



MARIA GONZALEZ

Writer of the Year candidate - Wando High School Yearbook

Walking into Wando High School, I had no idea that writing for the yearbook would grant me with experiences and opportunities that I would remember for the rest of my life. This staff gave me my high school family who I will cherish outside the walls of this school; but it also gave me the power of my voice. It gave me the ability to talk and interact with a variety of individuals and tell their stories to our classmates. Little did our fellow students know that their classmate, Luan, had raised his brother on the streets of Brazil until they were able to come to the states. They were unaware of the horror and misery he had to face before he became who he is today. His story could have been ignored. However, his sacrifice was honored with the story I wrote about him in our yearbook. That's the thing, yearbooks are not only about pictures and signing notes as students head into the summer, it's about documenting history, our history.

Prior to my experience as a writer on my staff, the students I passed in the hall were just that, students. I never thought about where they came from or who they are in the outside world without the fear of judgment from their peers. As I began my journey as a writer, I started interviewing these people who I had seen but never talked to. I learned that this random freshman in my school named Erin wakes up every morning at 5 a.m. to exercise her passion as an ice skater in the profile I wrote about her. Before I picked up that computer to write questions for our interview, she was a girl with brown hair I had only caught glimpses of in the hallway. Now, I knew about what drove her motivation, what gave her happiness in her life. These moments are what make this hobby and passion like no other. They allow me to learn about not only myself, but others as well.

I have also had the opportunity to give my share and commitment into this staff as I fought my way through the hierarchy starting from newbie to future editor in chief. I've contributed my leadership skills as a section editor for the Student Life section where I helped train my newbies who would grow to become section editors themselves. Each story they wrote, I went through it with them. A few have been award winning, a few not. But those stories that may not be the best or most interesting are still doing their job, they are telling the story of the students. This is an idea I stressed to my newbies as we began our training. I take a lot of pride in the fact that my fellow co editors come to me for advice on a story they may be struggling with because that tells me they trust me to help them as best as I can. I knew walking into those doors freshman year, I would do everything in my power to become editor in chief my senior year, and here I am. I do everything I can to help this staff in any way possible. I have since my newbie year where after every story I turned in early, I would ask how I can help in any other area of the book. This book has meant so much to me in the past three years and continues to which is why I do and will continue to put everything I have in it.

Even though this was a high school yearbook, it means much more to me. It means having a place to see what I have to say, it means representing the voices of my peers, and it means being able to display my leadership skills.

THE WAY WE EXPRESS

Senior uses art to showcase creativity

Choices. The choice of color. The choice of the medium. The choice to represent themselves through the strokes of the brush is what allows art to surround them. **Rose Still**, 11, captures their expression through the craft of creation.

Still's artistic talent is represented in all aspects of their life. It's in the way they show their emotions in theater. It's in the way they hear the beat of the music in Color Guard. And it's in the way they develop their digital and physical art pieces. The desire to create has always existed in Still.

"I've just been drawing since I could literally hold a pencil. So, it's been a part of my life since I can remember," Still said.

Throughout their life, Still has never been a vocal communicator. While a majority of the world utilizes words and letters to express themselves, Still uses their own way. Their language of speaking has never been as powerful as their language of art.

"When I do my art, I want people to feel the same way that I am feeling when I'm making it," Still said. "Art is an expression. Art can be anything. It's less about the skill, it's more about what the piece is about."

A member of the artistic community, Ashley Wyrick, who is Still's AP art studio teacher has seen many students come into their classroom; each as unique as the last. Wyrick has come to recognize the vast world that is art and all the unlimited possibilities for each individual.

"For some it's a very spiritual kind of process in terms of expression. It's very subjective and each artist brings different things to the table," Wyrick said.

Still's passion for art has been recognized by many of those around them, like Wyrick when they're in the classroom working on each new piece. Wyrick has seen Still's dedication first hand, as Still's mind is always onto the next project that they will pour their heart and soul into.

"Rose came in and was already artistically talented and gifted, they had that natural ability," Wyrick said. "As of late, they've really added a lot of personal meaning to [their art] and in doing so I think their works are really starting to become powerful."

While Still's passion for art is an attribute that is rarely overlooked, they don't just apply this passion to art, they apply it to their life.

Ellie Scherer is a close friend of Still that has come to appreciate not only their artistic personality but also the personality that encapsulates who they are as a person.

"Rose is one of those people who has passion for everything they do, and you can just tell when you meet them how unique and bright of a person they are," Scherer said. "It's like they create art wherever they go and they apply it to everything they do."

Although those around Still may believe that their art is amazing each and every time their brush touches paper, Still's biggest obstacle is not the support, it's themselves. As an artist, they find themselves rarely satisfied with their pieces due to the immense pressure they put on themselves to be the best constantly.

"I would honestly say my biggest critic is myself ... sometimes like I'll look at other art and I'll be like oh I can do way better than that, and then I'll look at 'better art' and I'll be like oh I'm never gonna be that good," Still said.

However this obstacle that they are always surrounded by, Still said this will not hinder them from pursuing their passion. It only strives them to do better and look to the future where they will discover a world of opportunities. That being said, as an art major, the hunt for work can be very overwhelming. But Still has found a way to ensure their success.

"When we toured SCAD, they were talking about how when you leave the school, you'll always have somewhere to go. You won't just be thrust out into the world with a degree," Still said.

Stepping into the vast network of possibilities, Still is still fascinated by the idea of art and how it can affect not only their life, but the whole world around them. The time of finding themselves in art has passed, and the time to succeed in art is now.

"It's all art. It's just like expressions and humans have always expressed themselves in one way or another, art is just expression without keeping it mundane.

Story by Maria Gonzalez
Design by Elise Gierhart



"Art is an expression. Art can be anything. It's less about the skill, it's more about what the piece is about."

CONQUERING STRESS: Preparing for her future has been a big aspect of her senior year, but **Bella Donofrio**, 12, has not let the stress of the future hinder her happiness of senior year. "[When people put stress on you] it's definitely hard, but College Board helps a lot with planning," said Donofrio; photo by r.converse



DETERMINATION BRINGS SUCCESS

Rigorous college application process determines senior's future

Her whole future depends on every microscopic activity she has done throughout her four years of high school. Four years. That's all she gets to prove to a college that she is worth the education that they offer. Four years to lock in her success and the life she wants for herself. The four years of expectations set by society and herself, is all over as she submits her final college application.

Scarlett Lewis, 12, future has been determined.

Lewis has been surrounded her whole life by expectations of going to a great college and receiving an education that will set her up for a bright future. Little did freshman Lewis know how important the college application process would be.

"It's like a big puzzle that you have to put together, you have to focus on all the achievements you've done through high school," Lewis said. "So it paints you as the best person you can look like to these colleges."

However, with great expectations comes great sacrifice. Lewis has witnessed firsthand how the application not only takes over academically but it also can take over a student's life. Lewis has had to force herself to stay motivated and finish the application process even when temptations such as

friends and family made her want to go out, but she persevered.

"In the back of my mind, I remembered that this is my future. These four years are going to set me up for the rest of my life. And those sacrifices are kind of something that you have to make to get to where you want to be," Lewis said.

Unlike most students going through this stressful process, Lewis has not allowed the stress to affect who she is as a person. Her sister, **Iszi Sanchez**, had gone through the process and knows how it can affect an individual, for the worst.

"Students shouldn't allow stress, uncertainty, and doubt cloud the process. Instead, try to make it a journey of self discovery. By the end of it all, you will learn a lot about yourself," Iszi said.

Jessica Rodgers is a guidance counselor who has helped countless students with the heavy weight of submitting their future on an application. The standards society places on students has had tremendous effects on the students, and not always in a good way. Rodgers has had to bear witness at how pressure can ruin what is supposed to be exciting as students step into their future.

"Students feel pressure because they see their

peers applying for/getting into certain schools, thus they then feel the pressure to do the same," Rodgers said. "Students struggle with comparing themselves with their peers, and this can be a hindrance on their self-esteem."

Despite challenges, Lewis has not let the battles of stress overcome her eagerness for a bright future to diminish. She overcame the time of stressing about applications has come to an end and now Lewis's focus is on what's ahead, the uncertainty of the unknown.

"You can just think about your future. You don't have to think about the past and all that stuff anymore, just where you can go from here," Lewis said.

Story by Maria Gonzalez
Design by Ava Theriault

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TOO IMPORTANT TO BE FORGOTTEN

Members of the Gullah Geechee community hold dear the value of heritage

It's the history of her people. It's in everything she does: language, food, family. Yet the culture is slowly disappearing as the generations progress. The Gullah Geechee culture is being forgotten. The history of her people is being forgotten.

Kamaria Brown, 11, is the daughter of **Carolyn Brown** and a member of the Gullah Geechee culture that stemmed from their ancestors who had to fight for their freedom as slaves. Being raised in the culture, she has been able to experience its amazing language. The culture also provides for a family beyond blood.

"We are a very close community. Everybody around me in my neighborhood we all like to see as being related to each other, we're so close. We don't go out of space from family," Kamaria said.

However, Kamaria, as well as many in her generation, are not as involved as their ancestors had been in traditions like sweetgrass making.

"I would be halfway in [the culture] based on my speaking... I'm like in and out at the same time because I'm not so involved in the sweetgrass baskets but the music brings all of us together," Kamaria said.

This slow disappearance of involvement in the culture has been witnessed by those like **Corey Alston**, who have been involved since childhood. The Gullah Geechee culture is one of Alston's most sacred aspects of his life, and protecting that has

always been important to him.

"It's a strong pride, to be a member of the Gullah community; to know where our ancestors were brought from, to know what our ancestors were put through, to know how we preserve the heritage of what the ancestors kept alive," Alston said.

However the continuation of his heritage is being threatened as new norms of society have caused traditions to slowly vanish. The traditions like the neighborhood hog roast on Fridays are slowly becoming less frequent as the community is slowly losing its sense of tradition.

"It's definitely changed, and I would say for the worst. My predominantly cultured community has been re-gentrified tremendously. By gentrification, it weakens culture," Alston said, "There were so many different cultural activities that allowed the communities to stay tight, now it's all about privacy."

As a mother trying to raise her children in the community that had once raised her, Carolyn knows the importance of passing the knowledge to Kamaria and the next generation as a whole. This culture is the history of the African American people in the southern coastal communities and it's a history that must not be forgotten, it's a freedom that needs to be celebrated.

"Raising this generation is important to keep

this art going and growing but it's hard. This generation doesn't seem to see the value and importance of this art and it's dying," Carolyn said.

Times are changing. Technology is evolving. With these great discoveries come changes in cultures and Kamaria plans to involve this culture when she raises her kids, but she wants it to be their choice.

"I want them to know about the culture and be able to express themselves throughout the culture but not feel like they have to be so involved in order to be involved with their family," Kamaria said.

However as the generations progress, Alston is very passionate about keeping this culture remembered. The fights of history, the charms of music, and the talents of sweetgrass basket making must be remembered.

"This culture must be something that needs to be talked about, kept alive and preserved for generations to come... It was a community of coming together for everything," Alston said.

Story by Maria Gonzalez

Design by Ava Theriault

"It's a strong pride... to know where our ancestors were brought from, to know what our ancestors were put through."

THE IMPORTANCE OF MUSIC

Johnson emphasizes the importance of instruments in the Gullah culture



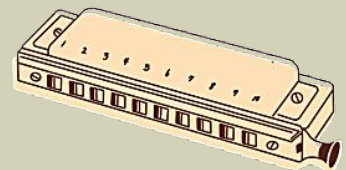
Victor Johnson, 11



BEAT OF THE DRUM: In Gullah culture, embracing one's spirit and liveliness is an important musical characteristic. "[The drums] are a percussion instrument that was mostly used when the slaves gathered together and would dance and have fun after the work day," Johnson said.



HARMONIES: The banjo traces back to times of slavery and connects the Gullah people to their history. "A banjo is essentially a small guitar. The slaves would all gather at 'clubhouses' to share their music and connect," Johnson said.



HARMONIES OF HOPE: During the time of slavery, music helped them keep their spirits up in times of hardship. "The harmonica is a free reed wind instrument. It symbolizes how they used music to communicate. It helped bring the slaves together," Johnson said.

EVERLASTING FRIENDSHIPS

Junior forms bond with fellow classmate after Special Olympics

Loren Whitehurst's, 11, presumptions were shattered about the same time his friend, Alex Smith, 12, tore through the finish line of her race in Wando's inaugural Special Olympics competition.

Whitehurst, a young man who admitted that he held assumptions about working with exceptional education students at first, said he quickly realized the line between him, Smith, and the other students wasn't as distinct as he originally thought.

"They're just like us, they are cool people," Whitehurst said, "I learned that you have to be patient, and get to know them."

As soon as Smith had won the race, Whitehurst immediately ran up to her and gave her a big high five while Smith danced to victory. He had such a sense of pride as he saw her win the race due to their connection that had developed since they met.

"My favorite part was watching her win her race, she was happy and I was happy for her" Whitehurst said, "I look at her like a little sister... she's just someone that I can be happy around and just be at peace with."

Although the impact of this extra support and motivation may not have been evident to Whitehurst, this day changed the relationship between him and Smith for the better.

"He's my buddy, I love him because he's nice. [I] dap him up [and] love seeing him in the hallways," Smith said.

Allowing for these connections to form between the general education and the exceptional education students was one of the organizer's, Abbey Zwetzig, exceptional education teacher, main intentions; however, seeing it actually happen was something exceptional.

"My goal for this whole event was to get my students out there, and for these other students in the hallway to say hi to my students, but I didn't know how it was gonna go. And Loren saying hi to Alex in the hallways, it's really special for her," Zwetzig said.

Word of the event spread so fast and wide that schools across the state requested to participate; Zwetzig had to limit the event to just Charleston County schools to make sure they could handle the crowd for the first time. However, Zwetzig really wanted to allow for the merging of these different students to occur so that she could widen perspectives.

"I think my students being with general education students is important, but I also think general education students being with my students is important. I feel like they get a different perspective on their lives and they just appreciate the small things and see how much they can do vs how much they can't do," Zwetzig said.

As this event continues to grow each year that it is held, connections like Whitehurst's and Smith's will continue to flourish. And overall, Zwetzig's goal for these kids is for them to have an equal opportunity to succeed and thrive.

"There's a lot of perspectives out there about what the students in my class can do, and the whole event just proved to everyone that they can do these events and achieve things just like everybody else," Zwetzig said.

Story by Maria Gonzalez

Design by Lucie Hauer

"They can do these events and achieve things just like everybody else."



COOL COMPANIONS:

(right) After completing his running event, Benjamin Keenan, 11, celebrates with his buddy. "I was giving a fist bump to my buddy, Max Rhoton, coming back from the 50 meter race. [I loved] hanging out with my buddies and winning a race," said; photo by g.mortellaro



GREAT GUIDE: (above) Davis Henry, 11, helps guide his exceptional education buddy to his next event. "I had a great time. It gives [these] kids opportunities they may not have if we don't have these events," Henry said; photo by g.mortellaro

JOURNEY TO TRANQUILITY

Family begins a program to raise awareness to mental health

The lights are dimmed. Lavender incense stretches across the room. It is quiet and the noise of the outside world has become mute. Staring into the mirror as he enters his next yoga pose, **Jackson Craft**, 12, has entered a state of mental tranquility.

The energy radiated in the room and the determination to feel that sense of accomplishment is a new feeling Craft has felt since he started yoga as a result of his mom's, **Cameron Craft**, new non-profit organization, Flow For Change.

"He has learned how to handle and channel stress in positive ways," Cameron said. "All of these things have contributed to him growing into the exceptional leader and mentor he has become to his peers both on and off the field."

The activity is different for each person, and for Jackson, this has been more of a physical journey rather than a spiritual one. However, for each person, the journey can be as exotic or calm as they desire.

"It's really your own canvas. They give you templates but there are variations and a lot you can do with it," Jackson said.

When first starting this organization, Cameron's main goal was to spread awareness to where the donations of their non-profit was going: mental health organizations. The effect mental health has on an individual has been a battle the Craft family has had to witness firsthand.

"Mental illness is debilitating for so many, and for me it has always been personal. From family members struggling with depression, anxiety, ADHD, and addiction, to friends in college battling eating disorders, to a close friend in high school committing suicide," Cameron said, "I have seen up-close the challenges and devastating effects mental illness can have on individuals, families, and communities."

Jackson's sister, **Riley Craft**, 11, has also given her time to help the organization grow into its fullest potential. Her

stance on mental health has always been personal and she has seen the false assumption made about those who suffer from these disorders.

"[Flow for Change] will help future generations so that they aren't gonna have to feel what the people in our family have felt. We have firsthand experience of how awful it can be," Riley said. "[Mental health] does not define a person, it's just another battle you have to deal with."

The Flow For Change non-profit has not only impacted the lives of many who suffer from these mental battles, but it's also opened the door for Jackson as he begins the next chapter of his life: finding his passions.

"I think contributing to [the organization] and doing something outside of work that's helping more than just yourself is really important and something I really wanna do in the future," Jackson said.

Both Craft siblings have been able to witness the influence their mother's work has had, and the community within.

"I love the sense of community that it brings... there's an aura of kindness that comes off a group of people who just want to make the world better," Riley said.

As the non-profit continues to grow, Cameron will continue to make the world a better place one yoga pose at a time.

"By shining a light of awareness, we hope to strip away any negative stigma and show people they are neither alone nor do they have to suffer in silence," Cameron said.

Story by Maria Gonzalez

Design by Elise Gierhart and Ava Theriault

"[Mental health] does not define a person, it's just another battle you have to deal with".



PEACEFUL PRACTICE: (above) Social Studies teacher **Elizabeth Poppens** uses yoga as a way to center herself. "[Yoga] is one way I can focus my mind and body. I really connect with myself. It is the most peaceful part of my day," said Poppens; photo by g.mortellaro



TOTAL AMITY: (above) Athlete, **Katie Clerc**, 11, has to always take care of her body, and yoga has done just that. "It's a fun way to stretch your body out and also keep your mind peaceful. Yoga is also something that you can make as easy or as difficult as you want and I love that," Clerc said; photo by g.mortellaro