

October 8, 2025
Volume 26 | Issue 1

state press magazine

The Expression Issue





state press magazine

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Editor’s letter

As journalists, we are taught to be impassive in our reporting, setting up a chain of events and introducing characters so that our readers may come to their own conclusions. For this issue, I challenged our writers to do the opposite: to reflect inward on the crucial role the word expression plays in the stories they tell and embrace the results. Expression is the backbone of storytelling, thriving where empathy and authenticity intersect. Our choices of expression are unwavering in their own right, creating controversy and pushing the boundaries of individuality wherever we can — whether we mean to or not.

In this issue, writers investigated expression in a variety of ways. Some explored cultural connections, like hair, food and dance. Others dug into more critical topics like mental health tribulations, the impacts of foreign conflict and analyzing the shifts in our online personas. One writer scrutinized the lesser-known relationship between two ASU powerhouses while another delved into the world of slam poetry. Finally, our feature story grapples with the political ties to denim and how recent events might hinder our fashion choices.

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Deluded Pragmatism

By Lavanya Paliwal

Illustration by Lavanya Paliwal



Part 1: External accusation:

Fear unknown, envy known,
live restrained, death constrained.
Suggestion. Succession. Seduction. Obsession.
Devotion, corruption — expression, eruption.
Skin, friction — expression, ignition.
Lips, temptation; eyes, delusion;
thoughts, percussion; oblivion — *expression*.

Why would YOU —

limit the limitless, bound the voice that drowns,
the sounds that pound the ground I stand on —
my expression, my expression.
Broken hearts dance, haunted pasts prance —
does music bleed?

Does it?—

Speak up, speak low, speak now, speak fast;
speak, shout, whisper — stay still, shh.

Now hush — whisper this:

(Open your mouth — let it roar.
Close your eyes — let it pour.
Sink fast, sink deep, sink raw — my expression.)

Hear this:

When death feels familiar, the unknown forgets fear — *expression*.

Part 2: Internal interrogation:

Mirror, mirror on the wall,
is my expression doing it all?
This feeling in my chest,
curling in the pit of my stomach,
among the ribs that brace my sternum,
to my clavicle,
to my cervical spine —
does the mirror-mirror feel me?

POEM

The intolerable, corrupt, ravenous ambiguity —
will my expression dare to show? — *expression*.
The religious, rigorous, relentless ritual,
will my expression dare to taste it, whisper it, know it?

Now embody — own it:

(breathe deep — feel it swell,
let it tremble — let it show.
unslouch your shoulders, let the quiet scream rise,
unclench your jaw — let it go.)
We're running out of time, out of words,
out of sensation, out of vision,
out of pragmatism, out of reason,
out of hurt, out of cure,
out of inhibition, of inhalation, of expression,
of — *expression*.
One loud yell, a cry, may do it,
and yet I'd rather succumb to the butterflies
for another eternity.
Perhaps it's I, tracking the mirror all wrong —
finding reflections to touch, to blame,
occupying a vacuous river — expression, my expression.

Part 3: The reluctant expression:

Where the depths are shallow and fallacy breeds,
I hope you feel it, now that I express no deeds,
now that I cannot unfold my ways.
I hope you sense the silence, wherever you are —
no depth too shallow,
no expression too vivid,
no expression too expressive,
none that brushes you behind that mirror,
mirror on the wall.

Now, brace yourself — hold it:

(tighten your chest, feel the stillness cling.
Feel the absence, the hollow aching to breathe.
That chase is your expression, striving to escape.)

Hush, listen close:

Talk to me, talk to me not,
Run fast, run far, run away.
I see you, you see me —
speak to me not —
feel the pinch of time,
the dead dove,
the silent embrace of solitude,
the branch of olive broken in the storm —
let nothing move,
nothing breathe,
nothing leave.
Do not express yourself, or —
express the quiet,

the shadows,
the sighs.
Bite the subtle smile off your lips,
wink the mystery from your eyes,
trace your fingers over the fine lines on your forehead —
no creases, no smile lines, don't surrender.

Why don't you contemplate?

Do it, now:

Do all singers carry a broken heart in their chest?
Do all painters paint nonchalance?
Do they know how to express,
or are they straining in vain?
What do you see when you look at yourself?
Do you smile often, or does it falter on your lips?
Do you break — are you beautiful when you cry?
Do you hear them laugh at your expression?
They ask you to be open, be free —
to celebrate the humane, to cry your sadness,
to feel spring's warmth, to strip in the summer,
to snuggle the winter,
crunch the autumn leaves beneath your feet.

Express delusion.
Express the joy in sadness.
Break the fear of expression.
Break the fear of freedom.

Lungs full of air, aching to escape
with a scream louder than life.
Don't speak, don't breathe, lie, hide —
express yourself.

Express the ease of acceptance,
the ease of perceptions.
Too loud, too real, too free, too afraid —
that's not expressing.
Express with restraints,
breathe with fear,
think before you speak,
think, think, think.
Shut up — they won't like it.
Shut up. Think. Act.
Wear a mask, or you'll spread it.
Shh...
Shut up. Sleep.
Breathe. Quietly, though.
Let the primal stir beneath your chest.
Don't clear all the misunderstandings.
Let your chest ache with it.

Why should your expression be the resolve?

From page to stage

An exploration of slam poetry and its budding community

By Aleah Steinle

Photos by Madison Koehler

One by one, poets shrug their way to the stage, pausing for a breath before diving in. Without fail, someone from the crowd offers the rallying cry: “Let’s go, poet!”

The room answers in its own language — the dim stage lights flare and the mic buzzes alive as music fades into a chorus of snaps, gasps and cheers. Some poems bring the crowd to their feet, their shouts tumbling over the bass of applause; others pull the room into a silence so heavy it almost hums.

Faces shift in real time — one smiling, one tearful, one staring at the floor. And when the last word lands, the poet slips stage left as if they hadn’t just cracked the room wide open.

Ghost Poetry Show — a community of poets and writers in the greater Phoenix area — celebrated its fourth anniversary at The Rebel Lounge on Sept. 15. The ensemble began in 2021, when Josh and Cylie Naylor stumbled into the world of slam and decided to make a space of their own.

The idea took root after attending several slam events in Downtown Phoenix back in 2019, at venues that eventually “fell apart.” The Naylor

wanted to create a place where people could consistently gather, perform and be heard.

As the night came to an end, Cylie turned the spotlight back on Josh, her co-creator. “You have moved lives. Saved lives. Look what you’ve done,” she told him.

But the energy at a Ghost Poetry show isn’t accidental. Slam poetry was always intended to grab an audience’s attention, more so than simply reading stanzas on a page. It’s the product of decades of voices carving out a unique space where poetry can thrive aloud and unfiltered. To grasp how this art form became what it is today means going back to the moment it first broke away from tradition.

At a time when poetry felt distant and unappealing to the general public, Marc Kelly Smith, poet and founder of the Slam Poetry Movement, sought to move away from elitist and high-brow circles in academia. By introducing competition and inviting lively, responsive audiences, he built a more democratic and interactive experience — one that brought poetry back to the people.

When Smith sensed a lack of passion in the art form,

his interactive poetry shows gave people a way to voice their values and emotions directly through performance, reigniting poetry’s spark.

In the gritty rhythm of 1980s Chicago, Smith tried out the idea at open-mic nights, where the crowd wasn’t just watching — they were part of the performance. The energy caught on fast, spreading from city to city until it led to the creation of the National Poetry Slam in 1990.

Smith may have set the stage for slam, but its voice came from elsewhere — from the rebellious spirit of the Beats, the urgency of the Black Arts Movement, the pulse of hip-hop and the timelessness of oral storytelling. His vision also echoed into global movements like the Beat Generation — where postwar writers pushed back against conformity — and Négritude, which rejected colonial assimilation in favor of celebrating African heritage and identity.

This lineage is still thriving on ASU campus, where the African American Men club hosts its own slam events. For the group, the mic provides more than a performance; it’s an opportunity to amplify their innermost thoughts and feelings.

brilliant greens and blues
I am a bird of paradise

We are mourning doves

turned night owls

turned game birds side of gay ni

turned colorless

America and A redd

through man

so instead hate

til it was life for a bi

paradise Sunshine



“Slam poetry plays the role of giving the students a voice they may have never had or never thought they would have,” said Adonis Watt, a student studying sports journalism and the club’s public relations officer. “When you’re on that mic, it’s all you.”

Watt has seen students use the stage to unpack their identities, challenge politics and share intimate experiences with their peers. That honesty, he said, ties back to freedom of expression — which first inspired the club to host poetry nights several years ago.

“I believe slam gives the students the chance to be honest about who, why and what they are,” Watt said.

The Phoenix movement

Among Phoenix’s new wave of slam enthusiasts is Sam Brown, who first encountered the art form in his high school English class in 2023. What began as a simple class assignment quickly opened the door to a kind of poetry that felt alive in ways a textbook never could.

For Brown, his introduction to slam poetry felt less like a lesson and more like an awakening. He fondly remembers when his teacher introduced him to the work of Rudy Francisco, turning his curiosity into passion. Having dabbled in rap during middle school, the leap into writing poetry felt less like a stretch

and more like a natural next step.

“[Francisco’s] that guy. Half of the people you know from [ages] 15 to 23, they’re in poetry because of Rudy Francisco,” Brown said.

Over the past couple of years, slam poetry has become more than a hobby for Brown — it’s an outlet. Words that once screeched in his head without release now have a space to land, to be spoken and to be heard. For him, it all circles back to one thing: freedom and no longer being a “prisoner to his own tongue.”

Instead of letting hardships weigh him down, Brown channels them, shaping struggle into verse and using poetry to its fullest force.

“Two years ago, I wouldn’t have said that,” Brown said. “Today, I will confidently say that.”

Brown has taken home titles at festival, regional and national-level slam events. As for his secret to a strong piece?

“You have to care more about the writing than you care about the performance,” he said.

When emotions run deep, thoughts linger and dreams recur, Brown turns to the page, letting pencil and paper carry the weight. For him, performing follows effortlessly when the writing is authentic.

Likewise, Phoenix poet Joe Duhownik — better known on stage as “Jaded” — believes slam’s heart beats in honesty. For him, putting thoughts to paper is less about being flashy and more about uncovering truth.

“I don’t always know how I feel about something until I write it down. And even still, I don’t really know how I feel about it until I’ve [said] it in front of 100 people,” Duhownik said.

He admits the stage may run on points and competition, but for him, the purpose is truth. His poems aren’t crafted just to dazzle a crowd — they’re raw, real and written in the hope that someone else will recognize themselves in his words.

While it’s “daunting” to move from the privacy of the page to hundreds of listening ears, there’s no hiding from it anymore, he said.

“I’ve said, stand by it, and I do. I’ve never really regretted saying something on stage,” Duhownik said.

That kind of openness, he explained, changes the atmosphere of a performance. The room shifts, people lean in, silence grows heavy and the words demand to be felt as much as heard.

Those watching the performance experience a different kind of self-expression, one that allows a crowded room to become a community.



... And I need to see a doctor today,

way, I look I just feel more pain.

the crain pain of america!"

It needs us sick, hurting, dying,

to do anything we can to hold on to a system

not hold us back, that only holds us back.



Slam and its impact

Academic poetry often exists for the quiet eye, crafted for journals where each line is measured for structure and language, while the reader's response remains distant. Slam poetry, however, flips that script.

Every word is shaped not by the poem's sole meaning, but by the performer and the audience simultaneously — voice, gestures, pauses and the energy that strangers exude in the crowd.

Their reactions — snaps, cheers, gasps — become part of the piece, influencing its rhythm and impact.

Heather Maring, an associate professor in the Department of English who has expertise in early English poems, spent several years guiding students through slam. She found that vulnerability is never one-note. It's textured, shifting and deeply personal.

"Some people may open up more when they can quietly reflect on the page," Maring said. "Others may feel encouraged by the stage, the confessional genre that currently dominates slam poetry, and the sense of community that an actual audience can inspire."

In slam, that tension is amplified by competition. According to Maring, many nationally recognized poets

have admitted they feel pressure to perform "confessional" pieces because vulnerability tends to score well.

What also sets slam apart, Maring said, is the multitude of secondary elements that go into the art. Tone, pacing, gesture, even silence — all of these physical elements carry as much weight as the poem's text.

In the digital age, accessibility only fuels slam's reach. Platforms like Button Poetry, YouTube and TikTok bring performances directly to younger audiences, who, Maring said, are more open to experimenting with new ways of communication.

"I enjoy hearing people speak their own words, which I can do while I'm driving or cooking a meal," Maring said. "For these reasons, spoken-word poems tend to be more accessible than written ones."

Julianne Conway, who attended Ghost Poetry's show on Sept. 15, has been fascinated by slam for more than a decade. What began as curiosity at 13 led to hours studying online videos, eventually growing into a lasting love for the art form. But even after all that screen time, she hadn't acknowledged one of slam's most defining qualities: community.





“In the audience, I have a lot of excitement. I feel the growth with the community,” Conway said. “Seeing the people go up and do the same thing and how they change and how they evolve. Everyone is so welcoming and safe.”

What keeps Conway coming back isn’t just the performance, but the perspectives. Each poet brings a lens of their own — sometimes dark, sometimes playful — and she loves the

way slam makes space for it all.

“When poets go up there, I’m like a big kid — wide-eyed and lofty. It’s an experience you can’t get out of the movies or a concert or anything like that,” Conway said.

For some, the magic of slam lies in witnessing the raw emotion on stage; for others, it’s in the moments that spill over after the mic is set down.

“I [did] an alcoholic poem and I [got]

off the stage and this guy, who’s all the way in the back, comes up to me drunk off his ass, crying,” Brown said. “I smell the whiskey on his breath, and he said, ‘Thank you. I’m struggling and you saved my life.’”

He also said being vulnerable in front of an audience is both terrifying and liberating. The very thing that feels unbearable becomes, in the end, the most powerful part.

The social media dilemma

An exploration of online platforms and the personas we create

By Jude Banihani

Illustration by Paulina Soto

It's 2016 and you just woke up in your teal-colored room. It's 6 a.m. and you're about to start your two-hour makeup routine. You begin with no sunscreen, five pumps of foundation, an exaggerated contour and the driest, crustiest liquid lipstick. Obviously, no blush, that's so 2013.

But let's go back to 2014. Before the YouTube beauty vloggers, Musical.ly and Vine, there was Tumblr — a place full of generic statements that everyone thought were groundbreaking at the time. It was all about striped leggings and large glasses with pouty lips. If you ask me, the whole thing is depressing, but that's not the point. You felt alive. You could be yourself, but not in the way you could be yourself on Instagram in 2012 or MySpace in 2006. I think the pattern is obvious — every internet “age” becomes more curated and complex as time goes on.

Today's social media platforms beg the question: Are we expressing our authentic personalities, or are we hiding behind a mask of social conformity?

Before the great TikTok influencers blessed us with their morning routines and hauls, there were countless former social media sites that fought for this moment. Most of the

earliest, Six Degrees, Ryze and Friendster, aren't around today. But LinkedIn, which originally launched in 2003, has been around for over 20 years and boasts 1.2 billion users worldwide as of July 2025.

The Y2K icon, MySpace, also launched that year. According to CBS News, just three years later, the company was valued at \$12 billion. The end for MySpace would come shortly after, in 2009 when Facebook overpowered its popularity.

The following year, the photography-based platform Instagram debuted. Users could now share photos and add a caption describing a specific moment and its impact. By 2013, the famous old school logo of a beige Polaroid camera with a rainbow stripe appeared on the phones of 110 million users. Instagram's success was noticed by Facebook, which bought the app in 2012.

Today's Instagram looks a lot different from the one users knew in 2010, with features like timed “story” posts, highlights, artificial intelligence components, direct messages and more.

Evolution

Saiqa Nawaz, a senior studying computer science, opened her first social media account

at 11 years old.

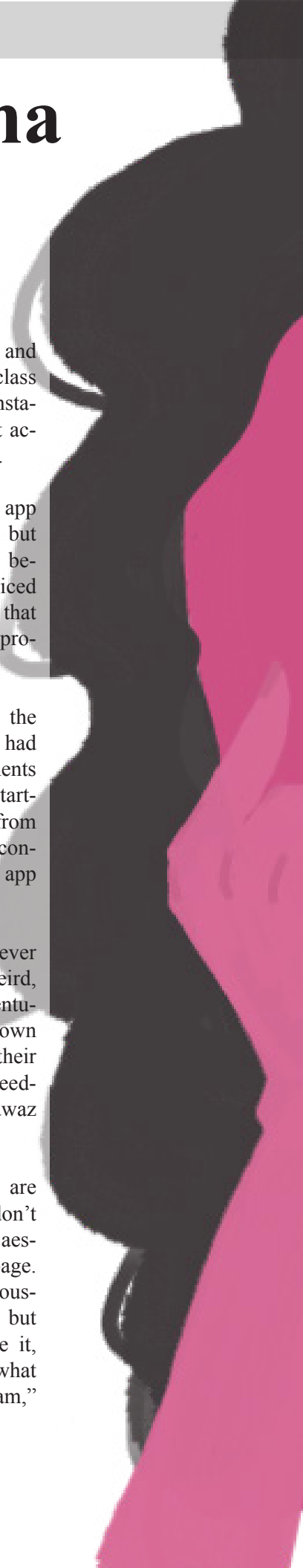
“I got my first phone then, and all the other girls in my class introduced me to the old Instagram, so that was the first account I ever had,” she said.

At first, it was just an app that she didn't use much, but around the age of 13, she began using it more and noticed the app had a lot of content that wasn't necessarily age-appropriate.

Nawaz also noticed that the comments left on posts had changed, too. Hate comments and anonymous accounts started to appear. But aside from these harmful words, the content users shared on the app adapted as well.

“We used to post whatever we wanted, like funny, weird, childish stuff, and then eventually people started taking down their posts and recreating their whole page because they needed to fit an aesthetic,” Nawaz said.

She said that today, you are viewed as “weird” if you don't follow a certain trend or aesthetic on your Instagram page. It's not that we consciously chase the latest trends but “even if you don't realize it, everyone tends to follow what they're seeing on Instagram,” she said.





Nawaz said this epidemic mostly impacts younger people as they are already more susceptible to social pressures. “I think young people are more affected by it because they tend to care so much more about their social life, but every different generation tends to follow its own trends,” she said.

Handpicked to perfection

Marlow Odeh, a senior majoring in computer systems engineering, believes algorithms and business deals play a part in the evolution of social media.

“Algorithms have gotten more complex over time through things like likes and hashtags,” Odeh said. “They take users’ input as what they like, sort it with previous interests and group it with stuff that have similar topics.”

The complexity of algorithms means social media users have to push for a top spot on the platforms. “Now there is a major industry behind social media in terms of employment and jobs,” Odeh said. “There is more of a drive to make money and profit by doing things that elicit more views.”

Noor Sawalha, a sophomore majoring in digital marketing, said newer algorithms, such as TikTok’s, have improved the marketing industry.

Given TikTok’s flexibility and freedom, videos recorded on the app can be short-form or span up to ten-min-

utes. Sawalha said this is what allows marketers and regular users to feel free-spirited and act within their creative bounds.

“I think TikTok is making digital marketing more relatable,” she said. “It could be a five-second video, it could be a one-minute video, but with TikTok, there is no right or wrong, there is no limit.”

Aside from the marketing incentives



social media offers, Sawalha sees a darker meaning behind users’ current lack of self-expression on these platforms.

“I don’t feel free in posting what I want, especially in this day and age, where politics really does play a role. I don’t feel anybody knows my specific opinions on certain issues,” Sawalha said.

“You never know what’s going to happen and how they’re going to use

this information against you, especially because everyone can watch.”

TikTok hits the scene

While YouTube existed long before TikTok, the app has gained dominance, with nearly 60% of American adults under 30 using the app. The nature of the app itself has shifted from dancing content to more explanatory and lifestyle content.

Nawaz believes the very nature of the app, which promotes videos rather than photos, allowing people to share more in-depth opinions, exposes users to more scrutiny.

“Say one wrong thing that somebody doesn’t like and they’re going to scream at you about it,” Nawaz said.

But TikTok isn’t what started the concept of hate comments or cyberbullying — it’s just another place where users feel more

comfortable leaving such remarks. While Instagram and Facebook accounts usually involve the creation of a personal profile, many people use Tik Tok anonymously.

“TikTok has made hate culture bigger and brought it out into the light, but it’s always been there,” Nawaz said.

Odeh also sees another issue that has come from the popularity of TikTok: Users have become “chronically online.”

“What I mean by this is there are a lot of people who get comfortable, I think too comfortable with saying things on the internet that they will drag into how they speak in real life,” he said.

Rather than bringing their personality to online spaces, social media users are developing a personality online and bringing it into their real lives instead. Influencers have adopted a unique accent, referred to as a “TikTok accent,” and they have even created a vocabulary of words only used on the app.

Long, strung-out words, high-pitched tones and therapy buzzwords like “gaslight” and “weaponize,” often used out of context, would all be key components of a “TikTok accent.”

Sawalha also expressed another concern regarding users’ behavior on TikTok.

She said the lines between privacy and being public online are blurring.

“I feel like with TikTok, especially, we’re normalizing a lot of unconscious videotaping. Like you’re just in public and most of the videos are someone just taking a video of another person without them knowing,” she said. “Even if you are talking to the manager and you’re all upset at Target, nobody should be videotaping it and posting it on TikTok.”

Reconnecting (with grass)

Jamila Marghani is a senior majoring in tourist development and management. Marghani’s concerns regarding social media mostly come from a standpoint of safety.

“I immediately think ‘safety,’ especially as a woman. Would I want random people knowing where I’m

that doesn’t say where I work, where I have worked, the city I live in, my email address, my phone number, or a resume that tells them even more about me, then I would put myself at a disadvantage,” Marghani said.

Parasocial relationships have also become a problematic side effect of social media. Marghani expressed concerns with “being a little too involved in a person that you might not know.”

“I feel like it is a parasocial thing. And I feel like that’s unique to an individual because a lot of people who use social media don’t use it that way. I think it’s an absence of meaningful real-life relationships, and they cling to these people on social media because they don’t have any substitutes in real life,” she said.

“We definitely need to be more mindful of the way we use social media,” Marghani said. “Safety is important. Social

media should be a fun thing where you can share the best parts of your life, but posting it in real time and lagging locations does pull back a layer of security for you.”

Social media is a powerful tool. It has the power to delude us into an idea that we are the most boring people in the world, while everyone else is fun and adventurous. Pull back the curtain, take a moment to reflect and “touch some grass.”



vacationing, where I go to school, potentially where I worked or where I lived?” she asked.

Marghani believes it’s become mainstream and normal to reveal personal details online, so most users don’t consciously consider safety. For example, when using LinkedIn, users thoughtlessly display their workplace and location on their profile.

“If I were to have a LinkedIn account



PHOTO CREDITS: LAVANYA PALIWAL



REPORT

In motion: The mind of a dancer

A look at ASU students who use dance as a creative outlet

By Aleisha Paulick

Photos by Madison Koehler

Ingrid Tonido recalls a time when she was three, when as soon as music started playing, she would randomly begin dancing. Her mother would stand beside her, capturing those moments. That habit later turned into a passion.

Tonido, a sophomore studying nursing, first gained an interest in dance after watching YouTube videos. She was especially inspired by Bailey Sok, a professional dancer turned K-pop idol.

"I noticed that my dance style comes a lot from her," Tonido said. "I like the way her musicality really shows through her dance style because she hits certain beats."

Instead of joining a company or studio, Tonido is a self-taught dancer who learned by imitating moves off the internet, giving her an understanding of how dancers process music, choreography and movement.

Her interest in dance later branched into choreography during her sophomore year of high school. Now, she is a part of AZNA Dance, where she taught a class featuring her own choreography to the song "Sticky" by Tyler, the Creator.

"When I first heard that song, I immediately wanted to teach [it]," Tonido said. "I reached out to AZNA and said 'Hey, can I teach this class?' and took that opportunity to put myself out there

and express what I wanted to feel."

Two of Tonido's favorite dance styles are freestyle and commercial dance — flamboyant styles that blend different types of dance. She mentioned the Gap's advertisement featuring girl-group KATSEYE as an example.

When she creates choreography, she starts by listening to the song to gain a sense of the feeling and tone. Then, she freestyles and tests out different movements, slowly building each part. Depending on the mood of the song, Tonido likes to add emotional or playful elements.

"Freestyling and choreographing are kind of the same because freestyling is like exploring with your mind and choreographing is taking that exploration," Tonido said. "The freestyle and refining and shaping it into something structured, something you would want to teach and perform."

Tonido also described dance as a form of expression, the same kind of expression that her 3-year-old self explored through music, which continues to drive her passion.

"If I felt a certain strong emotion inside of me when I'm listening to that song or if I feel like it resonates with me, I would want to express that," Tonido said. "So I also see dance as an outlet of what emotions I want to convey."

An emotional release

Similar to Tonido, Jordan Gauthier, a sophomore studying biomedical sciences, also uses dance to convey how she feels.

"It's an outlet, whether it's just wanting to celebrate and have a good time with friends or more emotional contemporary," Gauthier said.

Initially, when she was younger, she didn't grasp the emotions for certain styles. However, as she got older and gained experience with those feelings, only then was she able to fully understand and articulate the type of dance.

Gauthier recalls her senior year of high school, where she performed to "Dawns" by Zach Bryan and Maggie Rogers. It was memorable not only because of the emotion it evoked, but because of the song's symbolism.

"It symbolizes the end of an era and I feel like that's why it is so emotional," Gauthier said.

Unlike Tonido, Gauthier grew up in a competitive dance environment, starting at three years old. Her passion continued, despite her parents introducing her to it.

"As I got older, I really started to choose it," Gauthier said. "I even tried soccer and then I realized dance [like] any sport is really time-consuming,

so I needed to put my time toward one thing in order to be fully invested.”

Gauthier is also the co-founder of Downtown Dance, a club that formed in January 2025 and is open to all levels and dance experience. Each meeting teaches a new style of dance, like hip-hop and jazz.

She, along with her co-founder, started the club after reminiscing on the absence of dance in their lives, seeking to reconnect with it.

“We’ve continued to renew it and keep it going,” Gauthier said. “Since then, we just really wanted to create a space where everyone could express themselves.”

For each meeting, Gauthier and her co-founder will either trade choreographing, bring in a guest choreographer or collaborate, which she prefers.

“It’s fun making them up together, really seeing that moment when it clicks, like our creativity coming together,” Gauthier said.

Culture in dance

In addition to AZNA and Downtown Dance, there are also clubs that combine dance and culture, such as Lasya — an Indian classical dance club founded by alum Poojah Ganesan in 2024. Now in Fall 2025, the club is led by Manas Naghichetty Premkumar, a junior studying computer science.

Indian classical dance focuses on telling a story through its many styles. Lasya specifically focuses on a fusion between Bharatnatyam and Kathak.

Furthermore, there is a lot that goes into this genre; from maintaining a certain posture to ensuring the hips, legs and hands are aligned, and in specific angles.

“It’s a culmination of all of this, which makes it extremely rigorous,” Naghichetty

Premkumar said. “Also, the music behind it, sometimes the music is fast-paced and you need to make sure your footsteps match and sometimes it’s slow-paced.”

Although Naghichetty Premkumar is now the president of this club, she initially disliked dance until one teacher explained the reasoning behind certain movements.

“When I started realizing the theory

behind it, it was easier for me to understand it and do it with more interest and love,” she said.

That same teacher became an important influence in Naghichetty Premkumar’s life.

“She was someone who was really good at facial expressions, someone who gave more importance to the posture,” Naghichetty Premkumar said. “She was also a really sweet person, so I always idolized her when I was growing up.”

One way Lasya connects to the audience, especially one that may be unfamiliar with its style, is by including American pop music. They’ve combined Bharatnatyam with songs like “FE!N” by Travis Scott featuring Playboi Carti and “Diva” by Beyoncé.

According to Lasya’s Bharatnatyam choreographer Arshia Rajeshnarayanan, a senior studying computer science, she wants people to see the beauty of Indian classical dance and how it can pair with popular songs and trends.

“I want to show that it’s not outdated,” Rajeshnarayanan said. “You can still perform, you can still have lots of fun with it and still keep it in trend.”





Although not part of a club, Carla Hernandez, a senior studying dance performance and movement, still incorporates her Latin roots into her routines.

“It’s something that I love bringing in when I’m teaching or putting dances together, bringing my culture to show everybody that even though ballet is the main thing or even contemporary, you’re still able to mix them together with culture,” Hernandez said.

Hernandez’s dedication to dance began at eight years old when her father placed her in ballet. Similar to Gauthier, she also formed an interest at a later age.

“The moment I put on the leotard [and] put my hair in a bun, I feel like I fell in love with it,” Hernandez said. “As that time went by, I ended up getting into tap and then I ended up getting into jazz.”

At 18, she started her career by teaching the waltz for Quinceañeras, eventually expanding into

styles like slow dances for weddings. Later, despite becoming a full-time mom and completing her associate’s degree in 2004, she continued her passion as a dance instructor. Now at 43 years old, Hernandez is set to graduate with her bachelor’s degree in Spring 2026.

“Having that degree, I feel like it’s going to help me understand more of the history of why I’m doing it,” Hernandez said. “It’s not just me saying, ‘Well I don’t know, look it up,’ I’m able to put my knowledge out there for other people.”

Performance

Tom Bullard, a dance theatre technician for the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts, also majored in dance but with a focus in hip-hop.

Bullard has dabbled in other styles like contemporary and Afro-Latin movement. However, he was especially drawn to hip-hop due to watching dance battles and wanting to experience it in real life. Bullard later accomplished that goal in his freshman year

of college.

“It was an interesting experience,” Bullard said. “I really didn’t know what was going on at the moment, I was out there trying to do me but it was fun to try for the first time after watching it for years.”

In these battles, there is a DJ, an emcee, a crowd, judges and the battle setup: 1v1, 2v2, 3v3 and 4v4. It starts off with a preliminary round, where anyone can be part of it, then the judges pick either the top 16 or 32. Finally, those selected battle until there is a winner.

All battles are freestyle; however, occasionally there are specific styled competitions, such as popping, a type of freestyle that “involves contracting and relaxing” the muscles and creating something called the “hit effect,” according to an article from Red Bull published in 2020. The company hosts an annual event series called Dance Your Style USA where dancers from around the world gather to “connect and celebrate the diverse dance community.”

“I just let things influence me,” Bullard said. “The first thing that comes to my head and I just build rather than trying to come in with something because you never know what the DJ’s going to play.”

Bullard also recalls a time toward the end of his freshman year during a 3v3 competition, where he disliked the song choice and was having difficulty creating moves on the spot.

“When that happens, I instantly start trying to do things and I lose passion,” Bullard said. “When I dance, I want to keep that vibe, that energy and the joy is what really gets you.”

Within the dance scene, Bullard is known by his stage name Isolation-Tom. He received this specific name due to the praise he received for his isolations — a movement that focuses on controlling a specific body part independently from the rest.

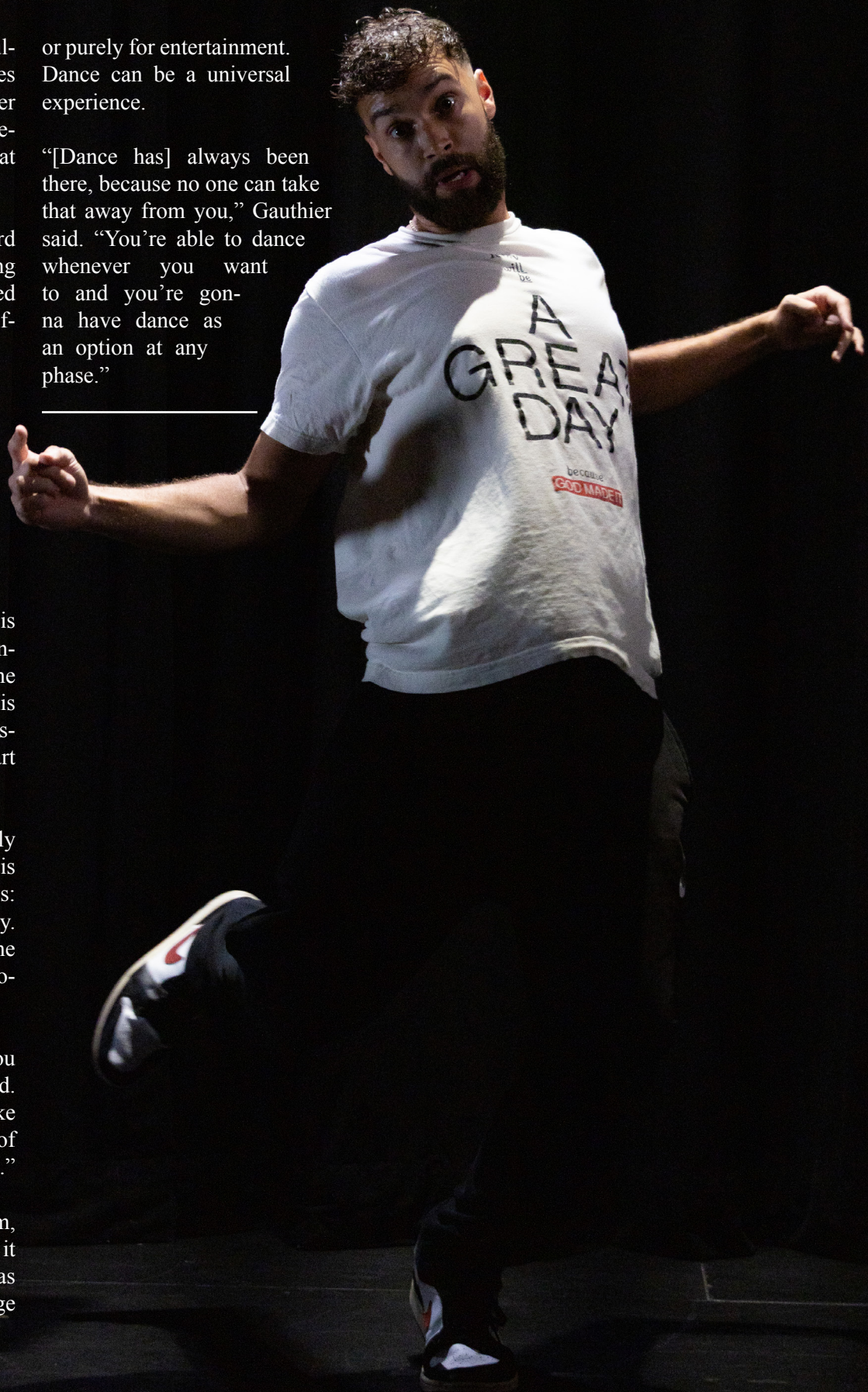
Bullard wants to continue not only performing but also teaching. He is actively part of two dance crews: Good2Go and The Wave Society. He is sustaining this goal due to the factor of imagination that dance provides.

“I like dance so much because you can make up anything,” Bullard said. “It’s never-ending, like I could take one mood and use it in any type of way I want and it can just continue.”

Dance is a multifaceted art form, there are many styles and emotions it expresses, whether it’s utilizing it as an outlet, connecting with a heritage

or purely for entertainment. Dance can be a universal experience.

“[Dance has] always been there, because no one can take that away from you,” Gauthier said. “You’re able to dance whenever you want to and you’re gonna have dance as an option at any phase.”



‘There’s no rain’: A retrospective of my mental health journey

Recounting personal tales of turbulence, institutionalization and persistence

By Evan Silverberg

Illustrations by Claire Chilton and Evan Silverberg



Content warning: This story contains subject matter that may be disturbing or upsetting to some readers, including suicide, self-harm and violence. Please proceed with caution.

Editor's note: Names of people in this story have been changed for privacy.

I walked down the plain, sterile hallway, a nurse beside me. The walls were not completely blank, but they may as well have been, decorated occasionally with the type of

generic photos a dentist's office has to make terrified patients feel less trapped. Perhaps that was the purpose here as well, though I was not at the dentist. It was an early afternoon on Dec. 22, 2021, and I was being led to my unit at a behavioral health center in Tempe.

It was a psych ward, a mental hospital, whatever you want to call it. I liked to call it "the looney bin" because taking any part in this situation horrified me, and pretending it was funny gave me some solace.

The facility and its patients

As I entered my unit for the first time, I observed my surroundings closely and nervously. There was a long hallway lined with bedrooms, a room for group therapy at the end and a nurse's station in the middle. The other patients sat in the hallway, and I noticed immediately that some were playing UNO. At that moment, I didn't care much for card games. I walked into my new room and cried my eyes out instead.

In a unit accommodating 13 to 17-year-olds, I was one of the oldest patients there, and also one of the few there mostly on my own accord. I was suicidal, and after a disastrous 17th birthday in November, I knew I needed more help than I was getting. But as I lay in my uncomfortable new bed for the first time, the contentment that I felt upon my arrival eroded. I was a mess.

Since we were not permitted to close our doors, I periodically heard other patients talking about me. About my sobbing. About my refusal to come out. Eventually, they left for lunch, and because I hadn't seen the psychiatrist yet, I wasn't allowed to leave the unit. Instead, food was brought to me.

While my grilled cheese was slightly burnt, I gobbled it down happily and rather thoughtlessly. I was just happy it was edible.



For a while, I enjoyed the quiet of my fellow patients' absence, but once they came back, I stifled my tears and introduced myself.

There was a variety of people in the hospital, and most were there either for suicidal ideation or drug detox. One person, Jacob, seemed to take an interest in me. He was the only other 17-year-old patient and appeared to be a leader among everyone else. He asked me questions so everyone could get to know me. While I've forgotten most of them, I do remember him asking about my dress.

Typically, new arrivals in a psych ward have to wear scrubs on their first day while the hospital examines their clothes for any

dangerous hidden objects. However, they had no extra scrubs when I arrived, so I had to wear a green gown — one that revealed my underwear when I sat with my legs crossed like everyone else. Jacob showed me how to play UNO with the unit's rules and even taught me some strategies.

He was the first person to make me feel comfortable there and always displayed kindness and thoughtfulness. And yet, I learned Jacob was in the hospital because he had allegedly planned a school shooting.

He became an elusive figure to me, one whom I tried and failed to fully understand. What I could gather was that, despite

es — by refusing to get out of bed, sparking a great war. Sometimes he would surrender and get up, and others, the staff would surrender and let him sleep.

Most of my peers were not so rebellious, and there were about a dozen of us at the start. Ethan and Ryan were two I instantly liked. They were also in the unit for mental health reasons. Ethan was outgoing enough to bring me out of my shell, even if just a little. Ryan and I had the same music taste, which gave us something to talk about. Maddie was the youngest, just 13 years old, there for both suicidal ideation and drug detox.

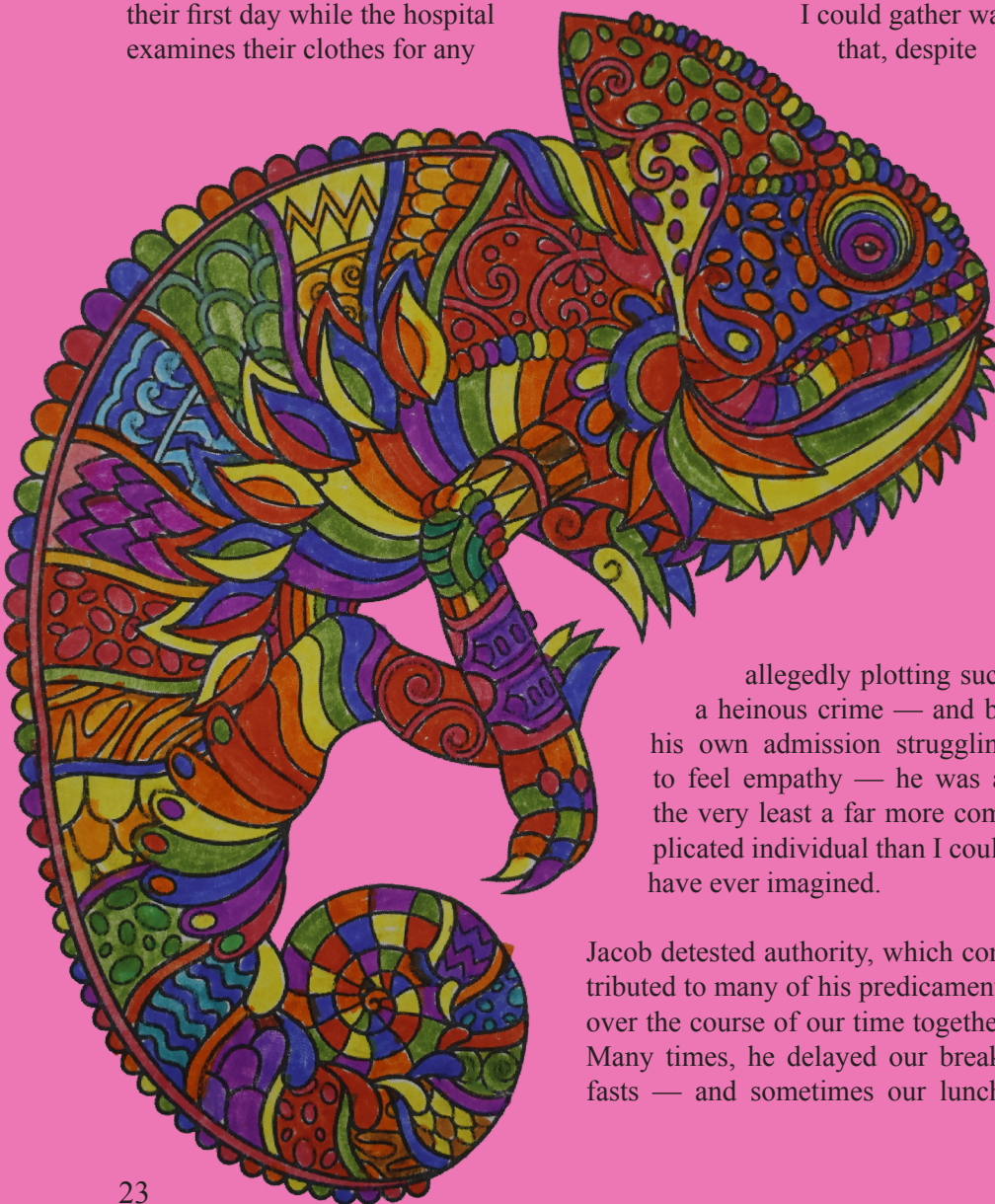
Emma, whose situation was perhaps the most severe of them all, was a girl scarred both physically and emotionally. She had been in the facility for almost 50 days preceding my arrival. Patients usually stay at a short-term facility like ours for seven to 10 days. A two or even three-week stay is not unheard of, but 50 days in that place is unimaginable to me, especially at 15 years old.

By my second night, Emma broke. I was adjusting, though I still seldom talked and felt like an outcast. I had my first psychiatrist appointment after waiting 24 hours and finally got my own clothes back, which was a big deal for me. My clothes are a part of my identity, so being able to throw on my Pearl Jam shirt helped me feel a little more like myself.

After our nighttime group therapy session, everyone lined up to get their vitals taken. The nurses did this every morning and night, a standard procedure at psych wards. I was toward the back of the line, watching with boredom as each person sat down in the chair, got their vitals taken and then was released.

allegedly plotting such a heinous crime — and by his own admission struggling to feel empathy — he was at the very least a far more complicated individual than I could have ever imagined.

Jacob detested authority, which contributed to many of his predicaments over the course of our time together. Many times, he delayed our breakfasts — and sometimes our lunch-



Once it was my turn, I sat down in the chair, facing the hallway. The nurse applied the blood pressure cuff on my arm and the thingy on my index finger to measure whatever that thingy measured. I tried to unnerve as the cuff tightened. The nurse was bent over, and I saw Emma slowly walk up behind him. By the time she grabbed a set of keys out of the nurse's pocket and bolted in the opposite direction, I was still trying to register what was happening.

She ran for the large wooden door kept locked unless we were being escorted. That was her exit. To get there, she had to make one turn in our unit, which was mostly one long hallway. As she attempted to change direction, one staff member tackled her to the ground, and several others joined to restrain her.

They held her in place and she screamed. It's a scream that still echoes in the back of my mind and haunts me occasionally to this day. It was guttural and painful — the kind understandably uttered by a 15-year-old girl trapped in such an enclosure.

I was horrified, but my peers were indifferent. They told me it happens all the time. And they were right. I heard that scream several more times, and I, too, became desensitized to it eventually.

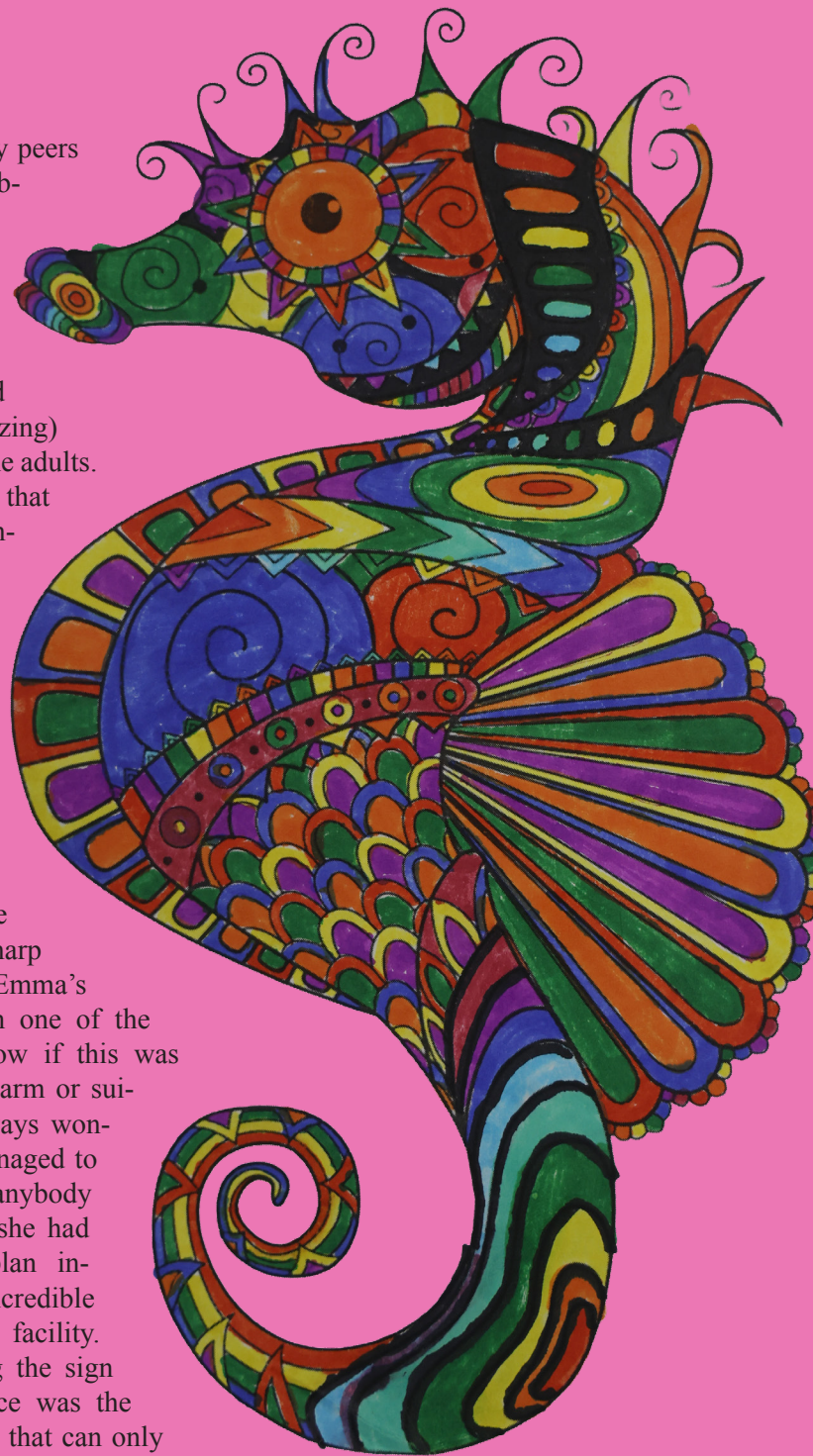
Regardless, I was alarmed by the extreme issues people much younger than I faced. Of course, I was just two years older than Emma and four older than Maddie, but at the time, I thought of them as children and myself as an adult. (Re-reading the journal the hospital provided to me has revealed that I was absolutely still a child at 17.)

It didn't escape me that the youth

captured within my peers made for a disturbing contradiction to the grave lives they managed to live in that time. Some of them (I worried myself by theorizing) might never become adults. It was a thought that haunted me whenever I glanced around at those cursed with both the innocent eyes of children and the battle scars of adults.

On the night before I left, the staff found a sharp metal sign in Emma's room, pulled from one of the walls. I don't know if this was intended for self-harm or suicide, and I've always wondered how she managed to get it in without anybody noticing. Perhaps she had some elaborate plan informed by her incredible knowledge of the facility. Or maybe stealing the sign without interference was the kind of dumb luck that can only be willed by pure, unfiltered desperation. Either way, the discovery of this sign prompted the last — and to my memory the most extreme — of Emma's breakdowns.

To my shock, she was still there when I left, though there was a plan for her to depart the day after I did. Not to go home, of course, but to go to a facility designed to keep patients for several months. I hope she went, and I hope she found remission there.



Learning to cope

By Christmas, I was feeling about as good as I could, given the circumstances. My first roommate — an interesting character in his own right — left a day earlier, temporarily giving me my own room. This worked great for me, and while I still compl-

ained in my journal about things like the inaccessibility of dental floss and never being let outside, I was mostly content. I socialized more and became more acquainted with those I spent my time with. My main focus in my free time, however, was my artistic endeavors.

Coloring pages are a staple in psych wards, and mine were bright and multi-colored, almost psychedelic.

My proudest works were a seahorse and a chameleon, each intricate and detailed with a variety of colors, taking multiple days to complete. My most enduring artwork from my time in the hospital was a bracelet, created one day in art therapy. I rotated between yellow and black beads with lettering in between, reading "There's no rain." It was a reference to Blind Melon's "No Rain," my favorite song, which I had been ruth-

lessly deprived of since my intake.

The song was written by the band's bassist from the perspective of his girlfriend, who had depression, and I adore it. Music has the wonderful ability of making me feel seen amid my most troubling emotions, and "No Rain" was the very first song to give me that experience. The hospital took that bracelet from me when I finished it, but returned it upon my discharge.

12/25

I used the fluoride toothpaste provided by the hospital this morning. I usually hate ~~the~~ it, but they don't let me bring my own toothpaste & my mouth was starting to feel disgusting after 2 days of brushing with just water. Floss is an obvious no-go & I'm starting to feel it in my gums. My nails & facial hair are getting long as well. Nothing I can do about that either. We have a room in the unit called the day room where we're supposed to hang out during our downtime, but we always gravitate to the halls for some reason. We spent a lot of the morning in the day room, and after group therapy (which is also in there, I drew & colored.

After that, we went to art therapy, which wasn't actually art. We played a card game & I finished 2nd of 11. It was fun. When I came back to my room I had a present on the bed. There was candy, socks, a plushie, and a crossword book. I'll make use of that. A lot of things in my room have moved, meaning they dug through my stuff that makes me uncomfortable. I got some more gifts from staff. A couple of stress balls & a fidget toy. I spent a while in the day room playing Yhatzee with a few other people. It was fun for a while, but it fizzled out when lunch came (we had it brought to +

Four years later, I still wear it on my wrist every day.

Art has many therapeutic qualities, and I highly recommend it for that purpose. However, the more traditional talk therapy I received during this time was lackluster, and my new medication was slow to start working. When my unit was spontaneously combined with another, I wasn't equipped with the tools to handle the change. I became suicidal again — a rapid change in mood from how I felt just a few days earlier.

When I finally went home on Dec. 30, I was not much better than I was when I came in. In fact, I was worse. Before my first trip to the hospital, my self-harm consisted of things like scraping myself with the rough part of the velcro on a baseball hat. Within weeks of leaving, I was cutting my arm open with knives. The scariest part was that it worked. I deeply hated myself, and I wanted to punish myself for existing. It felt rewarding, in a way, to do that.

On Feb. 23, 2023, over a year after my first hospitalization, I attempted suicide. I was a senior in high school, just months from graduating. Yet those three months felt like a lifetime when I believed it would truly be the death of me.

First, I started ditching classes, something I had never done before. When that proved to be as little of a real

solution as I knew it was deep down, I was out of ideas. During my dreaded chemistry class one day, I went to the nearest bathroom and locked myself into a stall. While this was a routine process for me when I self-harmed, that day was different. I wanted to die. Or maybe I didn't, but I knew for certain that I no longer wanted to be alive.

Thankfully, that was not the last day of my life. It was, however, my last day of high school. I dropped out, and replaced my schooling with a Partial Hospitalization Program, or PHP, which allowed me to receive intensive therapy during the day and go home at night. While my first hospitalization introduced me to a whole new world of intensive mental health treatment and the people who received it, PHP was where my life actually started to turn around for the better. I was educated in the methods of Dialectical Behavior Therapy, which fundamentally reshaped the way I thought.

Before DBT, much of my depression stemmed from feeling constantly haunted by the guilt of many minor regrets in my past, which I had exaggerated in my mind. The strategy of "radical acceptance" helped me come to terms with the reality that my past was out of my control. When I feel depressed about these regrets, radical acceptance taught me to repeatedly remind myself that it's in the past, and that there's nothing I can do about it except learn from my mistakes.

The second strategy, "wise mind," taught me how to stay rational in emotional situations — a balance of the emotional mind and the analytical mind. This strategy proposes that in a stressful situation, you should think of what the purely emotional and purely analytical responses would be, and then determine a "wise mind" solution that takes both responses into account without giving in to any extremes.

I never graduated from high school, a fact which did and still does cause me sadness. I never got the opportunity to walk across that stage with my friends, or hold up my diploma as my family cheered. Yet not long after I graduated from PHP, I took and passed my GED exams, allowing me to go to ASU as planned.

I owe much of my progress to the DBT skills I acquired, as well as my unrelenting passion for music and the arts, which provided me with as much fuel as food does. Along with "No Rain," many other songs have since helped me understand and contextualize my own struggles with my mental health.

My second-favorite song is "Lithium" by Nirvana. Named after the mood stabilizer, it's a song about violent mood swings and the highs and lows that accompany them. That's a fact I first learned from my friend Ryan on Dec. 26, 2021, within the confines of a behavioral health center in Tempe.

If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health, visit 988lifeline.org or text 988 for help. For campus resources available 24/7, visit <https://eoss.asu.edu/counseling>. ASU's EMPACT line is 480-921-1006 and is available 24/7.







PHOTO CREDITS: MADISON KOEHLER



PHOTO CREDITS: ABIGAIL WILT

A photograph of two people from behind, standing on a reddish-brown, rocky, and uneven terrain. The person on the left is wearing a black t-shirt and light blue jeans. The person on the right is wearing a light grey t-shirt and light blue cargo jeans, with their hands clasped behind their back. They are both wearing casual footwear. The background is a vast, open landscape with similar rocky ground and some distant hills under a clear sky.


Jeans, genes and subliminal messaging

How denim shapes popular culture and politics

By Keyanee Walls

Photos by Abigail Wilt





As the trend-mill cycles at rapid speeds, spewing out and promptly discarding each new fad, one thing remains constant: denim. For over four centuries, this twill-woven fabric has proven resilient, withstanding every inch of dirt, every new vogue and even every rebellion.

This textile has played a transformative role in the advancement of popular culture and politics worldwide. A symbol of the working class, counter-culture and individual spirit, jeans have remained at the forefront of several major social movements across history, including civil rights, anti-war efforts and women's rights.

Denim belongs to everyone; no one group is able to claim it. This versatility has facilitated the fabric's establishment as an unwavering staple in fashion.

Denim brands and consumers have continued playing into this elasticity, expanding on the various identities aligned with jeans today. This summer saw an influx of buzz-worthy denim campaigns and budding trends, toying with the unique ways that denim can be used as self-expression.

Levi Strauss & Co. is America's oldest denim brand. Since its founding in 1853, Levi's has become a symbol of the American cultural tradition. This brand identity is reflected in their marketing, often incorporating motifs that represent an idealistic image of a proud American working class.

Levi's use of commercial advertising reshaped how jeans were marketed, utilizing strong storytelling elements, popular music and of course — sex appeal.

While Levi's did not spearhead the introduction of sexuality in jeans advertisements (this can be attributed to Calvin Klein's 1980 commercial starring a 15-year-old Brooke Shields), the brand certainly propelled the trend forward.

In 1985, Levi's released their "Laundrette," commercial featuring model and heartthrob Nick Kamen walking into a laundromat, stripping down to his boxers and tossing his pants — a pair of Levi 501's — into a washer, as bystanders gawked in both disbelief and awe while Marvin Gaye's 1968 Motown classic "I Heard it Through the Grapevine," thumps in the background.

This commercial, set to a post-war era backdrop, is a prominent example of Levi's alignment with Americana themes that focus heavily on the deep ties denim has to the country's history, placing this idea (and the product itself) at the center of the advertisement.

In contrast, the Gap launched its iconic "Individuals of Style" campaign in 1989, which highlighted the idiosyncrasies in how luminary figures of the time dressed.

Photos by Annie Leibovitz, Herb Ritz and Steven Meisel illustrated the personal styles of icons like Joan Didion, Spike Lee, Lenny Kravitz, Whoopi Goldberg and many more in a series of black and white portraits.

This campaign undertook a unique spin on advertisements from a denim company, shifting focus beyond the jeans themselves and instead marketing a lifestyle.

The "Individuals of Style" campaign perfectly reflected the Gap's brand credo: "Championing Originality." Moving forward through the late 90s, the company remained consistent with this identity, ap-

proaching their marketing in yet another new and bold way — dance.

In 1998, the company released a commercial centering khakis, which featured a group of swing dancers jiving to Luis Prima's "Jump, Jive an' Wail." Another 1999 advertisement included individuals dancing to Bill Withers' "Lovely Day."

This series of advertisements aided in implementing the Gap's image as a brand concentrated on adding to and elevating the pre-existing style of its consumers, rather than wholly defining it.

Think piecing and trendsetting

This summer, three campaigns from large denim brands were at the center of internet discourse.

The frenzy began with the launch of American Eagle's "Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans" advertisement campaign on July 23, which featured the actress in a full denim set saying:

"Genes are passed down from parents to offspring, often determining traits like hair color, personality and even eye color. My jeans are blue."

This ad sparked conversation surrounding underlying nods to eugenics and the brand's contributions to the hypersexualization of women. Much of the outrage derived from the campaign could be attributed to the current political climate, where President Trump's administration has continuously promoted hateful rhetoric against marginalized groups, setting a dangerous precedent for people of color, immigrants and many other oppressed communities living in the United States.

In light of this, the ad's use of a white, blonde-haired and blue-eyed woman as the portrayal of "great genes" came across to many viewers

as grossly ignorant and distasteful.

Despite the massive influx of negative responses to the campaign, American Eagle stock surged 25% on Sept. 3. According to The Hollywood Reporter, American Eagle's Chief Marketing Officer Craig Brommers said on the company's earnings call that, "Sydney Sweeney sells great jeans."

Newly released items from the collection reportedly sold out in weeks, some not even lasting a full day, according to a CNN report. These results suggest that a demographic of consumers responded positively to the rhetoric pushed within the ads.

So then — who was this campaign really for?

According to American Eagle's Fall '25 campaign news release, Sweeney's attachment to this project is an effort to uphold the brand's status as Gen Z's first choice when it comes to denim.

Since the late 90s, American Eagle has made significant strides in appealing to younger generations. In 2000, the brand partnered with the popular drama series "Dawson's Creek," becoming the show's official sponsor. This union aided in boosting American Eagle's impressions among teens and young adults, creating a foundation for the identity the brand is known for today.

Amid recent controversy, however, this identity was called into question as American Eagle's marketing choices have sparked disillusionment with younger generations.

"I would say I hated [it], and I lost all respect for American Eagle after that," said Marcus Cheatham, a freshman studying kinesiology, when he was asked whether the brand's latest campaign resonated with him.



More students expressed a similar sentiment, some criticizing the overt sexual nature of the campaign.

“Like that’s [sex] not really a selling point for me,” said Zakye Mitchell, a junior studying architectural studies.

According to Brianna Walsh, a sophomore studying fashion design, the American Eagle campaign missed the mark for her as well. She also said that creative and thoughtful marketing is a great way to pique an audience’s interest, and she found just that in another denim campaign this summer.

Soon after the release of “Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans,” the Gap came out with a new campaign in collaboration with girl-group KATSEYE on Aug. 19. The launch of this collection and its accompanying ads gained a lot of attention on social media, for far different reasons.

The Gap’s “Better in Denim” campaign is a continuation of the company’s recent shift toward marketing jeans through emphasis on movement and music.

Last summer, singer-songwriter Troye Sivan partnered with the brand in their “Get Loose” campaign. The commercial garnered a lot of engagement on TikTok, as many viewers found inspiration in the funky choreography performed by Sivan and an accompanying ensemble, dressed in baggy jeans and various other denim garments.

This year’s campaign was set to a re-recorded version of Kelis’ 2003 hit “Milkshake,” and featured choreography that similarly captivated audiences.

According to Sydney Cohen, a sophomore studying fashion design,

this advertisement appealed to her both for its display of free movement while wearing jeans as well as the brand’s partnership with the culturally diverse girl-group.

“I’m also a dancer, so I think moving in your jeans is something so important, and being able to showcase that is just so vital to their advertising,” Cohen said.

Responses to this campaign highlighted how the Gap’s consistency in maintaining its brand identity translated well to a new generation, despite drastic changes in pop culture and political values in the last 30 years.

Levi’s also released the final chapter of their “Reimagine” campaign on Aug. 4 after a year-long collaboration with singer Beyoncé, promoting her 2024 country album “Cowboy Carter.” The four ad installments within this campaign referenced iconic Levi’s commercials of the past.

These advertisements include the aforementioned “Laundrette” commercial. This time, however, it depicted Beyoncé — adorned in a denim cowboy hat and Levi’s 501s — mirroring the motions performed by Kamen way back in 1985. The next two chapters “reimagine” the 1991 “Pool Hall Crash” and 1988 “Refrigerator” commercials. The final chapter is a compilation of the previous three, combining them into one cohesive story.

Beyoncé replaces the previous white male stars of these commercials and carries out their stories through a refreshed lens. This campaign thoughtfully revisited some of the brand’s most iconic (and controversial) campaigns, pulling them back into relevancy in a way that addresses cultural progress.





Student choices

What does Gen Z really value when it comes to their jeans?

Authenticity, versatility and comfort are among the factors most important to current young adults when choosing their denim, according to a Cotton Incorporated Lifestyle Monitor report from 2019.

For some students at ASU, much of this still applies. However, there are plenty of other considerations being made in the search for the perfect pair of jeans.

Tatiana Martinez, a junior studying sports journalism, cited Old Navy as her choice denim brand for its range and inclusivity in lengths.

Kayleigh Mapps, a sophomore studying fashion design, chose the Gap for similar reasons: “I feel like their jeans are size inclusive and they really know how to show that with their consumers,” she said.

Walsh and Cheatham both said that Levi’s is their top pick. According to Cheatham, Levi’s are both accessible

and easily customizable.

For Mitchell, denim is an important mode of self-expression, offering consumers a chance to really make it their own.

“With denim, I feel like you could do so much with it,” Mitchell said. “You could dye it so many different ways. And the distressing, you can’t really get something like that with cotton or any other type of fabric. So it’s just very versatile, and allows you to express yourself.”

When it comes to his own jeans, Mitchell prefers brands that implement unique design choices like Martin Ksohoh’s Red Monkey jeans, which utilize embroidery and other interesting features that make the jeans distinctive.

According to Cheatham, who enjoys customizing his own jeans, denim has the ability to make its consumers confident through this versatility.

“My homeboy, he started making jeans for me, and he gave me these custom black and white [jeans] with a strip of white down the inside and the out-

side. Those are probably my favorite,” Cheatham said.

“They fit so nice, and I always get confidence when I wear them, because they’re just [something] no one’s ever seen before.”

Cohen looks for comfort first when it comes to her denim, typically opting for a much looser fit.

“I have to wear a belt to keep my pants up because I wear the baggiest jeans there are ... I like street wear,” she said. “I like to be comfortable and I think [with] jeans [we] are often made to believe that maybe we can’t be comfortable in them. So I think baggy jeans are that perfect in between.”

For many students at ASU, jeans are an extension of their individual values and interests. Even as different styles of denim swing in and out of popularity, there remains space for the inclusion of distinct personal expression in the denim they choose to wear.

“I think just looking at someone’s denim means seeing a part of them,” said Cheatham.

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Tara na sa Pilipinas!

Balut, kwek kwek, chicken isaw and more — masarap!

By Senna James

Illustrations by Claire Chilton



Over the summer, I found myself in the heart of Concepcion, Tarlac — a small town in the Philippines. The province was tight and bustling

with Pinoys in tsinelas* who handled the humidity and the sweltering heat as if it were nothing (unlike me, who was sweating immensely). Dogs and cats roamed around as

tricycles rushed the condensed streets. Small stores mixed alongside houses in compounds that were normally home to rather large families.

I traveled there with my boyfriend, who was born in Concepcion, as well as his family. We stayed in a compound with multiple small houses, a water filtering company — that my boyfriend's aunt owns — and a place called Ardee's Internet Shop, where his cousin operates computers and kids battle in Roblox tournaments for money. During my time here, I used a tabo* when I showered, pisos when I bought food and sandals when I was inside.

I was *really* in the Philippines. I was experiencing so many new things, and for three weeks, those things became normal to me. This was the farthest I had ever been away from home and my first time out of the United States. I no longer had the dry heat and easily accessible toilet paper I was accustomed to.

You could say I was in a bit of a culture shock.

I vividly remember one night after eating at the Shakey's in Wal-Mart: I was stuffed into a tricycle — which is a motorcycle with a sidecar attached — with a family member from the compound I was staying at. She had just returned from her day at college, dressed in a school uniform that consisted of a skirt, heels and a tie. She was barely a year younger than me.

While we were watching the road pass through the screen of the tricycle, she asked me what the most surprising thing I've noticed about the Philippines was. I joked about the lack of toilet paper, and she was slightly confused about what I meant since, in the Philippines, most of the toilets were bidets.

On our five-minute ride back to the

house, we talked about how our universities differed and what majors we were. We discussed how she had never been out of the country (like me, until that summer) and how exhausting it must be for me to pick an outfit for school every day.

That night, our quick talk really made me think. Yes, it was quite fun experiencing so much in the Philippines — I mean, I saw banana trees in person and swam with whale sharks — but people's normal lives were so different from my everyday life.

And, quite honestly, what stunned me the most was the food.

Leaving my comfort zone

Before I ventured across the Pacific Ocean, my knowledge of Filipino food was limited, other than the more well-known foods like lumpia, pancit, sisig and san rival. What I *am* an expert in, however, is boiling pasta and heating the oven for a Party Pizza. Clearly, I'm not adventurous when it comes to food — and it's not something I'm proud of.

So, eating new foods in the Philippines was definitely a huge step.

But now I was in Tarlac — the region known for its abundance in agriculture, sugar and rice plantations. The food was bound to be vast and delicious.

After a quick 15 hours on a plane and a two-hour car ride, I was surrounded by family members of another compound. “Mano po” or “bless po,” I could hear as people took the elders' hands to their foreheads, a sign of respect. When everyone was nestled in and all the

hundreds of suitcases found their place, I tiredly nibbled on a lumpia. Eventually, the balut, a fertilized egg with a chicken embryo inside, was brought out.

My boyfriend's sister recorded our first time trying the Filipino delicacy, which took us about 15 minutes to work up the courage to eat. Now, I have known about balut for quite some time and I mentally prepared myself for this particular moment because I was determined to try it.

To eat balut, people typically peel the shell, only a little, to sip the broth, eventually peeling the rest to eat the yolk and the chicken. Unfortunately, I did not have the guts to eat the embryo.

The following morning, I was outside with a man who balanced a thick stick on his shoulders with two tin-looking buckets dangling on either side. He was selling taho, a sweet dessert normally eaten in the morning, through a straw. One tin was filled with jelly-looking tofu and the other was a brown sugar syrup with sago pearls. The man scooped up my taho and I chewed on the warm dessert as I headed to church.

Other mornings consisted of fried eggs, garlic rice, tocino (candied meat) or corned beef. I realized Filipino breakfast was essentially the American breakfast (eggs, toast with jam and fruit) I loved so much, but more hearty. Surprisingly, a lot of Filipino food also had a sweet consistency. Most things were sweet rather than savory.

Another cherished breakfast item in the Philippines is gatas ng kalabaw (carabao milk) mixed with rice and salt. Some days, I would wake up to

*Tabo - Water dipper

find a huge pot of carabao milk in the middle of the table and a large bowl of rice nearby. I was told to treat it like cereal. Aunties around me treasured it, saying they missed it when they were in the U.S. and attempted to recreate it with regular whole milk, but it was never the same.

And for two Sundays, I ate taho and rode in a tricycle over to Corazón de Jesus — a close neighborhood in Concepcion — where I attended a Catholic church with the same name. I would sit admiring the large, beautiful interior as I attempted to understand the service, but the priest spoke in Kapampangan, a dialect of Tagalog, at hindi ko po alam Tagalog.*

Afterward, I made a short walk over to a sari-sari store, which is a convenience store operated out of someone's home. Normally, the stores are filled with candies, drinks, chips and even hair products. I bought a Coca-Cola and poured the soda into a bag with a straw and then handed the bottle back to the owner. Thankfully, the cold and fizzy drink was the perfect remedy (other than water) after not having aircon* for an hour and a half.

The house my boyfriend grew up in was directly in front of the church. It was odd; I was able to notice a number of details that I would see in old photos of him as a child. Even his parents' large wedding photo still hung on the dark wooden wall right where they left it when they moved. It was a lively home where many generations were born and stayed, and even now, it was a home where people gathered and talked.

After service, people flocked to the home to visit their friends and family who now lived in the U.S. My boyfriend told me his lola (grandma) was

famous in the neighborhood. Everyone stopped by to say hello and bless her since she's been in the U.S. for quite some time now. But even after all this time, everyone still knows who she is. Neighbors, relatives and even the pastor from the service stopped by for a large, home-made meal.

I sat on a ledge along the patio, swinging my legs as family members chatted. It was after a lunch of pusit*, chicken and pancit, that I tried sour mango slices with bagoong. Bagoong, another Filipino delicacy, is fermented seafood paste and can be used in multiple ways, made differently depending on the region. In Concepcion, bagoong was made of shrimp. Oddly enough, it tasted like almond butter on an apple at first, but that might have just been my experience, and either way I enjoyed it.

Throughout my stay in the Philippines, I visited Concepcion, Manila, Bohol, Cebu and Boracay — each with its own dialect and food intertwined within the region. Some food, however, consisted of the same ingredients across the country, with small changes in recipes depending on the location.

One hot night, I ventured to Concepcion's town hall with friends and family. Lining the streets were vendors selling all types of food with various colorful, loud banners and makeshift fly swatters. We drank mango shakes, ate up kwek kwek and picked at chicken isaw while we sat under the dim street lights.

Normally, street food was off limits due to my (rather weak) stomach being unfamiliar with the Philippines. However, that night, I guess we didn't care. The kwek kwek, fried quail eggs, were skewered and served in a clear plastic cup with vinegar at the bottom.

Mango shakes were made fresh with the sweetest, juiciest mangos I have ever consumed. Chicken isaw, grilled chicken intestine, was served on a stick and is known as one of the Philippines' most iconic street foods.

I only nibbled on the food due to my fear of getting a stomachache, but my boyfriend finished everything off for me. Despite it being my first time trying an animal intestine, it was not bad at all. If anything, it was simply the texture that was a bit interesting. The kwek kwek was also good and, to be honest, really just tasted like a fried hard-boiled egg.

A new perspective

Most food in the Philippines was rather intimidating. I didn't grow up eating balut or ikaw — it was foreign to me and was even spoken poorly of by some people around me. Yet, it feels incredibly unfair to judge cultural food plainly because it's outside of someone's normal, which is why I went in with an open mind.

While the Philippines has vendors everywhere, it also has Jollibee.

Jollibee, a popular fast-food restaurant, is a staple for Filipinos. With its fried chicken legs, sweet spaghetti, mango pies and pineapple juice, the fast-food chain is scattered throughout the Philippines. One could say it's like McDonald's to the U.S., but McDonald's was equally as popular and even open at all times.

As much as I love that little bee mascot, toward the end of my trip, I started having beef with Jollibee. Or rather, it started beef with me... in my stomach. I won't get into the details, but I'll say this: I don't think I can have another Yumburger with cheese again.

McDonald's or "McDo" (as they call it) was also an interesting experience in a different country. While fries were still a staple, most meals were presented as fried chicken legs with rice and gravy, or even spaghetti. I noticed chicken legs are a beloved food over there.

Another popular chain is Mang Inasal, which serves huge marinated chicken legs, palabok, pork barbeque, sinigang, halo-halo AND unlimited rice. People actually walked around with large tubs of rice, waiting for someone to want more. My boyfriend's dad said American meals are just snacks to Filipinos, so I should prepare to come back to the states with a fuller stomach.

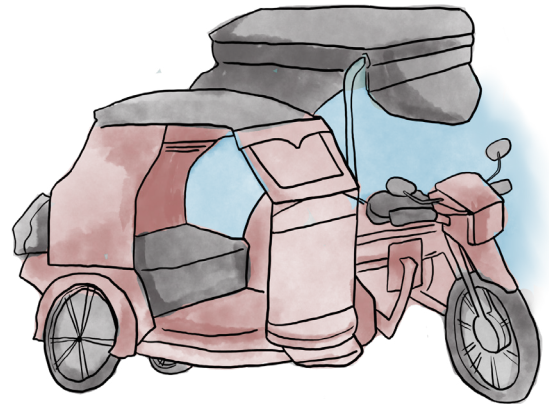
The people I was around definitely ate much more than I did, but through observation, I learned the true technique of using a spoon and a fork simultaneously. I still can't do it without dropping my spoon, but just about everyone in the Philippines eats with a fork in one hand and a spoon in the other, and neither is put down until they finish their food. It impressed me every time. When a spoon and fork were not used, people often ate with their hands. Normally, a scoop of rice and whatever food they were eating was bundled at the tips of their fingers.

It was truly amazing to be immersed in the environment. Sure, I visited many touristy places such as Boracay and Cebu (which were beautiful), but it was in Concepcion where I experienced the most.

I don't come from a large family, so being around so many aunts, uncles and cousins was new for me. I felt as if I were a part of the family there. My boyfriend's mom braided my hair, aunts cooked me eggs and everyone was always smiling and greeting me with such kindness. Even toward the end of my trip when I became sick, I was taken care of.

I left with five packs of Beng Beng, lots of Milo, bags on bags of Mang Juan and a profound love for calamansi juice. I also left with an entirely new perspective and palate for food and culture. I know I will be back sometime, but for now, I will continue to reminisce on all the ups and downs of my three weeks away from Arizona.

And next time, I will *NOT* drink any water that is not bottled.



NARRATIVE

The ties that define a water sport

A reflection on the Nagorno-Karabakh war and its lasting effects

By Sona Gevorgyan

Illustrations by Claire Chilton

Every weekend, a woman in her early 40s with long, dark curls wearing a flowy black dress visits her son's gravesite. Her husband quietly follows her like a shadow. He carries a small pillow with him, setting it right next to the tombstone when they arrive. The woman kneels, and as soon as her knees hit the pillow's softness, she lets out a small sob.

Her heartache has become a permanent companion. Occasionally, her husband takes out a cigarette from his pocket and lights it. Sometimes, he stands closer to his wife and tightly holds her hand. Other times, he gives his wife space, silently watching her cry from afar.

Together, they grieve for their son, Henrik Hakobyan. They lost him when he was only 18 after they sent him to protect their motherland in a war that started decades ago, long before he came into the world. It was a narrative he never asked to be a part of, but was born into just like every other Armenian. As a nation, we lost many like Henrik.

His father, who was also his coach,

shared countless stories about how water polo brought them closer together. Watching his son compete filled him with pride, moments that he will forever hold in his heart, but can only relive in his memories. "Henrik was my backbone," his father said during one of our visits after his death. I remember his voice breaking as he tried to light another cigarette.

I often go back to Henrik's story. My interactions with him were limited. We attended the same high school, one grade apart. I got to know him through the stories his parents and close friends shared after his death. Most stories involved his ambitions of playing water polo and competing in the Olympics one day.

The 2020 Artsakh War divided my world forever. Now, there is only a before and an after. It seemed unfair to move on from the tragedy my country had experienced. I frequently found myself feeling guilty for tiny moments of happiness. However, hearing about how Henrik lived his life as a young man inspired me to find a sense of peace in whatever I did. There was no more living in the

past, only moving forward.

The way Henrik's father spoke about his son's passion for the water sport always stuck with me. Eventually, it led me to the Mona Plummer Aquatic Center, where the ASU women's water polo team holds its weekly practice.

Elements of the game

The sun's strong rays burned my cheeks as I stood waiting for teammates Zoe Frangieh, a senior studying business data analytics and supply chain management, and Kat Featherstone, a junior studying speech and hearing science, to finish practice and get out of the water. The smell of chlorine singed my nostrils. A few minutes later, Coach Petra Pardi blew her whistle. One by one, the players slowly emerged from the pool and headed back to their lockers.

Zoe and Kat walked toward me, water dripping down their blue swimsuits — and not a single towel in sight. They both insisted we proceed with our conversation, even after I offered to wait for them to dry off.

ACTIVE

“We are used to the cold,” they said. The goosebumps on their arms and their constant shivering said otherwise. At a young age, they quickly transitioned from swimming to water polo.

Zoe, with brown eyes and hazelnut hair, first pursued the sport in middle school, which is late compared to her peers. She found this challenging, but leaned on them for support.

“I enjoy being a part of a team. You have people to fall back on if you make a mistake, and I just really appreciate being in a group setting,” she said.

Petra reiterated this, saying the team has “a sense of togetherness.” She then immediately tried to find some wood to knock on, hoping to prevent jinxing herself. She explained that in many cultures, like her Hungarian and my Armenian, knocking on wood was a way to ask the spirits in the trees for good luck.

In its earlier stages, water polo games were aggressively played and resembled an underwater wrestling match. Over time, rules evolved, brutality shifted and the sport became all about skill, speed and tactics.

Initially starting in Great Britain, the sport spread throughout Europe and eventually made its way to the

United States in 1888. Since then, approximately 500 water polo teams have emerged across the nation, including 66 women’s programs sponsored by the NCAA as of late 2022. Although the sport has been a part of the Olympics since 1900, it wasn’t until 2000 that a women’s team was introduced.

Like any new sport, water polo can be stressful for a first-time player. Zoe said she joined the team feeling unprepared. “It took a lot of hard work and a lot of getting yelled at constantly, always doing the wrong thing until you finally started getting it right,” she said.

Kat, on the other hand, grew up participating in Canada’s national teams. “I had a little bit of a better expectation coming in of what to expect for a college environment,” she said, her eyes a fierce blue, pool water dripping down her blonde hair.

Zoe said her biggest challenge this year was learning how to handle stress during games. “I was wildly unprepared to play as much as I did and I really let the pressure get to me,” Zoe said. “I’ve definitely grown to be able to put a lot of the worry and the pressure aside ... It’s about trying to play in the moment and enjoy it.”

The sport has taught them both a lot, not only as student athletes, but also

as individuals. Relying on teammates and communicating with one another is imperative to the sport. There is no “hero of a game,” and “everybody should be equally putting in effort, equally participating, equally sharing the win or the loss,” Zoe said.

Petra said that she has witnessed Kat and Zoe maintain a positive attitude despite the challenges the sport creates, believing they have stayed committed and understand progress doesn’t happen overnight.

“And now both of them are really flourishing, which makes me happy to see,” Petra said.

More than anything, Petra hopes her athletes walk away with lasting memories and friendships, growing from the environment and culture they were a part of. She emphasized that what matters most to her is the kind of women her athletes will become and the bonds they will hold in the future.

It’s not just about the seven players in the water — it’s all 22 team members — along with the coaches and staff — who support the team behind the scenes.

I couldn’t help but think that Henrik and his dad were a little team of their own. While his father coached, Henrik ensured everyone on the team felt included.

Familial bonds

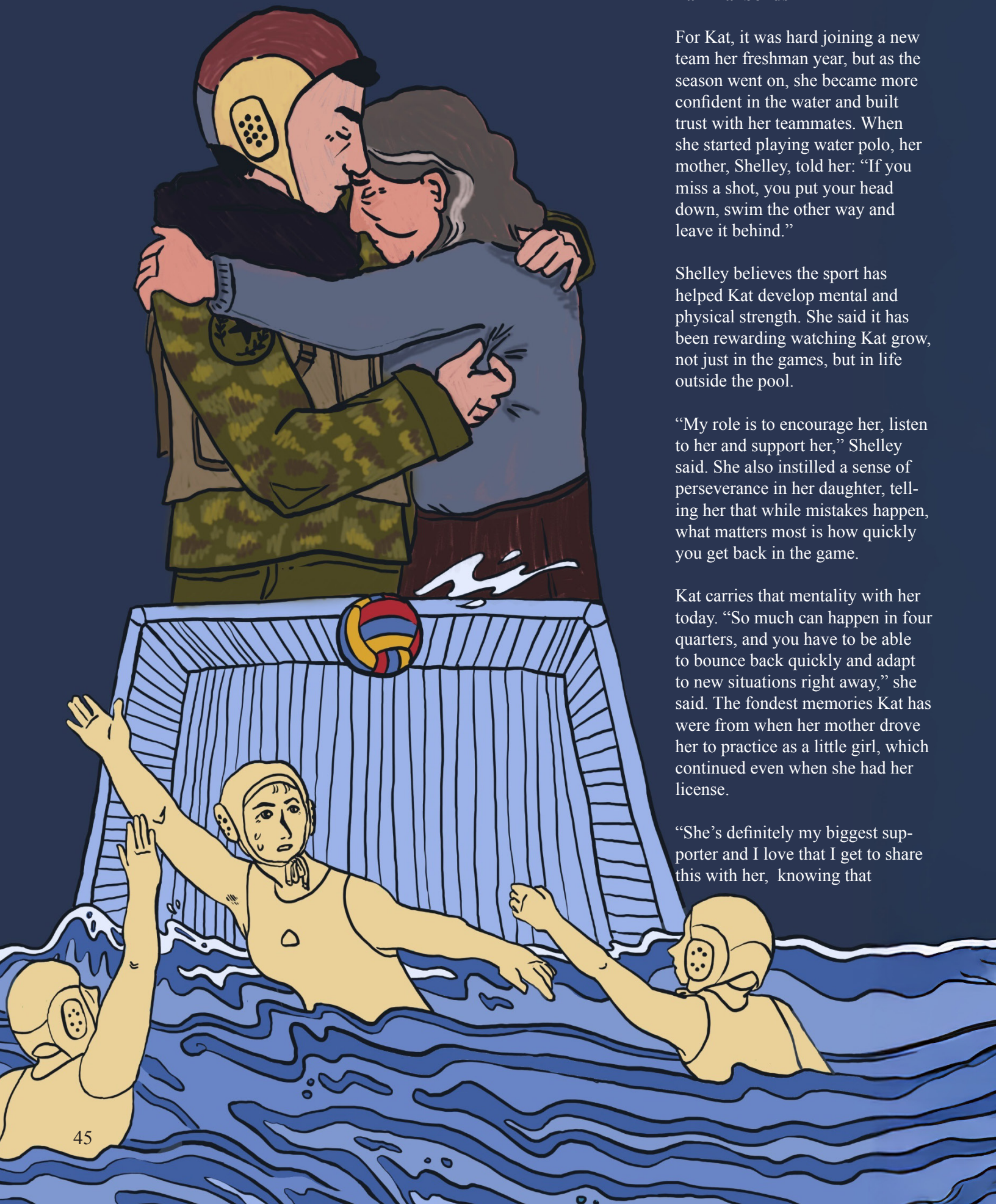
For Kat, it was hard joining a new team her freshman year, but as the season went on, she became more confident in the water and built trust with her teammates. When she started playing water polo, her mother, Shelley, told her: “If you miss a shot, you put your head down, swim the other way and leave it behind.”

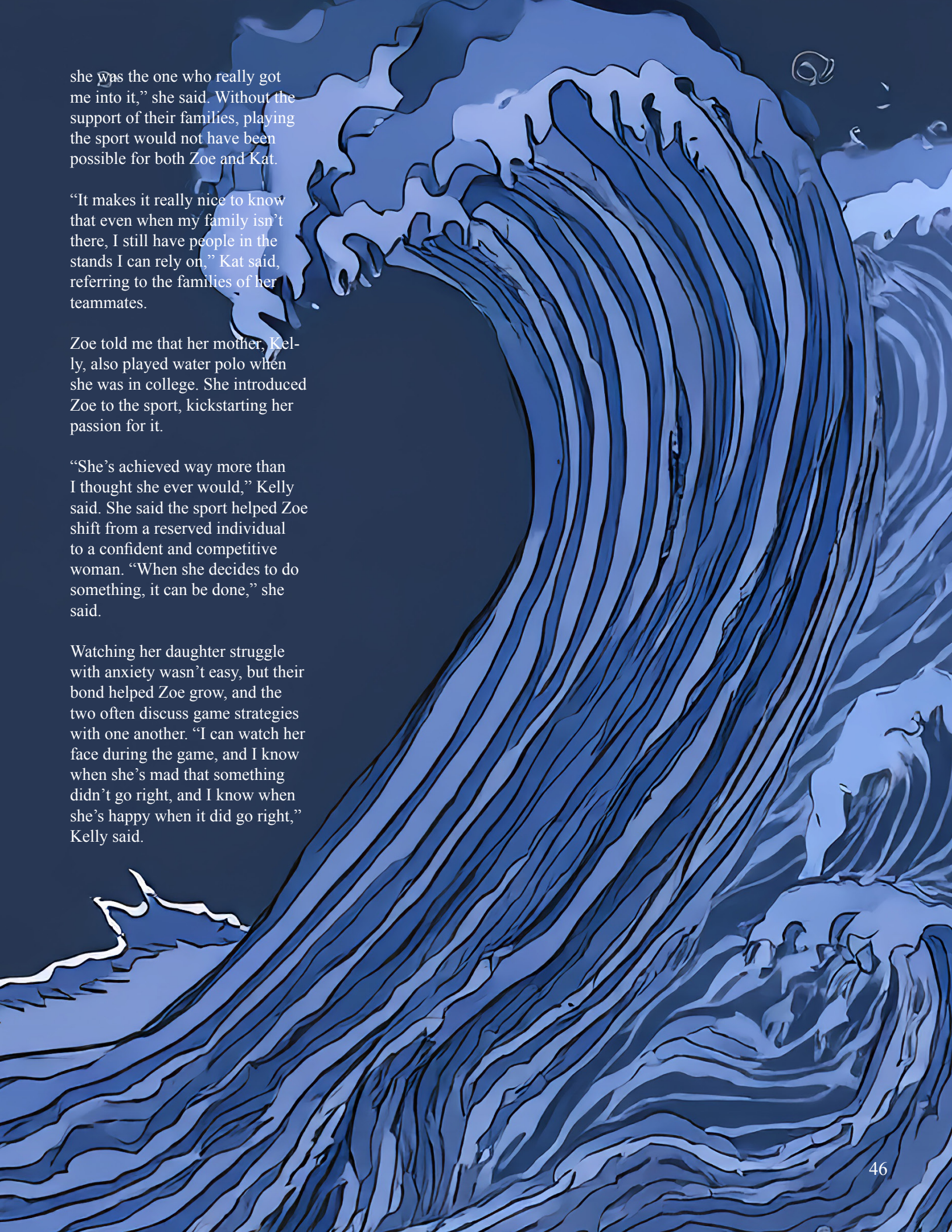
Shelley believes the sport has helped Kat develop mental and physical strength. She said it has been rewarding watching Kat grow, not just in the games, but in life outside the pool.

“My role is to encourage her, listen to her and support her,” Shelley said. She also instilled a sense of perseverance in her daughter, telling her that while mistakes happen, what matters most is how quickly you get back in the game.

Kat carries that mentality with her today. “So much can happen in four quarters, and you have to be able to bounce back quickly and adapt to new situations right away,” she said. The fondest memories Kat has were from when her mother drove her to practice as a little girl, which continued even when she had her license.

“She’s definitely my biggest supporter and I love that I get to share this with her, knowing that





she was the one who really got me into it,” she said. Without the support of their families, playing the sport would not have been possible for both Zoe and Kat.

“It makes it really nice to know that even when my family isn’t there, I still have people in the stands I can rely on,” Kat said, referring to the families of her teammates.

Zoe told me that her mother, Kelly, also played water polo when she was in college. She introduced Zoe to the sport, kickstarting her passion for it.

“She’s achieved way more than I thought she ever would,” Kelly said. She said the sport helped Zoe shift from a reserved individual to a confident and competitive woman. “When she decides to do something, it can be done,” she said.

Watching her daughter struggle with anxiety wasn’t easy, but their bond helped Zoe grow, and the two often discuss game strategies with one another. “I can watch her face during the game, and I know when she’s mad that something didn’t go right, and I know when she’s happy when it did go right,” Kelly said.

I thought about how, unlike Kelly, Henrik's dad wouldn't experience those moments again. I remember we sat by the pool in the early morning sun together right after he passed. "He was my best friend. I could trust him with anything," he said.

He had blown through almost an entire pack of cigarettes five minutes into our conversation that day. The smoke felt like it was burning my lungs. I held back tears and so did he. The only time his face broke into a smile was when he spoke about Henrik's sense of humor.

A splash of hope

After the war, Armenians lost hope. Throughout history, hope was what kept our nation together, no matter what we had endured. A nation that had survived a genocide and countless brutal regimes before gaining independence was now more divided than ever before.

Among land and many other things, we lost a generation of young men. Today, these men could have been artists, doctors, athletes or anything they once dreamed of becoming. Their dreams died, and along with them, the dreams of their families died too.

None of us are the same people we

once were. Everybody knows someone who has lost a friend, a son, a husband or a relative. Worries of new wars and more losses are constantly with us. We drown in waves of fear and trauma, and sometimes even a splash of hope seems too good to be true.

One evening, after a long day at my new job, I walked to the bus stop on my route home. Drained and exhausted, I asked the universe for a sign. Could the uncertainties and chaos happening to our nation have a meaning? Would these losses make sense to us one day?

The universe answered. Right before I reached the bus stop, almost like a calling, I saw a mural portrait of Henrik. I blinked a couple of times in disbelief at what was in front of me. Goosebumps covered my entire body, and I broke down right in the middle of the street. I kneeled on the ground, just like Henrik's mother does when she visits her son's resting place. I was too afraid to get any closer to the portrait, afraid that if I did, my eyes would betray me and the artwork would disappear.

After 2020, mural portraits of young men like Henrik appeared on many buildings and bridges in Armenia's capital, Yerevan. The artists behind these paintings wanted to ensure that

these young men and the sacrifices they made for our nation would never be forgotten. This way, their presence was among our people forever. Stories of war follow me around all the time, or maybe I choose to follow them. They have become my companions.

Every year on Henrik's birthday, his family comes together and hosts a water polo competition in his honor. I found myself grieving him and wondering what he could have achieved if he hadn't been sent to war.

But Kat and Zoe's stories reminded me of the lasting impact the sport has in bringing people together, just like it continues to bring Henrik's loved ones together after all this time.

In the past couple of years, the Armenian government has started offering support to parents who lost their sons, offering resources to help them conceive again.

A few months ago, I came across a video made about Henrik's parents. I watched, overjoyed, seeing little Robert "Henrik" Hakobyan calmly asleep in his mother's arms. Maybe a new water polo player would rise again. Until then, I could only hope that the little one stayed just as he was in that moment — safe and sound.

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An odd pairing: The ‘friendship’ that built ASU Gammage

Frank Lloyd Wright and Grady Gammage collaborated to create one of the University’s most iconic buildings, but their relationship remains relatively unnoticed.

By George Headley

Illustrations by Paulina Soto

Photo credits University Archives





FIRST BALCONY
(GRAND TIER)
14844

The president's son playing with blocks — an intense coffee shop conversation — No. 1 in name changing — an amusing relationship — a haunted house tour — Greater Baghdad — flicking dirt and pebbles — an honorary degree — two deaths, one year.

Frank Lloyd Wright, the renowned architect whose artistry spans from New York to Tokyo, arrived at a humble, two-story home in Tempe.

Its brick exterior and neutral color palette leave a comfort to the average visitor, and its interior, like any other home from that period, was a little crowded — a cozy home with a small porch and creaky floorboards. However, its backyard is something unique to the Gammage family: the beginnings of Arizona State University.

Wright was planning to meet with Grady Gammage, the former president of ASU from 1933 to 1959. While Wright waited on the first floor, Grady Gammage Jr. was playing with his toy blocks near

the famed designer. He observed the president's son and the decisions he made with the objects he held with enjoyment. Gammage finally trotted down the stairs.

"Wright turns to him and says, 'I've been watching your son, and your son will never be an architect,'" Gammage Jr. told me as we sat together at a Cartel Roasting Co. in Phoenix.

The former president's son is an intense man. We met on a Wednesday morning to talk about the relationship between Wright and his father, one that is physically represented by the prominent Gammage Auditorium. While he doesn't remember the interaction — he did become an architect later on in his life — he enjoys sharing it.

"Here's the stories I've been told that I believe have a kernel of truth," he said.

He's someone who isn't defined by his age, with a very energetic voice and an impressive memory. He remembers his father fondly as a distinguished "headmaster" of the teacher's school, which was known as "Arizona State College" at the time.

"He was older than my friends' fathers and he was always more dressed up than my friends' fathers," Gammage Jr. said. "I knew he was

different, and I knew he was kind of a boss of everybody around us, because we lived on campus."

Transforming the school from a teacher's college to a state university was challenging for former President Gammage. Much like how President Michael Crow's career at ASU is represented by a transition from the epitome of party culture to "No. 1 in innovation," Gammage's career is emblematic in the school's name change from "Arizona State College" to "Arizona State University."

He led the University toward being a college that offered undergraduate degrees and a competitive athletics program, expanding the school even before the approval of Proposition 200 in 1958, which solidified the name change. He was, if anything, one of the most influential figures in Arizona history.

Wright, however, was one for amusement.

"I am not insensible of the compliment you pay me by asking me to deliver the graduation address at your admirable little college," Wright wrote in a letter in April 1954 acquired from the Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library's Wright Correspondence from 1885 to 1965 from Columbia University. "But I must be in New York May 7th, Chicago May 17th, the Franklin Institute (gold medal) soon after, Yale University soon after."

Wright and Gammage were an unlikely pair. One was an architect with a fairly eccentric personality and the other a distinguished headmaster with a love for education. If there was a similarity between them, it would be their interest in Arizona's development.

Growing up, Gammage learned how "to be handy with farm





implements and building tools” out of necessity, according to his biography “Grady Gammage: ASU’s Man of Vision,” written by Dean Smith in 1989.

“He found ways to repair everything from harnesses to farm buildings,” Smith wrote. “His fascination with construction techniques stayed with him all his life, and in later years, he was never happier than when he could steal a few moments to watch workmen as they labored on campus building projects.”

Unexpected companionship

“Frank Lloyd Wright regarded Gammage as an acceptable, intellectual companion,” Evan Senat, a graduate student studying sustainable tourism, said. “So there were people that weren’t at their level, in the sense where they felt like they could not connect.”

Senat is the operations coordinator at the Virginia G. Piper Center for Creative Writing — the home near Old Main that was once the Gammage household — where students can stay for open hours to study or take part in creative writing workshops and classes.

She walked me through the house on a Tuesday, lecturing me on the rooms and the history that breathes in them. Her job includes providing tours and making sure the house remains pristine. She also told me

she enjoys retelling the myth about the house being haunted by Gammage’s first wife, Dixie Gammage, who died in their home in 1948.

She spoke with me about how Gammage Jr. almost caught the house aflame while burning ants with a magnifying glass in the attic.

“I didn’t get in all that much trouble for it, because I was the president’s kid,” Gammage Jr. told me.

She also told me about the architect and Gammage’s friendship, referring to Gammage’s biography. Smith’s book was published in 1989, drawing from interviews with Gammage’s family and friends.

“When they did come in contact with each other, it seemed like Grady Gammage was, I don’t want to say, putting up with, but kind of listening to Wright’s criticisms of ASU’s previous architecture,” Senat said.

While it’s unclear when Wright and Gammage first met, Wright first arrived in Arizona in the late 1920s’ when he worked on the unfinished San Marcos-in-the-Desert resort. That same year, he married Olgivanna Lazovich, who was the daughter of a justice in Montenegro, according to the Frank Lloyd Wright

Foundation.

“Mrs. Wright was this kind of strange, spooky character,” Gammage Jr. said. “She had a very thick Russian accent, and we would go out there and she would speak in these hushed elements, everyone would have to sit in silence, and act kind of reverential and I remember as a little kid thinking, ‘This is weird.’”

The origins of ASU Gammage

The auditorium, an idea that blossomed in Wright’s and Gammage’s imaginations as a grand presentation of the arts for the Valley, was a struggle for both innovators. Ultimately, the cast of characters who pushed for the construction of the auditorium, both before and after their lives, was the reason it became a reality.

There were challenges with getting the design approved on the legislative side. I was invited into the Tempe History Museum to gather documents and read through the museum’s accounts of the auditorium’s construction. I was welcomed by its history curator, Jared Smith — an eager individual whose company I appreciated.

Wright did not have the best relationship with Arizona politics.

He was originally dismissed for attempting to design a new state capitol, which he nicknamed "Oasis." His plan was shot down in "a violent outcry," according to the Arizona Republic in 1964.

Wright considered Arizona his adopted state. In his entire architectural career, Wright constructed a church, a resort and several estates for the area. Even with such developments, he still felt he could contribute more.

According to the Arizona Republic, he would later exclaim, "In all my efforts, I have never done anything for the people whose community I have enjoyed for twenty-five years."

His interest in building an opera house started when Lewis Ruskin and Walter Bimson asked him if he would be willing to offer an initial fee for the project, as reported by the Arizona Republic. Ruskin was the chairman of the Committee on Cultural Affairs at the University, as well as a retired businessman. Bimson was a banker, helming the Valley National Bank through the Great Depression.

While at a gathering in Bimson's home, Ruskin asked Wright if he was interested in building the auditorium. Wright, after his own experiences with political pushback, waited a bit to answer — 100 seconds in fact.

"They'll never build it," he said.
"They've got no use for me here."

Ruskin debated with him and later asked whether Bimson's involvement in the project would change his mind, who was a colleague of the designer. The Arizona Republic reported that Wright finally considered joining the team.

Gammage arrived at Wright's home, Taliesin West, to speak with him about taking on the role as the building's lead architect — the only catch was that Gammage couldn't pay him.

The estate, made of rigid lines and

wonderfully crafted glassware, sits near a desert hill, with a gigantic interior room and studio where Wright and his fellowship could operate. Gammage and Wright spoke for a bit, detailing the operation and the president's pitch. Finally, Gammage said goodbye.

After the conversation, Wright went to his wife, Olgivanna. She remembered the interaction fairly well as she spoke about it at one of the auditorium's opening events, according to the University Archives at ASU Library.

"Olgivanna, there is a very nice fellow, the President of a University, Grady Gammage, who asked me to design a building," Wright said. "But he has no money."

"Well," Olgivanna said. "But how are you going to do anything about it?"

"I don't know, I don't know," he replied. "It is very tempting ... such a nice fellow."

Wright was hesitant of such a large persuasion from Ruskin, Bimson and Gammage, sometimes going to his wife to contemplate his decision. However, after much thought — as if all the pieces lay right into place for him to take the gamble — the pressure got to him.

"I have faith in that man," he said. "I think he'll do it. I don't usually do this. I don't break my ethics by designing without any guarantee whatsoever, but I am going to do it."

Gammage and Wright finally collaborated in 1957, putting together the designs and preparing for the auditorium's eventual construction.

He agreed to use a design he originally had for King Faisal II from Baghdad, Iraq, according to WNYC. Faisal was killed during the July 14 Revolution in 1958, which left the plans open for use elsewhere.

Gammage and Wright walked around

the campus looking for a spot where they could begin construction for the opera house. After much strolling, they decided on the athletic field, according to ASU Gammage.

"I believe this is the site," Wright had said. "The structure should be circular in design and yes, with outstretched arms, saying 'Welcome to ASU!'"

While visiting the area, Wright was documented wearing a "navy blue cape and carrying a cane," as recalled by James W. Creasman, the former Alumni Association Secretary at Arizona State College, in Gammage's bibliography.

"I couldn't help but notice that Mr. Wright kept flicking dirt and pebbles with his cane onto Dr. Gammage's shined shoes, but Dr. Gammage never seemed to notice," Creasman said to Dean Smith.

Wright would often invite Gammage and his family to his estate. On one occasion, Wright offered to send a Bentley to retrieve Gammage from his office, according to a letter acquired from the Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library's Wright Correspondence from 1885 to 1965 from Columbia University. Gammage Jr. remembers the place in an indifferent light, claiming it seemed almost like a "cult."

Wright was involved in several cases of controversy, such as with the Taliesin Fellowship, where apprentices of the architect were influenced to participate in challenges set forth by Olgivanna. She was an apprentice to a Greek-Armenian mystic named George Gurdjieff, whose sacred practices were applied at the fellowship, according to "The Fellowship: The Untold Story of Frank Lloyd Wright and the Taliesin Fellowship."

But Wright came from a place of tragedy. In 1914, Wright was in Chicago when a mass murder at his first Taliesin estate in Wisconsin

took his first family. A waiter of the home set fire to Wright's property, murdering seven, including his six children and his mistress Martha Borthwich, according to the Public Broadcasting Service.

After legislative pushback on the initial design of the auditorium due to Wright's increasing budget, he never saw the design get its approval.

On April 4, 1959, Gammage and the faculty Committee on Honorary Degrees recommended Wright to receive an honorary degree from ASU in June, according to a letter acquired from the Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library's Wright Correspondence from 1885 to 1965 from Columbia University. The New York Times reported that Wright died from surgical complications on April 9 of the same year, five days after Gammage sent his letter.

Wright's protégé, William Wesley Peters, took up the project alongside the Wright Foundation and the Taliesin Associated Architects after the architect's death, working on it until its completion.

Months later, on Dec. 12, Ruskin and Bimson presented the plans to the Arizona Board of Regents, which saw heavy criticism and "the view that the auditorium was needed was not debated, but the Wright design was not viewed with unanimous approval," according to the Arizona Republic.

A few weeks later, Gammage spoke with Ruskin about having to alter the budget for the auditorium to "a lower figure than he had hoped," as reported by the Arizona Republic.

Gammage, struck with legislative pushback for both the auditorium and attempting to put up a medical building on campus, was reported by Dean Smith to seem "unwilling to leave his office."

"He walked along the corridor looking into each room as if he had some special reason," Ruskin said to the Arizona Republic in 1964. "At the parking lot, we talked more about the planning and he said, 'If there were only some way.' He broke off the sentence and concluded, instead, 'I guess I'm tired.'"

The next day, nearly nine months after Wright's death, Gammage died of a heart attack in his home on Dec. 22.

The two men — whose contributions to the project and their desire to leave a lasting impact on the state were monumental — passed, not knowing if the auditorium would ever grace the Valley.

What became of the auditorium

G. Homer Durham, the successor of Gammage, took on the project and secured ABOR's approval for the auditorium in 1961.

The first shovel was put in the dirt for the site by Gammage Jr. in 1962, according to ASU Gammage. He was around 10 at the time and was accompanied by his mom, Katherine Gammage, and Olgivanna. However, the former president's son was made aware of a classmate's party beforehand.

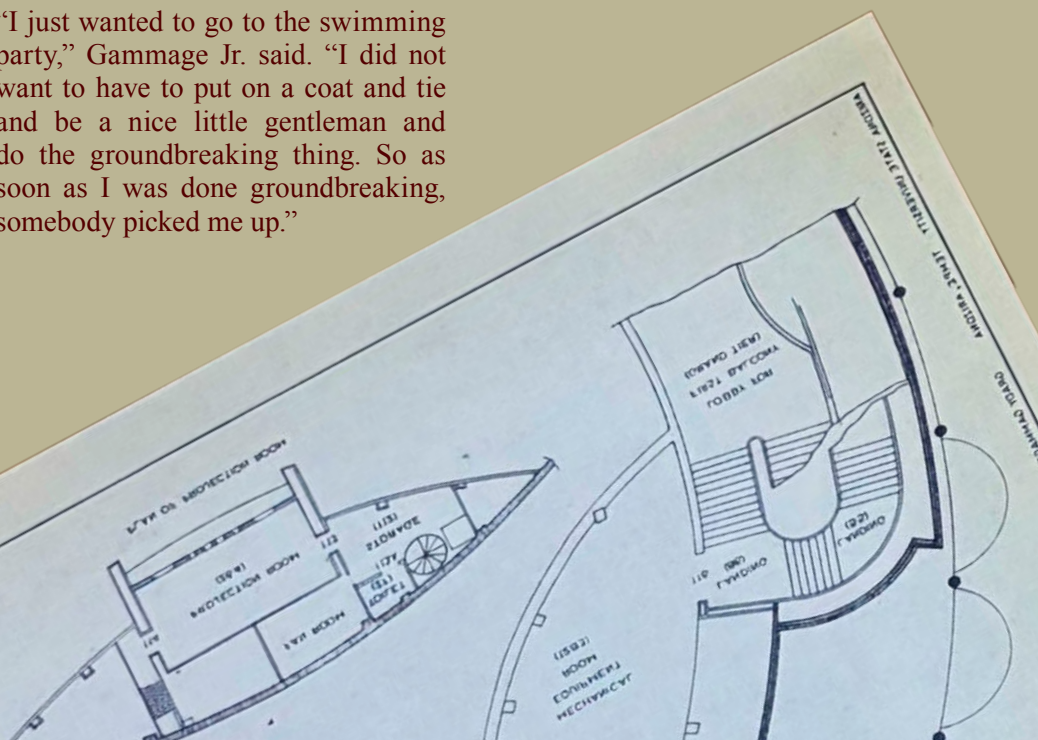
"I just wanted to go to the swimming party," Gammage Jr. said. "I did not want to have to put on a coat and tie and be a nice little gentleman and do the groundbreaking thing. So as soon as I was done groundbreaking, somebody picked me up."

Gammage Jr. and his mom still visited Taliesin West to meet with Olgivanna. The two widows connected strongly due to their husbands' friendship and their untimely deaths in the same year. Olgivanna would also helm the Taliesin Fellowship after Wright's death and preserve his reputation through the Wright Foundation.

"Wright and my father were friends to the extent that Wright had friends," Gammage Jr. said. "Wright was notoriously arrogant, very proud of his genius, and he was a genius."

At the auditorium's opening on Sept. 18, 1964, Katherine cited several lines of poetry from Robert Frost — those of which she said are engraved on her heart as she spoke of the "two wonderful men" who "were big enough to meet the challenge of their day," according to the University Archives at ASU Library

"The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
And I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep."



REPORT

The strands that shape identity

ASU community members describe their distinctive hair journeys and their significance

By Bella Keenan

Photos by Madison Koehler

Hair doesn't mean anything to me (now). It used to define me and control my self-image. I had dirty blonde hair that I loved so much as a child. Then... it was all gone.

In 2016, I was diagnosed with leukemia. As a 10-year-old kid, I didn't know what it was or the effect it would have on me for the rest of my life. I was less concerned about surviving and more concerned about losing my hair. It was my identity, and what felt like my only feminine trait.

Not only did I lose my hair, but I lost my self-confidence and self-worth as well. When people recommended I shave my head, I said "no." I was not going to give up on keeping it. I still had hope that the chemotherapy would magically not affect my hair. Unfortunately, that was not the case.

While my body was undergoing severe treatment, my hair slowly started falling out. Strand by strand, I saw my identity everywhere but on my head. Eight months in, I was hairless. It brought me back to my childhood when I was bald until I was three. By fate or not, this was the second time I had no hair.

Since I didn't change the way I dressed and my mannerisms remained the same, I was often mistaken for a boy. This upset me internally, but I understand now that it wasn't intentional.

It took my hair three years to grow back to its original length. Although

this time, it was brown and curly. The straight, golden brown hair I previously had was nowhere to be seen. Since hair growth is gradual, there wasn't one day when I felt completely relieved that it had all grown back. The hair acceptance process came even slower than its growth.

Most importantly, I wanted to put the cancer diagnosis behind me and live my life. With little to no hair, there was no way that would have been possible.

Fast forward seven years, and I was a junior in high school. My hair no longer meant as much to me, and quite frankly, I was tired of brushing it every day. I had also highlighted it a year prior, so streaks of blonde were still visible.

A photo of Halsey with short hair inspired me to cut mine off and donate it to childhood cancer patients. Just like that, it was gone again — but this time, at my own will. I had given my hair so much power that when I cut it off, I was able to give the power back to myself.

Hair is unique because every individual has their own unique experience with it. It can be a cultural, religious or personal choice. While it may not define me anymore, it can surely be a part of others' identities.

Cultural effects

For Nana Essel, a junior studying medical studies who is originally from Ghana, her black coils shine in their natural state.

"[My hair] is me and how I want to present myself naturally," she said.

Despite choosing to have an afro, her family members stigmatized the hairstyle, saying, "If your hair's not done, you don't look professional," Essel said. "You don't look put together."

She was inspired to wear an afro in 2018 after seeing people on social media with the same hairstyle. Even with her parents' doubts, Essel still cut her permed hair off.

"I felt like that time was a way to express [my] freedom," Essel said.

Her family's beliefs about natural hair come from Ghanaian societal norms.

"In Ghanaian schools, a lot of them have you cut your hair," Essel said. "There's not really a lot of freedom to express your hair in school, because they see that as a distraction."

Many outside of Essel's family see hair as beautiful.

"I went to church with my afro last week, and a lot of the aunties said, 'Oh, I like your hair,'" Essel said. "I was not expecting it at all."

Individuality and uniqueness is something stylist Twana Taylor, who works at 1027 Hair Lounge in Downtown Phoenix, embraces. She is familiar with many hair textures, cuts and colors.





“You have Asian [people] who want waves,” Taylor said. “You have African American women who want blonde hair. You have Hispanic [people] who want curls. Everybody is adopting something different, and I’m all for it. I love it.”

Taylor spends her work days listening to rhythm and blues while locing clients’ hair. As a self-proclaimed “loctician,” Taylor has been locing hair for 18 years. After starting her career in home and health care, she transitioned to full-time locing when a salon noticed her work on their client’s hair.



“Change was terrifying for me,” Taylor said. “To jump out of the window with a leap of faith and go into the salon, I thought, ‘You have nothing else to lose because you’re working without getting paid [from home and health care].’”

Taylor — who is originally from Chicago — moved to Phoenix at the end of 2023, leaving her with a variety of clients from all over the world. “I have clients from Africa, Alaska, Hawaii, and they’re all different races,” Taylor said. “I’m just grateful to be able to have the knowledge I already have, and be open to a broader clientele.”

With all hairstyles, Taylor emphasizes hair maintenance and health as a priority.



“We [as a society] sometimes focus more on beauty versus health,” Taylor said. “I’m a strong believer in a healthy scalp, healthy hair. I have no problem telling the client ‘no’ if it’s something I’m not comfortable with, or if it’s something I think is going to cause more harm than good down the line.”

Locs have a historical and personal significance. Historians have traced the oldest form of locs to 1800 BCE in India. They were also worn throughout Africa and ancient Egypt. More recently, they

were popularized globally by the Rastafarian religion in the mid-20th century and are considered by many as a symbol of self-expression that represents culture and individuality.

After working with many hairstyles throughout the years, Taylor said: “Whatever your decision is [with hair], that’s your decision. Don’t let anyone deter you from it. Don’t let anyone ask you why. You don’t have to answer anyone’s questions.”

Solène Seawright is a Spanish linguistics Ph.D. student from Pennsylvania who has wanted to cut all of her hair off since she was in middle school. After cutting it shorter during the pandemic, she decided to do it again before she moved to Phoenix in July.

“I wanted to do it when I came here, because no one else had a point of reference for my long hair before,” Seawright said. “This is who I am.”

Seawright was inspired by actresses like Danai Gurira and Lupita Nyong’o, who are both in the movie “Black Panther.”

“Anytime I saw a Black woman with their hair buzzed short, I was like, ‘She’s gorgeous.’”

Seawright decided to cut her hair around 2 a.m. one random night before her move. It was uneven, so she woke her husband up at 3 a.m. and asked him to buzz the rest of her hair off — finally fulfilling her childhood wish. “I just had to let it be,” Seawright said.

Now, she likes the sensation of feeling her soft, buzzed head.

“There’s no barrier between myself and the crown of my head. It’s just me being myself,” she said.

Seawright’s hair reflects her personal decisions along with a bigger cultural representation.

“My hair represents a sense of agency to go against the grain,” she said. “And especially for my ancestors, the people who came before me, who didn’t have the freedom to do what I do. I feel more connected to my culture with my haircut.”

Hair and individuality

Aiden Pintar, a sophomore studying astrophysics, keeps his light brown, slightly wavy hair, long enough to touch his lower back. It is noticeable to everyone who passes him.

Since he’s had it this way for five years, it is no longer apparent in his day-to-day life. “I just grow it out because I can’t bother to cut it,” Pintar said.

His mental health also affects how he keeps his hair.

“I don’t consciously use it to express myself,” Pintar said. “But depending on my mood and how I’m doing mentally, determines how well-kept my hair is at the time.”

According to Pintar, societal expectations may cause more men to have short hair. “I know a lot of other guys don’t grow out their hair because of cultural ideas of what hair length should be, depending on gender,” he said.

Catherine Buckley, a sophomore studying Japanese, has long, black and blonde braids as well as twists and locs meshed together to make her hair unique. The color, length and style are all ways she uses her hair to express herself. Buckley drew inspiration for her current style from an anime convention.

“It was based on ‘My Hero Academia,’ but it was specifically a fantasy thing,” Buckley said. “I was like, ‘Oh, barbarian, I kind of like that. How do I make it look pretty as well?’”

She first started experimenting with different hairstyles when she was 15 years old. Although her mom inspired different hairstyles for Buckley most of her life, her hair change was specifically influenced by classmates with braids.

“I was seeing other girls in my class wearing them, and I thought they were really nice. So I thought, ‘I kind of want that,’” Buckley said.

Buckley and her mom have built a stronger bond because her mom does her hair.

“Without her, I probably wouldn’t have the hair I have right now.”

Hayden New, a sophomore studying recreational therapy, also likes to be creative with her hair.

She has a bright fuchsia mullet that sits above her shoulders. About six times a year, she changes the color herself.

“Dying my hair is a fun process, it looks good, and it makes me feel happy,” New said.

She has been dying her hair since she was 10 and her liberty to express herself has been largely supported by her parents.

“When I was little, my parents always told me that I could do whatever I wanted with my hair,” New said.

From a buzz cut to bleached hair and everything in between, New constantly changes her look.

“Hair means being yourself,” New said. “It means nothing more than an aspect of your personality, an aspect of your physical representation of your personality. It’s just a form of showing the world who you are.”



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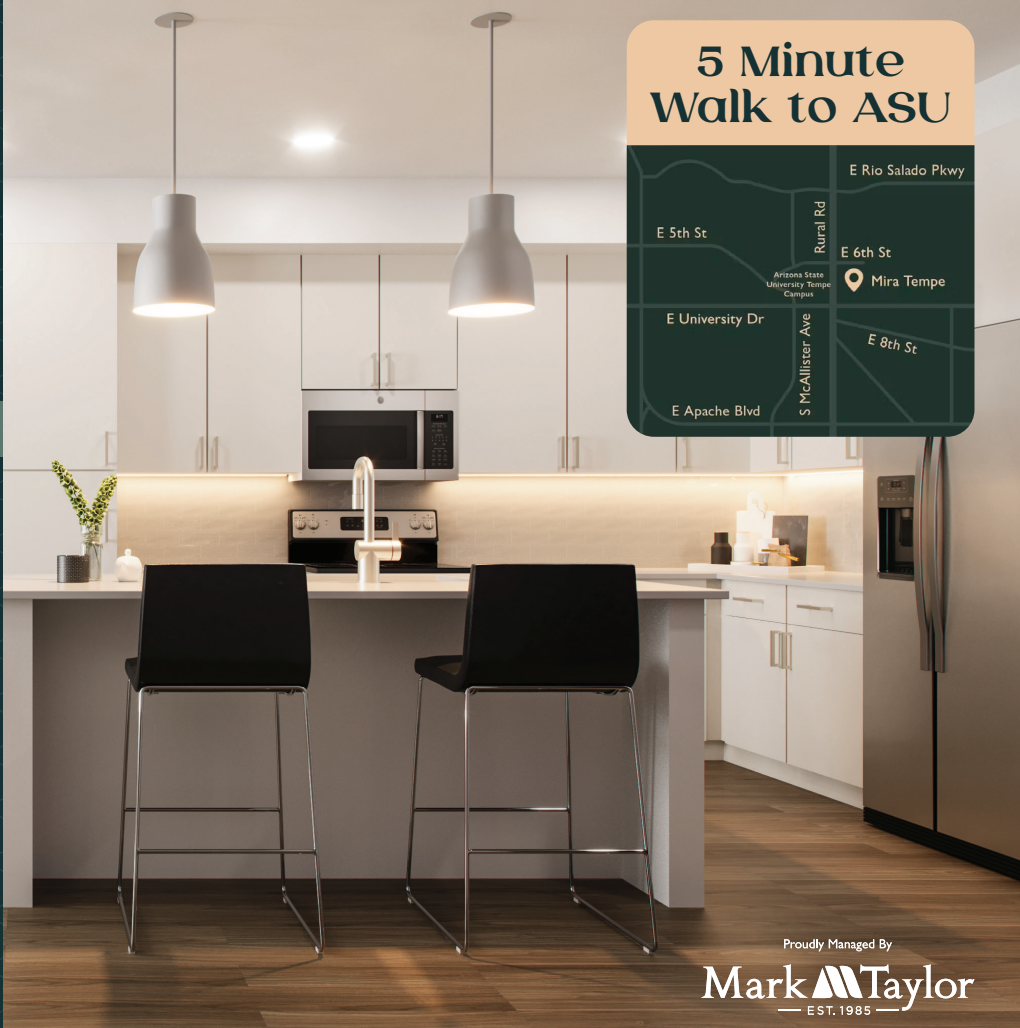
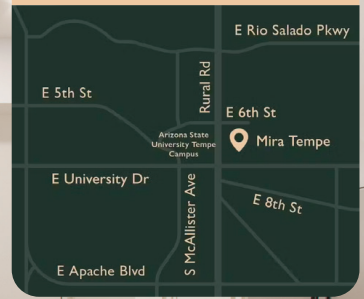
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