

THE NEXT STEP

York Preparatory Academy English 4 Reflections

Tiffany DiMatteo, editor

Foreword by Dr. T.K. Kennedy

English 4 students of York Preparatory Academy reflect on their lives and futures in individual essays.

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FOREWORD BY DR. T.K. KENNEDY

Lately, it seems that the news and other media outlets have focused on informing the public about the negative things involving our teenagers. However, many who serve in the education field with teenagers know that young people across this country are doing amazing things in their communities and abroad. There is an old saying in our society: “The children are our future.” If we truly believe that statement, we must provide children with more opportunities to develop their own points of view and express themselves. Hopefully, this manuscript provided our students with the means to be heard.

Nothing is more pleasing than to serve as principal to these talented teenage authors while they navigate through their individual thoughts and reflections in this book. Webster defines ‘reflection’ as *1. an image that is seen in a mirror or on a shiny surface. 2. Something that shows the effect, existence, or character of something else. 3. Something that causes people to disapprove of a person or thing.* In these essays, each author identifies with at least one of the three definitions within the text. Most importantly, the reader will discover the students’ skill level to think critically and evaluate incidents that are important to each of them. These thought-provoking essays are expressed in a manner that forces the reader to reflect and connect on a personal level, regardless of age.

Under the guidance of their senior English teacher Tiffany DiMatteo, students were led on a journey to reflect individually and to collaborate on a text for the world to peruse. She has empowered them to have a voice on various viewpoints surrounding their personal beliefs, concerns, and opinions about the past, present, and the future.

Some of these authors will use this book-publishing experience and feeling of accomplishment to lead them down a clear career path or educational pursuit. Others will continue to write or produce more published works in the future. No matter what may happen in their very bright futures, we are incredibly proud of these students and the work produced in this volume.

INTRODUCTION BY TIFFANY DIMATTEO

As I sit back and take a deep breath to admire the work of these students, the realization hits that there has been so much pressure on getting their writing on the page that I forgot about my share: the privilege of introducing their work to the world.

The chapters in this book were individually written by English 4 students at York Preparatory Academy, a K-12 charter school in Rock Hill, South Carolina. YPA was born in 2010 and had its first graduating class of seniors in 2015; the authors of this book will graduate in 2016 and 2017. The idea of a collaborative book was presented to them, we brainstormed topics and themes, narrowed down and voted on the top three, and we arrived on a theme that would appeal to almost everyone. There were students who wanted to write about the future and those who wanted to write about the past as an influence on the future. In addition, there were students who wanted to write more creatively, and, of course, those who didn't know what to write. However, through the process, the students realized that they all had interesting and significant things to say about their lives, and this text exists as a testament to their experiences and their ambitions.

These students had the indescribable pleasure of having me as their teacher (and learning how verbal irony is implemented in the classroom to uproarious comic effect). After thirteen years as a teacher, my students have been guided through literary analysis, creative writing, argumentative research, and Socratic seminar, but never through work that would certainly be published. I consider myself the ultimate appreciator of the literary arts because I have no interest in writing the next Great American Novel or Must-Read Memoir. When the school broached the topic of class-level projects, there was some panic, fear, and anxiety—from me, not the students. There was the burden of not only fitting it into the curriculum, but how? When? Do I press it on them at the beginning to get it over with? Or wait a little while until I know them and have a better sense of their preferences and abilities? Concern over high-stakes testing seems inconsequential when I have classrooms of teenagers with a publication date on the line.

But here it is: the book is ready for publication and to be shared with the world. Thank you to the parents and relatives who have raised these amazing kids, and for contributing to these stories, directly or indirectly. Thank you to the faculty and staff at YPA who have helped to make these young men and women who they are today. And to my students, my authors: I am so proud of the work you have done and the pieces of yourselves you are showing the world through your words. It has been such a privilege to guide you through this process. I can't wait for the ten year reunion to look back on this volume with you all!

THE PAST

THE BIG PUSH BY SEAN ALLEN

“In my future, I see myself going to college.” That’s most likely the answer every student gives about his/her future. If you take a survey and ask everyone what they want to do after high school, most students will say college. About 80% of students will say they will plan to go to college and 20% of those students will go to the military or take over the family business. But do those 80% of students actually make it to college? Do they know that it takes hard work and dedication to get colleges to at least look at your profile? Or do they think it will be easy and that their parents will do all of the work for them?

I plan on going to college and I am determined to make it there. Lately I have been visiting colleges with my dad like Duke, which was a great experience but has a very competitive acceptance rate. The college I want to go to is University of South Carolina. I haven’t yet toured the college, but I plan to in January.

In the future I want practice in the medical field. Since I was middle school I’ve wanted to be a dentist. I want to be a dentist because I shadowed a dentist and I was amazed at the work they do other than cleaning teeth; they pull out teeth and give shots, too. I realized I wanted to be a dentist because I felt that it was perfect for me and I can see myself doing that in the future. I know that being a dentist will take hard work and determination, but I know that I can do it. When I was shadowing, I realized that dentists have less to worry about than regular doctors, because they focus on the mouth and not any other body part. I obviously knew that, but I never realized it. I know that the University of South Carolina has a good medical school and I plan on attending it in the future.

In high school, I’ve noticed there are three kinds of students. The first type are the people who always get good grade. Sometimes they don’t try at all and they still have a high average in that class. I have friends who talk all class and when it comes to a test, they ace it with ease. Sometimes I’m amazed at how well that works. I wouldn’t say that I’m jealous of those people, but it would make life a lot easier. I have a few friends that just goof off the whole class and they still pass tests and quizzes, while I’m over here actually paying attention and still struggling on the topic. In high school you also have those students that don’t care for school at all. They don’t put in effort at all. They get bad grades and act like it was nothing. I would wonder what their parents are like, if they aren’t concerned about daughters or sons.

Finally you have those students who try and study and still struggle, and I would consider myself one of those students. I wouldn’t say I’m bad at school, it’s just difficult knowing that school isn’t my strong point. I could study for hours and hours and still not get what I’m even reading; the only way I can actually get the lesson is with the help of my dad, who is a big part of my life. Half of the time when I pass a quiz or test, it’s because of the help of my dad. Sometimes I

hate asking my dad for help because I want to be able to learn and study by myself, but I have no other choice. To me it's either study with someone who has more experience studying on his own or fail the next quiz or test. My dad has a pretty cool job--he flies undercover airplanes for the FBI. But flying for the FBI means that you have to learn how to fly an airplane, and in order to do that, he studied on his own for five years. That's what I want to be able to do. When I have my dad help me to study he has this strategy called "Alphabet Soup". This means looking for words that relate to the answer. It's a pretty cheap way of knowing the information, but it works most of the time.

It's especially hard to study when your only way of passing a test is out of town. Being in the FBI, my dad travels a lot and it's really hard to study over the phone. Sometimes if I have to, I even ask my mom for help, but it can be a struggle--she doesn't know how to pronounce some of the words because English isn't her first language. Originally my mom is from the Philippine Islands. My dad met her when he was stationed there while he was in the Navy. They got married there and my dad brought her to the United States. It's very difficult to have her help me, so I just end up trying to study by myself.

When I take tests or quizzes I always feel pressured because of my dad. My dad is a good person, but he is also a strict person. Every time I fail or mess up in school, I feel like I disappoint him every time. When I take the test I always think about the consequences waiting for me at home. What if I disappoint him even more? My whole life I've been pressured to do good in school. My dad had a hard childhood. He grew up with fourteen brothers and sisters, so he had to share a bed with four other siblings. He had to work in Missouri in the corn fields with his other siblings day and night. I can see why my dad pushes me so hard--because he wants me to have a better life than he did, and I don't blame him. If I had children I would want them to be better than me. In life, my main goal is to make my dad proud of me.

In the end, I am most grateful for what I have. I know that lots of kids would love to have a mom and dad that pushes them in school and in life. Some people don't realize how lucky they are to have parents that care and push them to do well. At the end of college I want to say that I wanted to go to college and I succeeded--not only that my parents pushed me, but because I pushed myself.

“MOM, MAY I GO TO THE BATHROOM?” BY PEYTON BRUMFIELD

When I was younger, I always wanted to be older than I was. Looking back now, I wish I didn't think that way as a kid. When you're little, you never realize how fast you are going to grow up and have to start being a responsible young adult. I really started wanting to be older than what I was around the age of ten. I showed that need with my bad behavior towards not only my parents but my teachers. This attitude towards grownups helped me learn many lessons just from this one experience at a young age. Let me be clear: I wasn't disrespectful to all of my teachers. I just felt like if a teacher didn't show me respect, I didn't need to show them respect. This way of thinking made it difficult for me and at least one of my teachers to see eye to eye each year. I went from the age of ten in fourth grade until the age of fifteen in ninth grade with the mindset that if a teacher didn't show me respect, I didn't have to respect them. I know now that this made school so much more difficult than it had to be. That experience of always having one teacher that I didn't respect made my life in school terrible for those years. I vividly remember not getting along with my fifth grade teacher at all. She was my homeroom teacher and I couldn't stand her (from what I remember, the feeling was mutual). Of course, now I couldn't tell you why I despised her. It's been so long ago and I'm sure it was over something dumb. The real problem I do remember was that my homeroom teacher and I not getting along affected my grades. That was when I began to realize it's better to just kill a teacher with kindness if you have to. That was definitely an experience that helped me realize that it makes school much easier when you get along with your teachers.

While I was in elementary school my mom worked for Kelly Services which is a program for substitute teachers. The problem with my mom being a substitute was that she frequently was hired to sub at my elementary school. I remember on several occasions my mom being the sub for my class. This started to become a problem because it's hard to treat the sub like a teacher when she's your mom and you live with her. Don't get me wrong, I definitely have respect for my mom, it's just strange to walk into class and have your MOM greet you at the door. What was even stranger was that she wanted me to call her “Mom” while she was the sub in my class. Imagine needing to use the bathroom during class and you have to raise your hand and say, “Mom, may I go to the bathroom?”

Throughout middle and high school, I have had many problems with administrators. In seventh grade, during recess, I decided to skip and go to the gym to play basketball. This was definitely a bad idea. It was the first time I had ever been written up and I was so scared. This experience put me in my place throughout middle school. In high school I got a little bolder in the second semester of my tenth grade year. I was taking Spanish II and my teacher had just passed out a worksheet. My friends and I had started saying, “I do what I want,” and I got the bright idea to write “I do what I want” on the worksheet. My teacher saw it and got furious. She snatched the sheet off my desk and walked over to her desk. She then proceeded to take a picture of the sheet

and sent it to the administrators. I was never called to the office but the administrators did write me up. This experience helped me understand how to be more professional in a classroom environment and not think everything is a joke.

Now that I am seventeen years old, I realized that life passes you by if you just sit back and worry too much about what everyone thinks. In my previous years as a high schooler I lived my life in the shadows, too worried about what others may think of me. As I have matured, I have learned not to care of what others think of me at all. High school is all about making experiences, finding yourself, and getting ready for your future.

For my senior year I want to make it a memorable one but also not forget what's most important: keeping my grades up. I have learned how important grades are through high school. I used to slack off in school and not worry about grades as much, but now I realize how important grades really are.

At the moment I'm not sure where I want to go to college. There are two reasons behind this; one being that I have no idea what I want to do for the rest of my life. The other being that every college campus has a different type of atmosphere and you should choose which one you feel you fit in with best. I have yet to go on an official college visit and hope to start visiting different colleges starting this coming spring. There are a two schools in particular I definitely want to visit. The first one being Western Carolina and the second being College of Charleston. If neither of these campuses seem like a fit for me, I'll just move on to different options.

Once I'm out of college I plan to get a job in my major. I know most people say life doesn't go how you plan it, but I have planned mine out. After I'm settled and have a good paying job, I hope to find a wife. I'm thinking of getting married at 26 and in two years have my first child. I definitely don't want to have a child before I'm settled because I want to be able to support my child. This may seem farfetched to try and plan out your life, but I've always felt like you need to know you can support a child before having one. Now don't take that the wrong way; these are just my morals and everyone has their own opinion. I'm not saying anyone's opinion is right or wrong. I just feel like to be the best dad I can be I should wait until I'm settled down.

The most important thing in my life right now is how I decide to live each day and to make sure all my decisions are responsible ones. I need to make sure I stay on track in school and always do my best work. Another thing I need to remind myself of are the lessons I have learned throughout my academic career so far. The first of those lessons being to always respect your teachers and professors even if they may not respect you. The second lesson is to always abide by the rules and never think you're above the rules that have been set in place. The most

important of these lessons would definitely be to always remember to do what makes you happy and not worry about what everyone may think about you.

INTO THE RIVER BY RANDY CYPHERS

After a very long journey up north to Ohiopyle, Pennsylvania, Kenya, Jeremy, PJ, Higgie, Greg, Becca, Sunshine, Jake, Rashid, Datko, and I arrived at the campsite well after dark. After being warned about the local wildlife, we got to our campsite, set up, and almost immediately fell asleep. The next morning I woke up knowing I was going to face my first class-five rapid--a large rapid with serious consequences--that day, and it was a scary feeling.

After the 45 minute car ride to the put-in of the upper Youghiogheny River, we slid our kayaks off the muddy bank and started down river. My best friend's dad noticed the face of a worried young paddler and started to give advice. "We have a couple miles of flatwater," he said, "so take this time to warm up. Imagine making these small little moves we are doing really big to wake the muscles up." I did just that--I started to over-exaggerate any little paddle stroke or hip movement, then I heard the best noise in the world: the rumbling of whitewater. I was told that I need to keep my kayak pointed perfectly downstream during the 15 foot slide. As we all started dropping off the slide, I see the hole (another name for a hydrolic in the river), and I keep my kayak pointed right at it and took the hardest paddle strokes I've ever taken in my life. As fast as I had started, I was through it and we had just dropped into the main gorge of this run. We had no idea any of the lines to run because most of the crew had only run it once before, so we ran the entire river, sometimes poaching lines from the commercial rafts that were chartering trips down the river.

After a couple or so miles we got to it: my first class-five rapid, Charley's Choice. I decided not to scout it because my nerves were totally shot. I was told it was a horseshoe shaped hole that was terminal, but to make matters worse there was a boulder smack dab in the middle of the hole, just small enough to crest out of the water. That boulder means you can't run through the middle so we pushed far right and subbed our boats out and to get spit out downstream. I was the third or so paddler in our group to run it, with one man out of the boat on a rock with a rope, just in case things go south. As I peel out of the eddie, I see my line as I approach the rapid. I get my first glimpse of the magnificent rapid that would ignite my passion for class five kayaking as I subbed out. Only my head and torso was above water and, just like a rocket, I accelerated away from the feature. I had done it! I felt like I was on top of the world--the thing I had spent so much time preparing for and fearing had paid off. The rest of the run was not over; there was a lot of fast-paced boulder gardens and lots of scouting, but we made it down the river safely. When we got to the take-out, we rejoined the rest of our friends and family, and went back to the campsite, ready for the next day to run an 18 foot waterfall. I didn't know it would change the way I viewed myself, the river, and kayaking overall.

There I was, landing the flattest boof of my life off of this magnificent cascade celebrating at the bottom of a job well done...and then I woke up. As I crawled out of the tent seeing most of

group already awake, we went into town, ate some food, then went to the festival, ready for another amazing run. This waterfall is like no other: an 18 foot sloping boof into a very large flat pool below. This particular drop is usually only run once a year at the festival; unless you have three or more people, it's illegal to kayak there. Before I even saw this waterfall, I felt the earth rumbling like an earthquake from the amount of water cascading over it. Once I saw it, I got nervous, not out of fear, but anticipation. I have learned through my four years of kayaking that a little fear is good--it's healthy for every man and woman to have respect for the river.

There were a couple of small rapids before the waterfall; no big deal. But then we got to the eddy where we were all sitting waiting for our turn, and I see the tops of trees and a small mist rising from the pool below. My best friend Kenya was explaining the best way to run this waterfall and how to lean forward and tense up after five or so minutes; then he peeled out and I saw my best friend drop out of sight. I knew it was my turn to go and as I get to the lip, everything goes into slow motion. I have a feeling of euphoria as I take a big stroke and come off--not the cleanest, but I had done it. Once again, the feeling of being on top of the world overwhelmed me as I rushed to the take-out to hike back up and run it again. I had no nervousness or fear but I was naive and did not even think about that. After we ran the rapids again, we were back in the same position we were looking at treetops and mist. I was pushed to the left side of the lip and took no stroke as I feel the full 18 feet onto my head heard a terrible noise: the waterfall beating down on my kayak. I tried to roll up several times, but I could get no air. I let go of my paddle and I pulled my skirt. Now I am swimming and I'm not in my boat, but something was different. I was not getting air...but how could that be? All I can feel are little bubbles similar to what you feel when you drink soda; they were tickling my face. I tried to swim upwards, but I could not get to the surface. I saw light and I tried to take a breath but got nothing but water. At this point, I'm running out of air and I started to panic. I feel a large object smash into the back of my helmet. My kayak! I spun around and could only get one hand clutched onto a grab handle. My boat is floating away from me, away from the bottom of the waterfall that was trying to suck me under. My shoulder was being pulled so hard I expected it to get dislocated, but luckily the boat pulled me right out. Now I am on the surface, swimming in the pool. Each breath I take feels like I am being stabbed in the side over and over. I had broken two ribs but did not know it. It didn't seem like I was in there very long, but I was underwater with no air for 45 seconds, and your body will take an involuntary breath at 50 seconds. I had pushed my limit and the river had humbled me. Each time I go kayaking, I think about that day. I know the river demands respect and if you don't give it respect, it will ruin your day. Most people think that after that experience I should have quit kayaking, but that day showed me that no matter how good of a boater you are, you can always improve. I have made it my life goal to become a better kayaker and I still am on that path as I write this story.

I can still say there is no bad day on the river, and this sport has taken my life and changed it quite a bit. I used to hate the river and would not like going outside, but as soon as I started

kayaking, it showed me a better quality of living than I could ever imagine. All I can think about now is where I will go next, what kind of people I will meet, and where my next step will take me. At the time that I am writing this, I am raising money to go along with scholarships I have gotten from WCKA (World Class Kayak Academy) so I can go finish my senior year in Chile and Colorado. I also plan on doing a North America kayaking tour where I start in North Carolina, go west to Colorado, up to Canada, back to the east, and come back to North Carolina through the east coast states while hitting some of the best whitewater in the world. After that, I plan on moving up into the Great Smoky Mountains and go to college and become a firefighter.

THE EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT BY JARED A. KEY

It has always been a struggle for me to learn and comprehend things as well as others. I found out that I had not one but two learning disabilities when I was in the fifth grade. At the time, I didn't fully understand what these disabilities were or how they affected my learning. The two learning disabilities that I was found to have are dyslexia and dysgraphia. These two disabilities have made it a serious challenge to get good grades in a lot of my classes, especially classes like English, history, and some science courses. Although they may affect my learning capabilities, they do not affect my stubbornness and desire to succeed. Even though I have trouble with English and history, I am really good at mathematics and some of the hands-on sciences courses. I have always loved working with my hands and creating new things. Therefore, I have decided to become a welder after I graduate high school. Being a welder would be perfect for me because I can create new things without my disabilities really affecting me. I plan on achieving this by going to a local tech college for a few years to get my degree.

My disabilities are mostly focused around reading, reading comprehension, and writing. Dyslexia is hard to explain. "A good way to understand dyslexia is to establish what it is not. It's not a sign of low intelligence or laziness. It's also not due to poor vision. It's a common condition that affects the way the brain processes written and spoken language...Dyslexia doesn't just affect reading and writing. It also affects certain everyday skills and activities such as social skills, listening comprehension, memory, navigation, and time management."¹ Dyslexia has really affected me throughout my life. There were times where it was hard to learn because I would get distracted from my work and couldn't concentrate. There were other times when I'd try to read a story or a page out of my textbook and when I finished I couldn't remember what I read.

My other disability is called dysgraphia, "a condition that causes trouble with written expression. The term comes from the greek words *dys* ('impaired') and *graphia* ('making letter forms by hand'). Dysgraphia is a brain-based issue. It's not a result of laziness or low intelligence...For many kids with dysgraphia, just holding a pencil and organizing letters on a line is difficult. The handwriting tends to be messy."² There were a few teachers who really made me feel bad because they would always talk about how bad my handwriting was. This really hurt me sometimes because I knew that I couldn't help it because of my dysgraphia. Although these disabilities can make it extremely hard to pass and get good grades in school, it is not impossible.

Being a kid with these disabilities was pretty challenging with all the reading and work without fully understanding my disabilities. Growing up I never really understood my disabilities as well

¹ Lapkin, Emily. "Understanding Dyslexia." Understood.org. 2 Apr. 2014. Web. 15 Dec. 2015.

² Patino, Erica. "Understanding Dysgraphia." Understood.org. 15 June 2014. Web. 16 Dec. 2015.

as I could have. I always tried to tell myself that there's was nothing wrong with me and that I was just like everyone else. But as time went on and I got older, the work got harder, which also made it much harder to hide the fact that I had these disabilities and that I needed help.

When I first found out about my disabilities I didn't really understand them. This made it hard for me to accept the fact that had these disabilities. I always thought, "Why me?" I always thought that I did something wrong. So this led me to think that I was stupid and I always expected to fail at everything. This really affected me because I just stopped trying. I thought, why even try if I was just going to fail?

After a while with the help of some close friends and some other significant people in my life, I came to realize that these disabilities were not really all that bad. They definitely don't make anything easier, but with time I've come to accept the fact that I have these disabilities. Although it was hard to adjust, it was definitely not impossible.

After a while I've come to realize that having these disabilities isn't all bad. I get printed notes at school. They make math a lot easier by being able to move around numbers in your head. Another advantage is people with dyslexia tend to be very creative and are able to think outside the box. This makes life a lot more interesting. Being creative and thinking out of the box tends to lead to a good time. For example, when I was younger I used to love the arcade game skee ball. I loved this game so much I had an idea to make my own so I did. It was a challenge, but in the end I had a great time. Which leads me back to welding.

To me, welding is a very attractive career. Because it has always been something that has interested me. There are endless possibilities when it comes to what you can do with welding. You can do anything from making cool sculptures to home projects like fixing a handrail or building a frame for something. Welding is a two year course and it is a demanding career and just a overall great trait to have.

So as I reflect on my past and think about my future, I know my disabilities will have an impact on whatever I do. But now I know that I can get through it. It will be hard but nothing's impossible if you put your mind to it.

IMPOSSIBLE = I'M POSSIBLE BY ELIZABETH NUNN

When I was little, I remember wondering what my future would be like when I was a grown up. From a young age I struggled in life, and I can't tell you my future without telling you my past.

I was born into a family with a mother who abused drugs and alcohol, and a father who suffered from depression and PTSD. My sister, who was only thirteen, took care of my little brother and me. By the age of four, the police came and took my brother and me away from our parents. We were sent to live with our grandparents. They told us that Mommy and Daddy had to work so we were going to stay with them for a while. A while turned into a year, and then that year turned into four years. By then I was eight years old, my brother and I had not seen our dad for two and a half years. The summer of 2006 he suddenly returned and life was the best it had ever been. We did everything together and then he disappeared again. That following January he was shot and killed, and we lost our dad forever.

Life went on and I made it into middle school, but I became very sad. By my freshman year I was very depressed and suicidal. The following summer I overdosed and was sent to the hospital for help. I came back, but then everything went to hell again. I was sent away from my friends and family for a year; while I was gone I had the best time and sometimes the worst. I was living in Indiana at a girls' boarding school that helped me a lot. I made some of the best friends I've ever had, but on June, 30, 2015, I lost a very good friend to suicide and it changed me forever. I returned home that August and started a new life. I started going to a new school, and I had to make all new friends. Of course I was very nervous but also excited, because it's my senior year of high school. I'm enjoying my new school and people here are very nice--I have made great new friends who accept me. My teachers are very nice and really caring, and my grades are the highest they have ever been.

So now you know my past. I have accepted that my childhood was a struggle, but I will not let that consume me. It has been a blessing in disguise because it has given me the strength and drive to make my future the best it can be. I have the best fiancé and friend in the world who has shown me that I can change the world. I love infants, children, and old people. From the time I was little, people always told me that I had a big heart for caring for others and from a young age I knew that my job in life was to grow up and become mother myself. I thought I would enjoy doing something where I would help people, so I thought I would like to become a nurse. I would get to do everything I wanted and I would get to work with the age groups I wanted, and make a difference in people's lives. However, when I found out that nurses have 12 hour shifts, I couldn't see myself enjoying that job. So I was lost and a little set back because I had not taken the SAT yet and people all around me were enrolling into colleges. I was stressed out but after all I had just come through, I wasn't going to let this get me down. I heard from a family friend that she attended York Tech and that she didn't take the SAT's either. She told me that all I

would have to do is take their Compass test and I would be accepted. I started to look into what degrees that they offered and that's when I found out what I was going to be: a dental hygienist. I would only have to go to school for two years and I would immediately be placed into a job straight out of school, and my hours would be great for raising a family.

Now, I'm signed up for second semester classes at York Tech. I thought my family would be happy with me now. Well, my hopes fell on deaf ears. My parents love me very much but aren't satisfied with my choices for my life. But I still have so many more dreams for my future. I hope that after I finish school, my fiancé and I can get married and think about starting a family. I can't wait to move into my dream house and smile at my life, knowing that I have done well for myself.

I have shared my story with you to show that even though I have had a rough past, it has helped me to become the person I am today. So part of my goal for this essay is to speak to you--you who have suffered, you who are struggling. I want you to know that there is always someone who loves and cares for you, even though you may not see it. I, too, have struggled to understand that my parents truly want the best for me. So even though times right now may be hard and you feel like nothing is going right and that you would rather give up than fight on, promise me that you will fight on. I promise you that if you do, you will surprise yourself.

STEPPING INTO THE UNKNOWN BY TIMOTHY SANDERS

I've always been told everything that I do now will reflect in my future. Now that I know that, I look back and think about all of the things I could have done differently. As a junior in high school, I think of all of the things that are soon to come. Knowing what you want to do after high school is very important because it not only reflects your career path, but also identifies you as a person. It shows intelligence and the skills that are required to master that job. When graduation comes around you experience many feelings, feelings that identify your thoughts towards college at the end of high school.

For example, worry may suggest that you may not know what to do next in life after high school. Many people are unsure of what to do after high school because there are many new choices to be experienced. You just have to be the one to make those choices.

When I was a freshman in high school, I always wanted to grow up so fast and to not be a kid anymore. Now looking back, I wish I could relive those moments. Now schools are trying to make us grow up too fast by making us take job surveys and shadowing careers that we are interested in. As I am getting closer to graduating, there are more jobs opening, thus making it harder to decide what I want to do. They give the students all of the ways to explore our options, but it's only making it more difficult for us to actually find something we like. Not only that, but when we find a career that we actually enjoy, we have to pick a college that we would like to go to. But when you find a college that you like, there is a chance that you won't even get accepted. Then again, it's not only schools that pressure us, it's also our parents.

Parents always say that they want the best for you, but sometimes the best is too much. About a year ago, I was having a conversation with my parents about my grades. I was taking three core classes, working and playing sports and I was struggling a bit with keeping up with everything. They kept telling me that everything that what I do now will reflect in the future. I knew that, but if i wanted to succeed and go to college I needed to do better. I then started to spend more time on my school work and by the end of the semester I had pulled up all of my grades. There is still a lot of pressure from them because a lot of my family didn't go to college and now I'm expected to not only go, but to get scholarships. What if my grades start to fall when I go to college? Everything will be new to me and maybe that will affect how I learn things. There will be new teachers, new students, new and bigger classes and all around a new environment. I think that that a new environment would be different, but I fear that I may not catch on as fast and I would have to try harder.

I envy kids in elementary school who already know what they want to do with their lives because I'm a senior and I still don't know. I'm interested in a lot of things, but it's hard narrowing it down into just one specific career choice. There are some things that I would enjoy doing more

than others, but some don't pay as much. I've always been influenced to teach something to do with soccer. I have been playing it for a few years now and I feel like it's something that I would be interested in teaching. During the school year, I taught children's soccer on the weekends and I had a great time doing that, but I have recently experienced working at a new job. My friend's dad gave me a summer job doing electrical work. I enjoyed doing that but I don't know if I would enjoy doing that for the rest of my life. Our school had a representative from York Tech come to the school and talk about welding and electrical careers at the school. I talked to him about possibly going to school there and he gave me a card and told me if I am interested in one of those fields, he could help me get a job straight out of college.

I am still unsure of exactly what I want to do, but for now I have a better idea. I have enjoyed electrical work but if I decided to go into welding, my dad could probably help me. I still have a year to decide but I'm not going to rush things. I want for whatever I end up doing to be something that I enjoy. Soon it will be the end of high school and it will be time to grow up and take responsibility. It will be time for me to leave high school and time to make new memories. It will be time for me to make new goals for myself but most importantly, it will be time for me to take my next step in life and for me to finally make one of the biggest decisions of my life.

THE PLAN

COLLEGE AND CAREER PLANS BY TYLER BILLINGS

The next step for me is to finish out high school with good grades and take extra courses to get ahead in college. I would also like to do some college courses my senior year at York Tech to start earning college credits. I also plan to apply to college early in my senior year so I have a better chance of getting in. After I graduate high school, my plan is to go straight to college. I would love to go to Clemson University because that's where my mom and grandparents went and it is a very good school, but I think York Tech would be a better fit for me. I would still like to visit some local colleges just to see what else is out there but I'm pretty sure I will be attending York Tech. I don't really want to go to a 4 year college because I don't think I can handle college for a full 4 years but if I want to get a higher degree I would consider a it. Also I do not want to go to a college that is out of the state of South Carolina because I do not want to deal with traveling a lot back and forth. When I go to college I plan to major in Auto Mechanics. Auto Mechanics would be the best choice for me because I love to work on trucks, cars, and small engine things. This is the next step for me throughout the rest of my high school and college years.

I am currently a junior so I have one more year to go after this year and I plan to make the rest of my junior year and my senior year be the best I have ever I had. For the rest of my junior year I plan to make good grades and get ahead in all of my classes. If I get ahead with all of my classes this year, my senior year should be easy and I can do York Tech dual enrollment to earn college credits. I have already been looking into colleges and what I want to major in and I think I have made a final decision but things can change in the matter of one year. Also, I plan to apply for college really early so I have a better chance of getting in. During my senior year I want to do the York Tech dual enrollment program that my school has, which will start giving me college credits and will give me a jump on college. If I don't do the dual enrollment program I still would like to go to York Tech, but I will most likely participate in the dual enrollment program because I want to get started on college so I don't struggle or have a hard time my first year. Those are my plans for the rest of my junior year and my senior year and what my goal is throughout both.

When I start college I want to major in auto mechanics because I have always loved working on cars, trucks and other small engine things and I would love a career field in that. I started working on small engine things when I got my four wheeler in first grade, and now I work on my truck. Auto Mechanics would be the best for me because I already know how to work on and fix some parts of cars or trucks and majoring in this field would build my knowledge a lot more. There are some things I definitely do not want to major in and that is a doctor or anything to do with teaching. My college plans are to attend York Tech and major in Auto Mechanics. If I decide I do not want to do auto mechanics I would want to look into agriculture because I grew

up all around farms and it would be cool to run my own farm, but auto mechanics is what's calling my name.

After college I plan to find a good paying job as a mechanic right away. I would like to start off working at a shop working for someone else, so I can see what goes on and how life is working in a shop. After working in a shop for someone else, I would love to open up my own shop and work on cars, trucks, and even small engine things such as ATVs and dirtbikes. I plan to make my shop a big name business and have a good reputation for doing good work. If my own business somehow doesn't work out, I will most likely just work for someone else in their shop. If I were to work in someone else's shop I would want it to be a family shop and not a worldwide shop. But if was last resort I might would work at a shop that is known worldwide and possibly stay and work my way up to the manager or the head mechanic. That's my plan for after college and what career I'm planning on pursuing.

Milton Berle said, "If opportunity doesn't knock, build a door," which can mean a lot of things. It can mean if you don't get offered a position or offered to a college you have to build the door to your future and do it all yourself. All my plans are set up to build my door to my future. My high school plan is to finish off with a bang and get a big jump on college. My college plans are to attend York Tech and major in Auto Mechanics. After college I plan to open up my own shop and if somehow that doesn't work out, I would want to just work for someone else in a shop or work in a shop that is known worldwide and work my way up to a high position such as the manager or head mechanic. The next step is not too far away but when it comes, I am ready.

THE SECOND QUARTER OF MY LIFE BY KHALI CLEGG

Throughout my high school career as a basketball player, I have prepared myself for my post-high school plans to continue to play the game that I love. From a young age I set very high goals and expectations that I plan to achieve. There are numerous things I wish to take action on, such as going to college and maintaining a set career path. Although my school of choice is unknown and my major is as well, I know for certain that I would like to participate in college basketball.

The game of basketball is an important part of me; it has been there for me when others were not. It has been a very consistent piece within my life. Basketball has been my refuge, a place where I have found my peace. Many bonds were formed with my teammates and coaches who assisted me through tough times, and I know they will be there when the tough aspects of my life decide to emerge again. Even though we will all separate eventually, my teammates are not just my teammates. They are my brothers, coach built this team to create a strong brotherhood and for us to play for one another. If you ever seen us play you could tell!

The relationship that I have built with the game has evolved over time. I have gained love, respect, and joy for the game in every single way. I have spent countless hours in the gym day in and day out to become great. I dedicated my time to the sport because I would hate to regret missing an opportunity. I want to live a content life, knowing that I gave it all each and every time. I treat every practice like it may be my last. I never know when I may gain an injury or run into a serious obstacle that may be difficult to overcome.

When I was younger, my extended family went on a vacation, and some of my older cousins, aunts, and uncles were playing a pickup game of basketball. I had recently picked up the sport and became an enthused eight year old. I supposed I was pretty dang good! I had just been added onto my first official team at the YMCA, so I felt overly-qualified to play with my family. Unfortunately, my uncle predicted otherwise and stated that I needed a little more experience in order to “roll with the big dogs.”

That experience has put fire under my feet, fire that has never been there before. I dreamed of “rolling with the big dogs.” Rage filled my body instantly. In my heart I knew I was already a “big dog”, an overly-qualified one at that I was big enough, smart enough, and good enough. I had to get better and I wanted to be the finest in the family. Better yet, I sought to become greater than anyone out there in the state. The expression my uncle used gave me the sudden urge to finally work to the best of my ability.

I am currently on the York Prep Academy basketball team. I play point guard which is also considered the “floor general.” The duty of a point guard is perhaps the most specialized role of

all positions. I am expected to control the team's offense by making sure the ball gets to the players at the right time. I figured by now since I've been maintaining that position since I started on the court I was well thought out to be a big dog.

Basketball has shown me much more than how fast I and strong I am. It has shown me that I am mentally tough and can work well through adversity. Certain situations that I have struggled with outside of basketball I've pulled through because I've struggled with something similar and connected them two together. Basketball showed me everything is not going to go my way, and also never give up easily on something because if it's worth having it shouldn't be easy.

College ball has always been a dream of mine and even though I may not have a definite school in mind, I have a couple offers to play. I am willing to join a team that will accept me as the athlete that I am. One aspect that I will be looking for when choosing my school happens to be the relationship the coaches have for their players, and how comfortable they make me feel being far from home.

I have chosen to extend my basketball career past high school for multiple reasons. One benefit that will most likely help me remain in school while enjoying the game is the fact that all schools offer tutoring sessions for athletes. Being an athlete is hard to balance. Your sport and school work in such a small amount of time longs for tutoring that would help me stay on top of my work. Another benefit I would be satisfied having is the connections the coaches may have to those interested in going to the pros. Lastly as an athlete, I will have the experience to take me to eventually coaching a big league team. If I were to run down such things knowing others may not have the same opportunities. I would call myself crazy!

There have been many nights where I planned out where I would go from here. There are also many nights where I have been too discouraged to continue. Either way I knew basketball was something I could never give up. My reasoning behind this is the fact that my love for the game defines me. Without it, it would be impossible to be the person I am today. Basketball is my stress reliever, entertainment, social aspect and my way out of Rock Hill. Saying that not to say I dislike the city I live in, I just know this isn't the right place for me and my family. I know there's more out there and I want to show my family that it's a better life outside of here.

So again you may ask, where I might be headed with basketball after this? Considering that there is a destiny for everyone and a plan for everything, I'll respond with, "Wherever God takes me." At the end of it all, He is the one that truly knows where I belong. So far, basketball has been His connection to me. If I am analyzing correctly, I would say that this is not going anywhere anytime soon. Basketball is my life.

MY FUTURE BY BRITTANY CRISP

As a high school student, I get asked about my future a lot. I've always had an idea what I've wanted to do in the future, but I don't have an actual plan. Well, the first step would be to finish high school. I'm almost done with that; I've got to take two more classes next semester and that's it. I'm excited to finish high school, but I might miss it after a while.

I need to keep my grades up and keep my GPA at a 3.5 at least. Mahatma Gandhi said, "The future depends on what we do in the present." So, in the present I need to be studying and making good grades, especially now that final exams are coming up. My mom told me if my GPA is a 3.5, my parents will help pay for me to go to York Tech, so I definitely want to take advantage of that offer. After I finish high school, the step after that would be to go to college. I've always wanted to go to college, and I always knew I would go. My parents have always encouraged me to go to college since I was little. I think it is necessary to go to college because I won't be able to get a job if I don't go. Ever since I was young, I've wanted to be a cosmetologist. Up until my junior year of high school, that's what I was planning to be. Cosmetology was something I was always interested in. I thought it'd be a good job for me. Because they say do what you love, right? This year, my junior year, things changed. I started thinking of other career options. I don't think cosmetologists make enough money. I know they say, "It's not about the money," and "Don't do a job just for the money," but in the real world money is important, especially once I move out and have my own family I have to support.

Another job I've always thought about having was being a dental hygienist. They make more money than cosmetologists. I looked it up online and it seemed like something I would like to do. So, I talked to my mom about it, and she thought it was a good idea. She said, if I wanted to, I could graduate my junior year and then, she said I could go take some classes at York Tech and go to school there. My cousin graduated early and went to York Tech and he seems to like it, so I'm sure I will, too. It sounds like a good idea to me so that's my plan for now. Graduate this year, go to York Tech, take all the classes I need to take, and become a dental hygienist.

Of course I want to take my mom up on her offer, because I'm ready to get out of here. I'm not implying that I had a bad high school experience. People say, "Your high school years will be some of the best years of your life," and I agree with that. I've had a pretty good high school experience so far. I've changed a lot, met a lot of new people, and tried a lot of new things. I think high school was fun, but I'm just ready to move on.

I hope I'm making the right decision, choosing to be a dental hygienist and not a cosmetologist. I could always go to beauty school later if I have any regrets. Also, I hope I'm making the right decision to graduate high school early, too. The guidance counselor tried to convince me to stay my senior year, and people tell me that senior year is supposed to be easy and really fun. Another

option my mom suggested is to still go to YPA next year and I could just take some study halls and easy electives. I just don't see the point in staying when it's unnecessary. Why waste my time when I can be doing something productive in college? I don't want to go away to college. I used to want to, but, I don't think I could leave some of the people I have in my life behind. I plan to stay here and finish all of my schooling and then I'll think about moving. I kind of like it here in Rock Hill, but I think it'd also be fun to move somewhere different and have new experiences. It also depends on if I have someone to move with, because I wouldn't want to move by myself. I'd get bored. I'm not exactly sure what my future holds, but that's basically my plan for now.

CREATING A BETTER FUTURE BY KATELYN FORSYTHE

Abraham Lincoln once said, “The best way to predict your future is to create it.” This quote is very powerful in saying that you can’t just sit around and wait on your future to unfold, expecting that you will get somewhere great later on. You are in charge of your future and the choices you make today will make or break you in the end. I, for one, am going to do everything I can to create my own future.

I plan on graduating high school this year. It's hard to believe that we are all seniors this year. As I'm writing this, I look around the room and see faces of people I have known since elementary school and some new faces of the people I met only just this year. It's amazing to think in a few months our little class of sixty and some odd students we will be walking across the stage.

After I finish high school I am planning on going to York Technical College for two years to get my basic classes completed and to get a degree in business, so hopefully one day I will be able to open my very own restaurant. I love to cook! I have been cooking since I was about seven years old. I remember being in the kitchen with my grandparents helping out with our big family dinners, especially the time at thanksgiving when the sweet potato pie caught on fire in the oven. That sure was a dinner to remember. I like the idea of bringing people together to have a good laugh and to get some family time in around the table. You name it and I can make it. Anything from mac and cheese to a big roast dinner, I would like to stick to simpler “Home Style” cooking when it comes to the place I would like to run. It was my paw-paw Whitesides’ dream to open his own restaurant; unfortunately, he passed away before he could do this. When I finally do open my little diner, I hope I will be making his dreams come true.

Not only will I be working on a business degree, but I also want a degree in radiology. Having a degree in business helps to pursue my dream for a restaurant, but having a degree in radiology helps to pursue a career that would be available if my restaurant didn't work out. If I attend college further than two years, then hopefully I will be able to go to the University of South Carolina or another one of these great colleges in the North and South Carolina area. I love the South because of the people and the idea of ‘Southern Hospitality.’

I know that being a radiologist and owning a restaurant are two very different careers, but I have always had an interest in radiology ever since I got injured playing one of my favorite sports. I was in the middle of a pickup game of basketball with some friends at school. I went up for a hoop shot but when I came back down, I felt and heard something snap. A couple of my teammates heard the crack and asked what was wrong. It turns out I tore a few ligaments and tendons, and I now have a cyst inside my knee cap and a lipoma, which is basically a benign tumor on my upper shin, close to my knee. The pain was very extreme and since then I have had

over fifteen x-rays and two MRI's. I've been through three rounds of physical therapy. If these problems still persist, I'll eventually have to have surgery.

If I hadn't messed up my knee so badly I'd probably still be playing and hoping for a scholarship. (Or should I say "hooping" for a scholarship?) Things happen for reasons though; plus, when have you ever heard of a basketball player who was only 5' 3 (other than Muggsy Bogues, of course) that got drafted into "the big leagues"? So I am kind of glad I am in this particular situation because it provoked an interest in a field of study that I wouldn't have given a second look too otherwise.

I would also like to minor in fine arts if I can. I know what you're saying: "This girl is crazy; she has way too many interests." But theatre and fine arts have always played huge roles in my life! I remember my first play: I was an angel in a church performance. I was about six years old and I remember being so excited about it. I didn't have any lines but my friends and I got to sing "Holy Night" it was my first taste of performing arts, and I've loved every bit of it since. I even know how to play a little bit of piano thanks to my Uncle Mike who taught me how to play a few verses of "Joy to the World" and I basically taught myself how to play the rest. My most recent performance was in a small skit at school. I was the mayor of a small town who had to solve a large crime that was committed. I may seem like the quiet type, but I love all types of visual and performing arts and I will take any part I can get! I also spend a lot of time drawing and have even entered a few competitions. I'm not the very best but it's what I like to do in my free time or just when I want to get things off my mind. Photography is also a big thing in my life. It feels like I am able to capture a moment in time and we will get to have a memory that will last forever. Whether or not the gig is big or small doesn't matter to me, arts have just always been a part of my life.

Out of all of the goals I have and dreams I've dreamt, I want to succeed most in making myself a good life and staying on track to create myself a promising future. I see myself living in Holden Beach, NC, working as a radiologist, starting up my own diner, dabbling in all the arts and playing a game of basketball with my family every once in a while. I give credit to all of the people who have tremendously helped me along the way. Among these people are my family, friends, teachers and coaches. I want to thank everyone who's helped me find my way to get where I am today. If it weren't for all of you, I don't know where I would be today.

TAKING THE JUMP BY JONATHAN GRANT

I hope to go skydiving over the summer before I head off to college. The idea of skydiving sounded scary at first, but I decided that this is something I've always wanted to try and it's something I've set my mind on doing. It's like what Wayne Gretzky said: "You miss one hundred percent of the shots you don't take." I think this quote is important because it is not only applied to hockey but can be applied to almost everything in life. I think we should all do what we love in life and we shouldn't settle for less. Honestly, if you are capable of being the best at what you do, why not pursue what you love? Life will throw things at you but you have to learn to dodge them. Some people may say this seems like a bucket list, but it's something I want to do before college because after college, you have to make rational choices. When life gives you lemons you make lemonade, and when life gives you opportunities to do what you want in life, you take those opportunities. What I love most about college is that I will be on my own for the first time and it's up to me to do the work necessary to graduate.

Most jobs require a college degree; in fact, around 60% of the jobs globally require a degree after high school. So in order to be in that 60% I need a college degree. Without a college degree you would be competing with people for the other 40% of jobs and most of those jobs' salaries are a lot less than most jobs with a college degree. One thing I know for sure is I will go to college. I've put too much effort into school to not go. School is something I've always dreaded, but I think of college as something to look forward to because if you don't do the work it's on you--there is no one to blame but yourself. It's a sign of freedom and responsibility and it's something I know that I can use to prove to myself and my parents that I am a responsible young adult. I know for sure that I don't want to be flipping burgers at McDonald's. I'm not saying there is anything wrong with that, but if you are capable of more, then why settle for less? I want to be happy throughout the day not just at the end of the month when I receive my paycheck, and not be upset with my job for the rest of my life. I don't want to be stuck in a career where I will wake up every morning and hate what I do; I want my job to be something I thoroughly enjoy.

My next step after high school will be to go to a four year college and get a bachelor's degree in marketing. I hope to use this marketing degree to help companies market their products or services efficiently and I want to go to college so I can make myself more marketable. As for which college I will go to I have not decided, but I have narrowed it down to the last two, College A and College B. I've already received my acceptance letters from both of these schools. At College A, I would be 10 minutes from my house and I would be able to be a commuter and not have to stay on campus which would lower the price by a lot; however, I feel that it may limit my college experience. College B might be the college for me since I am the kind of person who doesn't like to get out of their comfort zone, but college B is three and a half hours away from my house. Also I'm a rather quiet person and if I were to go there I would be forced to get out of my comfort zone which is something I believe is necessary for college and in life.

Your future is a lot to think about, but even in high school you have time; just make sure to not wait till the last minute. I believe that we all have greater potential than we believe--we just need to strive for it. I don't want to look back in life and realize that I never fulfilled any of my dreams. In life, dreams are the keys to happiness. I know that I need to pursue these dreams in order to make something of myself. I know that some people get angry with themselves because they are afraid of what they have become, they don't like their jobs or they just aren't happy in life and I won't just sit around and let that happen to myself. I will jump out of the plane if need be and even if I stumble, I will land on my feet and continue to move forward.

“MAKE MANY PLANS” BY MADDY KNOX

“You can make many plans, but the Lord’s purpose will prevail.” Proverbs 19:21

Twelve years of school and I never knew what I wanted to do when I graduate. I didn’t know what school I wanted to go to, what I wanted to be, or what my interests were. I’ve had many classes and teachers all trying to help me find out what I wanted to do in my life. Some made me think long and hard about some choices. I’ve had many jobs and schools that I have seen and heard about catch my eye. I’ve prayed that God would show me where my life should go and where I needed to go from where I am now. I chose this verse because it really just connects with what God says about His future for us.

“You can make many plans...” I’ve set my mind on so many schools and jobs that I would actually be willing to do in my life.

Some for example are Welch College in Nashville, TN; Pensacola Christian College in Pensacola, FL; Horry Georgetown Tech College in Conway, SC; Coastal Carolina College also in Conway, SC; Spartanburg Methodist College in Spartanburg, SC; and Spartanburg Community College in Spartanburg, SC. Among all the school choices I’ve considered many job titles for myself, like marine biologist. I love everything that has to do with the beach and I would love to learn more. I could help out everything in the ocean and learn more about it. I could be a Registered Nurse (RN), because I’ve always wanted to be in the medical field and I feel like I would be very good at taking care of other people. I’ve also thought I could be a Medical Assistant, because my papa, who I admired, was a doctor and I would love to try to strive to be like him in some ways. I could be a therapist because I am a good talker and listener and I always try to help people if I see them sad or I think they are going through something I try to make them feel better and I like hearing other people’s problems. I’ve always wanted to be in the service, so I have thought about being a military nurse, but I don’t think I could handle killing other people so why not take of the people who protect us and once again its medical and I would get a lot of benefits and I could travel. I might be a surgical tech or phlebotomist because its medical and I think it would be a cool job. Cosmetology and styling hair is something I’ve always pretended that I was going to do. I would still love to do it because there’s a girl thing about doing hair, and I’ve always thought of myself as a girly-girl. It’s the job that I always wanted as a little girl and had a passion for. As you can see I’ve had problems with seeing what I want my life to be like and what I want to do.

In my life I will have to make many plans. I personally believe that after the many years of looking through job titles and schools that I really know where I want to go from here. My plans when I graduate is to become a Phlebotomist and attend Spartanburg Community College. I believe that it’s a right fit for me, because they have more than 100 programs to pick from, it has

the lowest tuition in the upstate, it also has strong student support service. I will attend there in the fall of 2016. Many events will happen with my life before I get there, but I will not worry because God will show me what I should do.

"...but the Lord's purpose will prevail." I believe so much in my quote because He will help you when you ask.

My faith is important to me because of the many times in my life where I was alone and didn't really know what I wanted for myself and my life. My faith has given me so much hope to just keep holding on and working on bettering myself. My faith in God has helped me become who I am and where I am at in this point of my life. My faith has showed me that I do have hope in this world. As a Christian I have a purpose: to live my life for God. What I do in this world reflects on Him, with His help and guidance. That's the importance of my faith.

I hope that five years from now I am working and making money and maybe have a family after I graduate my college classes. I also hope to have a house and maybe pets as part of my new family. Things in my past have made me the person I am today. I can be like most people and say that I've been through so much, but I know now that I need my life to be together and in order. In my life I want to be have no worries when it comes to food and clothes, I want to have everything I need; I have faith that following God's path will provide me with what I need to be happy and healthy.

"You can make many plans, but the Lord's purpose will prevail." Proverbs 19:21

MAKING LIFE BEAUTIFUL BY BRANDI PATTERSON

Soren Kierkegaard said, "Life is not a problem to be solved but a reality to be experienced." High school is tough, but it's something that we all have to go through. No matter how hard things might get through school, there's always help for you and you shouldn't have to struggle. High school is supposed to be about making friends, having fun, and finding a career choice. For many of us seniors our future is right around the corner and time's almost up. Personally I think the world outside of high school sounds scary and overwhelming, but we all have to face it sooner or later.

"What do you want to be when you grow up?" I can't tell you how many times I have been asked that question. I used to say things like doctor and lawyer. Then, of course, reality hit when I got to high school and I actually figured out what a doctor did and what kind of schooling a lawyer had to go through. My mindset, my friends, my personality, and my career choice changed a lot after my sophomore year. For a lot of people high school is just about passing and making it to the next year. I didn't start taking high school seriously until my junior year because it finally hit me that I only had two years left. School has never really been my favorite place. I would dread having to wake up early and go sit in a classroom for eight hours a day learning. I would come up with every excuse in the book to be able to stay home or to go in late. Most of the time it didn't work, but sometimes I could get away with it.

It wasn't until a few months into my senior year that I knew what I wanted to do after high school. I have always had a thing for doing hair and makeup. I love to watch people get their hair or makeup done, and I especially love the reaction they get when they see the final results. I enjoy seeing their eyes light up and the smiles on their faces. I want to be able to make people feel beautiful or handsome and be happy to go out and be confident about how they look. I know a lot of people say girls shouldn't wear makeup because it's "false advertising," but if that is going to boost someone's confidence and make them feel good about themselves then let them do what they want to do. I don't think that you should be limited to how you want to look I don't think society should have a say in how you do your hair or your makeup. So many people are quick to judge a person just because they don't like the way they look, which is a lesson I have learned myself.

My biggest supporter would definitely have to be my mom, she has always been there for me in any big decision that I've had to make. My mom has always been very supportive in everything that I've wanted to do career wise, and she really helped me in making a decision in what I wanted to do after high school. My mom started selling makeup when I was about twelve, so I was introduced to it at a very young age. She has taken me to three different schools in South Carolina to tour so I could make the best decision in which school would be best for me. So I would have to say that if it wasn't for my mom, I would still be very confused about my future. I've always been interested in makeup since I was little but I wasn't interested in hair until I was about seventeen. I

talked to many people about going to cosmetology school; I talked to people who had already graduated and to people who were still attending cosmetology school. I was always told that it was a tough job and that it takes a while to build a clientele, but I was still determined to pursue this career that I have thought about for years.

When I was little I would always say that I would never be one of those girls who would always have their makeup, nails and hair done and dressed up for absolutely nothing. That changed when I got to high school. I started wearing makeup everywhere and I always had to get my nails done and I found myself constantly trying to look nice no matter where I went. I guess when I got to high school, I felt like I had more freedom and by that time my mom had given up on trying to tell me I shouldn't be wearing makeup.

So after I graduate I plan on going to cosmetology school and getting my cosmetology license. In about ten years, I'm going to try and open my own salon for hair and makeup and strive for success in what I enjoy doing. I've had many people try and talk me out of going to school for hair, but I stuck to what I love and I'm moving forward and doing what makes me happy.

PRIVATE ETHAN BY ETHAN RICHARDSON

For thirteen years of one's life, one sits in classrooms and are told to think of what one wants to do in life. It is a question that is asked so often, it is easy for one to simply get tired of it and not give it another thought. This is possibly the worst mistake that one can make in one's life. Once one has decided not to give this question another thought, it makes it difficult to decide when it is time. This is one of the many mistakes that I have made in my life and have suffered the consequences of it. I have waited until three months out from when my decision has to be made to make up my mind (somewhat). I have pretty well decided that military is the right route for me. I know that many people are going to be reading this and wondering, "What is he thinking?" The simple answer to that is I don't know what I want to do and the armed services could give me some guidance. I also don't feel like college is the right answer for me as I lack the values needed for secondary education. This decision was reached a few months ago, and now I am wrestling with what branch and job I would like to serve in and do.

I am primarily looking at serving in the United States Navy as a HM (Hospital Corpsman). The role of the HM is to provide medical care and support to the fleet, SEALs, Force Recon, and the FMF (Fleet Marine Force). I would ideally like to serve with the FMF as they are the ones going out there and risking their lives for our country. I feel as if that is the least I can do for these men and women, If I stay in for long enough to reach the rate of E-5 (Petty Officer First Class), the I would like to attend IDC (Independent Duty Corpsman) school and be assigned wherever from there. The role of an IDC is a bit more stressful than that of a normal Hospital Corpsman as they are assigned to be the only source of medical care on some of the navy's vessels and units (Submarines, some FMF units, etc). I would like to hold this job because it can translate to civilian work as an EMT, paramedic, or higher in the medical field.

The other branch that I am looking at joining is the United States Army as a Health Care Specialist (Army Field Medic). The role of the medic is similar to that of the Corpsman though the medic will receive EMT-B certification upon completion of their training while the HM will not. An Army medic will most likely see multiple deployments while they are in the service, but this is what appeals to me. After a certain amount of time as a medic, I would like to attend Flight Medic School in which medics are taught the basic principles of medical evacuation. The role of a flight medic is to provide air medical support to wounded soldiers on the battlefield and transport them to hospitals. Holding this job can translate to civilian work as an EMT, Paramedic, or higher in the medical field. Army medics are also qualified to attend Airborne and Ranger School. While this is not something that necessarily interest me, it is nice to be able to keep my options open. Wearing the tab of a Ranger is considered to be a great honor in the Army. It is also possible for medics to move to an 18D MOs, which is a Special Forces medical sergeant.

I became interested in this field of work when my neighbor moved into the house next to ours. He is former Army Airborne and worked as a paramedic and fireman one he was discharged. He said that working as a paramedic can be fun and rewarding but is also challenging. I can remember talking to him about the different things he saw while he worked as a paramedic. Once he was working with a woman when they were called to a wreck. As always, it was lights and sirens all the way there and a serious attitude. It was not until they reached the wreck site that they realized the worst part; one of the fatalities was the woman's mother. He told me this story to demonstrate how it can be rewarding but difficult work. I found that some medics go on to obtain a higher license such as P.A. (Physician's Assistant) or even an M.D. An alternative to this route is to join the South Carolina Army National Guard which would be the same thing except it would be a part time commitment.

My alternative route to either of the military EMS (Emergency Medical Science) careers is at Gaston College. They offer an affordable AAS (Associates in Applied Science) in EMS that will also give the student paramedic certification. It could be beneficial to me to go into the military with this college experience behind me, as well as a paramedic certification. It would allow me to potentially start with an advanced rank as well as make the military medical training easier. It would also give me a work field if I were to decide to not join the military. I would be able to work with many EMS agencies as a full time paramedic. Holding this degree could also help me if I decided to pursue a higher degree in medicine. One of the jobs that I wouldn't mind having later in life would be as a general practitioner. This is a person who practices general medicine and is often your family doctor. This career field has interested me for a while as it is both fun and challenging at the same time. If I chose not to pursue a career as a GP, I would probably look at becoming an ER (Emergency Room) doctor instead.

An AAS entering the military could be useful as it would, with a couple more years of school, allow me to becoming an officer which has a several benefits. One of the most prominent differences between an officer and an enlisted man is the pay scale. The base pay for an officer is close to the pay that someone with years of experience would receive. Officers also receive various other benefits such as their own eating hall as well as the respect that they are given. After twenty years, you would also receive officer's pay for life which is a nice boost at that point from enlisted pay.

I know that some may read this and judge me based on my decisions, and that's ok--you don't have to agree with it. I respect the fact that each and every person has their own individual ideas of what needs to come after high school. I chose to follow the path to becoming a healthcare professional to pursue my own dreams.

MY PERFECTLY GLAZED DOUGHNUT BY ELENA WALROD

When I imagine myself in the future, I see a happy woman. In no way do I imagine myself in a certain outfit or with a certain man or even a certain haircut. I see myself smiling or laughing or being my goofy, loveable self. I imagine a perfect summer afternoon, where I am sitting outside on a porch swing, drinking my favorite coffee blend and eating a perfectly glazed doughnut. Or even a cold winter night, where I am laying in my favorite couch spot, snuggled up with my fuzzy blanket and sleepy kitten, watching an overplayed Christmas movie. I imagine a stress-free life. But, like all imaginations, it's not real. It's all in my head. It's all a fantasy. The only person who can make these fantasies come true is me. But how do I make all of my dreams come true? How do I get to the place I want to be? How am I going to get my act together in order to have this "perfect life"? So many questions and about how I plan to live my life in the future. My answer to all of these questions is through happiness.

I remember one summer I was walking with my dad in Freedom Park, and we saw a woman walking her dog. She had tattoos up both of her arms, bright purple hair, and many facial piercings. She wore all black clothing, a band tee, and a baseball cap. After we smiled and passed her, I looked at my dad expecting a reaction. But he continued to walk and smile as normal. So, I asked him, "Did you see her?" He replied, "Yes." "Did you see her hair and her outfit?" I continued to laugh. He replied, "Yes." Still confused as to why my dad wasn't laughing at what ridiculousness we just saw, I asked him, "Don't you think she looked a little CRAZY?!?" I was dying of laughter at this point. All my dad had to say was, "Maybe to you and I, but looking that way is what makes her happy, and we shouldn't laugh at that." My dad's comment stuck with me. Why did I judge the way she looked? I don't want people judging me. From that moment on, I decided to not judge others by what makes them happy, and continue to live my life by doing things that made me happy.

I plan to live my life vigorously and thoroughly. I will enjoy my long nights procrastinating essays, even though that is frowned upon; I will enjoy snuggling my multiple cats, even though I will be made fun of; I will enjoy stuffing my face with my favorite junk foods, even though I will regret it later; I will enjoy getting a tattoo that means something, even though my mother will kill me when she finds out; I will enjoy dancing in my underwear to One Direction, even though I'll be "wasting time"; I will enjoy laughing and crying at the most inappropriate times, even though I'll lose all respect amongst my peers. I plan to live my life through hope instead of regret.

In order to do this, I have to know myself. I need to know what makes me ME. Finding yourself is not a one day project. And I know that these next few years of my life are when I will change the most. There will be life changing decisions that will need to be made. However through all these things, I plan to be myself, whatever that means at the time. Sometimes it will mean crying because I just can't get my college essay to sound the way I want, or sleeping through my spring

break because I'm behind on my sleep schedule. Whatever seems natural to me, is what I plan to do.

I realize that the act of happiness and "being myself" does not pay well in the real world. But, my point is not to make a career out of happiness. No matter what college I go to, or what career I have, or what man I marry, I will be happy and make the most out of my life. I will live a positive life no matter what I am doing, or what "path" I take.

I do want to have a full-time job in the future, so when it was time for me to choose my career path, I started off thinking about what made me happy and how I could make a career out of that. I love helping and caring for other people, so I began to look into careers that involved helping others. Eventually, I narrowed it down to two options: social work and physical therapy. Both of these options make me extremely excited for my future, whether it be helping parentless children or caring for a patient.

Even though I have limited knowledge of what the world has to offer, I am confident that I will soak up all the beauty and positivity and use it to my advantage. I want to explore all the beautiful things in the world, whether it is flying to Germany or just visiting a new book store that opened up down the street. Of course, not everything is wonderful and full of life. There is negativity and there is death. I plan to recognize these and learn from them, and help prevent them. In no way will I let the negative or entitled people in the world run my life or take over my happiness.

Now I realize this all sounds extremely optimistic and to most people, impossible. On some days, it even sounds impossible to me. Most of the time, I wake up uncertain about everything. I question how I will even make it through the day without crying or hurting another person I care about. There will be weeks at a time where I feel unsatisfied or unhappy. Not every day will be the best. There will be sleepless nights, ear-splitting arguments, sore legs, unflattering haircuts. But, the second I realize that it is my choice to be happy, and it is my decision to act a certain way towards people, I automatically make the attempt at being in a better mood and acting more appropriately. So, instead of being upset or dwelling on the bad things in life, I will reflect on what happened and learn from it. I will prevent myself from stressing and worrying. Once again, I am confident I can do this, it's in my nature to continue to improve.

So the next time I receive a complicated essay about my future or a simple question about what I see my future like, whether it be from an uptight college professor or a quality friend, I will tell them: "I see myself being happy and eating a perfectly glazed doughnut."

THE PUG LIFE BY RACHEL YOUNGBLOOD

I've come a long way in my seventeen years of life. Where do I go next? What is my next step? Most people want to be young forever...they want to party, have sex, do drugs, and drink. I suppose these are fun things to do every now and then, but what's the point in devoting your life to these things? I don't see the point in waking up every morning and smoking before school, smoking after school, drinking and partying every weekend. But I guess that's one of the ways I am different from some of my friends.

I have a year and a half left of high school and all I can think about is graduating. High school has been tough. It has been a lot of late nights doing homework and studying for tests. I have had lots of crazy teachers that are trying to prepare us for college classes and forgetting that we are still in high school. I have lost friends and made new ones. Finally, as a junior in high school, I can say I have some good friends that I feel comfortable being around. I think the main reason I hate high school isn't because I really don't like "high school" but because I don't like school in general. I hate getting out of bed and going to a school full of people who lie to you and talk about you behind your back. Every week I am taught a bunch of things that I probably won't use again in the real world. I guess it's good to know the history of the world and learn about all these great people and their achievements, but do I really need to be tested on my knowledge of these things? I've always liked doing projects that really help me remember this stuff, but I hate studying for hours to memorize stuff just to know it on a test and then not be able to apply it in real life. I'm ready to learn new things that will help me in the future.

I know it'll be scary to be on my own and I'm sure I'll miss being a teenager. I will miss not having responsibilities, being able to eat whatever I want, looking at pictures of pugs for hours, watching YouTube videos and tutorials on makeup looks that I probably won't ever be able to do, and being able to waste time watching the *Rocky* series over and over. Even though I am desperate to be done with high school, I have absolutely no idea what I want to do with my life. I know I want to settle down at a young age and have children young; not young like 18, but young like 25. As for the job thing, I don't really know which direction I'm leaning towards. I once wanted to be an accountant, but in middle school when math started to get harder, that was quickly ruined. Then I started to draw floor plans and realized I wanted to be an architect. But that grew boring and I just stopped doing it. Since then I have thought about being a hairstylist, an interior designer, or a wedding planner. I could be anything I want; I have so many choices. But it scares me that at 18 years old, I will be expected to know what I want to do with my life or where I want to go to college. Every day, different adults ask what I want to be when I grow up, or where do I want to go to college? All I can tell them is that I have goal and that goal is to not have a job that I dread every morning and that I count down each hour until I can leave. I want a job that makes me happy. I also would like a job where the people around me are happy doing their job. Being surrounded with happy people makes me happy.

I have also thought about being a stay-at-home mom. I know that is cliché and women can do so much more now that they used to not be able to do, but I feel like I could be perfectly content cooking and cleaning and spending time with my children. I want to be able to do things with my husband so that our marriage is always strong. I want to always be available to him and my children. Growing up, my mom worked two jobs and if I was sick I had to go to her job with her because she was so consumed with work. A job where I work 40 or more hours a week would potentially put a damper on my relationship with my children and my husband.

One of the main reasons I want to always be available to my kids and husband is so my relationships with them will always be strong. I used to have a good relationship with my mother, but not so much anymore and I haven't had the best relationship with my dad until now. I guess that's one of the reasons it's so easy for me to say I want to be independent. For a majority of my life I already was very independent. I want to always be there for my kids because I never really had that growing up. I guess one of my next steps will be to raise my kids the way my parents raised me with the same morals and values, but at the same time do it better and make sure my kids know I'm not going anywhere.

One of my next steps in life, as a person, will be to get over everything that happened when I was a kid: my parents divorcing, seeing my dad one weekend every month, the constant fighting, having to leave my mom. Parents don't know how hard a divorce is for kids. When my parents got divorced, it was extremely hard to have to go back and forth. One parent got Thanksgiving and the other got Christmas. I always wanted to spend all holidays with my dad so I could be with my older siblings, grandparents, and cousins. It didn't always work out that way, and a lot of times I got really sad for missing out on stuff. I don't want my children to ever have to go through being at different houses for holidays or ever feeling left out. Divorce will not be an option for me. I'm not usually one to give up on something or someone that I have already put a lot of effort in to.

I have a lot to do as a person and a lot of choices to make. I need to be stronger and focus on myself more. I'm gradually getting better at standing up for myself. As for school, after high school I will go to York Tech for two years and give myself time to decide what I want to do. I also think I might need to job shadow some people and maybe that'll help me. I can only hope that four to five years from now I'm a better person and I'm doing something that I love. I also hope that I'll be with someone I love; someone who gets me and knows everything there is to know about me. I picture myself sitting on my couch with my husband, my kids, and my pug watching *Rocky*. I have a lot to do leading up to my next step in life.

THE DREAM

WET SOCKS BY AUSTIN BALL

As I sit in the mountains of West Virginia reminiscing on a simpler time, I think back to my high school English 4 class when Mrs. DiMatteo had us write a chapter about “The Next Step” in our lives. Since a young age I loved the mountains, and I knew that one day I would hike the Appalachian Trail from start to finish. Now, as I sit by a dimly lit fire that crackles under the midnight sky, I think about what life has been for me since my high school career has ended, and what it may hold for me not only in the near future, but also 50 years from now when I am hardened by many long hours and restless nights, and the “Next Step” will be nearly impossible to reach.

As morning breaks and the sun peeks over the Great Smoky Mountains, the same sky that was once painted a dark, charcoal grey, now resembles a youthful watercolor painting. I think back to when I was sitting in class discussing “The Next Step” in my life. I thought about college, a wife and kids, what career I may have, and an array of things that honestly I could not predict. I did not know what college I was going to attend, whether it be a 4 year university, or a 2 year tech school. Would I get my doctorate and become a great neurologist? Would I get a 2 year business management degree and start a multi-million dollar company? Maybe I’d do neither. I did not know who my wife was going to be, or if I’d ever find the love of my life. Would I ever have kids? Would I be a father of 13, or would my only child be a German Shepherd that loved exploring just as much as I did? I was a 17 year old teenage boy who didn’t know what life had in store for him, but I had one goal in mind, something that was on the top of my bucket list, and that was to hike the Appalachian Trail.

So I decided the Appalachian Trail is what I’d write about, for it was something that I wanted more than anything and knew for certain I’d make happen. I always talked to my mother about my life dream of conquering the beast of hiking 2,168.1 miles from the hills of Georgia to the mountains of Maine, and every time I brought it up she gave me the same distasteful look. She’d say with the same tone of voice, “Are you trying to kill me Austin Scott Ball? There are murderers on that trail! Are you trying to turn my hair grey?” I’d look at her and laugh, explain to her that the only killers on the trail were either grizzly bears or my own mind. See, for me it was more than just exploring nature, it was about finding out who I truly was, and what better way to find yourself then to spend 6 months of your life with just the bag on your back and God to talk to? Mental toughness would be pushed to its limit, and achieving a personal goal would be greater than words could explain.

As I hike through the Great Smoky Mountains, thousands of trees varying from vibrant shades of green, to warm red-orange surround me. Though most of the leaves have been washed-out from the harsh change in climate, they are still breathtakingly beautiful. As I look at the trees I think

about how they're similar to people, because the reality of it is that we are not that different. Trees and humans alike both need water and nutrition to stay strong. We help each other breathe and without one another we would not be able to survive. Trees continue to grow until the moment they die, and I find this to be true for people as well. This journey along the Appalachian Trail has helped me grow as a person, not only mentally, but spiritually as well. I am a firm believer that man belongs to Earth, Earth does not belong to man. Enjoying what the Earth has to provide for us had been a wonderful experience and has made me a happier person.

When thinking about what the future has to hold, I do not care about materialistic things. What I truly care about is the people whom I love, and being happy. Happiness cannot be purchased, and true happiness comes from within. To anyone who wants to be happy, I'd say follow your dreams and make them come true. Metaphorically, the next step in my life would be finding Austin. Literally, the next step would be pushing through the dead of winter with soaking wet socks and dealing with the most unbearable blisters that have developed on the inside of my toes and back of my heels. To most people this probably seems like a horrendous idea, but to me it sounds absolutely amazing.

I remember talking to my uncle at one of our family reunions; he told me stories about his adventures as a young man and how he found himself in the years after high school. He bought a motorcycle and told my grandparents that he was off to the Colorado Rockies to become a ski bum. As he left from Ohio on his 1972 Honda Rebel, he only had one thing in mind: finding himself. As he rode through our amazing country he had a lot of time to himself to think about life, and what he'd like to do with it. He hated high school as a kid and had no dreams of going to college--all he wanted to do was adventure. As he reached California he got tired of that small motorcycle and traded it for a bicycle. He then rode his 10 speed all the way up the west coast to Washington, where he decided to work on a fishing vessel. After hard hours and restless nights, he decided that maybe college wouldn't be so bad after all. He went back to Ohio and attended Kent State University and went on to get his master's degree in what he loves. It took him a while to find himself, but now he is very successful and gives credit to those youthful adventures for making him who he is.

Listening to my uncle really inspired me to take time to find myself before I figure out what I want to do in this life. When I mentioned the Appalachian Trail to him, he stated that he regretted never hiking it when he was young because he is too old now and can't physically endure the harsh miles. It occurred to me that I need to follow my dreams before I get too old, so as I sit here by this fire in the mountains of West Virginia, I am thankful that I had that conversation with my uncle. Although I don't want to work on a fishing boat in order to find myself, it made me realize that taking time off between high school and college doesn't mean that you can't be successful in this life.

As a high school student I didn't really know what the "Next Step" of my life was going to be. I liked to think that no matter what happened I'd be happy, and after my uncle told me about his adventures as a young man, and how they prepared him for the next steps in his life, I knew that hiking the Appalachian Trail wasn't going to be a waste of time. The Next Step in my life is a chapter that will write itself, not the one that I wrote in my high school English 4 class. My dad always told me, "If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans," and I find this to be very true. The truth is that no matter where we think we're going in life, things can always happen and change our future plans. One plan that can't be changed is my decision to be happy, for "The Next Step" can always be a happy one as long as I am content with who I am.

THE AFRICAN DREAM BY CHLOE CRAIG

As Lo'a Reg laid down that night she had no idea she was about to experience a dream that would change her life forever. A dream that revealed to her a future she had only imagined having. A dream that would be the beginning of her future.

She was finally there! At age twenty-six, all she had been dreaming of her whole entire life was finally coming true. Lo'a Reg had just took her first step off of the airplane and the humidity of Democratic Republic of Congo hit her in the face. But at that moment the humidity was the last thing on her mind. Everything seemed so surreal to her, but she knew she was not there for pleasure: she was on an assignment. She was determined to go and make a pathway for her homeland people who had dreams and visions of being someone and going somewhere, but had no resources to do so. She wanted to give the children who had walked dirt roads barefoot, had swollen bellies from starvation, had never seen a reflection of themselves in a mirror, seven year old children who had to take care of smaller children but still needed someone to take care of them, she wanted to give all of them a chance. A path of hope to let them know that someone out there does care about them, and that is what she was determined to do.

Lo'a Reg grew up in small town Rock Hill, South Carolina, with dreams beyond her reach. There always was a burning passion in her heart to help others, but she knew she had to expand her resources in order to help others. As she was in high school, she began brainstorming ideas to help her develop into a successful entrepreneur so that when she graduate high school she would already have a head start on her future. Her whole family had the desire to own a business, so they decided to start a family business of sending care packages to college students, so that generations to come would have a dependable income. As she continued to work the business, she saved her money over time. She invested her money in different stocks and real estate. She wanted to save enough money so that by age twenty-five she would have enough money to travel and enjoy life freely. But her main goal was to make it to Africa to help people in need.

Her first step to making it to Africa was to begin giving. She was a firm believer in the verse, "Give and it shall be given back unto you" (Luke 6:38). If she was going to help others in another country, she had to help those in need around her first. So she began helping out at soup kitchens, giving her old clothes away to others in need, help build houses with foundations, donating to charities, and just being helpful to others in any way possible.

Loa's next step before making her way to Africa was to travel to all the places she had ever dreamed of going. She wanted to visit Jamaica, Cancun, Barbados, France, and many more. She basically wanted to just enjoy life without the pressure of society telling her how to live it. For example, going to school and graduating, going to college, working a nine to five every day, then

working for someone until old enough for retirement. By that time the status of the body may be declining, which prevents an elderly person from enjoying life. She had always told herself at a young age that she was not going to conform to society's way of life and was going to be her own person. So she decided to go and live her life carefree, without any regrets.

After she visited to some of the places she had hoped to travel to, she began to make her way to Africa. She decided to bring along some of her family for support, and to have someone to be with in a place she had never been before. They decided to go to Democratic Republic of Congo because it is known to be one of the poorest countries in Africa. When they first arrived in Democratic Republic of Congo, they went to one of the villages to help out with a food drive. As they were there, they observed the way the people lived, and noticed that mostly everyone there spoke French. Lo'a Reg had taken French classes for the last several months in preparation for her journey. Weeks after being there, Lo'a Reg was able to get books shipped from America to put into the classrooms that were going to be built, so that the children would have a source of education. Later she began to get nurses sent over for the sick people of Democratic Republic of Congo to help them with their health. She had a church built for the religious people of Congo. She had a whole list of things she wanted to do for the people of Africa, and was determined not to leave until those things were accomplished. And after she left Democratic Republic of Congo, she wanted to visit every other country in Africa and do at least one thing for them that would advance their wellbeing.

Lo'a Reg realized as she was traveling to all the different countries of Africa that she had no desire to go back to the United States of America. Her heart's desire was to stay in Africa and live in unity with her people. She moved the rest of her family from America to Africa so that they all could have the opportunity to experience a different side of the world. She had her a home built in Malawi (because the official language is English), and met an African prince by the name of Obasi Agunda who became her husband. As they continued with their lives, Lo'a never forgot her passion to help others in need and always remembered that whatever she did to put God first.

Suddenly Lo'a awoke from her dream, and could not be happier. She began taking the steps that were revealed to her in the dream. She thanked the past for all the lessons, and told the future that she was ready. As Lo'a Reg pursued her dreams she always remembered a quote by Mahatma Gandhi, which kept her motivated: "The future depends on what we do in the present."

MY FALLOUT LIFE BY MATTHEW CULVER

Just another day in the town of Sanctuary as I get out of bed and then gently wake my wife. Just as I'm done shaving, she walks up behind me to ask what we're doing today. We take our talk out to the living room where Codsworth, our Mr. Handy Robot, greets us and offers a cup of coffee. Suddenly, I hear our son Shaun start crying, so I dash to check on my son and my wife is following behind me, just in case Shaun needs that motherly touch. After we get him calmed down and changed his diaper, Codsworth beckons me to come into the living room to watch the television.

As I calmly walk in the living room the television is already on and the news anchor is distressed, saying, "The nuclear war has begun," as there are images of bombs being dropped. At that moment, a Vault-tec representative shows up at my door to informing me that my family has been selected to be "dwellers" in the Vault. Without question or debate, I accept his offer of immediately entering the safety of Vault 111.

As my family and I run to the Vault, we see people already crowded at the gate. We push through the crowd to find two men in power armor with miniguns guarding the gate, along with a man with the roster of approved family names. As soon as we are pushed through the gate, we begin our descent into the Vault--and we see the nuclear bomb drop and explode just as we are underground. Everything has happened so fast, but we feel as if we're safe. We talk to the other people in the Vault about what's happening and whether there will be any survivors.

We finally get down to the floor of the Vault and we are greeted by a scientist who tells us we have to be cleansed in a quarantine area, so we enter the pod. Suddenly, a white vapor starts to come from the top of the chamber and then I black out. I have no idea how long I was unconscious, but I wake up to find myself extremely cold. I can barely see out of the glass, but I look out to see my wife and son in the pod across from me and there is a scientist and an armed man trying to take my son away from my wife. The man has a revolver and is threatening to shoot my wife if she doesn't give the scientist our son. She keeps refusing and the man shoots my wife, the scientist takes my son, and I black out again.

I come to again and then it hits me: I'm freezing cold. I look at the glass and it's completely frozen and then I notice a blinking light with a symbol of a door opening above it. I push on the door to get out and as I do, the warm air hits me at once and I collapse onto the floor. It takes a second or two for me to regain control to stand back up; I open my wife's chamber and she is dead. I take the only thing that I can, which is her wedding ring. I find my way around the Vault and I take a lot of 10mm ammo and a matching pistol. I find myself at the vault door but I can't get out without a special key called a pip-boy. I see a body and then a giant roach-creature called a radroach. I shoot, it and then I check the body and find a pip-boy on his arm. I use the pip-boy

to get out of the vault and as I rise up the shaft on the platform, the light hits me all at once and blinds me for a second. I look around and there are buildings collapsed everywhere--it's a miracle that some of them were still left standing. As I rummage through the trash and debris, I find my robot Codsworth, who is overjoyed to see me. We go through the town of Sanctuary while Codsworth explains what has happened since I entered the Vault: I was frozen in that chamber for 200 years and there is mass chaos, every man for himself. Codsworth reveals there is a safe haven at a place called Diamond City, and it dawned on me that's the best way to find my son if he is even still alive.

In a few months, I've made it in Diamond City only to find that my son wasn't there. However, I've also helped the Brotherhood of Steel a lot by killing synths that are littered in the Commonwealth. I even stumbled across technology that unlocks teleportation so I go back to the Brotherhood of Steel's Headquarters, which is literally a flying fortress. I offer the technology to one of the lead scientists and within days he has duplicated it so a handpicked group can infiltrate the institution to end this madness once and for all. I was selected as part of the assault group.

We get near the institution and teleport inside. It's a giant factory with Tesla coils everywhere. It's actually breathtaking, but we remember that this is the place where people are making other people into cyborgs otherwise known as synths, and it must be destroyed. We find synths everywhere and it is hard to fight through, but we manage to get to a place that looks like a bedroom.

There he is! My son! I start to talk to him, but he responds negatively and calls out "Father" and then he is shutdown. I was so confused and I went away from the group to find this person called "Father" and as I get to his location, the group does also. I lead the way in and we find a sixty year old man and I ask him what he did with my son Shaun. He looks at me and tells me that HE is my son. He made the synth version of him at a young age because he wanted to create the illusion that I had only been frozen for only 10 years.

After we talk for a little while, I do see a resemblance between us--he looks more like my father, though. Shaun tells me that he plans on nuking all of lower Boston and repopulating the commonwealth with Synths. Now I've come into the hardest choice of my life: should I kill my son in order to let everyone else survive or let Shaun live and let his plan continue? I decide to do the right thing and kill Shaun so that everyone that I've met can survive. We finish destroying the Institute.

The credits finish, I log out and save the game for the last time. Now that I'm finished with the next step that I'm going to take is to go to York Tech and get a degree in Interactive Web Design and Graphics. I would make a couple working websites just for my portfolio. Then I would find

a company that needs the help and would be willing to hire someone with little or no experience or find a contract to work on/develop a website. Finally my career would go from there in my job or taking new contracts for websites, But video games will always have a part in my life where I can be adventurous and take totally different steps than the ones I take every day.

TO MY FUTURE CHILD(REN) BY MORGAN FOSTER

Firstly, I want you to understand how much love I have for you. As I write this I have no idea who you are, how much you weigh, what your grades are, the sports you're interested in, nor who you associate yourself with. I don't know the color of your hair, the shape of your nose, the amount of time you spend getting ready, the spacing of your teeth, nor the sound of your laugh. Although I don't even know your name, I do know one thing; and that is my love for you is unconditional and everlasting. You need to understand that I will always care for you. I will always fight by your side. I will always support you. I will always be proud of you. I will always be your mother and you will always be my child.

Sometimes this unbreakable bond will become strained and it will be hard, but understand I only want the best for you; whatever that may be.

In regards to your uncertainty on your 'next step,' I want you to understand that it's completely acceptable and normal for you to not be certain as to where you're going or what you're going to do with your life. I hope you realize it's not weird to be unsure and you are most certainly not alone in this. Many, including myself, have felt just as you do.

I know that it's hard to imagine your mom as someone your age, but rest assured I'm still dealing with the same anxieties and pressures you're feeling right now. I know the unnecessary amounts of fear and shame caused by a failed test. I know the late night cram sessions and the unquantifiable amounts of energy drinks consumed to survive. I know the dread of not wanting to go to sleep because you felt like you could have accomplished more in that day. And I know the dread of not wanting to wake up because the mere idea of school causes stress and anxiety. I know how easy it is to fall behind and how hard it is to catch up. I know that teachers can sometimes be unfair. I know that just because you do your best does not always mean you're the best in the class. I know that classwork and homework are not necessarily the only important aspects of your educational career; that experiences outside of school can lead to real learning.

And lastly I know the pressure of permanently deciding your future in a few simple questions is simply overbearing. Why do you need to give a final answer so quickly? How does anyone actually expect you to choose a profession when you haven't experienced that job? Should it be based on your interests? What if those interests become boring or change? Should your choice be based on the amount of income? How would you know what actual amount of money you need to live comfortably? What amount to live in excess? Or an amount that isn't quite enough to sustain?

I really wish I had the answers, but sadly I'm still trying to decide myself.

As of right now, I'm a senior in high school. Your grandmother pushed me very hard academically from a young age. I will be graduating a year early because of this intense pressure to be advanced and it has ultimately caused a great deal of stress to befall upon my shoulders. I feel as though I need to be the best in the best field, surrounded by the best people of their respective fields. This idea of perfection has been, both purposely and inadvertently, placed on me and has caused me to lack in self-confidence. It's difficult to imagine myself meeting the standards I feel I'm expected to meet. However, I know that you are not me. You are your own unique individual, with particular triggers that cause stress. Grades may not be what intimidate you or cause you to worry, as they do me. But I do also realize you will inevitably feel inadequate at some point within your life.

But it's important to understand that this fear and self-doubt shouldn't prevent you from doing what truly makes you happy. That is all I want for you. I want you to do something you feel is worth doing. I could care less the title your profession brings, or how much money you receive an hour, nor the amount of schooling needed. If you like what you do than do it.

Unlike many parents, I completely realize and embrace the fact that everyone is their own unique person with unique needs and preferences. I refuse to constrict you into the little box the parents of society have happily built for us. I'm not going to require you to only be a doctor or a lawyer. I don't believe that your profession should be based on the amount of money you make nor the respect your job is expected to have go along with it. I also don't expect you to be a master of the arts or exceptionally creative. You don't have to be an artist or a writer.

Simply put: I want you to be happy. I realize I've said this previously but it is everything that I hope for you. I think it's what every parent truly wants in the end, even if occasionally they believe money, respect, and power equate to happiness. If you are content in your life. If you have found peace in not only your profession but in your state of being. If you feel as though you are doing what you love for the right reasons. If you are happy, than I believe I have done my job as a parent correctly.

Therefore your 'next step' should always be the one that makes you most happy.

Your Mother,
Morgan

P.S. And at the very least, have good taste in music.

THE FANTASY BY DANIELLE HANCOCK

I've never been someone who plans things out. I just go with the flow. I do think about my future and what it could be like, but I always think, *I'll just see how it plays out. Maybe I'll do this, or I could do this.* I don't like thinking too far into the future, at least not seriously. I may fantasize about how it could be or how I wish it could be. However, it probably won't turn out the way I want it to. For example, I used to always dream of marrying a prince. Oh wait, I still do! Who wouldn't want to marry a prince? I like to be a little bit practical in my fantasies though, so that I can believe it may come true. I've googled princes and looked specifically for their age. I like to learn about them to see if I might actually like them as a person. If he goes hunting every year, then he's not the guy for me. Believe it or not, this is not my favorite fantasy of my future. I want to be an independent woman who works for a living and brings in the money for her family. I guess I'm slowly getting to the point where I'm seriously planning what I want my future to look like, at least, practically. This is my favorite fantasy of my future.

Before I graduate high school, I will get accepted into Clemson, and I'm going to celebrate with family and friends. I will attend the Graduation Formal at my church and look amazing! I'll dance and have a great time. Over the summer, I will start packing my stuff and get ready to go to Clemson. I'll say goodbye to my family and probably cry when I get there. However, I will call them as much as I can and Skype my sister almost every weekend. When I get there, I'll meet my roommate and we will be besties. We will eat at Moe's every day and talk about the cute boys who walk by. We will find a good church to go to and go whenever we can to worship the one true God, because I won't let life get in the way of my relationship with God. I will try to get into the Honors Program at Clemson because if I get accepted into the Honors program, I'm pretty much guaranteed a decent job when I graduate. It will also give me another discount on my tuition. I'll probably date a couple of cute guys to try and figure out what type of guy I like. Right now, I have no idea what kind of guy I like. I won't let a relationship distract me from reaching my goals, however.

I will graduate with amazing grades and go to a medical school in South Carolina. I will intern at a physical therapy office and spend two to four years there. When I am done with medical school, I will look for a good job working with professional athletes, maybe a football team or a basketball team. There, I will meet my future husband. He will get injured and I will help him to recuperate. He will be a great guy, unlike most professional athletes, and we will fall in love. We will date for four or five years and he will propose to me with a white gold ring that has a giant diamond. I will, of course, say yes. We will have a spectacular wedding. Everyone will be there. My sister will be my maid of honor. My mom will be there, looking amazing. My dad will walk me down the aisle. I will wear a ballroom gown so big they have to move the pews over so I can fit through. My wedding gown has to have a pretty long train, also. When my husband and I exchange rings, I will give my dad my purity ring that I have worn since ninth

grade. When I have my daddy-daughter dance, my dad will cry. For our honeymoon, my new husband and I will go somewhere fabulous, like Italy, France, Germany, or Bora Bora. We will have an amazing time and when we get back we will move into his mansion and resume with our jobs. We will see each other every night and cook together. We will play video games and act like goofballs together. We will work through all of the tough times together. I will try to be at most of his games. If I am working, I will simply watch it on TV.

A few years later, we will try to have children. I want to have two children: one boy and one girl. I want to be as amazing of a parent as my parents are. They are so great at what they do, it will probably be impossible to be as good as they are. However, they taught me that through God, anything is possible. My husband and I will try to live near my family, specifically my sister. I want to live by my sister so we will stay as close to each other as we are now. I also want our kids to be as close as we are. I will spoil my kids rotten and love them to death. I will teach them about the love of God and tell them about what He has done for me. I will watch them grow up and succeed in life. I'll see them get married and have children of their own. I will grow old with my husband and see my grandchildren as much as I can. I will then die peacefully with the love of my life.

I can only pray that my life turns out as well as this. I know I will have my ups and downs. Life isn't as easy as it seems. I will feel sad, angry, and stressed. However, I will also feel happy and excited. I am afraid of death but it happens. It's a part of life, it's inevitable. I shouldn't be afraid of it. I should embrace it.

DREAMING OF A NEW FUTURE BY MEGHAN JOSEPH

When I was fifteen, I used to love going to Carowinds every day in the summer. They had good food, a large variety of rides, and a waterpark--it couldn't get better than that. My friends and I would always go and stay a long time. Carowinds was expensive, but if you had a season pass you only had to pay once! We planned on going to the waterpark on this day, but before we went we wanted to squeeze in a few rides. While in the long line for "Boo Blasters," it felt like it honestly might have been a thousand degrees outside. My friends and I used to joke about passing out due to how hot it was, but it never actually happened, until that day. I began telling my friends I felt lightheaded, and in mid-sentence, I unexpectedly fell over. I remember blacking out, but still being able to hear people screaming and shouting. I hit my head fairly hard when I fell.

When I came to, I noticed I was laying in the grass. It wasn't just any grass--I was in the quad at Winthrop University. I didn't remember what happened, but I do know that I shouldn't have been at Winthrop. I got up and began to walk around and noticed that I didn't recognize any of these students. I roamed the hallways and peeped in the windows of all the classes. I couldn't help but notice one of the girls in the last classroom looked a lot like me. I only saw her from behind, but she still resembled me. I waited until that class ended and saw her walking out. I finally saw her from the front and I was right: she was an exact replica of me, only a little older. I tried to get to her fast to get to the bottom of this confusion, but she was in a hurry. I decided that talking to her would only make things worse, so I continued to watch her from afar. I noticed she worked really hard, which was way different from my work ethic in high school. It then came to me that I was visiting my future. And I realized that I would have to work hard in order to keep my future the same. This was almost like a wakeup call. It was showing me how bright my future could be if I just stay motivated and work hard.

After a while of watching my future self, I finally woke up and came back to reality in a hospital room. My mom was asking me a bunch of questions but all I could think about was my future. It turns out I had a minor concussion from hitting my head when I passed out, but the doctor said I should be fine, even though I had to wear a weird bandage on my head.

For a while, all I could think about was my life after high school. I was very excited to see what else my future would bring. I completely changed my work ethic along with my whole outlook on school. I realized it was just something I would have to complete in order to move on and have a good life. My grades started to change miraculously; my teachers were very impressed and pleased. I started to take my ACT and SAT scores way more seriously. I took a bunch of practice tests, looked at the practice booklets, and took a one-on-one prep class. I did everything possible to make sure that my test scores were good enough.

I realize that prior to my accident, I was at risk of both being lazy and settling for the future that came after that. Now I have a new attitude that will help me realize how important it is to stay motivated and never lose focus. You have to keep your eye on the prize no matter what that prize is, and you can never give up or settle. Settling is the worst thing you can do, along with being lazy.

This last year of high school should fly by if I don't continue to fool around. I'd never passed out before or anything close to it, but in a way I'm glad I did. If I hadn't I wouldn't have learned the valuable lessons I did. I hope I can do everything it takes to make sure that my future ends up the way I saw it in my dream. I might not attend Winthrop University, but I at least want to go to some nice college. I haven't quite got my eye on any right now. But I can guarantee you that that's all I'm going to be focused on from now until graduation.

THE FUTURE IS MINE BY MAIA MORRISON

My future is one of the scariest things I've ever had to think about. The most nerve-wracking part about my future is the fact that it is mine! My future can't be found in a search engine or defined by a dictionary. *My future*. Two words that can't be interpreted by anyone but myself. Two words that depend solely on my actions and reactions.

I have begun to realize that I have yet to begin my life: everything up until now has been practice, as if I've been trapped in a cage and the key is slowly turning in the lock. The part of my future I am most anticipating is my freedom. I think my future will be superior to my past and present because of the amount of freedom I will have. Without the ability to dream and explore life for myself, I don't think I will have enough determination to begin my own business or to achieve any of my other life goals.

Malcolm X once said, "Education is the passport for the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today." To his admirers Malcolm X was a courageous advocate for the rights of blacks, but fault-finders accused him of preaching racism and violence. He has been called one of the greatest and most influential African Americans in history. In the future I hope to be seen as influential and esteemed, and maybe even controversial, like Malcolm X.

In my generation, I think that education is one of the most under-appreciated gifts. We've all wanted to punch a wall because of a bad test grade, or cried at 2 in the morning because of an all-nighter that wasn't worth it, but education is a fundamental part of our lives. Without an education, many of us would have to live off of a mediocre salary and constantly need assistance from those who are more educated than us. If our educations were erased, or greatly diminished, our overall lives would suffer tremendously. Without an education, my career goals would be virtually impossible.

Although my future audience may not be as broad as Malcolm's was, I hope the effect I have on others' lives is as substantial. I want to help those in pain, whether physical or emotional, by attending a two-year college to work toward attaining my Bachelor's in Business. From there I see myself transferring to a four-year college to finish my degree. I am hopeful my next step will be going to a school for massage therapy or learning more about counseling. I have not yet determined whether I want to counsel children or those in failing relationships.

If, for some reason, I cannot become a massage therapist or counselor I want to be a chef. I would love to own a small diner in or near Charlotte, North Carolina. Many restaurants throw away pounds of food every day instead of helping those in need! If I were a chef I would go to every restaurant I could and find a way to save all of the leftovers for the homeless. At my own

restaurant I hope to help the homeless every weekend with free food and a place to lay their heads.

If none of my realistic career goals are attainable within five years I want to become an actress, singer, or comedian. I've always had a passion for singing, acting, and making others laugh. Although these careers are all somewhat impractical, I think I have what it takes to become successful in each field. If I became famous I would use my fame to help others by donating a large portion of my profits and time to those in need. I would love to help find cures for diseases like cancer, HIV, and diabetes.

I would also love to be a plus sized model. I haven't thought much about this plan, since it's my most outrageous one. Although I am not extremely confident with my body image, I would love to be an example for other girls. Since middle school I've experienced diffidence and timidity because of my outward appearance. Like many others in my shoes, I've used my personality to distract myself from my occasional negative thoughts. I would love to help others see themselves in a different light without masking their problems or being arrogant.

In fifty years, I hope to retire and use my savings to travel to Hawaii. My mother was born and raised in Hawaii, but when she left for college at age eighteen, she never looked back. I pray that I can meet some of my mother's surviving family members and create a bond with them that I've never had with my stepfather's family. I also hope to eventually travel to Maryland, where I was born, and possibly move there permanently.

Another inspiring quote for the future is, "Don't tell people your dreams--show them!" I found this quote inspirational because it's very realistic. Sometimes we are so eager to tell people about our plans for the future that we get discouraged when they tell us doubtful things. Many of us see ourselves moving places and achieving goals that others think are impossible. I have experienced skepticism before and it isn't an easy thing to "bounce back" from because skepticism from others can fill us with doubt and worry, and keep us from reaching for our goals.

For anyone still reading, I have one final piece of advice. Your future is yours and you may do with it whatever you want! However, your past and present are also yours. Every detail, every bit of them are yours, and you should behave as such. We will all make mistakes and do things that we regret, but those things should never hold us back from bettering our lives. Look at your mistakes as broken pens that have run out of ink and your present as a brand new pen. Will you only mark out your old mistakes with that brand new pen, or will you start another astounding chapter?

THE UNKNOWN

I'M NOT A... BY NATHAN BALLEW

Read this.

Yes, read all of this.

Every last word.

No, I'm not writing a bad haiku, because my English teacher would have a fit with my rhyme scheme.

The next step. The next step in my life is...college, degrees, marriage, kids, 401k, retirement, grandkids, old age, pills, death. It's all the same. Everyone else in this book is writing about their next step and I'll bet that most of them are all the same. Our teacher said to write about the next step. She said it could be just getting through the semester or the year or about college and careers. Everyone has big plans, or so they think. They will become doctors and lawyers, accountants and nurses, judges and artists, movie producers and software writers. I, too, will write about my future.

A scary looking fellow just walked on past by the window. I met a strange lady and she made me nervous. Everyone has anxiety. We fear when people look at us and see us during every breath we take, look behind us to make sure no one is following every move we make. Every smile we fake distances us from the greater social good which is honesty (thanks, Sting). Of course every time we distance ourselves we have anxiety from lying to our friends and family however, I do not have anxiety because if I have it it is in my possession I control it. I do not have anxiety, I am overwhelmed with anxiety. I have so much anxiety that one might wonder if I am neurotic because I am the one who peers over his shoulder, I am the one who fears the poisoning of my food, I am the one who fears the next step. What is my next step? Because I can't make it. Everyone writing in this book will make his own step and in a land full of Christians, of which I am one, some will say that God is on their minds. 'God direct me,' they say, then they go about setting their minds on worldly goals and disregarding Jesus's words on being conscious of their spiritual needs. "It does not belong to man who is walking even to direct his step," Jeremiah 10:23. Truly my goals are to pursue spiritual things. But to the reader who simply doesn't care, to the reader that does care but has no time, and to the reader who doesn't care and doesn't have time, I'll spare you the intimate details. In short: learn a new language, preach to others, strengthen the brothers. My hope doesn't lie in this world, but you don't care. I'm simply black ink on a white page. So read this, read all of this, and move to the next page about a girl who wants to be a doctor and go to college and go the the one after that which is the same story and to the next which only differs because it's a boy this time and he wants to be a mechanic, and every page is the same and I'd quote Billy Joel just to see if you're still reading and maybe "Piano Man" drifts through your head.

Everyone will write how they're non-conformists to society then write the same words as everyone else. Some are hopeful and believe that they'll do better and some will write of challenges. And I'll bet the girl next to me will quote *Firefly*. I'm not going to a big college, I'm not going to do x or y. I'm simply going to write this and show the futility of words on paper and how little they will affect change to the masses unless the masses want to believe and not just laugh at the hopeful work of some gullible teenagers. Their goals are rooted in realistic, attainable goals, but it's all the same.

However, perhaps you say, I can't only preach, for how will I get money? So I must aspire to some worldly goal, but I don't. Perhaps I'd like to be like my father who is a truck driver, which is not a glamorous job but they have CB radios, which I like. Or maybe I could be a plumber, or a mechanic, but now I sound like the commonplace writer who aspires to a worldly goal. Whatever it may be, I'll figure something out. For now I just have to focus my energy to get out of bed in the morning. And finishing this essay.

In the *Cheers* episode "Coach in Love Part One," Coach Ernie Pantusso says, "Irene, I'm not a rich man, I'm not a young man, I'm not a handsome man, I'm not a tall man, I'm not a strong man, I'm not a talented man, I'm not a well-traveled man, I'm not a smart man, I'm not a milk man, I'm not a fat man, I'm not a gingerbread man, I'm not a..."

Much like Coach, I don't have some special talent, I'm not much of anything, but I'll find something. Maybe one day I can finish the statement not as I'm not a... but I am a...

TWENTY BY WILLIAM BINKLEY

People step all the time. People take physical steps, steps in life, and steps in our mind. One might ask, what makes up one of these steps? Steps rule our physical world, as well as our mental world, and move our lives forward. People do not really think about what makes up steps or what steps to take next. Legs help us to step forward, but do people really know how they help us make our next step?

Humans begin standing on two legs. Pressure is applied to one's muscles and bones to help the person stand in an upright position. In order to propel one's body forward with their next step all of their weight is shifted onto one leg, the left leg. The right leg, the leg without the most pressure, is then raised. The toes also play a role in this step taking process. This is known as the toe-off phase in which the foot prepares to separate from the ground. The heel leaves the ground first followed by the toes.

The next phase is the swing phase. In this phase the leg has left the ground and has begun the walking action. This leg is stretched forward into a walking position and is dropped down. The heel is placed down with the rest of the foot following through. The right leg is now stopped in a position known as the recoil position. This position is displayed as the knee being bent and the lowest point of a walking stance. The knee bend absorbs the shock of walking into the next step. The person moves forward into their step and continues walking. The weight is then shifted onto the aforementioned right leg and the left leg is lifted. The process is repeated, but legs are not the only body part involved in making a next step.

Hips, shoulders, and the spine are also involved in taking one's next step. One must have balance in order to walk and balance is placed on the hips, the body's center of gravity. The hips rotate on an axis connected to the spine when one's leg is moved. The shoulders provide the balance on the upper part of the body. When the right leg is moved forward, to take one's next step, the left shoulder moves forward to counter hips movement and keep one's body in balance. Once the right leg has been placed on the ground, the left leg is raised and the body adjusts to uphold balance by moving one's right shoulder forward. When the body is not in motion, however, the shoulder and hips remain level to maintain the balance of one's body. The spine holds these parts together and remain relatively straight.

The head is used in taking a step, first, because humans must use their brains to walk. The head is used view where a person is going, it takes a step to make the next step. People decide where they are going by looking around their surroundings and making the decision, or taking their next step, on where to go. The head will also move around, because of the rotation of the body, to, once again, uphold the balance of the body. This is not the last thing that helps people take their next physical step.

The arms move in a pendulum motion in conjunction with the shoulders. As the shoulder rotates, the arms move with them, further maintaining balance. This helps keep the body move in sync with the steps being taken. The arms, the head, the spine, the shoulders, the hips, legs, knees, feet, heels, and toes all are involved in taking one's next step.

One could also compare this to life. When humans are born they are taught to walk and adjust to walking. As the legs become more developed, walking becomes much easier. Much like the legs, as the mind has more experiences, decision making, or step taking, becomes easier to do. As the leg muscles become more developed, they are able to withstand more pressure. Of course, all struggle while attempting to walk, while some struggle more. People go through life making decisions and while some can decide and move on, others can't decide or struggle more to decide. The mind acts in a similar way and when the mind develops fully, it can comprehend more knowledge. For example, if a child decides to touch a hot stove, the child will be burned. Since the child's mind now registers that the stove is hot, the child now knows to not touch the hot stove. Much like how the heels and knees absorb the shock of landing on the ground and follow through, the mind can relate. The death of a loved one provides a shock to the mind. The mind must process that they will be without the loved one and must continue on in life without said person. The mind must mourn and then follow through to continue taking the next steps in life.

Why am I telling you this? Well it's a grade that I needed to do on time. I didn't feel like revealing myself to you, either. I looked up all this information about anatomy to come up with 835 words about taking a next step. No, you will not know why I named my essay "Twenty." I confuse people to humor myself occasionally. You can ask me in person about the title, but I will give everyone who asks a different answer.

I have no idea what my life will be like in the future. Quite frankly, I hate thinking about it; it gives me more stress that I don't need. I hate thinking of all the possible outcomes because adults put so much pressure on knowing and commenting all of the aspects of your future. I want to focus on now and get good grades, make better choices, and learn to better my future. The adults that want to put more pressure than necessary can fight me.

I just know my future will be sarcastic and full of more people that think I like them when, in reality, I don't. I think the future will be amusing seeing people and how they view me versus how I really am, if they ever get to know me. People see me differently once they get to know me, which is usually a funny reaction. If you ever want to know something about me come talk to me. Take that next step.

ONWARD & UPWARD BY COOPER BROWN

When choosing a career, there's no clear choice. Each individual has their own skill sets and interests. Some people are mathematically inclined, so they'd make good accountants or something else in the corporate world. Others are good with their hands or better with applied skills, so they'd be better off in an engineering field or as technicians. And then there are those who are physically or athletically inclined. They'd fit into the athlete scene such as football, soccer, track and other competitive sports. There are so many skill sets, and each job out there requires the precise combination of specific skills in order to succeed in that field.

I, for one, am musically inclined. I play guitar (yes, electric and acoustic--if you can play one, you can play the other) and I like to think I'm decent. And by the time I'm out of high school, I'll be better. Also, I can sing. I personally don't think I can sing worth a damn, but everyone else says I have a great voice so I'll go ahead and use that to my advantage. My dream job, just like every other teenage guys is at some point, is to be in a rock band. To share my art. To tour. To make an exceptional salary. And most of all see the world. I want to travel and make a good life for my family. I'd take them with me and share my luxuries with them. I'd also go visit family. Mostly in the Netherlands, from my mom's side. I just want that life so badly but I don't know how I'd go about getting there. However it does help that I listen to the music a lot. Like...too much. It probably isn't healthy. But why not? I enjoy it and anyone who tells me not to was a kid at some point. They should understand. It is hard to get recognized in this day and age though. It's mostly who you know, or who just happens to be there when you're playing in some coffee shop in a city square. And I'm not going to get a stable career out of luck. I can't trust that some record producer is just going to hear me playing some day and say, "You're hired!" I just can't hope for that, it won't be enough. So I'd have to go to the label and talk to the producer. Or mail in a demo or something. I'm only sixteen and I'm not really sure on how to do all that, so it'll have to wait.

Perhaps I'll be a personal manager for a band. This position represents musical acts and guides all aspects of an artist's career. Their pay is conditional; I could get ten to fifty percent of the artists' earnings. However, most only get ten to twenty percent. Or maybe a tour coordinator. As a tour coordinator I oversee and coordinate all the elements and personnel. The pay would obviously depend on who my employer is, but the salary ranges from thirty five thousand dollars to one hundred and seventy five thousand dollars.

Another career field I would like to go into would be psychology. There's a lot of money to be made, and I enjoy helping people. Making people happy. Seeing people smile and knowing I made it happen. It brings me more joy than most anything, and I'd love to make a living out of it. But first I'd have to go to school for it. Preferably in-state or a surrounding state. Winthrop is a local college and has a good reputation. However the graduation rate is fifty three percent, which

upon further investigation, I found wasn't that bad. Another choice is North Greenville University. I've been to the campus on youth rallies and I like what I've seen. But I have never attended the campus during the school season, so I really don't have a fair opinion of the school. They also have a thirty nine percent graduation rate, which in comparison to Winthrop, doesn't look so good. However, I also have to consider which field I want to go into within psychology. I'd like to go into Clinical Child Psychology. I find the way that children, whether five years old or fifteen, understand situations to be very interesting--how they rationalize or attempt to remedy problems. They don't often take all the consequences into consideration, which leads them to come to more obvious solutions that we may not have come to realize otherwise. They think differently, not necessarily better or worse than adults, but differently. But sometimes that leads to bad solutions. Fixes to problems when there was no problem to begin with. The patient may think that the worst has just happened, and there's no way to fix it, so why try to? And more often than not, the answer is to keep trying. To make it better. But no one is going to take me seriously if I don't have a degree in the field. Nobody will hire me to make a kid better if I don't have a degree.

Today, more often than not, you need an education for both fields. To be in a band I probably wouldn't, but the label may prefer me to have a degree in music theory or music production. But it's more likely that I'll need it today, like I doubt that Jimmy Page, James Hetfield, or Slash had degrees. But now, it's required for almost any job. And I'd hate to lose the life of a rock star just because I didn't learn how to do it. It doesn't seem fair to me. If I'm good at it, why not hire me and let me do it? It sounds simple enough, but that's not how capitalist America works. So I guess I may have to wait an extra four years.

As for psychology, I know I'm going to need a degree. There are fields in psychology that don't require a license, but they also don't pay as much (and I wouldn't have a long enough essay if I said I'd just apply for one of those jobs). Like I mentioned earlier, I'd probably attend Winthrop University, it seems like a good choice. However I will seek out guidance in choosing a college. Probably my parents or teachers involved in the fields that I am interested in. Hopefully they can give me substantial insight.

I don't know which path to choose. One is realistic while the other is my dream job. I'll probably end up spending a long time chasing the dream of being a musician, but I'll end up having reality slap me in the face and tell to give in to the psychology field.

THIS COOKIE DOESN'T CRUMBLE BY NOAH COOKE

The Next Step. Right now, it's impossible to know what it is, but two steps in the future, when you look back, it will be so obvious. I don't know what that next step is for myself, and I don't know what to tell you right now. Now I could suggest a bunch of stuff, but I think that's arbitrary and not worth anything. The next step is right in front of us. I know mine is somewhere deep down, but I don't know if I am ready to make the dive to find it. I kind of like where I'm at right now, and compared to where I was when I first wrote this mentally. I felt alone, like a lot of my friends had left me behind to go on to better (or worse) things. A lot of people have changed between my 10th and 11th grade year. Some of the changes I really like, but more often than not, I don't like change. I think I have a fear of changes; I like living in my plastic mold where I can count on everything to go as it usually does. I don't like it when people fight and they stop talking, especially when they talk about each other to me or with me around, because I don't want to choose sides. I want them to get along again, or at the very least quit talking about the other. It's crazy how I can be best friends with someone, and the next day I don't even want to think about them, much less talk about them.

Social anxiety has probably been one of the most crippling things for me. I'm flat out bad at talking to people and getting my point across, because I stutter when I get nervous and I get nervous when I want to say something. There isn't anybody that I feel comfortable talking to, not because I think they're going to tell everybody everything I tell them, there is just something imbedded into my DNA that tells me not to. It's especially strange for me to be honest with people that I am really close with, because the thing I tell them could be so weird to them that they don't want to talk to me anymore. High school has always been somewhere I was afraid to be myself, not because I would fail my classes, but because the people are ruthless. There seems to be no privacy, and anything you say can and be told to everyone. Even worse, nobody stands up for each other anymore. I've seen best friends trash talk each other and it doesn't make sense to me. A best friend isn't someone you should want to hate, it is someone you should want to love.

My family and I have never been close, outside of watching a movie, a t.v. show or occasionally eating dinner at a restaurant. I think that has been a very healthy thing for me, my parents being somewhat hands off. I got to be the person I want to be, not like Neil Perry in the movie *Dead Poets Society*. I would love to be a doctor of course, but want to be a doctor on my own terms, not because I have to be one. I like freedom as an individual, and my parents not influencing me too much has really allowed me to develop into a free-spirited person. Of course I do have some parental rules: don't do drugs, don't drink, be home by a certain time, chores, a lot of the typical stuff for kids my age. What I have come to learn is that the point of my parents giving me these restrictions is not to keep me from doing the typical youth things, but to keep me from doing the non-typical adult things. They don't want me to do it as a kid and that be the only way I know

how to spend my Friday night, rather they want me to understand what it's like to still be a regular teenager.

Adulthood. It seems so far off, but I can almost touch it and pull myself to it. Almost. All that stands between me and the rest of my life is a few weeks, a semester, and another year of high school. Then maybe some York Tech classes, a job that I should feel lucky to have with my experience, and a small one bedroom one bath apartment or house. I don't really want to live at home because my brother is 23 and still lives at home, and that just isn't for me. It's kind of pathetic, how he cannot handle his own life and still needs Mom and Dad to help him do everything, whereas I am pretty independent, and I don't ask them for much besides groceries, a little financial help and a place to live. Don't get me wrong, I love my brother. He's my brother- we take care of each other. However, his life has taken longer to advance than mine will. I'm only sixteen, but I pay my own gas, sometimes my own dinner, and for my own clothes. I think that a lot of people say that kids aren't able to take care of themselves at my age, but that feels a little wrong to me. I can take care of myself for the most part, but that's excluding taxes, living costs, and all of that.

Maybe this is only the next step, but all steps lead to another. I think the most important thing out of all of this is to keep taking steps, don't get stopped because you failed a test, something went wrong in your life, or because someone is trying to hold you back. The moment you stop taking steps is the moment you get stuck. Don't spend too much time worrying about this step, because the next one is right behind it.

BUT WHAT NOW? BY JACOB EMMONS

The next step. The future is always uncertain. You never know where you'll end up or what will happen next. Every step forward you take is a step into the darkness, into the unknown. Nobody quite knows exactly where it will take them. The next step is always a step into what you can't see or prepare for.

As I take the next step, I realize that maybe the future is as scary as everyone makes it seem. Maybe every step further into these uncharted waters is more dangerous than the last, and everything I've worked for might be lost in an instant. Maybe everything I love will vanish in a puff of smoke, leaving me alone and empty on this dark path without a light to guide me. I realize that I don't know where this next step will take me. What if it takes me down to failure? What if it crushes the things I love and care for? What will I do then? If failure is a possibility, why even take this next step? Why even try when you know you might not make the right move? The future scares me, being unknown. It scares me to think of the risks and what I might lose. I always overthink everything. But why overthink it? Why not just look at the future head-on and take that next step?

As I take the next step, I realize that maybe the future isn't as scary as everyone made it seem. Maybe the future isn't an endless abyss of despair. The next step I take could take me somewhere great. I could be a billionaire CEO of a corporation, or in a profession that lets me travel around the world. Whatever this next step is, maybe it will take me somewhere that I want to go. Why step in this direction? Why not take a step in a completely different direction than this? It's completely up to me, I don't have to listen to anyone else. That's how Dad did it, and that's how I just did it. This decision could be the best one I ever make, and I don't need to worry about what's going to happen. Anything that happens, happens. This decision could be the one that takes me to the top and lets me make an impact on my future. If this step is the one for me, then why wouldn't I take it? Why not give this step a chance? Why would I hide here and not let the steps I take guide me to where I am meant to be? This step could take me to college or it could take me to starting a business on my own. I don't need guidelines to tell me where to go anymore; I'm no longer a kid, unable to make decisions on my own. I'll take this step when I feel ready to take it on.

This next step is another step away from where I am, though. It's a step away from comfort, from home. This next step could take me away from my friends, and my family. I might lose people who once meant the world to me. What if I don't want to lose them? What if I want to keep these great friends that I already have? Our next steps could take us away from each other and I wouldn't see them again. These people I have forged a bond with, and this life I have that I don't ever want to forget, why would I walk away from it right now? I love where I am now. What if I don't feel like that later? What if everyone else moves on to their next step and

leaves me all alone? What if I am the one leaving all of them behind? This next step is morose. It's a dividing step that can take away everything I've built and everyone I've loved. I just wish that others could take this step with me. I don't want to be alone. I want to be with these people I love, I don't want to lose these people that I've developed a bond with. I might take this step and lose them, and then what? What does the future have for me then? Why don't I just take my time before I take this step, and let everything stand still for a while, just to let myself love them for a bit longer? I hope that in our next steps that all of our paths cross again. These people have given me a reason to stand tall and take this next step, no matter where it takes me. But for now, I want to take my time and experience the people and things I love while I can.

Why does everyone expect me to go take this next step so suddenly? Why can't I take my time? They are always pressuring me to take this next step, never asking what I want or what I like. They always tell me what they think is best, and they never let me be the one to decide. It's as if everyone believes that they know more about me than I do, and that they know what's best for me and I don't. I wish they would just let me choose my own path and stop trying to decide everything for me. Who are they to decide what is best? Why do teachers and adults who have already taken their step from my position get to decide that they know what's best? Everyone takes a different step in a different direction, so shouldn't I get to pick mine? I shouldn't have a direction forced on me, I should get to choose how to step. "Oh, but what if this next step causes you to fall?" What does it matter to you? Don't you know why we fall? It's so we can learn to pick ourselves back up. I'll get back up and keep walking on in a new direction, shaping my own path and making my own maps. I shouldn't be forced into a mold that grownups set out for me. I'm not just a cog in the machine, I'm a person. I'm different from everyone else and my steps and my actions should show that. I mean, do I look like a guy with a plan? I won't take a step in the direction that you force on me unless that's the direction I want to take a step in. I won't do what you tell me just because you think it's what's best for me. I am not what you make me, I am a composition of what I do and what steps I take.

I'm not sure how to feel about this next step. I'm unsure if I'm supposed to be scared, curious, sad, or angry. I just want to know that I am able to keep going through all of the steps to come. I want to be able to look at the future and all of the uncertainty and have some sense of preparation. Maybe that comes with age, maybe as you get older and more experienced, you can become more secure in who you are and the steps you will take. My uncertainty towards the future will cause me to be a bit more cautious in my decision. I will make choices that will help me to be the best man I can be, undefined by adults who think they know best. I know that no matter what step I take I will take that step wholly, and will not let uncertainty stop me from giving it my all. All of my previous decisions have led up to this, and I am ready to take the next step.

THE MOVIE OF MY LIFE BY CHELSEA INGALLS

As young kids we all had different perspectives of our futures. Each one of us had one big dream, whether it was becoming the next great NBA basketball player or becoming a famous singer or actor. We looked at ourselves in the future becoming someone so great, and successful, but now the time has come where you have to figure out what your next step is in life and I wonder, how did everything happen and go by so fast? As kids, we didn't worry much about anything except what was gonna be for dinner, or who we were gonna hang out with after school, or what our plans were gonna be for the weekend. Some of us never thought the day would actually come to be in the senior class that then graduates and starts our own lives. Now being a senior in high school, reality settles in and makes me question who I am going to become in the future. That big dream I had in my head as a child isn't real life, and it's time to take the real steps that start my future.

For some of us seniors we realize that the dream we had isn't going to happen. Those thoughts and perspectives of our future we had as a child is gone because this is the time when we are supposed to start becoming who we want to be when we were older and now all the time is gone and we have no time for practicing or studying; we have to make the big decision. When we were young and full of dreams, we had all the time in the world to start learning and practicing to become great at who we want to be. When I was a little girl all my cousins were into accessories that I wasn't into such as Barbies and American Girl dolls. Luckily, I had an older cousin Stephen I would always rely on to skateboard or play videogames with while my cousins would be playing with their dolls. Stephen was a fantastic skateboarder. He would compete and win bags full of new Vans and new wheels and accessories that made his skateboard better to ride. Watching all his friends support him and always having a crowd around him made me want to become a professional athlete. I was playing soccer and spent most of my time trying to improve. I had realized I was better than what I thought I was, and became striker after my second game. I used to look up to Stephen, and he would make me believe that I was capable of becoming great at this sport. I moved on from soccer to basketball and volleyball, and I will always have sports as an important part of my life.

We sometimes change our minds on who we want to become, but starting early as kids such as playing basketball we practice to get better, so by the time it's senior year we are prepared and ready to start our next step in life. We always wish we could go back to start learning and practicing earlier so that we would be even greater when we become older, but as kids, not all of us thought in that way. I wished that I had practiced soccer more when I had first started because I had picked up basketball that made me gradually lose my passion for soccer. I had then spent more time on the court than on the field. My dad was a great athlete and had played soccer as one of his sports he pursued. My dad and I had built an even closer relationship from him taking time to teach me certain soccer skills to make me a better player. Knowing that we can't go back

and change how we lived, we have to work on what we can do now and become the best we can be without wishing we had done more. When your focus is on the past you get off track about your thoughts on the future. You are then too focused on the regrets, that you miss out on thoughts and ideas you could have had about ways to become better at what we decide to put our whole heart into.

Not everyone knows what they want to become in life and I am one of them. I had my mind set on being a nurse but then changed it to being an athletic trainer. Some people say that without college you won't get anywhere in life. I believe that college doesn't have to be for everyone. Hopsin said, "Did the man who invented college go to college? Ok then." Some people get job offers at a young age from either the family business or from a job they worked at while in high school. Everyone has a path to pursue and I believe it's possible to become just as intelligent and successful as people who do attend college. High school is the foundation, and what we do with what we learn and how we use our time is up to us. We have to make each day count by not missing out on opportunities that people invite us to be a part of.

Our view on life slowly changes as we gradually get older. Situations that come up can change our view on someone we built a close relationship with because we see the real side of them and never would have expected that they would make a decision to hurt each other. I have gone through this experience in my life with some extended family that I grew up. Like all kids, I made some bad choices and these family members viewed me differently. They were the ones that I thought I knew would always be there for me through the bad and the good. I'm actually glad they found out about my mistakes and I saw their reactions, because then I would be living my life thinking they would they would be there for me when now I know otherwise.

As we figure out who we want to be in life, we can't base decisions off of a single person's advice. We have to ask other people's opinions and then look back over everyone's advice they gave to us and then decide for ourselves what we want to do. The most important person I know that will always give me the right advice is my dad. I know this because he doesn't want me making the same mistakes he made. He listens to me and gives me examples of things that happened in his life and how he had either made the right choice or the wrong choice and tells me how he overcame it. I have also seen how much my dad has grown into a stronger person because my dad has so much respect for not just his family, but for others, too. Some people then take advantage of it and no one appreciates the things he does to bless people. Lastly, I value my dad's advice so much because I see the way he lives his life. He isn't someone who tells me to not make bad decisions and then he goes and makes the same one he told me not to. As a father he knows he is being looked up to so the decisions that he makes he thinks of me and my brothers so that we can see examples of how to live life doing good deeds and handling a situation correctly. Neither do we want to make a decision that will make someone we look up to proud of us, or to impress when really it's not something we really have a heart for because

the decision wasn't based on what would make us happy. What we decide now can affect our whole future. Whatever some of us choose to do, we could be doing every day which means we need to make it worth something that we know we are going to enjoy. Having to dread doing something every single day is going to get old and it's going to affect how we act and not enjoy life.

Each person has a purpose in life. We all have a talent, but some of us haven't figured out what that talent is. We have to put ourselves out there and do things we never thought we could do or even would do. We are not always going to be young; we get old and our bodies become weak as we get into adulthood and become parents and grandparents, which means we need to live life to the fullest now. I know that my essay topic was supposed to be about my next step, but the reason I didn't write about mine is because I am still trying to figure out my next big step in life myself.

We look at the movies and see that at the end somehow the problem always gets solved and everyone is happy, but that's not always real life. We are faced with certain situations that may not end with smiles, but we do know that there are days ahead of us to look forward to as long as we make the efforts to make them the days we won't forget. Our life is our own movie and we are the producers. But the thing that is different is that our movie doesn't end until we end.

I don't exactly know if I am going to have a comical, sad, or chaotic movie for my life or if my movie will have all of these elements. But I know that I will always make the best of what situations that come my way. The good and the bad obstacles that we will be faced with as we step out into the world on our own two feet will make us stronger at who we become. Life is a gift and we need to not take it for granted. I know that everything will happen for a reason, with a purpose behind it, and that will make me grow into the person that I want to become.

LIFE IS A JOURNEY BY EMILY JACKSON

I'm not good at planning. I never have been. So when people tell me I need to start planning for the future, I get a little freaked out. It makes my toes crinkle up and my stomach get all knotty. I can't even choose what clothes to wear tomorrow! Since 8th grade, my dad has been telling me to get a list together on what I want to do after school, and I have. In 8th grade, I wanted to be a veterinarian. In 9th grade, a marine biologist. 10th grade, a playwright. 11th grade, I wanted to be a film director. This year, my last and final year, I think I want to be a veterinarian, again. I'm still not sure, though, and it's driving me crazy. It seems like a good idea, but what if I end up hating it? What if it's not for me? Then I spend all the money and time in college for a career I hate. I'm scared to commit to anything, but my time is running out.

For now, I think it'd be best to start with what I don't want to happen with my life. I don't want to live at home, with my parents, until I'm thirty. I don't want to skip college altogether. I don't want to join the military. I don't want to be stuck at a fast-food restaurant for the rest of my life. I don't want to be homeless. I don't want to live in the busy city, but not a lonely countryside, either. I don't want a rich, lavish lifestyle where everything I ask for, I get. Most of all, I don't want to feel like my work is work. I want to enjoy it.

Now for some things I *would* like. I would like to get some level of college education. I would like to get a job I love. I would like to get married to someone I love and who loves me back. I would like to get a cat. I would love to make life-long friends. I would like to live in a cute little house in a perfect little setting. I want a life where family is not only defined by blood, but by who will stand by me when I need them most. I want a life that's not handed to me. I want a life that's my idea, not anyone else's. I want my life to be mine. Most of all, I want the life I've built for myself to be something I love. Something I can look back on and say, "There's nothing I regret doing with the time I've had." I want to enjoy it.

The idea of college scares me. It's going to be the first time on my own. I'll have to pay extra for staying in the dorms, or I'll have to pay for an apartment. I may have to have a roommate, but who knows whether or not they would keep up on their part of the rent? There could be a falling out between us, and then what? Then there's the matter of me actually doing my work. Now, it's easy to say "Of course I'll do the work! I'm paying for it!" but who knows how long that's going to last? I won't have my parents looking over me and guiding me through it. As much as I hated them hovering over my shoulders to make sure I get this and that done, I think I'm going to miss it when I leave.

Being a vet would be an amazing job, in my opinion. I love animals more than anything and being able to help them if they're not at their best would be wonderful. The only parts I would not be able to stand would be euthanasia or animals dealing with abuse or neglect. Just typing this part makes me so frustrated. Animals can be the most loving and loyal things on this Earth, yet people treat them so badly "just because." I don't understand how someone can do that.

If I do change my mind again between now and college, I'd have to say my backup plan would be a teacher. Preferably high school level, but I don't think I would mind elementary level. I would love to teach History or English, my favorite subjects.

I think the thing I'm most scared about would, by far, be my independence. It sounds good in my mind: "Oh yeah! No more parents telling me what to do. I'm able to breathe easy knowing every text I send or every action I do isn't monitored! I'm free!" But the more I think about it, the more scared I get. I'm going to be responsible for judging if something is a good idea or not. I'm going to be responsible for paying bills. I'm going to be responsible for remembering important events. I'm going to have to be a responsible adult. And I'm terrified of it.

It's alarming to think that it's been almost eighteen years since I've been born. It's been twelve years since I started school. It's been four years since I started high school. This time has gone by too fast and I'm worried about how fast time will go in the future. Where will I be in another eighteen, or twelve, or even four years? How will I have changed? How will my friends have changed? Will I look back on those years regretting everything, or will I be happy? I'm trying to think of how I can plan my time to make the most of it, but it's really difficult. I'm starting to think of my life like a treasure map. I just need to follow these little plans in order to achieve this wonderful, treasured life. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Life is a journey, not a destination." I hope my journey will be a good one.

21ST CENTURY SCOP BY TROY RAY

The future is a very confusing thing for a lot of people. I am not an exception; I have a lot of trouble when it comes to thinking about the future. For instance, I have never really known what I wanted to be. When I was a kid I had big dreams like to be a politician or an astronaut, but now I have nothing but doubt because as I come to the age of adulthood, I am gaining knowledge about the world as it is. I'm getting my first real look into how it works, and it's frightening for me. I'm going from never having to do anything but school and homework to having to get a job, going to college, and getting a degree so I can get a better job. Then find someone you love to be with, then raise a family, and guide them through the same process...it's daunting. All we want is not to be forgotten when we die. Like the scops from the Anglo-Saxon times, we want our stories to live on. So I take life in small steps, in the present moment, so that I don't overthink anything too much because if I do, I will take an idea and think it to death and it usually turns out bad.

In regards to the future I am a big thinker--even though it's not helpful in some situations, it helps me delve into some deep questions about the future and life. In life, I believe there are the strong and there are the weak. This is a very common idea when dealing with people and life but they usually only talk about physical strength. I'm talking about three different strengths and compare them to myself. To begin, the first strength is mental capacity and willpower. I put these in the same category because they go hand in hand in dealing with who you are as a person. Strong willpower will let you act on the ideas you come up with so you can accomplish something great. On the other hand if you have weak willpower, then you will be trampled by someone who is stronger and you'll never get anything done. Mental capacity isn't about how smart you are--if you look at it like that, you will always find someone smarter than you. It's about your common sense, how much information you can retain, and how smart you are. It's one of the most important strengths, in my opinion. If you have mental strength you can do more and achieve more while dealing with problems and situations. I'd like to think of myself as having a pretty good intelligence, even above average for my age, and I often find myself having to explain my ideas to people with closed minds who never let anything in and push away new ideas. All I can think is, why do people latch onto an idea and kick everyone down that has something to say about it?

The second kind of strength is emotional, which is the most important kind to me. A lot of people will tell others to "follow your heart" and it will lead you to all the good things in life. Maybe, but if you focus on emotion as the only guide in your life it will end badly. If, for instance, you act a lot on emotion and something bad happens in your life, then all that emotion will stop you in your tracks and break you down. It's what emotion does: it builds you up in good times and throws you around and kicks you out in the bad times. The key is to release emotion's grip on yourself and take everything in as a problem that needs solving. I do this because emotions will cause blind faith and bad decision making, so I try to stay as if only the good

emotions are there. When bad emotions spring up, I keep a cool head and take things one step at a time.

The third and final strength is obviously physical strength. Physical strength will always be necessary whether it be dealing with people or having a job. It can also give people the confidence to do things in life that others just won't do. I myself am relatively strong and plan on staying active during my life.

These three strengths do not just have something to do with life in the present, but also a lot with the future. If all of these are met, then you can be a successful person. It can let you improve as a person, a friend, a leader, but it can also take you wherever you want to go by enabling what you already have within yourself and releasing it in the world. I personally believe that I have these traits and have the ability to change the world, but to take this to heart I also have to believe that I can fail; nothing is ever set in stone. To be a good person and problem solver, you must have humility. Even if you're the best problem solver or genius in the world you won't always be able to succeed, and if you can't take failure in a good way you have to find it within yourself to move away from your faults and keep moving forward. The future is something I believe that has limitless potential. I believe as a people that we can, with these strengths, accomplish something great in this life and not just leave behind another meaningless life. I say this to show the longing in human nature to rise above yourself and become something more, to strive to be better than anyone. All we want when we die is to not be forgotten.

I BREATHE, I THINK, I DREAM BY ELLA ROSENBERG

Every day the same routine.

I wake up, brush my teeth, get dressed, sit in my car, turn on music, exit car, go to school, enter car, turn on music, go home.

From there I do homework with perhaps a light snack in hand while I work and write for a few hours, sometimes I clean if I finish early. It's a simple autopilot response that keeps me busy. After the day is said and done, I get ready for bed and go to sleep.

The cycle continues. It seems like the only thing that changes is the weather, the amount of light is left in the day, the music I listen to. I'm a robot, a machine. I follow the patterns and dare not stray.

One day, however, it *does* change.

I forget my phone, which I always use to listen to music in my car on the way to and from school. Instead, I turn on the radio.

Global warming, wars, lost children and school shootings fill the gap between my ears. An article about the lack of education and its effect on the surrounding area ends with something along the lines of, "*This generation is our future. We need to make sure that they know that.*" These words echo inside my head as I go about the day, not the lyrics of my current favorite band.

While walking along the halls of school I notice the banners and posters seem more vivid, "WHERE ARE YOU GOING?", "SIGN UP FOR THE ACT!", "DON'T FORGET THE SAT!" ... These posters make me struggle to remember my ABC's.

The conversations in passing snag my thoughts by the ear, "So I was thinking about Clemson...", "Did you hear that Rebecca got accepted...?", "I'm almost done with filling out..." The clouds in my head both dissipate and thicken as I go through the rest of the school day.

I drive home from school with the radio off, the noise in my head enough to keep me well preoccupied. More questions than answers seem to circulate in a slow rhythmic pattern, a halo of thoughts, the sound like white noise in my head.

I'm greeted by my mother at the door. She hands me a pile of envelopes and advertisements for various colleges and universities, and asks me if I've been reading them. I tell her truthfully that I had scanned a few, but not thoroughly. She shakes her head, sighing, "Well, at least read these today. You've got to start thinking about what you're going to do. The year is almost over, you know."

I nod my head and go to my room, placing my mail next to the others on my desk. I pull out my homework but I don't start, not yet. I'm too busy trying to un-muddle my thoughts to focus on the present while simultaneously trying to forget it. After debating for almost 10 minutes, I pull out my laptop and decide to browse social media to loosen up.

My friends on Facebook post pictures of their university lives, jobs, and adventures. This one is in Mexico, studying abroad and on her way to a degree in international communications. This one is taking a break from studying for her masters in biochemistry by watching the sunset on a local beach. This one is showing off her newest art thesis project, a short film about a pastel-colored mermaid wanting to attend a school on land.

I shut my laptop off and go back to homework only to have my little sister knock on my door to inform me that dinner is ready.

Everyone is sitting at the table, my grandparents are here, too. We're having my favorite food for dinner tonight, Argentine barbecue. The smell of spices and meat from the grill lift my worries away. I tune in on the dinner conversation as I help myself to some *pan y chorizo*.

My family is blended, my stepdad's side is from Buenos Aires, Argentina. When they speak, half of it is in Spanish, half of it is in English. I can't speak Spanish very well myself, but I can understand most of it. As I'm digging in, Tata, our nickname for my stepfather's father, asks my stepfather how everything is going.

"So, how is the project outside coming along?" he asks in rapid Spanish, before taking a bite of his steak.

"It's great, but I'm not really sure what to start on next," my stepdad replies (also in Spanish). "I've got so much left to do, I don't even know where to start..."

"Well," Tata begins, pausing for a moment. "Whatever it is, you need to decide soon. It's almost winter, by then it will be too late. Just start on something and then work from there. If you are overwhelmed, you can always ask for help."

The conversation drifts, some of it I can't fully understand. I'm not really listening anymore, anyway. I realize what I need to do now.

After dinner is over and I help to clean up, I bid everyone goodnight and head back to my room. I take a long shower, get in some comfortable clothes, and grab my laptop.

The hardest part is turning it on. I don't know why, it's such a silly thing, yet it is the most difficult. Once I press the button however, everything else follows easily.

I browse colleges online in place of clothing stores, I fill out applications instead of personality quizzes, and I start outlining essays instead of stories that I can never seem to finish.

The noise in my head stops. I suddenly realize I've been actually miserable since summer ended, but now I feel ok. It's like a weight that's been piling on my shoulders has finally been lifted, and I can breathe more easily.

I turn my laptop off and one-by-one the lights of my bedroom. As I settle down and doze off for the first good night's rest in I-don't-know-how-long, I start to visualize and wander into the realm of sleep.

A multitude of paths open up before me, some stretching thousands of miles ahead into the distance, some located closer to home. So many choices, all I have to do is choose one. I refuse to be stagnant. I finally know my next step forward.

I breathe, I think, and I dream.

SANTA, THE TOOTH FAIRY, AND MY FUTURE BY ROSIE TORRES

When I was four, people would ask “what do you want to be when you grow up?” Well, that’s easy. An astronaut, a princess, a doctor, a chef, a ballerina...the possibilities were endless; no matter what you said, the grown up would say, “Oh how cute,” and go along with whatever you said. “What do you want to do when you’re older?” The question gets harder as you grow up because it gets more serious. You can’t say you want to be an astronaut or a princess or a ballerina because those are not realistic. “What are you going to do when you graduate?” The magical question every single high schooler is tired of hearing. Since society has decided that it is completely normal to ask teenagers what they want to do for the rest of their lives, I guess I am going to have to wing this entire thing because I have absolutely no idea what I want to do and I will admit I am 500% lost. The only thing I have been told by adults so far is just take it one day at a time and it will just “come to you.” Sure. Whatever you say.

The goal for the rest of my high school years is just to graduate and leave. Why am I in such a hurry to leave? Because the high school experience is nothing like the movies and anyone who tells you, “They’re the best years of your life,” is a liar and I recommend you do not go to them for further advice. Of course I plan on going to college afterwards, although I have no idea what I will even major in. My plan when I was little, when Santa and the tooth fairy were real people, was just to get married and live in a ginormous pink mansion with endless halls and shiny chandeliers with my Prince Charming husband. I stopped letting that be my plan when I found that I could become insanely rich on my own and boys are dumb. My plan now is just to graduate with decent grades (because, let’s be realistic, anything better than that is beyond my capability) and to go to college at Converse and figure everything out then. I know for sure I’m going to take the Politics of Harry Potter (yes, it is a real thing and yes, I am very serious about it).

The question they should be asking high schoolers shouldn’t be, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” but, “Who do you want to be?” By changing out that one word, you bring out real ambitions, not default answers driven by how much money they’re going to make. It’s the truth, honest and simple. The possibilities will become endless again but this time they’ll be real and they’ll seem tangible. You can say, “I want to be the ballerina who lives in New York and does shows on big stages.” If I say, “I want to be the happy girl with cats and hot chocolate who dances in her pajamas,” people will laugh at me and say, “No seriously. What do you want to do?” The more specific question is not only going to give you an honest answer but the other person will really appreciate it, too. It makes us feel like you actually care about our interests and you are not just making small talk because you really don’t have a clue on what else to do. Believe it or not, teenagers really do care about the future, so much that sometimes we panic and self-destruct in an implosion of procrastination on studying or filling out college applications. We are terrified of the future because everyone puts so much stress on it. Yes, it is

important. Trust me--you don't have to tell us twice. Sometimes we need a breather, though. Deciding the future is not any easier with a financially-secure adult breathing down our necks.

Who do I want to be? I want to be like Malala Yousafzai and advocate the importance of female education in countries where it's questioned. I want to be like Princess Diana and go past the boundaries of everybody else's comfort zone to bring light to real problems in the world. I want to be like Margaret Thatcher and do things that people think only men can do. I want to be a human and animal rights activist, a world changer, and a feminist. I want to be a feminist like Beyonce and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Last but not least, although I want to be like these women, I also want to be myself. I don't want to end up being one of those people with ambitions at a young age who forget all their goals when they're older and end up having a job where you are chained to a desk with a sad plant and a creaky office chair. I want to make a difference somewhere, anywhere, for anyone.

My third step is to remain optimistic throughout everything. I have learned that pessimism only holds back what optimism could potentially bring forward. It's a simple lesson, one that took way longer to learn than it should have but I'm confident I'll use it for the rest of my life. The only three steps I have right now will be stepping stones for my future and hopefully will help me with all my other steps.

Perhaps you don't need everything planned out, maybe all you need is three steps to get you through everything. People have done much crazier things than graduating and having no idea what to do. I already know that no matter how much you plan and make steps, life is always going to say, "Not today, Bud." It's only going to get more difficult from here, but these steps have helped me with everything so far. All I need for right now is ambition, optimism, and of course, a sense of humor.