

teen ink

By teens, for teens

August 2022

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Finding Your Identity in the New School Year

PLUS
Stories of
Summer Travel
and
Poetry & Photography Contest
Winners!

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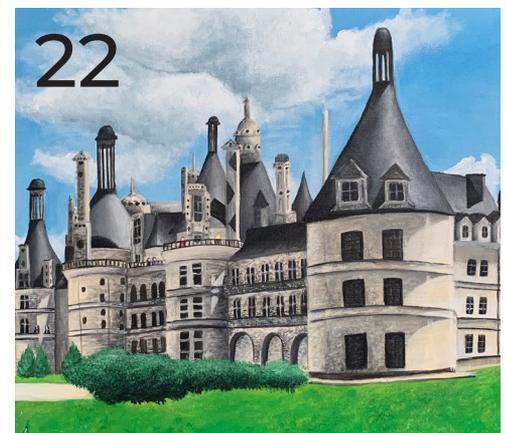
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IDENTITY

ARTWORK BY
NATALIE CULLEN,
AUSTIN, TX



THE LACKING SIBLING

ARTICLE BY CATELYN AIENA, ARGYLE, TX

It was my freshman year of high school, and my older brother and I were starting at a new school. My brother was going into a grade where people had already established their groups. But despite his nerves, I knew he would do fantastic. Being the only sibling I have, my brother was always my ride or die. The first real best friend I had. And as older siblings tend to do, he always protected me from just about everything. Our first year was tough, but we slowly found our way.

My brother soon became a star favorite among, not just his grade, but the whole high school. With his charisma, talent, and humor, it was no surprise that people instantly wanted to be his friend. And I was proud to call him my brother. Even though I did not make friends as easily as he did, I never thought of being jealous, so it didn't bother me.

It didn't bother me, until the comparisons started. Where my brother was chill and easygoing, I took a little more work. I was an independent, assertive, and opinionated 14-year-old. I loved to debate and have intellectual conversations, and many of the adults called me an "old soul."

In simpler terms, I was not fun or entertaining. At least, that's how I was described by other people in my grade. Around halfway through my freshman year, other kids would start coming up to me and asking about my brother.

"What kind of things does he like?"

"What can he really do?"

"Can you do them too, since you're his sister?"

I would never know how to respond to these questions, or why they were being asked of me. And when I would try to answer that I could not be like my brother, another student would happily respond for me.

"No. She is nothing like her brother. He's less uptight and way more fun."

At first they were just comments, simple questions that I could brush to the side and never think of again. But for months it continued, on and on and on. Kids I had never met began to talk about me and how I was the "lesser sibling."

"The lacking sibling."

I began to curl into myself because I was lost as to what to do. Do I stay myself or become

more like my brother? Do I become who they want me to be?

Slowly, jealousy grew for my own flesh and blood. I never thought I would be jealous of anybody. In fact, I never really cared enough to have that emotion. But life threw a curveball. Fighting this envy was more painful than what I assumed would be a knife to the chest. It felt like I no longer had a sibling. I was alone.

But I learned quickly how wrong I was. As I sat inside the dark shell that I had created, my brother began to hear the rumors spreading. And he deeply disagreed.

DO I STAY MYSELF OR BECOME MORE LIKE MY BROTHER? DO I BECOME WHO THEY WANT ME TO BE?

Every day my brother would start to be more loving and caring to me. Driving me to school. Coming to see me during lunch to make sure I was doing okay. Doing his best to hide the rumors with his truth.

My jealousy for him began to dissipate, because I learned that it didn't matter what other people thought about me. He was my best friend and my own personal protector. There was no point in me being jealous. After all, I was the favorite person of the coolest student at school.

Though being jealous was not a highlight, I do not regret this moment in my life. It taught me that family is a strong bond. Not so easily broken. Because of this, I believe that me and my brother would not be the same without this test.

But that is the way of life. Sometimes you have to travel through the dark night to find the things that make your sunshine.

After my brother graduated and I changed schools, I never was plagued with jealousy again. And as for those students, well my brother let them know exactly what he thought about me. Long story short, they never got to be friends with my awesome older brother. ♦



The Battle Field of a Tag Game

ARTICLE BY SENIE LUMA, BOSTON, MA



ARTWORK BY JIMIN LEE,
BRENTWOOD, TN

As if running in a school uniform wasn't hard enough, mixed with the agonizing Haiti heat it was like the Devil himself had paid us a visit to make it way worse. As soon as the bell rang for recess, everyone in class knew what was going to happen. There was a portion of the class that always ran to a food stand to get food, and then there was us. We were the ones who risked our lunches to play the infamous game of tag. The moment we stepped foot outside the classroom, we were all on a battlefield and it was every man and woman for themselves.

The courtyard was sort of a long, square-shaped yard with classrooms surrounding it. There wasn't much to the yard beside one water fountain at the end where kids would run to cool off. As for the ground, it was entirely concrete, so falls did get extreme at times. Everyone would gather around the water fountain, and once the tagger was chosen, the game was really about to begin. I was always the tiniest kid, but make no mistake, I was also one of the fastest. I remember tiny ol' me getting ready to run as the game was about to start, and it's still one of the best memories I can remember. Considering the yard wasn't too big, there was always this tension in the air where you could just tell everyone was trying to find the best location to run to.

As the tagger counts to 30, everyone scatters around the courtyard, running for their lives. The sound of each countdown number was almost as obnoxious as an alarm ringing at six in the morning. The feeling of pure adrenaline when the tagger says that the last number always rushed through my body faster than anything I knew.

There were many reasons the game brought me happiness, one of which was the fact that I was with some of my closest friends playing a game that became a tradition for us. Playing with everyone made everything else in the world go away. It didn't matter that we'd have to go back to class after playing, it didn't matter that we had homework. Nothing mattered because we were all lost in the moment playing a game we loved. I remember the sound of everyone yelling and repeating the name of the tagger as we all ran. We didn't simply scream the tagger's name. We didn't do it normally, we

used hyphens. For example if your name was Daina, when we yell out your name, it would be Da-Da-i-i-na-na, and everyone playing the game would say it together out loud. It sounded like an entire choir harmonizing.

When the game got really intense and people started getting caught, that's when I felt true terror. As I dodged everything and everyone around me, I could hear the screams of the others getting caught. The shrieks of my friends sounded like banshees in a scary movie, and they warned me that at any moment, I could be next. The thing about the game is that it is extremely fun, but the level of stress you feel when you're trying not to get caught is absolutely terrifying.

One of the scariest and most stressful situations was when you were one of the last few people still standing. When there's still a lot of people left in the game, it's more likely that there won't be too much attention on you; but when there aren't many people left, the chances are way higher that they'll come after you. There was always this tight feeling in your chest after running so much, and that's when you knew your time was coming to an end because there wasn't much else you could do. You were all worn out.

After everyone got caught, the fun didn't stop. Everyone gathered together trying to catch their breaths because it felt like we had all run the race of our lives. As the bell rang for us to go back to class, everyone was still talking about the game. Either talking about how we got caught, how we fell while running, how tired we were,

or anything else. The conversations usually continued in class until the professor was ready to teach, but it was overall pure happiness at that moment.

From a very young age, I grew up believing that if you didn't have a lot or you weren't as fortunate as others, then there are certain things you aren't capable of feeling. For me, one specific feeling that I learned you could always feel even if you don't have much, was happiness or fun. Every day playing that game with all of my friends brought me joy I know I'll forever remember in my life. ♦

AS I DODGED EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE AROUND ME, I COULD HEAR THE SCREAMS OF THE OTHERS GETTING CAUGHT.

ART GALLERY

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GUN CONTROL

A Time for Change

ARTICLE BY MANAV YARLAGADDA, IRVING, TX

ARTWORK BY
RANA EZELDIN,
CAIRO, EGYPT

May 24th was just another day for the children at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. The school year was almost finished and summer was just around the corner. But, what started as a bright and sunny day ended as a gloomy nightmare. An 18-year-old shooter maliciously entered the school and killed 19 students and two teachers in a tragic display of gun violence. Unfortunately, gun control has been one of the most controversial topics in America during the 21st century, leading to several political debates over the continuity of firearms. Year after year, gun crime rates drastically increase and the debate continues to rage on. Yet, the dilemma of gun control still hasn't been solved. While there has recently finally been some action in Congress to address gun control, it is not clear whether this action will have promising results. As the debate intensifies, people are left to pick between two divided sides, one supporting the removal of firearms altogether and the other supporting the continued sale and use of firearms. However, this article will not be focused on these two sides. Rather, this article will focus on several proven solutions that America could implement consistently. Several of these solutions have been outlined by various countries in their journey to address gun violence.

Before we discuss possible solutions to gun violence in America, it is important to understand why removing all firearms is not viable. Even though outlawing all firearms is very enticing and justified, especially with the outbreak of recent gun violence, it is just not feasible. Guns are commonly found

and used throughout America, making it very hard to completely outlaw all guns. If America was to prohibit all firearms, a new black market for trading illegal guns would most likely arise. This could have pronounced effects on the economy. Nevertheless, this is not an excuse for America to sit still and not address the issue of gun violence. It is time for action and change.

One of the strictest when it comes to gun control, Japan has drastically dropped its gun crime rate to virtually zero. According to Statista, in 2021, Japan only had 10 total incidents related to the firing of firearms. Compared to the United States, Japan is miles ahead when it comes to gun control

OUTLAWING FIREARMS IS ENTICING, ESPECIALLY WITH THE OUTBREAK OF RECENT GUN VIOLENCE, BUT IT IS JUST NOT FEASIBLE

because of its disciplined approach. To possess a gun, Japanese citizens must participate in a written exam, shooting exam, mental health evaluation, drug test, background test, and character references from family and friends. On top of all this, gun licenses must be renewed every three years. This arduous process keeps the Japanese people safe from gun violence and could be a model for possible U.S. gun control solutions.

a very import



When the pigeon started to speak, she figured it was time to finally get some sleep.

She'd been in the process of cutting herself some bangs — as one does at two in the morning — when out of the corner of her eye, a rather chubby pigeon landed on her window sill. It had started to make such horrible noises — like it was trying to hack up a hairball — doubled over, and positively choked on nothing at all.

Startled, she fumbled her scissors, cutting off a large chunk of hair in the process, and ran to her window in an animal-lover panic. The poor feathered thing was looking like it was attempting to bark up its lungs. Hands shaking, she rushed to pull open her window, but the darn thing was stuck again! She gritted her teeth and wrenched with all her might, tugging the window open and toppling into the opposite wall in the process.

She blinked in surprise, the bird had ceased its coughing and was staring right at her! The rotund creature stood up on its surprisingly spindly legs, gave one last wheeze, and cleared its throat rather rudely. Wait, cleared its throat?

“Got an important message for a...”, it paused for a moment, “a silly, pimply

ARTWORK BY GUO ZIXIN, SHANGHAI, CHINA

Important message

STORY BY VIVIANA ALFARO, HUGHSON, CA

girl?" It peered at her through beady eyes, "Must be you, huh?"

She screamed and slammed the window shut.

"It was a joke! A joke! Now just hold on a moment!," the pigeon croaked in slightly muffled indignation, "I've got a very important message for you!"

She screamed again, covering her eyes in fright.

"Excuse me? No manners at all, this one, should never have become a postal pigeon," it clucked to itself before rapping bossily on the window with a feathery wing.

"Open up! I got a message!"

The pigeon stamped its small clawed foot on the window sill, squawking from the other side. "I've flown a long way, and you're just going to ignore me? How rude!"

She peered shakily through her fingers at it.

"Hey! I'm talking to you! Also, it's cold out here — could you let me in? Maybe get me some hot tea? My throat hurts a bit, d'you think this is easy?"

She took her trembling hands away from her face and stared unsteadily

at the now shivering pigeon. Taking pity on the cold, if irritable bird, she tugged the window open once again. She watched as the pigeon fluttered through her window and hovered in the air a few feet away, eventually settling on the top of the mirror she was using to cut her new bangs with.

Settling smoothly on the mirror edge it fluffed its feathers, huffing in exasperation. "Took you long enough," it said, scowling at her through beady eyes.

"Sorry," she said shakily, "I haven't ever met a talking bird before."

"Yeah, well you should know better. I've had a hard enough day," it rasped irritably. "Right, right your message." The pigeon straightened up proudly. "It's a very, very important, and significant, and crucial message."

Her eyes widened — *what could it be?*

"Now, I know this may come as a shock, but I just had to deliver this message and it is..." it paused dramatically. "...It is that you should..." pausing again even more dramatically. "...Never, ever, try to cut your bangs at home, and honestly your hair is positively one of the worst

things I have ever witnessed, and believe me I have seen a lot, it's not easy being a postal pigeon."

She was on the edge of her seat, waiting for the very, very important message the irritable bird had to tell her.

"I'll say it again — never, ever cut your bangs at home. They always look horrible. You hear me?" the bird said extremely seriously. Then it continued. "Okay. That's the very important message. Now, when are you going to bring me that hot tea?"

She threw the bird out of her window and went back to cutting her bangs. ♦



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