



Viewfinder

*Essays on
the Future*

Edited by Charlie Farmer, Olivia Hennessey,
Rebecca Lant, Lorelyn Nolte, and Abbey Schneider

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Introduction

Welcome to *Viewfinder: Essays on the Future*, a collection of works that look at the future through the lens of fear, curiosity, wisdom, hope, and the past.

Each essay contains a photo chosen by the author with a filter to match the theme of the writing. We hope you find these essays helpful as you navigate the imminent mighty future.

As you read each work, note how the tone shifts from anxiety to anticipation, from alarm to aspiration, and from fear of the unknown to hope for a new day. After reading, imagine which filter you fit into based on your thoughts about the future.

We thank the brilliant writers of our Fall 2022 ENG 412/512: Print and Digital Editing class at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, and give special thanks to our fearless leader, Dr. Lockridge.

Enjoy reading!

— The Editors,
Charlie, Olivia, Rebecca, Lorelyn, and Abbey



Through the Lens of the Past

Filter: Sepia

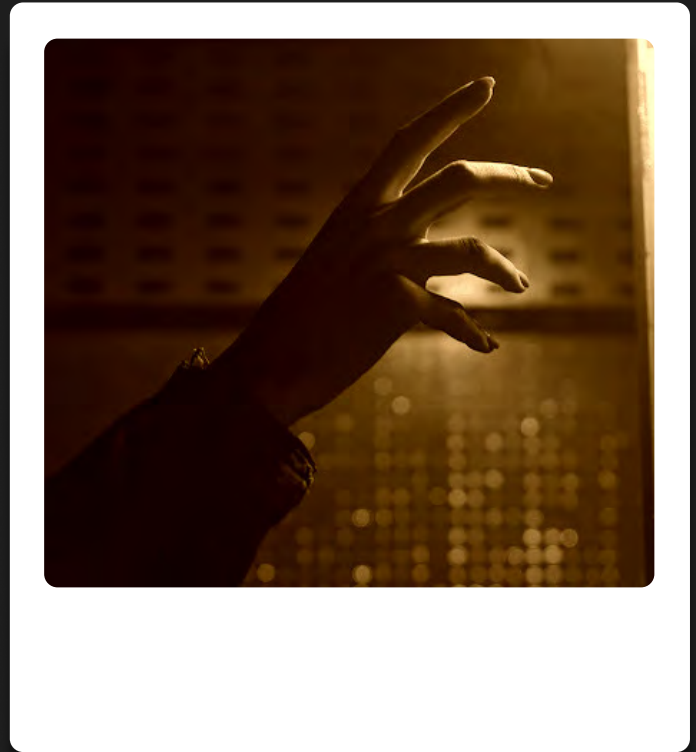
The sepia filter colors photos with warm brown tones, framing them as relics from the past.

Different Futures

Charlie Farmer

The Future I Write Down

Poem due next Tuesday by 5:00 p.m. Short story due next Thursday by 11:59 p.m. (I have ten untitled documents in my fiction class's Google Drive folder just from trying to start this stupid thing. Please, let this one work, let me finish it, let me not hate it when it's finished. I finally found a story I liked. I just need to write it the right way.) Conference this weekend, two hours away. Maybe I'll work on the short story on the bus ride over if I have the motivation. If I'm going to do any homework at the conference, it's going to be homework I like.



Discussion posts on Canvas. Reflections. Laundry (weekdays if possible; the machines are always full on the weekends).

“Lunch on Saturday?” Sent as a text message. Do you ever think about how we can write our futures? It's like creating art, isn't it? (I know, I know. It's just lunch on Saturday, but small things need creating too.) I meet up with the friend who became my best friend last year, and we talk about our crushes and the *Owl House* Season 3 premiere on our way to the dining hall. They live on the other side of campus, but I've walked farther than that to get to classes I couldn't care less about. Of course, this, too.

Two weeks ago, I wrote, “4:00 Makeup.” I was going to Facetime a friend I grew up with. They live in Oregon now. (Heart after the bullet point.) I had never worn eyeshadow before, and I needed help figuring out how to darken the pigment. I erased the bullet point from the “Friday” section in my planner when we had to reschedule. I crossed it out in the Sunday section when we had to cancel.

College dance the following Saturday. My eyeshadow turned out alright.

“I miss you.” Sent as a text message. Sometimes you can’t write about the past without praying to the future in the same sentence.

The Future I’m Alive In

When my parents and I used to take my oldest brother to Toledo, and my older brother to Ohio State, I would ride in the car, earbuds buried in my ears, blasting whatever music was fast-paced enough to serve as a soundtrack for my daydreams (I only had worship and Disney songs, but I managed to make it work somehow). I would stare out the window and pretend I was the one whose suitcases were stuffed in the back of the car and that in a few hours, I’d be walking into my own room far from home. I’ve moved into college dorm rooms twice now and, I’m sorry, past self, this isn’t quite as fun to live through as it was to wait for.

When I was in middle school, I googled the definitions of *tomboy* and *girly girl* and decided I was somewhere in the middle. I decided it believing I was satisfied with my decision, unable to be truly unsatisfied because I knew of no other words that might describe me better; realizing, I think, that I had discovered something important about myself but not quite understanding what, and I wouldn’t have accepted it if I’d known its name. I have a nonbinary pride flag pin on my bookbag now, and sometimes I want to write to my younger self and say, “I wish you would be happy to know who you are now. I know you wouldn’t be, but trust me anyway—you know yourself now, and you love yourself, and you’ll probably remember this Google search for the rest of your life, and it’s one of many, many things that’s going to make you smile.”

The Future I Think About

Finding a job. Finding a remote job or a job in a place I’m willing to move to. Finding a job when it feels like the world is about to collapse. Finding a job when the oceans are rising and farmland is turning to desert, when people are starving and people are angry, and life should never be a pay-to-play game to begin with. Finding a job I like.

Moving into a tiny house in a tiny town. No partner (I think). I always tell myself I’ll be happier that way, and I know I’m right, but it still scares me because I remember I only have one future, and what if I’m wrong? I might kiss someone someday though (maybe). No pets (I think) because I don’t want to leave them or bring them with me if I decide to travel. Still, part of me hopes my cat will live forever.

Sitting on a windowsill, watching the rain slip down the frosty glass, listening to the soft murmurs of thunder and the tapping of my fingers on my keyboard as I write. Or work. Crocheting blankets in the evenings, giving them away—I hope I'm rich enough to just give them away. I don't want the pressure of trying to sell the things I make. It's the same reason I no longer want to be a writer, at least not for anyone except myself.

Robots. Robots taking our jobs, then taking over the world—or maybe they'll be kind to us. We have a tendency to name them, after all.

Mechanical minds. Immortality. My brother once told me about how someday we'll upload our brains to a computer system and live forever. Maybe that'll be humanity's claim to fame if the aliens ever find us: we have the technology to fix death.

Can we fix everything? Could we, if we just had the technology? Is it too late for that? I understand why we try regardless. Sometimes I want to live forever, just to finally fix myself.

Cold death. Heat death. Atoms splitting apart, spreading across the universe until they are no longer close enough to remember our names or simply becoming so disorganized that the remnants of our existence are like paint peeling from the canvas of a long-unrecognizable portrait.

The Future in Three Parts

Elli Carder



The Future as a Question

Yesterday, the future was a bowl of Wheaties and a nap in the middle of the afternoon. It was boring and slow, but it was mine. Tomorrow, I expect it will be sweaters and my Doc Martens, books with sad endings, belly scratches for my dog, and maybe a coffee with too much cream. Or perhaps it will be none of those things. Maybe it will be a text from a boy I've forced myself to forget, a picture online of the first snowfall of the season in North Dakota, or a forest fire in California. The future is made up of the questions I ask to freak myself out and potentially trigger an

existential crisis. Where will I be? Who will I be? Will I *be* at all?

I wonder about this Earth, how changed it'll be in ten or twenty years. What will be gone? What will be new? I wonder if my children, if I decide to have them, will have lightning bugs to catch in the summertime or if that green luminescence will be stuck in the past. Already some species are at risk of extinction. We kill them with our pesticides and our lights that mimic the way they talk to one another.

My questions are often worries, things that I know can only be answered with time.

The Future as a Ghost of the Past

There are parts of my future spread out in my past. There's the last hug I shared with my grandfather, the TV playing softly behind us—an old western movie starring Clint Eastwood's ever-grimacing face. There's the night my grandmother died, the smell of hospital antiseptic and cold still following close at my heels like hungry hounds.

Some nights, I believe my grief will take a lifetime to get over. I plan for the pain like one plans for rain—an umbrella packed, sturdy boots set out by front doors, and a raincoat so as not to get drenched.

The future is a ghost that lurks in memories and cannot be exorcised.

The future is a moment I swear I have lived before. It is the familiar smell that catches me off guard in a random moment at a random place—peaches, dirt, freshly mown lawns. I am aware of its presence when I enter my grandparents' house, empty of them now. There, the future is locked in a war with the past.

When I was twelve years old, I saw the ocean for the first time. It was this massive thing; its blue was indistinguishable from the mid-July sky. The only way you could tell the two things apart was by the little dots of people swimming—the bright flashes of bodyboards and pool rings cresting the waves.

I remember the night we got there, stretched our legs and arms from the eleven-hour drive, and ran out to the sand. When we reached the water, the waves had already started moving out to meet us.

I remember thinking that the moment would be over soon, and my parents would call us back to go settle into our room. The magic of that moment never had a chance. It was like I could do nothing, like I had already run back to the car and could no longer smell the salt lingering like perfume in the air. It was the moment I realized I could see into the future, that time did not always move at the same rate. Ever since then, I have not been able to close my eyes to what is awaiting me.

The Future as a Dream

The future—not the one with flying cars or holograms, but the one where I am older and maybe own a dog—is not as distant as it once seemed. I am aging—every day, apparently—and I can see it in the lines around my eyes and mouth, feel it in my bones in the morning (or maybe I'm deteriorating at a young age, and I should call a doctor).

Most of my dreams are of the past—the house I grew up in with the tire swing and the bedroom I shared with my sisters—but recently they have been moving through time.

They are visions of potential. A house with a sunroom and a porch with rocking chairs. A job that is fine and good, but that doesn't consume me. They are visions of desire, like love and

good books, or a friend to walk with in the evenings, to call and talk to when I am lonely. They are an ear to listen, a shoulder to cry on, a hand to hold.

The future seems to hang in the early hours of the morning; it makes it easier to get out of bed and sometimes much harder to get to sleep at night.

The future is a billion little moments. It is an epilogue unwritten, one I am just starting to write.

Future Past

Hannah Sroka

In 2022, the note has three little penguins in the top left corner, matching the numerous penguins scattered on the inside of the envelope. In 2022, I try to decipher the cursive scrawled on the pages. The note is seven pages—or twenty-one penguins—long, and by the end of it, the cursive starts to get more spaced out, as if the person writing it had gotten tired.

In 2002 (September 21, 2002, to be specific), the sun is shining, it's about seventy-five degrees out, and my family has just finished celebrating my first birthday. In 2002, gas is \$1.37 a gallon in New York, milk is \$1.99 a gallon, bread is \$1.39 a loaf, and Budweiser is \$12 per twenty-four pack. In 2002, Cathy Sroka sits down, pulls out seven pieces of her penguin paper, and writes a letter in mostly perfect cursive to her newly one-year-old granddaughter.

On September 28, 2022, just over twenty years later, her granddaughter opens the envelope and reads the note.

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To me, Cathy Sroka—my dad's mother—is a figment of the past. I barely know her. She's constructed through fleeting memories of my toddler-age mind and stories from both my parents. There's a picture of her sitting with my sister and me underneath our Christmas tree, back when our living room was painted a pale yellow. Cathy has shiny shoulder-length brown hair, blue eyes, tan skin, and a smile that looks grateful and sad at the same time. The picture of us is hanging up on my bedroom wall in my parents' house, and sometimes I find myself staring at it, wondering how someone can seem so familiar yet so foreign at the same time. She died of ovarian cancer when I was in kindergarten. I don't even remember what I called



her. My mom's parents were Grammy and Grandpy; my dad's dad died long before I was born, but we mostly call him Grandpa Paul. In the present day, we call Cathy Grandma Sroka. It's always felt awfully formal to me, and if I think hard enough, I can come up with a vague memory where my dad says she hated that name, but I don't know what else to call her. She's a minuscule part of my past, someone I only really think about from time to time. I have very few actual memories about her, and the ones I have don't make me feel any emotion except a hint of grief, but for what, I'm not sure.

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In 2022, I expect the note to be about me, or at least about the two of us. It's addressed to me, after all. "Hannah Renee" is scrawled across the front of the envelope, slightly off-center, in a blue pen that doesn't match the rest of the note. And it is about me, in some way.

I see my past self through my grandmother's eyes as she writes about how I like to eat Cheerios, about how she gave me a book with Cheerios on the cover and I tried to pick them up and eat them, about how I mimic the referees' hand motions while watching football with my dad, about how I appear to be left-handed. (I write with my right hand but do almost everything else with my left.) And the entire last page of the note is her wishing me well, sure that I have grown into an amazing woman with great friendships and lots of opportunities before her. (In the present, I don't let myself think too hard about that. I wonder if she'd consider me successful. I wonder if I consider myself successful. I think that's a problem for future me.)

In 2002, my grandmother focuses on the present, although it's long since become the past for both of us. She gives me the prices of gas, milk, bread, and beer, and writes that there are fifty states and Bush and Cheney are in the White House. She says that it's been about a year since 9/11 and the US has invaded Iraq. She says that the US and the UK are allies. She mentions my family—the ones who have been born by now—all by name: my parents, my uncles and aunts, and my other grandparents. She's very matter-of-fact, a perfect mirror of the way my parents always described her, listing dates and names of her older relatives, all the way back to 1896. (That one, her father's birthday, is underlined three times.) Out of everyone, the only one I recognize is my great-grandmother Cyrilla, born on Halloween in 1917. She died just a few weeks before her hundredth birthday. Her death felt like the end of an era, but I don't miss her too terribly since I can count the number of times I met her on one hand.

My grandmother writes like she's reminding someone who she is, like she's lost her memories. Her name is Catherine Sroka. She is the youngest of seven children. She was born in 1946. Her husband, Paul, died in March 1975. That was a very sad day for her. Judy and Tom Turck—my

mom's parents—live in Cincinnati, Ohio. Cathy Sroka lives in Pine Bush, New York. My parents and I live in Portland, Connecticut.

It's almost as if she's grounding herself in the present, linking her pasts and futures together.

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If my grandmother were still alive today and we walked past each other on the street, I wonder if she'd recognize me. I wonder if I'd recognize her. We're family, sure, but she hasn't seen me in almost twenty years. In her note, she comments on my "beautiful blonde hair" and "big blue eyes". But these years have weathered me something great, with my hair turning a russet brown that I eventually dye red, and my eyes greening over time, like copper exposed to the elements.

In 2022, I realize that this note is my last personal connection to my grandmother. I can't call her up and ask how she's doing; I can't perceive her in any way except through my dad's memories. There's nothing tying us together except for a familial bond and this note. It's her past meeting my past, her future meeting my future. I feel a bit sad when I finish reading the note. I only knew about it for the past few weeks or so, but it still felt like the past twenty years had all built up to this, and now it was over. The note was read. This was the last time I'd ever hear something new from my grandmother. She's permanently stuck in my past now.

I wonder what she'd think of the future. I bet she'd be surprised by cell phones and how widespread the internet is. I bet she'd pause at the legalization of gay marriage, at the Black Lives Matter protests, at the current state of US politics. I wonder if she knew what her future would be like. I wonder if she'd gotten her cancer diagnosis yet, if she knew how fatal it would be. I wonder if she'd guessed that I'd have a sibling—a sister—and that she'd have five grandchildren in total: three girls and two boys. I wonder if she knew how she'd factor into my future despite being so rooted in my past.

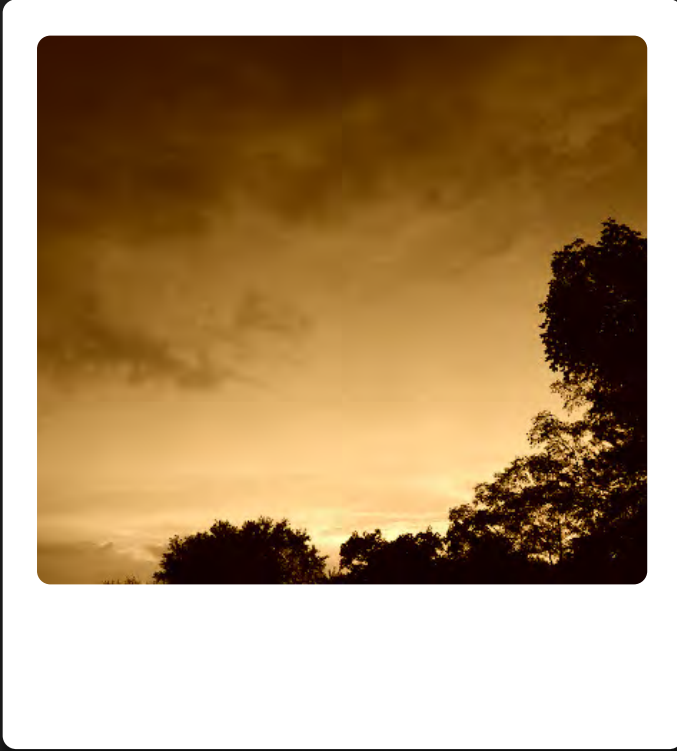
I try not to think about the note too much. Most times, I succeed. But other times, I'm left fascinated by the fact that it exists. It's my own personal time capsule, my own blast from the past. I wonder if the time since September 21, 2002, has passed quickly. I can't answer this question—my memory doesn't stretch back that far. In a way, it feels like it has; in another way, everything has changed so much that it feels like it must have been longer than twenty years. The note makes me think about the past, about the present, about the future. It makes me think about how they're all connected, about how maybe twenty years from now, the thought of gas being \$4 per gallon will be just as insane as it being \$1 per gallon. My grandmother had already lived most of her life by the time she wrote this note. This was her present, but it's my past, and I'm reading it in the future. And what brings them all together is

seven little pieces of paper with a trio of penguins in the corner of each page.

Time is a funny thing, it seems.

Don't Stop Believin': Small Town Girl Discovers it's a Not So Lonely World

Molly Monson



Living in one place for nearly twenty-two years is not typical of your average college senior. Neither is my college experience. My whole world has always been Oxford, a charming and tiny town attached to the eternal fountain of youth that is Miami University. After I decided to attend MU post-high school graduation, the question “What made you decide to stay?” always gave me pause. Why did I stay? I’ve been itching to get out since before high school, but I contracted away four years of my life to an institution six miles from my parents’ house and less than a mile from my old school.

I am intrinsically Oxford, and yet my face always heats with shame when I hear “townie,” followed by some sort of ignorant question. I do my best to retain my dignity with crossed arms when I run into an old teacher, dressed as a cowgirl matching six friends who have known me for less than two years. Awkward introductions ensue, and I am suddenly hyper aware of my friends, who have only known me in my twenties, gaining an insight into a chapter of my life that I never really got to close. It’s like sitting on your suitcase and trying to zip it, but your underwear and other personal items are bursting out and the whole airport is watching you struggle to regain your composure.

Or it’s like this—have you ever seen those tourist attractions that allow you to exist in several states simultaneously at some random conjunction? I have one foot in my hometown and one foot in my college town, though my feet are right underneath my shoulders and these places are all one and the same. I whiplash between the mindsets of a jaywalking student on campus and an infuriated local hitting the brakes hard on Patterson. I feel my hackles go up when my college friends shatter glass in front of the place where I took writing classes as a child, but

I've thrown my fair share of blue bottles. I work at an organization dedicated to serving this town, but this town has let down a local girl a few times too many.

I love this place and I hate this place. I have dreamed about the future for so long: *who I will become, where I might be, who will be with me?* What happens when I graduate and I'm not a student anymore? I'm in eighth grade again, running cross country. I'm almost at the finish line and I'm toward the front of the pack and I just need to kick, kick, kick my way through these last two semesters. *The finish line is right there; this is what you want, you want to be done?*

My future is so close, and I find myself dwelling on the past more than ever. Most people move in elementary school or sometime in childhood—their dad got a new job, and yeah, they had old friends, but they haven't spoken in years. My childhood friends are in my 8:30 a.m. English classes and ordering cheap beer from me at my job. My ancient childhood violin teacher still haunts the weekly farmers market, her string-calloused hands brushing across every vegetable at the Amish stand. My mom's friends lurk behind every corner at the grocery store; former classmates hand over fists of hastily-counted change across the counter and pretend that they don't know my name.

When you're twenty-one, the future doesn't go much further than Saturday night that very same week. We're all just trying to forget that we have a few short months before leaving behind found families and condemning them to the same neglect that old high school friends endure.

When my degree is earned and my cap has been ceremoniously tossed; when I've signed the lease and the loan, and I've committed myself to the next two years at some corporate job guaranteed to propel me headfirst into the real world, where can I look to find joy?

Existential dread is a fan favorite of seniors, fourth-years, final-years, and graduation awaiters. We suffered twelve years of standardized testing because if we didn't, we'd never get into college. We get into college and turn in assignments with bleary eyes and go through the motions of feigning professionalism, playing pretend at jobs in pajamas at nineteen that we will replicate in a suit at twenty-two. I have always struggled with this; you're telling me I spent my entire life in one place, working to be another cog in the machine? What kind of bullshit is this?

But then it occurred to me: life isn't about working or flexing your degree; we're not supposed to operate like this. Joy will be found in minutes at the desk at your first job, "ah-ha" moments and jobs well done. The world will slow down as life picks up without club meetings and group

projects; there will be time to read all the fiction my heart desires and to watch all the movies that I haven't seen and the shows piling up in "My Stuff" on Hulu.

I think most of us are accustomed to some level of handholding and the desperation of a painfully vulnerable email to get out of an exam. The last four years have been repeating high school with people you didn't grow up with and no (fully developed) adult supervision. Four years of blood sweat and tears. I don't want to buy a car or find an apartment; I want my dad to pick out something for me and I want my mom to tell me where I'll feel safe.

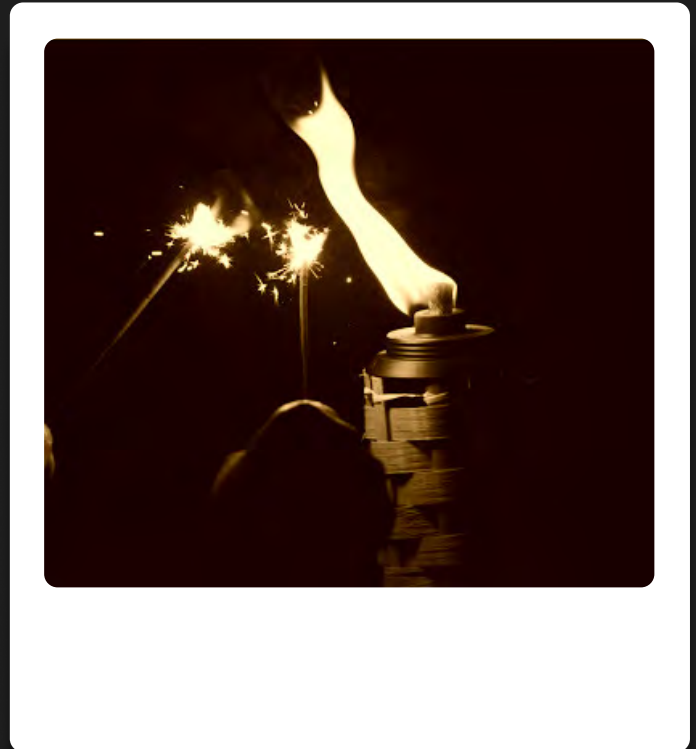
At the end of the day, I will pour more blood, sweat, and tears into my career than I ever put into four years of higher ed. I will be challenged, I will fail, and I will behave at the whim of my own autonomy. The past twenty-one years have been sleepy, somewhat sheltered, complicated, and spirit-breaking. I have loved and lost so much, and I have grown to my fullest capacity surrounded by the people I grew up with, and all the ones who are new. Someday soon, I'll finally drive past my high school for the last time, I'll see my old classmate who works at my favorite restaurant for the last time; I'll say my farewells, and I'll dive headfirst into a reality that is completely new to me and different to everyone else. One day soon, I'll hear "Don't Stop Believin'" at the bar and my friends won't belt the lyrics just for me, small townie girl.

One day soon, I will mess up, take up as much space as I want when I dance, speak as loudly as I please, talk however I want, wear things I like, and I will struggle and struggle alone, in a new city, in my own way—I can't wait.

The Future: A Nuanced Portrait

Olivia Hennessey

The future is entirely conceptual. By definition, it's theoretical—crafted inside our minds. The future can be terrifying, hopeful, or a combination of the two. It's never one thing. Each individual has their own ideas about what the future will hold, both for themselves and for the world at large. And even among individuals, it's constantly shifting. How I imagined my future at nine is immensely different to how I imagined it at sixteen or twenty-one. I believe that shift itself is essential to our outlook on life—it informs our choices, gives us hope, and shapes who we become.



Just Like the Grown-Ups

I was just like any other child. I couldn't *wait* to grow up. I wanted to be like the adults from a very early age: tall, wise, and independent. I constantly imagined what the future might be like, albeit unrealistically most of the time. In first grade, I liked to imagine myself as a sixth grader. They seemed like the cool kids, with their Abercrombie sweatshirts and pierced ears. But by the time I was in sixth grade, I felt nowhere near cool. I was daydreaming about high school by then. What would it be like to drive a car? Dye my hair? Make choices for myself? It was an exhilarating feeling to imagine myself grown.

When I thought about what the world itself would be like in the future, I imagined all of the clichés I picked up from media. I pictured the Jetsons, with their flying cars and robots. I thought that maybe by the time I was an adult, I'd have a robot for a friend. I guess I wasn't too far off.

Never did I think that there may not *be* a future. I didn't know what climate change was, and I

hadn't learned much about war. The future of humanity seemed like an unwavering absolute. To be honest, I had never considered the possibility that the future may be bad. History class had taught me about the bad things of the past, but it was never hinted that there may be bad things to come. This allowed me to carry a naive optimism into my teenage years. It was an optimism that quickly faded.

Chock-Full of Self-Doubt

Early in my teenage years, I experienced a radical shift in my outlook toward the future. With my own personal future, I began to experience self-scrutiny and insecurity on a constant basis. I worried about how others saw me, and about how intelligent and capable I really was. This, of course, comes with being a teenage girl. Pessimism was unavoidable. It didn't help that everyone began asking me the same question: "What do you want to do after graduation?" Even at fourteen years old, I was getting that question. It made me sweat every time. I realized I had no idea what I was even good at, besides school, and that success wouldn't just fall into my lap.

Despite my fears, I still had positive, unrealistic expectations about what life as an adult would be like. I thought my small town was the problem, that no one understood me there. I imagined that as soon as I got to college, it would all make sense. The friends I'd always wanted would be waiting for me. My classes would help me figure out my career path easily. I would get a job right away. It would all end up perfectly. This was, of course, wishful thinking. Around this same time, I began to worry about the state of the world for the very first time. Social media was partly to blame. This was where I learned about so many negative things, including the big one: climate change. I had yet to lose hope, though. I still thought society would band together and solve the issue before it got too out of hand. This was, again, wishful thinking.

Finding Peace (and Fear) in the Unknown

College-me is a lot different than high school-me imagined. I didn't make friends instantly; it actually took three years. I didn't figure out my career path right away, either. In fact, like most people, I'm still working that out. Getting a job won't be as easy as I thought, but that's OK. It's not what I expected, but in a lot of ways, it's better. I know myself more deeply than I did back then. I have much higher confidence as a result—both in my abilities and in who I am. I'm grounded. I don't worry so much about not knowing what lies ahead, either. My idea of what my personal future will look like is muddled, but to me, that's now comforting. There are so many possibilities out there, and I don't want to choose one just yet. Although I feel much more at peace with who I will become, I feel a bit more nervous about what will become of the

world. This is, in part, due to my education. The more I learn, the more frightened I seem to be. I want to be an optimist, as someone who loves humanity, but it just keeps getting harder. I hope we turn things around. I hope we can reverse climate change. I hope we can create a more equitable world. But anymore, I'm not so sure.

The Necessity of Imagining Times Ahead

The concept of the *future* has affected my worldview from an early age. Picturing what my life could be has gotten me through many hard times. It's part of what makes life exciting. Without the future, hope cannot exist.

On the flip side, thinking about the future can be volatile; it introduces self-consciousness, fear, and doubt. A lot of times, it's depressing and anxiety-filled, too. It's difficult, truly, but it's oh-so necessary. No matter how debilitating it can be to realistically imagine your, or the world's, future, we *have* to do it. Thinking about the future, and allowing it to shape our everyday decisions, is what will help us create something worthwhile for the next generation. We have to care about what will happen in our lifetime and, now more than ever, what will happen after we're gone.

WIGILIA

Sydney Scepkowski



My family's love language is talking about grisly crimes at *Wigilia*. The first syllable begins with a *v* sound, and the remainder follows like a rhyme of fig-eel-ee-uh. *Wigilia*, the word for the traditional Polish meal we share the night before Christmas, is entangled in the edge and melody of the Polish language. Our love and history, audible and assured.

Like the pronunciation of *Wigilia*, my family's Christmas Eve parties are a contradiction.

We are a quiet and stern revelry of downturned gazes, flatlined lips that barely color our mouths, stern jaws locked with secrets. Our occasional small talk is bites of pickled herring washed down with long sips of wine.

If my grandma were at the table, she'd be the first to speak above the trill of silverware, her voice crackling and labored by nearly a century of life. While I picked every sliver of cabbage from my *haluski* noodles, she'd offer a memory about a neighbor back in Arizona who committed suicide. Or a story she saw on the news about someone getting shot in Chicago again. Death was the heartbeat of our Christmas.

Outside, the frozen-over ponds and oil refineries of northwest Indiana fumed with winter gloom. Inside, dusty potpourri and her collection of Longaberger wicker baskets tinted my aunt's cottage a shade of lace-draped beige. Uncle Donn's iPad camera immortalizes our time together: my family fleshing out details of our year and eating layered Jell-O dessert. I've since thumbed through photo albums from those years, and the one constant is my grandma's averted gaze. Even back when she was sturdier than the frail woman I knew, she never looked at the camera.

Her eyes were nearly the same ones she gave my father, except for the color. Grandma's eyes were the source of the brush of gold that circles my pupils. I used to wish they were pure, watery blue like Dad's eyes. Now I just want to see Grandma; her hazel eyes we share, alive and reflected back to me.

She died in the spring, and now my family is running out of things to talk about that don't end with my aunt blotting away tears with a boughs-of-holly napkin. She feels the guiltiest: the caretaker and eldest daughter who kept the laundry clean and bills sorted. She was at Grandma's apartment in the assisted living home every day for the last few months.

My aunt asks the table about the little boy who went missing in Hammond.

"He drowned," someone says, probably my dad. My knife sidles up to sweet potatoes, Mom's recipe that won over the in-laws. She maintains eye contact with me, a hint to *say something nice*.

Changing the subject, I remind the table how Grandma would disapprove of the potato pierogies Mom served. *Why would you fill a dumpling with more starch?*

My aunt sighs. Her smile, though weak, brings tenderness. She hesitates before, then her voice skims to a whisper. "Let's open the cedar chest."

In my memory, Grandma's cedar chest was preserved as lore: a relic from her unwed past, spoken about often, but always distant and never seen. It didn't feel real until we were huddled in our garage that Christmas, looking down at the aging craftsmanship of cedar.

The bench-like thing groans as my dad raises the lid of the chest. It is hollowed, almost empty aside from a thick fleece blanket and one of those car flags with the Chicago Cubs logo. Not the gold crucifix she wore every day, no linens from Europe. Grandma's legacy had probably been cleared from the chest months ago by her daughters. I had been gone, one state east, when they sorted through the remnants of her not-quite-ninety-five years.

My mom suggests that I use the chest for storage once I move into my own apartment. All at once it is too much. I feel cold. The garage is dim with atrophied rust. I need to go inside now; I cry too easily to stay and stare at the empty box. Mom and I return to the kitchen in silent understanding. "Get everyone in the dining room for *opłatki*," she says, reaching into the cupboard for a saucer.

Dad and my aunt join me. I make them coffee while my mom tears open the packet of *opłatki* wafers she got from church. She even spoons honey into a ramequin. Grandma would have wanted to sweeten the *opłatki*, which had the same tastelessness as a communion wafer.

Holding the saucer stacked with *opłatki*, Mom says the blessing. She is a high school theology teacher, so prayer comes naturally to her. Mom cries like I expect her to; our sensitivity makes us alike. Warbly breathing, the rhythm of grief, escapes her as she passes each of us a wafer.

I turn to my aunt first. Breaking off a corner of my *opłatki*, I wish her peace and joy for the coming year. We exchange *opłatki*. I embrace her, breathing in the comforting scent of mint and meringues woven into her sweater. Beside us, Mom and Dad dip the wafers in honey and exchange their halves. This is our tradition— our expression of love.

That was our last *Wigilia*. We did not know that the year to follow would move unrelentingly. After eleven months of nothing good, December sludge puddles and freezes into a dirty and cold new year. My family had planned to celebrate *Wigilia* together, but my parents got sick just in time for Christmas. When the family eventually convenes at an Italian restaurant in January, the holiday is an afterthought.

While we wait for scallops and more bread for the table, my aunt hands me a gift-card-sized bag. I pull out wrapping paper and prepare to thank my aunt for the standard belated Christmas card and check. What I find instead is a jewelry box containing a modest gold necklace. A thin chain with a crucifix threaded through. I have seen this necklace in photographs predating my memory. There's one printed and clipped on my fridge at home. It's my second birthday party, and the Scepkowskis are standing shoulder to shoulder in the backyard of my childhood home. A shock of white hair, wearing a pink gingham dress; I'm the youngest by thirty years, easily. The dead balance the living. Uncle Donn and Uncle Ronnie were alive then. And Grandma.

"Is this *the* necklace?"

My aunt nods.

My face flushes with heat. The simmer of conversations and forks and knives on plates cools to dull white noise. I don't break down because, looped around my fingers, I am holding a relic of her life that I assumed had been buried with her. I cry, remembering that photo. Grandma was turned to the right, against the grain of forward-facing smiles. She is looking at me.

My grandma is *gone*. And this thread of gold pulled loose from a memory is somehow now mine.

How do *we*—her crucifix resting outside my beating, deciding, proceeding heart—exist together now?

Most of the time, her memory is just there under the neckline of my shirt, and I don't think about it until it reminds me that it's there. The crucifix taps rhythmically against my chest when I jog past the dusk-light deer near the Western Campus woods. Or sometimes the clasp of the gold chain snags the crucifix, stuck and misplaced until I slide it back to the center.

Memories seize me by the gut when the comfort of wearing something every day overstays. Half-remembered conversations flare like floaters in my vision. What my grandma always knew: the fact that I was in college somewhere, my part-time job at Culver's, my ex-boyfriend. At Grandma's funeral Mass, when I forgot my communion etiquette and instead plucked the eucharist out of the confused priest's hands. How she believed every restaurant should serve baskets of bread like Teibel's did. Hearing Grandma's hoarse timbre break with sniffing tears during our weekly phone calls. The following sequence of events: believing my grandma was alive, then—one FaceTime later—knowing she was dead, then going out for sushi to pretend my life was the same.

Then an older memory.

Springtime in Arizona when I was smaller than Grandma's green plastic patio chair. She picked the oranges from her backyard tree until I grew taller than her and could do it myself. My grandma at *Wigilia*: our quiet matriarch.

There is no epiphany yet; there is no thesis. I'll write one when I know.



Through the Lens of Fear

Filter: Street

The street filter puts photos through a sharp grayscale, making them appear bone-chilling and dark, inducing the anxiety of the unknown.

My Future Is My Only Hope

Liz Browning

(Trigger Warning: suicidal thoughts)

As a Rory Gilmore-adjacent high school student, I had every inch of the near future mapped out perfectly: get into an Ivy League, move to New York or any city more glamorous than Cincinnati, graduate undergrad at the top of my class, and become a bestselling author. I was incredibly wrong about all of that, and only portions of that dream are still desired, but it was that dream and hope for the future that kept me chugging for all of high school.

Anxiety attacks induced by impending AP exams and an A- teetering close to a B+ could only be dispelled by the somewhat false promise that all of that stress and pressure would pay off in the end. That my near-perfect GPA, ranking sixteen out of a graduating class of 400+ students and my ACT score of 32, would result in all my dreams for the future coming true.

Then, of course, those dreams came crumbling down when I received rejection emails from NYU and Columbia on the same day. I backed myself into a corner of applying to only four colleges: two out-of-state and two in-state. The two New York colleges had been taken off the table without my consent. Thus, I was left with two options: one close to home that I actually really liked or one a few hours away that I didn't love, didn't offer me as much financial aid, and was still located in a small Ohio town. I went with the former, but still couldn't tear my eyes away from New York.

I moved into college and started my first classes, but before I had even received my student ID or attended orientation, I started on a new spreadsheet filled with transfer options. I was hurt and humbled by my two dream schools rejecting me, so I widened my scope to schools with



higher acceptance rates and lower tuition costs. It was my future, my dream, and I wasn't going to let it go just because an Ivy League was now out of the picture.

But as I became friends with my roommate, met new people, grew fond of the small college town, and fell in love with a boy from my hometown that ended up at a college only an hour away, my transfer options spreadsheet started collecting dust at the bottom of my Google Drive. I was the happiest I'd ever been, and my fears of not having all the t's and i's of my future crossed and dotted slowly started to fade away. Better put, they slipped to the back of my mind. However, there's nothing like a global pandemic to serve as a wake-up call from your rose-tinted reality. It cut my freshman year short and set my sophomore year off to a rocky start. I became so disconnected from reality that I couldn't tell what I truly wanted anymore or why I wanted it in the first place. Did I really love my boyfriend? Did I still want to move to New York eventually? Did I even like the direction my education and career were heading toward? (Spoiler: that was my undiagnosed OCD speaking).

Still, I would be gripped by intrusive thoughts almost every single day that I was cooped up in my childhood bedroom. When I was finally given the okay to move back into the dorms, I once again filed those fears to the back of my mind and forced myself to be happy and live in the moment of my college experience. That was the advice my aunt and father had been saying since my senior year of high school, but funnily enough, they and everyone else in my family still asked about what I wanted to do with my degree every time I saw them.

The "end" of the pandemic had been a far-off light at the end of the tunnel that I caught a glimpse of the summer before my junior year. It was another opportunity to seize the moment and forget wallowing in my fear of the future, which is why I didn't see it coming when my boyfriend of almost two years broke up with me. The reasons made sense, in fact, they all involved our future as a couple. If we didn't break up then, our relationship may have broken beyond repair further down the line.

I didn't force him to break up with me, but it certainly pulled the rug out from under me. I consider myself modern enough to not put my hopes and dreams all into one person, especially a man. But perhaps he had been the one aspect of my future that I saw as a constant, a starting point to build off of. Now I had nothing. I was back to the drawing board, and I was not happy.

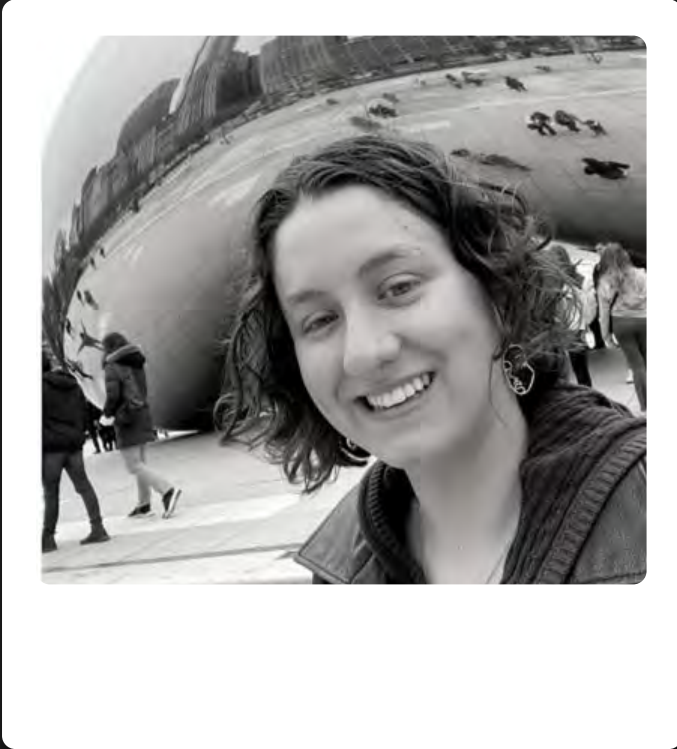
In fact, I was the most unhappy I'd ever been in my entire life. I had no appetite, no interest in anything, and certainly no plans for the future. Because at a certain point, I stopped wanting a future. I stopped wanting to have hopes and dreams since my plans had failed thus far. I

couldn't take any more disappointment, so I lost my will to live.

A 20 mg prescription of Prozac and a year's worth of occasional therapy sessions later, I'm back to wanting a future. Now that I'm in my final year of undergrad, my future seems to be the only topic my family and everyone else wants to talk about (even more so than before). The truth is, it's hard to focus on the future when it wasn't even something you wanted this time last year. Some of my AP student dreams are still intact: I still want to write books and New York is still calling my name. But I don't have a definitive answer. That's something I'll put off until next semester. Or maybe I'll keep putting that decision off forever, since that seems to be consistent with adulthood.

A Look at the Future Through the Past

Abbey Schneider



What Even Is the Future?

The future is an abstract concept to me. To me, it's better described as "the great unknown." Oblivion, perhaps. Or maybe a great, overbearing, teeth-chattering, terrifying, dark abyss that threatens to sweep me under at any moment. You can probably tell how I feel about the future from that statement. I hate it. I'm sitting at my computer writing this chapter and I feel my chest clenching (not to say that I don't normally have this type of feeling), and my anxiety is increasing.

The future is a general description of most people's anxiety. Anxiety is the fear of the unknown—the unknown of a situation, a moment, or a person. But for some, this is the future. I am an anxiety-riddled individual, but I always said that I feared the day-to-day more than the future. I don't know if that's necessarily true or just something I told myself. I take everything one day at a time because I enter an existential crisis if I even think a month ahead. And I've been like that since I can remember; the future has always been too big. But I'm hoping I'll learn to embrace the future after this chapter, and maybe looking into my past will help me get a handle on my future.

Childhood...

This title sounds alarming, but I have no intention of going into childhood trauma or whatever else I could discuss. Remember, this is about the future, or my fear of it.

When you're a kid, I don't think you have the same concept of "the future" as a teen or adult. I wanted to be treated as an adult. I wanted to grow up, which was about as much of the future as I could picture then. But I was scared of driving, going to college, and everything else. Even as a kid, I didn't do well with change, so the idea of this life I was supposed to have in five or

six years from that point was terrifying. Adults tell you not to grow up and to enjoy being a kid, but you're also told the best parts of life happen in your future. My main memory of the future as a child is wanting it to happen. I was scared of my path to the future (the actual steps of time and change and being independent worried me deeply). I wish I could say this changed as I got older.

Being a Teen Is Hard

High school. That's it, that's the sentence. Your formative teenage years are in high school, and you're constantly reminded of "the future." The minute you get to high school, it's college- and career-talk only. It's terrifying, and it did not help my already-growing anxiety for the future. I felt I had to take AP (Advanced Placement) classes for college credit and CCP (College Credit Plus) classes to prepare for college. This was my foreseeable future, and I spent so much time trying to succeed in high school, I did not think about the actual act of living on my own. And when senior year came, I was wholly unprepared.

I had finally picked a school (it took a lot to get to this point), but I was not ready for the next step. My parents told me up until right before I left that it would be okay if I wanted to go somewhere local so I could commute. But I wanted to go to college and live alone even though the idea made my head spin. I wanted to get past my anxiety about the future and have the college experience I had seen in the movies (I don't think I factored in how those kids never seemed to go to class). The whole summer consisted of my teeth gritting more and more as the start of classes inched closer. The next thing I knew, it was time to start at Miami University.

College Is Being a Fake Adult

Surprise! I made it to college. I'm not going to sugarcoat it—people don't joke about how tough freshman year is for no reason. I thought I was doing great halfway through the first semester, and then I realized I was lying. "The future" I had feared as a teen had caught up with me, but I was struggling with new elements I had not predicted in high school. No one tells you about the future of friendships when you're young and how much they can change. The truth is this: everyone's future is different, and my underclassman years at Miami led me away from many of the people I adored in high school. Now that I was in the thick of college, I needed a new future to overanalyze. I refer to this in my head as "after college."

College teaches you to be a fake adult. I learned how to live "alone" with roommates, how to sort of pay bills, and how to be exhausted all the time and still do homework. It's an odd in-between phase, where one second I have to try to balance my social, work, and school life, and the next my mom is calling to nag me about something (I love my mom, but I'm twenty-one

years old. I will figure it out). The only future I'm looking toward is a job, but really I want to be stable and successful. I want to live alone in a city where I can walk to most places. I want to decorate my snazzy apartment and get a dog. I want to (hopefully) not hate my job. It scares me to graduate and leave all the people and places I've grown to love, but for the first time, I'm a little excited about the future.

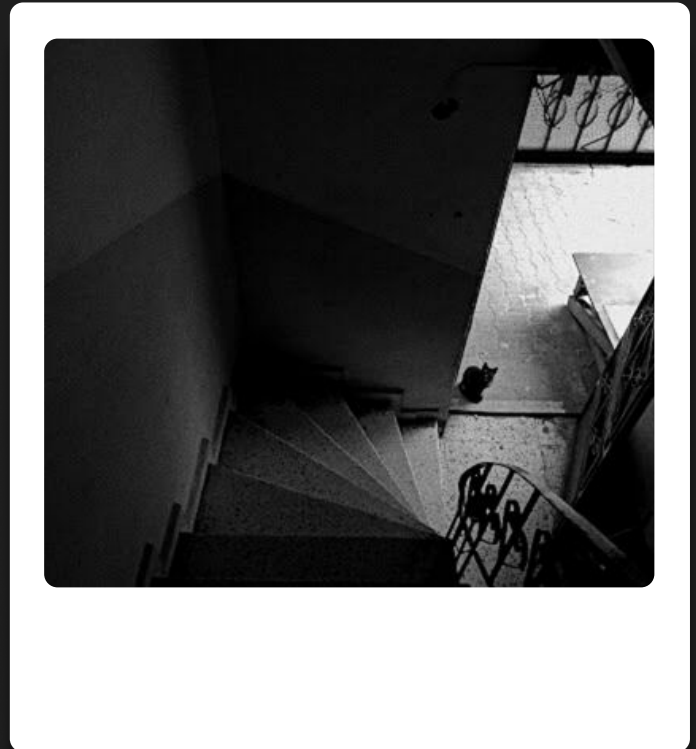
End

The future is inevitable, which is what I say to calm myself down when I'm overwhelmed. It's going to happen, just like it has all the times before, and I got through it then, and I will now. Now, I am a senior in college waiting for my "after college" future, and until it comes, I'm going to continue to take my life one day at a time.

The Big, Bad, Scary Future (It's Up There with Spiders)

Rebecca Lant

The future makes my skin crawl, my stomach tighten into knots, and my heart beat faster. If you asked me to create a list of my biggest fears, the collective unknowns of the future would be right up there with dark graveyards and venomous spiders. I think it's also important to note that I am similarly afraid of people who aren't afraid of the future. It takes an alarmingly confident and cheerful type of person to not feel at least a hint of fear when thinking about this looming, suffocating thing our lives revolve around.



When I think about the future, I'm terrified to the point of meditation, and if you knew me, you'd know that that is a big statement right there. I've resorted to having to forcibly clear the nagging thoughts out of my head to get some peace for at least a few minutes. I've even stooped so low as to recite cliché mantras, like the ones you'd find on your mother's Facebook page, to convince myself to think of something else. *Focus on the now*, I say, cringing at myself from within.

Unfortunately for my mental health, this idea of *focusing on the now* is much easier said than done, so for this brief amount of time, I'm going to allow myself to do the opposite. Right now, I will focus on the scary future—so what if I already feel the anxiety creeping in from where I shoved it under my bed and told it not to bother me? I would apologize in advance if I end up transferring my fears and anxieties into your mind, but by now, you know what you're getting yourself into and have decided to keep reading.

I'd argue that someone not being afraid of the future is like not being afraid of falling down a white carpeted staircase while carrying a piping hot bowl of SpaghettiOs. Odds are, you'll make it to the final step without so much as a fiery drop touching the carpet below, but that

doesn't erase the terrifying possibility of your cat deciding to scurry past you in such a way that you miss a step and go plunging toward the pristine fibers.

While this take may seem like it stems from quite the pessimistic view of something arguably full of potential, wonder, and endless possibilities, I actually think fear is a good thing. Fear means you are a normal, caring human being. This fear of unknown possibilities is what makes you hyperaware of your surroundings so that when little Muffin happens to make a break for it, you're already expecting it and your eyes never leave your feet. In this scenario, it was actually pretty smart to be afraid of the future, so give yourself a little pat on the back if you're like me. (And okay, even if you aren't like me, give yourself one, too, because you probably deserve one for another reason).

Even though it's not an entirely bad thing, fear can really start to mess with you, as I already admitted at the start of this essay. Sometimes I think it might help my fear to think of the future as just a matter of perspective. After all, it's only the future from some points of view. From others, it's the present or even the past.

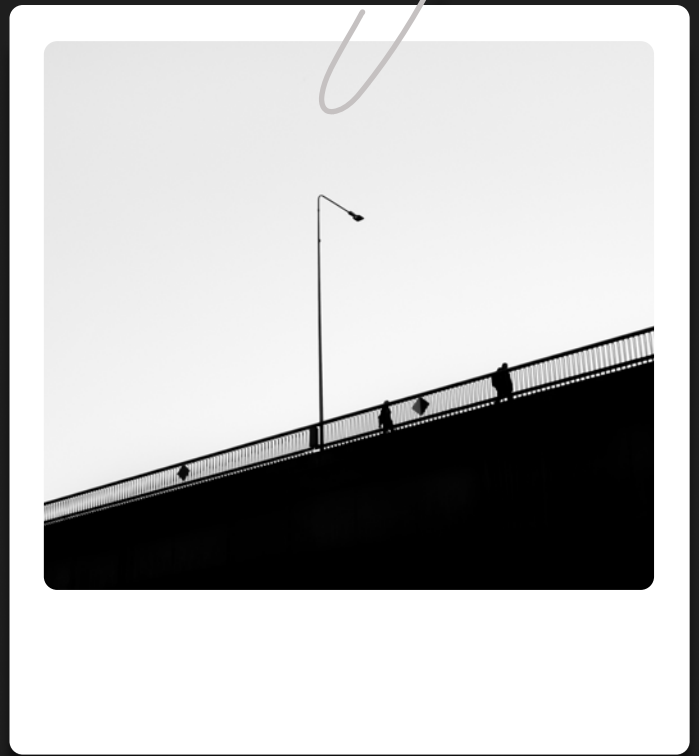
At my present, I am sitting at the kitchen table in my apartment with only two months left before my college graduation, and I can easily think of a moment in my past when I was afraid of something in the future, but now that future is years in the past. In this memory, I'm sitting on my blue comforter at my dad's house, staring at the Common App homepage, and it's so vivid that I can practically hear my old laptop roaring like an airplane about to take off. In the blink of an eye, I'm past the uncertainty of whether or not I'll be accepted into my first-choice college. (Spoiler alert: I wasn't.) Clearly, everything with college turned out fine regardless. If I look at it this way, maybe all of these thoughts I have about not knowing what's going to happen next week, next month, or next year—thoughts that make my anxiety crash through the ceiling above me—are not that big of a deal. It won't be scary next year.

Unfortunately, I've just realized that this tactic doesn't actually work for me, but hey, it could work for you. You see, as I try my best to convince myself of this idea, the thoughts about the year after that, and the year after that one, are simply lining up behind the door to my brain, waiting to step right into the vacant spot in my thoughts where the previous fear used to lie. But I guess that's okay since, as I said, fear can be a good thing if you really think about it.

Now, maybe you don't think it's a good thing to worry about things we can't actually control in the future, like that super-volcano lurking underneath the United States that could erupt at any moment. But what about stuff that we do have control over? What about how scientists are practically screaming into our faces that the Earth is burning up right in front of our eyes

because of our recklessness? Inject a healthy dose of fear into the greedy beings that control our resources and emissions, and we might just muster up the ability to slow down the downfall of our planet. Would you look at that? One moment, here I am being afraid of giving a presentation in my anthropology class later this week, and the next I've come up with the solution to global warming.

Okay, but in all seriousness, let's all stop being so hard on ourselves about fearing the future. Living in the moment is a really difficult thing to do, and the next time someone tells you not to worry about something that hasn't happened yet, you make sure to tell them that you hope they spill their SpaghettiOs.



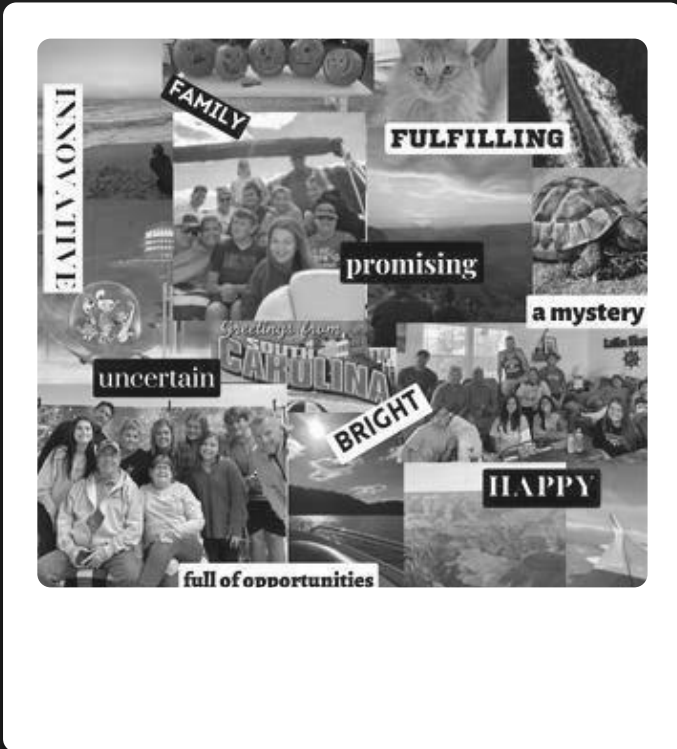
Through the Lens of Curiosity

Filter: Black and White

The black and white filter removes color and gives photos a classic, timeless feel that brings life and intrigue to different subjects of research.

Defining the Future

Maddie Dulle



According to Google, the future is “the time or a period of time following the moment of speaking or writing; time regarded as still to come.” While this (and other dictionary definitions you can find with a quick online search) may be the technical definition, I was curious to figure out if this is how most people would define the future. To put this curiosity to rest, I turned to a few members of my family to see what they thought. I chose people who were at different ages and important times in life with the hope of receiving a variety of answers. They were all asked a series of questions, with some

of the questions being more similar than others, in order to evoke different answers and thoughts they may have had. Here are the results.

JACKSON: my brother, a fifteen-year-old high school student

How would you define the future: “Bright and fulfilling.”

What is the future: “Well, it’s not the past and it’s not the present, so it’s what’s gonna happen. Now *that* is the future.”

When is the future: “Right after the present.”

Where do you see yourself in the future: “Not in the present.”

As a sophomore in high school who has yet to take life all that seriously so far, I didn’t expect many thoughtful answers from him. In fact, I was surprised when he answered with the words “bright and fulfilling” to one of the questions. Though he might have made an unexpected comment or two, the majority of his answers still aligned with my original expectations: he doesn’t really think about the future, but is more focused on what’s happening here and now.

EMMA: my sister, an eighteen-year-old college student

How would you define the future: “I would define it as a question mark. You never know what’s gonna happen. It’s an interesting question—a good question mark. A mystery.”

What is the future: “A lot of opportunities, and things we will learn, and potential.”

When is the future: “In the next two seconds is when it starts, and then it just goes because I don’t know what’s going to happen in the next two seconds. Like in fifty years; that’s considered the future, the more stereotypical [answer]. But also, like, if you were to kick me in ten seconds, I wouldn’t know that, so it’s like the future.”

Where do you see yourself in the future: “Hopefully with a husband, and happily married with kids and a couple cats and a couple reptiles, and with like a good career, and hanging out with my family sometimes.”

Despite only being a few years older than our brother, she does have a little more life experience than him, and I think that’s reflected in the way she responded to the questions. While acknowledging that the future isn’t just in the years to come but also in the next few seconds, she made note of what she wants her future to look like and the potential it contains to make that vision happen.

SCOTT: my stepdad, a fifty-two year-old, career-driven individual

How would you define the future: “Uncertain. Promising, I think, but uncertain.”

What is the future: “Tomorrow, next week . . . I think it’s promising and kinda cool because we don’t know.”

When is the future: “Next year, 2023, beyond.”

Where do you see yourself in the future: “Somewhere warm, not working, being in the Carolinas, traveling, just enjoying life . . .”

Of the four people that were interviewed, his answers were the closest to what I expected them to be. He has always been one to plan ahead and be excited for what is to come. For years he’s been setting himself up for retirement and working toward his goal every day to make sure he achieves it.

ROBIN: my grandma, a sixty-eight year-old retiree

How would you define the future: “Innovative. They’re gonna keep inventing and things will get more . . . atmosphere friendly. Technology.”

What is the future: “Nobody knows what the future is. That’s why it’s called the future.”

When is the future: “Anytime in the future. Anytime that’s not the present.”

Where do you see yourself in the future: “Dead.” (After this comment I proceeded to ask her to think more positively.) “I see myself in the future doing what I do now: spending time at the beach, spending time at the lake with my grandkids, and eventually dead.”

With being retired and having already grown her family, it wasn’t surprising to me that her answers were slightly darker than everyone else’s. She’s content with the life she’s built and happy with how it’s going. Despite not directly saying so, the innovative future she described as “atmosphere friendly” and full of technology is a future she doesn’t necessarily see herself living in.

A Combined Definition

The final question I asked everyone was about what picture they would use to represent the future. Each photo that they described resembled the answers already given and allowed me even more of a glimpse into what everyone thought about the future. Jackson chose the pumpkins we had just carved, Scott described a boat on a lake, and Robin mentioned *The Jetsons*. The one answer that stood out to me the most was Emma’s. Instead of describing one picture, she described multiple that all represented ideas and goals she had for life: her own mental vision board of sorts. This stuck with me not only because it was so unique from the rest, but also because that’s how I believe the future should be defined.

With so many definitions and ideas on what the future truly encompasses, there doesn’t seem to be a way to define it in a sentence or two that covers everything the future is and can be. It’s “the time to come” or “what’s gonna happen,” “a mystery,” “promising...but uncertain,” and “innovative,” but it’s also anything else you want it to be. So, while I had hoped that by the end of this I could come up with some sort of written definition, I instead decided to make an image to represent our collective future. This isn’t to say that everyone’s future goals resemble my family’s, but I believe there is something that each individual can relate to in the following vision board:

And to quote the surprisingly wise words of my little brother: “Now *that* is the future.”

Looking Back on the Future: As Told by Musicians

GraciAnn Hicks

Past. Present. Future.

The timelines of our lives can be broken into these three simple divisions. Like many of our internal struggles, many songs focus on the past—particularly those in the break-up category—and many songs focus on the present—particularly those in the love song category. But what about the future?

Although many musicians strive to define the future of their respective genre, or dream of being remembered by future generations, fewer are drawn to the future as a subject matter of their songs. People love to write songs about moving on (I'm looking at you, "Already Gone" by Kelly Clarkson) and becoming better people (again, Miss Clarkson with "Stronger (What Doesn't Kill You)"), but where are the songs that truly contemplate the future?

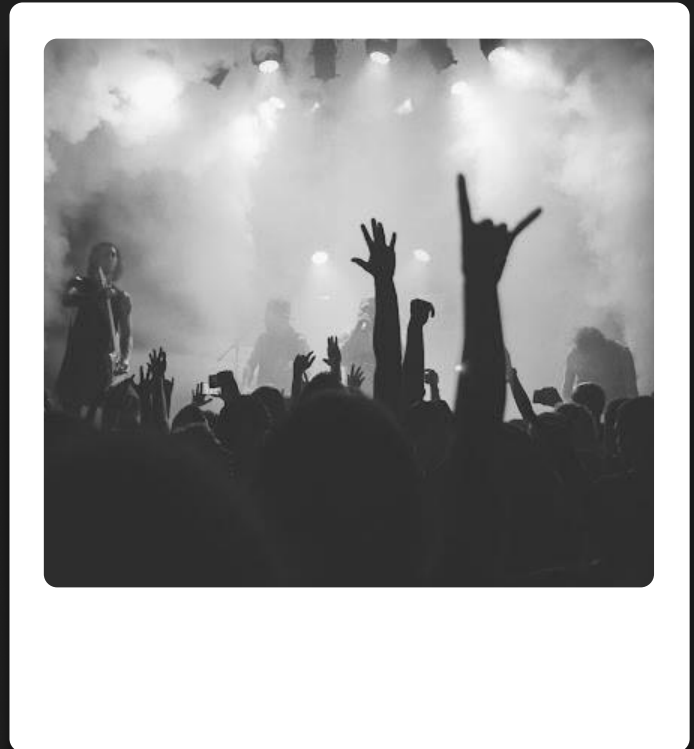
Outside of the context of dissecting a bad relationship, how many songs truly approach the subject of the future?

As one of the biggest sources of literal recorded history, music defines a generation: the struggles it faced, the causes it rallied behind, and its hopes for the future.

To understand how my generation advocates for a better future through music, I will examine songs about the future from several generations.

"One Hundred Years From Now" by The Byrds (1968)

Although we're forty-six years younger than the imagined audience of this track from The



Byrds, between the song's folksy instrumentation and simple (and clean) lyrics, my generation could be fooled into thinking this tune is much older.

Beloved by Baby Boomers and not many others, The Byrds certainly had their time in the sun. Hits like "Turn! Turn! Turn!" and "Mr. Tambourine Man" remain ingrained in society's collective musical memory. Yet "One Hundred Years From Now," which was written as a message for future generations, seems to have been forgotten.

With elements of folk, country-western, and rock of the time, The Byrds cashed in on an accessible sound that American fans would love. "One Hundred Years From Now" doesn't take too many risks; the harmonies are clean, the drums humbly move the track forward, and listeners can easily decipher the lyrics, which was crucial in a pre-internet era.

The song clocks in at two minutes and forty seconds with only two stanzas of text. For a tune that muses about the future, front man Roger McGuinn sure did write some ambiguous lyrics:

"One hundred years from this day will the people still feel this way / Still say the things that they're saying right now." (0:10–0:26)

It's clear McGuinn felt he was being deeply introspective and profound with this line, yet with such wide-open lyrics, even listeners at the time the song came out couldn't have been exactly sure of the meaning.

By the time the song reaches its centennial, the modest instrumentation and nondescript lyrics will ensure that "One Hundred Years From Now" evokes nothing but boredom from its intended audience.

"Mr. Roboto" by Styx (1983)

A mere thirteen years later, the progressive rock weirdos of Styx put out a song that confuses listeners and leaves them wondering: "why?"

A synth-heavy track off the rock opera concept album *Kilroy Was Here*, "Mr. Roboto" takes place in an oppressive future where rock music has been outlawed and robots have taken over most human jobs. The protagonist, Kilroy, seeks to break out of prison over the course of the song. He sings of his hybrid identity (part man and part robot) and of escaping prison disguised as a robot.

Although the album is fictional, it addressed common concerns of the eighties about advancing

technology. It warned against the possible negative consequences society could face if technology—even worse, *foreign* technology—became too prevalent.

The song reeks of the time; between the nauseating synths and xenophobia, a “modern” listener can hardly stomach “Mr. Roboto” unless they have a strong emotional connection to it.

The track opens with “Domo arigato Mr. Roboto,” (0:42–0:45) which is sung throughout and makes me wonder if they thought of this rhyme and then based the entire song on it.

I do appreciate the irony, though, that a song aimed to sound so futuristic has aged itself by being too reminiscent of the past.

“Virtual Insanity” by Jamiroquai (1996)

British funk band Jamiroquai explored similar themes to “Mr. Roboto” in this single that Millennials will never forget and most of Gen Z will never know.

The band started out as an acid jazz group but drew more upon electronic and pop music with “Virtual Insanity,” which remains Jamiroquai’s best-known song.

Songs as a form of political commentary were common for the band, as it has several tracks that comment on social and environmental issues. “Virtual Insanity” touches on technological advancement and eugenics, among other issues.

Perhaps as well-remembered as the song itself is the music video, which features front man Jay Kay by himself in a barren room with a floor that moves similarly to a treadmill, wearing a hat that can only be described as a fluffy top hat. The music video won four different awards at the 1997 MTV Video Music Awards.

The only insane thing to me is how publicists allowed poor Jay to wear this hat in the music video that ended up commemorating Jamiroquai’s short-lived success in the nineties.

Music video aside, the song once again reveals its age with the instrumentation. The jaunty bassline and strings-heavy chorus reveal all the makings of a popular alternative song from the nineties.

“Sagittarius A*” by Declan McKenna (2020)

While British rocker Declan McKenna might have just finished a tour of sold-out shows in the

United States, he is far from a household name, or from being widely known among my generation. Still, he has seen success with several songs, including his debut single “Brazil” (2014), which established him as a political artist.

Similar to *Kilroy Was Here*, McKenna’s 2020 album *Zeros* is a concept album, albeit much looser than that of Styx. Several of the tracks feature an extraterrestrial setting and overt political allegories.

“Sagittarius A*” is a deep cut from the album that comments on the reluctance of those in power to address or try to fix issues associated with climate change. Within the song, McKenna compares these people with Sagittarius A*, a black hole at the center of the Milky Way galaxy that pulls everything toward it and causes inevitable destruction.

Rather than trying to create a *new* sound, the song draws inspiration from rock artists from the ’70s. A mix of acoustic and electric guitars and keyboards propel the track, but the lyrics define it.

Near the end of the song, McKenna repeats the line “Wake me up when it’s over” (2:20–2:47) as a reference to people who choose ignorance and leave issues to future generations.

Although “Sagittarius A*” looks to the future and addresses modern issues, it will likely be judged as *of its time* in ten years. While I may think that the artists I listen to are on the cutting edge of music and are making bold political statements, the next generation will likely look back on them as boring, timid, or straight-up odd (*ahem* “Mr. Roboto”).

We can’t predict music trends. We can’t predict the future. We can only predict the inevitability of feeling old when future generations look back at the songs we once loved and make fun of them.

The Future of Food

Grace Leskovisek

Insects. Yes, insects. Crickets, mealworms, flies, and worms are the future of food. Younger consumers have shown a desire to live ethically and sustainably, which has led to an increase in vegetarianism and veganism. Due to this, large corporations—such as Beyond Meat or Impossible Foods—have risen in popularity with their alternative meat products. While plant-based food products have squeezed their way into mainstream consumerism, there is worry that these food products do not contain enough protein for the average person. That is where the insects come in.



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For people in the United States and Europe, eating insects may seem like an absurd idea, but according to *National Geographic*, human insect-eating is common in many cultures in many parts of the world—such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Guynup, 2004). Compared to red meat, insects contain a much higher protein percentage and a lower fat percentage, much like fish. Because of the high protein content of insects, there has already been a rise in the use of cricket protein powder. Although it is known that insects can be a great source of protein, there are other aspects of consuming insects that benefit us as humans and our planet.

Over the past century, human meat production and consumption have increased dramatically and—according to *LandHealth Institute*—are predicted to increase by at least 30 percent by the middle of the twenty-first century (Worth, 2020). This exponential increase in meat consumption shows that humans have been eating an almost insane amount of meat and this overconsumption is reaching a level of harm to our environment that may not be reversible. From LandHealth Institute:

Scientists recommend a mainly plant-based diet to sustain the growing populations. This diet is based upon a report compiled by a group of thirty scientists from around the world, focusing on nutrition and food policy. The scientists believe that meat and sugar consumption must drop by fifty percent in order to reduce climate change-inducing gases and preserve land for biodiversity (Worth, 2020).

While humans consume copious amounts of meat and sugar, we also waste copious amounts of these foods. There have been many strategies formed to lessen food consumption and waste, but because many people do not know or understand that their diet patterns can contribute to the current ecological crisis, most of the strategies prove to be fruitless. To understand how the consumption of insects can positively impact our environment, it's important to be educated on the meat industry's environmental effects and how it compares to the insect farming industry.

The meat industry is famously known for being a large contributor to many facets of climate change. From feed sourcing, greenhouse gas emissions, manure processing, water consumption, and many other aspects, the meat industry has made a large impact on our environment. Insect farming, on the other hand, has been found to be more efficient and better for our planet. From *National Geographic*:

Insect farming is arguably much more efficient than cattle production. One hundred pounds (45 kilograms) of feed produces 10 pounds (4.5 kilograms) of beef, while the same amount of feed yields 45 pounds (20 kilograms) of cricket (Guynup, 2004).

Not only does insect farming lower greenhouse gas emissions, but some insects also contain higher sources of magnesium, iron, zinc, and copper than beef (Baker, 2021). Insects also produce less waste than any other meat source, and what waste they do produce can be used as fertilizer.

On top of being better for the environment and more nutritious, farming, purchasing, and eating insects is much cheaper than purchasing quality meats. It's no secret that hunger across

the globe has been a crisis for quite some time, and with the rising cost of food, it's not looking like global hunger will be diminishing any time soon. Eating insects may not be an end-all-be-all solution, but it's a step in the right direction to a more environmentally and fiscally conscious society.

Now, it's understandable that for most people, the thought of consuming mealworms or grasshoppers may be something they approach with distaste, but there are many ways that insects can be prepared to seem more approachable. They can be fried and seasoned, sprinkled on salads, used in protein shakes, and made a part of many more dishes. Insects being used in cuisine is a relatively foreign concept to most living in North America, but considering the benefits to the environment, it should be a territory that is explored.

The looming threat of irreversible climate change has led many professionals to bring awareness and educate the populations on ways to lessen individual ecological impact. With the movement of younger generations trying to be more environmentally conscious, it's not a completely ridiculous thought that an insect diet may be on the horizon soon. This doesn't mean cutting out meat completely and only eating insects; it means focusing on implementing plant-based foods into a standard diet and maybe even eating a cricket or two.

Carbon-Neutral Cigarettes

Abbey Elizondo



Email: Public Relations Address to Customers

April 17th, 2046 | Cassandra [redacted]

Hello [redacted],

I attached the document for the public address about the recent news on our Oxy-cigarette to this memo. Please read for clarity and crisis management. The CDC and WHO have already recalled the Oxy-cig 35mL and 59mL sizes, and will recall the Oxy-cig Pro 35mL and 59mL within the next five days.

The sooner you can get this address to me, the quicker this issue will cease to exist.
Cassandra [redacted]

Company Statement to Employees

April 21st, 2046 | Mark Dreish, Head Director of Public Relations

Thank you for attending this crucial meeting. Recently, our carbon-neutral cigarette, better known as the Oxy-cig, was labeled more addictive and harmful to human lungs than tobacco smoke and e-cigarette smoke combined. We will investigate the source of this leak in due time.

All directors need to address their interest groups privately after this meeting, detailing exactly how to manage the communication about our product in various communities. Focus on previous addicts of e-cigs and tobacco, highlighting why our product is superior to theirs in every way. Environmentalists have devoured our message for years, never questioning the human impact it may have, until of course now. If anyone's voice is heard, it will be theirs.

Keep them convinced that this is the right path to achieving carbon neutrality; not the corporations, not the oil companies, not governments or international climate panels, it is us. We are in the hands of every American, purifying the air for the rest of the world may thrive.

Please report back to your directors when your community is under control, and then your directors will report to me on Monday. Buckle down everyone—we have a busy weekend ahead of us.

Major Producer of Carbon-Neutral Cigarettes Fires CEO for Negligence

May 1st, 2046 | New York Times

CEO Charles Bastif of the popular carbon-neutral cigarette company Oxygn was fired Monday morning for false advertising claims, data mismanagement, and public endangerment.

Oxygn sent out a statement with the dismissal announcement detailing the allegations against Bastif. They reassured the public their products are safe and clean, wanting customers to disregard the outlandish claims made by Bastif.

Mark Dreish, Head Director of Public Relations, had this to say about Bastif: “As hard as it is to admit, our leadership team had planned this announcement for months,” he said. “He grew up in a time where cigarettes were one of the leading causes of death, so it’s no surprise he would make false claims to destroy a company that he thinks harms the public.”

Charles Bastif declined to comment.

To stay updated on this story and other breaking news, subscribe to The New York Times.

Medical Journal Report from St. Helens on Death of Patient

May 14, 2046 | St. Helens Medical Facility

We regret to inform the public about a death that occurred last night in the oncology ward of the hospital. [REDACTED] had been receiving medical care from our staff for the past three months. He displayed symptoms similar to our lung cancer patients, so the nurses ran the standard CT scan procedure and then followed up with sputum cytology. While the initial scans and tests made it seem like stage 2, the following month proved that it was nothing this staff had ever seen before.

The patient's medical history was examined thoroughly for any genetic abnormalities that may have caused this rapid development of cancer cells. We found nothing to indicate he was susceptible to these changes. However, we did find that he had an affinity for smoking a particular type of cigarette.

The Oxy-cig is one of the most addictive substances our patients abuse, and more and more of them are ending up in our hospital beds every few months. I've seen them, and my co-workers have seen them, to the point where we want to report it as an epidemic. The doctors say that it's not a problem as they slip money into their pockets from Oxygn's corporate weasels. They're not the ones who have to talk to the families after these people die painfully slow deaths.

I'm sorry, I've deviated from the purpose.

[REDACTED] confessed to me that he had been smoking five pods a day, sometimes seven depending on how much time his employer would let him have breaks during his shift. I tried my best to detoxify his system once he came in, but there was no way to keep him from using. There was one successful day—although success is very relative in this instance. We may have removed all the harmful substances from his room, but the rage that ensued was something I've never seen before in my life and don't plan on seeing again.

He screamed at the top of his lungs for almost four hours straight, barely taking time to breathe or eat or drink. We had to give him one pod, just one, for him to stop. This was at the two-month mark. Most of my friends knew his reputation by this point. There was no way one pod would stop his madness. So we decided that giving him a sedative would be the best option. Looking back, we were just desperate to get him to stop.

The next day he woke up completely normal with no issues. But once we tested his blood, we knew one of the nurses had slipped him not one but three pods. That's how high the concentration was. I didn't blame the nurse. They knew his lungs would fail anyway with how strangely the cells were acting. Instead of killing the lung tissue from the inside out, this carbon shit caused severe inflammation, enough to kill a person within a few weeks. And it got smarter as we tried to attack it, hiding in the corners of his lungs to avoid being seen on scans, making us think that he was getting better. Almost as if it had a mind of its own.

The Future of Futurism

Harry Passerello

As 2023 approaches, and George Jetson turns a year old, the imagined future of flying cars and gleaming modernism he inhabits seems all the more unattainable. As the forces of capital and innovation lurch onward, making rapid technological advancement possible—and the Jetsons conceivable—they bring with them a myriad of problems. Environmental, social, cultural, and political degeneration can already be seen all over our world. On the track we've been put on, the imagined utopias of thinkers like Plato, Thomas More, and others seem almost impossible.



Futurism began as an artistic and social movement in Italy in the early twentieth century. It sought to inject energy and movement into art and culture that mirrored the rapid advancement of technology at the time. Artists, thinkers, and even politicians wanted to create a unique, dynamic, utopian view of a future made possible by advanced technology and design. Eventually, futurism was adopted by Mussolini and the fascists in Italy after the first World War as a way to promote rapid advancement and align the movement with the fascists' goals of aggressive expansionism and promoting Italian cultural supremacy. Though futurism has moved out of the hands of fascist agendas over time, it has never lost the mindset that rapid advancement in technology will be what propels us into a future fitting a Jetsons-like utopia—at the expense of other social, political, and environmental factors.

Modern futurists proclaim to be innovators, working for a better tomorrow. Most often they are capitalists looking to make a profit and create a world that mirrors ideas of the future inspired by the legacies of historical figures like Henry Ford, or even fictional ones like George Jetson. These imagined futures, however, are not just tainted by a capitalistic drive, but limited as well. Their visions project technology into a future without context and without thought of

the future advancements in politics, science, economics, or surrounding technologies that drastically affect the use and efficiency of such advancement. They envision “*what could be, given what we have,*” when their mindset should be, “*what will be if this trend continues into the future, and how do we get ourselves to a more ideal future?*”

A figure that exemplifies this kind of thinking is Elon Musk. Elon envisions a better world where cars run on clean electricity and not gasoline. Futurism is his schtick. When you buy a stock of Tesla, you buy into the mantra that Musk’s ideas and innovations will lead us into the future. This image is a curated one, however, and slightly misleading if you believe Musk’s only incentive is a cleaner future and not a richer one for himself. His vision takes a problematic technology and futurizes it—your car doesn’t burn gas anymore, so the problem is solved, right? In pushing for this future of electric and self-driving cars—putting us on a road to the flying cars of the Jetsons—we may reach a future that’s better than the present, but we don’t reach the best possible future. It is far from a utopia, but masquerading as one. Musk’s future eliminates a future with free and clean public transportation. He alone lobbied to stop legislation forming a national train system that would massively improve infrastructure and energy usage in America in favor of his hyperloop. By buying into Musk and the futurist mindset, we may get a shiny utopia of self-driving flying cars, but we lose a better future with clean public transportation, walkable cities, or infrastructure free of dependence on an exploitative private sector.

If we want to reach a more utopian future, we cannot rely solely on the power and promises of technology and ignorantly follow the Silicon Valley elites selling us this vision. Utopia requires equality in all matters social, economic, political, and environmental. Clean water and breathable air, even distribution and open access to resources, and outside-the-box innovations will be what bring us toward a better future. It may not look exactly as we imagined with the Jetsons sixty years ago, as some would push us to believe. But if it did, we would be buying gouged-out tickets to a Mars colony on a Space-X ship as the Earth burned below us. The future of futurism has to be a more equal one, a less capitalistic one, and a smarter one.



Through the Lens of Wisdom

Filter: None

*Unfiltered photos offer a look at the world as it is,
telling us the truth about reality.*

The Future Trap

Lorelyn Nolte



When I was a kid, I would keep a running list in my head of what I'd have to do to be like the people around me.

At first, I needed to learn how to tie my shoes; velcro was for babies, after all. Through some form of intellectual miracle, I did eventually get that skill under my belt. (I still do the bunny ears method, though. In a certain respect, I still haven't caught up to my peers.)

With that off the list, new things came to replace it. I obviously needed to be able to swallow pills instead of taking my

medicine as a liquid. Then I needed to learn how to swim and ride a bike. You wouldn't see any of the other kids with floaties, or training wheels, or liquid medicine.

I have a few vague memories of attending swimming lessons at a rec center, of floating on my back with my father's arms under me, paddling across the width of the pool with a boogie board. None of these things actually taught me to swim, though. I taught myself a few years later in the little inflatable pool that we'd put in the front yard in the summer.

It was a similar story to the bike. At some point, I decided to just learn it on my own, going up and down my gravel driveway in the summer heat until I finally managed to not tip over.

As the years went on, I would master old milestones and new ones would appear before me just as I was starting to get confident with my successes. When I got to middle school, people were suddenly getting boyfriends and girlfriends. They were going on dates that their parents drove them to and having their first kisses. All of this was a nonstarter for me. In that, at least, I was content to be stunted.

It wasn't so easy to abstain from driving, though. My mother was busy—a common theme—so I couldn't get my temps until I was seventeen. All of the local maneuverability courses were removed because delinquents were stealing the cones, and we didn't have any spare money to buy our own cones, so I made do with sand-filled Diet Pepsi bottles that I duct taped to the asphalt. Once again, a miracle occurred, and I was able to pass the driver's test.

Then, of course, I needed a job. There wasn't anything I particularly needed money for—I had always worked hard in school so I could get by on scholarships and grant money. But I knew I needed a job, so that went on the list. This didn't come true until the summer after I had graduated high school, but the job itself was short-lived. Apparently, scoliosis and ten-hour warehouse shifts aren't a good combination.

For all of those years, there was always one landmark in my mind: college. I had started worrying about getting into a good school in the third grade when I realized that every incomplete homework assignment, every failed quiz, and every flip of my card was a strike against my future prosperity. I had never imagined a life where high school wasn't inevitably followed by a four-year university program, and then a nine-to-five job.

I went to college because I, like many others my age, was never really presented with alternatives. If you wanted a job—that is, if you wanted your life to not be a failure—then this was the only option. I got an internship because that was a part of the package, too. A bachelor's degree isn't enough anymore; you need an internship to get a job, and I was never not planning on that.

Now it's my senior year, and the woman that I did my internship with has offered me ad hoc work. She even says that she'd like to introduce me to other work associates. I'm not even done with my education, but I've already got a job lined up—and that is the ultimate milestone, the gateway to what adults have always called *the real world*. For once, I might actually be ahead of the people around me, not desperately fighting to catch up or dropping out of the race altogether.

I should be ecstatic. The last two decades of my life weren't wasted. All of my effort has culminated in what I've been striving for: a job. Security. Normalcy. But I can't help but feel terrified.

Until now, each stage of my life has always provided more opportunities than the last. When I was still learning to tie my shoes and ride a bike, I didn't have much self-agency at all. When I could finally drive, a bubble of freedom formed around me. Money from a job could be

exchanged for anything if I had enough of it. And at college, I've been the only one that I've needed to consult for anything. I can switch my majors whenever I want, as long as I have the cash to go through with it. Other than meeting a minimum requirement for grades and attendance, I'm virtually untethered.

But a job—a *real* job for the *real* world, as the ones before now don't get to count—that is the milestone that chains me. Once I start working in an industry, it will become more difficult to change my course with every passing year. It's not just the greater strokes of my life that will be locked, either. Five days every week, I will wake up at 7:00 in the morning, begin my commute at 8:00, work in an office until 5:00 in the evening, and get home at 6:00. I'll cook dinner, take a shower, then have two hours to enjoy my life before I have to get ready for bed and start the cycle again.

I was once able to pursue those benchmarks on my list with such mindless intensity because, at the end of the day, they didn't have much impact. I didn't have to worry about what achieving them would mean for me because more choices would always open up. Now, each promotion will do nothing but entrench me further.

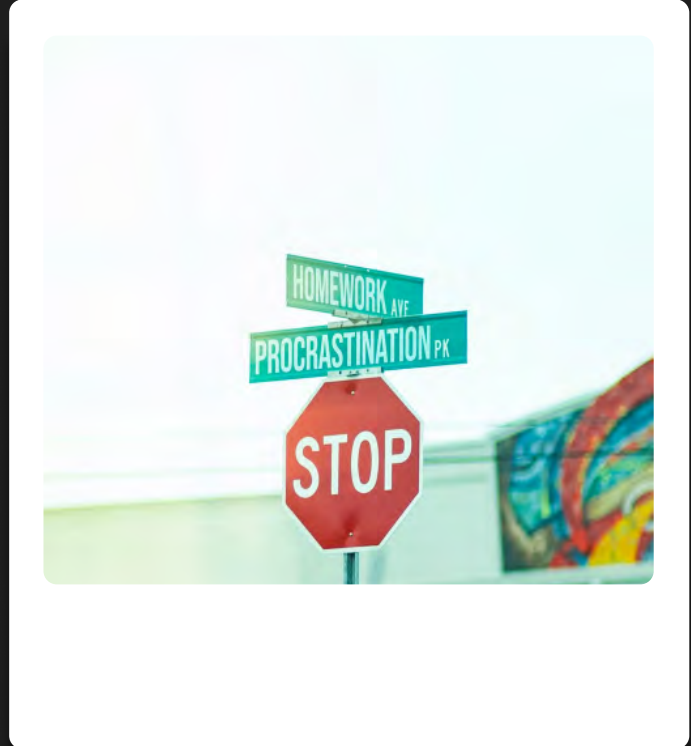
Only now that I've finally achieved what I've been chasing, I have started to ask myself if I actually want the things that I've always been taught to desire. From the outside, working professionals with a four-year degree look like paragons of the status quo. So did the teens who worked their minimum-wage jobs after school, who had gone to the BMV on their sixteenth birthdays and walked out with a license, the kids who went on dates, and rode their bikes, and tied their shoes. They weren't ostracized, and that's the only requirement for happiness, right? But then again, when have any of us ever been guided by anything other than fear? What kind of happiness can be found in that?

Perhaps my goals for the future were just the same thing: an attempt to be accepted. It never occurred to me that something other than a consistent salary might be possible because that's what everyone else either had or wanted. Other people, special people, were born with the ability to chase the unconventional, but not me. Not someone who was always struggling for a normalcy that she could never achieve. Not until just the right moment for it to horrify her.

Why We Should Care about the Future . . . Now

Julia Holzl

Procrastination is an inevitable part of life. As a college student, I am more than familiar with procrastination. At its surface, we think of procrastination as a short-term solution to a long-term problem. For example, putting off a large assignment until the day before it's due. After delving into the idea of procrastination, it's clear larger objects are at play. Today, let's talk about procrastination, the future, and how to tweak your mindset to care about the future.



Why Do We Procrastinate?

In most cases, procrastination is happening because something is uncomfortable and making us not want to complete a task. Putting things off evokes guilt and makes us even more unlikely to start a task. Of course, these tasks require effort and sometimes when a person feels drained, they are more likely to put off the task until another day under the guise that they will feel more motivated later on.

Most people struggle with motivation, or the act of starting an assignment. It's much easier to put off an assignment you're dreading rather than one you are passionate about.

Let's say, for example, you have a large paper due in two weeks. The first thought of most people is to work a little every day instead of waiting until the day before to cram. The far away due date slips your mind, and you're back to square one. This is how the mountain builds over time. The "I'll do it tomorrow" mentality will only hurt you in the long run.

How Does Procrastination Make Us Feel?

People who procrastinate tend to have a high level of anxiety, and occasionally have issues

with impulse control. This action affects our emotions in many ways and can end up making our work worse in the long run.

Having large amounts of work can feel like an overwhelming burden. How could you possibly know where to begin? Over time, small problems will spiral into bigger ones and eventually out of control. No matter how organized you are, it's probable that you have experienced procrastination at some point in your life.

How Do We Combat Procrastination?

The first way to combat procrastination is to adopt a system that works for you. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to procrastination, but here are a few places to start.

The Pomodoro Technique is a time management system that has people use the time they do have, rather than cramming. Do you have twenty-five minutes? Spend those twenty-five minutes completing the task on your list rather than scrolling through TikTok for the millionth time. Once the minutes are up, take a five-minute break. After four pomodoros, take a longer break of fifteen to thirty minutes. The increments of time make it easier to stay focused, which is why this technique is so successful!

If the Pomodoro Technique isn't for you, try the one-a-day technique. This technique is more applicable to chores or daily tasks, but it is still useful for college students. Dedicate one day a week to one item. For example, Mondays mean cleaning the kitchen or catching up on your psychology homework. Each day of the week correlates to some sort of task. Take one day off to reset for the week. This technique helps us know where to start.

Finally, the easiest way to combat procrastination is adding the things we dread to our daily routine. Putting off the future in any way will only hurt us in the long run. Be it worse grades or a messy room, procrastination will manifest itself negatively in your life. Add thirty minutes to your day to cross the items you dread off your list and things will seem so much easier to tackle.

Why Can't We Live by the "Tomorrow" Mentality?

If we put off things too long, goals start to lose their meaning. "I'll start working out tomorrow, I'll call them tomorrow, I'll do my laundry tomorrow." This is normal, it's human, but it's possible to change.

It is so much easier to say you will start tomorrow than it is to begin today. However, living life in the present is the only way to care about your future. It sounds counterintuitive, but tomorrow will always be tomorrow and today will only be today. Life moves fast. Starting today is easier than starting tomorrow, a day that isn't always guaranteed.

A Letter to a Future College Student

Laurel Dobrozsi



Dear soon-to-be college student, A lot is about to happen from now to the time you decide to embark on your next journey. As you may have presumed, you will gain a lot of knowledge about what goes into a career. But more than that, you will learn a lot about who you are without the influences from people who have played a vital part in your life thus far. From my time in college, I have discovered many things about myself that only came from having the opportunity to separate myself from a life once lived.

You might find that the things you thought were interesting during your time in high school no longer serve you—nor the people, for that matter. However, having people by your side is essential for going through life, in college or out in the real world. At first, this all can seem very overwhelming.

I wish to grant you a few words of advice based on what I learned about finding the right people to spend your time with during these next few transitional years into real adulthood. I cannot promise that these tactics will help you as much as they did for me, as everyone has their own path into adulthood and their own unique relationships with others, but I can share what methods I used to build healthy and strong connections of my own while in college.

Tip No. 1: Make One Connection in Every Class

For some, socializing with classmates may seem like the last thing they would want to do, but I promise it's easier than it seems. I always made it a goal, at the start of every semester, to make one connection in every class. This way, I could contact them whenever I had a question about an assignment or chat about what was going on in class. This helped me build confidence in what I was doing in school and made me feel included with the people in my

major. You will find that most people are trying to build relationships within their classes too. And who knows, you may have another class with this person in the following semesters, and can connect more easily the next time around.

Tip No. 2: Ask Others How They Do It

Let curiosity drive your systems. You may be curious as to how a specific person in your class does so well on the exams or how one classmate seems to always be on top of the assignments. Whatever you are curious about, don't be afraid to inquire about more information from the people around you. This goes for fellow classmates, professors, advisors, or anyone else around campus whose system you've envied. Why struggle to figure it all out by yourself when someone else has already found the best implementations? Additionally, the connections you build through questioning may be helpful in the future, allowing you to go back to them when you have further questions.

Tip No. 3: Join a Club

This may seem like the obvious answer, but I promise it is vital. It is important to find a group of people that align with some of the goals that you have, and what better way to do that than to join a group you and others are interested in? With clubs, there are a lot of opportunities, such as participating in projects and socials, which give you a chance to meet other organizations and get involved with the community at your school. Join something that you've always been curious about or something that you want to improve upon. You never know what hobbies or friends you'll pick up along the way.

Tip No. 4: Boundaries and Communication

With any relationship, boundaries and how you communicate will either be the glue that holds you together or the thing that tears you apart. The idea of setting boundaries can be extremely scary—nobody wants to cause conflict. However, boundaries are not set to ruin a relationship, they help build the relationship into something stronger. It is all about how you communicate your needs and your dislikes that make for a healthy friendship or relationship. Don't be afraid to create limitations on your friendships if it is what will help them succeed in the end.

Tip No. 5: Two and Done

There are going to be times when you come to a crossroad in your relationships where you must decide whether or not to keep putting effort in or to let it go. When you arrive at these moments, it is crucial to remember who you are, what your values are, and how much effort you have been putting in thus far. There is a lot you have to balance in college, and unhealthy relationships should not be one. I use the two-and-done rule. If someone has done something

that doesn't align with who I am or they aren't being a supportive member in my life, I communicate that nicely, set boundaries, and see if there is an improvement (evaluate if this relationship is important to me). However, if after all of that, the person continues to be an unhealthy relationship in my life, it is time to let them go. Two chances. That's all you need. Fool me once, fool me twice...let's not make it a third.

Tip No 6: Learn to Grow Apart

Coming from high school, there could be a lot of your life that you may leave behind, like the friends you saw every day, your family, your home pet, or just the simple habits you became accustomed to. This is okay and even encouraged. A sense of individuality does not appear overnight, but trusting that this separation is helping you become a better version of yourself is vital. It allows new people to enter. Don't be afraid to let them into your life. You always have a way to reconnect with those from your past, but don't let your past be what keeps you from growing in your present.

There is a lot to look forward to in these coming years. Lots of changes that will further shape who you are and what you want from this world. This time is going to be exciting whether you feel it now or later. If you think you have grown, just imagine where you'll be in four years!

I wish you luck on your journey and hope that you find the connections that last a lifetime.

Sincerely,

A senior at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio



Through the Lens of Hope

Filter: Amaro

The amaro filter brightens photos with a warm yellow glow and tints the shadows blue, evoking a sense of optimism and growth.

The Future: An Analysis of Why We Should Look Forward to It

Chase Talbott

I like to think about warm Virginia days, around ten or twelve years ago. You wake up to morning songbirds; there is no need for an alarm. As you walk down the stairs to your kitchen, you are not focused on how quickly you can brew an eight-ounce French roast, but how good the taste of Cinnamon Toast Crunch will be. As you leave for school, you are not dreading the workload or the group work that you will be forced to do later in your life. All you are focused on is how much you connect with your teachers, that incredible chocolate milk for lunch, and of course, the kickball during recess.



When you get home from school, you do not have homework to complete. You lay your backpack down at your front door and run to the creek behind your house. It is too small of a creek to catch any large fish, but you are not focused on that anyway; you care about the crayfish. You set up little traps and such to catch them, but for most of the time you just grab them with your hands. As you are walking back up to your house from the creek, with the crayfish wriggling around in your small fishing bucket, all you can see are the ticks climbing up your pants. You have never heard of Lyme disease, and even if you had, it would not have stopped you from going down to that creek every day. After you have eaten dinner and climbed into bed, you do not even realize how excellent your day was compared to the ones that are yet to come. You close your eyes in bliss, unaware of the lack of responsibility that governs your life.

Memories like this, although not exactly my own, remind me of childhood. When I reminisce about the past, I often find myself comparing it to what some view as the dread of early adult life. When you are young, you do not have this constant feeling of anxiety that seems to consume so many young adults. In today's age of social media and instant messaging, you

never catch a break. And this is normal and expected; as you grow older, you are naturally going to be working more often. After all, docile hands are the devil's workshop. But it is evident that so many young adults are tired, angry, and uninterested in the modern education and social systems that control their lives. So, what is it about the human condition that dissuades us from focusing on the past instead of the present? Should we be focusing more on the past, remembering our mistakes and learning from them? Or should we hold little regrets and only focus on what is in front of us?

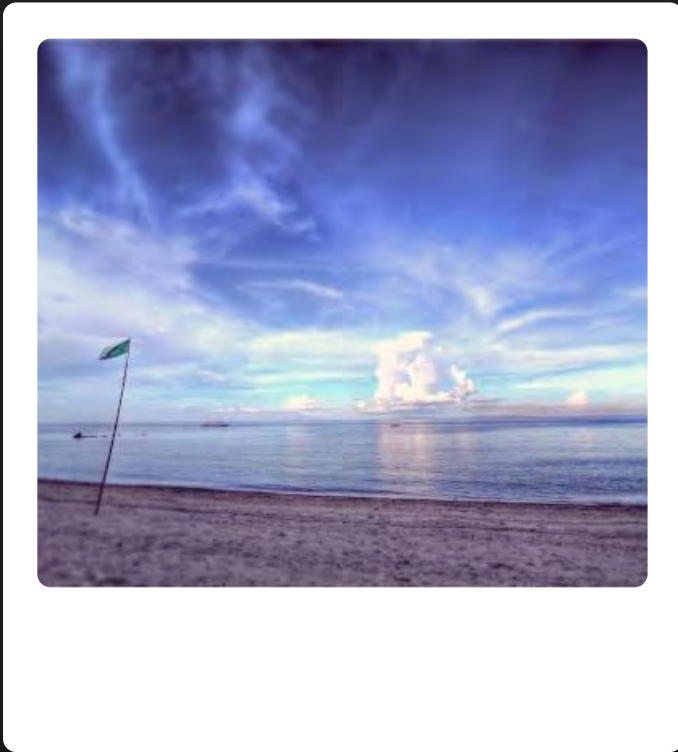
In response to the first question, people never truly realize that they are experiencing the best times of their lives while they are living them. Because the future is impossible to predict and naturally the unknown scares us, we tend to dwell on our past and overly romanticize it. For example, when you think about the best times in your life, you are more than likely going to think about something a couple of years ago, not last weekend. Nostalgia and time convince us that our prior years were the best, making us even more fearful of the future; however, this is not necessarily the truth. Especially for our generation of young Americans, despite all the political turmoil and polarized opinions, the best days are yet to come. Most people might disagree with that statement, but hundreds of things that our generation takes for granted now used to be everyday life. For example, not even a hundred years ago, most young men spent their young adult lives overseas. Many young women, already suffering from voting restrictions and household strife, were subjected to working in factories. This isn't to minimize any modern day suffering, of which there is plenty, but it's fascinating to reflect on how, instead of being shipped to Okinawa as a twenty-one-year-old (which my grandfather was), I am in college, safe, and writing an essay with a computer that would blow the mind of any scientist of that time.

I did not always hold this opinion, as generations routinely develop reasons to gripe about their own situations, but after reading Steven Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, my perspective on the topic changed completely. In his novel, Pinker uses the modern decline in violence as the most significant factor in arguing why the twenty-first century is the greatest period of history to be born in. Without going into extreme detail about his arguments, it is easy to picture how this makes perfect sense. For example, during prehistoric times, it was common for humans to be killed by one another, starvation, the elements, disease, or other deadly factors that are not as prominent in modern society. Fast forward a couple thousand years: middle-aged England was riddled with tyrannical rulers, the bubonic plague, and unlivable housing conditions. Although many across the globe still do suffer from these atrocities, Pinker indicates in his novel how much these acts of violence have declined worldwide.

While the world is far from perfect, I side with Pinker in believing that the best and most prosperous years in human history are still to come. As standards continue to evolve and tyrants across the globe are repressed, it is important for us to be optimistic and appreciative of what the future holds for us. It is critical to not be naive about the dangers of the world around us, for there certainly are many, but from everything that I can surmise about humanity based on my peers and members of my generation, as well as inspiring and justified optimists like Steven Pinker, the best day to be alive is tomorrow.

The Future: An Essay about Optimism

Ian Rose



As I sit here writing the very essay you now read, I cannot help but mull over what this essay will become, what the future has in store for me. What will the winds of fate blow my way next? I sure hope it's something at least interesting, maybe humorous, possibly enlightening in a way that the world has not yet seen. Probably not, but maybe. That is exactly what I want to hone in on: The Maybe.

The Event Horizon

The future is a weird place to think about. It is this intangible time that governs so much of our thoughts. There is no way to tell

exactly what will happen until we are actually experiencing it. Sure, we have our models or statistics that will tell us what will probably happen, but there is no way to predict exactly what will go down. Bad things raise their ugly heads for seemingly no reason, natural disasters strike with little warning, the planet is dying, and wars rage for the benefits of those in power. The deck is stacked against us and the Baby Boomers have played their fifth aces in a row. There is a doomsayer spilling toxicity into the internet in 288 characters at a time. What are we to do when the future looks so bleak? I always ask the whale.

The Whale

The band Noah and the Whale has a song called "Blue Skies" about being in a terrible place and trying to leave it all behind. It is a song about standing up for the first time in a long time to look into the storm and imagine the blue sky instead. A friend of mine recommended it to me when I was lying in my bed while my immune system began its long and bloody war against infectious mononucleosis, AKA mono. I listened to that song over and over until the melody wiggled its way into my mind, where it remains today. "Blue Skies" recognizes the hardships,

but does not shy away from them. The blue skies are The Maybe—the dream that life will be better than it is today. It is undying optimism in the face of total pessimism.

The Dream

When I think about the future, I think of a spaceport with dozens of star systems. Each one with dozens of planets and hundreds of cities bustling with life. Problems are abundant, but they are not insurmountable. Humanity comes together to pool our minds, our talent, and our resources to face any challenge set before us—a galaxy-wide utopia that will last until Sagittarius A* consumes the Milky Way. *Star Trek's* United Federation of Planets is the closest comparison that I can make. In the episode “Whom Gods Destroy,” Captain Kirk calls it “A dream that became a reality and spread throughout the stars.” Humanity embraces our differences to build a society based on liberty, equality, peace, justice, and progress of all sentient life. The Federation is not a system without flaws, but the betterment of those flaws is what makes us human. We strive to make the world a little better, just maybe.

The Leap

One of my favorite movies of all time is 2014's *Interstellar*, a movie about finding a new home world after a climate disaster destroys Earth's breadbasket. Beyond its stunning visual effects, the movie plays with time in an interesting way. The crew must land on a planet that orbits a massive black hole so they can collect data from a probe. However, because of the proximity to the black hole, the physics get a little weird. One hour on the planet equates to seven years lost on Earth and the crew literally gambles their own futures to maybe find some key data in the wreckage they find. All of *Interstellar* is based on The Maybe. It is quite literally a race against the future to find a place to raise a generation of people who never saw Earth as it was.

Interstellar continues to play with the idea of the future, the past, and what time really is when Cooper flies his ship into Gargantua, the black hole mentioned earlier. It seems completely foolish and even his robot companion makes a few snarky comments before Cooper sends them both over the event horizon. I will add a **spoiler warning** here just because I love this movie and I truly think everyone should watch it.

Cooper passes out or maybe wakes up in the fifth dimensional space outside of time itself. There is no future, no past, only the present as the human mind can understand it. He sees what we consider time to be physical threads to be plucked, like the silver strings of the world's longest violin. Cooper reaches into his own path to send one last message to his daughter and to himself. It is a desperate attempt to deny the path he has already taken.

Spoiler over. You are safe now.

The Maybe

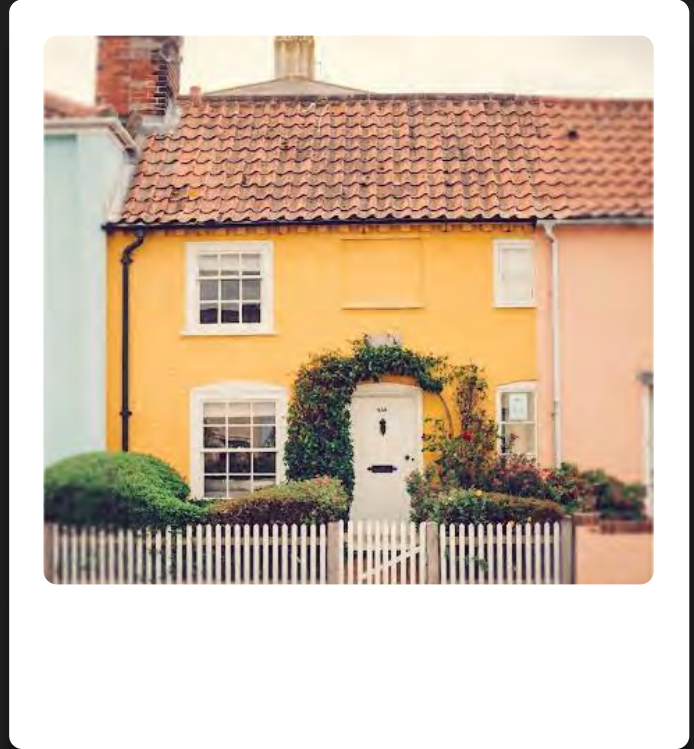
Ultimately, *Interstellar* has a lot to say about time, love, and The Maybe that is always on the edge of my mind. I do not know if I could ever stop thinking about The Maybe. The term “toxic positivity” comes up every now and then when I talk about this and I want to make the distinction between them clear. In my mind at least, toxic positivity is a denial of the human experience. It cannot also exist with negative emotions, or even big emotions. The Maybe embraces the human experience—its ups and its downs—and says “Hey, you are going to be OK. Life sucks right now, but it will not forever. Blue skies are coming but I know that it’s hard.”

My Future Home

Allison Huffman

The Yellow House

When I was little, my answer to “What do you want to be when you grow up?” changed every day. Sometimes, I wanted to write mystery novels and become a famous author. Other times, I fantasized about singing and dancing on Broadway. But that question did not interest me as much as the question of where I would live someday. Above all, it was most exciting for me to think about my future home: an imaginary, magical space I planned down to the smallest detail. My childhood dream house was painted a golden, “banana” yellow with a brick path leading to the front door, surrounded by a white fence and overgrown wildflowers. I’m not sure if the image of a yellow house was inspired by some now long-forgotten movie or a drive through the country, but it soon became my own. Growing up with novels and an active imagination, I mapped out new rooms and hidden corners in my dream house whenever I was lonely or bored or my mind wandered off in class.



Drifting off to sleep at night, I imagined my bedroom, the striped sofa in the living room, and the paintings that I would hang on the walls. My cats would sleep at the foot of my bed, and I would be able to cook mac ‘n’ cheese in the kitchen without the supervision of parents or teachers.

Determined that I would be an artist, I imagined that there was space in the living room for my easel so I could paint the trees behind the house in watercolor. There were wind chimes along the back porch. There was also a window seat with a floral cushion where I could read my favorite books. I did not concern myself with practicalities then, and the house seemed to exist in a world of its own. My house was not a cookie-cutter ranch in a suburban neighborhood; it

was a creation of my own, my room placed on the second floor on the right just because I wanted it to be.

Dorm Rooms

It seems childish to me now—sitting in my college dorm room—to plan out an impossible place, down to the furniture in the living room. Now, I rarely think in-depth about my future home. I have come to expect that nothing will be exactly how I imagined it. After living through an unexpected pandemic while moving away from my parent's home for the first time, the past few years have taught me that the future is not what I'd imagined.

Today, I worry about next year's housing. Negotiating utilities, location, roommates, and the pressure of housing prices takes some of the excitement out of planning your future home. Looking ahead to a future of recent-graduate apartments and temporary spaces, I know what my younger self did not: that where I live will never live up to my expectations for an imaginary home.

Recently, the future has filled me with more dread than fantasy. My mind goes to the harsh reality of social injustices and our changing environment. I rarely find time to wonder about the color of the carpet in my future house.

At the same time, I remember and can still imagine the hallway stairs when you first enter the white door of the yellow house. It seems important to me, somehow, that even though I haven't dreamt about my dream home for years, it comes back to me now and again, almost as vivid as it was when it first appeared.

After reflecting on my past conception of home, I realize that even as a college student living in transition in a cramped dorm room, it is important to me that my space reflects my passions and provides a space of comfort and inspiration. I try to surround myself with plants, art, stacks of books, and other assorted things that inspire me. To me, that is what the yellow house is all about.

Moving Forward

I have grown a lot as a person since I stopped thinking about my childhood dream home. I know that for many years ahead, I may not have a house that is truly my own. I know for certain that it won't turn out how I envision it. I have accepted that I don't know where I will end up. In this changing world, I have no idea where the future will take me.

No matter where I go, I want to remember my yellow house. My adult life is very different from what I imagined as a child or even as a teenager in high school, but I believe that forgetting this childhood dream would be giving up a valuable part of myself.

I may never have a “banana” yellow house (or even want one), but I hope my future home—whether that is a dorm room, a studio apartment in the city, or something else I cannot predict—will be a place where I am free to express myself, be creative, and surround myself with the simple things that make me happy.

While the future was always unclear, the yellow house was a kind of escape and comfort for a kid who moved into a new house every few years and always felt out of place in a new school. And now that I am a student looking ahead to the unknown future, the yellow house has become an image of hope and contentment. Though I’m no longer a child and know too well that the future is and always will be complicated with worries and anxieties, the yellow house brings me back to what is important.

To me, it is a reminder and affirmation that I can create a home and belong wherever I go. It ties me back to my childhood dreams and the creativity and wonder that first inspired me to leave my parents’ house, study a subject I care about, and pursue my passions. It reminds me that even as I move forward and away, I should never forget my past or give up hope for a brighter future.

The Fear of the Unknown

Jaclyn Graf



Alone

I am one of those people who journals. Well, I'm more of a fake journaler, if you consider that a journal entry occurs once every one to three months. I journal when something monumental happens, to prioritize my thoughts, or just to feel like I am actually doing something good for myself. Sometimes I even get funky with it and Google *journal prompts* to determine the fate of what I will write about. But in reality, I scroll and scroll until I find a question I want to answer, usually dodging, avoiding, and pretending I don't see any questions that involve my future.

Maybe my fear of the future comes from the side effects of *youngest child syndrome*. As I grew up seven and five years younger than my brother and sister, I believed that I would never go through the small to monumental milestones they experienced in their lives. I grew up basically watching a movie of two people I love and look like growing up while I believed I, for some reason, would always stay young. Soon, but not soon enough, I woke up as a senior in college unsure of what I wanted to do, be, or where to do or be it.

A Friend

I'm sure everyone has had a friend who makes an itinerary for every vacation you go on together. This is also the person who makes an itinerary for their weeks, two weeks before the week even occurs. What about a friend who has an itinerary for the rest of their life?

I sat on my couch, just after making dinner with this friend. We talked about her weekend, my day at work yesterday, her itinerary for the week, and how yummy the pasta we made was. Somehow, we got into a conversation about our futures. *How did I allow this to come up?*

Instead of changing the subject, as I usually do, I let it happen.

I have already accepted a two-year program in Chicago, so I'll stay there until I'm about twenty-five. Then I'll move back to Cleveland, hopefully meeting or rekindling with someone who I can see myself marrying. Date them for a year, get married, and have two years without kids. Then, I'll have one kid before thirty, then two more in the following five years. This man I meet—my then husband—will also be Croatian, so we will summer there. We will both retire by 50 and begin expanding our summer trips to the whole winter in Croatia. This will continue, I'll love my grandkids, then hopefully die peacefully in my sleep at around ninety. I couldn't even cover up my laughter, unsure of whether I was laughing at her having a plan up until her death, or out of jealousy that she knew what she wanted to do next week.

My Sister

I am lucky to have a sister who is the opposite of my friend above. Alex just turned twenty-nine, is single, and lives in our hometown. Now, this may sound lame, but I am envious of her utter love for Toledo and being single—even though she is one year away from the scary age of thirty.

Alex went to college in Louisiana, where she knew absolutely nobody on her first day of school. She began dating someone the first month of college, which lasted all four years. Due to the seriousness and length of their relationship, she planned to stay in Louisiana after graduation and marry him. The plan was perfect until it wasn't. They broke up the last week of school, resulting in her moving back in with my parents and starting a new job she hated.

Fast forward seven years and she is working at her dream job, in her dream apartment, in the same city as her family and closest friends, and will not settle for anyone if they are not the one she wants to marry. Alex is my inspiration and proof that everything happens for a reason, and she does not hesitate to tell me this, even when I do not always believe this worn-out saying.

My Dad

Religious or just wise, my dad is a die-hard believer that if you work hard and have a good heart, you will end up where you are meant to be. Last spring I was having a midlife crisis. Well, I guess, a three-year-into-college crisis. I felt like I was wasting my time at college, had no clue what career I wanted to pursue, and felt completely uninspired. Instead of going to my closest friends or even siblings, I knew I had to talk to my dad. As we took a walk around our neighborhood—like we have done countless times before—I explained to him exactly what was

on my mind and he couldn't help but laugh. This was when I received the best advice I have ever heard:

Jaclyn, if my life went exactly how I had it planned at twenty-one, hell even thirty, I would be no way near as happy as I am now. If you cannot see that, you can look at how your brother and sister's lives have panned out so far. Alex would have been married to that weirdo in Louisiana, and Nick would have still been living alone in a city he absolutely hated. It may be hard to see, but if you trust the process, I have no doubt in my mind you will find exactly what you are looking for.

Me

You would think that with two of the most impactful people in my life telling me to not worry about the future, I wouldn't. Isn't that truly impossible, to fully trust the process of your life without at all worrying that you won't accomplish your goals or that you will make the wrong life choices? Deep down, I know that everything will work out, but that doesn't mean I won't avoid journal prompts about my future or dismiss conversations with my friends about our future plans. Instead of avoiding these things out of fear, I'll avoid them because I know no matter what I plan or desire, life will not always go as planned.

About the Authors



Liz Browning

Pronouns: She/her

Major(s): Creative Writing and Professional Writing

Graduation year: 2023

Where I'm from: Cincinnati, Ohio

The first word that comes to mind when I think of the future: Unknown



Elli Carder

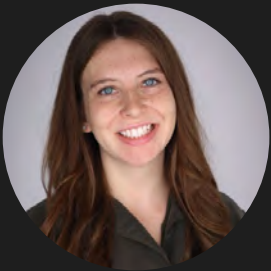
Pronouns: She/her

Major(s): Creative Writing and Professional Writing

Graduation year: 2022

Where I'm from: Hamilton, Ohio

The first word that comes to mind when I think of the future: Frightened



Laurel Dobrozi

Pronouns: She/her/hers

Major(s): Professional Writing

Graduation year: 2023

Where I'm from: Middletown, Ohio

The first word that comes to mind when I think of the future: Life



Maddie Dulle

Pronouns: She/her

Major(s): English Studies

Graduation year: 2023

Where I'm from: Springboro, Ohio

The first word that comes to mind when I think of the future: Intimidating



Abbey Elizondo

Pronouns: She/her

Major(s): Professional Writing and Creative Writing

Graduation year: 2024

Where I'm from: Bexley, Ohio

The first word that comes to mind when I think of the future: Excitement

About the Authors



Jaclyn Graf

Pronouns: She/her

Major(s): Strategic Communication and Professional Writing

Graduation year: 2023

Where I'm from: Toledo, Ohio

The first word that comes to mind when I think of the future: Intimidating



GraciAnn Hicks

Pronouns: She/her

Major(s): Journalism and Professional Writing

Graduation year: 2023

Where I'm from: Lima, Ohio

The first word that comes to mind when I think of the future: Job



Julia Holzl

Pronouns: She/her

Major(s): Strategic Communication and Professional Writing

Graduation year: 2024

Where I'm from: Chicago, Illinois

The first word that comes to mind when I think of the future: Hopeful



Allison Huffman

Pronouns: She/her

Major(s): Professional Writing and English Literature

Graduation year: 2024

Where I'm from: Cincinnati, Ohio

The first word that comes to mind when I think of the future: Horizon



Grace Leskovisek

Pronouns: She/her

Major(s): Professional Writing

Graduation year: 2023

Where I'm from: Bloomington, Illinois

The first word that comes to mind when I think of the future: Uncertain

About the Authors



Molly Monson

Pronouns: She/her

Major(s): Professional Writing and Entrepreneurship

Graduation year: 2023

Where I'm from: Oxford, Ohio

The first word that comes to mind when I think of the future: Hope



Harry Passerello

Pronouns: He/they

Major(s): English Literature and Professional Writing

Graduation year: 2023

Where I'm from: Columbus, Ohio

The first word that comes to mind when I think of the future: Apocalypse



Ian Rose

Pronouns: He/him

Major(s): Emerging Technology in Business & Design and Professional Writing

Graduation year: 2024

Where I'm from: Cincinnati, Ohio

The first word that comes to mind when I think of the future: Hope



Sydney Scepkowski

Pronouns: They/them

Major(s): Professional Writing and Strategic Communication

Graduation year: 2022

Where I'm from: Romeoville, Illinois

The first word that comes to mind when I think of the future: Unknown



Hannah Sroka

Pronouns: She/her

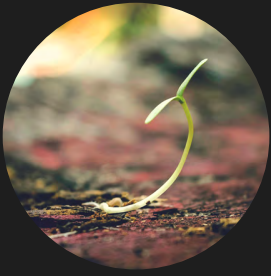
Major(s): Professional Writing and Creative Writing

Graduation year: 2023

Where I'm from: Portland, Connecticut

The first word that comes to mind when I think of the future: Intimidating

About the Authors



Chase Talbott

Pronouns: Prefer not to say

Major(s): Professional Writing, Political Science minor

Graduation year: 2023

Where I'm from: Ashburn, Virginia

The first word that comes to mind when I think of the future: Relaxation

Editors



Charlie Farmer

Pronouns: They/he

Major(s): Professional Writing

Graduation year: 2024

Where I'm from: Oak Harbor, Ohio

The first word that comes to mind when I think of the future: Hope



Olivia Hennessey

Pronouns: She/her

Major(s): Strategic Communication and Professional Writing

Graduation year: 2023

Where I'm from: Edgerton, Ohio

The first word that comes to mind when I think of the future: Fire



Rebecca Lant

Pronouns: She/her

Major(s): Creative Writing and Professional Writing

Graduation year: 2022

Where I'm from: Cleveland, Ohio

The first word that comes to mind when I think of the future: Yikes



Lorelyn Nolte

Pronouns: She/her

Major(s): Creative Writing and Professional Writing

Graduation year: 2023

Where I'm from: Medina, Ohio

The first word that comes to mind when I think of the future: Possibility



Abbey Schneider

Pronouns: She/her

Major(s): Professional Writing and Strategic Communication

Graduation year: 2023

Where I'm from: Pickerington, Ohio

The first word that comes to mind when I think of the future: Pain

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