

Mission

Aletheia (ah-LAY-thee-uh), which means “truth” in Greek, is a student outreach publication that strives to provide a voice for all students at Lynbrook High School. Inspired by Los Gatos High’s *Reality Check* and Monta Vista’s *Verdedera*, *Aletheia* was created to facilitate communication and overcome stigmas concerning prevalent and taboo issues within the Lynbrook community.

About

At the beginning of the school year, the *Aletheia* staff designates a list of monthly topics pertaining to the realities of high school. Each issue comprises of firsthand experiences submitted anonymously by Lynbrook students and alumni, professional articles relating to that month’s theme, and resources compiled by the student staff. Finalized newsletters are uploaded online and emailed to Lynbrook families. Back issues can be found on our website, www.lhsaletheia.org, under Archives.

The content in *Aletheia* is composed by the students of Lynbrook High School in San Jose, California. Ideas and opinions expressed within the publication are not necessarily reflected by members of the school administration or faculty.

This is the seventh issue of *Aletheia* for the 2012-13 school year.

Submissions

All Lynbrook students and alumni are eligible to submit stories. We publish all submissions that adhere to our guidelines, which are posted on the website. The *Aletheia* staff is committed to preserving the integrity of your content and will not make any changes, with exception to certain profanity (which are asterisked-out) and basic spelling errors. We do not edit stories for grammar or syntax.

Our October topic is Fitting In; stories are due by September. If you are interested in contributing, a submission box and a suggestion form for future topics are both available online.

*Expressing what
remains unspoken.*

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It's pretty hard to talk about death. Death of a relative, death of a dream, death of an enemy. Jesus Christ, our savior died for us in order to clean us of all the sins that we have. It's through his sacrifice for us and his death that we are able to go to Heaven once we accept him as our savior. Does Jesus exist though? Being that life passes on and people get hurt, raped, exhausted. Our entire image of a good life gets destroyed, dies, when we enter the real world. For some of us we enter it earlier on in High School. We realize that things actually "matter" now and that we have to "work." For others, college. You realize that your parents aren't around anymore to force you to study. Keeping up a social life along with keeping good grades, not so easy. And for some it's after college. When a family member dies or you realize that you aren't so special anymore just because you go to an Ivy League school. For my experience, it's the death of a dream. The death of realizing that no matter how hard I worked, I wouldn't be able to beat my rival. He's gotten to the US-AMO, created a club, is in a higher math class, and so much more. I gave up now. And this death. The death of a dream, it affects my everyday decisions because no longer am I confident. But I sulk and look away trying to hide. Because guess what guys? I'm a coward that is unable to stand up again after failure. I am hurt by loss and afraid of failure. I am dead.

I'm not afraid of death; I just don't want to be there when it happens.

~Woody Allen

A lot of people ask me... am I afraid of death? Hell yeah, I'm afraid of death! I don't want to die yet." Eminem speaks for all of us. Except I would like to kindly revise his statement to "Hell yeah, I'm afraid of oblivion," because oblivion, I think, is what we all really fear. But don't forget that "To the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure." Dumbledore never lies. The unknown is always an adventure. And afterlife? I have no idea. I like to think of heaven as a place where you go to collect yourself and come to terms with your life as it was, a place where you can move on. I'm Hindu, so the "moving on" would probably include reincarnation. But eternal happiness, sitting around in some great white expanse, seems pointless. Boring. I myself plan to kick the bucket at 63 and move on to become a happy great white shark named Bruce. Actually, as nonchalant as I may seem about this sub-

ject, I have indirectly been affected by death in my life. My best friend, my favorite person in the world, told me about how close she was to committing suicide, how she'd even written a letter for our family. I cried a lot when she told me. A lot. It was only then that I saw how real and terrible death was, how serious it was. I can't imagine living life without her. I don't even know how I'd cope. Perhaps I too would cut it short, in fruitless hope to be reunited with her. But probably not. Because I, too, fear oblivion. Who doesn't? their true colors so you can stay away from them. Make new friends. Go to school clubs, go make new friends. And remember, things will always get better with time. Most of the time.

What we have done for ourselves alone dies with us; what we have done for others and the world remains and is immortal.

~Albert Pike

When I was in first grade and I asked my mom about my other grandpa, she didn't know what to say. I asked her, where is he? Doesn't he love me? Why won't he come see me? She said he's with God now. And, being brought up in a religious environment that had instilled this idea of always seeking for God, I asked, "Well if grandpa found God, why didn't he take us all with him and introduce us?" I don't remember my mom's reply. Obviously, years have passed since and I understand that he passed away even before my parents were married. Between now and then I have faced the losses of my best friend's mother, my aunt, and another friend's father, all to cancer. I've also had an uncle who died from a heart attack and a grandma who succumbed to old age. It was easier to cope with my grandma's death than with my aunt's or my friends' parents, who died so young. I guess I was made to believe that death at an old age means that the person has lived a full and long and full life. But seeing my aunt's death, and how my cousin's were left behind... I question my beliefs when sh*t like that happens. If God is merciful, why does He take away a mother and leave two children angry and confused? I don't have the answer for that. Probably never will. I have to learn to accept death. See how my tense has changed? "Have to." I still haven't. After all, I'm only in high school. I still, hopefully, have a long time to think about things like love and death.

Disclaimer:

The person who wrote this submission should seek professional help.

I want to die.

Death leaves a heartache no one can heal, love leaves a memory no one can steal.

~Anonymous

I almost lost my mom. I remember doing stupid things to distract myself from the reality that I might come home one day in the near future and she wouldn't be there. My brother and I shopped for overly expensive clothes for her while she was getting surgery because we weren't allowed to stay there and because staying there would have been too scary. She lived. And she liked the clothes. I guess it was the expected result, since all everyone we knew was telling us was that she would be fine, but cancer is a scary thing, and you never know what is going to happen. Even now I don't know if she is going to have a relapse. Every now and then my mother will get angry and say something like "Well I won't be there when you have kids so good luck taking care of them all by yourself!" or "I don't know how much longer I'll be around but at least I know I'll be gone before you end up homeless on the streets!" And then I'll know that she's scared too. I don't tell my mom that I'm scared because I don't want her to feel bad. Instead I try to act normal. Except I don't really because other people's deaths, even those people I didn't really know, affect me much more these days. My grandmother's brother is over eighty years old, and he's very sick. He will probably die soon. When I went to see him it took all of my effort to act normal. I just wanted to cry because I wasn't used to seeing him this way. He was so sick that he needed my help for everything. I never thought about the fact that people die when I was younger. But I guess when I was younger I didn't realize that my parents could die or that my grandparents are getting older and older and that one day they will die. I don't like thinking about this at all. I just don't want them to die for as long as possible. I treasure the time I spend with people these days so much more than I used to, because you never know when they will be taken away from you.

My grandfather was gone the day of my cousin's wedding, last November. He'd had a stroke just before the Christmas of 2011, and my family thought he'd get better. That he could move out of the nursing home in a few months, maybe have some in-home care or something. Fast forward to the Food Club Day last semester, and I've just gotten back from his funeral. We had two services: one that contained Buddhist chants that I didn't understand but my mom and some other relatives did, and a Christian one with verses and some singing. They had a slideshow of his life, starting from early adulthood to him holding a baby me to--I don't even remember. But I remember crying when I saw him in the pictures. He seemed so healthy and happy there, completely different from the frail old man he'd become in the nursing home and, eventually, the hospital. But I can forget. My mind simply never brings it up. And it all goes away until someone or something brings him up again.

*To live in hearts we leave behind
Is not to die.*

~Thomas Campbell

My sister and I were riding our bikes on the sidewalk one time and my mom was walking behind us. Suddenly, my sister started to speed up and told me to keep up with her, so obviously I tried to keep up with her. What I didn't know, was that a car was baking out of the driveway right at that same time. They saw my sister pass, but what they didn't know is that I was right behind her. I saw what was happening and fell off my bike. My throat was choked up and when I needed it the most, my words failed me. As I saw the car approach me, I felt like I was paralyzed there, in that moment. Suddenly, the car stopped and a lady ran out of the car to see if I was okay. She saw me at the last second, and saved my life. This happened 4 years ago, and I haven't rode a bike ever since. How can you go back to something like that when almost being enveloped by death's arms? Being a Hindu, I am supposed to believe that there is a such thing as an afterlife and we are all reincarnated as something else or someone else, in our next life. My parents don't drill this into my brain, but they have a funny way of implying it. For instance, my wallet got stolen the other day and it had \$10 and a \$5 Starbucks gift card. It wasn't something really big, but still I almost started crying when I told my mom. She laughed and told me not to worry

because I probably owed someone \$15 in a previous life. Sure mom.... that's exactly what happened. Honestly I am pretty freaked out by the thought of death. Like what is death actually? What really happens to you? I think that if my mom, dad, or sister died, I wouldn't be able to go on with life. How could you cope with a loss like that? Everything you do would remind you of them and it would just be a torture to yourself. Death is a pretty f*cked up thing.

I decided to devote my life to telling the story because I felt that having survived I owe something to the dead. and anyone who does not remember betrays them again.

~ Elie Wiesel

Death is inevitable, death is natural, death is nothing to be scared of. I haven't really had any major experiences with death but from what I have been affected by, I can say that it's a little eerie. It's as if the person just went on a really long vacation but there's no hope of them ever coming back. Being an atheist, I've never really embraced the idea of a heaven/hell, afterlife, or reincarnation. I believe that a person's body and soul ceases to exist after death. I think that's the scariest part of dying- the not existing part. But I guess once you're dead, it doesn't really matter.

~ ~ ~

I think about death a lot. I always wonder where I will go after I take my final, last bit of air. Since I was raised non-religious, I have no afterlife or heaven to believe in. I think it's going to be similar to blacking out, but just forever. I hope it's quick.

I'm not afraid of death because I don't believe in it. It's just getting out of one car, and into another.

~ John Lennon

I have never tried to commit suicide, but it has crossed my mind for a couple of times. My grades are not good enough, my family is dysfunctional, my social life sucks. Those are some things that makes me want to end it all. But I'll keep on reminding myself how I'm not starving in Africa, how I'm so privileged to have a chance to live in a first world society. How

other people are facing problems much harder than mine, how they are struggling to feed their families, while I'm here with a roof over my head and a full fridge. I have to be satisfied with what I have, or else I can never be happy. Sometimes I see pictures of people living in third world countries and they look so happy with their rag torn clothes, and little huts. The kid's smiles are so innocent and wide when they see small morsels of food. The more you have, the more you'll want. But the society I'm living in makes everything seem so insignificant. The only way to feel like you're somebody is to dominate and beat others, whether it's by grades or by athletic abilities. The fear of being insignificant is drowning me.

While I thought that I was learning how to live, I have been learning how to die.

~ Leonardo da Vinci

My experience with death is like something out of a nightmare. I was about 8 years old when I found my mom lying dead on her bed. I was screaming at her and shaking her violently, trying to get her to wake up. My dad notified the police and I was taken to school. Later that day, I was called into the principal's office, where my dad told me and my little brother that my mom had passed. Right then and there, I remember getting this feeling like she was right next to me. That feeling still hasn't gone away. I like to believe my mom is my guardian angel.

Our dead are never dead to us, until we have forgotten them.

~ George Eliot

Though many people are terrified of the idea of dying, I think otherwise. Death fascinates me. The concept of disappearing one day intrigues me to no end. As an atheist, I do not believe in souls, afterlife, and reincarnation. I don't even believe that "I" exist. My body exists, yes, but "I" do not. "I" am just something created from the electrochemical signals that a chunk of muscle stuck in my skull produces. When "I" die, it is merely the stopping of the functions of my brain and body. When my body ceases to work, "I" cease to exist. As simple as that. To me, considering death as anything else seems far too hopeful and optimistic. However cynical my views are, death does affect my everyday actions. Since I believe that everybody only lives once, I live my life doing things I know

I will not regret in the future. Though during times of hardship I do consider the idea of suicide in order to escape the society that we live in, I know for a fact that I will not do it, not just because I don't want to disappear without a trace but also because life is far too short anyway. I have everything to lose and nothing to gain. Due to my views, I am a very cautious person. If I had no qualms about dying, I would probably be dead due to sheer recklessness. Perhaps my opinion originated from the death of my cousin in a car crash. Her death took me by surprise, and it took a good half-year to move past the tragedy despite having spoken to her only once in my life. In all honesty, I cannot say if her death had any impact on my views. Would the natural reaction be to wonder what she would be reincarnated as, or if she is happy in heaven? That was the reaction that my parents and my aunt and uncle had. I simply couldn't find a way to convince myself into believing that she still existed, in one way or another. That is all.

*For death is no more than a turning of
us over from time to eternity.*

~William Penn

I have no real death experiences. Myself, being muslim believe that death is a rude awakening of the human condition. Suicide is a sin. Has always been. Will always be. See, its not your life to take. Death is something is always consider. My number one fear in this world isn't being murdered, raped, tortured or shot. My number one worrying is losing my mom. When I think about it I don't think I could ever be the same. To me, there's almost no life without my mother. Death does affect my everyday decisions if I were to die tomorrow would I be proud of who I was today? I try to keep God in my mind, body and soul because in the long run, whats going to determine whether you enter heaven or hell is if you want god, or you don't want god. I don't know how I would cope with loss. I'm naturally a very sensitive person. I honestly think I just would sit in my bed cry. And sleep. And cry. I can see myself being thin from lack of food, I can feel the pain of trying to stand up. I try to make peace with everything. But I'm not sure death is something I could ever make peace with.

Roberta B. Corson, PhD

Clinical Psychologist PSY 18128

I am a licensed clinical psychologist in private therapy practice. I stand within the “depth tradition” where the work is not about getting rid of problems but rather understanding what is beneath them, going more deeply into them, and listening to the inner self so that there will be shifts that will cause lasting change. I listen, and I ask my clients to listen. There is so much wisdom when we listen to the deep self.

This is a second career for me. I am also an ordained United Methodist minister with 35 years of parish ministry. Part of my training was a year at UCSF Hospital as a chaplain intern.

In the hospital, in the church, in my practice, and in my personal life I have had many experiences with dying, death, and grief. I find it one of the greatest privileges of my life to be with the dying and grieving.

It has also been a privilege to meet the Aletheia team, to read your reflections as students, and to write my own response. Feel free to contact me, should you wish to engage further in this topic.

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Dear Lynbrook Students and Parents,

Letters are so much more personal than articles, and death is about as personal a subject as there can be, hence my contribution to Aletheia is in the form of this letter. Also, I am writing it to students and parents rather than addressing you separately. While adults often have more experiences, we all stand on this side of death and have many of the same questions, fears and hopes.

“If I survive this life without dying, I’ll be surprised,” wrote Mulla Nasrudin. I think most of us would agree, though many of us don’t want to think about it, right now at least. One of the marks of youth is the sense of being immortal. But death is an experience common to all life. The lovely children’s book *Lifetimes* reminds us that everything that is alive has a “beginning, a middle, and an end.” There is something reassuring about remembering that death is a fact; it’s universal; it’s a normal part of life, and it can be accepted rather than feared.

On the other hand, while common to all life, death is also individual and unique to each one of us. Our own dying is filled with unknowns and questions: When will it come? Where? How old will I be? Will it be painful? Will it take a long time? Will it be accidental or a disease? Who will be with me? Will it be sudden? How will I be remembered? Where will I be after death? Is there a heaven, hell, reincarnation, a loved one waiting, peace and bliss, or maybe nothing at all? So much is unknown, and it is the unknown that brings fear.

When my younger brother was dying of cancer at the age of 20, I asked him if he was afraid. He said, “I don’t know; I’ve never died before.” And you and I haven’t died before either, so how do we know? One of the hardest parts of his death for me was that he had to do it alone. No matter how much I loved him or how close we were, I couldn’t die for him.

I recognize that you, as the Lynbrook community, come from many religious traditions, cultures, and experiences of life and death. Honoring this diversity, I would like to share with you some of my own perspectives.

- **MANY WAYS OF DEATH:** There is no right or wrong attitude toward death or way of dying. My brother lived fully until he could no longer breathe, and then he turned to accept his death with grace and dignity. He talked about it and related openly. My father, on the other hand, did not talk about death or admit that he was dying. When he could no longer breathe the day before his death, he accepted a major professional publishing assignment. He tried to defy death by living to the fullest. (It didn’t work). I’ve learned over the years to respect the difference in how people face death, to be open to each person’s unique experience.

- **UNEXPECTED DEATH:** Unexpected death by fast moving disease, suicide, accident, or the hands of another, is traumatic. It makes no sense to our rational minds. Those who are left behind are confronted with feelings that life isn’t fair or predictable. Anger is real, guilt may be overwhelming, and grief is long. The world of the survivor is harshly turned upside down.

- **MORE ON SUICIDE:** If you suspect that someone you know is suicidal, the most important thing to ask is just that: “Are you thinking of suicide?” Using the word does not give that person the idea or make them decide to kill themselves. If they say “yes,” ask if they have a plan and what it is. If there is a specific, accessible means (like a gun), take immediate action to get help. You may need to call 911. The emergency services number in Santa Clara County is (855) 278-4204, which is staffed by people trained to work with such crises. If you are a teen and have a friend who is depressed and suicidal, be sure to tell an adult immediately. This is not snitching. If you or your parents can get the specific means of suicide out of this one’s possession, do so immediately. It is true that sometimes people use talk of suicide as a way of getting attention; however, as a psychologist, I always take this thought seriously and do whatever needs to be done to keep this person alive.

A special note to the anonymous contributor to this edition of Aletheia, who wrote, "I want to die." Please talk to an adult you trust right away about your feelings and thoughts. People care and no one wants you to die.

- **GRIEF:** When we know someone is dying and have time to prepare, we can grieve even before the death, even with the person who is dying. This is called "anticipatory grief." It can help soften the pain after the death. And because they have already done some of the grief work, those closest to the one who has died seem almost to be able to comfort others who hadn't been as involved.

- **CHILDREN AND TEENS:** Often children and adolescents feel left out at the time of death. They don't get as much attention. No one may listen to what this means for them. They have feelings and need to be honored for just where they are at the moment. They should have a choice about how much to participate in the activities around the death of someone close: whether to go to a service, to see the body, to be present at the burial. Again there is no right way to respond, but the choice is important. We all need to be listened to and honored at the time of death of a loved one.

- **SHARING GRIEF:** It is healthy to share grief: in a group, with a friend, with a counselor, with a religious community, or in writing. This way grief doesn't get stuck, and you don't get stuck. It is also helpful to find a way to celebrate that person's life and psychologically/spiritually release the one who has died. There are countless ways to do this, and some of the resources I've listed offer ideas. But as humans who continue to live, we need to have graceful ways of saying good-bye.

- **MANY FACES OF GRIEF:** Grief is not one thing. It is an umbrella for many feelings (joy, sorrow, loneliness, fear, curiosity, remorse, longing...). It is also a process that may take some years to move through. It is not a straight line, but has ups and downs, is more like a flow. Laughter and tears come from the same muscles, and sometimes one leads to the other, so don't be surprised to find yourself crying and then suddenly laughing. Grief has lots of faces.

- **IRRATIONALITY:** Grief can lead to irrational thoughts. For example, when someone we love dies, it doesn't mean we are more at risk of dying any time soon. I learned this the hard way. While my brother was dying, my father also became ill and died some months later. Two out of the six in my family died at about the same time. On the flight home, just hours after my father's death, the plane hit an updraft, which felt to me as though we were going straight down. I knew for certain that I was the next one to die, and soon my whole family would be wiped out. Not rational! But sometimes the fragility we experience around death leads to superstition, magical thinking, and not feeling grounded. That's okay. It passes. Get help in getting perspective.

- **GRIEF IS THE UNDERBELLY OF LOVE:** Just as death is intrinsic to life, so if we love, we shall sometime experience loss and grief. The alternative is never to love. How sad is that! We are made to love, and we are made to grieve. Such is the richness of our life.

- **HOW THEN SHALL WE LIVE:** If we accept that we will die, the real question is "how then shall we live?" The response I love most is the poem *The Summer Day*, written by Mary Oliver. I encourage you to look it up, but here are the last lines:

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

- **BEAUTY.** My mother died at an appropriate old age of Cancer and Alzheimer's Disease, and I had the privilege of being with her for her last week and last breath. As that week went on and she grew weaker and talked about her fears and life, her face gradually became luminescent and smooth, as though she had transformed into the beautiful young woman she once was. Peace seemed to settle over her. She talked until her last breath, and her final word was, "Elulubaba," which she repeated over and over. When I finally figured out it meant, "I love you, bye-bye" she shook her head yes and breathed her last breath. It was peaceful and beautiful.

In the week following her death, though I was exhausted, I found myself driving down Steven's Creek Boulevard. I felt bombarded by the number of cars, the plastic signs, the many colors, the traffic, and the noise. I felt sadness for the ways our culture diverts us from the truly beautiful and simple truths of life and death. Then I noticed

Additional Resources

How Then Shall We Live?

Four Simple Questions That Reveal the Beauty and Meaning of Our Lives. By Wayne Muller. (This is a book that draws on the wisdom of many traditions and speaks deeply to questions of life and death.)

Staring at the Sun: Overcoming the Terror of Death.

By Irvin D. Yalom. (Yalom is a Stanford psychiatrist. He tackles this difficult subject in a thoughtful, intelligent and moving way.)

Straight Talk About Death for Teenagers: How to Cope With Losing Someone You Love.

By Earl A. Grollman. (This is the leading book for grieving teens, written especially for them, as they are often neglected in the time of death.)

Healing Your Grieving Heart For Teens: Simple Tips for Understanding and Expressing Your Grief.

By Alan Wolfelt. (This provides 100 really practical ideas to help teen agers cope with grief and death.)

The Grieving Teen: A Guide for Teenagers and Their Friends.

By Helen Fitzgerald (Another classic that talks about nightmares, guilt, sadness, what friends can do.)

Weird is Normal When Teenagers Grieve.

By Jenny Lee Wheeler. (Jenny is a teen who shares her own experience getting through the unexpected death of her father when she was 14.)

Tuck Everlasting.

By Natalie Babbitt. (A fun summer read about a family who drinks from a spring of everlasting life and struggles with whether living forever is a blessing or a curse.)

a huge billboard. It was divided into two halves. The left half pictured a large painted butterfly with its wings open. The right half was all black with the exception of small letters in the corner which said, "BEAUTY."

I thought my eyes were playing tricks. Who would pay for a billboard with a butterfly and the word beauty on it? There was no logo, no company or institution, no indication that something else is coming, such as "Buy a Camaro: It's a Real Beauty". Nothing like that. Only a butterfly and the word BEAUTY.

The butterfly is not only the Christian symbol of the resurrection, but also a universal symbol of life transformed, graceful and beautiful. I have been told that in the Navajo language, the word for God is the same as the word for Beauty. It was more than the sign with the butterfly on it that rose above Steven's Creek Boulevard that morning. It was the sign of God's love.

As a pastor, I've concluded many memorial services with these words of the ancient Navajo benediction:

May it be beautiful before you.

May it be beautiful behind you.

May it be beautiful below you.

May it be beautiful above you.

May it be beautiful all around you.

In beauty it is finished.

In beauty it is finished.

And so, friends in the Lynbrook community, may you experience the beauty that is around and within you. May you live "your one wild and precious life" with love and gratitude.

With tenderness,

Bobbie Corson

Additional Resources

I Heard the Owl Call My Name.

By Margaret Craven. (Perhaps one of my all time favorite short novels. Another good summer read. This is about a priest who has been sent to live and work among an isolated tribe of Northwest Indians, while unbeknownst to him, he is dying. Deeply moving.)

Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children.

By Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen. (Not just for children. It is a beautiful and reassuring book for all of us to have on our shelves.)

What Dreams May Come.

A movie starring Robin Williams.

<http://www.pamf.org/teen/santaclara.html>

(This is a comprehensive resource for teens in our area. Loss and grief are among the many issues that they address.)