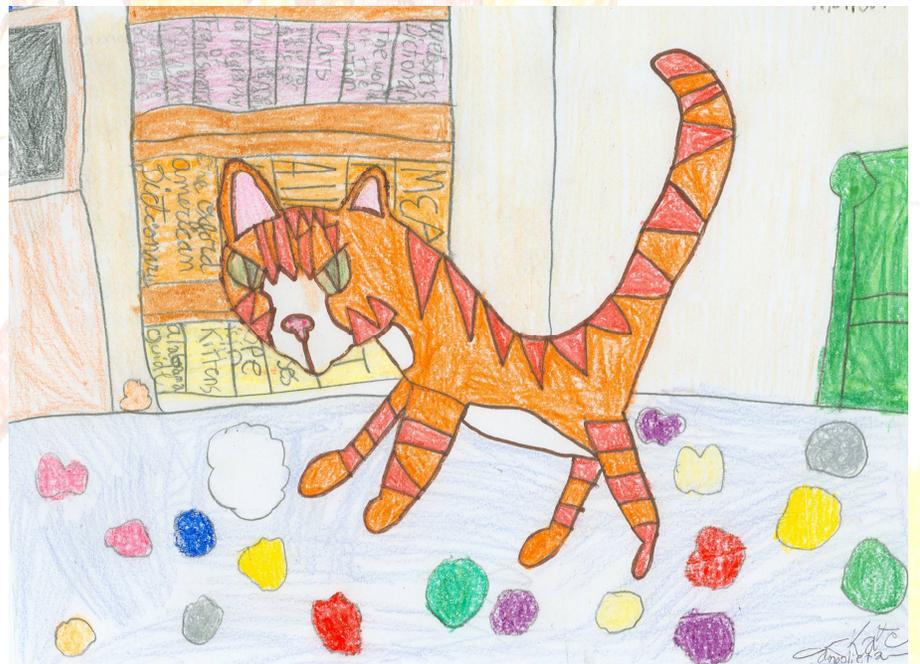


# Connecticut Student Writers



Katharine Campolieta, Grade 4  
Squadron Line Elementary School, Simsbury

Volume XX

May, 2008



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# Connecticut Student Writers

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the Connecticut Writing Project at Storrs.



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# **FOREWORD**

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of *Connecticut Student Writers*. It seems hard to believe, but those high school students who were published in the initial issues of the magazine are now in their thirties. They may have children of their own, children who love to write, children who are now submitting their own writings to the CWP for publication. It's not an unfeasible assumption, for this year the Connecticut Writing Project received over 1,200 submissions from across the state. Despite the changes of the last twenty years and the ensuing hurry-up pace of our world, children still love to write; they want their voices to be heard, their stories to be told.

The Connecticut Writing Project congratulates the young writers whose works were selected to be published in the twentieth volume of *Connecticut Student Writers*. We also would like to thank the writers' parents and teachers, for without their instilling a love and appreciation of writing in their children and students every day, the magazine could not have reached this milestone.

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# Connecticut Student Writers

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## Sparkles

I like sparkles.  
I like them on my shirt.  
I like them on my shoes.  
I like sparkles.

## Dancing Lessons

I take jazz square.  
I wear my dance clothes from home.  
I wear a red Chinese costume.  
My teacher is Miss Ann-Marie  
My dance clothes are in style.  
We start up the music,  
and we start to dance!  
I feel good dancing.

## My Kitten

I like my kitten.  
My kitten is pretty.  
My kitten plays with her ball every day.  
My kitten is fun.

## Rainbow That Couldn't Get Out

Rain going very, very fast  
Blue sky  
Trying ...  
Sun came out  
Rainbow colors trying to get out  
But the Sun dried them up!

**Micayla  
Malchiodi**  
Kindergarten  
Daisy Ingraham  
Elementary  
School  
Westbrook

**Andrea  
Marroquin**  
Kindergarten  
North Street  
School  
Windsor Locks

**Juliana  
Fabrizi**  
Kindergarten  
Daisy Ingraham  
Elementary  
School  
Westbrook

**Graciela  
Bourquin**  
Kindergarten  
Annie Vinton  
School  
Mansfield

**Allison  
Raynor**  
Kindergarten  
Annie  
Vinton  
School  
Mansfield

**Jozlyn  
Nowak**  
Kindergarten  
Annie  
Vinton  
School  
Mansfield

**Lacey  
Heim**  
Grade 1  
North Street  
School  
Windsor Locks

## **My Mermaid**

Purple skirt, sparkily  
Purple comb in your fin  
Purple and blue long hair  
Living in the ocean

## **Flower**

Seven petals  
A lot of petals  
Orange  
Yellow  
Round like a shape  
Growing in my backyard.

## **How to Make Apple Pie**

How to make an apple pie:

You will need

1. pie dish
2. apples
3. flour
4. cinnamon
5. put it in oven

Measure flour. Add butter and water to make a pie crust.

Peel and cut up apples. Put cinnamon on them.

First you go to the store. Next we get some apples. Then you go home.

Last we bake the pie. It was delicious when we ate it.

Yum yum, eat the pie. That's how you bake apple pie. Yum yum, tasty pie.  
Put ice cream on it, even tastier.

## When I Woke Up This Morning

When I woke up this morning, there was a foot of snow. School was cancelled! I ran downstairs and ate breakfast. I had a big bowl of Honey Nut Cheerios. I also had oatmeal. After that I went upstairs to get dressed and got ready for the day. After that I put on my pink Red Sox mittens. I put on my big black snow-pants. Then I went outside to make a big fat snowman. Next I went sledding. Right when I was about to go down my big hill, my little sister came out. I asked her, "Do you want to come down the big hill too?" "Yes!" she answered. My sister went in front of the sled and I went in the back of the sled. "Weeee!" we yelled. We had to duck out. Boy, was the ride fun. We loved it. That hill was very big. That ride was fun! We both got cold. Our mom called us in.

**Sydney  
D'Amaddio**  
Grade 1  
Gilead Hill  
School  
Hebron

## Untitled

One day when we were in my backyard we saw a mouse! I was worried. I did not expect there would be a mouse there. We had a beach in our backyard and a deck and an oval pool! There are lots of animals! It's a perfect home for them. We had groundhogs. And in our front yard there was a bird with babies and moles. We like to see them all! One day a bird chirped and hopped and flew all around a squirrel because the mother bird did not want her babies to get hurt. Since my yard is big, all the animals love to live there.

**Miranda  
Julian**  
Grade 1  
North Street  
School  
Windsor Locks

## Circle

Circle, circle going round and round.  
Curling everywhere but not a sound.  
    Playing like a disc  
    No beginning, no end.  
Circle, circle do your thing.  
Curling everywhere like a ring.

**Adriana  
Bird**  
Grade 1  
Rotella  
Interdistrict  
Magnet School  
Waterbury

**Mark  
Blais**  
Grade 1  
Broad Brook  
Elementary  
School  
Broad Brook

## **My Night Sky**

A shooting star looks like it is flying,  
but it is really falling from the sky at night.

A quarter moon looks like a banana in the night sky.

The trees look like ghosts in the woods at night.  
Street lights look like smiles in the sky at night.

Bats that hang from trees at night look like pears  
growing on trees.

The stars at night look like a connect-the-dots  
game.

This is what I see at night.

## **The North Star**

The night sky shines blue  
The North Star shines bright  
The sun shines red  
The trees are green  
Summer is coming  
The flowers are blue  
Summer, the grass is growing  
That's what makes it special!

**Caleb  
Tarbell**  
Grade 1  
North Street  
School  
Windsor Locks

## **Best Friends**

My friend Taylor is thoughtful and always cheerful. I admire her a lot. We are like sisters and we do everything together. Taylor has lots of pets. She has a dog named Snickers. He is really small. We never fight or make each other gloomy. I am always glad to see her. Her mom is always nice to me when I go to her house. We always giggle together. We cherish each other a lot. She always cheers me up. Taylor is really clever. When I call her, we talk to each other about coming over each other's house. When she sleeps over, we could sleep in my tent. Me and Taylor are best friends.

**J'niah  
Hampton**  
Grade 2  
Anna M.  
Reynolds  
School  
Newington

## The Best of Both Worlds

My name is Cooper. I am seven years old. I am half Chinese and half Swedish. My mom is from Taiwan. My dad's family is from Sweden. I have great aunts, great uncles, a great grandma, and cousins in Taiwan. I have cousins in Sweden. My Chinese grandma lives with me. My Chinese grandpa comes to my house from China every Christmas. I live near my Swedish grandparents.

I like being Chinese for many reasons. I get to celebrate Chinese New Year. My grandma, Poi, and my great grandma, Tai Poi, give me a red envelope filled with money. My favorite Chinese food is hot pot. It's a pot of soup with fishballs, meatballs, beefballs, pork slices, shrimp, and vegetables. I go to Chinese school every Sunday for two hours. I learn to read, write, and speak Chinese.

I like being Swedish for many reasons. During Christmas, we celebrate St. Lucia Day. We sing songs in Swedish. All the kids in my family get a gommakakar from their godparents. A gommakakar is a box with little presents and Swedish coffee cake. My favorite Swedish foods are coffee cake, thin pancakes, meatballs, and cookies. The cookies I like are Spitz and Peppkakar. Every Sunday I go to a Swedish church with my family.

I like being Chinese and Swedish because I get to do stuff that other people don't get a chance to do. I get the best of both worlds.

## Sharing and Caring

It was during the holidays and my grandma told me a lot of stories about sharing and caring. I really had a good time with all the yummy snacks and the stories. One night, I slept listening to the stories. While I was fast asleep, I was swiftly lifted by a huge elephant with a large tusk. The elephant carried me all the way to a thick forest and I landed in the middle of a large elephant herd.

The elephant families were together and were having family night. The baby elephants were playing together. Some of the grown-up elephants were drinking water from a common water hole. There was a family of giraffes also drinking water from the same water hole. There were some other animals like deer and zebra too drinking water there. Another set of elephants were sharing a common grazing land with some zebra and antelopes.

Nearby, a large group of monkeys were swinging from tree to tree. The baby monkeys were quite playful and were swinging upside down. One big monkey suddenly appeared with a bunch of bananas and shared it with the other monkeys. There were a few monkeys that were a bit far away and did not get any bananas. A big elephant happened to be watching this. It quickly ran to the banana tree, raised its long trunk, and plucked a huge bunch of

**Cooper  
Johnson**  
Grade 2  
Anna M.  
Reynolds  
School  
Newington

**Shreyas  
Srinivasan**  
Grade 2  
Frenchtown  
Elementary  
School  
Trumbull

Catherine  
Cranmer  
Grade 2  
Southeast  
Elementary  
School  
Mansfield  
Center

bananas. It soon shared it with the far away monkeys. Now all the monkeys became cheerful and started prancing around.

All the elephants, monkeys, giraffes, zebras, and the antelopes were having good food, water, and having a great family night. Suddenly, there was a very loud scream and a big sound. All the animals were shocked and started looking at the direction of the sound. One monkey swung from tree to tree and moved quickly towards the direction of the sound. It saw an infant giraffe fallen into a big ditch. The giraffe was struggling to get up and could not climb out of the ditch. The monkey realized that the giraffe was in great pain. This monkey soon swung back to the place where most of the animals were grazing and informed them.

A large mother elephant ran immediately with the monkey sitting on top of it to provide the direction. The elephant reached the spot and kneeled down. It reached out into the ditch and wrapped its trunk around the infant giraffe. The elephant lifted like a crane that we see on the road and brought the baby giraffe to the safe zone outside. By this time, all the other animals also came nearby and were watching. The mother giraffe was so happy and repeatedly thanked the elephant. The elephant replied, "This is what we have to do. We are all in herds. We are part of the larger family and have to help one another in times of need."

I opened my eyes and the morning sunlight was streaming through my bedroom blinds. I could see the smile on the picture of the large elephant in my bedroom. I got the feeling that the elephant winked at me. I realized that we still have a lot to learn from the ways of the animals.

## **The Moon Shone Bright, on a Starry Night**

The moon shone bright, on a starry night.

I sat in bed, pillow under head...

And the moon shone bright that night.

Shooting stars passed the bars of an old, aged gazebo.

And the moon shone bright that night.

Nightingales sat on sleeping daffodils.

Owls hooted like the toot of a gleaming new brass horn.

The now rising sun warned the night creatures that it was time to escape the beams of sunlight,

Though they will return the next time for the moon shines bright.

## Sunshine

I believe in nature  
My heart is like the sun  
I see the flowers  
I see the grass  
So let's go and have some fun!

## Cats

Purr. Meow.  
Tummy growls. Licking,  
Sleeping all day long.  
Scratch!

## The Magic Puppy

Hi, my name is Emma and I am really excited because I got a new puppy yesterday, and boy did I have an adventure! Let me tell you all about it.

"Mom, when is the puppy going to come?" I asked.

"Soon dear," my mom answered. Just as she said *dear* the doorbell rang.

"She's here, yay!" My mom answered the door. At the door was a guy with brown hair and blue eyes. He was carrying a big cage with a puppy inside. The puppy was a baby puppy called a Schnauzer.

"I absolutely love the puppy. Thank you!" I exclaimed. After the guy left, I took the puppy out of the cage and put some blankets and pillows inside it so the dog can be comfy. But just then I caught sight of a glowing note attached to the cage. Here is what it said: *Whoever gets this puppy, I want to tell you that it is magical.* My mouth dropped open at the word *magical*. I thought, *how can it be magical?* I whooshed up the stairs and told something to my puppy when I got to my room.

"Puppy, can you please turn into four kinds of puppies that I like?" And to my surprise that puppy turned into an Afghan, a poodle, a golden retriever, and a bulldog. I opened my eyes wide and looked to my report about dinosaurs I had to finish by tomorrow.

I asked, "Puppy, could you bring me back to the time of dinosaurs?" The puppy woofed and tapped her paw on the ground. Before I knew it, I was standing on grass before a big dinosaur. I said, "Wow, I'm going to learn something here." The puppy *woofed* and started walking away from me.

"Hey, where are you going?" I asked. They puppy started to run. I looked back. A stampede was heading right for me! I ran as fast as I could and finally

**Carly  
Carpino**  
Grade 2  
Pine Grove  
Elementary  
School  
Avon

**Jamie  
Alphonso**  
Grade 2  
Clover  
Street  
School  
Windsor

**Cassandra  
Bielmeier**  
Grade 3  
John Pettibone  
Elementary  
School  
New Milford

caught up with my puppy, when suddenly I was up in the air! I looked up and saw a pterodactyl above me. When we got to the pterodactyl's nest I knew what was going to happen to me—I was going to be eaten! As I hung over the baby pterodactyl's mouth I could hear a soft *woof*. I looked up and my puppy was sitting on top of the mother pterodactyl's head. My puppy bit her and she let go of me. I fell towards the nest. I wished, "Puppy, I wish you could fly!" My puppy swooped down and caught me. We flew all the way to a hill in the distance. At least we thought it was a hill. When I looked down I saw we were riding on a long neck's back! Me and my puppy spent a day enjoying the ride and then it was time to go home.

"Puppy, I wish we were home." A second later I was back home. I realized no time had passed, but what I didn't realize was that my next adventure would be an even more exciting one. And do you know what I named that puppy? I named her *Magical*.

**Alexander  
Glass**  
Grade 3  
Timothy  
Dwight  
Elementary  
School  
Fairfield

## Over the Hill

Over the hill dwells a dreary house. In that creaky old house a black cat disappears down a pitch black hall. I follow that cat quietly to a room. In that room there is jewel-encrusted cupboard. In that jewel-encrusted cupboard is a golden box and in that box there is a headless person!

The headless person starts to chase me out of the room, down the pitch black hall, out of the dreary house, through the woods. I stop to catch my breath. I walk back; there is nothing behind me. Then suddenly I see movement—there is a black wolf with red eyes lurking behind a tree, thirsty for blood. It starts to chase me, I run all the way home, I look back to make sure the wolf is gone, but he is not. I smack into a tree. I wake up. It was all just a dream.

**Molly  
Brian**  
Grade 3  
Tootin Hills  
Elementary  
School  
West Simsbury

## The Bad Day That Turned Out Good

Whoosh, whoosh, the heavy wind bashed against Sally Parker, an eight-year-old girl in third grade, as she walked to her bus stop. Sally hated school. She had no friends. She was always getting teased. When she reached her bus stop everybody stopped talking and started looking at her. She was puzzled.

Suddenly, a kid named Bob shouted, "Hey Sally, nice underwear!"

Sally looked down and sure enough her belt had come loose from running to the bus stop and her pants were at her knees. But the worst part of all was that by accident she had put on her sister's "Dora" underwear. Sally's face turned red like roses. Quickly, she pulled up her pants just in time for the bus.

On the bus kids were singing, "I see London, I see France, I saw Sally's underpants!"

Her day was turning into a disaster. While Sally was reading a math problem, she did the biggest burp. In gym, she farted while doing ten push-ups!

When she got home her mom was waiting for her on the front steps with a plate of cookies. But the cookies weren't for her.

"Hi Sally," she said. "Would you mind bringing these cookies to our new neighbors?"

"Sure," Sally said in a glum way.

She walked along the long itchy grass. Her feet tickled. When she got to her neighbor's house she stopped. From inside the house she could hear bangs and furniture scratching the floor. She peeked inside the window. Pillows were flying everywhere, furniture was tilted every which way, and toys were scattered across the ground. Sally wondered what was going on.

With cookies in hand, Sally knocked on the door. Seconds later the door flung open. A girl that looked like her age was standing in the doorway. Tears were in her eyes. Sally quietly handed her the plate of cookies. She couldn't help but ask what was going on.

"Is something wrong?" Sally asked.

The girl giggled. "I thought you would ask that," she said. "We just lost our dog Lucy. She's a black and white cocker spaniel." Then the girl said, "Come on in. By the way, my name is Emily."

Sally stepped inside. She looked around. It was a mess. She thought about what it would feel like to lose a puppy—she would be terrified.

"Can I help?" Sally asked.

"Sure," Emily replied.

Together the girls looked outside and inside and all around the neighborhood. There was no sign of Emily's dog, so Sally and Emily put up posters. Days and weeks passed and no sign of Lucy. Sally noticed that over those weeks Emily and Sally became better and better friends.

One day as Sally and Emily were playing in the park, they heard a little yelp.

"Wait a minute. That sounds like Lucy's yelp!" said Emily.

The girls followed the bark. Then they spotted a little tail wagging.

"Lucy!" Emily yelled.

Both girls ran over to the wagging tail. Emily picked up the puppy. Lucy gave Emily a big lick.

"Come on. Let's get home to give Lucy a big bowl of dog food," Emily said.

The girls raced to Emily's house with Lucy tagging along.

From that day on, Sally and Emily were like sisters. Sally knew that she could trust Emily and she also knew that they would be friends forever.

Maybe that bad day wasn't so bad after all.

**Meghan  
O’Hora**  
Grade 3  
South  
Elementary  
School  
New Canaan

## **Star**

That little saffron light  
High in the sky  
Twinkles  
Like a firefly  
It stays in one place  
In that hollow sky  
In a shape of  
A  
tiny diamond  
Shimmering  
Like your birth stone  
Out always at night  
Brightening  
And  
Sparkling up  
The night!

**Katie  
Ferguson**  
Grade 3  
South  
Elementary  
School  
New Canaan

## **Thanksgiving**

My mom puts silky sauce  
In a blue china bowl  
The turkey bubbles in the oven  
Like soup overflowing  
Juicy stuffing on a roll  
An autumn delight  
Greasy sticky gravy on my fingers  
Like I was in a tub of syrup  
Sweet crispy pumpkin pie  
Like cinnamon apple  
Roasting over a campfire  
It makes me feel thankful for this holiday,  
The food that we have, and  
The people who brought it to us

## Gliding

The blades of my skates cut through the smooth clear ice

Gliding and sputtering, tossing and turning, as the glistening tree stood high overhead

Right at that moment, my hair flew up and my ice skates jumped and twirled into a perfect landing

The faces in the stands clapped and cheered and it sounded like thunder

As I skated off, I thought about how magical those few seconds were, and just then, as I looked down, a silvery dust drifted up from my ice skates

I had felt nervous, but now a big smile stretched happily upon my face.

## The Rescue

Yawn! It was 12:33 a.m.! Bailey, my yellow lab, was snoring again! Her snoring is obnoxious-high-pitched, like metal brakes scraping along the road. She is a good girl, though. I love my Bailey dog.

As I peered out my window I saw it was snowing! Wow! The first real snowfall of the season was late this year, for this was February 14th. I absolutely needed to get a closer look. I wanted to see if it was good packing snow for snowball fights with my friends. I wasn't going to fall back to sleep anyway with Bailey snoring so loudly. I swiftly tiptoed downstairs, put on my cloak and fuzzy purple boots, and headed for the door.

Outside, I walked upon the freshly fallen, untouched snow, and by the light coming from the streetlight, I watched its crystals fall gently and change direction as the wind blew. I walked in the wind's direction around my house and suddenly I noticed, before my eyes, little animal tracks. They were about a half-inch in diameter. I was astonished.

Loving animals got to me, so I followed the tracks. They led to a woodpile at the side of my yard. I didn't see any creatures; my hopes of finding something went down. I took one more step forward, toward the old woodpile, and tiny, beady green eyes, as bright as a flashlight, looked up at me.

**Gwyneth  
Thalacker**  
Grade 3  
South  
Elementary  
School  
New Canaan

**Julia  
Mainelli**  
Grade 4  
Wapping  
Elementary  
School  
South Windsor

I jolted. I was speechless and slightly scared as I stood in the pitch-black night. With my mouth dropped open, I took a deep breath and told myself “Don’t be a coward; I could be saving some animal’s life.” As I watched and waited for this unidentified creature to move about, a car slowly crept down the street with its headlights on. Do you know what that meant? I was able to get a glimpse of this creature in the light! It wasn’t quite enough to make it out, but when another car passed by a few moments later, I could put the pieces together. It was a kitten!

All these exciting thoughts went zooming through my head. I realized then that the kitten was alone, with no mom or other kittens in sight. I became sad, and my thoughts slowed down. I couldn’t leave this poor and lonely kitten outside in the cold, and I was putting my foot down on that! I had so many questions. How could this kitten find food in the snow? How old was the kitten? Did the mom leave it stranded? I knew that this was not the right time for questions, so, as carefully as I could, I picked up the kitten. I didn’t even care if the kitten might be sick. It needed my help.

I followed my footprints back to the house. I tried to make a plan of what I was going to do. “Was I going to wake up my parents?” I thought to myself. The kitten in my arms began to mew softly. I knew I couldn’t bring this kitten into my house without my parents’ knowing. Plus, they could even be a huge help. Back in my house, I quietly went into the laundry room. I put the kitty in a “gi-normous” bin while I took my cloak and boots off. She almost looked lost in the corner of the bin it was so big. I looked at a nearby clock. It was 1:23 a.m.! I had been outside for almost an hour! I was exhausted from this adventure that wasn’t even completed yet.

I took the kitten out of the bin and held her lightly in my arms as I walked to my parents’ room, wondering what their reaction would be. I was worried that they would freak out. Once again I said to myself, “Don’t be a coward.” While the kitten and I stood in front of my parents’ bedroom door, I turned the knob and took a very deep breath. The light in the hallway came in with me and shined upon my mom. She was sleeping, but the light woke her up.

Mom sat up, looked at me, and asked two questions in a worried and nervous voice, “Why are you awake, and what is in your arms?”

I responded, “Well, ah ... Mom,” I bit my lip. “I found a kitten; she won’t hurt you.”

“Where in the world did you find it?” Mom questioned. We didn’t feel like going back and forth with questions and answers in the bedroom, so without waking my father we went to the kitchen and I explained everything from Bailey snoring to my rescuing the kitten. It was hard for me to admit, because I didn’t feel comfortable telling Mom I had left the house in the middle of the night.

After our rather long conversation about not touching wild animals and what I had done, we both saw that the precious kitten was asleep in my arms. Would my mom ever agree to let the kitten sleep in the house? Well, she finally agreed just for that night and said the kitten could sleep in my room in the bin with a

towel and water. My mother also ordered me to go to sleep. Bailey, the dog, woke up when I went back to my room, but she didn't touch the kitten because she is so gentle. She went back to her sleeping and snoring.

The next morning I woke up bright and early, partially because the kitten was crying, but I didn't tell my parents that. Nope, I wouldn't let them know that the kitten woke me up!

I gently picked up the kitten, cuddled her in my arms, and carried her downstairs into the kitchen. Both Dad and Mom were there having a discussion. Mom had explained to Dad all the events that had happened last night. The first things I said were, "Can I keep her, please, pretty please? She is so well behaved and I even named her last night. I named her Lilly because when she tried to jump out of the bin she reminded me of a frog. Frogs jump on lily pads. I am responsible. I can take care of her." I pleaded. I reasoned. I tried to convince them to let me keep her.

"Sweets." That's what my parents call me. "That is what your father and I are discussing."

"So?" I anxiously asked.

They looked at each other and both nodded yes, "as long as you keep up with your school work and take good care of your two pets. We will take her to see Bailey's vet this week."

I was overjoyed. It was a "Yes!" It was unanimous. This was going to be a great experience. I let Lilly down on the floor for the first time. Since we didn't have any kitten food yet, Mom and Dad helped me to break up some chicken for Lilly, and we gave her some milk. Afterwards, Lilly played with some yam and swatted at some bells hanging from the doorknob. It made me laugh every time she climbed up and jumped off the back of the couch. Sometimes it was even hard to find her because she blended in with the gray colored carpet. Lilly also switched her moods from playful to sleepy. Whether she stood on her back legs, or she slept with Bailey, she was mine!

I was so excited that I just had to put my words into a poem:

### **My Kitten**

My kitten has one wet pink button nose  
One mouth the size of a penny  
One tail as agile as can be  
Two green gleaming eyes watching over me  
Two little ears, twitching here and there  
Four tiny legs, stumbling once in a while  
My kitten especially loves cuddling on furry blankets in a pile  
That's why she is mine  
My cute, lovely Valentine

Celine  
Latona  
Grade 4  
Kelly Lane  
Intermediate  
School  
Granby

## Sweet Lily Water

“Grandfather ...” Morgan whispered from under her sheets. She really needed Grandfather. Grandfather was gone in Iraq; he had been gone for the whole summer. She read the tattered, gray letter again:

“Dear Morgan,

I am lost, lost in a world of imagination floating about the breeze lying on the golden beaches, soft against my cheeks. I let the breeze awaken me. The sun is drowning in the sea of magic. I taste the salt on my lips; I hear the waves crash their foamy wonder on the silk drawn cinnamon beach as the seagulls squawk and shriek. I look down the shoreline struck by the power of it all. My soul is carried away on the ocean breezes. How do you like it Morgan?

With Love,  
Grandpa.

P.S. My newspaper journaling is going nicely. I have even interviewed some soldiers.”

This time she smiled a little bit—the kind of smile that you’re not really sure if you’re happy or not. As she hung the note back on the wall she noticed a crumpled piece of paper slip onto the floor. It was from another journalist. The script was gloomy and looked as if the hand didn’t want to write it. The paper was dark and the ink had smeared across the page. “What could this mean?” Morgan murmured towards the picture of her parents on the wall. Three years ago Morgan’s parents had died in a car crash, leaving her to live with her grandparents. She would cry herself to sleep every night from loneliness. Now that same feeling began to swell up in her throat, churning her stomach. Dizzily, she began to read the letter, slow and easy, making the words stretch and cool down as they came:

“I am sorry to inform you that since leaving two weeks ago to interview a squadron of U.S. fighter pilots, Jim has not yet returned. I will let you know as soon as more information arrives.”

Morgan was breathing hard and wanted to cry and shout but was frozen with terror. Weakly she reached for the water lily mug. It was heavy and cold in her palm. She studied the mug. Grandfather had gotten it for her when she came to live with them. The brown clay mug with shimmery white water lilies on a sky blue pond looked marvelous. She stumbled off her mattress. Clutching the rail of the stairs with one hand and the mug in the other, she looked down the stairs. “Gr ... Grand ... GrandMary I ... I read this letter, you see. It was from the journalist. It ... it ... it said Grandfather is missing!” Morgan ran to GrandMary, sobbing against her blouse. Together they cried. When they could weep no more, they sat in the den where Grandfather would write. They put a picture of him on the seat of the desk. Morgan brought out the fairy candleholder and GrandMary lit the burgundy wax. The fairies tapped the tiny bells on each side. Ting, ting.

As the bells rang, Morgan grew sleepy. Soon she fell asleep in Grandfather's den. When Grandfather would stay up late to write, Morgan would sleep to the sound of Grandfather's heavy breathing and the scratching of the pen against the paper. The sun would rise and Morgan would find hot tea and buns sitting on a table next to her.

As she awoke the next morning, she smelled biscuits with honey, pancakes with heavy molasses and buttermilk. She looked at the writing desk; the fairy candleholder was tinged with black and the candles were melted. Morgan's eyes trailed through the room filled with memories. Suddenly she spotted the lily mug. Looking back at the fairy candleholder, a slight smile spread across her face. She packed rolls GrandMary had made and a jug of buttermilk.

Walking through the tall dry meadow made her feel important. The summer sun was hot but the late spring breeze blew, cooling everything. Grasshoppers tickled her legs and butterflies landed on her shoulder. She found a clearing with a small waterfall. Morgan carefully lifted the lily mug from her sack and without hesitation stuck it in the earth under the waterfall. The water trickled off its sides, creating a pond. She continued to gather bits and pieces of her surroundings, making a tiny home. Tree bark became walls, thin flat rocks made good stairs and floors, moss beds, a cork table .... When she was happy with her work, she slapped the dirt and sighed. "Now the hard part," Morgan whispered, "naming." Morgan looked around thinking hard. "Sweet Lily Water" was the soft murmur that escaped her throat.

She heard GrandMary calling her in for dinner. GrandMary was a short, plump, gray-haired woman with rainstorm eyes and peachy skin with at least a hundred wrinkles. Her smile was thin and wispy. Morgan could hear crying inside her little, wrinkled heart.

As Morgan slept that night, Sweet Lily Water Fairy Camp was bustling with activity. Raspberries were sent up on tiny acorn bowls attached to spider silk ropes. The lily mug was being polished by algae oil and rubbed with pond kelp. These tiny winged creatures were fixing up their new home. They had watched Morgan build all day and were encouraged by the hope and belief of her spirit. There were no stars in sight but the moon shown a creamy shadow spilling over the meadow. The leader of the fairies sat with his daughter on the top balcony looking over his new land. "We need to have the camp cleaned and furnished by sparkle-rise," the king bellowed. "The night is glorious and so very long. We will certainly get it done before the little girl returns."

His daughter Emerald smiled in response as she fluttered her blue sparkly wings. "I'm going to tell Ruby to heat up the rocks. We will celebrate our new home with a feast!" King Marble smiled as he jumped off the balcony, fluttering his wings and gaining confidence.

As the sun rose the next morning, Morgan jumped out of bed, washed, dressed, and shoved down her food. The group of fairies watched the girl leap across the field towards the camp. They cleaned their feast plates and flew to the treetops. As Morgan saw the sparkling rim of the lily mug, her mouth fell open. She gasped. Morgan knelt on her knees; with a pinky finger she picked

up a tiny notebook and pen. It had belonged to Sapphire, a tiny nine-year-old. Sapphire covered her throat. If Morgan read her journal she would find all her secrets and the king's decisions. Her face was red and her wings faded brown as they drooped. Her small bare feet slipped on the thin leafy branch, and Sapphire fell to the ground, landing with a splash in the lily mug. Morgan flinched; she put her hand in the mug, carefully lifting Sapphire up to her face. Sapphire's wing had a tear and had gone back to light blue. Morgan set her on her palm. "It's all right. I'll fix that," Morgan whispered to Sapphire like an old friend. Sapphire stared at Morgan in disbelief. She had seen others like Morgan being mean to the environment, smashing their homes. Morgan stood up, cradling Sapphire in her hand.

That night, Morgan finished the wrap and made a bed from a shell dish, padding it with tissues. When the bed was made and Sapphire was content, Morgan returned her journal. "Are you all right now? You haven't spoken a word since I found you," Morgan whispered in awe.

Sapphire spoke softly and calmly. "I am fine but I wish to be home."

Then Morgan heard heavy steps on the stairs outside her room. Morgan put the shell bed and Sapphire in her old toy chest. "Time for dinner. You must be starving. You missed lunch!" GrandMary's voice sounded old and tired as she opened the door to Morgan's room.

Sapphire sat contently on the shell bed writing in her journal:

5/17/08

I now sit in a dark empty toy chest. Morgan has me in captivity. Tonight I will call for Amethyst. We will hide with Aquamarine in the pond around the mug. It is funny but I am not afraid of Morgan. She is sweet and kind, and has helped me, but I am sad for her. She built the camp to have friends. If I leave, will she tear down the camp?

Confused,  
Sapphire

GrandMary and Morgan sat at the table in silence. Morgan ate quickly, sneaking pieces of bread, vegetables, and meat. When the meal was over, Morgan ran to the chest and was surprised to see Sapphire smiling up at her. "I can smell the steak," she said as she landed on Morgan's crisp white sheets. Morgan watched Sapphire gobble down the meal, then say goodnight and fly back to bed. Morgan wondered why Sapphire was so content and calm. That night, Sapphire waited at the window. At first, Sapphire could only make out small purple wings, blond hair, and green eyes. As the figure came closer, everything was clear. Amethyst was coming to the rescue. The two of them hugged and flew back to the camp. They hid with Aquamarine in the pond around the lily mug. Aquamarine was a mermaid fairy with a turquoise tail and

wings; her brown hair had blue streaks matching her violet eyes. When Morgan awoke and saw that Sapphire was missing, she felt lonely. Her face grew hot. Her eyes filled with water and her nose started to run. She decided to never go back to Sweet Lily Water Fairy Camp. She couldn't see the one who betrayed her. Morgan turned pale and ill. Although Sapphire was happy to be home, she wanted to see Morgan again. She flew to Morgan's window and saw Morgan burning with fever. "I wanted to say I'm sorry, and I know something you don't know. Your grandfather is alive!"

Morgan turned, opening her weak eyes slowly. "No, he is long gone. Sapphire, can you stay with me?" Sapphire nodded no and flew away.

Sapphire often visited and watched Morgan recover. She kept telling Morgan that her grandfather was alive. Morgan would not believe. Once Morgan was well enough, she visited Sapphire, Amethyst, and Emerald in the camp. One by one the other fairies landed around Morgan. Hundreds of glittery glistening wings flapped around Morgan.

"We love you Morgan!" the crowd screamed. "Your grandfather is alive."

"Wait until tonight," Sapphire said, leading the fairies into the crystal sky.

"Bye! We love you! Goodbye," they sang.

"Goodbye!" Morgan yelled. "I love you too!" Morgan ran home. She watched through her window as the wind kicked up abruptly and blew the camp over.

Morgan gasped. All of a sudden, Grandfather walked in the door.

"Grandfather!"

"Morgan!"

## **Buford's Puffball Bonanza**

Man, I was sweating bullets! Beads of moisture were forming on my forehead as the scorching summer sun beat down on our grey-blue house. I sat in the basement on our scratchy green couch, staring at our old cat, Buford. He was completely motionless. That was pretty typical for Buford, a jumbo-sized orange tabby with a head the size of a ripe cantaloupe. Moving enough only to shift position, Buford spent most of his time sleeping in the sun. Occasionally, he'd get up to eat his cat food.

I sighed glumly as I gazed out the window. The brightly-lit outdoors looked so tempting. I wanted to leap off the couch, pull on my sneakers, and sprint outside. But that wasn't going to happen, no way, because it was about ninety degrees Fahrenheit and it was hot enough inside as it was. If I went outside, I would feel like I might melt like the Wicked Witch of the West!

I did want to get off the couch, however, because, first of all, I really wanted to do something, and second, the couch was making me itch. So, I stood up. I wondered what I should do, but then my brain gave me the answer: "Get some puffballs, play with Buford."

"Puffballs, puffballs, puffybally puffballs," I sang joyfully. Lucky for me, a large Ziploc bag of puffballs sat right upon my art table. Red, blue, green,

**Katharine  
Campolieta**  
Grade 4  
Squadron  
Line  
Elementary  
School  
Simsbury

yellow, purple, white, pink, orange; there was a variety of colors.

“Here, kitty, kitty, kitty, kitty! Come on, it’s just your owner,” I gently whispered. Buford’s ears perked up at the sound of my voice, but quickly relaxed. He lost interest immediately because I wasn’t offering him a heaping plate of cat food or, even better, tuna fish.

“Hmm ...” I put my chin in my left-hand palm, clueless but thinking deeply. Then, I got this brilliant, genius idea (in my perspective). “That’s it!” I exclaimed, snapping my fingers. Hearing my snap, Buford shifted to face me. He usually looked at me when I snapped.

“Meow!” he moaned, almost begging to hear my idea. I knelt down to stroke his melon-like head.

“I’ll show you what I was thinking,” I cooed soothingly. First, I dumped out all the puffballs. Then, I set them up in two rows. The small ones in back, and in the front the four medium ones stood on the right and left of a huge snow-white puffball, the leader of the puffball army. “This is the battle of the century, folks,” I announced dramatically. “I present to you ... Buford’s Puffball Bonanza!”

“Yes! This will be so exciting,” I thought to myself. “I will never be bored again!” But, oh boy, did that moment prove my thought wrong! You know why? Buford looked at me; his green eyes narrowed to slits, and then looked away. He just wasn’t interested. Rats. I was bored again (and so was he).

I was mystified for a few seconds. It came to me quickly, though. “Puffballs roll!” I mumbled, smacking my forehead gently. Buford was a huge fan of things that roll. Gingerly, I kicked the puffball army all at once, snapping my fingers as well to get his attention. They rolled towards Buford, as if they were doing a forward march. Buford’s ears perked up again, and this time he looked up to see what was going on. Just as I predicted, the advancing army caught his eye, and he didn’t even look where the snap came from. At first he was still as a marble statue as the puffballs were in motion. His green eyes changed to a gleaming, glittering gold, a signal that he was transforming into a lion on the prowl. His eyes were wide, looking for one lone puffball prey to attack. An itty-bitty orange one bumped Buford’s paw ... he POUNCED! Faster than the blink of an eye, the lion seized its prey.

He rolled around on the floor with that little puffball, biting and batting. His teeth were like shiny, razor-sharp knives cutting something tender. His body language was saying, “Take that! And that! And that, as well!” I was mesmerized.

After wrestling for what seemed like an hour, he finally let his defeated enemy go. It rolled behind the bookshelf, cowering. Buford targeted a medium blue one next, but simply gripped it in his teeth for a few seconds, and then flung it furiously. It hit the wall, bounced, and landed on top of the TV.

“Yeah, woo-hoo! That’s the way, Buford!” I cheered. Buford was really getting into the swing of it now. My excitement was like a thermometer boiling over the top.

The “lion” looked around, challenging the other quarry. Suddenly, Buford

hissed, and caught sight of another puffball. It was large and snow-white. You guessed it. Buford had targeted the leader. But I knew Buford would win. With a mighty meow, Buford leapt onto the leader. He soon found it was harder than the little orange one and medium blue one. But against a little ball of squishy fluff, Buford was invincible. He ripped out chunks of the leader and he shook around what was left of that large puffball in his teeth. Meowing like crazy, Buford rolled around on the floor, crushing the leader and then finally dropped it. All that was left of the general of the puffball army was a few chunks of tangled fluff. Buford put his left paw on the biggest morsel left of his victim, almost like he was celebrating his victory.

Then Buford got up, stretched, and he turned his back, tail held high, happy he had won.

“Incredible!” I said. “No invaders will ever get past Buford the Great One.” Smiling, I plopped back down on that old green couch, and was not surprised to realize that I was no longer tempted by the outdoors.

## **Jail Daddy**

My Dad in Jail  
Trapped in steel bars  
Craves for cigars to smoke  
Only a dirty sink with soap  
Two eyes to blink every day

A toilet, a bed  
To dream of all good things he will do next  
A head to think  
Of all bad things and crimes  
He would never do again

I miss how I gave him a kiss  
On his smoky cuddly cheeks  
I drop tears when I try  
To let all the bad things go  
When moms says go to bed  
My head feels like it will explode

I look at him and remember  
That he is not going to be there too long  
Just for two years

I hope he remembers  
I will always love him

**Yvonne  
Roberts**  
Grade 4  
Killingly  
Memorial  
School  
Danielson

**Leiah  
Cutkomp**  
Grade 4  
Samuel Webb  
Elementary  
School  
Wethersfield

## **Soulful Sounds of Serenity**

The sound of music, soft and sweet  
Fills your empty mind,  
You can't just think of mindless words  
It's very hard to define

A gentle beat, a note to follow  
Repeats over and over again,  
With melody and harmony  
Until it's time to end

Piano or violin  
Or even a trombone,  
Can make the thoughtful noise you hear  
A beautiful, sweet tone

A lovely little piece of it  
Can really calm your head,  
It's tranquil, oh so tranquil  
You'll dream about it in your bed

Do not forget a specialty  
Will help you through eternity,  
You think it's easy to make up music  
But when you learn, you will see

You can find it in your heart  
As long as you try,  
Music is a mystery  
In your heart, it lies

## **The Hawk and the Mouse**

Circling silently,  
watching,  
with a careful eye,  
the movement  
of small animals below.

Tugged upward on a shaft of wind,  
the hawk does not cry out,  
or, indeed,  
make any sound  
at all.

**Sarah  
LeHan**  
Grade 4  
Holmes  
Elementary  
School  
Darien

Suddenly,  
a mouse,  
scurries out into the open  
unaware of the predator above him.

But the hawk is aware.  
He is aware with every feather on his body.  
He swoops down  
in a torrent of wind,  
in a dive, talons outstretched  
to grab the mouse he prepares himself.

He grasps the mouse between his claws  
and carries it into the blue.

But,  
the hawk flies into a low flying cloud and slackens  
his grip,  
letting the squirming mouse go tumbling  
into a patch of wildflowers.

## **Miss Minnie and Her Amazing Adventures**

### Chapter One

CRASH! BOOM! BANG! A small mouse dodged between pots, pans, knives, and forks with a slice of cheese strapped tightly to its back with an inch of thread, closely followed by a group of chefs. It dashed out of the kitchen, down the hall and into a tight corner. Moments later the sounds of clomping shoes and angry voices told it that it was no longer being pursued. Miss Minnie relaxed and began climbing up the elevator. When she got to the button she flung herself at it and fell to the floor. The door opened and she went inside. She then did the same thing to go to floor five. Falling did not hurt her. She had done it so much she was practically immune to it. She then scrambled out of the elevator, adjusted her cheese, and scurried into her mouse hole. She shoved her cheese under her bed, taken from a Calico Critters set. She now straightened her fur in her tin foil mirror taped on the bed, and flopped down on it. Today had been exhausting. She had picked up some matches for her candle, stolen two kernels of corn, brought home the monthly cheese, and yet there were still more errands! First, she needed to get a Coke from the refrigerator (her sister's family was coming for Christmas), then, get a good-sized Christmas tree. Finally, she had to do some Christmas shopping. Oh well, the sooner the better. Miss Minnie heaved herself up and tip-toed to the door. She looked left and right, and then darted into the room.

**Claire  
Copeland**  
Grade 5  
Emerson  
Williams  
School  
Wethersfield

She dashed across the floor to the refrigerator. It was a good thing room 207 was vacant. Miss Minnie stood on her front paws and pushed as hard as she could. The door opened with a pop and she slipped inside. She wandered among trees of Fanta, Sprite, Dr. Pepper, and root beer. Finally she found some Coke. She climbed up to the top, unscrewed it, spilled some to make it lighter, screwed the cap back on, slid down, and heaved it onto her tiny shoulders. She then used her feet and tail to climb down the racks to the floor. By then Miss Minnie could no longer carry the drink, so she put it down and rolled it across the floor to her hole. After pushing it in, she looked left, right, and sped toward the door to slide under it. She flashed out of the room and up to the elevator. Inside it, Miss Minnie thought. She knew where she could get a proper tree but not decorations. As she looked at the buttons, she had an idea. It was a good one, but it would be terribly dangerous.

## Chapter Two

A newspaper reporter sat in the lobby reading a rival newspaper. He frowned and scratched his stubbly beard with his oversized, hairy fingers. Business was not going well. He needed something amazing, something spectacular ...

Miss Minnie's heart raced as she stepped out of the elevator. She thought about what would happen if that man in the lobby looked up from his newspaper. Gathering up her courage, she darted into the lobby and jumped behind a chair. Next to the chair was a shiny white umbrella. Next to that was a Christmas tree decorated with berries. It had an angel on the top.

The reporter's name was Shniley. Shniley Jones. And as Shniley Jones put down the paper, frustrated, he caught something out of the corner of his eye. A mouse was swinging from the hook of an umbrella. Then, as Shniley rubbed his eyes, he heard a faint clump. The mouse had jumped off the umbrella and was now dangling from a branch on the Christmas tree. As he watched, the mouse slowly swung from branch to branch using its tail. When it got to the top it picked a twig off the tree and—Shniley almost fainted—pulled the angel's head off!

With the angel's head tucked under one arm and the other arm lugging the twig, Miss Minnie made her way to the elevator. When she got to her hole she didn't even notice a stubbly-bearded man make a couple of notes on his pad of paper and stalk away.

Miss Minnie then went to work with the "Christmas tree." She stuck it into a piece of cheese, put it in the center of the room, and twisted the angel's head onto the top. Perfect. After a short nap, Miss Minnie scavenged for presents under her bed, counting her guests. There was her sis, of course, and then there were her sons, Billy and Bobby. For her sister she selected a large piece of Swiss, and for Bill and Bob, some delicious provolone and cheddar. Finally, exhausted, Miss Minnie curled up on her mattress, knowing that Christmas was just two days away.

## Chapter Three

Scratch, scratch went Shniley's steaming pencil. He artfully recounted events as he thought. Just then, Shniley saw three mice scurrying to the elevator. There they sat, as though waiting. Shniley's eyes grew wide as he saw the elevator door open and the mice climb in, with the mouse he had seen before! The whole day, the newspaper reporter watched the mice "talk," have flipping contests, and jump on a doll bed! By the end of the day, Mr. Jones had to get a new pencil.

On Christmas Eve, the dreams in the hotel were countless. The mice were dreaming of delicious cheese, the manager was dreaming of a bell system, the cook in the kitchen was dreaming of mousetraps, a six-year-old boy on the fourth floor was dreaming of Star Wars action figures, and Shniley Jones was dreaming of a shiny reporter medal. Everyone was dreaming, and for once all was calm.

That morning, everybody was excited. All around the hotel, people were commenting on each other's presents.

"That's a wonderful pan."

"My, that's a nice-looking cheese."

"Wow! That could capture a hundred rats!"

Everyone was happy. But trouble awaited. Tomorrow, Shniley had to send out a newspaper and, boy, was he ready! He knew he would be famous in only a few hours.

This is what was in the newspaper the next morning:

### AMAZING MICE!

*Ladies and Gentlemen, there are four mice running around the Sweet Suite. But they are not ordinary mice. Here are some of the events starring the "miracle mice" that I have witnessed ...*

And he went on to describe all that he had seen. The article ended like this:

*As you can see, I have an amazing story to tell. These mice are nearly as amazing as I am! Read this newspaper for more amazing stories!*

There was an uproar at the Sweet Suite that day. Guests were searching the hotel, the manager was calling the exterminator, the cook was crying in the kitchen, and reporters were pouring in.

Meanwhile, the mice had no idea. Billy was last-minute exploring before his family left. Miss Minnie and her sister were talking, and Bobby was munching on his cheese when Billy came bursting in.

"Look what I found!" he exclaimed, sounding anxious. He took a small scrap of paper from between his paws and handed it to his mother. She gasped and handed it to her sister. It was a piece of the newspaper just big enough for

Minnie to understand what was going on. “We better make sure they don’t suspect anything,” she said. And with that, the mice set to work.

Minutes later, three newspaper reporters, two TV cameramen, and a skittish manager sidled into room 207. They got on their knees and soon spotted the mouse hole. They shined a flashlight in and looked around. The manager wrinkled his nose. It was smelly, littered with moldy cheese and broken items. Three mice were curled up on the floor. One was bigger than the other two.

“I don’t see no Christmas tree,” grumbled one of the cameramen.

“Or a bed,” murmured the manager, no longer skittish.

Just then, the exterminator came in. “Okay, I’ve got some spray,” he started to say, but as he looked in the hole, he frowned. “I can’t take dose mice away! Dat one’s got babies!” he explained. “It’s agains’ our policy to mess wif dem!”

“He’s got a point,” said the TV reporter, “and I don’t see anything special about these mice.” Suddenly his eyes widened. “The reporter must have tricked us! This is all a scam!”

They went down to speak to Shniley’s boss, who immediately apologized and fired him.

### Epilogue

After a while, everybody forgot about the mice, who had made the people think Billy and Bobby were Minnie’s babies! Her sister had hidden under the bed. Still, the mice moved away just to take precautions. Miss Minnie got married and had nine babies. And now, though no one else will, those babies (now adults) will always remember the stories of Miss Minnie’s amazing adventures.

## Truth or Dare

**Hannah  
Carpino**  
Grade 5  
Thompson  
Brook  
School  
Avon

I could hear Jack and Grace’s screams from my cement-stuck spot.

Kristin sat beside me in equal silence. That’s the way best friends are. You can be absolutely silent, but hear each other’s thoughts as loud as a bullhorn and as clear as a bell. Kristin must have been very bored reading my thoughts though, because my mind was wandering.

It was hot enough to fry an egg on a sidewalk (phee-ee!) coating everything in the stench of sweat. Kristin stood up and smiled in that mischievous way. I can read her thought. *Let’s do something, Hannie.* I sense an adventure coming on. And I’m not prepared. It was like a roller coaster with her. I went up and up and up with her, but when I went plunging down, it whipped every warning label out of my head.

She trotted over to the tire swing. I can practically sense little tips of devil horns bursting from her head, crawling from mine. But phew! All she’s doing is swinging herself back and forth, the creaking rope crooning a lullaby of a poorly-oiled machine. Bored by Kristin’s creak-creaking, I watched the smallest children—Carly, Tommy, Melissa, and Molly—make mud cakes on the shore.

Kristin shouts once she's herself, pumping, "Hannaaaah ... get Graaaace!" Grace is the third oldest when Kristin's visiting, so all three of us love hanging out.

I burst away, over the grass, onto the dock, don't touch the creaky wood, calling, "Grace ... uh, K.B. wants to see ya." Immediately she's out of the lake, drying off, watching that daredevil of a girl pump herself higher, higher, higher .... Will she fall? No, she's invincible .... I can't even think clearly I'm so nervous, being my usual worrywart self. All adults except Aunt Paige (Grace and Molly's mother) are at a restaurant.

Finally Kristin hops off. "So ... guys ... (pant, pant) want to ... (pant, pant) ... play Truth Or Dare?"

Grace nods before the word "Dare" slips out of Kristin's mouth. Grace is always so quick to agree to Dare someone, but she always chooses Truth. To admit, I probably do the same thing.

"All right then, Kristin, we'll ask YOU first! Truth ... or Dare?"

Kristin thinks. Then, finally, the waited word is there: "Dare."

Grace whispered, "Let's Dare her to twist the tire swing rope up all bunchy till it's way high up. Then she has to get on and let it spin."

We tell her this, and for a minute, I saw a tint of fear in her usual clear blue eyes. She inhales sharply. For a second, just a teensy-weensy second, I see any regular girl there, but in a flash, she's gone.

"I'll do it," Kristin declares bravely. "I'll do it."

Now let me tell you about the tire swing. It was put up by my great-great-granddaddy a long time ago. He got to enjoy the lake and the tire swing, just as we did. You see, we own four cabins on a piece of property on Lake Pocotopaug. The cabins are very small; two beds, a bathroom, a porch, and a kitchen. And no, they're not heated. We stay there all summer long.

Back to the tire swing. The adults assured us early on that it is stable; even though there's a rough patch about ten feet up. Kristin began twirling the swing; the swing began knotting up, shortening, being lifted into the air.

Finally it was done. By getting Grace on my shoulders, Grace could boost Kristin up and on. Then the dreaded word was spoken ...

"Ready."

We let go of the tire, and she began spinning (I'm really not exaggerating) wicked fast. Aunt Paige stood from her chair at the whirring noise. There was silence. Even Jack swimming at the end of the dock stopped. The mud pie "factory" came to a grinding halt. Aunt Paige stopped tending the flames of the fire burning in the fire pit. Now all this I'm about to tell you all happened in about, oh, three SECONDS.

CRACK!

From midair, K.B. screamed.

Grace yelled, "Kristin, it's gonna break. Jump!" Grace sounded anxious and terrified. I stood in awestruck silence. Aunt Paige comforted her daughter, "Relax, that's just the crackling from the firepl-"

Suddenly, little fuzzy gray things of the rope began to fly like moth balls in flight. Kristin jumped ...

It really was a fuzzy gray blur after that. The forty pound black tire took it's turn to fly—

“No,” I thought. *“It won’t fall on her leg. Please, oh please, God ...”* But when I stared down at Kristin, I realized that she was not moving.

“No,” I breathed. The tire fell with a sickening thud several feet away from her. Grace started to cry a bit. All I could do was stand and gulp down the gnawing urge to scream. Aunt Paige rushed to her side. I followed suit, but robot-like. I barely had feelings.

“No—*she can’t be dead, please ...*” But by the time I reached her, her eyelids were fluttering a bit, like injured butterflies. I kneeled over her, jiggling her arm, hoping she may come to her senses.

“Kristin ...,” I murmured. Kristin opened her eyes and grimaced. Up to that day, I’d thought K.B., the dare-devil, the dare-doer, would never hurt herself to the point of not bouncing straight back up. The air was suddenly so thick that I could barely breathe.

Aunt Paige asked gently, “Are you O.K? What hurts? Point for me.” Kristin half-smiled. “My head. And my ankle. A little.” Finally! She was speaking! Yeesss! Grace rushed over.

Aunt Paige shook her head. “If you had just ... fallen, well, you’d probably have a broken neck ... or worse. Thank god Grace told you to jump.” Gracie smiled a little bit at that.

Kristin shuddered. “Urn, c-can I g-go into our f-family’s tent?” Aunt Paige nodded. “I’ll get some ice and medical stuff for you.” “Hannah,” she said, “Take her into the tent.” Grace rushed off with her mother. Jack and the mud-pie makers were unfazed. I put my arm around her and together we walked to the tent.

With rest, she would heal. Simplified, the story would be told. With patience, things would get better. And, with luck, we’d get a new tire swing.

## It’s a Girl!

It is one of those hot, humid summer days that makes you wish for a pool and a cold glass of lemonade. A cloudless blue sky stretches overhead forever. I unlatch my aunt’s fence and slip into her yard when my cousin Leia sees me and races over to play. Soon we tumble and laugh together on the cool grass. I swing Leia up, up into the warm air, and back down again. She screams happily. My cousin is like a sister to me. We are almost oblivious to our age differences. But as we roll around, I remember it hadn’t always been that way.

I will never forget the day my mother hung up the phone, a huge smile lighting up her face.

“Get in the car!” she said, her voice sounding quick and short. “Aunt Carol’s had her baby! It’s a girl!”

**Lucy  
Tomasso**  
Grade 5  
West Woods  
Upper  
Elementary  
School  
Farmington

That car ride was the longest of my life, but I wished it were longer. I needed time to think. Thoughts were flashing through my mind like lightning in a dark sky. Aunt Carol (also my godmother) was a very special person in my life. She always took time to be with me, just us. She would listen to my opinions, such as when we went to a kennel and I got to pick out her future dog. Aunt Carol knew she could trust what I thought to be a good choice. I felt more grown-up and important around her.

But now, now that the baby was born, Aunt Carol would have no time for her already short moments with me! I clenched my hands as anger bubbled in the pit of my stomach like a boiling kettle on the stove. This dumb baby was going to steal my favorite aunt!

A large BUMP! informed me we had just then reached the hospital.

"I don't want to go in!" I said suddenly, just before we walked through the large sliding doors.

"You're going, sweetie," Mom replied kindly but stubbornly, and with that, she pulled me into the hospital. The next moments of walking felt like a dream, like this was happening to some other person. I was moving through long, narrow, white-washed hallways lined with doors. We stopped abruptly at #300, and a familiar voice called out, "Come in!" I entered the tiny room slowly, uncomfortably, and awkwardly, feeling numb and cold. I didn't want to see the baby or let my aunt know my true feelings.

A person who resembled Aunt Carol was smiling weakly from a bed in the corner. Her face looked tired and pale, but happy. She placed a small bundle in my hands and said softly, "This is Leia, your new cousin."

However much I resented the baby, curiosity overcame my anger, and I peered into a tiny face framed with brown curls. Her chestnut eyes sparkled as she gave me a gummy grin—her first smile! I felt a rush of feelings: first angry at myself for liking this baby, my cousin. And then reluctant, thinking, Well ... she's really cute. Stealing another glance at her little face, something settled inside me. Somehow, I could tell we were going to be great friends. A smile escaped from my lips as I glanced back at Leia.

Now, my eyes follow the same child who is now much, much older. I watch her run, jump, and play with the dog I'd picked out long ago. How had she been so tiny? I realized that I had judged Leia before meeting her. I'd been angry and upset. But I've learned an important lesson. Even today, I try to remember this whenever encountering new situations. Because little did I know, we really *were* good friends.

"Hellooo, earth to Lucy." Leia waves her hand in front of my face.

"Oh, come on!" I joke "Fine, TAG, you're it!"

"Not so fast!" she replies, shooting after my already retreating form. And with that, side by side, we run off together.

**Jackson  
Zinn  
Rowthorn**  
Grade 5  
Eric Norfeldt  
School  
West Hartford

## **There is a Sky in Me**

This poem was inspired by the poem “Wilderness,” by Carl Sandburg. In his poem he describes how the myriad elements of his character can be compared to various elements of the wilderness. My poem compares my personality and spirit with the boundless sky.

In me resides a cloud  
It transports me lavishly and tranquilly  
from barren desert to crowded metropolis  
It bores me, for it is tedious  
Yet it cultivates my interests  
in following the ways of life,  
in comprehending the sights I witness,  
and in living life by  
a steady, carefree tempo  
that beats only when I keep this cloud in my grasp.  
And I will.  
Because it was a gift from the Sky  
And the Sky will not take it back.

In me resides a sun.  
Shining grandiosely  
like a placid ruler  
Destined to assist  
and shed luminosity on any situation.  
Its heat warms me  
either too much  
or exactly accurate  
depending on whether  
I keep to this grandest of stars willingly.  
And I will.  
Because it was a gift from the Sky  
And the Sky will not take it back.

In me reside the stars,  
Gloating orbs of radiance  
Whose illumination seems imperial and arrogant?  
Yet as a consequence of that reality  
just like every incompetent being  
they are cowardly.  
Petrified of the objects that perceive  
them as diminutive.  
Perception means everything

to these stars  
when I grasp them tightly unwilling to let go.  
And I will.  
Because they were a gift from the Sky  
And the Sky will not take them back.

In me reside creatures,  
Creatures of the air,  
Regal and cruel  
Whose beaks and wings seem alien  
to the unknowing animals of the ground.  
For us, we have land  
for the fish and mammals of the water, they have the turbulent sea  
And the majestic birds have the lightness of air  
air that covers the feckless land and the ever-changing sea  
I keep these birds safe, sheltered  
For they were a gift from the Sky,  
And the Sky will not take them back.

In me lives the wind.  
Wind that moves the inflated clouds,  
and keeps the birds in the measureless sky  
while blocking the sun selfishly pounding rays,  
The wind is the leader.  
He only halts when his work is accomplished  
But his work is never enough  
although he doesn't fret about that  
as long as he doesn't depart from the wind  
And I will not.  
Because it was a gift from the Sky,  
And the Sky will not take it back.

The Sky is in me,  
Its howling wind—my leadership  
Its various creatures—my personality  
Its stars—my narcissism  
The sun—my selflessness  
With the clouds, my eagerness  
All given to me by the Sky  
And the Sky  
will not take them back.

Abigail  
Cipparone  
Grade 5  
Regional  
Multicultural  
School  
New London

## My Mother's Eyes

The kitchen chair is never  
As uncomfortable as when you are in trouble.

Silence.

Deathly silence.

Mom peers into my eyes and focuses.

Her eyes are knives,

Slicing through my brain

Seeking out any guilty thoughts

And gliding through the barriers

I try to put up.

My mother's eyes surprise me

And pierce again

And again

Leaving me helpless

And weak,

At her mercy.

It's not fair!

Whenever I try to look into her eyes,

It seems that there is a force field

Around her

Like a sword parrying and deflecting me,

Again and again.

Finally,

After a long battle

I tell all

Spilling any guilty secrets

Like blood flowing from an open wound.

I hang my head and try to escape any way I can

Seeking sanctuary in a quick lie.

Making me wish I were invisible.

## Is Living So Wrong?

Born on the moors to a caring mare  
The wind in my face and the warmth of my herd  
Made me feel secure and safe from danger

But then cruel men with ropes and whips  
Shoved us into a dark crowded truck  
Filled with some of us  
They were such a sad sight  
No light in their once lively eyes

We tried to knock down the walls  
But they would not yield  
We drove for how long, I could not tell  
Along the way, more of us were shoved  
Carelessly in  
The young ones' eyes were filled with panic  
And the old never had a chance

Our throats became parched and dry  
Our eyes turned hollow and ribs started to show  
My eyes held no hope but to huddle beside my mother  
And wait for the end

Finally the door opened, the light almost blinding us  
And I almost thought we were home  
But one smell at the reek in the air  
I knew we weren't  
We had come to a place far more terrifying than I had ever known

As I proceeded wearily down the ramp, my mother fell  
Oh, how the men whipped her, falls so harsh I had to turn away  
My brave mother stumbled down, dripping with blood

I shuddered as I looked down  
The dirt floor was covered with puddles of red  
And screams of terror filled the air  
We were led away and I did not look around  
For I knew the sight would not be pretty

We entered a rotting building filled with the awful stench  
Of blood and death  
My mom and I were torn apart by rough hands  
Dirty lassos swung over our necks  
Pulling us away

Stella  
Zhu  
Grade 5  
West Woods  
Upper  
Elementary  
School  
Farmington

We battled to try and get to each other  
But we were fighting a losing battle  
The same man who had torn us apart took out a pistol  
And aimed it at my beloved mom's head  
The shot rang out and I thought my world was coming to an end  
Her legs buckled and she fell with one last glimpse of me

The man turned around and grinned coldly  
I lashed out angrily at him  
A piercing pain ricocheted through me  
Sending a chilling feeling throughout my body  
I felt myself falling, falling  
And blackness overwhelmed me

I headed to join my mother in the same dark fate  
Did we do something wrong?  
To be born? To live?  
Is that so wrong?  
You took away our lives  
Why? Why? Why?

## Music: Fantasy of My Life

**Benjamin  
Shao**  
Grade 6  
Walsh  
Intermediate  
School  
Branford

The rich tone of music fills my heart, getting away all the stress, leaving with a story to tell. A story the composer left for me to figure out how he felt that day. Did something that means to him a lot get destroyed? Or did he have the best day in the world and didn't lose anything that he cared about so much? How did he feel while writing that song?

A piece of music with that kind of emotion leaves me with a question. Can I relate to this? Can I feel what he is going through? While I listen to the touching piece of music, I close my eyes and think of this. The emotional music moves my soul to a whole new level, one that I thought I would never reach. This level is a carefree world, full of strong emotions and feelings. I open my eyes and now live in reality, a world full of tension, war, and worries. No one will reach a carefree world but in music; I can feel it. The music is played and spreads across the room, trying to let me feel the power and tone it is played. Music is full of powerful and moving pieces that are guaranteed to move one's soul. Everyone is on the edge of their seats and listens closely to how the orchestra is playing, with what type of emotion and love.

Playing an instrument has an even better feeling than listening to it. The advantage is that when I play an instrument I can make up the mind on how to play it. There are no rules on how to create pieces of music. I like to mix pieces

of music and see which style I would like to hear. Any instrument can allow us to create our own style of music. Try to master your piece and have a song that you can call your own.

Music is a way to express my feelings or relax them. At some time, music can add a little relaxation in my day to get away all that stress. Music can even put me to sleep. Lullabys, soft music, these are a few examples of music that can let me catch some zzz's. But most of the time I can just take a seat and sit back, and enjoy the music.

Beethoven's fourth symphony is a powerful yet sometimes quiet piece. It blends in tranquility and the "can-do" spirit. Classical music mimics things in real life that would sound similar to the piece. It gets all instruments in the orchestra involved. This lets me hear the high, squeaky notes of the violin, followed by the bong of the drums.

But not all music is like that. Rock and roll lets out my free spirit and lets me move to the beat. During a rock and roll concert, I feel adrenaline through my body instead of peace and quiet. Also, a louder sound is made because of all the electric instruments. It also has a pumped up beat. Most of the music is fast, and has lyrics too. Since the instruments are ones that can be moved around, I mostly see many people use the whole stage, jumping and running around.

Jazz is a music that has feelings. The blues makes me feel that my spirits are down. It tells about their struggles and their sad part of their day. It's got a flowing rhythm that I, or anybody else, can't clap to since it has an unpredictable beat. The flowing notes never stop when the music starts. The blues is a piece that is played with notes that sound sad, like flats. Scatting is a way when musicians forget the lyrics. They'll keep on going until the song ends. Jazz always moves my body to the music, letting it flow through my body.

Around the world, people speak different languages, culture, and sports. But if two people from two different countries listen to a rock concert, they'll start relating. That's why everyone understands music.

## **Middle School Angst**

The alarm clock rang loudly, piercing the boy's eardrums. His hand slapped the buzzer. He rubbed his eyes and glanced around warily. First day of school. Charlie Stevenson quickly got dressed, slung his unused backpack over his shoulder, and trooped downstairs for breakfast.

"I made pancakes," Charlie's mom sang as he sat down at the kitchen table. Charlie's mother had his same sandy-colored hair and thin form. He grunted to show that he had heard. His father, Dave Stevenson, sat opposite him. He put down his newspaper, revealing his suit and tie. He gave Charlie a small smile. "Nervous?" he inquired. Charlie hesitated, not knowing if he could trust his father with information such as this.

"Yeah," he said quietly.

**Jack  
McKernan**  
Grade 6  
Memorial  
Middle  
School  
Middlebury

“You’ll be fine. If Hillbrook hasn’t changed since I went there, you’ll have a great time.”

Charlie thought about this as he walked down the road to his bus stop. An eighth grader, two seventh graders, and another sixth grader were already there. He barely acknowledged the older kids and they didn’t acknowledge him. The other sixth grader was a different story. He had moved down the street a few weeks ago and Charlie had not yet met him. The boy gave Charlie a small, nervous smile.

“I’m Josh.”

“Charlie.”

The boys shook hands. While they shook, the two boys sized each other up. Josh was small, being thin in frame and being shorter than most kids Charlie knew. Charlie was at least a head taller than Josh. The boy had straight blonde hair and dark brown eyes. He wore jeans, sneakers, and a blue polo shirt. The sound of a loud motor made them turn around. The bus came chugging up the street, the new tires eating up the paved road like candy. With a loud screech, the bus came to a halt in front of them.

Charlie felt sick. He had ridden the bus since his first day of kindergarten and he was way used to it. So that wasn’t the problem. This was the same bus Charlie had last year, so that wasn’t it either. Even the bus driver was the same. So what was the problem? The kids. Last year, Charlie was one of the oldest kids on the bus. Now he thought of himself as a kindergartner. He and Josh stepped into the aisle and quickly stepped into the second seats in each row. Charlie could tell that Josh wished he was invisible, just like he did. As he had suspected, the older kids were extremely loud and obnoxious. Josh once had to duck as a huge wad of bubble gum zipped past his head and came to a sticky splat against the windshield. The bus driver grimaced as he gingerly pried the mess off the windshield, tossing the wet substance into the wastebasket. Charlie heard it land with a resounding THUNK! The bus driver muttered to himself as he once again turned his eyes to the road. Charlie remembered him like this. He always seemed to be quiet, like he never wanted to talk at all. Charlie inched closer to the window. After a while the bus came to a stop. Charlie pressed his nose against the window, smudging the glass. He was finally here.

Hillbrook Middle School had been built some time in the nineteen seventies, when Charlie’s dad went there. A few years ago, the school had been completely refurbished. There was a new gym, cafeteria, and auditorium. All the classrooms had been painted as well. Charlie took a deep breath as he and Josh stepped off the bus and into the open. They were immediately swept through the throng of students like dust from a broom. Thoughts swam through Charlie’s head as he and Josh were pulled along through the current.

“Room 212,” he thought. “Mrs. Braggle, Room 212.”

Something just occurred to him. He hadn’t asked Josh who he had for homeroom.

“Hey Josh.”

“Yeah?”

“Who do you have for homeroom?”

“Mrs. Braggle.”

“Me too!”

“Cool.”

They walked in silence after that. The hallway was loud and confusing. Older kids were shoving each other against the tall green lockers; kids were yelling to each other from across the hall.

As they were jostled along with the crowd, Josh spoke up. “Do you think we passed the classroom already?”

“I dunno.” Charlie looked around nervously. He didn’t want to get on the teacher’s bad side by being late on the first day of school. An aide standing next to the door smiled at them.

“Where is Mrs. Braggle’s room?” Charlie asked her. She pointed a few classrooms down. “Thank you,” the boys said in unison. They stood outside the door. Charlie gulped. So did Josh.

When they walked in, they could clearly see that there were no teachers in the room. There were kids running around desks and kids standing up in little clusters talking to each other. Charlie’s eyes followed a neat little paper airplane as it glided across the room. The boy who had thrown the plane stood up.

“What’s up, Charlie?” he called out.

“Hey Bill,” Charlie grinned. They high-fived. Bill Simmons, one of Charlie’s best friends since preschool, was tall with broad, muscular shoulders. His crew cut made him look like he belonged with the Marines. He played defensive tackle on the town’s football team. A slamming door made them look up. An old woman strode briskly in, her eyes roving the room. Wrinkles creased her face. Glasses were perched on the end of her big, warty nose. Her close-cropped hair was tied up in a bun at the base of her head. Her eyes scanned the room with practiced ease.

“Hello class,” she smiled, or at least what she thought was a smile. “Today we will be writing the first draft on our essay entitled, My Summer Vacation. The class groaned as she began passing out paper to each desk. Charlie stared at his blank paper, chewing his pencil in thought. He hadn’t exactly done anything constructive this summer. All he did was hang out with his friends all summer.

“My Summer Vacation” he muttered.

The bell rang and with dozens of shouts, the sixth grade thundered down the school steps, all racing to the basketball courts, soccer fields and playground area. Charlie turned his head, looking for Josh. He didn’t see him anywhere.

“Josh?” he called out. Hmmmm. No matter, Charlie told himself, Josh probably found another kid to play with and was having a great time. He walked towards the basketball courts.

He could pick out Bill standing next to a boy named John Bowman, another one of Charlie’s best friends. John was around the same height as Charlie, with brown hair and blue eyes. He could run extremely fast. In fifth grade he had been able to run cross-country with the sixth and seventh grade.

“I got Charlie!” called Bill when he spotted him. It was a game of five-on-five. So far, Billy had picked Charlie and John Bowman. The other captain was a boy called Frubbs. His real name was Robert Frumman, but everybody called him Frubbs.

The game began. Frubbs checked off to Billy who passed to Charlie. He whipped the ball down to Bowman who faked a shot, then passed back to Charlie. Charlie went up for a shot. Swish!! Nothing but net. Charlie’s team high-fived. Bill checked to Frubbs who began to dribble the ball down. Bowman almost immediately stole the ball and threw it all the way down the court back to Charlie. Charlie dribbled around two more kids and was about to take a lay up. Then he saw something. He vaguely heard Bill shouting. Josh was sitting alone on the swings watching them play. Charlie estimated how far away the swings were. He then threw the ball towards the swings, right to Josh. Josh caught the ball unexpectedly.

“Wanna play?” Charlie called out.

Josh smiled. “Yeah.” He suddenly jumped up and took a shot. Again, nothing but net.

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Charlie sank down on his bed and sighed. He knew he should be working on his homework but now wasn’t the time. He replayed the day’s events back in his head. He couldn’t believe that Josh, small as he was, was that good a basketball player. He had scored twenty four points and gotten five rebounds. Charlie smiled. He wondered how many points Josh would score tomorrow. He let out another sigh. Maybe middle school won’t be so bad, he thought. Still, one hundred and seventy-nine days to go. He had better finish his math homework.

## A Long Walk to the Sky

Nina  
Franzen  
Grade 6  
Mansfield  
Middle  
School  
Mansfield

The giant loomed up in front of us. It was taller than I ever thought it would be. And I had definitely been thinking a lot about this. The mountain was supposedly called Bear Mountain. To me that sounded scary because everything right now sounded scary. I didn’t think that I could do it, or maybe I would fall behind my sister and her friends. I glanced back at them as they giggled hysterically over a joke one of them had told.

When we left the Community Center at 6:00 this morning, the sun hadn’t peaked over the horizon. On the way there I sat next to my dad with a book in my hands and soon enough we were there. Getting off the bus was difficult after sitting for hours in the same position, piled with all of the enormous bags. I looked around uncomfortably as everyone was putting on their packs and evening out the weight between us by passing out some of the food. I could tell that they were trying to give me as little as possible. I wanted to yell out to them saying “I can do it!!!! Give it all to me!!!” Although I didn’t make a peep as they adjusted my pack, I knew that I was obviously the youngest one here.

Many people had long legs and quickly left the rest of us behind. The path grew steeper and soon it felt like the ground was vertical and we had to grasp

trees to pull us up. Ten minutes into the long walk we started to lose energy fast. I was the person who held the chocolate, and everyone reached into my pack and took a piece. It felt good to have something useful on my back, even though I only had chocolate.

We continued walking. I was keeping a steady pace with my dad, and soon we pulled away from the rest of the group and walked upward. Finally we got to a ridge on a bend. We walked with longer strides that seemed to pull us right up the steep side of the mountain. Right when we sat down and looked where we hadn't even glanced at, I saw the miraculous view. The trees below me seemed like someone had just painted a picture of something they longed to see—but knew they would never get the chance. My dad just eyed it and whispered, "This is nothing. Just wait till you get to the top," completely out of breath. I just wanted to sit there forever trying to catch my breath, but since I knew it would never come back to me, I stood up and took another big step.

Then a strange sight caught us by surprise. A gigantic tree had fallen off to the side of the path. Its long roots stuck out around it and hung in clumps of dirt like a regular sized weeping willow made entirely out of roots. We met up with the long-legged travelers as they explored the cave inside the roots. Just a quick glance inside was enough for us. We started to keep walking along side with the leader of this group, until he turned around and told us that we had just walked up a mile.

"Only a mile?" What was he talking about? We had been climbing for hours!!! Still, he shook everyone's hand as they walked by, and smiled. I now felt so confident that I walked with a spring to my step. The rest of the climb went by quickly, and I suddenly realized how short the trees were. I was easily taller than them by a few inches. Soon I could feel the cool wind in my hair and sped up. I wanted to be the first to step on the peak, so I scrambled up the remaining rocks that were steeper than ever.

Finally, I was there! The wind almost blew me off balance, but I managed to stay up and walk on the rock to the very peak. The peak was only a small bump that was the tallest thing on the mountain. For miles I could see around, even with the immense amount of fog obscuring my clear view. I had been in a dozen airplanes traveling all over the world, on ski lifts and tall hills. None would ever equal what I saw that day. As the others reached the top, they went by me and immediately sat down, I suddenly realized how tired my legs were, and they felt like jelly. At first the wind felt refreshing after the humid climate of the rest of the mountain, but now I was shivering. I looked around at our location and was confused when I saw no place to set up camp. The leader obviously saw my expression because he told me that we still had to walk for about forty-five minutes until we got to camp.

I was up in front with the leader and his daughter. We stopped for what I thought was a break stop, and that happened to be the entrance to our site. I listened but couldn't hear the rest of the group behind us. So we took a sharp turn up on a narrow path that led us to some partially flat ground with wooden tent platforms. I removed my pack and suddenly weighed about thirty pounds lighter. I didn't feel like sitting down to rest. I wanted to jump around and sing

because getting that pack off was such a relief. So I stood up and walked back down the path to catch the rest of the group before they continued walking on the trail. As soon as they caught up, I led them up the trail to our site.

We finished unpacking and setting up our tents when the sun began to shine again. My sister, her friends, and I walked down the path and off the trail to a ledge where we could see for hundreds of miles, since the fog had lifted. We stood in awe as we silently watched the miniature cars and houses the size of grains of rice. Next to us was a small stream that flowed right off the side of the mountain in a tall waterfall. Then it hit me. I had just done what I never thought that I would ever accomplish. I was like the little train engine that could. The only difference is that she thought that she could and I didn't. That minute of realization had me remember thinking about how I didn't think I could do it and ... I did!

We stayed there until it was completely dark and lights were scattered around below us. We thought that we would definitely wake up early tomorrow to watch the sunrise. We had missed out on seeing the sunset because we were on the east side of the mountain. Even though we wanted to go to sleep early to see the sunrise, we ended up getting into our tents at about 10:00. Nothing would stop us from seeing that sunrise though, so as planned we woke up at 5:00 and walked down in our pajamas.

It was still dark when we got there so we sat down and waited. Soon the tip was visible between the mountains in the distance. It wasn't bright enough so that we would have to turn our heads; we could look right into the small sun. Golden light flooded the horizon and lit up the trees that were fast asleep a second before. Soon the sun was so big and round that looking at it now was not a possibility.

The day went on and too soon we had to pack up and go. I didn't want to leave after working so hard to get up, but I knew that good things didn't last forever. So we started the long walk yet again. I found that walking down was about twice as hard as walking up. The backs of my legs ached painfully as they continuously were at a difficult angle.

It took a lot less time because sometimes (even though painful) my legs wouldn't stop going down until I purposefully crashed into a tree or rock. Later my technique was to grasp onto one tree then let go and fly to the next and keep repeating. It worked, and soon I was at the last stretch until I reached the bus. I used the last of my energy and collapsed on the grass near the road. I had to get my dad to take off my pack for me and load it into the bus.

We loaded back on and quickly drove away. I glanced back at Bear Mountain triumphantly as it got smaller and smaller, remembering the time when it something growing larger in the distance. Something I had not yet accomplished, and now I looked back at it like a memory.

## Premonition

Breathe in: Whoo  
Breathe out: Hoo  
You'll do fine, just as always  
It is just another horseshow, so  
Ignore them  
The cries,  
The stares,  
The laughs,  
They are just distractions, and  
Their owners all wish they could do,  
What you are about to do  
Now the announcer is booming your name through the speakers  
Wrong again  
Why can't they say it as it's spelled?  
After all, there isn't a W  
All right now  
Enter the ring  
Turn left  
Trot  
Check your diagonal  
Sit  
Canter  
Check your lead  
Pick up the pace  
Find the first jump  
Keep your pace the same by counting  
1,2-1,2-3,2, 1  
Jump  
Now that you're soaring,  
Time is still,  
The whole world is quiet  
  
All eyes are on you,  
But you ignore them  
You are happy  
Doing your favorite thing:  
Flying  
Eventually  
(And sadly)  
It ends  
So what if it is over?  
You still have five to go  
In reality, it is less than five minutes  
In your mind,

Ashlyn  
Markosky  
Grade 6  
Ridgefield  
Academy  
Ridgefield

It is fifteen  
That is long enough to let time take you

You blink  
For the first time in your jumping round  
And you've finished  
It's amazing how  
You can lose so much time in a blink  
You have done amazingly above average for this horseshow  
Everyone is cheering for you  
Your best friends,  
Your parents,  
And even those silly spectators that have no idea what is going on,  
Or whether I've done good or bad  
But are clapping just the same  
(To be polite)  
Well, you have news for them  
You were great!  
You scored an 85/100  
(Scoring above 86 is like being in the Hall of Fame)  
That's brilliant  
And ...  
What is that beeping?

You know what that is  
You wake up,  
Annoyed  
At the alarm clock  
It's woken you up an hour early  
But happy you get to go see your all-star pony  
Yoshi  
A.K.A Just a Fling  
Go bring him a carrot  
Encourage him to help you live your dream today  
Just like any other dream before a horseshow  
It was a  
Premonition

## One Word

One word  
That's all it takes  
To make a  
Difference

One move  
To stand  
Out  
In the light  
To fight  
To be noticed  
For what you believe in

One love  
To push you  
To their interest  
To drive you  
To the top

One mind  
One heart  
One soul  
One move  
One love

One word  
That's all it takes  
To make a  
Difference

## Outsider

I'm an outsider, that's for sure.  
I belong to an untold world.

When I talk to people they look at me strangely  
And think my brain's been twirled.

I turn around and just look down  
To let the misery unfold.

**Katie Mihalek**

Grade 6  
West Woods  
Upper  
Elementary  
School  
Farmington

**Jordan**

**Bassett**  
Grade 6  
Brooklyn  
Middle  
School  
Brooklyn

I'm an outsider, that's for sure.  
I belong to a world untold.

As crazy as I seem to be  
They'll never really know

My heart churns like an untamed sea  
The way it comes and goes.

They judge before they know me.  
Guess what else they don't know.

All of them are the reason  
My face never seems to glow.

## Cinderella: the Real Story

**Madison  
Sundquist**  
Grade 7  
Mansfield  
Middle  
School  
Mansfield

Hi, I'm one of Cinderella's step-sisters. I'm here to tell you the real story about Cinderella. I'll tell you about the time she came to our house and the time she married the prince. We had the most perfect life until that little snob of a girl came. She always butted into our business, and she always made us look like the bad guy when we told her she looked bad and to go home. She would burst out crying and run home. She did that to us like as a joke, like when you kids say, "your face!"

Now, everyone thinks that we gave her the name Cinderella. Her father did that. She liked burning stuff when she was little and threw the cinders on herself. She liked the name Ella. Ergo, the nickname "Cinderella." That is just the start of it. Let's go to the beginning.

Her father married my mother and she moved in. Simple as that. My sister and I welcomed her into our lives with open arms. We just started being mean to her because of the golden rule: "Treat others how you want to be treated."

The next thing that happened was *so* Cinderella's fault. When she was playing with the cinders, she ruined her only dress and said, "Until I get a new dress I will not change except for my undergarments!"

That's how and why she is always wearing that foul, dirty, dress. Once her father died, we all had trouble coping, but she was the worst. You would think that it because it was *her* birth father, but the only reason she was crying was because she wasn't in the *will!!!* How shallow is that? She was also very depressed because she still had to live with us or find a job. She didn't want to do either. So, she set out to find a husband. She said, "I'll find a husband, and have him buy me a new dress. That won't take long." but since she would not change her dress, no man would even look at her—unless she had a million dollars wrapped around her.

About a month after her father died, she still was mad about a whole lot of stuff. We got an invitation from the Prince that said we were invited to the royal ball. All the young ladies of the house were invited, even Cinderella. She wanted to go, but our mother only had enough to buy supplies to make our dresses by hand. My sister and I were good seamstresses, and Cinderella was better than we were, but she was extremely lazy. She always sat around eating candies and pie. You would think that she would just get larger sitting around eating candies and pie 24/7, but it is always a fairy tale for Cinderella.

The next thing I want to clear up is the whole Fairy Godmother thing. That *never happened!* I saw the price tag on it with my own eyes. The reason she wanted it over by midnight is because she knew the store she bought it from was closing at 12:30.

What you all think about me is that my sister and I were going after the Prince, but that is totally wrong. My real, not step-sister, was going after the Prince. Of course Cinderella was too, or else she wouldn't be the princess.

The person I was going for was a waiter. He was so cute. He had a stunning smile. He was well groomed. He had muscles. The whole package! You also think that we didn't know who was in the dress and the glass slippers, but we did. The only thing we didn't know was who bought her the dress. It was a stunning blue dress with a light blue shawl. You could pick her out of the whole crowd.

I actually wanted Cinderella to marry the Prince for some reason. I don't know, but I think it's because I wanted her out of the house. She was really starting to annoy me! For what everyone thinks she is, she doesn't know when to stop doing something. She likes egging people on. When she is bored, she likes to make people mad for self amusement. It gets really old, really fast.

Anyway, I digress. What I could see, she changed her whole personality. It was really weird. She was nice and acted like she was shy. It was like seeing a mirror image of her; everything is the same ... except the opposite, you know?

Anyway, she wasn't very smart and forgot about telling him her name. How smart is that? That part of the story was true. Cinderella wasn't the brightest lightbulb in the lamp, if you know what I mean. That is also the reason that her shoe was made of glass—and the reason that her shoe fell off!

I wanted to tell the Prince that her name was Cinderella, and he could reach her at 123-456-7890. But my sister was physically holding me back. She said, "By the looks of his face, he fell in love. But, if there is no trace of her, he will never find out. Then I can marry him and he will never know because she would have already returned the dress!" Then she had a very evil chuckle.

I listened to her, because of all the evil things Cinderella did to me when she first moved in. I can still remember the agony and pain she put me through. Like her sitting on me, squeezing my hand until it hurt, and most of all, yelling at me for no reason. The worst part of the whole thing was that I didn't feel bad about what I was doing. Now looking back at it, I feel like a hypocrite because that's why I always got mad at her.

It all turned out for the better, though. It's as if that is why the Prince had so much attraction to Cinderella. He said later that she was so mysterious he had

**Paula  
Chen**  
Grade 7  
Mansfield  
Middle  
School  
Mansfield

to find her and learn everything about her. The worst part was that he said that to my sister—the one who told me not to tell. After that I had to chuckle at her because of bad karma.

At the end of the ball he found the shoe that she lost. Amazingly, they still gave Cinderella all her money back. I think it's because that solved the problem for the lady with two left feet. She was willing to pay triple the amount of money for one pair of shoes, but the store only had half a pair for her, until Cinderella brought hers back.

Then the next day, the Prince sent his people to find Cinderella, like Cinderella told you. He brought around her shoe door to door. The only reason that she was the only one to fit the shoe was because she had a 6 1/3 size foot. The only other one in the whole kingdom who had that size foot was that lady who had two left feet.

When he got to our house, he asked for all the ladies of the house to come to see him. They didn't know what it was for, so they let Cinderella go see him first. She was back in her tattered dress. Then the shoe fit.

So in the end, they got married. We became friends, and threw my mom and my sister in jail for a month. Then, when we were at the next royal ball, Joe, the waiter, proposed ... and I said yes. Like Cinderella says, "and we all lived happily ever after."

## Lactophobia

"Are you going to try the milk this time?" Abigail inquired while glancing over at me.

It took me an instant to remember the conversation we had over the internet last night. Yesterday, I had informed Abigail about my milk dilemma.

"I guess so ...," I replied uncertainly.

We each took a milk carton and a tray of food. We paid for our meals and seated ourselves at a rectangular cafeteria table where my other friends, Bert and Sara, were waiting for us.

Shortly after, I finished my lunch. Up to this moment, I had been carefully avoiding the milk carton. However, my friends continued trying to persuade me to taste it. Abigail also had never tried the school's chocolate milk, but favored the drink already, unlike me.

I snatched a small plastic cup of grapes from Abigail's tray and dumped out all of the fruit. I poured out some chocolate milk into the cup until the liquid was a few centimeters from the brim. Handing her the beverage, I waited for her to sample it first.

In order to reassure me, Abigail informed me of the milk's taste; according to her, it was simply a chocolaty flavor. I was still reluctant, but I placed the translucent straw in my mouth anyway. I recalled when I was younger; even then, I didn't have luck with milk.

Several years ago, my sister and I were going with my father to his office. I carried a paper cup of milk in my hand and was supposed to drink it during the

car ride over. I tried to consume some, but every time that I pressed the cup to my mouth, a wave of nausea swept over me, either from the scent or the taste of the drink. Back then, my family attempted on numerous accounts to force me to drink milk. Ever since I had stopped using a bottle, I never enjoyed the taste again; it was just unbearable.

When we parked, I disposed of the cup's contents onto the parking lot, hoping to sneak by without drinking it. Naturally, due to the unmistakable color of the milk, my father and sister eventually noticed the white puddle glistening in the perfect sunlight, momentarily staining the pavement.

Now, I was unsure of what to expect. Would I get the same uncomfortable feeling of nausea with an added twist of chocolate, or would I actually enjoy the taste and be able to drink milk again?

I gazed around and noticed Abigail and Sara staring at me impatiently. Bert was glancing off into space, appearing unconcerned with his surroundings. I glared at my friends to stop looking at me, and, before I knew it, I was chortling hysterically, unable to stop.

"What's so funny?" Sara questioned me.

"Stop staring at me!" I uttered between giggles.

In order to muffle my laughter and to mentally block out the background noise, I created a barrier between me and my friends with Abigail's chorus folder. It took me a moment to become peaceful once again. Just as I was about to sip some of the liquid, Sara knocked over the folder while asking if I had drank anything yet.

Partly annoyed and partly grateful for her interruption, I retorted in a playful manner, "No, but I was about to, thank you very much!"

As I submerged back behind the folder, I started to suck on the straw. A minuscule amount of liquid entered my mouth, and I tasted a sweet flavor. It was just as if I had drank cold hot chocolate ... if that would even make sense that is ...

"Oh my gosh! She's taking another sip!" Sara exclaimed, causing Bert and Abigail to make a fake gasp.

The taste was a bit indescribable, but I had to admit that it wasn't as I had expected. The beverage's flavor wavered in my mouth for a while and then faded away. Possibly it was an effect of what I had instinctively anticipated, but I thought for a split second that I had sensed slight uneasiness, and some disappointment crept into my mind.

*'Maybe next time,' I thought, 'maybe next time.'*

I can bring myself to this day and reflect about how it will impact me in the future or even in the present. Despite how insignificant this event may seem to others, it will always be important to me, now that I have moved forward from my lactophobia days ...

**Abigail  
Lavalley**  
Grade 7  
Sedgwick  
Middle  
School  
West Hartford

## **First Recital Blues**

Feet scuffed the wooden floors of the college stage as the act right before us finished up. Their arms went flying, legs kicked, and music blasted from the speakers in every corner of the immense auditorium. Blackout. The applause erupted from the audience while finicky dance instructors dressed in ‘CREW’ tee-shirts and black pants whisper-shouted instructions to the lighting coordinators up in the technical booth through their little ear pieces. They glared at the noisier kids from behind the velvet, red curtains. A baby crying in the audience could be heard over the chatter and restlessness of hundreds of parents, grandparents, and siblings. The aroma of roses was not nearly as odorous as the revolting smell of sweat.

We stood in that dank musty theatre in absolute silence and I yearned for the babies’ cries and mothers’ bickers for I was sure that everyone on earth could hear the thumping of my heart. Hairspray gagged me, making it even harder to breathe. My palms oozed and dripped onto the floor. I rubbed them against my baggy, black pants, and bit my lips so hard they bled. Tap, ballet, and jazz shoes all made their distinct clack from place to place. I could feel make-up running down my rosy-red cheeks. Michelle from another dance class wished me good luck.

“You’re on now!” Miss Alice hissed at our class.

I thought I would faint. She gave Emily, at the front of the line, a push out onto the pitch-black stage. The line hurried out behind her. “This is it,” I thought nervously. “Don’t you dare mess up or you will let your whole class down,” I warned myself. I stumbled onto the long stage and got myself set up to start dancing. Lights flashed on, the audience cheered, and an up-beat jazz song started.

I performed my tap dance under those blazing lights. “Step right, step left, smile, turn around,” I reminded myself.

I looked through the audience to find my family. Practically falling off the balcony, they tried so hard to get my attention to let me know that they were there. My hand urged me to wave, but I forced myself just to put on my biggest, brightest smile right at them. Concentrating on smiling, I lost my balance and stumbled forward. I did not fall all the way to the floor, but I felt as though all eyes were on me. My classmates appeared to glare at me. The sound stopped and I felt dizzy. I had ruined everything we had worked all year for. A single tear rolled down my cheek, but I continued to dance. Even though I was gloomy, even though my costume was the itchiest I’d ever had, even though I tripped, we finished and the song ended. I was sticky, matted, frizzy, and frazzled. The blackout came and we trudged off stage.

I could barely contain my tears. I sauntered out of the backstage room and met up with my family, who produced two bouquets of white and yellow daisies. I really felt like a failure. I didn’t deserve any of it. I had messed up! Yet there was my family, rosy and beaming from the packed auditorium. My fellow dancers smiled at me as though I hadn’t stumbled.

“You all saw me trip, right?”

“What are you talking about? You did great!”

My grandmother kissed my forehead. For the first time all day, I really, genuinely smiled. I had made such a big deal out of nothing! No one had even noticed. I took my bouquets and sat through my fair share of a thousand pictures.

That day I realized that I shouldn't be so hard on myself for silly mistakes. It is all about enjoyment. Having a good time is the best calmer in a nerve-racking situation.

## Ode to Apple Crisp

I sit on the wooden bar chair,  
tapping my foot  
with anticipation  
as I watch you  
basking in the oven,  
enjoying your personal sauna  
awaiting  
your conference with my taste buds.

Squinting to see  
through the small oven window,  
I admire your crispy skin,  
lounging in the center  
of the middle rack.  
I imagine  
rushing over to you,  
yanking you out  
of your scorching paradise.  
Your heavenly apple-cinnamon fragrance  
fills up the kitchen  
as I sink my fork  
into the depths  
of your sweetness.  
I close my eyes  
as I bring my fork  
Up to my mouth and ...

Suddenly  
I am jarred awake  
as I hear  
the oven buzzer sound off  
like a siren,  
announcing to the world  
that your time is up.

**Dan  
Gadoury**  
Grade 7  
Tolland  
Middle  
School  
Tolland

I walk over to you  
with deliberate steps,  
my mouth foaming  
at the thought  
of your simple deliciousness.

I turn off the buzzer,  
pull on an oven mitt,  
pry open the oven door,  
feel the electrifying heat,  
extend my arm  
into the oven,  
and carefully  
pull you out.

I sharpen my knife,  
taunting you.  
You hiss steam back at me,  
fearless.

I slowly  
slide my knife into you,  
revealing your tender  
apple flesh  
glowing  
in the kitchen light.

I plunge  
my glistening fork into you,  
close my eyes,  
and sigh with joy  
as I raise you  
to my mouth  
tasting the collision  
of tart apple  
and sweet cinnamon sugar.

Oh, almighty apple crisp!  
You laugh in the faces  
of apple sauce and apple pie.

The peeler was created  
just for you  
as was the oven  
and the fork.

You are the king  
with your golden  
cinnamon crown  
perched on top  
of all those slices.  
Ruler of my taste buds!

## Painting # 32

The sunlight filters through the foliage, dappling my furious face with illumination.  
I quicken my stride, pounding my feet into the dust.  
At last I come to the sandy bank.  
The water dawdles lazily along.  
I scream at it.  
I clutch the paints.  
I hurl them into the rippling depths.  
I gaze at the array of colors, swirling together, being swept downstream.  
Painting for me is no more, is hopeless.  
But the death of one art gives birth to another.  
I stare at the river.  
Now I appreciate it, I see, hear, feel the scene around me, and anger becomes inspiration.  
My footsteps follow me back to my house.  
I grope for a piece of paper, nestle a pencil into my hand, and  
Words of the paints,  
Of the river,  
Of the beauty of life  
Flood out onto the paper.  
I feel emotions I have never felt before.  
I am no longer an artist.  
I am now a writer.

**Daniel  
Sheehan**  
Grade 7  
Woodbury  
Middle  
School  
Woodbury

## Collection

**Haley  
Cormier**  
Grade 7  
Granby  
Memorial  
Middle  
School  
Granby

1.  
signs and shadows  
city lights  
flash  
then blur  
and your  
eyes play  
the defined  
notes of the  
skyline  
buildings  
brick and steel  
silhouettes  
against night  
the smell of cigarette  
smoke chokes  
the evening  
air, stings your  
eyes  
gridwork  
of concrete  
sidewalk beneath  
your feet, their  
feet  
people  
rush past  
weaving through  
the streets  
clogged with  
pausing cars  
taxis, blaring  
horns  
the motion  
of crowds  
only  
New York  
knows

2.  
the worn fenceposts  
have stood straight  
a long way now  
carrying the weight  
of the blue sky  
on their outspread  
arms  
sultry tenor  
serenades  
penetrates my  
bluegrass soul  
and the old barn  
faded red  
rustic simplicity  
tilting towards the  
setting sun  
splintered yet  
dignified  
watching the  
days  
silently standing  
sonnet of  
the rural road  
late afternoon  
rushes by  
through my window  
casts a golden  
haze  
spilled over  
the world  
and the fenceposts  
barbed wire rusting  
continue on  
waiting  
still carrying  
the weight of  
the blue sky  
blue sky

3.  
remember  
when you  
were just a  
child  
the sweet memories  
play like an  
old movie  
and you  
would  
run outside  
summer air  
balmy  
to the playground  
bare feet  
slapping  
the soft grass  
*thump thump*  
and you pulled  
yourself up  
onto the swing  
back and forth  
simple rhythm  
freedom  
as the wind  
tousled your  
hair, kissed  
your smile  
and you could  
touch the clouds  
other children  
below  
a blur of color  
movement  
and you knew  
swing slowing  
metal chains  
*clink*  
that you could  
fly

## Glimpses in a Square

Gray skies draped Lima, not an uncommon sight, as the sea-side city was in constant companionship with drizzling rain and the ashiest gray skies imaginable. Yet today, the city that lacked light was nourished by a certain measure of tradition, culture, and pride. Today, thousands of Peruvians would gather in their capital to venerate and laud their own Saint Rose, who was a beloved and most sacred figure to them, on her feast day.

I think that such a passion could drive away even the gloomiest of gray skies, for the sights, sounds, and smells were glorious. Street vendors had exchanged their usual wares for Saint Rose paraphernalia and were forming a queue of eager customers. Music drifted on a cool, persistent breeze through the commotion of the streets gathering delicious aromas—crusty, warm *empanadas*, tender, roasting alpaca meat, and *maiz* from the countryside with its oversized kernels. How tantalizing!

Our destination, the bustling, crowded *Plaza de Armas*, proved to be just as exciting as the rest of the overflowing city. The sound of Spanish chatter grew encroachingly louder, seeming to hold an air of expectancy, like something extraordinary was bound to occur. As we snaked through the *Plaza*, I could feel my cheeks blushing slightly, aware of the stares my summer-blond hair, blue eyes, and pale skin were attracting. I had tried to grow accustomed to the gazes over the past two weeks, as I knew that blond hair was an unusual sight among the locals, yet I couldn't help the color from rising into my cheeks with slight embarrassment at the persistent attention.

In front of us, on the brownstone steps of the cathedral, marched the Peruvian color guard—so proud, oh so proud, with their neatly starched uniforms and striking, young features. *They represent such an extraordinary nation, and they are so proud*; I remember thinking to myself and knowing that it was true.

I would not know it then, but a random occurrence soon to unravel would change my outlook and attitude from that point forward.

I had been casually scanning my surroundings, people-watching—a favorite pastime of mine—and in a foreign place like this, it was all the more fascinating. An old couple, their skins withered from a combination of toil, sun, and age, sat on a nearby bench, the woman donning a *chullo*, the traditional bowler hat of the Andes, and a skirt of vibrant colors. Near them, a group of young children frolicked, their dark skin so beautiful, their eyes so alive. A solitary young woman pushed a stroller, the excitement of the day enough to bring a smile to her troubled face. *I wonder her story*; I remember thinking to myself, and at once it intrigued and frightened me, as we live across a universe of time. We walked further into the square, and more faces crossed my eyes—a family, two elderly ladies, a man, a woman, a child, two teenagers .... I watched and observed.

Still, it was the next sight that truly caught my heart and held it captive: a straight line of teenage girls, with two middle-aged women as their lead and caboose. Each girl wore a meticulously clean, cream-of-wheat colored sweater

Amy  
Tomasso  
Grade 8  
Irving A.  
Robbins  
Middle  
School  
Farmington

and black skirt paired with heavy wool tights and black loafers. What could have been lengthy, radiant, raven-black hair was cropped short, nearly at the ears, in a manner that showed no frivolity or imagination. Their appearance, so simple and humble, startled me in an inexplicable way, and I queried my mother as to who they were. The last response I could have expected was that they were novitiates, or “nuns-in-training,” living in a convent. Oh, I’d read of convents in novels as dreaded places reserved for extra daughters, spinsters, socially disruptive women, and female criminals.

But in modern days? I’d never imagined, and for girls just my age and a bit older .... Were they separated from their families? Just the thought brought an abrupt glaze of tears to my eyes. As I gazed at the girls, my world stopped; my mind numbed. Once again, I imagined my life as theirs, and how immensely different it would be. Yet, would I know? It would be the only life I would have ever known. Would I realize?

Just as I was turning back toward the cathedral, my foot in mid-pivot, one of the girls raised her gaze, and her eyes caught mine. In the intense brown, I found a valley of emotion hardly expressed on her face, in which there lived sadness, a deep sadness that could even pass for loneliness, along with a subtle inquiry and amazement, both so similar to mine. Was it unhappiness that shadowed her fine features? Was that it? Or perhaps a feeling of being trapped .... I could not tell. Suspended, mid-pivot in my turn, the world rotated around me, whirling at a dizzying speed. Yet we held each other’s gaze, my head ever so slightly cocked, for the weight of my questions and the sheer lack of answers was so great.

Then, all of a sudden, I realized what I needed to do. Before the smile could cross my lips, the crowd shifted, and the future nun was lost from my sight. My gaze lingered, through I knew it has no focus, and although my breath has returned, the feeling of the earth being knocked from my feet still remained, as I knew it would for some time. The girl, I thought, was surely a gift from God himself, in her simple, angelic attire—such a contrast to her severe black hair.

She was sent to show my how very lucky I was to be here in this *Plaza de Armas* this very day. She was sent to show my how different my suburban life was from hers and thousands of others girls worldwide—how predictable, secure, and easy. *We are a network of sisters*, I thought, *yet we have no knowledge of it*. So great was my feeling then, and my ultimate curiosity, that I closed my eyes, knowing with a wistful pang of vain sadness that I would never know the story of this one sister.

My regret was broken with my mother—“Amy, look ...,” she said, directing my focus to the cathedral, yet my thoughts, broken and incomplete, would not obey. With one last look backward, I caught, for the briefest second, a glimpse of creamy white and a flash of the darkest black hair.

Was I imagining it? Though I will never know the answer to that query, I know one thing for sure: that insightful day, I made a pact to remember in my heart a sister so different from me, so many smiles away.

And that glimpse, I know, will last forever.

## And The Winner Is ...

“Students interested in running for this year’s class president please sign up in the office,” blared from the loud speaker on a sunny Orange County, California Monday morning. Students fresh off the bus filled the hallways. A few struggled with jammed lockers while others chatted about what they did over the weekend. There were also the other occasional students running through the hall in attempts not to be tardy to their homeroom class. Students who had stopped to listen to the bulletin continued on to with what they were doing. Only a few students continued to linger in the locker-lined halls. Shay heard the announcement but didn’t think much of it. Every year the popular crowd would dominate the election, leaving those who truly care off to the sidelines. She knew that she wasn’t popular, so therefore there was no reason she should run.

Shay grabbed her tray of mac and cheese and got in line to pay. When she exited the line she went to go sit down at her usual table in the cafeteria at Orange County Middle School with her best friend Lilly and a few other kids. She loved lunch; it was her favorite time of the day. She didn’t have to worry about tests or pop quizzes. She was free to hang out with her friends while eating her lunch. Around them were other round tables like theirs filled with friends talking and sharing the latest gossip. They had been close since their mothers met at work a year after the two girls were born. They had never fought and practically lived at each other’s houses. They even call their parents aunt and uncle. One time Lilly got so mad she ran away from her house and camped out in Shay’s closet for the night, until Shay’s dog Buddy smelled her and started going crazy. Then Shay’s parents found out and called Lilly’s parents and had them pick her up. When Shay sat down, Lilly blurted out, “You should totally run for class president. You would be perfect for the job. You are a natural born leader.”

“No thanks, I don’t think I’m cut out for making huge decisions. If you can remember, it took me three months to pick out the color of my bedroom. How can I make bigger decisions in a shorter amount of time that apply to more people?” Shay answered.

Lilly did what she always had done when she knew she was right, and blocked out what Shay was saying. Lilly had used this technique many times, like when she told Shay that they should go to sleep-away camp together and Shay disagreed. Shay and Lilly along with the others at the table went on to debate the class president job and Shay’s strengths and weaknesses for a while until Lilly said, “Shay, you may not be miss ‘popular,’ and we love you for that. But you have a shot at winning. Many people can relate to you because you are just like them, and THAT is what they want in a president. You are totally the girl next door. They don’t want someone who wears designer clothes. Who do you think will do a better job as president?”

“Fine, I’ll do it,” Shay ended. She knew that Lilly was always right. If Lilly thought that Shay could do it, then she could. She stood up and headed towards the office to go sign up. She couldn’t help but notice the little skip in her step

**Sydney  
Wolfson**  
Grade 8  
RHAM Middle  
School  
Hebron

as she walked. She was ready to give this her all, and hopefully win.

When Shay got to the office to go sign up for president, she saw Chloe, the most popular girl in school, and a few other students doing the same. Chloe, Lilly, and Shay had once been friends in elementary school. They hung out all the time. They even called themselves the terrible threesome. The summer before starting middle school, Chloe went to Paris for a vacation and appeared a totally new person when she came back. Ever since, Lilly and Shay had been too “Blah” to be Chloe’s friends. She knew that there was a small chance of her winning class president against Chloe. She was truly a leader. And her competitive nature would make her hard to beat. With her shiny blonde hair, straight white teeth, and designer clothes, Chloe would surely win, thought Shay. Shay looked nothing like Chloe. She had frizzy, muddy brown hair, and braces. She also had chunky glasses that made her look like a bug, and got all her clothes at the Salvation Army. It wasn’t Shay’s fault that her parents were going through a financially hard time and couldn’t afford the clothes that other students had. She liked to be unique. Also, vintage was in, so she wasn’t a total outcast. On the flip side, she had a nice group of friends. Shay was about to drop out of the race until she remembered what Lilly said about having a class president that people could relate to, and immediately changed her mind about dropping out.

The next day, as Shay was walking to homeroom, Chloe stopped her. “What do you want?” Shay said in a snooty tone. Shay didn’t care what Chloe had to say, but it looked clear to her that Chloe had an answer. However, Shay didn’t want to hear an answer; all she wanted was to get to her algebra class on time.

“I can’t believe you think that you have a chance of winning against ME. I am a much better choice for president than you. Who used to lead our little ‘group’ back in, like, what was it, first grade?” Chloe started. “No one will vote for you unless it is a pity vote. And believe me, there is a lot to pity. Just look at how you are dressed. Everyone can see through your last season Ralph Lauren knockoffs. And, who cuts that rat’s nest of a hair? Your mom? No one has had bangs like that since kindergarten. So, why don’t you just do us all a favor and drop out of this election, keeping what little dignity that you supposedly possess. And, if that isn’t enough to change your mind, remember that I already have over 75% of the student body on my side. There is no way you can beat that. I will be a great president; you’ll see. I care about true issues, like the dances, not world peace or stopping the little ‘groups’ in our school.” Chloe wanted to make sure to make a proper exit, so with a toss of her hair and a whip of her perfectly polished fingernails, she tore down Shay’s nearby poster and sauntered away with a sly giggle.

A week later it was Election Day. A layer of excitement hung in the air, not only for the candidates, but for the students too. During homeroom, Shay prepared her speech back stage of the auditorium. She practically had no fingernails from chewing on them in attempts to calm her nerves. The candidates had an hour to fix and rehearse their speeches before presenting them to the whole school. She knew that needed to win over all the students that were already on Chloe’s side. She added a few things here and there but

particularly enjoyed the main idea of her speech, so she didn't change much. Shay was nervous and didn't want to mess up, so she read over her speech multiple times. By the end she almost had it memorized. She also snacked on a few crackers to try to calm her nervous stomach. When she knew that she was ready, she decided to listen to Chloe practice her speech. It was quite idiotic, for her taste. All that was in it was how cool she thought she was. She wasn't that cool, like her put-downs on Shay. However, none of the things she said about her were true, and then there were the unrealistic things she believed she could make happen, like no school on Fridays and a shorter school day—as if.

Finally, the auditorium filled with students eager to hear the speeches and vote. It was amazing how quickly they quieted down, because most of the students weren't too keen on assemblies. Chloe appointed herself the 'honor' of being the first candidate to deliver her speech. After her the other candidates would go, and Shay would end. Shay didn't mind because then when the students heard what Shay had to say they would know that all Chloe said about her was a lie. From backstage Shay could hear that Chloe delivered her phony speech flawlessly. It appeared that the audience believed everything she said because Chloe earned herself a standing ovation.

When the audience mellowed down, Shay headed up to the podium. The audience grew silent. Shay took one look at the audience and choked. All of her lines got jumbled up and she grew nervous. Her vision was blurred too, so it was difficult to read what was on the piece of paper in front of her. She had acted, and this had never happened to her. She felt nauseous and almost ran off stage, until she remembered her reason for doing this election. She had never had stage fright before and didn't want to start right then. She glanced down to Lilly in the audience for some advice. She would know what to do. Lilly saw the fear and distress in Shay's eyes. She felt bad for Shay and didn't want her to get embarrassed. She mouthed to Shay to take a deep breath and relax. It helped. All of a sudden, Shay's nerves were gone. Shay gave Lilly a thank you smile and began to deliver her speech.

"A few weeks ago I would have never thought about being president," Shay began. "I'm nothing special. I am just a normal kid. I enjoy activities like horseback riding and swimming, not debating and writing lengthy speeches. So you, like I was a while ago, are thinking, Why her? Why Shay for president? I can tell you why. I care about true issues, like having vegetarian options in the cafeteria, and getting less homework on Fridays. I will take your ideas and put them into consideration, too. You need a lot of self-confidence to be class president, and I have a lot. I am a true leader and will make a difference in this school. I may not be popular, but I am just like YOU, and isn't that what is truly important? Please remember to vote for me, Shay, for the class president of 2008. Thank you."

All that was left to do was vote. Chloe and Shay stood in the doorway as the students filed out of the auditorium and into the gym to vote. They waved and smiled while reminding people to vote for them. The line of people went on and on like a never-ending train. It felt like the longest time in her life. She prayed that her speech made a lasting impression on the students and they

would vote for her.

Inside Chloe felt that she had won the students over. She didn't want to ride on her high horse, but she felt that she did well and had a shot at winning. Chloe, on the other hand, didn't look as sure. She knew how well Shay did and didn't know which way the election would go.

When Shay and Chloe got backstage, Chloe asked Shay if she could talk to her. Shay agreed by sitting down on a nearby folding chair. Shay didn't particularly like these little 'talks' but didn't want to be rude by saying no. Chloe went on talking about how she thought Shay wouldn't follow through with the election and just drop out at the beginning. Chloe told Shay that she respected Shay for running against her. None of it mattered to Shay. She could see the finish line and didn't want to look away. It was a battle of the fittest. Maybe if Chloe spent less time at the salon and more time on the court she would be more confident. To not stall this little 'chat' any longer, Shay finally ended their conversation with a sincere, "May the best woman win."

Two days later, the announcement that everyone was waiting for came over the loud speaker. "This year's class president election was a close one," exclaimed Principal Burns in her scratchy voice. Shay, who had a lousy day, suddenly perked up at the announcement. Everyone stopped dead in his or her tracks to see who had won. "The new class president of 2008 is ... Shay Smith."

Shay's eyes filled with tears of joy. She couldn't believe what she had just heard. She had actually won, and nothing else mattered right now. This was one of the proudest moments of her life. She could hear Chloe nearby saying how the election was fixed, but Shay didn't care. She ran over and gave Lilly a hug.

"Thank you," she whispered to Lilly, "for everything."

## Reflection

Rylie  
Dexter  
Grade 8  
William  
Johnston  
Middle  
School  
Colchester

Sasayaki woke with a start from yet another dream. He could see that the room in which he had been sleeping was still shrouded in ominous shadows. It was the result of a large full moon whose light coated the chamber like a creamy blanket. He shook his head to drive the dream away, but the images remained; a set-in stain imprinted on his mind. He had dreamed about the boy again. It was strange, he thought, that he should keep having the same dream over and over. It seemed almost as if the heavens were warning him about some impending doom that was linked to the boy in his dream. But the most peculiar thing, he thought, was that this boy was in fact an inverted version of himself. They had the same appearance, save the hairstyles and clothing, but their personalities were completely different. This dream boy was a headstrong, confident being. This was the exact type of person that shy, bashful Sasayaki tried to avoid. Despite this, Sasayaki envied the boy. He lived the exact type of life that Sasayaki had always wished for: a life of freedom and friendship.

Sasayaki turned to face the moon. The moonlight warmed his soul as he sighed longingly. *They say that people who sleep in moonlight go mad*, he thought darkly. *But it's too late. I already am.*

Sasayaki awoke to the sound of birds chirping. The places in his room that had once been filled with moonlight had been replaced by bright streaks of the morning sun. He shielded his eyes with his forearm. He remembered a time when he'd enjoyed sunlight warming his skin and brightening the vast blue sky, but lately it had been an unwelcome presence, touching his being in a way that made his skin crawl with distaste. *I, myself, was brighter than too*, he reflected. Maybe, now, the contrast was too great.

He waited for a few lazy minutes before, slowly, making his way downstairs. His parents had left for work by now, but that didn't make a difference. He barely saw or spoke to them even if they were home. He was merely thankful that summer vacation had saved him, for the time being, from the rush and crowded hallways of school. Most of the children, he imagined, were currently playing together with their own separate cliques. They always grouped together like that, even when the pressures of the school year were lifted. Sasayaki, however, belonged to no clique. In fact, it was unlikely that more than a handful of students at the school even knew his name. They had no sympathy for those who wished not to reach out. He was truly miserable.

A heavy crash sounded from behind Sasayaki, snapping him out of his train of thought. He turned, too quickly, resulting in a dull dizziness which forced him to take hold of the table next to him in order to keep standing. An icy fear choked his throat and numbed his mind as he realized that he wasn't alone in the house. A boy, no older than he, stood in the doorway, smirking in a way that made him look almost evil. *He's the one from my dream!* realized Sasayaki with growing panic.

"I knew that we were different, but I never imagined my other to be so *spineless!*" The double's tone was mocking. Sasayaki tried to ignore how much that voice sounded like his own ... well almost. He couldn't remember a time when he'd ever had the courage to speak in such a fierce manner.

"Who are you?!" Sasayaki's words were awkward. He wasn't used to yelling.

The boy stepped forward, "I'm hurt that you don't recognize me." The way that he said it showed that he wasn't hurt in the least. "I'm you."

Sasayaki trembled with anxiety. He had known. Of course he recognized the boy whom had plagued his dreams for years ... The one he saw every time he looked at his reflection. "What are you doing here?" As he spoke, Sasayaki's eyes darted between the doppelganger before him and the floor.

"Haven't you ever felt out of place in this world, like you were meant for something else?" Sasayaki was taken off guard ... Why would this boy ask him such a strange question? The change in subject had been so abrupt that, for a moment, Sasayaki wondered if he had missed something. The double seemed not to notice the questioning glance that he'd received and continued on, explaining, "We can't survive in the settings that we were placed in. There are two mirror dimensions, separated by a gate. Every 365 years, that gate opens for exactly fifty-five seconds. During those fifty-five seconds, no human souls are formed. If they were, there would be a chance of them being brought into the wrong world—just like we were.

“That night, fourteen years ago, the gates opened, and by some twisted miracle we were created and taken into the wrong worlds. It’s time to get back to where we belong.” He took a step forward, bringing his hand to Sasayaki’s forehead.

The world began to fade out from Sasayaki’s view. He could feel consciousness slipping away. The boy’s disembodied voice could barely be heard as he said one last thing. “Fate has a way of correcting itself .... Now we’re free.”

Sasayaki was swallowed by darkness.

He was awakened by the sudden sensation of falling. Panic gripped as Sasayaki found himself dropping into nothing. He was surrounded by a vortex of incomprehensible darkness. He tried yelling but nothing came out. *Nobody would hear me, anyways*, he realized.

All of a sudden, a voice rang out, echoing against the nothingness. “Sasayaki, wake up!” The voice was oddly familiar. “Wake up!”

He opened his eyes as if waking from a dream. Above him, he could see that stars had replaced the darkness. A girl about his age stood over him, an amused grin brightening her face. “I’ve been looking for hours, and I find you sleeping on the beach? Honestly, what are we going to do with you?!” she laughed.

Sasayaki looked around, finding that he was on a beach. Torches were lit, providing most of the light, and about fifty feet away was a group of people laughing and playing. This was the place he had been in his dream. “Urn ... Sorry ...” He looked down, embarrassed, as if he had done something wrong. She had been in his dreams too.

“No problem!” she replied happily. “I’ll be with the others. Come join us when you wake up!”

“Right. I’ll be over in a minute,” he said as she turned joyously and ran to join the others. He looked up at the stars. He remembered all of this. He remembered days past that he had lived on this island, with friends. But how was it possible? The other Sasayaki’s words echoed in his head. “*Fate has a way of correcting itself.*” Or maybe that other world had been a dream ... Maybe he’d been on the island all along. But as he looked up at the night sky, he knew that wasn’t true.

He sighed and wondered if the other Sasayaki was looking up at the same sky. A shooting star streamed across the heavens like a firework. He closed his eyes as tears of happiness stained his face. He was finally where he belonged.

The moonlight shined down onto the ocean water and illuminated the world with a radiant splendor. He could feel the warmth that its glow brought, seeping into his skin and untangling his soul from the tight, frayed knot which had formed from the years of stress and built-up anger that the other world had forced upon him. As the shooting star completed its voyage across the dark sky, Sasayaki closed his eyes. “Now we’re free ...”

The waves gently washed over the sand and the cool water began lapping at Sasayaki’s bare toes. He took one last look across the sea before standing to join the others around the fire.

## Untitled

I am untitled,  
like the ichthyoid, gliding along the  
bottom of the sea,  
undiscovered, unnoticed.  
Not big, or crucial enough  
to have a name,  
but I do exist.  
I am no swordfish,  
no prize will come in catching me.  
I have no hidden talent,  
or attain anything  
that will amaze you.  
I stay close to my piscine school,  
we spend our time together.  
Keeping each other's secrets,  
Helping each other through difficult times.  
We sail through the sea,  
past the silky stingrays, and  
wondrous whales.  
Longing to be as known,  
as loved.  
I do not have as shiny scales,  
I do not swim as fast,  
I will not grant you wishes,  
that I know as a fact.  
But I can be a great friend,  
one who waits and wishes.  
I can score the winning basket,  
or even run the fastest,  
but of this you'll never know.  
I am not the dolphin,  
jumping and twirling through  
the air.  
Pictures of me on all the postcards,  
center of all the attention.  
I also am not the shark,  
Notorious and detrimental,  
hated and bloodcurdling.  
I am unknown,  
untitled.

**Julia  
Michalski**  
Grade 8  
RHAM Middle  
School  
Hebron

**Danielle  
Saporito**  
Grade 8  
Scotts  
Ridge  
Middle  
School  
Ridgefield

## **The Man in the Straw Hat**

A bright, smiling face,  
Cheeks flushed ever so slightly from the afternoon sun,  
The man in the straw hat stands proud,  
The artist of his masterpiece.  
Each crop aligned to perfection,  
The colors creating a fall rainbow.  
Blowing in the cool, autumn breeze are whispers,  
Secrets of years gone by  
Like a song of the past being sung yet again.  
Like the gentle waves of the Polynesian Sea,  
The sense of pure delicacy,  
One touch and they could break.  
The artist stands proud.  
His magic hoe in hand,  
He stands ...  
The man in the straw hat.

**Sara  
Lutz**  
Grade 8  
Fairfield  
Woods  
Middle  
School  
Fairfield

## **A Mirror Image**

Looking back through the polished glass  
I see a reflection of a face that I am so familiar with  
Yet so distant  
But I see more than an old face  
I see a man from my past  
A man who once had a million dreams  
A man who thought he could walk on water  
A man who never gave up hope  
The reflection staring back at me  
Reveals a face of a younger man  
A man living his dreams  
Running marathons  
Owning his own company  
Laughing as he plays with his little girl  
What happened to that dream come true?  
Now I am all alone  
But this reflection just got clearer  
I have treasured memories  
Sunken deep in my heart  
Of a young man who thought he would live forever  
Time continues to move on  
Even if I don't  
But I kept my promise from when I was a young man  
To never give up hope

## All Hail Corporate America!

“I pledge allegiance  
To the lunch  
Of the United Fast-food chains of America.  
And to the burger  
For which it satisfies  
One stomach  
Under Wendy  
Indivisible  
With French fries and ketchup for all.”

When McDonald’s first opened in the 1960’s, its sole purpose was to provide comfort food for the occasional day out with the family. As the years progressed, however, old Mickey D’s became more of a lifestyle than a treat. When people found themselves running low on cash, they would stop for a burger from the dollar menu as opposed to spending money on groceries. Others had no time in their cramped schedules to cook their own meals, and so stopped for fast food on their way to work instead. Still, countless others simply liked the combination of speedy service and addicting, salt-loaded, fast food. Whatever it was that started the Happy Meal craze, we all knew by the end of the twentieth century that America’s chain food service industry had taken over the world and was here to stay.

As major fast food chains such as Burger King, Wendy’s, KFC, and McDonald’s became more and more popular, demand for meat became higher. Some of these companies began to use various types of ‘mystery meat’ to substitute for the material they needed, which would have been expensive. They began to make chicken McNuggets out of dejected bits of talons, beaks, and claws. They began adding less appetizing ingredients, such as sawdust, to Big Macs. While we turn away in disgust at these images, major fast food companies see it as a sure way to make big bucks. Using these less expensive ingredients, less money goes to the farms, and more into these companies’ pockets.

Naturally, all these foreign substances do not always agree with people’s stomachs. This is when another aspect of corporate America makes its entrance: the medical business. Their advertisements can be found all over our newspapers, and in just about every other commercial:

— “I can’t believe I ate that whole thing.”

— “Honey, take some Alka-Seltzer and you’ll be fine.”

(Ten minutes later the initially sick man is seen eating a chocolate cake).

These commercials often portray medicines as having miraculous effects, such as the one where a woman takes Aleve and goes through the rest of the week without having a headache. Therefore, when you feel your fast food lunch is not sitting too well, you’ve always got your Pepto-Bismol to make you feel better. By the time you stop into McDonald’s on your lunch break, you won’t even remember how that Big Mac you ate for dinner revisited you afterwards.

Lily  
Fleisher  
Grade 9  
Granby  
Memorial  
High School  
Granby

These medicines, however, are not always the miracle drugs we perceive them to be. Notice how the drugs' side effects are often saved until the end of the commercial, when someone speaks at a very fast pace, making the list sound something like this: "drowsiness dizziness exhaustion nausea headache depression spontaneous combustion and possible death."

Of course, no one heard the "possible death" bit at the end, as most of us gave up trying to decipher what the person was saying at the part where they mention possible spontaneous combustion. There are some instances, however, in which we cannot help but wonder. An example is when we hear a pair of contradicting side effects listed, such as "depression and extreme happiness," "constipation and diarrhea," or "sleepiness and insomnia." Physically possible? We're not sure, and quite frankly, we don't want to know—precisely why drug corporations use the blatantly propagandic device of saving the side effects for the end of the commercial, by which time most people have changed the channel.

As people eat more and more fast food, their health problems become greater than just indigestion. They begin to suffer from high cholesterol due to too many fatty foods. Physicians, who have made deals with drug companies, are funded for prescribing medicines such as Lipitor. Some of these drugs, however, have been taken off the market for producing heart attacks. No one knows exactly what the companies put in these medications, and not many seem to show interest in finding out. Evidently, physicians don't care too much either. "Hey, as long as we're funded," they're probably saying, "nothing else really matters." Some doctors figure that if the chemicals in these drugs are really that bad, our bodies will let us know before a problem arises. For now, all this pill-popping nation can do is listen to the words of political and social satirist Stephen Colbert: "if you ingest chemicals that are bad for you, your body will alert you by dying."

Another concern with corporate America is the establishment of two extremes in this country. As many overindulge in fast food too often, obesity has become a growing epidemic. On the other hand, fashion magazines and campaigns against obesity have caused a new issue to arise: eating disorders. We are constantly reminded that we live in a nation plagued by obesity. This fact has caused some to perceive that they are overweight, when really they are not. They develop anorexia, bulimia, or both, and become unnaturally and dangerously underweight. The rest of us are stuck in the middle between these two extremes, and are constantly badgered by the media to pick a side.

Worst of all, the media and major businesses have inevitably become government lap dogs. A portion of their money will go into the pockets of eager politicians, who are giving money to oil companies so they can pollute the earth and make more multitudes of big bucks. It is all a vicious cycle: our companies overwork us, so we have no time to cook our own meals. That is why we stop at McDonald's on the way home from work. We eat too much mystery meat, so we get sick, and reach for the Pepto. We think we're benefiting ourselves, but in the end, we're really just getting cheated while sending our money to greedy

politicians and business tycoons. To them, nothing matters as long as the cash keeps coming. Using propaganda, they have managed to sell countless products. This is where we begin to see the alter-ego of capitalism, the side that probably has Thomas Jefferson cringing in his grave. Nonetheless, corrupt or otherwise, corporate America has taken over, and it isn't going anywhere anytime soon.

## Myself As A Reader

There is one thing that I have found to be everywhere on this earth and that is reading. Basically, if you were taught how to do it, it is part of your everyday life and is used almost every minute of your day, if you're awake of course. I know that I am constantly reading, whether it is a sign, a book, an article, or just a map, not only as resources to allow me to do certain things correctly but also for enjoyment.

My first recollection of being read a book was when I was about three and a half years old. Of course my family had read me many books before then, but I had never remembered them or understood them until this time. I sat on my Pepe's left knee and leaned against his chest as we sat at the end of a long couch, my hand lying on top of his on the arm rest. He pulled out a book from the cushion to the right of him that had a border on the cover that was lime green with white polka dots and was centered around a picture of a girl looking into a box. He then read the title, *Look Out*, and asked me if this was the one I wanted to read. Of course my answer was yes, and he began to read the book to me. The story was about a little girl that felt that there was a monster in her house and therefore went looking for it. This occurrence repeated itself every time that my Pepe came over. I would ask him to read me *Look Out*, and he would always reply "sure." I really felt close to my Pepe, especially every time that he read me this book. That is why his death, a little more than a year after we first began reading *Look Out* together, was so devastating for me. I still have the book as a remembrance of him and will never forget the special time that we shared reading.

A year and a half later, in kindergarten, I brought that same book to school to read for show and tell. My mom had suggested that I bring the book in to school because it was my favorite book and was pleasantly surprised when I said that I wanted to read it. Back then, as with now, I was very small and quiet, and didn't volunteer for things that involved speaking in front of the class. I went to school that day dressed in the school uniform which consisted of khaki pants and a blue collared shirt with Ivy Drive embroidered on its left side. Show and tell was the last thing we did on Fridays before we went home. I had practiced reading all week to my parents, grandmother, and when no one else was around, even my stuffed animals. I was prepared! I can remember feeling nervous as I ate my snack, knowing that I was next to present what I had brought in. My teacher then called my name and asked me to go to the front of the room. I sat in a tiny chair that faced twenty -five pairs of staring eyes and began reading the book. I read every page, word for word; I nailed it!

**Michael  
Pasqualicchio**  
Grade 9  
Bristol Eastern  
High School  
Bristol

I left that day feeling proud of my accomplishment, but that feeling did not last very long. It was a rude awakening when the following week I was asked to read something else in class and finally realized that I was not reading the words correctly. When I read the book *Look Out*, what I thought was reading was actually reciting words from memory that I had heard my Pepe speak so many times before. Of course my family had known that all along, but had played along with the idea to satisfy me. It wasn't until the end of kindergarten that I was able to read a simple book, word for word.

As years passed, reading for me became just something that I was forced to do at school, but eventually school is what taught me to appreciate it, and that is when I became hooked! It was in Mrs. Consoni's sixth grade English class at Northeast Middle School that this new appreciation for reading developed. She assigned us to read *Number The Stars* by Lois Lowery. At first I looked at the cover which showed a girl with David's star in the background and thought it was either going to be a boring "girls" book or another book that we were forced to read for school and wouldn't enjoy. I remember the teacher telling us that we were not allowed to read ahead of the chapters assigned so that everyone could participate in class discussion the next day. When she said that I thought to myself, "Why would I ever want to read more than what I have to?" I was surprised when that night for homework we had to read chapters one and two, and I found the book so interesting that it was difficult for me to put it down and not read on further, and I was not alone. Just about everyone in my class found that book extremely interesting, too. I think that the book affected me so much because every day we would meet in "Literature Circle" and discuss what we had read the night before. We would meet in groups of six and discuss different aspects of the book. Each person was assigned a different job, such as discussion leader, illustrator, and literary luminary among others, which would help us to focus on important details in the story. Through these group discussions I was able to truly understand the characters, plot, and theme. I came to understand that a book is not just a bunch of words that are thrown together but are words, phrases, and sentences that are carefully selected by the author to add meaning and effect. It was the beginning of reading with the purpose of understanding why the author wrote what he or she did and the way in which they chose to do it. I had found meaning and enjoyment in reading!

Bringing me from the age of three and a half to the present, reading continues to be a huge part of my life. I am now fourteen years old and a freshman in high school, and although the pieces I read are appreciated in a different and deeper way, or are at a different level of difficulty than they were earlier in my life, I still use and apply reading to a countless amount of things. Whereas eleven years ago I was reading just to say that I could, I now read to obtain information, and expand my knowledge not only for academic reasons but also for enjoyment! Whether it is reading a text book, or articles on my favorite sports team, reading is and always will be a daily part of my life!

## Coming to America

**Spenta  
Mehraban**  
Grade 9  
Morgan  
High School  
Clinton

“Dear Mr. Abdullah Mehraban, we would like to invite you to come to America as a consultant to a conference discussing peace in Afghanistan.” Our Russian family friend read aloud as we all sat around her; we were all curious to know what these words meant since we spoke Russian and Farsi and recognized only a few words in English. My father was very excited the second she translated the message; he knew this was good news. He started dreaming and planning how he would go to America, bringing us along to start a new life filled with wealth, love, and peace. We were happy that my father was able to go on this marvelous trip in 1996; however, he was unable to bring us with him. We sat in our apartment anxious for the letter that held our future.

We left Pakistan by being smuggled into Russia by our family members that lived there. We were very fortunate that at least some of our family had lived in Russia. As illegal aliens living in Russia, we were uncertain about what awaited our family.

When I was only six months old my family fled from Afghanistan to escape the civil war and the violence caused by the Taliban. We settled in Russia without passports, making it difficult for us to appear in public. Our biggest challenge was avoiding arrest. Usually when we went shopping, my mother or sisters would use me as their “secret weapon” to escape the scrutiny of the police. At four years old, I was the picture of innocence, and my family’s freedom was in my hands. On one excursion, the whole family joined in. In Russia there weren’t very many dark skinned people or big families. This made us an obvious target. An over-zealous officer took us to jail and put most of my family in a tiny cell. My youngest brother and I were forced to stand in the waiting room, terrified about what would happen to us. After two hours, a friendly officer vouched for us, and my family was released. To this day, I remind my family how foolish they were to risk going out in public. I still remember the fear and the anger that I felt that day when I was treated as a criminal.

Finally, after four years, the memo came! “We are writing to you in regards to your father sponsoring you to come to America. You will have the chance to get your medical examination, fingerprints, and passports at 4:00 a.m. on January 15, 2000.” I jumped as I saw a smile in our good friend’s face. I didn’t even need a translation to know that it was finally time to be FREE! I noticed a drop of joy running down my mother’s face. She was going to be reunited with her husband once again. I had even started reading some English books to know what they were saying and to learn some words. All I learned were, “Hi, my name is Spenta. What is yours?” We didn’t have to deal any more with being illegal in Russia. We were finally coming to America, and nothing was stopping us!

The first few weeks were both exciting and frustrating. The most daunting challenges were understanding the language and getting used to the customs. The first day of school was not only fun because of the new adventures, but

also confusing because of my lack of language skills. The second day of school, I drank expired milk and had a terrible stomachache. I wasn't able to tell anyone how I felt. The teacher and the other students tried to help me, but I could not communicate with them until they brought in another student who spoke Farsi. I tried to speak to Neelab. "Dil ma dared makuna, ma modar kho muam." (My belly hurts and I want my mommy). She tried hard to listen and understand what I was saying, but she wasn't the best Farsi speaker, especially when the other kids were trying to talk to me at the same time. This was an unsettling experience for everyone involved, but it made me realize how important it was to learn English. I also understood how kind the people were in my new home.

A few years later at the Joel School assembly, when I was in third grade, I heard my name being called. "Will Spenta Mehraban come to the stage to accept her award for Citizenship." I was shocked that my name was called; I didn't know what I was supposed to do. All of my teachers congratulated me, and Mrs. Guiliford took a picture of me that sits on my mother's dresser. I actually felt as if I belonged here and that I was a U.S. citizen, although I hadn't even applied for a green card. Although I am still not a citizen and we have not received our green cards yet, I like to call America my home.

**Abigail  
Abbott**  
Grade 9  
Lyman  
Memorial  
High School  
Lebanon

## **False Illusions**

I'm tired of fighting, and tired of hurting. Why did it happen? What did we think would come of this?

Answers; That is all I asked for. You, god, my friends; everyone I thought I could trust.

Betrayal; a fierce move. I took your side and ignored everyone else not caring who was right and who was wrong.

Blame; you accused me of everything and demolished what I had left of my heart, so bad in fact that I turned to hurting myself.

Lies; I trusted you, told you my secrets, gave you my heart. You said three words and I told you to take them back if you didn't mean them, but you said them again.

Illusion; that one emotion I had for you. Our future eliminated by a choice I gave you.

Friendship; Something we lost along the way.

Betrayal; mistake; Lies; a fake. All the things you're made of; all things I fell for, wrapped in a hug.

Mistake; I believed I made one but it wasn't me hurting myself and the fact that I'm alone, it's the fact that I let you in and was always waiting by the phone.

## Confusion

Confusion.  
what words can describe,  
That emotion.  
The feeling of  
A scattered mind—a state of mind.  
The feeling just like  
A mother in deep desperation  
Looking for her missing link,  
Her child.  
You can read the definition  
In the dictionary.  
“An act or instance of confusing.”  
Or  
“The quality or state of being confused.”  
What I don’t understand is  
How can you define it?  
Confusion I think is like colors  
It’s in the eye of the beholder  
How can we know what true confusion is?  
Just like how do we know what color is what?  
All I’m saying is you can’t define confusion,  
You can just feel it.  
Like an ocean breeze.  
Confusion.  
what words can describe,  
That emotion.  
The feeling of a scattered mind—a state of mind.

## Forgotten

The atmosphere inside is quiet, muffled. He slumps into the seat at the back of the store and removes his chipped glasses, quietly, gently. He rubs his eyes with his fingers; he blinks a few times. His breathing is shallow, labored. The intercom above speaks softly; he does not hear it. He’s tired, so tired ...

A group of punks passes by. Tall, tough, jacketed punks traveling in a herd. They pass by him in the next aisle; they see him as they turn the corner. A harsh chorus of sneers and laughs ensues as they snigger at his tattered clothing, jeer at his wrinkled face, mock his slouched and defeated demeanor. Soon, they pass on, and their voices fade away. He is left alone again.

*It doesn’t matter, he thinks. Let them go. Let them laugh. They weren’t there, at that famous battle long ago ... They didn’t fight in the War. They don’t understand. They don’t remember.*

**Pahola**  
**Almonte**  
Grade 9  
Windham  
High School  
Windham

**Justin**  
**Kegley**  
Grade 10  
Old Lyme  
High School  
Old Lyme

He draws his ragged, torn coat around him. Even so, he begins to shiver uncontrollably. A chill blows into his heart from the past—suddenly, even in the warmth of the store, he feels cold.

Wretchedly, miserably cold.

*They don't remember ...*

*They were once an army of 100,000 men. Good, strong, loyal men; men who had fought tooth and nail for their nation. Men who had battled the fierce, icy winds on the bitter plains of the North and the hot, baking sun of the South. The men with whom they had recently shared beers and stories with were once the greatest fighting force in history; they were a genuine juggernaut of justice against the relentless forces of evil.*

*These were men. The greatest men of them all.*

*And they had all been slaughtered in a matter of hours.*

*The battle had begun at the base of the Borgoeth Mountains, in the foothills of the most treacherous terrain on the planet. The army had been marching south from a victorious crusade through the Northern Continent. All that had remained between these strong, battle-hardened soldiers were the Mountains ... and the enemy army that had lain in wait.*

*They did not know of their impending peril. How history would have changed were it not for the attack that waited for these fine, honorable men!*

*But it was not to be.*

A holiday jingle chirrup through the intercom above him. A new influx of shoppers pours through the doors farther down the side of the store, most of them in pairs or groups. All of them are young—sprightly, even—and all dressed up in the latest fashionable holiday attire. Knitted hats and bobbles combined with bright winter coats introduce a new palette of colors into the huge department store. The flood of holiday cheer and tourists sweeps past him towards the expensive, shiny products being advertised for them at the other end of the building—nobody seems to notice the hunched, unfortunate old man sitting against the wall at the back of the store. A few hasty, worried glances are cast his way, but for the most part he is ignored and forgotten. A useless, decrepit remnant of a bygone era.

A mother of two children steers her curious offspring away from the dumpy old man in the Goodwill coat at the back of the store. She's worried about her children's safety—who knows what he could be hiding under that old, threadbare jacket?

His lips begin to move, silently. His gnarled hands, resting unsteadily on his cane, begin to shake and quiver. He's cold, so very cold ...

*The bombs had tripped first. Big, powerful bombs, hidden under the trampling feet of the front of the army. Suddenly he had seen the entire hill in front of him leap into the air, then dissolve into a million shiny specks that rained down on him as he dove for cover ... Men, once his trusted allies and friends, were tossed through the air with a vicious, sudden finality that ripped them apart and caused them to die, right there before his eyes ...*

*Terrible, blood-curdling screams tore open the sky above them as the aerial*

*attack began. Bullets, bombs and blood began to fall upon the survivors in a terrible, hellish hail that lasted through the night. They fought their way across a mile of bodies and flaming wreckage to the one remaining hill that had not been flooded with blood and smoke, a single, solitary island in the widespread swath of destruction. There they would make their stand; there they would challenge the saboteurs that even then still continued to gun down the screaming, wailing soldiers still alive on that plain of death ...*

His hands are shaking uncontrollably. A store employee passes by him with hardly a glance. He does not notice her, does not notice the smiling, grinning, flashing displays of consumer products that crowd the shelves in front of him. They are mocking him, jeering at him and his generation—the ones who now lie crumbling into dust.

*He and the others began to feverishly fortify their pitiful hill; praying, they stacked the bodies of their fallen comrades in front of them in an effort to protect themselves. Less than two hundred of them were left after the first wave of attacks; and now they stood against the incalculable masses of the enemy army. They shivered and shook as the deadly, bitter cold tried to overtake them ...It began to snow again ...*

*Bullets suddenly streaked over their heads. They heard the chatter and bark of machine-gunfire. The enemy had found them at last.*

*He could hear their armor clinking and shifting over their muscular bodies as they poured en masse up the hill. His hands, once reliably solid and calm, shook hysterically as he fired in vain against the sea of guns, plate armor, and tanks that moved and gathered before him. All around him his friends collapsed in abrupt spurts of blood even as he continued firing; when he ran out of ammo he frisked the bodies for more. He screamed and wept as he watched his targets jerk and fall through his scope ... Surely he was dying, already dying ...*

*Fierce, agonizing pain suddenly tore through his left hand. The shine of steel glinted at him from the back of his hand through the outpouring of blood .. Fragments of metal zipped past his head as he continued to fire upon the enemy ...*

His trembling fingers trace a line across the back of his left hand. A thin, wavering scar threads its way across his bent and crooked bones—if he felt here, inside the sloped intersection between his forefinger and middle digit, he would feel the hard, elusive, jagged shard of metal that remains embedded in his skin ... He winces in pain as his fingers brush it, ever so cautiously ...

*They kept coming. A never-ending supply of armored enemy soldiers fought furiously for the death of the determined survivors at the crown of the little hill. With every jolt of recoil that thudded into his shoulder, another opponent went down. Ruthlessly he buried a .50 caliber bullet deep into each of their helmets, ensuring that with every time his right forefinger twitched the enemy army became smaller. The other soldiers in his division, the lucky few who had made it this far, still continued to fire at their foe. What little ammunition they had left was being spent rapidly; within another minute they*

would be nothing more than bodies and pools of blood on the ground.

*He had three shots left. Bang, went the powerful gun in his mighty hands. He watched his target fall down, down towards the ground, dead. Bang, and the ground shuddered as another heavily armored body hit the ground barely twenty feet in front of him.*

*One final shot was left on the entire hill. One lethal charge of gunpowder rested in the magazine of his trusty rifle, capped with an armor-piercing bullet. He watched carefully through the scope, trying to control his sobbing breaths, tried to fight back the tears that clouded and stained his eyes ...*

*He saw the glint of bloodstained titanium armor beckon to him from across the sea of night. One final soldier stood at the base of the knoll. Bending low to try and dodge any crossfire, the soldier ran awkwardly up the rise, gun raised—*

*The rifle in his hands jolted once. Through his scope, he watched as his rival's helmeted head jerked to the side, and witnessed the body, already dead, falling, falling ever so slowly through the cold, smoky air ...*

*The last ironclad warrior struck the dirt at the bottom of the hill.*

He had been there on that hill, decades before. He had brought down countless enemy soldiers that night. Innumerable enemy helmets carried his mark, the mark of a skilled sharpshooter who had stood his ground against an onslaught of death and destruction.

More than seventy-five years had passed since that fateful day. The images of blood, terror and devastation remain forever burned into his mind, mercilessly branded into his memory as the day that he had brutally slaughtered hundreds.

He was one of the Twenty. He and the other nineteen were the remains of a great and mighty army which had once stood 100,000 strong.

But the forces of Time eventually reclaimed the men that had miraculously cheated death on that bloodstained slope so many years ago. The men with whom he had served, the men with whom he had fought, were all dead now. One by one, they had faded from the pages of history and were lowered into the ground.

He is the last of the Twenty. Shaking and shivering, in need of a meal, passing his final days on a bench in a department store, he is the final survivor of that great 100,000-man army. He is all that is left.

Another holiday vacation jingle begins to play overhead as the shoppers sweep past him, ignoring him. He pulls his coat around himself and tries to fight back the cold that threatens to break out from the past and drag him back, back into the bitter, biting cold of that day ...

He is alone in the world. He is the last of the great soldiers who had once been recognized by an entire country. He is the last of the Twenty.

*I was a sniper at Borgoeth.*

*I was a sniper at Borgoeth.*

Quietly, meekly, he opens his pale, wrinkly lips and whispers to no one in particular, "I was a sniper at Borgoeth."

But no one hears him.

## The Adoption

When my sister Beth told me she wanted to adopt, I misinterpreted her. “Are you thinking of a kitten or puppy?” I asked. “God, Miriam!” she exclaimed into the phone. “I don’t mean a friggin’ pet; I already have one too many cats.”

“You only have one cat,” I told her.

“Stop being stupid,” she said. “I mean a kid, child, teenager, whatever.”

“Oh! Okay, like a boy or girl?” I asked, wondering what on earth could possibly stir my younger sister Beth into even contemplating adoption. She generally didn’t like kids under the age of twenty.

“Girl,” Beth continued. “Why would I want a boy for? I’ve had enough of guys and their bullshit. Anyway, she’s fifteen years old, named Ruby, and she’s been in four foster homes in the past four years. None of them worked out, and they need a permanent place for her. Don’t know why it hasn’t worked out before, but I met her in the children’s group a couple weeks ago, and she seems really sweet.”

“Right,” I said and paused, listening to her raspy cigarette voice on the other end of the phone. “Have you really thought about this at all?”

“You don’t think I can do it, do you, Miriam?” Beth accused.

“Well,” I said, wanting to be honest, for her and the kid’s sake. “You already have problems with Vinnie.”

Vinnie was her cat, a fat, white, ugly thing that was considerably skinnier when she picked him up in the alley next to her apartment building. He regularly peed in her shoes and shed like mad, getting white hairs on all her black waitress uniforms.

“He only pees in my shoes when I leave them out. The vet says he has dementia or something. God, Miriam, do you, like, not want me to adopt?”

“It could be a good idea,” I said, thinking the exact opposite. “Do you think you have enough room in your apartment?” I thought by pointing out the obvious we could squelch this whole adoption phase. Beth lived in a three room apartment above a Greek restaurant. Bedroom, bathroom, and kitchen.

“I do now,” she said proudly. “You know that obnoxious couple who lived on the fourth floor with the six roomer? Well, she dumped him and went to live with some other guy, and he moved to Forty-Fourth Street.”

“Let me guess,” I said, with inward dread. “You live there now.”

“Yep,” she said.

“Great,” I said, hearing the automatic garage door open and shut. “James just got home and I have to make dinner, so call me back when you hear something.”

Beth was my younger sister. Our parents divorced when I was ten and she was four. We both spent the two years leading up to the divorce curled up in the corner of our queen-sized bed we shared while Mommy and Daddy shouted and threw things. We only really came out from under the covers when their marriage was all over. Beth, Mommy and I sold the house and

Jamie  
Phillips  
Grade 10  
Arts at the  
Capital Theatre  
Willimantic

moved to a shady apartment complex across town, and Dad dropped off the face of the earth. Deep brain searching sometimes bring up memories of a short, bearded man wearing glasses and a funny grin.

My mother remarried five years after the divorce from Dad. We all moved to the large home of a tall, blond-haired man named David Prichard, who kind of avoided us, but still bought us lots of things and put in a swimming pool after Beth and I asked him.

Then I left for out-of-state college. Beth turned rebel child and I got frantic calls twice a week from Mom about her, caught with possession of pot, arrested at wild parties, stealing from her and David. I somehow managed to successfully avoid these calls as much as possible until the last one, which was on a much more somber note; Mom and David were divorcing, and I could only guess that Beth had gotten what she wanted, Mom to herself.

A few years later, Beth moved out of Mom's house and I graduated from college, marrying James Townsend, a truly handsome man with a PhD in child psychology, and Beth went through a number of boyfriends who were not James Townsend.

You could say I was the lucky one.

I didn't hear back from Beth for another month. When I walked over to the phone to read the caller ID, Elizabeth Smith, I hesitated, my hand hovering over the receiver for two rings, and on the third I impulsively decided to pick it up. Then I wished I hadn't.

"Miriam?" Beth whispered into the phone. "Can you come down to my apartment?"

By this time I had almost forgotten about the kid, caught up in other things, and it wasn't unusual for her not to call over long periods of time, so I had forgotten about her as well.

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "Did you get the kid? What was her name again?" "Ruby," she said. "And yes I got her, but can you just come down to my apartment, like now?"

"Why?" I asked. It was six o'clock. I had a beef stew in the crock pot and croissants in the oven, and my husband and I were about to sit down to eat. "Well, we're just about to have dinner."

"Can you please just come down?" she pleaded.

"There's something wrong with the kid," I said.

"Yes, there is, and please don't lecture me now," she snapped. "Just come down right away."

"Okay, okay," I said.

"Don't forget, Miriam," she said. "I'm on the fourth floor now."

And she hung up the phone.

I drove into New York City, about an hour from my house in Connecticut, to Beth's apartment in Queens. I pulled into Beth's street, and parked the car in front of the Greek restaurant. Three men were smoking outside it, and I am glad I didn't drive my Audi here; instead, I borrowed James's pick-up truck. I went into the door that led to the upper floors, trying not to make eye contact with

the three men. The buzzer panel was broken, and the door was propped open with a rock.

I got off the elevator on the fourth floor and Beth was sitting in the hallway, anxiously flipping her cell phone open and closed. She jumped up when she saw me.

“Oh thank God, Miriam,” she said, and hurried towards me. “I’m so glad you’re here.”

She gave me an awkward hug. Even though Beth was my younger sister, she still was a good three inches taller than me, with long shiny hair that was blond like mine originally, but she dyed it a dark brown now. She was wearing a sweatshirt and tight sweatpants. In the dim light of the hallway she looked very young, her tan skin washed out and her eyes makeup free.

“Okay, what’s going on?” I asked, tugging off my mauve cashmere gloves.

“Ruby locked me out,” Beth said. “I got through the paperwork and stuff so she could come and live with me okay, and honestly I think they ignored my record.” Beth had a minor record from when she was younger, the possession and a few DUI’s. “The other families Ruby’s been with are much worse. There was this one family who kept her in a basement room without heat, and this other lady who might have been nice but had five other foster kids too, and had hardly any money. Anyway, we have to wait two months to see how it works out, and then we can go through with adoption.”

“Really,” I said.

“She just moved in this afternoon. Went into the room I set up for her, and then when I went back out to my car to grab the rest of the stuff I got for her, I get back and the door was locked and I couldn’t get into my apartment.”

“Are you sure she’s in there?”

“Yeah!” Beth said. “I told her to open the door and she yelled ‘No!’ back to me and I heard the TV going. She yelled at me twice to get cable because apparently I don’t get MTV or VH1.”

We rounded the corner in the hallway and I heard the TV going. Really loudly. “The neighbors have complained four times,” Beth said, wringing her hands. “And the landlord is away for the weekend so he can’t get me in.”

We approached the door to Beth’s apartment, and stood outside it, listening to the television blaring within.

“And you said the two of you got along well?” I asked.

“Yeah,” Beth said distraughtly. “At the group we got along fine. I took her out to eat and go shopping a couple times, and she was great, really nice and funny. This was, like, out of the blue.”

“Okay,” I said, and eyed the old doorknob. “Hold my coat,” I said, and pulled off my jacket. I walked over to the door and wrenched out the doorknob, poked my fingers in the empty socket, and feeling around for the latch, pushed it out. I pushed the door in and it opened.

“Wow,” Beth said a little amazed.

I shrugged like it was no big deal. “Sorry about your door,” I said.

“Well, it’s nothing,” Beth said. “I’m just glad we got in here.”

“Where is she?” I asked.

“Living room,” Beth said. We weren’t bothering to lower our voices, because we possibly could not be heard over the blare of the television. I followed Beth down the short narrow hallway, which was supposedly a foyer, to the living room. Beth immediately marched over and shut off the television, flicked on the overhead light, which threw the dark room into stark detail. There was a girl slouched on the couch, feet up on the coffee table. She was tall and slim with clear porcelain white skin. Her name was appropriate because she had a long length of straight dark red hair. She was wearing a little too much makeup for her naturally beautiful features, an oversized navy blue sweatshirt, and tight jeans with red Converse sneakers.

“Ruby!” Beth exclaimed to the girl on the couch. “What the hell were you thinking? Because right now I could give you a piece of my mind!”

Ruby shrugged and reached out for the remote on the coffee table. Beth instantly snatched it away; Ruby slouched back onto the couch and crossed her arms.

“You locked me out of my apartment!” Beth screeched, building steam. “Do you know what Mr. Paddington, your social worker, would do if I decided to tell him about this little incident? He would take you away! Stick you back in the group home and you would rot there until you were eighteen!”

“Beth!” I grabbed her arm and led her off into the kitchen. “Don’t yell at her like that; you’re scaring her.”

“I was scared too!” Beth exclaimed.

“Of course you were,” I whispered under my breath, and Beth looked anxiously over my shoulder to the stationary figure slumped over on the couch. “Think of what Ruby is feeling. You said that her other families never worked out and now she’s wondering about this one, a single, young, wild woman with an apartment in Queens. She’s just testing you. So let it go. Go back out there and say, ‘I’m sorry for blowing up at you; you just had me really worried ...’”

“But—” Beth said.

“No,” I said firmly. “Tell her now,”

Beth rolled her eyes at me. “Fine,” she said, and walked back out to the living room.

“Ruby?” she said to the girl, and sat down next to her on the couch. “I am sorry for being mad at you, but you had me really worried. Promise you won’t do anything like that again?”

Ruby nodded.

“Are you sorry?”

I heard the girl speak for the first time, a bright and clear voice, but still with a teenager’s insolence. “Yes.”

“Okay, do you want to meet my sister Miriam, Mrs. Townsend?” I came out of the kitchen.

“Just Miriam,” I said, and extended my hand to Ruby.

She raised her arched eyebrows at me, slowly uncrossed her arms, and hesitantly shook my hand.

“Okay, Miriam, meet the nicer side of Ruby Welles. And now that you are introduced, I will be in the kitchen making dinner. Would you like pasta or chicken noodle soup?”

“I’m a vegetarian,” Ruby said.

“Oh goodness, I forgot,” Beth said. “Well, pasta it is.”

“Okay,” I said. “Since you two seem to be all set, I’m off.”

“Sure you don’t want to stay for pasta?” Beth asked.

“No, I’m okay,” I said. “I have a long ride back. Make sure to fix your doorknob.”

I called Beth the next morning.

“Did everything go okay after I left?” I asked Beth.

“Yes,” she said. “Thank you oh so much for coming over.”

“Where is she now?”

“Sleeping,” Beth said. “We stayed up late watching Friends re-runs.”

“Great,” I said. “Well, I’m just checking in. I’ll call you later.”

“Bye-bye,” Beth said. “Thanks a bunch.”

A few Saturdays or so later I was going into our company’s New York City office in Manhattan, and I took a small detour into Queens, leaving the Audi in the office parking garage and taking a taxi. It was broad daylight, but still. On the Queensboro Bridge I called Beth’s apartment from my cell phone. One ring, two rings, three rings. This could have been a dumb idea. Beth and Ruby might not even be at home. Maybe they had gone out shopping or something. Four rings, five rings. I was hoping she would pick up. I kind of wanted to find out if Ruby had gone back to the group home. Six rings, and the phone picked up.

“Hello?” a breathless voice said. “Who’s this?”

I knew it wasn’t Beth. “Oh, hello Ruby. This is Mrs. Townsend, Beth’s sister. Is Beth around?”

“Um, sure.” Ruby said. “Let me go get her.” The phone slammed down onto something hard, and I jerked my ear away.

“Hi Miriam!” Beth said. “What’s up?”

“Oh nothing, really,” I said. “I’m in New York today and I’m going to swing by your place. Is that a problem?”

“Oh no,” Beth said cheerfully. “Not at all. We’ll be around all day.”

“Okay,” I said. “See you soon.”

The taxi driver dropped me off in front of Beth’s apartment building. The buzzer was still broken, the rock still there, and still the three men sitting around and smoking. I pushed my way in and went up to her apartment door. I knocked once and the door flung open. Ruby stood in the doorway.

“Oh hi!” she laughed. Her long hair was up in a messy bun and she was wearing a smock smeared with a rainbow pattern of paint. Quite a change from last time. “Miriam’s here!” she shouted into the apartment.

I stepped gingerly in and saw that the living room had been converted into a makeshift artist’s studio. There were five canvasses propped up on easels, a clear plastic drop cloth covering the shag carpet and paint

everywhere. Beth was in the middle of it, also wearing a smock with leggings, equally paint splattered. I hovered in the foyer looking in.

“What are you guys up to? Bad time?” I asked, and looked around for globs of wet paint before moving a little more into the living room.

“No, no, it’s fine. Come in, come in.” Beth said. “We’re painting pictures.” I went to go into the adjoining kitchen where there seemed to be less paint, and nearly tripped over a white cat that curled around my ankles.

“Hi Vinnie,” I said nervously as he shed copious amounts of white hair on the bottoms of my black slacks. Beth hurried over.

“Get away, Vinnie,” she scolded, and picked him up, hugging him to her paint-covered front.

“Damn,” she said as Vinnie became covered in paint.

“Is that water based?” I asked.

“Yeah,” she said. “But now I have to wash the stupid cat. Ruby! Can you please put him in the bathroom before he walks over the place and makes a mess?”

Ruby carried him into the bathroom, and Beth pulled her smock over her head.

“Should I assume everything is going okay between you two?” I asked.

“Oh yes, fantastic. Sit down,” she said, and pulled out a kitchen chair, and I sat at the little Formica table.

“Tea? Coffee?” Beth asked.

“Tea, please.”

She poured some and sat down with me.

“How is James?” she asked, making small conversation.

“Good, great. You still single?”

“Course. I’ve got Ruby, so I don’t get out to clubs and stuff anymore.” She sipped her tea.

“Does it look like you’re going through with the adoption?”

“Yep,” she said. “No problems at all.”

“Wow,” I said and paused, taking a drink of tea.

“I told you I’d do it,” she said, and Ruby came into the room and slouched into the chair next to Beth. Beth finished off the last of her tea and announced lunch.

“We’ve both gone vegetarian,” she said. “Tofu meatloaf, walnut raspberry salad, or vegetarian lasagna?”

“The salad sounds good,” I said.

Over a lunch, and the walnut raspberry salad, which turned out to be quite good, Beth told me the details of the adoption.

“How many days is it now?” Beth asked Ruby.

“Twenty-four,” she said.

“It’s coming up,” I said, eating some of the salad. “This is good. When did you learn to cook like this?”

“I didn’t make it,” Beth said. “Ruby did.”

“Well, Kudos to you,” I said to Ruby, lifting my water glass. “You’re lucky. What, have you been eating take-out from the Greek restaurant

downstairs since you moved here?"

"Ha, ha," Beth said. "I'm getting better at cooking; Ruby's teaching me a bit."

We finished the lunch and I checked my watch. "Well," I said. "My lunch hour, well, my three-hour lunch hour, is almost up, and I have to get back to Manhattan."

"Oh, so soon?" Beth asked, and we walked towards the door.

"Yes, sorry, but don't worry. I'll stop in next time I'm in New York."

"Pick a painting on your way out!" Ruby called.

"Yes, do," Beth encouraged.

I left the apartment with a still-wet, colorful landscape painting by Ruby. I got home late that evening, the now-dried painting tucked under my arm, and went into the kitchen, where James was devotedly loading the dishwasher.

"Hi honey," I said, and set the canvas on the granite-topped island, and James put his arms around me.

"How did your day go?" he asked.

"Wonderful," I said, and leaned into him, smiling. "I saw Beth and Ruby today when I went into New York."

"How did everything work out?" James asked.

"It seems everything ended up fine," I said. "When I got there they were painting, and the apartment was a mess, but the both of them seemed happy, and there were no problems, so I guess they're going through with it."

"Really," he said. "I'm surprised."

"Me too," I said.

"Your sister actually is going to adopt," he sort of muttered to himself.

"Yes," I said, incredulous. "They have to wait another month or so, but yes, my little sister Elizabeth Smith adopted a kid."

## Blue Lipstick

"Hey, freaks, get out of my way!" Harsh words were spoken from a large male jock as he intentionally checked Jade into a wall. Angie brushed off her friend's shoulder and mumbled.

"They act like we aren't even here. Can you believe it?" Jade replied cynically

"Sometimes I wish I wasn't."

"Now come on. Don't say that," Angie did her best to cheer up her friend, but the attempt seemed ineffective.

"Angie, I don't see how this doesn't bother you. Everyone around this town is awful to us!" Without giving Angie time to react, she continued. "Our parents don't understand us; people at school think we're freaks. I guess it's because you have potential. I have nothing going for me."

Jade looked her in the eyes, to show the seriousness of her statement, and

**Katie  
Scibelli**  
Grade 10  
Rockville  
High School  
Vernon

then stormed off; Angie called out after her. “Where are you going? We have math!”

Jade yelled back, “I don’t care. I’m leaving!” She paused for a moment, then continued in an inviting tone. “You can come if you want; I just can’t deal with this anymore.”

Angie raced down the now-empty hallway to catch up; there was no way she was leaving her friend alone when she was this pissy.

The two girls drove around aimlessly without saying a word. The pounding music, smell of smoke, and jerky driving made Angie want to throw up, so she was glad when Jade finally pulled into the parking lot of a local diner. They ordered milkshakes and laughed at the old people who wouldn’t stop staring. Jade’s green hair and Angie’s blue lipstick did make them stand out. Jade seemed calmer, and things seemed to be going fine. In the seclusion of their own world, they almost seemed happy.

Angie was painting in her room when her father came home from work. After a stressful day, painting was the only way Angie knew how to escape. Angie’s artwork was dark but beautiful; she had talent, although she refused to admit it. Her father went right up to her room and knocked on the door. He spoke a few words, encouraging her to let him in. She knew it wasn’t only the room he wanted in on. Angie’s father wanted to be a part of her life. Instead, he was locked out, and Angie made no movement to the door.

He began to talk. “Angie, I got a call from your school today. They told me they’ve been sending letters home . . . You’ve been skipping class.”

Damn. Angie thought that math class was out to ruin her life. She didn’t care about school; she wanted everyone to butt out of her life and leave her alone!

But her father continued. “I’m not mad. I’m just worried. I don’t want to see you throw your life away. I think I know what’s going on, and I . . . I think you should talk to someone.”

Angie couldn’t believe her ears! He thought he knew what was going on? He thought he knew everything! And how dare he tell her she was throwing her life away. He had no idea. It was too much for her to handle. She opened the door and stared her father in the eyes.

“You think I need help?!” she shouted.

“You never deal with your problems!” he argued back.

“You still haven’t dealt with your mother’s death! Don’t think I don’t notice your paintings, or blue lipstick,” he replied. With this, her eyes began to fill with angry tears. She pushed past him and grabbed her purse on her way outside.

She quickly slid her feet into a pair of flip flops as she heard her father call after her, “See Angie, you’re running away, but you can’t run from your problems forever!”

With that, she slammed the door.

Once outside, she searched for her cell phone in her purse. When she found it, she flipped it open and pushed number four, speed dial for Jade.

“Hello,” Jade answered.

“Hey Jade. It’s me. Do you think you can come pick me up?” Angie asked.

“Yeah, sure. Have you been crying?” Jade agreed, but could hear the shakiness in her voice.

“Well, yeah, but I’m fine, just pissed off,” Angie reassured. With that she thanked her friend, said goodbye, and Jade was there in no time.

Jade took Angie to a nearby lake. It was a very peaceful and quiet place, the perfect place to talk about problems.

They both sat on a rock, swinging their feet beneath them, as Angie proceeded to tell Jade about what her father said to her. Jade listened but also gave the vibe that something was bothering her too. She sympathized with Angie, but as she tried to explain her understanding, she began to seem more troubled. After Angie was done venting, she asked Jade if everything was okay.

“Yeah, so ... is anything bothering you?”

Jade lied, but it was unconvincing. “I’m fine, why? Well, I mean, just life in general. You know.”

“Are you okay, though?” Angie continued, sensing her friend was hiding something.

“Eh, is anyone ever really okay? Life just seems so depressing sometimes.” Jade paused, but then finished her thought. “Sometimes, it just seems like it would be easier to forget about everything and go away ...”

After a moment, Angie asked, while trying to fight back tears, “Do you mean, like, killing yourself?”

Jade didn’t answer; she only stared down into the water below.

Memories played over in Angie’s head. Tears fell down her cheek, and streaks of black were left behind. Then, she spoke, in the quietest, most heartfelt voice.

“My mom killed herself, Jade. I’ve never recovered, and I miss her every day. I found my mom. She hung herself. Do you know what it’s like to live without a mom? Do you know what it’s like to come home from school to find that your mom decided not to live anymore? The last time I saw my mom, she was wearing her favorite dress with tears on her cheeks and a rope around her neck. I remember, I thought she looked so calm and peaceful; I remember she was so deprived of oxygen her lips were blue. Yeah, that’s why I wear this blue lipstick. My mom was depressed, but she never got help. I wish every day I could go back and save her. I’ll never get to save my mom, but please at least let me save you ...”

When Angie looked up, her friend’s beautiful green eyes were filled with tears. Jade wrapped her arms around Angie. The words “let me save you ...” replayed in Jade’s mind.

She held her friend’s fragile, shaking body, then picked her head off her shoulder and whispered in her ear, “You just did.”

Miles  
Wilkerson  
Grade 10  
ACT Magnet  
School  
Willimantic

## Untitled

There is a stone circle  
In the meadow over there.

These stones  
Are heavy like fresh rain  
fallen on the mangroves  
During monsoon season.  
Inside that circle in the meadow

There is a tree  
Bearing a single, bright-skinned red fruit.  
Inside this fruit are tiny, tender arils  
Filled with succulent juice.  
Between these arils  
Stands a waxy coating.

The meadow is beautiful  
Yet remote and untamed.  
The circle is elegant  
But is small and otherwise unremarkable.  
The tree is exquisitely grown  
But stands alone and aloof.  
The fruit is precious and most remarkable  
Yet cannot be picked.  
Most blessed of all are the sweet, ripe seeds  
Yet these seeds cannot break free of their walls.

I've been told of a time  
When these trees populated our world.  
These trees yielded abundant bliss  
And quenched the thirsts of great deserts.  
I've a friend who's tasted this pure crop  
And tells me it tastes like Summerland.  
And the world was beautiful then.

A time came, though  
That this abundance was squandered  
As the fruit grew rotten and black.  
And these fields now have but one tree  
To watch the world as a final sentry  
That waits to spread its bounty.

That lonely sentinel waits for its seeds  
To burst from the partitions

That keep them from one another.  
Only when the seeds find one another  
Can they erupt into the fields  
To reclaim their deserts  
And irrigate all they have lost.

If you stand in that meadow  
And contemplate its beauty  
You can see the stars in that field.  
You can see the planets spin 'round you.  
You can see continents on the skin of that fruit  
The nations, armed with metal and stone.  
And you can see the people of the world  
Just aching to burst free  
And love all there is to love  
Across the plains of a marvelous universe.

## Stitches

Childish stupidity forever imprinted;  
The short, thick line cut above my eyebrow.  
Reminder of that Cleopatra costume clad reflection  
That was visible in the mirror across from the bed.  
Laughter bounced from my mouth as I bounced higher.  
Something so fun couldn't possibly be so dangerous, right?  
Mom must have been fibbing when she said I could get hurt.

Sitting in your car, my heart is running a race.  
Will I come see you later? Yes, escapes from my mouth.  
As you extend your pinky and lace it around mine,  
An unspoken promise,  
I feel the pull towards you.  
Lips finally introduced, a slightly smoky taste  
From the Marlboros in the glove compartment.  
Why is it that you could possess my biggest turnoff,  
But when it's you, I just don't care.

My little brother ... I can't blame him for it, I guess.  
He was just following my example.  
Collision mid-air, panic flashes in my mind,  
Falling for what seemed like minutes,  
It must only have been seconds.  
The stand holding up the daytime sitcom  
Forever places a mark onto my forehead.

**Jordyn  
Woodtke**  
Grade 10  
Rockville  
High School  
Vernon

A hand on my knee, a kiss on the back of my head.  
These gestures of infatuation have been burned into me.  
The way you kissed me with such intensity,  
And then pulled away, only to look into my eyes with the same force,  
As if trying to make sure I was really there.  
Now it's a hand on her knee, a kiss on the back of her head that burn me.  
This hold you have over me is becoming far too heavy,  
I'm certain soon I will break from the weight.

Childish stupidity versus teenage naivety.  
Mom told me I could get hurt,  
But from which one did she mean?  
I'm really not sure which left a deeper scar.  
One was fixed with seven stitches,  
And the other ... I wish stitches could heal as easily.

**Patrick  
Crane**  
Grade 10  
Rockville  
High School  
Rockville

## **The Pumpkin Man**

Soft, orange and green yarn  
Expertly woven with loving hands  
Stuffing artfully visible  
Peeking out of stitching  
Like clouds at the corner of a blue sky  
A lopsided smile  
Captured in goldenrod rays  
It is an idol in the religion of childhood  
A tiny and loving god in the arms of its most devout worshiper  
The red headed child spots a lump on his god's neck  
And plucks off the foreign tumor

If only he could have done the same for his grandfather  
The real life Pumpkin Man

## A Personal Essay in C Minor

Instruments were made to be broken.

It's healthy to pound on the piano so hard you are afraid the keys will break. It's healthy that you trust your piano enough to want to break it. Your fingers are supposed to bleed through the strings of your guitar because you can't release the pain any other way. You're not supposed to be afraid to snap the strings. The strings should be able to snap. (*Even if it hurts*). No one minds when the drumsticks break in half. It's worrying if they don't break. You're not playing right if your drums aren't dented. If you can't dent your drums, then what's the point of playing at all?

Piano has been in my blood since I was six years old. My dad bought the first majestic instrument right before I turned seven, and it happened to be love at first sight. He played by ear, his large hands stretching across the keys, creating tidal waves of sound, avalanches that I heard best sitting on the floor next to the pedals. He wrote everything he played, with ribbons of reoccurring melody ebbing through the room. He told me I had to wait until I was eight to take lessons, and soon my beginning staccato notes took over his river of music.

My hands were little, with fingers that could barely reach an octave, and my teacher often had to rewrite left-hand parts for me so I could reach the notes. I hated it; hated every minute of practice to be endured for that infuriating piano, and many silly tears were wasted crying over practice that I would thank the stars for later. It was heartbreaking to trudge into the music room for practice when my dad was already there, but he always lifted his big hands from the keys without a complaint. (*Your turn*).

Sometimes I could hear music through my door late at night when I was trying to get some sleep. But when I went downstairs to ask my dad to please cut out the racket, I found him playing gently to my sleeping mother in the dim twilight, and I crawled back upstairs to my room, leaving my door open. I wanted some of the music, too.

When I had been playing for seven years, my parents moved us to the East Coast. During the moving hell, I tried as hard as I could to break that old piano, because maybe then it would hurt as much as I was. (*Don't cry*). But while I left the coast broken into pieces, the piano kept its shape. I couldn't have been able to really hurt it, anyway, and I was glad, because that meant that I could move on without guilt. It took us three weeks on the East Coast to buy a new piano, and when I first laid my hands on the cracked keys of the new one, I cried. Now there were two pianos on opposite coasts that were soaked through with tears that I couldn't help. But oh, the new one is striking, with mirror-like wood and real, cracked ivory keys. It's an upright that stands straighter than me sometimes, and the reminder of how to stand is just what I need. The best instruments are the ones who simply listen without judgment, and I can't count the times when there has been more crying than music late at night.

Lauren  
Martin

Grade 11  
Old Saybrook  
Senior High  
School  
Old Saybrook

Tyler  
Bakanas  
Grade 11  
Joel Barlow  
High School  
Redding

Around the same time that we left the West, my mother got tired of the same old song, and went off in search of something new. My dad left soon after her, to find someone who could appreciate his melody. I was left alone with the East Coast piano, and sometimes the only thing I could do was look at myself in the reflection on the wood. I was often angry with myself, this girl who had to hurt something but couldn't hurt her parents, so she was reduced to inanimate objects such as musical instruments. I was sometimes astonished that no matter how painfully I played, the hurt inside of me still bled into something beautiful on the piano. (*It understood*).

But the floor can dent where your heel pounds against the ground. You can break the hammers, and the cracks in the keys get bigger. You can play so hard that your entire arm hurts ... and if you pour yourself and all your hurts in between the keys, the piano will break. But you won't. (*Don't cry*).

## The Visitor

It clicked and hissed at me, a livid little dragon, and exploded into the air as if to fly away. It slammed into the wall instead and raised a dust storm as it knocked over everything in the room with futile flaps of its cramped wings. Terrified, it turned its attention again toward me, and hissed and clicked as if to blame me—as if its predicament was entirely my fault.

It was just a bird, albeit a big bird. I couldn't help but marvel at the sheer audacity of the creature as it glared at me after coming to a rest. I tried not to breathe in the stink rising from the concrete floor that was now splattered with the gory remains of a carcass dragged in by the dark brooding bird. Except for drifting dust motes, there was stillness, as if we both had deliberately paused in the crisis to listen to the steady beat of light rain on the roof. I tried to think as I glanced at the tipped-over bikes and strewn tennis balls. The bird stayed silent too, but I knew it wasn't thinking logically—or even thinking at all. The creature's panic was enough, however, to make me feel guilty. After all, how often does a turkey vulture find itself surrounded by walls and a boy with a shovel?

The confrontation in the storage room behind my garage was not my first face-off with nature. It has happened many times in my life, and the experiences are never in my favor. Wildlife should be ephemeral pleasure: a raccoon who whisks itself into a drainage culvert; a fox who appears a fleeting instant before disappearing into brush; even a deer, the tamest of woodland creatures, who bolts from the approaching human. Wildlife and humans operate, for the most part, in two separate worlds. It's when those two worlds clash that one can really witness, if never understand, what it is to be wild.

This was precisely the kind of situation in which I now found myself. The turkey vulture again launched itself into the air and again slammed into the wall. Then it crashed into a window with such force that I cringed in anticipation of the shivering sound of shattered glass. But not even a crack

showed across the opening, made opaque by a curtain of cobwebs, now ripped and dangling from the animal's assault. Still the desperate creature plowed into the window as if it hoped it would magically open. It could sense the open air outside and instinctually knew that was the way to freedom. I stood by the door, the only real exit, at first unsure what to do. In hindsight, I should have left, let the bird leave, and then come back to clean up the mess. Of course, being human, I did not walk away. Instead, I tightened my hold on the snow shovel and shuffled cautiously toward the vulture. I didn't have a plan besides a vague conception that I would somehow shoo the scavenger from the storeroom. I edged forward toward the bird. It panicked and flew first into another closed door, whose smudged windows let in dim, gray light. Then it smashed again into the window, and then again struck the door. Careening round the room, the bird's frantically flapping long black wings swept over tennis rackets, fishing poles, skis, kites, and old lacrosse sticks. Frisbees, soft balls, beach balls, and golf balls made a kaleidoscope with the yellow tennis balls rolling round the bloody remains on the floor. I stood bewildered, a sentry with my shovel, standing guard over a domain fast being trashed by bird from the past.

As if tired, the bird collapsed with a grunt in the center of the room and eyed me with a kind of primal hatred that can only be mustered by a beast whose modus operandi involves confidently shoving its entire head inside a rotting carcass. I edged along the wall in an attempt to get behind it. I thought maybe that it would fly away when I was no longer between it and the door. However, it didn't fly away, because I never got all the way around behind it. My maneuver was incomplete because I gave into temptation. I stopped thinking rationally. I found myself wanting to approach my fellow meat-eater, now squatting, looking rather shabby, its ruffled oily feathered coat staining the cold concrete floor. Its beady eyes, bulging from its red leather head, locked with my own wide-eyed gaze. I gave into desire. I wanted to understand it. Why was this prehistoric creature here, in the back of my garage, on this day? What would make a vulture pick up a carcass and fly into a human dwelling to eat it? So I inched forward, until the huge bird was but two steps away. Without warning, it launched itself into the air and flew right at me, screaming in rage.

Instinctually I defended myself, slamming it with the shovel when it reached me. It fell to the ground and lay motionless. A heartbeat passed, and then another. Fear and shock mixed with remorse to create a sickening concoction that overflowed my brain and drained to my stomach. I was acutely aware that I hit the bird extremely hard. I kept staring at the bird, willing it to please be alive. When I had all but resigned the bird for dead, it rose suddenly, flew out of the narrow open door, and disappeared into the trees. I breathed a sigh of relief, but inside I still felt bad. The truth is that I have no idea what happened to the bird. I can tell myself that it will be OK, but I know in truth that it's more likely that somewhere out in the woods an innocent creature is dead or wounded just because I wanted to get up close, to somehow

communicate with a wild thing.

I guess I'll never learn the lesson. Curiosity and the craving to be close have delivered me into trouble time and time again. When I was four, a deer kicked me in the chest at a local park after I approached arms outstretched for a hug. Between the ages of five and nine, I was bit multiple times by snakes in my garden as I futilely attempted to pick them up. One of the most memorable events in my life occurred when I was ten, as I was chased across an open field at Yellowstone Park by an elk whose space I had knowingly violated.

Whenever I come upon a wild animal that I can get a good look at, I can't seem to stop myself from approaching. Rationally I know this encounter between man and beast is not the same as when a visitor comes calling. It is not a "close encounter of the third kind." Yes, a turkey vulture appeared in my storage room as if it had come to make a visit. There it was, in my space, so indeed it was easy to imagine it had come for a reason. However, it did not take me more than an instant to understand the bird had turned to the shed simply as a safe place to eat, a location where it could consume its road kill without having to defend itself against fellow scavengers. Nevertheless, I imposed my emotional response, my need to communicate, upon the cornered creature.

However, my curiosity was outmatched by its terror. And I had learned the hard way from past experiences about the danger of wild animals. So I reacted in fear. I stopped thinking. I acted like a wild animal. I never wanted to hit the bird with a shovel. I didn't want to even touch it. I just wanted to know it better, and I wanted it to know me. Of course that's the irony, for the appeal of a wild creature is that we humans can never really know it. When it comes to nature, it is almost always better to just let things be. Unfortunately, like a lot of other humans, I can't seem to learn that lesson.

## Eyesore

Jessica  
Watsky  
Grade 11  
Branford  
High School  
Branford

It's been about a week since I've convinced myself that I've broken up with my ex-boyfriend, and about three hours since I've actually done it. Having poked myself in the eye trying to cry repeatedly, I have begrudgingly moved on to the erotic and dangerous Russian scholar to which I am currently betrothed, Geoff.

Recently, I bought myself a new pair of glasses. The old pair was crushed in a careless romantic fumble to remove them, but to the rest of the world, they simply "broke." So in my quest to buy a new pair of glasses, I began to wonder exactly why it was that I had them.

At the age of six, I was taken to the doctor's and given the option to either have pink glasses like my mom's lesbian shrink friend, Debbie, or blue glasses. I chose pink.

At the time, I'm sure I thought that glasses were merely a rite of passage everyone went through, but that would soon be changed by the merciless bullying I would have to endure throughout the next ten years.

Having past that awkward stage in my life, due to endless therapy and

dedication, I am now perfectly comfortable wearing my studio geek headphones, Communist party t-shirt, and Buddy Holly glasses, angrily ranting at the world through my computer.

So I went through the arduous process of choosing glasses, my ideals and styles painfully hindered due to my mother's obsessive-compulsive need for a style that was "in." The year 2007 was great for wide-set flat glasses akin to Star Trek's style, like a metal rectangle bent around one's head with eyeholes, and cheap. So instead of going to our Kennedy Perkins, where one could find \$500 glasses nesting comfortably on some beach pebbles in the clearance section, I found myself mindlessly wandering the throes of Walmart's fingerprint-smudged eyewear section. I'm extremely prejudiced against fingerprints on anything, unless they are my own. Then it's fine.

After buying my glasses, I delved further into my own eyewear history. By seven, my entire class knew what amblyopia was, due to my mindless recitation of its definition whenever asked as to why my specs were there. Hey, it beat, "God wanted me to be special," and by twelve, I'd gone through at least five pairs, all with extremely thick glass lenses. This was before the whole child-safety fad came across. Ah, the nineties.

And then my new pair came. They were wonderfully alternative, and green, to boot, so I felt instantly cool. However, in my romantic tryst, they were crushed, leading me to get this pair.

So on this night, I happened to wander into the living room where my family was awkwardly perched, like some sort of a presidential family photo, or perhaps waiting for a tour to walk by and ooh at their natural comfort in such a synthetic surrounding, my mom's L.L. Bean bathrobe and original French lithographs contrasting with my weatherworn Chuck Taylors and plaid throw. And my mom, as usual, questioned me about my break up, to which I hastily responded and tried to change the subject.

"So, Mom." I asked, crossing my legs. "Why do I have glasses, anyways?" She frowned. Perhaps she had no idea. In fact, perhaps there was no need for glasses, and I'd been mistaken my whole life. Maybe there was some other child out there who suffered from my horrible headaches, and only because their parents thought innocently that they didn't need glasses.

"Actually, I was wondering that myself. What do you use them for? Distance? Reading?"

I furrowed up my brow. "Um, neither. I have no idea why I wear them. I think they just cure my headaches." I get splitting headaches whenever I stop wearing my glasses for extended blocks of time.

"Oh. Well ... that's strange." And she continued to flip through the New York Times and compliment my mildly slow sister on her progress through her paperback book.

I headed back to my room and wondered, Why did I have glasses? Amblyopia, to be precise. But that had long since been corrected, and my prescription reduced to that of a normal person, 20/20. Surely if I stopped wearing glasses my eye wouldn't react violently and twist into the side of my

head, rendering me deformed like some sort of a creepy Quasimodo type of character.

Was it possible that my glasses served no viable physical purpose, but rather, served as a *mental* crutch? I wondered, and the more I thought about it, the more it made sense. I began to recite all the eye conditions I knew. I didn't have myopia, astigmatism, cataracts. No recent checkups had left me in fear of farsightedness, or temporary blindness. I had no reason to be wearing glasses.

I feverishly checked my prescription. The left lens was thicker than the right, but that was all. Holding them up to the light, I realized there was no visible change. Shouldn't the optometrists have realized this? Or have they all been taking psych courses along with Eye Anatomy 101?

"Hmmm ... this one's got an inferiority complex. Yeah, give him the usual. No, no prescription, but let him pick out a good pair. Yeah, those. The 'business executive' style. That'll work." I could just picture it now, a swarthy man in a lab coat, with the sleeves rolled up, working out a deal with his workers for some mild-mannered CPA from Pasadena.

So what, then, was my mental handicap? Aside from the Asperger's Syndrome, an occasional social phobia, chrome nail-biting, and various oddities, what could have possibly been the reason for me to have glasses? No longer needing any special prescription, I began to pore over the reasons as to why the hell I needed glasses.

Was I not smart-looking enough? Smart, yes, but did this proverbial Barbie doll need a pair of horn-rims to complete the whole torrid set? Maybe it was my facial size. Perhaps they sensed my inherent need, even lust, for a slightly less narrow countenance, and their sixth sense alerted them to press pairs of these on me, blaming them foolishly on a lazy eye.

I spoke to my shrink, Holly, about this. She asked me how my sex life was doing. And, what do you know, I happened to see a *lot* of shirts popping up around school, "I dig geeks" and "How big is your hard drive?" being a notable sample of the many I saw, and a lot more models sporting the glasses and laptop case look, casting the windswept hair and airbrushed abs for summer, and choosing to sport wide-eyed glances peeping out from spectacles and gangly arms protruding from oversized buttoned shirts with pens sticking out of the pocket. And I observed. And I thought about it, and the two seemed almost eternally connected ...

Next time I see Geoff, the glasses stay on. Who knows what could happen?

## Diary of a Desktop

I run my hand over the worn wood,  
Feeling the grooves of each carved letter.  
My fingertips become smudged with graphite as the writing fades,  
But the words remain eternally engraved in the surface of the desk.  
“CR + JN Forever”  
Enclosed in a crooked heart.  
I wonder,  
Are they married now,  
Living in a big house with a picket fence,  
Raising their three kids?  
Or did they break up a week ago  
And are now forced to stare at the bold declaration of devotion scratched into  
the desktop,  
An everyday punishment for naively believing in young, foolish love?  
“Jenny wuz here”  
The words spelled incorrectly in a futile effort to appear cool,  
As if a tiny act of vandalism would change her social status.  
Maybe she is a young girl who dreams of becoming popular,  
Or maybe she is already at the top  
And intends to prove it with this brief statement.  
Jenny has left her mark on the world,  
On the corner of a tattered school desk,  
Leaving a part of herself behind  
So that even when the desk is replaced and the old one is stored away, long  
forgotten,  
Jenny will be remembered as the girl who was here.  
“Hi”  
The single word stands out among the scribbles,  
A desperate attempt for conversation,  
A cry for compassion.  
Where is the owner of this solitary word now?  
Walking the halls with monotonous footsteps,  
Invisible in classes and even more so in the outside world?  
Does misery spill from their wrists in a crimson flow of sadness?  
Perhaps it was meant to be a humorous scrawl.  
Bored of listening to the teacher’s droning,  
A student doodled on the desk in order to escape the perpetual tedium of  
another lecture.  
Each scribble, each drawing, each statement in the wood,  
Can teach us more than any tome is able to.  
The desktop is an open history book,  
People record their lives in a few simple words on a single page.  
Hundreds of classrooms contain hundreds more blank pages,  
Waiting for someone to come and write their story.

Nicole  
Bruno  
Grade 11  
Glastonbury  
High School  
Glastonbury

**Andy  
Platt**  
Grade 11  
Glastonbury  
High School  
Glastonbury

## Clarity

I had never touched the water;  
The deep sea reflected nothing save a dark shadow,  
The sunlight absorbed by its blackness;  
A cesspool of both fish and forgotten memories.

Between me and this darkness  
Was not just one inch of plastic,  
But courage I had never felt before,  
Strengthened by the encouragement of my friends.

As I pushed across the water's surface,  
Cutting it into a symphony of radiating waves,  
I looked back for just a moment,  
Into the harbor my kayak had just crossed,  
It saw that it had cleared,  
Its memories revealed;  
I could see a reflection of the world.

In this moment of vision,  
Tranquility long lost inside people's minds,  
I felt at home,  
Right there in that kayak,  
If not only for a moment,  
As the shadows crept over the water's surface once again.

**Molly  
Graffam**  
Grade 11  
Bristol Eastern  
High School  
Bristol

## Control

The freshly accumulated  
Stomach flab is a sign,  
I need to regain control.  
It's time to quit eating  
And start getting hungry for  
Some flatter abdominal  
Muscles. This starts now.  
It starts with No breakfast,  
Continues on to No lunch,  
Possibly ends with a scanty  
Dinner, But Never any  
Dessert. I'm disgusted when  
I look in the mirror, horrified  
When I step on the scale.  
Yet I spend as much time  
With these items as possible.

While others glance quickly  
At their reflection I stop  
And stare, scrutinizing  
Imperfections. My thighs  
Converge and meet together.  
I grab a chunk of fat from  
My mammoth stomach.  
I'm satisfied only when  
I can count the vertebrae  
Down my spine and fit my  
Fingers under my ribs as  
I suck in my stomach.  
The one and only favorite part  
Of my body: my fingers.  
Long, thin, and bony,  
Unlike the rest of my  
Corpulent corpse. I've  
Indulged too much lately  
And it's time to get  
Back to business.  
Back down to  
Bony business.

## Immaculate

Wash away your sins. That's what the pastor always said on Sunday. He stood before me, my mother, my brother Chris, and Miss Wilk, my third grade teacher who said I wrote the most perfect Ts she had ever seen and told me to wash away my sins.

One Sunday I broke my arm and didn't even cry even when I saw the blood. Smooth beads the deep crimson color of my favorite sweater transfixed me, growing bigger by the second, bubbling from my own arm. Like magic. And I didn't cry when the ambulance came, or when they stuck the needle in the soft skin of my inner elbow. I cried when they took the x-ray. I had learned about them in school. X is for x-ray, a machine that looks inside of you, where your brain lives and your heart and your stomach. And your sins. The doctor would be able to see them. All the sins crawling inside of me, with angry faces like the germs on the poster the school nurse had. Wash away your germs, it said. When the doctor didn't find my sins, I decided he had mistaken the leering creatures frolicking within me for germs. Now I know sin isn't hidden inside. It's in every guilty look you give your mother, every time you watch a convicted man and hastily jerk your expression from shame to revulsion, because people expect you to empathize with the victim, not the criminal.

Dead skin, dead cells, dead expectations. Sin too great for soap alone.

**Molly  
Horan**  
Grade 12  
Bristol Eastern  
High School  
Bristol

Grainy exfoliator covers the crook of my neck, armpits, between each finger, toe, and the soft skin of my inner elbow. I'm too old now to care what the pastor sees. Old enough to know Chris has already driven half the girls in our high school to lufahs and prayer. Too young to let the sin just sit on my skin.

I knew he wanted me. A hungry look that should have repulsed me but entranced me, just as the trickle of blood had, without fear of pain. Pride and life were draining, but it was just so damn beautiful. Tiny liquid rubies. Savage raw desire. Things I thought I could only read about were so suddenly and easily handed to me I didn't think to ask how or why or what's next.

The day I broke my arm the flow of blood was stopped before my body was emptied of it. That's the difference.

Nothing stopped the innocence from escaping as I unbuttoned my blouse, or the purity from spilling from the top button of my jeans, or the self-respect emptying from my unhooked bra. There was comfort in knowing where my stream of rubies ended. My innocence could be in his hair, his sweat, his comforter with the pizza stains that I hated because they reminded me he had desires so mundane they could be sated with food. Reminded me every man, woman, and child has a store of the flame colored jewels I once believed belonged only to me. Stains that forced me to realize I was simply the first girl that stepped in the path of his starving eyes.

Wash away the sin. Everyone has sin, blood, desire. Wash away the ordinary. Anything to get back the eyes that beheld rubies that came from my arm alone.

**Matthew  
Viens**  
Grade 12  
Fairfield  
Warde  
High School  
Fairfield

## **A Dark Night in Israel**

The picture is shiny, fairly recent. Four American kids on a dark night in Israel; me on the far left, followed by Drew, Dan, and Hannah. Wearing bright colored shorts and t-shirts, we stand out in this dark and somber setting, yet remain alone in our group with arms around one another like the old friends we are. Drew's head is crowned with a familiar orange cap, worn and ragged from many years of sweaty hair, sunlight, and accidental falls in the dirt. The thick stripes of Dan's shirt stand out against the black backdrop, drawing the eye like an invisible magnet. At least he is sporting a yarmulke, the Jewish head covering that is tradition for men at the Western Wall. Hanna is donned in the turquoise group shirt each one of us in Group Nine had received the day before. Those shirts differentiated our small little community within the larger country. In a land where most people didn't speak much English and customs seemed strange and foreign, a sense of community was always welcome. As for me, I felt the need to dress up somewhat, to show some form, any form, of respect for the wall and its traditions. My collared shirt and khaki shorts are as much a token of respect for the wall as they are a way of easing my own turbulent thoughts.

Behind us, off in the distance, worn rock dimly shimmers with the glow of the camera. The image of gray cobblestone beneath us, imperfect and uneven, is

broken by a forest of legs. To the left edge of the photograph lies a nondescript grayish figure, an image that leads memory to fuse with imagination. Was this another teen from our group, waiting for his picture to be taken with smiling friends? Or was it one of countless Israeli beggars, pleading for a dime from the passing crowd? Too vague in both my memory and in the photograph, I no longer remember the figure's true identity. Our wide eyes are captured just before the piercing light of the flash can fully register and they quickly snap shut. We all smiled. Why not; the camera woman had just said so. So we each obeyed, wanting this moment in the spotlight to end. Because the smiles were a cover up, sheepish and awkward, a mask of the deeper emotion we each felt.

We stood in the midst of a war-torn country, where bombs lit the night less than one hundred miles away. The area this picture was taken in is no stranger to violence and pain, either. When we entered the gates to Old Jerusalem, our Israeli tour guide solemnly pointed to the thick stone wall stretching off to the left. He didn't say anything, didn't need to; we could all make out the bullet holes etched into the surface, painful reminders of the lives this land had cost. Trudging through the winding alleys of the small village inside was perilous, knowing that one wrong turn could lead to the Muslim quarter, where Jews were not warmly received.

The knowledge that we were surrounded by great mends and fellow Jews would normally have provided some comfort, yet this night was different. It was the last we had in a country we had come to know and love. Five incredible weeks spent living with Jewish teens, experiencing Israeli culture, and, of course, indulging in the local cuisine, were coming to a close. Emotions were running high that night, perhaps helped by fact that we were in the midst of an all-nighter, but happiness was not included in the spectrum. As we gathered, quickly and annoyedly, to snap this photo, I heard more than one person heaving with sobs. When one of our group leaders, a young, energetic college girl, perkily told us to smile, I could not comply. It felt strange and disrespectful, almost as if I was betraying those around me whose tears dampened the cool stone floor.

You see, I had just finished writing a letter to place in the wall, a letter in which I prayed for the memories of my grandfather and of a Holocaust victim I could never meet, a person whose pain and suffering none of us can ever recreate. I didn't have time to place it in a crack in the stone, didn't have time to process my emotion. I was rushed to the scene, where the other three were already waiting, with the letter, my confession to God, remaining tightly clasped behind my back. I was sure to keep this letter out of the picture, to keep it from being publicized. This was for my eyes alone, and for the people whose memories it contained, immortalized forever in the depths of my mind.

The other three held no letters, yet I could tell they too clung to memories. When the picture was taken, and the four of us immortalized in the picture went on with our lives, rubbing pain out of our eyes, Drew spoke three words to me. He said simply, "That was strange," three words that hold seemingly no meaning out of context. Yet these three words have stuck with me to this day

because it was indeed strange. Though this may seem quite obvious, no words could sum it up better. I didn't know whether to feel relieved or depressed, to sigh or to sob. Posing for a picture wearing smiles and draped in each others' arms, while the heavy darkness concealed the pain of others, was unbearable. I cling to an odd sense of guilt each time I look back on this photo, guilt for not understanding or recognizing this sorrow. This picture is hollow, the smiles on our faces mere props to show our families back home. The real picture lies in our eyes, which gaze toward the camera but are focused on some far off emotion. It is hard to capture a true picture, one that really depicts the essence of a situation. A picture is merely a facade, an empty book. The story behind the picture, the words to fill these pages, can only be written through the honest emotion of those whom it captures.

The picture remains shiny but with each passing day becomes less and less recent, aging just as the rest of us. One day the picture will fade, and all visual record of this moment will be lost. The only way to truly preserve the photo itself is in memory and reflection. Yet with time, this too fades, and the picture that holds a thousand words will become merely another page in the greater novel of life. It is pictures like this that help to form the chapters, plot, and characters of this novel. Yet it is the raw human emotion that fills in the words.

**Cynthia  
Green**  
Grade 12  
Cooperative  
Arts and  
Humanities  
Magnet  
High School  
New Haven

## Luke

My first pet was a hamster. Well, he wasn't my hamster; he was my brothers', but I liked to call him mine. I was eight or nine years old when we got him. His name was Luke. We named him after Luke Skywalker because my brothers used to be obsessed with Star Wars. Luke was more than just a pet; he was a friend. Yes, a friend.

We would talk about everything. Well, I guess *I* would talk about everything. This little boy down the street told me that I couldn't have a friend for a hamster, because it's not right to talk to animals. But *Dr. Doolittle* had just come out, and the guy was talking to animals, so I knew the boy down the street was wrong. He had to be.

But "you can't tell ignorant people that they're wrong, because they'll always think they're right no matter what you say." That's what my mom told me. So I didn't care what the little boy down the street said. I would say to Luke, "Luke, you're a good friend, as close as family, and I hope you never die." He'd communicate secrets to me with his little whiskers (which I didn't like very much because it felt like small spiders crawling on my cheek, and his wet nose didn't help either, so I'd very often push him away—the secret itself wasn't that important to me).

But Luke, Luke was one of those people who you could go to if you wanted to trash talk about that weird kid you didn't like. Like the boy next door who stole your bicycle for the third time and painted it pink because he didn't know what a *manly* color was, and he put new tires on it just to call it his own, but it *wasn't* and *never will be*, because it's mine! I mean, he doesn't even *like* pink. I

bet he was just making a cheap birthday present for some little girl.

I remember this one time when one of my brothers, Kevin, and I were feeding Luke some of his hamster food. He had a pretty good variety of food for a hamster. He had sunflower seeds, hard stale com, woody-smelling wood chips, and some other stuff. But his favorite was sunflower seeds. So when Kevin went to feed Luke, he put Luke on the bed and placed a sunflower seed on the comforter. I guess it was kind of like a scavenger hunt thing, since the bed looked more like an ocean of sheets to Luke. But he always found the sunflower seed. And when he went to eat it, he'd nibble little corners until the shell fell off and the seed tumbled out. But then there were times when he'd just shove his cheeks full with food until he could no longer fit any more in his mouth. If you ask me, this was a little greedy, and anyway, who's going to steal it—it's hamster food!

Luke loved the rolling ball thing; you know the plastic blue ball with the holes in the side so he could breathe? But they were little holes, small enough so his little pink foot couldn't go through. He loved that thing so much that one day he fell down two flights of stairs with it when he was running away from me. We were playing tag and he got so excited that he tumbled down the stairs. And it must've seemed like a long fall for a hamster, because everything is so much bigger when you're like four inches tall. That's way too long a drop if you ask me.

Luke died on a Saturday. I remember finding him looking like a shivering ball of fur, but I just assumed he was cold and threw a blanket over the cage. Not the brightest of ideas, but I think it helped him warm up. It seemed like he was glowing or something.

I left him alone for a little while because my mom had just bought me this coloring book, a big life-sized one that changed color when you wear 3-D glasses. It was a Wizard of Oz book, and I was coloring the picture of Dorothy skipping on the yellow brick road, except this road was an orange-green looking color because of the 3D glasses. But I still colored it yellow over all of the clashing colors, and the shoes were still that same bright red. And I wanted them to be sparkly like in the movie and like on ice, but it wasn't, and I tried so hard for it to be like that.

When I was done I hung the picture up above Luke's cage, because he knew I was going to be an artist some day. I was going to be real famous and everyone was going to love my work. So I decided to show a little bit of my appreciation by hanging up a picture over his cage. It was like a friendship ring. I guess.

When Luke died, he died in my lap. I held him in my lap while he shivered until I couldn't feel him moving anymore. I guess now he wasn't cold or was too cold to even feel cold.

I told my brothers when they got into the house, because Luke was their pet anyway. I told them I watched him die, and they began to cry. It's kind of bizarre to me how they reacted when they found out. Crying didn't even cross my mind until I saw them doing it—tears flying all over Luke. He was really dead, and I just sat there watching them mourn.

**Caitlin  
Donahue**  
Grade 12  
Rockville  
High School  
Vernon

We later found out that he died because he had maggots in his cage and that they'd eaten his insides. That news sounded like the taste of an unsatisfying piece of old candy to me: worms eating Luke's insides? How could that be? How come we couldn't tell that he was dying?

My mom said that we were supposed to change his cage more often and give him fresh water every day, along with fresh food. But I always thought that if he didn't finish all of his water, then it was all right to leave it in his cage until it was all gone. I mean, I thought it was rude to remove his water when he wasn't finished with it yet. My bad.

We didn't feed him for a long period of time, and he ate the wood chips in his cage. His pee and droppings allover them, but he ate them anyway. Flies laid maggots around and in his waste. We cleaned it out then, but I guess we missed it a few times.

It was an old shoe box that he was buried in. I put lots of toilet paper and cotton balls in before he was in. The cotton balls and tissue were meant to make him comfortable, like the coffins that big people are buried in. His position didn't change when I saw him in his little shoebox-coffin. He was still a ball of fur, except he didn't shiver any more; he was still. The hole wasn't very deep. After he was buried, I just looked at the little mound of dirt and placed a sunflower seed on top.

## **Man vs. Machine**

We drive down an empty, rain-drenched highway  
In a car that's known too many miles  
And not enough gas.  
It's summer, but the weather mimics March  
And we aren't talking.  
I glance at my face,  
Which looks sad in the side mirror,  
Rows of lampposts swaying and rotating  
As we approach and pass them.  
I wonder what the chances are  
Of one toppling slowly, like a large pine,  
Onto the hood of the car,  
Metal on metal,  
Air bag deployment a little too late.  
I think of you  
Struggling to free yourself from the wreckage,  
Man versus machine,  
Waging a war for one last breath.  
I dwell on thoughts of an accident  
Taking me away for good  
As I decipher cryptic license plates,  
The minutes turning into hours.  
"Not much time left," you remark,

Your eyes never straying from the road.  
I close my eyes and press my cheek  
Against the window,  
A layer of glass, unbearably fragile.

## Jacksonville

His father's squirrel gun lies broken in a closet  
As a kid, I traveled to Jacksonville,  
Found it boring, dreary,  
Concrete and wet heat,  
Spanish moss and sawgrass  
But when he lived there,  
it was wild,  
confederate and untamed.  
I hear he was a problem child,  
but in his old age,  
I found him as stubborn and uninspiring as  
his hometown.  
A technical manual on anything other than grandfathering.  
I don't suppose he was ever warm,  
But he must have been something once.  
I've been told that it started before I was born,  
He would shake his head in small ellipses as  
His hand would descend slowly and deliberately  
To grasp his spoon in quaking fingers.  
He had always been short,  
Now he was vast as well, and  
All of him trembles,  
Until he cannot paint anymore.  
In his thick, engineer's glasses,  
He turns to a computer, and,  
Like a diary left in the rain,  
His words would slur and bleed into each other,  
Disease spreading like ink  
Running like sores,  
The flesh is soft, the pages warped, and  
After his funeral service,  
his ashes were brought north to Jacksonville.  
And I will never see his grave, for  
Jacksonville has always felt like a dying city,  
And the only thing waiting for me there is a reminder  
Of how thoroughly one can be destroyed.

**Mara  
Dauphin**  
Grade 12  
Rockville  
High School  
Vernon

Rachel  
Norman  
Grade 12  
Rockville  
High School  
Vernon

## Well, I Think I'll Get Out of Boston

Brash men with indiscernible accents encourage me too enthusiastically to buy papers:

*Boston Globe, Herald, Star* ... quality news.  
Bullet and express trains shoot out of the city,  
Stretching like claws into the suburbs.

Businessmen in squeaky shoes rush by with dew on suitcases,

My journey requires no passport.  
My Charlie Card has no destination.

Just twelve dollars left on it,

I can walk onto any train on any line and get off at a multitude of locations.

But all the cities sound the same,

Like names of old British villages that New Englanders copied,

All of them, however old they are, seem new,

Meaningless novelties

Letters were strung and vowels hitched together,

But all they form are cabooseless woodnotes telling me of mythical places

Where no one knows my name,

The man in a corduroy jacket and green pants sits on a bench,

Clutching his leather-bound notebook like his only son,

His poem never ends, it's entitled, "Why?" and is dedicated to the almighty one.

I remember home,

And not just on maps with names like Newton, New Bedford, Hamptons,  
Springfields,

Lenox, Cambridge, and Worcester

Rolling over native tongues as "Wister".

But in senseless ceremonies and obnoxiously uniform houses, rundown schools  
and

smelly offices,

There was too much home,

I cut it all out and now there is nothing.

No graduation, no dinner, no parks or bike rides on trails,

No crappy towns with nothing to do but hang out in bowling alley parking lots  
or graffiti

highway underpasses,

Why does every city have to be nowhere?

And every man no one?

## Honorable Mentions

Austin Dorsey	Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Sully Gildersleeve	Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
MinSoo Kim	Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Boris Moscardelli	Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Lydia Jones	Arts at the Capital Theatre
Mary Margaret Stoll	Avon Middle School
Jillian Hochman	Bristol Eastern High School
Keith Michaud	Bristol Eastern High School
Elliott Woolworth	Bristol Eastern High School
Richard Smith	Central Magnet High School
Isabelle Calderon	Coleytown Elementary School
Amanda Francis	East Windsor Middle School
Michelle Schloss	Farmington High School
Nicole Bruno	Glastonbury High School
Haley Cormier	Granby Memorial Middle School
Marisa McCabe	Greenwich Academy
Tyler Bakanas	Joel Barlow High School
Alexandra Grimaldi	Kelly Lane Intermediate School
Tayla Guigere	Killingly Memorial School
John Gasiorowski	Lafayette School
Emily Johnson	Lafayette School
Sam Kyzivat	Latimer Lane Elementary School
Brendan Murphy	Latimer Lane Elementary School
Kelly Parlin	Lyman Memorial High School
Lucia Pratto	Mansfield Middle School
Ziqi Yao	Mansfield Middle School
Megan McCauley	Masule High School
Jacqueline Jean Bickley	Memorial Middle School
Hope Dieffenbach	Mill Hill Elementary School
Hillary Therriault	Mill Hill Elementary School
Victoria Hovick	Morgan School
Madeline Carroll	Nayaug Elementary School
Amanda Swanson	Nayaug Elementary School
Hannah Herde	New Canaan High School
William Evans	North Street School
Margot Eversdyke	North Street School
Hannah Haaser	North Street School
Liah Lombardi	North Street School
Madeline Ross	North Street School
Justin Kegley	Old Lyme High School
Alanna Mawhinney	Philip R. Smith School
Isaac Losacco	Redding Elementary School
Jillian Lozier	Regional Multicultural Magnet School

Patty Dandish	RHAM Middle School
Nicholas Peteros	RHAM Middle School
Kara Trippel	RHAM Middle School
Rose Goldich	Rockville High School
Ashley McCann	Rockville High School
Brigid Stoll	Roaring Brook School
Leiah Cutkomp	Samuel Webb Elementary School
Erin Tressler	Sandy Hook Elementary School
Maeve McMahon	Scotts Ridge Middle School
Thomas Nelson	Seth G. Haley Elementary School
Matthew Evans	South Elementary School
Kimberly Genuario	South Elementary School
Katelyn Sparks	South Elementary School
Amelia Strimple	Southeast Elementary School
Halley Haruta	Squadron Line Elementary School
Stephanie Laura Webster	Taft School
Emily Eisenhauer	Toffolon Elementary School
Katie Kerr	Tootin' Hills Elementary School
Daniel Schenk	Tootin' Hills Elementary School
Brittany Sims	University High School of Science and Engineering
Madeleine Hayes	Wapping Elementary School
Courtney Anderson	West Woods Upper Elementary School
Kyler MacDonald	Westbrook High School
Olivia Tempesta	Westbrook Middle School
Marcel Wright	William J. Johnson Middle School
Jamie Bernier	Windham Middle School

## Teachers of Published Authors

Cailin Aceto	Anna M. Reynolds School
Lisa Taylor	Arts at the Capitol Theatre
Maria Ogren	Branford High School
Deborah Carrington	Bristol Eastern High School
Elizabeth Burdelski	Bristol Eastern High School
Joanne Peluso	Bristol Eastern High School
Michelle Wylie	Broad Brook Elementary School
Erica Desabota	Brooklyn Middle School
Lisa Thomas	Clover Street School
Mindi Englart	Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School
Deb Mauro	Emerson Williams School
Mary Ellen Hussey	Eric G. Norfeldt School
Eileen Fenn	Fairfield Warde High School
Tina Rembish	Fairfield Woods Middle School
Allison Angon	Frenchtown Elementary School
Kathryn Folkes	Gilead Hill School
Michelle Godin	Glastonbury High School
Joanne Desrosiers	Granby Memorial Middle School
Laura Shafe	Granby Memorial Middle School
Shelia Riedell	Holmes Elementary School
Bonnie Frascadore	Irving Robbins Middle School
Janice Garvey	Joel Barlow High School
Catherine Grasso	John Pettibone Elementary School
Morgan King	Kelly Lane Intermediate School
Lisa Higgins	Killingly Memorial School
Liza Escott	Lyman Memorial High School
Laura Scruggs	Mansfield Middle School
Rochelle Marcus	Mansfield Middle School
Denise Perugini	Memorial Middle School
Leslie Chausse	Morgan High School
Barbara Rice	North Street School
Lori Everett	North Street School
Jessica Mularski	Old Lyme High School
Jeanne Proctor	Old Saybrook Senior High School
Ann Marie Castle	Pine Grove Elementary School
Christine Wilkie	Regional Multicultural Magnet School
Susan Zarbo	RHAM Middle School
Andrea Fletche	Ridgefield Academy
Victoria Nordlund	Rockville High School
Jeanne Stevens	Rotella Interdistrict Magnet School
Susan Gravel	Rotella Interdistrict Magnet School
Becky Golanski	Samuel B. Webb Elementary
Barbara Jennes	Scotts Ridge Middle School
Thomas Hine	Sedgwick Middle School

Kathryn Nicholas  
Paula Passero  
Julie Brennan  
Carrie Donnelly  
Michele Kelley  
Diane Anjone  
Joann Desy  
Sandy Lipscomb  
David Kelley  
Daria Plummer  
Judy Muirhead  
Kerry Jones  
Kristen Magoun  
Lynn Frazier  
Margaret Sheehan

South Elementary School  
South Elementary School  
Southeast Elementary School  
Squadron Line Elementary School  
Thompson Brook School  
Timothy Dwight Elementary School  
Tolland Middle School  
Tootin' Hills School  
Walsh Intermediate School  
Wapping Elementary School  
West Woods Upper Elementary School  
West Woods Upper Elementary School  
William J. Johnson Middle School  
Windham High School  
Woodbury Middle School