I
n this magazine, you will read about how our writers envision this issue’s theme—home. You will read about old homes and newfound ones, about how homes change as we get older, about homelessness, and about how climate change and natural disasters can endanger our homes. These pieces are meant to convey the complicated nature of the home, all the different forms and meanings it can take. There are countless more besides those contained within these pages.

For some, a home can be a place of safety and comfort, somewhere you always want to return to, again and again. This can be your childhood home or a place you only barely visited; the time spent there does not matter as much as how that place has affected you. When you are not there, you still carry it with you. It may change as you get older—new shops, new neighbors, new landscapes—and some people may lose the connection to the place they once loved because of this.

Your favorite spot may no longer exist, or it may look so different that it doesn’t feel like the place you once loved. For others, though, even the most drastic changes cannot sever the connection you feel to a home. Sometimes, merely the fact that your past self once inhabited this place is enough to preserve that past and keep it close. The best homes are those which provide a sense of belonging, no matter where you are in life or who you are with. The other side of this coin is feeling like you need to search for a place where you belong. The idea of home is endowed with so much importance and can be such a strong concept for some that to be without a home or without a place where you feel like you belong can be incredibly isolating. For others still, you may feel a sense of pressure to feel at home when you don’t—when you don’t feel comfortable in your hometown, when your home is unsafe, when you don’t feel connected to the culture of your home country. A home can, for better or for worse, hold memories of all kinds. Conversely, a home to which you do not relate can hold incredible emptiness. Home is the most remarkable of vessels.

And still, we can create homes for ourselves in others. Being with our loved ones can make us feel like we are at home—secure, at ease. Sometimes this person becomes our home base, so that wherever they are, there home is as well. This is a connection we cherish, and sometimes is all too fleeting. To lose a home—in someone or somewhere else—can be devastating. The multiplicity of home can here be a boon: we make many homes during our lifetimes. Though some take precedence at certain points in our lives, it is always possible to make a new home. The self can be the most lasting of homes, since we inhabit ourselves throughout our lives, though often in wildly different ways. Ultimately, whether it be in the self, in someone else, or in a certain place, the home has the potential to shape us in profound ways.

For me, I lived in the same house from age two to eighteen. Consequently, I have a strong connection to the idea of a hometown, though my conception of my hometown as my home has changed much since I left it. At first, the idea of leaving was something I looked forward to. I wanted to experience somewhere new, and in moving from Southern California to rural Massachusetts, I certainly got a change. On the downside, there was so much about New England culture that I didn’t understand. Even more, it seemed to me that most people at Amherst knew at least one other person here, oftentimes more within athletics, so I felt like I was left on the outside with no one to understand quite what it meant to be from where I’m from. Especially in talking with international students, I have realized that this is more often the case than I thought.

On the upside, the view was totally different. I loved (and still love) snow with a freshness that comes from never having to shovel the driveway as a kid, never driving with snow tires or scraping my windows, and never having snow ruin plans I’d made. And the fall foliage—well, no need to explain. Basically, for my first few months, I barely missed home at all. Even when I worked back home after my freshman year, I didn’t appreciate it, since all I wanted was to get back to campus and continue in this new chapter. Going home felt like going backwards. I wanted an internship somewhere entirely different, living on my own, discovering what it felt like to make a new home somewhere else—and I did that, eventually, and I wouldn’t trade those experiences for anything. But, the longer I was away from home and the more I learned about other people’s homes, the more I missed mine. I started to realize all of the things I was looking forward to doing once I was home, all of my favorite spots and restaurants I wanted to visit, and all the people I was excited to see. I’m glad that now I’m starting to fall in love with my hometown all over again, but I also recognize that my feelings about it are only possible because I left and because I continue to be away from it. Who knows how I will feel in five or ten years from now, or the homes I will make between now and then. Like I said, home has the potential to change us in profound ways. I hope you enjoy reading about a few of those ways in this issue of The Indicator.

Heather Brennan ’20 is the Editor-in-Chief of The Indicator.
The Report Card

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- LZ
Ballade

Kate Chang

A sketch of Southern California and Amherst

The hills of Conejo Valley seem to huddle together and press as close to the ground as possible to avoid being swept away all at once, stone dust bunnies threatened by the broom of dry winds and their own loose soil. The Santa Monica mountains which border the valley are dwarfed by their counterparts in the Appalachian, and even the Sierra Nevada. They are hovels for lowly foot soldiers, enshrouded by fortresses for kings. The only redeeming quality seems to be their east to west orientation, a small assertion of free will in contrast to the north-south direction of California's other coastal ranges.

Lesser beings to their divine superiors that they are, the mountains still take the form of giants. They lie in eternal sleep, sides gently sloping. Much of their surface is chapped and cracked, but they slumber through the oppressive heat, covered with blankets of verdant green and golden grain, a flash of bare brown sive heat, covered with blankets of verdant coastal ranges. The Santa Monica mountains which border the north-south direction of California's other coastal ranges.

by fortresses for kings. The only redeeming quality seems to be their east to west orientation, a small assertion of free will in contrast to the north-south direction of California's other coastal ranges.

Some isolated boulders jut out at steep angles to the surface, standing sentry to a coming place of rebirth. They have been worn smooth, hugged closely by plant life, their crevices filled again. As the sun sets, they glint warm reds and oranges. Scattered across the range, they light like beacons signaling between watch towers. Thus the land folds endlessly, where one might wander without fear of thirst. Some isolated boulders jut out at steep angles to the surface, standing sentry to a coming place of rebirth. They have been worn smooth, hugged closely by plant life, their crevices filled again. As the sun sets, they glint warm reds and oranges. Scattered across the range, they light like beacons signaling between watch towers. Thus the land folds endlessly, where one might wander without fear of thirst.

There is a rabbit in the moon, the grandmother says. When the world falls asleep, the child flits across shadows and chases the rabbit out to sea. The waves break and the rabbit disappears. The child, weary, drifts off unanchored. Awe! The rabbit shatters into a million shards. Dusk closes her lids; the earth is warm beneath her back. The voices around her fade. She ceases to exist.

Thus the land folds endlessly, where one might wander without fear of being lost.

Eventually, the mountains shed their dense greenery as they reach the Pacific, crumbling to sand. Mountains are measured against the sky, the tallest peaks piercing the clouds, aspiring in vain towards the heavens. Here, the sea lies at their feet, the sky captured in her reflection.

Her breath caught. It felt like a forbidden thing, but she couldn't resist once she had had the thought. She fled down the steps, down, down, into the dark bowels of the Arms music center. Heart beating, she asked the gentleman in his uniform if he might open a door for her. He gave her a kind smile—the first kind smile of many here. They climbed several flights of stairs; she could have the room of her choosing. She did not know the difference, she had never seen behind any, but it still mattered. She paused a beat, heat around her ears feeling the pressure of time: that one please. She was left alone: there was a skylight, the rain pattering against it, opening up to the forever night, a piano beneath. Lovely. What was it that Milton said? What has night—what hath the night—well, who knows. She played for—an eternity? A minute or two? Her fingers were not too quick; they had rusted from many hours away from the keys.

Someone knocked on the door. He stepped in with a smoothness that required no invitation. That's the piece my friend loves! Chopin Ballade 1. He shed his jacket; a few droplets from the outside world. He asked if she would play it for him so he could record and send it to his friend. Yes, why not. They talked about where they were from, some other things; he shared a sad film with her. They parted ways outside. She didn't see him again. He had decided to go to a different school.

She was brushing her teeth. Her neighbor asked, Do you want some tea? Why not? she replied, even though she would have to brush her teeth again. It was midnight. The tea was too hot; she jogged her knee up and down, nervous energy coursing. She was an unkempt child, mischievous; the senior held herself like a queen in her domain. Her energy was power, calculation, piercing, fingers in perfect rhythmic form, pattering on the arms of the chair. What are you playing? They listened to Beethoven. The senior tilted her face skyward, eyes brushing closed. Like that figure-skater. Like ballet. The room had a breath of magic—some temporal displacement, posters from another age, the Eiffel Tower, black-and-white, faerie lights strung up, wood and vines.

Thank you for playing. The visiting artist clasped her hands, his guitar still strapped to his back. Thank you, thank you, he said; his eyes were warm. As though the music had left a physical imprint, a press of lips upon the cheek.

Kate Chang ’22 is a Staff Writer for The Indicator. Illustrator: Emilie Flamme ’20
On Listing a P.O. Box as My Permanent Address

Ilyssa Forman
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A poem on feelings of transience, displacement, and lack of belonging.

The pinkish-orange light sets over the tops of buildings as I walk across wet pavement. Amherst is no home because I am everywhere visible. A nametag garnishes my bedroom door, slit of light pouring out from beneath to alert passersby of my presence. I have never navigated from one point to another without saying hello to someone and I cannot track the instances in which I was seen but did not see. Home is the hiding places I carved out with my body but had to leave behind—like the bathtub in my en suite bathroom, where I curled up and cried, fully-clothed, with the door locked and nobody knocking. Without this certain aloneness, I am an orange slice with its peel discarded. So, I have adopted a goodbye ritual for these particular places, in which I kiss my fingers and then press them to the door threshold before I step outside for the last time—a nod of gratitude to those undisturbed hours spent unraveling.

There used to be something ceremonious in how my family moved as a collective. We meticulously wrapped the unused china in newspaper and bubble wrap and with soft amenities, we mummified the grandfather clock—set to the time of my great grandmother’s death, it has not chimed in sixteen years. These objects are all my mother deemed worth protecting in the repeated dusty upheavals. Now, I carry my belongings alone, but have become well-practiced in their preservation, and in some ways, my own. This I was not taught and am forced to constantly relearn.

Home is the hiding places I carved out with my body but had to leave behind.

Ilyssa Forman ‘22 is a Staff Writer for The Indicator. Illustrator: Emilie Flamme ‘20
Home is where my family is, I said. So it is where the water is. Home is where the heart is, the mat outside my house responds. So how long can a heart live outside the body, no one asks.

When I close my eyes, I can see the bay beside my house. My home lives in my heart and behind my eyes, even as it sits outside.

I'm holding pieces of my family inside like silent grains of sand drawn closer by the ebbing water. My home is crashing back and forth. It flows between here and there, between Spanish and English.

And it is flooding. When I close my eyes, I can see the sea and it makes my foundation tremble to see how shakily it stands on the shore.

Pero, my heart is stomping out flamenco-style because it's missing you all, missing home. Every beat longs for an answering beat.

My body, my home is moving, oscillating with the waves that crash against it. It's a feeling and a place and it's moving between people. Our immigrant hearts know the feeling (and the ocean) better than most.

I wish the waves crashing on the shores between us weren't so sonorous. It makes me feel the distance more; it makes me feel the way my heart is split between both places in the echoes.

The heart likes to long for what it has and also for what it does not.

Long Island is just a sandbar, but it reminds me of my heart. And my ears are missing the sound of a house shaking with laughter and soothed by Spanish lullabies.


Climate disaster exists like the way a sound that is always a sound is nearly soundless. But it was the sound of the hurricane that whispered of vulnerability in my young ears.

The ocean was trying to tell us something, but it was falling on drowned ears. Trying to tell us that immigrants old and new will be (re)born.

With the way the ocean is eating the shore, with the way the increased incidence and intensity of weather, forest fires, hurricanes are breaking homes.

But look to the hands behind the hurricanes, feeding the earth itself.

Whispering our fears in Spanish, it's not the language barrier that makes words with no ripples.

Long Island was deposited by things greater than us, and those glaciers are long gone. But no one said that power couldn't change forms.

(the future reflects off the waters of our past)

And if we all are immigrants, will we fear ourselves, no one asks.

Bodies of water are flooding my heart now, or rather flooding my home now and it makes me wonder. Something tells me my heart (my home) is sick, tells me my home (my heart) is sick.

I have lived by the ocean my whole life and it still makes me feel ungrounded. My heart is unsettled in spite of itself.
Bodies of water are flooding my heart now, they are flooding my home now.

I wonder how long before this longing I am feeling now will soon be replaced by a different form of longing. The way absence morphs the bodies of people, and the displacement from their (our) homes morphs our (their) hearts.

the shorelines of my soul
are eroding. I think
about the way
movement makes us
feel more than anything
else. I think about the way
that the tides always tug us
in different directions, so
where will we go from here.

away isn’t really a place
or a choice in this case.
amongst the waves of change
the story is about
those who don’t have
the ability to move
against the current.

Climate disaster exists like the way a sound that is always a sound is nearly soundless. But it was the sound of the hurricane that whispered of my vulnerability in my young ears.

It was both Sandy and Irene, strong women, that taught me of destruction. Those hurricanes flooded my core, I was twelve the first time, thirteen the second.

My heart is in part my home, but you can’t really evacuate a feeling.

What does a home sound like when it is collapsing on itself. The wind shrieked from the cold, begged to be let in, tore against houses in pain. The wind howled in protest, in pain.

A transformer lit its body in brilliant flames before extinguishing to the wind. Stolen oxygen, and smothered life. A nearly soundless explosion, like the one I felt inside, the power of it all shown in its destruction.

Eight years have passed. I fear resignation and memory.

The hurricane is not the antagonist in this story. The antagonist is the groundwork laid for hurricanes, the antagonist is the response to hurricanes.

The antagonist is the way hurricanes have been made to devastate certain bodies.

When will the “environmental” issue will be an issue of the movement of bodies?
When will the “environmental” issue will be seen as an issue within the person and not outside of the person?
When will it be an issue of the home, and the right to live in one’s home?

remind me of my heart
and the way that our
movement here was one of hope,
reading letters in yayo’s scrawl,
pero yo no quiero
haceme ninguna ilusión,
yo casi estoy convencido
de que no voy a ir nunca.

remind me of my heart
and recognize that the word
ilusión in spanish
means both
hope and
delusion.

Collapsing is a process,
and this home is collapsing on itself.
I wonder where the heart will live if it is forced
to live outside the body in which it was grown.

Kiera Alventosa ’21 is a Staff Writer for The
Indicator.
Illustrator: Hannah Zhang ’21
Amherst Homelessness

On the night of Monday, November 4th, I attended a town forum about the housing situation in the Town of Amherst. It was held at the Unitarian Universalist Society, a small church marked by an intricate stained-glass window sandwiched between a Pride flag and a Black Lives Matter banner. As I walked in and found a seat, it almost immediately hit me that I was the only college student in the room. It was a strange sensation considering that nearly 100 percent of my time in Amherst, Massachusetts is spent in rooms with other college students. While waiting for the presentation to begin, I listened to the dull roar of small talk and felt an occasional stare targeted in my direction—my bulging backpack and the earbuds that I had been wearing when I first walked in had blown my cover; I was obviously a college student and people were clearly not expecting me to be there. Throughout the presentation, something kept rattling around in my head: the fact that I was the only college student at this forum was not just a little bit awkward—it reeked of irony.

Homelessness in the Town of Amherst

From 2017 to 2018, Craig’s Doors, Amherst’s only homeless shelter, served 172 individuals and had to turn people away nearly 200 times due to limited resources and capacity. Over 700 individuals use the services and resources of Amherst Community Connections, a case management center for at-risk or homeless individuals.

Of course, homelessness is not an Amherst-specific issue. According to the Boston Globe, in 2018, homelessness increased by 14% in the state of Massachusetts. It is not the fact that Amherst has homelessness that is interesting, but rather, what specifically causes it here.

There are the more general reasons. As Christine Brestrup, the town’s Planning Director, told me, “I think homelessness has always been with us…but I think that the recession that happened in 2008 exacerbated the homeless situation.” This is certainly a plausible theory. Amherst and the Pioneer Valley are known for having a somewhat tolerant population that is, as Brestrup puts it, composed of the kind of people that might see a homeless person and say, “Well, what can we do to help them?” Plus, Amherst has resources like Craig’s Doors and Amherst Community Connections, along with churches that provide shelter and a survival center where people can get clothing and food. Thus for people in need, Amherst might seem a suitable refuge.

However, Amherst’s most direct cause of homelessness is the unique housing dynamic that comes with being a college town. Though college students seem to be the largest contributors to the housing market problem, there is barely any engagement between the students and the town representatives working on this issue.

What Makes Amherst Homelessness Different

Housing, like any market, reacts to mechanisms of supply and demand. When it comes to a college town, these mechanisms function in a unique way. Since the population of a college town is mainly composed of students, faculty and college staff, the colleges have direct control of housing market demand. As Chair of the Amherst Municipal Affordable Housing Trust, John Hornik, put it at the housing forum, UMass is the town’s “largest landlord.” RKG approximated in its 2015 Amherst Housing Market Study that “the demand for off-campus housing this market generates in Amherst is between 4,000 and 4,500 students. UMass accounts for most of this demand.”

Not only do students increase the quantity of demand, but also the quality. Since students often find off-campus housing in groups of roommates, their pooled money can outcompete non-student renters vying for the same property. RKG’s data findings demonstrate that as demand has skyrocketed, supply cannot keep up. Between 2000 and 2010, Amherst’s total population increased by nearly 3,000 (much of which was a result of higher enrollment at the colleges), far outpacing the town’s housing growth of less than one percent. The elevated demand allows developers to “cherry pick” which housing market to serve, leading to a spike in the price of properties. This has created a housing landscape that has become virtually inaccessible to lower income renters and owners—and has wreaked havoc on the homeless situation.

The housing market displays a unique tension between the Town of Amherst and its institutions of higher education. Kimya Hadayet-Zadeh, a journalist and UMass alumna, discovered this dynamic while volunteering for Amherst Community Connections. She told me, “It’s hard for the average person not to see that UMass was expanding. Ever since I was a freshman at UMass, I became familiar with people being upset about the school expanding so much.” But shouldn’t colleges and universities want to expand their enrollment numbers? If they are able to provide higher education to more people, shouldn’t they jump at the opportunity? Senior Planner Nate Malloy agreed that UMass has a right to grow. But the more it grows, the harder it makes it for lower income Amherst residents to compete. This friction is a deeply complex issue. In order to address it, it will require both parties—the town and the higher education institutions—to collaborate.

And here lies the irony that I could not help but feel at the town housing forum. Why did I feel stares at the start of the forum? Why was a college student’s presence such an anomaly? Though college students seem to be the largest contributors to the housing market problem, there is barely any engagement between the students and the town representatives working on this issue.

Current Efforts to Combat Homelessness

To be sure, there have certainly been efforts on the part of the town to combat homelessness and provide more affordable housing. Brestrup explained to me: “The town has a...multi-pronged approach to increasing the number of affordable units...it’s not always obvious to people that this is going on...but incrementally we really are working very hard on it.” Some of the prongs of their approach include tightening inclusionary zoning bylaws, regulations that...
require a portion of new construction to be priced affordably for those with moderate or low incomes. Additionally, the town has put a significant amount of funding into affordable housing.

One specific instance of the town’s investment into affordable housing took up a new relevance on the Amherst College campus. On Wednesday, November 13, The Amherst Student, published a piece about the town’s commitment of $500,000 to Valley Community Development Corporation, an organization out of Northampton, to build 28 affordable units for different tiers of lower income individuals at 132 Northampton Road (i.e. right next to Pratt Field). In particular, the story called attention to a group of Amherst College faculty who had signed a letter against the town’s funding of this project. Considering the significant population of students coming from low income backgrounds, the story quickly became a hotly discussed issue on campus, as it should have.

But what is the date on that letter? May 28, 2019. The response from the Amherst College community was delayed by about six months. There are perfectly reasonable explanations for why Amherst College community members picked up on this story late. For one, school was not actually in session when the letter was first published. Plus, when students arrive back on campus, they are typically more focused on readjusting to the college routine. Still, while a six-month-late reaction is certainly better than nothing, it yields a lesser impact. When members of Amherst College disengage from our surrounding area, we lose input on important issues like Valley CDC’s affordable housing project. That is why it is necessary to pop the unspoken bubble separating college students from town residents—so that we can become proactive rather than reactive.

So the government is working on it. Local organizations are working on it. But still, something is missing.

Beyond the municipal sector, there are several local organizations working to combat the issue. Hwei-Ling Greeney, founder and executive director of Amherst Community Connections, described ACC’s philosophy simply: “Housing is the solution for homelessness.” ACC helps homeless or at-risk individuals navigate the bureaucracy of the housing system. ACC is engineered to be a “one-stop resource.” It brings doctors, therapists, and other specialists on site once a week in order to expedite the process of securing housing for their clients. Greeney explained the logic of ACC’s design: “How do we make their homelessness as brief as possible? By getting people who are involved in their process of getting housing on site.”

Organizations like the homeless shelter, Craig’s Doors, also work hard to provide resources for those without homes. But of course, as Greeney puts it, “Shelter is just part of this process. We want people to have emergency shelter for the night,” not forever.

So the government is working on it. Local organizations are working on it. But still, something is missing.

Tackling the Good, the Bad and the Ugly

Higher education is no stranger to collaboration. The notion of collaborative learning is deeply sewn into the academic philosophies of most colleges and universities. It presents itself as groups of students brainstorming solutions to problem sets together or sound-boarding ideas off of each other for an essay. Despite the familiarity that the colleges of Amherst have with collaboration, there are few avenues of collective action beyond the borders of their respective campuses.

One attempt to establish an official path of “town-gown” communication, as it is often called (the expression comes from the typical divide drawn within university towns between the residential and academic spheres), was the University-Town of Amherst Collaborative, or UTAC. I spoke to Geoff Kravitz, Amherst’ Economic Development Director, who noted that what people found most valuable about UTAC was “the opportunity to learn what was happening. For faculty and staff, what was happening

Though UTAC was effective at facilitating discussion, it simply did not have the resources to establish an actual staff and go beyond the brainstorming phase. Further, in the winter of 2018, Amherst shifted its form of government and Kravitz explained that “it was a little bit unclear how the town council would want to develop a relationship with the university and we didn’t want to presume that UTAC was that mechanism.”

Still, the UTAC model could serve as a guide for forming robust mechanisms of communication between college life and the town at large. Here at Amherst College, the Association of Amherst Student Constitution has a Student Town Advisory Board written into it. In theory, this body intends to group together Amherst College, Hampshire College, UMass and town representatives in order to keep communication strong. However, it is not currently as active as it needs to be.

Since UTAC stopped functioning, Kravitz reported that there are not necessarily “formal, ongoing forums for communication between say residents and faculty or students.” In other words, the AAS Student Town Advisory Board needs to organize and empower itself in order to truly be a formal UTAC replacement—a space where town and college representatives can continue to have an open dialogue about, as Kravitz put it, “the good, the bad, and the ugly.”

I’m Just a College Student. What Can I Possibly Do?

If you get only one thing out of this article, it should be that college students have a larger impact than we assume of ourselves. If you don’t believe that yet, reread the part about how students have fundamentally altered Amherst’s housing market. Evidently, when students join in force, we do in fact make a difference, for better or worse. It’s time to start channeling that power into a positive impact.

Some students have already gotten started. At ACC, Hwei-Ling Greeney works with student interns from UMass who get trained in case management so that they can help clients with their housing applications. Greeney remarked, “if we had to hire people to do the work that these interns do, we would have to raise an additional $50,000 to $200,000…” So despite college students being a primary source of the homeless problem, some are also taking steps to be a part of the solution. (Greeney will be looking specifically for Amherst College interns to volunteer during Interterm. If you are interested in getting involved, contact accinamherst@gmail.com).

Continued on p. 10
**Catastrophe**

Carolyn Thomas  
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A Short Story

B aby Esme wailed in her high chair. Father stuffed into the car almost our entire house contents. Momma baked her last batch of her famous snickerdoodle cookies. Ryan surveyed his comic book collection, his trophies, his Pokémon cards and tried to make the hardest decision for an eleven-year-old boy—what to choose to make the hardest decision for an eleven-year-old boy—what to choose to make the hardest decision for an eleven-year-old boy—what to choose to make the hardest decision for an eleven-year-old boy—what to choose to make the hardest decision for an eleven-year-old boy—what to choose.

Momma baked her last batch of her famous snickerdoodle cookies. Ryan still had time to say goodbye, but what about his baby sister Esme? Ryan could hear her sobs from his room and to him it was as if his two-month-old sister knew that something was very wrong. Ryan mourned the fact that he would never be able to share this world—the world he loved—with Esme.

Ryan carried his comic books, trophies, and Pokémon cards to his dad at the car outside. Ryan's father squeezed in the last of his favourite LeBron James jerseys, and then attempted to squeeze in Ryan's box. His father told him the car was at capacity and only things of meaning were allowed to survive. Ryan began to cry and his father told him to toughen up and stop being weak. They had to leave in an hour.

Ryan sought compassion from his mom. She consoled baby Esme and handed Ryan a cookie. He ate the cookie by ripping off the crusty sides, and thought about how the hurricane would rip apart his home in the same fashion. His mom, a woman filled with overwhelming love and compassion, sensed his sadness and pulled him closer to her chest. She drowned his anxiety in the loving warmth of her body. Ryan could hear his mom's heartbeat. It was slow and calm.

"Mom what if we lose our house and everything inside?" Ryan asked while choking on his words.

"It'll be okay Ryan. The hurricane may destroy our house, but never our home. Home to me is you, your little sister Esme, and no matter how much your father annoys me—he is my home too. A house is a building; a home is a soul. Our love is unconditional. Our love is adaptable and it will survive way beyond the constraints of this house. If you see it this way, home is everywhere." His mom told him while running her fingers through his hair.

"Let's go," Father yelled. "Everything is packed up."

Ryan walked down his porch steps for the last time and looked up at the sky. He saw blue specks, red stripes, green dots, and yellow spatters. He asked himself a question: how could something so beautiful bring something so ugly?

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“A house is a building; a home is a soul.”

Carolyn Thomas '23 is a Staff Writer for The Indicator.  
Illustration: Emilie Flamme '20

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**The Point**

The complexity of Amherst’s housing market goes far beyond my Intro Econ-level knowledge. There is no simple solution to lessening the impact of the town’s colleges on the homeless problem. However, one thing is clear: nothing can be done without reframing the issue as a dual-party problem. If students and higher education institutions are the source of the problem, then we have a civic duty to be a part of the solution.

As Greeney says, “…students need to look at this issue like a social justice issue, not just a housing issue.” Residents should not have to pay for students’ educational experience by getting evicted from their homes. That is not what a fair system looks like.

So next time there is a housing forum, or any town initiative that involves college students, there shouldn’t just be one of us in the room. We should not allow the ‘college bubble’ to limit us to reacting to injustice six months after the fact. We have a civic obligation to organize ourselves and pressure our institutions to uphold the values of collaboration that are rooted in our academic approaches. These values must extend beyond the classroom, beyond the admissions brochure, and beyond our campus borders.
Watching the Mountains

On Mortality and Mountains

The best time of year to watch the mountains is fall. The air is sharp and cold, the leaves are various colors of red and they fall in carpets, and the sky is a gray cloudy lid. These are not the "mountains" we have here in Amherst, not rising sleepy giants. These are colossal, powerful titans. These are Atlases, condemned to grip the edges of the sky. In the fall, they gain particular power from their size. The thunder and rain echoes in them and seems to become their voice.

But that is not the best way to watch the mountains. The best way to watch the mountains is to first forget yourself in mundane, busy life, in work and stress. Forgot the mountains are there. And then turn, and look at them. Sit in a park, among the grass, perhaps on a hill, and look at them. All the busy anxiety of day to day life over disappears. It is instead replaced by an elevation, an affirmation of life. It fills one with energy to look at a mountain, an energy to live.

I don’t quite know what it is about the human spirit that loves colossal beauty so much, particularly mountains, but I can guess. I think it has something to do with our mortality. Mortality, though, is not just death. It is a continual psychological curse. And it is a threefold curse. First, mortality leads us to cling to immortal values. The first thing we try to cling to is ourselves. When we realize that we are mortal, we turn to external values, something valuable we contribute and add to, such as society or humanity. But society, and is similarly, is mortal, and so the curse is rekindled again. Secondly, mortality leads us to believe that everything around us shares our ailment, that everything around us is temporary. Combined with the first part of the curse, we are constantly flitting from value to value. Nothing seems to us immortal. The third curse of mortality is forgetting we are mortal and mistaking immortality for life. The fundamental aspect of life is temporality. All life we know ceases. Life is defined, in part, by its inevitable cessation. Thus, it is a contradiction to assert that life which does not die is life. It is like asserting a decaying thing which does not decay is decaying. It does not make sense. Immortality is not life. We mistake ourselves for immortal because our comprehension of death is poor, and so we extend ourselves infinitely, not seeing, or not wishing to see, personal oblivion. So we mistakenly go through our lives immortal, that is, we mistakenly go through our lives lifelessly.

This is our ailment, and it is this ailment which mountains cure. Staring into the face of a mountain we are shocked out of our fundamental anxieties. They become so obviously foolish. The mountain shocks us because it is terrifyingly beautiful, it is truly immortal. We remember we are mortal, and we remember, simultaneously, that there are immortal values. The mountain’s beauty becomes an immortal value we can cling to. The mountain alleviates the curse of mortality, and leaves with only mortality’s benefit; life.

Looking on the mountains is to affirm life. It is to remember the values of life. It is to remember we are fundamentally temporary, fundamentally unimportant. The world can never be centered on you, the mountains say, because the world has no ears to listen to you, no eyes to look at you, no mouth to respond to you. But we would not want to be important. To be important is to be in some way immortal. To be immortal is to not live.

The mountain shocks us because it is terrifyingly beautiful, it is truly immortal. We remember we are mortal, and we remember, simultaneously, that there are immortal values. The mountain’s beauty becomes an immortal value we can cling to.

Ross Kilpatrick ’23 is a Staff Writer for The Indicator.
Photo by Grace Davenport ’21
I.
It is a shell, half baked, saturated with fresh dust, shimmering in the light of newly-inserted windows, dressed in plastic house-wrap. Inchoate, incomplete, inconceivable. The constructors have yet to erect the banister along the stairs, up to the second story. That’s dangerous. A ten foot fall is too much for a six year old girl. She presses her body against the wall—her wall—and creeps up the stairs, stepping quietly, fearfully, in this house that feels haunted, despite having never been inhabited, despite not even being a house yet. She looks into the empty box her parents call her future room, but she doesn’t see anything.

II.
Everything is white in this house. Every wall, every ceiling. It feels pure, clean, and if she looks up and focuses, the world contracts to a bleached little box. She likes it. She asks nicely, and her father flips her upside down, and it feels like she’s walking on a blank sheet of paper, the kind she steals out of the printer to draw out her fantasies on. The universe turns inside out, gravity reverses, everything feels correct, but the moment passes. She’s too old for this to go on for much longer. She ends up back on the floor.

III.
This house, this home, holds everything. It holds her markers and her books and her stuffed animals and her Legos and her favorite dress and her beanbag chair and her brother. And her brother. They play, everyday, hours, sometimes sketching out their imaginary worlds on the kitchen counter, other times building up slightly more real worlds in the basement with the bins full of unorganized Legos and the occasional unwanted Mega Blok, all these plastic pieces their mother managed to collect from the garage sales all around town, weekend after weekend, looking to augment her kids’ collection just a little bit more with the five, ten dollars she had to spare. This is how she and her brother spend their time. They construct their own adventures with these discrete blocks of wonder—they sink into the warmth of a familiar parallel universe. Until she finds the dead spider in the Legos, of course. There’s always a dead spider or two in the Legos. She scuttles away; the atmosphere breaks. She doesn’t want to play anymore, so she runs up the stairs, to her mother, hoping that the next time she looks back, it’s all gone.

IV.
It is a shell, hard, dull, but holding life within, a life inaccessible, impenetrable, a life that still belonged to someone else. It is a shell, hard, dull, but holding life within, a life inaccessible, impenetrable, a life that still belonged to someone else. This house seems like it wants her to focus her attention elsewhere, this house, with its dull exterior, the slightly overgrown shrubs in the front yard, the eroding blacktop of the driveway. Nothing like her home—her old home—with its scarlet brick face and neatly lined-up trees framing the sidewalk. She feels like an intruder as she runs her fingers along the peeling seam of the flowery wallpaper lining this box her parents call her future room. Soon, she’ll displace the memory of the now-dead woman, the mother of the man selling this house, who used to live here, who slept in that bed, who used that bathroom each morning. But for now, her parents haven’t bought the house yet. She is an intruder.
V.
Tacky, tasteless, dated, undesirable. Her parents say this relentlessly, but she continues to cling, in a fit of teenage rebellion, to the wallpaper which has surrounded her for years, this floral pattern which she thinks of whenever she closes her eyes and tries to imagine her room, the room she cannot quite visualize, just as she cannot quite visualize anything, really. Spending so many hours reading and studying and resting and crying in here has just left the imprint of these flowers in her mind, in spite of it all. But her parents rip down the wallpaper and paint the walls an enthusiastic orange, a far departure from its subdued predecessor. The orange unsettles her at first, but soon enough, that floral echo fades from her mind.

VI.
It is a shell, large and looming, magnificent yet generic, the stature of the young high-rise brought back down to earth by the ever-bustling subway station and the pervasive scent of dog urine. This apartment building I never quite lived in, the apartment that my mother and brother live in while he studies at NYU, won’t be my home much longer. Home is a migrant force. Home seems to lurk a few steps behind, no matter where I go, no matter the houses I leave behind. Neither of the two houses I’ve ever lived in feels like it has space for me, the former almost certainly housing some other family, the latter holding empty bedrooms and my lone father, but I always seem to have some sense of home about me. Houses aren’t reliable. Houses change, houses betray, houses push you away in a bad moment and pull you back in the next. Home clings, home keeps you warm at night, home holds you upright when your legs feel on the verge of collapse. I lurk in between worlds, in between childhood and adulthood, in between two freshly divorced parents, in between college life and real life. I feel devoid of any stable location in my life, some place to put my feet down and stand tall. Houses don’t help me any. But at least, I tell myself, I have home.
There are certain places where invisible things remain concealed for more months out of the year than others. Los Angeles was always one of those places.

This doesn't feel like home.

But I know I must be close enough because I pick up on the lingering scent of something burning. The air is saturated with grey smoke, flooding into the once clear skyline of the city. I imagine what it must have been like, her first sparks of light. Her first few flickers must have been innocent, charming until she grew greedy, unable to control the lust so she drank in all the oxygen, seducing her way in every direction, consuming all that she touched—the dried, the lifeless, the young, the old, and even the deeply rooted. Gluttony overcame her as her flames danced boundlessly through the forests. She was dangerously beautiful—those captivating reds and oranges, yellows and blues—but she was a ravenous beast, a manifestation of man's sinful, reckless behavior. I follow the smoke through six cities until her trails melt into the horizon, and her scent is overpowering by gusts of salty ocean air, bursting through the car windows. Suddenly, my eyes begin stinging and I am reminded suddenly of all that I love and hate about the horizon by the water—one so reflective of a deteriorating world, so deceptively beautiful, I cannot even begin to admire or despise it without drowning in the thought of my own singular passionate and frail existence.

I know I must be close enough because I recognize the way my feet sound as they pound down the neighborhood sidewalk. The cadence has not changed … left, right, wide left, right, left … I make sure every step falls between the almost perfect squares carved in the cement, gracefully dodging all the cracks that once caught the wheels of my roller backpack on the way to Ms. Zeidburg's third grade class: the first portable facing the basketball courts.

But Ms. Zeidburg doesn't remember me anymore.

So finally I decide I am not home.

You tell me that leather-lined gloves aren't meant for the snow. I take them off and curl my fingers around your bare hands. I decide I like it here, where the invisible can come out of hiding.
river channel

a candle light dance
in the center console,
a mere speck of tangerine in
a sea of darkness, looking
out at the distant houses
tucked away in the blanket
of night, visible only from
living room lamps whose
luminance jumps out through
windowed-walls.
houses of glass.
and i wonder what lives
they live, across the
river's channel.

Order

There's no order in the world
And I find myself wondering
What's the point?
To give so much
And get nothing in return
To stumble along
Down desolate paths
Reaching out with eager hands
Grasping for anything
That feels grounded
Always unsuccessful
Always empty handed
And for what?

River

I sold my soul
One night
To the darkness
To a river of my dreams
So it could be free
To live them
The dreams I lost
The ones I gave up on

—Anonymous

Daughter Poem

—my mother’s hands
on pale dough,
tan and veined
with nails cut short
kneading—

flakes of thin
crust left on the counter,
that salt-and-flour
bite softened
by teaspoons of cold water,
chilled so long
that a small pond
of ice hugs
the beaten tin sides
of the cup, waiting
to be broken by
a child’s eager finger.

Each time, we would steal
sugar-covered strawberries
from the bowl, and she
would pretend
not to notice, even
as we licked
our lips of the
lemon juice aftertaste.

Sugared sliver caught
between thumb and forefinger,
she would place
the berries
on our tongues
like communion.

When I come to visit,
my grandfather
bakes me a pie.
He even carves
my initials into
the soft dome
of crust, knife tip
just kissing
the fruit
underneath.

What else
is left
but to eat, and
be full?

I do not know
how to love something
without fear.

I watch
my mother’s hands
roll the dough.

Heather Brennan '20 is the Editor-in-
Chief of The Indicator.
Featured Artist: Courtney Lowe

Courtney Lowe ’21 is a Contributing Artist to *The Indicator.*
ARTS & CULTURE

Featured Artist: Emilie Flamme

Emilie Flamme ‘20 is a Contributing Artist to *The Indicator*. These photos were taken in Lebanon and Russia.
ARTS & CULTURE

Featured Artist: Grace Davenport

Grace Davenport ’21 is an Illustrator for The Indicator.
Petition

BRING BACK OLD VAL CUPS

Figure A. Old Val Cup

Textured: Great grip control

Cool!

Gone but never forgotten*

Figure B. New Val Cup

Smooth: Will slip out of hand, spilling EVERYWHERE

Ugly.

Tapered?

Easily forgettable

*If anyone has any intel on where the hundreds of old Val cups went, send leads to The Indicator™ office