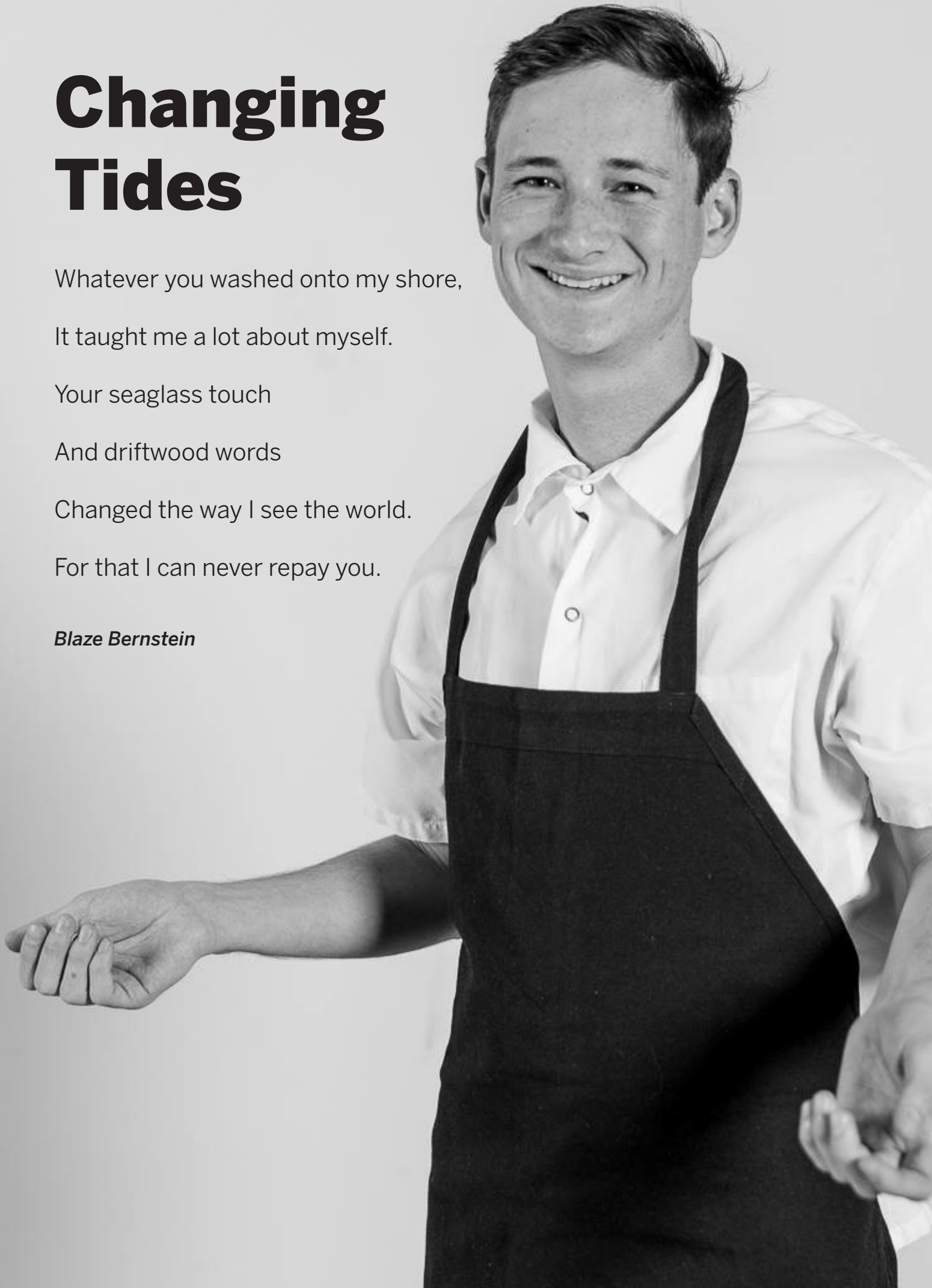# Changing Tides

Whatever you washed onto my shore,

It taught me a lot about myself.

Your seaglass touch

And driftwood words

Changed the way I see the world.

For that I can never repay you.

Blaze Bernstein

Always Enough

by Kalani Mah

My freshman year of high school, there was a kid in the back of biology class who was always hiding behind his little Chromebook. His name was Blaze Bernstein.

I can't pinpoint the exact moment when we became friends, but I do remember that what drew me to him was his cynical humor. His wit was unlike anyone else's I had heard before, always keeping the people around him quick on their toes. These traits made him not only unique, but also an incredible writer. He was able to effortlessly merge his intelligence with endless creativity. He was a scholar and an artist; a classmate and a close friend.

A few weeks into our friendship, we were walking down the hall on the way to class, and he told me that someone told him he should embrace the fact that he was gay by "acting more gay". I told him that there is no way to act gay; that just being himself is enough. It was always enough.

Throughout my years of knowing Blaze, he would never fail to put a smile on people's faces. He was critical and honest, which gained the respect of others surrounding him. Even though he was shy at times, his true self was projected when he was around those he loved. He was humble yet confident with himself, and would express his creativity in every aspect of his life – whether it be through writing, cooking, or even making YouTube Influencer parody videos. He was fiercely loyal to his friends and would stick up for them about anything, to anyone.

In January 2018, Blaze was reported missing. The news spread like wildlife over the next week, making national headlines and appearing on every news channel I saw. Searches occurred hourly. It was as if he vanished off the face of the Earth.

Eight days later, Blaze's body was found in a ditch at the park where he had been last seen.

On January 2nd, 2018, Blaze was murdered by a member of the Neo-Nazi group Atomwaffen.

Blaze's murder was classified as a hate crime. His murderer was a former classmate. I knew them both. I have talked to them both. I have sat in the same room, learning the same content as them both.

Since that day, the statement above is something I think about daily. Time after time, I fail to wrap my head around how someone's life is ended simply for being who they are. These hate crime stories you hear about on the news are something that you never expect to happen to someone close to you. But they can.

Even though this has been the hardest thing I have had to experience so far, I have gotten one of the greater lessons out of it. Blaze was someone who always lived in the moment. He took in every experience he had, causing him to have a great appreciation of life.

What got me through this time was seeing the impact that his life had on others. People from across the world were saddened and touched by his story, and now do good in honor of his name.

Even though little acts of kindness won't reverse the past, they are steps forward for a better future.

In my wallet, I carry a Polaroid of us at our junior prom. It comes with me everywhere, and reminds me every day to appreciate life and not take anything for granted.

Just 24 hours before he was announced missing, I wished Blaze a 'Happy New Year'. I wish I had instead told him how much I appreciated him and valued his friendship. It's still hard for me to imagine that I will never have the opportunity to let him know just how much he meant to me.

Today, tell your friends and family that you love them, and remember to always #blazeitforward.