



OUR OWN PRESSIONS

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY

TEEN

Writing & Art Contest

2018 Winners

Pierce County Library System

2018 Winners

Congratulations to the more than 1,100 talented students who participated in the 22nd 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. Writers Gloria Muhammad and Kathryn Galbraith selected this year's writing winners, evaluating originality, style, general presentation, grammar and spelling. Photographer Dominique Thomas-McCullum and artist Saiyare Refaei 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 and Pacific Lutheran University to help fund the contest.

POETRY
DRAWING
SHORT
PHOTOGRAPHY
STORY



Poetry Winners

Grades 7 & 8

1st What's Today?

Livy LeCompte

Pioneer Middle School

2nd Dance

Vanessa John

Lochburn Middle School

3rd About Love

Sofia Guerra

Annie Wright School

Grades 9 & 10

1st Sixty-Five Million

Kristine Pham

Curtis Junior High School

2nd Screaming in My Whisper

Daniel Titov

Other

3rd Night

Kaylie Steinbacher

Bellarmine Preparatory School

Grades 11 & 12

1st So I Weep

Hannah Carter

Franklin Pierce High School

2nd Ignorance

Keir Adamson

Gig Harbor High School

3rd Of Music

Allyson Chiou

Covenant High School

Drawing Winners

Grades 7 & 8

1st **Beyond The Garden Fence**

Ava Monner

Harrison Preparatory School

2nd **I Want to be Like a Sunflower**

Zoe Law

Columbia Junior High

3rd **Old Man**

Deven Loska

Key Peninsula Middle School

Grades 9 & 10

1st **Growth**

Avery Li

Charles Wright Academy

2nd **Technicolor Tears**

Tia Christensen

Other

3rd **Harambe**

Winter Lovelace

Covenant High School

Grades 11 & 12

1st **Impression**

Leeza Woodard

Covenant High School

2nd **Little Stork**

Katherine Hunter

White River High School

3rd **The Course of Winter**

Addeline Piippo

Bethel High School

Photography Winners

Grades 7 & 8

1st Falling Water

Kaitlyn Evans

Ford Middle School

2nd After the Rain

Malia Fraser

Goodman Middle School

3rd Illusion

Za'Nia Rushing

Keithley Middle School

Grades 9 & 10

1st The Darkness Bleeds

Olivia Morris

Foss High School

2nd Falling Apart

Wynter Barnette

Sumner Senior High School

3rd Karasu

Jade Dickinson

Graham-Kapowsin High School

Grades 11 & 12

1st Lost

Ethan Rutledge

Curtis Senior High School

2nd Libby

Kristie Alford

Tacoma Baptist Schools

3rd Dunes

Carson Fountain

Wilson High School

Short Story Winners

Grades 7 & 8

1st Ocean Storm

Zoie McCarter Other

2nd Paper Boats

Isabelle Tague Frontier Middle School

3rd Fear

Sam Davidson Home School

Grades 9 & 10

1st On a Throne of Blood and Lies

Alexandra Ellison Graham-Kapowsin High School

2nd My Life on the Underground Railroad

Grace Sieber Bonney Lake High School

3rd Finding Her

Maggie Reis Covenant High School

Grades 11 & 12

1st Rough Draft #4

Nathan Lawty Covenant High School

2nd A Hot Summer Night

Kaitlin Hochstrasser Spanaway Lake High School

3rd Bubba's Person

Bethan Sullivan Covenant High School

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Poetry

Grades 7 & 8

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OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS

What's Today?

By Livy LeCompte

First Place

Does she know what today is?

When she gave me thoughts and actions,

The day she passed me emotions to feel joy and sorrow,

When she provided me with the one thing I'll always have
even if it's lost,

Myself.

Today was the day that made up all my days.

But to her, it could be the day she'll never want to remember,

The day that ruined all her days.

Today,

It's my birthday,

Mom.



Dance

By Vanessa John

Second Place

The song hummed to life,
Lights awakening, heartbeat
Slowly to match the music

Her movements started out slow,
Almost as if she were
Moving through water
But the music picked up,
Her feet moved faster,
Her heartbeat picking up
Frantically
Suddenly she was dancing,
And turning, and jumping as
If the only thing that existed
Was the music
Too soon, the music slowed
Her feet calming, but her
Pulse still racing
She lifted her eyes to the
Audience victory enveloping
Her whole.

About Love

By Sofia Guerra

Third Place

Wonder.

The best thing you can do is

To save yourself from this,

Keep everything as realistic as you can manage.

Undoubtedly, the worst you can do is

Let yourself wander within the realm of your thoughts.

If you want to live a better life, you must

Never assume idealistic ideas to be anything but what they truly are.

A waste of time.

Ridiculous.

Unrealistic.

They are not, and never will be,

Here to help you.

You need to recognize that wonder and fantasies are

Always going to go against you in this competitive world.

Taking on a strictly disciplined mindset is

The best way to learn.

This is the truth of wonder,

Pay close attention and follow my advice.

(Now read from bottom to top)

Poetry

Grades 9 & 10

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
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OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS

Sixty-Five Million

by Kristine Pham

First Place

Disasters and war, bigger than ever before, leave sixty-five million refugees
No choice but to flee.

Peace is buried under debris once part of a home
And hope is what they carry in the ocean they roam
Looking for a place away from the chaos, never once forgetting what they lost
Away from where boys, playing plastic toys, are now young sons, loading metal guns.

These people are suffering, can't you see? Yet our country chooses to neglect it.
From eighty-five to forty-five thousand refugees, we've lessened how much we admit.
Isn't America the "land of the free"? Full of so many opportunities?
If we're born here, that is what we're guaranteed.
Shouldn't that be the same for those in need?

We tell them to leave, to go back to their country where all they can do is grieve.
Surrounded by terrorism and civil war, we choose to ignore
Rejecting those who are trying to come here to live in a world without fear,
We forget where these people come from
In which we will soon question what we've become.

Where is our country's empathy, humanity? The lack of these will leave us in vanity.
We need to help and support the refugees who aren't as lucky as you and me.

This needs to be our aim, because wouldn't we want the same?

Sixty-five million refugees. Sixty-five million chances for you and me

Screaming in My Whisper

by Daniel Titov

Second Place

Hey look up what's in that tree
Somebody deeper and darker than the black sea
I think he's trying to escape reality
Or maybe what everybody expects him to be
Go and earn a medical degree
Well hey that person is really me
And Lately I haven't been feeling well
Asking questions only time could tell
Getting old memories that come from nostalgic smells
I ran from my problems and then I fell
Now I'm stuck hiding in my shell
I try and call for help but I forgot how to yell
I'm sick of stupid trends that never end well
I try not to follow them But only rebel and repel
Because I'm just a lonely blood cell
Searching for my citadel

Night

by Kaylie Steinbacher

Third Place

I think of night in many ways
And when I think of it tonight
I see your face in every star
Your love, your life turned dark to light

I used to be afraid of night, and all the things it brought to me
My sadness, pain, and deepest fears, my gloom and my anxiety
The daytime I would seek with hope, for then I thought that you
Were only there within the sun, but now I know, this is not true

Through all those nights I lay in fear
Of things I thought could not be changed
You sat and waited patiently
'Til my perspective rearranged
And when I finally saw the light
Where there was none before
You took my hand, and gave me life
My vision of hope you did restore

I think of night in many ways
And when I think of it tonight
I think of you, and how you gave
My broken self a chance to fight.

Poetry

Grades 11 & 12

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY



OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS

So I Weep

by Hannah Carter

First Place

So I weep

I weep for Florida

I weep for Sandy Hook

I weep for Columbine

I weep because I care.

I weep because children were gunned down yesterday

I weep because it is normal to have crimson on our hands from the godless inaction that we have allowed to continue

I weep for the kids who can never look at their school again without thinking "There, that's where my friend died"

I weep because now we can see what kids were praying for right before they were shot, yet despite the countless tweets and snaps crying out "please, please let me live" we do nothing

I weep because thoughts and prayers are considered thoughtful condolences, as if that were enough to say I'm sorry that your child, your son, your daughter, your friend, your coworker is dead

I weep because when the tiny bodies of children too young to even conceive the notion that their parents could die have suddenly become the victims of a violence that not even an adult can fully grasp, we did nothing

I weep because it didn't stop there

I weep because it won't stop there

But most of all I weep because so many don't anymore

Ignorance

by Keir Adamson

Second Place

Ignorance is seldom bliss
A muttered word, an evil hiss
Hate and fury over heart
Passion and reason, drifting apart

Fear and anger cause our cursing
Bitter phrases we keep rehearsing
Vitriol spewed at our “rivals”
Acts of hatred threaten survival

Millions of people, utterly divided
Frustration and grief, totally misguided
Cultures and customs we refuse to understand
People bullied, beaten, berated, banned

Ignorance is seldom bliss

Of Music

by Allyson Chiou

Third Place

When Voice breaks through the silence,
Of man and instrument alike,
There strikes a certain violence,
That sparks in heart and mind a light.
This light may bear in listless soul
An animation- life made full;
Or light of peace like ocean still,
A restless mind with calm may fill.

Drawing

Grades 7 & 8

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OUR OWN
PROFESSIONS

Beyond The Garden Fence

by Ava Monner

First Place



I Want to be Like a Sunflower

by Zoe Law

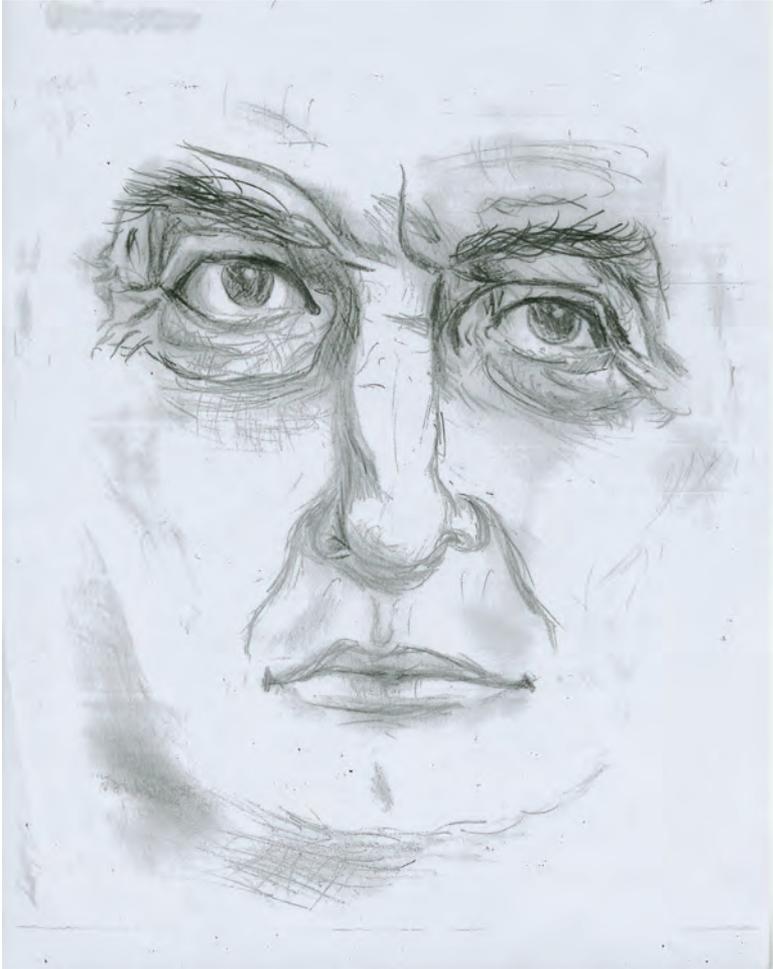
Second Place



Old Man

by Deven Loska

Third Place



Drawing

Grades 9 & 10

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
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OUR OWN
PREFSIONS

Growth

by Avery Li

First Place



Technicolor Tears

by Tia Christensen

Second Place



Harambe

by Winter Lovelace

Third Place



Drawing

Grades 11 & 12

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY



OUR OWN
PREFSIONS

Impression

by Leeza Woodard

First Place



Little Stork

by Katherine Hunter

Second Place



The Course of Winter

by Addeline Piippo

Third Place



Photography

Grades 7 & 8

POETRY
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**OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS**

Falling Water

by Kaitlyn Evans

First Place



After the Rain

by Malia Fraser

Second Place



Illusion

by Za'Nia Rushing

Third Place



Photography

Grades 9 & 10

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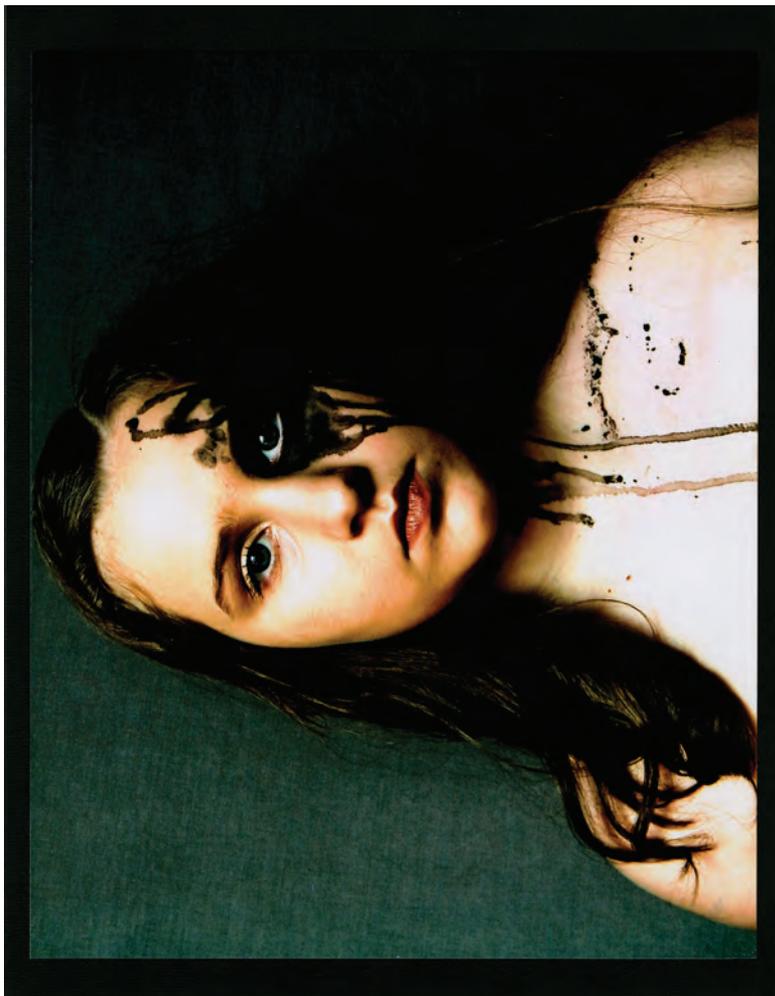


OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS

The Darkness Bleeds

by Olivia Morris

First Place



Falling Apart

by Wynter Barnette

Second Place



Karasu

by Jade Dickinson

Third Place



Photography

Grades 11 & 12

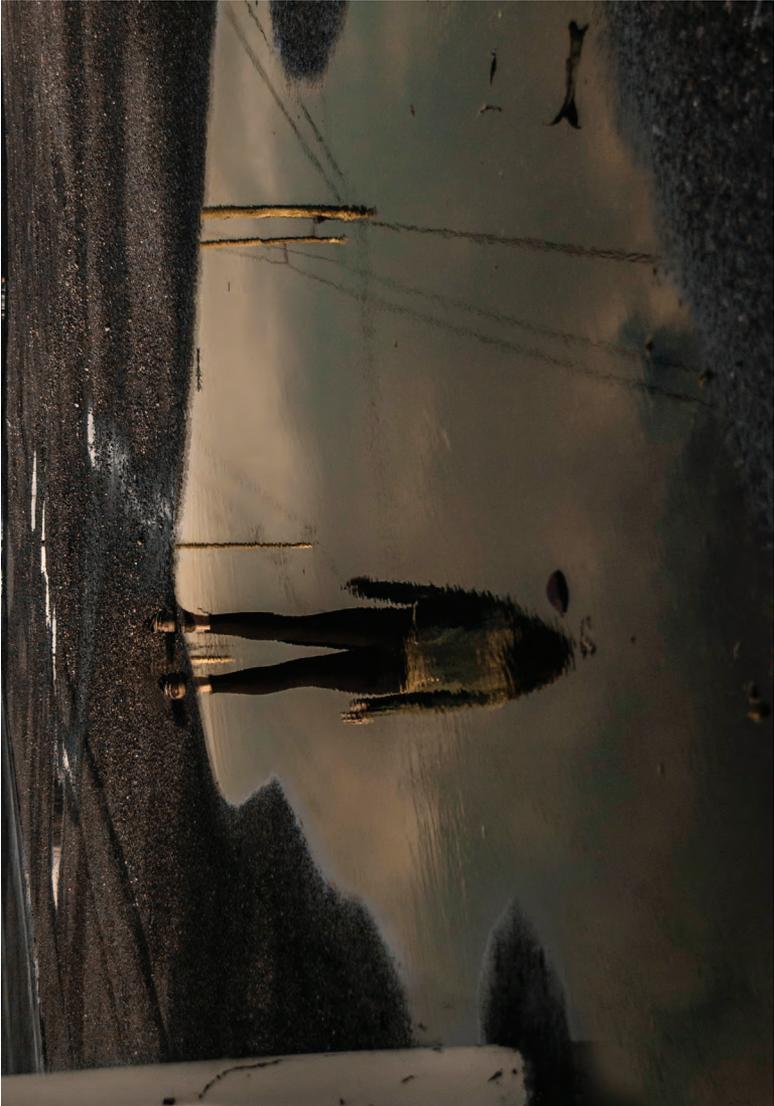
POETRY
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OUR OWN
PROFESSIONS

Lost

by Ethan Rutledge

First Place



Libby

by Kristie Alford

Second Place





Dunes

by Carson Fountain

Third Place



Short Story

Grades 7 & 8

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY



OUR OWN
PREFERENCES

Ocean Storm

by Zoie McCarter

First Place

I stand in the cold water, my feet gripping the coarse sand. Seaweed brushes against my legs; soggy and slimy. The salty smell of the sea makes me feel so free. Dark, gray clouds soaked with water gather in the sky. White waves start to form in the distance, stopping at nothing. Brushing against my skin, the soft breeze beckons me into the powerful, white curls of the sea. I fall into a deep dream as the wind slowly pulls me into one of the worlds great wonders. I see the water from the sea... carrying me to the sky and high above the clouds... I am content... it's showing me the power of the Earth... showing me what it really means to be free.

The sound of heavy waves crashing into the sharp rocks nearby awakened me. A strike of lighting catches my eye. Like a flame devouring everything it touches. I know now I should not have listened, the wind can be so calming and soft, and yet so deceitful. Acres of destruction I have seen the wind bring about, until now I had dismissed it. It whispered in my ear, a soft sea whisper, and I listened to it... I thought that I could trust it. The waves grew ever stronger, pushing me further out into the deep, dark depths of the sea. The wind starts to howl and scream. Like the sound of a wolf in danger, it's pack rushing to save it. Salty, dry water splashes in my face and in my mouth, I feel so thirsty and itchy. Suddenly, a white water beast swallows me and pushes me down into the dark, uninviting depths where no human should ever go. It brings me to the unknown, as deep as the sea can go. Water surrounds my body, holding in every breath of air. With all my might I push against the salty, cold ocean. Rushing to get out of the abyss, I swim as fast as I can to the white tops of the sea. I gasp for air as my head flies up out of the water. No cloud is in

sight, the white ocean waves have settled down and now slowly push me to shore. The wind seems to have ceased calling for me. No longer are the sharp rocks flowing with white ocean curls.

My feet once again feel the coarse sand. How magnificent land is, and how jubilant I am to see it. I crawl farther up shore, slowly and steadily. I roll over on my back, looking into the emptiness. My mouth salty and dry, pleading for water. The storm was over. Clear skies looked down on me, asking why I listened to the wind. In reply I whispered, "Oh, how free an Ocean Storm can be, and how free I want to be." I close my eyes and feel the ocean storm calling for me once again. The wind beckoning me to follow it one more time. Do I listen and follow it, like a dog follows its master? Or do I walk away and find something else to make me feel free? Like a bear that walks away from honey, leaving behind its one true source pleasure. For now I think I will glide like an eagle over the sea, searching for something else to fill me.

Paper Boats

by Isabelle Tague

Second Place

Eighteen months. That's equivalent to 1.5 years. 13,140 hours, or 788,401 minutes. 788,401 minutes and one second. Two. Three. Four-

My heart pounds as I let the pencil fall from my trembling grasp, re-reading the calculations. Tears well in my eyes- yet I clench my teeth, forcing them away. I don't cry anymore. Worthless tears won't bring him home. I slam my fist against the desk, scattering all my useless crap about. His paper boat tumbles to the floor. Sobs threaten to penetrate my chest but I hold them at bay, sliding off my stool onto the hardwood floor. Pulling my knees to my chest, I wrap my arms tightly around them, until I can almost imagine it's a hug. But I don't do that anymore either. No physical contact at all.

I sit there for another minute, rocking back and forth. Drawing in three deep breaths, I force myself to stand up, the hem of my shirt catching on a small nail protruding from the loose floorboard. Underneath, lies the last of his belongings- I couldn't let them go. Ambling down the stairs to the kitchen and snagging an apple and a crayon, I turn and creep down the hall until I reach his room. Trying the door handle- only to find it locked- I pull a hairpin from my curls and insert it into the keyhole, wiggling it around until the lock mechanism clicks. Slipping into the room and gently closing the door behind me, I collapse to my knees and tip my head back against the dresser- this and the desk being the only decor left in the room. They took everything else with them when they filed in one day, wearing strange masks, and bunched white suits. They took everything he'd touched away, and never brought it back. They wouldn't let me in- not even after they took away the stretcher covered with the white cloth. When I asked, they told me it was him. My brother. But I simply told them the truth- no, it was not. They were incorrect, I said. My brother couldn't be under there,

because he was already gone. He'd run away, I would whisper, eyes darting side to side. He's run away, like we always planned. Except he forgot me on accident- that's why I have to wait right here for him to come back, so he can take me too. The baggy-clothed men would merely fake a smile and pat me on the head, as if I was a child. But seven is far past childhood- that's what he always told me.

"Annie," he'd whisper to me, "to be seven, means you get to have adventures; to go places and meet new people." He'd tell me tales about how he was going to run away- and he'd take me too, now that I was seven. He even made me my very own adventure vest, sewn from his old Boy Scout outfit. He and I would race out to the backyard, me in my vest and him in his baseball cap. We made maps of where we would go once we ran away together- and we hid them under the loose floorboard in my bedroom. Except one day, we were out in the yard, when he started to cough. He did that a lot- but this time, some of the strawberry jam from our PB&J sammies had come back up I suppose- pooling on the ground and making him sway.

Mother wouldn't let him outside after that, and I wasn't allowed to see him. Every other day, a man in white with a funny crooked nose would visit him in his room, then come out and whisper to mother. Sometimes however, when I got bored of playing by myself, I'd sneak into his room and sit by his bed as he whispered me stories (quietly so mother didn't hear), occasionally having to pause to wipe strawberry jam from his lips. One day after I snuck into the room, he asked me to grab some paper. A big thick stack, he'd instructed. So I did, and he did something wondrous- he made me my very own boat! I loved it so much, that I begged and begged until he taught me to make one all by myself. He then leaned over to me and whispered, "When we run away, if we ever get seperated, just send a paper boat down the creek, and I'll find it and come back to you- underst--" he was interrupted by lots of coughing, and red jam spilled all over him- onto the floor, and all over me. His eyes widened, and he desperately lunged for my hand. But I had grown frightened and drew back, scurrying out of the room, tears streaming down my cheeks. I ran to my room and slammed the

door, crumpling on my bed. I sobbed and sobbed, terrified that mother would find out I'd been in his room.

She found me later on and sat beside me on the bed. She stroked my hair and cried with me for some reason, even though she was the reason for my tears.

We cried some more, then she enveloped me in a stifling hug, not noticing the jam stains splattered across my shirt. She squeezed her eyes shut, and told me he was gone- that my brother had gone to a better place. I was so shocked that I simply stopped crying, jumping off the bed and sprinting to his room- but the door was locked and I couldn't get in. So I just sat, waiting for him to come out.

But he didn't. He had run away without me, it seemed. And had locked the door behind him. He must've told mother he was going somewhere better, I suppose. And I'll bet he was gonna take me with- if only I'd had the guts to take his hand. This was my fault. So when the baggy-clothed men showed up, I corrected them. He ran away, so no, he wasn't under some blanket. And after they patted my head and whisked his belongings away, I grabbed paper and began making as many boats as I could- writing messages on each of them; that I'd still like to run away, and that I was still at home, so he should come and get me now. I ran to the creek and sent them free, one by one.

I awoke the next morning, but he hadn't come yet. So I made another, and sent it down the river. Each day I did this, while gradually pushing the rest of my family away. If I had grabbed his hand, I would've been with him now. If I hadn't spent so much time crying, I could've caught up with him. So now I don't allow contact or crying because I'd thrown away my chance, and I don't need to risk missing another one.

Eighteen months. Equivalent to 547 days- and each day I've sent another boat down the river for my brother, waiting for the day he comes back to take me away.

I'm still waiting-
And will as long as it takes.



Fear

by Sam Davidson

Third Place

You have no reason to be afraid. You're safe and protected in this house. Just calm down and go to sleep. The only real enemy is fear. All you have to do is face it.

That's what they always told me. "It's all just a feeling. There's nothing in my closet, under my bed, or waiting behind the door I'm about to open," I told myself, "It's all just a feeling: fear," I thought, "All I have to do is face it."

I continued to say those comforting words to myself in bed. I closed my eyes, but every time the house moaned and creaked, I had to open them and look around to make sure nothing was there. I'd never find sleep. For the past month I hadn't been able to. Fear, the thing that took my sleep, my courage, my everything. It seemed to never cease torturing me at night. "It's just a feeling," I whispered to myself.

It was true of course. Fear wasn't a living thing, just a feeling. Just a thing that made me be afraid of irrational things. I continued to try to keep my eyes shut and forget my fears.

"Bump, Bump!" Was something coming up the stairs!

No, I shut my eyes again.

"Creeeaak!" Is that my bedroom door!

No, it's just the wind. I got to get to sleep.

Then the smell of something burning filled the room. Maybe the neighbor was smoking. No that wasn't it. I don't know exactly how to describe it. It was like someone using rats as fuel for their fire. No I've never smelled that but, that's probably the best way to describe it. I gagged violently.

“Hello Thomas,” said a voice that sounded like two pieces of metal scraping against each other.

I sat straight up. “Who’s there?” I asked, my voice quivering.

“You shouldn’t have to ask,” The terrible voice answered, “You’ve heard of me many times.”

I was so terrified that I had a hard time speaking, but I continued.

“I don’t know who you are.”

“Who I am does not matter. You’ve escaped my clutches to many times, Thomas.”

I didn’t know what he meant, but I wasn’t going to wait around to find out. I bolted to my parents room for help, but no one was there.

I was filled with terror. Where had my mom and dad gone?

“Thump! Thump!” He was coming down the hall.

I had to escape. I ran to the bedroom window. I was about to open the window when a dark figure appeared right outside of it.

“You can’t escape me,” he said with his horrible voice.

I didn’t get a good look at him because as soon he appeared I booked out of the room. I quickly ran back into my bedroom and slammed the door behind me. I hid in the closet. “This time you can’t wake up. You can’t escape into your miserable mortal world now!” he taunted outside my bedroom door.

I stood there in the dark closet for what seemed like forever. For a second I thought he might not have been able to find me and given up. That was when the smell of rats corpse being burned filled the closet. Then my bedroom door creaked open.

He moved into the room. The darkness disguising him seemed to be darker than darkness itself. It made me feel that if I so much as touched it, the darkness covering him would consume me. The way his head jerked, the wide steps he took, and even the way he

held his arms told me this was no human being.

I needed to stop looking through the crack of the closet door, but I was so hypnotized by the things appearance. Suddenly his head stopped jerking and looked straight at me! He then disappeared. I froze with fear. Where was he! I suddenly felt something ice cold go through me. It seemed I could hear a high pitch scream in my ears. The figure hid by darkness was in the closet with me!

I wanted to scream, but I couldn't find the air to do it. I stumbled out of closet and started racing down the stairs. As I ran downstairs, my feet felt weak. I tried to keep them on track, but my unsteady legs tripped over one of the steps and I tumbled downstairs. I don't exactly know how but at some point while I was falling I hit my head against the wall. When I finally hit the bottom of the stairs my ears were ringing, I had a horrible headache and felt like I was in some kind of dream. Every sound through the house was twenty times louder and echoed in my head. "I've never seen someone fail so pitifully," The thing laughed.

The sound of his echoing voice made my headache ten times worse. He slowly walked down the stairs towards me. I had to run, but I was sure if I got up I'd pass out. I slowly crawled away. "It's funny how desperate humans get." He drawled.

Using, all my strength I slowly got up. By that time I was covered with sweat and exhausted. I limped into the kitchen as fast as I could away from the man disguised by darkness.

Even though he was darker than darkness itself and could be distinguished fairly easily from normal darkness I still couldn't quite see where he was. I grabbed a flashlight out of one of the drawers in the kitchen and, stood there waiting with anticipation.

He suddenly appeared in the kitchen. How he traveled so fast I had no idea, "I am wherever ever darkness lies," he said as if answering my thoughts, "You can't run from me. I will consume you!" He screeched.

I shined my light at him. There he stood with no shadow to hide him. He had beat up clothes, Haggard black hair, and his face seemed to be made of ash. He had deep dark pits for eyes, sharks teeth, and razor sharp claws. Bloodstained knives covered his long tail. I stood there petrified in horror.

“Who are you?” I screamed.

“I`m surprised you don`t recognize me,” he said with his terrible voice, “I`ve tortured you for the past month! Let me introduce myself. I`m fear!”

My mind was racing. Should I fight? I couldn`t fight him. I could run. No, that also wouldn`t work. He`d always find a shadow to appear in. Suddenly words came through my head. “The only real enemy is fear. All you have to do is face him.”

I looked Fear in the eyes and, “You`re just a feeling, an emotion. You`re not real!”

Beams of light shot through his body and consumed him into nothing. I stood there in shock. Light came through the windows. I had no injuries or pains. I could hear my parents getting up from bed upstairs. Everything was back to normal.

Fear still sometimes haunts me. He lost the battle, but he was not truly defeated, but I knew if fear ever really came back, all I had to do was face him.

The End

Short Story

Grades 9 & 10

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY



OUR OWN
PREFESSIONS

On a Throne of Blood and Lies

by Alexandra Ellison

First Place

A sliver of moonlight bathed the night sky in a milky haze, casting a shadow that reminded all who lived in its wake that the ghostly pallor hid many secrets. Up high in the mountains not a single star shone, twinkled, or glimmered; for a thick blanket of unyielding darkness stretched and swallowed every light that dare begin to flicker.

“Keep marching, we should reach the cave soon.”

Deep within the largest mountain of the North, a squadron of six well-trained soldiers strained their eyes against the darkness in hopes of catching a glimpse of the supposed cavern.

These six well-trained soldiers, the Lieutenant, the Sergeant, and four privates sought to end World War III by preventing the newly reincarnated Axis and Allied Powers from continuing to wage war across the planet.

In their quest for peace, the small group of freedom fighters journeyed through the menacing mountain; prepared to ensure an Allied victory by killing the Axis Powers’ Commander.

“They say...,” whispered Lieutenant Horne, leader of the small group, “they say that the old god used to draw strength from these mountains. Always one with a flair for the dramatic, Horne paused to brush the snow off of his boots and allow his familiar story a chance to build anticipation. “Remembering this tale, our adversaries in war, the Axis Powers, supposedly locked their chief Commander here; in the very same mountains that gave the old gods their strength.”

“And what of this almighty Commander? Partly to stave away time, and partly to keep the conversation going, Sergeant Lister indulged Horne and asked the question he was most certainly awaiting.

“The true face of evil, the Axis Powers’ Commander, is everything we aspire to keep from plaguing this earth.” With years of practice, Horne knew exactly how to weave his words so that they resonated within each soldier. “She stands only for oppression and hate, leading hundreds of armies in an unjust march against our liberal freedom.”

At this point, Horne and his men finally arrived at the mouth of the cave; buried at the center of the mountain and etched into solid rock years ago. It was then that they were finally able to venture inside.

The cavern was magnificent, lined with raw obsidian in such a way that reflected every beam of light from the flashlights, and yet greedily absorbed it all at the same time. It bounced light around the space, playing tricks on the eyes and mind, until landing upon the largest object in the chamber.

There, in the base of the Mountain, at the center of the obsidian chamber, towering ten feet above Lieutenant Horne, sat the Axis Powers’ Commander. From upon her throne, atop a pile of sticks, stones, and bones; she sat and watched with delight as Lister collapsed, sick with exhaustion and fear.

There were many things unsettling about the Commander to say the very least, but most unnerving of all were her raven eyes. They pierced through Horne in a heartbeat, their underlying malice the only thing stopping him from collapsing alongside Lister. She sat ramrod straight and still as a cat, although her mannerisms were far from domesticated. With mangled jet black hair that reached her knees and canine-like teeth that threatened to rip flesh from bone, The Commander did not seem like one for playing games.

As a display of her power, The Commander raked her steel-tipped fingernails down the arm of the throne, leaving five wide gouges permanently embedded into the fabric of chair.

Horne was brimming with questions and accusations, much too distracted to think about the danger he was in. Face-to-face with the root of all evil, Horne demanded to understand why she was so intent on the suffering of millions.

“Was this what you wanted?” Standing on the rough stone of the floor below, Horne could only strain his voice so far to address the figure towering above. He said the words with as much venom as possible, but they made little impact on their target.

“Was this,” he repeated, finding newfound strength in each word. “What you wanted?!” By now he was screaming, desperately shouting from his position on the rocky earth below.

Still, The Commander did not respond. Sitting on her lavish throne, she did not even acknowledge that Horne spoke at all.

“What was the point,” Horne inhaled deeply and started again. “What was the point of starting this war, enlisting thousands of soldiers to slaughter men and women where they stand, destroying countless lives for the promise of dominance?”

This time, after a considerable length of silence, The Commander stirred. Slowly, she rose, and began to walk closer to Horne. Except, she didn't really walk.

Coiled around her Commander's legs lay a dark, dense mist. It was ever-changing, constantly shifting with each step she took. Neither solid, liquid, nor gas; and yet somehow all three, Horne knew of no words to describe her ethereal, yet frightening way of movement.

“Stupid, little man,” The Commander hissed from the mountain of bone. “I do not wage war against humanity, I do not destroy their armies. They bring death upon themselves, starving the populace so that soldiers may stay strong, creating widows and orphans every day for the greater good of the country. I do not cause their suffering, no, I merely sit and watch as mankind destroys itself.”

War had already destroyed the world twice over, obliterating entire towns and is with new technology designed specifically to slaughter.

When the third installment of this great conflict came to pass, world leaders and military strategists alike both caused mass destruction; destruction inflicted for the welfare of individual countries.

In every great battle throughout history, all parties were willing to commit gruesome crimes of warfare to ensure victory.

“Man can try to make peace, but the influence of war will always be strong among those whose ideas and opinions face opposition. However, to face war on this large of a scale, all participants have to first believe they have nothing in common. Humans are so small-minded, all it takes is the very idea of a monster to turn man against his fellow man.”

As the illusion of dissonance faded, so did The Commander. Gone were the ravenous canines and the shroud of impenetrable darkness. Like curtains drawn back she disappeared, until Horne was left with no one but himself to play the villain in this story.

Without that veil of separation, Lieutenant Horne realized that war was not fought with distinct opposition, two sides fighting a war against evil; but that mankind simply destroyed itself.

As the last flashlight began to die, Horne felt the mountain rumble around him. When the last light in the cavern began to fade, he heard The Commander’s final warning echo throughout the chamber.

“Unless humanity can learn from their ignorance, learn that the true monster lies within and that heroes are no different from the people they call villains, mankind will never grow to stop writing their own demise; forever sitting atop a throne of blood and lies.”

My Life on the Underground Railroad

by Grace Sieber

Second Place

Moonlight streams across an open desert,

Hearing silent pleas for help.

A slave runs whispering,

Almost to freedom. Almost to freedom.

The sunlight peeks above the mountain tops,

Hearing cries of joy.

A man walks by, yelling

Almost to freedom. Almost to freedom.

“Come on! Everybody keep up!” Aunt Harriet yelled.

A slight moan came from maybe fifty yards behind me. I run to my elderly father, despite our instructions. He is struggling to continue, with his pale face and rasping breath, I can tell this will be a long journey. He whispers, “I’m ok hon’. Ya’ll go on ahead and I’ll catch up.” “No, Papa.” I said.

“Come on, let’s at least reach the creek to get off the dogs’ scent, then we’ll rest,” I said.

He nodded shortly and set his jaw. I search the shadowy woods ahead for my younger brother, Moses, who is up with the rest of our group. I see him give the “signal”, ensuring us the coast is clear, and that Harriet said we can rest for a moment.

We slowly make our way to Moses, whose eyes show milky-brown. He grasps my arm and whispers. "Everyone's resting, by the creek." He shows us the spot, and we sit down. Beneath the underbrush and safety of the surrounding trees, we spoke in low tones. Moses is twelve, three years younger than me. . . his birthday just around two weeks ago. Brave, young, and open-minded, he is wise beyond his years, even if he is sometimes a pain in the you-know-what. My father, fifty-two, is a tall, muscular man. He is now thin and feverish since his last beating from our master on the plantation. The floggings had become more and more common; maybe once or twice every two weeks. After all the beatings, our family and a few others soon decided to become runaways on the Underground Railroad.

The Underground Railroad is a network of safe houses, codes, and trails; all for the intent of helping slaves become free. The James family sent messages to many famous conductors. Conductors are men and women who help runaway slaves by leading and guiding runaways along their path to freedom. Harriet Tubman herself answered and agreed to help us flee to freedom. On the night of our escape, my master whipped Father one hundred times. The flogging had badly hurt him; his wounds making it even more difficult to leave.

Moses shook me out of my thoughts. "Elaine! Harriet says it's time to go." We have been running for a few days now, and our first stop on the Underground Railroad is at a conductor's house. The conductors' houses are called "safe houses". Safe houses have secret rooms where we can stay for a time, and then the station master will direct us to another house with another room. We are near one, Harriet said. Our group heads off in that direction, relying on Harriet's power of observation to remember her past trips here. After walking about four hours, we stop in front of a home. Harriet stoops close to the clothesline and studies a hanging quilt. I look at my father inquisitively, to see if he knows what she is doing. In response to my glance, he puts a finger to his lips.

After she comes back to the woods, she conveys to us that this house is not open, first because no lantern is lit in the windows,

and second, the quilt sent a message saying that we should run quickly away from the area. After this explanation, I was informed that abolitionists have set up codes and symbols. Some consist of a lantern in the window (like we did not find) and quilt codes. On the quilt, there is a symbol that Harriet recognizes as the Drunkard's Path. This code means that we have to use zig-zag movements to throw slave catchers and the dogs in our area off our scent. We set off learning that there is going to be another safe house up ahead. After arriving late at night, under the cover of darkness, we approach the house in small groups. The station master's name is Thomas Garrett. He is a famous abolitionist, and offers a safe house to any fugitive slaves passing by. Inside, Thomas gives us food, water, and a cozy place to sleep- his small hidden basement. Shelter enough, we stay here for almost a day, regaining our strength and preparing ourselves for the next leg of our journey to freedom.

Just as we are packing up and about to leave, I hear a faint knock on the door upstairs. Harriet froze, and instructs us all to sit down and be perfectly silent. I hear Thomas open the door, and then a scrambling of feet, almost like he is being pushed out of the way. Large, heavy footsteps crossed overhead. "Please!" I hear Thomas cry. "I have done nothing wrong!"

"The more reason for us to search," said a gruff voice. "Boys, search this place up and down. If I even find one negro in this rickety house of yours, you'll wish you were in hell."

"Oh!" I gasped.

"Shhh!" came the reply. Thomas was being searched. If we are found, we could be beaten, returned to the awful plantation, and likely killed. Footsteps thunder overhead as the men rummage through bookcases, knock over furniture, and grab clinking china off the shelves. My heart hammers out of my chest. Closer and closer sound the footsteps, slowly drawing nearer to our underground hideout. I hear yelling, shouting, the slamming of doors, and then quiet.

Silence is a dangerous thing. It curses the heart, the rhythmic beats washing over the mind like waves crashing against a beach. I do not move a muscle. Scared for our lives as we sit in utter silence for what seems like hours. Finally, a small footstep sounded. Then another, and another. My ears picked up a heavy thud of a heel rebounding against the hard floor. Our trap door opens and down comes Thomas, somber and weary. Sitting down. He explains to us what had happened. Two catchers from the south had decided to travel north looking for some extra cash. If they could find any black folks, any at all, they would sell them at auctions; claiming they had captured them as runaway fugitives. The men had dropped by the house, searching for slaves or blacks. Finding none, they left. It was a miracle of God.

Thomas said he will send us away, to another house and then to a boat where we will ride to Canada—into freedom. Silently I pray, thanking the God who had saved us. As we depart, I look into the sinking Sun. Taking my father's hand, I whisper; "almost to freedom Papa. Almost to freedom."

Finding Her

by Maggie Reis

Third Place

Pierre limped off the steaming train, followed by his nephew. He wove his way through the passengers, bumping into a woman with an autumn colored hat and a fur stole. Above him towered a clock, measuring the time as it sped by as fast as the train it ran, running on an engine of steel and steam. He bought the morning post, now “old news” according to the ancient man sitting on his stool, peddling his ink-stained paper. After passing under a massive arch of stone, under which he had crossed so many times before – times that now seemed so long ago – he lifted his umbrella above his head, ducking into the pouring rain. The smoke from his pipe lingered in the dank air. Home again. Paris, 1945.

No; or was it Paris, 1914? Wasn't he walking the opposite way? Toward the iron horse? Away from home? Into war? Yes. A moment remembered, faces he would never forget. Her hair was the color of a chestnut mare, Her dress a blue cotton. “Train departing for Maubeuge: now boarding,” the conductor announced over the loud speaker. He tore himself away from Marie, his fiancé, like so many other young men in green uniforms were on the train platform. Hugs were given and kisses blown out of lowered train windows. Why did war have to do this to them? Love could never end. “I love you, Marie,” he had said.

“With all my heart,” she had answered, as a tear ran down Her cheek. She hastily brushed it away with the back of Her hand.

“I'll be back... someday...”, he had whispered, handing Her a photograph of him in his uniform. He jumped aboard. The train station faded from focus as tears blurred his vision.

Then, Paris, 1918. War washed. Tried and torn. Herbert, his fellow brother in combat, searched the young girls' faces for that "one face"; when Herbert found his fiancé, he ran toward her. They locked in a hug. "You're home!" she whispered. Pierre smiled at the thought of their reunion and her sparkling eyes. But he couldn't find Her. After two years, he had given up. He had lost Her forever. Gone, like the life in a dead and trench-weary, soldier's blank eyes. Gone. . .

The clock tower stroked five gongs as the timepiece's hands crept along its old face.

"Let's go, Jean," the old man muttered to his nephew behind his shoulder, as he quickened his pace. The rain began to pour and the sky crackled in the ominous clouds overhead.

"Yes, Uncle Pierre," reluctantly answered the cold young man behind him. His lips were blue and his ankles showed beneath his trousers. He stumbled over his long legs. A shock of brown hair hung over his face that had fallen out of his cap, covering his clear blue eyes, the color of a cold, foamy sea. Struggling with the heavy suitcase, he followed faithfully as his uncle led the way to the boarding house.

As the rain and wind blew harder, they ducked under the veranda of a flower shop. While they waited for the rain to abate, Pierre looked in the shop window. Posted in the window was a sign: "Bike for Sale".

"How would you like a bike to ride to school with, Jean?" he asked.

"That would be swell, sir!" Jean added with a grin.

"Let's go in and have a look at it," Pierre suggested, indicating the advertisement in the flower shop window. He turned the knob on the green door.

"Bonjour, monsieur," greeted an attractively dressed young woman, from behind a bouquet of pink chrysanthemums. When Jean stooped into the door, she stopped short, locked in his gaze. "... messieurs. . .", she corrected herself. "I am Madeline. Is there anything

I can do for you?" She was still staring at Jean.

"We came to look at the bike that was advertised in your window," responded the old man as he glanced around the room. Bundles of tulips, iris and heather laid steeping in old canning jars around the shop. An old chandelier hung from the low ceiling. Behind the desk, scraps of ribbon and old stems lay in a pile near the bouquet of pink mums. Crystal vases decorated the flowers with elegance.

"Yes," agreed Jean, suddenly, jerking himself from Madeline's gaze. He lowered his eyes to his shoes, embarrassed.

She led them through the back room to the back-doorway entry. A rusty green bicycle-built-for-two leaned against the brown, water-stained wall. Pierre caught his breath. The room grew glassy and faded. Memories flooded his mind. He and Marie riding on a green bike, into the horizon. Marie would always ride in the front and he in the back seat. The sweet smell of freshly shorn grass on a summer's day. She now turned around in her front seat and smiled teasingly, her hair rippling behind her, eyes shining. He smiled back, deeply breathing in the summer air. But could this be the bike they had ridden on? How was it here, in a flower shop? Reaching forward, he rubbed his hands over the cracking leather of the front bike seat. He touched the finish. The dirty green paint flaked off into his hand.

"My Aunt Marie is dying in the hospital, so I come open her flower shop after I am finished with school in the afternoon..." Madeline was explaining shyly to Jean, leaning on the doorframe. Sinking his hands deep in his pockets, Jean blushed.

His heart jumped. Did she say it was her Aunt Marie? Dying? Her flower shop? Has she stood here before?

"Pardon me, Miss. I believe I knew your aunt. We were good friends." Pierre blurted, tearing himself from the memories and focusing on Madeline's face. "We were engaged." Pierre added, nodding at Jean's surprised expression of disbelief.

“But you told me...” Jean started, trailing off, as Pierre dismissed him with his hand.

“I know.” Pierre muttered.

•••

Paris Hospital, Room 14. A man stood at the door, his hand hovering over the metal knob. Would he dare? His shoulders hung loosely over his frame, a cap held limply in the other hand, exhausted. A pink chrysanthemum peeped shyly out of his breast pocket. He stared intently at his hands. They were shaking uncontrollably. Would I dare? Would she recognize me? A week of sleepless nights. Does she still love me? A tormented conscience. He jerked his hand toward the door. He pulled it back again. I can't. With effort, he raised his hand to the door. I must. I may never see her again if I don't.

The door creaked slowly open.

Lying in a cot, lay a beautiful woman, her silver-grey hair resting on her shoulders. Her head rested on a pillow and her eyes were half closed but still sparkled like the stars. Through the window, the sky was the very color of Her dress the day he had lost Her.

“Pierre?” She whispered, barely audible, straining to recognize him. Propping herself up with her arms, she sat up painfully.

“I'm home,” he answered, smiling painfully. His heart melted, lip trembling.

They were both crying.

He had found Her.

Short Story

Grades 11 & 12

POETRY
DRAWING
PHOTOGRAPHY
SHORT
STORY



OUR OWN
PREFSIONS

Rough Draft #4

by Nathan Lawty

First Place

“Now, where to begin?”

I sit down at my computer desk in the basement, staring at the blank, white sheet of digital paper that in a few hours- or days- will become the first draft of my short story. I type a single sentence, stare at it for about five minutes, then write another one. I decide that I don't like that last sentence, so I rewrite it. Once I repeat this process about a hundred times, I'll have a short story, by no means high in quality, but the best work I could come up with. Not all of us are natural writers, after all.

The hardest part of writing a short story is always figuring out exactly who or what to write about. Flannery O'Connor said that the best stories always start with complex, yet relatable characters. This is something I had been lacking in my previous stories. My first story had a character with a name, red hair, jealousy, and not much else. My second and third stories mixed things up by adding more characters, but quantity did not equal quality. This story, however, was going to be different. I was going to use the most complex, relatable character I know: myself.

It's true that there is nothing spectacular about me. I'd say I'm a rather average high schooler. However, that just increases my relatability. Audiences love “average Joes”. Frodo Baggins was an “average Joe” before the ring found him. Dorothy from The Wizard of Oz was an “average Joe (or Jane?)”, before she got caught in a twister. Why not me?

Alright, I have my complex, relatable character. Check. What's next, Flannery? Put them in an unusual or new situation and see how they react? Alright then.

As I'm typing on my computer, I feel rather encouraged about the work I'm doing. 310 words already! Suddenly, the computer turns off. I try to turn it back on again, but nothing's working. The light above my desk also turns off, and the one in the bathroom, and the living room. Before long, the only light I see is from the smartphone in my pocket, vibrating against my side harder than I knew it could. I pull the phone out, and almost drop it when I see the message in my notifications:

“COME OUT OF YOUR HOUSE IMMEDIATELY! THIS IS NOT A DRILL!”

A million thoughts race through my head. A drill for what? Who sent this message? Who else was it sent to? What should I do? This message is clearly connected to the power going out, so whoever sent it must mean business. I wondered if I could message back to it and say, “Or what?” but that felt unwise. Number one rule of being in a hostage crisis: never make your aggressor angrier. Is that what this is? What else could it be? Could I defend myself? There was a gun underneath dad's bed.

As I stare at the phone for a good thirty seconds thinking these thoughts, a second message pops up, the same as the first. I close my eyes and take a deep breath. It appears to me that I only have one choice. I creep upstairs and look through the peephole of the door. Nothing there. Just my typical front porch and front yard.

“Well, here goes nothing.” I say to myself and creak the door handle. The door slowly swings open, and my limbs grow numb to find...

A cliffhanger! Of course! Audiences love cliffhangers! I finish typing on the computer after over an hour of hard work and look back at what I have done. It's almost 650 words long, a perfect length for a short story, in my estimation. It's not perfect, of course, but what else would peer editing be for? I save and print my story, confident that I have just created a contest winner.

A Hot Summer Night

by Kaitlin Hochstrasser

Second Place

Adlai wiped the sweat from his brow, then tapped his pen against his desk. He bobbed his head to the beat enthusiastically. The song, admittedly, was probably not contributing to an effective study session. However, he had convinced himself that if Mozart could help as background music, then metal probably could as well. After all, they both involved string instruments. Surely the same principle applied, right?

Man, it was hot. The apartment's air conditioner seemed to have gone out again. Usually a good jostling would make the thing splutter back to life, but it was all the way across the room and he didn't want to go to the effort. Instead, he would just suffer through the stifling heat.

Perhaps he shouldn't have taken summer courses, but less people attended this time of year. The only major drawbacks were the dingy dormitory being inadequately equipped for the blistering summer weather, and his aggravating roommate.

Joseph. Adlai found himself glaring at his textbook just thinking about him. They'd been in several... disputes during their time under the same roof. Joseph felt like it was his life's duty to point out the faults of others, and apparently Adlai's were numerous. Adlai thought that his roommate should start following some of the advice that he seemed to take such pleasure in dishing out. Where was he, anyway? No doubt attending a late night protest of some sort.

With an annoyed sigh, Adlai leaned back in his chair and squinted at the ceiling in the dark. He'd read the same page of his economy textbook at least three times, and it was no more comprehensible than the last. There was a crack on the ceiling; it appeared like a mouth in the dim illumination from his battery-powered lamp.

The first few notes of “Fire and Flames” met Adlai’s eardrums, and he swung forward again to vigorously drum his pen to the music. Too soon, seven and a half minutes had elapsed and the song was over. The next song started to play, but he wasn’t really feeling that band at the moment. He reached over and grabbed his phone, then scrolled down his playlist. He adjusted his earbud and absentmindedly noted just how sweltering it was, like a sauna or the surface of the sun.

Briefly, Adlai wondered why he didn’t have any new notifications. But then he recalled how he had put his phone on airplane mode to prove to himself that he had self control. He picked a new song and cranked up the volume even higher than before, biting his lip as he aggressively shook his head up and down.

Any thought of Joseph was far from Adlai’s mind, as well as his economy studying. He continued on, unaware of the apocalyptic hellscape outside his curtain-covered window. The night surely was blazing hot. As brimstone rained from the sky and the red flames licked higher and higher, Adlai kept reaching for the volume button to find that the music was already at its maximum.

Bubba's Person

by Bethan Sullivan

Third Place

Of all things that Bubba loved to do, there was nothing so tail-wagging as the times he spent with his best friend Mike. Mike and Bubba would wander down the trail from Mike's home that led to the river on a sunny Saturday afternoon, just taking their time. Or they would play seek-and-tag. Bubba would hide in the bushes by the lawn while Mike pretended not to notice, then jump out at him when he walked by. They would tear across the grass and tumble down in a heap of arms and legs and fur. Bubba would jump on Mike and lick his face till he laughed and pushed him away. Maybe they would go to the river and Mike would throw sticks in for Bubba to catch, as he sat by the bank swinging his ankles in the fresh, cold, current. Whatever they did, Bubba was always watching Mike because he never knew when Mike would need him.

Bubba looked up from his bone and reverie to Mike's face-blue eyes intent on deciphering the words of the new I-can-read book he had received for his fifteenth birthday. Bubba could tell Mike was frustrated because he kept yanking on little bits of the curly blond hair that lay on his forehead. But gradually Bubba became aware of something else, something very wrong; it made the hair on his neck feel all prickly. Mike needed him now. Bubba had already started barking by the time Mike fell thrashing in wild jerks to the floor. Usually Mike's mom would have been there by now, but Bubba couldn't wait for her to get home from the shopping; the old routine had kicked in. Running to the kitchen, Bubba leapt from the ground to a chair in one bound. Scrambling onto the table, Bubba began to bark again with all his might. Help was close at hand.

Bubba raised his head from his paws at the sound of keys at the door. As it opened he got up, wagging expectantly. But Mike's mom came in alone with the groceries and she had done for the past month. Bubba's tail drooped; this had never happened before. Bubba couldn't understand why Mike wasn't coming home now; where was he? Bubba knew he had done all he could to be there for Mike, but he wondered if what he did was enough. Was Mike disappointed? Was he tired of playing with Bubba?

Mike's mom sank into the arm chair and began to sob. With a heavy heart Bubba padded over to comfort her; leaning against her legs and pushing his nose into her hand, just as he would do for Mike when he got discouraged. Days past in which Bubba would lie on the couch without stirring, even to look out the window. Everything seemed grey to him now. It was rainy and Mike's mom and dad were never around much—someone else would come and feed Bubba. When they were home they would whisper about hospital bills and surgeries, things Bubba didn't understand.

Then, one day, something began to change. There was excitement mounting in the house. Friendly grownups kept putting up streamers and balloons, and people came in and out all day. Men were building a strange tilted path from the door to the ground. And a sliding chair was attached to the stair rail. Bubba watched all these changes from the window. He watched ladies put up a huge banner, stir punch, and take a warm cake from the oven. Bubba was growing more interested. Teens carrying signs and snacks soon invaded the house, patting Bubba and saying, "almost time," and, "you're going to be excited." Everyone gathered in a big circle then one man said, "now, don't be too loud, or pushy—it might be a little overwhelming, and embarrassing too." What? What were they talking about? Bubba pushed through to the front of the crowd going outside, just in time to see a car drive to the gate. It turned and stopped in front of the lawn. Doors opened. Dad and mom got out. Bubba was taut with suspenseful excitement. They seemed to be lifting something out. . . But Bubba didn't wait for it to touch the ground. With a wild, joyous

bark he was already flying down the drive, ears sailing in the wind; running, running. Because it was Mike! In a minute Bubba was in his arms, licking his face to clean off the salty tears. Mike squeezed him hard and rubbed his ears and laughed and hugged him again.

Mike couldn't do a lot of things he had done before. He couldn't walk in the woods, tumble on the grass, or spend a day by the river-Mike's new chair couldn't wheel over the uneven path. Mike always had to sit now. But Bubba didn't mind. He knew that Mike still loved him and wanted him around. Bubba sat next to Mike when he went to the doctor to get a checkup so that Mike could squeeze his paw if it got too painful. Bubba sat next to Mike when he was connected to a beeping machine with tubes so he could lay his gentle hand on Bubba's warm back and feel something that wasn't mechanical and cold. Bubba sat next to Mike when he took his special bath. Bubba sat next to Mike when he was painting with his weak hands. And he sat next to Mike, a warm, faithful friend, when he was crying; the young and friendly Mike could not run, or eat, or join his friends in games. But most of all he was sad because he could no longer make his gentle voice say what he intended it to say. He had to use an electronic device to speak with his race. But Bubba loved him, Bubba was always there; Bubba watched out for him. Bubba would always snuggle up on his lap no matter what, licking his face and smiling up at him when Mike made audible the only word that was still possible for him to say, "Bubba, Bubba, Bubba." Though it was his only word, coming from Mike's heart, it meant the world. And Bubba knew it.

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