What dreams may you leave unfulfilled?
A closer look at the story behind the 'Before I Die' wall.

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Citizens of Columbus may have seen the black chalkboard wall underneath the Bradley Theater, or its sister in Dinglewood Park. The "Before I Die" wall, erected as part of Artbeat 2013, has a story that reaches far beyond the artistic. The wall is the result of Candy Chang, an artist who "believes our public spaces are as profound as we allow them to be." The idea came to her after a close friend died. She tells the story on her website: "I painted the side of an abandoned house in my neighborhood in New Orleans with chalkboard paint and stenciled it with a grid of the sentence 'Before I die I want to _____.'...It was an experiment and I didn't know what to expect. By the next day, the wall was bursting with handwritten responses and it kept growing."

The wall has appeared in locations across the world, including the Middle East, China, Germany, and Japan. Everywhere it appears seems like magic; almost overnight, the wall will fill up with the wishes of the people. The wall provides a medium for the unspoken desires that so often we are afraid to voice out loud. Heidi May, Assistant Professor of Art at Columbus State University, took her Digital Media class to view the wall as a participatory art project. Andrew Williams, one of her students, said the wall forced him to face his own mortality: "When you actually see the wall, and some other people have written on it, it makes it okay."

No one ever wants to think that they too will die on day; when students are young and in the prime of their lives, they feel invincible. The wall serves as a reminder that we are not. Unlike other reminders, however, this one isn't grim – it enables viewers to think about the time they have left and gives them an outlet to voice their dreams. Once spoken aloud (or written!) those dreams seem more concrete, more attainable. Some of the wishes written on the wall are touching; others are heartbreaking. "Before I die I want to travel the world with my true love," "Before I die I want to retire," "Before I die I want to legally marry Yolanda," – all of these dreams anyone could relate to. The wall closes the distance between people and provides a healthy way to talk about something that one day will come to everyone.