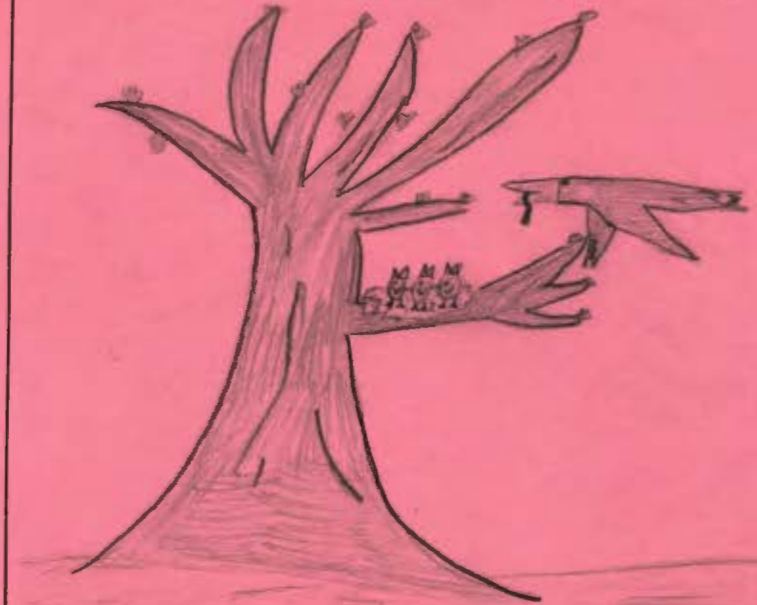


Connecticut Student Writers

Fly Up High

UP, UP, UP, the bird will fly.
Bright red wings soar up high.
Three baby birds wait in their nest.
When mom returns, they'll have a worm eating fest.



Erica Jessen, Grade 3, Tootin' Hills School, West Simsbury

Volume XIII May 2001

Connecticut Student Writers

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the Connecticut Writing Project



Selection Committee

Steven J. Albrecht
Barbara Cohen
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Jennifer Shaff
Vikki Smith
Kathy Uschmann

Editors:

Steven J. Albrecht
Jason Courtmanche
Kerry Jones
Jennifer Shaff
Vikki Smith
Kathy Uschmann

Layout: Joanne Cordón
Cover: Erica Jessen,
Tootin' Hills School

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

Director: Mary T. Mackley
Co-Directors: Jason Courtmanche
Donna Ozga
Kay Saur
Susan Zarbo
Program Asst.: Susan Lavallee

Department of English, U-Box 4025
215 Glenbrook Road
University of Connecticut
Storrs, CT 06269
(860) 486-2328 (860) 486-1530 fax
cwpadm4@uconnvm.uconn.edu
<http://www.ucc.uconn.edu/~cwpadm4>

FOREWORD

The stories and poems which fill the pages of this magazine chronicle the lives of Connecticut's students, from kindergarten through the last years of high school. The words reveal to us every emotion the students feel, from the wonder and fascination the youngest students experience over simple pleasures like snowfall and family pets, to the complexities and varieties of emotion the high schoolers have come to know through first loves and personal losses. To read these words is to know and understand these students; in a way, it is even to revisit our own youth.

Nearly three thousand students submitted samples of their writing this year. It was a labor of love to read through them and be given a wide window into the hearts and minds of these students. The submissions selected for inclusion in this edition of the *Connecticut Student Writers* magazine give everyone an opportunity to peer through this window, however brief or oblique the view may be.

We invite you to read this magazine, to marvel at the beauty of words, and to honor the students who crafted them.

Editors

Steven J. Albrecht
Jason Courtmanche
Kerry Jones
Jennifer Shaff
Vikki Smith
Kathy Uschmann

Connecticut Student Writers

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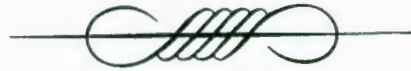
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The Snowman's Wife

Snow is cold in the winter
Ice is frozen in the winter
A snowman looks nice in the winter
He needs a wife in the winter



One Snowy Day

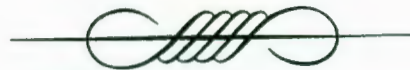
I woke up on a snowy morning and I looked out the window. I got dressed and asked Mommy if me and Lauren could go outside. She said yes. So we went outside! We stood on a hill.

Wow! I said, "My butt is solid when I fall!" That was cold! Then me and Lauren built a snowman together. We went sledding and it was fun!

"My boots are filled with snow," I said in a very grumpy voice. So we went inside and took our wet clothes off.

When we got out of wet clothes, we heard Mommy yelling. She was standing in the middle of the room trying to get her socks off. She spilled the hot water on her foot! After Mommy stopped complaining about the water, we had hot chocolate together.

Good-bye snow! I will see you tomorrow!



Troll Trouble

It all happened when I went to my grandma's house. On my way I heard something. I let go of my dog. Then I turned around. There was nothing there so I turned around again. My dog was gone out of sight. I looked for him but I could not find him. It was really weird. Then I heard it again and this time I saw it. I said, "Wouldn't you rather have my hat and scarf?" I rubbed my scarf around my neck. It said, "No, I do not want it." I did not know it but another troll grabbed my scarf. So they had both things. They tricked me. So I tricked them. "I can fly. I'll show you how, but I'll need my scarf and my dog." They gave me the scarf and the dog. The end.

Jasmine Aiken
Kindergarten
Gaffney
Elementary
School
New Britain

Taylor Liedke
Kindergarten
Anna Reynolds
School
Newington

Delaney
Stearns
Kindergarten
Scotland
Elementary
School
Scotland

**Hannah
Coyman**
Kindergarten
Hart Magnet
School
Stamford

My Trip To Disney World

We got to see Mickey Mouse and we got to eat hot dogs there. Mommy took a picture of us next to Winnie the Pooh and Tigger. We did a lot of walking because we had to park the car so far away. We went swimming with the dolphins and I got to ride on one.



**Christina
Sabia**
Grade 1
Hart Magnet
School
Stamford

My Mom and Me

When my mom reads to me,
I like to read with her.
When my mom goes shopping,
I like to shop with her.
When my mom feeds the cats,
I like to feed the cats with her.
When my mom watches TV . . .

I am asleep!!



**Callie
Hagemeister**
Grade 1
Daisy Ingraham
Elementary
School
Westbrook

Sled Dogs

Sled dogs
rush
over hills
running
like a
shooting
bullet
faster and
faster
they go
up and down
they go
barking
all the way.

The Runaway Mitten

Sarah Brochu
Grade 1
Richard D.
Hubbard
School
East Berlin

One day on a snowy afternoon Melissa, Samantha, Brittany and I were walking home from school. When we got home, my older sister Alison took my mitten. Samantha gasped. That night we could not stop talking about my lost mitten. The next morning, when we were walking to school we were talking about Melissa's seventh birthday party in two days. It was the coldest day of the year, but I was wearing my mom's mittens to keep me warm. When we got to school, I looked in all the closets in case Alison put it there, but it was not there. How could I find it?

As we were walking home from school, we were not talking. We were searching for my lost mitten. Now I have to wear black mittens. When we got close to my house, we saw Alison shoveling the driveway. As we took our first step on the sidewalk, she yelled, "What took you so long, slowpokes?" We lined up our boots and ran inside. We threw our coats on the couch and ran up the stairs to our secret tent under my desk in my room. We talked about the mitten.

Samantha said, "I have an idea. Why don't we sew a mitten?"

"But we don't know how to sew," said Melissa.

"Let's go to the beach!" said Brittany.

"Yeah," I said. "Let's go tomorrow."

The next morning we went to the beach. I saw something shaped like a mitten, but it was a fish. After that we went home.

That day we were the first ones at Melissa's birthday party, so we looked there too. We even tied Melissa's sister Stephanie to a wall and tipped her just in case. After the party we got a hair cut. The lady turned Melissa's hair red. She turned Sam's hair blue. She put a lightning bolt on my forehead. When we got home, this time my dad was shoveling the driveway. We did not say a word. We went straight up to my secret tent and talked about the mitten.

Samantha had another idea. "I think Alison still has it in her pocket or closet, don't you?"

"No, it can't be," I said.

"I think she has a little point," said Brittany.

"It will take us all winter to find that mitten," said Melissa.

"Let's look for Alison and do what we did to Stephanie," said Samantha.

"You're brilliant, Samantha DeFrancesco," I said.

So we looked and looked but we could not find her. Then I remembered she was at her friend Kailin's house. I did not tell them because they'd cry. The grass was growing the next day when we were walking to school. It was almost spring.

I said, "I guess you're right about taking us all winter to find that mitten."

Melissa said, "Now we are near the school. I can see it."

At recess we saw a cat. Before taking it home we told Mrs. Yale. She said, "I'll hold it and at the end of the day you can come and pick it up."

"OK," I said.

So at the end of the day we came to pick it up. We named it Snowflake.

At night we whispered ideas to each other.
Samantha said, "I think my ideas are good."

The next morning, we walked to school as usual. My mom took care of the kitten while we were at school. It was getting warmer. Meanwhile my mom was making pumpkin pie. The kitten winked her eye and thought to herself, "Yummy."

When we got home we could smell it really good. We each ate six pieces in eighty-five pies. The next day was Saturday. We made cookies. Meanwhile the cat was sniffing up Alison's closet. Suddenly she pulled something with two legs and two hands. She brought it down the stairs into the kitchen.

"A mouse," we all screamed.

I looked closely and said, "No! That's my lost mitten!"

That's the story of the runaway mitten.



The Boy Who Practiced

Once upon a time there was a boy and he was too shy, and he couldn't climb a tree. He couldn't climb anything, and he was sad. He kept practicing, and then he could climb anything! First he climbed a tree. Then he climbed a mountain. Then he climbed a slide. Then he climbed a ladder. In the end he was tired and he was proud!



If Mrs. Cohen Threw Papers in the Garbage

If Mrs. Cohen threw papers in the garbage, Mrs. Cohen will find them and want to make something out of them. She will make a spider out of the papers. She will remember spiders make webs. She will make a web to go with it. She will show her class on the rug. When she shows her class, she will see papers with scribbling on them and she will . . . throw them in the garbage!

Blair Cassell
Grade 1
Rogers Magnet
Elementary
School
Stamford

Matthew
Miller
Grade 1
Orchard Hills
School
Milford

Lions

You can hear the roar
like drums in their throats
miles away.
The lion watches the zebras
like black and white TVs.
He runs as quick as the howl of a wolf.
The lion sneaks up on the zebra
as fast as light.
He pounces . . .
The lion spins the zebra
around like a helicopter blade
pins it down . . .
and eats.



Dear Jack

Dear Jack,
Thank you for carrying the water. I'm sorry that I pushed you down the
hill. Next time I won't do that.

Your Friend,
Jill



Little Chipmunk

One cool September morning
A chipmunk
crawled out from a hole
underneath my front steps.
Its eyes sparkled
as it stared up at me.
I wondered
if the chipmunk had a mother?
. . . as my mom was sending me off,
for my first day of school.

Erik Van Eck
Grade 2
Mary T.
Murphy School
Branford

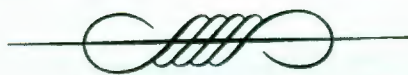
Jeff Bogdan
Grade 2
Skinner Road
School
Vernon

Tara Higgins
Grade 2
Daisy Ingraham
Elementary
School
Westbrook

Gregory Zito
Grade 2
Squadron Line
School
Simsbury

Hunting Boy

One moonlit, cold February there was the snowstorm of the century. In the middle of the night, I was helping my dad get ready to go hunting. All of the other Native Americans were sleeping. My name was Hunting Boy because in the spring I would always pretend to hunt. I would draw a buffalo and hang it up. Then, I would throw a rock at it and hit it in all different places. Sometimes I would miss it. I always wanted to go hunting, but I was too young. After a little while, my dad left. Eight hours later, my dad came back home to our teepee, very tired with no food. The next day, my dad was very ill. The winter had been so cold and snowy that we were almost out of food. So I had to go out to go hunting. My mom and dad gave me three pairs of pants. The top layer was very thick bear fur. They also gave me a buffalo bone knife and a blowgun. The buffalo bone and arrowhead were tied together with a vine to make a knife. I made it in the spring. It was gray and brown with a little bit of green because it was camouflaged. They gave me the last of the meat. I put on rabbit skin because it would camouflage me and then I set out. I crept up the trail and saw some deer tracks. I followed them. Finally, I found the deer. I threw my knife toward it, but I missed it, so I crawled away. A little later, I walked into a gigantic bear. I screamed as loud as ten speakers and ran as fast as I could. Finally, I climbed up a tree and saw a buffalo and the buffalo's baby. I didn't shoot it because it was so cute. Eventually the bear went away. I saw a bigger buffalo. I climbed down the tree, ran very fast and crept up very quietly behind it. I shot the buffalo three times in the head. By that time I was freezing in my toes, fingers and my face. I put the buffalo on my back. I was heading home when two people from the village came on horses looking for me. I climbed on the back of a horse and we rode home. At the village, everyone had a party for me because the buffalo would feed the whole village. Then they gave me a gold bow and arrow. I did not know what to say. Then the leader said, "You did a great thing. You earned this new name. From now on you will be called Survivor Hunter." I was so excited. My dad was happy for me and he became better. After that day, I always went hunting with him all of the time.



Aidan
Galligan
Grade 2
Burnham
School
Bridgewater

The Karate Kittens

Once upon a time in Kitty Cat Land, there lived three famous little kittens. They were famous because they were the best karate warriors in the land. They protected Kitty Cat Land from bad cats of all sizes and shapes.

Their worst enemy came from the jungle: the black panther. He had razor sharp teeth, a tail like a whip, and claws like newly sharpened daggers. His teeth were like swords. Every animal except the Karate Kittens ran from him in fear.

One day, the black panther snuck into Kitty Cat Land! He kidnapped some

kitty cats and took them back into the jungle. He planned to fatten them up and EAT them! (Don't get sad. Do you know what's going to happen? Don't tell your friends! Okay, let's get back to the story!)

When the Karate Kittens found out what had happened, they were furious. They decided to make a plan. There was only one way to rescue the little kitties. They would have to fight their way into the black panther's lair! They would also have to fight all the other animals of the jungle because all of them were afraid of the panther. Since they were so scared of him, they did whatever he said, and he said, "Fight the Karate Kittens!" It was going to be big combat.

The Karate Kittens went into the jungle, even though it was only three against many. They walked carefully through the jungle and met a troop of monkeys. The monkeys pelted them with bananas and tried to kick them as they swung over their heads. The Karate Kittens blocked the bananas with so much speed and skill that the yellow missiles bounced right back at the monkeys.

Next the Karate Kittens met the wild boars. The boars tried to gore them with their tusks. The Karate Kittens jumped high in the air and landed on the boars' backs. When they got to a low branch, they held on and swung the boars into the air with their feet, banging their heads on the tree.

Around the bend, The Karate Kittens ran into the elephants! The elephants shot water at them with their trunks, but the Karate Kittens grabbed the elephants' trunks and swung them around like lassos until the elephants were too dizzy to stand.

THEN . . . they met the black panther! Very dangerous hand to hand combat began. There were flashes every few minutes: black fur and golden eyes everywhere and white fur and blue eyes everywhere. They jumped over the whip-like tail! They blocked the slashing claws like daggers! They chopped the teeth like razors! Finally, weary and bruised, the Karate Kittens rescued and brought home the kidnapped kittens. The black panther never was seen again. THE END.



Woodlander Adventurer

Downy, the reindeer, cut a comical figure as he shuffled down a winding path in the snowy Canadian woods, his droopy features looking even droopier. All the while he was mumbling, "So what if my legs are longer and skinnier than Tall Horn! So what if my nose is red and my horns aren't straight. I still have the right to play with Tall Horn! Oh how I wish he would let me." He sniffed. Even the air smelled sad to him. Right now, Downy wished he had a friend.

"Ah? What's this I hear you mumbling about Tall Horn?" asked a cheery voice in the trees.

"Who said that?" asked Downy, startled as he looked around.

"Me!" said the same friendly, carefree voice.

"Who's me?" asked Downy, still not sure if it was something safe.

Alex Bryce
Grade 3
Annie E.
Vinton School
Mansfield
Center

"Me is Firjak the squirrel," he replied.

Downy let forth a sigh of relief. Squirrels were easy to deal with; in fact, they were almost harmless. But as Firjak descended the tree, a sudden feeling of panic came over Downy, for this was no ordinary squirrel.

Firjak had on a shirt and pants that he had sewn from leaves. Two birch bark belts crisscrossed his chest and on his back was a pouch that contained two stone spears. As he stood before Downy, he constantly reached for his spears, as if something dangerous was lurking in the shadows. Last of all was the horrible yellow scar that ran down the left side of his face and neck. It probably ran down his whole body! The mere sight of him sent chills up Downy's spine.

"What're you staring at, deer?" he asked, his voice no longer cheery, but gruff and husky.

"I didn't mean to stare at you," said Downy. "But you almost don't look like a squirrel!"

"Well, I am! Didn't anyone tell you it's not polite to stare?" Firjak asked, annoyed.

"Sorry," said Downy, sniffing. "I didn't mean to insult you."

Firjak smiled. "You weren't. You see, I haven't been around another animal in quite a few seasons and I guess I've forgotten how to act," he added rather shyly.

"Oh, I understand," Downy said, smiling too.

"Come on, I'll take you to where I live. You look hungry," Firjak commented.

"Okay!" Downy replied, feeling he could really trust Firjak now.

Jumping into the trees, Firjak called down, "I'm going to scout ahead for my house. Just follow the rustle in the trees." Downy cautiously followed, waiting for the rustling noise before he ventured on. After a short time had passed, Downy heard Firjak call down. "We're here!" Downy stopped and looked around, but he didn't see any home. He cocked his head, confused. "Up here," said Firjak.

Downy peered around to where he thought he had heard Firjak's voice. There before him was an ingeniously hidden staircase. It was constructed with tightly woven vines, camouflaged so that it looked like it was part of the tree. Downy slowly went up the staircase. When he couldn't see the ground anymore he looked around. He found himself in a world of wonder! On every branch possible there was a small building. Each building was missing a wall so air could circulate through. In numerous spots, where thick branches were very close together, Firjak made flooring out of tightly woven vines. He had put dirt on top of this to create a garden where he could plant things in the spring. The whole place looked like a palace.

"Over here!" called Firjak. He led Downy into a large cozy room with a fireplace. Taking off the cushions from a couch he set them down in front of the fireplace and plopped down. "Make yourself at home," he said spreading his paws wide. Downy sat down near a small platter of food and began munching on the oat scones and strawberries that Firjak had prepared. "How did you ... find this tree and ... build all this?" asked Downy between mouthfuls.

"It's a long story," Firjak replied. "But if you like, I'll tell it to you."

"Okay," Downy said, still munching.

"All right then. It all started a few seasons ago when I was young and the leader of a tribe of squirrels, the Flashpaw Tribe. We made this tree our home. Those were the days! No one dared to oppose us with me as their leader. Then one day, a fierce band of wildcats attacked us. Their leader's name was Ferag. He fought like ten warriors. His tribe slew all the Flashpaws except me. After the battle, Ferag and his men mysteriously disappeared. I fled back to this tree and have lived here ever since. But now Ferag has come back again.

Downy gaped at Firjak in a questioning manner. "How do you know he's in these parts again?"

"Seen him," Firjak answered. "And his horde too! Not all wildcats anymore, though. He's got stoats, weasels, and ferrets too."

"But we have the best trained otter guards for our land forces and pike guards for our water forces. Can't they hold them off?" Downy asked, terrified.

"No, his horde outnumbers the otters and pikes two to one, and once they break through, they're in our peaceful woodlander territory."

"What about the squirrel tribes?" Downy questioned the sinewy squirrel.

"Flashpaw was the only warrior tribe in these parts," Firjak replied dismally.

"Then I guess it's hopeless," Downy said with a defeated look on his face.

Then suddenly a spark of hope came to Downy's face as he recollected, "That is, unless the deer tribe comes to the rescue. My dad is the king of our clan. I know he would be more than willing to help!"

"Well, why didn't you say that before?" Firjak cried back enthusiastically as a plan began to form in his head. "We don't have much time to waste. Go quickly to your land and gather up your force. I'll follow you to the edge of Woodlander's territory to make sure you made it safely. Then I'll return here and wait for you."

"Okay!" said Downy, his chest swelling with pride. He scurried down Firjak's stairs and into the dew-strung morning. He hadn't realized he had been in the tree house so long. He pranced along the trail and before long he came to the edge of Woodlander territory. He signaled to Firjak and continued on his way.

Running down the path he came to a fork in the road that he did not recollect. "Which one should I choose?" Downy thought frantically. Choosing the left path, he dashed down it. Suddenly, everything became familiar to him from the jackdaw nest close by, to the yew sapling it was in. "I guess I chose the right path!" Downy rejoiced cheerfully.

Just at that moment, he heard something—a faint whimper from someplace close. The more Downy walked on, the louder it became. "It seems to be coming from those nearby bushes," Downy concluded. Downy cautiously made his way to them. Using his nose delicately, he pushed the branches apart and peered inside.

What he saw made him turn to jelly. At the edge of the bush's roots was a pit and in it was Tall Horn sweating with fear. Surrounding him was a weasel and two wildcats. Their spears were pointed right at Tall Horn's heart. "I've got to help Tall Horn!" Downy thought, terrified. He quietly backed away from the bushes. His arms began flailing wildly in search of a weapon. Suddenly he stopped, realizing he was supplied with his own. He could use his hard antlers and sharp hooves to free Tall Horn.

Taking a deep breath he charged into the bushes and called out his tribe's war call, "Eulalia!" The weasel jumped up in shock, "What in tarnation is that comin' this way?" the weasel hollered as Downy came thundering toward them.

"I don't care what it is. Let's just get outa here!" yelled one of the wild cats. They ran like a mob of angry badgers was chasing after them.

Downy skidded to a halt next to Tall Horn. Tears of happiness fell from Tall Horn's eyes. "Downy, you saved me! I was so wrong about you. You are brave—one of the bravest creatures I've ever met, Downy!"

"Well, thank you Tall Horn. Coming from you, I consider that a great honor. Right now let's just go and tell my father about those wildcats. There has to be more around here."

"I'm with you, Downy!" Tall Horn responded energetically as he climbed out of the pit. They set out together, chatting like good friends.

On the way to his father's tent, Downy and Tall Horn encountered a strange sight. A countless horde of stoats, wildcats, weasels and ferrets, battered and bruised. They were all marching away from the Woodlander territory. In the distance, a small figure was seen waving a victory flag from high in the branches of an elm.

"Well, I'll be. It's Firjak!" Downy exclaimed with joy. "He was able to fight them off. Now the wildcats are retreating back to where they came from."

Downy and Tall Horn reared up and hit the air with their front legs as a signal they had seen him. Turning towards the path to home, Downy and Tall Horn happily pranced away, their heads held high with pride and dignity.



Secret Spot

Mary and me
laughing, laughing, laughing,
birds singing
lullabies,
the wind snoring away,
leaves swaying and dancing.

In the broken
glass-like sunlight,
with shadows
stretching to take
over the sunlight,
I felt like the whole
world is singing
and laughing
together,
along with Mary and me.

Laurie
Himmel
Grade 3
East
Elementary
School
New Canaan

Beetle Skin

I saw a dead beetle
shell on a bare tree
with swaying of grass
and a forest in the background.

A big ray of sun
hot and round
finding the dead
skin of the beetle.

The birds were
all chirping and
Alexa laughing
and my breath
shaking ready to
pick up the beetle
skin.

I wonder where
the beetle skin
came from.

chirping
chirping



Starry Night

Starry night, I ponder and walk along the Milky Way.
As the stars guide me out of the misty night,
The clouds float into the darkness,
And the day bows down and lets night take over.
The moon herds the sun away like a farmer with his sheep.
A shooting star whizzes past,
Like it's been locked up for years
And is finally saying, "I'm free! I'm free! I'm free!"
A sheet of stars covers the houses,
Like a sign that God is watching over us.
The sun soon comes back and takes over the throne again,
As it watches the moon run off and soon the stars follow.
The clouds come out of their eternal sleep and guard the sun.
Once again it's light.

Emi
Alexander
Grade 3
East
Elementary
School
New Canaan

Sophie Zander
Grade 3
Samuel
Huntington
School
Norwich

Farah Kader

Grade 3

Mary E.

Griswold

School

Kensington

Night-Lights in the Sky

Maria plugged a night-light into the nursery wall. It was such a boring day in Middletown; nothing ever happened. She watched the blinking amber clocks change by the minutes. "Ah," Maria sighed as she sat by the burning logs within the grate. When the fire finally went out, Maria lit four candles that sat near the building blocks. She listened to the neighbors watch the Fourth of July parade on TV, as six lantern lights flickered on the front lawn. Suddenly Maria dashed behind the rocking chair when a gust of wind blew through the window carrying a herd of glowing fireflies. She took heavy steps back all the way to the grate to start another blazing fire. Maria turned her head to catch a glimpse of the gleaming eyes hidden in the bushes with flaming red red roses surrounding them. Vroom! went a motorcycle as it raced down the road followed by a million headlights. Maria couldn't bear to stay all alone in the dark with nobody around, but she knew the train cars would light the track and lead the way back to her cozy, bouncy bed! Maria watched fifteen beacons sweep the coast as sixteen ships untied. She could just look out the window all night and gaze at the captain turning the light switch on and off. Twenty airplanes flew across the sky and touched the twinkling stars. Maria widened her hazel eyes and threw her long blonde braid over her shoulder to get a good look at the drops of water that fell in gigantic pond-reflected moons, and that were destroyed by lightning bars. Soon Maria heard a crash, and suddenly a blur of sparkling dust covered the sky, and turned into colorful spirals. "Wow! Fireworks!" Maria gasped. "Middletown is not so boring after all."



**Walker
Downey**
Grade 4
South
Elementary
School
New Canaan

Soldiers

See them stalking across the streets
Of Denmark, patrolling the neighborhood. Standing on every
Little corner and sidewalk, knocking on every
Door, looking for Jewish families.
Intruding on every house
Even in the night. So, run if you hear the
Rasping voices and marching boots of these
Soldiers.

Go Away, Come Again Another Day

Cloudburst
Emptiness
Awe-inspiring
Condensation
Mist

Plunging like a tornado into
The cracked and
Twisted drainpipe.

In a suspension below the oily
Pools of puddles
With tears in a
Shadow of darkness.

Twirling into an enormous
Bag of potting soil
Making it scatter all about
To enrich a magnificent
Prize winning rose bush.

Showering gadgets
With drops of crumbled
Rust
Penalized for carelessness.

Spinning
Onto a doll dressed for
A tea party
Absorbing the moisture
Like a sponge.

Drizzling and zipping like flies
Onto a red and white baseball
That never made it to home plate.

Rain, Rain.
Go away, come again another day.

Sasha Stein
Grade 4
Mary T.
Murphy
Elementary
School
Branford

Cinderella From the Fairy's Point of View

Okay, I know. Cinderella is your favorite fairy tale. You love Cindy. Well, I'll bet my buttons you wouldn't if you were the fairy godmother going "Poof, poof, poof" and "bippity boppity boo." Here is that wonderful story of good ole Cindy from my point of view.

One beautiful morning when the birds were singing, Mr. Sun was shining. I was sitting in my living room reading a good book (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*). Suddenly the telephone rang. It was my boss, Nina. "Sorry to interrupt, Katerina," she apologized, "but a girl named Cinderella needs you. She lives at 222 Robin Lane, Greenwich, CT."

She NEEDS me. She WANTS me, rather. Why can't people learn to live without us fairy godmoms? However, I pulled myself out of my big squishy armchair and put on my pink lacy dress that itched like one hundred hornets. Then I groped around behind the grandfather clock that stood in the corner tall as a basketball hoop for my wand, which had a big, sparkly, pinky white star at the end. When I found it, I grabbed it and flew out the door. When I got to Cinderella's home, I saw a young girl with long, golden curls and blue eyes. She was in ripped clothing, and crying. "Why are you crying little girl?" I recited the well-known speech. Cinderella immediately launched into a story of her step-mother and sisters, a prince, a ball, and nothing to wear. So I waved my wand and turned a pumpkin into a big, grand coach.

Then I turned some newts into footmen and guards and drivers. I caught some mice and turned them into horses. Then I gave Cindy a beautiful ball gown and a pair of glass slippers. "Now," I told her, "get into the coach and go to the ball. Have a good time, but be back by midnight. At midnight everything will disappear."

She looked at me. "Okay, I will. Now, goodbye."

I watched the little squirt drive away and decided I'd follow her. As I flew through the cool, pleasant night air, I thought of the time before I had become a fairy godmother. I could hardly remember it. I went to Smith College. I loved science, art, drama, and music. I still do. Then I met Nina, my boss to-be. I had listened, amazed, as she told me her secrets of the new job she had gotten—boss of all the fairy godmoms. When she had asked me if I wanted to be a fairy godmom, I replied yes, thrilled. Now I'm not as sure I should have. I arrived at the castle with a bang, which goes to say you should always look ahead of yourself if you are moving. I saw Cinderella step gingerly out of the coach. She smiled and walked into the palace. I followed her closely. Well hidden, I watched as the prince ran up to her and brought her to the dance floor where they danced, hand in hand. I won't give you any details. It was too lovey dovey to talk about.

The next day at ten o'clock a.m. I was sitting in Cindy's room talking. "So, Cindy," I asked, "how was the ball?"

"The ball was good, but now it's all over because I had to run hippity skippity out of there at midnight," she answered. Just then there was a knock on the door. "That would be the prince," Cindy sobbed.

"What?" I asked. "Getting together with him. What's wrong?"

"Oh, everything," Cinderella replied. "The prince is coming to look for the girl with the glass slippers and my stepmom has forbidden me to see him!" Great, I thought. Here comes another wish! I decided to get out of there before Cinderella wished for anything. I tried to open the door, but couldn't!

"Get over here, Cindy," I yelled. "The door's jammed."

"No," Cinderella replied. "My stepmom locked me in."

"Oh, that's just great," I muttered darkly under my breath. Then I waved my wand and the door opened.

"Yes," cried Cindy jumping up. She ran out the door and down the stairs.

"You're welcome!" I called after her. I followed her down. In the living room I hid myself to watch. The prince looked at Cindy and said, "That's not her, I know it. Come, let's go." He looked meaningfully at a short, squat man whom I guessed was his footman.

"The rule says every maiden," the footman said. He gestured at Cindy to sit down. She sat and he picked up a cushion with something covered with a cloth on it. "A maiden ran from the ball last night, leaving this on the stairs." He pulled the cloth away and I gasped. Yep, you guessed. It was Cindy's. "The prince felt he loved her and is searching for the maiden whose foot fits this slipper," he informed us. After a long speech, he put the shoe on Cindy's foot. It fit. The stepmom screamed and fell into a chair, and the prince scooped up Cindy and kissed her. The rest I don't know. I covered my eyes.

The next week I was sitting in my armchair when I got a telephone call. It was Cindy. She went into hysterics about the prince wetting the bed and burning toast. "That's really too bad," I told her and hung up before she could make another wish. Maybe I'll send a straw to her with a note saying, "Suck it up, Bub!" but for now I have to call Nina about retirement.



The Piano

Wood into keys,
Keys into sound.
I hear music . . .
Its vibrating sound
That echoes through my head
Like a ball bouncing
In an empty room
Trying to come out.

Emily
Maynard
Grade 4
Witt
Intermediate
School
Stafford
Springs

**William
Simpson**
Grade 4
East School
New Canaan

The Shot

I cocked my head to the side to get a superior view of the play down at the other end of the rink. A sigh escaped my lips. It looked as if my team could clinch victory over the Cougars. All they had to do was trap the puck in the red zone. But then something went wrong.

A skater wearing black was sprinting down the ice in full throttle; he had one way or another stolen the puck and escaped from the conflict with the rubber disk curved soundly on his stick. But fortunately, one of my quicker teammates was hot on his heels.

All of a sudden, a stick flailed out and knocked the puck out of the Cougars' control. The tiny puck came sailing down, wide of the mesh.

My defensemen came crashing into me, knocking the goalie's stick from my grasp and against the corner boards. I jerked my head as I noticed a soft crunch as somebody's skate pierced my stick.

Oh grand, I thought. I'm stickless, and the puck is in my zone! At that moment I noticed a "crezzsh" as a forwards skates scathed the ice behind the net as he curved around and whipped the puck to one of his teammates, and that one immediately took a shot, which I effortlessly deflected with my right pad.

There were 10.2 seconds remaining in the third period. I knew we must hold on to the win. Suddenly, a Cougar had a clear and uncluttered corridor to my net. He tried a swift move, in which the forward tries to fake out the goaltender. I knew I had to block this shot. My legs snapped into a split instantaneously, but yet that was not quite sufficient.

He tried to flick the puck above my shoulder . . . My reflexes just turned onto autopilot, and my glove shot up and enveloped the puck.

An earsplitting roar arose from the minuscule bleachers.

I speedily snapped my legs back so I was sitting on the bitter ice surface, still gaping unbelievably at my glove that seemed to be hanging in the heavens.

WE HAD DONE IT.

**Kristina
Krupa**
Grade 5
John Wallace
Middle School
Newington

The Cheating Cheetah

Long, long ago in the warm savannas of Kenya, where the tall dry grass grew and before people ever lived in Africa, lived a nameless creature who came to be called Cheetah. This creature was not liked by the other animals because he always bragged that his soft, golden brown silky fur was perfect. It was true that Cheetah's fur was beautiful, just as he said. Back then, Cheetah's fur did not have any spots, so that golden brown color made the Cheetah's fur look even more beautiful. Cheetah loved to run and he let everyone know how swift he was. One day Cheetah was trotting around and saw Sun talking to his friends, the Wind, the Rain and the Earth. The animal we now call Cheetah strolled over to the Sun and challenged, "Hey Sun, I bet that I can race you and your rays across Africa, and

get to the other side before you. If I win, then you will give me some of your rays so my fur will be even more beautiful and shiny. But, if I lose (which will not happen, he thought to himself) then you can have the honor of naming me for all time. I have lived all these years and I still do not have a name." The Sun, who was very wise and respected by all, eagerly rose to the challenge.

The next warm summer evening, Sun and Cheetah met to agree on the route that Cheetah was supposed to take. As they were discussing the long and difficult route, Cheetah deviously plotted to himself, "I'm not going to take that route; it's too long and hard. I know a much shorter route that I can take that will get me to the finish line fast. Then I know for sure that I will win!" Cheetah then laughed out loud, thinking he was the cleverest of creatures.

Cheetah woke up early the next day, ready to race. Since the Wind, the Rain, and the Earth heard about the bet, they agreed to be the ones to start the race and to say when it was time to go. The Cheetah just finished stretching his long legs and was ready to race. With a loud roar, the Wind thundered, "On your marks, get set, go!" Cheetah spread out his long legs and sprinted as fast as he could dash. Cheetah ran and ran and ran over the hot sand of the savannas. He went up steep sand dunes, across dry plains, and past many oases. The Sun also worked very hard, too. He shined and spread his glistening rays over the earth. It was noontime and the Sun decided to take a short rest from all of his hard work. His friends, the Wind and Rain, blew in large fluffy clouds to help cover the Sun's rays. Now was the time for Cheetah to begin to carry out his deceitful scheme. As he came to a place in the desert where he was to run up and over mountains of sand, he found a shortcut around the dunes that would save him time. No one knew that the Cheetah was cheating because the Earth, Wind, and Rain were not paying any attention to him. They were all trying to help Sun think of what name the Sun should pick for Cheetah. However, the gusty Wind gave up trying to think of a good name for Cheetah. He turned his head and caught wind of Cheetah's tricky scam. This made the blustery Wind very upset, so he blew with all his might on Cheetah to slow him down. The Wind blew so strongly it made a gigantic dust storm. Dust smacked against Cheetah's face and got into his eyes. That made Cheetah slow down, but after a while the Wind ran out of breath. He told his friend the Rain about the sneaky animal; then Rain started to pour and pour. The water soaked his beautiful fur heavy and that slowed Cheetah down even more from cheating. But it wasn't long when the Rain became exhausted. He found he had no more water to shower to the once-parched land below. The Earth was then all wet and moist. Cheetah continued to run, but as he leaped across puddles, he kicked up mud that splattered on his soggy fur, creating hundreds of tiny, ugly spots on his once stainless fur. Cheetah knew it looked bad, but he kept on running anyway. However, he was so upset he took a wrong turn, causing him to be lost. He stopped and turned back to find his way, but it was getting late in the day.

Soon Sun heard about what Cheetah was doing and he became very angry. He turned bright red in the face. He looked like a big fat cherry without a stem. He started to shine like he had never shined before. The heat made Cheetah thirsty and he needed to slow down. Sweat poured down his face. It was now certain that Cheetah was going to lose the race. The bright Sun was almost touching the Earth.

Evening was setting in and the mud on Cheetah had been baked onto his smooth fur by the Sun. The Sun was so weary from shining all day, but he had won the challenge! The Wind, the Rain, and the Earth rejoiced joyfully with the Sun. When Sun was about to set, he remembered that he would be able to name Cheetah as his reward for winning the bet. He decided to wait until the next day to name the creature.

The next morning Sun rose and awoke Cheater. "I have thought of a name for you." He announced to all the gathered animals that from that day on the animal's name would be "Cheater." He would be called this so that all would remember the dishonest way he had cheated trying to win the race. Cheater then trudged out to a sparkling blue lake and tried to wash away the brown ugly spots, but they did not come off. He was so upset when the spots would not wash off his once beautiful fur that he cried and cried.

After Cheater cooled off, he ran over to the Sun and his friends and begged them to please take the spots away, but they all agreed, "What's done is done." The spots will help everyone spot the cheaters in their ranks. Afterwards, the Sun, the Rain, the Wind, and the Earth lived happily ever after.

After a century or two had passed, Cheater still looked the same, but people had come to Africa by that time. The people wanted to know what the swift, spotted animal's name was. When the lumbering gray elephant said "Cheater" through his long trunk, it sounded like "Cheetah." So, from then on the people called him Cheetah.



Zip

Ben Davis
Grade 5
Tashua School
Trumbull

"Come on, Ben, keep going," the rope director yells.

I stand on the third rung of the heavy, silver ladder that leans against the sixty-foot high tree that I am about to climb. My goal is to reach the platform at the top of the tree. Then I will glide diagonally into the pond below. This is my first time on the aqua-zip.

I take another step. There are many thoughts going through my head. Will the ladder fall? Will the cord that is holding my harness to the tree snap? When I get to the top, will the platform fall? If anything goes wrong I will fall sixty feet and probably die. I try to keep my mind off the platform and everything else that I am thinking about. I try to think about when it is all over and I am safe in the water.

I can see my camp director in his white motorboat encouraging me to go on. He is saying things like "You can do it" and "Don't be afraid." I can also see the rowboat that will pick me up when I land in the water.

I finally make it to the top of the ladder. I step on the first metal bar that is sticking out of the tree. It seems like there are hundreds of thousands of bars still

to be climbed. I start to feel a pain in my stomach. It feels as if the tree is a negative magnet that is pushing me backwards. With every step it becomes harder for me to keep my balance.

"I want to come down," I say softly, but no one else can hear. "I want to come down," I say louder.

"Keep going, you're almost there," the rope director yells to me.

I take another step and start to cry. Once again the rope director yells at me to keep going. He seems anxious for me to finish so that everyone else can get a turn. I look up, and to my surprise, I see the platform a few feet above me. I suddenly realize that I have made it to the top. All of my fear seems to disappear and excitement explodes into me. Eagerly I climb three more steps. I put my hand on the platform and pull myself up.

From the top I can see the people who have already finished staring up at me with excitement. I remember how my friends didn't look scared before they jumped. The other rope director attaches my harness to the zip line. I feel like my whole body is going to shatter. Finally I work up enough courage and zip off.

For the few seconds that I am in the air I feel like Superman flying through the sky. I can't hear anything except for the wind rushing past my face. In front of me I can see endless treetops. I also see little people water skiing far below. They look like ants skiing on a large puddle. I feel so dumb that I thought this would be scary. Before I know it I am about ten feet away from the water. Closer, closer, my feet hit the water, SPLASH!!



The Loss

The soldier walks out of his tent.
He picks up his gun.

The seed cracks open.
The sprout pushes its way out.

The soldier marches to stand bravely in front of his enemy.

The sprout breaks through the surface of the soil to blossom and show its beauty
before the sun.

The soldier pulls the trigger and the bullet rockets its way out of the barrel.

The flower falls, crumples, and dies.

Another life wisps through the air . . . destroyed.

Christopher
Chromey
Grade 5
Hall Memorial
School
Willington

Samantha
Weston
Grade 5
Union School
Unionville

The Blank Page

At the beginning of the writing period I open
my blue writer's notebook and
flip to a . . .

Blank Page

The brightness of the page blinds me,
making me think of all the new
words to write on the . . .

Blank Page

But the words I'm looking for are lost,
fighting with the others, wanting
to be the perfect words
written on the

Blank Page

Somehow, some way I pull the words I need
together just like a magnet, but still
can't figure out how to form
those words into something
to write on the . . .

Blank Page

Poems, novels, biographies, fiction, I
brainstorm ways to form the
selected words from my mind
into a magical piece of
writing to fill the . . .

Blank Page

I decide on a poem, but what subject?
Nature, flowers, friends, sports
I need the perfect idea to make
readers want to read my poem
which is right now my . . .

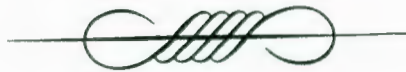
Blank Page

Finally the most outrageous idea ever!
A blank page poem!
I think of how much of my page will be
filled with my idea. I start to
write on my . . .

Blank Page

Now my page is full but once it was known as a . . .

Blank Page



Star Girl

Once there was a little girl named Lara. Lara loved the stars. Every night she looked up at them with love in her eyes. As if they were her own. As if she had some sort of connection with them. Every night her father peeked in her room. He was terribly worried about her. Why didn't she go to sleep? Why didn't she pay attention in class instead of drawing stars all over her papers? Her father was not the only one worried about Lara. Her mother and teachers and classmates had all noticed it. "Silent Lara" they called her. She never spoke to any of them. She always answered all the questions her teachers asked her with an astronomic answer.

An example would be: "Lara, what is two cubed?"

"Well, Mrs. Bringle, I do believe that when Mercury, Mars, Venus, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto align you can count them and see for yourself."

When all of the room parents and teachers and her parents could no longer stand it, they held a meeting with her astronomy teacher. "What are you telling my daughter?" her parents asked.

"Yes, what?" the rest of the group cried.

"You must understand. I teach her the same material I have taught the rest of the class. I do admit to giving her a little extra information and allowing her to borrow my astronomy books. But there is nothing wrong with that. She just loves it. If you have any further questions, I advise you to talk to Lara," he replied.

"But she never answers questions right!" someone called.

"And she turns in homework blank with stars all over it!" someone else cried.

"She snubs our kids!" a woman yelled.

"Well, I'm sorry to hear that, but what can I do? I can't take away her love of the stars no matter what I say. Even if I stopped teaching her she would still love them."

**Bethany
Hanford**
Grade 6
Essex
Elementary
School
Centerbrook

That night when her father tucked her into bed he asked her, "Lara, why do you stare endlessly out the window? And must you continue to look from your bed? If you stare at the ceiling it will help you fall asleep."

"Oh, Daddy," she said. "Try to understand. The stars are out there. Not on the ceiling. And I stare out the window because the stars are faraway and I can see them better if I sit in the window."

"Oh," her father said. "I see."

That night, Lara had a dream. She was an astronaut; weightlessness took over her body. Then she was floating past asteroids towards the sun. The infrared radiation and heat made her sweat. She was panting hard. Suddenly, she was sitting up in bed, fully awake.

The next day they each got to stand up and share what book they were reading and tell what it was about. When it was Lara's turn, the room became hushed. What would she do? They wondered. Would she start babbling about inner planets and outer planets and all that? They waited, silent for her to begin. When she reached the front, she turned to face the class.

"I'm reading *The Satellites That Made Us Great*. It's about man-made and natural satellites. It talks about how moons are satellites and is filled with other cool facts. It even talks about how they orbit things and take pictures of them!" She had finished. She sat down and began to draw a perfect star on the cover of her notebook.

That night when she got home, she went straight up to her room. There she found a present on her bed. She unwrapped it rapidly. A telescope! It was perfect! Now she didn't have to sit in the window. But she would still be reluctant to go to bed. She looked at the card. It read:

*To My Star Girl,
I thought about what you said. Now you can look out the window without getting cold. I'll tuck you in at 8:00 tonight instead of 12:00.*

Love Dad

P.S. Look up

And so she did. The lights were out and she gasped at what she saw. The whole ceiling was covered with glow in the dark stars and planets. She sighed. What a wonderful thing her father had done. She would thank him, of course. She decided to try and do what the teachers wanted her to and she sat down to do her homework. She wanted this to be her thank you to him. She would try to be normal.

When all homework was done she changed into her fleece, star-studded pajamas and climbed into bed. Her dad came upstairs, and she was tucked in as she asked him, "Do you ever wonder if maybe there are other girls on other planets who would be friends with me?"

Little did she know that millions of miles away, a little girl on Mars was being tucked in and looking through her telescope at tiny Earth and asking her father the very same question.

Ode to Books

Melissa
Reifers
Grade 6
Middlebrook
School
Wilton

A book
Isn't just made up of
Paper and ink,
Not just words,
Not just chapters,

A book is a life,
Wanting to tell its story,
Wanting to express the joy
Or sorrow hidden in its typed pages,
Wanting to show off its accomplishments,
Wanting to hide its embarrassments,

A book is a life,
Not just sentences,
Not just paragraphs,

It is refreshing
Like a cool mountain stream
Twisting and turning down the rocky mountain side,
Or its words could kindle a roaring fire
Of injustice in your soul,

A book is a life,
Not just letters,
Not just stanzas,

It is an escape from reality, diving
Into someone else's perspective, living
Someone else's life,

It is better than reality,
Because the troubles are not yours,
Yet you feel as if you are the person,
Facing all their obstacles with a turn of the page,

When you read a book,
You're in a different world,
Shut out from the world surrounding you,

A book is a life,
Not just paper and ink.

Danielle
Burnette
Grade 6
Clark Lane
Middle School
Waterford

You and I Together

We have heard

We have heard

And the laugh of children

The deafening silence

We have experienced

We have experienced
Adventures that we call our
Own

The never traveled road

We have known

We have known
What we shouldn't know

And what we should know
And remember

We have seen
Almost everything

We have seen

Or at least that's what we
think

But everything we think

May change in the future

We have seen it all together

And experienced it together

Together 'til the end
You

Together 'til the end

And I

Together

Together



Maggie
McCarthy
Grade 6
Juliet W. Long
School
Gales Ferry

I Wanted It

I wanted it.
I *sighed*.
I nagged.
I *begged*.
I **whined**.
I got it,
I feel **horrible**.

Egg Drop

Kim Schonfeld
Grade 6
Baldwin Middle
School
Guilford

I had seen the flash before, many times, sitting cool and content inside the Carton, when the door had been opened, and the Human hand had come to grab a bottle of juice or a bag of carrots. But it was different now when the flash came again, revealing the darkness outside of what the Human calls the Fridge. Again the hand came reaching and flipped open the blue cardboard top of our Carton. Quaking and clattering with fright, my little brothers and sisters and I held our breath, waiting for the Human hand to make its decision. It slid over our cool shells, slithered around our chilled white heads, and the pink fleshy thing made a grab—for me!

I was lifted out of the coolness of the Fridge and into the open dark air of the Outside in the hot, pink Human hand. Hurriedly, I was smothered into a wrap, not unlike the fate that had befallen the chicken and the pickles in the Fridge. I was closed into a darkness blacker than any I could have ever imagined. The Pepsi and the lettuce had told of the darkness outside of the Fridge, but it was nothing compared to this.

As the days passed, I became vaguely aware that other, heavier wrappers were being placed around me. I could no longer see a thing and I was certain that if I were ever returned to the Fridge, the wonderful brightness of it all would stun me senseless. I agonized over that for a while. That meant (I supposed) that I was no longer kin to my brother and sisters in the Carton. I had become an egg of the Outside.

The day finally came when I was brought to a place very far from the Fridge, bouncing all the way in a silly sort of Human contraption designed to carry loads and closed with a black shiny thing I have learned is called a zipper. I could hear the raucous buzzing of Human children, cheering perhaps for the person that held me in my bundle of protective wrappings. Eagerly, I peeked outside, and the first glimpse of brightness made my head sway with dizziness. I retired back into the shadows of the wrappings—but not before I saw something that made me yelp with fright: a wall made of blocks of hard, sturdy Human material stood before me, and just looking over the top made my very yolk run cold. Just over the ledge was an extremely long drop. And I'm talking huge. But the worst part had to be that I knew I would be going that way.

I cried and screamed, hoping some Human would hear me. I rattled the wrappings, sobbed, shouted, even rolled around, but nobody came to my aid. Finally, exhausted, I burrowed down into the thickness of the wrappings, hoping for the best. The shouting of the Human children increased and I swear I felt my yolk flip over. Gulping, I held my breath, felt the security of the Human hands give way beneath me, and I fell, screaming in terror all the way down. Down, toward the ground I plummeted, and I don't hesitate to note that it was horrifying. I wished briefly for the cool, round chamber of the Carton. My Carton. I screamed again.

But the fall slowed suddenly and a plastic rippling chimed from overhead.

"Look at the parachute!" I heard a Human child exclaim. Oh, I thought, relieved, praise that parachute! I landed with a soft thud on the ground and the

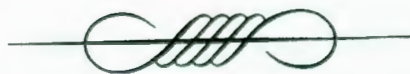
cheering of the Humans was louder still. The wrappings were ripped away from me, revealing my smooth, untouched shell. The brightness was almost overwhelming. It reminded me of back home in the Fridge, and I chuckled, smiling. I had survived the egg drop.



The Mask You Wore to the Masquerade

Daniel
Kiernan
Grade 7
Gordon C. Swift
Middle School
Watertown

I am the mask you wore that night
To the party you walked with me
When we arrived you put me on
To look like the bird of prey I am
Soft feathers sprout from my head
Almost like the hair on yours
When we entered the others looked up
To find a bird colored midnight black
Chandelier light sparkled on my face
Soft music echoed through the air
You danced with friends
Drank bubbling champagne
All behind the disguise of my face
For I am the mask you wore that night



A Wise Man

Ricardo
Sanchez
Grade 7
East Lyme
Middle School
Niantic

From the dark ghetto regions of the Bronx,
A colored man arose from the people,
The significant soul taught me from the sinning and the innocent,
Healing the wounds which were inflicted by the legion of immortal bleeding
spirits,
Evil has not consumed his life but brilliance has always stayed in his mind,
Remembering the past ancestors, he shows me the tapestry of my life and my
future . . .

Thalia

Ana Figueroa
Grade 7
Windham
Middle School
Willimantic

Mama says now Thalia is in Heaven. Mama promises that now she is okay. I don't believe her because now Thalia is all alone. How can she be okay if Mama isn't there to feed her or bathe her? All I know is that Thalia is gone. I won't ever hear her laughter. Never, ever again. Mama says that Thalia is an angel. Thalia was an angel, I tell her.

Mother tells us, Sasha and me, that she loves us.

"No you don't," I say. "You can't love us if you're sending us away." Mama frowns. I can see tears welling up in her eyes. I know I've hurt her feelings. But she doesn't love us anymore. She loved Thalia, not us. I can't bring myself to feel bad for Mama. I don't think I can, and I don't think I ever will. I turn away from Mama as if she has turned into a snake. Out of the corner of my eye, Sasha does the same. But she isn't angry. I know that Sasha turned away because she doesn't want Mama to see her cry. Mama holds out her arms to Sasha, tries to hug her. Sasha whimpers, but she doesn't snuggle with Mama.

I want to snuggle with Mama, but I don't. I already miss Mama, but I can't tell her that. Then she will want us back, but she can't have us back. It's too late. Aunt Catherine, Mama's sister, is coming to take us away. Aunt Catherine isn't the one keeping us. That's not what Mama says, though. I've seen Aunt Catherine before. And she has seen me. I don't like her, and she doesn't like me. I guess we'll be the perfect aunt and niece. Yeah. Right.

"Darling," Mama whispers. "I will always love you. I have to send you away. I don't want to, but Mama has to get herself back together." I frown when I hear this. Mama sees me do it.

"What's the matter, baby?" she asks.

"Why didn't you send us away when Daddy left?" I ask. Mama doesn't answer right away.

"Well, he just wasn't that important. I mean, I didn't get so upset over him. But Thalia is different." I keep frowning. What Mama has told me shows me she doesn't care. She would rather die without us than with us by her side. She loves Thalia more than us. That is why she is sending us away. I spin around to face Mama. This time, I know that she has turned into a snake behind her milky skin.

"He wasn't important to you, but he was to me," I say. I can feel my anger rising up. I know that I am about to yell, scream.

"But I was upset. All those nights, I cried. I prayed that you would come and hug me. But all you cared about was Thalia. You heard my crying. You ignored me and all because of that stupid baby!" I am yelling at Mama now. I pull the pillow out from under her head. Mama is taken by surprise. I throw the pillow at the wall with all my strength. I wish it were Thalia. I grab another pillow and throw it at the stupid crib she slept in. I can hear the impact of the pillow against the wood. I wish Thalia were in it, and I wish that it had been a brick I'd thrown. I wish the wood would splinter and crack.

"I *hate* Thalia!" I scream. I jump off the bed. Mama calls me, throws her arms out to grab me. But I'm too quick for her. I swerve away from her arms. I run outside, and I don't stop until I reach the end of the fence. Mama doesn't want

us to go into the field. She says it's dangerous, too many snakes out there. I jump over the fence and keep running. I'm barefoot. I step on something sharp. I don't have time to stop or scream out. I run and run as if I am late for something very important, I run so fast I feel like if I am late to wherever I am going, I will be punished severely. I keep running. I feel so tired now. I can tell I'm in the middle of the field because I can see the big rock that marks the center. I run toward it with newfound energy; the pain in my foot begins to throb.

After what feels like forever, I am finally sitting on the rock. I examine my foot. There is a deep, long gash in it. It is turning purple and it's still bleeding. It hurts like a fire is burning in my foot. Now I hear a noise. I can't see through the tall wheat, but I know it is Sasha.

"Come here," I say to Sasha. She immediately steps out from behind the wheat. I hold my arms open. She jumps into them, and I hold her tightly. We just sit there in silence, embracing each other tightly. Suddenly, we hear something sliding in the grass. It doesn't sound like feet. It sounds like something slithering through the grass. Suddenly a snake slithers out of the wheat. At first I think it is just harmless. Sasha leans out to touch its shiny scales. At first I am ready to let her. But then I remember the poem Mama taught me about snakes:

Red touches black, you're okay, Jack.
Red touches yellow, you're a dead fellow.

I look at the red and yellow rings. The colors are touching. Panic washes over me like a wave.

"Sasha, no!" I yell. I snatch her hand away from the snake. At first, she is confused. Then she is angry with me.

"Let go!" she shrieks. Then she remembers the poem. Her face turns pale. I am scared for her and me. What will we do if the snake strikes? The snake knows we are there, too. It begins to slither over to us. I know that it is ready to strike. I don't know why, but I do. And I am right. It coils up, hisses, and shoots itself up at us. I scream and close my eyes tight. Suddenly I hear a gasp escape from someone's mouth. I know it is not Sasha. I open my eyes and see that it is the snake that has gasped. I remember how strangled it sounded. Then I look up. Mama is standing over the snake, a hoe in her hand ready to strike again if the snake moves. Mama is terrified of snakes. She has just killed one.

Sasha and I run to Mama. When I hug her, I grip extra tight to her waist. I know now that she loves me because she is crying too. Mama never cries. She pulls me away from her and looks at me tenderly.

"I'll never send you away," she whispers. I know she means it, too. I hug Mama, and I don't hate Thalia anymore.



Harry Potter and the Prisoner of the *New York Times* Bestseller List

David
Burstein
Grade 7
Weston Middle
School
Weston

As an eleven-year-old fan of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, I was outraged when I heard that *The New York Times* plans to remove these incredible and significant books from the fiction bestseller list. There is, of course, no question that the Harry Potter books are bestsellers. By every measure, they are among the best-selling books of our time, as shown by the unprecedented 3.8 million first printing of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, which will be released on July 8th.

The New York Times bestseller list should be celebrating the success of the Harry Potter books and the ways they have encouraged increased reading and book buying. Instead, according to *The New York Times Book Review* editor, Charles McGrath, "The time has come when we need to clear some room on the list." Thus, to solve this "problem" of Harry Potter's tremendous success they are shuffling them off the main fiction bestseller list and, in my opinion, "ghettoizing" them into a category for best-selling "children's" books.

I think this is an unfair and wrong-headed approach. Here's why.

First, children certainly aren't the exclusive Harry Potter readers. Many adults read and enjoy them. I've seen business travelers reading them on airplanes. My grandmother devoured them the moment I lent her my copies. As a matter of fact, in Britain, so many adults wanted to buy Harry Potter that the publisher actually changed the cover art of the first book to make it look more serious.

Even by *The New York Times*'s news standards, Harry Potter is admittedly important to adults. When book four's title was announced it was featured as the lead article on nytimes.com. This shows that Harry Potter is an important landmark of our time . . . to children and adults.

Although *The New York Times* bestseller list has never really been about literary quality, it is worth pointing out that the actual literary quality of J.K. Rowling's work is probably higher than many of the "adult" authors on the bestseller list. Her imagination is more vivid, her language more interesting, her characters more compelling, her plots more riveting, and her values are certainly more sound from a moral viewpoint than many "adult" bestsellers. In this latter regard, it's interesting that *The New York Times* seems to have no problem with several "adult" books that are currently on the bestseller list and happen to be about children. For example, *The Empty Chair* (which I haven't read, but is described on the bestseller list as being about "a disturbed teenage boy who abducted two young women"). Or, *The Bluest Eye* (which I haven't read either, but is described as "the story of an 11-year-old black girl—pregnant by her father"). Shouldn't a series of books that deals with this same age group in a more positive light at least be considered alongside titles with such depressing descriptions? (Or is adult fiction a euphemism for depressing books about morally aberrational characters?)

What is *The New York Times*'s reason for consigning Harry Potter to the

second-class status of a "children's" bestseller? In line with Mr. McGrath's explanation, they don't want to give up three, soon to be four, and maybe even five or more slots on the list to the same author, many of whose most ardent fans happen to be children. Or could it be that these oh-so-sophisticated editors just don't like Harry Potter much? I have long wondered why the *Times's* descriptions of the three books are almost identical, even though the books are very different. Compare this to the three Nora Roberts titles currently on the paperback bestseller list, each of which is specific and differentiated to capture the essence of the plots, and you will see what I mean.

Nora Roberts, in fact, raises an interesting issue. She has three books on the paperback bestseller list currently. Would anyone suggest moving her out into some newly created category? There have been times when Stephen King or John Grisham or Tom Clancy held multiple places on the fiction bestseller list. Did *The New York Times* ever think of exporting these authors to a special category and excluding them from the main fiction list? So why this treatment for a "children's" writer?

On the current fiction bestseller list (June 25), the number one best-selling fiction book is *The Indwelling* (described as "[t]he seventh in a series about true believers who confront the Antichrist"). I don't know about you, but I'd be happy to see *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* overtake that title. Unfortunately, if *The New York Times* exports Harry Potter to a separate children's list, we'll be left with *The Indwelling* as the number one best-selling fiction book. Just think what future generations will say about our time period if they look back at the archives and think that everyone in America was reading *The Indwelling* this summer, when in fact far more people were reading *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*.



Abby Garnett
Grade 7
Vernon Center
Middle School
Vernon

The Squirrel Wars

I remember that summer, long ago, when my neighbor waged war upon the squirrels. It lasted for the whole three months of summer vacation, and I spent most of my time at his house to hear the latest developments. It all started when I was collecting my pay for the yard work, and Mr. Sullivan just happened to look out the window while he was washing the dishes. What he saw made his mustache bristle indignantly.

"Myrna!" he bellowed. "Those squirrels are at it again!"

Outside, three squirrels were scarfing seed from the birdfeeder with a vengeance, and more were joining them every minute.

"There's a whole passel of them," Mr. Sullivan continued. "A herd, even! They're devouring everything!" He barreled out the door, with me jogging behind, and made for the squirrels like a bulldozer, yelling and flailing his arms wildly. The squirrels scattered into the trees and jumped away, chattering in a

most irritating way. Mr. Sullivan was left shaking his fist after them and shouting angrily.

"This is war, you mangy little fur balls!" Suddenly, he turned to me and muttered, "Remember that, Bobby, you're my witness." Then we both marched back into the house to form our attack plan.

From that moment on, I was no longer Bobby, the little kid next door; I was the honorable Colonel Wilcox. Mr. Sullivan was the general, of course. He had to supervise over all attacks, retreats, etc. I was perfectly happy in my position, though. Any ten-year-old would be. I was so enthusiastic I offered to climb a tree and spy on the enemy, but Mr. Sullivan told me it would not be necessary.

On the twenty-first of June, at 1100 hours, we made our first attack. We rushed in and took the birdfeeder down off its hook, then quickly crept back into the garage. My neighbor laid the feeder on his workbench, and then with a triumphant gleam in his eye, drew out a pair of pliers! I gasped appropriately.

"Now here's the plan, my boy. We attach this piece of wire" (here he did so) "and then, when those ugly squirrels try to climb onto the birdfeeder, they won't be able to grip the wire, and they'll all fall off! Bwooh hoo hoo hoo hoo hahahahaaaaaa!" he began to laugh maniacally. At first, I wondered if I should go get help, but when he didn't fall to the ground and start twitching convulsively, I decided to join him instead. It was great fun, but now that I look back, I think he was serious.

On day two of the Squirrel Wars, I sneaked off in the early morning to see how our little plan had worked. It hadn't, really. When I reached Mr. Sullivan's yard, I saw a bunch of squirrels swarming over the birdfeeder, as usual. I watched as the squirrels effortlessly jumped onto the feeder from the ground. Soon Mr. Sullivan threw open the door and began growling at the poor things. They ran away so fast that they were only a blur in the corner of my eye.

"It appears," Mr. Sullivan said gruffly, "that we need to revise our plan a little."

We spent the next half-hour trying to shorten the wire with a pair of dull scissors. When we finally got them to cut, we spent another fifteen minutes trying to bend the wire around the birdfeeder's handle. Then, stealthily, we moved in on the target. When we were close enough, Mr. Sullivan hung the birdfeeder hastily and then bolted, leaving me alone and bewildered in the backyard. I rolled around the side of the house, peering into the bushes, until I saw him crouching, watching the feeder.

"Get in here, quick," he hissed, pulling me into the bushes. "Your mother will blame me if you get eaten by squirrels!" For a long time, we watched the feeder, but nothing happened. Then, just as Mr. Sullivan began to smirk, we saw a small gray body hurtle through the air and land on the feeder. My neighbor's mouth dropped open. Then he straightened up, looking affronted.

"He jumped from the deck! But—but—" he began to splutter. I patted his arm.

"It appears we need to work on our plan again," I said in a comforting voice.

Throughout the summer, we tried plan after plan. We tried moving the

birdfeeder all around the yard, but somehow the squirrels always reached it. We tried putting it on a pole in the middle of the yard, but they climbed up the pole. So then we drilled a hole in a platter and hung it under the feeder to stop the squirrels from climbing up the pole, but they just leapt onto it from the trees. No matter how brilliant our attack, their counterattack topped us every time. It was clear to me, if not to Mr. Sullivan, that the squirrels were winning this war.

Close to the end of the summer, Mr. Sullivan began resorting to rather ridiculous plans. On August 15, we emptied all the seed out and hung the feeder "as a decoy." We were proud to say that the squirrels were no longer eating the birdseed, until Mrs. Sullivan kindly pointed out to us that the birds weren't eating it either.

Ten days, four hours, six minutes, and a wastebasket of crumpled paper later, Mr. Sullivan emerged from his lair with an object in his hand—the perfect squirrel-proof birdfeeder! I trotted behind, feeling proud. I hadn't really helped, but occasionally I had brought him a mug of coffee, so I felt as if it was partly mine, too. This spectacular device had wires running all around its outside, about an inch apart, so the birds could reach in and get the seed, but the squirrels couldn't fit through. We hung it up that afternoon with great ceremony. Mr. Sullivan even made a speech. As he began talking, I promptly fell asleep. I hate speeches, and adults get so annoyed when you don't listen. Mr. Sullivan, however, felt that he had to repeat everything for me once I was awake, spoiling my fun.

Four days later, I was sitting on Mr. Sullivan's patio, drinking lemonade and celebrating our victory. Neither of us had seen any squirrels eating the birdseed since we hung up the "Miracle feeder."

"Well, my boy, we did it! We beat those silly animals! You know, I think that I'll patent this idea. Oh, they'll pay big bucks for it, all right . . ." He continued talking as we walked inside. I turned around for a last look at the wonderful birdfeeder, and almost choked on my lemonade. A squirrel was reaching between the wires and grabbing the seeds, eating them ravenously. Mr. Sullivan asked me what on earth was wrong with me, but I didn't answer him. I was laughing too hard.



The Truth of War

Mark smiled proudly. He looked all around him. To each side of him were men dressed in brilliantly shining chain mail. In the front of the massive army marched the most honorable and greatest warriors, the knights. Each knight was dressed in silver plate armor and on each breastplate he wore a colorful garment which proudly showed his coat of arms. The same coat of arms flew lightly in the breeze on a banner at the end of the knight's lance. Also, upon his silver colored helmet were placed the heads of mythical beasts, which symbolized the knight's honored coat of arms. Mark wished he could be in the proud ranks of the knights as they rode on their mighty steeds. But it was impossible for a pitiful peasant like

**Matthew
Wright**
Grade 8
East Granby
Middle School
East Granby

himself to become a high and distinguished knight. Mark thought to himself that even if he could not become a high and distinguished knight, he would become a great and mighty warrior. After tomorrow's battle he would be famous for the number of men he had killed in battle.

The army halted and set up camp. Mark sat down next to a large fire where several other men from his unit were talking and sharpening their weapons. Most of the men there were about Mark's age and, like Mark, tomorrow would be their first real battle. Still there were several men there who were a lot older than Mark and who had seen many more battles than Mark might ever see. Those few men had scars as proof of their battles. As Mark began polishing his iron helmet, he heard a discussion between two of the older soldiers.

"It's always sad to see young recruits," said one of the men.

"Yeah, they don't know the mess they've got themselves into," said the other man.

"I'll bet we'll see a bunch of them run after tomorrow," said the first man.

"I don't think there will be any left to run after tomorrow, because there will be quite a slaughter," said the second man.

"Well, Mitch, I hope to see ya tomorrow night," said the first man.

"Well, if ya don't ya'll know I broke the loop," said Mitch.

"You know, I wish there was an easier way to get out of the loop than dying," said the first man.

"Willie, you know that only a few ever see life without battle after they start. Will you know the truth of war? You know all war is death. Now what did I always tell you before battle?" asked Mitch.

"Everyone's gotta die, so don't fear death or hate killing, just curse the day ya started fighting and pray ya see the next day," said Will scornfully.

After that, Mark turned to look at the two friends. Both men were old. One man (Mark guessed it was Mitch) was fat and sort of short with a short, curly, gray beard. His friend also had a beard, except his beard was almost white. The other man was also taller than his companion was, but not by much. The other man also had a scar over his left eye.

Mark stared at the two men, extremely puzzled. These men had no doubt been in many battles, but yet they did not talk of the honor they had won during them. They also did not talk with any patriotism. Did they not respect our gracious and charitable king? What was this talk about tomorrow's battle being a slaughter? Our army would easily rid the savage army we faced tomorrow from this earth. And by doing so we would all win recognition from the king in a grand celebration. As Mark thought of this, something bothered him. Why did those two older men talk about a loop and about cursing the day they started? What did they know? Mark put down his helmet and decided to go to sleep. As Mark curled up next to the fire, a cold wind blew by, and it seemed to whisper death in Mark's ears.

Morning came quickly. After a quick breakfast of gruel, Mark's division was sent to march to Aivacon where they expected to meet the enemy. Mark was quivering with excitement. He could not wait to meet the enemy and have the enemy meet his blade. As soon as the troops entered the forest on the way to

Aivacon, they were ordered to halt. When they did, there was a great shout and enemy cavalry charged. Mark steadied his spear. An enemy knight came charging and smacked Mark's spear with his shield. The force from this blow shattered Mark's spear and sent him flying back. The enemy knights quickly retreated.

It had rained heavily that morning so there was thick mud, which made it harder for the horses to run. As soon as the enemy cavalry had fallen back, the foot soldiers were sent in. Mark unleashed his blade and with a great cry he charged the enemy. Soon he met face to face with an enemy soldier. Mark's foe swung at his chest but missed. This gave Mark the chance to get one good swing at the enemy. Mark gave his opponent a hard swing at the neck. Mark's swing cut deep into the enemy soldier's neck. It also forced broken bits of chain from the soldier's armor into the soldier's wound. The soldier stumbled back and fell into the mud. His helmet was knocked off, giving Mark a better look at him. Mark looked at the horrific scene he had made and felt a deep grief inside himself. The soldier was just a boy, younger than even Mark. His blood mixed with the mud and rainwater, and his golden blonde hair was now dirty.

Mark could not believe what he had done. He had made a young sister cry herself to sleep. He had made a mother feel unexplainable grief. He had caused a father to wrestle with the fact his son was gone forever. Worst of all, he had destroyed one of the purest things, another person's life, one as unique and wonderful as his own.

Suddenly, a great fear took hold of Mark: this could easily happen to him as well, and Mark had to continue to kill to make sure it did not happen to him. Mark hated this, he hated how he had to choose between someone else's life and his own. Most of all, Mark hated how he chose his own life over others.' Mark also realized that he was stuck in this system of pain, destruction, and death until the war was over, which could take years, or until he died. Mark, at that moment, understood what those men were talking about at the campfire. Mark understood the truth of war.



The 136-Year-Old Stain

Franklin County, Virginia

**Anna
Kendrick**
Grade 8
King Philip
Middle School
West Hartford

Mrs. Powell tugged on the splintery floorboard. It resisted her pull, then suddenly sprang up, causing her to fall back. She regained her balance and peered into the small black space between the attic floor and the ceiling of the girls' bedroom. It was just large enough to conceal the salted ham, the bulk of the family's remaining food, in a place she trusted Union soldiers wouldn't search and find. She pushed aside a cobweb and set down a thin, crinkled sheet of their 1864 Franklin County newspaper, then shoved the ham in on top of it. It was only early May, yet the scorching Virginia summer had already begun to pervade the house and attic. The ham gave off a slightly cloying, spicy scent and was warm and

greasy. The instant it touched the newspaper a small golden grease stain started slowly growing outward on the thin paper. Mrs. Powell secured the old board, and then stood back to ensure that the ham was hidden inconspicuously. Satisfied that it would not be found by any raiding Yankees, she returned to the creaky, narrow stairs that led down to the hallway.

The rough rag and lye soap stung her raw hands as she scrubbed a plate. She dipped the cloth back into the pail and wrung it out, her back hunched as she worked in the kitchen. The clouds suddenly shifted their position outside, so that a beam of late July sun shone through. Mrs. Powell glanced out the window at the bright late afternoon sun just beginning its descent behind the Blue Ridge Mountains. She squinted and scanned the land. The light illuminated the vast green fields of waist-high grasses waving in the wind. The old wooden split-rail fences running all through their property were silhouetted against the sky, casting long, lazy shadows. "Is that our chestnut horse grazing in the far field?" she wondered. No, she knew her husband had saddled him up early this morning to ride out to Roanoke for barn supplies. She was certain he wouldn't make it back until well after nightfall.

She strained her eyes. This horse was different. Though it was lean and in need of a better feeding like theirs, it appeared to be a darker brown and have white patches spotting its haunches. Her gaze traveled along the edge of the forest bordering their land. She could see a group of men. Though they were merely a haze from where she was sitting, they were gradually emerging into focus as they approached the spacious, shady front porch. Now that she could see the horse more clearly, she knew she was right. The horse was certainly not her own, for it seemed to be built more for riding and racing, not farmwork, and its saddle had a pattern of letters and flourishes engraved into the leather.

She realized she was clenching the rag in her hand, and she loosened her grip on it, dropping it into the pail as she clattered the wet plate down onto the table. Mrs. Powell wiped her dripping hands on her apron tensely and stood up, walking out of the kitchen and around into the hall towards the front entranceway. She was alone in the house, defenseless, but she did have sense in her head.

Mrs. Powell stood behind the door with her back leaning against it. She waited until she heard them knock, then spun around and, smoothing out her dress and apron, slowly opened the door. Four men stood there in front of her. The first thing she noticed was their tattered blue uniforms. Rough, sloppy stitches lay on patches of cloth a few shades darker than the original material. Only one wore shoes, and they were so worn he might as well have not been wearing any. The men were sunburned and haggard. Their bloodshot eyes seemed to reflect the horrors they had seen and the hopelessness they had felt.

"Might we come in, ma'am?" one said politely, tipping his hat.

Mrs. Powell warily opened the door a crack wider.

One man stepped forward and shoved it open.

"I'm an officer for the Union army. We're going to have to search your house for provisions."

"There is no food for you in this house," she said stiffly. "My family is starving just like you."

"I'm sorry," he said unapologetically. "We have to look."

She nodded. "Then I'll show you around."

"No, that's all right, you just stay right here," one said.

Mrs. Powell shook her head stubbornly. "No." She tightened her fist into a ball and covertly slipped it under her apron without the soldiers taking notice.

They stepped forward, walking into the large, Wedgwood-painted dining room. They checked all the cupboards, looked under the carpet for loose boards, and checked the wall for holes or hidden storage closets. Each time nothing showed up, they would shake their heads and pace on through the hallway to the next room. It continued like this, all through the first floor, up the stairway, and into the girls' bedroom, the final place to search on the second floor. They went through their usual routine, and finding nothing again, they began to leave.

Mrs. Powell stood right behind them through it all. They looked at each other, beginning to feel faintly uncomfortable. Something about her was making them feel threatened. As the officer was walking out the doorway, a fly buzzing in his ear caught his attention. He stopped to swat it then gazed up as it flew up to the ceiling, resting on a faint, mustard yellow blotch on the ceiling.

"Hey!" he yelled. "Look at this!" The other three men rushed back in, their bare feet pounding on the polished wood floor. Mrs. Powell was right behind them.

"Where's that mark coming from?" he questioned her roughly.

"I suppose it's coming from the attic. I don't know," Mrs. Powell lied easily and unwaveringly.

"Take us there, then."

She nodded and turned, leading them around the stairwell to a narrow green wood paneled doorway. She placed one hand on the small brass door handle, turning to survey the men. They looked away guiltily. As she pulled the door forward, one soldier glanced at her dirty white apron. He noticed her hand under it, and remembered how she had consistently kept it hidden from their view. He nudged the one next to him.

"She's got a gun," he muttered under his breath.

The others heard his whisper and began to stare at her. She pretended not to notice.

"Uh, ma'am, actually, we don't need to search your attic. We can take your word as the truth," stuttered the officer. All four hurriedly spun around and clambered down the narrow stairway. She heard the thick front door close decisively, and the sound of rapid horse hooves drifted up to her. She pulled her empty fist out from under her apron and smiled. She, and the family's ham, were safe.

This story is a significant part of our family history. The Virginia farmhouse where it took place stands proudly on the same family land as an antique store and historical landmark. My grandfather has devoted the past five years to restoring the house and grounds from the disrepair of just a few decades ago. Whenever we visit him and the farmhouse, he loves telling the story of his ancestor, Mrs. Powell, and her ham. Dozens of futile attempts to paint over it and 136 years later, the stain defiantly remains!

The Rookie

Sam Cutler
Grade 8
Middlebrook
School
Wilton

"We're almost ready for the Superbikes," the loudspeaker blares,
while everyone in the pits gapes and stares.
The rookie rider stands, next to his RC51;
stepping out of the pits, he squints at the sun.

Leathers unzipped down to the waist,
the rider is eager to start his first professional race.
A prodigal racer fresh out of an amateur division
whose skills had made the switch an easy decision.

While mechanics tinker and fiddle, his Honda lies poised.
As the engine is revved, it makes a magnificent roaring noise.
The finely tuned machine sounds more than ready to ride.
The pit crewmen all move away to the side.

Zippering up his leathers, he ambles to his RC51.
After one last swig of water his helmet is tugged on.
With practiced finesse, and a single graceful gesture,
he flips down the visor and heads for the starting area.

A few bursts of throttle take him to the track.
He rolls to a stop at the head of the pack:
A suited crusader atop a ferocious beast,
both are anxious and enthusiastic to begin the race.

All racers are ready, in their positions.
None of them matching the rookie's disposition.
R1's and Milles, Kaws and Gixxers.
A few RC51's, and a pack of 996's.

The bearer of the flag checkered black and white
backs off the track to his right.
The green light flashes; the race has begun.
The bullets burst forth from each one's respective gun.

The motorcycles howl around the first bend,
an unbroken line of machines and men.
Still they haven't separated as they go up the hill.
Through the hairpin the digits on the leader board lay still.

No one has passed at the end of the first lap;
in first, the rookie, for whom everyone claps.
He and the trailing three have broken away from the rest;
the seasoned veterans are prepared to show the amateur their best.

The total of 4000 cc's of power
scream along at over 150 miles per hour.
The first lap is over in an astounding 1:13,
a time the likes of which had rarely been seen.

The following laps go by one by one,
racers switching positions under the scorching afternoon sun.
The rookie's Honda and a veteran's 9R,
an old timer's 996 and another vet's Yamaha.

Finally, it's the 25th lap; only two remaining.
On the hill the rookie hears the vets' engines straining.
He decides to make his move around the next bend,
the maneuver that will put him in front until the end.

He lines up on the outside of the tight hairpin,
holds down the throttle milliseconds longer than he had been—
the newbie realizes his rookie mistake.
But he's already sliding on the grass; it's too late.

The 996 roars on ahead,
the R1 and Kawasaki closely following him instead
of the rookie everyone thought would be victorious.
A fraction of a second's action made the day notorious.

The humbled rookie roars back onto the track,
racing harder than ever to get back
to where he was before his blunder:
ahead of three top riders, the lightning to the veterans' thunder.

By the turn that was the last of the lap that meant the end,
the rookie acknowledged where he had been sent.
His error had pushed him back into fourth place,
the event which made the rookie modest after his first pro race.



I Am

Stars go up

An end to night

A sheet of darkness
covers the sky

Miriam
Alvarez and
Claudia
Quiquivix
Grade 8
Central Middle
School
Greenwich

For I am . . .

Dusk

I put to sleep
the day
I am beautiful

I tell the moon
to come over
I'm brilliant
Like the sun
and the moon

I turn the sun
off
Dusk
Colorful
Brilliant
Beautiful
That is what I am
And that

Always be

I promise
I'll
Be there
For I am . . .
Dusk

I trap the light
While
I show off

For I am . . .
DUSK

Every morning I
clear the stars

For I am . . .

Dawn
I wake up
The morning

I am beautiful
I tell the
moon to go home

I'm brilliant

Like the sun
and the moon
I turn the sun
on
Dawn
Brilliant
Beautiful
Shimmering
That is what I am

I will
Always be
Wherever you are
I promise

Be there
For I am . . .
Dawn
I uncover the
sheet of darkness

While

my fierce colors

For I am . . .
DAWN

Princess Diana

Joseph
Cirigliano
Grade 8
Martin Kellogg
Middle School
Newington

My heart was pounding rapidly. I was extremely nervous. It was my first day of fifth grade and I was finally a middle school student. I cautiously entered my classroom, and that's when I saw her. She had to have the most gorgeous smile I had ever seen. I never believed what people said about love at first sight, but I was in love with Diane Smith.

Over the next several months Diane and I became very close friends, but I never let her know that I liked her. I wasn't sure what to do. Should I tell her? I was all confused! Then it dawned on me. Valentine's Day was only a few weeks away. This was my chance! Now the only problem was, what should I give her? One day while carrying on a conversation with her, she mentioned how she collected beanie babies and really wanted the Princess Diana Bear, since her nickname was Princess Di. What a great idea!

One of my best friends, Leah, also happened to collect beanie babies; therefore, I talked to her about my idea. She told me that she knew a dealer who had a bunch of Princesses to sell. Then, she mentioned the price. Eighty dollars for a bear! Now I suppose that if you collect them, eighty dollars might not seem so terrible; however, to a fifth grader, it was an enormous amount of money.

Over the next few days I thought about how I was going to collect the money. I surely couldn't ask my mother or father to borrow the money, and my allowance, obviously, wasn't going to cut it. It was then that I remembered I had been saving money at my grandmother's house for my family's trip to Florida. My grandmother had been holding it so that I wouldn't spend it. All I had to do was take some money out of that envelope and I could easily afford the beanie baby. For a second I thought about what would happen if she noticed the money missing, but the thought quickly disappeared.

I figured that if I took some money, but not a lot, she wouldn't notice a thing. I called Leah to discuss my plan. The final idea was that I would take sixty dollars from my envelope at my grandmother's, and Leah would lend me the other twenty. I was extremely excited. However, I began to feel kind of guilty about this whole process, so one night while watching TV, I asked my dad what he thought about my buying the beanie baby for Diane. He made it perfectly clear: he was against it. Did I really want to go behind my dad's back and buy the beanie baby?

I thought about what I was going to do all night. I couldn't decide. When I walked into class the next morning and I saw her smile at me, my mind was made up. I was going to buy her the beanie baby! This only made me more excited.

That night I called Leah and told her I really wanted to buy the bear for Diane. She told me that her mom was going to the dealer on Saturday to buy some beanie babies. This gave me three days to get the money. That night my mom was going over to my grandma's house to visit. How perfect was this? I went with her, and while they were having coffee, I went into my grandma's bedroom, got my envelope of money, and took out sixty dollars. I quickly shoved the money in my pocket and prayed that no one would notice.

Saturday rolled around and I went over to Leah's house. Her mom took us

over to the dealer's house. On our way there, Leah slipped me the twenty I needed to buy the beanie baby. We pulled up to the dealer's house and went inside. The man already had the beanie babies we wanted to purchase out on his kitchen counter. When I went to pay the man, Leah's mom asked me if my parents were okay with my doing this. I hesitantly mumbled, "Yes," and took the bear.

When I arrived home later that afternoon, I hid the beanie baby under my coat and ran into my bedroom. I then hid it in the bottom drawer of my dresser, underneath some T-shirts. Valentine's Day arrived and I was ecstatic about giving Diane the bear. Just as we were going to our lockers to pack up our stuff to go home, I pulled it out of my backpack and gave it to her. Her eyes glowed with excitement. She yelled out a huge thank you and gave me a hug. Butterflies fluttered in my stomach. To me this was a huge thing. The girl of my dreams had given me a hug!

That afternoon I was on cloud nine. Nothing could spoil the fantastic mood I was in. At least, that's what I thought. That night, I was sitting on my couch watching TV when the phone rang. My dad grabbed it before I could, so I muted the TV, trying to hear his conversation. He kept repeating the same two phrases over and over again, "Uh huh" and "Really." Who on Earth could it be? Just then he hung up the phone and called me over.

I could tell by the expression on my dad's face that he was not pleased. The phone call was from Diane's mother. She explained that there was no way Diane could accept the bear because she knew its value. My dad was not a happy camper. He gave me a long, tiresome lecture on how I should have used better judgment. My mom agreed; however, she understood I didn't do it because I was "evil," but because I was blinded by love.

The next day in school, Diane gave me back the bear and told me she was sorry her mom wouldn't let her keep it. I made up some excuse, too, so I wouldn't look so stupid. The truth is, I felt absolutely horrible.

That afternoon my mom took me to the dealer's house to return the beanie baby. I was so embarrassed. I thought I was going to die. I had to go to Leah's house to return her twenty dollars, too. Then came the worst of all. I had to tell my grandma what I had done and return the money. To my surprise, my grandma honestly didn't care. She gave me one of her miniature lectures and took me to put the money back in my envelope. I was surprised when I counted the rest of the money in my envelope and realized all of it was there. We both found this rather odd. Where did the sixty dollars come from that I was holding?

My grandma pulled out another envelope from her closet. It was marked "My Vacation Money." She counted the money and gave me an odd look. I had accidentally taken the money out of her vacation money, not mine! Now I felt completely humiliated! I returned the money and told her how sorry I was.

After that everything went back to normal. I was still friends with Diane, but somehow my feelings had changed. I was extremely thankful I hadn't spent all that money, only to find that in a week's time, I did not feel the same way about her. Looking back, I wonder how I could have been so ignorant! I obviously had way too much confidence in myself to think that I could have ever pulled off a plan like that. I know now I'll never do that again.

Jennifer
Garcia
Grade 9
Norwalk High
School
Norwalk

Forever Changing

Soft thuds fill the air.
Ka-thud ka-thud
Apples.

Hit the cold, dying grass.
They fill the empty air,
With echoing.
Like the hollowness in her heart.

The forever changing.
Jade, ruby, gold.
Fall from the withering trees.
Apples.

Hit the cold, dying grass.
Changing with haste.
Like her constantly changing emotions.

The textures change,
These precious jewels of Autumn.
Smooth and shiny,
As if made from marble.
Yet rigid,
As if made from glass.

As her hand wraps around the apple, chills pass up her spine.
The rigid glassiness of the apple,
The marble-like feel sends another chill.
Reminding her of her timidity.

As the girl lifts the apple to her mouth,
The cold, sweet scent tickles her nose.
But she does not refrain from biting into the apple.

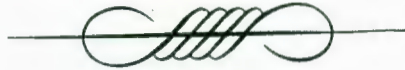
CRUNCH!

Wet, juicy, sweetness engulfs her mouth.
As she swallows the succulence, she reflects on her life.
For hers is much like that of the apple's.

Starting as a seed, the girl grows and blossoms.
When it is time, she falls from her mother's tree
Of protection, crashing to the ground.
The girl.

She hits the cold, cruel world.
Forever changing.

Jade, ruby, gold.
Each color representing her emotions.
Jealous, angry, timid.
And everything between.



You and Me Song

Seconds pile up from your absence,
swell,
and set ablaze the nectar of your presence
I find myself drunk on this love
violating all earthly things with its depth and beauty
We shadow each other in falling behind in the restless time lost
But soon find ourselves at the heels of,
then trampling over reality
Planning our arrival on all those living fake
The spectators will stand, blood pulsating
with miseducation of love,
While we pull up the red carpet and walk down a forever replacement of
music, which put us there,
To live in the urban of each other
Grazing our lips on living
Finally, quivering on a noon's daylight, Judgment Day will catch us
and ask us what we liked most of this obscured term called life,
And I will say it was you.



A Swinging Affair

For nearly three years, I'd been begging my parents to let me wait on the customers who came to the bar at my father's restaurant. My mother was worried about the "lecherous old men" who were liable to be there, and my father's concern was that I'd put his "Blue Bamboo" diner out of business by messing up. The truth of the matter was that I wanted to meet someone, you know, interesting. I worked so hard on my parents that they finally gave in when I was seventeen. The first time I stepped into the lounge as a working girl sent shivers up and down my spine. Above the clamor of glasses clinking and voices bellowing there drifted the sweet sounds of Glenn Miller, Count Basie, and Louis Armstrong. The smoke lingering in the air made my eyes water, but the electricity in the environment made our neon sign pale in comparison.

Stephanie
Custance
Grade 9
RHAM High
School
Hebron

Amy Noonan
Grade 9
Canton
Junior Senior
High School
Collinsville

"Hey, HOT STUFF!"

I ignored the voice just as I'd done for the four-month span of 1943 that I had been waitressing.

"C'mon, baby, I'm talkin' to ya!"

Nope.

"Listen, I just want a drink . . ."

I turned around finally, searching for the source of the slightly accented voice. It came from a young man in a gaudy Hawaiian shirt. He couldn't have been more than twenty-years-old, a fact which made me wonder what he was doing in the States when there was a conflict in the rest of the world.

"What's a little kid like you doing in a bar? You gotta be . . . what? Fifteen?" he said as I walked over to him.

I felt my temper flare (as well as my nostrils) as I mumbled, "Seventeen!"

"Whatever," the man said with a disarming smile. "So you gonna take my order or do I hafta mix the drinks myself?"

I decided to step out of my usual self and interrogate my customer. He had definite potential as an interesting quarry. "Hey, guy, shouldn't you be off in Europe or the South Pacific? There is a war goin' on, you know." I expected him to shy away from my question, mainly because he seemed like one of those lowly draft-dodgers to me.

"I'll have a Manhattan, and yes, I know. Believe it or not, dollface, I am in the war—just on leave for now," he said. "Gotta go back to my unit in two weeks."

Dumb enthusiasm coursed through my body. A real fighting man! Here! Talking to ME! I tried to hide my enthusiasm by saying something clever. Instead, an explosion of teenage stupidity exited my mouth.

"Really?!"

My hero looked up from his bowl of pretzels, took one look at me, and let out a laugh that could've rocked our little section of New York.

"Boy, you must not get out much!" War-Hero said, flashing an immediately consuming choirboy grin. Realizing what an idiot I must have looked like (eyes wide and bulging, mouth agape), I tried to reclaim my lost composure by pushing back a lock of my hair . . . seeing as it was losing its Marilyn Monroe curliness; I determined it was time to put the rollers back in.

"No, I . . . uh, I get out. Why, sometimes, I even go to The Haven . . . you know, that theatre on old 42nd street? Or . . . or a ballgame over at Yankee Stadium; I even saw Joe DiMaggio once!" Oh, if only it were true! I could tell that Mr. Purple Heart wasn't buying it when he arched both eyebrows and sent his brown eyes straight through me.

"Listen, doll, I'll make ya a deal," he began. "Meet me here tomorrow night at seven. Wear somethin' decent—no ball gown or anything, just get your Mary Janes spiffed up."

"What? Mary Janes? What're we doing?" I queried. He answered with a single word: "Swingin'." And with that he got up, paid his tab, and left.

Waiting for seven o'clock the next day seemed to take all of 1943. When my date for the evening finally walked through the door, I hardly recognized him.

Bedecked in a zoot suit, wide tie, and spectator flats, he looked to be some sort of Hep-Cat God. My jaw slackened as he strolled up to me. Suddenly his eyebrows furrowed, and a pensive look came over his face. I looked down at my outfit; having never gone dancing, I made the mistake of wearing a long, narrow dress (the color of "blah gray", I might add) and matching pumps. Zoot Man rolled his eyes.

"You got any dough on ya, doll?" he asked.

"Dough?" I answered dumbly, still caught up in his attire.

"Money—baby, you can't swing in those duds!"

After running two flights of stairs above the restaurant, I approached my room. Articles of clothing flew everywhere as I frantically searched for an appropriate thing to wear. Bobby socks, okay. No, no sweater, it's too warm for that. Nope . . . no . . . augh, where IS it? Then it appeared: the gorgeous, slightly racy red dress that I was saving for my high school graduation. It cost a bundle, but it was worth it to me. The dress had a nice V-shaped neckline, and the hem flared out around my knees, making it look like I actually had hips. Strapping on my mother's patent leather Mary Janes, I took one last look in the mirror before heading out. I was slightly saddened by the fact that I had no chest, but no matter.

When he saw me in my new ensemble, The Swinger grinned at me and said, "Aw-right, hon! Let's go get 'em!"

"Wait!" A revelation came over me. "Two things: I can't dance and what's your name?"

"Yes, you can and call me Mack," replied my date as he grabbed my arm and whisked me out of the Blue Bamboo.

We arrived at "Bimbo's 365 Club" around eight. Mack introduced me to the doorman, known as "Bernie the Bulge," under the light of a glowing neon sign. Bernie welcomed the familiar face, but narrowed his eyes questioningly at my person. After learning that "the gal" was with Mack, the enormous doorman opened the entrance. As we stepped inside, a scene resembling chaos came into view. Couples twirled, shook, and stepped to an incredible beat in the center of the massive dance hall. I looked around, amazed. The vaulted ceiling was a deep blue, as if it were the night sky, and red velvet curtains hung from the lengthy windows. Even the polished wooden floor was alive, vibrating from both the bouncing feet and the wonderful music. My eyes widened at the spectacle set before me, and I could feel my heart pound for two reasons: it was an absolutely phenomenal atmosphere, and there was no way I could dance like everyone else.

"So whaddya think?" Mack yelled at me over the blare of trumpet, sax, and drums.

"SWINGIN'!" I screamed back. Then he took my hand and introduced me to complete and utter humiliation.

"Okay, just follow me, baby," Mack explained. Suddenly, he was a mass of feet, legs, and arms, seeming to flail about madly but at the same time looking entirely coordinated. I tried to accomplish the same feat, but to no avail. My movements were stiff and unsure, much to the chagrin of Mack. He stopped just as a cymbal crashed, and began to put me through my paces.

Step right, step left, kick back, twirl.

"No, no! Step LEFT, not on my foot!" he yelled good-naturedly. It took me about six times, but I finally got it right and giggled in delight at my newfound rhythm.

"There ya go!" Mack smiled. He then proceeded to pick me up, throw my body skyward, and catch me just in time for a dip. I let out a shriek throughout the entire step that was perfectly coordinated with the wail of Benny Goodman's clarinet.

"WHY'D YOU DO THAT ?" I demanded, furious that I had felt the hem of my dress up around my head somewhere between earth and sky.

"It's just a jive move, babe!" answered Mack, grinning wildly. "C'mon, I'll show you again." Before I could protest. I was up in the air once more. When my legs were firmly planted on the ground again, I was laughing. My dance instructor looked on, bemused. "See?" he said, "not so bad the second time!" The final notes of "Exactly Like You" played out as we smiled at each other.

"Ooh—*great* song . . ." he continued. "LuLu's Back in Town? Johnny Mercer with . . ." Mack's memory worked furiously. "The . . . the Paul Weston Orchestra!"

For the rest of the night, nothing mattered. Music coursed through my body; the silky trumpet, crass trombone, mellow clarinet, raw saxophone, tinkling piano, and tight percussion were, well, "instrumental" in the evening's events. Some Ella Fitzgerald around midnight, then a hep number from Duke Ellington, and later Frank Sinatra.

Before I knew it, it was 3:15 AM and Mack and I were singing and dancing as he walked me home. It was a warm summer morning, and the dew was just beginning to form on the flowers. As we stood on the sidewalk outside mom and dad's restaurant, I remembered that my Fighting/Swingin' Man would be returning to the front in a short while. I glanced over at him; he was scratching his head of thick curly hair, the color of sand.

"Listen . . ." he began.

"Yeah? I know," I finished. "I just . . . I had such a good time tonight! Can we swing it again tomorrow?" My heart was pounding with anticipation. Please say yes!

"Aww," Mack smiled. "You like it, don'tcha?"

"I like you!" I blurted out. Then I felt my face turn red-hot. I turned away, embarrassed. Mack chuckled.

"I know. And I like you! . . . but it just won't work, dollface. I gotta get back to the fighting soon, and then, uh, where would you be?" He sounded uncomfortable.

Immediately, I felt empty and short of breath. My mind worked furiously, trying to find a way to change him.

"But it could work! Lotsa folks are separated, and then they come home and, you know, get married . . ." My voice wavered as I said the last part of my sentence.

The boyish grin faded from Mack's face. He looked down at the ground, then heavenward, and then his eyes shifted to me again. He pursed his lips for a minute before letting out a sigh.

In a vain attempt to win his heart, I stepped closer and kissed him with all the passion I could muster without bursting into tears. Mack responded at first, but then pulled away. Confused, I decided to try again, but was met with the side of Mack's face as he turned. Why was this so hard? Didn't he love me back? Then he took both of my hands in his and looked down at me.

"Babe, I know that you wanna live for tomorrow, but me . . . I live for today."

It was all I could do to keep from crying.

"C'mon, cheer up," he grinned. "A hot number like you won't have any trouble getting' a new dance partner! Just look at those legs!" His ploy had worked, because I laughed half-heartedly.

"Look, I just don't want you to get hurt," Mack continued. "A guy like me an' a girl like you? It doesn't go. That would be like swingin' without a heart." An uncomfortable silence hung like a thick, choking smoke in the air.

"I'll see ya around," Mack said before kissing me on the cheek and hailing a taxi.

I cried for about a week after he left me standing outside the Blue Bamboo, and to this day I'm still angry with him. How dare he, making me swoon over him and then running off to make some other stupid girl fall in love with him! Hmph. But on the other hand, he showed me the best time I'd ever had in my life thus far. Sure, he's gone, but maybe I didn't really love him. After all, that was almost fifty years ago; I was "young and foolish." No, I didn't love him. I loved the music, the dance, the sheer thrill that is swing. I suppose that's why I have a new dance partner.



A Beautiful Haze

There is a haze over the valley.

The gentle silhouettes of the mountains rise up against the sky

Each one a different shade of gray color.

A thin halo of light outlines each one, the trees are barely visible,

Only lined forms covering the mountains.

A cloud floats, lost amid the maze of peaks and valleys

And an orange sun settles in among the peaks to spend the night.

Yet we drive past the overlook at the side of the mountain road without stopping.

And everyone else agrees—

"It's too hazy, there's no view."

It's beautiful.

Yet I'm the only one who sees it.

In our quest to find the highest peak,

The best view,

The best photo opportunity,

We've forgotten that a haze can be beautiful too.

Christine
Vezina
Grade 9
East Lyme High
School
East Lyme

Nicole Lawton
Grade 9
Newington
High School
Newington

The Strength of Death

Not a day goes by that I don't think about my lost cousin Marie: her long struggle between life and death and the strength that she showed every step of the way. Most of all, I admire the courage that she portrayed. Even on the days when she was very sick, all that anybody saw was a courageous individual who wasn't afraid of the fate that would take her away from the living world.

I woke up, remembering that Marie was taking me to the beach with her. Although she had just been diagnosed with breast cancer, she wasn't going to let it get in the way of the life that she was living. I climbed out of bed, excited for the day that awaited. Knowing that Marie might not survive the disease made me realize that the time that I spent with her would be precious. I no longer took her presence for granted.

It's funny how a terminal illness can make people act differently. It's something that you can't help; somehow, you treat the diagnosed as though they are helpless. I soon found out that trying to hold her down was like trying to keep a fish from the sea.

"Gabiella! Come on! The ocean's not going to wait forever!" Marie cried.

I scrambled in my room, cramming batteries into my camera. I couldn't forget it at home on such a special occasion.

"Come on, Gabby!"

"I'm comin'! I needed to grab my camera 'cuz this is a special day," I said.

As soon as those words left my lips, the hurt that was spread across Marie's face made me regret it. It was a look that I had never expected to see from her. Her whole face dropped as though someone died right in front of her. The pain her face showed was heart-wrenching, as though her soul had been stripped from her and all that remained was a battered person left out in the cold. It made my brain sizzle.

"You never brought your camera to the beach with us before. Is today special because we found out I'm sick, and you don't think I'm going to be around much longer? Let me tell you one thing right now. I'm going to get through this, Gabby. I promise you."

"I'm sorry. I, I just thought that it would be nice if I brought my camera," I murmured.

"I'm going to get through this—we're going to get through this."

She started the car and we pulled out of the driveway. As we drove along, we didn't talk much. I watched the trees fly by as we drove past them. More and more, I appreciated the character of each one. Some were scraggly while some were full and rich.

I felt that two trees represented Marie and me. Emotionally, Marie was full and rich, ready to take on anything that challenged her. She was not going to let the disease break down her soul. She wanted life more than anybody that I knew and no matter what it took, she was not going to give up on herself. She would fight the illness until the end. I was the scraggly one, not able to handle myself when I was thrown into a pool full of emotions. When I hit, I frayed out in all

directions. I was feeling every emotion possible and I couldn't overcome them all. All the feelings overwhelmed me and I let them swallow me whole. Physically, I felt that the roles were completely reversed. I was full and strong, flourishing in my youth. I had the energy to keep me going. She was the one that was weak and breaking down with nothing except willpower to keep her up. The cancer was dissolving her body, denying her the abilities she once had.

Sometimes you have to wonder how something as simple as a tree can trigger feelings and thoughts that you never realized that you had.

The beach was gorgeous. Although it was the middle of winter in New England, who says that you can't go to the beach?

When we reached the top of the cliff that overlooked the sea, I stared straight to the horizon, feeling free on the edge of the cliff. It was as though time had stopped. I was in complete awe and amazement.

It was sunset and the sky was a soft yellow color. It reminded me of the summer days when Marie and I would sit by her pool and drink lemonade. We would talk until our throats were red and dry. The trees had a layer of ice preserving every single branch. The slightest touch of your finger could break the branch right off the tree. There I left them alone, letting their beauty enchant my mind and harmonize with nature. The ocean was the color of gold, reflecting the sky. The sea wavered, soothing my soul and taking me into another state of mind. The waves splashed a white froth up onto the rocks below. Everything was very poetic, like a dream.

"Now this is something you need a camera for! This is beautiful!" Marie exclaimed.

"No, I don't need a camera. I can always remember."

It was something that I never wanted to do. I hated visiting Marie when she was really sick. It made me see how close to death she was. For an illness to break down Marie's spirit and soul, it had to be strong enough to kill. Still, I got into my car and drove to see her.

My first glance at her as I walked in the door was heart shattering. Her face was a splotchy yellow. Her mouth had frown lines and her eyes were full of melancholy and anguish. They were pleading with me to love her. The cancer had totally taken her in body and soul. The strength I once saw in her heart was gone and she was sacrificing herself to the sickness.

"Jack, who's come to see me?" she asked her husband. She was looking right at me and she didn't know who I was. She didn't even know who I was!

"It's me, Gabriella."

I felt a tear stream down my cheek. Marie just rolled over and didn't look at me. Not in my wildest dreams would I ever be able to believe that anything could affect anybody the way that it had affected Marie. It drained her of everything she once had: physical and mental strength, happiness, and love towards her family. I knew that she still loved me but she didn't know that, and that grieved me.

"Why the hell did you come! Get out of my house! I hate you! I HATE you!" she burst out.

I ran out of the house, too dispirited to stay. I knew that she didn't mean what she was saying—it was the cancer talking, eating her alive. I couldn't stay.

I went back to her house after that, and I soon found that that was her at her mildest. Some of the profane language that came from her lips was language that I never heard from anybody, especially somebody as kind as she is.

When I walked into the kitchen and saw my mother's face, I knew something was terribly wrong. Her face was white with agony and shock. There was only one possibility.

"Marie is gone," she said softly. She cried and sank to the floor, not able to speak another word.

I fled the room and threw myself on my bed. I cried to myself for hours. It wasn't fair that she was gone. She was one of the most benevolent and compassionate people somebody could ever meet. She could do the world a lot of good and affect it in all the right ways. She had always talked of how she wanted to attend my wedding and be the godmother of my children. I now knew that that day would never come.

I always thought that I would be ready for the day when it came, but I wasn't. Not anything in the world can prepare you for death, even if you know that it's coming.

The hymn "Amazing Grace" filled the church with its rich sound. Knowing that that song was Marie's favorite made me start to sob. She had always sung it at different places and I never missed an opportunity to harmonize with her.

Marie's coffin was flourished with extravagant white flowers. She had picked out the floral arrangement herself. She had planned the entire funeral down to who was going to sit where and what style that the pallbearers' gloves were going to be.

The funeral was beautiful but nothing could neutralize the pain that I felt. Seeing all the faces of the family that she loved just dug the knife deeper into my heart. I couldn't conceive that these people could feel the same as I. I felt sorry for them all because I felt so forlorn. When it ended, I realized that I hadn't registered anything that was said.

I got into my car and started to drive towards the highway when I realized where I was. I was only an hour from the beach and I was definitely going there, in my black dress and all.

When I finally reached the beach, it was dark out. I climbed to the top of the cliff and stared out over the ocean. The trees were still covered in ice, along with the grass. The crispness of the air made it seem as though I was breathing purity, cleaning out my insides and freeing my heart of the burden it had carried for so long. The sound of the waves against the rocks was deafening yet peaceful. The moon was high in the sky and the stars shone brightly. They were reflected in the ocean, turning it silver. When I looked up I saw a new constellation I had never noticed. It was a face and it was smiling. I took it as a sign that Marie was where she belonged and going to be okay.

Revolving Doors

Fleeting images in a window
slipping through the cracks
a labyrinth of reflections too ephemeral to decipher,
too permanent to disappear.
Stagnant shadows stick to the revolving door
imprinted on the city landscape,
the reaction to the posh window display, "Live a little"
dictates the door's cycle—will it be
a debutante's dayglo indulgence in the luxury of the lobby?
(need that coveted new lipstick)
or a rootless baglady seeking solace in the warmth of the lobby?
(need to escape the cold sidewalk cement)
Carried by an urban undercurrent,
I am swept through the revolving door,
Captured in a New York moment
Suspended within this 5th Ave irony.
The revolving door continues to spin,
rotating to the rhythm of the crowd
the individual in the crowd,
rotating to the push of each hand.
Linking two worlds held at arm's length
Transparent dividers,
separating and segmenting, transporting and transforming.
The juxtaposition of blurs and boundaries
formulate the deadhanded distance,
as revolving doors turn and turn
time and time again,
Never ceasing to halt for anyone.



Fire and Ice

Peter Edwards awoke one morning and rose from his bed. At the age of 143, his eyesight was failing and his joints had become stiff. He wasn't so old. In the year 2065 the average person lived to about 137, and it was no surprise that Peter's health had been deteriorating at a steady rate for years now. As Peter rose, his knee bothered him and his eyes took a few extra seconds to focus.

Peter began to dress for comfort, in loose, soft, khaki-colored pants and a fleecy shirt. He had had a feeling for the past few days that it wasn't going to be long until he passed on, so looking especially good was not one of his priorities. Peter decided to spend the morning in the park. He slowly, arthritically, tied his walking shoes and left the house.

Lauren
Feinberg
Grade 10
Fairfield
High School
Fairfield

Lauren
Barredo
Grade 10
Valley
Regional
High School
Deep River

As he walked down the street, he remembered his childhood. The streets were much dirtier then. Today there was no litter anywhere in the city, and the air also wasn't so dusty and smoggy. It was a warm autumn day, with a bright, clear sky and the fluffiest kinds of clouds. As Peter entered the park through the sharp, wrought iron gate, he noticed his friend, Wilbur, sitting at a picnic table. Wilbur was a few years younger than Peter, but they had both spent all their lives in the city, with paths that crossed periodically through friends, school, and jobs. Both retired now, they often spent the mornings playing chess in the park; however, they really spent a great portion of the time reminiscing.

"Good morning, Will," began Peter, walking towards him. "Do you have the pieces?"

"Of course, Pete! I'd a feelin' you'd be comin' around today!" answered Wilbur. The two took their usual spot at one of the picnic tables in the park. As they began to set up the pieces, they began to chatter about their youth.

"The sky seems awful close today, huh, Will?" Peter remarked casually.

"I suppose so," said Wilbur, making the first move. "It does seem like it's low today, Pete." Their conversation of childhood in the city continued. "When you were younger, I guess heaven was just farther off."

"I guess so," said Peter. "We also didn't have any of these nice playthings either. All we could do was look at the sky."

"Yeah. Do you remember the games of stickball we used to have?"

"Sure do. And if you lost the ball, you'd have to go get it, because you only had one."

"Kids today is spoiled; they don't gotta do real work. They don't have chores anymore."

"Well, Will, I do think all the kids is happier than when we was little."

"Yeah. The war changed everything. It's nice to see everybody getting enough to eat and warm clothes to wear in winter..." The memories continued to float to the sky in the morning sun, some gently accented with the quiet clicking of the chess pieces.

Around one o'clock the game ended, and Peter and Wilbur parted ways. Peter slowly began to walk down the sidewalk to the deli to get a sandwich for lunch. When Peter was younger, Hauston's Deli had been deep in the slums. The sandwiches were the best, but you couldn't walk down the street alone for fear of being mugged. Now the city was clean, though. The slums no longer existed. There were no gangs and no violence whatsoever. Old men were respected and able to walk down the street to a good deli to buy a nice lunch.

Peter opened the door and went inside. He was served personally by Josh Hauston, great-great-grandchild of the original founder. Lemonade with a nice ham and cheese, with lettuce and tomato and mustard appealed to Peter today. "For you, Pete? My number one customer? It's on the house today!" said Josh as Pete opened his wallet. Today there was deep kindness in the city.

Peter ate at a table outside the deli and then began to walk home for an afternoon nap. As he slowly shuffled down the sidewalk, he was greeted by many smiles from passersby. As Peter began the slow climb to his apartment, he thought that, although he would never wish that his childhood had been easier, it was nice

that the city of today was such a happy place. Hardship, while building strength, did not spawn as much affection from everyone. It was a good progression that people chose this happy life. Peter lay back on the sofa, calmly, with some classical music playing softly and slid into a comfortable sleep from which he knew he would never awaken . . .

In the real world, the body of number 285739 relaxed. It was immediately determined that number 285739 was absolutely deceased. The virtual reality sensors were unplugged and removed from number 285739's body. 285739's food tube stopped pumping bland, gray nutrition into the body of 285739. Now 285739 could feel nothing, had he been alive. The large helmet used to control thoughts and virtual sight was removed. The body of 285739 was slid from the cold, steel table and incinerated. The computerized, mechanical beeping of the machines continued on. All over the ruined planet, people were being incinerated and created. A new "born" baby was set onto the empty, cold table that had once housed number 285739. This was number 128563950. Number 128563950 was encased in sensors so that it could virtually feel things. The large helmet was lowered onto 128563950's head. The central computer began controlling the thoughts and perceptions of another generation of muscle-less, blind, thoughtless human beings. But, they were all happy.



A Mother's Love

Rachel and her two daughters, Marie and Kristen, just moved into a large colonial house on top of Goodson Hill in Savannah, Georgia. The house had a spectacular view of the city below. Rachel sighed and looked around at the multitude of boxes that the movers had just brought into the house. It would take a lot of work to get the house in order and livable. She went outside to help her two daughters finish unloading the last boxes out of the car.

It took almost three days to empty all the boxes, but they had done it. Rachel made supper, and the girls went off to their rooms. As Rachel was clearing the dishes, she heard a dull thump coming from above. She thought nothing of it and continued washing the dishes. The thump gradually grew louder, clearer, and more insistent. Finally, Rachel decided to go upstairs and ask her daughters about the racket. Neither of Rachel's daughters had heard the strange thumping noise, and it had mysteriously vanished as she reached the top of the stairs. After saying goodnight to her daughters, Rachel headed for bed. She curled up under the warm covers and started to read a book that she had found packed away in one of the boxes. Rachel was startled by a noise similar to the one she had heard earlier. She got out of bed and went into the hall where the attic stairs were located. Rachel had never explored the attic before. She crept cautiously up the stairs and peered into the darkened room. Rachel could only make out the silhouettes of unfamiliar objects. She reached up groping in the darkness to find the light. Her hand tightened around a long, thin cord which she pulled. Rachel was momentarily blinded

Aliza Krevolin
Grade 10
West Haven
High School
West Haven

as her eyes became accustomed to the sudden brightness after the pitch black. When she recovered her vision, she looked around and found nothing out of the ordinary. There were boxes of forgotten mementos and broken furniture from the previous owners. After satisfying herself, Rachel went back downstairs and fell into a deep sleep.

Two weeks passed. Late one evening Marie approached her mother and told her that she often felt a presence in her room when she was asleep. One night, she had even awakened to hear a woman's soft voice call out a name that she did not recognize. When she looked around, no one was there. Rachel was disturbed by what her daughter told her and was reminded of the thumping noise she had heard before.

Rachel went to bed puzzled over these two instances. She felt a hand urgently shake her to wakefulness. When she fully opened her eyes, she saw a trembling Kristen standing over her bed. Kristen was extremely pale and clammy to the touch. Rachel calmed her down long enough for Kristen to relay what had transpired. Kristen claimed that she was sleeping until she heard a noise inside her room that penetrated her dream. She awoke in a cold sweat and there, standing at the foot of her bed, was a young woman in some kind of old-fashioned clothing who was looking down at her. Kristen's heart pounded with fear as she continued to explain. There was a light surrounding the woman, which made her appear as if she were glowing. The woman was trying to speak to Kristen but all Kristen saw was her mouth moving, forming words that she could not comprehend. Then the figure vanished as quickly as she had come. That was when Kristen ran in to her mother's room. Rachel did not know what to say to her frightened daughter. She wanted to reassure her that everything would be okay and that it was all just a scary nightmare, but she could not. Rachel needed to figure out who this woman was and what she wanted.

Rachel, Kristen, and Marie started their quest for the identity of the mysterious woman at the public library. They pored through books about the town's history. They learned that during the Civil War, there was a battle fought nearby and the house had been used as a hospital to treat the wounded. In addition, they learned that the Goodson family occupied the house. Kristen found out that the house was rebuilt after a mysterious fire. Unfortunately, they could not find anything else about the house or the mysterious woman. They went home with more knowledge of their intriguing woman, but it did not settle anything.

Rachel continued her search at the historical society. There she discovered that the mysterious woman was Priscilla Goodson who was married to Nathan Goodson. He had joined the South during the Civil War and left Priscilla with two young children. She wanted to contribute to the Southern cause, so she opened her house as a hospital for wounded soldiers. Local legend said that Priscilla awoke to find her bedroom ablaze. She managed to narrowly escape through the window because the flames blocked her path to the doorway. Without thinking of her own personal safety, she went back into her house to save her sleeping children. She managed to battle her way through the smoke and flames to rescue her baby. Once the baby was secure in the arms of one of her neighbors, Priscilla boldly entered the house again to save her other child. Unbeknownst to Priscilla, her son had

already escaped from the house and was in the back yard. Tragically, the front part of the house collapsed on Priscilla as she searched in vain. They never recovered her body. The front of the house was rebuilt, but the origin of the fire was never found.

Shocked by what she had just learned, Rachel sat in silence as she contemplated the heroic mother who risked everything for her children. She collected the information and shared it with her daughters who were touched by the strength of a mother's love. They surmised that Priscilla must still be searching the house for her beloved son.

That night Rachel fell asleep and dreamed of Priscilla. In this dream, she explained to Priscilla that her son had safely escaped, and there was nothing to worry about. Rachel continued to comfort Priscilla by saying that her children were safely with their father. A look of happiness and relief flooded over Priscilla's face.

The sound of the alarm clock blaring woke Rachel with a start. It had only been a dream. In her bed that night, Rachel had been engrossed in her book when she felt another presence in the room. She peered up from the pages of the book to find Priscilla standing next to the bed. Priscilla whispered thank you and disappeared. Priscilla's tortured soul was finally at rest. Her children were safe. Rachel and her two daughters never saw Priscilla again. Rachel always wondered if it had really been a dream.



No way

There is really no way to define life
No way to set quotes for situations
No way to correctly stereotype.
There is no way to help a situation if you're not in it,
No way to change anything
The tears of few can't put out the fires of many.

There is no way to know what religion is right,
No way to know who started what fight.
You will never know what one feels in their heart,
No way to know when you will depart.

You will never know when you will fall in love . . .
No way to know whom others think of.
People's truth may be confused with lies,
There's no way to see what's real through dishonest cries.

Kimberly
Herbst
Grade 10
Danbury
High School
Danbury

There's no way to know what your life will bring,
No way to know what will happen next spring.
We think in generalities but we live in detail.
We hate people who don't use our same scale.

There's no way to tell when your time has become too late.
So until there is a way . . . leave things up to fate.



The Siren's Song

Kurt von Tish
Grade 10
Norwich Free
Academy
Norwich

Unending Knowledge
Knowledge of the world, of the mortal and immortal
Come to our island, listen to our song
Relax and listen to our sweet voices
We know what you want, we can tell you it all
Listen to us now and leave with wisdom
Beyond all men, living and dead
With wisdom beyond the immortal gods

You think you know it all, like all mankind does
But you walk through the Earth not knowing what you can be
You can be great, you can be wise
You can grow strong, learned beyond your years
We will show you how
Leave your world behind
Pull away from the gray lifeless mortality
Of the Earth you call home

Come to our voices
To our colorful world
To the place where knowledge blossoms
Brighter than the flowers of calm, gentle Spring
Warmer than the rains that comfort the Earth
Golden like Dawn's brilliant delicate fingers
Come to our voices
Dripping like honey

Come and listen to our unending song

A Tribute to Louis Ali

Note: On January 1999, I visited a leprosarium in the Philippines. Most of the lepers were in relatively good condition except one man named Louis Ali, who seemed to be in most serious condition of all.

Joo Eun Kim
Grade 11
Wilbur L. Cross
High School
New Haven

Your visage haunts me till this very day
Your smell still nauseates me
Your eyes still pierce into my very soul
Your name still agonizes me

It's been twenty-two months
But it feels like just yesterday
When I visited the leprosarium
When I saw you on your bed

You drew no interest
You drew no sympathy
You drew no love
You drew no one

I saw you in your corner
A lump of body on a pallet
I approached you
Fearful of what lay on the pallet

A gasp escaped from me
I shrank back with a shudder
I forced my eyes to take another glance
I took in your pathetic figure

A rubber for your face
Two holes for your nose
Three fingers instead of five
Dull, yellow for your skin color

My eyes traveled from your
Head with few strands
To your feet with deformed toes
Then up to your face

You took a glance at me
Thought me rude to be gawking
But went about your task
Task of struggling to reach for a bowl

I hate myself for not reaching out to help
My feet froze right then
I could only stand mesmerized
Not lifting a finger during your struggle

Your hand shook as you picked up a bowl
A bowl filled with yellow substance
With your deformed hand
You slowly brought the food to your mouth

You held a feast with me as your sole guest
One guest who could not move or talk
You acknowledged my presence with
A glance that told me, "This is what I am; what you gonna do?"

Then the odor reached me
The odor of your urine under your bed
That has not been cleaned for hours
Your filthy blankets

A new bowl of rice was too costly
To be spent on you
A mop was too precious to be wasted
Cleaning your urine

Who are you, dear man?
Do you have a family, dear man?
Why does no one take care of you, dear man?
What is your name, dear man?

Thousands of questions I had
None of them were answered
You stared blankly at me
Gave no effort to reply

Perhaps you can't talk?
Perhaps you are shocked I asked?
Perhaps you don't know?
Perhaps you want to forget?

Desperate to know
I turned to the man next to you
He shook his head
Bewildered at the thought of knowing your name

Even your roommates despise you
The same people with same disease
The same lepers look down on you
You are worst of the lepers

I traveled from beds to beds
Seeking a soul who cared enough
Enough to know your name
I finally found a nurse

Louis Ali
It struck something
You were one of us
You still are one of us

Like all of us you have a name
And it's about everything you have
You had a family
Your family deserted you

You have a past
Perhaps a successful past
Where you had a flock of friends
Your friends deserted you

Who are we to shun you?
Who are we to give you the worst?
Who are we to wince at your odor?
Who are we to look distastefully at you?

We have the odor you don't have
We are distasteful
Our neglect, our selfishness
Are what cause our odor

Odor that is stronger than your urine
Filth that is filthier than your blankets
Wrinkles that are more numerous than yours
Deformity that is harsher than yours

I promised you I'd be back
Back to clean up your urine
Back to show that I remembered
Back to give you love

But here I am
Thousands of miles away
Still standing with the unfulfilled promise
Promise of cleaning your odor

You probably aren't surprised
You heard thousands of promises
Empty promises
Promises of return

You still have the odor with you
You still are covered with filthy blankets
You still have the thrown-away food
You still sit and wait for a comfort

I still stand with the odor
Odor of lack of love
I still stand with the filth
Filth of lack of initiative to reach out

I still have the promise to fulfill
I will rid of my odor first
Then help you cleanse yours
Together, we will be clean



The Recollection

Recollection is exquisite.

See how your pale arms crisscross,
Reminding me of thin, braided wicker
glazed white.

Miraculous.

How those frail arms seem to provide such strength,
Elbows locked furiously tight,
palms pressed so deep,
as if to leave unmistakable imprints in the
dark, marbled granite.
Boosting yourself up to the counter counting,
lusciously, forbidden cookies

Ashley Albert
Grade 11
Trumbull High
School
Trumbull

One
by
one
and two by two.

Your hair's so straight then, your eyes are black,
your skin is peach, your lips light rouge.
Detained simply with feeble clips,
your uninvited bangs wisped across your eyes;
shading them from a garish sun.
Remember the tears when they whispered to you,
that all they would do
was grow?

You discovered mirrored reflections,
Lit wax with fire,
Treasured grass stains
on strong denim,
You made sticks and string a mansion,
Choked on devious apple
cores.

Painstaking

So many times,
I've traced the crescent gleaming curves,
of your once
miniature hands.
Sometimes using the leftover bits of
Charcoal,
you so often left out in the rain.
Reminiscent of the many shades of the child who once
mocked, winced, unveiled;
Felt such a passion within her torrid,
Baby heart,
Yet . . .

Recollection has been so exquisite.

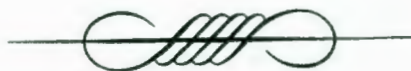
Oh please, you ought to remember
Even if nothing ever stirs you like the moments of before,

How your sweet, pale arms once crisscrossed,
Reminding me of thin, braided wicker
glazed
white.

Christian
Gaucher
Grade 11
Fitch Senior
High School
Groton

New Yorker

i am the greatest
new yorker
in the world
i can throw elbows
in bloomingdales
on sale days
with the best of them
i can beat a suit
down the stairs
and snatch his seat on the F train
i can down a burnt pretzel
and a three dollar bottle of evian
in two minutes flat
i've got the shades
the coat
the black outfit
the heels on my shoes
are big enough
to take down a mugger
while walking through central park
after sun down
i can bargain a fake gucci
in china town
for eight dollars
with a faux velvet case
thrown in
i can jump in the taxi
you've been trying to flag down
for half an hour
faster than you can open the door
i could intimidate you
with the look in my eyes
that would tell you
i am a true
new yorker



The Preference of War

Melissa
Graziano
Grade 11
Guilford High
School
Guilford

Melissa sat at the dining room table, casually dipping Wheat Thins into a small vat of cream cheese. The occasional crunch of the cracker only added to the racket of the random flipping of the television channels of the next room. Eventually a long sigh followed a short period of silence after the TV was clicked impatiently off. The slow rustle of a heavy body forcing itself from a comfortable position was heard coming from the living room. A shuffle of feet, another crunch, and the two people met. The man who had just entered the dining room where Melissa was sitting stopped his tired footsteps and stared at the table.

"Melissa?" he impatiently inquired.

"Hmm?" she mumbled wearily, munching on another cracker.

The man's large hand swept through the air above the table, motioning toward its contents. "What's wrong with this picture?" The question was only half rhetorical.

Melissa sluggishly turned her head toward where the man had pointed. Opened cereal boxes were filed neatly next to piles of dishes lying stacked one on top of the other like buildings in a model of New York City. Silverware and crumpled napkins littered the crumb-infested tablecloth, which was blotched with brown, red, and yellowish stains. An empty carton of Lactaid lay on its side in the middle of the table next to a large glass bowl of what used to be green beans.

Melissa said nothing but looked nonchalantly at the man, her father. He waited with raised eyebrows for an answer to his question; undoubtedly she would respond in the way he expected.

The girl remained silent. She eventually returned her attention to her delicacy and paid the man no further heed.

The man, surprised and disturbed about his daughter's unusual, yet uncomfortably casual, lack of obedience, felt small waves of heat rise in his head.

"Do the dishes, Melissa, come on." Impatience and an air of paternal supremacy intermingled to form a command that was created only to be obeyed. The man began to walk coolly toward the kitchen.

"I prefer not to," the voice from the dining room spoke passively, yet with determination

The man thought, for a second, that his first step into the kitchen had triggered the explosion of a hidden land mine. He ultimately decided that this couldn't possibly be, and rejected the statement he thought he had heard. Surely he must have been hearing things!

"What was that, dear?" The remark was only half sarcastic. He was, after all, a little deaf, though he hated to admit it. *Maybe she had said*, "I would love to." "Yes, sir, I ought to."

But no. "I prefer not to," his daughter plainly reiterated. His ears had been correct in their interpretation. So astoundingly correct, in fact, that they began to get excited. Waves of heat radiated out of them at a hazardous speed. His eyes, jealous of this celebration, began to lose their good nature. His eyebrows descended upon the furious eyes like two dark, hairy storm clouds as visible lightning flashed within the two boiling, glassy orbs. Realizing the tempest was ap-

proaching, the man attempted to calm this storm like Zeus had done so many times before.

The man laughed. Laughed a laugh heard too many times before by his faithfully compliant daughter, who had stopped eating and sat unmoving in her chair—her father's chair—with an expressionless face and icelike eyes.

Too many times had she heard that laugh. It was a laugh that said many things: "You are too small to live up to my power. I am supreme King of the land, and what I say is the law of all, for I am the honorable house-god." It said many other things as well, too numerous to count, and each one more insulting and oppressive than the one before. This time, however, she would ignore the insults. Live past the oppression. She was going to stop it, today. If he was going to take her refusal with a grain of salt, she would pour it into his eyes. It was about time for her to take drastic action.

The last of the man's laughter trickled into his words, "Come on, do the dishes." His eyes wandered back to the far side of the kitchen, then became caught on something he seemingly forgot. "And take out the garbage when you're done. Ya know, I've got to tell you to do everything around here!" he added impatiently. His footsteps in the kitchen were much heavier than before, much more awake, and more angry.

"I prefer not to," Melissa mumbled defiantly, though her voice was now out of her father's earshot. She had not won—not yet. Her lifelong archrival had fled the battlefield, laughing with amusement at the weakness of her scanty army. Somehow, it wasn't fair. It was true, her father paid the bills—but only half. He never cooked, never cleaned. It sometimes seemed as if he didn't do anything at all. Was he the classic, stereotypical Italian father, who ruled the court with an iron fist while his daughters slaved for him? After all, he didn't work nearly as long, hard, or often as her mother, who toiled endlessly for years to keep her family happy. But Melissa knew that she could never be happy with this tyrant roaming free.

Melissa decided, *If he's going to ignore me, then I will ignore him.* She knew perfectly well what the outcome would most likely be. Yet, she had never really tried deliberate resistance, boycotting, and striking against her own father. After all, did he not put food on the table? *Yeah, the food I have to cook every night,* she thought. Is he not helping to pay for her college education? *Yes, but what's the point of going to college if she couldn't go where she wanted to go?* The grudges piled up in her mind all over again, almost toppling over. The list was ever-growing; seldom a day went by without her adding to the mental tally sheet she had been building up against her father since she was old enough to think.

Finally the hateful list was ready to be thrown into the fire. Her father's vicious henpecking days were over. He would no longer be a burden on her already weary mind.

Melissa calmly put the lid back on the cream cheese. *I ate enough of it,* she thought, smiling at herself, albeit a weak smile. She rolled up the bag of Wheat Thins and stuffed it back into its box, being careful to close the flaps properly. The box's promotional picture of the Grinch smirked at her. She turned

the box around so the picture no longer faced her. She threw the box into the dark cabinet and stuck the cream cheese in its little private compartment in the refrigerator door. Then she left for her room, leaving the dishes to filthy abandonment and the trash to independent multiplication. The next few hours went smoothly: Melissa was left alone with her homework for a full two hours, forty-seven minutes and thirty two seconds when a volcano erupted in the kitchen.

"WHY AREN'T THE DISHES DONE? MELISSA!"

Keep your cool; don't give in; don't even answer, she told herself. She had known it was going to happen eventually. She didn't realize how long it was going to take. The previous battle had been forgotten in matrices, mitochondria, and mid-eighteenth-century Massachusetts.

Thunderous footsteps approached her room, ever increasing in volume. Melissa listened to them like a tree listens to the sharpening of an ax. Her bedroom door swung open with a bang as it hit the closet door behind it with such an amount of force that it made Melissa start slightly.

"Why aren't the dishes done?" her father bellowed, anger forcing the sound of the words to bounce off the walls, making them shake. "I asked you three hours ago to do the dishes and take out the garbage. Why are they still not done?" There was no mocking laughter in the voice now, no hint of any attempt to suppress the fluid rage steaming from his body, his voice, and his very stance. Melissa didn't see it, but she knew exactly what was happening, what he looked like: his eyes were flashing threateningly, nostrils flared and white, the lines on his forehead forming ranks, his jaw clenched like the rest of his muscles as he spoke through his teeth. She didn't need to turn around in her seat, which faced the wall opposite her bedroom door. She stood her ground by not moving. She was determined to show the least amount of emotion possible. Don't even flinch, she commanded herself and her own mental army as a tiny flutter of courage lit up within her spirit.

"I prefer not to," Melissa said in a voice a cannon might make before exploding, knowing full well it had a very slim chance of hitting an enemy target since the home fort had practically been captured by enemy forces. Somehow it was worth the match that ignited the fuse.

With these words, the man finally realized that his own daughter had risen against the Crown. His face wore an expression of absolute shock, until it twisted itself into enraged frustration. If it was a war the traitor wanted, it was a war she would get—and lose.

Melissa remained firm and motionless, except for her eyes, which scanned the textbook in front of her: "*The colonies were to be kept in a state of perpetual economic adolescence and never allowed to come of age. As Benjamin Franklin wrote in 1775, 'We have an old mother that is peevish grown; she snubs us like children that scarce walk alone; she forgets we're grown up and have sense of our own.'*" She could no longer concentrate on the words after this, but her eyes only scanned the characters without bothering to synthesize them. Her concentration was too busy helping her brain stay calm for the battle at hand. She knew her father was ready to strike, but she purposely wanted him to fire the first shot. *Just like Mr. Powers said*, she thought, *let him take the blame for the war.*

"I prefer not to," she continued forcefully, more forcefully than she had wanted. She tried to restrain the tone of her voice, but it was too late. She had reached the point of no return. "I prefer not to do the dishes, nor take out the garbage, nor cook dinner, nor rake pine needles for six hours straight without lunch, nor clean your disordered rubbish off the kitchen and dining room table, and the stove, and the counter, and the coffee table. I prefer not to do my homework exactly the minute I come home from school, because I'm so exhausted. I prefer not to practice my violin when I'm so stressed and tired I can barely stand up. And, I prefer not to sacrifice myself and ignore my spirit for the sake of your happy little vision of a perfect child!"

There was a deafeningly quiet pause while Melissa turned around in her chair to look at her father, it was but the eye of a rampaging hurricane.

"I realize that you want me to help around the house; that's understandable. But what I don't understand is why I am working so hard with school, practicing, and everything else while you're knowingly thrusting unnecessary weight on my back. I have a lot of homework today, and it will probably take me until midnight to finish it all as it is! I was only relaxing for about five minutes before because I was so overwhelmed I could barely breathe! You, on the other hand, seem to have a lot of free time: you can do the dishes every once in a while. I know you know how to vacuum and rake the leaves from all the times you've told me I was doing it wrong! I prefer not to follow your 'do as I say, not as I do' rules . . ."

The speech had been long enough. The man could not believe the indignity of this small, powerless being whom he helped to create and keep alive, feed, clothe, and shelter, not to mention love. How dare she make such accusations! Crushing this rebel would be the end of the entire treacherous revolution. This renegade would have to be brought immediately to the gallows.

With a sudden burst of energy, the scene dissolved into yellow, white, and red bursts of light. Between tinges of pain, earsplitting waves of incomprehensible bellows and roars from both sides repeated themselves over and over like echoes, crashing around the scene like waves. Men fell, wounded and defeated, their blood splattered on the damp grass as their souls left their hole-ridden bodies out of shame, crying, making the rain fall in torrents . . .

That's exactly how it had happened. Melissa spends the next few hours replaying it over and over painfully in her mind as water builds up behind her eyes, a dam of anguish and casualties.

The soapy water sloshes around her hands, the suds flying in her eyes and dripping onto her favorite t-shirt. She can feel the grease caking on her soft hands, the water wrinkling her fingers, burning from the hot water. The battle is over. But the wreckage it caused is strewn all about her now. Had it been worth it? She sobs as she again plunges her hands into the soapy water. She honestly doesn't know. The clinking of glass against metal turns her attention to the salty remains of an old leftover tray. *Salt*, she thinks to herself, remembering her vow just a few hours before. Her own army had failed her; the salt had been poured into her own burning wounds. *This war is not over*, she thinks as she closes the dishwasher and

heads for the front foyer. She quickly shoves her feet into her sneakers, grabs the overstuffed bag of garbage, and heads out the back door, letting the screen bang shut behind her.



The Kiss

... The first time we kissed, we didn't stop and laugh like we thought we would. Instead we continued and it became more than a dare between friends. In the dark I continued and held you closer, closer. Your arms held me securely, held me passionately. I realized that you are like me, both soft and ferocious ...

"I almost feel bad," she says to me, "because this will be very difficult. You can't be prepared for it."

"But I know my parents," I reply. "I mean, my mom and I used to go to New York to protest the St. Patrick's Day Parade because they wouldn't let the gay and lesbian organization march."

"Yeah, but it's a lot different when it's *your* kid."

Jess's parents had trouble when she first told them. She says that her father still thinks it's just a phase that she'll grow out of. But my friends always say that I have the perfect parents to "come out" to because they're so accepting and open. I think I've even incidentally mentioned to my mother that I've had crushes on girls—although that must have been a number of years ago, at a time when I basically wrote off those feelings as admiration or friendship. She was extremely low-key about it. She'll probably be very low-key when I tell her about Jess.

The trouble really isn't my parents' responses. But whom, beyond my immediate family, can I tell? Which uncles and aunts won't want me around their children? I will have a mark upon me. I am now their smart, beautiful niece, the niece they rarely see, but with whom they always enjoy spending time. With one admission I could become the immoral rebel.

"You'll start to get angry," she continues. "You'll have to watch family members sitting at the table crying, and you'll just have to stand there. What do you say? 'I'm sorry. It's not my fault. I didn't decide this.'"

I'm standing in the kitchen, shifting my weight from side to side, arms crossed not in defiance but because of vulnerability—looking down at a relative who has her head on her hand. She's weeping. I feel helpless. Or maybe I'm sitting across the table from them, giving it time to sink in, scratching at the plastic tablecloth with my fingernail.

Which ones do I tell? Maybe my younger cousin Melissa will think it's uncool and weird and her brother Danny won't want to talk to me. Is it wrong to tell only a few? Am I being ashamed? I'm being unduly afraid. Should I just say, "This is who I am"? That's not my natural approach. I never feel comfortable confronting people like that, especially not my extended family, with whom I have a slightly distant and formal relationship. I don't think I'm forthright enough

Aoife Spillane-
Hinks
Grade 11
Wilbur Cross
High School
New Haven

to be bisexual. The Patron Saint of Sexuality should pick someone who'll be better equipped to represent the team. My extended family is not all that close to me. Maybe I can avoid the issue entirely and only tell them about my boyfriends.

Great. I can deny half of myself.

Just as if she was a guy I was dating, I feel the same giddiness when I get off the phone with her, check myself in the mirror the same thousands of times, look on the Caller ID box with the same sense of hope and anticipation. The only difference I can see between this and any straight relationship I've had is that this one feels safer, and more natural. When I'm with her, I don't have to perform. I'm myself, whatever that happens to be.

Why will I be so different when I tell everyone?

Hello everyone, it's still me here. I haven't changed. In fact, I'm more myself now.

My grandmother could hate me. Perhaps my dad will ask me to be discreet about it. Can I bring her as my date to his Christmas party?

"So we're . . . together?" I ask.

"Yeah."

I exhale. I hold the phone as if I was actually holding her.

I imagine people from church walking by while we're kissing. I imagine my French teacher walking by. I imagine my Kindergarten teacher walking by—why are they upset? Disgusted? Disappointed? What am I doing that's so wrong, so bad?

I want to kiss you on any street, hold you at the movies just like any couple, slow dance with you at the prom, without feeling the weight of everyone's stare.

I don't want to be "bad." Being thought of as the "bad kid" is one of my biggest fears.

Don't be mad at me. Don't think I've changed. Don't yell. Don't whisper. Don't don't don't don't.

I like her. Do I fear what they'll say? I love her. But will I tense up—become paralyzed—when she moves to kiss me? Will I turn away?

I don't want to.

Take my hand, and hold it. These are my parents. They'll love you . . . I'm a good person. I'm going to be a very good girlfriend. I won't turn from you. I won't allow their judgments to stop this wonderful thing from happening. Here I am, ready to love you with abandon.

As long as I can brave the stares.



Susan Ulbrich
Grade 12
Coginchaug
Regional High
School
Durham

Rhythmic Like Count Basie

I was particularly squirmy the day I listened to Mrs. Ravenport's conversation with her son, as I hungrily guzzled down my cherry and vanilla bean ice cream soda. My mother eyed me across the glass-plated table, and with one whip

of her fragile hand, smoothed down a lost wisp of an auburn bang that stuck straight out of my mop of hair.

"It's sweaty out," I declared to Mom across the table, but she rolled her eyes, and said it couldn't be sweaty out. I thought it was sweaty.

"Sweltering is more like it," Mom said peering at me through her brass-rimmed spectacles. *Sweltering*. I repeated the word over and over again and rolled the syllables around my mouth before I popped a luscious cherry off its stem and moved it back and forth within my chubby cheeks. It was sweaty in the air, and I wiped the perspiration off my forehead and onto my yellow, floral sundress. Mom was reading *The Wall Street Journal*, and I tried making out a sentence from across the slippery surface of the table, yet the lettering was so small, so fine, that the words were unreadable.

Leaning against the cool plate of stained-glass that separated our red leather cushioned booth from another identical booth, I felt the chill of the smooth surface run down my cheek, up my neck, and into my ear. I pressed my freckled ear against the glass cupping it so it suctioned to the multicolored plate, and then I pulled away slowly and listened as my ear made a hollow, popping sound. I pressed my ear once again to the stained-glass, resting it on a triangular shaped piece of blue glass within the booth's divider.

I didn't even mean to listen. Honest. Mom always said that I shouldn't be so nosy because eavesdropping is incredibly rude. But here I am, sweltering on a sweaty day, and I hear the word "g--damn." As a little girl, I was struck with a horrible, yet at the same time, mischievous sensation. I knew "g--damn" was a bad word, because once Mom smacked me on the bottom for screaming it at my cat when he bit my ankle. I learned the word from Tommy up the street and didn't know it was bad until after my bottom was stinging and pink. After hearing "g--damn" through this blue chip of shiny glass in the divider, I formed an "o" with my sticky lips. This surprise reaction slowly crept into a playful grin, as I continued to listen intently to the conversation between these intriguing people in the booth next door.

"Mother, it is plain to see that you cannot and will not be able to take care of yourself without Father around anymore." A starchy man's voice spoke deeply to his mother, his tone neither kind nor reassuring. The mother didn't respond.

I remember being as silent as when I have time-out at home, and I sat motionless in the booth, listening to the low growl of the son's voice as my heart beat rapidly against my chest. There was silence for a long while, and all I could think about was the word "g--damn" and how I wished that these people would say it again. Or, for that matter, maybe they would say another curse, and this time I would make sure not to repeat the bad word near Mom.

The mother spoke: "I am not going into the home, Joseph." She sounded disturbed through her quaking voice and I immediately liked her. I could tell from her voice; she had a sweet, high-tone, consoling, and melodic voice, and it was warm honey to my cold, little ear. I leaned back, and as my eyes traveled up the divider, I could see Joseph throw his big, burly hands up in frustration. "Mother, we both know your medical condition, and it is not safe for you to be alone in that big house! Let's bring you to Granby's Home and see how you like it." The honey

voice retorted, "No. I don't care if I live alone. I got along fine for forty-seven years with your father, and I will get along just fine by myself." I was startled when I heard the sharp rapping of her palms against the glass table.

A cheerful waitress interrupted the old woman. "Hello, Mrs. Ravenport. It's nice to see you again. May I get you anything to drink?" *Mrs. Ravenport was her name.* Good afternoon, Sandy. May I please have a hot, herbal tea? Thank you."

No longer refreshed against the glass, my ear felt clammy and hot. My cherry and vanilla bean ice cream soda was a mere pile of foam at the bottom of the cloudy mug. I sat up and leaned across the table and imitated the formal address that Joseph had used. "Mother, Mother." Mom answered me coolly without looking up. "What?" She continued to study her paper. "Mother." She snapped, "Why are you calling me that?" I didn't answer but breathed in deeply and sucked the foam out of the bottom of the dirty jug with an unladylike sound. Mom didn't even look up.

Wondering how Mrs. Ravenport was doing, I again pressed the side of my flushed and sticky face to the stained-glass, avoiding the sweaty vestige from earlier. This time I pressed my ear upon a newer, green chunk of cold, refreshing color. I heard Mrs. Ravenport sobbing quietly. I could tell she was sobbing for she was hiccupping. I always hiccup when I cry intensely. When I hiccup-cry no one hears me but my cat. Tommy heard me once, too, but that was just because I fell out of our tree fort in the back woods and hurt my right elbow. Mom never hears me hiccup-cry. She says that crying should be against the law because it only shows how weak a person is. "Especially never cry in public," Mom always says. "That, in itself, should be considered a crime." Mrs. Ravenport was hiccup-crying in public, and I briefly wondered what her sentence in jail would be if Mom were the harsh judge. I heard Joseph mumble something, low and rough, not kind or consoling in any way. I wanted to jump over the divider and give Mrs. Ravenport a hug and tell her that hiccup-cries were okay and that her son was being mean. Unfortunately, I couldn't see over the divider without standing up on the red leather cushion. My feet could hardly reach the black and white tiled floor below the table, let alone peer at the identities being hidden from me.

"I'm not going. I'm not going," whimpered Mrs. Ravenport. "Yes you are. Don't start this again, Mother." Joseph stressed the word *mother* in a condescending and horrible way that made my nose wrinkle up just like it does when I taste the pasty film of lima beans. "Suzy. Suzy." I leaned up when I heard Mom's voice trailing in the air. "I'm going to the ladies' room. Be good and sit up straight." There was jazz music playing in the background. *Tommy likes jazz. Usually I play the imaginary trumpet or saxophone when we are "pretend" practicing with our famous band, but sometimes, only rarely, I am allowed to beat those drums. Tommy almost always beats the drums. He bangs his two branches from the large sycamore onto the hollow sounding, empty paint cans and we make music just like his idol, Count Basie.*

Mrs. Ravenport was quiet now, and Joseph ordered, "Have your belongings packed and ready by tomorrow. I'll go call you a cab." I noticed him rise and a dark shadow was cast upon the seat where Mom had been sitting. Joseph was as

burly as his thick hands. His dark, unshaven face emphasized his broad shoulders and protruding belly. Drawing tightly toward his square jawbone, his narrow lips anchored into a large scowl. He trudged away from the table leaving Mrs. Ravenport all alone.

I stuck my sticky palms to the table and pushed myself up. Standing on the booth's padded seat, I could fully absorb the actual Mrs. Ravenport through my curious eyes. Silver hair, like the color of my cat, twisted neatly into a bun at the top of her tiny head. Her piercing blue eyes were puffy and red-stained like my sundress spotted from the ice cream's cherry dye. I smiled shyly, and as she beamed back I noticed that her smile, surrounded by fine lines, was soothing like her voice.

"Hi," I announced. "Hi there. Have you been listening to me?" I felt my sweltering face perspire further as I shamefully nodded my head up and down. Mrs. Ravenport laughed lightly and reached up to cup one of her hands over mine. "Are you okay?" I asked, reassured by her touch. "Oh yes. When I have a sweet, little girl care about how I'm feeling, I know everything is going to be quite all right." She blinked away a lonesome tear and smoothed her lace shawl down across her breast. "Are you sad because you have to move?" I asked. I smoothed my dress, mirroring her gesture, and tucked a strand of my wild mop behind my clammy ear. Mrs. Ravenport sighed and squeezed my hand. Straining her shriveled face towards my freckled skin she whispered, "I'm sad because the one I love is hurting inside, and I'm afraid I won't be able to do anything about it anymore." Her voice trailed off as I saw Mom walking towards the table. "Bye, Mrs. Ravenport." I quickly laid a light kiss upon her frail and wrinkled hand and flopped down onto the red leather cushion, sprawling my feet out on the end.

Mom arrived at the table, fishing for some loose change deep within her pocketbook. "Get your feet off the booth. Haven't I taught you anything?" She muttered something under her breath that I could not translate, and I instantly wondered if she was still missing Daddy. Trailing behind her clicking heels, I followed her out of the restaurant. Clamped in my moist fist was my straw wrapper that I intended to fling at that horrible man, Joseph, but he was nowhere to be found. Upon exiting the restaurant, the wrapper floated and drifted silently to the scorching pavement below.

"Why are you littering?" scolded Mom and she bent down to retrieve the crinkled paper at my feet. Her face was so close to mine when she stooped toward the roasting concrete, that I could feel the silky strands of her auburn hair against my skin, and I could smell the sweet aroma of her lilac perfume. She grabbed the paper wrapper, and as she began to stand up, she paused when she caught my hazel eyes drifting over her delicate features. Kneeling in the middle of the parking lot, outside of a restaurant with connecting red, leather-cushioned booths, my mommy looked me in my eyes and asked softly, "Suzy, why did you drop that? You know better." I wasn't listening; as I ran my damp fingers over her face, our noses almost touched, and our breaths pulsed in time with each other, rhythmic like Count Basie. And I hugged her. I pressed my sweltering body against her starchy suit, and I didn't let go. My sticky, pudgy hands clamped onto her back, and I felt her delicate fingers hesitantly grasp the stained, yellow sundress.

Amy Ma
Grade 12
Conard High
School
West Hartford

indelible

prominent; nothing less than a
strawberry splashed across her chest like a
scarlet sunrise, and
that is the color of desire,
steeped and swarming with
bittersweet flecks of nausea and
animation, she makes scraps of conversation
innocuous and vestal—
producing a sunny vial
which she empties into the outstretched palm of her hand—
the veins like pale rivers winding sustenance
and meaning in her skin.

*marilyn monroe wore a size 12,
but audrey hepburn wore a 2. times change.*
she tells her friends she could never stand to be a boy
and have her waist measured in inches—
she prefers the solid fragments of
girlmeat,
possible to reduce to one number.
she fluctuates between a 2 and a 3 and
wears her strawberry as hester
wore her letter:

crucified by vanity, marked by desire.
What might she be saying, between the narrowed
curves of girlishness, the sparkle that has
been amiss in her eyes? ...

she says that once you have tasted
emptiness like this it is hard to let go.
There is method in her starving purge,
marked and vicious,
scissor-gratified and talons too.

The strawberry inked by a reckless hand
which she thought would come off in the next wash
is luminous like hearts worn on sleeves,
perched on shoulders like cardinals.

*There are many things that
don't come off
in the next wash.*

The fervor and the loss. dropping like a boulder
into unspeakable lows,
crimson like the fruit she pushes
to one side.
Sinful red desire.

the paradox of a dog day

one time—
a july night stained with old sweat—
our friend went down on his bike going
ninety mph. he said
“that’s what I do.
I’m a biker.”
we tried to dissuade him
but our voices stretched like pale taffy
and our eyes inevitably turned
back to the fireworks over Coney Island
that seemed to spread themselves
like whores over the masculine ocean

two days
after that, my lover
shot himself in the foot then
committed himself to an asylum. he said
“I’m unstable. I need
help.”
we let him do it, even though
a host of raptors
shredded my insides

the phone rang
only hours later, to send
through the lines the voice of
my father telling me
“your mother’s gone. she’s
left.”
and he didn’t know when she’d be coming home
I told him it was ok. She’d left
thirteen years ago. When I was
ten. We all were ten
that year. Even the adults.
I hung up and listened to the room
turning itself inside out

and now
I stand here
when it feels like 2:59 am
every day
even when I’m waking up
staring at the clock

Chris Gynell
Grade 12
E. O. Smith
High School
Storrs

Tamsyn
Flathers
Grade 12
Stratford
High School
Stratford

here in this dark dark room
I wait for the minute
to pass me by



Dénouement

For Andy.

I stare at my feet
and tell you what you know,
but need to hear.
And my heel tap-taps
against the leg of the chair
with the continuity and monotony
of time, and of life,
and of this relationship.

And when I've said my piece,
I look into your eyes;
hazel, and yellow and glazed.
I won't apologize;
I'm not sorry.
But I understand as your gentle hand
encloses my knee in its grasp,
silencing all the noise.



Alycia
Ebbinghaus
Grade 12
Robert E.
Fitch Senior
High School
Groton

The Beach

"Ep, ep, ep!" my grandfather calls to me. "Kicka 'em legs hardah! He's beatin' yeh!" Several strokes have turned 'up' into 'ep' as well as altering much of my grandfather's language. I bite my lower lip in that serious, life and death determination that comes to eight-year olds in every matter. My cousin Pat kicks his legs as hard as I do, making his cracked black rubber swing arc up higher than mine. He is seven. The breeze off the Sound is made more intense as we fly back and forth on the swings and the salt from the ocean dries faster on our skins, forming sparkling crystalline patches on our arms, legs, faces, and backs. Our hands sweat as we grip the thick metal chains, our feet are covered in a fine dusting of the beach's powdery white sand.

"He's still higha 'en yeh!" my grandfather calls. A boy in red swim trunks turns and stares at my grandfather as he speaks, smirking. But he says nothing. "Ep, hon, ep! Don'a, don'a let 'im beat yeh!" My grandfather's voice is rocks rolling down a wooden plank, his mouth lagging on one side, not quite forming the words as everyone else does. The doctors once said he would never be able to speak again. For months and months, he tried to speak—at first by himself in the backyard, with only Pete-dog, our golden retriever for company. He forced himself to shape the words, knowing that they would come, maybe not right away, but in time. *Things always get done when you try*, he would tell us. It's been years since his strokes, and he has always sounded the same to me. His speech is broken, but Pat and I understand.

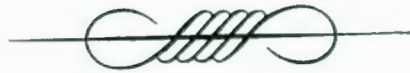
I kick harder and harder. My toes are now even with Pat's. Our warm, sunbronzed legs kick back and forth in unison; the dried salt from the ocean glistens. My feet edge past on the next forward arc. My grandfather calls, "I a'toll yeh! Yeh did i'! Yeh try-a get higha 'en 'im and yeh did i'! Ha-hah!" I laugh with joy. Pat yells, "Race you to the water!" and jumps off the swing at its highest point, not even slowing down a little, racing across the yellowed, sunburned grass to the beach below. I skid to a stop and tear off after him. We hit the sand at the same time and rush past people on their backs, soaking up the sun's rays, our feet spraying up wakes of fine white sand. We dodge blankets, chairs, and sand castles, but always head for the blue-green waves. It is high tide—the salt is heavy in the humid air, scented by sea and sand and sunblock. We crash into the water, both falling face-first as a wave knocks us both off our feet. I come up sputtering, spitting salty water from my mouth. Pat chucks a clump of lime-green kelp at my forehead and it lands in my thick, tangled dark hair.

"Aaaaaaiiih!" I yelp and send a crest of water into his face with my arm. He smacks the water with his fist and we splash each other until we both end up lying exhausted on the wet sand, the waves washing over our legs. My grandfather comes to us with our towels, "Tine tuh go," he says, helping each of us up and enfolding us into sun-warmed terry-cloth. We each take one of his hands, three figures walking down the beach—two shapeless ones, one draped in lemon yellow, the other navy blue, and in the middle, one dressed neatly in khaki and pinstripes and polished wing-tip shoes, wearing a grey tweed Tyrolean hat.

The playground is different now; the cracked rubber swings that Pat and I raced on were declared "unsafe" and were replaced with fiberglass ones. The grass that died every summer but reappeared every spring has been replaced with astroturf and gravel. A timber and heavy plastic playscape sprawls where the huge metal slide that left black streaks on the back of your pants used to be. But the smell of the beach is the same, even in October. The sea is stronger, the salt pickling the mist a little bit, and the sand has lost some of its sunbaked wildness, and the smell of sunblock as faint as the foam trails left by each wave as it washes away the shore. But it's all still there. The ocean is an angry grey now, the blue of summer left behind as hurricane season blows through and winter creeps in. By the end of November the water will be black.

Though the playground I knew has gone away, and my grandfather has died since, and Pat and I have grown up, the beach has stayed as it was when I

only cared about making it to the ocean first. Its smell takes me back to that time of summers being long enough, days spent swimming and swinging and drinking in the sunshine as we did Kool-Aid; nights spent chasing lightning bugs with old peanut-butter jars, camping out in the backyard with flashlights on all night, neither of us willing to admit fear of the dark. And my grandfather watching us from a short distance away, laughing and taking it all in.



Honorable Mentions

Michelle Abraham
Rachel Antonucci
Michelle Atsales
Kyle Anderson
Emily Bancroft
Krisztina Bauer
Michaela Belanger
Megan Bishop
Robert Brito
Nathan Burke
Allison Champlin
Christopher Chromey
Reggie Clark
Amy Cohen
Rebecca Cook
Arielle Cutler
LiMing Dolan
Kate Dowd
Cole Duncan
Josh Feder
Zoe Fieldsteel
Maggie Frederick
Rebecca Frele
Kathlyn Gainer
Rachel Goldberg
Jacqueline Gumm
Susanna Guffey
Gary Guyette
Kirsten Hall
Payton Henry
Meredith Hill
Kaitlin Helaire
Stephen Hooper
Erin Jenkins
Tom Johnson
Pooja Karukonda
Frederique Kemp
Tamarra Kemsley
Felicia Lambe
Rachel Lesser
Mary Linders
Zachary Lipson
Erica Long

Conard High School
Granby Memorial High School
Woodstock Academy
Seymour High School
Daisy Ingraham School
Windsor Locks High School
Jack Jackter Elementary School
North Branford High School
Lafayette School
East Hartford High School
Hamden Hall Country Day School
Hall Memorial School
Hebron Avenue School
King and Low-Heywood Thomas
Dr. R. H. Brown Middle School
Middlebrook Middle School
Housatonic Valley Regional High School
Mercy High School
East Elementary School
Simsbury High School
Vivian McRae Wesley Elementary School
Hubbard Elementary School
John Read Middle School
Batcheller School
King Philip Middle School
New Canaan High School
Middlebrook School
Mansfield Middle School
East Hartford High School
Center Elementary School
Canton Junior/Senior High School
Wolcott High School
King and Low-Heywood Thomas
Windsor Locks High School
Dr. Helen Baldwin Middle School
Buttonball Lane Elementary School
East Elementary School
Saxe Middle School
Danbury High School
Eric Norfeldt Elementary School
Highland Park School
Hart School
Oxridge Elementary School

My-Linh Luong
John Mattie
Thomas McAvoy
Adeline Mitchell
Hao Nguyen
Meg O'Connor
Keith Petrower
Brett Richetelli
Elizabeth Rocheleau
Juan Carlos Rodriguez
Alison Romano
Christopher Rovero
Olivia Schum
Jennifer Silverman
Trevor Jude Smith
Andrew Sondheim
Jordan Stearns
Charla Stetson
Courtney Tabor
Kelly Van Deusen

Sedgwick Middle School
Mary E. Griswold School
North Windham School
Worthington Hooker School
Central High School
Emerson-Williams
Rippowam Magnet Middle School
Mary T. Murphy School
De Paolo MiddleSchool
Windham Middle School
Union School
Torrington High School
Middlebrook School
Simsbury High School
Sedgwick Middle School
Timothy Dwight School
Scotland Elementary School
Windsor Locks High School
RHAM Middle School
Mercy High School

Teachers of Published Authors

Leslie Abbatiello	Wilbur Cross High School
Jonathan Andersen	Edwin O. Smith High School
Tara Armstrong	Juliet W. Long School
Linda L. Balestracci	Guilford High School
Sherry Bedore	Skinner Road School
Maureen Billings	Squadron Line School
Jason Bluestein	Tashua School
Judith T. Bosworth	South Elementary School
Joy Bowers Campbell	Fairfield High School
Susan Bredehorst	Gaffney Elementary School
Paula Colbridge Brisson	Scotland Elementary School
Wayne Caliento	Windham Middle School
Susan Caraher-Devine	Rogers Magnet Elementary School
Justine Case	Central Middle School
Irene R. Cohen	Orchard Hills School
Joan Cole	East Lyme Middle School
Jason Courtmanche	RHAM High School
Susan Cowey	Mary T. Murphy School
Jeri A. DeSantis	Robert E. Fitch Senior High School
Susan Desrochers	Burnham School
Barbara Dowd	A. Ward Spalding School
Susan Evageliou	Hall Memorial School
Barbara Evangelista	West Haven High School
Martha Fisher	Mary E. Griswold School
Kathleen Forando	Clark Lane Middle School
Diane Forster	Annie E. Vinton School
Melissa Frey	Coginchaug Regional High School
Madelyn Frink	Robert E. Fitch Senior High School
Evelyn Garrow	Vernon Center Middle School
Deborah A. Giaconia	Essex Elementary School
Joyce E. Grassl	Daisy Ingraham School
Mary Halzack	A. Ward Spalding School
Mary C. Hanna	East Elementary School
Paul Helvig	East Lyme High School
Cheryl D. Hoffman	East Granby Middle School
Nancy Horton	King Philip Middle School
Linda Kuehn	Hart Magnet School
Linda Lamothe	Norwich Free Academy
Ruth Lee	Danbury High School
Diana Martinez	Stratford High School
Janine May	Hart Magnet School
Diane Mikan	Canton Junior/Senior High School
Florence Modi	Samuel Huntington School

Jacqueline Morales
Kathy Morgan
Chris Muscott
John A. Perotti
Leslie Poltrack
Mindi Rappoport
Nancy Robbins
Nancy Ryan
Mike Seal
Carol B. Sfara
Irene J. Sikorski
Roger Smith
Susan Sullivan
Bonnie Tremante
Michele Vaughn
Richard Walsh
Carole Weaver
Daniel Wilcox
Debra J. Young

Baldwin Middle School
Anna Reynolds School
Weston Middle School
Newington High School
East Elementary School
Middlebrook School
Tootin' Hills School
Mary T. Murphy School
Union School
Martin Kellogg Middle School
Norwalk High School
Trumbull High School
Richard D. Hubbard School
Middlebrook School
John Wallace Middle School
Valley Regional High School
Gordon C. Swift Middle School
Conard High School
Witt Intermediate School