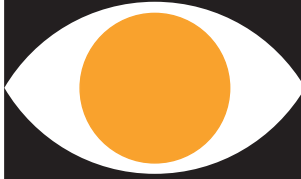


2006

Pierce
County
Library
System



*Our Own
Words*

10th Annual

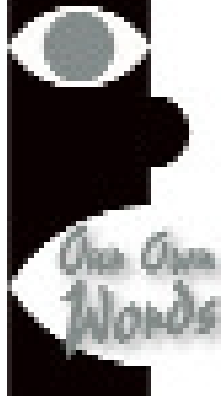
WINNERS

Pierce County Library System

Teen Poetry & Fiction
Writing Contest

2006 Winners

Final Judges:
David Whited
Randall Platt



Poetry Winners

Grades 7 & 8

1 st	Rewrite by Ellen Elizabeth Grover	8th	Homeschool
2 nd	Anthony by Laila Fontenot	8th	Cougar Mtn. JH
3 rd	Angel of the Cemetery by Jamie Braun	8th	Aylen JH

Grades 9 & 10

1 st	Medieval Mathematics by Miles Unterreiner	10th	Gig Harbor HS
2 nd	Summer by Anna Mason	9th	Bellarmino Prep.
3 rd	Hey Cowboy by Molly Jordan	9th	Eatonville HS

Grades 11 & 12

1 st	Farmer's Prayer by Eve Hart	12th	Rogers HS
2 nd	Earth Worm by Sarah Andersen	11th	Covenant HS
3 rd	Respite by Jessie Roy	11th	Emerald Ridge HS

Short Story Winners

Grades 7 & 8

1st	In the Shadow of Freedom by Cole Stephens	7th	Charles Wright Academy
2nd	Those Who Care by Hannah Thornton	8th	Pioneer MS
3rd	Hope Hole by Michelle Kester	7th	Mason MS

Grades 9 & 10

1st	The Omega Theorem by JohnMark Taylor	9th	Curtis HS
2nd	Stream by Mary Cassio	9th	Homeschool
3rd	The Humbug by Rosemary Shelden	10th	Covenant HS

Grades 11 & 12

1st	Tom and Lee Conquer the World by Stephanie Dering	11th	Rogers HS
2nd	Not for Time by Brittany Bond	12th	Covenant HS
3rd	The Joy of a Kitten by Sandra Morrow	12th	Covenant HS

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All poems and stories are printed as written by the author.

Poetry

Grades 7 & 8



One
Own
Words

Rewrite

Two weeks ago, I was a gerund,
an undercover action-lover
pretending to be a noun.
Soon enough, the imperative police
caught up with me.
They forced me to speak
with the interrogative team
who asked me some tricky questions;
they didn't want anyone sneaking around.
They made me become a dull old noun,
and I was released.
Bored, I became an interjection.
Now, I stand out from everyone else,
the star of the positively exclamatory show.

Ellen Elizabeth Grover

Homeschool, 8th Grade

Anthony

My brother
Flies and soars
At the midst of the metal giants
His feet and legs and arms all carefully balanced
So he will not ruin his performance.
My brother is sent airborne
By the crescent moon in this concrete sky.
He turns, twists, flips his board,
A magnificent kick-flip.
I clap and he smiles.
This is my brothers passion.
He is lord of this hard world.

Laila Fontenot

Cougar Mountain JH, 8th Grade

Angel of the Cemetery

I am the angel carved so long ago;
Not a soul is alive who knows what I know.
Only my eyes of stone have seen
The many shed tears with their silver sheen.
Only my sensitive ears have heard
Every prayerful and sorrowful word.
My wings may now flutter, but they feel the touch
Of a curious child after losing much.
In this cemetery I call home
Myself and the dead can never roam.
For I am the angel, carved so long ago,
Not a soul is alive who knows what I know.

Jamie Braun

Aylen JH, 8th Grade

Poetry

Grades 9 & 10



One
Own
Words

Medieval Mathematics

I fell asleep in Math one day, and thus, to my chagrin
I found myself bedecked in metal, an armored suit of tin.

A knight was I, on noble quest! To save some damsels in
distress!

Quaff some tankards, goblets, flagons – defeat some
fire-breathing dragons!

But most of all, I somehow knew, my most important mission
Was to defeat, in epic duel, the Evil Dark Magician!

I mounted then my noble steed, a stallion of the finest breed
And soon I'd reached, and then confronted, the Dark
Magician I had hunted.

“Prepare thee, fool, thy soul to perish!” (I twirled my saber
with a flourish)

“It’s time for thee to say good-bye; I’m hungry for Magician
pie!”

“Then let our duel commence!” said he, “if first you’ll answer
this:

What is the sum of twelve times five and three times
thirty-six?”

I swung my sword to slash the creature, who morphed
instead – it was my teacher!

I woke up then, to my dismay; I’d had a dream in Math that
day.

Miles Unterreiner

Gig Harbor HS, 10th Grade

Summer

You put a ukulele strumming in my summer afternoon.

And the ice cubes-clink, clink-
into my glass.

You put the sunglasses on my ultraviolet eyes,
and tell me that everything will be alright.

The moon is bright.
But the sun is brighter—Let's play while we still can.

Will you laugh with me? Will you run with me?
Will you bandage my knee when I fall in the park?

Kiss it, baby, make it all better.
Can you push me on the swings?
Higher-higher-higher...

(I have a feeling that another Popsicle-stained-tongue
Summer is about to begin.)

Anna Mason

Bellarmine Preparatory, 9th Grade

Hey Cowboy

Hey you with the cowboy hat,
Your wife is so so fat.

You think you're so patriotic,
I think you're a little psychotic.

You talk of a free land,
I think you've got your head in the sand.

With all your beer drinkin'
Your morals are stinkin'.

How can you be so proud?,
Truck up high and your stereo loud.

What the heck,
You're just a red neck.

You're proud to be in the USA,
What would the Founding Fathers say?

Molly Jordan

Eatonville HS, 9th Grade

Poetry

Grades 11 & 12



One Own
Words

Farmer's Prayer

O God,
flower my thoughts
like the cherry blossom
silent and strong below
the canyons of earth.
Form me yours
as each melting sunset
each lonely cloud
each dead blade the coyote shatters.
Make me a tumbleweed
a powerline
a shade of blue
Pray I, the chosen dust.
Amen.

Eve Hart

Rogers HS, 12th Grade

Earth Worm

Of all the creatures, of the earth below,
Oh, none would move so tedious and slow.
No eyes to see, beneath our feet they lurk.
This is the earth worm, digger of the dirt.
Mute, legless, limbless burling through the soil.
The farmers plow of earth, as he would toil.
Through water, ice and rock he tunnels on,
To cultivate the land and forest lawns.
Just small enough to fit inside your hand.
In such a little time does our friend span,
He does so much his days under the roots.
Such work can we not watch and follow suit.
From birth to death the earth he tunnels through.
Oh, wonder at the works that small things do.

Sarah Andersen

Covenant HS, 11th Grade

Respite

Ignorance is bliss; therefore
punctuation is suffering
with its marks of interrogation, exclamation points;
with its various brackets and quotes to rack words
until they give up their meaning.

But other times, it gives us pause:
a comma for a word omitted
a semicolon, colon, dash –
an ellipsis to swallow whole phrases
leaving no trace but three enigmatic dots.

A period for Sisyphus,
the brief breath as he descends
before taking the sentence up again.

Fessie Roy

Emerald Ridge HS, 11th Grade

Short Stories

Grades 7 & 8



One
Own
Words

In the Shadow of Freedom

“Koru! Koru! Come quick! Come quick!” Emme screamed as she barged through the door, interrupting my train of thought.

“What, what now Emme?” I yelled back. “Can’t you see I’m busy?” I tried to ignore her, hoping she would go away. I enjoyed the peace and quiet while writing my journal.

“It’s on the-it’s on the radio!” she said, breathing heavily as she ran into the cramped room. Emme stood there impatiently, while blocking the sunlight that shone through the small, dusty window inside the barrack. I tried to ignore her shadow that appeared on my paper. “It’s President Truman! He’s going to be speaking on the radio! Everyone is gathering in the cafeteria!” Emma expressed excitedly with big eyes.

“The President!” Now I knew it *must* be important. We had just bombed Japan only a week ago. I dropped my journal and yelled, “Let’s go!”

Emme and I entered the cafeteria sweating and out of breath. It was the middle of August with the temperature at a soaring ninety degrees. “Papa! Mama! Where are you?” I tried to get the words out. Emme and I managed to push our way through the crowd.

I stopped when I heard President Truman say, “I am pleased to announce on this 14th day of August 1945, the Japanese have surrendered to the United States.” Everyone shouted, laughed, and cried. I realized that all Japanese-Americans would be released from the relocation camps, including us.

Tears of joy and happiness filled my eyes when I saw my parents. Emme and I ran to them, and the four of us held hands as we slowly found our way out of the chaotic cafeteria.

As the sun began to set, I saw the shadow of the guard as he stood in the tower. I said softly to myself, "This will soon be over." The barbed wire fences, the guards, discrimination, and the loss of freedom.

I tried to sleep that night, but my mind took me back to 1941 when security and happiness turned into trials and uncertainties. I saw our house in Sacramento and...my friends. I felt the excitement of that cold December day as we played baseball in the street.

"Strrike three! You'rre out!" Tommy yelled as he motioned his arm. Those four dreaded words ate their way to the pit of my stomach. I stood there paralyzed with the bat wrapped around my body and my head hanging low, painfully embarrassed. I hoped to play on the Little League team this spring with my friends.

"Good try, Koru. You'll get it next time." Bobby said encouragingly. He was my best friend, and I knew he would never let me down.

"Yeah, next time Koru." said Michael. My friends helped me for hours as Bobby told us about the Christmas party he was going to have. Then it finally happened. I hit the ball! We stood there amazed as the ball soared in the air and landed several blocks away. Life couldn't get any better, especially when I had Bobby, Tommy, and Michael.

Two days later on Sunday, December 7, 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. The United States was now at war with Japan. I didn't see any of my friends for a week. When school finally began, I waited patiently for my three friends to show up. I peeked outside to look for them, but the street was vacant. I suddenly felt sick to my stomach as I headed to school by myself. As I turned a corner, a man approached me and said, "Hey, Jap! You don't belong here!" I froze in my steps and felt my hands tremble. I tried to swallow but those hateful words choked me. I ran away from him and his words, but I knew those hateful words would catch

me. I couldn't wait to get to school to seek comfort from my friends.

The fourth grade classroom became quiet as I entered through the door. I felt everybody's eyes upon me as I tried to find my seat. I knew something was terribly wrong. When the bell sounded for recess my friends ran out the door, leaving me straggling behind. I walked out to the playground, approached my friends, and said, "Hey! How's it going?" My heart sank as they walked away without an answer. I felt like an outsider as tears pooled in my eyes. "Hey, Bobby, Tommy, Michael, what's wrong?" I felt my heart beat in my chest. "Was it...something I said?" I barely got the words out.

"Well...it's just that..." Michel tried hard to speak. "Our parents don't want us to play with you anymore." He finally finished and looked at Bobby and Tommy for reassurance.

"Why?" I asked, afraid of the answer.

"It's because you know...the Japanese attacking Pearl Harbor. Our parents think it's best if we don't hang out anymore, at least for now." Bobby answered, looking embarrassed.

"What about your Christmas party on Friday, Bobby?" I asked.

"I don't think you should show up," Bobby said, now sounding defensive. "It's not that we don't like you," he added. "It's just that our parents...you know."

"No, I don't know!" I cried, feeling betrayed. Then I did the only thing I could do. I ran away. I wanted to be free from discrimination and from the guilt that was now consuming me. I stopped suddenly when I found myself in front of my house. I couldn't move. Something inside me changed. My heart grew cold, and my tears stopped as suddenly as they began. I felt angry, alone, and terrified. How could I face my parents with the awful thought now in my head. I wished I wasn't Japanese. My life as I knew it would never be the same, and it wasn't.

My family and I were sent to Tule Lake Internment Camp in May 1942. I left most of my possessions behind, but kept the feelings of betrayal with me. For years I prayed for a life of freedom, like the one I once had. But, my freedom was shadowed by the past.

Lying in my bed that hot, August night, I realized that I was no longer that same boy who lived in Sacramento. Playing baseball with Bobby, Tommy, and Michael was gone forever. I couldn't wait to be free from here, especially after hearing President Truman's voice on the radio. Then I realized it wasn't the barbed wire fences, guards, and discrimination that were preventing my freedom. It was me. I grabbed my journal and wrote my last entry.

August 14, 1945

Freedom is forgiveness
while remembering the past.

Freedom is family
and feeling proud of who you are.

Freedom is friendship
and trusting those in the future.

What would life be without
forgiveness, family, and friends?
For me, life would have
no freedom at all.

I am no longer walking
in the shadow of freedom.

My eyes grew heavy and began to close. I fell into a deep sleep, finally feeling free.

Cole Stephens

Charles Wright Academy, 7th Grade

Those Who Care

Sonnet walked quickly to the old riverbed where she spent so much of her time. She squinted, trying to see ahead to the next streetlight. Though it was only 2:30 P.M., it was still hard to see; the smog was especially thick that day.

When Sonnet reached the next streetlamp, she got her bearings. She prepared to make her trek through the digital park. She'd have to acclimate herself as she switched from the harsh concrete environment in which she lived to the obsolete digital park, then to the barren desert landscape that surrounded the city. Sonnet readjusted her air-cleansing mask and turned into a back alley, kicking various pieces of trash on her way before ducking into the digital park.

The park was a square mile of holographic trees and wildlife. It had become full of glitches, like a scratched CD. It was usual to see foliage disappearing randomly or squirrels skipping back and forth. After walking for five minutes or so, she made it to the outskirts of the park and stepped out into the desert landscape.

Here, in the barren desert, there was an old dried up riverbed. To the right and at the edge of the bed, there was an actual living tree. Sonnet had first found the ancient tree on a day about 4 years earlier when she was ten. She and her friends had been playing tag in the digital park. During their game, she had wandered past the limits of the park to the old riverbed where she noticed the tree. At first she thought it was just a glitch in the digital park, but figured it would be a good place to hide. Sonnet had been shocked when she had realized it was solid. At the time she didn't know why, but she had wanted to keep the discovery to herself. Sonnet felt almost a maternal instinct that compelled her to protect the old tree. Since that day, she had felt that the two of them were kindred spirits.

Sonnet's friends and family didn't understand. They seemed oblivious to the chaos in which they lived. Sonnet supposed that they didn't realize how bad the world had gotten, or how bad it was still becoming. She felt like she was the only person who was mindful enough to pull up her hood during a downpour. Everyone she knew believed the lies that the government told about the world. It was as if they were too wrapped up in their own mission of self-happiness to realize that the world was being destroyed. Where there had once been lush forests, there was now endless dust. Where there were once grassy fields in which rabbits and birds frolicked, there was now cold concrete.

More thoughts like these ran through her head as she walked to the old gnarled tree, her soul mate. Was she crazy for thinking that there was something wrong? Surely someone else would have raised concerns before now if there were truly something wrong with the world's transformation.

Sonnet stretched out under the tree, bringing out a book she had found in the back of an old library that was in the midst of closing. Most people didn't have any use for reading any more and preferred faster paced versions of entertainment. Her friends spent their time playing V-box, a virtual reality game system.

It was after an hour of reading that Sonnet finally noticed the little silver briefcase laying beside her, next to the tree. Sonnet slowly lowered her book and sifted through the thoughts swimming in her head. She didn't think that anyone else came to this spot. Her immediate thought was almost unbearable: "What if someone wanted to kill the tree?" After all, wood had become very valuable. Water was precious, too, and an underwater stream was almost certainly the nourishment that kept her tree alive. Again, a natural instinct to protect overwhelmed her as she thought of the tree coming to harm. Sonnet searched for inner strength and calmed her rapid breathing before pulling the briefcase toward her. To her

surprise, the front of the briefcase was engraved. The words read, “To those who care.”

Sonnet puzzled over the engraved words and felt a sudden wave of curiosity. She determinedly opened the little briefcase and found a pile of brittle newspaper articles, something that had become rare, as most documents had become digital. Sonnet readjusted her air-cleansing mask before taking out the first newspaper. “Toxic Waste Being Dumped Into Rivers” read one headline. “Save The Rainforests!” read another. Headline after headline exemplified the ruin of the environment. “Global Heating Melting Glaciers” still another read. As the dates progressed through the sequenced articles, the documented damage done to the environment worsened.

Though the people written about in the earlier newspaper articles were quick to complain, few did anything about the disastrous happenings. Stories of environmentalists willing to take a stand became few and far between. Most articles ridiculed conservationism and used words such as, “hippies” or tree huggers”. The people seemed to think that technology would save the world. Sonnet read furiously through the briefcase’s contents until there was only one paper left. The last artifact was not a newspaper article, but a typewritten letter that read:

Dear Concerned Person,

If you are reading this paper, hopefully you are someone who cares about the world around you. The people of the past made a choice not to care, or to care about the wrong things. They were so preoccupied with the superficial, that they didn’t notice what was happening to the world. Now the world is a dark place. Although we can’t change the past, we may be able to change the future. Make the right choice.

-Someone Who Cares

Sonnet looked through the little briefcase once more, hungry for a clue that could lead her to a way to help. She asked herself over and over, “What is the right choice?”

As Sonnet pondered her thoughts, the letter, and the newspaper articles, she mindlessly played with an acorn her hand had run across while sweeping the dried earth surrounding her. She continued to stir the scorched dirt until she had created a hole big enough to drop the acorn into. Sonnet, almost instinctually, poured her ration of water for the day on top of it.

It was not the act of planting the acorn, but the hope that arose from it, that convinced Sonnet to share her tree and dreams of changing the future with her family and friends. She had faith that the twisted old tree could not only raise awareness, but also inspire motivation and movement. Sonnet made the decision to do more than merely care that day; she decided to take action.

Hannah Thornton

Pioneer MS, 8th Grade

Hope Hole

He looked at me with his soft eyes, like pools of melted gold, dotted in the middle with a drop of black night sky. “I will reach the bottom of Hope Hole, and come back with *freedom* Miya! *Freedom!*” He exclaimed, shaking my hands in his, eyes blazing with excitement. “No Ayan,” I said softly. “It’s too dangerous. Yes, there is a creek down there that can keep you alive, but, if you don’t fall into the creek, you-you’ll die down there.” At that, Ayan dropped his hands. I saw his eyes fill with love as they searched me and found worry. “But I would do it for you Miya! You mustn’t die enslaved by men!” Then he left me, and set off towards Hope Hole. Of course, he did climb the hole: his brown muscles bulged and dripped with sweat as he did. But I knew I would never see him again...not after he fell.

For months after the tragedy my heart ached with sorrow...each month, I yearned for my Ayan more and more. Finally, taking my mind off Ayan, my marriage was set by my father, as it was for every woman in my tribe, at the age of sixteen. I was to marry the lord of our tribe, for he thought I was of “fine merit.” I was to love him, but the lord was a greedy man, with sad eyes and a thick, hairy stature; most impossible to love. Not only this, but he treated his women like dung. Not to say the other men in our tribe did not treat us this way. In fact, they didn’t care if we died doing work for them, as long as the work was done...but the lord was worse than all of them.

The lord and his fathers were the ones who created the “Hope Hole Law” and Hope Hole’s name, although the name was a big lie. The only “hope” the *ditch* brought us was a fake, murderous hope. You see, in the “Hope Hole Law,”

they teased us women by saying that, if we climbed all the way down Hope Hole and back up again, we could marry whoever we liked, instead of who our fathers chose. But no woman ever made it down and back. Few even tried it in the first place, since they knew they'd fall to their deaths if they did. The fact is, most women of our tribe thought you an ignorant fool if you attempted the climb, let alone if you failed it...

But I was different than most women. I knew that if I didn't make it, and fell to the bottom, I might splash into the creek down there...The creek that was thought to keep you alive as long as you were in it, no matter how healthy you were...the creek that was the "hope" for women in our tribe...and, the creek that, if Ayan fell into it, he would be alive now. You see, if I made it down and back up Hope Hole, I and all our women could have freedom. That is why I chose to climb Hope Hole...why I chose to risk it all.

I could hear my tribe from behind me: the woman protesting against my climb, the men snickering at me, and the lord yelling, "go on, Miya. Go *free* your friends, just like your *love*, Ayan, did." With that ugly comment, I stood rigid, one foot hanging above Hope Hole. I felt the sudden urge to strangle the lord just then. The urge pounded through my every vein in red hot anger, but I held it tight, fists clenched, and turned back to the open fall of Hope Hole. The sight of it lingered in my head as I teetered back and forth at the edge of the hole: the image of the jagged cliffs on every side, the leafy tips of blue-green evergreens deep below, and the black mist that hung amidst it all. Then, as the image stuck there, my anger turned to fear: eye-popping, teeth-chattering fear. What if I did *not* fall into the creek, but to the life-threatening ground? And, worst of all, what if Ayan wasn't even- NO! He *was* alive! I jumped off.

Eyes clamped shut, hands hugging my legs against my chest, and the women's earsplitting screams still ringing in my

head, I fell for what felt like days. It was like not being able to breath, but still breathing; like frozen air blocking out all life. Finally, I hit something; it felt like cold, icy hands running up my spine...up, all the way to my head. My eyes flipped backwards, and I saw nothing.

When I awoke, above my head stood a giant, brown...blob? No, a tree with four evenly placed branches. Ah, a man - a man with soft eyes, like pools of melted gold, dotted in the middle, with a drop of black night sky. Ayan. I jumped up, tears of joy cascading from my eyes, and embraced him with a love never-ending. "Oh Ayan! Ayan, you saved me!" I exclaimed. Nevertheless, he just nudged me aside and pointed behind me. Curious, I looked, and there it was, clear and transparent...the legendary creek. I noticed myself then, soaked to the bone from my swim, and Ayan, a big, wet smudge on his shirt from my hug, and a smile on his face. "Oh Ayan, I love you!" I said, and he laughed.

A moment of merriment passed and Ayan turned to the rocky cliff, beckoning me to him. One hand held in mine, he lifted me onto his back, and we began our ascent...soon, as we reached the top of Hope Hole, as his muscles burned from my weight and his, Ayan slowed and I noticed how much he wished me free; how much he loved me.

Setting me on a ledge and reclining on another one opposite me, Ayan grinned, and gazed at the ebony sky. "Miya," he said, "you must climb to the top and wait for me there. And-" "But-" I began to protest, but he went on. "And if I am not there in three days, you must leave. I need to rest now and you must go on. Free your sisters. GO!"

So I left, and I reached the top where I waited for Ayan. No one stopped me, of course. They were too startled by my appearance, and we women were free now, so the men couldn't make me work. I waited there two days, no tears, just a solemn stare. Alas, day three came and went...no Ayan.

That evening I packed my things and as I started my trek away from the village, I looked back at Hope Hole, one last time, just in case. Seeing nothing, I began to walk away...Yet, through that gray, night-time fog, something caught my eye- something like two soft pools of melted gold, dotted in the middle, with a drop, of black night sky.

Michelle Kester

Mason MS, 7th Grade

(INTENTIONAL
LEFT
BLANK)

Short Stories

Grades 9 & 10



One
Own
Words

The Omega Theorem

A Mozart sonata played, while his fingers clacked away with something approaching fervor.

The man sat at a computer, pounding the keyboard at ninety words a minute. His gaze flickered nervously between the monitor, and the nest of facts, figures, columns and calculations he had woven around himself across the last six years.

Such activity summarized his life. From the time he had first learned to count, he had set about systematically reducing the world around him into the base-ten system. Other children played with their electric trains, bicycles, and action figures; *he* deduced the bulk of Euclidean geometry. He always had a notepad in his pocket and a pen behind his ear. His teachers would often watch him cover paper in seeming scribbles and ask him what he was drawing, to perhaps be told that he had derived the formula for the sum of a finite geometric series.

It was while browsing a textbook that he received his life's first thrill. It stated that according to Newton's second law, an object's acceleration was inversely proportional to its mass. Until then, he thought math only a game, which might come in handy for talking about manmade concepts. But now, seeing that nature itself obeyed mathematics, his scribbling took on a new dimension. Whenever he had a hunch about something, he soon saw that creation itself ticked to that hunch. With renewed zeal, he continued feverishly scribbling his equations – his *decrees* – for nature to follow.

Sensing his arrogance and fearing he was becoming a cold-hearted computer, his parents persuaded him to learn to play the violin. Music's beauty melted his iron heart for a time, and he thought he had found something truly beyond the realm of his equations. But when he learned music theory,

and saw music reduced to the interactions of varying frequencies and their effects on the brain, he realized his error. With some regret, he marked up music as another of mankind's baubles, and conquered it with his notebook.

When he graduated from high school, first in his class, impatience sprouted within him. Though he could swallow a college textbook in an hour, the sheer breadth of knowledge to be found in the universe – stars, chemicals, brains, viruses, quarks, time, cells, planets – staggered him. He was sure, however, that there was a shortcut to his goal of perfect comprehension.

All phenomena resulted from some higher principle; given that principle, one easily deduced the original phenomena. Given physics, chemistry was obvious; given chemistry, biology was quickly realized; given biology, neurology was a step away; finally, given neurology, the concepts of beauty, art, and human morality were mere corollaries. Like a tree's branches, there was in the end one trunk, one supremely fundamental rule to discover, that made the rest of science a logical exercise.

In his mind he called it the Omega Theorem. It bound Einstein's four forces, explained the universe's birth and death, shattered the paradox of a black hole, unified quantum and relativity theories, and – incidentally – explained every other phenomenon in the universe. One by one, the great minds of the age had risen to challenge the final mysteries of nature, and one by one, they fell short. $E = MC^2$ proved painfully limited, string theory stumbled, and quantum mechanics was soon found terribly old-fashioned. Einstein, Hubble, Hawking – it took humankind millennia to produce brains of their caliber, yet he had grasped – and refuted – their most profound theories by the age of ten. He alone could discover the answer.

It wasn't as though theoretical physics was his only chance at success. He received invitations from colleges, research institutes, universities – *you could cure cancer, you*

could establish world peace, you could end poverty... None of these mattered to him. They limited him. They answered none of his questions, while the Theorem could make him master of the universe.

Six years later, he stood on the Theorem's brink.

Aware of his finger strokes completing the entire human scientific endeavor, it was no wonder he felt slightly apprehensive.

He had gathered all the data he would ever need. Through the years he had cast light upon the Model from every angle imaginable – every quantum reaction, every gravitational anomaly, every magnetic peculiarity – and little by little discerned its form. Nothing escaped his gaze. Nonetheless, the work was agonizing – every step took him into new territory. A single expression might take six months to derive. The observations he used were not all his own – thousands of papers, studies, and essays over the decades pointed out abnormalities in the current structure of science, but no one before him had had the genius to turn thousands of strange footnotes into a workable model.

Today he would complete mankind's great project. He had created a model, a dozen formulas to describe it, and had nearly finished a fifty page paper on their derivation – remarkably terse, given his endeavor's scope.

Across the street, a string quartet practiced. He wished they would go somewhere else. Although he harbored an unconscious fondness for music, he had long since denied its appeal to him. Catching himself humming along, he reminded himself that music was simply an odd coincidence resulting from the effects different sound frequencies had on the brain – nothing but an evolutionary abnormality.

His right ring finger depressed the period key one last time. With the certainty born of his infallible mind, he realized that this simple movement had ended science. He leaned back, exhaled, and then –

He laughed.

He giggled as he surveyed his masterpiece; he chuckled at the perfection of his formulas; he roared as he went back over his observations, every trifle trumpeting his omniscience.

It now seemed so *easy*. No mysteries were left anymore. He hardly believed that humans had taken so long. At last, he had wiped, “Here be Dragons...” off of every map. Nature in all its profundity finally bowed to him, utterly conquered.

He looked out the window to survey his new realm.

He stopped laughing.

The object homo sapiens call “the earth” was rotating in relation to the stellar object homo sapiens call “the sun,” in such a way that “the earth” began to obscure the photons “the sun” had emitted roughly eight minutes prior, and the remaining photons refracted through the atmosphere in such a way as to modify their frequency – and accordingly, the contrast of their neural imprint on the homo sapien in regards to the neural phenomenon of “color,” so as to produce a neural impulse in the homo sapien generally associated with relative smallness of form.

Meanwhile, across the street, four ape-descendants manipulated various man made objects in order to produce coordinated vibrations in the air around them, producing wavelengths whose frequencies interacted in such a way as to produce a response in the neural pathways of the human brain which are generally associated with the phenomenon known as “emotion.”

The sun was setting, and *Greensleeves* was playing.

“My god, no...my *God* – how’d I miss all that?”

Isaac balled up the theorem, threw it into the trash, and dusted off his violin.

Again, someone was laughing, but this time it wasn’t him.

John Mark Taylor

Curtis SH, 9th Grade

Stream

East of the mountains, a gathering of buildings, too small to be a proper town, has rested for many years. It is too quiet for post offices and grocery stores, too small for names, and so those who live there simply call it the Town. The Town is a green place, soft and insignificant. Its people are gentle; their actions are muted and their voices are hushed. But the Town is a lush place. It lives, and thrives, in its own soft, quiet way, and the soft, quiet people who live there want nothing more than what they have already been given.

Near the edge of the Town, a stream has always curled, half-hidden by maples and oaks and any other tree that has the inclination to grow there. The stream does not bubble, nor does it gush, but it flows smoothly through the Town and past it, twisting out and away from the greens, yellows, and browns of the Town's landscape. In the spring and summer, the stream's banks are covered with fine green grass, interspersed with patches of moss and red clover. Then the trees turn, and brown and yellow leaves fall onto the banks and into the stream, sailing with the water out of the Town. The banks grow cold and muddy, and finally freeze with the frost and snow. But the stream rarely freezes; it flows cold and clear past the whites and browns and out of the Town, pouring out into the open world.

The stream's banks were warm and green, long grasses springing up near the trunks of the trees. A woman sat on one bank, her feet bare. With one arm, she held her infant child to her body while he slept. The other arm was stretched in the grass behind her, propping her up as she gazed at another child, seated next to her with his feet in the stream. She smiled a soft, quiet smile as her son kicked up water with his feet. Seeing his mother's smile, he laughed, a toddler's

high giggle, and then, pointing at the baby, spoke in a small voice. Smiling again, she answered him in a murmur, and both mother and child stood. Taking the boy's hand, the woman began walking toward the Town.

Time coursed past the Town. The steam's banks became bare, and then covered with leaves, and then white with snow. Trees grew taller, the boundaries of the stream widened, the people aged together, softly and quietly. But the stream's water remained unchanged, flowing cold and clear past the greens and yellows, oranges and browns, and whites and grays of the Town, pouring out into the open world.

Now two boys sat by the banks of the stream, one nearing the age when a boy becomes a man, the other still only a boy. They sat on the green grass, not talking, just listening to the water. Idly the older boy reached up and ran a hand through his dark, curly hair. Then the younger one, whose eyes never left his brother, mimicked the motion in a rougher, less experienced sort of way. This made the older boy laugh, and the younger boy laughed in turn. Standing, he grasped the hand of his brother, trying to pull him up as well, but the older boy spoke suddenly, quietly, waving a hand, and the younger boy began walking back toward the Town, his face just a little harder than before.

Looking over his shoulder to make sure the younger boy had gone, the elder stood, drawing his feet up out of the stream, and took a knife from his pocket. Opening it, he stepped to a tree and quickly and methodically began carving in the tree's bark. Carefully the knife curved through the dark ridges, shaping first the letter "R" and then "L". He moved back, looking steadily at the tree, a deep light in his eyes. Then he turned and began running back toward the Town.

Time coursed past the Town. The stream's banks became covered with leaves, and then white with snow, and then warm and green. Trees were beaten by wind and weather; the Town hardened, brightened. But the stream's water remained

unchanged, flowing cold and clear past the oranges and browns, whites and grays, and greens and yellows of the Town, pouring out into the open world.

Now a man stood on the banks of the stream, the dead leaves limp and wet under his feet. Beside him stood a woman, only just drawn from childhood. Her eyes looked unblinkingly in his, and she held his hands between their bodies. They spoke to each other in soft, quiet voices, the man and the woman, but did not walk, did not move. They merely stood, listening and speaking and hearing but not attending to the sound of the water. An hour passed, perhaps two, and then the woman, with a quiet word to the man, began walking back toward the Town. The man, watching her walk for a moment, a deep light in his eyes, sighed and followed her back toward the Town.

Time coursed past the Town. The stream's banks became white with snow, and then warm and green, and then covered with leaves. The Town began to grow larger, gathering more force and noise. But the stream's water remained unchanged, flowing cold and clear past the whites and grays, greens and yellows, and oranges and browns of the Town, pouring out into the open world.

Now the banks of the stream were crisp with new, clean snow. A man stood again on the banks, but not the same man. This man was smaller, younger. He laughed in a loud, bright voice, and his eyes were creased from years of smiling, but he had the same dark, curly hair as the first man, the same features in his smaller, younger face. Beside him stood a woman – the same woman. She was older than before, but she smiled alongside the man, not a soft, quiet smile but an intense smile that poured from her eyes to his. They stood together on the cold banks, sometimes walking a short way but always stopping, talking, smiling. An hour passed, two, three, until the sky was dark and filled with stars, and the moon shone fair on the snow, lighting the pale letters etched

on the tree. Then the two stopped, laughing. Taking each other's hands, they turned and began walking back toward the Town.

On the bank of the stream, a man stood gazing after them. A breeze moved his dark hair as he silently watched, arms clenched over his chest. His eyes were hard and dark and cold, and utterly broken, watching the man and the woman until they could no longer be seen. Then he turned and began walking away from the Town, following the stream's water as it flowed clear and cold, past the deep, shifting dark of the Town, pouring ever out into the open world.

Mary Cassio

Homeschool, 9th Grade

The Humbug

As I sewed the apron onto the front of my daughter's Dorothy costume, I looked at the clock and gasped. *Sixty-seven minutes until we leave for play practice, and I haven't finished this, started dinner, rotated the glasses in the china cabinet, or even started laying out the play program for tomorrow night!*

Brianna popped her head in the door and mumbled something with a question mark at the end.

"Excuse me? You have to learn to speak clearly, Brianna!"

"How do you separate eggs?" Brianna shrank back behind the door.

"Can't you see I'm busy? You should try and help me out a bit, not ask me to do more." I started ripping out a crooked seam.

Sixty-four minutes later, I sat in the car, waiting for Brianna to take the cake out of the oven. "Hurry up, Brianna! The director can't be late!" I muttered.

Brianna came running out, and we drove to the playhouse in silence. By the time we arrived, the cast was already there.

I tied my hair back in a ponytail as I strode to the front of the auditorium. "OK, we're running straight through. I'll try to keep from stopping you." The cast giggled, knowing it would take a miracle to keep me from stopping them every five seconds.

I managed it for the first five minutes, but when Brianna huddled as still as the rock of Gibraltar as her house was supposedly being yanked off its foundation and whirled through the air, I had to do something.

"No!" I jumped onto the stage. "You're terrified, Brianna! Shake! Show me some terror!" I widened my eyes and shook

like a three-year-old when his father is coming to tickle him. Brianna turned away. *Well that's why Dorothy isn't played by a forty-year-old woman*, I smiled to myself.

Brianna quaked dutifully, but while Brianna hopped around the stage, trying to get the ruby slippers onto her feet, Alexia, the perfect good Witch of the North, tittered. How had Mrs. Durston managed to raise such a model child, head the PTA, and yet never seem tired?

I tried to hold my tongue during dinner. But when Brianna started complaining about the tuna sandwiches I had slopped together, I lost it.

“You do know why I didn't make a better dinner, don't you? I was slaving all afternoon on your costume and your play practice, while you made pies. Can't you at least put a little more effort into your one chance to be famous? You know who's going to be there. When Mr. Ming sees your talent, you'll be headed for Hollywood. Just help me out a bit! Memorize your lines, for Pete's sake!”

Brianna's eyes fixed on mine, and her face froze in neither a smile nor a frown.

“I'm sorry. You do have them memorized. But can't you put a little expression into it? And don't you look at me that way, young lady!”

Her eyes left mine to rest on the tuna falling out of her sandwich and she mumbled, “My play?”

Well, I guess it was my idea. I just wanted to give her the opportunity to be famous, like I never was. But she's only doing this for me. I bit my lip. Have I failed to do anything for her?

Before I could catch my breath the next morning, it was 4:34 P.M. – time to leave for the play. I berated myself the whole way there for leaving the “H” out of “Dorothy” on the program.

As I sprinted around with last-minute crises, Brianna offered me a chocolate cookie. “It'll make you happy and give

you energy.” I swallowed it in one bite while I pinned a munchkin’s costume.

As *The Wizard of Oz* started, I squeezed my hands together, glancing around the audience until I spotted Mr. Ming, who was examining the rings on his fat fingers. I held my breath.

It started out all right. Brianna looked almost genuinely frightened – maybe she was – as she held on tight to Rachele in her dog costume.

But as she said her lines to the ground in front of the good witch of the North, Brianna started jiggling up and down. I glanced over at Mr. Ming. He was admiring the stonework on the walls. *Maybe he didn’t see that.*

As the play progressed, however, I lost all hope. Mr. Ming slumped lower and lower in his chair, and Brianna jiggled so much her words were lost. I rather wished they’d hurry up and get to the wizard so he could give Brianna some courage.

But the wizard could not give Brianna courage any more than he could give it to the lion, and she started stumbling through her lines. One mistake led to another, and soon she ground to a halt.

Mr. Ming was wide awake now. He looked genuinely anxious for her to remember her line.

I didn’t want pity for my daughter. I wanted dumbstruck admiration!

Brianna’s eyes fastened on me, as if to say, “I’m sorry! I tried!”

“Are you not a great wizard?” I hissed. But it was too late. Brianna burst into tears. I hid my face in my hands and waited for it to be over.

Somehow, we got home. I tried to comfort Brianna, but she could not meet my eyes. I dashed to my room and locked the door.

I lay down on the bed and fell asleep, dreaming that I was the wizard and had turned into a ball of fire. Brianna was running away, shouting, “No, no! I don’t want courage!”

Suddenly, I woke up with the realization, *I’ve been trying to seem like the perfect mom, and give Brianna courage, like the Wizard of Oz, but I can’t change her. I’m just a humbug. I was so wrong! How can I make it up to her?*

I rushed into the kitchen, which smelled like apple-cinnamon. Yum!

And then I realized it. *I don’t need to change Brianna. She is already a better cook than I am!*

Brianna was grunting as she pushed a marble rolling-pin over some very un-circular piecrust.

“Brianna! Did you leave any apples for me?” I yanked the fridge open. Not an apple in sight. “Oh, no, now I can’t make dinner!”

As Brianna’s face froze again, I laughed. “Oh, well, too late for supper anyway.”

“You’re not angry?”

“Course not! You know what I realized?” I rolled up my sleeves.

“What?”

“I need to help you out a bit, not ask you to do more. Here, gimme that rolling-pin.”

As she handed it to me, she smiled. “You’re a good mommy.”

Rosemary Sheldon

Covenant HS, 10th Grade

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Short Stories

Grades 11 & 12



One
Own
Words

Tom and Lee Conquer the World

It starts like this: one step on the ice rink and I've broken my leg. It's not even impressively mauled, just a clean break from being a klutz. Nobody signs the cast, especially after Tom scrawls all over it his this-five-minutes favorite poem, *Jabberwocky*.

"Doesn't get any better than that! 'Beware the Jabberwock, my son!'" He brandishes an invisible sword, grinning insane. I sigh and shake my head, not bothering to hide my own crazy smile.

"No Emerson? Byron? Shelley –no 'rise like lions'?"

"That was last week. I'm into absurdism now."

"*You're* absurd."

"Ha ha ha," he deadpans.

Meanwhile I can't get up for a week, and thus have a hard time keeping track of the Boy. That's what I call him in my head, affectionately. The All-American, All-Mischievous, Tom Sawyer Boy. It's cute, but really? He's dangerous. While I'm out, Tom starts no less than two fights, three fires, eight doomed projects, and a search party. Those are just what I've heard yet.

The day the cast comes off he shows up at my door, and I know something's up.

"Hey, hey, guess what I got!" He is practically bouncing with excitement. *A lobotomy*, I want to say. *Your mom*.

"Nothing," I say instead. "You got nothing."

"That's bad grammar."

"Tommy? I don't want to hear about it."

"Yes you do, see, because you have interest in this."

“Interest?”

“Fifty dollars of interest.”

I swear. “Where did you get that?”

“Dearest piggy-bank, my friend. For children ten years and younger.”

I have no choice; I give in. “All right, if I’ve got so much interest in it, tell me what *it* is. But you owe me.”

“Of course I do! But only if this doesn’t work.”

“A scheme? Are you telling me this is another hare-brained scheme?”

“Lee, Leelee, love-lee,” he sweet-talks me, as if I didn’t know better already. “Not a scheme, a highly-evolved plan. Harebrained, maybe, but that’s genius you mean. It wouldn’t be one of my highly-evolved plans if it weren’t hare-genius-brained.”

“Sure, Tom. Sure thing.”

“This baby is the sweetest thing you’ve ever seen. We’ll go to Vegas, Mexico, New York - you name it and we’ll be there, stylin’ -”

“Spill it, you smooth-talker.”

“- I said, in style, top up -”

“A car? A convertible?”

“- wind in our hair, foot to the floor, flying. Think of it! Two hot-shot superstar kids on our way *up*! Feast your eyes, Lee, on this piece of machine.”

He hefts the garage door with a flourish and a gleam in his eyes, like he’s got something to show me, something real nice, and I almost believed his talking it up it was so good, but now the light’s on I can see this is no sweet ride, not even a convertible. It’s just a piece of machine - a piece of unfinished, clattery, oily machine. The seats are torn at the seams, leaking their manky yellow stuffing. The ceiling cloth has sagged down, flopping like a huge sail belly.

“Tom,” I begin, not knowing what to say. “Tom, you... you, you know this ... this really... Tom, I am telling you. You. Owe me.” I look at the un-car again. “So bad.” He ignores me, too happy to care, and climbs into the driver’s seat.

“This is it. *The thing*. We’ll go somewhere, really *go*, I can *feel* it.”

There is absolutely nothing good to say, so I lie. “Yeah. Yeah, I see it.”

“I feel like Gatsby. I feel like that American dream, like Pilgrims and the twenties.”

“You never read that book. Gatsby never sat in a beat Machine with a crazy big plan.”

“He never had the chance, is why.” Tom is perfectly serious, perfectly concentrated on his Big Plan. I snort. It is laughable, but at the same time, I could cry. A gutted grey car, a motor sitting on the sidewalk, lurking sad and eerie like some dripping organ. “You don’t know how to fix this thing.”

He gesticulates with his treasure map, eyes wide, “I’ve got the manual, Lee! I’ll learn so fast your head will spin right off your neck.”

“And then?”

“What do you mean, *and then?* We’ll *go!* Get thee behind me, Salinas!” He grips the wheel, white-knuckled and wide-eyed, grinning like a coyote. I can almost hear the screech of tires, even here, jacked up on the driveway.

It never happens. What happens is Tom goes inside to get a drink, and some punk grabs a few parts and tools left laying out on the driveway, and bolts. Tom never saw the kid, and his dad came home later and screamed him out for losing his tools.

“My dad’s going to sell what’s left,” Tom says. “Keep the money to pay for his tools.”

“Did you tell him fifty dollars of that’s mine?”

He looks at me wearily. No words.

“I’ll tell him, then.”

Tom sighs and hangs his head.

We go to the park and sit on the rotting dock, watching the still pond, dangling our feet in the water. The day might as well be over, looking at Tom’s gloomy face. But nobody else is here, that’s the important part, and the water is too calm to pass by. This sunlight must be sat for, this pond must be watched, this heat is meant for basking in the shade. That’s the whole point of August.

“I wanted to go somewhere,” he says, finally. His voice is rough-edged and sad like the sky. “It was a stupid idea.”

“No. No, it was a good idea. It would have worked, maybe.”

He snorts. He doesn’t believe me. But I believe him, I believe *in* him. I tell him as much, because there is no better moment.

“It wasn’t a good idea,” he says, leaving it at that.

Suddenly I’m angry. He can’t give up like this. “It was damn good. It was the best idea anyone’s had in this stupid town.”

“Stop trying to make me *feel better*.”

“You’re feeling sorry for yourself. Come on.” I stand up, impatient.

“I want to stay longer.”

“We’re going somewhere. Come on.”

“I said I want to stay longer.”

Stomping down the dock, to the shore, I turn back to give him my best Look. The one that says, You’re going to listen to me or else I *will* leave you, and I won’t answer the door when you knock today, tomorrow, or the next day.

He gets up and comes with me, grabs my hand and holds it as I stalk to the car.

I hit the freeway. Tom is quiet the whole way; I'm tense; he can feel it. Maybe he can't get some hope for himself with his farfetched Plans, but I can get some for him.

It only takes an hour and we're at the ocean, in up to our knees, and I point out to the blue, make him look real hard.

"We own that, Tom. That whole damn world is ours. Don't you *ever* forget it."

He is still. He takes a deep breath, releases, then looks me in the eye, grins so hard I can feel my cheeks ache.

"Well *dub!*"

Stephanie Dering

Rogers HS, 11th Grade

Not for Time

I rowed as quietly as possible across the glassy bay – squirming on the thwart because I'd stepped on it with wet feet before sitting on it. As I rounded the spit the house came into view, looking more like a fortress made of silvered wood than the humble dwelling it had been. It's once brightly-lit window stared vacantly at me without recognition.

“Well, what did you expect?” I muttered to myself, “it to welcome you with open arms? You hardly gave it cause for that.”

After beaching the dory, I stepped gingerly up the seaweed-coated stairs that led to the empty doorway to the basement.

The basement was now bare but for a few sawhorses in the far corner. Yet in my mind's eye the room came alive, as it had been long ago.

“John, John, Danny's here!” shouted my Aunt Meg as she dragged me by the hand down the steep stairs.

Uncle John nodded in my direction but said nothing.

Still smiling like a three-year-old, Aunt Meg skipped back up the stairs, despite the silver braids that swung behind her. I was left alone with the silent man, who was to be my guardian. Getting one slim strip of wood perfectly smooth seemed to be his only concern.

As if I needed a guardian, I was twelve years old and big for my age, and here I was packed off to some obscure bay in Puget Sound with two old relatives.

For what seemed like hours I sat, eyes half closed and lips sneering at him. He was humming softly, apparently rejoicing in his work, now and then he sang a few snatches of words, “...sands of time are sinking...” his head wagging to the tune but his hands all the while worked steadily on the dory slowly forming before my eyes. My stomach growled.

“Get that thwart there sanded and fitted – then we’ll think about dinner,” he said, without glancing up.

I did not move.

A great din presently came from up the stairs – like someone was kicking pots and pans around on a stone floor. But it was only Aunt Meg setting the table.

“She’s hint’n she’s hungry,” Uncle John said, with the slow smile he always had when speaking about his sister. “So am I.” He stumped up the stairs deliberately, but when I tried to follow,

“You will not be welcome at dinner till that thwart there is finished, Dan.” And he closed the door.

While they ate, I slaved over the thwart – my first meal with them and I never ate it.

That was fifteen years ago, just after I had been suspended from middle school.

I climbed the now rotting stairs leading to the kitchen – still yellow and the evening sun still glowed through the west wall that was all windows. Ivy had invaded through the arched windows and entwined about the cupboards.

In a neat row across the ceiling of the kitchen nook were the hooks Uncle John had hammered up for Aunt Meg to hang her lavender up to dry on. Aunt Meg loved lavender and all herbs – any flower with a scent. She used to sit there, beneath her lavender, listening intently to the sea lapping, the waves breaking over the sand spit and the gulls wheeling above, and she’d breath deep breaths of the lavender and salt, she even liked the smell of seaweed drying on a low tide.

“It’s like listening to a concert to hear all that richness,” she would say to me.

She could tell when the tide was ebbing or flowing from the sound of the waves; she could tell the call of a turn from a kingfisher; she could tell were Uncle John and I were just from the sound of our feet.

I glanced into the bright little room, off of the kitchen, which had been her bedroom, fearful of the memories it would hold.

I saw a boy, old enough to know better, slink in and lift the lid of Aunt Meg's treasured money chest, as I reached my dirty little paw in it, another hand softly brushed mine aside and closed the lid. I froze for a few seconds, then swung around – her vacant eyes seemed to pierce my soul, and I writhed as one would at the touch of a red-hot poker.

“I expect you'll find the view from the kitchen's the same as here,” she said leading me away. I cried silently with shame and anger at letting myself be caught, she pretended not to notice, but she had never missed a sound in that house.

I hastily left the room and its memories, turning to the kitchen garden. Aunt Meg loved the cool, richness of dirt, but she never grew anything but herbs. She could grow every herb, both commonplace and exotic, except for thyme. Thyme refused to grow in her little plot of land, despite all her coaxings. I think it had something to do with all the salt in the soil there by the bay, but then, all the other herbs grew. She laughed as once again, come spring, her thyme seed refused to show its head,

“Must be we're not made for time, Danny,” she said, then her face began to glow as if washed in the light of some unknown sun, “I am so glad I cannot see *this* world.”

That was the last time she ever worked in that little plot of soil.

As I turned away from the overgrown plot of land a phrase from the song Uncle John had been humming flitted like a ghost through my mind, “Dark, dark hath been the midnight, but dayspring is at hand.” Aunt Meg had been overflowing with that dayspring, that “deep sweet well of love.” And my life, despite her faithful love, had been a dark, dark midnight. Will dayspring ever come?

Brittany Bond

Covenant HS, 12th Grade

The Joy of a Kitten

They had finally come and she was so excited. Mabel Danielson was an eighty-two year old woman who had been a widow now for twenty years. It was just three months ago now that her only son moved across the country to be with his kids. She had spent her time since then in the garden, watching re-runs of I Love Lucy or knitting; but knitting was getting too hard on her hands now. Life was whizzing by, as like it was a dream, black and white and dull. It wasn't until her neighbor, Lydia Smith, told her that her cat was having kittens that she began to look forward to something again. A little kitten would be just the thing to make her life happy again. She had always loved taking care of people and animals, but she hadn't had the chance in such a long time. It was time now; the kittens were ready to be taken home. There were 5, and Lydia had put up signs around the street saying that whoever wanted one could just come by and get one.

It was around 2:00 when Mabel got outside and hobbled over to the Smith house. It was a nice sunny day and Lydia was out in the yard with the little kittens in a box.

"They're going fast," said Lydia. "Only one left, are you interested?"

"Well, maybe I'll take a look," said Mabel, sound stubborn. She didn't want to sound desperate.

As she looked down, a feeling that she hadn't felt in a long time put a smile across her face. It was love at first sight. The kitten looked up at her, eyes squinting from the sun and her little wet nose scrunched up as she let out a sneeze. Mabel laughed.

"How...", she began, but right then a loud noise was heard behind her as a little boy ran and scooped up the kitten.

“Please Mom,” He squealed. “Please can I have it? You promised!”

“Jimmy, quiet down! Of course you can have it, but you need to ask the nice lady how much she wants for it.”

The two walked over to Lydia and Jimmy’s mom handed her some money. Lydia glanced over at Mabel uneasily, but Mabel put on her best smile as if to say, “I wasn’t going to take it, look how happy he is.”

Mabel knew the boy. Jimmy was always running down the street with his basketball to the park. He would sometimes even stop by and talk with her on the days that she was out in the garden.

Jimmy’s mom walked back to the car and Jimmy ran after her, but at the fence he stopped and looked back.

“Mrs. Danielson?” He said.

Mabel then realized she was still staring at the box.

“Yes dear,” she said, turning to face him and putting on her sweet, old lady smile.

“I just wanted to say, have a good day.” And he took off to his car.

“Thank you,” she said, almost to herself.

Mabel said goodbye to Lydia and slowly made her way back to her house and turned on the TV. She loved the episode where Lucy worked in the chocolate factory.

A couple of days went by and the unexplainable feeling of loss Mabel felt was beginning to subside. She was back to her normal routine; making tea and watching TV. She even started knitting again, although her fragile, arthritic stricken hands could only take it for 10 minutes at a time.

One sunny day, Mabel could no longer take being indoors so she decided to go back to her garden since it had been so neglected recently. She put on her knee pads and painfully squatted to the ground. Weeds covered everything –

her tomatoes, beans, carrots, everything. She worked for about an hour without seeming to accomplish anything. Her hands hurt and she was frustrated. Throwing down her trowel she pushed herself up quickly, but as she did so, she heard a pop and her hip gave way. She lay there as the sharp pain subsided, but the tears kept flowing. All the loneliness and sadness of getting old rushed out, and she could no longer hold it in. She lay there in the cool grass with the sun beating down on her for what seemed like forever, but she knew she had to get up. Very slowly and carefully, she used all the strength she had left in her arms to pick herself up. Her hip was fine now, but she still had a pain in her heart. Her eyes began to water again as she hobbled back to the house thinking of how pathetic she had become. She had just reached the door, when she heard a familiar voice.

“Hello, Mrs. Danielson.” Jimmy’s voice rang as he bounced his basketball. Mabel turned trying to look happy, and smiled.

“Hello James,” she said as she opened the door.

Jimmy cocked his head a bit with a questioning look, then smiled and headed off.

“Have a great day.”

That evening, Mabel sat in her big comfy chair by the fire and read a book. She had taken a hot bath and now felt much better. She was getting to the climax in the story when there was a knock on the door. When she finally opened the door, there was little Jimmy with the kitten in his hands and a look of dismay on his face.

“Um...Mrs. Danielson, My mom says I can’t keep the cat. She says she’s allergic to it and she can’t stop sneezing.”

“O, that’s horrible James, I’m sorry.”

They stared at each other in an awkward silence when finally Jimmy spoke.

“I was wondering if you would want to take care of him, and I don’t know...maybe I could come visit him sometimes.”

Mabel felt sorry for the little boy, but couldn’t help a little smile.

“I would love to take care of him for you, and you are welcome over here any time. I know the cat would love to see you, and so would I.”

“Thank you so much,” he said, putting the small kitten into her fragile arms. “I’ll bring over all the stuff we have for him and I will see you tomorrow. Thanks again.”

The boy left and Mabel stood holding the kitten. He looked up at her and let out a soft meow. Tears filled her eyes again, but this time they were tears of happiness. She would no longer be all alone. She had the cat, and now, a little boy.

Jimmy opened the door to his house and his mom rushed over to him.

“Sweetheart, I can’t find Fido anywhere, do you have him?”

“Mom,” he said, standing up straighter, and looking proud. “I gave him to Mrs. Danielson. She’s lonely and she needs him more than me.”

His mother looked down at him, smiled adoringly, swooped down and enveloped her son into a huge hug.

“Mom, please let go,” he said laughing, “I can’t breathe.”

Sandra Morrow

Covenant HS, 12th Grade

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