This publication was produced by the Connecticut Writing Project—Storrs.

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*By Erin Wilkinson*
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East Shore Middle School

Elizabeth C. Adams Middle School

Elizabeth C. Adams Middle School

Fairfield Ludlowe High School

Farmington High School

F.M. Kearns Primary School

F.M. Kearns Primary School

Franklin Elementary School

Gideon Welles School

Gideon Welles School

Glastonbury High School

Granby Memorial Middle School

Greenwich Academy

Greenwich Academy

Greenwich Academy

Hall Memorial School

Henry James Memorial School

Henry James Memorial School

Holmes Elementary School

Holmes Elementary School

Joseph A. DePaolo Middle School

Juliet W. Long Elementary School

Juliet W. Long Elementary School

Carolanne Powers

Rick Hribko

Phillip Day

Marina Volluva

Tina Rembish

Michelle Tardiff

Ashley Langill

Khristine Sherman

Pamela Flaherty

Kristen Brennan

Eileen McIntyre

Jena Demaio

Jennifer Ferrigno

Caroline Elwell

Maureen Mooney

Jeffrey Schwartz

Connie Wilde

Laura Litewka and Melissa Russell

Allison Young

Rachel Satter

Sheila Riedell

Kerri Fenton

Lisa Tedder

Audrey McVeigh
Kelly Lane Intermediate School
  Meghan Boval
Kelly Lane Intermediate School
  Melissa Lagano
Kelly Lane Intermediate School
  Susan Gleason
Kelly Lane Intermediate School
  Kristina Giannitti
Kelly Lane Intermediate School
  Stephanie Stupienski
Killingly Intermediate School
  Matthew Sierakowski
Lake Street Elementary School
  Allison Sinacola
Latimer Lane Elementary School
  Tamara Edney
Latimer Lane Elementary School
  Maryann Lindquist
Ledyard Middle School
  Alex Rode and Tom O'Brien
Mansfield Middle School
  Debra St. Jean
Mansfield Middle School
  Julie Hodgson
Memorial Middle School
  Barbara Marano
Metropolitan Business Academy
  Danielle LaPan
Metropolitan Learning Center
  Megan Maziarz
Montessori Magnet School
  David Adamson
New Canaan High School
  Hannah Magnan
North Windham School
  Danna Irons and Lynn Frazier
North Windham School
  Elisa De Faria
North Windham School
  Stephanie George
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  Stephanie George and Patricia Patino
Old Saybrook Middle School
  Michael Harten
Old Saybrook Middle School
  Peter Smith
Parkway School
  Rebecca Mollica
RHAM High School  Deborah Anger
RHAM High School  Megan Coffey
RHAM Middle School  Julie Day
Rockville High School  Victoria Nordlund
Rocky Hill High School  David Fortier
Sage Park Middle School  Shirley Cowles
Simsbury High School  Michael Lenz
Simsbury High School  Sean Hogan
South Windsor High School  Emily Clifford
Squadron Line Elementary School  Maureen Billings
Squadron Line Elementary School  Beth Broderick
Squadron Line Elementary School  Kara Maslar
Squadron Line Elementary School  Jacqueline Scalia
Squadron Line Elementary School  Kristine Walker
Stanton Network School  Denise Hanner
The Master’s School  Greta Blanchard
The Master’s School  Sarah King
Tolland High School  Ivy Morrison
Tolland Middle School  Joann R. Desy
Tootin’ Hills Elementary School  Peg Bruno
Tootin’ Hills Elementary School  Melissa Champagne
Tootin’ Hills Elementary School  Karen Barton
Torrington High School  Mary McVerry
Westbrook High School  Steven Albrecht
Westbrook High School
Weston Intermediate School
West Woods Upper Elementary School
William H. Hall High School
Woodbury Middle School
Woodbury Middle School
Woodstock Elementary School

Catherine Eichler
Shelby Schlotter
Elena Zajac
Kristin Larson
Cindy Pezzullo
Chris Dembishack
Sarah Hull

The Hanger
Emily Feeney

Tootin’ Hills Elementary School, grade 6
Foreword

“Our lives begin to end the day we are silent about things that matter.”

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The Connecticut Writing Project congratulates the young writers whose works are published in the 2014 Connecticut Student Writers magazine. We also thank the families and teachers of these outstanding writers. Through your love, guidance, and tolerant respect, our children are being empowered to record the realities of today and the exciting possibilities of tomorrow.

Writers know what matters. With words, they capture the feelings of being with Grandpa, the awakening of flowers in spring, the wound of being bullied, and the absolute resolve that if you write it, some day you will have a pet dragon that flies. We thank all of the young writers who submitted their works for publication. It takes remarkable courage and strength of character to share your voice with the world, particularly at such a young age. Please know that at the Connecticut Writing Project, your voice, and your writing, matters!

Marcy Rudge and Ethan Warner
Editors-in-Chief

Creative writing has always been something of a neglected child in the family of language arts education. Too often, creativity in writing instruction has been relegated to elementary school holiday tales and high school electives, never a core component of any curriculum. While we have always asked students to read stories, poems, and plays, rarely have we ever asked them to produce these genres of writing. But for more than a quarter of a century, Connecticut Student Writers magazine has provided students and their teachers with an audience and purpose for their creative writing. Literally more than twenty thousand students have submitted their original work to the magazine since 1988. Increasingly, however, Connecticut Student Writers is becoming even more of an oasis of creativity in an educational landscape dominated by standardization, data collection, and testing mania. As creative writing falls farther and farther away from curricula and instruction for no better reason than the fact that it will not appear on the state tests, we remain as a source of inspiration and motivation for the creativity of our students. We are proud and excited to enter our second quarter century of publishing the creative writing of our Connecticut’s K-12 students in this, the 26th edition of Connecticut Student Writers.

Jason Courtmanche, Ph.D.
Director, Connecticut Writing Project
Playing Super Mario with my Friends
Gustave Lacasse
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, grade K
Honorable Mention
-Kindergarten-

Ethan Angelini, “My Pond,” Daisy Ingraham School
Edward Kibo King’oo, “On my Birthday,” Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Gustave Lacasse, “Playing Super Mario with my Friends,” Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Derek Seeley, “Kai is Walking in the Forest,” Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Madeline Tafoya, “The Carnival Fun,” Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Kalyani Tihaiya, “When I was Sick,” Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Linnea Tucker, “The Cat,” Montessori Magnet School

Little Turtle and Frog
By Abby Ditzel
Woodstock Elementary School, grade K

Little Turtle, I'll be your friend.
Frog, that's me!
We would have fun
and be together under the sea.
We won't let go
because we stick together,
You and me.

Rainbow Dragons
By Kaela Jia
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, grade K

Two dragons used their tails
Like paint brushes
They dipped them
In paint buckets
To drip colors to make
A Rainbow
**About Flowers**  
*By Wyng Gwen Tse Wan*  
*Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, grade K*

I like roses.  
The smell of roses reminds me of being in Preschool.  
There were so many friends and teachers.

I like dandelions.  
They remind me of fairies in my dreams.

I like daisies.  
They remind me of the morning shine.

The most perfect flower is a sunflower.  
It has the same color of the sun.

---

**Fox at Christmas**  
*By Abby Ditzel*  
*Woodstock Elementary School, grade K*

Fox was happy because it was Christmas Eve. He was decorating the tree with tiny ornaments. He had gone into the dumpster and looked in garbage bags. He collected the ornaments that humans threw away.

Fox was heating his food at the fire. Acorns, flowers, and watermelon soup. Fox was eating soup. He was calm for dinner because he did not want to get on the naughty list. He was hoping to get a few toys from Santa.

Fox was too excited to fall asleep. If Fox didn't sleep, Santa would not come to Fox's house! Uh oh!

After he played in his bed, his eyes got weak. He fell asleep.

In the morning, he got his presents under the tree; an elf toy and a toy rabbit. He was feeling joyful!
I went to the store. I found a toy robot. It is as big as me! I bought it for $5.00. My mom gave me the money. I bring it home, and it was out of control! The robot gave me wings. I flew into a crack of the door with the robot. It was my mom’s room. The robot cracked the window so my mom would be freezing cold. He cracked all the lights so it would be dark. My mom got really mad. She threw the robot out the window. I said to my mom, “That’s really some angry thing to do!” I went to get the robot. He was broken into so many pieces I had to throw it away.

Papa brings in wood for our fire stove. Papa puts it in the stove. He lets it burn for a long, long time. The fire stove makes the whole house warm. It makes my whole bedroom warm so I can get some sleep. When I wake up, I watch the news. The fire stove keeps me toasty warm!

Me and my family went for a hike in the woods. There was water in the woods. There were lots of rocks. Me and my dad climbed a tall rock. We climbed a tree over the water. It was a tree that fell down. My favorite thing about hiking is that me and my family go!

I really wanted to go on a ferris wheel. I went on one in New York. It had rainbow dash ponies on it. I wanted to go on the ferris wheel at Toys R’ Us. It was green, and it had four seats. I got to go on it with Logan, Parker, and Daddy. It went a little bit, tiny fast. I opened my eyes and smiled.
Honorable Mention
-Grade 1-

Sophia Caneira, “When I Was Born,” Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Lila Cummiskey, “My Gido’s Story,” Squadron Line Elementary School
Erickaliese Field-Santiago, “Owlet’s Fun Adventures,” Charles H. Barrows STEM Academy

Batting Gloves
By Cole Brown
Latimer Lane Elementary School, grade 1

Sticky
Black and white
Gloves
Get a
Good grip
On a
Swinging
Bat.

Waves
By Michaela Trinks
Latimer Lane Elementary School, grade 1

See the waves
Pouncing
On the sand
Pulling back
The sea shells
Clearing up
My long line of footprints,
Handprints,
And writing, too.
The Big Fast Quad  
*By Nicholas Kowalczyk*  
*Charles H. Barrows STEM Academy, grade 1*

My Birthday  
From Mom and Dad  
I got a Quad  
WOW!

The motor  
It’s fast and big  
It’s really loud  
R-r-r-r-r!

It’s yellow  
With small, round lights  
Fun in the snow  
Cool!

Snow Quad  
Makes tracks in the Snow  
Tracks make driving  
Fast!

Mystery of the Missing Keys  
*By Ashley Malkin*  
*Parkway School, grade 1*

I was so excited about going to the Hawk Watch Festival that I skipped breakfast. I was so excited that I put my pants on backwards. I was so excited that I ate my lunch for snack. I was so excited that I got on the wrong bus home, and I had to go to the front office to have my mom pick me up because my bus had already left.

But then it turned out that the Hawk Watch Festival was tomorrow. I went off to bed, and my mom stayed up late to watch a movie.

The next morning I was so excited that I ate a super fast breakfast. I put my pants on my ears, but I quickly fixed that. Then, I put my Halloween costume on instead of my shirt, but I fixed that, too. I told my mom it was time to go now, but she couldn’t find her keys. My mom looked on the floor, but no keys. She looked in the bedroom drawer, but no keys. She looked in the drawer where grown-ups keep important stuff but children are not allowed to touch, but still no keys. She even looked in the refrigerator, but no keys.

I knew this was a job for the girl detectives. I quickly called my friends Molly and Stacey, and they came right over. We double-checked everywhere, even the refrigerator, but still no keys. Suddenly, I noticed that a few magazines had fallen off the shelf. That seemed like a clue, so we checked up on the shelf, and the keys were there!! We solved the mystery, and as a reward, my mom took all three of us to the Hawk Watch Festival.
In the car, I explained, “I think I know how the keys got in such a strange place. My mom must have been so tired last night that she had a big yawn while she was watching her movie. She must have set down her keys on the shelf without realizing it, knocking down the magazines.”

Epilogue

We all had a great time at the Hawk Watch Festival. Molly’s favorite part was looking at bugs. Stacey’s favorite part was watching the hawks soar. My favorite part was learning about Native American arrowheads. Most of all, I was proud that teamwork had solved the mystery and happy that the girl detectives all got to have fun at the Hawk Watch Festival together.

---

Raining Art Supplies
By Joxel Gonzales
North Windham School, grade 1

One day, I came out of school. I began to draw all sorts of art things. It began to rain. I looked up at the sky. I was surprised because it was raining sketchpads, smelly pencils, art erasers, art books, and colored pencils. I never saw it rain art things before. I took 3 of everything. I went inside, and I was going to draw. But the art supplies started to fly around, and they started to draw what I wanted to draw! I was going to draw a horse, and the pencil and colored pencils flew up and onto my paper and started to draw a horse.

My sister came in and saw the picture, and she said, “I like your picture.” I smiled and said, “Thank you.”

---

My Day in New York
By Sydney Henry
F. M. Kearns Primary School, grade 1

The train stopped with a bump. Me and Taylor, my sister, jerked forward. The train stopped. I asked my dad if we were at Grand Central Station. He said, “Yes.” Grand Central Station is my mom’s favorite place because of the ceiling.

Finally, we got off the train. My dad, Taylor, Mom, and me got off the train. We had a hard time getting off the train because there were a lot of people on the train that were going to New York, which was where we were going. Then, we went into Grand Central Station. When we got in, me and Taylor looked up at the ceiling. It was beautiful. The ceiling had unicorns and people with wings. I said to my mom, “Isn’t it beautiful?” My mom said, “Yes.” There were tons of people, so we had to stay together. We walked around.
We went up some stairs and my dad, Mom, and Taylor opened the door that led out of Grand Central Station, and we walked out of the building. I could feel the cold air against my face. I asked Dad if we could go see the big, big Christmas tree. The big Christmas tree is something they put up on the first day of December. My dad said, “Yes.” I was so excited! Then, my dad asked if we wanted to go to see the ice skaters. Me and Taylor said, “Yes!” Then, we walked on the sidewalk next to the road. Then we were there. “We found the Christmas tree!” I shouted. It had beautiful lights. The ice skaters were skating next to it. We walked over and stood against the gate. We watched the beautiful ice skaters.

Next, I asked my dad if we were going to the Museum of Natural History. My dad said, “Yes.” We had to take the subway first. It’s something we ride on.

When we got off the subway, we were in front of the museum. I opened the door, and we walked in. There were tons of people. I felt squished!

There were so many things that we did. I loved seeing the different colored racks. I saw some that glowed in the dark. They were so cool. I also like the animals that used to be real, but were stuffed. We walked so much that when I saw a bench, I liked to sit on it and rest!

I couldn’t believe it was already time to go home. I had a great day, but I was ready to go home. I felt happy that I went to New York, but I was sad that I was leaving. I can’t wait to go back!

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Honorable Mention

-Grade 2-

Jonas Altieri, "The Trip," Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Nevaeh Delaney, “Thank You, Martin,” Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Lexi Donshik, “Snow,” Squadron Line Elementary School
Vivian O’Sullivan, “No Fashion Show,” Squadron Line Elementary School
Alex Tindall, “Win This Game,” Squadron Line Elementary School

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I Walk in Beauty

By Tovah Lowy

Squadron Line Elementary School, grade 2

I walk in beauty
I am the sharp, silver skate blades gliding on the smooth ice
I am one with Rosy, on her brown back galloping through the meadow while her wild chestnut mane flows in the wind
I am the snow falling like glittery diamonds from sparkling puffy clouds
I am a dancer swirling and twirling in the moonlight
I am a cloud white husky rolling in the snow—having fun
I walk in beauty whenever I see someone smile
Your smile is my smile
I Walk in Beauty

Nature
Hebah Mariyam Habib
Anna Reynolds Elementary School, grade 2

NATURE
I look Outside and I see Nature Around Me.
Trees with Swaying Branches, Wind Gracefully flows with Me.
The Soft Lullaby of Birds Singing.
The Warm Sun Light Shining.
Beautiful Butterflies Flying Gracefully above Me.
Flowers Blooming all around Me.
Green Crickets Chirping beneath Me.
Now you see, NATURE is all around us. Even You and Me.

Three Smart Inventors
By Aaron Harris
Central School, grade 2

Once upon a time, 3 smart inventors were working in a laboratory. Their names were Eidison, Corneles, and Albert. Eidison, Corneles, and Albert had been working in that lab for several years now and had invented several things. One day, things were going fine when suddenly a voice demanded, “Inventors! Inventors come out or I’ll boom and I’ll bang and I’ll blow your door down!”

“No! No! Not by the beards on our chinny chin chins.”

“All right, you asked for it!” said the mad scientist, and he banged the door down. The inventors quickly loaded their inventions and plans on a cart and rushed to their van and sped away. Meanwhile, the mad scientist charged in the room only to find it empty. Bewildered, he left.

The inventors were racing at top speed in their van. Albert said, “Let’s go to the sea!”

“Okey dokey,” said Eidison, who was driving. They drove to the seaside.

“Let’s use the sub to explore the sea,” said Corneles.

“Let’s do it!” said the others.
The inventors used a sub they invented to explore the sea floor. Finally they came to a clearing.

“Let’s build a sea dome here,” said Albert.
“Good idea,” said the other two. So, they started building. In no time, they had a nice sturdy sea dome.

“Let’s add security,” offered Albert.
“Good idea,” said Eidison. So, the inventors added security buoys. The next day, Eidison yelled, “Sub approaching on port side!”
“The mad scientist found us!” shouted Albert. Suddenly, they heard a bump, and then a cry rang out: “Inventors! Inventors! Come out, come out or I’ll boom and I’ll bang and I’ll blow your door down.”
“No, no, not by the beards on our chinny chin chins.”

Then there was a boom and a giant hole with water gushing in. The inventors thought they were goners, but a big tube reached in the hole and sucked the inventors up. It was their submarine! They were saved! The sub drove them to the surface and transformed into a rocket and started going up.

“I wonder where we are going,” said Eidison.
“Me too” said Albert.
Finally, they came to a stop on the moon.

“This is the perfect place to make a lab!” Eidison said. They started to build and before they knew it, their moon base was done.

“I think we’re safe here,” said Albert—and they were! They lived on the moon and were never bothered again. And as for the mad scientist, well, let’s just say that he got tired of looking.

The End

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The Adventures of Kernel Man and EVIL Dr. Donut

By Ella Webster

Anna Reynolds Elementary School, grade 2

Once upon a time, there was a kernel and he was a man. Soon, many people found out that he was a superhero! There were lots and lots of evil things in the city. He defeated most of them except for E.D.D.

E.D.D. has a canon that shoots sugar glaze from his hole. E.D.D. is the most EVIL villain in the whole city! One day, Kernel Man was walking around the park. He stopped at the store to get a new red cape. He heard a girl say, “Oh no! NO MORE POPCORN!”

He said, “I must have not heard that.” But...he heard it again. “I’d recognize that voice anywhere! That is Katy Bell. She is my friend! I think I know who is up to this...E.D.D.,” he muttered to himself. He tried to find EVIL Dr. Donut. But he could not! Oh no, he could not! But he kept on trying. He looked in some bushes. He looked in some trees.

“Of course! Why did I not think of this sooner! Well...he is a donut...Dunkin Donuts!” So, he walked two miles to the Dunkin Donuts. He slammed the door open. And then, there he was, EVIL Dr. Donut.

“Oh, you again!”

“No! I’m not Chicken Man!” said Kernel Man. “I’m Kernel Man!”
“Well, let’s start this fight. Whoever falls down first loses,” said E.D.D.
“And whoever is still standing wins!” said Kernel Man. “If you lose E.D.D., you have to
give me back the POPCORN! OKAY?”

“Okay. Let’s just start the fight!” said E.D.D. “Okay, you over there. Charge!”
They all charged, but E.D.D. used his canon first! But Kernel Man has a secret power! And
that is his shell. His shell can roll over anything! And the best part of all is that it has a Punch-o-
matic! And fainting powder. He said to himself, “I’m going to use fainting powder! So then I can
lock him up in jail.”

So, he went in his shell, and quickly he got the bag of fainting powder. He threw the
powder over E.D.D before he could even move, and he fainted! Kernel Man called 9-1-1. “We
will be there in about five minutes.”

“We’re here!”
“Lock him up!” said Kernel Man.

“He has fifty years in prison,” said the judge. Everybody cheered and clapped because
E.D.D. was caught.

“Wait!” said Kernel Man. “We did a promise! He needs to give me back the popcorn!”

“Here is all the popcorn that I have stolen.” And he gave him ten popcorn boxes. So
Kernel Man went to the store. And he found Katy.

“Here Katy,” said Kernel Man.
“Thank you,” said Katy.

And they all popped their popcorn and had a wonderful life.

THE END

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**The Insect Expert**  
*By Lauren Webster*  
*F. M. Kearns Primary School, grade 2*

I am an expert on insects. I know that insects have 6 legs and spiders don’t because
spiders aren’t insects! Did you know that ants are gross because they
have little hairs on them?!

I know that butterflies have long tongues and so do moths,
and you probably want to know why they have long tongues. It is
because they use it to drink nectar. Nectar is something like honey,
but it’s not.

I know that bees have two big eyes and three smaller eyes,
and I think I know why. It’s because it helps them see better.

I know that some insects fly, like ladybugs. Ladybugs are all
red with black spots, but they are not always like that. There are
some kinds of ladybugs that are all yellow with black spots.

I know that ticks are insects, and they are bad, so if you see one on you, get it off quick
because they bite you. You get a bad sickness, and that sickness could make you die!!
Bird
By Leilani Fecho
Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, grade 2

Blue as a blueberry high up in the sky,
Yellow-headed bluebird flying by.

Blue throat in a garden, sipping nectar,
Listening to the old man’s lecture!
All About Me
By Megan Hintlian
Anna Reynolds Elementary School, grade 2

I would be the type of girl that would be shy on the first day of school. I would talk to try to make friends! I like helping people and making people happy. But to tell you the truth, I misbehave sometimes. No one can be perfect. But I try to be good. I try to work really hard in school. I love my family and my cats so much. And I don't care what people think of me because I'm being myself! And you should be yourself, too! That's me and my life. Thanks for reading. Bye!

Honorable Mention
- Grade 3 -

Megan Alonzo, “All About Basketball,” Squadron Line Elementary School
Phoebe Jones, “Friendship,” Kelly Lane Intermediate School
William McCarthy, “My Life,” Daisy Ingraham School
Joana Negron, “My Family,” North Windham School
Sydney Pink, “Lovely Wedding,” Stanton Network School
Ava Westergren, “The Surprise,” Buttonball Lane School

Swoosh, Swoosh
By Jack Grossman
Squadron Line Elementary School, grade 3

Swoosh, swoosh. The leaves on the trees sway in the spring breeze.

Swoosh, swoosh. The bees are buzzing through the field of bright yellow flowers in the early evening air of June.

Swoosh, swoosh. The waves of the great Atlantic Ocean are coming to shore on a dry August day.

Swoosh, swoosh. The children are running past each
other playing tag on the playground at Squadron Line School in September.

Swoosh, swoosh. The air is rustling the ivy covering the buildings in the chilly autumn wind.

Swoosh, swoosh. The squirrels are scurrying and twitching their tails in the moist dirt and fallen leaves in the Connecticut woods, looking for acorns.

Swoosh, swoosh. The snow falls in fast flurries, tossed around by the winter wind.

Swoosh, swoosh. Someone has dropped his sled, and it races down the steep, snowy hill.
dumped the two animals on the side of the street because of his lack of money. The two had been walking for five days straight. Every now and then for food, the two would spot a snowman with a carrot nose. Riley and Hedgy had been with each other their whole lives even when they were just two little things that couldn’t even see. They both wished that they were in their old foster home in Paris, France, sitting by the flames in the fireplace looking at the sparkling colors of reddish gold, wishing they had a forever home. But of course they weren’t. “Found one,” cried Riley as a carrot-nosed snowman came into view. The two animals rushed over to the half-melted figure and pulled the little carrot off the poor snowman’s face. After the two animals had crunched down on the last bite, the now freezing animals rushed off to the next house and the next trying to find more heavenly carrots. Riley and Hedgy both knew that the two carrots a day that they had couldn’t keep Hedgy living for the two to five years he would most likely live and the twelve to fifteen years Riley would most likely live. They could probably only live for two more days. They needed shelter, and fast. They also knew they would run out of snowmen with carrot noses when winter was through.

TWO DAYS LATER...

Riley and Hedgy had fallen asleep in a cave not far from a lake with a sign that said “Lake Waterfall.” In the morning, Hedgy and Riley were surprised to see that all the snow was gone and the birds were singing their welcome back spring song. The children were playing outside, the air was warm, there was wildlife in every corner, and there were leaves on the trees. “The signs of spring!” Riley and Hedgy both exclaimed in unison with glee. It then dawned on the two that now they couldn’t eat carrots, but they could eat the new garden plants that were blooming and the colorful berries from all the bushes. But they knew they still had to find a real home so when winter rolled around again they wouldn’t be cold and hungry. Then it hit Riley—no, not an idea, a car. As soon as the woman driver realized she had hit something, she stopped her car and got out of it. She walked toward the animals calmly as if nothing had happened. She carefully picked up the scared little dog in one hand and the quivering hedgehog in the other. She then placed both gently on the back seat of her car with a lab coat and other doctor tools. Hedgy and Riley then knew she was a highly trained veterinarian. When the car finally pulled up to a curb and they got inside, the animals weren’t scared of her at all. Riley had his foot x-rayed, and they soon discovered that he had just one spot in his foot where it was broken. Riley was very glad he and his friend had shelter for at least two weeks while his foot healed. Hedgy then remembered the letter Mr. Firnick had taped to him that said,

“I have abandoned Riley (the dog) and Hedgy (the hedgehog) for my lack of money. I barely have enough money to feed myself, let alone two growing animals. I didn’t give them to a pound because I couldn’t pay the five dollars you need to turn in a dog you can’t keep any more. Please take extra good care of my old family. Please know I really couldn’t do anything else, and I really do love these animals. Sincerely, Firnick”

TWO WEEKS LATER...

It was now two weeks later, time to remove the cast on Riley’s paw. The vet had put ads in the local paper of an adoptable puppy (Riley) and hedgehog (Hedgy) who must be together, and posters up on every street lamp in the town. Still, no one wanted them. One Saturday night a week after Riley had gotten his cast off, the phone rang. Every time the phone rang the friends always got excited, except this time they didn’t because they had been let down so many times they believed no one would ever call and adopt them. Riley knew it was probably just some cat owner calling to see if there was special food for hairball control, but he couldn’t help being a little excited. Like always, the receptionist picked up the phone and said in a friendly voice, “Hello?” and with Riley’s good, puppy hearing he could always listen to the phone calls even if the phone wasn’t on speaker. The lady on the other end said hello back then she said, “My dog
just died, and I’m looking for another pet or two. I saw the ad in the paper about the adoptable dog, Riley, and the hedgehog, Hedgy. I was wondering if you can hold them until tomorrow so I can come down and see if they are my type.” Of course the receptionist said yes to the deal and then turned off the lights and locked the doors for the night. Riley repeated the conversation to Hedgy, and he was just as excited about it as Riley was. That night Riley and Hedgy didn’t sleep a wink. Before they knew it, it was morning and in just a couple of moments the nice vet that had saved Riley and Hedgy would come in and see the message on the piece of paper that the receptionist had left to the vet, saying that Riley and Hedgy were reserved for a lady named Bell and her husband, Henry, to come and see if they had the right personalities they wanted in a pet. An hour after the entire vet staff had arrived, Bell and Henry came to see the animals. The second the couple saw the animals, they knew that they were definitely the type they wanted. Riley and Hedgy were soon in the back seat of a blue minivan heading toward their new, warm, cozy home. Riley and Hedgy were so excited to finally have a new home. Riley was so excited he accidentally went to the bathroom on the back seat. Luckily, Bell and Henry didn’t get mad and just laughed. After a while, the car finally drove into a driveway of a new looking blue house with white shutters. The second Hedgy and Riley saw the house they knew they would love it. When the new family got inside, the two excited animals did love the house and knew they would always love their new parents, no matter what.

EPILOGUE

A long time after most animals and people should be living, Riley and Hedgy were still living at one hundred years old but still felt as though they were two years old. They now knew that they must be magic animals and to this day, they are healthy and acting young.

The Mystery at Blue Ribbon

By Jordan Hopping
Anna Reynolds Elementary School, grade 3

CLOP, CLOP! Pippin, the brown and black bay pony, jumped a cross rail and landed with a clop. Pippin and I are best friends. I ride him a lot. I also ride with my friend, Maya. Maya rides a horse named Rapp. Rapp is a big white horse. Rapp and Pippin are best friends just like me and Maya are friends. We also have a horse named Misty, but we don’t ride her as much. One day, Maya and I went on a trail ride through the woods on Pippin and Rapp. It was dark and chilly out so we put our coats and gloves on. At the end of the trail, there was a little river. So Maya and I got off our horses because we didn’t want Pippin or Rapp slipping on the rocks. So we carefully walked across the river trying not to slip. When the trail ride was over, Maya and I brushed Pippin and Rapp. We brushed Misty, too, because she was good all day. After we were done brushing, we put the horses in their stalls. It was 9:00 and time for Maya and me to go to sleep.

The next day, we went back to the barn. Maya took Rapp out, and I went to get Pippin out, but when I got to his stall, he was gone! “Maya, Pippin’s gone!” I screamed!

“What do you mean he’s gone?” Maya asked.

“He’s not in his stall, and the door is open!” I yelled. “Let’s go check the woods,” I said. We ran out to the woods and looked for him. But we didn’t find any clues so I asked Maya to go back and get Rapp. When Maya came back with Rapp, I hopped on the back with her, and we
started trotting around the paths looking for him. We still didn’t find him or any clues, like hoof prints. Then we remembered his favorite spot to eat grass on the side of a path, and we went there, but he wasn’t there. Then Maya saw a little green puddle of saliva from Pippin next to the path. So we knew he had been there eating grass. We went farther down the path and then we saw some hoof prints. I started to drop treats from my pocket on the path so maybe he would follow it. We started to smell something, so we followed the smell. It got stronger and stronger, and then we saw a pile of horse poop. Maya said, “Pippin must be around here somewhere!” We both laughed. We walked farther through the path and then we heard Neigh, Neigh.

“It must be Pippin,” I yelled. Rapp neighed back and started to walk on. We followed the Neigh and came to the beginning of my street.

“Now we must be really close,” said Maya. We cantered down the street, calling Pippin. We stopped at my driveway curiously. I discovered some muddy hoof prints in my front yard. I dismounted off Rapp and ran around the house to my backyard as Maya tied Rapp to my mailbox and ran after me. We found him eating clovers and fresh hay in the corner of my yard.

“I found him!” I yelled. And I ran over to him! When we got over there, he was covered in dirt and grass.

“He’s a mess!” said Maya. “We need to brush him when we get back.”

I hopped on Pippin bareback and gave him a huge hug. Then we walked back to Rapp. Maya hopped on Rapp and headed the long walk back to the barn. When we were halfway back to the barn, Pippin started to yank his head down and eat something. I looked down and saw he was eating the peppermints I left for him on the way here. Soon, Rapp saw them, and he started eating them, too. Maya and I laughed! We finally made it back to the barn and brushed both of them. “I’m never going to lose you again,” I whispered in Pippin’s ear.

We went into the barn and looked at Pippin’s stall door. It looked like somebody had chewed it. We both stared at Pippin and laughed. “I know what we’ll be doing later!” I teased.
Bear loved to eat meat, but not vegetables. When we went out for dinner, we used to save part of our hamburgers for Bear. We pretended that there was no food, but Bear knew the truth. We couldn’t ever get past him without being discovered.

2010-2011
In 2010 and 2011, Bear taught Snickers and Teddy (my cousins’ dogs) some very important skills. For example, he taught Snickers how to go to the bathroom outside and not inside the house and taught Teddy you won’t get in trouble when you sit on the couch. Teddy is the only dog allowed on the couch today.

2012
Bear died on the 25th of February 2012, at the age of eleven. I knew Bear my whole life, and I miss him a lot. It was nice knowing him, and I am grateful that I met him. Also, he was a great dog, and I’m happy he lived to an old age.

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Golden Retrievers
By Mikayla Wetjen
Central School, grade 3

Out in a meadow a dog plays, bounding through the tall grass. The wind blows his fur. A sound so cheerful we all have heard before: “Woof!” Then, somewhere far away, his voice echoes, to remain forever in our hearts. All of us love this very special kind of dog: This is the wonderful life of Golden Retrievers.

Golden retrievers look very, very different from wolves. They have smaller muzzles, damp noses, oval shaped eyes and floppy ears covered with soft fur. Their middle is covered with fur as soft as silk, and their neck slants down to their chest. Their legs are long and muscular so they can run fast. Their tails express how they feel.

Golden retrievers’ main job is to work with hunters to retrieve the game. First, the hunter shoots the game. Then he says, “Go get it boy!” The dog goes to find the game and retrieve it. The dog’s reward? A pat and: “Good job!” The commands are: “Go get it boy!” which means “go find the game.” The whistle is for calling the dog back.

If you want to take care of golden retrievers you will need a few things. First, you need water, a dish, and food. You should try different types to see what type your dog likes best. You should also measure your dog’s food because if you feed it too much, it will get fat. If you feed it too little, it will starve. Your golden retriever will also need a place to sleep. You can find many pet beds at pet stores. Try to find a pet bed big enough so your dog will be able to walk around in a complete circle. Your golden retriever should have a large space to run. A backyard with a fence is a great place to run! That way both you and your golden retriever can be safe. If you want, you can build a doghouse for your golden retriever!

Golden retriever puppies are very playful. They need lots of toys when their teeth come in. You would not like your dog chewing your carpet! Hard bones are the best kind for teething. They love balls and toys that squeak. You need an area for them too! A small fenced-in area with a bed, food and water dish and plenty of toys is good! They like toys that roll, squeak, bounce, and make noise.
You can find lots of good toys at pet stores. They have all sorts of toys for dogs. Since they like to retrieve, you should buy toys that they can shake. Rag dolls are a good choice. Your dog will love it! As we all can see, golden retrievers are very beautiful pets. This world would be plain and dull without the voice of the golden retriever. Woof!

Honorable Mention

-Grade 4-

Olivia Birney, “Lost,” Squadron Line Elementary School
Alexa Esparza-Finsmith, “5 Point Picture,” North Windham School
Alessandro Gaudio, “The Killer Tarantula,” Braeburn Elementary School
Calder McKenna, “Why I like Fantasy the Most,” Anna Reynolds Elementary School
Madeline Ross, “Choir Practice,” Braeburn Elementary School
Kalyani Srikanth, “The Sounds of the World,” Holmes Elementary School

Mythical Creature

By Tyler Brown
Kelly Lane Intermediate School, grade 4

A mythical creature with a strange looking horn
Started eating a waffle with a side of fresh corn
He had a tail all the way up to his head
And was bright green with a few stripes of red
Started chowing down people with one humongous bite
Saw some orangutans and started to fight
Had a big mouth that he used to breathe fire
Wanted to have fun and kicked a tire
A rather small rabbit with a sword
Also he carried a television cord
He took the cord out of his pocket
And started to put it in the socket
He electrocuted the creature with the strange-looking horn
That ate a waffle with a side of fresh corn
Fall Morning
By Saskia Zimmerman
Holmes Elementary School, grade 4

In the forest, on the ground
Wrinkled, brown maple leaves
Lay still and lifeless
Folding under my feet
Peace

Water glides over velvety stones
Forming small pools
Gently hushing, rippling
Coolly feeding life
Happiness

Birds whisper faraway songs
A veil of mist cloaks this dreamlike world
Trees shine with fresh raindrops
Hanging from bare branches
Tranquility

My heart beats loudly
Empty trees surround me
Breathing sweet wooded air
A carpet of moss I stand on
Love

Deer graze in the meadow
Rose lips tap jade grass
Chilly fall sky
Swirling around me
Silence

The Great War
By Pearce Boit
Kelly Lane Intermediate School, grade 4

Lee Baker signed his signature at the recruiting station as the veteran gave him a uniform. He boarded the plane to go to another American base. He looked at the other soldiers in the plane as they talked on and on and on. One soldier looked at him and said, “You a shy one?”

Lee responded, “Sorta, it’s just that I don’t know any soldiers…”
“Well if you want to know one, you’ll know me!” the soldier said. “I’m Jacob.”
“I’m Lee.”
They shook hands as the pilot said, “We will be landing soon.” The men grabbed their gear and got off the plane when it landed. Then they piled into the barracks. Three hours later, General Grant told the men they would be going closer to German borders. Lee got nervous. He had never gone to war, but he did have skill with a gun.

Lee boarded the plane, holding his Lee-Enfield rifle and his helmet on his head. Hours later they landed, but in a more... unpleasant place. This place had trees with no leaves, small patches of embers flaming, dead grass, grey sky, and trenches in the ground everywhere. They piled into the trench and marched on for hours. They made camp and ate hardtack and drank water. They all went into their sleeping bags and went to sleep.

A loud boom woke them all up at 3:27 in the morning. They looked over the side of trench and saw Germans aiming guns. They quickly grabbed their rifles and fired back. Lee saw men on each side of him fall. He reloaded as he saw the commander of the squad load a rocket into a mortar. He lit the fuse, and it shot out of the small launcher. The Germans were wiped out in seconds. Captain John, who led the squad, asked the men, “How many wounded?”

“Three wounded, and none dead!” came a reply from somewhere in the panicked men.

“Good. Send them back, and we’ll march on.” They marched on for days, and they came to an airbase. They climbed into biplanes and took off. “But I don’t even know how to fly!” complained Lee.

John said, “Pulling back the lever makes it go up. Pulling it—”

“I know the basic controls...” Lee said.

“Good. So get flying.”

Lee started the engine and took off. He flew for a few minutes when he then realized he was firing his machine gun at German biplanes.

Hours later, Lee tried to land but instead failed to. He jumped out a few feet from the ground and watched the biplane burst into flames. Lee watched, uselessly looking at the men putting out the fire. General Grant walked up to Lee. “You may have destroyed $100 of mechanics, but since you’ve never flown a plane before, this is a pass. Crash another, I’ll kick you out of the military.” Lee sighed. Why did he have to be in the military? His grandfather forced him. He was in the Civil War.

Later, Lee overheard the generals talking about the war being days from over. Lee got excited and told the other men. Another general, General Scott, told the men they were having a last battle. He said it wasn’t the final battle of the war, just the last battle for the division. Lee was even happier. Less of a chance of being shot! But then the bad news came.

“We will be outnumbered by at least fifty men,” General Scott said. “The enemy has at least four hundred seventy-three men, and we will only have four hundred twenty-six. We will have to try to hold off for a while.”

The battle arrived sooner than Lee thought. Only three days had passed before they were ambushed by several machine guns. Lee fired back. He thought to himself, I won’t die... I won’t die... I won’t die... The battle raged on for days, when Lee felt a jolt on his left leg. He had been shot. He fell down like a ragdoll while medics rushed over to aid him. He couldn’t last forever, but not forever in survival, just how long could he stay awake? Not long, because Lee had just fainted. Hours later Lee woke up in a large white tent with families hugging their husbands for being back from war. He sat up to see his family smiling at him. He smiled back. “Mother! Father!” he cried as he ran over to hug them. He almost toppled over before he grabbed his crutches. “I was only hit in the leg. Not the head or chest. Those would have been crucial.” He greeted his brother and sister as they climbed into Lee’s father’s car and drove off on the dirt road.
Promise
By Alexa Esparza-Finsmith
North Windham School, grade 4

Mamí……..Mom
Tío………..Uncle
Abuelita…Grammy
Coyote……Someone who brings Mexicans who do not have visas to America
Te dígo……I tell you
Tu Papá…..Your dad
La cocina…the kitchen
Niñas, niñas, no se vayan…Girls, girls, don’t go
Puros 10….straight A’s
Papí…………Daddy

January 23, 1993

Dear Mamí,

I miss you already. I made it to Tío Juan’s house. It was a long bus ride, but I was happy to meet Tío Juan and my cousin Mariana. She is 15, the same age as me, and will be going to America because her dad was killed a year ago, and she needs to work to send money to her mom to support her little brothers.

Tío Juan got in touch with the Coyotes. After his phone call, he told us not to wear fancy clothes or the Coyotes will take them. We leave tomorrow.

I’m worried about what will happen. I’m worried that I might get caught. I’m worried that something will happen to you or that Abuelita Sara will get sicker before I can send you money for her medicine.

January 24, 1993

Dear Mamí,

I started my walking today in the morning only wearing my worst clothes and a backpack with a change of clothes (and my journal!). Six hours passed, and I was already out of the water. We were all tired but I didn’t want to stop. We kept walking for another six hours of walking. We were all very thirsty and hungry. We decided to sleep for a few hours, but the Coyote wasn’t all up to it. We finally convinced him.

January 25, 1993

Dear Mamí,

This morning when I woke up, I felt cold, homesick, hungry, and thirsty. If we knew we needed to walk for this long, we would have brought more water and food. We finally got to a lake. We used our shirts as filters for our water bottles, not caring about germs. We decided to rest near the lake for a few hours.
I feel dizzy and sick. We are going to start walking again.

We walked until nightfall; then we heard a scream. It was Mariana. We didn’t know if she was hurt or captured. The Coyote turned around with his little flashlight. Mariana was on her hands and knees. She had tripped over a rock. The Coyote yelled at Mariana. He said, “I told you to stay together!”

Then we kept on walking. We walked and walked and walked.

We finally saw a dirt road over a hill and across a mountain. After we went over and across we got about 3 yards from the dirt road. The Coyote said this was the hardest part. He said if we got caught, don’t tell the name of the Coyote. He said to run across, then hide over the next hill. He told us to stay together.

We ran fast, te díg, fast. But, in two separate groups. Unfortunately, the second group got caught. I felt lucky we made it! But also heartbroken for the other group. I thought what it would be like to be back to square one. Left off with nothing. I really felt real lucky!

We walked another two hours and at about four in the morning, we saw a casita—a 2-bedroom house. We were all so happy. We went in and drank water! It felt awesome. There were already 11 people there and another Coyote. The Coyotes said, “You are safe now.”

Our Coyote wanted to speak to Mariana and me alone. We went into a cement room painted light blue with no windows and dark. There was a light above on the ceiling and a bunk bed cot in the corner of the room. There was a mirror too. The Coyote said, “Tu Papá will pick you up half way.”

We went back into la cocina. Both Coyotes said, “If you have any money, we can pick up some tacos.” I had $20 but did not want to give them away, just in case something unexpected came up. Other people did. In about half an hour they came back with 3 plates of tacos and some bottles of soda. People fought to get a taco or any piece of a taco they could—meat, tortilla, or even some onion. Somebody said, “Don’t eat too much. You haven’t eaten for two days.” Mariana got two broken tacos and we shared. Some people ate a lot and threw up.

I am so happy I finally got to eat and drink clean water. I am worried that I might still get caught. I am still worried about Abuelita. I am excited that I made it across the first obstacle. I’m in America now.

January 26, 1993

Dear Mamí,

Early this morning, the Coyote woke us up. He said, “Let’s go. We don’t want to be late.”

We went to the car. The Coyote said, “Go in the trunk.” Mariana got in first. Then I did. He said to be quiet and do not move or else we’ll be caught. We felt hot, sticky, squished, and unaware. We had no idea what was going on outside the car. When the car started to move, I got some air from between the taillights. I felt fortunate that I was the one who got the air. But, there wasn’t a lot of room in there, and Mariana and I got tired and stiff.

I was scared, Mamí. Scared that they would catch us and send us back to Mexico.

We could feel the car stop and go, stop and go. After an hour and a half, we felt the car stop. Mariana and I whispered to each other. We came to an agreement. We would wait for five minutes and then bang on the trunk if the car didn’t start to move.

Five minutes passed. I hesitated, then started banging, and we both screamed, “Let us out! Let us out!”

The Coyote let us out. We were in an empty parking place. I asked quietly, “When will
Papí be here?”

He said, “Soon. He better be.” Two hours went by. The Coyote said, “Thirty minutes more, then we have to send you back to Mexico.” I do not want to go back to Mexico, Mamí.

15 minutes passed. Then 25. Pretty soon 29. We lost minutes fast, just like we lost hope. I could hear Mariana counting seconds. And when she said, “59,” she opened the trunk, and we got in, feeling disappointed.

We started driving. Suddenly, I heard a yell. It said, “Niñas, niñas, no se vayan!” I felt a little relieved and asked myself if it could be Papí. The Coyote stopped the car. Then he backed up into the parking lot. I banged on the trunk again. The Coyote let us out. It was Papí. I was so happy. Tears began to fall out of my eyes. Papí swooped me up into his strong arms. He swung me around and around.

We got into Papí’s old rusty pickup.

When we got to the California Race Track, after another one and a half hours of being squeezed into the truck, I saw my Tío Chuy. “He lives here, too?” I asked, surprised. We had a big party to celebrate coming to America successfully.

I promise I will study hard and get puros 10. I promise I’ll send home money for Abuelita’s medicine as soon as I can. I promise I’ll write often. I promise things will work out now that I’m here in America, Mamí.

I promise.

Charlie
By Sofia Hanna
Tootin’ Hills Elementary School, grade 4

When you enter a door, something about you always changes. There was a stirring inside me that 27th of December that I had never felt before. The feeling came from the people inside the hospital room that loomed ahead of me. The feeling came from the fact that I was expecting one more set of eyes than usual. I tensed and took a deep breath waiting for this door to be opened into a new beginning.

A gust of hot blistering air washed over me as I slipped through the doorway. My cheeks were getting rosy, and my teeth grabbed the inside of my bottom lip. My long, fleshy fingers looked like baby birds squirming together, grasping for food as I fiddled them. “Come sit down, guys. The baby’s not here yet,” Papa said as he directed us toward an armchair. I flopped into it and snapped, “When is Charlie going to be here?”

All of a sudden, before anyone could say anything, someone was knocking at the door. “Come on in,” Mama exclaimed, nodding her head towards the door. A knot formed in my stomach that was tight like a cobra enfolding its prey. I knew that a special new set of eyes would be peering through a crumpled squint. This picture was so strong that it made thoughts rush through my mind. Will he cry? Will he be cute? Will he need a diaper change while I’m here? Will I get to hold him before Elias? The sound of wheels rolling through the hallway made me flinch. Just then, a woman strode in wheeling a cart full of blankets, but when Papa approached, I knew it wasn’t just blankets.


“He’s here! He’s here!” I yelled, hurling myself out of the chair as I finally processed my thoughts. Slowly, I walked forward, craning my neck over the cart. There he was asleep, as still as a fawn curled against her mama doe. “Would you like to hold him?” Papa questioned. “Yes,” I answered, letting out a yelp of joy. “He’s sooooo cute!” I giggled gently, tapping his tiny ears. Compared to mine, they were three times smaller. That set of eyes gazed up at me, blinking as if he knew who I was.

“Sit down,” Mama beckoned, waving me towards her bed. I snuggled into a comfortable position and clasped my hands together as if in prayer. Suddenly, I was told to open my arms, and my brother was laid down in the crook of my elbow. I could feel his breathing steady with mine, and I knew that I would always be there for him—anytime, any place. The time I held him flew by just like time spent laying on the couch reading.

Mama reached to take Charlie from me, and I knew it would be time to leave. I strutted out the door; tall and proud like I had grown. When you exit a door, something about you always changes. Today, it was my family. It was myself. It was my heart. It was my brother. It was my whole life. And I liked it.

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**Special Times**  
*By Madeline Wikiera  
Colebrook Consolidated School, grade 4*

I think I am the luckiest kid in the world because my great grandmother, Mom-mom, lives right next to me. Every Saturday afternoon I visit her. We used to enjoy doing a lot of things together, but now that she is ninety-one, it is hard to do some of our old, favorite activities together. She is very important to me, and I love her so much.

Several times she brought me outside to go bird watching. We would watch them soar from tree to tree in our backyard. She knows all about birds and has many books on them. Every time I see a Blue Jay it makes me think of her. She calls me her "Little Blue Jay" because I love the color blue. Mom-mom even has her own bird, which is a cockatiel named Peanut. She has had him for a very long time. I help her take care of Peanut, especially when he falls out of his cage. Peanut cannot fly and can be hard to catch. Watching birds is something we both enjoy, and birds will always remind me of my special Mom-mom.

Another thing we both enjoy is jewelry. When I was little we would put on lots of it. She has many types of jewelry; gold, silver, and gemstone necklaces and bracelets. She knows a lot about gemstones because she has a lot of books on them and used to work at a jewelry store. Just last year, when she thought I was more mature, she gave me a colorful gemstone that has been cut into a flower shape. It was a special stone from her personal collection. I keep it in a safe spot because I don’t want to break it. I know that this gemstone will always with me just like Mom-mom will always be in my heart.

My mom has told me about how she, Mom-mom, and I used to go to the grocery store when I was a very little girl. Mom-mom would keep me busy by grabbing my hands and playing peek-a-boo. This would make me giggle and giggle. Every time Mom-mom got her cheese at the deli, she would always make sure I got a slice. On the car ride home I would always take off one of my socks and throw it in the front seat. When we got home they would have to go digging for my socks. Mom-mom still chuckles and teases me about it even to this day. I wish I could remember those times; however it makes me happy to know that Mom-mom still does and
laughs with me.
Now that I am older, I realize that spending time with Mom-mom has become more important to me. It makes me sad thinking about how she can’t stay forever. The memories we share are very important to me. I want to always treasure our time together. I will never forget Mom-mom because she will always be right here in my heart.

Honorable Mention

-Grade 5-

Ashley Heinrich, “The Audition,” Latimer Lane Elementary School
Emilia Montgomery, “Secrets,” Latimer Lane Elementary School
Ryan Proulx, “A Day at the Cabin,” Juliet W. Long Elementary School
Georgia Randall, “Snowflakes,” Tootin’ Hills Elementary School
Carley Simler, “My Life as Mary Lyn,” Lake Street Elementary School

Depression

By Abigail Maher
Kelly Lane Intermediate School, grade 5

You want the wind to sweep you off your feet and carry you to a place with life.
Shadows disguise me from the outside world.
My own cloud of fog makes my desire evaporate into the lonely space that surrounds me.
You feel trapped like an hourglass is counting down on you.

So Much Depends Upon A Black Cat
(Inspired by William Carlos Williams)

By Sophia D’Urso
The Master’s School, grade 5

So much depends upon
A black cat
With slanted eyes
Studying a gray mouse
She pounces
As the mouse quickly
Scurries away
She runs
With claws scraping up against the floor
Wondering
Where did that little mouse go?
Lucky mouse
Whimpering cat
As sad as a lonely bird
That cat
As happy as a bottlenose dolphin
That mouse
The cat still creeps
Along the edge of the wall
Mouse got away
Cat lies down
With her tail flicking
Lucky mouse
Whimpering cat.

Sisters
By Megan Broderick
Tootin’ Hills Elementary School, grade 5

Some kids at my school think that it is strange that my sister and I get along so well. They say their siblings are slamming-their-face-in-a-door type siblings. Well, Kirsten and I, we love doing things together. She is four years younger than me and looks up to me as a role model.

I seized my coat from the closet, grinning at Kirsten as she tried to drag our golden retriever (Daisy) down the stairs. Daisy shuddered from the wisps of cold air that approached the front door. I clutched the leash and Kirsten’s coat from the hook.

I hastily scribbled a note saying:
Dear Mom and Dad,
We took Daisy for a walk. We will be back at 3:00. Thanks!
Briana

I turned the key in the front door jogging in place to get ready for Daisy’s sprint. The clouds blocked the sun from shining onto the ground. I quivered from the frosty wind as I nudged Kirsten to signal her that this was the time Daisy bolted. I opened the door...

“STOP! DAISY! TREAT? TREAT?” I screamed in frustration. I turned around expecting Kirsten to laugh super hard pointing her finger at me for flailing my arms and trying to control Daisy. But—my sister wasn’t there. She was gone. She was gone. It repeated in my head. I tried to tell myself it wasn’t true. But, she really wasn’t there.

Cars pushed away the flurries of snow fluttering down from the sky. I frowned, holding out my frozen hands to catch some bits of snow that flew in my direction. Kirsten was out somewhere alone, in a crowded neighborhood full of strangers, and it was snowing. Mom and
I was lost, alone, without anyone to comfort me. Daisy propped her head against my leg, giving me a warm blanket. At least I have a dog to give me comfort and to warm me up, I thought to myself. I got up and searched around the block. I spotted a lot of people, but none of them were my sister. But I still did not give up. I called home, redialing just to make sure I got the number right, but no one answered. Maybe Kirsten was at home and didn’t hear the phone ring.

As I started to pet Daisy, I remembered the time when I was six and Kirsten was two. Dad came home from work with a small box. We opened it and found a puny puppy shivering from the lack of a full coat of fur. We hugged her tightly and gave her food and some water. We set up a bed with our dolls’ blankets and the box that she had arrived in. We didn’t know what to name her as our parents told us to go to bed, so we quickly wanted to think of a name. We both went downstairs wearing the same pajamas with plenty of daisies. And at the same time we both shouted, “DAISY!”

I smiled hugging Daisy tightly just like I had when I first got her. I was happy to finally get a pet, let alone a dog. But, it had been a birthday gift for Kirsten. She was the one who got to decide where Daisy was allowed to sleep and who could take her on her walks. Kirsten—being her kind self—let the whole family take care of her.

Out of nowhere I started shedding tears. They ran down my face and onto my winter coat like it was a race to see what tear got down to the ground first. I slowed down to a whimper and began to calm myself down. I casually got up with an “I’m-not-missing-my-sister look” in my face. Tears dried up on my face like water on a car window after it rained.

I imagined what it would be like when I would walk home and Kirsten would already be there thinking the same way I did. We would sit around the fire drinking homemade hot cocoa. There would be mountains of marshmallows in my cup and the whipped cream hovering over them. Hot fudge would drizzle down the sides making the cup difficult to hold. Kirsten’s favorite drink was hot cocoa I thought to myself, sighing.

I got up and walked over to the Nelson’s house, knowing that they would let me use their phone. I strolled up with confidence repeating my phone number. 435-926, I thought. I knocked vigorously again and again but there was no answer. I rang the doorbell until I finally gave up. I took a deep breath and tried to think of happy thoughts, but it only made me feel worse. I questioned myself if I was a good older sister. How could a person who lost her other sister be a good sister?

My body slumped as I trudged home in the coat of snow already covering the ground. A family walked down the street laughing their heads off. Together, I thought. Jealousy squirmed up inside, but I hid it underneath all my other feelings. I needed to let it out with anyone, anything. I could let it out like a cat whose tail is being sat on or an elephant that falls right on its trunk after falling off a huge rubber bouncy mall in the circus. If only I was that cat or elephant. But I wasn’t. I was a strong older sister. I would fight for her, lead her, and be there for her. I was someone who would do anything for her younger sister—anything.

Finally I had reached home. I bolted for the door, but someone was already there. I smiled, running for Kirsten jumping up and down with glee. She was sobbing in the corner, holding on to Daisy’s favorite ball. “I ran home to get Daisy’s ball when she dropped it, and I forgot to tell you about it,” Kirsten said between sobs. I picked her up and spun her around me
Makena’s Story

By Anna Cohen

Brown Middle School, grade 5

I slowly opened my eyes, hoping what had happened a few hours ago was just a dream. I will never forget the white men swarming into our village. They took me. We were in a big room on the boat with a rotten egg smell that seemed to hang in the air. It was burning hot and dry. We were slowly rocking back and forth like a mother soothing a baby, except it wasn’t relaxing. My throat hurt from screaming, and my eyes were damp from crying. It wasn’t just tears of sadness, but tears of shock and confusion. My stomach was grumbling because I hadn’t eaten for days. I looked around and saw all different women. Some were crying and moaning while others were sleeping. No one was smiling. I had so many questions to ask, but mostly I was terrified. I had one big question that seemed to shatter my heart, “Where is my family?”

Even though there seemed to be thousands of women on the boat, I didn’t recognize one person from my tribe. All of a sudden, a little girl chained to me started to cry. I didn’t blame her. This was horrible. I looked down the aisle and saw a scary man with skin as light as the moon. He looked almost like the man who destroyed our land and stole all our people. I was surprised when he placed a big bucket in front of the room but all I could do was watch in confusion. The bucket was full of a soft mushy substance with little chunks that the men said was “food” called horse beans and slabbber sauce. Any other day I’d turn down that disgusting stuff, but anything tastes good when you’re starving. I took a handful of mush and put it in my mouth. I slowly bit down and the substance stuck to the roof of my mouth and the big brown chunks kept on getting stuck in my teeth. It was horrid, but I knew I wouldn’t live much longer if I didn’t eat.

After 86 days of the same disgusting food and the yucky smells on the cramped, hot boat, our journey came to an end. The room was not rocking much anymore and some people were being guided out of the area. Were the strange people letting us go back to our land? When it was finally my turn to be dragged out of the boat, my legs felt rubbery and wobbly. When I stepped outside, it was so bright that it wouldn’t have surprised me if the sun itself was right outside the door. I was almost excited until I realized that this new place looked nothing like home.

We were chained together and escorted to an area where many white people were gathered. I had no idea where we were, but the place gave me a family of butterflies in the pit of my stomach. Suddenly, a man with a salt-and-pepper beard walked out in front of us. Our eyes were glued to him, and we wondered what he was going to do. “Welcome to the slave auction,” he said in a booming voice. He took a puff of his cigar. The man continued speaking, but I

with a grin from ear to ear.
“I’m just glad I found you,” I replied.

Having a sister means that you have someone to share adventures with. Kirsten was perfect for that. Having a sister was just what I wanted, and Kirsten was the perfect sister. A kind, soft-hearted, loving sister, someone who taught me how to get through tough situations without even trying to. Even though I am always the oldest sister, Kirsten acts older than I am. And she always will—always.
couldn’t hear him. Sweat was pouring down my face and my heart stopped beating. Everything was hitting me. I was becoming a slave.

I felt a tight, monstrous grip on my arm. A man with a wrinkly face and long black hair was standing above me. “You’re coming with me.” I was the most terrified I’d ever been. He walked me across the way and pointed to fields of cotton that seemed to stretch on for miles. “Your name is Mary, and if you don’t respond you’ll be severely punished. The overseer will be watching,” he said as he walked into the farmhouse and slammed the door. I thought my name was Makena? I did not want to argue. It would be best if I didn't figure out what “severe punishments” were. So I bent down and started to pick. Tears fell out of my eyes and trickled down my cheeks landing on the cotton. I wished my mama was here to tell me that everything’s going to be okay.

Suddenly, I felt really tired. I knew the scary men were going to get mad, but I was too tired to care. I rested my head on the soft cotton and felt like I was lying on a cloud. My eyes began to close. I dreamed that I was still in Africa and my mom and I were laughing and playing. We were running through fields of grass and playing games. It was one of those dreams that feels so real. Mama smiled and said, “Are you okay?” I opened my eyes to see a girl probably a year or so older than me with the same dark skin and dirt stains on her face. She had dark curly hair in a bonnet with wisps peeking out. She looked at me and asked again, “Are you okay?” I nodded and sat up.

We were in a little room with walls made of logs and in the corner there was a mattress stuffed with hay. It looked like a place where they kept animals. The smell of cow manure hung in the air and the room felt humid. I scratched my head and peered back at the strange girl. She smiled. She had really white teeth.

“I’m Kamaria, but they call me Maria.”

“I’m Makena,” I said.

“That’s nice,” she smiled again. “I found you sleeping so I brought you here. If it weren’t for me, you’d be in big trouble right now.”

“Oh!” I replied. I told Kamaria how I came from West Africa on a ship to America.

“I’m from West Africa too!” she said. I didn’t get why Kamaria was so happy. This was only my first day being a slave, and it was the worst day of my life.

We must have talked for hours because before we knew it, it was dinnertime. A woman came into the hut with bread and butter on a tray. She scowled at us as she left. It tasted nothing like Mama’s homemade meals but still better than the awful tasting food on the boat. I wished I had appreciated Mama’s meals while I could.

“Want to hear my plan?” Kamaria asked. I nodded wondering what her plan would be.

“I’m running away,” she whispered. My eyes got wide. “I hear some free slaves are starting something called the Underground Railroad.”

“What’s that?” I whispered.

She told me that they help people run away and be free. “The best part is, I’m leaving tonight! Want to come with me?” she said.

It was a lot to take in. I thought for a few minutes that felt like hours. I weighed the decision back and forth in my head. Go or stay. Go or stay. If I stayed, I would have to deal with this horrible new life. If I went, I would be taking a chance to get captured by the slave catchers and beaten, but I also had a chance to find my family and knew my mom would want me to be free, so I had to trust my instincts.

“I’m in,” I said smiling, and she hugged me. Wow, I was hugging someone I just met.

As I picked cotton that night, I realized that if we got caught then we might even be killed. Why had I not thought about that before? I was beginning to have second thoughts but I
had already made a deal with my new friend, and the sun was setting. When it had been dark for three hours, Kamaria and I snuck out. We brought bread and a blanket since Kamaria said we’d be walking for days. We also had to light a match because it was pitch black outside. I tried to pretend I wasn’t scared. I was still trying to make a good first impression and being a scaredy-cat wouldn’t help. We tiptoed through the fields of cotton, and I was sweating and shaking the whole time. As we were about to enter the woods, Kamaria stopped and looked at me. Her eyes were filled with fear and I could tell she was trying to hold the tears back. For the first time, she looked worried. She squirmed around as she tried to talk.

“Promise me that whatever happens from here on out we will stick together.” I smiled and gave her a hug.

“I promise.” And then I followed her into the dark, mysterious woods. I smiled to myself, imagining the great life I once had but also the new amazing life I was about to discover. As nervous as I was, deep, deep down I knew it would all work out.

A Single Tear
By Katy Wolff
Coleytown Elementary School, grade 5

I dropped to my knees, head in my hands. Thanksgiving was in 2 weeks, and I had absolutely nothing to be thankful for. Dad’s warm hand touched my shoulder. I looked up at his sad eyes. I pulled myself to my feet. My eyesight went blurry, as tears gathered in my eyes. “This is it,” I thought dizzily to myself. “She’s going.” I stared at my feet, watching them take me closer to the house with every step. The alarm beeps as I turn the knob and open the big black side door.

Jade walked up to me and wound around my legs, purring. Her rib cage stuck out, and all it did was remind me again of just how skinny she was. My finger bumped along every protruding rib. I picked her up, rubbing her soft black ears. She meowed at me, unsure why my cheeks were wet, but loving every second of the attention. She didn’t have a clue what was going on.

She had a tumor in her throat, and we had desperately prayed for a miracle. We had hoped that one day we would wake up and our cat would be cured. But there was no escaping fate. We loaded her into the cat carrier, and then into the car. The ride to the vet’s office was deathly silent, except for the frantic meowing coming from the trunk.

The tires crunched wearily on the gravel, pulling into the vet’s parking lot. We plodded up the stairs to the building, staring at our shoes.

The chime rang merrily as we opened the door, and I resisted the urge to run. The happy sound seemed so out of place on this horrible day.

My parents flopped on the wooden bench, mentally and physically exhausted. They both looked like they were about to cry. That frightened me. I had never seen my parents cry before. I told myself to be brave.

“The vet will see you now,” the sympathetic woman at the front desk said. We trudged into the cat room.

In there, I opened the carrier and let Jade out. She stretched and walked around on the examination table, already getting familiar with her new territory. She laid down, totally at ease. “No.” I whispered, more to myself. My voice sounded very far away. “No.”
The vet came in and started preparing in the needles. He laid the first one down on the table, reaching for some antiseptic wipes. He had a soothing voice, but he couldn't reassure me that everything was going to be okay. I looked around at the ticking cat-themed clocks on the walls, but they just reminded me of how little time Jade had left. The vet was wiping Jade's leg now, preparing for the shots. I reached out for her instinctively. The vet smiled at me, and I slowly let go of my cat. I knew it was supposedly for the best, but that didn't change the fact that Jade was going to die. The needle plunged in, and I leaned back against my mom. A single tear dripped down my face.

The vet had left for a minute, and we kept petting her and saying goodbye. My dad was crying. The vet came back, and he had the second needle with him. I closed my eyes. I just couldn't watch. There was a soft meow, and my mom hugged me tight. I opened my eyes and watched Jade's chest slowly rise and fall, then stop. That was when I knew she was gone. Tears flowed like waterfalls, making paths down the rock of my face.

The ride home was completely silent, the air thick and heavy, filled with memories. The times she had sat on my lap when I was sick, how she had licked me all over, till the end thinking I was her kitten. The times I simply sat with her, enjoying our alone time. I thought about how she had died licking me. How she was a cat like no other and could never be replaced.

We arrived home, still silent. We laid Jade down in the rich, brown earth. Dad slowly covered her and finally, he gave the ground a last pat. The wind whipped through me as we walked into the house. I felt horribly guilty about leaving her alone in the cold, dark night. This just didn't feel right.

In the kitchen, looking out at the darkness, I was hoping that this was all a terrible nightmare. But deep down, I KNEW it wasn't a nightmare. Cats didn't live forever, but she was more than a cat to me. This was like losing an older sister. Tears came to my eyes again. "Go to bed, sweetie." My dad whispered, embracing me. "Good night." I said softly, my voice shaking.

Late at night, lying under my covers, painfully alone, I longed to hear Jade's collar jingle again. So I padded over to my dresser and grabbed her collar, the only thing I had left of her. I looked out into the dark night, feeling the crisp November air through the cracks in the windows. I suddenly realized my parents and the vet were right. She was in a better place. I missed her. I always will. But I went back to bed, and found sleep at last.

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**My Creek**

*By Shelby Glenn*

*Hall Memorial School, grade 5*

Behind my house, deep in the forest, is a creek. The creek is small but is a big part of my life. I like to sit by the edge and listen to the soothing sound of the water rushing over rocks and branches. I sit on the tree hanging over the creek and close my eyes. The water trickles down off the tiny stone bridge and shines under the golden sunlight. *Slip, slide, splash* goes the water as fish jump out. Deer gracefully tiptoe over to the creek and bend down to drink from the rushing river. The water fizzes and pops like bubbles from an opened soda can. The wind blows over the water's surface, creating tiny ripples along its glossy top. Wildflowers grow by the edge, and leaves fall down onto the grassy forest by the creek.

It starts to rain, and the tiny droplets plink down onto the creek. Little waves splash up over the curved edges of the creek, and the pace of the water speeds up. Then, the rain stops,
and the clouds fade away like shadows meeting the first rays of sunlight. The water calms as if it were a baby hushed by its mother, and a robin lands on a nearby tree. The river spreads over the land, passing by most of the world.

As dusk falls and the stars come into sight, the moon’s reflection shines down onto the creek. Then, I hop down off the tree and go home.

Months later, the water freezes. All that is in the water is now trapped underneath its glass-like covering. I slip on my boots and step onto the ice. The ice cracks but never breaks. I run down the frozen creek and glide down, screaming and laughing. My sister comes down to the slippery and icy river to join me, and we both slide down the creek.

Later, the sun shines down on the flowing creek, and the birds come back from the south. Then, the ice melts. The water is free and dances across the land. The turtles sun themselves, the deer drink, and the birds chirp. Behind my house, deep in the forest, is a creek.

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**Honorable Mention**

*Grade 6*

Katelyn Hadley, “Ready...Oar Not!” *Gideon Welles School*

Laurel Pitts, “Falling in Love: An Insightfully Beautiful Romantic Comedy About the Worst Best Day of my Life,” *Greenwich Academy*

Karen Ru, “Sweet Side of Fear,” *West Woods Upper Elementary School*

Jillian Thrall, “Fear Lives in a Civil War Soldier,” *Kelly Lane Intermediate School*

Emma Tishler, “Discovering Dance,” *Gideon Welles School*

Jason Zulpa, “The Magic of Words,” *Woodbury Middle School*

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**The Hanger**

*By Emily Feeney*

*Tootin' Hills Elementary School, grade 6*

Let me bring you back to a time,
A time when the forests turned from light to dark,
A time when the storm rolled in, and drove away the singing lark,
And changed all my world,
To anger.
On a hanger,
Draped with black and gold,
A bleak future did also hold.

There were times when I swelled with pride, and understood a purpose.
There were times when I admired a life of service,
But now that hanger draped with black and gold,
A terrible, bleak future, for me, did also hold.

They were taking him away,
A year or less he told us one bright, summer day.
Still, it seemed like a lifetime, and all the sun just went away.

Soon it will be night, and night it will stay.
Forever.

I kept asking and asking,
Is there another way?
Any other way you can stay,
With me?

Is there something you can do?
Or was it something I did?
Or something I should have done?
Or something I might do?
Please? I’ll do anything...

A gentle smile, a teardrop moistened apology.
My country needs me,
I have to go.
But I need you, too, Daddy.
Desperately.

On a hanger,
Draped with black and gold,
A bleak future for me did also hold.
When the day for saying goodbye finally came,
I felt as if nothing could ever, ever be the same.
There were tears that lasted for weeks,
And nothing else could matter.

And all I could think was: And will he live or will he die?
And how much longer?
When will it be over?
I never knew there could be worse things than dying,
But what if one of those unspeakable things, before this, unimagined,
Happened?

What if something was lost that he could never find?
What if his body came home, but not his mind?
Would we ever be the same?
Could we ever be the same?
In Afghanistan, what would we all leave behind,
On that hanger,
Draped with black and gold?

And as I looked into the eyes of the others around me, I knew who had paid the same kind of fee. The price of freedom isn't ever free, says the post on Facebook.

The price of freedom is surely not free, often ultimately paid also by families. And with those who knew, we didn't need to talk, or share, we just suffered, silently, together.

And, also, I knew by their eyes, who, among my friends, could never understand. They could never understand, and that was my only joy, for me, during those days. I so envied them.

And I am left, alone and bleak, to stare at that hanger, week after week, draped with his black and gold.

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**Bad Luck**

*By Alix Caffray*

*Greenwich Academy, grade 6*

up on the roof
not on the ground
laying there until you're found
walking around
in shock
she was your key and you were her lock
no one hears you
because you're alone
silent tears
can't reach the phone
because you've fallen
and will never get back up
can't believe
it's just bad luck

keep talking
speechless
The horizon was a milky, indecisive glow by the time Ever set out towards the Royal Gardens. The stars, beaten into submission by the oncoming daylight, told her that dawn was coming soon. Much too soon. She cast an upwards glance at the sky and cursed softly, quickening her pace and doing her best to ignore the sting of bitter dewdrops brushing her bare feet. Another hurried look revealed only a handful of stars left in the pearly grey sky.

She was running now, black hair escaping its hasty braid, white skirts flying behind her as she raced with the sun. There. There was the dusty old pathway, still and silent with lack of use since the gardeners stopped using the back entrance. She practically flew the last few steps to the trail, which she followed until she arrived at the rusty, unlocked gate that led to the Royal Gardens. She plowed through it, orange metal hinges grinding in protest, all pretense of her formerly treasured subtlety gone as she took off once more. Through the meticulously paved pathways, down sloping beds of flowers, under soaring archways, over gurgling streams she sprinted, her pale face red from exertion and the glassy dawn chill. Her heartbeat skittered in her chest, struggling to keep up with her racing thoughts. The prospect of losing, of making it to the fountain seconds too late, was unfathomable. Ever had to get there in time. She just had to.

So, when she breathlessly rounded a corner and was immediately dwarfed by the looming frame that led to the fountain, her heart switched paces from a staggering trot to an unbearably loud thumping; she couldn’t help but wonder if this was what heroes from storybooks felt like when not just their lives, but the lives of the entire kingdom, were about to change. She usually stopped to admire the creamy ivory and elegant carvings on the grand
from the sickroom. For all those nights I couldn't sleep because I heard coughing and retching and screams of pain of broth and bread, way....

and the opportuni

star still burns in the sky on the thirteenth of June, "The Granter" is sitting by the fountain in the Kingdom's standards. The King's commoner clothing was particularly shabby, so the men, assuming he was poor, ridiculed and teased him throughout the night. As the sun started to rise, the men shared a hefty meal of an equally as hefty cost, and while the men argued over who would pay the bill, the King stood up, and the other four silenced immediately. "You think me poor, correct?" He questioned them. They responded immediately great with whoops of affirmation. "Then, my friends, I have a little challenge for you: If you think I am so poor, I cannot pay for this meal, say so." Though they were slower to confirm this time, their minds working to figure out this poor commoner man was pulling, they still all agreed. "Then, how about this: If I truly cannot pay for the meal we've shared, then I owe each of you twenty hours of labor. But, if I can pay for this meal, then you each are owed one tiny wish to me. What do you say, gentlemen?" After much discussion, three of the men agreed, while the youngest stood up beside the King.

"I cannot agree. You are a small man, and an undoubtedly poor one, and I will not make you do twenty hours of work in my name instead of earning your own living." That was when, of course, the King revealed his real self. The kind man was sentenced to be made immortal and acquire the power to grant wishes by the King's magicians, and then serve the King for his everlasting life, granting wishes to the youngest heir to the throne. It is said every year, as the last star still burns in the sky on the thirteenth of June, "The Granter" is sitting by the fountain in the Royal Gardens, waiting for the heir to the throne to come."

The memory of the article gave her no pleasure; it only reminded her of her former responsibility as the youngest heir to the throne. It was her duty to find this mysterious Granter, to make the wish that would save the kingdom. But she had failed that responsibility, and the opportunity was gone. Just like the King would soon be.

“No!” Ever screamed, her voice hoarse and throaty. “No! I didn’t come here...not all this way...For years I searched for you! For all those hours I stood at his side, feeding him spoonfuls of broth and bread, or just watching him as he slept from a coma he might never wake up from, for all those nights I couldn’t sleep because I heard coughing and retching and screams of pain from the sickroom. I only stood it because I thought that you would help me! That you make him
better! And I absolutely refuse to accept no as an answer! I know your secret! *Come to me!*

She was bellowing now, tears freely flowing down her face, unleashing all the boiling fury and wrenching sadness that had churned inside of her ever since her father had become sick. She lowered her head, tangled ebony hair cascading down and brushing the stone pathways. "Please." A broken whisper, emerging from the lips of a broken girl. "Please let my father live." She turned away, tasting salty tears on her lips. She wanted to fall asleep and never wake up, never look into her father's hopeful blue-green eyes, an echo of her own. "Please."

Under the ivory archway, down the twisting paths, through the murk of her despair as she wandered away, glassy-eyed, she didn't hear the satisfied, maybe even smug, voice behind her.

"Granted."

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**Flying My Own Way Home**

*By Emma Chin*

*Juliet W. Long Elementary School, grade 6*

Birds, sitting on a power-line. When the light goes green, they take flight. I am at home on my laptop, knowing that the light in my head is not yet green. The light will let me know when my life will head off into the life that I need to lead. People will want me to go in a certain direction. But right now I’m flying my own way home.

Lynn is my name. I am your typical 17-year-old girl who will search on Tumbler and can eat a whole pint of ice cream or play on a soccer team. But I have had one of the roughest lives. I live in a rural area with my mom and my brother, Elias. He’s older than me by two years. He hasn’t found a job and is trying to get into college, but my mom can’t support us enough financially to send him. She works as a waitress at a hole-in-the-wall restaurant. I have tried my best to find a job in the past but haven’t found much, until I was able to start a small business with my two best friends, Danielle and July, to sell homemade cookie dough. It is kept frozen, and we have to sell 30 boxes in order to reach our weekly goal of savings. At the end of the week, we split up the money, and on the weekend we prep more dough for the week. My life is actually very simple. I’m very average. I’m a junior in high school, and I have a boyfriend named Ashton. I’m very skeptical about next year because I want to go to college soon. I have to learn to fly on my own and make decisions for myself. I just don’t know how ready I am for it, so maybe the money part of things is really just a blessing in disguise.

Today. It’s my last time setting both eyes on my school again. Tears stream down my face with joy. I am free. I stand hand-in-hand with Ashton. We move our tassels and that cap that is mine; for one day, it flies into the air to never be thrown again. It will one day be in a box, in a closet somewhere. Summer comes. I think endlessly about college. My mom says I should go to community college since I can’t afford any other schools. One good thing is that my brother has worked some things out with his girlfriend to afford an apartment together, so he will be moving out in the fall. And now my mom has found a boyfriend! So I might have a new stepdad. And maybe even a new sibling. But right now I just need to be a bird in flight lessons.

Two years have passed. I am now 20 years old. Luckily, over the summer my mom got married to someone who was able to support me in going to college. I got into three universities but
chose the one farthest away. Odd. Elias goes to a college maybe three hours away from me. Ashton actually is about to get into Oxford University in England. An international boyfriend—how cool! And my mom and stepdad had a daughter and named her Deborah. I’m happy to have a little sister, although I’m so much older than her. We are 19 years apart...amazing! I think my flying skills are improving. I’m starting to take flight.

I’m in my junior year of college and coming home for Thanksgiving to see my family. My sister is 3, and my brother is 24. And me, myself, am 22. I walk through the door while Deborah dashes up to me and hugs me by the knees. I love her more than anything. Food is delicious as always. I love the warmth going around the table, and seeing joy in my mother and brother’s eyes that I haven’t seen in ages. My dad and Deborah are just as happy. Maybe in a few years, me and Ashton will feel the same way my family feels. I’m really starting to fly. I am taking off and spreading my wings. Flapping. Keeping up. Heart pounding. Eyes content. Go. Fly long and hard until you need your rest. You will fly. One way or another. Live for the moment because everything else is uncertain.

**Sugar**
*By Meghan Kennedy*

*Memorial Middle School, grade 6*

Our relationship wasn’t always amazing. Maura and I were like grains of sugar in a cup, dreading the day when a tidal wave of water would dissolve us. In second grade, she was my tiny piece of heaven. In third grade, the truth blinded me almost as much as she had.

Going home that first day of second grade, I felt great. A smiled glued itself to my face and wouldn’t let go. I was about to burst. I had a new friend, I loved my teacher, and everything was so easy. “Mom!” I practically shouted, when I finally saw her in the mob of people in the café. “Come meet my new friend!” I tugged her arm until she started to walk and then pulled her to Maura. We hugged and gripped our hands. Our moms met, shook hands, and talked for a moment. From that day, we were always together. Nothing could separate us. I remember sometime between second and third grade, we had our first sleepover. My mom and I had gone to pick her up. There was a mischievous glint in my mom’s eyes as she shouted up to Mrs. Fellin. “Maybe, Maura needs to sleepover.” Four hours later, we were on my porch screaming our heads off. Maura had called her mom with the invitation, and her mom had said yes! I was thrilled. It was my first sleepover and her first sleepover. We spent the hours before bed together discussing our future. First, we would go on vacation together, then, when we were older, we would go to college together, live next to each other, and then get matching Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retrievers. We were young girls with huge ideas.

On the first day of third grade, I danced a jig when I found out we were in the same class. Mrs. O’Neill let us pick our seats, and I didn’t care what table I sat at as long as Maura was there. I was constantly amazed as we explored our friendship and found loads of things we had in common. We both played soccer, we both loved to read, we both loved animals, we both strived for good grades in school...the list went on forever. There were two particular memories that are glued to the back of my brain. At recess, there was nothing to do, so we made the swings into a roller coaster. We would swing really high, clutch the chains, and then tip our heads back so we were looking backwards. We were like pencils falling through the air at 50 mph. If I
closed my eyes at a certain moment, it felt like the air was letting us fall and then catching us right before we hit the ground. The other memory was since we loved reading so much, we made a book mountain on our table. There were about 10 books stacked in a pile between us. My books, her books, and the book we were currently reading together. Each morning, we would carefully stack the books. Although we didn’t read all of them, we always had a choice. When we sat down at the table, the books towered over our heads.

No drops of water fell on us those years.

Fourth grade was the year that the drops of water started pouring down. They started small and got larger each day. Maura and I weren’t in the same class, but we were close as ever. I made two new friends, and she made two new friends, which was good, but it created problems. To be perfectly honest, I was so used to being Maura’s best friend for life and death, I hadn’t thought about new friends. I was jealous of her close relationship with them, and I felt like I wasn’t part of it (even though I was). They sat at the table with us (the peanut-free table) and joined our games of foursquare. They were really kind, and it was nice to have new friends sitting with us. It was about this time I learned that Maura was jealous of me. I didn’t know why. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t figure out why she would be jealous of me. I no longer felt the happiness between us, and I didn’t like it. To me, it felt like something was being left unsaid. I knew we were going to be in for something. I just didn’t know what.

The day I got my teacher letter, I called all my friends, except Maura. I stared at the phone for an hour until her number was dialed, and my thumb was on the “talk” button. I decided to hit “end,” though. I never received a call from her either. When I found out Maura was in my class, I felt like I was holding the world’s weight of guilt on my shoulders. The second week of fifth grade the tsunami of water fell on us. We started fighting. With boys, fighting is done with a fistfight. With girls, the fighting is done with words. It is drawn out to the breaking point. This is what happened to us. We fought like cats, talked to each other like we didn’t matter, and just plain ignored each other. Sometimes I went home and cried—not because Maura was getting to me, but because I couldn’t believe my best friend for life was quickly becoming my enemy. One particular time, we were working on that day’s math problems together. I had to go to the bathroom. I flipped my paper over since I was done with the problem. When I came back, Maura was glowing at me.

“Go back to your seat. I don’t want to work with you.” I was shivering from head to toe. This was not my best friend speaking. This was insane. “You can’t tell me what to do. This isn’t even your seat. I’m NOT moving.” It was clear that I had won the small battle when Maura gathered her stuff and stormed out of her seat. Even though I didn’t want to, I stayed in that seat until math block was over, just to prove that she wasn’t the one holding me there. One other time, I put the bathroom pass on my desk and slid Maura a note to meet me there. I left the room and stood at the sink washing my hands for what seemed forever. Finally, Maura stormed in.

“What?” she demanded. The speech I had prepared flew out the window. “What happened to us?” I asked out loud. “I’m jealous of your ability to do math,” she whispered. We said we were sorry and then hugged. We fought for days and then had the bathroom visit on a regular basis.

Present Day

When I found out that I had gym with her in 6th grade, I wasn’t happy. On the third day of school, I walked to gym slowly. During gym we all went outside to practice for the mile run. When I was done, I ended up walking with Maura. “Hey,” Maura prompted. “Hi,” I said back. I looked down at my shoes. Where was this going? “I’m sorry.” The words entered my ears as a whisper, but soon my brain was shouting them. I couldn’t help but smile. I bounced to my feet
Hanging Up My Cleats
By William Diamantis
East Shore Middle School, grade 6

It was a perfectly sunny October day, one of the best days for football in the fall of 2011. It was the second play of the third quarter. I was playing defense, middle linebacker on our home turf at Jonathan Law High School. My eyes were on the ball. As I ran forward toward the running back, I took the most devastating hit of my life. I went head to head with the running back from Amity. I went down. I got up for a second and went right back down again. I remember the coaches coming over to me as I lay on the field. Have you ever felt like you were sent into space? This was my first concussion.

A concussion is a change in the way the brain works. When someone gets hit very hard, the brain moves inside the skull. It is caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or other part of the body. Some concussions last for a short time; others can last for a long time. Some symptoms I had were headaches and confusion. The light bothered my eyes. I wore sunglasses during the day in our house during my recovery.

In the coming hours after my first trip to the emergency room, I learned so much about my brain. I was nine years old, and the first thing I learned was about not having brain stimulation. I could not watch TV, play video games, or go outside. I had to stay in the dark, and I hated it. The doctors called it “cocoon therapy.”

In an article entitled “What’s a Concussion?,” it stated that every year more than 400,000 kids go to the emergency room for serious brain injuries. According to kidshealth.org, “Car crashes, playgrounds, and sports are the most common ways that kids get concussions.” I have learned that it is important to tell your coach and your parents if you take a bad hit. I have seen my teammates suffer from broken ankles, fractured feet, heat exhaustion, pulled muscles, and more concussions. You should never let anyone pressure you to keep on playing.

You may have heard of profession football players that have had serious head injuries. They have long-term health problems later in life. Sometimes, when they return too quickly or return and have another injury to their brain too soon, it is very dangerous. With this in mind, my parents became very protective of me. However, they let me play my favorite sport again the following season. My second concussion was just two years later in October of 2013. I was playing defense, made a great tackle, and took the running back down. When he fell, he fell on top of me, and I hit the back of my head on the turf. I knew right away that this was it. My second concussion. The medics told my parents I had two choices: I could take the ambulance or they could drive me to the hospital. I knew I was not taking the field again. This is why I am now “hanging up my cleats.”

After my first concussion, I was sent for a CAT Scan. Kids Health helped me understand that “CAT” Scan stands for “computerized axial tomography.” Translated, that means a scanner

and grabbed her in a hug.

I’ve learned that when people have huge fights, it is hard to come back as a completely new person and say “sorry.” Maura has been able to do that when nobody else in my life has.

That tsunami of water finally evaporated, slowly and surely, leaving the sugar part of us settled, but uneven.
takes a computer picture of what is going on inside your body. I was nervous about the scan. I had to go in alone. I lay on a bed while a big wheel spun around my head making noises. I didn’t want to know the results. I was scared the doctor would say I couldn’t play football anymore, or worse, like something may be wrong with my brain. The doctors were nice to me, so that helped to keep me calm. The results came back quickly. I was lucky; I did not have bleeding on my brain. My recovery time started with four days in the dark. Cocoon Therapy. I had a lot of rest in a dark, quiet room. The only activity I remember was walking with my parents at night in the dark, just to get me out of the house for a few minutes.

It was hard to stay in a dark room all day. I knew my friends were outside playing and having fun. I fell behind in my schoolwork, and my grades went down. I used to take spelling tests and get 100. The first test I took after my concussion, I got a 30. My teachers knew something was not right. After a limited time at school and resting a lot, I felt normal again about two weeks later. I missed the rest of my football season. I was very upset when I was told I couldn’t play. Now, I know my brain is way more important than playing sports, even if I don’t like it.

After the next few months, I was able to play sports again. I started basketball later in the fall. Every time I fell down or hit my head while I was playing outside, it reminded me of my concussion. I was careful, but I didn’t want to stop playing all sports. The doctors said I could play again, but if I were to have another concussion, I would have to stop playing my favorite sport, football. I guess I was unlucky, because it happened again this year. This time I knew the drill. I went back into cocoon therapy and had limited stimulation.

This spring, I will go back to the doctor for a baseline test. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention website stated, "Baseline testing is a pre-season exam conducted by a trained health care professional. Baseline tests are used to assess an athlete’s balance and brain function (including learning and memory skills, ability to pay attention or concentrate, and how quickly he or she thinks and solves problems), as well as for the presence of any concussion symptoms. Results from baseline tests (or pre-injury tests) can be used and compared to a similar exam conducted by a healthcare professional during the season if an athlete has a suspected concussion.”

My second concussion was not as bad as the first one, but a concussion is a concussion. I never want to go back into the dark. I am hanging up my cleats for now, at least until I get to high school.

Honorable Mention

-Grade 7-

Victoria Cao, “First Day Jitters,” Coleytown Middle School
Charlotte McMillan, “Flashback,” Granby Memorial Middle School
Kara Skrubis, “Saving a Dog that Saved Me,” Granby Memorial Middle School
Annabelle Strong, “Balanced,” Henry James Memorial School
Rosemary Watson, “Rosy with Red Hair,” Mansfield Middle School
Harbour Woodward, “Trapped,” Greenwich Academy
Look Around
By Julia Swett
Old Saybrook Middle School, grade 7

From the smallest grain of sand
To the brilliant images of Mother Nature
Inspiration lies within

Residing in your soul
Waiting to create a spark
Igniting your passions

All it truly takes is a single glimpse
Of what captures your attention
Instantaneously, inspiration strikes

Never look farther than the horizon
Or the sanctity of your home
For inspiration is your closest ally
Who is always prepared with ready arms
That will encase you in its warm embrace

“Inspiration comes to us slowly and quietly...prime it with a little solitude.”
Brenda Ueland

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Legacy
By Abigail Howard
Franklin Elementary School, grade 7

Spread your wings little butterfly
Break out of the trap
And into the sky

And then you will be free
From pain and suffering
And mostly me
Break through all the doors
That life makes you face
The challenges build you
But mostly your strength

Face things fearlessly
Like you do everyday
Don’t let the wind push you
The opposite way
Don't let the people around you
  Clip your wings
Don't paralyze your voice
  Just let yourself sing

Stand up against the wrong things
  And encourage the right
Break free of this chamber
Break down all the fright

Stand tall for the others
  And be their voice
For your God is watching you
  Waiting for that time

When guns don’t settle fights
  And word of the tongue
    Can be a rose
    In a garden of love

Support those people
  Who never gave up
And never let them

  But most of all
    Little butterfly
Don’t tell me the sky’s the limit
  Until you fly just that high

Check on the footprints
  On the moon
Make sure they’re still there

Touch the American Flag
With the pride to live here
  And honor your country
In the worst of your times
  Fight on little butterfly

  I hope you fly high

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The Loon’s Call

By Ian Kamperschroer

Ledyard Middle School, grade 7

The moonlight was soft and still on the calm water of Lower Saranac. The rhythmic
lapping of the waves on shore was one of the only sounds heard. A low, thick mist hung over the water, covering the islands and creeping through thick green conifers and foliage-laden oaks. A light breeze swept through the forest, and a gentle whisper hushed from among the branches of the autumn woods. Somewhere among the trees, punctuating the silence of the cold night, a twig snapped, and the lonely call of a loon echoed across the lake.

Kingsford awoke slowly to the thin light of daybreak. The moment he opened his eyes, he knew he would not be able to go back to sleep. He reached across the bed and for a moment forgot, as he had almost every day for the past six years. He rose slowly and strolled across the bedroom to the large window overlooking his wide lawn. His dry, fragile hands threw open the dark green curtains as sunlight flooded his bedroom.

The old man made his way downstairs and into the kitchen. Heavenly smells started to waft through the house. Outside robins and cardinals fluttered through the trees, singing to him as he ate breakfast. Winston, an old lab just as reserved as his owner, rested his chin on the smooth tile floor of the kitchen and patiently watched his master eat.

After breakfast, Kingsford dressed quickly and made his way across the dew-covered grass to the small wooden shed that held his kayak. Moments later he was pushing off from shore, paddling onto the lake with swift strokes, Winston leaning over the edge of the small boat. Little Thomas waved from the front porch of his family’s lake house.

“Good morning Mr. Wembeley!”

Kingsford smiled. “Good day to you, too, young sir!” he shouted back, giving a mock salute towards shore.

As they glided across the water, the crisp morning air brushing across their faces, Kingsford remembered the long, grey days after Eve had disappeared. They had found the kayak still and empty on the lake, Winston curled up and whimpering in the bottom. She had gone out to sketch the islands and the perfect, undisturbed water, a favorite pastime of hers. All that was found was her notebook, lying on the seat, and a rather tiny black birding whistle that made the sound of a loon’s call.

For years there had been disappearances throughout the area. Sometimes long periods of time would pass, but for almost twenty-five years they still hadn’t stopped. And after each there was always found a miniature birding whistle. Kingsford had never paid much mind to the disappearances...until the day his wife vanished. For a long time, Kingsford did not kayak, and did not leave the house. He stayed in his bedroom, silent, grieving.

Now, however, his kayak cut through the water, past the Twin Sisters and Pirate Island. Up ahead he spotted a tall man in a canoe, silhouetted by the late morning sun. He quickly recognized the middle-aged male as Victor Simms, a lake resident himself. He was a pale man with long, lanky legs and broad shoulders. A short stubble of a slightly grey beard accented his narrow face and was matched by his scraggly hair. He was a bit awkward and preferred to be alone. Now, he was observing the winged species of mid-autumn flying overhead. Kingsford shouted out to him.

“Fine morning, Mr. Simms. Wouldn’t you agree?”

The birder turned towards the old man, a pencil and exquisite sketches of Canadian geese in his hands. Winston’s ears perked and an aggravated growl escaped from his bared teeth. Kingsford gave the dog a scolding look. He was surprised, though, as Winston had never behaved in such a wild and aggressive way.

“Winston!” Kingsford snapped. The Labrador didn’t flinch, though, and let out a furious, staccato bark at Mr. Simms.

“Stupid dog,” Kingsford said. “Old age, I tell you. He’s a grumpy coot now. Thirteen years will do that to a dog, I suppose, though.” Mr. Simms looked thoughtfully at the clustered
formations of honking geese sailing across the cloudless sky.
  “You don’t see coot very often, do you?” Victor said finally.
  “Come again?”
  “Coot. You know, the bird. It’s not often you see one.
  “Oh.”
  Mr. Simms glanced at Winston, still growling, and then said finally, “Well, goodbye.” And
with that, he rowed away.
  “What an odd fellow.”
  When Kingsford reached home, it was noon. He dragged the kayak up to the shed. He
and Winston walked inside together and ate a short lunch. He spent the afternoon napping,
working on the poetry piece he wrote for the town newspaper every week, and tending to his
vegetable garden.
  Night fell and Kingsford made a simple dinner and ate alone, Winston sleeping on the
kitchen floor. He went downstairs into his library and read from his personal collection of
favorite literature, including original copies and manuscripts by Ernest Hemingway and other
authors of his time. Among his most treasured pieces were a first-edition copy of Harriet
Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin and even an original hand-written poem by Walt Whitman.
He bought any book that he thought was worth reading. He was a retired English professor and
had taught at Brown for over twenty years until he retired and moved to his hometown of
Saranac Lake. The man had always loved to read and write, and his extravagant library was his
most prized possession.
  Now he read in front of a large, impressive fireplace crackling and snapping as a light
drizzle fell outside. Winston had followed him downstairs, and now the old, black dog was laid
out in front of the fireplace. Kingsford stopped reading from Atonement, a book that he loved so
far. Beyond the tapping of rain on the windows, beyond the bright red logs spitting out fiery
orange sparks, beyond the sound of Winston’s light snore, he heard it again. He was sure of it.
Footsteps. Upstairs. He rose as quickly and silently from his chair as possible for his aged body.
  The old man moved swiftly across the room to the gun vault he kept hidden behind a
bookshelf in the far corner of the room. The footsteps were moving closer, louder now, across
the living room and into the kitchen. Winston awoke and began to bark ferociously as
Kingsford slid the bookshelf aside and began to enter the combination. The footsteps moved
across the kitchen to the door leading downstairs to the library. He opened the vault and
grabbed a shiny, black revolver. The old man frantically loaded the gun. The door opened.
Heavy footsteps moved down the stairs. The old dog snarled and bounded to the stairs.
  “No Winston!” Kingsford heard the dog climb halfway up the stairs. The dog snapped its
jaws, and a man screamed. Winston howled desperately and fell to the bottom of the stairs.
Kingsford cocked his gun, his heart like a drum, pounding, pounding, pounding. And then, out
of the corner of his eye, he saw the tiny, black bird whistle lying next to Eve’s last sketch. Many
a weary night he had held the two objects in his hands and tried to make sense of everything.
Now, though, he realized who had caused him so much sorrow.
  He turned from the vault and pointed the pistol at the doorway to the library. Silence
fell, as black as the cold night outside. And then the voice spoke.
  “Kingsford.”
  He spun quickly and saw a tall figure silhouetted by the moon shining through the
window. He still had his birding gear on.
  A single gunshot pierced the night, and then all was silent but the lonely call of a loon
echoing across the lake.
Dancing the Way to My Dreams
By Caitlyn Leahy
RHAM Middle School, grade 7

I sat up in bed the morning of August 13th and instantaneously stared down at the beaten blue and black lump on the floor. My dance bag I had purchased nearly seven years ago had experienced a heavy dose of wear and tear. As I peered closer, I saw my gray ballet shoes, complete with a toe hole that had threads hanging out of it, stuffed in the bag. They had once been a perfect bubblegum pink slipper with no flaws. Quite a different story now. Each of my beloved dance shoes had become something else. Originally being seventy dollars, these pieces of footwear are now worth a penny each!

I yawned with my mouth stretched as wide as it could and groggily descended the staircase. A plate of scrambled eggs, crisp bacon, and a cup of orange juice had been placed at my seat at the table. My parents both wished me good morning, and I uttered back an inaudible mumble of response. Being the world’s slowest eater, I finished this small meal in about half an hour. I sauntered into the bonus room to do some pushups and crunches so I could get stronger for my audition in just five days. I was auditioning for the Golden Girls Dance Team.

The Golden Dance Competition organization was holding auditions for teen dancers ages twelve to fourteen to travel to each of their competitions and perform and entertaining dance before the award ceremonies. They also wanted Connecticut dancers since they travel over New England. The thought of performing a difficult solo routine frightened me to no end. Though, I knew that I could do this, I just lacked in confidence. Dance is my life, and I intend to keep it that way.

Later that afternoon at three o’clock, I arrived at Dance Spirit Studio where I would be rehearsing my audition dance with my instructor, Alyssa Covinetchi. Alyssa was already in the studio and was practicing some movements to an upbeat, lively melody. Alyssa then looked up from her cross-legged position on the floor and greeted me with a warm smile.

“Hey Claire, are ya read to work today?”

“You know I am,” I playfully responded back.

We started with a good stretch and my muscles felt loose and bendable. The dance included numerous fouette turn in a row where I had to keep my leg at a ninety degree angle as I was turning on the ball of my foot, high kicks, some acrobatic movements, and some splits and leaps. It basically included all the hard moves most dancers struggle with. I was one of those dancers. I flunked my routine. I fell out of my turns, my leaps looked like small hops off the ground a child would make, and my kicks were low.

“That was a disaster,” I sighed just as I finished.

“I agree it wasn’t your best,” Alyssa started. “But it wasn’t all that bad either.”

I frowned.

“But the auditions are in five days, and I’m definitely not ready.”

“Just try it again. It was your first run-through. This one will be better. Trust me,” Alyssa reassured.

“Fine,” I huffed and did the routine again.

It was better than the first, but it still wasn’t in the place I wanted it to be. But soon enough, today’s rehearsal was finished. Alyssa told me not to be as hard on myself as I left. I took this into consideration.

*I can’t be perfect, I thought, but I can do my best.*

Two days later, I was back in the studio with Alyssa. We drilled the dance about five times, and Alyssa noted me on just my improvements each run-through. We kept doing the
dance over and over again, until it was almost time to leave.

“You did amazing today,” Alyssa complimented. “If you keep with it, those judges will be begging you to be on their team.”

“Thanks,” I responded, as my cheeks flushed.

As I woke up two days before my auditions, I was feeling more confident than I ever had about my upcoming performance. I hopped joyfully down the stairs to the kitchen table where my parents had serious faces on and were whispering so that I could not hear them. They looked at me with long faces. My mother patted the seat next to her, and I sat down suspiciously.

“We have some bad news,” my mother started. “Alyssa was out at a get-together with some of her college friends last night, and she was driving home very late. She got in a car accident with a drunk driver.”

My hands immediately flew to cover my gaping mouth.

“She is in the hospital with some injuries. Nothing life-threatening, but still serious.”

Tears welled in my eyes like a cloud holding rainwater, which eventually it broke and the water came pouring. Each tear was like a small, salty river cascading down my cheek. My hands covered my face as I sobbed. My parents cradled me as I tried to catch a breath between my outbursts of tears.

“Does that mean no rehearsal today?” I asked timidly.

“Unfortunately not,” my father replied gently.

“Will she even be able to come to my audition?”

“I don’t think so, honey,” my mom said painfully.

I don’t think I can do this now.

I went into the bonus room to practice my fouette turns. I did two very well, but I fell out of the third and landed on my behind. I slammed the floor with my hands as hard as I could and screamed in frustration.

I picked myself up and tried again. I made the same error as the first time. I pounded my fists on the hardwood, causing a rocket of pain to soar through my hands. Too upset to try again, I ran to my room. Just before I flung myself onto the bed, I stared at myself in the mirror. I saw a frazzled girl who had no hope left.

“What is wrong with you? Why do you mess up so stupidly?!”

I fell face-first into my pillow and cried for the second time that day.

I woke up the day of the audition nauseous. I gathered all my shoes and warm-up apparel before getting into the car. I was silent on the drive to the high school we would be auditioning.

I was impressed at the volume and length of the stage. The auditions were just starting and there weren’t too many competitors here yet. After what seemed like eternity, I found myself changed into a flowy contemporary dress of a lilac color with lace flowers stitched onto the fabric, a royal purple sparkle necklace, and a false diamond headband. My palms were slick with sweat, and my heart was racing a thousand miles a minute. I heard it thud in my chest, and the rest of the world became silent. My name was announced on the microphone.

“Next to the stage please, Miss Claire Aberworth from Dance Spirit Studio.” I approached the stage as the audience applauded politely. I knew I had done it. There was loud applause from the audience as I sophisticatedly walked off the stage. I rushed back to my parents as they hugged me. I felt a tap on my shoulder and turned around to find Alyssa there. Though, she was in a wheelchair with her leg bandaged in a huge cast, completely immobile.

“You came!” I said breathless as I reached down to hug her.

“Yup, those nurses couldn’t keep me from coming,” Alyssa replied with a small laugh and
a smile, pearly perfect white teeth and all.

A week later, I paced back and forth in my bedroom, awaiting a call from Alyssa confirming the results. Around an hour later, I got one.

"Hello? Alyssa?" I squeaked.
"It’s me. Guess what?"
"I didn’t make it?"
"Correct."
"Wait, what?" I yelled in confusion.
"They want you to consider their scholarship offer from a Jeffrey Winter course for the best teen dancers like you, and a solo in their national competition, instead of just a team position. What do you say?"
"Oh my gosh, yes! Let me go tell my parents."

I felt overwhelmed by the news, and I felt slight numb with utter shock.
"Call ya in a few, kid. Congrats."
"Thanks, Alyssa, for everything."
"Of course. Now go celebrate."

Dance is life. That’s so true.

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**In Memoriam**

*By Robert May*

*Elizabeth C. Adams Middle School, grade 7*

October 17th, 2010. It started off well enough, breakfast heralding a new day with a scrambled egg and a sesame bagel adorned with strawberry cream cheese. It’s funny, you know, that all of the little, almost insignificant details before a time of crashing tragedy stick to you like every single small bit of metal unable to escape a magnet, even though that tragedy should have long washed them away. I was happy enough, with the near weekend promising pancakes and late mornings.

Suddenly, my father sat me down in front of him, which was a sure sign that he wanted to talk. I figured that it would be a lengthy, one-sided conversation about my education, which was quite common then, as it is now. But the single statement that he wished for me to hear was not remotely related to plotting number lines in mathematics. He simply said, “I’m sorry. Your grandfather passed away this morning.”

The first thing I thought of was *Really, Dad? That was a sick joke*. Then, I realized he was dead serious. I sunk like a rock in water into shock; my heart stopped beating, I stopped breathing, I stopped *living*, for one long moment. Then, a white-hot knife plunged into my heart, carving away all of the memories, the smiles, the laughter, the sickness, the hospital, the visits, all of it; they all melted away, evaporating into a red mist. All that was left was tears and sorrow. The only thing left to do was to shed the tears to encase my depression, to represent my sadness, leaving me a sobbing, shaking, empty wreck.

I tried to go to school, but my hastily built barriers gave way to the pure force of the grief I was left with, and I broke down, giving way to the rain of my eyes, my windows of truth.

They told me I needed a therapist. I told them... well, something that I may not be able to print on paper.
I remember going home, all of those sympathetic eyes watching me, and I felt sick. I thought, What do they know? How could they care if they can’t even fathom my pain? Their windows of truth show them nothing but lies. I remember sitting down and watching that BrainPop video about “death.” Seeing that stray cat with flies buzzing around it, I thought, How can the center of my world be dead? How can time march on? Even now, with perfectly logical answers to criticize my nine-year-old reasoning, I still ask. My eldest brother took the news with disbelief. My second eldest brother, with stoic strength. But even then, we all cried, whether little or much, over our relative, who taught us math when we were small, cooked us our favorite consumables, held us when we cried. But now he is not here to hold us together through our tears, and so there was no complete calm in our home that time.

There was to be a funeral and cremation that weekend, but only my father went.

“It’s what your grandfather would have wanted,” my father said with a wince at the mention of his late parent. “Remember, your studies are the top priority.”

That weekend, I sat on my bed, refusing food, empty and hollow. So much for the late mornings and pancakes.

Even now, whenever I loosen my guard, whenever I let down the bandages and packing over my torn and empty soul, I break down. To this day, I haven’t forgotten. I continue to wear a hole over my heart where my grandfather used to dwell. But even if he is gone from this world, I still hold a shard of his being that I rescued from the irreparable wreckage of my endless despair. I hold this precious piece of the past in a place within my heart called “hope.” And when the sadness encroaches me, I look into that place, so delicately dubbed “hope,” to remind myself to never lose it, at the very least in memoriam of my grandfather.

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**The Dreaming Begins**

*By Peter Alfano*

*Old Saybrook Middle School*

It was eight days before Thanksgiving, three years ago, after school. I was pouring over my massive library behind my bed. For years, my family sent me books as gifts, or ones they didn’t want anymore, and my collection had snowballed. Now, the bookshelf was so full of books it was fit to explode. There even were some books slipped into the cracks and lying on top without support.

“Ugh,” I muttered. I was always trying to find a good book.

“Almost 1500 books, and nothing good to read,” I groaned. Then, I glimpsed at the sets. My aunt, Nancy, gave them to me last Christmas, but they didn’t seem interesting enough to read. The first package had the entire *The Chronicles of Narnia* collection. The second had *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, books one through three. I tore open *The Chronicles of Narnia*, seeing as I wouldn’t have to find the rest of the series, and began to read the first book, *The Magician’s Nephew*. As I studied and turned each page, I had, for the first time in a while, become truly absorbed in the book. The story had an amazing plot that seemed to leave me wondering what the next page was going to be like, and it had such amazing detail I could see every little movement of the characters. It was one of the few stories that could grab me by the hand and take me through its maze-like plot. I was breezing through the pages, feeling the wonder and mystery of the story in my mind and heart.

“If only I could be a character,” I thought. Then I realized: why can’t I? I thought about
how I could be a new and different character in the story, how I would act with the original character(s), or against them, and how I could change the story of the magic of the rings, the plot of traveling to and from the different worlds, and even the places for the better by saving them from destruction. Before I knew it, I was onto the second book, The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe, then the third book, The Horse and His Boy. But before I was halfway through, it was getting late. I had to go to bed. The entire night, I dreamed even more easily asleep than awake about putting myself in the book. I was on the battlefield, which was the great desert blocking the northern kingdom from Narnia. I mounted a mighty steed, armed to the teeth, and fully prepared to fight the treacherous kingdom and its ruler, who had invaded Narnia. I was cloaked in chainmail and wearing half a suit of armor, the half that covered the limbs. The enemy was sighted coming over the hills.

“Charge!” yelled the captain. His armor and helmet prevented me from getting a good look at him, but I did know he was incredibly short, possibly a dwarf. The only thing I could recall from that time of the dream was tens of thousands of soldiers, around half of them against us, probably more. Around me everywhere were loud clangs and clashes, cries for help and grunts of agony. All I saw were people falling to the ground, dirt, sweat, and blood. I was sparring off against the king. He wore no crown, but a visor-less helmet with a complete suit of armor. His left hand held a shield with a sword through a lion as an emblem to resemble his attempts to destroy Narnia. He had obviously mastered the blade, as had I. I tried to slice through his armor, but my sword only bounced off with a cling.

The next thing I knew, he had bashed me in the head, and I landed near a fallen enemy, arrows sprouting from his chest. In the pool of blood next to him I saw myself, but I was looking at a completely different person. His hair was a flaming red, and his face covered in scars. Then I realized that it wasn’t someone else. I was that person. I got back on my feet, shaking of the daze and shock, and continued to fight. I was on the evasive, and when I rolled past him, I saw he had a weak spot. His back was covered in leather straps. Before I could cut through them, though, he had turned around and caught me square in the shoulder with his shield. I couldn’t feel my right arm, but I still fought back. I rolled around him and slashed upward on his back. He gasped as the armor slid off his body. He wasn’t nearly as big as his suit of armor, if anything it was twice his size. No wonder he needed the leather straps. He had a deep brown goatee, but his head wasn’t as lucky. His head was as bald as a doorknob.

We continued to spar, each time our swords clashing. Then, I caught his shield with my sword, cut the strap used to secure it on his arm, and knocked it into the air. While he was in shock, I struck his hand with my shield, and he dropped his blade. He was completely defenseless. I was close to bringing him to his knees, one last strike to be made.

My blade was half an inch from his chest just when I woke up, breathing heavily and covered in sweat. My heart was racing as I looked around, expecting to see myself back on the battlefield, or perhaps in a dungeon as a prisoner. But all I saw was my bed, my desks, and my half-broken bookshelf. The rest of the week, I spent most of my time diving into stories to make a different plot altogether, becoming a new hero, preventing lives from being lost. But that day, that amazing, wonderful day, changed me forever. My imagination has been revived, and the lifeless days seemed to have a new luster and always seemed more exciting and wonderful than before. That day was the day I learned to dream.
Honorable Mention
-Grade 8-

Elaina Griffiths, "The Race," Elizabeth C. Adams Middle School
Rebecca Coyne, “Under One Sun,” Mansfield Middle School
Matthew Garry, “Claws,” Joseph A. DePaolo Middle School
Rebecca Coyne, “Ashes,” Mansfield Middle School
Alexis Smith, “Best Friend,” Killingly Intermediate School
Isabelle Dorman, “A Wall to Remember,” Henry James Memorial School

A Drop in the Ocean
By Eden Schumer
Coleytown Middle School, grade 8

My family was like the animals
Of the big blue ocean
Wet from the sadness of seven years ago
We managed to evade
All of the fish nets
And trenches in the deep
That could ensnare us
And break us apart.

My sister was the sea ray
Always swimming, but vulnerable too
Shielding me under her gigantic gray body
Keeping her head high, to see what was approaching
The one who stayed strong
And brushed by the whale’s side
A little bit too long
So I could grow up untouched
Inside the chilling ocean waters.

My stepfather was the seahorse
Fading in and out
Of the whale’s shadow
Always essential
I’m thankful for the day the octopus was swimming
And found that seahorse to rescue us
With his strong survival skills
To keep us away from the silent kills.
Momma was the octopus
Juggling all of the challenges to take care of us
Hard working as could be
But still making time for me
Hiding us in her cave
What a difference
Having us safe made
How she did it all, I'll never know
Like a tree in the eye of a hurricane
Bending, but never breaking
Even when it was shaking with fear
For the mighty whale was coming.

And then there’s the whale
My father
His tail banging the ocean surface
Over and over again

A manic whale

Who made us all shiver
When he made that enormous emotional leap up
From the blueness of the water

A depressed whale

Who after breaking the surface
Would dive back down without delay
To the base of the ocean floor
And would always promise
He wouldn't do it
Anymore.

Last but not least is little me
I am the clown fish; small but seen
Hiding in my anemone
Peering from between the tentacles at everything
Always holding the sadness in
Perhaps, I am different
Optimistic, Hopeful, Positive
Even when the only thing the octopus and the seahorse saw
Were corals dying, and the whale lying
I was safe; protected and preserved
But still shivered when I heard
The whale drop down to the ocean floor

It is seven years later.
The whale has swum far away
But still it lurks in the same ocean
It’s ironic that we never swim into each other
Perhaps Poseidon keeps his eye on me...
I have learned that a tear for us is just a drop in the ocean.
Nowadays the sun shines upon its surface
The water is affectionate.
We have come out from the cave and into the joyful world.

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Taking the Damage
*By Emma Stone*
*Woodbury Middle School, grade 8*

“Play hard,”
they said
and I did.
But my cleats,
took the damage,

Thrown in the dank garage
lying limp, frayed,
a played game.

Cracks of stitches
caked with mud
3 stripes,
white as snow,
reduced,
to a mucky greenish-brown.

Sagging laces,
crinkling, cracked, curling,
at the edges.

The toe sole
flapped open,
a mouth,
biting, snapping,
hungry for the ball,
sticky remains of mutilated duct tape,
attempting to patch up,
for just one more game,
but blown through,
again.

The outstretched heel
that rubbed
skin raw off my Achilles.
Burning, scorching through Band-Aids,
Blazing into skin,
A red-hot inferno,
Peeling away the layers
of soft white flesh.

Stiff pegs
on scratched bottoms,
rip up single blades of grass,
one by one,
a street cleaner,
rumbling down the uneven road,
that tears up clumps of weeds,
and scrape the mud from the ground.

"Play hard,"
the said
and I did.

Green Greed
By Hailey Gudrian
Sage Park Middle School, grade 8

All I have ever known is brown. I don't even remember what green looks like anymore. I can't see it or feel it. I can't even taste it on my tongue. Brown is dull and sad, rough and hard. It tastes dry, like an endlessly flowing desert. These drylands are full of brown, and they take up the places where tall strong forests used to stand. Human action interfering with nature is what caused all this obliteration of green. This desertification.

We never noticed it at first, but I guess it wasn't that big of a change. The levels of fresh water only diminished slightly, it merely stopped raining for a month at a time, and the forest slowly began to shrink. But now if I think back...maybe if we had looked harder and read the signs, maybe we would have realized that the Earth was...dying.

Desertification and drylands used to simply affect people living in poverty. Now it's a problem for everyone living in this arid region. In fact, our main resources are depleted because of it. Climate change has also come into effect; most of the world is immersed in a dry climate home to deserts. The rivers and lakes have dried up, and the polar caps have melted. Hundreds of millions of people have already perished, and I know many more will collapse to disease, starvation, and dehydration due to drought.

Mass migration has also gone into effect. That is if the drifters can find a way to weasel their way in. the reason they want to get in is because Canada holds the largest amount of water in the world. It's because of The Wall; a big dam that stretches 5,525 miles along the Canadian-American border. That dam keeps all of the fresh, clean water, which melted from the ice caps, inside Canada and away from the greedy grasps of the rest of the world. That's just another sin
of this dying planet. Greed.

I have also heard that northern countries like Russia, Sweden, and Finland are developing giant walls in an attempt to keep out all the dying countries from their precious water supply. The once frozen north are now oases no one can touch.

Today I think I’ll join all those drifters in the great migration to Canada. I’ll leave this overpopulated broken nation once known as the United States. I will become a drifter and relocate. There’s nothing to lose, nothing to keep me back; I have no attachment to this marginal land.

I packed up my things from the eight-feet by eight-feet cell-like room I live in. There wasn’t much to hold onto: only my dad’s old pocketknife, a few other mementos, and my breather. A breather is something the government invented about ten years ago, back in 2065. A tree’s main job was to take in sunlight and carbon dioxide, and through chemical reactions, turn it into sugar or glucose, some water, and oxygen. But with no trees from all the deforestation there is nothing ecologically in the ecosystem doing that so we can’t breathe. All there is out there is carbon dioxide and smog of polluted oil fumes, so the breather does the trees’ job. You put it over your mouth, and as you breathe in, it releases energy to make a chemical reaction to change the unbreathable air into good old H2O. The only downside is it leaves a bad taste in your mouth from the chemicals.

Our containment-units work the same way. They’re airtight so that nothing bad gets in. they have vents that filter the air into oxygen just like the breather. The only problem is I’ve heard of incidents when someone’s vent gave out in the middle of the night, killing them from the harmful air that was consumed as they slept. That’s why I’ve learned to sleep with my breather on…just in case.

I strapped on my old worn out leather boots, stuffing the end of my cargo pants into them. I throw on my long white coat putting the hood up to cover my head and neck. Outside the sunlight is merciless and beats down on the skin with burning rays. It’s best to cover up exposed skin.

I looked back at the empty room as I slung the old tattered bag over my shoulder with my few possessions. This is it. I’m leaving, and there is no turning back. This cell has no meaning to me, none at all. All that matters to me now is getting into Canada and making a better life for myself. I opened the door letting the sunlight illuminate the dark room. With my first steps outside, my journey begins.

It occurred to me as I started walking on this voyage that you don’t know much about me. So far all you know is that I’m some troubled guy who’s running away from all he knew. The name’s Asher. Nineteen. Male. It’s not like it matters in this world what I look like. Like you care anyway. If you really need more details, I have two scars—one on each cheek. The first I got from my father when we were playing and he accidently slashed me with his pocketknife. The second I got from falling down chasing the bandits who killed my family. I really don’t feel like talking about that, not because it’s a touchy subject—it’s just that I don’t care anymore. People die and there is nothing we can do about it. The minute I walked out of my home, I left everything about me behind.

As I walked toward my oasis I saw many things that would make any sane person want to tear their heart out. I witness starving, dehydrated, dying towns and villages. Whole societies whose lives were vanishing. I saw people who were so thin and fragile I thought I would break them with one touch. They lived in houses that were being grinded away by abrasion and erosion. Was this really the world we lived in? Or was this some kind of nightmare? When I passed through these towns I did so in a hurry. There was no regret or remorse I could feel. I had to keep moving. I had to keep living.
The wall was a menacing site to behold. This grey concrete barricade seemed to reach up into the heavens. It seemed almost beautiful, stunning. But I knew better. This divider was made by the blood, sweat, and lives of innocent people. It’s not like it mattered though, all I needed to do was find a place in the wall where I could crawl in and enter the sanctuary. And as I walked for a while I finally found it, a hole in the dam big enough for me. This was it. I would finally be away from this hell I used to call home. I can be free now; I can witness this green they talk about. I finally weaseled my way through to the other side. I can see it now; the beautiful warm life of this new...Hell.

It's nothing like they said it would be. This new world is full of machines and lifeless technology. Everyone of the same status wears identical clothes from the poorest wearing red to the richest wearing pure white.

"Why do you wear such a white outfit? Here inside the wall we wear what is assigned. For everything in the wall is safe and in order," a woman said to me with a crazed smile. What sort of brainwashing has gone on here?! And to me, white is the color of all the people outside who strived for a better life! White is the simple color of my family, so plain, but happy! This world is nothing like I imagined. Where’s the hope? The future? The trees?! THE GREEN?!

I ran out of there with all my might and climbed the forsaken wall. My fingers bled crimson onto that death dam. But I scaled this border that separated two completely different worlds. Both of them are wrong. I will not be a part of any of them. That is what I have decided.

I reached the top, arms and legs aching. Hands bleeding. I look around me, my eyes finally clear. No, I am not a part of any of these dying worlds, this restoration ecology. Not the drought-filled desert land, or the mechanical utopia. What I am part of is the new world. I don’t know what it’s going to be like, but it’s going to be better, for I love this world and I don’t want its people to disappear. This world is dying, yes, but miracles happen and there is a chance we can resurrect it. We will have sustainability. And maybe one day I’ll see a tree on this sacred earth, and I’ll finally know what Ma and Pa meant by it. Green. Greed.

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**The Tree**

*By Parker Toth*

*Elizabeth C. Adams Middle School, grade 8*

Ed gently dipped the brush into the can of green paint and began to stroke the wall, creating stripes and layering them upon each other.

Working as a house painter in Bendale wasn’t a particularly exciting job. The small town in the country of England wasn’t particularly wealthy. Ed Lyle wasn’t needed too often, but when he was needed, he was appreciated. He painted the newly built house of John and Ethel Marshden, a couple in their thirties who had recently moved to the town because they appreciated the countryside feel of the place. The family had told him that they would not be home until later that night. He told them that he’d be done by the time they got home, and he meant it. Ed Lyle was the only house painter in Bendale, and he was skilled at his trade. Ed was tempting fate, painting a house when he had read that temperatures were to get low later on. However, he had started hours earlier and was almost done with the last.

Suddenly, out of the corner of his eye, he spied it. Across the way, a tree stood. About as high as the house, it was a lonely oak. Ed previously thought that he was the only human in the area, for the house was about a mile down the road from the center of Bendale. In that tree, he
saw a girl of about fifteen with a rope in her hand. She had climbed up the sparsely branched tree to one of the uppermost branches. As he squinted to see exactly what was going on, he realized what was happening. The girl had tied a slipknot in the other end of the rope, and as soon as Ed saw that, the situation became clear.

Although he was fifty-three, Ed quickly descended the ladder and loaded it onto his back. On the double, he sprinted towards the tree. He cried out to the girl, “Stop! You don’t know what you’re doing!” She acted as if she could not hear him. As he neared the tree, he swung the ladder around and set it up. He leapt upon the ladder and ascended as quickly as he could, shouting attempts to deter this lost girl from her goal. She jumped off the branch, having placed the rope around her neck, just as Ed reached the top of his ladder. Ed stretched his arms out and managed to catch her just before the rope went taut. He grasped the squirming girl in his hands, his ladder not tall enough to safely hold her, but tall enough for Ed to hold her up by his own strength.

Ed said to her, “Listen, I don’t know who you are, but I don’t know what has put you here, but I swear on my life, this is not the answer!” The girl squirmed and squealed, desperate to finish what she had started. Ed realized that the girl would not listen to reason and that he would have to do something. However, all he could do was hold her full weight with just the strength of his arms. So he stood firm.

The minutes ticked on, and the temperatures dropped lower and lower, until Ed thought that if the strain didn’t kill him, the cold would. The land grew darker, and he glanced around the still-squirming girl to see the sun. Its form had dipped partially below the horizon, and he desperately did not want the sun to go. In this world, everything changes. Even time, the most destructive force of all, constantly changes. Mountains crack, kings fall, the ground splits open, but the sun stands firm. It sits, like a sentry in the sky, a symbol of fortitude. And when the sun fades, nothing is stable. He wanted the sun to stay, to keep him steady in this trial, but all things must end. And the sun went.

“All things must end,” Ed thought, “but this doesn’t have to end yet.”

Ed owed no debt to this girl, he didn’t know her name, he didn’t know her story, and he didn’t know what could happen. But he stood firm. And while a lesser man may have been able to hold her in place for ten, twenty, maybe twenty-five minutes, Ed did more. He held her there not for ten minutes, not for twenty minutes, not for forty-five minutes. He held her there for an hour and twenty-seven minutes. He did this in the freezing temperatures, and at the end of that time, the Marshdens returned and saw the twisted circus act in their backyard, the most breathtaking display of life and death, locked in place. They took action, calling emergency services. As the paramedics led the girl away, Ed looking into her eyes, and she looking into his; Ed saw that she would not try it again. But in that day, in that hour and twenty-seven minutes, Ed not only proved his strength, not only his endurance, but Ed proved another thing. He proved the length to which humanity would reach to keep one lost, lonely girl alive.

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**Talk**

*By Emma Esposito*

*Killingly Intermediate School, grade 8*

I felt him tense up, his whole body shift from a quirky canter to a ruthless gallop. I had lost control.

The best thing to do would be to hold on and hope for the best. And that’s exactly what I
did. Thinking he’d stop when reached the barn, I sat up in hunt seat position, half halting trying to calm him down.

I guess the beastly animal had misunderstood my actions. He went completely off the path swerving, heading directly towards the giant oak tree standing ahead.

“Oh no,” is all I could manage. I ducked down as far as I could, but the 15.4 hand American Quarter Horse was inches too tall. I heard the thick branch smash against my Troxel practice helmet. Instant pain reared from the back of my head—out of instinct, I suppose, I threw my hands up and grabbed my throbbing head, which was not a good idea considering Zeke was still cantering along the driveway, and I was extremely dizzy.

Then blackness.

It was almost as if I fell asleep for a few moments. I don’t remember falling off, nor do I remember being carried to the garage.

I “woke” up lying down on a cooler with a bag of Green Giant peas on my head. Covered in blood, I caressed my head and tried to sit up, wondering where my horse was, but I was soon stopped by Mr. Kevin, a barn aid to me, but certified EMT according to him, set me back down telling me not to move.

“Are you nauseas? Tired? Do you know where you are? What day is it?” Mr. Kevin bombarded me with questions.

I just sat there looking around at everyone. I must have looked terrified because Emily’s mom came up to me and calmly said, “It’s going to be okay,” then proceeded with more follow up questions.

But that was the thing.

I wasn’t scared at all.

I knew I was going to be okay. It was almost as if my brain was telling me I was fine and not to worry.

If anything I was more confused than anything. I didn’t remember hitting the ground, or getting up and walking towards the garage...but next thing I know, I’ sitting there watching a little girl with her mucked up riding boots pacing back and forth, next to Sparkey, her adorable 13 hand Welch pony who was still connected to the bridle latched on her arm. She got a hold of my dad and he came straight away.

The car ride to the hospital wasn’t awkward but tense. The occasional “You still awake Em?” from Father and whimpering from me. When we got to the hospital my Dad helped me hobble right in. I then went to take a seat but was pleasantly surprised when they called us in right away.

The room gave off a pale yellow glow and dreary feeling. I sat in the hospital bed sort of giving myself a short summary of what just happened. One of those peppy nurses with the colorful scrubs and warming smile popped her head in.

“The doctor will be right with you,” she said.

I just stared at her, too tired to make any motions. Her smile faded and she cautiously backed out shutting the door behind her.

Dad and I waited and waited and waited, until finally the doctor greeted us. She asked me all sorts of questions. Trying my best to answer them, my dad ended up taking over.

I was next sent to another room, covered in that same dull paint. My head starting to clear up, I could see what I was doing now...I crawled up on a tall, cold piece of metal. Flashing lights and loud obnoxious beeps went off and I felt as if the room was spinning. But it wasn’t the room—it was that machine that I was in. I didn’t like it. I was finally sent back to the room and cleared with the doctor to go home.

Instead of going home I went back to Zeke, I lay there on my bed though staring him in
the eye and I whispered to him, but no words came out. For the language between a girl and her horse is something no one else could ever understand. It is silence, and at that moment when he took off we weren’t communicating. He meant no harm, he was asking for directions, which I failed to give him.

Then it was like I realized something I thought I’ve always known. You can’t let your guard down. You can never stop talking when you ride, even if the talking is through body language. Every movement, every head turn, even the direction you’re looking in gives the horse a different signal. It’s almost as if you and the horse have a secret connection. But the second you think it’s okay to sit back and enjoy the ride, something will go wrong.

You always need to be talking.

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Different
By Cynthya Gluck
Franklin Elementary School, grade 8

Was it the eyes?
  Nope.
Or the smirk?
  Nada.
How about the laugh?
  Bingo.

She knew you were different from the start. Always, always, always, guys caught her attention either with their dazzling baby-blues, or their mysterious, bad-boy smirk. But with you, it was the little kid giggle that was such a contradiction to your 5’9,” muscular-but-not-too-muscular frame. When the edges of your lips turned up and all 140 pounds of you started shaking from a crack at an immature, middle school joke, so did everyone else around you, including her. Your goofiness wasn’t awkward, but attractive. You’d be so silly, like smashing a cupcake into the birthday girl’s nose, or calling her “Princess” after learning that she could put a better spiral on a football than half of the guys you knew. Your vibe was always positive and you never meant any harm.

Then she got to know you.

Your eyes became mysterious after the ashes caged behind them started to burn, smoke rising through the brown barrier of your pupil. The way you talked about those whose egos were through the roof, always forgetting where they came from, only focused on what they would gain in the future: you didn’t talk “smack” or as if you’re above them. You merely said it how it was and left it at that.

The way you mentioned professional football and the paid athletes, not like a regular 14-year-old boy who only wanted to be them because of the money and raunchy girls that came with the status, but what the game must mean to those who storm the field, or how the pressure doesn’t get to their heads. How those who do play, demand to be seen through their actions. How she simply knew that that could be you one day because of your nonchalant
commitment, drive, and heart.
How you believed “Princess” could play on your winning team with you. How you believed she’d earn the respect of the other male players purely by proving her yet undiscovered talent.
How you shook hands with the coach who’s team wiped yours out, not in shame, but in marvel and respect.

The way you carried your tiny brother over the snow, because you love him, but saying it was just because you didn’t want him to get his basketball shoes wet.

That’s when she really knew you were different.

Was it the eyes?
Nope.
Or the smirk?
Nada.
How about the laugh?
Not anymore.
It was the passion.

Honorable Mention
-Grade 9-

Vy Dinh, “Summer in Texas,” South Windsor High School
Julia Gerbasi, “The Last Noises,” Fairfield Ludlowe High School
Eduard Miska, “The Celestial Magicians,” Fairfield Ludlowe High School
Stephanie Torres, “Women,” Bulkeley High School
Jamila Williams, “story untold,” Metropolitan Learning Center

thrown
By Pritika Seshadri
Simsbury High School, grade 9

you shattered like a wine bottle
filled with your tears
the salty drops ran out of your veins
and into a puddle on the front porch
to be stepped on by those ignorant
and those evil
yet still the tears flowed in a river of sorrow
and found their bed at your feet
where you dissolved like a smile melting off the rising sun
the jewel of the sky that took in your tears
along with every other sad story and dark tale
and turned them into a storm
and like this jewel, a yellow pearl
you struggled against the night
and burned at the touch of dawn
screaming and writhing against him
against me
we came with a thousand colors, him with immediate reds and oranges
the colors of blood and deceit, a heart torn in two
and i promised of cool blues and greys
the colors of calm and protection,
the thread of a seam stitched with heartstring
but even the sun must return to the sky
and you were always a wine bottle
more and more precious as the years passed by
so of course you belonged in his drunken hand
see, i picked up your shards and glued you together
but when he opened his arms, you still went
he took you, darling
drank every last drop
and it was perhaps a second
before he threw you against the floor again.

Thirteen Ways of Looking at Zero
By Savannah Herbek
Simsbury High School, grade 9

I. The equilibrium of the tranquil times
   With our guns in deep pockets
   And the violent times
   Which glaze over our eyes with the prominent red targets
   On everyone’s back

II. The walls that impede the circulation
    Of thoughts, ideas, needs, wishes
    The portal of darkness when the lids close like garage doors
    We think and breathe zero

III. It is everything for nothing
    The criminals tear open locks with their metal teeth
Eating up the fine china and jewelry
Everything for zero
Now we are zero

IV. The machine sputters and stops
It spits out its last data, drooling ink
Those two lines cut through the once numbers
But one is still there
Zero

V. I want them all
One for a double decker pool
Another two for my tropical bird on a gold leash
Maybe three for my mansion with infinity of layers
The six zeros illuminate the dreary nights
And accompany my lone number one

VI. They dig for answers, sweeping away the dirt of
Sevens, elevens, twos, fives
I crave zero
To hold them, the circles, engraved in each hand

VII. Whispering in my ears
While I toss and turn in the blurs of commotion
The Boston accent, the sharp, condescending voice, the deep, eerie, dark voice
All swarm buzzing in my head
Bring me zero to chase away and absorb the silence

VIII. The baby’s eyes are closed
It takes tiny breaths
Soaks in silence
I whisper words
It’s no longer zero

IX. The zero doesn’t really mean anything at all
It’s been 1 hour or 01 hour
Put it here, put it there no one cares
Until it swims to the other side
At the end of the sea of letters and numbers
Drowning its opponents until the zero sucks the whole sea away
It lying bloated on the coarse sand

X. The zero is in the silky shadow
Wrapping its arms around the linens of my bed
It whispers softly, just enough for its sharp sounds
To cut clearer and clearer until that is all I hear
XI.  The black hole in my head
     Eating away at the information I accumulate
     It chokes away the words, bent in my throat
     I cough but nothing comes out
     Nothing
     Zero

XII.  In the land that rays that pierce the ground
     Where elephants swim and butterflies snake up the clouds
     Where the wind sings the songs of broken skies
     I lay in the cocoon of velvety, thick grass
     My soul and mind is zero

XIII.  I roll the zero over snow
     As the snowflakes cease, a soft silence freezes time
     My feet kiss the ground
     But the zero does not leave a trace

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**The Bus Stop**

*By Hannah Sharpe*

*Fairfield Ludlowe High School, grade 9*

Audrey watched the once-green leaf, which had flooded with crimson and brown and had lost its bright, healthy, glow. It struggled against the wrath of the wind and clung to the dry branches with had sustained it for so long. As gusts slowed to a gentle breeze, the leaf remained suspended in the air.

Audrey wondered how much longer the leaf could withstand the violent wind.

The smile she used as a disguise had melted away as she descended the steps of the yellow school bus. She waited for Phoebe’s elementary school bus to pull up to the curb, where she watched as her baby sister stumbled onto the pavement, her pink bow disheveled and unraveling, her knees scuffed from the adventures of the playground. She smiled warmly as she extended a hand to her Phoebe.

“Ellie’s daddy brought in cupcakes today, ‘cause it was her birthday. We sang happy birthday, and her daddy read us a storybook,” explained Phoebe excitedly when Audrey asked her about the green frosting that lined the edges of her lips, which had begun to chap in the cool autumn air.

Phoebe’s story was another painful reminder of her younger sister’s own approaching birthday. Just as Audrey had done throughout her childhood, Phoebe would have to make up an excuse to her kindergarten teacher about why her father couldn’t be present on her special day. Audrey had done her best to shield Phoebe from the harsh, judgmental world as she grew up, but now that she was starting school, Audrey questioned her own ability to create a stable world for her sister on her own. The responsibility loomed before her, a threatening monster that she didn’t know how to slay. She longed to be her sister’s hero, but she didn’t know how to fill the shoes that only a mother could.
Audrey gently led her sister towards the tiny, yellow cottage that sat at the end of the street. Her feet felt heavy. She heard the school bus pull away from the curb with a defiant screech and stood as Phoebe turned to wave goodbye to her classmates, whose smiling faces inched out of sight. Audrey was reminded of the many faceless people she passed in the halls, and the smiles she threw in their directions. She thought of the best friends that knew everything, yet nothing, about her.

As she leaned over to retie the bow that had unraveled in Phoebe’s hair, she was overcome with the memory of her mother. She recalled breathing in the flowery scent of her perfume as clean, manicured fingers tied her red bow into careless loops as she ushered Audrey through the door of the home they used to share. She remembered how the scent of rose was only thing that lingered long after her mother had closed the door for the last time.

She tied Phoebe’s bow tighter.

She envied her mother for no longer having to look into the eyes of her father, which were as hollow as the bottles that he drank.

She envied Phoebe, whose youth kept her exempt from the burden of their father. She envied the honest smile that was the focal point of Phoebe’s delicate features, her eyes and ears telling no tale of the horrors they had seen and heard. She winced at the thought of Phoebe having to navigate the maze of childhood on her own, without a real parent. There was only son much Audrey could do.

“How can I put her through this?” she thought, guiltily.

Audrey constantly struggled against the secrets that had never ventured beyond the walls of the yellow cottage. She knew of the shame and the fear that would follow if she were to tell her secret, but she longed to be released from the burden that she carried. She knew her friends would withdraw themselves from her, but how could she blame them? It wasn’t their fault that they had fathers who brought in cupcakes and picture books on their birthdays.

Phoebe tugged on Audrey’s arm, refocusing her on a recap of the drama of her kindergarten world, stemming from a stolen crayon and an unfair game of hide and seek. Audrey laughed as Phoebe imitated the horrified expression of her friend when she realized her favorite pink crayon was missing. She wished for a stolen crayon to be the greatest of Phoebe’s struggles.

Audrey slowed her strides, trying to make the short walk back to their house last as long as possible. She savored the clear sky and Phoebe’s innocent chatter, which filled the crisp October air. She thought ahead, dreading the night that loomed before her. She would try to douse the fire that her father had set to his insides and watch as the flames consumed the tiny home, refusing every attempt at being extinguished. She was all too familiar with how they roared, unpredictable and out of control. Audrey was marked by the irreversible burns they had caused her.

She led Phoebe up the steps of their front stoop. She stepped between Phoebe and the door in order to unlock it, and placed her hand on the small of her sister’s back, leading her across the threshold. She glanced back at the curb of her street. She saw the bare branch and was reminded of the leaf who had succumbed to the relentless wind and freed itself. She imagined the leaf spiraling to the ground, falling amongst the others who had long ago been released. She thought about how they littered the ground, masking the grass in a sea of yellow and orange.

As she turned her back on the silent street, she was consumed by a thought. Maybe one day she would close this door for the last time.
He was a widower, not of a wife or of a loved one dear; but a he was a widower for sure. As a boy, he sat beside his father on the worn workbench watching ordinary planks of wood being sculpted into magnificent dressers, and tables, and toys. He still remembers the way the sawdust lingered in the air and the smell of dry lumber. He still sees his father’s creased hands as they reached deally for another screw and how they were always tinted with the stain he was using for his most recent project. He still remembers the workroom mouse that his father swore he would get rid of one day, but whom the boy loved and named Jeffery. And he still remembers the day when he was a child no more; the day that he told his father that he was to move away that fall and how the tears glinted in the eyes of that man he loved so dear.

So the young man set off to the city full of hope and aspirations. He rented a small apartment, four strides across, six wide. The room couldn’t even fit a bed. But he was happy there. He’d walk to school each day dressed in one of his father’s old shirts, and whenever he felt alone, he’d feel the familiar fabric between his fingers. If he thought hard enough, he’d remember the workshop, and he’d promise himself that one-day he’d make his father proud.

He had a spark embedded in his mind of the things he’d do and the places he’d go, and as of the moment all he could do was wait for the timing to be right. By now, it was winter and the snow fell in graceful flurries. The young man walked by a small café on his way to school when something, whether it was a start in his heart or guidance from fate itself, led him in through the doors. The silver sleigh bells hanging on the door jingled as he strode in.

He ordered hot cocoa and sat at a table facing the window. It was warm inside, and the sky out the window was dark with snow clouds. Then the most peculiar of things took place in the small café. The aroma of coffee and pastries lulled the young man to sleep, and when he awoke, the young man found himself deeply in love.

While he slept, he dreamed of a store like none you’ve ever seen before. It was a store that had more floors than any other building in the whole city. It was a store with floors so expansive that a marathon could be run inside, and still the runners would not see the whole place. It was a store that would be inspired by all the things he was taught as a boy while sitting next to his father.

The first thing the young man ever learned to make was a model airplane. It had a propeller that spun, and it could fly as far as 30 feet. He painted it red and Jeffrey the mouse would sleep in it at night. After the first plane he made another, and then another, and then more and more until his room was flooded and the cabinets were stuffed with his creations.

This would be what he’d sell at his store. He’d make thousands, no millions of airplanes, and children worldwide would line up to buy them. He’d be rich. He’d be famous. He’d be the best toymaker around. And with this idea the young man practically skipped out of the café, nearly forgetting to pay. He was too happy to sit through a dull day of classes, so he danced through the streets. He was married to his new idea. He’d stop at each building for sale and say, “One day this will be mine.” And the spark inside his head agreed and promised the man that they’d be together forever.

That evening, the young man composed a note to his father while lying on the floor of his makeshift apartment. He told him of his dream and of how they could be partners together. He wrote with such great gusto and enthusiasm that soon his note was eight pages long.

Back in his childhood home, the young man’s father and mother sat together eating soup. It was cold outside and both were glum. His father could no longer work in his shop...
because his fingers had grown stiff with age and his back was sore from years of sitting hunched over his workbench. His mother was sad for her favorite cupboard had split and it could not be fixed. As the two sat in silence, Pete, the mail boy, dropped off a letter that he said was from the city.

The young man’s father tore off the envelope seal with a brass-plated knife, and the man’s mother read over his shoulder. When they finished reading neither said a word, and the old man slowly wrote a letter in response, sighing deeply after each sentence.

Two weeks later, in the city, the young man still danced through the streets. He tied a string around his finger because he was told that it would help him remember what he had to do. And it sat there just like a wedding ring.

He stopped at the café every day now because that was where his new dream was formed. He brought along his mail this particular day, and he skipped through most of the letters until he saw one addressed in his father’s writing.

He skimmed through the letter but stopped half way down. He didn’t read enough to see his father’s reasoning—that it would be impossible for a single man to build so many toys and for so many people to want model airplanes. He didn’t read enough to realize that it was all out of care. Instead, his heart became heavy with disappointment. And it was worse still because all he ever wanted to do was make his father proud.

That day he did not waltz to school or smile with his head held high. He ripped off the string tied around his finger like a wedding ring, because why should he bother to remember a dream that would never come true? Why should he bother when it had already died? That day he was alone; no longer able to walk hand-in-hand with the idea he loved so dearly. That day, he became a widower to hope.

For the weeks to come, he passed by the café and went straight to the bar where he mourned with all the other brokenhearted men. He didn’t write to his father again who was only trying to help. It wasn’t until the next winter that anything changed.

The next year, on a wintry morning, the young man woke up no longer content with his miniature apartment. He dragged his feet to school and suddenly felt a pull towards the small café. Whether it was the start in his heart or guidance from fate itself, something led him through the door. The silver sleigh bells hanging on the door jingled as he wandered in.

It was cold outside and warm in. He ordered hot cocoa and let the fragrance of coffee and pastries lull him to sleep. And when he woke up, he found himself deeply in love with the most wondrous of ideas. While he was asleep, the most magnificent thing happened. He dreamed of a fire enveloping the street. In the dream, he was wearing a suit with a mask and rubber boots. Behind him, other men cowered in red trucks while he marched forth—the bravest of them all. And in one swift move, the fire was out and a cheer roared through the city. He took a bow and knew his father would be proud.

That day, he tied a new string around his finger, so he wouldn’t forget his dream. It sat there like a wedding ring. He pranced to school—a widower no more.

Self-Harm: Personal Narrative
By Gabriella Palmieri
Metropolitan Business Academy, grade 9

What is your most proud moment? Was it when you won the championship and the
feeling you felt right after it? Or when you got an A on an assignment and how proud you made your mother? Well, mine was when I was strong enough to stop convincing myself that I was okay. For this June day, the air suddenly felt cold against my bare arms. My goose bumps felt as if they were beginning to rise out of my skin and eat my alive. The warm summer breeze didn’t feel so warm anymore, as it made its way into my mouth.

I couldn’t stop myself from choking every now and again as I watched my mother stare at me in confusion as to why I made her sit directly across from me. My heart was pounding so fast and loud, I didn’t know how to make it stop. I wanted out of this plan. I just wanted to say, “Ha, sorry Mom. Just wanted to tell you that I love you!” But I couldn’t.

Seconds felt like hours, and minutes felt like years. “Mom...” I finally managed to get out. I was scared and I was thinking that, instead of actually speaking out loud. My left hand reached under my right thigh, grasping the note I had written. I felt the paper slice the top of my thumb, but I was so numb to anything at that moment, it was as if I almost hadn’t felt anything at all. The hand grasping the note reached across to my mom, as she met me halfway and opened her hand.

My mind was spiraling out of control, going through eleven different scenarios. Will she understand? Is she still going to love me? Will she look at me differently? Will she cry? Before I had time to come to any conclusions, I loosened my grasp on the letter, as it fell in between her rosy red palms. I heard the crinkling of the paper unravel as her eyes darted to the first words that reflected through the back of the spiral notebook page I had ripped out at school.

“Dear Mom,” it had read. My face was frozen. All I could do was watch my mother’s expression through my glossy eyes, which already were blurry from the tears making their way down my cheek. It must have taken my mother an hour to read that letter, because time was frozen and everything felt longer than it actually had been. But I remember when she was finished. I was crying, not the screaming, can’t breathe type of crying, but the silent type, which is the worst way to cry. She got out of her chair and walked to me. The next moment, all I knew was that her arms were wrapped around me. I felt safe. My mother, my protector, my queen, my best friend, was caressing me. I couldn’t see her face as I was buried in her chest, but I knew she was crying the same way I had been.

“Honey,” she had begun saying. For the first time, hearing her say that meant everything to me. She had said it plenty of times before, but it never hit me until now. “You’re going to be okay. I love you.” Those words didn’t just go through my right ear and come out of my left. Those words saved me. They saved me in a way that my mother will never be able to understand, nor will anyone be able to.


This very moment changed my life forever. It was the type of moment that I know I’m going to remember for the rest of my life. Every fourth of a month, I remember how strong I was at that moment in June. Not only did it make me stronger, it opened my eyes and shaped me into the person I wanted to be for the rest of my life. Little by little throughout the months since June, I began to watch myself grown. I started enjoying the little things in life, like hearing my mother’s laugh as she tries to remember The Brady Bunch theme song, or trying to comprehend my best friend Kaitlin’s love for Morgan Freeman.

I surrounded myself with these things that made me happy, and that’s what has been keeping me strong since. This began changing the way I was living the rest of my life. I changed my perspective on people, realizing that a bright beautiful smile could either make or break someone, and that sometimes a few kind words are what a person needs to hear the most. But
mostly, I changed the perspective on myself. I loved myself again. I lost myself for a while. I felt different. I felt as if I was a different person. I spent more time crying than having a smile on my face. More time lying in bed trying to convince myself that it was normal to be that way, when it really wasn’t. I wasn’t Gabby anymore. But now, it’s as if where I was a year ago is all a blur because I have been on the right track, and I don’t intend to change the road I am on. Instead of looking in the mirror and picking out every one of my flaws, I stare a little deeper. I look a little longer. I notice everything beautiful about me, and each day I try to do this. I refuse to be labeled as the person I used to be. My scars do not define me. Instead, they make me more beautiful than I was before.

Honorable Mention

-Grade 10-

Melissa Smajevic, “A Season’s Change,” Rockville High School
Lauren Barber, “Wild Horse,” The Master’s School
Elijah Oates, “A Shepherd’s Point of View,” The Master’s School
Allie Geilich, “Observations,” Ellington High School
Danielle Hoffman, “Choosing to Live,” Farmington High School
Carmen Borca-Carrillo, “New Year’s Resolution,” Westbrook High School

Dragonfly

By Julia Rossiter
Arts at the Capitol Theater

On my window each dawn
was the press of a hardened wind,
and soon after, a fragile dragonfly,
dancing and whirling with the air.

For weeks, it’d arrive along with
a chill and my own remorse. I
was going mad: craving you in
the pitch-black eyes of a sweet,
fluttering dragonfly.

And on the times when you’d
forget or lose track of the sun,
I would too. Never mind his
rushing wings or speckled back.
It was you who was lost.
Kept late on the desks that rest
under fluorescents. Thinking
about our blankets and whether
or not tonight I’d remember
to turn on the porch light.

Dragonfly, fly past my window,
and come in through the front.
Dance with me like you would
with the wind or on Christmas Eve.

Let thin wings yearn for your return
and glow as if nothing’s wrong.
I’d sweep it all beneath our blankets,
and fall asleep next to a nimble little bug
that just can’t find a way home.

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**My Trivial Tale to Tell**
*By Alyssa Mulé*
*Greenwich Academy, grade 10*

It’s been a while since I’ve seen you
and let me just start out by saying:
yes, I have done great things.
Over the course of our separation,
I have seen and done all
you promised I would someday see and do,
and some days have come and passed,
buffeting and bleaching me,
but bleaching my teeth too
until they shine like pearls, like the moon,
catching the breathless, awestruck world
in my smile.

So I should therefore regale you
with chest-puffing tales of woe and worry,
then of bright triumph and teeth
flashing across night sky;
but for all the beauty of my newly constructed smile,
I find my lips pressed together more often,
and I would rather tell you of sweet trivialities
that laze cloudlike across my mind, blocking the moon,
and cause my mouth to curl in a toothless smile:
secret, soft, like the patter of stars against the sky,
trumping even the garish gloom-light of the planets, 
and of the pale white moon.

Waiting for Alexander
By Alyssa Mulé
Greenwich Academy, grade 10

In the months before the War on Terror began, Alexander often stroked my hair as we lay in bed at night, regaling me with tales of Greek myths. Fairytales, I mumbled, and pretended to listen to the adventures of men and monsters rather than to the mellifluous rise and fall of Alex's sweet, low voice as he described battles, chortled over the follies of humans, and explained why Achilles was his favorite character in The Iliad, his preferred classic. Each morning when Dawn with her bloody rose-red fingers shone once more, I would wake early, stretching long limbs toward the opening sky, its underbelly slit open to allow for the rays of that glowing golden orb, the sun.

At seven, when Alex slipped from bed to head to the National Archives, oh-so-careful not to wake me, I squirmed sleepily beneath his swift kiss, watching through a sleep-heavy gaze his tilted smile and long fingers and blinking glasses-concealed eyes. Later, once I had splattered my studio with paint used to create images of his face and form, when dinner lay long left and cooling on the kitchen table, he would run in, out of breath and apologetic for his tardiness, which I laughed away as I wound my arms around his neck.

Under the soft lights of our small, but elegant, London flat, together we laughed away the cares of the waiting world outside.

Now, two years after he enlisted and one since his comrades came personally to my door to deliver the news, I often wonder why I let his fantasies unfurl, flourish in sweet, heady madness, stories of gray-eyed goddesses and fleets of ships scudding over the wine-dark sea, of red plumes and redder blood falling thickly to the sun-scorched earth. Of the Trojan War, of heroes famed and old.

"Alexander," I murmured the night before he made that fateful decision, "What's the matter?"

We lay side-by-side in the semidarkness, his jewel-green eyes shining through the gloom, and his lips were twisted in something like anger or confusion.

He blew out a breath, turning onto his back. "Tell me. How many Mandys, other than you, do you know of?"

My brow furrowed as I recalled; I knew better than to ask why, than to ask why, than to interrupt his peculiar curl of thought, a wisp of braided mist. "Well, there's Mandy Johnson—you know, that awful woman who works for a couple of my best customers—and Mandy Trace, whom I went to college with. And I think there's an Amanda on the floor below us—"

"Not 'know,' 'know of.' Is there a Queen Mandy, a great author, a—an Olympic athlete or something?"

"Um...Mandy Moore?"

He muttered something in what I presumed to be Ancient Greek, and I tenderly touched his arm.

"What did you say, baby?"
He stared straight up at the ceiling. “I know of another Alexander: Alexandros of Macedonia. Alexander the Great.” He swallowed hard, and his hand found mine. Grateful for that small gesture I pressed it to my lips. “I am just another Alexander.”

Right then I should have said something, anything, railed about his merits or attempt a feeble joke. Instead, I merely moved closer to him, laying my head on his chest to better hear the reassuring thump of his heart.

Since then, I have of course devoured all the knowledge one can have on Ancient Hellas, and still for all my trying I cannot discover why he chose golden-haired Achilles over those smarter, sharper, more like him; still I cannot unearth the secrets locked safely for eternity within his stilled heart. I may not find them in this life, but I will never stop trying to connect the loosely braided threads of consciousness of my clear-eyed husband, while he looks, fruitfully I know, for sun-gold Elysium.

My favorite character of Homer (my preferred ancient storyteller, as well), of course, remains Penelope, that wily and willing woman who waited for a husband who might never have returned.

I know that my Alexander, much like his hero, Achilles, has plunged into death. I may not find him in this world, but in the next, well:

I will search and search. Luckily for him, I have chosen my role models more wisely, and I, like patient Penelope, intend to wait.

The Rocking Chair

By Tori-Marie Lauria

RHAM High School, grade 10

The house was silent. The kind of uneasy silence that lurks after a storm. In the living room where my father stood, his enraged face glowed red. Reprehensive eyes gouged at my unnerved state. Having just crawled from my huddled position on my bed, I now stood assessing his position, his stance, his looming presence.

Woeful tears plummeted from my eyes.

My father, filled with rage and blank stares that tore me up like the shirt and pants he wore in this moment when he turned away. Following it, a dreadful

abrasive,
billowing,
noise,
and after that
abrasive,
billowing,
noise.
He had obliterated my mother’s rocking chair.

That chair was special to my mother’s tender heart. He had just taken out his fury on the shape that almost replicated my mother’s lanky and reclusive character—just to pain her.

The room smelled like week-old fish just bathed in dark, moldy alcohol. The stench caressed my father’s lips, grabbed my nose, and ripped it in two. My mother arrived next to me, holding me close to her, her face heavy. Her grasp was so solid on my shoulders it caused
discomfort. Tears kept strolling down my face.

It seemed I was in the middle of it all once again.

Words tried forming with my tongue, but none seemed to escape.

I unraveled myself free from my mother and fled to my placid room. Gruesome screams unmerged from the origin of this nightmare. Tenaciously, I returned to clustering myself on my bed. Screams. Screams...they had again consumed this home—and my perception.

It seemed to go on for an eternity.

I could hear the struggle, the heartbreak, and the tears that leaked through in my mother’s voice. I could hear the drunk and vulgar expression that stained his face.

The house was silent.

A Starry Night
By Clare Burhenne
Fairfield Ludlowe High School, grade 10

It was a cold November evening in Pennsylvania when I first saw stars. I don’t remember that night clearly, but I can still feel the numbing chill that invaded my bones. It was Thanksgiving, or maybe the day after, when I had lain among tall grass just beyond the manicured lawn outside my grandmother’s house. From my vantage point, every protruding stalk seemed to brush the sky. Looking up, I had a perfect angle to view the sky and the space above me became a wide, blank canvas. With the fear of ticks and disease my mother had instilled in me ever fresh in my mind, I must’ve been sprawled out on a blanket. However, it wasn’t what was below me that I focused on that evening, but what was above me: stars. At least a hundred I counted that night. Specks of light so far away from me, so numerous and abundant that I could not grasp the unfathomable infinity I sat under.

I had left my grandmother’s house just as the sun was setting, dipping below the waving and wrinkled fingers of cornstalks in the field behind her house, in a neighborhood where there was only one house per block. The absence of people, of noise and light was particularly surprising for a girl who had only ever lived in a heavily populated town. All I could think of was my vulnerability; there was no foolish innocence on display as I sat near that field when the night began. As a child I was plagued by infinite fears, a function of my OCD and anxiety. The fact that I had left my grandmother’s house as the light left the sky was a triumph. The fact that I was alone (and without any assurance that a neighbor could hear my screams) was unprecedented.

I’m not exactly sure why I set out that night, maybe it was too clammy in my grandmother’s house, which she always set at a balmy 78 degrees, or maybe I just wanted to be alone. I soon found my solitary perch in the field beyond and adjusted to the cold ground. As a twisting wind hit my face, my mood shifted. I could practically hear it weave its way through the cornfield even before it assaulted my ears. Suddenly the stalks appeared like spires supporting the dimming sky. And when the wind quieted, the hum of crickets ascended like an orchestra warming up before a show. I imagined a high murmur spreading across the field starting with the first “chair” and winding its way back through the members. Moments like these convinced me these earthbound creatures knew their roles and that their sounds would soon fall into a rhythm, moving with the dark, doing its best to accompany the celestial show to follow.
Before that November evening, my local repertoire of stars never seemed to number more than a few dozen and were never more important to me than any other collection of shiny objects. I think perhaps this is because I had never seen them truly gleam as I did that night; a pure, unfettered shine that captivated me, seizing my attention. The sky had been mostly black, like a thick blanket, slowly becoming pockmarked, and then punctured by the sharp, piercing light of the stars.

I’m not sure how this might have affected you, but to me it was as if someone had turned the key that ignited a red glow in my heart. I felt an immediate and pervasive warmth, almost as if I was being held. It was similar to how I experience love: safe, awed, intrigued, satisfied, and consumed all at once. Maybe it has more to do with passion than love. My mother told me she felt the same way when she first began studying insects and my dad said he felt that way when he discovered philosophy. That night in November, just beyond the sanctuary of my grandmother’s lawn, my inhibitions and fear nowhere to be found, I felt it for stars and the boundless space they lived in. I knew something new had happened.

The twisting constellations had set my eyes on fire. I felt like I was appreciating a piece of art in an empty hall. No one was there. No one had to be for me to realize I was where I belonged. Although their colors were lost on me, I later learned that stars come in ever-changing hues. The first stars ever to exist after the Big Bang were theorized to be huge balls of gas that burned brilliantly blue, excited to be alive. They hoarded hydrogen and used it recklessly. Slowly, orange, yellows, and whites made their way into the mix. Yet all of those were placed on the sideline when compared to the beautiful red hyper-giants that dominate the sky. They burn the brightest, live the shortest, and throw off as much heat and material as possible calling to all who will listen,

“I am here.”

In that moment, I felt like doing exactly the same.

The wind had kicked up another notch, the leaves from the cornstalks no longer held strictly to their stems, but the stars still glittered bright above me. I didn’t want to leave the blanket or the light, but my fear of getting grounded outweighed my newly found passion for stars.

From that moment on, I came to believe that to live without the stars was to squander my life. They did more for me than I could ever do for them, they gave me something to hold onto when the sun was out or clouds swept the night sky clean. I can’t say with certainty I have all the details right of that night, but I can say that what I experienced held me tight and never let me go, ushering me down an uninhabited, endless hallway, filled with the finest artwork in the universe.

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The Funeral
By Simon Lambert
RHAM High School, grade 10

I walked into the church, fists clenched and heart heavy. It was a small church with few people in attendance. I walked past some of the almost empty rows. I sat down, knees shaking and uncomfortable. I stared at the urn on the table and the picture next to it. She was smiling like she always did. Happy. Nice.

This isn’t right, it’s not fair, why her, why now.
The pastor came out from the backroom and started to speak.
“ Amanda Monington was…” I tuned out. I knew what she was: she was funny, smart, different, and she never judged anyone. One of the rare ones. An intense anger came over me. My face went red and my knuckles white. I closed my eyes and put my head down. The memories started to flow. To pour. All I could think about were the good times we had and that there would be no more. I remembered her saying to me, “I want to meet you again, you know, like later in life.” And I replied, “Yeah me, too, that would be cool. I’d like to meet you later on too.”
The sound of silence filled my ears. An intense weight fell on my chest; it had sunk so hard and so fast. I could feel the tears starting.

Stop. Don’t. Keep it together.

I inhaled. I held it. My eyes still closed, I saw it. It was her. A memory. She was laughing. Innocent. Simply happy. How she always was. Somehow out of all the darkness, there was a light. I exhaled. The escaping tears that were running from my eyes were wiped by my shaking hand, and miraculously I managed a smile. In remembrance of her. My eyes opened, and I saw her family members standing up at the podium.

“We uh…” Her father said in a shaky voice, “We found this in her room, when we were going through her things and...well, I guess I’ll just read it.”

He cleared his throat and read a poem. It was a philosophical masterpiece about the meaning of life. That was her. A deep thinker. An outside of the box thinker. One of the rare ones.

Amanda, thank you. I will never forget you, and all the things that I learned from you. Goodbye.

Rest easy, Amanda
September 6, 1997 – June 2, 2013

Honorable Mention
-Grade 11-

Rachel Crook, “On a Bus Stop Bench,” Torrington High School
Ly Dang, “Simply Piano,” Conard High School
Emma Henderschedt, “No More Crazy,” RHAM High School
Kyra Nordlund, “Hashtag,” Glastonbury High School
Angelina Raffone, “Warmth,” Westbrook High School
Danielle Wilson, “Reopening Wounds,” Arts at the Capitol Theater

Time for the Harvest
By Leonard Chiang
Tolland High School, grade 11

My life is a vine under-developed
With great potential for growth.
I am glorious in my greenness
And (naturally) green in my glory.
I am presently precariously stuck,
Lo, low below where I must go.
After all, I am but an adolescent.
I already know, though, that one day,
It will all bear fruit,
As it has to an extent done already.
It will be time for the harvest,
And I will readily, steadily yield
Grapelike bundles of success.
They will be waxy to the touch,
Rich in skin-snapping sweetness.
It will be a victory of tart roots,
A sensation particular to grapes,
The one that bursts forth and gushes,
Brushing gently and lusciously
Upon one’s tongue.

I suppose it all makes for...
For a veritable sparkling wine,
Ever-agitated,
Forever under the pressure
Of the unyielding rule
Of some cork
That situates itself regally
Atop the slender neck
Of a sleek emerald bottle.
Inside, I am ever-effervescent,
Awaiting that “someday”
Down the road
When patience pays off
And the cork whpp-bp-0000ms off
And the pressure is off.
And only then
Will my hard-wrought joy
Attain its primly proper fullness.

Yes, this sparkle has spunk,
And, of course—
Inevitably and invariably so—
That will attract attention.
Surely, some will buy this wine,
And drink it heartily: goolp
And set down the glass: thump
And aptly appreciate its producer: ahhhh.
Still, it seems,
I break too many a bottle
From my very own vineyard.
An acrid acidity accrues,
Becoming too much to bear.
Without warning,
The impish imbalance,
The imperfection, the impurity,
Topples the bottle.
The neck breaks; glass fractures, cracks,
Snapping and shattering upon impact
Against the ancient,
Grim, dim grounding of reality.
In a mere instant,
All that I gathered and packaged neatly
Is lost, completely and irretrievably lost.
The sparkle, now spoiled, goes splat.
It stinks—reeks—
So rank and rankling, this...
This...*rotten* batch here,
Now coagulating like spilled blood,
Utterly unsightly.
And due to this ruinous move,
This sudden lash
Of ill temper and ill fate,
The fruits of my labor
Must wait, biding their sweet-sour time
Until I finish picking up the pieces,
Until it is time for the next harvest.

"IF THE SKY WERE A MAN..."
*By Taimoni Knighton*  
*Metropolitan Learning Center, grade 11*

He is a constellation of stars amid blue-black skin and bright blue eyes.
Head tipped back in appraisal of imaginary Gods, sitting on thrones of bones,
with wine glasses of stardust in their hands.
*And he loves you doesn’t he?*
He promises you galaxies
To get you to stare into the sky and listen to his fears of the apocalypse
   (the day he will be nothing more than an empty abyss filled with black holes and dead stars)
He only visits at night; comes in through the window
Lies in bed and tells tales of all the Gods’ names he’s attempted to twist into words
How they left lichtenberg figures on the roof of his mouth
  How they used human hands to claw scriptures into his chest.
  Stained his skin ink-shades of blue and violet.

But you love him?
  He is ‘god in ruins.’
Supernovas explode again and again in your mouth to create
  The nebulas that spot his neck from the lovers he visits when your sun rises and
  there’s sets.
But you love him just as the others before and the others after.
  He never told you, you were decaying stardust. He never told you about the Gods
dwelling in his ribcage or the footprints he carries in his lungs.
  He never told you. . .
  But you love him?

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war in the flatlands
By Hannah Carpino
Avon High School, grade 11

There was a time in my life when I would lay in bed at night, wide awake, and I’d be quiet, but in me there was this screaming and thrashing and thrumming, this energy. I’d lie perfectly still, try to capture the feeling of being alive. The feeling of being filled to the very ends of your nerves.

Most nights now, I sleep soundly and the adrenaline of my memory is gone.
I’ve only met one person in my life who understood the feeling. He could describe the lapses between seconds, the spaces between his thoughts- the time that you’re not sure even exists. In a lot of ways, he was the smartest person I’ve known. One night when we were just thirteen, I sat out on the street with him, a cul-de-sac, carefully picked broken glass out his hand with a pair of tweezers. I let him bash at his head with his one good hand and self-hatred and anger poured out of him with his blood. He had shattered a mirror- or had it been a lamp? That night it was not important.

His name was Connor Mitchell and I had known him for as long as I can remember. In all my memories of childhood, Connor is there. He was always dirty and laughing as a boy, I remember. There’s a picture of us as kids on my postage stamp suburban-green lawn running away from my mom, who squirts as us with the hose. My mom called him my mirror image- we both grew into ourselves awkwardly during adolescence, all long legs and height, freckles and common brown eyes. I can remember eating endless bowls of mac n’ cheese with him in the years it was the food we’d swear by. I can remember hide and seek when we were young, footraces and little lungs close to exploding.

In a month, we will graduate. We have not spoken for a more than a year, only shared nods in the hallways. After school, he smokes against the cool bricks of the building, acknowledges me with a half-wave. Most the time he is lost in a crowd of other boys, hidden by laughter and stupid jokes and a cloud of smoke.
When we had drifted apart in the winter of junior year, I remember wondering why. I remember wondering who would look after him. December, January, the calendars turned pages; time went on. Life went on. The world went on and I wondered if God was keeping an eye on that boy.

Late May, slamming lockers, senior restlessness. I hear from friends that come fall, Connor’s going to Holy Cross. I want to congratulate him and breathe some kind of sigh of relief. I remember when he was younger how goddamned skinny he was, bruises coloring his freckled skin like pieces of a night sky. He needs to get out of his house, I think. Maybe it'll be good for him.

Later, I’m sitting in the library when he sits a few seats down from me. An awkwardness I never knew as a child stops me from going up to him without fear. He is older- so much older-now, broad shoulders and muscle and day-old stubble, leaning over a book, squinting a bit as he reads. Somehow he is someone different and it scares the hell out of me. I watch him and I feel this energy build in me, my knees shaking. For a second, I have all the unstoppable adrenaline I knew a long time ago, all the fear, all the uncertainty. The boy I watch is and is not Connor Mitchell. When he sees me, there is no recognition in his eyes.

When we were younger, he told me about the yellow lines in the streets, how they separate the go-toers from the come-fromers, how there were places in the world bigger than roads. Bigger than yellow lines.

When we were younger, it was Us against Them, Us against our parents, Us against our town.

When we were younger our friendship was innocence and scraped knees and finding out. Now, sitting across from him at a library table, he is not the same Connor who offered his hands to me, his broken glass, his blood, his secrets. He is not the boy I grew up with.

When I come home, my little sister is sitting on the front porch and I hear the rise and fall of her whistle before I see her. Like most other days, she is bent over the table, Crayola worlds blooming under her little hands. She tells me she wants to be an artist, though eight-year-old career dreams change like the tides.

Today, she says her drawing was of me. I see myself vaguely in the sketch, wearing a green cape. Across the sheets of paper, a smiling version of myself battles white-sheeted ghosts, vampires with teeth dripping garish red, fighting wars across pages and pages of her little-girl dreams.

She tells me it all takes place in a faraway land, where she has drawn pink mountains, orange ponds. In her land, there are no roads with their yellow lines, no cul-de-sacs, no flatland with houses upon houses. The place she has drawn is so far from the suburbia she knows I have to smile. It’s beautiful.

Then she says that I’m a superhero, and all the energy is back, the rush of indescribable emotion that both instantly charges me and leaves me quivering. But I am able to steady myself this time, tell her that of course I’m a superhero, of course I always save people.

There’s a hitch in my voice I hope she doesn’t notice, and I’m pointing to her ghouls, her demons chasing each other around her paper, telling her that one day she’ll get to be brave too, and one day when she’s grown up she’ll fight these wars.
Broken Reflex
By Kaley Chamberlain
The Master’s School, grade 11

The last hour and a half has melted together. Beginning at 8 a.m. was the first mistake. The second was having financial accounting as the class to begin the day. My concentration would not have been as vague if I was not exhausted. But the constant pandemonium of my parents’ bickering kept me counting the dimly glowing stars that clung to my dark ceiling, symbolic of happier childhood days. Promptly, the dull finance teacher repeated his daily routine; explaining in monotone, the value of business investment and economic stability. The classroom filled with students that embodied the mundane boredom then became obscure. The white board overflowed with notes and diagrams that muddled into a hallucination of black lines and figures. The clock’s rhythmic ticking lulled me into a sleepy trance—my body relaxed and a silent stimulus evoked in the depths of my core. The muscles began to awake from their buried slumber. It crawled up my lungs and grasped the inhale of my first breath; steadily suspending. The air escaped for a moment, disappeared, suffocating while struggling to contain the breath. Letting go, I released the air toward freedom. I shifted my weight and heard murmurs of acknowledging the epidemic. A wave of exhaustion swept through the room. The crest of the wave crashed and regained its breath and then another person across the room picked up where the last left off. It was an unbroken circle that weaved through each row and across the classroom. Like the work of a sorcerer, it transformed from one person to the next, contagious with an unspoken truth.

Fairytale
By Marissa Fenn
The Master’s School, grade 11

Once in a while, Talia got lucky. Once in a while, she managed to escape into herself, into the fairytale world of her mind. It was better in there, away from all the noise. Everything made noise. Everything was loud. Even colors had voices that would push behind her forehead, pulsing even when her eyes were closed. Morris said she was better. Morris would know. She called him Morris because his real name was Dr. McMorriarty, and McMorriarty had too many colors. Reds and browns and dark, itchy greens that sounded like a thunderclap with every syllable. Morris said she was better, but she didn’t feel better. She felt like a rainbow full of colors even God wouldn’t know, because there was no room for God in her busy, busy head. Some things didn’t have colors or noises—bread dough was one of them. That was why she was here, standing beside a cold, silent table, kneading cold, silent dough and escaping into her fairytales. Fairytales are where wishes fall like diamonds and where little brothers don’t fall asleep and never wake up. Where nothing has too many colors, too many sounds, too little room in her busy, busy head. So she sits in her fairytale, listening to nothing and kneading her dough. She wonders where this bread will go, so full of silence and fingerprints. She wonders how many other ingredients will join the silent dough—perhaps little fruits or apple filling. No sooner had she thought this until the colors filled her mind. Her fairytale had fled, washed with the shades in every word. She closed her eyes, tied the panic to the ground, and breathed a sigh. Morris could get a fairytale back. Morris would know.
I was wearing a black and white kente, a patterned cloth traditionally woven by hand in Ghana. Wearing white in my kente represented the white of an egg from the white clay used in spiritual healing and purification for contact of ancestrals. The black that was also present, derives its significance from the notion that new things get darker as they mature, physical aging comes with intensified spiritual energy and the communion of ancestral spirits.

Wearing white and black also meant I was at a thanksgiving, a party where people gave thanks to god for guiding their loved ones through the gates. It usually came 1-2 days after seeing your loved one for the last time, buried underneath the earth. I didn’t get to see Kofi one more time before he went to sleep in dirt. “You’re too young, there are no kids present at a funeral,” my grandmother had said. An excuse I didn’t understand that time. I wasn’t that young, I was 10, and I could handle it. Upon looking into my grandmothers hard stoned eyes, to argue my point across, I knew the real reason why I couldn’t go. My grandmother Victoria Darkor was the toughest person I knew, and she wanted it to stay that way. She didn’t want anyone, especially me to see her fall and break over the loss of her best friend, because there was only one time that had ever happened and that was when she divorced my grandfather, years ago, and she had never been the same. She was the cold blooded monster that no one cared about, but I just wanted to say, “It’s alright, he was my best friend too, it’s okay to cry,” but upon glancing at my grandmother’s face, I knew it was a war I was going to lose.

At the thanksgiving, I looked all around the saddened looks of people overcome by their pools of hormones in their eyes.

I was scared that over the years Kofi would descend like dirt in the back of my head, I was scared I would forget him, scared that I would forget all the things we did together, because right now I couldn’t remember what tonight’s homework was.

“Ahwww that still hurts,” I said as I looked at the huge cut that had stayed on my pointer finger for too long.

“That’s a big cut mamafia (a nickname given to me for being born on a Friday- Ghanaian tradition),” Kofi said, looking at my pointer finger over his nearly finished chicken soup (Ghanaian delicacy).

“I know Kofi, that’s why it still hurts,” I said rolling my eyes at Kofi. He was older, wasn’t he supposed to be smarter too.

“Don’t get cheeky with me young lady,” Kofi said, as he tried to give the toughest disciplined look that only my grandmother could muster, before he started laughing in a wave of giggles, with me falling suit.

“Give me your finger,” Kofi said. I obliged and brought my pointer finger close to his hands, with curiosity in my eyes. I gave him my finger only for him to stick it in his nearly finished chicken soup.

“Gross,” I said as I retracted my hand.

“Mamafia, the soup will help the healing process on your cut,” Kofi replied.

“How?” I retorted back.

“All the herbs and spices in the soup have healing powers, and because my mother said so, and she well is the smartest woman alive,” Kofi replied.

“It’s healing already,” I said, no longer feeling the burn of the cut.

“Give it a few days, you can reward me with a hug, ‘thank you,’ and all your chicken,” Kofi
replied. I often lost bets to Kofi, and my grandmother wondered why the lack of protein.

The music got louder and the pools of hormones finally let themselves be known. Tears continue to slowly and silently stream my face. This was Kofi’s favorite song; he was forever listening to this song to the point where I knew the lyrics word for word. Kofi played this song when he picked and dropped me off from school. Except one day.

It was 6:30 a.m., the usual time Kofi picked me and my brother up, even though school started at 8:00, but since my grandmother’s house was 30-40 minutes away. Kofi would drop Everett and I at ICS, International Community School nursery, and Everett and I would go onto one of the buses parked around the nursery, which would also take 30 minutes to reach the ICS Elementary, Middle, High school that were in another area. I got into the 2005 blue Corolla with Everett sitting on my right and my Aunt Ama in the front seat across from me. No music was being played.

“Kofi, no music today?” I asked.

“No music today mamafia,” Kofi said over the noise my brother and his leapfrog were making.

“Moses (my brother’s middle name) jye (stop), me sea jye (I said stop),” Kofi yelled over the noise.

Kofi then stopped the car along the side of the road. I looked around. We were at least a few miles away from the nursery. Kofi then got out the car, and so did Aunt Ama. She then started to talk to Kofi, but I don’t think he was listening, Kofi’s eyes were glazed over and staring at on spot right on Aunt Ama’s face, before his eyes rolled in the back of his head, and for a milisecond, I swear I saw one tear find its way out before Kofi collapsed into a heap of Aunt Ama’s arms before his head hit the ground. “Ca car noome (stay in the car). Me sea caa car noome (I said stay in the car),” Aunt Ama yelled as I got out the car.

Aunt Am gently laid Kofi and the ground and dialed an ambulance.

“Me wo neapa wa ha, me tem tee ne heart, bra intem (I have someone here, I can’t hear any heartbeat, come immediately). Ya wo near Tema Circle (we are near Tema Circle),” Aunt Ama said through the cellphone. She then dialed another number.

“Ba fa Mamafia ne Moses, bebi a ye Kofi, ya wo near Tema Circle, bra intem ambulance ne ba (Come and pick Mamafia and Moses, something has happened to Kofi, we are near Tema Circle, come fast, the ambulance is on its way),” Aunt Ama said through the phone before disconnecting it.

A few minutes later the ambulance came on the road with its loud sirens, letting it be known to other cars to move out the way. The ambulance stopped in front of the car. The back doors opened releasing two paramedics, who got straight to work picking up Kofi and securing him into the ambulance.

“Ne pa bako ne temie ba (Only one person can come),” one of the paramedics said looking at us.

Aunt Ama walked back to the car and stuck her head in the window on my side of the car, looking at both Everett and I, before saying, “Car noome, Uncle be ba, be fa wo, me frem car noome unless Uncle bra (stay in the car, Uncle will come pick you up, don’t come out the car unless Uncle comes).” With that, Aunt Am got into the retracting doors of the ambulance.

7:30 a.m., the clock read. 20 minutes, which felt like 3 hours, later, there was knocking at my side of the window, I glanced at a sleeping Everett in the back seat. Fearing the worst I turned around; it was only my Uncle Papa Yaw, my mother’s baby brother. I got out the car running towards my favorite Uncle and attacked him in a tight bear hug. Uncle Papa Yaw then
asked if I was okay and glanced at a sleeping Everett in the back seat. He then turned halfway, giving his car keys to an unknown stranger behind him who, when I took a closer look, was actually Kwame, a worker at my grandmother’s store. Uncle Papa Yaw proceeded to direct himself and me towards the 2005 blue Corolla, and Kwame went the other way towards my Uncle’s black Chrysler, and we drove retracing out steps home.

At around 8:30 p.m., my fears were answered when I heard my grandmother’s voice coming up the hill towards the house yelling, “Wa wo, wa wo, wa wo, wa wo (he’s dead, he’s dead, he’s dead—a Ghanaian cry alerting others that the worst has come).” My grandmother and her stone-hard eyes, with a crying Aunt Ama behind her, took off her shoes, and went straight to her room.

Kofi’s song was still being played. I still remember the lyrics word for word, and it goes like this: Kofi.......Kofi.......Kofi.

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**Honorable Mention**

*Grade 12*

Miranda Wheeler, “Doppelgänger,” *Torrington High School*
Emily Burg, “Secrets,” *Rockville High School*
Russ Hurlock, “Track Mania,” *New Canaan High School*
Leah Clark, “1-800-mycelebritypet,” *New Canaan High School*
Konatsu Sonokawa, “Running Forward,” *William H. Hall High School*
Sana Suhail, “Reflection,” *Academy of Aerospace and Engineering*

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**Song for a Stranger**

*By Alexandra Rose*

*New Canaan High School, grade 12*

*Time for you and time for me,*
*And time yet for a hundred indecisions*
*And for a hundred visions and revisions*
*Before the taking of a toast and tea.*

“The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock” by T.S. Eliot

Mother-not-mine, you might be beautiful.
You might lisp, stutter, stammer
You might be as nervous as I am
Today
What will I say?
Mother-not-mine I guess I’d start off somewhere like
  I love you-you and the fill-in-the-blanks that are your traits,
How you sit in empty space, as yet unknown.

I dance a limbo of curiosity and comfort, of longing and lethargy fighting one another
  a tiring dance I wake with day in, day out.
  It nags and negates the details of your mystery,
a mystery of chocolate or vanilla, Bahamas or Anguilla, your Mama or your Papa
Who’s more like you?

Mother-not-mine, For me?
It’s my mom: my mother-mine, together what we’ve been
  through it’s too much to tell you.
At least for right now.
  But I hope some way, somehow
I’ll find the answer to...
  What do I say?
  How do I say it?
There’s so much at stake in this transition, this position, this phase
  The thought of your face,
A shared embrace,
  That all seems easy enough.
But what about when the hugging is
  done with, what about when the new touch is no longer enough?
What do I say?

  Do I fill you in on the days, the months, the years?
The sunburns and sunsets,
  the scars and the tears?
All the insignificance that brought me here?
  Maybe...
  We should just start fresh
No stories from prom
  No fill ins on all the wrong boys, little joys...
This song I sing is my story,

A story I want you so badly to hear,
but how do I dare disturb your universe
  how do I steer clear of what I fear?
Mother-not-mine...
What do I want to say?
  Away, away, away, I want to sit in a place
of solitude where no one knows my name
  and the vibrations of my tongue
take a break under the hot sun
that burns my sensitive skin
a trait inherited from your unknown kin.
   Come, Mother-not-mine.
   Let us go then, you and I.

What do I want to say?

Today
Today I meet you,
Today I say nothing,
Today I say Nothing

Unknown no longer,
I may not have the words,
   But my song is stronger,
   Than words on a page,

   than words like not-mine.
   Maybe I won’t say my story...

Cause my story sings.

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December 2\textsuperscript{nd} through the 8\textsuperscript{th}
By Horlando Cornejal (Orlando De Los Santos)
Bulkeley Upper High School, grade 12

Monday night and I’m already drinking.
Celebrating my tenth month at the group home.
The cheap vodka,
Burned a little, lit up my stomach,
Forcing emotions and bottled sappiness into
Texts and phone calls.
The I love you my ex-girlfriend wanted to hear is said
As my roommate tries to pry away
My phone from my ear. He’s anxious to call his
Ex too. I’m tired.
I will reap the fruits of my labor later,
My bed looks beautiful and lonely.

Tuesday morning, I am hung over.
My head has little nails in it,
I drink orange juice.
My favorite radio station told me to do so.
First period and I can't look people in the eyes  
As the teacher tries to explain the assignment.  
His voice carries over; it hits my hungover self hard.  
I tell him I give up; I hate his class and the valedictorian  
That is slowly failing out.  
Second period and the hood rats in math class  
Aren't helping either. Their complaints  
Irritate, getting under my skin like  
The bullets they swear they dodged.

Wednesday evening, the prettiest girl in the world  
Asks if I’m okay. I laugh and awkwardly say yes.  
Part of the texts were true and the rest was the vodka talking.  
I don't remember telling her I loved her.  
I can't look her in the eyes either.  
They feel as if they are digging into my skin,  
I feel tortured. I realize, I hate her,  
That I hate her beautiful smile and her Hispanic-Italian curves  
And every other fiber in her body  
And in everyone else’s.  
I wish I had a dog,  
To feel his raspy tongue against my cheek,  
As he watches over me as I throw up the  
Spaghetti dinner and cheap booze.  
I’d bury him in my back yard when he wants to go fetch with God.  
He’ll rest against a rusty car and I’d call him my friend.  
Thursday morning, I’m up earlier than usual.  
I have to be bullied and victimized for  
My moral plays, its easy money.  
The tweens are excited, it’s their second time  
Seeing my group. Their old enough to  
Know about pot brownies and the danger of  
Nudes. I want to be like my boss,  
His shaggy grey hair and quietness  
Seems wise and all knowing.  
I have an afternoon shift later today.  
My coworkers are high school drop outs  
And college flunkies,  
They swear that an $8.25 wage subsidizes for their  
Faltering dreams and passions  
As if humanity had a price tag.  
I swear I will become a writer  
So I can chronicle their choices and  
Regrets and mine into a Word document.

Friday afternoon, I leave school early  
And I go Christmas shopping.  
I buy some toy cars that my brothers will destroy,
The rubber tires and plastic shells won’t hold up against
Their little hands. I buy a cheap watch for
My secret Santa. I’ll tell her I spend $40 when I only spend $13.
I have nothing else to do later.
My roommate will be in school,
While I stay home,
Contemplating suicide over and over.
A coin with the word No on both sides.
I don’t have the guts.

Saturday night, I’m writing a poem on my laptop.
I’m listening to the Cranberries Zombie,
I like how the woman sings,
As if the pain of the bullets hit her too.
Maybe she is a survivor.
Maybe I’ll be one too.
I have to get up early tomorrow morning,
My mother and the Catholic Church are calling,
As if their prayers can save me.

Sunday morning, I walk down Webster St,
I told my roommate last night that
I would like poems read at my funeral,
Let the red roses brighten someone else’s day.
I call my mom: she isn’t at church,
I’ll go to her apartment instead.
I sit on the couch and pretend to hear her
Talk about my sister and how much she misses her.
I pretend to listen to my little brother’s rant about school.
I leave and the walk back to the group home is
Full of thoughts and Biggie,
I’m thirsty and the first thing that comes to mind is
I need a drink
A swig of some cheap whiskey would help.
stranger. He was sitting on a couch with a paperback in hand. She studied his change of emotions as he read a page. His face seemed so refreshingly open and honest to her. Suddenly, the friend that was beside her spilled her drink. She tore her eyes off of him for a second and helped her clean it up. When she looked back again, he had left his spot bare and had left her agitated.

She needed air. She stood up and walked over to the side door of the establishment. She finally reached the door and pushed herself through to the outside. She was startled by how many people huddled outside. They had all seemed to have had the same idea as her. She craned her head left and right to find a place on the street that was semi-isolated. She settled for a streetlight to the right of the building, perpendicular to an alley that she noted skeptically. Propping her purse on her knee, she sorted through its contents to find her cigarettes. Her fingers thankfully touched the plastic wrapping of the package, and her slender fingers pulled one from its place. Now all she needed was a lighter, but there was suddenly a lack of people. Or maybe there were people, but she was too timid and too tired to ask them. She sighed and had resolved to leave when she heard a voice coming from the outskirts of the light. She squinted to make his face as he walked closer to her. She recognized him as the atypical man she had been fascinated by.

"Are you in need of a light?" he asked her, flicking the top of his lighter.

Stunned, she mutely nodded her head in affirmation. He smirked at her skeptical eyes as he lit her cigarette and held the lighter there a moment too long.

It made her uncomfortable; his presence made her uncomfortable. But she liked it. She liked feeling nervous because it meant she felt something. She was drawn to him; he seemed different to her from the others that surrounded her on a daily basis. He had glanced at her with wide eyes. Everything about him was narrow, except for those eyes. He had narrow hips, narrow shoulders, and most likely a narrow mind. But those eyes. His dark hair fell just above them, outlining them perfectly. As he had walked closer to her, she had noticed their glassy state. That intrigued her. He wanted escape just as much as she did.

She connoted that first night with perfection.

He had been tricked into coming to the party that night; he had been taken advantage of that night in a vulnerable state. He was bitter, stoned, and heartbroken. She had used him once again. Once they arrived at the party, his friends abandoned him for the lure of an open bar and hors d’œuvres. He decided to sit down on the cushioned bench and read the paperback he had absentmindedly grabbed while leaving. He flipped to a random page, but before he was able to concentrate, he could feel himself being intently watched. He leaned back into the cushions, and rolled his eyeballs toward his eyebrows, lifting his head slightly. It was a woman staring at him. At that moment, one of her companions created a scene that caused the woman to break her fixation on him. He was thankful and decided that it was the perfect moment to escape her.

He craned his neck to look for an exit and found one on the side. Outside was even worse. There were masses of people huddled together to fight off the cold. He wormed his way down the street, stopping only when he found an abandoned alley. He settled for the large dumpster to the right of the alley and sat down beside it. He took the reinforcements he had hidden in his pocket and decided to light up—a ritual he had become so accustomed to. He sat there smoking in complete bliss, with a crowded mind in need of emptying. He thought of Mary and how someone with a name so holy continually fucked him over without penance.

His thoughts were interrupted when he heard a soft groan coming from the direction of the street. He quietly put out the lit blunt and stood up. It was the woman who had fixated on him. She had a cigarette in her mouth and a hopeless expression. He subconsciously began comparing her to Mary. As he got closer to the street, he could see how similar they really were.
Their hair was the same caramel color, the same shoulder length cut. They both had heart-shaped faces, although Mary’s was pudgier than this girl’s. They were the same height. He wanted to hear her voice, see if that sounded like Mary, too.

He approached the streetlamp quietly, and just before the girl removed the cigarette from her mouth, he asked if she needed a light. He had scared her, but that gave him the power in their conversation. She nodded her head, and he was unsatisfied. He got closer to her, and he began to ask her questions. First, he began with subtle topics, but as he sensed her relaxing, he moved deeper and deeper into conversation, searching for a response similar to Mary’s. He was determined to get to know her better. She was going to be someone holding the door open for someone else better to come back to him.

She noticed the shift in him soon after they began dating. The perfection she had felt the first night was the only reason she had for staying with him. But after a while, even the memory of that first night could not keep her from hating him. She resolved herself to breaking up with him. She sat him down across from her and told him they needed to discuss their relationship. She told him everything she felt obligated to say—that he was too needy, he was too cliché, there was no love.

“Mary,” he whispered gently, tilting his head to the left. “Why do you continuously do this to me?”

She was confused, but more than that, she was frightened. Something about him had changed, and the name he uttered…did she hear him wrong, or was he mistaken?

“Mary…” He repeated the name again.

Was he delusional? Unaware of how to respond to him, she looked into his eyes to formulate a response. And that’s when she noticed it—something was missing. Sure, his eyes had their signature glassy, wide appearance; but there was something deeper than that was not evident. His eyes had gone cold. He stared back at her.

“Did you take something?” she whimpered. “Why are you acting like this?”

He didn’t respond to her. He walked over and circled her, drawing his finger along her body as he moved.

“You are continuously hurting me, Mary. You know I’d do anything for you. Why do you treat me this way? You’re really flawed, Mary. Sure, you may be beautiful, but something is not right about you. I would do anything for you. Why do you treat me this way?”

She shook in fear and knew she had to do something but was paralyzed and left unable to communicate. She wasn’t sure how to, and what the consequences would be if she did. She decided that he was still himself. He had done too many of something and was acting delusional. She would allow him to say what he had to say and then transport him to the nearest hospital. As soon as she resolved this predicament in her head, he stopped in his tracks. He walked to the front of her, knelt down, and touched a bulge in his front pocket.

“Remember this,” he whispered, as he took out a silver gun. She felt her heart pound and though how sick it was her life was going to be ended this way. She closed her eyes and prepared herself for the shot. Her eyes opened to the sound of the bullet hitting bone. She let out a cry, but felt no pain. Only then did she realize that he had dropped to the floor and that blood was rushing from his head. She whimpered.
Coping
By Caroline Muller
New Canaan High School, grade 12

We received our assignment on December 3, 2079. An inadequate male (I.M.) by the name of Timothy K. Brenner was to live with us starting January 2, 2080, until December 23, 2082. The idea being that if the assignment goes well, my wife, Margot, and I will choose to have Timothy joins us for the holidays of 2082 and adopt him as a permanent member of our household. Based on what I’ve heard, that happens about 20% of the time. Based on what C.O.H.P. (Care of the Homeless Project), pronounced “cope,” tells society, that happens about 70% of the time. Seems like bullshit to me.

But all right, so our government compensation begins on January 2, we'll receive our first deposit code by email the day Timothy arrives. The compensation is supposed to cover approximately 50% of the care required for Timothy, but everyone knows it doesn't. It barely covers anything, and he's just going to be a burden on our income until he gets a job or our assignment is over. Chances of him getting a job though: pretty low. So we're just going to deal with it, but I guess we can handle it; we're doing pretty well right now even though the economy has been struggling. Without the homeless and with the federal government having to pay for so many people, most public facilities have gone into a state of disrepair since so much money is being poured into C.O.H.P. The school systems, colleges included, were regulated just two years after C.O.H.P. was founded to ease the cost burden of education.

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It’s January 27. Timothy’s been here for a few weeks; he’s all right. We’re all getting along, and he’s trying to get a job, or at least that’s what he says he’s doing all day. We believe him since he leaves every morning in business attire (usually mine) and comes back later with forms and business cards looking like he did when he left, just more tired. His broad shoulders protrude from my button-downs. He’s a thick man, aged with years on the street. As we sit across the dining room table from him each night, his five o’clock shadow never faltering, his expression is almost bovine; reflecting, empty, with arched shoulders and glazed eyes.

We got lucky, he doesn’t seem to be a drug dealer or user or an alcoholic, so we’re happy. Today’s just another day, until after dinner.
Tim’s gone to bed, and Margot and I are watching a movie. She’s been moody all day...probably PMS. But what do I know?
Then she tells me she’s pregnant.
“What?” I stare.
“I’m pregnant,” her eyes are glued to the 3D.HDTV wall (I swear these acronyms get longer with every model).
“You are?”
“Yes.”
“Are you unhappy?” I’m hesitant...I thought this was good news.
Silence.
“So you’re unhappy.”
She sighs and looks at me. I watch an exposé of emotions flash across her eyes, eventually landing on defeat. “How can we afford this right now?” I hadn’t thought about that...But we’re fine, I mean yeah, Tim’s definitely putting a dent in our income, but we’re doing just fine. How expensive can a pregnancy be?
“We’re doing fine, honey; there’s nothing to worry about. This is good news!”
Her furrowed brow relaxes. She looks up at me with a hint of a smile. I know that behind that initial distress, she’s happy about this.
“This is good, okay? This is exciting,” I smile. She smiles back.

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Margot goes to the pregnancy doctor—I don’t know what they’re called—she handles it. They tell her that she needs an ultrasound, which is apparently significantly more expensive than I thought. Knowing that plenty more of these are going to be needed over the next nine months, I think about the extra hours I’m going to be working…to keep up with this baby…and with Tim...

He says he’s making headway in his job search, yet he keeps coming back day after day with no follow-up interview. On weekends, he generally just lounges around the house; I got him to go to the gym with me once or twice, and he accompanied us to Margot’s first ultrasound. He said it was a good outing, a way to get out of the house on a dreary day, he sounds so comfortable.

Our assignment letter tells us that if any major life changes occur, we should notify our local C.O.H.P. agent. So, after the ultrasound, we drop off Tim and head to town hall.

We ask to see our C.O.H.P. agent, and we’re directed to a room on the fourth floor. We have our eyes scanned and are promptly invited in. A woman of about 35 sits at a desk in front of us and chirps, “Hello, how may I help you today?” She invites us to sit down, and we explain our circumstances.

“Oh, congratulations!” she squeals. “That’s fantastic news! But you’re wondering what that means for Tim.” She’s pulled up our file in her records so she knows all the details of our assignment and turns the hologram so we can see. “Well, I would say this is grounds for an increase in compensation, but I’ll have to run it by our regional supervisor, who’ll run it by the state authority, who will probably report it to the CEO, but I’m sure that it’ll go by fine. This must have happened before.” Her brow furrows, and her eyes dart to the tablet as her bony fingers begin tapping.

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“There are no more extra hours I can take at work, honey.” It’s 10:30 on a Tuesday night, Margot’s due in just under two weeks. I’ve just gotten home, and I’m being hounded about ways I can get more hours so we can pay the doctor on time and send in the money we still owe for the vitamins that Margot keeps needing more of. I’ve lost weight, and the bags under my eyes deepen every day from sleep loss. My shoulders arch forward just a little more than before from the extra hours behind my desk.

“Well, I don’t know how this is going to work then,” Margot says, exasperated.

“What am I supposed to do about this, Margot? I’m working until 10:00 every night, we haven’t eaten out in months, the house only holds what’s absolutely necessary, what else is there for me to do?”

“Tell Tim to get his shit together and pull his weight around here.” Her bare feet pound out of the kitchen.

He’s supposedly still trying to find a job. He doesn’t go out looking anymore. He says he’s waiting for interviews, but our food still disappears more quickly than it should, and the water and electricity costs are still through the roof. It’s been eight months since his arrival; one
would think he would be used to having running water, yet I still have to wait hours every morning before I can shower for work...

Margot’s stomach protrudes like a globe from her maternity clothes, and she looks ready to burst, due in what, twelve days? She’s on maternity leave from work, still getting paid, and the compensation for Tim’s presence still deposits on the second day of every month. With gas prices skyrocketing and all these doctors and vitamins and ultrasounds, our incomes are really weighed down.

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There’s nothing left. I look at myself, and it looks as though I’ve aged ten years in two months. What happened to the blue eyes my wife fell in love with?

The baby’s eleven weeks old, and we’re out of diapers. My wallet’s empty, Margot’s is empty, the credit cards no longer work, and I’ll be damned if Tim helps pay for a thing around here. Our second notification about the mortgage being unpaid came right above our still unchanged compensation code in my inbox. Tim now has a driver’s license, so he’s using the car and gas and going to buy things that we don’t need. He still sits across from me with that bovine expression on his face, mouth slightly agape as he chews in a circular motion.

It’s Thursday night, 11:30, and I’ve just gotten home from work to find an exhausted Margot seated at the kitchen table, holding a crying Bobby. He’s a hard baby. He likes attention, and he likes crying. Tim barely helps. Margot drags a folder of bills across the touch screen, pauses, and drags our compensation file into the folder as well. She looks at me, that look of defeat in her eyes once again. She double taps the folder and opens a single bill: “The compensation covers half of this bill—the cheapest of them all.”

I put my head in my hands and rub my temples. I miss sleeping. Tim doesn’t; he’s asleep right now, that asshole. What does he even do all day? Eat our food? Our food we can’t pay for? That he buys more of? With our money? Our money that’s dwindling. Why is he our problem? Why do we have to pay for him? Why doesn’t he pay for us? Why doesn’t someone else pay for us...

”Why are we trying so hard, hun?”

“What?” Her tired eyes question me.

”Why are we trying so hard to keep up with all this? All this—shit.” I swipe through the folder with my palm, and error messages pop up. “We take care of Tim, right?”

”Yeah.”

”Why doesn’t he take care of us? Or why doesn’t someone else?” She looks down and back up, squinting, contemplating, what I’ve just said. “Why am I working fourteen hour work days when all that happens if we don’t pay the bills is we get kicked out?”

”Because we can’t afford to live on the streets, Rob.”

”We wouldn’t live on the streets, Margot. C.O.H.P. would just assign us to be someone else’s responsibility.”

”What?”

”That’s how it works, right? Homeless people get assigned to someone after three weeks of consistent non-residency? So we stay with my mom for three weeks, claiming homelessness, and get assigned to someone who has to take care of us. Tim’s not our responsibility, the house isn’t our responsibility, we’re not our responsibility…” Margot’s eyes land on mine when the thoughts lay to rest in her head.

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I look in the mirror, the circles under my eyes are deep, the lines on my face growing. My shoulders arch forward more than before, and my once blue eyes look grey. There’s a strange familiarity in the glazed eyes that stare back at me; the slightly agape mouth hangs. That recognizable expression that I just can’t quite put my finger on.

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**Aó Dài**  
_by Vy Dang_  
_Conard High School, grade 12_

Initially, the áo dài, or the “long dress” as it is called in English, was not something that I liked to wear. In my eyes, they made me look twice at my age and bloated in their fitted look. Year after year, my parents insisted that I wear it to all my piano recitals and school events. But because they do not always fit correctly, I would get away with wearing a typical summer dress to those functions. However, as I browsed through the numerous photo albums that lay around the house, I could not help but admire the pictures of my mom in her younger days in Vietnam, flaunting the simple, yet elegant dress. The pictures depicted young women, all dressed in traditional white Vietnamese uniforms, as they walked the city streets of Saigon. The gown with the two long slits on both sides flowed in the wind, revealing the silky trousers underneath.

I have seen the women in my family wear this dress to various family occasions. The áo dài is tailored to the woman’s figure. The collar is high, extending the neck to an upright position. With a steady hand, intricate designs are embroidered into the fresh silk; each dress is unique in their size and decoration. Each dress has a little surprise that draws you in whether it is the different color trim on the collar and sleeves, or the designs that line the train. All women in my family and all women in Vietnam wear each dress proudly. Although we are diverse in our background dreams, the dress is a symbol of unity, drawing us all together back to our roots.

Life throws various obstacles in our way, but the only solution is to be resilient and continue on. My family, although fortunate enough to be able to live in a comfortable life in Vietnam, took the risk of immigrating to the United States leaving behind literally everything they owned to start a new life. My mother arrived with my grandmother, with one suitcase shared between the two of them, not knowing the language. She made the choice to find numerous jobs to provide for her family instead of finishing her high school education. All of the sacrifices that my mom has made do not bring her down, but contribute to the experiences that make her stronger. Her strength helps me mature and learn to become more independent. It is from these stories that I am proud to flaunt my heritage and display it for others to see. With open arms, I am proud to embrace my Vietnamese tradition and culture. Through memories and stories of Vietnam, I was introduced to a greater understanding and a love for the history of my country and the history of my people. The áo dài not only symbolizes the timelessness of an ancient culture; it signifies who I am.

Quynh Anh sings her song, “I Say Gold,”
“You think yellow, I say gold.
It’s the color of my real skin.”

The Vietnamese culture is so rich like the color of our skin: the bamboo hats, the vast rice fields, pho (noodle soup), an example of the country’s delectable cuisine, and of course the
ao d’ai (long dress), the ultimate symbol of feminine nationality. The dress is a mark of elegance; it is down-to-earth, yet fierce. Understanding its significance in our heritage has helped me appreciate it more. I remember being embarrassed the first few times I wore it; but now, I can wear it with pride, proudly displaying the culture of my country with a new found appreciation for the roots that define me. All of my experiences, stories of my heritage, and my ambitions are all patches of my ao d’ai. We may be coming from all different backgrounds, and have different aspirations, but we are somehow all connected spiritually by this ordinary, humble dress.

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**It’s a Bird, It’s a Plane!**

*By Bryan Bliek*

*Rockville High School, grade 12*

Few today can resist the allure of superhumans and their high-octane exploits, their exotic locales, and their beautiful damsels in distress. Who are my superheroes? Who clearly stands for the betterment of mankind? My justice league, those who inspire me, those who would grace my personal Mount Rushmore are quite different than the larger-than-life, infallible heroes that occupy the American psyche.

Without a desire to *go boldly where no man has gone before*, the world around us would be unrecognizable. Perhaps the most courageous man within the last one hundred years was Mikhail Gorbachev, former General Secretary and President of the Soviet Union. Quickly ascending the ranks of the Communist Party, Gorbachev was an atypical politician who developed a maverick reputation characterized by “incorruptible honesty” (Achievement). Seeing his grandfather arrested, tortured, and imprisoned by the secret police, he experienced first-hand the abuses of the totalitarian regimes that dominated the state (Spartacus). This would define his later decisions; when elected into the post of General Secretary in 1985, he immediately began to challenge the status quo of corruption and political inefficiency, even as issues domestic and abroad mounted. Nonetheless, Gorbachev bravely continued forward and the late 1980s were marked by arms reduction talks with President Reagan, German reunification, and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, as well as the famous perestroika and glasnost directives (Britannica); respectively, these directives resulted in the democratization of the Soviet political system and increased individual freedoms for the public—such revolutionary actions.

However, they were not without consequence; by the time of his resignation and Soviet dissolution in 1991, Gorbachev had endured turmoil in the former Soviet satellites, economic collapse, and an attempted coup. (PBS) Thus, it certainly takes a particular caliber of man, a man of exceptional inner fortitude and unparalleled mental strength, to fight for the greater good at the cost of his own popularity and prestige.

“In the name of Communism we abandoned basic human values. So when I came to power in Russia I started to restore those values; values of ‘openness’ and freedom...My life’s work has been accomplished. I did all that I could.” - Mikhail Gorbachev

There is an old Latin phrase, “Si vis pacem, para bellum,” which states, “If one desires peace, prepare for war;” unfortunately, this adage is too often true. Change and violence go hand-in-hand, as evidenced by situations such as the ongoing Arab Spring. This, however,
makes instances of reform without bloodshed all the more extraordinary, and few have mastered the art of peaceful protest - *ahimsa* - like Mohandas Gandhi. Gandhi was first recognized as a great figure during his stay in South Africa where he, after witnessing the degradation of the local Indian populace, fought for the rights of his fellow expatriates (History; Lal). By 1922, Gandhi was an established name in his homeland; jumping from one endeavor to the next, he took issue with British colonialism, and he became a champion of Indian independence, which was realized in 1947, largely due to his nonviolent displays of civil disobedience. Meanwhile, he also used his immense charisma to better the lives of many of India’s downtrodden Dalits, or the caste system’s “untouchables,” and to improve Muslim-Hindu relations (History). In fact, he was so highly regarded by both factions that he was able to bring peace to religious riots in Calcutta merely by going on a hunger strike (Lal). As mentioned above, the common man often resorts to violence to accomplish his aims, and even the noblest superheroes rarely succeed without an errant punch or kick. Gandhi, the “Great Soul,” therefore, approaches transcendence of the definition as a shining beacon of ethical conduct.

> “Nonviolence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man.” - Mohandas Gandhi

The late 1990s marked the beginning of what has been deemed the “Age of Information,” and a vanguard of this movement was Steve Jobs. Hardship was an omnipresent part of his life; raised by a lower-middle class family, Jobs never had much money to spend, but he did eventually go to Reed College - a decision that he later called “naive” (Moisescot; Jobs). However, his time there was short lived; Jobs dropped out soon after enrolling and decided instead to pursue his interests, one of which was calligraphy. Thus, out of these inauspicious beginnings emerged the first instance of Steve Jobs’ triumphs through innovation; after meeting Steve Wozniak at the age of twenty and founding Apple Computer, the lessons he learned helped create the typography of the Macintosh computer, a product which would make him and his company extremely wealthy (Moisescot). By 1985, though, Steve Jobs, recent millionaire and computer *wunderkind* found himself in a rut once more; as a result of intracorporate power struggles, Jobs was fired from the very company he co-founded (Moisescot). Yet, he didn’t quit. Instead, he invested all of his time, effort, and money into new ventures: NeXT Computer and Pixar, which both became successful. After winning an Academy Award for *Toy Story*, Pixar’s reputation as the preeminent animation studio was firmly established, while NeXT was purchased for $400 million - by Apple (Moisescot; Jobs). Thus, Jobs returned to the company he had originally founded, and from 1996 until his death, he singlehandedly created the smartphone, tablet, MP3, and app industries and turned Apple into the most valuable company on Earth, even as pancreatic cancer withered away his body. The names of acclaimed innovators such as Tesla and Carnegie are immortalized in the titles of countless entities, their likenesses preserved in stone and sculpture; it would only be fitting to render the same treatment onto a man whose contributions were Promethean in impact.

> “Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower.” - Steve Jobs

The Bible had Samson, the Greeks had Achilles, and the Romans Hercules. Americans have Superman, or as he was known in real life, Christopher Reeve, who even off-stage, like the character he portrayed, was no ordinary person. Close analysis of Reeve’s biography (Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation) reveals that he was something of a Renaissance man.
He was learned, having studied at both Cornell and the illustrious Julliard School, and he was active, both physically and socially (Homepage). He often supported Democratic causes and took special interest in human rights (in the late 1990s, he helped secure the freedom of seventy-seven Chilean artists marked for death by the Pinochet regime) and the environment. It is common knowledge that in 1995, Reeve was paralyzed by an equestrian accident, but even as his body, once the epitome of the sculpted physique, degenerated, Superman never ceased being super. Once his condition stabilized, he used his celebrity status to raise millions of dollars for spinal cord injury research, testified before Congress in favor of increased health research and stem cell funding, and established his own research institution and organization (Biography).

"A hero is someone who, in spite of weakness, doubt or not always knowing the answers, goes ahead and overcomes anyway." - Christopher Reeve

Monuments of the scale and consequence of Mount Rushmore stand as a timeless testament to the creator’s personal ideals; they boldly proclaim to the world, “I was alive and I stood for this.” These are the individuals who inspire me, and these are the individuals who deserve only the highest commemorations and commendations. These are the people who I would want to represent who I am. Combining Gorbachev’s courage, Gandhi’s strength, Jobs’ innovation, and Reeve’s perseverance, I know what I stand for, what I will work for, and what I will live for: progress.

“What makes Superman a hero is not that he has power, but that he has the wisdom and the maturity to use the power wisely.” - Christopher Reeve

Works Cited


Design and Typography
Connecticut Writing Project—Storrs, 2014

Magazine Designer
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