

# Connecticut Student Writers



Luciana Mueller, Grade Five, Hall Memorial School, Willington

Volume XIX, May 2007

---

# Connecticut Student Writers

---

A publication sponsored by  
the Connecticut Writing Project at Storrs  
and the Aetna Endowment



## **Selection Committee**

Evangeline Abbott  
Kelly Andrews-Babcock  
Fran Cohen  
Joan Degen  
Lisa Higgins  
Nadine Keane

Donna Ozga  
Joanne Peluso  
Daria Plummer  
Laura Toffenetti  
Susan Zarbo

This publication was produced by the **Connecticut Writing Project at Storrs.**

Interim Director:      Laura Toffenetti

Program Assistant:      Sharlene Smith  
Graduate Assistant/Layout:      Jeanette Zissell

Department of English  
215 Glenbrook Road Unit 4025A  
University of Connecticut  
Storrs, CT 06269-4025  
(860) 486-2328  
(860) 486-1530 fax  
cwp@uconn.edu  
<http://www.cwp.uconn.edu>

# **FOREWORD**

*For in the true nature of things, if we rightly consider, every green tree is far more glorious than if it were made of gold and silver. ~ Martin Luther*

...as are the words of our children. This year student writers from throughout the state planted a glorious tree for us and foliated it with wondrous prose and breathtaking poetry. The roots of this tree are deep; more than 1100 students in kindergarten through grade twelve submitted pieces to be considered for the 2007 *Connecticut Student Writers* magazine. What follows are the pieces whose vibrant writing leapt off the page, whose poignant words resonated long after reading, and whose honest voices touched chords deep within the readers.

The Connecticut Writing Project invites you to share in the joy of writing that infuses the following pages.

Editor

*Nadine Keane*

Assistant Editors

*Evangeline Abbott*

*Kelly Andrews-Babcock*

*Lisa Higgins*

*Joanne Peluso*

*Daria Plummer*

*Laura Toffenetti*

*Susan Zarbo*

# Connecticut Student Writers

---

## *Contents:*

Finn McGannon, “January Leaves”	1
Olivia LaRosa, “Snowflakes”	1
Jocelyn Madden, “My Toy”	1
Joseph Hinckley, “My Swing”	1
Lindsey Riggles, “Love”	1
Dylan Marshall, “Camping”	2
Tanner Selmont, “Winter”	2
Ryan Guthrie, “My Mom’s Best Day Ever”	2
Aran Gillette, “First Grade School”	2
Jason Hanson, “My Snow Day”	3
Sagan Hayes, “If Luke Was a Custodian”	3
Abigail Eswarakumar, “Never Ending Dreams”	3
Justine Shikowitz, “One Kiss, One Hug”	4
David Landolfi, “Crystal Ball”	4
Clare Meehan, “The Pool Accident”	4
Cynthia Rodriguez, “The Strangest Dream”	6
Elena Hillery, “Isabella Going Camping”	6
Caroline Kantis, “Super Sib”	7
Jacob Ginden, “My Night With Aliens”	8
Emily Eisenhour, “Little Kit and the Great Spirit”	9
Emily Sandall, “Let Me Read”	10
Benjamin Rattet, “Anxious Poem”	11
Henry Crain, “Maple Trees”	11
Samantha Simoni, “Chainsaw’s Great Escape”	11
Justine Aulet, “Words Hurt”	12
Kelsey Duffy, “Makeup at Midnight”	13
Avantika Tankala, “The Murder of Johnathan Ludwig Donduci”	14
Rebecca Glass, “Puerto Rican Sunset”	18
Hugh Cipparone, “Memories of a Day on Long Lake”	18
Abigail Cipparone, “The Chicken Coop”	19
Hayley Reuben, “Shanson and Midnight”	20
Bridget Kelly, “Double Crown”	24
Kevin Kaufman, “The Fire”	25
Nia Clemons, “Beautiful Me”	28
Shea Echols, “The Red Wheelbarrow”	28
Ellerie Field, “The Cave”	29
Pieter Martino, “A Vacationer’s Witnessing of Navajo Suffering”	29
Richard Wenner, “A Dramatic Experience”	31
Patrick Driscoll, “Wipe out!”	32
Jacqueline Bickley, “When I Was a Pirate”	34

Dan McLoone, “The Wedding”	35
Shaifur Rahman, “I am From”	36
Michael Lee, “How to Survive Boy Scout Camp”	37
Cristina Macklem, “The Teasers”	38
Amy Tomasso, “In the Fire’s Shadow: One Survivor’s Story”	40
Greta Grant, “Sitting Above the Clouds”	41
Parker Aubin, “The Defining Moment”	43
Brittany Cruz, “Can I Call You my Friend?”	44
Erik VanBezooijen, “Email”	44
Leila Fletcher, “Sue”	47
Perri DiChristina, “Heartbeat”	48
Laura Paik, “When She’s in Love”	50
Elissa Levine, “Writer’s Block”	52
Hannah Sikand, “Invisible”	53
Anna Nassiff, “Umbrella”	54
Deidra Berthod, “Good Idealists”	55
Maggie Hendrickson, “Wings”	57
Jared Fischer, “What a Sight!”	61
Adrienne Isaacson, “Firefly Nights”	62
Victoria Helwig, “Graceful Garden”	63
Anne Skelding, “Shadow Play”	64
Sydney Pierce, “Something on the Rocks”	65
Evelyn Herazo, “The Introvert Always Runs from Something”	67
Ashley Okuwazi, “Born in a World I’ve Never Seen”	68
Katelyn Lovejoy, “Solace”	70
Melanie Lieberman, “Tonight the Womb Will Tingle With Future Speech”	71
Annie Bass, “Over Your Head”	72
Heather Nielsen, “Snowflake”	74
Amy Riccio, “After Visiting Barnes and Noble”	76
Mara Dauphin, “Rapunzel, Samson, and the Banyan Tree”	78
Stefanie Kocian, “For the Peach Fuzz, Especially”	79
Rachel Norman, “Fifty-Two Years”	80
Khanh-Anh Le, “How to Eat a Bowl of Pho Ga Properly in the Le Household”	81
Kelly Shea, “The Whistler”	83
Zachary Goodwin, “Down the Hill, Up the Stairs”	85
Molly LaFlesh, “James vs. Pac Man”	86
Julia Neusner, “My Friend from the Summer”	87
Kate Gibson, “Untitled”	88
Honorable Mentions	90
Teachers of Published Authors	92



## January Leaves

The leaves are twirling,  
Over to their pile of friends;  
The leaves are swirling,  
Over to their pile of friends.

The leaves are blowing,  
Over to their pile of friends;  
The leaves are flowing,  
Over to their pile of friends

## Snowflakes

Snowflakes fall gently down  
They look like a crown  
Shining, sparkling and glistening all around.

## My Toy

My Toy  
Huggable, Cute  
I love my  
Teddy Bear

## My Swing

I want to go onto my swing.  
I like it when it goes high.

## Love

Love comes from all around the world.  
Love enters my heart from your words.  
Love comes from me and you.  
Love is everywhere.  
Love declares my name and yours  
and it was guaranteed  
long ago.

**Finn  
McGannon**  
Kindergarten  
Daisy Ingraham  
Elementary  
School  
Westbrook

**Olivia  
LaRosa**  
Kindergarten  
Philip R. Smith  
School  
South Windsor

**Jocelyn  
Madden**  
Kindergarten  
Killingly  
Memorial  
School  
Danielson

**Joseph  
Hinckley**  
Kindergarten  
Deans Mill  
School  
Stonington

**Lindsey  
Riggles**  
Grade 1  
Tootin' Hills  
School  
West Simsbury



**Dylan  
Marshall**  
Grade 1  
Daisy  
Ingraham  
Elementary  
School  
Westbrook

**Tanner  
Selmont**  
Grade 1  
Daisy  
Ingraham  
Elementary  
School  
Westbrook

**Ryan  
Guthrie**  
Grade 1  
North Street  
School  
Windsor Locks

**Aran  
Gillette**  
Grade 1  
North Street  
School  
Windsor Locks

## Camping

Fires crackling  
Leaves falling  
Animals growling  
People eating.

## Winter

I see—  
snowflakes falling  
down the chimney.  
I hear—  
Santa saying,  
“ho, ho, ho.”  
I taste—  
snowflakes  
in my mouth.  
I feel—  
the cold snow.

## My Mom’s Best Day Ever

On Tuesday me and my dad went out to get my mommy flowers.  
I asked the man if he could give us color flowers and he said “Sure, little  
guy.”  
So that’s what we got.  
Then I gave it to my mom and she said, “Oh my goodness! Thank you  
guys!”  
“You’re welcome,” we said.

## First Grade School

School! First Grade!  
This is my class! My teacher is Ms. Everett. I sit by the dot. Let’s get stuff to  
draw and trace. We sit on the risers to sing in music. Here is the library where I  
get Jack and Annie’s books.  
I love school!!

## My Snow Day

One day my mom and dad woke me up and they said, “No school!” because it was a snow day.

First, I saw my dad’s truck. The wheels were stuck in the snow. Next, I got a shovel and dug my dad’s truck out. Then I dug a big hole. Wow! It was 40 feet deep. I will use it as a trap when I play with my friends.

Then I went inside and I had some hot cocoa. I went back outside again and guess what I did? I buried myself in the snow. No one could find me. It was the best snow day.

## If Luke Was a Custodian

If Luke was a  
custodian he’d be the  
best one yet. He’d twirl around  
on spills, though never get  
all wet. If Luke was a custodian,  
he’d fix chairs in a hurry.  
Though Luke is no custodian,  
he’s just a Star Wars fan.

## Never Ending Dreams

Dreams never end.  
They flow through your mind.  
They bounce back and forth  
and can be any kind.

Dreams may seem real.  
Dreams make us think,  
but when you wake up,  
they’re gone in a blink.

**Jason  
Hanson**  
Grade 1  
Broad Brook  
Elementary  
School  
Broad Brook

**Sagan  
Hayes**  
Grade 2  
Southeast  
Elementary  
School  
Mansfield

**Abigail  
Eswarakumar**  
Grade 2  
Worthington  
Hooker School  
New Haven

**Justine  
Shikowitz**  
Grade 2  
Coleytown  
Elementary  
School  
Westport

## **One Kiss, One Hug**

Kiss from Mom  
hug from Dad  
they leave the room  
that special feeling  
left inside me  
lights out  
darkness covers my room  
like a blanket  
but  
my heart  
lights it up

**David  
Landolfi**  
Grade 2  
Worthington  
Hooker  
Elementary  
School  
New Haven

## **Crystal Ball**

Come, come and hear your future.  
It could be really great.  
All you have to do  
is sit right down and wait.  
I will look into my crystal ball  
and tell you what I see:  
a fortune, a job, a brand new life!  
Just listen to me. You'll see.

**Clare  
Meehan**  
Grade 2  
East Farms  
School  
Farmington

## **The Pool Accident**

"I bet I can swim faster than you to the life guard chair," I said as Jessica and I were in the field club pool one Thursday afternoon on a bright summer day.

Jessica is one of my best friends, and she can be a little loud. Sometimes, especially when we're in the pool, Jessica can be a little bit wild and crazy. When we're with my sisters, they usually hang out in the shallow end with my youngest sister, Cecily, since she's not really a good swimmer yet. That makes Jessica even louder than usual since she has to yell across the pool.

We were jumping. Splash, splash, splash! In the pool, out of the pool, in the pool, out of the pool... we were out of the pool, and I was about to jump when Jessica dared me to do a twist jump into the pool. I felt nervous about this.

First I said, "I'm not too sure about that dare, Jessica." Then I smelled the pool air and thought how exciting it might be to try a new jump.

I thought in my head, "You can get hurt doing that if you haven't done it

before.” A big pit started to grow in my stomach, and my teeth began to chatter a lot. I began to wonder if I should or not.

But then the answer just popped right out of my mouth! “All right! I’ll do it! But I’m not a very good swimmer. But still, I’m not too sure about it.”

I guess I was thinking in my head for a while.

Then Jessica screamed, “Do you want to do it?”

I thought in my head for a little while and I had to say, “Of course, best friends have to do what they’re told!” (I always said that when I was little.)

So I did what I was told—I did a twist jump into the pool. Then, just then, something happened.

Since I wasn’t that good of a swimmer, and I always held onto the pool, I started too close to the edge of the pool, and... something happened—something no one was expecting.

I split my chin open. I screamed so loud that the whole field club heard me. I screamed louder than I ever did before.

The first thought I had in my head was, “Do I have to be her friend anymore?” I know it was a silly question, but it was the question that was in my head. My mom and dad came rushing over.

“WAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!!!” I cried even harder as they came towards me. Mom grabbed me out of the pool and Dad ran frantically to find a doctor.

Jessica was nowhere to be found. I bet she was feeling pretty bad.

By the time I was in my mom’s lap, not crying, it was five o’clock in the afternoon. It seemed like forever that I had been crying and waiting for help to come. Finally my dad came, huffing and puffing, with the doctor following close behind. The doctor took a look at my chin and whispered something to my parents. Then she padded up my chin with cotton and gauze and suggested that I go to the hospital for stitches.

At the hospital we waited in the children’s emergency room for a few minutes. I held the cotton on my chin tightly and waited for my name to be called. At last a friendly nurse came and took me to Room 5. I sat down on a long cushioned table and waited for a doctor to come.

Finally, a tall, gray-haired doctor walked in and said, “Hi, my name is Dr. Stock.”

He rubbed some medicine on my chin so that I wouldn’t feel anything and patted it dry. Once it was numb, Dr. Stock started stitching my chin. It looked like little tiny butterflies sewn into my skin. It wasn’t such a beautiful sight, though, since it was skin colored and a little bloody with an outline of black.

About a week later, I got the stitches out of my chin. But the scar has never gone away. Every day when I look in the mirror, I see the white scar on my chin and think to myself, “If someone ever dares me to do something that I don’t want to do, I am going to trust my own thoughts and make a good decision!”

**Cynthia  
Rodriguez**  
Grade 2  
Rotella  
Interdistrict  
Magnet School  
Waterbury

## **The Strangest Dream**

One night I had the strangest dream. There was something wrong in my room. POP! Suddenly there was a monkey in my room. It ripped all my books, and it tormented all my toys. It was a horrible creature. He took me out of the house and into the forest. It was full of snakes and zebras.

“What is this place?” I asked myself.

“This is the rain forest,” the monkey explained.

“You can talk?” I asked.

“Yes, all the monkeys can talk here,” he said.

I thought I was dreaming about a talking monkey. The monkey explained that it was not a dream. Just then, the monkey started swinging from vine to vine. He thought that was exciting because that’s what monkeys do, right?

I went from vine to vine, too. One vine was really a snake. The snake popped his head out from the trees and tried to grab me with his big, large teeth. I jumped off of the vine from behind the snake and fell into a lake.

I called for the monkey, but he was so far away he couldn’t hear me. But something else did hear me. It was an elephant. He called the other elephants with a large blow from his trunk. It was louder than you could ever believe.

Elephants came charging from all around. Some were humongous and some were just large. One elephant put his trunk into the water and pulled me to safety. I said thank you to the elephants. They flapped their ears, and I knew they said, “You’re welcome.”

Finally I caught up to the monkey. Then I said, “I’d like to find my way back home.” The monkey gave me a banana instead. When I took a bite from the banana, purple smoke came out and made me fall asleep. When I woke up, the monkey was gone, and I was in my bed. The only thing I saw was my stuffed monkey swinging from my light. I thought this was the most exciting dream I had ever had, and I knew I would never forget that rain forest monkey.

## **Isabella Going Camping**

One Friday (it was 2:00 p.m.), Isabella and Neilley were packing for summer camp. They were going together. Isabella was driving. She was 16 years old. She had her driver’s license. So then they were driving and got there. They smelled the fresh air.

Isabella said, “Don’t you love the fresh air?”

“Of course!” said Neilley.

They set up their tents and made a fire.

Isabella said, “Look at those stars!”

Neilley said, “Aren’t they beautiful?”

And their dogs came with them. Their names are Molly and Annabelle.

**Elena  
Hillery**  
Grade 2  
North Street  
School  
Windsor Locks

After they sang the camp songs, they went to bed, but they shouldn't have. At that moment a bear was coming, and he was hungry. He came to their tent when they were asleep. The bear stole all the food from their packs— cakes and sandwiches.

And then the bear tried to blow out the fire. When he did, he roared and it woke up the girls, and they scared him away with some hot tea. And then they had a midnight snack. And then they went to bed.

The next day they had to go home. Neilley was driving home. They both took turns driving there and going home. They drove home and got a snack and had a sleepover that night.

## Super Sib

“Quack! Quack!”

I, Caroline Kantis, was at the park with my two-year old Super Sib Sophie, who doubles as my annoying little sister. The only problem was my Super Sib Sophie was pulling out the ducks' feathers and sticking them in my shirt. So for payback, I dumped water all over her head.

“Mmm, nnn, uh,” said Sophie. And just when you think she learned her lesson, she filled up another bucket of water and dumped it on my shorts.

I dunked her in the pond. Super Sib went all the way in. Ducks started quacking and honking at the invader. I started writing in my notebook, and here's what I wrote:

*I will never forget this wonderful moment.*

The light was soon fading, so I took my Super Sib out of the pond and walked home with her. By the time we got home, the feathers flew out of my shirt, and my sister was dry.

My mom asked me, “How was your day at the park?”

“Oh, fine,” I said, looking at Sophie accessorizing herself with mashed potato and giggling.

Looking at Sophie's accessories made me hungry, so I ate my mashed potato without having Sophie stick feathers down my shirt.

Later, it was bath time. Rubber ducks were everywhere. I hopped in, but Sophie thought she was back at the pond.

She threw herself on the carpet. She covered her face and sobbed.

“No bath, no bath! Duckies bite me!”

I tried not to laugh.

Mom asked, “What's so funny?”

“Oh, I don't know,” I said, squeezing the duck and remembering.

“Quack,” the duck squeaked.

**Caroline**

**Kantis**

Grade 3

Irving Robbins

Middle School

Farmington

**Jacob  
Ginden**  
Grade 3  
Eric G.  
Norfeldt  
School  
West Hartford

## **My Night With the Aliens**

BANG! I woke up right away.

“I still think we should conquer the universe, Pork,” something said.

“No way, Zork,” said Pork.

Pork and Zork stepped out of a tiny space ship. I hid behind my bed.

“Hey kid, get back here!” said Pork and Zork together.

There was a hole in my wall, and two strange beings were on my bedroom floor.

“Who are you guys? Are you nice? What are you?” I asked.

“This is Zork and I’m Pork. We’re aliens and yes, I’m nice,” said the alien on the right.

“I’m nice, too,” said Zork, sarcastically.

The aliens looked like green creatures with helmets on and had antennas. Zork’s right antenna was bigger than his left antenna. Pork’s antennas were the same size. The aliens were about 12 inches tall. Both looked like squids.

“I’m wasting time here. I’m off to rule the universe!” Zork, the bad alien said as he ran away.

“We’ll have to catch Zork before he can do any damage to your planet,” said Pork, “Zork is bad because Dad always liked me best. We crashed our spaceship because he drove and doesn’t have his flying license.”

Pork jumped into the spaceship. “Come on in,” he said.

“Wait a minute, Pork. How am I going to fit in that small spaceship? It’s only two feet tall,” I said.

“Not to worry, just touch it,” said Pork.

“Okay,” I said, and I shrank.

“Wow! That was cool!” I said. And the chase was on.

CLICK. I buckled my seat belt and VROOM VROOM, the engine started.

“You want to drive?” asked Pork.

“I’d be delighted! But how do you drive?” I asked him.

“It’s easy, just play this guitar,” he said.

“Okay.”

Wow, wow, wow wow wow, la la la, la la la, la la la. I played the opening riff of the Iron Man song and off we went!

“Let’s find Zork!” said Pork.

“ZORK IS AT WALMART OF EARTH,” said the radar.

“Let’s go to Walmart!” Pork and I said together.

The ride was bumpy as we glided through the air, but yet very awesome! We crashed into Walmart.

We abandoned the space ship, and immediately I got bigger.

“Wa Ha Ha,” laughed Zork hysterically.

“He’s right there!” said Pork.

“Let’s get him,” I said.

“Gotcha!” yelled Pork, “You’re going to get in so much trouble with Dad

when we get home!”

“Nooooooo, I’ll be back. Ha ha ha ha!” laughed and screamed Zork.

We got the stuff we needed from Walmart to fix the spaceship. The aliens dropped me off at my house. Before they left, they fixed the hole in my wall. I was so tired I fell asleep right away. In the morning I woke up. Everything looked normal.

“I must have been dreaming,” I said, “or was I?”

## **Little Kit and the Great Spirit**

A long time ago there was a beautiful Indian. She lived in thick woods on a small island. Her name was Little Kit. She was the daughter of Chief Nintakwans. Little Kit had long black hair and wore the finest deerskin skirt and shirt. She had the fluffiest bear skin moccasins and lived in the second biggest wigwam. Only the chief’s was bigger. She had many, many friends. Even though Little Kit was a princess, she still had to work with the older women because everybody did their fair amount of chores. She cleaned and packed meat, picked corn, made clothes, and helped make baskets.

Then one sunny day, great news started to spread. The birth of a new child! Chief Nintakwans and Little Kit’s mother were having it. Little Kit was delighted, but then things began to change. The women began to make new papooses. The men began to make new bows and arrows. The kids made more dolls. Everybody was getting ready for the new baby, but Little Kit began to feel weird inside. She felt nauseous like she was going to throw up. She tried to ignore it, but she could not. It got worse and worse. Something was calling her. Something wanted her to go into the woods.

One day after the baby was born, it was announced that a ceremony would be held in Chief Nintakwans’ wigwam. Little Kit ran to her wigwam. She looked in a basket made of dried grass. It was the color of the sun. Little Kit reached in the basket. She pulled berry purple beads out and braided them into her hair. Her mother stepped in the doorway.

“Little Kit,” said her mother, “go help the older women make baskets. The ceremony is at night.”

Little Kit sighed and walked out of the wigwam.

She stumbled past her father’s wigwam. He was putting on a huge headdress with blue jay feathers in it. One big cardinal feather in the middle waved in the gentle breeze. Little Kit giggled. Her father looked so silly with the cardinal feather drooping.

Little Kit trailed into the forest. Something was telling her to do that instead of working. Pretty soon she met a man who looked tired. He sat near an old, broken lodge. A gray wolf skin robe was wrapped around his body. It looked new. He had white deer skin moccasins. His face was wrinkled. Little Kit told the man to come back to the village with her, but the man said no.

“I am the Great Spirit,” he said.

**Emily  
Eisenhauer**  
Grade 3  
Louis Toffolon  
School  
Plainville



Little Kit gasped and said, “You’re... the Great Spirit!” The weird feeling in her stomach had led her straight to him.

“Yes, I am,” the Great Spirit said, “Now listen to me. I am running out of power. I make millions of deer a day, but the hunters kill them.”

“So?” said Little Kit, “You can make more.”

“No,” said the Great Spirit, “The new baby will grow up to kill the last deer.” The Great Spirit’s long white hair blew in his face with anger.

Little Kit ran home. She told everybody about what she saw. They decided that the new baby, Little Wolf, would be a medicine man because they didn’t want him to kill the last deer. He became the best medicine man in their tribe’s history.

The hunters promised not to kill as many deer, only as many as they needed.

The next day Little Kit went back into the woods. She noticed there were many more deer in the forest. She walked to the place where she saw the Great Spirit, but nothing was there. She was disappointed because she wanted to thank him for telling her about Little Wolf killing the last deer. She wanted to tell him that Little Wolf will become a medicine man instead of a hunter. She also wanted to tell him about the hunters not hunting as many deer. She would never forget talking with the Great Spirit.

**Emily  
Sandall**  
Grade 3  
Southeast  
Elementary  
School  
Mansfield

## Let Me Read

Give me some peace and quiet,  
give me some time to read.  
Give me a book about dragons,  
it’s all I’ll ever need.

Give me the gift of a daydream,  
with magical creatures galore.  
Unicorns with golden horns,  
I’ll always seem to want more.

If I get the book I desire,  
I must quickly take a look.  
Nothing’s as good, I must admit  
as a long and well-written book.

## Anxious Poem

A mouse trying to get home, away from a cat chasing him  
A fish swimming away from a hook  
A squirrel trying to gather nuts before winter  
A monkey racing another monkey for bananas  
And me, racing down the football field, hoping to score a touchdown

## Maple Trees

I'm sorry you get a hole drilled into you almost every year.  
You may think it is strange that we let your blood run into a bucket  
and spread it on our pancakes.

## Chainsaw's Great Escape

"Where's Chainsaw?"

Sarah looked at me; I could tell what she was trying to say by looking at her eyes. She knew that she had *accidentally* left a 19-year-old cat outside unsupervised. My Mom, Dad, sister, and I all knew that Chainsaw would run away if she was left alone outside.

My Mom's face turned white, then red, "Sara Elizabeth Hoffman Simoni, are you telling me that you left that cat outside?!"

My sister decided not to answer. Instead, she just nodded her head. I could see the tears swelling up in her eyes. I could also feel them in mine.

Chainsaw was the most important thing to me. The worst part was, it was garbage night. That meant raccoons and foxes. A long time ago, Chainsaw got in a fight with a raccoon—and lost.

The next thing Sarah did was run out the door. My mom ran out after her. A few seconds later, I scampered out, too. Sarah ran around the house calling her name. I guess we had run around about seven times. I couldn't wait anymore; I had to find Chainsaw NOW!!!! It was getting dark, and we still hadn't found Chainsaw.

"We'll find her, I know it." I was trying to stay positive.

"Face it, Samantha, Chainy's a goner." Sarah was always thinking negatively. "Mom, have you seen her yet?"

I waited for an answer.

"No, not yet."

Chainy had never run away before. Soon, my mom called the Phelps to see if they could help. I thought to myself, "I don't think the Phelps want to help." I mean, they were eating dinner. But I guess they said yes because they all ran outside.

We looked in bushes, behind rocks, under the shed and deck. No matter

**Benjamin  
Rattet**

Grade 3  
A.W. Cox  
Elementary  
School  
Guilford

**Henry Crain**

Grade 3  
Juliet W. Long  
School  
Gales Ferry

**Samantha  
Simoni**

Grade 4  
Wolcott School  
West Hartford

**Justine  
Aulet**  
Grade 4  
Hanmer  
Elementary  
School  
Wethersfield

how hard we looked, we couldn't find her. Sara *thought* it was all her fault that Chainy ran away. One hour passed. No one had seen or heard Chainy. I was hoping we would find her soon. The wind blew hard. I was afraid she would freeze to death, or catch cold or— wait, I'm being negative.

"Sarah, Samatha, go inside and finish your homework."

I thought to myself "Mom is being so unfair." But, I walked up to the back door anyway and took my homework out of my backpack. I couldn't really concentrate because my Mom wouldn't let me help look. After I finished my math, I read a book. Then my Mom walked in. She was holding something in her arms.

"CHAINY!!!" I yelled.

My mom put her down.

"Don't bother her, she's been through a lot tonight."

I ran and sat next to her. I read a book about cats to her. I guess she liked it because she started to purr. I couldn't believe we found HER!!!

*In loving memory of Chainsaw Hammer Simoni 1987-November 14, 2006*

## Words Hurt

"You are so fat!"

Am I really? I never knew that about myself. When I look in the mirror, I see a pretty, smart, funny girl. I have to tell you, growing up is so hard sometimes.

WORDS HURT! I cry in my pillow. My tears are hot and wet, and no matter how I try, they just would not stop. My mom holds me and tells me I am beautiful. I want to believe that. I want to believe that all the mean people in the world will be sucked up and put on an island until they behave and learn that WORDS HURT!

I scream inside! It feels like a big, giant rock is sitting on my heart. I wonder if this is how it feels when your heart breaks? I do not like this.

Not one bit. Mom says this is an important lesson in my hands. She says I need to dry my tears and set the world straight, one person at a time. But how will I know who my real friends are, and who are the people who will choose to hurt me? I guess that does not matter at this point.

What matters is that I know first hand: WORDS HURT and I will let people know that one by one. I will share my story with the girl who makes fun of another because of the clothes she wears. I will let the boy next to me know that if he excludes someone from his basketball game, IT HURTS! No more hurt. NO MORE! I will stand up for all the people who are about to have hurtful words tossed their way. If I can change one person's mind about being mean, I have done my job.

## Makeup at Midnight

“They have to be asleep by now,” I thought. Besides, after a long day at the lake in New Hampshire with ten kids, the moms have to be pooped. It’s just after midnight, 12:37 AM, to be exact.

“Now let’s move, sisters! Time for payback, girly style,” exclaimed Cate.

I giggled softly as I crept up the stairs to the sleeping loft with the other girls tiptoeing behind me. Suddenly a gasp came from behind Abby, followed by a faint smack. I whirled around, and to my surprise, Callie had dropped the makeup bag. Jars and tubes with fancy French words on them spread across the floor.

“Thank goodness for the carpet,” I said under my breath.

By the time we reached the middle stair, it felt like we had been climbing for hours. The next few stairs went by quicker, almost like riding up an escalator. Finally we reached the top, just a few steps away from our target: our smelly brothers.

Next, we had to face the challenge of getting past Mimi and Caroline, my mom’s old college friends. I couldn’t help but to stop and look at them. Their hair was piled on top of their heads with the biggest, brightest curlers I had ever seen, and to top it off they were wearing what looked like green yogurt on their faces.

After watching them for about a minute, we got back into action. We tried getting past them in lots of different ways. We tiptoed. We crawled. We inched. We edged. We even tried rolling on our backs like the spies on TV. I made sure to jump or step over the creaky floor board, which was an easy find because we had lined it with glow-in-the-dark tape the afternoon before.

When I reached the bed of our first victim, Patrick, Cate and Callie’s brother, my hands felt numb. I was so nervous! In my mind I could see my mom scolding me for what I was about to do. More than anything, I was afraid of her pursed lips and the “you-should-be-ashamed-of-yourself” look on her face. I also didn’t want to be grounded for a week, but the hushed whisper of the girls behind me wiped those visions from my mind.

I plunged my hand into the makeup bag, desiring not to make any noise by rattling any containers of cream or makeup. I thought I had pulled out the glitter, so I nervously started applying the gooey, sticky stuff to his eyelids, using the gentle touch that my sister recommended during our sneak attack practice session and dress rehearsal earlier that day. I even put some under his nose to look like a sparkling mustache!

Next, I added old, clumpy mascara, eye shadow, and eyeliner. When I shined a dim flashlight over his face to check the results, I realized that apparently the cosmetic that I thought was sparkles turned out to be an unidentified pitch black, gooey substance. “Oh well,” I thought, “it may not look right, but it does look funny.” The other girls were decorating the three other boys in a similar fashion.

**Kelsey  
Duffy**  
Grade 4  
Samuel B.  
Webb  
Elementary  
School  
Wethersfield

“Quick,” Callie called, “Two minutes until my mom wakes up to check on Baby Jack.” Two minutes, that wasn’t a lot of time. I just had to finish the eyes...

Done! I rushed over to the stairs where my partners in crime, my three girl friends and my older sister, were waiting for me. We hurried down the stairs, but quietly. When we reached the bottom of the first staircase, we heard Caroline’s alarm clock go off and a groan. We sprinted down the stairs as fast as we could.

We tiptoed back into our room and bolted under the covers. Callie sprang up the ladder to the top bunk as I pulled the covers over my head, trying to take them from Abby and Cate, my sleeping companions on the air mattress. My sister Megan poked me on the head and mumbled in a sleepy tone, “Go to sleep.” I guess somebody was tired after our adventure upstairs.

The next morning, I woke up to an annoying bluebird chirping outside the window. Then I remembered the night before: the sneaking, the green goo on our moms’ faces, the attack, and the fear of being grounded or chores, chores, chores for the remaining time of summer vacation. I jumped out of bed and shook the other girls awake. We frantically brushed our teeth and hair and bolted into the living room.

And that’s when we saw our victims. They all had funny drawings all over their faces. I thought Bailey, my little brother and Abby’s victim, looked the most hilarious. Bailey had sparkles, goo, and eye shadow smeared all over his forehead. There were pink dots on his ears to look like earrings, and he even had red lipstick swirls all over his neck, face, and hands.

“Hi guys,” I said, casually trying to hide my giggle.

“Oh, you better be sorry! This isn’t funny!” screamed Patrick.

“Yes it is,” replied Abby.

Zoning out, I didn’t seem to notice Bailey dash out the door and grab a bucket of ice cubes from the cooler. I was too busy wondering how the boys would get revenge. I had no idea that a moment later I would find out. Boom! Dump! Shudder! My brother had dumped ice cubes on my head, as revenge.

“Great,” I muttered.

After that amazing night and morning, I discovered that you have to take it if you want to give it. I still think it was worth it, because the girls and I had the laughs of our lives.

## **The Murder of Johnathan Ludwig Donduci**

It was late November, past midnight, on Parker Brook Lane. You could hear a pin drop— if it wasn’t for the cooing of pigeons coming from Number 13.

Number 13 was a tall, young man about 26 years old. His name, Johnathan Ludwig Donduci, was part Hebrew, part German, and part Italian. John owned a farm adjacent to Parker Brook. He earned most of his living from vegetables he grew and the animals he raised. It was a good business, but just in case of a

drought, he also worked part-time as a cook at a big house nearby. The wealthy owner of the house, Luke Moncuni, owned a large market in town. His daughter, Kelly, was fond of John and often visited him. They liked to send messages to each other through John's pigeons. John didn't know it, but Kelly was a little afraid of her father.

Luke Moncuni was a mysterious man. No one ever knew what he was thinking. Children were often scared of him and thought that he was from Transylvania. He wore black robes that scraped the floor. He walked swiftly and always looked straight ahead. He had a cold, hollow voice and didn't talk much to anybody.

John Donduci loved children and they loved him. In fall, they buried him in leaves and had snowball fights in winter. In summer, he took them swimming and let them feed the animals in spring.

If you went to the marketplace, one store would stick out. The Moncuni market was nearly empty, while the Donduci market was overflowing with people. If you looked at the scene closely, the Donduci Market was happier than the Moncuni Market. People were chatting joyfully as the cash register was clinking away.

Luke Moncuni, however, was not happy that the Donduci Market was taking away his customers. He put up signs that said, "Moncuni Market, Best Products You Could Get." He offered sales, discounts, and even "buy one, get three free deals." But no one paid attention. They knew that these deals were useless since his products were so bad. Luke was desperate for more customers.

On Thanksgiving Day the Moncunis were having a feast. John was eating breakfast before going to his farm. Suddenly the phone rang. It was Luke, who sounded exhausted. He asked John to come to the house. He explained that they were having a Thanksgiving feast, and that his everyday cook could not make it. John agreed to come. He quickly got dressed, jumped into his car and drove to the Moncunis.

At the Moncunis, tons of food needed to be prepared—pies, chicken, and every dish that you could imagine (and even some dishes that you couldn't imagine). John set to work right away. Finally, as he finished the last dish, the first guests arrived. Luke burst through the kitchen door and asked John to stay for the feast. The food was splendid and the wine excellent. Luke offered John a special glass of wine, saying it was for helping him. Feeling a little queasy, John left the feast and drove home. On his way, he gazed into the rear view mirror and saw the Moncuni's fancy car following him. He got a little suspicious but thinking about it made him queasier, so he pushed it out of his mind and reached home.

As soon as he reached home, John felt like he had an upset stomach. He threw up just as he was about to lie down in bed. Later, he tried to remember what had just happened. That's it! He had gone to the Moncunis, and Luke had offered him wine, which had made him queasy. He tried to think what might have been in the wine because he was an excellent drinker. Suddenly, he

remembered the Moncuni's car following him home. Maybe Luke had done something to the drink. John realized that Luke had never liked him. He rushed to the phone and picked it up to call Kelly, but he stopped. Who knew who would pick it up? He ran to his writing desk and picked up his quill and began a letter to Kelly. He finished the letter and tied it to one of his pigeons. It was pure white with brown splotches. John watched as the pigeon flew off into the night time sky. Then he went inside and collapsed on the living room floor.

• • •

Kelly was sitting on her bed, gazing out the window. A pure white pigeon with brown splotches appeared in view. Kelly leapt up, recognizing John's pigeon. It landed on the windowsill and started pecking on the glass. Kelly opened the window. The pigeon hopped inside. Kelly eagerly untied the note from its leg and began to read:

*Dear Kelly,*

*I don't want to scare you or anything, but I think someone poisoned me at the feast. I won't say who in case this letter is intercepted. Please try to help me even though there may be nothing much you can do. The poison will probably take a while to act, but I still will probably die. Goodbye Kelly, for this is probably my last letter to you.*

*John*

*P.S. Your father gave me a glass of Sangiovese.*

Kelly's smile faded and dread spread across her face. She rushed to the door. Just as she opened it, Luke walked down the hall. Kelly backed into her room. Everything in her mind went fuzzy and she fainted.

John's farm boy, Jake Jackson, always came early in the morning to feed the animals. When he came in the Friday after Thanksgiving, John was not there to greet him. He went inside and was shocked to see the dead body of Johnathan Ludwig Donduci. Jake immediately called the police. Soon sirens sounded on Parker Brook Lane.

• • •

Officer Smith burst into John's house. He looked around. All he saw was John's body, Jake standing there awestruck, and some muddy footprints. Nothing interesting.

Officer Smith was known for his sharp mind and keen observation. He started 'clue-hunting,' as he called it. He studied and measured the footprints and took samples of the mud. Very quickly, he realized that it could be anybody's footprints, including John himself. He took off John's shoes and placed them on top of the footprints. He immediately saw the similarities. They were John's footprints. It was a false clue. He followed the footprints outside to John's pigeon coop and back inside straight to John's body.

Then Officer Smith walked into John's bedroom. The blankets were a bit dry, but wait! One part of the dry patch was a different color. Some sort of liquid must have dried up there. After he studied it closely, he found that it was throw-up. He ran tests on it and found that it was wine— wine with poison mixed into it. This particular wine— *Sangiovese*— was made by Adams Wine Shoppe. Officer Smith decided to pay them a visit.

The manager of Adams Wine Shoppe said that the last customer who had ordered *Sangiovese* was someone that John wouldn't know. They went back through the list till they found someone that John would know. The seventeenth person on the list was Luke Moncuni.

Officer Smith immediately went to the Moncuni's. He knocked on the door, and Kelly answered it. She was holding a pigeon with brown splotches. The officer recognized it as one of John's pigeons and asked Kelly where she had gotten it. Kelly looked frightened and mumbled, and so the officer knew that she was hiding something. Luke was casual and answered all the questions, as if nothing had happened. Because of that attitude, he became a prime suspect, along with Kelly.

Officer Smith next visited people in John's street. They told him that the Donduci Market was doing a lot better than the Moncuni Market and that Luke didn't want any competition. Smith found out that John had gone to the Moncuni's the day of his death. Someone also said that Kelly and John were good friends. Officer Smith knew that this took Kelly off his list of suspects. And if Luke did kill John, then he knew exactly why and how he had done it.

Officer Smith rushed to the Moncuni's to question Kelly again. When officer Smith told Kelly why he was there, she led him to a quiet room and gave him a sheet of paper. Officer Smith began to read...

• • •

Luke was working on his Blackberry, day dreaming about the customers he would now get. Suddenly, Officer Smith burst through the door, yelling, "You are under arrest for the murder of Johnathan Ludwig Donduci!"

• • •

AFTER...

Luke was sentenced to prison for 10 years. Kelly took over the Donduci market and farm. Officer Smith was awarded a medal of honor for his clever work.



**Rebecca  
Glass**  
Grade 4  
Timothy  
Dwight  
Elementary  
School  
Fairfield

## **Puerto Rican Sunset**

The big ball of glowing magic emerges  
Its radiant reflections flood the sky and soak up the clouds as if the clouds were  
a raft  
Afloat in the ocean of sunshine  
The town seems to be submerged in a quilt of last minute sunlight  
The tall trees look charcoal resting against the soft sky  
The black raven swims across the sky  
Puncturing the town with his deep depressing caws as if he has lost his only  
love  
And he spends his life calling for her  
Soon darkness arrives with her long black gown flowing behind her  
Slowly she creeps up over the horizon  
She is coming, coming  
As she glides over the earth  
The sunset is cloaked in her nightly shadow

## **Memories of a Day on a Long Lake**

**Hugh  
Cipparone**  
Grade 4  
Regional  
Multicultural  
Magnet School  
New London

The early morning sun  
creeps through the clouds.  
I hop into my worn canoe,  
and thrust into the deep.  
Paddling smoothly  
on the lake,  
I am free.

The hot midday sun  
beats on the burning sand.  
I crash into foaming waves,  
pulling through,  
like leaves leaping into a cool blanket.  
In the waves,  
I am alive.

The orange purple sun  
melts on the horizon.  
We gather for a family dinner,  
feasting on steaming fresh corn,  
and jabbering with cousins.  
With my family,  
I am content.

The stars glisten  
in the midnight sky.  
I hear the loon call  
like a lonely wolf,  
howling in mourning.  
Under my covers  
I drop to sleep.

On vacation  
in the northern Michigan woods,  
the time gallops by.  
Soon we depart  
but we never leave  
that day behind.

## **The Chicken Coop**

I hear the White Call ducks quacking.  
They swim elegantly in the water,  
like a rich merchant's sons and daughters  
walking with pride past grimy peddlers.  
When the ducks waddle out,  
they politely make a line  
by the feed door  
then daintily nibble at the pellets.

I see the baby chicks  
taking their first steps in life.  
They wander  
and wander,  
searching the ground  
for their first speck of corn,  
their first piece of feed,  
their first taste of a crunchy bug.  
The chicks stumble  
across the ground,  
toddlers, trying to find out how  
to use their little legs,  
huddling together  
to keep warm.

**Abigail  
Cipparone**  
Grade 4  
Regional  
Multicultural  
Magnet School  
New London

I see the Black Rosecomb  
scratching around the ground  
trying to see a bit of yummy corn  
or lovely filling grain.  
She fluffs up her feathers  
careful not to fray them on the ground.  
She clucks quietly and soothingly  
while she takes a tranquil dust bath  
before settling  
to lay a warm, tiny, pure white egg.

I see the bold and valiant cockerel  
eyeing me with suspicion  
thinking about his hens below him.  
He strides up and down his cage.  
Waiting,  
waiting  
for the time when he  
can be head of the flock.  
His brilliant saddle feathers  
cross his back  
in streaks of gleaming green and black,  
making him look like the king.

I see the crabby, broody hen  
watching while I try to snatch the egg.  
But she is too quick for me  
pecking before my hand touches the egg.  
I pull down my sleeve  
so as not to get hurt again.  
I wait and wait,  
for the right moment  
then snatch the egg  
just before the broody hen attacks again.

## **Shanson and Midnight**

### Chapter 1 – A Little Magic

A while ago in the Black Hills of South Dakota, there was a farm called Silver Water Creek Farm. It was a big farm, run by a big family, with 25 horses, six paddocks, and acres and acres of pastureland. It sat nestled in the rolling hills with craggy stark wild-looking mountains to the north, and a scrub pine forest to the south. Through the middle of the farm ran the Silver Water

**Hayley  
Reuben**  
Grade 5  
Kelly Lane  
Intermediate  
School  
Granby

Creek, where poplars seem to dance along the banks of the creek as it trickled through rocks along its path.

The farm had many animals, including goats, cows, the horses, a donkey, two farm cats to keep the mice out of the barn (but only one did its job), and two dogs to help round up the animals and bring them in from pasture. They shared pastureland with the buffalo, and the horses were both fascinated by and fearful of the huge wild buffalo.

On that farm, there was a young bay stallion called Shansonyo, but he preferred to be called just Shanson. Shanson was eight years old, and used to be a fine racing horse before he was injured. He won the famous Black Hills Derby when he was a three-year-old, a fine beginning to his racing career. But he fell in the mud during a practice session, and ever since then he felt pain every time he tried to run or even look at the track. His owner kept saying that he would race again someday, but for now he must rest.

Shanson's three-year-old brother, Bariao, was enrolled to go to the Black Hills Derby, which took place only once every five years. Normally the brothers got along well. They played and chased each other in the pasture, but sometimes they fought because Shanson was bigger and got more of the molasses cookies that were their holiday treats. There was a friendly rivalry between them, and Bariao desperately wanted to be like Shanson and win the Black Hills Derby on his first like Shanson did. Shanson loved his brother but was getting more and more jealous as each day brought the race closer.

There was also a beautiful black blanketed mare named Midnight Wonders, but most just called her Midnight. She was usually bright and perky but had some dark memories and a kind of magic that made her mysterious to other horses.

Midnight saw Shanson glaring at his little brother with big eyes. Bariao was being groomed and readied to be put in the trailer and taken to the race track in preparation for the race on the following day. Midnight whinnied and said to him, "Do you want to go there so badly that you'd do anything to be able to go?"

His reply was "Yes."

She neighed back to him, "I can help you."

But before she could say any more, Shanson interrupted and told her, "You'd have to be magic to do that."

He reared up as if he were a hawk swooping over the water to catch fish for his young. Then, to his surprise, Midnight started galloping around him as if it were the summer ceremonial dance. This was to keep him and his future family healthy (which actually wasn't that far in the future). He saw something he'd never seen before... a twinkle in Midnight's eye.

Midnight said, "Fetch me a goat, a field mouse, a cat, a dog, a duck, a mole and two cows."

Shanson went to get them, and when he did, they followed him as if they were hypnotized!

When Shanson came running back to Midnight, she asked, “Why are you running so quickly?”

He answered, “Because the farm animals seem to be behaving even more strangely than usual!”

Midnight didn’t seem at all surprised. She just turned her back to Shanson and, with a swish of her long, graceful tail, all the farm animals turned into a saddle, saddle pad, bridle, halter, lead rope, trailer, tractor, and jockey.

When she turned around, Shanson had all the tack on, and the jockey leading him into the trailer. She walked into the trailer to join him, as if they were going to have their own personal little party there. The jockey climbed into the truck and started driving them to the big race.

## Chapter 2— Finally Here

As soon as they got there, Shanson said to Midnight, “I hope Bariao doesn’t fall like I did. I don’t want him to get hurt.” He thought of all his sadness of the last few years and the pain that had cost him his racing career.

“What am I doing here, Midnight? What makes you think I can run again?” he neighed to her.

Midnight looked into his eyes with concern and then looked down at his bad leg. Her eyes filled with tears and she nuzzled his leg, leaving the tears on his old scar. Shanson began to feel a tingling in his leg and stared at her with wondering eyes. He felt his muscles strengthen and his energy rise as it had when he first won the Black Hills Derby. He ran the length of the fence with Midnight following close behind.

He turned to her with surprise and said, “I can’t believe it! I can run! You’re amazing!”

Soon they came upon a familiar trailer and realized it was Bariao’s. Shanson didn’t want Bariao or his jockey to see him so he hid behind a shrub, and walked shamefully away from Bariao’s trailer and then trotted back to camp, with Midnight by his side. He knew that only one horse per farm could be entered in the race, and Bariao was the official entry for Silver Water Creek Farm.

“Midnight, thank you for what you did, but this isn’t going to work,” he told Midnight sadly, “My time has passed, it’s Bariao’s turn now.”

Just then Bariao came up to them and said, “Shanson, I saw you running and you looked beautiful out there! Wasn’t it painful to run like that?”

Shanson smiled at Midnight and told him, “No, it wasn’t. For the first time in years, it wasn’t. It felt good; I felt like I was almost flying!”

Bariao grinned and said, “You should race. I’m too young and too scared. I don’t know what I’m doing out there.”

Shanson smiled and said, “Thank you. I shall share the prize with you, if I can win. And...” but Shanson didn’t finish the sentence.

Bariao looked confused but then smiled and winked at him. He trotted back to camp and faked an injury so they would withdraw him from the race.

Shanson's jockey went to the man who owned Silver Water Creek Farm and told how Shanson had run, urging him to enter in the race. The owner looked at Shanson and shook his head while the jockey pleaded with him, then finally nodded. Shanson smiled gratefully at Bariao as he was led to the starting gates.

### Chapter 3— The Big Race

Shanson was excited but nervous. His jockey was also looking pretty scared. Shanson saw Midnight and Bariao encouraging him and his jockey and urging him on. He thought the bell would ring any minute now, and it did. They're off! Shanson hardly heard the voice of the announcer or the crowds; all he heard was the beat of hooves on the track as they raced. He felt all his energy and attention focused on the track ahead of him. He was in sixth place, with five horses ahead of him, but he knew he could pass them, thanks to Midnight.

Just then a bug flew straight into his ear, and he shook his head violently, losing his concentration. Two horses passed him and now he was trailing. Midnight saw this and suddenly bucked. Bariao stepped back from her, wondering what she was doing. The bug bounced off Shanson's ear and he charged forward with great might.

He had two more laps and began to pass the other horses one by one! As he entered the straightaway, he found himself in second place, and he leaped forward just as they passed the finish line!

Shanson was happy and relieved. He knew he could do it, and with Midnight's help he had won. He felt like screaming and running around, but he was also tired from the race. Bariao and Midnight were rearing with excitement and twirling around each other.

Shanson heard them neighing "Well done!" "Way to go" "I knew you could do it!" Both came forward to join him at the winner's circle.

Shanson sighed with relief.

"I couldn't have done it without both of you."

Midnight suddenly looked awfully afraid of something. She had forgotten to tell Shanson that they had to be home by noon when her magic would run out.

She whispered to him, "We have to go. My spell will be gone at noon. Your tack, your trailer, your jockey, and your legs will all go back to the way they were before in twenty minutes."

Shanson barely heard her over Bariao's excitement and the hubble bubble of the winner's circle.

"What? No! It's over, now we get to enjoy it!"

Midnight said, "You won the race, we can get the trophy later; we have to go now."

Shanson reluctantly slipped out of the crowd and followed Midnight to his trailer. The jockey was beginning to bray like a goat, and Shanson's legs were

starting to tingle again. The jockey fell off Shanson’s back and crawled into the trailer, leaving his hat on the grass.

#### Chapter 4— Same Old-Same Old

Just as they pulled into the drive to the farm, the magic wore off and all became as it was before. Shanson’s legs ached as they slowly walked back to the barn. Midnight started giggling, then Shanson started to laugh.

“Thanks again for helping me win the race. It felt really good to be out there again, but I never could have done it without you. Next time, I think I’ll let Bariao have his turn. My racing days are over, and I’m finally happy about that. I realize now that there’s something better than racing... friendship.”

Midnight nuzzled him and they trotted back to the barn.

## Double Crown

**Bridget  
Kelly**  
Grade 5  
West Woods  
Upper  
Elementary  
School  
Farmington

It was the day, the day of the FEA cross country run. I glared around the field, seeing kids stretch in the hot, bright sun. I heard many kids laughing, chatting, doing cartwheels, and playing tag. I stretched on the field watching all the busses from the other schools roll in and unload all the third and fourth grade participants of the run.

After we were done stretching I heard my gym teacher’s voice on the megaphone: “All fourth grade girls, please go to the starting line!” That was me. As I got up and jogged to the starting line, my nerves raced up. My legs shook as I took one last stretch. As I bit my lip, I could feel a shiver go down my spine.

“I won it last year, I can do it again,” I assured myself, “This is my race, I need to win.” I knew that I needed the double crown of a two year victory.

“On your mark, get set, boom!” The gun went off and the race began. The start was chaotic. Some people fell, and others even lost a shoe. Luckily, I stayed on my feet.

After about 200 meters had gone by, everyone started to clear out. At that time I was probably in 15<sup>th</sup> place. I needed to catch up. Soon came the hayfields. The high grass tickled my legs as I passed about seven people. A cool breeze prickled my cheek as I exited the hayfields.

Afterwards I passed two people rounding a large oak tree. By then I was in third place. Sweat dripped down my face.

As I passed the playground, I saw my one year old little brother clapping and I saw many other kids cheering me on. My legs started to move quicker, gaining on the second and first placers. My heart felt as if it was beating 100 pulses a minute. Right then, I passed the second placer. My mind flashed back to the day I won the year before— that great feeling I had— the feeling of a champion. I got more determined. After a minute I was only one step away from first place.

“I’m going to pass her,” I assured myself. My legs moved fast as I took long stride. “One step,” I told myself, “One step.”

Then I took that long stride. My left leg rose off the ground and my arms pumped forward and passed the first placer. I was in the lead! But the second placer wasn’t too far behind. If I wanted to stay in the lead, I would have to pick up the pace. My legs moved faster, leaving the other girl a few more steps behind. She could still keep up if I didn’t keep up the pace.

My legs ached. It felt like knives were stabbing my thighs. I could barely breathe, but that didn’t stop me. The finish line was only about 100 meters away. I ran as fast as my legs could take me. My name echoed in the crowd. “Go Bridget! Come on, Bridget!”

The finish line was only a few steps away. My legs were numb, and I felt like I was going to fall any second. “I’m one step away,” I told myself. My foot lifted off the ground and crossed the finish line! My arms shot up in the air!

“Yes!” I shouted. I had won the race again. “Two year victory,” I told myself. Right then, all my aches and pains disappeared and a smile spread on my face. Afterwards, everyone congratulated me. I got tons of hugs and high-fives from friends and family. After everyone finished, all the participants and family walked into the gym for an award ceremony.

Starting with the 12<sup>th</sup> placer, they called girls up one by one. “Third place, second place,” I was next.

“And the first place winner is Bridget Kelly, come on up!”

Right then I held my head up high, threw my shoulders back, and got out of my seat and walked up. I felt like I could reach the impossible. Boston Marathon, here I come! I had reached my quest, and I was the double-crowned champion. When Mr. O’Conner, my gym teacher, put the medal around my neck, a smile, ear-to-ear, erupted on my face. At that time, I felt like the luckiest girl in the world.

## The Fire

It was a beautiful day and certainly a perfect day for a walk. I was leisurely strolling through the park and was quite tired, so I plopped down on a rusty, old bench. As I was admiring the landscape, I noticed a small, thin, red box laying on the ground. Curious, I picked up the red box and shook it. There was something inside this mysterious box.

Then, I turned over the box, revealing seven bold letters imprinted on it. I read it carefully. It read: MATCHES. Those seven letters startled me. My parents strictly told me to NEVER play with matches, so I tossed the box and the components into the nearest trash bin. I once again sat down and relaxed on another bench that was under a tree in the shade. I was so exhausted that I gradually fell asleep under the tree.

**Kevin  
Kaufman**  
Grade 5  
West Woods  
upper  
Elementary  
School  
Farmington



During the middle of my long nap, I was suddenly awakened by the sound of scuffling and whispering. No more than ten feet away from me were two teenagers picking through the trash bin where I threw out the twelve-pack of matches. I saw puffs of smoke rising around the teenagers, indicating that they had been smoking earlier. These two figures looked like troublemakers.

“Sweet, look what I found,” the older one of the two blurted out to the other, pointing to the box marked “matches.”

As I heard those very words, my heart sank.

“I got the perfect thing to go with those!” the younger one replied.

The younger teenager crept away into an alleyway between two tall buildings. I sat there wondering what would happen next as I peeked out of one eye at the older teenager standing impatiently near the trash bin holding the box that contained the matches.

Minutes later, the other teenager appeared from the alleyway and darted toward the trash bin. Under his right arm, he carried a long, thin box marked: FIRECRACKERS, and under his left arm, he held a large jug marked GASOLINE! He held up a match which caught fire, and in no more than a second, jerked his hand away, letting the match drop to the ground. His partner, the other teenager, dumped out the rest of the matches onto the single burning match. They both stood there watching the matches quickly engulf the others in the pile.

I started to worry at the sight of the matches, but I told myself, “*It’s just a sparkle.*”

“Let’s have some fun,” the older teenager remarked.

He drew a small jug out of his pocket and opened the lid and poured the gasoline on the small fire. He also threw the whole box of firecrackers into the pile.

“This is going to be awesome!” the younger teenager screamed at his close partner.

The fire made the people in the park look and wonder curiously what those crazy teens were up to.

Suddenly, the matches exploded into a massive inferno, shaking the ground in the park violently, making me, the teenagers, and other people in the park collapse to the ground. The fire was massive, the size of a ten story building! It spread rapidly, ripping through old trees, causing them to come crashing down. Innocent people stood watching helplessly as the firestorm surrounded the perimeter of the park, engulfing everything in its path. I could hear loud cracks from the exploding firecrackers, which the teenagers were playing with only moments ago. A nearby tree that had been destroyed by the fire shook the ground as it landed, causing its branches to fly everywhere, and several other trees fell, making it feel like a huge, never-ending earthquake. Right then and there I thought I was going to die, stuck in the erupting inferno, trapped just like a helpless animal caught in a cage.

As I tried to get up from my sudden fall, I noticed that I was trapped in a field of blazing fire and debris. I slowly got up and tried to make an effort to

move further through the fire toward safety. I choked a few times as I inhaled the thick smoke that surrounded me. Then I ran as fast as I could through the field of fire. From someone else's view, it probably looked as if I was a Nascar driver racing in the Daytona 500! I struggled very hard to run and dodge the huge pieces of debris that were now ablaze! Every few steps, I stumbled and hit the ground repeatedly. As I got up from one particular fall, my clothes brushed up against a piece of wood that was on fire, and my clothing and legs started to burn!

"What should I do?" I whispered to myself as I started to panic. I was lost. I had no idea what to do, but suddenly a bright, yellow light bulb turned on in my head.

"I got it!" I thought excitedly.

I dropped down onto the ground and started to begin the "STOP, DROP, and ROLL" method that I learned from my town's firefighters. I remembered them saying to do this if your clothes ever caught on fire! I rolled and rolled repeatedly under the smoke that hovered a few feet above me. It was quite challenging to roll because I couldn't see since my hands were over my eyes. The firefighters had said to do this so that my eyes wouldn't be harmed by the flames. I kept rolling and rolling, but the fire on my clothes just wasn't going out! Time was valuable and was quickly running out! The flames were severely burning my legs, and I knew I would have to get out of this extremely hot inferno soon to survive this terrible accident!

Quickly, I tried to focus more on escaping to safety than on my clothes and legs burning! There were only minutes left until the section of the park I was in was going to explode into a huge blaze! Some of the close flames started to get big and tall and started to violently spit ashes everywhere. A few hot ashes that caught fire struck my shirt, burning small holes in my clothing and severely burning my chest and back. Feeling extreme pain from the burns, I fought on through the roaring blaze, confident that I was going to make it out of there in one piece. I got on my knees and began to crawl under the smoke screen. Crawling is perhaps what I should have done in the first place, since you cannot inhale smoke when you are on the ground because smoke rises! I glanced around as I crawled through the maze of fire, and the only thing I could see were bright red, blue, and yellow flames towering around me and thick, black, foggy smoke floating around me.

I thought to myself, "I can do this!"

I was determined to get out of that engulfing inferno alive! I crouched there for several long moments. I counted to 0 from 5 quickly. In a deep, groaning voice I counted "1, 2, 3, 4, 5," then suddenly darted through a series of thick smoke walls and tripped and fell onto the hard, unforgiving ground. I looked up and noticed clean air. No smoke! No flames! I had finally reached safety!

Doing the STOP, DROP, and ROLL method once more with all the energy I had left, the fire on my burning clothes and legs was finally put out. Although amazed and thankful that I escaped that dangerous fire, I also felt as if I was going to collapse from exhaustion.

Eyeing my family in the crowd of emergency vehicles, wailing sirens, and voices from people and firefighters, I limped away from the fire and hugged all my family members tightly. Then I was lifted into an ambulance and taken away from the scene and brought to the hospital. Surprisingly, the doctors informed me that I had only experienced some bad burns but would begin to feel better and should recover soon.

A couple of days later at school, I found out that everyone at the park where the fire erupted had survived and was in good condition, including the two young teenagers who had started the fire.

But there is one big important lesson to learn from this: **DON'T PLAY WITH MATCHES!** Matches are for adults only and should not be used for fooling around and playing with!

**Nia  
Clemons**  
Grade 5  
Davis Street  
School  
New Haven

## Beautiful Me

I am black.  
I am not the color of dark lead in a sharpened pencil.  
I am black.  
I am not the color of the glasses that Stevie Wonder wears.  
I am honey brown.  
I am the color of caramel swirled in a Snickers bar.  
I am the color of brown glitter you sprinkle on a picture.  
My color is beautiful brown like the beautiful rich earth.  
I am the color of glistening gold shining in the Sun.  
Blessed me! That is who I am!

**Shea  
Echols**  
Grade 5  
Toffolon  
Elementary  
School  
Plainville

## The Red Wheelbarrow

The red wheelbarrow sweeps away your misery,  
destroys the pain, gets rid of the drama.  
The red wheelbarrow sweeps away the stress  
and also the people that you loved who died.  
The red wheelbarrow sweeps  
away the pain  
that you see  
the stress  
and what you hide  
every day  
when you go to school.

The red wheelbarrow sweeps away everything  
that you've come to hate  
and takes it away  
to some place that makes sure you never  
go near it again.

## The Cave

The cave reeked of fresh-kill and cat.  
A bed of moss lay in one corner  
Poppy seeds in the next.  
Sun dared not enter this spot yet  
Moonlight danced in the dark void.  
A ball of fur slept on the moss  
Unaware that he was going to give up life.  
Rain splashed outside the dying creature's den,  
Making such a delicate sound  
That the spiders danced  
And spun threads around the entrance.  
The moon watched from his post  
The great sky above.  
The barren cave stalactites  
Glimmered in the puddles of light  
Making it seem like a world where fairies danced.  
The old cat gave his last breath  
And decided to go dance with the stars  
In the great silver pelt that is the sky.

## A Vacationer's Witnessing of Navajo Suffering

My parents have told me about how dreadful some people's lives are. They've told me about people who beg for grains of rice and struggle to stay alive. They have told me about people living in shacks, tears flowing down their faces, unable to keep their newborn babies from starving. It seems unimaginable. I knew that it was a concept that I could never quite comprehend—until one seemingly peaceful summer day when we drove through the Navajo Indian Preserve in Arizona.

My family was cruising through a stretch of desert on our way to the Grand Canyon in our RV. The desert was vast—stretching far into the distance. No water could be seen, and not a tree could be spotted. The heat was so intense I could smell it.

**Ellerie  
Field**  
Grade 5  
Hall Memorial  
Middle School  
Willington

**Pieter  
Martino**  
Grade 6  
Reed  
Intermediate  
School  
Newtown

“I can’t wait to get out of this desert!” The thought pounded through my mind as a drop of sweat trickled down my forehead.

“Let’s stop for lunch,” I suggested.

“Sure,” my dad replied.

We pulled over next to a decrepit arrangement of logs that I thought was a long-forgotten shack. As we stepped outside, I realized what it really was— a Navajo jewelry store. One question instantly popped into my head when I saw it. How are the Navajos supposed to make enough money to live selling little items in a little shack in the middle of the desert? I shrugged off the thought and tried to eat.

After lunch as we drove down the highway, we came upon more of these decrepit shops; only these shops were running with Navajos inside them. Feeling sorry for these Indians, we stopped at one of the shops to buy a few items. A bitter taste soiled my mouth as we approached the store for I was afraid of what I might find.

I remember how sickly and depressed the Navajo running the store looked. Her skin was extensively wrinkled, her hair was tangled, and her voice was hoarse and dry. Her puffy, red eyes had a deep, forlorn look to them. Big half-moons drooped under them. A maroon faded dress draped over her body. It looked like it was a sheet with holes cut out for the head and arms. Torn slippers covered her feet, and they offered almost no protection. Sorrow gripped my heart. My eyes grew wide in shock. I was just now starting to comprehend what my parents meant. Still, this was only the beginning of what I was going to see. We bought a wood carved turtle for my friend and then returned to the RV.

Soon up the road, we drove by a few homes. I knew they belonged to the Navajos because of their ramshackle appearance and the cracked paint that was peeling off the rickety walls. My eyes grew even wider. My mouth was dry.

I also remember the Navajo’s cars. They were old pick-up trucks riddled with large dents like craters on the moon. Peeling paint covered the cars’ exterior. A few automobiles were tilted to one side with flat tires. I couldn’t imagine how they could still drive.

One of the most devastating events was when I witnessed a child sitting by a house with tearful, crimson eyes, similar to those of the woman at the store. She stared into the distance as if searching for some sign of hope, a sign of happiness for her and her people in the clear desert sky.

Here these people were suffering in the unforgiving heat. Here I am, in a comfortable RV on an expensive vacation on my way to the Grand Canyon. Here I am, never having to worry about starving or having enough food.

I looked down at my clothes. I never really thought that I was that privileged to wear boxers, shorts, a t-shirt, shoes, and a hat every day. After seeing these Indians, though, I reconsidered that.

This experience made me realize how lucky I am to live where I do. It forced me to think about how fortunate I am to go on extravagant vacations and eat three meals every day without having to worry about money. It’s still tough

to comprehend the horrible way these Indians are forced to live. I had always thought that everyone in the United States— the land of the free and the home of the brave— lived joyful and peaceful lives. After all, isn't that what the United States is supposed to be— making your own choices and living freely? Well, these Navajos certainly don't have these freedoms.

Anyway, what did the Indians do that was so negative to the Americans? Weren't the Indians the first people to live in America? What gives us the right to force them to live in the desert? Indians are meant to live in forests and plains where they can build villages, hunt for animals, and live like their ancestors. My heart sank in my stomach as I thought about all these things.

For the first time, I realized how lucky and fortunate I am. For the first time, I can almost comprehend the quiet suffering I had just witnessed. I plan doing everything in my power to stop it. When I grow up and when I earn a salary, I won't forget the Navajo Indians. I will donate money to them regularly. Whenever I think I'm not fortunate or don't have enough, I will reflect upon my experience with the Indians. I will think, "You know what? I do have a lot. I am very fortunate, and I live a lot better than most people in the world."

## A Dramatic Experience

There was utter darkness in the theater. You couldn't see anything. But there were voices. Soft ones, yet many. Chatting their lives away. While I was here. Waiting. Clambering. Teeth chattering. Then, to my dismay, the sparkling red curtains receded. The huge, bright, black spotlights engulfed me like a police searchlight. Most of the voices ceased, yet some rude ones kept blabbering. I was exposed! I nervously looked around. My fellow actor glanced lightly at me, brave but uncertain as I. I wasn't the only scared one here. AH! The annoying little cameras took me aback, all flashing, bright and white as can be. It got to the point where it felt like they were *mocking* me in some way.

Then I noticed everything around me felt real, so vivid, yet everything afar was of no importance. Big was the word to describe the crowd. Their faces had this hypnotized, mesmerizing look. *Whoa!* I thought. I felt like a priest, no, a *god* to these people! It was overpowering, overwhelming, and of course, kind of scary. I wheezed on some hot air in the spot light's beam. The lights were hot! Then, several aromas filled the humid air. I recognized anxiety—the skippy and short smell, and fear—the slow and painful one. Of course I smelled nervousness, the panicky worrying one. Realizing this, I decided to calm my nerves. I breathed in, sucking everything in, taking it in, and breathed out, not wanting to die of no air and to adjust to the scene, thus lowering my shock. It was calm, yet nerve-wracking. I slowly grasped the metal chair adjacent to me. It had scrapes and scrapes, like it had been through a lot of hardship, yet it was proud. I could feel the *wet sweat* pouring down my head, like a shower. It was

**Richard  
Wenner**  
Grade 6  
Gideon Welles  
School  
Glastonbury

either humid, or nervousness, but you could guess.

“Holmes, I have had a dreadful experience on the toilet” were my first lines, which I wanted to scream; proclaim to the world! The words I knew were like Old Faithful. You had no idea if it was coming out, but you’re always reassured when it does. I knew my lines all too well, and I knew I could do it.

Yet an uprising negative doubt was spreading like a virus through my body. The words wanted to come out, but they had a bad case of the doubt virus. But then, my eagerness came; no, *wrestled* in. It was complete pandemonium! There was a restless little puppy dog in my body, scraping, pounding, kicking, scratching, *energizing* in my body. It was desperate to burst out, to find a way. You can bet how jumpy I was. I rolled the thick, wet saliva in my mouth over and over again, trying to extinguish my parched mouth. I could taste the faint warmth of the light produced by some monstrous spotlights. I stepped on one of the creaky wooden floorboards, which made a monotonous creaking sound. I noticed the annoying sounds of shuffling of feet, video cameras, rude whispering, beeps, boo bops, and clicks.

And as I slowly trained my thoughts together, I heard the sound of nothing. The faint glow; the screech. Which might sound funky, because you think I’m hearing nothing, which can’t possibly be nothing, because I’m hearing something. But I did. It was magical, illogical. I liked it. FLUSH! The toilet sounded on the speaker. Kevin Lorraine, an actor offstage, had sounded my cue. I collected my thoughts, pulled myself together and screamed in a stupid manner, “Holmes, I have had a dreadful experience on the toilet.”

## Wipe Out!

**Patrick  
Driscoll**  
Grade 6  
Latimer Lane  
School  
Weatogue

“Whoaaaaa! I schreeched as I teetered on the edge of the saucer-like, inflated tube floating motionless next to the boat, which was ready to take off like a dog about to chase a cat. I wondered what in the world I was doing out here in the middle of the ocean surrounded by jellyfish as I got comfortable. *Hadn’t I just proved to everyone I wasn’t a baby? I hadn’t fallen off when I went with my dad. Of course, that could change if I went with Jay, my dad’s good friend. Maybe I shouldn’t do this a second time. No, I’m not a coward. Bring it on!*

My heart was pumping so fast I thought it might blow up. I was anxiously waiting for Jay to plop himself down beside me. I knew that there was nothing to be afraid of, but since it was my first experience tubing, I felt like I would wet my pants.

“Watch out!” I cautiously exclaimed. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to step on your head.” Jay chuckled. His body was laying helplessly beside mine now. *There’s no turning back now.* I filled my nostrils with the tremendous ocean aroma. I felt like I could do anything now. Rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr! The motor sounded like a tiger about to pounce.

“Ready?” Jay asked.

“Ready” I replied excitedly.

“Let’s go!” Jay yelled to Mr. Silpe. The boat began to gradually glide along, every minute gaining more speed, making waves and bigger waves. Then the thrill began. The boat was now accelerating at sixty miles per hour. I was bouncing up and down and swaying side to side. My hands were beginning to become numb as I clung to the foam handle for my life, my mouth was filling with the salty spray of sea water that was being churned up from the barreling double motors, and the tube was raising me up and plummeting Jay down sideways near the water. Then the tube was raising me up and plummeting Jay down sideways near the water. Then the tube abruptly jolted to the other side of the cove, following the mammoth boat. The speed was intensifying as fast as a forest fire spreads from one tree to the next. I felt the muscular gusts of wind pounding against my slightly-tanned face. I pictured myself up in the air with all my skin stretched out in all different directions, my hair flying up in the air like a vast flame. My legs and feet were flopping like fish out of water. There was another swerve out of the blue, and the rope pressed against the colossal motor that was roaring like hungry lion whose prey was Jay and me. *Hold on tighter you fool. If you fall off, you’ll be in the ocean with all the jellyfish.* Wait, wouldn’t it be more fun to fall off?

“Tell him to go faster!” I giggled as my bubbly-voice laughed along with the waves. So Jay gave a thumbs up sign. There was another veer, this one almost knocking us off. The big waves were repeatedly collapsing over and over our heads at this point.

Mr. Silpe twisted the wheel swiftly. The tube was going out of control, zigging and zagging as if a two-year old was driving it with a remote control. The tube began to lift me higher and higher, because Jay weighs about 300 pounds of pure muscle, and I don’t even weigh 100. Oh no! Look at that big wave! Actually I think we’ll need a bigger tube. I closed my eyes tightly as we went airborne through the cool, fresh air after crashing off a giant wave. We bounced up and down. I was losing my tight clasp on the foam handles, and the wind was shoving me off. It happened in a split second when the lumbering tube finally flung us off it. I took a deep breath in and closed my mouth as Jay and I separated from the tube. SPLASH! Jay and I were floating in the cove, and the neon red and yellow tube was zooming away.

“Yack, Yack, Yack!” I wheezed. I sounded like a drowning pig. I would have sunk into the deep, blue ocean if I wasn’t wearing a bright red lifejacket. When I shattered the surface I sputtered out a mouthful of water, coughed a few times, and exclaimed, “That was totally wicked!”

I floated on my back, taking a nap on an invisible lounge chair. I looked around myself at the massive, green-blue, foamy ocean. I was having such a good time. The dazzling sun was beaming down on me, creating a tender warmth throughout my body in the spine-tingling water. That’s when I realized what a wonderful day I was experiencing. The boat came up behind us. I tugged myself up the metal ladder with a smile on my face that was stretching ear to ear. “Let’s go again! Let’s go again!” I chanted.



**Jacqueline  
Bickley**  
Grade 6  
Memorial  
Middle School  
Middlebury

## When I Was a Pirate

When I was a pirate in the city of Ned,  
I wore high buckled shoes and a scarf on my head.  
I was fearsome and mighty, the bravest of brave.  
I would venture in any old dungeon or cave.

I wore a patch on my eye and a belt made of gold.  
My teeth were quite yellow, and looked very old.  
I fought dragons and Cyclops, and sea snakes galore!  
I stole all of my goods and I never was poor.

I bathed once a year, and I brushed my teeth twice.  
My hair was all scraggly and teeming with lice.  
I cleaned out my cabin each decade or two.  
I ate nothing but flounder and icy cold stew.

My ship was a good one, all polished and sleek.  
She never would capsize and never would leak.  
The swirling dark water would splash up at her sides.  
Especially when there were very high tides.  
The fierce winds and rains would all tear at her mast,  
But no matter the trouble, we would always get past.

When the winds would blow hard, we would lower her sails,  
We would hunt for small tuna, bluefish, and whales.  
When all of the high waves would clash at our ship,  
She would always stand sturdy and never would tip.

During the day we would sing songs and dance.  
The music we played would put you in a trance.  
There's been no other time that I've preferred instead,  
To when I was a pirate in the city of Ned.

# The Wedding

A cooling breeze,  
Mixed with a warm sun

Guests of plenty, coming, going,  
Preparing for the time

Seats filling up,  
Food being eaten,

I see the red barn,  
I smell the wet hay

Seats are filled  
It is time

Dali the dog,  
Ready to go

Rings on cushion,  
Dog on leash

Bible open  
Preacher starts

“Do you swear?”  
“I do” “I do”

Preacher motions  
I start walking

Down the aisle  
Dali’s pulling

I’m pulled to the left,  
I’m pulled to the right,

Down the aisle,  
Dali’s pulling

Stop at pew,  
Give preacher ring

**Dan  
McLoone**  
Grade 6  
Whisconier  
Middle School  
Brookfield

Ring off cushion,  
Ring in hand,

Ring on finger,  
Hand in hand

“Kiss the bride”  
Preacher says

They both kiss  
And they were wed

Out of barn  
Onto street

Bicycle for two  
Silent, waiting,

Aunt in back  
Uncle in front

Pedaling along  
Towards the setting sun

## **I am From**

I am from Bangladesh, land of gold, the mother country.

I have sat at the feet of banyan trees along the banks of rivers.

I am filled with sadness, there is gloom on my face, my eyes are filled with tears.

I miss my country, homesickness covers me like a quilt.

I am from a school where the discipline often takes a physical form.

I am from the Bengali language, but also Arvi, Ardo and English.

I am from spicy foods, curry, rice and fish fried in tasty oil.

I am from the Muslim religion where we celebrate Eid and Ramadan.

**Shaifur  
Rahman**  
Grade 6  
Verplanck  
Elementary  
School  
Manchester

I am from a people who are poor, but proud.

I am from broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight.

## How to Survive Boy Scout Camp

When your parents sign you up for a week of Boy Scout Camp, they always tell you about all of the fun that you will have: you'll make friends, you'll be better at swimming a mile, you'll learn how to start a fire, and you'll learn how to weave a basket. They weave an exciting yarn of archery, exciting hikes, and marshmallows. The day your parents drop you off at camp you are excited. But you also have a feeling I have nicknamed "I am doomed." This sense of doom gets worse as you see their car drive off, and you feel the raindrops beginning to hit your nose.

No matter how prepared you think you are, you are never really ready to survive Boy Scout Camp in the rain. Your parents have packed, to your dismay, two coats, two pairs of boots, eight undershirts, twenty pairs of underwear, and eighty pairs of socks. Imagine trying to fit that into a pup tent! The sad part is, you wear it all in one soaking day. The rest of the week is, as you can guess, smelly (and wet). You hope that your mother won't say "Have you changed your underwear?" and that she bought extra laundry detergent. You also hope she won't be squeamish when the worms crawl out of your boots in the laundry room.

I have much experience surviving camp in the rain, primarily because it has rained on every campout that I have been on, with the exception of Yawgoog, RI; at Yawgoog, there was a blizzard. You need a good sense of humor and the attitude I refer to as "It can't get any worse than this." But you soon find that you are wrong (cue Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony). It can get worse.

The week before camp, you spent hours trying to figure out how to smuggle in, and keep hidden, your favorite stuffed animal. You and Mom devised a plan, sewed a secret pocket inside your sleeping bag, and pinned said cuddly friend out of sight. When you have finally made it past your first wet day, all you want are dry clothes and a good rest (and a radiator, but you're out of luck on that one).

The next thoughts in your head are "Where did it go?" "Where is my secret source of joy and comfort?" "AHH!", and "(interjection), (interjection), (interjection)." It is then that you realized that it fell out of your sleeping bag into the car. The rest of the week is miserable, and they don't let you contact home in any way. How do you survive, you say? You either cuddle up with an extremely smelly (and wet) sock, or you go into the latrine and cry so much that you fall asleep in the toilet. Once again, attitude and a sense of humor are necessary, but not always helpful.

If you can make it through the first four days, your parents will finally bring

**Michael  
Lee**  
Grade 7  
Vernon Center  
Middle School  
Vernon

**Cristina  
Macklem**  
Grade 7  
Tolland  
Middle  
School  
Tolland

your stuffed animal for you when they come for Parents Day. How do you survive the ever-longed-for Parents Day, when you think that there is a chance that your parents missed you so much that they cut the week short and take you home? After almost a week in the wilderness, it feels good to hear Mom say “Have you changed your underwear?” You hear some of your friends begging their parents to take them home. Their parents say, “We paid for you to come here for a week, so that’s what you’re going to do.”

You know that your parents will say the same. They try to convince you that “It’s a terrible week at home: it’s over 100 degrees and the power’s out.” somehow, they always succeed in making you agree to stay for three more days.

On Parents Day, all of the scouts and leaders put on a play, called a skit, to make the parents laugh. You have a campfire and dinner together. It’s so nice to see your mom and dad; all you want to do is stow away in the family van. But they are heartless and don’t pay attention to your tears, groveling, swollen ankles, drippy nose, puppy-dog eyes, and whimpering. Here, humor and attitude won’t do a thing. You just have to rely on your leaders to physically drag you back to camp. That’s what leaders are for, anyway.

Finally, the last day arrives. Wasn’t that fun? You admit that you are proud of yourself and got to experience many things like rain, lots and lots of rain, and bugs, lots and lots of bugs. But you also got awards, knowledge, mosquito bites, and lots of baked beans and hot dogs. I can’t wait for next year! Want to come? But in the near future looms the Boy Scout Winter Freeze-out (also offering canned ravioli and frostbite).

## The Teasers

My shoes pound on the sidewalk as I walk to my bus. I have a million things buzzing through my head. *What do I have for homework today? Do I have a meet this Wednesday? Who are we running against?*

I squeeze through the aisle and work my way through the obstacles. There are backpacks in the middle of the aisle and kids sticking their heads out of their seats to talk. I finally reach my seat and look two seats behind me and one seat across. Two boys from seventh grade, my grade, are sitting together listening to an I-Pod and talking. One seat behind me, two sixth grade boys are laughing about something funny that happened at lunch.

My eyes scan outside the window and around the bus. The girl who sits with me is nowhere to be found. I sigh and roll my eyes, knowing that I will get a sixth grader that I don’t know. I think back to this morning. Hadn’t she said something about soccer? I sit down as the rest of the sixth graders piled on the bus. I try to make the seat look filled. One girl with flaming red hair spots my seat and pounces. She looks tired, maybe even sad. I don’t say anything as I put my backpack on my knees and look out the window. The two boys behind me must know who she is because they start punching the seat on the side the girl

is sitting. I feel the seat vibrate. They punch the seat as if it were a punching bag, over and over again. The older boys look up from their music and decide to join in, laughing as the younger ones pound the seat. The girl looks like she might start crying, but she sucks it up and looks straight at the seat with a piercing strength. The four boys are whispering loudly now, *just* loud enough for her to hear.

“What is *she* doing back *here*?” the 7<sup>th</sup> graders asked.

“Ha ha...” their laughter echoed.

“She is so weird, isn’t she?” They all nodded in agreement.

“Yeah.”

“Ha ha...”

“You should have seen what she did in math class today...” one of the sixth graders said, smiling.

They look up now, realizing that the whispering isn’t working. I see her face cringe slightly, but it is gone in a flash. The younger boys go back to hitting the seat again; obviously thinking that it is more effective. They punch the seat even harder than before, and my backpack wobbles on my knees.

“Stop it!” she finally says as firmly as her quivering voice can. They smirk as they continue to punch the seat. She had done *just* what they had wanted her to. Through the crack between the seat and the window, I smile, too, but only because they wouldn’t stop looking at me, urging me to join. In reality it wasn’t funny, it was wrong. I almost joined but then I remembered my pain, my confusion.

*“This doll has to marry this one over here,” I remember telling my mom back in third grade. I didn’t have a care in the world. Nothing holding me back. But then fourth grade came. The boys on the bus from my grade teased me. Everyday they looked at me like I was different, like something was wrong with me. I felt their eyes burning holes through me. I would look out the window and try not to listen, but they were always stalking and always staring—all through school and on the bus. I had to find strange ways of dealing with my pain. I would work myself so hard that my hand would go numb. Work, family, and friends were the only things that got me through that time, but it was hard for me to make friends. I felt like I was at a lower level, like I didn’t belong with certain people, that being friends with them was wrong, no matter how much I wanted to be friends with them. Even with friends, even after the teasing stopped, the scars never left.*

They hadn’t teased me for a while. I turned around before they could talk to me. I didn’t say anything for the rest of the ride. I felt ashamed.

Knowing that my stop was next, I grabbed my things, and “*The Teasers*” and I got off the bus and went to our houses. They were laughing with wide grins like they had just heard a funny joke. I, on the other hand, felt like I could have done something, like I could have stopped it. I frowned as I walked inside. Feeling hopeless, yet not.

So my advice—just hang in there, girl. It will get better with time. And

Amy  
Tomasso  
Grade 7  
Irving Robbins  
Middle School  
Farmington

remember, when someone sits next to you on the bus, don't be a "Teaser," but most of all, don't be like me. Do something about it. They might tease *you* for it, but think of the pain you are sparing for someone else who gets it a lot.

## In the Fire's Shadow: One Survivor's Story

I sit quietly, my head stooped, to avoid the freakish presence of the solitary man on the platform, performing lustrous acts. Imagine, swallowing fire! He leaves, giving me ample opportunity to raise my widened eyes. The circus tent surrounding me, exhales with the wind, ever flapping, a rhythm for my ears. Inside, the crowd is near to bursting, a story of a thousand faces. I wonder how, where, and when they've come.

Now, the ponies. I lean closer to my father, joining to make one heartbeat. He is smiling, engrossed. What memories does this conjure for him? What journey is he retracing? Perhaps into the old country he wanders. Oh, to have remembrances such as his. I revert my eyes to the platform. Something, not the pony, dances blithely in the corner. An effect, most convincing! The pony is curious. Ah, to live the life of such a creature! Yet the rider thinks otherwise. She desperately tries to lure the animal to other courses. Now, the pony is dancing in the gossamer shadow, one beautiful, intact dance, drawing attentive eyes.

Yet I am taken aback when I see that my eyes notice something greater than a simple dance. Flame. Churning, lapsing, and growing. I am mesmerized. Others are as well. They laugh naively.

"What an act! I tell you, this show's never gypped me of my money. Never!" Is this onlooker so sure? I nudge my father.

"Fire, do you see?" He cranes his neck to view the threat. It is growing, spreading, relentless. At first, confusion overpowers our reactions. Someone nearby remarks, "What? This can't be. It's an effect!" Most of the crowd remains stationary, paralyzed with fear or disbelief. I glance dartingly, warily, at the performing platform. The pony is in hysterics, as is his rider, now leading him, her shrieks plainly audible.

"Father, we must do something!"

"Let's not wait to see them put it out." His nervous voice betrays his effort to calm me. So I am alert. It is then, amidst the conflicting fusion of many languages, colors, and images that a second wave of emotion breaks out—this time panic. Like a foghorn, the call breaks out.

"FIRE!"

"I'll be damned. This cannot be so!" And yet, as in some nightmarish fantasy, it is incredibly so. The connection among people breaks, each one trying to escape on his own. My father surveys the surrounding happenings.

"Up, if it's the last thing I do, up!" my father exclaims.

His hand trembles as he makes one sweeping motion with his arm, picking me up on one side and my younger brother and his friend on the other. I

become fearful. Such an able man as my father, having to run away from the disaster advancing at his heels. He eyes the dense crowd already in the aisle. We are too high up to run out quickly. Instead, he near carries us in an ascent up the bleachers. My father tightens his grip, then inhales deeply, his lungs filling with the pungent smoky air. Smoke, the unannounced killer, such a filthy substance!

We reach the uppermost row of bleachers. Now what's lacking is the courage to leap ten feet below. Still, his jump becomes mine. The air lashes at our very faces, and, willingly or not, I let the fall take me. My throat, too closed to allow for a scream, imitates a weak, solitary moan. All time seems to have hit a brutal, jarring conclusion. We lie in a mangled heap below the bleachers.

Exit. Fire. Panic. Illusion. Exit.

My father tears at the canvas tent, now consumed as an illuminated waxy candle, having its final say in life. A fire's delight. I run silently, my head stooped, to avoid the descending ceiling of smoke as I pass beneath the tent skirt.

"Run." A mass of fire.

"Shush." The screams of the neglected.

"Quick." The roars of trapped creatures.

"Hurry." A heart full to breaking.

"Look not." A question amidst the chaos: "Why?"

• • •

By whatever grace, we survived the Hartford Circus fire of 1945— my father, younger brother, neighbor's son, and I— though the memories of those who perished scorch me every day with a presence greater than fire. It is as simple as that. So now— "why" we survived will never be answered.

"Thank you," has taken its place.

## Sitting Above the Clouds

Sitting with her back to the wind  
An old, worn chair propped up against the harsh mountain air  
The chatter and murmuring of a hundred people  
Inside the nearby hut  
Reaches her ears

She stands, listening  
That's when the sound of the teakettle  
Thin and high  
Like the cry of a seabird gone astray  
Twists and twirls its way inside her mind

**Greta  
Grant**  
Grade 7  
Avon Middle  
School  
Avon



She rushes inside  
Pulls off her hiking boots  
No one says a word about the chunks of dark mud  
that litter the floor around her  
So she pours herself a cup of  
Steaming hot tea  
With no mind of cleaning up

She sits there and thinks  
Sipping her hot tea  
She's thinking  
She's thinking of the long hike that day  
From Madison Spring to Lakes of the Clouds  
She remembers everything  
Every last detail  
Of crossing four mountains  
And struggling through the alpine zone  
Of the panoramas dotted with slender trees  
And stormy skies

Jolted out of a daydream  
By the hut crew performing  
Their mandatory skit  
She throws back her head  
Laughing  
The cold air carries it over Mount Clay  
Like some twisted form of euphoric song

She pulls on a wool hat  
Thick woolen socks  
That rub her sore ankles roughly  
And a scarf  
Long, and hand-knit by her mother  
The violet and emerald stripes bright in the darkened bunkroom  
Then crawls into her bunk bed  
Reflecting that  
On her favorite night of summer  
a season so often imagined as balmy warm  
As sunshine drenching your skin  
Reflecting that on this summer night  
It was only twenty degrees outside

## The Defining Moment

I enter the labyrinth,  
ushered by a hand,  
the silent hand of God.  
Into the circle of life—  
An interminable path to the core.

It is overwhelming,  
seemingly perpetual.  
Hesitantly, I continue.

Lights looking over me,  
guiding me through the path.  
They outline the long voyage  
I must make to the center,  
the defining moment.

As I move,  
I twist,  
I separate—  
away from others—  
on the path that is a snake  
on my own path—  
my own track.

It's a long jaunt to life's crossroads—  
to the center of the labyrinth.  
I am guided, though, by a force.  
To say it in words  
would be doing the impossible.  
No words describe it.  
It is of the mind,  
it is spiritual.  
It drives me.  
I continue.

At the center,  
I silently sit—  
I pause and pray,  
I reflect.  
I contemplate.  
The maze of life is busy  
it twists around me,  
but I am at peace.  
No outside noise distracts me.

**Parker  
Aubin**  
Grade 7  
RHAM Middle  
School  
Hebron

I turn in silence,  
I start my way back.  
I live life over again,  
around in circles,  
a reflection of my past.  
I'm on my own but  
never alone.

I continue.

## Can I Call You my Friend

**Brittany  
Cruz**  
Grade 7  
Windham  
Middle School  
Willimantic

Friends till the end,  
Can I call you my friend?  
No matter if we fuss or fight,  
Will you call me that same night?  
Would you start a rumor about me?  
Or stop one?  
Would you help me with my homework?  
Or laugh and call me dumb?  
If I ran away, would you let me leave?  
Or be the better person and come look for me?  
If I said, "Leave me alone!"  
Would you stay away?  
Or would you sit and listen to what I had to say?  
If I was sick in the hospital,  
Would you come visit me?  
Or just send a card only saying you missed me.  
No matter how much trouble we get into,  
Will you be with me till the end?  
I think the real question here is,  
Can I call you my friend?

## Email

**Erik  
VanBezooijen**  
Grade 8  
Whisconier  
Middle School  
Brookfield

You don't know who I am, or how this letter about my life that I'm writing concerns you. But it really isn't about me. This is just an example, my stupid, pathetic existence, about what's happening to us over here. Almost all of the people in the camps have been forced to endure the same torturous trials that I am about to describe. This email is pointless. It will probably never reach you; the Spy Satellites will trace the message and destroy it. If it does reach you, I will be killed. But that doesn't matter. I will die here, I know that, and if this must come to pass I want my— our— story to be told at last.

Nero, Bonaparte, Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Hussein— all dictators, all

twisted, an evil spawn of corruption, hated and berated by those who survived their reign. These survivors passed on the stories of the wicked deeds of the power-mad overseers to future generations, and we cast disdainful glances at the skeletons of their fear-mongering empires. And yet, when such a dictator knocks on our own door, where then are the critics, the protesters, the rebels and the skeptics? Nowhere to be found. Throughout history, mankind has done its best to shed responsibility by blaming the dictators who oppressed them. Yet it is ourselves who set up these maniacs into positions of power, who gladly gave them our freedoms. Why did we do this? It's painfully clear. We were afraid that we would abuse our rightful powers, and so we sold them away that we could blame another, a single man, for humanity's flaws. The cycle continued of dictator, dictator's downfall, dictator, and so on, throughout the course of our lives. But one day, the cycle stopped, and we at last tried to take accountability for our actions, it was too late.

We elected for President in the year 2068 a Republican known only today as the Overseer. All documents possessing his real name were destroyed. By that time, the countries of China, Japan, India, Iraq (where I live), Israel, and Iran have all been forced to become states of the Supreme Faction. But in the wake of North Korean bombings, the citizens panicked. The Revised Alien and Sedition Acts of 2069 were passed by the Overseer, and he used them with totalitarian force. Jews, Muslims, blacks, Indians, Asians, Hispanics— all minorities who posed a threat to the homogeneity of his so-called utopia were arrested, and disappeared. I was one such prisoner.

The wastes of Iraq, my home country, were transformed into a vast expanse of prisons and concentration camps. They had been set up in 2050, as torture chambers where Islamic terrorists were condemned. But now, the iron grilles of the prisons cast their long shadows upon the faces of innocents. Tiny cubicles were packed with as many as fifteen prisoners of varied nationalities and religions, and disease spread like wildfire. But what could I do? Only watch, crying silently from behind my bars, watching sickness kill off men, women, and children in the other cells.

The guards, after about two months, finally cured the plague. But many would rather have died. For what they did next was so monstrous, so evil, that I can scarcely believe that I had ever witnessed it. They tortured the prisoners to death, one by one, right in front of us. And they forced us to eat the remains of the deceased.

I remember once, I saw a child, not yet thirteen years old, wrenched away from the hands of his wailing mother. The child, screaming as loudly as his lungs would allow, was chained to an iron slab. The torturers stood over him, and amputated his limbs. All the while the mother could only squeal to her son in a language I could not understand, and the child looked at her with pleading eyes, but he could not talk, for his tongue had been cut out. I tried to look away, but a guard entered my cell and forced my eyelids open with tape. They burned the child's face with the sides of a hot poker, they threw poison in his eyes, and they ridiculed him. But the whole time, he did not cry. He simply

stared at his tormentors, screaming occasionally when he could not bear the pain, defiance in his eyes. He would not give in. He would die with his honor intact. Along with the other prisoners, I wept. The fatal injuries he had been forced to endure killed him soon after. Then, the guards took the body away, and their translators told us that the next day, his body would be burned in the ovens, and we would accompany them.

Since the prisoners were so numerous, the tortures soon stopped, and every day, we lined up in the courtyard. We are so weak. We cannot fight our captors. The Overseer thought of us no better than animals, and through degradation, through torturing and beating, we have become a pack of soulless cannibals. We have no will to live. The minorities of the Supreme Faction have at last been transformed into the animals that the government thought us to be at the beginning of their extermination. We gladly wait in line to be burnt alive, in groups of ten, within the ovens of the camp. The mother of the dead child wiped the silent tears from her face. She stood there before the guards, and quietly pleaded to be the first to be cremated. Her face was rigid. Indifferent. Nonchalant. But her voice cracked beneath her sorrow and guilt. Sorrow for the son she had been unable to save. Guilt for stepping down as an inferior before her captors. She had no desire to live. She wanted to die. And her wish was granted. What have we to live for anymore? Totalitarianism is here to stay. Freedom has never rested with mankind, but before, we had the power to seize it. No longer. The Overseer has taken that away from us, a heinous crime that no other dictator has ever dared to attempt. He has succeeded. Minorities have committed themselves to chains. Supreme Faction drones are oppressed as well; they are unable to find this freedom that, at one time, they had treasured. Why should any humans deserve to live now, after selling themselves so cheaply to dictatorship?

My turn in the ovens has not yet come, for unlike the prisoners around me, the non-whites, the non-Christians, the democrats, the radicals, the anarchists and the rest, there is still something I must do before my death.

Send this email. I escaped my prison this morning, though how I did so is of no consequence. The important thing is that the idea of freedom must be remembered by the masses. Remembered and treasured. We lost sight of what was important long ago, but the concept must be kept alive. If it dies, then mankind is doomed. So many have forgotten it. I refuse to. Please, spread the word that tyranny must be thwarted. Not for my sake, for when the guards find me they will shoot me on the spot. For the sake of memory, for the sake of humanity. The horror of watching that little boy tortured to death has made everything clear. These people, slaughtered by oppression and for our own indolence, must be avenged. We must not let these people die such horrible deaths in vain. Let them be a reminder to us. A reminder that we have given up our freedom. If we continue to sell our freedom, these consequences will be repeated. More children will die. More mothers will weep and surrender themselves to death by fire. But there is still hope. We might have finally lost our freedom. But I pray that it is not so. I will die. But if you spread the word

that freedom, no matter how frail, is still alive, you will not have to.

## Sue

Though winter had blown out of my house months ago, cold still remained. I tried to escape it, and take my mind away from the hole in my heart, but somehow that icy breeze kept weaving its way back in, along with thoughts of my late Sue.

Sue had been my friend and sister for nine years. She was one year older than me, 14 at the time of her death. It's true that she was hyper and constantly had anxiety problems, but that had never stopped her from always being by my side. Without words, she had known when I needed to be comforted. She was a protector and a listener at the same time— she always kept watch to make sure I was safe, and secrets I had kept inside somehow found their way to my lips when she was around.

Until the very end of her life, she had never lost her will to make use of each day. Action used to be a necessity to her. Even as her voice began to fade away, she still tried to make noise, resulting in rasps and odd sounds that I am unable to describe. Had that stopped her? No.

I had watched as each day, her life became shorter, as if someone was cutting it away, one snip every time the sun fell through the sky. As her feet had begun to swell, she still continued to walk, falling over sometimes, or leaning up against the side of the sofa to support herself. I remember feeling helpless as I watched her waste away. What could I do?

I could not stop cancer.

By the last day of her life, Sue could no longer walk. Her final days had been spent lying on a blanket. She still had tried to move and to keep up her spirits. I had stayed home from school that day because I felt a little sick. Little had I known that it was to be Sue's last day alive.

Later in the afternoon, my family and I packed ourselves into the car, along with Sue. Time to go to her doctor. She hated to be picked up— until the very end, she had moaned when Dad had carried her into the car. Car rides had been her least favorite activities in the world. They made her nervous. But in this final trip, I was scared to see how quietly she went.

When we had arrived at the doctor's after an awkwardly silent ride, Sue had to be carried into the room where she would breathe her last breath. After an examination the doctor announced that she had been bleeding internally.

The doctor had told us that she would continue to suffer until she died. It was time to end her life.

When the doctor returned to the room with the needle in his hand, that's when my mom and I had to leave. I had not wanted to see Sue die right before my eyes.

I had looked back at her before I closed the door, and I had whispered

**Leila  
Fletcher**  
Grade 8  
Fairfield Woods  
Middle School  
Fairfield

**Perri  
DiChristina**  
Grade 8  
Eastern Middle  
School  
Riverside

“Goodbye,” just loud enough for me to hear, though I still like to think that Sue heard me, too. It must have been the hardest decision of my life— choosing to stay with her as she passed, or allowing myself to slip out of the room.

Mom and I had stood by the car, crying and hugging and saying, “I can’t believe it,” while my Dad and my sister, Rachel, watched Sue leave the earth forever.

Of course, what I think about when I remember Sue is not how she died, or how in just one week the cancer would take years of love away. Sue gave me strength. She tried her best to survive until she could move no longer. She never gave up on herself, or on her life. Inside I now know that she had been hurting more than I will probably ever know, but outside she fought.

Don’t stop living all you can, even when you know that it’s all over. Sue knew she was dying, how could she not? But she never showed my family and me. I want to be as strong as Sue had been, and I want to have as powerful a will as my Sue did.

Yes, Sue was a “good dog.”

## Heartbeat

Seven months ago, I woke up. Not in the sense that I just woke up from a good night’s sleep, but that I finally opened my eyes to the real world. This “awakening” did not happen randomly, nor did it happen because I wanted it to. If I had a choice, my eyes would have stayed closed for the rest of my life, just because it is so much easier that way.

That day, I was late for school, my bag with the watermelon design on the top slung over my shoulder. Its contents were probably half missing, strewn over my house in the chaos of trying to get to middle school on time. My sister’s hair was probably unbrushed, as it always is, and there was probably a stain on her shirt from a breakfast of strawberries and bagels and messy cream cheese. Because of me, my mom was probably late for a “Very Important Meeting,” but the meeting would probably wait for her. My dad got up at six, as he normally does, put on his swimsuit, and swam a mile in the loud, endless pool in our basement, waking me and the rest of the family up at six-fifteen. That was the beginning of my weekday.

The only slight difference on this Thursday in March was that, instead of going to work, my dad had to go to his “yearly” physical, which he hadn’t had in three years. He didn’t really want to go, but my mom decided that everyone needs reassurance that they are in top condition. So, he set off in his dark blue Audi, impatient for his useless visit to be over.

I am not my father, so I just cannot be in his mind when he sat in the waiting room. His foot was probably tapping against an old, musty carpet, while his six-foot three figure sat in a chair that was lumpy from years of being sat upon.

“DiChristina, Michael, please follow me,” summoned the drowsy secretary

from behind the counter.

The doctor checked up on everything possible. Blood pressure, cholesterol, and finding it all perfect, he decided to take one more last look at my dad's heart. As the doctor placed the cold stethoscope on my dad's chest, his face fell. Quickly, the doctor sent him down to the cardiologist on the next street. After being passed through yet another waiting room, the cardiologist took a closer look at his heart.

"If you look at the aortic valve here," the doctor pointed to a round thing about the width of a half dollar, "It is supposed to be about the size of a quarter and has expanded much more than is normal. You are very lucky that we discovered this when we did."

"What would have happened if you didn't find this problem now?" my dad asked.

"The valve would have expanded to the point where it burst."

"And when would this have happened?"

"In about a few months."

The only thing to do was have open-heart surgery as soon as possible; the surgery was scheduled for next Tuesday.

When I came home from school that day, tired and loaded down with homework, I knew something was wrong. All through my work that night, I worried and worried about why my parents were acting so strangely. After everything was packed for the evening, I went up to my mom to ask her what was wrong.

"What? Oh, um, let Daddy explain. He can do it better."

My dad was standing at the kitchen island, a stressed look on his face.

"Daddddyyyyy, did your checkup go alright? It just feels like something is wrong. Whatever. Oh! Guess what?! I had a quiz in French and—"

"The checkup didn't go alright."

"It didn't? Why? What's wrong?"

He explained to me what the doctor had told him, including a diagram of his heart on a small pad of paper. It all went over my head except for one thing— surgery. I, unlike my sisters, understood how serious this was— the surgery was to be one of the riskiest out there— open heart. The surgeons would have to basically break some of his ribs to get to his heart, then the doctors would put a mechanical valve in his heart, and, to make sure his body wouldn't clot it up, he would have to take a blood-thinning medication for the rest of his life. The next few days were all very strange and clumped together. Hospital brochures were strewn over tables; calls were being made to friends and family members. My mom and dad had finally decided on a hospital in New York, where one of the country's best cardiologic doctors worked.

"And after we are done with your surgery, you will have to stay in the hospital for four to seven days," the doctor explained to my dad, who was lying on an operating table. There were about eight doctors in the room: The main cardiologist, three doctors in training, two nurses, and two anesthesiologists.



“Mr. DiChristina, look over here!” one of the nurses said, indicating my dad’s left hand. As he turned to examine his hand, everything started to get fuzzy. In a few seconds, the anesthesia had knocked him out. As the nurse had distracted him, one of the anesthesiologists had put in the drug. The surgery had started.

Many hours later, my dad woke up with a tube in his mouth. Feeling nauseous, he freaked out. The doctors had not told him that the tube in his mouth was there to help him breathe, and nothing could go wrong with it.

For the next few days, my dad was put on heavy drugs. He had nightmares of imps the size of our cats with evil eyes and being closed in a box not big enough for him. But as more of our friends and family visited, he began to relax more. The doctors were always available, with nurses at their side.

It was only six days my dad had been away, but it felt like a lifetime. When both of my parents came home, they explained to me how well the surgery went and how long it would take to recover.

Medication for the rest of his life, always needing to be aware of his heart and how fast it was allowed to beat, these things would always be on my family’s thoughts. When my dad first came home from the hospital, he was much thinner than he was before because he had already started to lose his muscles. For the first few days, he was quiet, and would always pause every ten minutes to listen to his heart. It was frightening, because I had never seen my dad scared before, and knowing what was going on just made everything worse. In the course of his recovery, there were still quite a few scares, one where I had to call 911 because not enough oxygen was getting to his brain. Even now, he pauses if he thinks something has gone wrong, but I have started to get accustomed to it. No one likes to hear that someone in their family has to have a serious surgery, but it is better than hearing that someone in your family has a burst valve, and that he should have had an operation.

This is not one of those stories that end easily. There is no happy ending. There really is no ending at all. My life will never be exactly the same again. Everyone is much more conscious now, and they all view the world differently. If you sit still and listen closely, you can hear his heart ticking, almost like a clock; this is the noise that has changed me most. And, if you sit still and listen closely, you can hear how much everything has changed. But, sometimes, the change isn’t all bad. Sometimes, change can be the thing you need most, no matter how much you don’t want it.

## **When She’s in Love**

She’s glowing a bit today,  
A little touch of radiance to her skin,  
A little spark in her eye.  
She bounces slightly when she walks,

**Laura  
Paik**  
Grade 8  
Newton  
Middle School  
Newton

And the air around her hums with music.  
She is so very dreamy,  
And I know something's up.

She's lilac-scented today,  
The fragrance hanging about her like a heavenly floral curtain.  
Her hair bounces with her step now,  
Silky and shining in the sunlight that never leaves her  
As she strolls by,  
Aureate as the golden adornments that seem to drip from her as of late.  
She smiles,  
Perhaps at me, perhaps at everyone and no one.  
She's so very lovely  
When she's in this mood.

She's shining, brilliant and ecstatic, today.  
She gleams,  
Her hands clasping and unclasping,  
Her lips becoming fuller and redder  
Each time she leaves the restroom.  
She sails through the hallways,  
Floating on an unseen breeze or nimbus,  
And she rules the day,  
Never looking down, never falling from her phantom pedestal.  
Today she gives him that long, adoring stare,  
And he stares back.  
She's so very stunning, when she's in love.

She's not here today,  
Replaced by a girl who's dying,  
Dull as stone.  
And the only trace of shine left  
Is the sparkling of a diamond tear  
That makes its long, slow journey  
Down her ashen face.  
She clutches herself in a position that is protective,  
But also keeps her arms from being empty.  
He does not look at her today,  
Though she still gazes at him.  
Go to her,  
Rest your arm on her shoulder,  
Catch her tears and unlock her arms from each other.

It will all fade away before she knows it.  
She is so like all the others,  
Falling in and out of what we call love.

**Elissa  
Levine**  
Grade 8  
Fairfield  
Woods Middle  
School  
Fairfield

## **Writer's Block**

A solid steel wall.  
Looking in front of me  
I stumble into it  
Over  
And over again  
I've memorized the tiny  
Cracks and crevices—  
Every minute detail  
In my adventures of what appears to be  
Staring into space  
But  
I'm not  
I'm staring at the wall

Everyone else seems to get around it  
Or just plow  
Straight through it  
Their pencils scratching away  
Writing about their dog  
Or their lunch  
Or what they see out the window

The idea light bulb over my head won't work  
Or it forgot to go on  
A power outage in my brain  
That needs to be fixed  
It's a vault  
And I don't know the combination  
Locked away  
From my thoughts  
That perfect idea that  
Eludes me

My fingers tapping  
Out of control  
In frustration  
Until someone comes to unbolt the gate,  
To let me in  
To invite me  
To join them

## Invisible

I'm one of those 'invisible' kids.  
No one seems to notice if I'm not there.  
I'm one of those kids that's always been there,  
but never been noticed.  
I'm one of those kids that cling to teachers  
Because I have no friends.  
I'm one of those kids that hides from the future,  
and refuses to get rid of the good old past.

I'm one of those kids who take things so seriously,  
That you can never tell when I'm kidding.  
I'm one of those kids that you never see in the lunchroom,  
Because I don't want to have the torture of eating alone.  
I'm one of those kids that has strong ideas,  
But not a voice to share them.  
I'm one of those kids that doesn't talk much,  
You could never know I'm there.

I'm one of those kids with hidden talents,  
There's lots of ways I could surprise you.  
I'm one of those kids that cry to sleep,  
Because no one is there to help me.  
I'm one of those kids that wants to give,  
And asks for nothing in return.  
I'm one of those kids who will stop and help you in the hall,  
even if I'm then late to my class.  
I'm one of those kids that dare to be different,  
Even through your glassy stares

I'm one of those 'invisible' kids,  
That's always in the way.  
I'm one of those 'invisible' kids,  
That is never asked to play.  
I'm one of those 'invisible' kids,  
That gets blank stares in a crowd.  
I'm one of those invisible kids,  
That's never going to be proud.  
I'm one of those 'invisible' kids.

Am I really that different?

**Hannah  
Sikand**  
Grade 8  
Mansfield  
Middle School  
Mansfield

**Anna  
Nassiff**  
Grade 9  
Arts at the  
Capitol Theatre  
Willimantic

## **Umbrella**

Rain hammered the leaky tin roof in rhythmic fury. It matted the unprotected world, driving empty beer bottles into the mud and reducing escaped napkins to pulp. It enhanced the colors of the sparse patches of sickly grass and the dreary concrete walkway.

The girl stood at the edge of the concrete, the spot right before it dropped down to the tracks. She had on a boxy yellow raincoat two sizes too big; her jeans were frayed at the hems, too long even for her own tall legs. She had neither a hat nor an umbrella, or even a hood. Her face was obscured by the thick, wet sheet of rich brown hair, except for a tiny corner of her small mouth.

The boy watched her from the sixth story of a ramshackle apartment building across the tracks. He was staring out the grime encrusted window, bored with sleep, even though it was nearly eleven o'clock. Besides, the illumination from the lampposts by the tracks bathed his room in a luminescent glow that made his eyes itch.

The girl was pretty, the boy decided, though he could not glimpse her face. He was enraptured by the bit of mouth that poked out; the lips were bulky and pink, like fresh bubblegum. She seemed to be waiting for someone as she glanced down the tunnel. The boy wondered where the girl's parents were, and why they had left her alone in the dark, drenching night. And without an umbrella.

The boy thought he should go down and meet her, perhaps. That would be nice of him. The girl would enjoy company; she wouldn't be lonely at all. He could wait with her until that somebody she was waiting for turned up; he would have to remember to scold them for being so late. He would bring the girl an umbrella, too.

The idea had barely had time to settle in his mind when he was lacing up his sneakers and pulling on some jeans. The boy crept to his closet, balancing on the balls of his feet so that the decrepit floorboards wouldn't creak. He pulled out his older brother's yellow raincoat instead of his own red one. It was large and boxy on him, like it had been on the girl. He thought she would find it funny that they had the same raincoats on. Maybe they would have lots of other things in common too, and they would be friends. He imagined what she might be like as he trod down the stairs with care. In his mind, she already had a face; it was round and sweet, with dimples. She would snort when she laughed, just like he did.

The boy gently unhooked the neighbor's pink and green umbrella from the coat rack as he passed, remembering not to open it until he got outside. Otherwise, he might have seven whole years of bad luck, like the tall boy at school had told him.

He stepped out into the rain and opened the umbrella. It was hard for him to hold it up; the wind kept trying to snatch it. He forced the warped door shut behind him. Then the boy looked across the tracks, and his breath caught in his

throat. She was standing right there, just across the tracks. He realized that he hadn't really expected her to still be there, but that she would disappear, like a mirage. There was something about her that had seemed so aloof and ethereal through the window, but there she was, her face still not visible. He looked at the mouth corner. It twitched upwards, very slightly.

The rattling of a train halted him, though he hadn't know he was moving. He would wait to cross. The lights of it filled the tunnel before him, its shrieks resonating in his ears. The corner of the girl's mouth was smiling again, less forced than it had been last time, and peaceful.

The train had nearly reached them. The girl slipped over the side of the crumbling concrete with the grace of a feral cat. The boy knew her true beauty in that single frozen moment, and the hair fell from her face and she hung there, in midair, untouched by the world around her. He saw her playing with her little sister, arguing with her teacher, and laughing with some other girls on a playground. He heard her play her French horn as though nothing else mattered, and saw her trip and scrape her knee; her mother picked her up and kissed the little wound.

The boy went back inside and hung up the umbrella.

## Good Idealists

The epic tale of Good vs. Evil, wizards, witches, knights, and magical powers are the basic necessities for your fairy tale. The struggle where good ultimately triumphs when evil sets out to overcome all civilization. A typical man in black, defeated by the knight in white, who always has his undefeated plans to conquer, until the "good" discovers a loophole to the "wicked plan." The stories are all the same as the previous ones. Each story passed down from generation to generation. And even though the characters seem different behind those masks, they all are considered holy and flourish among the community.

Imagine a small community in London about 20/25 years back, when they had their stone roads and funny cars. The small children playing, their laughter dancing in the faint summer breeze. The smell of the heat in the air. You see the local artist painting the view of the hilltops and the baker down the street. As you walk past the wooden fences, you smell the collision of lilacs and sweet rolls exploding in the air. You are tranquil and at peace.

You meet up with your best friend Charlie, and you two go skipping rocks on the glimmering lake. You do this until the sun starts setting, and Charlie walks down the street opposite you as you both race homes to meet their curfews.

A horn goes off. You choke on the thick pollution that has seeped its way down your throat and covers your lungs. The sticky air melts in your mouth.

**Deidra  
Berthod**  
Grade 9  
Griswold High  
School  
Griswold

You enter the ten-story building that you were just standing outside of. The receptionist, practically pushing you, sends you through a set of wide, wooden doors. You sit down in the uncomfortable, black leather chair. You don't want to make much noise, but with each squirm, the chair creaks.

“Good morning, Mr. Smith. Let's just cut to the chase and get started. Do you know how much money you have cost this company with your frivolous ideas of a charity program?” says a big man in an all-black suit as he stands from his leather business chair. He is now towering over you. His face is pale and unyielding. You couldn't stand the heat of his stare as you felt it searing through your skin and clothes layer by layer, until it reached your blood and bones. The pressure turns you cold and numb. You are paralyzed as he makes his way to your side. After he threatens your life, job, family, and pet dog named Spot, you stutter out an incomplete sentence of acceptance and promising to provide what is demanded of you. Your boss is such a sweet guy, isn't he?

Of course you realize at once which place you wish to be. With your boss as he heavily spits insults and threats at you during your “meeting,” right? To return to the sweet summer air and warm golden sun streaming over your smiling face would be the better choice. You realize that Charlie is a good person with good intentions and will be a kind, giving person for the rest of his life. You have also noted that your boss in the big corporate world is unforgiving and has his morals screwed up.

Thus, Charlie is the good knight and your boss is the evil wizard. The thoughts of good and evil are obviously fairy tales, but they go deeper than that. They are historical myths that were at one time focused on everyday society. The bad guys were your basic, self-driven, money earning jerks. The good guys are your everyday, hard working, under appreciated, moral citizens. After years of gossiping about wicked bosses, these stories were developed. “Cinderella” was a small school child whose trio of teachers forced her to stay inside and do class work at recess. She had missed a day of school to tend to her father's cold. “Jack and the Beanstalk” told of the innocent child being beaten by his drunk father as he tried to run back down the stairs he had gone up to see if his father was alright. These stories were made from everyday people who have no lives and enjoy making fun of all of the people who are self-centered and “evil” at heart.

As you can see, the childhood bedtime stories your mother or father read to you, as you lie comfy and warm, nestled in your bed, were stretches of the truth. They tell of the millionaire living in Hollywood who never gives enough of his \$3 billion charity money to one charity in particular. They are based on your average, optimistic idealists working their way through the “cold, cruel” world of greed-driven people who made their way up the social ladder after many years of hard work and loneliness and into the world of well earned respect. They really are horrible people, aren't they?

## Wings

The streets of Chicago. They can be a pretty rough place if you don't know what you're doing. They're full of car fumes, endless crowds, and countless numbers of homeless people sitting on every street corner. Each of these bums has the same story, the same excuse of why they can't get a job. Or at least that's what I used to think.

I'm from a small "city" in Connecticut, which shouldn't even be called a city compared to the massive size of Chicago. So I'm not used to seeing so many people sitting on the side of the street because they have nowhere else to go. It used to scare me. But my little sister, Emily, was fascinated by them. She would stop at every person, whip out her little piggy bank, and viciously shake it up and down until a penny or two fell out.

One time she stopped to watch the Copper Cowboy, who was a gold spray-painted man who danced to Michael Jackson on the corner of Michigan and Wacker. I realized she wasn't walking next to me and ran back to get her just as the bus we were rushing to catch turned the corner. I grabbed the piggy bank in one hand and took her hand in my other. I dragged her along behind me as she started to make a scene for everyone to see.

"Gabriel! Stop pulling me! I have to say goodbye!" she yelled as she turned back and waved to the man.

Gabriel, that's my real name. Emily is the only one who can call me that and live to tell the tale. To everyone else, I'm known as Gabe. Sometimes I feel like this kid's mother. But I guess I'm the closest thing she's got. Our father is often too busy with his computer business to take care of her. I mean, I'm only sixteen, and I shouldn't be stuck with the responsibility of someone who's half my age.

So I dragged Emily along and caught the bus just as the doors were about to close. I was about to insert four dollars to cover the cost for both of us, but Emily stopped me.

"No, Gabe! I wanna pay for it!" she whined.

"Alright, fine," I answered, rolling my eyes.

She turned back to me, "Can I borrow two dollars?" I gave her the money and she gave it right back to me so I could put it in the machine, which she couldn't reach. I pushed her down the aisle as she smiled proudly, convinced she had paid for the ride herself.

We took the two seats behind our father. He was too preoccupied with a call to Japan to notice that we had gotten on the bus five minutes after he did. His business is what brought us to Chicago in the first place. He had to set up a chain of computers for his company's new Chicago chapter. While we were here, I was supposed to be looking at colleges, which was hard to do with my little sister tagging along all day.

I stared at the back of his head as he chatted away in fluent Japanese, one of

**Maggie  
Hendrickson**  
Grade 9  
Bristol Eastern  
High School  
Bristol



the many languages he had taught himself. If only he put that much effort into acting like a real father. Everyone says I'm the spitting image of him. I have his dark hair and basically his whole face, except for my green eyes that I got from my mother. Honestly, I hope our appearance is the only thing we have in common. I would hate it if I grew up to be just like him.

I turned my thoughts back to my little sister, who didn't take any notice of the fact that our father was ignoring us. I guess she's used to it by now, she's too little to remember the days before Mom died when everything was normal. But I remember them like it was yesterday.

"Emily, how many times do I have to tell you? Don't give them anything, don't talk to them, don't make eye contact. Don't even look at them!" I lectured as I handed back her piggy bank. "Haven't you learned not to talk to strangers?"

"But I didn't think he was strange at all. He was just a person, Gabriel, like you."

I didn't really know how to respond to that, but she didn't notice. She was already busy making up a conversation between her doll and her piggy bank. We didn't say a word until we were back in the apartment building. We were making our way up to the 28<sup>th</sup> floor in the elevator when my father finally got off his cell phone. I noticed a sign hanging on a small bulletin board to the right of the buttons. It said there was a club downstairs next to the restaurant that was open to high school students only. I pointed it out to my father before he could dial another business call.

"Dad, can I go? Please, come on, I've been watching Em for the past two days nonstop. Can't I have a couple hours to myself?"

He read the sign over the top of his glasses. "You're too young," he stated simply, as if that would end the conversation.

"But it's only open for high school students! Come on Dad, just a couple of hours." The elevator doors opened and we walked to the room. He pulled out the room key and paused with the door open so I couldn't get through. Emily scrambled under his arm and ran over to the t.v.

"Two hours, that's it. You hear me?" he demanded.

"Yes! Thanks Dad! Two hours, got it." I ran to my room, changed and was back in the elevator heading to the first floor all in the next five minutes.

The club was open to all who had their high school ID card with them. I walked in and looked around casually. There were couches, some tables, a DJ, a little stage towards the front of the room, and a bar serving sodas. The music was already blasting, but no one was dancing yet. I decided to get a soda. I turned the corner and bumped right into a girl coming from the opposite direction. I instantly apologized for running into her, and then I noticed I had knocked over her soda.

"Oh, sorry. Here, I'll get you another drink," I offered as I bent down to pick up the cup. I hurried over to the bar. "You're such an idiot," I mumbled to myself. I got her a Coke and turned back to her. She introduced herself, her name was Erica.

“I’m Gabe,” I replied. She smiled back at me. She had a beautiful smile.

“Gabriel? Like the angel?” she asked, her smile growing wider.

“What?” I said, but then I realized she was referring to my necklace. It must have fallen out from under my shirt when I bent down. The necklace had a gold charm hanging from it in the shape of wings with my name written across it. “Oh, that. My mom gave it to me when I was born. Gabriel is my full name.”

“Oh, that’s so sweet. Are you really close to your mother?” she asked. I could tell she really cared about what I was saying.

“My mother died seven years ago,” I said, avoiding her eyes.

“Oh, I’m so sorry. I know what it’s like to lose someone you love. My little brother died a few years ago.”

We continued talking for the rest of the night. I loved being with Erica. Even though we just met, I felt so comfortable around her. I could just be myself. I noticed she wasn’t wearing any makeup, but she didn’t need it. She had a natural beauty about her. Her bright blond hair made her stand out against the darkness of the room.

After a while the club started to slow down, and we went outside to get some fresh air. It was only then that I realized how late it was. It was over an hour later than I had promised my father, but I wanted to spend more time with Erica. I offered to walk her home, but she said it wasn’t a good idea. I was about to ask why not when I felt something tugging on the back of my jacket. I turned around to see Emily standing there with a huge smile on her face.

“Emily! What are you doing here? Where’s Dad?” She didn’t need to answer, I could see Dad marching towards us in his usual position; his cell phone pressed tightly against his ear. I turned back to Erica to explain what was going on, but she was gone. I looked up and down the street, but there was no sign of her. She didn’t even say goodbye.

Emily wiggled her little hand into mine and pulled me down the sidewalk. I kept looking over my shoulder, just in case Erica came back, but she never did. We walked back up to our room. But the whole time I couldn’t stop thinking about Erica.

The next day, I finally had some time in the city by myself. I went out to look at some colleges and decided to stop at Starbucks. I walked through the revolving doors and turned the corner when I walked straight into someone, yet again. I looked at who it was and realized it was a homeless person. I could tell by the way they were dressed, in stained jeans and a dirty, oversized coat, and by the way they were scrambling to collect all of the coins that had just fallen out of a paper cup they were carrying. I rolled my eyes and bent down to help. As the person stood back up, her hood fell back so I could see her face. I was completely shocked. I looked down, blinked a couple of times and then looked back into the eyes of the person I had collided with.

It was Erica.

I could not believe it. “Hey, what are you…” but she pulled her hood back up and ran away in the direction she came from before I could finish what I

was saying. So I took off after her.

“Hey! Erica!” I ran through the crowds of people to catch up to her. I turned a corner and stopped. Before me was an enormous crowd of people all dressed in orange and blue. The Bears game must have let out. There was no way I could possibly find her now. She knew where she was going. Something told me she didn’t want to be found.

I walked back to the hotel, still in shock that the girl of my dreams had turned out to be nothing more than the thing that disgusted me the most. It couldn’t be.

I took out my key and opened the hotel room. I fell down on my bed, rethinking everything. Then I remembered what my sister had said, how the homeless man was just a person, too. Maybe she was right.

The hotel door opened and Emily came running in with my dad following behind her, talking away on his cell phone. I got up and walked over to her. She was already anxiously trying to shove her *Little Mermaid* tape into the slot so she could watch it.

“Hey Em, can I ask you something?” I said quietly.

She looked up at me with her big blue eyes. “Sure Gabey.”

“Why do you always want to help the people on the street?”

She gave me an odd look. “Because they need it,” she answered as if it were a stupid question.

“But you can’t help all of them. It’s their fault they’re out of a job, you shouldn’t have to suffer for it.”

“But I *like* helping them. And it’s not always their fault. They just need another roll.” She continued when she saw the blank look on my face. “You know when we play Monopoly and I land on one of your properties, but you let me roll the dice again. Well they need a do-over sometimes, too.” She turned back to her movie and left me to think about what she said. Sometimes Emily surprised me by how much she knew.

The next day, the three of us were walking down Michigan Avenue. For once Dad wasn’t on his cell phone, but he was still walking a few paces ahead of me and Emily. We were going to cross the street when Dad turned to grab his ringing cell phone off of his belt clip when he ran right into a limping homeless lady who was coming from the other direction. It was obviously his fault; he wasn’t looking where he was going.

“Hey! Watch it, moron!” he yelled at the lady. He reached up and pushed her back with both hands. She stumbled back a few steps and fell down against the building.

“What good did that do!?” I screamed back in his face and pushed him out of the way. I turned to the lady to see if she was alright. I bent down to pick up her few belongings and reached out my hand to help her up. She took it and slowly got to her feet. She was shivering. It was November and it can be extremely cold when you don’t have a warm coat, so I took off mine and put it around her shoulders.

She looked up at me. “Oh no, I couldn’t possibly...”

“No, take it. You need it more than I do,” I replied.

“God bless you.” Then she saw my necklace, which must have fallen out when I bent down, and she gasped. “Gabriel, my angel.” She smiled and turned back around the corner, out of sight. I shot a look back at my father, who hadn’t moved since I shoved him. Then I jammed my hands into my jean pockets and continued walking down the street.

As I was walking away I heard Emily say quietly back to our father, “She was just a person too, Daddy.” She ran after me and slipped her hand into mine. We walked the rest of the way home like that, smiling at every person we passed because we knew it could make a difference. I kept thinking about how the old lady had called me her angel.

Then Emily said quietly, “Gabriel, your wings are showing.”

I stopped walking. Sometimes I swear this girl can read my mind. I realized my winged necklace was still dangling outside my shirt. I reached up to put it back under, but I stopped. I let it hang back down out in the open. Then I smiled to myself because we all need to spread our wings out every once and a while. Maybe, just maybe, some of us really are angels. But maybe we all are.

## What a Sight!

We drove ‘round that final corner  
The final turn in our journey  
Which seemed to last a lifetime

But *it* was now in sight  
Oh what a sight—I’ll say if I might.  
And it was this very moment  
That I will always remember.

It was the first time I’d been there  
At this wonderfully perfect and beautiful place.  
I could have sworn it was heaven.

The first thing I saw was the greatest of all  
The mountains, emerald giants  
Towering over us, glaring down.

And on their heads they wore thin white caps  
Which seemed to be made of marshmallows.

The green bushy trees danced in the wind  
As their branches shook all about

The leaves could be heard whispering to each other  
As they rustled in the light breeze.

**Jared  
Fischer**  
Grade 9  
Simsbury High  
School  
Simsbury

The leaves could be heard whispering to each other  
As they rustled in the light breeze.

The sun was an everlasting fireball  
Ruling the sky with authority  
Whose heat could be felt cooking your skin.

But most beautiful of all was the ease with which you could breathe  
The fine air allowed you to enjoy every breath of oxygen  
You could feel the thin air, smell the thin air, taste it too

The wind was like a cool fan on a hot summer day  
Faintly humming as it passed, making the weather perfect.

The sky, as blue as the ocean off the shore of a tropical island,  
Made the scene complete.

And floating around was the aroma of the fragrant flowers of summer.

This was paradise, and it called out to me.  
I was in the valley, and the valley in me.

## Firefly Nights

the night is  
AWaSh with promise  
mysterious  
otherwise it is  
a branch of human spirit  
just like a limb  
reaching from the soul  
to gently brush the muggy air  
it smells of life  
the night is  
still  
no breath of breeze  
and yet without a doubt  
at last  
alive  
a humid  
*balmy* night  
the sky becomes  
a murky shade of blue  
and rain begins

**Adrienne  
Isaacson**  
Grade 9  
Simsbury High  
School  
Simsbury

to l i g h t l y fall  
till not one stubborn dry safe speck  
does l.i.n.g.e.r. in the universe  
every man and all of nature  
rejoice life in blissful never ending tandem  
not a solitary sound  
but water drenching all in sight  
for those who choose to stay outside  
breathing is intoxicating  
and everything is feasible  
the night is  
*ceaselessly* DIVINE

## Graceful Garden

Hey angel, time to wake-up now  
Open your eyes and let's run away  
Escape to a place only we can know  
A secret place where only we can go

Our secret garden, angel, we've been here before  
Do you remember too? No  
I'll remember for you  
I'll keep you here in my mind  
I'll keep it all here in our eternal springtime

Breezes blow through the trees  
Petals spiral down, stems die  
Still I can hear your voice  
Leaves rustle and birds cry

"I won't ever leave you." Words you said to me  
A year ago, last December  
Yet time never slows down, my angel  
I'm colder now than I ever was before  
My heart breaks and mangles  
I wish I could forget your face

Breezes blow through the trees  
Petals spiral down, stems die  
Still I can hear your voice  
Leaves rustle and birds cry

**Victoria  
Helwig**  
Grade 9  
Guilford High  
School  
Guilford

And I miss you  
In my dreams I tell you  
Even though I never could before  
I love you

Breezes blow through the trees  
Petals spiral down, stems die  
Still I can hear your voice  
Leaves rustle and birds cry  
In our graceful garden

## Shadow Play

Anne  
Skelding  
Grade 10  
Manchester  
High School  
Manchester

Shadows made their living there, dancing on the walls and creeping into the corners. Nary a sound could be heard as the night progressed.

No one was there. No one saw them as they wrapped their tendrils around their prey; each object in the room became the host for a shadow to feed on.

As the night progressed and the moon rose, a few faint, silvery beams of light shone through a forgotten window. The shadows, creatures of the darkness as they were, shied away from it, scattering in the pure light. A cloud reached out to cover the beautiful orb; radiance had no place here.

There was silence. It seemed almost a tangible thing, as if one could reach out and touch it, brushing it with trembling fingertips, and shivering at its coldness.

They say that silence is golden. Whoever it was that first said this phrase had obviously never chanced upon a room where the shadows played, and the silence was as menacing as a scream of fury or a growl in the night.

It was cold. Not physically cold, perhaps; pulling one's blanket around one's head, or tightening the coat about one's shoulders would do nothing to keep out the chill. It was brought about by the darkness, the shadows, and the silence. It was a clammy cold, a dirty cold. Not a single kind thought could breach its defenses and warm it, breathing life into a dead world.

Suddenly, a door was opened, and a yellow, electric light shone into the room. The shadows fled to the corners, cursing the beings that disturbed them with silent shrieks of fury. Two shapes stood silhouetted in the glow.

The taller figure turned to the smaller one, speaking words of reassurance to the young child at his side.

"See, Emi? There's nothing to be afraid of. It's just shadows. Go back to sleep."

The small figure was pushed gently inside, and the door was closed. With the light gone, the shadows came out of their hiding places.

*No, there's nothing to be afraid of... nothing at all...*

The shadows cover all.

## Something on the Rocks

**Sydney  
Pierce**  
Grade 10  
Avon High  
School  
Avon

It's strange when a guy has a headache before he even gets into a bar. It's usually something I don't expect until morning, when I wake up without much of a memory of exactly how much I drank the night before. I bet it's always more than I think. The glasses kind of fade into one another after a while. It's not like I'd count to begin with. I don't even think the bartenders bother to count anymore. Especially not in this bar. You just kind of know it the moment you walk in. It's not one of those loud, club-like bars with a blaring bass and dozens of women in short skirts laughing in the middle of the room. Nope. This one's quiet. There's a hint of music in the background, but only enough so that you don't actually have to speak to the bartender when asking for another round. You can tap the bar, and pretend he wouldn't be able to hear you if you opened your mouth. He'd be able to hear you; he hears everything. You just don't want to say out loud that you're drinking your life down the drain. One bottle at a time.

I'd never been to this particular bar before, but I'd been to plenty like it. The difference was that I was walking in with what felt like a hangover. It was ten o'clock at night. The bartender lifted his head from a dusty glass, noted my condition, and put it back under the counter. He pulled out a beer and set it on the bar in front of me. I sat down, put a hand around the bottle, and avoided his gaze. But I could feel him looking at me. It was only for a minute, probably not even that. It was the kind of look that said he had no idea what my day had been like, but he sure knew where it was going. It was sympathetic, understanding even. But I couldn't be sure whether it was because he'd sat at a bar like that himself... or because he'd seen too many others do the same. I like that in a bartender. That uncertainty.

He didn't say a thing, just set the beer down and moved on down the counter toward a woman a few stools down from me, sitting at the corner. She looked like she'd been there for a while. Her back was hunched over the bar, thwarting anything that could interrupt her misery. There were a number of empty glasses in front of her. I've noticed that about people in bars like this—they want to be here. Their sole purpose for being in this place at this time is to drown themselves in alcohol and mistakes. They want to. They want to get it done here, where it's perfectly private even though there could be a dozen other people sitting within a few yards.

Maybe everyone knows this. Maybe that's why they can sit so close.

I was alone. There was the woman down at the end and two quiet guys off to my left. They wore faces like they'd been watching a football game that maybe could've gone either way for awhile... and then in the final ten minutes some jackass linebacker had to take out their quarterback. It was a dazed face, confused even. With glazed eyes and a mouth hanging slightly open, as if they just couldn't get it through their heads that it really was over. It was just a bit of bad luck. But it screwed 'em. There was a small group of people towards the



back corner at a table. They were talking, quietly, as if they knew anything above a whisper would interrupt somebody's silence.

But I was alone.

I looked at my hands. One was resting on the wood of the bar; the left one. Ready to smack it for another. Anticipation twitched in my fingers. God, it was in my very nerves, and I knew that I wouldn't be able to shake it until the bartender had left another beer in front of me. Even then, I'd still be shivering. The other hand was wrapped around the bottle, water beading sweat-like on the edge of my fingers. It was half empty, and I couldn't remember taking a sip.

I stared blankly at the empty wall behind the counter and the shelves of glasses, but looked up when somebody slammed down into the seat two down from me.

It was a woman. She wore faded jeans, a little muddy, and a shirt that had definitely seen better days. She looked at me for a second—probably because I'd been looking at her.

“What the hell happened to you?” she said, sliding her long legs under the counter.

I quirked an eyebrow at her. Happened? Oh yeah. That. My left hand reached up to my forehead, feeling for something. And there it was, a little trickle of blood, just where I remembered it hurting like hell. It wasn't much. Enough to get noticed, I guess, but nothing serious. Nothing I couldn't forget about.

“Run-in with a plate,” I said.

She held my eyes with her own for a minute and then nodded just before I was going to tear them away. It was short, but slow. She nodded as if she understood and then quietly got the bartender's attention.

A drink wasn't the only thing the bartender brought to her in the next couple minutes. There was a wet rag too, and she slid it across the bar to me, without looking. It left a thick line behind it, drenching the wood. I really wished she hadn't done that. I really wish she hadn't made me think about that.

But what was I even there for if not to think about it? Wasn't I just like every other person in that bar?

Of course I was.

I took the rag, with a nod and a murmur of thanks. The blood was mostly dry by now, kind of crusty, with a few bits that were still a little wet. I dabbed at it for a while, not really paying too much attention. The cut was small, not deep. It had only bled so much because it was my head. According to my wife, blood is all it seems to be full of. Maybe a little fluff, too. A lot of alcohol.

I dropped the rag back onto the counter and glanced sidelong. She was sipping at a tall glass of something on the rocks, eyes glued on the blank wall behind the counter. I appreciated the seat this woman had left empty between us. It meant something to me, that length of blank space. It meant that, in the morning, I'd be able to forget that I'd probably spilled my heart at her feet. It meant that none of this, this atmosphere, this potential conversation, meant anything at all. Later, I could just say that I was drunk; that I'd drowned my

consciousness in bottle after bottle of icy alcohol; that it had filled me and overwhelmed me until all the emptiness had been replaced with something that felt like so much more. It wasn't, of course. It was just liquid. Never solid, never stable. It wouldn't be capable of building my life back up from the ground. I knew it, at the time. I knew that I was doomed.

And I didn't particularly care.

## The Introvert Always Runs From Something

A decade late, that's what my father always said. Right after my oldest brother Tomas was born, my parents wanted a girl. Instead, they had two more boys. So twelve years after Tomas, ten years after Henry, and nine years after Bobby, I saw the world.

My whole family was elated (endless cards in Spanish and phone calls from relatives in foreign countries). Even the hospital gave them a celebratory lobster dinner. Maybe that's why I love seafood these days. Yet I hate sunlight and/or living room lights. I was born in the summer time, you see, and I remember too many bright lights, then.

So, is it fair to say that as the last child and only girl I was spoiled? Well, that's debatable. While my pre-teen brothers went shopping for rap CDs I had to follow my indecisive mother around the bra section for seemingly an eternity. Perhaps at three is when I learned impatience. Either that or it clicked in my tiny, infantile brain that I would never be high maintenance. Albeit that didn't mean I wasn't dragged along for the production of getting dressed to go out. I dreaded those special occasions where my mother would put me in something floral and feminine. I swear, childhood is such a dictatorship.

My mother's parents were from Puerto Rico and my father was born in Barranquia, Columbia. They did speak to me in Spanish quite often. But the adhesive of my culture was somehow too diluted and thin to take hold of me. It mystifies me, since I'm so close to being an immigrant myself. So as a child, I can't really remember speaking to my parents in Spanish. They would talk to me in their language and get a response in mine. Although Mommy grew up bilingual in New York, I still feel as though being free from another tongue left me to truly master English. I think it's why I'm so articulate; it's the only voice my consciousness ever spoke to me in.

But I have flashbacks of at one time, being a little *senorita*. The Spanish *senorita* that dances with castanets, her long black dress swirling by her knees, looking elegant because she could look magnificent with her hair tied up by two rose blossoms. She is the portrait of *Espana*.

My Uncle Benny, who was visiting from Venezuela, (he is, of course, Columbian too, but he lived as a doctor there) would cook with my father a Spanish feast. They'd make the empanadas, *la arroz, y las arepas*. My mom handled *los pastels, el sancocho, y el pernil*. The aroma of mild and hot spices

Evelyn  
Herazo  
Grade 10  
Cooperative  
Arts and  
Humanities  
High School  
New Haven

blended with the soft, chewy texture of tropical roots twirled through the air. Only the mere mention of authentic Hispanic home-cooking and I'd start drooling. As a child, I felt no guilt in enjoying my people's food.

Someday I will visit the motherland, and the fatherland, and the land of my forefathers (because I do have great-grandparents on my father's side who came from Spain). But I've lived in Connecticut my entire life. I've never resided outside of New Haven! It's a weird attachment for me. It is an old town from colonial ages and the architecture of many buildings retains a gothic style. Since I could walk, I trekked through the New Haven green, passed by the main library where in elementary school I started checking out books. I'd pass by the three adjacent churches that have been there since 16-something, something. During the winter I'd hope my parents would be out late enough to drive past the giant Christmas tree erected in the middle of the park; that's when the lights were turned on.

When I entered kindergarten (German for "garden of children." Yes, I knew German better than Spanish), I felt a vague sense of loneliness. Here is the birth of my distance from the rest of society. The other little boys and girls were either rambunctious or placid. There was no place for my demeanor in those poles. I was just well-behaved. I was not hyperactive because there was no need to be, and at five there is nothing to disappoint me on a daily basis. Rule out nervous fear, for future reference. I was indifferent about the idea of sitting with a group of strange people who were about my height. Perhaps my introverted personality was born during my kindergarten year.

## **Born in a World I've Never Seen**

**Ashley  
Okuwazi**  
Grade 10  
Manchester  
High School  
Manchester

They front'n  
Lie'n  
Most of 'em be dream'n  
of the life they see but the one they really don't want  
Magazine covers' deceit  
The way kids were brought up  
Runnin' around like strays  
with no sense of direction or boundaries

You see suburban kids  
or even the lowest standard student enrolled  
in a school to get them to Harvard  
So what do they do?  
Take the opportunity and run with it  
or be the next victim in a game played  
by many teens...  
Follow the leader

The leaders happen to be not just one person  
but a group of manipulative trend setters  
It shows in our statistics that these trend setters  
leading our teen society  
are just the next generation  
from the parents who haven't yet taught their kids  
the difference  
between moral values and bein' civilized  
and  
having too much fun and criticizin'

One quarter of our teen society has impregnated itself  
Another quarter enrolled its lives into gang violence  
92% given up its innocence to someone who's anyone  
by the age of 17

Now in the eyes of another,  
no hurt or problem with the way they live  
But from the perspective of that child who actually lives that life  
it ain't easy  
not having that better school  
There's a life you wish you were born into  
with no idea of the experience  
but the visualization of what  
U hear and want  
to C  
is not happening  
for the life U wished U lived  
would be demolished  
before you'd even have the chance to experience  
the world U wish U were born in

Kids lie about their lifestyle  
Why?  
To fit in  
Apparently bein' a hoodrat or the cutest chick wit a baby  
is the new hot topic  
These kids are shoutin' out GET FAMILIAR  
but no one can hear them for they mutely wait  
for visual notification  
or the change that has been too late  
to alternate

People gettin' shot  
dyin' left to right  
We gasp and even cry  
but wut 4  
cuz it happens everywhere  
And nonchalant kids still screamin'  
I AIN'T AFRAID TO DIE  
until they put themselves in the world in which  
they wish they were born  
And when bullets come racin' to their heads they lay there  
askin' forgiveness wondering  
what they done to deserve such punishment

It's simple.  
Nothing.  
For they were blessed and born into the world  
The world in which every child should but don't grow up in  
Except they followed the smoke left behind by those trendsetters  
who rolled up that last "L" for the homies  
left behind on their own graves to reek into that system  
With that impregnated teen  
visiting her child's deceased father.

## Solace

**Katelyn  
Lovejoy**  
Grade 10  
Cooperative  
Arts and  
Humanities  
High School  
New Haven

This is the broken poem,  
for when you're a fragment of yourself.  
The poem for when your heart has been out of your hands too long  
and you've forgotten what the erratic pulse feels like  
when it's murmuring and dancing against your fingertips.  
This is the poem for crumbling into bed  
and cradling the salt marks staining your skin  
because they remind you  
you are alive.  
This is the poem that reaches for your hand  
when others have left you quarantined,  
for they fear heartache is contagious.  
It will gently rock you back to sleep,  
lost in a lullaby  
while mother nature tells you,  
it's not as bad as it seems, and shush,  
go to sleep...  
and you will.

And this poem will protect you,  
from the monsters that are  
the messages you can't bring yourself to delete  
echoing in your mind,  
and sad songs you can't help but loop,  
because the anguish is acceptable  
just as long as you never forget.  
This poem will be your knight  
when you've let your guard down  
and are too injured to muster the energy  
to pull your shield back around you.  
So close your eyes,  
and hum the comfort of the poem.  
Let it piece you back together, when there's nothing left  
to keep you whole.

## **Tonight the Womb Will Tingle With Future Speech**

The tongue will stumble  
On foreign movements  
Like the first kiss,  
a fearful submission  
a timid endeavor

Tasting new words with hesitance  
Memorizing their texture  
As they rest on tastebuds,  
thistle tastes like abrasive  
sea-foam tastes like paisley  
robust tastes like canned soup

The future Whitman and Williams  
Are emerging silently  
Newborn perceptions  
swimming as formless anomalies  
in pools of light cast out  
from a flickering nightlight

**Melanie  
Lieberman**  
Grade 10  
Rockville High  
School  
Vernon

Annie  
Bass  
Grade 11  
Wilbur Cross  
High School  
New Haven

The miracle of life  
Begins with a crackle  
A single nerve  
    pulsating with the vision  
    of a masterpiece  
    sculpted in words.

## Over Your Head

Tara told you once, walking through the rain and muddy tire tracks at the Jewish women's retreat on a YMCA campus in the middle of March, that American Indians believe rain drops on your head make you smart. When you walk in the rain now, you can feel the pounding through the thin woven *kippah* clipped to your head. You were not wearing a *kippah* at that retreat, the year Tara told you about rain; she was wearing one of those big puffy bright ones on top of her frizzy black hair.

Three years later she came to the retreat again, and she no longer wore a *kippah*, but you did. You covered your head all the time by then. Tara told you about how her father is Muslim and her mother is Jewish, so she is claimed by both religions. When you think back to that, you think of Muslim head coverings—of the veils for women, of the Moroccan prayer hats that Jews wear too, sometimes. You think about the opposite, too: the notion that a gentleman takes his hat off upon entering a church, or in the presence of a lady; and a quiet, irreverent part of you thinks about head coverings keeping one's brains in.

• • •

You like to appreciate rain when you're walking through it, to slow down and shove your wet hands into your damp, empty pockets to try to warm them up. You think about the rain, and nature, and God, and Rabbi Heschel's radical amazement. How is it fair that he should tell us to be in perpetual wonder of creation? He spent his whole life studying spirituality—how could he possibly expect you, as a teenager, to work all that into your mundane life? And then you realize that re-seeing mundanity is the point.

Yes, you hurry through the rain most times and complain about the weather a lot, especially now that you've decided it's a good conversation starter. You leave worms to die in the puddles by the sidewalk and kill indoor ants rather than bothering to find a sheet of paper and carry them outside (so they can crawl back into the house again, you tell yourself). Yes, you complain bitterly about getting up early in the morning for school, and stumble two blocks through the cold lifting darkness to shiver on a concrete bench at the bus stop without noticing the clean still air before everyone's up, and sometimes you could even see the sun rise if you turned around and looked, but you're facing the other direction, and can't be bothered.

But you love walking in the dark and lying in the grass under the stars at two in the morning because then you can feel the difference in the air, the atmosphere that means no one is up except you and the wind and the crickets, and that's when it's easiest to believe something else is there, too. You are your parents' little hippie, with your long, flowing skirts and flowers in your hair and your feet, always bare, dirty and callused from tree climbing. You watch little Lea distressed over the worms because they're dying, stuck in the puddles, and feeding syrup to the ants in her kitchen, and you almost want to be her, but not quite enough because that part of you is gone, like Lea's "brave side," whom she named La'ela and who accounts for Lea's running the mile fast and climbing up high and looking down, whom she says she has lost.

• • •

Last weekend when Bekah stayed at your house, you sat on the kitchen floor after dinner, Bekah leaning against the fridge with your head in her lap, your father leaning against the cabinet near the doorway to the dining room. As Bekah tucked your hair behind your ears, she and your father talked about which images they concentrate on as they pray—"Nightly I drench my bed"—"My eyes are dim and aged because of my anger and tormentors"—"Don't let me die, God, because dead people can't praise you." They were so sincere, they got so much from the liturgy, that you leaned back out of the way of their conversation. You realized that for all your fanatic hunger for Jewish learning, organizing afternoon prayer services during recess last year, bombarding your school for its weak Judaics, you were still missing something. You had forgotten why you wanted to pray.

Then this weekend you wanted to sing after Friday night dinner. You led your parents into the living room to sing *Shabbos* songs for half an hour. You had not gone to synagogue that evening because they do services early on Fridays during summer, and you don't like walking out after the evening service into bright sunlight. But staying home meant missing the most melodic service of the week. So you convinced your parents to pray with you, which didn't take much, and it felt so right standing barefoot on the carpet in the corner of the living room with your brown *siddur*, perfectly the right size and weight, held in one hand. You opened it to the pages for Sabbath that you don't usually use in your prayer book at home, so they're fresh and smell nice and don't show, like the weekday section does, the torn edges and flopping pages of three years of use.

You don't usually pray the afternoon service because you tend to forget until the sun goes down, and then it's too late. But the next day you stood in the kitchen by the window and found the quiet concentration that praying alone allows so much more easily than in groups.

• • •

Even when you don't remember how to pray, you remember why you want to cover your head. You don't regret that decision, even when your *kippah* stops people from seeing your fancy new braiding technique. You remember



**Heather  
Nielsen**  
Grade 11  
Bristol Eastern  
High School  
Bristol

hiking with your mom in the February woods. Instead of a kippah you wore a bandana, and as you walked through dead leaves and obstinate patches of old, icy snow, the bandana kept falling loosely off, so eventually you covered your head with your sweatshirt hood instead. Your mom, who doesn't cover her head unless she's praying, asked why it was important to cover yours now, when no one else was there? But especially here, of all places, you wanted to keep your head covered, because being in the middle of the woods that were not quite dead in the middle of winter evoked such a large, connected feeling that God must be involved, present. The least you could do to be humble, to honor that connection, was wear your *kippah*—it reminds you to remember. Of course she understood when you told her, and you clambered onto a fallen tree trunk and jumped emphatically down, back to the path.

When rain soaks through your *kippah*, you feel that smallness and largeness at once, the sense of cosmic scale; just as pine trees look the same and forever when there's a whole forest, this palpable wet darkness, this rain and this fresh-grass air and this spidery, sticky web of God and man and earth and heavens, are all so big they never stop. When the sky rends open, there's nothing but your *kippah* between you and the rest of the world, reminding you to keep your brains in and to think about the raindrops bringing you wisdom.

## Snowflake

It was the dreaded water-cooler conversation piece of December. The plastic green garland and faded crimson bows had been hung around the gray cubicles of the office, crowds laden with bags of over-priced merchandise bustled down the icy city sidewalks, and there was that incessant ringing of Salvation-Army-Santa bells that could be heard even this far away from 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Yes, it was at this time every year, on Christmas Eve, that the women of the office would gather with their freshly manicured nails and their gaudy reindeer earrings to discuss my most-avoided topic: "So, what are you doing for Christmas?"

This year that conversation caught me off guard as I was headed back to my desk with a cup of coffee, and now I was trapped, staring at my nail-bitten fingers and listening to the annual drone of ski lodges and trees, relatives and turkeys, Santas and opening presents with loving families on Christmas morning. When it came to be my turn to share holiday plans, I rattled off my yearly spiel involving a nonexistent boyfriend and his make-believe hot tub, feeling my cheeks flush and not meeting any of my co-workers' eyes. Their chatter continued, and I took my leave from the circle as soon as the conversation allowed, in the midst of Caroline from accounting's over-told tale of her husband getting stuck in the chimney four years ago.

I sighed and resumed my computer work, hoping to finish early and get home before the drunken office party commenced. In truth, I hated Christmas. My apartment lacked all the usual Yuletide accoutrements—I had no tree, no

tinsel, no stocking hung by the fire with care—only a string of battered C-7's I had hung two months earlier when I was too lazy to replace a broken lamp. I had no presents to give, and expected to receive none. My uncles, aunts, and cousins had all drifted away through the years, and my parents and grandparents had died. My only remaining family was my younger sister Brittany, whom I hadn't spoken to since our mother's death the day before Christmas Eve ten years prior. We had fought over a silly trinket, Mom's engagement ring, and Brittany left my life forever, taking the treasure with her.

I remembered that ring as I set my brisk pace home, a flurry of snow marking the evening and clinging to my eyelashes. How the dusky world sparkled, the way my mother's diamond always had sparkled on her left ring finger, marking my dead father's love as she cooked and cleaned and turned the pages of the storybooks of my childhood. It was her one true prized possession aside from her two daughters, and I proudly imagined wearing it on my own finger when I was grown up, my parents' memory carried on the hand of their oldest daughter.

So lost had I been in my memories that when I slid the key in the door of my apartment and turned the knob, I didn't even notice the figure shaded in darkness that shared the hallway with me.

"Sarah," it said, stepping into the flood of light spilling out the door of my apartment. The woman was thin, maybe too thin, with mousy brown hair that hung uneven and stringy to her bony shoulders and framed her sunken face. I inhaled sharply in surprised, for although it had been ten years since our last meeting, and she'd changed so much, I recognized her face as the very ghost of my mother's.

"Brittany," I whispered, surveying the damage ten years had done to my sister, wondering if I'd changed as drastically, "What do you want?"

"I need a place to stay."

What could I say? For all the harsh words and damnations that had passed between us ten years ago, she was still my sister. Silently, I gestured through the door towards the couch, and silently she followed the direction of my hand.

I wondered what twist of fortune had left my sister in such a skeletal state of the youthful, exuberant girl I once knew. I sat at my kitchen table eating one of those frozen TV dinners, watching my sister sleep fitfully on the couch. I wanted to rouse her and ask her what turn of events had led her to my apartment on the ten-year anniversary of the crack in our relationship; but by now that crack had become a seemingly irreparable rift, so I remained silently chewing my cardboard-flavored macaroni and cheese.

At ten p.m. she awoke, just as I was flipping channels on t.v., trying with all my might to avoid any program that mentioned bb guns or anything remotely festive, all the while sipping some "Irish hot chocolate." I fixed Brittany a mug as well and we sat in silence, neither of us really absorbing the faded laugh track of an old rerun. Around midnight, she broke the silence, her eyes transfixed at the snow gathering on the fire escape

“Do you remember that one Christmas Eve, when we were, like, ten? The whole family was over for dinner, and the Nor’easter of the decade hit, and all 18 of us ended up sleeping in our tiny old house?”

“Was that the time Uncle Greg fall asleep on the couch with his mouth wide open, and Mom kept trying to throw candy canes into it?”

Brittany’s dull and lifeless eyes brightened and she chuckled. “Ah, Uncle Greg sure was something. Then there was the time he tried to come down the chimney by climbing up it first, remember that?”

We stayed up until three in the morning, reminiscing about Christmases with 18 family members clamoring around on the table, piles of wrapping paper too high to see over, crazy things our aunts and uncles had done, and our grandmother’s cooking. Throughout the night, we built a bridge over cruel words and lost time into the present and future by using fond memories of the past.

When I finally went to bed that night and left my sister to sleep on the couch, I drifted off not with visions of sugar plums, but of the days to come: I would fully reconcile with my sister, discover her secrets, invite her to move into my tiny apartment, and no longer spend holidays alone with a fictional boyfriend. It would be a wonderful life from that point on, living in harmony and raising families together as Brittany and I had planned to do as children, before our mother died. Getting my sister back was the greatest Christmas gift ever, and in my ten years without her, I’d come to realize how readily I would trade my sister for that stupid ring if given a second chance.

I awoke the next morning, a pale sunlight reflecting on the snow, gleaming through my bedroom window. Like a child excited for presents on Christmas morning, I ran into the living room, eager to catch up on all the time lost with my sister.

But Brittany was gone. There was nothing stolen, nothing moved. The couch cushions bore no indentation, and she had left no note. It was as if she had never been there at all, and I would have passed the previous night off as only a dream if I hadn’t discovered the small velvet box left on top of the TV set. Inside was a familiar ring, glittering like a snowflake.

## After Visiting Barnes and Noble

Amy  
Riccio  
Grade 11  
Greater  
Hartford  
Academy of  
the Arts  
Hartford

My father could have become a professional tennis player had he not switched over to real estate, and he taught me to swing a racket as soon as I could hold one. He positioned my hands properly, and sent endless swerves my way until I didn’t miss. Growing up, I would spend hours hitting old tennis balls against the backboard of my basketball hoop.

While my father showed me the correct backhand grip, my mother taught me how to cook without measuring cups, experimenting with spices and flavors. Often when things become too much to handle, I take out my

aggression on a batch of oatmeal cookies, beating eggs and butter like it was their fault that my life seemed to be falling apart. When I was going through a rough time earlier this year, my teacher noticed that I had been coming to school upset, day after day. I told her how I like to bake away my grief, rolling dough on flour-covered counters to keep busy. She told me that it was my way of putting goodness back into the world, despite things that seemed to be crumbling around me.

Writing came easily to me in elementary and middle school. My teachers always praised my work, told me I had a gift, and that I should continue to write. When I got to high school, I chose to go to an art school where I could focus solely on creative writing, as well as attending a normal high school where I would take unnecessary classes like calculus and physics. In my normal high school, I am still one of the better writers, for the same reason that the quarterback of the football team can throw a perfect spiral much farther than I can—he works at it and he loves what he does. A perfect line in a poem is throwing that winning touchdown, except instead of a stadium of cheering fans there is just me, finally able to silence a thought that had buzzed through my head for days. That perfect silence is everything I work for, and I know that all the time and deleting wrong phrasing and extra words has been worth it, because after all the hours and flattened fingertips from passionate typing, I can point to the piece and say, “That was me. I did that.”

Despite the sporadic surges of inspiration resulting in a short story idea or early draft of a poem, there are many times when I feel like I cannot call myself a writer at all. In the art school, I am one of many writers, all gifted and worthy of praise. It is hard to feel talented when surrounded by talent, some of which is much greater than my own. It is a growing process, and I am on my way to producing masterpieces, but am not quite there, and sometimes wonder if I ever will be. I do not read poetry late into the night, and know a lot less prestigious writers than I should. I go through periods of time where I cannot type a coherent sentence, never mind a short story worth any praise.

Then there are the times when I feel as though I could be nothing but a writer. When I am suddenly struck with some new insight, very little can keep my pen from writing the idea on the nearest piece of paper, candy wrapper, or even my own hand. Once, a poem came to me, and with no paper around, I wrote and revised the whole thing on my arm, cross outs and all. The next day I had to convince my science teacher that the not-entirely faded words across my skin were in fact a sudden visit from my muse, and not the answers to her test.

Last weekend I wanted to feel like a true writer, so I made a stop at Barnes and Noble. I sat on a wooden stepstool against the shelves and spent forty minutes looking through the poetry books of Sharon Olds. As I sat there, many people passed by me. Some were alone, and I watched as they would pull a book off the shelf, squat near me to read the back into the empty space between neglected copies. One man asked his girlfriend if she had read Dean Koontz. She said that she hadn't, and he went on to say that “He was good, if

you liked pseudo-horror novels that attempted a mysterious edge.” She said nothing, and he filled the silent spaces with large words that showed off his literary knowledge, and they walked on.

Sitting there, I finally felt as though I was doing what I should be as a writer, studying up on my art form and expanding my inner repertoire. Then I became aware of my own spine resting against spines of many books behind where I sat, as well as the thousands of books that lined the walls to the ceiling. Each one took many months or years to be completed, the ideas and nit-picked details of the book consuming the author until it was finished. For many, the completion of their own book would be the most significant, possibly only significant, accomplishment of their lives. Many people would never read their words, know their name, or realize how much time and backspacing went into each page. I, a self-proclaimed writer, was using the life’s work of many merely to rest my back as I read the work of one.

I don’t know if I will ever have read enough to hold an intelligent conversation about a lot of the authors in Barnes and Noble, and I don’t think that I have ever used the word pseudo correctly in any sentence other than this one. Despite this and despite the fact that the world may never see or appreciate my tortured poetry and witty short stories, I do enjoy writing. Writing, like cooking and smashing serves into an old backboard in front of my house, is a release for me; it’s what I love to do. I don’t need to write a number one bestseller to know that, and if I never do, I will be okay. I will be able to look back over old journals and works collected over time, and say, I’ve put some of the goodness back into the world, or I wrote one perfect line, and this piece is mine. I did that.

Mara  
Dauphin  
Grade 11  
Rockville High  
School  
Vernon

## Rapunzel, Samson, and the Banyan Tree

When I was six,  
every morning my mom would brush  
my long, thick blonde hair.  
She would separate it into three strands  
and then braid them, carefully,  
loosely, as if hair was the most delicate,  
precious medium in the world.  
She always wanted to trim it to my shoulders,  
but I wouldn’t let her until I was nine.  
I wanted long hair, always long hair.  
I wanted to be Rapunzel,  
forgetting that Rapunzel had troubles of her own.

The only thing I knew about cancer  
was that it made you lose your hair,  
but when they told me to cut it  
before the chemo got there first,

I didn't listen.  
Fifteen inches of Florida blonde  
falling out haphazardly,  
gold all over my clothes,  
gold in huge chunks in the brush.  
I guess I should have listened.  
I cut the few stragglers,  
wrapped myself in a bandana,  
and walked through the doors of the middle school  
where my classmates' hair had never looked  
quite as voluminous or touchable.

But it grew back,  
a dull, mousy copper,  
spilling over my shoulders,  
and I've regressed to the tender age of six,  
saying, "You will never cut this hair."  
It will grow long and wild  
and root into the ground like a Banyan tree.

And now instead of Rapunzel,  
I am Samson,  
for as thin as it is,  
this hair is so weighty  
that if it fell again, it could crush me.  
I finger the strands,  
lift them up to the light  
where they catch in ambers and golds,  
limp, copper threads of hope and  
strength and balance.

## **For the Peach Fuzz, Especially**

I'm standing up for freckles  
(because it's time that someone did)  
And for knock-knees and for buck-teeth  
and for zits the size of Ohio on picture day, too.

I'm calling out to cloudy days  
(Highs in the low to mid seventies, average humidity)  
and to frayed blankets and  
To stuffed rabbits with the eyes chewed off.  
I'm talking about wrinkled clothes  
And wrinkled faces and  
Nine-to-five-behind-a-desk,

**Stefanie  
Kocian**  
Grade 11  
Glastonbury  
High School  
Glastonbury

Retirement at sixty-five to focus on playing golf and driving slowly and  
Wearing ugly bedroom slippers in Florida.

I'm putting in a word for the suburbs.  
For middle-class, for middle-aged,  
For doing nothing-much, for idle  
'How are you?'s and automatic 'good's.

I'm advocating nothing-words and nothing-news like  
Cats saved from trees, classified ads for gently used cars  
obituaries for old men.

No one writes sonnets for runny noses or rhapsodizes on  
Peanut butter and jelly sandwiches or revels in the glory of  
Tax accountants or copy editors or maintenance men.  
No one extols the virtues of sweaty socks or shakes a fist at the sky singing  
The praises of chewed bubble gum to the heavens.

No one mentions the million ordinary days.

So I'm standing up for freckles  
because someone really should,  
And for the mutts with the funny ears, the milk mustaches, the dryer lint, and  
the peach fuzz, especially.

For the million ordinary days.

And the million ordinary people.

Especially.

Because someone really should.

## **Fifty-Two Years**

I open an old tobacco can,  
A few precious firefighter and army patches rest proudly  
at the bottom of the tin,  
With the pop of the cap, the smell of Joe's Camel is released,  
And you appear in front of me...  
I clearly envision you as you once were,  
Energetic brown eyes and hair, pale Irish skin. a green tattoo, and a beer belly,  
But the warm memory doesn't last,

**Rachel  
Norman**  
Grade 11  
Rockville High  
School  
Vernon

I see you sedentary, cushioned in your steely box,  
Dressed up in your black suit,  
Willie Nelson songs playing while we say goodbye to you,  
With your odd mustache and large balding head,  
Not quite the way we remember you.  
I'm sharing an armrest with a cousin I hardly know,  
Wondering what song I'll want played when my time comes,  
I try out my x-ray vision on you, but I just don't see  
Men in suits close the casket, viewing hours are over  
And my chance to know you,  
is gone.

## How to Eat a Bowl of Pho Ga Properly in the Le Household

“Excuse me, but are you Vietnamese? ‘Cause, I was wondering if you’d give me a recipe for pho ga.”

At that time, I was both surprised that this employee on a Lake Tahoe ferry recognized my ethnicity and impressed by her obvious good taste. Even recently, when a new acquaintance discovered that I’m Vietnamese, she gasped in awe, “They [the Vietnamese] have *the best* soups! I just love pho ga!”

Though slightly taken aback, I replied with awkwardness, “Thanks?” I must admit that Vietnamese cuisine is superior to any other, but then again, my mom is the most talented, though undiscovered, Vietnamese chef. It seems that for many, the words “Vietnam (or Vietnamese)” and “pho ga” are virtually synonymous. Although I don’t know how to cook pho ga *yet* (my mom has finally agreed to teach me before I leave for college so I won’t have to live on pizza), this employee’s question reminded me of how I’ve mastered the art of eating it.

### *How to Eat a Bowl of Pho Ga Properly in the Le Household*

**Prep-Step: Know what pho ga is before you proceed to enjoy it.** Pho ga is the traditional Vietnamese chicken noodle soup. The rich and aromatic broth serves as the base for the thick slices of chicken and flat rice noodles. Pho ga is generally garnished with cilantro and green onions and is served with a side of fresh Thai basil, mung bean sprouts, lime wedges and red chili peppers. For even more flavor, hoisin sauce and chili sauce are added to the broth.

**Step 1: “Eat” with nose (not literally of course).** The aroma is the best indicator of pho ga’s quality. It illustrates the time that chef has allowed for the broth’s flavors to develop. Its distance aroma reminds me of eating many pho

**Khanh-Anh  
Le**  
Grade 12  
Middletown  
High School  
Middletown



ga dinners regardless of the weather. In the winter, a steamy bowl of pho ga would melt away the cold after a few hours of sledding with my brother on a delightfully unexpected snow day. In the summer, I still enjoyed the soup while sweating from the day's humidity and the broth's warmth.

**Step 2: Actually eat the pho ga.** Plunge your chopsticks into the noodles and twist them around the chopsticks like eating spaghetti with a fork. For those deficient of chopstick-using abilities, it's OK to use a fork instead, though you may run into the "asking for a fork complex" at many pho ga restaurants. (It is a point of pride that I learned how to use chopsticks before a fork. This ability, albeit seemingly insignificant, is an indication that I have still preserved parts of my Vietnamese heritage.) Then, completely absorb yourself in the flavor and texture of the broth, meat, noodles and condiments that contribute to form this perfect bowl of pho ga. I have come to appreciate that pho ga is the perfect exemplar of the sophistication of Vietnamese cuisine. The sharpness of the green onion counters the mild taste of cilantro and Thai basil. The rice noodles are soft, while the fresh bean sprouts are crisp. In essence, Vietnamese cuisine is a delicious balance of contrasting flavors and textures.

**Step 3—The final and most important step: Sip the broth slowly.** Though this may sound outlandish to many who have grown accustomed to eating traditional American chicken soup with a thick slice of bread at hand, I too can recall many occasions when I've upset my mother by pouring excess broth down the sink. In retrospect, I understand now that it is the only proper way to truly savor pho ga's flavor and demonstrate appreciation for the chef's tireless efforts. Typically, it takes my mother two hours to make pho ga's broth from scratch, as the stuff in the can simply would not suffice. There is no need to use a spoon to complete this step, just lift the bowl with both hands to your lips and sip the broth slowly, thoughtfully—allowing the flavors of chicken, onion, star anise and ginger to linger on your tongue.

From the above steps passionately described in detail, the joy of eating and the sophistication of food are evident. Food is more than a necessity; it is an effective impetus that brings family members together at the dinner table to talk and strengthen relationships. I have so many fond family memories associated with food. I can recall celebrating the upcoming births of my twin cousins over a bowl of pho ga and my clumsy attempt at putting an unusually long pho ga noodle into the mouth. It was on that very occasion that my uncle recommended the spaghetti-fork-esque method that I use to this day. And in many cases, cuisine is the one lasting aspect of any culture in America. Though I have never visited Vietnam, its cuisine is a physical manifestation of my parents' *que huong*, their roots, which I proudly celebrate whenever I am immersed in a bowl of pho ga.

## The Whistler

**Kelly  
Shea**

Grade 12  
North Haven  
High School  
North Haven

It happens when the house is still, and I am alone. Always when I am alone. I'd like to say it began as a dream, but I cannot say that with much conviction, for lately it has become difficult to tell my dreams from my waking reality. Like the bitter, gray waves of the sea beneath a clouded, steel-storm sky, there is no discernable horizon to separate the two.

In the creeping darkness he stands beneath my window and watches me. He does not move; he does not speak; he only whistles. The whistling is ever so soft—almost imperceptible over the quiet rustle of the night time animals as they move through the dark blades of grass. It is a haunting tune—a desperate keening that makes the very roots of the trees curl in upon themselves in despair. Yet, it is also a tune of seduction. For hours it plays in my head like some sort of grotesque music box. It calls to me as I lie in bed, trying to block it from my ears until I feel I must whistle that desperate tune back to him, yet something holds the sound behind my lips. I will not let myself whistle it back.

His eyes... oh they do make me tremble so, for they are simply black. There is no color to them at all; they are like deep wells spiraling downward into oblivion. It is with these eyes that he watches me from outside my window. Perhaps he is some sort of spirit or ghost cursed with an unfortunate fate and bound to the wood of the trees that surround our cabin. Perhaps he is not a ghost at all, but just a living human with no place to go who has lost his sense and is trying to communicate in the only way he knows how. Or perhaps he has sold his soul to the devil and is trying to invite me to do the same. I know not.

I dare not tell Mother or Father about the man because I will only worry them. They will surely assume the worst, and Mother will cry and light her candles and pray for it all to go away. Father will accuse me of sin, witchcraft perhaps, and make me fast until he is sure my name has been erased from the Black Book.

I have tried speaking to them on the subject of magic, but Mother only places her hands over her ears, and Father raises his hands as if to hit me every time I mention the word. I believe they are slightly frightened of me.

Long ago, they discovered that I was not like them, although they have done their best to fix that. For their sake, I went along with the beatings and the fasting and the ridiculous prayers. Now I pretend that magic frightens me as it does them. I pretend that I do not see the creatures flitting through the forest around our cabin. I ripped up the roses I had planted in the garden before my mother could see that they had grown a phlegmy black color instead of the normal, velvety red. I do not speak of the strange symbols in my dreams or of the foreign words that are on my lips and tongue along with the taste of morning when I awake from my sleep. And I do not tell them about the

whistler who stands below my window.

My father likes to sit outside the cabin on cloudless, winter nights and stare at the tiny pinpricks of light in the sky. He talks of how it soothes him and how the silence and tranquility of nature make him feel safe and relaxed. I do not understand him. Nature is neither silent nor tranquil, especially when it is night. Night is loud and vicious. There are creatures that emerge from the bowels of the ancient earth that would not set foot in the open while the sun shone. The animals rustle the grass; the insects scratch across the bark on the trees. I can hear the melting of the horizon as the blistering sun spreads its arms across the ground like a pillow in preparation for its hibernation. The soil breathes in the moisture of nightfall. When I attune my ears, I can hear the creatures of the night exhale.

The other night I had a dream. I was walking through the forest around my cabin, and my five senses were calling to me. Something was wrong. For the longest time I stood beneath the stretching branches of an old oak, struggling to pick up a scent or a sound that would alert me to what was happening. Then it struck me: I could not hear anything at all. Nature was silent.

Immediately I began to run, my bare feet slapping the ground. The roots and the acorns that would have normally lacerated the soles of my feet did nothing to harm me. Something had to be terribly wrong for the woods to be holding its breath as it was. I could make out a shadow up ahead. Its edges were harsh and unnatural, and its form contrasted terribly with the sinuous and seductive curves of the forest around it. It was not a creature of the night or even a creature of the woods. As I drew closer, I realized that the shadow was actually a man. He stood like a statue amidst the trees, dressed in a fine, tailored suit and hat, his eyes closed, and one finger to his lips.

I stopped running and hoisted myself up onto a low branch of a nearby tree where I could watch the strange man without disturbing him. He just stood there, immobile, pressing his finger to his lips, shushing the woods. A slight breeze brushed a strand of my hair across my face, and I watched the leaves on the branches around me sway slightly, but the forest remained silent. The leaves did not rustle, and I could not even hear the wind in my own ears. The man in the suit did not move; even his breathing was imperceptible. The silence was suffocating, and I could barely draw enough breath from the still air to keep my head clear. It was squeezing the very air and life from me! Suddenly the man's head jerked in my direction, and his eyelids snapped open, revealing solid black eyes. It was the whistler beneath my window. Even in the dark of the forest, his eyes sparkled like shiny beetles. Never breaking eye contact with me, he slowly lowered his finger from his lips.

The forest came alive. Once again I could hear the breathing, the sighing, the rustling, the melting, the crawling, the shrieking, the calling. The life force of nature was beating in my ears, and suddenly I could breathe again.

When I awoke, I could hear him whistling outside my window. I was tempted to peer through the windowpane at him, but I restrained myself. Someday... someday, I will whistle back.

## Down the Hill, Up the Stairs

Finally the sun had begun to relax, as it slid into its comfortable hovel behind the forested hills. And as the sky's light fell, darkness took advantage of the opportunity to pursue the light, creating a final battle, with fires of red and pink sprouting across the horizon.

Peter stared at the beautiful painting the heavens had created and sighed in relief. It had been a long day for him; the work on the farm had driven him hard. So as he began the hike down the hill towards his house, he took a final glance at the fields, the barns, and the animals. At this sight he smiled, remembering all the things he had worked on that day. Early in the morning, just as the sun was rising, Old Farmer Greg taught him how to tend to the rows of squash. Later he fed the chickens and after that began working with customers. At some point he grew tired of selling tomatoes and eggs and lettuce, so he returned to the squash field and then taught what Greg had taught him to the young boy who lived near the farm.

He thought of all this as he walked, whistling the tune that was stuck in his head all day. He couldn't help but smile; he was content with the day, and he had gotten a lot of work done. Fatigue nagged him though, his bed called. As tired as his legs were, he refused to slow down; he wanted to rest.

Close to the bottom of the hill, he crossed the main street, where cars flew past. New and old, each automobile flew past; he recognized all the drivers. But memory of these individuals fled him as fast as the cars escaped his sight. Tall oak trees lined the road, one of which had his and his wife's initials carved deep into it. The height of this tree was impressive as he looked up at it; it almost reached the sky. One of the fiery red leaves fell and touched his face, reminding him to continue home.

And there it was. Looking up, he had never realized the beauty of this house; in fact he had always thought it quite modest. Now, though, it was not his house but a kingdom; its clean white paint shining in the pink glow of dusk.

Fire consumed his thighs as he climbed the stairs to reach the door. He grabbed the golden door handle and swung it open. The lighting in his house had never been brighter; he squinted his eyes. Again his legs were engulfed in flame as he ascended the stairs to his room, and the fatigue began to take hold.

His wife was waiting for him in bed. An innocent smile took hold of his face, realizing his wife's beauty never ceased to amaze him. Ensnaring himself into the warm blankets, he embraced his wife. They kissed each other goodnight, said their prayers, and let their dreams take over.

They dreamt the same dream. They dreamt they never stopped dreaming. They dreamt they lived in the sky.

**Zachary  
Goodwin**  
Grade 12  
Glastonbury  
High School  
Glastonbury

**Molly  
LaFlesh**  
Grade 12  
Rockville High  
School  
Vernon

## **James vs. Pac Man**

I realized this morning  
That your eyes  
Would be familiar to me even  
If I had never  
Met you.

I deal with similar  
Red-eyed puffy Sundays,  
Eyelash curler working  
Frantically  
To wake them up.

I layer on mascara  
And think about you  
Readying yourself for *your* morning,  
Sliding sharp steel  
Across stubble  
Long overdue for a shave.  
In your half-asleep  
Haze you imagine  
Cancer eating her away,  
Breasts stomach intestines liver kidney  
Like a twisted game of Pac Man.

I used to imagine the same  
Of my father,  
Throat lungs larynx tonsils lips  
Gnawed away  
By a sharp yellow mouth.  
Dad was a lucky one, though.

He maneuvered his levers  
Fast enough,  
Did not let those ghosts  
Get the better of him,  
Was awarded an extra life.

I wonder how many times  
You repeat it each day,  
A machine with a mouthful of toothpaste  
In front of a morning mirror.  
You must practice a lot  
To have been that comfortable  
Telling me, practically a stranger  
Who doesn't know *you* hardly at all,  
Only your eyes.  
They held no hint of tears,  
Your voice no tremor of weakness,  
As you let out that  
Wisp of a phrase,  
"My mother  
Is dying."

## **My Friend From the Summer**

I met him in early June. The machine spit out my timecard.  
I placed it in the rack behind another bearing  
an unfamiliar name, barely legible, scribbled in black ink.

I stumbled, exhausted, out the back door. There he sat  
in a folding chair among the buzzing flies, the nauseating stench of  
decomposing discarded foodstuffs that overfilled the dumpsters.

He'll sit there blowing smoke each subsequent summer day,  
a worn, oversized shirt bearing the Ocean Beach Park logo  
draped over his red sun-scorched skin, torn khaki shorts

stained with dark splotches of sweat and burger grease.  
Disheveled blonde hair glistened with collected scum, begging me  
to grab the maintenance boy's green hose coiled on the ground

and spray him down.  
Cigarette balanced delicately between two fingers,  
he tapped a pile of ash onto the grease-stained asphalt.

**Julia  
Neusner**  
Grade 12  
Williams  
School  
New London

I glanced at him, nodded, continued to my car.  
Leaping out of the chair, he shook my hand, asked my name, offered his.  
*My ride forgot about me*, he grinned. Bright, toothy—

the charming grin that will make quarters clang into the tip jar Monday  
evenings

when families flock to see antique cars.  
*Can I bum a ride?* I groaned. *Yeah, yeah, just put out the*

*cigarette*. He dug it into the ground.  
This conversation will become routine. He'll call me  
one month later all coked up,

*can I crash at your place tonight?*  
Because he fought with his mother  
again. He never elaborates, just bears that deceiving grin,

that teases me, makes me guess the source of  
the dark clouds behind the sunshine  
that bottles, pills, and laughter so effectively hide.

The following morning he'll tiptoe down the stairs before I wake,  
walk to the beach. His shift begins two hours before mine.  
I'll be greeted by that familiar garbage stench.

Punch in my timecard, there he'll sit smugly in the folding chair,  
one knee folded over the other, grinning,  
tapping that damn cigarette.

## Untitled

**Kate Gibson**  
Grade 12  
Williams  
School  
New London

sleep is addicted to darkness  
swallowing the butterfly sun  
leaving behind pesky flies of stars  
tempting the internal clock of day and Night.

Logic and numbers start spinning on the page  
Round and Round in circles of Disney teacup rides,  
coaxing to the mind places I might have been,

But for whatever reason the memory escapes me  
the impalpable thought on the tip of my tongue  
or the recognizable name that I can't connect with a face.

Darkness slivers  
Instigating fear in the mouse, playful wonder in the cat.  
Unclicking the lock  
Brushed by a flap of feathers  
Marking liberation from gravity.

Even after the echoing alarm buzzes in my ears,  
dream world endures:  
its allure resurfaced through  
omnipresent deja vu  
and occasional mosquito questions  
dodging every attempt to get rid of them.



## Honorable Mentions

Matthew Lallier	Anna Reynolds School
Emma Dudley	Arts at the Capitol Theater
Sarah Hudak	Avon Middle School
Nadia Sims	Bloomfield High School
Justin Dubrosky	Bristol Eastern High School
Jessica Saponare	Broad Brook Elementary School
Nicole Kiker	Coleytown Elementary School
Naitza Diaz	Cooperative Arts & Humanities Magnet High School
Travis Miller	Daisy Ingraham Elementary School
Kousanee Chheda	Edwin O. Smith High School
Alexis Klimaszewski	Elizabeth Shelton School
Even Feinberg	Fairfield Warde High School
Nicholas Salese	Fairfield Woods Middle School
Alison Van de Berghe	Fairfield Woods Middle School
Michelle Schloss	Farmington High School
Shreyas Srinivasan	Frenchtown Elementary School
Colin Hegwood	Glastonbury High School
Daniel O'Brien	Glastonbury High School
Rebecca Martino	Granby Memorial High School
Matthew Vossler	Holmes Elementary School
Casey Aldrich	Killingly Memorial School
Codi Beshaw	Killingly Memorial School
Margaret Dzenko	Latimer Lane School
Rachel Harshaw	Latimer Lane School
Elise Hanks	Ledyard High School
Emily Barksdale	Lordship School
Sumaali Chheda	Mansfield Middle School
Kelsey Gross	Mansfield Middle School
Megan Shea	Mary T. Murphy School
Jacqueline Bickley	Memorial Middle School
Laurel Speed	Newtown Middle School
Jennifer Wells-Qu	Northfield Mount Hermon School
Alison Miller	Old Saybrook Middle School
Jillian Pignatiello	Philip R. Smith Elementary School
Hanna Carpino	Pine Grove Elementary School
Lisa Chan	Regional Multicultural Magnet School
Joshua Harlow	Regional Multicultural Magnet School
Augie Pimentel	Regional Multicultural Magnet School
Audrey Allain	RHAM Middle School
Patty Daudish	RHAM Middle School
Nick Peteros	RHAM Middle School
Sam Glass	Roger Ludlowe High School
Allison Solis	Rogers Park Middle School

Sam Reynolds  
Maggie Sposato  
Maria Nahuatlato  
Jenny Guiliano  
Lianna Giles  
Marysia Borucinska-Begg  
Brian Kaether  
Tommy Garzillo  
Rachel Gedansky  
Jennifer Mears  
Corey Plasky  
Eugenia Neri  
Kevin Trierweiler  
Ryan Rist  
Annie Bass  
Jasmin Figueroa  
Danae Sawchyn  
Cleo Junker  
Suzuhiro Yamamoto  
Harry Zehner

Saxe Middle School  
Saxe Middle School  
Seth G. Haley School  
Simsbury High School  
Smith Elementary School  
Southeast Elementary School  
Stillmeadow Elementary School  
Tashua Elementary School  
Tolland Middle School  
Vernon Center Middle School  
Western Elementary School  
Western Middle School  
Western Middle School  
Whisconier Middle School  
Wilbur Cross High School  
Windham High School  
Woodbury Middle School  
Worthington Hooker School  
Worthington Hooker School  
Worthington Hooker School

## Teachers of Published Authors

Michael Gudaitis	Avon High School
Janet Schwartz	Avon Middle School
Lisa Taylor	Arts at the Capitol Theatre
Anne Verzella	A.W. Cox Elementary School
Elizabeth Burdelski	Bristol Eastern High School
Mary Gadd	Bristol Eastern High School
Lisa Walczyk	Broad Brook Elementary School
Edward Wolf	Coleytown Elementary School
Mindi Englart	Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School
Laurie Kukta	Daisy Ingraham Elementary School
Carolanne Powers	Daisy Ingraham Elementary School
Waltrina Kirkland-Mullins	Davis Street School
Tracy O'Lari	Deans Mill School
Mary Ann Montano	East Farms School
Chris Begole	Eastern Middle School
Jodi Labbe	Eric G. Norfeldt School
Lori Campagna	Eric G. Norfeldt School
Josephine Feola	Fairfield Woods Middle School
Denise Stemmler	Gideon Welles School
Michelle Godin	Glastonbury High School
Rafael Oses	Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts
Nadine Keane	Griswold High School
Erika Kovacs	Guilford High School
Michael Seal	Hall Memorial School
Gary Petersen	Hanmer Elementary School
Lynn Hoffman	Irving Robbins Middle School
Deb Thibault	Irving Robbins Middle School
Mary Porter-Price	Juliet W. Long School
Vikki Smith	Juliet W. Long School
Cynthia Gordon	Kelly Lane Intermediate School
Kelly Andrews-Babcock	Killingly Memorial School
Kristen Pabich	Latimer Lane School
Edward Pitcher	Louis Toffolon School
Kelly Cecchini	Manchester High School
Julie White	Mansfield Middle School
Nancy Martland	Memorial Middle School
Hayley Zinn-Rowthorn	Middletown High School
Patrice Gans	Newtown Middle School
Susan Bass	North Haven High School
Joan K. Degen	North Street School
Lori Everet	North Street School
Joseph Marinone	North Street School
Maggie Francis	Philip R. Smith School
Sara Strait	Reed Intermediate School

Sydni Nieves  
Christine Wilkie  
Susan Zarbo  
Victoria Nordlund  
Susan Gravel  
Jeanne Stevens  
Becky Golanski  
Paula Robinson  
Julie A. Brennan  
James Hendricks  
Melissa Rubertino  
Karen Clarke  
Henry Fay  
Marcia Gibbs  
Ellen LeSure  
Joan Pepin  
Daria M. Plummer  
Jeannie Morton  
Jessie Wilhelm  
Leslie Abbatiello  
Lewis Gleich  
Carol Belli  
Pamela Rogalin  
Jennifer Otano-Vera  
Kathy Lembo

Regional Multicultural Magnet School  
Regional Multicultural Magnet School  
RHAM Middle School  
Rockville High School  
Rotella Interdistrict Magnet School  
Rotella Interdistrict Magnet School  
Samuel B. Webb Elementary  
Simsbury High School  
Southeast Elementary School  
Southeast Elementary School  
Timothy Dwight Elementary School  
Toffolon Elementary School  
Tolland Middle School  
Tootin' Hills School  
Vernon Center Middle School  
Verplanck Elementary School  
Wapping Elementary School  
West Woods Upper Elementary School  
West Woods Upper Elementary School  
Wilbur Cross High School  
Williams School  
Windham Middle School  
Whisconier Middle School  
Wolcott School  
Worthington Hooker School