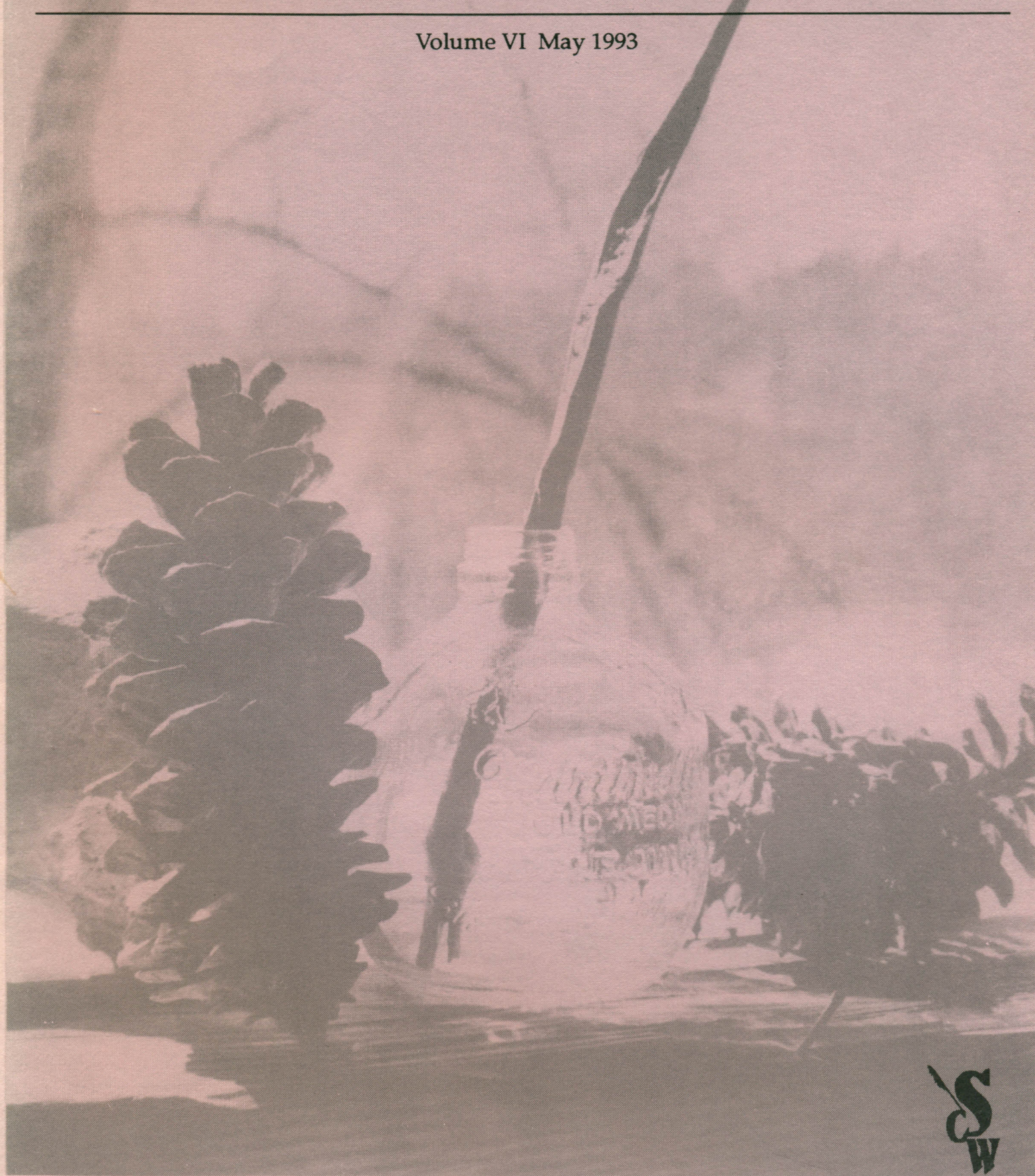


CONNECTICUT STUDENT WRITERS

Volume VI May 1993



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Foreword

In the following pages, the students of Connecticut write their lives. They write of the joys of the natural world, the rich memories of childhood, and the special bonds of family and friendship. They also write of divorce, personal tragedy, and mortality. Their writing is honest and fearless. They write to discover and to explain. Their writing is an expression of their hearts and minds and a mirror of their worlds.

In writing their lives and their worlds, these student writers help us to write ours. We begin to understand what young people feel and see and think. We begin to change how we feel and see and think. As we read their words of courage, joy, and sorrow, we discover again what it means to be human.

The Connecticut Council of Teachers of English and the Connecticut Writing Project congratulate this year's authors. Join us in celebrating the student writers of Connecticut and in reading their worlds.

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Kristen Prescott
Grade 1
Prudence Crandall School
Enfield

My Boyfriend

I love a boy. He's not a bad boy. He never makes trouble. He broke my heart when he broke his nose. His name is Jonathan. He has a brother. I don't love him. He's not as cute as Jonathan. My dad knows Jonathan's dad, and I know his dad, too. He goes to Prudence Crandall School where I go. I love Jonathan so much.



Linnea Geres
Grade 1
Lake Street School
Vernon

Your Mind Can Think

When you drink, it rains
in your mind.
When you eat, it's sunny
in your mind.
When you laugh, it sprinkles
in there.
You move to think in your mind.
When you think, it makes a crystal
in your mind that helps you think,
And in your mind
you're a picture
So you can remember yourself
when you die.



Casey Ciaccia
Grade 1
Kendall School
Norwalk

My Birthday

One morning it was my birthday, and I opened my birthday presents from my family. We went to the store to buy decorations for my birthday at home. I asked my Mom if I could use the phone. She said, "Yes." So I got the address book and called my friends. They came over to my house, and while we were waiting we played a game, and it was Sorry.

Then some of my other friends came and I opened my presents from my friends. I said, "Thank you."

My friends said, "You are welcome." We had ice cream. Some people had chocolate and some people had vanilla. We played more games, and we had a movie to watch from my mom.

It got late and my mom said, "Time to go to bed girls." So we got into our sleeping bags and my mom said, "Good Night, and do not talk."

We said, "Okay!"



My Pepper

Pepper is a parrot.
Pepper can be fun.
Pepper is good and green.
Pepper does tricks.
Pepper is a boy.
I love my parrot.



Trouble

Once there were two boys camping in Nickerson State Park. Their names were Duane and Tim. They were walking around in the woods for a long time. Then they noticed they were lost. They fell asleep in the woods until they were found by friends. They were so happy to see them. Tim and Duane will never walk alone again in the woods.

I'm Me, You're You

I'm me;
You're you.
Let's not get mixed up.
'Cause if we do!
You'd be me
And I'd be you!
I'm better being me -
Than you!



Justin Green
Grade 1
Rogers School
Stamford

Amy Bass
Grade 1
Plantsville Elementary School
Plantsville

Molly McCue
Grade 1
Dr. James H. Naylor School
Hartford

Jennifer Caron
Grade 2

Jack Jackter Elementary School
Colchester

Dogs

Once upon a time there were lots of dogs and they lived in the woods. Pluto, Goofy, and Clifford were their names.

Pluto was the cutest. He had a big nose. He could honk his nose like a clown and stand on it. Pluto liked to play with his cousins, Goofy and Clifford.

They liked to play games like hide-and-seek. Pluto chased Goofy a lot. Goofy chased Clifford for a long time. Pluto was the winner. He won a silver bowl. The other dogs were happy for him.

Once Clifford was in a dog show. He won a prize for doing cartwheels. It was a chocolate sundae with a cherry on it.

Goofy won a big, fat, juicy doggy bone. He did the most somersaults. He did a lot of them. He could do flips, too.

Once he twisted his ankle. He had to go to the hospital and have shots. The nurse put on his cast. His ankle was swollen. He had to sit and watch T.V. all day long. Goofy was lonesome so Clifford and Pluto played with him.

When he got better they all moved from the woods to a lake. They fished and lived happily ever after.



Justin Lamb
Grade 2
Natchaug School
Willimantic

What Is Black?

Black is the night.

Black is the costume Batman wears.

Sometimes your mind goes black.

Black is the color of blackberries.

Black is one of the darkest colors.

Black is a stripe on a zebra.

Black is the color of when the lights are out.



John Kennedy
Grade 2

Mary T. Murphy Elementary
School
Branford

Fire

Fire, you are like
an orange,

You are hot like a stove.

You are like a pot of boiling water
popping with bubbles.

You are like a fireplace of ashes.

You are like millions of fireflies.



The Day Santa Almost Retired

Long ago on a freezing winter night that would have nipped your nose if you dared to go out, Santa got sick. Mrs. Claus sent for the head elf. He ran as fast as his little curled up feet would take him to get the doctor.

The doctor came all right, but he came grouchy and grumpily. The doctor hated Christmas and the spirit of Christmas, so he lied and told Santa, "Nobody believes in you!"

Santa felt very blue and upset so he said to Mrs. Claus, "Since I'm no good any more I think I should retire."

"Don't you go believing in that nonsense! You will disappoint all the kids in the world," said Mrs. Claus.

In the meantime, the coldhearted doctor came back to town and said, "Santa's not coming around this year." All the kids felt very, very upset and ran into their houses.

The bad news spread to kids all over the world! One little girl named Maria who lived in Italy was very sad. "We can't let this go on!" cried Maria. At night when everybody was asleep, Maria snuck out. She had to find Santa. She followed the North Star. Suddenly Jack Frost jumped out at her. He tried to nip Maria. In back of her was a deep hole. When Jack grasped at her she fell forward and he missed her and disappeared down the deep hole.

Maria went on through hills of snow, blizzards and storms! Then she saw a street pole painted red and white. There was a sign on it that said North Pole. Maria was excited! She walked and walked over hills of ice and snow. Then another sign said in red and green letters, "Santa Town." Now Maria was really excited.

She saw two cute elves. They led Maria to Santa who was laying in bed. "Santa, all the kids are crying and sad because of you." Santa got up and put magic dust on Maria and before she knew it she was waking up in her bed at home.

"On Dasher and Dancer and Blitzen and Vixen, Comet and Cupid, Prancer and Donner," yelled Santa. That night, Santa gave presents to everybody in the world, even the doctor. When the doctor woke up in the morning he saw gifts everywhere. From then on he loved Christmas.



A Frog by the River

A frog by the river
That is running swift
Hopped on a lily pad
That was about to drift.



Christopher Cummings
Grade 2
Central Elementary School
Southington

Patrick Toner
Grade 2
South End Elementary School
Plantville

Jillian Kellogg
Grade 3
Natchaug Elementary School
Willimantic

My Memory to Remember

Is it because she went away?
Or is it because she left me?
Mom, why is she gone?
No one knows,
But way down in your heart
she'll always be there
even if you can't see her.

But why can't I see her?
She's in a special place.
What is that special place, Mom?
Somewhere where dreams come true.
Deep down in your heart
No matter what, she'll always be there.

I remember the smells of the waffles that she made us.
They smelled so sweet that I could just cry.
I remember when she brought me to tap and ballet
She took us all out to dinner even though I was only a
friend of her two daughters.
I remember feeling like one of her own children
She treated me so well.
She was always very special to me.
When I was lonely she'd call me and ask if I was O.K.
She wanted me to go to her house every day and to play games.
I remember playing Chutes and Ladders and how funny it was
when she went all the way down the chute.
I remember. I remember. I remember all the special times I
had with my special friend.



Nathan Hooton
Grade 3
Redding Elementary School
Redding

The Snow Parrot

The wind swept across the icy pond. I heard it howling. I threw off my covers
and ran to the frosted window and stripped away the curtains. It was still dark. A tree
had fallen onto the telephone wires. I heard the sound of sleigh bells. Deep snow
called me outside.

I threw on my clothes, ran down the stairs, flung the door open, and ran out. The strong wind carried my hat away. I started running after it against the wind with snow smacking against my face. Just like a bee, the wind was stinging my nose. I jumped into the air to get my hat and put it back on.

I began to make a snow sculpture. It grew into a parrot. It had a big beak and two big feet. I put some food coloring on the icy, wet snow, and it took on the best colors. It really looked like a freezing cold parrot. I gave it a little hat that had green and black stripes on it and put a pirate's patch on its right eye. I carved a little grin on my parrot's beak and pretended it was saying "Arrrrr Sonny, walk the plank." I said, "Perfect - just what I wanted."

I saw the sun come up over the fallen tree and ran back into the house, tore off my clothes, put on my pajamas, jumped into bed, and closed my eyes. Ten minutes later my sister ran into the room and said "There is a big snow parrot outside. How did it get there?" I said I didn't know. It was my little secret.



Sailing

Wind in your face.
Sun in your eyes.
Islands ahead as far as the eye can see.
Sweet smell of salt.
Fish jumping up from the sea.
Waves gently splashing against the boat.
Jellyfish gliding on the sea like flowers.
Sailing is a dream come true.



Is It Robin O'Clock?

Is it Robin O'Clock?
Is it five after wing?
Is it quarter to leaf?
Is it nearly time for Spring?
Is it grass to eleven?
Is it flower to eight?
Is it half-past snowflake?
Do we still have to wait?



Lindsey Priest
Grade 3
Riverfield Elementary School
Fairfield

Vanessa Pergolizzi
Grade 3
Dr. James H. Naylor Elementary
School
Hartford

Anne Murphy
Grade 3
Holland Hill Elementary School
Fairfield

Just Imagine

Imagine I'm a kite in the sky,
And I can fly way up high.
I greet the birds as they fly by
And then I turn and say good-bye.

Imagine I'm a tropical fish.
At dinner I use a shell as my dish.
I would be turquoise, pink, and yellowish.
How I wish I was a fish!

Imagine I'm a buzzing bee.
Think how busy I would be,
Collecting nectar for honey
From each violet and lily.

Imagine I'm a shooting star,
And I can go so very far
And count how many stars there are
I wish I was a shooting star!

Imagine I'm a redwood tree,
Birds would make their nests in me.
In spring I would be very leafy.
Just Imagine!



Eric McLean-Shinaman
Grade 4
Writers' Den Club
Simsbury

Open-Heart Surgery

Two years ago, when I was in second grade, I found out that I had a hole in my heart and I was going to have open heart surgery.

I went into the hospital for a test operation. I have lactose intolerance, and I think the doctors wanted to be sure that the surgery would be safe. It turned out that it was. I went home that same day.

A few weeks later I went back into the hospital for my real surgery. I was scared. I didn't like the thought of having surgery. What if I woke up in the middle of the operation?

When I got there they took me to the playroom. I had some fun. Then, just before the operation, the nurses gave me a shot. It took three people to hold me down. I just don't like shots. I was really nervous about going up to the operating room. But the man who took me on the stretcher pretended he was pushing me in a car. It took my mind off the operation.

The worst thing was that Mom and Dad couldn't come into the operating room. The man wheeled me in. I saw lots of mechanical thing-a-ma-bobs and lights. Then they put the anesthesia over my face, and I was out.

I remember waking up. Mom and Dad were standing beside the bed, looking at my face. I couldn't talk. And I couldn't eat for about two days. When I got out of intensive care and was back in my own room, my doctor walked in one day with a little black and white panda bear in his pocket. He handed it to me. That made me feel good.

I stayed in the hospital for two weeks. Before I left, I got to play video games down in the game room. I was still having some problems with breathing, and I needed to use the oxygen mask sometimes. Then I got to breathe okay without it.

It was a rough trip home. The streets were bumpy, and every time we drove over a bump, I hurt. I was so glad to get home.

That was two years ago. I'm fine now. I can run around and play sports and do anything I want. I don't think about my heart problems anymore. I don't have any.



The Magic Toe Shoes

Once there was a little girl named Becky. Becky loved ballet, but she was a klutz! Whenever she tried to do turns across the floor, she would always get dizzy and fall.

One day her parents took her to see *The Nutcracker* ballet. Becky watched the dancers up on stage and wished she could dance like them. During intermission her parents went outside. All of a sudden a beautiful ballerina walked over to Becky and handed her a shimmering pair of pink toe shoes and said, "Use these when you need them the most."

Before Becky could say "Thank you" the ballerina was gone. Becky couldn't wait to get home and try them on. When she put them on her feet she felt a strange tingling feeling as if they were magical. She stood up and tried to dance. Slowly at first, she began dancing across the room. To her amazement, she was dancing more gracefully than she ever had before.

Many weeks passed, and Becky's dancing seemed to improve each day. Her dancing teacher was amazed by her improvement. Before the end of class one week, Becky's dance teacher said she had an announcement to make. She said that the town was going to put on a production of *The Nutcracker* ballet. All the dance schools in town were asked to send their best student to try out for the leading role of "Clara." The teacher said that she would announce the student who would be chosen to try out the following week. Becky was so excited, and she hoped that she would be the one chosen.

Jessica Stonoha

Grade 4

Wilcoxson Elementary School
Stratford

The following week Becky went to her dance class feeling nervous and excited at the same time. Finally the teacher announced who would try out for the part of "Clara" - and it was Becky! Becky was so excited that she started jumping up and down around the room. Becky practiced more than ever with her magic toe shoes. She knew how special they were and that she could never dance this well without those shoes.

The day of the tryouts finally came. Becky was so nervous she had butterflies in her stomach. She ran out of the house grabbing her dance bag which her mother had packed earlier for her. When she got to the theater where the tryouts were taking place, she waited nervously for her turn to come. Finally, when it was her turn she quickly began to put on her toe shoes. But something was wrong. There wasn't that tingling feeling when she put them on. To her horror, she realized that she had the wrong shoes. She wanted to run out of the building and get the magic toe shoes at home. But she couldn't. It was her turn; and if she didn't dance now, she wouldn't be given another chance. When she got on stage the music started. She said to herself, "There's no turning back now." She tried out a few steps; and before she knew it she was gliding across the floor dancing better than she ever had before - and without her magic shoes! Soon she was done. She waited until the judges decided who would dance the part. The judges soon made their decision. It was Becky! She was so proud of herself. She realized that she had confidence in herself and no magic helped her this time. She didn't need magic anymore - she finally learned how to have confidence in herself instead!



Colin Newcomb
Grade 4
Poquonock Elementary School
Windsor

When My Cat Died

When my cat died I was sad. I was crying for 5 minutes. I missed my cat very much. I was at my dad's home when Maggy died. I was having fun until I heard this news.

I was 7 when I got her. I got Maggy from a family in a town nearby. My mom and I went to look at a litter of kittens. My mom let me pick out the one I wanted. Maggy was the cutest so, I picked her. She was a calico kitten. Her colors were orange, white, and black. I think she was a month or two old when I got her.

When I brought her home, she was scared at first; but she was still cute. When she saw my dog in the hallway, she spit at him. I think she did this because she was scared. I brought her to my room and tucked her in a blanket.

I said good night to Maggy, and we went to bed. Some nights I played with Maggy in bed. Sometimes I thought she was good luck. The next morning I saw Maggy on my bed. I rolled her up in a blanket. She liked that. And the next day I saw Chuck playing with Maggy.

I had Maggy for 2 or 3 years. She was run over by a car on my street. I'm not sure if she died quickly because I was at my dad's. The year Maggy died, for Christmas my mom got me a stuffed cat. I sleep with it every night. I still have pictures of Maggy. Sometimes I think of Maggy and the good things about her. I still love her. Sometimes I think Maggy moves at night when I go to bed.

I got used to Maggy being in Heaven. My mom said I can plant flowers where Maggy is buried. I never did plant flowers there. Maybe someday I will.



Fall

Fall leaves in the sky
swishing, swishing, swishing by.
Over and over until they die.
Fall leaves in the sky!



The Friendship Bridge

Come walk with me,
Talk with me,
Travel across
The friendship bridge.

There we will meet,
And throw stones down below,
See our reflections at
The friendship bridge.

In the spring the water
Will quickly pass.
Bringing flowers on the way to
The friendship bridge.

In the summer the water
Will be warm to touch.
The trees will give shade at
The friendship bridge.

Emily Hargraves

Grade 4

*Nathan Hale Elementary School
Enfield*

Mary Elizabeth Fulco

Grade 4

*Putnam Elementary School
Putnam*

The autumn brings changes.
Leaves colorful and bright.
Floating like feathers beneath
The friendship bridge.

The winter brings whiteness.
Glistening crystals of ice.
Hanging off trees near
The friendship bridge.

Come walk with me.
Talk with me.
Cross over to
The friendship bridge.



Aidan Evenski
Grade 5
Mystic Middle School
Stonington

The Blue House: Super Structure and Hurricane Gloria

Up until the time I was five, I lived in a small blue house on Greenmanville Avenue. The house had a dirt basement and an attic which had a pull-down trap door stairway. Greenmanville Avenue was a busy street, the kind where little children have to be careful. I liked to watch that street with all the cars going down. Even more interesting was the Mystic River which was across the road. It had all sorts of neat things: boats, waves, and people.

In back of the house there was an enormous pine tree and a smaller maple. All around them there were gardens. The yard, however, was tiny. To make up for that, my father built us a wonderful swing set which we called the Super Structure. It was one of the best things that has ever happened to me. It had rings, swings, monkey bars, and a see-saw. A bridge of tires led to a low platform. From there you could go up to another, higher, platform. To my sister and me, who were very little, the second platform seemed miles tall. We played there for hours on end. We could be birds or pirates or princesses up on the high platform. It was wonderful!

I remember once when Hurricane Gloria came to the Connecticut shores. The big tree in our neighbor's yard fell down. This tree was huge. So huge, in fact, that they had to cut a tunnel through it to let traffic through. I went up in the attic and got "rocked" to sleep by the winds that shook our house. Our cousins came from Mason's Island (probably my grandmother came, too), and we feasted on McDonalds' French fries by candlelight. After dinner Sarah (my little sister) and I

climbed in the box our new TV had come in and pretended we were at sea in the storm. The box ended up doing summersaults.

I really liked the blue house and the years we spent there. From the gardens to the musty basement to the white-capped river to the tiny dogwood tree which never grew, that house was my house for six years. I loved it.

And still there on Greenmanville Avenue in plain view of the road a little blue house stands with wisteria growing on the porch, a playground in the back, and a stump of a great tree next door across from the pretty Mystic River. When I pass, I look for it because it holds many memories.



Silence

Dedicated to all the deaf children & adults everywhere

An ordinary man, in a silent school,
Walking down an empty hallway,
His shiny black dress shoes
Tapping, tapping down the hallway,
Tap, tap, tap, echoing in the corridor,
This ordinary man,
Wearing an old-fashioned blue suit,
A starched white shirt,
& a red & white polka-dot bow tie,
Tapping, tapping,
This ordinary teacher about to do an
Extraordinary thing.

Silence,
A classroom full of silent children,
Only the humming of cars outside,
The teacher enters,
He is to teach how to talk without words,
More silence.

The teacher begins,
Hands move rapidly,
The kids start to understand,
Their faces light up like stars
& the moon lighting up at night.

Janessa Wolf

Grade 5

*Ridgebury Elementary School
Ridgefield*

Silence,
 An empty classroom except for the teacher,
 Tap, tap, tap
 Go his shoes as he walks to the door,
 Darkness,
 Light from the hall pouring into the room,
 Creating dozens of shadows,
 Tapping, tapping along the hallway to his car
 Is the teacher.

Day after day,
 Month after month,
 Year after year,
 Child after child,
 The teacher has taught a great gift,
 The gift of communication,
 Now his silent students
 Can become ordinary people.



Marissa Hughes
Grade 5
Holland Hill Elementary School
Fairfield

The Park

I am sitting on a swing watching the lazy sun seep down behind the dark city.
 I'm all bundled up feeling nice and cozy. It's lonely, yet peaceful in the old park. I
 can feel Jack Frost just waiting for the right time to nip at my face. The trees are bare
 and the ground is covered with leaves like a woven quilt.

The silence of the park made it seem like something magical was going to
 happen as a flock of birds landed on the ground pecking at the moist grass. Suddenly
 they all flew up towards the sky. I watched them as they faded into the sunset.



Ellyn Fishkin
Grade 5
R.D. Seymour School
East Granby

Winter Lights

Winter wonderland
 Snowflakes falling like six-sided stars
 Spectrum of lights glistening from the sun.



The Perfect Earth

Water is fresh and clean
Ozone is not being destroyed
Rainforests are growing
Land is only developed when necessary
Dreams are always good and they can come true.

Peace is at hand
Everyone is healthy
Air is clean
Children everywhere have enough to eat
Everyone cares about one another.



My New Little Sister

I heard the door slam shut downstairs. "Maybe it's my newborn sister and my mom," I thought.

"Melissa, come and see your sister," Mom called.

It was December 1st, 1989; I was eight years old. I walked downstairs and ran to see my sister. "She's beautiful," I said, "I love her red hair and her pretty blue eyes."

She was wrapped in a small blanket with bunnies on it.

"She's so small," I said to my mom.

All of a sudden my grandmother, my nana, my papa, all my aunts and uncles and cousins barged through the door. I tried to say, "Hi!" but no one would listen.

I thought, "Maybe they didn't hear me!" I said "Hi!" even louder, but no one heard me. They were only interested in my new little sister.

I went to my room. I felt sad. Why wasn't anyone paying any attention to me? I was just as important as she was!

An hour passed quickly, then another. No one had come to talk to me. No one even noticed that I was missing. After awhile I went into the kitchen to get something to eat.

"Where have you been!" my nana asked me.

"In my room," I said.

"Why were you in your room?" Nana asked again.

"Because no one pays any attention to me because of her," I said as I pointed to my little sister. "None of you like me any more!"

"But of course we like you," Nana said.

"Where did you get an idea like that?" my mom asked.

Aaron Epstein

Grade 5

*Columbus Magnet School
East Norwalk*

Melissa McLellan

Grade 6

*Hall Memorial School
Willington*

"You didn't pay attention to me; you didn't even notice I wasn't out here. You only think about Krystal!" I exclaimed.

I grabbed my sandwich and ran into my room.

"Melissa come out, meet your sister," Mom said.

I hesitated, but I went out anyway. She put out her arms like she wanted to hug me.

I outstretched my arms, took my sister, and hugged her.

After I let go my sister made her first clap and her first laugh. That made me feel like I was someone special to my sister. And I guess I am.



Joel Wolpert
Grade 6
Latimer Lane School
Weatogue

Guardian in the Sky

His knife at his side
His bow in hand
Quiver at his back
Fending off invaders
Watching over the land

Standing tall
In the Crimson sky
Splattered with stars
Disguised
Stars shooting by him

Moon goes black
Midnight
Lunar Eclipse
He's left in the dark
Moon comes back

Snow covered ground
Mystical glow
Sky turns Purple
Cloudless
Chilling

The "Wars of the Night"
Have subsided
Now he can rest

ORION



Ice Prospector

Going out to check the puddles,
In search of an ice-hunter's dream,
Poking water with a knowing toe,
Looking for an icy sheen.

Going out to check the puddles,
Every morning since early fall,
In search of feathery glass
And frozen mirrors and crystal balls.

Going out to check the puddles,
Past fallen red leaves and Halloween,
I skid and fall with a shocking crunch,
A fall to wealth, to riches unseen.
I've finally found my prospector's dream.



Tender Feelings

The significant odor of mothballs wafts from the aged, musty suitcase covered with cobwebs. Hesitantly, the elderly man surveys his new surroundings. Apathetically, he notices a large brass bed and some old mahogany furniture. One thing that specifically catches his eye is an exquisite desk made of bird's-eye maple. It is just like the one in the house he used to live in with his wife out in the beautiful countryside. Turning speculatively, he reaches inside the deteriorated bag and pulls, slowly and gingerly, with what seems like brittle hands, a fragile picture from a worn out velvet casing. Gradually he makes his way over to the lovely desk and carefully sets the precious photograph on it. As he looks at the image of his adoring wife and himself, treasured memories come floating back to him and he remembers the place where they first met. They both knew they would always love each other and that they would have to stick together or their lives would not be complete.

He sees it as if it were in front of him. The large maple tree, the hill full of all its beautiful flowers surrounding them, and her, as young and beautiful as a radiant star glowing luminescently in the moon's brilliant light.

He also remembers himself. Nervous and shaking like a leaf, fingering the precious ring that would mean so much to him. He had worked at two jobs, day and night, for many months. If she didn't accept it, his life would crumble, for his life would mean nothing without her with him.

Elizabeth Archibald
Grade 6
R.D. Seymour School
East Granby

Katharine Perry
Grade 6
Canton Intermediate School
Canton

As he reflects on these important memories, he remembers something and gets the family album. There he finds a certain page and takes out a small flower that his wife had pressed for him a long time ago. As he holds it in his hands, it crumbles to his touch and the man can't help thinking how much he is like the flower.

Quickly he glances into the cracked mirror above the desk and sees a useless man of seventy-five with wrinkled skin and balding hair. It is an immense contrast to the twenty-six-year-old, young and agile. When he married his twenty-three-year-old wife, he was so handsome with his blonde hair. She was ravishing with blue eyes like pools of water reflecting the moonlight.

As he stands reminiscing about past times, a series of loud sounds brings him out of his mesmerized state, and, startled, he wonders what it is. It is only his son's family getting ready for dinner. Living here will be hard for him and even he knows that his worth is not appreciated by his son or his family anymore. He and his son had fallen apart long ago because of the girl his son married.

With a deep sigh, he slowly puts the old picture into its secure enclosure. With some strength, he holds back his heartfelt emotions and makes his way down the rickety staircase to supper.



Emily Johnson
Grade 7
Central Middle School
Greenwich

Under the Weeping Willow

Under the Weeping Willow on the dying fall grass.
I hear my name called by the wind in the trees.
Closing my eyes, I listen.
Plunk and Babble in the relentless, smiling creek.
The symphony of birds and the drone of late mosquitoes.
Under the Weeping Willow, her leaves caress my cheek.
Wind plays with Pond, rippling and tickling her face.
Under the Weeping Willow, a dauntless frog draws near.
Chipmunks scurry in and out, living in eternal worry.
Under the Weeping Willow, into the evening I wait.
Geese and ducks cry as they take to the sky,
Leaving the Pond for the night.
Under the Weeping Willow, Sun sinks low.
Below the skies and into the trees.
Trailing his burning robe behind him.
I know I must go, but the woods tell me not.
I can feel the powerful beauty of Nature, my Mother.
Under the Weeping Willow.



A Day to Remember

Amanda Starkel
Grade 7
Granby Memorial Middle School
Granby

One day when I was about ten years old, I went skating with one of my close friends, Sandy Kevet.

Sandy came over to my house one day and said to me, "Hi Amanda, are you busy?"

"No," I replied.

"Then do you want to go to the pond to ice skate?" Sandy whispered.

"Sure."

As we walked over to the pond Sandy asked, "Amanda, have you finished your report for social studies?"

"No," I replied. "Have you?"

"Nah, I still have a lot left to do. Maybe after we finish ice skating, we could work on them together."

"Yeah, we could work at my house. That would be great," I told Sandy.

When Sandy and I arrived, we sat down and laced our skates up. Since Sandy went skating more often than I did, she was much quicker at this procedure. She finished and got up and went out on the pond. "Hurry up," I heard Sandy call to me.

"I'll be right there," I called back.

About five minutes later, I finished lacing my skates; and when I looked up, Sandy was gone.

Then I remembered one other time when I had been skating with Sandy. She made fun of me because I was so slow, and then she ran away, pretending she had left.

I decided to go out on the ice and make like I didn't care.

When I was out on the ice about thirty feet, I saw a big hole ahead of me. It looked as though someone had fallen through. Thoughts of panic ran through my head.

I skated over, looked inside, and saw a light shade of color, the same color as Sandy's jacket. And then I realized that this was no joke. Sandy had fallen through the ice. I was so scared I had no idea what to do. All of a sudden chills were running down my back.

I went closer to the hole and looked inside wondering why Sandy was not coming up. "Sandy, can you hear me!" I screamed. I didn't want to try to get her out myself because there was a chance that both of us might get stuck, so I ran as fast as I could to the nearest house for help.

Frantically, I rang their doorbell and said to them, "You must call the police. My friend has fallen in the pond; she's going to die!"

Soon I knew that if I waited for the police it would be too late. I had to try myself, even if it took my life.

I ran back to the pond and skated out to the hole. Reaching in, I looked for Sandy's arm. Tears were streaming down my face.

"Why can't I find her?" I shouted.

Then I heard sirens coming. The paramedics came running out on the ice. I ran away not wanting to see the sight of my best friend dying.

The next thing I remember is seeing the ambulance fly down the road. To this day, I still remember the flashing lights and siren.

Later that day, Sandy's parents called me and asked me to come over. When I got there, Sandy's mom said to me, "Amanda, we know you tried hard to save Sandy; don't blame yourself."

"Sandy's clothes and skates weighed so much that they pulled her down," Mr. Kevet said with tears in his eyes.

"We will never forget your special friendship with Sandy," Sandy's mother whispered.

"I won't either."

I left their house without saying any more.

Sandy died all because I couldn't save her. And I would feel guilty all my life.



Alison Hollister
Grade 7
Hall Memorial School
Willington

My Dream

I sat curled up on my bed with my nose pressed against the cold glass of our apartment window. No matter how tightly my foster mother, Mrs. Bezil, tried to shut it, the noise, a string of city sounds, still floated in. I didn't mind; these sounds are always the same, no matter where or how frequently you move in the city.

Being a foster child isn't easy. The longest I stayed in one place was for two years. Anyway, I saw this beautiful woman across the street at a busy market. She looked about thirty years old. She was tall, maybe five feet, six inches. She had red hair with spiral curls that cascaded lightly over her face. Her green eyes contrasted with her red hair and light, peachy complexion. Her high cheek bones and slender frame made her look very elegant. There was something about the way she acted that made her stand out amongst the crowd. I think it was the fact that she didn't rush around like the rest of the people. She walked slowly and patiently from place to place. She was dressed perfectly in a green skirt and jacket. Her high heels were the same exact color as her outfit and her eyes. I had always imagined my real mother as being that way. So perfect, so elegant.

Somewhere deep down, I knew that my mother couldn't be that perfect. My mother had made one large mistake, abandoning me. When the woman had paid and was heading towards her car, I whispered, "Mom?"

She turned and stared straight at my window and into my eyes as if to say, "Goodbye Candy."



Dad

Dad is a beaver
hard working,
busy,
smart.

Dad is summer
relaxing,
warm,
sunny.

Dad is a lake
calm,
occasionally strong,
a provider.

Dad is a sweater
warm,
comfortable,
handsome.

Dad is a car
reliable,
made to last,
classy.

Dad is a book
informing,
enjoyable,
entertaining.

Dad is a diamond
hard,
priceless,
fancy.

Dad is a Greek god
superior,
healing,
respected.

Adam Augustyn
Grade 7
Cornwall Consolidated
West Cornwall



Franca's Halloween

"Oh, no!" exclaimed my mother as she pulled into our driveway. "I forgot to buy Halloween candy!"

Elizabeth Olear
Grade 8
J.A. DePaolo Junior High School
Southington

She backed out of our driveway and headed toward the grocery store.

"What about Franca?" I asked, "You told her we'd be back before dark."

Franca is my mother's cousin who arrived last week from Avigliana in Italy. This is her first visit to America. She speaks Italian and a few words of English.

Franca is a small, plump woman in her mid-thirties. She has blue eyes and long golden brown hair that she almost always wears in a braid. She usually wears a smock covering a blue or black dress.

Franca is very shy when it comes to the general public. Inside the walls of our safe house she is a vivacious, peppy person, but whenever we go out, she becomes very quiet. She speaks very softly in Italian, in short, quick sentences. She loves to bake Italian cakes and cakes with long recipes. Whenever we have company she helps my mother serve the pastries she has made, but then quietly vanishes until they leave. Franca is very self-conscious and also embarrassed about speaking Italian.

My mother is the only one who really communicates with Franca. Mom learned Italian from her parents. When my mother and Franca are talking, their discussions can get pretty exciting. Franca talks with her hands; sometimes she even uses props. Once she threw garlic across the kitchen because my mother refused to buy her a pig.

"Did you explain about Halloween?" I inquired.

"No," my mother answered, with a worried expression on her face, "I was going to this morning, but we were late and things were so hectic. Oh well, I don't think she'll answer the doorbell."

Unfortunately, we had to go to two grocery stores, a CVS, and finally to K-Mart to find enough Halloween candy this late in the afternoon on Halloween.

We hurried home to find several small children in costumes, fleeing from our house crying. My mother jumped out of the car calling all of the children back. She thought they were upset about not receiving any candy. They quieted down after they got their treats, but still looked fearfully at our house.

We went inside to see Franca banging bowls around. Two small bowls were sitting on the kitchen table, half filled with a wide assortment of candy. Franca's big blue eyes were wide open and she was speaking very quickly in Italian to my mother. It took five minutes to explain the whole story to my mother and the only words I recognized were "ding-dong" and "knock-knock."

"Mom! Mom! What happened?"

"She said the doorbell rang several times and finally she decided to answer it. Little children that were elaborately dressed were saying things she couldn't understand and then handing her bags of candy. She said she was very polite and only took one piece from each child."

When my mother finished, I started to laugh and before long my mother began to laugh. Even Franca started laughing, although she didn't know what we thought was funny.

The Halloween candy only lasted in our house for a week, but the fond memories we have from that Halloween will last a lifetime.

Dad

I never knew you
as a
child
your name,
shunned.

You left, when I
was young.
I never saw you,
not really.

Stories,
I heard daily
of the
evil
things you'd done.

Confusion,
I'd never met you,
yet
my hate for you
was strong.

I changed my
last name, to
spite you.

It worked.

For eleven years,
no contact.
Not even an occasional
birthday card.
Nothing.

Until that day, you
called.
I was speechless.
how was I
to address you?

Elyse Cahill
Grade 8
Saxe Middle School
New Canaan

"Dad"
"Mister"
"Father"
"? ? ?"

I chose not to
address you
at all.

You wanted to
come and visit,
see me.

Confusion,
this stranger,
my father,
wanting
to visit me.

You came, different
than I expected.
Not evil,
funny,
charming,
sweet, but
a little strange.

We talked
for hours
about everything,
and yet
nothing.

I was still
unsure
how to address you.
So, I didn't.

Your visits,
frequent.
your calls,
daily.
cards,
On all appropriate holidays.

Your name is now said
openly.
Mom and you talk
often,
She says,
you're a good man.

Confusion
am I now to love,
this man I once
despised?

I thought about you,
realized
you care for me
love me,
even.

Yesterday,
you called,
we talked,
you said,
"I love you"

Confusion
I just wrote you
a card,
addressed it
"Dad"
ended it
"With love,
your daughter."

Family Tree

The scientists tell us we're descended from apes
That came from earlier mammals
Who evolved from dinosaurs
That came from lizards
Who came from frogs

Elizabeth Wall
Grade 8
Canton Junior Senior High
School
Collinsville

That once were fish
Who came from tiny sea life
That started with just a few cells
Made of organic dust
That came from the earth
Which is made of compressed gas
from stars

Some people say,
"No! That's not religious! Not right!"

But I say, "I'm proud to be the daughter of stars."



Alexis Kendall
Grade 8
Eastern Middle School
Riverside

No More Mistakes

Your ignorance had forced you to look at the sky and assume the day would be beautiful. That was the first and biggest mistake. But it wasn't all your fault. It's the sun's job to make it look beautiful, and it's pretty good at it. Today the sun was in full bloom, highlighting the azure sky with glamour. There was only one cloud: a small, fluffy, innocent, "could do no harm" cloud. Of course you took the kids on a picnic. That was the second mistake, and as for the third, well, it wasn't exactly the smartest idea to pick a spot a mile away from the car. But you were ignorant, so none of this had occurred to you. You set up the lunch and made everything look so cute; with little peanut butter sandwiches cut into triangles and tiny squares of fruit punctured with toothpicks. That was when the cold wind flew past you, warning all of the coming storm. That was when the sun leapt behind the tiny, frightened, cloud, who, once lonely, was now accompanied by several other clouds, filling the once perfect sky: the sky that in three seconds had gone dark as if turned off by a light switch.

You fumbled in the dim light to gather the food and shove it in the bag. Then you grabbed the kids and tested how far you could go before the rain started. Two steps were less than you had expected. A sharp light flashed, and you froze. At that instant you realized where you actually were: standing in a soaked field in the middle of a lightning storm. You told yourself, "No more mistakes," as you dropped the bag and picked up your two kids. You had always been a good runner, but with a kid under each arm, it wasn't as easy.

The thunder crackled in the sky trying to compete with the slapping of the rain. You felt the pain in your eyes as you searched endlessly for the car. At last you saw it, bright against the dull sky. You put down your oldest and fumbled for the keys. Your hand was shaking so much, you could barely open the door. The kids scrambled in and shut the door quickly, as if not wanting anything else to get in. You slowly

pulled onto the road, then started to breathe. The long trip home seemed miniscule compared to the race to the car. By the time you got home, you were dry and your kids asleep. After you had silently taken them to bed, your wife cheerfully greeted you apparently unaware of the present storm.

"How was it?" She asked, eager for a response.

"Fine," you said blankly. "What's for dinner?"



The Quest

The sun beat down on our tired, weary shoulders. I looked toward the sky for something, anything that would tell us if we were close, close to the one thing we had sought for so long. I raised my eyes to the heavens and expected to see a ray of golden light emanating to the place of divinity. Instead I saw nothing but the stolid face of pale blue and the mocking laughter of the clouds. Tamerac Lake was nowhere in sight and neither was the golden trout.

It had all started a few nights before. I had been camping in the Sierra Nevada mountain chain in California for five days with my relatives when my cousin Butch, asked, "Who's coming with me on Wednesday? I'm hiking up to Tamerac."

"What's Tamerac?" I asked.

He got a faraway look in his eyes. "It's a lake five miles up in the mountains, 10,000 feet above sea level. It's the only place where a golden trout could be. I've been searching for a golden trout ever since I held my first fishing pole forty years ago." There was a long silence and Butch's eyes grew dim. You could almost see the nostalgia building in his half smile.

"Have you ever seen one?" I asked.

"What?"

"A golden trout, have you ever seen one?"

"No. But I know they're out there. They've got to be." It sounded like the quest for the Holy Grail. Suddenly I thought I saw a crown of gold rest upon Butch's head and felt a plate of armor around my body and a broadsword at my side. I had never really known Butch, and I wanted to get to know him better. I could tell that he really wanted a golden trout. So I decided to take him up on his offer, even if I had no proof that what we were going after was a reality. I had to believe him; I had to follow him to the ends of the Earth. After all, he was my ride home.

During the night we tried to recruit from our neighboring campsite at least two other knights to join us on our quest. But no one wanted to go. "It's too long of a hike," or, "You're just chasing shadows," were the main excuses. Even the toughest of the tough weren't up to it, "Golden trout are just a myth," they said. Butch and I prepared for our trip somewhat disappointed that no knight was interested in our

Michael Ragozzino

Grade 9

Trumbull High School

Trumbull

quest. We were up before the sun peeked his head over the distant mountains. We gathered our gear, and, feeling a little like Lancelot following King Arthur, I followed Butch to the path which, we hoped, would eventually lead us to his Holy Grail, a golden trout.

Not fifty feet up we put down our gear and had our first break. We were tired, and the path seemed to go straight up. My armor was heavy; hope was fading. We continued to take a break every seventy-five feet to catch our breath because the air was thin and the climb was difficult. My feet were sore, and my lungs ached. The once lively conversation had dwindled to a couple of grunts and groans. I was starting to get dizzy and the path seemed to go on forever. But just as I thought about turning around and going home, we saw a ridge on the mountain where it looked like the lake was. We scrambled toward it. "We made it! We made it, Butch!" I yelled to him, "We're here!"

The king ran up the narrow path with his knight right behind. "We made it, I can't believe it!" the king replied. But when we got to the top and peered over the ridge, all that we could see was a sloping field. Our hearts sank. I had spoken too soon.

We continued on, disappointed, but more determined than ever to prove everyone wrong. Conversation was lively again, and I was enjoying myself when we came to a fork in the path. We made a terrible mistake: we took a wrong turn and ended up in a dark, dank forest. Butch and I tried to determine which way to go, but it seemed hopeless. Had we come this far, just to take the wrong trail? Our dreams seemed distant and out of reach. I took another glance at Butch and he looked more like an average guy searching for his dreams than a king on a great quest. I had to think of something, anything. I got the map out of his pack but it was hard to read. Finally I just made a guess. "If we keep going on this path," I told Butch, "I think we'll run into the old trail and be back on course."

He just smiled, but I still remember his look of triumph when we finally made our way over a river, out of the woods, and onto our original path. I had been right, and he seemed proud that such a knight had chosen to go with him.

We were content for a while, and we talked about football and fishing. But then, as time grew on, we grew weary. My feet were throbbing with pain and were covered with patches of blisters and scabs. I don't think there was anyone in the state—or kingdom, for that matter—who couldn't hear Butch and me breathe. The air was thin and so were our lungs. We had already drunk all of our water, and our throats felt full of sand. There was one thing I couldn't protect my king from—fatigue. My armor had faded, and the only thing that could polish it was the thought of holding a golden trout. The trail was steep and our legs were weary and dead with exhaustion, yet we continued. We had been walking for hours; and, in a last effort, Butch and I climbed over a ridge and saw nothing but dry land. I nearly collapsed.

"Well, Michael," he managed to say between gasps, "I guess we'll have to go a little farther. We're not beaten yet."

I nodded my head and just grunted. I looked to the forest that we had to go into. I

tried to speak, but it was a hoarse whisper, "Yeah, Butch, it'll be a great story when we get home with a golden trout." My words were hollow, yet he still smiled a half smile. We had to beat that mountain—my king had to reach the castle. Two hours later, after all the paths and trees and rocks, after all the stumbling and coughing and encouraging words, I felt like I was going to die. I could see it on my king's face too. We were almost beaten. Had I let my king down? Did I deserve to be with him? But just then we saw an opening below us. We raced toward it and gazed at the waters of Lake Tamerac rippling under the cool breeze of the Sierra Nevadas. We had made it. We had made it to the Holy Land. All of the fatigue and pain was gone.

"I knew it was up here somewhere, Mike," Arthur beamed.

"Somehow, so did I." Mike and Butch had reached The Lake, but Arthur and Lancelot had reached the castle of the Holy Grail. It was time to try for the impossible, to try for a golden trout.

We fished for hours but our hooks were empty, except for the water-logged bait that rested, limp, on the end. I looked up to the skies and wondered. I wondered if the whole trip was worth nothing. I wondered if the king would ever fulfill his lifelong ambition. I wondered if we had brought all our hope only to have it drowned at the bottom of an empty lake. But I knew what had happened—why we had been sent on our holy quest: not for the trout, but for something much greater.

We fished and fished that day and never found a golden trout, but we did find something. Each other.



A Winter Story

The last rays of sunlight streamed through the sitting room window of the white wooden house upon the hill. It was a cold, crisp evening, and snow blanketed the sleeping ground. The stately old house blended in well with its icy surroundings.

Inside small children ran to and fro playing hide-and-seek. Fires burned in every fireplace in honor of the family gathering at Aunt Gertie's. Women sat in the elegant parlor drinking cups of tea. The men sat in armchairs smoking pipes and laughing.

It was getting late, and the children had become tired. Presently they found their way to the quiet sitting room where they discovered Great-grandmother Sugar sitting alone in her rocking chair. Her wrinkled hands lay in her lap as she gazed out at the setting sun. The tired children collapsed on the braided rug. "Great-grandmother Sugar, tell us a story!"

Grandmother smiled fondly at the children. "So you wish a story, do you, Little Ones?" The children looked up at Grandmother expectantly, smothering yawns.

"Long, long ago there lived a very ancient woman who had become blind many years before. She lived with her grandchildren and great-grandchildren who loved and respected her very much. They called her 'The Old One.'"

Amie Giordano

Grade 9

*J.A. DePaolo Junior High School
Southington*

"People in that village made a living by fur trapping. Every January all the men and older boys set out on their yearly journey. They would travel all over the land, trapping animals and selling furs. In December they returned to the village bringing supplies.

"The Old One became strongly attached to a great-grandchild, a young boy named Alexander. She loved Alexander dearly, and grieved when it came time for him to make the yearly journey. She would miss Alexander and the tiny lute he played. He had carved it out of wood himself, and its music was truly beautiful. When The Old One listened to it, her face lighted up with joy; and she was perfectly happy.

"When Alexander left in January, she fell into a deep depression and would eat nothing for days. Gradually she would get back in touch with reality, and then she would start waiting for the return. When it came she again reveled in ecstasy, caught up in the joy of his captivating music.

"One year, on the day before Alexander's departure, she told Alexander, 'It is my time, Alexander. I feel it. You will return next year and play for me. The year after that you will find me gone when you return.'

"Alexander left, and she waited quietly for his return, getting weaker and weaker. One day they came, heavy boots trudging over the snow. They kissed her, one by one, but she became impatient and kept demanding, 'Where is Alexander with his music for me?' They were reluctant to answer.

"Finally an old man laid a rough hand on her shoulder. 'Mother, Alexander died last February of the fever.' Her face drained of color and her cracked lips opened, but no sound came out.

"After a time she spoke tremblingly, 'I must hear the music again before I am gone.' She shut her eyes and spoke no more. The people tried to console her, but it was no use.

"Through this awful time no one noticed Alexander's sister. She remembered watching her brother carve the little lute as a young boy. She chose a piece of wood and carved diligently for days. One day The Old One was so weak that the people doubted she would make it through the night. Alexander's sister knew it was time. Villagers heard the music and ran from their houses to listen. Her tone was shaky and some notes sour, but everyone recognized Alexander's music! Light spread over The Old One's face, as it had when Alexander played. When the girl was too tired to continue, the breathless people noticed The Old One shut her eyes and lean against the chair. Now she could die in peace.

"So Little Ones, you liked that story?" Grandmother Sugar asked. But the children had all fallen asleep. Without warning, a woman flung open the door.

"Oh, there you are, children! Why it's late, and time to go! Good night, Great-grandmother Sugar." One by one the children were collected and Grandmother was left alone again. She looked into the dying fire. She slowly unfolded her hands and gazed fondly at the object illumined by the flickering firelight: a tiny wooden lute.

Winter's Day

You see the trees swaying in the wind
As if to say, "Don't. Go Away."
But you heed not what they say
And go anyway
Up that dark, deep path
To the one place you know
To what seems to be the stars above.
You think you're on top of the world
Sitting on that cold, rough rock.
You see reality in a fog passing below.
It is luring you
To go down where the people are,
But still you long to stay with the tree.
Finally you say,
"I'm sorry I have to go but I'll come back;
You'll see."
And the trees sway
As if to say,
"Don't go away."



Alone in a Crowd

The telephone rang at about nine o'clock. My best friend, Alison, was calling to ask me to go to the mall with a bunch of kids. I really didn't feel like doing anything but disappearing, but I sighed and said I would go. I called to my mom that I would be going out, then went out to sit on the porch and wait for Alison and her mother to come pick me up. I couldn't get myself to look forward to the day that much, though. Ever since my parents had separated and my dad had moved in with another woman, I had been feeling unshakable, depressed and lonely.

Alison's mother pulled up in front of my house, and I climbed into her car. I was greeted with various yells from some of my friends, but I didn't feel like answering. I was surrounded with people my own age, but I felt completely isolated and alone.

When we arrived at the mall, we wandered together into a clothes store and began poking through the racks. I couldn't find anything I liked.

"Laura," asked Alison, "what do you think of this shirt?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. It looks good, I guess."

Alison looked hurt. "You don't like it, do you?"

Russell Turner
Grade 9
East Lyme High School
East Lyme

Elizabeth Lobsenz
Grade 9
Bedford Middle School
Westport

I tried to smile and wished that I could crawl back into bed. "No, it looks fine," I told her.

"Hey, are you all right? You've been acting kind of quiet today," she said.

I shrugged. I really didn't think that I could tell anyone how lonely I felt, probably because I couldn't figure out the real reason for the way I was feeling. I realized that my friends were drifting out of the store, so I followed them. We went from store to store and my friends talked to me, but I felt completely separated from everyone around me. I couldn't understand how I could feel so lonely in the middle of a group of friends.

We went to a restaurant for lunch and I held a table while everyone ordered. A friend of mine, Jenny, ordered for herself and for me. Then she wandered over to the table.

"What's the matter?" she asked me.

"Nothing," I mumbled. I wished that everyone would leave me alone, but I also wanted someone to keep me from feeling so alone.

Jenny shrugged. "Well, you look really out of it today," she commented, walking back to the line. I knew that she wouldn't be able to help me. We ate lunch and I tried to join in the conversation. But I felt so cut off that I could have been eating with strangers.

Two hours later we were all waiting for Alison's mother in front of the mall. I hung outside of my friends' crowd, feeling miserable. Alison noticed me and came over to talk to me.

"Listen, Laura, what's the matter? You haven't said anything all day, and you look really sad. Is there anything I can do?"

I shrugged. "I'm okay," I muttered. Suddenly, tears began to well up in my eyes.

"Why don't you come sleep over at my house tonight so we can talk?"

I nodded and managed a wavery smile. I started to feel a little bit better at the thought of talking to someone and getting away from my mother.

Just then Alison's mom came to pick us up and we all piled into the car. Alison leaned forward and whispered something to her mother. Her mom nodded and glanced at me in the rearview mirror. After we had dropped everyone off at their houses, we got to Alison's house and headed up to her room. We flopped down in two beanbag chairs.

"So what's up?" Alison asked. She paused a second, then said hesitantly, "Does this have anything to do with your dad moving out?"

"I guess it does, in a way," I answered. "I don't really think I could explain the way I feel to anyone. No one I know is going through the same thing."

Laura looked thoughtful. "That must be a really lonely feeling," she said.

"Yes," I nodded, "it sure is."



Diner

Days with glaring light that made her
 hands shake
 and her eyes water
fade slowly,
like the remnants of a pastel dream.
Surrounded by intruding voices and vacant smiles,
she finds courage to look from under heavy lids
 to detached glances.
Her hands find the icy counter top and
 tap
 tap
lightly.
 Nodding, a man sits beside her.
His smile is late winter snow,
 gleaming white
 tarnished by trying, grey days.
She feels her face grow warm
and then warmer,
 and she remembers suddenly
 the need to smile.
Try as she might,
 her face is stone
 and falling; she stares into her coffee.
Feeling her heart beat inside her,
 softly
and surely
 like a lost drummer boy,
 she dares to wonder
if the coffee she drinks
 will ever get any warmer,
if the music
 will ever sing,
 and if the sunlight that waits
patiently beyond the window
 will ever find
 her face.

Liz Garcia
Grade 10
Ridgefield High School
Ridgefield



Keech Combe
Grade 10
Greenwich Academy
Greenwich

Untitled

Trust me,
I'll catch you,
I'll be there,
I'll throw you up in the air,
Let you fly like a bird,
Soar through the clouds,
Slide your fingertips across the heavens,
Flap your wings
You'll stay up,
Trust me,
Glide,
Glide,
Glide,
Fly down to my hands one day,
Let me hold you,
The way I held fast to you,
For seven years,
Then seized for seven more.
I'll give you refuge,
Rock you,
In the cradle of eternal innocence,
Embrace you,
Healing the wounds of pain by the touch of my lips,
When the scabs heal,
When the tears no longer run down your cheeks,
I will toss you up in the air,
Trust me,
Beat your wings,
Glide,
Glide,
Glide,
Into the darkness,
Cruelness,
Heartlessness,
As you fly away look over your shoulder,
In the distance you will see a lone figure,
My hands raised towards the sky,
Waiting for your next sojourn,
Waiting to catch you once
more. . . my little girl.

Crossroads

On the bus carrying Bloomfield teens
going to Bloomfield High School,
the regular takes place.
Shuron and his gang
begin ranking on the new boy
(I'm not quite sure what his name is yet).
Nadia gets on the bus happily,
as if there is anything to be happy about.
On a cold Tuesday morning.
She sits in front of me and
begins telling me a story about her favorite T.V. show
(she has one for every night).
Our conversation is interrupted soon
as some students rush over
to the other side of the bus.
On the bus carrying Bloomfield teens
going to Northwest Catholic High School,
the regular takes place.
The "private schoolers"
peer into our bus
as if we're specimens under a microscope.
(And we do the same.)
Today, though, I decide to take a look.
I wipe the fog off the window
and look into the adjacent bus.
I see a couple of people
but one girl catches my eye.
I catch hers at the same time.
She smiles and I wave,
I press my hand to the window
and stare at her unintentionally.
The October morning cold
that touched the window
soon penetrates my pink fuzzy gloved hand.
I wince and pull my hand away. Our bus takes a left,
while theirs goes straight ahead.
For a moment I think,
it shouldn't end this way.
But Wednesday will come
and I'll see another girl who might be wanting to
turn in her grey plaid skirt
for a pair of my jeans,
while I dream of being in her penny loafers.

Uchenna Richards
Grade 10
Bloomfield High School
Bloomfield

Katie Tolliver
Grade 11
Wilton High School
Wilton

China Breaks Easily

Many of the pictures in my house are of my brother Andy and me as young playmates, happily hugging and holding hands. One picture in particular is of us in a sandpile, our arms in a tight embrace, smiling at the camera. There is a definite resemblance between us, a common bond only siblings can possess. He was always there for me, helping me when I fell, or protecting me from the enormous world that we were so sheltered from. The two year age difference between us was not evident because I was much taller than he was. The third grade did me no justice and I longed to be with Andy's "older" crowd. I admired him with all the fervor of a musical fan, almost obsessed with his grace and talent. This came to an end the day I realized my brother was a mortal.

I remember it clearly. It was an evening in the spring of 1985. That day, Andy had caught a huge bass, proudly throwing it on the counter so Mom could have the honor of pulling the long, slimy strands of guts and mucous from its scaly body. Fortunately, it did not taste as bad as it looked, especially with the butter sauce Mom cooked it in. The rest of the night was eventless: an hour of TV, a bedtime story, and a goodnight kiss. My sleeping rituals were as strange then as they are today. As usual, I started on my right side, stretching my legs as far as they would go, and concentrated on sleeping. It was around two o'clock when I awoke again. This brief interlude was once again part of my ritual, allowing me to turn onto my left side. In mid-turn, I heard a strange, obnoxious sound coming from Andy's room. I threw the pillow over my head knowing that each of Andy's snores would progressively get longer and louder. After a few minutes of trying to keep out the nuisance, I was about to scream at him to stop, when his light went on, painting the slim shadow of my mother on the door. A ray of yellow brightness cut into the darkness of the hallway, poking and prodding at my unadjusted eyes.

I slowly stumbled out of bed, my head dizzy with sleep, and went to his doorway. What I saw horrified me and was sculpted into my brain forever; my father was holding Andy's limp, puppet-like body in his gigantic arms. His small body was motionless; a white sheet of paleness covered his sullen face and his hands were clenched in tight, menacing fists. I remember how gray my father's eyes were as he looked up at me standing in the hallway. A tear from his cheek fell onto Andy's sunken chest, darkening the crimson pajama top, almost sizzling into the cloth.

"It's okay, Katie. Get dressed. Andy isn't breathing and he needs to go to the hospital," my mom calmly said from behind me, her hand placed over the phone receiver. I stood in the doorway a little longer, watching, crying, sorting out the strange scene in front of me. Mechanically, I put on the sweatshirt and sneakers she gave me. I was so ashamed because I was too scared to touch my own brother. All of a sudden he had become an object, a thing that was cold and without feeling. His eyes were closed like the shades in his room and I did not want to open them. I thought that whatever had hurt him would get me too if I did. I fumbled to tie the cumbersome laces as my father's crackly voice rang in my ears like a sharp, irritating whistle.

"Please don't die, Andy. I love you so much." He pressed his cheek against Andy's, slowly rocking back and forth on the squeaky bed. I was sobbing so much I could not breathe and my body was soaked with tears and sweat. A terrified excitement had engulfed me and my body switched to manual and took over my brain. I grabbed Andy's stuffed bunny, his pillow, and his favorite blanket and ran downstairs with Dad close behind. I ran outside to meet the ambulance, pushing and pulling until all the paramedics were inside.

I started to ramble, "He's not breathing. I thought he was snoring, but then the light went on and Mom was on the phone so I knew something was wrong, but I knew he wasn't snoring and I..."

"Katie! Let these people do their job! Go get your jacket." Mom was leaning over Andy on the couch, gently stroking his hair as a paramedic checked his vital signs.

The trip to the hospital was endless. Darkness loomed everywhere except for the street lamps and flashing stop lights. I was so proud because the world seemed to have shut down so my brother could get to the hospital more quickly. I was sure the police had cleared the roads and closed the stores because they knew my brother was sick. Then again, it was three o'clock in the morning. The amazement slowly wore off as my mind kept returning to the same thought of my brother's room being empty. I cringed at the thought of waiting at the bus stop alone and having no one to play badminton with. Waiting in the lobby only made it worse; both of my parents paced up and down on the worn hallway carpet, taking turns sitting in the chair next to mine. I had always seen my brother as a super-hero, invincibly strong and smart. I never believed or even thought he could falter. As my body ached from the lack of sleep, I realized how much I loved my brother and could not survive without him.

Finally, I was allowed to see him. He had stopped breathing during a seizure. It had never happened before and the next few weeks would be filled with tests and questions to find out why.

I never told my brother the feelings I had that night. But the whole ordeal had exposed me to the weak side of not only my brother, but my whole family. He made me understand how vulnerable we really were and I think I was angry with him for burning that hole in our once spotless existence. But the one thing I regret about that night is that he would not let me hug him. He still won't.



Reflections

They say that eyes are the mirrors of the soul
And I tend to agree with that.

Michael Dauplaise
Grade 11
Rocky Hill High School
Rocky Hill

I often look into the eyes of others
When I am walking along the crowded, feverish, concrete streets of the city
Or the dusty and peaceful roads of the country
And I study them
Silently, but hard
Being careful not to stare
For fear of filling them with even more paranoia.
I try to conceal my surprise
As I peer into those windows of the past,
And discover what scars they have left behind them,
What mistakes they have made,
What strain they have been through
But my amazement soon subsides when I come to the realization that
Nobody is perfect.
I search deeper into these fragile orbs
And discover anguishes buried deep
But unallowed to be forgotten completely
And swept away like an everyday function
Such as drawing a breath.
I wonder why these pains are forgotten so freely?
I suppose that they are hidden simply because they are flaws of character
But not totally brushed away
Because fear has used these flaws
As a catalyst to work harder.
Then I glance away from their eyes
Towards a building or some other solid object
To prevent myself from searching any further,
For, what I would surely find
I know I would not like
Because something hidden so deeply
Is marked with grief, pain, and finally, evil.
I walk home quickly
Trying to be inconspicuous
And hiding the fears of my revelations about the past
And what we have all left behind us.
I run to my bedroom mirror
As I bolt through my apartment door,
And my anxiety suddenly dies down
Because as I look at my reflection
My eyes do not tell me of a dark and cold past,
But rather, they encourage me to look forward
Towards the image of an optimistic future.

You're Carrying Away Dreams

You're carrying away dreams shattered.
Wednesday morning,
I awaken to tinks and clinks
of dreams deferred
represented by broken glass
in your recycling truck.

You go on with your job
as you're supposed to.
Unfeeling toward what looks like
Just refuse for recycling
You are
But no
Those are dreams shattered

In the orange plastic box
lies the champagne bottle
that we were to share.
Next to it
pieces of the wine goblet
thrown in anger.
That night as I picked up the pieces
of that glass
with my dreams of happiness reflected in each,
I cut myself on the glass
the sting of blatant rejection hurt more.
In the plastic orange box sit
My love letters to you,
on environmentally sound paper
that you gave back.
Water-soluble ink wasted.

So Mr. Recycling man,
through you,
I'll return these things to the earth
Do my part for the betterment
of the world.
Trying to do something
that someone
somewhere
will appreciate.

*Alison McMeans
Grade 11
Bloomfield High School
Bloomfield*

I hope cold hearts are recyclable
because I'd put them in that orange plastic box
for the betterment
of my world.



Amanda Gunn
Grade 11
Stamford High School
Stamford

After Ice Cream

Today my mother and grandmother hauled me off to a cemetery, right after ice cream at the Dairy Queen. No stops in between. There I was nearing the end of my cone, and we were pulling up to see dead people all lined up in rows. I thought I would vomit; I don't like the cemetery.

And we climbed from the car - the sanctum of the car - where the air was breathable and didn't smell like death until you opened up the doors. I wished I could hold my breath like I'd done when I was little, but Mom and Grandma were all settled in, ready for a long visit with old friends. They had no flowers to offer, just sticky-sweet fingers and heavy, living feet.

And I saw the gravestones of people I never knew, deaths I never mourned, pictures in the family album. I strolled and strolled in my tight summer dress, feeling the freshly dug earth through the soles of my shoes, pushing down at the rocks as if they were outstretched hands trying to escape from prison.

We went after ice cream; we went to see the dead in the hot, hot Illinois July. Mom and Grandma chuckled over memories while I listened to cars zipping by on the street, listened to people living beyond the big iron gates. There I walked, sticky with sweat and ice cream and aware of my vital, young flesh: moist skin stretched over bending muscles, blood pumping beneath my breast. I swung my arms and hips just to make sure I, too, was still alive, strutting my way through the thickness of the dead. The restless newly dead, trapped in the cemetery. I don't like the cemetery. I don't like to step on buried boxes.

Stone after stone, the long-dead were covered with green grass, but the freshly dead with rocky, upturned earth. Dead funeral flowers. Dead leaves hanging in wreaths. It made me feel better, trampling on the long-dead. With them I knew there was no stirring, no scratching at the satin of the coffin, no rotting flesh, no escaping arms through rotten coffin wood. There were just shiftless, dusty bones - skeletons that gave up re-assembling.

I don't like stepping on boxed bones. I don't like the cemetery. I don't want to be buried in one. I don't want nostalgic women or fleshy girls in slick summer dresses walking on top of me with drippy ice cream cones, feeling the lumpy earth.

I don't want to be buried in a cemetery. I want to be stuck right in the ground so my bones can break into rocks and my hair can grow with the grass. My flesh can grow up and out and be majestic and sweet and alive in the roots of an apple tree, inhaling warm wind. Not like all those dead people trapped in rotting boxes.



Televisions Don't Bounce
When Dropped
From a 3-story Window

Karen Grossi
Grade 12
Bloomfield High School
Bloomfield

You resort to talking about the weather
how

“Yeah, it’s cold but not as windy as yesterday.”
and tapping your foot
on the oil-spilled
frozen lawn

As if we just met
on a sidewalk.

You’re Grandpa,
sharing the same thought as me.
It’s the first Christmas without her.

We’re off in your new car
(it smells nauseatingly new
clean and like a hospital)
You, in front
staring at me in the mirror
where objects appear closer
than they actually are.

Me, in back,
head bobbing and tingly
as if a thousand ants
are playing jump rope.
I swallowed three Dramamine.

All of us plan to have a fun
old-fashioned family
Christmas:
pretzel eating
red and green ribbon snipping
Budweiser beer drinking
and married Uncle Dan
rubbing Mom with his fork-prong fingers
winking when heads are turned.
Except Mom’s dead.
But I look a hell of a lot like her.

You converse about the pink and green house
 with no driveway
 spotted on the way
 to this fun
 old-fashioned
 family Christmas.
 But the headphone song
 with Pink Floyd chiming "Wish You Were Here"
 drowns you out
 and you know it.



Stephanie Smith
Grade 12
Frank Scott Bunnell High
School
Stratford

Celebration of Myself

Modeled After the Style of Walt Whitman

Accompanied by my mother as always,
 I go out to the beach.
 I drag the chairs across the sand.
 Burrs are stuck on my sandals, clinging to the long shirt that covers my blue
 bathing suit.
 We lay for a bit,
 Occasionally turning the chairs in the direction of the sun.
 A young child, I run.
 Run blindly down to the water and dive right in . . . I submerge myself feeling
 the salt's sting in my eyes.
 An enormous shark chases me in shallow water. He catches me and I do not try
 to run . . . We do battle.
 I am a valiant soldier, a small but quick-witted warrior.
 I pull myself triumphantly from the water, and enjoy the cold mud seeping
 through my toes.
 Later on my mother and I cram all our belongings into the little car and we leave
 . . . She is sufficiently bronzed . . . I have enjoyed a juicy cheeseburger with
 lettuce and tomato . . . Summer is still a charbroiled cheeseburger at the beach.
 We arrive back at my grandmother's (A short trip from the beach)
 I enter the house and plop carelessly onto the couch inhaling deeply the smell of
 spaghetti sauce . . . awaiting the shower that is now occupied by my mother.
 I crinkle my red nose to feel the sunburnt skin crack.
 I lick my lips to taste the salt from the water.
 You should've been with us that day - my mother and me, for the world was ours.
 Where were you?

You were there, on a different beach, with another mom.
 Everyone feels the world is all their own sometimes.
 Laughing, loving, sharing, screaming, crying.
 Sometimes when it's mine it is mine alone.
 I have seen the best.
 I have seen the worst.
 I have yet to be the best.
 The city draws me.
 Feet pounding the gray pavement of the long, busy streets . . . Watching the
 people I find I fit in there . . . we all do.
 It's a new experience each time I go there . . . the smells: hot dogs, popcorn,
 gasoline, cigarettes . . . are all wonderful.
 Simple things surround me.
 I immerse myself in pleasure.
 The changing leaves of fall brighten up even the dingiest of avenues. The once
 gray streets rejoice in the array of leaves being tossed about by the brisk wind.
 I am content to sit under an almost leafless tree, barefoot, and sink my cold toes
 into the damp grass.
 I watch the people.
 A couple stops a few feet ahead . . . His large dark hand holds her pale one tightly,
 and they kiss . . . I am happy . . . they are too . . .
 I say something many are not able to hear . . . or do not want to . . . People are
 people. Race is skin deep . . . beauty is the same.
 So do you say to a man with an unattractive wife it is wrong to love her? The ideas
 are one in the same . . . much like the people.
 I am the girl who is easily confused . . . What should I wear? What should I eat?
 I am the woman who is definite in her ideas . . . racism is wrong . . . church and
 state should be separate.
 I am the PERSON who is caught in between . . .
 Lover of freedom . . .
 Lover of fun . . .
 Lover of romance . . .
 Of soft sounds that grow louder and quiet down again . . .
 to warmth, comfort, peace.
 A peace-loving God is watching us all . . . above us, below us, hiding in the
 shadows cast by pine trees on a well-lit street at night . . .
 He is everything, man, woman, the retching bum who sits on the corner
 drinking and begging for money as you pass him by. You should not pass God
 by.
 I have made mistakes. I believe in love at first sight. I am she who accepts hurt
 rather than hurting others . . .
 I saw him . . . loved his smell . . . he had high cheekbones . . . clothes fully intact
 except for a jean jacket strewn over his shoulder . . . his legs were thick and

muscular . . . placed him solidly on the ground and in my mind . . . it is crowded.

Thoughts flood into my head and overflow out my ears . . . except for the fact that we will all enjoy a better afterlife - be it heaven or not - no thoughts are clear.

God awaits us.

I personally await him . . . I long for a tranquil existence . . . none of us will return from it untouched . . .

I am content . . . I am celebrated.



Chandra Prasad
Grade 12
North Haven High School
North Haven

Things You Find in a Little Girl's Pocket

She digs anxious hands into rough denim quarries,
Searching for the one object
Which she values more than any other.
Front right pocket yields only a small notebook,
The emotional outlet she utilizes
When she is angry with her boyfriend.
Here are amazingly complex ballads, haikus, sonnets,
All expressing the same idea:
The male species is inferior.
Fingers probe into front left pocket,
And discover a Bazooka gum wrapper,
Along with two phone numbers:
One to call for a job application,
And one to call
For the nearest women's health clinic.
She will call the latter phone number
To inquire about a friend's problem.
She wonders if her mother would believe this story.
Better to keep it a secret.
The job application number will probably be lost
Accidentally?
She does not really want to arrange flowers all summer.
Determined, she tries the back left pocket.
A change purse containing five dimes and three quarters
To be spent on phone calls or an ice cream.
Or maybe she will patronize
An overlooked lemonade stand.

She knows how satisfying it is
To see a child smile.
Her back right pocket turns out to be the treasure mine.
She smiles at her grandfather's pocket watch,
So old in her youthful palm.
She reads the inscription etched on the backside:
"To my favorite Grand daughter,
The passing of time is harsh,
But I hope you will not emerge unscathed.
The more you endure,
The more vital and strong you will be."
She ponders these words,
As she stands beside her grandfather's grave,
Clutching the watch tightly to her body.
She ponders the idea
Of old time embracing new time.



Hanging From A Train Bridge

Daddy views the past in me.
There's a sniper in his brain.
Mother's in his P.O.W. camp,
In darkness locked away.

I'm hanging from this train bridge
Off the fence, above the tracks
Like a wet shirt on a clothesline,
With scars across my back -

Just gazing down the tunnel,
Where the heat begins to rise,
And the train invades the distance
Causing sweat to seal my eyes.

When they dropped the Agent Orange
In the jungles of the night,
An unconquerable pain they inflicted -
A mildew of the light.

Kimberly Hurlbut
Grade 12
Morgan High School
Clinton

They proudly sang their nation's hymns,
Thinking not of me, between their silent swears.
For they cannot hear their crying sons -
Above my father's drunken nightmares.

So I am left here in this war.
My prayers are the letters I send.
The rumbling train my adversary,
To the soul I must defend.

Iron wheels explode in my heart,
Anger and fear abound,
Yet release with the train shrieking down the tracks
Leaving me to the gentle sound

Of the wind which encases my body
From this battle's raging end,
Granting me the sight and vision
To lift my eyes again.

Soon the battle will all be over
And I'll be safe from every harm -
Only when I finally am home
In my heavenly father's arms.

Yet I know I'm not the only one
Who's prayed to be released
From the wrenching sounds of bombers
And the snipers in the trees.

It's the sound of every soldier
As he charges up the ridge
Or when shouting in all his pain
Hanging from a train bridge.



Closer To Fine

It's dark. I strike a match and light the cigarette dangling from my mouth. There.

I'm stressed out. The millions of questions in my life are all tumbling on top of me like the ocean waves I never got to see this summer. My senior year of high school begins tomorrow, and I can't wait to get it over with. I like smoking during times like this. Sitting at my windowsill, with the sound of crickets washing over me, I can see billions of tiny stars through the clear August night. It makes me feel very small, and I can finally begin to shuffle my problems and neatly pile them on my consciousness to be dealt with.

I'm sick of silence in relationships. It seems to hover over my life and choke me just when I need to speak. It's like I'm moving my mouth, but no words are coming out.

My friend Sara and I got in a fight tonight. We fought about fighting. I said that fighting has done a lot of good for this world. It's saved relationships, it's saved lives. Sometimes silence is the worst thing for a person. She told me fighting hurts people and that it's never right to hurt someone. But I think it's better to hurt someone you love than to continue suffering without that person knowing. Arguments are the only time when words of brutal honesty really come out of my moving mouth. That sticky silence is finally cleaned out of the corners of conversation.

So we fought, and where do we end up? Silent again. But things will change. Time will heal the wounds the argument made, and our relationship will grow because of it. Without the fight though, silence would have prolonged our growth.

Then there's my father. With him the silence is different. It's like that quiet stillness that clogs the air on Sunday afternoons. We just don't talk. Cordial words of hello and goodbye and how's life are all that seem to fall from our heavy mouths. I'm from a big, Irish Catholic, meat-and-potatoes family. There's a sort of expectation for all the boys in my family to be beer-drinking turbo jocks who go to a big state university, then become successful businessmen. And what am I? A writer.

My dad was always at work when I was growing up, and I was raised by my mother and siblings. I remember when I was very young, when words were meaningless and affection was something shown, not spoken. Every night I'd spend hours playing and laughing with my dad after work. But in the morning he'd be gone.

Before long I grew too heavy for his lap and too old to spend time with my parents. The happy buzz of our meaningless conversation was swatted like an insect of my past that I needed to get rid of. I wanted words.

All those days while I was growing up my dad was locked in some skyscraper, toiling to support our family, and not once did he ask for anything in return. That was just his way of saying, "I love you." I understand and appreciate this. Maybe I'm greedy but just to hear the words, "Thank you," "I'm proud of you," "I care," would be the sweetest music to my ears.

Now our days are clogged with that heavy Sunday silence, and neither of us will break it. Instead we use it as a shield. We dodge our feelings by hiding behind it. I blame him. He blames me.

Brian Jansen

Grade 12

New Fairfield High School
New Fairfield

My parents think I'm on drugs because I lock myself in my room and listen to Bob Dylan. And I write. That's where my words come from. I can escape from my quiet world by building stories filled with commotion. But those words don't fill the air with sound. They lie flat on dead pages waiting for curious eyes to pick them up. Those words don't say, "Thank you," "I'm proud of you," "I care."

Rest assured I'm not a junkie. The truth is that my parents are looking for a reason why this gap of silence separates us and an excuse why they let it grow. Sometimes I wish we would argue. I wish that brutal honesty would fly out of our mouths in the heat of a passionate fight. But it doesn't. It builds up in our hellos and goodbyes but is kept safely locked in our heavy mouths.

Before long I will be in college, and those words will be even more impossible to say. I fear I'll be spending my life moving my mouth with no sound ever coming out. I'll just wander through life tripping over sentences I'd wished I said.

My cigarette is almost halfway done. Smoke is like sound. It occupies that emptiness in the air that would otherwise force me to look inward. The song playing on my stereo has been a sort of anthem for me this summer. It says, "There's more than one answer to these questions pointing me in a crooked line. And unless I seek my source for some definitive, the closer I am to fine." The music soothes me. It fills that emptiness in the air so I won't acknowledge that emptiness in my soul.

It reminds me that I think too much. I analyze life so much that I never stop and live it. I'm so busy choking on words that I can't just breathe the air and feel my heart pump life throughout my body. Sometimes I wish I didn't think so much. I wish I could just be oblivious to the problems in our world and in my own world. But I can't. I get passionate about things. I get in arguments. I care.

This summer I feel that emptiness in my soul has grown so big that I am now forced to acknowledge it. It's now bigger than any music or sacred cigarette can fill. I feel this longing for my life to change and for my problems to lay themselves out and suddenly be solved. But nothing has changed. All I do is retreat into my words and my cigarettes.

I feel this summer has been wasted. Every day I would lock myself up in the mall and toil to support my college education. I didn't go to the ocean, I didn't sunbathe, I didn't even swim. My friends said I was so pale that I looked like a ghost. I was a ghost this summer. I'd disappear from my surroundings and retreat into solitude. Then I would haunt my own consciousness and demand an answer to these questions pointing me in a crooked line. But my repeated pleas only seemed to echo off my empty soul and come out of my moving mouth in silence.

Still, I have this song and I have this cigarette. Music speaks when I cannot. It becomes the words I wish would come out of my mouth. And the smoke just relaxes me. When I can't speak, all I can do is breathe. I'm good at that. With a cigarette in hand, I can watch my breath come out and pretend my problems are hidden somewhere in that cloud of smoke leaving my body.

So the summer is gone. A woman I work with named Mary Beth doesn't even like summer. She says it's too hot and sweaty and deep. But autumn, oh boy. If

there's anything I love most about this world it is the fall. Things change in the fall - weather, leaves, lives. Mary Beth is a fall person too. She's old enough to be my mother, yet I can talk with her like she's my own age. The words come out when I'm with her. Late night conversations with her became my chance to release those heavy words locked up in my mouth.

If there's one word that fits Mary Beth, it is freedom. I don't know why. Maybe it's because she doesn't trip over sentences she wished she'd said. Instead she argues. She's honest, She cares. That is freedom.

My friend Sara is repressed. She allows herself to be tied down by those around her for a fear of hurting them. Her mother has this image she wants Sara to fit. Sara, the real Sara, is not this person. But she allows herself to be buried by her own love for her mother. She remains silent because she cares. But she doesn't care enough to be honest. She doesn't care enough to hurt her.

I fall somewhere between my two friends. I seem to be brutally honest to all those around me, yet I become choked by silence when it comes to my own flesh and blood. I want to be free, like Mary Beth, to say those brutally honest words. But like Sara, I'm afraid of the truth. The truth hurts . . . not only the people I love, but also myself.

So I'm still standing on this isolated plateau with miles of silence between my parents and me. But I have the fall to look forward to - when the wind is always whistling and the air is always perfumed with smoke. My cigarette has long been finished, and my song is now reeling to a stop. That overwhelming silence surrounds my thoughts, and I look to the stars. The crickets don't even seem to be making noise. The only sound I hear is my soft breath, singing to me in the darkness and a beating heart, pulsating to my song of life.

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