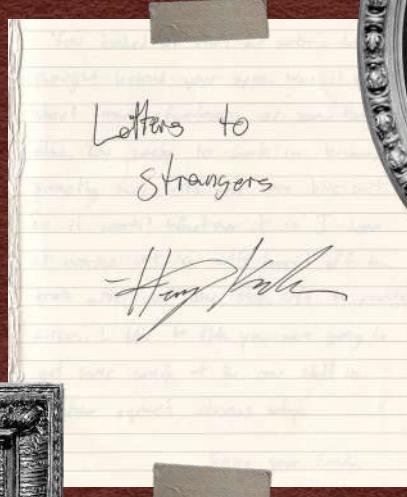


# Daily Trojan Magazine

THE MONTHLY ADDENDUM TO THE DAILY PAPER | ISSUE 06 | OCTOBER 2024 | EST. 2023



## THE EVOLUTION OF HALLOWEEN

BY MIRANDA HUANG

## THE AGE OF THE VANILLA DJ

BY SAMMY BOVITZ

## USC ON FILM

BY THE DAILY TROJAN  
PHOTO STAFF

## FALL 2024 EDITORS

*Editor-in-Chief*

**KIMBERLY AGUIRRE**

*Managing Editors*

**STEFANO FENDRICH**

**ALIA YEE NOLL**

**ALEXA AVILA**

**BIANCA ARZÁN MONTAÑEZ**

**NATHAN ELIAS**

*Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Director*

**PEYTON DACY**

*Chief Copy Editors*

**DEON BOTSHEKAN**

**FIONA FEINGOLD**

*Art & Design Director*

**VIVIENNE TRAN**

*Photo Editor*

**HENRY KOFMAN**

*Magazine Editor*

**SASHA RYU**



# Table of Contents

## COVER STORY

### **LETTERS TO STRANGERS, 16**

BY HENRY KOFMAN

## COMIC FOUND, 14

BY AMELIA NEILSON-SLABACH

## ANECDOTES

### **THE EVOLUTION OF HALLOWEEN, 10**

BY MIRANDA HUANG

## A LICENSE PLATE A DAY KEEPS THE HOMESICKNESS AWAY, 34

BY JENNIFER NEHRER

## THE REAL WORLD

### **USC ON FILM, 44**

BY THE DAILY TROJAN  
PHOTO STAFF

## CLUBS PERSIST DESPITE SETBACKS, 38

BY REO

## CULTURE

### **THE AGE OF THE VANILLA DJ, 6**

BY SAMMY BOVITZ



My parents raised me on public radio. On the weekends, my dad had “Car Talk” and “Wait Wait... Don’t Tell Me!” blaring from the stereo in our garage. On the weekdays, my brother and I strapped into our booster seats and listened to “Morning Edition” and “Fresh Air” from the back of our mom’s Toyota Sienna. At the time, I didn’t realize it, but now as I look back on my childhood it’s difficult for me to recall a moment when there wasn’t National Public Radio playing in the background.

When I turned 18 and went away to college, my days fell silent and my life started to feel more and more out of my control. After there was nothing left to distract me from all of my unresolved problems, I did the most predictable thing a person in my position could do: I had a breakdown.

By the end of my first semester, I retreated into myself completely. Everything that I used to love had lost its spark. Writing, reading, getting dinner with my friends — all of

it just made me feel more empty. As stupid as this might sound, the only thing in the world that I still enjoyed was listening to NPR.

In 2021, there were over 750 episodes in the online archive for “This American Life.” I probably listened to at least 600 episodes that year — most of them at least twice.

If you’re not familiar with the show, “This American Life” is a public radio program that’s been running since 1995. Each week, the show takes on a new theme — such as “The Big Rethink” or “Swim Towards the Shark” — and the hosts compile a series of different stories that all tie back to that theme. The show, by nature, is incredibly broad, but I always loved whatever they had to offer.

Listening to an episode meant taking a 60-minute break from my nauseating self-pity. The hosts had a way of making every story feel so special, and that was addictive. I was desperate to have something good in my life, and in a way, I found it.

These days, I don’t need a constant stream of podcasts to stay afloat. Af-



ter the end of my freshman year, I did the second most predictable thing a person in my position could do: I started to get better.

Of course, nothing is that simple. There are still good days and bad days. On the bad days, one of the most powerful ways I keep joy in my life is taking the time to listen to people's strange and heartfelt stories. I encourage you all to do the same today and read through our newest edition of the Daily Trojan Magazine. Whether it's a work of fiction, a personal narrative or a long-form essay — each story in this magazine fits into a larger collage of charming, heartfelt and thoughtful storytelling.

Read about **Henry Kofman** writing letters to strangers, **Sammy Bovitz** unpacking the "Age of the Vanilla DJ," **Miranda Huang** reflecting on celebrating Halloween as a college student, **Jennifer Nehrer** sharing her love for license plates and **Reo** exploring the recent delays in the recognized student organization ap-

plication process. From there, enjoy a special film photo essay of campus from the *Daily Trojan*'s photo staff, and take in the beauty of **Amelia Neilson-Slabach**'s latest comic strip.

I am so grateful that this vibrant, curious and creative group of people was generous enough to share their writing and art with me. I am also endlessly indebted to our Chief Copy Editors **Deon Botshekan** and **Fiona Feingold**; our director of Art & Design **Vivienne Tran**; our Photo editor **Henry Kofman** (again); our digital managing editor **Nathan Elias** and, of course, our Editor in Chief **Kimberly Aguirre**, who has been there to support me every step of the way.

Without them there would be no magazine, but thanks to all of their hard work, today we get to send out a new collection of incredibly special stories.

**Sasha Ryu**

Editor, Daily Trojan Magazine





This is not a tribute.  
It's an autopsy.

SAMMY BOVITZ

**C**an I admit something embarrassing?

I'm fascinated by the "Funk Wav Bounces" series. On the one hand, Calvin Harris's duology of beach-ready pop anthems could not be further from what many would consider "artistic" or even "high-quality." The production uses famous features and basic basslines as crutches to prop up a formula that never evolves in interesting ways. On the other hand, it is an unmistakably specific work that, through its sheer charisma, has earned millions of fans. I'm one of them.

This is not the first time I've written about this strange contradiction at the core of "Funk Wav," but this story is not about this pair of albums. At least, not yet.

When Harris was set to release "Funk Wav Bounces," there was a troubling trend in the music industry that made it seem like the duology was destined for failure. As the album was developing, a series of electro-pop tracks had formed a toxic tidal wave that washed over the music industry for the better part of a decade. This is a retrospective of that time, which I've chosen to refer to as the Age of the Vanilla DJ.

Allow me to be very clear: This is not a tribute. It's an autopsy. Let us examine the remains before they rot.

## "WE'RE DIFFERENT AND THE SAME" (2012-2016)

A vanilla DJ is, technically speaking, an artist. In reality, they are more akin to a formula. If you were to build one, here's what you'd use:

First, you're going to need a name. Whether you make up a name or use

your own, it needs to sound totally uninspiring. This will make more sense when you meet our main characters.

Next, you're going to need a minuscule array of hits. Anywhere between one and three is the sweet spot, and they should have short titles that audiences can remember — that way, they won't have to attempt to recall your inevitably forgettable name. These songs must always center around mediocre beat drops and a featured vocalist — ideally, someone either on the A-minus/B-list or, better yet, someone completely irrelevant.

**"It's no secret that there are 'good' and 'bad' pop songs, but it's a difference that is quite difficult to read at times. Which songs are painstakingly crafted playfulness, and which are just mind-melting stupidity?"**

Finally: The vanilla DJ's goal cannot be to inspire greatness. Above all else, their work must be inoffensive and easy for young adults to awkwardly sway to after a warm beer or two.

In order to understand this phenomenon, we should meet our initial pair of vanilla DJs. In 2012, Zedd and David Guetta — yup, those names will do just fine — burst onto the scene with songs that moseyed up the pop charts with all the integrity of a giraffe playing professional baseball.

It's no secret that there are "good" and "bad" pop songs, but it's

a difference that is quite difficult to read at times. Which songs are painstakingly crafted playfulness, and which are just mind-melting stupidity? It's often hard to tell. But over time, the public reaches a consensus over which song is which. It's that consensus that determines which pop songs stand the test of time as enduring and valuable hits, and which ones fade into obscurity. "bad guy" is a campy and fun track whose seemingly effortless "duh" took a young artist named Billie Eilish dozens of takes to get right in the recording studio, and because of

the sheer quality coursing through that song, she's now one of the biggest musicians on the planet.

Then, of course, there are songs like Zedd's "Clarity," featuring Foxes. It has all the hallmarks of a vanilla DJ track: a beat drop that reeks, a bland production style and mediocre vocals. Overall, Zedd and Foxes form a combo that will make you ask, "Who is this, again?" Rinse and repeat for Zedd's other hit of 2012, "Stay The Night" with Hayley Williams — a bigger name than Foxes, but not exactly Beyoncé.

David Guetta had a similar case of mid-level fame, meeting squandered talent in his first big hit. Released in 2012, "Titanium" featured a then-unknown singer-songwriter named Sia. Her vocals are impressive, and the songwriting on this track is one of the few that I can somewhat defend.

This begins a cycle common to many songs like "Titanium." There might be promising vocals or production, and for a



(Photo: Lamborghini / GoodFon.com)

moment, it seems like the future of pop has arrived.

Then the beat drops, and you're reminded exactly why this era died. There's just nothing to these songs — no message, no value, no ... anything. They exist, and that's about all they have going for them.

More major figures of this subgenre emerged as the decade screamed onward. In 2015, Major Lazer found his mainstream breakthrough with "Lean On," which is so empty — even for a vanilla DJ track — that it's not really worth reflecting on. That track's featured artist, DJ Snake, soon followed with "Let Me Love You" in 2016, featuring a bored and somewhat embarrassed Justin Bieber. Then there are my personal least favorites, The Chainsmokers. They began churning out vapid faux-emo tracks like their 2016 duds, "Don't Let Me Down" and "Closer," which both exude nails-on-a-chalkboard energy.

Occasionally, a genuinely inspired track would shock the vanilla DJ landscape by actually do-

ing a good job at electro-pop beat drops. Released in 2013, Disclosure's "Latch" features an energized performance from a pre-fame Sam Smith and an out-of-the-box production style. "Rather Be," released in 2014 by two-hit wonder Clean Bandit, is the rare vanilla DJ track that makes you want to hear more from its no-name featured singer, Jess Glynne, while having some inventive production of its own. Unfortunately, Clean Bandit's other big hit, "Rockabye," was notably less inspired when it dropped two years later. Sean Paul's whining and a cookie-cutter beat drop are a far cry from the violin-heavy experimentation found in "Rather Be."

These songs were not all created equal. "Don't Let Me Down" is attempting to go for some flavor of heartbreak, "Rather Be" is a pretty solid — if unconventional — love song, and ... good luck determining what exactly "Lean On" is trying to talk about. Production is a little different across each artist, too. Clean Bandit toys with acoustic instruments far more than their counter-

parts, and Zedd really likes to let his woman vocalists belt their hearts out.

But still, the landscape of the vanilla DJ for some time was a train of seemingly unstoppable success that would ultimately come to a halt after a few months, at which point the partiers and radio stations would move on to the next cataclysmic hit. These songs were exceedingly replaceable. Just like a new hook, any new beat drop is susceptible to getting stale over time. But unlike many of the pop songs that defined previous decades, a shockingly small amount of vanilla DJ hits were standing the test of time. It was clear that, if we were going to get producer-driven songs and albums to stay relevant, something needed to change.

That brings us back to Calvin Harris. "How Deep Is Your Love" and "This Is What You Came For" introduced the mainstream world to Harris's vanilla-adjacent production style. While the latter track featured a peak-of-her-powers Rihanna — an unmatched coup for a vanilla DJ — Harris was still largely making songs built around tired beat drops,

random vocalists and a bland, inoffensive vibe that are equally perfect for frat parties and bar mitzvahs.

As 2016 drew to a close, the party for vanilla DJs was reaching its end. While the next generation of stars was still somewhat in the distance, it was becoming clear that new influences were beginning to shape mainstream pop sensibilities in the United States. Latin pop and hip-hop were beginning to hit the U.S. at a previously unseen scale. Meanwhile, a new class of pop princesses named Dua, Billie and Olivia were just one hit away from overthrowing queens like Katy and Taylor. All three women resurrected styles and sensibilities that were thought to have disappeared from the mainstream. "Sour" brought back pop-punk, "Future Nostalgia" kickstarted the return of disco — and Billie Eilish blends almost every genre she can into her "pop" work.

In other words: Vanilla DJs were not going to survive this. They would have a few more hits, and maybe another artist would sneak in the hit-making door before it shuttered for good, but they were ultimately all doomed. And one of their own delivered the perfect kill shot.

## **"I MIGHT EMPTY MY BANK ACCOUNT": 2017-2024**

In the best ways possible, "Funk Wav Bounces Vol. 1" shunned the trends of the artists in its class to forge a new path when it was released in summer 2017. Instead of tired and "edgy" beat drops and droning synths, sexy guitar licks and energetic drumlines anchored the production. Gone were the no-names or almost-names — every track had either a genuine star or made the most of a more niche hitmaker. The album's

"Funk Wav" style boiled down to disco-inspired beach pop, a perfect and expertly crafted left turn away from the exhausted potential of a doomed subgenre.

While I love its sequel as well, "Vol. 1" in particular shows the strength of Harris's decision to hit the eject button. Harris headlined Coachella in 2023 and produced for major albums like The Weeknd's "Dawn FM." He's even returned to his vanilla DJ roots when necessary, and to much greater success than his peers — "One Kiss," a Dua Lipa team-up which released a year after "Vol. 1," is the only post-2016 vanilla DJ track to have remained in the zeitgeist.

Things were not looking good for the vanilla DJ, a trend that Zedd proved with the release of "Stay" and "The Middle," which ultimately recycled old ideas and presented them to a bored audience when they released in 2017 and 2018, respectively. The same goes for The Chainsmokers's "Something Just Like This," which decided that now was the time for them to enlist a major band like Coldplay in a move that proved to be too little, too late in a post- "Funk Wav" world.

But by far the most embarrassing of these falls has to be Guetta, who re-emerged with what I consider the final major vanilla DJ song released to date. In 2022, Guetta dropped "I'm Good (Blue)" alongside vanilla vocalist Bebe Rexha. Not only does this song sample an obnoxious track, but it somehow molds this sample into a bland mush through yet another copy-pasted beat drop that only demonstrates just how doomed these DJs really were.

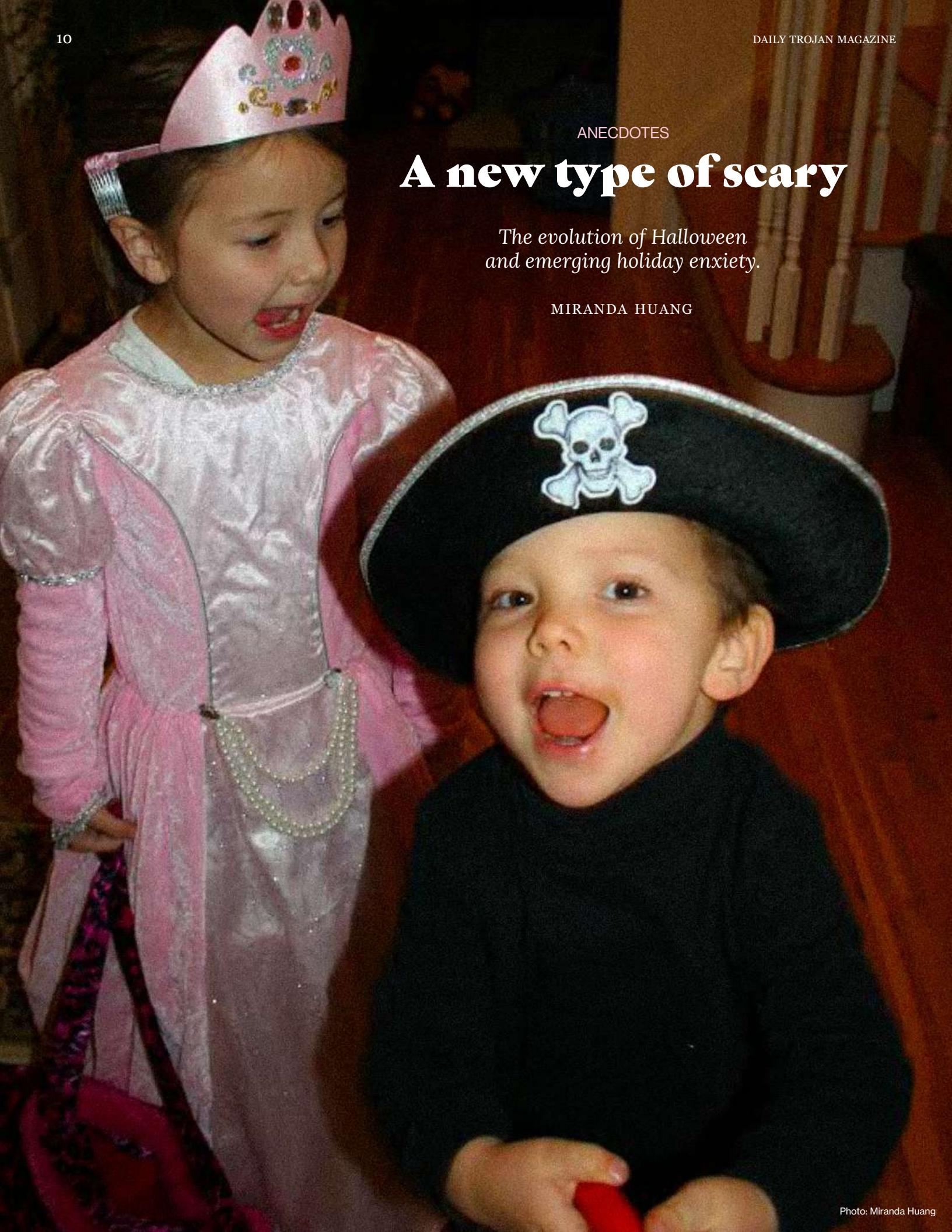
Despite this, one final vanilla DJ was able to rise from the ashes and squirt out a few more hits. Marshmello was perhaps the most vanilla of the vanilla DJs, a man with a fake

marshmallow on his head making cutesy little beat drops that thrilled 6th graders everywhere. His hit pair of 2018 singles, "FRIENDS" and "Happier," brought a much-needed dose of bubblegum pop into the vanilla DJ mix — but it wasn't enough for these songs to stand apart from the vanilla DJ lineage for too long. Marshmello's career was just a victim of poor timing — he would have had a huge 2014, had he been around.

If there's one thing we need to learn from this doomed era of music, it's this: No matter what you think "bad taste" means, you should be comforted by the fact that it almost always loses. Pop culture can be incredibly dumb at times, but it can also bring us a shared experience that can enrich our lives for many years to come. There's a reason that "Avengers: Endgame" (2019) was an unprecedented cultural event, and "Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker" (2019) just barely crossed \$1 billion. It's about quality — nothing more, nothing less.

Even if it feels like it doesn't sometimes, quality still matters — even in blockbuster media designed for the masses. If we as a society can tell that something is derivative, dishonest or uninspiring, we move on. But when we find that album, film, game or show which rises above the rest due to its sheer quality, we hold on tight to that work for as long as we can. In saying goodbye to the vanilla DJ era, we can find comfort in our ability to let go of the things that may be holding us back from finding true greatness.

Sammy Bovitz is a staff writer for the Daily Trojan Magazine and an assistant editor and columnist for the Daily Trojan's Arts & Entertainment section, penning the biweekly column "Boardrooms & Blockbusters." Bovitz is a sophomore majoring in journalism.

A photograph of two young children at a Halloween party. On the left, a young girl in a pink princess costume with a crown and a pearl necklace looks down with her mouth open. On the right, a young boy in a black pirate costume with a skull and crossbones hat also has his mouth open. They appear to be reacting to something off-camera.

ANECDOTES

# A new type of scary

*The evolution of Halloween  
and emerging holiday anxiety.*

MIRANDA HUANG

**R**emember that scene in “Mean Girls” when Gretchen snidely comments on Cady’s zombie ex-wife costume at their high school Halloween party?

“If you don’t dress slutty, that’s ‘slut shaming’ us,” Gretchen said in the newest film. Meanwhile, Karen in the 2004 version of the movie asked, “Why are you dressed so scary?”

When I was in fourth grade, I dressed up as Evie from “Descendants” (2015). I bought the electric blue hair extensions, the grunge dark jacket, the matching set of leggings and a pair of black wedges to top it off. Sauntering down the block with my plastic jack-o’-lantern at the raging hour of 7 p.m., I bravely approached each door and screeched that renowned phrase. It was the very definition of Halloween: a night spent asking for candy. And yet, it was so much more: a picturesque snapshot of my childhood.

As a kid, the week preceding Halloween was filled with decorative class parties and nostalgic movies like the “Halloweentown” series. Unabashed candy wrappers lined couch cushions and backpack pockets, while the scent of cinnamon and apple pie wafted from the kitchen. Then came the Big Day: a night of hand-holding, cheesy decorations, giddy candy trading and eager exclamations of “Trick-or-treat!” By 10 p.m., I would look into my bag of treasures, arm straining from holding the weight of candy I would soon wolf down, and sigh, a fever-like enthusiasm buzzing over my mom’s chiding voice, yelling to save some sweets for later.

Soon entering the picture was the in-between: the period between the ages of 12 and 15 when it was unclear to me what was a socially acceptable activity for me to do on Halloween. With my height — a whopping five feet tall — I could pass as a 10 year old, and I could repeatedly go trick-or-treating, in spite of my age during that period. But would I be the tallest in the neighborhood, and would my voice be too low? Of course, there was always the option of watching Netflix and baking — Pillsbury

Doughboy Halloween sugar cookies never do get old. But staying home was lame, wasn’t it?

As that period passed, Halloween soon became synonymous with partying. Long mesh tulle skirts and dollar store under-eye makeup morphed into mini skirts and revealing tops. TikTok series of Halloween costume ideas were most telling as childhood costume staples such as Buzz Lightyear — the unwieldy props and foam-enhanced arms — were swiftly replaced by items like sequin booty shorts and bright green tube tops.

To be clear, there is nothing wrong with dressing up in those kinds of costumes. In fact, as the fall season creeps in with colder (80-degree) weather, I look forward to partaking in this newer tradition: dressing up for the sheer fun of feeling confident and

eagerly assessing what creative concoctions others have come up with on the big day. (Last year, I remember observing a friend group dressed as different soda brands — Diet Coke, Sprite, Fanta and more, all of which I found innovative.)

Even so, the intention behind Halloween has changed with age, and I often feel ostracized for missing the cuddly, warm night of chomping on Kit Kats and waking up with sugar-induced stomach aches.

Samhainophobia, or the fear of Halloween, often arises out of some past traumatic event relating to the holiday. Haunted houses, horror movies, supernatural stories or all of the above ... Alas,

**“Samhainophobia, or the fear of Halloween, often arises out of some past traumatic event relating to the holiday. Haunted houses, horror movies, supernatural stories or all of the above ... Alas, my emerging anxiety refuses to be boxed into any of these categories.”**

my emerging anxiety refuses to be boxed into any of these categories, instead stemming from a deeper tension between social anxiety about drinking culture and a raging fear of missing out.

A 2023 survey conducted by the American Psychological Association found that of 2,061 adults, nearly 2 in 5 claimed to observe an increase in stress during the holiday season; thirty-six percent of those surveyed claimed that the holidays feel like a competition. After falling through rabbit holes of blog posts and Reddit chains, therapists and the broader online community seem to agree on one thing: with its complicated social dynamics and interac-



Noah Pinales / Daily Trojan

tions with strangers, Halloween can digress into a unique source of stress for adolescents and teens.

As I sifted through this information, a feeling of familiarity swept through my body. Compounded with my introverted personality, questions of whether or not I should be drinking enabled a hamster wheel of anxious thoughts. How did “being festive” become equated with “going to a party?”

And another dilemma, arguably the biggest of them all: what do I wear? What clothing will I feel secure in? And why was “finding a costume” now interchangeable with “trying to look as sexy as possible?” As one teenager from a Psychology Today article on Halloween anxiety remarked, “It’s usually about, the sexier the costume the better. Not everyone can get away with wearing these [costumes].” Was that now the point?

This consortium of “what-ifs” penetrated my mind from the beginning of September until that dreaded day. It was a constant battle of choosing between my inner child and the conforming young adult who doesn’t want to be left out.

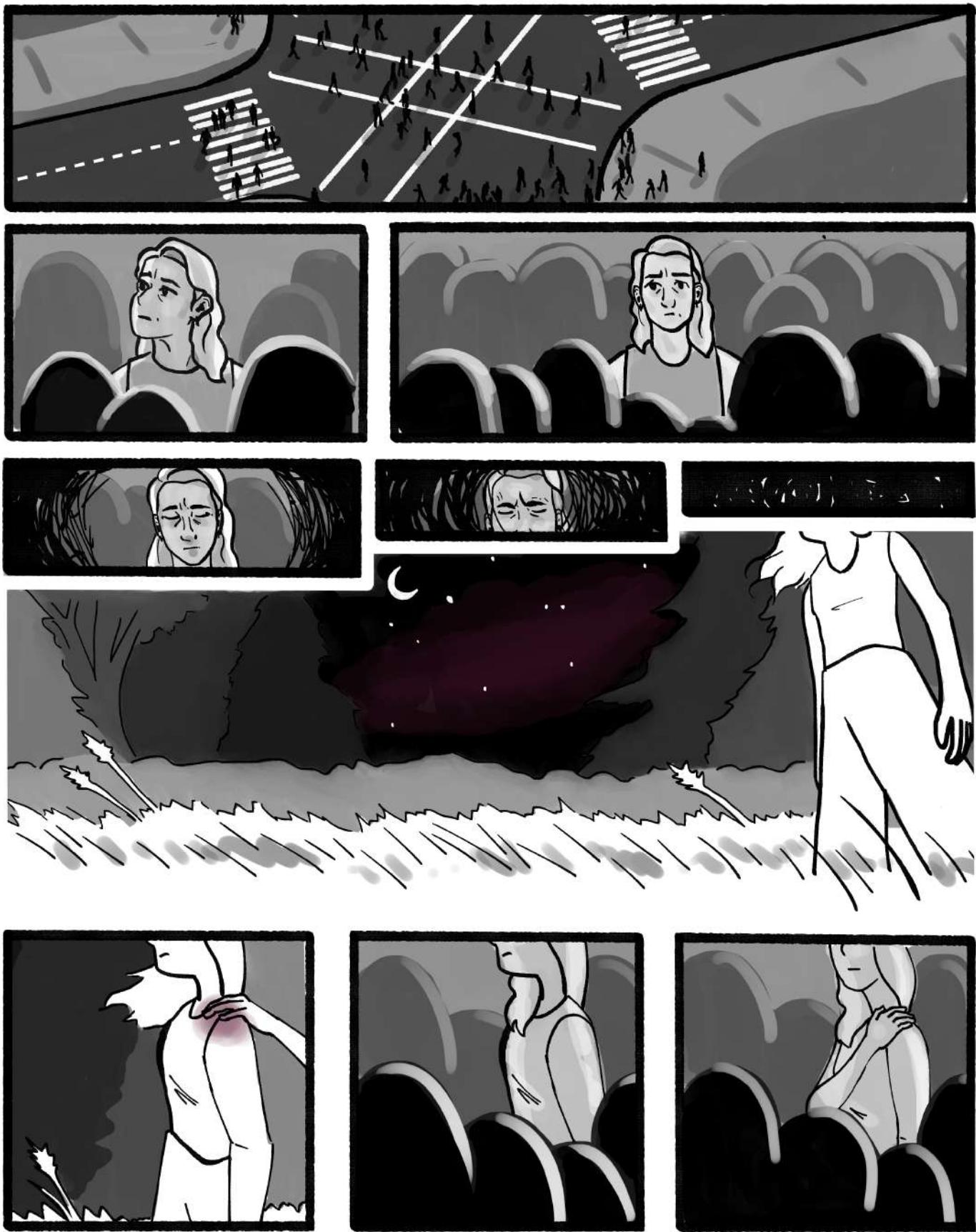
But has the essence of Halloween actually evolved? Or is it just my perception? After all, as I

compared the two extremes of Halloween preparation, the boiled-down versions maintained their integrity. The goal of Halloween was, and still is, to dress up and have fun. Regardless of the parameters, “fun” is fun, however that may look to given individuals. And while it might not be the goofy, soft-edged holiday it used to be, no one is claiming you can’t bake Pillsbury Doughboy sugar cookies and go out on Halloween.

So, while I don’t have a clear-cut answer to this personal dilemma, I am sure to rely on one consolation: the fact that Halloween is still, at its core, a holiday of disguise, a time of costumes and tricks. Whether or not I lean into the spirit of Stars Hollow from “Gilmore Girls” and the silly Target knick knacks that scream comfort, I know I can still be the zombie ex-wife or “Descendants” character. Just as Karen sang in “Mean Girls,” “Don’t like who you are? / Then hit that costume shop.”

Miranda Huang is a staff writer and assistant editor for the Daily Trojan Magazine. Huang is a freshman majoring in creative writing as well as molecular, cellular and developmental biology.





For everyone who has — or is — lost...

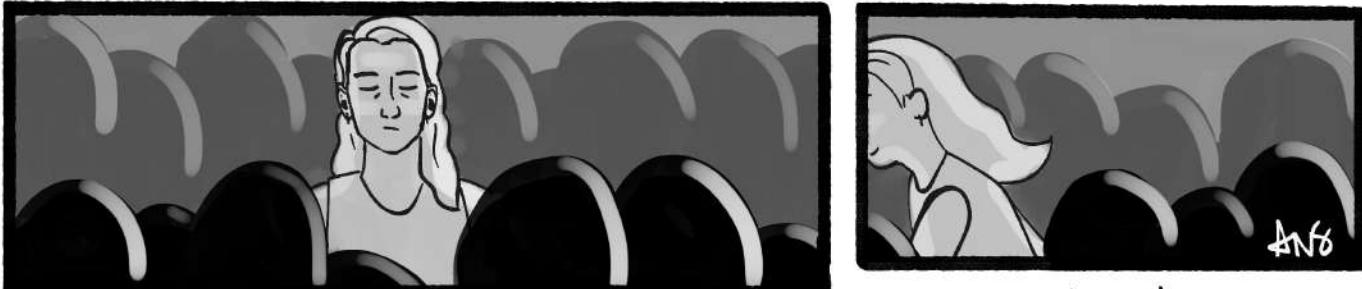
People will want to find you.



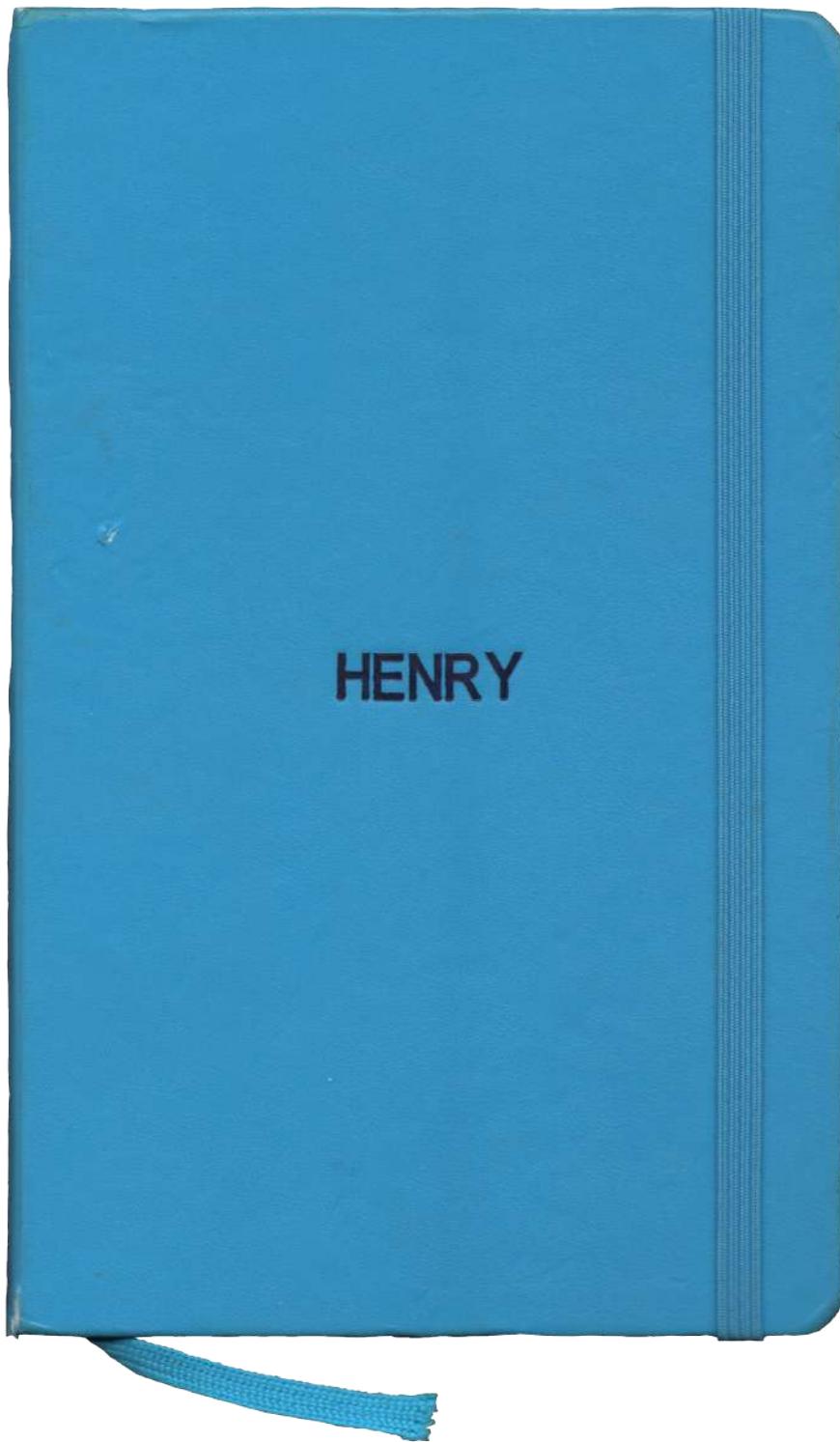
But the long and short of it will be,



And in the meantime,



you are still here.



## LETTERS TO STRANGERS

*While these letters are all purely based on my imagination,  
there is at least some truth in every single entry.*

HENRY KOFMAN

Dear Reader,

Wherever I go, I have my dark blue backpack. It might not look like much, but my backpack is where I keep one of my most prized possessions. Inside one of the slightly hidden back pockets is a small notebook. The cover has a tiny blemish, and the edges have seen better days. The whole thing is about the size of one of my hands, and it has an elastic band that keeps it shut. It's not very glamorous to look at, but like almost every other notebook, it is what is inside that is important.

My great aunt gave me this notebook as a present for my 19th birthday. On the front, she had my name embroidered in dark blue letters: "HENRY."

Today, when you pull back the elastic strap and flip the cover open, you will find the remains of 10 torn-out pages. Those pages — which existed from a previous life of this notebook for so long, now lay hidden in a desk drawer — folded and sealed in an envelope. Behind those pages, you will see a page that reads, "Letters to Strangers."

I started my collection by accident while I was abroad in London, and still continue them to this day. Whenever I feel like it, I take out my notebook, look for a stranger and write them a letter. I never speak to them. I never give them the letter. I just write it. I make assumptions about these people that I am almost sure are false, but I make them nonetheless. I fill out a simple page, sign it, then close the book until next time.

I never expected anyone to read these entries, but looking back at my notebook and all the lives inside of it, I now want to share these, so other people can see the magic of strangers that I have come to see. These letters are simultaneously true stories and my made-up falsehoods. They help me shift how I see others and how I see myself.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Henry Kahan".



The National Gallery, London  
Nov. 22, 2023

To the old man with the cap, glasses and sideburns,

You sit diagonally behind me. I don't know what you are doing but it seems like you are drawing in a notebook. Probably drawing the painting in front of you. I got just a glimpse, small little sketches. You seem content in life. Sitting in the National Gallery alone, sketching art. You were an author before, wrote some very interesting stuff. I hope you enjoyed life and keep enjoying it.

Artistically,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Harry N. Parker".

USC Village CAVA  
Sept. 6, 2024

Dear guy with round glasses and a button-down,

You seem to be having a lovely conversation with her, I am so happy to see you both smiling so much. I am not sure what you are explaining, but it has the both of you really interested. Having connections like that are so special and when there is someone that magical in your life, take a chance to appreciate it. A good conversation is rare. You just stay talking when you can.

Conversationally,



Tutor Campus Center @ USC  
Jan. 25, 2024

Dear three friends laughing by the fountain,

I am very happy for you. You seem to be enjoying each other's company. Friendship can be magical, and when you find that laughter it's amazing. You have known each other a while now. You feel as though you can trust each other with anything. The world waits for your adventures and the drama that stops them always fades away. Cherish the friendship, cherish the laughter, cherish each other.

Friendly,



Life A

## PVSC Village Sep 6, 2024

Dear guy with round glasses at PVSC Village

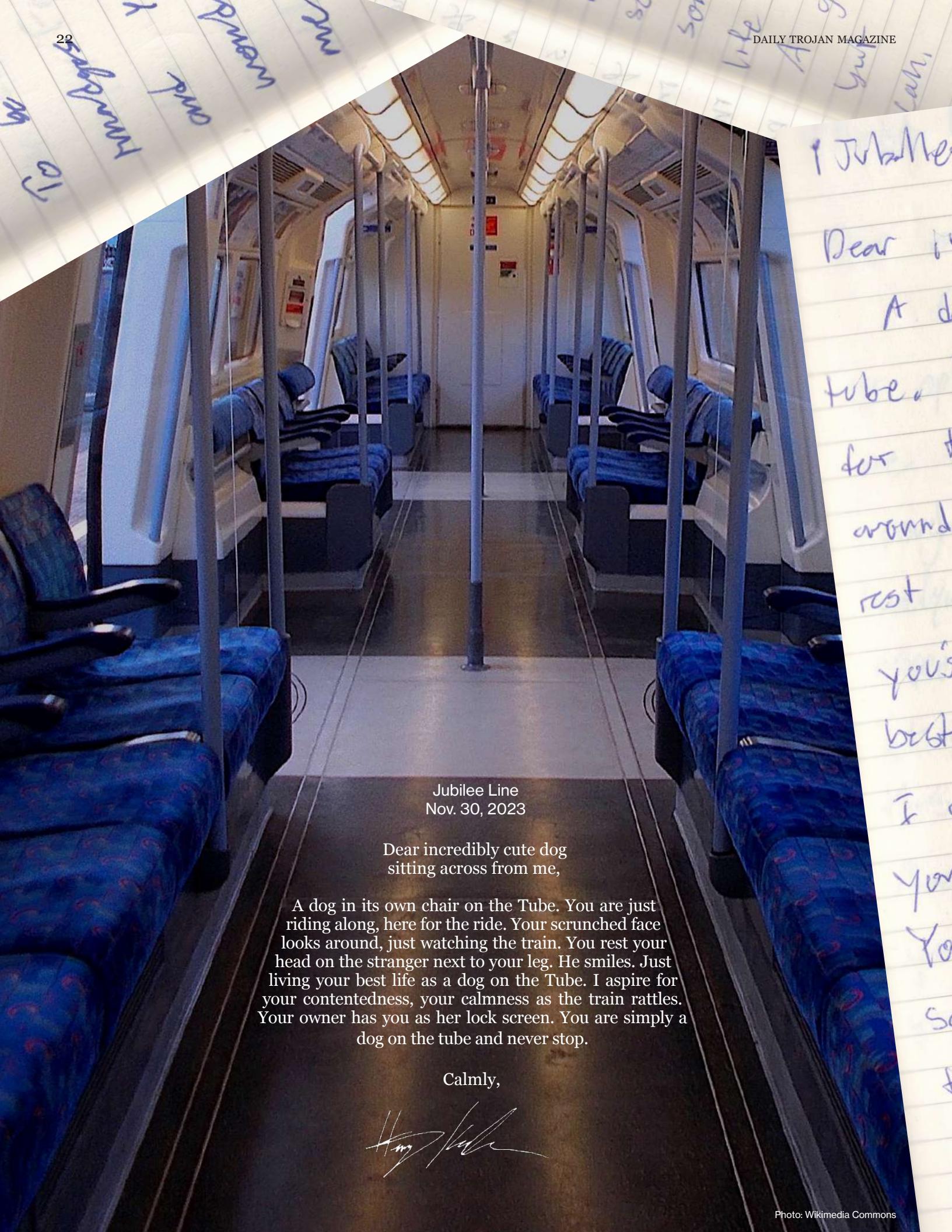
You seem to be having a really lovely conversation with her, I am so happy to see you both smiling so much. I am not sure what you are explaining but it has the both of you really interested.

Many connections like that are so special and when there is someone that matches on your life takes a chance to appreciate it.

A good conversation is rare

but stay talking when you can.

Conversationalist



Jubilee Line  
Nov. 30, 2023

Dear incredibly cute dog  
sitting across from me,

A dog in its own chair on the Tube. You are just riding along, here for the ride. Your scrunched face looks around, just watching the train. You rest your head on the stranger next to your leg. He smiles. Just living your best life as a dog on the Tube. I aspire for your contentedness, your calmness as the train rattles. Your owner has you as her lock screen. You are simply a dog on the tube and never stop.

Calmly,



Dear guy  
15 2024

line Nov 30

Incredibly cute dog sitting across from me happy to see you so much. I am not sure why in its own chair on the tube. Your sunburned face looks like the tide. Your sunburned face looks just watching the train. You have your hand out the stranger next to you. He smiles. Just like your life as a dog on the tube. Inspire for your contentness, our calmness as he tries rattles. Our owner has you as her lock screen. You are simply a dog on the tube and never stop. Calmly,

Hughie

seem to have a conversation with you. I am really happy to see you both of you have many connections like so special and when someone that maybe like take a chance but stay calm.

A good coversation but it has not seen but it has really inspired. See that as in there is still in your appetite it.



London Overground  
Nov. 23, 2023

Dear mom of the loud children,

You seem tired. Kids are a lot. You try to juggle all of them, and you do your best. I think it's hard to remember we were all children like that at some point. I don't remember it, but I'm sure I was just as loud. But now we grow up and learn and are grateful for the times our moms tried their hardest even if we didn't listen. They will grow up, get quieter and write letters to strangers on trains.

Sympathetically,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Henry Miller".

Leicester Square, London  
Nov 22, 2023

Dear man watching his phone with AirPods in,

You keep looking up and looking around. Could it be that what you are watching is boring, or do you have something on your mind? Maybe a mix of both. You are watching the phone but move to watching the people on the train and I am watching you. How full circle. You and I are alike I think. Both looking, both watching.

Observantly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Henry Miller".



TCC @ USC

- Jan

Dear tree friends

I am very happy

My son seems to be enjoying

Friendship can be enjoyed.

You find that

You have known

You feel as

First each other with myself.

Academy Museum - Jan 21, 2024

Dear two kids amazed by cinema,

Your wonder and joy delights me

To be that in awe with the movies

monologues on a screen is a rare

and you have such a beautiful

wonder in your eyes. You remind

me what makes cinema so

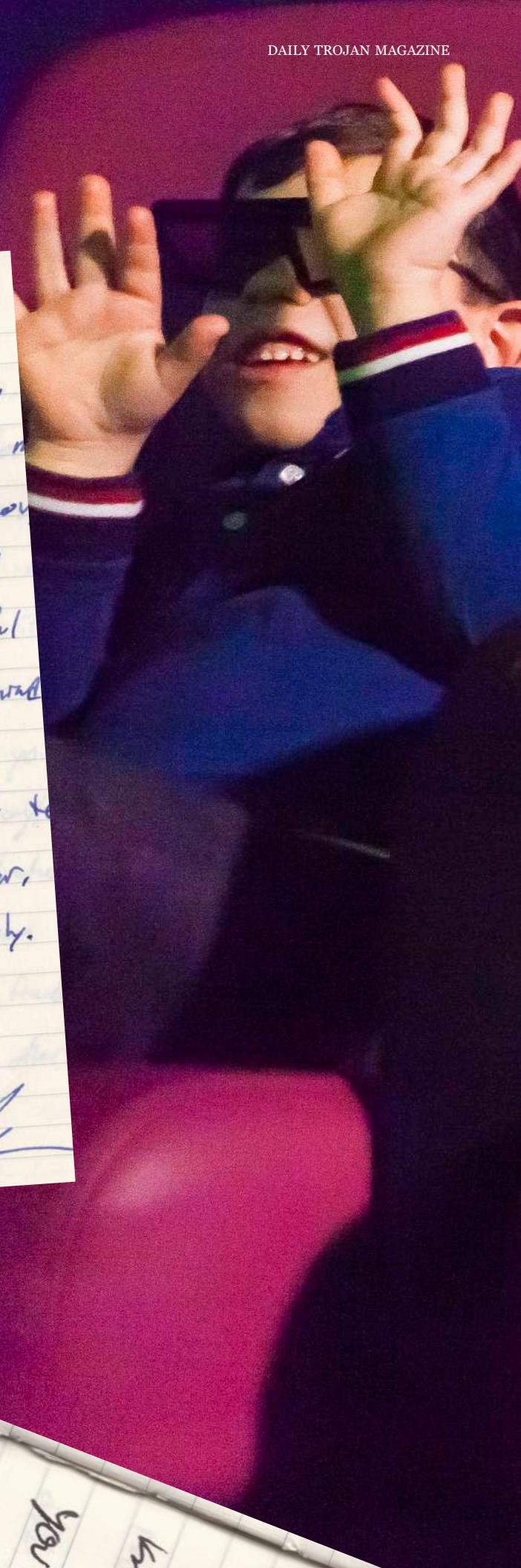
great and why it's important to

create art. Keep your wonder,

keep being amazed, like cinematography.

Cinematography,

Hug Halle



Academy Museum of Motion Pictures  
Jan. 21, 2024

Dear two kids amazed by cinema,

Your wonder and joy delights me. To be that in awe with the moving images on a screen is a real treat and you have such a beautiful wonder in your eyes. You remind me what makes cinema so great and why it's important to create art. Keep your wonder, keep being amazed, live cinematically.

Cinematically,



USC Village  
April 13, 2024

To the “yellow jacket” sitting on his phone at 2 a.m.,

A late Friday night. Lots of drunk college kids walking by, I’m sure. A father, your kids are asleep at home. I am sure they are great kids. You must really care for them. After all, you took this job at 2 a.m. A slow night, so you do what you can to fill the time, but in the end your phone is only interesting for so long. You long to be doing something, adventuring even at 2 a.m. Seems your shift is done now. Good luck on your adventures.

Adventurously,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Haylie Kuhn".



I hope my silly scribblings can be helpful to you. I have found the more I go back and look at the letters to these people I do not know, the more I get to know them. Some of them, I vividly remember what they look like, and others are just built into my imagination. From authors in London to yellow jackets in the USC Village, there are so many lives always being lived. To me, to see a stranger and see their entire life in my writing is something special.

To bring life to these living people is contradictory, but it has a lot of truth in how most people see the world. Too often are the people around you just a passing thing, an “NPC,” but you don’t know about their robust and expansive lives that are just as interesting as your own. Everyone was at some point a stranger. So go out, write to strangers and if you are feeling so bold, take those words off the page and talk to them.

Dear man on the down in the blue suit

You looked at that card with a lot of  
thought behind your eyes. Was it the card  
about

## Letters to

## Strangers

-Hans Klok



Vivienne Tran / Daily Trojan

## A license plate a day keeps the homesickness away

*Why plates from fifty(-one) states make me feel closer to my family in D.C.*

JENNIFER NEHRER

I have ridden along Interstate 95 more times than I can count. Though I see it less these days, being away at college and all, I still remember the frequent trips up and down the northeast corridor — going to New York, New Jersey or both. What made those hours in the car, along a stretch of road lacking any surprises, all the more exciting?

### License plates.

When I was younger, my father introduced me to the “license plate game.” Many play it in their own ways, but his version involved seeing how many different state license plates we could spot on a single road trip. The game kept me on my proverbial toes while still safely buckled into the back-seat of my family’s gray sedan. I would keep my eyes glued to the window, calling out when I saw a plate from a new state; more excitingly, I would call when we saw one uncommon in the region. I mean, why would someone drive all the way from California to the East Coast?

### GROWING UP WITH THE GAME

My father tells me he started playing the game because his mother — who, coincidentally, I get my middle name, Natalie for her Naomi, from — taught him to play it on family vacations. They would drive everywhere because his father — a United States Air Force doctor — was afraid to fly. This is not a joke.

In one of his email-length text messages, my dad tells me that he, his mother and his brother would always be on the lookout for plates. Either his mother or brother would maintain the trip’s running list, but his mother stole the show with the

little songs she would sing when they saw certain states — like “M.T.A.” by The Kingston Trio whenever a Massachusetts plate came into view. Other favorites included “This Land is Your Land” by Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan’s version of “Home on the Range.”

When I started getting more serious about the license plate game at the end of my sophomore year of high school, I made checklists in my Google Docs for each trip we took. Each list had the trip dates and states we crossed throughout the trip. After all, it’s less impressive to see a New Hampshire license

**“I relished every time I found a plate we were missing for the month — especially if it was rare. A few times, however, my father nearly crashed because I got too excited and yelled upon seeing an especially rare plate.”**

plate when you did it during a drive through New Hampshire.

The game also accidentally led to me teaching myself where certain license plates are more common. U-Hauls generally have Arizona plates, and big trucks can either be Indiana or Maine. I became less surprised seeing those on the road.

As the game got more serious, more of my immediate family joined in. We expanded the competition — between ourselves and the world, that is — to cover months. How many different states could we find in September? What about

October? November? The months when we didn’t travel were especially exciting. What could we accomplish on just our home turf?

Disclaimer: Our home turf is, after all, Washington, D.C. Tourism certainly gave us an advantage.

Nevertheless, license plates became something I would keep my eyes out for every day. I relished every time I found a plate we were missing for the month — especially if it was rare. A few times, however, my father nearly crashed because I got too excited and yelled upon seeing an especially rare plate.

With every passing month, we got increasingly more serious about how we collected our data. For a while, we searched for an app that could handle our search, and in February of 2022 — during my senior year of high school — we found one. Suddenly, our games became a lot easier to track, and we’ve been using the License Plate Games app ever since.

### MOVING ON... SORT OF

In August of 2022, my family had a tough decision: how — or if — the game would change when I moved across the country for college. Being the oldest child, we hadn’t had to think of this yet. Ultimately, we decided to become a split-coast team instead of competing against each other from opposite ends of the country. Some may say this is cheating, but it eventually would become one of the ways I learned how to cope with living 3,000 miles away from home.

When I left for college, I took the iMessage chat with me. My sister and my parents became inundated with texts that were just the names of states as we updated each other on the sightings each month.

Not shockingly, my move to the West Coast yielded a world of “new” plates and patterns. I began to see more variations of West Coast plates and delighted in the plentiful diversity brought on by the nature of a college campus. When I met my boyfriend, Daniel, and started taking advantage of the fact that he had a car, he and I would walk through the Shrine Parking Structure and point out license plates from near and far. This also might be cheating, but we would sometimes remember that particular cars were always there — which definitely helped us check off Arkansas some months.

As I explored parts of Los Angeles for the first time, the license plate game added a layer of excitement. I would stare out the window of whatever car I was in and examine not only the buildings and scenery we passed but also the cars on the road, searching for states we hadn’t yet collected for the month. I learned the frequencies of certain states’ plates in my new vicinity — including what I still think is a strange amount from Illinois — and adapted my expectations in tandem. Suddenly, finding a license plate from Oregon on day two was commonplace.

## THE SEARCH FOR NUMBER 51

While there were many months in which we came close to finding all

51 license plates — including D.C. as is proper — we would always be left disappointed by a straggler or two ... or more. In one particular month, Daniel and I found ourselves scouring the parking lot at Spudnuts after

bountifulness — the former from earlier in the month and the latter from Daniel during break — we could still not fill the Hawai‘i-sized hole in our list. And in January of 2023, Wyoming laughed yet again as it hid its cars from our view.

February 2023, however, was different.

Perhaps it was my mother, on a trip to India for work, who may have inadvertently blessed us with good fortune by sending a picture of a license plate from Delhi after I requested “literally any [plates] you find,” just as the new month began. In her defense, I walked right into that one.

On Feb. 2, my father performed a miracle and produced a Hawai‘i license plate while still in the Nation’s Capital. On the fourth, I added some Southern California regulars — Nevada, Montana, Idaho, Utah and Washington — with a sprinkle of rarity: Iowa, Kansas and North Dakota. While slightly common for the area, North Dakota is still an infrequent guest on our monthly lists.

Two days later, I entered the Shrine Parking Structure again and added seven states to the list. Including regulars from both coasts, we were well on our way. Would this be the month? Might we finally spot all 51 for the first time?

Four minutes after my C-SPAN fanboy father commented on Arizona Senator Kyrsten Sinema’s outfit for the State of the Union ad-



Vivienne Tran / Daily Trojan

ball game in a last-ditch attempt to see Wyoming. In another, Nebraska evaded our gaze. During my first December back home, even with the aid of both Los Angeles and San Diego’s

dress the next day, I found Maine. Two days after that, he pulled a rare Kentucky and Louisiana. Another two days later and, the South found my father again in the form of an Alabama license plate.

During this month, we developed our official policy for out-of-state assistance. On Feb. 17, my friend in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, sent me a picture of a Wyoming license plate by his dorm. Could it count? My father's verdict: "would you give him/her one of your kidneys if a transplant was critical for their survival ???"

Yeah, I would. The plate counted for a full 22 hours before, in a stroke of luck, I happened to see a Wyoming on the road in L.A.

On Feb. 19, several of my friends and I piled into Daniel's minivan to drive down to San Diego for the day. During the trip, we saw multiple South Dakota plates (which we needed), multiple Hawaiis (which we didn't), as well as Nebraska and New Hampshire.

Down to two.

Our kidney rule came back into play on Feb. 26: Daniel's sister spotted Alaska back in San Diego. One left.

That night, Daniel and I were ready to hunt. We had decided Mississippi — our holdout — was common enough in L.A. that we were ready to scour the USC garages. After dinner at Everybody's Kitchen, we set our sights on the McCarthy Parking Structure.

First floor? Nothing. Second? Nada. The two even had back sections that were less than helpful. The lights inside were dim, and the place was cold and kind of wet. I was getting ready to call this one a dud and check the Shrine in the morning. And then ...

Some states, dear reader, do not require cars to have a valid license plate on the front. As such, I made

sure to walk around and check the backs of any car in the garage that denied us a front plate. On some occasions, Daniel thought I was being a bit ridiculous. "A Tesla would not drive all the way here from Mississippi," he would say. I still checked.

Near the end of the third floor, I spotted a Lexus with no plate in front. As I walked around to check the plate, Daniel aired his skepticism yet again. "A Lexus from Mississippi?" He asked.

"Oh my god!" I exclaimed.

It was.

Daniel rushed over as I stared at the plate in disbelief. "Oh my god!" I said again, beginning to jump up and down for joy. We knelt down and took a selfie with the plate, ready to send it to my family with an excited text. We had found all 51! But I had to do something else first.

I didn't care that it was now midnight back home; surely, he would be awake anyway. I called my dad and showed him. Both of us were ecstatic — we had accomplished a feat years, maybe even decades in the making.

After I hung up, I screen recorded myself checking Mississippi off on our in-app list. In my excitement, however, I think I forgot to send the video. Regardless, I typed out a victorious message — five texts, actually — and broadcast it to the family group chat. We had vanquished the proverbial dragon that we had set our eyes on long ago.

It's never over, though.

On March 1, 2023, I sent the next text in my family group chat: "While we may have achieved all 51 plates in February, THE GAME IS NOT OVER!! Send in any [plates] you see for the month of March!!"

The next day we had at least 19 plates. Back to business as usual.

## AND THE GAME GOES ON

Since February 2023, we've managed to spot all 51 plates seven more times. And at the beginning of each month, regardless of the outcome, I tell my family to refresh their memories and be on the lookout once again.

I've never wanted to stop playing the game, even if I manage to spot all 51 a certain number of times or somehow get all 51 plus all of the plates possible from Canada. Why would I? It's become a fact of life. I'll continue to blurt out the names of states as I see their plates on the street and pass the game onto my children on a fateful road trip.

Why?

I think the license plates have been a subtle — or not so subtle at times — reminder of my intrinsic connection to my family. Each time I find a new or rare plate for the month, the group chat cheers. I see the plate and think, "Well, I've got to tell my family!" Oftentimes my father will follow up with, "How are you? How's class?"

Other times, I don't notice the connection, but looking back, it's definitely been there. How else can I explain the warm feeling I get when pointing out already-found license plates as I walk or drive by? Why does the analysis of a plate design make me feel simultaneously ecstatic and nostalgic?

Wherever I am, wherever they are, one of us will always have a plate to send. It's a built-in conversation starter, a cheat code to catch up on life. I'm not sure if I should call it a tradition or something we just ... do. Whatever it is, though, I'm glad we have it.

Jennifer Nehrer is a junior majoring in journalism. She is the *Daily Trojan's* Data Editor. She was formerly the News Assignments Editor.

# Clubs persist despite setbacks

*Student organizations discuss challenges with Campus Activities.*

REO

Last fall, Campus Activities released an application for student organizations seeking new recognition. The process went on routinely until the office rejected every applicant, directing them to reapply in August.

In August, Campus Activities released an application for student organizations seeking repeat recognition. The process did not go on routinely. Instead, most student organizations ran into issues with their application. Campus Activities missed its initial deadlines, and USC replaced this semester's involvement fairs with smaller, scattered tabling fairs.

Throughout September, many clubs waited week after week for Campus Activities' final decisions that would determine whether or not they were recognized by the University. These decisions determined the clubs' futures at USC, and their delays came from numerous problems with this semester's application process, both predictable and not.

## THE PROBLEMS:

Even for the clubs that fell victim to the freeze in January, there was a plan in place. The University requested that those clubs reapply to become a recognized student organization.

In January, Campus Activities wrote that the RSO freeze resulted from a need "to ensure that RSOs — which currently number over 900 at USC — are both supported and fulfilling the important role they play in our campus community." The resolution to

make new clubs apply alongside the 900 pre-existing clubs may have stressed the system already struggling to "support" and "fulfill" their needs.

According to many club leaders, the timeline to handle this stress was never adequate.

"What threw us off the most was how swift the first deadline would be," said Andrew Bawiec, the co-president of SC Garden Club and a senior majoring in environmental studies. "Prev-

ning of the school year, the shortened turnaround made the process more difficult, Bawiec said.

"You're asking people to do club activities before the school year starts, which is always tricky, especially with advisers," Bawiec said. "[Our adviser has] been very lovely [and] communicative with us, but especially on such a time crunch, we were stressed."

Josh Morton, the president of Spoiler Alert Improv and a senior majoring in theatre with an emphasis in comedy, said the timeframe they were given was unthinkable, given what goes into the application.

"While it's not this Herculean task to sit down and do these trainings ... it takes time, and especially over the summer — when you're probably busy or don't want to do that because it's the summer and you shouldn't have to — the fact that we were given four days to do it, to me, is mind-boggling," Morton said.

Still, clubs wanted to make the deadline, so they pushed on, in spite of setbacks.

"Our auditions were planned for the second weekend of school, so if we couldn't get in on that involvement fair, then it didn't matter if we got into a different one, because that's really all we care to go to that for: to advertise our auditions and get people in the door in that way," Morton said. "It was a lot. The timing was really tight, and the communication with Student Affairs was difficult, to say the least."

A fast-approaching first deadline threatened many RSOs with discouragement, especially those where close communication was not an option. Christophe Merriam, the co-president of Trojan Filmmakers

**“When Campus Activities first contacted RSOs on Aug. 8, the deadline to apply to table at the first involvement fair was eight days away — Aug. 16. However, RSOs wouldn’t have all of the necessary materials to apply until Aug. 12.”**

ous years ... we were given more time than just a single week."

When Campus Activities first contacted RSOs on Aug. 8, the deadline to apply to table at the first involvement fair was eight days away — Aug. 16. However, RSOs wouldn't have all of the necessary materials to apply until Aug. 12, when Campus Activities released the required training modules for officers and advisers.

While the applications are typically released before the begin-

Club and a junior majoring in the business of cinematic arts, said TFC had to wrangle a team of officers scattered around the globe.

"I was in New York shooting a commercial ... My co-president wasn't in the country; she was visiting family. My vice president, pretty sure they were out of town, as well. The treasurer was out of town," Merriam said. "At that point, we were just like, 'There's no way we're going to be able to finish this.'"

Meanwhile, even club leaders on campus scrambled to organize their applications. Rather than email Campus Activities and wait days for a response, Morton opted to go into the offices directly, which he considered an advantage.

"Not everyone has the time to go into the USC whatever office and ask all these questions. Not everyone has the privilege of having their adviser's phone number, who they can easily contact," Morton said. "Even though I had all these things going for me, I still struggled."

In Garden Club's case, as they were not informed of where to find their required training modules, they needed to consult other students on Reddit to find the trainings. While the club also reached out to Campus Activities, the response from Reddit came quicker. Bawiec said the delay made an already difficult deadline even more stressful.

"We had to delay our individual officer training by the first couple days, pretty much leaving 48 hours before the first deadline for all of our officers to complete the trainings," Bawiec said. "We pulled it together, but it's a bit ridiculous of an expectation."

Morton said the trainings also became an issue for Spoiler Alert, mostly because of the poor

design of the website where the trainings were located.

"When you open up the page, there's this giant blue rectangle, and inside of that is a lot of text, basically telling you everything you do, and they hyperlinked the trainings. If you know anything about hyperlinks, you know that hyperlinks are also blue, so there was no way of knowing they were hyperlinked," Morton said. "It was just a facepalm moment of, like, great web design."

ployment, the application would not accept the adviser in the role. As a result, Morton needed to find another adviser for the club.

Spoiler Alert was able to handle all of its woes before the first deadline passed, and they submitted the application. Morton said they were quickly denied.

"There were three words missing in our Constitution, which is absurd that that is a reason that you can halt someone's process," Morton said. "It's just so bureaucratic and unnecessary."

As has been made clear by the slew of outspoken club leaders in the time since, issues like these were not contained to a single group or school. They were prevalent everywhere.

In the middle of the application process, the School of Cinematic Arts held a meeting to lay down some new rules for their own RSO program, which ran parallel to the Universitywide RSO program. Merriam and leaders of other aspiring SCA RSOs attended.

"This year, SCA was planning on changing it where you had to be a USC RSO in order to get the SCA RSO," Merriam said. "In the meeting, most of the orgs were like, 'We're struggling with obtaining USC RSO status.'"

Merriam estimated that 25 organizations attended the meeting and that only one or two were not struggling with the application process.

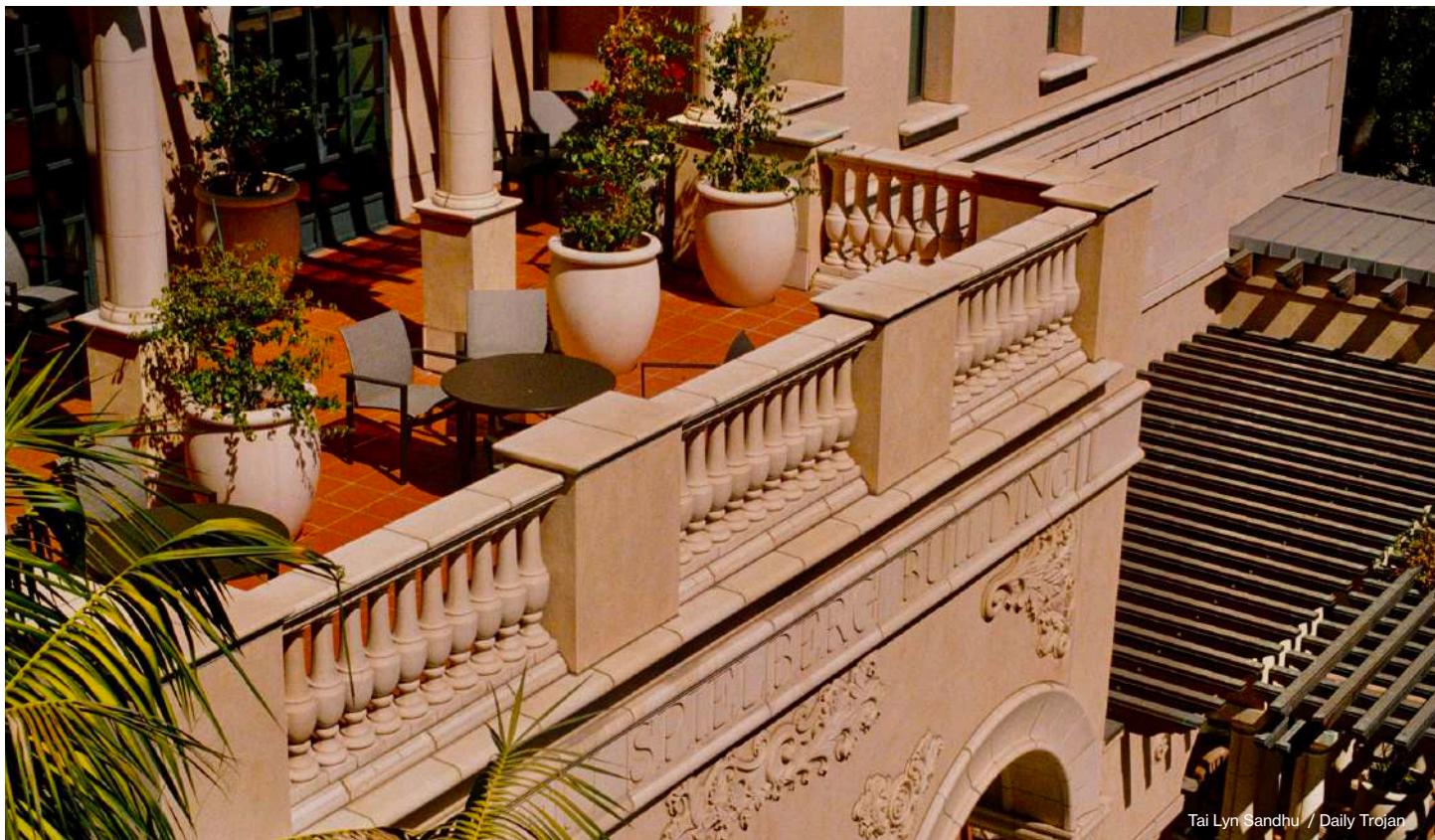
At an Undergraduate Student Government meeting Sept. 17, over 10 RSO members and leaders spoke to USG and Diana Zarate, a program coordinator from Campus Activities unaffiliated with the RSO team. Alexandria Gee, a fifth year majoring in theatre, said the issues with this year's application process were unprecedented and discouraging.

"This is something that came out of the blue," Gee said. "I don't know

## **"Under the original plan, Campus Activities intended to have made it through all applications submitted on or prior to Aug. 30 by Sept. 12 ... Instead, that same weekend, the office had only made it through applications sent in by Aug. 23."**

While officers could look to Campus Activities' FAQ page to answer many of their questions, the location of officer training modules could not be found on the page. Further, applicants did not receive emails spreading information about widespread issues such as this.

At the same time, when filling out the application, Morton discovered the faculty adviser who had worked with the club for the past year was no longer able to serve as faculty adviser. Because of their part-time em-



Tai Lyn Sandhu / Daily Trojan

what the problem is, but it's getting to the point where who wants to be involved and have leadership if it's gonna take a toll on our mental health?"

## THE HURDLES

After noticing issues with the application process, Campus Activities scrapped the idea of hosting traditional involvement fairs. It became abundantly clear they would not be populated at the rate the office was approving applications.

For the entirety of the application process, that rate had been a mystery. Campus Activities did not provide a timeline for when clubs would receive word back. That changed Sept. 14, when they revealed how many applications they had processed in the month since. In one month, the office made it through 11 days of applications. In other words, they were missing their target goals by over a week.

Under the original plan, Campus Activities intended to have made it through all applications submitted on or prior to Aug. 30 by Sept. 12, the proposed second involvement fair. Instead, that same weekend, the office had only made it through applications sent in by Aug. 23.

Campus Activities estimated that they would complete processing by the end of September, but if their rate of responses held steady, they would finish processing Oct. 26. Their estimation indicates they either already made it through the majority of applications by Sept. 14 or their processing speed increased over time.

USC took an office that, by its own admission, was not equipped to take on additional responsibilities last spring and threw that same office into an overwhelmingly difficult situation. Many, in and out of the office, paid the price.

Morton, for example, resubmitted Spoiler Alert's application with

the proper changes to the club's constitution, but they were rejected once again, after receiving the same — now outdated — information included on their first rejection.

When it came to the second week of Campus Activities' revamped RSO Spotlight Tabling Fairs, Morton walked into the offices to get the club's problems sorted once and for all. Morton met with a coordinator who permitted the club to table at the fair.

"So I bring my poster on Thursday, the second week, and I'm like, 'Hey, I did everything you told me, how do I get to table at the fair this week?'" Morton said. "When I went into the [coordinator's] office, the first thing she told me was ... I'm working 12 hours a day, and I go home, and I don't eat food."

Although Morton said the plea for sympathy was hard to accept considering the lack of communication, Morton said he still saw Campus Activities putting forth a genuine effort that he recognized.

"I'm sure they're trying, and I'm grateful that they're putting in the work, but at the same time, this has caused so much anguish for me and for, I'm sure, plenty of other people in my position, and so my patience is really thin," Morton said.

The problems getting recognition before the tabling fairs then caused other issues for the affected clubs. Bawiec said Garden Club missed out on an important enrollment opportunity when they were unable to secure a spot at the fair.

"A big portion of Garden Club's membership comes from the involvement fair, especially the early involvement fairs. It is vital for organizations to have those spaces so that ... we can advertise," Bawiec said.

Though Campus Activities redesigned the fairs to meet the needs of the delayed timeline, Morton said the new tabling fairs presented problems with timing and attendance.

"The fair just felt depressing this year," Morton said. "That's super lame, because if I didn't find out about my club freshman year — oh my God, I would have had a miserable freshman year."

Bawiec said the problems affected opportunities for collaboration in addition to the problems with advertising.

"I am not aware of what new clubs have been added," Bawiec said. "In previous semesters, I would peruse the involvement fair in order to see if there were clubs that we could maybe collaborate with, but I can't really do that."

At the Sept. 17 USG meeting, Lawrence Sung — a senior majoring in international relations with an emphasis in global business — said although the problems with the application process affected senior leadership, their effects would be more damaging for newer students.

"The people that ultimately suffer ... are the underclassmen, the freshmen, and especially the transfers and the spring admits that come here needing community and are right now unable to find that community," Sung said.

## FINDING A LIFELINE

Merriam said being a club in SCA significantly reduced the stress the club faced last semester — having been a victim of the freeze — as the school offered help where the University did not.

"Our saving grace last year was we were an SCA RSO," Merriam said. "Due to still being a club that had a lot of membership, there were a lot of people within SCA that were very helpful with us."

That help continues this semester, according to Merriam.

"Luckily, SCA is trying to work with us a lot, which I'm very thankful for," Merriam said. "A lot of the faculty there has been really nice with trying to help us book rooms and getting things like that on campus."

At the meeting between SCA and its clubs, organizations representing various interests were seeking RSO status. Merriam said the lack of help for many of the smaller, newly formed clubs was a clear issue.

"There's so many really cool SCA student orgs that do so many different things, whether it's in animation, in games, in film," Merriam said. "It's definitely wrong that USC isn't helping bolster these things, especially for programs that historically haven't had as many clubs and things. It's really important that we amplify those voices and give them the resources that they do need."

Morton said his improv club was his favorite part of his time at

USC and lamented the lack of support for an aspect of the college experience that he saw as integral.

"I've enjoyed my classes. I've enjoyed meeting people, but this has been a truly unique experience that I know I couldn't get at any other school," Morton said. "Whenever I am talking to a prospective student about USC, the first thing I talk about is my experience with this group."

Though Campus Activities recognized that clubs "are responsible for the majority of programs and events held on campus, including concerts, lectures, special events, spirit rallies, cultural and social events, and conferences," Morton said the lack of communication and support for student organizations was "baffling."

"Without these student organizations, USC would be a hollow shell of a university," Morton said. "It would be a research institution that has parties, and while for some people that's great, that's not what I want out of college."

As a member of a club that had previously operated with and without RSO status, Merriam said the setbacks would not stop the club from operating at its highest possible capacity.

"We have a pretty active membership base, and people enjoy the club, but it's kind of ridiculous that we struggle with just getting our RSO status," Merriam said. "We've done it once without it. We can do it again. We're just gonna stick our heads down and still provide the same resources that we have before for students."

*Sean Campbell contributed to this report.*

Reo is a staff writer for the Daily Trojan Magazine and the *Daily Trojan's* news section.



THE REAL WORLD

# USC ON FILM

HENRY KOFMAN

**O**n Oct. 6, 1880, USC first opened to its 53 students and 10 teachers. Eight years later, the Kodak #1 camera became available to the public. From the start, film photography has been a crucial way to capture the history and beauty of our ever-changing campus. Today, USC continues to expand, with new buildings appearing alongside the old. Physical media is increasingly rare in the 21st century, yet it holds the power to capture reality in a unique hands-on form. For a special Daily Trojan Magazine photo essay, staff photographers, **Jake Berg, Bryce Dechert, Tai Lyn Sandhu** and **Mallory Snyder**, took it old-school with physical media, a roll of film, to capture the sprawling life of a 144-year-old campus in "USC on Film."



Jake Berg / Daily Trojan



Tai Lyn Sandhu / Daily Trojan



Mallory Snyder / Daily Trojan



Tai Lyn Sandhu / Daily Trojan



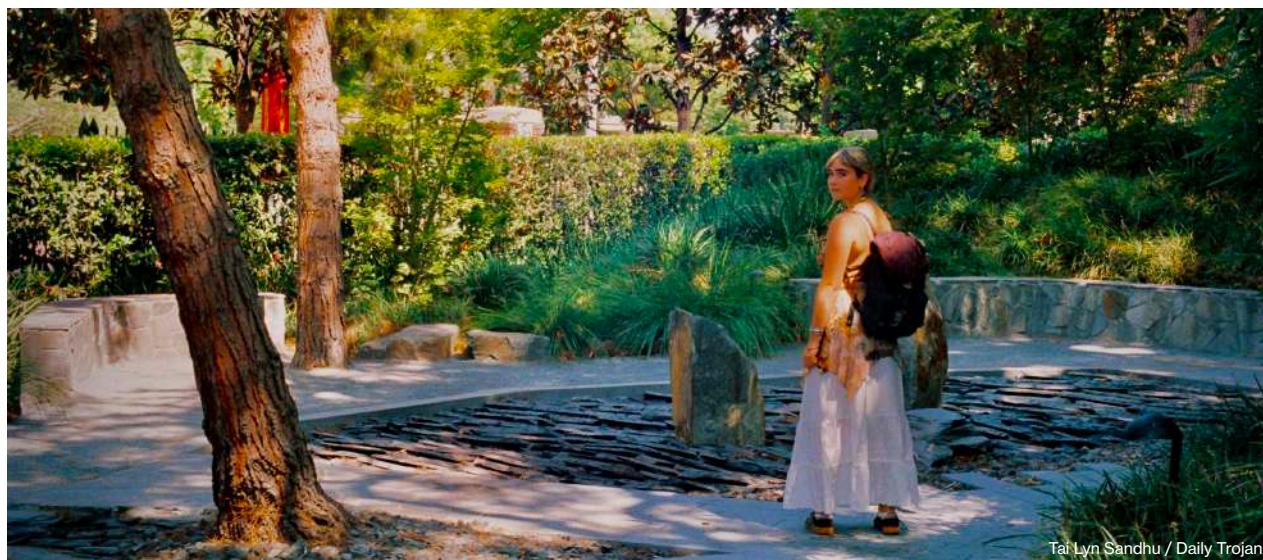
Tai Lyn Sandhu / Daily Trojan



Bryce Dechert / Daily Trojan



Bryce Dechert / Daily Trojan



Tai Lyn Sandhu / Daily Trojan



Mallory Snyder / Daily Trojan



Mallory Snyder / Daily Trojan



Mallory Snyder / Daily Trojan

DT  
mag

EST. 2023