

THE OCCASIONAL SLATER

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Some Of The News, Some Of The Time

February 2025 Edition

Fall Semester In Review

Off The Bench



Kaianna Bernstein faces off against an opponent from Brattleboro

Sports injuries affect everyone. Whether you are injured, a member of your team is injured, or even just someone in your community is injured, it causes ripples in the social structure of your community. Some people get pretty upset about their injuries, and have to miss out on practices, activities, and sports games.

However, different people have different standpoints on their injuries. Some people even find silver linings in their injuries. I interviewed six people, and I got some mixed and repeated results. One of the people that I interviewed, Mable Noonan, was speechless. She had broken her elbow, and couldn't think of an answer for a single question.

I interviewed Maverick Traverse and he told me that he had nearly broken his arm. He was told to "walk it off," as the severity of his arm injury had not yet been determined. Cody LaFrancois said that he hated pretty much every aspect of his injury. He had broken his collarbone, and was told to "deal with it," similar to Maverick Traverse being told to "walk it off;" there was very little sympathy in initial responses.

continued on page 4



The artist, R. Sanford Stragnell, in his studio.

Portrait of a Local Artist

My grandfather, a small art business owner, has been working as an artist for a long time. First working as an artist and rugby specialist in college, he was always a creative and innovative person. His father told him that he would "Starve as an artist" so he should "Learn how to do something else", and so he became an electrician. Even while working in that field, he still worked as an artist. After he retired, he continued working as a recycled scrap metal artist, his work inspired by nature. He makes unique things out of interesting materials, such as his copper leaf Christmas ornaments. His name is R. Sanford Stragnell, and he goes by Sandy, Sanford, or Sandman. Along with being an artist, he is also the referee for the women's rugby team at the Vermont State University in Castleton and has worked with rugby for years.

I recently interviewed him about himself and his life and took pictures of his art.

AR: "What was your inspiration to become an artist?"

RSS: "Hm... I was fascinated by the way the torch was able to make the metal malleable."

AR: "Do you think you can tell the story of your rise to being an artist from the very beginning to right now?"

RSS: "The need to be creative."

continued on page 3

A Senior-Year Shift: How Early College Affects "Slater Nation"



The senior section of the bleachers is pretty empty at an assembly at Fair Haven Union High School as a result of Early College student departures.

The gymnasium bleachers were packed with people who were excited to start the day—except for one section. The senior bleachers of Fair Haven Union Middle and High School were notably empty for the first Principal's List assembly this past Friday.

Fair Haven, a school participating in the Early College Program, allows students to earn college credit while completing their senior year of high school. This opportunity's impact is felt by the entire student body.

"My upper-level electives are clearly shrinking every year. Look at all the extra books on the shelf," says Michael Bruce, a history teacher with a 24-year career at Fair Haven.

A graduate of the school himself, Bruce channels his passion for the institution into his teaching. As the teacher of AP Psychology, as well as two

continued on page 3

Hallway Talk

What is your opinion on middle schoolers being involved in clubs/activities with high schoolers?

Azalea Rehm, 7th: "I think that sometimes it can either be intimidating for the middle school students or it can be a new and interesting experience. I myself did fishing club, a club that involves middle and high school, and I made friends with some high school students and had a very nice time."

Edie Grossarth, 8th: "I love it and think it's such a good thing to be with the high schoolers and it's so much fun!"

Payton Colburn, 9th: "I love it! I think it's great including the middle schoolers in these things. It's a great way to meet your upperclassmen and get a good relationship with them before they get into high school."

Anonymous, 11th: "I feel like it is really unfair to have middle school students involved in our club/activities, especially pep rallies. I feel pep rallies are more of a high school thing and less of a middle school thing. All the high schoolers had to wait their turn to be part of these high school activities and I feel like it's really unfair that the middle schoolers get to just join our activities."

Elaina Allard, 11th: "I don't approve of middle schoolers being combined with high schoolers in clubs and activities. Seventh and eighth graders are at a drastically different stage in their life than juniors and seniors. Having them participate in activities with those much older students is inappropriate, as 12 and 13 year olds should not be in an environment with 18 year olds. In addition, middle schoolers change the dynamic of high school clubs; behavior issues are much more of a burden and oftentimes high schoolers are left to supervise the middle schoolers. This leads to decreased enjoyment of clubs by high schoolers and potentially decreased high school enrollment in clubs. I think middle school should have their own clubs just like the high school does, but they shouldn't be combined."

Anonymous, 12th: "I'm not the biggest fan of it. When I was a middle schooler we had to wait and get excited to be a high schooler to be involved in the activities. I feel like they shouldn't get to have high school privileges before they're even a high schooler because that's what I had to go through when I was their age."

What do you think about the 10 and 2 rule?

Henry Young, 8th: "The 10 and 2 rule is absolute baloney because those are the times it makes sense to use the bathroom, before the lesson starts and when the lesson is over."

Anonymous, 8th: "I think the 10 and 2 rule means well, but sometimes in certain circumstances it's annoying to have to wait if you really have to go to the bathroom or something. But overall, I think it helps students stay more focused and engaged for the last little bit of class and the first part of the instruction time without any disruptions of people asking to leave or worrying about who's leaving."

Anonymous, 11th: "Honestly 5 & 5 feels, and sounds better. 10 is a little excessive in most cases, and 2 minutes I think may not be enough time to keep everyone in the class."

Anonymous, 12th: "I think it's overall stupid. Some teachers I've had aren't super strict on this rule, but some are. You only have three minutes to get to class, and there's barely enough time for bathroom use."

Anonymous, 12th: "I get why it's a thing but in between classes the bathrooms are full and you can't wait, otherwise you'll be late for class. But if you go to class for the 10 minutes you just sit there needing to go to the bathroom and can't focus and no matter what you say some teachers won't budge when it comes to the 10 and 2 rule. I've almost peed my pants on multiple occasions! Because of it I'm not a fan."

How do you feel about the issues that are occurring in our bathrooms?

Anonymous, 8th: "I think that it's kinda ridiculous that middle and high school students can't manage to use the bathroom for 2, 3 minutes without causing problems or making messes. They are used by everyone and it's inconsiderate to leave the bathroom trashed for someone else to have to deal with."

Abby Young, 10th: "I think that the way people behave in the bathrooms is really immature and honestly gross. I can't understand why anybody would willingly choose to hang out in the bathrooms. It is also super annoying for people who actually need to use the bathrooms."

Anonymous, 11th: "I feel like people are just being way too immature. They should just use the bathroom, wash their hands, and then leave. There is no reason to goof off in the bathrooms because then it is causing problems for people who actually use the bathroom for the intended purpose. High schoolers need to grow up and realize what they are doing in those bathrooms isn't funny anymore."

By Anna MacKay, staff writer

continued from page 1

AR: "Was there ever a time where you felt like you wanted to give up being an artist? If so, how did you overcome the conflict?"

RSS: "Nope. The need to make is in my soul."

AR: "What do you think is your most memorable accomplishment, whether it be in the art field or in something else?"

RSS: "Meeting my wife, Pam."

AR: "What is something that is very important to you when it comes to creating your art pieces?"

RSS: "Movement and life."

AR: "What is your typical process when it comes to creating an art piece? Materials, tools, work area, ect."

RSS: "Uhm... Usually it's some part that I have to figure out the rest of. The dinosaur started with just its foot, but I didn't know whose foot it would be, so I had to figure out whose foot it would belong to."

AR: "Finally, what do you feel is your favorite art piece you've made, or what is one that you are proud of?"

RSS: "I'm proud of all the pieces that I've made, and my favorite would have to be 'Two Hearts Beat as One.' It starts with two pieces of recycled copper roof flashing cut into two hearts, then the two pieces are brazed together to make one heart to be used as a talisman for hope, love, and strength."

By Azalea Rehm, staff writer



Above: The author, Azalea Rehm, holding her grandfather's (R. Sanford Stragnell's) favorite piece, "Two Hearts Beat as One".

Below: "Copper Maple Leaves."

Photo credits: Pamela Stragnell



Left: The artist, R. Sanford Stragnell, outside his art gallery (*Red Door Gallery*).

Above: Inside the art gallery.

Below: "Dinosaur"

Photo credits: Pamela Stragnell



To contact this artist:

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StragnellArt.com
Etsy shop:
www.etsy.com/shop/StragnellArt

continued from page 1

other upper-level electives, he is concerned for the longevity of advanced programs.

"If we continue the way we're trending right now with more kids going and less classes like this, it will start to limit the opportunities for people that stay."

Benjamin Worthing, one of FHUMHS's co-principals, emphasizes how the lack of seniors within the building alters the process of how underclassmen integrate into the high school.

"One thing that happens at the school-level is that we lose some of our most mature students, who are the role models, so that's a tough thing to deal with," he said.

In a small-town school with roughly 600 students spanning grades 7-12, seniors are depended on to lead traditions. When 73 out of the 90 seniors do not attend all-school assemblies, there is a dramatic shift in culture. "When I first started here, that [the senior bleachers] would be full. All the seniors were here all day long," he said.

Worthing's mention of a culture shift was also mentioned in an interview with Clarabel Redondo, an Early College student and current Fair Haven senior.

Redondo, who took three out of the seven AP classes offered her junior year, states that Early College was the most natural step in her education path. Both of her siblings also pursued Early College during their senior year, she said.

"Fair Haven wasn't that bad. It's just that going to Castleton would be a shiny new experience for me," she said.

Redondo is not worried about spending her senior year off-campus, stating, "just because I'm not doing my last year, doesn't mean that my traditional high school experience is suddenly gone forever." The Early College experience includes new people, new clubs, and new class offerings, students said. Fair Haven students want to further advance their education, and Fair Haven teachers are at a crossroads.

"I don't want to selfishly try to keep a kid here for the sake of Fair Haven when it would be better for them to go there," Bruce said.

Bruce, a prominent fixture of the Slater community, cherishes his relationships with students. Surrounded by two decades worth of photos with students and "forever family," Bruce said, "if there's an institution that's close to my love for this place, it's that place ... I just want what's best for the kids."

By Reilly Marsden, contributing writer

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Book Review: *Unbroken*, by Laura Hillenbrand

This book is about a man, the legend himself, Louis Zamperini. Louis Zamperini, a trouble-maker in his childhood, broke several distance running records. Zamperini was in the Olympics at 19 years old, and then went off to fight in World War II. He enlisted in September of 1941 becoming a 2nd Lieutenant. He became very close with his crew like most airmen did. They flew their B-24 Liberator plane, the "Super Man", through thick and thin. They ran many missions together; some of these being the air raid on Wake Island in 1942 and the bombing over Nauru. One mission resulted in 594 bullet holes. The crew suffered deaths and injuries during that raid and the plane still had to make it 5 hours back to base. Miraculously, they did. The "Super Man" was obviously out of commission, so the 372nd bomb squadron had to find a new plane.

The only plane available however, a B-24 Liberator as well, was the "Green Hornet", a plane that the crew that was assigned to it deemed "not able to fly" but they had no choice. The "Green Hornet" was the plane Zamperini and his fellow crewman went down in on May 27th, 1943. Only 3 men of the crew survived the crash; Zamperini, Phil, and Mac. They had to survive in the Pacific Ocean with barely any supplies for 46 days. Three crew members survived the plane crash but only two survived being stranded in the ocean. Zamperini and Phil, his only surviving crew member, were then captured by the Japanese.

After much torture and transfers he was moved to a Prisoner of War camp that was led by Mutsuhiro Watanabe or as the prisoners called him, "the Bird". Watanabe targeted Zamperini and nearly killed him during his nearly 2 years of being a POW. The things that Louis went through, being targeted by the Bird and the inhuman treatment of a POW, only added to the miracle that Louis survived. Although, the days of the war would haunt him for the rest of his life. When the prisoners finally found out the war ended Zamperini was still close to death. He was still suffering severely, and for years he would struggle with alcoholism, PTSD, and anger issues, even after building a family. Eventually, Louis Zamperini would become a God-fearing man and a motivational speaker. He spoke about his war days to help others. Later, Zamperini would go back to visit many of the guards that abused him and forgive them. He even tried to meet with "the Bird," but he wouldn't see him. Louis sent a letter saying that he forgave him anyway and that he hoped he could find God like Louis Zamperini did.

Louis Zamperini received many awards for his service, including the Purple Heart, the POW medal, and the Distinguished Flying Cross medal. Even into his 80's he ran the Olympic Torch Relay. Specifically, he ran three of those for Japan, the country that imprisoned him for years. Above was just an overview of his life, not even diving into the details of the amazing life Louis Zamperini led. It is all from reading the book *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption*. Although this is not the only book based on Louis' life; He co-authored many books and there is also a Young Adult Adaptation of Laura Hillenbrand's original book. Let's dive into the details or lack thereof in the movie.

In the movie *Unbroken*, directed by Angelina Jolie, it does not cover nearly as much as it should. In movies it is hard to capture all that people went through and honestly it did a good job showing the trials Louis went through, but it also can't cover it all like the book can. The author of *Unbroken* wrote the book over a span of 7 years, hundreds of interviews with the man himself and other military personnel as well as their families. Hillenbrand also did research on the specific historical events to get a timeline and add details in the book to allow readers to understand the time period they are reading about. Since a movie only has so much time to explain the entire life of a person, you are limited to the amount of information you can include.

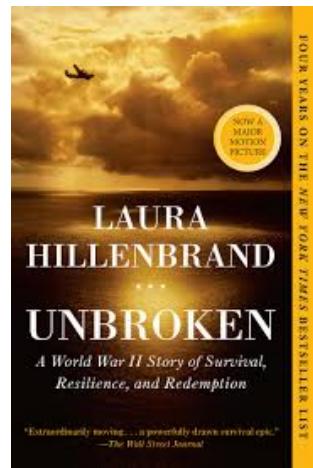
This biography movie or book, but especially the book, is something to remember and learn from. Louis Zamperini's life was not only admirable but also inspiring. Laura Hillenbrand's book title shows what his life was: "A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption" but when you read the book or watch the movie his story is so much more.

By Erica Stoliker, staff writer

Poetry Corner

A soul burdens the flame that abandoned dark, and in that dark are the most vile, inhumane creatures to stand before me. When we remove the flame, when the light burns out, what's left of the dark now is gone. And what's left of the light stands tall in the steady of all. Like man withstanding surgery, why not aid what enjoys misery? And why is it that when I beg does my soul shrink? Quite the epiphany I found when the flame in my chest abandoned the dark in my chest.

By Layne Crosby, contributing writer



continued from page 1

There was some joking. Cody LaFrancois had been following Maverick Traverse when he had been injured, and joked, saying to "Never follow Maverick." People thanked their doctors for providing them with a cast.

The three previously mentioned interviewees had little to say, but the next three gave me plenty of responses. I interviewed Layton Hall about his face breaking during the baseball season (I won't go into the gruesome details), Gabriella Coan, who sprained her wrist, and Adam Butkoski about breaking his hand. I also interviewed Alina Greene, who tore her meniscus.

Layton Hall said lightheartedly that he had more time to sleep. He may, however, have an ounce of truth. Rest helps a lot with swift recovery, but too much rest can make someone feel depressed. His mom offered to get him pizza, which he also offered in an upbeat fashion. He feels that going up to the batter's box is a bit more stressful, but generally only with older kids. I happened to be at the event, a baseball game, when Layton "broke his face." One of his teammate's younger brothers ran over to me, and said so. The pitcher was an older kid, and actually there to be a referee, as I recall. Layton said that advice he would have given himself before the accident was simply, "Don't go up to the batter's box," which is good advice to avoid a batting-related injury.

Gabriella Coan sprained her wrist, and her mother made her soup. She, too, was thankful to the doctor for giving her a cast. Gabriella says that she flinches, now, when playing her sport. She, too, made time for resting. She would have told herself "Just don't play in that one game."

Alina Greene said that someone said to her "If you keep working, you'll get there," referring to working past her injury. She was not pleased with being out of sports. When it comes to the sport she was playing, she is now slightly more anxious. She says that her dad and her friends were the most supportive out of everyone.

Adam Brutkoski broke his wrist, and was upset about missing baseball. His mom made him Italian soup. Now, he's a little bit anxious about catching the ball. Adam wishes that there were more opportunities for injured kids to still be included in their sport, and in school activities as well.

I would like to thank my interviewees, Gabriella Coan, Alina Greene, Layton Hall, Adam Brutkoski, Cody LaFrancois, Maverick Traverse, and Mable Noonan. I would also like to thank Mr. DiFrancesco, Mr. Merrill, and Mr. Csizmesia for helping me find people to interview. But, I would especially like to thank the casual reader of *The Occasional Slater*. Keep being awesome!

By Elizabeth J. Purdy, staff writer

Editor's Corner

Welcome to the semester one review issue of *The Occasional Slater*! This issue is the result of many months of work by our staff. As I told you in our inaugural edition, we want this newspaper to be the voice of the student body here at FHUMHS and a forum for student opinions, accomplishments, and concerns. However, we can't do that without input from you! We have a solid core of dedicated staff but we would welcome any new staff members or individuals who just want to be occasional contributors of written pieces, works of art, photographs or anything else we can display in print or on our website or our Facebook page. As always, we appreciate your support of our endeavors and we welcome your feedback and suggestions. If you are interested in joining us or contributing, please contact me in room 211 of the high school or email me at mbruce@svuvt.org.

Michael W. Bruce, editor & faculty adviser



Original Artwork: Raya Provost, Eye Candle, 2024, Pencil on paper.