

# Portal to the Past

Selected Student Poems celebrating Wyoming Seminary's 175<sup>th</sup> School Year

Compiled by Logan Chace, Wyoming Seminary English faculty, and Dawn Leas, poet and poet-in-residence, 2018-19

## **Forward**

By Logan Chace, Sem faculty

As part of our 175<sup>th</sup> school year celebration, Wyoming Seminary brought on local poet and educator, Dawn Leas, who split time between the two divisions as our Poet-in-Residence, to work with English students in producing poems honoring Sem and reflecting on its history and their own feelings toward the school. She came to English classrooms of each grade level and led writing exercises of all kinds, such as persona poems—writing in the voice of some of our former Sem Presidents—and “13 Ways of Looking at Sem” poems, mimicking the style of Wallace Stevens’ famous poem, “13 Ways of Looking at a Blackbird.” The students enthusiastically participated in these workshops, and, in turn, learned a lot about their own creative expression as well as facts about our beloved Sem that they may not have known before. *Portal to the Past* explores and celebrates Sem from many different angles and perspectives: it is a look into the history of the school while standing on the threshold of the present and the future. This is a selection of some of the student poems that came out of these sessions with Dawn Leas at the Upper School, a testament to its bedrock and an examination of all that we hold to be true, beautiful, and good about our venerable school.

### **13 Ways of Looking at Sem**

By Reese Butcher

One.

A new beginning  
Never before seen faces  
First steps on a different campus  
Sem is novel

Two.

Old tales  
Lifers who have been here forever  
Every pebble feels like a part of their existence  
Sem is timeless

Three.

Another life  
Thousands of miles from home  
Living in Swetland, Carpenter, or Darte  
Sem is independence

Four.

Diverse  
Students who come from all over the states  
Travel from all over the world  
Sem is international

Five.

Opportunities  
Clubs pop up like wildflowers  
SRG, Film Club, ESC, True Blue  
Sem is choice

Six.

Routine  
Classes Monday through Friday  
Practice or rehearsal after school  
Sem is structure

Seven.

Free time  
Hanging out with friends in front of Fleck  
Throwing a frisbee on Back Campus  
Sem is fun

Eight.

Work  
Piles of homework and tests taller than the Eiffel Tower  
Nothing is handed to you  
Sem is endurance

Nine.

A job

Teaching all day long

Do they even listen?

Sem is an occupation

Ten.

Class

Learning about languages, our past, or how to do ten times five

Teachers have no idea how much they teach us outside of the textbook

Sem is learning

Eleven.

Titles

Freshman are the “worst”

Seniors “rule” the school

Sem is misnomers

Twelve.

Competition

Who will have the highest grades?

Who will win society day?

Sem is friendly-rivalries

Thirteen.

Aid

Required community service activity

Always a hand stretched out to pull you back up

Sem is service

### 13 Ways of Looking at Sem

By Nicole Amoachi

I

First cluttered, quick steps  
Slow to a leap in the air.  
The spaces between disappear.  
Gravity doesn't matter when you're late to class.

II

But time doesn't exist yet,  
Not until the bell thunders.  
Time doesn't exist any more  
Than the bees;  
Maybe they're late, too.

III

Right foot, then left,  
And 50 more paces.  
My arms weaken under  
"The Complete History of Sem."

IV

Thirty eyes peering up,  
Emptied out by the summer's heat.  
I'll fill their cups from my pitcher.

V

The tall, wooden lockers are scratched  
From things like flowers  
Or the sharpness of keys.

VI

The students pass to and fro,  
Some with the sky in their smiles,  
Others lost somewhere in the concrete ground.

VII

It was only my first day  
Until it was my last.

VIII

Their smile fell off  
Just after turning that corner,  
And reappeared.

IX

Sem:  
A place to find someone to be  
Before you're anybody at all.

X

Forty months.

XI

Who knew?  
Who knew that it only took yourself?  
Who knew, indeed.

XII

"Once," I said, "I'll come back."  
I remembered before I forgot.

## XIII

Wyoming Seminary College Preparatory School

### **13 Ways of Looking at Sem**

By Jess Kline

1. Brick boxes carrying a flood of colors  
Both in mind and skin  
Wrapped in Sem's blue and white ribbon
2. Pieces of ripped ideas in the recycling bins  
Just the beginning  
Picked out, stitched, and hanging on Sem's wall
3. Sem painting of athletes  
Poems of Ivys
4. Choral rooms filled with different songs  
Different beginnings  
Different endings  
Same Sem chord
5. Screaming voices Preaching equality  
Sem's unity
6. Children in a sandbox building careers  
Sem's heat turning their sand to glass
7. Swimming in honey to be the best  
Sem's final test
8. Wrestling the problems of the world  
Running for president  
Dancing on expectations
9. Sem coloring books filled with open shapes  
Leaking unique ideas
10. Wiping the whiteboard  
Working on eliminating Sem's stress
11. Sem's impossible challenges  
Emerging Victorious
12. Sem gives you the lead to your pencil  
One day you'll write a masterpiece
13. Sem's summed up idea  
Barely scraping the swimming pool's surface

### **Definition of Sem**

By Korina Blades

High energy throughout the Sem community  
Everyone is so friendly without any disunity  
Students, faculty, and teachers  
Cheering for all the athletes in the bleachers  
All striving for the best university  
Sem is filled with great diversity  
Sem is filled with love  
As beautiful as a big white dove  
No drama, not one fight  
I am proud to be a Blue Knight!

### **More than a Place**

By Daniel Irwin

On the outside, a house  
On the inside, a home.  
Kind and welcoming,  
Supportive and united,  
True, beautiful, and good.  
Sem is always there  
To help with your homework,  
To wake you up in the morning,  
To make you food and to always support you.  
At Sem, you form relationships.  
You laugh and cry.  
Sem is always there for you.  
You are always a part of Sem,  
And Sem is always a part of you,  
Whether you like it or not.  
When you score a point  
Sem supports you.  
When you fail a test  
Sem still supports you.  
There are always fights,  
Always arguments.  
On the surface divided  
But inside united.

## **Sem is a Home**

By Jennifer Zemetro

Like walking into the arms of your warm, welcoming family.  
Smiles and bright eyes fill the campus  
With determination for what will be accomplished today.  
Being new makes hundreds of butterflies fill in your stomach,  
But the support and hardworking mood from your peers fills your mind,  
Distracting you from your fears and worries.  
It can be hard at times.  
Time Managing, focusing, and finding the drive to work,  
But this family is always standing by and will help you on your way.

## **Sem Is**

By Gram Doherty

A place where people care about you  
A place where you won't be judged  
A diverse community  
A place where people strive to be true, beautiful and good  
A place where people struggle on work, but teachers will be happy to help  
A place where many talents are mixed together  
A place that is the true,  
The beautiful  
And the good

## **Sem Is**

By Samantha Quinn

Sem is like a second home,  
And always full of joy.  
It's full of opportunities  
For every girl and boy.

It's like a rollercoaster ride,  
And you never want it to end.  
Happiness and nerves all in one,  
But at least you're with your friends.

Everyone is going through,  
Almost the exact same thing.  
You're never alone when you're at Sem,  
Because of the friendships it will bring.

Something's always going on,  
Whether it be sports, academics, or arts.  
Everyone is so welcoming;  
They all open up their hearts.

Sem is a place where we feel safe,

Where we can be who we are.  
Sem is a place where we will learn,  
And our knowledge will take us far

**Sem Is**  
By Sophia Galante

Sem is oh so true and good,  
Everyone will say,  
That when you walk right into Sprague,  
Frowns are washed away.  
Its warm and loving atmosphere,  
Complete with spirit and charm,  
Is something that is unlike most,  
And found hard to disarm,  
Whether writing, reading, or trouble in math.  
Please, always know  
That students at Sem are led down paths,  
That will never stop making them grow,  
Grow to be future leaders.

**13 Ways of Looking at Sem**

By Andrew Lehman

I. Truth Beauty and Goodness,  
the ideals of an ideal school,  
the morals of Sem.

II. Sprague—  
Creative  
Ordered  
Strong  
Sem.

III. Nesbit—  
Stern  
Rational  
Grounded  
Sem.

IV. The Library—  
Peace  
Solitude  
Determination  
Sem.

V. KCCA—  
Busy  
Important  
Connected  
Sem.

VI. Fleck—  
Thankful  
Elegant  
Warm  
Sem.

VII. Klassner Field—  
Effort  
Heart  
Future  
Sem.

VIII. Carpenter—  
Inviting  
Happy  
Memories  
Sem.

IX. Students are the body,  
but also the personality and life,  
the character of Sem.

X. Honor and Honesty:  
a code that we live by.

XI. Society is our legacy,  
our pride and rivalry,  
our chance to leave a mark.

XII. Community and Faculty:  
the intangible glue,  
the spirit and energy

XIII. Home.  
Sem.

## **Thirteen Ways of Looking at Sem**

By Andy Yin

### I. Ring the bell

When Blue Knights head to their next class.  
From dawn to dusk,  
The tower guides students' tasks.

### II. Students rushing in to the cafeteria

When the lunch bell hits.  
Smiling and chatting and greeting  
Outline Blue Knights' daily feelings.

### III. "Winter man" guards the back campus

As cars drive slow.  
The best day has come  
As Sem students step on layers of snow,

### IV. At the entrance of Sprague Hall

Where the statue stands.  
Good luck to all, says Levi,  
When every year he befriends.

### V. In the hallway of KCCA

Do the melodies echo.  
From vocal to instrumental,  
Blue Knights develop their skills.

### VI. From Klassner to Nesbitt,

from pool to court,  
athletes trying their best,  
showing their Seminary pride.

### VII. Among the breakers and flasks,

Blue Knights find their paths  
into the world of science  
where atoms make no silence.

### VIII. Acting out Shakespeare

and rubbing with words.  
Express your emotion, he said,  
as Blue Knights draw out their swords.

### IX. All interests can be fulfilled

when you join Sem's clubs.  
There's always one that fits you  
where you meet your friends and laugh.

### X. Where do you come from, they ask:

China, Israel, and Germany.

Gathering at Sem,  
and it's our destiny.

XI. A place to call home  
and a place to be strong.  
Here, Sem educates the young  
and sends them to the life they belong.

XII. From 1844 to 2019  
we carry our traditions—  
the true, the beautiful, and the good  
will never go out of fashion.

XIII. Here I wait, the Blue Knight says,  
welcoming you all to visit me for days.  
As I am 175 years of age,  
you all help to start a new page.

### **13 Ways of Looking at Sem**

By Bill Chen

1. Walking down the Sprague red carpet, I am surrounded by happiness, greeted by a gentle breeze and joyful laughs, this is what we call Sem.
2. My friends back in China are curious, how can someone deal with the immense homesickness from being away for so long? But little do they know, to me, coming back to Sem always feel like coming home.
3. The bronze guy next to the Bell Tower sits there and carves wood all day, just like us, sitting here and doing work all day.
4. Live for the moment, for the four years will pass by before you know it.
5. I miss all the skyscrapers in my hometown, but I also know for a fact that none of them are as tall as the Bell Tower.
6. Summer time? More like bummer time because I can't stay at Sem.
7. No Cavalry in history can match the force of the Blue Knights.
8. In the bitter cold winter days, where wind howls and snow rampages, the only force that drags me out of my bed is the love and caring of the Sem community.
9. The true, the beautiful, and the good are like blood that courses through my veins. I will never lose it in my lifetime.
10. Carpenters chop wood; Carpenter Hall boys karate chop obstacles.
11. The final airhorn from the referee is loud; the cheering from the Blue Knights is even louder.
12. As the bell in KCCA rings, a new year full of surprises has begun.
13. The Sem community is an unbreakable knight shield, blocking off all the sorrow and negativity.

## **Why Sem?**

By Michael Chen

I: Good question.  
Because it is Sem

II: The pillars of Sprague,  
Firm and tenacious,  
Like guardians of the knowledge world

III: The pink flower in front of the student center,  
whirls the scent of spring

IV: Great teachers and students.  
Like family, fraternal and warm.

V: Various Sports and clubs,  
try something new and make more friends.

VI: People from all over the world,  
learn from different cultures and explore the world.

VII: Also the bell tower dance,  
wild and crazy.

VIII: What about the weekend?  
NYC trips, vans to Arena Hub, never felt bored.

IX: What is the best thing?  
Society Day undoubtedly, passionate and competitive.

X: Also the community service day,  
warms others and ourselves.

XI: Already 175 years,  
The spirit of blue knights never wither.

XII: The idea of true, good, beautiful,  
enriches generations after generations.

XIII: I love you Sem.

## **Levi Sprague**

By Jackson Amend

Before I leave, I wish to provide  
First-rate buildings side-by-side.  
A beautiful campus with large facilities  
Opening up the door to more possibilities.

A place where learning, art, and athletics grow  
Right in the heart of Kingston borough.  
Mathematics, science, music and sports  
Can be experienced through people of all sorts.

I hope to build a center in which students can converse  
To study, to enlighten, to immerse  
Themselves in the beauty of education  
To make Wyoming Seminary a secure foundation.

## **Levi Sprague Poem**

By Aviah Dahlgren

As the doors of Sprague open  
Their voices are loudly spoken,  
Students turn to their right  
To see in shining light  
The Levi Sprague's statue.

To those at Wyoming Sem,  
He's one special person to them  
Cause if they have a game or a test  
and wish to perform at their best,  
They simply touch his head for good luck.

You can tell it's quite the tradition,  
For with one quick vision  
You can see the worn part of the lead  
From thousands of hands swiping his head.

## **Levi Sprague and the Changing of Minds**

By Bridget Tost

Music waves in the air  
New tunes playing  
Students hug decorated walls

Notes bounce and smiles grow  
Feet step and arms sway

The floor fills  
Packed tightly  
Like city streets  
Or subdecks of great ships

As the tune sounds through my ears  
Memories play through my head  
Reminders of the changes  
In my years

A new song comes on  
A modern one  
A room full of movement

Kids dance in the new clothes  
Twisting and turning like  
Machinery wheels

Arms rise and fall  
Like the changing of the tides  
The changing of the century

The stomps remind me  
Of the rough times  
The singing reminds me  
Of the joyous

This new dance  
Reminds us all of how the world  
Has changed its mind  
And Wyoming Sem along with it

## **The Friendly Face of Levi Sprague**

By Julianna Saltz

I watch as they come walking past  
Hurrying to their next class.  
Some pat my head for good luck on their test,  
while others walk through and ignore me,  
too busy talking and laughing with friends.  
I look at them and think  
how far this community has come:  
From sadness and devastation  
to halls filled with joy and laughter.  
I think of what I helped create,  
a school where everyone is welcome  
and imagination and creativity is praised.  
They exemplify the true, the beautiful, and the good.  
They hold doors for one another, support one another, laugh with one another.  
I look at them and think  
though I may not be alive to talk to them,  
I know them, for they are not strangers, they are family.

## **Levi Sprague's Thoughts on Music**

By Hope Austin

Although I wish I could have done more here,  
I'd like to think that I have made a change  
And if that change had brought a little cheer  
I would not stoop to think that at all strange  
I have to say that I am proud of most  
The music I have heard filling the air  
The notes hang in the air just like a ghost  
The music departments exciting care  
The voices blend with lovely gracefulness  
The instruments blare on joyously loud  
The children play and love with mightiness  
They bring peace to a boisterous sullen crowd  
    Yet, I look around and I see a smile  
    A smile that will last a long, long while

## **Seize The Day**

By Elle Caliendo

Loved my time  
Everything good must end  
Valued change  
Inspired the people

Students came and went  
Passed my knowledge  
Rejoiced in success  
Accepted truth  
Gave the torch away  
Under three words I lived  
Embraced every day

## **Memories of Levi Sprague**

By Jacob Gilbert

At first I was just a resident  
But then I became the President  
I was never too hesitant  
To provide innovations that were relevant

With lights and heat  
This place couldn't be beat  
The school itself is quite a feat  
Including all the buildings

The tower in the middle  
Makes everything seem little  
The bell tower can be seen from all around  
But things weren't always perfect

Once the world was plagued with war  
Many students were needed in battle  
Depression was spread about  
And sadness was heard from all around

At first it was just a recession  
But then it turned into the Great Depression  
But we bounced back  
Better than ever

Finally we shined the light  
Now our sports teams could play at night  
They always put up quite the fight  
It is such a wonderful place

But now my memories are beginning to fade

The life I have I would not trade  
At Wyoming Seminary I have stayed  
And never have I ever strayed

### **A Final Goodbye From Levi Sprague**

By Gabe Lott

To my dear friends:

Whether it be a sport like basketball,  
Or football in the fall,

Be it dancing, or singing  
Or the bell tower ringing,

Doing well in your studies  
Or spending time with buddies,

Or fire, poverty, division, and conflict,  
Destruction, flooding, utter chaos,

My time with you has been quite fun  
But alas; my time is done.

### **The White And The Blue**

By Khizar Amin Ali

70 years I have been at this place,  
Seeing smile after smile on everyone's face.

Watching the children come and go,  
Oh, how I am going to miss that so!

Looking up now I see, although very vague,  
A stone that writes Levi L. Sprague.

And so I look back, to 1866,  
To all my changes, to all the new bricks.

I think of Sprague, Nelson, and all the new halls  
I love this school, to me it calls.

Even though I am gone, I continue to watch,  
Every class, every student, every Sem sports match.

This school has faced floods and fires,  
Almost every event something no one desires  
This doesn't stop us, oh yes it is true!  
Watch out! We are the white and the blue.

## **70 Years of Sem - A Levi Sprague Perspective**

By Christina Kaspar

70 years, which seems a long time  
I wonder how much I heard the bell tower chime

Working through many trials and tribulations  
Sometimes I can still hear the congratulations

So many things I did arrange  
Who knew the small things would add up to big change?

When people think back on Sem  
Will they think of me, of what I did for them?

Maybe my influence will be as constant as space  
Remembered as one remembers their first pet or birthplace

Or will I become a sort of mystery  
Mentioned in time but lost in history

## **Levi's Last Walk**

By Abby Price

As I walk down the copper-colored street  
I reflect on my time here at Sem.  
I think of all the people I meet  
and wonder what I mean to them.  
Left foot, right. Left foot, right.

The changes I made,  
The clubs that were created,  
The games that were played,  
The children who were educated.  
Left foot, right. Left foot, right.

"Did I make a difference?" I think while I walk.  
"How will they remember me" I mumble under my breath.  
"Did they listen to the times I talked?"  
"Do they know I'm nearing toward death?"  
Left foot, right. Left foot, right.

I know this might be the last time  
I walk down this long street  
I know that when I'm gone Sem will be all right.

## **This is Sem**

By Christina Cikowski

Why keep on going?  
Family and friends, devastated,  
War seems inescapable,  
Endless.  
Why keep on going?

Because Sem is a community,  
A world,  
A place to explore,  
To satisfy curiosity,  
To find knowledge,  
And experience growth.  
Why keep going?

It is for the individual.  
It is a place to where you belong.  
It is a family.  
It is home.

Why keep going?

Because this is Sem.

## **Who Will Save Them Now?**

By Hannah Frels

Too young.  
They're dying too young.  
Fighting for a war that  
They didn't sign up for.  
Schoolbooks switched for shotguns  
Spraying sweet death across the battlefield.

Too quiet.  
The halls seem too quiet.  
It verges on unnerving to me,  
The absence of children  
Murmuring their hellos as  
They pass by my office.

Too little.  
I made too little effort.  
Was there something I could've done?  
Even though I'm the fourth president  
I still couldn't save them.

Too late.

It's too late.  
I see them waving goodbye  
To everything they've ever known  
To fight on foreign frontiers.  
And I wonder if I'll ever see those boys again.

### **Sem Is**

by Rhianna Lewis

Sem is late nights and early mornings  
The day catching up to you on the bus ride home  
And falling asleep until you get to your stop  
Sem is countless hours after dinner of math homework you eventually understand  
And rising before the sun does for practice  
Sem is hitting snooze more than once,  
But waking up when you realize first bell is with your best friend  
Sem is like home  
And I'm here more than there  
Sem is late nights and early mornings  
And not trading any amount of sleep for the hours spent on Sprague

### **Sem Is**

By Ariana Marien

Cheering from fields bouncing off buildings  
Echoes of voices floating on a stage  
Pencils gliding on paper as fish in water  
Paintbrushes and swimmers moving with strokes  
Chatter from groups releasing laughter  
Spoken explanations of difficult topics  
Keys on laptops and pianos alike  
The oxymoron of inside jokes with everyone  
Close friend groups open to new members  
Sem: commonalities and individual thought

### **Sem Is**

By Marshall Curtis

Sem is true, to itself and to others  
It is a place where the teachers all care  
And the students are all happy just to be here  
Here all are welcome with warm loving arms  
And are cared for and sheltered from all other harms  
Sem is also beautiful in all ways and forms  
Here we have a diverse atmosphere, especially in the dorms  
Our arts program is always proud to preform  
Sem is good, from education to sports

Here we have field hockey, wrestling, basketball and more  
All of these teams are almost sure to have the highest score  
We are good with our grades, from math to art  
And we always keep Sem near to our hearts

### **13 Ways of Looking at Sem**

By Katarina Banks

I. First grade Fish Tales play.  
Making costumes for the animal we were.  
First grade at Sem was fun.

II. Second grade Picasso paintings  
Learning how to paint.  
Also learned to trace cursive.  
Second grade at Sem was fun.

III. Third grade Because of Winn Dixie,  
A book that I loved.  
Also a section with worms.  
Third grade at Sem was fun.

IV. Fourth grade two separate classes.  
Learned all of the states and capitals.  
We also memorized our multiplication tables.  
Fourth grade at Sem was fun.

V. Fifth grade Pledge of Allegiance in homeroom.  
Went to a different room after every class.  
Fifth grade at Sem was fun.

VI. Sixth grade book about a family member.  
Learned something new.  
A field trip to Medieval Times,  
where we got to eat with our hands.  
Sixth grade at Sem was fun.

VII. Seventh grade we learned about clouds.  
Also played a lot of games.  
Stayed overnight at Camp Orchard Hill.  
Seventh grade was fun.

VIII. Eighth grade trip to Washington D.C.  
Last year in the Lower School.  
Sad goodbyes to teachers and to a few students who left.  
Eighth grade at Sem was fun.

IX. Ninth grade a new campus.  
People from all over the world.  
Many new friends and transitions.

Ninth grade at Sem was fun.

X. Tenth grade friends from China, Sweden, and Austria.  
A missed winter term.  
Tenth grade at Sem was fun.

XI. Eleventh grade still in progress.  
Great classes and friends.  
Decisions to make about college.  
Eleventh grade at Sem is fun.

XII. Twelfth grade yet to come.  
Excited for new memories and friends.  
I hope twelfth grade is fun.

XIII. Pre-K through twelfth grade  
memories were made.  
Wyoming Seminary is fun.

### **14-Line Love Poem: Why I love Sem**

By Samantha Barcia

The feeling of sleeping in on an L-day  
Having your favorite class first thing in the morning  
Smiling as you patiently watch the prize wheel tick tick tick  
Walking out of Sprague to see the sun warmly shining  
Sprinting to third floor Sprague because you're late for Spanish  
Going back to sleep after reading we have a snow day  
Scrambling through the bake sale to buy a brownie  
Showing off your brand-new hydroflask  
Going to school in sweats on a dress down day  
Getting your favorite teacher for a dreadful class  
Diverse people coming together for something amazing  
Seeing for friends after a way too long break  
Having a family away from home  
Having a home to always go home to