



OUR OWN
WORDS

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**8th Annual Pierce County
Teen Poetry & Fiction
Writing Contest**

2004

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Poetry Winners

Grades 7 & 8

1st	Full Moon by Margaret Chwat	7th	Kopachuck MS
2nd	A Galaxy of Stars by Donica Beckman	7th	Aylen JH
3rd	The Cedar and The Pine by Robby Fort	8th	Kopachuck MS

Grades 9 & 10

1st	In Skin by Ryan Sibonga	10th	Henry Foss HS
3rd	Cupida by Stephanie Dering	9th	Ballou JH

Grades 11 & 12

1st	A Cup of Sugar by Erica Fagerstrom	12th	Gig Harbor HS
2nd	My Silent Sonata by Elizabeth Floyd	12th	Peninsula HS
3rd	The Salesman by Adrienne Johnson	12th	Bellarmino

Short Story Winners

Grades 7 & 8

1st	The Party by Asia Tail	7th	Annie Wright
2nd	The Bookshop by Mary Cassio	7th	Homeschool
3rd	The New Daddy by Jessica Skelton	8th	Key Peninsula MS

Grades 9 & 10

1st	Homemade Paradise by Eve Hart	10th	Rogers HS
2nd	Maria's Tears by Carolyn Draper	9th	Ballou JH
3rd	Pizza and Painting by Larissa Lovelace	10th	Covenant HS

Grades 11 & 12

1st	Pistachios by Drew Scott	11th	Emerald Ridge HS
2nd	Alaskan Way by Tiffany Pickett	12th	Emerald Ridge HS
3rd	The Dancer by Megan Beals	12th	Gig Harbor HS

Poetry



Grades 7 & 8

Full Moon

Full moon, a flashlight –
Beams of brightness,
Against an ebony void
Lighting a path,
For wanderers of black nights
A vast ivory ball-
A crystal in the sky

Margaret

Kopachuck MS, 7th Grade

A Galaxy of Stars

Some stars burn brightly in solo spots
Like diamond dots on velvet.
Some gather and gleam behind the scene –
The sky's own tinsel blanket.

Alone and bold, in glittering groups, a trillion clusters;
The cosmos has all kinds of stars, each adding to the luster.
Would a star wish to shine the way another glows?
Could it not see a sparkle of its own?

In the universe of galaxies
Expanding throughout time,
There are no stars who do not give light;
There are many wonderful ways to shine.

Donica

Aylen JH, 7th Grade

The Cedar and The Pine

Rising from the dust
Splashing water kills the bird
Nobody knows why
The frog never got to say goodbye

The twins cannot withstand a hit
They do not stand tall anymore
The fire killed the steel
Too hot for anyone to feel

The whale is still swimming
And the pig is still squealing
The bird will never chirp again
The twins might be back but nobody knows when

Robby

Kopachuck MS, 8th Grade

Poetry



Grades 9 & 10

In Skin

Sleeping nights, tossing and turning,
Can't sleep because skin is burning.

Rubbing, itching, skin's scratched away,
Trying to get rid of the skin decay.

Dry and cracked, or sore and red,
Praying for new skin and the old to shed.

No use in trying, the skin will never heal,
Living life doomed...to forever feel.

Hiding under scars...and scabs they keep,
Rage and pain wait...and dig in deep.

Fearing true self...coming to be,
When skin erupts, surfacing, bleeding.

Hiding the misery...growing old,
Living with the pain...until skin grows cold.

Ryan

Henry Foss HS, 10th Grade

Cupida

I want to make love to a rose
in ink, in paint, in the air
like pollen spreading, permeating
new life will come from within me
as I came, new life, from the earth
and her movement with the sky
I want to show somebody who I am
so I will believe in myself
so I will have something to put faith in
when the shade of age has fallen
“I once made love to a rose,” I would say
and even so, I needn’t speak
my actions will be my evidence
at last, they may prove me right

Stephanie

Ballou JH, 9th Grade

Poetry



Grades 11 & 12

A Cup of Sugar

A cup of sugar,
Powdered sugar, not brown sugar.
With the white of hospital bed sheets,
And the quietness of a baby sleeping.
It comes when nights are cold
When school isn't meant to be in session,
And the side of the earth where you call your home,
Is farthest from the sun.
The type of blanket that is cold at first,
Then warm underneath the pocket.
It's snowing.
Like a cup of sugar.

Erica

Gig Harbor HS, 12th Grade

My Silent Sonata

November sings to me as
I wrap myself in the woolen
sweater; each itch a stitch in time.

Naked branches hum constant breezes
to the stormy skies above and the
softly blanketed grounds below.

Color has been muffled from nature. In
the distance loose chords
carry the fog.

Darkness serenades earlier than usual;
the sun slips away to the sound
of mountain's lullaby.

Nature's acappella composes the crisp cold air.
Trees sway to the beat of Heaven's Hymnal.

Elizabeth

Peninsula HS, 12th Grade

The Salesman

A man accosted me the other day
A wine-eyed, toothless wonder
With nails of polished amber
And a chattering offer
of the key to life.

I thanked him, brusquely, and moved on
My tattered Vans trying their damndest to sound professional
As they scuffed a curt, no-nonsense arc around him
And left him standing,
resilient in the dusk.

Later, as I wove my way along the concrete boardwalk,
I sent a mental apology to that pitiful pile of protein
And wondered how long it would take
To walk the forty blocks home.

Adrienne

Bellarmino Prep, 12th Grade

Short Stories



Grades 7 & 8

The Party

The tears rolled, mixed with laughter too loud to be true.

What a celebration! How is it that Man, even after such horrible crimes, can maintain the mood to throw a party? If a person is able to surmount feelings of sorrow so quickly, in order to laugh and speak with old acquaintances despite the knowledge that a dear friend has been lost, do they honestly have feelings at all? It seems to be the nature of all humans. In a battle true warriors would hide their fear and fight with courage. Only in the depths of night with no one but themselves as company they would weep like a child who just learned of death. Suppose the same is true in smaller circumstances, and instead of the conflict of war, it is a simple self-conflict. Maybe that day everyone was a warrior inside. I suppose the best way to honor someone so magnificent is to reflect their personality. In this case, a party would do just that.

When I first learned my grandmother died I was shocked somehow. It wasn't unexpected, yet when the phone call finally came I was dumbfounded. Only a few tears slipped out of me that night.

I was lucky enough to see her before she went. My mother took me with her on one of her many visits. It was hard. I didn't know what to do. I couldn't mess up in those short days with her.

Life is full of worries, yet what is there to do but see how it turns out. And that is what everyone did during that short month: waited it out. Everyone kept going on with life as usual. I was taken aback by the normality of it all, but I was swept up into it too; like a bird flying against a storm:

there is nothing to do but give in. I did my homework, I read my books, I even managed to show a little teenage anger, but even normality couldn't keep me from a unique softness.

Most days were the same; medication in the morning, reading the paper, taking a nap, visiting friends, medication, and so on. I saw the medicine go in, I saw the coughing bring it out.

People were always stopping in to visit. My grandmother had been around for 70 years and she was well loved. It all made me feel so small. I wanted to weep and tell my grandmother how much I loved her and missed her already, before she was even gone. But I didn't. I couldn't. I couldn't break down and give everyone more things to worry about. Their love and tenderness belonged to my grandmother, and I knew that it would hurt her too. It would hurt her more than the rest of them. I imagined that if I did break down there would be a room full of weeping souls before long. Some type of chain reaction, like dominos.

Eventually the day came when we had to leave. My mother said her goodbyes first. Then it was my turn, and I found myself at a loss for words. My eyes started to fill with tears as I gazed into my grandmother's beautiful face. I bent and laid my lips on the top of her head to give her what I knew would be our last kiss. Then for a moment everything was simple again. I managed to squeeze out, "I love you." And I knew that she loved me back. And there was no need for reassurance because we both knew what the other felt.

Then the moment was past.

I remember it clearly and even now I cry for my memories, and plead to a god I am not even certain in that I will always remember.

The sound was all around me at the funeral party. There were a ton of people, yet only a fraction of all who knew and loved my grandmother. There were people I recog-

nized, but most I didn't. I stayed close to my relatives clinging to my mother and aunts. I was a child again. It was all compliments and jokes. I heard that I was beautiful more times than I can remember or could trust; nothing that night was real.

I went over to where my mother was talking to a nervous-looking woman who had black mascara marks under her eyes. The woman had a drink in her hand; most people at the party did. She was my Uncle Peter's friend. After a minute or two, to my horror, my mother left to say hello to a friend, leaving me alone with my Uncle's friend.

My talk with her couldn't really be called a conversation, for a conversation consists of two people talking, and all I managed to get in was a few nods of my head, and ya's. She started talking about her 18-year-old son and she mentioned Peter constantly, going back and forth between the two: her son and Peter. She told me how her sweet, nice son didn't have a girlfriend, and how he would have loved to meet me. I tried to tell her that I was only 12, but she wasn't interested in what I had to say. She was flirting for her son in his absence. Then she said what a "wonderful, wonderful man" my Uncle Peter was, and how my grandmother's death was the hardest on him. How could she think that it was hardest on Peter? She wasn't only his mother! Peter didn't have to fly from across the U.S. to see her, and worry about the cost of flight tickets and not being in Ohio often enough. It was hard on everyone, including Peter and including me. It was my grandmother's funeral party and she was talking about her son, her life, herself!

While I was raging inside, on the outside I maintained my smile and continued nodding my head. I contented myself with making cruel insults about her in my mind. Twice through her talking hot tears clouded my vision, but I forced myself back into that suspended grayness between dreaming and reality. As she talked she slowly drained her

cup. She kept repeating the same things over and over, like a broken record of dreadfully bad music. I told myself pitiless and nasty lies about her, thinking of horrible things I could say to hurt her. I sipped my own soda, hoping it could have the same effect on me as her drink had on her.

Finally she stopped, and a short while later the party came to a close.

When I think about that night, I feel so sorry for the way I treated Peter's friend. For the woman I despised so much and so unjustly, I now feel love. I can't explain my emotions. Passionate feelings are too complex to be explained. I realize now that I was really the only one she could talk to. She could only talk to a child.

Peter's friend taught me something important. I saw in her the human desire to defy our pain. She taught me how the human race deals with pure, cold heartbreak.

Asia

Annie Wright, 7th Grade

The Bookshop

All the windows were broken in the bookshop. It had been owned by my family for as long as the building had been standing, but clearly, whoever had visited in the night hadn't cared. The door was destroyed, and the shelves had been emptied. Books were strewn everywhere, covers ripped off and pages fluttering on the floor. The damage was devastating, but I had no time to linger. I hurried to the back room, afraid of what I would find there.

The heavy oak floor panels of the trapdoor were broken and splintered, and several rungs were broken on the old ladder. I lowered myself down into the small storeroom and reached to turn on the one, bare light bulb, but that had also joined the ranks of the broken and destroyed. Faint light filtered in from the window above, barely illuminating the dark room. Taking advantage of the light, I began searching through the room, searching for anything that would restore my hope. Finding nothing, no sign that anything, or anyone, had been left untouched, I sat down on a small, wooden chair, breathing heavily.

Sitting there, alone, in the remains of my store, I thought about the events that had taken place in order to bring me to this point. What would have happened if I had refused to help the suffering Jewish family yesterday, though it seemed so long ago? Although my help had been next to useless, without it, would they have survived another hour on the streets? Or had my taking them in brought about their ruin sooner? Slowly, my mind was drawn back to the events of the previous day.

It was late afternoon. Business had been slow, and my eyelids were slowly starting to close. Suddenly, the tinkle of a

bell jerked me from my sleep, and I looked up. A woman, heavily dressed, despite the warm weather, was standing just inside the door of my small book shop. A shawl covered her head, casting her features into shadow. Beside her stood two small girls, both dressed similarly to the one I could only assume was their mother. The only thing that stood out about them was the small yellow star sewn onto the front of their clothes. When I saw the star, my first impulse was to look down, look away, or ignore them. The star marked them as Jews, and to help them would be taking their fate upon myself. I was about to turn away, when suddenly, one of the girls lifted her head and looked straight into my eyes. Her face was dirty, and tracks ran down it from where tears had washed away the dirt. But what struck me was her eyes. The eyes themselves were nothing out of the ordinary, but their expression was haunting. In her eyes I saw the pain of persecution and fear. This girl, though she couldn't have been more than eight, had endured more than I could ever imagine. When I looked at her eyes, I knew it would be heartless to turn them away.

Before I had a chance to speak, the woman approached me.

"Sir," she said. "Sir, I know that you have every right to refuse us. But you were the only store on the block without a single swastika. Please, sir. If you have any sympathy for us, please help us. We have been running for our lives, and my children are exhausted. Do you have room for us, just for one night? We will be out of your life by morning."

Her face was earnest, her voice, desperate. I furtively glanced at the window, and, seeing no one, beckoned them into a back room. Set in the floor was a trapdoor, carefully concealed by an old rug. I moved the rug aside and opened the door.

"You can stay in here for the night. It's just an old store

room, but it's the best I can do. I'll bring you some food in about a half hour."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" She exclaimed. The children looked up at me gratefully, and then climbed down the ladder. Their mother followed, and then I closed the door. I carefully covered it back up again with the rug, and then locked up the shop to buy some food.

It was growing dark when I returned. I went to the back room immediately, giving them the food, and then closing the door as soon as possible. I couldn't risk being seen. After an hour of nervously waiting on customers, I closed up the shop and went home for the night.

A distant siren jolted me out of my memories and into the present. My shop was destroyed, and the woman and her children were gone. Reliving memories would get me nowhere. I was on my turn, turned into a refugee with one crushing blow. I couldn't go back to my former life. The Nazis were probably already searching for me. With nowhere to go, no place to hide, I sank lower and lower on my knees, my mind slowly giving way to despair.

Mary

Homeschool, 7th Grade

The New Daddy

She walked down the long corridor to the very last room. The red door stood out from all the rest. It meant that what was inside was to stay inside, to be let out only to use the bathroom her mother told her.

Elizabeth wondered if she would end up there. As a child she was very ignorant to the fact that being insane does not happen to everyone. She walked on to the next door and the next, as her mom dragged her along. They were there to see her father. He had gone off to war, but her father didn't come back. She called him the new daddy.

They quickly arrived in front of another door, but this time they stopped. Her mother looked inside and looked as if she was going to break down right there. Elizabeth couldn't see inside. Her mom grabbed the door handle and pushed Elizabeth inside. Her mom walked away quickly saying something about being back soon.

She looked at the room. There was nothing but a bed with a man inside it. This was the new daddy. He was pale and had a robe to match. He looked up. His blue eyes looked so empty to her. She just stood there.

He yelled, "Sarg! What's this little girl doin' on base?"

She stepped back startled. He was so different to her. She realized that she didn't like this new daddy too much.

"Daddy?" She said

"No honey. Sarg! What's up with the little girl she could get killed!"

She didn't know what to think. He wasn't even a new daddy. He was a strange man who didn't recognize his own

little girl. She wasn't someone else's like he thought, she was his.

She turned around and opened the door. "Where's my daddy!" she screamed.

The nurses popped out at this dreadful sound.

"Honey where's your mom?"

"Where's my daddy" she cried. This time beginning to panic.

The man inside the room began to scream along with the little girl. Only he sounded like he was having fun. This scared her even more.

She took off running down the hall past the nurses into the waiting room. There was her mom sitting hunched over sobbing.

"I don't like the new daddy. Where's my daddy?" She cried.

Her mother took her into her arms and they cried together.

"I miss the old one too. I miss him too."

Jessica

Key Peninsula MS, 8th Grade

Short Stories



Grades 9 & 10

Homemade Paradise

The summers in West Glenville, New York, are hot and make you real tired. Your hands and toes get sticky from sweat and wild blackberry juice running between your fingers. The men nap in their boats all day, ignoring their be-aproned wives waving their rolling pins at them from the shore. There're wild turkeys as big as deer taking refuge in the wheat fields and lake leeches waiting to suck you dry. Last summer, Harley Sloane claimed a leech sucked his little sister until she was ten pounds lighter.

Mom and Dad are inside grumbling about politics. All the old folks are sitting on their front porches, rocking back and forth in the sweltering humidity and fanning themselves with Hart's general store flyers. Ordered outside for being nuisances, my little brother Stanley an' me wander the lakeshore, skipping stones and throwing pinecones at each other. Everyone knows each other around here, 'cause the houses are all crowded around this one little lake, and I guess that's how it's always been.

"I'm bored," Stanley mutters, kicking a pine tree and sucking at an ice cream. "When's Dad gonna get a new truck?"

I shrug silently. Stanley crouches beside me, peering carefully at an anthill. The weeks elapse more slowly since Dad's truck, the pride of me n' Stan, bit the dust. No more hanging out the windows and lolling our tongues like the Briggs' dog on the hottest New York summer days. Stanley begged Mom to let him put an obituary in the Sunday paper. Ma finally relented and bought a dollar-fifty square. Stanley's poor spelling appeared at the very top of the obituary column on Sunday:

“Mr. Red Ford was in a tragick aksident june 5th and will be mised by all. he leavs behynd a Vokeswagin an the *ollll* field trakter. he dyed at the yung age of ate.”

Mom choked up when she read it. For an instant, I thought she was crying, but she held her stomach and was shaking so bad, I took it she was trying her darnedest to hold back a laugh. “Very good, Stanley,” she said. “Now the truck can rest in peace.”

“More like rust in pieces,” Dad grunted from behind his morning newspaper.

The depressing memory of our beloved truck seems mutual. Stanley frowns at a caterpillar fighting off some violent red ants.

“C’mon, Stan,” I call, walking toward the lake dock. Stanley follows obediently after grinding the caterpillar with his bare foot.

He perches on the edge of the lake dock, sucking at his bubblegum ice cream and licking his fingers. He tentatively dips his toes in the water, holding onto the dock with his free hand and leaning forward.

“Watch it,” I warn. “I’m not draggin’ you out if you fall in.”

Stanley glowers and wipes his nose on his sleeve. “Not gonna fall in.” Curling his toes, he lifts his legs up and quietly watches the water trickle from his ankles. The sun glances off the surface of the lake, its heat enfolding us like an unwanted sweater – the kind your grandma hand knits you for Christmas.

I wrinkle my nose meditatively. “Where’d ya get that?” I point at the medicine-colored ice cream.

“Ice cream man.”

“Probably stole the money...”

His face wrinkles in protest. “Didn’t! Mommy gave me some money,” he grins, sticking out his fluorescent pink tongue.

“Fibber,” I murmur quietly. Mosquitoes lazily skim the lake, fat with a feast of warm blood and apricot nectar. Water bugs breast stroke toward the dock, sensing the sickly sweet syrup of Stanley’s ice cream dripping into the water. “Stanley!” I exclaim reproachfully. “Idiot! You’re getting it all over your overalls.”

He brushes the pink mess away from his overalls, but ends up rubbing it further into the fabric. “Don’t call me that. Ma says so.”

“Call you what I like.”

Stanley stares at me defiantly. “No one can make me feel interior.”

I scowl. “In-fer-i-or, dummy.” I grin with superior enlightenment. “El’ner Rose-velt said that.”

Stanley gives me a confused, indignant look. “Never heard of him. I thought Dad said it.” He purses his lips. “Didn’ he said it?”

“Yeah, but he stole it from Ms. Rose-velt first...” I break off in a whisper “...that’s why Dad can’t hear in one ear. El’ner whacked him with her cane.”

Stanley’s eyes burst with surprise. “No he didn’t!” he shrieks emphatically. Then he drops to a whisper. “He did? Is that lady our grandma?”

I snort and slap the back of his head lightly. “No, stupid! She’s the queen!”

“Ohhh...” He stares at his hands with sudden reverence. “Bet she knew Mommy. Mom knows everyone.”

“Pro’bly.”

Stanley squirms uncomfortably. “Wan’ some ice cream? I don’t wan’ it any more.”

“Naw.” I lean back against a dock support and watch Mrs. Briggs snip buds and lush flowers off her prized hybrid tea roses. She has a habit of lecturing us about Latin flower names over the fence every time we get too close to her rose patch. Plant foetidas to keep the rodents out. Onagraceae make good box flowers. Don’t plant your rosaceae too close together. I make a mental note: dig up one of her bushes and ransom it tomorrow.

“Stanley?” I say quietly.

Stanley stirs next to me. “What?” he replies sleepily.

“What do you figure heaven is like?”

He sighs and screws up his face. “Bet it has mosquitoes. Jessica – Mayborn, the one that lives over there – she said all the animals go to heaven. Even the germs.”

“I bet it’s like Glenville. Dad says the people here are too stupid to be sinners.” I close my eyes and lean against the bank. “Maybe it’s like summer vacation...”

Why can’t the world always be like this, I wonder thoughtfully. Don’t have to think about anything. Ice cream man every few days.

Yup, I finally decide, *this* is heaven. In the Glenville sun, the obscurities of tradition evaporate. And the old folks and lake leeches and little kids and husbands snoozing in their motor boats make all the other months seem like a waste of time.

Eve

Rogers HS, 10th Grade

Maria's Tears

Alone in the dark attic, Maria traced the carvings on the chair's arm. It was blanketed with dust, and her finger left a trail like a wandering traveler on a snowy day. This chair had been her father's. It had been his baby. Every night, after a hard day's work, he would march through their creaky door and gladly settle down to be with his family. Now all this chair did was collect dust.

She stopped running her finger along the intricate design. Her eyes traveled to the lone window in the tiny room. Light streamed down in a pillar and Maria saw the tiny particles of dust floating around in the air. It was summer, her father's favorite time of year. She thought of the cool grass waiting outside that her father always said was nature's carpet. Grief tightened her chest and her throat felt dry. But she did not cry.

Tears had long since caressed her cheeks. Maria's mother told her that tears were cleansing and that she should end her grief by crying. That was exactly why Maria did not cry. She had always disliked her mother, and her resentment grew even more when her father had died. Maria's mother had stopped mourning so soon; it seemed she did not care. Maria was still grieving. She felt she always would be.

Biting her lip, Maria turned back to the dusty chair she had been fingering earlier. Did she dare sit in her father's precious chair? Doing so would mean accepting that her father was gone. Dead. As long as Maria never sat in that chair, she felt there was always a chance he might come back. That he might suddenly open the attic door, burst in, and sit for a chat with his only daughter. If she was sure not to sit in his chair, it would be open for him to return to.

Maria blinked rapidly to keep from crying. The grief was still so near. Every day felt like the day he died, and every time a piece of his property was discarded it felt like a part of him was being destroyed. She couldn't do it. She couldn't sit in his chair. There was no way that Maria could accept her father's death. The death that she most lamented. He could not be gone. There had to be some hope left.

To take her mind off the chair, Maria looked to his other belongings in the attic. Her father's clothes sat in an unruly heap in the corner. Maria embraced the fading fabric and smelled the cloth. Under all the dust, it was still there. The scent of her father. His essence. Maria drank it all in, wishing she did not have to travel up to the attic to smell that. To see her father.

He had loved her so much. Maria knew that. She had loved him dearly as well. When he died, it felt like the end of the world for her. There was nothing for Maria to live for. Nothing for her to enjoy. There would be no safety net for her to fall back on when she failed. No one to love her.

Suddenly, Maria heard the loud clomping of her mother climbing the stairs to the attic. She quickly placed the shirt she had been smelling back in its place and tried to act like she was doing nothing. Her mother burst through the door and turned on the light. She looked sad and slowly closed the door behind her.

"Niña," she almost whispered, "What are you doing up here again? You've been coming up here since we moved your papa's things here. Don't think I haven't noticed."

"It has nothing to do with Papa!" Maria spat at her mother, who was used to the tone.

Her mother's eyes softened and she held out her arms to her daughter. "Come here, Maria."

Maria did as her mother commanded, although she

wished to do otherwise. Her mother gathered her in a warm embrace and stroked her hair.

“You cannot fool me, *niña*,” she whispered soothingly, “I know why you are here. You miss him. And I do too, Maria. I miss him with all my heart.”

“Then why do you not show it!” Maria yelled angrily, pulling away from her mother, “You got over his death almost a few days after he left us. If you truly loved him, how could you do that? How could you forget so quickly?”

“No, no, no, *hija de mi alma*. I didn’t forget,” she assured Maria. “Of course. I will never forget. Never ever. I loved your papa very much. And because I loved him, I had to move on. I had to try to go on without him. Your papa wouldn’t have wanted me to waste away, hoping that someday he’d come back, even when I knew it was impossible. He would want me to live a good life. And he would want you to do the same.”

With that she kissed Maria on the head and silently left the attic. Maria stood, letting her mother’s words sink in. Could she really accept her father’s death after so much denial?

Images suddenly flooded her head. Her father smiling over a giant birthday cake. Her father pushing her on the rusty swings at the park. Her shining eyes when he came home from work each day. That was what she missed. That was her father.

Closing her eyes, Maria reminisced. She could hear his laughter. The sweet, deep sound echoed off the empty room in her heart that he had once filled. Her heart ached like the day he died and another memory came to Maria. It was of her father’s last moments. She could see the white hospital bed and his starched blankets. The dim lights overhead had flickered as she sat by the lonely bed. Her father was in it. His normally shining eyes were dull and his mouth bore a

grim smile. She remembered how she had fought back the tears. Then she remembered how her father had taken her hand and whispered his last words into her trembling ear.

“*Te quiero*, Maria. Always remember that. Always remember that I love you. Even when I am gone, I still will love you. Remember that.”

A single tear had rolled down her cheek as she whispered back, “*Te quiero*, Papa.”

And then he was gone. Maria opened her eyes. The memory hung in the air and she heard her father’s voice echoing throughout the attic. She still loved him. With all of her heart, she loved him. And he still loved her. Maria’s mother still loved him, so she was able to move on. She was able to know that although he was dead to the world, he would live on in her heart.

Without a shred of shame, Maria let herself cry for the first time since her father’s death. Tears streaming down her cheeks, Maria sat down in her father’s sacred chair. She bent down and kissed the minute carvings on the chair’s dusty arm.

“*Te quiero*, Papa.”

Carolyn

Ballou JH, 9th Grade

Pizza and Painting

Joshua Alexander McGaven, or Josh as he was better known, was a tall boy about sixteen with dark curly brown hair and blue eyes which were now staring in embarrassment at the boy in front of him.

How awful, I have to ask the geekiest boy in the whole school for help. First my parents lecture me about spending too much time playing basketball, and now I have to get Allen to tutor me? he thought; pushing his way through the crowded lunch room towards Allen. It was tempting to just turn around and go back to his table where his friends were waiting, but he couldn't do that now, his parents would find out and he didn't want to disappoint them. So he reluctantly walked up to the lunch line where Allen was waiting patiently to buy his food.

"Allen?" He asked, "Could I talk to you for a minute?"

"I don't let people copy my homework," Allen replied, pushing his glasses up with one hand.

"No, it's not that, I need a math tutor and I was," he sighed, "wondering if you would tutor me?" Josh glanced around to make sure that none of his friends were looking.

"Sure," Allen said, his face softening, "as long as you're willing to listen to me."

"Okay, how 'bout tomorrow? After school?"

"Sure."

"Thanks!" Josh said; then dashed back towards his table, and safety.

That wasn't so bad, he thought, as he sat back down. Thankfully no one noticed that he had been gone, so he relaxed.

The next day, Josh had almost forgotten about Allen's math tutoring and it probably would have slipped his mind completely if he hadn't passed Allen in the hallway who said, "See you after school, in the library."

For the rest of the day he had a sickening feeling; the dread of the upcoming tutoring, but before he knew it, he was sitting at one of the tables in the library, math book open, waiting for Allen to come.

Five minutes passed and Allen didn't come. Josh shifted, looking at the clock he wondered if Allen wasn't coming after all. Ten minutes; hearing someone enter the library and looking up he was relieved to see that it wasn't Allen. Fifteen minutes; he thought of how he would explain to his mom that the tutor hadn't shown up so he'd just have to give up. There must be an easier way of getting a good grade in math without studying.

The door opened; this time, much to Josh's dismay, it was Allen, holding three large books in one hand and juggling a few paint brushes in the other.

"Sorry I'm late," he said setting his things down on the table.

"I'll say you're late!" Josh remarked, "Where were you?"

"Nowhere," Allen replies, "Let's get started."

The minutes dragged on, until finally tutoring time was over. Quickly, Josh thanked Allen, then ran off to his car, and safety.

Weeks passed, and this became a routine, Josh would sneak into the library, Allen would come in late, Josh would reprimand him, then Allen would tutor him, Josh would thank him, and then rush out to the safety of his car, and home.

Finally Josh asked Allen why he was always late. To

which Allen merely replied, "I have a prior commitment."

That seemed to settle the matter, at least, until it gnawed at Josh's mind, almost as much as his upcoming math test. He decided to find out what Allen was up to.

So, when he got a chance, he looked at the class assignment board, seeing that the juniors were in the Computer room, he snuck out of class five minutes before the bell rang. He waited outside the Computer room door, searching for Allen, but he couldn't find him anywhere.

Discouraged, he went to the library, and was astonished to find that Allen was already there.

"Where have you been?" Allen asked.

"I was uhh... in the bathroom," he answered.

There wasn't much conversation after that, other than Allen explaining how to do certain problems and asking about how Josh felt that he did on his math test.

That night he couldn't help wondering about Allen.

There is a lot more to that guy than there seems. If only I could figure out what's going on with him.

A light tap on the door interrupted his thoughts.

"Come in," he said. His mother entered, a light smile resting on her face.

"Can I talk to you for a minute?" she asked.

Josh nodded and stiffened his posture; ready for a lecture.

"I heard about your grade on your math test from your math teacher already," she said.

"And?"

"You got a 98%," she smiled, "good job honey, and because of your hard work, I'm going to take you out to

pizza, and you can bring one friend. Okay?"

"That's awesome! Thanks mom."

"Alright, you sleep well okay?"

"Sure, thanks mom," Josh said as she left the room.

He spent the rest of that night and the following day, thinking about who to invite to his pizza party. His reoccurring thought was Allen. But he didn't want to invite someone like that. Someone so unpopular. Besides, he wanted to have fun.

But, then again, he might have fun with Allen. They were becoming friends; they actually talked, and Allen was a lot better than Josh had thought he would be.

He resigned finally, to invite Allen. So, he went to Allen's computer class, at the end of the day to tell him, as they didn't meet for tutoring on Thursdays because of Josh's basketball practice.

He was surprised not to find Allen anywhere, but, determined to tell him that day, he asked the computer teacher, Mr. Campbell, who said that Allen was in the Art room.

Hurrying to the Art room, he breathed a sigh of relief to find Allen standing at the far wall, paint brushes in hand, painting a mural.

"Wow! What an awesome painting!" he said.

Allen looked up from his painting red faced, "W-what are you doing here?"

"I wanted to invite you to pizza with me and my mom," Josh paused; taking in the painting.

It was of the library, people were sitting at tables studying, and right in the center of the painting were Josh and Allen with a large math book between them.

"That's so cool. Did you paint this?" he asked.

Allen nodded, wiping his brushes off.

“I’ve done some of my own painting,” Josh said, “but not like this.”

“Thanks, I think.”

“So, would you like to come with me and my mom to pizza this Saturday?”

“Who else is coming?”

“Just you, me, and my mom,” Josh answered, “She said I could bring one friend.”

“Friend?” Allen questioned

“Friend,” Josh smiled.

The two boys stood for a moment in silence, and looked at the painting.

“Wanna come over to my house?” Josh asked.

“Sure,” Allen replied.

The boys headed out of the Art room, and Josh found that he didn’t mind Allen’s many pens protruding from his pocket; he didn’t mind the large glasses, and he didn’t mind being Allen’s friend.

Larissa

Covenant HS, 10th Grade

Short Stories



Grades 11 & 12

Pistachios

Lewis suddenly woke up with the sound of his alarm clock and then pressed the snooze button, which turned on the radio. The radio was tuned to a station that hardly gave more than weather and traffic reports. From time to time, global news and local news were mentioned but only if the news was drastically important. The traffic report said that there were a few accidents due to the temperature dropping drastically in the early morning during a slight rainstorm, which made the roads a bit icy and changed the rain to sleet. They made no comments about how this could affect a person's travel to reach their job, which was how Lewis preferred it. He didn't like people telling him how his life was going to be changed because of some kind of event. He had decided that his life was his business and no one else's. The weather was simple, only a mere mention of temperatures being in the lower forties with a slight chance of rain at noon. Snow was possible, but there was no mention of snow being a problem for anyone. If it were to snow, a few inches of wet snow would be expected, and no more. Lewis waited until the traffic and weather reports were done then shut off his alarm clock.

Lewis turned his alarm clock toward him as he got out of bed and then stared at the time in wide-eyed horror. He should have arrived at work almost ten minutes ago. It usually took Lewis a full hour to get ready to go to work, which gave him enough time to shave, shower, eat, get dressed, and check the traffic reports a second time. Now Lewis barely had time to make himself look decent. Lewis dashed into his closet and snatched a shirt, a tie, and a pair of pants off their hangers so quickly that each hanger broke in half. He only had a single piece of bread for breakfast, which he wadded

into a ball and chewed it as he shaved in the shower. As he was buttoning up his shirt, he heard a clang of metal against metal, then the crash of metal against brick. Lewis stopped and listened carefully. He could have sworn he heard birds chirping a moment ago, or a background noise of some sort. Now that was gone. With shirttails flying behind him, he ran out of the bathroom to check his home for any damage. As he glanced out one of the windows overlooking the front yard, he saw a flutter of his neighbor's curtains across the street. The house had a massive chunk missing from its left side, and a rusty red pickup truck was sitting in the rubble. The curtain was fluttering in a dry wind, waving for help from its shattered window.

The windows of the truck were cracked so badly that they looked like crystal spider webs. The windshield was mostly gone, with only a shard here and there left standing. Among the rubble in front of the truck, he could make out three people lying still. Lewis guessed that they were the former occupants of the truck. They were all covered in a light dust, probably from the bricks that had been pulverized in the crash.

Lewis was torn. That was someone else's truck, someone else's house, and someone else's friends. If those three people had felt like racing with another car despite the dangers, it wasn't his place to question them. Lewis just wanted to finish getting dressed and then get to work as quickly as possible. But at the same time, he wanted to go help those three people. They could be alive. He could save them. The crash could have been just an accident, and those three could be well-meaning people.

If Lewis went out to help those people, he wouldn't be able to get to work until much later. He stepped away from the window and tried to avert his eyes, but his gaze stuck fast to the truck. He imagined himself in their position, lying in the dust, hoping for someone to help them so they could live.

Lewis tried to turn away again, but he felt a deep penetrating stab at his heart. It seemed easier to just leave them there, but he knew it wasn't right. Lewis realized he could never live with himself if he simply left them for dead. Lewis rushed into the bathroom and grabbed as many bandages and medicines as he could hold. Then he flew out his front door and across the street.

A few hours later, Lewis was sitting in his living room back at home, mentally and also physically exhausted. The crash was headline news and he had been interviewed by at least five different news networks before the entire ordeal was over. The three people were at the hospital now, but they were expected to have a full recovery. One of the medics on the scene told Lewis that if he hadn't been there they would have bled to death. Lewis' boss was overjoyed that one of his workers was so caring for other people so he gave Lewis the day off. A coworker was in tears because those three people were her cousins. Lewis' phone was unplugged because of nonstop calls from newspapers and neighbors.

For now, all he wanted was peace and quiet and something to calm his nerves. Lewis walked into the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. He searched around and found what his doctor called his "comfort food," which was a bag of pistachios. Lewis always enjoyed the process of opening the shell to get at the edible nut inside. He hated the shells that were still closed because they took astounding effort to open and then the nut lacked any flavor. The shells that were partially open, however, were easy to open and tasted good as well.

Lewis got a bowl to hold the shells and sat down at the dining room table. He reached into the bag and pulled out a promising pistachio. However this one was completely seamless. It wouldn't be worth the effort to open it. As Lewis reached back into the bag for another, he realized he was like a pistachio, of sorts. He practically separated himself from

everyone for most of his adult life until now, so in that case he was like one of those closed pistachios: hard to open and not worth the effort to open. Lewis realized that he could still have his privacy, like the partially opened pistachios, if he got to know the neighbors and his coworkers at work. Bracing himself for the onslaught of phone calls, Lewis picked up the telephone cord and plugged it back into the wall.

Drew

Emerald Ridge HS, 11th Grade

Alaskan Way

A man in a black Armani suit kicked the side of his silver BMW, as he cursed to himself the frustrations every human being feels when their car breaks down. He threw his jacket on the cold sidewalk and stood under the orange streetlights, sighing in reminiscence of the way the worst day of his life was turning out. He felt as if he were the most cursed man on earth as he looked back at the smoke seeping through the hood of his 60,000 dollar sports car. Rain began to fall from the dark Seattle sky in piercingly frigid drops and the man bent down to retrieve the jacket that was earlier a victim of his previous temper tantrum. This retrieval caused his own business cards to descend out of his pocket and into a nearby puddle. The perfect, ivory white cards that used to display legibly, Jonathon Dougston—Attorney at Law, rapidly transformed into a moist, grey slab of tree sap in the icy puddle. The cursed attorney bent down once again in agony to pick up the ruins of his business cards.

“This day just keeps getting better and better,” he mumbled under his breath. When Mr. Dougston returned to his upright position, he spotted a man in front of him, holding out a cold, pleading dirt-stained hand. The attorney rolled his eyes in annoyance and in an emotionless tone, told the beggar, “I’m sorry, I don’t have anything.” The street dweller put the begging hand over his mouth, while he coughed heavily, and then to the attorney’s wish, continued down the sidewalk of Alaskan Way. Turning his wrist in a certain fashion to view the time on his watch, the attorney glanced at the time, and knew that he would have to call someone on his Motorola cell phone to be rescued out of his situation. But what about his mental state? Mr. Dougston knew he was 10 times more qualified for making partner with the firm, than

his villainous colleague. The attorney paced the sidewalks a few minutes, trying to make sense out of his life full of flaws and the thought of the great perfection every one who surrounded him had that he did not. He reached into his pocket for his cell phone, flipped it open like an angry child and dialed information for a tow truck. With the arrival of the tow truck, the worrisome night of the cursed attorney soon faded.

The next morning, the attorney was awakened by the haunting ring of his home phone an hour earlier than his usual time of rising. The number on the screen of his phone looked vaguely familiar.

“Hello?”

“Johnny?”

The attorney had not been called by his childhood nickname for years, so instantly he identified the caller as his mother.

“Yes, mother. What is it?”

There was an indefinite pause, and then the sobbing woman continued, “It’s, it’s your little brother. They have found him. He’s dead Johnny. He’s dead.”

The doctors labeled his cause of death due to prolonged exposure to the cold and a severe case of Tuberculosis. The drive to the funeral home in the attorney’s newly repaired car was treated like a routine drive to the market. He had not seen his brother since a decade before when the stubborn, young boy stormed down the stairs, promising, “he would never return” and then slamming the door behind him.

The attorney held in all the anguish and sadness that boiled inside of him. In his line of work, it was best to keep emotions unseen. Getting used to this made it hard for the

man in the black Armani suit to cry, despite his desire to. The attorney walked to the casket that would serve as the only reunion for him and his younger sibling. He tried to prepare himself for the cold face he was about to look upon in the cherry oak coffin. Finally, he stepped up to his little brother's resting place. He first looked at the red roses spread over his chest, then at his hands. The bearded man that used to be his baby brother possessed familiar hands; cold hands, pleading hands, dirt-stained hands.

Tiffany

Emerald Ridge HS, 12th Grade

The Dancer

Miss Lapinova Dale was a dancer. A marvelous one at that, but none were so lucky to know. She danced the rhapsody of the city streets. She danced the summer afternoon. Her movements could even catch the sly smile one friend gives to another when the two share a private, silent joke. And yet, with all her dancing, she kept it hidden. At the table she took special care to knock over a glass at least once a week. She slouched, she klunked, she tromped through the day, and danced at night—only at night.

Her mother always said, “Lapinova, you are a very sweet child, but so ungraceful. It’s a wonder you’ve survived thus far.”

Her father always said, “Lapinova, you are a beautiful girl, why do you hide all hunched over that way?”

Her siblings were indifferent.

After the sun sank on a particularly difficult day—the urge to dance was horrific with the symphony playing her favorite sonata throughout the school—she closed her door like every other night, opened her closet, reached far into the back, and took out her dance costume. She smoothed the skirt’s wrinkles, set the hat securely over her head, and snuck out her window into the pale moonlight. The night was brisk, and she shivered, but she began to dance anyway. A dog howled, a cat yowled, birds woke and flew to watch. She was startled, never having such an audience before, but she didn’t lose footing. The wind picked up, blowing her skirt about, and throwing up cast away pine needles, still Lapinova never faltered. She took the wind and made it her partner. She danced to the animal’s cries, and floated along with the breeze. It carried her closer and closer to her house, but she

did not notice. She danced and danced, only the crash stopped her. She hit the side of the house and fell onto her bum.

“What the—” a light went on in her parents room.

“Who’s there?” boomed her father’s voice. “I’m warning you, we do not take kindly to trespassers here.”

Lapinova’s heart caught in her throat. She couldn’t bear to have her dancing known by anyone. What if no one liked it? What if she was awful?

A big yellow dog that had come to watch the dance barked up at the window. She smiled gratefully towards it.

“It was only a dog, dear.” came her mother’s voice. “Get back in bed.”

She waited until the house was silent once again, then got up to dance. But this time, the animals had left; the wind had stopped. She had no audience, and her partner had left for a different dance. Only the blank faced moon watched her. Lapinova could not stand it. She had experienced an audience. She had been watched, and enjoyed. She had danced her best just before hitting the wall. Lapinova stopped dancing early that night.

The next morning she cut out an ad for Madam Pirouette’s ballet school and posted it on the fridge. When asked by her mother, “Why the sudden interest in dance?” she coolly answered:

“I believe it can do something for my posture.”

Megan

Gig Harbor HS, 12th Grade