



fountain of

YOUTH

EXPLORATION OF THE INNER CHILD

summer edwards

CONTENTS

Fountain of Youth explores the psychology behind the inner child and how the perception of self changes over time. “A Child in Your Shadow” specifically looks through a psychological lens, while following articles traverse the editor’s personal experiences — both positive and negative. Jump to “Tea in Wonderland” for a reflection on childhood, and “Under the Influence” to see how society has influenced the editor’s outlook on life. “Reflections of Self” covers traumatic topics resulting in a lost identity, and “Uncovering the Veil” focuses on living inside a mundane system. Finally, read “Pockets Full of Posies” to learn about how the editor is reconnecting to their inner youth and play as an adult. There is a trigger warning for the article “Reflections of Self” since it covers stories regarding death and suicide.

03

Contributers

04

Editor's Note

05

A Child in Your Shadow

15

Tea in Wonderland

29

Under the Influence

41

Reflections of Self

55

Uncovering the Veil

69

Pockets Full of Posies

86

Concluding Note

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Dear Reader,

The term “fountain of youth” is mentioned in several legends throughout history. Greek and Taino Indian mythologies claim there are bodies of water that can magically restore youth in anyone who touches them.

Fountain of Youth explores rediscovering the inner child and youthful spirit, metaphorically representing you touching these mythical waters.

In this issue, experience a deep dive into my life and get to know me on a very personal level. I believe sharing

vulnerability makes this message more impactful, so I hope this content serves you well.

I am incredibly grateful for all of the advisors, editors, and other talent who participated in the development of this magazine. Thank you all!

With love,

Summer Edwards

editor's

note



A CHILD IN YOUR SHADOW

PHOTO BY SUMMER EDWARDS



“Who am I?” is a question with no definitive answer — it is an unsolvable equation of thought. The human mind and consciousness are concepts philosophers and scientists have been studying for generations. According to psychology, the psyche is at the core of one’s being. It represents one’s sense of self and innermost world. Everyday experiences influence one’s understanding of self, causing it to alter and adapt throughout their life. Hence, the answer to, “Who am I?” is never stagnant, it is in constant flux.

Carl Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, believed that the psyche was composed of various archetypes, one of the most important being the child archetype. According to Jung, the child archetype represented the unconscious and authentic parts of the psyche. This archetype was not limited to only children, but rather to the child-like qualities that exist in everyone.

Jung’s ideas were developed further by a Canadian psychiatrist named Eric Berne, who came up with the idea of the child ego. The child ego was divided into two parts known as the free child and the adapted child. The free child was spontaneous, creative, and joyful, while the adapted child had been conditioned by society to conform to their expectations.

It is important to note that the child archetype and the child ego represent distinct aspects of the psyche. The child ego is an individual structure that is unique to each person, and is shaped through personal experiences and interactions with others. In other words, it is a component of an individual’s formed identity. On the other hand, the child archetype is a broader term that shapes the human psyche, and is associated with qualities like curiosity, playfulness, and creativity. It is a collective pattern that is shared by all humans.

A more common term that combines the child archetype and child ego is known as the inner child. One half of the inner child is a representation of our child-like spirit and imagination. It gives us the ability to wonder, play, and dream, which are significant parts of psychological well being. The other half is a repository of our unresolved childhood wounds. Over time, unresolved trauma builds within the subconscious and can cause emotions of fear, anger and sadness. These emotions may become overwhelming and

may lead to dysfunctional behaviors such as substance abuse or self-sabotage.

Moreover, societal conditioning can have consequential effects on the inner child. At the time of birth, the psyche is uncontaminated by socio-cultural impressions, leaving one as authentically themselves. The younger the person, the less they have been influenced by external forces. The world is new to children, leaving them open to be curious and explore. Children are predominantly sensitive and expressive; they openly express their wants and feelings until they are taught otherwise.

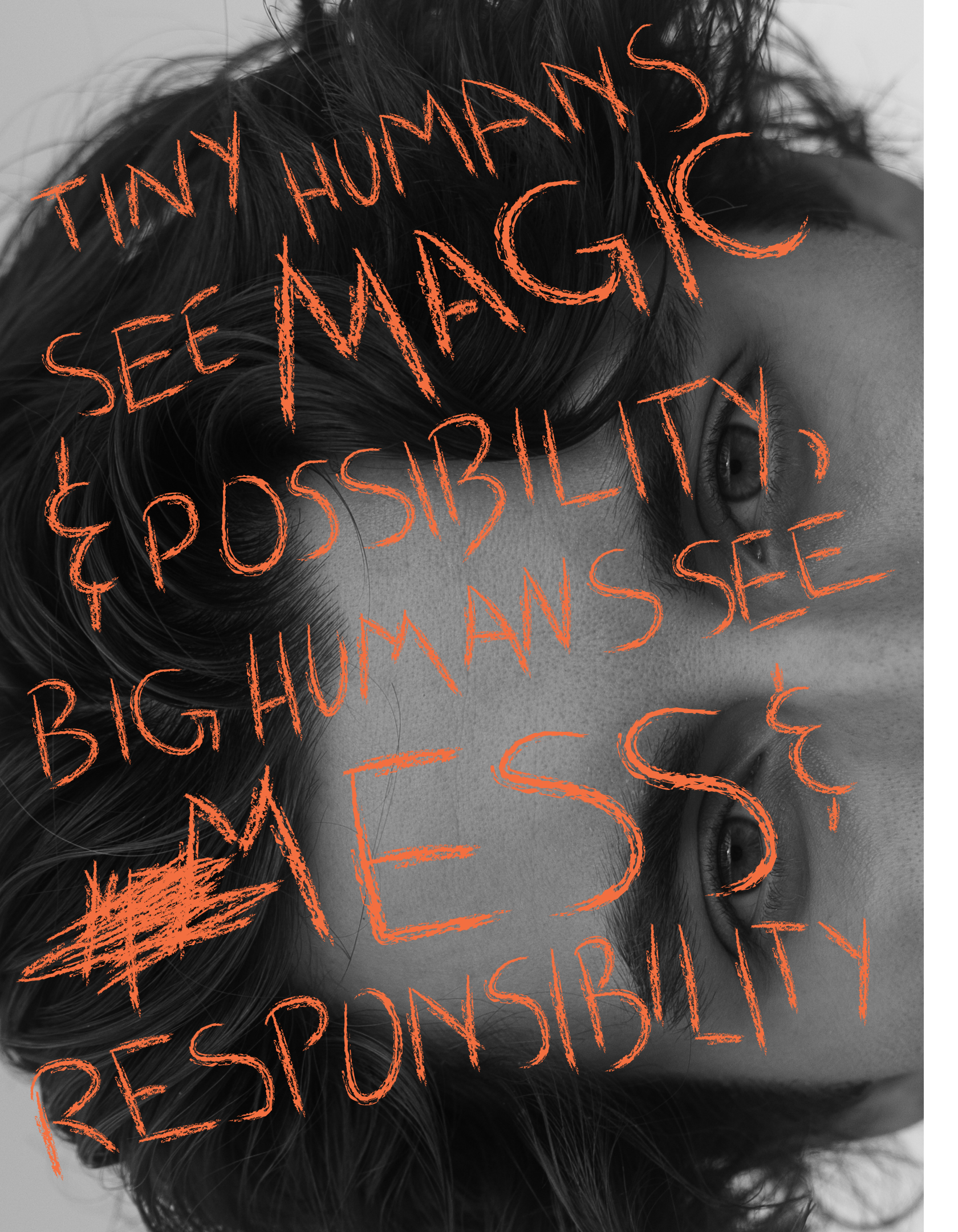
Vince Gowman is a trained somatic therapeutic counselor and life coach with a focus on neurobiology and trauma resolution. Today, he spends most of his work career as a keynote speaker, author, and teacher. In his article, *The Adventure we Long for Lies in our Childlike Heart* and in *Feeling the Unexpected*, Gowman writes, “Children are groomed to listen to others but not to themselves, and certainly not to their feelings. We tell children to ‘grow up’ in direct and indirect ways to be like everyone else. How much of your childhood were you supported to... express your feelings, your inner truth, what’s important to you vs how much did people tell you what and how to think and discount your imagination?”

Every parental figure or guardian approaches parenting differently; however, there are common trends when raising children. Society rewards kids who behave; therefore, adults must teach children to limit their emotional expression and follow the rules in order to obey societal norms. This may lead to kids focusing on conforming and pleasing others rather than personal fulfillment.

A similar perspective is shared by Lucia Cappachione, a former art therapist who received a Ph.D. in psychology. Cappachione argues in her novel, *Recovery of Your Inner Child*, that, “As time goes on, the child runs head-on into the demands of the adult world. The voice of grown-ups begins to drown out the inner voice of feelings and instincts. Parents and teachers say, ‘Don’t trust yourself, don’t feel your feelings. Don’t say this, don’t express that. Do as we say, we know best.’ ... With time those very qualities that gave the child aliveness are forced into hiding. In the process of raising, disciplining, and educating children, adults often turn the child into a predictable adult.



WHO
AM I?



TINY HUMANS
SEE MAGIC
& POSSIBILITY
BIG HUMANS SEE
~~THE~~ ESSENCE
RESPONSIBILITY

By eradicating the child's vulnerability, they severely damage the self of the child". In essence, social norms and cultural expectations can shape the way people perceive themselves and the world around them.

When someone steers too far from their authentic core, the inner child will call for a reconnection with the true self. If this call for attention is ignored, the inner child will retreat and go underground. Psychological theories say that a retreat of the inner child is typically perceived as a loss of self, which can lead to deep feelings of sadness, loneliness, and emptiness — as if an inexplicable something is missing.

This can manifest into other physical and psychological symptoms, including: addiction, depression, patterns of self-sabotage, codependency, offender behavior, low self-esteem, difficulty explaining feelings, harsh inner-critic, fear of abandonment, commitment issues, and childish outbursts. Consistently ignoring needs, feelings, and desires will ultimately interfere with one's relationships and their life.

Inner child work acknowledges that behaviors as an adult originate from childhood experiences. It focuses on developing self-awareness to recognize unmet needs. It is a practice of self-discovery. Building a stronger relationship with the inner child has remarkable benefits, such as: helping reconnect to passions, improving emotional regulation, gaining a better understanding of self, improving physical health, developing healthy coping mechanisms, increasing self-esteem, and learning self-care. Reconnecting with the inner child evidently creates a more empowered sense of self that is aligned with authentic desires and values.

The answer to "Who am I?" will forever change as people are constantly changing. Humans are complex beings, and no adult can be the same as when they were a child. Even through self-discovery, one will always be learning new things about themselves. They will reconnect with old passions and create new ones, while new experiences will change one's outlook on the world. Yet, learning self-compassion and standing hand-in-hand with the inner child improves your perception of self and outlook on the world.

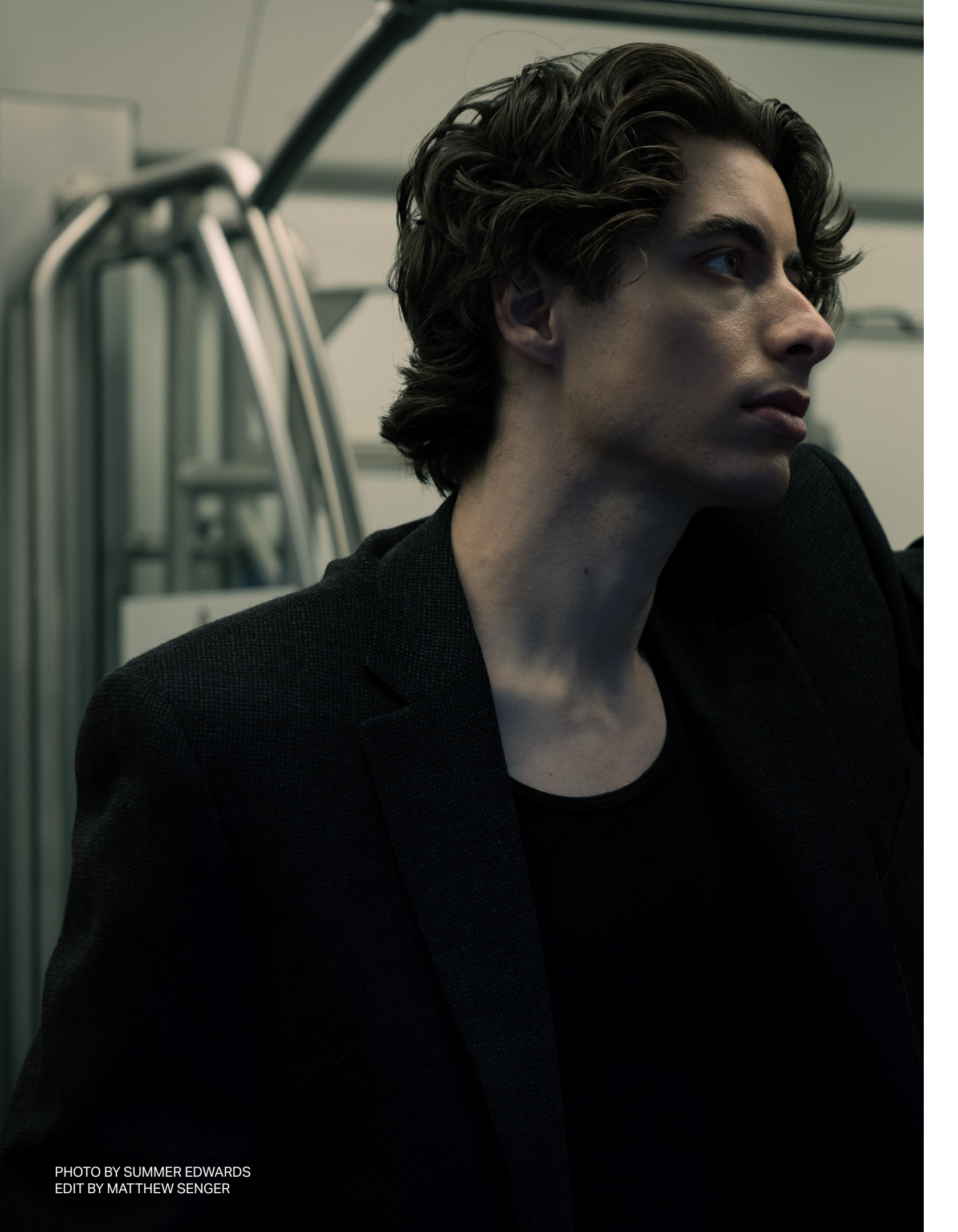


PHOTO BY SUMMER EDWARDS
EDIT BY MATTHEW SENGER





TEA
IN
WOMAN
COUNTRY
LAND



PHOTO BY SUMMER EDWARDS
EDITING BY MATTHEW SENGER



The inner child is clearly a complex psychological phenomenon, but how can we apply it to a real-life scenario? In the upcoming articles, I explore how the inner child relates to my life and the ways I have evolved over time.

Childhood was a sacred time in my life. I am fortunate to have grown up in a loving household with both of my parents, my younger brother, and various pets along the way. My family provided me with boundless love and care, and taught me that happiness was the key to life. They encouraged me to explore new curiosities, supported me, and rooted for me when I was down. Looking back, I would not change a single aspect of my childhood, it played a crucial role in turning me into who I am today.

I recognize that some people may not view their childhood in the same light as I do. Every person has a unique upbringing that shapes their perspective. While I encountered hardship, obstacles, and pain, I am aware that some have had more challenging experiences. Nevertheless, I do not discount the struggles I faced; they were very real and impacted me in various ways.

As a child, I had a very energetic spirit, and I was full of curiosity and adventure. Each day was a new opportunity to discover all of the things life had to offer. I always told my mom that I wanted to know everything, and that I was determined to see the world.

I usually spent my time exploring outside, playing imaginary games with my brother, creating artwork, hosting tea parties, and reading books. While most kids my age preferred storybooks, I was fascinated by the sciences and read about astronomy, paleontology, anatomy, biology, entomology, zoology, and geology. I was attempting to learn 8th grade level science in the 2nd grade on my own accord, no one forced me or pressured me to learn. I was purely driven by my thirst for knowledge and how happy it made me.

I would collect rocks and fossils and put them on display in my room as if it was a museum. I still have them to this day — a whole box of them. Inside, there is a skull of a prehistoric mammal, a slab of sandstone with ancient fish protruding from the surface, trilobite and ammonite fossils, shark teeth, obsidian, lava rocks, and various crystals.

Aside from my love for science, I also admired the arts. I attended a plethora of art classes from stained glass, to ceramics, painting, drawing, and mixed media. I found myself captivated by the natural world and its creatures, which was evident in my early artworks. I painted an array of parrots in hues of blue and red, leopards lounging on tree branches, and sparrows braving the winter cold. I created ceramic vases adorned with blooming flowers and glass plates shaped like leaves. My drawings consisted of dogs, horses, and whales, while my old digital cameras were filled with pictures of birds, rabbits, and plants. It was through art that I discovered a true passion, and a way to express my creativity and find solace.

(text continued on page 21)



PHOTO BY SUMMER EDWARDS
EDIT BY MATTHEW SENGER



DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

When I explored the outdoors, my mind overflowed with imagination and curiosity. I often visited my grandparent's house on my father's side, where my grandma would mow the lawn and cut trails into the grass every Sunday. The paths would wind and branch off in various directions, leading me under shady trees, around the barn, and through fields. I called these paths "fairy trails" and imagined them as magical roadways through nature. I would adventure down these paths searching for rabbits in their burrows and robins in their nests; and occasionally stumbled across ant hills or picked ripe fruit from the plum and apple trees.

Growing up in my childhood home was like living on a natural playground. In our front yard, our pond stretched down the hill with waterfalls on all corners. I looked for fish and dragonfly eggs, and created terrariums for the

pond snails. We had evergreens that I would climb and a backyard where I could play and dig for dinosaur bones.

Life was good and my positive outlook on the world excited me for the future. I could not wait to be an adult and finally be allowed to do as I please without my parents telling me "no". I had faith in humanity and romanticized daily tasks like going to the store and driving a car. Life seemed glamorous with so many opportunities for exploration.

If someone asked my younger self, "Who are you?", my response would be filled with optimism and positivity. I would say with certainty that I am an artist, scientist, explorer and dreamer. Without hesitation, I would describe myself as creative, innovative, smart, adventurous, kind, and happy. Life was blissful and I foresaw nothing getting in the way of that.





PHOTO BY SUMMER EDWARDS
EDIT BY MATTHEW SENGER



PHOTO BY MATTHEW SENGER



PHOTO BY MATTHEW SENGER





UNDER THE INFLUENCE

HOW SOCIETY ALTERED MY WORLDVIEW

Growing up has been bittersweet, but more bitter rather than sweet. As responsibility and stress piled on, the world lost its vibrancy, and turned duller and grayer with each passing day. I hit road bumps, potholes, and dead ends. Sometimes, I found myself going in circles, repeating the same mistakes or feeling like life would not stop throwing the same punches.

Looking back, societal norms and expectations significantly altered my perception of self and worldview. I was naive as a child and easily influenced by what was handed to me. Little messages started trickling through my ears at a very young age, and cogs in the machine unintentionally harmed my sense of self for not conforming to their idea of normalcy. Their messaging trickled down to their children, creating a domino effect until everyone was programmed to follow their rules. This domino effect eventually bled into my own life.

One of the first things I noticed was that boys were viewed as “stronger” and “better” than girls. I would hear things like, “Can I have three strong boys come help me put these chairs away?”

“You run like a girl.”

“You throw like a girl.”

“You’re really going to let a girl beat you?”

“You’re such a pansy.”

Crying was viewed as weak, pink and purple were viewed as feminine — which came with the connotation of being “lesser”, volleyball was a “girls sport”, the list goes on. I have always been competitive, so naturally, I hated all of these things in response. I did not want to be viewed as weak, I wanted to be strong. I did not want to feel lesser just because I am a girl, I wanted to feel like an equal.

Over time, these messages slowly etched themselves into my brain. Their normalization corrupted my young mind into thinking that this was how the world should view things. I originally despised these messages, but eventually I started practicing them. I, like everyone else, became the villain that I hated so much.

As a result, my favorite color became blue and I began to hate wearing pink and purple. I started refusing to wear dresses because they were “too girly”, and anything with sparkles was “too much” for me. I no longer allowed myself to cry and when I saw others crying, I judged them as weak. I discounted sports like volleyball because I was constantly told it was “easy”, “girly”, and “dumb”. If the boys did not want to play it, neither did I. If there was any chance of my actions showing signs of weakness, it terrified me.

My sporting endeavors eventually led me to basketball and swimming. While swimming did not immediately capture my interest, I soon realized that I loved winning races. The dopamine rush was addicting and swimming eventually became a huge part of my life. Even though boys did not directly compete against girls, swim meets had races for both genders. I loved winning my races, but not nearly as much as beating the fastest boy. It was empowering knowing I swam faster than them.



In physical education, we were required to complete fitness tests every semester. Finally, it was my time to shine, my moment to prove that I — a girl — was capable of besting the boys in my class amidst society telling me otherwise. I would push myself to the limit just to make sure I beat the popular boy in my class. I would beat him 28 pull-ups to 24, 52 push-ups to 50, 110 crunches to 107. Despite me outperforming him, nothing could convince him that I was stronger. He could not accept that a girl beat him in a fitness test.

That being said, I was not competitive just to feel better than boys. My competitive nature was rooted in a need for external validation. The

praise I received from others in exchange for my success made me believe that my performance was indicative of my value and how others would view me. Winning at sports, doing well on tests, and earning A's became a core aspect of my identity.

From kindergarten through 8th grade, I went to a charter school that placed a great deal of pressure on its students to achieve academic excellence. Standard 5th grade classes contained 6th grade material while honors classes taught 7th grade material. We were given loads of work. I remember having 80 math problems for homework each night, reading multiple books in Spanish, and completing 50 page packets over spring *break*. As soon as I would get home from school, I would immediately start my homework in order to get it done on time.

My school district required something called MAPS testing, a test that displayed your academic performance compared to other students throughout

the nation. From the beginning, my results were higher than average and I received an abundance of congratulatory remarks from my superiors. To me, these results set the bar of how I should be performing, that this was now the expectation from me. It came to the point where I would fall apart if anything lower than an A was printed on my report card. If I did not do well on a test or an assignment, I felt stupid. I did not *want* academic validation, I *needed* it. Not for myself, but because others expected it from me. Fulfilling their wants made me feel intelligent. It made me feel good about

myself. I could not give them a reason to think less of me. Consequently, I became chained to the painful cycle of perfectionism and people-pleasing. I was so focused on what others wanted that I lost touch with what I wanted.

Overall, my experience with the education system crushed my love for learning. I no longer found joy reading non-fiction books and told myself I despised it. Learning started feeling like a chore — a box that needs to be checked in order to flip to the next chapter in life. I became so hyper-fixated on my responsibilities and fulfilling expectations that I put my needs and desires on the back burner. This should not have been the reality for me, or any kid for that matter.

that I had no birdies told me intimidating, looked like a “b*tch”, and appeared anorexic. To be clear, I have *never* had issues with food, but it was hard avoiding body image issues when people were always commenting that I looked too skinny and needed more meat on my bones. Sometimes, I worried about my small wrists because I did not want people to judge me.

(text continued on page 37)



WAKE UP



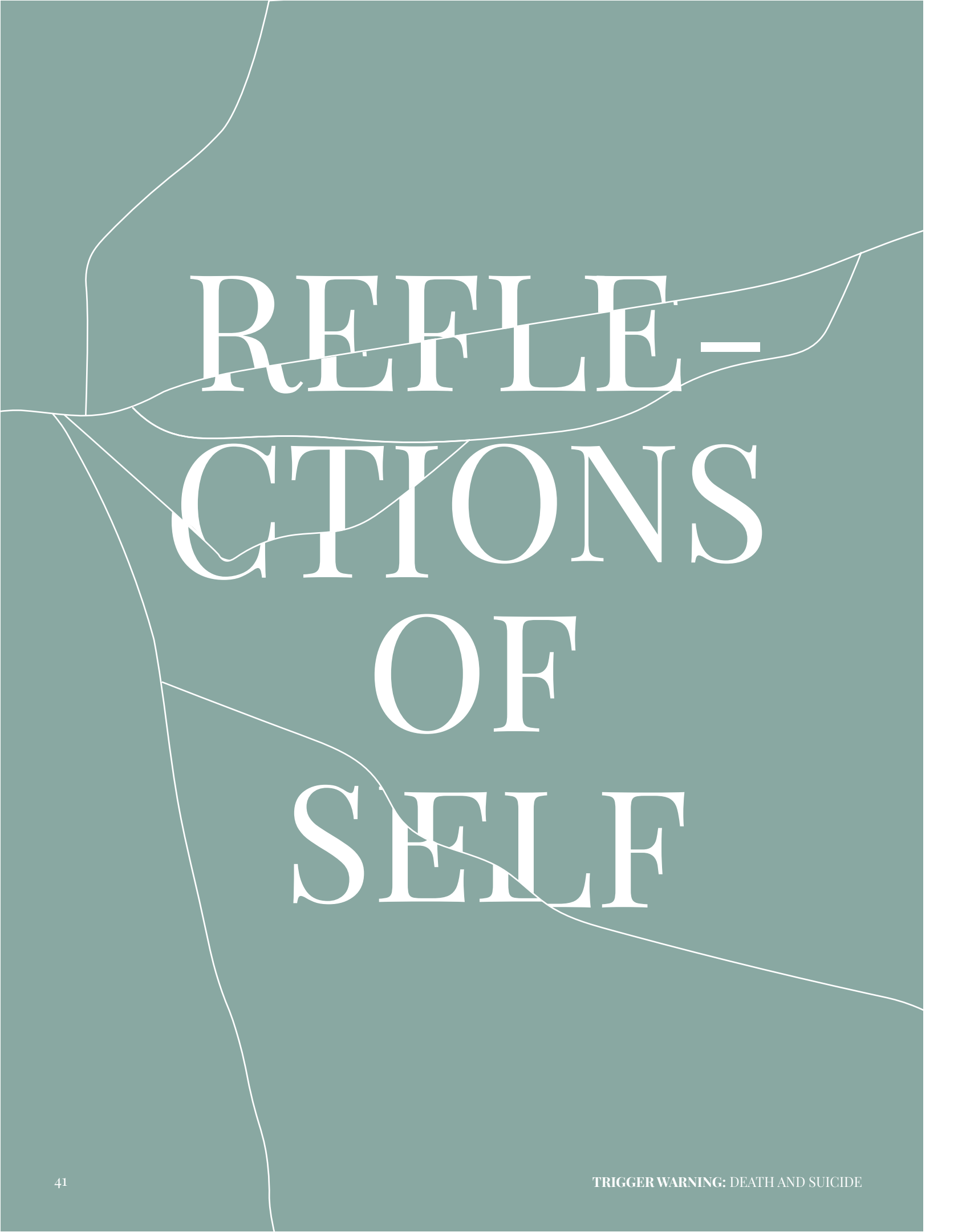




The things people criticized me for were out of my control. I could not control how my body responded to food or how my neutral expression looked angry. What hurt me the most was hearing rumors that I had no personality. In reality, I had severe social anxiety because I was worried about what others thought of me. I was often quiet during group conversations because I was obsessing over the perfect thing to say. I wanted to be liked and feel accepted, but the more I wanted it, the more I worried about it. I internalized what others told me and began labeling myself as “shy”. This mentality was

limiting because it made me believe that I was only capable of being a quiet, reserved person.

At this point in my life, the answer to, “Who am I?” started becoming murky. The words and opinions of society began to overpower my own. If I were asked this question in 8th grade, I would have defined myself as a competitive swimmer, an all-A student, and an introvert. I would believe that I was intelligent, optimistic, and determined to excel; but the brightness of my childhood was slowly slipping away.

The background is a solid teal color. Overlaid on this are several thin, white, abstract lines that meander across the page, creating a sense of movement and depth. These lines vary in thickness and direction, some curving gently while others are more angular.

REFLECTIONS OF SELF



PHOTO BY MATTHEW SENGER



PHOTO BY MATTHEW SENGER
EDIT BY SUMMER EDWARDS

My perception of self was incredibly influenced by others, not just with the words I heard, but also with the actions I saw. Who I am, how I handle emotions, and how I communicate were key aspects of myself that changed over time in response to the world around me. Each time I would look into the mirror, I saw someone different staring back at me. I was not the same person I was last year, last month, or even last week. As the world changed, I changed, too.

Everyone experiences their own form of childhood trauma that changes them forever. I began experiencing death at a young age, but it started out small. When I was 10 years old, one of my dad’s good friends was killed in a head-on car collision. I did not know this man, but what affected me was seeing my dad’s pain. Seeing his vulnerability made me feel such intense sadness and empathy for him. I could not imagine anything like that happening to one of my friends or family members.

Five years later, in 2015, I was in the car with my dad and my younger brother, driving to swim practice. We pulled into the parking lot

and were making our way to the front door when we received an unexpected call from an extended family member — who never calls. My dad glanced with one eyebrow raised and said, “Huh, I wonder why he’s calling. I’ll call him back later.” While I thought it was weird that he called, I did not think much of it after I got out of the car.

After every swim practice, I normally carpooled home with one of my friends. Her dad picked us up as usual and asked the typical “How was practice?” question that he asked every time we got into the car. In the 20-minute car ride home, I had completely forgotten about the strange phone call from earlier. We pulled up to my house and it was almost completely dark, which was unusual since the lights are normally kept on. I waited outside after knocking and eventually had to let myself in with the key from the lockbox. It was after 9 PM on a weekday and my whole family was not home. Confused, I called my mom to ask where they went. In response, I heard the heartbreaking news that my uncle, her brother, had unexpectedly passed away. He was a healthy and active man, but suffered cardiac arrest sitting at his desk in the basement.

My uncle’s death unfortunately triggered the end of my grandfather’s life as well. He was pushing 98 years old and had already suffered through multiple health problems, the death of his other son, and his wife. Personally, I believe he died of heartbreak. It was sad seeing my mom’s side of the family slowly chip away, but even more sad watching her through her grief.

ELIZABETH
 ASHLEY
 ITNEDI

My family is super important to me, I would go to the ends of the Earth for them. My love for them is greater than anything I have ever experienced. Anything that affects them also affects me. Anything bad that happens to them also stabs my inner child, and it is so painful. But nothing would have prepared me for what happened the following year.

In 2016, my summer was spent swimming at meets, traveling with my family, hanging out with my friends, and spending lots of time at my grandparent's pool. I loved going to their pool. It was tucked away in their backyard and surrounded by pine trees — it was beautiful. It felt so special having a private pool where I could spend time. Little did I know that part of life was coming to a close soon, way sooner than I expected. My grandma had become ill a couple years prior and started losing parts of her long-term memory. It was not bad at first, but she started depending on my granddad more as years went on.

When I was a kid, I saw my granddad as the type of person who would live to a very old age. He had beaten more than one cancer and always stayed active. He still had his wits about him and overall seemed pretty happy.

The day after Thanksgiving that year, my granddad disappeared. He had gotten into an argument with my grandma, took off his wedding ring and his watch, and left. I was Black Friday shopping with my mom when we heard the news. I could tell my mom was really worried, but I did not think anything bad was going to come from it. I told my mom that he probably just had to let off some steam and maybe went to a friend's house or a hotel.

The next couple days, my dad, my brother, and my aunt searched for him. They drove to every location they thought he may go, but with no luck. Eventually, they were driving anywhere to hunt him down. My mom and brother cried the night away since they had already accepted him to be gone. My dad and I, on the other hand, were still optimistic that he was okay.

The following day, I was at home when we got a call on our landline phone. It was my dad. I answered, "Hi, Dad." I quickly noticed his short breaths and cracks in his voice, he was crying.

"I found him," he said, he could barely get his words out.

"You did? Is he alive?!" I immediately asked. I thought that maybe these could be tears of joy. My dad did not respond at first, probably because he was choking on his breaths. So I asked him again, "Is he alive?"

"No, he is dead!" he yelled back, "Give the phone to Mom."

I felt myself fall into a trance. This did not feel real, I did not feel real. I sat at the top of the stairs hugging my knees, with a blank stare to the floor.

I learned that my dad was at my grandma's house standing outside when he noticed a white truck sitting in the parking lot of a church in the distance. My granddad drove a white truck, but it would be strange if he was at church. My dad drove over to the truck to find the horrifying truth, he described it as "worse than his worst nightmare". I will not go into detail, but my granddad took his own life.

The perfect and whole family I had was shattered. The once beautiful reflection was now only half there and cracked all over. I cannot imagine being the one to find my granddad in that state. I wish I could take that vision away from my dad and rid him of that pain.

After that day, all family tradition stopped. Christmas never felt the same, family dinners never felt the same, a hole had been burned into the family. It was almost like my childhood died with my granddad the moment he pulled the trigger.

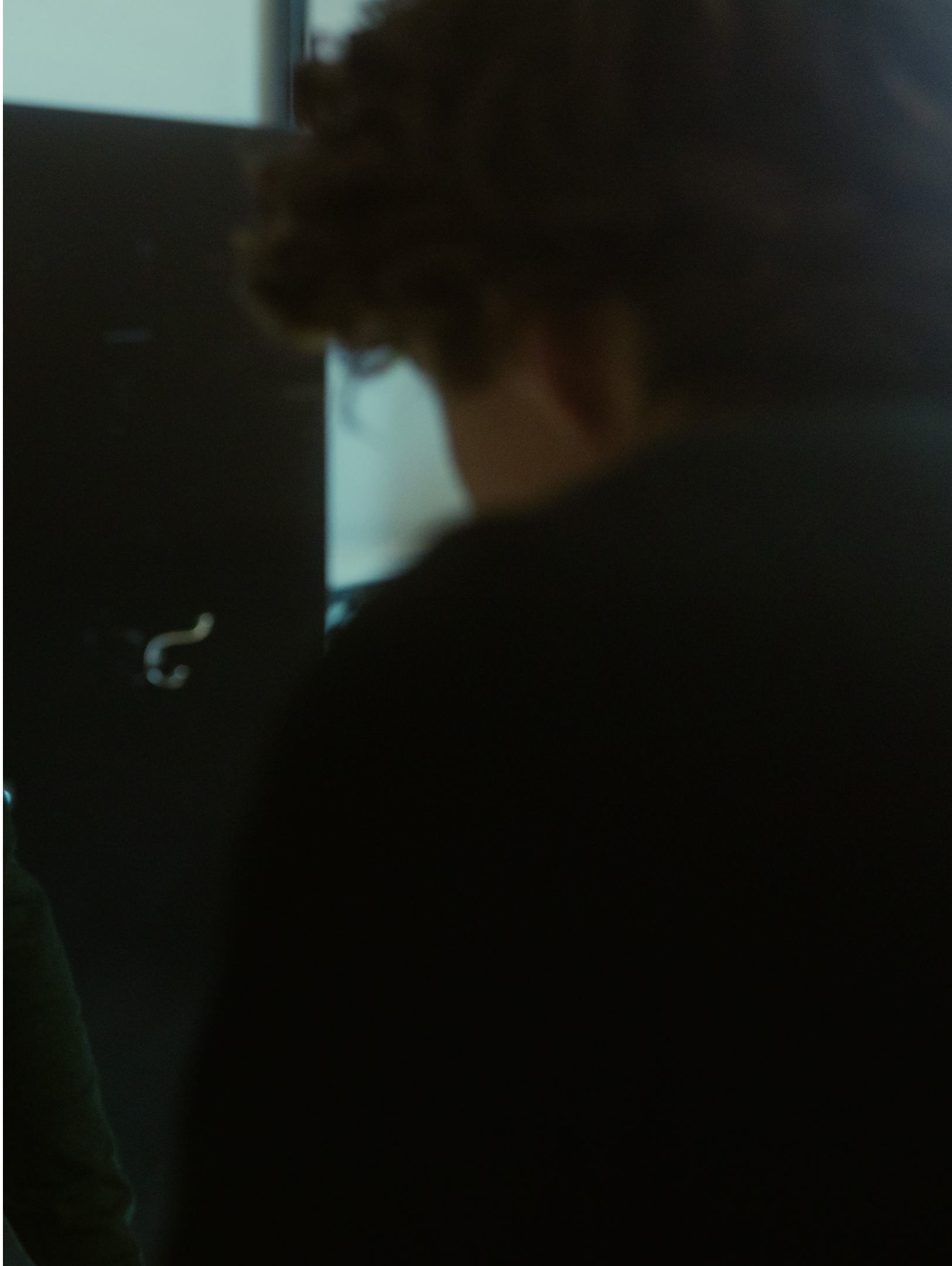
I kept silent about the incident, I did not tell anyone except my closest friend who was like a sister to me. I went on about my days as if nothing had happened. It was a good act, no one noticed anything had changed. I repressed any negative emotion that stemmed from it. I would have rather felt nothing than the intense, burning sting. Numbness quickly consumed me and I built the tallest, strongest walls around me. I prided myself in having a "heart of stone". I felt untouchable.

(text continued on page 50)





PHOTO BY SUMMER EDWARDS
EDIT BY MATTHEW SENGER





PHOTOS BY MATTHEW SENGER
AND SUMMER EDWARDS

Eventually, repressing emotions became second nature, I did it without even noticing. I was protecting myself from feeling sad and anxious, but little did I know was doing more damage than good.

In time, this behavior morphed into an avoidant and hyper-independent personality. I did not want anyone's help. I did not need anyone's help. I could do things myself and I could do it best because I was a perfectionist. If anything remotely made me stressed, I tuned it out. I forced myself to not think about it. I was a procrastinator and I hated opening up about my feelings. I was a terrible communicator and I unintentionally hurt others because of it.

My social anxiety was at an all time high by the middle of high school. I had the hardest time not overthinking my next move because I was still desperate for people to like me. However, when I reached junior year, I noticed I was receiving more attention from boys without doing anything different. I started to feel accepted, which was something I had been searching for. Overtime, this boosted my confidence and helped me break out of my shell. I started doing more social activities because I wanted to, not because I felt obligated. I built a network of friends and went out almost every weekend to do something fun. I finally felt like I belonged.

High school was coming to a close and the next chapter in my life was full speed ahead. By graduation, I had developed what felt like long lasting friendships. Although high school had its ups and downs, I remember it being a lot of fun and cherished the memories that I had made. However, the summer after graduation, everything seemed to crumble. I had a falling out with two of my closest friends and my third friend moved across the country.

As college loomed on the horizon, I had the painful realization that I had to leave my family and childhood home behind. I resented the fact that society expects us to move on from our home and start all over again. The thought of beginning a new chapter without it was overwhelming. I felt so alone and terrified of the future.

I went into college with no friends and the transition was extremely difficult for me. I was in the engineering school and became

swarmed with work. Getting A's was not as easy as it was before, I worked harder than I ever have and still received C's.

I struggled with friends. I found a group to hangout with and they were all very nice. However, our values did not match and I did not feel like I belonged. I tried changing myself to fit in, but that just made me feel more alone. I was partying multiple times a week because that was what my friends were doing. Although it was the college experience, I did not enjoy getting hammered every weekend.

I hated college. I just wanted to go home where I felt like I belonged. I fell into a depression and could hardly get myself to leave my dorm. I was sleeping all the time. I felt so mentally and physically exhausted.

One day, on November 5th, I received an unexpected phone call from my mom around 8 PM. I was alone in my dorm room laying in bed. I was happy that she called, maybe talking to her would help me feel better. I answered the phone, "Hi, Mom!"

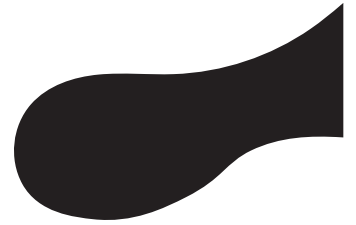
There was a pause before she responded and she said, "I am sorry I have to tell you this over the phone, but...", she continued to tell me that one of my cousins had committed suicide. I immediately sat up in bed with wide and teary eyes. This cousin had a wife and kids, and my heart broke for them. He took his own life in the same way my granddad did. How they found him shook me to my core.

Death is a monstrous creature. The more death came to my doorstep, the more I was afraid of it stealing the ones I love. Now, there had been a suicide on both sides of my family. If only I would have known that was the last time I would see my granddad or my cousin, I would have hugged them tighter saying goodbye. These deaths taught me to cherish every moment I can with my loved ones because I will never know when it will be my last.

After my uncle in 2015, my granddad in 2016, and my cousin in 2019, my heart drops every time I receive an unexpected phone call. My first thought is always, "Oh no, what happened?" I almost do not want to answer it, sometimes ignorance is bliss. I constantly worry about my remaining family members and I am terrified of my last day with them.

The months following the incident with my cousin, I would look at myself in the mirror with swollen eyes and mascara dripping down my face just wishing I could go back in time. To a time of happiness and pure joy. I wanted to go back to my childhood before everything had changed.

As I looked in the mirror, I did not know who I was, I was so lost in myself. I felt lightyears away from who I was when I was a kid — from my inner child. My sense of self was unclear and muddy, and I did not know how to make myself happy.

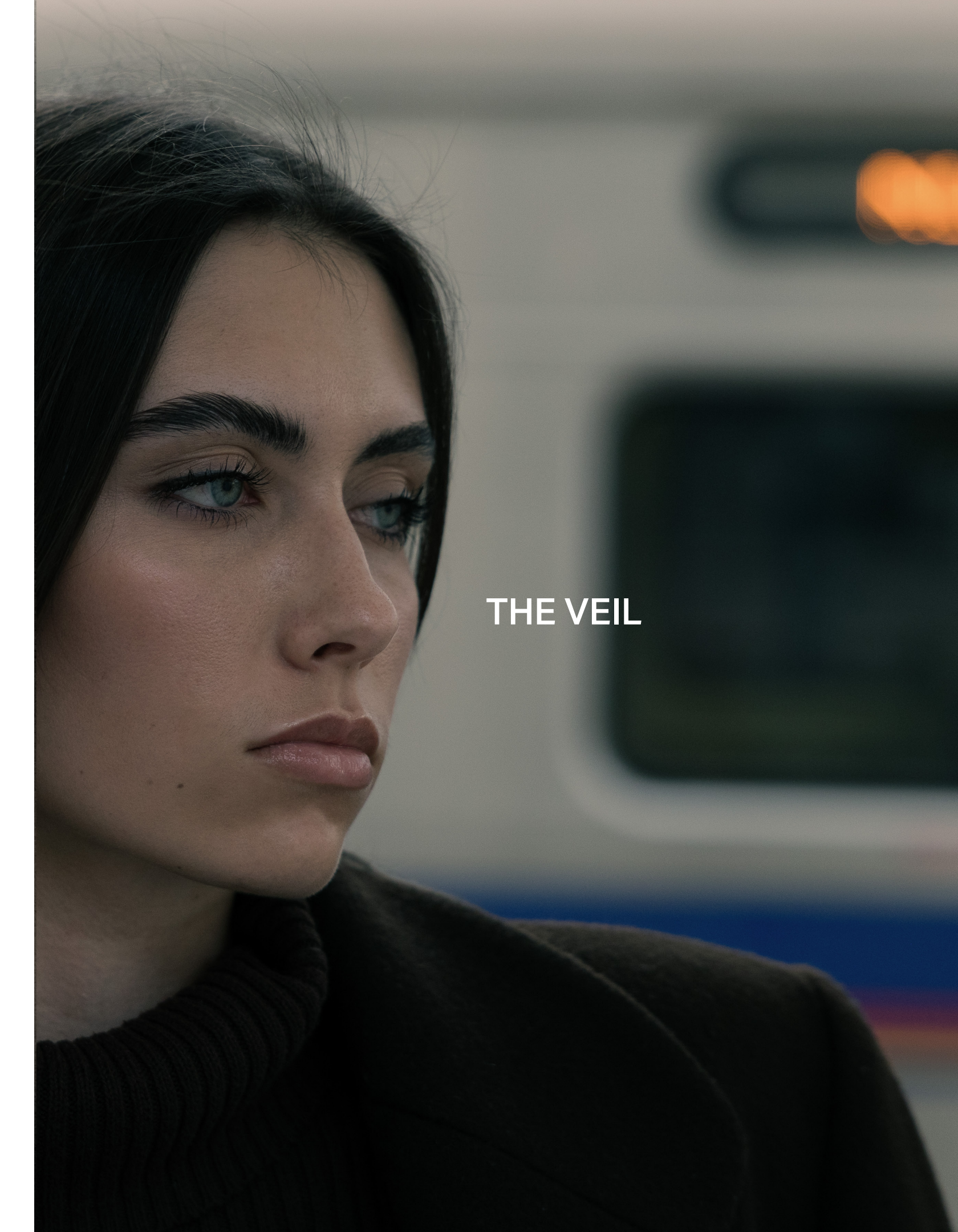




RECOGNIZING THE HARSH REALITY

UNCOVERING

PHOTO BY MATTHEW SENGER



THE VEIL



PHOTOS BY SUMMER EDWARDS
AND MATTHEW SENGER



READY, PLAYER 1? READY

PHOTO BY MATTHEW SENGER
EDIT BY SUMMER EDWARDS

The next few years of college were more of the same. Well, sort of. The COVID-19 pandemic hit during the second semester of freshman year and I immediately went home. To be honest, quarantine and online school significantly improved my mental health. I enjoyed living in my bubble without any obligation to leave the house. Plus, I was with the people that mattered to me most, what else could I ask for?

It was not until I neared the end of college when reality began sinking in. As a child, there appeared to be a clear path in life. Everyone seemed to follow the same trajectory: go to school, graduate, find a job, and work until retirement. However, as a graduating senior, I started questioning whether this was what I wanted for myself. I realized that this system was backed by made-up rules that people were expected to obey without question.

To be clear, it is not that I do not see the value in education or hard work, but rather the lack of freedom that this system entails. We are born into a world that demands our obedience and conformity, and we are taught from a young age to accept this as the norm. As a result, we spend most of our lives chasing after societal expectations, without questioning whether this is really what we want for ourselves.

As I looked around me, I noticed how we really are cogs in the machine, expected to work tirelessly to keep the wheels turning. We are forced into an education system that teaches us how to be good workers, good employees. In the end, we all come out the same, ready to be fed to the system.

Yet, many of us do not even realize this. We are too focused on meeting deadlines and paying bills to step back and question the reality we live in. We are too busy trying to keep up with the Joneses to ask whether we are truly happy with our lives.

The sad part is we do not really have much of a choice. We have to survive and we can only do that through money. Money is the ticket to freedom, to do whatever we want and actually live life to its fullest without worrying about bills.

So where is the balance then? Do I conform like everyone else and work a 9-5 until I am 65?

(text continued on page 63)



PHOTO BY SUMMER EDWARDS



It would be low risk and I would have a stable income, but what if I regret not trying something different? Would I rather spend my time doing things that make me happy at the risk of being broke?

As I start my next chapter, I am scared to be completely consumed by the adult world. I do not want to live to work and have each and every day be the same. I do not want everyday tasks to become mundane and redundant. I am terrified of being a part of the rat race, the hustle culture, and completely losing my sense of play and adventure. It is hard to believe that there was a time when I romanticized simple activities like going to the store and driving a car. Now, I am reluctant to get in my car and drive to the grocery store. I do not want to spend money on gas, and I sure as hell do not want to spend \$50 on six grocery items.

I am a senior in college and about to graduate in a month. The “official” adult life is right around the corner. I still do not know what I want, but what I do know is I want to prioritize my happiness. I do not have a solid answer to “Who am I?” besides the fact that I am creative, I love art, I love to travel, and I want to feel free.



Premium

\$ Price per gallon
(Tax included)



MINIMUM OCTANE RATING
BY A.I.D. METHOD
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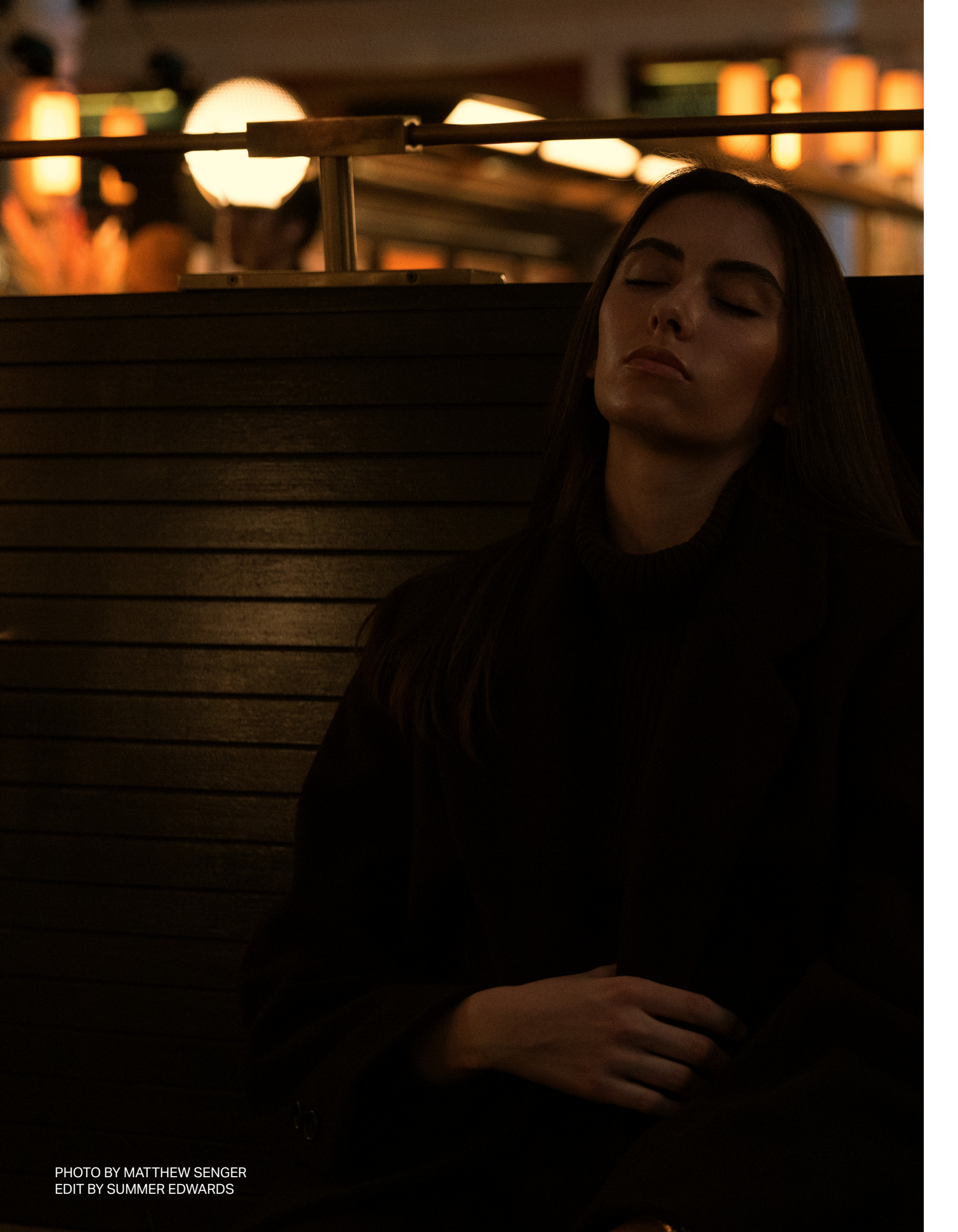


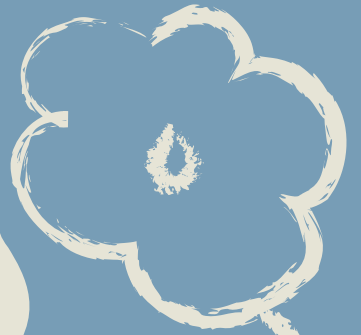
PHOTO BY MATTHEW SENGER
EDIT BY SUMMER EDWARDS





PHOTO BY MATTHEW SENGER

POCKETS



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PHOTO BY MATTHEW SENGER



I know the past three articles may make me seem cynical or angry at the world. I have almost completely focused on the negative aspects of my life, but I promise there have been good things as well.

Even through the good, I — like many others — have strayed away from my inner child over the years. Societal norms, expectations, pressures, and trauma have all morphed how I perceive myself. I tend to worry too much about what others think, I often put others' needs before my own, and I habitually avoid confronting difficult situations.

Over time, my inner voice of feelings and instincts have been increasingly ignored. My mindset was that I needed to focus on “more important things” like school, sports, and money. If something bothered me, I would ignore it or suck it up. At the time, I did not realize how damaging that was to my psyche. I needed to focus on what I cared about, what made me happy, and learning how to say “no”.

Reconnecting to my inner child has been a powerful way to tap into my playfulness, sense of wonder, and joy. It has been a form of self-discovery that has reconnected me to my passions and has helped me feel more in control of my life. Ultimately, it has helped bring my child-like spirit into my adult life. I started by redefining happiness, focusing on the little things, reflecting on what made me happy as a child, and going on adventures.

Redefining happiness has been a crucial starting point to building my relationship with my inner youth. I would spend my time chasing after the big things in life, like the accomplishments, the milestones, and the goals. I believed that once I achieved those things, I would reach happiness. Yet, nothing has the power to provide happiness, happiness needs to be created within. It takes work and it takes time. Genuine happiness will not just come knocking on my doorstep. If I sit around and wait for happiness to appear, I will sit there forever. I have learned that happiness is not something that will find me, it is something that I must create.

When it comes to the little things, they are often overlooked; but they are things that can come with the most joy. Like feeling the warm

sun after a long winter, hearing birds chirping on spring mornings, taking the first bite of my favorite dessert, and receiving a text from a loved one.

Ultimately, recognizing the little things creates a more positive mental space. I have become more aware of my happiness within by focusing less on inconveniences, and focusing more on things that kindle joy. I read a quote once that said, “When you focus on problems, you will have more problems. When you focus on possibilities, you will have more opportunities,” and I believe this thought holds true. When you constantly focus on the negatives, noticing the negatives will become second nature.

However, learning to appreciate the little things is a skill that takes practice. It requires me to slow down, be present, and notice the beauty around me. Too often, I catch myself getting caught up on things that are out of my control. I worry about the future or spend too much time living in the past. I forget that the only moment I have is the present moment, and that I have the power to choose how I feel and what I focus on. When I practice living in the moment, the little things become more apparent, and gratitude follows closely behind. I start feeling grateful for what I have rather than longing for what I do not have.

Reflecting on activities I did as a child has opened my eyes to what I should be putting more time toward. When I have free time, I find myself not knowing what to do. Bored, I would turn to social media and scroll for hours, wasting my day away. It became so bad that I was spending up to 12 hours on my phone, and you can imagine how that affected my brain.

As a solution, I curated a list of things I enjoyed doing as a child. Exploring outside, learning new things, sitting in nature, making arts and crafts, taking pictures, directing films, and selling things like lemonade are some to name a few. I have so many great memories doing these things when I was younger, and now I make an effort to focus on them in my free time.

I started reading again, I am learning ceramics, I go on hikes and photoshoots, I am learning

(text continued on page 78)







REDISCOVERING

YOUR
YOUTH



to sew, and so much more. This magazine in and of itself is a reconnection to my inner child. It has been creatively challenging and exciting. I have tapped into photography, art, and design in ways that would make my younger self so happy. It makes me happy, too.

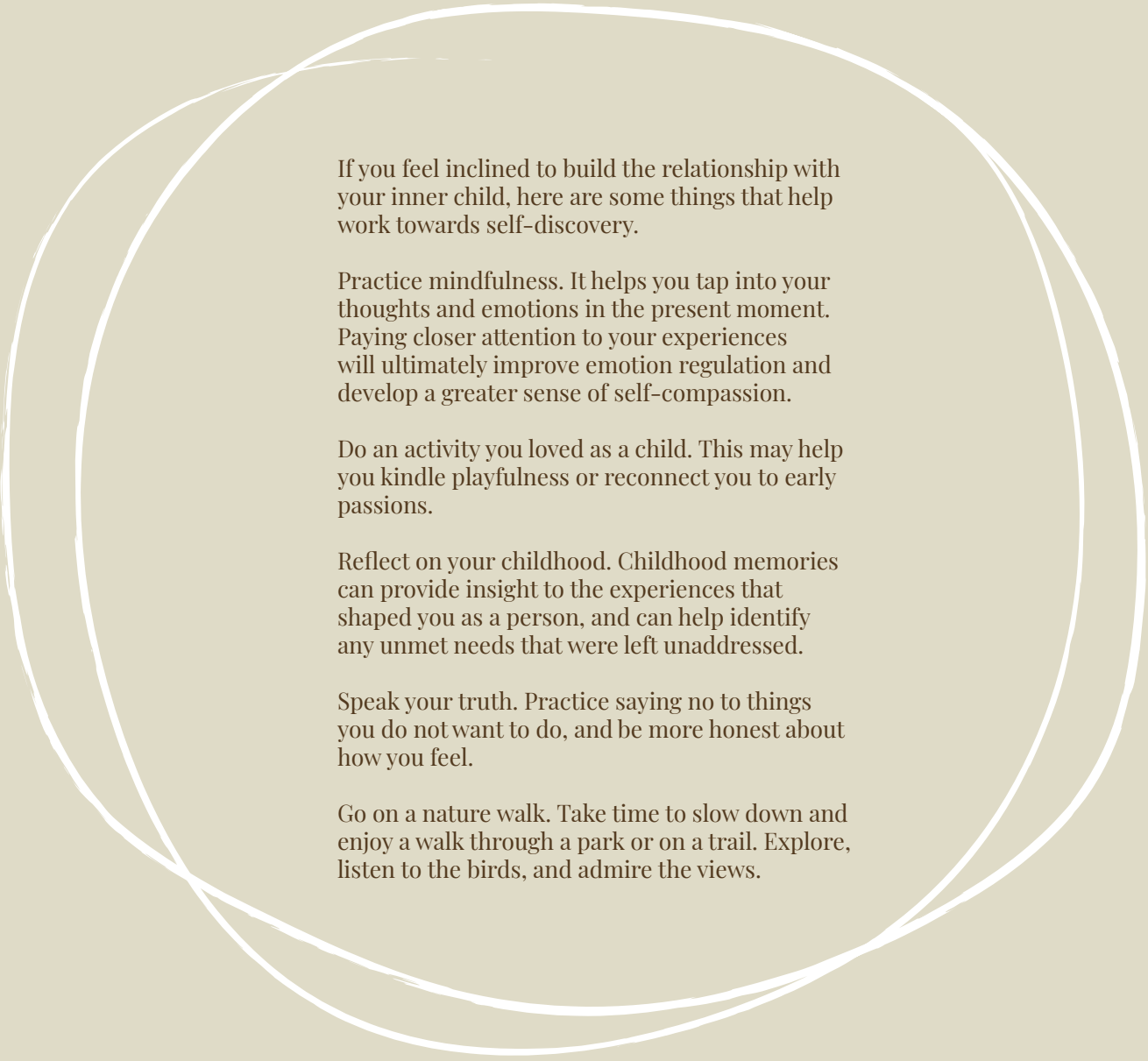
One of the main things I had lost touch with was my spontaneity for adventure. I used to quickly agree to go on mini adventures, but over the years, I found myself being “too tired” to get out of the house. I would come up with some lame excuse of why I should not go on that walk, that bike ride, or that drive. I love to travel, I talk about it all the time. So why was I not making a greater effort to plan something, or at least spend the day in the mountains? Getting myself up and out of the house is a small change that makes a huge difference. I always feel better after a getaway, even if it is small, even if it is just a 10 minute walk. It has increased my playfulness and my sense of wonder for the world — just like when I was a child.

In order to reduce my stress levels, working through things that bother me rather than

pushing them under the rug has been extremely important. I cannot stress enough about how beneficial it has been to confront problems I am facing rather than avoiding them. If I am not speaking it, I am storing it, and that gets heavy. It will weigh on my shoulders and loom above me like a dark cloud.

The main reason why I struggle with this is because I am a huge people pleaser. I like to keep the peace and avoid making people upset. However, I also need to keep the peace within myself — the way I feel also matters. As a result, I have been learning to stand up for myself and say “no” to things I simply do not want to do. Having mature conversations and compromising a solution is a better alternative to just sucking it up.

Building a relationship with your inner child is the foundation of developing self-awareness. It helps develop healthy coping mechanisms, and reconnect you to passions and dreams. It helps you recognize unmet needs and improve self-care. You ultimately learn to love yourself and your life more, which I think is beautiful.



If you feel inclined to build the relationship with your inner child, here are some things that help work towards self-discovery.

Practice mindfulness. It helps you tap into your thoughts and emotions in the present moment. Paying closer attention to your experiences will ultimately improve emotion regulation and develop a greater sense of self-compassion.

Do an activity you loved as a child. This may help you kindle playfulness or reconnect you to early passions.

Reflect on your childhood. Childhood memories can provide insight to the experiences that shaped you as a person, and can help identify any unmet needs that were left unaddressed.

Speak your truth. Practice saying no to things you do not want to do, and be more honest about how you feel.

Go on a nature walk. Take time to slow down and enjoy a walk through a park or on a trail. Explore, listen to the birds, and admire the views.

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PHOTOS BY MATTHEW SENGER







CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

I hope that this magazine allows you to see life through a different lens. Maybe you learned something new or were even able to relate to my experience. Maybe you did not like the message, that is okay too. Regardless, I hope you can reflect on your own life and recognize whether you have any unmet needs or unfulfillment. Consider reconnecting to your inner play and adventure; build the relationship with your inner child. It is about feeling free and full of life. I genuinely wish you well in the days to come!





FRONT

PHOTOGRAPHY
Matthew Senger

COLOR-GRADING
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COMPOSITING
Summer Edwards

RETHOUCHING
Matthew Senger



11

PHOTOGRAPHY
Summer Edwards

COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger

RETHOUCHING
Matthew Senger



6

PHOTOGRAPHY
Summer Edwards

COLOR-GRADING
Summer Edwards



15

PHOTOGRAPHY
Summer Edwards

COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger



8

PHOTOGRAPHY
Summer Edwards

COLOR-GRADING
Summer Edwards

COMPOSITING
Summer Edwards



17

PHOTOGRAPHY
Matthew Senger

COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger



9

PHOTOGRAPHY
Summer Edwards

COLOR-GRADING
Summer Edwards



19

PHOTOGRAPHY
Summer Edwards

COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger



22

PHOTOGRAPHY
Matthew Senger
COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger



32

PHOTOGRAPHY
Matthew Senger
COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger
COMPOSITING
Matthew Senger



23

PHOTOGRAPHY
Summer Edwards
COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger
RETOUCHING
Matthew Senger



33

PHOTOGRAPHY
Matthew Senger
COLOR-GRADING
Summer Edwards
COMPOSITING
Summer Edwards



24

PHOTOGRAPHY
Matthew Senger
COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger



42

PHOTOGRAPHY
Matthew Senger
COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger



25

PHOTOGRAPHY
Matthew Senger
COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger



43

PHOTOGRAPHY
Matthew Senger
COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Sengere
COMPOSITING
Summer Edwards
RETOUCHING
Summer Edwards



46

PHOTOGRAPHY
Matthew Senger

COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger



52

PHOTOGRAPHY
Matthew Senger

COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger



47

PHOTOGRAPHY
Summer Edwards

COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger



55

PHOTOGRAPHY
Matthew Senger

COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger

COMPOSITING
Summer Edwards



49

PHOTOGRAPHY
Matthew Senger

COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger

COMPOSITING
Summer Edwards



57

PHOTOGRAPHY
Matthew Senger

COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger



49

PHOTOGRAPHY
Summer Edwards

COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger



58

PHOTOGRAPHY
Summer Edwards

COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger

COMPOSITING
Summer Edwards



59

PHOTOGRAPHY
Matthew Senger
COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger
COMPOSITING
Summer Edwards



69

PHOTOGRAPHY
Matthew Senger
COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger



61

PHOTOGRAPHY
Summer Edwards
COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger



71

PHOTOGRAPHY
Matthew Senger
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64

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Summer Edwards
COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger
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Summer Edwards



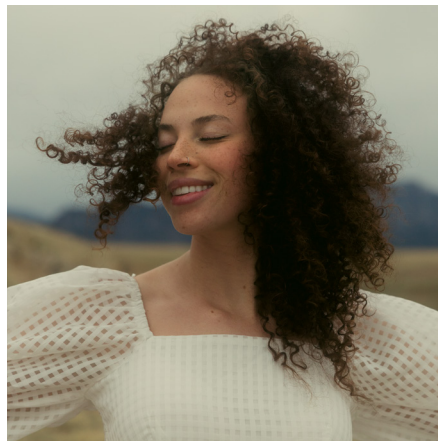
74

PHOTOGRAPHY
Matthew Senger
COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger



65

PHOTOGRAPHY
Matthew Senger
COLOR-GRADING
Summer Edwards



75

PHOTOGRAPHY
Summer Edwards
COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Sengere



76

PHOTOGRAPHY
Summer Edwards
COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger



82

PHOTOGRAPHY
Matthew Senger
COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger



77

PHOTOGRAPHY
Matthew Senger
COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger



85

PHOTOGRAPHY
Summer Edwards
COLOR-GRADING
Summer Edwards
COMPOSITING
Summer Edwards



80

PHOTOGRAPHY
Summer Edwards
COLOR-GRADING
Matthew Senger
RETOUCHING
Summer Edwards



86

PHOTOGRAPHY
Summer Edwards
COLOR-GRADING
Summer Edwards
COMPOSITING
Summer Edwards



81

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