

THE COMMENTATOR



The Commentator Editors:

Top (L to R): Jess Pruett (teacher), Ava Flournoy, Hannah Tittermary, Celia Acey, Maggie Jacoby, Lizzie Herod Middle: Katie Hall, Anna Meiller, Merrick Mock, Shishira Nakka Bottom: Poppy Friske, Afton Hessian, Lorelei Kelley, Ella Post and Ellie Grace Robinson

We Have Been Changed For Good



Katie Hall
Editor-in-Chief

For as long as I can remember, I have been infatuated with words and storytelling. I've traveled to a variety of different worlds through the captivating words of authors, political scholars, activists, and philosophers. While at Freeman, I navigated the road to Damascus, sat at a dinner table with the Stoics, engaged in civil disobedi-

ence from the Birmingham City Jail, and, this year, took up residency in the halls of Congress. Mr. Peck, thank you for being my tour guide on these travels. You have encouraged us to hone our definition of "Truth" and explore beyond the bounds of Plato's cave. Thank you for indulging my incessant questions about Congress and for showing me how much fun "Constitution time" can be. Aside from my adventures in ethics and government, I traveled around the world through transformative pieces of literature selected by the Freeman English Department. Ms. Hunnicutt, from "Persepolis" to "Purple Hibiscus," you introduced me to so many different perspectives in literature that have deeply enriched my view of the world. Even as we emerged from the pandemic and classrooms full of plexiglass, sophomore year still felt foreign in many ways, but you brought back a feeling of familiarity. In your class, I started to remember how school felt before everything changed. Thank you for introducing me to inspiring texts and reminding me why words

and stories mean so much to me. Mr. Schuster, you deserve a huge thank you for putting up with our constant commentary and shenanigans, but in all seriousness, I want to thank you for the passion and inspiring insight you bring to AP Lit. On the first day of school, you shared with us that, "literature is art." This year, masterpieces from James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, James Baldwin, and Sarah Moss proved that those words of wisdom are unequivocally true. By interpreting these written works as art, I learned to better separate my thinking from the binary viewpoint of right vs. wrong, success vs. failure, and insight vs. ignorance. My writing, and my mind, became inherently freer thanks to the perspective you shared. Ms. Beaton, your compassion and encouragement have instilled a new sense of confidence in me that I have always struggled to find with math. This year, my fear of failure became subservient to the beauty behind the patterns and reasoning you showed me. Your teachings led me to truly appreciate an entirely different world than the

ones I am accustomed to in books. Mr. Pruett, thank you for embracing our idiosyncrasies (long live Judith) and putting up with my ridiculous attendance reminders (sorry, I'm not the best paper airplane pilot). Most importantly, thank you for all that you've invested in each and every one of us. I am so grateful for your mentorship and your unwavering commitment to our entire staff. Finally, I'd like to express my sincere thankfulness for the two years I spent as Mrs. Curry's student. She held a genuine interest in all of her students which made me feel seen and loved. I will always remember her as a shining example of true empathy and dedication. To the incredible faculty of Freeman, thank you for enthusiastically cheering us on in all our endeavors, even on the days when you only knew us by a pair of colorful initials on Microsoft Teams. Thank you for encouraging us to grapple with controversial questions and helping us find the courage to have difficult, but necessary conversations. Thank you for not shying away from the challenges that face

us outside the walls of Freeman and for urging us to take an active role in the world we inhabit. I will continue to heed this advice as I discover what my college years have in store. Even though I am beyond excited to start the next chapter of my life, I'll miss walking into Room 208, knowing there was an afternoon full of hysterical laughter awaiting me. I'll miss the spot I affectionately call 'the InDesign Corner,' where I let my perfectionism run a little bit wild as I edited pages of the paper. Most of all, I'll miss feeling instantly uplifted when I walk into class, knowing that there are 13 remarkable young women — who are some of the most supportive and caring individuals I've ever met — leading alongside me. It has been such a privilege to serve as Editor-in-Chief of The Commentator. Thank you, Freeman, for all the travels we've taken. I couldn't have anticipated the true breadth of knowledge I'd gain and the worlds I'd explore when I chose to spend my high school years on Three Chopt Road. Thank you for welcoming me into the family.

Room 208: End Scene



Poppy Friske
Editor-in-Chief

"The Commentator" Season 1, Episode 1 - "Pilot." Act 1, Scene 1 We open in a public high school classroom. Students mill around excitedly, their nervous smiles bouncing off the linoleum. The camera pans over the sea of tables and lands on our main character, Poppy. She is an average 17-year-old, looking anxiously around the room for a familiar face. Nothing extraordinary, yet the audience still somehow roots for her. In a word, pathetic. (Note: I only made myself the main character because I am unfortunately forced to write this from my own perspective. Please do not interpret my

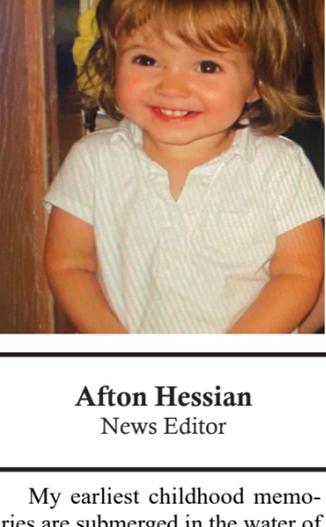
casting choices as a form of self-flattery, as it is quite the opposite.) Poppy (V.O.): I applied for this class because I love to write, not because I love high school. It'd be so much easier to isolate myself for the next two years, keep my head down, and try to get it over with as soon as possible. That's all anybody wants, right? To survive. Poppy fades into the background as the lens expands, ending on a shot of the "Rm. 208" plaque outside the classroom door. End scene. "The Commentator" Season 1, Episode 3 - "Get Over Yourself" Act 2, Scene 2 We open in the high school cafeteria. Poppy's mind is obviously elsewhere, while, a few tables over, a group of fellow journalism students (Shishira, Ava, Celia, and Afton) laugh over their lunches. Poppy (V.O.): We idolize the odd. The unique, the undefinable — everybody wants to be different. Especially in a public school, where it's so easy to be reduced to a stereotype, all anybody strives for is that one feature that can set them apart. Well, screw it. I'm three months into the school year and I have more Monopoly victories than friends in this class — and I'm terrible at Monopoly. I'm done trying to be mysterious; I mean,

who am I kidding? I can't even get catcalled by the creepy day drinkers at my restaurant job. No more 'waiting to be discovered.' Cut to the classroom. Students file in as the bell rings, signifying the beginning of the post-lunch period. Among them, Poppy laughs with Shishira and Ava. Poppy (taking a sip of water): I know, right? That movie's the best! She begins to choke on her water. Poppy: I'm ... (sputters) ... choking...! Shishira and Ava (deadpan): Good. Poppy (V.O.): Finally, true friendship. It feels good to seek out your own treasure. (End scene). "The Commentator" Season 1, Episode 6 - "Words on the Page" Act 3, Scene 1 We open in Room 208. Junior staff writers are chatting casually as they work on their articles for the upcoming issue. The camera pans over and lands on Poppy, staring blankly at her computer screen. Poppy (V.O.): I'm a storyteller, but I'm also my own worst enemy. Cut to her screen, the Google Doc reading "shutupshutupshutup" as the cursor blinks expectantly at the bottom of the page. Her fingernails tap the desk, flaunting chipped red nail polish to conceal a hand paralyzed by self-loathing.

Poppy (V.O.): I love to paint a picture with words, mainly because I'm too self-critical to actually paint a picture. Through writing, however, I've learned that if you ramble on for long enough, people will either convince themselves that what you're saying is really profound or give up and assume they are too intellectually inferior to understand. Win-win. The only issue is actually getting started. Shishira glances at her screen, a look of amusement and slight concern veiling her face. Poppy: I'm about three seconds away from ripping out my own eyeballs. Shishira: Oh! Um ... maybe we don't do that? Just write something, anything. Put words on the page and make them pretty later. Poppy: It's like I'm still waiting for a burst of creativity or something. I just can't write a single sentence without second-guessing every word. The bell rings for lunch and students quickly file out of the room. Obviously dissatisfied with her progress, Poppy slams down her laptop and sighs. End scene. "The Commentator" Season 2, Episode 1 - "Take it to the Chief" Act 1, Scene 1 We open in the journalism class-

room on the first day of the new school year. Despite the presence of ten times the friends she had last year, Poppy is obviously still anxious as she chats with Katie. The room pulses with pent-up energy, dimming as we focus on Poppy's rhythmic knuckle-cracking. Katie: Hey guys! Welcome to Journalism! I'm one of the Editors-in-Chief, and... She looks to her co-editor expectantly, awaiting an introduction. A look of terror washes over Poppy's face but quickly dissipates as she breaks into a smile. Poppy: I'm Poppy, your other Editor-in-Chief! This class is going to be a challenge at first ... We pan out over the room as Poppy gives an overview, early afternoon sunlight filtering through the windows. Poppy (V.O.): I applied for this class because I love to write, not because I love high school, and definitely not because I ever saw myself as a leader. I've always been a people-pleaser, a doormat, but they don't make it very far. Never mind my lack of extrovertedness and perpetual self-doubt; I have passion. At this point, it's my greatest asset, so I'm going to run with it. We'll see where it takes me. (End scene.)

A Love Letter to Richmond



Afton Hessian
News Editor

My earliest childhood memories are submerged in the water of the James River. I became enraptured with the natural world as I laughed with my older sister while jumping off rocks, watching a gar-

longer than my 4-year-old body swim underneath my legs, and lying in the shallow waters watching minnows drift over my arms.

As I aged, a sense of whimsy surrounded these memories until they began to feel as though they belonged to someone else. I felt out of place in Richmond so, in December of my freshman year, I applied to work at a bakery in a New Jersey beach town. I got the job and spent the summer nocturnal with back pain from filling arm-length deep piping bags with frosting for eight hours a day.

The same week I got to New Jersey, Lucy Dacus released "Home Video," an album chronicling stories from her childhood growing up in Richmond. That summer, ironically, was when I fell in love with Richmond. Listening to her songs, I was filled with a longing for the sharp, shrill sound of the cicadas, the lingering heat on the black pavement at night, and the lushness of a southern summer.

In the dedication for her memoir "In the Dreamhouse," Carmen Maria Machado writes "If you need this book, it is for you." I have found myself coming back to that book just as I have with the James River and "Home Video." I often traipse between comfort and leaning into new experiences, never fully ready to make the leap. When I need familiarity, I tuck myself under my glow-in-the-dark spaceship sheets and allow myself to remember lying on the bank of the James River with my mother, water lapping against our legs.

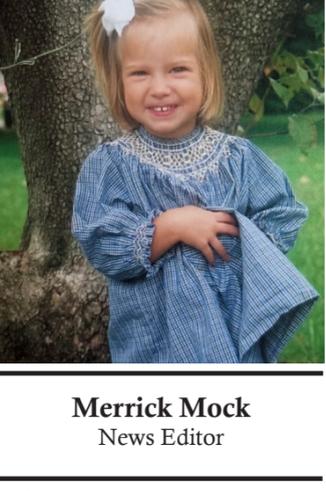
In the last few monologues in "The Haunting of Hill House," Victoria Pedretti's character muses about the significance of time, ultimately concluding that "Our moments fall around us like rain. Or snow. Or confetti." There was a day this spring when I woke up and the trees were green again. I had been bogged down for months, studying and losing enough sleep that days or weeks

would go back without feeling like much was happening. Coming home after We the People nationals and listening to "Cartwheel," I genuinely felt like I regained consciousness. Similar to Lucy Dacus, I tend to think that the future is a benevolent black hole, time doesn't have to be linear, and its presence isn't malevolent. Even though time passes, the earth stays stagnant. The field by the war ruins in Goochland will still be there, the rock at the river you have shown to everyone you love will not move, the creek you and Annie fell into will still flow, and the four walls of your childhood bedroom will stay standing, even if it is another child who now occupies it. The people you met in Richmond who filled your life with vibrancy and meaning will remain with you even though you no longer live in the area.

Essayist Rayne Fisher-Quann wrote about how living in a culture riddled with manic consump-

tion and constant availability atrophies our ability to love. She described that devoting time to perfecting that one strawberry tart recipe, or reading your favorite Donna Tartt book five times one winter feels like an act of rebellion that is worthwhile. This is how I have tried to live ever since I read the essay, and it worked. I feel the first breeze of wind in fall and remember how I felt the year prior reading "The Goldfinch." I taste champagne vinegar at a restaurant in Florida and am brought back to my kitchen when I started using it to make biscuits, and I hear an Adrienne Lenker song and remember how I felt in September 2022. What I didn't know was that this applies to people too. When I'm at college next year or even after I graduate when I have a life disconnected and fragmented from my home, I will have the people from home whom I love. When I talk to them, I hope I hear their voices and think of Richmond.

From PB&J's to Prom



Merrick Mock
News Editor

In kindergarten and first grade, I was terrified to ride the school bus. In fact, I refused to until two neighbor friends convinced me that I'd be safe. They would sit with me while my mom drove behind the bus for several of the

following days so I could look out the bus window and be reassured that I wasn't alone. Little did I know that those would be the two girls I would be getting ready with for my senior prom.

Like a majority of people's lives, not much has stayed consistent since kindergarten. However, in the case of the group of people I fearfully walked into Tuckahoe Elementary with on my first day, I can confidently say our giant friend group of 30 has stayed well-nurtured for 13 long years.

I've been repeatedly told by every adult in my life that the spring of senior year will be one of the most bittersweet times of my life. Now that it's in full swing, I can completely attest to that statement. The déjà vu I faced during the senior walk at Tuckahoe Elementary was one of the most nostalgic yet gut-wrenching moments I've ever experienced. Every classroom was the same, the teachers were the same, the

haunted lunchroom bathroom was the same, but every student in the Class of '24 noticed one major change to Tuckahoe: everything seemed smaller. Clearly, Tuckahoe hasn't shrunk in size since our time there; instead, we were the ones who did the growing.

I can safely say that I did not only grow in size but in character as well. My once timid personality has flourished into a bold, outgoing, and, most of the time, overly honest person. I probably owe every person reading this an apology for something I've said, so I'm sorry. However, I also owe every one of my friends the most genuine thank you. When we do get separated and the days, months, and years pass until contact becomes rare, I want them to know that I had some of the best days of my life with our friend group.

It's hard not to sound cliché here, but the phrase "when you know, you know" has recently struck me, especially at senior

prom. It was hard to fathom that I was taking photos and eating at a lengthy dinner table with the same girls and boys I ate my PB&Js with in kindergarten. At the age of five, I thought that friendship was a casual affair. I wasn't aware that I would stay friends with the same group of people for the rest of my younger and formative years, but upon reflection, I realize it's all I've ever known and it's been the best blessing that was never really in disguise.

Now, I know that lifelong friendships are a relatively common experience. However, I sincerely hope that anyone reading this has been blessed with the same quality of friends I have found because they are truly irreplaceable. No friend group will ever come remotely close to the sisters and brothers I have been fortunate enough to gain over the last 18 years of my life. As we wrap up our time here at Freeman and the eagerness to start

our new chapters intensifies, try to find moments of tranquility and gratitude, because things will never truly be the same, ever.

Before writing this reflection, I was flooded with thousands of thoughts and memories, and what struck me most was that my earliest ones shared the same group of friends as my most recent experiences. We've come a long way from playing massive rounds of "knock-out" on the blacktop and waiting at our designated bus stops to only having a few more "last" experiences together. I'll sign off with the most sincere thank you to everyone for leaving me better than you found me, and for making it feel like an integral piece of me is missing as we all split up for the first time. To the Gardner girls, when I hear the word "loyal," it has a face, and it's yours. If I grow up to be even a quarter of the people you all are, I will consider my life well-lived. Thank you for being my second home.



Sharing is Caring



Celia Acey
Sports Editor

Like most other kids growing up, I was always told to share with the people around me. While I used to interpret this message in terms of physical items such as

toys and food, I've since found that this lesson was preparing me to learn how to share something much more important.

I've always had a more introverted personality. In a room full of new people I generally keep to myself, I enjoy spending time alone, and I don't tend to open up to strangers. I'd never seen this aspect of my personality as a fault until somewhat recently. While I know it's not necessarily a bad thing, it has become something I've tried to work on over the past two years.

The first step I made to expand the bubble I'd created for myself was joining Journalism. At the time, I didn't know anyone who had signed up for the class. Nervously walking into class that first day, I sat down with Ava Flournoy, Afton Hessian, Poppy Friske, and Shishira Nakka. I didn't know at the time how many memories and laughs I would later share with them. As much as I'll remember the jokes and experi-

ences we shared, what I'll take away most are the lessons each of them shared with me — the same ones I will now share with you!

1. Ava: Be a light in other's lives; always treat people with kindness and respect. The more I've gotten to know Ava over the past two years, the more I've learned about true kindness. Whether it be a compliment, listening when a friend or stranger is going through a tough time, or a quick smile, these simple acts have the power to change the trajectory of someone's day. Ava's big heart is always looking out for those around her, and I feel truly lucky to have met her back in seventh-grade gym class. Wherever you go, always be on the lookout for ways to make your community a more uplifting and loving environment.

2. Afton: Learn to find value in experiences and people rather than material items. For as long as I've known Afton, she has always tried to find ways

to connect with the community and environment around her. Her love for the outdoors combined with the strong friendships she's able to develop are what I admire most about her. But more importantly, Afton has taught me about perspective. At the end of the day, it's the memories you create with the people you love that you remember the most; so always try to stay mindful in the moment. As my grandmother likes to say, "It's your presence, not your presents!"

3. Poppy: Always be loyal to those around you; act with integrity. One of the traits I cherish most about Poppy is her unwavering loyalty and quickness to defend those around her. I would define her as a fierce protector, always willing to put herself on the line for those she loves. As you navigate new friendships and relationships, remember to be loyal and dependable to those around you. Remember to trust yourself. Poppy has the biggest heart and is a rock for so many around her. I hope

that everyone gets to experience a person like Poppy in their lifetime.

4. Shishira: Live fearlessly and be your truest self. You are both worthy and deserving of love and happiness.

As many who walk the halls of Freeman know, Shishira is a once-in-a-lifetime kind of person. Her energy and love are endless, and she is always ready to cheer you on through any obstacle you encounter. The biggest things I have learned from her are to embrace your authentic self, act in line with your principles, and know your worth. It's your personality and values that define you, so be confident in expressing them to those around you. Remember, nothing is embarrassing unless you make it!

Although it's hard to imagine that in just a few months we'll all be going our separate ways, I'm excited to watch each of my friends grow and share these lessons with all the new people they meet, just as I will share everything they have taught me!

Matthew McConaughey, You Are My God



Shishira Nakka
Centerspread Editor

Have you ever seen that scene in “True Detective” where Matthew McConaughey says that time is a flat circle? He’s right. This thing that rules over all of us with brass knuckles and an iron grip — it doesn’t even exist. As I’ve navi-

gated my time at DSF, I’ve often thought of that sentiment delivered by my tan God. If none of this is real, it doesn’t even matter.

Well, I lied. Time is still not real, but how we spend it matters. During my high school career, I spent a lot of time feeling embarrassed about the result of my time here. I’ve fallen down the stairs at school and after receiving first place at the statewide We The People competition, I’ve made so many dumb jokes, and I’ve failed. Lots. You might be thinking, “Gee, Shishira, how on Earth did you manage to keep going?” Wonderful question, sweetness.

I am something of a resilient creature, I think. Or something close to a unicorn — my very existence proves everyone wrong. I am bad at a lot of things — math, history, science, math, math, math. But the one thing I can give myself credit for being good at is never giving up ... unless it’s for a Macro test because what on Earth is that? I can’t count the number of times I’ve faced a roadblock of some kind — a classmate cracking a joke at my expense, failing a test or 20, struggling with the

reality that people consider my intelligence to be lower, if not the lowest, or that I have a dent in my head. The truth of the matter is that when these things happened to me, I felt miserable. I wanted nothing more than to hide under my Short Pump sheets, watch “Peaky Blinders,” and wish the rest of the world away. To hide away is what the rest of the world might want me to do, maybe it’s what I should be doing, but it’s not what I want to do — it’s a waste of time.

I receive all my me-ness from knowing that my failures have taught me one thing: the power of the bounce back. Not familiar? Let me lay it out for you, hot stuff. When we fall, we are given two options: to stay on the floor writhing in pain, wallowing in self-pity like the Grinch, OR to dust ourselves off, take a deep breath, and start again. I choose to start again. Always. I have been awarded many challenges in this life, and it would almost make sense for me to stay at the bottom where I belong. “We started from the bottom now we here,” said Drake.

Sometimes, my resolve slips out of my hands like a snake

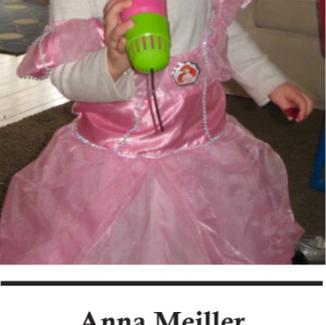
and my classmate’s perception of me infects my thoughts like venom — coursing, stinging, and coma-inducing. So, like a great statue, I have fallen, practically crumbled down. Yet something builds me back up, and that something is faith, dear ones — faith in the fact that I can do better and be better, regardless of how many times I’ve failed.

The only real failure I could have is not seeing my experience for what it is — beautiful. How great is it that I can now turn these four years into stories to tell all of you? That my vulnerability can be a strength and not a weakness? These beige and white walls are witness to the greatest love I’ve ever had — Freeman. It is because of this place that I’ve known what it feels like to be loved, supported, and believed in. Freeman has taught me the difference between being lonely and being alone. I’m not alone when I can hear Dr. Marshall saying “Go Mavs” over the speaker. And because of the people Freeman has granted me with the gift of knowing, I’ll never be lonely again.

Time is not something to fear,

but something to embrace. As the end of my time here rears its ugly head, I can look at the goodness that is in the very air that fills this special school. I wouldn’t be the person I am today without my time here at Freeman. Who knows the beast I might have become without Mr. Pruett and his corporate mohawk, Mr. Schuster and his ... distaste for a certain blonde with carbon emissions, hearing the first “You’re so charming” from Mr. Peck, Mr. Lewis and his man bun days #neverforget, Mrs. Thayer and all the tests I begged not to take, Mr. Gallo and his centripetal faith in me (this is the one physics word I remember and I still used it wrong). A part of me doesn’t even want to imagine a world in which the hands of Freeman don’t hold me, but another part of me has to realize that that world will still exist in a few months. So, I learn to savor time instead of scare it away. Essentially, time being a flat circle means that we live in an eternal cycle of time — what happened to us before will happen to us again. So, Freeman, if leaving you means you’ll come back to me eventually, that is a future I can live with.

Counting Down to the Last Day



Anna Meiller
Mav Minute Editor-in-Chief

I’m not kidding. Although it might seem cliché, I believe that the endless amounts of busy work, the exclusive cliques that only include friends people have known since kindergar-

ten, the awkward group projects, and the overcrowded hallways are not experiences to cherish.

Now I am not trying to pretend to be “not like other girls,” by not liking my senior year or feeding into this idea of how being different somehow makes you special. Instead, I think that most students, at one point or another, have felt an underlying distaste toward school. What changes this attitude for most is senior year. We cherish things when they are coming to an end. And so, as the countdown to the last day of senior year winds down, I’ve watched more and more sentimental feelings emerge around me.

However, what happens to those unable to pull this sorrow out of them? What if there is no allegiance to this school’s community? What if all you see is the same school and the same classmates who have always walked the same gloomy hallways?

Currently, in my English class, some students and I are reading “Severance” by Ling Ma. This

novel speaks to the robotic repetition of everyday life, and how we turn to brainless zombies after long periods of such reiteration. Applying this to high school, when I look back on these four years, I feel interconnected with the brainless zombies in “Severance.” We go to the same seven classes, with the same people, in the same route to each class for a year before returning in the fall to do it all over again.

Now, when I am writing this, I do feel a pang of guilt in my stomach. After all this hatred has spilled out, I remember all of the teachers at Freeman who have worked hard for me to have a superior education. The teachers who have dedicated their time and effort to their students, helping to form the new generation who are (hopefully) drivers in intelligence, empathy, and kindness.

I also reminisce about my close-knit friendships and the individuals who show spontaneous kindness to those around them, some of whom they barely know.

Whether it is asking someone to join a group at a table or asking how they are doing, the little moments always make me smile.

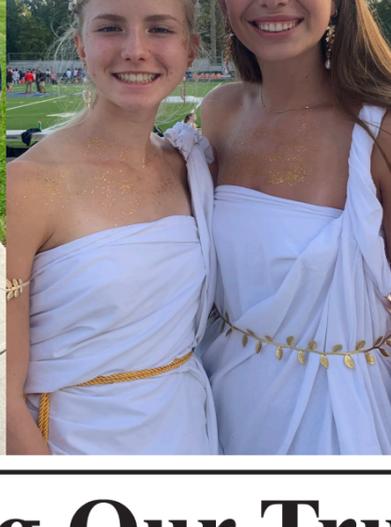
I distinctly remember my third grade best friend and I “playing high schoolers.” We pretended to talk on erasers that were acting as phones, saying “OMG,” “gurl,” and “she said what...” a little too much. When I think about my current friendships, they are not exactly as the ones my third-grade self acted out. My friends and I probably spend more time in parking lots talking and looking at cute animals at Petco than I could have ever imagined. However, to keep with the article’s theme, I will say my friends (and teachers) are separate entities to the school experience, although that might be toeing the line of school appreciation.

Last school year, I came to identify with the saying “You can sleep when you’re dead.” Now, this might not be the healthiest outlook on life, but I think this “inspirational” quote shows how much life can drain you. What-

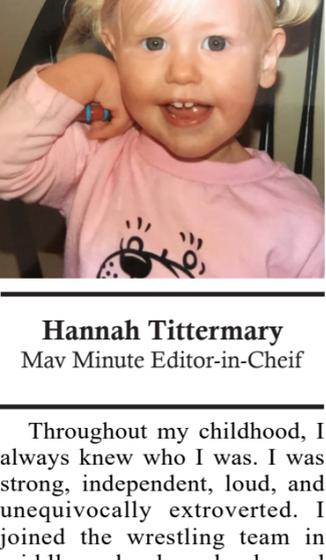
ever you are struggling with paired with rude interactions, piles of work, dim lighting, and uncomfortable situations all make school something that takes the role of yet another stressful place.

The bad parts of high school were not exactly as pictured in Disney Channel movies (I was never pushed into a locker, had thrown food at me, or had my head pushed into a toilet). However, I prefer those comical, bizarre experiences to the raw and real experiences of COVID-19, a teacher’s death, and friends coming and going.

Now I know I am expected to end this article with a grand speech on how—actually, guess what? I am so happy about my high school experience! However, instead of subjecting you to an overly sentimental paragraph about my growth, I’ll end my article as honestly as I started it: Yes, I did grow as a person. But, I do not credit my growth to the structure of high school, I credit my development to myself, my teachers, and the considerate individuals who inhabit the school.



Being Our True Selves



Hannah Tittermary
Mav Minute Editor-in-Chief

Throughout my childhood, I always knew who I was. I was strong, independent, loud, and unequivocally extroverted. I joined the wrestling team in middle school and planned

and coordinated a powderpuff game that got over 400 attendees, all while dressing however I wanted and being my true self.

Then, I got to high school, where I was surrounded by people I did not know. For the first time, I started to care about what people thought. After freshman year, I stopped wrestling. I started dressing just like everyone else and, though I was still my full self around my friends, I became quiet around people I was not comfortable with. I was scared to be denied their validation. This lasted through my sophomore year until I began to realize that the people who showed up for me were the ones I wanted in my life, and that changing for others would only make me a lesser version of myself. Once I started feeling more comfortable opening up, my high school experience took a u-turn for the better.

My junior year, although eroded

by outside tragedies, was when I started to rebuild my foundation. The first major moment occurred at Mrs. Curry’s candlelight vigil, where I went up to speak and openly cried in front of pretty much everyone I knew. When I got down, I received a slew of affection, warm words, and hugs. In the days that followed, people whom I didn’t know very well told me they were moved by what I said and had cried with me. Through the grief, I experienced a new level of comfort from the people around me.

In the remainder of the year, I opened up to new people and added to previous relationships. I reached out to old friends and reconnected with people I had lost touch with. I spent that year fostering relationships I could count on, knowing that these people truly wanted me for who I was. To clarify, I have always loved who I am, however, my doubts came from others’ opinions of me. As the months

passed, these cares subsided.

By the end of my junior year, I was full-blown Hannah once again. I started an internship with the National Women’s Political Caucus of Virginia and went to various classrooms to recruit people I did and did not know. From that experience, I hired 20 summer interns from Freeman alone. The next few months were spent creating events and postcards for female political candidates. The summer ended with me giving a speech to the leaders of the National Women’s Political Caucus at the national convention. I made lasting connections with my fellow interns and colleagues throughout the political atmosphere.

Then, my senior year hit, and I can say, without a doubt, that this was the best year of my high school experience. I found friends I love and whom I know love me and I have built a community of people I trust. I am fully open with people I

didn’t know beforehand and allowed all people around me to know my true personality. Now, when going through the halls, I constantly say “Hi” to people, knowing that I have made a community at Freeman.

I had a friend tell me recently that they have noticed my shift around others and are proud of me for growing into who I am today. The thing they notice most is that I treat all people the same — my personality does not change for a single person. What I love most is that my friends love me for that.

If I had to give one piece of advice to underclassmen, it would be that the people you are meant to be around are the ones who know you for exactly who you are. It can be difficult to build a community within a place that has so many pre-existing relationships, but I promise that, in time, your people will come along. Keep your head up, do your thing, and allow people to come to you. They will

The Class of 2024 Future Plans!



Longwood University
Cohen Atkinson
Grant Cornwell
Jane Garitz
Ella Post
Nicki McCormick



Emory & Henry College
Brooklyn Tipton



Institut Lyfe
Mason Cioffi



Virginia Wesleyan University
E.G. Taylor
Amaya Ward



College of Charleston
Millie Grymes



Texas Christian University
Hanna Piper



Simmons University
Everett Garner



University of North Carolina
Lee Sowers



Workforce
Aida Poore
Danny Medina-Barrera
Aidan Spencer
Christian Griner
Salvador Bernal
Elian Llorens
Clarence Brinson
Katherine Brantley
Cristofer Duran Pereira
Jack Godby
Austin Clark
Son Dinh
Darian Llorens
Tayjon Jarrett
Caleb Tufaro
Daniel Richmond
Deyra Bueso
Austin Clarke
Aiden Sullivan
Eric Hoang



University of South Carolina
Jack Buckbee
Olivia Branson
Henley Shumadine
Catherine Mottley
Emmie Davis



Pratt Institute
Ava Keppler



Pennsylvania State University
Morgan Moyer



Fairfield University
Tierney Ciaverelli



University of Notre Dame
Cooper Speidell



Loyola Marymount University
Christian Washington



Worcester Polytechnic Institute
Sarah Kang



College of William & Mary
Lorelei Kelley
Grace Hunsicker
Spencer Philips
Dory Urquhart



Virginia Tech
Charles Saunders
Sylvia Butler
Matthew Estes
Carson Aker
Meredith Stoneman
Lizzie Herod
Austin Deignan
Francesca Nolen
Nicholas Shaia
Anna Meiller
Hannah Mahan
Charles Cunningham
Leighton Cauble
Bennett Herod
Ellie Shugrue
George Pellei
Cade Hendricks
Nora Rossi
Owen York



New York University
Isabel Lafrance-Melendez



University of Alabama
Anne Douglas Council



Marymount Manhattan College
Ryland Ward



Liberty University
Walker Jordan



Virginia Commonwealth University
Jaylynn Walker
Monserrat Ruiz
Tam Doan
Adonis Morales
Angel Brinn
Saleh Ahmed
Nitya Kumar
Karen Israel
Sophia Snipes
Matthew Harris
Arnesa Smajlagic
George Tobin
Kayla Long
Mary Caroline Hall
Olufunke Akinsanya
Cayman Goode
Thomas Munson
Shiny Chandravel
Bianca Pavon
Edwyna Blay
Poppy Friske



Washington and Lee University
Charlotte Gardner



Elon University
Lily Holtz



Davidson College
Catherine Doll



University of Vermont
Willa Sharrar



Howard University
Savannah Babb



J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College
Aslin Galvez
Van Pham
Evan Milby
Trista Walton
Andres Bravo
Karolina Plungas
Iris Carlos
Amer Sabanovic
Brian Croxford
Rudy Martinez
Abygail Jones
Evelyn Sosa
Jayden Anderson
Yanar Moltashy
Rojai Patillo
Mohamed Kassem
JaNasia Cabbins
Levi Godzwa
Almedin Tibic
Victor De Paz
Ana Lopez
Mirmes Jusic
Kensington Mize
Thy Dinh
Drexil Rohde
Mary Samson
Aliyah Hadzic
Cierra Garland-Jones
Ben Rauscher
Jordan Mayers
Gryphyn Hilgenhold
Amar kesko
Keiry Gaytan
Tatyana Plata
Lawrence Jefferson
Justin Zepeda
Angie Mejia
Rashad Johnson
Sharai Chaney
River Farinha
Jyohna Wilson
Gage Kasten



Virginia State University
Mark James



Randolph-Macon College
Lewis Beach
Addison Yocom
Fiyori Miller
Ryan Bland
Seth Dzansi
Eleanor Tongel
Riley Mullis
Ethan Park



Virginia Military Institute
Owen Andrews



James Madison University
Reese Lash
Ava Flournoy
Shishira Nakka
Sierra Hancock
Virginia-Anne Harmon
Holly Jahn
Jamie Han
Megan Gustavson
Charlotte Holloway
Claire Smith
Avery Grubbs
Matthew Roberts
Merrick Mock
Matt Ciaverelli
Aiden Ward
Emma Nelson
Jack Winston
Moheb Riad



University of Mary Washington
Dylan Becker
Eva Milby
Lola Bender
Zelda Gaines



University of Tennessee
Ava Hare
Campbell Craun



University of Georgia
Caroline Frank
Henry Kirkeby
Sam Flippin



St. John's University
Kyren Johnson



Roanoke College
Timothy Wilson



University of Virginia
Ellie Grace Robinson
Afon Hessian
Allison McCullough
Mariana Mantovani
Will Cox
Hannah Tittermary
Shep Pounders
Katherine Pollard
Natalie Schweickert
Jeric Marcelin
Catherine Conway
Leo Schulman
Margaret Jacoby
Michael King
Ellie Wood
Matthew Kish
Ian Gilstrap
Annabelle Nee
Katie Hall
Alex Ayers
Angie Portillo
Joshua Hawkins



University of Minnesota
Twin Cities
Jailyn Pipes



Fairmont State University
George Ferguson



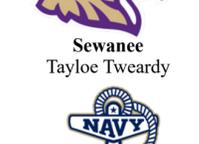
American University
Zeyna Mbengue



University of Pennsylvania
Grace Bowersox



Sewanee University
Tayloe Twardy



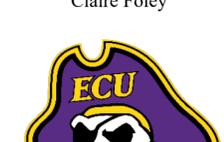
U.S. Naval Academy
Max Vest



Ohio State University
Celia Acey



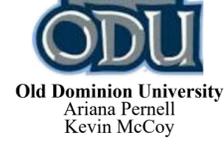
Auburn University
Claire Foley



East Carolina University
Brenna Fischer



Old Dominion University
Ariana Pernell
Kevin McCoy



Indiana University
Bloomington
Claire Stuhlmacher



University of Florida
Sherry Luo



Radford University
Stella Fredrick
Zach Sisson



Christopher Newport University
Darmani Alexandre
Mason Shepherd



Piedmont Community College
Kylie Crewell



Savannah College of Art and Design
Emerson Gamlin



Princeton University
Sastha Tripathi



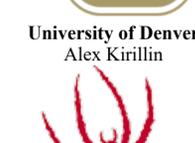
University of Central Florida
Iisa Elovaara



Furman University
Hollis Reynolds



University of Denver
Alex Kirillin



University of Lynchburg
Noah Duffy
Jacob Andrews
Ryder Warren



Lehigh University
Chandler Doll



East Coast Polytechnic Institute
Emmanuel Day
Gavin Bennett



North Carolina State University
Emily Ellen
Kate Sanne



University of Mississippi
Molly Stephenson
Mackenzie Fellows



Appalachian State University
Walker Bristow
Meredith McCaffrey



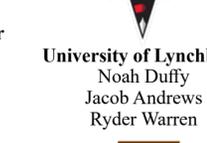
North Carolina Central University
Makayla Stewart



University of Miami
Nicholas Gavin



Lehigh University
Chandler Doll



Military
Logan Zimlich-Halter
Nathalie Abarca
Calvin Taylor



Trade School
Luisa Lopez
Jermaine Gamble
Hawa Abdulkadir

Riding the Waves



Ava Flournoy
Graphics Editor

There is an unmistakable sound in between the waves crashing on the shore and the water's run back to its home; there is a silence at that moment, one that I chased in high school. I wanted a period of time to retreat and take a breath while expecting another wave to crash within the

span of seconds. As the final days of school approach, I realize that I have been chasing the wrong thing; silence is not the reward, but rather the chance to ride the wave.

Those moments of silence seem nice in theory, but when they are really happening — a break from school, the time between when you get to class and the bell ringing — are they really so great?

In my time here at Freeman, I have learned that I need to seize every moment and not rush through something in order to have a little more time to watch "Gilmore Girls" (although rewatching it numerous times never gets old). I need to move with the current of life, expect ups and downs (because there will absolutely be some DOWNS), and grow from the experience. Although the waves of your high school and adult life seem daunting, just know that you will get through it.

Last year, my downs were countered by so many ups. Once, I had a very difficult time making it

through the day with a smile on my face, but one teacher took time out of his crazy schedule to make sure I was okay — I thank Mr. Gallo for showing me that type of kindness. As the waves took me through AP Physics I (even though there were definitely times when I wiped out), I learned incredible information from a wonderful teacher — physics and life lessons all in one class.

The tides will bring you in and out of experiences — the good and the bad. Instead of waiting for them to be over or watching the countdown on your phone drop day by day, savor the moment. Know that you will grow from all the things that happen in school. Whether it be the knowledge you gain or the people meet, there is always something that will inspire and encourage you to keep going. Let the waves move you through your journey. Don't struggle against them, but wade in the time of your life.

As you see the water begin to crest and form a wave, take a

chance and don't look back. When I decided to run for Class of 2024 Historian during my sophomore year, it was something that was totally out of my comfort zone. I never imagined seeing posters of myself lining the hallways, but putting my name out there helped me better understand myself. After serving as class Historian for three years, I can confidently say that working on projects within the school — prom planning, fundraising, picture taking — has prepared me for issues that will arise later in life.

Making the decision to ride the wave and not look back, whether it be in high school or something smaller, is the best decision I have ever made. It has allowed me to be present in the fleeting moments of senior year. It has made it clear to me that the friends I have made here are for life. I have found a community that has lifted me up in the water and in return, I do the same for them. Taking the wave metaphor a little too

far ... they are my boogie board (okay, most definitely too far, but you get what I'm saying, right?)

We all know that one quote from Archie in "Riverdale" about "... the epic highs and lows of high school football," but in my case, it ends after the word 'school' because I really don't know about the highs and lows of high school football. Even without the sports component, that is what this wave of school is: epic highs and lows.

Those moments of pure joy that seem straight out of a movie are the peak of the wave for me. Celebrating football games and singing along with the marching band, rooting for the senior class in tug-of-war during pep rallies, laughing so hard with friends that tears threaten to spill over, walking through the halls passing out copies of "The Commentator" — these are the moments I will remember for a lifetime. They wouldn't have been possible without taking chances and riding the wave.

Walks to Remember



Lizzie Herod
Online Editor-in-Chief
A&E Editor

For me, a typical school day consists of waking up, getting ready, going to school, eating, walking, and eventually going to bed. This may seem like a very basic and mundane day, but, at times, it can be so chaotic. Change is constant and unexpected things often happen. However, amidst

this chaos, there is one thing on that list that has stayed with me throughout my high school years — my infatuation with walking.

I've always loved having a schedule and routine implemented in my life — even if it's just one little walk in my day. Now don't get me wrong, the constant cycle and notion that 'every day is the same' has haunted me during the cold winter months. But through the constantly changing weather and school life, my walks have provided a stable escape. They first started during the dreadful COVID days of 2020, when my mom and I wanted to break out of isolation and take the opportunity to get fresh air. To this day I have maintained the tradition of going on these walks, whether it's with my mom or friends.

I have realized that one stroll, at least on a psychological level, can come to represent our high school experience. We go through ups

and downs, we go up and down hills. We meet new people and see new scenes. We gain knowledge through conversations and we deep dive into new hobbies. We build friendships over time and we meet the people that we will spend almost every day with over the next four years. There's a clear overlap and relationship between my walks and my four years of high school.

My freshman year was almost completely virtual, so at the beginning of my sophomore year, I was thrilled to begin a real year of high school and jump into new activities and classes. My uncharted future filled me with motivation and the hope of a fresh start. At the same time, I was just a little anxious underclassman looking up to the upperclassmen, wondering if time would flash before my eyes until I was the one being looked up to. When I begin a walk, I feel a sense of excitement and eagerness to start the journey. After a

long day trapped inside, I finally get to feel the outside air on my skin and let my brain relax while enjoying the ethereal scenery.

In my sophomore and junior years of high school, I was in the middle of my walk, taking it all in and trying my hardest to get the grades that would eventually lead me to a brighter future. These years were definitely the hardest, as many would agree, but they were also years that sparked growth and cultivation. Through the loads of work in my AP classes and the rocks in the road, I found my path. Through the areas of shade and conflict, I had to problem-solve in order to find my way to the bright sunshine.

As a senior nearing the end of high school, I'm feeling a mix of relief and melancholy that it's almost over. Toward the end of my walks, I tend to be out of breath and tired, but I find myself wishing I could continue walking and talk-

ing. Passing the little kids playing in their front yards reminds me of how fast it really happens. They too will grow up and go through their own journeys. They will also reminisce on the simplicity of scootering around the neighborhood or playing under the trees. The never-ending path in my walk seems to end so quickly, leaving me ready and excited for the next. That is why I love taking walks. I get to experience everything around me changing — yet I'm in the present, taking it step by step. The changing seasons — from falling leaves to sprouting trees — represent the altering phases of life and unsteady emotions within.

This is not to say that you have to go for a walk every day, but it is a reminder that time goes by so fast. We have to treasure it and take it all in because, before we know it, it's over and we'll have to wait for the next opportunity or the next chapter of our lives.



What High School is Really All About



Ella Post
Online Editor-in-Chief
A&E Editor

If someone told me that my high school years were going to be like this, I would have never believed them. As a kid, the movies and TV shows I watched heavily influenced my interpretation of what high school was going to be like. I expected there to be distinct groups: the popu-

lar kids, jocks, skaters, goths, etc. I also thought that in order for me to have friends, I needed to be in the 'popular' group, wear certain clothes, look, talk, and do certain things. However, when I arrived, I was shocked at how normal, and almost mediocre, high school really is. Everyone does their own thing and there is much less pressure to be "popular" than the movies led me to believe. The only similar aspects are football games, dances, and school breaks.

As a person who does not enjoy being alone, going to school has always been fun for me. It forces me to get up, see people, and interact with my community. I wish I appreciated the social factors of school more, as I now realize that it's something I'll miss the most when I leave for college.

Through these interactions, I have learned how to communicate and gained important knowledge about myself and my peers. That is what high school should be glorified for: starting your journey to find yourself and learning how you contribute to

a community, not how "popular" you are, what car you drive, what sports teams you're on, etc.

I love to listen, observe, and be present for life experiences. Some people may consider this a more introverted characteristic, but I see it in a different light. I think that being less talkative can actually be beneficial. You have the potential to contribute at the right moment in time, and you won't feel forced to say anything. Also, I would argue that having introverted qualities is not necessarily a bad thing, despite what TV shows and movies about high school might display.

Communicating can feel even easier when you don't try too hard to talk a lot — it will come to you naturally when you let it flow. Letting myself experience the moment and taking a step back from trying to be social has allowed me to form better connections and have more enjoyable interactions with others. I don't text or Snapchat a million people a million times a day; I simply respond to people whom I genuinely care about and do not try to spread myself out

too thin. The common high school ideal is to have a bunch of notifications, streaks, texts, or DMs in order to feel or look popular. In my opinion, I feel stressed out when I see too many little red icons at the top of the Messages app.

Not caring about how many people I talk to has also allowed me to focus my energy on hobbies that I enjoy, such as lacrosse, spending time with friends and family, making artwork, and more. I also have more time to complete homework and extra-curriculars that other people may use to scroll on their phones. I do love a good Netflix binge, though.

Even though high school feels bland at times, there are some really life-changing moments that occur during these four years. Being on a three-time state championship lacrosse team has been a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I cannot even put into words what it feels like right after the game is over when the team storms the field, jumping, crying happy tears, and cheering with excitement. The feeling of being surrounded by people who

support you and are there for you is really special. I hope everyone has a moment like that, whether it is in sports, musical performances, theater productions, art shows, or a club they enjoy.

As the days get closer to graduation, I become more and more envious of the people who get to stay at Freeman. I know I have so many new, fun, and exciting college experiences waiting for me, but a part of me is sad to leave all of the people I have come to know. The bonds I have made with teachers, coaches, faculty, and staff at Freeman are extraordinary, and I will remember them for the rest of my life.

I will also never forget the friendships I have made. I have had the honor of being in (mostly) the same friend group since seventh grade. The girls I hang out with are a special group, and I love them all. Leaving them will probably be one of the hardest things I will ever do. If I could do it all over again, I would, 100 percent. The Freeman Family will be in my heart, forever and always.

Closing the Final Chapter: A Review of High School



Lorelei Kelley
Copy Editor

Before I joined the ranks of “The Commentator,” I spent a good portion of my days writing book reviews, talking with authors, and

editing Advanced Reader Copies of books — a true Copy Editor in the making. In the hours I spent drafting, developing, and publishing those reviews, I acquired a love for writing that guided me through high school and gave me a way to comprehend the world around me. With that experience in mind, it felt fitting for my final article to be a review of the four years that have shaped who I am today (gosh, I sound sappy).

The Characters:
The coalescence of past, present, and future is unique to high school. All at once, you’re surrounded by friends you’ve known since elementary school and people you’ve never met. Although frightening, four years of meeting new people have opened my eyes to so much and given me friendships that will continue long after I (hopefully) walk across the stage at graduation — we’ll see how AP Computer Science goes.

When it comes to new friendships, nothing is more prominent than the close-knit group that is the Journalism II class. From drawing competitions that made us real-

ize why we’re journalists and not artists to our raucous, ink-stained, and candy salad-filled distribution parties, the abundant memories of my past two years in journalism still elicit a few giggles whenever I think of them. Even if Mr. Pruett takes it upon himself to compare me to the sad cat meme at any opportunity he gets, these months of writing and editing every section of the paper have gifted me with a group of friends who never fail to brighten my mood after AP Macro — seriously, what even is money?

It would be remiss to discuss those who have shaped my high school years, especially my senior year, and not mention the 20 individuals who accompanied me to Washington D.C., and survived the near-death experience that was the trip to our hotel. After a year of working alongside one another, nearly cutting off blood flow to each other’s hands while anxiously awaiting awards announcements, and being the most supportive group of 19 girls (and two honorary ones) I’ve ever met, I can honestly and wholeheartedly say that We the People was one of the best

experiences of my life. #nozoo. The Plot:

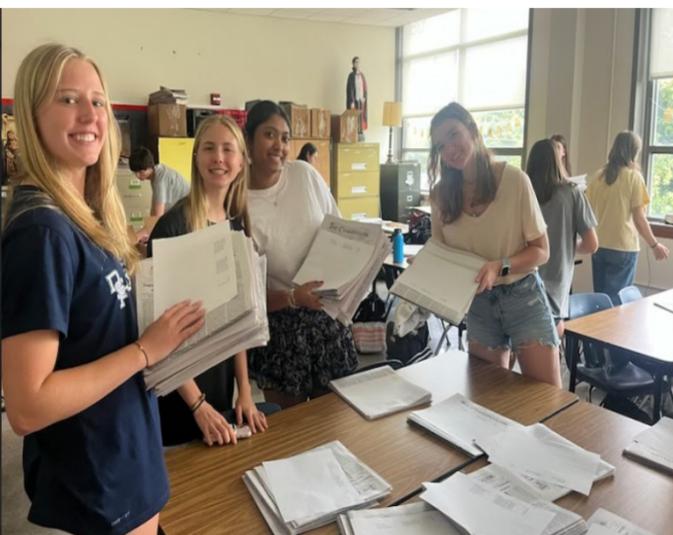
Although I officially became a Freeman student in Sept. 2020, my true high school experience began the following year when I was finally able to walk the halls of DSF. From there, I soon became enveloped in the culture of Freeman as I joined clubs, volunteer groups, and, eventually, journalism.

This is not to say that high school was without its challenges. Believe me, I barely made it out of AP US History alive. No one told me it was a good idea to take three sets of the same notes but I did it anyway — oops. That was definitely a mistake on my part. Yet, the learning curve I faced every year kept me on my toes, which is not exactly an impressive feat since the top shelf in grocery store aisles does the same thing.

Alongside each difficult moment or class was one that reminded me of the fleeting beauty of these four years. Even as I struggled through AP Calculus — you know you’ve matured when you can laugh at yourself for failing nearly every assessment in a class — I

thrived in my two history classes and found myself being challenged each day in Ethics. That’s really what high school taught me: being challenged is good. Being forced to question everything you believe in and learning to make informed opinions that you can defend is the best thing a teacher or friend can do for you. Without that, you lose the ability to grow into yourself and your beliefs. It is because of those friends and teachers that I can confidently take part in discussions, even if they deal with sensitive topics or require me to form and express an opinion — something I continuously struggled with until this year.

Final Thoughts:
Leaving Freeman brings with it a mixed bag of emotions. There’s the never-ending dread that I am nowhere near ready to start college in the fall that exists right alongside the need to escape the vicious cycle of senioritis. Despite hitting some rough patches along the way, I am forever grateful for the years I have spent walking the halls of Freeman and the time I have spent writing for “The Commentator.”



The Richest Girl in Richmond



Maggie Jacoby
Features Editor

If the clock is nearing 11 p.m. on Christmas Eve, my mother will have gone to bed and my father will be watching this old movie called “It’s a Wonderful Life.” Sometimes I watch it with him, but it is long, and I have not seen it all the way through. It is about

a man named George Bailey who is trying to reconcile his worth in comparison to others who are well on their way to achieving, or who have achieved, success. At a low point, with some supernatural assistance, George has a vision of what the community would be had he never been born. He begins to see the difference his life has made. This is affirmed by an outpouring of community support for his family at a time of financial need toward the end of the movie. He is left with a book inscribed, “Remember, no man is a failure who has friends.”

As a third child of four, I have always been trying to find my place. I wanted to matter and stand out. All the things we are told to do to be successful over these last several years in school have been my pursuit. It occurs to me, however, that these are the sorts of things that George Bailey coveted before his epiphany. Perhaps I paid more attention to that old movie than I realized, but I can confidently say that it was my investment in people that has shown me the greatest returns.

While some of these roots took hold in Maybeury Elementary School, it was not until Tuckahoe Middle School that I met the majority of my best friends. In eighth grade, things took a turn at the end of the year with COVID-19. We understood the dangers (as much as we could), but we still found ways to meet up, even if that looked like a social distancing picnic at the University of Richmond.

High school followed with an inauspicious start. The academic pressure, social cliques, and athletic expectations of high school are hard enough, but throw in a global pandemic and our challenges seemed to multiply exponentially. The lessons we might have learned from those who preceded us were turned on their heads. Our parents were trying to figure out their own lives at work and our administrators and teachers who worked so hard to ease our minds were similarly ill-equipped and uncertain.

After Freeman announced that we would start the school year off virtually, my friends and I decided we were going to complete online school together. We discussed

whose house it would be at each time, what we should make for lunch, and during lunch, we would play many rounds of Among Us, catching up on how our days had been so far. Although we tried our best to pay attention to our teachers’ lectures, it was so easy to get sidetracked and lose focus. I blame the two buttons in the top left corner of the Zoom screen (“mute” and “camera off”) that allowed us to talk about anything and everything during the school day. We would come together, and while on “mute,” we were anything but.

What could have been (and was for some) a very isolating experience during the pandemic became the best part of my days because of my friends. While we were navigating school virtually, one of the many new challenges, our consistent conversations were medicine. A foundation was built during this difficult time that, hopefully, will support the natural weight that time and distance bear upon relationships. Global pandemic fears eventually gave way to a rebirth in normalcy as we returned to school and took on tenth,

11th, and 12th grade, each with its own markers, like driving, dances, college talk, and, now, nostalgia.

What strikes me about these memories is how active and intentional we have been in loving each other. The constant flow of ideas about how we could spend time together was exciting, but upon reflection, there was always an undercurrent of great affection and mutual pursuit that was deeply felt. We confided in each other when we were struggling and celebrated our accomplishments. The key was persistence. We did not miss a day when it came to investing in each other.

At the end of “It’s a Wonderful Life,” after hearing that George’s family is in trouble, his brother, Harry, returns as a famous war hero, having lived a life that George envied more than anything. Upon his return, Harry maneuvers through the crowd that has gathered in George’s home, grabs a glass, and raises it: “A toast to my big brother George: the richest man in town.” As bittersweet as these days have become, I feel like the richest girl in Richmond.

‘Til You Can’t



Ellie Grace Robinson
Opinions Editor

In fourth grade, I had my heart set on being a member of the Student Council Association (SCA). My motivations were the alleged donuts they provided at meetings and getting to decide when Hat Day occurred. I wrote up my best attempt at a speech, prayed a few times, and presented with shaking

hands to my classmates. Then, Mason Shepard (the Class of 2024’s current SCA Representative and a good friend) handed out lollipops and I watched my dream of being on the Tuckahoe Elementary SCA slip away. When fifth grade rolled around, I did not reapply.

Fast forward to my freshman COVID year. Sitting in my kitchen at noon on a random Tuesday, I read through the Schoology update for requirements and expectations of being a class officer. I was bored and tired of the repetitive nature of each day, so I downloaded the document and filled out the application. My mom asked what position I was applying for, and I said “President! Go big or go home, right?” Four years later, and I’m in the final weeks of my fourth year holding that title.

In high school, there’s naturally this big pressure to put your best foot forward. We think we’ve escaped the middle school phase of bad breakouts and awkward brace

faces. We’re trying to discover who we are and who we’re supposed to be, knowing the countdown to the real world is approaching. But here’s the truth: there is time! These four years are an opportunity to try new things and leave your comfort zone. When the fear of rejection creeps up, the worry that the popular group won’t want you, that someone will reject your proposal, that you won’t get the lead role, or that you’ll get cut from the team, I urge you to remember that no one ever got anywhere by playing it safe. It is sometimes a painful realization that being the coolest in the room and appearing outwardly put together isn’t all that it’s chalked up to be. Doing nothing and just going along with what your friends are doing or what your parents tell you to do eventually pushes you back.

The world is expansive and all-encompassing and we are small and insignificant. Our time on Earth is finite, and we were made

to pack as much adventure as we can into it. If the average person lives to be 78, that same person spends about 26 years sleeping, seven years trying to get to sleep, and 12 years on their phones. This leaves only 33 years to do cool stuff and discover what makes you tick.

In 20 years, it won’t matter if you had an Owala water bottle or a Lululemon-filled closet, if you were labeled as a nerd or a skater or a jock. What will matter is if you feel good about who you are. This starts with not being afraid to swim against the current and fight that inner voice telling you to care about the little things because it’s not. One of my favorite songs, and one that embarrassingly makes me cry just about every time I hear it, is “Til You Can’t” by Cody Johnson. The lines “If you got a chance, take it, take it while you got a chance / If you got a dream, chase it, ‘cause a dream won’t chase you back,” consistently bring me to tears. Another set

of lines that gets me is, “So take that phone call from your momma and just talk away / ‘Cause you’ll never know how bad you wanna ‘til you can’t someday.” My biggest piece of advice is: when you try something and fail, know who you can run to because there will always be someone there for you. For me, it is my family. They provide me with unwavering support, for which I am forever grateful.

So, jump at those opportunities, knowing you have people to pick you up from the potential fall. Try out for the play, even if you’ve got terrible stage fright. Go on a date, even if they’re way out of your league. Apply for the job, go to the club meeting, learn to play the guitar, or run for class president! It is infinitely better to try and fail than to spend your whole life wishing you had tried, wondering what could have been different had you opened yourself up to new experiences and the possibility of new passions.

SENIOR SUPERLATIVES

SOCCER MOM & DAD



Brenna Fischer & Dawson Hancock

MR. & MS. DSF

MR. & MS. DSF

Nicholas Gavin & Lily Holtz



Leighton Cauble & Shishira Nakka

Most Likely to Win Top Chef



Matthew Estes & Afton Hessian

Most Likely to Survive the Hunger Games



Most Likely to Join the CIA

Josh Hawkins & Natalie Schweickert



Most Likely to be President

Ellie Grace Robinson & Spencer Phillips



Most Likely to be on Jeopardy

Luke Wolski & Annabelle Nee



Ethan Park & Nora Rossi

Most Likely to be on Broadway



Most Likely to be Caught in a Tardy Sweep

Christian Washington



Most Athletic

Max Vest & Walker Bristow



Most Artistic

Aida Poore & Evan Milby



Jack and Jill of All Trades

Charlotte Holloway & Shep Ponders



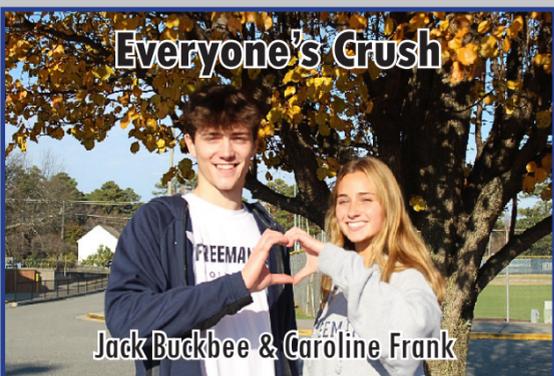
Everyone's Friend

Katherine Pollard & Mason Shepard



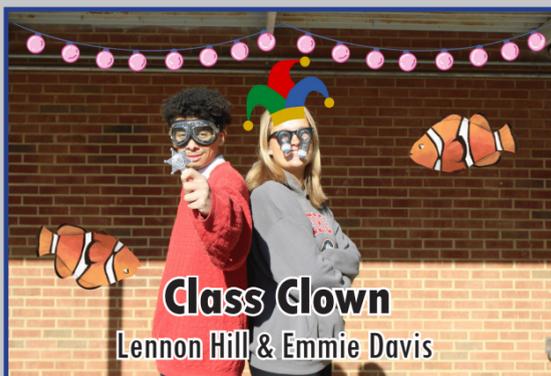
Everyone's Crush

Jack Buckbee & Caroline Frank



Class Clown

Lennon Hill & Emmie Davis



Best Smile

George Pellet & Ellie Wood



Best GalPals

Olivia Branson & Catherine Mottley



Best Bromance

Matthew Kish & Michael King



Best Dressed

Sarai Salazar & Jack Köhler



Down the Road



Jess Pruett
Staff Advisor

This year's senior staff of the Commentator has been a great class to work with. We found new stories to tell, new perspectives to explore, and new ideas

to share in a variety of different mediums, from the Mav Minute newsletter to our online content and social media, to our old-school black-and-white newspaper with a wonderful legacy.

This particular group of student journalists has it all: the drive to remain one of, if not, the best newspaper in the county, lovely senses of humor, diligence, grace, creativity, honesty, and integrity. I couldn't be prouder of the work they have done this year.

There was great leadership (thank you Poppy and Katie!) and lots of dedication and hard work done by everyone else on

the senior staff. But, as always, this is the time of year for them to move on to bigger and better things. Bright futures, all.

To my seniors: you will do great things. I am sure of it. I thank you for the friendships, the banter, the silliness—and the seriousness when it comes to journalistic integrity and solid, thoughtful writing. I have always said that this is one of the hardest parts of the year for me: bidding farewell to another group of journalism students, with whom I have had the pleasure of working with for two years. They are the ones responsible for continuing the tra-

dition of the Commentator. And, in the process of doing that, we have all become fast friends.

To Poppy, Katie, Lizzie, Ella, Shishira, Afton, Ava, Merrick, Ellie Grace, Celia, Maggie, Lorelei, Anna, and Hannah: thank you. All of your hard work, intelligence, empathy, compassion, jokes, and conversations will be missed. I consider myself very lucky to have had the chance to work with such bright and creative students. I am looking forward to seeing and hearing about your successes and achievements down the road. You will be missed dearly. Good luck and Godspeed.

