





## Painting Silent Pictures

We'Ged Youth Media Issue 11

Issue #11, *Painting Silent Pictures* highlights the internal battles the youth have faced or are facing in a world where mental health among youth is at its worst due to a lack of resources. We would like to take time to honor these young people who have chosen to be vulnerable with their storytelling and continue to move with love and delicacy. Through their storytelling, it's noticeable the small steps these young people have taken to become better versions of themselves and the growth they have undergone. It's important to note that young people are deserving of gentleness and unconditional love and not always have to be resilient in order to be respected. Despite the

adversity they have faced or continue to face, they still show up for their community by hosting cultural events like those highlighted at the end of this zine in order to revitalize indigenous practices. It's beautiful to see these young people fly in their own way.

Since 2011, We'Ged Youth Media has served the City of Merced and connected youth to their community and each other via the power of media. A project of Youth Leadership Institute, We'Ged is committed to changing the narrative around young people and challenging the status quo. They provide youth with training in journalism in order to uplift powerful stories through a hyperlocal community health lens. Currently, We'Ged houses 12 youth reporters and mentors, publishes online year-round, and produces one publication a year. Our mission is to support and equip young people with the journalism and advocacy skills they need to tell their stories and the stories of their communities.

### Our Staff:

Program Coordinator Daniel Garibay

Program Manager Jesse Ornelas

### Our Youth:

Carlos Juan Nava    Xeffrei Champion

Angelina Chavez    Nevaeh Mendoza

Gyana-Price Gilkey    Ana Quintana-Oreja

Minevera Prado    Arjuan Duarte

Natalia Stewart

Climate Feelings: An Anthology



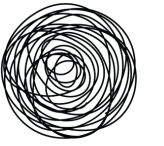
Season of Change



Depression



Blooming In The Face Of Adversity



The Hole In My Back



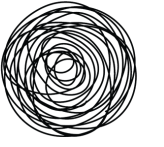
The Upside Of Failure



Calm Before the Storm



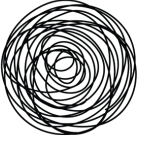
A Trilogy



There Is No Shame



Peace?





# Climate Feelings: An Anthology

by Jeffrei Champion

1. 2021, not yet 21.  
Born a year too late,  
So I'm just a bit off.

My brain is fuzzy, like a slow automaton  
My hands are mechanic, scrolling past articles I hate  
Forgive me if I'm a bit cross.

Gause you see, the world's on fire  
And we're adding to the pyre  
Saw this happening when I was young  
But thought by now it'd all be done.

The solutions were there, but we just made it worse  
I can see Earth's time becoming more cursed.  
Hearse after hearse after hearse  
World pandemic, racism systematic, water carcinogenic,  
my mind feeling hallucinogenic.

Is this sort of neglect genetic?

And here I'm sitting, numb to it all  
Till the tears well up  
But they refuse to fall  
Frustration at a max, this is so fucking stupid!  
What can I do, as one? I'm not suited.

I wrote an essay in middle school about the topic of climate change  
Preached to teachers who could do nothing arrange  
For solutions to problems that by just existing we caused  
In a system designed with giant fatal flaws

And now rather than preach, I just sit in my room  
Head in my hands as we're approaching our doom.  
Never thought I'd make it past 16, now I'm pushing 21  
Still doesn't matter though, this world's done being preyed on.

Her rotting carcass is bloated, and ready to burst  
And us maggots are sitting on top, far too immersed  
In eating and eating, not knowing what comes next.  
A parasite dies with its host if it doesn't move on from the nest.

2. Lately, I've tried to empathize with the billionaire.  
What rush, to do whatever I like, like flying through air!  
Nothing at all would ever bother me,  
and problems would seem inconsequential  
Yet, I still cannot imagine covering  
pollution like a dirty scandal  
Denying its existence is easy in short term  
But even the rich have children,  
which they leave the world to in turn  
You are not invincible, your money isn't a shield  
Lungs rot against poison, all flesh eventually yields  
I cannot fathom, my heart aches and brain spins  
How can they live like this, and think that it's a win?

Woe to the gold idols, ropes around their neck  
Woe to the poor, who are being poisoned  
Woe to all as Mother Earth burns  
Woe to us, weep and yearn.

3. I wonder how Dodos felt  
When the first ships came in

Did their feathers shudder with fear  
Or were they oblivious?

When the forests were felled  
And there were less homes where people had been

Did they feel the touch of death near?  
Or were they assured in their resilience

Did the dodos know the end was coming?

I stare at my hands and wonder about the dodo

4. My favorite animal no longer exists  
It hasn't existed since before my birth, even.

The Thylacine had two common names that depicts  
What a wonderful beast it was, to perceive and

To admire

The Tasmanian Tiger, the Tasmanian Wolf

As the seasons change, so do we. Our  
minds, bodies, and feelings change. We  
adapt or improvise with what the new  
seasons might bring. Or we may not. We  
may feel the same sadness or demotivation  
in all seasons. As the weather gets better  
and heats up, it does not mean that for  
everyone, like myself, our feelings get  
better.

The season of spring has felt heavier and  
more challenging than the winter since  
I was a junior in high school in 2021.  
Even now as a first year in college, I am  
finding that this spring semester is more  
challenging than my fall semester and not  
due to an increase of academic workload.  
In 2021, as a junior I was unsure of why I  
was not feeling better with the increase in  
warmer weather.

For some, the challenge when it comes to  
mental health and depression is seasonal  
depression as a result of the lack of  
sunlight and colder weather. That being  
said, I was confused about my own  
feelings but not knowing any resources,  
I ignored how I felt. Instead, I distracted  
myself by joining community organizations  
and therefore getting busy. The feeling  
of being down even in the months with  
“better” weather persisted but I did it by  
moving forward with my responsibilities  
and other life duties. Fast forward to  
spring 2022, once again not feeling any  
better emotionally even as the weather  
changed and got warmer. At this point,

I was a senior in high school and under a  
lot of stress trying to figure out where I  
would be attending college.

That being said, it was easier for me  
to blame the feelings of sadness and  
lack of motivation on the school related  
stress. A short time after graduating  
high school and surpassing the stage of  
confusion regarding my next step after  
high school, I was still feeling sad and  
lacking motivation. So, during a picnic in  
the summer surrounded with tasty Central  
Valley fruit and tall refreshing trees, I  
expressed to my friends that I felt down  
even in the summer when I thought I was  
supposed to be feeling good.

I expressed that I felt that I had been  
left behind. Left behind in the sense that  
during the winter and colder months,  
it feels as if many people are struggling  
with depression or anxiety but as we  
transitioned into the warmer spring or  
summer months, many people started to  
feel better.

Being sad or depressed in the winter  
always feels more acceptable because  
we can easily attribute it to the weather  
which is out of our control. More people  
also feel it so it is something that you can  
connect with others about. My friends  
did not have much of a reaction other than  
“dude you are probably just depressed.”  
Though I did not expect my friends to find  
any solutions in that immediate moment

# Season of Change

by Ana Quintana-Ceja

to help me feel better, it reaffirmed  
that it is more isolating to feel sad in  
the warm summer or spring months  
because others have surpassed that.  
I made it through that summer and  
started attending UC Merced in the fall  
of 2022.

Now, I am in the second semester  
of my first year so it is Spring 2023.  
At this point, I have felt an immense  
amount of lack of motivation for  
reasons I have yet to identify. Since I  
am living on campus, it is easy for me  
to surround myself with my scholarly  
friends and therefore be distracted  
in that sense. To further that, I think  
living with my friends and constantly  
being surrounded with them will  
allow me to hang onto them and  
potentially feel my emotions elevate  
into a higher and better mood.

Though I can find ways to cope and  
understand how I feel in the spring  
and summer months, it would be ideal  
that there may be outside resources  
for me to utilize. If my friends are right  
and I “am probably just depressed,”  
I would hope to receive professional  
help and resources, ideally having  
received this since being a junior in  
high school. Perhaps in that situation,  
I would not be sitting in college  
two years later still feeling behind  
emotionally as the weather transitions  
into the warmer spring months.



# Depression

by Minerva Prado

Why'd you have to summon those with lessons?

It turned into a constant fear of an obsession

Nothing good ever comes out of you

People screw themselves up

You have nothing to offer but sadness

That later turns into a void of madness

Yet you see faces

That sees through smiles

Sometimes they come through without joy

That try to fill in that fake smile with void

It's not their fault

It's just a matter of time when you fade

From those captured souls

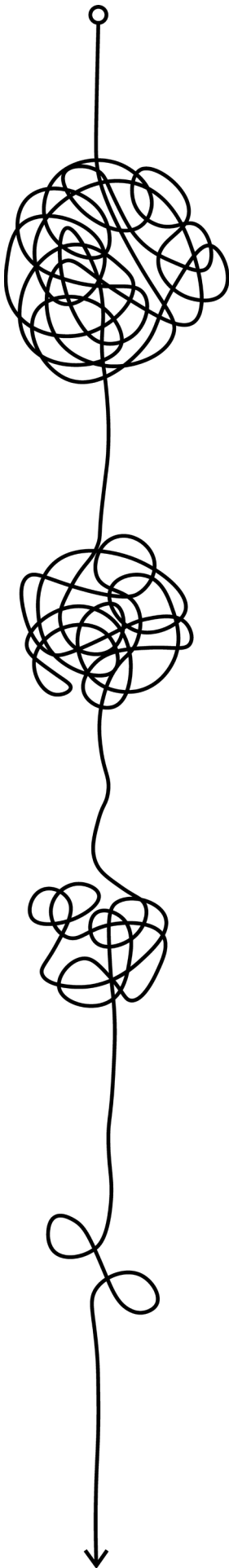
They'll have freedom again

Numb but won't feel not a tiny sense of grief

Because they'll finally be in relief

Within themselves they'll be free

In disbelief.



# Blooming In The Face Of Adversity

by Carlos Juan Nava

Hi, my name is Carlos. I am 18 years old and I grew up in Merced, California. In my experience, Merced has been a hard place to grow up. My family life has been filled with struggle because of my parent's drug addictions and, as a result, from the time I was 4 until I was 13, I moved in and out of foster care.

As a child, I wasn't aware of the impacts this would have on my mental wellness because it was normal to me. But, as I got older, I began reflecting and noticing that I was facing adversity. I was saddened by the realization that being in foster care kept me from my family, made me feel unstable and didn't allow me to be myself because I was living with people that I didn't know. Some of the parents would mistreat me and force me to conform to their culture, and being in foster homes with white parents showed me that they believed I was inadequate, which my brother and I normalized. I am currently in the process of figuring out my cultural identity, who I am and who I come from. I know I have indigenous ancestry. I didn't need other people from other identities to force me into something that I'm not. My brother during this time, normalized this abuse and I learned to disassociate from it. Mostly, I missed my family. I felt trapped.

I remember one incident when I was about thirteen years old where my home was being raided by law enforcement and I was bracing myself to be separated from my family again. This time, I was so emotional that I fought back against the officers. I smacked the officer's hand off me, "I don't know you. Why are you touching me?!" I yelled in outrage, trying to remove her from me.

This was the last time I was separated from my family.

After going in and out of the foster care system, mostly for my younger teen years, I returned home to see my parents reunited, but they still had their struggles. I was less stressed though and felt safer with my parents. My mental wellness fluctuated as home was still not a healthy environment for me but things seemed to be improving. As time went on, I was able to become more stable. Knowing no one could help me, I figured I'd teach myself on my own how to help myself. I learned that I was resilient and wanted to have a better quality of life for myself. I became more social and made lifelong friends. I played basketball throughout my foster care experience as a way to cope through what I was going through. Going back home, I made friends on my own and found coping strategies like skateboarding, meeting new people and making friends that also helped me stay distracted from my past traumas.

If I could offer any words of advice to young people who are struggling with mental health, I would say that it is not your fault. I encourage them to stay true to themselves and never give up, to try to go out of their comfort zones and meet new people. Creating consistency in your life reminds us that we can try over and over again. We are resilient. We are sacred.



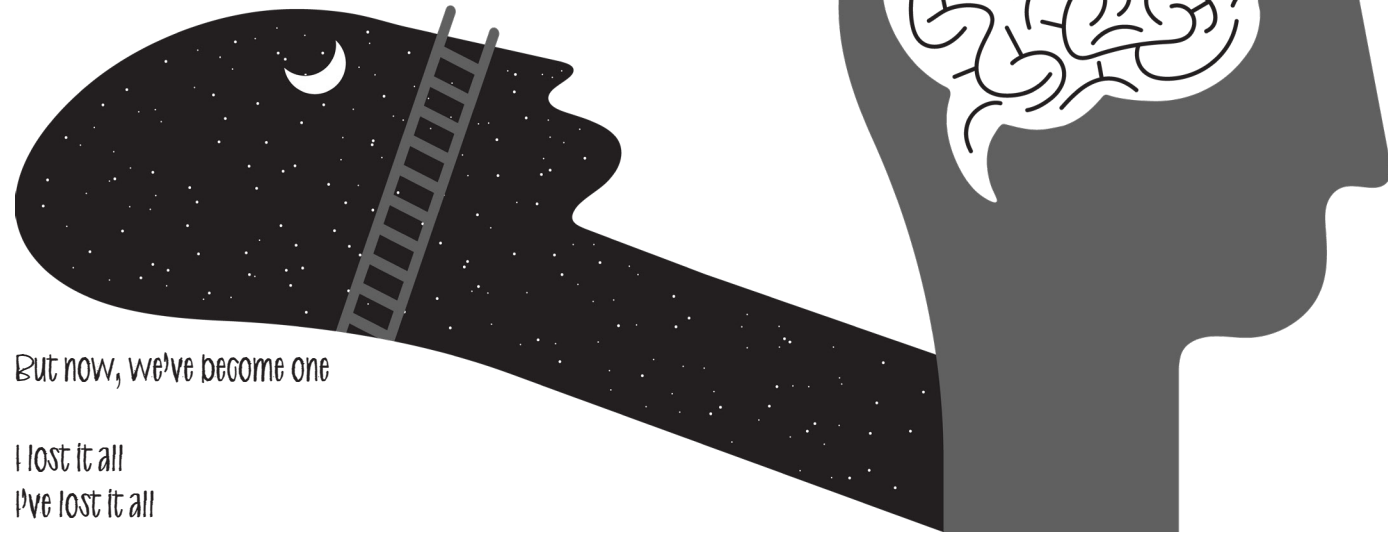


# The Hole in My Back

by Arjuan Duarte

It's bleeding  
Aching from the damage you've done

I thought you were there to help  
I thought you were my escape when we were two



But now, we've become one

I lost it all  
I've lost it all

I lost everything that belonged to me  
My own thoughts  
My own voice  
My own body

Lost it all to you  
I depend on you  
I need you  
I really can't think or breathe or even live without you

I looked at you for an escape  
For a release of some kind  
For some form of safety  
For just a few seconds I wanted to feel sane

One brief moment  
One second of freedom was all I needed  
One more chance to feel normal  
Now it's all gone

# The Upside Of Failure

by Lina Chavez

A failure I have experienced was having bad grades and just not caring about school. I learned that having bad grades or doing bad in school in general will catch up to you and you will struggle in the long run. In the end, school really isn't that bad, it genuinely teaches us and prepares us for the real world, even if you think it doesn't it helps us understand the history and everything that has happened. One of the failures I had was having bad grades that I didn't realize until my junior year.

My junior year I was told that I would need to go to continuation school for my senior year because of all the times I would not do the work or put in effort to even care about school. It was at that moment that it hit me that I really needed to put in the work and effort to do better. There's nothing wrong with continuation, to some people it might help them, but I actually wanted to try and put in the effort because I didn't want to give up that easily. The reason why I never liked going to school was because I didn't like being around a lot of people. I would always get nervous or shy so I would just leave and that's what led to bad grades and attendance.

Being behind in school can really catch up to you regardless of where you are. As a freshman things were hard for me due to family and friends. I was mentally struggling and didn't want to be around anyone, that's why every time I went to school I left. My sophomore year it was the exact same thing, especially since covid happened and I felt like it had an impact on everyone. So once I got into my junior year it was different since everyone had to stay isolated, but I soon got used to being at school especially knowing that I only had one year left in school.

I started feeling more mentally stable even though I still would have my days, but I'm still pushing and striving for the better because no matter what you go through things will always get better within time and the outcome will always come out good if you just think positive. So being in school doesn't last forever, it just prepares you for the life you're gonna have in the future and teaches you the things you need to know.





# Calm Before the Storm

It all started during a rainy and cold night in a semi-flooded street. My mom and I had heard about the upcoming storms and the possibility of some flooding. We live a couple of blocks away from Bear Creek.

My mom and I live together. My parents are divorced but still close and present in my life. Our nearest relatives live in Modesto. My father lives in Jackson, more than 2 hours away while my Mom's boyfriend Leon, lives 5 hours away in LA. As the rain was getting harder and the wind was getting stronger, the rain was filling up our street and was approaching our front yard. I, who never lived through a severe weather experience, wasn't too worried. My mom, on the other hand, was having some anxiety. Nevertheless, she said, "I am feeling really tired for some reason. Let's just get the basics ready. And go to bed. I think we are going to be okay." I, who had lived with her my whole life, knows how she can get sometimes. She is a mom, and a very careful person. I didn't really think too much about it nor wanted to protest. We were both really tired at the time, I thought I would get some light emergency packing done.

If we were going to be evacuated or needed to leave quickly for some reason, I knew that it would be worse for me not to be somewhat ready. Having all the basics: my mom, my dog, my phone/electronics and clothes. Those were truly the most important concerns and items in my mind. At 2:30 a.m. my mom was awakened by frantic screams and warnings from an unknown neighbor pounding on our front door. My mom recounts the following: "I rushed to open the door, half asleep. The woman was hysterical, "We are being evacuated. The water is coming. We have to leave now." My mother asked the neighbor, "Can we leave with you? Now?". My mom was confused. I could hear the panic rising in her throat. Me being half asleep I could hear this conversation but not process it. My mother barged into my room and strongly but calmly said "Nati, Get up. We have to go! Please don't fall asleep again". I woke up. My first thought was that we were late for a doctor appointment but the memories from last night quickly emerged in my head. I asked my mom "What's going on?", she replied while leaving my room "We are being evacuated". I was sleeping in a shirt and underwear at the time and managed to put on my raincoat and rain boots. I thought my mom went outside

by Natalia Stewart

for some reason, so I ran out bare legged in heavy boots with a long rain coat on. I impulsively shrieked in pure fear of being alone and away from my mother. I then ran to the bathroom to find my mother bending down and cleaning a dead bleeding mouse in her bathroom that my mixed tabby cat Lakshimi had brought in; who had shown this predatory behavior in previous days leading up to this day.

The cats had brought a mouse inside the bathroom. My mother found a bloody torso and blood smeared on the bathroom floor. For a second she thought of cleaning the mess before leaving. There was no time. How do I choose stuff that is important? Shoes. Do I put on pants? I grabbed Ziggy, our rat terrier pet and his bed. The neighbor took a picture of my house as we left. You can see his bed left in the doorway. I was still in my underwear with a shirt on. I felt like I was in a zombie apocalypse. Adrenaline was coursing through my veins. Everything was so fast, I was so fast. At the moment of crisis, it was me, my mom and my dog. We were against the world on that day. The world we live in today turned scary and unpredictable in one second. A world where fears, screams, and begging for help did nothing for many people and got lost in the strong wind running through the air.

My mom was disoriented driving aimlessly. It was dark and the street was flooded. We were not sure where to go. We left the house within ten minutes or so. My mom had her purse and her backpack prepared for one night out of the home. Is more water coming fast our way? We went to the shelter but did not stay.

I went in to check it out for myself after my mother and I finished calling my dad explaining we were finally "safe" and what had happened to us. I remember thanking him because he was so calm and collected while I wept in fear of what could've happened. Just like in a movie, I had a moment where everything came out. My biggest regrets in life with him were when I apologized profusely after our worst moments with each other and expressed my unconditional love for him that I have for him which I try to keep hidden and underwraps for him. Because, after everything we had been through including that moment. I still loved him, The emotions I had back then, I also feel towards him now. They are the same. He's my father, and I wouldn't



change it for the world. When I entered the shelter, behavioral health was already there. I met two people in the front behind a table with a sign in sheet. It was a person named Robin and a Black man who I forgot the name of. They were super nice and when I was finished signing in, I said I was more than happy to volunteer and help them and everyone else who were affected by the flood. For some reason they were stunned and said it was very nice of me to offer my help. Even now, that moment confuses me because I'm the type of person that when disaster and crisis occur, I don't get isolated and selfish.

I learned from my parents who work in mental health that helping others is the best thing to do, to become welcoming and help others who are in need. The people who were there were scared and in the same boat as me. When the worst comes into play, embrace each other and the community. Help everyone out so everyone can get through situations easier.

I also wanted to get us out of there, it was getting full of people. We did have a better place to go in Modesto, my grandparents' home. It had stopped raining. I didn't know if it was safe to get on the

freeway. My mom asked the policewoman. "She said, if you go, go now. The freeway is open."

My mom drove through the night in our broken car. The car had been giving us trouble and had all kinds of noises coming from the engine. My mom was praying for it not to die on us. We drove towards the freeway. It started raining again as we approached Ceres, near Modesto. My phone started ringing and my mother's too. It was a loud alarm announcing a tornado warning. The rain started pouring hard on the windshield and we could not see anything. My mom decreased the speed to about 35 miles per hour, behind a big truck.

We were so frantic that we lost our way. We were able to exit the freeway. My cousin Paula helped us because we got lost on the way. We finally got in, so we tried to calm down, talking about the storm, reflecting on what we had just gone through and went to bed. I woke up in the middle of the night, for a few nights checking the streets. Not allowing myself to feel calm until the storms passed in the next few weeks after the flood.



# A Trilogy

by Akina Westmoreland

## DANGING WITH DEATH

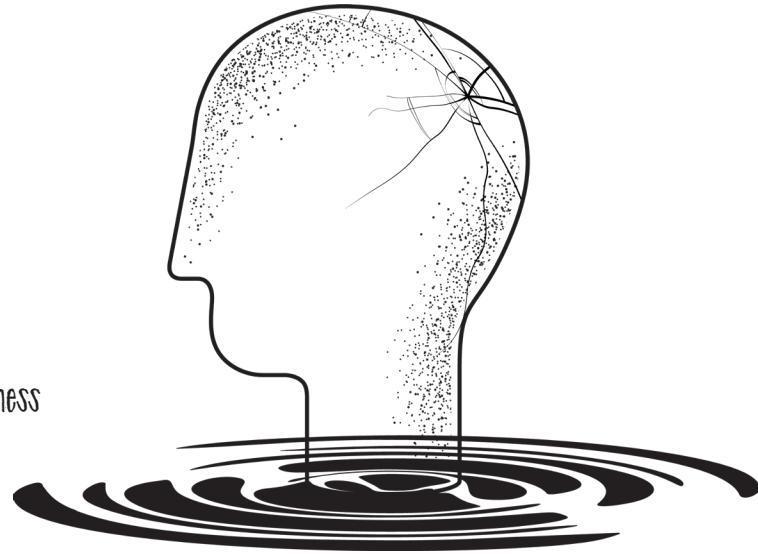
Like taking a walk on a breezy day  
before you go home and take that risk  
Suicide like the thought that I am swimming  
but the realization is that I am drowning in my darkness  
Like the time your parents take you to McDonald's  
to buy you a happy meal but are you really happy?  
Suicide is like a noose around your neck  
and that feeling of being suffocated kicks in by your depression  
so bad you think to yourself is this my last breath  
Suicide is when you take that risk to take that last breath as your body scrambles with anxiety  
but your mind has come to terms that this will be your last dance with life

## CRY

As you cry the feeling of anxiety warms you like a hug from a friend  
Crying as you feel the depression rise in like ocean waves coming in  
Your heart beats like a drum from the stress overriding you  
As you realize the feeling you may feel was just inside of you, inside your mind, inside your body, inside your heart  
And as you take a deep breath you realize what real eyes fail to realize when they look at you  
Can there be more to you? As people ask when they look at you  
The pain you hold, it's cradled like a baby, gentle but strong can you handle such an emotion?  
As the motions of your days fill you with commotion are you ready to release what you feel? Are you ready to heal?  
As you already know this question may be hard to answer but as you sit and you think you know what's better

## HEALING

It's better to heal then reveal what you really feel  
because if you show what you feel you'll only be told that you're wrong  
But as you take that first step and that chance to heal realize that it's you vs you all along in this battle to win  
but in the end who really wins is the pain the pain of realization that things will never be the same  
But could change come with good and could good come with change  
as you sit to realize that your reaction will be the same either way  
You come to peace in the end and that's the good to say



*Not all trans bodies have to be a certain way. Being able to change and be yourself should never be looked down on. You deserve to be comfortable in your body, starting off your journey of change is uplifting. Don't stop, there is no shame in being trans.*



by Cyana-Price Gilkey



Peace?

what is it like to be at peace with oneself?

to not be at war with one's mind

it's a blissful thought

but a laborious thought

dawn rises and so do the hopes

but dusk mopes

alone again my mind a hole

what could fill such a soul?

poison in a pretty pill

but at least it will kill

the feeling that makes me so ill

what's the need for communication

when you could have sedation?

by Nevaeh Mendoza

# Thank you to the youth of We'Ced for sharing your stories!

Your stories are powerful and so is all of the incredible work you have done for the people of Merced. It's important to celebrate your wins, so here are a few that stand out from the last year!

## Dia De Los Muertos 2022

On November 2, 2022, young people of Merced hosted a community altar for Dia De Los Muertos at McNamara Park in order to hold space and celebrate our departed loved ones. Free tamales were provided as well as face paint and music. Community members brought photos in order to contribute to the community altar. May we continue to create spaces to honor and celebrate those who have transitioned to the spirit world.



## 2nd Annual Winter Solstice 2022

On Dec 10th 2022, the young people of Merced hosted their 2nd Annual Winter Solstice "La Fiesta de Huitzilopochtli" in order to celebrate all that 2022 year's sun has brought us and commemorate all that has passed. The event started with a Four Corners Healing Run in order to commemorate the lives our city has lost to violence that is about 2-3 miles long. Next, the youth-led an interactive workshop. Then it proceeded with an Aztec Dance in order to celebrate our beautiful culture. Lastly, the event ended with free food for everyone. Our community carries a lot of sacredness but also a lot of hurt. It is through unity that we can heal and dream of better years ahead.



## 2nd Annual Spring Equinox 2023

The young people of Merced continue their journey to reclaim & revitalize healing indigenous practices for their second annual spring equinox event. They were joined by young water striders from New Mexico in a ceremony meant to welcome the spring time, while simultaneously connecting and becoming one in our struggles. For many of the young people, it was their first time attending an event of this nature, being held in the heart of South Merced. Our hope is to continue to build relationships with indigenous communities and strengthen our accessibility to cultural healing.





wecedyouth.org