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Teen

2013 Winners

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creativity in youth.**

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2013 National Medal for Museum and Library Service Winner

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Congratulations to the nearly 1,000 talented students who participated in the 17th annual Our Own Expressions Teen Writing & Art Contest.

Volunteers, including Pierce County Library System staff and Pierce County Library Foundation Board members, reviewed the entries. Author Liz Gallagher and poet Kristen McHenry selected this year's writing winners, evaluating originality, style, general presentation, grammar, and spelling. Photographer Dane Meyer and artist Jennifer Adams selected the art winners based on composition, artistic skills, creativity, and effective use of media.

Pierce County Library Foundation awarded the winners with cash prizes and the winning entries are published in this book.

Pierce County Library gratefully acknowledges the support of Pierce County Library Foundation, The News Tribune, Pacific Lutheran University and Print NW to help fund the contest.

2013 Winners



*Our Own
Expressions*

Poetry Winners

Grades 7 and 8

1st Colors of the Island

Gabriel Carlson

Kopachuck Middle School

2nd A Different Way to Paint

Tamminga Watchman

Other

3rd Paradise Island

Shane Lillie

Kopachuck Middle School

Grades 9 and 10

1st Snow

Brenna Peever

Home School

2nd Coloured Balloons in a Cemetery

Rachel Duerst

Columbia Junior High

3rd Time Machine

Jocelyn Gonzales

Steilacoom High School

Grades 11 and 12

1st Dissolution

Jack Chakerian

Gig Harbor High School

2nd Consider Tiresias

Clay Snell

Tacoma School of the Arts

3rd remember

Esther Lee

Curtis Senior High School

Drawing Winners

Grades 7 and 8

1st	Vibrant Daniel Matsuda	Other
2nd	Obert the Octopus Grace Wilsie	Ford Middle School
3rd	Bluejay Watching Leah Harlander	Home School

Grades 9 and 10

1st	The Architect Penny Mae Rhines	Home School
2nd	Uncertainty Mikhaella Walden	Curtis Senior High School
3rd	Macklemore Lauren Sullivan	Bellarmino Preparatory

Grades 11 and 12

1st	Her Passing Fixations Rachel Lynch	Tacoma School of the Arts
2nd	The Sands of Time are Sinking Tamala Aown	Covenant High School
3rd	Untitled Jesse MacKinnon	Peninsula High School

Photography Winners

Grades 7 and 8

1st Water

Dawson Dressel

Ford Middle School

2nd Dream Catcher

Mercella Washburn

Key Peninsula Middle School

3rd Leaf

Delany Sager

Ford Middle School

Grades 9 and 10

1st House of Cards

Nick Tollefson

Peninsula High School

2nd Nature Overcomes

Mirna Ali

Franklin Pierce High School

3rd Seaside Escape

Taylor DeSmet

Ballou Junior High School

Grades 11 and 12

1st Chairmental Guidance

Esther Lee

Curtis Senior High School

2nd Peering In

Jesse MacKinnon

Peninsula High School

3rd Beauty in Details

Ellen Carr

Home School

Short Story Winners

Grades 7 and 8

- | | | |
|------------|--|-------------------------|
| 1st | A Young Heart and Her Friend the Snow | |
| | Virginia Davidson | Pioneer Middle School |
| 2nd | The Noir Harbor Pier | |
| | Summer Ash | Kopachuck Middle School |
| 3rd | The Girl Who Dared | |
| | Hailey Holm | Glacier Middle School |

Grades 9 and 10

- | | | |
|------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1st | Grief's Perspective | |
| | Natalia Giovengo | Sumner Senior High School |
| 2nd | Meat | |
| | Matthew Pfefferle | Covenant High School |
| 3rd | The Child Bride | |
| | Meg Low | Washington Virtual Academy |

Grades 11 and 12

- | | | |
|------------|---|------------------------|
| 1st | Bright Eyes Watching Butterflies | |
| | Amanda Gordon | Gig Harbor High School |
| 2nd | Lifeline | |
| | Erin Haas | Bellarmino Preparatory |
| 3rd | Mr. Wanderer | |
| | Hansol Hyon | Lakes High School |

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Poetry

Grades 7 & 8



*Our Own
Expressions*

Colors of the Island

by Gabriel Carlson

First Place Winner

Red, delicious highland cranberries melting in my mouth
Orange, the island sunset of hazy sun stained clouds
Yellow, like the dashes on the road not far from here
Green, when fresh, wild pear is abundant on the tree
Blue, how the lake water glimmers in the morning sun
Purple, lavender in the garden outside my window
Black, ash and smoke from the fire
White as the clouds meandering above
All the colors of the island blend into one perfect place

A Different Way to Paint

by Tamminga Watchman

Second Place Winner

The mystery of words is the picture they make
Without pencil, or paper, or canvas, or paint.
This image is unseen, yet it's not weak or faint.
Instead it's full of color and life; it's ornate.

Now try, if you're able, to imagine these words
Creating an image on a vast drawing board.
The design they depict is not simply explored,
But is intricate, complex, and full of rewards.

Just as paintings spark words to describe how they look,
So stories, with words, create canvases in books.
So many written sketches have been drawn through time;
I can't help but try to paint through this simple rhyme.

Paradise Island

by Shane Lillie

Third Place Winner

While I sit here in the window,
When yellow tamaracks dance in the wind,
Where the dark evergreens know no bounds,
As the birds serenade each other from a distance,
Because the sun shines through the trees like giants,
Then the deer wade in the sea of flowers
 in the meadow,
I sip a cup of tea as warm as the morning
 of Christmas.

Poetry

Grades 9 & 10



*Our Own
Expressions*



Snow

by Brenna Peever

First Place Winner

The world has been reborn;
Erased, and drawn again strangely.
Around me all is softly
Hard and sharp, a muffled starkness.
And above, and below, and all
Around me, is this wonder of a
New-born, ghostly world,
Old and new as Time, both
Darkness and clear Light together.
And the trees sleep softly
On; or hold their breath in wonder.
And I walk by, the first
To see this; maybe, too, the last;
But neither first nor last
To know this reverence. For this
Alien world has come, not
Once, nor twice; but many times, and
Each time it is new. I
Go on gently, floating in delight,
Among the fallen snow.

Coloured Balloons in a Cemetery

by Rachel Duerst

Second Place Winner

Notice out there, within the distance
An abandoned cemetery
Beside a weathered headstone sways a
Bouquet of balloons in arrayed hues
Waltzing with the wind. Careless.
Free. Boasting their pride and joy.

Look now, near the dirt-paved road
An expressionless figure
Gazing back upon a single grave. Humbled.
On the person's face formed a
Piteous smile beyond a heart of stone.

Notice out there, within the distance
A sealed letter
Torn and tear-stained by rain. Exposed.
Inside the parchment held a
Collection of words meant to be said
Haunting its author. Ceaseless.

Innumerable words: to explain. Describe. Cherish.
Confess. As though holding a world of thoughts
In the palm of your hand.

Time Machine

by Jocelyn Gonzales

Third Place Winner

On.

Through the viewfinder
objects of mundane utility
yet infinite beauty
wisps of miasma through its crevices.

Zoom in on a dew droplets
resting on the cusp of a leaf.
Zoom out to the bustling city street
lives and stories brushing
as fleeting as a kiss
yet, just as remarkable.

After finding
the perfect image
a flawless moment to capture... click.

A sliver of time
netted like a jellyfish
a jarred firefly
a pressed flower
to be touched with withered hands.

Off. And on, again.

Poetry

Grades 11 & 12



*Our Own
Expressions*

Dissolution

by Jack Chakerian

First Place Winner

I'll tell you where I am now:

Water curls, whitens, polishes the sand, then dissolves.

The cliff's grasshair.

Numbing cloudwater, white and gray.

Rotten wood.

Salt in the air.

I see you:

Tickets and emails,

Applications and resumes and photocopies and folders and

Stop!

What touches your hand or presses your feet?

Feel the clothes against your skin.

Feel the shape of your breath.

Your wristwatch and your telephone,

Your shopping list and your four o'clock shift,

Even that friend or teacher or stranger moving their mouths at you,

Explaining or whimpering or laughing or yelling.

Let them all dissolve in the waves of the sea

Consider Tiresias

by Clay Snell

Second Place Winner

I lounge prone on a beachhead,
Listening on the air for Berloiz' Symphonie Fantastique;
In the first movement two beats are accented;
They are the only noise as the beach tears itself in two.
Fission is absolute, sand's smallest component stripped raw-
Water is no longer translucent but rather an opaque grey;
Times New Roman expands perfectly from the violent epicenter,
Toward a girl washing her hair. I step forward and beg
Her to rinse my eyes in fresh water; the Atbara, Ganges,
Thames. Clean in white rapid. Calcified gloriously.
-I am the breathing incarnation of barbarism,
Enveloped in river and returned to the saline sea.
I taste sodium and spot the pre-blast beach.
Periodic transmigration;
I reach for a floating rhododendron near the bank
And permit water to envelop my ears and eyes,
Consumed in the same silence as the Symphony;
Passed through youth and age



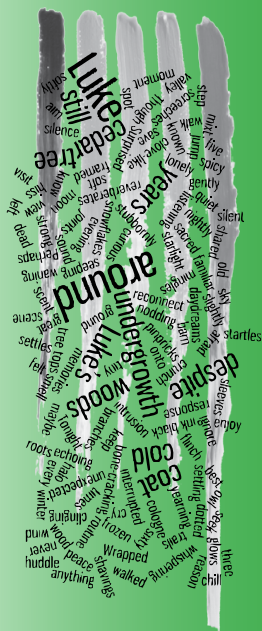
remember

by Esther Lee

Third Place Winner

remember when you used to
smile with your
teeth?
your dimples were
two anchors pulling
the drawstrings of your mouth

Grades 7 & 8



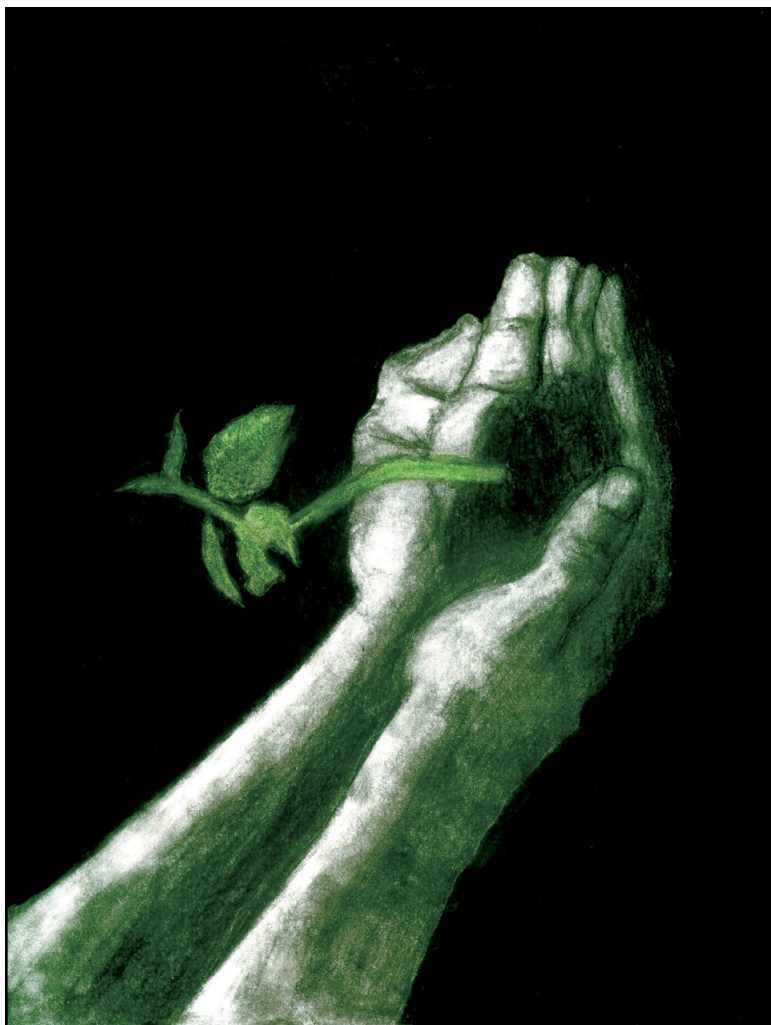
Our Own Expressions



Vibrant

by Daniel Matsuda

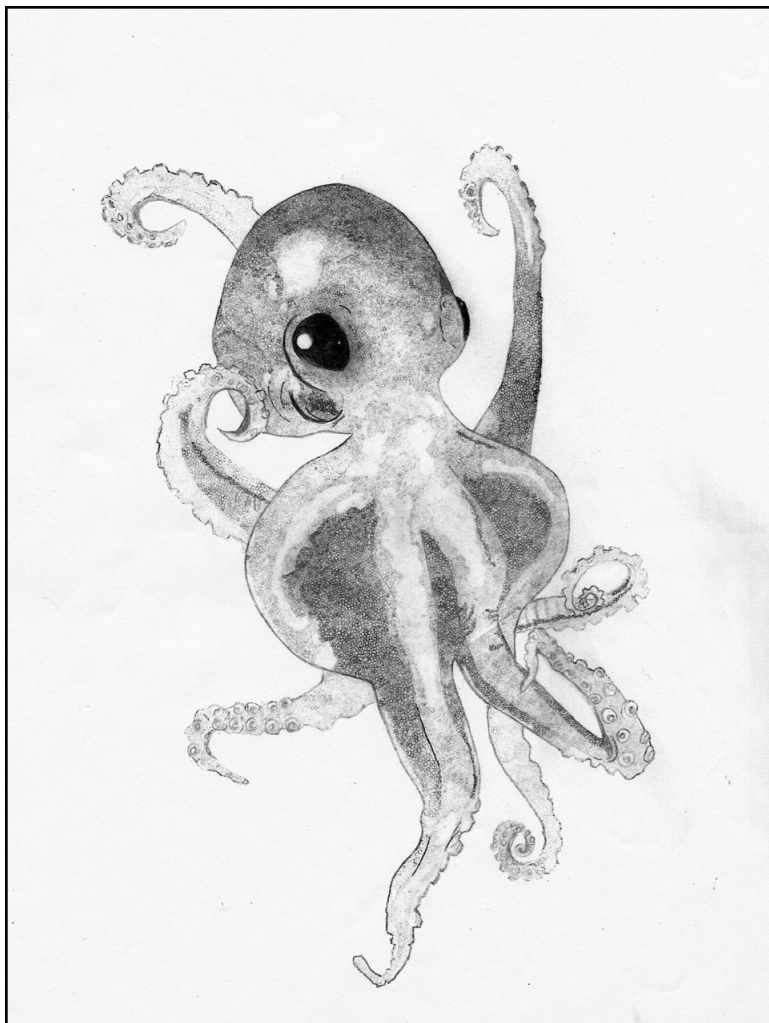
First Place Winner



Obert the Octopus

by Grace Wilsie

Second Place Winner



Bluejay Watching

by Leah Harlander

Third Place Winner



Grades 9 & 10



Our Own Expressions

The Architect

by Penny Mae Rhines

First Place Winner



Uncertainty

by Mikhaella Walden

Second Place Winner





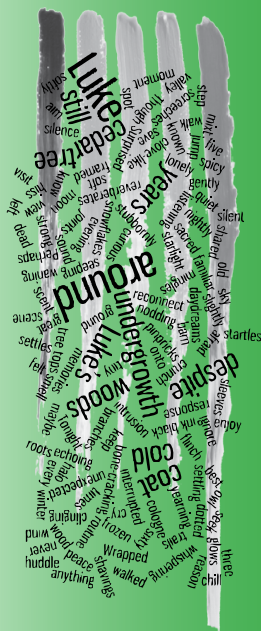
Macklemore

by Lauren Sullivan

Third Place Winner



Grades 11 & 12



Our Own Expressions

by Rachel Lynch

First Place Winner



The Sands of Time are Sinking

by Tamala Aown

Second Place Winner

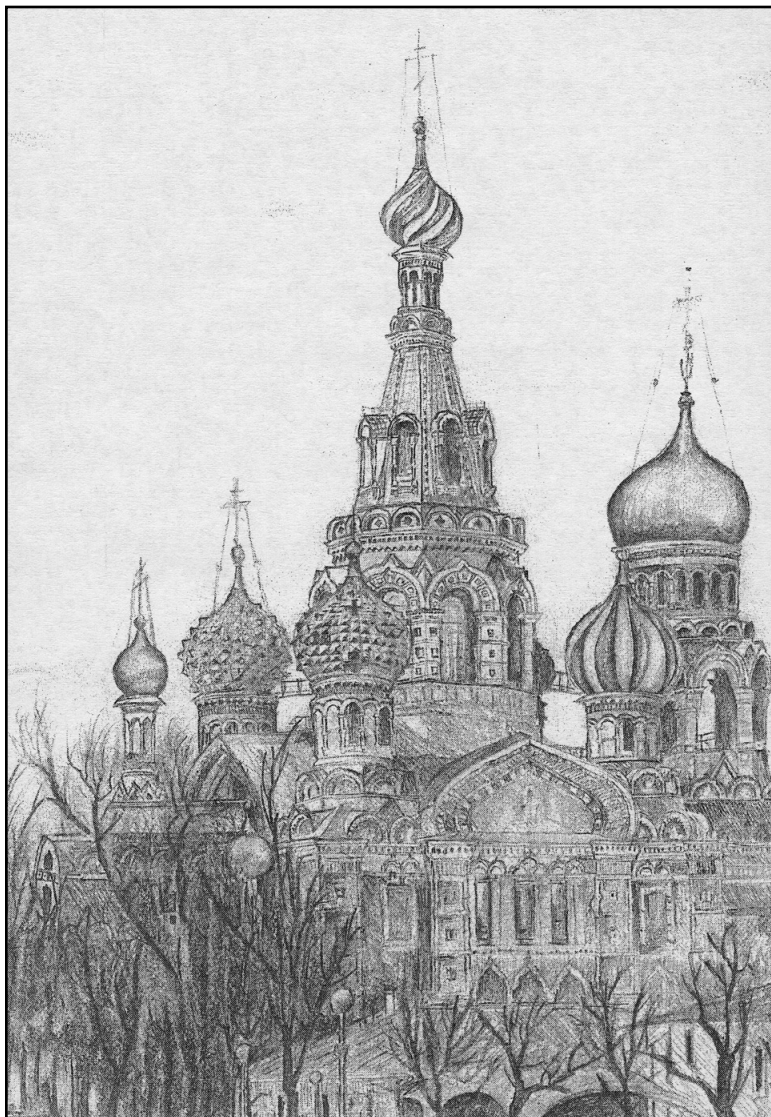




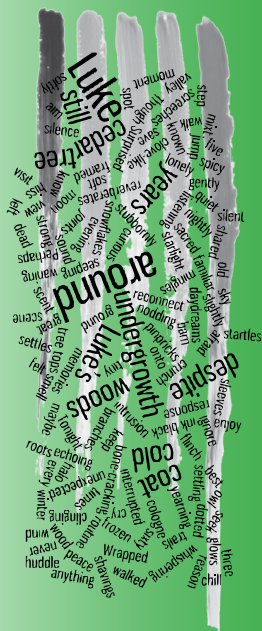
Untitled

by Jesse MacKinnon

Third Place Winner



Grades 7 & 8



Our Own Expressions



Water

by Dawson Dressel

First Place Winner



Dream Catcher

by Mercella Washburn

Second Place Winner





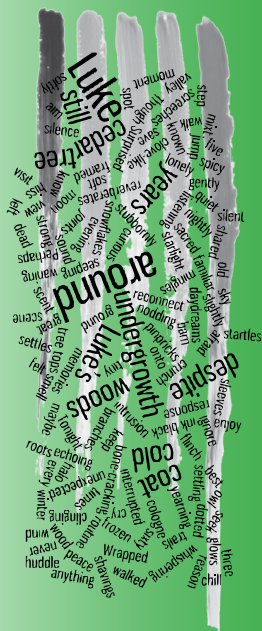
Leaf

by Delany Sager

Third Place Winner



Grades 9 & 10

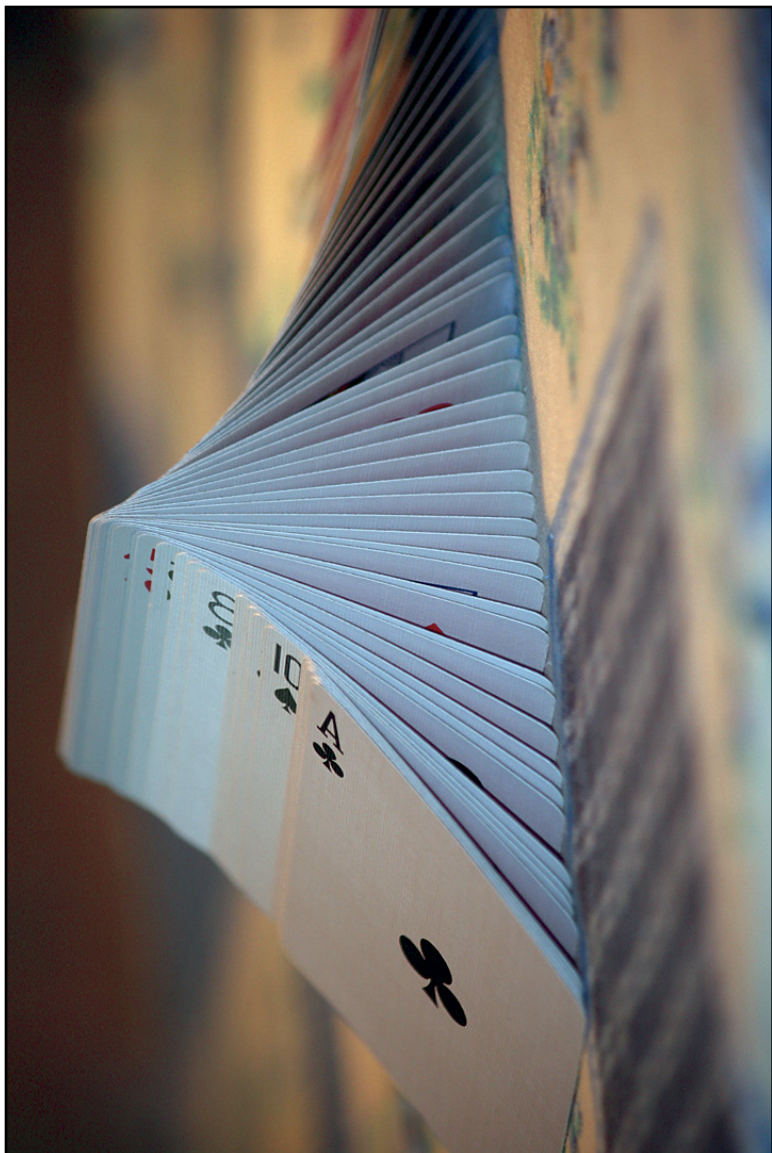


Our Own Expressions

House of Cards

by Nick Tollefson

First Place Winner



Nature Overcomes

by Mirna Ali

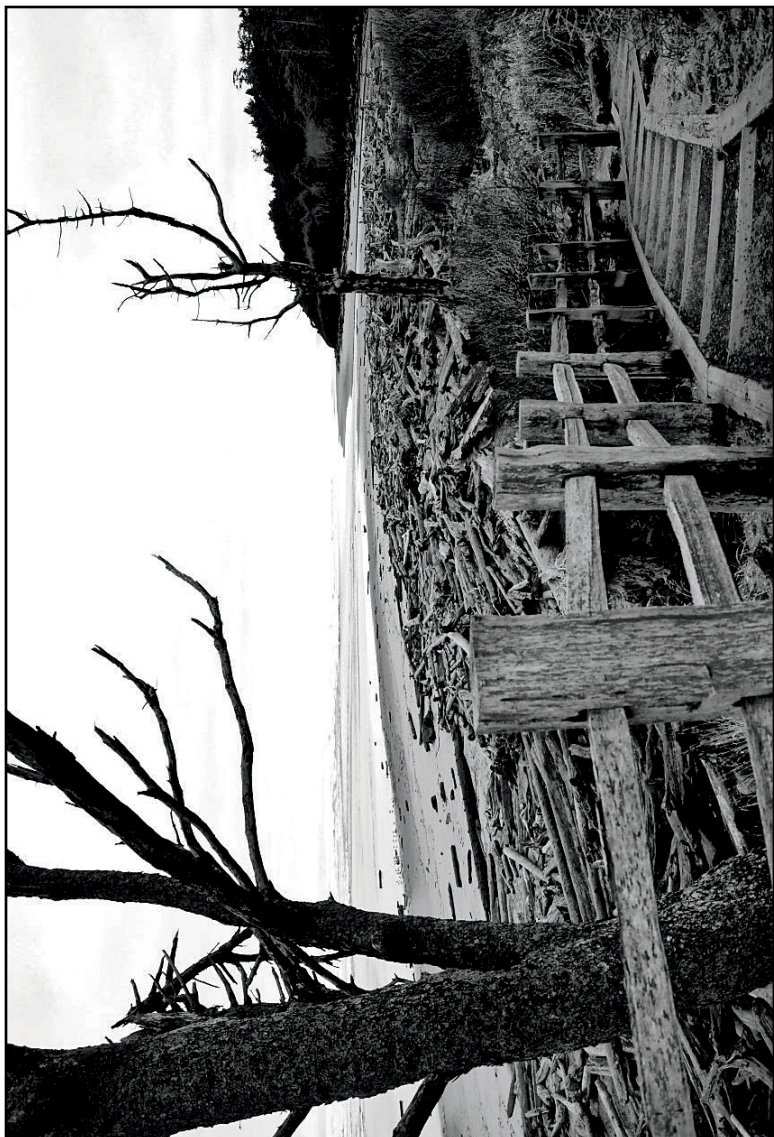
Second Place Winner



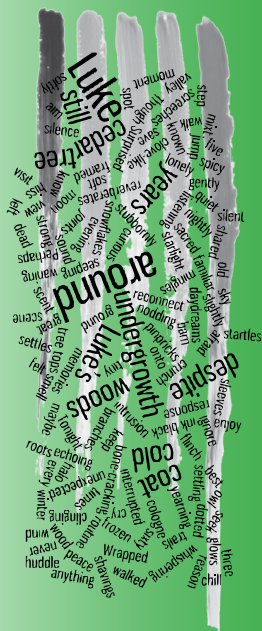
Seaside Escape

by Taylor DeSmet

Third Place Winner



Grades 11 & 12



Our Own Expressions

Chairental Guidance

by Esther Lee

First Place Winner



Peering In

by Jesse MacKinnon

Second Place Winner



Beauty in Details

by Ellen Carr

Third Place Winner



Grades 7 & 8



A Young Girl and Her Friend the Snow

by Virginia Davidson

First Place Winner

"Please... Forgive me." She whispers, taking one last glimpse of the place she loves and hates, the place you live. Bowing her delicate head, she gives a quiet sob. She should not be asking for forgiveness.

The snow crunches rhythmically under her plodding feet. It seems to her the sound of the shattering of her already mangled young heart, like a mirror. Even the crimson blood completes the picture, tiny, perfect rubies tumbling onto the pale landscape in her wake.

And when she bleeds, she bleeds, knowing you won't care.

It will not be her face on the milk cartons; she knows this. Perhaps, someday, you might look up, barely conscious, murmuring, "Isn't something missing?" Speaking to no one, because no one is there anymore.

The ghosts of her short, tragic life flood her amber eyes, crystal tears whispering her history as they escape, following the footsteps of so many before. She has never been one to be strong, to be stubborn.

After all, she still loves you. She would die to know you love her.

But when you find her absent, years from now, you won't shed a tear for her. You've forgotten the love you once had for her. She is the sacrifice, and you won't try for her.

You don't try, not then, not now, never.

No one is missing her. At school, she is invisible. They do not remember her save for, "You're smart, aren't you? What's the answer to this problem?"

They can solve their own problems now. The unusually violent thought shocks her, and she stills, biting her already cracked lip.

Am I really this bitter?

Am I so insignificant?

Am I really this unimportant?

She knows the answer, and she takes a deep breath, sucks the wintry frozen breeze into her scrawny chest.

"Isn't something missing? ISN'T SOMEONE MISSING ME?!" She screams, choking on racking sobs, collapsing onto the soft, sympathetic snow, as she has fallen into dreams of you before. Dreams that you love her, that you are a family once again, that Daddy didn't leave either of you. Dreams are all they were, and she woke each time to an empty room, bare of your presence.

She always wakes without you there.

She is alone, utterly alone, throughout her life and now as she lays, crying softly in the cold. No one loves her, not like you used to. No one cares that she is missing.

No one cares that her mind is missing.

The snow embraces her, its frosty arms numbing her body and her pain. She is broken, spread-eagled on the floor, and her friend the Snow is keeping her soul from the fate of her heart.

The glacial temperatures are slowing her blood, making it sluggish. Her tawny eyes glaze over, nearly closing, dark eyelashes frosted and blanketing them. Her bony fingers quiver of their own accord, lily-petal throat convulsing as she strains to form words. Cobalt lips crack apart, a dawdling tongue-tip slipping out to moisten them, not that it will do much good now.

"Mummy..." She croaks weakly. You aren't there for her, and she won't wake again.

Her only friend hugs her to its breast as her own chest drops,
struggling for one last breath.

It never comes.

A young, bleeding heart ices over, finally at peace in the snow.

And when, two days later, a teacher becomes concerned, she is not
there to assuage her worries, however founded they might be.

And when, a week later, a search team stumbles upon her stiff corpse
half-buried in melting snow, her pallid face is still contorted in love for
her friend, lips still forming the plead of "Mummy..."

Because you didn't care for the missing.

The Noir Harbor Pier

by Summer Ash

Second Place Winner

"Please come down from that tree India! It's not safe. Plus, those apples probably have worms in them."

I sighed, "Alright Mom!" As I slid off the large branch I had been sitting on, a piece of my dress snagged on the splintering wood and tore a hole in the skirt. Normally this would have upset me, but today I was in an exceptionally good mood. It was a Sunday, and on Sundays I could do whatever I pleased. Except, apparently, sit in apple trees.

I bent down and picked up my bike which I had carelessly thrown upon the stony, September ground. I got it for my birthday last year, and I've used it nearly every day since. It's dark red with a white basket on the front, which I use to carry my lunch box to and from school. My bike is like a friend to me. It's there for me even when no one else is.

I mounted the bike with ease and began pedaling towards town. The ride to town is short, especially on cold Sunday mornings. Traffic here in Noir Harbor is so scarce on weekends; I can ride all the way through town without having to break for a single car.

Upon entering the library I was not surrounded by the comfort and warmth that I usually felt. Instead there was a sick feeling of suspense, which seemed to weigh down the room. The librarian, Mr. Handel, did not greet me from his usual seat behind the tall, mahogany counter. Actually, he didn't greet me at all, which I now realized, had never happened before. Concerned, (and a bit scared that he had collapsed and died due to his old age), I started walking slowly towards the counter. "Mr. Handel? Are you there?" No reply. I took a deep breath and tried to prepare myself for whatever I might see. I rose up on my tiptoes and slowly peered over the counter.

Sitting upon Mr. Handel's chair was a note taped to a large black book. I should just leave. I had no reason to believe that note was for me. But I knew. Somehow, in my heart, I knew. I walked around the counter, assuming that in lieu of recent events getting in trouble for breaking a petty library rule was the least of my worries. I picked up the book and sat down in his chair, (something I had always wanted to do, but at this moment held no significance.)

I first turned to the note, which, somehow not to my surprise, was addressed to me. I began to read the letter.

Dearest India Blue,

I believe that in this book I have seen what is to come. Very soon you will face great danger if you do not heed my warning. Although, I fear that even this, may not save you. After you are finished reading this letter, you are not to even glance at the book until you are safe at home with not a soul in sight. Only then may you open it. More instructions wait inside.

Sincerely, Victor Handel

P.S. Do not worry about me. I have only taken a long vacation from which I most definitely will not be returning.

Within a moment I ran out the door and hopped onto my bike. I pedaled all the way home, not once looking at the black book in my basket.

I slammed the door to my room and sighed a breath of relief. No one had noticed me creep up the stairs with the huge book under my jacket. I jumped upon my bed and peered around the room, I was alone. Carefully setting the book down, I read the title: A Collective History of Noir Harbor Vol. 17. What does this have to do with me? Somehow, (despite my violent shaking), I was able to open the book. Written upon the inside cover was another, considerably shorter, note.

Dearest India Blue,

Page 279.

Sincerely, Victor Handel

Slowly I turned the slightly torn pages; trying to hold off whatever was on that page just a moment longer. But eventually it came. Page 279. A picture of me.

At first there was nothing so very odd about this, until I looked at the caption. A young girl watches in anticipation as the ribbon is cut at the official opening of the Noir Harbor Pier. (1933) I didn't understand. 1933? That was 50 years ago! How could that be? Just then, my eye caught a glimpse of a piece of paper hanging out of the corner of the book. I pulled it out. It was another note.

Dearest India Blue,

I know you are probably worried and confused but I want you to listen to me very clearly. Every word I write to you is true. The girl in the picture is you, and the date is correct. 1933. It may seem to you that this is not possible, but you are wrong. Due to recent scientific and mathematical breakthroughs, we have developed a new technology, time travel. I trust that you are familiar with the idea so I will not go in to detail on the subject. Just know that it is very real, and immensely dangerous.

There are two organizations that have control over this technology: The U.S. Government and the V.S.P.C.D.A. You do not need to know what that stands for, just know that you must only trust the latter.

Sincerely, Victor Handel

He's saying I shouldn't trust my own government? Why shouldn't I? And who is the V.S.P.C.D.A? So many questions were buzzing around in my head that I couldn't think straight. I threw the book across the room and tried to get some sleep.

It all happened so fast. It was Monday morning and I was just sitting and listening to my teacher babble on about nonsensical scientific theories, and right in the middle of class a man from the U.S. Government walked in and told me I was needed. The whole class stared at me as I walked out the door. The officer told me that there wasn't much time and that we needed to hurry. I protested remembering the warning from Mr. Handel, but eventually he picked me up and carried me out of the school. I screamed and screamed but he wouldn't let me down and he locked me in the back of his van.

We had been driving for about 2 hours. I needed to escape before we reached our destination. To create a diversion I started screaming at the top of my lungs. We pulled over to the side of the road. The man opened up the back, but before I could run, he pulled out a tranquilizer gun and shot me in the chest. I blacked out.

I awoke with a jolt and looked around me only to notice that I had been lying on some sort of a dock. Wait! This is the Noir Harbor Pier. But why are all these people standing around? And why were they dressed so... old fashioned. I stood up and turned around and *flash!* Someone took my picture.

The Girl Who Dared

by Hailey Holm

Third Place Winner

The guard was walking routinely around the bunker. She had about sixty seconds to run, if she chose. They would shoot her if they saw her small, weak, emaciated figure fleeing. But it was a better way to go than the showers. She'd heard the screams and the whispered rumors. Anything was better than the showers, where her mother and sister had gone only days before.

She was decided. She pressed her back to the rough walls of the bunker and felt it pricking her through the filthy rags that inadequately covered her body. Taking a deep breath, the girl slid through the window-hole and out onto the moist ground. She slunk around the side of the bunker, passing other windows and at last reaching the main door, the closest point to the fence.

In a brief moment of passion, she picked up a handful of stinky slop from the churned up mud by the door and smeared it on the hated symbol painted there. They'd find it come light, along with her gone. Or dead. Either way, she would be free.

The girl looked down at her torn, threadbare dress with the yellow star sewn clumsily on the front. She poked her fingers under the edge that was starting to come off and ripped it free with a strength she didn't know she had.

About to throw it down in the dirt, a better idea surfaced in her mind like bubbles in the harbor back home in Hamburg, and she glued it with mud over the swastika on the door. Hopefully it would still be there, come morning roll call.

Thirty seconds.

She flipped around and eyed the fifty feet that lay between her and freedom, tasting danger on the cool night air. Danger and

the promise of freedom tantalized her and stoked the small fire of resistance that had kindled within her broken spirit.

Fear awoke within her for the first time as she heard the guard returning early. She ruthlessly tamped it down and out of existence. The small figure turned and sprang for the low edge of the corrugated-metal roof. She was only eight years old, but had been the best at gymnastics at home, before... *No!* She shoved the memories away.

Hunger-weakened muscles protested but did their job as she hauled herself over the roof and laid flat, heart pounding louder than a drum. She hardly dared breathe. The guard walked steadily, stopped, and revealed cigarette.

The girl groaned inside. She lay there without moving, ignoring the muscles that began to cramp, and prayed for the guard to move. But he appeared to have no intention of going anywhere soon.

A pain distracted her from her thoughts. She carefully lifted her right hip from the ground and reached beneath, not letting her skin or clothing scrape the roof. Pale fingers grabbed the rock that had somehow gotten up there and was lying down again when a new idea gave her pause. She twisted and threw it as hard as she could; the pebble just didn't clear the far end of the roof and *pinged* against the metal.

As the guard came alert, snuffed out his cigarette, and began his rounds again, one hand straying to the grip of his Luger adapted long-range pistol, the girl allowed herself a small smile. She brushed a strand of blond hair out of her face and dropped off the roof, landing awkwardly and twisting her ankle. The pain was instant and excruciating, but she somehow ignored it. A wild fury was rising within her small frame, and it obliterated pain and fear and doubt and everything else except a desire, a need, to exact this small vengeance on her captors.

With every fiber of her body on alert, she crept forward, seconds behind the sweep of a searchlight. She crouched next to a fallen

log that hadn't been carted away yet. There was just enough of it to conceal a half-starved girl to shelter out of the stern gazes of the lights.

When waiting longer was courting a death wish, she stood and scrambled the last twenty feet to the fence that separated her from the forest. Eight feet of high-strength chain-link steel topped with coils of razor wire, there was lumber sunk three feet into the ground and a foot above it to discourage digging. She crept along in the food of dark shadow the searchlights couldn't penetrated, testing each section of board as she went, until one moved slightly. The smile on her face was too old for a child; it spoke of loss and grief and fear, unimaginable suffering, and a burning desire for revenge.

She wrapped her fingers around the protruding edge of the board, pulling with all the strength in her skinny arms. It came loose with an angry squeal, and she froze, waiting for the shouts and gunshots and running feet. But no one seemed to have heard, and after an interminable wait, she relaxed and placed the board carefully to one side. They would find it, and her bolt hold, in the morning, but she didn't care. She wasn't coming back.

The girl carefully dragged her battered body through the hole; it was just big enough for her small figure. She collapsed to the ground on the far side, exhausted, but somehow mustered the will to haul herself up and along the fence to the soldier's automobile parking area. A general was visiting with his entourage; his auto was her ticket out.

A shout rang out from behind her. A guard had spotted her, turning around at the wrong moment and seeing her. A wild laugh escaped her, for she no longer cared.

The rapid-fire chatter of machine guns pierced the night, and bullets strafed the air. She broke into a limping run, dodging left and right, aiming for the trees now.

Time seemed to slow down; some instinct told the girl to dive

right, behind an auto. A bullet whistled by precisely where her head had been a second before. She huddled in a shaking lump behind the car, waiting for the barrage to abate, for a chance.

That chance never came. A misplaced bullet drilled through the metal frame of the auto, finding its way to the fuel tank.

With an eardrum-shattering *boom*, the car blew up in fire and smoke and flying shrapnel. A red-hot metal shard sliced her face, barely missing her eye. Flames scorched her left leg and arm and burned off her hair on the left side.

Painfully, she pushed herself up. Blackness crowded her mind and threatened to swamp her, but she knew she had to get away before letting it take her. Fighting through the pain, she dragged her broken form into the trees, knowing she had to hide.

A hollow in the roots of an ancient, gnarled oak tree provided excellent cover. She curled into it, trying to balance comfort with concealment, and at long last, relaxed. Shadows writhed across her vision and drowned her mind, and her eyes slowly flickered shut.

Short Story

Grades 9 & 10



*Our Own
Expressions*

Grief's Perspective

by Natalia Giovengo

First Place Winner

Grief; it was a malicious monster inside of me, eating away at my being, consuming my warmth and leaving behind emptiness that felt hard like ice. It was a disturbing emotion, and also foreign. This feeling, this true grief, was completely new, and I didn't like it. I wasn't sure what to do except to sit slumped on the church's bench and let the cold envelop me.

The pastor rattled on in his pathetic speech, my guess at what he considered "comforting words." I wasn't reassured, but by the looks of the people around me, whose tearstained faces showed only an inkling of the depression I felt, they were sucking in his homily hungrily.

Finally, the balding man stepped down from the podium, allowing another man to take his turn. I knew the face from somewhere, of that I was sure. The name lingered in the back of my mind, but I couldn't seem to dredge it up, so I ignored him with discontent.

Listening to people prattle on about the tragedy of my mother's death was only pushing me further into my guilt. My mind soon became numb, in which I tuned out every mention of her name or mine.

I didn't want to relive that wretched night. I didn't want to hear the tires squeal on the asphalt as a car came colliding into us from the side, flipping the car onto its top. I didn't want to feel the glass as it exploded into thousands of shards. I didn't want to smell the gasoline or burnt rubber as another car skidded across and set fire to the scene around me. I didn't want to taste the smoke as it filled my lungs. I didn't want to see my mother next to me, covered in blood, reaching for me with a frightened but determined look in her eyes.

I could feel the guilt now, as if it was forming a tangible cloud of heat around me so that only I could suffer its blaze. I did *not* want to feel my mother's hands push me out the window of the car, or the ground as I crawled further away from the scene. And, the worst of all, I did not want to remember the horror I experienced as I realized that my mother was still trapped in the car that was going to explode.

I ripped myself away from the nightmare, focusing on the fact that my father was now at the podium. His anguished face was enough to distract me.

He stared at the papers he had brought with him; his gaze was not focused enough to actually be reading them. His red-rimmed green eyes scanned the room, looking for something that obviously wasn't there, before dropping down to the papers once more. He cleared his throat a few times.

"My wife, a woman whose loveliness surpassed that of any angel's, was the love of my life. She lit up a room with her presence, and dazzled everyone with her smile. She was always determined to bring happiness to anyone less fortunate than herself. She was kind, gentle, and beautiful in every way.

"Every day I spent with her, my adoration rose higher and higher than the heavens, and the same went for her and our boy." I flinched at my mentioning.

"They were always together, the two of them. *Nothing* could separate those two. No force on Earth was powerful enough to break the bond that they shared. Not even death weakened their deep connection with each other. I loved both of them. They were my world, the two of them." I frowned. Why was he speaking in the past tense? I ran over my faint memories of our relationship, not coming across a moment where we had gotten into an argument. I remembered with a jolt that I hadn't talked to him at all since the accident. The thought brought on a new wave of guilt. I listened closely to his next words, for it seemed his speech was coming to a close.

“No matter how much grief I may feel, love will always follow it. I won’t allow myself to forget how I felt *before* that horrible day. I’ll try to remember everything before that, because somewhere, I know that that is what is wanted for me. It’s what is wanted for all of us.”

With that, my father stepped down and departed into another room, out of my sight. This seemed to be a cue that the speeches were over, because at that moment, everyone stood up and moved in a herd towards where my father had disappeared to.

I wanted to follow them, but my bleak feelings began to return. I got up off the bench morosely and walked to where a large picture of my mom stood by the stage. My eyes lingered on her face, the way her lips were curved into a smirk, as if she had just been proved right about something before the picture was taken.

I started to turn away, as the grief was making my chest heavy, but something caught my eye. I followed the path of the rainbows shining through the colorful church windows to a very familiar item that was sitting on one of the benches. My eyes widened slightly and I reached out and picked it up.

As soon as I touched it, a warm feeling spread in my fingertips. It was a snow globe that my mom had gotten me for Christmas one year.

The blue and gray house inside was covered in fluffy white flakes of fake snow. The face of the lone girl that stood in the yard showed no emotion, but it didn’t matter; her feelings were obvious in her stance. Her head was turned upwards, towards what would be the sky, but her eyes were closed and partly covered by the blonde hair that was frozen in the nonexistent wind. Her arms stretched out, palms up, as if to embrace the world. I shook the globe, watching the once-still flakes now become a flurry as they swirled around before settling again.

It seemed to hold a whole new meaning for me now. This perfect scene was in *my* control. I could make it whatever I wanted. This girl, she could be happy, sad, angry- *anything*. The snow globe holds the scene, but *I* choose what to do with it. And then it clicked.

This tragedy was not my fault. It was my decision what to do about it though. I ultimately had two options; I could stay and let my depression destroy me, or. . . I could move on. My mind was made up within seconds, because there, at the back of the church, was my mom. Everything made sense in that moment. I was with her now. I sprinted down into her warm embrace, and it felt like I was coming home.

“You’re ready?” She asked.

I turned to look around the church. Next to my mom’s picture by the podium, a picture of me materialized. I knew then that it was time, time to move on with my mom.

“Let’s go.”

And we did, together.



Meat

by Matthew Pfefferle

Second Place Winner

Something squished under Aaron's boot. He looked down at the green stain. A foot-long cockroach lay dead beneath his feet. It probably smelled rancid, but Aaron couldn't tell. If he smelled anything out here, it meant his gas mask was broken, and he was about to die a slow and painful death.

Aaron kept walking. He remembered the bomb drills in school, all those years ago. The teacher told them to cower under the desks and pray.

That didn't work. The Cold War was like a keg of gunpowder, and everyone was holding a match. When Stalin decided to launch the nukes, the whole world turned to a radioactive wasteland in a few weeks.

Aaron survived. Cockroaches thrived. Most of what's left died.

All in all, it was not a good day.

His Geiger counter crackled—one of the bombs had fallen here. Maybe he was walking in the ruins of a military base, or a weapons lab.

Maybe this place was just unlucky. Aaron didn't know.

He sat down on a scorched tree trunk and pulled a map out of his cloak. Handwritten notes covered half of it: Minefield. Weapons Cache. Bear Cave.

One note appeared more than any other: over every town, every city, every village, a red X—"no survivors." Whoever designed those nukes did his job very well.

Aaron had not heard another human in seven years. He did not expect to hear one every again. And then, he heard a baby crying.

His rifle snapped to his shoulder as he scanned the area. Impossible. It must be some new mutant. A trick of the wind. But then he heard another voice.

"Tom! Tom! The baby's gone and hurt itself again!"

Aaron ran, all pretense of stealth abandoned. A dead landscape flitted past him as he dashed in search of the survivors. A cracked wall rose in his path, covered in military camouflage. Aaron mantled it in seconds. When radioactive bears start chasing you, you learn how to move fast.

Behind the wall, a thick concrete gate hung open, lit from within by electric lamps. A woman in a floral dress, face caked in makeup, looked on as a tearful toddler rolled on the dirt. She had cut her leg against a rock.

Aaron stood dumbstruck for a moment. Someone else had survived the bombing.

And that someone was colossally stupid.

Aaron grabbed the child and bolted through the door, slamming it behind as fast as he could, praying the toxins outside had not made it into the bunker.

He turned and broke seven years of silence with string of long, loud expletives.

Aaron continued, "What do you think you're doing! Why do you think they built that door in the first place? What... how are you people even still alive?"

The woman tossed a tube of pills at him. *M2A34 Radiation Inhibitor/Biohazard Protection. Not For Civilian Use.* "The Army left a few thousand crates of those when they cleared out of here. Works wonders for your complexion, too."

"If these... things work so well, why are you the only survivors I've met?"

A tall man in a tattered Army jacket strolled down the hallway to Aaron. "Maybe you just really suck at finding people." He extended his hand, like this was normal. Aaron didn't shake it. "Well then. I'm Tom, she's Beth, and that little caterpillar is Lily," he said, pointing at the baby, who was now trying to eat Aaron's boot.

Tom held out a saggy tube of meat. "You want an enchilada? We've got millions of them in storage. Some sort of clerical error."

Aaron stared at the man as he tried to formulate a response. "The entire world is annihilated by a nuclear firestorm... and you're talking about enchiladas?"

"Well, yeah. They're pretty good."

Aaron's hunger overrode his confusion and he ripped the enchiladas out of Tom's hand. He hadn't eaten in two days.

They tasted strange, but anything beats hunting rats.

"Are they any others?" he asked.

"Sure. Just let me stick 'em in the microwave," answered Tom.

"Survivors. Not enchiladas," corrected Aaron.

"Oh. No, not in this bunker. The only people we've seen are corpses."

Aaron sighed. He had hoped to find a city of survivors—instead, he got two crazy people and a baby. At least the food was good.

"If you want to stay the night, there's an extra bed back there," said Tom, pointing down a winding hallway.

Aaron nodded his head and began walking. "Thanks."

The bed was dirty and stained, but better than sleeping on dirt. Aaron fell asleep immediately.

That didn't last long.

After seven years in a radiation-soaked nightmare, Aaron learned

to sleep lightly. There are a thousand things that would love to feast on your body in the night.

He awoke to the sound of muttering outside his room.

"But he's such a nice man..." whispered Beth.

"Do you think these enchiladas make themselves, woman? Do you want to starve?" said Tom. "Think of the baby. We need food to last the winter."

"Well, when you put it that way..."

"Good. It's settled. I'll hold him down while you do the butcherin'!" A cleaver rasped as it left the sheath.

Aaron sighed. The first people he'd met were cannibals. He'd thought those enchiladas tasted odd.

He rolled out of bed and pulled out his pistol. His backpack and pillow, hastily crammed beneath the blanket, made it look like the bed was still occupied.

Tom opened the door. The decoy worked.

"I've got him!" Tom yelled, as he lunged onto the backpack. "Beth, this is a good one! Plenty of fat and meat!" Beth followed, hacking manically. Aaron saw why she wore so much makeup: without it, her face was covered with yellow streaks: a diet of human flesh had left her diseased.

Aaron took aim. Two shots echoed through the cramped bunker. In the distance, the baby started crying.

As it turned out, Smith and Wesson made far better friends than those two psychopaths. Aaron shoved Tom's body off his gear. Beth was not so cooperative.

She lunged at him, still clinging to life after a bullet to the face. Aaron shot her again, three times, but not before her teeth closed around his nose and bit off a chunk.

Beth slumped to the ground, finally dead, as Aaron staggered

back. He wiped her blood off his face: now all her infections were in him as well.

He quickly rummaged through his pack, looking for the pills. *Take one per day.* He swallowed it, frantic to get these germs out of him. He bandaged his wound and began to explore the rest of the bunker. It looked like he was the new ruler.

Only later did he read the rest of the bottle: *Side effects include hallucinations, insanity, and delusional behavior. Expiration date: July 17, 1986.*

Over a decade ago. Aaron laughed. He laughed a lot, now that he'd taken the pills. The world seemed much happier. Sometimes, he thought the nuclear reactor in the bunker was talking. He usually talked back.

He'd never enjoyed enchiladas so much in his life.

The Child Bride

by Meg Low

Third Place Winner

The smell of flowers hangs heavy in the air, piercing the darkness around me. Leaning out from the small tent, my eyes probe the horizon, searching for some sign of light, something to give me hope. There is nothing. Sunset was an hour ago, and the stars are tiny eyes watching my sorrow.

“Anya, quit daydreaming.” My sister impatiently grabs my wrist and pulls me back into the confines of the dim tent. I can see the irritation in her dark eyes, but I know she is only acting annoyed to cover her sadness.

By the light of a few candles and an oil lamp, the women paint designs in red on my face and eyes, while braiding back my long black hair. Jewelry, heavy and shining, is used to adorn my forehead, ears, nose, and neck. A richly embroidered sari is tied onto my body. They talk idly as they work, preparing me, an eleven-year-old girl, for the night ahead. The women, including my mother and two older sisters, wear smiles even though they know that what’s going on is illegal. Their false sense of happiness has no affect on me, however. Maybe I should try to act excited or eager. After all, it is my wedding day.

I know that the legal age for marriage here in India is eighteen. My village knows it; my family knows it. That hasn’t kept them from engaging me to a young man I’ve barely met, pretending I’m nineteen when anyone who sees me can tell I’m little more than a child.

All at once, the tears spill down my cheeks. Without speaking, my aunt Jamini wipes them away with dark hands calloused by work and sun. She understands what it’s like; to know that you have no power over what’s going to happen, to be afraid to speak out against something that you know is wrong. Jamini had been married when she

was nine years old, even younger than I, to a husband thirty years her senior.

“Enough of that,” says my mother, reapplying the black paint to my eyes (I know the make-up is supposed to make me look older) even as the silent tears send muddy streaks down my cheeks. “Try to be happy,” she says with a lighter tone in her voice. “It’s a special night.”

Yes, it will be a special night. The elaborate rituals of my wedding ceremony will take place under the cover of darkness, just in case authorities show up. My whole village (most of them living in poverty, tending the fields of cotton) will be there to celebrate.

Being forced into an arranged marriage young is not only practiced here, but common. And if the child bride is old enough to understand what is going on, she is old enough to also know how helpless she is in the situation. I know that I have no control.

Finally, I am finished. One by one, the women file out of the space until only Jamini and I are left among a few low-burning candles. The tears have stopped, but I still feel so small and weak.

I don't want this! My parents had told me I was not allowed to go to school anymore last year, and casually informed me that I was engaged only a few months later. I had never had a choice in what would happen to my life. Freedom to make my own decisions was an idea that has never seemed so far away.

Suddenly I notice the urgency in my aunt’s eyes. “Anya. You don’t have to do this.”

Had I heard her correctly? I know the women are waiting for me to emerge. Was she suggesting I try to escape my wedding? Now?

Her voice is low and she speaks quickly. “I can buy you some time. You can run now, escape to the next village. Find my friend Vara. She works with the government. She can help you.”

The desperation on her face is plain. I search her eyes for some sign. Suddenly, I understand the sorrow there. Jamini had become

pregnant while she was still small, not physically mature for childbirth. The baby had died inside of her, and Jamini, now almost forty years old, had never had children.

This realization hardens something inside of me, desperate seconds ticking by. I want to go to school. I want to not marry until I am ready for it. I want to be free.

My lips form a tight line and I nod my consent. Hurriedly, Jamini thrusts me out the back flap of the small cloth tent, and I crawl to my knees in the fragrant night. Behind me, I hear the muffled sounds of my aunt emerging from the front, murmuring something to the women.

But I am gone. I pull the heavy clothes up past my knees and run silently in the opposite direction of the tent. Numbly, I remember always winning the races the other kids held after school, even against the boys. I let the small, tender memory grip me, and before I know it I'm crouching in the rows of cotton that make up the primary livelihood of my village.

Quietly, I breathe in the faint smell of smoke, jasmine, and damp earth. I clutch a handful of soft dirt near the base of one of the cotton trees, and I can just barely see wilted blossoms dropping to the ground around where I crouch. I touch the flowers still nestled in my hair, and surprisingly feel no regret; only exhilaration. I pick up a flower petal and impulsively toss it into the air, fixing my eyes to it as it drifts back to the ground. I am free!

Sounds of shouting from the village gives me a quick reminder that I'm not free yet. Instinctively I duck down, pressing myself to the earth like a stalking cat. I know from here and in the darkness no one can see me. I hope no one can find me, either. Will they think to look for me here?

Resolutely, I crawl down the row of cotton, leap the slow-moving stream, and find my way onto the dusty road. Walking quickly, I leave the village behind me, my whole life. But now I am excited for the future. I can find Jamini's friend. I somehow know she will help me.

One more hill, and the small star-pricks of light of my old village will disappear. I hesitate there for a moment, a small, dark figure in tattered wedding garments, face smudged with earth and red paint. But I am a free, small, dark, figure.

I turn again and walk in the direction of the next village. And I feel nothing but hope.

Short Story

Grades 11 & 12



*Our Own
Expressions*

Bright Eyes Watching Butterflies

by Amanda Gordon

First Place Winner

DEATH liked butterflies.

He doesn't know why, exactly. If there was a reason, it is long forgotten.

But DEATH liked butterflies.

He sits in a park today, taking a short break from his eternal calling. No one needing his personal attention will die today, and he so takes this moment to appreciate life, such as it is.

There are plenty of flowers here for the butterflies to hover around. DEATH stares pensively at them as they weave between the petals. He runs a hand through his muddy brown hair with a tiny smile, wondering idly whether he will ever be called to collect on the deaths of flowers and butterflies.

Beyond the rows of flower bushes there is a playground. There are children there- and in DEATH's vision, they glow with years' worth of life remaining. Their parents, slightly dimmer, souls slightly more tired, sit on other benches or buzz around their children busily, occasionally glancing over at him in curiosity.

DEATH watches as one particular butterfly, yellow with black spots and stripes, flutters away from its flowerbush, bobbing toward the children at play. Some of them point at it and try to catch it or hit it with things. Discreetly, DEATH gives the small insect just a little protection from himself, and he doesn't know whether it helps or not, but the butterfly is not harmed today. It flies through the air, wheeling and circling, slowly but surely making its way in his direction. Unhurried, unworried.

Finally it hovers just above his nose. It stares at him, and DEATH

wonders now what the butterflies see, when they look down into his storm-grey eyes.

DEATH holds out his hand, ever so slowly, and murmurs, too softly for anyone to overhear, "Hey there little fella. Don't you worry now, I'm not here for you. There, that's a good little butterfly," because just now the yellow-and-spotted-and-striped butterfly rests on DEATH's hand, breathing heavily.

A brilliant smile lights up DEATH's face as he looks at the small insect. It's just an insignificant little thing, its life only a spark in his sight, but its trust touches him, deeply and forever.

He hears the rustle of clothes beside him and turns slowly, taking care not to dislodge the butterfly on his hand.

Before DEATH stands a little girl, maybe seven years old. She has light blonde hair and blue eyes, she clutches a tattered stuffed rabbit, and she is staring at him and the butterfly as though they are more amazing than anything.

"Hey there," DEATH greets her gently, quietly. "Hi," she whispers back. "Why does you has a butterfly on you, Mr. Death?" she asks him, and DEATH feels his eyes widen as he stares at her for a moment. Then he composes himself, and gives her a magician's grin when he answers.

"Well now, I like butterflies. They're pretty. But don't go telling anyone, okay?" His lightly mischievous whisper makes her suppress a delighted smile, and she nods happily. She likes silly secrets. "I promises, Mr. Death, I won't tells anyone."

"Mr. Death, my name is Melody, does you have a name, Mr. Death?" She introduces herself and asks him all in one breath. The butterfly stirs on DEATH's hand, and so he stills for a moment before answering.

"That's a lovely name, Melody. No, I don't have my own name yet. I'll probably get one eventually. Do you want to hold the butterfly?"

DEATH speaks steadily, in a low voice that sounds almost forcedly light. But it is a charming voice, and the little girl looks up at him and nods solemnly in response.

"Alright, Melody, hold out your hand like this..." He shows her how to hold her hand for the butterfly to perch on, how to coax it off of him without hurting it or scaring it.

Now the girl holds the bright and tiny insect, its wings flapping slowly as it stares over at her from her hand. She peers right back at it, and DEATH looks at the two almost sadly. Then Melody smiles, wide and sincere, and DEATH resettles happiness back into his expression.

"Melody," a man's voice calls out over the playground, "Melody, sweetie, we've got to go home now. Daddy has a big day tomorrow, and your mother wants us both home for dinner." DEATH looks around for the source of the voice. It is a man in a fancy suit, who wears confidence like a crown. He looks like he makes his living with his charming manner and soothing voice. He glows brightly in DEATH's vision; he is a man who will live a very long time.

DEATH looks back at Melody, who seems torn between keeping the tiny butterfly and running to her father. DEATH gently takes the rabbit she holds and tucks it under her arm, and then shows her how to cup a hand carefully over the little yellow butterfly, just long enough so she can go and show it to her father. Then DEATH lays another protection from himself upon them both and sends Melody and the butterfly on their way.

He hears her call out to her father- "Daddy! Look at me, look, Mr. Death showed me how to hold butterflies's!"- and he rubs the back of his head sheepishly, becoming invisible just in time to keep from being seen by Melody's father. 'Oops.'

Eventually Melody releases the butterfly. She takes her father's hand, and they walk together in the direction of the parking lot. DEATH watches them as they go. Then, shoulders drooping, he turns back to the other butterflies. He sits there on that park bench for a long time, watching them flutter and fly and bob amongst the flowers.

The little girl called herself Melody. And she liked butterflies too.

DEATH had heard somewhere that souls of the dead lived on in butterflies. He didn't know anything about that business, but he hoped it was true.

Because in his peculiar vision, the life in Melody glowed with only the dimmest spark. No more than the meanest butterfly.

The next day, he shushes her soul in its distress, and sings a quiet song to lull her into sleep.

He gathers her soul, and her mother's, in his arms, and they disappear just as Melody's father enters the room.

DEATH cries that night.

Against his better judgment, DEATH goes to their funeral. He watches from the background. As Melody's father stares through the service, and out into no-one-knew-what, for a moment he catches DEATH's eye. DEATH bows his head in sorrow and mouths, "I'm sorry," before disappearing into a haze of nothingness.

Sometimes DEATH wonders what Melody's father made of him. Whether he thinks there's some reason that DEATH met his daughter the day before she died.

DEATH wonders if the other man believes in Fate.

On the day of the funeral, DEATH saw a single yellow butterfly alight upon Melody's coffin. He looked around. There was nowhere for it to have come from. And it glowed brightly, with more than a spark in his sight, as it lifted off, flying away from the funeral, away from DEATH, and away from the ground below.

Lifeline

by Erin Haas

Second Place Winner

1995

"Who would you say you are, Miss...?" The smartly-dressed businessman glances down at the aspiring actress' credentials secured on the clipboard resting on his lap. He returns to his inspection of the young girl in front of him, furrowing his brow like she is a mystery he is attempting to solve. "Miss Mason?"

Alice Mason, a woman with lengthy dark brown hair cascading in sleek waves down her back, inhales steadily before answering. Her shaky hands press nervously on her colorful patterned skirt.

"An actress, sir. More than anything else, I want to be an actress."

The man refers back to the papers organized on his clipboard once again. He slowly shifts through each sheet while the woman in front of him shifts her weight from one foot to the next uncomfortably.

Her headshot portrays a smiling and beautiful snapshot of her personality. Bubbly and lively, Miss Alice Mason could be a profitable gain to his talent agency.

"She has the face for the business," he thinks to himself.

He eyes the scripts shoved into his clipboard and grabs one, handing the flimsy packet to Alice. "Here, study this. This will be your lifeline if you get a callback."

2005

"Who would you say you are, Miss Alice Mason?"

Alice Mason, sparkly jewels intertwined in her attention-grabbing updo, turns her head towards the source of the question. Her soft hands rove over her luxurious fur coat as the TV camera stares at her,

gauging her every reaction and word.

Nerves, though still present, are not visible to the eyes focused on her and she responds in a steady and rehearsed way.

“An actress. I’ve played a few of the most famous and recognizable roles in television and movies to date in the past ten years. I had the incredible opportunity of portraying the young Princess Diana last year! Of course, I owe all of my success to my adoring fans and my stubborn determination to be the best actress possible.”

The corners of her painted lips turn upwards slightly, a motion identical to the smile she practiced in front of her ornate mirror the day before. She leans back in her chair, comfortable amidst the attention of the crowd and the bright, flashing cameras.

“So, I have to ask.” The interviewer leans towards the beautiful starlet, scooting forward in his seat. “What’s next for Alice Mason?”

The crowd goes silent. The interviewer, expectant and curious, leans in a fraction closer, gripping his cue card in tight fingers. The lights are suddenly too bright. The multitude of cameras zooms dangerously close to her face. The hush of the room reveals the underlying rapid beat of her frail heart.

Alice Mason, seemingly perfect in every way, licks her dry lips and tips her head to one side flirtatiously.

“Who knows, Brad. Really, who knows?” She grins at the crowd as the roaring applause meets her ears.

“Alice Mason, everyone! What a delight.” The interviewer, Brad, and the young star stand up and lean in to embrace each other in a brief hug. Alice glances out into the crowd, the lights of the studio blinding her to each individual face. She wears a cheeky smile and blows loaded kisses to the audience as she walks gracefully offstage.

After entering the cluttered backstage area, an attendant guides her to a chair. As the makeup artists fuss over her flawless hair and

face, she looks up at her agent.

“How was I?” Her usually peaceful expression contorts into one fearful and full of worry. “Was I okay?”

He walks forward, resting a warm hand on her shoulder and lowers his head to her eye-level. He directs her eyes to the mirror where they both assess the results of her performances. “Perfect, darling. You were exactly what the public wants.”

Present Day

“Who would you say you are, Alice?”

Alice, wearing a plain, white gown, is surrounded by four sterile white walls and the unintelligible mutterings of other residents. No glittering accessory adorns her wrinkled hands, limp hair, or bony arms.

Light bursts in through a large dusty window as a black, velvety curtain is pulled back in one swift movement. In reaction, Alice abruptly raises her thin arms to shield her blinking eyes.

A staff worker softly strides to where Alice is curled in a ball in the corner of the room. Tapping her on the shoulder, the woman repeats her question.

“Who are you today?”

Alice, her eyes slowly becoming adjusted to the natural light, unwraps her arms from around her skinny legs. Watery eyes stare into the sympathetic eyes of the official, badge-wearing woman in front of her.

Who am I? A violent, throbbing pain erupts in her head. She turns her attention to the floor as if it will provide the answers she craves. Who am I?

A sudden realization causes her to return her gaze to the woman squatting near her legs. Alice lifts her chin, confident. “Why, I’m Amelia Earhart. I’m the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic!” Her lips

curve upwards in a cocky grin. Alice's eyes rest somewhere beyond the woman, to perhaps an imaginary crowd. She sits still, hands clasped securely in her lap, as if expecting applause.

"Try again." The woman asks patiently, turning to straighten the disorderly starched sheets on her patient's rickety bed.

Alice's smile falters, but she quickly recovers as she stands to her feet and marches over to the worker. "Who am I? I'm Princess Diana. I am married to Prince Charles and I have had two sons with him, William and Harry. I was... killed..." Fear flits across her face and for a second she appears unsure. Her confidence falters. "No, I-I... I don't know, I don't remember. I don't know."

The woman considers this response for a moment, pausing to glance at her patient, and then shakes her head. Back and forth. Back and forth.

Alice closes her eyes, tightening the fists rested at her sides.

"Who am I?" Alice mutters the words to herself over and over again like a personal mantra. Her brain puzzles over each word, frantically searching for the answers that will set her free.

The worker finishes tidying the small space and places herself directly in front of Alice.

"What do you desire?" the staff woman questions, attempting to drag Alice out of her silence. "What do you want, child?"

Raising her head, Alice stares into the worker's benevolent features. Without hesitation, Alice replies.

"I want the script."

The worker puts one hand on her hip and exhales slowly. "The script is no more, Alice." Alice's shoulders slump, her unsteady fingers reach up to comb her thinning, tangled hair. "The movie is over, Alice. The movie is over."

With these words, Alice's gaze flickers around the bare room as if she is just now noticing her surroundings. She backtracks until her spine rests against a dull white wall. Her legs seem to cripple beneath her and she sinks gradually down the wall, eyes staring straight ahead. Alice hits the floor with a dull thud, defeated. No rescue awaits her.

Mr. Wanderer

by Hansol Hyon

Third Place Winner

I stand here tonight to tell you a secret. I could have anything I wanted — the world even bowed before me. But those days fell apart. Here, listen to my secret and you'll see the truth of the world.

When was the last time you dreamed? Let us forget about everything but tonight. Let the show begin! — But remember this: Good magicians never reveal their secrets.

Call this illusion, call me an illusionist if you would like. But remember this: Anything is possible.

Who are you and who am I? I guess it doesn't matter who we are tonight. I signaled the doorman to close the door. The lights began to go off and the murmur among the crowd disappeared.

* * * *

Ready, set, go. Let the drum rolls begin and let people speak their minds.

As I lifted my head, I saw colorful feathers of royalty. In front of the crowd full of highnesses, I let two doves fly among them. When they returned to me, kings and queens of cards already have come alive, and a diamond ring has reappeared from my hat.

One breath at a time and one trick at a time. Don't turn on the lights yet. Let them see the world that they haven't seen.

Every minute slipped away from my fingertips. All the riches of the town would come and go. Even all the butterflies from a picture flew over me, and flowers have disappeared to be free. But I stood here on a same stage and created what they call, an illusion. I couldn't let myself disappear, or even make myself feel alive.

Nothing seemed real. I started to walk.

“Tell me, where have I seen you sir?” A young woman stopped and smiled.

“Probably once upon a dream, dream is always a good place to meet new people, right?” I adjusted my black hat and let it cover my face gently.

“Well, Mr. Wanderer, if you wander for too long, my tea shop is just around that corner. Come and stop by any time.”

I continued to walk – out of the city. Wherever my feet stepped, that was my land. I finally entered a nameless forest.

“Hey, who are you? Who do you work for?” A deep voice interrupted the silent song of blue birds.

Before I could even start my sentence, a gun pointed at my face.

It was a group full of both young and old that I met. The oldest looked around 80 years old and the others were too young to be standing out in the cold.

“My name is... Well, just call me wanderer, Mr. Wanderer.”

Talking for hours in the middle of the forest, the oldest told me: ‘we’ve all dreamt of a beautiful infinite garden where magic is our reality.’

For the past few weeks, the forest seemed to become my second home. My magic would dazzle so many young boys and old men in the forest. They believed every movement of my hand gestures. Just as how my old magic teacher would say, “Magic becomes real when you finally make people believe.”

Then, it was the fifth week with 40 men, and the oldest, John, finally opened his mouth. “Gentlemen, do you remember why we are out here today? So many of us got hurt. Our souls are already dead. We must never forgive! Freedom, that is why we stand out here in the dark today! We planned to overthrow the king and queen for so long.

Mr. Wanderer!

You can call it a rebel if you'd like. In fact, any coward would call this evolution of righteousness a rebel. We are going to create chaos with your magic, and two days later, new rules will be created."

What a fool I was to smile at him. I guess the illusion and the fascination that I claimed to be mine for a long time were just chaotic to many living creatures.

After two more sunsets, the forest became smaller every step we took. Swearing to come back safely, a group of men has in fact already changed my dream. I just wanted to live.

It could be my last show, last time to recreate the fascination of old days. Lord, help my poor soul.

When we got to the town, I prepared for another magic show.

Suddenly one person became hundreds of people. A young lady who had a familiar smile was in the crowd as well. Where have I seen her before? The smell of coffee bursts down my throat.

"Tell me, what is your name dear?" I spoke at last.

"Charlotte, that is my name." She whispered silently.

"Call me, Mr. Wanderer. Now, I'm going to need your help. Please, hold the other side of the box and wish for anything you want."

Charlotte looked at me like I was crazy. Maybe we do need some chaos to get away from the real world. When I opened the box, there lay a red rose.

When I was about to touch her white soft hand, I heard gun shots behind the crowd. It felt like a dream. White doves in my hat flew away and white rabbits ran away from my old brown bag.

All the police in the town spilled innocent blood everywhere. It was the men in the forest that started this massacre of liberty, but it was soon to be these soldiers who will end this madness.

As I could hear screaming of my audiences, I ran quickly back to the forest. Breathing uncomfortably, I stood silently.

The sky suddenly turned bloody red. Where am I? The familiar white rabbit busted out of the bush in front of me and started to run, "I'm late! I'm late!" What was it running after? Crows flew above him in an infinite circle and yelled, "Nevermore."

And here I was, watching the time fly by.

"Who left his door open? He needs to stay in his room!" The house opened and an old lady came out of the door. More people followed her and grabbed me by my arms.

"Who are you? Let me go!" I screamed. What did I do so wrong? Why were they so mad?

* * * *

As I stand in a room, I was smiling next to a woman in a picture. Who am I? The room opened slowly.

"Do you know where you are? You are at a hospital. You are mentally ill. My name is Charlotte. I've been your personal doctor for the past 5 years."

Her soft hands touched my face. Charlotte — what a familiar name, I thought. Her perfume that smells like roses passed by my nose.

"You must be tired. I'm going to put you to sleep and we will talk tomorrow." A sharp needle went through my vein. I could feel chemicals of medicine burst inside of arms and they started to react with my blood — starting from my left arm slowly to my right arm. I got tired very quickly.

Without having any time to calm myself, I closed my eyes and started to wonder: Did my dream even begin?

