

A Writer's Journey

I would like to preface this compilation by saying that the journey of a writer is one of the few things in life that has a beginning but no definitive end. It's only natural that once a writer unlocks their passion and skill, they explore different avenues with every stroke of a pencil and click of a keyboard. And because the journey of a writer is about learning what you're comfortable with and then instead pursuing that which makes you uncomfortable, it's also expected that writers have clear highs and lows throughout their journey. They make (plenty of) mistakes. Break *some* rules. Okay, *a lot* of rules. But the beauty of it all is that a writer's journey is like a never-ending diary. And with that, here are some of my own journey's entries:

Piece #1: Dec. 2018 "Crossing Over"

Taking dance classes to supplement musical theatre or taking digital media courses to strengthen film skills is not the easiest task at an arts school, but some Dreyfoos students look toward a path of combined arts. There are many challenges associated with taking on the "double-major" life, but also many benefits that make the feat worthwhile.

"I was a vocal major for my first two years at Dreyfoos, but chose to switch to communications between my sophomore and junior year after I joined the debate team and went to summer creative writing programs," communications senior Abigail Jordan said. "I wasn't planning on becoming involved in the music department again, but when a free period opened up in my schedule, I decided to take a chorus class, since my love for music hasn't faded."

Many students gain new interests after exploring a pair of arts, which can often develop into their own career path. Communications junior Gracie Hanks is taking a costume design class alongside her communications courses in order to be more familiar with the fashion side of film.

"Taking a costume design class along with my film and TV classes [is] really beneficial because it allows me to grow as a filmmaker and a costume designer," Hanks said. "I'm interested in both of those things as a career when I graduate, and taking these classes now gives me a step ahead in figuring out what I'm good at."

Along with the advantages of experiencing and improving skills in multiple majors, taking classes in more than one major has its challenges. Balancing a talent and passion for two different art areas can double the workload for some students and take up more time outside of school.

"The biggest challenge of being in two different majors is the workload," Jordan said. "Both music and communications can be really demanding time-wise, with after school rehearsals and debate tournaments and practices. They require a lot of effort outside of the actual classes."

Aside from the challenges that students face with taking classes in multiple art areas, administration also faces some obstacles when scheduling crossover classes. Because each

student has individual interests, it can be difficult for administration to organize the schedules in a way that fits everyone's needs.

"Scheduling is the biggest challenge because [someone] might want to take a class in another major, but it doesn't meet [their] schedule," principal Dr. Susan Atherley said. "It can conflict with what you're already taking and [courses] you have to have."

In addition to scheduling, the acceptance procedure for crossing majors introduces another obstacle for those who wish to double major. Students must go through appointments with the department deans and their school counselor, and they must have a majority of classes in their own major.

"Two classes within [your] art area are required, so if you come in [to Dreyfoos] as a communications major, you have to take two communications courses," assistant principal Corey Ferrera said. "If there's room in your schedule for something else, and it fits in terms of fulfilled prerequisites, then the dean of [the other] department [has to] approve a non-major to come in."

However, the process of allowing students to be involved in other majors has not always existed. In the school's early years, artists were committed solely to their major.

"Prior to my coming [to Dreyfoos, students] were not allowed to cross over at all," Dr. Atherley said. "But students are now finding that they have other interests, so why not dabble in a little bit of something to find out if you're good at it or not?"

Still, the school's administration believes that Dreyfoos must stick to its roots and that students should maintain dedication to their majors. Students who put their all into their artistic talent is what makes Dreyfoos what it is.

"What we try to protect is the integrity of each department, so we would never want to get into a situation where [a major] is watered down," Ms. Ferrera said. "Every student [who] auditions for Dreyfoos gets into a specific department [and] is expected to meet those department requirements."

Overall, taking courses in more than one art department is an extension of many students' interests and talents. Whether someone is dedicating their time to one major or dividing their classes among multiple arts, each student has a passion to pursue.

"It's not about going and jumping in[to other majors] or taking another art class," Dr. Atherley said. "It's about [having] a real interest and talent [in another art] as well."

REFLECTION ON PIECE #1

This was one of the first articles I wrote for my high school publication, and obviously so. Looking back at my work, I recognize the apparent redundancy between some of the points made, but an effort to make the story well-rounded in my interviews is also recognizable. I remember planning for this article and entering the principal's office with the most anxiety-ridden aura. However, after getting comfortable with all of my interviewees and building relationships with both students and faculty around school, I learned to better my inquisitive and conversational skills.

Piece #2: Feb. 2019 "Caffeine Compulsion"

Dance sophomore Nicholas Lamaina taps his foot and clicks his pen as he quickly jots down notes in English class, only giving himself a break from writing to take a sip of his iced coffee. Classmates around the room sip their own caffeinated drinks, taking part in a possibly addictive trend.

Coffee has become an increasingly popular part of today's culture and can be found in the hands of students roaming the halls. The consumption of these drinks has turned into a dependency for some and a potential addiction for others.

HOW IT WORKS

Coffee addiction is when a person is physically and mentally dependent on caffeine in such a way that without it, that person would experience withdrawal symptoms. Although it may seem like an addiction, it is only considered a dependency because it causes a "small rise in dopamine," unlike a drug like methamphetamine, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse for Teens (NIDA). Dopamine is a chemical that is linked to movement and emotions, so an increase of dopamine can make one feel more alert.

Dopamine travels to a "pleasure" spot in the brain; this positive effect causes a person to want more of whatever created this sense of satisfaction, according to Harvard Health Publishing. Eventually, the body becomes accustomed to having dopamine in order to stay alert and aware, so if the body is deprived of caffeine, people can feel withdrawals, which are symptoms of the caffeine discontinuation, according to the Alcohol and Drug Foundation (ADF).

THE EFFECTS

After drinking coffee, a person may feel both the positive and negative effects of caffeine within five minutes to 12 hours. Coffee can speed up the signals that travel between the brain and the body, giving the illusion that one can do things faster and more efficiently, as the ADF has said. However, withdrawal effects can be detrimental to health.

Caffeine dependence can lead to withdrawal symptoms if it is not consumed within 24 hours after the last dose. The most common symptoms of withdrawal are headaches, nausea, and fatigue; more serious effects can include irritability and depressed mood. The ADF also mentions that many young people who drink a lot of caffeine are likely to "suffer from sleep problems and anxiety."

Strings sophomore Anabella Paolucci said that when she started drinking coffee, she "used to get symptoms like anxiety." But now that her body is "so used to it," she would "probably just feel horrible" without her daily coffee.

The intake of caffeine can make the consumer feel more energized through the day, according to the ADF. Other benefits may include "added longevity, lower blood pressure,

[and] less weight gain with aging,” according to Harvard Health Publishing. The observational studies conducted by Harvard claimed that having up to four cups of coffee a day can bring about these health benefits.

Caffeinated drinks have also been proven to have many antioxidants that help lower the risk of degenerative diseases, including Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease, and several types of cancers, as reported by the U.S. National Library of Medicine.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Regardless of caffeine’s effects, many students have developed a dependency on coffee to start their day off with a boost of energy. Lamaina said he can “go awhile without drinking coffee,” but he still finds it difficult to stay away.

“My day revolves around the cup of coffee I have in the morning,” Anabella Paolucci said. “My brain functions better when I drink coffee, so when I don’t have it, I’m miserable.”

Family influence and the availability of caffeine at home has led some students to follow in their parents’ footsteps, consuming caffeine to the point where it becomes routine in their own lives.

“I started drinking coffee because my parents would,” strings senior Valentina Paolucci said. “I would start having some of theirs and then I eventually just started drinking my own a lot.”

Others start consuming caffeine because of school and outside extracurriculars. Having to get homework done every night and fit in practices and rehearsals for dance makes Lamaina “so tired” that he drinks coffee to “keep [himself] awake.” For Valentina Paolucci, balancing school and her major drives her caffeine compulsion.

“I can’t go to school or focus on anything,” Valentina Paolucci said. “I can’t practice violin if I don’t have at least two cups of coffee, [and] I feel like I can’t socialize well if I don’t have coffee.”

While Valentina Paolucci believes that coffee can be “bad because you’re relying on something to function,” her sister Anabella believes that coffee, without the added creams and sugars, can actually be “kind of healthy for you.”

Like Lamaina and the Paolucci sisters, many students’ days revolve around their morning cup of coffee. Consuming caffeine has become a trend among students, but the dependency is real for those who rely on it daily. With the possible withdrawal and positive effects, it has become difficult for many to resist the caffeine compulsion.

REFLECTION ON PIECE #2

“Caffeine Compulsion” was another milestone in my journey as a writer. After previously honing in on interviewing skills, I instead decided to delve into the research part of reporting. This was the first article that required me to do a bit more than a day’s worth of digging on the internet. Reading the story now, I realize that I may have focused too much on the informational aspect and neglected the human interest component. However, I don’t regret the

research experience this article provided me with, as well as the opportunity to learn how to break stories down using subheadings.

Piece #3: April 2019 “Sipping Through Steel”

A 2015 video of scientists attempting to remove a plastic straw lodged in a sea turtle’s nostril resurfaced months ago. The disturbing footage spread across various platforms, raising awareness about the harmful effects of plastic waste and pollution. Since then, various cities, states, businesses, and individuals have focused their attention on one aspect of the problem: single-use plastic straws.

Although some plastic straws are reusable, most are single-use and end up in the ocean or in landfills as non-biodegradable material. Consequently, metal straws have become a part of the lifestyle of thousands in an attempt to spread environmental activism and raise awareness over various social media platforms. Restaurants nationwide and even cities like San Francisco, Seattle, and Miami Beach are taking action to ban plastic straws, encouraging people to purchase their own metal, bamboo, or paper straws for personal reuse.

“Plastic straws represent our throwaway culture, which [has] developed over the past 50 years or so,” Eric Goldstein, senior attorney of the Natural Resources Defense Council, said, according to the NRDC. “They’re pretty easy to do without ... [and], unlike many other single-use items, it’s essentially impossible to recycle straws.”

This past 2019 Earth Day, Los Angeles passed a law that requires customers in restaurants to request a straw rather than automatically be given one, reducing the amount of single-use plastic handed out and discarded. Many local organizations have launched campaigns such as the Straw Free With LMC initiative, started by the Loggerhead Marine Life Center in Jupiter, Florida. LMC partnered with restaurants across Palm Beach County, such as Clematis Pizza and Juno Beach Cafe, to participate in a plastic straw boycott during last year’s Earth Day. Several businesses have decided to continue their commitment.

“With all the permanent changes businesses, like restaurants and hotels, are making to stop their plastic straw use, I think this will become a lifestyle,” visual sophomore Krista Brochu said. “For most individuals, little effort is necessary to participate in this [trend], so their part in its permanence is easy.”

Along with businesses, many individuals have begun purchasing reusable stainless steel, glass, and silicone straws for personal use. Many metal straws are collapsible and come in portable packages with brushes to clean them. Due to the increased quality of reusable straws, many students are realizing their plastic counterparts are a convenience they are willing to give up.

“I decided to start using metal straws more, especially at home, because it’s such a small investment with such a big impact,” communications sophomore Katherine Oung said. “I’m also glad that a realization about the harmfulness of [straws] is happening because it’s jumpstarting the conversation about the waste we as humans produce.”

Along with increased awareness, the banning of plastic straws and the hyperfocus on a single pollutant has struck controversy. Advocates for individuals with disabilities argue that

banning plastic straws creates an unfair disadvantage for disabled people who require plastic straws to drink.

Although metal straws seem like an adequate alternative, “[they] can become too hot and cause injury,” according to Global News. Also, people who have mobility limitations “may not be able to wash reusable straws,” which poses a problem for the plastic straw bans.

Companies such as Aardvark Straws and BeOrganic and states, such as California, have taken this problem into consideration and come up with administrative solutions. Aardvark Straws and BeOrganic produce paper and glass straws that offer an alternative to metal ones.

However, environmentalists and researchers argue that the sole concentration on reducing plastic straw usage creates an unrealistic sense of accomplishment. The plastic waste in the ocean is mostly composed of plastic grocery bags, food wrappers, and plastic bottles. *National Geographic* reported that plastic straws make up only about 0.025 percent of the “8 million tons of plastic flow[ing] into the ocean every year.”

“The risk is that banning straws may confer moral license—allowing companies and their customers to feel they have done their part,” Leape said. “The crucial challenge is to ensure that these bans are just a first step ... so long as it’s part of a much more fundamental shift away from single-use plastics.”

Students are also aware that the microcosm of reducing plastic straw use is a part of the environmental solution. Although reducing single-use plastic straws is a step in the right direction, it doesn't cover the entirety of environmental reparation society aims for.

“The hyper focus on straws is a problem, but it’s the simplest option available that will draw people in. As of right now, convenience is necessary to gain a following to help the environment, but straws themselves are only the tip of the iceberg,” Brochu said. “Ultimately, the hyper focus on plastic straws will become a problem if it continues past its point of necessity, but it’s not an issue as of this moment.”

Regardless, cutting down straw usage and making people aware of environmental damage can lead to the reduction of other unnecessary plastic usage and the employment of reusable products. The shift from plastic straws to sustainable ones is a global endeavor: Sipping through steel is just the first step.

“I think this is the type of trend that will stick around,” Oung said. “The best case scenario would be if ... using reusable straws was just the beginning and in the future, we have a culture [where] more and more of our commodities are sustainable and less wasteful.”

REFLECTION ON PIECE #3

This article was similar to “Caffeine Compulsion” in that I stuck with my temporary obsession with sharing all the knowledge I had found. Doing real research on my own felt so new and exciting to me that I just wanted to regurgitate all the new facts I learned back onto the page and feed it to my readers. However, with that, I feel as though I still neglected the human interest aspect. In this part of my journey, I was still learning how to tie the facts into real people’s stories to make a cohesive product.

Piece #4: “The Stigma of Male Dancers”

Good Morning America’s Lara Spencer blew up on social media after receiving backlash from the dance community. Spencer commented on Prince George taking ballet, laughing with her co-hosts and adding that she’d like to see “how long that lasts.”

Following the incident, Spencer apologized on Instagram and live television. She also conducted an interview with several male dancers regarding their experiences. Although Spencer may have recovered from her ridicule, this situation underscored a much broader issue—society still seems to live under unspoken gender roles, giving those with large followings the ability to scoff at those who don’t fit the mold.

“I’m not heated,” dance junior Alex Thomas said, shaking his head. “I mean, people have their values and opinions and everything, but there are certain negative comments that people can say that a lot of people don’t want to hear, and I think just saying it on live television wasn’t a good idea, especially with everybody else laughing in the background. I think that’s what really set it off.”

Thomas pointed out that Spencer’s comments could have only served as an impetus for dancers to work harder. “Your enemies are your biggest supporters,” Thomas said. “Anything that your enemies say, just prove them wrong, and, in this way, prove *her* wrong—that us male dancers can do ballet.”

Most in the dance community were not enraged but rather disappointed at the ignorance that still exists. Many were surprised that the host of a show with such a wide influence would make degrading comments.

“In reference to Lara, I’m not necessarily mad at her for saying what she said. I’m more shocked, if anything, that she would go out and publicly say that on national television,” dance sophomore Mason Evans said. “Like, girl—everyone just saw that. I believe the reason she said it was just because she wasn’t educated enough [about] being tolerant and accepting.”

Many dancers and their supporters were taken aback by Spencer’s reaction to what they love to do. Male dancers of all ages, as well as their parents, took to social media platforms, like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, to educate Spencer and let her know that it *is* OK for boys to dance.

“If I could tell male dancers who are afraid to pursue dance one thing, it would be to not care what people think of you,” Evans said. “Use people’s judgments to push you to work harder. It shouldn’t matter what people think of you as long as you are happy and are trying to achieve your goals. It may be hard in the beginning, but it gets easier.”

Being at a school of the arts, students are no strangers to breaking boundaries and social norms, even in spite of obstacles. They take their passions to heart, and when someone threatens those passions, it can be tense and unsettling.

“I feel like one side of society supports male dancers, which is amazing,” Evans said. “There is also the other part of society [that] thinks that we’re all feminine and that dance isn’t important. But, I believe it’s just because they haven’t taken the time to understand it.”

There always has been, and likely always will be, people in society who look down on those who have uncommon interests—Dreyfoos, luckily, happens to be a haven of expression

and acceptance. In fact, students *celebrate* each other's originality, and dancers like Thomas feel that "it's really welcoming to dance here."

"At Dreyfoos, it's different because ... no guy is looked at differently because they dance," Evans said. "People at Dreyfoos understand it's an art form and are really accepting of it."

As with anything, every individual artist faces a different experience as they pursue their career or passion. Thomas started dancing when he was just 2 years old, gaining more and more skills in his art over the past 14 years.

"It was hard growing up to dance," Thomas said. "When people find that out, it's weird. But, then they really see all the hard work and challenges that I'm put through."

Adversity is nothing new to male dancers, but having people with common interests and struggles is a motivator. Dance dean Heather Lescaille pointed out that when her husband attended Dreyfoos in the '90s, "he was one of three male dancers in the program."

"The biggest challenge [of] being a male dancer is being a minority," Evans said. "Going into dance is sometimes a little nerve-wracking when you're the only boy or there are only a small number [of boys]. Also, being a male dancer, I feel like sometimes it's easy to feel out of place because there aren't really a lot of us."

However, the program has grown to include 18 male dancers grades 9 through 12 this year, with two others taking dance as an elective. Lescaille pointed out that the increase in male dancers is beneficial because there is "safety in numbers."

"I think it depends on the group setting that they're in," Lescaille said regarding how challenging it may be to be a male dancer in today's world. "I think among other adolescent males, in particular ones that don't go to this school, [being a dancer] may be a difficult conversation still for them to have and that's because of the lack of education of the arts in schools in general."

Despite the various obstacles, many dancers express gratitude for being able to create their art. Dance proves to be a rewarding experience for all who have had the opportunity to partake in it.

"I think the greatest [reward], in general, is just expressing it and doing it because you're passionate about it," Thomas said. "And there's nothing else in the world you'd want to do besides dance, all day, every day, for the rest of your life... that's the biggest reward."

Being such a disciplinary and complex art form, there are many values and lessons to be learned from dance. Everything from self-control to attention to detail can be applied to experience outside of the studio.

"I think [dance] teaches you how to fail and how to get back up, and I think that that's a great lesson to have," Lescaille said with a confident nod. "And then, I think for the audience, it teaches you to have an appreciation for something that's live and right in front of you and to use your imagination – something I don't think everybody uses anymore."

Mrs. Lescaille aims to teach her students the right skills and mindset needed to defeat adversity and ignore the stigmas that surround male dancers. Lescaille hopes that her students will leave Dreyfoos not only "well-trained and well-versed in various techniques and styles, but [also] confident enough to go out there, regardless of what anybody says to them."

Male dancers are just one of many groups in society who face hardships, whether it be difficult training or the ridicule from those around them. However, Dreyfoos students will continue to push through trials and setbacks as society adjusts to the ever-evolving world that will one day accept the fact that boys do ballet.

“They will face rejection,” Lescaille said. “Whatever rejections that they face [I hope] that they hold their head high and they keep pushing, they keep climbing and they have a successful career ahead of them in life.”

REFLECTION ON PIECE #4

Having been a dancer myself before getting into journalism, I had a personal attachment to this story. “The Stigma of Male Dancers” not only allowed me to further develop my interviewing and writing skills once again, but it showed me a deeper more specific passion I had in writing human interest stories and profiling the student body. This article was the beginning of my obsession with emotionally appealing stories. I found the writer’s spark that I had been looking for.

Piece #5: Nov. 2019 “A Legacy to Leave Behind”

For 19 years, students have seen him pass winks and encouraging nods on their trips to class. For 19 years, they’ve seen him relentlessly represent his favorite football team, the Philadelphia Eagles, and roam the school with his walkie-talkie. For 19 years, Assistant Principal George Miller has been bridging the gap between administration and the student body.

Mr. Miller will be retiring September 2020, as required by the state, after two decades of working at Dreyfoos; however, his legacy will be remembered through the way he bonds with students and through his many quirks. One in particular is how he comes to school with a new tie every morning, donning patterns ranging from florals to drum sets.

“The ties really broke the ice [between] me and the student population because they knew me for my ties,” Mr. Miller said. “[At] Parent Open House, I would wear a tie that was kind of different and parents would come up and say, ‘Hey, so you’re the cool assistant principal.’ And I didn’t try to be, but the kids remembered the tie[s], which means they remembered me, which means they knew they could come talk to me if they had a problem.”

His signature quirk has led to a game of sorts between him and the student body. According to the game’s rules, the first person to compliment Mr. Miller’s tie on any given day receives it at the end of the day as a gift. He will often pull students aside in the halls or out of class for a few minutes to bestow them the honor of receiving one of his ties.

“I think the kids appreciate it when I give them one of my ties, especially if they like it,” Mr. Miller said. “A couple of parents have commented that their daughters or sons really appreciate the tie, [that] it was a nice gesture, and they have it hanging in their room. I think that’s pretty cool.”

Although the tie game has been something Mr. Miller has become known by, it hasn't always been around. The tradition began about three years ago, when one student he was close with happened to be graduating, and she commented that she liked his tie. Mr. Miller decided to give it to her "as a graduation present."

"At the time, I had 500 ties," Mr. Miller said. "What am I gonna do with them? I have more [now] from gifts, and if I saw one that I liked, then [I] bought [it], but most of them were gifts."

Mr. Miller isn't hard to find, being that he is typically in one of two places: his office or the cafeteria. However, some students have gotten so interested in the "game" that Mr. Miller has had them come up to him in the parking lot, the halls, and anywhere he might be in hopes of getting his tie before anyone else.

"I've had a couple kids waiting for me when I park my car in the morning to see the tie I have and if they like it," Mr. Miller said. "I've had kids yell at me because they saw me coming down [to the cafeteria] for breakfast [and say] 'I really like your tie.' [But I'd say,] 'Too late, somebody already got me at my office.' I think it's cute."

It can be easy for students to feel distant from administrators, but Mr. Miller tries to break that barrier each day, from asking a simple "How are you?" to giving away treats, like ice cream and chocolates. According to Mr. Miller, the tie game served as a good "door-opener" between him and students.

"Everyone knows Mr. Miller," theatre sophomore Daniel Reiter said. "[He] is the type of person I aspire to be like. He's someone [whom] all students feel comfortable talking to and someone that is willing to do anything for the students."

Before Reiter attended Dreyfoos, he used to hear "a different story about [Mr. Miller] everyday" from his sister. "My sister would always talk about him, and I knew I wanted to meet him and become friendly with him," Reiter said. "And, I did."

Before coming to Dreyfoos, Mr. Miller worked at Suncoast Community High School, Palm Beach Lakes Community High School, and Santaluces Community High School, among others. Upon coming to Dreyfoos, Mr. Miller started as an assistant principal and kept the position throughout his career here, creating the master schedule, facilitating testing, and organizing field trips and SRAs.

Mr. Miller's favorite part about working at Dreyfoos has been the student body. "The kids are more appreciative," Mr. Miller said. "I think that their 'artisticness' makes them special, kinder, gentler – they're not hardcore. These kids have a sweet edge to them."

Likewise, the student body has found many things to love about Mr. Miller. Many students have formed special relationships with him, whether they've known him for their whole high school careers or only for a single year.

"Dreyfoos won't be the same without him," dance junior Kaylee Frost said. "Mr. Miller will be the man I will get to brag to the future students that I met. He brought smiles wherever he was and you were lucky to have ever witness[ed] him strut around in his Eagles suit."

Although a number of students, like Frost, "sadly" have yet to receive a tie from Mr. Miller, his amiable nature will still be something students can carry with them beyond high

school. His positive personality stands out to students and makes him a role model for many, including Frost, who described Mr. Miller as “hilarious, helpful, and just a joy to be around.”

Reiter, although only recently becoming close with Mr. Miller, agrees with Frost that his legacy will be “long-lived after he [retires] because all the stories about him will get passed on each year.”

“It makes me really sad that Mr. Miller is retiring because I haven’t had much time with him, but I’ve been able to get to know him really well last year and this year,” Reiter said. “While I’m sad, ... he’s done so much for Dreyfoos and for me and I wish him luck on his next chapter of life.”

REFLECTION ON PIECE #5

The feedback I received from this article and the emotion surrounding it allowed me to delve even deeper into human interest journalism. A family member of Mr. Miller even reached out to me to let me know how meaningful the article was to them. Dreyfoos’ student body had a clear attachment to Mr. Miller as a person, and I knew I had to cover it in the most thorough and reverent way possible. At the end of the story-writing process, I knew I had done something of my own for the school’s community that would leave a legacy behind.

Piece #6: Nov. 2019 “Teachers Go On Leave to Start a Family”

Leaning back in her desk chair with her hands rested on her stomach, science teacher Diana Hertel jokes about her recent experiences going through pregnancy. She laughs about her sudden shift to a “5-year-old’s diet” of pizza and pasta, and she’s far from alone in her pregnancy journey.

“Baby on Board” signs won’t be an uncommon sight in the faculty parking lot, with multiple staff members expecting newborns in the coming months. Four faculty members—science teacher Anuska Larkin, technology support Edward Maniaci, social studies teacher Kathryn Bregman, and Ms. Hertel—are due between Halloween and February, so the school has begun preparing for their leave.

Before a teacher can officially go on maternity or paternity leave, they must submit a request to the School District of Palm Beach County and discuss their leave with the principal. The District, Principal Dr. Susan Atherley, and the teacher can then begin scouting for a fill-in.

“We try to find somebody to come in and teach the classes, which is the challenging part,” Dr. Atherley said. “It’s hard to get somebody to just come in and teach for six weeks, and where do you get a certified teacher to do so?”

To find a temporary replacement, the District is required to advertise for at least five days. The teachers and Dr. Atherley, along with other faculty members, can join in on the hunt to ensure a reasonable substitute is selected. Once candidates are identified, they are interviewed by Dr. Atherley and go through a process to get cleared to substitute.

“I feel like we’re putting the best qualified people we can find in there,” Dr. Atherley said. “Most of our teachers care enough about our kids that they want them to get good instruction.”

In Ms. Hertel’s case, science teacher Marilynn Pedek Howard recommended a recently retired chemistry teacher she knew, whose name hasn’t yet been released. Dr. Atherley and Ms. Hertel have been working to get this retired teacher cleared and prepared to replace Ms. Hertel while she is on leave for six weeks after winter break, since her baby girl is due on Jan. 8, 2020.

“The plan is to have somebody come in that has a lot of chemistry experience,” Ms. Hertel said. “As long as she’s still OK to do it when the time comes, that’s what’s going to happen. She definitely knows what she’s talking about. I just hope [my students] take advantage of her expertise.”

In addition, Ms. Larkin will temporarily be entrusting her position to Sandy Schulman, a previously certified teacher who taught physics. While Ms. Bregman’s substitute is still undetermined, Mr. Maniaci will not be temporarily replaced in his position as technology support. Instead, technology coordinator Edward Hornyak will be absorbing a heavier workload in regard to addressing technical issues around the school.

“I want to be there for my wife and my new son ... I just need time to settle with the new growth of my family,” Mr. Maniaci said. “[Mr. Hornyak] oversees the whole department, in which it’s just me and him. He’s going to be the one taking all the mission critical calls while I’m gone. He’s fully capable of doing both roles, but there’s a lot of work to be done.”

Although finding temporary teachers hasn’t been a problem thus far, problems could still arise if the stand-in were to cancel. Ms. Hertel has expressed her concerns with the uncertainty of the status of her prospective substitute, stating that nothing is “set in stone.”

Regardless, having a temporary teacher for any period of time can have an effect on the students in the classroom. Many trust the assurances of their teachers, although they are still skeptical as to whether they will learn as well as they have been under their current teachers.

“I [wonder], if we *do* get this [replacement teacher], are they going to teach like [Ms. Hertel]? Are they going to do things like her? Are they going to follow her directions?,” communications sophomore Jasmyn Dormeille said. “You [get used to the teacher], and then you don’t want that change.”

Despite students’ concerns, many believe teachers deserve the time off to bond with their family and newborn. The faculty who are leaving will be taking breaks ranging from about two weeks to 12 weeks.

“I feel like they should get at least three months off,” Dormeille said. “You want to love that baby, you want to comfort that baby – I don’t think that can happen in a few weeks.”

Dormeille speaks from personal observations. Her mom has three kids, while her dad has six, so “it’s a lot stacked up,” Dormeille said. She has experienced first hand the stages of raising a small child and the amount of attention needed for a baby. Other students agree with Dormeille’s opinion on teachers having extended time for maternity or paternity leaves.

“It’s challenging to balance work and the kid: Trying to do and get everything on time is [hard],” visual sophomore Veronika Zaloginova said. “[They] definitely deserve more weeks

[off] because it is important to look after the baby before it's old enough and it's a lot of hard work, especially for new moms."

Zaloginova is also no stranger to taking care of a baby, as she has helped her stay-at-home mom take care of three younger brothers most of her life. Her father is able to support the family and allow for her mother to stay home with the kids, which is a full-time job in and of itself. However, some choose to return fairly quickly after giving birth.

"They don't give us a lot of maternity leave, so I decided to come back [after six weeks]," Ms. Hertel said, "but only because I can afford it, in terms of my dad, [who] is here. He will be our nanny, so I trust him. My dad is a retired elementary school teacher, so he knows how [to take care of] kids."

Most teachers need to turn to family members to help take care of their newborns because of the lack of paid maternity leave available. Ms. Hertel is applying for Short Term Disability, which allows her to be gone for six weeks but only receive a portion of her regular salary.

According to Article 22 Section 1 of the "Collective Bargaining Agreement Between the School Board Of Palm Beach County, Florida And Service Employees International Union/ Florida Public Services Union (SEIU/EPSU)," faculty requesting maternity leave must use their "accrued sick days." Teachers are given one sick day every month of employment and four sick days on the first month of every contract year.

However, if the accumulated sick days don't cover the desired time, teachers must use unpaid personal leave. This is often an unaffordable option for teachers, as most of them need to go back to work in order to support their family. In fact, having and raising a kid from birth until age 17 costs over \$200,000 for a middle-class family of four, according to CBS News.

"[It's hard] having to go back to work so soon after having a child, because you want to be there for your kid," Dormeille said. "But at the same time, you need to rack up that cash to take care of the kid, so I feel like that would be the biggest challenge."

Because many sick days are used for doctors appointments and actual days off needed for illness, some teachers are faced with a shorter amount of time with their newborns. This can be difficult for new mothers who want to be there often for their children.

"The reason why people do maternity leave is because it's a bonding time with your baby and this is what, I think, all mothers look forward to," Ms. Hertel said. "Six weeks is going to pass by really quickly, it's going to be hard to come back, but, you know, [I'm] just being there [when] I can."

Besides the restricted time and pay, teachers have to focus on preparations for their children both inside and outside the home. Mr. Maniaci mentioned that his in-laws would be helping with the baby and that his wife has been reading up on parenting books in preparation for their newborn.

"It's a life-changing event. My life, as it is now, is going to be totally flipped upside down when it's time for me to have responsibilities with helping a new human being," Mr. Maniaci said. "You know, it's exciting, [but] the anxiety levels are so high right now. I almost feel like I'm swimming."

Despite the anxieties that come along with raising a new child, the faculty is confident in themselves and in each other to take on this new chapter of their lives.

“We want them to really enjoy the process,” Dr. Atherley said. “It’s a very special time.”

“Well, it’s all going to be a challenge,” Mr. Maniaci said, letting out a chuckle. “I’m going to learn how to be a parent. It’s my first child, so that’s the challenge right there—just learning how to be [a parent]. [But] we’re humans, so every day is a learning experience. From riding a bike to ... learning how to drive a car. You know, life is all about new experiences, so [this is a] new chapter of my life and my wife’s and my family’s life.”

REFLECTION ON PIECE #6

I remember when I first got the idea to write this story. I was sitting in my chemistry class sophomore year, having a casual conversation with Mrs. Hertel. I knew she would have a baby in the coming months and I was curious as to how she would go about balancing her career and her child’s future. After about an hour of back and forth questions and answers (and many lunches spent in her classroom), I decided that the topic of maternity leave for teachers was something the community needed to hear about. It didn’t seem like much of a controversial topic on the outside, but once I got involved in the inner workings of it all (reading the state’s laws, interviewing several teachers and students, and researching the effects of maternity leave), I couldn’t believe it wasn’t a bigger deal. My first draft for the article was several days late because I had spent hours every night for several nights in a row trying to get the full picture on the topic. By the time I turned in the first draft, it was a daunting 6-page document begging to be cut down. However, once the editors and I got it through all of the drafts, it was something I could confidently (and still to this day) say I’m proud of.

Piece #7: Jan. 2020 “Derailing Harassment”

“Tri-Rail has always been a little bit sketchy,” visual junior Arianna Norberto said. “Even at the Boynton station, there would be needles on the ground or gross condoms at the West Palm station. It was kind of scary and there were a lot of scary people there. There was security, but there was no security for me.”

Norberto had been on her daily commute to school through Tri-Rail public transport when she was sexually assaulted. For Norberto, it was a morning like any other, except the students were let off the train on the opposite side of the tracks.

“It’s always been a little funky, and my mom always [has] my location on my phone... just to make sure [because] there’s so many weird people on the train,” Norberto said. “I remember, we were getting off the train, and usually we get off on the right side of the tracks... but it was weird today [since] we got off on the left side. So... this time, we had to go up the stairs and the elevator, so everyone was merging like a bunch of sardines.”

Hundreds of students emptied onto the stair platform, shuffling over to the other side where the street was. Norberto, flanked by two of her friends, crossed over to a spiral staircase where public commuters pushed each other aside in a rush to work or school.

"I was walking and someone grabbed my butt. And then I turned around [to my friend] and I was like, 'Did you grab my butt?' And she was like, 'Why would I touch your butt?' So we kept walking a little bit more, and we're barely moving, in terrible traffic," Norberto said. "[After] a few more steps, I feel the hand again and it's grabbing, and I was like, 'What the hell.'"

After feeling someone grab her from behind for the third time, Norberto concluded that her friends were not playing a joke on her. Confusion sank in as she continued past the stairwell, wondering what had happened.

"Everyone was just walking...like they didn't even [notice]. And then there was this man who pushed went in between me and my friends. At first I thought he tripped or he was just pushing me to get out of the way, being rude. And I was like, 'What are you doing? Stop pushing me,'" Norberto said. "But he just kept pushing me into the wall and then I was cornered there. I pushed him off with my foot ... and then I remember just screaming and cursing him out."

Norberto recalls seeing two fellow female students watching, but "they did nothing," leaving Norberto to fight alone. After pushing the man away and attempting to create a scene to scare him, Norberto rejoined her friends.

About 26 percent of Dreyfoos students take Tri-Rail, with a third of students claiming to have witnessed or experienced sexual harassment on Tri-Rail premises. According to the Florida Council Against Sexual Violence (FCASV), adolescents ages 14-17 are most likely to be sexually victimized, putting many high schoolers at risk for sexual harassment, especially in a public environment that they are so regularly a part of.

"I think [sexual harassment] is not just a problem with how Tri-Rail is, I think it's just a problem with men," Norberto said, referring to her incident. "It wasn't too deep to me because ... I've kind of accepted the fact that that's how things are ... You don't want to have to ignore stuff like that, but it gets to a point where it's like, 'What the eff are you gonna do?'"

THE AFTERMATH

"People don't want to be dramatic and they don't want to go to someone or report it," Norberto said. "I wouldn't go to a chaperone because I feel like ... that person [get] in trouble. And in a really weird way, I do feel guilty because small things can really make an impact on someone's life."

Upon arriving at school after the incident, Norberto reported to her first class where Spanish teacher Lori Brown was beginning a lesson plan. However, a small conversation in the front of the class would soon turn the class into a lecture discussion about sexual harassment.

"What struck me the most is how she thought it was normal," Mrs. Brown said. "She didn't think it was that big of a deal and that freaked me out. This can't be put under the carpet and ignored. This should be dealt with and exposed and not just kind of ignored, and I don't want any girl or guy to think that [it] is acceptable."

Many victims of sexual harassment either refrain from speaking up, attempt to justify the offender, or brush off the incident. All of these passive approaches to harassment, however, have been counterproductive in confronting the problem.

Much of the harassment that occurs goes unreported and unaddressed. In fact, according to a survey of Dreyfoos students conducted by *The Muse* only 5 percent who had experienced or witnessed harassment at Tri-Rail went on to report it. Norberto is one of the many adolescents who felt that reporting the incident would just do more harm than good.

"[Students] should not feel threatened or worried that someone's going to grab them or touch them or do something like that," Mrs. Brown said. "That's not what it's supposed to be like just because it's a different form of transportation than the traditional school bus. Everyone deserves to be safe. It's not okay. It's not alright. And it has to be called out for what it is."

In order to monitor the trains and keep students out of harm, the school district assigns chaperones. These chaperones are often retired bus drivers or police officers, but they aren't held by any "high requirement" to become a chaperone, according to assistant principal Leo Barrett. They only have to be "an adult with some common sense." However, the chaperones often fail to help students who may feel unsafe or uncomfortable.

"The last time I was on the train, the chaperones were really rude," Norberto said. "It's not like you feel any more welcome by them than you do by strangers. They are kind of strict though, and if they see you sitting with a grown adult... they'd be like 'no sitting with that person on the train. Split up.'"

Dreyfoos does not have an established school uniform but instead has a lenient dress code, allowing students to express themselves in whatever ways they feel. Regardless, sexual harassment prevails whether the victim is in sweats, just as Norberto was, or if they are in something more form-fitting and "attractive."

"They huddled me back in, but it was just weird. And it was just so foggy, like it was a weird day," Norberto said. "I showed up that day [and] I had a hoodie on and I had sweatpants. Sometimes I wear... [clothes that don't] actually show *anything*, and you *still* feel uncomfortable. No matter what, you just feel like there's something weird, like everyone there sexualizes [you]."

"It has no nothing to do with what a person is wearing," Mrs. Brown said. "Nobody's asking for [it]. And nobody has the right to do that. No matter what they're wearing. I don't care if they're wearing a pillowcase. I don't care if they're just wearing a huge garbage bag. That's not accepted. It's just not right. That's crossed the line. And that's sexual harassment. "

TALKING ABOUT IT

Sexual harassment comes in many different forms, however. While Norberto experienced a common form of physical sexual harassment, communications senior Emily Elias experienced verbal and visual harassment when she was stalked at Tri-Rail her sophomore year.

"It was Valentine's Day, and my mom, as usual, was really late, but this time, she was super late picking me up at tri-rail, so I had to wait [at the station]," Elias said. "It was just me,

another student from Dreyfoos, and this guy. Pretty soon it was just me and him standing there [and] it'd been 30 minutes. My mom was really late, like she was in traffic. So I was like, I'll talk to him."

The student who Elias had been standing with was around her age at the time of the incident. He was going to a private special needs school but had been taking Tri-Rail and happened to be at the Boynton Beach station when he first met Elias.

"The next day, I saw him again on the train and my mom wasn't that late, but I talked to him because I saw him," Elias said. "Things started escalating pretty soon after that, like right after school ended on either the third or fourth day, he was there at the West Palm Beach station, not in Boynton anymore."

The young man had been waiting for Elias at the station and made his way to her. Elias recalls telling him where she went to school, but she had never thought that he would go out of his way to find the location or pursue her at the station nearest Dreyfoos.

"I'm looking at my friends like, 'Holy crap. Okay, this is getting a little bit much.' Now he's like sitting with me waiting for the train," Elias said. "I have my friends around me and they're like, 'This is not okay. This is weird.' And then on the train, he kept asking me for my number and really weird things and I was like, 'No,' and he kept trying to use my phone [and] I was like, 'No.'"

After this had been going on for a few days, Elias was in speech and debate class when the "Me Too" movement was brought up in a discussion. Elias later approached her teacher, communications dean Angela Anyzeski, about the stalking.

"She specifically came to me because it was something that was going on at that time, and she wasn't sure if she should be concerned," Mrs. Anyzeski said. "She didn't want to get the guy in trouble and she didn't want to overreact. As a woman, you're so worried about everybody else and inconveniencing other people and making them feel bad and you take responsibility for how they feel... and that's exactly what had happened. I thought, 'God, what if this kid... tries to stop her or hurt her or do something like that.'"

Elias hesitated to relay the situation to Mrs. Anyzeski because she worried about making it into a "big deal" and "blowing it out of proportion," a common fear in victims of harassment who want to avoid appearing hysterical, overanalyzing intentions, or getting the offender in trouble.

"I was just being nice to him," Elias said. ... "I wasn't scared of him because to me he was harmless. But Mrs. Anyzeski was like, 'You don't know what he's capable of. You don't know him.' And I was like, 'that's true.'"

After reporting her situation to school police officer James O'Sullivan, the young man's school and parents were contacted, and he no longer rode the train at the same time or place as Elias anymore. Although reporting this incident ended the conflict for Elias, many occasions of sexual harassment go unreported and unaddressed.

"We need to know anything that happens to our students that's out of the ordinary," Mr. Barrett said. "The school district pays... Tri-Rail a very nice sum of money for each student to be a Tri-Rail rider."

The issue of sexual harassment on Tri-Rail reaches farther than the tracks. However, the administration has expressed that they have taken several measures to prevent incidents from happening, but without frequent reports, the issue persists.

"It's communication. If you come to me with an official complaint, I'm going to make sure that [an] official investigation is conducted," Officer O'Sullivan said. "We should be able to address it. We can't fix what just happened, right? But we could hopefully prevent it going forward."

REFLECTION ON PIECE #7

All of the articles I had written and skills I had been developing led up to possibly one of the most emotional articles I had ever written. I was sitting in the editing room brainstorming a story idea when I remembered Norberto telling me about this incident happening to her just last year. Somewhere in the back of my mind, I had thought we covered the topic of sexual harassment, but I was wrong. So, like any journalist would do, I jumped at the opportunity to write about it. This article had tested me in more ways than I could have imagined, having to reach out to several outside sources, compile hours worth of interviews, and finally put it together to create something worthy of its implications. And somehow, I feel as though I did it. Now, this isn't the end of my journey as a writer (since there really never will be an end). But, I can confidently say that each and every article and word in this portfolio built me up to be the journalist I am today.