

The background of the cover is a collage of geometric shapes in muted colors: light gray, light pink, and off-white. On the left side, there is a vertical gray rectangle containing a stylized white eye and a white mouth shape. On the right side, there is a large black vertical rectangle containing a large white eye and a white mouth shape. The text is overlaid on these shapes.

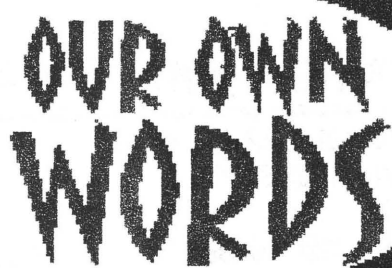
5TH ANNUAL

OUR OWN  
WORDS

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OUR OWN  
2001

Pierce County Teen  
Poetry & Fiction Writing  
Contest 2001



OUR OWN  
WORDS

A stylized, high-contrast graphic of a face. The face is composed of a large black shape with a white eye and a white mouth. The text "OUR OWN WORDS" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font inside the white mouth area. The face is set against a white background with a grey rectangular border at the top and bottom.

# WINNERS

## POETRY (Grades 7th & 8th)

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First Place	Marc Hobbs, 8th Grade Pioneer Middle School, Steilacoom
Second Place	Cameron Wise-Maas, 7th Grade Aylen Junior High School, Puyallup
Third Place	Allysen Halsen, 8th Grade Kopachuck Middle School, Gig Harbor

## POETRY (Grades 9th & 10th)

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First Place	Sharalyn Bechtel, 10th Grade Covenant High School, Gig Harbor
Second Place	Katharyn Shriner, 9th Grade Covenant High School, Home
Third Place	Megan Crowley, 10th Grade Gig Harbor High School, Gig Harbor

## POETRY (Grades 11th & 12th)

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First Place	Ashley Schulze, 12th Grade Gig Harbor High School, Gig Harbor
Second Place	Kevan Lim, 12th Grade Gig Harbor High School, Gig Harbor
Third Place	Elisa James, 12th Grade Lakes High School, Lakewood

# WINNERS

## SHORT STORIES (Grades 7th & 8th)

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First Place	Mandie Tollefson, 8th Grade Lighthouse Christian, Gig Harbor
Second Place	Sabrina Bird, 7th Grade I. A. Mann Middle School, Fort Lewis
Third Place	Elizabeth Cordell, 8th Grade Kopachuck Middle School, Gig Harbor

## SHORT STORIES (Grades 9th & 10th)

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First Place	Kaitlin Shideler, 9th Grade Bellermine Preparatory, Tacoma
Second Place	Amy Bowden, 10th Grade Eatonville High School, Eatonville
Third Place	Ian Beck, 10th Grade Sumner High School, Sumner

## SHORT STORIES (Grades 11th & 12th)

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First Place	Lara Rogers, 12th Grade Charles Wright, Tacoma
Second Place	Stephen Rousseau, 12th Grade Bellarmine Prepoaratory, Tacoma
Third Place	Emily Burt, 12th Grade Curtis Senior High, University Place



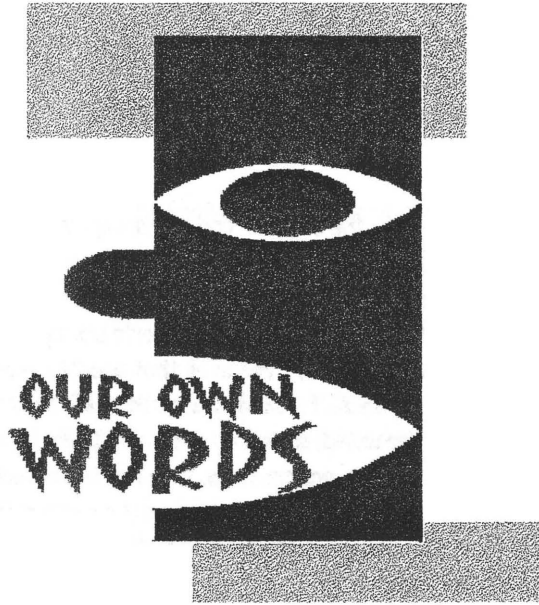
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POETRY

7th & 8th  
Grade

## OUTCAST

In a world of acceptance, I am the outcast, and life brings its curse upon me.  
Lost in a world of those who are found, trapped in a place of freedom.  
Alone in a crowd of those who are happy, hungry in an eternal food pantry,  
Poor in a universe of wealth, and yet, all the world belongs to me,  
For I am found within myself, free in all that need be free,  
Befriended by one who is oneself, full of the truth of life's mysteries,  
Rich with the love of the world, so perhaps, it is not I who is cursed,  
But those who cursed me, and perhaps, I am not the outcast,  
But those who cast me out, for thus, the curse is a curse in itself,  
The unacceptance is acceptance in disguise,  
And therefore, I am the accepted,  
And the world is the outcast of me.

*Marc Hobbs  
1st Place, 7-8th Grade, Pioneer Middle School*

## A WAVE UPON THE SAND

Through my fingers in a torrent,  
Like a wave upon the sand.  
Like the rumbling pound of thunder,  
Moving in upon the land.  
It foamed, it twirled  
Like the birds can fly.  
A hiss of steam,  
A raspy cry.  
Proud and strong,  
This flowing form.  
A deep cool taste  
Of the mountain storm.  
Washing by me as I stand,  
To be a wave upon the sand.

*Cameron Wise-Maas  
2nd Place, 7-8th Grade, Aylen Junior High*



## PAINT

Paint

Huge, majestic

Walking, cantering, galloping

Tan, white, almond, black

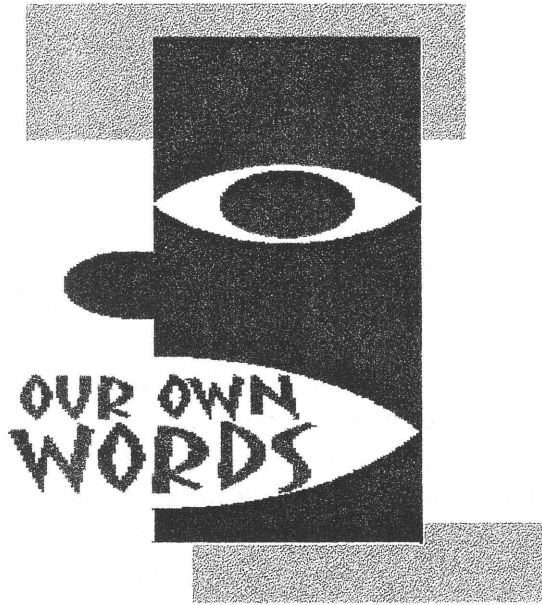
Sniffing, eating, drinking

Wild, unpredictable

Horse

*Allysen Halsen*

*3rd Place, 7-8th Grade, Kopachuck Middle*



# POETRY

9th & 10th  
Grade

## UNTITLED

Like the silver-golden globe pouring streams  
Of liquid light down to earth below sky,  
Like that moon which shines so bright and so seems  
Without one spot but dimples few from high,  
Are men, dazzling and glitt'ring with brave feat  
And good deed, valor, and strength by their name,  
Seen from kind eyes, seem all morals to meet,  
All obstacles to thwart, all fears to tame.  
But like the moon, when viewed from nearer gaze,  
When those dimples few grow to craters great;  
When men are viewed without the friendly space,  
Their acts are found as for the public slate:  
    Their brightness dims as the moon's at new day;  
    Their faults, as craters, push bright fame away.

*Sharalyn Bechtel*  
*1st Place, 9-10th Grade, Covenant High School*

## ALDERS' COTILLION

Spring debutantes  
Gowned in new leaves shimmering -  
A joyous dancing canopy  
Caressed by the breeze.

Brocaded partners of green and light  
Pass ribbons of gold -  
Sunlight promenading through the trees.

*Katharyn Shriner*  
*2nd Place, 9-10th Grade, Covenant High*



## UNTITLED

The brush, the stroke, the feel of the paper.  
The paint, the color, the textures they make.

Oh how I love to paint the stars.  
To paint the flower, to paint the park, to paint the people who walk past the window.

White turns to pink, and turns to peach, and turns to orange.  
All the colors, blended together. Color wheel is up for a spin.

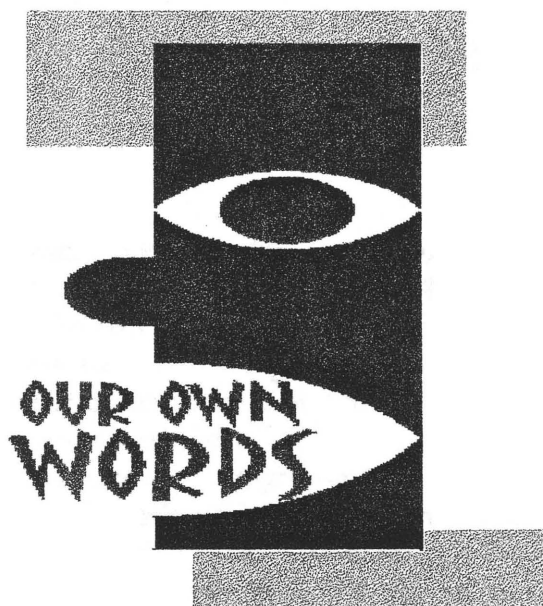
Who here can paint? Only the chosen few? Or is it all of us, we just got scared as children.  
On the fridge, mom hung our "art", dad put it on his desk.

Maybe if we all just thought real hard and focused on the past, we'd  
All be able to paint our hearts. In colors we thought weren't allowed.

Your emotions, your feelings, the anger of today.  
The love, the sorrow, the pain of the past. All together on one big canvas, titled "Tomorrow"

All in the hope of better things  
To come my way, or maybe yours.

*Megan Crowley  
3rd Place, 9-10th Grade, Gig Harbor High School*



POETRY

11th & 12th  
Grade

## SUNFLOWERS

My father and I stand, and the enormous heads of sunflowers  
sway above me. He is taller. He looks down to see glowing  
yellow, amber, orange, transparent petals radiate from a face  
dark and closed, it holds onto what might be:

tiny lives nestle, around, around, spiral to the center.

Too soon, the sunflowers will bow—

worn-out puppets with heavy heads, strings severed, sink to the ground.

The biting wind will twist the petals from the face

and suck what was once gold into the cold night.

The tiny seeds will overflow, spill out of the blossom

to meet my father and the earth and below.

I will be alone.

Now, the faces are bright, their green leaves cup the breeze.

My father is beside me and my face points toward the sky.

*Ashley Schulze  
1st Place, 11-12th Grade, Gig Harbor High School*

## DINNER

My parents eat with chopsticks.  
They never learned to use a fork and a knife.  
My parents say,  
Chopsticks are superior to a fork and a knife.  
Chopsticks click quietly against china.  
Forks grate against crockery.  
Chopsticks teach balance and grip.  
Forks stab great chunks of food.  
Knives rip and tear. With fork and knife,  
people rush through microwave dinners.  
My parents savor their steamed rice and vegetables.  
They say impatient people use forks.

*Kevan Lim  
2nd Place, 11-12th Grade, Gig Harbor High School*



## NATURE THE CALM

In the beauty of the greens, the reality of life appears,  
Full of fertility and varied tints, yet changing.  
Do we adapt as well as these speechless friends,  
Or are we caught wilting as the seasons change?

Are we like the covering of fog that drifts away,  
Or do we stay firmly planted like moss on a log?  
What in nature keeps it continually on track, never lagging behind?  
Why can't we learn from the willows that wave in harmony from side to side?

Little drops of dew flow down a blade, while leaves transfuse to red,  
A tiny bird breathes in afresh, while an old tree falls to the ground,  
A change from night to day appears, readily awaiting the next,  
While the sounds of anguish resound from cities near.

*Elisa James*  
*3rd Place, 11-12th Grade, Lakes High School*



# SHORT STORY

7th & 8th  
Grade

## ABIGAIL

"Abigail?"

Abigail looked up from her dusting at the sound of her mother's voice.

"Yes, ma?" she asked.

"Would y'all's mind runnin' down to the stream to get me some water fer the Mistress's and Master's dinna' tonight?"

"No, ma, I'll be back in a flash!" she exclaimed, as she hopped up from her crouched position by the chair. She took the bucket from her mother and started her way down to the hall, to the back entrance of the plantation home. As she skipped amongst the mossy trees and yellowing leaves, her thick, braided hair got stuck on a branch. She paused for a moment, then continued on her way. As she neared the little stream, only five feet wide, she could hear the gentle splashing of the water as it went by. She knelt down beside it, and dipped her bucket into the cool water, catching it as it flowed by. When her bucket was full, she gently took it out of the water and stood up. She walked back to the house, careful not to spill any water, and handed it to her mother. Her mother took it and poured half of it into a pot resting on the stove. Abbie reluctantly went back to her dusting while her mother chopped carrots and beans to put into the soup.

"Abigail, come here," her mother suddenly said.

"Coming, ma," Abigail answered. She stood up and walked over to her mother standing by the stove.

"Abbie, dear, go give this to Miz Lucille and this ter Master Litchen, will ya?"

"Yes, ma." Abbie reluctantly took the plates from her mother and started towards the dining hall. Abbie usually looked for any excuse to get away from her dusting, but she would rather dust the whole house than go face-to-face with Master Litchen.

Master Litchen was a vulgar man, somewhere in his late forties, with a nasty temper. He was prideful and vain, and lived for his money. His temper was getting even worse because he was balding, and nothing seemed to please him anymore. His wife, also, was vain and prideful. She would always parade around, looking down scornfully on everyone else.

As Abbie nervously walked into the room where the Mistress and Master sat, she set their plates down in front of them and started to leave, careful not to make eye contact with either of them, but still standing by the door for a moment, in case they called her.

"That will be all, thank you. Now leave so we may enjoy our dinner peacefully." With those words spoken by the Master, the Mistress gave a small laugh, and Abbie turned and fled the room, as quickly as she could without running. When she got back, she was surprised to see that her mother had already finished the dusting. Abbie went back to her little hut by the fields as quickly as she could.

Her mother was the only one of her family of eight that could read or write anything. Each night she had a lesson for Abbie prepared. Today was no different. Abbie sat down by the chair that her mother sat in. With a stick, she wrote

her name in big loopy letters. Then her mother took another stick and said:

"Abbie, I'm gonna show ya how ter write the day. See, this is how you spell Tuesday, yeah, you got it. Un-huh, that's it." As she spoke, she wrote the letters in the sand and Abbie tried to copy them.

Her mother spoke again. "Okay, Abbie, and this is how you write the date. These are numbers. Remember numbers?"

Abbie nodded her head.

"Good. Now draw a 1, then an 8, yes, very nice, now a 6, and last a 5. Then write November - here, just copy mine - and a 1 and an 8. Good, ya got it!" Abbie tried her hardest to write the numbers and letters in the dust, and her mother was patient with her.

"Ma, I'm real tired. Can I go to bed now?" Abbie asked.

"Yes, dear, I'll see ya in the morning', " her mother answered, "And remember, tomorrow we need ter wake up early ter make Miz Lucille's breakfast. She wants flapjacks and eggs, so we need ter get a good head start on 'em." Her mother gave a weary sigh as her baby sister started to cry.

"You go on to bed, now, or else you'll be tired in the mornin'."

Abbie went over to the other room in the hut, put on her sleep clothes, and fell asleep as soon as her head it the pillow.

Abbie woke up to the sound of people talking. She sat up straight in bed, thinking she was late for work. She looked around herself and saw that everyone was still in bed. Her two older brothers left even earlier than she did, so she relaxed and laid back down again. She heard the voices again, but this time she recognized them as her parents. At first all she could hear was mumbled sounds, but as she lay still for awhile, she could begin to make out some words. At first she could hear her father, talking about a man. His name was Abe something. Abe Lickem? Login? Lincoln? Yes, that was it, Lincoln. But why would her father be talking about a man named Abe Lincoln? She remembered hearing that name somewhere, but she couldn't remember where. She was very tired, though, and she promptly fell back asleep.

Abigail woke the next morning to sunlight streaming through the window. She hurriedly jumped out of bed, dressed, and ran into the other room. She was surprised to see her mother cooking over her own stove, humming to herself. She turned to Abbie, who stood gaping.

"Abbie, dear, I have somethin' to tell ya. A few months ago, our president, Mister Abraham Lincoln (Abbie's ears perked up) freed all of the slaves. Just today Mister Litchen (again her ears perked up) She had never head her mother call him anything but Master!) is lettin' us go. I suspect someone from the North came down 'n gave him a talkin'-to. Yer papa is goin' ter get them papers right now. Honey, we're goin' up North! We're free! We're..."

With these words her papa came in the door. He appeared happier than Abbie had ever seen him. With tears in his eyes, he showed Mama the papers, which he had signed with an X.

"Baby, we're goin' ter Pennsylvania firs' thing tomorrow? I reckon Dave Bradley, than white man who was here the other day, had somethin' to do with this. Dave, I heard that he was an abolitionist. Them guys work fer us gettin' free! Imagine that!"

Abbie's eyes filled with tears of joy. She had heard wonderful things about Pennsylvania. She heard that people up there didn't own slaves, and that colored people were treated the same as whites. She would be able to own her own property and mules and... oh, the thought was too much! She was free! Free! She thought that no one could ever be as happy as she was then.

*Mandie Tollefson  
1st Place , 7-8th Grade, Lighthouse Christian*

## DARK DREAMS

I was a thief, a shadow in the night, an unknown killer. I always stood alone and watched, watching the people grow up around me. Watching what I didn't have: hearts, wishes, and most of all, dreams. So pure and innocent that a nightmare could strike any minute, but I still watched, waiting for just the right moment to enter the unknowing minds and ravage those sweet dreams, leaving them with an empty feeling inside.

Don't get me wrong: I was not always a monster. I once was a child myself, transformed by loneliness and greed. I had become a renegade at a tender age. I walked through alleys and illegal clubs at night: I was part of gang wars and robberies. And through it all I felt nothing. That one word is what made me this thing. Well, that and my 'gift'.

I remember on one peculiar day, when I was still in school, I happened to be staring at this one boy, who had the weirdest expression upon his face. Somehow, I had tapped into his mind and saw what he was thinking. I will not say what I saw-but I will say that he had the dirtiest mind on earth- and I did not like it. So I took the liberty of shattering that dreadful picture into a thousand pieces. Both the boy and I were surprised, but I am happy to say he was never able to conjure up that image again.

Every once in a while since, I was able to see people's dreams. Every single one, amazed by the capacity of each hope and fantasy, awed me. Even my life on the streets, I could see through people's minds now and then. But little did I know that my power was about to grow.



I was awakened by a noise in my alley. Unconcerned, I went back to sleep. But I awoke again, hearing footsteps. I feigned sleep as the stranger neared and didn't open them until they had stopped. It was nothing but a man. He had black hair and goatee. The only peculiar things about him were his eyes which was a fiery color that waved inside his pupils. He wore all leather. He was seated on the arm of an old couch and staring at me.

I narrowed my eyes at him and asked, "What do you want?"

"You, " he answered simply.

"Listen crack head," I said, getting up, "if you wanna fight..."

"I don't want to fight, " he contradicted, "just talk."

"I settled back down and asked, "Who are you?"

"My name is a hundred but my meaning is one."

"I'm not much with riddles, " I said.

Silence.

"Well," I said hotly, "I haven't got all day, what's the word."

"I am aware of your gift, " he said.

"What gift?" I asked skeptically, as I lay down.

"How do you know about that," I demanded.

"I know all."

"So? What does that have to do with anything?"

"What if," he asked as he got up, "I was to offer you a chance of immortality?"

"What's the price," I asked sarcastically.

"There is no price," he said.

"No price," I asked in mock surprise, "What type of devil are you?"

"But," he said ignoring my immaturity, "there is one change that will have to take place."

"What change?"

He smiled secretly. "All changes are different. It just depends on the person." He paused. "Do you agree to the consequences?"

I laughed. "Do you expect me to believe that junk? Ha, immortality my behind. There's no such thing. Ha, Ha, what a joke!" I looked at the dude. "What an *idiot!*"

I sat up and said, "Thanks a lot, you've just made my night. Now go away you're wasting my time. Immortality, ha!" I continued to laugh.

The man didn't move. He just stood there, staring at me in a not amused way.

"You're not kidding are you," I asked after a while.

He shook his head dismayingly.

"Oh my god," I said, "You are insane!"

"It's the truth." He crossed his heart, "I swear; on my honor."

"Prove it," I challenged.

"Prove what," he asked innocently.

"That you are able to do such things."

His mouth curved slightly as he took off his jacket, and with arms extended, he held out his hands. He then cupped his hands together, and they began to glow. When he opened them again, a rose bloomed right before my eyes.

"Impossible," I exclaimed.

Suddenly, it turned into a ball of fire right in his hands.

The man thrust the ball at me and I reeled away from the spot. It landed on a stack of newspapers and it burst into flame. I quickly grabbed an old moth infested blanket and smothered out the fire.

"Now do you believe me," he asked.

I looked away from the burnt newspaper and said, "Uh, I think so."

"You think?"

"Gee, " I said, ignoring the question, "immortality sure doesn't sound like a bad idea after that close call."

"So you agree," he asked, surprised.

"Well, not exactly. I don't understand what this has to do with my seeing dreams."

"When you are immortal," he explained, "you can control your powers. I thought you could put that to good use. "

I thought a moment and finally nodded my head in agreement.

"Good," the man said with a smile.

But before I could say one more thing I felt a great dizziness come over me, and I fell, unconscious, to the ground.

When I woke up, I felt horrible and run down. I raised myself up to my knees and looked for the strange man, but he was not there.

When I rubbed my head, I found that my hair felt different. It felt more thick and solid and even smoother. I grabbed a few strands and found that my hair had somehow turned silver!

My arm brushed something leathery as I checked to see what else had become of me. I looked back to find two silver, bat-like wings upon my shoulders.

I checked my head once more to make sure I had no horns or anything. I didn't.

*Curse that fiendish devil* I thought, *for turning me into this unknown thing.* For a devil, he was.

"Oh well," I said, "At least I don't have to eat people."

I tried to find out how to work my newly accommodated wings, but nothing happened no matter how hard I tried.

"Looks like my little friends have a mind of their own."

I looked up at the brick apartment and studied it. It wasn't very tall, at least four stories. I started to wonder if I might be able to scale it. It had enough cracks and loose bricks that it shouldn't be too hard.

I found a good place to start, and slowly started to climb. My body easily got use to this new use of arms and legs, and soon propelled me to the top of the building in a matter of seconds.

I walked to the edge and peered down into a large alley. it had to be at least fifteen feet wide. *Maybe I could practice here,* I thought.

Again, I tried to get my wings to open, using every muscle I knew about. But, alas, my transformation must have made some completely new bones and meat. It made it very difficult for me, since I knew not how to use pinions and whatever parts a bat was made of.

I started to think of reasons why they wouldn't budge; when I happened to hear the sweetest sound anyone could of ever heard. It was like crystals and twinkling bells. I wanted very badly to find the source of the music, and right away I knew exactly where it was. I jumped to the roof of the opposite building, and surprisingly, left a good amount between the edge and me. I immediately continued running and jumped five more buildings, until I reached the source.

I climbed down the side headfirst and positioned myself on a narrow window ledge opposite of another window across the street. It was the bedroom, and inside was a sleeping woman. The song seemed to be beckoning to me. I didn't know what to do. Suddenly, a voice came out of nowhere, saying, *Focus on her essence; let it pull you toward her. Let it call out your name as you and it unite.*

For some odd reason, I listened to the voice and closed my eyes, letting my spirit leave me and enter the woman. She was dreaming, a pure innocent dream of love and laughter. It was this that called out to me, this dream that she would probably forget when she woke up.

I thought I could make it easier for her, and before I knew what happened, I had "swallowed" the dream, and without another thought I returned to my body.

Suddenly, my wings opened and automatically picked up a breeze. I glided awesomely above the crowded streets and farther on. I had found out what I had to do.

I fed upon dreams now. They are what keep me strong. From that, I found that I no longer cared what I did; I could live forever.

I laughed, and flew west, into the dark.

*I was a thief, a shadow in the night,*

*An unknown killer- so don't sleep tight!*

*Sabrina Bird*  
*2nd Place, 7-8th Grade, Mann Middle School*

## THE LITTLE CARROT

Long ago, very far away, carrots worked and seldom played. The little carrots went to boarding school, and the teacher carrots were intensely cruel.

One day a little carrot cried, "Why don't the teachers like me, why, oh, why?"

Another little carrot simply voiced, "You cry all the time, when there is no point."

The little carrot sobbed and smiled, "Do I really act just like a child?"

The other little carrot replied, "Think about it and listen to yourself, you must learn when to stop sobbing, or else." The carrot uttered nothing more, and simply walked away, leaving the little carrot all alone, to sit and ponder all day.

The little carrot thought to himself, "I must act more grown up, or I might be put on a refrigerator shelf."

So the little carrot tried to think of ways to stop his crying habit and soon enough he stumbled across a mean and loathsome rabbit.

"Why hello there you tasty little carrot. I thought you had been eaten by the fearsome, creepy ferret," exclaimed the rabbit.

The little carrot looked confused, but he was also tickled, and amused. "Why would you think such a gruesome thing? Did a teacher from my school hear me sing?"



Did he send to me the hungry ferret king?"

"What do you mean my silly friend? There is no ferret, I like to pretend."

Quiet and cautiously, the little carrot whispered some words, "At my school, no singing is permitted, no songs may be heard."

"Don't worry, " the rabbit explained, "as soon as you're in my stomach, your songs will never be heard again!"

"Your stomach?" the carrot questioned with fear.

"Yes, I'm a rabbit, what did you think, my dear?" replied the rabbit with a mischievous grin, ear to ear.

The carrot simply yelled and explained, "To eat me would be wrong!" as fear ran through him once again. As the rabbit licked his tiny lips, the carrot ran, oh so swift. He kept running just for another block, making sure it was safe to stop. He finally made it back to school, and realized he had kept his cool.

"I didn't cry, " the little carrot thought, "I acted like a grown up, like I was taught."

So from that day on the carrot smiled, he never cried, or acted like a child. He learned how to control his tears, also to stand up to his horrific fears. So the little carrot was loved by all, and thought of by the teachers as the grown up that was small.

*Elizabeth Cordell  
3rd Place, 7-8th Grade, Kopachuck Middle School*



# SHORT STORY

9th & 10th  
Grade

## MILKMAN SUMMERS

Jerry Barnell was the milkman. Every morning, he pattered through our smallish town in his beloved green pick-up truck, who he'd christened Ramona. She was faded and real dinged up, and probably almost as old as Jerry himself, which was saying a lot. They'd trundle down our street at a quarter 'til eight every morning, and if I got up early enough in the summertime, Jerry'd let me ride with him on his route.

My very best summers were spent like that, with just the three of us - a skinny old may, a skinny little kid, and a beater. We'd swap yarns, me and Jerry, with Ramona putting her two cents in every now and again.

"So, Shorty," Jerry'd say. "So, Shorty, how's them minnows down in 'at ol' millpond?"

"There's lots," I'd say. "I got me a real fat one, and Momma even fried 'im up for me. Biggest thing she ever saw, is what she told me."

Ramona clunked her approval, and Jerry grinned his gap-toothed smile.

"Bet it was. 'Ow bout them polliwogs? Should be losin' their tails right 'bout now, 'spect."

"Big 'n' fat. They jump real far now, too, but I ain't got my hands on one yet."

Jerry grinned again. "Whin I's yer age, we'd git out in 'at ol' pond with our britches hitched up 'round our knees and kitch th' biggest ol' things y'ever laid eyes on."

I could feel him working up to a story.

"Yessir, we brought home some mighty big whoppers. Tried t'keep 'em in th' bathtub once, I 'member 'at. Put some nice liller-pads innit fer 'em 'n' everythin'. Took me a-while to see why Ma didn' want 'em there. We thought they's doin' fine.

Ramona rumbled obligingly, almost like she couldn't think of a single reason why anyone wouldn't want such a great thing in their bathtub. Jerry sighed and licked his lips. "Yep," he said, "Those were some good 'ol times."

And then he'd tell me more stories about his childhood and our town as we drove slowly along his route, stopping only to exchange empty bottles for full ones.

"There was th' time," he'd start, "whin me 'n' Nielson Gray - ya know 'is widow, I th'nk?"

I'd nod a yes and tell him "Yep. I carry 'er groceries 'ome from the store sometimes."

Then Jerry's whole face would light up. "Good kid! They say kids these days is no good, but I jis knew it weren't true! Anyhow, where'd I git to?"

"You 'n' Nielson..."

"Oh. Well, Nielson had this fat li'l pony named Dandy - coulda stood a family a five on 'is back, we useda say. Yeah, we'd go ridin' all th' time on 'at o' pony. Then one day, we was about yer age, we got this idea outta nowheres. We were gonna teach Dandy ta jump! Took 'im out into th' woods 'n' rode 'til we found a real big log across th' path. Neil rode Dandy t'wards it like crazy, an' jis whin we thot he'd clear it, Niel whint a-flyin' and Dandy got stuck on top of 'at ol' log. I had t' run back 'n' git help, 'n' it were nearly th' next morning' afore anyone was able ta budge 'at pony!"

We chuckled and grinned together as we thought about that poor little horsey stuck up on a log, and Ramona chugged contentedly.

Then one day, she got kinda sick. We were plunking away down Wisteria Avenue, and Ramona hiccuped twice and died. Jerry's mouth made this little, wrinkle "O" for a second, then he hopped out of the car, battered toolbox in hand, and said, "C'mon, Shorty, we got work!!"

So I got my very first "automechanical one-o-one." We clambered back in the car with enough grime on us to cover a sawmill twice. As we wiped our arms on on old towel, Jerry told me, "That's prob'ly a th' best things a body kin know, fixin' stuff. Next ta 'at, prob'ly readin' an' writin'. Still teachin' ya that stuff at school?"

"Yeah. Don't like it, though. Ain't very intristing."

"Don't let no one tell ya book lernin' isn' interestin'!" It was the first time I'd ever seen Jerry look truly serious about anything. "It can be. Can do lotsa things, anythin' ya want, if ya git all yer schooling. 'Course," he said, twinkling, "sometimes it's good ta learn stuff here, too." He thumped

his heart with his fist. "*Right in here.*"

I nodded dumbly, mulling over what had just been revealed to me. For the first time ever, we rode the rest of our route in silence. Even Ramona. We all seemed to want to savor something.

That was my last summer with Jerry. I had to move with my family to a bigger town. I never got to see Jerry and Ramona again. Which was, in an odd way, okay. I think we said our good-byes on better terms than most people could even dream of. I still have his stories. And the memories. I keep them all with me, Jerry. *Right in here.*

*Kaitlin Shideler*  
*1st Place, 9-10th Grade, Bellarmine Preparatory*

## BITTERSWEET SIXTEEN

The pale pink blush of a June morning dawned just as Katie awoke, sat up, and stretched. It was her sixteenth birthday, and she had woken up especially early in order to usher in this new chapter of her life.

To Katie, her sixteenth birthday was special, because it represented the turning point in her life between childhood and adulthood. Her parents were suddenly allowing her to begin dating and driving, and her friends were treating her with a new level of admiration and respect. The newfound privileges were a little overwhelming, and Katie needed some time to gather her thoughts she reflected on her life so far and her life still to come.

A huge, formal sweet sixteen party was planned for that evening, and the day would be spent decorating, cooking, cleaning, and generally preparing for the festivities. Katie was excited, but she wanted to sneak away for a few moments of quiet introspection.

She got dressed in a pair of old, comfortable jeans and a cozy hooded sweatshirt, then slipped out of the house, being careful not to wake her parents or older brother. Katie's family owned ten acres of land out in the country, where half of the property was devoted to the house, a small vegetable garden, and a well-groomed lawn. The other half was an open field, where wildflowers were given free reign, and a family of white-tailed deer thrived. It was to this area that Katie headed.

The field was especially beautiful that morning. A soft layer of dew covered the tall grasses, dampening

her tennis shoes. The sun was finishing its morning ascent, and had left behind a myriad of color on the horizon. Katie smiled to herself as she walked along, stopping occasionally to pick flowers. She made her way to a tall, flat rock hidden by a grove of trees. The rock had been Katie's special retreat for years. When she was little, Katie's mom had taken her out to the rock for picnics, and as she grew older, the boulder had become a place for her to contemplate her thoughts, stargaze, or even do homework. Now, Katie was looking for a way to come to terms with losing her childhood and being suddenly catapulted into the adult world.

She lay back on the rock, shielded her face from the sun, and tried to clear her mind. While she lay there, one childhood memory kept appearing in Katie's thoughts. When she was little, her mother would occasionally wake her up early in the morning, and together, the two of them would steal out of the house for a morning walk in the field while the rest of the world still slept. Katie's mom had always told her that fairies lived among the wildflowers, and if they woke up early enough and were very quiet, they might be lucky enough to find one. In the days of her childhood, Katie had been enchanted by fairies, and she had wanted nothing more than to actually see one. Of course they never did, and by now Katie realized how silly it had been of her to believe in fairies, but a part of her wished her youthful fantasy could be real.

As Katie rested on the rock, a deep sadness washed over her. She would never again be able to act like a little kid, doing things such as picking bouquets of dandelions for her mom or running barefoot in freshly mowed grass. Her days of searching for fairies among the flowers were forever ending.



Katie sat up abruptly, realizing that almost an hour had passed while she was daydreaming. Reluctantly, she started back across the field, feeling more melancholy than when she had started out. As she neared the house, she realized that her family was awake and preparing breakfast. Katie entered the house to smells of fresh coffee, eggs, and bacon.

"Happy birthday Katie!" Her parents, and even her brother, all grinned at her as she walked into the house.

"Thanks, guys. How's breakfast coming?"

"I haven't burned anything yet, " Katie's dad shouted from next to the stove, where he was waving his spatula at her in greeting.

"Great." Katie rolled her eyes at her dad's antics as she sat down at the head of the table next to a small pile of presents.

"Go 'head and open them, Katie. We don't have to wait for breakfast, " her mom said. "That's okay with you, right, honey?" she asked, directing the question at Katie's dad.

"Sure! I can see fom here, " he answered, concentrating more on making the eggs than anything else.

Katie first picked up a present she knew was from her brother. It was wrapped with crumpled corners, no ribbon, and had a greeting card haphazardly attached with the piece of scotch tape.

"Gee thanks for putting so much effort into wrapping this," she said sarcastically, looking at her brother.

"No problem," he replied, yawning. "Stop complaining and open it."

Her present turned out to be a gift certificate to her favorite clothing store. "Hey, thanks," she said, before reaching for the next package. Upon opening her next gift, from her parents, she found a collection of lavender-scented bubble bath. Katie thanked both her parents, and then her mom said, "You'll get the rest of your presents tonight, but there's one more thing I want you to open this morning." And she handed Katie a small box wrapped in gold paper. Katie gave her mom a curious look, then tore off the paper and opened the box to find a gold necklace with a fairy charm dangling from the chain.

The look Katie's mom got from her daughter expressed all the thanks and appreciation that was needed. Katie walked over to a mirror, put the necklace on, and smiled to herself. She stood in front of the mirror for a long time, until her brother asked, "Why the heck do you have that goofy smile on your face?"

Katie turned around and glared at him, but she really wasn't upset. With the fairy charm around her neck, she had realized that maybe it was okay to take a little of her childhood with her into her adult years. Maybe she still could believe in fairies after all.

*Amy Bowden  
2nd Place, 9-10th Grade, Eatonville High School*

## MISUNDERSTOOD MAN

"Bwah ha ha," the super villain laughed evilly as he secured the poor, helpless, sexy blonde to the Super Roaster Toaster machine. "Soon you will be just so much roasted blonde burger! Bwah ha ha!"

"You evil man," shouted the blonde in commendable defiance. "You'll never get away with this!"

"I already have," sneered the super villain, twirling his luxuriant black mustache.

Suddenly there was a huge crash as the west wall of the secret hidden laboratory was blown into bite sized chunks.

"WHAT?!" screamed the super villain.

Out of the settling mortar dust a shape appeared. It seemed to be a tall, lanky man wearing ill-fitting neon green Spandex with a large red "M" plastered to the middle of his chest.

"Have you come to save me?" cried the blonde lustily, in a voice that implied she'd expect more than just saving.

"Yes," replied the super hero, whose name was Misunderstood Man.

"Wait a minute," said the super villain. "I'm not sure I understand. *You* intend to save *her*?"

"Of course," said Misunderstood Man. "I am a super hero after all; this is part of the job description.

"Maybe I should clarify," said the super villain. "Aren't you a bit scrawny to be rescuing sexy babes?"

"You know, I resent that remark," said Misunderstood Man. "A guy's physical prowess or lack thereof has absolutely nothing to do with whether or not he should be able to assist women who are in need of rescuing. Remember, it's what's on the inside that counts."

"Oh, baloney," said the super villain. "Wake up and smell America. Can you think of any super hero who isn't either big and buff or ruggedly good looking and equipped with more gadgets than a three foot Swiss army knife?"

"You're missing the point," said Misunderstood Man.

"Like, okay," said the sexy blonde. "I'm a little unclear on something, too. See, you have, like, no awesome gigantic weapons, nor do you have amazing speed or physical strength. So, what I'm saying is, how are you going to, like, rescue me?"

"I'll use my super power," said Misunderstood Man.

"What super power?" asked the super villain and the sexy blonde in tandem, then looked surprised and glared at each other.

"You wouldn't understand," said Misunderstood Man morosely.

"Oh, come on," said the sexy blonde, tossing her head and sending her hair swinging about her face. "I'm not, like, a ditz or anything."

"You see, " said Misunderstood Man, "my power is that no one can comprehend what I say. There isn't a person out there who really understands anything that I tell them. Thus, if I talk to a villain long enough, then they'll eventually be so confused that I can just walk off with whoever I'm rescuing or hand the villain over to the police or whatever."

"I don't think I get it," said the super villain.

"Yeah, like, me neither," echoed the sexy blonde.

"That's the point," said Misunderstood Man tiredly, as he started cutting away the blonde's bonds with his Swiss army knife.

"Okay, let's back up," said the super villain, leaning on his patented Evil Control Board (guaranteed to make taking over the world and committing dastardly deeds a cinch or your money back). "You're here because you're under the delusion that you can rescue this incredibly good looking blonde from being roasted by me, but you don't have anything to assist yourself in the endeavor except for some super power which you aren't even willing to reveal to the person being rescued. Oh, and a Swiss army knife, too, I see."

"If you want to think that, go ahead," said Misunderstood Man. Turning away from the now freed sexy blonde, who was currently engaged in trying to figure out how the heck she'd been untied, he started demolishing the Roaster Toaster machine with his patented Basher Trasher baseball bat.

"No, no, no, what you're saying just doesn't work, " said the super villain. "In other words, you don't make any sense. You seem to be perfectly okay with accepting my slant on

the situation. A proper super hero is supposed to impose their will on the super villain no matter what the super villain thinks or feels. That's the whole point."

"No, I'm afraid that you've quite effectively missed the point entirely," replied Misunderstood Man. By then he had finished turning the Roaster Toaster machine into scrap metal, so he turned to the sexy blonde and escorted her toward the demolished west wall.

"All right, now I really do not understand," said the super villain angrily. "You keep telling me I don't get it while confusing me with completely unrealistic explanations. You are not good looking, your muscle tone is nonexistent, you have no cool gadgets except for whatever you destroyed my wall with and a Swiss Army knife, and still you seem to expect to rescue this incredibly sexy blonde." The super villain looked up to continue with his tirade, but realized that he was now alone in the room with a smoking pile of scrap which, with a little imagination, could once have been a Roaster Toaster machine.

"What? Where'd he go?" said the super villain. It was really vexing when people just skipped out when you were trying to talk to them. Especially when they took women that you intended to fry along. "Grrr," growled the super villain, madly twirling his mustache.

Meanwhile, outside of the super secret hidden laboratory the sun was just setting in a magnificent caress of red and purple fire across the sky. Nature happily grew and flourished greenly, while triumphantly romantic music played softly in the background. Into this incredibly romantic setting emerged Misunderstood Man and the recently freed sexy blonde.

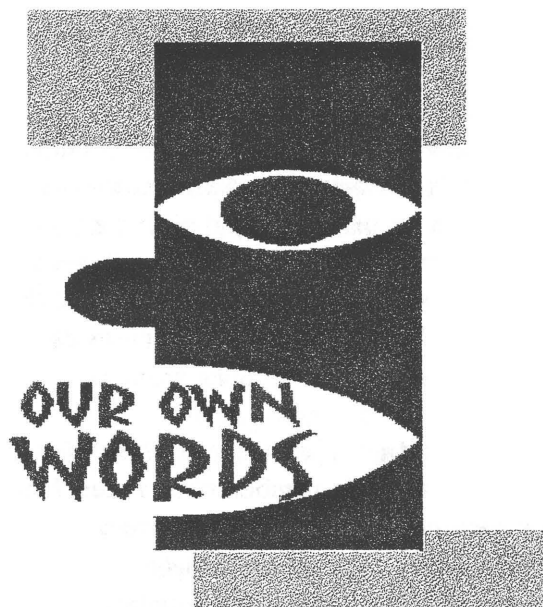
"I'm not sure how you did it, but, like, thanks for rescuing me anyway," said the sexy blonde to Misunderstood Man. "I'd love to stay and chat, but I've got, like, a really important job interview for a major motion picture company, and I'd really rather secure a role as a brave heroine than reminisce about your less-than-impressive rescue attempt."

"You sure you don't want to have dinner tonight?" said Misunderstood Man. "I did just rescue you, and you are kind of sexy after all."

The blonde stared blankly at Misunderstood Man, obviously not understanding. "No, but thanks anyway," she said, then turned and left.

After staring at the blonde's retreating back for a while, Misunderstood Man sighed and started walking away. "I guess it was worth a shot," he muttered to himself. He didn't really know why he bothered defeating super villains when it was obvious that no one got the point. He didn't even get to use his arsenal of gigantic guns and amazing gadgets that he held in reserve just in case something went bad. But still, the people of America needed someone to save them, even if they couldn't comprehend why, and he was the only one he knew who really understood the job.

Ian Beck  
3rd Place, 9-10th Grade, Sumner High School



# SHORT STORY

11th & 12th  
Grade



## LE LAC DES CYGNES

The little boy's eyes are like lacquered Asian ceramics. I see in their bowls of dark reflection my own elongated limbs twisting, the white plums of my costume rippling in the spotlight as I dance. How did I miss his eyes during the first act? He's only two rows back. Perhaps I didn't notice him because the house is full; New York loves Tchaikovsky this year.

This is the fifth performance of *Swan Lake*. Already the rehearsals and their number have faded from memory. The steps long ago became as elementary as the marking down of one's name with a fat crayon. Only the performances retain a distinct color and label in the album of my mind; the difficulties with the choreographer and the visit to the doctor are blurred slightly, graying and yellowing as snapshots of the past tend to do. The smell of the first night's roses is mingling in my recollections with the odors of greasepaint and sweat.

The flashbacks must assail me later. I am dancing now. When I am dancing, there can be nothing else.

Nothing but the boy's eyes again. There are swans in them, glinting like pieces of the moon undulating in a shadowed lake. I am a swan swimming in those eyes, bobbing up and down on the surface of the water and aching for a way to escape the alien body thrust upon me by a malevolent enchanter. I do not want these contours: the ovoid body and rounded belly, the stumps of legs useful only for waddling, the wings. What good are wings to me? I do not want to fly from the raised guns of hunters in the Russian winter. I only want to dance in the lights of the royal ballroom and to be

admired for my footwork.

Are the boy's eyes reproachful? He is making it difficult to concentrate on the characterization of Odette. His eyes trigger a memory of someone in my mind...Myself. I see myself in them, in this boy. He has my defiant eyes, my famous liquid obsidian eyes that have never required eyeliner or mascara. His eyes are convex mirrors in a dimly lit room, firing back at me my own distorted image. I see myself projected on the great wide screen behind my eyes, having difficulties with the choreographer and visiting the doctor and then dancing and dancing and dancing.

I am an artist. I must ignore this distraction. The contemplation of a child in one's audience is a luxury the dancer cannot afford. Didn't New York fill the aisles and rows, after all? New York is here for *me*. One child does not matter.

The curtain lifts once again. It is the fourth act, the final act. Movement number 28: I hear the swell of the violins and cellos, *allegro agitato*. Adrenaline flows in my body as freely and wildly as the bows leap across the strings. This is the time of the storm, Odette's death scene. It is grief that kills Odette - her lover's betrayal. Everyone knows the pain of of being rejected in favor of someone-or something-else. That's why it's so easy for New York to empathize, to appreciate more than Tchaikovsky's music and the choreographer's passion. This is the power of dance. With it, I can communicate tragedy and beauty and make the offering of catharsis to New York. The entire theater is holding its breath when I shudder my last on the stage and sink into my co-star's arms. The mechanical lake swallows us and we are lowered into the depths behind the orchestra pit. Another performance concludes as planned;

another triumph.

Nonetheless, the applause is profoundly thunderous tonight. Standing ovations and cries of "Encore!" Roses again, long stemmed scarlets with the muted scent of the hothouse. The heat of the house lights strikes me; their brilliance is temporarily blinding.

New York is on its feet. But one seat in the second row is already empty. The boy has vanished. Someday I'll forget the details of tonight, the grease mark on the sole of my left shoe and the splitting of my right middle fingernail. I'll forget the difficulties with the choreographer and, afterwards, the visit to the doctor. But those black eyes so like mine will not fade from my mind until my teeth go soft.

I didn't want the boy to go. I wish he could have stayed to share the glorious reception of our masterpiece. I don't think he understands the personal sacrifices I have made for my art. Art requires total focus; I couldn't watch a child while dancing. I had to choose not to see myself in those eyes to be the best dancer I could be, to devote myself wholly to the creation of something beautiful.

His eyes were haunting. They were lovely, those Asian ceramic eyes. I will not forget them. But my choice has already been made.

*Lara Rogers  
1st Place, 11-12th Grade, Charles Wright*

## DINER TALES

"So, buddy, are you going to buy anything, or are you keeping me on the clock for fun?" Cheri did not mean to be rude, the question just slipped out of her mouth. In her defense, her shift has started twelve hours ago, and she had been walking between the fryer and the front counter all day. She wanted nothing more than to clock out, take the bus home and slip her feet into her nice, comfortable slippers. The last thing she wanted was to get into a war of words with the Armani suit sitting at the counter. Thankfully, he did not even raise his eyes from the menu as he ordered. Cheri passed the order on to Joe and then clocked out. On her way out the door, she passed by the Armani again. He seemed pretty down, and she considered taking a moment to talk to him. But she saw the bus pulling up to the corner, and weighed the prospect of her warm slippers against standing in the rain until the next public transportation came by. So, she walked out of the small diner, ran to the corner, and climbed on the bus, heading towards home and slippers.

"So, buddy, are you going to buy anything, or are you keeping me on the clock for fun?" Chad could tell that the tired-looking waitress behind the counter would not wait forever, so he quickly ordered. He did not look up from his menu while trying to hold back the tears he felt welling up inside him. He knew that he should have gone straight home, but the smells from the diner had just seemed so appetizing. However, now he felt like he was suffocating. He wanted to scream, "My father's been diagnosed with Alzheimer's!" but couldn't. He choked down the food and paid the cashier. He put his coat on, and opened the door. He shivered in the cold wind, wincing as the rain slid down his collar. He stood there

for a minute, looking out. A middle-aged woman pushed past him as he stood in the doorway. He watched as she melted into the crowd of pedestrians, and then set out to become one of the masses himself, hoping to forget his pain by fading into the background.

"So, buddy, are you going to buy anything, or are you keeping me on the clock for fun?" Jacob looked up from his work in irritation. The last thing he needed was to be distracted by an altercation between the waitress and her customer. He looked down at the article he was writing. He needed to finish this article so badly, but was experiencing writer's block. He glanced at his watch, noting that the deadline was in five hours. He needed the paycheck this article would bring. Without the money, he would not make his child support payment, and Sheila could keep him from taking the kids over their spring break. He put his head in his hands and groaned. If only he had some inspiration, but there was nothing to write about. Then, he looked at the counter, and noticed the man sitting there, with a stricken look on his face. He picked up his pencil, and began his article. With luck, he could write enough to earn that paycheck he needed. He glanced up briefly as the man exited, then returned to his fevered writing.

"So, buddy, are you going to buy anything, or are you keeping me on the clock for fun?" Angelica looked up and sighed. Everybody these days was too tired, too stressed, and too broke. She knew the feeling. It had been months since she worked. She sighed to herself. Where does a dancer go when she's too old to be on stage? Angelica wanted to go home and wash her cares away with a bubble bath. She stood up to leave and winced as her muscles protested. She laughed at the irony of her situation. She, who had once dance for twelve hours straight to raise money

for a children's hospital, couldn't even walk a few blocks without getting sore and short of breath. She hobbled over to the cash register, fished around in her pocket for the money to buy her drink, and then set out on the long trip towards the door. A sad looking man stood there, looking out onto the rainy streets. Angelica waited a moment, then walked past him to the outside, and set out for the long walk home.

"So, buddy, are you going to buy anything, or are you keeping me on the clock for fun?" Joe looked up from the fryer, and sighed. He hated making Cheri stay so long, but he was understaffed and needed the help. It was just so horrible when she started to antagonize the customers. Especially this man. He looked so sad, sitting there alone with his face buried in the menu. Joe wished he knew why the man was so upset. He wished he could help all the people who walked in and out of his diner, but he just kept to his kitchen, and tried not to bother them. Like the woman sitting in the corner, who looked defeated, shrunken and just plain old. Or the man sitting in the booth, writing something. Joe wished he could help them. But he kept to his kitchen, and tried not to bother them. They probably had their own lives to lead, and would not want his interference anyway. When closing time came, he locked up, and then set out on his long walk home. He could not be late, since his cat, Mrs. Whiskersen, would be waiting for him to serve her up some dinner.

As Joe walked home, pondering the events of the day, Cheri was just fixing herself a cup of cocoa. She sat down, as always, in front of her television. She looked over at the empty spot where her ex-husband used to sit, and sighed. Chad walked for hours in the rain, watching the people walk by, wanting to scream his pain out to them, but keeping

himself quiet. He ended up at St. Mary's of the Sacred Heart, and decided to go to the priest to seek counsel. The parish secretary told him that office hours were just ending, but that the office would be open at nine o'clock Monday morning. Chad sighed, and walked back out into the rain. Jacob rushed the article over to the main office, just in time to submit it. He took the paycheck to the bank, and made the usual arrangements to transfer it to his wife's account. Then, he went home to make plans for his next visitation with his children. Angelica went home to take a bubble bath, only to discover that she was out of bubble bath crystals. She started running the water to fill the bathtub anyway, figuring that any bath was better than no bath. She sat in the tub, listening to the sounds of silence in the world around her.

*Stephen Rousseau  
2nd Place, 11-12th Grade, Bellarmine Preparatory*

## JUST PASSING THROUGH

From the moment he appeared over the hill, they knew he was not one of them.

He walked with a distinct limp, dragging his twisted foot behind him, and as he walked, that same foot dragged on the cobblestone road. The sound was like a deafening clamor as he plodded into the town.

*Click. Scrape. Click. Scrape. Click. Scrape.*

The first person to see him was the blacksmith, coming out of his shop to greet the sun preparing to blossom over the horizon and warm the chill spring air. As he laid eyes on the stranger, the blacksmith noted his shabby coat, his torn leggings, his gnarled walking stick, and the dirty hat pulled low over his eyes. But all of this paled when the blacksmith saw the band of bright red leather around the stranger's wrist, which contrasted blindingly with the earthen coloring of his person.

In a self-conscious moment, the blacksmith stole a hand to the back of his neck before recovering his composure and marching straight back into his shop with a huff, slamming the door. There would no lovely sunrise today.

The stranger didn't look up. His eyes remained downcast as he entered the heart of the town. Early-rising villagers were already congregating in the square when he was seen coming down the main street.

With each person who saw him, the air grew thicker with electric tension. They stared shamelessly, taking in every



detail with their attentive eyes. They shuddered at his tangled hair, which was far too long for a Real person. They whispered about his bleeding, weather-cracked hands and crushed foot. How could such imperfections be allowed, they wondered? And always they quailed at the sight of the red band.

He looked up only once in the course of his steady sojourn. A little girl, barely old enough to be Real, came darting from a house to fetch her rubber ball, which had rolled out into the street. The ball stopped right in the path of the stranger, and he came face to face with the little girl. She bent to retrieve her toy and looked up to find herself staring into a pair of weary and pain-stricken blue eyes.

In an instant the child's own grey eyes filled with fear. Shrieking for help, she ran for the house to be greeted by the protective arms of her equally grey-eyed mother. The woman, shaking from surprise, cradled her daughter and bravely dared a scolding to the stranger.

It was only then he glanced up, turning eyes as cerulean as flashing sapphires in the direction of his accuser.

Abject terror crossed the woman's face. She cowered, reaching to the back of her neck, feeling the amber Love-stone that was embedded there. Then she put her hand over the nap of her daughter's neck, sheltering the precious Stone that had only a few weeks earlier been planted there.

The stranger took but a moment to complete his glance, only a second before he once again downcast his eyes and continued on, but it was enough to confirm to the town what he was. Now as he finished his passage, people ran from him,

closing up their shops and hiding behind corners. No one taunted him, for they knew that Unreal people could be very dangerous. Instead they glared through the safe shield of windows and shutters. Fear and intense loathing was projected from their stares. Some were angry to have their peace so shattered. Others were hateful that such abominations could live. Those particular villagers focused on the back of the stranger's neck, wondering about the scar that would surely be there. It must be a terrible and ugly distortion, they decided, for anyone as disheveled as this must have had his Lovestone torn from him. Surely the Gods had lost all love for him.

Yet, oblivious by hard training to their thoughts, the stranger continued down the road, dragging his foot, the click of his walking stick echoing from one row of houses and shops to the other. *Click. Scrape. Click. Scrape.*

The villagers behind the windows and corners turned their heads as he passed, eyes locked by devouring emotion. He was anathema, and they hated him, but he stirred within them an undeniable fascination. None could take their gaze from him.

*Click. Scrape. Click. Scrape.*

By the time he took leave of the town, his ordeal over, the tension in the air was thick enough to cut with a knife. It seemed to crackle through the blood of every villager, making their feet fidget and their breaths grow short and sudden.

At last, one brave soul, the town chandler, visibly shaken, ventured into the street. He peered cautiously out into the silence from the doorway of his chandlery and

watched the outsider disappear down the road. Only when he had vanished behind the trees of the bordering forest did the Chandler step from safety from his porch onto the cobbles. Others followed, but there was a silence between them that continued through the day. The disturbance had been quiet and subtle, but some would never forget the Unreal one.

The stranger himself barely breathed until he was well away from the town.

When the trees began to close in, their sheltering arms making a canopy over the rundown road, the outsider collapsed onto the side of the path, burying his face in his hands to stifle his sobs.

He was a warrior, but his was a silent war, a struggle of buried feelings. In moments of opportunity he would leave the sanctuary of his comrades to venture into the raging river of hatred, seeking to block the endless flow. He would welcome the anger into his heart, bringing down all barriers to let it claw mercilessly at him as he sought to tire it into ceasing its ravages.

Only for a moment did he allow himself to weep. Now was the time to be strong, and soon he stood again, continuing on, preparing to leave his mark on the next town. That mark would remain in the hearts of some for all time. Slowly it would accumulate into real thought. That was forbidden, but no one would stop him. The Gods didn't even know he existed. No one would hinder his mission.

He was, after all, just passing through.

*Emily Burt*  
*3rd Place, 11-12th Grade, Curtis Senior High*

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