Summer Reading Assembly Sheds Light on Local Refugees

By Natalie Redmond

On October 1, Mount Mercy Academy hosted a panel of three refugees and Andy Cammarata of Journey’s End in the Mercy Center auditorium, where the panelists shared their stories and answered questions posed by Mount Mercy students. This assembly was intended to tie in with the summer reading “school-wide read,” We Are Displaced by Malala Yousafzai, which chronicles the plight of refugees all over the world.

Mount Mercy students were led into the school auditorium, where Andy Cammarata, the head of Journey’s End Mission Integration and Community Outreach Refugee Services, gave an introduction to what refugees go through as well as a brief outline of services provided by Journey’s End. Journey’s End is an organization in Buffalo dedicated to assisting refugees who settle in our area.

After Andy took her seat, students went up on stage and posed questions to the three refugees: Noor Alamer, Farouk Majeed, and Bitsat Yitayeh, a student here at Mercy. In sharing their stories, the speakers were able to shed light on their unique experiences and the obstacles they faced in order to get to Buffalo.

A common sentiment reflected by all three speakers was that they had no choice but to become refugees. Majeed and Alamer had to leave poor conditions in order to survive. For both, this decision was a matter of life or death. Yitayeh was born and raised in a refugee camp.

Majeed told the audience about his life as an engineer in Iraq working for the United States military and how his son was kidnapped twice: first by Al-Qaeda, and second by his own workers. Majeed was forced to flee Iraq for the safety of his family. Unfortunately, Majeed cannot become an engineer in the United States because his degree is not considered valid here. He now works for Journey’s End as the Housing Specialist. Majeed reflected that he can never go back to Iraq. Apparently, Al-Qaeda is still asking about him in Iraq. On top of this, his brother has been missing for over six years.

Due to his work for the United States, Majeed was able to flee Iraq in six months. But that’s not the case for most refugees.

Alamer, who is Palestinian but born in Iraq, said she was constantly moving around in order to survive. Her family was sent to the Philippines first. Her parents were arrested for three months and forced to endure harsh conditions after they were found not to have a valid passport. Alamer’s mother, who has back problems, was forced to sleep on the ground in prison. Alamer couldn’t speak to her parents while they were imprisoned, and she was visibly shaken as she spoke about her parent’s ordeal to the Mount Mercy community. Ultimately, it took Alamer over ten years to get to the United States.

Yitayeh, one of Mercy’s own students, was born in a refugee camp. Her parents had lived in the refugee camp in Djibouti for over twenty years after they had fled conflict in Ethiopia.

Yitayeh talked about how she only had her parents in the camp and that she has never met any of her extended family. She expressed that she would love to go to Ethiopia one day in order to meet her family.

One experience that Yitayeh shared was when she had to pretend to be of another faith and wear a hijab in order to keep herself safe at school while in the camp. Yitayeh also connected her experience to Alamer’s in that both women shared memories of imprisonment and described the effects that such internment had on them and their families.

Students at Mercy reflected upon the assembly afterward. “I thought it was soul-touching, and it really opened my eyes to how close to home the refugee crisis is,” said senior Brigid Burke. That appears to be the common consensus among the students of Mount Mercy. “I thought it was really enlightening, personally. Sometimes we only think about our own community and we don’t realize refugees are around us. I think the assembly helped us see that there are refugees around us and that we can help them,” added Lizzy Lang, class of 2020.

If you would like to become more involved with Journey’s End by making a donation or volunteering your time and energy, contact them by phone at (716) 882-4963 or online at www.jersbuffalo.org.
Halloween Assembly Is Valued Tradition at Mount Mercy

By Brigid Burke

October 31st is a beloved day here at Mount Mercy Academy. Students enjoy showing off their unique costumes and participating in the plethora of activities at our annual Halloween assembly, and they are able to express their creativity while bonding with classmates over games and events throughout the day. It is a favorite tradition at MMA.

To kick off the day, students are greeted by friends and faculty decked out in a mix of cute and scary costumes. It is always fun to see the hallways crowded with students wearing entertaining outfits. “I think the Halloween assembly is a great way for the school to come together as students and show off their creativity through their costumes,” said senior Chloë McHugh-Freedenberg.

Throughout the day, students are also treated to spooky music playing over the intercom as they walk to their classes. However, all of this is nothing compared to the Halloween assembly that closes out the day.

This year, students ended their day with a high-energy Halloween assembly. Students competed in a pumpkin carving contest, a Halloween themed relay race, a trivia contest, and a costume contest. These events sparked a competitive spirit throughout the student body.

The assembly started off with the pumpkin carving contest, during which two students from each grade level created a haunted house-themed pumpkin. The pumpkins were then rated by faculty and students.

While those students worked on their pumpkins, four more students from each grade competed against each other in a spooky relay race. This reignited Mercy’s age-old class rivalries and pitted the classes against each other. At the end of the race, the juniors were in first place, followed by the sophomores, then the seniors, and finally the freshmen.

The assembly finished with a costume contest where students competed in the categories of scariest, most creative, and best group. Freshmen Paige and Jenna Angle won the scariest category as the Grady Twins, senior Mia Mahar won the most creative category as Frida Kahlo, and juniors Janiah Ball and Anani Debose along with senior Taliyah Shabazz won best group as the band TLC.

This year’s Halloween assembly was full of energy, excitement, tension, and passion. It has definitely restarted class rivalries and was a great predictor of the tensions that will be coming up during Spirit Week. The Halloween assembly is a cherished event here at Mount Mercy Academy and a great way for students to celebrate with their friends and classmates.

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A Halloween Mistake

By Natalie Redmond

Cara and Bea shared similar music tastes and they both liked the show Parks and Recreation… Other than that, though, they were polar opposites.

Cara was a blonde two-sport athlete and primarily wore fuzzy sweaters, scrunchies, and crocs. She owned a puka shell necklace and one of those expensive water bottles.

Bea, on the other hand, was a major contributing member of the art club. She wore all black all the time and had hand-cut bangs that streaked across her forehead. She usually had black smudged underneath her eyes. Cara couldn’t tell if it was eyeshadow or eyeliner.

Unlike friends, right? Cara’s other friends thought so too.

Bea had invited Cara to a concert. Apparently, an “underground alternative band” was playing at a warehouse on the East Side.

“What’s the band called?”

“Impreciable Mistakes.”

Cara rolled her eyes at the sound of that.

“No one wants to go with me,” Bea whined.

“And I know you’d like this band. You’re supposed to dress up, too. I’m going as Wednesday Addams. It’ll be so fun.”

Cara had contemplated it. It sounded a little sketchy…

“Just go… Please? If you don’t like it I can drive you home.”

It did sound kind of fun. Hocus Pocus could wait until tomorrow night.

Cara had to figure out a costume. She hadn’t dressed up for Halloween since sixth grade.

Cara dug through her dresser for ideas. A stroke of genius hit her when she pulled out a pair of black leggings.

A cat. Being a cat was just the easiest cop-out. Sure, she didn’t own ears or a tail, but black eyeliner on the face is just as convincing.

Cara pulled on a pair of black leggings and a black shirt. She sat down at her vanity and selected some eyeliner. She rarely used this stuff; she was surprised she hadn’t thrown it out yet. With a few quick swipes and a dot on the nose, Cara was a cat.

She checked the time on her phone.

Left: The Class of 2020 cheers for their classmates. Right: Seniors Mia Mahar and Melanie Bebak work on their haunted house pumpkin for the carving contest.
It was 6:46. She had fourteen minutes until Bea arrived. Cara decided to find out a little bit more about Impeccable Mistakes. A quick Google search yielded...

Basically nothing. No music videos or social media. They did have a Spotify page, however. Curious, Cara clicked shuffle on their Spotify. The song was called “Winter.” It consisted of a drawing voice singing some unintelligible lyrics over a heavy bass. It definitely sounded alternative, but Cara could not for the life of her figure out what the singer was saying.

Cara shrugged and let it play while she shuffled around her room, trying to find her wallet.

When the clock hit 6:55, Cara went downstairs to wait for Bea.

“Mom?”

Cara’s mom was putting some finishing touches onto Mallorie’s candy corn witch makeup. She didn’t look up, so she was too focused on the glittery makeup going onto her younger daughter’s face.

“I’m leaving in five to go hang out with my friend.”

“What are you doing?” Her mom still wasn’t looking at her.

“She invited me to this concert thing. I don’t know if we’ll be there long.”

“Just be back before midnight, okay? You have school tomorrow.”

Cara was blessed with a mom who trusted her immensely. Her mom rarely questioned her because Cara rarely got herself into trouble.

Cara’s phone vibrated. A text from Bea: I’m here, ready when u are.

Cara complimented her sister’s costume and moved to leave her house. A group of trick-or-treaters blocked her escape. She stood next to her father as he passed out the treats.

“Your costumes are awesome, love the StormTrooper,” Cara’s dad proclaimed, giving them all handfuls of candy.

When the kids left, Cara sped outside to get into Bea’s car. She really was dressed up like Wednesday Addams, with tiny twin braids and pale makeup on her face. The smudges of black usually underneath her eyes were there, but much more apparent.

“A cat?” Bea was grinning.

“Last minute costume, okay?” Cara sat down and buckled herself in. “I like your costume. You really look like Wednesday.”

The drive there was shorter than expected. They listened to Impeccable Mistakes the whole time, per Bea’s demand. Cara thought they were pretty good, but she still didn’t understand what the singer was saying. Bea insisted it was because she hadn’t listened to them long enough.

“I go to basically all their concerts. I’m obsessed with the main singer, he’s so amazing,” Bea said.

Cara got out of the car when they parked. She could hear music already. The warehouse was...spooky-looking. It was old and brick, with graffiti covering its outside. It was illuminated by one janky-looking strobe light. Bea said Impeccable Mistakes had most of their concerts at the warehouse.

“Where is everyone?”

“Inside. We’re thirty minutes late.”

Cara blanched. Did Bea sound angry? Bea led the way to the entrance of the warehouse. A heavily pierced and tattooed teenage boy stood at the door. He was wearing a cheap looking red cloak and bright red devil horns to match.

Bea said something confidently to the boy. Cara didn’t catch what she said.

“Hey, Bea. Newbie?” said the boy. He was eyeing Cara.

Bea glanced back at Cara, who was standing there awkwardly.

“Yeah, newbie.”

Cara felt nervous. The music inside was blasting, and this dude gave her bad vibes.

“Hope she likes it.”

The boy moved to let them in. Cara followed after Bea like a lost puppy.

“That was Dane, he’s the best and so funny! You’ll love him.”

Cara frowned. “We’re seeing him again?”

“Well, like, of course. After this concert, you’re going to want to go to all of them.”

“Right.”

Bea led Cara down a hallway. It was plastered with posters and graffiti and illuminated by neon signs and black lights hanging from the ceiling. It was definitely cool-looking, but Cara was starting to feel uneasy. She reached into her bag for her phone to text her mom...

“Oh no. I left my phone plugged in at your car. Can I go grab it?”

“We’re already late, Cara! Live in the moment! This is gonna be so awesome, you won’t need your phone. Trust me.”

Cara felt silent. Bea was smiling so wide, she felt bad for asking in the first place. Before she could say anything, they were stopped at a door. Music was blaring.

“This is going to be so fun. Like, you’re going to love this so much.” Bea gushed, pushing open the door.

The scene was surprising. It was a much larger crowd than Cara expected, all dressed in costumes as far as she could tell, and they were all swaying in unison to the music. It was extremely dark in the space, and only the stage was illuminated by two orange strobe lights. The band was onstage playing...

Winter, of all songs. Cara recognized it.

“Ugh, I love this song,” said Bea. She grabbed Cara’s arm and dragged her into the crowd. Bea pushed through some of the swaying people in order to get closer to the stage. Cara felt bad. She stepped on about eight different witches’ shoes.

Bea swayed along with everyone else. Cara tried her best to keep up.

“Why is no one dancing?” Bea murmured to Bea. Bea didn’t answer. She was staring up at the lead singer with such an intense and unrelenting focus that her forehead was creased.

The singer on stage was a very tall, pale and thin man, with short jet-black hair. He was wearing a t-shirt with a pumpkin face on it. His face was very narrow and weasel-like. His eyes were closed as he sang long, deep notes of words Cara still couldn’t understand. His voice in person was entrancing. Almost angelic. She couldn’t help but sway alongside Bea, never taking her eyes off the singer for one moment. When Winter was finished, the band played a few more songs. No one danced, regardless of how fast or slow the song went.

Suddenly, after a particularly fast song, the band quieted. The whole room stopped swaying. A newfound anticipation to hear this guy talk filled Cara’s thoughts.

“Damien!” The crowd shouted in unison. The singer smiled at the group.

A large portion of the crowd sat down on the ground. Only a few remained standing, including Cara. She went to sit down, but Bea shook her head at her.

“I’d like to personally welcome the newcomers,” Damien said, staring into the ground with wide eyes. “It’s amazing to see how we’ve grown as a community.”

The people sitting on the ground nodded their heads attentively. Cara, feeling awkward, wrapped her arms around herself. She tried to smile.

“Your sacrifice will be worth it,” Damien continued, his head leaning closer and closer to the microphone...

“Eternal life for a quick bite, that’s a little joke we say,” Damien chuckled. The rest of the crowd laughed too. At the same time, the crowd of people got to their feet. Everyone who was standing close to Cara was staring at her.

“Wait. What?” Cara looked over to Bea in confusion. Bea just stared back. Cara went to step back, but Bea reached out and grabbed Cara by the shoulder.

“Don’t run, it will hurt more.”

“Bea, what is this?” Panic. That’s what Cara felt. Everyone was staring at her with this weird look... Cara looked around in horror. It felt as if everyone was encroaching on her... Stepping towards her, reaching for her...

“Bea!” Cara said more forcefully. She felt tears welling up in her eyes, her throat felt all closed up. The tightness in her chest made it hard to breathe. Was this a prank? A joke?

A hand touched her shoulder. Then one touched her arm. Then another touched her back. Cara whipped her head around. She was completely surrounded.

Bea was in front of her now.

“I just want to say thanks, Cara. You’re such a good friend for doing this.”

Cara couldn’t breathe. Bea gave her a bright smile. The highlight of said smile was the gigantic incisors Bea was sporting. They looked like vampire teeth.

Cara was frozen in fear. So many people were touching her, coming toward her... They were all smiling too.

They all had vampire-looking teeth too...

Cara heard a scream of pain. Then she couldn’t help but scream.
Diversity Panel Increases Awareness of Race Issues

By Chloë McHugh-Freedenberg

On October 30, Mount Mercy Academy students and faculty gathered in the auditorium to hear from several featured panelists as they spoke about diversity issues and the challenges that come along with being a person of color in the United States.

Panel moderator Alexys Swygert, from Buffalo Prep, interviewed six panelists: Kristen Luppino-Gholston, Jean-Jacques Yves Sibomana, Sister Consolacion, Maya Meredith, Leiah Renford, and English 12 teacher Sierra Blackwell. The focus of the discussion was how diversity-related issues impact the panelists’ lives every day. This connected ideas from The Hate U Give, a movie that students viewed prior to the presentation, to real-life events and people.

While each panelist came from a different background, they were all tied together by their common experiences with the adversity that comes with being a person of color. Each guest speaker answered questions and shared their views during the various topics of the presentation. The topics included questions about code-switching, T.H.U.G.L.I.F.E., and police brutality. Panelists also talked about the decision to distance themselves from those who have dismissed their struggles.

The first topic the panel discussed was code-switching. Code-switching is, by definition, the alternating of languages or varieties of a language within conversation. However, the panelists shared that code-switching goes beyond just language, as it impacts the way they act and position themselves in the different communities they are a part of. The topic of code-switching relates to The Hate U Give as Starr, the main character, crafts two versions of herself that she switches between depending on her environment.

Blackwell shared that while she was growing up, she felt like an outsider in her own family due to her experience being educated in a predominantly white environment. Blackwell’s fellow panelists agreed with her views on code-switching, with Meredith adding that code-switching is “how you understand yourself and how you survive as a person of color.”

The panelists went on to discuss the meaning of T.H.U.G.L.I.F.E., a phrase made popular by 2pac and a prominent motif in The Hate U Give that gives the film its title. Sibomana shared with the audience that T.H.U.G.L.I.F.E. is a mindset and is incorporated into his everyday life. He explained that many African Americans, including himself, have to put on a face every day and fight to build their own success because there are no other options. If he did not fight each day to work his way through the systems of oppression that discriminate against people of color, he would have no way of moving up in this society.

Sibomana’s powerful words helped students get a better understanding of the fact that discrimination against minority groups places people of color on an uneven playing field, causing them to have to build up themselves and their lives from different points than those who are in more privileged positions.

The discussion topic shifted to police brutality, and then to people within society who degrade the plight of people who have lived through discrimination and prejudice. While speaking about these major issues, there was a general consensus among the panelists that the issue of police brutality incites a surge of emotion which causes them to physically shake as they feel anger, sadness, and fear.

The topic of police brutality helped illustrate how real people can be made to fear those in power who have a duty to protect all human lives in dangerous situations. Some of the panelists acknowledged that people of color are subjected to violence when officers act on their own prejudices. Ultimately, Blackwell called for more accountability within police departments, which the rest of the panelists supported.

For many Mount Mercy students, the presentation was eye-opening. “The diversity panel was a great way to show students about the struggle of African Americans and what they experience on a day-to-day basis,” said senior Brigid Burke.

Junior Anani Debose added to this sentiment. “The assembly provided us with a lot of information and changed our viewpoints on how minorities might feel going to this school. Having the assembly shows that we are trying to change for the better.”

This seems to be the general reaction from most students here at Mercy as they feel it is important to learn more about the way others experience the world.

“I think the diversity assembly was a necessary presentation for the school. Many of us here at Mercy live fairly sheltered lives and it is important for us to be exposed to the difficulties that minorities struggle with, especially if we do not experience them ourselves,” said Jill Kotwica, class of 2020.
**Chloë McHugh-Freedenberg**

Spotlight by Maddy DiGiore

Crew. It is a sport of great endurance, determination, and arduous labor. A sport that takes commitment and is featured in the Olympics. Even so, it often tends to be forgotten. Here at Mount Mercy Academy, there are several students who row for the Buffalo Scholastic Rowing Association (BSRA) and one student in particular who has earned recognition thanks to her incredible talent and skill. This student is senior and award-winner Chloë McHugh-Freedenberg.

This past summer Chloë was fortunate enough to attend the Olympic Development Program for the Northeast Region, which is a huge honor. After her incredible rowing talent was recognized, Chloë was one of 28 girls from the Northeast who were invited to attend. The program lasted one month, taking place mostly in Saratoga, New York while the last ten days were spent in Sarasota, Florida for the races.

Members of the program practiced three times a day whether it was rowing on the water, erging (rowing on a workout machine), or doing yoga. When they were not practicing, they were participating in team-building activities which included hiking a mountain, swimming in the Hudson River, and spending time together on the beach.

Chloë described her experience at the program as being a physical challenge because of the constant working out with no days off. Not only that, but the program stretched Chloë mentally as well. “It was also a big step for me as I was away from home for an entire month and I showed up without knowing anyone,” said Chloë.

Despite the program being quite the challenge both physically and mentally for Chloë, she persevered and ended up winning two gold medals and one silver at the races where she competed against fellow rowers from all over North America. This was an amazing accomplishment for Chloë, who started rowing the summer before sixth grade because her cousin had her attend a camp that she coached.

At first, Chloë hated the sport and wanted to quit, but thanks to her mother who encouraged her to not give up just yet, Chloë continued to row and ended up falling in love with it. She truly enjoys being on the water and forming close bonds with her teammates. Chloë has been looking into colleges such as George Washington University, Rutgers University, and Trinity College. She is very excited to say that she has just recently committed to Temple University as a Division I rower. She decided on Temple because of its wonderful, welcoming community and the multiple academic opportunities offered there. She also finds the crew team and coaches to be “super great.” Congratulations to Chloë on all her success with crew and the best of luck to her in the future. At this rate, she may be headed to the Olympics one day!

**Ms. Pitre**

Spotlight by Dominique Khoury

Before school began this year, the Spanish III, IV, and V students at MMA lost their Spanish teacher. We were left without a teacher for about two weeks, but we were blessed with our new teacher, Ms. Pitre, coincidentally. We are very fortunate that Ms. Pitre’s resume was forwarded to our school.

Ms. Pitre moved to Buffalo because her significant other was offered a job here. She taught English to Spanish-speaking children in Puerto Rico and now teaches English-speaking children Spanish. Ms. Pitre says that there are challenges in teaching both languages. For instance, English-speaking students have a hard time learning Spanish because there are “a lot more verb conjugations” in the Spanish language. She also says that Spanish-speaking students have a hard time “because in English the vowels have more than one sound and in Spanish, there is only one sound.”

Ms. Pitre, however, is fluent in the language since she grew up in a Spanish-speaking country. She still has family in Puerto Rico today. After Ms. Pitre left Puerto Rico, her family endured Hurricane Maria. Ms. Pitre’s family went through many hardships during the hurricane. They could not reach her, their power went out, and they started to run out of food.

In addition to Ms. Pitre adjusting to the Buffalo community, she is also adjusting to the Mount Mercy Academy community. She came from a much larger, co-educational, public school. Every day she is becoming more familiar with her new schedule and students. Teaching at a new school can be just as difficult as going to a new school as a student. It is a “difficult change,” but Ms. Pitre loves the welcoming, “humble environment” as well as the “schedule and the students.”

While we may have started our Spanish studies a little late this year, Ms. Pitre enthusiastically says that we can “absolutely, without a doubt” finish our school year strongly.

**Miss Sanderson**

Spotlight by Jenna Angle

Miss Sanderson is the music director at Mount Mercy Academy. She first became interested in music when she was three and began teaching music in 2007 at Matt’s Music where she started off her career giving private lessons.

“When I was little my mom would play her Phantom Of The Opera cassette tape all the time and I remember singing along with it confidently knowing every word by the time I was in first grade,” Miss Sanderson stated.

Miss Sanderson participated in band, chorus, and drama club. She played the flute in 5th grade and continued to participate in chorus and drama club throughout middle and high school.

“I was always just drawn to the arts,” Miss Sanderson said. “When I was in Middle School, I had an amazing band teacher named Mr. Frazier. He showed me that music was a great way to express emotions, which helped me to get through a lot of difficult times.”

From that moment on, she knew that she wanted to teach music to future generations.

Here at Mercy, Miss Sanderson hopes that students find her classes meaningful. “I want all students who participate in our program to leave with a solid foundation of music literacy so that they feel confident to pursue musical endeavors beyond the classroom if they wish to do so. I also would like everyone to leave this program with a sense of accomplishment in knowing that they worked as an ensemble to create an artistic experience for audiences.”

Miss Sanderson would like to emphasize that if any students are interested in being a part of the music program you can reach out to her anytime with questions.

She would love to have all the students in the music program!
Éclair Squares
By Maddy DiGiore

Base Layers:
2-3oz packages of French vanilla instant pudding
3 cups cold milk
8oz container of cool whip
box of graham crackers

Topping:
4 squares of Baker’s Semi Sweet Baking Squares
2 teaspoons of white Karo syrup
3 tablespoons of butter
1 tablespoon of vanilla extract (Optional: 1 teaspoon of almond extract along with or in place of vanilla)
1 ½ cups of powdered sugar
3 tablespoons of milk

For base layers:
1. Line bottom of 13x9 pan with graham crackers.
2. Mix together packages of pudding and milk with a hand beater until thick, pudding-like consistency is reached.
3. Gently fold cool whip into the pudding mixture, being careful not to over-mix.
4. Pour half of the mixture over graham crackers in pan and cover that with another layer of graham crackers. Then pour the rest of the mixture over that layer of graham crackers and put one more layer of graham crackers on top.

For topping:
1. Melt chocolate squares in a pan/pot on the stove.
2. Mix together packages of pudding and milk
3. Gently fold cool whip into the pudding mixture, with a hand beater until thick, pudding-like consistency is reached.
4. Refrigerate for a few hours to a day and enjoy.

Notes:
-Serving Size: About 10
-Best if eaten within a few days. (After the 4th or 5th day, the graham crackers become soggy.)
-You can also make this in the form of a dip. Make pudding mixture and chocolate topping as directed. Break the graham crackers into pieces and dip into chocolate mixture and allow to cool/harden. Dip the chocolate covered graham crackers into the pudding mixture and enjoy (solves the issue of soggy graham crackers).

Caramel Apple Dip
By Erin Jackson

8oz light or regular cream cheese
¼ cup brown sugar
1 tsp vanilla
1 tub Marzetti or other brand caramel apple dip (in fresh fruit/veggie section of grocery store)
1 cup toffee bits (made by Heath)

Mix the cream cheese with the brown sugar and vanilla. Spread on bottom of pie pan. Layer the caramel on top and then sprinkle the toffee bits to cover. Let set a few hours or overnight. Take out a few minutes before serving to soften.

Serve with apple wedges, pretzels or graham cracker sticks.

Class of 2020 Makes Memories in New York

By Amanda Songin

From October 13-16, the class of 2020 flew to the Big Apple for their senior trip. Apart from getting up early in the morning to catch a flight, the girls were excited for the adventures and laughs that awaited them.

To kick off our first day, we got the chance to go to the New York Coffee Festival. Students tasted various coffees, teas, lattes, juices, and pastries. Many of the girls also participated in the Water Catwalk. For those who strut the catwalk carrying two heavy jugs of water, the festival donates $30 to a person in a coffee-growing, third-world country.

After buying merchandise or taking pictures at the Devotion photo booth, which was set up by one of the festival groups, the girls headed to the Springhill Suites to check in. Later that night, we were given the chance to really say hello to New York by seeing the lights, visiting the multiple shops lining the streets, and going to dinner together.

The next day started with a subway ride to Coney Island. It was a beautiful, sunny day for games, rides, and especially for getting thrown upside down by the Luna 360. The park offered a classic carnival and boardwalk, and the girls could even visit the beach to take Instagram pictures and dip their feet in the Atlantic.

Following Coney Island, we explored the Central Park Zoo, which afforded us the chance to see many animals at their most active times.

Tuesday morning, we visited The High Line, which is an elevated green space that is over a mile long. Because this unique park weaves through many of New York’s iconic buildings, visitors get to see a different side of the city and notice some of the special architecture in Manhattan.

That night, we attended Mean Girls on Broadway. Despite having walked for miles that day, the Mercy girls forgot about their exhaustion while they watched a hilarious musical that left everyone satisfied. Some girls even got autographs and pictures with the actors! After that, students were able to stay out and shop for the rest of the night with their chaperones. We were all able to experience the must-sees and must-dos of NYC, such as visiting M&M World and other attractions in Times Square.

The last day was bittersweet. We grabbed breakfast and hopped on the bus to the One World Observatory, a viewing experience at the top of the Freedom Tower. The panorama was incredible and the trip through the elevator was thrilling as it ascended over 100 stories in less than 60 seconds.

After many more pictures and taking in the view, we all headed outside to see the memorial for 9/11. Getting the chance to see the names of people engrained in the stone made my heart stop. The structure of the memorial made us think about the symbolic meaning of the waterfall and how it caves in like the building did years ago, and being there was tragic but incredibly emotionally powerful. This part of our whirlwind tour left all of us with feelings of respect and appreciation, and we even sat down and talked about how life-changing and earth-shattering this moment in history really was.

JFK International Airport was our next and last stop. We checked in, worried about Mr. K losing his wallet, ate at the food court and waited for the plane; then, we waited on the plane, as our flight was delayed due to weather. The flight home was bumpy but quick, and soon we landed home in Buffalo.

Needless to say, it was a special trip and a memorable experience. The senior trip is different for everyone, but there is nothing like traveling and making memories with your friends. We had a few mishaps, but considering all the laughs, memories, and experiences we had, it was more than worth it!

Seniors Hope Willert, Allysyn Pajek, Hannah Dierolf, and Evelyn Nowak enjoy a roller coaster at Coney Island.

The School Called MMA
Limerick by Erin Jackson

I go to a school called MMA.
Some of the things these girls do make me go “Okay?”
Sometimes I feel hurt in the brain,
And like I am going slightly insane.
Walking down the hall I say, “Am I going the right way?”
Reflection

Short Story by Jenna Angle

“Boom, boom, boom!” The banging grew louder as I made my way towards the shaking door.

I knew he was there, waiting for me to go outside. I could feel his eyes on me, even through the thick glass. I tried to keep my hands steady long enough to dial 911, but as I dialed the three numbers, I realized there was no signal. Why is he here? What does he want? These questions raced through my head as I dashed towards my bedroom door, hoping this nightmare would end.

Soon, about 2 hours had gone by and I still hadn’t found the courage to see if he was waiting for me. I turned on the news to see if anyone else would know what’s going on.

“Breaking news!” the reporter said, sounding concerned. “There is a man about the age of 45, who has been convicted of murder, on the loose.”

I was terrified, but I knew that I needed to do more than just stay in my room and hide for the next 2 weeks until my parents returned from vacation. I headed back out toward the living room, feeling like I was going to burst into tears. When I got there, a wave of relief splashed over me. I couldn’t feel his presence anymore. Somehow, I knew he was gone.

I turned on the news to see if he had been caught. The news had moved on to other events, and I started to calm down. Suddenly, the screen went pitch black. All I could see was a man’s reflection in the TV screen. It looked like he was peering through the back window. I panicked and screamed in terror. Fortunately, I heard a police car roaming the neighborhood. I had to think of a way to get the cop’s attention.

I quickly ducked into my room and grabbed a flashlight. I dashed toward the window and began blinking the flashlight through the glass pane. I watched as the police car headed toward my house.

“Are you all right, ma’am?” the police officer hollered through the window.

I quickly pointed toward the front door.

“Th-the murderer that escaped, he was at my window,” I tried to explain, holding back my tears.

I met the officer at the door, and we slowly headed towards the back window.

“Um, ma’am…” the police officer began suddenly. “I don’t think the man was outside your window.”

“Wh-what do you mean?” My whole body started to shake.

“I don’t think he was outside your window at all. I think he was behind your couch the whole time,” the police officer replied.

He moved behind me and pointed to the muddy footprints behind the couch.

Before I could say anything, my bedroom door began to squeak open...

Terror

Poem by Maddy DiGiore

Terror is a paralyzing emotion; Beginning in the back of your mind Slowly creeping up from the bottom of your spine Capturing you and holding you hostage, freezing you in time.

Terror; what a sensation it conjures: Whispering at the nape of your neck Tingling at the surface of your delicate skin Chilling you to your core.

Terror detains you; It feeds off your fears It keeps you from leaving And it forces you to stay.

Terror, oh, how it confines you It slithers its way in and swallows you whole Imprisoning you in your own mind Until you finally realize that it’s all in your control.

Music

Poem by Lizzy Lang

One of my favorite music genres is hip hop. But then again, I do love pop. My least favorite is the blues. It makes me want to snooze.

To any music I will still bop But with good music, my dancing will never stop.

When the song is intense I strap on my shoes And my moves just start to ooze.

I dance around like a spinning top- Hopefully, I don’t anger a cop. In my car I blast my music and cruise There is nothing I have to lose.

Music will never flop. I like to sing my music on the rooftop. Love of music is what I choose.

Wonderful music, I will never refuse.
Dear Catherine

I have a boyfriend and we have been going out for almost two months. My mom still doesn’t know about him. I want to tell her, but I don’t know what her reaction will be. How do I tell her the right way? It’s great that you want to tell her! I don’t think there’s necessarily a “right” way to do it, and I don’t know your mom, but I can certainly give you my best advice. First of all, she’s most likely going to be a little upset (or at least annoyed) that you didn’t tell her sooner, so I suggest getting in front of that right away, acknowledging it, but focusing on the fact that you’re telling her now - maybe start with something like “I have something I want to tell you, and I’m sorry I didn’t tell you before, but I don’t want to hide things from you and I want to be honest.” Then, I think you should just tell her straight out. You can say that you didn’t know what her reaction would be (just like you said to me), but emphasize how important it is to you that she be included in what’s important in your life, and that you hope she’ll be supportive because you really care about him and he’s important to you. I think the best thing you can do when telling her is make sure she feels like you’re telling her because you want her to be involved in your life and you respect her and care about how she thinks of you, not just because you feel obligated to. I hope it works out for you!

Help! I was not accepted into NHS and it tore me to shreds. I identify entirely based on my school merit. My friends frequently mock this, but they don’t know how much it genuinely stings. I completely understand this - as much as I wish I didn’t, I attach a huge amount of my self-worth to my academic performance, and it’s difficult to change that, especially when you’ve been doing it for years and it’s been positively reinforced. I’m sure not getting into NHS feels like a huge blow, but the best thing you can do when telling her is make sure she feels like you’re telling her because you want her to be involved in your life and you respect her and care about how she thinks of you, not just because you feel obligated to. I hope it works out for you!

I’m questioning my sexuality and don’t know if I should keep it a secret anymore. But, at the same time, I don’t want to come out and then realize down the line that I’m not and be out. #Confused

First and foremost, I just want to make sure you know how normal questioning any part of your identity is, honestly. My personal belief is that every aspect of our identities is on a spectrum, and now is the time when we really start figuring out where we fall. This is something important for you - whether or not you share it is your choice, but the most important thing (in my opinion) is that what you choose to share, if you do, is your truth right now. No one’s going to check to make sure that what you say today is the same a year from now, or five, or fifty, and even if they were, it isn’t up to them. Your identity is yours to define and it isn’t subject to anyone else’s interpretation. It can change or it can stay the same, you’ll find out eventually, but either way, it’s yours. And you don’t have to come out to the world all at once - you can (and probably should) start with the people you trust. Personally, I believe that being your true self is incredibly important - and whether that’s in front of one person, or five, or the whole world is not only up to you but completely okay, however you decide. I think whatever choice you make here is okay because it really is your life and your choice, but my personal belief is that it’s always best to speak your truth, as cheesy as that sounds, even if it’s only to one person. In my experience, it feels so much better to have your true self exist outside of just your head. I wish you all the best, and I’ll leave you with this quote from Audre Lorde, which I think says it better than I could: “I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood.”

I just realized that I didn’t answer a whole bunch of important emails in a timely manner. Will answering them now make the situation worse? Can it get any worse? Am I a terrible person?

I’m pretty sure we’ve all been there. My suggestion is to just answer them. It might seem rude, but I promise it’s worse for the sender if they feel like they’ve been completely ignored. Of course, the delay in response could make you look a bit irresponsible or disorganized. But, responding shows you do have respect for others who have reached out to you, and that although you might be late, you do still care. Just be sure to acknowledge your error and start with a sincere apology.

Our Voices Unite Us

Comic by Dominique Khoury