

THE

VOICE

16
YEARS!

MAY 2016

**SPECIAL
EDITION**

A LOOK BACK AT 16 YEARS OF

**FRIENDSHIPS,
COMMUNITY &
TELLING OUR STORIES**

ON THE INSIDE: Stories from our own experience, creative writing from past and present contributors, and more photos!

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THE
Voice

NEWSLETTER LAUNCH 2015



EXCLUSIVE
BACKSTAGE
PHOTOS!



about me...



I am

JOHN LANGER

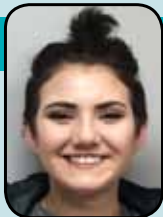
- ★ I believe in religion, education and equality.
- ★ I like people who are honest, funny and energetic.
- ★ If people really knew me, they'd know my likes, my views and my values.



I am

PHOENIX WELLS

- ★ I believe in you.
- ★ I like people who are genuine, understanding and accepting, alive (generally), gentle and patient.
- ★ If people really knew me, they'd know my favourite Disney character, my Hogwarts house and my love for science.



I am

BERI COOPER

- ★ I believe that every person has some good in them and every downside has a bright side.
- ★ I like people who are funny, caring, accepting, friendly, honest and happy.



I am

NATHAN GORMAN

- ★ I believe that there is no heaven or hell. However there is an afterlife.
- ★ I like people who are funny, kind, outgoing, energetic and honest.
- ★ If people really knew me, they'd know that I'm in CAS, and have been since I was one year old.

Change

By Jennifer-Joy Robichaud (2011)

Change is something we all fear — whether it is a big fear or a little one, we all fear it. But this fear is natural and normal.



Truly, I think it's part of our instincts — the fear is meant to protect us from the unknown. But change is necessary in our lives, from growing up to changing schools to changing classes mid-year in high school.

Change was the key to our evolution, if you believe that sort of thing. According to some, it made us who we are today — the evolution of our genetics made us better, smarter humans.

So, though it may be scary, change is a good thing. It teaches us better than any professor ever could.

Writing

By Tamara Cooper (2016)

A lot of people such as me find it super hard to express how we feel in a context that isn't written.



To me, writing is a place I can be free and do as I please. I can be who I really am without the fear of judgment. It helps me in a way talking never could. I feel more alive expressing in written form or art. I can really get out how I feel.

There was a point in my life where I was afraid of so much. The unknown was the scariest thing in my world. When introduced to writing I was so unsure of how I felt about it. But the more I tried, the more it became a huge part of my life and has become so important in my day-to-day life.

Misconceptions about youth in care

By Beri Cooper (2016)

One of the biggest misconceptions that I felt people had about me when I was in care was that I wasn't "enough". I didn't meet society's standards of the average teenage girl and I was different than most other teenagers I went to school with or was friends with. I felt that I was pitied or looked down upon by others sometimes because I lived in a group home; that teachers or parents, even staff thought "oh she's bad because she lives in a home".

In almost all cases it's out of the youths' control when being placed in care and they're not bad at all. There are so many underlying factors and different aspects that people don't consider when referring to youth in care.

The lowest time living in care for me would have been when I was discharged from my first placement. I grew to be very attached to the staff, the area and the house itself. I called them every day for weeks after just to chat or ask them how things were going. I felt lonely living elsewhere, like something was missing from my life and I fell into a bit of a depression.

Spending most of my time indoors, I overate, secluded myself from others and dwelled mostly on not being able to live in that house. Eventually, I started going out more and began gradually getting over it. And with the weeks that followed I was invited to come live in a house right around the corner.

Finding comfort in life

By John Langer (2016)

"The old man sits all by himself and thinks of better years, when he used to believe in stars, and would dream away his fears. The young boy moves so fast he doesn't see the stars above, and all his dreams are crushed by an old man who didn't dream enough." –Tonight by Tyler Joseph

As a child, I couldn't wait to grow up and tackle the real world. But to me, I didn't know what the real world was, and I still don't. Most of us don't, every day is a new learning experience for us.

Most of my older relatives would tell me not to dream away my childhood; "it's some of the best times of your life". To me, I couldn't see why. I think turning 16 sort of showed me in a way. I had always

“ There are so many underlying factors and different aspects that people don't consider when referring to youth in care. ”

I learned that being a youth in care — or in other words, a youth constantly being surrounded by temporary placements and people — to never let myself get so attached to something that was out of my control and to be open and accepting of new things and ideas. Now, I never pass up an opportunity to meet new people and I always order something different on the menu!

By Nathan Gorman (2016)

Some misconceptions of youth in care are:

- They're unwanted,
- They're only trouble,
- They screwed up their life.

These misconceptions are believed only because youth have posed these at one point or another. One youth can set the standards for all youth in care.

They're not fair but we can't change what people think. However we can prove them wrong if we set our mind to it.

said I'd be the first in line to receive my driving license. Now, I'm 17 and I still have no plans at getting one.

I really love these lyrics. In other parts it states: "The young boy wants to move ahead, but the old man sings rewind."

When is that point in life when we no longer dream of growing older? Is there a span of time where "we feel we're neither nor, not wanting to go back again, and not wanting to go forth."

I'm now comfortable with where I am in life. I sometimes have a wish or two where I was 18, or maybe 27 or something, but it's settling to accept where you are in life, and let the future unfold itself.



Newsletter group with special guest Shauntay Grant. (2012)

Judging youth

By Sasha Sahabandu (2011)

I think adults judge teenagers based on their looks because I have had it happen to me — a lot. I went in a store and one of their employees was following me and it was really annoying. So I asked her why she was following me and she said “it’s standard procedure” when there was a lot of people in the store.

So I admit I got a little mad but I wasn’t that mad. And the girl had a very frightened look on her face and she threw her hands up to her face and begged me not to beat her up. I think adults mistake teens by the way they dress and the way they act.

I know a lot of teenagers that act a lot worse than other people. But it is hard to be judged by people who don’t even know you. In a way I think it’s kind of like bullying because people say stuff about you and they are just judging what they see and not what they know.

You might see a person with horrible ripped-up clothes who could actually be a cool person inside. Or you can see a person with nice neat and stylish clothes and they are actually a total snob.

Just looking for my place in the world

By Shakisha Downey (2010)

As a minority in society, people in our communities think we are so much different than the rest of our generation. Foster kids are stereotyped as out of control teenagers who have trouble with the law or their parents have trouble with the law.

In all reality, we aren’t that different. Yeah, we have some anger, but what kids don’t? In some cases, it’s the stereotype itself that gets up our anger.

Just like every other kid in this world, we just want to belong and have a chance to be successful. People need to understand that and respect us for who we are and the situation we live in.

Little do they know that we have less control over our lives than they think. Their attitudes toward us determine how we deal with living in foster care.



Executive director's note

This is The Voice that almost never was.

Last summer, as we wrestled with the impact of major funding cuts from

the provincial government, we weren't sure we could push ahead with another year of the Newsletter Project.

Other non-profit organizations in the region that help the disabled, the disadvantaged and youth were similarly dealing with a slash in public funding. The easy path might have been to throw up our hands and admit defeat.

But the board of the Youth Voices of Nova Scotia, which oversees this project, is a great believer in the value of the Newsletter Project. For 16 years, the project has given a voice and a focus to young adolescents living in care, and has brought some joy and empowerment to their lives.

So we decided to push ahead. Though we had a smaller than usual group, the enthusiasm was full speed as always. We put an emphasis on writing this year, and so we wrote, and read, and shared and discussed the stories the group produced.

Though I've been involved in writing and journalism for many years, I'm always fascinated and impressed by the honesty and insight the youth bring to their writing. Whatever shield they protect themselves with seems to lower when they write about their joys and struggles of living in care.

So we decided we'd look back at some of the powerful writing over the previous years along with some fresh stories and poetry from this year's group. It was difficult to choose from among so many great pieces that have appeared in The Voice.

During our time together at our weekly sessions, we delve into various topics that affect the lives of young people living in care — developing emotional literacy, considering and planning for the future, creating resumes while learning how to improve chances of getting a good job, talking about healthy relationships...

But the cornerstone is developing their "voice" — a confident, thoughtful and bold reflection of the young people they are becoming. We have open and frank discussions about whatever is on their mind — from challenges in school, and hurdles of living in group homes or with foster families, to neck tattoos and piercing. Those free-wheeling conversations are often as informative for me as for the youth!

Since taking on the director's role in 2008, I have met so many outstanding and interesting young people, each with their life challenges but each with unique gifts and outlooks. A very few stayed only a week or two — most have remained with the Newsletter as long as their busy lives allowed them.

I have watched some grow up, and transition from quiet and bashful pre-teens into confident young adults ready to take on the world. And that's the beauty and strength of this unique program. By providing a safe and supportive oasis in the midst of the swirling chaos of life, the Newsletter Project helps the youth find a safe landing spot.

Over the 16 years since Andrew Safer conceived this program, scores of youth in care have come through the doors, made new friends, participated in the program and had their stories published in The Voice. Through all the change, there is one constant — Ammy Purcell.

Ammy has been deeply involved with the Newsletter Project practically from day one. She arrived as a youth at the urging of her social worker, stayed, became a facilitator and a member of the board of directors. She has been an indispensable cog in the weekly sessions. I can count on one hand the sessions she has missed in all these years, and only because she was likely too sick to get out of bed!

So I send a big thank you to Ammy for all her selfless dedication to the Newsletter Project. Thanks also to our enthusiastic board of directors, to the great folks at the Phoenix Learning and Employment Centre, to the committed funders and various supporters who have allowed us to offer this program to youth in care in our city.



Sandy & Nathan at the Newsletter launch in 2009



Facilitator's message

By Ammy Purcell

I would like to start off by saying that this year has been the most difficult year of my entire life. But once again, the Newsletter Project has been the one single constant thing I could rely on.

My father took sick early in the fall and I needed to step up and care for him as he was on very serious medication. It was a very stressful time and I wasn't dealing with it well. By mid December he was admitted to hospital.

I could no longer care for him on my own. The doctors had no idea what was happening to his health and why he was in so much constant pain. He was confused and delirious and in need of constant care and attention. I spent a lot of time at the hospital with him.

But even in his altered state of mind he still remembered that Wednesday night was Newsletter night. He would always ask how the sessions were going or what we did that night. The Newsletter was almost the only thing we could have an actual conversation about. That and my full-time job and how that was going.

I really think that it's because the Newsletter has been such a constant in my life for so long. It's a part of me and it will be forever. I think if someone had to describe my life in just a few words they would say Wal-Mart and the Newsletter.

Unfortunately my father passed away this January due to a heart problem, before the doctors were able to find out what was causing him to be in so much pain. It turns out that he had a pseudo-inflammatory tumor in his skull and neck

and that was causing all the problems.

Dad and I had been through a lot together. He raised me from just an infant all by himself. I took him for granted a lot in my younger years and I regretted that later in life. We definitely had our problems but he really did do everything in his ability to make sure I had a good life and I thank him so much for that. I regret not telling him that often enough.

So now I live all by myself in his house with his cats and am really forced to be an adult, something I should have done many years ago — and it is terrifying. Everything is changing so quickly and I have never been a person who embraces change very well at all.

But through all of this I still come to the Newsletter every Wednesday. We may have had a small group this year but that doesn't matter. I feel like the Newsletter is my anchor — it holds things down for me to keep everything from spinning out of control.

Every other aspect of my life now is completely upside down but I still have this program to keep some form of normalcy and I appreciate that so very much. Everyone needs an anchor sometimes, and the Newsletter Project is mine.



Lucas and Ammy at the Newsletter in 2008.

The future

By Phoenix Wells (2016)

Where do you see yourself in the future? What an under-appreciated question.

Not enough people realize that at any moment in their life you can be whoever and go wherever you wish and love whatever you want. I feel like it's a question that's too open-ended for a lot of people, too scary, and that's why we tend to avoid it. But the best way to predict the future is to create it yourself.

“Isn't it better to cross a line and suffer consequences, than to stare at the line for the rest of your life, wondering “what if”?”

It can be scary to contemplate, especially in today's world where you ask an 18-year old to decide their future when a month ago they had to ask to go to the restroom. But it's yours to create. And if your dreams don't scare you a little bit, I don't think you're dreaming big enough.

Sure, sometimes things don't happen the way you imagine them, but isn't that why you take chances? Isn't it better to cross a line and suffer consequences, than to stare at the line for the rest of your life, wondering “what if”? Because sometimes,

you never know how perfect something could turn out to be. The future belongs to those who are willing to get their hands dirty.

My future is still developing. I've hit bumps and that's okay. I know that I'll be able to tell my adopted children that I am, in fact, older than Google, and blow their minds. I know that some day I'll be living in a quaint flat, walls covered from corner to corner, floor to ceiling in things I write, or stumble across and think I should see every day, and pictures of things and people I love.

I know I'm going to come home one day and have my children climbing all over me, and we'll talk about aliens and superheroes and princes and princesses and bullying.

I know I'm going to teach my children to be decent human beings, to stick up for themselves, and each other. Family doesn't end in blood, and family means no one gets left behind. I know I'll teach them to take care of the Earth, and in return the Earth will take care of them. To plant gardens, to raise animals and care for them properly.

My children are damn well going to have a childhood they won't spend a lifetime recovering from.



John, Beri and Phoenix share a laugh at the Wednesday evening session.

No one to tuck you in at night

Manda Jarvis (2004)

I may not know how it feels to go to sleep on an empty stomach, nor do I know how it feels to only have the clothes on your back, and no bed to sleep in at night.

But I do know how it feels to have no one to tuck me in at night when I feel scared, or to have someone rub my head when I feel ill, or bail me out of trouble, no matter what kind.

But I do know one thing: you always have yourself.

The science of plumbing

By Trevor Dakins (2003)

Personally, I don't think there is much, if anything, that is really wrong with "the system." Sure there are lots of way to improve, but the most effective of those is more money, but that is just not possible, at least right now.

This picture displays John, the plumber, assessing the damage or problems with the "pipes of care", but his wrench just isn't big enough to tighten any of the loose joints. In the same respect, does the government have a big enough wrench, or budget, to seal the leaks in the pipes of the system?

BELOW: "John the Plummer" by Trevor Dakins, 2003



Looking back on the Newsletter

By Lucas Kreft (2016)



As you get older, time seems to pass very fast.

Sometimes you are focused on something, and then an hour seems to go by in an instant. You remember a moment in your life, reflecting if it was positive or negative. You can remember distinct details as if you were back in time, right in that moment.

I look back and remember the Newsletter Project, the youth who I tried to guide in life, the friends I met, and the accomplishments and opportunities that were given to me.

I remember the activities and mentors that would come in and engage the youth. I still feel like it is more than an organization — it's a family. Being away from the Newsletter for five years makes me feel like I am still connected and part of a family. I am not good with reading minds, but I'm sure friends who have been with the Newsletter would say the same — this is a family, a 15-year old bond, something very hard to break.

To my friends who are still involved, you are the real hero. Continue helping and mentoring, guide the youth to be positive and grow as a family.

I haven't forgotten about the cookies, five years later. Those were good cookies. I reflected back in time and reflected on the cookies!

Too many cooks

By LoriAnne MacPhe (2002)

Being in care gets on my nerves because there's so many different staff and stuff in group homes, and they all have different opinions about stuff.

And also, your social worker has total control over everything you do, where you can stay on overnights, if you can go in a car with certain people, who you are allowed to hang with, who you can talk to on the phone, and all that craziness.

They have control over how much money you get for stuff you need and stuff you don't really need.

A DREAM SHE WILL NEVER FORGET

By Ashley Baxter (2010)

A quiet sleepless night
She tosses and turns
Sweating violently through the clothes she wears
Staining the sheets below.
A dream she will never forget
He stands with his arms wide open
But her feet won't let her go.
The rain beats against her window
The wind brushes a tree against the house
But she won't wake.
She screams his name
He doesn't move and he's slowly walking away
And she can't chase after him.
Her father will never come for her
Only in her dreams does he love her.
Laying awake now
With tears streaming down her cheeks.
A dream she will never forget.



I LET GO

By Jaydee Riley (2009)

I let go, and let it fade away
This pain that I once had
It's time for me to move forward, live big, and dream
Wake up and then I see.

Times are hard, but then I let 'em go
I move forward and attempt
Then I fall; there's no one there to pick me up.

I sit there in a ball, and ask myself why
I try to move forward and try again
I know there will be a time when I see the light.

I let go, and let it fade away
This pain that I once had
It's time for me to move forward, live big, and dream
Wake up and then I see.



PRAYER

By Tina Doucette (2003)

I pray, for my sister to find happiness
I pray, for my brother to have success
I pray, for my foster mom
For reasons that cannot be named
I pray, for everyone in the world
Who has to grow up too fast
I pray, that we can move on
When something goes in my path.



TO FIND MY WINGS AND SOAR

By Haley Glaspey (2009)

As time flies by there's always that moment
Where I just stop and remember what you said that day.
You said, "No matter what happens when I leave,
I will always stay in your life. I'm leaving her, not you."
That's what you said to me.

So yes, you lied
But part of it is my fault.
It was my fault because I made the mistake
Of letting only a few words sink into my heart.
I made the mistake then,
But you left me to pick up the pieces.
Now I trust nobody, not even myself.
Now it's time for me to let go
Find my wings and SOAR.



DISAPPEARING

By John Langer (2016)



For my next act, I show you a classic: the art of disappearing. Some say that seeing is believing, but what about the things we encounter that our brains are blind to?

It is simple. Close your eyes, and witness my presence fade into thin air. Feel me leave your life. Can you feel me slipping? Leaving you hanging on the edge while you scratch your head and wonder, where in the world did I go?

I leave you with a simple memory. I will make an impact on your life. I will be there for you when you fall and you'll catch me when I do the same.

But any day now, I will abandon you. Don't blame me; it's just what I do. I don't enjoy it; I simply got comfortable. If this doesn't make sense, I'll clear that up right away. I will leave you when you need me most. I won't walk to you; I will walk away.

POEM

By Rebecca Moore (2009)



I am happy.
Time is in my favour.
Productivity and positivity are my daily goals,
Thinking right and doing good.
I respect myself and others.
I am a free individual.
I have my own mind,
My own thoughts,
My own goals,
My own morals.
I will support those who need help.
I am fully aware of my personal power.

FEAR

By Tamara Cooper (2016)



The fear of the unknown, the damage and neglect holding you back.
Feeling alone, scared in pain because of the false hope of change.
Spending countless nights in the dark, fragile in tears.

DON'T JUDGE ME

By Elyse Saubier (2006)



Don't judge me for what I say or do.
Don't judge me if I act like a fool.
Don't judge me for my clothes.
Sooner or later yours will wear and tear also.
Don't judge me for not having brand name stuff.
Don't judge me if I sometimes act tough.
Don't judge me if I think of myself as ugly or fat.
You don't know how much self-esteem I lack.
Don't judge me if I say something mean from a bad mood,
Because you can also be crude.
Don't judge me for things I like,
So what if I don't have a bike?
Don't judge me because I am quiet,
I've just learned to keep my mouth shut.
Don't judge me because I'm not smart,
I make up for it with a very big heart.
Don't judge me for what I do or don't have,
It's really not that bad.
Don't judge me because I don't have any friends,
I've just been burned too many times.
Don't judge me because of my looks,
It's not my fault I never had what it took.
I know it's easier said than done,
But please don't judge me because you think I'm poor or a slum.
Don't judge me because of the scars on my wrist,
You don't know how hard it is.
Don't judge me because you don't know me,
And until you know what I've gone through,
Then you'll know why I act the way I do.

What would I say to people regarding challenges of a youth in care?

By Nathan Gorman (2016)

I would tell them that life in care isn't good or bad. It's both, only because we face struggles every day and we don't know how to face them.

If we don't have people to believe in us, we don't have anything.

Challenge is hard and we need help; some people don't know how to ask for it and some just don't want help. Regardless, we need help and don't assume that it's good or bad.

Worst things about care

By Jessi Eisan (2006)

The worst thing about being in care is when you are first coming into care because you are usually young. CAS and police come to your house and take you. They put you into a home where you don't know where you're going.

You're at a strange home with strange people. I think the worst part about that is when you go to the house and you don't understand why you're there, and you just want to go back home with your mom or dad or both.

“ [My foster mom]’s always there for me and by my side. ”

When I first came into care, I was really scared and mad but I didn't really understand why I wasn't with my mom but due to certain circumstances, I was removed from my home.

But I've been in care for five years now. I've moved from place to place to place but I love who I'm with now. My foster mom helps me when times are hard and when I'm in trouble. She's always there for me and by my side.

CHANGE

By Stefan Illsley (2011)



Change

Change all the hate to kindness

Change all the problems in the world

Change hatred into love

Change all the past into dust

Change enemies into friends

Change family issues into family tolerance

Change sadness into pride

Change fights into fitness

Change

Taken from home

By Jennah-lee Howe (2007)

When I was two years old I was apprehended from my home because my mother was a drug addict. She used to bring home different men almost every other night. They would hit her and treat her like she was a nobody.

Sometimes she would leave me and my baby sister in the house alone while she went out with some guy, and that's why I got apprehended from my home.

The strongest people around

By Lawrence Pickrem (2008)

Youth in care are probably the strongest people around because they are the ones who are facing larger problems than most people could even imagine growing up. We don't need to worry about whether or not our clothes look good and match. We often have more pressing problems. Things like where we'll sleep tonight, what and how we will eat, and constantly worrying about money and the lack of support we are receiving.

In the end, this makes us stronger individuals who are more able to live in the harsh world we are finding ourselves in, more often than not. People who live sheltered lives never get the benefit of experiencing these things or gain the knowledge that youth in care do.

An unforgettable Christmas

By Jamie May (2007)

A negative memory that really sticks out for me would be one Christmas when I was about 10 years old. It was Christmas Eve and my dad was drinking as usual because "it's the holidays".

I was in my room watching a Christmas special on TV when I heard them start to fight. I kept saying to myself, "Please, not tonight, any other time but tonight."

As usual, bad luck was on my side again and it escalated. He started to break and throw things at my mom, the wall, and the balcony door. When that didn't satisfy him, he knocked over the Christmas tree with one swing of his hand.

While all this was going on, I had climbed down from my bed and tried to hide behind my dresser because I didn't want him to get me. I don't know exactly how long I was there, but eventually my mom came in and told me to call the police, quickly, because he was "starting" to get out of hand.

I climbed out from behind my dresser, called the police, and tried to tell them everything even though I was crying really bad. The guy kept me on the phone and tried to calm me down till the officers got there.

He told me I was very cooperative, considering what was going on. When the cops got there they tried to find out what happened and my mom kept saying "get him the hell out of here!" She told them what happened and they took him to the "drunk tank" till the next morning when they let him out.

When he came home they both acted like nothing happened. I couldn't believe it? This is one Christmas I'll never forget.

Lowest time in care, and how to cope

By Nathan Gorman (2016)

I feel the lowest times in care are when I have social worker switches. It's sad because I'd connect with someone really well, and then lose them.

When this happens I can't control it so I get upset and sit alone with my music and writing. I get attached, and don't know how to let go.

What holidays mean to me

By Tamara Cooper (2016)

Holidays to me are a time you get to spend with your family and friends but mostly family. It's a time where you can all get together and you can share the finer things in life like being together as one.

My favourite time of year is Christmas. I used to love spending it as a family with my sisters and being a part of something special with the rest of my family. I can even remember the days my mom was a part of Christmas.

We also went to my grandparents to spend Christmas day with them, sharing amazing memories and having the biggest most amazing Christmas dinner together.

Being home with the whole family is always special to me, although this year was really different. I didn't get to spend it with family. I got to spend it with someone very special to me. It was still great, but Christmas will always be my favourite.



Self-portrait drawing by John Langer.



John, Ammy and Phoenix at a screening for *The Race*.

Food for thought #1 By Phoenix Wells (2016)

It terrifies me to think that some people are so small-minded to actually think we're the only life forms in the universe, ever.

Do you ever try to comprehend how many universes there could even possibly be, let alone probably, and how much *stuff* there is *in each one of them*? There's everything, everywhere. And how small everything really is, the ant crawling on my hand right now, the coffee table, me, you? No matter how big we think, it's still so tiny.

To put it into perspective, if the sun was shrunk down to the size of a white blood cell, the Milky Way Galaxy would still be the size of the continental United States. The universe is big, we know that. The crazy part is, the universe isn't actually just bigger than you can possibly comprehend, but according to recent evidence, billions of times larger than that. What it says, is that the universe is big. So big, that just that fact, just its mere bigness, is enough to blow your tiny ant mind. And it just keeps getting bigger.

The Hubble ultra-deep field image, the most massive picture ever captured, shows approximately 10,000 galaxies. Each of those galaxies contains anywhere from ten million to one trillion stars. The average star is roughly a million times the size of Earth.

And yet, with all that junk, the Universe is more than 90 percent empty space. All of that, in this tiny photo; a photo that took 400 orbits and 800 exposures to capture. And the kicker? What makes this photo so all-in-one awe-inspiring,

and breathtaking, and absolutely, nauseatingly terrifying? This image covers one thirteen-millionth of the entire night sky (That's 1/13,000,000).

If you're like me, it leaves you alternately awash with spiritual wonder and a view of the human race to be, actually, so very, very small. Can you possibly imagine that much space and that many planets and stars and atoms smashing together without intelligent life forming? Now it's just a matter of getting around that pesky general relativity and we'll be best friends with aliens in no time. Or, like, a million years.

So all that stuff we just said about how big the universe is (at least 90 billion light years)? Forget it. That's small beans. The Cosmological Horizon is here to make your day a whole lot more complicated. Since we can only observe stellar bodies that have had some effect on us (usually bombarding us with light), there is an outer limit to what we can see of the universe. Hence, the "observable universe." What about the rest, the parts of the universe beyond our Starcraft-style fog of war?

Well, according to some math I've got absolutely no interest in going into, the size of the "actual" universe is so large that if the universe we just described (the "impossibly", (Always mark the word "impossible" with quotations. After all, the word itself is "I'm possible") mind-bogglingly large one) were the size of a quarter, the actual universe would be the size of the Earth.

The Dominican Republic

By John Langer (2016)

This year, I was lucky enough to be part of a small group from school that travelled to the Dominican Republic for a humanitarian trip. Along with 26 other students, I spent seven days experiencing what life in the Dominican is really like.

Before this wonderful trip, I had always wanted to visit a resort. But after spending my time there, how could I go to a resort? I couldn't go for a tan, not after I witnessed a little boy, around the age of three, grab hold of my hand and guide me through his community, all while barefoot and walking upon broken chunks of glass.

I could not dive into a swimming pool after seeing a 45-year old man so weak that he clearly struggled to keep his eyelids from snapping shut, and too weak to brush the dozen or so flies away that pestered him and landed on him. He was too weak to speak; too weak to live. I couldn't sleep on a king-sized bed while the children from the slums in Santo Domingo slept on practically nothing.

When the group went into the bateyes, the small sugar workers' communities, the children there would surround us and take hold of our hands. They would laugh with us and smile with us while forgetting about the rest of world.

The child that walked with me would walk upon broken glass and painfully-sharp rocks without showing any emotion. He wouldn't even flinch. Unfortunately, I could not do the same.

Each day was amazing. We built a home for a family of nine who had lived in a house with just one room, which wasn't even near the size of my bedroom in Canada. We donated over 1500lbs of clothing, medical supplies and other necessities. But each day, there was at least one thing that broke my heart and by the end of the day, I was so impacted by the trip and by the sights I saw, I felt guilty simply walking into my front door.

Now the last thing the coordinators wanted us to feel was guilt. But how can I live like I do and not feel guilty? Is that even possible? In the area we live, it is impossible to walk down the street and not see these wonderful things. Now, to a lot of people, it just passes them by. After you witness what life is like for others, you began to realize that it can always get worse. Personally, I've learned that I am extremely lucky and I should be grateful for the things I have.

Since diving back into the world I live in, I understand why we aren't supposed to feel guilty. And I understand what the trip was really about — opening our eyes and being thankful for the things we possess.

The next time we get upset because our television signal is a bit rusty, maybe we should use that time to reflect on our belongings.



John working in the Dominican Republic.

LIFE IS HARD

By Beri Cooper (2016)



Life is hard, hearts are harder,
sometimes too hard to find a reason
Past the tough times and all the lost ones to find
something to still believe in.
Because it's just the hard parts and our scared hearts
that hold us back from dreaming.
We're barely raised, still being brought up,
dealing with constant change at this bitter age,
We're only teenaged and feel middle aged.
Feels like nobody seems to get you,
nobody seems to listen.
And we're runaways or we're rejects or we're turned out
or we're missing.
We're from broken homes, we're unstable and we're lost,
we're addicted.
But we're unique and we're special, we're loved ones and
we're gifted.
We're all equals but we're different.
A small part of us, we're still children.
Influenced by society that we're building.
Feeling sometimes like we can but most times like we can't,
'Cause doubt swallows our ambitions and takes us by
the hand.
But we're not yet out of adolescence, so we still won't
understand.

Is the cup half full or half empty?

By John Langer (2016)

In my eyes, as people, we're sort of like cups.

Water fills half of the cup, and air the other half. Like cups, if too much is poured upon us, we begin to fill up more and more until we eventually overflow, and spill out.

But, if we are too empty, we have nothing to consume, nothing to process, and nothing to reflect on.



Personal goals

By Nathan Gorman (2016)

My goal for the future is to become an automotive service technician. Ever since I was a kid, I had a strong passion for cars and this goal allows me to use that passion.

I don't know anyone personally who had this goal, however I'm sure if I expand my network I'd meet people that have achieved this goal.

The best way to achieve this goal is to look into a college course that can certify me for the career, then apply it to the automotive industries.

Food For thought #2

By Phoenix Wells (2016)

Do you ever just think about the fact that the stars that existed billions of years ago are what made it possible for us to be alive? Every atom of everything you see was once part of a star; and the atoms in your right hand probably came from a different star than the atoms in your left.

You couldn't be here if the elements - oxygen, iron, nitrogen, hydrogen, all of the things that are needed in our ecosystem and evolution — weren't created by these stars exploding into a nuclear space furnace. I think that's one of the most poetic things about science; the fact that we're all stardust, as well as everything around us.

Now to get further into it. Imagine you're out on your step one night, having a smoke or shovelling your walkway, or maybe you're playing hide-and-go-seek in the dark (don't you dare tell me I'm too old for that). And you look up, and see a star.

Well, you don't really see the star. The star itself had already exploded long ago. But you see its light, the only thing left of something that existed long before any recognizable life was even thought of. And we're just seeing it now. The elements that came out of those stars had time to collect together, and create who knows how many incredibly delicate systems, one of which we call home. We are literally watching the last traces of our previous forms, slowly but surely blinking out of existence.

Have you ever thought of the quantum theory "entanglement". The insane part is where you move an electron on one side of the universe and an invisible force goes millions of light years and smacks another electron into wiggling in an instant, which is about a million years

faster than what's "possible" without time travel.

It says if two electrons are created together, they are continuously "entangled". And, heedless to the distance amid the two electrons, a shift in quantum spin in one electron will immediately cause the other electron to change direction as well. So what does this mean for us? Teleportation, more or less, but really tiny.

Hypothetically, you could separate two electrons by as much space as you wanted, and they'd still be linked in such a way that actions taken on one would affect the other immediately. Meaning information is being transmitted at such hypersonic speeds that they end up being faster than the very speed of light.

And though the party-pooping scientists have been busy coming up with limitations on the kind of information that could be transmitted, no one has yet been able to disprove the theory that there is an invisible force in the universe capable of instantly affecting matter millions of light-years away.

But wait, the chaos gets worse (or better, depending on how you look at it). If you pay attention to the big bang theory, then there was a point in time where every atom in the universe was condensed into a singularity. Which means that everything is quantumly entangled.

Some scientists have even gone so far as to claim that quantum entanglement shows that there is no such thing as space, and that everything in the universe is still touching. Space is just an illusion created by our flawed perceptions, and we're all one.

I Believe...

By Phoenix Wells (2016)

I'm not going to start this off with anything like "I believe...". Because for one, that's cheesy, but also because I don't have this question asked very much and when presented with such a vast, open-ended question, there's so much that goes through my head it seems to mesh together into a mere unreadable blankness.

To start, I don't believe in a giant man in the sky who will send you to burn in hell if you refuse to be his cheerleader or love people of the same sex. And I believe you probably shouldn't trust people that consult their imaginary friend for forgiveness. That's not to say I don't believe in some sort of afterlife — I have had far too many experiences with the paranormal to deny there being something beyond our physical realm.

- **I believe** in barefoot summer days in the city. Busking all week, with tender feet and sun-kissed skin and taking the money you earn to the farmer's market.
- **I believe** that the most beautiful people have known loss, known suffering and heartache, and they've found their way in the depths. This suffering has taught them to have compassion, a gentleness, a deep, loving concern and an understanding for life. **I believe** beautiful people do not just happen.
- **I believe** in you, even if you don't believe in me.
- **I believe** we are products of our past, but we don't have to be prisoners of it. Never let your struggle become your identity. Each and every one of us are shaped by our memories, dreams, thoughts, actions, emotions and outlooks. It takes billions of perfect storms to create you, me and each passerby living a life as vivid and complex as our own, populated with their own ambitions, friends, routines, and inherited craziness. An epic story continues invisibly around us, like an anthill sprawling deep underground with elaborate passageways to thousands of other lives you never even knew existed. In which you may only appear once, as an extra sipping coffee in the background, a blur of traffic on the highway, or a lit window at dusk.
- **I believe** in science.
- **I believe** that those who don't believe in magic will never find it. And you know, I do believe in magic. We are born with whirlwinds, forest fires and comets inside us. We are born able to sing to birds, read the clouds and see our destiny in grains of sand. But then we get the magic educated right out of our souls. We get it schooled out, church-ed out, spanked out, washed and combed out. Put on the straight and narrow, and told to grow up for heaven's sake. Because the people doing the educating are afraid of the magic we had known, and because it made them ashamed of what they'd allowed to die within themselves.
- **I believe** if you fight fire with fire, all you get is a bigger burn. Do no harm, but take no shit.



- **I believe** that hope is the only thing stronger than fear.
- **I believe** in things like road trips, coffee shops, passports and long foggy day beach adventures (Sometimes 5 miles into the next town. Whoops.)
- **I believe** sometimes we all need other people. Living, breathing excuses to believe better things exist.
- **I believe** you are allowed to feel messed up and inside out. It doesn't mean you are defective. It means you're human.
- **I believe** the soul always knows what to do to heal itself. The challenge is to silence the mind.
- **I believe** home is not where you're from, or where you were raised. It is where you belong. Some people travel the world to find it. Others find it in a person.
- **I absolutely believe** in aliens. The universe is far too large and there is far too much potential sustainability for us to be the only ones here.
- **I believe** the world is not made with shades of grey. It is made of colours like azure and coral and marigold and emerald, but it insists on painting everything in black and white and fitting it into boxes that it understands. Don't do that to yourself. Paint your personality a million different colors; leave them scratching their heads — unsure of how to handle the magic that you are.
- **I believe** sometimes it takes losing what we were settling for to remind us what we deserve. And it is okay to be angry, frustrated or hurt. It is never okay to be cruel.
- **I believe** two things are infinite: the universe, and human stupidity. And I'm not sure about the universe.
- **I believe** we are here to unlearn the teachings of the church, country, and our educational system. We are here to kill war. We are here to laugh at the odds and live our lives so well that Death will tremble to take us.
- **I believe** respect is for those who deserve it, not those who demand it. Age is not a measurement for wisdom.

Thank you!



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PHOTO GALLERY FLASHBACK



SPECIAL COVER RETROSPECTIVE from 2015 to 2000

