

A Policy In Honor of Professor David Wyman Good News for Students Taking ENG 098

By Josilyn Straka &
Isabelle Mascary
ASSISTANT EDITORS

Students needing to retake the ENG 098 course are now able to do so without the use of their financial aid and instead have the fee waived through the new David Wyman ENG 098 Course Repeat Policy. The policy is named after the late professor David Wyman who started this course retake idea back in 2017 as he was an advocate for the policy and worked hard to pass it, along with the English Department.

As quoted from the course catalog, “Fundamentals of Writing is designed to help the basic writer recognize proper usage of grammar and mechanics. Students will be introduced to the writing process and will produce at least five essays. Other forms of writing included are journaling, free-writes, and active learning exercises emphasizing student

success skills. A grade of “C” or higher is required for advancement to the next course.”

There are a variety of reasons a student would be in this developmental class. To name a few would be that a student has been out of school for a while and needs a refresher, a student that speaks a second language, or a student that needs more time to reach their goals.

According to Zach Buscher, “students are placed in this course because of Accuplacer scores, but now it has more to do with self-placement and/or, or as in the case of Dual Enrollment students, or high school GPA.”

Buscher also said, “we believe ENG 098 gives students the tools they need to succeed not just in ENG 101 and ENG 102 but all of their classes going forward. This course should improve retention and foster stronger outcomes overall.”

While speaking with Laurie Occhipinti, Dean, School of Liberal Arts, Education, Humanities, and Communications at MWCC, she mentioned during a policy committee meeting recently, that a faculty member suggested that the policy be named in honor of Wyman since he worked so hard to get the policy to where it is. She said, “he (Wyman) would be happy knowing his name is on something that is going to make a positive impact.”

With a lot of experimenting, hard work, and dedication, Occhipinti said now that the policy is formalized as of October, it will be listed in the MWCC course catalog Fall 2023.

In the past, she had to email professors to keep them informed regarding the policy, then they may pass this information along to the students who would benefit from it. Now students can learn about this



Photo courtesy of the Wyman family & MWCC

Professor David Wyman

policy and its information in the course catalog.

The tuition fee is waived to retake this course, a great benefit so the student does not have to use their financial aid. There is still an institutional cost however, and that comes from the President of MWCC’s budget and that then assumes the cost.

Professor Michelle Valois shared that Wyman was a fair-minded person. He hated big corporations, and greedy capitalists.” She added, “it is a beautiful thing that the policy is going to be named after him.”

Wyman was an English professor at Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC) before his passing earlier this year. He was also a poet, he published two anthologies, *Proletariat Sunrise*, including poems with the concern of global warming and apocalyptic

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Remembering Megan Bower Sincere, Charismatic, and Adventurous, Bower Will Be Dearly Missed By All Who Knew Her

By Isabelle Mascary
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Megan Bower was an Automotive Technician student at the Mount who unexpectedly passed away on September 22. Born and raised in Littleton, Massachusetts, she was passionate about her dreams, family, friends, and, most importantly, helping others. She had a major impact on those she met. Although she has passed on, there is something we all can learn from her story. She was not just another young woman that passed away from an unfortunate accident, she

was a beam of light, gone too soon, but her story will live on and help the lives of others, just as she lived.

Megan loved to travel. Alongside her recent boyfriend, “They were all over the map and traveling to Canada,” her mother Anne Bower shared. “She went around the US by herself.”

In 2021, Megan took three weeks off and bought herself a Prius because it was fuel efficient, and she was able to plug in her electric lunch box while driving herself around the country. “It totally freaked

me out as a mother when your daughter wants to do something like this,” Anne said. But being the explorer and adventurer that she was, “she did it.” When she was not working on a vehicle, her hobbies included surfing, rock climbing, riding her motorcycle, and also taking care of her two cats.

“Megan always had an outdoor voice,” her mother shared. “You cannot take her anywhere and think you’re going to have a normal tone inside a restaurant,” Anne Bower chuckled.

If they were going shopping,

she would have to remind Megan to take her delivery down a notch. “She was just so out there and had this zest for life and had to make her voice be known,” Anne Bower said. Reminiscing on the time they took a weekend trip to Vermont last year, she said, “When you chatted with her, she was a motor mouth a mile a minute.” Anne Bower laughed, “She was just so excited in her personality.”

Megan not only dreamed big,

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Acknowledging our Holiday Differences

MWCC Students Share Perspectives on Seasonal Celebrations



Photo by Stephanie McCabe from Unsplash

By Lexi Gallagher

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

With Thanksgiving having recently passed and the rest of the Holiday season coming up, it is important to acknowledge that these holidays may not be celebrated or accepted by all, and some may not be spending the day(s) as they wish.

Nursing student Haylie Drew feels this impact when it comes to her job at the Jaffrey Rehabilitation and Nursing Center.

“On Thanksgiving this year I worked at the nursing home,” Drew said. “My family goes to my grandma’s house for Thanksgiving, but I unfortunately have missed this every year since I have worked for the nursing home.”

Another Nursing student at the Mount, Sarah Glodgett, who also works for a nursing center is going through similar struggles in the holiday season.

“It is required that we all work at least one holiday a year, normally more than that,” Glodgett said. “It is a struggle

at times, but some residents do not have visitors on these days, so it is important to me to try and make it special for them and remember to be thankful for what I have.”

Drew feels similar in caring for the residents when they may be feeling lonely.

“Thanksgiving to me means being thankful for who you have but also helping those, like my residents, who don’t have anyone,” Drew said.

Jessica Jablonski, a Criminal Justice major, switching to Graphic Design, has mixed feelings about the Thanksgiving Holiday.

“Thanksgiving to me is a holiday where I get to eat delicious food with my family, but also more importantly, a time where I like to reflect on the actual history behind Thanksgiving and give my respects to the people who were negatively impacted by the history,” Jablonski said. She continued to state that the past is “extremely messed up” and “everyone should be taught the real history of this holiday.”

STEM, Cannabis, and Beyond!

The Cannabis Industry Has a Bright Future and is Here to Stay

By Alondra DeLeon Guimaraes

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

STEM week was underway running from October 17 to the 21 at Mount Wachusett Community College. Many events were planned that week including a panel presentation on “The Future of the Cannabis Industry in North Central Massachusetts and Beyond” which was hosted by Career Services.

The panel included Morgan Hopkins and Stephanie Weaver who are cofounders from Cardinal Point Collective LLC based in Fairport, New York. Tom McMenemy, co-founder of Temple Hill Collective in Orange, Massachusetts, participated in the panel as well.

What makes the industry successful anyway? Career services presented that in May, over three billion dollars were made in gross sales from cannabis products. According to the Cannabis Control Commissions in Massachusetts, there are 375+ licensed retailers, 275+ cultivators, and 225+ manufacturers. A successful growth is evident based on these facts alone. As Kyle from Career

Services puts it, “The industry is here to stay.”

“Although it’s a growing industry, it is also very highly regulated. There are also so many opportunities for companies in this industry to be profitable if innovative,” said Hopkins. For example, “It is illegal to cross state boundaries with manufactured products because of the different state regulations,” according to McMenemy.

In this case, companies must invest in making business within the other state partnered up with to avoid the action of crossing states and violating state regulations. This opportunity leads to a benefit in the cannabis industry which requires these collectives to hire employees locally with different backgrounds.

Most people didn’t first start or major in the cannabis industry. Panelists Hopkins and Weaver had different degrees that they were both able to incorporate into talent and knowledge to help cannabis businesses grow. The most needed positions right now in terms of STEM are engineers in chemistry, science, or basically

any scientific engineering background that could help meet “the strict regulations just to have 5 milligrams of cannabis in gummies,” McMenemy said.

However, one doesn’t need a degree to join this field. Mount Wachusett Community College teamed up with Online Cannabis Education to offer certifications for cannabis industrial related careers. For those looking to start a career, the first one must be twenty-one years of age. Secondly, McMenemy recommended starting off as a budtender. “You will get and learn the retailer experience and skills necessary,” the panelist said.

How does the future look for cannabis? So far it looks bright even though the field is strictly regulated. Revenues are expected to increase, new career opportunities, company expansion or collaborations, technology advancements—you name it! “Just take a step back and see where you can fit into the cannabis industry” Weaver said.

Photo by David Gabrić from Unsplash



Have a Story to Tell?

If you’ve got the scoop on the latest community news, feel free to contact our editors about adding your voice to the *Observer* crew! To reach out, send an email to:

mountobserver@mwcc.mass.edu

Letter from the Editor: The Value of our Voices

Mount Observer Editor-in-Chief Reflects on Time at MWCC and Relays Her Hopes for the Future of the Paper

By Maddison Willigar | EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

If you had told me on my first day of college that I would be writing a farewell letter as the Editor-in-Chief for Mount Wachusett's student newspaper, I don't think I would have believed you.

I came to the Mount in the Fall of 2020 as an unsure and confused liberal arts major with no idea what she wanted to pursue after college. I settled on Liberal Arts with the hope that electives would give me the room to explore a bunch of different avenues, all while getting my base courses out of the way.

Now getting ready to graduate from MWCC in less than two weeks, off to major in either English Writing at Keene State or Creative Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, I finally feel like I am able to hear my own voice, and I owe a large part of that to *The Mount Observer*.

Nearing the end of my first semester at the Mount, the possibility of taking Journalism 1 was presented to me. As a quiet and sometimes socially awkward person, I felt an overwhelming amount of hesitancy. However, as someone who always gravitated toward the Rory Gilmore and Chloe Sullivan characters of the world, there was an even bigger feeling of intrigue that I couldn't shake.

I decided to sign up for the course that spring, but I was still hesitant. Yet, after a few weeks of learning, writing, and interviews, I felt the pit in my stomach slowly begin to shrink. Something about the writing of this class drew me in, ignited a spark of interest I hadn't felt during my first semester, and I wasn't ready to let go of that feeling.

That next fall, I decided to step out of my comfort zone again and sign up for creative writing, a class I had been eyeing since my first semester. The class was everything I had dreamed of and more, and it wasn't long before I decided that I wanted to switch my major.

I had grown up writing songs, plays, club proposals, you name it, and it was in a composition notebook in my bedroom. Yet, when it came time to decide on a major, writing was never something that crossed my mind. However, after taking these two classes, it was all I could picture myself doing.

After switching to the professional writing track, I signed up for Journalism 2. Throughout the course of that semester, I grew even more comfortable with the journalistic process and felt like I was finally coming into my writing style and the kind of articles I enjoyed writing.

Toward the end of the semester, I was offered the position to become *The Mount Observer's* editor for the Fall 2022 semester, and though there were millions of questions and doubts that raced through my mind, I couldn't say no. There was always something outside the capacity of my comfort zone that screamed to me, taught me, changed me, and I needed to experience that one more semester,

especially since it would be my last one at the Mount.

Over the past few months, I have witnessed the importance of *The Mount Observer* as a vessel for students' voices from a new perspective. College is about shaping our minds, growing, and becoming aware of ourselves and the society we live in, and having an outlet in which we can share our thoughts, realities, and experiences with others is a powerful tool.

By letting your voice be heard in whatever article you write, you give a voice to others, and I think that is what *The Mount Observer* means when it says: "Voices of the students of Mount Wachusett Community College."

Katie Fuller, the new advisor of the *Observer* this semester, echoed this sentiment throughout the time I was able to work with her. She reminded me of the importance of involving students in every fiber of the paper and how this is a student space that deserves to be advocated for. This mindset was something that our advisor of many years, Professor Sue Goldstein, taught us as well.

Professor Goldstein continuously embraced and modeled what these nine words meant. She highlighted the importance of journalistic integrity and our responsibility as journalists to uphold this with our words. Professor Goldstein was the biggest supporter of student voices, and I am honored to have worked with her for two semesters and to have been given the opportunity as the editor for this semester. With the talented and dedicated Isabelle Mascary taking over as editor in the spring, I have no doubt the paper will be in good hands.

Every contributor and editor this semester worked so hard, and I found myself constantly amazed by the depth of ideas and weighty stories they wanted to tell. Each writer was eager, willing to revise and re-interview until they carefully crafted a piece they felt was worthy of being on the page.

Even when we decided to put together a Halloween edition of the paper (*The Count Observer*) together, quite last minute, everyone was beyond willing to do whatever they could to pull it off. Students were writing extra stories and getting last-minute pictures on top of their normal assignments just to have a creative and spontaneous issue, and this hard work paid off. From every little detail, our graphic designer Tom Hill Jr. added, to the creative content that filled each page, this issue was my favorite to put together the whole semester.

These are the kind of voices I hope continue to fill the pages of *The Mount Observer*: every size, shape, tone, and differing level of volume they have. With the paper, I hope students are able to see that their words hold power and that through this, they can create a feeling of empowerment for others because, without our voices, the halls of MWCC will become silent.

During our time here, each of us are given the opportunity to let our words echo off the campus walls, but the question is, what will you have to say?

The MassTransfer Program

An Affordable Transfer Path for Students Going to a State U or UMass School

By Devin Bowler

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

College is notoriously unaffordable to the average family, which can make getting a worthwhile education difficult. This is why many colleges in Massachusetts have joined a program called MassTransfer to aid in getting a bachelor's at a well-established school while not breaking the bank.

The MassTransfer program is a program where Massachusetts public colleges and universities have joined forces to aid cost-saving transfer paths to reduce prices while getting a State U or UMass bachelor's degree.

The idea is to go to a local community college and follow a set transfer path to get your associate's and then transfer with 100% admission to a State U or

UMass school.

There are requirements that students must reach in order to be eligible for transfer, per the MWCC's transfer path found under associate degree options on their website. First, you must enroll at an eligible community college, which you can find on their website mass.edu/masstransfer/.

Next, you have to follow a

series of required classes in order to qualify for the transfer, and while taking these classes, you must average a C or 2.5 GPA, and this will vary with your major. Then after that, you must submit a transfer application to your school of choice that is in the program, and as long as you meet the requirements above, you can transfer.

After conversations with

one of the MWCC's transfer counselors Marcus Williams, he told me, "When enrolling at MWCC in regards to following a transfer path, it is very important to discuss how and when to take your required classes."

This brought up the idea of summer classes, and if you were to take summer classes

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Growing Gratitude, One Leaf at a Time

The Brewer Centers “Grattitude Project” Aims to Encourage Optimism and New Mindsets

By Alondra DeLeon Guimaraes
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Between November 1 and 30, down the hall from the college bookstore and campus police, slightly hidden from the wide open, one may have seen a welcoming vinyl tree decorated with colorful sticker-like leaves with grateful statements written on them right in front of the Brewer Center. This inspiring work of art was known as the Gratitude Project.

“I came up with the idea,” stated Michel Cocuzza (pronouns: she, they, them), who is the Civic Engagement Coordinator of the Brewer Center. “I’m always looking for different ways to help students with their mental health.”

How does this project work? Students are encouraged to stop by and write on a leaf at least one thing they are thankful for. Then, that leaf will have a spot on the tree outside the center. “When

you are grateful for things, it literally changes your brain waves,” Cocuzza explained. “I am a visual person and I thought it would be nice to portray a visual aspect of gratitude through a tree overflowing with leaves that people can walk by and see.”

According to the coordinator, the project came just in time for the season of the mid-semester slump— in which a majority of students drop out of classes. In addition, she recently learned from studies that anxiety and depression among students have reached a new high at 60%. Prior to the pandemic, it was just 40%.

“It is real! I would know because I have studied here [MWCC] before and know how it feels,” Cocuzza emphasized. “Sometimes dark things are just so big and we just need to look for our strengths. Students need to be optimistic and seek out their strengths. This [the Gratitude



Images provided by Alondra DeLeon Guimaraes

The MWCC Gratitude Tree

Project] is a way to help change their mind set a little bit.”

Once the project was on display, Cocuzza stated she has seen many students’ demeanor change after they reflect for a

moment before adding on to the tree. “A student the other day came into the center and shared her anxieties with me,” The coordinator recalled. “She was so discouraged and I encouraged

her to write one thing she was grateful for on the leaf after some reflection. Once she was done, her demeanor changed and left happier than how she first came in.”

Minding Your Mind at MWCC

Professional Speaker, Wes Woodson, Strives to De-stigmatize Mental Health Through Personal Conversations

By, Annabelle Kennedy
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Wes Woodson, 24, travels the country with a Minding your Mind presentation with the aim of eradicating the stigma surrounding mental health. Last week he was in Minnesota; Friday, November 4th, MWCC was lucky enough to have him bring his presentation to our North Cafeteria.

For a year, Woodson has been using his own story to help students realize there is nothing wrong with asking for help and that they are brave in getting help

for mental health challenges. “My mission is to inspire one million people to believe three words: I am enough. Because I could never believe that myself,” Woodson said.

Minding your Mind is an organization that uses storytelling to combat the stigma of mental health and getting help. With over a dozen presenters that travel all over the U.S., Minding your Mind aims to create safe spaces to talk about the signs and symptoms of mental health challenges. They offer in-person and virtual talks.

Woodson is a professional speaker, has a media company, and is a professional writer. He teamed up with Minding your Mind because they had similar end goals. “I want to empower people to feel less ashamed. That’s why I love the partnership with Minding your Mind. They have a similar mission,” he said.

Melissa Manzi, the mental health coach/counselor here at MWCC, thought it was important to keep mental health awareness

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Mass Transfer Program

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the summer before transferring, would you still be eligible? UMass Amherst admissions counselor Kevin Van Develde said, “As long as everything is going according to plans with the transfer by the time you submit the application, it’s fine.”

The benefits of going through this program are if you complete your associate’s transfer track with a 2.5 GPA, you will be guaranteed admission to an eligible school. Along with this, if you were to average a 3.0 GPA or higher with select programs, you would be eligible to get \$1,714 per year for tuition. With this transfer path, you may be eligible for scholarships like the Honors-to-Honors Scholarship or the Flagship award, which are both only available to MassTransfer students.

For more insight into what this program offered, current MWCC transfer student, Chandler Parker, gave his thoughts on the process, “...a very easy process as I worked with the transfer counselor at MWCC and Fitchburg State to see what classes would be able to transfer over.”

It’s always good to take advice from those who have already gone through the process you want to take part in. Parker’s response to such advice to any student wanting to follow this program was, “...have a plan on what colleges you are looking to transfer to and to speak with the transfer counselor... Having a set plan on what colleges and courses you are looking to transfer over will help the process go smoothly.”

Minding Your Mind

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in the public eye. Manzi said, “Mental health is a subject that gets ignored. My conquest has always been to keep bringing it back into our topics.” Manzi is also the one who brought the online suicide prevention training to MWCC this year.

Woodson shared his story in an elegant and friendly manner. He went through how his mental health challenges started and how he really started to take care of his mental health. He outlined how he manages his anxiety by making other people feel as if they could conquer their own mental health challenges or help others with their challenges.

At the end of the talk, Woodson spent time talking to the students and answering any questions they had. Woodson said, “We do this to make the students we talk to more safe, less alone

in talking about their possible mental health challenges.”

Manzi explained she is hoping to bring Woodson back in the spring semester for another presentation of his story. This reporter highly recommends catching the next presentation. It is nice not to feel alone in your mental health challenges, and this talk can help talk to others about their challenges as well.

If you need counseling or know someone who does, please reach out to Melissa Manzi, our mental health coach. She can be found in room 140, Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. She holds in-person and virtual appointments. The number for the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline counselors is 988, and they are available 24 hours a day. As Wes Woodson would say, you are enough.

MWCC’s THRIVE Center Providing the Support Needed to Help Students Thrive

By Annabelle Kennedy
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

From 8am-4pm, Monday-Friday, MWCC’s Thrive Center is open and ready to help with any problem you may have to provide support and help you succeed.

Upon walking into the Thrive Center, you will be greeted by administrative assistant, Gwen Budzinski, who also happens to be a MWCC student majoring in Human Services. When the Thrive Retention Center was first thought of it was based on the idea that everyone can succeed at school when provided with tools and support.

Retention offices in colleges are traditionally only concerned with students who are on academic probation or having other struggles for school. According to Missi Sargent, Dean of Academic Affairs, the Thrive Center at MWCC takes a

different approach. “We need to be student ready. We need to be meeting the students where they are at,” Sargent said.

If you are struggling in a class and are nervous about talking to the teacher, the Thrive Center can facilitate that for you. One of

“We take a holistic and individual approach as well, everyone’s story is a little bit different.”

The Thrive Center strives to be what every student and faculty member needs. “We are always broadening what we do here for students,” Kacian said.

“We need to be meeting the students where they are at.”

– Missi Sargent

the Academic Coordinators will sit in the meeting with you to help you feel more comfortable. Sometimes they will need to refer you to another department, but Theresa Kacian, Holly Kreidler-Phaneuf, or Sargent will gladly walk you there.

Kacian, an Academic Coordinator at the Center said,

Teachers can also utilize the office. Kacian said, “We also help faculty. We have a really good relationship with faculty. Faculty referrals became very key during covid.” However Kacian doesn’t see covid as a complete negative. “I see it as a positive for our

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ESports At the Mount

Started During Pandemic As Way to Connect, MWCC’s ESports Club Has Hopes for a Gaming Lab and Competitive Teams

By Gabriel Velez
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

You might not have heard of it, but the Mount does in fact have an ESports club advised by Brett Moulton, the server support specialist in IT for the campus. The ESports club was started during the initial stretch of the COVID-19 pandemic to address the challenges to socialization in the beginning of lockdown.

“Nobody could connect in person anymore. So, student life started looking into ESports. We started a Discord. We played a few online game tournaments to kind of get together and interact with people over our computers,” Moulton said. Kathy Matson, the director of student life here at the Mount, reached out and helped start the ESports club. They

played games such as *Rocket League*, *Among Us*, and other online games.

According to Moulton, the club’s goal is to eventually gravitate their players and community to where they can play and train together as teams. “We don’t provide a gaming lab on campus. We don’t have anything set up for that and I really wish we did. But that’s gonna take a lot of push from the students to say ‘Hey we wanna do this. We wanna have an Esports tournament and we wanna have our teams’ and I don’t know if the school is gonna do that unless the interest is clearly there by the students to say they want that,” Moulton said.

The club clearly has an interest in setting up competitive teams

as their Discord server is set up in such a way that there are various chat rooms and voice channels for discussion and play of various multiplayer games like *Overwatch*, *Rocket League*, *Fortnite*, and *League of Legends*. All games that can be run on a PC with smaller system requirements, which is a priority for the club. They value teamwork in the club as it is important to the competitive aspect of these games.

They would also love to have some of the conventions of having an Esports team. However, Moulton was particular about the details of doing so. He said, “Maybe we need that computer lab so that we can go in there, meet up, and maybe even have things in

that lab like coaching. So, we bring in experts on games that know how to strategize and play better against their opponents. I personally think it’s critical to have some sort of lab like that, some meeting place for gamers and right now all we have for gamers is that student lounge where we have a couple TVs and you can plug in your own game systems, but otherwise, we don’t have anything at all really.”

Although there’s a lot of technicalities and campus politics involved in getting the right tools for the club, Moulton believes that it’s possible, with the motivation of the students, as well as exposure.

Moulton said, “It would require some politics to see how we can work with other people using the

same room for something else. It’s not like there’s much space that’s dedicated to one thing. There’s a lot of shared spaces. So, to have a space that’s dedicated to just Esports, that can be a little costly if it were just for Esports.” He added, “It’s not impossible. I don’t rule anything out. I think if there is enough push from the students and we work up the ladder to get there, we could make a lab happen for Esports.”

If you have any interest in joining the club or speaking to anyone involved, check InvolveMount to get a link to their Discord server or speak to Moulton.

Remembering Megan Bower



Photo submitted by Isabelle Mascary

Megan Bower

but she was determined and goal-oriented. “She recently looked at a piece of land a month before she passed,” her mother shared. This land is located in Gardner, and she wanted to build a tiny house on it.

“She had saved quite a bit of money to accomplish this and actually put in an offer on this piece of land,” her mother recalled. “The land was about \$65,000, and she had \$50,000 in the bank.” Not wanting to put all of her savings into the land, she offered \$47,000. Despite not getting the land, this is an example of her determination and dreams. “She just had big dreams and didn’t think anybody would stop her,” her mother shared. “That was her mantra.”

Recalling a funny pastime, her mother shared the time when she walked through a glass door. “It was a moment when she was living with a boyfriend a year and a half ago,” she began. “She was so in the moment that there was a glass door that she thought was open.” She continued with laughter, “She walked right into it. She was too busy to really look at the glass. Everyone was

laughing.”

Megan was always late everywhere that she went but got better with time. “At Christmas time, we would always wait a little while longer for Megan to finally come around,” her mother shared. “It was notorious for her to be late wherever she went.” She laughed and continued, “She had no sense of time and showed up whenever the wind blew her in.”

Megan’s classmate Brian Roach shared that she was an organ donor and was able to help save the lives of three people. “She was the most amazing person I’ve ever met,” he added. Brian is a student that she befriended.

According to Automotive Department Head Eric Almeida, who had Megan as a student for two years, “When Brian began [the automotive program], he was very nervous about being in this type of environment.” He continued, “Megan took him under her wing, and they became really good friends.” After she passed, Megan’s mother actually gifted Megan’s tools to Brian.

Megan made helping people a passion, and it is a skill that

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occurred naturally for her. She wore her kindness on her sleeve. Almeida described her as being an advocate for females in the industry, and her attitude was, “If you can do it, I can do it too.”

Almeida shared a time when Megan went above and beyond for another student whom she had just met. “Megan was always helpful, always happy, and always smiling.” He shared, “I had actually just met Megan, and she had only been in class for two days, and at that time, I didn’t fully know her name yet.”

He continued, “We had a student that came in who struggled with English. He was an ESL student. He was not on any of my class rosters; he just showed up.” He added, “I asked him if he registered for class and did you go through financial aid and the student just simply said no, he just came to class.”

After trying to explain to the student how financial aid works, Megan was listening from a distance, and she came over and stated, “I got this.” Megan pulled the student to the side and explained the process of financial aid, but he still did not understand. “He did not have a car or license either,” Almeida added. “So she gave him a ride to the school towards the main campus, walked him over to financial aid, filled out the paperwork for him, and got him registered.”

Without knowing who he was or knowing anything about him, she was able to help this student without hesitation. “That’s just the type of person she was,” he shared.

After she started the program here, she moved to Gardner to be closer. She was in the program for two years. Dean of the School of Business, Science, and Technology Veronica Guay indicated she [Megan] didn’t want to leave. “She was taking her time,” Almeida shared. They wanted to make it so “she [could stay] here forever,” he chuckled. She was taking classes as slowly as she could, according to Almeida, because she loved being here in the program. Almeida shared, “Everyone that Megan made contact with ended

up becoming her friend after that.”

Megan’s former landlord attended her celebration of life and shared the story about how Megan and her boyfriend had an apartment but ended up facing eviction. Megan moved out, but the boyfriend stayed. Eventually, they ended up going to court. Despite a troubling moment, Megan became friends with her former landlord’s attorney. “She was just infectious anywhere she went,” Almeida shared.

The Automotive department wants to create a scholarship in her name. Her family will decide the requirements for the scholarship. With the help of George LoCascio, the Assistant Professor of the Natural Resources department, a memorial garden will be created in remembrance of Megan. LoCascio is going to get his students to design and build a garden right outside the Automotive building in the picnic area where Megan used to eat her lunch. The plan is to have it opened in Spring 2023.

Along with professors and fellow students, Megan will be remembered by her best friend, Alicia Blake. Blake recalled a time when she and Megan went to CVS in Harvard Square. “We [received] a receipt that was about 3 feet long. Megan proceeded to skip around, waving it in the air like a ribbon as we walked along,” she shared. “She was laughing the whole time and made some strangers laugh along with us.”

me happy.”

Blake recalled a job that she left because it was making her miserable, but Megan was the one that helped her come to that realization. “I told her my dream of traveling, and because of her support, I drove across the country and back in March of this year,” Blake said.

The two hiked and traveled together often. “At the end of my month-long cross-country trip, she [Megan] flew out and finished the trip home with me for the last five days of it,” Blake said.

They always tried to find new trails to hike around New England. Megan’s strong personality could not obscure her kindness. Blake said, “Sometimes she came across as harsh, but it was always with good intentions and a giant heart. We also both love the music venue The Palladium in Worcester and went to many concerts there. Her favorite bands were Dayseeker, We came as Romans, Volumes, Amity Affliction, Holding Absence, Movements, Being as an Ocean, and Loveless.”

Megan embodied the ability to resolve conflict and connect with the most difficult people. Her mother added, “She took care of the misfits in the area.” Anne shared a time when Megan befriended a difficult neighbor of a client they both took care of. “There was this guy that lived next door to Olive, a woman that we took care of,” she began. “It was a dead-end street, and he has

“Her attitude was more so, ‘it will work out.’ That’s how she rode the wave.”

– Anne Bower

Acknowledging that people don’t often get the chance to praise their loved ones while they’re still here, Blake noted, “I always sung praise about Megan while she was still here. She always pushed me to go for what I wanted in life and what makes

three vehicles, but he would only use two vehicles,” stating that the third vehicle would be used for a parking space. “It would make parking a challenge.”

After being able to successfully get the city to put handicap

>>> continued on next page

parking signs in front of her client's door, to her surprise, "He went and got a handicap placard and started parking in this woman's spot." Although Anne was faced with an annoying situation and was on the verge of losing her mind with this man, at that moment of time, Megan became friends with him.

She looked into his background and connected with him while softly reminding her mom, "Try to look at the upside" because she always tried to find the good in people. "She never blew up at people," Anne shared. "Her attitude was more so, it will work out. That's how she rode the wave."

Megan asking, "Why are we here?" Her mother replied, "You're going to need one, and you might as well pick it out yourself," continuing as she burst into tears, "Because what you're doing is killing yourself, and you might as well be a part of the process and relieve us of this because we want one less thing to have to do when you finally go."

It was a wake-up call that worked. Amazingly, she had gone through four rehabs and many detoxes. "She's been to the cape, and I did not think this was going to work in her favor, and I thought we were going to be burying her in this way," Anne

while I was gone and not to plan any trips those three weeks that I will be away."

However, like the adventurer that Megan was, she reached out to her mom to inform her that she had planned a trip to Canada the last week her mother would be away. "That meant we're both going to be out of the country at the same time," Anne shared. "I was so upset. I don't get to go on these trips ever."

Recalling a past conversation preceding her death, Anne shared, "It was like she knew she wasn't going to be here." They were having a conversation about a person that had died doing what they loved, and then Megan blurted out, "Mom, if I ever died in a motorcycle accident, I would be fine with that because it was something that I love to do."

Unsure if it was something for Anne to look back on or a sense of bizarre comfort from up above, "Maybe I knew this was coming," Anne shared. Three weeks later, Megan passed away from a motorcycle accident on September 22, 2022.

Though the news was tragic, knowing she was a person of faith gave her family comfort. Megan was raised in a religious background and held onto her spiritual belief as she ventured off onto her own spiritual path in adulthood. Her favorite phrase was a phrase that Jesus spoke to his followers, "Love one another as I have loved you." It was a phrase that she expressed through her actions as she lived, especially as a fully-fledged adult, said her mother: "I got to see her at her best."



Photo submitted by Isabelle Mascary

Megan Bower's toolbox, now fitted with a photograph memorializing her.

"I got to see her at her best."

– Anne Bower

An obstacle that Megan struggled with also served as an example of her resilience and desire to learn from her past and help others grow. "From seventeen to twenty-four, she was struggling with heroin," Anne shared. "She was in pretty deep, and heroin is one of the hardest things to overcome."

When her parents learned of her addiction, they took her on a ride toward a wake-up call. "I told her let's go for a ride, and I didn't tell her where we were going except we have a Christmas gift that we want her to pick out," Anne shared.

Her parents took her out for breakfast and stopped at a place for monuments. Anne recalled

Despite the challenges she faced, Megan proved to be resilient and successfully recovered from this addiction. "Eventually, she got off her methadone," Anne shared. "She didn't feel bad, and she didn't need to feel the need to have something as long as she kept herself busy."

Megan also worked alongside her mother to provide personal care for a ninety-five-year-old woman. The time came for her mother to take a three-week trip to Ireland, and Megan ensured she was not going to plan her own trip during the time her mother was away. Anne said, "I told her she will be in charge

THRIVE Center

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students, because it pushed us forward in terms of efficiency and technology," Kacian said.

The Thrive Center opened in late 2019, just as covid started to be talked about. "Faculty were trying to find students and keep track of them. Where are they? How are they doing? They elicited our help to do that. So that has turned into something

really great that we do," Kacian said.

Now that everyone is back on campus the Thrive office is looking forward to having students come in and see them face to face. It's a place where you can have a snack, a chat or get some advice in a safe environment. Kacian shared, "We want this to be a real safe haven for students, they can

come in and talk to us about anything."

If you have questions and don't know who to turn to, the Thrive Center will be able to help you find the answer. At the very least they will help you find the person who does have the answer. "What we do is ever changing,[and] we are going to improve all the time at what we are doing," Kacian said.

Course Repeat Program

>>> continued from page 1

issues and *Violet Ideologies* has a theme of capitalism.

Buscher said, "Wyman taught ENG 098 and was an active participant in our Developmental Education Working Group. He was a big believer in giving the students the time they need to grow rather than pushing them towards completing courses at a

faster rate without getting what they actually needed from the experience."

Wyman left almost two decades of memories and impacted MWCC. Wyman's advice for beginner writers and poets was "to read a lot", and importantly, "start writing, keep going, and do not give up."

Profile: Reed Fitzgerald

Mount Wachusett A.C.T Clerk Pursues Masters Degree at Fitchburg State



Photo courtesy of Reed Fitzgerald

Reed Fitzgerald

By **Alessandro DiVito**

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Reed Fitzgerald, the smiling face of the A.C.T. office, is 23 years old. They are an optimist, avid videogame player, who prefers and enjoys making home cooked meals. They moved

to Massachusetts from New Hampshire in roughly April of 2020, and later in March of 2022 came to be a full-time staff member at Mount Wachusett Community College, specifically a Clerk in the Advising Career and Transfer office (A.C.T).

As a Clerk in A.C.T., Fitzgerald's duties include but are not limited to answering student questions, making appointments with advisors, answering emails and phone calls, creating documents and flyers, and making purchases for the office.

Fitzgerald graduated from Plymouth State University in New Hampshire with a Bachelors in English in 2020. Fitzgerald was originally in an undergraduate program for English Education but decided to just do English due to a series of events between their Sophomore and Junior years of college. While studying abroad in Japan, Fitzgerald faced a tough semester but overall enjoyed their time in Japan.

When they came back to Plymouth State University they faced feelings of isolation and had someone close to them experience severe mental health struggles who was still studying abroad. At the time, they thought

they were going to have to drop everything to go get him but luckily they didn't have to. With all that happened, their grades started to slip, and while they did try to talk with their teacher about the situation, they felt they needed more resources to prosper.

According to Fitzgerald, "She told me she thought I had given up on being a teacher." This simply was not true. With everything going on, they decided to drop the Education part of their degree and take classes towards an English degree with classes like Critical Theory and Advanced Poetry. It was a hard decision because they had put all their eggs into the English teacher basket.

However overall, Fitzgerald is happy they made the choice because they were no longer sacrificing their mental health for classes anymore, they got to take classes that became really impactful even still to this day, and looking back they don't

think being a high school teacher would have been a good fit for them.

While Fitzgerald struggled with these hardships they did not do it alone. They made some really good friends during the trip to Japan. Fitzgerald said, "They were some of the best people I've ever met and became my instant family." Fitzgerald and these friends still talk regularly with each other despite being all over the United States.

The hardest thing for Fitzgerald was the isolation coming back from their study abroad. However, Fitzgerald is happy with their life. With things becoming easier and with the stability of their current partner and living situation, they sought out work at MWCC. Because of the experience Fitzgerald said, when asked about their clerk job, "I ended up falling in love with higher education and MWCC specifically."

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"Reed Fitzgerald" >>>

Profile: Devin Bowler

Computer Science Major Has Goals for Starting His Own Company After Graduation

By **Alondra Deleon Guimaraes**

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Devin Bowler sits in his room with gamer headphones on preparing to share a synopsis of his life as a student since graduating high school in June of 2022. Currently, the eighteen-year-old is now in his third semester at Mount Wachusett Community College studying under the Mass Transfer program. He was lucky enough to start college education early with MWCC's dual enrollment program to get ahead towards the computer science degree at UMass Amherst.

"I've been around computers for most of my life and with friends," said Bowler. "I'm

fascinated by that space of technology of manipulating what you see in the world by integrating technology into what you do every day."

While studying to achieve his goals all in one academic year to then transfer to UMass Amherst, Bowler works at the Learning Success Center inside the LaChance Library at MWCC as a paid tutor for the computer science major.

For anyone looking to join the program, Bowler emphasized the importance of really grasping the fundamentals of computer technology and to build a solid foundation to succeed. Without at least a basic knowledge of computer skills, majoring in this

field would be quite the challenge. "I find students that come into tutoring with assignments come because they don't understand what the question is building upon," Bowler explained.

Besides the student life, Bowler enjoys watching movies or playing games with friends—all on the computer. As a student in computer science, Bowler views MIT's Lex Fridman as a mentor. This American-Russian professor works in researching self-autonomous vehicles and other machinery works.

What inspires Bowler the most is Fridman's routine and discipline through it all. When

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"Devin Bowler" >>>



Photo courtesy of Devin Bowler

Devin Bowler

Profile: Alondra DeLeon Guimaraes

MWCC Nursing Student Has Goals to Transfer to the University of Oklahoma



Photo courtesy of Alondra DeLeon Guimaraes

Alondra DeLeon Guimaraes

By Devin Bowler
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

“I’m just taking it one step at a time!” said Alondra DeLeon Guimaraes, a 25 year old nursing major here at Mount Wachusett Community College who is working on transferring to Oklahoma for nursing.

Guimaraes said she chose this major because of her passion for helping others. “I’ve always been someone who’s enjoyed helping people,” Guimaraes stated.

She went on to say, “I originally wanted to go into a literature major but was fascinated by the idea of nursing.” With a nursing major comes challenges for passing certain criteria. Guimaraes spoke on her frustration and troubles within the major, mainly focusing on the time it was taking to complete what she needed to get done.

She also talked about her struggles in passing the needed exams and an unfortunate series of grades that lead to MWCC not being able to help her any further. “The exams were not

your typical exams one would normally take. There are multiple answers to a question that are correct. However, there is only one that is the best answer which is very difficult and anxiety-provoking,” Guimaraes said.

However, Guimaraes is not ready to give up even with these struggles she has been facing. She knows what she wants and is doing what’s necessary to do so. Her goal for this year is to make sure she is set up for her transfer to the University of Oklahoma.

Looking ahead to what the future holds for Guimaraes and what she plans to do after she finishes with her schooling, she said she first wants to gain some experience following her years in school. Guimaraes said, “I want to work in an inpatient nursing setting like Medsurg, ICU, or even the emergency room. The plan is to work there a couple years and gain experience through the many scenarios one could face through in patient services.”

This path is with the idea of

working at a non-profit called Samaritan’s Purse. Samaritan’s Purse is an organization that reaches out to poverty around the world plus third-world countries. They give medical treatment on-site to those in need after critical disasters.

Guimaraes found the organization’s team, DART, by researching charity work she could participate in and engage with. “I found out about the organization through a church charity event. After that day, I decided to do some research on them and that’s where I found the DART Team,” Guimaraes said.

Guimaraes is Christian and has always believed in following organizations that align with her beliefs. “I’ve dreamed of helping out with a mission work which was where the nursing career idea came up for me,” Guimaraes said. It’s been her dream to aid in mission work and wanted it to be in form of a job, not just a hobby.

Reed Fitzgerald

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Currently while working they are also pursuing a Masters in English at Fitchburg State University. When asked about their Masters, Fitzgerald said, “It felt like when I graduated with my undergraduate degree that the bar had been moved and now employers want you to have a masters instead. Part of the pursuit of the masters is for me, I’m lucky enough to be in a job that will help me pay for it and I really love learning.”

They continued, “I didn’t know what I wanted to do when I got out of college, and now I know I’d like to stay in higher education, and I’d like to be in a role that’s still student-facing but I can also work more one on

one with students.” Fitzgerald is currently taking Advanced Research in English Studies, and Topics in Literature: Comics and Graphic Novels as their first two Masters classes at FSU.

Along with finding a balance and a home in the higher education world as an employee and grad student, a part of Fitzgerald’s identity that has evolved is their gender. During Spring break in February of 2020, they decided to start using they/them pronouns after being exposed to the idea through class.

Over the next few months, they grew more comfortable with their new identity and began “doubling down on the whole thing” as Fitzgerald put it

and by the following year 2021 in October Fitzgerald decided to physically transition.

About a month into their new job here at MWCC they started to go by Reed, feeling comfortable enough to be themselves at work, and didn’t start testosterone until the summer of 2022. Since then, Fitzgerald has known that they are “One of the only people who are this visible and visibly out, making [themselves] a safe space for many students.” In part because of this, Fitzgerald has become an advisor of the Sexuality and Gender Alliance Club (SAGA) here on campus trying to educate people and overall help those who find themselves under the umbrella of LGBTQIA+.

WE WANT YOU!

Looking for an extracurricular activity for next semester but not sure what to do? Join the *Mount Observer* crew and get your writing, photography, artwork, or reviews out into the world! Or maybe take on a behind-the-scenes role and help run the *Observer’s* website or social media. Whatever your interests, you can find a place on our team.

So Join Today!

Have your own thoughts on a TV show, film, book, or video game? Write a review and send it to mountobserver@mwcc.mass.edu It may just end up in our next issue!

I am One in Four

Student Shares Personal Journey to Remind Others “You Are Not Alone”

By *Annabelle Kennedy*
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

One in four American women will have an abortion by the time they are 45 years old, and I am one of those women.

I had an abortion when I was 28 years old. I feared having a child. I was not in a place where I was mentally or emotionally ready to be responsible for another life. I was living in a small apartment in Allston at the time, had two roommates and a job as a waitress, and I felt incredibly alone and ashamed.

The baby's father and I hadn't been dating for long, and he wasn't ready to have a child either. I decided that I could live with the decision of not having a child and regret it, more than I could live with the idea of having the child and not providing a loving, stable home for them.

What I did not know at the time was that I would not just feel relief after the abortion. Society makes you feel like you should only feel relief. The only other emotion allowed is overwhelming regret that you must hold inside you and take to your grave; that you have done a shameful and terrible thing no one wants to hear about.

Turns out, I would feel many emotions intensely. As someone who cannot name emotions easily, it was an overwhelming time of confusion, agony, and anger. I didn't know anyone personally that had an abortion.

I probably did based on the numbers, but society says we are not allowed to talk about and share those experiences. We aren't allowed to know what may be normal and what may not be. Even small groups of women who consider themselves friends

There is a distinct line separating my life before and my life after.

Counseling may have helped me figure out what I was feeling and how to handle them, but I didn't even know services were available for counseling after my abortion. You don't receive

me? Would we be a team against the world? Sometimes driving a car, I envision a child back there in a car seat and wonder what our conversation would be like. Would they be an uber-nerd like their father and me? Or would they love sports (Something I am

tremendous amount of grieving to do. I just didn't know that I was allowed to grieve over an abortion. Then I found the book *May Cause Love* by Kassi Underwood. It was everything I needed, and I didn't know it.

Underwood's book allowed me to acknowledge my anger and grief and let it go. It led me to discover that I am not a bad person. I am a person who had to make a hard decision and did the best she could with love in her heart. I even developed a healthy, loving friendship with the baby's father. That is why I am telling my story.

I want young women, especially now with *Roe vs. Wade* being overturned, to know that they are just people doing the best they can with the circumstances they were given. That they are not alone, that they are allowed to grieve over having an abortion, and that we all need to tell our stories and share our experiences.

Nothing gets better if you don't talk about it. I want women to know that being one in four is not a shameful thing. They had the courage to make the best decision for them. That is not an easy thing. I would ask people who are opposed to abortion to realize that we are all humans trying to get by in the same world. We all want the same thing: happy, healthy children when we are ready. Women only want the chance to decide when that time is going to be.

“This is a trauma. No one makes this decision lightly. No one uses this service for birth control. We agonize for as long as we dare to make this decision.”

– *Annabelle Kennedy*

may not tell each other that they had an abortion due to the shame that is associated with it. Most women are left to deal with it all alone.

In the time immediately after the abortion, I started to drink even heavier than I did before. I engaged in dangerous behavior. I drove the baby's father crazy with late-night drunken phone calls; He even blocked my phone number for a time.

I had no support system in place to help me with this trauma. I didn't even know I should have a support system in place. It felt like to me that now I had the abortion, I have no issues, and I can continue my life as it was before. But, the thing is, my life will never be what it was before.

information on the mental health effects of this type of trauma.

This is a trauma. No one makes this decision lightly. No one uses this service for birth control. We agonize for as long as we dare to make this decision. In the end, I told myself that I could have an abortion if I made my life the best it could possibly be, that my child wouldn't be sacrificed in vain. For many years I failed on that promise. I spiraled and fell into a deep depression that I am truly just coming out from the other side of.

I felt a tremendous amount of sadness. I don't know if it is possible to miss someone you have never met, but if it is, I do. I wonder what my child would be like. Would they look like

lost at unless it's roller derby)?

I wonder, and I feel my loss. I allow myself to feel it deeply. I know now that, yes, I did make the right decision. I would never want to put my trauma on another person, especially a child.

Being ten years removed from the situation and having spent the last three-ish years in quarantine isolation, really exploring myself and my mental health, I have a better understanding of what I was feeling then. I was angry with myself for having to make the choice in the first place. I should have been more careful, maybe celibacy is the way to go, and I am so dumb, kept running through my mind while I figured out what I wanted to do.

After the abortion, I had a

Devin Bowler

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asked if Fridman was one of the reasons to inspire him into this field, Bowler responded, “Lex was not what got me into computer science, after the fact he inspired me to branch out into computer science fields like machine learning.” Then Bowler explained briefly what lead him to computer sciences. “Most of my friends I met through

online stuff and being around computers. At first, I didn't know what major to pick. But two of my closest friends chose computer science—so I was like ‘I'll give it a shot since I like computer programming,’” Bowler said.

Once Bowler finishes his requirements to transfer and graduate, he plans to try to build his own startup company that

will focus on machine learning as well as augmented reality or start a career with a more hands-on approach. “I have always known that I've wanted to do something based on computers or in the engineering field. I just didn't know what computer science was initially,” Bowler said.

When asked if he recommends computer science at MWCC,

Bowler quickly said yes although he is in the computer science transfer track. He briefly said that there's more prerequisite requirements to complete before the actual computer courses begin. “It has been fun so far even though most of the classes aren't computer science related,” Bowler shared. “I only start the computer courses next semester.”

No matter where he ends up,

the eighteen-year-old desires to surround his life with technology. Above all, Bowler's greatest motivation is the idea of a legacy and making a small impact by researching in the computer world. “For me, it doesn't need to be a space to leave behind an impact, but a space to make a path towards a career,” Bowler said.

Creative Writing

Defrosting Slow

By Maddie Willigar

My breath morphs into saturated air
like clouds of dew that pour straight from my lungs
and flakes of white fall like a morning prayer
that softly drips off tips of human tongues.

The neighbor kids whip their packed balls of snow
at layered armor: puffer coats of plush.
Each child falls like leaning dominoes
until the numbing chill makes their cheeks flushed.

I hear their parents call from cozy homes
the warming sound melts through my train of
thought.

There's something in the comfort of their tones
that pulls me back to moments I forgot—

my childhood preserved in blocks of ice
defrosting slow and coming back to life.

Sacramento

By Josilyn Straka

It was you, bright eyes, big smile
You reeled me in, won me over
I was elated, hopeful
And then, in the blink of an eye
It was over, no explanation
Sacramento will never be the same to me.

That Christmas Cheer

By William A. Lefrancois

Outside, the snow is falling, trees all with a cap of white;
Inside, our hearts are lifted, hoping for times to be bright!
The world around us, so much trouble it has been;
Maybe through that Christmas cheer, we'll find the good once again.

The ground lies all frozen, covered in wintery ice;
Not a sound do you hear, just the wind howling and blowing so nice!
Nature at peace, calmness, and quietude reign supreme;
If only that Christmas cheer, if only it was everyone's dream.

Look for that Christmas cheer, it's always been there;
Let your heart be happy; let loose of every care!
The season is coming, soon it will be here;
The perfect time, the best time, to share with those who are dear.

Don't worry about problems; they always cloud your way.
Let your heart sing with the season; fill it with glee every day!
If people get along, brothers and sisters finding their way;
If nations celebrate together, then we'll have a wonderful day.

The world is full of good people, some very young and some getting old;
Each person is different, but inside, all the same, we are told.
Love and laughter are universal, the remedy to every concern;
If we can feel that Christmas cheer, then a lesson we will learn.

Enemies set aside differences, friends gather together;
That Christmas cheer unites all, no matter the weather.
Wind may be howling, snow may be falling;
People come together, all hear the spirit calling.

Families gather together, expressions of love are shared;
Neither anger nor ill will are present, only good thoughts are cared!
Children safe with family, favorite pets to enjoy the season;
So much joy and pleasure, letting go of anger is the reason.

The world to be at peace again, this the prayer of one and all;
An end to violence and despair, harkening to serenity's call.
Friend and foe alike, joining in holiday joy and cheer;
A world of happiness, a world where love's residence is near.

That Christmas cheer, the goodwill feeling of timeless years;
When times are at their worst, when we are overcome with fears.
Look to the feelings of the holidays, wrap your hearts with those who are dear;
Forgive, forget, laugh, and be happy; this is the message of the Christmas cheer.

Send your finished works of 1,000 words or less to
mountobserver@mwcc.mass.edu.

Black Panther: Wakanda Forever (2022)

A Better Sequel?



Image from IMDB, copyright Marvel Studios and The Walt Disney Company

By **Gabriel Velez**

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Black Panther: Wakanda Forever was directed by Ryan Coogler and starred Letitia

Wright, Angela Bassett, Tenoch Huerta Mejia, Danai Gurira, Dominique Thorne, and Martin Freeman. Having enjoyed but not loved the original *Black Panther*,

I found myself being rather concerned with this sequel. With the death of Chadwick Boseman looming over it, the film seemed almost destined to be anxiety-inducing. Fortunately, it is safe to say that the film succeeded in being a tribute to Boseman.

Wakanda Forever is the final film of Phase Four, a phase itself that is rather underwhelming, to say the least. While this film doesn't quite change the messy nature of the phase itself, in my opinion, it does provide one of the best entries this phase has had.

The film centers around Wakanda one year after T'Challa's death. The U.N. is on them like crazy, and the world wants what they have. However, when the mysterious Talokan attacks and reveal themselves to Wakanda, a chase to protect a scientist begins as well as the defense of Wakanda from war with Talokan.

The film's overall respect and love for Boseman is present. Anytime the film wants to tribute to him or remember him, it's felt, especially in those opening ten minutes where the film addresses what happened to T'Challa. If T'Challa was recast, the film would be lesser for it,

and the emotional weight of the film, along with the arc of Shuri (played by Wright), wouldn't have taken place.

The film is a huge step up from the first in many ways. The action choreography is better, and the performances are significantly stronger. Wright really impressed as Shuri. The amount the film asks of her is a lot, and she takes it all with stride and respect for the newfound role she has and the circumstances that gave it to her. The character, too, is much more interesting and likable. Mejia is great as Namor, and Bassett gives an Oscar-worthy performance as Queen Ramonda.

Besides the performances, the film's score is astounding and really immerses you in the world of the film. The cinematography is stunning at times, and the overall change of camera work is significant. It feels way more mature than the first film in that regard. The holding back of comedy, in general, was a welcome surprise, but the film does still have some bad jokes.

Unfortunately, however, the film is kind of a mess in every other aspect. The story and motivations are a bit jumbled, and the film itself is juggling way too much. The main issue here is

Riri Williams, aka Ironheart. She has very little to do in the story and is essentially a McGuffin which reduces any form of character development she can have. Just like America Chavez in *Multiverse of Madness*, she feels like a cardboard cutout rather than a fully realized character.

Another issue in this film is Namor and his motivations. These motivations start out sensical, with his passion for his people and fear of colonizers. However, how easily he wanted to start a war and how ruthlessly he wanted to kill Riri Williams didn't make much sense and weakened his character towards the end. Because of this, Riri feels utterly useless to the film.

Overall, the film does contain lots of emotion, some strong character work from Shuri despite some issues, strong visuals and score, and generally better action and effects. While I do believe it is better than the first film, I can't deny that it certainly isn't as impactful. *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* is a 7.5/10 from me.

Review: *Sonder* (2022)

Dermot Kennedy's Sophomore Album Wears its Heart on its Sleeve

By **Elysian Alder**

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Sonder, by Irish singer-songwriter Dermot Kennedy, faced two delays during its release. Initially set to be released on September 23, 2022, the album was first pushed back to a November 4 release, and then was again delayed, this time to November 18, when it finally reached the ears of his eager fans.

The delays, however, served to add to what can only be described as the experience of this long-awaited album. Leading up to the release, Kennedy took to social media and his own website,

dermotkennedy.com, to bring fans together in a truly special way with something he dubbed "the Sonder Stories."

The Sonder Stories acted as a way for Kennedy and his fans to share their own unique human experiences and cultivate a safe but vulnerable space with one another by answering a different question posed by Kennedy via video message each week.

A clever and touching move on Kennedy's part; touching because it's often difficult to find artists these days who openly express how much they truly, deeply care about the individuality of their fans, and clever because the very

definition of *Sonder*, the album's title, is, "the realization that everyone around you is living a life as vivid and complex as your own."

With Kennedy's chart-topping debut album, *Without Fear*, being released in 2019 and *Sonder* having been written during the COVID-19 pandemic, the singer-songwriter certainly had plenty of time and experience to draw from for this eleven-track concept album.

The album opens with 'Any Love,' showcasing Kennedy's breathtaking vocals while

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"Sonder Review" >>>

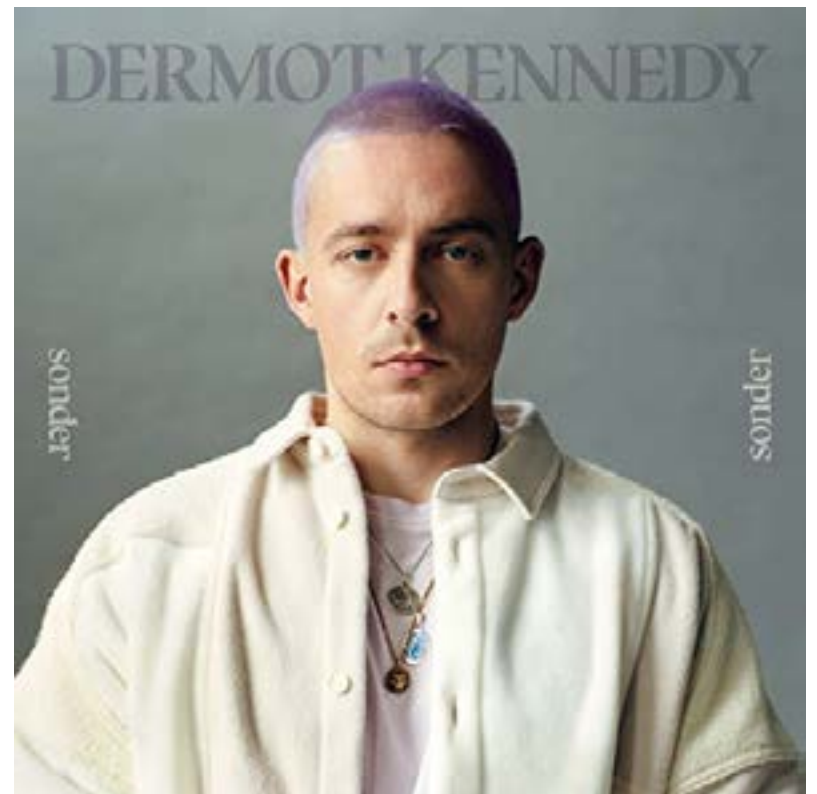


Image from Amazon.com

Sonder Review

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being backed by smooth, layered electronic sounds that are executed flawlessly in a way that bolsters rather than distracts. By leading the album with a track that begins with his distinctive voice, I found myself immediately immersed.

Other reviewers have claimed that Sonder lacks any display of Kennedy taking risks with the album, but the prominent electronic beats are new for him, and in my opinion, incorporating synth and electronic sounds for strong vocalists like Kennedy always poses the risk of being messy or overwhelming. However, this is not even close

to being the case here.

‘Any Love’ is followed by four of the five already-released singles— “Something to Someone,” a song that feels like a story of its own, reflecting on the experience of loving someone and how subtle and quick it can be to lose them; “Kiss Me,” which feels like a track that could be redone into a beautifully composed instrumental tribute featured on Netflix’s popular historical-romance Bridgerton, playing in the background of a passionate and long-awaited love confession; “Dreamer,” a ballad with an admittedly confusing tempo to back the hopeless sounding message being delivered in the lyrics; and

finally, “Innocence and Sadness,” which is my least favorite single on the album due to the pacing of the song being awkwardly frantic and mismatched to the gentle piano behind it, which was another risk taken, despite it not having a smooth delivery or payout, and being the only song on the album written solely by Kennedy.

However, Kennedy rises from the melancholic depths of these earlier tracks, with the next few tracks being uplifting, heart-warming, and showing a brighter and more resilient side to the human experience that Sonder strives to tap into.

“Homeward,” the seventh track, solidified itself as my

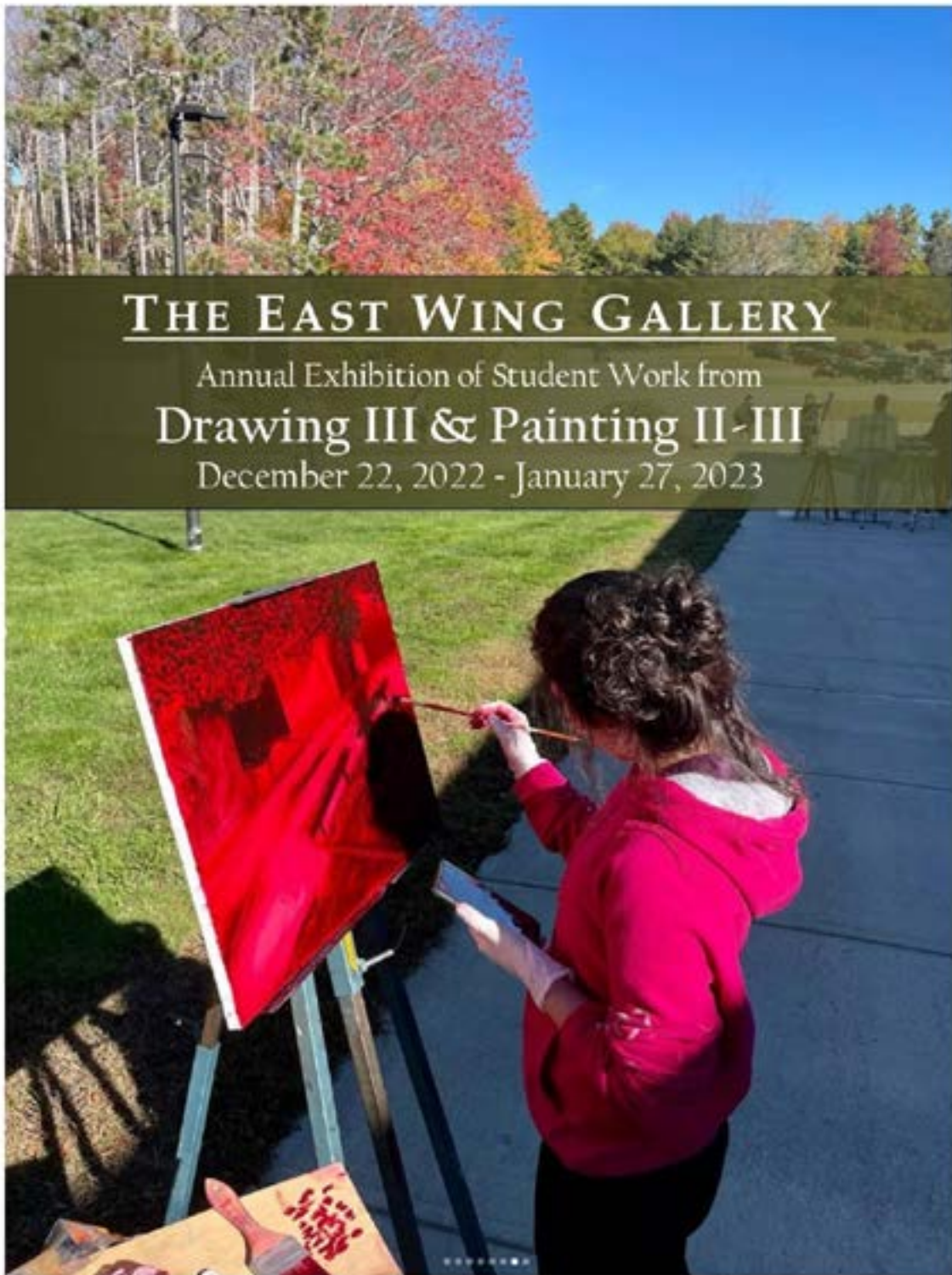
favorite on the entire album with the lyric: “Sorrow is a season/ Everything that hurts will pass.” The track also alludes to the messages of earlier songs several times in ways that are clever and subtle.

In its entirety, ‘Homeward’ is a reassurance— it’s warm, and it’s empathetic, and intimate, and knowing that this album was written during quarantine, a time that fostered a disconnect among people, makes that hit so much harder.

Kennedy is sometimes compared to musicians such as Ed Sheeran and Lewis Capaldi. However, while the former tends to lean heavily into generic, cookie-cutter pop trends and the

latter tends to rely exclusively on heartache, Kennedy hasn’t lost the raw, edged sound developed from his humble beginnings as a busker on the streets of Dublin, and he certainly hasn’t lost the ability to reflect not only vulnerability and realness into his songs but also to remind us of the importance of hope and healing, of connection.

All in all, Sonder is a phenomenal album, with a solid conceptual foundation that I feel was delivered in some way by each track as they flowed into one another, and written by an artist who isn’t afraid to wear his heart on his sleeve and give us a glimpse of his own vivid and complex life.



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Zoom <https://mwcc.campuslabs.com/engage/event/8130859>

December 21: "Green Society Meeting." 12:30-1:30PM

Greenhouse <https://mwcc.campuslabs.com/engage/event/8536760>

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