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CELEBRATING CELEBRATING CELEBRATING

© Justin Wise, 2012

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From bluegrass to jazz, country to hip-hop, and folk to classic rock, this exhibition provides a multi-sensory experience that crosses racial, social and economic lines to celebrate the rich, mostly unfold, tale of Kentucky music.





FROM THE EDITOR

DEAR READERS,

This issue took a little longer than usual. But for good reason, rest assured. In this issue, we explore the daily lives of immigrants and refugees in our city, and we wanted to do their stories justice. After doubling our page count, more than quadrupling our number of copies, and much interviewing, designing, editing, and re-editing, we finally bring you "Home & Away."

A Tanzanian soccer player, a Guatemalan learning English behind Churchill Downs, and students breaking down language barriers at a school designed just for them. They each have a unique story that, when put together for this issue, showed us the amazing diversity and opportunity in Louisville. Immigrants built our country, and continue to build up our communities closer to home.

But we also did some digging this issue. We looked into the confusing and complicated situation at Bernheim Forest. We pored over legal documents, took a few trips, and interviewed and re-interviewed to bring you an in-depth personal analysis of the issue at hand.

Our reporters give you their own personal stories, from reimagining the definition of "family" to connecting Louisville with the rest of the state. Plus, a fun food review! (Hint: you'll want to throw on your poodle skirt.)

So, did this issue take a little longer than desired? Yes. Do I regret any of the process? Absolutely not. We have been as thorough as possible to bring you stories that are interesting, important, and informative. We gave our all to each story and each person, taking us back to our why. We do it for immigrants, for refugees, for abused and abandoned children, for Louisvillians and Kentuckians, for environmental activists and corporate defenders. We do it for you, too, so enjoy it! And, as always, tune in to our website ontherecordmag.com to read this issue's stories and check out extra features like photos, video, audio, and more!

HAPPY READING,

ysa Jean

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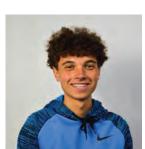
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ON THE RECORD is a magazine by and for the youth of Louisville. In 2015, our publication transitioned its format from duPont Manual High School's tabloid-size school newspaper, the Crimson Record, to a magazine that focuses on in-depth storytelling with Louisville-wide audience and distribution. Using our training as writers, photographers, and designers, our mission is to create quality local journalism for youth that includes the crucial but often overlooked youth perspective. Each issue's content is determined and produced by youth.

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On the Record is a member of the National Scholastic Press Association, the Columbia High School Press Association, and the Kentucky High School Journalism Association. Previous awards include NSPA Pacemakers and CSPA Gold Crowns. Individual stories have earned multiple NSPA Story of the Year placements, CSPA Gold Circles and the Brasler Prize.

CONTACT US!

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PERSPECTIVE

An investigation into the background of the "Save Bernheim Forest" movement.

PHOTO BY MIA BREITENSTEIN

Join us on our journey of understanding the message and facts behind the "Save Bernheim Forest" movement.

words by LILLIAN METZMEIER, JOHN WOODHOUSE, & SKY CARROLL design by PATRICK HARPER

of us, it was the signs. That was our first encounter with the "Save Bernheim" movement.

Scattered across our everyday landscape were these yellow, almost fluorescent-looking yard signs. Displayed across them, the phrase: "SAVE BERNHEIM FOR-EST." So accustomed to seeing these in our daily life, we'd grown fairly numb to the message behind them. And frankly, we didn't really care.

When our magazine assigned us a story centered around the "Save Bernheim" movement, we were conflicted. While we were excited to have a new story and get a chance to write, our enthusiasm was met with a sense of indifference. As a duo, we – being Lillian and John – knew virtually nothing about the movement. All we had were those signs. That repetitive part of our everyday commute had become something that now required our full understanding and attention.

To comprehend the issues at hand though, we had to answer the most basic question: What is Bernheim? While we'd each been to the forest before, we couldn't have given you any kind of formal definition.

Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest is over 16,000 acres, or about 25 square miles, of land near Louisville that's home to some of Kentucky's most important and diverse wildlife. Along with being both education and conservationbased, Bernheim is a place that families in-state and out-of-state visit to hike beautiful trails, check out the elaborate art installations – like the fully repurposed sculptures of forest giants – and observe breathtaking natural landscapes.

Last year, Bernheim celebrated its 90th year as part of Kentucky's ecosystem. Amidst the forest's year of celebration and pride, they've faced two major challenges, both of which have received substantial media coverage and public feedback.

The first of these two obstacles, the one that we made the most sense of, was the study by the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet of proposed interstate routes, some of which would go directly through Bernheim. Immediately, this caught us by surprise. It was incomprehensible to us that an interstate, no matter the size, could be allowed to cross through a place like Bernheim.

"The interstate would be devastating. They would literally remove an entire knob or two – an entire hill," said Mark Wourms, Executive Director at Bernheim, when we interviewed him in October.

This completely shook the people of Bernheim and had activists and community members concerned for Bernheim's future. We contacted the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet to hear their perspective on the study, but before they were able to give us a response, the problem seemingly vanished.

That was because in October, then-Governor Matt Bevin and the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet ruled out Bernheim as a possible route, issuing a statement assuring no parts of Bernheim would be affected by these routes, to the relief of Bernheim employees and forest-dwellers alike.

At the same time that the interstate commotion began to fizzle out, our confusion surrounding the second project had only just begun. At first, the issue seemed simple. Louisville Gas and Electric utility company (LG&E) designed a natural gas pipeline approved in 2017 - that would go through Bernheim's Cedar Grove Wildlife Corridor. According to LG&E's website, the pipeline is 12 miles long and about 12 inches wide. According to Wourms, it would cover about eight acres of Bernheim's land. Extending out from an existing LG&E natural gas transmission line, the pipeline would provide the citizens of Bullitt County with natural gas. LG&E claims the current Bullitt County natural gas pipeline is maxed out and needs more capacity.

The issue? According to Bernheim, the corridor of land that this pipeline would be cutting through is conserved in order to protect the natural features on it.

"The impact is loss of forest, loss of habitat for rare and endangered bat species... it would directly cut across a number of springs and it would cross one of the cleanest creeks in the area," Wourms said.

During a meeting with our editors to gather and discuss ideas for our story, we did some initial research by reading coverage from different news media outlets and sources in the state. Across all mediums, we were met with essentially the same message: Bernheim is under threat.

"It would be approximately a 75-feet-wide swath of land for 12 miles that they would have a permanent easement on, which means that they will control that land forever," Wourms said. "It means they will not allow any trees to grow on that land forever. And you know, it's a permanent scar and will impact water and groundwater throughout that length."

When we searched the website posted on the "SAVE BERNHEIM" signs, the looming issues facing the park became much more apparent to us. Repeatedly, the site warned us that not only was Bernheim land in danger, but that the effects on the overall forest would be dire. Bernheim was calling for support, not just to "Save Bernheim Forest," but to protect all conservation land - to set a precedent for future threats from corporations to forests and conservation land across the country. In an opinion piece published in the Courier-Journal by Andrew Berry, Director of Conservation at Bernheim, Berry said: "And let's remember, this dangerous precedent of breaking a conservation easement makes this a bigger issue than just Bernheim. We are fighting for conservation protections everywhere at a very pivotal moment in time for the environment and our future as a planet."

We began to tackle the story with the only angle we assumed was correct – that we must save Bernheim.



We headed to Quest Outdoors, a Louisville store that sells basically anything you need for whatever outdoor escapade you may be planning, to learn more about the threats to the forest at a "roadshow" organized by Bernheim employees. The roadshows are a way for Bernheim to explain their "side of the story," as Berry put it. He and Amy Landon, Communications and Marketing Director at Bernheim, travel to locations all throughout the Commonwealth to explain possible threats to the forest.

At the roadshow, there was a table with the signature yellow signs along with two stacks of petition letters - one stack addressed to the Kentucky Cabinet of Transportation and one to LG&E. During our roadshow visit, we, along with dozens of other community members, signed these letters without hesitation. Almost mindlessly, we had jumped into an 8,500 strong movement that we didn't know or understand enough about. Admittedly, we should've waited a little longer to fully to take a position.

This meant more research. "LG&E has been very effective at getting their side of the story out," Berry said.

This is true. With a quick Google search containing keywords such as "LG&E pipeline," we found that LG&E provides the public with an informational webpage that contains project details, answers to frequently asked questions, and even a "Fact vs. Fiction" tab that directly refutes misinformation.

On the website, LG&E has labeled themselves as "long-time supporters of Bernheim" and claims they worked with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure that they are "making decisions that protect threatened species and are least impactful to the environment." There is also a map of Bernheim that shows what part of the land the approved LG&E pipeline would go through, along with an existing crude oil pipeline and electric lines. While on this map, we discovered that the route of the pipeline extension closely follows a pre-existing electric line that has no affiliation with LG&E. According to the website, the pipeline route covers 0.03% of Bernheim's land.

MAP OF BERNHEIM BERNHEIM PRENHEIM PROMUMERTY (NOT OPEN TO PUBLIC; PURCHASED AFTER CPCN APPROVALI

PROPOSED LG&E NATURAL GAS PIPELINE EXISTING NON-LG&E CRUDE OIL PIPELINE EXISTING NON-LG&E ELECTRIC TRANSMISSION LINES

BERNHEIM

ARBORETUM

(OPEN TO PUBLIC)

Follow the Pipeline

2013

Andrew Berry claims Bernheim Forest began looking at the land for the Cedar Grove Wildlife Corridor.

may 31, 2017

PSC has hearing for LG&E. LG&E states that they had provided all necessary information for the granting of a CPCN and asked the PSC to grant it so they could carry out the pipeline project.

PSC=Public Service Commission

oct. 2, 2018

Bernheim purchases the land the KHCLF and it becomes conservation land under the conservation easement.

aug. 20, 2019

The PSC orders Bernheim and LG&E to submit legal briefs for the issue at hand.

sept. 19, 2019

LG&E submits brief.

i july 13, 1990

Kentucky legislature passes KRS 146.550-570, establishing the KHLCF.

KHLCF=KY Heritage Land Conservation Fund

nov. 23, 2016

LG&E files application with the PSC for an approval of an increase in its gas and electric rates. LG&E also included information about the Bullitt County pipeline project in this application.

june 22, 2017

The PSC grants a CPCN to LG&E for the pipeline project.

aug. 1, 2019

Bernheim files complaint against LG&E with the PSC pertaining to the pipeline and CPCN.

> Sept. 9, 2019 Bernheim submits brief.

dec. 20, 2019 The PSC rules against Bernheim. After attending the roadshow, we talked to Natasha Collins, Director of Media Relations at LG&E, hoping to gain some clarity regarding the timeline of events and pipeline approval.

"This was a part of a filing we had before the commission in 2016, and the commission approved this project in 2017," Collins said.

The commission Collins referred to is the Kentucky Public Service Commission (PSC). The PSC is a board of three people responsible for regulating rates and services regarding utilities. Think: electricity, water, sewage, natural gas, and so on.

Initially, we had the same question as many others – why can't LG&E choose a different route, one avoiding one of the state's most highly-regarded and popular forests? Collins told us changing the already approved route would take five to seven years with an increased cost to customers.

"We believe that the path that we have chosen, with regard to the route and in regard to the planning, is the best path forward for being able to serve the community," Collins said.

Collins informed us of an even bigger detail that we, along with much of the public, weren't fully aware of. Not only is this land closed to the public and used solely for conservation purposes, Bernheim purchased it *after* the PSC approved LG&E's pipeline.

That seemingly simple fact was like a puzzle piece that we'd been missing. It had baffled us that under any circumstances LG&E could even propose a project like this. After all, this forest was founded and continues to be run in the name of conservation. A pipeline built directly through it seemed unfathomable. But it made sense if the land didn't belong to Bernheim when the project was approved. After speaking with Collins, we gained an entirely different perspective. She opened our eyes to an idea we hadn't yet considered:

Could LG&E be in the right? We immediately took our newfound knowledge to our editors. In just a few minutes, our outlook had changed entirely. The once adamant advocacy tone was gone from our conversations, replaced by an almost accusatory one. We needed to take an honest look directly into everything that confused us about the issue.

In interviews and public statements alike, Bernheim has painted a picture that LG&E had been "secretly planning" this pipeline.

According to Berry, the beginning of the land-buying process actually started in 2013, when they began to look at possible conservation land to purchase. Bernheim finally bought the land, called Cedar Grove Wildlife Corridor, in October 2018 after receiving funding in 2017. 2017 was also the year the PSC approved LG&E's pipeline project. Bernheim placed conservation easements and deed restrictions on the land in October 2018, too.

"Those two things are something you use as a landowner to ensure that certain things don't happen on it," Berry said.

A conservation easement, according to the environmental organization Land Trust Alliance, is "a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government agency that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values." What does this mean in regards to the pipeline? Berry claims that the easement means Bernheim can "never destroy the land and its natural features." Now, this is where things get tricky. Initially, we had the same question as many others why can't LG&E choose a different route, avoiding one of the state's most highly-regarded and popular forest?



We weren't sure where to go. Bernheim told us one thing, while LG&E told us something completely different. After receiving little documentation from either side - besides vocal complaints and arguments - we decided to take verification into our own hands. At one of our staff worknights, we asked for the help of our staff's resident "legal fairy," Sky Carroll. Sky is the content director for the magazine, and has more legal knowledge than the two of us combined – fueled by her participation in youth government conferences like Kentucky Youth Assembly. While we only intended to ask for Sky's help to clear up our legal confusion, she became an integral part of our entire story. Suddenly, our duo became a trio, and just in time for things to get much more complicated.

We started with a simple Google search: "LG&E Bernheim lawsuit." After some adjustments and a few clicks later, we found an LG&E legal brief for the PSC.

While skimming that document, something kept coming up: Case No. 2016-00371. This called for another Google search. This took us directly to the Public



DIRECTOR OF CONSERVATION Andrew Berry, Bernheim's director of conservation, explains the situation Bernheim is facing. "If we don't act today to protect the best natural lands we got left, then it's gonna be too late. So, you know, it's about protecting Bernheim. It's about protecting natural land and it's about protecting property rights," Berry said on Oct. 20. Before taking on the role of director of conservation, Berry was a longtime forest manager.

PHOTO BY MIA BREITENSTEIN

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Mark Wourms, Bernhiem's executive director, speaks on LG&E's approved pipeline on Oct. 20. "This pipeline is going to be dug into the earth, which completely changes the geology of that area and of those springs," Wourms said. He's been involved with Bernheim since 2008.

PHOTO BY MIA BREITENSTEIN

Service Commission's website, where we found endless links to documents having to do with Case No. 2016-00371. We gave up on finding any pertinent links after a few minutes and went back to reading the same brief from LG&E to the PSC.

In this brief, another phrase seemed to be in every few sentences: Certificate for Public Convenience and Necessity, or CPCN. Another search.

A CPCN is a certificate that can be granted by the PSC to a developer before they provide utility services, like gas or electric services, to the public. So it makes sense that LG&E would need one before building the natural gas pipeline. Back to that later.

We were still pretty unsure of the timeline of events. When did Bernheim get the land? When did LG&E get approval? And of course, who was in the right, if anyone?

Bernheim claimed they began looking at the land in 2013, but we couldn't find any documentation to back that up. Plus, "looking for land" doesn't equate to ownership. After following up with Berry for some clarification, he said that "work on building the Cedar Grove wildlife corridor started much earlier than the actual purchases" and "these discussions with landowners, funding, and due diligence time periods take many years for conservation projects."

In order to find documentation of the purchase, we found the conservation easement previously referenced – but this was no easy stroll through the forest.

When discussing visitor access to the land, LG&E referenced quotes from the easement in their brief. We couldn't find any easily accessible copies of this easement online, but in one of the footnotes, we found that it was physically housed in the Bullitt County Clerk Office.

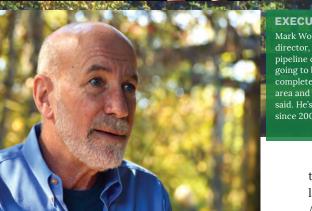
So on Dec. 4, we took a trip to Bullitt County.

After mistakenly walking into the library and then aimlessly wandering around outside, we finally ended up in the right place – but not before going up to the wrong desk first. Searching computer records was no easy

feat, and we weren't making any progress. Then, Lillian brought out LG&E's brief and found that they listed the actual record book that the easement was in, which happened to be sitting right beneath the desk we were in front of. We pulled out the book, nervously flipped through hundreds of pages, and there it was. After a brief celebration of what seemed like a detective-like accomplishment, we took pictures of the 18-page document and were on our way back to school for a few hours of close reading.

The PSC granted this easement on Oct. 2, 2018 – after the PSC approved LG&E's pipeline in June 2017. However, on page five, it says, "It is the purpose of this Easement to conserve and help ensure the continuation of the conservation values of the Property." In other words, this easement is what made the land in question – the Cedar Grove Wildlife Corridor – conservation land.

Essentially, this means that the land would now have restricted uses and it and the species there couldn't be disturbed in any way, other than approved activities. Page five also says, "There





STROLL THROUGH THE

People stroll across a bridge in Bernheim Forest on a sunny day on Oct. 20. The proposed pipeline would run through an area that is not currently open to the public.

PHOTO BY MIA BREITENSTEIN

shall be no public visitor activities at the Property," except for previously authorized management activities and approved scientific research. This idea constituted one of LG&E's main justifications for their pipeline project – no one would be allowed on the land it would go through.

However, the most important part of the easement might be in the first few paragraphs, where the Kentucky Heritage Land Conservation Fund is mentioned. Page two reads: "The Property was acquired in part with Kentucky Heritage Land Conservation Fund ("KHLCF") money..." The KHLCF was established through KRS chapter 146.550-570. In KRS 146.750, it identifies what money in the fund can be used for, and says that money can be used to buy land as defined in KRS 146.560. KRS 146.560 classifies those lands as:

- Natural areas that possess unique features such as habitat for rare and endangered species;
- Areas important to migratory birds;
- 3. Areas that perform important

natural functions that are subject to alteration or loss;4. Areas to be preserved in their natural state for public use, outdoor recreation and education.

KRS 146.570 also states that "Lands acquired shall be maintained in perpetuity for the purposes set out in KRS 146.560." In other words, land purchased with KHLCF money is supposed to be kept as conservation land.

But what happens when that conservation land was already approved for a natural gas pipeline constructed by LG&E? On the other hand, what about when the land is home to endangered bats and a rare species of snails? Should LG&E's project approval even matter?

We weren't sure, either. That's what's still developing. On Aug. 1, Bernheim filed a complaint with the PSC (remember: a board that handles rates and services pertaining to utilities) explaining their discontent with LG&E's actions regarding the natural gas pipeline that would go through the territory Bernheim now owned. The PSC received it on Aug. 2. The complaint marked the beginning of Case 2019-00274. Then the PSC ordered Bernheim and LG&E to submit legal briefs on the matter – why they were in the right and the other was in the wrong.

Throughout this process, Bernheim alluded that LG&E had been "secretive" about getting approval for their pipeline and that they didn't follow proper guidelines. We still didn't know exactly what this meant or have any details. So, we searched for them ourselves on the PSC's website.

Bernheim alleged that LG&E had buried their application for a CPCN to approve their pipeline in an application to the PSC about increasing their gas and electric rates. Turns out, we saw that this claim did have some merit. In Case 2016-00371 with the PSC, the one we'd given up searching through earlier, there's a roughly 100-page document that seems to be about gas and electric rates. But this wasn't all that was there. On pages 31 through 35, the PSC briefly mentions the Bullitt County pipeline plans and then expresses consent to granting a CPCN for the project. You wouldn't expect it to be there unless you knew it was

there. After all, the application and document was primarily about gas and electric rates. Whether LG&E combined the two applications simply because it was easier or to deceive Bernheim – as Bernheim claimed – we don't know.

Further, regarding CPCNs, KRS 278.020, yet another Kentucky law, states that after a CPCN application is filed, the PSC must hold a public hearing for all "interested parties" to the project at hand. On May 31, 2017, there was a hearing, but Bernheim wasn't there. Bernheim claimed that they should've been present at the hearing and that LG&E should've notified Bernheim of their CPCN application. But, remember, Bernheim had no conservation rights to this land at the time of the hearing.

SAVE BERNHEIM FOREST

bernheim.org/forestunderthreat

Bernheim &

Once we had all of this information, we needed to make sure we had interpreted everything correctly. The wealth of knowledge that we now had at our disposal was confusing and, at times, created a fog around the entire case. Our journalism adviser recommended speaking to an environmental lawyer to help clear things up, an impartial opinion from someone with credibility. So that's exactly what we did.

On Dec. 17, we headed to Lexington.

We met with Bethany Baxter, an associate attorney at Joe F. Childers and Associates, and laid out our collection of documents. We guided her through every piece of legal text that we'd accumulated, asking clarifying questions all along the way. To our relief, she found that our interpretations of the documents were right, and we'd been on track thus far.

In the end, Bernheim had these complaints:

LG&E did not file a separate application for a CPCN for the pipeline project.

Bernheim representatives were not present at the PSC hearing.

Bernheim was entitled notification of LG&E's application for a CPCN.

However, on Dec. 20, the PSC rejected Bernheim's complaints. Essentially, the PSC didn't think Bernheim had successfully made their case against LG&E. They also said that Bernheim was not an "interested party" at the time of the hearing since it wasn't their conservation land.

Since the whole issue was whether the PSC had made the right decision in granting a CPCN through LG&E's rate application, we felt like the PSC wouldn't be likely to change their original decision. Bernheim apparently saw this coming too, as they said in a statement: "They were considering their own prior decision," and labeled the PSC's decision as "unfortunate but not entirely surprising."

Whether LG&E will build their natural gas pipeline soon is unclear, as other issues are still playing out. For example, LG&E still needs some permit approvals and is still pursuing eminent domain lawsuits against other landowners before beginning pipeline construction.

Bernheim also said in their statement, "This decision is in no way the end of this issue or our fight to protect Bernheim's land and conservation easements," making one thing certain: Bernheim is not backing down.

CONCERNING

For us, there came a point where, when discussing the legality of the situation, we had to take a step back. In the end, there's who is correct – and who is right. At the root of this entire fight between LG&E and Bernheim is a forest. Throughout the months that we'd been researching, writing, and working on this piece, the fact that there's a real forest with a real pipeline threatening it became lost to us.

While we found ourselves engrossed in a local environmental threat and dispute, the international movement for environmentalism and climate justice was taking the global stage. Over the last year, a 17-year-old Swedish activist, Greta

In the end, there's who is correct and who is *right*.



Thunberg, became the face of the movement, beginning with her decision to skip school to strike for climate justice. Since then, she's addressed the United Nations and urged the world to join the fight for climate justice.

At the World Economic Forum in January 2019, Thunberg spoke on our Earth's current climate and environmental state.

"I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if the house is on fire. Because it is."

Bernheim Forest is, in a sense, on fire. And as small as the flame of this pipeline seems, the loss of conservation land anywhere should concern us in the age of climate change.

Just this year, the United States Department of the Interior approved construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline that will go through Montana. This pipeline is part of the Keystone Pipeline System, which transports over 35 million gallons of crude oil from Canada to the U.S.

Like Bernheim, supporters of conserving natural land have used both lawsuits and public protests to challenge the pipeline's construction. The over-10-year-long fight between a coalition of Native Americans and environmentalists, and one of North America's largest energy corporations, TC Energy, has stood as a symbol in the struggle against corporate dominance over our environment that's become far too common.

Movements like Saving Bernheim, the protests against the Keystone XL Pipeline, the Standing Rock protests against the Dakota Access pipeline in North and South Dakota, the protests against the Mountain Valley pipeline in both West Virginia and Virginia, and dozens more movements around the country, have all been part of something bigger than the individual projects themselves.

They're sending a message to the entire country, and even the world: If we don't fight any and every disturbance to our environment, the future of our planet will be the one to suffer the consequences.

"One of the analogies I've used is there's this thing called death by 1000 cuts. If Bernheim is celebrating 90 years and we want to be here for 90 more and 900 after that," Wourms said. "We can't have little cuts occurring every 10, 20, 50 years it will add up and take the integrity out of our systems."

Yes, this issue is about a timeline of events, KRS chapters, CPCN applications, and yard signs that sparked a movement. But at its core, Bernheim supporters see it as an instance of corporations disregarding environmental concerns and ignoring attempts to conserve land and its natural features.

But let's back up. In the beginning, it wasn't that we actually didn't care about the environment or protecting Bernheim, we just didn't fully understand the details of the movement. Rather than taking an active stake in the issue, we passively supported a movement – we silently agreed with efforts to save a forest voiced by those yard signs.

As student journalists, we've been told time and time again that the number one element of journalism is the truth. When sources gave us contradicting facts that suddenly skewed our understanding on what was true, it became our responsibility to discern what had happened. Along with finding the information we needed, we also gained an understanding of what real investigative journalism looks like.

The yellow signs are still out there, lining the yards of our everyday commutes. They still display the bold message they had when we first began this story, but the meaning for us has shifted. For us, they not only act as a symbol of a movement to counteract corporations' actions, they now mark the beginning of a call to research, a call to investigate, a call to dig a little deeper. •

paintec poison

front door of her grandmother's house in the Oakdale neighborhood near Churchill Downs, one-year-old Roxanne (Roxy) Price watches pedestrians and traffic on the road on Oct. 16. Just outside the doorframe and on the windows, columns, and the roof hid the danger beneath the cracked paint that caused Roxy to get lead poisoning. 4118

A Louisville family faces a silent threat: the lead paint in their home.

words by PAYTON CARNS & JUSTIN PRICE • design by GRANT STROMQUIST

oxanne Price pushed open the crimson curtains to reveal a window regularly smudged with her sticky prints. We watched as she pressed a small hand against the glass; her blue eyes stared longingly at the cars that whizzed past. Her nose was smushed against the window, leaving a foggy imprint behind in its place.

The white paint coating the frame of the front door was visibly tarnished with years of neglect. Cracked paint hinted at the danger that lay beneath.

On that October day, Roxanne could not go past the white door, even though she desperately wanted to. She could not play in the front yard or even stand on the porch.

Just months ago in July, Roxanne sat with her mother, Christina Allemang, in a doctor's office for a regular checkup, when the doctor said something strange to the family.

Roxanne had lead poisoning.

Lead — as in a soft metal that is in the paint of most old homes in Louisville.

Poisoning — as in Christina and Jeremy Price, Roxanne's father, might have to worry about their daughter growing up with mental impairments that could impact her ability to live a normal life.

What's the issue?

Lead can take many forms, but the most common source of exposure is through the paint in homes. If paint starts to chip or peel, families are at risk of lead exposure, and high levels of exposure can create health problems. While lead in the bloodstream is extremely harmful for anyone, it is especially dangerous for the primarily affected group children under the age of 12. The substance's chemical makeup confuses their young bodies.

"When it's ingested, even as just kind of a little bit of dust, the body thinks that it's calcium. That's why children absorb so much," said John Cullen, founder of LockUp Lead, a local company that provides communities with simple-to-use lead testers. "They need a lot of calcium for their bones, so they accumulate this and nothing in the body that usually would weed out poisons always recognizes it as a poison."

Roxanne, who was ingesting lead paint chips scattered around her house, was unknowingly poisoning herself. Without the financial ability to afford the safe removal of the peeling, leadbased paint from their home, they were forced to leave.

For many others like Christina and Jeremy, living in older areas around Louisville and across the U.S., this problem is not uncommon. Lead-based paints were banned in the U.S. in 1978, but the danger of lead exposure is still a threat to families living in houses built before the regulations. Mostly, residents cope with the problem by painting over it with newer, latex-based paints. While renovations to remove the lead are an option for some, the complete removal of lead can bring about significant costs unrealistic for the families where it's most concentrated.

According to the Louisville Metropolitan Housing Coalition, poverty continues to concentrate within the city's west and southcentral areas. It's here that a majority of older, unrenovated homes sit, hiding the threats under their chipping exteriors. For many families, the low pricing makes these homes reasonable options.

"The deal was too good to be true," Jeremy said. "You know, \$625 a month for a house. You can't even get a one-bedroom apartment for that."

Starting over

While the price on the house was low, the price they paid for their daughter's health turned their lives upside down.

The car ride home from the pediatrician was a tense, quiet

one. Christina tried to keep her composure, knowing she would later have to tell Jeremy that the home where both of their daughters grew up was no longer a safe place for them to live.

"Yeah, I was sad," Christina said. "I mean, that's my baby."

In just three or four hours, Christina, Roxanne, and Autumn, Roxanne's nine-year-old sister, were off to Christina's mother's house, leaving Jeremy behind with the looming threat of lead in their home.

On Oct. 13, Jeremy sat with us in the booth of a local restaurant, explaining the events that had unfolded over the past year. A short distance away, tables were crowded with families and other customers whose indistinct mumbles filled the air; lively music played quietly over the speakers as waiters shuffled around the room.

"My personal reaction..." he said, pausing as he remembered Roxanne getting sick.

He stared off into the distance before he hid his face in his open palms. After a minute, he looked back up again, slowly taking a sip of his drink, attempting to regain his composure. He carefully wiped his eyes and continued on.

"Reality started kicking in, you know what I mean," he said, clearing his throat.

Jeremy reassured us that he was okay, and kept going.

"It's hard. I should've did this, did that. And what it all boils down to is the amount of money you have, you know, and that determines where you go, what you can and can't do. When you got kids, you gotta do what you gotta do."

Jeremy's reaction was our first glimpse into the extremity of the issue; we could now put a face to a problem we were struggling to understand.

For Justin, one of the writers of this story, it was especially eye-opening. Jeremy wasn't just someone in a news story; he was Justin's family, a distant cousin. The pain on Jeremy's face painted a picture of a father unknowingly raising his children in an unsafe environment, despite doing the best he could. At the beginning of the writing process, the facts and statistics Justin researched pushed the family's trauma out of



view. But now, it was no longer an intangible phenomenon, but a harsh reality. His own financial advantages had shielded him from ever having to face what people in his community — people in his own family — faced every day.

While Christina, Roxanne, and Autumn moved into Christina's mother's house, Jeremy stayed behind, determined to get his deposit back while holding onto the hope that it would one day be their family's home again.

However, the situation did not disappear. It got worse. In fact, it got so bad that the house was deemed by the health department as no longer safe for Jeremy to live in as an adult.

Thus began a grueling journey of couch surfing and long nights at work that often ended with Jeremy sleeping in his car.

"I was just trying to stay at work as much as possible so I could get the money to do what I gotta do," Jeremy said.

It was a difficult and painful ordeal. The place Jeremy and his family once called home was beyond reasonable repair. They needed to find another option, and fast.

Life with lead

We entered Christina's mother's house on Oct. 16. A welcome mat greeted visitors at the front door. Inside, the hardwood floors were hidden by a sea of children's toys, from stuffed teddys to scattered building blocks. A children's TV show played quietly in the background as Roxanne giggled, stepping on her mother's feet.

While Christina was grateful they could move in her mother's home just a few miles away, the house was supposed to be an escape for Roxanne. The place she had lived in since birth was no longer safe for her, and it was crucial to her health that she move out. Unfortunately, they realized this home was also in an area notorious for its lead, and removing the paint was not an option, once again.

Beneath the surface, this environment was far from welcoming. Christina had to keep a mat at the front door to catch any lead residue accumulating on the bottoms of their shoes throughout the day, making sure it was wiped off before they entered the house. The living room, unlike the barren front yard, was filled with toys. Because of the lead in the soil, stuffed animals and Barbie dolls were Roxanne's only taste of a normal childhood. The same toxic paint that coated walls was also in paint on the roof. When it began to rain, the old paint started to chip, dripping off the roof and into the grass and the soil where Christina's mother once grew vegetables.

Because of these hazards, practically nowhere was safe for a small child. Roxanne's entire world was behind the front door - a barrier to a life beyond lead.

It was up to Christina to provide her daughter with small distractions that could help them make the best of a bad situation. Although it could never compare to a yard of their own, trips to Iroquois Park brought some light to the darkness that had crept into their life. Here, the situation at home could be left out of sight, even if just for a minute.

But there was hope for this family. Roxanne was able to get the treatment she needed to get her lead levels down through an alternative diet and monthly blood tests. Because of this, she will avoid long term physical and mental health effects as she grows older.

However, some people aren't as lucky. Eric Roberts, a researcher from the American Academy of



"What it all boils down to is the amount of money you have, you know, and that determines where you go, what you can and can't do."

-Jeremy Price, father to Roxanne

Lethal Lead in Children

Brain

Reduced IQ, behavioral difficulties, and learning problems.

Nervous System

Slowed body growth, a reduction in senses, coma, and convulsions.

Anemia

Blood doesn't have enough healthy red blood cells to deliver oxygen to tissues.

Abdomen

Constipation, a loss of appetite, and abdominal pain.

All are irreversible.

Lead is ingested through eating or inhaling paint dust and chips. Lead also gets into the soil, so playing outside is not an option for small children who might ingest it. Lead is stored in the bones, liver, kidneys, and brain.

66 It's really a kind of hidden secret. People have been happy to kind of sweep it under the rug."

-John Cullen, founder of LockUp Lead

Pediatrics, found that nearly 50% of the approximate 1.2 million cases of children suffering from lead poisoning were not reported.

According to the CDC, children and adults regularly exposed to lead can have immediate short-term physical symptoms such as abdominal pain, constipation, irritable moods, loss of appetite, frequent headaches, and memory loss. While the physical symptoms eventually disappear, what's left behind is stunted brain development and the possibility of mental disabilities that, more often than not, are permanent.

Prevent the poison

Like the Price family, John Cullen became aware of this phenomenon when his own son, Jack, had evidence of higher lead levels at a young age.

"I was renovating older houses kind of part time with my wife while I was doing city planning work," Cullen said.

While he worked in these older areas, he came into contact with the harmful dust hidden from view, collecting on the bottoms of his shoes. Each day as he came home, Cullen was unknowingly leaving behind a toxic trail — one that would put Jack in immense danger.

Over time, and without their knowledge, the substance accumulated within the young family's home.

Thankfully, the Cullens caught the issue early on before it spiraled into something that would permanently affect their son. Despite this positive outcome, the incident was too close of a call for them, fueling Cullen to abandon his career and focus on a solution that would eliminate the chances of any other family having to experience the same nightmare he had.

"It's really a kind of hidden secret. People have been happy to kind of sweep it under the rug," Cullen said.

Because of Jack's experience, Cullen founded LockUp Lead in 2008. They offer an instant test kit that colors paint bright red wherever lead is present. They also have a spray bottle that neutralizes the red spots, making the lead less likely to be absorbed by the body. These can be used on window sills, door jams, and, of course, walls. It's a cost-effective solution to identifying and eradicating the threat of lead exposure in homes.

The company started as just a Louisville project but blossomed into a nationwide movement, aiding families from small homes in the Louisville area to the White House.

"President Bush's dog got lead poisoning in the White House when they were doing some renovations," Cullen said. "When Michelle Obama learned that, she told us that they were doing renovations now, and she lived there with her daughters so she wanted us to send her some LockUp Lead products. That was a pretty thrilling delivery."

While Cullen and his company love these national deliveries and want their company to soar, their main focus has always been on the local, lower-income communities and helping them live in safe homes. LockUp Lead teamed up with Louisville Metro Housing Coalition to give housing options to families that are displaced because of lead exposure, just like Jeremy's.

Fortunately, you don't have to suddenly become an

LockUp Lead

OTR reporters Payton and Justin sit with John Cullen, founder of LockUp Lead, on Dec. 12. His products help local families identify and remove the lead in their homes. Pictured on the left are lead neutralizers. According to LockUp Lead, "These products chemically react with the lead to reduce its bioavailability by up to 99.5%."





entrepreneur and develop your own products to help with the ongoing lead crisis. As this problem has become more and more nationally recognized, companies and organizations have been popping up all over the country to educate communities and offer ways to help.

The Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, a program of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), attends community events around Louisville to provide free educational materials about lead and lead removal. Additionally, they strongly encourage all children and adults in leadconcentrated areas to be tested, even if you are unsure if it is a problem. Their page on cdc.gov gives information on what lead is, what it means for all parties involved, and what you and your family can do to remove it.

Catching high lead levels early is very important but often

difficult when dealing with such an invisible problem. Raising awareness of programs like these and reiterating the extremity of lead poisoning can save children from a life of diminished mental capabilities.

Another small, but effective way to combat lead poisoning is by both encouraging and participating in a lead-safe, nutritional diet. Because the body mistakes the metal as calcium, it automatically absorbs it into the bloodstream. Promoting a diet rich in calcium, vitamin C, and iron lessens the likelihood of the lead entering the blood and, in turn, lessens the symptoms later on.

Looking ahead

A month later, we walked up unfamiliar front steps, gazing at the home that would foster new beginnings for Roxanne's family. It was a stark contrast to the decaying facade we were met with at their former home. Inside, the clean front room gave no hint of the tension in their previous household. Roxanne's ordeal would no longer have to be the center of the family's world.

This wasn't a typical move; rather than stacked boxes and displaced furniture, the space was mostly empty, other than the single fold out chair and newly purchased La-Z-Boy.

"We're planning on buying mostly new stuff — not because of the lead but because of the memories. We just want to start over," Christina said.

The family was opening the door to their future — leaving behind restricted diets and monthly lead tests for a future of lazy backyard pool days.

"The neighborhood's better and they can go outside and play," Christina said. "We don't have to be so scared of lead all the time." •

CHIPPING AWAY

Many old homes in Louisville contain lead paint on their interior and exterior. At Christina Allemang's mother's house, where one-year-old Roxanne stayed with her family, lead paint chips away in the windowsill. **FROM THE PAST** On Oct. 23, Emma Brooks (a pseudonym) holds up a childhood photograph of herself with her family. We have chosen to keep identities anonymous to protect the victims.

PHOTO BY LAINEY HOLLAND





SENSITIVE CONTENT WARNING: This article contains content about child abuse that some may find disturbing.

There are over 22,000 reported cases of kids suffering from abuse in our state. Here's one girl's story.

words by MADDIE CURRIE & HANNAH WELCH • design by MADDIE CURRIE

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

The names in this story have been changed to protect the identities of the victims. OTR verified accounts through court records and arrest reports.

heels rolled up to the driveway of their house, making pops where rubber turned on broken cement. Emma Brooks sat in a car seat next to her big sissy, Teresa Smith. Emma was at an age where she would hold up three fingers to answer people when they asked, "How old?" Her sister, Teresa, had run out of fingers the last year.

A series of indecipherable flashes erupted. Gunshot number one came from the backyard. Gunshot number two came from familiar hands. After gunshot number three, the car began rolling in reverse, faster than they had rolled in.

Suddenly those flashes led to a dark, malicious red — a red that covered the three-year-old's hands too heavily. As the velvet stains covered her hands, she recalled the words:

"What's wrong with sissy?"

It was July 26, 2000. Emma's biological father, Jack Smith, had threatened to murder her mother. Instead, a friend of Jack fired shots at the car. The assault left Teresa blind, mentally handicapped, and partially paralyzed in her left arm.

Nineteen years later, Emma sat isolated in the corner of a party with her friends. People in uncomfortably-close proximity emitted a thick, sour stench of alcohol. She didn't have to consume alcohol for the chemical to affect her. Emma's brain switched its channel from the present to a rerun. The familiar smell immediately triggered the episode she's lived over and over again.

Emma hyperventilated; her heart was under the impression that she must run for her life. Eyes sore and face discolored, Emma ruminated over one of the many moments when her life was rerouted by abuse. Nineteen years later, she still has nightmares of the dark, red color.

Emma found herself tracing over her hands as if the stains never went away. And in some ways, they never would. Tears painted her cheeks as she struggled to make sense of what she just relived.

To reveal the facts of that night, we (writer Maddie, along with two OTR editors, Ysa and Ella) uncovered Shelby County Civil Court records and arrest citations. A friend of Jack, who actually shot at the car, pled guilty to first-degree assault with a deadly weapon. But Jack's charge showed terroristic threatening, a Class A misdemeanor, for threatening to kill her mother with a rifle earlier the same day. In our research, we confirmed that Jack possessed a lengthy criminal record spanning over two decades for charges from assault to driving under the influence – a violent pattern that corresponded with the timeline of the sisters' allegations of abuse.

His actions left the family with a lifetime of ongoing recovery from signs of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and other mental health issues. Every day, Emma says she navigates triggers that can send her back to past traumas. The flashes come in fragmented pieces, difficult to put together into a full memory. These episodes come from years of repressing memories.

A Harsh Reality

"I know four close family members, three extended, and five friends that have experienced abuse," Emma said.

In the United States, nine out of every 1,000 children will become victims of child abuse. In Kentucky, that rate is even higher. Our state, as of 2017, has the highest rate of child abuse in the country – 22.2 of every 1,000 kids, more than double the national average.

If child abuse is so common, especially in Kentucky, why aren't we talking more about it? Many of the kids in these dangerous environments are the only ones who can tell their stories, but, because of their vulnerability, they are often silenced.

"I was always really afraid to tell people because I felt like they would think I was crazy," Emma said.

According to a report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, child abuse can cause lifelong trauma. In 2017, 10 children died from child abuse in Kentucky. Circumstances like these, while rare, demonstrate why it's so important to get kids out of abusive environments and into help as early as possible.

Child abuse is a pretty broad term, but, according to the U.S. government-run Child Welfare Information Gateway, it specifically includes "any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation." A "child" under this definition means a person who is younger than 18.

Emma and Teresa lived the truth of this definition, saying they were verbally and emotionally abused by their biological father, but also scarred from witnessing the physical, verbal, emotional, and mental abuse against their mother.

"I remember sleeping in the car sometimes because we were scared to go home," Emma said.

In another instance, Jack attempted to explain away a burn on Emma's cheek, saying she "walked" into his cigarette butt. It left a scar on her cheek for years.

"He would just threaten with knives, and wear big boots, and he would kick her," Emma said recalling witnessing the abuse of her mother. "She would just tell us to go to the bedroom, and sometimes we'd call the cops, and it would be a big ordeal in the neighborhood."

Emma says she continually experienced trauma experiences during visitation with Jack visitations that were still ordered even after her sister was shot.

The Next Chapter

After Teresa was shot, she was flown into Norton Children's "I remember sleeping in the car sometimes because we were scared to go home."

Emma, 22

Hospital in downtown Louisville and hospitalized for four months.

"They told my mom originally that she wouldn't live because the way the bullet hit her in the brain," Emma said of her sister. "The bullet is still in her brain, fragments of it."

Their mother stayed at Teresa's side for the majority of her recovery, along with close friends and family, including their pastor's family from their church in Shelby County.

"The small church that my mom and I grew up in, the pastors would come and speak to my mom and kinda help my mom, because she felt like she had to fight the doctors," Emma recalled.

During this time, Emma moved between houses of close relatives along with her 18-yearold brother. He was separated from many of the situations as he was not a part of the shooting, but he suffered a life with Jack even longer than Emma did.

"He was actually the one who told my biological father to leave and never come back," Emma said.

After her brother stood up to Jack, he and Emma were referred to the Ronald McDonald House by Kosair.

"The location is right next to the hospital, so it provides a home away from home that's close to your family which was really helpful for us," Emma said.

Emma and Teresa's biological father faced charges for terroristic threatening, typically a five to 10year sentence, of which he served even less than the minimum. Aside from the time he was in jail, the family still feared for their safety. After leaving the hospital, the family lived on a fixed low income. Their only option for shelter was the same home in which they had suffered abuse for years. Going back to that house was dangerous, and put the family through even more trauma when Jack was released from jail.

For example, Emma has a resurfaced childhood memory of laying belly to carpet, leaning on her elbows as she colored in and outside the lines. Her momentary peace was interrupted by screaming and banging, followed by Emma's biological father breaking down the front door. Jack had just been released from jail, and the house was under his name.

The circumstances forced Emma's family to leave.

Emma doesn't remember all of the accounts like these, but some of them resurface in flashes.

"Eventually after that night when he broke down the door, after the shooting, me and my mom and my brother lived in a government apartment," Emma said. "It was the only way to get away from him."

In the years after this, Emma and Teresa visited Jack in legallyrequired, supervised visits a few times per year. "I remember seeing my biological father some throughout those years because in court, my mom offered him the house and all the money and everything in exchange for sole custody of me and my sister," Emma said. "He chose to take all of that instead of the kids. But, they still ordered visitations ... The judge made it okay for us to have to visit him even after all that."

These visits led Emma to repress her feelings.

"I would pretend like everything was okay even though I knew it wasn't okay," Emma said.

In 2009, when Emma was 11 years old, Jack took her and Teresa away during one of their regular visits. The visits were required to be supervised by another adult, usually a family member, but this time no one was watching, leaving the girls defenseless with their biological father.

He lied about why they had to leave their visiting location and took them to Bloomfield, Kentucky, an hour away. Emma hadn't realized he had no plans of taking them back. They pulled up to a trailer where their biological father and his girlfriend were staying. When they arrived, there was no cell signal, no connection to safety.

"He was fine, and we were laughing about stuff, and he just started acting really weird and he started yelling at me and asking me why I didn't drive," Emma said, voice breaking. "Now I know that he was diagnosed with mental illness, but then I didn't know that, and I wasn't fully aware of the drugs and the drinking and stuff."

Emma was able to find cell phone reception later in the night, contacting her mother, and eventually returning to her "real" family, her mother and stepfather.

For years, the girls still visited their abuser and his extended family, staying silent about their history. It wasn't until adulthood that Emma and Teresa were able to choose to stop seeing Jack.

"He would make a big deal about us going to his family things, so I would go to his family Thanksgiving, hide in the bathroom and cry there," Emma said. "I would just pretend like everything was okay on the outside but there wasn't really a lot I could do."

Although Emma now refuses to see her biological father, she relives memories of life with him every day. As a recent graduate from the University of Louisville nursing program, she's moving forward with her life, but her career is not an escape. Emma described treating a patient whose circumstances triggered her traumatic memories.

"She wrote down on a piece of paper that her husband had hurt her mentally and physically," Emma said. "She tried to show bruises on her wrists and stuff."

Emma felt that their similar experiences connected them and she believed the woman was telling the truth.

"Her daughters were taking the dad's side and calling her crazy," Emma said. "It was really frustrating to me because she was so emotional."

Even the suggestion of reconnecting with her biological father sends Emma into a state of panic and anxiety. Some people in her life are left with the impression that her trauma isn't affecting her to this extent.

This miscommunication is a direct result of the isolation Emma mentions in her personal definition of domestic violence: "Any situation where, not just physical abuse but also verbal abuse, isolation, manipulation — it starts with that stuff, the isolation and manipulation," Emma said.

Isolation is a common, powerful, and dangerous weapon of abusers. It's the weapon that continues the cycle of abuse, pressuring victims into silence. Emma fights this feeling to sustain the fulfilling life she strives for.

It's not only her battle, though. It's the battle of countless victims around the state. It's the battle of any citizen who wants to create a future free from abuse. Your part in ending the silent cycle is doing the very thing every abuser fears the victim will do speak out.

What's Your Role?

According to a report published by the National Center for Biotechnology Information, abused teens may not always report their abuser. Individuals 12 to 19 years of age only report about one-third of crimes against them, compared with one-half in older age groups.

This makes it important for outsiders to understand the signs.

Physical signs of abuse can be injuries like burns, bites, bruises, and swelling that can't be explained, frequent physical complaints (headaches, stomach aches), and signs of injuries that weren't properly treated.

Behavioral signs include a child seeming afraid of their parents, always acting very cautious as to not upset them, and protesting returning home. It's important to remember that these signs are not always so clear cut. The situation is different for every person.

Keep in mind that if you believe that a child is being abused, Kentucky has a mandatory reporting law that requires that you alert the authorities. A call to 911 can begin the process of getting children the help they need.

Although circumstances vary for every victim, Emma is able to find help by connecting with others. Emma was able to share her experience with her best friend, another survivor of abuse and her peer in nursing school.

"We really connected because she was so open about everything that she'd been through," Emma said. "She helped me get comfortable talking about it and get comfortable with the idea that it's okay not to be okay."

"I would just pretend everything was okay on the outside, but there wasn't really a lot I could do."

The emotions just hit me so hard, and I don't know why I'm being so emotional, but I just can't help it.

Emma, 22

Getting out and getting help is one of the first steps to breaking the cycle of child abuse. Studies show that 80-90% of domestic violence victims end up abusing or neglecting their own children because of their increased risk for PTSD, aggressive behavior, anxiety, and substance abuse. Survivors who seek therapy for their trauma have better odds of overcoming their abuse. If you know a survivor of abuse, your role in encouraging them to seek help can make the often isolated road to recovery feel more comforting, affirming, and rewarding.

If it wasn't for the encouragement of her husband, Jeffrey Brooks, Emma may not have reached out for help. Because of his pushing, Emma agreed to go to therapy at Southeast Christian Church for six months.

"I didn't start going until I was 20," Emma said. "Before that, I thought I was fine. I repressed it so much that I almost forgot about it."

Jeffrey believes that therapy has allowed her to share her wounds and help her become herself again.

"I want her to have the tools and the things to get through her situation," Jeffrey said. "I support her no matter what."

Emma doesn't just represent victims of child abuse. She represents the upstander, a victim who is making active efforts to grow through past pains by speaking out against her abuser and others. Emma is especially focused on breaking the silence that follows abuse. And she doesn't do this on her own. The support of her family and friends with similar stories continuously proves to Emma that she is not alone.

"We all fall short, but when we have people on our side, it's just another great reason to keep on going," Jeffrey said.

The future can seem dark and hopeless coming from such a heavy past, but Emma has hope. She looks forward to the future she has in making new relationships with people, loving her friends, and bringing a new family into the world.

"I know for some people, it makes it hard because people have a fear of being like their abuser. But I feel like it's made me more excited, because I can be different," Emma said, revealing dimples from the sides of her cheeks. •

National Child Abuse Hotline Domestic Violence Hotline

1-800-4-A-Child 1-800-656-HOPE

24-hour toll-free hotline available for counseling and information. The counselors can also refer you to a local domestic violence center. If you or someone you know is injured or in immediate danger, contact local law enforcement.

Gestures That <mark>Heal</mark>

Everyone can make a difference in mending the effects of childhood trauma by using these five simple gestures that help to develop supportive and caring relationships with victims of abuse.



Listen.

Patient, receptive figures in a survivor's life can help them feel valued and safe. Attentive listening shows them that their thoughts matter.



Comfort.

Gestures that make survivors feel safe can buffer the "fight or flight" stress response so common in those who have experienced trauma.



Collaborate.

Working with survivors to help them learn communication and problemsolving skills will allow them to gain independence and ask for help when they need it.



Inspire.

Helping survivors recognize their strengths and natural talents can reverse the stress that negatively impacts their own belief in themselves and their potential.



Celebrate.

Recognizing a survivor's accomplishments can help them build on their own identity and remind them of their importance.



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words & photos by Faith Lindsey \circ design & photo illustrations by Patrick Harper

punk, r&b, country, rap: Louisville has it all.

From jazz in New Orleans, country in Nashville, to hip-hop in Atlanta, music is no doubt an essential part of a city's culture. Check out these up-and-coming music artists in our city, Louisville, Kentucky.



"It's not about not having fear — it's about facing it," Horace Gaither, 17, said about attempting to navigate the music industry. As a self-proclaimed lyrical writer, he uses his music to "teach different." Currently, he has one song released called, "They Ain't Got It," and plans to release new music soon.

iov

Horace Gaither 🖸 @horacegaither

V Line

Rej Forester, 27, and Karen Ledford, 24, make up the band Grlwood from Louisville. "The kind of music we play is angry girl music," Ledford said. Their shrill runs and simple-yet-unconventional, catchy hooks have secured the band a loyal community full of punk, queer and femme followers across the nation and beyond. GRLwood C @grlwood_band CRLwood []





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Their stories come from all over: Tanzania, Guatemala, Vietnam, Ethiopia, Burundi, Eritrea. They've all made America their home. But it's not just them. American-born, immigrant, refugee, indigenous — in these stories, **we invite you to break down the barrier of "us" and "them." This is...**



C

Scan here for more "The Power of We" content on our website.

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Beyond the Spires Youth are beating the odds with the help of the Backside Learning Center.

Come As You Are 52-59

Newcomer Academy helps youth learn the language of a new land.

60-65

Kickin' It In Kentucky How Kentucky Refugee Ministries helps this teen find community through his love of soccer.

BEHIND THE STABLES Standing in front of the stables at Churchill Downs' Backside on Nov. 19, Merlin Cano smiles while recounting her expectations of living in America. "When someone mentions America, the first thing to your head is New York – the big city, the pictures that you see," she said.

PHOTO BY MIA BREITENSTEIN

Learn how this Churchill Downs-based nonprofit lifts kids from one of Louisville's hidden communities over their everyday hurdles.

story by ANNIE WHALEY & KATIE CUMMINS design by JAMES JEAN-MARIE

leven-year-old Merlin Cano didn't know what to expect as she walked into the chapel nestled between stables on the Backside at Churchill Downs. Lately, it seemed not knowing what to expect had become her new normal.

A girl approached Cano with a cheerful expression.

"Do you wanna play?" she asked. Cano's eyebrows furrowed. The words were gibberish to her.

She tried to reply but the problem was, having recently emigrated from Guatemala, Cano didn't speak enough English to understand what the girl had said, let alone play with her. All she could do was look at the girl with a blank expression.

"They brought me here. I always say that because they didn't ask if I was okay with it," said Cano, now 18, laughing and referring to her parents. "Like, I didn't know what this country was."

Unfortunately for Cano and many other immigrants in the United States, this disconnect is all too familiar.

Cano had imagined the entire country would be four million square miles of New York-esque skyscrapers, crowds of people, and bright, colored billboards.

Instead, as she got off theplane and set foot on American soil for the first time with her mom and siblings, Cano was greeted by the dreary parking garages of the Louisville airport and commotion of the concrete highway. For the first time, she met some of her much older brothers and sisters — most of whom she'd only ever seen in pictures.

"I remember thinking that she looks so different from the picture," Cano joked, laughing as she recalled seeing her older sister for the first time. "Like, she looks better in the picture."

THE CHOSEN COLOR Five-year-old Victoria focuses on finding the perfect color for her friend's birthday card at Front Runners on Nov. 12.



CUTE COUNTING A young girl named Karen smiles, holding up three fingers when asked her age while at the Front Runners program on Nov. 12. She's not three; she's in the kindergarten-second grade room.

Most of her family had already moved to the United States and gotten jobs as equine workers at one of Louisville's greatest attractions, Churchill Downs.

But for Cano and her family, rather than oversized hats and mint juleps, the track is a place filled with dirt roads, stables, baby goats, and horses. Tucked just off Fourth Street, this community is known as the Backside.

When we — the writers, Annie and Katie — set foot onto the Backside, people greeted us with smiles and waves. We watched as workers groomed horses, cleaned out stalls, and people zoomed by on bicycles. A goat was perched near the corner of the stables. We immediately had our phones out to take pictures, but the workers paid no mind to the animal. They continued on with their work.

Many of the workers at the Backside are immigrants who came to the United States seeking financial stability. A good amount of them come to Louisville not speaking any English, and because of this, it is hard to adapt to life that occurs outside the track. That's why many of the workers find themselves turning to a program that helps them in any way they can to succeed: the Backside Learning Center (BLC), an independent non-profit.

Nestled right behind a giant jumbotron and just steps away from the track, the BLC offers English as a Second Language (ESL) services, basic social services, and provides educational resources. Sometimes their clients need everyday things that many people take for granted, like translation services at a doctor's appointment, help communicating with their child's teacher at a parent-teacher conference, or legal support.

"There's just this relaxed, open, friendly exchange that takes place. Even if it's just somebody coming in to pick up their mail – we receive a lot of mail for the Backside workers. I like the community aspect just the social aspect of it," said Mariah Levine Garcia, the Family Resource Coordinator at BLC. Levine Garcia's warm smile is often the first thing people see when they walk into the BLC.

Originally called the Klein Family Learning Center, the BLC opened its doors for the first time in 2004 and they have remained very, very busy. In 2019, 90 adults enrolled in ESL courses, 80 children and youth received homework help, and, since opening its doors, four students have gained U.S. citizenship. These statistics are great achievements for the BLC, but to people like Cano, these numbers represent more: their friends, their coworkers, and their community.

Cano and her family were introduced to the ESL program when she was 11, although she wasn't able to attend their programs regularly until she was able to drive. At that point, Cano's parents also started attending ESL classes.

Cano would attend the class with her parents, aiding both the teacher and her parents.

"I was the youngest in the classroom, just sitting there helping my parents," Cano said, pointing to the bigger classroom across the hallway as we interviewed her.

These classrooms are adorned with Spanish-to-English dictionaries and walls of vocabulary like "balcony" or "receipt" — words so mundane many people don't even remember learning them. This was in sharp contrast to what she encountered at Thomas Jefferson (TJ) Middle School and Iroquois High School, where she found the language barrier harder to overcome.

Despite spending a year at Newcomer Academy (see "Come As You Are" on page 52), the transition to TJ and Iroquois was still rocky. The combination of meeting some of her immediate family for the first time and adjusting to Louisville's culture was close to overwhelming for Cano.

"At first it was really hard for me," said Cano. "I felt really sad and everything, but then I started to

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like it."

Once Cano got her driver's license, she was able to appreciate little things like going out after school with her friends and trying restaurants all around Louisville.

"We would actually go to one of our teachers to ask, like, opinions about different places to go," Cano said. "Good ones, and cheap."

However, eating the ropa vieja at Mojito Tapas with her friends wasn't always her top priority. Driving meant more familial responsibilities, like driving her parents around and translating for them at things like legal appointments. Cano also worked two jobs while attending Iroquois — one at Walmart and one on the Backside at Churchill Downs with the rest of her family.

So, while most high schoolers find themselves still in bed well into the morning on the weekends, Cano is wideeyed and awake at 5 a.m., walking thoroughbred horses.

"Oh my god, I get ready in like five minutes and I would just take something to eat," Cano giggled. "When I get to the barn, I eat it there. And we usually finish by nine with horses."

> Often times, Cano was straddled with responsibilities that many high schoolers in Louisville aren't prepared to cope with. She

> > was

stretched thin between two worlds, but one place where she was able to find solace was the BLC.

As Cano got older, she realized that those classrooms the same ones that she had spent countless evenings in, helping her parents learn English — could be a resource for her, too. So when the time came for her to start thinking about college, she knew exactly where to turn.

"I came here to ask them if they could help me with applying to colleges and maybe doing my FAFSA and all of that," Cano said, referring to her college federal financial aid forms . "Because like, I had never done that before, and I couldn't get the help at home."

They helped Cano get into Jefferson Community Technical College (JCTC), where she is currently studying to become a nurse.

Cano kept returning to the BLC, not only to receive help, but to volunteer. Once she graduated high school, Cano was offered a job working as the Youth Activities Leader. Now, she works as a thoroughbred walker in the early morning, goes to classes at JCTC in the middle of the day, and helps lead the Front Runners program at night.

Front Runners is an afterschool program that offers academic support and assistance to the children of the Backside workers. Annie, one of the writers of this story, is a current volunteer for this program.

⁵I tell them all the time. If I'm able to help you, I will.

Merlin Cano

Like Cano, the kids from Front Runners face the challenge of having to learn English while speaking mostly Spanish at home and translating for their parents. Front Runners aims to address these problems while still making sure the children are able to play and act like kids in a friendly environment. The program fosters curiosity, literacy, and mindfulness through group reading, drawing, and games.

"I love watching them grow and learn, and their curiosity, and just really learning from them and them learning from us. It's a good feeling," said Levine Garcia.

During one Front Runners meeting, the volunteers led the kids in a call and response. An energetic volunteer in her early 20's cheered at the crowd.

"TARZAN!"

The kids giggled while repeating the name in a high pitched voice and trying to flex their scrawny arm muscles.

"SWINGIN' FROM A RUBBER BAND!"

Their arms swayed above their heads, smiles stretched across their faces.

As the kids started entering each classroom, they were greeted with volunteers who helped them with whatever they needed. When we visited in early December, one group practiced times tables while others sat on the couch listening to a volunteer dramatically read "If You Give a Mouse a Cookie."

In another classroom, one girl, Victoria (5), was focused on designing a colorful birthday card for her friend, Karen (6), at the next table filled with hearts and rainbows. She bounced from her seat, getting the exact color of pink she needed to make the card perfect — to make her friend's birthday perfect. When she gave the card to Karen, Victoria was practically beaming. Karen lit up



MURAL MUSE A warm and colorful mural at the back of the classroom greets students at the Churchill Downs' Backside Learning Center on Nov. 12.

PHOTO BY MIA BREITENSTEIN

as her friend grinned. (Due to a request from the BLC, we have elected not to include the last names of minors.)

After homework and reading time, there's snack time – the kids' favorite. Here, the kids can munch on oranges or other fresh foods. But the most important part of Front Runners is the last 45 minutes: group time.

Group time usually starts with a check-in activity from Levine Garcia, where they practice mindfulness and reflection. Students are broken up into four groups: "Pre-K," "K-2," "3-5," and the youth room (6th to 12th grades).

The youth room, normally filled with laughter and excited energy, was unusually quiet and dark the night we visited. Rows of computers illuminated the students' faces. In the youth room, a local organization, Peace Education Program (PEP), was establishing their first after-school pilot program, called Youth Influencers, made for the students at Front Runners. According to Lijah Fosl, the program director, the program teaches students how to utilize social media in order to "challenge prejudice and have a positive influence on their communities through their personal stories."

The BLC, including Front Runners, works with many local organizations to support the equine workers and their families who call Louisville home. This comes in the form of after-school programming that helps students discover their artistic side among other things. The BLC has also worked with well-known local foundations like Kentucky Shakespeare, Kentucky Refugee Ministries (see "Kickin' It in Kentucky" on page 60), and the Food Literacy Project.

This youth room is where you'll find Cano every Tuesday and Thursday evening. Everyone at the program knows Cano — she's basically Front Runners royalty. She always seems to be talking to someone, sometimes with parents, sometimes with students, and other times, like when we visited Front Runners, talking to Levine Garcia.

A group of six kids have started to call her "Tía" (or "aunt" in Spanish). She calls them her adoptive nieces and nephews in return. Because Cano is closer to their age, she was in their position just a couple of years ago. She understands their thirst for independence and she understands what it's like to be in their shoes.

"I feel like if I go up to any of the girls, they will just trust me and tell me how they feel, what's bothering them and everything. But with the boys, it is a little harder. I don't really know why. They probably need a male to talk to," Cano said.

During a Front Runners session, when we asked Andira (15), a sophomore at Iroquois High School, if she wanted to participate in our interview, she looked at us like we were crazy.

"Are you sure? My English isn't that good," she said, blushing.

"She's lying," Cano, who had overheard, said. "Her English is very good."

Andira only blushed harder. The Backside at Churchill Downs is made up of immigrants and their families, supporting each other, just like how Cano cares for Andira. The BLC only bolsters that strength.

Cano can now help the kids at Front Runners who remind her of herself, walking into that chapel,



iWELCOME! IBIENVENIDO! Jorge, a junior at Southern High School, talks about what he wants to do after high school on Nov. 12. When asked what he wants to study in college, his answer was, without any hesitation, "medicine." He's been attending Front Runners for two years now.



ALL SMILES On Nov. 12, Elizabeth Diaz smiles down at the birthday card she makes for one of the kids she mentors. She is 16 years old and in her first year of volunteering at Front Runners.

unsure and unrooted. She helps them find their voice. She helps them find a setting that's their own with others that will support and uplift them. She helps to build bridges between them — to inspire and connect their community.

Cano is not the same little girl sitting in that church years ago. She is not unrooted from her home, unsure of the people around her, and most importantly, uncertain of herself. She has been planted not only by the people of the Backside, her friends at Iroquois High School, and the BLC, but also the hard work she put in to make the best of her situation.

She has now grown from someone who looked for help, to someone who gives it. She has blossomed into a role model and a person who people flock to for advice and friendship — a person they trust.

"I tell them all the time," said Cano. "If I'm able to help you, I will." • 55 I love watching them grow and learn and their curiosity and just really learning from them and them learning from us. It's a good feeling.

Levine Garcia







Newcomer Academy helps students balance the pressures of a new culture, language, and lifestyle.

words by ALAURYN MOORE & YAARA ALEISSA • design by GEFEN YUSSMAN



our first-year students walked through the hallway side by side, nudging each other as they

laughed at their own jokes. One spoke in an Arabic accent to another student who replied in a thick French accent. The other two boys communicated with Wolof and Vietnamese accents — all of them speaking the same language but putting their own twist on it. Their varying backgrounds didn't create a barrier. Rather, this journey was something that they shared.

"I am the king!" 18-year-old Gisubizo Ndayishimiye yelled with a grin. His friends turned their heads and laughed as he puffed his chest out.

Amused, 17-year-old Boubacar Dieng replied, "You are no king; I'm the king!"

Tesfalem Haile, 20, joined in on the banter as he spoke over them, "I am the oldest, I should be king!"

Hoang Nguyen, who was 15 and a bit more reserved, watched them from the side as a light chuckle escaped him.

These students come from different places around the world: Ndayishimiye from Burundi, Dieng from Ethiopia, Haile from Eritrea, and Nguyen from Vietnam. They immigrated to the United States last May, and continue to adapt to their new life and a new language. But in that hallway moment, all the barriers broke down.

The sound of their voices echoed through the hallway as they conversed carelessly in this new language. Ndayishimiye, Dieng, Haile, and Nguyen all continuously apologized throughout the interview for their mispronunciations, but when they were together, they laughed off the imperfections. To them, that was okay — being able to learn this new language together was enough.

As the bell rang, students of Newcomer Academy flooded the hallways and greeted each other. Haile's friends approached him with beaming faces and outstretched hands. They entered the classroom, divided themselves among their linguistic groups, and began conversations in different languages that united each of them.

Newcomer is a middlethrough-high school in eastern Louisville's Klondike neighborhood that is dedicated to helping newly-immigrated students become proficient in English as they adapt to their new environment. The school helps students up to age 21. Currently, the school enrolls 655 students who speak 22 different languages.

The school is also unique for giving English as a second language (ESL) learners the opportunity to be part of an accepting community which allows them to communicate in their language to their teachers while learning to speak English. The majority of the teachers at Newcomer either speak English as a second language or are fluent in multiple languages. This advantage helps break down the linguistic barrier between teachers and students.

That day in class, it was September - still early in the year. Scott Wade, a teacher at Newcomer, decided to arrange the students so that they were sitting next to someone who came to America by different means: some by boat, some by bus, and some by plane. In a Nigerian accent, a student shouted "mix and mingle" to her classmates as they got situated in their new seats. The students no longer had a sense of ease on their face as they looked at each other for what was to come next. However, it was only their third class of the day and there was no time to fret over old seats. They all had presentations to give, which included sharing their age, native country, languages they



UNITED • Some immigrants, like Boubacar Dieng, 17, come to the United States to help reunite their family. "I came here with my brother searching for some papers or documents for my mom to come here," he said.



OPPORTUNITIES • Hoang Nguyen, 15, is a student at Newcomer Academy who "came to America to learn English."



TRANQUILITY • For some Newcomer Academy students, this country has been an escape from their turbulent past. To the United States, he says "thank you for giving me peace," Gisubizo Ndayishimiye, 18, said.

PHOTOS BY FAITH LINDSEY



"Every day we have wars and every time people die."

- Tesfalem Haile, 20, speaking of his home country, Eritrea

spoke, and dreams for the future.

Haile became particularly jittery once his slide appeared on the board. He made his way slowly to the front of the room, looking straight ahead and avoiding the eyes of his classmates. At the age of 20, he was an older student in the class. However, his interactions sows that it didn't hinder his ability to form relationships with his classmates.

Haile is from a small East African country, Eritrea. He boarded a plane to Ethiopia with his stepsister to escape the wars that had torn his home country apart and immigrated to the United States after living in a refugee camp for five years.

"Every day we have wars and every time people die," Haile said.

The Eritrean-Ethiopian war was the final straw; Haile knew he had to leave. The war started in 1998 and ended in 2000, but the two countries didn't officially agree to peace until 2018. Just as his own country overcame its struggles, Haile was determined to be triumphant in his own battle.

"You have to learn because you have to change your life, no one can help you," Haile said. "If I have to change my life, I have to learn."

Newcomer offers classes that help Haile and other students learn the complexities of the English language and culture. Classes like Wade's Explorers Program take place every Monday. Students learn about current global events, even activism like that of Greta Thunberg and Malala Yousafzai, both prominent youth activists. During one class, the students watched a video about Thunberg and Yousafzai, but slowed it down so that they could comprehend each word of the video. They watched attentively, their eyes widened as they learned about the different ways these young women have made a place for their voice in the world.

Every student has their struggles, each one of them learning at a different speed. Still, they were all newcomers, all of them tackling this new language together. The Explorers Program offers a place where students can focus on the direction they are headed during their next two years at Newcomer, while still appreciating the countries they originate from. During those two years, the students will gain many new life experiences and opportunities.

After school programs organized through the YMCA aim to create a welcoming and educational environment for Newcomer students. Volunteers and the YMCA staff organize soccer, basketball, and tutoring services for students. In addition, teachers like Wade and the current principal, Gwen Snow, play a part in the success of their students. In the past, Snow had been an art teacher at Newcomer and connected with her students through interactive activities, rather than traditional language conventions. One strategy Snow used to connect with and understand her students was a storyboard.

The activity involves "asking them to draw a storyboard of the events that happened, and have some different images that go with it. Under the images, they can start to generate words underneath," Snow said.

Being able to form these narratives helps bridge the gap between students' native languages and the English they're learning. Many students who attend Newcomer come from Guatemala, Honduras, Cuba, Tanzania, and Rwanda, but no matter where they are from, they all have a story to tell.

That's no less true for Abdurazak Ahmed, a Newcomer student from Kenya. Before coming to Newcomer, Abdurazak was nervous about handling the pressure of learning a new language and being singled out for not knowing English. But at Newcomer, Ahmed had teachers who helped him learn English and further develop his speaking

"Newcomer is the place where I found myself and I feel comfortable."

- Abdurazak Ahmed

abilities. He recalled the different methods teachers used in his native country versus here, in America. In Kenya, he explained. School was not prioritized, classes were small, and students had to pay for their education. Students waited for their teacher to enter the classroom as opposed to teachers waiting on the students. However, at Newcomer, Ahmed said has grown close to his fellow classmates and teachers.

"One thing we all have in common is that we are like brothers and sisters here, and even the teachers are like our parents. Newcomer is the place where I found myself and I feel comfortable," Ahmed said.

Newcomer has helped provide opportunities for students since its start in 2008. Former Newcomer student. Nini Mohamed, also from Kenya, described his own experiences as a student there that first year. At the time, the school was still operating out of Shawnee High School. Mohamed was only at Newcomer for six months because of his rapid improvement, quickly transferring to Waggener High School. Even before starting at Newcomer, he remembers the feeling of getting his first backpack, something many kids have long forgotten.

"I used to go over to the Kentucky Refugee Ministry building, and what they do is they prepare you and make sure you have a backpack," Mohamed said. "They make sure you have books, pencils, and as new as I was, it's exciting to get a backpack of your own. I was like, 'Oh my gosh, I finally have a backpack!' (See "Kickin' It in Kentucky" on page 60 for more about Kentucky Refugee Ministries.)

Mohamed recently selfpublished a book called "The African in America" and is working toward his second book. He said that his first book's purpose was to bring people together — specifically the African community.

"Since I published my book, I have helped four people write their own books, and that makes me feel good. It's like you're writing your own story but helping other people write their stories as well," Mohamed said.

Mohamed believes Newcomer was an integral part of his own story. What he learned there helped launch his work as an author and motivational speaker. His achievements represent a fulfilled promise for the school, to connect students, bring them together, and lead them to bigger places. Though Mohamed, Ahmed, and Haile's origins spread far and wide from different East African countries, the school has given them the tools to succeed in America, and has been vital in defining who they are growing to be; Mohamed an author, Ahmed a mechanical engineer, and Haile a doctor.

"In this book, I would like to share with you my life in between Africa and America," Mohamed wrote in the second edition of his book. He goes on to say how "it is amazing how they love this country enough to do whatever it takes to get here" — illuminating the strenuous journey of making a once foreign environment a place they can call home, a place they can come as they are.

Where do Newcomer Academy students originate?



largest person = 184 students smallest person = 1 student

JUST FOR FUN.

S MILLING

Saleh Ekuchi, 16, teases a friend by trying to kick the ball out of reach on Oct. 19. "When I just got here I started making friends from soccer and school," Ekuchi said.



Leaving home was not his choice, but he found a new community with the help of a Louisville soccer program.

words by JACOB HAMM & LAINEY HOLLAND • design by PATRICK HARPER

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ain pounded on the roof of a brick house. Outside, the air was chilly, but inside, it was warm, cozy, and dry while everyone scrambled around the kitchen to prepare meals for the family's celebration.

Almost everyone. Barely visible through the pouring rain was 14-year-old Saleh Ekuchi with his big brother and a few friends, running and playing with a makeshift soccer ball. With each step, their shoes sunk into the mushy ground.

Their mom called for them to come inside, but the boys continued laughing and treading through the oozing mud.

It was New Year's Eve in Tanzania, and the boys did not want to miss out on the chance to celebrate with a game of soccer – even in the pouring rain. "I can never forget that; it was so fun," Saleh, now 17, reflected as we sat next to him on a bench outside of Iroquois High School.

We chatted with him about some of his favorite memories from home. Just as it was raining in Tanzania that New Year's Eve, there was a light drizzle. It was enough to be noticeable, but not enough for an umbrella or a raincoat. On the field in front of us, a few members of his soccer team scrimmaged with a pair of portable goals; a little bit of rain wasn't going to keep them from practicing.

Saleh's parents are from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. His parents were no longer safe in the Congo, so in 1996 they moved to Tanzania, where Saleh and all of his siblings were eventually born. His family first lived in a refugee camp – Tanzania was never meant to be a permanent home for them. In 2017, Saleh was 14 years old when he, his five sisters, four brothers, and parents left Tanzania as refugees.

"When I left my country I was crying," Saleh said. "I was happy and at the same time I was sad because I left my friends and my family."

The Ekuchis made multiple stops before settling in Louisville, stopping in Kenya, Dubai, and Washington D.C., bringing only their clothes and a few sentimental items they could not leave behind.

"I had this chain right here for my religion, so I had to bring it," Saleh said as he pointed to his red and white beaded necklace. "I brought my Bible with me and a book with my family pictures in it."

When Saleh and his family got here, they found comfort in the services provided by Kentucky Refugee Ministries (KRM).

"They showed us how to get a Social Security card and how to get an ID. To go to the store, they give us food stamps and showed us how to use it. Sometimes they gave us clothes and shoes," Saleh said. "Anything like what school you're gonna go to, what bus you're gonna take. We didn't know anything when we just got here."

KRM is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing resettlement services to refugees, assisting them with their integration into our community. KRM provides families like the Ekuchis, access to resources and opportunities so their clients are no longer seen as outsiders, but an integral and unique part of our country and community.

"They love everybody – they don't care if you are from here or there. They don't care about skin color or anything," Saleh said. "They don't care if you are old or small, they are going to help you in any way."

Many organizations similar to KRM believe refugees can benefit the community by becoming contributing members of society through employment and selfsufficiency. A study from the Fiscal Policy Institute found that "19 of the 26 employers surveyed

- 73% - reported a higher retention rate for refugees than for other employees," meaning refugees tend to stay with an employer longer than other hires. However, not all Americans feel that this validates their adoption into our communities. The Trump administration plans to place an 18,000 person cap on the number of refugees allowed into the country in 2020, the lowest since 1980 when Congress first created The Federal Refugee Resettlement Program. 2018 was the first year since the establishment of this program that the U.S. did not lead the world in refugee arrivals.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo delivered a press statement in which he supported Trump's signing of the Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2020. According to him, the U.S. should prioritize the people already in the country who need assistance.

"Indeed, the security and humanitarian crisis along our southern border has contributed to a burden on our immigration system that must be alleviated before we can again resettle large numbers of refugees," Pompeo said.

The seemingly never-ending national debate revolving around refugee and immigration policy is enough to make anyone feel overwhelmed. Here's the good news: KRM is just one of the many nonprofit organizations committed to helping refugees build a better and safer life wherever they are resettled by catering to their basic needs to promote self-sufficiency and integration. Saleh has been in Louisville for two years now, and he says his family still receives help from KRM when they need it.

When Saleh met Mary Daly, his caseworker from KRM, she asked his name, where he was from, and the languages he spoke – but he had something more important on his mind.

"I asked how I can join a soccer team. They have a partnership with HYR and you can join a team. And two months later we joined the team at HYR," Saleh said.

HYR stands for Highland Youth Recreation, the soccer league that Saleh and his brother joined. For Saleh, being part of a soccer team was key in finding a sense of community in Louisville – and a cure for his cabin fever.

"I didn't have anything to do at home and it was summer. We didn't have a car and we didn't have anywhere to go. We were just sitting in the house and watching TV all the time," Saleh said. "So as soon as we started playing soccer, I was very happy."

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Saleh is one of many refugees who calls Kentucky home. Our state is a hotspot for incoming refugees from all over the world. In the 2019 fiscal year, 1,323 refugees arrived in Kentucky, making it number five in the nation for total refugee arrivals. For Louisiana, a state with almost ⁶⁶ There's a difference between immigrants and refugees. We came as refugees. We didn't have any choice. We didn't make any choice.²⁹

-SALEH EKUCHI, 17

200,000 more people than Kentucky, that number was 21. Louisville is an epicenter for a lot of these refugees, welcoming nearly half of those that have come to Kentucky since 2002. Since he lives in a state and city with so many other people from similar backgrounds, Saleh believes it is important to clarify for native Kentuckians and Louisvillians what being a refugee means to him.

"There's a difference between immigrants and refugees. We came as refugees. We didn't have any choice. We didn't make any choice," Saleh said.

When Saleh and his family made it to Louisville, they didn't know anyone. After just one week, different families were coming to meet his family. Coincidentally, one of them used to be their neighbors in Tanzania; the Ekuchis began to find a sense of community in a new country, away from home. However, it took Saleh a while to get used to how people act differently here than in Tanzania.

"You know in my country, you gotta talk to your neighbor. You got to say, 'Hi, how are you? How did you wake up?' But here it was a little bit different," Saleh said. "When you wake up you don't





even talk to each other. You just look at your neighbor; you don't even say 'hi' to them."

According to Saleh, sports are also a lot different in Tanzania. Americans often grow up playing many different sports, but in Tanzania, soccer is the thread that binds people together.

"It doesn't matter if you're a girl or boy, we just play all of us together. You just make something up and start playing – you don't worry," Saleh said. "It doesn't matter if it's night or day, you can play soccer anywhere. So soccer is the best part of my country."

NEW HOME, NEW TEAM

HYR is a program where kids and teens ages four through 16 can play in divisions based on age. Patrick Fitzgerald, who grew up playing in the league, is the current director.

"I played in HYR in 1976, the very first season they had soccer and I'd never even kicked a soccer ball before. So that's how I learned about soccer was playing with HYR. I played it for five years as a kid then I coached it for 15 years as an adult," Fitzgerald said.

When Fitzgerald took over as director in 2017, one of his priorities was to diversify the league. He started by reaching out to KRM and, in January of 2017, HYR worked with KRM to get 20 international players involved in the program.

Fitzgerald explained to us why HYR is intentional in calling the KRM clients "international players" instead of "refugees." Referring to them as refugees reinforces the stigma that they are outsiders, rather than vibrant additions to our community.

"There comes a point where you are a refugee and you are resettled, but then you are just a person who lives here. You may or may not still get some kind of services, but you're not a refugee anymore," Fitzgerald clarified.

There were still logistics in the program that needed to be smoothed out in order to assist the players and the needs of their family, such as transportation.

Since HYR is part of Highlands Community Ministries, they were able to use a church van to pick up kids whose families were KRM clients for practices and games.

"It's not just that they can play in the league for free. We help them get some cleats, socks, and shin guards and get them transportation to practices and games," Fitzgerald said.

Saleh was one of the players who received this assistance; he was overjoyed to be able to play on a soccer team because his family could not afford the high expenses of club soccer in the U.S. He rode in the van to games, learning more about American cultural norms and how to better communicate with his new teammates.

When Saleh joined the soccer program, he already knew French, Swahili, and Kibembe (a language of the Democratic Republic of the Congo), but his English was limited to his name and age. On the way to practice in the church van, his teammates would force him to speak English, using it as an opportunity to get him comfortable with the language, even if he made mistakes.

"Just talk. Nobody cares," Saleh shrugged. "If you don't



NATURE. Ekuchi shows off his juggling skills, kicking the ball up into the air with alternating feet

IT'S SECOND

on Jan. 19. "If I didn't play soccer I'd like I'd be so lonely...staying at home all the time. As soon as I started, I met a lot of friends," Saleh said.

practice, you'll never know how to speak English. So I just started talking to them."

When he started playing soccer for HYR, Saleh met a lot of friends, some of whom helped get him into a soccer club. Currently, Saleh plays for Iroquois High School, Falls City, and a team called Wakanda FC, where he plays outdoor soccer and futsal – a type of soccer played on a hard court with a smaller, weighted ball. Last summer, his Wakanda FC team travelled across the region, winning tournaments in Indiana, Tennessee, and Missouri.

"If I didn't play soccer, I'd be so lonely staying at home all the time. I don't like to watch TV, so I'd probably be sleeping all the time or using my phone. And I don't think I would have any fun if I didn't play soccer," Saleh said.

Currently, Saleh is a referee for the younger leagues of HYR. Working with these young kids, he and the other referees spend almost as much time being a teacher as a ref.

"When they don't know how to throw the ball, we gotta show them. We gotta teach them the rules. You cannot touch the ball with your hands!" Saleh laughed. "Sometimes when they play, they just take the ball and throw it! You gotta say, 'You gotta use your feet!"

A GOAL IN MIND

Too often, people with differing opinions about immigration toss around the word "refugee" as a buzzword without thinking about what it means, or the people behind it who have faces to become familiar with, names to learn, and stories to tell.

Saleh's story is to keep his focus on playing soccer, reffing for HYR, and adjusting to life in his new community.

"I just try to fit in with America. I just want to be like normal people," Saleh said. "It doesn't matter if I'm a refugee. I just gotta feel comfortable and try to fit in with other people."

Luckily, the soccer pitch is a place where Saleh doesn't have to try as hard to fit in.

Half-time for the HYR soccer game had ended, and Saleh headed out onto the field behind Atherton High School. We watched as a swarm of children surrounded him, reaching for the soccer ball at his feet. He pulled the ball back and kicked it up and over the head of one of the kids, who watched in amazement, as Saleh brought it back down behind him. The sound of laughter from Saleh and the children echoed through the air. People across the field watched Saleh as he showed off his impressive soccer tricks.

The sun was at its peak in the sky, shining on Saleh as he blew his whistle to resume the game. He was right where he wanted to be: teaching a new generation of kids to love soccer the way he does.

Becoming a referee for HYR has given Saleh the opportunity to earn a little money while giving back to the organization that helped him grow his passion in a new city. But it isn't about the money.

"Even if it was for volunteering, I would do it 'cause they helped me a lot," Saleh said. "I would do anything for them." •

















Burger Boy is the perfect classic diner to grab a bite at any time of the day.

words & design by MARJORIE MAYS • photos by JOHN WOODHOUSE

n a rainy Friday at 3 o'clock, I sat down at a four-person table at Burger Boy Diner with Ella (my sister), Jess (my brother and OTR staff member), and John (another OTR staff member). Menus, condiments, and other necessities for enjoying a burger sat in the middle of each table. There were a few other customers when we first sat down. Bumper stickers covered the wall above the grill, which was visible behind the counter, seeming to showcase the restaurant's political values. Stickers like "Yarmuth for Congress" and Carmichael's Bookstore highlighted clear support for the Democratic party and local businesses. Oldfashioned diner signs covered one wall and University of Louisville flags and posters framed the windows. There's no sign outside that would let you know you're looking at Burger Boy, which almost makes it feel like a hidden hole in the wall you have to know about to find.

Daniel Borsch has owned Burger Boy since 2008, along with other local restaurants including Toonerville Deli, Burger Girl Diner (Burger Boy's twin sister), and Old Louisville Tavern.

Right when we sat down, the server took our drink orders (just water for all of us). They were very casual with us since they were also young adults. It took us a while to decide what we wanted to eat because of all of the options on the menu. There was an all-day breakfast, classic burgers, sandwiches, "munchies" (sharable items), milkshakes, and more. After a little consideration, we were ready to order.

Jess ordered the server's recommendation of the Kickin' Chicken Sandwich with onion rings (\$6.99, \$3.49). The sandwich consists of seasoned and breaded chicken filet, fried with pepper jack cheese, special sauce, and bacon on texas toast. My sister and I both ordered a breakfast meal (yes, at 3 p.m.); mine being two eggs, home fries, bacon, and toast (\$6.49); and hers was two buttermilk pancakes, two eggs, and bacon (\$7.49). John got the popular Bison Burger Combo (\$13.99), which came with fries and a drink.

In the time waiting for our food, only a few other people came in and out — it was even just us at one point. This made the service quick; it only took about 15 minutes to get our food. The whole time we could see it being made behind the counter and hear the sizzles of the grill.

Our server walked out from behind the counter with arms full of plates, the smell of bacon and juicy burgers wafting in with him. Because it was right after school, everyone was starving, so we were ready to dive in. I started with the bacon – it was the perfect balance of crispy and juicy. The home fries (breakfast potatoes) were coated in the same spice mixture as the french fries, which was John's favorite part of the meal. Although the Kickin' Chicken Sandwich's bun appeared burnt, it was satisfying and filling, with the "special sauce" being the highlight. It was stacked so high that Jess could barely fit his mouth around it. The onion rings were crisped to perfection, the pancakes were light and fluffy, and my sister and I both cleared the scrambled eggs from our plates.

We were very satisfied with our experience overall. However, we did notice that when we sat down to when we finished eating, there was never a water refill or the typical check-in from servers that you usually get.

Once we finished our meals, John decided he wanted dessert, so he ordered a cinnamon roll, which wasn't in stock. Then he tried for a brownie, but got the same response. He saw the carrot cake on the counter and ordered a slice of that since he knew it was in stock (\$3.99). He enjoyed it, but he said it wasn't quite sweet enough for him. We all finished up the last bits of our meals, paid at the counter, and went on our way.

Burger Boy has the classic diner ambiance and is the perfect place to grab some local food after school or work (or really any hour since it's open 24/7). It's easily accessible from downtown and several school campuses, and there's a TARC stop at the same intersection if you don't want to deal with the street parking. The prices are reasonable and the casual vibes are perfect for going with friends. •

\$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ 2-\$5 \$6-\$15 hours: open 24/7 (502)635-7410 TARC: E Burnett @ S Brook





In times of political division, unity is more important than ever.

words by LILY WOBBE • design by MARJORIE MAYS

'm from Louisville. No, not Kentucky. *Louisville*." Hearing this all-toofamiliar conversation, especially among my peers, breaks my heart. Maybe it's because they grew up in the city, feel more connected to Kentucky's northern counterparts, or haven't grown to appreciate the rest of the commonwealth; regardless, the divide between city and state runs much deeper than the rolling bluegrass hills.

I must admit, I was one of those people, and not too long ago. Just like so many other young people, I grew up in Louisville with an overwhelmingly urban mindset. I got used to having a city in my backyard and I took the opportunities it gave me for granted. Louisville seemed to turn a cold shoulder to the rest of the state, which to me, made it feel distant and disconnected. But more importantly, I saw Kentucky as a place that held me back rather than one I could grow in and truly call home.

Then, this summer, I was given the chance to travel the state on a week-long service trip. At first, the idea sounded crazy — I'd lived my whole life in Louisville. Why would I want to spend my summer driving through the cornfields of rural Kentucky?

My preconceived notions of our state, outside of my hometown, got me thinking. Why does Louisville, the most prominent and influential city in Kentucky, seem so separate from it?

Politics.

It's a complex and intertwined issue, but politics is one of the biggest causes. Look at any map of Kentucky's political parties and you'll see a wave of red counties dotted by the occasional blue, Louisville being the largest. In a country divided along partisan lines, it's no surprise that they seem to divide Kentucky's people as well.

Louisville native John McCarthy is the founder of McCarthy Strategic Solutions and is one of Kentucky's toppaid lobbyists. According to him, the disconnect all comes down to legislation.

"The divide usually comes in decision-making in the legislative process about where you spread resources," McCarthy said.

This makes sense when you consider Kentucky's political makeup. Naturally, Louisville's state legislators advocate for more Democratic policies since Louisville is more Democratic, and vice versa. Because of these political divisions, it becomes increasingly difficult for Louisville's policymakers to cooperate with each other, furthering the political divide.

For example, gun control is a heavily politicized issue, with Democrats usually voting in favor of tighter restrictions and Republicans usually voting against. Kentucky is no exception.

"Gun violence is a topic that's very important to the Jefferson County delegation, where the rest of the state doesn't view guns as the issue. They view the people that are using the guns as the issue. And that's just a difference on one policy," McCarthy said.

Money also plays a huge role in the divide.

"Everyone wants money spent in their area, so the difference comes in what sort of things you want it spent on," he said. "Out in I saw Kentucky as a place that held me back rather than a place where I could grow and truly call home. -Lily Wobbe

the rest of state, they're used to doing more with less."

Similarly, people from Louisville are more likely to advocate for government spending on infrastructure and urban development. In Kentucky's more rural areas, however, people tend to need agricultural subsidies. This only increases the divide since it requires lawmakers to heavily advocate for their own counties rather than consider the collective good of the state. While disagreement on finance is normal and occurs all the way up to the federal government, it can be especially isolating on the state level because it's a much smaller governing body.

While the rest of the state's financial income is important, it's important to mention that Louisville's massive contribution in the form of tax revenue is also vital to the success of the entire state. Jefferson County, which includes Louisville, generates millions of dollars in income tax that is distributed throughout the other counties. Without that funding, the rest of the state would struggle to raise funds for education, healthcare, and other important services.

"The rest of the state knows the economic benefit we have with a strong Louisville. It helps everybody," McCarthy said. In the most recent election, a slim, yet powerful, majority of the state voted for Andy Beshear in the gubernatorial race, replacing incumbent Matt Bevin. Although Kentucky has historically had many more Democratic governors – a five to one ratio since 1931 – many young people only remember a Republican Kentucky and saw Beshear's win as a shock.

From a national standpoint, Kentucky's switch to a voters have the power to create change in the commonwealth if they don't like what its leaders do.

On both the state and national level, it is imperative to look at the candidates closely and make decisions based on their integrity and disposition instead of just their party. Seeing Kentuckians vote for Beshear gives me hope for the state. It isn't based off of his policies or political affiliation, themselves to have an accent at all. The same is true the other way around. It's a different type of divide, but it only contributes to the feeling of separation in the state.

Communication and cooperation are critical now more than ever. In a nation as polarized as ours, it's more and more important to bridge the divide and work for the common good for the common*wealth*.

A short drive down Bardstown Road or a walk through one of Kentucky's forty-six state parks should be enough to remind any Kentuckian that our state is vibrant and beautiful.

Democratic governor in this recent election is also surprising since the state has the reputation of being deep red. Electing Beshear goes against the Republican stereotype that people assign the state. Despite Kentucky's Democratic past, however, those on the national level might wonder why a bunch of gunslinging, bourbondrinking, horse racers elected a Democratic governor.

So Democratic governors in Kentucky are anything but new. This year, however, Andy Beshear was the only Democrat elected to a top state office — a stark difference from the other five Republican winning candidates sharing his ballot. The election makes it clear that Kentuckians aren't voting straight-ticket.

Some voters, however, only voted for Beshear out of rejection for Bevin. To many, Beshear was just the lesser of two evils. Even still, his win shows that Kentucky but because our state's voters are taking initiative and researching candidates before they cast their votes. This is essential to a healthy democracy and Kentucky is showing incredible amounts of promise.

Another rift exists because of our state's geography. To southern states, Kentucky seems more northern, whereas to the north, we embody the south. Within the state, this separation is visible, too. Urban regions of Kentucky, like Louisville, connect more with the industrial north, whereas more rural parts identify more closely with the agricultural south.

This is more of a cultural difference, and it's noticeable in things as simple as the perception of accents across the state. Kentuckians from Louisville and other urban areas perceive rural Kentuckians to have southern accents, while those people might not consider Aside from politics, Kentucky is often overlooked by larger, more popular states. Some people summarize Kentucky as horses, bourbon, and basketball, but there's so much more to be proud of.

"A lot of people try to discount Kentucky based off of stereotypes, but Kentucky is actually a pretty cool place to live," said Abbie Turner, a high school senior from Georgetown.

Although she lives close to Lexington, one of Kentucky's biggest cities, Turner wishes the state was more cohesive as a whole. If Kentuckians were more cooperative both socially and politically, perhaps our reputation would be closer to improving.

Some people from outside of Kentucky can't look past its negative stereotypes, but proud Kentuckians are able to see its true beauty in their everyday lives. A short drive down Bardstown Road or a walk through one of Kentucky's 46 state parks should be enough to remind any Kentuckian that our state is vibrant and beautiful.

Turner has a lot of pride in her state, but also in her city. Sometimes, she feels like Louisville is given a lot of credit when Kentucky's smaller cities work just as hard. Louisvillians shouldn't be the only ones allowed to be proud of their city.

Haley Comstock, a high school junior from Owensboro, also stressed the importance of representing Kentucky positively as much as possible. With stereotypes more prevalent than ever, Kentucky residents represent the state even when they're away from it.

Since Kentucky isn't a center for international business to the extent of New York or California and doesn't have a massive tourism industry like Florida or Texas, it can be easily dismissed. In order to fight those misconceptions and give Kentucky the positive reputation it deserves, we should think carefully about how we represent our state at all times.

"You have to take into consideration that it's your own state, and that's what you represent," Comstock said.

Additionally, we have to stop taking things for granted. Louisvillians take ease of access to the city for granted since we live fairly close to almost everything we need. It's easy to forget that the majority of the state doesn't live a mere 10 minutes from a wide variety of businesses, restaurants, and places of recreation. This doesn't just apply to Louisvillians, though. From the mountains in the east to the rolling fields of the west, we all have the tendency to forget how unique our own regions are. For Riley Gillam, an eleventh grader from Pikeville, seeing mountains on a daily basis is custom.

"This is what our backyards look like. I didn't realize how gorgeous and how great it was, because I've grown up around it and it's all I've ever known." she said.

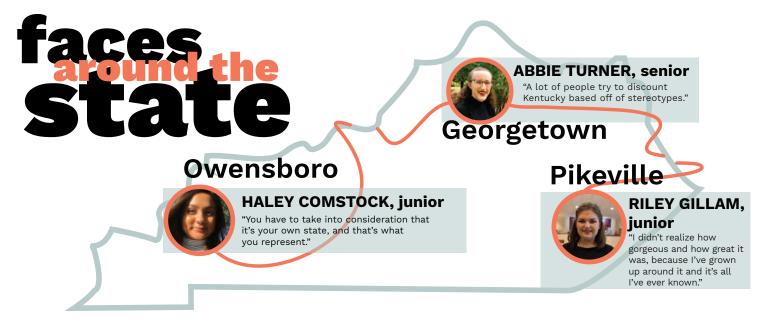
So, this summer, I decided to go on the trip that I'd been uncertain about for so long, and I'm so glad I did.

On my trip, I got to meet people from all around the state, including the three quoted in this story, all while getting to explore their hometowns and learn about their unique cultures. In Murray, I met college students at Murray

Instead of letting those differences divide us, we should celebrate them. -Lily Wobbe

State University and learned about their student journalism organizations. In Owensboro, I volunteered with Habitat for Humanity and met families in need who had been given shelter by the organization. At the Cumberland Gap, I hiked in one of Kentucky's stunning state parks and got to appreciate our state's natural beauty.

More than anything, I learned just how diverse Kentucky's culture is. Not only is Louisville unique, but *every* place in our state is. Instead of letting those differences divide us, we should celebrate them. In the end, our differences shouldn't make Kentucky divided. They should make us united. •



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PERSPECTIVE

SENSITIVE CONTENT WARNING: This piece contains content that some may find disturbing.

STRENGTH IN HARDSHIP Whitney Nguyen, 16, on Oct. 22. Whitney was raised solely by her mother.

PHOTO BY JAMES JEAN-MARIE

Whitney was raised by one parent alone. Here, she redefines the word "family."

words by WHITNEY NGUYEN • design by SARAH WOODSON • photography by JAMES JEAN-MARIE

...it was just my mother and I holding hands, one of my hands left hanging by itself.

WHITNEY NYUGEN, 16

o you ever want to meet your father?"

The spoon nestled within the palm of my hand halted inches before my mouth, the soup wobbling before spilling over the edge onto the table. I stared blankly at the mess before my brain processed the question.

"What?" I asked, still gazing at the puddle of soup.

"Do you ever want to meet your father?" my grandmother repeated.

I lifted my eyes to see her already eyeballing me, studying every muscle, like she could pry the answer from my face before getting my words.

"No," I said.

"Why not? Don't you want to meet him? Every child wants to see their father," she persisted.

"Well, I don't," I said, my jaw feeling tight.

"Every child should have a father in their life. A father should be there for his daughter," she said.

My grip tightened on the spoon, suffocating it before releasing and dropping it back into the bowl. The outline of the spoon had been ingrained into my palm.

"Not every child should! Especially when that father was never meant to be a father to begin with! Why don't you ask him why he's not there for me? Why are you asking me?" I shouted.

Her eyes were wide open now, finally taking everything in. She opened and closed her mouth, unsure of how to respond.

Good.

In that moment, she wasn't my grandmother, wasn't my mom's mother, wasn't part of this family. She was an outsider.

I stood up, the chair screeching a couple steps back. I slammed the bowl into the sink, causing it to clatter against the other dishes, before storming away to my room. My vision blurred, but I squeezed my eyelids shut, hoping to block the stream of tears threatening to flow down my cheeks, and with it, the emotional damage I endured every time the topic came up.

Mylinh's struggle

Ever since I was old enough to clearly grasp my surroundings, I knew I had lacked something that was often considered fundamental in a child's life: a father.

Insignificant things like watching fathers carry their kids on their shoulders had a significant impact on me. It felt like they were high in the sky, while I was low on the ground the weight of what wasn't there pulling me down. I remember hating to draw as a kid because every time we had to draw in kindergarten, everyone would draw pictures of their families. They were more like stick figures rather than actual portraits, but usually there were at least three figures in the family.

I would often peer over at my classmate's artwork and see the stick figures, the hands of two parents accompanying each hand of my classmate's. I'd compare it to my own drawing, where it was just my mother and me holding hands, one of my hands left hanging by itself.

I felt a sense of incompleteness when looking at my stranded hand.

What was I reaching out for? I could never communicate these feelings to my mother either, even though her father never held her hand or guided her through her childhood either.

As the oldest child of a family of six at the time, my mom had to constantly shoulder the weight of all the responsibilities.

It was an endless cycle of caring for her siblings from when she got home from school to one or even two in the morning, then waking up to dress herself and her siblings before making them breakfast, and then heading back to school. Her parents also expected her to help with their jobs by either countung money or going to the market with them to sell pigs. Not only was she under constant pressure from her parents to take on all the chores — they also expected her to excel in school.

"How can one person be perfect at everything?" said Mylinh Nguyen, my mother. "As a child who was only eight years old, I should've been eating, playing, and sleeping."

But she didn't have time for any of that.

She was only 10 years old when she was forced to understand what needed to happen for her family to keep a roof over their heads.

On that day, her hands were shaking, sleep roused out of her system, and fear settled in the pit of her gut. Her chest felt heavy, and her eyes were already filling to the brim with tears. She heard the sound of her father grunting and a pig squeaking frantically. She didn't feel the cold, only the guilt wrapping around her. Her mother stood next to her, but offered no comfort.

"Hold the pig down!" her father ordered.

She and her mother scrambled to him with their hands out. She took the end of the pig and her mother held down the pig in the front, as her father prepared the butcher's knife. She wondered if she could let go right then — let the pig run free. The knife coming down on the pig finished the thought.

"Everyone has a good memory of their childhood, but mine was not what I thought anyone deserved," she said.

Her parents' cold shoulder to not only her, but to each other, sealed the deal for her. When her uncle offered to take her to America, she didn't hesitate.

"I dreamt that America was the best place to go, and that it would change my life. It did!" she said.



MOM + DAD

FOREVER FRAMED •

Beth keeps this photo of her with her late husband, James Theodore "Teddy" Weber, that was taken before Teddy was born.

PHOTO BY JAMES JEAN-MARIE

I thought he was a life raft, ready to save me."

66

MYLINH NYUGEN, Whitney's mother

I do think the way society is set up, it's set up with people thinking you have a mother and a father."

BETH SCHWEICHLER, mother of Teddy, 11

When she arrived in America, she immediately began working to get her license to become a manager at one of her uncle's nail salons. There, she met my father.

"I was young and I was very lonely," she explained. "I thought he was a life raft, ready to save me."

She ran away with him to Tennessee, and then Florida, and got pregnant with me. Before I was born, they moved in with his family back in Kentucky. She drifted along with him, clinging to him like he was her savior. Until he wasn't anymore.

She decided to run away when she realized he was no longer keeping her afloat. He was drowning the both of us. With a sandal clinging to her foot and a bag full of diapers strapped to her back, she carried us to safety. Even though safety meant uncertainty. A few days later, when she tried to take out money from their joint bank account, she found out he withdrew all the money and an extra 35 dollars, leaving her with nothing but a debt she couldn't pay.

"It hurt me. I would cry every night and for days," she said.

But now she needed to learn to be her own life raft. Her youth was a graveyard of memories that always haunted her, but now she needed to learn to live. My mother had survived a difficult childhood, and her adulthood only brought more challenges.

"It was hard. It was just you and me and it was really hard. Everyday I had to go to work, from 10 in the morning until eight at night. I picked you up from the babysitter's, and had to bathe you, feed you, and then cook for myself. It was a busy life," she said.

Her determination to provide a stable life for the both of us caused her to sink into this workaholic state. This would also be the anchor that kept our mother-daughter relationship from moving forward.

"You have your ego, and I have my ego. You have your pride, and I have my pride. Deep down in our hearts, we love and care for each other, but we can't communicate it to each other," she said.

The complications that are intertwined with leading a family independently, especially for a single mother, are profound. In fact, the U.S. Census Bureau categorizes single mothers as the second most common established household for children under 18, making up about 23%. The struggles do not go unnoticed by the children either — in some cases, they struggle as a result.

Beth and Teddy's story

It was that time of the year; the parent-daughter dance, or what most of the school referred to it as: "*father*-daughter" dance. Girls skipped into school, beaming with smiles, all buzzing about the dance, like bees congregating in a field of flowers.

Girls leaned their heads toward one another with their ears perked up, cramming in the one-foot space between the alleyways of each column of desks. They whispered details of their dresses with one another, how they've been practicing the steps with their fathers.

The chatter didn't stop at the playground either. Kids would ask each other if they were attending the father-daughter dance, leaving 11-year-old Teddy Weber deeply confused as to why it was suddenly being referred to as the "father-daughter" dance.

Father-daughter dances were originally a historic tradition to signify a final moment between the father and daughter before she began marital life with her husband. These dances are also prominent in quinceañeras, marking it as the first dance a daughter has with her father as a young woman. This tradition has been embedded into society for decades, making it a well-known and highly-anticipated moment that families prepare for with their daughters.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER • Whitney Nyugen, 16, and her mother, Mylinh, sit on

PHOTO BY JAMES JEAN-MARIE

But for Teddy, it's something she wishes she'd never have to hear about again — just like how I wish my grandmother didn't pressure me about my father.

According to the Country Health Rankings and Roadmaps, the percentage of children living with a single parent in Kentucky is 33%, whereas, the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics states the overall percentage of children living with a single parent in the United States is 27%.

"I do think that the way society is set up, it's set up with people thinking you have a mother and a father," said Beth Schweichler, Teddy's mother.

The "traditional" family unit consisting of a mother, father, and their children is defined as the "nuclear family." The U.S. Census Bureau states that 69% of the families living in the United States consist of two parents catering to their child or children. This is the family structure that America has been growing up with, but for Teddy, it's an unfamiliar one.

Unlike my father, Teddy's father never got the chance to get to know her.

Beth recalls her last moments with her husband. His eyes sparkled as he spotted her, coming in from the garage and drawing closer with a skip in his step. He kissed her once, said "I love you" with a smile and went back out. He came back in, kissed her again, and said "I love you" with the same smile.

"Why are you so happy?" she asked, chuckling.



MYLINH + WHITNEY

"I just love you so much," he said.

She matched his smile with her own.

"We're gonna go riding, you wanna come with us?" he questioned, motioning to the motorcycle.

"No, you just go out with the boys," she reassured him.

He kissed her once more, before pulling away with an "I love you."

What she didn't know was that, it would be the last time she felt his kiss, saw his smile, and heard his "I love you."

"You're kind of in survival mode," she said, referring to how she copes. "I found out my husband died, and then I was pregnant, and I found out I was going to be a single parent." It hit her all at once. The loss was tremendous, but Beth looks for the positive.

"My job as a social worker, working with people with severe mental illness, helps me put it in perspective," she said. "Even with losing everything I had and being a single mom, you get to a point where you have to recognize, it could be worse."

When she found out she was pregnant, she was fortunate enough to be showered with kindness from the community, whether that was through money or tangible support.

"It was hard because I'm really independent, and it's really hard for me to take things," she said.

Nonetheless, she embraced her pregnancy and gave birth to Teddy on her birthday, what she refers to as her husband's "last gift" to her.



When she says, 'He lives in you,' I think she's also speaking to herself."

BETH SCHWEICHLER, speaking of her daughter, Teddy

"A lot of people weren't happy that I was naming her Teddy," Beth said. "It's because I'm a girl," Teddy said. "She's totally Teddy though," Beth said. "Her personality is a Teddy."

Despite the criticism, Beth was firm in her decision to name her daughter after her late husband.

"I want her to remember him... and whoever she ends up with, at least she finds someone with the qualities of her dad — a good person," Beth clarified.

There was a time when Teddy used to carry a picture of her father around with her, tucked away in the pocket of her pants. One of her teachers, who celebrated Day of the Dead, allowed her to pin his picture up on the wall in her classroom in honor of his memory. Others weren't as understanding. Teddy was often cautioned by her teachers not to talk about her father at school, so much to the point where she was used to people turning their ears from her.

Now, Teddy attends Bloom Elementary. She's free from the weight of father-daughter dances, but that doesn't mean her transition was smooth sailing.

One morning, Teddy woke up to her cousins snagging her Calico Critters figurines without her permission and making a mess of them. When she confronted them, she was met with, "You're spoiled because you don't have a dad."

Teddy receives an abundance of toys from her grandparents, which prompts her cousins to believe she's spoiled because of the absence of her father.

Beth says she also experiences comments like "Oh, I was divorced so I understand."

"That's not the same," Beth said. "She would come home and cry and say to me 'It's not fair that I don't have my dad... and at the base of her fear was that something was going to happen to me and then she wasn't gonna have either of us. So she didn't want to leave me and go to school in case something happened."

Beth made the decision to put Teddy into therapy at a young age to help her through her developmental process of coping.

Teddy's involved in a variety of recreational and after-school activities, among them theatre and dance. She even participated in the Louisville climate strike, and independently sold baked goods and lemonade for charity.

During Teddy's time at a Lousiville private school, the identity of which they prefer not to reveal in this story, she was bullied by a boy who was persistently pushing her around.

"I asked him if he wanted to go bowling!" Teddy exclaimed.

The bullying ceased after that invitation.

"She's amazing. I couldn't ask for a better daughter," Beth said.

Teddy currently acts at Walden Theatre where she's destined to play Rafiki in their production of The Lion King.Teddy has a line that Beth believes is significant.

"When she says 'He lives in you,' I think she's also speaking to herself," Beth said.

Defining family

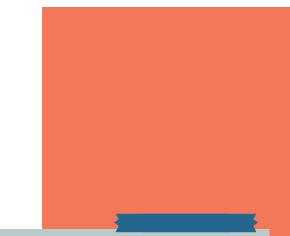
Family has always been a complicated subject. It's one word, but it holds many layers.

For both Teddy and me, the concept of "family" has always been complicated — our brains are hardwired to question whether our own families strayed from the meaning of the word.

They don't. Even if we both never had the choice to decide whether our fathers existed in our lives, our mothers are a constant reminder of what "family" means to us. The word may conjure the image of the traditional "nuclear family," but it's time to realize family isn't strictly defined that way. "Family" is a multitude of examples that stem from more than just what's seen physically, or what's plastered on television. If people were more open-minded towards the ever-growing concept of family, we could start to see a change in how we treat other people. We could start to see less of the judgement, less of the accusations, and less of the isolation that people face when they don't fit the mold.

This outlook on family could shift the perspective, so that my grandmother would understand that the lives my mother and I lead are complete without my father. It would teach the teachers at school to be more open-minded to Beth and Teddy's situation, one where they're physically missing a part of their family, but still have him tucked away in their hearts. It would lighten the burden that society has unknowningly shoved onto families that don't fit into the box.

Single parent homes may not be the typical household structure, but there are a lot of children living in these environments. Sometimes by choice, and sometimes not. It's important to normalize these homes because they represent "family" as well. Family isn't defined by the numbers or the structure, it's defined by the love. •





BETH + TEDDY

SWING HIGH • Beth Schweichler and Teddy Weber swing together on their front porch on Oct. 27.

PHOTO BY JAMES JEAN-MARIE

do you have an addiction?

Caffeine: The drug that every teenager has indulged in without thinking twice.

story & design by JESS MAYS

Caffeine:

a naturally occurring substance that is in plants such as coffee beans, tea leaves, and cacao. It is most commonly seen in drinks, but also in some foods we eat such as chocolate.

How Caffeine Impacts our Bodies

Caffeine messes with your body. It is a **stimulant** that affects the <u>central nervous</u> system, and it is very unique because unlike most drugs, caffeine is legal and unregulated.

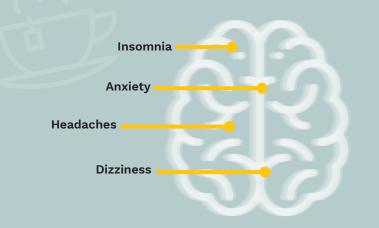
The Central Nervous System

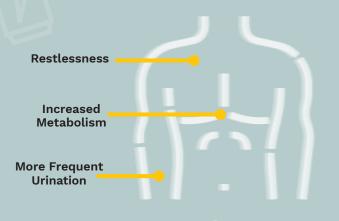


The center of our thoughts and controls body movement. Controls communication between the body and brain.

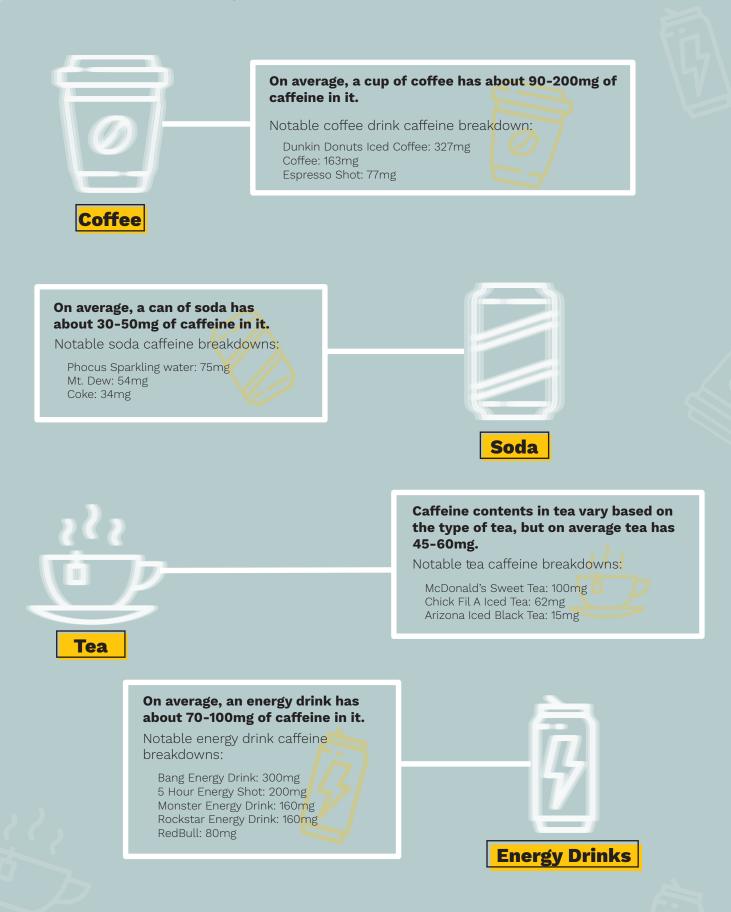
Brain

Spinal Cord





Teenage caffeine consumption should cap out around 100mg, but the drinks you drink every day may be much more loaded with caffeine than you think.



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