

cardinal  
& cream



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 6** **THE EDGE PROGRAM**  
WRITTEN BY: AMY DE GROOT  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY: BRYLEE WILLIAMS
- 10** **WATER COOLERS AND FIRE HYDRANTS:  
A MODERN MEDITATION ON MONOCULTURE**  
WRITTEN BY: MACIE SMITH  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY: BRYLEE WILLIAMS
- 14** **RESCULPTING:  
IN THE HANDS OF THE POTTER**  
WRITTEN BY: COLIN HARRIS  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY: BRYLEE WILLIAMS
- 18** **CLOTHED IN CONFIDENCE**  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY: BRYLEE WILLIAMS  
& OLIVIA TEN NAPEL
- 22** **PROFESSORS & STUDENTS,  
WALKING TOGETHER**  
WRITTEN BY: ABIGAIL VAN NESTE  
ILLUSTRATED BY: ABBY THOMAS
- 26** **THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE MY ROOM**  
WRITTEN BY: MARGEE STANFIELD  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY: BRYLEE WILLIAMS
- 32** **WORDS TO KEEP**  
WRITTEN BY: TARYN LENGACHER  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY: OLIVIA TEN NAPEL
- 36** **SEASONS OF THE HEART:  
SITTING IN THE GARDEN WITH MICHELE ATKINS**  
WRITTEN BY: ARYANNA HIGHFILL  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY: OLIVIA TEN NAPEL
- 40** **ATHLETIC PURGATORY:  
UNION ATHLETICS IN THE NIL ERA**  
WRITTEN BY: LUKE DALTON  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY: BRYLEE WILLIAMS
- 44** **CREATING WORSHIPFULLY:  
RISK, REWARD & MAKING MUSIC WELL**  
WRITTEN BY: BRIGHT BURNS  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY: OLIVIA TEN NAPEL
- 48** **ESCAPISM:  
RUNNING TO REDEMPTION**  
WRITTEN BY: NORAH TAYLOR  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY: OLIVIA TEN NAPEL

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

DEAR READER,

I wear a gold locket around my neck every day with my granddaddy's photo in it. I wish he could see this magazine. He valued knowledge greatly, often asserting it was the one thing no one could take away from you. Being kind and honoring to others, on the other hand, was the best thing you could give. Every morning, he would sit at the kitchen table and cycle through mugs full of black coffee as he read the paper. He would be thrilled to see me in school pursuing journalism. He's one of the many influences that make up who I am.

Sometimes I don't feel like my own person. Not because I feel like I'm somebody I'm not, but rather that I am made up of so many factors that came from somewhere, something or someone external from me. We are shaped by the world around us, for better or for worse (spoiler alert: it's a pretty agonizing mix of both). Yet, it's what makes us who we are. Lately I've been thinking about all of the things that have made me who I am.

So much of who I am today I owe to others — friends, family, teachers, coworkers. I have been lucky enough to have my parents as my best friends my whole life. I was blessed with six beyond-incredible grandparents who helped raise me with so much love. I'd count all my pets in this category too. My one-eyed black cat, Tom (named after Tom Hiddleston — if we're talking about people who've influenced me), is more special to me than, admittedly, a lot of people are.

The countless hours I've spent immersed in stories have shaped my own. From losing myself in books, to my history with and concerning level of love for the show "Once Upon a Time," to nerding out over Marvel and "Star Wars" with my dad, listening to Taylor Swift and The Beatles songs as if they were the soundtrack to my life and rewatching Disney films way too often. These stories didn't just serve to entertain; they developed how I see the world and what I want my own to look like.

The places I've lived have shaped what home feels like. The places I've traveled have expanded my sense of possibility.

Nearly every person I've loved, every place I've been, every thing I've consumed, has had a direct and visible impact on my life, even if it's only on a small scale. Ultimately, the Lord shapes our lives through these things in both small and big ways that we don't often see until we look back.

That's what we explore in this issue of the Cardinal & Cream: influence. What influences us, and how do we influence others? You'll find stories about the people shaping Union, parts of Union that impact us and personal testaments of things that have been influential.

As you flip through the pages of this magazine, I hope you reflect on and appreciate all that has influenced you and your story and, in turn, also think about the influence you have on others.

All the love,

Margee  
Stanfield

Margee Stanfield  
Editor-in-Chief





**MARGEE STANFIELD**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



**BRIGHT BURNS**  
CO-MANAGING EDITOR



**ABIGAIL VAN NESTE**  
CO-MANAGING EDITOR



**AMY DE GROOT**  
FEATURES EDITOR



**MACIE SMITH**  
CO-A&E EDITOR



**COLIN HARRIS**  
CO-A&E EDITOR



**LUKE DALTON**  
SPORTS EDITOR



**ARYANNA HIGHFILL**  
NEWS EDITOR



**NORAH TAYLOR**  
MULTIMEDIA EDITOR



**BRYLEE WILLIAMS**  
LEAD PHOTO EDITOR



**OLIVIA TEN NAPEL**  
ASST. PHOTO EDITOR



**ABBY THOMAS**  
LEAD DESIGNER



**JOSHUA KELLEY**  
ASST. DESIGNER



**TED KLUCK**  
FACULTY ADVISOR



**TARYN LENGACHER**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER



**ABBY THOMAS**  
ILLUSTRATOR

AS **STORYTELLERS**  
DEVELOPING OUR CRAFT  
— WE SEEK TO —  
HONOR, MOVE AND INFORM  
**OUR COMMUNITY**  
BY CREATING NARRATIVES THAT  
**ENCOURAGE** THOUGHTFUL CONVERSATION,  
**ADVOCATE** FOR POSITIVE CHANGE  
& **BUILD** LASTING CONNECTIONS.

**EDITORIAL BOARD & STAFF**

4 — POLICY: The Cardinal & Cream is a bi-annual student run publication. Perspectives are the opinions of their creator, not the staff of Union University.  
— The Cardinal & Cream is a member of the Southeast Journalism Conference, Tennessee Press Association and the Baptist Communicators Association. —

# ONLY AN “US” THE EDGE PROGRAM

WRITTEN BY: AMY DE GROOT

PHOTOGRAPHED BY: BRYLEE WILLIAMS

The entire gymnasium held its breath. A shoe screeched across the hardwood floor, basketball dancing off a player's fingertips once, twice, three times. It hung in the air, suspended for a beat, waiting fervently for the final blare of the buzzer to slice through the tension. After a second more, the buzzer relented, the sound ricocheting off the glass backboard, caressing every NCAA tournament banner swaying above the bobbing heads of the rigid student section. A collective exhale from the crowd was followed by immediate, unrelenting chaos.

It was the quintessential college sports experience. And right in the middle of the fray stood Naika Wilson, hands outstretched in celebration, a grin etched across her face as she embraced her team members.

“The basketball team is like a family, and I really appreciate that,” Wilson said.

Wilson is the Union University women's basketball team manager, a job she says challenges her but gives her great joy. She is also an EDGE student.

“Working with the team is one way God has opened up an opportunity for me, even though I have a disability,” Wilson said. “It's not going to slow me down in life. It's going to make me a better person. I'm going to stand out and do my work and advocate for myself. I can prove anyone wrong.”

Wilson attributes much of this confidence and self-advocacy to her enrollment in Union's EDGE Program. The EDGE Program

is a residential, post-secondary education program designed to encourage independent living and job skills that lead to a better quality of life for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities. EDGE offers two degree options: the two-year basic certificate and the four-year advanced certificate programs. Since the EDGE Program welcomed its first cohort exactly 10 years ago, in the fall of 2015, it has become a staple on Union's campus.

“Our students are existing in all different areas on campus,” Rebecca Holloway, director of the EDGE Program, said. “We have a student on the cheer team. We have students in sororities, in SGA, and in the residence halls and classroom environments. Our students are being pushed outside of their comfort zones to reach new levels of independence.”

That is a major goal of the EDGE Program: pushing people toward further independence. To Victor Madden, a senior graduating in May from EDGE's advanced certificate program, that is exactly what EDGE accomplishes.

“I've been learning how to cook. I live on my own. I'm smart. I'm intelligent,” Madden said. “I can define my disability, and I can show other people that I have a light inside of me.”

Though Holloway and the other leadership of the EDGE Program encourage and challenge their students to reach these high levels of independence, there are still barriers, many of which are related more to perception than ability.

“I embrace [my disability] to this day,” Wilson said. “But a lot of people are like, ‘You don't have to do work or do the assignment for school’ because of my disability. I still can do work, and I do it right.”





Wilson is 22 years old, which is older than me. She is taking six classes this semester, which is more than I'm taking. She is a basketball manager, works out regularly and is a leader in the EDGE Program. She is someone for me to look up to — for a lot of people to look up to. Yet, she has still found that people underestimate her. They don't see her as a 22-year-old college student taking six classes while being involved in extracurriculars.

"I think people have good intentions with that," Holloway said. "They think they're helping the person by saying, 'Let me do that for you' or 'They didn't know any better.' But that's not helpful for anybody. These college students are smart and capable of doing a lot of things. We need to love people enough to have high expectations. That's not unkind. That's actually the kindest thing that we can do."

Good intentions don't always create good results. In fact, in this case, they rarely do. Low expectations of Madden could harm his dream of owning his own car washing business, never encouraging him to learn, grow and try. Low expectations of Wilson created an internal struggle within her: "Am I dumb? Am I smart? Am I actually capable of success?"

"I couldn't accept that I had a disability because that made me guilty," Wilson said. "I didn't want to have a disability. I looked down on myself. But I learned to embrace it more and more because God did make me for a reason — for a purpose. And He has great plans for me."

That is another major goal of the EDGE Program: guiding students to accept themselves just as they are and find their purposes as followers of Christ. But finding purpose and acceptance requires exploration. And exploration requires branching out, especially in a college context. The EDGE Program prepares for this reality as well, partly through its mentorship program. EDGE mentors are traditional undergraduate students paired with an EDGE student who simply do daily life together.

"I basically just try to add [my mentee] to my regular day," Trace Robinson, junior economics major and first-year EDGE mentor, said. "I went home on Saturday to eat dinner with my family, and so he came with me. Very rarely is it us doing special things. Like any other friend, it's about adding him to what I do."

This mentorship program allows EDGE students and mentors to experience campus in a typical way. It is not new or innovative. It is just about living life together as average college students, something EDGE students and mentors alike desire.



"Students in the EDGE Program are more like traditional undergraduate students than you might think," Holloway said. "My students desire friendship and acceptance and purpose, which is what most undergraduate students are here to figure out."

As a college student who has loved, lost, made mistakes and grown, I can confirm that is true. As someone who talked with Wilson and Madden extensively about their goals, dreams and aspirations while in college and beyond, I can assume that it is true for them as well.

"I love being at this school; it feels like home," Madden said. "I miss my family, but school feels peaceful and joyful at the same time. I have friends here, and it's going to help me find a job someday."

Just like Madden, I hope my college education will land me a job someday. Just like Madden, I miss my family. Just like Madden, I love this school; it feels like home.

And that's the whole point.

The EDGE Program doesn't exist to create an isolated space for students with intellectual or developmental disabilities. It doesn't advertise a unique college experience. It doesn't exist to coddle or appease students. The EDGE Program exists to continue Union University's mission of providing Christ-centered education that

promotes excellence and character development in service to Church and society.

"A lot of people treat them differently, and I'd say just treat them like they're another person," Robinson said. "If I'm texting [my mentee] to take him somewhere, I just tell him I'm picking him up at six. I don't try to overexplain things or talk to him differently. I'm patient, but it's just like with my friends. He's just like the rest of us."

Just like the rest of us means going to classes and participating in group projects, complaining when the professor's instructions are overly complicated and unclear. Just like the rest of us means standing in the middle of the dining hall, head on a swivel, stressing because you can't find which table your friend is sitting at. Just like the rest of us means there is no us and them, only an us.

"Just treat me like a human being. That's all," Wilson said. "You can't always judge a book by its cover. You can always assume that I can't do something, but I'll always prove you wrong. I'm still learning about myself, so be open to learning about me too."

A sharp buzz pierced the silence. Wilson's cheers erupted, mingling with all the others. Her hands reached out toward the triumphant Bulldogs right along with everyone else's.

It's the quintessential college experience.



# WATER COOLERS & FIRE HYDRANTS: A Modern Meditation On Monoculture

*WRITTEN BY: MACIE SMITH*

*PHOTOGRAPHED BY: BRYLEE WILLIAMS*

“I really need to set aside more time to watch TV.”

I’ve said those words more times than I can count in the last four years of college, and every time, I have really meant it. It sounds weird, right? Maybe that’s not what you would expect to hear from me right now, at this moment, on this page. It feels like the conversation — especially in artsy, self-reflective personal essays in the *Cardinal & Cream* magazine — is usually centered around how we need to consume less media. I’m no stranger to it: the eternal shame spiral of struggling to reduce my screen time, trying to tear myself away from my fifth rewatch of “*Gilmore Girls*” to go write a paper, or realizing that my “quick check of Instagram” has actually turned into a 45-minute doomscroll and I don’t remember any of it.

TV just isn’t something that I prioritize very well, though. Don’t get me wrong, I have my staples that I always go back to (“*The Office*,” “*Friends*,” “*Gilmore Girls*” — all the usual suspects), but I’m not what I think of as a “TV person.” I don’t have particularly discerning tastes about what I watch, and my viewing choices are more driven by my moods than by any savvy understanding of cinema. My friends are always recommending shows and movies to me, telling me that this is the one that I’ll really love — I just need to get through the first couple of episodes, and then I’ll be hooked. But at the end of the day, I just have trouble branching out.

So the conclusion I’ve come to is that I need to be more intentional about watching TV. And to be clear, I don’t say this to imply that I’m some kind of Luddite. I may not be addicted to television, but my phone’s screen time report is really nothing to be proud of. So this desire isn’t coming from a lack of media input. Maybe what I want is not more media, but a way of consuming media that feels more meaningful. What does that look like? And what’s missing from the way that we currently approach something like watching TV?

This summer, I started a show I’ve always meant to get into: “*Breaking Bad*.” (I’m late to the party. What else is new?) A few years back, someone told me that they think it’s the greatest TV show ever made. At the time, that seemed like a stretch, but you know what? I think they actually might be right. It’s really, really good. I fell down the “*Breaking Bad*” rabbit hole in May while trying to shake an awful case of jet lag, and I was instantly hooked. The plot, the character development, the questions raised about human nature and morality — it’s a stunningly good show.

As enthralling as I’ve found “*Breaking Bad*,” you know what I’ve also found frustrating about it? I can’t find anyone to talk to about it, so I’ve been experiencing the entire show mostly on my own. If I want to know anyone else’s thoughts about the episode I just watched, my options are limited to lurking on Reddit or the off-chance that someone in my orbit might also be a fan. This makes sense at the end of the day, though, because “*Breaking Bad*” isn’t currently airing — it concluded in 2013. But since the advent of streaming, this asynchronous, siloed viewing experience has also become the way we watch series that are currently being released. We no longer have a consistent, shared cultural experience of media, and as asinine as it might sound, this actually erodes our connections with the people we encounter on a daily basis.

To explain what I mean, I'll share something that's slightly embarrassing, because it's the furthest thing from highbrow, cultured or unique. Over the summer, I succumbed to the trends and became heavily invested in the Amazon Prime TV series, "The Summer I Turned Pretty." The story is fun, but what I really love about the show is how Prime chose to release it: one episode at a time, once a week on Wednesdays. I've been having weekly watch parties with friends and debriefing episodes every Thursday morning for the entire summer. It feels fresh and different — since we entered the streaming era, TV viewing doesn't tend to work that way anymore. When "Friends" was airing every Thursday night in the '90s, you had a guaranteed conversation with your coworkers locked and loaded for Friday morning at the water cooler. Is it idealistic of me to feel nostalgic for that? I think that we've sacrificed a shared experience for the convenience of streaming and the rush of the binge-watch.

Last year, I visited one of my friends in New York City around Christmastime for a few days of post-finals decompression. One evening, we decided to meet some other friends in the West Village, where a Liverpool vs. Tottenham football match was being broadcast. We walked under the green awning, through the front door, and were met with a buzzing crowd dotted with blue Tottenham jerseys, starting rounds of chants that I'd never heard before but suddenly wished I knew so that I could sing along.

When the winning goal was finally scored, the entire place erupted into wild cheers and whoops. People, who clearly didn't know each other, threw their arms around each other's shoulders in joyful solidarity.

I wasn't wearing a Tottenham jersey; I hadn't even understood most of the match. But when it was time to leave that place, I really, really didn't want to go. Was I all that invested in the match? Not really. But I was hooked on the feeling of being in a room where everyone was experiencing a media-centered moment together, in real time. It doesn't happen that much anymore.

All of this reminds me of a story Kurt Vonnegut tells in his essay collection, "A Man Without A Country." Here's what Vonnegut says:

"I once told my wife I was going out to buy an envelope.

'Oh,' she says, 'well, you're not a poor man ... why don't you go online and buy a hundred envelopes and put them in the closet?'

So I pretend not to hear her. And go out to get an envelope because I'm going to have a hell of a good time in the process of buying one envelope. I meet a lot of people. And see some great-looking babies. And a fire engine goes by. And I give them the thumbs up. And I'll ask a woman what kind of dog that is ... The moral of the story is — we're here on Earth to fart around. Of course, the computers will do us out of that. But what the computer people don't realise, or they don't care, is we're dancing animals ... we love to move around. And it's like we're not supposed to dance at all anymore."

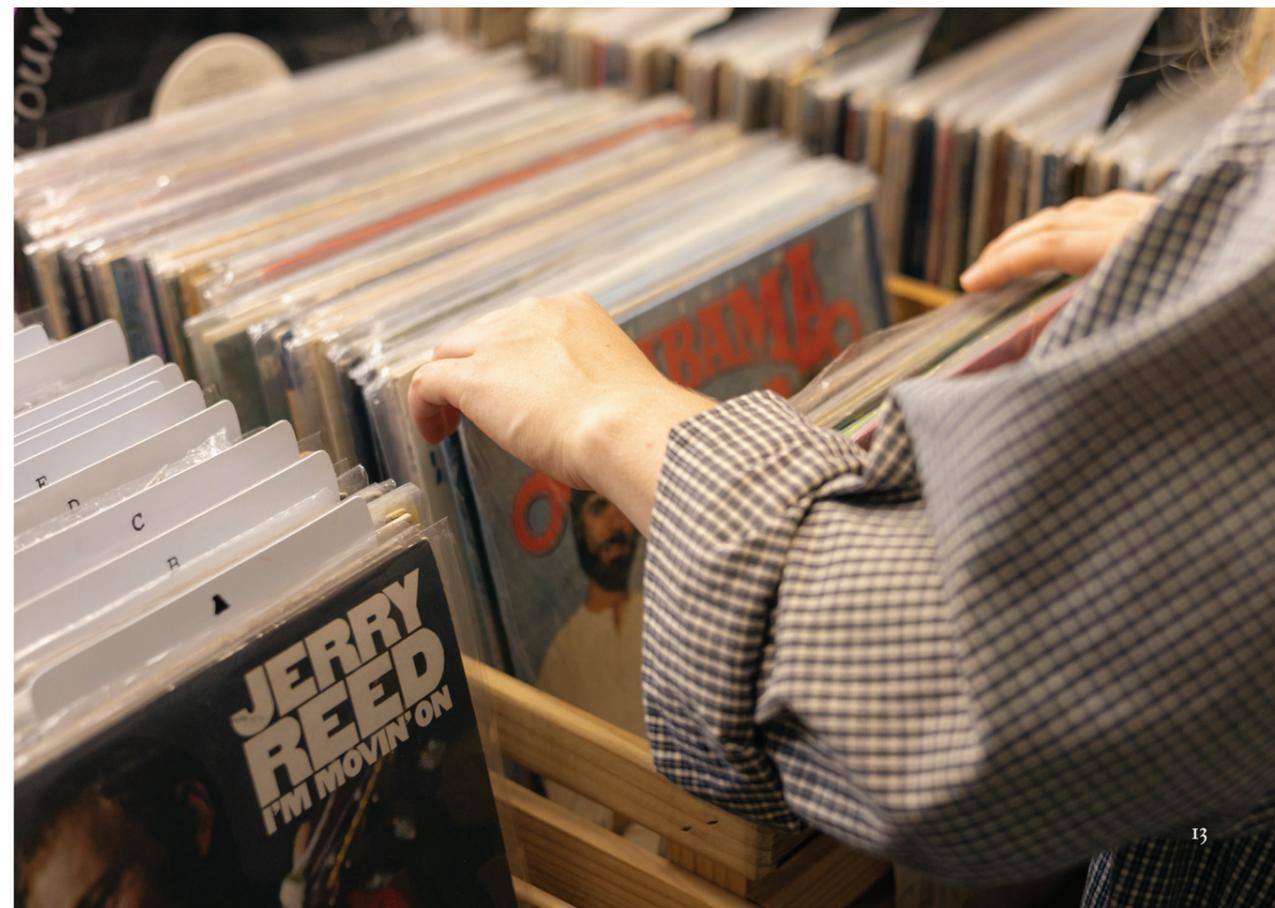
Maybe a TV show is a little like a box of envelopes. And maybe what we really need is connection over convenience. Because,

sure, we have more options than ever for what we might watch. Given five minutes, an internet connection and a can-do attitude, I can access just about any show or movie I want. And yes, it's cool that we get entire seasons dropped on streaming platforms at one time. Sometimes it's nice not to have to wait around for the next week or month to see how a story ends.

But you know what? I'm not sure if I really want a bottomless glut of content to sift through completely on my own, hoping I can eventually find something palatable to distract me from my loneliness. I am exhausted by the fire hydrant of content, content, content. I want a way of experiencing stories that connects me to others instead of isolating me from them. And I don't think I like who I am when I'm alone in my room watching TV on my laptop.

By my estimation, "The Summer I Turned Pretty" will not be winning an Emmy anytime soon. There are plenty of shows that are better written, have better acting and boast more original storylines. But — it's been a long time since I've had as much fun watching TV as I've had while watching "The Summer I Turned Pretty." And that's because of reasons that transcend the show itself. It's about the anticipation of waiting an entire week for an episode to drop rather than watching it all in one fevered binge. It's about watching the new episode with a group of friends the day it's released instead of sitting alone in your dorm room, hunched over a laptop, letting the "play next episode" slider go for hours on end without even getting up to stretch your legs.

Give me the water cooler over the fire hydrant any day of the week.



# RESCULPTING: In The Hands Of The Potter



*WRITTEN BY: COLIN HARRIS  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY: BRYLEE WILLIAMS*

For the art students, it should have been a typical Thursday night — another all-nighter for the potters to prepare their teapots for critique the following Monday. One moment, carefully concentrating on forming the shape of a lid, the next moment, they are abandoned, left to dry out. Fire alarms shrill, piercing the night as water gushes in. Walls peel from their bases. Group chats explode with panic, questions and misinformation as students clamber to safety.

Many thought lightning or a tornado had struck the building. In actuality, the torrential rain that had been pounding campus all day had caved in the roof, breaking the sprinkler system and gas line, causing flooding to sweep across the area.

Shelby Rector, the 3D shop technician, was in her office when the accident occurred.

“The entire building shook, and the bottom of the walls connected to the baseboards started peeling away in my office,” Rector said. “My biggest concern was figuring out what happened and to get my students to safety.”

After escorting the students who were inside to safety, Rector turned off one of the ceramic kilns that was on, which turned out to be a miracle as a nearby busted gas pipe would have coupled to create an explosion.

With the kiln off and students safely escorted out, she placed a call to Paige Ward Moore, an art and ceramics professor and faculty member, who immediately left for campus to see what she could do.

The following morning, Moore, Rector and many university faculty, as well as students, rallied together to clear the entire sculpture and ceramics studios and closets, taking everything they could — from decades’ worth of delicate clay pieces, art prints and books, to screwdrivers and even whiteboards. They had to take everything they could because they had no clue when or if anything would be replaced.

Because one of the large exterior walls had collapsed, many prints were in danger, and Moore had to quickly relocate them with the aid of President Samuel W. “Dub” Oliver.

“That was a really great picture of servant leadership,” Moore said. “It was encouraging because we were in a period of disaster and devastation, and the highest leader of the university is helping us with the most seemingly menial tasks.”

Strong leadership can be a positive contagion, spreading like wildfire and inspiring more people to step up to the plate. Fighting through confusion and exhaustion, Moore determined to be an anchor and to set aside her personal comfort for the sake of all those who relied on her.

The model demonstrated by the leaders did not go unnoticed, and it inspired students to rally together and accomplish the tasks that needed to be done to save their department.





“Seeing my professors step up so quickly and so readily, knowing they would do whatever it takes to make the rest of the semester happen, was very inspiring and encouraging,” Reid Pike, a junior art therapy major, said.

Even the strongest of leaders need to rely on the support and strength of others, and Moore told me that on that Friday, when she and the president and faculty were assessing their next steps forward, she began to cry, burdened by the hard road ahead.

“It taught us to rely on the Lord’s strength, and without it there was no way we would have [made] it through,” Moore said. “He showed us what needed to get done, and He was so gracious and kind to us.”

It was evident how blessed the situation was, because miraculously, no equipment or artwork had been lost. Additionally, a week prior, the neighboring engineering department had moved into the newly constructed campus building, opening up their space for the art department to start repairing and rebuilding.

While student work and all the equipment had survived the flooding, and they had a space to move into, morale was still low.

It is true that art can be made in any place with any materials, but the students had lost something much more than a room; they lost one of the most prominent places in their lives.

“The loss of the studio for art majors is equivalent to them losing their homes,” said Moore. “It’s not like they simply lost a classroom. They lost a space where they spent more time than their own dorm rooms. That space had meaning to them.”

Though already a close department by nature, the accident brought them together in a way nothing else could; the encouragement and support they gave one another and the stoic forbearance with which they bore it is a wellspring that every department should draw upon.

One evening, the entire art community and several faculty members stayed up the entire night to help a senior art student fix the feet of pedestals that had been water-damaged so that she might still have her senior show.

To help students process, grieve and learn from the experience, Moore created an impromptu response project for her 3D sculpture students to take the ruined and water-damaged pedestal feet and turn them into pieces of work reflecting on what the Lord had been teaching them through this experience.

That meaning and importance were conveyed in their work, with many students’ pieces reflecting on their cherished memories with their friends in the studio. Reid Pike created a visual representation of the parable of the lost sheep with her pedestal, filled with clay sheep and scraps of memories forged in the place that was once her home. It was a piece that reflected on the ultimate provision of the Lord and how He meets our deepest needs, often in ways we don’t expect.

“I got a copy of this book called ‘In the Hands of the Potter,’ and it helped me realize God’s sovereignty over the situation,” Pike said. “It was an actual grace that the building collapsed. It opened an opportunity for us to evaluate why we make art and the worth of it and the impact of doing it together.”

*Together.* That was the common theme across every conversation I had about this accident. When it came time to rebuild, the art faculty was given an immense amount of autonomy to rebuild how they wanted to, and the administration delivered on almost all of their requests: widening spaces, new floor drains, more track lights, a student gallery and, most importantly, proximity.

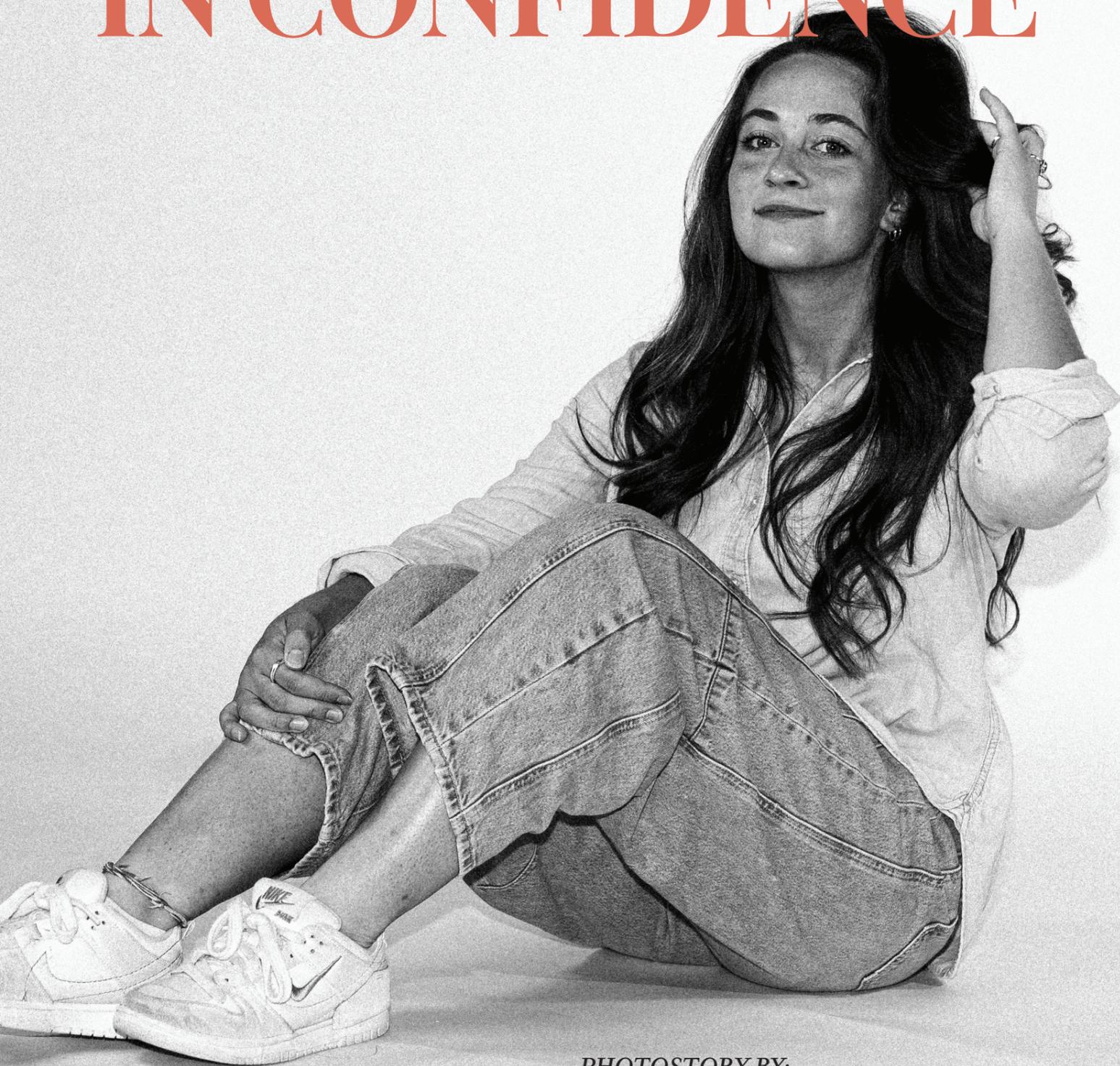
For the first time in Union history, all the art studios are next to each other. Students and teachers can walk down the hallways

and see each other hard at work and be inspired and encouraged by one another. Now they are a unified department, not just in spirit, but spatially. For the students, this experience will be a catalyst for growth because of the hardship they overcame. Memories of the building collapse will fade. But for the department, it is cemented as a part of their history.

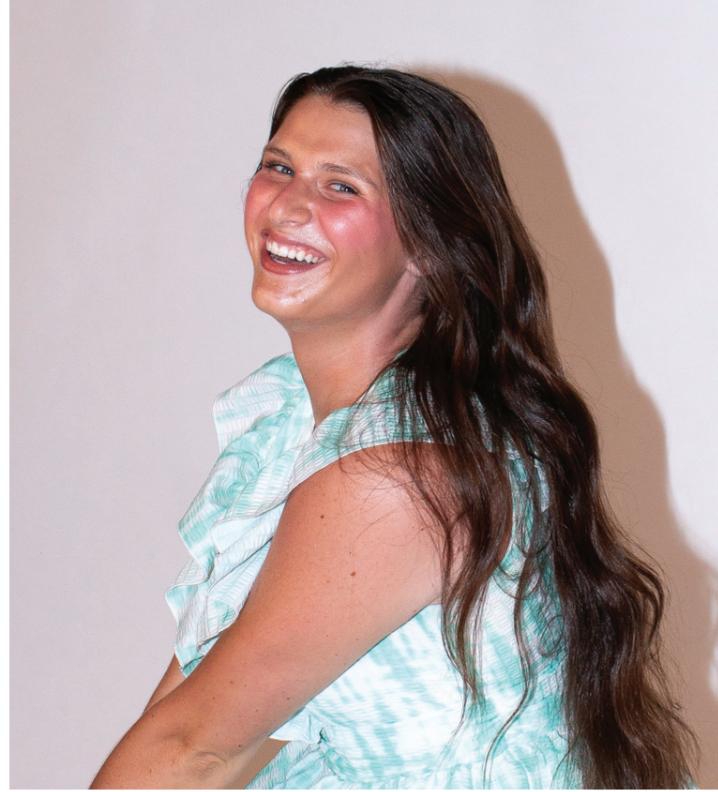
Our prayers are rarely answered in the ways we expect, but the Lord does always meet our deepest needs. If we knew it came with hardship, we might never pray for it in the first place. Our lives will be marked by trials and tribulations, but He is merciful always if we reflect on the good things we have been gifted with. Your walls may be cracking under the weight of the water of this world, too, and your life can come crashing down at any moment. But we have a Savior who restores, and He can reconstruct your life into something better than you can possibly imagine.

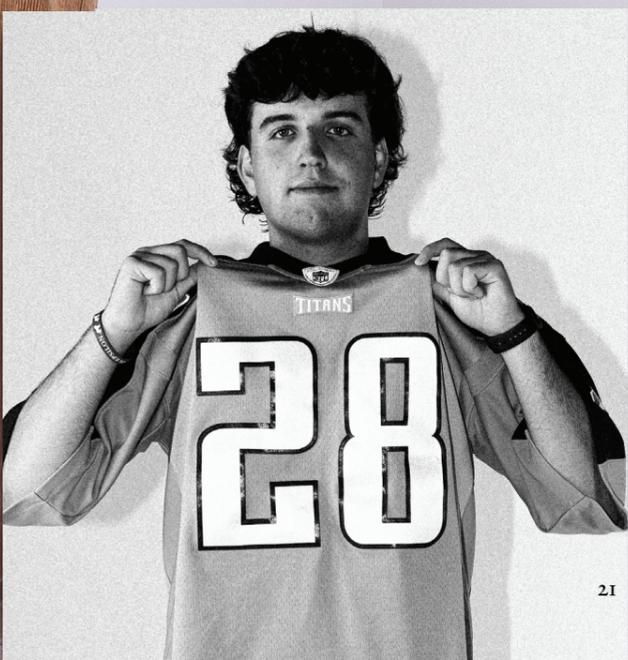
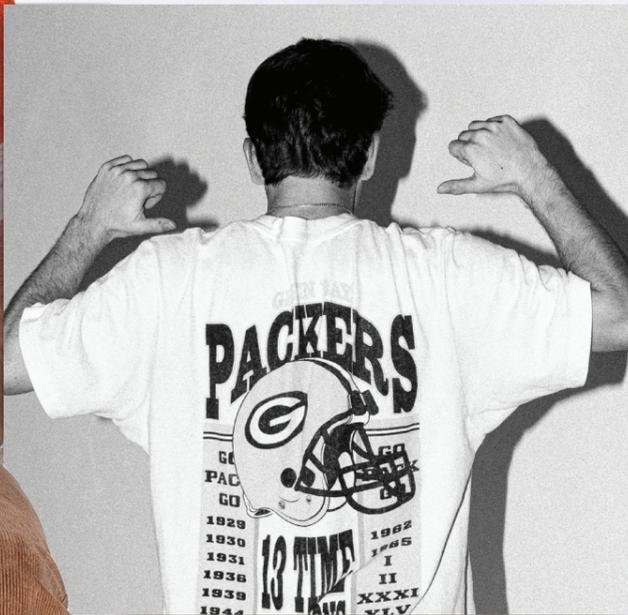
“There’s always a silver lining. The Lord works in mysterious ways,” Moore said. “It might not be how I would choose to go about it, but it was an [answered] prayer to have a more unified space, and the future of the art department is going to be all the brighter for it.”

# CLOTHED IN CONFIDENCE



PHOTOSTORY BY:  
BRYLEE WILLIAMS & OLIVIA TEN NAPEL





# PROFESSORS & STUDENTS, WALKING TOGETHER

WRITTEN BY: ABIGAIL VAN NESTE  
ILLUSTRATED BY: ABBY THOMAS

I dreaded going to college. I disliked the idea of moving five minutes away from home, instead of thousands of miles away, like my other friends did. I was worried that on the small campus of only a few thousand people, I wouldn't find anywhere I could truly connect.

But I was never worried about my teachers.

Growing up in Jackson meant I'd been rubbing elbows with professors anytime I stepped out of the house. From seeing them in grocery aisles to church pews, I had encountered them in nearly every area of my life. But these bonds with my teachers aren't something that only local students have; they extend to every Union student.

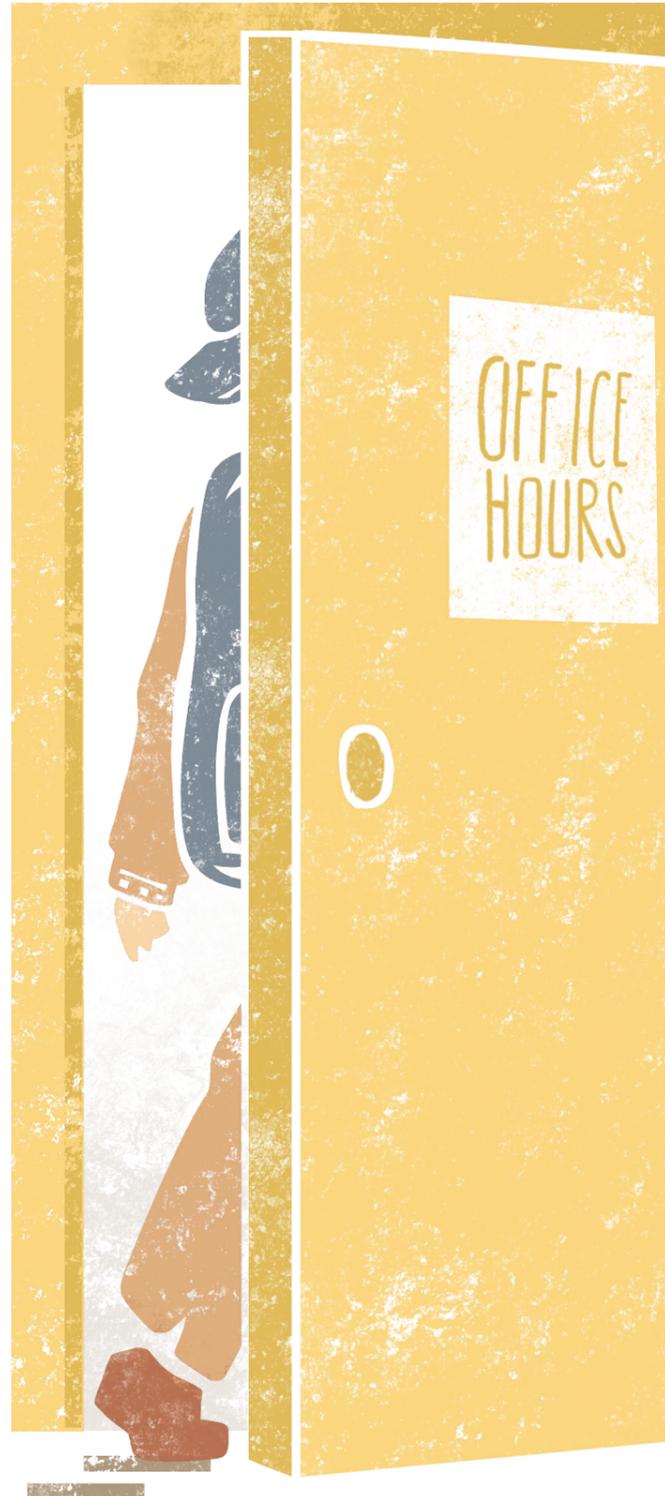
Many faculty members have unique and intentional relationships with their students. When you ask students which professors they have a deep personal relationship with, a few names come up again and again. One of these is Scott Huelin.

Scott Huelin, professor of English, is the director of the Honors Community. Honors at Union is a way for students to bridge deep thinking about the world with their coursework. The Honors Community is known for actually being a *community*. The professors know their students and their struggles. With intentional times set apart for students and faculty to form connections outside of the classroom, Honors is built on interpersonal relationships. Thus, Huelin is qualified to speak to this topic.

Firstly, begging the question, how do students even begin to form these relationships?

"Go to office hours, go to office hours, go to office hours," Huelin said in response.

Even in the busyness of day-to-day work, professors set apart multiple hours a week, some even multiple hours each day, to be available to their students. Every professor is willing and able to meet with their students about their classwork, but for many, this becomes a time where students hear and see their professor's faith lived out both in words and actions. Students come with full trust that their professors will not only hear them, but will also be able to guide them in wisdom.



"A shared faith in Christ and a shared interest in the life of the mind go a long way," Huelin said when asked how, on the flip side, *he* establishes connections with students.

Every professor at Union wants to see you thrive in your coursework and to succeed in the real world, but on top of that, they also want to see you grow in your relationship with Christ.

Professors are a safe place for students to ask pressing questions as they wander through the most transformative years of their lives. This makes college begin to feel like more than just a place where you learn.

It's a place where you grow.

However, it can be hard to grow in larger colleges where the professors *can't* know you well.

"In my first semester at my alma mater, there were 500 students in my chemistry class and 250 in my Western civ class. The professor definitely didn't know my name, and I certainly didn't know anyone else in there," Huelin said.

Union has the advantage of only having around 3,000 students in total. While the small size of the school could be seen as a hindrance to some, for the professors, this means their biggest classes might only be 30 people. This allows teachers to form meaningful connections with each of their students.

"I learn my students' names right away. Usually, I can name them all by the second class period of the semester," Huelin said. For Union professors, teaching isn't just about the material—it's about making sure that the students feel seen and known.

He and many other teachers have clearly achieved their goal, judging by how students talk about them.

Alana Williams, a sophomore Christian ministry and English literature double major, spoke eagerly about her professors. "The kinds of teachers I've had at Union have really seen me as a person and helped me personally think through things. And they enjoy what they do," Williams said.

She expressed how her teachers prioritize making sure each student is confident in their understanding. Williams shared a



---

story of a teacher walking her through a difficult assignment, “not leading me by the nose, but showing me where the deeper issue was in my work.” She expressed her thankfulness for the time professors commit simply to allow their students to dialogue with them about their work.

I asked if she could tell the difference it makes to have teachers who are pursuing the Lord in everything.

“I think they cultivate a ton of humility,” Williams said. “The professors here are really humble and willing to admit when they don’t know something, and that allows for a much deeper dialogue.”

She also explained the unmistakable passion all her teachers have for their craft.

“There’s a holy delight you see in them. That’s really the fear of the Lord. They are delighting in Him so deeply that the opportunity to teach doesn’t come up dry,” Williams said.

Huelin raised this point when discussing how his students have formed him as a person.

“My students continually reignite my love for learning. Seeing familiar subject matter through their unfamiliar eyes helps me recall the thrill of one’s first discovery of life-changing ideas. They [also] help me stay humble, because they often ask questions I hadn’t anticipated or develop new angles from which to see old questions,” Huelin said.

This holy delight, as Williams described, is not possible without the student’s desire to see it.

Entering college is, without a doubt, a humbling experience. Reality was forced upon me quickly when entering my college-level classes. I was hit with the hard truth, ‘I am not as smart as I thought I was.’ The sheer idea of speaking to my professors, who are the best in their field, left me timid. But growth and maturity led me to the realization that I didn’t need to be the smartest. My care and my desire to work would be reflected.



“The advice I would say to freshmen who aren’t sure how to begin these relationships with their teachers is, firstly, think deeply. Show that you care ... ask deep questions and be willing to take time to interact with them about your questions. Care about your homework. And put yourself out there to interact with them! That will lead to a lot of really rich connections,” Williams said.

Learning is more than just a classroom pursuit. It’s a constant and ever-developing endeavor that will cost more than just 50-75 minutes. This goal is exactly what Union is founded on. Our core values of being excellence-driven, Christ-centered, people-focused and future-directed are perfectly shown in everything expressed by both student and teacher. These relationships are not a rare commodity but rather the physical display of living out Union’s values.

But personal connection is not the only reason to have these relationships.

“When the Father wanted to reveal Himself more fully to humankind, He didn’t send a book; He sent His Son,” Huelin said. “Learning, in the fullest and richest sense of the word, is always incarnational and therefore, relational.”

Learning without human connection is always possible. But without it, learning comes up lackluster. A qualified and passionate professor can teach you just about anything they want to. But a teacher who walks beside their students through their life and school is a teacher who will change the trajectory of their students’ lives.

While I did dread going to college in my hometown, it has been the most transformative time. I realized what I dreaded was the fear that I would experience no transformation. But I quickly learned that transformation doesn’t happen only when you move away: it happens when people walk with you and help you move through your life with wisdom.

# THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE MY ROOM

WRITTEN BY: MARGEE STANFIELD  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY: BRYLEE WILLIAMS

By the end of a lot of days, I'm driving home with my head full, overthinking and ruminating on everything I said or did, vowing that I should probably never go out into the world again. My brows are scrunched, my shoulders are tensed and my heart is anxious as I clutch the steering wheel. But then I remember I'm only minutes away from this ...

Sitting on a big white corduroy couch and, surrounding me, there are books and plants, cozy and warm lighting, baked-good-scented candles and fairy lights flickering, artificial sounds of a fireplace or rain playing (bonus points if it's actually raining), a warm drink in one hand and a book in the other. Wrapped in a fluffy brown blanket and my one-eyed black cat snuggled up in my lap. The walls are lined with things I love: shelves of books, posters, pages of "Frankenstein," my favorite novel.

It feels like a big sigh of relief when I pass over that threshold. No matter what happens in a day, I have this to retreat to.

This is my happy place. My room.

*"Romanticize a quiet life / There's no place like my room."*

Phoebe Bridgers sings those lyrics in her song "I Know The End," and I feel them so deeply. There truly is no place like my room.

The thought makes me never want to leave. I told my mom once that I don't think I'll ever feel as at home again as I do here.

When something starts to slip through my fingers, I get the urge to commemorate it to the best of my abilities. Lucky for my overly sentimental nature and tendency to romanticize everything, I'm a writer, which gives me the perfect outlet to immortalize something without letting it fade away. In a little less than a year's time, I will pack up the contents of this room into boxes, and the space that has been my sanctuary for the majority of my life will suddenly cease to exist. Sure, the four walls will still be standing, but its essence will be gone. No magic. Just a room in a house with white walls and wood floors.

So here I go, grieving something before it is actually gone — as I so often do.

Your room starts as a blank canvas. It may just be a bed. But, slowly, whether you mean for it to or not, it becomes obvious that the space is yours. Even if you're not somebody who has gone through many phases of collecting things in massive amounts (as I am guilty of and my room bears witness to — Funko Pops, books, plants), you naturally accumulate things over time. Posters from

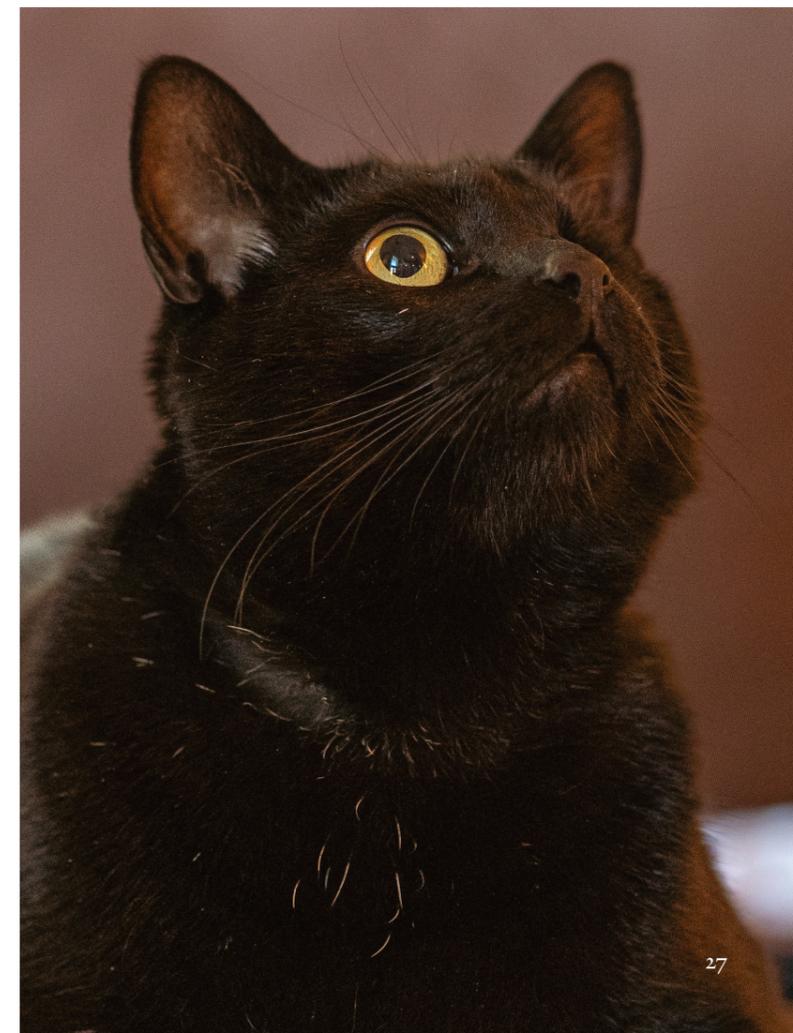
your favorite movies, records by your favorite artists, stuffed animals you couldn't bear to part with even after growing out of them. Physical evidence of things like all the hobbies you've partaken in (even the failed ones) — drawers full of old diaries and things you've written, lightly used guitars, even more lightly used crochet hooks and yarn. When all these things that are uniquely yours come together in one place, it's like this concentrated, compact representation of you and all that you love.

That's why our rooms become such safe spaces for us. It's your own little pocket of the world. It feels safe and uniquely curated to you.

Consequently, it also becomes the backdrop for going through your life and, ultimately, growth. Your room is the space where you experience a lot of your most vulnerable moments. You process big life events in the confines of those walls, your highest highs and lowest lows. I know my walls have seen a lot.

My journey with my room started when I was in the fourth grade and deeply desired a dollhouse for my American Girl dolls. The issue was, my current room in the house didn't have the space for one. So, being the spoiled only child I was (am), for Christmas that year, my dad not only custom-built me a big dollhouse, but moved me into the master bedroom of our home and remodeled it to be the room of my 10-year-old dreams. The walls were bright teal — my favorite color at the time.

Not too many years passed in the room before it started to change. I was already somewhat of a nerd when I moved in, so there were a couple of Star Wars posters on the walls, but soon, you could hardly even tell the walls were teal because they were covered with posters as I became obsessed with more and more shows and films.





I binge-watched the show that would come to be my favorite of all time in this room. That led to the birth of a YouTube channel dedicated to the show that I ran throughout my pre-teen years right from my room. I started to find myself through expressing my creativity in that way. I laughed and cried, grieved and grew. My room allowed for a space where a world full of good things was nurtured into me, like my relationship with the Lord, my love for reading, the ability to comfortably be alone and the discovery of the things I'm passionate about.

As I evolved, the room did, too. The walls were eventually painted white and the dollhouse was eventually repurposed as bookshelves.

But my room didn't always foster good things. Sometimes I feel like it made me Emily Dickinson levels of recluse.

This room also saw the time that I left public school to homeschool. I had become aware of how hard and scary the world can be and just how anxious a person I am. Suddenly, my room was the safest place in the world. It wasn't just a place I enjoyed being in, but a place I felt like I *had to be* in order to be safe.

I'm a chronic introvert, and I think at one point in time, it's safe to say I was fairly agoraphobic. I did not want to leave my safe space. I rarely left my house throughout my homeschool career, and then, when it came time to go to college, I ended up not moving away. I chose to attend the school where my dad works and live at home for four more years.

I'd say that's partly because I love my room, but also partly because I wasn't ready to step outside the safety of it.

My room fostered not just a desire for safety, but a reinforcement of my fears. "What happens when I leave?" echoed in my brain. "Here is good. Here is safe." My room became a shield against change.

So now, this room has also seen the entirety of my college experience: late nights of studying, moments of doubt and panic, the discovery of what I want to do with my life. And, despite my best efforts, change happened anyway. The more I grew, the more I started looking to the future rather than the past. And, eventually, the future started to seem more exciting than terrifying.

I just needed to stay in the sanctuary of my room a little bit longer to grow enough to be ready to move on. All along, my room has been preparing me to leave it.

A different part of that Bridgers' song has started to echo in my brain.

*"I gotta go now, I know, I know, I know."*

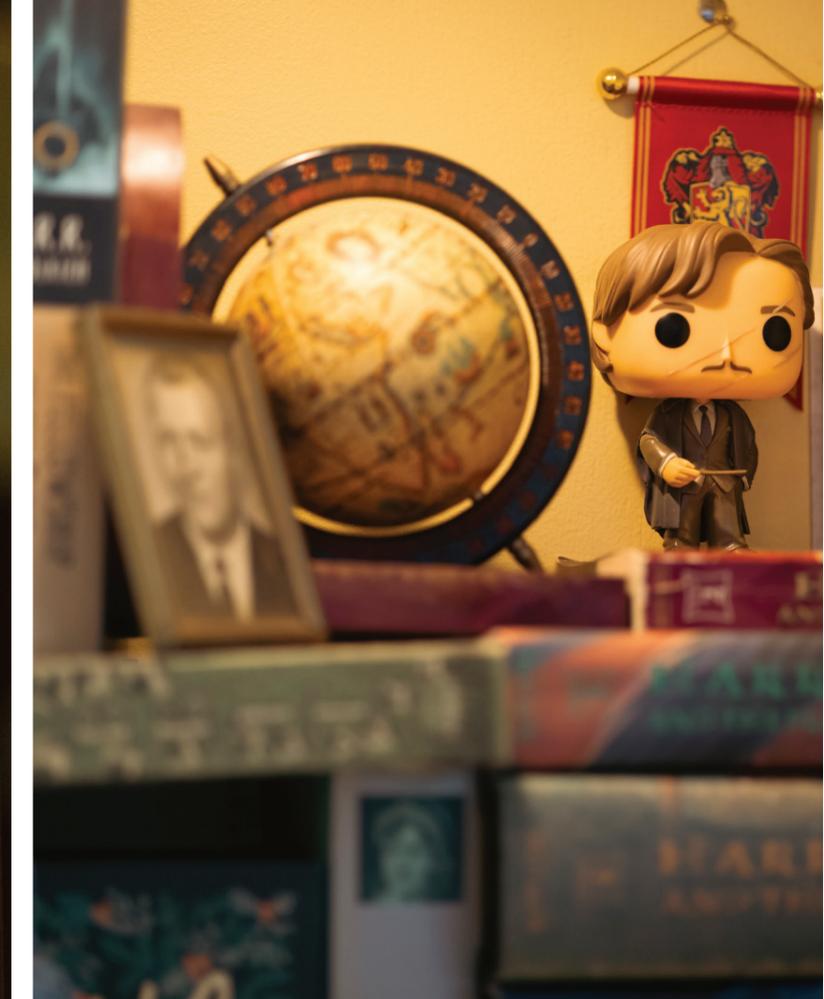
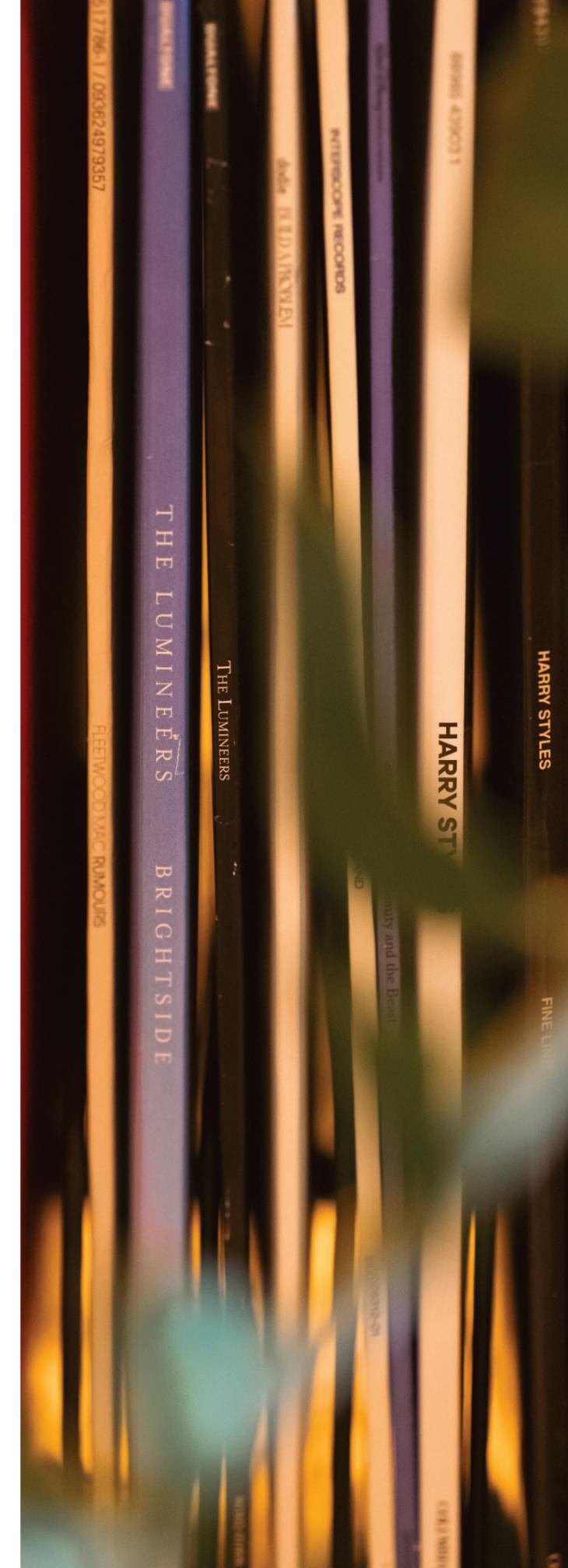
I'm grieving childhood, holding onto it for dear life, but the reality is I'm not a child anymore. I can't force myself to stay in a place I've outgrown, and I'm thankful for the growth I've had. I can try to put it off as long as I want, but I'll have to be brave enough to let go and grow up at some point.

Fear is my greatest struggle. We often don't view fear as something inherently sinful, but fear is the absence of faith. Not believing the Lord will ever bring me something as great as He already has would be to deny His goodness and providence. My hope and my prayer is that I don't grow to be so afraid of change that I miss out on something and become stagnant.

This room has acted as a training ground of sorts, and I owe it to my room to be brave enough to step out of it. The reality of the unknown is still rightfully terrifying, but I know I can look forward to the future with joyful faith that God will guide me just as He always has.

This time next year, maybe I'll be in an apartment somewhere (who knows) that will prove the notion that I'll never feel at home again wrong. I'll fill it with a lot of the same stuff — books, plants, my one-eyed black cat (of course) — but those walls will witness new eras of me and exciting installments of my story.

That's something to look forward to, not to fear.



HAPPY Valentine's DAY

MACIE, WILL YOU BE MY BRIDESMAID?

Snaps to Colin for doing hard things.

Bright, Happy Birthday! People always say that college where they find their best friend and I have 100% found that!

You is kind you is smart you is important you inspire me to be better! Stay positive and love yourself!



The Dalton Gang

you are my MACIE!

Best in people

most of it and always... I Love you more than you can know, and I'm so proud of you.

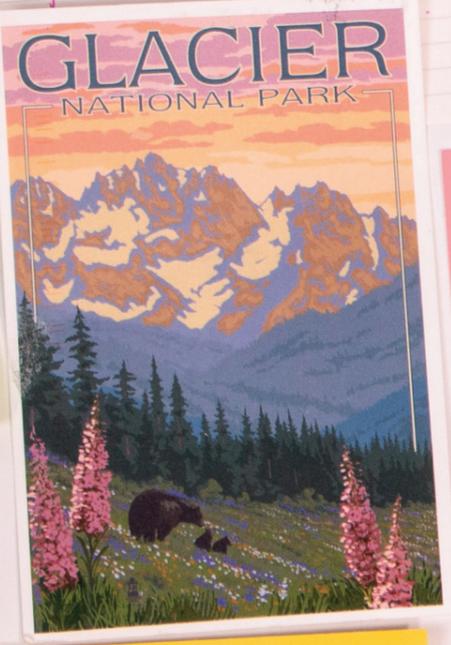
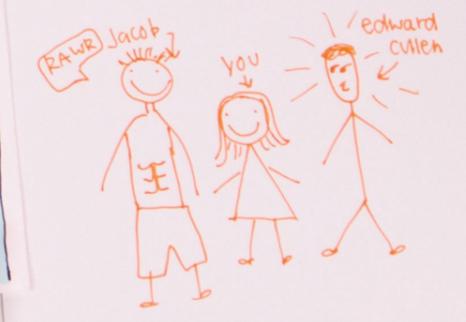
Love Always Dad



Bright, Well done!! So fun to be here tonight. We celebrate you. Love Always the Nappers



an Bright Girl, I have been praying for you this week and want to share with you... I know what God wanted me to do with my life. He used Ps 52:8 'I will instruct you and lead you...'



Sweet Sixteen 1006-2A YOU ARE SO LOVED



Hey Dear - Sunday I know it will be a Very Very Busy Week for you, but you can handle it. Try to get to bed before 12 each night.

BRIGHT! Happy Birthday Party! I Love you very much, I am very excited to celebrate you! You are truly the always make me of joy and love. I hope 19 is the many dates (some jokes!) I LOVE YOU

# WORDS TO KEEP

WRITTEN BY: TARYN LENGACHER PHOTOGRAPHED BY: OLIVIA TEN NAPEL

Margee Rose, You made a wish, you did the work, and your wish was granted. I so proud. (always)

Extend grace on yourself and others. and that can be for sure you. For

been blessed by our friendship and I pray for a friendship that will last decades. This year will be an adventure but I can't wait to do it with my adventure buddy, my name twin, and the woman I get to call my friend and roommate.

I love you see you soon. Olivia Besse

Margee, Gosh, I can't believe our co-managing time over! It's so sad to realize. But I am so thankful that I have gotten to not only work with you, but be your friend. You are such a wise, smart, beautiful friend and I expect you to be in touch. You MUST tell Lin and I all about the shenanigans that happen after we are gone. I know you will read Cardinal + Cream so well and keep creating beautiful things. I love you so much, girl! let me know if you ever want a girls trip to Nashville. I'll be your Airbnb. Love, ymatu



I love legend! You have grown so so much and I am so proud of you! You should be proud of yourself too! Bite legs and touch heads! -Maree

about thirty minutes ago a started to clear the pile (and brain) and I just came to up. It was just the encouragement. Now with tears in my please know what a ple friend / student / learner. Thank you for all of the

April 26, 2017

icious-girl! sleep as I. try tired-tea ying over than care of. So...

The well-timed, handwritten note seems to speak to the heart in critical moments like no other words seem able to, whether digital or verbal.

This afternoon, as I walked back to my dorm with a friend, she told me about her plan for the next hour. "Practice guitar, write a note for someone ..."

Write a note for someone. How novel!

In our digital age, tangible artifacts and written words carry relationships deeper than the superficiality of text messages, Instagram pictures and Netflix streaming. Writing a physical note to someone communicates intentionality. Physically writing a mail address and return address, posting a stamp in the right corner and personally taking a note to the mailbox — all communicate intentional thought and action.

When I was young, my brother and I used to go to the library with our parents and check out movies and books. It was the highlight of the month as we roamed the library for our precious stock of stories that month. When we brought them home, I would read every word possible on the back and front of the

DVD case, shuffling the colorful cases around on our coffee table until I came to a decision about which I would vote to watch that evening.

Last May, as my mom and I passed our library on the way home, I thought aloud to her, "I want to rent movies again. Let's do that this summer." I miss physically renting, holding the movies in my hand, reading every jot and tittle of fine print. I miss a lot of physical realities I grew up with that are now replaced by digital substitutes.

Likely, when you were celebrating your birthday, your grandma wrote you a card telling you how she loves you. When you were stressed over a test, your mom wrote you a note with encouragement. When you left college for the semester, your friends wrote you farewell notes. When your grandfather passed, a church member wrote simply, "I'm sorry for your loss," as they showed up to embrace you at the funeral.

We feel seen. And we tangibly hold in our hands a reminder of love.

The handwriting on cards grounds us. And we can bring those words with us in our pocket, our journals or under our pillow.

Those words are ours to keep.





# SEASONS OF THE HEART: SITTING IN THE GARDEN WITH MICHELE ATKINS

*WRITTEN BY: ARYANNA HIGHFILL*

*PHOTOGRAPHED BY: OLIVIA TEN NAPEL*

Maybe it was the sunlight spilling through the blinds or maybe it was the maternal friendliness that felt just as warm, but sitting across the desk from Michele Atkins, professor of education, associate provost and Title IX coordinator at Union University, I had the feeling I was about to figure at least something out.

She began to tell me her story. She talked about being a young woman who thought she knew her path and destination: classrooms full of children, a life devoted to teaching K-12. She loved the order of it and the joy of watching lightbulbs turn on in young faces.

“I just thought that’s what I was going to do for the rest of my life,” Atkins said. “I want to work with children. That’s what makes me happy.”

But God had other plans.

Not long into teaching, an unexpected door cracked open ... graduate school. She never planned on furthering her education or dreamed at night of working in administration, but the nudge was persistent. She returned to school and found herself teaching part-time, then directing graduate programs.

“I never sought those positions,” Atkins said. “They just seemed to find me. Each role demanded skills I didn’t know I had ... some of them I didn’t have, but had to rely on the Lord to provide them. He always does, doesn’t he?”

She laughed softly as she traced the arcs of her life — returning to school, taking opportunities she hadn’t imagined, leaning into roles she didn’t feel equipped for.

“God changes you in so many ways if you just sit back and let Him,” Atkins said.

She described being nudged, sometimes pushed, into positions she could not have achieved on her own. One moment, she was teaching — the next, she was pursuing further education herself. One season, she was balancing motherhood with lecturing — the next, she was asked to take on administration. Each yes felt impossible until she was in the middle of it, carried by something greater than herself.

“What I learned is that God gives you things you cannot handle on your own,” she said. “And the funny thing is, you don’t even know that you can handle it until you do.”

I nodded as her words sank in. Little did Atkins know, she was speaking directly to the questions blaring in my head as a senior about to graduate. Questions about whether I’m ready for the next step, whether I’ll make the right decisions. Hopes that maybe, one day, I’ll look back on what feels like chaos and finally see the strategic, intentional plan that was at work all along.

Motherhood taught Atkins as much as teaching ever did. Administration demanded as much listening as leading. Even now, planning her daughter's wedding feels like yet another lesson in trusting that beauty doesn't have to come from control but from love.

There is a pull between quiet, ordinary beauty and the fire that drives people to lead, to disrupt, to act with courage and intelligence. Sitting with Atkins, I felt a seed of understanding take root: perhaps God does not call us to one thing forever, but to bloom fully in the season we are given, trusting that the next will ask something new.

"God has to keep giving me positions I cannot do on my own," she said. "I think the term people use now is 'Type A.' I just like to get things done and get them done well, and when I do, it's that much easier to rely on myself. That's my thorn. That's my cross. I have to keep stepping into those unprepared places to be reminded I can't do it all and I certainly can't do it on my own."

She described her new role as Title IX coordinator, a position she never sought but accepted as a calling.

"It is heart-wrenching," she said, "walking with students through some of the hardest moments of their lives, trying to turn trauma into opportunity for redemption. It's a very honored position. Even though it's difficult, even though most people think I'm crazy for doing it, it's redemptive work." She paused here, the gravity evident in her eyes.

After years of teaching and administration, this role felt totally different. It was not about curriculum or policy, but about meeting people at their breaking points and standing with them in hope.

In a culture like ours, where people are encouraged to pick a category and stay there, Atkins is, as she puts it ... well, crazy. She's embraced a lifetime of pivots, a life that refuses to be compartmentalized. She's done the "boss," the "nurturer," the "academic," the "counselor," the "advisor," the "Title IX Coordinator," all with the same humility, the same intelligence, the same devotion. She's a walking argument against our culture's neat boxes, a reminder that we can live fully in multiple roles and remain whole.

Atkins' words were not heavy with pride but light with responsibility. She talked about the students she guides, the delicate balance of justice and care and the spiritual discipline it requires to speak truth with compassion. Every sentence carried a weight that was neither burdensome nor performative — it was witnessed, lived through decades of learning, failing, growing, trusting.

"You're never called to one thing forever, Aryanna," she said again, almost casually, but I heard the depth beneath it. "God grows you into different things. He places you in seasons for a reason. Because who I was in one season prepared me for the next, and the faith I learn today is the faith I'll need tomorrow. Why would I think I'm made for only one thing, when God Himself is always creating, always renewing, always leading us somewhere new?"

By the end of our conversation, I felt as if I had walked through decades of life in an hour. Atkins' wisdom was not abstract, but tangible, rooted in experience, faith and relentless love. I felt the fullness and nostalgia of flipping through an old photo album and remembering sweet moments you almost forgot. Nostalgic, not because I can relate to teaching in the classroom, juggling motherhood or leading an administration the powerful way this wise woman does, but because God shows Atkins' the same faithfulness in every chapter of her book that He has in every chapter of mine. And as I begin yet another new chapter, that reminder means everything.

She reminded me that perhaps life is not a straight line, but a garden, shifting with seasons, light and shadow, growth and pruning, endings and beginnings. Somehow, without even realizing it, she had poured a little warmth and living water into my own garden that has felt caught in a winter far longer than I would like.

I left her office and finally cried. My own mother's words came to mind: people are like flowers. Some are perennials, present through every season of your life. Some are annuals, here for a moment, leaving beauty in their wake. Neither is less valuable or less necessary. Sitting with Michele Atkins, I, at least for a moment, understood what that truly meant.



# ATHLETIC PURGATORY: UNION IN THE NIL ERA



**WRITTEN BY: LUKE DALTON**  
**PHOTOGRAPHED BY:**  
**BRYLEE WILLIAMS**

Dec. 15, 2023. This was the third college basketball game that I had attended. I did not really expect much from it. All I wanted was something to do on a Friday night. And yet as the game progressed, the atmosphere in the arena began to change.

What started as murmurs turned into fervent yelling. The West Florida Argonauts (what even is that?) were battling to cut down Union's impressive lead to only one with 20 seconds left in the fourth, but it did not matter. The Bulldogs would rally and get a defensive stop, winning in an impressive fashion. With a decisive victory like that, the hustle of the defense should've been the talk of the town.

But that was not the headline after the game.

It was Gulf South Conference Freshman of the Year Jordan Pyke, a rookie sensation out of Shining Light Academy. His routinely spectacular double-double gave the Bulldogs the edge they needed to get the victory. But his explosiveness also energized the fans in the stands.

From quiet Baptists to passionate spectators, Pyke's electricity was contagious. He elevated the fanbase of our small Division II university to a culture that united students, athletes and fans alike.

Jordan Pyke was the spark.

... And there he goes.

The transfer portal lurked in the shadows of Pyke's greatest feats.

It was no secret that he would be taking his talents away from here at the end of the season. Union Athletics simply couldn't hope to retain such a player. And Pyke isn't the only one.

Year after year, across Union athletics, we fight a constant battle against a never-ending entity. The portal entices players with bigger spotlights and a bigger bank account, tempting them to trade a one-of-a-kind community for a few more dollars.

And Union becomes a simple waypoint, a middle ground for illustrious careers of Division II prowess.

For a Southern Baptist school, we have somehow become purgatory.

Purgatory is such a funny concept. It can be defined as a holding place or state of agonizing limbo.

Union is a place where athletes can see a smiling professor waving to them from across the quad or a faculty member high-fiving them for a great game last night. They walk into the lunchroom, and they're greeted by name by the same cafeteria staff every day.

And yet, Union and its students receive this stigma, as if athletes' time here is just another period of waiting. Where they're isolated from the rest of their travel ball friends or peers who went on to bigger and better things.

At this level, it is easy to become cynical and secluded.





Athletes enveloping themselves completely in their craft, throwing themselves into their own corner of campus, becoming segregated from the rest of the mainstream populace — that's what it means to be a Division II athlete. But does it have to be?

Jazalyn Anousinh was a star for the Lady Bulldogs, leading the team to the Division II Final Four during her final 2025 season. Originally from a Division I program in Southern California, Anousinh transferred to Union at the end of her sophomore season; Union stood out to her.

"The community at Union is starting to intertwine more and more ... the moment you get over that 'I'm an athlete, I'm better than everyone else,' that's when it starts. Like, we're all made in God's image. We're all the same at the end of the day," said Anousinh.

Excellence-driven, Christ-centered, people-focused, future-directed — nowhere in our core values does it mention championship-crazed or fiercely-fanatic. The fact of the matter



is that Union, at its core, is about the people it serves on a daily basis. That includes our student-athletes.

"It's a big thing I like about here. When I'm in class, it feels like my teachers actually want me to do good with the content, like actually understand the content. I've had good relationships with all my teachers here ... I came here and found a good blessing for me," Knoah Carver, senior finance major and starting guard for the men's basketball team, said.

At some schools, the actual school part can be drowned out with NIL contracts and applause from a student section. But not here. Union makes sure, first and foremost, that athletes are students and that they are going to be ready for their futures.

"What you [can] get here and build with a group of guys, build with the team, build with your teachers — that's gonna prepare you to go out into the real world more," Aaron Fynaardt, junior cell and molecular biology major and member of the men's cross country team, said.

Student-athletes at Union are a part of a community that is unlike any other Division II campus in the nation — a campus where they aren't simply a number but a valued brother or sister in Christ.

"It's really hard when you're put on a pedestal, and this is your job. It's the most important thing to you ... winning is everything ... but all that fades away. I'm retired from playing basketball; none of that matters anymore," Anousinh said. "So at the end of the day, all I remember is the relationships I had with everyone, and the love that I felt every single day — something I wish every athlete could experience."

If these testaments are any indication, our so-called purgatory reputation is a fallacy. While it may get hot in West Tennessee, to call it an "intermediate place of suffering" (another definition of purgatory) could not be farther from the truth. Our athletes are loved. They are regarded as image bearers of God.

That's something that NIL can't place a price tag on.



Union Athletics is not a waiting room, but a training ground. With the integration of biblical principles into every aspect of the craft, these players are not only better in their playing ability but in their humanity as well.

At the end of the day, the letters of the jersey will fade from cardinal to a muted ruby. The statistics, a mere pastime for future dinner conversations. And while the accolades and small-town fame will be nice to hold onto, they will not last.

What will last is the love of the peers and professors who cared enough to know them. The love of a community that they gave their all to and the love of Jesus Christ that was shown to them every single day.

Union is not something to be escaped, but to embrace.

And, this place is not purgatory. It's a privilege.

# CREATING WORSHIPFULLY:

## Risk, Reward & Making Music Well



"I think when you're really feeling something and you can't find a song that expresses that — you have the opportunity to write your own song," Hope Watson, sophomore public relations major, said. She sat across from me, full of energy, constantly adjusting her curls, beaming as she explained why she loves what she does.

For a creative person who wants to do a creative thing professionally, the "why go to college at all" question is pretty much a constant. For musicians, this is especially the case. They don't need a degree to write or record or produce, so why pursue one?

I've been wondering about this. I'd heard some of the music released by Union students, and it was good, like, really good — at least to my untrained ear. If making music is what these students want to do professionally, and they're doing it now, why spend the time and effort in classes ostensibly teaching them things they already know how to do?

It was easy for me to assume that Hope Watson and Makenzie Slauson would have similar answers to this question (both Union students, both streaming wherever you listen to music), but I was wrong.

"I was grateful God opened doors for me to attend Union," Watson said, "but before those doors were open, I didn't think I would be going to college. I actually thought I would be playing [gigs] and getting a band in Nashville." She already knew then, in high school, that she wanted to make music a career. College for Watson is a formative thing — an opportunity to grow up a little, to meet people who love the Lord and to better discover who she is, while she continues to pursue her music outside of her degree.

When I asked what it's like to do the thing she wants to do professionally in college, Watson grimaced slightly. "It's a little stressful," she said. "You gotta balance a social life; you gotta balance academics." This year, she chose to focus on promoting her music and playing gigs instead of getting a steady part-time job, choosing her art and her faith in her potential over the stability that would come from a regular shift at Chick-fil-A.

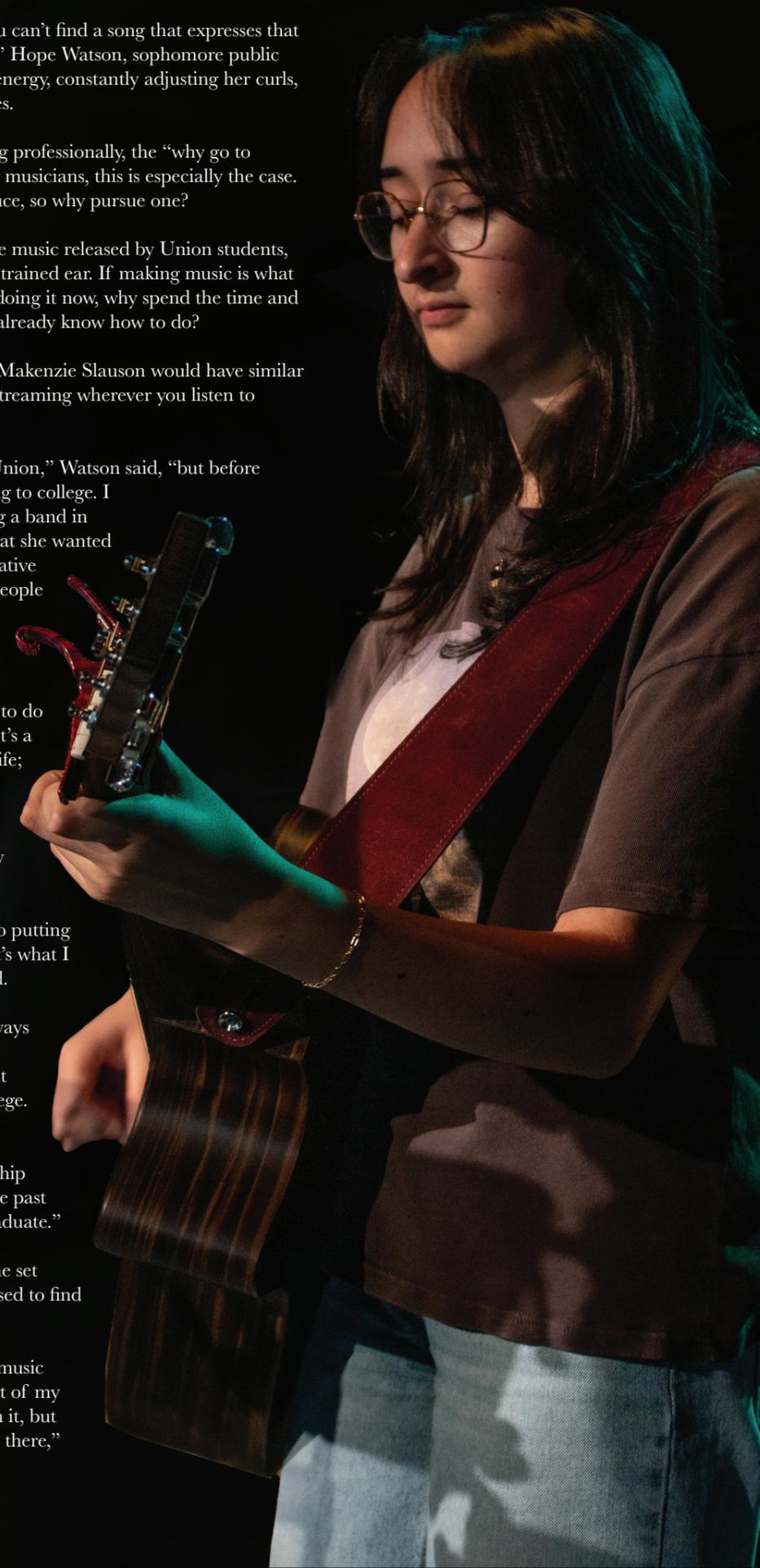
"It's a lot of balancing everything, and I think it's also putting a lot of trust in God, but it's also really fun because it's what I love. So, it's worth it. It's worth the risk," Watson said.

Slauson's story is different. Although she, too, has always loved creating music, she did not anticipate that songwriting would become so significant to her, and it wasn't part of her career plan when she came to college.

"When I was a freshman, I was like, 'Oh, I'll just do this in college and then I'll just stop,'" the junior worship leadership major said. "After writing this much for the past three years, I can't picture myself stopping after I graduate."

Songwriting, for Slauson, is a longtime love, which she set aside to pursue a call to ministry, but has been surprised to find a new calling to in the last few years.

"When I got to college, I was not expecting to make music and release as much music as I have ... It is a big part of my life now. My heart posture has completely changed in it, but it's still cool that little childhood dream is still kind of there," Slauson said.



WRITTEN BY: BRIGHT BURNS  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY: OLIVIA TEN NAPEL

What has this heart posture change been?

“I think as I’ve made music more and more at Union ... I’ve learned more about how creativity can be glorifying to the Father,” Slauson said. “Because, I mean, He created us to be creative beings, and He gave us the ability to create. And so I think when we’re able to make music that is excellent, and we do it for His glory — that’s worshipful.”

This is a perspective that is near and dear to my heart. I’m not a musician, so I can’t relate exactly, but when I sit down with a laptop or pen in hand to try to transpose thoughts or impressions into English words, I feel the weight of the task. If the pursuit of truth and beauty and creativity and excellence is a pursuit of an all-beautiful, infinitely-creative God, what an enormous responsibility it is to create well — to create *worshipfully*.

“I really just want to make the best music that I can,” Slauson said.

She told me how satisfying it is to write or play something with her band and know, tangibly, that it was a step forward from what they’ve made in the past. She wants to continue to improve, to innovate, to try new things, to stretch her creativity and to honor the Lord as she does so. This is a risk, too, just as much as choosing music over a part-time job. To push oneself, to try new sounds, to experiment and reinvent are daunting things and not always comfortable.

Though Slauson and Watson both want to create Christian music that is excellent and interesting, mainstream Christian music, as they both pointed out, can feel a bit less than totally creative. When I asked them to list their musical influences, the lists were largely secular — names like Olivia Rodrigo and Adele (Watson), Phoebe Bridgers and Lizzie McAlpine (Slauson).

Beautiful, truthful, impressive work can, of course, come from any image-bearer — as Watson said, “All of creation points back to our Creator!” This is a lovely truth. But it’s a bit disappointing still that music by Christians for Christians has tended to sound as if it came out of the same, uninteresting mold.

I am nevertheless encouraged by something Slauson pointed out: a shift in current Christian music. Artists like Forrest Frank and Chris Renzema are growing an audience, even charting, without a traditional, cookie-cutter “Christian” sound.

“I think it’s because they’re different! They’re just a different sound,” Slauson said. “I love being creative so much, and I think there needs to be more creativity in Christian music.”

For Watson, the urge to create is all about storytelling. “The passion comes from loving connection and being able to share my story with people,” she said. “I also think God is the greatest storyteller ... God is a God of creativity. That’s something to be celebrated.”

“When I was younger, I had a hard time articulating myself, and I felt very, like, unknown and unseen,” Watson said. Songwriting helped her come out of her shell to express herself.

“Ultimately, I just want to get to know people, and I want them to know me. I want to deeply know others and be deeply known,” she said.

Watson pointed out how much music becomes a part of our lives: the songs you listen to while falling in love or after a breakup or while driving too fast, too late with a group of friends. We adopt soundtracks; we pick the background music to our stories. “I would love for my music to be a part of other people’s stories.”



# ESCAPISM: Running To Redemption

*WRITTEN BY: NORAH TAYLOR  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY: OLIVIA TEN NAPEL*

At any given moment, I exist in multiple worlds.

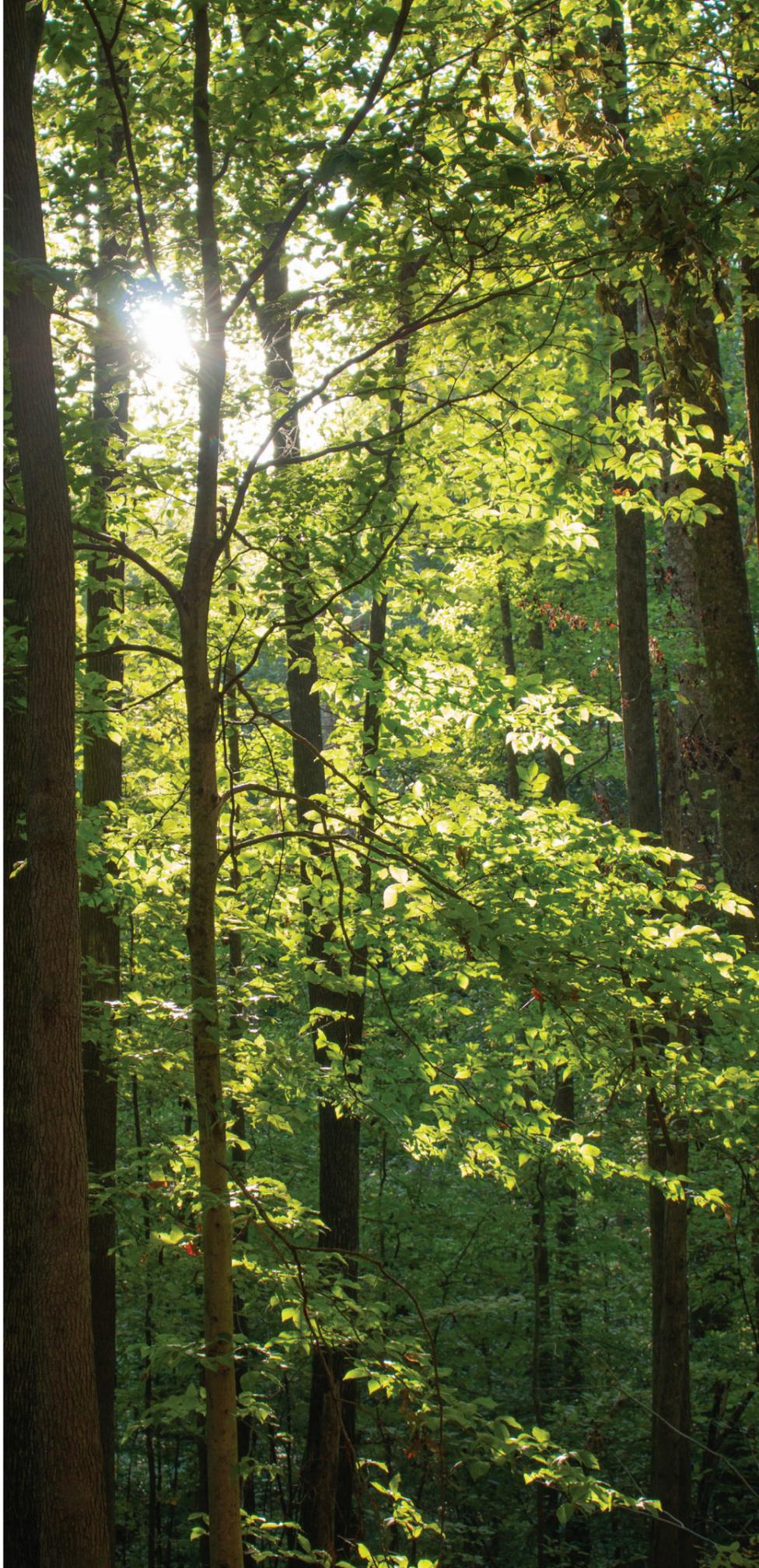
Whether it's Brandon Sanderson's Cosmere, Stan Lee's Marvel Universe or one of Christopher Nolan's time-jumping dramas, some fantastical world exists hand in hand with the literal one in which these words exist. The primary cause for this is that, frankly, I am a nerd. I was raised on "Star Wars" and the cartoon X-Men, and every stick that graced my little hands became a mighty sword (or wand if it was smaller).

I didn't start out as a reader. In fact, I struggle to this day to admit to myself that I am becoming one. I loathed assigned reading logs in grade school and found class trips to the library immensely boring. I'd typically find the first book I saw with a decent title and cover and sit — impatiently, I might add — as my classmates gushed over the next book in the series they were reading. That was until I found a little series called "The Secrets of Droon" by Tony Abbott.

I owe a lot to those books. For the first time, I read words that weren't just ink on a page. They were a new environment unfolding around me. I saw the very characters before me as they climbed down magically appearing rainbow stairs. I heard the sounds of feet on stone floors as we snuck through the evil Lord Sparr's castle walls. And I felt the pressing need to save Princess Keeah and, ultimately, the land of Droon.

After "The Secrets of Droon," came "The Chronicles of Narnia," then "Harry Potter" and so on. All of these stories shared one sentiment: they showed characters who escaped to a whole new world hidden from others.

As a kid who grew up surrounded by nothing but suburban houses and rows of never-ending crops, I found peace in wistfully staring out the car window as I daydreamed. Road trips became a haven of time set aside for me to fantasize about "Avatar: The Last Airbender" or the original "Justice League" cartoon. While I couldn't actually read or watch anything in a car due to Public Enemy Number One — car sickness — their worlds were well-established inside my head.



As the road passed below us, the golden hues of an Indiana sunset over cornfields were the canvas for a world that existed for me and me alone. My imagination had far less limitations than the confining walls of our Toyota minivan. And so, from a very early age, my mind taught itself to wander, to find all that a world could be and all that ours was not.

It was in exploring these differences that I was first confronted with the concept of escapism.

Escapism is often defined as the act of seeking distractions from unpleasant realities through entertainment and fantasies. It's alluring: the idea that one can simply open a book, turn on the TV or even just close their eyes and suddenly be completely removed from the mundane mediocrity of work, stress and just life.

However, people often paint escapism in two contrasting lights. While some romanticize the beauty of mentally existing elsewhere, many deem the habit dangerous. Though choosing to ignore our problems may be the easiest way to handle them, most would agree it is not the healthiest.

As of a few months ago, I wouldn't have been able to give a solid opinion on the concept. I avoided thinking about it — determining if I was engaging in unhealthy behaviors felt far too close to an “unpleasant reality.” But when something influences the stories you consume, tell and live, one has no choice but to grapple with it.

Even if you aren't a raging nerd like I am, odds are, you often forget about life's troubles by turning on a sports game or the 2005 “Pride & Prejudice” for the umpteenth time. Inherently, there's nothing wrong with this. God gifted us with the ability to tell good stories and to play good sports for a reason. To enjoy these gifts is a form of worship when done with the right heart. So the question then became: “Am I running to these stories with the right heart?”

When understanding the need to escape to stories, my gut instinct said that the desire must initially come from something that I want to ignore — an external bad, if you will. The world provides constant examples of things that we would rather not think about. But to say that we want to avoid all problems would be inaccurate. If you were to put a movie in front of me that was all sunshine with no conflict or antagonist, I guarantee you that I would fall asleep within the first twenty minutes.

Instead, I prefer to read and watch stories that tell tales of great mystical wars paralleled only by the interpersonal strife of the characters. While the conflicts of these stories seem far greater than any I face on a day-to-day basis, they carry the familiar reminders of the troubles I find in my own life.

In thinking about my relationship to escapism, I was worried that the external bad I run from may be my own sin.

A story, when written and set in pages, can never be tainted by my mistakes. A character, when given life by another author, doesn't make the same wrong choices I do. A world, when made by a stranger, can't be shaped by my flaws.

I did not like this conclusion. It was a pessimistic mentality, and therefore, one I was not content with settling for. If I were actively running from myself, would I not grow tired? Would I not be emotionally spent?

Escapism must actually be based on an internal good. Something is nestled in the lines of dialogue and descriptions of luscious landscapes that I long for after a rough day.

There are nights in which I want to just shut myself in my room and watch a good movie four walls, warm blankets and the dim light of a flashing TV screen shielding me from the preceding day. I like this kind of quiet. The only noise that floods the space is that of

characters exchanging meaningful dialogue. Their story arcs carry themes of forgiveness, courage and deliverance. These are a part of the internal good I long for, and they all point to one ultimate theme.

It hit me like the aliens hit New York City in “The Avengers,” “War of the Worlds,” “Pixels” or any of the other countless movies where New York is the victim of some otherworldly attack.

In all of these books, movies and even in sports, redemption finds a way to shine.

I make mistakes. (That has been established.) Because of these mistakes, not only do I need redemption, but I crave it.

I crave it so much that when I find a character who attains it, I wish to exist alongside them. When I read of a world that has been redeemed, I’m reminded that, though I sit in a broken world, the true Redeemer has already come.

By the grace of God, I can say that I have been given redemption. Because Christ came down to earth — fully man and fully God — died on the cross for my sins and rose again on the third day, I have been redeemed.

We see this redemption in all of these stories that we run to. I see redemption in the way Tony Stark decides to use his talents for good. I see redemption in the way Edmund Pevensie is restored by Aslan after betraying his siblings. And yes, I see redemption in the way my dad played a special celebration playlist when the Washington Commanders started making good team decisions and winning some games.

We don’t have to escape to fictional worlds to know redemption. With each story that depicts good triumphing over evil, I am reminded of the true story — where Christ, the ultimate good, triumphs over evil. In this life, we will face the consequences of our sins, but there is a hope that washes over us, knowing that the ultimate battle is already won.

One day we will live in a truly redeemed world — a world that is much different than the one we exist in now, but one that is far better than any worldly author or director could imagine.

When we look to good stories and wondrous worlds as a reminder of true redemption’s source, then — and only then — are we engaging in escapism with the right posture of heart.





VOL 110 - ISSUE 01  
FALL 2025

