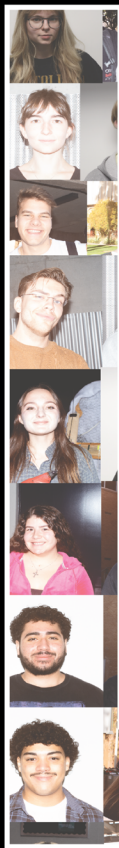
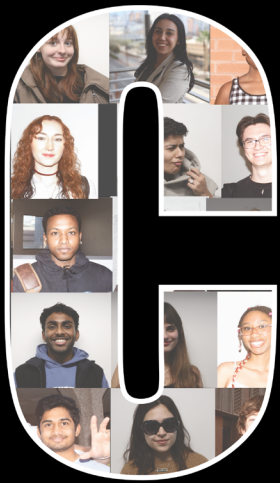


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Editor's letter


The pertinence of culture will remain constant and has throughout time, but the ways in which it is defined is ever-changing and ever-evolving, hence the reason the theme of culture has cemented itself as an SPM tradition. Culture is the lens through which we understand the world, or in this case, the ASU community.

In this issue, writers peered into spaces like the punk scene or off-campus comfort spots to better understand the culture that fosters them. Others poked at concepts that were cultivated by societal norms, like resiliency, New Year's resolutions, networking and what it means to be an eldest daughter. One writer wrote about a solo trip to Tanzania, while another grappled with their experience being forced to leave America. Finally, one writer satirizes the current college dating scene, and the SPM editors create comics surrounding their ethnicities.

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I'm not your mother

A look into the lives of eldest daughters

By Abigail Wilt

Photos by Ollie Slade

Illustration by Lilliana Lopez



A typical morning in my household growing up looked similar to an opening night of a mainstage theater production. I would walk past the bathroom to the sound of my sister belting an original song from the shower while the older of my two brothers was just around the corner asking me to help him finish his math homework. In the living room, my youngest brother was begging me to watch him do cartwheels. As the eldest daughter, I was the stage manager tasked with making sure everyone was where they needed to be and had what they needed.

“Matthew, I can’t watch you do cartwheels right now; Jon needs me to help him with his fractions. Give me five minutes.”

“Jon, all you have to do when you divide fractions is remember: keep, change, flip. Make sense?”

“Ella! I still need to shower. Can you get to the finale so we can make it to school on time?”

“Everyone, we have to be at the bus stop in 20 minutes!”

Eldest daughters everywhere are pillars for their younger siblings to stand on whether they accept the responsibility or not. While my mother was most definitely present and involved in our daily lives, I still felt the pressure to show up in ways a mother would.

My role in my family makes up a large part of who I am today. I’m not mature for my age because I have an old soul; I had the responsibilities of someone twice my age. I’m not a straight-A student because I’m smart; I can’t set a bad example for my siblings. I’m not organized because I like to be organized; people are always depending on me. At times, the weight on my shoulders was more than I could carry.

Seen and heard

Marriage and family therapist Kati Morton went viral on TikTok after she

posted a video identifying eight signs someone might have “eldest daughter syndrome”:

1. You feel an intense feeling of responsibility.
2. You’re an overachiever, type A and very driven.
3. You worry a lot and probably have anxiety.
4. You struggle with people-pleasing behaviors.
5. You have a hard time placing and upholding boundaries.
6. You resent your siblings and your family.
7. You struggle with feelings of guilt.
8. You have a difficult time in your adult relationships.

Morton clarifies that the video is not an official mental health diagnosis, but rather an explanation of the term.

Research around the connection between personality and sibling order is varied. Some studies show a positive correlation with birth order and I.Q. (older siblings have a slight advantage), but most research suggests that birth order has little to no effect on personality. However, the viral phenomenon has brought solace to eldest daughters who relate to each other through their shared experiences.

“Honestly, we do have a lot more anxiety, and we feel a lot of pressure like we need to be the best and take care of things for our family,” said Elizabeth Agazaryan, a graduate student studying sports journalism.

“I am 100% a people pleaser, and I don’t like it,” said Laynie Ben, a sophomore studying aerospace engineering astronautics. “I also feel like I am the type of person to be prepared, but overly prepared. Like, I’ve thought about all of the scenarios and I have a little anxiety tied in with that. I think that comes from having a weird dynamic at home.”

As a result of the eldest daughter trend, online spaces for eldest daughters have grown in popularity. Digital creator Sherri Lu founded the

online “Eldest Daughter Club” on Instagram and TikTok, and podcaster Kendra Austin hosts “Eldest Daughter” where she talks about intergenerational trauma.

Often, eldest daughters spend their time caring for others, overextending themselves and failing to receive the same care in return. Eldest daughters everywhere are searching for spaces where the difficulties of their shared experiences are seen and heard.

Existing as a girl in the world

Gender roles play a big part in shaping the experiences of an eldest daughter. Traditional expectations of femininity consist of household responsibilities like cooking, cleaning and childcare, and these tasks are often placed on daughters. While these traditional expectations have become less common, the effects trickle down.

“My father saw that it was a mother’s job to make babies and stay home,” Ben said. “I wanted to make rockets, [but] I didn’t really get a lot of support from my dad because it didn’t align with his vision [of traditional gender roles and expectations]. I try to separate [from] that so I don’t feel super connected to it, but I know it impacted me a lot.”

Andrea Lee, a freshman studying nursing, has a younger brother. Growing up, she felt an added pressure to succeed and set an example.

“You are the older sibling, so you are expected to know what is right and what is wrong and you’re just left with that pressure,” Lee said. “Especially coming from an Asian household, grades were a big thing, so I felt like I always needed to have my grades up, and if I didn’t, I felt like I would be disappointing my family.”

Lee also talked about the ways in which gender expectations coincide with cultural expectations in Asian households.



"In Asia ... girls are told [how to be] so I feel like I have to live by that as well," Lee said. "For example, girls can't be masculine, and they have to be good at cooking and good at cleaning and taking on more of a feminine role."

Keyon Owusu-Asante, a senior studying criminal justice, grew up in Ghana and the U.K. She is an older sister to her younger brother and sister. In her African household, she also faced cultural challenges when it came to being the eldest daughter, but it didn't stop her from pushing back.

"Being African, there are a lot of things you learn early on, like things about respect, how to speak and when to speak. For example, if my dad and brother and other men were in a room, I wasn't allowed to come into the room. Very weird rules like that.

"My brother is younger than me, so in my head I thought, 'Why is he allowed to be there and I'm not?' So I started trying to break the mold. Anywhere they said I couldn't go, I would go. My brother doesn't know how to cook, and

I tell him, 'You're going to starve and die because I'm not going to cook for you,'" Owusu-Asante said.

Despite Owusu-Asante's efforts to even the playing field, she still felt an added pressure she wouldn't have if she were an eldest son.

"I always tell my siblings that if I died and came back to Earth, I would either be an only sibling, or I wouldn't come back at all or be a boy," she said. "It's just easier to be a firstborn boy. When I was younger, it really affected me because girls were seen as secondary citizens."


Speaking up

It's hard to understand what it's like to be an eldest daughter if you're not one. "Eldest daughter" trends on social media offer a community of understanding and care for eldest daughters who might not have it in their daily lives. A strong exterior is not always an indicator of a happy interior. Sometimes, we need help even if we never ask for it.

"It's really, really a lot of pressure," Owusu-Asante said. "I think we all end up way better than anything our parents could expect because of the things they put on our heads at a young age."

"Just say shit," Ben said while reflecting on the advice she would give her younger self. "I was just so afraid to speak my mind or give my opinion because I thought it would make things worse. It might be scary in the moment, but there's a chance that it would be better. I would take that chance over 100% chance of normalcy."

So... no, we don't really have time to show you how to fold a fitted sheet; watch a YouTube video. We shouldn't have to remind you to brush your teeth in the morning, you should just take care of yourself. We will always be there for you, but sometimes we need someone to be there for us because we're human too.

A young woman with long, straight dark hair is the central figure. She is wearing a leopard print, off-the-shoulder, long-sleeved crop top and high-waisted blue jeans. She is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. Her hands are positioned near her shoulders, with fingers slightly spread. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

*“We feel a lot of
pressure like we need
to be the best and
take care of things for
our family.”*

— Elizabeth Agazaryan

Diamonds and deportation

By Lavanya Paliwal

Illustrations by Lilliana Lopez and Lavanya Paliwal

I got deported. My main character energy is bigger than yours.

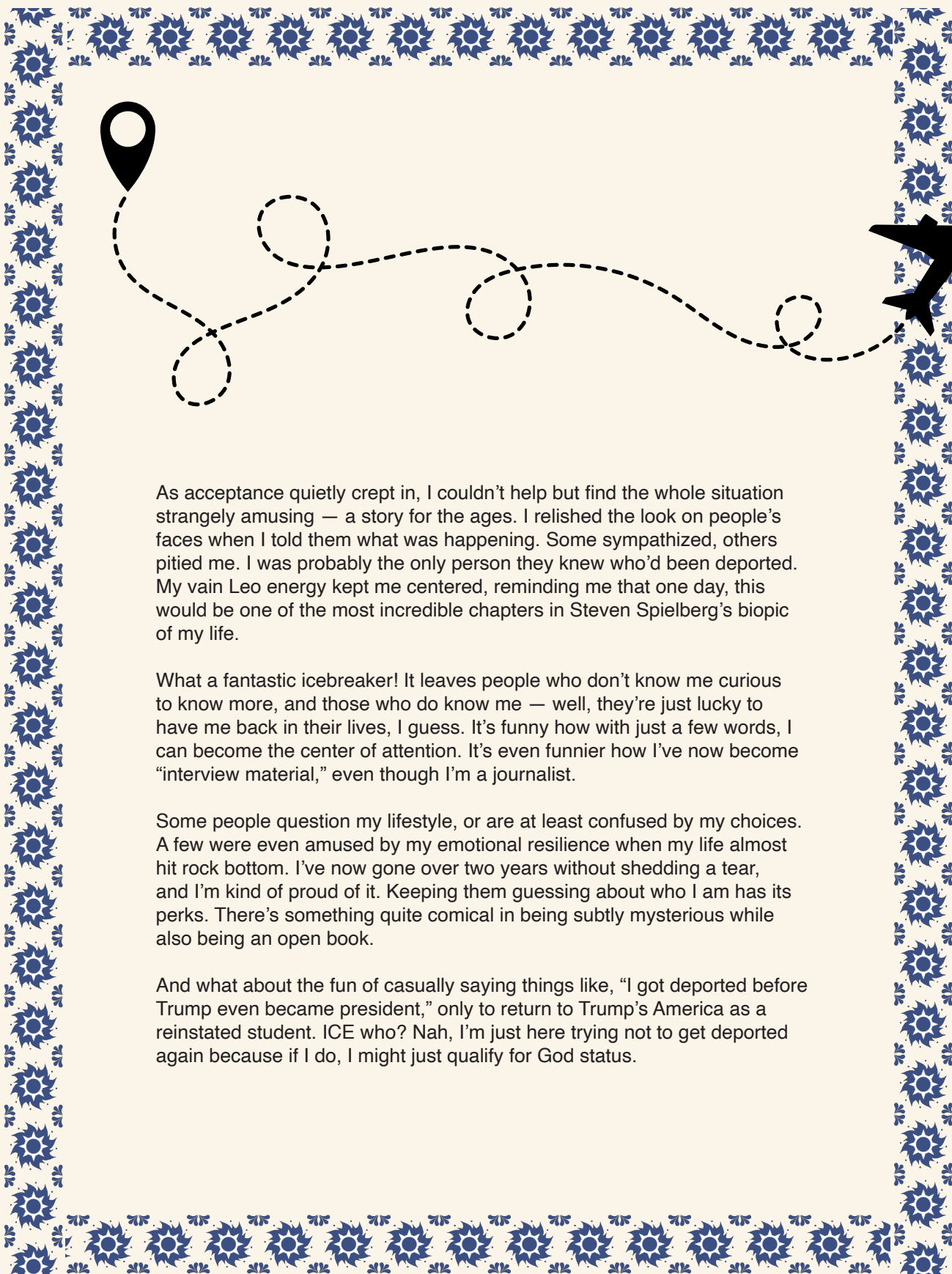
Making a short documentary about an artist and feeling the pure essence of art flow through my muscles and veins was the most intense wave of pleasure I experienced last year. Immediately, my mom's voice echoed in my brain, "When you get too happy, there's always a rush of sadness coming your way, so take it easy, baby." It's like her voice had become my conscience, my intuition. All my gut feelings, all the warnings of something going wrong, echo in her voice like a siren blaring in my mind. And right after that, I received an email that made her words seem like carvings on the wall.

I had to voluntarily leave the country, possibly on a temporary basis with a slight chance of it becoming permanent, in order to avoid becoming an illegal immigrant. All of my records as an international student on a visa suddenly had to be terminated. I was distraught by the news — I thought of my parents, who'd done so much to get me to where I am, and yet here I was, unable to hold the title of 'student' in the U.S. for longer than two semesters. The only way to ease the weight of it was to find a solution.

And find one, I did.

What's better than being deported from one country? A vacation to two others, a fresh tattoo and, of course, more diamonds. Nothing, really. That's how I restored balance to my emotions.

My initial reaction was a mix of discomfort and shame — enough to make me hide this new, deep secret from everyone I know so it wouldn't spiral out of control and have them form judgments about me. Knowing me, it wouldn't have been a total surprise to anyone, but since I was surprised, I needed to embrace my reality before anyone else did.



As acceptance quietly crept in, I couldn't help but find the whole situation strangely amusing — a story for the ages. I relished the look on people's faces when I told them what was happening. Some sympathized, others pitied me. I was probably the only person they knew who'd been deported. My vain Leo energy kept me centered, reminding me that one day, this would be one of the most incredible chapters in Steven Spielberg's biopic of my life.

What a fantastic icebreaker! It leaves people who don't know me curious to know more, and those who do know me — well, they're just lucky to have me back in their lives, I guess. It's funny how with just a few words, I can become the center of attention. It's even funnier how I've now become "interview material," even though I'm a journalist.

Some people question my lifestyle, or are at least confused by my choices. A few were even amused by my emotional resilience when my life almost hit rock bottom. I've now gone over two years without shedding a tear, and I'm kind of proud of it. Keeping them guessing about who I am has its perks. There's something quite comical in being subtly mysterious while also being an open book.

And what about the fun of casually saying things like, "I got deported before Trump even became president," only to return to Trump's America as a reinstated student. ICE who? Nah, I'm just here trying not to get deported again because if I do, I might just qualify for God status.



Fake friends, faker futures

I simply refuse to get your number

By Claire Geare

Illustration by Lavanya Paliwal

The art of networking. The ability to slap a smile on your face and say hello to a stranger, hoping beyond hope that this very person is the ticket to your success. You must have a certain *je ne sais quoi* to be successful in such an endeavor. An indescribable aura that makes it possible to be so fucking fake. And as a nonbinary girl-thing with autism, I don't have it.

I'm sorry to break the news, but I'm... a film major. Disgusting, I know. I'm truly the scum of the Earth. And if there's one true cliché about us, it's that networking is our real major. Second only to business majors, we film students schmooze like there's no tomorrow. Quite literally. Like, the only possible reason there is to behave like that is if planet Earth was scheduled to explode in 24 hours.

Today in class I was told that "networking is the name of the game." Shoot me! Please God, put a gun to my head and pull the trigger. I thought I was getting a degree, not playing a goddamn game. But seriously, how do you look a lecture hall full of students in the eyes and tout that the only pathway to success is through leeching off someone else?

The fundamental truth behind networking is a delusion that you'll "make it." That somehow you're the exception to the rule. That in a class full of 250 wannabes, you're the wannabe who just so happens to be the next Quentin Tarantino. And I'll tell you right now, you're not. And unless you can somehow slip foot porn into the next Oscar nomination, you never will be.

As the next Tarantino or Anderson or Nolan or whoever else you convince yourself you'll be as great as, isn't networking below you? The very nature of being a film student means you think you're better than everyone, so while you network, you're really just associating with the common folk. The other 249 of you who won't make it anywhere at all. The peasants who will one day wait by the phone, hoping *you* call.

While these film majors may claim that you can never have enough friends, I argue you definitely can. Especially when they're not your friends. Are you really texting that guy in your directing class when your dog dies? I think not. You are, however, the first to reach out when he gets the internship you wanted. How sweet! What are friends for if not to be frothing-at-the-mouth jealous over?

What really gets me about the whole concept of networking is the very fact that it requires one to acknowledge the most fundamental problem in the film industry while doing nothing to fix it. In a perfect world, success would be based on talent, skill and a unique perspective. And yet, the most successful person out of all of us wannabes is going to be the guy with the fullest contact book. It's pathetic.

I'll admit, maybe it's me. Maybe I'm the problem. I'll be the first one to cop to being a weirdo with little to no social skills — not exactly an ideal candidate for schmoozing. Or perhaps the reason I find this all so abhorrent is my rampant individuality complex. Or I'm like that guy in the "Matrix" (never seen it), and I'm the only one who realizes how god-damn stupid this all is. Or maybe I just have autism. Who's to say?

Alfred's Tanzania

A glimpse into my solo trip to Africa

By Jude Banihani

Photos by Jude Banihani

After 12 hours of flying from Amman, Jordan, to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to finally landing at Kilimanjaro International Airport, I was in Tanzania. As soon as I landed, I saw Mount Kilimanjaro, Africa's tallest mountain, in all its magnificence, and I was awestruck at how it rose above the scenery.

Even though I had just arrived, I could tell the country was going to be a beautiful place. As I got off the plane and walked across the tarmac, I saw gardens with vibrant flowers and noticed Air Tanzania's plane with a blue tail featuring an illustration of a giraffe — Tanzania's national animal. I made my way to the yellow fever

screening, and after they took my temperature and checked my vaccine card, I officially started my journey.

This trip to Tanzania would be my third and shortest solo trip. I was drawn to its safety, outstanding tourism sector, rich culture, friendly people and abundance of wildlife.

After leaving the airport, I took an hour-long taxi ride to Arusha, where I stayed for a day before heading out on safari. The streets were filled with markets selling a mix of traditional and Western clothing, an assortment of toys for the upcoming Christmas holiday, and vibrant fresh fruit like guava, avocados and bananas. Colorful vans whirled by, adorned with religious sayings like "Jesus is king," representing the churches they were donated from.

As I strolled through Arusha, I noticed that many of the shop signs written in Swahili, the predominant language in East Africa, were almost like Arabic words written in English letters. I found out that Swahili is a mix of Arabic and local African dialects, hence the similarities. A wave of excitement washed over me as I used my first language to piece together meanings. I felt like I was in the right place.

I came across a young man selling beaded bracelets — something I love to collect. He explained that the blue beads symbolize the oceans around East Africa, green is for the savanna of the west, yellow is for the sun and black is for the African people. Together they represent the Tanzanian flag.

After my first night in Tanzania, Alfred, a safari guide with over 17 years of experience, came to the hostel I was staying at. He is a tall man who wore a beige button down shirt with matching pants, and most distinctly, a striking





pair of James Bond-style aviator sunglasses throughout my entire trip.

For the next eight days, he showed me around the jungles and savannas of Tanzania. Alfred's favorite word is happy. His smile never faded throughout the trip and his most spoken words were "I like for everybody to always be happy."

Meet Alfred

During my time in Tanzania, Alfred and I became great friends. Me, being Arab, and Alfred, being African, we bonded over the similarities and differences in our cultures. Alfred's full name is Alfred Ignas Kiwia. "I was born on the slope of Mount Kilimanjaro 45 years ago," he said.

Born and raised in the village of Marangu, Alfred moved to Arusha as

an adult to pursue his career and start a family. After studying engineering in college, Alfred spent a few years working for a tourist company. Realizing he wanted a more hands-on career, he decided to pivot and go back to school at the College of African Wildlife Management in Moshi to study wildlife management and tourism. Three years later, he began working as a safari guide in 2007.

In 2010, National Geographic approached the company Alfred was working for at the time. They were interested in filming a documentary on wildlife in Tanzania, and the company decided to send Alfred out with the team.

"It took about 28 days in the bush — Tarangire, Ngorongoro, Serengeti and in the other game reserves," Alfred said. "You have special permission to

go off-roading and everything because filming, it needs for you to go more miles to find animals."

Alfred took the National Geographic crew out to some of the most remote areas of the national parks where they followed different animals. "We go for the wildebeest migration, we go for the lions, we go for the leopards, we go for the cheetah and finally, we go for the giraffe," he said.

The National Geographic team was impressed with Alfred's talent. "Many people, many tourists, say, 'Alfred, you have a talent, you are a super guide, why don't you run your own business?'" he said.

He sat with the idea for years before investing in his own safari company in 2024. In January 2025, he officially registered his company as "Vantage





Explorations Africa.” I jokingly suggested the name “Adventuring with Alfred,” but I’m no marketing expert. Alfred plans to begin tours later this year and take new guides out into the wild with him to train before sending them off on their own.

Alfred explained that as a safari guide, there is no option but to be in top physical shape. Alfred had to drive through rough dirt roads, and when it rained, these roads would turn into mud. At one point, the car got stuck, and a fellow safari guide driving by had to attach a rope to our car and reverse to get it out. All part of the adventure.

Aside from being a safari guide, Alfred is a husband, a father and a devoted member of his church. Religion plays a big role in Tanzanian life. Roughly 60% of Tanzanians are Christians, 30% are Muslims and some follow

traditional African religions. But aside from religion, people around Tanzania take pride in being a part of the nation and being African. Tanzania is one of the most diverse countries I have ever seen — over 120 tribes call the country home.

What it takes to be a safari guide

Safari guides go through a long process before they put on the khaki uniform, set foot in the beige Land Rover and descend into the bush. They first attend wildlife colleges where they spend three years studying wildlife, environmental science and tourism management. After completing their studies, they train for years with more experienced guides before leading their own safaris.

The roads in the national parks are

rocky and winding — the guides jokingly call it an “African massage.” The lack of signs and GPS navigation means that if you are lost, it’s definitely an emergency. After years in the bush, Alfred has memorized the roads by heart and can identify any animal in a heartbeat.

Going into the national parks means you will be up close and personal with wild animals. At one point, I got to see a lion feasting on a freshly killed buffalo. When we went back to the site the next day, the lion’s family had joined, leaving nothing but bones behind. It’s the kind of thing you only get to see once in a lifetime.

Tanzania is known for the big five — lion, leopard, buffalo, rhino and elephant — all of which I was privileged to see. It can be difficult to spot some of these animals,

especially leopards, as they are secretive, independent and territorial. Many safari guides, including Alfred, are so skilled they know exactly which leopards live in certain areas, increasing your chance of a rare sighting. This expertise was what allowed me to spot one leopard in the wild. It walked right past our car, gave us a little show and ran off into the tall grass.

What it means to be a safari guide

While tourism poses a big risk of causing environmental degradation, the tourism industry is a key pillar of the Tanzanian economy. To combat the risk, the country is serious about protecting its nature and has found ways to promote sustainable tourism.

In a rapidly modernizing world,

Tanzanians still follow many traditional practices, many of which stem from the Maasai people, enabling them to care for their wildlife. Natural resources are not overused or depleted from the environment, trash bins are not permitted in any national parks and single-use plastics are outlawed nationwide. Safari guides are not just there for tourists — they are part of the ongoing effort to conserve nature.

One of the many reasons tourists are not permitted into national parks without guides is the risk of poaching. Poaching was a huge problem in Tanzania, and it nearly led to the extinction of black rhinos and the African elephant. Night safaris are heavily restricted, as poachers have the most luck getting hold of an elephant tusk when no one is

around. The national parks are heavily monitored by park rangers who may carry firearms in case they have to use them on poachers.

“Before it was not like now,” Alfred said. “There was a big chance of poachers coming to shoot our animals — especially elephants, black rhinos, leopards, cheetahs — so the number of animals in the 1940s and ‘50s was decreasing.” After the government employed trained park rangers, the crackdown on poaching increased the number of animals in the wild.

Aside from wildlife conservation, many safari guides strive to give back to their country. Unfortunately, many safari companies are owned by foreign investors, meaning a large part of the profits never make it to the Tanzanian people, according to Alfred.



He seeks to combat this issue.

In 2011, a group of Australian tourists went with him on a trip and wanted to give back to the Maasai people, a nomadic tribe living across Kenya and Tanzania. Many Maasai people struggle with accessing safe, clean water sources, and the tourists wanted to raise funds to build a well in a Maasai village. The tourists raised money in Australia and sent the funds to Alfred, which he then used to organize a team and build wells in 15 different Maasai villages. He also organized a project to buy warm clothes for Maasai people living in Ngorongoro, an area of high elevation that experiences cold weather.

As a father, Alfred values education for all children and wants to use funds from his business to pay for

education in villages, build wells and buy supplies. This is the culture among safari guides — they seek to help tourists and give back to their countries.

My highlights

I went to three national parks on my safari: Tarangire, Ngorongoro and Serengeti. Tarangire was filled with giraffes, elephants, baboons, monkeys and I even spotted a mongoose family. Ngorongoro is a volcanic crater located at a high elevation. Given its lush habitat, year-round flowing river and cooler temperatures, it is an animal paradise. I was lucky enough to spot two black rhinos, one of the most difficult animals to encounter in the wild. I saw flamingos in the river, herds of zebras and wildebeests endlessly grazing, and

hyenas hiding in the tall grasses. Serengeti, the park that inspired “The Lion King,” had no shortage of lions. It was mid-December, and zebras and wildebeests were still migrating. Hippos filled the rivers and crocodiles sunbathed on boulders nearby. Most notably, I saw a leopard hiding in a tree with its swirly tail dangling down.

There really aren’t enough words I could use to describe my time in Tanzania. It was beautiful, safe and life-changing. The people of the country are some of the friendliest I have met, and their loving nature and hard work inspired me. The best part of solo traveling is the friends you make along the way, and for me, Alfred is a lifelong friend.



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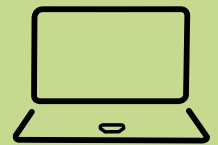
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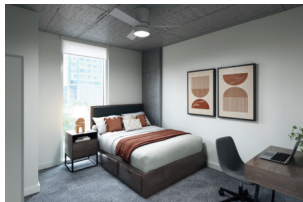
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**BE AMONG THE FIRST TO SECURE
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Through the lake of fire

Looking back on the Phoenix area's influential punk and alternative rock scenes

By Evan Silverberg
Photos by Ollie Slade
Illustrations by Lilliana Lopez







On Nov. 18, 1993, brothers Curt and Cris Kirkwood were in New York City. That night, the pair of seasoned punk rockers joined Nirvana, one of the biggest rock bands in the world, in covering three of their own songs for Nirvana's "MTV Unplugged" performance.

Overnight, the Kirkwoods' band Meat Puppets skyrocketed from '80s underground icons to '90s mainstream rock stars. But in the '70s, Curt, Cris and their drummer Derrick Bostrom were high schoolers in Phoenix.

"We met each other through the underground grapevine," Bostrom said. "At the time, they weren't into punk rock. I was, and I was trying to find anybody who wanted to start a band with me."

In 1979, after Bostrom introduced Curt to some of his favorite punk records, Curt agreed to recruit his brother so the three could start playing together. However, Cris had more of an aversion to punk rock than his older brother. Bostrom described two concerts that changed Cris' perspective on the genre, the first of which occurred at ASU.

"Around 1979, artists [that the Kirkwoods might have wanted to see] started coming to town — Iggy Pop, bands like DEVO, Talking Heads, stuff like that," Bostrom said. "Cris had gone and seen Talking Heads when they played at Neeb Hall."

According to Bostrom, Cris was impressed by the Talking Heads' integrity after seeing them get into a fight with the promoter, as well as their more structured style of punk rock compared to groups like the Sex Pistols, which Bostrom preferred.

In 1980, Cris and Bostrom saw Lucy LaMode, a Phoenix punk rocker later known for her satirical group Killer Pussy. The show was disrupted by "jocks," as Bostrom described them, and a riot broke out in the audience.

"We got our picture in the paper, and Cris and I were in the New Times pogoing in the audience," Bostrom said. "Cris was amazed because he didn't take it seriously and didn't believe it was real."

The Meat Puppets officially formed in 1980 with Bostrom on drums, Cris on bass and Curt on guitar and vocals.

They soon became one of many influential punk and alternative bands to emerge from the Phoenix area in the following decades.

Hardcore origins

"By the time we did our first shows, we had developed an extremely feral style," Bostrom said.

"We liked the idea of really getting out there ... challenging the audience and creating a safe space to go crazy on stage. ... I was on what I considered to be a spiritual quest to lose my freaking mind. I'm sorry to say that I was successful in that aspect."

The Meat Puppets weren't the only Phoenix-based punk band producing a "feral" sound — JFA formed in Phoenix in 1981. Their debut EP, "Blatant Localism," released that year and quickly became a staple of ultra-hardcore and a pioneering skate punk album. The record featured six songs and clocked in at just seven minutes long, perfectly capturing the volume and speed of first wave hardcore punk.

According to Tony Beram, the founder of local label Placebo Records and manager for JFA, skate culture became paramount to JFA's success. "Their fans had things in common," he said.

Bands like Meat Puppets and JFA entered a unique scene. "The older kids that we looked up to were getting into punk rock and forming little bands," Bostrom said. "They were smart enough to know that they weren't actually from Britain, so their punk rock bands were kinds of parodies of punk rock bands. ... They weren't angry; they were amused."

Oftentimes, these bands intentionally provoked their audiences to the point of getting into fights during the set. "The Phoenix scene always had this heavy sense of irony to it; you weren't supposed to take it too seriously," Bostrom said.

Crude irony and unapologetic noise were guiding principles of early '80s

punk bands in Phoenix. Its groups were perfect microcosms of this. JFA stood for Jodie Foster's Army — a reference to John Hinckley Jr.'s obsession with an underaged Jodie Foster being his motive for shooting Ronald Reagan.

The Meat Puppets' 1982 self-titled debut album has been described as "unintelligible" and "incomprehensible" by both its biggest fans and its harshest critics. The band's off-the-wall live performances were even more chaotic than they sounded in the studio.

"You take our first album ... then add no sleep, bad sound, inexperience, and you're going to get a magnificent noise," Bostrom said.

Mad Gardens

As punk bands in different pockets of the Valley discovered each other throughout the late '70s and early '80s, there was no venue to host

consistent shows for the developing scene. According to Beram, "It was the wild west back then." Many venues wouldn't allow bands to come back after one performance, he said.

"Maybe it would get closed down by the police before it ended, maybe it would make it until the end and someone would break their collarbone," he said.

It wasn't until 1981 that Phoenix punks found their home. Phoenix Madison Square Garden, a shoddy venue on a sketchy stretch of Van Buren Street, became the heart of the Phoenix punk scene.

In 1981, the spot was owned by Beram's uncle and used primarily to host amateur wrestling events. After briefly announcing wrestlers there, Beram — who was known by his moniker Tony Victor in the punk world — received approval from his uncle to host punk rock concerts on Saturday nights.



Quickly, Phoenix Madison Square Garden earned the nickname “Mad Gardens” from its patrons, who witnessed bands perform in the wrestling ring. “Just about every punk band in the country came through and played Mad Gardens,” Beram said. Dead Kennedys, Minor Threat and Social Distortion were among the bands who performed there.

“The local bands were now in a position where ... a headliner from out of town could draw a few more people in, so it gave the bands a little bit more of a steady place to play for a while,” he said.

Violence was a regular issue at Mad Gardens. Beram received calls from angry parents threatening to sue over injuries their child sustained. One night, the lead vocalist of Adolescents threw a bottle into the crowd, prompting security to chase him into the bleachers. They eventually grabbed him, picked him up and dropped him, splitting his head open and starting a riot.

“You wake up the next morning wondering if you’re still going to be in business after something like that, and we had incidents like that every so often,” Beram said.

The venue’s wrestling matches were even more dangerous than its concerts. After a string of audience injuries, they were forced to stop operating in late 1983. With Mad Gardens needing both wrestling and concerts to stay open, it hosted its last shows in early 1984 before closing.

Branching out

“By the time [Mad Gardens] ended, we had graduated into a national act,” Bostrom said.

The Meat Puppets had signed with indie label SST Records, which played a substantial role in facilitating the growth of punk, indie and alternative music in the ‘80s that became the blueprint for ‘90s rock. Suddenly, they were touring with punk heavyweights like Black Flag. However, this meant spending more time performing to

hardcore traditionalists who detested the band for the ways in which it veered from punk norms.

“Over the course of a couple years, we ended up falling into the hardcore scene, which was not really our scene,” Bostrom said. “We had already experienced having stuff thrown at us and getting spit on because we dared to open for Black Flag and have long hair.”

The Meat Puppets were ready to branch out. They spent time listening to artists like Neil Young, Fleetwood Mac, Pink Floyd and the Grateful Dead. “What we discovered is we could play any kind of song,” Bostrom said.

“Meat Puppets II,” released in 1984, was a complex mash of punk, psychedelia and country music that has since been hailed as one of the most influential albums to come out of the ‘80s underground. A Rolling Stone review following the record’s release called it “a kind of cultural trash compactor,” and compared it to “wandering into a drug-detox center and overhearing twelve strung-out conversations at once.”

The Meat Puppets’ third album, 1985’s “Up on the Sun,” stripped away most of what remained of the band’s hardcore roots, favoring an upbeat but mellow style of psychedelic post-punk with country-inspired lyrics. Like its predecessor, “Up on the Sun” sold well and received positive reviews.

In the mid-1980s, the norms in underground punk began to shift on a national level. Bands like R.E.M. made indie music enveloped in punk ethos that still appealed to mainstream sensitivities. This was the beginning of alternative rock in earnest.

As these kinds of indie bands began migrating to the major labels for more money and greater popularity, the Meat Puppets struggled to adjust. “We could not get a major label deal,” Bostrom said.

Touring with their current label was also difficult. “When we went on tour

with [SST], it was such a shoestring affair,” Bostrom said. “It was eating from giant pots of spaghetti at night and sleeping on people’s floors and playing for \$25. ... They refused to take us on some of the harder tours.”

The Meat Puppets finally left SST for a major label in the early ‘90s. London Recordings attempted a hail mary by trying to rebrand the group as country artists for their 1991 major label debut “Forbidden Places.” Despite positive reviews, the album sold poorly.

While it seemed like the music industry had moved on from bands like JFA and Meat Puppets, ASU was fostering the growth of a new scene in the Phoenix area to meet the shift in demand.

The alt-rock boom

Gin Blossoms formed in Tempe in 1987. Following R.E.M.’s lead by matching indie sounds with pop songwriting and mainstream sensitivities, they gained notoriety in Phoenix — particularly around ASU’s Tempe campus — in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s. Deemed ‘college rock,’ upbeat alternative bands like Gin Blossoms dominated student-run college radio at the time.

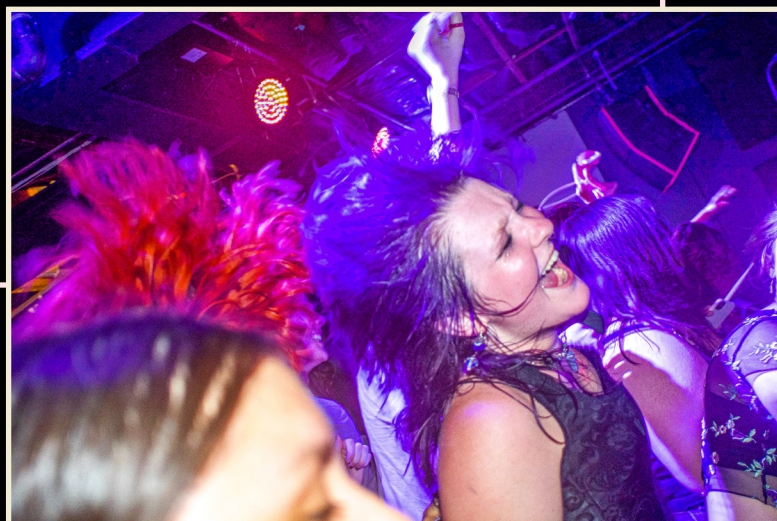
In its early days, the Gin Blossoms frequently performed for ASU students at clubs on Mill Avenue in downtown Tempe, earning them local fame by the time of their 1989 debut album “Dusted.” They catapulted into the national spotlight with their major studio debut “New Miserable Experience” in 1992. Two songs on the album, “Hey Jealousy” and “Found Out About You,” reached No. 25 on the Billboard Hot 100.

The Gin Blossoms’ mainstream success came largely from the band’s close ties to the ASU community. The band’s memorabilia can still be spotted at restaurants near the Tempe campus, and in 2022, a stretch of Eighth Street in Tempe was renamed Allison Road Avenue, after “Allison Road,” one of the band’s most iconic songs.



“It was just a really
electric-feeling scene.”

— Roger Clyne





Along with the Gin Blossoms came a fledgling scene of alternative college rock bands in Tempe. The other most successful was the Refreshments, who landed a minor hit in 1996 with the chronically-catchy and mindlessly-rebellious "Banditos," which peaked at No. 71 on the Billboard Hot 100 and remains a cultural keystone in Phoenix-area rock history.

"It was tons of fun," Refreshments vocalist and ASU alum Roger Clyne said of the Tempe scene. "Everybody knew everybody else, everybody slept on everybody else's couches, borrowed everybody else's guitars. There was a lot of camaraderie and competition, but the whole scene was really good for art. Everybody was excited to create music and share it with an audience and collaborate with other bands. It was just a really electric-feeling scene."

It was also in the mid-'90s that the Meat Puppets saw a new surge in popularity after joining Nirvana on stage for the band's iconic "MTV Unplugged" performance in November 1993. But Bostrom said he and the Kirkwoods had not always seen the group as career-savers.

"We were at a difficult time because Nirvana had kind of taken the wind out of our sails," he said. "They were selling, we weren't. They were doing big shows and we knew that the label wanted us to ape Nirvana — they wanted us to 'go grunge.'"

However, after reading a Spin article where Kurt Cobain cited "Meat Puppets II" as one of his favorite albums, the Meat Puppets linked up with Nirvana and landed a gig opening for them during a short tour. According to Bostrom, Cobain's decision to invite the band to join him for "Unplugged" at the end of the tour and cover three of their songs was spontaneous.

"Somehow Cobain decided it would be a good idea to have Curt help him face down MTV," Bostrom said. "We can't ask Cobain about it, but he obviously drew some sort of strength from the Kirkwoods, who are fucking wild men. They're feral and nuts, but they can also be reassuring in their craziness."

While Bostrom decided to head home after the tour, the Kirkwood brothers joined Nirvana in performing covers of Meat Puppets originals "Lake of Fire," "Plateau" and "Oh, Me." Overnight, the legendary concert transformed the Meat Puppets into a mainstream act.

The band's 1994 album, "Too High To Die" almost immediately became their best-selling record, moving over 500,000 copies and becoming their first and only album to be certified gold by the RIAA. Its single "Backwater" became the group's biggest hit, nearly crossing into the Billboard Hot 100's top 40.

However, the album's production was marked by hostile disagreements between the Meat Puppets and their label about the direction of the album, with London Recordings pressuring the band to lean into grunge tropes despite their wishes for creative control.

Between wrestling with their label for creative control and Cris' addiction problems leading the band's management to demand Curt fire him, Meat Puppets went on hiatus in 1996 — just two years after their greatest success.

"Because of Nirvana 'Unplugged,' we were able to stop," Bostrom said. "We were able to get off the road and quit without throwing [ourselves] into working at the Burger King window. It worked out well for us, and it allowed us to stop doing what we didn't like doing."

For the second time, Meat Puppets were relics of a bye-gone era. The Gin Blossoms would have one more hit, 1996's "Follow You Down," before joining them, while the Refreshments' last hurrah was creating the "King of the Hill" theme song. Meanwhile, music in the Phoenix area continued evolving.

The Phoenix effect

The Phoenix punk and alternative scenes in the '80s and '90s were unique to the Valley. Some would argue they could not have happened anywhere else. Pitchfork described "Meat Puppets II" as "a sun-baked, country-fried, acid-addled cowpunk album that could have come from nowhere else but the Arizona desert."

Beram said bands in Phoenix sounded very different from one another compared to other cities' scenes. He believes this may have had something to do with how spread out the Phoenix area is.

"I went to Maryville High School, so my experience was quite different than somebody that was going to Brophy," Beram said. "You can grow up in the Valley, and depending on where you are, you can have a very different experience than somebody else that's growing up 80 miles the other side."

For alternative bands like the Gin Blossoms and Refreshments, ASU provided a perfect scene for them to platform music that appealed to the listening habits of students.

"You have 40,000 ready, willing and able young people with a couple dollars in their pockets who would pay a cover charge and go drink a pitcher of beer and cheer on their bands," Clyne said. "It was indispensable. I don't think that without the support and receptivity of the student body that any of these bands would have had nearly the audience we were blessed to have."

"The Wallace and Ladmo Show" was a children's show that aired locally from 1954 to 1989, partly known for featuring performances by rock bands. Bostrom explained how growing up watching the show shaped the Meat Puppets' music.

One band, Commodore Condello's Salt River Navy Band, made an album that parodied the Beatles' "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club" with lyrics about the show's characters. "So here you are, seven years old, and your kid's show's going 'check out this fucking acid rock, kids,'" Bostrom said.

The show may have also impacted the uniquely satirical and ironic nature of the Phoenix punk scene.

"There was a subversive element to the show," Bostrom said. "A lot of young people who came up watching that program developed a very wry sense of humor, a tongue-in-cheek approach. And to us, not taking it seriously is taking it seriously. That's the way we do it; that's how you came up in Phoenix."



Dating in the age of the Trump manosphere

Advocating for young men

By Abigail Wilt

Illustrations by Paulina Soto

One of Trump's largest voting demographics in the 2024 election was young men. This is a demographic I'm familiar with. As a woman who dates men, they make up the majority of my dating pool.

For many women, a lot was on the table this election — the main issue being bodily autonomy. After the election, many women took to social media declaring their newfound loyalty to the 4B movement, a radical feminist movement with origins in South Korea. Its pillars state that women should abstain from sex with men, halt dating pursuits, refrain from marriage and stop having children with men. Women were obviously upset.

To me, it was clear why an overwhelming majority of young men voted for Trump in this election. They have it hard right now. Only one third of young men are college educated, many feel discouraged by the job market and they're twice as likely to be single.

If I was a young man, I too would vote for someone who supports my passions for crypto, cars and bitches. I get it.

After all, it's a fact that women without a relationship invest their time into friendships and careers. Men without a relationship play video games and vape. I think it's time women take responsibility and go on dates with these men!

So... I thought I would bring you along on a date to show you how we might better serve this disaffected majority.

The date

Like before most dates I agree to go on with men, I was hopeful. I spent two weeks engaged in witty banter over text with this guy before he asked me out. He seemed really cute and made it clear he was passionate about family and making a name for himself one day. I liked that.

He offered to take me to this fancy restaurant in Tempe I wanted to try. We planned the date for a Friday night. He was going to pick me up around 7 p.m.

I was excited. After investing a lot of time getting to know him over text, I was optimistic that our in-person chemistry would match our virtual chemistry.

I waited inside my apartment until I saw the notification that he was out front. I hurried down and walked out to see him waiting in a

2020 Ford F-150 pickup. I could feel the bass from his music reverberating through the ground. As I approached the truck, the passenger window rolled down, he leaned over and he told me to hop in. So... I did.

During the 10-minute drive, I asked him how his day was while Drake's top hits played in the background.

"It was good. I went to the gym and



listened to this fascinating podcast the whole time. It was three hours long, so I'm surprised I stuck with it. Then, I went home and chilled until I had to get ready for tonight," he said.

"Oh, nice! I also went to the gym and then I went to work. It was crazy at work today. I also had to finish this massive project I've been working on for a class. I'm almost done, thank goodness. Then, it took me surprisingly long to get ready for tonight," I added after an awkward pause.

"Oh, cool," he responded.

We pulled up to the restaurant and headed inside. After we were seated, the waitress approached the table and asked for our drink orders.

"I'll have water and a glass of red wine, please," I said.

"Uh, do you have any beer? Just anything but Bud Light," he said.

"We have a selection of craft beers if you want to take a look at the list on the menu," the waitress responded.

"Okay, uh. I'll just take the darkest beer you have," he said.

"Alright, I'll be right back with that," the waitress said.

After the waitress walked away, he leaned in to speak like he wanted to say something in confidence.

"I can't believe women can get jobs when they look like that. Especially at a nice place like this. I would never hire someone if they looked like that. It's just unprofessional," he said.

I assumed the comment was in response to the waitress' blue mullet and piercings.

"Hmm, I don't think I ever gave much thought to it before," I responded.
"So, do you have any plans after you graduate?"

"Uh, I don't really know yet. I just started investing in crypto, so hopefully I'll start to make some money there. I think I want to go into the tech business though. It just seems really profitable because of Elon and everything. I really want to have a family one day though," he said.

"Oh really? How many kids would you want?" I asked.

"Right now, I think however many God wants me to have," he responded.

"Oh, okay. I really want to have two or three, but definitely after I'm 30. I want to focus on getting my career off the ground first," I added.

The waitress came back with our drinks and then asked for our food orders. I ordered the caesar salad, and he ordered the ribeye steak.

"God, I can't believe these prices! The economy is just so bad right now. Hopefully that will be fixed soon though," he said.

"Yeah, \$50 for a ribeye steak is crazy!" I responded. "So, what do you like to do in your free time?"

"Uh, I've really been loving this video game. Not sure if you've heard of it. It's called 'God of War,'" he answered.

"I have heard of that! Some of my friends play it," I responded.

"Oh cool, okay. Well, I play that and then I've been really into podcasts lately. I listen to Joe Rogan and some other ones. I also have classes and stuff too," he said.

"Oh nice! Okay." I took a large sip of my wine.

The waitress came back with our food.

"I like to read in my free time. There have been a couple articles by some journalists I've been loving, and I love reading different fiction and fantasy books," I said.

"Yeah, for me, I feel like I can't trust the media anymore, so I don't read articles and stuff like that. But that's cool that you do though," he said.

"So, do you keep up on current events then?" I asked.

"Yeah, I'll see stuff on X and TikTok, but I don't pay for news or anything. I feel like I trust actual people more than big media," he answered.

"Oh, okay. Interesting. I definitely read the news, but that's because I'm a journalist," I said.

We were approaching the end of our meals. He gestured to the waitress for the check.

"You're not one of those girls who needs to split the bill to feel independent are you?" he asked.



"Oh, no. Definitely not. Everyone calls me 'little miss dependent,'" I joked.

"Okay good because I got the bill. Don't worry about it," he assured.

After he put his card into the checkbook, the waitress came to pick it up. As she walked away, he leaned over to whisper something again.

"Did you notice that her name tag says 'she/they'? What does that even mean? Sometimes you're a woman and sometimes you're not? Makes no sense to me. So annoying," he said.

"Yeah, I don't know," I responded, swallowing the last of my wine.

The waitress returned the checkbook, he pulled out the receipt and then he got up to leave. I followed.

As he was driving me home, I decided to throw caution to the wind and ask him one last question to glean any final details I needed to know about him.

"So, why didn't your last relationship work out?" I asked.

"Oh god, really? Well, for one, she was crazy. Always needed me to text her and she was perfectly okay being one of those childless cat ladies for the rest of her life. She also started to let herself go and gained a ton of weight. No shame on men who date overweight women, I just couldn't do it. I also found out she was bisexual and that was too confusing," he said.

"Oh, okay. Good to know," I responded.

"I mean, you don't seem anything like her, so don't compare yourself or anything," he said as I darkened my phone's lock screen with a picture of my two cats.

"Don't worry. I'm not," I gulped.

He pulled up to my apartment.

"Well, I had a really great time. I want to see you again soon."

"Okay, have a good night!" I said as I hopped out of the car.

Blind optimism

We have to remember: At the end of the day, they mean well. I found that the best way to approach this situation is to gaslight yourself.

Let me demonstrate:

Instead of feeling offended when a man makes a condescending remark about other women, tell yourself he's only being honest. He's not afraid to speak his mind!

Rather than argue with him after he says the last election was stolen, tell yourself he's just a concerned citizen. So civic duty of him!

When you find out he voted for Trump, tell yourself he thought he had to fill in the bubble for the candidate he DIDN'T want in office. Silly boy!

In the land of delusion, we will survive.

All jokes aside, I care about men whether they care about me or not. I see the person behind the politics even if my personhood is up for debate. I'm promising to do better to make them feel seen and heard, and you should too.

#youngmanadvocate



The rule of thirds

How off campus hangout spots can foster community

By Bella Mazzilli

Photos by Ollie Slade

Songbird Coffee & Tea House is home to students hunched over laptops, mothers entertaining hyper children, business types conducting outdoor meetings and older couples chatting over warm matcha lattes.

Tufted headboard-style benches upholstered with green velvet anchor the room, while Inky Bob, the shop's black, fluffy feline mascot, roams the uneven wood floors and greets patrons of all ages with a quizzical look. Abstract paintings, potted plants and paper cranes create Songbird's eclectic, yet cozy atmosphere. The historic house turned shop is meant to be "an extension of your living room," and it seems that way, as many downtown Phoenixians find themselves gravitating to the space to gather and unwind.

Third places, or places separate from one's home (first place) or workplace

(second place), are essential to fostering a sense of community and finding comfort in a public space around people whose company you enjoy. For college students, third places mainly provide stress relief from work or the buzz on campus. Even though many flock to coffee shops, third places can be anything — whether you have to pay for something or not, be indoors or outdoors, be surrounded by quiet or chatter, they are defined by those who inhabit them.

Tempe

Max Hackert loves the green color of Premium Matcha Cafe Maiko and its overall energy. Hackert, a senior studying supply chain management, is a cafe enthusiast. Whether it be tea shops, like Cafe Maiko, or a proper coffee shop, like King Coffee, Hackert delights in the energy of her chosen third places, as she reserves her

apartment and bedroom for personal time to relax and unwind.

Her rationale for spending most of her time in cafes is people. A lover of chatting, Hackert finds the subtle din of cafe conversations to be helpful when she is studying or working on her computer.

"Maybe it's the extrovert in me that's like, 'I want to be around people,' even though I'm supposed to be focused on my work," Hackert said.

Hackert's perfect third place must have beautiful windows and cascading light, but she also enjoys being outside. "It's so beautiful here in Arizona, and I swear I will go to photosynthesize," she said.

The atmosphere Hackert looks for is present in Eden Tea & Coffee House.

"I wanted it to feel like home away from home," said Amie Pierone, owner of Eden.

Eden is located in a 1920s-style craftsman house just off the Tempe campus. Walking in, you're immediately greeted by baristas and the smell of brewing coffee and tea. The brown leather armchairs complete the room and give the shop a welcoming feeling. Pothos plants adorn the high shelving and refurbished furniture, covering every square inch of space.

Tempe residents of every age converse over large steaming mugs of Eden's signature drinks. The creaky wooden floors and uneven





it to be another home for her and her customers, which includes many ASU students from the Downtown Phoenix campus.

“I mean, it literally is a house ... And that’s something I wanted to make sure wasn’t just an exterior. I wanted [it] to still feel like a home when you come inside,” Westgate said.

The homey aspect of Songbird means that, like Eden, customers typically spend extended amounts of time in the old house’s thick walls.

Westgate said that even though it would probably be more profitable to have people come in, hang out for 20 minutes, and make them move along, there’s a ton of electrical outlets for a reason: they encourage patrons to plug in their electronics and stay a while, peppering in conversations with others when they can.

“We want our community to be as diverse as possible because we feel like that’s what really makes it rich,” she said.



ceilings make the room feel lived-in. Lo-fi music streams softly through the speakers and combined with the chatter of the patrons, the vibe of the shop is comforting.

“I never wanted it to be just strictly commercial and transactional,” Pierone said.

Following a connection-based ethos, Pierone wants students to feel welcome to stay for more than the typical few minutes of grabbing a drink and leaving. Pierone provides customers with what she calls “to-stay cups,” or ceramic mugs, so they feel encouraged to take up space in Eden’s environment.

Pierone said she is enthused with how she can foster community in Tempe, and feels fulfilled from providing a community gathering space. Pierone is also happy to see older members of the Tempe community interacting with students.

“I ended up having a custom little journal made called Stories of Eden so that I could write down things that happen because there’s so many special moments,” Pierone said.

Downtown Phoenix

Erin Westgate, owner of Songbird, loves coffee and her Roosevelt Row arts district community. She considers

Songbird supports all kinds of local art, from visual to auditory artists. The cafe hosts local musicians regularly to draw customers in and to uplift the voices of local musicians.

“It’s still the arts district, and it’s really important to me that we honor that, and so that means live music on Saturdays and featuring local artists on the wall,” Westgate said. “It’s vibrant, but I hope that it also is a calming place for people to kind of shut off from the outside world if they need to for a little bit.”

West Valley and Polytechnic

Not being located in a college town or at the center of a major city, ASU's West Valley and Polytechnic campuses are quieter and less compact than its Tempe and Downtown Phoenix counterparts, but that's the beauty of them — there's no getting caught up in foot traffic on the way to class or navigating bustling intersections.

The tradeoff, however, is being in a location where there aren't many traditional off-campus third places students can walk to. Instead, students occupy the library, the gym or outdoor seating areas in their free time.

According to Bobbi Hinrichsen, a sophomore studying pharmacology and toxicology, the lack of third places near the West Valley campus can provoke feelings of loneliness at times. The central part of campus is set well within the perimeter, far from the main streets. At its busiest times, students can be seen conversing with each other in passing, but even then, the open space prompted by the grassy quad and isolated buildings dampens the buzz.

But ultimately, Hinrichsen loves the atmosphere and takes advantage of the nice outdoor areas. Plus, she feels that the campus' energy is very focused, as many students are in STEM fields. Even though the West Valley campus lacks third places, Hinrichsen said

its administration tries to facilitate community engagement in on-campus spaces, and she admires them for doing so. However, the essence of a third place is the informality of its community engagement and interaction.

Hinrichsen said without her car, she would feel isolated and trapped within the green spaces of her campus, but luckily for her, she can drive to her equivalent of a third place: a local movie theater.

Unconventional third places

Third places don't necessarily need to be a sit down and talk environment. They can be activity based or centered around a community interest or group.

Aside from coffee and tea shops, Hackert enjoys rock climbing at Phoenix Rock Gym in Tempe.

"What I like about climbing is [that] I can really fully disconnect from society," she said. "It's really not a

serious thing. ... It's so much fun to just completely disconnect for two, three hours and talk to the people there about anything and everything.

Part of the reason Hackert enjoys rock climbing is because of the physical nature of the activity; she isn't worried about her social skills when everything is facilitated through scaling a rock wall. Despite that, Hackert's jovial spirit has led her to make friends quickly, and she is now fulfilled both physically and mentally.

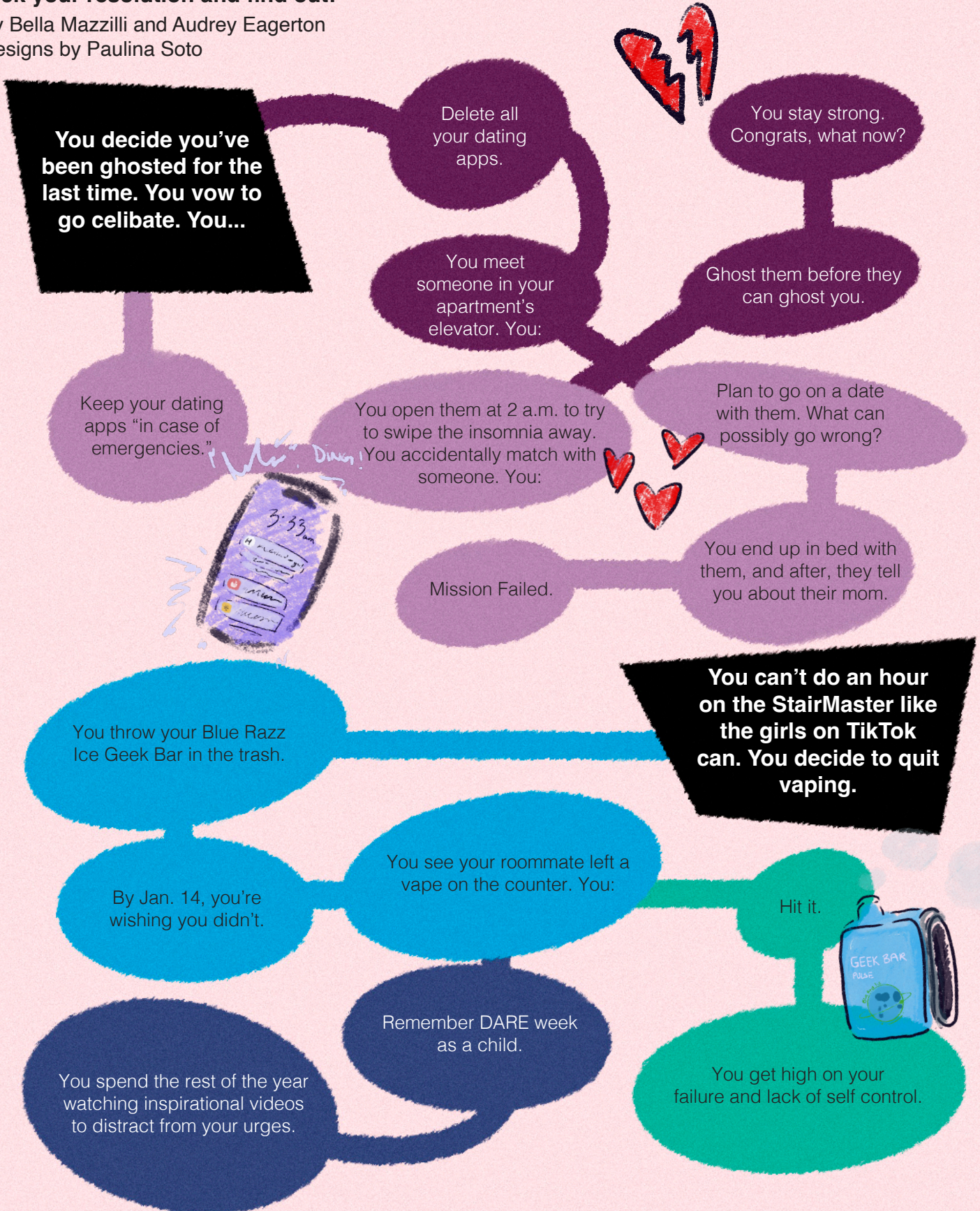
Third places provide their patrons with the opportunity to exchange life experiences together. Hackert's time at Phoenix Rock Gym has allowed her to bond with her fellow climbers, and even though it's a different experience than the connections she has made with a cup of tea in hand, it's provided that sense of fulfillment that all third places foster.



Will you survive 2025?

Pick your resolution and find out!

By Bella Mazzilli and Audrey Eagerton
Designs by Paulina Soto



You chose to exercise more. So unique! You:

Walk into the gym, apprehensive. You:

Head to the elliptical and read the instructions. You:

Follow your roommate into doing the first hot yoga class of your life. You:

You spend your entire savings on Lulu.

Let the endorphins fill your brain and you see God with a protein shake.

Pass out.

You go into debt from gym memberships and protein powder pyramid schemes.

Mortification. Never again.

A gym bro picks you up off the floor.



Raise your hand at every opportunity (establish dominance over your peers).

Show up to all your classes *actually. You:

You pulled a 2.4 GPA last semester. It's time to become an academic weapon. You:

Quietly sit and pay attention (thinking you're better than everyone).

Someone challenges your opinion (your new nemesis).

You start using ChatGPT to best said nemesis.

Your professor compliments your writing (academic validation is better than human touch).

You get imposter syndrome.

Academic weapon neutralized.

You make a couple grammar mistakes and have a mental breakdown.

You drift into mediocrity again.

You don't speak to anyone for three months. Only library.

You have no friends.

4.0!!



Resiliency is bullshit

Why being a victim is okay

By Claire Geare

Illustration by Paulina Soto

I like the 1980s movie “Labyrinth.” You know, the one with all the freaky puppets? It spoke to me. And there’s this line. The line that destroys the labyrinth, freeing our heroine who was trapped inside, an illusion crumbling before her. The line that summarizes my experiences in this world so succinctly it permanently rests on my left forearm.

“You have no power over me.”

As I shower, I look down at this trivial phrase, wondering why I would do such a thing as to tattoo such meaningless words onto my body. I suppose it’s meant to represent my resiliency, a way to remind myself of what I’ve been through and who I am now. A socially acceptable way to let the world know that I’m a victim of child abuse.

Victim.

It’s not okay to be the victim, they say. If you’re the victim of something, you’re weak. You’ve let the bad thing win, and you watch, powerless, as it controls your life. You have a complex and you’re too sensitive and you should be over it by now because life moves on. But I can’t move on, so I just say I’m “resilient” instead.

Really, it’s just easier this way. Easier for everyone else, that is. See, “resilient” is a much easier pill to swallow than “victim.” It implies every horrible thing I’ve been through but presents it with a bow on top. It’s a way of saying I’m different and somehow better than all of those other victims because I got over it.

I’m not over it.



I bought a bumper sticker in Tucson. It says “having weird parents builds character.” I bought it half as a joke and half as a way to promote some image of myself. An image of a girl who’s better now, a girl who doesn’t let it get to her, a girl who is *resilient*.

But deep down, I’m not resilient. I’m fucking traumatized. I use these meaningless phrases to obfuscate the reality nobody wants to hear about.

The reality in which I’m not resilient, I’m a victim.

You see, the problem with resiliency is that it’s earned. The very nature of being resilient implies that you’ve been forced to move on from some terrible event. It’s not a trait like honesty — a conscious choice by the person possessing it. Resiliency is thrust upon you, baked in after years of hardship.

A few months back, I was looking for a new job. I went on interview after interview after interview, all in the hopes that someone would pay me minimum wage to do more than is reasonable. But if you know anything about interviewing, you'd know that they always ask you some bullshit question about the hardest moment in your life. Why is that McDonalds' business? Who knows. Nevertheless,

naturally, you're often asked to explain yourself. But nobody ever *really* wants to know about the panic attacks that make you think you're dying. Or the night terrors that keep you up until 4 a.m. Or the flashbacks that send you 10 years into the past in an instant. Because that stuff is boring.

What's interesting, on the other hand, is the story of a comeback. Everybody

was before, a meek little brown-haired girl scared of her parents and scared of the world.

But that girl will never leave me. And I'm not sure I want her to.

The truth is, a year and a half ago I lived in a group home. I guess the proper term is "extended care facility," but for all intents and purposes, it was a group home. I'm still not sure I really belonged there, but I didn't quite belong anywhere else either. We would learn things like how to brush our teeth, do dishes and manage our money. I'm fortunate enough that these things come fairly easy to me, but living — as a concept — doesn't.

So I packed up my stuff and moved somewhere where I wasn't responsible for my own life. And while I may not have needed to know how to brush my teeth, I did need to know that life goes on. There is a life after victimhood. Or I should say within victimhood.

Something I've always struggled with is the gray area. The very fact that two things can be true simultaneously. I may be resilient, but I'm still a victim. I can be both. I *must* be both.

As I navigate the maze that is victimhood, I feel trapped in a labyrinth of my own. Every time I think I'm moving forward, I end up hitting a dead end. But the beauty of a labyrinth lies in the paths untraveled. I may not be moving forward, but I am moving *somewhere*. And I may never reach my destination, but maybe, just maybe, that's okay.

As a victim, there is no way you *should* feel. You may choose to see yourself as someone who has overcome something very difficult. You may see yourself as someone who will never overcome what you've been through. But all you have to know is that life does go on. Resiliency or not.

So, I own a lot of meaningless shit. Bumper stickers, tattoos and mementos, all unified by their utter lack of importance in the grand scheme of things. They all paint a useless picture of a girl who has seen too much. A victim. But that's okay. It has to be okay.



it's a fact of life. And each time I'm asked what happened, I evade the question. How do I tell fucking Starbucks that I was abused as a kid? So instead, I say I'm "resilient" because I've had a "tough life."

Tough. That's one way to put it. Another way would be that I've contemplated suicide most of my life.

The secret to this answer is in the implication. Trauma is not my personality, but it sure did form it. So,

loves those. Somebody who defied all odds and made it out a better person. But that narrative is bullshit. Why is a comeback expected of me?

I look in the mirror and ask myself such a question. What if I didn't have some triumphant ending to my horrible story? Instead of conquering this insurmountable obstacle, what if I leaned into my past? I look at my unnaturally dyed hair and piercings and tattoos, and I see a girl desperate to change in some way. Any way. I couldn't possibly be the same victim I

CULTURE COMICS

By Savannah Dagupion, Leah Mesquita and Audrey Eagerton
Illustrations by Lilliana Lopez

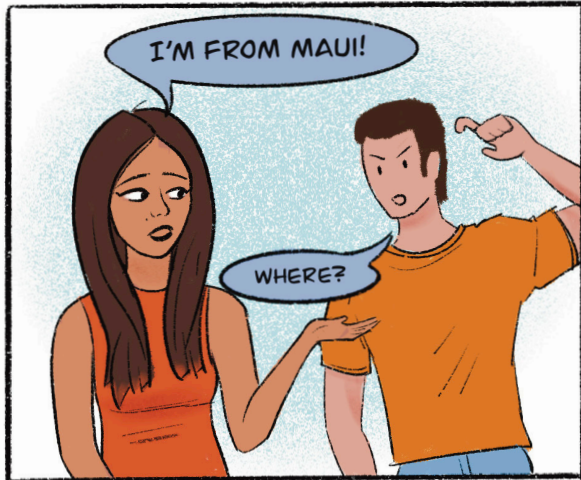
LATINAS LOATHING



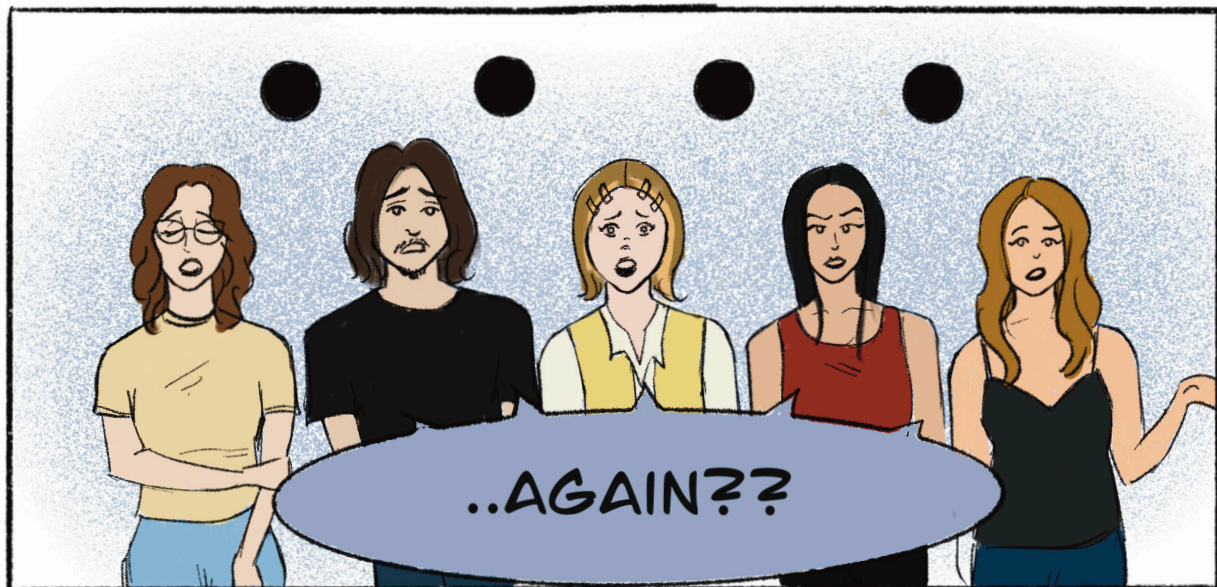
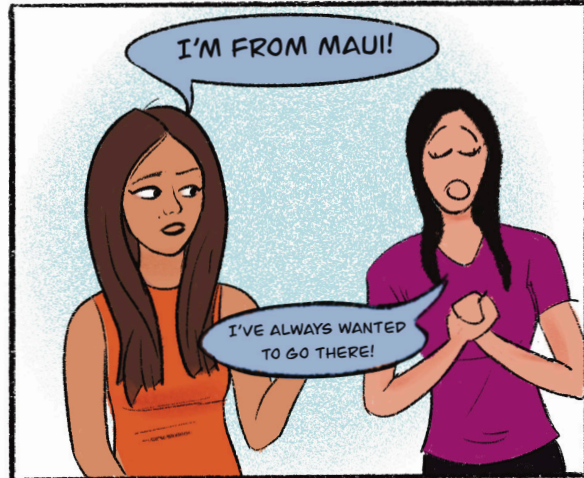
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AFTER MAUI WILDFIRES



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