

Connecticut Student Writers

Pride

A mirror reveals no other image
Yourself, it's all you ever see
Ambitious, a dangerous quality
Magnificent you must be
You alone, basked in glory
1st place is a broken home
Be your best because you must
Must or be insufficient
The honor is all yours, your
majesty...

Excerpt from
"The Seven Deadly Sins"
Anne Whitehead, Grade 11
Rockville High School

Connecticut Student Writers

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FOREWORD

As is implied by the cover of this year's *Connecticut Student Writers*, pride in excess can be sinful, but pride in moderation is nothing more than the pleasure and satisfaction that come from diligent and superior work. The teachers of the Connecticut Writing Project are exceedingly proud to present the 21st volume of *Connecticut Student Writers*.

The pages of this year's magazine emanate pride. Over 1,000 Connecticut students, grades kindergarten through twelve, took such pride in their writing that they submitted hundreds of stories, poems, essays, and plays for publication. The 78 pieces selected for publication reflect our students' strong sense of pride in their imaginations, their writing, and themselves.

The Connecticut Writing Project-Storrs congratulates the young writers whose work is published in the 2009 *Connecticut Student Writers*. Furthermore, we would like to thank the writers' parents and teachers for their proud support and encouragement.

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**Elementary School
Poetry and Prose
Grades K-5**

Unicorns have horns.
The horns are magic.
When they are afraid of something,
The horns glow the opposite color that the unicorn is.
If the unicorn is not afraid of something like a bear,
And if the bear was a friend,
The horn would stop glowing.
The unicorn would be able to see again.
The unicorn would gallop over to see her friend.
The unicorn would nudge and hug to make sure her friend would know she is there.

We sit
My brothers
We sit in the grass
Eat lollipops
We sit and look at my favorite star

I love cats
Fluffy
Beautiful
Cats give kisses

I wonder where my dog is.
Have you seen him?
No, I have not.
I still can't find him.
What should I do?
I looked behind the curtains.
Now I am going to look under the bed.
And I found my dog!

I caught a fish on my dad's boat!
The pole shook and shivered.
I was happy.
It was a purple fish.
It was fun.
I love you, Dad!
He took a picture of the fish.

The cats were at the park.
They went up a trail.
They found a castle.
They went inside and found a princess.
The princess gave them jewelry and they became princesses.
And they got crowns too.
And they lived happily ever after.

Blue

Blue is a really sad color. It makes me cry whenever I look at the sky.
Blue is the saddest color on Earth. It makes me cry all of the time.

Purple

Purple is an elegant color. It fills my heart with joy.
Purple is a color of the rainbow. It is the first color.

Pink

Pink is a joyful color. It makes me feel happy.
Pink touches my heart. It is one of the colors in the sunset.

Orange

Orange is one of the colors of the rainbow.
Rainbows are my favorite thing on land.
Orange is the color of a planet.

Yellow

Yellow is a joyful color. It reminds me of sunlight.
Sunlight is beautiful. Yellow is the color of twinkling stars.

The crying wood
The dancing flames
Are fighting together.
How sad
That wood
Would not win.
The fire
Happily laughing
The wood sadly dying
While the fire is dancing above.

One Friday night I went outside and helped my dad shovel the driveway. I asked him if I could go in the snow mountains. He said, "Yes." So I went on the snow mountains. My foot slid down. Daddy put me on top of the car and my foot had no boot on it. I had to go in the house and put a different sock and boot on. I went back outside, and then I threw snow at the window and made my baby brother, Brady, laugh!

My mom wakes me up early. I don't like that.

My mom makes me get dressed.
When I come down, my mom says, "You go get new clothes on."
She makes me get a yellow shirt. I don't like that.

My mom tugs my hair.
"Ouch," I say. "That hurts!"
I don't like that.

My dad makes me cereal when I want a breakfast sandwich.
I don't like that.

My dad makes me brush my teeth.
I don't like that.

Then, it's time to get on the bus. I wave goodbye to my dad.
I am happy now.

One day my dog had puppies. I was excited. She had puppies before, but this time it was near my birthday. It was 8/8/08 and she had 8 puppies. The first two were black, then a brown puppy, then a yellow one, then black, then brown, then black, and the last one was yellow. Penny is a chocolate Lab and Dozer is a black Lab. Penny wouldn't feed the puppies until all eight of them were born. After the puppies were born, we ordered pizza, and our order number was 8. Now 8 is one of my lucky numbers.

Icicle
Shine smooth
Icicles are falling
I feel really glad
Drip

The afternoon rain streamed down the window pane.

Plink, plunk, plunk.

The rain came down. Boring!

I listed the presidents in my head

I got as far as Lincoln before I lost count.

Still, the rain came down.

Even more bored, I laid down on the couch and tried to go to sleep.

I counted horses jumping over fences.

But it didn't work.

Still, the rain came down.

Since there was nothing better to do,

I began to pace back and forth, back and forth.

Still, the rain came down.

When would it stop?

I stared and stared out the window.

I stared and stared and stared.

Plink, plunk, plunk.

The rain sounded like the hands on the clock.

Still, the rain came down.

Then ... the rain stopped.

Diamonds sparkle like snow falling,
Like a kitten's clean fur,
Like the sun setting.

Once upon a time, there was a boy named Anthony. Anthony was at recess when he found a shiny blue pebble right near the swings. He picked up the pebble and put it in his front pocket. *Ring, ring,* went the school bell! He lined up to go to his classroom, Room 10. Then, Anthony went into the classroom and started to pack up for the end of the day. He got all of his things and put them in his blue backpack. Then he went out the door and got on the bus. When it was Anthony's stop, he got off the bus and ran into his house. Anthony walked into his room and tried to do his homework, but he couldn't understand it. He wished he knew the answers to his homework. He decided to take a break and have a snack. When he went to his room to try and do his homework again, he noticed it was all done correctly. Surprised, Anthony said, "Who did my homework!?" Next to his homework was the pebble, and it was glowing green. Anthony wondered if he should keep the pebble or get rid of it. He decided to make the right choice and get rid of it so he could do his own homework the right way. The next day, Anthony went to the beach and took the magic pebble with him. On the beach, Anthony took out the pebble and threw it far into the water. If you're at the beach and see a shiny pebble, then it might just be a magic pebble.

Chapter 1: Sasha and Katiya at Home

"Wake up, Sasha!" said Katiya. "Come and help Mother make bread for Christmas." "Do you have any of that pure white flour?" asked Katiya to Sasha. "Not anymore," said Sasha. "I used it all to make bread for lunch." "Oh no!" said Katiya sadly. "What are we going to do?"

The two girls walked down the bumpy stairs to help Mother. "I know what to do," said Katiya with a sly look. "Let's go and look for Kolobok!" "Kolobok! I have not seen Kolobok since I was a little girl. I think he has been lost forever," added Mother. "Oh yes," said Sasha. "I remember the stories you told us when we were little about how he ran away from his home a long time ago." "We need to find him," replied Katiya. "He is the most delicious piece of bread you can ever have for Christmas." "I might have tasted his parents before with the flour I used to make bread for lunch," Sasha said enthusiastically. "I would love to find him and eat him up," added Sasha with a yummy reply.

Chapter 2: The Ferris Wheel at Gorky Park

The two girls got their bright coats and blue galoshes and ran out the door. They glanced outside and looked around, anxious to start their adventure. "Russia looks so sweet that I want to eat it in one bite," said Sasha, licking her lips. "Sasha, do not be silly. We are on an important mission. We need to find the country's most beloved bread," replied Katiya firmly. "Ok," said Sasha with a frown. "But Moscow is a big place," said Sasha with her eyes wide. "Where can we start?" "I know," added Katiya confidently. "I think we should start by going to Gorky Park. There are some animals there. We can ask them if they know where Kolobok is." "Why animals?" said Sasha, curiously. "Don't you remember the

story of Kolobok?" responded Katiya impatiently. "According to the story, some animals wanted to eat him but Kolobok managed to escape." The two girls held hands and walked very decisively towards Gorky Park.

After a long walk, they got to the park and ran into a curious, fluffy rabbit. "Hello Mister Rabbit," said Katiya. "We are looking for Kolobok." "Do you know where he is?" said Sasha. The rabbit pointed to the Ferris wheel and then quickly hopped away. "I think we should go on the Ferris wheel and when we are at the top, we should look for Kolobok all around Gorky Park," said Katiya. "That sounds like a good idea," replied Sasha, "but we need to buy the tickets. Do you have any money?" "Yes, some money," answered Katiya. "Let's go buy some tickets."

Waiting in line, Sasha looked a bit scared. "What is the matter, Sasha?" asked Katiya with a funny look. "I do not want to go on. I think it looks too high for me," said Sasha. "I cannot leave you alone here," said Katiya firmly. "You have to come with me. Close your eyes at the top and imagine you are eating the sweet Kolobok," added Katiya. "All right," said Sasha, still scared. So the two girls hopped on the Ferris wheel. At the top, Katiya said, "Wow, isn't this so beautiful?" "No," responded Sasha, with her eyes closed. "The only thing I can see is Kolobok entering my mouth." Katiya looked all around Gorky Park, but nothing yellow caught her eye.

"You can open your eyes now," said Katiya to Sasha. "We are almost at the bottom." "Did you find Kolobok?" asked Sasha anxiously. "No," responded Katiya. "I had a nice view but nothing yellow moving." "What should we do next?" asked Sasha. "Our next step is Red Square," answered Katiya.

Chapter 3: Shopping at Red Square

"Do you want to go to the bread section at Red Square?" asked Sasha. "Maybe Kolobok is caught there." "Okay," said Katiya. So they went to a store in Red Square. "Wow! That is a big store!" said Katiya. "Oh yes," said Sasha. "It is a big store, and it takes a long time to get there." So the two girls ran fast. On the way, Sasha saw a clothes store. "Wait! Maybe we can buy a new ushanka for Father so that his ears will not get so cold and red when he goes to work." Katiya looked at the beautiful boots. "These valenki would keep Mother's feet from getting wet when she goes to buy our food," she said. Then they both said at the same time, "And some galoshes for us!"

After buying some Christmas presents, the two girls walked on, and they decided to stop in the instrument section. Sasha loved to listen to the sound of the musicians' fingers on the strings of the balalaykas. Katiya watched a man open and close the bayan. The sounds reminded her of the carnival at Gorky Park. Both girls stared at the flowery dresses that artists painted for the Matrioshka dolls. Sasha looked at the diamonds, which made her think of sugar. This reminded her of the bread section. "Let's not forget about Kolobok!" she said to her sister. They hurried over to the long line in the bread section. "Oh," said Katiya. "I was so interested in the music that I forgot about Kolobok." While they waited, Sasha talked about all the other sweets she liked. "Do you know where Kolobok is?" they asked the baker when they finally came to the front of the line. "No. Why don't you try the Kremlin?" he replied.

Chapter 4: The Kremlin

When they arrived at the Kremlin, Sasha was getting very hungry. "Oh, I want Kolobok here right now!" "Shhh!" said Katiya. "We're inside a church in the most famous place in Moscow." Katiya liked to look at the art in the churches and palaces of the Kremlin. "Look!" Sasha could not control herself. Behind a tomb was a round loaf of bread with a smiling face stuck on the wall. "You found me!" said Kolobok. "I love to play hide and seek with the little children." Katiya grabbed Sasha's hand. "So the stories Mother told us are true! Kolobok is a magic bread!" Sasha ran to grab Kolobok and caught him.

Chapter 5: Kolobok's Secret

"You caught me!" said Kolobok. "Well, if you let me go, I will give you a secret recipe that you can use to make the most delicious bread you ever tasted." Sasha let go of Kolobok but still held Katiya's hand. Katiya tried to pull Sasha away. "I'm scared." Sasha was so hungry that she did not want to leave. She pulled Katiya so hard that they bumped into Kolobok. Kolobok said, "Don't be scared. I won't hurt you. Just listen to my recipe: mix flour, water, salt, yellow food coloring, adventure dreams, and put it in the samover to bake delicious bread!" Sasha said, "But Mother does not have any flour." With a big smile, Kolobok handed her a giant white bag of flour.

"Sasha, get up. You're sitting on me," said Katiya. When Sasha stood up, the girls thanked Kolobok and looked around. But the smiling bread was gone. They tiptoed out of the Kremlin and ran home. When they got home, Katiya wrapped the Christmas presents they had bought and hid them. Then Sasha showed their mother the flour and recipe. "Father!" Sasha and Katiya called. "You won't believe what happened to us today!" They made the bread just in time for Christmas.

"The Bright Light" – Brigid Stoll

Grade 2, Roaring Brook Elementary

"Rise and shine!" my mother shouted as she opened my curtains to the bright sunrise. I groaned and trudged from my bed to the bathroom to get ready for school. After gulping a quick breakfast, we charged outside through the squeaky garage door. The frigid, cold winter breeze made me widen my eyes with surprise as it found every uncovered and loose opening in my jacket. Now I was awake! We walked peacefully down the big hill in the still morning, enjoying the orange sunrise over the trees until the glare of a bright light shined in our eyes. We squinted to see what was reflecting, but it was too hard to see with the sun shining on the clean, white snow. Worried we would be late for school, we hurried down the hill.

The next day was the same routine. Down the hill we went and again the bright light shined in our eyes at the same exact place. It was very mysterious! However, concerns about being tardy made it impossible to investigate. I thought about it all day at school, but I was puzzled by the mystery. I decided to wake early the next morning so we would have time to check it out. The third day I was a bit scared and anxious and excited as soon as we walked out the door. I held my mother's hand extra tight. Like the days before, it happened again, except today was NOT a bright, sunny day but a dark and cloudy day!

This time my curiosity overcame my fear and I walked toward the glare from the reflection. The light led me beside a tall bushy evergreen tree at the dark edge of a gigantic, gloomy forest. The evergreen had small, red berries hanging from its amazingly beautiful, light green needles, which were partly covered with snow. There it was! A bright, brilliant shining diamond button on the coat of an ancient, worn doll!

"Why was she in the bush?" I wondered. Perhaps she fell out of someone's trash can or a baby might have thrown it out of her carriage while on a walk with their mother. My mother didn't know if we should keep her (germs, you know) but I needed her. There was something special about this doll. Behind that scratched face and dingy clothes there was a sad, warm look on her face. I begged my mother to let me take the doll home. After a short pause, my mother grudgingly said okay. We continued to school where all I could think about was the doll.

As soon as I arrived home, washing and cleaning the doll was my first job. She was soon restored to what I imagined she looked like when she was new. The bright diamond buttons on her green velvet dress glistened and shone in the sunlight. The velvet had swirly designs and her glossy black patent leather shoes shone like new. Her silky, dark brown hair looked just like mine and smelled

of sweet, flowery perfume. Her expression had changed. Instead of her sad eyes, she seemed to have a slight smile on her face and a sparkle in her big, brown eyes! I ran to show and thank my mom. "I cannot believe my doll could turn out to be so beautiful! Her name will be Samantha!" We played together all day until eventually my parents told me it was time to go to bed.

The next day, I woke up and couldn't find Samantha! That was strange because I remembered bringing her to bed with me. I asked my sisters if they had seen her, but sadly they all said no. Finally at night I went into my closet and there she was on the floor. I thought it was odd because I didn't remember putting her there. I was so confused I hardly noticed how clean and organized the sweaters and shoes were in my closet. As I was dressing my beautiful doll Samantha for bed, I noticed inside her dress that the stitching said, "Made with love in the North Pole by Billy Elf!" She was somebody's special gift from Santa!

At school, I was daydreaming about Samantha and Billy Elf and didn't finish my math before recess. After recess, I returned to my desk but could not find my math! Soon, a classmate had found it on the floor and gave it back to me. Phew! I hurried to my desk to finish it and was stunned to see it was already completed! I wondered who had done my work, but there was no time to investigate. The class was starting Share Time. When I went to get Samantha from inside my desk for Share Time, I noticed that she was somehow on my chair with a pencil in her hand instead. I just grabbed her and sat down in the circle.

The following morning, I was considering how my work could have been finished and suddenly had a great idea! I did a few math problems wrong on purpose so at recess I could spy to see who was doing my work. During recess, I peered through the window of our classroom. I cupped my hands around my eyes to get a better view and there it was! SAMANTHA WAS DOING MY WORK! I could not believe my eyes! I gasped with wonder and excitement! Samantha must have heard my gasp because she immediately became stiff and doll like. I ran to tell my best friend, Caroline, but before I found her I decided this secret was too special to share.

I pretended like nothing had changed until after we got home from school. I rushed upstairs carrying Samantha and slammed the door to my room closed for privacy. I told Samantha I knew her secret and tickled her stomach until she stopped pretending she was an ordinary doll. Eventually Samantha started giggling and we gave each other a huge, loving hug. Samantha helped me clean my room as we talked for hours, and we became best friends. No matter how old I am, I will always keep my doll Samantha. She is my dear, loyal friend, a helper, and my bright light that keeps me smiling.

"On a Cold Winter Day" – Ryan Angers

Grade 3, Tolland Intermediate

On a cold winter day
Why not look out and say,
How beautiful can you be?
Mother Earth is never just for me.

"I Am Alive" – Abigail Harty

Grade 3, Clover Street Elementary

I am a beautiful smelling rose swaying in the wind
I am a car honking my horn to tell people to move
I am the white friendly puppy barking at the cat
I am the bumblebee buzzing around your head

I am the thunder rumbling in the rainstorm
I am a graceful girl dancing on stage
I am a viola playing sweet music
I am a red ball bouncing in the street
I am the fish swimming gracefully in the water
I am the stray cat walking in the street
I am a ship moving on top of the water
You see, I am alive I am alive
I am the sun shining in your face
I am the moonlight glittering in the dark
You see, I am alive I am alive

"In My Mother's Arms" – Alexis Mary Klimaszewski

Grade 3, Elizabeth Shelton Elementary

My favorite place ... where can it be?
I can go there when monsters come into my dreams
I can go there when someone hurts my feelings.
I can go there when my tummy hurts really bad.
I can go there when I fall and cut my knee.
I can go there when I need to be warm on a cold winter day.
I can go there when there is a secret to share that no one else can hear.
I can go there when I have really great news to tell.
Do you know where it is? I bet you can't guess.
My favorite place ... the place ... in my mother's arms.

"Swimming with the Gentle Giants of the Sea" – Betty Berdan

Grade 3, Buttonball Lane Elementary

DONSOL, PHILIPPINES, April 2008 – We woke up very early to eat a quick breakfast and walk along the beach to the Whale Shark Visitor Center, located in Donsol on the Philippine Island of Luzon. The whales are the most active in the morning, so it was important to quickly rent our snorkeling equipment, flippers, mask, and snorkel, and head up to the boat on the beach. We met our B.I.O. (which means Buntanding Interaction Officer) who would help us interact properly with the whale sharks. It is important to swim with them in the right way so we don't scare them or cause them any problems. It's also important for our safety. They are large creatures; some get to be 30-40 feet.

So we boarded the boat, made our way out to sea, and watched. "There's one!" called the B.I.O. We quickly put on our flippers, masks, and snorkels and sat on the rim of the boat to dive in. "One, two, three," said the B.I.O. So we jumped in and swam away from the boat, careful to stay clear of the motor. "Look down and swim forward!" he said. We looked down in the murky green water but saw only the creature's tail before it disappeared into the murky blackness.

We swam back to the boat, took off our flippers and then climbed up the ladder into the boat. The spotter, who stood on a tall pole on top of the boat, spotted a shadow of another whale shark, and we got ready, waited for the signal, and jumped in again. This time the whole whale shark went right underneath us before it swam way down. We hopped back on the boat, and the captain steered away. As we waited, we saw the tail of a whale shark sticking up out of the water! We waited while the B.I.O. was sure it was swimming and then we went in again. This time it emerged out of the deep with

its mouth opening and closing, taking in tiny shrimp, right in front of us! We swam with that one very closely, so close we had to pull up our knees so its tail wouldn't hit us! Back in the boat we ate a snack and waited for the crew to locate another shark. Back in the water again, we swam and noticed several much smaller fish swimming alongside its gills. Whale sharks have gills for they are the largest fish in the sea—not a whale. We swam ahead of this one quickly and turned around. The shark opened its mouth and closed it! Then it dove, and as we came up to the surface of the sea we talked about how great the experience was and how beautiful and yet different every shark's spots were.

All told, we saw nine whale sharks in three hours, including two great spots when we swam above the sharks for at least two minutes. Some groups got to see only two or three, and so we were very lucky to not only see but swim with these gentle giants of the sea. You might not think it is cool, or you might feel scared to swim in the sea with such large fish, but it's really neat—one of the neatest things I've ever done.

"The Magic Flute" – Eliza Douglas

Grade 3, West District Elementary

The old Sizzleberry Well was all crust, no water. So it was no surprise when in 1952 a flute got stuck inside and was covered in crust also. That was how it got stuck to the inside of the well.

In 2005 an elderly woman found it. At first it seemed innocent enough, but as soon as she played the first odd, mournful notes, all the animals came rushing over! The old woman took the flute from her lips and looked at it. On the flute were the words "Amy E. Greenday, 1912-2003."

"Oh!" She gasped.

Everyone knew who Amy Greenday was. She had died many years ago and was trapped in the flute. Her flute was very dear to her, but because she summoned animals with it, she was thought to be a witch. So after she was imprisoned in the flute, it was thrown down a well. Whoever threw the flute down the well clearly had no idea the fungus was alive! It had grabbed the flute and stuck it to the wall! The old lady had almost set her free!

Now if you were wondering why that is a problem, it isn't. There is no telling what a spirit might do when he or she is set free. They would probably try to get revenge on the unfortunate soul who had imprisoned it in the flute and threw it down the well. Whoever broke the flute would send Amy E. Greenday hurtling to her death, and whoever played her song would set her free.

Since the old woman had not played the spirit's song, she hadn't set her free. So, as if that were that, the old woman walked home with the flute clutched tightly to her heart, for she was one of Amy E. Greenday's children, Ms. Jessica B. Greenday, but she disguised her last name as Foohey.

The next morning, the old woman heard screaming. When she looked out the window, she saw a herd of wildebeests. She got dressed and went casually to the town hall and told the mayor that she could charm the wildebeests out of the city. All she would like in return was 1,000 guilders. The mayor agreed, so she went outside and played a tune on her mother's flute. The wildebeests followed as she walked up to the top of a mountain.

"We are saved!" the townspeople cried.

"Clean up this mess!" the mayor yelled. "Now!"

"But first my pay," the old woman said.

"No. And you better leave before I kick you out!" the mayor yelled again.

The old woman left. But while the kids were all at school and the parents were at work, the old woman played the flute and summoned the animals to a cave. Then she released Ms. Amy E. Greenday from her flute.

Everyone was content and they lived happily ever after.

Well, almost ...

It was a happy Thanksgiving Day. We had a large family gathering in my great grandma's home in Ohio. I played with all of my cousins and we ended the day with a nice family dinner. In the night, we saw a Star Wars movie in the family room. I went off to sleep halfway through the movie. While I was sleeping, a bunch of aliens entered the family room and snatched me away in their flying saucer. We landed on an alien planet and the surroundings were quite different and strange. The aliens appeared different, dressed differently, but were talking in a human language. I noticed space cars on the streets, and there was a gas station where the cars were filling up light for fuel.

There were a lot of alien kids playing, and I decided to join them. As I approached them, I asked hesitantly, "Can I play with you all?" They seemed to understand me and replied, "Sure." Then we all played together a spaceball game, similar to a baseball game. After we finished playing, we all went for dinner. They did not have any dining tables. The dinner table was actually a live creeper with leaves like in the middle of a jungle. They did not have any plates but huge leaves like lotus leaves as dinner plates. They served Galaxy soup, Mars bread, Space pizza and Astro pasta! I was becoming more and more curious. Then, one of the elderly aliens sitting next to me started telling me its story.

About one hundred years ago, many of them migrated from their earlier planet. They started migrating because they faced a huge shortage of food, air, and water. They did not know where to go within the whole planet. They went in a spaceship to find a new place as many of them started dying of thirst and starvation. The aliens, at last, discovered their present planet and settled down. But, from the time they started living in their new planet, the aliens started leading a new life. There was a rule by the Space Governor that the citizens should not waste certain natural resources. The aliens could not have any wooden items in their homes or public places. They were not allowed to cut any trees to make wooden furniture. Their governor said that they lost a lot in their earlier place because of cutting all the trees. The aliens had homes that had roofs like solar panels. They had furniture made of strange material that did not have any wood. Also, the aliens were strict about not wasting water. Hence, the aliens started eating in large leaves as these are hygienic and can be buried back into the soil as fertilizer for the trees. They also saved water as there were no dishes to wash after dinner. The elderly alien went onto narrate various things that they do differently now in their daily lives and how they are saving all of their resources. We finished the dinner with dessert that had Milky Way cookies and Space cream that tasted like our ice cream.

All of us went back to bed after dinner. The elderly man came back and told me that the name of their original place from where they migrated was "Earth." I was startled and hurriedly threw my quilt aside. I realized that I was still on planet Earth, and the morning sunlight was streaming through my window. I could still see trees through the windows and felt relieved that we still have time to save ourselves. I went to brush my teeth but made sure I did not leave the tap running!

Soldiers serve our country with their souls
To save America is their goal.
They dodge, duck, dip, and dive,
And sadly, not all of them have survived.

Through shine, snow, sleet, and rain,
We never use their names in vain.

We honor them very well,
And in our eyes—they are swell!

They are always there to help us,
And do it without a fuss.
Soldiers fight the wars we start,
And people watch sadly as they depart!

“The Long Rest” – Julianna Pestretto

Grade 4, Kelly Lane Intermediate

Golden needles carpet the forest floor awaiting
The arrival of dancing multi-colored leaves.
Wind whispers a lullaby
As nature prepares to sleep.
Squirrels scurry to and fro gathering
nuts for their winter slumber,
The full moon plays hide and seek
among clouds as nighttime falls.
A frosty blanket paints white crystals
Onto blades long ago green.
This closes the door to sweet summer memories
As the earth prepares to dream.

“Park” – Emma Sherrill

Grade 4, East Farms Elementary

The flowers call to the bees
“Hi, hi, touch me, touch me.”
In colors of puzzling purple,
blinding blue,
perfect pink,
optimistic orange,
yippy yellow,
ready red and,
Glossy green.
Bees singing, “Buzz, buzz.”
Butterflies rejoicing with a soft twitter, twitter.
The flowers were visited by the sun
as it sprinkled some of its color upon them.
The flowers are like people
Unique
As in “We the People”
Important.
The boss of the bunch
Telling the new buds the perfect time to pop out of the ground
The bees are knives,
Everyone fears them, but they
Are very helpful.

September 18, 1912: A Decision

Dear Diary,

Today was treacherous. The boss yelled at me because I stopped work in the factory for a second to tuck my numb hands into my pocket. The factory is freezing. The boss would yell at us if we coughed—it is terrible! He’d bark, “Mary! Stop being such a lazy slacker and get to work!” The boat is leaving from a port in Galway in six weeks. I’m going to live in Norfolk, Virginia, with my sisters Kathleen and Bridget once I get there. I hear in their letter that the payment at the textile mill is full, much the opposite of Mark’s factory.

September 27, 1912: Home!

Dear Diary,

Today I cried very much. In Norfolk and on the S.S. Bycarneilo, I will long for Mum’s famous apple pie recipe and listening to my older brother, Sean, play his tin whistle. The bitter coldness stung my face when I went out to fetch logs to heat the hearth. Once a fire started, I settled down in the cozy rocking chair. My Irish Setter, Pat, nuzzled up on my lap and knocked my sewing out of it. “Pattie!” I scolded. Pat always makes me laugh. I will miss my home so much!

October 1, 1912: Packing

Dear Diary,

Today I packed up my suitcase. I brought a photo of my family I would be leaving, a quilt that my mother knitted, and mittens. Also, I took my Bible and Grimm’s Fairy Tales. An umbrella and rain slicker went in with everything else in my suitcase too. I would be leaving behind my knitted scarf, though, and my stuffed figurine of Pattie. I will miss Pat desperately. My mixed feelings confuse me. I sobbed hard tonight.

October 4, 1912: I Leave Home

Dear Diary,

Today I started to travel to the port. My relatives all hugged me and tried to assure me there was nothing to fret about. But I doubted this. The only food I had was a bottle of fresh water and salted pork. The journey to the port was long and hard. It stormed several times. Thieves were underfoot all the time, so I was constantly turning my head every second that I heard a sound. Even a rustle in the tall grass startled me. I smelled the salty air and felt sharp rocks that broke through the soles of my heavy boots. I was freezing at night because my musty blanket had holes where stubborn moths had bitten through. The cheerful call of a finch woke me up every morning. I felt that it was urging me to get up and keep traveling. “Get up! Get up! Quick, quick, quick!” I used a small butter knife to cut off the slabs of meat for a meal, once every day. Every night, a nightingale sang a lullaby for me that made me drift off to dreamland.

October 31, 1912: The S.S. Bycarneilo

Dear Diary,

Finally after about four weeks, my destination is in sight. The tall ship, the SS. Bycarneilo, stood proud, the sails waving. “Hello, hello. Welcome aboard!” they whispered in the breezy wind. I spotted my sister Fiona who worked at the port, running over to me. She thrust her arms around my neck and sobbed. “Oh Mary, I’m so happy for you! Oh, have a wonderful time! Promise to send money back, and remember to chip off a piece of the street. They say that in America the streets are paved with gold!” I’ve

heard this before, numerous times. I laughed and replied, "I promise!" Fiona waved wildly and cried between sobs, "Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye!" I waved back to her until her body was out of sight.

November 1, 1912: Cramped Quarters

Dear Diary,

Everyone was rushing around, crying goodbyes and hauling their luggage up the huge stairs that led to tall, proud S.S. Bycarneilo. I got a little teary-eyed. I felt sad, relieved that I'd actually made it on the ship, but I didn't feel prepared for what was in store for the tall ship. Of course I knew about storms and food, but people added to the problem too. Everyone was cramped at the bottom of the boat, and the smell of fish lingered in the air.

November 2, 1912: Departure!

Dear Diary,

I am going to miss all of my family and friends. I am traveling alone, so I packed an expensive photo of my family. It will be hard for me. I am always surrounded by people I know and love, and on the ship, it is cramped yet lonely because I am traveling in steerage. Tons of travelers are squished at the bottom of the boat.

November 19, 1912: Paved with Gold?

Dear Diary,

I wish I could be back at home sipping tea with Mum and Dad, Daido and Maimo, all my relations, and of course Pattie. Instead I am eating stale bread that is full of worms, and I am vomiting everywhere. The only beverage they serve is filthy water. I frequently feel like I want to scream in frustration, but I decided against it. After all, soon I'll be in America. The streets are paved with gold! But soon doesn't seem soon enough. Storms rock the ship and the stuffy heat is more than I can bear. A question keeps nagging my brain—what if I don't make it through the inspections at Ellis Island?

November 22, 1912: Ellis Island!

Dear Diary,

Ellis Island was as hectic as a family party with millions of people at it. Babies screamed and children clung tightly to their mothers. I was worried, very worried. People said that ships were swimming coffins—I definitely agree on that. But this was like an anxious crowd of worries. Baggage checkers looked untrustworthy. I would *not* like to part with the only luggage I would bring to the new world. I panicked whenever someone sneezed. I would mistake it for a scream or a threat. This was chaos—pure, hectic chaos.

November 23, 1912: Inspection!

Dear Diary,

The process made it seem like Ellis Island was more of a walking coffin than an immigration center. First, I had to drop off my baggage and try to remember the number. In the midst of the tests and inspections I kept whispering to myself, "175, 175, 175." Next, I had my passport checked. I was asked questions such as "Name? Age? Date of birth?" I hated this because everyone was staring at me. I almost forgot what my address was. The stern face of the reporter threw me off. I prayed to God that I would remember, and thank the Dear Lord I did. My prayer of thanksgiving played repeatedly in my head. Then came the worst part: the medical inspection. The doctor's gleaming hook reminded me of evil Captain Hook. I flinched and winced many times. It was even more uncomfortable than the "swimming coffin." Luckily, I didn't get sent to the hospitals, as many others did, and I counted my

blessings. After that came the legal inspection. Forty questions were asked, and I felt sort of bad for those strict legal inspectors. It must be pretty boring to ask one hundred and twenty questions for only three people. I answered them the way my Daido and Maimo taught me. The questions I answered without hesitation were my name, and if I'd ever been in jail before. "Mary O'Brien" and "Most definitely not!" Finally, I brought my ferry ticket and stepped onto my final ride to America.

November 25, 1912: Mixed Feelings

Dear Diary,

During the whole process of being accepted into America, I had completely mixed feelings. When I had the hook go under my eyelid to check for diseases, I was hoping and grossed out at the same time. Hoping I wouldn't be deported and grossed out because they had to flip my eyelid inside out. In my opinion, that's gross. When I was on the ferry, I was impatient and relieved. Impatient because I couldn't wait to reunite with my sisters Kathleen and Bridget in Virginia and relieved that I had made it through the journey to the New Land!

"Diamond Dilemma" – Erica Tressler

Grade 4, Sandy Hook Elementary

I panted my way down Park Avenue, hoping I had lost them. I turned my head. He and his partner were bumping into people of all shapes and sizes in their rush to catch me. I turned into a parking lot. Miraculously, I found an unlocked, dark black Hummer and hid inside. I could sense they were coming. I heard faint footsteps and a dark voice said, "Check all of 'em; I need to find that kid." They started searching each car. It wouldn't be long before they reached mine. The diamond I clutched in my jacket pocket belonged to my family, and I was going to keep it that way. The Hummer's door clicked open. I was trapped ...

So this is how it happened. My mom and dad went to go shopping, and I had to stay home. My parents just wanted to be alone, so they had made up an excuse to do so. I would have complained, but that's for babies, so I just sat in my room and started to read. Suddenly, the doorbell rang. I skipped downstairs hoping it was my friend Cooper to see if I wanted to play. I looked in the peephole, and it was the mailman. I wondered what he wanted, because he never stopped at our doorway. As I opened the door, I got my answer. The mailman stepped inside, an evil looking smile on his face. I wanted to run, but before I could even make the first step, I was grabbed by the waist. Another guy with the "mailman" threw me into the closet and locked the door. I heard him finally go upstairs to join his friend. I knew what I had to do. I just had to get my toothpick out of my pocket, put it in the lock hole, and "click," the door opened!!! Running at top speed, I knew I could beat them to it. I knew what they had come here for. I maneuvered around all the creaky floorboards and into my parents' bedroom. The "mailmen" were already frantically searching.

They were searching for the diamond. It was not just any old diamond, this diamond was HUGE. It was the diamond we had inherited from my great aunt. The diamond was so clear and so shiny that if you stared at it too long, it would make your eyes sting. I ran toward my parents' bathroom door, locked it, and turned toward the far wall. I removed a tile. My hands were shaking so badly the tile slipped to the floor and shattered. The opening revealed a small blue velvet box. I quickly stuffed it in my jacket pocket. Just as the bathroom door came crashing in, I was dropping from the window onto my mother's favorite rose bushes. Not even feeling the scratches from the thorns, I started running ...

The man with the goatee peered into the Hummer. I was scared. More scared than I had ever been in my life. I was hiding in a little spot under a seat. I was sure he would find me. His eyes scanned

the car. He almost saw my shoe, but I moved it away just in time. The door to the Hummer slammed shut.

I knew I was in danger. I had to get out. I climbed out the back. When I got to the concrete, I froze. My pursuers had their eyes glued on my hand. They slowly walked toward me as I backed away. An ugly smile had spread across both of their faces. My face and body were frozen with horror and fear. I turned to run, but ended up ... captured.

They shoved me into their car. I had duct tape covering my mouth and their old handcuffs on my arms and legs. I didn't think the car ride would be that bad, but I was wrong. They threw me into the back. Twinkie wrappers and dirty socks covered the floor. "If only they had taped my nose," I thought once I had smelled the horrible odor. Thankfully, their lair was only minutes away. They parked their car a few feet from a hill with large grey rocks covering it. We entered a dark opening into a cave. The place gave me the creeps. As they carried me in, they spoke greedily about the diamond and about how rich they would be! I had to stop them ... I had to.

They threw me on the ground next to a pile of rocks. I coughed as the dust filled my mouth and nose. Handcuffs still bound my hands and legs. I felt a surge of energy and purpose. I knew how to get out of this mess. While they were sitting on two large rocks in the corner, my hands were making their way to my pocket to get a toothpick. I had opened one lock today; I knew I could open another. Carefully moving my hands to my pocket, I managed to grab hold of one of my toothpicks with my two fingers. Turning it toward the lock on the handcuffs, I went to work. It seemed to take forever, but then I heard that beautiful "click." I peered across the room. My captors were still wrapped up in their conversations about what they would do next. I slowly reached down to unlock my feet. Just then they turned and saw what I was doing. I was too quick for them. I dashed to the exit, through the dark opening and into the brilliant sunshine. I had to adjust my eyes, the sun was so bright. I continued to run toward the road when I couldn't believe what I saw. A police car was traveling right toward me. I frantically waved my arms until he pulled over. As my captors were running out of the cave, the police car pulled up, blocking their car. The policemen quickly exited with their hands on their holsters. Now it was my captors who had looks of fear and horror. Their arms shook as they raised them in the air. One policeman barked, "What is happening here?" I breathed a large sigh of relief and smiled. "I can tell you. It's actually a very good story."

"Attack of the Mummy" – William Zawilinski

Grade 4, Kelly Lane Intermediate

Beep, beep, beep went my alarm clock. I got up excitedly to find my parents weren't awake. Wow, it's 6:15 a.m., I noticed. Well, I don't care because today is the day I have been waiting for, for a long time. Why is this day so special, you ask? Well, if you are thinking birthday, you're wrong. It was the day of the big field trip to the history museum. I thought how cool it would be to go and visit all the awesome exhibits, especially the Ancient Egypt one. I then went downstairs to get all my stuff ready for the field trip. When I finished, the clock read 6:54. It's almost 7:00, I thought. I finished getting dressed, grabbed my backpack, and then headed to the bus stop. I ran into my friend Noah there.

"Hey, Noah! Aren't you psyched up for the field trip today?" I asked.

"Totally!" replied Noah. Then we started talking about what exhibits we were looking forward to the most.

Moments later, after we ended our conversation, the bus rolled on to our street. We got on and found two empty seats in the back. The seats had so many holes in them you would have thought the bus was manufactured in Switzerland. As the bus drove into the student drop-off area, a sudden burst of realization hit me. Oh NO! I forgot money for the souvenir shop, I remembered. Oh well, I don't need a

souvenir, I thought. So I looked on the bright side of things. I still had an awesome field trip to look forward to. I gratefully got off the bus and walked into school, jittery with excitement.

But then, when I got to class, I heard our teacher, Mrs. Sherbert, say to me the most terrifying words ever to be known to man. "Kids, settle down, settle down. I have very important news to tell you all. The field trip is canceled." OH, NO! No, no, no, no! This cannot be happening. I thought I must be dreaming, so I slapped myself across the face several times and then realized it was useless. I was not dreaming. I was living a nightmare.

Suddenly, Mrs. Sherbert wasn't as sweet as her name makes her sound.

"Mrs. Sherbert, you're kidding, right?" I asked.

"No, no, no. I am entirely serious. There have been an number of disappearances there," Mrs. Sherbert replied.

"So today, we are continuing with our regular schedule?" I asked.

"Precisely," she replied.

"Ugh," I moaned. This is the worst day of my life, I thought. Then, a light bulb sprung on in my head. I got an idea. I will go to the museum after school today, I thought. The rest of the day passed like a blur. Soon came dismissal. I packed everything up and started down the hall. The hall itself looked like a museum with all its paintings of Jupiter and the rest of the planets.

When I got on to the bus, I planned what I was going to do at the museum. First, I was going to go visit the Native American exhibit. Next, I will go and see the Declaration of Independence. Lastly, I will visit the Ancient Egypt exhibit. By the time I finished making the list, it was my stop. Luckily, I was staying home by myself today, which would be the perfect time to go and visit the museum. I just have to wait until my parents leave, I thought. I walked inside to do my homework to pass some time. By the time I had finished it all, they had left for their movie. That was when I departed for the museum.

On my way, I ran into Noah. "What's up? I'm on my way to the museum. Wanna come?" I asked.

"No thanks. I got a lot of chores to do at home," said Noah.

"Okay. See you later then."

"Bye!"

I continued walking, and after several minutes, finally got to the museum. I looked at the business hours. Okay, Thursday 11:00 am-6:00PM. It's 5:30PM right now. I have 30 minutes to look around. I then made my way inside to find a little table next to the snack bar with Fireball burritos on it. Mmm ... Fireball Burritos—my favorite! I grabbed one and gobbled it down. Mmm. Delicious. After I finished eating the burrito, I started looking around. And, when I had almost finished looking around everywhere, it struck me. Oh God! I've got to get to a toilet! I thought. And I ran to the nearest bathroom.

After I finished, I walked out, looked around and saw no one. "Hello?" I yelled. Hmm, there's nobody here, I thought. The museum must be closed. Well, I guess that's what happens when you spend 20 minutes in the bathroom after eating a Fireball Burrito. This just means I'll have to unlock the door and walk out, I figured. I walked to the door and noticed the lock. It needed a special key. Uh-oh, I thought. Hey, maybe I could pick the lock with this paper clip. But the lock was too complicated.

Planes from WWII towered over my head. With every step I took, the floor creaked like old bones. The air had an old dry smell. I felt like I was in a graveyard—it was so quiet and deserted. My throat was dry as sand and tasted like stale crackers.

Suddenly, in the distance, I could hear what sounded like footsteps coming from the Ancient Egypt exhibit. What in the world could that be, I wondered.

I darted around to see right in front of me, standing there, NOTHING! In the blink of an eye, I caught a glimpse of what appeared to be a moving shadow. "I'm confused," I thought. "What is that?" I

mumbled. "It's probably the moon moving, making some shadows bigger and smaller. But, wait! The moon doesn't move," I remembered. Just then, I heard the footsteps again, only they seemed to be getting closer. "Okay, now I am officially creeped out," I thought. What is that? Then I slowly turned around and, to my surprise, found myself face-to-face to a figure with old creaky limbs, and a smell like someone gave him onion deodorant. He was wrapped in toilet paper splattered with moldy spots. The toilet paper smelled as if it had been used. I soon realized that the figure I was face-to-face with was a breathing MUMMY! "AAAHHH!" I screamed.

Then, I did what I never did before. I leapt out of the mummy's reach and ran as fast as I ever ran before. "Boy, Scooby and Shaggy make it look so easy," I uttered breathlessly. As I was still running at a speed of what felt like 80 mph, I looked back. He was still gaining on me. "Whoa ... Ouch!" I wailed. "Oh, what happened?" I asked myself. I looked around to find I had slipped on spilled lacquer. "Uh-oh, he's getting closer," I nervously babbled. Due to how nervous I was, the clumsy broke in. Because I was so clumsy, I couldn't get up without slipping. During the slipping episode, the mummy made his way closer and closer. Finally, when the mummy was about three feet away, I got my balance back and fled the area, just breaking free of the mummy's reach yet another time. I made my way through a labyrinth of hallways, passageways, and rooms until it was a dead end, and I had nowhere to go.

I caught a glimpse of a shadow coming my way. "Oh, great!" I yelled, feeling annoyed. "The mummy is coming. This is just great!" Now, he's going to eat me or something like that. But, it wasn't the mummy who was coming. It was a monstrous, horrible, blood thirsty ... mouse? Whew, that's a relief, I thought. But it wasn't for long. It turns out that the mummy was following the mouse. "Well, the relief was good while it lasted," I said, disappointed. "Goodbye, cruel world!" I yelled. When the mummy was about one foot away, it happened.

BOOM! The mummy exploded right in front of me. The figure who now stood there had a football player's body, weapons lining his pockets, and was dressed in all black wearing sunglasses. He said, "You're welcome." I was too flabbergasted to speak. And, before I could say anything, he was gone. He had blown the door open, so I could get out of the dreaded museum and get home.

On the walk home that night, unanswered questions flowed through my head. Who was the man in black? When I finally got home, I quietly made my way up to my room, got in bed, and slowly dozed off to sleep where I entered a wonderland of dreams where anything is possible, even being chased by a mummy.

Silence.
Forgotten history
Surrounds me.

An ancient tree,
Stands unnoticed,
Centered in this lonely place.
Old, tangled roots
Creep through the hard,
Crusty ground.
Cedar trees strangled
By rusty vines.

Ghosts of history
Whisper softly in my heart
Sad, innocent deaths.

Clouds form a cold,
Dead darkness over me.
Leaves are scattered about
All around me on the dirty,
Frozen ground.

The wind picks up,
Raindrops fall hard,

Darkness.
Lifeless

Old,
Ripped American flags
Stand crooked
Beside crumbling graves,
Threadbare and fading away.
Heroes are buried here.

I can't move.

"Christmas without Homework" – Asa Gray

Grade 5, Saxe Middle

I hate doing homework; it drives me insane
I'd rather be eating a striped candy cane!
For candies mean Christmas and Christmas is fun,
But homework is something that never gets done!
I finish today's but tomorrow's is there,
And the thought of next week's makes me pull my hair out.
Though sugarplum visions should dance in my head,
The 8 and 9 tables just fill me with dread!
It's time to ask Santa to look at my list,
And read the request that I do not want missed:
The most wonderful present that Santa could give ...
No homework forever as long as I live!

The small wood box
Lying on my bed shelf
Ashes of
An old friend
Hold so many pleasant memories
His blue collar
Hanging on my bed
Still ringing
As if he still wore it
I miss the days
He would come
Padding into my room
Making me
Gag at his horrible breath
Sometimes I
Open the small box
When I do
Memories
Happy and sad
Overpower me
Just like he would
The small patch of his fur still black and white
Once my old friend's clothes
That small box
Its golden latch
Sitting on my bed shelf
Holding back my old friend

An empty bench, crooked and broken. The only person who ever attempted to sit on that bench was Gerald Davis, a man with a swollen heart, a shattered memory, and a life that ended in a mystery, all because he sat in that particular seat.

Gerald Davis was old and fragile. He was like a glass sculpture waiting for his time to be dropped and broken. His hands would shake, as if memories haunted him. His eyes would wander to the sky off into his dream world. His foot would tap along the sidewalk on a gray day. This all began on a bitter November afternoon with wind that pierced the tips of your ears.

Gerald was walking with his cane clutched in his frail hand. His mind was fickle. He hadn't known where to go. The street of Amato was dark, while the beautiful Maple Street corner was filled with life. As an old man, his mind wasn't bright, so he picked a direction where his life would change forever. Amato Street. It was dark, few streetlights, and had old brick apartments with shattered windows, covered with graffiti. The only sound on Amato Street was he and his cane, tapping along the street. At the end of Amato Street, there held a bench. Gerald was finding himself tired, so he focused on

trudging to that seat to sit on. He limped over, inches from the bench. As soon as he sat on it, troubles rose in the horizon. Sweat poured from his eyebrow. His face reddened as ripe as a beet. He was panicking but making no sound. His breath grew shorter, almost like wheezes. He was single, so nobody at home would know about him, care about him. His eyes shut tightly and he grabbed his chest, tearing the wool sweater that was given to him by his used to be granddaughter.

Tears came from his eyes. But they were unusual tears. So unusual, the earth froze. In less than ten seconds, Gerald was pelted to the ground. When the world unfroze, sadly his tears didn't. They were stuck to his cheeks. Little glass raindrops they looked like, perfectly shining in a single ray of sun. Gerald was alive but not moving. He was asleep; would he never remember he sat on that bench?

He lay there with glass tears forever. He never woke up to find that his heart was swollen, or his memory shattered. The seasons drifted by. He would be drowned in snow and drenched in leaves. The silhouette of his body shone in a brisk patch of sunlight. His shadow was the only thing that was practically alive. And since people were never to walk down Amato Street, Gerald was never found. He may have died, but his tears didn't. And the tears were always to signify something, something that would always be a message to any open heart. It is, "For love is fragile, fragile enough to be ruined if teased or coaxed." The old man lies there, with elegant glass tears.

"The Big Blue Chair" – John Fincher

Grade 5, Coleytown Elementary

Sizzling sand, pounding waves, swaying grass, and dominant dunes. The sun shines bright in my eyes. Squinting, I see barren mounds of sand and a yellow reflection in the open ocean. A whistling wind ruffles my hair. The mountains of driftwood form statues. This is the place that Grammie loved, and most of all, she loved the big, blue ocean.

Memories flood my mind: her puffy, white hair that fluffed up, her wrinkled face that was dotted with freckles, her brown eyes that sparkled in the light, her big banana smile that was always on her face. I think back to the time we spent together in her big, blue chair with me in her lap, playing games and telling stories until it was time to go.

My best memory was at the zoo. We heard the screeching of monkeys and singing of birds. Over all the commotion, the roar of the king of the jungle could be heard. At every cage, I leaned over to talk to her, trying to break the silence. I knew in my heart she was fading. Her hugs getting weaker and weaker. The last time I saw her, my smile turned to a frown.

We couldn't take her out. Rubbing the tears away, I realized how big her heart really was. Tons of family pictures of happy times surrounded her. At times, her mind was blanking. Her voice sounded funny through the air tubes, interrupting conversations with rapid coughing.

One day, she was napping and never woke up; at least that is what my mom said. She passed before card time in the McKeen Towers Nursing Home. I knew her my whole life, and now it will be hard to live the rest of it without her.

At the end of our visits, she would always say, "Take a dive in the ocean for me." This was the last thing she said to me. So every time I back flop into the ocean, I think of her laughing in her big, blue chair and me in her lap.

Ahh, don't you just love the feeling of Cape Cod sugar sand in between your toes? Good memories. What if those memories are swept away by rising tides caused by global warming? Just imagine waking up to the sun rising over Old Cape Cod. You walk through the salty sea spray and across the beach's boardwalk, as you hear the waves crashing. Later on, you ride your bike to the local fish mart. When you arrive you see the early fishermen pulling up to the dock. You pull fresh lobsters out of your traps for tonight's boil on the beach. You are starting to get hungry for lunch. You stop at the seafood restaurant where they have the best mouth watering popcorn shrimp. I like mine with ketchup. After lunch, you take a tube ride through the channels of the marsh. The minnows swim under you. Now it is time for the lobster boil. You build the crisp warm fire. As the sun goes down, you think, will Cape Cod always be here?

Global warming will eventually affect Cape Cod. It will affect the Cape because carbon monoxide (a chemical that warms our planet too much) is melting the icebergs in Antarctica and the water will cause the sea level to rise. When the sea level gains one more meter of water, it will cover Cape Cod. The water will flow through Lewis Harbor in Hyannis, Cape Cod. You will only be able to see the high elevations as islands. The rest will be under water. Carbon monoxide is produced by electricity, cars, and about 80% of our everyday items. How can we help stop water from rising above Cape Cod? We can all help prevent global warming. One major way we can help prevent it is by using wind turbines for electricity. These wind turbines work by using a natural resource. This natural resource is wind. When the wind goes by a wind turbine, a generator starts up. This generator creates electricity. This can go through wires to our houses. During this environmentally healthy process, there is not any smoke to cause carbon monoxide. This will help reduce the melting of the icebergs. You can help our planet by putting these wind turbines up. Wind turbines are environmentally better than our average power plant. Another natural resource that is as effective is solar power. Another way to help global warming is to use less gas in a car. Burning gas puts carbon monoxide in the air. So if we are using less gas, that means we have to do something to get around. So why not walk or bike ride? It's fun, it's healthy, and it's environmentally friendly.

You can also help global warming by getting a CFL. A CFL is a compact fluorescent light bulb that uses 2/3 of the electricity as a normal light bulb. That means you would save \$30 in electricity over that light bulb's life time. It also lasts 10 times longer than a normal light bulb. If everybody in the USA bought a CFL light bulb it would be like taking 7.5 million cars off the road. We would save so much electricity and put less carbon monoxide in the air.

Next time you are out some place you love, help save it by buying CFL light bulbs. Donate money for a wind turbine. You will help slow down global warming. Places such as Cape Cod, Maine, and many other vacation spots will be there for generations of people to share its scenery, fun and cherished memories.

**Middle School
Poetry and Prose
Grades 6-8**

Dark clouds hovered over my curly hair,
Like wings of a bird.
Upset and scrambling through my head,
I grabbed those trusty shoes.
And so I dance.

My backpack stuffed with books,
As I loom over hours and hours of homework.
I have to get it done.
But I know I have that floor to myself.
And so I dance.

Every day, pencil in hand,
With my blue eyes gazing over the small notes that
Will assist me on the upcoming tests.
I release my frustration.
And so I dance.

That bad grade appeared, as tears
Stream down my cheeks.
My confidence is lowered.
I use that emotion.
And so I dance.

The kids gang up on me and verbally attack.
Why do they do this?
Leave me alone.
I know where I can be myself.
And so I dance.

Sometimes the pressure consumes me,
Yet I love what I do.
My schedule is busy
I can't give it up.
And so I dance

Dawn breaks the dark, dim nights of solemn.
The long nights of war and evil cease as the heat of the sun
reaching over the hills warms the souls of the hatred and violent.
The horrid periods of darkness seem never-ending, as if the earth stopped revolving and the outer face of
the world never saw the peaceful light of the sun ever again, or the devil laid a blanket of ominous
darkness and despair over the surface of the universe that we share.
The darkness causes us pain as if a spirit of annoyance and vanity
dwells in the blackness and stalks us while we can't even see it.
But when the sun rises the world will recover like a wounded soldier that was injured during war.
The sky will turn from a scarce black to sapphire.
The morning glory's petals will open revealing its colors.
A monarch butterfly will break out of its cocoon and show off its beautiful orange color.
Joy will fill everyone's heart.
Evil will cease, but will dawn ever come or is it just a dream?

My soul,
My heart,
Resembles a river,
Tumbling and turning,
Twisting and never stopping,
Searching for the open sea,
Yet, my swift pace slows,
As my path takes a bend,
I must persevere,
And push myself on,
When the vast ocean approaches,
I flow on.

My soul,
My heart,
Brims with the color of ginger,
Like a fresh orange,
Ready to fuel the world around me,
But yet,
Masked beneath me,
A faint sense of sky blue holds back,
Like a fluorescent sea,
Mellow and serene,
But riveting with energy,
Carving my way around the world.

My story is like no other, and completely indescribable. Yet I’m always being asked to relive it for the entertainment of others! And so this will be a personal record and recount of what *really* happened. Actually, it will be *the* record because I will say no more of my story (p.s. I will not have this last paragraph held against me) so ... enjoy?

You *might* say that it started when I got on the plane. Others might argue it was when I got that weird letter, but you know what? Tough luck! Like I said this is a *personal* account, meaning I’M THE ONE WRITING IT, NOT YOU! So I will start at “the beginning according to Austin.”

There was the name “Austin Avery” at the top of the page, but that was (and I can’t believe I’m about to say this) ALL there was! It may not seem so ground breaking but this just *doesn’t* happen to me! I had been sitting at my computer for ... half an hour now (according to my watch) waiting for that idea to hit—as it always does—and for my eyes to glaze over and my fingers to fly willingly across the keys, as they always do. But this time, nothing was happening—and that *NEVER* ... *well* ... *doesn’t* happen!

I needed a break from this terrifying phenomenon, so I exited out of the program and pushed away from the computer. I walked into my room and changed out of my sweat pants. Maybe a walk would inspire me, who knows? I started at a brisk pace down our driveway (which is surrounded on either side by beautiful weeping willows), but by the time I reached the end—it was a pretty long driveway—I was lagging and walking very slowly indeed, letting the warm, crisp, summer air completely indulge me.

By the time I rounded the first corner, I was practically floating. A kind of blissful sleepiness had enveloped my mind. Without realizing, I followed my legs to the park—one block away—and was now standing in front of an unusually thick patch of trees. Getting down on my knees, I crawled through a thorny hole. I stood up on the other side, covered in little scratches, and gasped.

Before me was a fairytale clearing, fit with flowers, a stream, and a peach tree. And a note? There couldn’t be! But right there tucked among the branches, caught by my keen eyes, was a creamy, manila envelope. And as I stared, the flowers seemed to move and sway. But they only swayed one way, not back again. They seemed to be pulling and pushing me, and I was listening.

I moved slowly through the grove, not noticing that the flowers edged out of the way carefully—carefully enough for a person not to notice. I reached the tree and broke the spell; I couldn’t climb such a sweet, fragile tree anymore than I could ... I don’t know. Perhaps ... “fly” is the word I’m looking for? But of course that couldn’t be the right word I thought as I looked down and realized I was in fact levitating ... towards the note! I took this as a sign and grabbed it. Unfortunately I was right and as soon as the note was in my grasp, I dropped to the ground. It didn’t hurt, just knocked the wind out of me. The main disadvantage of that letter was that it burned me!

Well, I can’t actually say burned, because it wasn’t a burn. There was a strange *almost* painful tingling spreading through my body that was strongest at my fingers. I dropped it and stared. After ten minutes of staring at it without any explosions or anything, I got irresistibly bored. So I leaned forward cautiously and grabbed the letter. Nothing happened. I was scared, so I turned and ran, telling myself that it was the wind that had moved the flowers. As for the feeling, well, I guess I just chalked that up to my overactive imagination, and I completely pushed the whole ... *floating* idea out of my head.

I was home. I was safe; everything was fine and absolutely normal. Except for the creamy envelope on the bed next to me that I had found in the woods, burned me, and—even though I had never seen it before in my life—it had my name on it. And, of course, came the tiny voice in my head, *you just flew!* Dang! I thought I lost that thought! But now it was back, and it pounced on me like a lioness leaps out at her prey. And like the lioness’ prey, I fell victim of a crashing blow. I was so shocked that I rolled

of the bed onto the floor. And down fluttered the envelope. Call me crazy—it was a mysterious envelope that had burned me in the woods—but I was superstitious and I can't ignore an obvious sign.

I MUST be nuts, I thought to myself as I tore the top corner off. I opened the envelope and beheld a strange letter:

*We seek the sought we teach the taught
A city unbroken.
A language unspoken.
Your ancestors know
I promise, you'll go
For the green land awaits you.*

Complete gibberish! Or ... not. One phrase leaped out at me: the green land. And that, my fellow readers, is why I am on my first flight to Ireland, with directions to my grandmother's house and my parents wishing me luck on my "class field trip."

My grandmother was ... unusual. She looked oddly youthful for her age. I had only met her once and I really can't remember her. I find that surprising because of her stock white hair, her strange accent, and her crazy outfit—she wears the same type of thing every day: a floral apron, a loud, checked dress, an absurdly large pin, and a scarf. After only one day with her and I'm pretty bored. I told her I would go for a walk.

I'll never forget that walk. It was beautiful, but that's not my reason. Oh no! My reason ... was the falls. They were beautiful too, but again beauty is not the answer.

Exploring, as well as writing, is in my nature. So when I saw these falls ... I had started to climb the small cliffs before I had even returned to reality.

And once I was back, I wasn't so sure. I had come to a cave that certainly hadn't been there before. And inside, deep inside ... there was a light. I don't mean like a lamp. I mean a bright, inhuman glow. There were silhouettes in the light, and as I looked closer, I began to notice something strange. My eyes widened, I gasped, and I let go of the wall. Splash! That brought me back to reality and back to my senses, which were very annoyed! My body screamed cold; my lungs yelled, "air." My nose made a gurgle as it filled with water, and my eyes cried darkness! As for my ears, they soothed quiet, but I scrambled back to the surface of the pool, and they heard noise again.

I climbed out bedraggled and sopping, but that didn't slow me down. Oh, no! Nothing was going to slow me down as I ran. I didn't bother to look back, and if I had I would have seen the cave closing, but not before that tiny shadow slipped out after me.

There's no use denying it, I thought as I lay in the sun, waiting to dry off. What I had witnessed there was impossible, and yet there it was! Before I go on, I should tell you what I'm stammering about. Because, believe it or not ... I had just seen fairies.

I finally dried off and had gotten home. And a disturbing sight awaited me. The house was a mess. It looked as though a tornado had gone through ... I bent down to pick something up ... *my clothes!* I ran to my room and found my grandmother reading something. It seemed like she had read it a thousand times. I recognized it; it was my note. She looked up and ... smiled? "I'm glad you found your note. Welcome to the family, dear," she cooed. I didn't get it. Wasn't I already part of the fam... —that's when it hit me. She was a fairy and so was I!

I sat on my bed and gazed around at the magical beings that had crowded the room when grandma had called them. I also looked at Grandma as she unfolded her wings, and at the mirror as my own lovely wings sprouted from my back. The fairy teacher, Ella—who had followed me here—was trying to show me how to shrink down to the size of a fairy. I couldn't quite get it, but that was fine; I had forever to learn.

I started off slowly walking towards home plate. I stepped onto a small patch of moist dirt that had been recently watered and raked. I glanced up from my feet and noticed the two pearl white foul lines leading to 1st and 3rd base. I looked over at every player who was playing the field for the Glastonbury 11-year old Americans. Blue pinstripes highlighted the grass-stained uniforms. The ump's in their coal black shirts and smoky gray pants all stretched out their arms. If the pitcher was trying to intimidate me with his goggles and mean face, it wasn't working at all. He was shorter than me and scrawny. His skin color showed the hours that he had dedicated towards practice this summer in the hot beating sun. A cool breeze swept over Richard H. Ross field. The aroma of the concession stand lingered in the air as well. I could smell the hot dogs and fries coming out ready to eat. I couldn't help but notice the large scoreboard with old blue paint and yellow lights. I thought about all the people before me looking up at that same board. One of the lights in the visitor's column that read zero was out. I looked over at the home section and it read the same. A few players spit or jumped up and down, staying warm in the field. Birds flew overhead and gawked at the loud cheers from the many spectators of all ages. Their black wings fluttered as they voyaged closer and closer to their destination. The scrawny boy on the mound named Peter, or "Diddy" as they called him, spit in the dirt and motioned towards the mound. He dug his worn cleat into the hole on the mound.

I stepped into the right-handed side of the batter's box and scraped my black Nike cleats on the soft chocolate-colored dirt. I slowly tapped my CF3 BLACK bat on the lightly dusted home plate. Then I dragged my 21-ounce bat in the air and swung it towards Peter a few times. I breathed in the cool summer night air and let it back out. My team waited anxiously in the dugout, chanting, "Let's go, Dozer. Let's go!" (Clap, clap). The pitcher looked in my eyes with his cold glaze. I noticed his legs were trembling in fear. I wasn't one bit afraid of him at all. He doubled the white ball in his glove as I imagined the red stitches on the ball and small particles of dirt encrusted in the stitches until they were helplessly knocked out by a hard hit. He twisted his face and the roaring crowd went from an uproar to almost silent. Peter wound back his arm, and I watched intensely as he went through his wind up. Like a windmill, his arm started to come down. I was only a few seconds away from watching the ball come by me. He released the ball as hard as he possibly could. I triggered my arms, getting ready to swing if I thought it would be necessary. I heard the ball whip through the wind. It came closer and closer. It had one mission—blow by me and go over the plate. I had to admit it was fast, but I was ready.

I swung a little early, and I made head-on contact. The ball hit my CF3 BLACK dead center. There was a little vibration sent down to my hands. The ball ricocheted off like a rocket. One hundred and fifty feet out it landed in a small patch of dark emerald green grass in right field. After a few short hops, it rolled onto the grey rocks of the warning track. As the right fielder made a few long strides to the ball, I threw my bat and hustled hard out of the box. As I bolted down the 90-foot line, I kicked up dirt from my heels. I hit the soft, pearl-colored bag and made a few steps to round. I slowly strode back towards first where the first baseman looked down in disgust. I clapped my sweaty hands together and produced a loud clap that cried over the park. The National fans cheered as we were now one step closer to a wonderful win.

Mind racing, heart pulsing, fingers rattling, I waited anxiously on the couch. Every tick and tock sounded like a base drum echoing in my ears. My eyes darted around the familiar oak walls clouded with diplomas, certificates, and family photos. Opposite from me, my mother sat on a direct replica of the old withered leafy green couch that I was sitting on. The bottoms of my thighs were starting to feel sticky against the thick elegant leather beneath me in the late August afternoon. The significant rumble of the washing machine hung low in the room next to us, and a sweet fresh scent of laundry detergent trailed through the house. My mother’s glasses were perched upon her nose as she scanned through her emails intently.

“Mom!” I sliced through the silence with my razor sharp voice, and she looked up abruptly “Yes?” she sighed. “When are they going to come?” I complained. “A few more minutes, Becca. Be patient!” she snapped. *I can’t wait till Maria and Thomas come, with those cats ... I thought. I wonder how they will look. Would they have chocolate brown fur that glistens like freshly rained-on mud? Or will they have strikingly brilliant orange fur like a full cup of orange juice in a magazine ad? They might even have white fur that looks like a fresh blanket of snow, powdery and graceful.* Ten minutes passed, and then suddenly my train of thought halted abruptly on its track as the doorbell screamed through the house. My heart hurled itself into uneven beats, thudding against my chest. Feet rushing, arms flailing, I jumped up and scrambled to the door. I leaned in and flung it open with all my might.

Before me stood a ravishing young woman. She had long, wavy auburn hair with sheens of copper glinting in the setting sun. She wore a thin black headband around her head hippie style. Her eyes were piercing green, shaded by long sandy eyelashes. She wore a midnight-black fringed summer top and a long brown skirt that flowed to her knees. Beside her was a shorter, stubby man. He wore lightly-washed, dirty blue jeans and a faded auburn t-shirt with the words “Life is good” scrawled across the center over an amateur sketch of one cat and a dog. His blonde, cropped hair was swaying in the breeze and his deep black eyes stared at me, standing there dumbfounded. “Hello. I’m Maria and this is Thomas,” she said gesturing to the man beside her. I blinked twice. Her high-pitched, silvery voice rang through my ears. Under Maria’s intense green eyes, I suddenly began to feel very aware of myself. I felt my bare foot gnawing at my opposite heel uncomfortably, and let my foot drop abruptly. I tasted the sweet, sticky summer air on my tongue and shut my jaw immediately. I noticed my nose crinkling in reflex as Thomas’s nauseating deodorant seeped into my head, sending little aches through my brain.

“Um, hello! I’m Rebecca. Are you the people from the, um, pound?” Maria and Thomas both nodded calmly. “Please come in!” I said, the enthusiasm much too obvious in my voice. “BECCA!” I screamed in my head. *“Keep your cool. You don’t want Maria to think you’re some kind of ... weirdo.”*

They both bent down in harmony to pick up the little metal cages behind them. Gliding on their fascinatingly graceful feet, Maria and Thomas gracefully passed by, holding the old and rusty metal crates steadily at their sides. I leaned back against the door. I followed them inside as they introduced themselves to my mother. I noticed a small whine from one of the little cages; a shock of excitement went through me. Maria turned to me. “Where’s your bathroom?” she asked. “Upstairs to your left,” I smiled. “Okay guys, let’s go!” *“Um, why was this lady asking us to go to the bathroom with her,”* I thought. I hesitated and looked at my mom but she just nodded. So I followed eagerly.

Bodies fidgeting, mouths panting, we stood in my somewhat roomy bathroom. There was enough space for the four of us each to move comfortably, but that was limited. The walls of my bathroom are creamy ivory, in contrast of the crystal sky blue sink and shower. My eyes traced the ivory diamond-patterned tiles on the floor as if they were a maze. My nose deeply inhaled the bathroom air, smelling like a fancy mix of all my soaps and shampoos. I felt the sleek, shiny, polished wood door behind me that I was nestled up against. Maria explained the cats should be in a *small* contained area

when it's their first time in a new habitat. I watched carefully as Maria and Thomas unlatched the two little crates. My heart raced with excitement and my fingers twitched with anxiety to see the tiny, moaning kitties. I heard a high-pitched whine echo through our bathroom, as if one of the cats were begging for us to love her. Maria finally got her crate open, and a slinky cat prowled into Maria's arms. He stared at me with eyes that were yellow with black slits sliding down the pupils.

"This is Max. He's the boy twin," Maria said. Max leapt from the lady's arms and onto the counter, whining, scratching, and squirming. He brushed my hands with his nose. I drew away in shock. His nose was angelic, soft and silky and gentle as a feather. I smiled as I thought to myself, *"he is so kind and gentle."* I reached down to stroke him but something drew my attention elsewhere. The little moaner was now in Thomas's arms. She was long and thin. Her coat shined; every bristle of fur was made of sterling silver. I gasped. She looked up at me. Her eyes were two little balls of 20-carat gold, interrupted by the same black slits centered in her pupils. Other than her small gray body, her chin, chest, and bottom of her paws were snowy white.

"Can I hold her?" I stuttered. Thomas smiled and gingerly released her. She let out one small cry. I cradled her. She tried to find a position she was comfortable in, squirming, wriggling, and twisting. Finally she rested. With her white belly facing up and her claws leaning to one side, she stretched her tiny head back and closed her eyes. As I stroked her fur, I realized that it was so immensely soft, it must have been woven from silkworms. My mind wandered off to the future. *"I can imagine myself on a rainy day ... I will have a roll of string in my hands, unwinding it so she can jump and attack it with her claws, laughing, jumping, and playing. Then, when I get hungry I will make myself a tuna sandwich and let her lick the can. Soon, after more playing, we will both flop on my bed, exhausted, and she will sleep next to me purring, as we both drift to sleep."* I leaned down and nuzzled my nose in her fur. A musty smell seeped up my nose. As I lifted my head I heard a low rhythmic rumble. As the noise grew, the little silver kitty stretched her claws into my shirt. I smiled up at my mom as I exclaimed, "She's the one!"

"First Snow" – Wilder Carnes

Grade 7, Newtown Middle

Snow fell softly upon the dry cold land.
Thin sheets of white intertwined with frozen grass.
It soaks into roots of trees and becomes laced
Into their long spiraling branches.

The wind whispered a soft melody
as it blew powdery snow beneath dry leaves.
Frost formed at the edge of roads
reaching out to swallow dry black pavement.

Ice licked at the corners of the house trying to find a way in.
Snow stuck to the tops of cars and roofs.
The land was like a pure vast white canvas.
Open to the minds of creativity.

Cold air descended down, cascading and spreading everywhere.
Fighting to find a spot in the cracks surrounded by rock and sediment.
Wind blew mindlessly, falling and rising in endless circles.
The first snow is this and will always be this.

The wind howls—
A storm is coming
The sky is black,
Like a dark auditorium
Before an opening song
Rain pours down against the roof
Like an endless drum roll
Thunder booms
With a cymbal-like crash
Lightning flashes
Like lights on a stage
Puddles spill down the roads
And driveways
Creating a shushing
As if from an audience
Leaves rustle
Like maracas
As they struggle
To hold onto branches
Trees sway
To the rhythm of the wind dancing
As rain pounds down on them
The storm reaches its peak
Like an orchestra
At the climax of a song
The sounds all reach a crescendo
Then suddenly
The storm becomes faint again
The wind calms
To a lonely whistle
But the storm plays on
Raging still
Then
At last
It starts to back down
Until the wind is the final sound
Like a solo flutist
All the storm
Merges into one
For one last moment
In the big finale
Finally
CRASH!
A clap of thunder
Ends the concert.

The painted throng, like an infectious disease
Of anticipation, its wiry tumors spreading
From sea to shining sea
Recruiting eager crowds through the screens of televisions
In every corner of this cultural canvas
The wave of silence, it swept through the nation
In soundless elation
The world tilts its head to look
See the sun rising to its regal zenith
So as to get a better view of the figure of humanity
Tall and dignified on a brisk January day
His empathy, spilling out of him
Washing the podium
And the thirsty onlookers below.

They look up at him, a tide of millions
Washing up on the shores of history
They stand in a garden of marble
Watching with hungry eyes the vindication of hope
For was it ever such a crime to strive for something,
To work for it, to believe in it?
Perhaps for some the possibility of a miscalculation
Is an intimidating prospect,
Perhaps they couldn't bear to fail
But is it not doubt that restrains our potential?
All that is asked of you today
Is to try, to attempt at something
Greater than what we have
And with the collective determination
Of the human race
We can achieve the common good
That so many of us could not imagine yesterday

Triumphant smiles emitted
By the radiant expanse of people
In their scarves and coats, they are the waiters
They waited for the schoolteacher to get new textbooks
So she could nurture the minds of her pupils
They waited for the soldier to come back home
So he could meet his child
They waited for the retired man to be respected
By those he employs to ensure his security
They waited for a world of solar arrays and wind farms
So they could once again look at a clear sky
Without the film of smog that taints so much of our natural canopy

They waited for a man to emerge
As a guiding light for the modern world
One with a resolute devotion
To the ideals that will build a better tomorrow
Because this is the United States
And we are the huddled masses yearning to breathe free

They will not have to wait any longer

"Person of the Year" – Jonas Burkhard

Grade 7, Mansfield Middle

"Well, there are not that many Negroes qualified for this Court. There would be, maybe, I would say a maximum of a dozen. I couldn't imagine more than that. I'd have trouble naming them, but I know of 'em. I know of 'em. There are some awful good ones out there. They don't get up here though to argue cases." — Thurgood Marshall.

There is no question about it. Thurgood Marshall is absolutely the best choice for Person of the Year. He was definitely one of the African-Americans qualified for the Supreme Court. The first African-American on the Supreme Court, Thurgood Marshall has many reasons to be Person of the Year. First, he helped draft constitutions for several African countries. In addition, Marshall argued (and won) the Brown vs. Board of Education Case. Also, while serving on the second circuit of the federal appeals court, he made 112 decisions, all upheld by the Supreme Court. This is why I think that Thurgood Marshall is the best possible choice for Person of the Year.

I find it very impressive that Thurgood Marshall was chosen by the UN and the UK to help draft the constitutions for Ghana and Kenya. He helped in ensuring equality for the white minority in Kenya's constitution, even though America's whites discriminated against Thurgood Marshall's race. This shows that he is fair. A constitution is a very important part of a country's legal system and government. To not have an adequate one is like a bird's not having wings. To be chosen to help draft such an important legal document shows that Thurgood Marshall had proven to the UN and the UK that he was a "servant of justice." Also, he insisted that in Kenya's constitution there had to be a Bill of Rights. In the US, the Bill of Rights ensures such important things as freedom of speech. Kenya's Bill of Rights prohibits discrimination based on religion, race, or gender. Kenyan nationalist Thomas Mboya expressed his gratitude for Thurgood Marshall's role in drafting the first Kenyan constitution: "I do not know whether it will ever be enough to write letters to thank you for your good work," he said. I really admire Thurgood Marshall's role in helping to draft constitutions.

Another reason that Thurgood Marshall should be Person of the Year is because he successfully argued the Brown vs. Board of Education case. In this case, it was disputed whether or not there should be school segregation. The case itself is made up of five individual cases, all on that subject. African-Americans didn't have the same nor equally adequate facilities as whites. For example, they had far less schools. Imagine them crammed in a classroom with thirty other unhappy students and a teacher who is probably not paid enough. Thurgood Marshall was the second person to argue this case. I think his victory in this historical situation certainly broke down a barrier. If not for Thurgood Marshall, then maybe we'd still have school segregation, and we might not have African-American friends. Winning this case brought the US closer to the part of the Constitution that states, "All men are created equal." This is one of the first and most important parts of the US Constitution, almost everyone has heard of it, yet even the government had acted against it. By ending school segregation, African-American children

had access to “white” schools, which were better. Having a good schooling can lead to a more prosperous life. Winning the Brown vs. Board of Education case was definitely a step in the right direction, and Thurgood Marshall should be recognized for it.

Furthermore, while serving on the federal appeals court, Thurgood Marshall made 112 decisions. All these decisions were later upheld, or approved, by the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court is the highest court in the country, and the court is supposed to strive for the best. If this great court approves 100% of a justice’s decisions, then, wow, that man (or woman) must be a very great justice. This is how I view Thurgood Marshall. Other than the 100%, Marshall made 112 decisions in only four years. This shows that he knew what he was doing. He didn’t have to think (this doesn’t mean that he didn’t think thoroughly enough) about the case too long, or get confused and caught up in it. Thurgood Marshall could have served longer on the court, but he was elevated as solicitor general, or the lawyer representing the government in court cases, and the assistant of the attorney general, showing that people were impressed with what he did on the federal appeals court. Another way that his great work on the federal appeals court is reflected is that this federal appeals court, out of the thirteen federal appeals courts, remains the most highly respected. Moreover, Thurgood Marshall was only the second African-American to serve on a federal appeals court.

As you can see, Thurgood Marshall is the best choice for Person of the Year. He helped draft constitutions, won the Brown vs. Board of Education case, and was a great justice on the federal appeals court. At one time, Marshall had several artifacts, including a monkey skin suit, displayed proudly in his office. They were given to him by an African tribe that made him an honorary chief because of his role in drafting the Kenyan constitution. Really, why would you pick somebody other than Thurgood Marshall for Person of the Year?

Other Information about Thurgood Marshall—in case you aren’t convinced yet.

- In 1933, Marshall successfully sued Maryland University to admit an African-American whose application was turned down because he was black. Like the Brown vs. Board of Education case, this was certainly a step in the right direction.
- As solicitor general, he won 14 out of 19 cases that he argued for the government in the Supreme Court. That’s more cases won before the Supreme Court than any other American, and this again shows his great skills.
- Marshall graduated from Lincoln University with honors in 1930.
- He served on the Supreme Court twenty-four years, retiring in 1991, two years before his death.

“The Vow Taken” – Ariana Javidi

Grade 7, Mansfield Middle School

It used to be in the fifteenth century in Sheerness, England, that you could not go out in the darkness of the night.

Sometimes small children wandered out or strayed from the path when coming home from the marked or church. They were never seen or heard from again. Once a little girl went out to feed the pigs, and when she came back inside the house, her parents were gone; her mother’s apron a dirty, stained heap on the floor, her father’s axe in two pieces nearby. The little girl had not heard a sound.

That same girl vowed to find her parents. She was four when she made that oath. The neighbor, the old medicine woman who lived a few miles away, took her in and reared her, constantly cursing her for her wickedness. That woman often said that since the girl’s parents were not here it was only her lawful duty to bring up the girl as her own, which meant beating her as often as possible and giving her

no supper when she did anything to displease her. As you may have guessed, the two hated each other, and the girl had resolved to run away once she was old enough.

Nine Years Later

She slipped out of the house, the old woman's laughter echoing in her ears. The old woman had been telling her crude stories of her parents, and after ten minutes she could not bear to listen to any more of them. She ran out of the house, even though she knew her penalty for not listening would be no supper, but she did not care. She had had enough.

She was a slim girl, with dark eyes that looked into your soul taking up most of her thin face. She was clothed in a ragged brown dress and cloak, the hood of the latter drawn up so most of her face was in darkness, except her eyes, which burned with defiance under the hood. She slipped away into the woods surrounding the cottage where she lived with the old woman. Her bare feet made virtually no sound as she stepped quietly though the forest like a shadow or ghost looking for its home. The air was cold, the darkness settling like a blanket over the forest, the tree branches bending in an arch over the path. Their fingers rustled and creaked with the wind, and when they were moving, it looked as if they were alive. The moon glowed over the trees like a vast orb, the sheer moonlight breaking over the trees and lighting the path in slivers of light.

Every breath she took in through her nose was sharp and biting—so cold that it almost hurt to breathe. It was so cold that you could taste the ice on the wind. The smells had been swept away, leaving a clear night behind. There were no smells to taint the air—there was just cold.

Every little noise made the girl jump and spin around. She hurried away, through the arch of the path beneath the pale, silvery clouds surrounding the moon. The rustle and drag of her cloak was masked by the wind and the creaking of the trees. The trees, as if possessed, danced and shook with a supernatural energy, the darkness surrounding them sweeping and impenetrable. Small figures seemed to be there and then not there, vanishing and reappearing in the scarce light. She shrank away from the shadows and ran faster still and more quietly, hair flying out of her hood as her desperation and fear of the woods overcame her.

The wind grew in height and sound so that it whipped around her, dead leaves and dirt carried with it so it looked as if a god were taking revenge. The wind gained and gained, and gained and then—

It stopped.

It stopped.

There was a deadly, heavy silence—the silence of the earth.

Suddenly, as if a bell hit hard with a hammer, the woods rang with demon laughter, clanging, overwhelming, piercing the girl's ears and drumming constantly against her skull.

Several Hundred Years Later

A group of small children are standing in a clearing of trees, moonlight illuminating their pale faces. Their shrieks of laughter pierce the air like a knife. They are all in costumes. There is a witch, a ghost, a princess, and a skeleton. Suddenly, the mother of one of the children comes from the house slightly behind the woods with an extremely long driveway. The children are in her backyard. Their faces shine with happiness and delight as they go through the woods, the mother leading them to a street full of houses. They come to the door of the nearest house, number twelve, and knock on the door.

Their high, childish cries of "Trick-or-Treat!" are matched by another group of children in a neighboring doorway. A woman answers the door, her soft auburn hair colored with gray. Her kids are too old to be trick-or-treating. She gives the youngsters a generous handful of candy each and fondly watches them go, a smile on her face. They run to the next doorway, ready to do the same procedure for twenty houses that night.

"Trick-or-Treat!"

"Trick-or-Treat!" they shout.

"Halloween!"

"Halloween!" they shout again, then break into giggles.

The echo drifts back with the wind, sky, and earth—

All Hallow's Eve.

All Hallow's Eve.

In the woods behind the house, a wind sweeps the clearing, and it briefly releases memories of the past—of the girl from hundreds of years ago.

In the Modern World

If only that girl lived today. She would have marveled at what this dark night had become. She could walk along the streets with her parents, take her lost youth by the hand and become a little girl again. She might be a princess, or a fairy. She would be happy and eat too much candy. She would have friends and family. What she had lost ...

Her grave lies in a silent wood, near the place where her cottage must have stood, trees bending over the small unmarked grave as if in prayer. The sun shines gently over the wildflowers that have grown on the grave, their fragile, beautiful heads twining upwards toward the sunlight, soaking up the sun. One flower grows taller than the rest, its bright sapphire color the exact shade of the light of the girl's solemn eyes. The flower grows, alone in its longing, reaching up towards the sun. A cloud passes over the sky, and the head droops down. A petal drops from the drooping head, and the wind carries it gently down, back to earth, as if a tear has dropped from the flower's eye.

"A Place to Remember" — Mrinal Kumar

Grade 7, Coleytown Middle

My travels have spanned the fierce beauty of Niagara Falls, the dry heat of the Arizona desert, the pearly white beaches of the Bahamas, and cobbled paths of Paris, but my favorite place is my grandmother's house. It is set on acres of land, surrounded by lush palm trees, with spiral staircases leading to rambling rooms, and my grandmother waiting on a sprawling white veranda. It is the one place that beckons me time after time. It has shaped my understanding of the world and anchored me though many of my formative years.

The house is located in South Kerala, the most scenic state in India. Tall coconut trees dot the landscape, and every morning a variety of wildlife gather in the spacious garden. There are too many colors for the eye to register, from the rich green of the grass to the bright pink flowers that would make a flamingo blush with envy.

On entering my grandmother's house, you are immediately swallowed by the vastness of it. No two rooms are the same; each has a unique tone set by distinctive architecture and the paintings of family artists. Winding staircases connect the many floors, making what should be a routine walk from room to room quite an adventure. Getting lost in its expansiveness has led to discovering dust-laden antiques and cellars full of family memories, toys passed down over the years, and books that are earmarked by the fingerprints of more than one generation.

But what makes the place in India a home rather than a house, and a place to love more so than just to live in, are the people. Here, I would wake up to see the gardener scaling the coconut trees using a coil of rope and dexterity but no ladder. Following the tantalizing aromas from the kitchen, I would find myself in the warm embrace of the housekeeper who kept the house running with her mouth-watering food and her quick wit. And then, I would say good morning to my grandmother. Her kind, affectionate

nature always rubbed off on me, and made me feel loved and very special. I remember long games of Scrabble and intense sessions of chess with her. I remember her cheerfulness, her patience, and her love of life. I remember, too, the wizened old man who would show up without notice. Not a day passed without my grandmother's giving him a plate of treats and a hot cup of tea. He would wave at me while the team curled upwards, relaxing his wrinkled face. Never a word exchanged, and yet volumes had been spoken. The driver's baby, who amused himself with nothing more than pebbles, the carpenter who was too old to work but came out of loyalty and love, the tailor whose father's father had tailored the wedding attire of many a bride in the family—these were the people who lent character to my favorite place.

When I was eleven, my grandmother passed away and my annual vacations came to an end. From being a hub of activity and a treasure-trove of humanity at its best, the house is now just a shell, albeit a beautiful one. Time will take its toll, weeds will take over the manicured lawn, and the rooms will bear the brunt of neglect, but my grandmother's house and the time I spent there will forever be the benchmark against which I rate my life experiences and travels.

"The Last Hawk Child"—Alexandra Loukides

Grade 7, Elizabeth Adams Middle

Clad in mottled near-black, the small group of warriors crept through the forest. They made no sound, blending perfectly with the night. The guards were tired and not alert, and died easily without sound. Soon they were within the circle of shaggy bark huts that housed the Hawks. They laughed silently to themselves. The predators were the prey.

Soon, smoke and screams filled the night air. Taka, Hawk Clan, was burning.

Nestled in the hut with the semi-wild birds that shared her tribe's name, a young girl huddled in a corner while the predators screeched in distress. She had crept to the bark hut after dark, as she so often did, for the company of the avians who resided there. The rustling of wings, the soft churrs that were common sounds among the raptors, comforted her when she could not sleep. And so, when Kuro, Vulture Clan, attacked, she was not found at first and killed like the rest of the Hawk children. Her name was Zora sen za Arashi, Sky before the Storm, and she was very frightened. Her green eyes, wide with fear, stared into the dark. The Hawkchild had a definite advantage at hiding; her coloring was darker than Kuro Clan's, even than most of Taka's.

Zora wondered what to think. Her mother was probably dead, the female warriors being the first targeted. Her father had died several years prior. She had no siblings. The hawks had been all the friends she needed.

The hawks. She looked around at their sharp intelligent eyes. She knew each and every one of them by name, knew their quirks. Zhiro, the pale haya-hawk with blue eyes. Kai, the huge reddish-brown kei-hawk, who could take down a goose or a swan. They were her friends, and if she didn't do something, they'd be killed. Zora went around to each of their perches, soothing them. Then she carried them outside, one by one, and gave them a quick toss into the air like she had learned from the hunters. "Fly away, there is no home for you here anymore!" she whistled after them into the night. "Fly, and do not return!"

Finally, only one hawk remained; Karyu Raiku, Hunter of Lightning, her own bird. Most children had to wait until they were fifteen or sixteen, but when Zora was on a practice hunt, close to her tenth year, she had found the abandoned haria-hawk chick and had been permitted to raise her. The girl smiled at the predator sitting on her wrist. So many memories. Raiku was as close to a sister as she had ever had. But, if she wanted to protect her surrogate sibling, she had to lose her. It pained Zora from the bottom of her soul, but she had to release the hawk. She brought Raiku outside and threw her up into the

night. The haria circled, confused. She whistled a plaintive cry to the night. Why was her earth-partner abandoning her? The slender avian circled and tried to return to her friend, but was fended off by upraised arms. The hawk whistled again; why did the human she knew reject her? The hunter circled again and again but received no friendship from the arms that she had perched upon so often.

Finally Raiku gave up and flew into the night. Zora watched, tears running down her cheeks as she watched the receding form of her best friend, her sister, her teacher, her guide. The feather she wore braided in her hair fluttered in the wind, a remainder of the friend she had lost. It was one of Raiku's first molt, a time she remembered well. It was about when she had begun to slip off to the hawk hut on a regular basis, not just in winter or when she couldn't sleep.

The crackling of the fire behind her reminded her of the group of warriors who had invaded her camp. She found a tree with thick branches and climbed to the middle height swiftly. This was her secret, the roads in the air. No one knew about them but her; she could move among them without being seen. Raiku had shown her the pathways, and now she could travel as easily along them as on the ground. The haria had taught her many things high above the ground—how to listen for rain or snow, how to tell the passing of the day from the moon and sun, stories about the patterns in the stars, how to whistle and churr the soft syllables of serifutaka, the hawk language. Zora began to run along the sky-trails, and the memories became more painful. None of that would ever happen again.

She ran for several hours without stopping. As the distance between her and her burning home grew greater, so did the ache in her heart. Raiku was—had been—more than her friend, she had been a part of Zora's soul. With the hawk gone, she felt like part of her soul was missing.

A large shape passed overhead. She jumped back, almost losing her balance. Could it be koru, the bird that hunted the night and stole away the souls of the very old and very young? She might still be prey. As Zora contemplated striking out, she shrieked a warning in the hawk language. The koru would not take her soul! The same shape passed over, closer this time. It perched on a branch close to her watching, and churred softly. The hawkgirl's heart skipped a beat. She knew that voice. "Raiku," she said softly. She stepped closer to the hawk. "I missed you." The haria stepped up on her arm, nibbled her ear affectionately.

Suddenly a sharp pain lanced through her skull. Zora started to fall, but saved herself by grabbing a branch. There was no injury, so the source of the pain must have been inside. But why? Her question was answered as Raiku whistled to her. For the first time, she understood it as words, not as images and feelings. *It is very rare that we give this gift to one of you. Usually it is a hawkling that receives it. But you saved us from the fire and hawk-killers, and have always been hawk in your soul. Now, you may choose. Hawk or human ... the form is yours.*

With a start, Zora noticed that the trees were full of hawks, all shapes and sizes. Some were the ones she had released from the hut. Others she had never seen before. All were watching her intently. Quietly, she whistled back. *I am hawk.*

Feathers burst from her arms, and her feet hardened into talons. Her size changed dramatically. Her clothes fell from the trees, shredded by the energy emanating from her body. When the transformation was complete, a light, strong, pale hawk stood in her place. This was what she had desired since her life had begun, to fly free, on the wind. The hawks in the surrounding trees took off suddenly, and she joined them.

And, as the moon went black briefly with a rush of beating wings, the warriors who were still searching for the last Hawkchild looked up and touched whatever charms they carried, afraid of vengeful spirits. They had no idea that the one they searched for soared among the birds that had darkened the moonlight, rejoicing in the strength of her new wings.

People never think about the way they die.
The sadness overpowers your emotions.
It is inconspicuous to believe, to feel, and not see the pain caused by a pathogen.
To have it cause a bomb of weakness and hopelessness throughout your veins.
But a disease is just an excuse to die.
Unfortunately that was my alibi to have my life taken from beneath my flesh.
Some pass before others.
Remains left with what used to be your home, your friends.
Although as it was in my case, dying young means you don't give up as much.
In my point of life, I only left one major factor;
The warm smiles and presence of my loved ones.
But what my family does not realize is that heaven gives souls another chance.
I will always be with what I will never be in body again for.
The consequence is my family's not realizing what is right next to them.
I will always follow their lives.
The lives of the ones who may eventually forget me.
The new creations joining my family that could not know about me.
But what if?
I can send a sign, a reminder to all those still important in my soul.
To let them know that I am still here.
A living, comforting, extravagant, beautiful creature to show a sign for me.
On the day of my funeral,
My very own mother driving home stops to see an indubitable sight.
A group of vivid red cardinals cross the path of her car.
One for each of the 11 years of life I served.
And somehow she knew.
She knew at that point that I am with her and all of my loved lives forever.
To keep on living her life, yet never to forget me.
As I am her and all of my family's guardian soul now.
My signal, my proof to humans is my cardinal body.
A reminder of me when my type of implausible bird is seen.
Seconds, days, centuries from now I will still love and be with them.
And to think I am right there with my loved ones at this very moment.
To help them with the life I couldn't complete.
Flying along their path of life.
I am a cardinal soul.

As I'm sitting in the park
I open my eyes and see the world as never before
A stray dog with longing in his eyes
An ant waiting by a bread crumb for his friends to come and help him
A leaf floating gently to the earth, and then slightly sinking down to the earth as though it was awaiting
applause for reaching the earth unscathed
All of these things occur every day
Do you see it?
Are you watching?

Ew! People exclaim as they see the
Mangled body of a man, assuming him to be as deformed and cruel as his body
Perhaps though, you think, what if he is not
As deformed as you think?
That his deformity goes only as far as his physical features, perhaps the real deformities only in one's
loathing of such a person
Have you not the capacity to think of what they would want? How would you feel if people felt the same
way about
You?

Oh, beautiful moon, God of the sky
Do you realize how intriguing you are?
Your silvery rays are calling me
Telling me to stay out a little longer to behold your beauty

It never gets old
Every time I see you
My thoughts are different
And it makes me wonder
Do you have feelings and emotions as I do?
So please tell me, moon,
For I am your most gracious fan

Ah, music, how could I live without you?
How could I stand one day without your drums, Keith Moon?
Guiding the band into their piece
Of well thought out music
Exploding with joy, anger, sadness, love?
How could I live without your guitar, Jimi Hendrix?
Playing it like a wizard of some sort
Putting the audience into awe as you rip out another solo
Giving people goose bumps even after your death with your talent
How can you live without music?

A girl watches from her window

A soft brown colored fox
Bringing home food for her babies
On a cold winter's night

As the fox turns her head
And stares into her eyes
She sees the determination to stay alive
In those golden gleaming eyes
On this cold winter's night
Oh, I wish I could see her now

So you think you have a problem?
So you didn't get that game you wanted for your birthday
So you lost a bet to a friend
So you never got to go to Florida
Iraqis never know when a suicide bomber will decide to kill them all
A child is left an orphan after his parents are killed after a roadside bombing
A wife doesn't know if her husband will come out of the war alive
So you think you have a problem?

Did you see me skip a step walking down the stairs when I saw you?
Did you hear me sigh as you walked by?
Did you feel my tension when you and I were in the last ones in the room when class was over?
I hope you did.

The moment I heard your sweet sound
It caused me a feeling I can't describe
Every song stirring a different emotion inside me, leaving me longing for more
I am asking you now
Am I worthy to possess such a power, to cause people such joy?
I assure you that I will do my best
To play you, my trumpet, with all my might.

Splash! You finally manage to escape to the pool after a hard day
Smiling, for you know you can always find salvation there
In that cool water that feels so good against your skin
You wish you never had to get out, knowing that if you did the world would start again
In its never ending tornado of troubles
That if time could stop while she was in the pool, why couldn't it stay that way?

Does anyone ever really die?
10 years after your death
Your daughter still sits alone for hours
Her eyes closed
Her expressions
Matching all of the memories
You had together

When the sky stays gray and the sun don't shine, when the kids don't play and their freedom's mine. I control everything, everyone, every place, when one steps out of line I'm gon' get in they face. I don't need a diary to express how I feel, 'cause I'm the one in control and that's something that's real.

Little boy got beat cause his mama don't play, and the neighborhood kids saying "it's ok." When he really knows better, he just do what he wants, cause his daddy don't care but his mama will front. He telling mom to just relax and chill, it's something she considered and that's something that's real.

Little girl in school and she stayed alone, three years later she was way too grown. Yelling at the teachers just to have someone to blame, Mama stay crying saying, "She's not the same." Working on the corners tryna hustle some money, don't know the reality she's thinking it's funny. Yet her parents tryna work and pay off the bills, but she don't really care and that's something that's real.

A baby stays sick because her mama was poor, she didn't get the call from the job she looked for. The baby had died 'cause her mama was too late, now she understands the definition of hate. The father had left just before she was born, but Hell have no fury over a woman scorned. She couldn't help the fact that her baby was ill, she took it to her grave and that's something that's real.

When the sky stays gray and the sun don't shine, when the kids don't play and their freedom's mine.

A few days ago my family and I decided to take advantage of the snow that had just fallen and go sledding. We traveled up to Putnam to check out the sliding at King's Hill. King's Hill is a large hill and perfect for sledding. There are parts that are steep, some that are smooth, and some have jumps, but all provide tons of fun.

My mom and dad watched us as well as the other kids slide down the hill. I did perfectly well on my first run. It was perfectly thrilling. My ride was exhilarating as I soared down the crystal-lined slopes. My sister enjoyed her first run, too. She glided smoothly over the glistening snow exclaiming, "Woo Hoo! That was awesome!!!"

The most entertaining part of our sledding adventure, however, was when Mom took to the slopes! Mom said she had not gone sledding in many years, so my dad and I encouraged her. She climbed aboard our black toboggan that used to fit our entire family but now fits only two of us. Mom wanted to go it alone, though. Apparently, this turned out to be a good idea ... for us. Mom gently lowered herself onto the toboggan, and my dad gave her a slight push. Whoosh! Down she went. At first things seemed fine. She got about midway down the hill when all of a sudden, the sled did a 180. Mom screamed and began sliding backwards until she hit a bump and flipped sideways out of the sled, landing on a patch of cold powder. My sister said, "Oh, no."

Dad said, "Wow, I knew she was bad at driving, but this!" I just laughed hysterically! We knew Mom was okay because she was laughing, too!

The next run she was on my awesome, steerable sled. She thought she could do better with something she could steer, but, alas, she was absolutely wrong! Mom got on my sled and prepared to set

off on her maiden voyage upon a steerable sled. Again, she started off slowly, gaining speed as she descended the hill. Suddenly near the bottom, she hit a jump that catapulted her into the air while the sled turned sideways, landed upside down, and came to a stop. Mom, on the other hand, was rolling sideways like a log down the remainder of the hill. I hopped on the toboggan and raced down to meet Mom. When I got to her, I said, "Okay Buddy, I've seen enough. Let's see your sledding license!" Thankfully Mom is equipped with her very own padding; my sled, however, was not so fortunate. The seat on the right side is now bent.

Mom's third and final run was back on the black toboggan. When she approached it, she said, "I have a score to settle with you!" If the sled could talk, I'm sure it would have said, "Bring it on, old woman!" Mom plopped herself down. We all offered advice on how to keep the sled straight and not go backwards, but the sled had other ideas. All of a sudden, everything got silent. Mom gripped the string attached to the sled. Her eyes narrowed. She looked down the hill without fear or worry. She leaned left, she leaned right, and she leaned left again! Mom pulled up on the string in an effort to steer the black stallion of a sled straight, but that sled had a trick up its sleeve (if sleds have sleeves). As Mom passed the midway mark, the sled again spun around wildly, but Mom was ready. She then raced down the hill backwards with ease! The sled came softly to a stop at the bottom. My sister and my dad opened their eyes cautiously. Mom raised her arms in a triumphant holler, proclaiming, "Yahoo! I am the backwards sledder!"

"The Guide" –Shannen Mavros

Grade 8, Dr. Helen Baldwin Middle

Kristen slammed the front door. She rushed to the little car, where her husband Jack was waiting. She opened the door and squeezed herself in between two heavy bags of clothes and some food. She noticed Jack readjusting in his own seat because of the chunky, put-together-tent pieces crammed next to him. Despite the lack of comfort, they both smiled, full of anticipation.

White-water rafting, trails that wove through the beautiful woods, and spectacular mountain views would make this the perfect honeymoon for the adventurous couple. Living in the city, there weren't many decent campgrounds. So, the couple had decided to follow some long, old, hiking trails that Jack had heard about from a friend. Although Jack had never actually seen the trails himself, his friend assured him that they were wonderful. He said that the trails were wide enough to set up a tent on so they could camp, too. It would be perfect.

Kristen lowered her window and smiled. The cool, early-November air felt wonderful. It wasn't long before they left the city, and were driving down a beautiful, country road. But the beauty didn't last long. The once-clear, blue sky became covered in heavy black clouds.

Tap! Tap! Tap! Jack heard the rain drops splat on the car's roof. He pulled over when he saw a big wooden sign. *Wildberry Mountain Trails and River Rafting.*

"We're here," Jack said as they stepped outside into the pouring rain. They stared up at the tremendous, lush pine trees. The white tips of the towering mountains peeked out from far beyond the wall of dense, beautiful evergreens. Jack and Kristen were too excited to wait. They ignored the rain and began gathering their hiking bags. Jack opened a small compartment attached to the Wildberry sign, and pulled out a tightly folded Wildberry Trail Map. Kristen was already stepping onto the muddy path.

It wasn't until the rain finally stopped that they could really see how wonderful this all was. The water droplets that clung from the tree branches sparkled in the afternoon sunlight. Colorful wildflowers and luscious berry bushes grew along the side of the twisting trail. As the murky water that once covered the ground began to dry up, blankets of fallen pine needles, soft green moss, and brilliant plants were revealed. They followed the little trail guide until they reached the river. This is where their adventure truly began.

"The water went up when it rained," Jack said, listening to the roar of the deep river. Kristen looked at a stack of rafts piled up high between two big logs, just inches away from the angry current.

"Should we still go?" she asked, still looking at the rafts. Who knows what that powerful river could do to a little blowup boat?

Jack didn't know what to say. They didn't have to wait for the water to go down. They still wanted to see the rest of the mountain, and they'd only brought enough food for three days. If they were going, it had to be now.

"Yeah," Jack said. Kristen looked unsure. "It'll be more fun." He didn't know whom he was trying to convince, Kristen, or himself. He picked up a raft and began strapping their bags to it. Kristen grabbed the map from Jack's bag and studied it. They had planned to take the river a long way. Kristen shoved the map back into the bag and, reluctantly, stepped into the raft with Jack. They strapped on their helmets, and Jack picked up the only paddle that they could find.

They knew right away that they had made a mistake. The current instantly pulled the raft down the river. Jack nervously tried to control their little boat. They were going too fast, though. The powerful water was forcefully swaying them. They had been pulled far away from their original trail. Kristen yelled, "We need to get to the riverside!" but Jack couldn't hear her. He turned around to ask her what she had said, but before he could say anything, *pop!* The tiny raft scraped the side of a jagged rock, puncturing the rubber, tossing the raft over. Jack and Kristen were sent into the cold, raging water.

Jack was pounded into the cold, hard rocks on the river's floor. He was struggling to reach the surface, but when he remembered Kristen, he quickly pushed himself up. "Kristen!" he screamed! He turned left, then right. No Kristen.

"KRISTEN!" he screamed louder, starting to panic. No Kristen.

Then, he heard someone cough. As if in a dream, the roar of the water became silent to him. He could only hear the cough. He turned again, and right in front of him was Kristen, emerging from the river. Jack managed to swim over to her. They fought their way through the rushing water and eventually made it to the riverside, where they rested on the rocky sand.

"My bag!" Jack remembered. "I had strapped our bags to the raft!" He jumped up and looked at the water. The tattered remains of the raft had quickly moved far down the river.

"Oh, no," Kristen sighed. She thought of the cold night ahead. They had no tent, no food, no water, and no map. In a flash, their dream trip had turned into a nightmare.

Suddenly, Jack heard something. He jumped, not expecting what he saw. Instead of a bird or a squirrel he saw a man stepping out from the maze of trees and bushes. He looked about the same age as Jack. He seemed tired and dirty, but somehow happy and relieved, as if he had just found something that had been lost.

"Hello," Jack said.

"Hello. I'm Andy," he said, with a kind smile. He began to explain that he had been lost for days. He was happy to finally see someone. Jack and Kristen explained their situation while Andy listened closely seeming to understand. When Jack and Kristen finished, Andy reached into the small bag on his shoulder and pulled out two small towels for them. As they dried off, the strange man started to build a shelter for them out of branches. He leaned each piece of wood up against a large rock. It wasn't much, but it would keep them dry if it rained, at least. It was already dark, and getting cold. Andy insisted that Jack and Kristen get some rest. Jack still wanted to know a little more about the stranger but was too tired to disagree. They crawled into the shelter and covered themselves with the towels from Andy. Although it was still cold and damp inside, they were happy to still be alive.

When the couple awoke, they didn't hear the sound of the nearby river's roar. Instead, they heard the crackle of a fire. They crawled out of the shelter and saw Andy sitting on a log, tending a small campfire and cooking eggs on a tripod made of sticks. Beyond him was the river, now very calm. It was

lit by the orange glow of the morning sun, reflecting on the still surface of the water. After breakfast, they put out the fire and decided to start looking for a road or a trail. "I think we should walk up the riverside since that's the way you came," Andy suggested. Jack and Kristen agreed. After a while, Andy said, "I think we should start looking for a trail." He had already begun walking into the woods, so they followed him.

They continued walking, Andy always choosing which way to go, until the night. The sun had set long ago, and it was too dark to continue. Everyone was growing tired, so Andy found a dry clearing for them to spend the night at. They had hiked all day with no sign of trails or roads. They were eager to end this dreadful day. Soon, they were all asleep. The following morning, they all awoke just as the radiant sun rose. This morning seemed even more beautiful than the last. Ribbons of gold, pink, orange, and lavender illuminated the sky. The trees sparkled in the morning light. It felt like the earth was telling them that everything would be okay.

Although they were all still dreaming of fluffy eggs and crispy bacon, they had to start hiking. Andy, seeming confident, pointed east. "We should start by going this way," he said as he began to walk. "Let's turn here," he said after a while. "We should go this way," he suggested later.

Andy led them late into the afternoon. Jack was starting to doubt Andy's decisions. He was considering taking charge of the group when a miracle happened. "A TRAIL!" Andy screamed. "We found a trail!" he called again. Jack and Kristen were amazed. Andy had guided them. They thanked Andy several times before realizing that they still didn't know which way to go. Left, or right?

"Let's go left," Andy said. Jack and Kristen couldn't disagree now. They had to trust him. So, they walked through the night. They were tired but determined to find a road.

Finally, the black sky began to brighten. Although it was a cloudy, gray morning, it felt perfect to them. After a sleepless, dark night they could finally see clearly. They kept hiking until the afternoon. Suddenly, Kristen saw something that brought tears to her eyes.

The woods opened, letting sunlight pour onto their faces. Right in front of them was a road. Kristen and Jack hugged each other tightly. It was finally over. "Andy, how can we ever thank you?" Kristen yelled. Andy didn't answer.

"Andy?" they yelled, but the man was gone.

The couple was eventually found by the roadside and taken to a local hospital. They hadn't forgotten Andy, though. They notified the police that he was missing and described him to them. A long search was held until they finally called Jack and Kristen.

"I'm sorry, but your friend's body was found in the river. But, uh, our research shows that he died before your trip. It's impossible that he could've been with you those days."

But Jack and Kristen knew the truth. Andy *had* been with them. Although they were sad, they bowed their heads for the man who had saved their lives—their guide, Andy the angel.

The elderly weaver deftly works the colorful threads through the loom. Each thread signifies a memory in his life. The first thread, a brilliant turquoise blue, weaves its way in and out of the loom's strings like a snake. It represents long days of sailing on the ocean, the sparkling water raining over the bow as it cut through the waves. He remembers slowly drifting off to sleep as he listened to the rhythmic rocking of the boat, bobbing on the choppy sea.

The next thread is a soft yellow. He remembers how his wife's face would gleam as she gazed at the daisies and daffodils in her garden. He pictures the dappled light on the forest floor as he strode among the mighty oaks, the leaves crunching beneath his feet.

He fingers the next thread, a majestic crimson, before working it into the loom. He thinks of long winters in a weathered armchair, listening to a crackling fire, the orange glow dancing about his face as he watches the birds. He can't tear his gaze from the cardinal perched on the branch, its plumage contrasting sharply to the snow-covered pine.

The man's usually nimble fingers stumble over the following thread. A pained look comes on the man's wrinkled face. He stares through the navy blue thread as his eyes become cloudy. It matches the uniforms of the two men who knocked on his door that brisk day in November. He remembers a flicker of empathy on the men's faces as they told him. His badges shone so brightly as the wind whipped through the branches. The old man shivers as the familiar chill seeps into his bones.

A smile returns to his face as his eyes drift over the next thread, a kelly green. He revels in the memory of roaming the rolling grassy hills and lush forests as a boy on the emerald isle.

And finally, a pure white thread is worked into the loom. It signifies the serene contentment of the old man's soul. He was finally at peace with his impending death. He knows that even when he is gone, his memories will live on in the colors of the blanket in front of him, comforting and keeping his grandchildren warm.

**High School
Poetry and Prose
Grades 9-12**

One half lie down in the
sunlight meadows of the
eight worlds, smiling and
singing, living in the
moments of a spotless
mind to wake from the dream
on a warm silver rock
on the eve of hidden twilights.

The other lies far beneath
rocky carapace of the world
beyond the deepest abysses
and trenches, so far down
that even the stones and the water
had forgotten the light of the moon and stars
the bright face of the sun and the
cradling breath of the winds.

Bitter cold
Morning wakes up

Turning right a r o u n d the corner
The end is welcoming me near.

Nothing lies ahead
Except the cold, hard dirt
Wincing with every pound
The trees o..v..e..r..h..e..a..d
Towering over me, watching

And the line

The colorful triangles
Hanging up – side – down
Attached to the plastic
Like clothes on a clothing l-i-n-e

The finish

My legs are *sluggish* no more
They **pull** themselves up
Like a b.o.y in gym class
Doing pull-u-p-s

My feet are an **anchor**
Keeping the boat
From f l y i n g out of the water
And into the *sky*

Faster

FASTER

My wheels **turn**
Helping the car
Z OOOOOOO M down the road

F I V E yards to go
A competitor is near
Like the paparazzi
Chasing a movie star

I **confidently** follow

My sweat is a faucet
My legs are *frost*bitten, immobile
My heart is an AMPLIFIER

My feet are *joyous*
For they have crossed
Over the bridge

And into the h e a v e n s

The relief
The r—u—s—h

The card

My hands *accept* the card
Like a **teenager**
Accepting a d.i.p.l.o.m.a

My eyes are *curious*
And *h a p p y*
For my **great** accomplishment
They thank my legs
For working sooo fast

Looking down
A *smile* s p r e a d s

10th place

I see the pain in her eyes,
The fear that traps her face.
Usually so angelic and sweet.
I see it as she sits on the stairs,
Chin propped on her hands,
Elbows resting on her knees.

I want to comfort her
As she has done for me,
In all my times of trial,
Even at my age.
And that's the thing that stops me.
The age difference.

I've had thirty years fewer
Experiences, memories, and dreams.
Perhaps I'm too young
To fully comprehend.
But still, as she sits on the stairs
And I look into her eyes,
We hear her baby cry himself to sleep.
An overwhelming emotion
Slipping into the night.

My tears fall for her
But just in my heart
Where condolences can't be seen or heard.
Maybe when I grow up,
We can talk, woman to woman.
Maybe she will confide in me.
Because then it will be my turn
To listen and comfort.

But for now, I will sit on the stairs with her
And listen to her baby cry.
And I will take her hand in mine
And bear the silent sorrow
That is filling the room.

I now roam alone in this frigid place that I find myself in. The pale white powder that hides the earth below leaves no stray place of where the storm was lazy. Not a strand of green divulges what once was, the life that thrived here, the perfect paradise. The naked branches of the trees no longer seem like hands reaching for me. They only seem like dark, ominous silhouettes that reach for the sky. There is no more sun. No traces of light. Even the moon, which was like a midnight sun in the darkest of nights, no longer reflects the light; only my mistakes. My own personal mirror mocking me, too far away for me to strike and shatter. I look at the ground once more, but this time I turn around. *One* pair of footprints there to mock me now, seeming colder than what they are laid in. They remind me of you.

You left before the storm began, and although I hadn’t noticed it, I do now. You were never of any extreme importance to me. Come to think of it, I hardly ever noticed you. Oh, what light would come from your smile now if you would just beam at me but one time! But you are long gone. You caused the storm.

What had I missed? What had been an oversight in this whole mess that I created, unbeknownst to me? But I know what drove you away, unable to be at my side any longer.

No.

One simple word. Two letters. Not much in comparison to other words in the English language. But it means so much more than triskaidekaphobia, the fear of the number 13. It was long enough to make you run from me. Two letters that can be cured by two words.

I’m sorry.

No! I will not! No pride of mine will be swallowed, no tongue of mine will be bitten as you tell me what I did wrong. How could I know? What did you ever do? If I never paid attention to you, then why not try to make me? How is it all my fault, and none of it yours? But, as I mull over the possibilities, I am reminded of the changes that occurred since you left.

Fire lost its heat, losing the element of danger that it once held in my eyes. Cold fire. Cold enough to sear me, though, chilling me to the bone. The night lost its enigmatic qualities, the sounds made me less curious and more afraid. The day lost its splendor, the sun its light, the stars their ability to grant wishes, the clouds reminders of other objects of childhood. Nothing possessed that special element of awe to it anymore. Sunny days became too light, so much that it divulged everything in its path, nothing was left to the imagination. Rainy days lost the romance of curling up to a loved one and gently kissing them, the water from the heavens became cold, and shudders ran themselves up and down my spine. Dark days were too dark, leaving me out in the cold and ignorant of my surroundings. But why?

Why? A question that can be answered with another. Why not? But this answer does not serve its purpose in my case. But still, my mind forms the single word. Why? More words form as I close my eyes. What had I done? Had I not been attentive enough? I had listened, sure, what more could I have done? I did what you asked of me. What more could you ask for? I don’t understand. I thought I had, but I suppose not. I suppose that you’d probably want me to apologize.

No!

Although that word created the problem, it solves it in my mind. Guilt seems futile at this point. Perhaps the winter that is your leaving has left me a changed person, one with a cold, indifferent demeanor. And it’s your fault. So why don’t *you* apologize? I open my eyes and feel something warm run down my cheek. I exhale, the air in front of creating yet another cloud. It seems more difficult to breathe now, the breath comes in short gasps, if it even comes between the sobs. I fall to my knees.

This is all I need, this cold blanket of snow around me, nice and cozy. Who cares if I shudder, who cares if I’m numb? WHO CARES?! YOU’RE GONE. WHY DOES IT MATTER?

YOU'VE FORSAKEN ME! WHY SHOULD I EVEN CARE FOR YOU?! I rock back and forth, knowing I am on the brink of insanity. Would you visit me? Will I ever see your face again? Will I? Will you tell me you love me, just one more time? Just once more? Oh, to hear your voice again, it would be sweeter than a symphony of Stradivariuses!

I'm sorry.

I'm sorry.

I'm sorry.

And if you don't accept, I'll understand. How stupid I have been. What a fool, what a fool I've been! I love you; although I never showed it, I always have! I'm sorry! I have no pride, no reason to be proud, and I want to feel the warmth of your hand in mine again! Please, I'm sorry!

But are my walls too high?

The stone that isolates me from this world, creating this precarious balance, straddling between a mind kept and a mind lost. The walls have ends that are invisible to my eyes, reaching farther than the stars, casting a shadow upon my part of the world.

But you climbed them once, did you not?

But they were far shorter back then, many moons ago, when fire still had heat and the sun its light. Back when life thrived and snow brought out the children in us and we played in it. Stupid little insignificant details, but how much I miss them! Back to when I could see your smile and hear your voice and hold the warmth of your hand in mine. How I loved them, how I *love* them, now that I will never see you again. You're too far away.

"I'M SORRY!" I scream out into the deafening silence that coated my ears. The shrillness of my voice echoes throughout the trees, mocking me. Will this torture ever end? Will I ever find my peace? But peace is brought as I hear a symphony and feel warmth again.

"I forgive you."

"The Science of Hot and Cold" – Kody Mooney

Grade 9, A.C.T. Arts at the Capitol Theater

If you like the cold more than anything else, does that make you cold-hearted? When you like to sit out on your front porch in thirty degree weather with nothing but a light blanket covering you, staring up at the stars, does that make the thoughts you feel cold and heartless? If your eyes are encrusted with deep blue ice and see nothing but the waters and snow, can you think happy thoughts? If I could go to Alaska for a week in a cabin in the middle of one of its green forests, with no windows and nothing but a small fire lit in a small stone fireplace, I would be up there in a flash. Now, when most people meet me, they think warm, nice, and funny. If you didn't know me and I said I love the cold, would you hate me?

I don't know why it happened. I don't know how, but that hot, dry sun burns my skin. That smoldering ball of fire in the sky makes my skin red and sweaty, makes walking unbearable. How can anyone stand to live in the sunshine state or in the desert state or any state that has so much hot sun? What about the equator? My God, you could fry an egg on a rock or blister your feet by stepping in sand. What about those people who with a thirst for fire, warm blankets, sitting inches away from the fire? What makes them so warm and fuzzy?

There is no saying that states, if you like the cold, then cold you shall be. Or is there? Is there somewhere out in the world a little saying or phrase that implies cold makes you cold-hearted or cold makes your blood run cold? If you like the cold and have a taste for blood, then you're a vampire. I haven't ever come across something like that but I'm sure it's out there. What do so many people have against the cold? Is it really cold they have a problem with? I see people in real life taking a big drink from a glass of iced tea on a hot day or pouring chilled lemonade in a swirly pitcher. They have their

drinks chilled to keep it from getting warm, so it's heat the people truly hate. They ward against it with their smooth ice cubes and ice packs of doom. They carry streams of cold water and pools to keep their bodies cool and protected from the fiery rays of the sun.

What about people who like both a cup of hot tea and a bowl of cold ice cream? Are they good or evil or both? Do they play both sides of the field? Do they disguise themselves as ice freaks one moment, then bang, fiery vicious monsters the next? Do they slip big secrets and packets of money under the door of good and evil?

Are we all just human, living normal lives drinking hot coffee and having cold popsicles on the beach in the warm sun? Do others sit under the star or lay on a single blanket letting cold's soft hands glide across a face? Do they like both good and evil, hot and cold, all that it represents? Can we represent the circle of life or is it just about heating that last slice of pizza and cooling down the hot chocolate heated for a minute too long? Do we have a purpose in life? Is this all a figment of my imagination? Can we feel the warmth from a heater, cool breeze from the wind? Like the heat, love the cold? Feel loved, feel the cold shoulder? Shiver in the cold, sweat in the heat? Feel passion, feel at peace?

"Caesar" – Hayley Paquette

Grade 9, Simsbury High

A man ran into the throne room, stumbling to get to the end of the long hall. He reached the throne and knelt on the ground. A man's voice came from the shadows on the chair.

"What is it? Why have you come to waste my time when I have a war to plan?"

The voice was cold and chilling.

"My lord, I have a message from the commander of the Gallic troops," the trembling man said. The man on the throne reached out a hand and took the scroll. He opened it, scanned it slowly, and his face broke into a twisted smile.

It was a bright, sunny day in Rome when everything changed. It was the day that Julius Caesar began his journey to become the most powerful man in all of Rome.

He was sitting in the garden in back of the villa. He bent over and plucked a flower from the soil.

"Julius, come on! We have to be out front for Papa!"

Julius bolted up and ran out of the garden and into the villa's courtyard. His sisters were waiting for him and were already dressed in their good togas. Just as he got to them, Julius could see a cloud of dust coming up the road. His father rode up and pulled his horse to a stop. He jumped down and barked at Julia Major to get him a basin of water to wash in. Julia Minor was sent to get food ready for him. Julius looked up at his father.

"So, when I get home, I cannot even expect my only son to be properly dressed?"

This was what Julius had been waiting for. Every time his father came home, he had to criticize Julius. The boy made a small whimpering sound. His father's hand came across and hit him hard on the cheek.

"Don't be insolent, boy! Go and clean yourself up! I am disgusted with you!"

Julius ran away, feeling the welt begin to form in a perfect reminder of his father's hand. He went to his room and lay down on his bed. Why didn't his father love him? If he spent so much time in the Senate, how could he see how much Julius had achieved?

"Julius, don't cry. You need to be strong in front of your father."

Aurelia, Julius's mother, came into the room. She was the head of the house when Gaius was away. Aurelia ran the slaves and that left little time to spend with Julius. Aurelia wiped the tears off of

Julius's face and they left his room. Gaius was sitting at the table, stuffing bread and wine into his mouth. Both of his sisters were standing in the corner holding trays.

"Aurelia, do you know what your son did today? He came to meet me wearing a dirty toga. He purposefully insulted me."

"I'm sorry, Father," said Julius in a whisper. "I was working in the garden and forgot to watch the sundial. I meant no disrespect to you."

Gaius harrumphed and turned away. Aurelia motioned for Julia Major and Minor to leave the room with Julius. The three walked out of the room and into the garden.

"Look what I have done in the garden," said Julius. He went to a small patch of earth and knelt down. A small sprout was poking out of the ground. He touched it gently and stood up.

"It is a lily. I haven't tried to grow one yet. If it blooms, then it will be a beautiful flower and the pride of the garden."

His sisters looked at him, and he could tell that they were not as excited as he was. His sisters were always fussing with dishes and food and sewing. They would even walk away when he tried to talk to them about his garden and flowers. Julia Major looked at Julius and left to go help her mother. Julia Minor went to sweep the courtyard. Julius looked around him. The villa was so beautiful and peaceful. How could no one in it be kind to him?

"No one understands me," he thought. "I can't talk to Father because he does not care about me. My sisters only care about what they must learn to run a house properly. Mother is always so busy, running everything in the villa. My only friends are the flowers. They don't care what I do."

Julius got up and, feeling hungry, went to the kitchen and found that his father was still there. He quietly walked to the counter and got a piece of bread with honey. Suddenly Julius fell to the floor, twitching and jerking around. He was so shocked and scared that he began to shout for his father to help him. His father turned to look at him.

"Stop that yelling! You're disrupting my meal. Go shout and be wild outside," Gaius said. For what seemed the longest amount of time, Julius lay there, writhing. He felt himself begin to calm down. He slowly got up and walked out of the room. The twitching fits did not happen often, but they were very scary. Julius was always afraid that he would never be able to stop a fit once it started.

Later in the day, Gaius called the family into the courtyard.

"I have important news. I am going back to Rome for important issues have arisen. I will be there for some time," he said. Julius felt a wave of joy and relief come over him. His father would not be coming back for a long time.

"But when I leave for Rome, I will be taking Julia Major and Julia Minor. They will come so that I can find proper husbands for them," said Gaius. Julius was shocked. His sisters were leaving. He might never see them again. Julius knew that they did not care much for him, but he could not imagine a day without them. He would be alone for years before he left the house to find his living in the empire. He looked over to his sisters. Their faces were expressionless.

"We leave in three days time. Pack your belongings, girls." Gaius sent the two off to their rooms. He turned to Julius.

"Julius, I have sent for a tutor to come here and teach you what you need to know for life. No more playing in the dirt and growing flowers." He spit on the ground at this sentence.

"You will be a man, Julius. I will not have a weak son. You will do what I tell you. No more flowers, whimpering, or any of those fits. Be strong and brave." Gaius turned to go back to the kitchen.

"I won't do it," said Julius quietly.

"You won't have a tutor. You would rather play in the dirt," said Gaius. Julius nodded his head. Gaius punched Julius in the face. Julius fell, feeling blood run from his mouth as he hit the ground. Gaius kicked him and said, "You will learn respect for your elders and betters."

Julius lay there on the ground, as he heard his father tell his family to go back to work. It was nightfall when he recovered the strength to stand and hobble to the garden bench. He sat and began to cry. Everyone was leaving him, everything that he had ever cared about. He had only his flowers to keep him alive. Julius looked to the small patch of earth where he had planted his lily flower. Julius Caesar was only eight years old when the bloom of his lily, his pride, was ripped up by its roots and thrown in a heap on top of the ground.

"Sir, we are ready to begin," said the general, riding up on his horse. The emperor still stared blankly into the distance. He watched the enemy troops, all lined up in their straight rows.

"This is necessary," he told himself. "The ones who defy must be punished. Weeds must be pulled to let the flowers grow."

"Shall I give the orders, sir?" asked the general. The emperor nodded slightly and the general turned away. He raised his arm and brought it down sharply. Horns sounded and the masses began to move in a slow formation toward the opposite troops. The emperor nudged his horse into a canter and then a gallop. He smiled and began to laugh. Julius Caesar rode into battle, laughing in the face of his enemies.

"Back to Nature" – Victoria Dearborn

Grade 10, Norwich Free Academy

When a Leaf falls,
The Tree does not mourn the loss,
Nor does the Leaf.
It is free and naked
No longer tied to the tree which remains
Rooted firm in the soil.

The Leaf allows itself to be carried
Its Feathery petals gently fly
Until it reaches the ground
The unifying Mother.
Her pale green tendrils
Braided in multifarious patterns
Long enough for any stem to snag.

The amber leaves flutter to the ground
With grace. They slowly fall without a sound.
No longer left to cling to limbs of trees,
Again they drift through autumn's crisp air. Free
To soar, to spread beauty to what is bland.
The earth makes space for brittle leaves to land.
Their colors blend together, welting
The grass with shades of burgundy melting
With scarlets, crimsons, like a field of flames.
The beauty nature bears as trees disclaim
Their leaves remain litter to lawns. Machines
Made to destroy nature's canvas are seen
As tools, eraser, used to create, to perfect
The perfect yards. Each leafless lawn constricts
The image fallen leaves have painted Earth
With. We are not able to see the worth
Of natural art as it is destroyed
By man. The beauty shed by trees is void.

Her old age is heavy, palpable.
She might as well hold the dagger to the midpoint of her brows.
The truck on her right ought to twist her legs and let her body heat swell.
She dies, like the dead road kill that just appears from the grip of life's smirk.
And the smoke simmers a slow fog, letting the 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit freeze
and float away into the air of healthy diaphragms.
Her bag is square, the business of it placed in her bosom.
Her pants are straight legged and her shoes are too triangular.
She is a walking geometry proof.
I look to my young, flourishing bones and ankles and praise my body
for not being old, because I am not ready for a pickup or someone to prove
that I am a postulate so easily defined.

You know, we are just like Velcro.

I'm sitting here in the den, the place historical to our relationship, setting to thousands of movie nights and confessions in the dark. Sprawled on your favorite spot next the small mountain of colorful pillows, I think of you, and how you always used to dive in here headfirst, then come back up with your arms outstretched, yelling, "I'M KING OF THE WORLD!" Then I'd grab your waist and knock you back down into the pillows, ending your career as a monarch.

I flip my cell phone up, dial your number, and then flip it back down again. Why am I so scared of a phone call? I give myself a brief pep-talk to boost my self confidence, then flick the phone back up again and press each digit with infuriatingly slow deliberation; you'd think I was about to call Satan himself if you didn't know any better. I click the green button and immediately regret it. It's taking you too long to pick up. I know you and your paranoia of leaving the house without a cell phone, so I also know that right now, you are probably staring at my name on the caller ID, debating whether to pick up or not.

"Hello?" It's you. I don't know if I should be relieved or aggravated. Velcro, I think once more. In my mind, I always compared you to Velcro. For one thing, it's practically everywhere: shoes, clothes, bags; we live in an overly Velcro-populated world, and you are just like that: omnipresent.

"Uhm, hi. It's me. So, uh, remember how we were saying that you could come and chill? So yeah ... can you?" I stuttered.

"" Oh man. The silence is definitely not a good sign.

"Hey, are you still there?"

"Uuhh, yeah, I'm here. So listen ... something came up with my boys tonight ... and you know ... they're my team ... so yeah, you get it right? I can't. Sorry." Sure, I get it. I also got it when you whined and complained for hours about how much you despise your basketball team. Have you ever considered the fact that Velcro might feel pain? It must surely be unpleasant to be continuously and brutally ripped apart from your significant half. I pity Velcro when it screeches in agony as each individual hook of plastic is separated from its fuzzy companion; the hooks obviously don't want to let go of the fur, otherwise the process of divorce wouldn't be so reluctant, so excruciatingly hesitant. Out of the two halves, I am definitely the clingy and irritating one, the side with the hooks. You, without a doubt, are the fuzz; the cool half, the one that doesn't drive people insane because it won't attach itself to the first thing it touches.

"Yeah ... Yeah, totally. It's cool," I replied.

"Ok, good."

Neither one of us says anything for the next five and half seconds of the conversation, but it feels more like five and a half hours. I know exactly how long it is because I'm staring at the clock on the wall opposite to me as the deafening silence drags on. Each tick of the seconds' hand feels like a small blow to the heart.

From your point of view, the conclusion of our bond is comparable to what happens to Velcro when it becomes old, when the hooks begin to falloff and shrivel up, so it is impossible to actually keep the two halves together. Everyone knows how irking it is to have to deal with a strap that, no matter how many times it's pressed against the other side with one licking motion of the hand, will come shooting up perpendicularly a few seconds later. There is just no way around it: if the Velcro is too worn out, it will not work; the only thing that can be done is to spare the pathetic, beaten up material the nuisance of having to live through another day, and toss it in the trash. I admire your ease of thought: you saw something that was not functioning and beyond repair, so you got rid of it. Your flawless logic makes me

incredibly envious; I wish I could have let go as effortlessly as you had. It would have made my life so much less complicated, but I've always been a bit of a masochist.

"So hey, what are you up to?" I say in a slightly shrilly voice.

"Not much, you know the usual ... hanging out. You?"

"Not much ... same ... I mean, I might be doing something tonight too, but yeah. Not much." I know you can tell I'm lying because you don't even bother to ask me what I might be doing; you probably don't feel like listening to me make up bull about my imaginary Saturday night.

"Ok, cool ... Uhm ... I gotta go now, my mom's calling me. See ya." It's your turn to lie now; I know because it's the fourteenth, and you told me that your parents were going to be out of town on the fourteenth. But I let it slide, figuring that the conversation is already awkward enough to begin with.

"Bye," I say meekly, and hang up. My mouth is a bit dry and my whole body feels numb. I barely have the strength to get up, so I just sit there like a moron, and think of you some more.

I make a brief attempt of interrogating myself to figure out why this would happen to us, but then I realize the futility of it; understanding the precise reason why our relationship faded away is not going to bring you back. I can turn and spin and rotate this situation any way I want to, but it's not going to hurt any less no matter what; maybe I should just forget about you instead of spending so much time analyzing the texture of human fabric.

"Soldier" – Aidan Galligan

Grade 10, Shepaug Valley High

The jeep rolled to a gradual stop as it reached its destination. The driver side door swung open, and the commanding officer stepped out onto the carefully laid gravel, his boots barely disturbing the manicured drive. The officer leaned against the front of the car, resting one hand on the warm metal hood. As he waited, he thought back to all of the battles he'd fought and all the missions he had completed in his many years of service. The soldier allowed himself a moment of satisfaction at the thought that his efforts had helped to keep the people and place he cared about safe. It was true; he had killed many an enemy, but it was never out of malice or to satisfy some misguided sense of retribution. He killed so that others could live. All his life, even before joining the military, the commanding officer had always adhered to a strict self-imposed code of honor and loyalty.

This was a rare moment of nostalgia for the celebrated soldier, for at heart he was a hardened and scarred fighter, well worn by the rigors of war. He had been there in the beginning, when the military shut down their special ops branches in favor of the proposed Spartan Initiative. He was just a gunnery sergeant then, but he had great aspirations, and he knew what he wanted. Six months later, he was inducted as Spartan No. One—One—Seven. From there he had to undergo two years of intensive and unforgiving training. He broke his left arm, his sternum and two ribs eight months in. Three months later he was sore but on his feet, often training into the night to counteract time lost mending. After he graduated Spartan Boot Camp, the officer rose quickly through the ranks, proving himself to be reliable, skilled, and resourceful.

"Bzzshhhht." Spartan 117 swiftly cut his reminiscence short, and pushed himself upright, standing straight with shoulders squared, like an iconic military portrait. Striding purposefully around the jeep, he reached under the steering wheel and lifted a communications radio off its rocker. The commanding officer pressed a raised button on the side of the radio, and its buzzing ceased. This was what the officer had been waiting for: orders from his superior. Listening carefully, the Spartan gave affirmatives where necessary and, from force of habit, gave a salute upon hearing his formal rank, "Master Chief," a signal from the other man that the conversation was over, and that all orders were final. Master Chief slowly switched the radio off and grasped the steering wheel. He turned the key in the

ignition and sped forward towards the gate, barely visible in the distance. As he neared the fence, he accelerated, removing his pistol from its holster. Weapon cocked, the Spartan swept the gun from side to side, searching for a hostile target. Frowning, Master Chief placed both hands on the wheel, as the car shuddered, screeching through the locked gate, bending and ripping metal asunder. The veteran wondered why there were no guards at a terrorist headquarters. Forcing the thought out of his head, he continued on, the wind tearing at his fatigues and Mjolnir body armor. Soon enough, his target loomed ahead. As Master Chief slammed on the brakes and skidded to a halt, something still bothered him. The huge complex ahead, which could be seen from miles away piercing the horizon like a well-crafted spearhead, looked nothing like a terrorist building. It was modern, well kept, and, if he had to guess, the soldier would have said it was a factory if anything. Squatting on the gravel, the officer rested his head in his hands. Orders were orders, and, to his knowledge, his superiors had never been wrong before. What did he know about terrorist camps anyway?! The man grappled with his doubts, something he was not used to. He had always had hunches on missions, but they never conflicted with the objective; they had always aided in the mission's success. Then again, the Spartan thought, his guesses had always served him well.

Opening his eyes, he examined his environment. His inspection frustratingly rendered no clues to support either side of the officer's internal clash. Releasing the breath he had been holding, he decided that since he'd dedicated his life to the military, and it has taken care of him so far. He wouldn't spite its trust because of some premise he had. Stick with the facts, he said, and the facts were what his superior had told him. Rising now with grim resolve, Master Chief walked up to the building closest to him. From his breast pocket, he removed a small item. A click later, the homing beacon was activated. Sticking it to the exterior wall, Spartan 117 turned away and leaped into his vehicle. He was far away when the first bomb fell.

Master Chief groaned, stretching his arms out, and rinsed his face in cold water to dispel what few vestiges of sleep still clung to his mind. Opening the door to his hotel room, rented for the night before he returned to HQ, he bent down and picked up the newspaper left for him. Filling a glass with orange juice, Spartan 117 stood at the counter and took a sip of juice while scanning the headlines. The glass shattered on the tiles, covering the immediate area in a flood of orange. Master Chief didn't notice, so intent was he on the headline that seemed to fill his vision. "Terrorists Suspected in Massive Bombing of Factory, Thousands Killed." The hardened, loyal soldier felt himself being consumed with the horror of his own actions. All he had ever had faith in had driven him to this evil deed. No more would he take orders, never knowing if he was helping or hurting innocents. A single tear coursed down the man's cheek. A tear of remorse, a tear for betrayed conviction, a tear for his soul.

Epilogue

"Lieutenant, has Master Chief checked in yet?"

"Let me check ... no sir, although he was due four hours ago."

"Hmm ... that's unfortunate. We could have used him for more. That last mission was a huge success. Well, another casualty of war. Mark him down as KIA."

"Yes sir."

"Oh, and Lieutenant?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Find Spartan 118 and tell him to meet me in 'Barracks A' to be briefed on the next operation."

My mama used to tell me that, in writing, there's always truth exposed, whether it be journalism, fairy tales, or in stories. There's always a bit of truth behind the fiction. When I was two, my mama left, packed her bags and left me and Pops. She tells me through letters little reasons of why she left. She told me that she needed to do more in her life; she threw a lot away by having me. I don't mind, though; I know my mama loves me more than my pops ever did. I don't like my pops all too well. I know deep down he's a good man, but his drunken side don't show it. At night, it gets worse; my pops comes home from the bar and likes to slap me around. He tells me that I'm the hugest mistake of his life. He says he could have been like Mama, goin' to an Ivy League school. I always laugh at that; everyone knows my dad is dumber than a sack of potatoes. My pops is a mechanic and did his best to raise me, and I respect that even if we don't got a lot. Grandmamy tells me to forget his words, and he don't mean it. My grandmamy takes care of me the nights he gets violent; I always sneak out of my trailer's window and walk down the street.

Tonight as I sit in my grandmamy's kitchen with a bag fulla frozen peas over my left eye, she tells me, "Kerrie Anne, in two days you'll be 18, the same age as your mama was when she had you."

"Yup, Grandmamy, I know that." I nodded my head knowingly.

"Now don't you run off and git pregnant with your sweetheart, you hear me?"

"Oh Grandmamy," I chuckled. "Lawrence is too good to me. He accepts my moral ways."

"Kerrie, you're a good girl, ya know that?"

"Thank you, Grandmamy." I smile; at least someone is proud of me.

"In two days, you'll be of legal age."

"I understand that."

"I want you to move out of your daddy's and live with me, okay? I live closer to the community college than your pops. And I don't like the way he treats you."

"But Grandmamy! I got accepted to Boston University! I have a scholarship!"

"I know sweetheart, but I think it'd be best if you stayed close to home."

"But I wanna go! I wanna live in the same city as Mama! I want it so badly!" I tried to persuade her.

Grandmamy wiped her forehead; it was a hot, sticky night in Georgia. She looked kinda pained at my decision.

"Alright, Baby Girl. It's your choice. Do what you wanna do."

"Oh, thank you, so much grandmamy! That meant awfully a lot to me," I smiled.

My grandmamy just nodded, but in her weary gray eyes I could sense some form of her being proud of me.

"Now, Dearie, why don't you tell me how ya got that scholarship?"

"I wrote a story, and it made it to Nationals!" I exclaimed.

"Oh, well, dear me, you're just like your mother, talented in writing." Grandmamy smiled a toothy grin. "Does your mama know?"

"No," I smiled slightly. "She hasn't written me in six months."

I had my birthday at my grandmamy's trailer. Lawrence and my Grandmamy were the only ones there. I didn't care, though; they were the only people that mattered. My mama was on the other side of the coast, but I was gonna see her soon anyways. Lawrence gave me a promise ring and told me he'd love me forever. I loved Grandmamy's gift the most; a one way ticket to Boston.

"Grandmamy! I love it!" I yelled. "When do I leave?"

"Tomorrow morning, Darlin,'" she said with a sad smile.

I think I gave my grandmamy the biggest hug I ever gave to her; I know she was sad that I was leavin' her just like my mama. Lawrence looked sad too; after all I was with him for three years.

"I'm sorry, Lawrence." I kissed his pouting cheek.

"It's 'kay, sweetie. We can do long distance, as long as I know that you'll be comin' home for me." He smiled as he wiped away a stray tear off my cheek.

I went home and packed all of my belongings in an old musty-smellin' suitcase my grandmamy gave me. My pops came home and asked if I was runnin' away; I told him I was goin' to college and he laughed at me. He told me I was stupid, and I'd never get accepted in to a college, and that no one wanted me, he said with me gone his life will be a whole lot better. I think he's the stupid one. My mama wants me, grandmamy wants me, and Lawrence wants me. I'm also goin' to college, and I got accepted. My daddy needs to get a brain. I fell asleep that night and woke up as the sun gently broke across the sky becoming a vibrant dawn. The neighbor's rooster crowed, and I knew my pops would be sittin' at the table waiting for his coffee, all hung over. I heard the familiar honk of Lawrence's old Ford truck, and I grabbed my suitcase. I passed by the kitchen and told my pops g'bye. He asked where I was goin', and I told him I was leavin'. He laughed and told me to make him his coffee. I was serious, and I told him I was goin' to Boston and hoped he took care of himself. I left the house and he was screamin' at me, I didn't care; I am beginning a new chapter of my life.

I sat on the airplane, replaying my goodbyes with my grandmamy and Lawrence in my head. Lawrence blubbered like a girl. I tried to sleep and watch a movie, but the woman next to me kept fidgeting.

"S'cuse me ma'am, but you're fidgeting. Is there something wrong?" I asked politely.

"No, it's just, ugh. I'm trying to write a story, but I can't start it. I already have writer's block," the woman explained.

"You know, my mama is a journalist, and she used to say that writing exposes the truth; whether it be journalism or a made up story, there's always a bit of truth behind the fiction."

"Really?" the woman asked.

"Yep, now does that help any?" I smiled.

"It sure does. Thank you, Miss."

I felt special. A middle aged woman who wanted to be an author and she took my advice, she took my mama's advice. We chatted on the plane for awhile; I found out that she writes books for teenagers. I've never read anything she's written, but I guess she must be good 'cuz she flying to Boston for a conference and she just got out of one in Georgia. I told her how I'm gonna see my mama and how I got a scholarship to Boston University from a writing contest. She was impressed and said many people try out for that and I made Nationals. She asked if writing was gonna be my major and I nodded my head yes. I told her I wanna be just like my mama, 'cept that my mama is a journalist and I write stories. The plane landed, and before we got off the plane, the nice author gave me her number and email address and told me to keep in touch with her.

I took out an envelope that held one of my mama's letters and showed a taxi driver the address. He took me to my mama's penthouse. I was nervous 'cuz this is the first time I was gonna see her since I was two. As I reached for the doorbell, I imagined my mama bein' surprised with tears in her eyes holdin' her arms out to hug me. I rung the doorbell and waited.

"Hello?" she asked. I watched as she opened the door curiously. She had light brown hair and piercin' blue eyes, just like me. I was just like mama in everyway.

"Hi, Mama." I smiled, and she did exactly what I imagined her to do.

Are you in or are you out
Actions filling me with doubt
Scattered pieces to a puzzle
Only angry when you guzzle
Be my dad or be my foe
Relationship that cannot grow
Years of torture and resistance
Screaming battles and persistence
Fourteen years and now you're trying
Beg and plead but no complying
Past cannot be left behind
Try and try but I'm not blind
Mom and brother might give in
But I am strong, have always been
Would've worked when I was eight
When daddy's love was always great
Now I'm grown and you're too late
Thank the bottle for your fate

The sun gleamed against the water for the last time
before being wholly swallowed by fog.
The air vibrated as the clouds groaned,
demanding total dominance of the heavens.
Snails casually conversed among themselves,
while flies fervently gossiped nearby,
in their own animated language.
Raspberries shivered and trees purred
as the wind gained momentum,
the air suddenly saturated and heavy.
The vast water rippled gently,
waves lingering for an instant,
before melting back into the hole,
vanishing like fainting maidens.
Then, in one breathless collapse,
the skies laughed with lightening,
and like bursting glass,
released the rain
and let it pummel downward,
freefalling toward Gaya's open arms.
The drops pooled along every surface,
blurring the scene to an opaque smear.
The sky hummed a final time
bored with the lake's quick surrender,

and promptly guided its troops onward.
The scene was absolutely still,
absolutely perfect—
as it forever lingered in the air.

“Ripple Effect” – Danielle Charette

Grade 11, Coginchaug Regional High

Three months of questionable orthodontia
pried the Red Sea between my sister’s front teeth.

Tomato sauce, white lies, and oxygen flow through that rivulet,
but I’d imagine so too do the vibrations of Joplin solos as she gurgles
ragtime to her willing fingers,

Along with the raucous outbursts of 6th grade recess,
clever requests for interest on her chore allowance,
and breakfast cheerios,

A meaty sarcasm chews itself through that gap
as she scrutinizes basketball,
the cat,
and overzealous children’s librarians,
in her quiet, under-the-breath ripple effect.

Licking their way through the crevice swim the Native American legends
she loves so much,
and the salty tears that insisted eleven years old still gave her leeway for
teddy bears.

I’ve convinced that cleft left her with extra oomph in blowing up the
umpteenth balloon during the summer’s circus phase,
just as clarinet rhythms ought to be easier with such a flooding
embouchure.

Buffered by those ivory mountains hide the trickling disappointments of
lost chess games,
soccer upsets,
and sibling dejection in the name of homework.

I know her little fissure reinforces the spunk of the sisterly smirk
she saves for me in church balconies,
bus rides,
and band concerts.

Oh the subtle beauty of facial contortion, sneers, and mutual DNA.

She must slosh in her ravine during math quizzes,
Girl Scouts,
and pretzel breaks,
dancing a salivary dance so endearing and vile
she magnetizes a tiding love.

Another trip to that sterile office hub, a few practiced braids with the
dental wire, a smile from the long-haired hygienist and those life-
confronting dentures will find themselves in disappointedly perfect geometry.

Bridged at last, they'll stand as two pearl fortresses against the spitting
truths of her tongue.

But no latex gloves can quench that pulsing tide,

And I hope years from now she'll savor the eroded traces
of her personal English Channel,

If only for the aftertaste.

"The Seven Deadly Sins" – Anne Whitehead*

Grade 11, Rockville High

Part 1: Envy

Claws pressing against porcelain skin
Stopping beauty for all but a second
The Monster protruding from your pores
Green eyes and a charismatic smile
Corrupted by all your inabilities and
assumptions
Stealing with another into a lightless pit
Wanting to possess what can't be purchased
Blind to self-worth
A smokescreen to reality
Will soon fade away ...

Part 3: Sloth

Unmoving and relaxed
To ignore what is important
Stay seated, watch the snow
Oblivious because you choose to be
Simplicity is what you settle for
Not worth the extra breath
Movement limited to want
Putting off all obligations
Taking the next step only by force
Time strides by and you take no notice ...

Part 2: Wrath

A scratch. Deafening noise. The silence
breaking.
Sharp, shattered nails
Leaving scars upon your heart
Your walls engraved
Wishing evil upon others
Building revenge in boiling blood
A ticking time bomb in your veins
Excessive hair as first priority
Avenging against those who wronged you ...

Part 4: Lust

Obsessive, magnetic touch
A spark, lightning shocks
Ocean eyes and a goodnight stare
Elegant skin, soft and opaque
Static lips fused by a thought
A mystical thought
Needy of passionate actions
All the dark rooms full of memories
Leaving you to your lonely wants
Obsession ...

Part 5: Greed

Torn, green paper
 Weathered and stolen from the most needy
 A must have
 Never goes out of style
 Addictive, dollar signs for your eyes
 Like water, consumed to survive
 Breathe in prosperity
 May it soon slip from your grasp ...

Part 6: Pride

A mirror reveals no other image
 Yourself, it's all you ever see
 Ambition, a dangerous quality
 Magnificent you must be
 You alone, basked in the glory
 1st place is a broken home
 Be your best because you must
 Must or be insufficient
 To honor is all yours, your majesty ...

Part 7: Gluttony

Indulgence Too much Too fast Too soon
 Excessive amounts
 A poisoned apple
 Some red wine
 Wanting more and more
 How much can you handle,
 Until there's nothing left?
 Consumed.

*Please visit www.cwp.uconn.edu/docs/CSW2009.pdf to see the author's piece in its photographic form.

"Long Block" — Danielle Charette**Grade 11, Coginchaug Regional High**

Muslims refer to their life-defining physical and spiritual odyssey to Mecca as the Hajj. My Hajj is something more akin to a rundown Pickett Lane, a calculated turn onto Maiden, a short jaunt on Haddam Quarter Road, and then a prolonged jog down Main Street, past the market, the fire station, and my church's eminent copper beach tree. The track team calls this route "long block" by virtue of the fact that it's about a mile more than "short block" and wraps itself around the town in a distinctly rectangular hug.

While I enjoy this run because it avoids inclines, symbolizes haphazard "recovery day" practices, and trails past the gas station which is more often than not playing the psychedelic tunes which parallel my own 60's CD collection, I love it most because it has become synonymous with Lindsey, my running partner, my best friend.

I've always been somewhat partial to this route. It's something about the way the sun etches the outline of Durham's colonial houses. Or maybe it has to do with the folksy dependability of the same cars pausing at the same stop sign at the same time each day which convinces me I'm in the process of imprinting my memory with a nostalgic ink, something Thornton Wilder might put into words.

But realistically, running "long block" was for several seasons a matter of cruise control. I ran it because my coach told me to. My feet drummed the sidewalk, my mind drummed a sidetracked Beatles tune, and I left it at that. Lindsey changed "long block." She changed my automatic pilot syndrome, and in essence she changed me. Most people I know have intersected my life at a declarable point. We could graph it if we wanted to—a particular party, a certain conversation, a week at summer camp—when the friendship evolved. I'm at a loss as to what axis I'd chart Lindsey along. But then again, neither of us is very good at math.

I don't know when Lindsey and I began running "long block." There must have been some date last December when we broke from the rest of the indoor team to complete this orbit around the hub of town, some pocket of twenty minutes made tongue-tied by a combination of heavy breathing and the stilted verbiage of new acquaintances, but I can't for the life of me unearth that internal calendar. Suddenly we ran it every day, and suddenly she was my closest companion. It seemed as natural as the stream we routinely ran beside which snaked its way hour by hour along the park's perimeter. Our friendship flowed with comfort, confidence, and an apparent disregard for the typical transition from strangers to comrades.

Clad in our armor of "trackie" gear formatted by spandex, fleece, nylon gloves, and insulated hats, we jogged our way into the icebox of New England winters and built conversation as steadily as we did endurance. Talk turned to teachers, the injustices of the imminent presidential election, her contempt for calculus. We laughed at the absurdities of our little town—misspellings on signs, people who never shoveled their sidewalks, the simpleton story bits that passed as news in the local paper. Our dialogue adopted humor but also the seriousness of what we made of human nature. We wrestled with the definitions of integrity and success. We decided we believed in angels.

Lindsey and I might have been an unlikely pair, fissured by two years in age. She was at the cusp of sealing her high school experience, while I was still trying to slice into mine. Yet both of us suffered from a suffocating fear of the future—whether that correlated to colleges, grades, or our long-term sense of self—that was soothed only by exchange with the other. You could say our friendship was founded on a mutual contempt for the tailspins of our perfectionism, yet we paced onward along Main Street anyhow, which I liken to our ultimate faith that our frets would be sidestepped by fate. We joked at how similar our reactions were, to the point that we likened the perspectives we gained through talking as healthier renditions of carrying on a private conversation within ourselves, minus the schizophrenia label. We plugged through town as determined athletes nonetheless, she with her nearly flawless form, I with my arms slightly akimbo like the wings of a chicken, perhaps as a plea for God to let us fly.

They say running is an addictive sport, but more than my thirst for exercise endorphins, I was addicted to the person I became when I was in Lindsey's company. I woke up in the morning excited for track practice not because I savored sprinting the 400 meter but because she helped me achieve a higher vision of the person I wanted to be. Her catchphrase became telling me to relax and find gratitude, and I listened because she responded when I reminded her of those same global ideals. Later when she scrounged for a picture of us to place in her dorm room, we would chuckle at our utter lack of moxie when it came to getting ourselves in front of a camera, but, as we pointed out, just because we had few photos of each other didn't mean we'd let ourselves lose sight of the "big picture" mindset that got us through the trivialities of everyday high school. Given the mystery of how complementary we'd so quickly become, Lindsey and I decided we must have met in a previous life, one in which track spikes had already been invented of course. At the very least the fibers of our souls were distinctly interwoven.

Once the season ended our friendship manifested itself more in prolonged summer nights of iced tea and chatter on my back porch, egregious phone bills, and the letters I mail to her at college than in running shoes. For symbolic significance we repeated "long block" when she returned home for a fall weekend in October, but we laughed at the futility of trying to update each other on our lives while our oxygen-depraved lungs were clocking overtime. These days we debate Whitman, spirituality, and conservative politics more so than we do state-qualifying times, but I'll always associate our friendship with the parameters of "long block," perhaps because its streets mark the preliminary roadmap of our closeness, perhaps because its name gives geometric meaning to a relationship so abstract it would otherwise be impossible to quantify. In adopting the tempo of afternoon traffic, we adopted the rhythm of friendship, the mileage of which I'm hoping breaks any pedometer.

Mina threw the covers off her legs and swung her feet to the floor. The moment she had been waiting for all night had finally arrived. The floor was cold beneath her tiny bare feet, and she tugged her nightgown closer against her fragile body. She tiptoed down the hallway so she wouldn't disturb her slumbering mother and sister.

Mina thought back to the countless times she had silently walked this hall before. She was only five years old, but she could remember just fine. A smile stretched across her face as she remembered the feeling of butterflies in her stomach when she reached the warm light that flooded the hall. She ran through the course of events that she knew would unfold as soon as she walked out of the darkness.

Entering the kitchen, she would see her father, a grizzly bear of a man, standing in front of the open refrigerator. Hearing the soft patting of her feet against the linoleum floor, he would look up and weakly smile at his youngest daughter.

"Good morning princess," he would say as he would pick Mina up and set her gently on the countertop.

"Hi Daddy," Mina would reply, just like always.

Neither of them would say a word after that. Somehow they had come upon the agreement of not speaking much during these special mornings together, though Mina always felt she had something to say to him. Still, she would remain silent to please him.

Mina would watch him move back and forth from the cabinets to the counter. She wouldn't wonder about the exciting things to come at school that day; her focus would be solely on that moment with her father. Searching for the resemblance between her small, rosy features and the hard lines of his face, she would cast her eyes away if his gaze happened to pass her way.

As he prepared his coffee for the morning's drive, he would reach his giant paw into the cookie jar that sat on the counter next to Mina, pull out two cookies, and hand them to her. She would happily take them, knowing her mother would disapprove of her father giving her sweets this early. But it was their little secret.

The minutes would pass, dawn slowly approaching. Mina would sit and help her father pack his lunch for work. And when he would top the lunchbox off with a sandwich, she would give it a small pat. Her daddy had always said a sandwich tasted better after a good pat.

Mina would know what was coming next; she would be dreading it all morning. Her father would sigh and pick her back up into his arms.

"Time to head back to bed, little princess," he would say.

And as he settled her back into bed, Mina would want to confess how much she loved him and just how much these mornings meant to her. But for some reason, she could never make it out.

Mina remembered sharing these mornings for weeks now, but this morning was different. While she had been reminiscing the mornings before, she hadn't realized that the light was not flooding the hall like it had every other day.

She stood in the dark kitchen wondering if she had just woken up a little earlier than usual. Pulling a chair over to the counter, she scrambled up to take her place. She would wait for her father to come, he always did.

She reached into the cookie jar and took two cookies for herself. Sitting there in the dark, she nibbled on her father's favorite cookies. And as she noticed his empty lunch box laying face down on the cabinets across her, she vaguely heard the rumbling of a car's engine as it pulled out of the driveway.

The neck is the most beautiful and powerful limb. It is the vessel from which Pegasus sprung and the vehicle by which many kings have lost their lives. It is the single vulnerable point of any living thing—tortoise, alligator, deer, ox, elephant, human. Necks are indifferent to money or status; kings and queens have died by the neck as much as vagrants and paupers. It is that which attracts with its graceful slope, and that which takes away everything with a deft gesture to the carotid. The neck is precisely where a machete would soon lodge itself, and the neck in question belonged to Private Karl Hussings.

Private Hussings didn't like war. Actually, he would've been a pacifist if it would've kept him out of the war. It was like a vacuum with a wide and selective mouth, picking off his friends one at a time, and Hussings himself had been chosen, out of rural Massachusetts and into the depths of the sticky Vietnamese jungle. Hussings liked people and places, and had the land not been full of war, the hungry beast, he may have liked Vietnam very much. He could almost picture himself in a baseball cap and sunglasses, standing next to a tour guide, looking up at an ancient Vietnamese temple with fascination as the tour guide explained the importance of religion as a pillar of Asian culture.

But at this particular moment, Private Hussings had been separated from the rest of his regiment during the night and was stepping quietly through Vietnamese thickets, his ears pricked for American voices. The forest—well, it was a jungle really—was thick and humid and green. Even in New England, Hussings had never seen so much green in one place in his life. Ground and air were clogged with leaves, mud, mist, and silence. No monkey chatter or birdsong. Real silence. Private Hussings could not see his feet, much less where he was going or what was three yards in front of him. He tried not to think about it.

According to his watch, it was 1:56 pm and 96 degrees Fahrenheit when he heard a rustling somewhere close by. He seized his gun immediately and swung around to see the machete flying towards his neck. Before Private Hussings could yank the trigger, the warm metal scraped his neck, and he knew he was going to die.

Just as Hussings came to this realization, a large, knotted hand seized the machete and yanked it away. Hussing's finger finally grasped the trigger, and his gun spat a bullet in the direction of the machete. There was the smack of a body falling into the mud, and the jungle returned to its silence.

“That was a close call there,” a deep voice said behind him. Private Hussings turned to face the man who had pulled the machete away from his neck.

The man was tall and barrel-chested, with a uniform very much like Hussing's and a scruffy white beard. His eyes twinkled amid the heavy, chiseled lines of his face. He was smiling warmly, as though greeting an old friend.

The stranger pushed aside the bushes and looked down at the attacker. The dead man was young. His legs looked as though he was running on his side, and his helmet was crooked. Red seeped from his torn throat and made its way toward the thick, smooth roots of the tree next to him.

The private looked away. The man let go of the brush; it sprung up to hide the corpse from view. He put his hand on the private's shoulder and began to steer him in the direction opposite the body and the tree.

“Lost your regiment?” the man asked.

Private Hussings nodded. “Thank you for, well—”

“Don't mention it. You would have done the same. We're all just tangled in the woods out here aren't we? Even that young man back there, no doubt.”

Hussings opened his mouth slightly, as though about to speak, and then seemed to decide against it.

The old man studied him intently. “Don't ponder it. If you hadn't fired, I would have.”

They walked through the jungle in silence for a few minutes. The older man walked with surety, although Private Hussings couldn't see any sort of markers or previously carved path. They hacked at the branches and vines with their knives.

"Sir?" Hussings asked. "How did you wind up out here?"

The man smiled and stared forward. "I was sent to find you, Karl," he said.

"Really? How did you find me?" He wanted to ask how the man knew his first name, but he didn't.

"Instinct," the man said.

Private Hussings searched the man's chest for a name but the uniform was blank. "Sorry, sir," he said. "I don't recall your name ..."

"That's because we haven't met. Sorry for not introducing myself." The man stopped and held out his hand. "Call me Christopher."

The private took the hand and raised an eyebrow. "Just Christopher, sir?"

"Just Christopher."

"Christopher, sir," he asked as they continued through the thickets. "May I ask a personal question?"

"So long as I retain the liberty not to answer."

"Aren't you — aren't you a little above the average serving age, sir?"

The man laughed. It was a deep, booming laugh and it resonated against the jungle leaves. "No one's too old or too young to serve where I come from."

Hussings smiled a little. "Well, Christopher, sir, assuming we come from the same place, I say there would be a few mothers who would disagree with that."

The man gave a half-nod. "There's always someone who will."

In the distance, Private Hussings could see light poking through the wall of green. They were almost out. "Jesus. You really know your way around this place, Christopher, sir."

"It's instinct. Your company should be waiting for you."

"Christopher, sir? Want to know something kind of funny?"

"I like jokes."

"It's not really a joke; it's funny in a weird way. You know, my godmother gave me a Saint Christopher pendant before I came out here, because he's supposed to protect travelers. I've worn it ever since. See? It's right around my neck right now. And the weird thing is that you're Christopher, sir, and if it weren't for you, I'd be dead, eaten up by the jungle or worse."

The man smiled, but he said nothing. They were at the mouth of the jungle. Private Hussings could see his comrades in the distance, waving at him. He turned to thank the man once more, but he wasn't there. In fact, he was beginning to lose the whole jungle, as though someone were scrubbing at the world with shoe polish. It was all being sucked away into black, the shouts of his friends were dying away, the ground wasn't touching his shoes, he couldn't feel shoes on his feet at all, couldn't feel anything. It was black and quiet and ...

Lieutenant Maylow looked down at his dead soldier and sighed. Well, they'd found Hussings, against all the odds. They just hadn't found him in the condition they'd hoped. Once a man's lost in the jungle, he's a goner for sure. One way or another.

"Conners," he said to another soldier. "Tell Shea to call a chopper down here. Tell them we've got one dead."

Private Hussings lay at the base of a thick, smooth tree, his neck clean in half.

Beyond the stretch of ocean,
The peach sun illuminates the monstrous cottages.
Teetering on cliffs,
Overlooking the picturesque landscape.
Give me my passport.
I'll take the express flight.
To a land of the wealthy,
A land of no worries,
A land where everyone's like a child's cutout
In their perfect Barbie and Ken lives.
I can be one too; paste me there,
Just there,
In that last bit of daylight.
Where the only language you need is that of
Seagulls cooing, waves lapsing,
And the wind whistling
As it carries away your problems.

The wind picks up as though God has heard me,
Has heard my wishes and is here to help.
But no, it blows mockingly towards me, sand in its arms.
Reminding me of a life I can never have.
So I remain stuck on a page of an overlooked child's book,
No one to free me and cut along the dotted line.

His home had a repository —

the soot gray tux with the stay pressed pleats,
damp with the heady scent of mothballs—

the pictures that could no longer remain on the walls,
for the sake of sanity, and the holes thick with wood rot—

an empty bed frame shoved into a mildewed corner,
stripped of sheets and sagging like the gray beneath his eyes.

He watched the sun sink behind the moon
and twirled a cigarette between his fingers,
letting the embers fall like bombs around his feet.
One hit an ant,
and set it writhing like Johnny in the dirt.

When the torment was too familiar for to watch,
he shoved dirt over its mangled body
with the edge of his boot,
and bowed his head.
Here and then gone.
There were so many others
where that one came from,
it wouldn't be missed.

He flicked the cigarette behind him,
into the place he could no longer remain,
trapped between the faded faces and
Unused clothes.

His back turned, he felt the ground shudder,
inhaling the smoke of the remains
that he could never watch
smoldering into the earth.

I grew up here. In
the woods, by the
croaking frog pond,
where the leaves form
like thick film over
the water, and the birds
whistle with strange
tongues. I grew up
here, where broken
bottles peek through
the brush, old and still
shining. Where the
damp soil reeks of iron
and the pine trees
lose their needles
like dead skins. I grew
up here, where fathers
stumble past bushes
that catch on their
round bellies like
babies' fingers.
I grew up.

Lisa is sitting in the Barnes & Noble parking lot, tapping her index finger on the steering wheel nervously. She abruptly stops the soft drumming of her hand and runs the smooth bottom of her index finger over the dashboard. She lifts up the pad of her chubby finger and examines the light grey dust on the tip. Annoyed, she jabs a number on her cell phone and checks the time. 4:37 p.m. She smiles crookedly and shakes her head in disbelief.

"He's always late," she whispers softly to her 2007 weeper hanging from her mirror while fanning her face with her license papers.

As if he heard her, Sam taps on the passenger car window with a broad grin of relief.

"Sorry I'm late, Lees. Jaclyn wouldn't let me out until I restacked all the darned magazines."

"Yea, whatever. It's okay. I wasn't waiting long. I needed to get out of the house anyway ..."

Her thin lips smooth into a straight line and her eyes glass over.

"Mom and Dad been riding your butt again, Lees?" He lets out a short huff of air at the end of his question and furrows his eyebrows into angry slants. Lisa can tell he's annoyed, but instead of turning it into another one of their family affairs, she keeps to herself.

"No ... just, uh, too much homework and I needed a break ..." Sam turns in his black leather seat to look at Lisa, who is firmly holding the steering wheel with both hands, looking straight ahead. Her keys are in the ignition, but she hasn't started the car, and still Sam can tell she's trying her best to keep her face composed and concentrated.

"Okay ... well, let's get home then. I'm mad hungry."

Sam's stomach makes a grumbling noise so Lisa starts the ignition and turns her head slightly to the left to avoid the awkward distance between her and Sam. He pokes the radio and throws on some pointless station to drown out the screaming silence between the brother and sister.

Lisa pulls to a stoplight and sits, focusing on the low humming of the car engine. The silence drags on between her and Sam, neither sibling saying a single word. The chorus of some corny rap song comes on, uttering the words, "Where'd ya go? I miss you so. Seems like it's been forever since you been gone."

"Wanna watch a movie tonight, Sam? There's gotta be something good out on DVD." She turns to the right and raises her eyebrows as she smiles, suddenly feeling good about this proposition.

"Uhh, naw. I can't, Lees. I'm chillin' with Eliza." Sam doesn't even look at her; he pretends to be very interested in the Mobile gas prices across the street.

Lisa bites her lip and her eyebrows droop. "Oh, okay, yea, that's fine, another night then..." The last two words are a whisper as the stoplight turns green and Lisa presses the ignition, gunning down the street. A few silly tears well up in Lisa's eyes, and she swiftly takes the back of her hand and wipes underneath her swollen eyes. Sam still looks out the window past the moving trees and searches for the volume dial with his left hand to turn the music louder. As rap pounds through the stereo, Lisa cries, Sam stares, and outside the rain falls.

One day we all crowd in the back of the classroom. Adrian, the boy with the olive skin and ringlets of obsidian hair and dark brown eyes, sits on the back of his chair, hunched, legs casually spread, with a sly smile on his face. When it’s break time, he tells us that he had sex last weekend. We *ooh* and *ahh*, and Roksolana screams, *No you didn’t! Liar!* And he says, *It’s true, it’s true*, and I’m lost amidst their argument because the worst thing is not knowing what sex is, and how can I say anything when I do not know what it is? And I’m worried and I look around but everyone has shiny eyes and slightly opened mouths and they beg him, *Tell us, tell us!* And I look to my friend Kristina, who twists her mouth into a slight chagrin but turns towards Adrian and says, *What happened?* And then, thank God, someone as lost as me says, “what’s sex?” And everyone laughs and no one answers and Adrian says he does not feel like explaining, but it makes you want to pee when you’re doing it. And then what? And then you just feel like you’re the best person in the world and like God has forgiven you all your sins and like you’ll always stay happy. And I lose interest after that because I don’t really care if God forgives me for my sins or not because I decided that I don’t sin that much.

Except for this one time when I was outside with Kristina and Andriy, the boy we teased because his grandma gave him a short bowl cut, and it was funny looking. While we were climbing the rusty playscape, Ostap came up to us and told us there was no 7th class that day. Because sometimes we have six classes and sometimes seven or sometimes five. Andriy says, *Not uh!* and runs inside to make sure. But by that time the bell rings and the playground is empty except for Kristina and I and we dig the toes of our shoes into the brown and yellow schoolyard sand ridden with cigarette butts and candy wrappers. And the presence of the children before us lingers and the rain starts falling, so we run up the cracked concrete steps inside. I don’t think we really believed Ostap, but it gave us an excuse to leave. Gathering our schoolbooks and bags and coats we leave the school, laughing and skipping.

Skipping.

And we walk by the little house with the garden and the Rottweiler watchdog and it runs to the gate barking. Down Lomonosova St. and to the bottom of the church where we go to get the Holy Water sprinkled on our bread rams and colored eggs every Easter. We decide to go to the new toy store on Galizkaya St. because it has American Barbie dolls and teddy bears and red shiny things. The store is closed for a lunch break so we press our noses and palms against the glass and look at the American Barbie dolls and the teddy bears and the red shiny things. I see a Beverly Hills 90210 notebook and I gasp with glee and turn to Kristina and tell her about it and she says, *Oh I really like that show.* And I say, *Oh well it’s my favorite* and I lie and tell her that I asked my parents to get it for me for my birthday and that she can’t get the same one as me because I wouldn’t be best friends with her anymore.

We walk down the cobblestone alleyways towards the tram stop and we’re back at the foot of the hill that goes to the school. *What are you going to do*, she asks. And I shrug my shoulders and dig the toe of my shoe into the dark congealed dirt and say that I’ll go home or something.

And then I take tram number 9 that goes right to my house and I cross the street with the cafe named Yulia. It’s named after me. Well, not really. But I pretend like it’s so because I pass the cafe everyday on my way home from school. Past the gynecological clinic and across the street from the 24 hour store is the grey apartment building with the heavy metal door that doesn’t really lock. It just looks threatening. And inside the building is murky and dark blue with worn marble steps and walls smelling like piss. I skip two stairs at a time and I know I’m on the fourth floor when I hear the Rottweiler Irma barking and scratching at the doorway.

One time Grandma sent me to borrow a cup of sugar from our neighbor, Lidiya Nicolayevna, and she had to hold Irma back because she was afraid that she would bite. And I looked on the floor where there were red spots and I asked if Irma was hurt and Mrs. Nicolayevna said, *Oh no, dear, she’s just*

a bitch. And I nodded my head and said I understood but I didn't know what that meant except that it was a bad word and I wondered what the dog did to anger Mrs. Nicolayevna and how it was relevant to the blood on the parquet.

We live on the fifth floor, so I go up 20 more steps and I know it's 20 because I count every time to make sure that they're all there. I go past the common floor balcony where we hang clothes to dry sometimes and where I cut my hand one time because the window pane is broken and I put my hand on it. There's three apartments on each floor and we live on the one on the left and the people living next to us own a husky and it has eyes the color of blue-its and his name is Wolf, except in Ukrainian it's pronounced more like *Woh-ohlf*

When I come home my aunt is making beet soup and my little cousin is sitting on the floor chewing on one of my Barbies with drool glistening on her lower lip and I run forward, dropping my backpack to the floor and I scream, *NO ANYA!* And she tugs on the head of my Eliza doll from *My Fair Lady* and the head pops off and now I'm on the floor biting and slapping my little cousin. I feel my aunt tugging on the back of my shirt and she puts me upright and spansks me and I look at her and my mouth turns down and I don't know what to say. She doesn't say anything either but puts Anya to nap and tells me to go sit in the kitchen.

Big spoonfuls of potatoes and carrots and beats in my throat are hard to swallow because my aunt is asking me how school was today. And I know I'm not guilty for anything, yet I can't help like I left school when I wasn't supposed to but I swallow that feeling down with my food and it sits in my tummy, festering. I tell my aunt everything but leaving school early.

And then Grandma comes home.

And my spoon falls into the soup and it splashes on the table so I wipe it quickly with my shirt before anyone can see. Grandma sits next to me and smiles a full tooth, guilty-kid smile. She asks me how school was. *Good,* I tell her. She says, *So did anything happen?* And I take another spoonful and shake my head but it doesn't go down. Grandma says, *So I got out of work early, and I thought I would surprise my little Yulia and pick her up from school. So I go to the school and guess what?*

I don't say anything.

Your teacher tells me that you didn't show up for class today, says Grandma.

And I can't swallow my *borscht* so I spit it back in the bowl and start crying and say it's not my fault because Ostap told us there was no 7th class that day and Kristina left early too so why isn't she in trouble and how am I supposed to know whether we have 7 classes or 6 and I don't know what else to say so I ramble on and big tears are falling into my soup.

I'm not hungry anymore.

My aunt scolds me and Grandma tells me that I got a 2 for the day in English because I skipped the class and that I'm lucky because my teacher said I can make it up if I stay after school. I'm ashamed because a 2 is the second worst mark you can get after 1, on a scale of 1 to 5. We get graded every day on behavior and homework and accuracy and posture. I've never gotten one before.

Grandma leaves the room and my aunt looks at me and starts laughing and I laugh and cry and wipe my snot with my shirt.

A green frame sits on my night stand. In the picture he is a little older than I am now, standing next to a boat by the water in Massachusetts. I look just like him. My mom says that we walk the same, talk the same, and that we have the same mannerisms. He's my dad. Although I didn't meet him until I was fifteen, he was always a huge part of my life. As I got older, my mom would tell me what my dad would do in certain situations and what he would probably tell me. I would do just as he would "say," which was actually my mom speaking in his place.

When I was fourteen years old, my mom and I sent letters out to all of the addresses that we could find for him. The letter provided basic information about me. All I knew was that I wanted to know who my dad was and to see someone that looked like me. About a month later, my mom got a letter back from my dad's lawyers asking for a DNA test. Within the next couple of weeks, my mom and I went to New Haven and got our mouths swabbed with Q-tips. The test came back positive.

Weeks later, when I was about to go to a soccer game with a group of friends, my mom said that I had to stay home because he was going to call. I told my friends to go to the game without me. Anxious, I played on the computer and watched some TV, but at nine o'clock he still had not called. Mad and tired of waiting, I took the initiative and called him. As the phone rang, my heart was flipping. A woman answered the phone, who would turn out to be my stepmom. I told her who I was; "Hold on one second," she replied. Then I heard a deep hello.

I wasn't sure if I should hang up the phone or pretend to be a bill collector. Do I say hi or hello? Do I tell him my name? Do I tell him my last name? What was I suppose to say to the one person that I had always wanted to talk to? He said hello again, and my mind went blank. I didn't think I could even tell him my last name if he were to ask me. Quickly I pulled myself together, "Hi." He asked whom he was speaking with, and I said "Courtney." There was then a long awkward pause.

We talked all through the holidays and sent pictures back and forth. For Christmas I made him a scrapbook from when I was a baby up until the summer that I started talking to him. He sent me an album of pictures that showed him doing things that he liked to do, such as, rock climbing and camping. He told me about his college years and meeting Jamie, my stepmom, and how she was pregnant. He didn't talk much about his dad or his mom; all he said was that he didn't have a good relationship with his dad and that his mom died when he was very young. I told him what classes I was taking at school and what sports I used to play. Soon we started talking about meeting. I would go out and see him in California for a week.

When we met at the airport, I didn't see a middle-aged man who had grown up and had a family; I saw the same younger face that was sitting at home in the green frame. My heart started acting like it did the first time I called him. Was I supposed to shake his hand or give him a hug? Did I call him Dad or did I call him Chris? When he asked to carry my bag, did I let him or did I carry it myself? I blinked. "It is nice to finally meet you," I said as I gave him a hug and let him carry my bag.

Once we got back to his house, we ate dinner and took a walk to the park. The next couple of days, we bought plants for the front yard and planted them; we played tennis, went to the movies, and went to the fair. Every night after we ate dinner, we either went for a walk around the block or played a board game. On the day that Dad had to work, Jamie, Maya, my baby sister, and I went and had lunch with him. He worked as an enologist at a winery, and he took me around and showed me where they stored all the wine.

The morning that I left, Dad and I took a picture on the front porch, and that picture now sits in a frame next to the one I had of him for many years. Now that I have met my dad, I am very glad that my mom and I sent out those letters. I thought that I would need a miracle if the letters were actually going to make it to him; I guess miracles do happen.

Honorable Mentions

Kindergarten

Mekhi Hayden, *Annie E. Vinton Elementary*
Kiley McCarthy, *Daisy Ingraham Elementary*
Nathanael Oliveira, *North Street Elementary*
Alex Viar, *Philip R. Smith Elementary*

Grade 1

Sydney Diana, *North Street Elementary*
Beau Dragone, *Booth Hill Elementary*

Grade 2

Abby Carstensen, *South Elementary*
Hannah Drew, *Anna Reynolds School*
Marley Garfield, *Holmes Elementary*

Grade 3

Tori Bergstein, *Long Lots Elementary*
Ben Burns, *South Elementary*
Arianna Canny, *West District Elementary*
Alison Mlodzinski, *Tolland Intermediate*
Jessica Parillo, *Tashua Elementary*
Sophia Tsikitas, *West District Elementary*

Grade 4

Maya Annunziato, *Green Acres Elementary*
Hannah Berman, *University of Hartford Magnet*
Olivia Diaz, *Jennings Elementary*
Ayla Guttman, *Toquam Magnet School*
Daniel Jersey, *Long Lots Elementary*
Clare Meehan, *East Farms Elementary*

Grade 5

Sharon Lettan, *Holmes Elementary*
Margaux MacColl, *Long Lots Elementary*
Emily Rosenberg, *Latimer Lane School*
Jenny Schneider, *Jennings Elementary*
Stephen Wright, *Clover Street Elementary*
Olivia Zimmerman, *Coleytown Elementary*

Grade 6

Hannah Carpino, *Thompson Brook School*
Jessica Joyce, *Essex Elementary*
Kevin Konrad, *Juliet W. Long School*
Margaret Rodriguez, *Essex Elementary*
Jenna Wertsching, *Gideon Welles School*

Grade 7

Emily Barbeau, *Mansfield Middle*
Caitlin Culligan, *Avon Middle*
Allison Koehler, *Mansfield Middle*
Alvaro Lanao, *Memorial Middle*
Addison Nix, *Silas Deane Middle*
Benjamin Shao, *Francis Walsh Intermediate*

Grade 8

Eli Andrew, *Coleytown Middle*
Catherine Heller, *Scotts Ridge Middle*
Jacinta Lomba, *Two Rivers Magnet Middle*
Daniel Sheehan, *Woodbury Middle*
Lily Trotta, *Woodbury Middle*
Kristen Wallen, *Sarah J. Rawson School*

Grade 9

Samantha Credit, *A.C.T. Arts at the Capitol Theater*
Kaila Galinat, *Norwich Free Academy*
Taylor Martin, *A.C.T. Arts at the Capitol Theater*
Stephen Potter, *Simsbury High*
Malek Slama, *Simsbury High*
Ashley Veilluex-Bonneau, *Cheney Technical High*

Grade 10

Steven Apicello, *Rockville High*
Victoria Dearborn, *Norwich Free Academy*
Michael Dorsey, *Bolton High*
Lily Fleisher, *Granby Memorial High*
Lauren Kidd, *Rockville High*

Grade 11

Elise Budziszewski, *Glastonbury High*
Patrick Crane, *Rockville High*
Daisy Finley, *Greenwich High*
Kathryn Johndrow, *Rockville High*
Joel Kruger, *Kingswood-Oxford School*
Tammy Palacios, *Lyman Memorial High*

Grade 12

Alex Guarco, *E.O. Smith High*
Paige Iverson, *E.O. Smith High*
Alyssa Palazzo, *Glastonbury High*
Jocelyn Rose, *The Morgan School*

Teachers of Published Authors

Evangeline Abbott, *Tolland Intermediate*
 Joseph Anastasio, *Bacon Academy*
 Judy Atwood, *Frenchtown Elementary*
 Russ Bombard, *Kelly Lane Intermediate*
 Jan Brennan, *Avon Middle*
 Julie Brennan, *Southeast Elementary*
 Christopher Brown, *Norwich Free Academy*
 Mary Bucaccio, *East Farms Elementary*
 Carleen Bumsch, *East Farms Elementary*
 Susan Bush, *F.M. Kearns Primary School*
 Sue Canfield, *Colebrook Consolidated*
 Kelly Cecchini, *Manchester High*
 Leslie Chausse, *The Morgan School*
 Erin Conte, *Saxe Middle*
 Michael Corvello, *Sandy Hook Elementary*
 Constance Crawford, *Dr. Helen Baldwin Middle*
 Sylvia Crunden, *Colebrook Consolidated School*
 Christine Dembishack, *Woodbury Middle*
 Paul Ferrante, *Coleytown Elementary*
 Maureen Festi, *Stafford Elementary*
 Melissa Frey, *Coginchaug Regional High*
 Sue Gallo, *Highcrest Elementary*
 Becky Golanski, *Samuel B. Webb Elementary*
 Betsy Grant, *Elizabeth Shelton School*
 Barbara Greenbaum, *A.C.T. Arts at the Capitol Theater*
 Lori Grindrod, *Long Lots Elementary*
 Michelle Godin, *Glastonbury High*
 Lynn B. Hancock, *Regional Multicultural Magnet*
 Jeffrey Helming, *Anna Reynolds School*
 Danielle Herbette, *Westwood Upper Elementary*
 Joan Hijeck, *North Street Elementary*

Cathy Holdridge, *Juliet W. Long Elementary*
 Sheila Johnson, *Killingly Intermediate*
 Martine Keating, *Elizabeth Adams Middle*
 Leslie Kelly, *Pomperaug High*
 Morgan King, *Kelly Lane Intermediate School*
 Sonya Kobes, *East Farms Elementary*
 Donna Koropatkin, *Mansfield Middle*
 Cheryl Laferrier, *Newtown Middle*
 Lisa LaForte, *Spaulding Elementary*
 Maryann Lindquist, *Latimer Lane School*
 Hazel Malbin, *Long Lots Elementary*
 Barbara Marano, *Memorial Middle*
 Paige McCarthy, *Tomlinson Middle*
 Stephen C. McLaughlin
 Mary Gayle Meyer, *Greenwich Academy*
 Diane Mikan, *Canton High*
 Rebecca Morton, *Buttonball Lane Elementary*
 Victoria Nordlund, *Rockville High*
 Susan O'Neill, *Buttonball Lane Elementary*
 Silvia Ouellette, *Shepaug Valley High*
 Joanna Peluso, *Bristol Eastern High*
 Barbara Rice, *North Street Elementary*
 Paula Robinson, *Simsbury High*
 Marcy Rudge, *Annie E. Vinton Elementary*
 Jennifer Sacks, *Middlesex Middle*
 Denise Stemmler, *Gideon Welles School*
 Stephanie Stupienski, *Kelly Lane Intermediate*
 Lisa Taylor, *A.C.T. Arts at the Capitol Theater*
 Lisa Thomas, *Clover Street Elementary*
 Nancy Usich, *Roaring Brook School*
 Ed Wolf, *Coleytown Elementary*
 Cynthia Gordon, *Kelly Lane Intermediate*