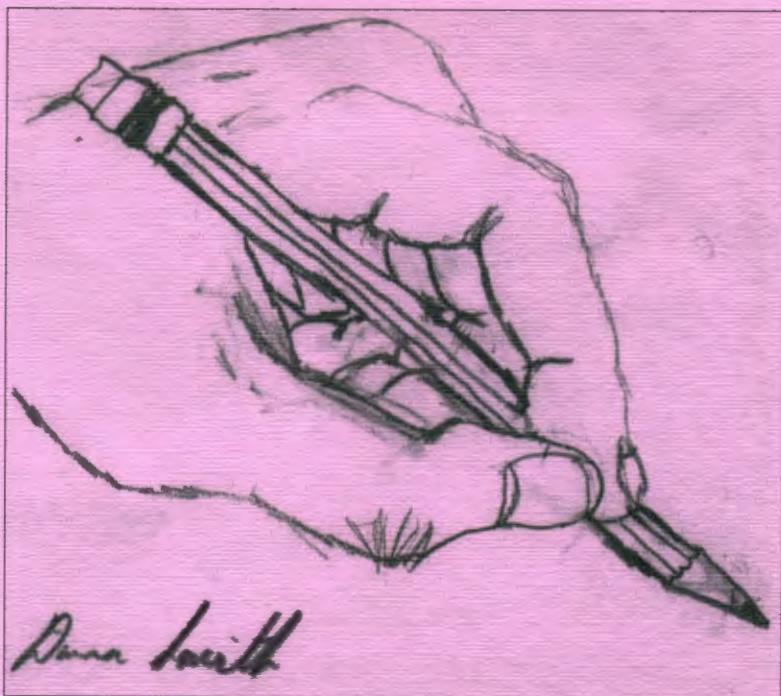


Connecticut Student Writers



Volume XII May 2000

Connecticut Student Writers

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FOREWORD

In the following pages the students of Connecticut write about themselves. They write about their lives, their fears, their hopes, their dreams. They look into themselves fearlessly and often with humor. Through these pages, we can learn about them. Perhaps we can understand them and ourselves a little better.

This year over sixteen hundred students from across the state of Connecticut submitted entries sharing their satisfaction in the craft of writing. The following pages represent a small sample of that creative energy shared by students and teachers through the power of writing.

The Connecticut Student Writers magazine is a celebration of student writing sponsored by the Connecticut Writing Project. Join with us in honoring these authors.

Editors

Barbara Cohen
John Goekler
Jennifer Shaff



Connecticut Student Writers

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Fall Poem

Hi I am a leaf.
I make food for
my tree.
Then fall comes.
And I fall from the
trees and I make
colors.
Soon I turn
brown. Hi I am a baby
leaf.

Antonio Strumolo
Kindergarten
Mitchell Elementary School
Woodbury

Slyly and the Three Birds

Slyly was a fox, and there were three birds. Slyly climbed the tree. Slyly fell down.

The End

Luke Jenusaitis
Kindergarten
Mary T. Murphy School
Branford

Sharpy and the Three Stegosauruses

Once upon a time there were three little stegosauruses. Bony, the dad, was making the plant stew. When he was done, he said, "This is too hot. Why don't we take a walk?" That's what they did.

Sharpy, the tyrannosaurus, came and discovered the house with the door open. He went into the living room and went in a big chair. Sharpy said, "This is too hard." Sharpy went to the next chair. He said, "This is too soft." He went to the smallest chair. He sat for one second, and it broke. He went upstairs. He went in a room. He tried to sleep in the first bed. It was too hard. He tried the next bed, too soft. He tried the smallest bed. It was just right. When he woke up, he went downstairs and went in the kitchen and saw the plant stew. He ate one bite. Sharpy said, "This is terrible. I'm not a plant eater. I am a meat eater."

Then Stegy, Fin, and Bony came back from their walk, and Sharpy ran out of the house and never came back, and they went in the living room to sit down. Bony said, "Sharpy was sitting in my chair." Fin said, "Mine, too." Stegy said, "Busted." They all went upstairs. They went in their room. Bony said, "Sharpy has been sleeping in my bed." Fin said, "Mine, two." Stegy said, "Mine, three."

They went downstairs to eat the plant stew.

Eben Bitonte
Kindergarten
Jennings School
Fairfield



My Friends

I have many friends. Some are American, and some are Indian, and one of my best friends is Nishung and Nikahar, and one of my other best friends is Katy Craybell, and she is in California, and I really miss her, and she's never going to come back again because her dad is working in California. Nishung and Nikahar invite us to their house, and we invite them to our home.

Katy Craybell is still my heart and dream. That is what a friend is all about.

Meghan Grenier
Grade 1
Killingly Central
School
Dayville

My Butterfly

This is my
Favorite butterfly
Flying in the sky
Yellow and blue
And green and red!

Paloma
Casteleiro
Grade 1
Hall School
Bridgeport

CITY RAP

I live in the city
And it is great!
There's lots of things to do
I skate in the park
And even go to the zoo
Everyday I walk to school
And learn my ABC's
On a hot day I jump in the pool
To stay so nice and cool
So you see I'm as happy as can be
The city is the place for me!



Fall Leaves Fall Down

Fall leaves fall
d
o
w
n

on a pretty fall day.

THEY
DANCE
IN
THE
WIND.

The Snow

The snow is great!
I love the snow.
Listen, listen, listen
to the sweet and soft snow.
I play as I listen
and make snow angels
in my front yard
before school.

Miles Lucas
Grade 1
Natchaug
School
Windham

My Baby Brother and Me

Dedicated to Daniel

I was playing **Catch the Monster** with my baby brother in the pool. **Catch the Monster** is a game, and I was the monster, and my brother was the guy who tried to get away from the monster.

We splashed in the water. "Where is my baby brother?" "He is under the water." I saw his hand, and I swam under the water and grabbed his hand. I pulled him all the way up and out of the water, and I put him on the porch. I wrapped a towel all around him so he could dry off.

Isiah DeGracia
Grade 1
Natchaug
School
Windham

Eliza Owen
Grade 2
Memorial
Elementary
School
East Hampton

Then I went in the house to tell my mom that my baby brother almost drowned. Mom asked, "What happened?" I told her that Luis was all the way down to the bottom of the water, and I swam down to get him. Mom said that we would bring him to the doctor's right now.

I felt sad when my baby brother couldn't breathe, and I was happy at home when we were safe.

Anna and Mr. Spiker

Anna was standing against an old oak tree. She was staring at Mr. Spiker's frozen pond. How she wished to skate on the pond. In fact, she wished she could skate anywhere. Suddenly, Mr. Spiker's door opened. Then Mr. Spiker carried a big, black bag out. Anna was so frightened she ran all the way home! Later that day Anna was sitting at her kitchen table, picking at her lunch. Anna's mom asked, "What's wrong?" "I got skates for Christmas, but I have nowhere to use them." "But what about Mr. Spiker's pond; it should be frozen by now." Anna gasped, "Mr. Spiker! Not there!" "You're afraid of lonely, old Mr. Spiker?" Anna shivered. "But everyone says he's scary." Her mom said, "I'm sure he looks scary, but he's really a nice man. You call your friend Jane. We'll make cookies. Then we'll bring the cookies to Mr. Spiker." Anna's mom, Anna and Jane went to Mr. Spiker's house. Anna and Jane felt scared as they rang the door bell. Mr. Spiker opened the door. Mr. Spiker didn't look scary at all. He was just old and wrinkly. He smiled, "Please come in." They had hot chocolate and ate the cookies. And then Anna and Jane ran home and grabbed their skates. Anna's mom and Mr. Spiker watched the two girls ice skate on his pond.

Robyn Bonacci
Grade 2
North Stratfield
School
Fairfield

If Your Little Brother Ruled the World

Volume 1
A Vanessa and Allen Book

There once were two friends named Vanessa and Allen. They were best friends and lived next door to each other in the country. One summer day, Vanessa's dad, Peter, built a clubhouse in Vanessa's backyard. Peter filled the clubhouse with books.

That same day, Allen came to play. Vanessa and Allen were playing soccer when Vanessa remembered about the clubhouse. "Dad made the coolest thing for us," she said.

"What is it?" asked Allen.

"Clubhouse! A clubhouse!" shouted Vanessa.

"Wow!" replied Allen, "let's go in!" So they went in.



"There is nothing in here but books," said Allen.
"I know," said Vanessa. "Which one should we read first?"
"How about this one?" suggested Allen. He brought over a book called *If Your Little Brother Ruled the World*.

It looked like a good book, but when Allen opened it, the two friends got sucked into an illustration! When they got completely in the book, they saw an enormous castle!

"What's inside?" asked Allen.
"I don't know, but I want to find out," replied Vanessa. So they went inside. They met lots of their friends, including Ray, their second best friend.
"What are YOU doing here?" asked Vanessa and Allen over and over again to all the familiar faces.

Then, they heard yelling. "Let's check it out," said Allen. So they followed their ears to a beautiful throne room where a familiar looking boy sat in a throne.

"That looks like my brother sitting in there!" said Allen.
"Hey! That IS my brother!"
"So what are all these important people doing here!" asked Vanessa.
"Maybe they are slaves, and that would make my brother a . . . KING!"
Vanessa swallowed hard.
"What's wrong, Vanessa?" asked Allen.
Vanessa replied, "They are slaves, and if your brother catches us here, we will be slaves as well!"

"I didn't think of that! Let's get out of here just in case!"
So Vanessa and Allen TRIED to escape the room, but the King caught them. He ordered them to come.
"Come here! You two are my slaves! Do I make myself clear?" thundered the King.

"Yyyy . . . , " Allen hesitated.
"Well?" thundered the King.
"Yes," Allen finally said.
"Now, you go shopping at Posters. Here is a list." The King gave Vanessa a long list of Pokemon cards for her to buy.

An elegant man drove Vanessa to Posters and told her to call 500-5464 when she was done. As for Allen, he did daily chores, like take out the trash.

Nobody, except the King, was happy, especially not Vanessa and Allen, who just started to work hard.

Then, Vanessa had an idea! She would call the phone number and ask to talk to Allen!

She bought the Pokemon cards and called him. Instead, Vanessa's friend Margaret picked up the phone.

Vanessa and Margaret were surprised to be talking to each other on the same line.

"Psst, Margaret, I have a plan," whispered Vanessa.
"What is it?" asked Margaret.



"To talk to Allen," replied Vanessa.

"That's it? It could use some increasing, my friend," said Margaret.

"How?" asked Vanessa.

"Well, you talk to him and tell him this plan. I think it will work. If you want to escape, you must either distract the guards and escape or glue their armor headpieces so they can't see you escape!" replied Margaret.

"Sounds good," said Vanessa.

"OK. Here's Allen. Bye-bye," said Margaret.

Then Allen went on the phone with Vanessa. She told Allen the plan and then asked for the elegant man. He was leaving with the phone.

Finally he picked Vanessa up. When she got to the castle, she saw that Allen had glued the headpieces.

"Great job!" whispered Vanessa.

They ran to the courtyard and saw a big blur.

"What's that?" asked Vanessa.

"I don't know, but I want to find out," replied Allen.

So he stuck his hand in and got sucked in, followed by Vanessa, and WHAM, they were back in the clubhouse.

"What an adventure," exclaimed Allen.

Then, he said bye-bye and went home.

What will their next adventure be . . . ?

Meryl Gersz
Grade 2

Killingworth
Elementary
Killingworth

The Little Leaf

Once upon a time in the late summer there was a little leaf who sat upon a branch. He was green, yellow, orange, and red. He was very colorful, so his name was "Colorful." He was a very kind leaf, and he had lots of friends. Their names were Spikey, Red, Yellow, Orange, and Green.

One day Colorful noticed he wasn't colorful anymore. He was yellow. Colorful woke up the next morning and noticed other leaves were falling off their branches. A cool breeze lifted Colorful off his branch. He saw his friends falling, too. He wondered what was going on. Colorful fluttered to the ground lightly. He looked at himself and said, "I am brown!" Colorful was very sad. Colorful looked up and saw little, white flakes falling down onto him. When they hit the ground, they turned into a blanket. Colorful fell asleep.

After a long time Colorful woke up. He looked and saw that he was on his



branch again. And he was colorful. Colorful learned a lesson that he will not always be colorful and that it doesn't matter what he looks like on the outside; it matters only that he is still the same leaf on the inside.

Kenneth

Healthy, smart, fast, and nice

Son of Ken and Bernice; Brother of
Cassandra, Brian and Deven

Lover of bugs, animals and reptiles

Who feels mad when I'm hurt, sad when I
don't get something and scared near a fire

Who needs Yoshi when I'm sleeping, a house to
live in and Mrs. Bruno to learn

Who fears overflowing toilets, falling off a
cliff and hits

Who gives candy, toys, and presents

Who would like to see tarantulas, erupting
volcanoes and aliens

Resident of Simsbury, Connecticut

Eilers

Kenneth Eilers

Grade 2

Squadron Line
School
Simsbury

A Lost Heart

One day on a city sidewalk
A heart was broken by a telephone.
A child heard her mother say
Grandmother has died.

Roxanne

Reverendo

Grade 2

Buttonball Lane
School
Glastonbury



Jordan Bean
Grade 2
Daisy Ingraham
School
Westbrook

Soccer

Legs are tired,
Hair is sweating,
Thinking of water,
Thump!
Somebody
passed to me,
I drive the ball
down
. . . I score!

Andrew Ray
Grade 3
Cider Mill
School
Wilton

Veterans Day

The old wrinkly hands look like the hands that pumped the guns for freedom.

Each step looks like the same step that walked on the war grounds to fight for liberty and justice.

If you look into the eyes of the ones who fought for our country, you can see the memories that go back so far.

You can look into their hearts and see that they are the ones that care about the freedom of our great country.

Ian Swain
Grade 3
Tootin' Hills
School
West Simsbury

SUMMER

Four dolphins glittering in the blazing sun
While the sunrays spread rapidly over the beach
And the waves crash on the smooth shells and the rough sand



Snow Flakes

The cold, wet and white snow

f
a
l
l
s—

it floats through
the blue delicate sky.

Snow glitters in the light and

flies d
o
w
n.

Hard and light, the snow pushes
its way to become frozen and cold.

The ice is slippery and has a
CRUNCH to it.

Gabby Casanova

Grade 3

Mary T. Murphy
School
Branford

Peace

WHEN I THINK OF PEACE
NO FIGHTING COMES TO MIND
BUT LOVE, JOY, AND HAPPINESS
FOR ALL OF MANKIND.

WHEN I THINK OF PEACE
NO GUN SHOTS DO I HEAR
BUT ONLY CHILDREN'S
LAUGHTER
RINGING IN MY EAR.

WHEN I THINK OF PEACE
NO KILLING OF MY FRIENDS
BUT A LONG AND WONDERFUL
LIFE
FROM BIRTH UNTIL THE END.

Leemarvin

Benton, Jr.

Grade 3

Hill Central

Elementary

School

New Haven



Samantha
Briggs
Grade 3
Daisy Ingraham
School
Westbrook

My Dad

Three years ago my father passed away. I do not really remember him that well, but what I do remember is good stuff, stuff like going to the pub and getting a little pack of Ruffles potato chips. The man who worked there was one of my dad's friends, so my dad would swing me over the counter. I was able to pour my own Coke from one of the nozzles. I usually spilt it all over the counter, but he never minded a bit.

I also remember playing on the pinball machines. My dad was good at that. He was also good at the game where you grab the stuffed animals with the claw. We would always play those games while we were there. My mom really hated when my dad brought me to the pub, but she never stopped us once. I always wondered why Mom did not stop Dad from taking me, but I'm sure glad we continued to go. I loved going, and now I have something special to remember.

I remember Dad's dog, Nicke. We would take him everywhere. He was as cute and soft as a newborn baby. I will always remember going to the Big E with Dad. The whole day was so much fun, and we did so many things. It was like we were there for more than just a day. I also remember every single time I would be at Dad's house. We would always go to my grandma's house for dinner and visit. We would play with my grandma's colored bingo chips and always have so much fun.

There was one day, however, that I will never forget. It was probably one of the worst days in my entire life. The day . . . my dad died. I remember it like it was yesterday.

It was a cold, windy day. The sun was hidden behind the clouds. It was scary looking that day . . . or maybe I was scared. Scared of what would happen, scared of death, scared of being scared, scared of losing someone else. I remember walking up the stairs, step by step, slower and slower. With each step I felt more and more terrified, and I didn't know why. I thought, if I went in there, my life would be over. I'd have to face the one thing that I was afraid of. We got to the door. I was trembling all over. My knees were shaking, and my heart was pounding. I looked around, took a deep breath and a big gulp. I grasped the door tightly, so tightly I could feel it pushing on my skin. The door slowly opened. When I walked in, there was a big collage of pictures from when my dad was young and tons of pictures when he was older. I looked to my right, and there was the coffin; no one was around it. I couldn't see my father, but I felt like dropping to my knees and fainting, but I had to be brave. I felt like there was something inside me that said *be strong*, so I knew just then I could be strong. I could do it! I walked over, crying a little bit. I felt confident. I looked in the coffin. When I first saw him, it was probably the saddest thing I ever saw in my life. I just can't explain it or explain how I felt. I left a stuffed bear on the coffin. It was white with a red tie. Then I touched my dad. It was like nothing I've ever felt before.



My dad was cold, numb, and heavy, and he was white. It was scary. I felt a chill down my back, like I was numb and cold, too. I walked over and collapsed on an empty chair. I was thinking, hoping, and wishing my hardest wish that it was a dream, a bad dream, or perhaps a nightmare, a nightmare that would never end. But it wasn't a nightmare. It was real, and it had really happened. At that moment, I felt like I wanted to die, too. I was thinking that for some reason, it was meant to happen, but why my dad and why me? We stayed only for about twenty-five minutes, but it seemed like forever. Then other people started to come. That night I couldn't sleep at all.

I still cry every once in a while. I try to think of the happy times with Dad, but that one sad day always comes back to my mind. I will always miss him, even if I didn't know him as much as I would have liked.

Sassey

Hello, my name is Violet. I have a puppy named Sassey. Sassey is a girl. I got Sassey a week ago. I take her to the park; I even take her to my friends' house. Their names are Kasey and Shayna.

One day I played fetch with Sassey, and when she was fetching the Frisbee, she found a hole in the fence and ran away. I looked and looked for Sassey, but I didn't find her. After looking for Sassey, I called Kasey and Shayna to see if they could help me find her. They said, "Yes." So they came over, and we started to look for Sassey! We looked all around the neighborhood. I was sad because we didn't find her. I was so sad I started to cry. Afterwards Kasey, Shayna and I went inside and had a snack. We had ice cream. We had ice cream because we were hot. When we were eating our ice cream, we were making posters saying, "Lost Dog," and we also put my phone number that is 555-1234. Also we drew pictures of Sassey. I missed her real, real much! Then after we ate our ice cream and were finished making the posters, we got a stapler and stapled the posters on every telephone pole we found. No one found Sassey. That made me sadder.

Afterwards we went to the park. When we got there, we started to play. I played on the jungle gym. Kasey went on the monkey bars, and Shayna went on the swings. When Shayna was swinging so high, she saw Sassey at the lake!!! I got very excited and happy. . . .The lake was next to the park. Next we ran to the lake as fast as we could go. I saw Sassey, and Sassey saw me. When she saw me, she licked me. When she licked me, my shirt got muddy and wet. Afterwards we went home and fixed the fence. Kasey, Shayna, Sassey and I played fetch. After that Sassey didn't run away again.

Alesha
Fahrenholz
Grade 3
Mary F.
Morrison
School
Groton



The Great Adventure

As Fritz and Patches were staring up at the clouds, Fritz wondered what it would be like to go on a journey, and so did Patches. After a minute or two of thinking, they decided that they would go on a journey together. They both went home and packed for their trip. They met again at the Old Oak Tree and set out into the meadow to begin their journey. They were hopping along when suddenly Fritz looked up and saw a big, shadowy figure. It was Claw, the evil hawk. They wondered if he had seen them, and he had. He dove at them but missed as they quickly darted into the nearby forest. They had never been there before, and nothing was familiar to them. It was dark, and they were tired from their journey, so they found a small clearing and settled down for the night.

The next day, they continued through the forest. It was a dark and damp place, but the tree tops let in some light every once in a while. Half-way through the forest, they stopped to take a drink from a nearby stream. As they finished drinking, their ears twitched as they heard a noise coming from the bushes. It was nothing to be afraid of. It was just an old friend of theirs, Thumper, the wood rabbit. They were glad to see a familiar face. He asked them where they were going, and they told him all about their journey. Thumper told them that if they needed any help, he could always be of assistance. Since Fritz and Patches didn't really know a lot about the forest, they asked Thumper if he would like to come along on their journey. Thumper agreed willingly, and they all set off again with Thumper leading the way. In no time at all, they came to the edge of the forest. Fritz and Patches thanked Thumper for his help and said good-bye.

Fritz and Patches continued their journey. All they could see for miles around were hills and hills of fresh grasses and flowers. They played and chased each other up and down the mounds of earth, while making slow progress on their journey. After about an hour of galloping, they came across a torrent of water. They certainly could not cross it with one bound. It was too dangerous. Suddenly Patches spotted an old log lying across the river just a little ways down. It was risky, but Fritz and Patches decided to take a chance. Fritz was first. He hopped across slowly and carefully, and finally made it to the other side. Patches hopped across quickly without looking down.

After the river, there was a small piece of flat land, followed by a large group of mountains. Climbing the mountains was very hard work for such small rabbits. The sun was beginning to set just as they reached the top of the mountains. As they gazed down, their eyes fell upon a great valley that they could only dream of. Before their very eyes lay the most wonderful place in the world. There was a grand waterfall which flowed into a freshwater lake. There were thousands of grape vines with purple, juicy grapes blooming. There were also rows of wild, fresh heads of lettuce. But the most important thing was that they were safe. So in the end, Fritz and Patches made their home in the valley.



The Thanksgiving Feast

The wind blew through my golden hair. The waves hit steadily against the Mayflower as it rocked back and forth. Finally we would have religious freedom! My family and I were leaving England to go to the "New World." I walked down to my bunk where my mother was getting settled. I plumped down on the bed and untied my bonnet. That night there was a storm. The wind howled fiercely and beat against the sides. Thunder rumbled through the air, lightning lit up the sky, and the ship rocked vigorously with the waves banging on the side. I tossed around in my bed, anxious for the storm to stop. Finally the winds died down, and the clouds moved away. Then a voice echoed through all of the rooms. "Land Ho!" I jumped to my feet as if I'd had hours of sleep. I slipped on my slippers and grabbed my bonnet. I pulled on my bonnet as I ran through all of the many halls and finally got to the deck. Then I saw it. The beautiful land! The huge trees swayed in the wind. It was getting closer and closer and closer and then, THUD! I slid and fell at the same time, blinking in amazement. I quickly got to my feet and ran to my bunk. When I got there, everyone was looking around confusedly. That's when I shouted, "We've hit land!" My family looked at me amazed and in disbelief. My mother said, "We'll all get dressed in our best clothes for the first day on . . . a . . . the New World!" I grabbed my best clothes and put them on. I rushed out onto the land. I looked around. But this wasn't what I had imagined. I had imagined a small village with many girls my age. I had imagined a colorful and warming village and the smell of freedom of religion. But what I saw was woods and woods and no houses at all for miles. Then my mother and father came out. I looked at them, disappointment on my face. My mother and father looked around and then back at me. Then my father said, "I'm sure that there will be a village nearby!" But he sounded unsure. That week I wrote in my diary:

Dear Diary,

We are now in Plymouth. We name it that because it was one of the towns in England. In the week, my family built a log cabin. I liked my house in England much more. My room is small, and everything is kind of squished in it.

Well, good-bye.

That winter was worse than bad. The snow blew fiercely around until there were many feet of it. The roof leaked as my father lay ill in bed. I put a warm cloth on his head and fed him hot broth every day. The doctor came every other day to try and cure him. He tried and tried but said it was no use. That night I cried myself to sleep. I never wanted my father to die, but it seemed as if the only thing to do would be hope. So I did. I wore the beautiful locket he gave to me at my birth. It rested on a gold chain. The locket was a glimmering gold with the words "Claire Hedman" engraved in it. I held it in the warm palm of my hand,

Morgan Griffin
Grade 4
Booth Hill School
Trumbull

squeezed my eyes shut and wished that my father would attack the illness and kill it. But, my wish didn't come true. Father died last night. It was horrible. I stayed at his bedside and talked to him. Then I went to get the broth, but when I came back, it was too late. I dropped the bowl. I heard a splatter and a crash behind me as I ran to the bedside. I grasped his hand and shook him. It didn't make a difference. He was dead.

I cried and cried that night, not able to go to sleep. In the morning we had a funeral. I wore black and felt the same way. Tears trickled down my cheek as I threw a bouquet of flowers over the dirt he lay under. Father wasn't the only person who died that winter. Hundreds of people died. Mother and I and many more were lucky to have our lives. I still cried myself to sleep, but I was kind of getting used to having no father. It felt very different, though. There was no one to build things or laugh a low, deep, rumbling laugh.

One day an Indian came to the governor's house. He wore a beautifully colored feather headdress that touched the ground. He had a long, wooden stick with many symbols on it that meant nothing to me. He used the stick not as a cane, but for pride. He wore nothing except a deer skin wrap. From that Indian, I knew that they were different. We all thought the Governor was in danger. A sigh of relief left my mouth as the Indian and the Governor came out talking. I knew they had settled something.

The next day we found out that the Indian was named Squanto. He would help us plant food so next winter a disaster wouldn't occur like last winter.

That spring we dug deep and poured seed in the holes. Then we covered up the holes. My mother and I dug rocks out from under the rich soil. We watered and looked after the plants every day. I was trickling water over dirt where seeds were hidden. I knelt down on the soft dirt. It felt cool and gentle on my bare knees. I bent over and brushed away a little dirt. There, poking out of the thick soil, was a little plant. It was a small, pale and weak little thing, but it was still a plant, and I somehow knew it would survive. I climbed to my feet and brushed the dirt off of my knees. Then I ran into the house and said, "Mother, we have a baby plant!" She hugged me and replied, "We won't fail this year, Claire, we won't!" I knew she was right. I hugged her back and smiled.

Of course, after that, many other plants started to pop out of the ground. By April, all of the plants had a nice, long stalk as big as me! Buds started to sprout out of the tip of the stalk. After awhile, all of the corn had grown. Mother and I held our skirts out, plucked the corn off the stem and plopped the corn in our skirts. I enjoyed shucking the corn, too. I loved peeling layers and layers of green husk and golden silk off of it.

I met a girl my age. Her hair was a golden blonde. She had beautiful locks. She had baby blue eyes. Her name was Julia. We played together all of the time. We liked to play dolls the best. Her doll was made of beautiful snow-white porcelain. Her lips were as red as roses and curved in a lovely smile. The doll's eyes were a dusty brown. She had beautiful auburn, curly hair, which rested on her tiny shoulders. She had a pretty, dark pink bow clipped on the top of her head behind



her straight long bangs. She wore a soft pink party dress with puff sleeves and white lacy frills at the bottom. The dress also had a dark pink bow around the waist. Julia's doll was magnificently beautiful. My doll was very ugly compared to Julia's. Her face was smudged with dirt. Her lips were no longer the bright red but now a pale red. She had knotty, straight brown hair. The doll's skin was not beautiful porcelain but a dirty cloth. She wore a dress made of rags. I had tried to make it myself, and it came out as a dirty white square. But no matter what the dolls looked like, we treated them like princesses.

Finally, summer came. The grasses dried and the sun blazed. I ran around in my bare feet. I got sunburns on my shoulders. We worked hard. I wiped the sweat off my brow as I dug my shovel in the dirt. I pulled out a plump, sandy brown potato and threw it in the basket, which held many more. When there were no more potatoes left to dig out, I grasped the handle to the basket and luggered it inside. I plopped the basket and myself on the wooden chair.

Before we knew it, it was fall. The leaves changed to colors like maroon red, orange, and yellow. When the crisp breeze rushed through Plymouth, the leaves fluttered down to the ground. Pumpkins grew on long, lingering vines.

One day a loud knock came at the door. It was the governor. He said we would be having a feast tonight near the cornfield. Mother and I wore our Sunday dresses. We strolled down to the cornfield where there was a very long wooden table. On the table were golden cornbread, beautiful turkeys, cooked beans, fluffy mashed potatoes, steaming turnips, maroon cranberry jam, stuffing and good smelling corn. It was wonderful!

All of the Pilgrims and Indians were there. We all sat down and gave cheer to the Indians for helping us. We started eating all of the delicious foods. I piled things on my plate and tried things I never had had before. We thanked the Indians once again after the feast. As I left, my stomach full, I thought how lucky I was to have the Indians to help us.

Sam's Wish

"Sam!" called the King. "I need my horse so I can go for a ride." "Yes, your majesty," exclaimed Sam. "I'll do it right away!" Sam was King Arthur's stable boy who took care of the horses and royal pets. Sam also had to clean the stables and exercise the animals. Sam was an orphan boy who was taken in by King Arthur and Queen Abigail when he was only four years old. He loved the King and Queen but secretly was in love with their lovely daughter Princess Rose (who was also secretly in love with him!). But there was a minor problem, for the Princess had to marry a prince. Sam was hurrying to get the horse ready, for, as usual, he wanted to show the King he was a hard worker worthy of marrying a princess.

Gregory
Leitao
Grade 4
R. J. Vance
Elementary
School
New Britain



As the King trotted off on his spotted stallion, Sam wondered if he would ever marry the Princess. He sighed and started walking back to the stable. Suddenly he heard a startled cry coming from the riverbank. Sam ran off to the river to see if someone needed help. When he finally arrived, he found that the King's horse must have slid down the muddy bank, and the King had fallen into the river. The King was being washed downstream toward a waterfall! "How will I save him?" thought Sam. He acted quickly and ran over to the King's stallion and jumped on. He started to gallop down the riverbank. When he finally got closer to the panicking King, he tore off a branch from a nearby weeping willow, quickly tied it into a lasso, and threw it toward the King. "Grab on, your highness!" he cried to King Arthur. The King heard him and grabbed onto the long branch. Then Sam began the long job of hauling in the King. It took a lot of heave and ho, but after a few minutes the King and Sam were sitting next to each other on the bank. "Thank you, Sam," the panting King said. "Now let us be on our way."

When they returned to the castle, the King walked across the drawbridge. Sam started walking down the dirt path to the stable. "Wait!" the King cried. "I want you to come in with me and tell the Queen what you have done." Sam had been in the castle only once before to deliver the new saddle the King had requested. As they walked into the castle, Sam noticed all of the fine weapons and shields. When they walked through the banquet hall, Sam thought the tables looked as long as half the river. When they finally reached the Queen's throne, he saw that Princess Rose was with her mother. "Sam!" exclaimed Rose. "Why are you here?" Before Sam could say a word, the King began to tell them the exciting tale of what Sam had done. When he was finished, Sam began to return to the stables but stopped when he heard the King cry out, "My royal ring has disappeared!" Sam turned back and said, "I would be honored to help you search for it, your majesty." "Then it shall be done," the King exclaimed. "Now begin the search," he ordered. All the servants started searching in the banquet hall because it was the biggest room, but Sam was smart enough to sneak out of the hall to search the royal throne room. He searched under all the carpets and in every cabinet. Then Sam decided to search the thrones themselves. He stuck his hand in between the cushions and felt something hard. He pulled it out and discovered it was the royal ring! Sam ran to find King Arthur. "King Arthur, King Arthur, I found your ring!" he shouted. "Your hands must have been so wet from the river that your ring slipped off your finger and fell between the cushions." "Oh, thank you, thank you, Sam," the King exclaimed. "You are such a smart young man that I shall make you my royal squire!" "I'm honored your majesty," replied Sam. "You can move your belongings into the castle right away," said King Arthur.

Sam was carefully carrying his things back from the stable when he heard the trumpets blare and a lookout yell, "The Black Knight and his army are attacking the castle!" By the time Sam reached the castle, King Arthur and his army were already on their way out to battle. Sam dropped his belongings on the first table he saw and grabbed one of the weapons that he had admired when he had first walked in. Sam ran out with his weapon and saw the Black Knight on his



horse galloping toward the King with his sword stretched out. "Nooooo!" wailed Sam. He ran toward the scene, but because he couldn't use a sword properly, he decided to use his cleverness to save the King. He thought fast and ran in front of the King and started jumping up and down, screaming at the top of his lungs. This spooked the horse, which made it rear back and gallop away. As the horse galloped away, it slipped on the same muddy riverbank the King's horse had. The Black Knight fell into the river and got washed down the stream. "This is the same thing that happened to the King," thought Sam, "but this time there is no one to save him."

Once everyone had returned to the castle, the King called Sam up to his throne. "Sam," the King started, "you have saved me from the Black Knight. Your acts of courage have shown me that you are worthy of becoming a Royal Prince." "Your Majesty," Sam replied, "I have one more thing I wish to ask you." "Tell me, my son," the King answered. "I wish to marry your daughter, Rose," said Sam. The King turned and looked at Rose. "Is this what you wish to do?" he asked her. "Oh yes, Father!" she exclaimed. "So it shall be done," announced the King.

Sam and Rose were married the day after the battle at a grand celebration. Many years later when the King and Queen had died, they became rulers of the land. But King Sam never forgot that even though he had once found the royal ring, he now had found a better treasure, his dream come true.

Don't Kill the Animals

Just think

We could all live in harmony
with the other critters on earth.

There would be no
highly endangered animals.

You would never see
a poor cheetah's fur
as a hat or
a zebra's skin
as a rug.

You would never see
an elephant's tusks
as an ivory necklace or
a rabbit's foot
as a charm.

Charlotte
Cipparone
Grade 4
Regional
Multicultural
Magnet School
New London



You would still see rhinos
stampeding around
the African plains.
Golden tamarins
would swing freely
through the trees.

You would still see pandas
romping in the Himalayan Mountains
eating lots of fresh bamboo shoots.
Sandpipers would hop around
on the sea-wet sands
digging for bugs.

Just stop and think . . .
What beautiful animals these are!
What incredible creatures surround us!
We could all live in harmony
if only we would learn
DON'T KILL THE ANIMALS.

Emily Cook
Grade 4
Forbes School
Torrington

Stream

Stream.
Calmly lapping
Up against the shore
Wish-wash wish-wash
Bubbling & splashing
Rocks
Colored leaves
Float gently
Downstream
Like a mini sailboat
On the sparkling
Crystal clear water
On the riverbank
Reeds rustle in the
Brisk autumn wind
The sun shines down



Through the leafy branches
Of the trees
Making beautiful patterns
On the calm, quiet
Stream.

The Hummingbird

Everything was dark.
Everything was still.
Except for a movement or two,
Up there on the hill.

A ray of light,
And a chirping or two,
Announced, "The day has come!"
My! How time flew!

The sky turned red.
And then it turned gray!
And then it turned blue!
What a beautiful day!

Some bumblebees flew,
right into the air.
They flew over here,
and flew over there.

Dewdrops quivered
Some fell to the ground
Others stayed on their perch
Not making a sound.

The sun made its way
To the middle of the sky,
And that it was moving very slow,
No one could deny.

The bees came back
For their midday meal
Bubbling with nectar
From a far away field.

Layan Fuleihan
Grade 4
Jeffrey Elementary School
Madison



This day would seem
(Maybe not to you)
That this day was not
Anything special, or new.

But to a little red flower
Stuck up on its stalk,
Not able to move,
Not able to talk,

There was something different
About this day
Something special, or tense
In a way.

A steady fanning
And a constant humming
A breath of wind
And a tiny heart drumming
Readied the flower that something was coming.

Still humming
A humming bird swoops into sight
Hovering in the air
Feathers glimmering in the light.

A shining black eye
Like the smooth black pebble on the beach
Small delicate feet
Like the seed from the core of the peach.

It dipped its long beak
Into the pool of sweet drink
When the beak touched the surface
It seemed to blink.

It sipped it all up
And flew high, high, high!
It flew into the sun,
And disappeared into the sky.



Everything was quiet
Everything was still
Except for a breath of wind or two
Coming from that hill.

It was time for the bees
To go back to the fields
For they depend on the flowers
to supply their meals.

The sun made its way
To the bottom of the west
For it was time to sleep
It was time to rest.

The bees came back
For their dark night's peace
For their wings to rest upon their sides
For their business to cease.

A shining moon
And a twinkling star
Announced, "The night has come"
To anything near or far.

Everything was dark
Everything was still
Except for a movement or two
Up there on the hill.

The birds twittered,
"The light has come!"
And finally
Another day had begun.



Ana Rader
Grade 4
Academy
Elementary
School
Madison

I Wonder . . .

Why we come, why we leave
Why we enjoy things, why not
Why we are us, why grass is green
Why some people are nice and some mean
Why people don't bark and trees don't sing
When the moon will die and the sun cry
Why my eyes are hazel, and yours blue
Why I was born younger than you
Why there are slaves, and people free
Why earth has the life of you and me
Why G-d lets us die, not live forever
Why I can't talk to flowers
Or jump in a book or act like the characters
If toys talk behind my back
I wonder how my brain thinks
How a clock clinks
Why a spark ignites
Why lamps light
I wonder what you wonder
I wonder,
I wonder,
I wonder,
Yet tomorrow
I'll wonder more.

Suzanna
Slater
Grade 5
Francis Walsh
Intermediate
School
Branford

The Constellation of Ado and Gondel

Sunshine splashed the town of Ceashone. Birds chirped merrily, and bees buzzed about. The townspeople were all doing their chores in a cheerful way, when something wrong happened in the heavens.

Ryel, God of Rain, was full of sorrow and was very angry. His son had been killed that very day. He began to tremble and shiver. Suddenly, tears flowed down his cheeks and fell. They fell down onto the land of Ceashone. Plop, plip, plop! The tears of Ryel dripped down roofs of houses and gathered in tiny puddles on the ground. The puddles became bigger and bigger.

A while later, the tears of poor Ryel were flooding the land of Ceashone. People scurried into their homes frantically. Rabbits in the forest hopped about looking for something to hide in, and birds flew to safety in tall standing trees.



Nearby, a young man was rushing to get to Ceashone. He was going to save the town from the great flood Ryel, God of Rain, made because of his sorrow. On his beautiful horse, he rode into town. His horse, Gondel, had long, powerful legs that swiftly galloped on the grassy land. His long, thick neck was holding his head high and proudly, and his tiny ears were alert every second of the day, listening. And the young man himself, his arms seemed so firm and strong as he held the reins tightly. He had long, flowing hair the color of a daffodil. The young man wore a sandy color robe with a golden belt around the middle. He wore no shoes. This young man was named Ado.

Once he reached the flooded town, he stopped his horse to a halt and climbed down off the horse's back. Ado stood still for a moment, sucking air through his nostrils. Finally, once all his strength was gathered up, his eyes wandered around. Ado spotted a tall oak tree with its arms reaching far out into the sky. Running over to the huge tree, he jumped up to the closest branch. Up, up, and up the man went as though he were a monkey and knew climbing so well.

After a long time, Ado finally came to the highest branch. Cautiously, Ado stood straight on the branch, facing the town of Ceashone. With all the energy he had built up before, he was ready to release it. Ado took a big gulp of air and then blew with all his might.

When Ado let all the air out, the flooded town was about to be the usual town it was. All the tears of poor Ryel that were covering Ceashone were blown away by the powerful force of Ado.

The frightened townspeople stepped out of their houses; the animals came out from trees and their hiding places. The town was saved.

Ado was still in the tree. He was glad that his plan worked, but from all that force, he felt completely drained and eventually died there. The God of Rain saw this all happen and rode down in his chariot to the tree. He took Ado in his strong arms and laid him in the chariot. Ryel then remembered Gondel, Ado's horse, and put him in the chariot, too. Ryel took the two companions up to the heavens. There, he placed the two high in the sky, for both were so brave and powerful. Everyone honored Ado and Gondel. And to this very day, you see Ado on his horse high up in the clear night sky.

The Barn

A dusty relic of time, filled with fragrances of old, rust-infested farm machinery and bales of hay the color of midsummer sunsets, sat over forgotten fields of wheat. Its collapsing walls now contained only memories of its thriving past--a time when the farmer with suspenders on shoulder and bucket in hand walked in to milk Bess, the old cow, whom he drained dry daily. The cow tried to

Ned Frame
Grade 5
Redding Elementary
School
Redding



hide her massive body and let out an unwelcoming grunt. The farmer only replied with a chuckle. At the top of the barn came the sounds of laughter as the farmer's sons threw down some old rope through a loose floor board and the oldest exclaimed, "I go first!" in that older-brother, pushy way. He jumped down and grabbed the rope, swung a couple of times and let go, falling onto the lush, green grass. The younger brothers followed one by one. But when the last one tried, he smashed through the wall near which the farmer was milking. The commotion disturbed Bess and she reacted with a good blow to the farmer's chin.

Then as the fiery red sunsets drew to an end, the farmer's wife snuck out to the barn and slouched in a corner and lit her husband's corncob pipe. Breathing in and letting out the smoke with a long sigh was followed by running children screaming, "Caught you!" She dropped the pipe to the ground and raised her arms up in the air.

Later that night a crackling sound awoke the farmer from his slumber. He looked out his window only to see half his barn engulfed in flames and all the cats and rats and bats and Bess scattering in all directions for cover. Later that morning after the fire brigade was about to leave, one of the red-dressed men whose coat was singed and burnt held out a corncob pipe and explained to the farmer that this was the source of the fire. The farmer's wife's face turned as red as the blazing fire itself, and she tiptoed into the kitchen to make breakfast.

An old man on a white sheeted bed listened to the rhythmic beeps of a heart machine attached to his chest. He bent down to scratch his dented chin and gazed out the window of the "Golden Years Rest Home" to see a half-charred barn. And in that moment the barn collapsed to the ground along with the man's rhythmic heart beat.

Perfect Jump

Tory Vasone
Grade 5
Tashua School
Trumbull

"Thump!" I just landed the second to last jump, and now the last jump is coming. I think back in my mind remembering how to do a perfect jump. *Skis together. Check. Standing up straight and balanced. Check. I'm in the perfect position now and picking up speed.*

I feel like a popsicle in a freezer as the wind numbs my face. The jump is getting closer and closer as I speed toward it. *What if I lose my balance and fall?* I think to myself. I've seen it happen to people, and some had broken arms and legs and needed to be carried away on a stretcher.



"Never mind that," I whisper to myself as I shake away my thoughts.
"Here comes the jump."

As I soar over the jump, I push down hard on my ski poles and lift up into the air. I look through the orange lenses of my goggles. Everything looks orange. The trees surrounding all the snow look like the orange glow from the sun when it is setting. All the skiers, snowboarders, and people on snowshoes look as orange as a roaring fire. Even I look orange. Everything appears to be one, big orange.

It feels like I'm on the moon with no gravity. *This is so fun that I could ski over jumps every day*, I think to myself. I feel as light as a feather, and I'm just floating in the wind. I seem to have wings and am flying toward the sky higher and higher, into the air, and up to the clouds.

It's like I'm in an airplane peeking out of the window. The people look like little ants scurrying around the ground trying to catch the lift back up the mountain. There are animal footprints in the snow like rabbits, deer, and squirrels.

"Thump," I hear my skis hit the snowy ground. *I made it. I made the jump I had trouble with all day. I feel so proud of myself. I did it! I finally did it! I beat the jump.* I've landed in a perfectly straight position like expert skiers. If someone saw me when I went over the jump, they would say, *Wow! She was really good!*

"I'm the best!" I whisper to myself silently as I head toward the lift and back up the mountain.

Ballpoint Pen

The skinny
long
lizard
clings to
the lapel
with his one lone claw.

Quiet
until
his long blue
tongue
spits out
blots of ink,
leaving behind
trails of
words.

Jason Wadecki
Grade 5
Regional
Multicultural
Magnet School
New London



Nicole Dumez
Grade 6
Canton Intermediate School
Canton

Dear Great Gramma,

I am writing you this letter because I miss you. I always will. We shared great times together watching Bob Barker on the T.V. and now that I think back, I don't know why you even bothered to watch that show any more since you had seen all of those reruns at least twice.

When I was smaller, I loved the "milk shakes" you would make me, with all of the chocolate sauce I could squeeze out of the bottle before you stopped me. That was fun! I remember all of the love you gave Missy, your cat, even though she bit and scratched you, and I remember, most of all, our talks. Talking and talking all day about all we could think of and dream of. We'd talk about the raspberries and blueberries I would pick for you; we'd talk about the weather or the birds that ate your crab apples in the summer. We'd even talk about relatives you had that I had never met before because they had died or lived far away. You wished that someday you would go and visit those far away relatives wherever they were, even if they were, in fact, in heaven. I guess you got your wish since you aren't here any longer.

I would walk up that long, steep hill to your house in the morning, and you'd greet me at the door with a smile and a hug. We'd go out on the porch and swing and talk in your big, big red swing and listen to the chickadees sing. In the evening, I would walk back down that long, steep driveway and leave you to dream and wish and hope about the future some more.

I remember, Great Gramma, that one time in the middle of winter I had you put your boots on and come outside in the snow with me. There was a big pile of snow on the side of your house that I wanted you to see. I walked over it, and nothing happened, so then I convinced you to walk over the mound as well. You didn't want to at first because you thought you would fall through, but I was persistent, and finally you took that fateful step. Your foot sunk all the way to the bottom of the pile. That was hilarious; I couldn't stop laughing! When you finally pulled your foot out of the snow bank, your boot didn't come back up with it, and that made me laugh even harder. We both tried to pull your boot out of the snow, but it was no use; it was stuck! Grampy had to shovel it out of the snow, remember?! You had to walk, one boot on and one boot off, into the house. When we were all settled inside again and were drinking hot cocoa, I asked you if you wanted to do it again and started laughing. You gave a little "umph" and started to laugh with me.

I also remember the time you and I were "camping" in the brand new trailer Grammy and Grampy had bought. I was so excited! I waited all day for night to come! When it finally arrived, I ran up to your house and hurried you down to the parked trailer. We talked for a while and played a few card games. Then it got late, and we went to bed. I got scared as soon as you were asleep and snoring. And I got up in the middle of the night and walked down to Grammy's house, leaving you in the trailer. In the morning I went up to your house, and you said to me, "you left me all alone," and chuckled.



Great Gramma, I remember the last time I was ever to see you again, Thanksgiving of 1999. I was so excited to see you in your “new placement” (a nursing home). Your new “house” had two beds, two dressers, a comfy chair, one window and a bathroom. The bathroom was shared by four people. If I remember correctly, your room had wallpaper on only one of the walls . . . pink ribbons with flowers on them . . . and the rest of the walls were white. By then you had unfortunately lost your eyesight. You said to me, “a few people around here have wheel chairs, and I can’t see too well anymore, so they all look quite like Joe to me.” I don’t know if you recall, but I laughed at that and so did you! You were also having breathing trouble as well, and you were on a breathing machine 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This contraption had an approximately 20-foot tube attached to it, and you remarked, “I can’t go anywhere, or they’ll find me no matter what.” That was the last time I saw you or ever will. We will all miss you so much! Have fun, wherever you are.

Love,
Nicole Dumez

The Sculpture

The winter sun warmed Maria Clojoyce’s back as she pinched, kneaded, and prodded her clay. As usual, Maria was blindfolded. Being an abstract sculptor, Maria wanted her sculpture to be flowing from her imagination, not her eyes.

“Honey, it’s suppertime.” Hazen, Maria’s husband, smiled at her. Their girls, Claire and Suzy, smiled longingly at the thought of a delicious dinner. Black pants swished loosely around Maria’s legs like a summertime evening breeze. Maria’s tanned feet framed fire-engine red toenails. A floral, long-sleeved shirt danced around her, flowers gleaming and shimmering. A necklace with a single diamond as a charm glistened, showing off a bronzed neck and face.

Maria pushed the red handkerchief over her head so that her pure, long, blond hair flowed like a waterfall. She smiled at Hazen and then looked over to see what she had sculpted. Her scream pierced the air.

The murky gray clay had been formed into a woman’s figure, a figure who looked remarkably like Maria. A knife handle was sticking out of the woman’s back, her body slumped over in an easy chair. The date on the calendar was that very day, the time on the clock was 11:30 p.m. Maria looked over at Hazen and the girls and fainted.

As the world slid back into focus, Maria saw her husband, trying to revive her. The girls handed her a glass of water, which she drank slowly. Now that she was conscious again, Hazen began comforting her.

“It was a coincidence,” he said. “The person happened to look like you.

Laura Lubin
Grade 6
East Ridge
Middle School
Ridgefield



Okay? It's all in your imagination. The winter winds drive me crazy, too. Come on, relax and let's have dinner."

The family walked together into the kitchen and sat down to a steaming dinner. String beans glistened with half-melted butter, and sliced almonds adorned the spring-colored vegetables. Mashed potatoes with a pat of butter and salt on top looked like a snowy hill with a buttery sun dawning above. Spice-dotted chicken fell apart at a knife's touch.

"Mommy, can we eat?" Suzy asked, and Maria chuckled.

"Of course!" They began to eat, discussing the day's events.

After dinner, the girls raced off to prepare for bed. They changed in their rooms, each sitting on her bed. Suzy's walls were painted a rich royal blue, with a white trim. The rug was light blue, and an orange beanbag chair was plopped on the floor. Glow-in-the-dark stars littered the ceiling. The three-year-old sat on her bed, which had a cheery sunshine-yellow spread, an orange, citrus-colored pillow and bed skirt, and a beautiful mahogany frame. She got up to get Snuggles, her rabbit, and then fell into bed.

Five-year-old Claire's walls were a shimmery deep purple, with white trim. The bedspread was a light, powdery blue, and the bed skirt and pillow were lavender. The walls were covered with paintings, each as cheerful as the next. A beautiful lavender rug adorned the floor. A small, blue rug sat by her bed, and a rich purple beanbag was huddled by a bookshelf in the corner.

She pulled down the covers, sprang into bed, and shouted out to her father. "Dadeee! Tuck us in, please!" Hazen walked into the room.

As Hazen tucked the girls in, Maria slowly and thoughtfully washed the dishes. Was the sculpture her fate, to occur at 11:30? She hoped not. She shuddered and resumed mechanically rinsing silverware.

At 9:00 p.m. Maria relaxed in the basement in her easy chair and watched a three-hour long movie about life in Paris, as Hazen cleaned upstairs. Before long, she had nodded off.

Suddenly Maria jerked awake. The wind howled in the woods, screaming and shrieking like a werewolf. The house rattled unpleasantly on its foundation. After a moment, she looked over at the clock on the wall and clapped a hand over her mouth. The time was 11:29. Maria tried to calm herself. The girls were in bed, and Hazen was sharpening knives in the kitchen, like he did every night. What could happen? But as the clock turned to 11:30, the grind of the sharpening stone stopped. Was it just her imagination, or were there footsteps on the stairs?



The Night Sky

Salmon watched as the sun fell slowly out of the sky. This happened every night. The sky would be full of light in the daytime, but then, at dusk the sun would fall down the mountains and be swallowed by blackness. At night darkness blanketed the world, and no one could see anything.

"Salmon, come here," called Old Salmon, the grandfather of the river.

"I can't find you," said Salmon.

"That's the problem," replied Old Salmon. "No one can see."

"Isn't there something we can do?" asked Salmon.

"Yes," answered Old Salmon. Although his eyes were resting on Salmon, he was not looking at him. Old Salmon stared through the waters as if trying to remember something he had forgotten long ago. Salmon waited patiently. Still staring far off into the water, Old Salmon began, "Last night I had a dream. In my dream the night was not as dark as the center of your eye. The sky shined with a new light. It wasn't as bright as the sun, for you could look at it and not be blinded. I realized it was a very small piece of the sun. We must get this piece and place it in the night sky." Old Salmon spoke faintly. These days Old Salmon tired quickly, even from talking.

"Who will you go with to get a piece of the sun?" asked Salmon.

"I'm not going," chuckled Old Salmon as he let himself slip onto a bed of riverweed. "You are."

"But I . . . I don't know what to do or how to get there," said Salmon, twisting his fins nervously.

"Ride on Raven," panted Old Salmon, and he closed his eyes.

Old Salmon opened his eyes again to stare at Salmon and said, "You must go." With that he closed his eyes . . . forever.

The next morning Salmon awoke. He knew what he had to do. Slowly Salmon swam to the edge of the river. Nothing looked the same today. "I don't suppose it will ever be the same without Old Salmon," thought Salmon. He swam to the tip of the river and began to transform. All salmon could transform into human figures. As color whirled around him, slowly his fins dissolved, and two long, slender arms grew followed by two sturdy legs. Soon Salmon was staring out into the forest of the upper world. "Raven!" he called as Old Salmon had instructed him to.

"What? Who calls my name?" screeched a flutter of black in the trees.

"It's me, Salmon."

"What do you want?"

"I'd like you to take me to the sun, please."

"The sun?" exclaimed Raven. And he cocked his head to the side, "Why do ya' want to go to the sun?"

"I need a piece to put in the night sky. Nighttime is too dark and . . ."

"I see," interrupted Raven. "All right, hop on."

Salmon thanked him and hopped on.

Caitlin Gwin

Grade 6

Juliet W. Long

School

Gales Ferry

Their trip lasted nearly three moons. They slept on clouds and ate small birds flying by. They drank the rain. Finally they reached their destination. Before them was the most magnificent glow you could imagine. Fire spat off of the ball and into huge arcs. Salmon readied himself to jump, bracing himself for the fire. But when he landed, he felt warm and comforted. He reached his hands down into the great ball of fire and extracted a warm glow. It was just so wonderful that he had to take another handful, and another, and another. The only thing that saved him was Raven's call.

"Hey Salmon, you coming?" shouted Raven.

Salmon hopped onto Raven's back, and they flew home.

That night Salmon sat under a tree with his great ball of sun. When the last of the real sun disappeared, he threw his sun into the air. The sky was filled with light, and Salmon could hear creatures all over the world cheering. Salmon felt proud as he heard the happiness he had caused. Soon the cheering changed, though. Creatures became angry.

"It is too bright, I can't sleep," he heard a river otter cry. Raven came flapping over. "Salmon, you must return some of the sun," he exclaimed.

Salmon climbed on his back, and soon they were at his sun. Salmon was infuriated. He had tried so hard, and now the whole world was angry with him. Since Salmon was so mad, his sun slipped from his hands and into the river. Salmon jumped on Raven's back, and they returned to the river. Slowly Salmon hoisted the ball of fire out of the water. "What am I supposed to do now?" he wailed.

"Look at this," pointed out Raven as he lifted the great ball. The sun shone with a different light. "It's not as bright as before."

A grin slowly spread across Salmon's face. "Yes, yes, it could work." But the grin shortly faded. "It's much too wet and heavy and will never stay in the sky," he sobbed. Disappointed, he quickly transformed back into a fish and disappeared into the river.

Raven sat in his tree with the wet sun when it hit him. He had a wonderful idea. "Crow, Thunderbird, Eagle, come here," he shouted. The three birds found him easily by the glow under his arm. "Go get all your friends, and gather as many sparkling grasses as you can," he instructed. Soon a whole flock of birds was at Raven's tree. He instructed them to weave the largest and strongest net that they could out of the grasses. When they were done, they placed the sun into it and flew it up to the sky. As Raven had hoped, the sparkling grasses stayed in the sky holding the sun.

Salmon looked out of the water and saw the night sky's new beauty. "Moon and stars," whispered a voice that sounded oddly like Old Salmon. When Salmon turned around, no one was there. "Moon and stars," he repeated to himself. "Moon and stars."



Thunderbolt

I play
hide and seek with
my friends
Rain and Thunder.

I hide
as Thunder
roars with
excitement
searching
for me.

Then
I hear
his boom bang voice
as he
tags me.

I yelp with
my crackling voice
sending yellow
sunbeams
in the
air.

Rain
is shocked by
my yellow yelping
and she starts to cry.

When we
play
hide and seek
it is like
a circus.

Thunder is the ring master,
I am the mighty lion
and Rain would be a perfect
clown.

We are tired of
roaring,

Celestina
Hodge
Grade 6
Bennie Dover
Jackson Middle
School
New London



yelping,
crackling,
yelling,
and crying.

As I scatter home
I send one more
yellow sunbeam
clashing
through the sky.

Just
for
fun.

Laura
Armstrong

Grade 7
King Philip
Middle School
West Hartford

The Day My Heart Lost

I knew in my heart that I had left behind someone dear. I hoped that I had dreamt the whole thing, and he would be there right in the doorway of my house, but he was not. It was becoming late, and I hadn't heard the door smack the broken frame to tell me my brother Rick was finally home from partying. Instead, all I heard was the silence of the night and the creaking pipes from my heater. I began to think of all that had happened today. All that I thought or at least wished was a dream, was reality.

Just today I had dropped off my brother Rick at his new home for the next nine months. When I had walked up those steps of Springfield College carrying my brother Rick's laundry and baseball equipment, I became very tired. Carrying two bags on your back up three flight of steps, just to reach a floor where you know the person you love most will be staying, was not the most monumental trip. We reached floor A3 and entered my brother's room. I took a picture of the small but cozy room because I knew the next time we would visit it would have everything imaginable scattered about the room. The walls were made of concrete blocks painted an off-white with a black framed window across the back of the room overlooking the street. My dad and brother Mike placed his belongings on his side of the room in the cramped closet and on the wooden shelf above the window. My mom and I began to make his bed because he would never do it. The sheets were a light blue sky tone which made my mom think of a jail cell against the white walls, so I call it the college cell. When I sat down on his bed, the most unprovoked thing happened. I got a bloody nose. I got it to stop with a tissue, but I felt embarrassed walking around a college campus with a tissue up my nose.

Everyone was finally situated after a few arguments. His roommate arrived and unpacked. It started to rain, and I heard the droplets hit the little window



in the silence of the cramped room. Everyone said their good-byes with a tear from my mom and a smile on my brother's face. Then I noticed everyone said good-bye except me. Rick put out his arms, and I jumped right into them. I felt his tight squeeze and smelled the hint of Abercrombie cologne he had put on this morning. He said to me, "Laura, don't worry. I'll be back before you know it, with laundry for mom." I almost started to cry, but I held my tears in, and my family walked to our car. Before my mom could leave, my brother had to put on his beanie, a little cap with blue and white triangles in a pattern. He didn't look that bad.

We reached the car, and we all piled in. I turned around and glanced at his window as I wiped a tear from my eye. Then thoughts went racing through my mind. I must have asked myself thousands of questions. "It's going to be hard for me to remember that every night he might not be at the dinner table," or "Every night I won't have a baseball game to go to watch and cheer him on." Then I thought, "My other brother will just get a little extra attention, and I'll be at all his games instead."

I don't know how my family feels, but I know deep down inside my heart I miss him so much and hope for his next return home, either for vacations, holidays, laundry trips or just to say hello on the weekends. I know that I miss him the most.

Untitled

It was lunchtime at school when I heard a ringing in my left ear. I wondered for a second if it were something serious, but I assured myself it was nothing. It started to ring louder and louder. One side of me said, "You'd better have the nurse check it." The other side said, "Don't be a wimp, Joe. You'll be fine." The first side argued back, "You're better safe than sorry!"

I thought that the safety first idea was better, so I decided to go down to the nurse's office. On the way down the hall, I wondered what was really wrong with me. "Could this really be something serious?" I asked myself. Little did I know that this June day in 1995 would change me for the rest of my life!

That evening, the phone rang. I liked talking on the phone, so I picked it up. "Hello." I said. I repeated in a frustrated voice, "Hello?" but there was no answer. I moved the phone over to my right ear. "Hello?" I asked.

"Hi, Joe. Why didn't you answer?" you asked.

"Oh, it's my Dad." I thought to myself. Then I told you all about my horrible day.

"What did the nurse do?" you asked in a concerned voice.

"She pointlessly shoved cotton balls in my ears," I replied annoyed. "I shouldn't have wasted my time if I knew she would do something as ridiculously stupid as that," I thought to myself.

Joe Laflamme

Grade 7

Pomfret Com-

munity School

Pomfret Center



"Joe, we're gonna have to bring you to an ear doctor," you said in a serious voice. I couldn't believe this was happening. What a nightmare! I knew you were definitely right; this was a serious problem

"Okay," I replied sadly.

"I'll see you later, Joe," you said.

"Yep, see you later, Dad," I said worriedly.

As soon as you could get an appointment, the whole family took a ride to the Hartford Children's Hospital. It was a boring and depressing ride. The whole time I thought and hoped everything would be all right. I wondered where I went wrong. I also wondered, why me? I told myself I would have to stop having the "why me" attitude because it would just bring me down. We pulled into the parking lot, and I looked up at the large, brown building. We met the doctor, who was tall and thin, and must have been in his mid-fifties. He told me that I was going to have to take some hearing tests to determine what was wrong. We walked down the hall to the audiology waiting room. I tried to read a *Sports Illustrated* magazine, but how could I read at a time like this?

You must have noticed my feet swinging around, so you said, "Don't be too nervous, Joe. The tests should be simple." I didn't reply, but I calmed myself down a little.

Thoughts started buzzing through my head such as, "What if I go even more deaf? I'd have to stay home all the time, I'd probably have no friends, and I'd probably have to live with my parents forever! Will it get better, or will I be stuck like this forever? I hope it gets better."

"Joseph Laflamme," called the audiologist who was going to test my hearing. You and I both got up.

On the way down the hall the audiologist asked a few typical friendly questions such as, "How's school?"

I answered bluntly, "Good." I began to become nervous, worried, and scared, but when I looked over at you, I felt more comfortable. You also gave me courage, and with you there, I would act like a man no matter what happened. You were right there to help me, and you knew I needed you, too. There were two small rooms with a large window in the middle of the wall separating them. One room was for the audiologist. It had a computer and a microphone. The other room had two chairs and many different types of headphones. I sat down, and you sat down next to me.

"I'm going to put these headphones on you, and every time you hear the pure tone, you'll have to raise your hand," the audiologist said in a calm, almost soothing voice.

"Okay," I replied.

When she left to go into the room next door, you said, "Don't worry, buddy. Just raise your hand when you think you hear a beep." I took your words into consideration and felt less nervous and more prepared.

"We'll start with your right ear," replied the audiologist through the headphones. I wiped my clammy hands off on my shirt. I looked over at you, and in your hazel eyes I could tell you hoped so much that everything would be all



right. The desire in your eyes was very strong. You were resting your chin on your hand, and the look on your face told me I would be okay. I felt comfortable with you there. Then the pure tones came. The tones seemed to go on forever. Each time I heard one, I got even more excited. I could even hear the lowest sounds. I raised my hands so many times that my arm was sore. I was relieved when the audiologist told me that the right side was done. You looked glad to see my hand go up. I told myself not to get too overjoyed because I still had the left side to be tested. The silence seemed to last forever. I hopelessly looked over at you, but your expression said you were not ready to give up. I strained to hear, but I couldn't. The annoying pure tones were gone. I looked over at you again, and I gained some hope. I was relieved to see the door swing open. On the way down the hall you and the audiologist talked about my status.

"The right was above normal but there was nothing on the left side," the audiologist replied.

"Pathetic," I thought, "just pathetic." We met Mom and Amy back in the waiting room to see the doctor.

While we waited, you said to me, "Don't worry, Joe. It's not over yet; they might be able to cure it."

"I hope so, Dad," I replied. You gave me hope then that I needed.

"Joseph Laflamme," called the doctor. When we all entered the room, he looked over the paperwork. He then said, "We don't know what the cause of this was, but it looks like sudden deafness. It happens to quite a few children these days. There is no way surgically to repair it, and there is no cure for it. Joe, this won't ever get any better, and it is something you will have to live with for the rest of your life."

"Could it have happened from playing my Walkman too loud?" I asked.

"No, it isn't your fault," said the doctor's assistant. I couldn't believe it! My whole life with just one ear! I was stunned by the reality of it! I just couldn't believe it! I wasn't going to cry about it. You were a man, and I wanted to be one, too, so I didn't weep like an eight-year-old boy. The doctors talked like it was a done deal, but you didn't accept that for an answer. The doctors convinced me that there was nothing to do but give up, but you weren't going to give up. You were going to try every possible way there was because you love me too much ever to quit. From that day forward you took me to a different doctor, you tried different medicines, and you constantly searched for information on ways to heal it. I will never give up, and I know you won't either.

Thank you, Dad, for giving me strength, courage, and hope. Thank you for supporting me and staying with me especially in that tough situation. I know you will always be there for me when I have a problem. I know I will always be able to come to you for help. You will always keep me from giving up, just like you did in that situation. It shows how much you put your family before yourself. I love you very much, Dad, and Merry Christmas.



The Boy and the Ball

The light of the fire danced in his eyes. It was magnified in the deep brown, expansive orbs that were nestled comfortably in his head. The flickering, almost impish nature of the flame was sucked into his eyes, then thrown out in a dazzle. The boy stared at it, transfixed. He looked . . . and saw beyond the flame, beyond the figures scuttling about, attempting to put out the blaze. But he did not know why. This fire, it was not evil. It burned; it hurt. But that's just how it was. It didn't mean or want to hurt. It just did. The boy was used to this. Many things in his life didn't mean or want to hurt. His father did not want to hurt him. His father did not mean to. It was his drink. It was that drink that made him do it. He said he would only have "a couple." He did realize that the "a couple" hurt his family. And his Ma . . . Ma did not want to hurt. She knew her tears hurt almost more than Father's drink. But with Father and his drink, she cried. She cried from the hitting, and the yelling, and the "a couple." She didn't want to cry, because to cry was to hurt. The only thing that didn't hurt was . . . the ball. As he thought of this, his eyes drifted slowly away from the flames. They strayed, unblinking, to the disfigured, tattered lump in his hand. At first glance it appeared to be nothing of importance. Only on closer inspection would one realize that it was, in fact, a baseball. It had been, merely hours ago, an already patched and frayed sphere of sorts. But the fire had made it char black, covered in soot, the stitching almost burned away.

"Hey, kid." One of those monstrous figures spoke as it approached him. This one was a deep-voiced man, heavyset, not at all like the short lady figure, who had been standing next to him, watching him "What's that, kid?" The boy did not respond. The figure, a firefighter, bent over to look into the boy's soot smeared face. "What's your team?" he inquired, suddenly realizing that the boy was holding a baseball. "Mets fan, I hope not?" The boy stared at the burning building. "Not much of a talker, is he?" the man said, turning to the lady. "Frank, stop it. He's going through a lot, with his parents dead. . . ." She stopped, glanced worriedly at the boy, as if expecting him to burst into tears at these words. But the boy did not react—he did not show any signs that he even registered anything ever being said. The man huffed. But then he noticed something. "Hey kid, let me see that ball." The boy's eyes flashed recognition, and he jerked his head towards what he perceived as a threat. He knew not why this man was threatening him, or why he wanted the ball. The ball. . . .

His father slammed the door behind him. He was over two hours late, and the strong scent of whiskey could be easily detected on his breath. This was how most nights typically unfolded. Next, Ma would scold him for being late, and for the drinking she knew he'd been doing. Then he would retaliate, and they would argue. Father would explode in a fit of cursing. Not long after came the hitting. He would slap Ma, and if the boy wasn't quick enough, he would be caught and



endure a belt whipping. And the tears would be shed like blood from a still-gaping wound. And all he could do was cry, cry with the ever weeping world, and clutch the ball to him, and focus, think of the ball. . . .

Walking down the sidewalk, throwing the ball up and down, up and down. Within the rhythm he found a clarity, a refuge from the hurt and pain of the world. People were accustomed to seeing him, throwing the ball up and down, up and down. . . .

But then the fire. His father came home even later than usual. He stumbled as he opened the door. His eyes were glazed. The boy witnessed it through a crack in the door, Ma saying he hadn't paid the rent, and how the water had been cut off. Father swore and smashed his hand against the table. Ma yelled at him to stop the drinking. Cursing, he grabbed a chair, opened a bottle, and tried to drink, but he coughed and spilled it onto the floor. He swore; she cursed him. He stood and advanced towards her but stumbled and fell. Sprawling, he toppled into the old kerosene heater. It crashed to the carpet, setting it alight. "Oh my God!" Ma screamed. Dazed and muttering curses, father crawled from the blaze. Ma scrambled for the boy's bedroom. He had just enough time to seize the ball before she hoisted him and rushed to the hallway. The ball fell in the living room. She placed him at the door, screamed, "Run!" and went to help Father up. But he slipped, and they fell. Other tenants were evacuating now. He could not see his parents through the smoke. Something dropped at his feet. The ball. Fighting the searing pain, he grabbed it. "Run!" someone screamed. To the boy, it sounded just like his mother.

Now, here he stood, the ball, his sole possession, in his hand. "Kid, give me the ball," the firefighter said. The boy studied the ball. It was not so badly disfigured that you couldn't make out where the words had once been. . . . In fact, he could almost trace them. . . ."Kid, what was on it? The ball, kid. The ball." The boy stirred, as though coming awake. He looked up. "No," he said and stuffed it in his pocket. Just "no." There was no defiance, no brave, courageous valor. Just "no." Someone from child welfare came to take him to his aunt's. All the while, he thought about, clung onto the words on the ball that were no longer there. "To my boy, Love, Dad."



Ricky Cosse

Grade 7

Eastern Middle
School
Riverside

Maeve

Your face sits on the mantle piece . . . and I
imagine
Your miniature fingers,
A maze and adventure for you and we,
we are just your tour guides, waiting to show you everything.

Your glimmering blue eyes spy
What is around you,
And you wonder what it is.
Your feet kick around like a dog's
tail
on a summer day

All you can rely on is your five senses.
You feel,

With your . . .
Chubby Fingers,

You walk on water
when there is none.

You explore with your eyes
like looking through a

a new set of binoculars.

Your nose is saturated with great scents from a bakery.

Your ears
they can identify
where things are
like two sets of eyes.

I can picture you when you were first home.

The home that is a giant question mark.

Clueless of the views,
All you want to do is venture,
But you want to ask,

what or
where

what is this?

If only you could say a word
But words they have no meaning to you.

Your toes stretch out
like rubber bands

Your fingers curl up



like you're filled with anger.
But truthfully you are not,
But will rest for tomorrow,
for an even
greater
adventure
awaits you.

Freedom over Family

Chito stood at the door of his family's house in Havana as the socialists raised their flag. Outside the door Grandfather had been taken to an alleyway with several members of the community who were anti-Castro. Several soldiers followed the community members. Grandfather would die part of a family. A family of Cubans. The silence of the day was interrupted by a shot. The soldiers all fired once, and it was over. Chito bit his lip. His mother grasped his shoulder and cried softly to herself. Chito couldn't stand to watch his mother cry. His brothers Lorenzo and Pedro stood next to their mother. Lorenzo and Pedro turned their backs to the scene and walked inside. Padre was already inside. He sat in their living room reading the Bible. Padre looked towards the Lord for help. The Lord was his shepherd, and he relied upon his Lord. Chito's sister was sitting looking through old albums of pictures. Linda tried to pull out those pictures that would return the good memories to their family. Linda was the middle child. She was two years older than Chito but a year younger than the twins. Chito was only 15.

Fighting back tears, Padre closed the Bible and sat in a shroud of silence. The same tears that Padre fought back dug out rivers in the dust on Linda's face. Chito took up the Bible and began to read aloud. Chito was the youngest, but he wanted to help. He wanted to be the good Cuban boy that his father had once been. He wanted to be the good Cuban boy that his father's father had been before the communist murderers killed him.

In a wavering voice out came Psalm 129, "Much have they oppressed me from my youth, now let Israel say. Much have they oppressed me from my youth, yet they have not prevailed. Upon my back the plowers plowed, as they traced their long furrows. But the Lord cut me free from the ropes of the yoke of the wicked . . ." Lorenzo cut him off before he could continue, "Stop your mourning all of you! Grandfather was a traitor to Cuba's future! The future of Castro!" Chito stood in rage and dashed at his brother's throat. Leaping from his feet, Chito tackled his brother with a violent force. Pedro kicked Chito in the ribs. "Lorenzo is right!" he screamed with rage, fueling his body's anger. Chito spun with his fist open and backhanded Pedro's face with enough force to break the skin above Pedro's eye. Padre put his hand on Pedro's and Chito's shoulders.

Alex López
Grade 8
King Philip
Middle School
West Hartford



With a silent word, he had broken up the fight. Padre looked at his twin sons with a quivering lip. "Have I heard you right? Are you faithful to this pig, Castro?" Neither boy had the courage to look his father in his face. Lorenzo made a small nod with his head. "I will have no fighting about this. I can only hope that one day you will see your mistake. Until then you are no longer my sons. You are no longer accepted in this house. No one loyal to Castro will live in my house. Only those loyal to Cuba and their Lord." Padre tapped the Bible with these last words. He handed it to Lorenzo and collapsed into his chair. Linda ran to his side, and Chito steadied his mother as she broke down into tears. Padre hung his head in his hands and pointed out with a gesture from one of his fingers. Both boys saw it as clear as day. The line had been drawn, and there was no eraser. The family had been split.

Pedro and Lorenzo were dazed about what had happened. Had not their father just evicted them from their own house? Their family had turned their backs to them. Pedro and Lorenzo stood on the dusty street outside of the house. The historic buildings of Havana stood tall compared to the two boys. A beautiful 1950 Chevrolet convertible rolled by the two boys. Its wheels gleamed with the tropical sun, and its paint had not a single nick in it. The car parked about twenty feet ahead of the boys. Pedro and Lorenzo were looking with wild eyes at their surroundings. The pair inspected every clothesline that hung above them and every farmer carrying his products to the market. Two pairs of eyes, both filled with tears, searched for an alternative. Two pairs of eyes searched for an answer.

The door to their white house opened. Their mother wept as she sat in the window. Chito stared at an invisible ghost behind them. Chito's eyes gleamed with tears, but his soul had been darkened. His gaze was like an eagle's. Neither Pedro nor Lorenzo could meet it, so they turned their eyes upon the open door. Linda walked out from the door. "Why don't you say you're sorry, Pedro? Lorenzo apologize to Padre. Please." They both could not stand to watch their sister cry, but they would not apologize to Padre. "The future of Cuba is Castro's not Padre's." Lorenzo spoke up. Linda threw the bag down and ran back into the house. Padre walked across the wooden floor of their house. His face showed nothing. When he reached the door, he looked at them and shook his head. "Nothing here to look at." With that he shut the door with enough force to shake two of the red Mexican tiles from the roof. Grabbing the bag, the two boys began to walk away.

Chito sat in the living room. The entire world for Chito had been gutted and thrown in the trash. The two brothers that he used to consider his best friends, his crutches in times of need, were now traitors to the family. His brothers were now outcasts, his father thrown and shaken. His grandfather had been shot by two socialist soldiers right in front of their house. Both his mother and sister had not stopped weeping all through dinner. Chito could not force himself to eat. The steam rising from the plantains reminded Chito of the soul of his grandfather rising to heaven. The young boy couldn't believe that anything could be good at a time like this. He shrank into his room.



The beige walls surrounded Chito and enclosed him. Chito felt dizzy and fell onto his bed. He looked out his small window. Outside he could see a car, a beautiful car with shining wheel rims and paint without a flaw. Chito knew who was inside the car before he looked. A man in a white suit sat in front of the wheel but faced the back seat. Another man in the front seat turned his head and looked towards the back seat. It looked as if two kids were in the back seat. Not just any two kids though. Chito knew who they were. He didn't hate them for it. He dreaded them now. Only a few people could own a car like this. The car was a sign of power, an advertisement of sorts. Yet the people inside it needed no introducing. They were the DGI. The DGI was Castro's answer to the CIA. Spooks. They had the power to crush a family. In this case, just their advertising had ripped apart Chito's family. Exhausted, Chito collapsed upon the bed with a sigh and fell into a dreamless sleep.

Chito awoke the next day to the smell of rice and beans. Had it all been a dream? Chito ran around the corner and saw that everyone was at the table except for him. Except for him and his brothers. Chito sat with a heavy heart. He was famished, and so he began to eat. Soon cubed steak cutlets were brought out, and the breaded smells of the meat began to mix with the sweet smells of the red peppers that garnished the rice and beans. Chito was home. He knew that the people around him loved him, and he knew that he was safe. This was a home of anti-Communists. He looked around at the family that surrounded him. They all were silent.

He needed to break the ice if this family was going to survive. "Padre, I fear for us." Padre looked up from his plate. His timeless eyes saw right through Chito. The yellow vase held one red rose that seemed to be just waiting to wither. "Boy, if you are going to say something, spit it out. Do not talk in half statements." Chito nodded. He knew that his father would see right through his first statement, but at least now he knew that his father would be able to talk. "Last night, Father, I saw Lorenzo and Pedro get into a DGI car." Padre took another bite of his food. He chewed slowly as he inspected the plate in front of himself. "Are these friends of yours?" Chito was taken aback by the question. There were so many traps laid out in the question, so many different meanings that somehow all fit together. Chito knew that there was only one way to avoid a confrontation with his father. "No, Father, they are no friends of mine. They are only some strange boys I saw on the street. They seemed to have known me. What if they try to turn us in to the DGI? They would kill us like they did Grandpa." Padre smiled. He was proud of how his son had learned to play the game. He played it well, too, but Padre not only played the game. He made the rules as well. As the smile disappeared into the wrinkles on Padre's face, his mouth opened. "Son, they do not know us. We are safe." Chito knew what was going on. He nodded and smiled. He could tell that Padre had something up the sleeves of his goyavera.

After breakfast Mother and Linda cleared the table and began the chores of the day. Padre worked as a piano tuner. Currently Padre was working on a piano that was said to have once been owned by George Gershwin.

There were no chores for Chito to do so he went to his room to get a hat.



When Chito looked at his bed, a package lay on top of his sheets. The boy rushed over to the package and opened it. A card fell onto his lap. "For when I get home. This will keep them from knowing us." The words would make no sense to anyone outside of the family, but to this young boy they made perfect sense. He carefully unwrapped the box that lay inside of many layers of tissue paper. When Chito reached the box, he was disappointed. "A humidor?! A wooden humidor?!" Thoughts raced across his mind at incredible speeds. He threw the clasp at the front of the box. Praying, he opened the lid. Inside lay a gun. It was small yet perfect. There were numbers and letters engraved into the side. It read, "Colt .45 Military Issue." Next to the weapon lay two clips of bullets. A box of bullets lay in one corner of the padded humidor. In the other corner there was a card, "Compliments of the Libres."

When Padre arrived home that day from work, he was smiling and whistling. He kissed Linda as she swept the yard. Chito ran out to greet him. Giving his father a bear hug, Chito began to talk. Padre held his hand over Chito's mouth. Once inside, the hand was removed, and Chito began to thank his father. Padre had to explain, though, that the gun could never be shown to anybody outside the family or to his sister. "Linda must be kept out of this. Treat her as you would a small child. Tell her the truth, but don't let her know the bad that is involved with the truth." Chito nodded.

"Padre, what does the card mean? Who are the Libres?"

"My boy, the Libres is a group dedicated to freeing Cuba. They are people like us. They want to end Castro's reign upon the city. These are the good guys. They have heard about our family and would like us to join. I can't because I need to work to support the family but you . . ."

"Yes, Father!! I will join. We shall end the tyranny of this country."

That night a car pulled up in front of the house. It beeped twice. Chito knew who it was. Pulling the humidor out from under his bed, he ran out the door. Yelling good-bye to his family, Chito turned once outside the door. Something glistening caught his eye. Upon further inspection he saw nothing. He ran over to the car and got in. Inside there were already three men. The two in the front seat were older than Chito by about twenty years. The other man in the back seat looked to be about 17. Chito was the youngest in the car. The car took off before anyone spoke. The men in the front seat turned to him. "Welcome to Los Libres."

For the next three weeks, Chito was trained and taught to serve his cause. He stayed with a man named Rubén. Rubén trained Chito how to fight and use his gun. He taught the boy how to spy and be invisible. Soon Chito had gotten quite a reputation. He was now called *Arma*, which means "weapon," literally translated. He had the best score in target practice and was assigned the job as the gunman with three of the best men Los Libres had. Riding next to the driver, his job was to look for any threats. If there ever were an attack, he would be the first man to fire a shot. Chito didn't like the idea of killing people, but he understood that it might be necessary to help his cause. Los Libres wanted Castro out of the way so that



Cuba could be restored to freedom, yet they needed the information on where he was before they could end his tyranny. There was an information war going on between Los Libres and the DGI, one side always trying to eliminate the other.

Chito knew that the time had come for his training to help the cause that he so dearly loved. As he ran out the door, Linda yelled to him, "Where are you going?" Chito turned to tell her that he was going out with some friends when he saw a light glisten. Wheeling his head around, he saw two DGI cars sitting in an alley next to his house. The alley was normally filled with trashcans, but now two gorgeous cars were parked there. Running to the car, Chito dove into it. Both cars pulled out behind Chito's. As the two men in the back seat turned to see if they were still following, a third car pulled in front of Los Libres'. Chito had already drawn his gun. Looking at who was in the car that now blocked them, he realized it was his brother Lorenzo

In a second all of the memories flooded to Chito: the murdering of his grandfather, the sorrow of his family, the fight, his father's rage. All of it came back to Chito in a brief flood. Raw emotion clenched the youngest son's jaw shut. The two cars behind Chito started shooting. The two men behind Chito fell dead instantly. The driver was fumbling for his weapon. It was Chito and his brother now. Unlike the fights they had as kids this one would end bloodily. Chito fired his weapon and killed the driver of Lorenzo's car. He clenched his teeth and remembered his grandfather. Firing twice more, he stopped the other DGI agents from interfering with Lorenzo. Lorenzo raised his gun and yelled, "Traitor!" He never finished his words as Rubén shot him twice. With wide eyes, Chito now stared at his brother, the word *traitor* forever on his lips, frozen there into eternity.

Rubén yelled to Chito, "If you want to live, I would suggest moving!" With a silent nod both men rolled out of the car to their separate sides. Chito fired his gun into the two cars but had to run as the DGI agents returned fire. A bone-chilling scream pierced the air. "Libre Cuba!" Rubén was walking towards the two cars, firing two guns at once. Taking two men with him, he was ripped apart. Chito's knees turned to Jell-O. Falling against the side of the alley, the young boy had been changed forever.

Tripping over trash cans, Chito tried to run. He could hear men yelling, "He went down the alley." Chito was trapped; the alley ended with a solid wall. Chito jumped under a dumpster and waited. The DGI agents began to search the alley. Slowly they moved closer and closer. Praying to God, Chito called out Psalm 129 again, "Much have they oppressed me from my youth . . ." He relied on the God that these pigs that now hunted them were trying to eliminate. The men started to head towards the end of the alley. Chito was trapped and outnumbered six to one, yet he would not let his cause down. Suddenly one of the men fell to the ground, then another. The DGI agents turned and began firing. At the other end of the alley stood Chito's father behind a garbage can. Chito rolled out from under the dumpster and began firing at the agents. His father started to run towards the remaining three agents. Chito felt his leg go limp and then his stomach implode. He wouldn't look down. He didn't need to. Falling to his knees, Chito saw the face of the man who had shot him. Pedro stood with his gun smok-



ing. "Brother!?" Chito looked down the alley with his calm eyes and saw his father's body falling backwards as the DGI agents continued to shoot his lifeless body. Screaming, Chito began to cry, "No!! You are no brother of mine." Chito fired twice and fell face down into the alley. Pedro collapsed, disowned. It was over. The family lines had been drawn in blood.

Much have they oppressed me from my youth, now let Israel say.
Much have they oppressed me from my youth, yet they have not prevailed.
Upon my back the plowers plowed, as they traced their long furrows.
But the Lord cut me free from the ropes of the yoke of the wicked.

May they be scattered in disgrace, all who hate Zion.
May they be like grass on the rooftops withered in early growth,
Never to fill the reaper's hands, nor the arms of the binders of sheaves,
With none passing by to call out:

"The blessing of the Lord be upon you! We bless you in the name of the Lord!"

Lindsey Marrotte
Grade 8
Windham Middle
Windham

Unexpected Journey

Why her? Why now? I asked myself these questions as we drove home in my mom's Honda Accord. It was about 9:30 p.m. on Halloween night, 1999, and I had just seen my Aunt Lisa. Her feet were swollen, her eyes were yellow, and lesions were all over her body. She had no hair, and she walked as slowly as a child taking her first step. She even needed help walking in her little girl style. Mom said repeatedly, "This is probably going to be her last Halloween." I thought in my head, "You've been saying that for the past five years."

My aunt had cancer for just about as long as I can remember. Her eyes and skin were tinted yellow because she had jaundice. Her liver was shutting down. Because of the intense treatment of chemotherapy, she had no hair and her body was swollen because of the harshness of the medicine. Before we left my grandmother's, she had forced three huge pills down her throat and swallowed a liquid that made her face scrunch up. In her faint voice she said, "Now I know why the little boy runs away from his mother in the Dimetapp commercial." Our laughs were polite but stiff, trying to cover up the pain we felt. Lisa had such a strong belief in God, and I admired that even though I don't believe in religious things to that extent. She was very courageous, fighting very hard to live. If anyone could will herself to be well, Aunt Lisa could.

This all started when I was eight years old. I remember going to school that day in late fall. I remember coming home to an empty house. It was the first time my mother was not home for me. I was thinking, "Why would she do this to me? What was going to happen to me?" Luckily two of my neighbors saw me sitting on my front door stoop, came over, and stayed with me, comforting me.



My mother came home ten minutes later, rolled down her car window, and sharply commanded, "Get into the car. Quickly!" I did not want to get into the car, but I was unsure of the tone in her voice. I did as she said and slid into the back seat. My mother explained, "Aunt Lisa has just had a mammogram and an abnormal growth was found. The doctors had done tests all day, and I stayed by her side the whole time." Fear and sadness creased my mother's face. Our family has a history of cancer.

When the test results came back positive, everyone was upset. Aunt Lisa was pregnant with her second child when her breast cancer was diagnosed. Because of the intense chemotherapy that she needed to try to save her life, she had to terminate her pregnancy. This was probably the hardest decision she ever had to make in her life. I can't imagine the sadness she felt the day she and Uncle Dave had to end one life to save another.

Chemotherapy began very soon after one of her breasts was removed. She had to stay at my grandmother's house for months so that my grandmother could take care of her and Tyler, her son. She really needed round-the-clock care and help with Tyler because Uncle Dave could not leave work. While convalescing, she stayed in the same room she grew up in. That must have been some comfort to her. The chemotherapy was very trying. She was constantly sick, and she lost her hair. But, with time, she got better, and we thought she was cured. Her hair started to grow back, and it was so beautiful, dark black and very curly, and as soft as a newborn's hair. For one year, she was better. She was getting stronger every day, and we thought she was cured. We thought she had beat the cancer.

Then, at the end of one summer, just as her new, beautiful hair was starting to reach her shoulders, the cancer returned. This time it had attacked her liver. The doctors said that she was a perfect candidate for a stem cell transplant. This required a month's stay in the hospital in total seclusion. My mom talked to her three times a day while she was in the hospital.

After a month in the hospital, Aunt Lisa went back to my grandmother's house. She still could not have visitors because she had a very low white blood cell count, and if she was exposed to any germs, her body would not be able to fend off the infection. Again she stayed in her girlhood room, but this time she was truly alone. She could not visit with her son. The only people she could see were my grandmother and grandfather. Her food had to be prepared in special ways to kill all bacteria, and her room had to be kept impeccably clean to ward off germs. The only way we could visit with her was to talk to her from outside her window. Unfortunately, her window was on the third floor. My grandfather put up a ladder for my mom to climb up and talk to her. This was hard for my mom because she doesn't like heights, but she loved Aunt Lisa more. One of my other aunts convinced a telephone company to install computers with electronic eyes in my grandmother's home and in Aunt Lisa's home where Tyler and Uncle Dave lived. This way they were able to talk to and see each other through the computer. This helped get her through her confinement.

After this ordeal, Aunt Lisa started to get better and life was starting to return to normal again. Then she went for one of her routine check-ups, and the



cancer in her liver was still there. Everyone was sad again. Tyler was older and more fun to be around now, and his mom couldn't even enjoy him as much as she'd like to. He never seemed to notice because in his mind she had always been sick. It was very normal to him that his mom was in the hospital or needed to nap frequently. He probably didn't even remember his mother having hair.

In the summer of 1999, Aunt Lisa came to Maine where our whole family vacations together every year. This summer was different from other summers. I was happy, and I had fun playing in the lake with my cousins, but we were restricted in ways as we had never known before. Aunt Lisa needed midday naps now, and the medications she was on caused her to be very irritable, contributing to our limitations. No longer could we run into our grandmother's house at any time we wanted, and sometimes we had to swim at our own homes because we got too noisy and disturbed Aunt Lisa's slumber. It was almost like having a baby in the house again. I was a little reluctant to be around her. I was uncomfortable, and quite honestly, she was a downer. As sympathetic as I felt toward her condition and her pain, sometimes I found I felt angry. Everything was different now. Everyone was different now. There was too much sadness in our lives.

Maine was quieter now than it had been in previous years. Before Aunt Lisa left Maine, she asked all of us to build a garden, called the "Forever Garden," where everyone in the family would contribute their favorite plant or flower, and everyone would tend to it in memory of us being a family. It was a beautiful idea, but it was sad because it made us all feel like she thought it was her last summer in Maine.

The summer progressed as did the cancer. It traveled to her brain and, in time, to her spine. Halloween was the last time I saw my Aunt Lisa alive. She died November 13, 1999 in her sleep at her own home.

It was very painful for my mother when we had to look through our photo albums to find pictures of Lisa for a collage for the funeral home. She was so photogenic that my mom kept taking out almost every picture of her, saying, "This is a great one of her." It was painful for me to watch my mom hurting. The wake was very difficult for me. It was an open casket, and I didn't feel comfortable approaching it, or death. Her son, Tyler, did not seem sad. He seemed better adjusted to this than I was. He even called me a "scaredy cat" because I wouldn't view Aunt Lisa.

Now she's gone, but she'll never be forgotten. Hundreds of cards were sent to my grandparents after the funeral. Numerous mass cards were sent from friends who belonged to different religious groups all over the country. Church masses will be held forever in remembrance of her. It was enlightening to see that so many people cared about my aunt. One day I asked my mom, "Why did Aunt Lisa get so many mass cards?" My mother sadly answered, "A young person's death is very tragic because you can't help but imagine what life could have held for her." Right then it struck me hard that she was only 37 years old, and it was a sad moment for me.

For five years everybody's life revolved around my aunt's ups and downs.



With the chemotherapy, there were no traditional family get togethers. It was very hard to convince my grandmother to take a day off and spend some time with us. Now, life is starting to have a little normalcy—as normal, that is, as can be expected without Aunt Lisa's smile and happy outlook on life. There is a void, an emptiness, in all of our lives now, but she was so sick, and in so much pain, that I know that she is in a better place, and we who are here without her are in a better place because of what we learned with her on her life's journey.

A Picture in My Mind

In this one we are a family together
Guarding one another with our lives.
Smiling as if we were really happy.
Laughing and having fun is what I see
in this family picture.
As if there were no problems
In the world at all.
But do not believe everything you see.

A picture does nothing but hide the
True feelings you have behind your heart.
A picture shows only the outside cover
Of your feelings, but not the inside.

People can hide many things beyond a picture,
But the only way you can really see the feeling
Of happiness and laughter is to look beyond
The picture.

Beyond the fake smiling masks,
Which people wear to hide their true feelings.

Patricia Padilla
Grade 8
Alfred E. Burr
School
Hartford

The Tempest

A humid air hangs over the land,
Like a warm, woolen sheet.
The sky is hidden by a thick grey blanket,
Shadowing the ground to a dusky gloom.
An ant scuttles across the ground,

Benjamin Marshalkowski
Grade 8
Timothy Edwards
Middle
School
South Windsor



Avoiding the columns of burnt, crumbling grass
That hinder its path like natural giants.

Suddenly the sky flashes with a blinding brightness,
A shining blade slices through the horizon,
Roaring with a vengeful fury.
Thousands of liquid bullets dart to the ground,
Powerfully displacing the landscape,
Taking no prisoners.
One streaks down towards the ground,
Harshly pummeling the ant.
The sky echoes with angry snarls,
From all around the atmosphere.
The wind howls angrily,
Pushing over anything in its path.
The sky continues to flare and roar,
As if reality itself is being torn from the universe.

And then it stops.

The rain no longer tackles the ground,
But drizzles slowly, apologetically.
Small pools of water form,
Shining in the sun that peeks through the tears,
In the grey blanket.
The air cools down, the woolen sheet removed.
The ant rises and continues its course,
Avoiding the columns of burnt, crumbling grass
That hinder its path like natural giants.

Lauren
Feinberg
Grade 9
Fairfield High
School
Fairfield

The Mirror's Shadow

The glaring surface of eternity at sunrise
catches me by surprise
An identity framed and twisted in antique gold
squints back.
A looking glass upon myself,
I am merely a reflection, the
mirror's shadow, my own
but individual duplicate.
As I search for the beauty queen within me,
it echoes, echoes an image,



of wasted minutes, chic.

The aura that embraces and cradles my spirit is shrouded and smothered by a layer of pressed powder, concealing my imperfections iridescent lip gloss smeared to accentuate those pouty lips, until the mirror only allows me to see what I am not—

or what I am not only allows me to see—the agony of adolescence.

But a mirror has no thoughts, no words It is not judgmental, just glimmers of light that reflect warped rituals of being.

Looking inward, I glimpse a resemblance of a Picasso portrait, distorted and fragmented pieces of self, my sense of self.

Alone, the mirror and I:
If only I could believe that
I should not be someone else's mirror
maybe I would not just be
the mirror's shadow.

I gaze into the mirror once more at sunset, and ponder
If a mirror only reflects
has no thoughts, no words
why does it say so much.

The Hero

You never think it's going to happen to you, especially if your life has gone without much tragedy. But it can happen, and it did happen to me.

As soon as I walked into that hospital, a vile smell hit me, a smell of illness and helplessness of all those poor, sick people. It was a chastising smell telling me to leave, and I almost listened. Yet, I continued onto the elevator lifting me into the realm between life and death, the intensive care unit.

When I got into the waiting room of the ICU, I saw my mother slumped in a chair. She was in a trance of grief and didn't even see me enter. I ran over to her and gave her a hug. She gave a devastating cry and clung to me as if she would never let go.

I told her I had a surprise and held up a Satsumas. A smile flickered across

Sarah Dionne
Grade 9
Newington
High School
Newington



her face, and she took the orange from me. It was an old joke between us. You see, when I was younger, I didn't like lemons or lemonade, so when I was sick or sad, she gave me an orange and told me to make orange juice instead of lemonade.

I gently took her arm and goaded her to come for a walk with me. I took her tear-stained hand and guided her to the elevator. We exited the hospital to walk in the gardens and pathways nearby. It was a winter wonderland. Frozen rime was lustering the trees, and the sun was burnishing the snow. It was all so beautiful.

Yet, that beauty was what had caused my grandfather to be dangling between living and going to God. My grandfather was a renegade who was 89 and very stubborn. He shouldn't have been driving today. He shouldn't have driven, period! Alas, he was, and his poor old eyes hadn't seen the yellow light turn red, they hadn't caught the oncoming car or the black ice, and that huge snowbank had just escaped his vision.

He had broken his pelvis. Most older people do—it is a bone that weakens with age. When Mom got the call about the tragedy, she was just pinning on her cameo and getting ready to go pick up my grandfather for church. He must have gotten tired of waiting. If only we had been ready earlier. If only he hadn't tried to drive, if only . . .

While my mind was gnawing on the "if onlys," a heart-rending siren brought me back to the present time. I glanced at my mom, and the gaudy cameo that Grandpa had given her caught my eye and caused a tear to fall. We had walked in a huge circle, and we were back at the entrance to the hospital. It was beckoning us to come inside, and we re-entered the dreary hospital where the most important things in life are out of our control and in somebody else's hands. When we got up to the ICU, my father was waiting there for us. He gave me a lifeless smile and tried to cheer me up by telling me a story about Grandpa. He knew that Grandpa was my role model, and I always wanted to be just like him, no matter what.

"Johnny, I remember when you were still very little, you saw that recruitment poster your grandpa had hanging up, and your eyes lit up like seeing a Christmas tree with all sorts of presents underneath." (I was very "into" war and G. I. Joes back then.) "Your grandpa saw you staring and saw his opportunity. Nobody else really liked to hear his war stories, and he figured he would try them out on you. He got out his old army helmet, and you would sit and listen to him tell war stories for hours. You were mesmerized by him. You made your grandfather feel very special, and he returned the love. You had a real connection, a bond with him that nobody else had. You're very lucky for that."

My family and I all walked into Grandpa's little, bland, somber room. We saw his arm move, and there was an ecstasy of shouts. It brought a doctor running. We told him what we had witnessed, but we didn't get the answer that we had been hoping to receive.

"Don't wager too much on that. Many people here get excited by that and have false hope. It just hurts more in the long run. It was probably just a reacting



nerve, a spasm." And he left.

Our family gathered around that bed, and I started just talking to Grandfather. I told him when he woke up, we would finish putting together his armada of ship models. I told him how we would go fishing for the striped bass that froth the water. I told him we would lug out his memories and listen to his stories about chasing ermines and raccoons in the Ozarks with his blue-tick hound. I told him that when he woke up, I would do anything he wanted. Just please come back and say good-bye before you leave. Another tear escaped through my eyelashes. Why was I crying? He wasn't going to die, not yet, there was still so much we had to do together . . .

A beep interrupted our family's own separate, quiet thoughts. Doctors and nurses pushed us away from Grandpa. They separated us from him, and another tear escaped. A nurse ushered us out, and we waited for a report on what happened.

What seemed like hours later, the doctor came in. We were asked into his office not knowing what to expect.

"I'm sorry, but we lost him. We—"

He was stifled by the sound of my mother's wails. The news hit me like a thousand burrs and briars going into me simultaneously. I was dumbstruck. This couldn't be happening to me. I don't know how long we sat there, but our minds took over while our hearts were in arrest. I couldn't hold back the tears any longer. My eyes became like a gusher, and my cheeks were where the stream went down. This was impossible! My hero was gone.

The sun dawned bright and clear on the day of the funeral. The sunshine reminded me of my grandfather's smile. The funeral didn't do justice to how much he meant to me and what he did for so many people. I don't think I fully understand how lucky I am to have had a grandfather like that. I do now, and I'll never forget him. I shall never forget my grandfather. He once told me that every time a person dies, a new life begins for him as a star in the sky, and I can look up there for advice when he's gone. As I look up there now, I can see his face so vividly in my mind, better than any photograph. Although he wasn't a war hero, he was a hero in our family's eyes in every possible way. We hold him in our highest esteem and in our hearts forever. His headstone reads, "God's little hero, rest in peace now and forever." And it's true in every possible way.

Now as I'm sitting here on my bed staring at his World War I helmet on my highest shelf, more tears threaten to come. My eyes drift to a point next to the hat where the clay orange that my niece made lies. The recruitment poster is tacked above it. My grandfather's picture is up there, too. The picture may dull and the poster may wear and the helmet may age, but the memories will always stay alive, for I know that in my heart my grandfather is still alive and he is in me and in everything that I do now and forever.



Vietnam

Sgt. Maxwell Allan hit the ground with the rest of his platoon. He raised his machine gun and shot toward the soldiers who were advancing towards him. He saw two of the soldiers go down in front of his gun. He laughed in joy and yelled over to his friend, a private in his platoon.

“Yo, Jack, I got two Charlies!”

“I only got one man!”

“Gotta keep yer score up if you want ta stay in this platoon!”

“I’ll beat ya sooner or later, Max!” Jack yelled with a hearty laugh

Then there was a large crash and a deafening boom.

“Yo, Jack, we’d better get out of here soon!” Max looked over to where Jack was standing, and there was nothing left but smoldering dirt. Max yelled and tore off in the direction of the enemy. He was yelling at the top of his lungs and shooting his gun off in the soldiers’ direction. The jets dropped more bombs, and Max saw them take out two more of his platoon. He grabbed the other two team members and had them take off to the nearest base. He figured if they got to the base, then they would be able to help in the next battle he was supposed to be at, and he now needed all the platoon he could get. But as the soldiers ran off in the direction of the base, another boom sounded through the jungle. Max had a sinking feeling; he knew where the bomb landed. He looked over, and sure enough, the two men were lying on their backs with their bodies cut up from the shrapnel. Max decided to take off before he met the same fate as the rest of his platoon.

As he ran through the dense jungle, Sgt. Maxwell Allan had to bear the weight of his pack punching him in the back as he moved up and down. The bombs and napalm rained from the sky. The ground was shaking with such fury he was lucky to stay on his feet to escape the next bomb that would hit the ground close to him. He could barely hear over the rapid firing of his machine gun and the screaming of the Vietnamese soldiers who were falling to the ground in his path. The screaming of the T-28 bomber planes overhead was overwhelming, and every time they made the next pass, his heart would race when he was wondering whether or not the next bomb had his name on it. But while he was running, the bombers made a hit not more than 50 feet away from where he was. The shock sent him through the air and to the ground. He grabbed the field radio off his pack; he would try to contact the bombers and tell them to stop their next run.

“Bombers in the area, please cease your fire! I repeat cease your fire! You have made 5 friendly hits so far, and you will make more if you don’t cease your bombing!”

“Negative, sir, we have orders to level this area, whether you’re in it or not.”

“I am the commanding officer in this area, and I am ordering you to cease fire!”

“Negative, sir, our orders are from the lieutenant. If we disobey him, we will no doubt get court-martialed.”

“Then at least give me time to escape drop-zone!”



"Affirmative, sir, you have 5 minutes until we commence bombing again. If you are not out of the drop-zone by that time, we cannot stop again."

Max got a rush of adrenaline and started off as quick as he could, setting off for the base within 20 miles of where he was. He figured he could get transported back to Camp Holloway Base in Pleiku, where he would receive further orders. He just hoped that he wouldn't encounter any enemy troops that would slow down his pace. If he didn't escape the drop-zone before the napalm came down, he was dead.

He started off only following his compass arrow, not looking where he was going at all. But then he raised his head when he heard a firefight going on right ahead of him, intersecting his path back to the base. He decided to go around them but with great care. But what if there were Americans involved? Should he tell them the bombing is about to start again? Or would that alert the enemy to the raid and drive them away as well? He thought about using the radio, but what if there were Vietnamese soldiers using the same channel?

He finally decided to get closer to see if there were any Americans. As the bangs and rapid firing of the guns got closer, so did the time to the bombing. He then had second thoughts, but it was too late now. So he got as close as he could until he could see the sides. They were both composed of Vietnamese soldiers! This was mission impossible, but it was now going to be hard to go around the confrontation without becoming a casualty. He had to think of something quick. He looked more closely at the soldiers and then noticed on one side, there were people dressed in civilian clothing, that must have been the North Vietnamese side. They must have captured some civilians from the town which was being bombed and used them as soldiers. Sgt. Allan decided to go to the other side. He went around the firefight in the thick of the brush. He stopped when he got behind what he assumed to be the south, but there was really no way of telling—their outfits were both the same—and now he noticed that both had civilians on their sides. Then it came.

The screaming of the T-28s returned again, shrill and steadily getting louder. Max decided to start leaving. He was already half way around the fighting, so why not try to get fully around it? Then an explosion rocked the land between the two opposing sides. 10 soldiers were knocked off their feet. Max started running again. An explosion then nailed the ground right next to him, within 30 feet. He fell to his side and noticed his shoulder was burning with an intense heat. He grabbed it in pain and found that a piece of shrapnel was jutting out of it. He grabbed the shrapnel, burning his hand, and pulled it out, flinging it to the ground. He then looked at the injury. It was very bad, he was profusely bleeding, and there was no way he would make it the other 15 miles like this. He then he decided he might as well try; trying was better than lying down to die. So he then remembered a technique that some of the guys had been talking about at the base. They were talking about pouring the powder of a bullet on a deep wound and lighting it on fire to burn it closed. So he took the rifle at his side and released the clip from the machine gun. He took out a bullet and with his knife he pried the tip of the bullet out of the actual chamber. Then he poured the powder of it into his



wound. He had no lighter, so instead he shoved the clip back in the machine gun and put the end of the barrel near his wound. It was difficult, but he pulled the trigger, and then an explosion of fire came out of his wound that was so intense it made him go unconscious. He must have been there for a while, but he finally woke up.

He felt weak from the explosion. He winced in pain as he tried to move his neck, and when he tried to get up, he grunted in pain. He eventually got the strength to pull himself into a sitting position. But he didn't sense the full actuality of his injury just yet. He was still a little delusional, and he knew it, but now he was starting to see that it was better than this war. He would rather now die than kill any more people. He just wished to be back at base so he could go back home to his family and be back to normal.

"I guess the guys at the base were wrong about how little that would hurt. But hey, it worked, didn't it?"

He was surprised to have grinned at his own little joke, but when he realized what his shoulder looked like, he stopped grinning. The tip of the bone of the upper arm and the shoulder joint were now revealed, and all the flesh that did remain before the brilliant idea was now gone.

"Oh man, this bites! I HATE THIS WAR!" He shouted out loud. He didn't care who heard him at this point. It's not like he thought he was going to live much longer anyway.

Although it did keep him alive for the time being, he thought he should still not take his time getting to Camp Holloway Base. He drank his water down to the very bottom of the canteen and then tried to get up. His balance was a little off, and he felt light-headed, plus his arm was aching like the shard of metal was still in it, but he could still walk. He continued on, slowly, but at least he was moving. He decided to go until he either died or made it to the camp, so he just tried to walk normally. After about 3 miles he fell to the ground; he was too thirsty to walk. He was dizzy and felt like throwing up, but he knew it wasn't that far from a river, only two more miles. So he once again gathered himself and started off.

Those felt like the longest 2 miles of his life, but he made it to the river. But then he found that he would have to cross a bridge. This wouldn't have been bad, but the Vietnamese soldiers usually rigged the bridges with explosives. So he sat down by the river and filled his canteen while he thought about how he would make it across. He couldn't go upstream or down because then he might lose his way. And he could go over the bridge, but it would be risky. He decided then just to cross through the river. He submerged his whole body, except for his eyes and a little of his head. He knew if any more than that showed, he would be an easy target for a sniper. He swam through, keeping himself afloat using the poles that supported the bridge and kicking his legs.

When he made it across, night was starting to fall. He knew in the night he was definitely in trouble. There would be no way for him to navigate, and with his arm, he was lucky not to have died already, let alone spending the night alone with it. He just decided to go as far as he could. He saw a rice field up ahead, not



a good sign. That meant the Vietnamese soldiers might be watching this area or might have set up mines in it. He had no choice but to go through it. So he started down into the mud surrounding the raised areas of what looked like grass to him and watched for trip wires or plates. He walked softly and with his feet close to the ground so as to give him warning of a mine before he approached it. He kept walking at that pace and then bumped his foot against something. It made a "clink" noise. His heart leapt, and then he gathered his mind and looked down. There was the plate that he noticed as the ones used on mines lying right on top of the tip of his boot. It was a mine all right, but he knew if he disposed of it now, it would more than likely explode and alert the village nearby. So he propped the plate in the up position with a bit of a stick so it would be less likely to go off when he was in its vicinity. He stepped away softly and made sure not even remotely to disturb the mine. He then lay down in the jungle, realizing that there was no way he would make it anywhere in the night. He set down all his stuff and closed his eyes. When he woke up, he heard screaming. He looked out of the jungle into the rice patty, and next to that there were large bonfires going. The Vietnamese soldiers had reached that village and were now destroying it. The bonfires were really buildings whose roofs had caught on fire. He had to leave right now, or the soldiers would soon find him

He started running through the trail, and about 1 mile later he stopped to catch his breath.

"I swear . . . that I will never . . . kill another person . . . if I can just leave this . . . war . . . alive!"

He then heard the soldiers' voices coming up the trail behind him. He started to run again, but it just seemed the faster he went, the closer the soldiers got. About 100 meters up the trail he saw the base in the clearing. Just as he started to get to the clearing, his eye caught a glare of something shiny to his left, out of the trees. "SNIPER!" someone in the base shouted.

But it was too late. Sgt. Max Allan heard the bang and knew where the bullet was headed. He landed on the ground with a hard thud. He felt the bullet enter and then closed his eyes.

"At least I tried," he thought before he went unconscious. "At least I tried."

Times Don't Change

The occupants of the front hall knew that they were the least likely of all in the house to be replaced by technologically advanced newcomers. The decorations in there were mostly too sentimental to remove. The Clocks were among the most permanent members of the house. Therefore, Digit Clock always felt that his job was fairly secure.

Rain was trying to squeeze out of the clouds one morning when the Boss came home carrying an enormous box. A storm was passing through the area.



Katie Beardsley
Grade 9
Simsbury High
School
Simsbury

Everything became extremely quiet when he stepped through the doorway and flung a soggy hat and coat over one of Peggy the hat rack's pins. It was as though an alarm had gone off in everyone's ears (to which the Clocks had become immune) that made them aware of coming danger. All the appliances prayed that the new thing would not cause their unemployment. Grandfather Clock scolded Digit for teasing the vacuum cleaner, Hoover, in the hall closet that the box contained parts for the installation of a central vacuum system.

Relief spread across the house as the Boss and his wife excitedly put together the new member of the house, Mac, the computer. Everyone, including the Boss's wife, was elated at his purchase of such an original object. There was nothing in the house like Mac. They both praised all the things he could do and how simple he would make their lives.

Several moments passed before the Boss called his wife into the new computer room to look at all the features Mac boasted. From what Digit could hear from the front hall, Mac could do just about anything. He could play games with the Boss and his wife, store important documents, print out recipes from countries all over the world, remember telephone numbers and addresses, and play music. It was all too obvious that Mac would be replacing a lot of things that assumed they were safe. Digit really felt sorry for everyone else when he heard that it was only a matter of time before Mac could get new software that, with a click of a button, would perform any task imaginable.

On the way out of the new computer room and through the hall, the Boss's wife said to him while pointing to Digit, "Well, Honey, now that we can set an alarm and see the time on our new computer, we can get rid of that thing. It'll just collect dust now that it isn't useful." The Boss shook his head in agreement. Digit's job had suddenly become one of the many that Mac eliminated. He could hardly believe what he had heard. Neither the Boss nor his wife wanted or needed him. It was the worst feeling Digit had ever come to know in his short life.

"Did you hear that?" asked Hoover, digging Digit's wound a little deeper. "You aren't quite so state-of-the-art! You're useless! At least someone's finally come to this house to make the Boss and his wife realize that you're nothing but a dust collector."

"They just don't know what they're talking about!" he retorted. "They need me more than they know."

"We shall see. But one thing's for sure," Hoover added while twitching his bristles to make the point, "it doesn't look like Mac's ever gonna get dusty."

"That's quite enough!" boomed Grandfather Clock from the living room. He immediately stopped the argument between the two "Friends." Grandfather was older and wiser than any other object in the house. The advice he gave was always sound, and his words always soothed a person who was hurt. His body was meticulously carved with swirls, and his chimes seemed to sound more beautiful with each hour. Digit loved him deeply. "You can't get too worried about everything, Digit. There is a time in even the most worthless thing's life when it is useful. Sometimes people don't see the good qualities of another because their judgments are clouded by something shiny and new."



"During an emergency, though, the Boss probably won't want to boot up a computer," he said.

Unfortunately, Hoover's earlier words had gotten the best of Digit. He wanted to make sure that the Boss and his wife knew that a clock was more useful and reliable than a computer. He therefore directed his anger at Mac. The banging of the rain against the windows only added to his fury.

Mac was too concerned with the worsening storm outside to take notice of Digit climbing onto the computer desk. "Why did you have to do this to me?" shouted Digit at the preoccupied computer. "You shouldn't be doing my job!"

"I'm only doing what I'm expected to do," Mac answered.

"You're not willing to help me? Can't you shut off your clock?"

"That would be wrong. I'm supposed to perform to the best of my ability, and I'm not about to stop doing something just because it's inconvenient for you."

"I can do nothing to convince you that you don't need that extra responsibility? What happens if you lose track of minutes because you are performing too many tasks at once?"

"No work load is too heavy for me. Nothing stops me but electricity," Mac replied, unaffected by Digit's plea for help. Just then, lightning lit the sky and thunder shook the house. The power went out, and Mac's face disappeared from the screen.

The Boss and his wife immediately ran into the computer room. "Darnit!" he shouted as he hit the table upon which Mac sat. "I forgot to turn off the computer. The whole system will be ruined now!"

His wife rushed around the house grabbing batteries for flashlights and lighting candles so they could see in the dark. "Boy, am I glad," she said to her husband while waving a flashlight and pointing to Digit, "we didn't get rid of that little clock. I forgot that it's the only one in the house that's run by batteries."

They needed Digit. The Boss and his wife finally understood that new things do not always have all the answers to life's problems. Time does not stop for storms.

Nobody Cares

Miss Lydell was a good teacher. I mean, for where she was and what she had to do, she was good. She probably deserved better, actually. Hayes Middle School was no place for a good teacher. Nobody cared. Not everyone was stupid, and not everyone was rude, but nobody cared. Miss Lydell taught my English class one year. It was an aggressively typical English class: the curriculum, just like the curriculum for all the classes in a school that didn't care, was rudimentary at best. We read a couple books, a couple poems, a couple short stories. Nobody expected anything more.

It always seemed to me that Miss Lydell knew what she was doing but didn't

Rebecca Ellis
Grade 10
The Williams
School
New London



have the energy to love it any more. Classes like mine were probably what drained her of any joy she had once taken in teaching English. We were terribly apathetic, my class. If Miss Lydell asked one of us a question, we'd usually answer it, but no one ever volunteered. That, plus teaching the same stupid grammar lessons year after year. . . . It would be enough to dishearten anyone. Miss Lydell was overweight and prone to violent mood swings. She lived alone.

Once in a while my class would snap out of its stupor, and then we would get into a discussion. Surprisingly, we were capable of a real one, with people taking sides and getting pretty vicious about it. When that happened, Miss Lydell would usually just sit back and intervene if we got too out of hand. I think she liked to see us interested in something, even if it wasn't something that had to do with English class. It must have been sad for her to see us all sit there and waste away.

There was one discussion, though, that Miss Lydell *would* join in on. It was something we discussed more than once that year: our society's treatment of old people. For a normally docile woman, Miss Lydell could get very agitated, and she'd lecture us on the logic of assisted suicide and the inanity of the unspoken American doctrine Live Long At All Costs. That would always put a rather abrupt end to the discussion.

One time, Miss Lydell left for a few days. Naturally, nobody cared. Even I didn't think much of it. But when she came back . . . I had always sensed a sort of elusive sadness about Miss Lydell, something fleeting that I couldn't quite put my finger on. But when she came back it was hanging around her, a depressed and pathetic aura that I could almost reach out and touch. She scowled more, she smiled less, and when nobody in my class would talk, she just gave up and let us sit in silence for minutes at a time. Her gait had never been what one might call sprightly, but after those few days she was gone, her body seemed to drag, like the laws of physics slowed down just for her.

During that week she returned, we got onto the topic of aging again in class. The expression on Miss Lydell's face would have shocked anyone into silence as she railed about the humiliation of getting old, of being thrust into a nursing home filled with minimum-wage employees who were content to stick you in a wheelchair and leave you drooling helplessly in the hallway outside your antiseptic, underfurnished room. She left class before the period was over. Everyone else was glad for the free time. I was worried.

I knew from overhearing a conversation Miss Lydell had had with my math teacher that her mother was very sick. I also knew, from brief mentions in class, that she had a sister, niece, and nephew. As I thought about Miss Lydell more and more, a scenario began to form in my head:

Spoiled children, like some that I knew, crowding around their mother and whining, "Mom, why do we have to go see Grandma? C'mon, we hate that place, and she can't even remember our names anymore! Mom, please, can we just not go this once? Yeah, we know that's what we said last time, BUT MOM—" And finally their mother can't take the whining any more, so she snaps.

She calls her sister on the phone. "Elaine, do you think you could go visit



Mother this weekend? Yes, I know I asked you last weekend, but you know how the kids are. . . . I can't help it, Elaine. I just can't control them. And you know how I hate going to see her all by myself. . . . Yes, I realize that, but you're—no, no, never mind what I was going to say. No, it's just not important. Elaine, please, I promise I'll make it up this time. . . . Oh, thank you so much."

Miss Lydell, alone, sitting by and watching while her mother wastes away and doesn't have enough mental capacity left to know that it's happening. The place smells; it reeks of cleansers and morphine and death. The lights are harsh, cold, casting no shadows. Every once in a while comes the sound of a babble or a shriek from down the hall. Sometimes they'll wheel the shriekers past the door, strapped down in a standard-issue wheelchair. No one knows what they're screaming about. No one knows what monster is in their heads that makes them try to break the bonds that tether them to the chairs. Miss Lydell can't tell what's in her mother's head as she lies there staring blankly at the ceiling. Monitors beep. The man across the hall sobs for his long-dead wife. The sun goes down, and it's time to go home, at least for the people who still have one.

I tried to erase the picture from my mind. After all, it was terribly pretentious: what did I know about my English teacher's family dynamics? I couldn't presume to imagine her life as melodrama. But I never could shake the feeling the Miss Lydell wasn't really happy.

Once, in the part of class between when she stopped trying to teach and when the bell rang, Miss Lydell was talking to me. She was my big supporter; she really believed that I could make something of myself. That day she was saying that she expected a novel out of me by the end of the year. Miss Lydell smiled—an ironic half-smile, the only kind she seemed to be capable of—and asked me to please write her thin.

Make-Believe

Come play with me.
The world outside entreats us,
tempting, enticing,
with promises of sweet, delicious air.
"Come explore."

Who do you want to be today?

Anyone.

Olympic athlete?
Poised, muscles tense,
at the starting line,
ready to explode
at the sound of the gun.

Sarah Brown
Grade 10
East Hampton
High School
E. Hampton



Cowboy?
Untouchable transient of the
untamed west,
traveling the dusty roads,
on a quest to reach the setting sun.

Astronaut?
The earth a tiny sphere,
nothing more than a
misty dream
over the horizon of the moon.

The backyard
a portal to anywhere,
free from the
limitations of your world.
Just believe.

Don't tell me it's just a game.
Don't tell me life doesn't work that way.
Don't tell me about broken dreams.

I won't believe you anyway.

Richard Bradley
Grade 10
Canton Junior/
Senior High
School
Collinsville

Noise

The cemetery across the street stares at me through the slightly transparent windowpane; I am too preoccupied to notice. I watch my mother struggle to remain calm as she mashes a banana in a measuring cup.

"You have to give me the address of the woman who made me that wonderful blanket so I can write to her, dear," says the sickly voice of my wrinkled grandmother.

"Yes, Mom. I don't have it with me right now. I'll give it to you over the phone when I get back home."

"Hear this? This is the greatest boogie pianist ever, black or white." My grandfather taps his foot enthusiastically, seeming unnervingly distant all the while.

"Here, Mom, pour this into the batter, okay?"

"Sure dear."

My mother turns to check the oven.

"Should I pour in this water, dear?"

"Yes, Mom—it's vegetable oil."

My grandmother's shaking hand slowly spills the liquid into the bowl



containing the dough.

"Ain't nobody here but us chickens," my grandfather sings to the crackly old cassette playing in the dining room. "I used to love this stuff when I was growing up . . ."

The music creates a sick irony as it meets the glare of the lurking cemetery. "What kind of instrument is that?" my mother asks.

"Beth brought us cookies, Ed." My grandmother smiles.

"Isn't that a muted trumpet?" I say, speaking for the first time in nearly an hour.

"Yep, he got it," chuckles my grandfather, who begins singing again.

"Ed, we're making banana bread."

"I don't care what you're making, Grace," my grandfather responds, irritated, but half joking.

"Fine!" My grandmother is suddenly defensive.

"Okay, Mom, now we have to pour the dough into the pan."

"I pour it into this?"

"Yes."

Most of the dough fills the mold of the bread pan as it is supposed to, with a few small blobs clinging to the side. My grandmother picks up the blobs with her index finger and attempts futilely to make them join the rest of the batter.

"This song is about a bunch of black guys stealing chickens, and the farmer hears them so he bangs on the coop, and they just shout, 'ain't nobody here but us chickens!'"

"Dear lord!" exclaims my mother, not entirely at the racism of the old song.

"Do you want a cookie, Ed? Beth brought us cookies . . ."

My grandfather sighs. "No, Grace, not right now."

"Dad, how long does it take for the oven to heat up?"

I notice a sort of pea green aura about the room, like the smell of that ugly pillow that's been around your house since before you were born.

"Heat what up?"

"The oven. I preset it, but is it warmed up yet?"

"Oh, sure, it's warmed up if you turned it on."

There is a creaking sound as my mother opens the oven and slides the bread pan inside.

"Bethie, you have to give me the address of the woman who made me that wonderful blanket so I can send her a card."

"I know, Mom. I'll call with the address as soon as I get home."

My grandmother looks over to me. "You're such a handsome boy, Richard, and I don't mean to embarrass you, but I'm your grandmother, so I can say these things objectively."

"Thanks," I respond emotionlessly, trying to smile as I always do when she compliments me. I intentionally avoid the eyes of my mother, which I know are waiting to look at me for some sign of sanity in this old, dusty house. Although I cannot explain why, I know seeing that look in my mother's eyes is the last thing I want right now.



I peek out the window, and the cemetery appears to be even closer than it was before. I turn away, dismissing this as an optical illusion, or a trick of the mind.

"That bread smells good, doesn't it?" says my grandfather.

The music ends, and all that is left is the white noise of blank tape.

Elizabeth Ayn
Moe
Grade 10
Joel Barlow
High School
West Redding

Carvings

I carve myself from
The layers of voices
Sounds stretching
In flame and in water
Running fearlessly along
Your sheets of perfect ice

I paint myself in
Thick mud blankets
And stand in the shower
Days slipping (Rinse thoroughly)
Feet shifting (Repeat)
Water stripping boredom
To reveal drama? (Scrubbed raw)
Water peeling skin
And warming the wounds
That you conveniently cut
Somewhere between
Soap
Blood
And tears

Caitlin Schneider
Grade 11
Berlin High
School
Berlin

New London Ledge Lighthouse

September 28, 1999, 2:48 AM

Serene . . .
thousands of firefly lights
across the Sound
illuminate the sky . . .
the Moon has vanished



but a handful of minute
Stars glisten above like a sprinkling of
Diamonds on a drape of
Black Velvet Sky and
spiderweb Clouds . . .
below, the Waves
slosh gently against the
catwalk and rocks,
rippling
shimmering
with the Lights of the
Harbor, where faint
outlines of boats stand
like lonely captain's Wives:
watching
wishing
waiting . . .
Placid night air and
sea Breeze
surprisingly warm for
early autumn
brush gently over the Dreams
of those who soundly Sleep . . .
sister lighthouse to the West
Solemnly blinks a stoic
Warning to the ships that
would otherwise drift
Perilously close to shore . . .
in the Air the
Silent Music of Tranquillity:
Heavenly
Beautiful
Serene.

Permit Me to Tell You . . .

*Permit me to tell you about tension,
The rope inside me that's been fraying for quite sometime.
The fire that's been smoldering, overlooked, unnoticed.
Everything's by the book, Everything's recorded.
Nothing is unplanned, yet nothing is planned.
You have to do well.
You will get a scholarship.*

Janette
Polaski
Grade 11
Enrico Fermi
High School
Enfield



*You must be the best,
Or so I'm told—though they say they don't care.
That I don't have to be
beautiful.
That I don't have to be
perfect.
That I don't have to be
them.*

*That is, as long as I do my best all the time.
But I need to make the honor roll.
I need to be the leader.
I need to be well liked.
I must cover up problems and be happy,
Or do I? Can I break away from these pressures?
They say so.
But then the world doesn't put up with idleness.
I'm trying to cut through, but I can't.
I can't do more than merely crack the wall about me,
But the light is right here next to me if I could just . . . reach the switch.*

Dierdre
Dougherty
Grade 11
Newtown High
School
Newtown

Friend

I'm your other friend.
The one you call when your mother gives you
self-help books for Christmas.

The one who counted down,
Forty days with you
Until your boyfriend came home from college.
Must be biblical.

Like our musings about organized religion.
“No God” you, the atheist, says “stop trying to recruit.”
I muster up sweet and hollow words while thinking:
Don't you know I'm agnostic?
Again we are met with the half truth
that comes with civility.

I skipped class for fear of your contempt.
Your murderous glances, your secret notes,
eyes that can bore through me like vectors of
your whim.



I'm the girl who stole the family car for you
Our need saw it sitting on the prickly-hot gravel and we drove away
listening to music by sad women with big hair,
screeching like banshees.

I'm the girl who is lonely in the solitude of
your indifferent aftermath.

Leaky Faucet

The cool sheets feel good. I am very tired and looking forward to some rest. I settle in and close my eyes.

Plunk . . . plunk . . . plunk

What was that?

Plunk . . . plunk . . . plunk

I realize it must be the sink. Maybe I did not turn it off all the way. I'll ignore it.

Plunk . . . plunk . . . plunk

I can't ignore it. I guess I'll have to get up and turn it off. I peel myself out from under the covers and turn on a light, nearly blinding myself. I walk, half asleep, to the bathroom. My eyes scan the room. Ah. The culprit. I grab both knobs and turn them until the water stops completely. Silence.

Back in my room, I settle in again, close my eyes, and think while waiting for sleep to overtake me. A new theory on the formation of the universe pops into my mind. It goes something like this: a black hole, centrally located, sucks up a certain amount of matter into a tight ball. This ball passes through the black hole and out the other side. On the other side, it slips out in the shape of a rain drop. This drop "lands" somewhere in the infinite basin of space and disperses in a big bang like explosion. Thousands upon trillions of stars and galaxies are created from this mass, and they spread out, forming life in a billion different forms, before sliding back into the big black hole at the center of the universe.

A thought occurs to me. A connection is made.

I rise again from my bed, this time a little more quickly and with more purpose. I walk back into the bathroom, plug the drain in the sink, and turn the water on ever so slightly. Now one drop falls every few minutes.

Plunk . . . plunk . . . plunk

For the third time that night, I enter bed. This time, before closing my eyes, I draw my curtain open and look up into the night sky. I see thousands upon trillions of stars and galaxies. I imagine a billion different forms of life.

Plunk . . . plunk . . . plunk

In the dark, I smile and drift off to sleep, comforted by the sound of a drip-

**David
Malaspina**
Grade 11
Southington
High School
Southington



ping sink. My last recollection is the sound of drips striking the basin and a thought.

Plunk . . . plunk . . . plunk . . . We aren't alone . . .

Lauren
Suchman
Grade 11
Conard High
School
West Hartford

Good-bye

There is a Coke stain
On the mint-green carpet of the
Guest bedroom, where my father's cup
Succumbed to gravity
Before he left.
That night, my mother
Forced a scrub brush
Rhythmically
Back and forth across it.
She scrubbed until her
Muscles stretched to an extreme and
Threatened to snap from the bone;
Until a bluish hue tinged her hands.
Salt water dripped off her face
And separated on the carpet,
Creating rivers among the
Pure rug fibers and molasses-brown
Color.

The baby-yellow crib
Stood against circus stripes
Papering the opposite wall;
A testament to the permanence
Of a stain.
So, she worked until the coarse
Fibers of the scrub brush
Loosened and became
Beige specks against
The midnight mark.
She worked until she had
Exhausted her supply of soap, of bleach,
Of everything.

In the morning,
My mother was still there,
In the wicker rocking chair.
She sat on the dejected cushion
As if she had been there for 20 years,



Holding tightly to my nightgown,
So that it strained against my rosy skin,
While a music box mechanically plinked
“Send in the Clowns” in the background.

Everyone said the stain would go away,
But even after nine years, it was still there
When we loaded the crib into
The yellow Ryder truck
And drove away.

Ollie-ollie-ox-in-free

I'll tell you what I want in life, and I try, and I'll tell you it in a hushed voice in the back of a black Toyota Corolla hatchback that my mother used to drive me to school in when I was in second grade; I'll be wearing a Boston Red Sox T-shirt and you can be the girl in the Lincoln ahead of us that I went to kindergarten with. Then one day my mother won't be at the house this morning as she is usually, and you'll be looking through the window and you'll see a little boy in glasses sitting on an orange couch . . .

. . . and I was a little boy, I'm less a little boy each day because I was sitting on the couch, I'm sitting thinking (perhaps) about what my mother packed me for lunch, contemplating the nuclear fate of universe, trying orange *couches*,

orange pull-out couches that now reside in my basement, that I think of whenever I contemplate the nuclear fate of the universe

. . . and I get to be alone again, I wait for my mother and I am continually seeing things out of the corner of my eyes . . .

I had a seizure then, my body shook and it did so inside, and I could not talk, the only time in my life when they would have me say absolutely nothing, but listen to me now I had the best things, I would have said the most marvelous things, you wouldn't even have *believed*, but I was unable to speak . . .

. . . and I try . . .

and someday I'll get there, they tell me, maybe I'll get back there I think, I'll be back in that silence, my 100 Years of Solitude in just minutes, and I remember that I was hot that night, in winter (I had school) I remember I was hot, positively broiling, wholeheartedly on fire learning hot being hot and they said later, “It

Alexander M.
Carnevale
Grade 11
The Williams
School
New London



wasn't the heat," and I believe them when they say it because they are so *convincing*.

I could feel the saliva on my chin, I went to raise my hand to wipe it off but my body was static, it was the worst kind of electricity, it barely existed. Realizing what can only be called the superbness, the insult, the anger. The saliva and the anger and the insult. I tell you and I try . . .

Later they took me to the hospital, where tests occurred upon my head for once, where I was tested for what mattered and can I ever be serious about a test again . . . no . . .

It didn't seem to take a long time before I was visiting Harvard and purchasing books of poetry for lady friends and in that way the rest of my life is seamlessly connected . . . my talking life to the minutes when I could not speak at all. I could not remember afterwards . . . I can picture myself sitting on the orange couch but it is nothing but pure fantasy, "a dream deferred," said Langston Hughes but he was sitting on a different couch and it wasn't orange, and I tell you, I'm saying that I was alone, I was isolated, and I know what those words mean, I have defined them for the rest of my life . . . I was smart, my brain waves were nice but there was a disturbance, there were facts that proved to me what I was in that moment . . . the worst moment, the non-speaking moment, the history. I have these feelings . . . once a teacher I had (he was a bear of a man named Bo) he said to me that yes, You Must Write What You Know. But—you do not have to have experienced something, you need only know the feeling . . . the example is that you might not have ever been an astronaut, but you can write about it if you've ever felt empty solitude . . . oddly enough, I have nothing to say about astronauts. I am not fascinated by space, by that, ever since those seconds passed . . . I always liked dinosaurs. Do you know what I mean?

. . . next there was sleep deprivation, I waited on a cheap carpet in my living room that looked out on a place owned by people who lived in Denmark, a cheap carpet in a faraway place up the street. They said that I had to get very little sleep; they told my mother she could take me to see a movie, that would be for the best . . .

My mother took me to see *The Rocketeer* and so I did that, I was tired the whole time, wearing glasses too heavy for my face, then going to bed only to wake up in that hospital, in a sea of my betters, I'd been better. They put a cap on my head and turned a machine on and that really *was* the time when I tried, but I don't remember anything else, it goes away like car leather. What I mean is that every time they play *The Rocketeer* on television, I get the ole Shudder Up The Spine; I can feel on my skin the texture of car leather, that texture which I forget every time I leave a car and every time I enter it, that feel then is the singular feeling of the machine they attached to me in that hospital and I hope and I pray that I will not forget it.



... and then apparently to get me back to that orange couch they placed me in the heart of a machine, and I wasn't allowed to move in the machine, I was allowed to listen to music . . . what did I listen to . . . it was television theme songs . . . it was cartoon theme songs. *The Jetsons* theme. Or perhaps it was not that at all.

Then later my vision began to speak in the low tone it uses when it wants me to listen . . . it was, what it was was white, it was the coldest white you have never seen and that's the upside of everything, right, I know the color white.

The machines run together in my mind, they make me feel like I feel now, like I felt then, like I feel when I am packaged and sent to your local distributor and then when I sat in an MRI, I had an EKG or *some* kind of acronym, and the worst part was always the acronym.

In my memory these events occur at the same time, the orange couch, okay, yes, and then I was running down a hill at top speed, and I think it is kind of contemptible to run down a hill because it makes you look like you're fast when you are solely a slow Jewish boy. But I'm (what?) in first grade, I'm trying to impress them Chelsea Banas I remember Sue Hainline, I was trying and I run down the hill and they were watching and they must have been little *girls* even, they must have been . . . and I try . . . and I tripped, as no one would do, as I would do, I scarred my face, and those girls looked on and I remember the orange couch on that Tuesday morning and I can only say that had I spoken a word then I would not have tripped down the hill, and then I realize that I cannot remember the order of events, it is more like I tripped first, and I think that one event causes another no matter the place and I sit on the orange couch that ponged of the nation of Denmark that lived across the street from me and the noise is deafening.

Had I known it at the time, I would have said, yes, marriages can last forever, the people I want to love me will, I'll get what I deserve and then some things I don't; it was a white on that MRI machine that makes you believe in something, at least for as long as you can stand to, believe me it makes you want to cuddle up on some old orange couch that sits in your basement, play the stereo low and have seizure after seizure, a range of them, a veritable cascade, and you can learn what those words mean when you grow older, I'll be glad to tell them to you, I may be distracted, because there is that white out of the corner of my eyes, piercing through the orange, calling everyone's bluff, telling me I'm a little boy; making me a man.

. . . and I'm trying for the last and first time; *that* time.

I will never be able to tell you what I wanted to say, we get a sense of, we make do with, we find out, we come to conclusions, of whites and orange couches, and then of people and their lives and the way they live them badly, and the way they



Kira Austin
Grade 12
Central Magnet
School
Bridgeport

cry when one of them ends and some of them begin, and then the way it makes them afraid, the way it tells them what it's all about in that indirect way, orange couch, yes that's right, and we keep on searching.

The 8 Ball

Nathan sat cross-legged in the grass, and the S. O. S. Band's "Take Your Time" played on the radio. At the far end of the yard, where the other kids were playing, the sound of the record player blaring late 70's and 80's music faded, and the fast-paced Spanish salsa from the neighbor's house picked up.

Not that Nathan minded the Latin music. He enjoyed hearing it when he went over there to play. It was just that the Temptations and Teddy Pendergrass sounded more home.

Nathan sat with his plate in his lap trying to finish a chicken wing and an ear of corn. His daddy had told him he could have a desert for every meal he ate. Having already conquered two plates to get pieces of coconut cake and apple pie, he was working toward a hunk of watermelon.

"Nate!!" his father called. He picked up his plate so bugs wouldn't get in it and carried it to the grill where his dad was brushing barbecue sauce over the ribs.

"Yes, Daddy?" he said.

"What is that? Your third plate?" Nathan nodded. "What you try'na get?"

"Watermelon," Nate answered, squinting as a breeze blew smoke into his face.

"Gimme that plate before you get sick," his father said. "Go get a piece of watermelon."

"Thanks, Daddy!" he said, dropping his plate on a chair. He ran to the table where his uncle was slicing the watermelon. Nathan stared at the thick wedges, red as cherry Kool-Aid and probably just as sweet. Nathan chose the biggest piece and was biting into it before he left the table.

"You know, if you swallow a seed, a watermelon'll grow in your stomach," his uncle told him, lisping every "s" word through the gap between his front teeth.

"Nuh-uh," Nathan said.

"Yes," his uncle said.

"But Jordan swallowed a seed yesterday, and nothing happened to him."

"Who you gonna believe? Your favorite uncle or a cousin who wets his bed?"

"You, I guess," Nate answered.

"That's right. Now go eat your watermelon. And don't swallow no seeds. I'm not breakin' up the cookout to rush you to the hospital when the watermelon starts growing and your stomach swells."

Nathan took his watermelon and left the table not at all convinced a seed could grow in his stomach. He decided to get second opinions from his cousins. He walked across the yard taking small bites from his watermelon and carefully



avoiding seeds . . . just in case.

"Hey!" Nathan shouted. "Uncle Terrence said if you eat a seed, a watermelon 'll grow in your stomach."

"No way," most of the cousins said. A few of them agreed with Terrence, though. Their moms had told them that, too.

"But you know how grown-ups are," Cassius said. He was almost eleven. "Always tryin' to trick kids."

Everyone nodded agreement and glanced across the yard to where the grown-ups were dancing and singing along to SugarHill Gang's "Rapper's Delight."

"You know what we gotta do," Cassius said.

"Ask the 8 Ball," they answered. "The 8 Ball never lies."

They ran back to the picnic area, and none of the adults remarked upon it. They were too busy reliving the eighties when they were a size 5/6 and still had full heads of hair.

"To the beat, beat is so unique/C'mon everybody let's dance to the beat," Nathan's father sang loudly. He called for his sister's new husband, Derrick, to join in.

"Have you ever went over a friend's house to eat and the food was just no good," Sheryl's husband sang just as loudly as Nathan's Dad. "I said the macaroni's sour, the peas all mashed, and the chicken tastes like wood/You try to—uh—you try and—um—" Derrick stuttered and brought the picnic to a screeching halt.

Nathan snickered as he made a break for the house. Derrick was in for it now. Even Little Petey knew the words to "Rapper's Delight."

"He doesn't know the words!!" Nathan's father shouted.

"Well," Sheryl said. "I never would have married him if I knew that."

Everyone laughed, and the picnic jumped back into full swing. No one noticed the youngsters were gone.

They ran through the kitchen and into the living room where the magnificent Magic 8 Ball sat on a speaker covered in dust. Nathan reached out to pick up the ball, but Cassius stopped him.

"I think someone should eat a seed first."

"Why?" Nathan asked.

"To tempt fate," Cassius said, and since none of the other kids knew what fate was, they didn't question why it needed to be tempted.

"Well, I'm not doing it," Nathan said.

"Why not? It's your watermelon."

Nathan shook his head, and Cassius accepted the unspoken reason that Nate was not the youngest and so had some torment protection.

"Give it to Johnathan," Nate suggested. "He'll eat anything." He was also the youngest cousin—still running around in a diaper and T-shirt. Nathan took a white seed from his watermelon and told Johnathan to swallow it. The younger boy obeyed.

"Okay," Nathan said. "Ask the 8 Ball."



Cassius picked up the ball, closed his eyes and asked:

"If you swallow a watermelon seed, will a watermelon grow in your stomach?" He shook the ball up and turned it over.

"What does it say?" the younger children asked.

"Yes ... definitely," Cassius read.

"Oh no!!" Nathan screamed. "Johnathan's gonna die!"

All the children screamed, including Johnathan who was too young to know what was going on. They ran from the house—a wild stampede—and stormed the back yard.

"Johnathan's gonna die!! He ate a watermelon seed, and it's gonna grow in his stomach and explode!!" Nathan shouted.

"Whoa!" Uncle Terrence said in a loud, booming voice. The children stopped abruptly, and Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean" blared from the radio, filling the silence awkwardly. "Calm down and answer this question." Nathan nodded. "What color was the seed?" Uncle Terrence asked. Nathan stopped to think for a second.

"It was white," he finally answered.

"Oh," Terrence said with a wave of his hand. "Those won't hurt you."

"So Jonathan won't die?"

"No. Go play."

The adults laughed delightedly as Nathan and the other kids walked sheepishly back to the Salsa-Merengue side of the yard.

"Do you believe him?" Nathan asked, taking a bite of his watermelon slice—careful of both black and white seeds. Cassius shrugged, indifferent.

"Hey, Johnathan," Nathan said. "Come and try this black seed."

Kimberly Dicso
Grade 12

Frank Scott
Bunnell High
School
Stratford

Lost America

I walked beside the newest crop of domesticated rebels squirming in guilt-provoked fits, running from the pesky itch of dying consciences,

who scrounged through boxes of hope at trailer park tag sales at the crack of dawn on dewy ripe melon mornings,

who thought heartache was relative,

who sang deceitful lullabies to ten-year-old teddy bears stuffed in jail cell toy boxes—fur to die for,

who supported drunken parent children and never complained until it was no use,

who stood on their heads to see things properly,

who walked blindly past acquaintances who were once friends and those friends who were once acquaintances but somehow changed or became like the rest, acceptable by secret yet understood terms,

who stabbed friend after friend in the back with the same knife before washing it first,



who believed Hitler was Satan, but who didn't believe in God,
who played hide and seek behind eyelashes,
who dreamt impossible candy corn dreams for the sake of dreaming them
without wondering why,
 who swayed back and forth to the drunken ska beats of lost memories,
 who sliced their own skin with broken glass and marveled at magic stop
sign red but refused to eat animals or neuter their dogs,
 who filed into cold alter jukebox sanitariums in upstate New York,
 who jaywalked on dead ends ringing doorbells just for kicks,
 who summoned the wrath of the safety-wire razor peach-fuzz antichrist
 who tossed and turned on uneven platter mattresses with the entire world
revolving around a protective headboard—softly sleeping, sleeping, sleeping,
 who wove in and out of traffic on rainy days fighting frantic windshield
wipers to avoid steelwreck accidents tragic with burning rubber tire tracks and
mocking streetlights unmoving in their verdicts, reflecting shattered glass dreams
off glistening pavement with laughing wet lines,
 who walked over danger yellow lines, wanting to be blind raccoons on
December night freeways,
 who sang at the top of their lungs to no one in particular,
 who sang oldies from 1984,
 who counted by twos and threes and tens, and never closed in on infinity,
 who tried to explain the meaning of pi,
 who clung to the memory of cotton sheet Kleenex against an abandoned
fireplace, where a mother, father, and two perfect children should have shared
stories of school and promotions,
 who tried to clean up the tempest wreckage of their lives with an old
Hoover,
 who were slobs,
 who bashed racists and homosexuals,
 who were racists and homosexuals,
 who lied because it was better than who they were, who they are,
 who do-si-do-ed through stoplights and skipped to the mocking rhythm of
windshield wipers and squeegees in invisible carwashes,
 who wanted to legalize pot in all its destructive glory because it healed
their pain on dark nights when they were never good enough for closet drunkard
office bosses,
 who wanted a really good high—a really, really, good high—knock 'em
dead,
 who proclaimed the great truths of life from couch cushions reeking of
stale Cheetos; revelations about half-time scores and new toothpastes—whitening
power for everyone,
 who turned their backs on the American dream selling hotdogs on New
York City street corners in sub zero temperatures and yet smiling all the same,
 who slept with their eyes open leaning against brick wall drugstore mat-



tresses or on pine benches across the street,
 who bent over backwards to kiss their own asses, who spoiled themselves
with rich-boy shopping sprees and begged for lunch
 who sniffled in kamikaze sorrow rain showers, watching umbrellas swal-
low drowning idealists—suckers,
 who hated those who slept because they couldn't,
 who were eaten alive by the hypnotic magicians behind the polls in No-
vember snowstorms; Houdini for President,
 who sold their souls for nice sweaters,
 who shoplifted and wondered why the world hated them, why the world
hates them, why the world cringes at the sight of a well-dressed packaged smile
with no wallet,
 who robbed their own parents while talking to strangers,
 who snuck into bars, seedy joints under dying streetlights where they
would order too many drinks so they could ramble on about the things they were
ashamed of,
 who stripped down to their underwear but never bared their souls,
 who cried because it was something new,
 who left candy in their pockets and change in between car seats and tried
desperately to throw George Washington a red lifesaver,
 who thought God hated them,
 who thought God didn't exist,
 who didn't know the difference,
 who had three-year-olds with no fathers, and at fourteen already gave their
toddlers birthday gift-wrapped packages to do better than they did,
 who, in their perverse recklessness, in their mass intellectual suicides, in
all their nonsensical wandering for some misunderstood yet perfect cause, just
wanted to be loved.

Adrian Kudler
Grade 12
Hall High School
West Hartford

Untitled (On Heat and Saturday Nights)

Jackie and I are at the diner tonight.
She is drinking coffee, but I've gone off the stuff.
It gives me headaches.

The topic tonight is mating
and Jackie points out the human obsession with quality;
bugs and everybody else are happy with quantity.
I ask, why is human mating so competitive?
Because everyone wants to have superior children.
And why do we want superior children?
We're working toward something as a race.
What are we working toward?



I guess we're working toward an advanced society, in terms of technology.
What's the point of that? Who cares? What does it matter?
The universe doesn't care.

Jackie admits I'm right
and the universe keeps on going and expanding
and there is no one else we know in the diner tonight
and Mr. Hoyt, our physics teacher, says that
heat will eventually destroy everything.

Heat is conserved, it never goes away, it never stops
and it starts right here in the movement of Jackie opening a creamer
and it moves through the smoking section and out the door and through the
parking lot
and pretty soon it'll be out there at the ends of the universe,
riding that frontier like a cowboy.

Just about the time that it should be reaching the Dog Star,
the waitress comes by and pours another cup for Jackie
and we both lean over and blow,
trying to cool things down.

Poem for a Birthday

for Sylvia Plath

You wrote one of those once,
one "Poem for a Birthday."
I found it deep in the middle
of your anthology, glistening
in seven neatly segmented pieces.
I never did read past the third;
your seemingly-psychotic thought pattern
drowned me immediately
in words laid thickly on the page.
I began to skim the surface for
empty spaces,
studying the shapes of letters,
drinking the whiteness between verses
Roman Numeral I and II and so on
for pages until an even deeper ocean
of blank paper

Emily Bright
Grade 12
Rockville High
School
Rockville

signified the start of a new work.
I felt as if I were staring
at the Great Wall of China
and trying,
through some generalized experience,
to discern its greatness
from a four-by-four segment.
I set your poem down for later reading,
later,
after I'd gleaned from your
wealth of poems an inkling
of your thinking and style
and could return with tools to explore
the immensity of your artistic mind.



Keenan O'Connor
Amelia Parenteau
Catherine Poirier
Caroline Psutka
Matt Raible
Meaghan Ray-O'Reilly
Samy Sabh
Casey Sartor
Lauren Schwartzman
Erin Siegal
Katherine E. Steir
Rebecca Straus
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Lindsay Sylvester
Bartley Tablante
Kelly Ward
Kadeesha Ware
Evan Woodford
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North Stonington Elementary School
Eastford Elementary School
Granby Memorial Middle School
Latimer Lane School
Hall Memorial School
Cider Mill School
Deans Mill School
Canton Intermediate School
RHAM High School
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Natchaug School
Cider Mill School
Conard High School
Simsbury High School
The Williams School
Natchaug School
Daisy Ingraham School
Academy Elementary School



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| | |
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| Diana Boorjian | Southington High School |
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| Marilyn Burgeson | Hall School |
| Martha Butler | The Williams School |
| Florence Caillard | Mount Hope Montessori School |
| Joseph Calise | Berlin High School |
| Diane Cerreto | Natchaug School |
| Joanne Chesnes | Buttonball Lane School |
| Jason Courtmanche | RHAM High School |
| Stacey Daly | Jeffrey Elementary School |
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| Cynthia Field | Timothy Edwards Middle School |
| Sandra Geres | Rockville High School |
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| Sheila Marini | Booth Hill School |
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Conard High School
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Tootin' Hills School
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Simsbury High School
Daisy Ingraham School
Forbes School
R. J. Vance Elementary School
East Hampton High School
Mary T. Murphy School
John Winthrop Junior High School
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Memorial Elementary School
Windham Middle School
Killingly Central School
The Williams School

