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Foreword

More big fish have been caught with words than with hooks, lines, and sinkers.

This year over 900 Connecticut students from grades kindergarten through twelve baited their hooks with captivating stories, poems, essays, and dramas and reeled in our selection committee. The result a big catch, 78 pieces guaranteed to hook readers. The Connecticut Writing Project is proud to present of these works in the 23rd volume of the *Connecticut Student Writers* magazine.

The Connecticut Writing Project congratulates the young writers whose works are published in the 2011 *Connecticut Student Writers* magazine. We also thank their parents and teachers; their positive expectations foster a love of writing and give young writers the courage to unleash their creativity.

Nadine Keane Editor in Chief

Connecticut Student Writers magazine is approaching the quarter century mark, and once again our submissions have topped 900 pieces. Every year it is exciting and encouraging to see so many students submit their creative writing to Connecticut Student Writers. I know I speak for most teachers when I say that the current emphasis in the teaching profession on testing, data, and standardization has become overwhelming, and even discouraging. Too often we feel compelled to teach to the tests and thereby to kill the joy in so much of what we love. With so much emphasis on outcomes, quantification, and standardization, we lose sight of things like process, quality, and individuality. But in the pages of this magazine you will find ample evidence of teachers who are committed to finding and providing opportunities for their students to develop and express their individual voices and their creativity. In these pages there are no fill in the blanks, no bulleted lists of requirements, no percentiles, no rankings, no rubrics, and no standards. Instead, you will find compelling personal essays, entertaining fictional stories, and achingly beautiful poems. So we thank all the students who have written, but we also thank all the teachers who have rejected the notion that the best education emphasizes that which is common, standard, and quantifiable in our students, but who have instead taken the time and made the effort to encourage the creative, acknowledge the personal, and foster the unquantifiable in the children we teach.

Jason Courtmanche Connecticut Writing Project Director

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Selection Committee

Kelly Andrews-Babcock Laureen Anthony Jane Cook Sherri Daley Cathy Holdridge Betsy Kowal Megan McNabney Alex Rode Marcia Rudge

Elementary School, Grades K-5 Poetry

Love Tractors

Logan Bouley

Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade K

Sounds like a brand new dirt bike. Looks like a go-cart I'm driving a motor-power, gas John Deere tractor!

Affie

Luke Jones Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade K

My dog Affie likes to lick the snow grey and new!

Walking My Dog Outside

Ava El-Hachem Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade K

My dog is sniffing the bushes, smelling leaves, wind, outside air Happy!

The Sky

Lang Lee Latimer Lane Elementary School, Grade 1

The sky Looks like A river In the air In the Afternoon.

When the sun sets It looks like A giant Pencil eraser And fire burning. At night It looks like The leftover Dark, damp coal And there are Leftover sparks

From when The fire Was burning.

Twinkle Star Twinkle

Lauren Thompson

Frank M. Kearns Primary School, Grade 1

Little stars turning into snow How beautiful! You taste mmm You feel cold You look sparkly I hear nothing Thank you for coming.

Feelings

Andrew Vlach Latimer Lane Elementary School, Grade 1

Happy, Sad, Angry, Frustrated, Worried, Scared, Excited, Calm, Proud. So many feelings in one day. Paper Scared

Charlie Panella

West School, Grade 2

White Four Points Clear As a cloud Can Cut you And Bleed

Wild Horses

Kaitlyn Sill South School, Grade 2

Horses run into the barn ring, With saddles on their backs. Trotting hoofs, Pounding on the ground. Biting bits, Snoring, Tossing their heads in the air.

Finger Prick

Caroline Brooks West School, Grade 2

Pins and needles in My hands. "Get in the Car!" Mom yelled. Going to the Doctor's. Signed in and Up the stairs. "Ouch," I cried. Blue and white Poured the red Liquid Into a Cup. Down,

Down,

Down. Into a little White dot. "Ouch," I screamed. Again another One Waiting to Be Clicked. Green lollipops from the doctor. Signed out and DOWN The stairs, Into the Car, And Back Home.

In Petersburg I Walked

Boris Moscardelli Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade 3

In Petersburg I walked into the playroom Mama and Papa were waiting for me I changed into my new clothes

In Petersburg I walked back to my group I showed Mishka to Igor and my friends I said good-bye to Ludmilla

In Petersburg I walked down the stairs I got in Yuri's black car We drove away from Baby House Number 7

In Petersburg I walked into the hotel It had a big restaurant I slept in the bed

In Petersburg I walked on the airplane The airplane took us to Massachusetts Mom and Dad took Mishka and me home *Lavinia Kosher East Farms Elementary School, Grade 3*

Blue is the color of summer skies, Blue is the color of blueberry pies, Blue is the shade of wild oceans, Blue is the color of rain.

Blue is the smell of crisp winds, Blue is the scent of fresh spring bluebells, Blue is the aroma of blueberries.

Blue is the feeling of wet salty tears, Blue is the texture of soft floating wings which lie on a small blue jay.

Blue is the mood of cold rainy days, in which you peer inside a puddle, seeing your reflection very near.

Blue is the smack of minty fresh chewing gum, in the process of making your mouth freeze, Blue is the feel of twilight breeze.

A glowing haze of color...

Cyan Navy Sapphire Azure Cobalt BLUE

I Am the Sun

Caroline Vlach Latimer Lane Elementary School, Grade 3

I am the sun, One of many, But I am yours.

I am red, I am yellow, A sphere of abstract colors.

Blue

I am a ball of fire, Of light, A ball of goodness for you all to admire.

I am big, round, The royalty of the universe I'm in. The planets and stars worship me.

You should honor me too, For I make day and the moon at night, And for I am also the only one you've got.

I am

Your Sun.

Where I'm From

Gwenan Walker East Elementary School, Grade 4

I'm from the soft buzz of my mom's sewing machine, from the loud roar of my dad's lawn mower in the distance of the backyard. I'm from the faint "sketch sketch" sound when pencil goes on paper, to the snap of the tape, to the rustle of markers, as the sounds drift out from my room. (More likely, the kitchen.) I'm from the loud music, or the loud bangs of dancing feet coming from my sister's room. I'm from the noise of the hairdryer, floating out into the hallway, from what used to be pale yellow, to the now pink walls of my room I got when I was six. I'm from the cluttered shelves of books and stuffed animals, from the "click click" of the computer keys coming from the study. I am from beachy smells of salt, the splashing water, and the monument of sandcastles on Bald Head Island. I'm from the stone streets of Colonial Williamsburg, from the hot weather, to the historical shops and buildings. I'm from fairy tales to Greek myths, the ones that drift me to another place, from the books I constantly study, Atlantis, Anastasia, the Titanic,

mysteries that left me eager for more. I'm from the long walks that my dad, and my sister and me took to our favorite rock we climbed on to watch the sunset, from "where's your brain?" or "sit up straight or I'll strap you to a board!" I'm from staring into space, from the weird questions I ask in my head. I'm from jellybeans, cakes, and lollipops, from the imaginary notebook in my brain that I write in.

I'm from the coral and the darting fish I saw snorkeling, I am from these moments... a single leaf in the family tree, far different than the rest.

Winter

Michelle Parent Montessori Magnet School, Grade 4 It's a cold kind of day With nothing left to do But soak up that winter feeling. Feel a chill Р U and D 0 W Ν your spine. Cold and frosty in a reassuring kind of way. Lie ro а u nd and think of hot chocolate flowing D Ο W Ν your throat. Lie in the snow and make a snow angel and think about throwing а snow b 11 S as you play in the snow. Listen to birds as they come back from winter.

See buds groW from the ground damp from snow.

See the snow plows pass you by as spring

ro rolls a u nd Seasons go by quickly, so live life While you have it.

Joy

Sophia Kodak Squadron Line Elementary School, Grade 4

Joy is a feeling that is unexplainable.

Primary colors can't be made out of any color but itself.

Joy is a primary color.

The sweet smell of puppy breath and freshly cut grass

are the smells of joy.

The winter's first snow to the last day of summer,

joy is sprinkled all around us.

From a toddler's own belly laugh

to the gentle waves crawling up the shore

to tickle toes,

the sound of joy is practically everywhere!

Freshly baked cookies and warm toasty hot chocolate with

marshmallows floating are comforting tastes of joy.

The mid July sun blazing in cool refreshing blue pools of water are examples of "summer joy!"

The true feeling of joy is almost a warm toasty volcano of

excitement that erupts with a jump and the lava spilling out as laughter.

For me,

true joy is laughing with my family and friends,

all of one big joyful family.

Joy isn't exactly unexplainable; it's just hard to think of the right

words to describe it.

Joy.

Luna

John Rhodes Tootin' Hills Elementary School, Grade 4

Luna is a light so bright in the sky The moon lights the night. I see through my window the moon is rising up the mountain in the early evening. Luna.

Snowflake

Lauren Sampson South School, Grade 4

Snowflake all cold and different Shape.

It would take a lot to be a Snowflake.

Rising and falling to the Ground but it does not Make one tiny sound.

Dainty and beautiful they Fall one by one. But it only Takes one snowflake to Know winter has begun.

Silent Arrow

Owen Plourde Kelly Lane Intermediate School, Grade 5

Silent arrow withdraws from the quiver "Fwoom." Arrow creeps from the grasp of the bow Freezing everything in its gaze. Winds stop howling, raindrops stop falling, And trees stop swaying. With one life gracefully standing... Then dropping in a moment Silent as an unwanted thought

In a heartbeat.

Nature's Simplest Beauty

Regina Caggiano

Squadron Line Elementary School, Grade 5

Miniature cups caress perfectly tangled petals, Spontaneous hues of bruised plum, bland white, riveting red.

Wilting torches of lilac plumes, Burning bright in the reddened light.

Abundance of cocoa speckled leaves, Bursting from splintered flower finger bones, Passing unheard whispers to the orange sun.

Sleek slides of forest green and bright crimson stems Twist their way up to the sky Believing they can do anything.

All explode relentlessly Out of single stout stalk.

Nature's Simplest Beauty Sits in silhouette As sunset's light waltzes upstage,

Flower.

Words

Zachary Austin Ann Antolini School, Grade 5

Words are a gift to our human race, Words can never be forced into place. Twisting and turning, Diving and delving, Words can alter our hopes and fears. Words are like diamonds, But with value much more, Yet words have more power than machines of war. Words are many colored, And masters of disguise, And they can be twisted, to tell naught but lies. Words are athletic, With more strength than steel, Words have much texture, With a smooth or rough feel. Words can be vile, Words can be bright, They'll bring in the dark, Or they'll bring in the light.

Elementary School, Grades K-5 Prose

Smokey

Alison Pearson

Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade K

Smokey was the size of my mom's hand. She bit the foot of my favorite Barbie doll. Smokey pooped and peed a lot. She sleeps in a cozy, round bed. Smokey got hit by a car. She went to Heaven. I miss you Smokey, I wish you would come back from Heaven.

The Line Drive

Nicholas LaRosa Philip R. Smith Elementary School, Grade K

Here I am getting pitched at a baseball field. It is cold out here. But someone is going to hit me with a baseball bat soon. Here I go!...Crack!... I am flying in the blue sky right out of the field.

Boom! I land right in a dog's mouth. This dog had white curly hair. The dog started to run around with me in his mouth.

When a lady came over and took me out of the dog's mouth and handed me to a cute little boy. The boy said thank you and I always wanted to catch a line drive. Now the boy was happy and I had a new home.

The Magic Park

Annaliese Mills Philip R. Smith Elementary School, Grade K

There is a park. It's not just any park. It's a magic park. It doesn't have swings and slides and stuff. It has a green train and the tracks are zigzags. Going on the train makes you really dizzy. There are magic bubbles. When you blow them, the bubbles surround you and tell you things that make you happy. It has a gumball machine that has bubble gum-flavored gumballs. You get to the park by a pathway that is in a tree. You blow bubbles around the tree and an elevator opens up. You step in and it takes you up to the magic park. You can only go in the spring and summer. I can't wait for the snow to melt!

The Lost Elephant

Natalie Ehrenwerth Frank M. Kearns Primary School, Grade 1

There was an elephant in my backyard this morning. I could hear the elephant. I looked outside there he was sniffing with his trunk. I wondered why he was sniffing.

I got my dog's water bowl. I put it outside. Then I put a big bag of peanuts outside. I watched from the window. The elephant was hungry. I was proud of myself.

I decided to call the circus train. He said, "I'll be there." As quick as a wink he was there. I asked, "Could you load this elephant on your train?" "Sure I can," said the conductor. "He was our very best elephant in the circus. Somehow he escaped. We all looked and looked but we could not find him so we gave up. But you found him."

He put the elephant on his train, as he chugged along he waved at me. I waved back, then I said, "Goodbye." He said it back.

I took my dog's water bowl back inside. I took the bag of peanuts back inside and I went inside and had breakfast. It was eggs with ketchup. I was glad I could help the lost elephant and did not have to have my parents do it. As I ate I thought what a strange morning this was!

The Princess Who was Very Kind

Makayla Xiao Daly Squadron Line Elementary School, Grade 1

Once upon a time, there was a princess. Her name was Princess Mary. She was very kind. She shared everything. She was picking flowers for her best friend.

Back in the castle, she was planning to do something kind. She helped people tie their shoes. She helped old people cross the road and she picked flowers for friends. She was so kind that everyone called her the Kind Queen. And she became famous. She arrived in a limousine.

Everybody appreciated her kindness. Everyone wanted her autograph. Finally, she returned home.

The Monster

Kathryn Damato Anna Reynolds Elementary School, Grade 2

When I woke up the first thing I saw was not Mom or Dad, it was a big, green, hairy, ferocious, six eyed monster! I sat up in bed and screamed "Ahhhhh!" He chased me all over the house. I was so scared. I tried to quickly think of an idea to get rid of the monster. "I got it," I said out loud. I ran downstairs as fast as I could and I opened a low window. I taped a piece of rope to each side of the wall, and then I waited for the monster to come. I hid as he came near the window. I screamed "Boo," and he got so scared that he tripped over the rope and flew out the window. That was the end of the big monster.

But there was a problem. When the monster was upstairs I noticed something. I was calling the monster a he, but it was actually a she, and the monster had babies! The babies were cute, but they were also mean, hairy, and ferocious just like their mom. The only difference was that they had three eyes instead of six, and there were ten of them!

I tried to trip them with the rope too, but they were so small that they could just walk under it. I walked upstairs and realized the babies were slow like turtles. I went to my room and thought and thought. How could I trick them?

I went to the kitchen and got some food. I made a path of food leading out the door. Then, I put on some music and the ten little baby monsters did the Conga right out the door. I went upstairs, sat on my bed, and tried to think how the monsters even got into our house. Did the monsters really exist, or was it just my imagination?

The Failure

Sara Rosenthal

Colchester Elementary School, Grade 2

As I am eating a yummy berry on a slender tree's branch, I begin to feel some snow fall onto my delicate wings. Suddenly, I see a gray cloud from right above my little head. I can smell the stale fragrance of frozen water that is right next to my small tree. Before I could eat another berry, I immediately felt cold, white snow under my sharp talons. It reminded me of a soft blanket. Instantly, I hear something prancing towards me. Finally, I could see that it was one of my enemies. In the blink of an eye, my enemy jumped right at me! I was so scared that he was going to get me! He was really close to getting me when...I flew up from the snowy tree and above his head, escaping from danger. After I escaped, I felt relieved because my enemy fell and ran away looking very upset; a failed attempt on his part. Next time I hear something coming close to me, I will react more quickly.

A Horrible Discovery

Rachel Bergstein

Long Lots Elementary School, Grade 2

"Rachel, you can wake up now," said the nurse. I tried so hard to wake up. Thoughts were filling my mind. My head was so heavy. My eyelids would not open. It took what seemed like a long time until my body would listen and wake up. The nurse gave me some apple juice to soothe my throat, which was sore from the camera they put down it. At least I had Mrs. Kasoogi, my Ugly Doll, with me to keep me feeling confident and safe. My parents had given me Mrs. Kasoogi on the way to the hospital as a prize for being brave.

As soon as I was well awake, my Mom picked me up and softly said the words I did not want to hear, "Rachel, you have Celiac Disease." My eyes started to get teary. Then one teardrop rolled down my face and onto my hospital gown. More and more tears streamed down as I started to cry. So many unhappy thoughts filled my mind. *Am I the only one in the world with Celiac Disease? The only one in my family?* I felt so alone. *What if I couldn't eat anything I loved ever again?*

When the tears stopped pouring out, my Mom helped me put on my clothes. Then we left the hospital. We drove to Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream Shop, which was not far from the hospital. I got black-raspberry ice cream in a cup. Then we drove home.

My sister, Tori, greeted us at the door. She stayed home with a babysitter. "Are you okay?" she asked. "Was it horrible?"

"It is horrible because I have Celiac Disease and I can't eat wheat or gluten for the rest of my life!" I screamed, mad at the world. *No more Planet Pizza! No more birthday cake! What if I can't go to any more birthday parties? No more school lunches* ... and I loved their pizza! *I don't want to be different!* I felt so left out!

There was a week or two left of Kindergarten and I managed okay. I still didn't feel well, getting lots of stomachaches, which made it hard to concentrate in school. The last day celebration was hard because they ordered pizza for the class and I couldn't have it. I was so

sad I wanted to cry. I started to sniffle, then my eyes started to get watery, but I stopped before anyone could see me because I didn't want to be embarrassed.

Even though my Mom brought in a special gluten-free treat, it didn't really help. I was the only kid in my school with Celiac Disease and the only one that couldn't eat what everyone else did.

Soon camp started. One day we had a camp carnival and we had a licorice eating contest. I gobbled up one whole, long stick of licorice not knowing it would be my last ever! The counselor didn't know it had wheat in it. After that, I felt so sick I went to the nurse's office and my Mom had to pick me up. She explained that I can't eat licorice anymore and we went over all the candy that I could and couldn't have. "It's not your fault," my Mom said. But I thought it was.

My Mom bought gluten-free foods that I could have and we laid them out on the kitchen table and we sat around the table and tasted the foods. We all took a bite of the same food and judged if it was good or not. If we all didn't like it, we knew not to buy it again. If we liked it, we would buy more. We called it a "tasting party." Having a tasting party made me think of the questions I had when I was diagnosed. Now I had some answers. Well, at least one. With all these products available, I couldn't possibly be the only one in the world with Celiac Disease. Now that I'm 7 ¹/₂, we know a lot about Celiac Disease. It has been 1 ¹/₂ years living gluten-free. I can't have wheat, but there are lots and lots of things I can have made with gluten-free flour.

There are now about 10 families in Westport with kids with Celiac Disease that we have met, and I'm not the only one with Celiac Disease at my school anymore.

Now that 'my family knows a lot about Celiac Disease, I'm as healthy as ever!

The Birds in My Backyard

Katelyn Hadley

Frederick Bielefield Elementary School, Grade 3

I am very interested in the birds in my backyard. I have seen them all my life from the glass deck doors near the kitchen table. They sometimes swoop at each other, scaring the others off! Sometimes, they even play chase! My family just recently put out a tray of food because there was too much snow to get to the bird feeders. It was so much fun watching the birds of all shapes and sizes come to the tray, bit by bit, very cautiously. Finally, lots of birds came flying to the tray (even a squirrel hopped over)!

I have 34 species of birds in my backyard, all different shapes, sizes and colors. There are big birds, small birds and middle-sized birds. Some of the bigger birds are the Red-Tailed Hawk, Blue Jay and Mourning Dove. Some middle-sized birds are Cardinals, Downy Woodpeckers and Yellow- Bellied Sapsuckers. Some small birds are the Screech Owl, Tufted Titmouse's and Juncos. All the birds are so cute and fun to watch! And there's a weird thing. The Carolina Wren loves to go under the snow-covered grill! His call sounds like he's saying, "Cheeseburger cheeseburger cheese," and my grill cooked cheeseburgers in summertime. So maybe he smelled them and was looking for them (he even went into the drip tray)! There are lots of species of birds in my backyard, all with different personalities.

I used my bird book a lot to help me find the names or colors of the birds in my backyard. Sometimes, I knew the name of the bird, but I wanted to know the colors. Sometimes, it was the other way. I knew the colors and patterns (or just saw them), and wanted to know the name. But it was always the same: I needed to look it up. So I would find what type of bird it

was (example: tree clinging, perching, hawk-like, pigeon like), and go to the page it said below the bird. That page would have that bird's description, voice, habitat, nesting, range and a bit of info about that bird. (This might not work for bird field guides other than ones released by The Audubon Society.)

The birds in my yard are beautiful! They have lots of colors. They could be red, orange, yellow, blue, white, gray, brown or black. The male Cardinal is almost all red with a tuft on its head that it can raise and lower. The Blue Jay is almost all blue to blend in with the sky. The Dark-Eyed Junco is almost all black and very small. Those birds are pretty colorful!

Some birds in my backyard can camouflage themselves, but some males are meant to stand out. For example, a male Cardinal is bright red. He's meant to stand out. A female Cardinal is light brown. She can blend in with the trees. I think a male is bright to attract a mate and a female is dark for camouflage. A Blue Jay is blue and white like a sky with tiny fluffy clouds. When sitting, a Mourning Dove looks like a rock! When a Screech Owl is sitting on a tree, its gray or reddish brown color makes it look like the tree.

Some special things I saw weren't in my backyard but my front yard. A few days ago, I saw a flock of Robins in my backyard. At first, I didn't believe it was them. It was winter! But then, they flew to the front yard. My sister and I raced to the window closest to where they were. It was amazing! The whole flock was eating dried cherries off our big cherry tree. It was lots of fun to see. But I was very upset when I came home from school one day and found that the Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker was pecking holes in my favorite tree and making the sap run out of it so he could lick it! It made me disappointed to think that I might not ever be able to climb my favorite tree again. In my opinion, the Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker is mean!

Sometimes, I would think of a pun when I heard a bird's name. I think they're pretty "punny!" I wonder if a Junco really plays with junk? If not, why is it called "Junco?" I think that Flickers flick other birds. I think so because whenever the Flicker comes to our deck, other birds move out of its way like it's going to flick them! Does the Cedar Waxwing really have a waxed wing? It would be really weird if it did!

I've really enjoyed watching and learning about birds in the past and would love to learn more about them in the future. I'd like to go to state and national parks and bird sanctuaries to watch and learn more about birds. I love birds!

The Time Machine

Allan Allag Kelly Lane School, Grade 3

Boom! Boom! The sound of thunder struck again, startling me as I was forcing myself to stay awake at my desk. I needed a change of scenery so I raised my hand and asked for permission to use the bathroom. As I headed out of the classroom and went down the hall, I noticed a strange black door that was partially open. Curious to see what was behind the door, I skipped the bathroom and headed right for it.

Suddenly, I heard a voice calling my name and asking what I was doing. Thankfully it was Dylan and not a hall monitor, or worse, a teacher. Ignoring his question, I cautiously approached the door, opened it and was surprised to see a winding black staircase leading down to what appeared to be the basement. Just as eager to see what was in store for us, Dylan quickly agreed to be my partner in this adventure. Off we went.

The staircase went round and round for what felt like forever. We were well below the basement. We were both getting nervous. No we were scared, but we were together and kept going. At the base of the staircase was a large door. I slowly turned the door knob as Dylan anxiously stood behind me. We passed through the doorway and to our surprise saw what looked like a time machine right out of a movie.

We entered the time machine and started looking around at all the buttons and gadgets surrounding us. Dylan called me over. He found an instrument panel with instructions that read "Enter Year of Desired Travel." Doing as instructed, I entered 1066. Dylan ran and closed the door and I pulled the lever next to the panel that said "Pull Me."There was a sudden rumble and bright lights flashed across the time machine. Dylan and I were both knocked to the floor by the sudden jolt. When Dylan and I got back to our feet the time machine was full of smoke and the door was knocked off its hinges.

We slowly peered out of the open doorway and were shocked to see armored knights on horses ride by us. We immediately ducked back into the time machine so we were not seen. Dylan screamed out, "This thing actually works. We are not in Granby anymore." While Dylan was talking, I noticed that we were dressed in similar clothes as the men on the horses. How this happened I do not know, but at least I would not look awkward in my David Ortiz jersey, blue jeans and sneakers. Then a voice interrupted Dylan, "I am malfunctioning. I must be fixed or I cannot get you back to Granby. Please find water to fill my tank and a new handle to replace the lever necessary to return you home."

It was the time machine talking to us. Dylan and I regrouped and made our way out of the time machine. We knew we had to find someone or something to help us. Dylan and I knew we could get the help we needed from a blacksmith, but how were we going to pay for his work? The time machine answered, "Find the bag of coins below the instrument panel. You can use the gold to pay for the tools." The immediate thought that came to me was, *Boy this time machine thinks of everything*. I knew we needed to act quickly as we were already in a heap of trouble for skipping school.

As we made our way out of the time machine and into the woods we saw a clearing up ahead. Through the clearing we saw a town. That is where we would find our blacksmith. Dylan and I were both quiet as we were taking in the scenery. It looked just like the pictures in the history books, but there was no time for sightseeing; we had a job to do. We finally found the blacksmith and asked him to make a lever that matched the one we took with us from the time machine.

Once the work was completed we thanked and paid the blacksmith with the gold and ran straight back to the time machine.

Dylan filled the water tank and I replaced the lever. We were ready to return home. Dylan entered 2011 and we held on tight. We felt another crash and saw smoke fill the time machine and the door flung open. As we exited we saw the staircase, checked to make sure we were back in our original clothes and bolted back to class.

I raced back to class as fast as I could, hoping for the best. I flung the classroom door open and heard my teacher say: "Allan please be more careful with the door. There is no need to run back from the bathroom." I was confused by her comment and looked up at the clock to see that I had only been gone a few minutes. Time had stood still while Dylan and I were gone. We were in the clear. I sat back down in my seat and got ready for our weekly spelling test.

At recess Dylan and I met up and talked about what happened to us. We both agreed that although our adventure was short, it was way cool. Then we began to plan our

next journey on our little secret below the school.

A Fragrance of Life

Olivia LaRosa

Philip R. Smith Elementary School, Grade 4

The average nine-year-old gets up every day, goes to school, does homework, and perhaps plays an instrument or sports. They may even take fabulous vacations every year with their family. But when you think about it life is like a fancy perfume mister sending out its fragrance for us to share. It can spray a scent of good or bad, but in the end, it all leads to what I call the Fragrance of Life.

The Fragrance of Life was totally delightful, in fact full of joy, while we were on vacation. It was the scent of family, fun, and adventure. It was the floral scent of the warm sun in a winter month, which we all enjoyed. That was the case until we returned from vacation. Shortly after our return, my brother fell off a truck and broke his jaw. We were in the hospital with him for a full three days! He ended up having surgery and could not eat anything for six weeks. Over Christmas, the aroma of food could do nothing but annoy him because he could only have breakfast drinks or bowls of soup. This was just another spray of my Fragrance of Life.

My beloved Godmother passed away on the Tuesday after Christmas. She was fighting a horrible disease for many months, which our family fought with her, at least as much as we could. Although we knew her life with us may be shortened, we never expected her to die at her own mom's memorial service. This is a full splash of the Fragrance of Life.

Just when things started to settle down, BOOM, another mist of the dark fragrance hit. A close family friend lost her battle to cancer. She was an extraordinary person, a chef and community activist. While I was at her memorial service, I looked around and thought that not all fragrances are as simple as good or bad, but there are variations.

In the end, I have learned that in life you will sometimes be sprayed or even showered with fragrances of all kinds. It is like walking through a garden and encountering the varied smells, some good, some bad, and some that are just uncertain. However, it is up to you to keep it all in perspective. Your optimism, internal strength, courage, love and all things that make you who you are what will help you balance all the scents in your life. I have learned at a young age that there are no guarantees in life. And so goes the Fragrance of Life.

Fairytales

Natalie Bielat Tootin' Hills Elementary School, Grade 4

Joy gazed at the sunny sky. The daisies and indigo irises bloomed against the fence. She loved springtime! Up in the branches of her tree, she had a perfect view of the sky. "Mew?" Her newest kitten, Pearl, gazed up at her. At eight weeks, Pearl was the youngest of Joy's five furry felines. The wind whistled past her, blowing her wavy hair straight back and Pearl's little white ears flat. The breeze also carried the sweet perfume of pansies. The branches of the poplar tree reached for the sky. Joy picked up her book of fairytales. It was rusty and tattered, but strangely still a brilliant shade of red.

"Mew?" Pearl jumped onto her lap. Joy began to read, "One snowy winter day-"Joy stopped abruptly. The winter scene's snow seemed to be swirling! Joy clutched Pearl and leaned forward. Was she imagining it? Just then, a sharp pang hit her like a rock. She was shrinking! "*Pearl*!" She yelled. "*Meowww*!" Pearl kicked and turned until she was the size of a newborn mouse.

Joy hit the ground with a thud. Suddenly, everything went black. After a few long minutes, Joy opened her blue eyes. Cold, wet snowflakes tickled her nose. Where was she? Pearl mewed and jumped on her. Strangely, everything looked familiar. She was in the book!

Fluffy flakes of snow whirled around like dandelion puffs. Evergreen trees were decorated with red and green balls for Christmas. Red holly berries and spiky leaves dotted the fences. Even though it wasn't spring, it was still lovely. Meanwhile, seven funny little men marched by with their miniature shovels and axes, singing, "We're in a winter wonderland! A winter wonderland! And everything's so perfect in our winter wonderland! Filled with many wonders ..." They marched away, too far to hear.

Joy blinked in surprise. They were the seven little dwarves from Snow White! *Of course,* Joy thought. *This is a book of fairytales!*

Pearl mewed piteously. Then Joy remembered. It was time for Pearl's milk! They had to get home! She was also homesick, anyway. Joy desperately walked north, south, east, and west. There was no entrance back home. Joy cried out in despair. Her name sure didn't fit her then! How would she get home? "Mew?" Pearl's mew was drowned out by a loud fanfare that could split your ears open. About five hundred black horses wearing all gold trotted by, holding their heads high. When they parted, a huge golden chariot pulled by pure white *unicorns* rumbled by. A haughty-looking girl wearing a crown sat in the back of the chariot and waved her jeweled scepter.

"Her Majesty, the Princess!" Villagers shouted and waved, but the princess only spared them a disgusted look down her long nose.

"E-excuse me." Joy bobbed an awkward curtsey. "You- your Majesty, I'm not from here. I-I was wondering if you know how I could get home. I live-"

The princess was so surprised that her two-foot high hairstyle nearly toppled over! "Who are you?" She asked coldly. "And how *dare* you approach my carriage?"

"I-I am Joy. This is my kitten, Pearl." Pearl bared her tiny white teeth so that they glittered dangerously and hissed. The princess took no notice.

"I will not waste my precious time with you. Go ask the wizard instead. Now off with your head!"Joy gasped in realization. This was the Queen of Hearts when she was still a princess! Joy ran for her head; she didn't want to lose it! She raced through snowy fields and deep snow drifts until the enraged shouts died away. She gasped for breath. "Oh, Pearl, we'll never get home now! All because I tried to read a book!"

A sudden loud song filled the air. A girl, dog, lion, tin man and scarecrow marched by, singing, "We're off to see the Wizard, the Wonderful Wizard of Oz!" They were Dorothy, the dog Toto, the Cowardly Lion, the Tin Woodman and the Scarecrow. Joy laughed. They were from *The Wizard of Oz*! She could follow them to the wizard! She began to follow them along a yellow brick road, just like in the book! It twisted and winded around clumps of dry grass. Joy was getting tired. Pearl stated that *she* was tired by hitching a ride on Joy's shoulder. Still the group went on.

A shaggy old hut labeled "The Wizard of Oz" came into view. Dorothy's silly group walked right by it! Good! Now Joy wouldn't have to wait for them! She knocked on the door.

Pearl mewed loudly. The door swung open and a craggy figure in black appeared. "Please, come in," he welcomed them. He stared at Joy and his grey eyes seemed to pierce her. "Yes," he said after an uncomfortable silence. "I can send you home."

Joy gaped at him in disbelief. "Ah, yes," the wizard laughed, "I can read minds. And I can tell that your kitten wants milk." He waved his hand and a glowing silver bowl filled with milk appeared. Pearl squealed and lapped it up in two seconds straight. Then she purred contentedly and quickly fell asleep. "When do you want to go?" the wizard asked. Joy scooped up a very sleepy Pearl and stated confidently, "Now."

A cold whirlwind swept Joy off her feet. Pearl mewed and dug her tiny claws into Joy's already torn shirt. They were lifted high into the air. "Thank you, Wizard!" Joy called. Her voice was drowned out by the rush of wind. A flash of purple light came, and suddenly Joy was lying on her back under her tree with Pearl. Her other kittens, Gingersnap, Saphira, Holly and Calico crowded around her. Joy laughed as Holly licked her chin. "You know what, Pearl?" she told her. "Some people like the wizard can be very kind. Others like the Queen of Hearts can be horrible." (She was schooling Pearl in "Kitten Kindergarten," which she'd "founded" a week ago.) "Do *you* know the good thing to do with this book?" As an answer, Joy seized the book and hid it under a clump of grass. Now no other children would be trapped in Fairyland. "I hope no one finds this," she whispered.

In Search of Home

Pei Yi Zhuo

Torrington Elementary School, Grade 4

On a cold Alaskan spring day a wolf pack was searching for food. They were running around sniffing the ground when a hunter who saw the wolves jumped out from behind a tree. The hunter was carrying a gun, which he shot into the air and back into the ground in an attempt to frighten the wolves. The wolf pack ran away barking loudly. The hunter laughed with delight, but he didn't know that a single wolf cub was left behind. This is the cub's story.

The eight week old pup crawled into the thick bushes. The wolf wandered around the dark forest. Everything was still and silent except for the hunter's nasty laughter. The wolf cub didn't know where he should go. Night was coming. So the lone, frightened wolf cub slept on the snow. The next day at dawn the young wolf set off. The cub was extremely hungry, but he kept going. He trudged through the thick snow. Suddenly he became too weak and his legs gave way. He whimpered, but no one was there to hear him, so the wolf cub just lay there helplessly on the snow as if he was dead.

Suddenly a man came up to the wolf pup. The wolf's eyelids were heavy. The man came closer and shot the wolf with a tranquilizer dart. Two shadows emerged from the woods; it was a man and a boy. The hunter reached out his hand smiling. "Tom, skilled hunter," he said.

But the dad did not extend his hand. "You better get out of here before I call the EPA," he said. The hunter grunted as he trudged off into the woods. "We better get this wolf cub home."

"Why don't I name him Mac?" the child said.

"Okay," replied Dad. "Come on Mac," he said picking up the wolf pup. The wolf pup opened his eyes slowly. He was staring into a glowing fire in a cottage. He felt a warm, gentle hand stroking his back. "Don't worry, Mac," Nate said softly. The wolf cub whimpered. Mac heard footsteps.

"Look who woke up," a voice said as Mac turned his head. It was the Nate's father. "I've called the park rangers. They told me to bring the cub to the ranger station," Nate's father said. Dad put a plate full of raw meat in front of Mac. Mac was so hungry that he gobbled everything up. "He sure is hungry. Good thing we brought him here. He would've died out there," said Dad as he looked at his watch. "Well we better get him to the ranger's station." Dad wrapped Mac in blankets and walked out the door with Nate following him. He opened the side door of a minivan. He put Mac in the back seat. He walked to the front door of the van and got in the driver's seat. Nate jumped into the shotgun seat.

The van started down the bumpy, rutted road. The van came to an old wooden cottage. On the front door there was a sign that said "Ranger's Office." Dad, Nate, and Mac went in and walked down a hallway. They came to a door with a sign on it that read Mr. Mark Henson. Dad opened the door and inside there was an old man who was bald. He was snoring away. "Mr. Henson," said Dad.

"What," Mr. Henson said sleepily. "Oh Mr. Carson," he said. "Sit down please." Nate and Dad sat down. "So you say that you got a wolf pup," Mr. Henson said.

"Yes and we would like to know what we should do with him," said Dad.

Mr. Henson thought for a minute then said, "I think it's best to send the cub back into the wild."

"But what if hunters try to catch him again?" asked Nate.

"Well, we're going to put a tracking device on him," replied Mr. Henson. "It's a collar that sends radio signals telling us where he is located."

When Mac was first released he was having trouble finding food. But then he found something furry and he ate the squirrel and he continued walking. The next day Mac was running quickly. He had disturbed a moose and the moose was charging him. Mac ran as fast as his short legs would carry him. After a while he stopped running. He turned his head around and saw that the moose was no longer chasing him. Mac continued to walk. Mac learned to hunt squirrels and rabbits when he is hungry, being careful not to disturb any moose or large animals.

Three months later Mac had grown bigger. Mac was now very hungry. He sniffed the air and he smelled meat. Mac followed the scent and it led him out of the forest to a lake. He sniffed the air again and turned his head to the right. There was a wire cage with the door opened. Not realizing that it was a trap, Mac walked right in as he followed the scent of the chicken. As he began to eat the chicken he heard two voices. "So you caught a moose. Show it to me," said the first voice.

"Can't. Made stew out of it." Then he laughed. Mac knew that laugh. It was the hunter. "Looks like I caught something." The hunter walked out of the bushes and he laughed. He was wearing a camouflage shirt and pants. He picked up the cage and threw it into the back of a truck. The man that had been talking to him had left.

Meanwhile at the ranger station, "Hey look he's not moving," stated a woman who was monitoring Mac. She thought, *Perhaps he is sleeping*. Then she thought, *This is a camp ground*. Why would he sleep in a place full of humans? He's in trouble.

Nate and his father were telephoned to come back to the ranger station. "We believe that Mac's in trouble and that he's been captured. Since you are the people who found him you can help rescue him," said Mr. Henson as he opened the door to his Jeep. There were two other park rangers in the vehicle as Nate and his father jumped in. Mr. Henson started driving.

Meanwhile, at the hunter's cottage the hunter was snarling at Mac. "I'm going to kill you and I am going to keep your fur as a trophy."Then he laughed his wicked laugh. Mac whimpered. The hunter suddenly heard the sound of a car. He glanced out the window and saw the ranger's Jeep. The hunter quickly hid himself in the closet.

The rangers, Nate and his dad emptied out of the Jeep. "According to the signal Mac should be in that cottage," one of the rangers said. They walked up to the front door and knocked on it. When no one answered they forced their way in. They found Mac in a cage. As Dad was opening the cage, the hunter suddenly jumped out of the closet just as Dad freed Mac. The hunter was holding a gun pointed at them. "Oh you think you can beat me but you will be dead." He laughed really hard.

Dad noticed that the window was opened. "Come on Nate," he said as he bolted out of the window with Nate and Mac right behind. As Mac was flying out of the window the hunter stopped laughing. He fired his gun. Bam, bam, bam, bam. Mac escaped the shots and kept running. He ran into the woods. Nate and his father followed him. Mac stopped because in front of him was a wolf pack. They growled and they looked angry. Then a wolf that was a little bit smaller than the ones that were in front of Mac came out of the pack and she looked Mac in the eye and sniffed him, then she licked him. Nate and his father watched speechlessly. Mac was home.

Giants of the Armageddon

Ian Kamperschroer Ledyard Center School, Grade 4

Manston ducked behind a broken lamp pole as a building behind him was swallowed in a tremendous explosion. His squad had just entered Stalingrad, and they were being pinned down mercilessly by Russian soldiers. The sun was going down, but the Russians didn't stop fighting even though the temperature was dropping rapidly. Suddenly, a Russian soldier jumped out from a narrow alleyway. Before the Russian could pull the trigger of his Tokarev SVT-U rifle, an MG-42 fired from behind him.

"Arrghh!" he cried as he fell to the ground. A German soldier stood over the body of the Russian.

"Thanks!" Manston shouted to the German who had just saved his life. "Thanks."

The last shot was fired from a Russian soldier at the end of the street. He had blasted a young German in an artery with his Gorunov SG-43. The German's neck was spurting out blood. "Someone help him!" yelled Manston as the soldier's mouth gurgled out the red liquid like a waterfall. A medic rushed to the young man's aid. But by the time the medic got there, he was dead. Now, everything was quiet and dark. It was freezing cold. Manston walked away. He had to find somewhere to sleep.

Manston woke with a start. He had been sleeping under an abandoned T-34 tank. A door had slammed at the end of the street; the Russian side of the street. He crawled out from the tank to go to the bathroom. He walked across the rubble over to a building. Suddenly, he heard an explosion from behind him. WHOOSH! Fire shot up into the air as the very tank he had been sleeping in was engulfed in flames. A wave of heat swept over him as he dove behind a destroyed German Tiger tank. Above the roar of the explosion of the tank behind him, Manston could hear the sound of what seemed like a million gunshots. Suddenly, a Russian

soldier about 40 yards down the street emerged from behind a large piece of rubble. In his right hand, he held a grenade and in his left, an A VS-36 rifle. He wore a look of sheer determination on his face. Manston could tell he wanted to kill a German. The soldier drew back his arm and then threw the grenade as high and far as he could. Thump! It landed right next to him!

"Oh my God!" screamed Manston. He jumped up and tried to leap behind a building. Too late.

The explosion threw him to the ground. He looked down at his body. It was better than he thought, considering he was only about 6 yards away from the explosion when it happened. Blood was running down his leg, but that wasn't what hurt the most. A burning pain on the side of his neck hurt so terribly that he couldn't even scream. He dared to look behind him. A blood-soaked flap of skin hung from his neck. He slowly reached up and touched it. He could feel a huge gash. It stung badly, but he managed to sit up.

Then he realized something. He didn't have his gun. He had left it under the tank. *How could I have been so stupid?* Manston thought to himself. All he had was his knife. Suddenly, the gunshots died down. The horrible sound of brave men screaming hung in the air. A medic rushed to him and somehow, despite the noise of all the shouts and yells, he drifted away into a deep sleep.

The Terrible Truth

Andrew P. Schwartz

Coley Town Elementary School, Grade 5

"I can't quite put my finger on it," I told my brother Eric. "The only thing I know is that between homework and a lot of other stuff, my life is falling apart."

I looked at Eric and he said in a low, tired voice, "it's getting to me, too."

We were in his room while Mom and Dad were in couples' therapy. We were trying to figure out why Mom and Dad were out, while we were stuck at home with a babysitter. The only thing we knew was that it couldn't be good. We came up with a few options: First, they were going to be sent to a mental hospital because we were driving them crazy. Second, they were going through depression because of gas prices and other costs. (The only reason we suspected this is because Dad goes on the *Wall Street Journal* website a lot.) Dad was always talking about how much the "economy stinks."

I kept a small list of suspicions in my head. Here is what I had at the time: my mom went on "J. Date" a lot, Dad had been looking for houses, and Mom was going to see "a friend" alone every once in awhile. Not only that, they both kept asking me if I would I like it if we had more "alone time."

Mom and Dad came home and Eric and I ran downstairs. We asked them where they had been the second they opened the door. They explained why they had been in therapy and my heart dropped to the bottom of my feet. Suddenly, the world wasn't so wonderful anymore. When they said the three words that they did, they drained all of my happy feelings until I felt like the world was falling apart. I felt like I was alone, falling into a bottomless pit. My insides were turning to ice, and my brain went numb at the very thought of it.

I yelled, "How could you do this to me?" I bolted up the stairs like there was no tomorrow and ran down the hall taking a left into my room. I slammed the door so hard the door hinges barely stood the impact. I barricaded myself in. I wanted to starve myself. I yelled, "I am not to go out for as long as I live!" I tried to make the room airtight, but I didn't have something without a crack in it. I pulled out a chemistry set that I had been given a few years ago, but it didn't say how to make poison.

About thirty minutes later my Mom yelled, "DINNER!" I heard footsteps down the hall. The footsteps sounded light so I guessed they were Eric's. I didn't want to eat, but my stomach had a mind of its own. I ate my carrots, imagining they had arms, legs and the faces of my Mom or Dad, in turn. I took the plastic fork next to my plate and snapped it in half. I spoke in a low voice, "That was you." It sounded almost like a growl, warning an intruder to back off.

I asked in a forced calm voice, "When did it start?"

She said in a sorrowful voice, "After you were born." It sounded like someone who just figured out that someone important to them had just died.

"You do realize this will change Eric's and my life forever." I spoke as if every syllable hurt me. I thought of all the good times before now, and all of a sudden I remembered them battling and fighting every so often.

"Do you have to?" I asked them.

My mom said, "It's for the best."

I finally accepted the terrible fact that my parents were getting a divorce. I wondered if I was going to have to choose which parent's house I would live at. Would my parents use me to spy on each other? I imagined going in the car to see each of them every so often. Moving half of my things to another house. The awkward questions my parents would ask me. I also wondered what would happen to our dog, Peanut Butter.

How would they pay for everything with only half the money that they had before? If they couldn't pay for everything, we might have to move to a different, less expensive neighborhood and I would have to move to a different school. There is nothing more that I can do to prevent it. My life is tearing in half.

Life Isn't a Fairytale

Zamantha Benvenuto Montessori Magnet School, Grade 5

Some people are really lucky; their lives are like fairytales. To my family our life used to seem like a fairytale, at least for awhile.

Hi, I'm Zam, short for Zamantha and I have a great family- a younger brother Alessandro, a wonderful mom and a great dad. My brother and I both do well in school; in fact my mom works in our school. We were all healthy and happy and our life was like a fairytale. Then it happened; the event that changed our lives forever. One day my brother and I were racing around playing tag in the house and I sort of pushed him when I tagged him and he fell down hard. He said his leg hurt so we stopped playing tag. Then when he started limping, I felt really bad. It was mostly my fault and at first I was scared and thought he broke his ankle when I pushed him. When my mom noticed my brother was limping a lot, she took him to the hospital.

The doctors took an X-ray of my brother's leg. The doctors told my mom he just had a simple little bruise. I was glad the doctor said he was okay. My brother doesn't usually complain about things but I remember he didn't even want to run around at recess that week so I knew he really wasn't all better.

A couple of days later my mom saw my brother was limping even more, so after school we all walked to the hospital because my dad had the car at work. Although it was not far, on

the way there my brother fell twice, which was unusual. He normally wouldn't fall for no reason and I could tell he wasn't doing it for attention. When we got to the hospital my mom wanted the doctors to take another x-ray but they didn't want to. So my mom said that my brother's leg hurt so much that he couldn't stand it.

It was the first time I saw my mom exaggerate and not tell the exact truth. My mom always said it isn't right to lie but she did. Later on, what my mom said turned out to be true, though I wished it hadn't been. The doctors finally agreed to take an x-ray but this time of the hip too. In the x-ray the doctors saw something wrong but weren't sure what the problem was, so they told my mom that she had to take my brother to an oncologist.

We didn't know what the doctor saw wrong but when they said we had to see an oncologist right away, that's when my mom got really afraid. She told me later, that was when she knew inside her that my brother had cancer.

After he saw the oncologist they told my mom that he had cancer. YES, MY BROTHER HAD CANCER! I felt horrible because it was my fault he fell; I was the one who pushed him. I should have been in more control, I'm older.

Having my brother in the hospital was really hard for the whole family, but mostly frightening for my little brother. It was a tough time for all of us because everything changed. My mom was always in the hospital with my brother so she was almost never able to be at home with me any more. The hospital became a second house for my brother and my mom but not for me. I ended up going to the hospital but not every day for the whole day like she did. Most of the time I had to stay with my grandmother or my dad.

Alessandro was 4 years old when he was diagnosed with a very rare cancer. He had stage 4 cancer on the bone called lymphoma. Sadly my brother had to be in a wheelchair for 2 years. He ended up having to use the wheelchair because he lost all the bone on his left hip. I remember how I felt when I first saw my brother in a wheelchair. It felt like one day we were running around playing tag, and then the next he was in a wheelchair. My brother was always in the wheelchair so that was how we had to get from place to place. I felt really bad for him because it must have been really depressing for him stuck in a wheelchair watching every one else running around and having fun.

My brother had to go through so much like spinal taps, special medicines, chemotherapy and the needles my mom had to give him every day. When I was at the hospital it was a really sad time for me too. Because of the medicines he had to drink, my brother started to look different. He became really overweight. I also remember when I saw my brother lose all his hair. Sometimes the doctors would let my brother come home, and since I shared a room with him, I remember sometimes in the morning seeing pieces of hair on his pillow. That was really difficult to see. It was also a good thing we shared a room because if at night my brother had to go to the bathroom, I was the one who had to go get my parents to help.

It wasn't just my brother like that but most of the kids at the hospital looked the same as my brother. I remember there was a little boy in the hospital that used to play with my brother but one day I heard my mom say he had died. I felt horrible. I would get scared thinking that could happen to my brother.

I also met a 12-year-old girl in the hospital who had cancer. I remember when I first saw her. The cancer had changed her looks so she looked really different from some people that you would see at school or the mall. She seemed really nice. Later on I found out that her parents were planning a birthday party for her at the hospital. At first I thought that was really great, until I found out that were having her party at the hospital because they knew she was going to die very soon. I remember wondering what would happen to my brother. Two years passed and my brother survived. My brother was really strong. He had to have 4 surgeries even though he was only four years old. Even though my brother was little, he never blamed it on me when they found cancer right after I pushed him and he fell. Somehow, my brother got really lucky, and he didn't even have to stay in a wheelchair. My brother is okay now. Somehow his bone re-grew itself in his hip even though the doctors said it wouldn't. In fact, now he is up walking and even running again. I am able to play tag with my brother again but I am always extra careful now. Well, I try to be anyway. After all I am still a kid too, and I forget sometimes.

I was also pretty lucky because I had great parents to explain to me what was happening to my brother. My parents never blame me at all, but I never really told them how I felt so guilty. I guess I was so scared I didn't even want to tell anyone how I felt partly responsible. Even though I know that really didn't make sense. I know now the cancer was already growing inside him before I pushed him, but I still felt guilty. My mom said that it was a bad thing when I pushed him, but at the same time it was a good thing because maybe we wouldn't have found out about the cancer in time. My brother was really strong and really, really brave; he didn't complain or cry a lot.

I learned a lot about myself and about my brother too. I guess I didn't really know my brother was brave until then. I always thought bravery was when someone goes into a burning house or jumps in the pool to save someone's life, but bravery is much more than that in so many different ways. I'm so glad my brother is okay. Wow, I guess that in the end, my life really is like a fairytale. I never really liked fairytales before because they start you hoping for miracles that only happen in fairytales or movies but not in real life. I guess I was wrong though because my miracle is my brother. I'm glad my life, and his, turned out to be a fairytale after all.

Before You Were Born

Teresa Forlenzo Reed Intermediate School, Grade 5

Before you were born, I waited and waited and waited for you.

Before you were born, I read *Winnie the Pooh* to you and hoped you heard. Mama said it was a head-start on learning. It must've worked because you're extra smart. I also sang "Thriller" to you. Now you idolize Michael Jackson.

Before you were born, I would climb into Mama's bed and lay my head on her mountain of a stomach. I was listening to see if you were asleep. Once I thought I heard a giggle, probably not.

Before you were born, you kicked Mama from inside her belly and got away with it. Now you know that if you kick Mama you'll earn yourself a timeout.

Before you were born, I saved presents to give to you the day of your birth. Usually just something I happened to pick up on the floor. Sometimes I would find a penny sticking out of the cracks in the floor. Into your piggy bank it would go.

Before you were born, I prayed to God that you would be a healthy baby. I was worried that you wouldn't be.

Before you were born, Daddy and I used to draw pictures on Mama's big stomach of what we thought you'd look like. We were never close.

When you were born, you were as pink as a cherry and as loud as an elephant. The hat you wore made you look like one of those little Beanie Babies that you see in the display window of a toy store. You only had a wisp of hair sticking out from under your hat. Your tiny fingers were tightly closed into a fist around my thumb.

When you were one, I took you on wagon rides down the neighbor's hill. You liked it so much that you made me do it again in the winter. It's really embarrassing when you have to trudge through the snow dragging a toddler in a sled behind you, especially when you trip and land face first in the snow and the toddler falls over laughing. But I did it for you. I will never forget that day.

When you were two, I carried you around in a cardboard box and presented you to Mama and Daddy as "mail." They would open up the box and pretend to be surprised when you came out and shouted, "Boo."

When you were three, I taught you how to play on the computer. It became your favorite thing to do, so when I asked you if I could try you said, "No."

Now that you're four, you run into walls and play "instruments" (pots and pans) for us. You play "grown-ups" with your friends (yelling at dolls and sending them to bed when they don't eat their salad). I taught you how to make Mama and Daddy laugh – walk down the hall like a fashion model when they're eating dinner. One time you actually tried it. They looked at you like you just fell down from space and into their dining room.

Now that I think about it, you are a pretty funny sister. You were worth the wait.

Middle School, Grades 6-8 Poetry

I am Like an Owl

Sofia diTommaso

Essex Elementary School, Grade 6

I am like an owl. Wind whispers To me, And only me, Calling me, Searching for a play mate, Hunting For someone who dares come out in the Crisp, cool, night. Night is mine. I can smell it, The wonderful smell of night. I taste it, As though tasting rich, cold, vanilla ice cream. Screeching, Calling, a star winks from the darkening sky. My voice ricochets off the stillness of the night, Then silence, Absolutely still silence. A pair of eyes, Large eyes, Stare at me, From under the porch. My friends, My animal friends are up and ready for some Entertainment. The moon's shadowed eyes Seem to glow, His mouth forms a smile,

And then he's gone ...

Disappeared. Fallen straight from the sky.

The sun, So low,

So intimidating Laughs, An evil laugh A terrible laugh. My night is gone. My beautiful, Wonderful, Night, Is gone. Sleep overcomes me. Dreams of night And Thoughts of day Fill my head. Waiting And Waiting, Waiting And Watching For my dear friend Night. I am like an owl, Night is mine Day is not.

My Team is a Basket

Savannah Herbek Latimer Lane Elementary School, Grade 6

Our bodies are brisk straws Grown at different fields We come together We learn to weave each other Side by side, intertwined Our basket Strong enough to hold a fish

Though if one gives up Breaks just slightly We all unwind The fish escapes Now It has been Days since we have lost a fish Now if one breaks We help repair each other And hold on tightly

The Season of Colors

Kaylee Schultz Ledyard Center School, Grade 6

Paint drips off an artist's brush, dyeing the world red and orange. The vibrant hues of autumn then fall again, drifting gently to the ground. The scarecrow grins merrily as he and the multicolored raindrops scare away his enemy. Then, that smile turns to a frown as he watches his treasure trove of golden squash and brass pumpkins be picked and taken away. As the sun sets, the very same pumpkins are set alight, haunting the streets with their new eerie grins and terrified faces that are frozen in horror. Sunrise brings a promise of a new day, trying hard to make the early mood light, cheered by the citrus and magenta decorating the skies. The air followed suit, blowing cinnabar leaves through the streets. Then they turn brown as Jack Frost clings on, anxious for a ride. Then Snow comes, icing the streets with the first of the crystal blankets she made during the autumn's reign. Grays and whites are soon the only visible colors. Breeze watched from a distance, and then sighed. He gathered his colored leaves and vegetables and flew off into the frosty sun.

Submerged

Taylor Spadafora Tolland Middle School, Grade 7

I dive into the sea of words and I float around in the letters for five, ten minutes then I sink in.

I feel an anonymous sentence pull at my leg and I'm yanked under, all the words grabbing and pulling.

I'm sinking

farther

and farther, the letters taking me in as their prisoner. They'll never let me go.

Pages turning like waves ahead, words swimming by, powerful, mysterious.

Chapters above me, towering like skyscrapers.

I'm not afraid.

I let them drag me under, taking their world in as I sink.

And then, I start floating upward, passing many harmless words. They must have given up.

And then I surface,

the real world coming back.

Drowning in You

Jalen Hunter Windham Middle School, Grade 7

I wake up every morning thinking of you, I go to sleep thinking the same thing too. Throughout the day you're on my mind, Twenty-four-seven you make me blind. Blind to everything but emotion, Your heart swallowed me like it was an ocean, And I was the victim of not pain but of pleasure. The water was a feeling of unbelievable measure, It filled my lungs and I couldn't breathe, I closed my eyes but I could still see. The light in your eyes was incredibly bright, It helped me see beyond most peoples' sight. But only when I looked you in the eyes, And it came as a surprise Because I've never drowned like that before. Overwhelming me, more and more

By the minutes, seconds we were together, We didn't make conversation, not even about the weather. But there were whirlpools surrounding me, We ignored them and let them be, And so I drowned in my own sorrows, That I didn't talk to you, today or tomorrow. So now I'm slowly drowning, drowning like a rock, The water surrounded me like a hungry hawk. I am drowning, Drowning in you.

Gone

Samantha Lotko Newtown Middle School, Grade 7

The woman stood in front of the table, her weathered, sad hands slowly rubbing her face. She was getting fairly old, and was grieving for heaven every day.

One day, she went to the hospital and I went for a visit.

She closed her eyes and lay still.

I pulled the warm blanket up underneath her chin and said a prayer.

The beautiful flowers I brought fell from my hand as I kissed her cheek.

She closed her thoughtful brown eyes as a weary smile spread across her face.

Right then I knew that it was time.

I opened the window and walked out of the stuffy hospital room, feeling at peace. There was a small song, a little smile, and then nothing.

Time's Frozen Place

Hannah Carpino Avon Middle School, Grade 8

There is a certain grace to my grandmother As she tucks the feather in her hair A certain contentedness to her eyes For this is a routine that has been performed every year for a long time My mother opens the box that holds her feather Lifting the lid gently, gingerly Admiring the simple but beautiful Brown and white feather Both of them hang colorful weights on their chests: their bead strings My grandmother looks like an Indian chief, proud and astute Her eyes fierce with pride, her neck swallowed by the thousands of beads While my mother is some type of queen, a gentle smile that gives away nothing Her bead strings just as overpowering Long brown Native American style tunics encase them With symbols painted in fading colors Silent colored words of another language But the paint on my dress is still bright I have no feather to tuck in my hair My bead strings number only four Because I have only attended four years Four years of bliss at Singing Eagle Lodge, New Hampshire For two weeks each summer, my world is alive with traditions that never die Two weeks where the White Mountains create some type of border Where the real world ends and camp begins Our time is not stolen by modern thieves Technology like phones and computers We never hear the sound of cities Only the uninterrupted song of joy

This is the place where the traditions of our natives are valued Twice during the two weeks of camp, each girl and counselor Will don their Indian dresses and tunics Counselors will put their feathers in Girls braid each other's hair, laughing and joking But once they arrive at the lodge, the mood changes Somber, quiet faces flushed from the heat of the raging bonfire The older girls have rainbow burdens of beads And the youngest girls may have only one string But you can see in the way they behold it That it is enough for them That one little string has brought them so much joy For their eyes are wide with wonder Their heads bowed in humbleness They understand that this is a sacred place And the oldest girls, they weep and hold each other Maybe this is their last year as a camper, and next year they will be counselors They cry for the years that have come to pass And the ones encased in shadow that have yet to come; a mystery They cry for the joy that camp has brought them

Looking across the lodge at familiar faces The fire is reflected in each of their eyes Dancing crazily in the hearth And yet there is another kind of fire I can see Some kind of hope in them that burns as bright as any bonfire And this fire will never go out These are the girls I have grown to love I have grown a feeling of sisterhood with these girls Who come to camp from across the world To unite as one family

As the moon gradually grows brighter and the night grows darker,

We join, arm in arm, to sing familiar songs, songs of old Our voices carry high into the rafters, different voices blended Swirling together, getting louder and louder Finally the last verse comes And our voices are hushed Because something in us has ended, something invisible And we are left to our thoughts

When the last day of camp arrives I am not prepared One huge leap from Paradise and I will return to the regular world again The last bits of extraordinary washed from me Like waves washing away a sandcastle standing on a barren beach Packing away all of my items in my green duffel bag But my bead string I cannot bear to put away My last vestige of heaven, I place it on my neck Other girls follow suit, smiling slightly, eyes brimming with memories One by one, my friends are slipping away Driving back to their worlds But as each of them leave, tears clouding my vision, I embrace them Our bead strings clinking gently between Our two beating hearts.

Everything is Fine

Rebecca Glass Tomlinson Middle School, Grade 8

Dear Mom,

I would tell you that since your gentle spirit swam away into the sky and your frail body was lowered beneath the ground everything has been fine. Well, let me start by saying, it's not. But what's easier? To pretend. So I pretend that glass vase didn't soar across the kitchen last night, only to meet a devastating fate. Shattered. You adored that glass vase. I pretend his face didn't melt away into one of hatred and indecency and his eyes burning embers in the light. His eyes used to be so beautiful and kind. Soft with a father's love and a good man's morals.

I pretend that clink I hear, of glass on glass, bottle on glass, doesn't sound like a bomb before it explodes ... but doesn't it?

pour drink explode

I try my best to take your place and comfort the little ones when all sanity is lost.

~ 41 ~

I read to them and pretend to be the fairy godmother of Cinderella and the seven dwarfs that befriend Snow White.

I have been doing a lot of pretending, Mom a lot of lying too.

I won't lie to you though. In your absence the fingers of grief have touched us all. We are decaying in the depths of human misery. We are descending in a melancholy downward spiral. Floundering in a vast pool of numbness.

but that's what death will do to a family. that's what death will do to a husband. that's what alcoholism will do to a family. a broken family.

He misses you, we all miss you. Everything's not fine.

Where I'm From

Caitlyn Chapman Eastford Elementary School, Grade 8

I am from Legos, from Windex and Dust Vision. I am from the congruent condos of Suffield Meadows, Full of the home-sweet-home stench of ferrets. I am from the butterfly gardens clouding my senses, The fresh-cut grass cradling me gently. I am from graveyard cakes and sight problems, From Cheryl and Michael. I am from the math geeks, the comedians, and the artists, From "Finish your food!" and "Keep your head out of your dinner!" I am from a family that doesn't go to church, that doesn't believe in any one thing, that likes to debate religious beliefs. I'm from Connecticut of the U.S.A., Turkey and fresh apples. From the crazy Auntie Kay getting cancer, The great-grandmother gone nearly blind, And the silly father who broke an ankle playing basketball. I am from dozens upon dozens of photos All stuffed and packed into albums, Then bookshelves, All capturing lost moments in time,

Of family not to be heard from, And friends not seen. I am from these moments Never to be retrieved. I am from these photographs, Maybe that's all we'll ever be.

Middle School, Grades 6-8 Prose

A Whole New World

Katherine Blomstrann Mansfield Middle School, Grade 6

What is the true meaning of writing? It is not the dictionary definition, but simply what you feel inside. Dictionary.com defines writing as: "the act of a person or thing that writes." My mother told me that you should not use the word you are defining in the definition. I decided to look up the definition of "write" and found that it is "to trace or form (characters, letters, words, etc.) on the surface of some material, as with a pen, pencil, or other instrument or means." Everyone has his own way of thinking about what writing might mean. Take a moment to think about it. Simply stated, writing is not just tracing letters on a page, but it is the way your mind can express worlds of new ideas. Fiction, fantasy, non-fiction, essay, poetry and narrative are all ways of expressing ideas on paper. Writing gives you the power to speak to the world by allowing thoughts to pour out and express what was waiting to be shown to others. Once I found out that writing could be so powerful, my life changed; it changed forever.

I started writing more than simple words and phrases in second grade and I can even remember our first assignment. *Write about an animal escaping from the zoo and how you got it back.* Although I wrote about the obvious (an elephant being lured back from his escape with a peanut), it was the process that fascinated me. I loved how you could take your mind, focus on all of the possibilities of your imagination, and speak to the universe in endless ways. Writing became my voice. That moment was when I started to enjoy it.

As I grew older, I thought about things that could be done with my writing. Teachers told me that on paper, you did not have to be realistic because in fiction, anything is possible. Then I rethought my first piece of writing. Maybe after the elephant escaped, I could bring it back by creating a giant, feathery, pink mythical pelican for it to ride. The over sized pelican could scoop the unaware elephant up with his beak. Another possible scenario would involve attaching peacock feathers to the elephant to somehow make it fly. When I learned that fantasy was an option, an option that brought great power, I could not wait for a pencil to appear in my hand. After my first writing experience, I began to create dreams that I wished would come alive. During the times that I was writing, those dreams became reality for a moment and I felt like I was there fulfilling them.

Sometimes I just sit down with nothing at all in front of me, and I just stare into space. My mom, sister and dad all ask me if I am bored or they tell me to find something to do. What they do not know is that my brain is processing ideas constantly of new stories that I could make come alive even when it appears that I am just sitting around looking like I have nothing to do. Since this happens almost every day, I just have to sit down and write about what is on my mind. I like topics that I choose more than those that are chosen for me at school. My hand and mind work together to create something that is all mine.

Writing is my voice, my dreams, and something that will always be my own. When I write, I feel free. I can make more than mythical pelicans and mischievous elephants. I can make anything. Writing is so much more than creating letters on a page; it is an opening to a whole new world.

The Mast

Gianna Michaelson Gideon Welles School, Grade 6

The waves slapped against the sandy shore on the windy, May afternoon. We could hear seagulls calling to one another as they perched upon the old broken posts jutting out of the ocean. Those posts used to support a dock, which got taken down before I was born. The water was way too cold to swim in; it was too early in the year. Schools of tiny fish were racing through the water, dodging clumps of seaweed and rocks. *I wonder when the jelly fish would come, if they did at all,* I thought to myself. *I hope not for a while.*

The saltiness of low tide reached my nose and taste buds and I cringed. Even after living here for every summer of my life, I still haven't gotten used to that smell. Maybe I never will. I could hear the crash of the waves as they hit the shore. Since it was May, the sand was cool enough to walk on, but when June came along, my feet would burn. I couldn't wait. I followed my dad's footsteps, going along the trail to our kayak. I stopped short. What lay ahead of me was something I never expected to see. It looked like a mast from a huge ship. It was about twenty feet long and two or three feet around. It was a dusty gray color kind of worn down with stripped nails spiking out from the sides where it once held the pole down. Small holes poked out from the wood, dotting the mast.

It was truly amazing. I just stood there wondering what may have caused this pole to end up here on this beach. Was it just some people who brought it down here for some reason? I tried not to think about that. It kind of burst my bubble. Maybe a ship fell apart here, on the beach or in the water and this was one of the parts from it. Well, then where were the other parts? There weren't any that I could see. How did it fall apart? Was it a massive storm that destroyed a boat and this floated over here? If so, were there people on the boat? I hope not. I wonder.

It was a stormy night, the wind howling and pushing the great boat back with the current. Waves reached up high in the air and tried to grab you. Sometimes they succeeded, pulling sailors off the sodden wood floors. Rain splashed against all of the decks ferociously as the captain stood, emotionless looking over his ship. Sailors scurried around the deck, desperately trying to control the boat against the massive waves.

A scream erupted louder than the crash of the waves. Another sailor was thrown off of the ship and forced down under the terrible salt water. The storm got worse. It was like the waves were to get the boat to capsize. The captain's eyes grew wide in terror. He tried to cry out as the huge wave approached the boat. It was at least twenty feet above the normal sea level, ready to curl. The captain started to yell out orders, his eyes glued to the wave but no one could hear him. Even if they had heard him, they were all too panic stricken to respond. Now people were deliberately jumping off the boat, afraid of what might happen next. Then it happened.

The wave hit the boat at such force that it sent it totally under water. The mast was flung off of the boat, sent floating away, carried by the current. The boat kept on sinking and sinking until it hit the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. All of their belongings were lost. Most of the crew got off in time but some of them didn't make it; they'd be down there forever, trapped in the boat. The mast was flung off of, sent floating away, carried by the current. It floated and floated until it reached Mansfield Grove, a beach community in Connecticut. As for the rest of the ship ... well it's still down in the Atlantic Ocean somewhere along with its passengers.

Wow, spooky. I shivered. That thought was still fresh in my mind, as I walked back up to the cottage trailing behind my dad. I looked back once more, but the pole was gone! The whole twenty foot long pole disappeared into thin air! "Dad-"I started to say, but I thought better of it. This would be my secret.

Gone With the Wave

Pritika Seshadri Latimer Lane School, Grade 6

Waves crashed and seagulls soared. The pale pink and beige sand slipped through my toes. The smell of sea salt and the sound of waves crashing against the shore felt liberating. They pounded rhythmically and felt soothing to my ears. The water seemed welcoming and friendly and its cool, inviting hands reached out to embrace me. No one would be able to resist the pleasant ocean. Almost immediately, I closed my eyes and imagined a smooth, ten foot dive. I slowly opened my eyes and said to myself, *I'm ready*. My diving gear was in order so I jumped and cut through the smooth, blue liquid, oozing out from the depths of eternity. The next thing I knew, I was underwater.

My smooth dive was broken by a large fish and I swerved to dodge one. I swam to the bottom, and I realized I could see pretty well. I was in shallow water. Curiously, I looked around, kicking up sediment. What I saw had amazed me. There were swirls of color, majestic reds, heroic blues and dazzling oranges. Clumps of anemone waved to a steady rhythm, and their flesh comprised of light periwinkle, a pale pink and caramel orange. The coral seemed to be hard and bony, rough and callused. However, at one touch, they crumbled to the sand floor in a heap. Seaweed brushed against my legs. I kicked off a large rock and cut through the water. As my legs and hands moved in sync, I floated on the ripples underwater. Finally, I followed a shoal of salmon to a coral reef.

The coral reef was like a city. Small little shrimp scrubbed other fishes' teeth like a car wash. There were little caves that fish lived in, like houses or apartments. It looked like every fish had its own place. Shoals of fish followed their leader, and they moved in sync. All their slender bodies moved side to side. Suddenly, as if they practiced it, every single fish disappeared behind a rock or crack. I slowly turned around, and I saw teeth, lots of teeth.

An eagle of fear with talons of weakness soared in my stomach. My throat went dry, as if the ocean had transformed into a dry, dangerous desert. I gulped. Thoughts rushed through my mind, like a gushing river. Was it a shark? Would I tragically die, or would I heroically vanquish this marine enemy? That was enough. I kicked as hard as possible and used long, deep strokes. To my relief, I started to rise to the surface. However, a shark could still drag me down to the dark, unexplored depths of the mysterious ocean. A wave of shock and realization sent me off again. The shark was gaining on me. What could I do? My knees started to shake, and to my horror, I started to sink. I was done for.

Then, as if a miracle happened, I floated up to the surface. In fact, I was pushed up to the surface. My eyes widened. What was going on?

I whipped my head around in the water, and I saw a long, silver figure with friendly eyes and a curved nose. Its teeth were sharp, but blunt compared to a shark's. What was I thinking? I had unreasonably panicked and worried unnecessarily. After all, a dolphin wouldn't hurt anybody! Yes, the marine mammal I was looking at was an Atlantic Spotted, white-faced dolphin. I reached out my shaking hand and touched his grey skin. It felt like a beach ball, rubbery and smooth. Then, as if all the sadness had been sucked from the world, the dolphin opened his toothy mouth and grinned. As soon as I put both hands on his back, he darted away, me with him.

We curved along edges and ducked under natural coral-made arches as we seemed to glide through the ocean.

Suddenly, I heard a shrill, high-pitched whistle. My dolphin replied with a series of tongue twisting clicks. Then out of nowhere, another spotted dolphin swam along beside us. This one was smaller with mischievous eyes. She swam right to my side and cuddled up to me. I gently pressed my hand on her head, which felt soft and smooth.

Finally, the dolphins rose for air. As soon as I could see the shining sun, I felt very solemn. The sun, which was obstructed from my view before, looked beautiful. It was like a fiery ballerina, whose toes danced upon the very sky. The clouds had disappeared, leaving the sun, the dolphins and me.

At that moment, I stood on the dolphins' backs. Yes, I did. I placed my wet feet on their rubber skin and let my arms out to face the sun. It was magical and fallacious, strong and unsullied. I could feel the sun's warmth soothe my cold face. That very moment was too divine to put in words. I was dizzy, yet stable and calm.

The dolphins chirped and I put my attention on them. They swam closer and closer to shore and I would have to say good-bye to my new friends.

I realized the dolphins were tilting to let me slide on the sand. I stepped off, but turned back. A longing to be with them forever filled my heart as they flipped in the air. I stared at the rippling spot where they vanished, and I felt a rush of emotion; a mixture of excitement, happiness and sadness. I hoped, hoped with all my heart, that they'd come back. However, they were gone. Gone with the wave!

Forever Thankful

Annastasia Martineau Mansfield Middle School, Grade 7

Sunshine yellows, tangerine oranges and royal purples flashed across my canvas as my paintbrush swept over it in a blur of color. It was expressing exactly how I was feeling that day, excited and curious to see who would come into my art studio. Signing my work, *Isabelle 2010*, I looked out the window at my small town and hung my newest abstract piece next to the others. I looked over my life's work; walls and walls of paintings I had made on every occasion. Curly streamers of color on a black background were for the upcoming New Year, strands of ruby red and evergreen woven into tangled wreaths of mocha brown symbolized Christmas, and a scrambled tree holding dots of rosy pink, sky blue and soft greens represented Easter. I was very proud of every piece I had made, but realized that I still had almost every piece, even though I was trying to sell them.

Later that day, a ring of the shiny bell on the door told me that customers had arrived. I saw two women walk in, each with a disapproving look on their face. I still welcomed them, and invited them to look around. They didn't respond, so I returned to my place behind the counter. I saw one woman come to the counter with my favorite piece, which I had made the first day of autumn that year, with its bronze, golden, tomato red and scarlet orange leaves.

"Excuse me, but did your daughter make this? I know my five year old is making pictures like this with her crayon box right now. It's very cute," she said with mock admiration.

"Yes," I answered, swallowing hard, "yes she did." Laughing, the woman and her friend bought the piece and strolled out of my studio. I felt a wave of depression run through my veins. That woman knew I had made the painting. Everyone knew. No one would come back when she told them of my childish work. Only to laugh. To laugh at my different style that they didn't understand. I tried to calm myself. Surely two people could not effect the fate of my whole studio. But maybe it wasn't just them. No one had come into my studio for weeks. I was probably going to have to shut my studio down and then...

No. I wasn't going to let my mood be spoiled by two people. I decided that I would get some fresh air and paint the beautiful day. I started with a macaroni yellow for the sun, and painted a large, round spiral in the middle of the canvas. I then filled the spiral with a pale orange and put bold, reddish sunbeams flowing out from it. I already was feeling sunnier and less depressed. Continuing my work, I added a streak of cloudy gray with my thickest brush. It would be a misty day. Or maybe it would rain. Yes, rain seemed to fit the day better. I added raindrops, tears of navy blue sliding across the sky as I thought about what those horrible women had done to me. I inserted a neon yellow streak of lightning, going right through the sun. This made me feel better, as my true feelings were now out on the canvas. Sighing, I went back into my studio and set my picture out to dry. For the rest of that day, and all that night, I only sat, staring at the bell that might never ring again.

No one came the following day, so I used the time to find out if those women were the only ones who disapproved of my art. I called one of my friends, who always told me what she was really thinking. If she didn't approve, no one would. When I asked for her opinion on my studio work, she seemed surprised that I was still painting, but that I should be proud of my work, even if it was *abstract*, something that most people didn't understand. She talked to me sweetly, but I could hear the criticism in her voice. I hung up, letting the phone drop out of my hand and hit the floor with a loud thud. My own best friend didn't even admire what I did anymore. There was no one left. No one cared. Even my mother told me while I was growing up to be more sophisticated, and not to "play with ugly random lines on paper." My brothers and sisters used to make fun of me, scribbling with their fat magic markers and claiming it to be "a masterpiece," then breaking out into giggles. My whole life, no one had understood what I did. Maybe they were right. Maybe I didn't know what I was doing and should just stop. But what if there was someone, somewhere, who *did* like my art? I couldn't stop. *I* liked what I did in any case, and knew I shouldn't let anyone's decisions influence me. But they should like what I do. They would too, if they realized that it wasn't just random scribbles, it was my thoughts and feelings. Every line, dot, and swirl wasn't accidental, it was precise. All these years, and no one in this town had figured that out. I had even been offering art classes in my studio lately, but no one had come. No one even wanted to learn.

The townspeople needed to be shown that it was okay to have a different view on things. If they wouldn't come to me willingly, then I would go to them. I couldn't take this anymore. It was like they were shunning me from society. I wouldn't allow it, though. I would just go tell them. I looked outside. The streets were busy that afternoon. Perfect. I would stand on the sidewalk, right in the middle of the rushing crowd. They would have to notice me there. I was so enraged that I had no planned speech; I just sprinted out my door with the jingle of the bell behind me and started to shout. "Do you not see the sign on this door? Do you not have any time in your busy scheduled lives for art?" I dashed back inside and brought out a painting I had made on the night of my last birthday. "Do all of you not know what this is? Do you not see the moon in the night's sky, the meteor showers? Should I point out which is which?" People were starting to stare and usher their children around me, covering their eyes. My voice broke. "You should all be ashamed of yourselves. Give me a chance!" I started to cry, and ran back into my studio, collapsing on the floor in a fit of sobs. I cried until I had no more tears then walked solemnly up the stairs of my studio to my house. I would close my studio the next afternoon.

The next morning, it rained. As I watched the drops slide down my window pane, I knew that no one would come in. There was no hope for my little studio, or for my art to be accepted. I slowly walked towards the sign on my door, and gradually began to turn it over for the last time. Just as I was halfway there, the door was pushed open, knocking me to the floor. I looked up, fuming, to see who had done it. I knew it was probably more people who hated and disrespected me and my work.

"Sorry." I looked into the face of a young girl, who looked to be about ten. "Are you still open? I love your art and my mom said she would buy some for me." That one word meant the world to me. *Love*. It had been too long since I had heard that word, and it was music to my ears. The girl pointed to the painting I had shown the people on the street the afternoon before, and began to explain it to her mother. She got it exactly right. She understood every line, every circle and every color I painted. She bought four of my pieces, and even asked for art lessons. I didn't know who she was or what part of town she was from, but when she walked out, almost skipping in joy, I knew I wouldn't turn over that sign for a long while yet.

If that girl was the only one in the whole world who cared and understood, that was okay with me. I realized that she had saved me from a fatal mistake. I should never have even thought about closing down the only thing I was passionate about. I loved my work, and no one could change how I felt inside. She gave me hope, and I could never repay her for that. I was forever thankful.

On the Edge

Grant Sirlin Coley Town Middle School, Grade 7

"Racer ready? 5... 4... 3... 2... 1!"

In a burst of energy, adrenaline courses through my veins as I propel myself out of the starting gate. I attack the course like a madman, with everything I've got.

Skiing is the sport that I am truly committed to with every single ounce of my being. I became an official racer when I joined the race team five years ago at Ascutney Mountain in Vermont. For me, racing is like living a dream- the training can be hard work, but there are moments of freedom and pure joy along the way.

My story begins at the onset of my 4th year as a racer in the crisp ski slopes of Vermont. It was my second year at Bromley Mountain, and I was a 1st year J4. That means that I was competing with other racers that were a year older than me, so I knew that I had to step up my game. After training as hard as I could for a month and a half, my first race had arrived. I was determined to finish strong. It was the start of the season and I felt that I hadn't performed particularly well in the prior year. When I peered down at the course from the starting gate, it looked intimidating. The large blue and red gates that were only connected by snow and ice left just one way to get to the finish: a superhuman amount of speed. After what felt like an hour, the starter finally counted down. As I bolted out of the starting gate, blood pulsed through every muscle. I was overcome with what felt like enough energy to light up the whole expanse of New York City. BAM! I nailed the first blue gate with my shoulder while flexing my ski all the way on edge, slicing through the snow. I watched as each and every gate slipped right by me, still focusing intently on what was ahead. Coming to the end, I pulled into a tight tuck. Nearing the finish line, I swiped my hand out, trying to improve my time by stopping the clock with my motion. In the blink of an eye, I was at the bottom of the trail, listening to the announcer blurt out my time. Quickly, I hugged my dad and went over to the scoreboard to check where I placed. I counted 12 people ahead of me out of 70 racers and managed to get a small fist pump in before my coach congratulated me. My 13th place finish launched my season with a boost of confidence.

Over the course of the season, I hovered on the bubble between making the state championships and missing my mark. Regardless, I tried to make the best of each of my practice runs. Finally, as the season drew to a close I was still on the verge of making it to the State Championships, still uncertain as I waited to hear if I made it. After three anxious hours, I heard my name listed as an alternate. But there was a silver lining: I was accepted into the Super Giant Slalom event since one of the competitors was not able to attend. Nevertheless, my head hung; I was upset and discouraged because I had been dying to make States! How could I have been so close and yet so far? But all was not lost. There was one last chance to possibly enter under official rules; I could attend the Shootout with other competitors throughout Vermont.

The day of training before the Shootout was grueling. The practice course was similar to the anticipated race course, so I skied literally on edge. But as I neared a gate, trying to get as close as possible to hit it with my shoulder, it clipped me in the face and a sharp pain pierced my front left tooth. Before I knew it, I was on the ground with the gate sitting next to me, a gaping hole was where my front tooth had been, my knees and face bruised. A man nearby saw the crash and rushed over to help. I was a bit dazed and confused. Though momentarily dazed, I was able to collect myself to go to ski patrol and call my parents. I explained to them that even with a broken tooth, I had to get to the Shootout.

A missing tooth meant nothing to me. I felt that I had worked hard to get to the Shootout, so I seized the opportunity. Unfortunately, I did not perform up to par for States. I nearly crashed and everything fell apart. How could this happen? I was beside myself, but was still determined to travel to States for the Super-G race.

When we arrived, everything seemed surreal. That is, until I heard the bad news. The Super Giant Slalom race was canceled due to inclement weather. However, I was allowed to forerun both races since I wasn't able to officially compete. My hopes were shattered. I'd made States for one specific race as a 1st year J4, and I couldn't even race in it! A tough decision stood before me: I could either go back to Bromley for one of the last enjoyable weekends of skiing, or stay for States but just forerun each race. I thought long and hard before deciding to stay. Prior to the races I hung out with friends, swam in the pool, and relaxed. But when it finally came time for the races, I got serious; I suited up and pretended that I was in the gate for real. Everyone cheered and I set off like wildfire. Unfortunately, on the third gate of the course I tipped over and my ski spontaneously popped off. Well, so much for that run. My second and third runs were better, as I made sure that I didn't fall. My fourth run was my last. In the final moment prior, I set up at the start and looked up into the sky, seeking divine inspiration. Then I made a break for it. Before one thought came to my mind, my hips were into the hill, shoulders square, pushing my way through the steepest section. I laid my skis all the way on edge, barreling over the gates ahead of me, flying down the mountain with my hands and body in

posture that coaches try to teach their racers. As I crossed the finish line in incredible time, the crowd roared. I tingled all over; I knew that I had finally beat my clock.

This story marks one momentous year of my racing history. Things could've gone my way, but they didn't. As I looked back at my season, it mirrored a rollercoaster ride. Some might ask, "Why would you even attempt to succeed in a sport when the odds are against you?" Or, "Why would you ski in a race with no opportunity to compete?" And my answer would simply be, "I am passionate about ski racing, with its peaks and valleys, its challenges and triumphs. Someday I will land on top."

The Enchanted Melody

Ly Dang

Sedgwick Middle School, Grade 7

Beep, beep. The timer went off once again. A blonde-haired lady in a fancy gown complained, "Why did they stop her? She was on the last couple lines!"

My sister nudged my side and whispered, "You're up next. Don't worry, you're going to get first place. You shouldn't be so tense. Relax!" I looked down at my lucky black recital shoes, and thought to myself *How am I supposed to relax? What if the judges stop me on my last couple lines, too?* CREAK. The sound of the squeaking metal hinges on the door echoed through the long narrow lobby.

The time keeper stepped out into the hallway to collect her next victim. A young girl about the age of eleven slipped under her arm and ran to the lady in the corner. I could hear her stifled tears as she wept into her mother's shoulder. "Be sure to stay for the announcing of the places," said the time keeper as if she did not even care that a poor girl in the corner was crying her eyes out. Just as I was about to walk over and comfort her, I was directed into a concert hall where three formal judges were politely waiting for me. I took a last glance at my sister, who was mouthing words of encouragement, and walked into the dim room.

I meandered up the steps onto a large stage. There was a single spotlight shining down on the black piano. I sat down on the smooth bench, waited for the judges to stop rustling their papers, and their cue to start. I rested my fingers on the keys in the right places, took a deep breath, and began. I played the first chord loud and clear, like a cricket chirping on a warm summer night. The notes flew beneath my nimble fingers.

The judges fumbled with their papers, tapped their feet on the wooden floor, and dropped their pencils, but it had no effect on the outcome of the piece. I blocked out all of my surroundings as if I had pressed the mute button on the TV remote. I was in my own little world, encircled by blank walls, with only my music as a companion.

My fingers danced along with the sweet melody of Mozart as my body swayed along with the beat. The dynamics shifted from a loud march to a tranquil lullaby. I was no longer in the dull blank room. The scenery changed, and I was now at the entrance to a mass forest. I stepped across an old wooden bridge to a calm wooded area. As I strolled along the dirt pathway, I smelled the scent of hot cinnamon and fresh new leaves. My right hand played the quiet chirping of the birds flying overhead, while the left represented the steady gusts of the wind. I lay down in a spot of lush emerald grass in the serene forest while birds flew above my head.

My short nap was cut short by a deafening roar. My left hand replaced its calm flowing wind with an uncontrollable breeze, while my right played erratic chords up and down the

ivory keys. The rain fell like a blizzard and hit the ground like stones. Thunder rumbled and shook the ground beneath me. I heard lightning crack at the horizon as it lit up the darkened sky. I dived under the protection of a large tree to doge the furious weather. The downpour died down to a sprinkle, and the black clouds shifted away to reveal a bright lemon sun, the forest once again at peace.

As the piece reached its conclusion, the sun started to set. The sky was painted scarlet and bronze while the shining light started to dim. I ambled lazily back across the old, wooden bridge. As I reached my last note, I was pulled from my fairytale to reality, like a puppet being dragged on its strings. In the blink of an eye, I was back in the concert hall. I looked down at my tan fingers on the milky white keys playing the concluding harmony so effortlessly. I no longer saw the dirt pathway or smelled the aroma of hot cinnamon and fresh leaves. My hands jumped into the air as I played the final chord. My arms gingerly landed on my lap, like a leaf swirling and twisting to the ground.

The Power of Words

Emily Betterton Granby Memorial Middle School, Grade 8

Have you ever felt that there is something mysterious, something magical that controls our world? Something that dictates what we do, what we feel, that leads us in the right direction? Something that is good, and at the same time powerful, more powerful than we can ever know? Think for a moment of what that force could be. There are only a few options, a few aspects of life that could ever hold that much power. Pictures are moving, and one glance at the most beautiful works of art can bring on emotions so strong you never knew that you could feel them. Music, when written well, is so touching and so stirring that one song could melt a heart of stone. But when words are present, there is no other force that could be the magic people have felt for centuries. Words have power, meaning, and depth. Words describe, depict and display. Words connect, unite and strengthen. Words can touch areas of our hearts that nothing else can, and words are unique to their kind. Words are essential to life, be it writing, speaking or singing. We can't live without words any more than we can live without breathing. That is why words contain a greater power than we can ever know, can ever relate to, can even imagine.

Have you ever witnessed a power that can turn around a country's segregation, open a new world of fantasy, or bring tears to the eyes of millions? Many have, and so many more know what caused it. Without words, none of these great feats could have been accomplished. Take Martin Luther King Jr.; with certain important combinations of meaningful words ("I Have a Dream" speech, August 1963), he used the spoken word to convey the feelings that he and many others shared. These words, spoken so simply, brought down segregation over time, and only words of great power could accomplish such a task. Look at the whole new world that was opened to so many people when JK Rowling published her first *Harry Potter* book. She put into written words a world of magic and of fantasy, and introduced it in such a way that it was an instant hit among those who earlier had scoffed at the thought of fantasy books. Soon there were millions of readers camping outside bookstores just to read the words that she had written.

Then there is the power that words have when sung, one of the greatest powers humankind knows, like when country singer Alan Jackson moved his listeners to tears when he introduced a song about the country's tragedy on September 11th. Have you ever been touched by words? No doubt you have. So why is there any doubt that words are all powerful?

Whenever you see someone crying, or laughing, have you ever thought about why they are expressing that certain emotion at that particular time? Usually it was because they heard something sad or funny, or even beautiful. But whatever the reason is, words had something to do with it. Words are the basis of our society, the building blocks of our life. Without words, communication would not occur in the way that it does (even sign language uses visual symbols to replace spoken word), and everyday tasks would be much harder. We use words so much more than we do anything else. As much as we need water and sustenance to live, we need words to live a whole and complete life as well. Refraining from speaking would be like refraining from a whole aspect, a whole part of life that is essential to happiness. It's almost as if our subconscious realizes this, and gives us words to use to remain intact. Without even realizing it, whenever we do the simplest things - reading a newspaper or singing along with the radio - we are using words. So words are as essential to our everyday life as anything else that you can think of. Even our own thoughts contain words! Without words, would we be able to sing along to our favorite songs, communicate with the people around us, or read? The answer to that is "no," and that is what makes words some of the most powerful things ever.

Things of power have histories of power. Not only do words hold power now, they have held power for as long as they have existed, and will as long as they exist. No one knows what the first word was, or when it was spoken, or who spoke it. But ever since that mysterious word was uttered, words have held power that is not contestable. Words have been used since ancient times for many of the same reasons that they are used today - communication, and the basis of our lives. So as we choose our words carefully today, we never think about how long words have been around, and how many times they have been used. If power is in numbers, nothing and no one can hold a candle to the power that words have over us all, because there are over 600,000 words in the Oxford English Dictionary alone. That doesn't hold all the words in the English language, though, not by far. And then there are an estimated 100,000,000 languages in the world. That's 60,000,000,000,000,000 (60 quadrillion) words, approximately. Now let's look at the population of people in the world: 6,893,913,624. You can do the math. That gives each person in the world about 8,703,329 words of their own. That's eight million, seven hundred thousand words per person. So if you think that our country, with all its weapons and people, is the most powerful force in the world, think again. If you think any country, with their weapons and people are the most powerful forces in the world, you are wrong, because nothing can compare to the power that we have given words.

There are many things that could be argued as the most powerful forces in the world; music, for example, pictures for another. And while these and many other things have great power that cannot be diminished, in order to do almost anything, we use words, giving them the ultimate power. Without words, we cannot complete even the simplest tasks, yet without music or art we would be able to continue, even with the loss of a great beauty. Words and language could be called the greatest "invention" of all time. Words have moved nations, are essential to life, and are the most powerful things in sheer numbers alone. Words have magic and change our lives as often as we think. Words have a power that cannot be challenged.

Bare Necessity

Quinlan Harper Mansfield Middle School, Grade 8

Scotland, 1652

John MacBarter continued his trek through the unforgiving Scottish Highlands, the numbing wind worming itself through his tartan and into his already frozen flesh. The two oxen John were leading balked in protest, wanting only a day's rest and some decent food. John, a former Scottish rebel who served under William Wallace, was used to this tough and forbidding climate. Even being raised under the British occupation, this was far too much strain for him. He knew from experience that the oxen would not last another day without rest. In the back of John's subconscious, he knew that he had to get to the port, to his family, to freedom. It was only a matter of time before the soldiers of the king tracked down John as a part of their initiative to eliminate the Scottish rebellion entirely. John let his weary knees collapse, and he kneeled on the rough dirt road. He knew what he must do, but he attempted to avoid thinking of it. When it became apparent that there was no alternative, he slowly rose to his feet. John unsheathed the dirk that he kept slung in his belt and sliced the withering tethers that harnessed the oxen. "Yer free now, ye poor beasties. Ach, it hurts me bonny heart to let you go. Now be off!" And with that, he smacked the animals on their backs, and they galloped off, back down the road. John watched them sadly, for he had kept and raised these oxen for 13 years.

When the beasts disappeared over the crest of an old burial mound, John MacBarter turned around and trudged forward. Before he could take two paces, he bumped into a strange little man, almost knocking him back.

"Sorry about that, laddie. Ah'm in a bit of a hurry," muttered MacBarter.

"Wait, sir. You dropped your satchel," said the small man. He was short, but not stocky. A blazing orange head of hair encircled his crown, and he smiled not with his mouth, but with his eyes. His clothes were a bit unkempt and patched in places. There was a similar man standing next to him; same hair, size and build, but this man had nicer clothes and a mischievous twinkle in his eye. MacBarter regarded them with caution, for just a moment before he was sure that no one was near.

"Thank ye. Sorry for crashin' into ye like that, but I can't spare time to talk. Goodbye."

MacBarter continued his hike. The Green Barracks Inn was only a few hours away. He could get a quick drink and some good food in him, and then continue his way toward the port on Dunarch, where his wife and daughter were waiting. John recollected tales of ghosts haunting the barren highlands, and goblins lying in wait behind rocks, that he had been told when he was a child. Now, those old fears were surfacing through the years of convincing evidence that strange things existed only in nightmares.

John decided that it was in his best interest to quicken his pace and reach the Green Barracks by nightfall. As he managed to reach the top of a hill on which an ancient druid monument was placed, the small town came into view. John stumbled down the hill and onto the dusty road that led into the town.

The Green Barracks Inn was a rundown old pile of wood, situated at the edge of town. It was perfect for travelers coming from the barren lands, journeying to the bigger cities like Northshire and Dunarch. John sat down at a table near the kitchen door and listened to the taverner and his wife cooking dinner. This was a convenient change of pace. He quaffed his beer, inhaled his pot roast, and upon completion, patted his belly contentedly. John surveyed

his settings. A fire was roaring in one corner of the room, the doors to the kitchen were in another, and the rest of the building was taken up with tables. John stared longingly at the stairs leading up to the beds. His family had been waiting all day; they didn't have beds, so why should he? But he was so tired, so very tired. No. He must get to his family. John broke free of the trance; he got up and left before he succumbed to the temptation. Upon walking out the door, he noticed the two small men sitting by the fire. John could have sworn that two travelers had been heading in the direction opposite of his. John disregarded the fact and walked back out into the frozen waste. Dunarch was not far from the inn, only a couple of hours. John set to it. It was tiring, and took up all of his remaining energy, but he did it. The sight of the town might as well have been the gate to heaven in John's eyes. As he approached the port, a familiar sight beheld his - his old friend Ewan MacCloud. They had fought together at the battle of Sterling, and John had saved Ewan's life. John wondered if Ewan would still recognize him in his battered traveler's clothes. John walked up to Ewan and greeted him.

"Hello there, Ewan! I'm surprised to see you still drawing breath! How's life?"

"John," exclaimed Ewan, "what escapades have you been up to?"

"I'm escapin', just like you," said John.

"Really? I'm about to board me own vessel bound for Paris. I still have room for one more. Will you join me for free?"

Oh, this was tempting to John. All of his worries, frets and fears could disappear in an instant. But he needed to bring his family, and there was only room for one. But it was charge-free ... NO! He must tend to his family first.

"I'm sorry. I must refuse your offer. It was great seeing you again, Ewan."

"Ah, you're a braw laddie. Always looking after family. Godspeed," replied Ewan.

With that, John turned away and searched for his family. When he saw them, his heart lit up with joy. He ran forward and swept his daughter up in his arms. They boarded the vessel, paid the fee, and cast one last look back at Scotland. John noticed the red-haired men watching him leave.

"You two," said John, before boarding the ship. "Why do I always see you when I have to make a decision?"

"I'm very sorry friend, but we cannot tell you that," said the smiling one.

"Well then, can you at least tell me your names?" said John, as he boarded the vessel.

"If you really haven't figured it out yet," said the smiling one, "our names are Desire and Necessity."

True Confessions of a Tortured Twin

Lucy Tomasso

Irving A. Robbins Middle School, Grade 8

"Wow! You're a twin! You're *so* lucky!" I probably hear that enthusiastic yet completely erroneous statement at least twice a day. Maybe some people would enjoy that extra attention, but not in my case.

I'll usually respond to this typical assumption, "Actually, not really." And often it's spoken to empty air, the person having lost interest after learning that no, I can't send telepathic messages to my twin, Edward. "In fact," I reply, "we always have to split everything between us. It's half the fun, from pictures to presents to parties." (Exasperated eye roll.) In fact, I'm still waiting for the day I discover a severed English muffin and a half-ply napkin in my lunch box.

The only thing I didn't get *half* of was embarrassment. I look back on our hideous matching pink and blue outfits and think, *Couldn't my own parents tell Edward and me apart without using gender-color-codes*? Maybe that's why little pink onesies have given me nightmares before.

What's worse is that it didn't stop at a young age, *oh* no. I still have the clone Dalmatian costumes from Halloween, 2001. And that old piggy bank with "Lucy and Edward" carved into it. *As if* my twin would share his money with me.

So as Mom and I went through all our old photo albums last week, I wasn't surprised when picture after picture assaulted my eyes, each a duplicate of the last one. Each snapshot was split right down the middle: on one side, my smiling face, on the other a pudgy, wailing baby; my *wonderful* twin. Edward and I "connected at the hip," on a blanket, in a car seat, at my aunt's house.

Where was *my* moment to shine, *my* moment in the spotlight? Why was every picture spoiled by none other than my unsmiling brother? We resembled the difference between night and day. I learned how to use a fork; he threw food. I read; he ripped up books. I played with dolls; he played with mud. I'm not saying that my childhood was ruined; I'm just wondering why *I* don't have a perfectly posed portrait like any other normal kid.

Yet unfortunately, being a twin is not only a way of life; it has also become a title. I've always wondered if people were just going to call me "a twin," why did my parents bother to name me in the first place? It would have saved them a lot of time searching in *Baby Names A-Z*. Everyone probably imagined us, Edward and I, as a package; coupled, same, double, bi-fold. Peanut butter and jelly. Shoes and socks. Buses and pollution. You can't get one without getting the other.

Living as a twin makes me jealous of my only-child friends, who take their names for granted. I guess it must be easier for my mom to keep track of her kids by associating Edward and I as one person. Or maybe she just can't remember who's who.

"Twins! Come downstairs for dinner!"

"I didn't break the vase, the twins did!"

"It's one of the *twins*' turn to do dishes tonight!"

These are only a few examples of this degrading nickname in my house. Yet, regardless of how dissimilar we twins may be (and no matter how many times I protest!), still this generic name prevails. I regret to say I've submissively grown accustomed to it after more than fourteen years.

I'll admit it, being a twin isn't *all* drawbacks. I've never been lonely. I'll always have someone to talk to. And on the occasion I need help catching a snake or something, I'll have someone to go to. Ha! As if I'd ever need to catch a snake. As if Edward would ever help me even if I *did* need to catch a snake. Oh sure, he'd catch the snake. But I'd find it in my bed three days later. Whatever.

Well, I'm warning you now- never underestimate the hardships of being born into the life of a twin, especially fraternal. At least if we were identical, we could play all those wonderful stereotypical twin tricks. But there's no fraternity in being fraternal. And the fact that Edward is a boy, eight minutes older, really piles on the joy. Then again, where would the dog be without its fleas?

Which adds up to the bottom line: instead of another Gemini constellation, I'd rather be a single, shining star.

High School, Grades 9-12 Poetry

Racing Weather

Heather Schiller Simsbury High School, Grade 9

The Nail-biting Wind sends a Chill down my bare Legs and arms as the team Carries the stubborn boat down The brown and shaky wooden dock The moment has finally arrived to jump into The sliding seat; the race begins soon with my oar Held tight in my numb hands. Get warm soon, here we Go. Up to the starting line, my breath short, and fog surrounds Us, anticipating the start of a race, a fight until the end. Ready, set go! The horn signals, the coxswain starting to scream commands, I can barely control My movements, everything is second nature by now; the water slaps my face angrily And the wind strikes against my exposed neck, but I cannot give up, keep rowing through the Choppy waves; glancing out of the boat; the competition is near, but I can't think of the other teams, Just us fighting the elements, giving it all we've got, right until the very end; time passes, my back aches Like a bat has been taken to it, bruising and scraping my bones and muscles, but I cannot give up, this 1 Is for the team; sacrificing a day of pain for the ecstasy of winning; sliding up to then pull back with such Force, every person in synch, slapping the frigid water at the same moment with the oars of pain and joy As the end is almost near, I know we all feel it, so it's time to power through the rest like this is the last Race ever, for some it is, which makes it all the more glorious and saddening; more water penetrates My entire body as if it were punishing me for not rowing hard enough; motivation to ignore the Brutality of the sport and battle the conditions; Oh! the sun finally breaks through, warming My frozen limbs, uplifting, before hearing screams of encouragement from the parents And friends, teammates, coaches; then I smile to myself; I know this is the reason I row, knowing that the victory is so sugar sweet; a deserved rainbow, and With the glinting gold medal held high in the air, the pain disappears Replaced with our happiness, flowing endlessly through Our veins, because racing the weather Was never so worth it.

My Ode to You

Alexandra Grimaldi Granby Memorial High School, Grade 9

Look around, let it go You're not Suspended in mid-air With no Chance to reach the ground You gotta Live in the moment Nothing else defines who you are They say Your actions define you. Even if you regret who you were, do you regret who you were when you tried on someone else's style? Doesn't matter who you were before you still got one more chance to make it alright, You gotta throw down your gun and get out of the fight. If you can't do that, ask yourself who you are now Don't let your actions define you as someone you don't wanna be because they say you're a criminal if you shoot a man and They say you're stupid if you just don't want to try to understand. Can't you

see we've all done things we aren't proud of, but can you face who you see in the mirror looking back at you? Can you look yourself in the Eye? When your life flashes by, will you have a single regret before you die? Be the Angel Against evil If that's who you need to be and if you dream of climbing mountains, then just go ahead Don't be misunderstood by miscommunication Just be who you would want to see Looking Back at You

Free Spirit, Free Soul

Caitlin Culligan Avon High School, Grade 9

As I sit here, I am waiting. For what, I don't know. A miracle? No. There are plenty of those here already. I don't know what I am waiting for, And it makes me happy. What is there to wait for? Out here, I am not human. I am the faintest trace of a footprint, The millionth leaf to fall. I am barely there. I wonder- can anyone see me when I am In this secret place? Am I visible? No. I am a free spirit, free from worry, from pain. When I am here, I am blessed.

I think about things I'd never think of Anywhere but here. How old is this rock? How did it get here? And that tree-What is its story, what does it feel? This is my sanctuary, my safe haven. Many school and work related thoughts crawl through my head, But I pay them no mind. Why should I? Why should anybody? A gust of wind sends thousands of leaves spiraling away On a journey. One hits my face, but I don't care. It reminds me of a stream that meets a boulder, But keeps on going. This leads to another thought, like a chain reaction. We give up too easily. We can't figure out a model airplane kit-Oh, well. We can't get an A on a test It doesn't matter; it's just one grade. I give up. Three simple words, yet they leave such a big impact. Don't give up! Keep going! Try again until you get it. Find a place where you can let go, And be a free spirit. My neighbor calls his dog in. Here, Rover! Here boy! Mom steps outside. Supper in ten! Simple phrases, Yet we depend on them. They make us who we are Even if we don't know it. I think of what these words mean to us. And as I think, as I sit here, I think the strangest thoughts. Thought-provoking thoughts. Do vegetarians eat animal crackers? Thoughts we don't have time to think. The best thoughts in the world. I have sat here the better part of an hour, And in that hour, I have been free. Free spirit, Free soul,

Free. I conclude this poem with a challenge to you. Find a place where you can let go-Free yourself, leave worries behind. Let yourself go, let your spirit fly. A myriad of thoughts will come to you; Thoughts you never knew you could ever dream up. Open your mind, open your heart. You will leave seeing things in this world that no one else sees. And you will be free.

Midnight

Kristen Kompare

Arts at the Capitol Theater, Grade 10

On the empty street, just after tragedy, hundreds of stars kept watch. It was as if the streets were a constellation and continuous sentient souls traveled tirelessly as watchmen along it, their intangible essences journeying outward.

As one, they hesitated, as if they had casually acknowledged the acceptance of existence. They trekked on over the street; they conquered it, stood still, and by the time the lights came on again, they carried with them an unseen being. They were greeted as souls of midnight.

Evolution

Allison Hawley Rockville High School, Grade 10

Love: noun; intense affection, enthusiasm or fondness for another. But who actually uses the dictionary these days, When you can just pop up the internet in the palm of your hand like it's nothing? But maybe, if we took the time to use the knowledge in our heads for something other than just how to get that next girl in the bed, maybe we would come to appreciate those words

and be able to use them in conversation, other than just 'yo, what up man?' Then maybe our country could gain a little more respect. Because right next to love is low, and Lower: adjective; in a position considered inferior to others in value or rank. And that's where we are and will be, if we continue to let ourselves be degraded and refuse to see that, although it may seem un-cool, it really is cool when you can say what you mean without just quoting some celebrity from a magazine. And maybe words will get back their meaning. Like back when you couldn't say 'gay' unless you were happy Back when if someone said 'I love you' they were speaking from the heart, not just the eyes. Because now you can't tell the difference between truth and lies. But people are afraid. Just searching for approval from peers, teachers, friends, and anyone that'll listen. That's why we do what we do. But if anyone did stop and listen, they'd hear a desperate crying out for help, attention, and Love: noun; intense affection, enthusiasm or fondness for another.

Once Upon a Time

Hayley Kolding Canton High School, Grade 10

Once upon a time there was a little girl who danced in the woods because she would rather have her own tree-house than a palace

And that girl, she caught spring peepers in her bare hands and named them names like Julia and Alice and whispered prayers that they would find their own frog princes

And once upon a time, back when she was young, she took off her shoes at recess because she wanted to feel the earth's heart beating beneath the soles of her feet

That girl is not so little anymore but the pads of her feet are still brown under her socks and if she finds a flower she likes, she'll still put it in her hair

And every once in a while, she sits down under a tree for a moment just to breathe.

It's Not Okay

Aminah Muhammad Rockville High School, Grade 11

Walkin' down the hallway What do I see? I see boys posted up, Thinkin' Yeah, I'm a G. Hats to the side, pants barely on If you didn't wanna wear that Why'd you put that on? Belts are for pants You got loops for a reason Me seein' your boxers Ain't no tease and If you think that's cool Then, yeah you fly I'm just sayin' what I see Out the corner of my eye I see couples holdin' hands makin' plans For the weekend Me wishin' he was here to kiss him on the cheek And as the days go by my life goes on Sit down Pen and paper Just to write my song. Walkin' down the hallway What do I feel? I feel stares on my back You lookin' at my new heels I feel my swag go up While your swag goes down I feel on top of the world Queen Aminah, where's my crown? I feel your attitude hit me from way over there I feel the vibes that you're sendin' me Whisperin' you don't care But you do You know you do

Tell the truth To my face This the place Where everyone around you is the same And I ain't been here long But everybody knows that This right here is my song

Walkin' down the hallway What do I hear? I hear the slam of the locker First block is comin' near I pass a group of boys Only one of them is black I hear the white boy say "Man nigga, you is wack!" I stop my tracks Look back Turn around With a frown on my face Cause it's not okay for him to say that He's not even black, And even then, it's still not okay.

Do you know where that word came from; Derived from; seemingly breathed air That wasn't our air to breathe for so long? For so long, my ancestors Were called that by Your ancestors And were forced to answer with nothing else but "Yes Master." In the dictionary, do you know what that word means? Someone who has dark skin, Or who is black, And lacks the ability to process a simple thought Or can't be taught how to do anything Because they're ignorant. Don't forget inferior to the overseer Who rushed them to pick that cotton, Trust me, it won't be forgotten What they had to go through, To make it through, for me and you.

Imagine the pain they felt as the whips Cracked against their backs And master calls them *that* name

While they call out HIS name Because even though they lived In a cloud of shame, They believed in something higher. It's not okay for you to say that, You're not even black, And even then it's still not okay. I wish that word never existed I wish it would suddenly disappear Into the thin air That surrounds our heads That has been washed thoroughly With filthy hands Letting us believe we can say that word. Not even a word, More like a weapon That jabs and cuts our ancestors spirits In the gut Making them suffer all over again.

You say that word Like you meant to say Friend, or guy, or man And if that's what you meant Then say that then Because in the end This generation underestimates That word to the fullest Thinking you're the coolest When that weapon Flows from your lungs, up your throat, out your mouth To someone's ears It doesn't process like it would All those years ago. Just let it go, Drop it, leave it, let it suffer Knowing we don't need it.

Weather Map

Sarah Munger Greenwich Academy, Grade 11

The paper is possessed by an empire of color, the lethargic mist of a spraying storm lusting over borders, pumping lawless swirls of ink from the epicenter, silken threads of longitude and latitude tying knots around the knuckles of mountains.

The unwashed, orange fingerprint presses against the ocean, the generous hips of round earth squeezing yellow, red, green, blue as the ozone opens its mouth to wind, negative space, and collateral damage.

The white curling pixels make it raw, make it clean cut, an interrogation of correct mathematical angles across the page, the baby teeth of science crunching together as we wait for God to remember who we are, where we are,

and that we know it's coming.

Sticks and Stones

Logan A. LeDuc Rockville High School, Grade 11

Let's start at the beginning.

You were, say, five weeks into your mother's first trimester.

Your vocal cords wouldn't be developed for another five weeks and yet

That would be the most used part of your body.

Fast forward six years, and you can be seen roaming the playground looking at everything and talking about absolutely nothing to anyone who'd listen.

You weren't a shy child.

You were more outgoing than most,

singing to strangers in the grocery store and making friends everywhere you turned.

But, like hopscotch, the numbers just flew by and away went nine, and you skipped past twelve and now you're sixteen. Underclassman. Quiet. Alone.

That brave little girl who made friends around every bend has been bottled up and shoved to the back of your own cluttered mind.

Everything you want to say is written in a notebook no one opens but you.

Those vocal cords are slowly eroding away,

except when you escape in chorus and you belt out all the emotions you're too scared to let out any other way.

The same precious gift your mother gave you has been used to harm you.

Mutterings of lies, and whispers of gossip just to add a little spice to everyday activity, have

somehow

made you their main attraction in their dehumanization process.

So now you're a mute.

Everything seeps in, but nothing ever comes out.

You're scared to say anything, knowing your words will be used against you by the same girl who promised 'best friends' during recess in the second grade.

People change. Moments fade. You. Grow. Up.

And with growing up, comes putting up.

And with putting up, comes fessing up.

And with fessing up

comes words.

Words you vowed never to speak and words you dread to sound out.

Syllables that won't come and shapes your lips don't make.

Because you're soft.

She promised 'best friends forever' ten years ago, and you still hold onto it.

Hoping maybe, you'd relive that distant past that somehow happened to slip through your fingers.

But in the back of your mind, you know it's never,

and outside, you're shrugging like it's whatever but...

In the first ten weeks of your life, you were given your most powerful weapon.

Used for you or against you, it's up to you.

'Cause all of us,

not just some of us, all of us,

The Obamas, The Hitlers, The Kennedys, The Castros,

the regular everyday blue-collared workers,

all started as innocent 6-year-olds just looking for someone to sit on the other end of the seesaw.

No one ever wanted death and pain and suffering from the start.

Traditions sent by voice from parent to child caused their pain.

Beliefs sent by voice from adult to next generation caused this hate.

Immaturity sent by voice from teen to teen caused this death.

Sticks and stones,

may break her bones,

but words are meant to kill.

Sparks

Anna VanderLeest Rockville High School, Grade 12

I've seen sparks

Broken Christmas tree lights hanging on crisp pine branches A black and wood AK-47 sniper rifle A red Jaguar backfiring on the highway Between that college boy and that high school girl

But each spark was insufficient

The Christmas tree's luminosity held no radiance That AK-47 brought someone's husband home in a casket and A red Jaguar was motionless when highway traffic proceeded And that boy only wanted sex

So the sparks went out My son grew up without Jesus And his father When he was five his grandpa died And his sister made him an uncle And the sparks went out

Gone

Lauren Kidd Rockville High School, Grade 12

I can look to the stars and challenge the gods I can plead with the fates to re-spin my tapestry. I can beg Cupid to find me love. But in the end I'll toast with Dionysus And all my problems will disperse into a drunken haze. We'll trace our steps from the bar on 32nd And mock the sliver of moon remaining in the wee hours of morning. Together he and I will stumble up the side walk Crossing sewer grates and lowlifes like me. For a split second we find our minds wandering to a different lifetime. I wear a black suit and hold a shiny briefcase. Along with dozens of others I shrug to work Going in early and leaving late. Supporting a family that would only go up in flames at the flick of a cigarette butt. The gods spared me But decided that family is disposable. I cross into the street And stare into the pre-dawn mosh-pit. Soon the sun will bathe the earth And quench night, But I will remain dirty and thirsty, For every drink I take brings me one step closer to a fate even my old friend Dionysus couldn't handle. Breaking my bottle in the street He watches me stare at the shards of glass sliding across pavement questioning how anyone could be so pathetic. The decision has been made; I must suffer like he did. Shielded by manmade shade. I too collide with the golden purity.

Scars

Melissa McCann Rockville High School, Grade 12

Shoes light up with a flash of color each time my feet hit the concrete steps. It's difficult for such a young and carefree mind to be interested in anything else, Like the next steep step my short little legs had to overcome. So a hop, skip, and a ... trip.

Leaves me in tears each time you're not sitting in the stands. What else could possibly be so important? Oh it's Saturday, you must be bonding with your best bud Jack Daniels and his obedient pet, Slots. You're not waiting to embrace me after my hard work on the field,

But she is there to cradle my face and tell me it's going to be alright. I squeeze her hand as tightly as my small grasp will let me As stitch after stitch in my chin, the needle pierces me again,

And it stings every night when I wonder What it's like to be "Daddy's little girl." Not even my sweet innocence could make you love me The way I deserve.

I keep my head held high. No one notices anything unusual; My plan is working. Only if I let people in, Only if I point it out, Will they notice a scar that has been with me since childhood.

High School, Grade 9-12 Prose

The Rain

Danielle Osborne Simsbury High School, Grade 9

Fidele stared at the darkening sky in wonder. He loved the sound of the rain splashing on the dirt roads and how the cool droplets felt against his skin during the dry seasons. His mother had once told him that if there was any good left in this world, it was the rain. When he had questioned why, she replied, "For He gives His sunlight to both the evil and the good; and He sends rain on the just and the unjust alike." Fidele did not fully understand what she had meant, so his expression remained puzzled. She had glanced at him, and chuckling said, "If you don't understand me now that's fine, soon enough you will. Try to be more attentive in church next time." Fidele had shrugged it off then, but now as he looked up at the sky, he once again contemplated the meaning of his mother's words. He was soon distracted and resumed catching grasshoppers until he could hear his mother calling him. Fidele sprinted towards the house with the smell of isombe making his mouth water. He crossed the threshold into the small, cramped room that was his family's living quarters. The windowless walls were corrugated iron, red with rust, and the floor was hard-packed earth; there was no ceiling but a few tattered tarps covered the small space below. In the center of the roof, the one intentional opening, about the size of the family cook pot, allowed smoke from the fire to escape. In the middle of the room below, there was a small fire pit at which his sister, Nazina sat stirring a pot of fragrant stew. She ladled too-small portions of the gumbo into tin bowls and handed them to Fidele and his mother.

Fidele quickly consumed his portion, hoping to have more time to study with his sister. Nazina attended the Rubingo Primary School, and since Fidele was still too young to walk the long distance to the school, she brought home her schoolwork and tried to teach him what she had learned in class that day. Fidele was an excellent learner but the frequent rioting nearby distracted him from his studies. For centuries the two main tribes of Rwanda, the Hutu and the Tutsi, had been in conflict. Blinded by hatred and envy, they saw each other as enemies.

Fidele didn't understand why the Hutu hated his people so much but he remembered his mother once explaining to him that the Hutu were angry with the Tutsi for events that happened long before he was born. Years ago, under Belgian rule, the minority Tutsi were given power over the majority Hutu. The Belgians favored the Tutsi for being wealthier than the Hutu and for looking more European. With that advantage, the Tutsi were able to establish their own government to rule over the Hutu, but they continually oppressed them. Since the end of colonial rule, control of the government had gone back and forth between the tribes, and with each regime change the tribe taking control retaliated against the other for previous misdeeds.

It seemed to him there was nothing to be done about it, so he paid no attention to it and resumed his studies with his sister. After they had spent almost two hours poring over textbooks and worksheets, Fidele and Nazina were ordered to bed by their mother. As they lay down on the straw mattress, their mother gently tucked them in, smiling and whispering loving words to help them sleep. Fidele had had a very busy day. Playing outside, pondering the meaning of rain, and studying seemed like a handful to his tiny body, so he fell asleep quickly. Later Fidele heard his father enter the house, finally returning home from the plantation. His father kissed their foreheads as they slept and quietly went about his business.

For the next several weeks Fidele's peaceful life continued on until one fateful night in April on his fifth birthday. Riots were erupting more and more often and the children Fidele once played with had disappeared behind the shadowed doorways of their houses. The whole country seemed to be holding its breath, waiting for something to happen as tensions grew daily. That night, silent figures moved in darkness towards the sleeping village.

Fidele and his family were jolted awake by the screaming of a woman a few houses away. Her piteous cry was followed by the sickening sound of steel against flesh, and soon a child's voice pierced the air, wailing in agony, but his cry abruptly stopped as well. The terrified voices of men, women and children filled the cool night air and their blood began to stain the ground.

As soon as the shouting began, Fidele's father had blocked the door with the small, rickety bureau, and hastened his family towards the other end of the room. Moments later, the shouts of men and the pounding of fists could be heard at the door. Fidele and his sister cowered in fear and grasped their mother's arms tightly as she tried to soothe them: The wooden door splintered and soon gave way as several men hurled themselves against it. Fidele's father jumped between the men and his family shouting, "Run! Get as far away from here as possible, now!" Fidele's mother furiously rushed at the men, forcing them outside where others waited while screaming at the children to flee. Nazina grabbed Fidele's hand and sprinted out the door, dodging the rough hands of the invaders. The bloodthirsty little mob hooted with laughter and began pursuing the children through the blackness of the night. With Fidele in front of Nazina, the two kept running further and further away from the village. When they had almost reached the main road, exhausted and out of breath, a rough hand grabbed Nazina by the hair, jerking her hand from Fidele's.

"Keep running!" she screamed after him as her voice faded from his ears and her body went limp and dropped to the ground. Fidele's eyes welled with tears, but he ignored them and his desire to run to his sister's side. He bit down on his lower lip and glanced back one last time in the direction of the village. As he stood in the middle of the dirt road, Fidele could feel the sprinkle of rain as it fell from the blackened sky. The rain washed away his tears and the blood of his loved ones, but his pursuers continued advancing towards him.

Fidele turned his back to them and ran towards the nearby church, hoping to find protection from the killers of his family, for the nuns had always been kind to him whenever he attended mass. They were already sheltering other Tutsi villagers who escaped, but their good deed was not well intentioned. The good sisters had already taken the side of the Hutu, and as Fidele approached them they called out, "Child, are you looking for shelter from those terrible Hutu and this cold rain? We will help you. Hurry, come inside where it is warm." They beckoned him, and Fidele had no reason not to trust them, so he gratefully entered the church. Inside the lofty room several other Tutsi were already nursing their wounds and mourning their lost family members. None of them noticed as the nuns left, one by one, with the last bolting the doors behind her. Only when they smelled smoke and heard the demonic laughter of the raging mob did they begin desperately trying to escape.

Fidele watched bits of the flaming ceiling crash down; and as the roof opened up the rain began pouring in on them. The people near him ran about in panic, screaming and begging those outside to open the doors but, of course, they would not. Terrified, Fidele looked up once

more at the sky and as the rain fell he remembered his mother's words: "For He gives His sunlight to both the evil and the good, and He sends rain on the just and the unjust alike." He thought of the mob outside, jeering and mocking his people as they burned alive, and then he understood the meaning behind his mother's words. In that instant, the flaming timbers came crashing down on him, and all that was left was the rain.

False Identity

Maggie Luongo Newtown High School, Grade 9

Most of the time, people in high school aren't being themselves. Alexandra realized this by the second day of school. Her mom always told her to choose friends wisely and be careful of the kind of people she picked to hang out with, but she never really understood how to do that, if she couldn't even see people for who they were. It was like choosing whose false identity she liked the most, which didn't really mean anything.

Ever since elementary school, all Alexandra was, was herself. By middle school, being herself wasn't cutting it anymore; her clothes were suddenly too different. She wasn't thin enough. Everything about her was wrong. Everything was unlike everyone else. By her freshman year of high school, she was completely out of place.

Slowly, one by one, her friends left her to join their own false identity groups. More than once, Alexandra would be left sitting alone in the cafeteria and a couple times she was caught skipping lunch altogether.

"I'm worried about her. She seems depressed," her mom would explain again and again, like Alexandra wasn't there. Finally, after putting up with this for months, Alexandra decided she was through with being different and being driven to therapist appointments after school.

She asked her mother for some money to buy some new clothes, which her mom agreed to in a heartbeat. She got her hair layered and highlighted, and by the next Monday morning, she was feeling like a whole new person. Her jeans were torn in the right places, her t-shirt was fitted but not too tight, and her Uggs were the popular chocolate color. When she got to school, she even insisted that people start calling her Allie. She did everything in her power to appear just like everyone else. However, everyone used the "new her" as a new way to make Allie miserable. "Isn't that cute? Alexandra's trying to be a normal person," girls would taunt. One of her former friends even tried to interview her for the school newspaper. "It's for the gossip column. I hope you don't mind," she said while trying to hold back the laughter.

Once Allie's mom heard about this, she decided enough was enough. "Allie, you know your Aunt Laura has been asking again about us coming down to live with her for a while. With my job being completely over the internet these days, we could give it a try. A little change could be just what we need."

In a few months, with a car and a rental trailer packed with stuff, Allie and her mom were on their way to a new life.

On the first day at her new high school, Allie had a plan. She quickly located the popular people in her classes and began talking to them. After watching people have fun in her old town, she had picked up on a few things about how different types of people act.

By her second week at her new school, she was invited to a party at Kerry Sanders' house. Kerry Sanders was a tall thin cheerleader. Her light blond hair was naturally just right so she didn't have to worry about dyeing it. Her clothes looked straight out of an expensive fashion magazine and her friends were the celebrities of the school.

Allie's mom was thrilled about the invite and Allie was shocked. The party was nothing like Allie had ever experienced before. Multiple times she would look behind her to make sure it was her someone was talking to and not someone else. There was no denying that she was making friends and that the people in South Carolina really liked her. She wished the kids at her old school could see her now.

"Look at what Catherine's wearing today," Kerry whispered to her one day at lunch. Allie followed Kerry's gaze and saw a girl with really short hair wearing a Polo shirt with a skirt reaching to her ankles. Allie couldn't believe how much this girl resembled the way she herself used to look. This, for some unidentifiable reason, made Allie really mad. Memories flashed back through her mind of kids making comments about her clothes and her hair.

"Let's go ask her where she got her haircut," Allie snickered.

Kerry laughed. "Yeah let's go. I bet she did it herself with safety scissors. Hey Catherine, I love your hair. Where'd you get it cut?"

Catherine, who was alone, turned around from the sandwich she was eating. "Does it make a difference where I got it cut?" She appeared to be pretty smart and very brave. Also, she was right. It didn't make a difference. Catherine was still going to be sitting there with her chicken sandwich and Kerry was still going to hate her whether she got it cut in Los Angeles or did it herself. Finally, after a few more crude comments from Kerry, Allie watched Catherine pack up her lunch and walk away.

"What a loser," Kerry said laughing.

Allie nodded. "I know." Agreeing with Kerry definitely seemed like something a girl named Allie would do.

One afternoon during English class, Allie's teacher, Ms. Fields, announced that they were starting a unit on biographies and instead of writing about famous or historic people, they would be writing about each other's lives.

Allie glanced across the room at Kerry who mouthed *partners*. She smiled. It felt unbelievably good to sit and listen to the teacher's directions without worrying herself sick over who she would find to be her partner.

Unfortunately, it turned out partners were being assigned. Allie heard her name read off with Catherine's. Kerry sent her a sad, sympathetic look from her seat across the room. Allie nodded back. After the teacher gave out the papers, Allie made her way across the room to go sit with Catherine.

"Hi," she said briefly not even giving Catherine the chance to respond before reading the first question. "What are three things you enjoy doing?"

"How about I just write my answers on a piece of paper for you and you write yours down for me?" Catherine asked. Allie shrugged. That was completely fine with her.

The first few questions really weren't hard at all to answer, but then they got a little more complicated. Number 6 read, "What is one thing not many people know about you?" Allie considered her options of how to answer such a question.

Nobody here knew that she had been considered a loser at her old school. But, of course, she couldn't write that. She could make something up that sounded cool, but she didn't really see how lying could play a role in this assignment.

She decided to skip that question and go back to it later. But much to her dismay, the next question was even harder to conjure up an answer for. "What were a few of your biggest accomplishments over the past 10 years?"

Allie had absolutely no idea how to answer that one. Undoubtedly, her biggest accomplishment in her life was to become Kerry Sanders' friend and leave her socially outcast days behind. But of course, she couldn't write a thing like that.

Allie's thoughts were interrupted by Catherine handing over her sheet of paper and saying, "I'm finished."

Allie took the paper from her and began to read some of her answers. A few of her biggest accomplishments were: being an extra in a movie, getting her writing published in a magazine and winning a regional spelling bee.

After reading her accomplishments, one word came to Allie's mind and it was not "loser." It was "cool." She wanted to ask Catherine what movie she was in but then she realized that Catherine wasn't exactly talking to her or even looking at her for that matter. Also, Kerry was sitting just a few desks away with her partner, and had been watching her intently.

"Wow...um...your life sounds really interesting," she said feeling like it would be pretty weird and mean not saying anything. Catherine nodded, still not looking at her. Worried that Catherine thought she was being sarcastic she added, "I'm serious. The movie, getting published, the spelling bee...that's all really cool."

"Thanks," Catherine replied softly.

Allie was beginning to feel really terrible for convincing Kerry to go make fun of Catherine the other day during lunch. Somehow she had felt by doing that, she would be getting back at the people who made fun of her. But now she knew she didn't get back at them. She just became one of them.

Ms. Fields called for attention. The bell was about to ring. "Please take this time to exchange e-mail addresses or phone numbers with your partner so you can work on the project over the weekend," Ms. Fields instructed.

"Do you want to exchange phone numbers?" asked Catherine.

"I have a better idea. How about you come over my house on Saturday afternoon to work on it?" Allie asked, hoping that Catherine would give her some sort of a second chance.

After a few seconds, Catherine nodded. "I guess I could do that," she said.

Allie smiled. "Great. It'll be fun." She wrote her new address out on a sheet of notebook paper. At that moment, Allie realized something she would never forget. It is easy to fool other people, but impossible to fool yourself.

The Horrible Camp Jewell Overnight

Caitlin Culligan Avon High School, Grade 9

When people think of camping, they think of a warm fire, a cozy tent and hot s'mores. They definitely don't think of walking miles just to reach the campsite (in the rain), sleeping on bare ground with nothing over you but a tarp, and mosquitoes biting the insides of your ears at four in the morning. These are unfortunately the first things that come to my mind when someone says "campout."

Two summers ago, I went to a sleep-away camp in Colebrook, Connecticut called Camp Jewell. We spent hours riding horses, playing volleyball, swimming, and doing everything that could be considered fun. We even stalked one of the counselors until we found him 30 feet above the ground in a tree, wearing a dress worthy of *Little House on the Prairie*. Everything about this camp was great, even the cabins. We're talking a sitting room, bathrooms within the main structure, and gas fireplaces. Due to this lack of typical "campishness," every village (age group based on gender) spent one day and one night out in the wilderness. My village, the Utopians, was scheduled to take our overnight on July 16-17, 2008. Little did we know that this excursion, designed to be a fun trip, would turn out to be a less than pleasant experience that I'm sure no Utopian will ever forget.

7:00 a.m., Cabin 7B. When we woke up that morning, the first thing that registered in our minds (after Reveille jolted us unceremoniously from dreamland) was the rain. It was barely 7 o'clock in the morning and already the rain was coming down hard. Being as naive as we were, we thought of the dreary weather as nothing more than a notification that all outdoor activities would be indoors, and our overnight would be postponed. The normal schedule would resume the next day, or so we thought. Our counselors then told us to gather up our camping gear; the overnight was still on. Amidst sighs, groaning, and the pain of dragging ourselves out of the warm sheets and blankets, the news sunk in, and a chorus of "WHAT?!" soon filled the tiny room.

8:30 a.m., Dining Hall. After breakfast in the dining hall with the rest of the Camp Jewell family, we donned raincoats (in some cases, garbage bags), and packed up the last of our supplies for the overnight. We were only to bring necessary items (potatoes, meat, veggies, ingredients for s'mores, bug spray, sleeping bag). No pajamas or toilet paper were allowed; they took up too much space. It was like we were planning an escape from prison; essential items only and our packs couldn't weigh more than 10 pounds each. At 9:30 a.m. we departed. The rain had let up enough to enable us to see more than ten feet in front of us, but nevertheless, we were soaked before we had gone half a mile. None of us campers really knew where to go; we just followed the counselors, who weren't sure themselves. *Great*, we thought. *Just great*.

11:30 a.m., God Knows Where. We had been walking for hours, through rain and mist, completely soaked through. We had crossed roads and trekked mud pits even Stanley (the infamous pig, back at camp) would find revolting. Three wrong turns only made the hike worse; we were as good as lost. We took turns carrying the burden that was the cooler of food, all the while dropping sleeping bags in mud, slipping on slick grass, and having our shoulders scraped raw by the straps of our backpacks. The only thing I had to carry my things in was a red drawstring gym bag with the Camp Jewell logo of people jauntily hiking (oh, the irony!) emblazoned on the front, and a garbage bag loaded with two sleeping bags, paper plates, and tin foil for hobo dinners. The thin strings of the bag cut deep into my shoulder blades, making every movement painful, and the garbage bag kept slipping out of my hands due to the ever-present precipitation. We weren't even halfway to our campsite.

2:00 p.m.; Wilderness A Campsite. After around four hours of hiking, we reached our destination and quickly set up our sleeping bags under the torn, blue tarp we would sleep under. Booming rounds of thunder and cracks of lightning added to the dismal setting, but the sound had long since stopped startling us. We gathered stick upon stick of firewood until we had a small flame going. I still remember the itchiness of the hemlock we carried, the constant pinpricks of pain as mosquitoes enjoyed a buffet, and distant sounds of the rest of the camp enjoying the music that always played before dinner. We could even hear roll call. (*"Where* are *the Utopians?"*) We heard them cheer as they made their merry way to a hot supper, despite them being six miles away.

3:30 p.m.; Wilderness A Campsite. We then spent an hour collecting spindly little sticks for our pathetic fire before laying out the bits of food for our hobo dinners. Considering the size of our flame, they would take at least two hours to cook thoroughly. It was barely big

enough to cook for a mouse, and incredibly feeble. Just as the first foil bundle was placed in the flames, a brief rain shower extinguished the wisp of heat. At this point we were too worn out to get angry, so some of us cried instead. Luckily, one of our counselors offered to walk to the Wilderness B campsite and cook our dinners there. At last, after our setback with the cooking, we ate. Lukewarm meat, soggy vegetables and cold s'mores had never tasted so delectable.

6:00 p.m., Wilderness A Campsite, Under the Tent. It had been a very long, strenuous day for the Utopians. We faced rain, lightning, fatigue and bone-tiredness for the past nine hours, and were very nearly asleep. We huddled under the tent in our sleeping bags, playing a game called "Hot Seat," in which each person had to truthfully answer questions asked by each girl. They could be as ridiculous or as deep as we wanted, and they were often things like "Describe the most *lugubrious* day of your life," and "Who was your first crush?" (My answer? A boy from "Barney" named Michael. I was four.) We played until we ran out of questions to ask, and as soon as "Taps" played in the main camp across the lake, we succumbed to slumber; going, going, gone.

5:00 a.m., Wilderness A Campsite. Startled into reality by a small alarm clock that a camper so thankfully remembered, we cautiously stretched our sore muscles, reluctant to move. Fifteen minutes later we were footslogging our way back to camp, eyes still unfocused and droopy from sleep deprivation. (It is utterly impossible to sleep with a persistent mosquito literally in your ear.) I had left my shoes out in the rain by accident, which did absolutely nothing to raise my subterranean spirits. We wove our way through the woods and onto the trail again. Before we knew it, we found ourselves trudging through the Rancher section of Camp Jewell. Despite being asleep on our feet, we were aware enough of our surroundings to wonder how in the world we'd reached camp territory already. As it turns out, we had taken a shortcut, a shortcut that we could have taken to get to our campsite. This trail took us a mere ten minutes to conquer, as opposed to the hours-long hike we endured the previous day. Yes, it was as frustrating as it sounds. By 5:30 a.m., we were back at camp, feeling more relieved than we'd ever been before.

6:00 a.m., Cabin 7B (at last!). Weary, unkempt, and oh so soaking wet, we rejoined civilization. We waited by the door to the bathroom in bath towels, awaiting the five minute showers that were the sole thing we wanted at the time. When I finally stepped into the shower, I swear I started steaming as the torrid water reacted with my icy skin. For the first time, I used up the entire five minutes I was allotted before drying off. For the first time in what felt like forever, the girls of Cabin 7B were fresh and clean.

7:30 a.m., Dining Hall. We never realized how much we had taken for granted until we had to go without. The Belgian waffles accompanied by hot cider were no exception. We ate like pigs the morning we got back, and must have gained 10 pounds between us. We couldn't have been happier, and even the Ewoks, our male counterparts, (amused by our tale though they were), gave us a warm welcome back. This experience was one of the most unpleasant in which I have ever been fated to partake. However, as I look back on it now, I cannot help but smile as I picture our journey, one I surely will not let slip from memory.

Shades of Gray

Stephanie Diamond

Edwin O. Smith High School, Grade 10

There were few things she took pleasure in, and even the select few didn't make her happy anymore. Except for two. Her two secret vices. The first was Him. Catching His eye for a moment was enough to improve the worst of days, and most days were pretty lousy. She didn't appear unhappy to students and teachers in school, just transparent, never seen. Odd, because that was all she wanted; attention, to be noticed. She never got attention from her mom; she was always a half a bottle of Jack short of sober. She didn't get any from her teachers, despite her 'straight A' report card. They were too preoccupied with the swearing kids, the kids who didn't do their homework. That was never her. She was the dependable girl, the smart girl, the good girl. Good. That was a word she loved, craved even. Whenever she was called good, she clenched on to it like a positive lifesaver in a sea of negativity. More than anything, she wanted to be good enough for Him. She wanted Him to look into her slate colored eyes with his hypnotic blue ones and tell her she was good enough and that it would all be okay. And she would believe Him, and she would be happy. But He was too busy staring into Sarah Johnsons' stunning green eyes. Sarah was good enough, Sarah was pretty enough, and Sarah was happy.

She sat on the cold bus seat. The limited cushioning had worn out from hundreds of kids' abuse, and now the hard metal plate stuck through the backrest and into her thin fame. Three rows up, she saw the back of His head. His shaggy sand-colored hair and broad shoulders shook as He laughed at something Sarah said. Sarah was funny. Her perky chocolate brown ponytail bobbed up and down as she made wild gestures. She was probably telling Him a story, another thing Sarah was good at. When it hurt to look any longer, she tore her eyes away from the happy couple and looked out the window. It was a dismal November day. Yesterday's snow had melted to slush and had been tossed aside by snowplows to form a gray icy river streaming down the side of the road. Gray, like her eyes.

The bus lurched to a stop in front of her house. As she walked to the front, she hoped to feel the lingering burn of His ice blue eyes on her back. She got closer and closer to the doors and she didn't feel them, but she knew it would happen. Today would be the day. She was positive! He would notice her! She was so wrapped up in her fantasy world that she didn't realize she was already down the bus stairs and crossing the road. He hadn't noticed. He never noticed.

She stood on the sidewalk in front of her house. She imagined that maybe sometime long ago, her Victorian house had been a magnificent glowing yellow. But not today. Time had worn its toll and now the house was a chipped, dull beige, almost the color of a manila envelope that had been splattered with stale coffee. The grass hadn't been cut and the leaves hadn't been raked since her dad left when she was four. She was sixteen.

She made her way to the front door of the old house and the cold gray slush began to seep through the holes in her worn Converse that belonged to her mother before her. She trudged up the stairs and turned the tarnished door knob. They never locked their house. There was nothing inside to steal except sorrow and unpaid bills. She pushed open the door, and with a chorus of groans, the rusty hinge gave out. *Shit*. She would have to fix that before her mom got home. She stopped for a minute and listened. She didn't think her mom was home yet. But maybe she never left for work at all. Maybe her mom was upstairs sleeping off yet another rough night.

She saw a pile of envelopes on the dirty kitchen table: warnings from electric companies, cable companies, and gas companies. *Double shit*. She would have to take care of those too, but she had a system. If it was the first warning, ignore it; if it was the second warning she would find some way to pay the bill. She would have to deal with the cable company first, because mom would be enflamed if she couldn't watch her shows, which she valued far more than a hot shower. After that came electric, then gas.

She grabbed the envelopes off the table and clutched the stack in her hand. She dropped her backpack to the ground. Despite losing the twenty pound menace, it still felt like she carried the weight of the world on her shoulders. She began the trek upstairs to her room, careful to avoid the eighth stair from the top where the old pine wood had rotted out and left a dark black hole that led to nowhere in its place. Loose change, pens, paychecks, and her dead goldfish had met an unknown end in that hole. Mom had caught her foot in it and tripped down the stairs on several hung-over mornings. Mom's boyfriend had thrown her favorite locket from her grandma down the hole in a drunken rage. But they never fixed it. She didn't know why, but she had learned it was usually better not to ask.

She opened the door to her room and tossed the bills onto her bed. She could take care of them later. Now she needed to take care of herself. A rare smile crept onto her face; a smile of anticipation. She walked to the bathroom with a new lightness in her step. She bent down next to the toilet and reached behind it. Right next to her mom's half empty bottle of whisky was her second vice. She picked up the emerald green razor and popped out one of the blades. Then she returned the razor to its place and fled back to her room, blade in hand. She sat on her bed and for the first time all day, she pushed up the sleeve of her thick, mothball scented sweater to reveal the dilapidated web of scars crisscrossing her wrist. She looked at the faint blue veins that ran the length of her arm. Blue like His eyes. Those eyes that she was not good enough for. She guided the razor to a fresh spot and pushed down. Pain filled her body. The best pain possible. Euphoria. She looked down and saw the red blood seeping from her arm, her only reminder that she really was alive. She felt the wet trickle of blood roll off her arm and onto her jeans. She smiled. She relocated the blade and thought of Sarah, that girl she could never be. She thought of Him, that boy she could never have. She pushed the blade down, adding another line to the mangled map of her life displayed across her wrist, and hoped that one day, maybe, she would be good enough.

Facehooked

Audrey Morgan Bacon Academy, Grade 10

Not an avid movie watcher, I often find myself in an epic daydream at the movie theater, the daydream replacing the viewing of a film I was probably forced to attend in order to have any sort of social event in the sub-rural town of Colchester, CT. However, one film has deservedly claimed my attention, and that is *The Social Network*. Featuring a dramatic plotline and an incredibly talented cast, *The Social Network* is certainly a quality film, but how do these characteristics separate it from any other classically "good" film? As I sat down and typed in the Facebook URL upon my return home from Gallery Cinemas, my fingers knowing precisely what keys to press, my answer arrived: Facebook directly affects our lives. From cyber-flirting to cyber-stalking to encouraging us to procrastinate on that project due in two hours, Facebook relates to practically everything we do. In fact, as I type this essay I casually flip to Internet

Explorer after a few minutes of total engrossment in writing to check my page. Perhaps the reason that *The Social Network* resonates so well with us is the fact that we are not bystanders of the film's story. Not only do we play a large role in the story, we are living the story.

Whether or not we realize the part we play in this huge phenomenon, we are all subject to Facebook's ability to influence our social behavior, management of time and self-esteem. Facebook is an easy format to essentially show the cyber world how funny, smart and cool we can be. Any witty observation or clever commentary that pops into one's head is destined to be their Facebook status. While "likes" praising one's insight or joke seem to be uplifting to their self-esteem, a Facebook status can often suggest a lack of self-esteem to begin with, merely a way of showcasing one's humor or intelligence online because it is easier to do so than to face someone in person and risk being mocked. The problem with using the internet to convey one's emotions is that communication extends beyond the written word. Body language and speech delivery play key roles in communicating outside of the cyber world, and those who choose to limit their thoughts and ideas to the internet don't give themselves the chance to learn proper social behavior.

Though cyber-stalking, known adoringly as "creeping" by those who practice it (aka everyone), appears to be harmless, repeated immersion in another person's life by viewing their wall, pictures, and other features can cause severe blows to one's self esteem. *Why are they prettier? They have so many friends. I'll never be as popular as them.* These thoughts constantly run through our minds as we place labels on virtually every person we connect with through social networking. One's evaluation of a person's character can be based solely on a Facebook profile. Similar to the media's persuasion techniques, a profile can change one's perception of a person, or force one to make judgments of a person before knowing them, or, even after having seen them in person. We can only critique a person based on the information that is presented to us, and by creating Facebook profiles we put ourselves at serious risk of being misunderstood or judged for what we are not.

If Facebook is capable of lowering our opinions of ourselves, as well as making us the main targets of pre-judgments, how does it manage to maintain our focus efforts? What drives us in staying up until 2 a.m. on Facebook is the human desire to be accepted, to be wanted, to be known. Facebook friends are not equivalent to actual friends, but we still like to believe our social statuses are increasingly parallel to the number of "friends" we have. The difference between a person with one thousand Facebook friends but hardly any real friends, and a person with 5 Facebook friends but a circle of real friends who care for them deeply, is that one gains notoriety, while the other is surrounded by the reality of happiness and given the opportunity to live life as it is meant to be lived, outside the world of social networking. It is up to the Facebook user to decide which person they want to be.

The Journey That Is the Writer

Saman Azimi Edwin O. Smith High School, Grade 10

He was a witticism on the part of God: a writer. Prevented by his righteous perfectionism from feeling satisfied with the fruits of his toil, he nevertheless found solace from his very journey itself, his odyssey to scour the human soul for meaning and for virtue, which he would then seize and expose on the page for the world to see and be moved. For this he had a perpetual ardor, and while it fed his soul to the brim, he felt at times that he was on a path that held no

meaning, a ship careening to shores where there was no font of inspiration, where his body and spirit would be utterly defeated; a ship on which he was tied to the mast, and could do nothing but look on as it careened beyond his control. He was cruelly trapped between his love for writing and the loss it begat.

In a life where he was granted nothing, saw nothing beyond the superficial world he toiled in, he discovered writing. It appeared to him as a wonderful freedom, stemming from the escape he felt through his reading of Dumas and Dostoevsky. When he realized it, he knew that there was no path more righteous, or more appropriate for him, than that of the writer.

Like every writer, he was an ascetic. He stoically dismissed the temptations of the worldly pleasures that captivated the world that surrounded him, a hedonic culture into which he refused immersion, preferring to stare in from without to capture a powerful portrait; embarrassing, cruel, and perhaps with a faint glimmer of hope. He was a martyr for future generations, consigning himself to a wretched existence with the righteous hope that someday his work would provide something beyond entertainment to future generations. He did not cast his lot in with the crass, the Rollings and Meyers who dominated the literary scene in the eye of the layman. He supported himself on the certainty that he could write things a hundred times more astute, a thousand times more profound than any others, and it gave him a desperate dignity; dignity that would be bruised every time he found a writer who somehow possessed a degree of skill unjustly higher than his own, who no doubt did not endure the countless hours of mental and emotional torment that he did to attain his humble status as a writer.

For days he would sit unmoving, a motionless sentinel in the chair with a lively mind that searched for inspiration. And each day he would leave the seat with a paragraph on his paper, a stanza, a single line, a jumble of words. In his wearisome, unappreciated journey for the next literary masterpiece, he kept perseverance as his painful watchword, and every day would be focused on his task, attempting to emulate the skill of seemingly every writer to simply write without thinking. He seemed the only one in the world, though, who thought that impossible. The rough gem of great writing was in him, of that he was certain, but he knew not how to unearth it, how to simply bring it forth to the page without a grain of thought, a grain that he knew would slow down his journey immensely. Thus, he thought without writing, and the page would remain starkly white.

He suffered this fate daily, but knew that there was no going back. To reject the path he'd put himself on as a disciple of language and thought, a journeyman questing after the perfect work of writing, would be a slap in the faces of Steinbeck and Dante and Tolstoy, all of whom had fought through the disabling pain to create brilliant and compelling pieces of writing.

The journey was a difficult one, though. Like any writer not willing to put out a single work of quality less than perfect, he lived a life of inspirational drought, lasting months, years and undoubtedly decades, before a fortunate spatter of revelation would come, if even that much. The worst fate that could befall him, though, and any writer, was the tantalizingly small glitter of inspiration that comes every few months. With it fueling his work, he hungrily wrote with skill comparable to any of the Greats, his skill flowing forth from his fingers like elixir to turn the leaden words on the page into fluid, golden poetry and prose. Then the fountain of inspiration would trickle dry, and the painstakingly built essay or tale being written would slowly putrefy.

Each day he would follow his intuition, and it would lead him to a meandering and

often circular path. For a week he would follow a dashing and cosmopolitan hero on his escapades through the vast and generic American cityscape wooing women, his life becoming a wreckage before his planned personal reconciliation and transformation into a paragon of virtue and conscience. This hero's journey would often end prematurely.

The next day the writer would wake with a new seed in his mind. He would detail the simple story of the mediocre protagonist, his character compelling in his so very human jealousy and greed. The brief tale would attempt to draw a profound conclusion from the very normalcy of his life, but the sophisticated metaphor would be lost in the verbose jargon and unclear plot, turning from a planned web of complex deductions into a confused mire holding no definite conclusion at all.

Upon awakening the next morning, he would realize the folly of his previous attempts, and would resolve to write more simply. Thus, his next character would be a model of righteousness, unwilling to submit to society's injustices, and would soon deteriorate into a crier, didactically pointing out the world's ills.

Each day he would feel more and more dead, more detached from the world, from the flow of inspiration that fueled his work. These were the dark days, where his life would become a chaotic tumult of marijuana and alcohol, followed by self pity, which would lead to more abuse of the chemicals falsely fabled to bring inspiration.

It would take a radical change of perspective to make someone as cynical or as romantic as a writer to realize his folly, his straying from his path. He would find that change through books, music, sights and thoughts. It would stir in him feelings he could not pretend to articulate, and he would once again remember something all too easy to forget: the joy that was part of what it was to be a writer.

Part of it was the power to escape. He could effortlessly create a universe millions of times more beautiful than the one he inhabited. He could experience apocalyptic cityscapes, lewd escapades, and fantastic lands of serpents, knights and damsels no less than perfect.

The rest of it, though, was the power writing granted. He wielded the ability to emotionally move, to make life clearer, to create and encourage thought where there was none before.

Above all, he held power over words. Through this, his power was absolute. He could bring down governments, foster revolution, create religions and schools of thought, and he held the ability to live forever, to always be present in the minds of those to live a decade, a century, a millennium in the future.

Thus he would reawaken with a fervor, ready to write himself out of any pit he had fallen in. The sun was more yellow and less white those mornings, the sky a beautiful blue instead of a ghastly one, any instances of silence were moments of peace and thought instead of silence akin to that of death.

Now he would write, prose of brilliant, mediocre and poor caliber spewing from his fingers. And while he did not love every word, he loved the wholesomeness of his work, and would realize, not through epiphany, but through constant work, the truth about life; namely, that it held no tangible truths. Its stream was neither wholly arbitrary nor fated, and whichever it was, its course was unknown.

Feeling immeasurably wiser, and with his hope restored, he would again set out to create the ultimate work of literature. And whether it was arbitrary, or whether it was fated, he would again in time lose his inspiration, his drive, his path. His own star-crossed journey would become the stuff of tales and legends; a painful, powerful and hopeful metamorphosis of the indomitable human soul.

As We Grow Apart

Caitlin Meuser Simsbury High School, Grade 11

There was a vacant look in your eyes as you watched me clean. Your eyes reminded me of the glass bottles we hung from trees. They never reflected sun onto our yard; they just stayed empty as they swayed in the ever-present wind. I thought maybe you were thinking of our conversation from Maine. I shouldn't have called that night.

I wonder if, when you forget to turn the newspaper pages in bed and simply stare at comics, that's where your mind is. You stare at the idiosyncrasies of mice and men until I am sure, if I touched your skin, it would be cold. I do touch it sometimes, but I feel nothing. Nothing scares me.

Under the sheets you make me forget this nothingness I call normal. I feel silk and skin that I pretend is pleasure, but normalcy returns as soon as you roll onto your back and stare at the ceiling. There are no stars up there. I told you this once. You never responded.

"Honey," I stare at your mouth and watch it caress that word. Or, I imagine it caressing the word.

"Hmm?"

"Goodnight." Then you turn over and I am almost fooled that you're asleep, but your breathing seems too labored, pained. I imagine what reaching back out to you would be like. I wonder if it would be painful.

I think I whispered something about how chilling the water was that night when I was in Maine and you were not. I forgot the way it could freeze your cells until blood and air have nowhere to go but out. I told you all this before my quarters ran out. I might've said something else, but you never mentioned that conversation again, never mentioned how it felt to wake up to a phone call and realize that the bed was still empty. I remember the last thing I thought was how sorry I was, but I'm not sure if I said that out loud.

Now I scrub the floor until my fingers are tangled and bloody and raw. The blood creates new stains that, try as I might, I can't seem to get out. I spread my fingers out and probe the cuts until you come home and see the mess I am, spread out on the floor. You put away your briefcase first then hang up your coat on the hook, making sure the pockets are empty of change and things you wouldn't want me to know about. I see your hands deftly check your phone for messages, then slip it back into your jacket for safekeeping. It isn't until your work paraphernalia has been taken care of that you turn back to me.

"Goodnight," you murmur, as you sidestep around my heaving figure and retreat back to our room.

I'm not sure what I own anymore.

After, I pick myself up and clean my cup of lipstick stains and that hard smell you said reminds you of hospitals. You are asleep now, spread across the bed until there is no space left for me.

Outside the window the moon is full, and if I put my hands up high enough I can fit the orb in my hand. I once told you that everything was tangible. My mom told me that the sun and the stars are simply up there for the taking if you know how to get to them. That made you laugh and pull me closer once. I still believe that almost everything is tangible, but I can't seem to get a grasp on you anymore.

I remember the town in Maine. It was called Alexander. I remember in high school I had fallen in love with a boy named Alexander, Alex for short. He brought cigarettes and knowledge to share with me, until I was filled with smoke and what I thought was magic.

I think I told you all of that, rambling on inconsequentially until you wanted to hang up. Maybe you thought of divorce, however fleetingly, and how that would relieve you of this pain, of me. I told you about Alexander, yet I never thanked you for saving me from myself there.

I arrange the pillows and blankets on the couch and almost feel domestic, as if I'm preparing a bed for houseguests. I imagine I would have a nice ham cooking in the oven for them, and the smells would be permeating across the house until every corner smelled of home. They would be bringing the dessert, something like apple pie with vanilla ice cream, and I would make decaf coffee with extra cream and sugar. But there are no guests coming. The bed I'm making is for myself and myself alone.

You know what came after the boy named Alexander. I claimed it was hereditary, like cancer and allergies, but I know you didn't believe me. You were brought up the right way, brought up not knowing that Jack Daniels wasn't a rock star on TV, and Grey Goose wasn't something your mother cooked for Christmas dinner. I envied you; still envy you, you and your upbringing in the suburbs of Connecticut.

After that conversation I tried to bottle up my past, but I couldn't beat it. Some days it would sneak out of the liquor cabinet that was only opened for parties. Other days it would surprise me, turning up in my car dashboard or purse I rarely used. I would wonder momentarily how it got there, but in the end it didn't matter. Once in a while I'd fight the temptation until I thought I might win, but the liquid would taunt me until sweet oblivion took my guilt away. It took everything away, even you.

I once thought about what it would be like to tell the truth and admit my secrets, to open up. But my secrets are ugly, and you, asleep in our bed right now, are perfect. I couldn't ruin your perfection.

So I write it all down instead, my words never staying in the lines because my hand can't stop shaking. I write about that night, about how one minute I was sipping liquid that burned my throat and my sorrows, and how the next I was lost in the dark, watching a car drive away and wondering where I was. I was stumbling through rain and cold wind that bit my skin when I looked up and saw the moon. I started to pray.

I didn't pray for myself, even though your favorite word to throw at me is "selfish." Instead, I prayed for you. I prayed that, wherever you were, you were safe.

Cobalt

Alyssa Holmes Rockville High School, Grade 11

There's something about the serenity of a lake that has always made me uncomfortable. As a slight ripple passed along the glassy surface, the only thing to splash up in my face was a wave of boredom. I pulled my baseball cap down over my damp hair and sighed, feeling the tiny boat with its chipped turquoise paint being tossed below me.

"Dad," I said. "We're not catching anything. Can we at least move to a different spot?"

"Have patience, Kimmy. We just got here." A floppy white fishing hat sat on his head,

making his already narrow head seem misshapen.

"It's *Kim*, Dad," I sighed, propping up the pole between my feet and reaching for my cell phone. I saw him out of the corner of my eye, shaking his head in disapproval.

"Texting. Texting will be the death of you."

"This will be the death of me! Why do I need to sit here and catch my own damn fish?" I said angrily, the boat thrashing with my every move.

"It's more than just catching fish," he stated calmly, tugging at the clear line with his index finger.

"PLEASE enlighten me as to how fishing is more than just catching fish," I said. He thought for a second, letting the line out and slowly reeling it back in again.

"It's a connection," he said after a while. "It's a connection with water, with nature. It can teach you about tranquility and persistence. And it's quiet. When you're fishing, silence is the only sound you hear."

"Okay, Buddha," I mumbled under my breath. It was still early, and the sun was just beginning to peek over the edge of the water. I pulled my cap down further and tried to find a way to get comfortable on the splintering wooden seat. I finally tilted my chin down and dozed off, my arms crossed in frustration. The pole between my feet started to twitch, and I woke up instantly to grab its handle.

"Easy," my dad said calmly. "Easy. Don't start reeling yet. Let it bite the hook first." I sat with the pole in my shaking hands, feeling a rush of adrenaline. The pole began to dip forward as my dad yelled, "Now!" and I yanked it back, just like he taught me. "You've got it!" he shouted in excitement. "Now reel!" He coached me patiently, instructing me to let out some line and reel it back in again. I struggled, my biceps straining as the fish fought for his life. Finally his tail thumped along the side of our small fishing boat, and my dad scooped it out of the water with a net. With trembling fingers I reached in and grabbed hold of the line, lifting up the whole pound that was my catch. I glanced at my dad as he bit his lip.

"I thought it was a lot bigger than this," I said quietly. He burst into laughter and I shortly followed, the two of us rocking the small boat with every chuckle. I took a quick picture with my "big catch" before I tossed it back and watched it disappear into the dark cobalt. That was the only fish either of us caught that day, and yet I somehow felt accomplished.

As I sit here in my dad's old fishing boat, I take in my surroundings. The water seems brighter than I remember, the sun reflecting off of its glass surface. It's early, but it's hot. I pull my baseball cap over my damp hair and watch the small waves ripple past me. My dad sits next to me, both of our poles lying on the bottom of the boat where we left them.

"It's a connection," I hear him say. "It's a connection with water, with nature." I finally understand what he means. I breathe in the fresh air around me and I hear the silence that he heard. My chest feels tight as I reach over and pick up the urn next to me, grabbing a handful of my father's ashes and letting the wind pull them from my fingers. I watch as his remnants blow through the air before settling and disappearing into the dark cobalt.

An Unfinished Story

Amy Tomasso Farmington High School, Grade 11

In a library full of books, I found a different story. Alluring in its simplicity and reassuring in its realism, it is so impressive, so charming, and so tempting. I watched from my carrel and feigned absorption in logarithms, while in reality I was a captive reader of a debut novella. By the final page, I assessed the receding characters, and then wrote down the words the protagonists should have recorded but never would, for fear of tarnishing their imperfect encounter.

He was an older man in his seventies, moving with the steady deliberateness of someone who knows exactly where he's going and the process required to get there. His demeanor was unpretentious and almost jolly; the corners of his mouth lifted in what seemed to be a permanent smile or a look of continual approval. His dress was simple variations of beige enveloping a round belly that alluded to hearty dinners and sumptuous desserts.

He held in one hand a newspaper, and in his mind a mission: to check his e-mail. It was with pure determination that he took up this task; he was the tortoise and the computer the hare, each moving at different paces toward the same finish line, engaged in a perpetual race. The man tinkered with the computer keys and groaned. He kept his left hand poised on the newspaper as if to maintain a connection with a simpler past in which the human mind and artificial brain were on the same plane, not competing, neither winning.

The computer is a stubborn thing though, its facade impenetrable, not to be interfered with unless done with proper knowledge. The man finally heaved himself to his feet and retreated with the same steady, deliberate (and this time slightly defeated), gait to the reference desk. Despondency was visible in the gentle slope of his shoulders and the slight bowing of his head. Yet as he returned toward his desk, on his face was a new expression, one of ...intrigue? Purpose? Amazement! Because...

She was close to 65, and probably dyed her rust colored hair. Her build was large in a decidedly feminine way that didn't evoke attention but rather seemed to fit her. She walked drolly, her backside sticking out in a librarian-esque manner, and her features were soft and composed, yet rather pensive, like she was literally lost in thought of the books that surrounded her. I wondered how many books she'd read (thousands?), and why she loved them so much.

She and the man traversed the multitudes of bookshelves, he explaining his predicament and she acknowledging it with neither accord nor disapproval. When they arrived at the object of distress, they both stopped. She gazed out the window at the hill and river below with dreams and a spark in her eyes.

When she spoke, her voice was low and breathy, like the sound of pages turning in a book or a pen navigating a leaf of paper. "You've picked the best spot-just look at the river."

He looked, his eyes drifting from the flowing river to her round features. He spoke too. "My brother once told me that this is the only river in the northeast that flows north." Their eyes met at this statement, and they pondered the enormity of this river literally defying the gravity that binds it to its path and sets it on its course.

"It's flowing north, flowing home." After she said this, the unspoken question floated in the silence between them. *What is home?*

The simplicity of the natural beauty they were witnessing held them captive, spellbound, absorbed in each other; the easy companionship and seeming lack of words, despite

the multitude of books on all sides.

It was a beautiful thing to witness, but beauty never lasts. I could see in his eyes the desire to ask her the story of her life, to hear her voice and become engulfed in it and to stare at the river and be reminded of goodness and happiness, to fall in love again and rewrite his own life story as its co-author.

Instead, she turned to the computer. "What's your server?" "Hotmail."

With a conclusive click she was gone, and the only question he had asked was how to work the internet. He was left alone with his newspaper, the computer, the river and the hill, and all the books in the world to fill the void she'd just left.

Letter to a Younger Me

Andrea Adomako Central High School, Grade 12

Dear Me, 6 years ago:

You're craving more. There is a hunger inside of you that can only be satisfied by feeling like you belong, like you're wanted. You're devoured by feelings of abandonment and loneliness and you don't realize that the agonizing pain will get better. When the stars start to sprinkle the night sky you'll look for the brightest one and you'll wish for something better. On the days when the pain engulfs you, when you've been whipped and you have scars of worthlessness and emptiness imprinted all over your developing body, you'll pray. You'll negotiate deals with Him, hoping He'll grant you inner peace. He doesn't. Eventually you stop believing in Him too, the same way you stop believing in yourself. Your hope and faith is drained out of you day by day until you abandon the one thing you always had, yourself.

I am pleading with you. Forsaking all gracefulness, I surrender to my knees as I beg you to resist the evil temptation. Grant my exhausted soul the same mercy I desired to give to you. Don't do it. That memory: the bedroom, its obscurity, the unfamiliar shadows, they will haunt you forever. You feel forced, deep down you want to resist, but you don't know how to say no to people who want you. You've never been put in that position before. I promise you, it isn't worth it.

You do it anyway.

You label yourself a whore for years to come. There is a permanent layer of filth on your body and you accept that you will never be cleansed. You don't even attempt to excuse the action with the phrase, "you were young. You didn't know better." Your innocence seeps away from you as acid rain seeps into the soil, killing any hope of a beautiful bloom.

I am sorry I did that to you. Forgive me. Forgive yourself.

Michael Lown Saint Joseph High School, Grade 12

The only way you will ever truly love something is to live in a world where it no longer exists. My mother once told me that after her third husband walked out on her while she was two months pregnant with my sister. She never realized how much she loved the drunk until she knew he was never coming back. She was right about that more than I will ever care to admit. I thought that this would be the best way to start this story, because it's been years since I've been able to live a life without guilt, without living with the pains for committing the crime for another man's hate.

It all started when I sixteen. I was many things when I was a kid. Smart was never one of them. I knew it and everybody else in town knew it. So much so that it surprised absolutely no one, not even my mom, when I stopped bothering to go to school after the tenth grade and spent everyday working at a local hardware store. I liked the job because it didn't involve using my head and the boss liked it because he knew that he could pay me less than minimum wage and I'd be too stupid to argue with it.

The customers were mostly kind and easy-going while the boss seemed like a nice old man when we first met. Sure, he had his flaws like everyone else, which included throwing away every penny he ever earned on cheap booze, and he usually beat his son whenever he dumped too much of that booze into his system. But he loved him. At least he did a good job pretending he did. His boy usually spent his weekends and his summer breaks from college working at the shop with me. His boy's name was Billy. Billy Donahue.

Billy did it for the extra bucks and it seemed like a chance to try to build a decent relationship with his old man. I liked Billy and Billy seemed to like me. Not that I didn't have any problems with him, myself. Billy was too artsy- fartsy for my liking. Spent too much time talking about Ernest Hemingway rather than anything important. One time I wondered if he thought I wasn't artsy-fartsy enough, and that I talked too much about non-Hemingway things than something actually important. If he did, he hid it well. Billy never wasted his time finding faults with others. He would simply accept anybody, warts and all. He probably did that because it was a sensitive, new age thing to do, and it also helped attract the ladies who always like a sensitive kind of man.

The next summer he came back with a new girlfriend. She was probably the only person in town who liked talking about Hemingway as much as he did. When I first saw the two I just thought it'd be some old fling like the others and they'd be over in two weeks. That never happened. Instead, they began liking each other more, and I started liking her. She was the quiet type, never talked about all the books she'd read or all the other artsy-fartsy things she did, like Billy. And if she did speak, it was something funny or cute, or both. Everybody in town liked her, when I begin to think about it.

The only person who didn't like her was Billy's old man, my boss. During a routine lunch day, Billy once told me that the reason was some strange psychological problem that made it impossible for his old man to ever truly accept his happiness. His idea seemed good but I thought the real reason was a helluva lot simpler: Billy was white and she wasn't. To an old-time drunk like him, that was more than a good excuse to break the two up.

He knew that the girl was not going away anytime soon and realized the only way to end it was to run her out of town. His first idea was to bribe her with a couple hundred bucks

Hate

and tell her that a "pretty girl like her can do so much better than my boy." She just stared at him like the racist drunk he was and left with Billy. When he figured that being nice was getting him nowhere, he decided that he needed his employee of the month to help him out: me.

He met me one day during my lunch break and told me his dilemma. He spewed out a bunch of bull about how the girl was beginning to become a bad influence on his boy, that she came from a broken home, and that she was just no good. He even told me how her brother was spending the rest of his life in jail for killing some little girl three months back. That was a lie. She didn't even have a brother, but I was too stupid to figure that out at the time and believed every word he flew at me.

His plan was nice and easy. She worked at the local ice cream parlor and usually got off work at around ten. One day, I would sneak up behind her dressed up like a mugger, pull a gun on her, and tell her that she was better off someplace else like New York or Detroit, or something like that. That plan seemed fine to me except for one problem: I had never seen a gun in my life, much less held one in my hand. *No problem* the old man told me. Turned out he kept a gun in a worn-out shoebox since his uncle gave it to him when he was five. It was small gun; small enough to sneak inside your shoe if you needed too. I told him it wouldn't be smart to use a loaded gun when I had no thought of actually hurting her. The old man just told me that that idea was lousier than my usual ramblings. *People could tell if they're being threatened with a loaded gun in their face even if they never had before* he reasoned to me. Made sense to me at the time.

I used an old black ski mask I hadn't put on my face since I was ten. I slept in my mom's car and waited until it was ten at night when I saw her and a friend starting to close up the parlor. They walked out ten minutes later and began to talk awhile. I waited in the car until the friend left for hers, which she did ten minutes later. By the time she drove out of the parking lot and I left my car, with mask and gun, the girl was still walking to the bus stop on the corner.

When the gun was in-between her eyes, I starting telling her exactly what the old man told her to tell me, *you're no good for Billy, and you're better off somewhere else.* That seemed to be working until she started to pull the gun away from me. I started to get a little nervous, and thought I should tell her *don't worry. It's me.* I pulled the trigger before I could say it. I killed her. After that, I got into my car, drove home, and hid myself under the covers.

When I woke up, Billy called me up to tell me what happened. Apparently the cops thought it was just a case of a mugging gone wrong, so I was off the hook. I never saw his old man after that. I wouldn't be surprised if that's what he had wanted to happen all along. That sounds just the right kind of vicious for him. Son of a Bitch died of a heart attack three months later. I never saw Billy again after that. He spent the rest of his life as a recluse. I read about his death a year ago in the daily obituaries. Nobody went to the funeral.

I've been wondering to myself if there is a lesson to be learned from this whole story, and I'd like to think there are a few. Maybe there is some truth in what I said before. Maybe I didn't realize that Billy truly loved her, and that his old man truly loved to hate her until after she was gone. I also realized that hate is a horrible reason to do anything and is something that must not be fed to grow larger, like I did. When I look back on the whole situation one more time, I remember another thing my mother told me after she heard about the shooting, the day after. "Hate will kill us all," she said. She was more right than I'll ever know.

Finding Myself, Four Thousand Miles Away

Robert Dei Dolori Granby Memorial High School, Grade 12

Sweat fogs my sunglasses as I push a wheelbarrow across the dusty build site. My wriggling cargo is not heavy, but I am very careful not to let it tip as I navigate the rocky soil. Paulo is bright-eyed, dark-skinned and skinny. He loves to run around barefoot teasing the workers, with the energy that is universal to five-year-olds. He also loves rides in the wheelbarrow. He sits upright and attentive, and smiles at his younger brother who is riding in a cart next to him, utterly naked. We pass by the boys' home-a square, clay-brick structure no larger than the average American living room-and suddenly I remember my scare at the airport earlier in the week.

My heart sank as the last piece of luggage was lifted off the baggage claim. My trip had hardly even begun, and already my resourcefulness and nerves were being tested by lack of sleep and lost luggage. Four months earlier, mid-way through my junior year, I had decided to participate in a build trip with Habitat for Humanity. Growing up in a comfortable suburb, I had come to realize that I had been handed a life of considerable security. At the very least, I could always expect three meals a day, a roof over my head, and the support of a loving family. But the more I began to venture outside the dreamlike bubble in which I lived, the more I discovered evidence of the massive inequality that currently divides our world. As I read and heard disheartening reports from the third world, and as I traveled to new, exotic places myself, poverty became increasingly real and important to me. Clearly there is no concise solution, I realized, but there must surely be a way in which I can use my fortunate situation to improve someone else's, even if just by a little bit. After hearing about a relative's life-changing experience with Habitat, I knew that I had found the opportunity I was looking for. Although I spoke no Portuguese and had never stepped foot on South American soil, I chose a group travelling to Salguiero, Brazil. I relished the thought of experiencing a whole new culture firsthand, while also providing a family with a brand-new home. After months of anticipation, I finally found myself in Recife Airport, staring sleepily at the vacant conveyor belt. I tried to think clearly (a difficult endeavor, considering the negligible stints of sleep I had managed in my claustrophobic airplane seat the night before), and walked over to the information desk. As I communicated my dilemma to the young Brazilian woman, I dismissed my own nagging fears of spending a week and a half building houses under the hot sun, in only the clothes I had on my back. At the time, I had not even considered that what I had in my carry-on backpack easily amounted to more than the total sum of some people's possessions.

A burst of laughter brings my attention back to the build site. As Paulo waves to some nearby friends from his wheelbarrow chariot, I suddenly feel extremely humbled. It is nothing short of an honor to be carting around this child, who has grown up in such dire poverty, to whom a wheelbarrow ride is the day's only excitement and pleasure. If I were cast into his situation tomorrow, would I even survive? I think of my friends back home enjoying their summer vacations, driving around in cars (their own cars!), thinking nothing of the countless gadgets and conveniences that cushion their everyday lives. How bewildering, how eyeopening, how terribly heartbreaking it is to interact with someone stripped to the very bareness of life!

Despite how little he had, Paulo still managed to endow me with one parting gift: a new perspective. From that moment on, I knew that I would never again see my life in the same

light. The trip began with the fear of losing my possessions. As it turned out, I ended up finding something infinitely more valuable than anything I could have packed away in a suitcase: a deeply authentic appreciation for my own life.

Honorable Mentions Poetry Honorable Mentions

Claire Hadley, Grade K Leila Osorio, Grade K Petra Leite. Grade 1 Grace Palmer, Grade 2 Xander Welty, Grade 2 Evie Wittmann, Grade 2 *Javier Diaz, Grade 3* Hannah Groonell, Grade 3 Alyssa Khoo, Grade 3 Katherine Kaczmanski, Grade 4 John Rhodes, Grade 4 Lauren Sampson, Grade 4 Akira Higgins, Grade 5 Nicholas Rossitto, Grade 5 Jesse Stanhope, Grade 5 Lauren Hipplewitz, Grade 6 Julianna Pestretto, Grade 6 Emma Sheahan, Grade 6 Brendan Jones, Grade 7 *Cassidy Wechsler, Grade 7 Emily Wert, Grade 7* Sarah Coleman, Grade 8 Jamie Cowan, Grade 8 Matthew DelMastro, Grade 8 Ryan Bonacum, Grade 9 Karita Perry, Grade 9 Rachel Sennott, Grade 9 Emily Daly, Grade 10 Joshua Gomez, Grade 10 Lauren Silver. Grade 10 Sacha Gomez, Grade 11 Jennifer Mears, Grade 11 Lizzi Ta, Grade 11 Katie Mango, Grade 12 Jesse Steinmetz, Grade 12 Razvan Stoian, Grade 12

Frederick J. Bielefield Elementary School Annie E. Vinton Elementary School Latimer Lane Elementary School Colchester Elementary School West Elementary School West Elementary School Clover Street Elementary School Sandy Hook Elementary School South Elementary School West District Elementary School Tootin' Hills Elementary School South Elementary School West Woods Upper Elementary School West Woods Upper Elementary School Kelly Lane Intermediate School Juliet W. Long School Kelly Lane Intermediate School Wells Road Intermediate School Vernon Center Middle School Tomlinson Middle School Avon Middle School Woodbury Middle School Mystic Middle School Smith Middle School Edwin O. Smith High School Windham High School Simsbury High School Bristol Center High School Windham High School Rockville High School Windham High School Rockville High School Rockville High School RHAM High School Shepaug Valley High School Rockville High School

Prose Honorable Mentions

Isabella Hamley, Grade K Clara Shangold, Grade K Sophie Viar, Grade K Kayden Burke, Grade 1 Shaan Mehta, Grade 1 Sarah Carstensen, Grade 2 Zachary Geisler, Grade 2 Calla Gentilucci, Grade 2 Bartholomew Codd, Grade 3 Brayden Grim, Grade 3 Alyssa Solomon, Grade 3 Sommer Prime, Grade 4 Devin Rhoads. Grade 4 Meghan A. Walsh, Grade 4 Pei Chao Zhou, Grade 4 Sarah Grinalds, Grade 5 *James Hobar, Grade 5 Kate Werle, Grade 5* Alex Glass, Grade 6 Annelise Helbling, Grade 6 Matthew Rossi, Grade 6 Alyssa Grimaldi, Grade 7 Julia Meehan, Grade 7 Anish Moorthy, Grade 7 Emily Bak, Grade 8 Hannah Carpino, Grade 8 Joseph Phillips, Grade 8 Nancy Fu, Grade 9 Jakob Gattinger, Grade 9 Amanda Whitehouse, Grade 9 Felicity Emerson, Grade 10 Ariana Farnsworth, Grade 10 Lisa Mueller, Grade 10 Hannah Cole, Grade 11 Samuel Lagasse, Grade 11 Aminah Muhammad, Grade 11 Noah Morgenstein, Grade 12 Hayden Stearns, Grade 12 Anna VanderLeest, Grade 12

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Colophon

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