

Pierce County

Teen Poetry

& Fiction

Writing

Contest

OUR
OWN
WORDS

2007-08

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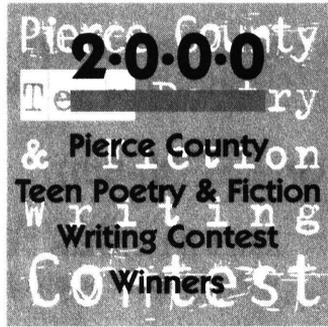
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Poetry (Grades 7th-8th)

- First Place** Bailee Miller, 7th grade
Kalles Jr. High, Puyallup
- Second Place** Destinie Day-Gray, 8th grade
Home School, Bonney Lake
- Third Place** Deborah Kammerzell, 8th grade
Curtis Jr. High, University Place

Poetry (Grades 9th-10th)

- First Place** Adam Van Etten, 10th grade
Steilacoom High School, Steilacoom
- Second Place** Presley Lind, 9th grade
Ferrucci Jr. High, Puyallup
- Third Place** Larisha Shelman, 9th grade
Ballou Jr. High, Puyallup

Poetry (Grades 11th-12th)

- First Place** Kevin Fisher, 12th grade
Gig Harbor High School, Gig Harbor
- Second Place** Emily Eakland, 12th grade
Gig Harbor High School, Gig Harbor

Third Place Laurie Ballew, 12th grade
Charles Wright, Steilacoom

Short Stories (Grades 7th-8th)

First Place Randall DeJarlais, 7th grade
White River, South Prairie

Second Place Rachel Bennatt, 7th grade
Gault Middle School, Tacoma

Third Place Mikael Bangcaya, 8th grade
Gault Middle School, Tacoma

Short Stories (Grades 9th -10th)

First Place Nicholas Mirra, 10th grade
Foss High School, Tacoma

Second Place Ian Beck, 9th grade
Sumner Jr. High, Sumner

Third Place Stacia Torborg, 9th grade
Annie Wright, Tacoma

Short Stories (Grades 11th-12th)

First Place Lara Rogers, 11th grade
Charles Wright, Puyallup

Second Place Stephen Anderson, 11th grade
Bellarmine Prep, Puyallup

Third Place Stefanie Fox, 12th grade
Gig Harbor High School,
Gig Harbor

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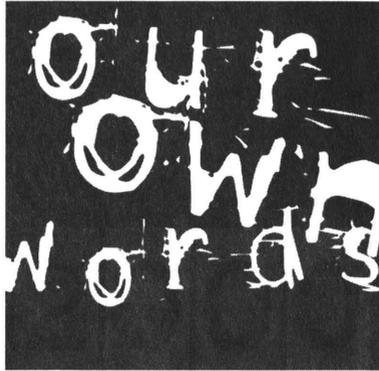


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POETRY

7th & 8th Grade

Untitled

There's a chill in the air, and a dark brown bear
crosses the snow, she has places to go.
My fingers are numb, I hear a bird hum,
I look and see a robin, her eyes twinkling bright.
She flies back to her nest, because she thinks it best
to get home, before it starts snowing again.
I'm getting lonely, I'm comforted only
by the sparking beauty of the fresh fallen snow.
I see a rabbit with the dreadful habit
of running, without stopping to say, "Hello."
I've no place to go, and deep down I know,
that no one will be here for a very long time,
so I'll just sit down, and let my thoughts take flight,
with no one to talk to on this cold winter night.

*Bailee Miller,
1st Place, 7th Grade, Kallis Junior High*

Musical Notes

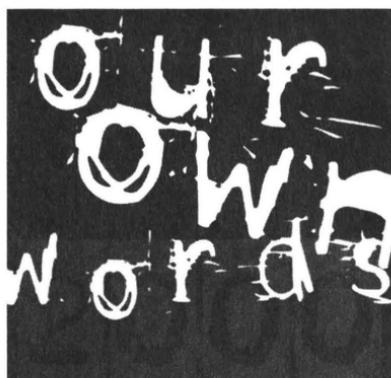
Eighth notes, quarter rest, pause,
The music swings, it flows with clause.
It's dancing, it's fun, and brings us all pleasure,
Oh, how those notes sing every new measure.
Pianos are classical, guitars tell of saddle and spur,
Ties, repeat, and slur.
Every piece tells a different story,
And everyone shines in its own glory.
Flute, trombone, clarinet, bass,
Play in perfect harmony, and float about like lace.
Come join me through music without flaws.
Eighth notes, quarter rest, pause.

*Destinie Day-Gray,
2nd Place, 8th Grade, home school*

A Sonnet To School

I leave to you the ever-creeping gloom
that quickly overtakes those sat at desks.
A'slumb'ring in a quiet sunlit room
tomorrow's heroes, tired and depressed.
I leave to you a fear both deep and wide
of tests unstudied for and lockers jammed;
a creeping fear of failure none can hide
not even if they've dutifully crammed.
I leave to you its innocence and joys
what adults call the best years of your life.
So many blooming girls and teenage boys
are trapped between their locker and a knife.
So even with the very best of luck
the early teenage years will always suck.

*Deborah Kammerzell,
3rd Place, 8th Grade, Curtis Junior High*



POETRY

9th & 10th Grade

Honeybees

The hive is alive with buzzing bees,
They bring back nectar, may it please,
The queen; she bustles about her noisy home,
Laying precious eggs in honeycomb.
Maturing in a hexagonal cocoon,
They emerge as adults all too soon,
Whence they must leave their protective shelter,
To careen about, helter-skelter.
All must play a vital role,
In attaining society's ultimate goal,
Accumulating a wealth of honey;
Not unlike us and our beloved money.

*Adam Van Etten,
1st Place, 10th Grade, Steilacoom High School*

Mirrors

We are stars shining, stars dying, suns laughing,
Today ate yesterday and tomorrow is hungry and only the
future is good enough to taste

In a universe where time has married light and their
honeymoon

is the ocean, my tears carry globes and rivers in them.

A sunray can kill and its death is the dark but fireflies
mourn and pray like ministers like little beams
dancing in the black

Everyone now is a flower, but I've never been in bloom
but like carnations like daisies you are rose thorns in
my flesh

my blood colors your petals and then the rain
sends us

running, dead leaves floating in puddles in lakes in
blue skies

in black holes and love is just fires kissing fires
burning sex and sweat

My teeth rip deep into your emotion (piercing tongues to
tongues to my heart you are my pulse).

*Presley Lind,
2nd Place, 9th Grade, Ferrucci Junior High*

Trembling Beauty

Silk, sake, and the Shamisen

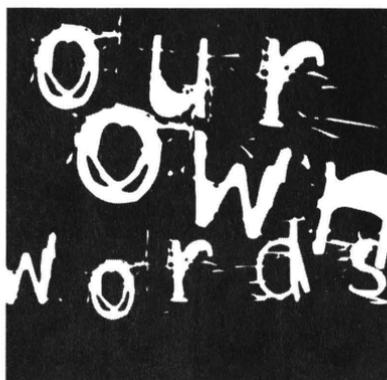
Wear the kimono, pour drinks and play a song,
Have a few laughs and dance.

Schedule a party, tie your obi, powder your face.
Slip on slippers, open the door, walk out into darkness.

Arrive at the party and play a Koto for guests.
Be calmed by their continuous smiles, hear constant
laughter.

When the night is through, walk home quietly young
Maiko
Don't be afraid of growing up,
For you will soon be a full-fledged Geisha.

*Larisha Shelman,
3rd Place, 9th Grade, Ballou Junior High*



POETRY

11th & 12th Grade

Water

Teardrop leaves glisten
rain drips from tender lips
into a stream that roils
over a shallow bed.

Water mingles with rocks.
Twisting ripples turn and fold,
licking light over their curves
and then swallowing.

The surface pulls tight
smooth over black depths
like fine sheets.

And the lake shivers
when the wind blows.

*Kevin Fisher,
1st Place, 12th Grade, Gig Harbor High School*

Tilden Park

The worn path through trees
beckons to children,
preoccupied lovers, weary travelers.

A girl chases her red ball down the path,
shouts gleefully as the sun plays
hide-and-seek in her hair.

The sun sweeps an orange glaze
across the weathered tree swing,
begs me to play in the afternoon glow.

The touch of engraved initials
along the seat feels rough under my palm.
I remember my father, carving our names
into this swing, and I can feel him
next to me once again.

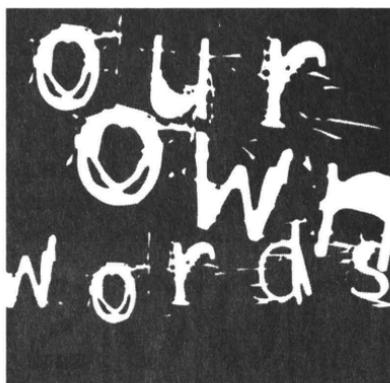
*Emily Eakland,
2nd Place, 12th Grade, Gig Harbor High School*

Unsettled

A dead tree impales
the belly of water like a knife
The stab of the samurai, *barikiri*

kiri, kiri, kiri,
the birds pinch the air with noise
I wait for peace

*Laurie Bellew,
3rd Place, 12th Grade, Charles Wright*



SHORT STORIES

7th & 8th Grade

The Coat

I lay scratched, frayed and moth-eaten in the back of a forgotten closet, an old coat no one wanted. I began to think about my past, back in the good old days.

I hung near the store window, another beautiful frosty morning, one in which I would not be sold. For I longed to hang in the front window, but I never would. The so-called “cool” coats occupied that space. I had hung on the hanger by the window and watched people go by all day long. Yes, kids had gazed at me while in the store, even tried me on, but none of them seemed to want a good old coat these days.

I sat all morning, until about noon, when finally people wandered into the store. I noticed a particular family that was actually looking to buy something. The boy of the family was wandering around the store when he stumbled upon me. “Mommy, Mommy, I want to have this coat!” he yelled.

“Are you sure you want *this* coat?” his mother said. “Yes, Mommy, I do”. “Okay,” she said with a sigh. All the while I was trembling with excitement. Would I be bought?

I don’t remember much at that except waking up in a box in the boy’s house. One thing I did remember was that the boy’s name was Timmy. The next morning I awoke in the same box. I forgot where I was for a second, but then I remembered that I was in my new home.

In a few hours’ time, Timmy came rushing down the stairs, grabbed me, and flew out the door. Down the steps he rushed, into the snowy street whereupon he began flinging balls of white at his buddies. I was scared of all this commotion, but I liked it. I had never had balls of white thrown at me. Next Timmy’s buddies grabbed me

and we rolled around in the white for a while. Finally, after much fun, Timmy's mother called him in for dinner.

From then on I went everywhere with Timmy. Every day he would drag me to and from school, and on the way home we always got in white ball fights. I was Timmy's favorite piece of clothing. He even wore me inside. But I know nothing good can last forever and slowly I became just another thing in Timmy's crowded life.

I lay awkwardly on the floor just looking around. "At least I'm better off than I was in the shop," I thought, "I do have a home now, I guess." All of a sudden I abruptly stopped thinking. Suddenly I noticed two eyes that seemed to be out of place. "Oh, it's the cat," I thought, "undoubtedly up to no good". The cat slunk towards me with mischief in her eyes. "What are you up to you dumb cat?" I thought. "Are you going to pounce?" Then, almost as if she had read my mind, she did.

I don't know how long I hung on the hanger after the cat incident before I saw the first sign of life. Maybe a week or two, but I do remember seeing one of the most dreaded things that a coat can ever see, a moth. It fluttered through the closet with such innocence, but I knew what he had come for, food. I held my breath hoping with all my heart that he wouldn't see me, but he did. He landed and began eating.

I think I sat in that closet all summer before I finally saw Timmy again. He looked a lot bigger and taller now. Sure enough, as I had expected, he was too big to fit in me any more. So I became just another lonely piece of clothing that hung in Timmy's closet. I guess I'm no better off than I was in the beginning, a lonely sad coat, no one wanted.

*Randell Dejarlais,
1st Place, 7th Grade, White River*

Something Strange in the Grass Forest

Long ago in the little town of Twinkle Berry, there was a young boy whose name was Joshua Timberline. He had a normal childhood, at least for the people of Twinkle Berry. To us they would come about as being quite different or strange. They eat frogs and drink pond water and they actually think it's good! These people are but an inch high and live in the grass and sleep in hollow logs. YES!! They are little fairies. Ground fairies to be exact.

But now, back to Joshua. As I said before, he had a normal childhood, at least until his parents disappeared. He had no place to go but to try and find them. So, a day after they mystically disappeared, after saying good bye to his best friend, Jumppop, he packed up his clothes and some food (clovers mostly). After this, he started on his way. He knew there would be enough food, but he wasn't sure about his faith and hope - would they last long enough to find the two most important people in his life?

He walked until he came to the bank of a very large river. On the other side of the river there were large grass blades, all bunched together, growing in a large area of dirt. This was Joshua's first time crossing the rushing river and he was getting a little nervous hopping from one shiny gray stone to another, that were bulging straight up out of the water. As he walked across the stone, he realized that he may never come out of the grass forest alive. Through the grass forest, he continued to travel until he heard a strange sound like a whistle or buzzing. At first he thought it might have been a grasshopper. If so, he needed to hide, because grasshoppers eat ground fairies, but as he went further into the grass forest, he saw a large moving figure with a black tint to it, and he heard the noise again, only louder now. He glanced over at the large black object, which was standing perfectly still, with its

huge mouth hanging wide open. Joshua actually saw the noise come pouring from the black object's mouth. Then the mysterious object made one quick chirp and disappeared into the darkness of the grass.

The noise faded, and soon was gone. Joshua had no idea what this creature was or what it wanted, but he was quite scared by now and decided to find a covered place to sleep as it would be dark soon. He kept walking until he came to a space under a rock. Walking over to a bush nearby, he grabbed a shiny green leaf off of it, took the leaf, and went back over to the space, placing the leaf over the top of him. As he lay there, he thought of his parents and how he wished very much they were here with him. With the thoughts of his parents in his mind, he was able to calm his fears and drifted slowly into a deep sleep.

The next morning he awoke with two little sugar ants nibbling at his toes. Shaking the little critters off carefully, Joshua began his journey once more, with the two little ants following him as if he was their leader in a parade or a marching band. Joshua just let the little guys follow him, for he figured that at least he'd have someone to talk to, even if they couldn't talk back to him. Soon they came upon a large cave with spider webs all over it, and sack like things on the sides. He saw a slight movement in these sacks and as he walked into the cave, he heard that strange noise from last night again. Almost immediately he saw a huge black shadow coming towards him again. As he hid behind a large boulder, the hideous beast passed him, breathing hard. Joshua was terrified as the beast left in a huff. About a minute later, the beast disappeared into the forest.

As soon as Joshua knew the beast was gone for sure, he ran out of the cave and found a stick. Rushing back

into the cave, he poked at one of the sacks on the wall. He quickly realized that there were living things trapped in these sacks! With his hands, he ripped at the webbing, tearing each little strand away. Inside the first sack, was a young boy about Joshua's age, who thanked Joshua and helped him peel away at the others. When they came to the last two webs, they ripped them open and there were Joshua's mother and father. Petrified, they gave a quick look around and jumped away from the wall, crying because they were so happy to see their son. They hugged him and then all of the ground fairies left the cave together, and journeyed on towards home.

When they reached the river, they helped each other across as fast as they could to make sure that they were as far away from the mystical beast as possible.

A cheer of happiness erupted throughout their little town when they arrived home. They were never bothered by the beast again and everyone stayed close to Twinkle Berry, just to be sure that they were safe. And of course, they all lived happily ever after!

*Rachel Bennett,
2nd Place, 7th Grade, Gault Middle School*

Mango the Monkey

One warm sunny summer day, a monkey named Mango was in his tree house eating. “Mmm, I love mangos,” he sang to himself. He was about to take another big juicy bite of his delicious mango when he heard someone knocking at the door.

He opened it and it was his neighbor Carrie, a red-headed monkey, “I can smell your nasty fruit from a tree away! Why don’t you eat bananas like the rest of us,” complained Carrie with irritation. “Well, I would be eating bananas but I’m allergic to them,” Mango said back. “Strange little monkey,” Carrie said as she turned to leave.

Carrie then stormed out of the door, still calling Mango names. Why can’t other monkeys accept that I like mangos? Mango thought to himself. How can I make the other monkeys try mangos? Mango thought and thought and thought, then he thought some more, but no idea came to him. Mango was about to go to sleep, when he noticed something on his calendar. On the calendar was a big red circle. It was for the Banana Festival.

The next day Mango started working on an idea he thought of when he saw that the Banana Festival was in two days. His idea was to get bananas, cut the tops off of them and then squeeze the banana out. Next he would stuff in chopped up mangos and freeze it all.

He planned to do this because at the Banana Festival, every monkey brings in three of his best bananas and gives them to the judges. The three judges are blindfolded and they are each given the same banana to taste. The winning banana maker would get their name on the big banana statue in the middle of town, and by their name goes the kind of banana they used to win. Mango finished

making his three bananas thirty minutes later. Then he popped them into his freezer and took a long nap on his comfy wicker chair.

o o o

The day of the festival arrived at last. Mango took his bananas out of the freezer, put them in a little cooler, and walked to the festival. When he got there, Mango was told to give his bananas to the Banana Festival officials. They took the bananas and put them in three different containers all marked with the number 25. They were marked 25 because Mango was the 25th and last contestant. Mango walked around for awhile, as he waited for the judging to begin. Finally the judges came out, wearing their blindfolds. They took the banana from the first box, felt for the stem and opened it. The judges were suppose to judge them on a score of 1 to 10. The first judge was the mayor of the town, and he gave the banana a 6. The second judge was Carrie, last year's winner. She gave banana number one a score of 8. The final judge was the only pastor in the town, and he gave the banana a 9.

When the second banana was judged, the mayor gave it an 8, Carrie gave it a 5, and the pastor gave it a 9. The third banana was also put before the judges and the scores were high. The mayor gave it a 9, and Carrie and the pastor gave it a 10!

Finally, Mango's "bananamango" came up. The mayor, Carrie, and the pastor all bit in at the same time. They all said, "Mmmmm...Delicious!" "This is different and very tasty," said the mayor. He gave it a 10. Carrie just loved it. She also gave it a 10! Then the still blindfolded pastor tried to find Carrie and take her banana because he finished his and he loved it so much that he wanted more. Finally he remembered to give it a score, and the score was a 10!

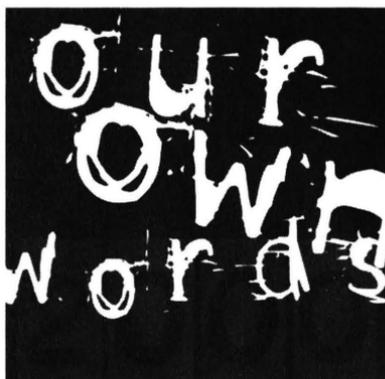
The mayor solemnly announced, "Banana #25 is the

winner!” He and the other judges took off their blindfolds and saw that the color of the banana was not whitish, but more of an orange shade. It also had a different type of smell to it.

“Whose banana is this?” asked the mayor to the officials. “The banana belongs to Mango,” the officials said, looking at their entry list. The crowd was shocked. The mayor asked, “What kind of banana is this?” Mango replied, “It is not a banana. It was a mango in a banana peel.” “Well then,” said the mayor. “If this is a mango, I say that it is the best fruit I’ve ever tasted.” The mayor then told the crowd to try the mangos.

That day, Mango’s name was put on the big banana statue in the middle of town. Right next to his name was the type of “banana,” which was “mango” in this case. Now, Mango doesn’t get made fun of. All he does all day long is eat mangos and take naps on his comfy wicker folding chair.

Mikael Bangcaya, 8th Grade, Gault Middle School



SHORT STORIES

9th & 10th Grade

SUN CALLER

The village slept deeply, recovering from the harvest celebration of the night before. Thirty grass huts surrounded a fire-scorched clearing. It was the end of the dry season when the crops, summoned by the scorch of the sun, would be harvested to ensure the survival of the village for another winter. Long before sunrise several men emerged from their huts, their bearded mouths yawning. They stretched their dark limbs, and walked to the center of the village. Slowly, the entire village trickled out of their huts and assembled in the clearing, the stars shining down on the vast stretch of plains and hills.

Even the children were tired from the dancing and celebration of the night before. This morning's ritual required little childhood exuberance. The renewing of the sun for another harvest was a somber ceremony. If the sun did not shine the crops would not grow and the village would starve. So it was that the Sun Caller was the most important member of the village.

Like a solitary lioness stalking prey through thick summer grass, the Sun Caller made his way through the crowd of fifty. Villagers clothed in dyed cotton cloth, parted in front of him and closed ranks behind him.

The Sun Caller was a tall man with a long white beard. His legs and arms were scarred and dark, and his face was lined and dry. One hand carried his staff, a polished blue stone embedded in one end.

The crowd formed a perfect circle surrounding him. The Sun Caller dropped to his knees, and touched his nose to the ground. "Akkai!" the crowd chanted. "To the Earth, the source of our food!"

The Sun Catcher leaned back on his haunches and raised his cane to the sky with one hand, eyes closed. "Rokkai! To the Sun that gives us light!"

An elder of the village presented the Sun Caller with a small bone bowl filled with red dust and two stones. Respectfully he retreated to the edge of the circle. The Sun Catcher sprinkled the dust over the ground. He struck the flint stones over the dust, and bright blue flames erupted briefly. The smoke faded away in a gentle breeze and the Sun Caller stood. Holding his cane high in one hand, he closed his eyes and began to hum. The Sun Caller was endowed with the will of the gods. Without his gift, the sun would not rise. The crowd maintained a respectful, nervous silence.

Several minutes passed as the Sun Caller hummed. Over the distant hill a thin blue line rose in the sky. A thin band of green followed blue, then orange, then red. The sun rose, following its rainbow escort, a terrific crescent of yellow brilliance that seemed to seep out of the hills. The Sun Caller dropped to his knees, and touched his nose to the ground again. The circle stood, all eyes fixed on the horizon.

A cry came from the crowd so sudden that it startled the Sun Caller. The sun had risen completely from behind the hills. Giving chase as it rose was a titanic black disc. The disc slowly slid up the bottom of the sun, blocking out the light in one terrible motion.

The crowd fell into disarray. The Sun Caller frantically went through his ceremonial motions again, but the sun continued to be devoured. "The gods are taking away the Sun!" a voice screamed, and a hand pointed at the Sun Caller. Women cried and men hollered as night pushed the dawn back into the ground. The colors on the hori-

zon faded again to black, and the stars came out once more. All that was left of the sun was a thin ring of burning fire low in the sky.

“The Sun is gone! The Sun is gone!” the people were terrified. Their source of life was gone, the crops would die and the world would be in perpetual darkness. Frantically the Sun Caller poured the remainder of his ash on the ground and struck the rocks together. The fire hit him in the face and disappeared as quickly as it had flared. The Sun Catcher fell onto his back.

A wide-eyed woman pointed a shaking finger as the Sun Caller staggered to his feet, wiping the smoke out of his eyes. “He has lost the will of the gods! He has lost the Sun!” the crowd surged forward. Trembling with eyes wide, the old man waved his arms frantically to ward off the mob. He fell to his knees and bent his nose to the ground, but was kicked onto his back. An instant later the mob of a hundred arms grabbed for him. The terror was as severe on the faces of the villagers as it was on the dark face of the Sun Caller beneath their tearing hands. The Sun Caller had to be removed before the gods would bring back the sun and the light it shed. Beneath the desperate hands of a village dying, the Sun Caller was ripped from the world for what he had brought upon the village.

Those not swarming the Sun Caller were standing back in horror and fascination. Several children were milling around the mob, trying to find the reason for the commotion. A small boy bent down and picked up the broken end of the Sun Caller’s staff. As he examined it the reflection of a crescent of bright light shown off the blue stone undamaged in the staff. The boy raised his head to the sky, then cried out as he pointed to the sky with the staff.

As the villagers gazed heavenward, the great black circle lifted itself from the sun and moved off into space. The sun's orange light poured down to Earth with renewed energy, and the villagers surrounded the little boy with the broken staff. "He has summoned back the Sun! We have life! We have Life!" The admiration for the new Sun Caller was painted with summertime emotion across the peoples' faces. The boy was delighted with the attention, and raised his broken staff again to the sky. The village rejoiced, and parted for the coming of the new Sun Caller.

*Nicholas Mirra,
1st Place, 10th Grade, Foss High School*

Glitch

Sam Teller died on a Tuesday.

One moment he was strolling across the street when all of a sudden BAM!, and he was floating upwards toward the pearly gates.

To put this mildly, this surprised him.

Sam had known he would die someday of course, but he hadn't been reckoning on it happening quite so soon. He hoped his family would take the news well, because he obviously had no choice in the matter. He was also angry that he was going to miss the local frisbee championship when his team, the Stupendous Spinners, had a chance for the great frisbee cup.

Pretty soon he floated to rest in front of an immaculately dressed man sitting behind a nice wooden desk on which was a slim, white computer. Beside the desk a glittering road started, and Sam could vaguely make out a huge gate at its end.

"Hello," said the sitting man to Sam. "I'm Saint Peter. Welcome to Heaven. If you'll be as kind as to give me your name, I'll see if you're on the list."

"Oh," said Sam. "Oh, um, yes. Well, I'm Sam Teller."

"Your full name," prompted Saint Peter, laying his hands on his computer keyboard.

"Samuel Lester Teller," said Sam, who was beginning to come out of shock. Saint Peter's fingers flew over the keys. Sam waited.

And waited.

And waited some more.

A line was forming behind him, and Saint Peter was drumming his fingers impatiently, when the computer gave a little beep.

"Nuts," said Saint Peter vehemently.

"What's wrong?" asked Sam, automatically moving around the desk to view the computer screen. On it he read this:

Error. Host computer has too many requests pending.
Please try again later.

“The computer connection must have a fault in it again,” snarled Saint Peter. “I hate it when I get these stupid messages. I’m not even on a network! And now I’m going to have to go get that idiotic computer technician. I hate working with him. He’s so ‘holier than thou.’” And with that Saint Peter rose and went stomping off toward Heaven, still muttering to himself.

Sam Teller blinked.

He hadn’t thought saints *could* have grudges.

After a while of standing in line doing nothing, Sam got bored. Saint Peter still wasn’t anywhere in sight, and the computer kept making distracting beeping noises. Sam decided to see if he could do something to help. *After all, he thought to himself, I was fairly good with computers before I...I...got sent up here.*

With this in mind, Sam moved to the chair, sat down, and started to check out how the computer worked.

“Hey,” said the next woman in line, “you aren’t Saint Peter.”

“Oh, shut up,” said Sam.

The computer still had the error message on its screen. Sam hit enter to clear it off (the computer was so old it didn’t have a mouse) and started reading what was on the screen.

Main Menu:
Search current Admittance List
Contact Hell for a pick-up
Contact God
Play Tetris
Open Options/Control Menu

Sam chose “Open Options/Control Menu.”

Open Options/Control Menu
Monitor Options

General Controls
Tetris Options
Admittance List Options
Major Convoluted Control Menus for the Whole Computer
Back

Sam chose “General Controls” and got nothing interesting, so he went back and chose “Major Convoluted Control Menu for the Whole Computer.” Now here was something more useful.

Major Convoluted Control Menus for the Whole Computer
Basic Computer Interface Set-up
Not-So-Basic Computer Interface Set-up
Insanely Complicated Computer Interface Set-up
Back

From experience, Sam knew that anything less than the “Insanely Complicated Computer Interface Set-up” would be pointless to look into, so he chose that. What came up was an insanely complicated bunch of list of options, blocks of code, and what looked like a story told in hieroglyphics.

After perusing the insanely complicated interface set-up carefully, Same found a small piece of text that said, “Sadistic Error Messages ON.”

“Aha,” breathed Sam, and turned off the sadistic error messages. Leaning back in his chair, Sam started scrolling back up to the top of the screen. On accident, he hit the return button. The computer beeped.

“Oh, no,” said Sam searching frantically for what he had done, but he couldn’t find anything different. “Ah, well,” he said, “Can’t win them all.” Finally he made it back to the top and hit the back button.

Suddenly he started. The control menu options were different. There was something new.

Major Convoluted Control Menus for the Whole Computer

Basic Computer Interface Set-up
Not-So-Basic Computer Interface Set-up
Insanely Complicated Computer Interface Set-up
Glitch Options
Back

'Glitch Options,' thought Sam. What are 'Glitch Options'? He chose it. The screen read as follows:

Please choose your glitch:
Entrance into wrong area (either Heaven or Hell)
Non-existence
Add interesting twist to this computer
Return to life 15 seconds before your death

Sam was shocked. This menu had to be a fake. Even though Heaven would be a great place to be, he still had to consider that he hadn't finished *life* yet, not to mention missing the local frisbee championship. Plus his family wouldn't have to be shocked and disgusted when they found that all that was left of him resembled road kill.

Well, thought Sam, *there's only one way to find out if this is fake.* He highlighted the return to life option and hit return.

* * *

Fifteen seconds before Sam Teller died, he looked both ways before crossing the street, noticed a speeding pick-up truck and decided that he should wait. After the pick-up went by, he strolled off and went to join his friends in their frisbee warm-up stretches.

And up in heaven Saint Peter swore because the computer had hit a glitch and for some reason wouldn't accept the name of the woman next in line.

*Ian Beck, 2nd Place,
9th Grade, Sumner Junior High*

Happy Forever After

Mamma is looking sad. I can't figure out why, so I cry. I'm on the floor underneath a table and all I can see are her feet. They look sad. I cry and her feet come clomp clomp towards me. She grumbles and picks up the doll on the ground, throwing it at me. Emilia, she says, here's your doll. I see her face when she throws the doll to me. She is sad.

Papa isn't here. I haven't seen Papa in a long time. I saw him I-don't-remember-when, but he didn't look at me when he was here. Before that time he wasn't here for a long time. Mama always looked sad.

Flash! and I am a fish. I would swim, but I can't swim out of water. I need to go to the sea, and I am going but Flash! and I am one of the pests picked off of the coffee leaves, dashing through the air. Flash! again and I am Ramon, lying on the ground panting.

It is dark. I wish it were light. In the house it is light. But the people in the house say I do not belong there. Where do I belong? The people say I am a bastard. The people say I am a dishonor. The people say, go! You do not belong here.

I smell coffee but I pretend I smell roses. There are roses all around me and I am waking up to a day of embroidery and fancy dinners in European mansions. I close my eyes and pretend it, and I hope it is true. Then I open my eyes. All I see is the dirty cracking wall, and all I smell is coffee. Instead of flowered silken sheets I lie on a lumpy mattress beneath a scratchy red wool blanket. And Mama calls, Marisol, come help with breakfast.

Papa is here. I woke up beneath the table and I saw their feet. Mama's feet are looking happy, but Papa's are not. Papa is making loud noises. I do not like loud noises and I cry. Papa makes a louder noise. Now Mama's feet are scared.

It hurts. It hurts to see him hit Mama and it hurts when he hits me. Mama is crying and she is screaming. She says my name, Emilia, and she says, don't hurt her, and she cries.

I am waking to the kicking of a person from the house. Move, bastard, he says, we don't want you here. Move, bastard, you shouldn't stay here, he says every morning and every evening I am back behind the shed. There are nice things in the shed, I am sure, but the people in the house keep a big metal bolt on the door, so I can't get in.

Flash! I am a fish and unprepared. My fins grab the feet of the kicker; they grab the big metal bolt. I flop, searching for water, I gasp, until Flash! I am Ramon, and the person from the house kicks me again and I run.

There is someone outside our house. A boy. A prince! Because at last, my prince has come. He is running away from me though, running towards the shore, away from his princess, Marisol.

I love him, this prince, because he will take me away from scratchy wool blankets. He will take me to his palace and we will live happily ever after.

But now he is running away.

Papa is gone now, and I am back beneath my table, watching Mama's feet. Mama is crying and I am crying. Mama isn't looking good. She looks sad and sick. I want Mama to be better. I want her to stop crying, I want to hear her say, Emilia, everything will be all right.

But Mama is crying and I am crying and nothing is all right.

I am near the sea when Flash! I am a fish and a flop towards the shore, gasping. I am wet up to my fins when Flash! I am Ramon, panting on the rocks and scared.

Flash! I do not like the water because I am a bug and I fly and skip awkwardly away from the huge expanse of ocean, relieved when Flash! I am Ramon, lying prone on uneven ground, wishing to what god there may be, wish-

ing to someone that I were a person in the house.

The people in the house make me leave; they call me bastard. Some do not look at me, and the ones who do kick me, because I am a bastard.

My prince, even though he is clumsy, has come back for me. He is running and tripping and falling back towards our house. My prince, my beautiful prince, my knight-in-shining-armor; he is falling and he lies in the dirt near our house. He is not dead, I say, I hope. My love cannot be dead. He will come for me and take me away to his palace.

I am sitting at the window, wishing and pretending it is paned with colored glass and swathed with velvet and intricate brocade. It is a hole in a dirty wall and all I can see through it is fields of coffee and the ugly orange Colombian sun.

Mama is not looking well. I hear her breathing from on top of her mattress, and her breaths are not smooth. She makes sad sick noises when it is dark outside. When it is light she cries, and she never moves.

I stay underneath my table. Where else would I be?

Flash! it is dark but I am a fish, a fish out of water moving desperately towards the ocean. I am dry. I need to be wet. I am in up to my fins, I dive in furiously, I take a breath, and Flash! and I am Ramon, but too late, for I am too deep and it is too dark. I am Ramon who should be dry but is wet and sinking too fast. It is dark. It should be light. It is light in the house, but I cannot see the house. I cannot see anything. It is too dark.

I cannot gasp. I cannot breathe. When I try, I sink. I close my eyes, and I sink. I close my eyes and I sink.

I am told I shouldn't spend my time at the window. Marisol, Papa and Mama say, you shouldn't spend your time staring out the window. There are better things you could be doing, they say. But I have been at the window since my prince disappeared. My prince, my knight-in-shining-armor, isn't here. He hasn't been here since I saw

him fall and then get up again, once more towards the sea. He must return, to rescue me.

Mama is sleeping. She sleeps, mostly. So I will sleep too. When I sleep I do not care; I cannot know. I will not know if Papa is hitting me or if Mama is crying. I sleep and all I feel is my dreams. I dream of a boy in a brightly lit house happy with his princess. Goodnight, Emilia, my doll tells me, and I sleep.

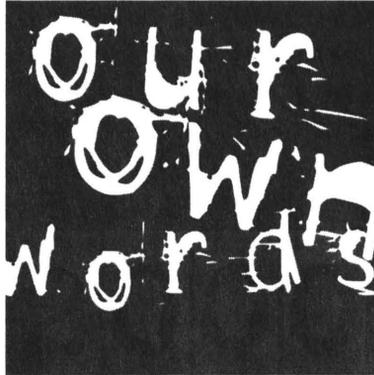
I left today, after I made supper and then cleaned it up. I went to the sea, where my prince would be waiting. And I found him, on the shore. He lay there deep in thought while I waited for him to rescue me.

I'm back at the window, because he didn't rescue me, didn't turn around, but I know he will come soon, to rescue his princess, Marisol!

My dreams are all that I need. I am comfortable beneath my table with my dreams of the boy and his princess as my pillow. Mama may be crying and Papa may come back, but in my dreams the boy and his princess live happily forever, and I am happy too.

My knight-in-shining-armor, my prince, my love, the boy who slept beside our shed, is dead. I knew it when I saw him again on the shore, lost in thought. I sit at the window, and though Mama and Papa call for me, I look through the window and imagine how it would have been to live in my prince's castle, a king and his happy queen and the baby princess. Ramon, Marisol, and Emilia.

*Stacia Torborg, 3rd Place,
9th Grade, Annie Wright*



SHORT STORIES

11th & 12th Grade

White Envelope

The summer sky outside my window is the soft blue of a baby blanket, woven with milky threads of clouds. I can hear my mother singing downstairs, her alto mixing with the metallic clank of dishes. She's making home-made pancakes with boysenberry syrup for breakfast. I trudge downstairs and into the kitchen to set the table. Three knives, three forks, three glasses, three big white plates with blue rims, three napkins. My fingers protest when I leave the fourth setting in its resting place: the middle oak cabinet above the stove.

May I be excused? I'm not hungry...

Here I am in my bedroom again, stomach empty and eyes still lined with sleep. I sit down, legs crossed Indian-style, on my bed. Some nameless force draws me here, imprisons me in this room.

Maybe today I'll open the white envelope.

It's the first Sunday in July, early morning and already the shimmers of heat rise from off our black tile roof. The day is trapped in the motionless intensity of a Van Gogh painting, a vibrant stillness that belies its silent screaming energy. Golden light invades my room and bathes the walls and carpet in its glow. I want to refuse the warmth and the radiance of this glossy, catalogue-page perfect summer day.

God, can't you see I'm already burning?

I stand up. I feel like a human cigarette, and my vanity mirror reinforces this characterization. Before me is the reflection of a tall, thin shape. Pale dry skin like paper wrapped around. Smoldering red-rimmed eyes framed by the hazy smoke of tobacco-brown hair.

Not what my parents see when they look at me, of course. Or my friends. They tell me I'm beautiful: creamy

complexion, curly chestnut hair, eyes like that summer sky. Is the ravage of this carcinogenic guilt invisible? Maybe my stealthy pain conceals itself somewhere deep inside my body, growing and growing and filling me up, quieting the gurgle of my vacant stomach as it metastasizes into a tumor that conquers even my hunger, destroying me from within.

Somehow, it seems the sunlight eludes me now, perhaps gravitating toward my desk, where the white envelope lies.

The imperfect glass of the window casts light like the feathered gold of an angel's wing on the white envelope. I'm drawn from the mirror to my desk, where the full heat of the sunlight wraps itself about me like an overprotective mother. I arrange my gangly limbs in the stiff wooden lap of my old chair. My fingers are aching to open the envelope, but so far I am too afraid to loosen the flap and view the contents, for to do so is to confront the darkness of my past.

Will you forgive my weakness?

It's been eleven days since Laura's mother laid the envelope upon my desk. "This was in Laura's room. She would have given it to you, but..." she said, her gentle voice trailing off and crinkles round her mouth battling to turn up into a sad smile. She didn't need to finish, of course, because I knew then that Laura would not be returning from the hospital. Laura, my best friend.

My best friend is dead. She won't spend the night beside me on this floor again. No more giggling in sleeping bags and waking up to sunshine and pancakes. No need to set an extra place at the table. No more dreams of college and art school. No more laughing together. No more crying together. No growing up. Not together. My eyes sting with tears as the memories of a lifetime pulse through my veins. Such a short lifetime on this little blue-green planet.

And all the blame is mine.

As I sit here, wondering what Laura must have scrawled in this last epistle, I try to imagine her in heaven. Please, please let there be chocolate cake and cookies and french fries. And all the other morsels we denied ourselves in this terrible crusade to be impossibly thin like the women in the magazines we pored over on the floor of this room. My room. I taught her everything I know about anorexia, about the hunger for an image that can never be attained. And my student eclipsed her teacher.

Laura made the image a reality, five feet six and ninety pounds. And she kept losing weight, until eleven days ago. Until the heart attack, when her soul slipped from her slip of a body.

I reach out for the envelope, resolving to open it at last. Only my name, printed in loopy, cursive, mars its white innocence. The black letters are like the stains of guilt on my wicked heart. With trembling hands, I rip apart this last vestige of my best friend,

Inside is a birthday card, pink butterflies and glitter.

“Happy Birthday! You’ve taught me the true meaning of friendship! Love Laura!”

A shudder of revulsion seizes me. I rise and drop the card and the white envelope into my wastepaper basket. I don’t know whether it’s the heat of the noon sun, or my touch, that ignites the paper. It burns to ash, like that of a cigarette.

God, can’t you see I burned up already?

*Lara Rogers, 1st Place,
11th Grade, Charles Wright*

Within the Oaken Grove

Earlier today I was at the park treating myself to a small picnic of coffee and a ham sandwich. The sun was especially bright, and although I do so enjoy the sun, I was dwelling in the shady relief that some tall oaks offered. I sipped my iced coffee and ate from my sandwich, letting my thoughts wander.

Then - quite suddenly - I became aware of a whispering from behind the trees under which I sat.

"What will we tell Mother?" said the first voice I heard. It sounded like that of a small child, but I couldn't tell if it was male or female.

"We shan't *tell* mother!" replied another with a similar androgyny. This voice spoke much more hurriedly than the first. It was also a little deeper, but sounded more feminine somehow. "She's blind as a bat; she'll *never* know."

"I suppose," said the first, slowly, innocently.

"Quickly!" said the second. "Make the hole a bit deeper and let's toss him in." I heard some clinky noises (two shovels, I presumed) and heavy breathing from both parties. Number Two spoke again after some time: "Oh, poor Father! I knew we shouldn't have gotten into the absinthe."

"You know what Mother always called it, didn't you? The *Green Insanity*. When you drink something with a horrid name like that no one can only expect you to do something *mad*."

"Do shut up, *please*. Let's hoist him in or we'll be late for tea with Mum." Heavy breathing, again, and some groans.

A multitude of macabre thoughts came to mind, each one more so than the preceding. I sat there, frozen, pondering the scenarios that might have caused the death of these children's father.

"Now that he's in the ground." Began Number Two

once again, “shouldn’t we say a few words?” Number One gave a silent agreement, and Two continued. “Good, you always were better at that sort of thing, so I nominate you for the task.”

“Why should I” asked Number One solemnly.

“Because I am older and more important. Plus you’re the one who pulled the trigger.”

Number One sighed at this, “But *you’re* the one who told me to get into . . .” Another sigh. “Oh, alright.”

With a bit of preparation, Number One began his elegy.

“Father was a good man. He will be missed.”

“You know,” interjected the older sibling, “I think that perhaps I should have done that myself.”

Number One sighed once more. “You know, Mother really will start to worry. I think we should be off.”

“As do I.”

I heard a scampering of feet, and then silence. Breaking my daze I ran back to where the voices had come from, the grove of oaks offering privacy for their horrible deeds. Obviously my curiosity was piqued – these children had killed their father! A little ways into the grove I reached a large plot of disturbed earth.

I admit now, quite freely, that I most assuredly did not make the correct choice in the succeeding events.

I quickly brushed away the earth with my hand. What I found surprised me almost as much, as I expected to find a fresh corpse in the shallow grave. The first thing I noticed was that the soil was much more compact the farther down I got, even though it may have been only inches into the earth. I picked at this hard earth relentlessly until my nails were bloody and covered with dirt, only then realizing that what I was picking at was actually solid wood.

I reached around the wood, discovering contours, trying to figure the scope of the object. After time I realized that what lay before me was an ornate coffin.

I stared a moment, aghast, thinking of the trouble those children had gone through to procure such an item. Or, I thought again, maybe they weren't even children at all.

I opened the coffin and a murky darkness leered out at me. The depth of the coffin eluded me. It seemed to sink down forever, luring me in with the smell of death. There was no corpse to be seen.

As I kneeled there, peering into the fathoms of the coffin, I heard a snap behind me. I turned sharply, but as I did I felt a sudden, white-hot pain in my head. Twisted, childish laughter surrounded me, drowning me, pushing me into the grave. I screamed and fell in. The lid closed behind me, and I fell. The darkness enveloped me, as did the sickening laughter.

The horrible, twisted giggles intensified. I clawed at my face and the sides of the coffin, trying to get out, but to no avail. I reached up, grasping for the lid of the coffin, but my hand found nothing. With an undramatic thud I reached the bottom of the narrow chamber. The laughter silenced. The pain ceased. I heard one word that seemed to echo to infinity: "Father . . ."

*Stephen Anderson, 2nd Place,
11th Grade, Bellarmine Prep*

KNOTS

Pa ate the whole carp that night. Mother was talking about the trip to Niagara: the water, the lodge. She was saying something about her hair being longer, his hands softer. The way it had all changed and how she couldn't get back there. Pa scooped fish onto his fork. He shoveled it into his mouth and looked out the window. "Good fish," he said. Then he pushed back from the table and left the room.

The pocket knife is his. So is the whetstone. He sanded this block. It has been three years since I put it in the bottom of my drawer, I judged my need for a trip to the Laundromat with it. When I grabbed it instead of socks, I knew it was time. I took it out last week; it has been sitting on the armrest of this chair since then, untouched.

I was at the window before him. I saw the first cloud of exhaust. He was behind me to see the brake lights burn red for a moment, then blacken like the rest of the car. He coughed and lit a cigarette. When I think about changing that night, the car still pulls away. He doesn't.

I was whittling around a knot when he came up. "You're gonna have to stop workin' the knots all the time." He grabbed the piece of basswood from my hands. "Carve the picture you got in your mind." He looked down at the block, set it on the table, and said, "I need a smoke." He walked out. I never understood how to see the end before starting, how he could carve the border of something not there. I never understood, so I stopped trying. We didn't talk about it again. I doubt he noticed.

He used to sit in this rocking chair. I would creep to the end of the hall and watch his back. The slow creak of wood coming together with other wood sounded like a tree branch snapping. When his rocking stopped, he stared through the window, through birch and redbud and maple. When his rocking stopped, the silence entered so full I had to hold my breath. It was thick in

those days. I used it like a cradle: rocking to sleep in its echo. Nights when the wind flung branches against my window, I lingered on my haunches just outside the light from the room.

I am going to carve this block. Not whittle, carve: lock it in a vice and screw bits into the drill and grind through the wood. That's what I want: the feel of woodgrain bursting. And the slow push all the way through. I'm going to carve straight to the center of the knots. The smell of sawdust will tell me when I'm done.

*Stefanie Fox, 3rd Place,
12th Grade, Gig Harbor High School*

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