

# Old Mind, New Mind

*Gracie Meijer*

I have no memories prior to the age of fifteen. Whole vacations, family deaths, personal milestones have been lost in the swirling quagmire that is my mind. My parents will often ask me if I remember something we did together when I was young. For a brief moment, I board the ship and venture deep into my hippocampus. I turn the room in there upside down, ruffling through rows of files and manila folders, trying to find what I'm looking for. I search over, under, and through. I push back curtains, lift blinds, enter doors. Nowhere, not even in the closet where I keep the overflow, the miscellaneous, can I find the picture my parents want me to see. I return to the present, fingers to temples, and let out a heavy, not-this-again sigh. They say, really? You can't even remember that? We spent so much money and time to make that special for you. It's a kind of frustration I can't really describe. It's like putting together a piece of furniture by hand, carefully and lovingly adding each piece, only to realize at the end that it won't hold any weight because you forgot a screw. You're left wondering how you let this happen.

It took me twenty years to finally get help: 30 milligrams of Vyvanse in the morning and 10 milligrams of Adderall in the afternoon was all it took. Starting to take a controlled substance every day when you're my age is a peculiar experience. It's a sweet respite from the old mind I had -- the one that traveled so fast it could've knocked you over if you got too close. It's also like a kind of grieving. I think about all the times I talked over people, all of the times I was late to something important, all of the friends' birthdays I forgot. I think about the late penalties on assignments, the low self-esteem, the memories my parents tried to make with me that I couldn't hold onto because my brain was overbooked. How I must have looked so lazy, so arrogant, so ungrateful. I grow

resentful, even: I wonder how nobody noticed.

My new mind is squeaky clean, polished platinum, a churning producer of steady, coherent thoughts. My new mind holds a place for people so that their voices can be heard instead of mine. My new mind has replaced its sharp electric current with a slow, thoughtful breeze. I feel at home in it. But the sweetest part of it all is the breathless affairs I get to have with my old mind. On the weekends, when I skip my stimulant ritual, I return to it. I take care of it. I keep it warm and dry. I don't ask too much of it. I remind it that there's no one to please. The curtains are closed, the theater is empty; we can simply sit together and reminisce. I forgive it for forgetting what my grandmother's cigarette-smoke hugs felt like. I even forgive it for not telling me it needed help. I say that I know how hard it is to ask for help. And when I leave Old Mind for New Mind, sleepy in bed on Monday mornings, I pull it close and say, "I'll see you on Friday night".



*Gracie Meijer is a junior in MCAS studying English and minoring in Medical Humanities, with a concentration in Creative Writing. She is on the pre-health track and will begin paramedic school this June. She is passionate about emergency medicine and the outdoors and hopes to be an ALS ski patroller during her gap year(s). She is known for rewatching old John Mulaney specials for the twentieth time and making her roommates kill spiders for her in the middle of the night.*

# The Sunset

*Thomas O'Rourke*

Day turned into night. The sounds of the hospital – the constant droning of the cardiac monitor, call bells, coughing – were all put to rest with the same CD my mom had played after tucking me into bed as a child. The acoustic lullaby I loved so much was now used to comfort my nana as she struggled to fall asleep, uncertain what the next day would bring. Would it be another scan? More radiation? Chemotherapy? I left the hospital every night that summer confident that remission was inevitable. However, this confidence slowly slipped as I watched my once youthful and kind-hearted sixty-nine-year-old nana rapidly decline into a stage IV cancer patient. Each day she aged what seemed to be an entire decade. The glow in her eyes faded as cancer overtook her brain. She was there, but at the same time, she wasn't. Feelings of helplessness turned into frustration as the cardiac monitor played one final, dreadful note. Had my nana's initial coughing fits been investigated further than her doctor's pretext diagnosis of "seasonal allergies," she may have had a fighting chance against her cancer. Now, whenever the sun sets, I'm encompassed not by the fateful hospital lullaby I know so well, but by the presence of my nana guiding me through this game of life.



*Thomas O'Rourke (MCAS '23) is studying biology and hopes to attend medical school to become an Army physician after graduating from BC. He wishes to pursue family medicine, where he feels he can have the greatest impact on America's soldiers and their families. Family medicine is unique in the way that it fosters a strong patient-provider relationship and allows for preventive healthcare before disease strikes; both of which are important to Thomas. Outside of the classroom, Thomas volunteers as an EMT with BCEMS, works in the McMenamain laboratory, and is a cadet in Army ROTC. In his free time, he enjoys cooking and spending time outdoors with friends and family.*