

2005 Winners

Final Judges:
David Whited
Lorie Ann Grover



Our Own
Words

Poetry Winners

Grades 7 & 8

1 st	A Rocking Horse by Heather Perry	8th	Aylen JH
2 nd	Black by Briana Bowers	7th	Homeschool
3 rd	Stones by Nicholas Robinson	7th	Kopachuck MS

Grades 9 & 10

1 st	The Poem In All Of US by Krystal Blackburn	10th	Spanaway Lake HS
2 nd	Simply Me by Madison Graffe	10th	Gig Harbor HS
3 rd	Balloons by Jessie Roy	10th	Emerald Ridge HS

Grades 11 & 12

1 st	Life The Light by Benjamin Love	12th	Covenant HS
2 nd	Fat by Grace Crumpton	11th	Tacoma School of the Arts
3 rd	Daddy by Lynnette Vermillion	11th	Orting HS

Short Story Winners

Grades 7 & 8

1 st	Summer by Carolyn Anderson	7th	Mason MS
2 nd	These Dreams Kill by Victoria Fragoso	8th	St. Charles Borromeo
3 rd	Ming-lan's Notebook by Katherine Ling Caras	7th	Ferrucci JH

Grades 9 & 10

1 st	On Wing by Stephanie Dering	10th	Rogers HS
2 nd	The Goose Father by Tami Kim	10th	Lakes HS
3 rd	American Barbie by Tessa Erickson	9th	Lakeridge JH

Grades 11 & 12

1 st	Gone Fishin' by John Lenzo	11th	Homeschool
2 nd	Café Family by Rebecca Sevin	12th	Clover Park HS
3 rd	Untitled by Hannah Wickstrom	12th	Covenant HS

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Poetry

Grades 7 & 8



Our Own
Words

A Rocking Horse

A rocking horse
With torn fabric,
An eye missing,
Ragged mane,
Frayed tail,
But in the one good eye
There are many stories to be told,
Times when a day never went by
When it wasn't ridden by a child,
Children loved this simple toy
For simply what it was,
And left it loved and old,
They kept the memories of good times
Fresh in their minds.

Heather Penny

Aylen JH, 8th Grade

Black

Black is the sky, Black is the night
Black is the bird that takes to the air in flight
Black is space, Black is the rock
Black is the asteroid that falls down to earth
Black is the mane, Black is the tail
Black is the horse that runs free and wild
Black is the coal, Black is the smoke
Black makes the fires that warm our homes
Black are your eyes, Black is your hair
Black are your features that make me smile
Black is the sky, Black is tonight
Black is the color that makes me feel right

Briana Bowers

Homeschool, 7th Grade

Stones

Stones are observing,
As they have always done,
As they always will.
Caring not for the chains of age.
If only they could tell me,
Their secrets, their desires, their memories,
I would be the richest in the world,
For stones are the historians of time as no others are.
Stones see everything,
As man never could.
They see the bustling of man's short life,
And they laugh at the frailty of human age.
A stone is eternity.

Nicholas Robinson
Kopachuck MS, 7th Grade

Poetry

Grades 9 & 10



*Our Own
Words*

The Poem In All Of Us

There is a poem in all of us if we'd take the time to find
A story unfolds of a young boy's love for his mother, soft and kind.
Or perhaps of a woman's glory as she shares her thoughts and mind
We could enjoy the poem in all of us if we'd take the time to find.

There is a poem in all of us and if we tried to understand
We would see why she weeps at night from the fear of her
 lover's hand.
Or the hopes of a child alive in a world where war plagues the land
Let us read the poem in all of us and try to understand.

There is a poem in all of us, could we stop to recognize?
If we each paid heed to another's poem there'd be less angered eyes.
This place in which we live could be cleansed of deeds that terrify
If that poem in all of us would just be recognized.

If time permitted me so, though my heart might not endure
I'd read that poem in all of us, of this I am quite sure.

Krystal Blackburn

Spanaway Lake HS, 10th Grade

Simply Me

My identity is in danger, though you cannot see,
 So many cliques, not one I want to be.
The cheerleaders that prance around, graceful in every way,
 The jocks that always succeed in any sport they play.
The punks that walk around, thinking they're hardcore,
And the preps that diss the punks, whom they secretly adore.
 The nerds, the geeks, the freaks, and the weirdoes,
My high school life is like looking through a window.
 I see the cliques and want to give in,
 I want to belong, to be one of them.
But when the light hits the window, I can truly see,
 The person that I'm meant to be,
 Simply me.

Madison Grafte

Gig Harbor HS, 10th Grade

Balloons

For my birthday, I received a bouquet
of balloons. They bobbed behind me as I ran, white streamers
tightly clenched in one fist, pink and red
and more white. My hair crackled with a Styrofoam noise.

The next day, they hung in midair,
occasionally limping up (ungracefully)
to glare at me (reproachfully), then sinking down again.

Later they lounged, shrunken. Few were
still apple-firm; most were like flaccid walnuts, or
grapefruits. Their ribbons tangled
behind them, drawn and looped like tapeworms.

With regret, I punctured them, and watched with vague
horror as their helium-breath left them
and they died.

Jessie Roy

Emerald Ridge HS, 10th Grade

Poetry

Grades 11 & 12



Our Own
Words

Life The Light

What life is there in dark and dismal night?
The light's the life that rises every day.
Not rain nor sleet that showers down the ground,
But sunshine pouring out its bright array.
A golden sun breaks forth the fruitful spring,
Awakening the cold and cloudy skies.
As buds arise and flaunt their colors bright,
And creatures open misty, shrouded eyes.
The darkness runs and hides beneath the earth
For shelter in the graves of dust and grime.
Death's glory gone and grip released of life.
What room is there for dark in sun's set time?
When piercing light grows strong and higher still,
No shade shall stand, the shadows sink past hills.

Benjamin Love

Covenant HS, 12th Grade

Fat

I find her in the girl's room, slumped against a bathroom stall
She is crying
A puddle of sadness lies at her feet

"I wish I were beautiful," she says.

I stand in a corner close to the door
Huff, huff, huff
Trying to catching my breath
After chasing her
After they called her that name

Fat

And she is crying, crying tears like she could fill the ocean

Grace Crumpton

Tacoma School of the Arts, 11th Grade

Daddy

Daddy, why did you do the things you did?

Didn't you love me?

I know now you are the one with the problem, not me.

You're the one who left a daughter and son.

How do you even sleep at night?

Do you ever wonder if we're all right well.....we are,
mommy tucks us in tight.

Sometimes I forgive you and miss you,
mommy makes it alright.

You broke your children when you left that night,
mommy is here to make it alright.

We are all okay mommy's here and its alright but daddy.....

late late at night if you ever wonder we're alright!

Lynnette Vermillion

Orting HS, 11th Grade

*Short
Stories*

Grades 7 & 8



*Our Own
Words*

Summer

Every now and then Mom and Dad bundle Trent and me into the car and take us for a walk. Tearing us surly teenagers away from our individual posts at the computer and TV is no easy task, but every so often they manage it, and we trundle off to park the car somewhere and take a family walk. Today is one such day, yet another lovely Sunday afternoon in Fircrest, Washington.

“So, Trent,” I say, as we pass by the evergreen trees, the ever-blooming pansies, and the bungalow-style houses of Proctor, painted in the ugliest shades of mint and teal greens ever invented, “Have you asked anyone to the prom yet?”

Grunt.

“Ooh, what’s her name?” I inquire a little too enthusiastically. “Helen!” scolds my mom. “Don’t embarrass him now! He won’t tell us about it afterwards.”

Grunt. I drop the subject, and stare out the window at the 1940’s houses outside. The scenery reminds me of sprinklers, saltwater taffy, sidewalk chalk, and the scent of the local swimming pool - summer, in short. I love each season equally and separately (a sign either of my short attention span or my wide perspective, I don’t know which), but summer brings back all the memories of being a little girl again. Summer, for a child, is a time when they go to bed tucked in and still laughing over the stories Mom and Dad tell from their childhood, and wake up to the promise of love and laughter and lemonade. I want to wear lime green again, and have my mother braid my hair in pigtails, or wear saltwater sandals and eat bologna and Wonder Bread sandwiches.

Instead, Mom parks the car and we all get out at Owens Beach. Owens Beach is one of our family’s favorite haunts for family walks. The sidewalk at Owens Beach is engraved with poetry, and has little mosaics of shells, sea glass, and dice, or bottle caps, around little holes that do nothing but collect dead leaves and litter. There is something poetical that could be made of that, but I do not know exactly what, so I content myself with reading the poetry others have engraved on the path. Mom starts picking herself a bouquet of horsetails.

“Mom,” says Trent scornfully, “Look at your hands. You’re going to get mud all over the car.” She laughs and wipes her hands on her pants, which only makes it worse, of course.

“Mom,” I say, “What are you going to do with those?”

“Put them in a vase,” she says innocently.

“Those are weeds,” my Dad protests.

She shrugs and picks some ferns to tease him with. When I was little we called them “daddy-teasers” because he hates the little spores on the back. Perhaps it is revenge, but he finds the tiniest, most overgrown, invisible rabbit track to follow in the whole place, and plunges onwards. He has the utmost confidence that we will follow and that it will not lead him straight into a ditch; we have prayers.

“Soon you’ll be off in college with your party friends, Trent, and you’ll forget all about us,” says Mom, teasingly.

“You’d better not have party friends,” says Dad.

“Of course Trent will have party friends. He’s just a party guy!”

“Oh, yeah. We’re gonna have wild parties in my dorm with everyone we know until three A.M. every night, and if anyone complains, well, we’ll just invite them, too, and we’ll be so cool that they’ll come.”

“Who’s this we?” asks Mom.

“Trent always talks in plural, Mom. That’s just how cool he is.”

Though we joke about it, I am insecure about Trent leaving for college next year. I have never been the only child in the house, and I am not looking forward to it. Trent was always there to tease, to debate, argue, and laugh with, to blow off steam on, to give me rides to rehearsals, and lend me CD’s. I have always had a brother to roll my eyes with over school, parents, and the world in general. It will not be the same having the computer to myself when I get home from school. I will be alone with my cousin at family get-togethers. It will be so quiet; no band practice or CD’s playing in the next room, and no singing in the shower. We will not have the lovely political, historical, and philosophical debates, or long walks like this one. I will be so alone.

We walk on a little in silence, pondering and panting replacing our laughter. The woods are beautiful, green with the new spring plants. Flowers never grow here, but out of the fallen fir trees sprout tiny bright green plants. Others may consider them weeds, but I think that is only their perspective. A weed is any plant growing where it is not wanted, and these plants are perfect just where they are. My brother never thinks anything is a weed; whether this is because of his accepting nature or his aversion to gardening, I have never known.

“Vashon Island looks so close today. You could just take a tightrope and walk all the way across,” Dad observes.

“Helen would trip and fall in,” says my kind older brother.

“I wonder who Vashon was named after,” I say, dreamily, choosing to ignore Trent’s comments on my coordination.

“Saint Vashon the Magnificent,” says Trent promptly.

“I don’t believe you,” says Mom, as well she shouldn’t.

I used to imagine the people that the islands near us are named after. I don’t know who any of them are named after really, but I like to imagine the kinds of people that get islands named after them. When I was little, I imagined everything had a personality. My bike, the trees in our yard, and even one of my dresses - I gave names to everything. I used to think that numbers and letters all had colors, and gender. A was red and female, B was blue and something of a humbug, and C was young and pink and female. Now the world seems so much more distant, and yet I read what people from England, Australia, and China think about poetry, knitting, and books every day on the Internet. The world has shrunk, and lost some of its childhood glamour, but life is not boring. It is a beautiful mosaic of friends and family, of color and light, and of summer and winter, spring and fall. Darkness and cold, bitterness and gloom are woven in too, but only to contrast. Unhappy things never happen without casting light on some other area that will bring us joy. Trent will be leaving our house this fall, but life will go on. He will come back for Christmas, or to get his clothes washed. We will call him, or he will call us. He might even burn me copies of some of his CD’s first. Winter never comes in Washington without summer, and we love the sunny July days all the more for the rest of the long, rainy year.

Carolyn Anderson

Mason MS, 7th Grade

These Dreams Kill

“It hurts too much to dream like that, Bhuvan.”

Lily heard the faraway voice echo; soft as a lullaby and louder than her heart.

“Yes, it does.” Lily responded to no one; her words tearing at the stillness of the night, “These dreams kill.”

Dreams were Grimm, Andersen, and Kipling fairytales—movies and sweet cotton candy at the carnival. They were closer than flesh, but farther than God’s unending wisdom; short-lived, delusional, and unattainable. Hope-lifting; faith-burning.

Lily had built a world. A dream-world of Toons, Rock Gods, Genies, Bazaars, Superpowers, Gelato, Swing Clubs, and River Highways of Gondolas and Sailboats. She designed a country of bustling wilderness, inhabited by talking animals—inspired by *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, *My Father’s Dragon*, and *Ponpoko*—and Western mining towns with saloons playing clinky piano tunes, neon cities of buildings unlimited by sky—replications of Jack’s Beanstalk—and Star Wars space travel to planets beyond. Soon after, she witnessed its destruction—a Pompeii reenactment; burned, trapped, and enveloped with stone by the Growing-Up process: realization of possibility and impossibility, sense and nonsense.

“The only way I used to be able to stand being in this world was to hold it in my hands, in front of my eyes. That way I thought—it can’t get me or something.”²

Lily, however, had never opened her eyes to the world of Sacrifices, Crime, and Power Struggles. These things which

occurred every day in Reality had never been introduced in Bazaar-Genie-Super-Swing Land.

“There are too many babies. And diseases. And crazy psychos,” Lily remembered My Secret Agent Lover Man saying, “The world’s a mess.”²

Then the lanka witch, Vixanne, always watching Jayne Mansfield movies and denying the grief, “Some people see more than others. It gets worse. You must not look at it. You must forget. Forget everything.”²

She tried. God knows how much Lily struggled to close her hazel eyes, singing “Childhood living is easy to do. The things you wanted I bought them for you,”³ and chatting to Peter Pan’s shadow—trailing in fiction-world wake. She became a misanthrope—withdrawn from classmates and family—the people who had regretted their crummy lives as well, but who had discovered something worthwhile.

Now orchestral music replaced Lily’s Beatles-Bangles-Rolling Stones-Kinks collection and weaved a straight-jacket cloud of tranquility over her, though she described it as an ever-warm winter coat. Steamy showers would fill her days, along with fireplace-sittings, and resting in lengthy afternoon naps.

“Holy girl, don’t get up for running. Stay like this on the hills of my chest. Don’t wake up, I feel strange when you go.”⁴ Lily sang lullaby goodbyes to Reality before returning to slumber; into Bazaar-Genie-Super-Swing Land.

“Suffering is a matter of choice.” Madjid preached as she was sucked into sleep, “We do not have to suffer anything in this life, if we are strong enough to deny it. When we suffer things, it means that we have lost control. So I will say that suffering is a human weakness.”⁵

Soon, Lily was living these words; she could ignore the pain—or withstand it, as she thought. The lack of friends, distance of family, and all other hardships of Reality didn't bother her; *couldn't*. Nothing ever hurt; except for the nightmares that came at night; the terrors unseen. And she could feel them ascending rapidly like a Song of Evil.⁶ But after the nightmares, all that existed was pain.

"I take the shoe boxes out. They are filled with newspaper clippings I used to have on my walls. 'Whales Die in Toxic Waters.' 'Beautiful Basketball God Gets Disease.' 'Family Burned in Gas Explosion.' 'Murder Collects Victims' Body Parts.' Pictures of all the pain I could find. A pain game."²

Newspaper headlines of chaos and disaster began floating around Lily's strive for separation from Reality. When she observed the homeless man at the bus stop begging for money, the flying whirlwind of wasted resources—fliers, pamphlets, magazines—and the cigarette butts littering Mother Earth, the words of Khaled repeated themselves over and over. They kept repeating themselves. Kept repeating themselves. Repeating themselves. Themselves.

"Suffering never stops. We only tell ourselves it does, to make the kids stop whimpering in their sleep."⁵

First there had been too much happiness. Then, too much pain. They had danced back and forth, shocking Lily each time and sending her thoughts into a flurry of gray pan-demonium.

"Is there a medium?" Lily asked the suffocating, Reality air. "Somewhere in between happiness and suffering that I can exist without pretending?" The Fun-House-twisted-mirror-world she had created rattled in its golden shackles; breaking again. And this time Lily was falling with it.

Memories were resurfacing and affecting Lily tremendously. She remembered her concerned parents, the classmates who had attempted to include "Dream-Girl-Lily" in their games, and how she had run away. "All they want is for me to remain here; to keep me unhappy." Lily had once thought, "Why else would they say there's something wrong with me?"

Nowadays Lily couldn't be sure. "I don't understand," she whispered, "I thought no one could see me; that I had fallen into yesterday. But now it seems they wanted me to be *happy*; to reside in Reality, and somehow stay alive, even with all the bad things." And a song arose with the memories, singing, "Now that I'm older, I know much more than I did back then, but the more I learn, the more I can't understand. And I've become content with this life that I lead, where I drink too much and don't believe in much of anything. And I lie to myself and say, 'It's for the best.' We're moving forward, but holding ourselves back, and we're waiting on something that will never come..."⁷

"Will I ever understand?"

Everything in Reality was full of doubt and inconsistency. But Lily knew that pretending would no longer save her.

"I look things right in the eye now. That's the best way. Right in the eye without anything to make it easier," says Vixanne. "Remember to look in the eye. That's what you taught me. Look at your own darkness."²

And then it materialized: just a flash of understanding, but that was all she needed. "These dreams kill," she repeated, "These dreams kill sadness and pain and horror. They destroy monsters of hate and sacrifice and the 'too much happiness' we have and keep it from squashing us."

From this, she realized she was not alone. The people she disregarded as slaves of Reality were now Courageous, Withstanding People who had once felt like she had, but who had learned.

“We learn from pain—for example, that fire burns and is dangerous—but what we learn from suffering is what unites us as one human people. Pain without suffering is like victory without struggle. We do not learn what makes us stronger or better or closer to God.”⁵

- 1 *Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India*. Aamir Khan.
- 2 *Dangerous Angels: The Weetzie Bat Books*. Francesca Lia Block.
- 3 “Wild Horses.” The Rolling Stones.
- 4 “Run.” Air.
- 5 *Shantaram*. Gregory David Roberts.
- 6 *The Pearl*. John Steinbeck.
- 7 “For the Best.” Straylight Run.

Victoria Fragoso

St. Charles Borromeo, 8th Grade

Ming-lan's Notebook

Almost every day since she stated that she wanted to be a writer, people have told Ming-lan what a good one needs to do. Her teachers taught her proper grammar, paragraph structure, and passage comprehension. But what she wants to learn is the hidden story within her.

Her mom often says that good writers are storytellers, intensely observant of people, places, and events. They learn to be insightful of others and themselves. Then, a need to put a story into words becomes a passion.

Long ago, her mom had lived in San Francisco's Chinatown. When she was eight, she received a gift from her parents that was described as a “weapon” for school – Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary. The Lan family had immigrated from China to America the year before, and Ming-lan's mom was still “doing battle” in school, fighting to speak and use English. She carried the heavy edition everywhere studying it page by page, “S” on the hard days and “Y” on the easy days. What grew out of necessity became enjoyment that led her mom to the library and a love of reading. This, the gift she gave to Ming-lan.

The storytellers in Ming-lan's family are all women. Grandma tells stories about the magical Chinese walking plants used for curing people, the White Haired River Ghost who saved villagers from Mongol attacks, and the Acrobat who balanced one hundred rice bowls on top of his head, and the Silk Weaver who wove robes for the Empress Dowager. Ming-lan's mother tells stories about her childhood in Chinatown. Grandma's brain eye predicts that Ming-lan will one day become a writer. Ming-lan struggles for it to come true.

In her bedroom, Ming-lan writes in her spiral notebook. For the last few years, she collected binders full of pictures, poems, and stories, all stored in a box. Sometimes she cries when she's unable to find her story because it's like someone desperately lost without a road map. But, somewhere, deep in her head she knows that she is happy when she creates plots, settings, and characters that are true. Ming-lan takes her pencil and writes.

Katherine Ling Caras

Ferrucci JH, 7th Grade

*Short
Stories*

Grades 9 & 10



*Our Own
Words*

On Wing

Unexpected it comes, on a yellow September afternoon; the magic finds a way into the apartment, into your room – a magic of birds and wings.

It is the wide white spread, the soft angles, the serrated feather edges, the way they fold and settle on the familiar golden skin of his back. Gently, because it looks so fragile and unreal, you stroke the crook of the joint with your fingers; gently you touch, you feel the heat and the pumping of veins close to the surface. He shivers beneath you, and what sensation must he be feeling – what does it feel like to have this, to have *wings*? You cannot even begin to imagine, except when you think about war veterans who have lost a limb and their phantom pains – perhaps you have only lost your wings, and for a second you imagine you feel them, stretching out behind and to your sides and into the air.

But it is only imaginary, and as you know this the feeling disappears. You are human above all, too grounded to be bird-like.

It is beautiful; it is strange. Who are you to judge? But there is no denying the glory, as the sun shines through the window and glances on the white sheets to make shadows of ridges, glances on dark hair and sinks in like velvet, settles in eyes that gleam but softer now, cooler. The glory captures you; the glow of the curtains and his body illuminated, the feathers so soft and brilliant. He looks at you and sees your eyes on the white shapes; he looks at you, reaches for your face with a hand, but you take his hand in yours and keep staring, staring. He says your name; you stop, now, look at his

face, in his eyes: he smiles. Leaning down you kiss him, and his lips are dry, yours cracked. A hand, now – your hand, touching where familiar and foreign merge, the throbbing heat upon his back, and he shivers (shudders, but no) and still he smiles.

When you leave for work he is looking to the window already, thinking, waiting. What is he thinking? He does not say; you do not know.

What is it, you ask him. *What is it*, again, when he does not answer. It is something silly, your question, and you wonder if the answer will be as well – if there is one. He barely speaks anymore, just looks at you, expects you to understand. Maybe he no longer has words for these things he feels. What do wings do to a mind? There must be some connection, you think; how could there not be some connection.

What is it. You make the accusation, prod him with this demand of a question. There is something hidden yet, there must be, because wings do not do this all on their own. Again, he looks away, turns to the side, and you can see their bumpy outlines under the blanket he has wrapped around his shoulders. You lose your question with this; your mind is absorbed in the sight of him, silhouette against the blue window. If he asked you what you meant by *it* you could not tell him. But he never asks.

You are almost glad of this except you feel like crying. Instead, you reach an arm around his waist, lightly holding him to you, both looking up at the patch of cloudy sky, both searching for something.

You miss hearing his voice.

He has changed. Obviously he has changed; that has what these past days or weeks or so have been, his change. But there is more than that, you know now. Much more.

Sometimes you feel like you do not know him anymore, and it is an awful thing to feel but you do anyway. How can you help it? He has changed.

Maybe people with wings do not need you any longer. There are fewer words between you, and more silences, longer ones, colder.

You spend time out of the house even when you do not have to; the streets are full of the ordinary. Once this would have pained you and you would have avoided the street-corners, the alleyways, the stores of people coming and going and coming; you would not linger among strange strangers, but go home to his arms for the night. Now it is comforting, the bustle and rush of the unknown, the mix of different people who all average out to normal.

Between your past and his wings, what normality is there? Between the white spread of sheets and tea-colored walls, his gold skin and your brown scars, the tangle of black and tawny hair, the glance of eyes and the absence of glances, what is there? You don't even know anymore. You don't know anything.

He does, though. When you come back late and mumble something about work – of course he knows. You would spare time to feel terrible about what you are doing (not doing) except you are tired and the bed calls. He calls, quietly (how he has changed), with his eyes, and he cannot see the wings spreading behind him but you can, and they spread wide. The feathers and joints are still warm under your touch, and he tries to smile, tries not to let you see him wince.

Some day the magic will have to leave, but you do not know when. Not until that night, when you wake up to find him gone, the sheets only barely warm, and a cold breeze coming through your open window. You can still smell him, there in the air, lingering, and you hold your breath and stay

there, perched, *oh*, on the edge of the bed, not getting up to look out the window, to look down. Physics are suddenly important, though who knows about these things in this new world of wings. But no, as the sun rises, you do not get up to close the window, cold as it is. Instead you leave the room, and retrieve the paper from the front door.

Perhaps one day you will wake and find yourself with magic sprouting from your shoulders, and a new desire in your mind. Perhaps that day you will take to the sky, and you will join him again, a pair of winged creatures. Perhaps.

Stephanie Dering

Rogers HS, 10th Grade

The Goose Father

The subway station was heavily packed with people heading home from work. He finally stepped out and began to drag his feet toward his apartment. He fumbled through his keys in front of the house, although he perfectly knew which one would open the door. Even after holding the right key, he hesitated for a moment before fitting it into the hole. He took a big breath, opened the door wide, and stepped inside.

Without taking off his shoes, he stood at the entrance. He opened his arms wide for his son to run into. His daughter hurried out of her room and gave him a big kiss. Sweet aromas of curry rice and spicy scents of Kimchi drifted enticingly in the air, as his wife came out of the kitchen.

When the light was turned on, however, there was nobody to welcome him. He stirred awake from his imagination. He was soon disappointed to see an empty apartment in front of him as always.

“Only 3 more weeks,” he thought to himself as he took out some of leftovers from a refrigerator. “Then I’ll be with my family.” He took a big spoonful of rice and swallowed, waiting for the time to pass by.

“Daddy!” My brother ran. My mom also hurried her steps toward him as he came out of the airport. I followed after them, with a big smile on my face. My dad was, what they call, a “goose” father. It is a Korean term dubbed to indicate a dad who stays in his native land while the rest of his family members migrate to a foreign country. Many of the

families follow this path in order for their children to receive higher quality of education, just like our family.

The father birds in geese families are known for their dedication. Their sole motivation is to love their families, creating strong bonds. “Geese” fathers are the same. In hopes of their families leading better lives, they sacrifice everything. My dad is one of them.

As we walked toward our car, my dad filled us on news from Korea. We listened attentively. Not being aware of the current situations in Korea, it was hard for me to follow. But I didn’t mind. The important thing was that my dad was going to be here with us, although for a brief time. Yes, just two weeks of visit per year. His visit made our family to reunite like a completed jigsaw puzzle.

Several hours had passed since the airplane took off. “It must be flying over the Pacific Ocean.” He thought as he sunk deeply into his seat. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn’t get his daughter’s words out of his head.

“Dad, we are in America now!” She had yelled at him last night. “Your Korean ways are not accepted here!” He shook his head. “What had become of her?” Just a couple of years ago, he would have never expected his daughter to yell at him or even talk back at him. But that night, after he chastised her briefly and smacked her on the head, she blew up on him.

“Don’t you even know that it’s illegal in America to hit your child? Dad, if I had called the police, you would be in a jail by now! It’s a crime!”

He buried his head in his arms and mouthed her very last words. Was it a crime that he scolded his daughter? Was it wrong for him to wish the very best for her?

All these years, he had put his utmost efforts to keep his family safe and intact by working to his bones. He often went home past midnight, working extra hours to provide his family with additional economic means. He had lived by counting one day after another, enduring loneliness.

His daughter's actions left him extremely distressed and confused. However, what made him even sadder was that she seemed perfectly fine with saying those petrifying words. She hadn't even shown a sign of guilt or regret; instead, she had proudly marched upstairs and vanished into her room. All night, he wished for her to come down and apologize. But a hope was nothing more than a hope.

He looked out the airplane window. His scene was blurred by thick layers of gray clouds like his mind. He wished that those clouds were gone. He wished for a clear vision to see through every single thing.

The airplane soared into the sky. In a moment, it was out of our sight. We stood there, looking after white traces that it had made and went back to the car. The week with my dad was finally over. I was soon overcome by a sudden relief. The visit had been not only awkward but disastrous.

Of course, I was happy to see my dad at first. However, I soon found it hard to talk to him. Ever since I came to the States, I had forgotten most of my mother tongue. My dad, on the other hand, spoke broken English. How were we supposed to communicate? Our attempts to make meaningful conversations had decreased throughout his visits. Then, just a night before he left, everything blew up.

I still couldn't believe that I had poured those horrible words at him. After all, it was usual for Korean adults to smack their children if they had done something wrong. I was surprised that dad didn't punish me for yelling back at him.

But I had to admit that I did mean some of the words I said to him. As I was getting used to American life, it was difficult for me to adjust to two very different cultures, the West and the East. My expectations inside and outside of home varied significantly. Every single thing came into conflicts ranging from boyfriends to curfew hours. When talking to the elderly, including parents, you had to give your full respect. How dare was I to confront my father with such a contemptuous attitude!

Suddenly I realized how quiet our car was. I looked at mom through the back mirror, whose eyes were intently fixed on the road. I glanced at my brother who was fidgeting with his fingers. I was overcome with a great sway of emotions as I realized what I had done to our family.

I turned my eyes out the window. I felt tears rolling down my cheeks. I wondered if things would ever be the same between me and my family. Far beyond, a flock of geese flew in an arc-shaped formation.

Tami Kim

Lakes HS, 10th Grade

American Barbie

The locker room is filled with girls fixing their appearance. An intoxicating mix of perfume fills the air making me want to gag, but I'm too out of it to notice. The endless prattle of who won the year book elections continues. I don't anticipate being the winner of any category. Besides, it's just a popularity contest to flatter the preps and flatten everyone else. I glance over at queen bee Bridget Cade, a definite contestant for "Sweetest Smile," a title which should be renamed "I Use This Smile to Backstab You, Have a Nice Day", but the year book committee told me it was too long. No one listens when you try to tell the truth anymore. What can you do?

"Bmlaaaaa," My thoughts are interrupted by the second-period bell. Shoving a happy-pill down and trying to smile; I'm on my way to face teenage hell.

As people crowd the hallways, the discussion continues. Rumor passes by saying "Foxiest Flirts" are going to be Tina and Alex. It's a good title for them because it cleverly covers up the actual meaning: the "flirts" are no more than dirt, which is what the duo is worth. Calling a girl slutty and a guy a man-whore isn't adult etiquette, but this is high school, and if it's common knowledge, who can disagree? Tina and Alex have made out with half the campus, and needless to say, they've gone bases pass that. Leaving my thoughts of disgust behind, I slink into my seat and ignore the other students.

I stare down at my paper. It tells me my name is Aleaha Durning. Sometimes I have trouble believing that, or maybe it's just hope that I'm somebody else. Only my teachers recognize me; other than that, I don't exist. It has never bothered

me before, but this week I can't stop thinking about it. Staring into my compact tells me I have brown eyes, matching frizzy hair, a large nose, zits, and that I am trapped in this unbeautiful body. Even my mom tells me that I'm no beauty queen. Thanks for the support. The sun seeps through the window trailing through the hair of girl in front of me, as an attempt to lift my spirits. It fails. The head cheerleader has perfect blond locks that definitely affect her mind. Being blond, she is expected to be dumb, and I don't think she's ever challenged that. My secret name for her is "American Barbie": complete with three-hundred and sixty days worth of outfits, matching shoes included. Doll doesn't think on its own.

The crinkle of paper catches my ear, and I see enough of a note to read "Vote Dylan Wood - Agile and Athletic." That may be true; he can run the mile in five minutes, but his popularity and sexy abs will be the reason of his success. I've done a few school projects with him. He is surprisingly not all sports centered or incompetent like other athletes at our school. Teachers pride over him and, to top that, he's first in our small town to think of applying to an Ivy League school. But lately I've been watching him. He goes in the woods behind the gym after school with the rest of his team. The pressure on him to be fast has directed him towards doing speed. I should tell someone, but I do have to attend Middlesex High for four more years, and I want them to be as painless as possible.

The bell rings, a signal for lunch to start. Again I head out into the traffic of the halls and make for my destination. Marleigh, my best friend, is already at our "nerd" table chowing on pizza. I admire her, because she never sacrifices what she wants, including food. People whisper that she's fat, but I think she's perfect. She's one of the few girls I know who's nice to everyone when they don't deserve it and gives people hundreds of chances to redeem themselves. Gazing around I see Glen Strawn, my American Barbie, definite winner of

“Cheeriest Cheerleader.” This is also a false name for “Thinnest and Prettiest Mini Skirt Wearing Fool.” I know for a fact that she’s anorexic; my mom is friends with her mom and I overheard them talking. There’s nothing I can do, every girl has gone through a period where they didn’t eat, so it’s probably just a phase. I don’t think it’s that harmful for her anyways. Being thin is part of her perfect image that she portrays; a gorgeous painting to laugh at all the honorable mentions like Marleigh and me.

“Do you want some Cheetos?” Marleigh asks, offering Glen the bag as she strides by.

“Gross. No thanks. Do you know how many calories are in those? I might end up looking like you.” She sneers and continues walking. Bridget’s right behind her laughing. “You know Aleaha,” the backstabber contributes just for everyone else’s humor, “you shouldn’t eat those either, they’ll add to your mountain range.”

“What a bitch,” I mumble once she’s a safe distance away, “not every one’s born with perfect skin.”

“Why does Glen worry about calories? She’s totally skinny; I wish I had her body.” Marleigh sighs and starts to munch on the chips. “Oh well, I’m finishing these, might as well keep the weight on.”

“Don’t say that Marz-Bars.” I encourage her. “You’re not disgustingly fat; Glen just sacrifices all food to get thin. Trust me, at our high school reunion, she’ll be gargantuan.” I know Marleigh doesn’t feel happy in her overweight body, but what can you say? The truth doesn’t help her any.

I think it’s so awful that even the best people feel they need to look a certain way to be accepted. Parents always think that insecurities are just part of teenagers, but there’s brain corruption behind our vulnerability. Everywhere we see air-brushed photographs and fake muscles. The ironic thing is

that even though everyone knows those models are fabricated, people still feel the requirement to resemble them. Personally, I can see and know how I look, a plain Jane, but I can’t accept it. Brainwashed, I continuously want to be seen as one of these phony idols. My secret way of making life easier is taking anti-depression pills. Nothing dangerous, but I do wish that I could show expression with out having to subscribe. Marleigh eats, Glen doesn’t eat, Bridget backstabs, the “flirts” like Alex and Tina let themselves out cheap to feel loved, and Dylan does heavy drugs; they all find their own way to deal. The part of me deep down that still clings to some passion wants to rip up every fashion magazine, throw out all the make-up girls use to make ourselves feel prettier, and burn every fairy tale that has a “beautiful maiden” mentioned. Logically and emotionless, I know there’s nothing I can do to rid America of its artificial image. But I wonder, if America is the supposed home to the free, than why do myriads of us teenagers believe we are so bound to the chains of our own insecurities?

Tessa Erickson

Lakeridge JH, 9th Grade

Short Stories

Grades 11 & 12



Our Own
Words

Gone Fishin'

The setting sun transformed the western clouds into molten gold, and lit the treetops on fire. The soft rhythmic splashing of oars was the only sound in a tiny lagoon. A flat-bottomed rowboat glided slowly across the water toward the mouth of a small chattering creek. In the water surrounding the creek's entrance, an occasional disturbance caused ripples to appear. Dozens of Chinook salmon lay under the steep overhanging banks of the creek, waiting for the rising tide to permit travel upstream to their spawning grounds. The salmon glittered in the evening sun like the newly minted coins of a sunken pirate's hoard.

In the boat, a sixteen-year old boy stood, attentively watching the movements of the fish. He was thin and sun-tanned, with an Italian nose and hair the color of a mud puddle. His clear eyes missed nothing, not even the hasty retreat of a camouflaged flounder as it sped from the boat's shadow. His gaze focused on the congregated salmon, trying to discern the largest fish. The boy reached down into the boat, picking up a lightweight trout rod.

After a brief consultation with his tackle box, the boy deftly tied a No. 4 Blue Fox spinner onto his leader. A flick of his wrist sent the lure flashing through the air toward its goal. It landed a few feet from the right bank, quickly spinning with the current away from the salmon. Another cast, this time straight into the school of fish. The boy reeled slowly, ready at the slightest resistance to set the hook deep in the mouth of some nickel-backed monstrosity.

An abrupt jerk made the boy whip up his rod with a grunt, but to his dismay, he found his lure to be deeply

embedded in an underwater stump. After tugging his rod up and down, this way and that, he gave up the lure for lost, and clipped his line.

With a disappointed sigh, the boy again consulted his tackle box, this time choosing a Mepps Red Devil spoon. He set his jaw as if to say that no stump would ever rob him of *this* lure. He began casting again among the salmon, but without response.

After fifteen fruitless casts, the boy decided to make one last effort before rowing home. He propelled the lure like a true fisherman, sending it straight as an arrow into the oblivious school of fish. His browned fingers slowly turned the reel, his arms tensed for the slightest resistance.

Suddenly, the rod nearly jumped out of the boy's hands as a colossal salmon blasted out of the water. The fish thrashed up the creek, leaving behind a trail of froth like an escaping submarine. The boy leaped out of the boat and stumbled after the huge salmon, unsure of just how to conquer this wild thing of nature.

A sudden thought smashed into the boy's head: the line on his reel could only handle ten pounds of weight, and his pole was designed for lightweight trout fishing. All this ran through his mind in an instant.

Suddenly, the salmon changed tactics and made a mad dash downstream, a swift hard bullet of muscle that would do anything to loosen the hook biting into its jaw. As the pole doubled back onto itself to support this unaccustomed weight, the graphite fibers shattered from the strain with a resounding crack. The boy's heart fell as he watched the salmon slicing down the creek with his lure and line. As he followed the salmon's rapid progress, however, his eyes perceived that the fish had mysteriously stopped in mid-stream. It occurred to him that a shallow gravel bar lay near the fish,

and that the salmon could have easily been grounded temporarily.

Without a second thought, the boy sprinted toward the thrashing behemoth, ignoring the pain of barnacles on bare feet. Lunging parabolically as he neared the stranded fish, he attacked with the ferocity of a ravenous grizzly bear. With a splash that nearly emptied the creek, the boy's body crashed into the finned torpedo. Clamping fingers of steel onto the slimy scales of the undulating fish, the adrenaline-charged boy struggled in the icy water.

With a mighty heave, both fish and boy flopped onto the muddy bank, the boy desperately fighting up the bank, the salmon viciously slapping to and fro toward the water and freedom. After a few minutes of bitter struggling, the boy hauled the exhausted, gasping, speckle-finned mammoth up to the top of the bank, swiftly dispatching the salmon with a blow to the head.

As the boy sat panting for air, he could not help but feel the pride of a true sportsman who had given every ounce of strength to conquer some part of nature, and had overcome. The boy had tested his strength in the age-old fight of man against nature, and had emerged victorious.

John Lenzo

Homeschool, 11th Grade

Café Family

He had been thrilled when she invited him to meet her and her sister at the café. It only boggled him that she called it a “business venture.” He swam through ideas of what she might be planning, even as he pulled up to the café, walked inside, and took a seat with the two.

The girl, not more than seven, was shifting uncomfortably in her chair. She shoveled a fork full of cake into her mouth while trying to find a new way to sit. The contemporary and novel excuses for a café table and chair were much too big for a little girl. Sugar made anyone of her age fidget.

As he sat down, the woman at the table pointed to the paper in front of the young girl. “Before we start again, is there anything else you need?” The little squirrel took one more big bite, then shook her head, cute cheeks full of cake, and grabbed the pencil. The two sisters smiled at each other and he became aware of himself. He was about the same age as the woman. He wore a goatee and glasses. His green eyes were hidden by long, loose strands of hair that he never managed to control and had learned to let them do as they liked.

The woman pulled out a travel book full of pictures from Japan and started listing things she saw. She read clearly but very slowly, pausing now and then to let the little girl collect her thoughts.

“I spy with my little eye,” she began, like a car trip game he had played when he was younger, “blue butterflies, untrimmed bright light green grass, pink cherry blossoms falling in the wind, long twisted branches on many trees, stone lanterns, golden fireflies, a beautiful full moon, and everything is reflected in a lake.” Hearing the words created a

picture in his mind of a safe place, cool and calm, that only their little café family could enter. The woman waited while the little girl sketched wildly, as small children do. The girl's ideas flew from spot to spot on the paper. She let her imagination flow freely through the pencil, moving in fast currents over the paper. It seemed to lack rhyme or reason; a random expression of imagination. She hummed quietly to herself as the older artists watched in curious silence. Something was different about the method of the little girl. She possessed a focus few children could bring themselves to hold. Her eyes seemed to see beyond the paper and into the world open only to little girls. As she jumped from spot to spot, she focused on it with her entire heart, creating a masterpiece of scribbles, scratches, and smooth curves that formed slanted circles. In a few moments of an entertaining attempt, she set the pencil down and returned from little-girl-land to her squirrel-like habits with the cake. The woman took the paper and showed it to him. He gave her a sympathetic smile. He didn't want to hurt her feelings, but he didn't understand why she was showing it to him.

"This is where I come in," she said, taking a pen from her pocket. "It's hard to see what she's really putting on the page." She had already started sketching, wasting no time. "But I can always see it." He watched her sketch while trying to keep a critical eye, but there was still an unmistakable softness to him. Skeptical as he seemed, there was an admiration for the woman and her sister he was trying to cover.

Her eyes danced, as her hands danced, as the pen danced on the paper, tracing images that were already there but just a little distant. Her whole being went into what she was doing and, though she was only sitting, she moved as the pen moved. His eyes watched hers, ignoring the paper. He wanted those eyes to look at him; see him in the beautiful way that she saw the paper. If the paper had beautiful pictures on it

that he couldn't see, perhaps he too had beautiful pictures in him she could see.

Sooner than he expected, she put the pen down and turned the picture to him. Where there had been a mess, there was a beautiful picture that matched the beautiful fantasy of the pure mind of the child. The fireflies were dancing with the butterflies and they went through a forest to a party on the moon over the water, guided by lanterns. Yet the touch of the woman added a sense of realism and gravity that made you feel that it wasn't so impossible to wish to go with them. He stared deeply at the picture, eyes floating from one part to another, stunned.

"We do it together." She said, giving him a knowing smile, "but we need one more thing." She took his hand and looked into his green eyes.

He averted his gaze away and down to look at the full little girl in the chair.

"What more could you need? It's beautiful enough as it is."

She held his hand tighter. "You know what. We need your gift of color." She looked back at the sketch. "I can't see it and she couldn't do it, but I know that you can see where the colors are. Please, just look at it." He looked up and back to the picture.

He could. He could see the cool analogous colors from the water and trees contrasting with the light from the man in the moon. He could use the greens to give the leaves life and the grass growth. He could make the blue of butterfly wings and gold glow of fireflies dance waltzes, tangos, and perhaps even the foxtrot. He could give the lanterns light to guide with. He wanted to do it. His fingers twitched a little inside hers. Rough, but strong fingers filled with so many

desires at the moment, they might have flown in every direction if it weren't for steady, lovely hands holding them.

"Please?" She whispered.

"Of course," He answered softly.

"More cake!" The little one yelled.

Rebecca Sevin

Clover Park HS, 12th Grade

Untitled

Ken squinted as the sun's rays bounced off the water, blinding him, before he pulled his sunglasses down over his green eyes, covering the worry lines that had in the last year replaced his old laugh lines. Could he do it? Glancing at his watch, he flexed his strong, tanned hands by his side and looked at the water. It seemed ages ago that he had not feared the water and spent hours on it every day. Just then Mike arrived, towing a 19-foot inboard-outboard Glastron.

Silently they went through the routine of launching the boat, as past hours of working together clicked back into place. When they were finally in the water, Mike idled out past the no-wake zone and slipped into neutral to look at Ken.

"You sure you want to do this? You haven't been out on the water since..."

"So where were you, Mike?" asked Ken, fiddling with his waterproof watch.

Mike paused with a sigh and answered, "I didn't have anyone to back me up. It took longer than usual." He then pushed the throttle forward and skimmed across the water in the direction of the channel.

"Well, thanks for bringing your boat out. The marina's got ours dry-docked for repairs before the summer season. We got a call this morning saying our navigational buoy has been caught up in some logs, and after last year...well, the marina can't afford not to have that buoy up and running at all times," finished Ken quickly.

"I still don't see why you couldn't have had someone else do it tomorrow," said Mike as he scanned the surface of the water for floating debris that could damage the prop. "No one will be boating near there tonight."

"I just need to do this," said Ken turning his head to stare at the water.

When they reached the damaged buoy, Ken looked again at his watch. "We've got fifteen minutes before the tide changes," he yelled over his shoulder as he gingerly walked onto the boarding platform and began to detangle the mess of debris from the buoy's underwater cable. The work was tedious and Mike had to reposition the boat more and more frequently as the tide slowly got stronger.

After the fifteen minutes had passed, Mike yelled to Ken, "Almost done back there?"

"Getting close, gimme another coupla minutes," said Ken.

"You don't have a couple of minutes, Ken. The tide's changed already. We need to get out of here," said Mike as he glanced over at the rocks behind him.

He bit his lower lip as he thought about the sailboat that had been caught there last summer. The water always ripped through the narrow opening at dangerous speeds when the tide shifted, and numerous signs and buoys warned boaters to stay away. However, the navigational buoy had been down and the pilot lost track of the time. When he remembered the tide, it was too late and the sailboat's little motor overheated as they dashed for safety. They were thrown into the rocks and the whole family was killed. Ken's family.

"Ken, we need to leave. Get in the boat," said Mike as he put it in gear.

"Finished!" cried Ken as he slipped down into the back-seat with relief.

"About time," said Mike as he accelerated out of the channel. "We cut that a little close if you ask..." Just then the motor made a gut-wrenching wheeze, and then as abruptly as it started, the noise stopped. Along with the engine. Stunned into silence for a split second, both men watched with open mouths as the boat drifted backwards, steadily picking up speed.

Exploding into action, Ken raced to the bow to retrieve the anchor from under the starboard seat while Mike ripped open the engine cover. The rope was tangled in the chain, and Ken had to use every ounce of his willpower not to wrench at it, as that would only worsen the knot. In thirty seconds that seemed like thirty years, Ken had the rope untangled and tied to the front mooring cleat.

While Mike cursed at the engine that wouldn't start, Ken hurled the anchor out into the sea and watched with a paper white face for the rope to go tight. Only after the slack had disappeared did he steal a glance backwards at the rocks.

"Mike, what's the problem?" asked Ken as he rushed back to help.

"The engine overheated. I think there's something in the water intake. We gotta get it out!"

Ken looked at Mike with sickened eyes. The anchor would only hold for another few minutes, but to dive in that current was possible suicide. If he lost his grip, he would be swept into the rocks before the man on board could even scream.

"Gimme a pair of goggles," said Ken as he stripped his shoes and shirt.

“No, Ken, I’ll do it,” started Mike, but with one look into Ken’s hardened eyes he started looking for the goggles. “I’ll get the oar and try to keep the bow faced into the tide to give you some cover. Here,” he said, giving Ken a rope. “Tie this around your waist.”

Ken stood on the boarding platform and took a deep breath to steel his fluttering stomach, then slipped into the water. The strength of the current nearly took his breath away, but with one hand clutching the engine, he felt around the water intake and began to search for the problem, until he felt something soft and slimy. It was kelp. He grabbed it and started to pull just as the boat swerved to the port and offered him no protection. His hand slipped.

Mike strained every muscle in his body against the oar to point the boat in the right direction, but it was a losing battle. The tide was so strong at this point that they were slowly slipping backward. The anchor would not hold much longer. “Come on, Ken,” he muttered through clenched teeth.

Ken needed air. He was tumbling head over heels until the rope caught at his waist and he felt like he was being cut in half. His goggles were torn off and he blindly thrashed towards the surface. But strangely, for the first time since he had lost his family, he did not fear the water that threatened to kill him. Just as he thought his lungs would burst, he gulped in delicious air. “Mike! Mike!” he screamed. “Start the engine!”

Mike saw his head pop out of the water and leaped to the pilot’s seat. He turned the key with closed eyes, and the engine sputtered and coughed, then started. Gently accelerating, he angled across the channel and beached the boat before rushing back to pull in Ken.

“Come on. Come on,” he urged as he leaped into the water to drag Ken ashore. Patting him on the back to get him

to spit up the sea water he had swallowed, Mike waited breathlessly.

“Mike?” Ken finally whispered.

“Ken!” screamed Mike, as he grasped him in a hug. “We cut that a little close if you ask me,” he said with tears streaming down his face.

Hannah Wickstrom
Covenant HS, 12th Grade