what seemed to be never-ending peaks, I began to see the beauty that the clouds can bring, too. After reaching our campsite, the sun started to come out. I took a deep breath and just sat and watched.

Each experience was a reminder that things change.

When I look at the sky, I see a lot of different times in my life. Now I know that sometimes I just need to push through a situation, one foot in front of the other. Other times, I need to remember that the blue sky still shines above, even if I can't see it.

SUPERLATIVES



Most likely to start a podcast:
Ezra Norberg

Most likely to park between the lines:
Georgi Armstrong

Most likely to travel the world:
Eloise Egger





Most likely to win Love Island
Violet Davis

Most likely to be a hand model:
Nellie Purdy

Most likely to comsume energy drinks like they're water:
Isabelle Abadie



Most likely to be a Michellin Star chef:
Saul Janiak Stein



Most likely to pull a push door
Ben Hodges

Most likely to Win a Nobel Peace Prize:
Nelson Kerr-Ritchie

Most likely to marry their high school sweetheart:
Elijah Taylor

Most likely to be an RHS teacher:
David May

• GRAPHICS BY TULA WINTON