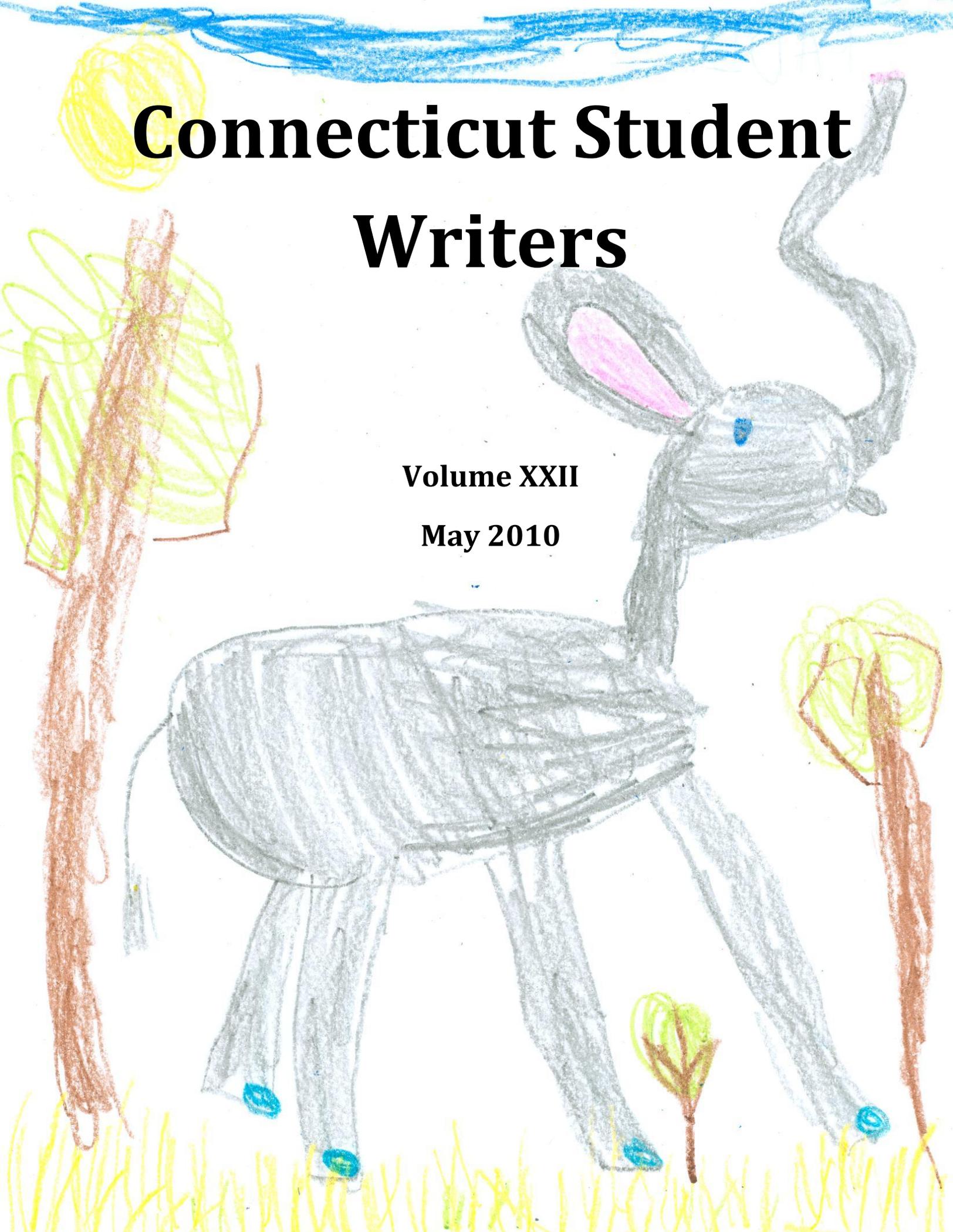


# Connecticut Student Writers

Volume XXII

May 2010



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Student Writers  
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**May 2010**

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# Foreword

On a cold Saturday in February, thirteen teachers from schools across the state gathered to read this year's submissions to the 2010 *Connecticut Student Writers* magazine. As they read, the members of the selection committee often found themselves nodding in agreement with the young authors' wisdom, chuckling in amusement at their adventures, and occasionally shedding a tear in empathy for their sorrows.

Culled from the over 1,100 submissions and published in this magazine are the best of the best. There are poems heralding nature's wonders, stories exploring mankind's idiosyncrasies, and essays delving into life's mysteries.

The Connecticut Writing Project congratulates the authors whose works are published in the 2010 *Connecticut Student Writers* magazine. Also, we would like to thank their parents and teachers for nurturing and supporting the love of writing.

Nadine Keane  
Editor in Chief

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Essayist Phillip Lopate once wrote that writing "is an enactment of the creation of the self." As a writer, I have always loved this statement, but I love it even more as a teacher, because as teachers of writing we are asking our students daily to conceptualize and define themselves through the act of writing. Literally, we are asking them to compose who they will become. It's amazing to think that the Connecticut Writing Project-Storrs is publishing the twenty-second edition of *Connecticut Student Writers*. In that time we have published approximately 1,500 students, and awarded honorable mention to almost as many. More impressive than that, perhaps, is that more than 20,000 students since 1988 have submitted their work for consideration. Kindergarteners published in that first issue are now approaching thirty years old, and high school seniors are forty. It's awesome and humbling to think that all of us affiliated with the Writing Project and with the magazine in particular have been instrumental in helping those children compose the adult identities that they wear today.

Jason Courtmanche  
Connecticut Writing Project Director

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Joanne Peluso  
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Alex Rode  
Marcia Rudge

# *Elementary School, Grades K-5 Poetry*

**“Warming by the Fire” – Ayanna Barreto-Vasco, Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade K**

Sitting down  
Warming by the fire  
Red, smoke curls  
I feel warm and cozy there.  
Looking outside at the stars.



**“The Magic Crystal” – Sergei Moscardelli, Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade K**

Behind a stone wall, a green, magic crystal  
fell off the wall. It could glow in the dark.  
It had green, purple, and red glitter.  
I found the magic crystal.  
It gave me SUPER powers.  
I can glow like a headlight.  
I can pick up a whole building and drop it down where it was.  
I took the magic crystal home.  
I put it in my bedroom on my table.  
I say Good night, Magic Crystal.  
It glitters back at me.



**“Snowflakes” – Harrison Moss, Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade K**

They smell like mint.  
They are red with a little blue.  
They come from the clouds.  
They have little hearts in them.



**“My Dog Audrey” – Caroline Vlach, Latimer Lane Elementary School, Grade 1**

Fierce heart,  
Thumping boldly in a powerful cage.  
Housewarming heart,  
Singing sweetly inside a soft mattress.  
Protector,  
Loyal friend,  
Always by my side.



**“Quiet Snow Stars” – Shannon O’Charek, Frank M. Kearns Primary School, Grade 1**

Snow stars in the night  
Sparkling like a light  
Blown in the wind  
Building up snow



**“I’m a Butterfly” – Kathryn Damato, Anna Reynolds School, Grade 1**

I’m a butterfly  
I love flowers  
All my friends do too

We dance and prance  
We flip and flop  
There is so much to do!

We like being butterflies  
We’ll sing and ring a beautiful song  
We’ll bring a beautiful song  
You’ll laugh and giggle  
You’ll like to dance  
Around, a-a-around

Giggle and giggle  
Laugh and laugh  
You’ll run run run  
You’ll play all day  
You’ll want to be me  
You’ll have fun all day  
When you say, “Let’s play”

You’ll hop and you’ll pop  
You’ll jump around all day  
You’ll sing a song,  
A beautiful, beautiful song  
When you hear “Hurray!”



**“Diamonds” – Jalah Cooper, Clover Street School, Grade 2**

I have 13  
Wonderful diamonds  
Diamonds sparkling clean and round  
Shiny looking  
Diamonds for you  
And for me to see  
To have and share  
My wonderful diamonds.  
Broken diamonds now  
Broken, broken diamonds  
I feel so sad



**“Encyclopedia” – Bart Codd, South School, Grade 2**

**encyclopedia**

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**“Stars Are Bright” – Sophie Duplock, South School, Grade 2**

Stars are bright,  
Stars are bright,

I wish I could go  
Out to space and  
Take one right now.

I love stars.



**“A Note To The Birds Outside My Window” – Sophia Meyers, Kelly Lane Intermediate School, Grade 3**

Good Morning.  
I am using a period, NOT an exclamation mark.  
Do you want to know why? You are being too loud.

It’s 4 o’clock in the morning. I need some sleep so I am not tired at school. Also, my mom might yell at me for getting up so early.

Maybe you should fly to Massachusetts. I know there is a good place there called Big Y. Maybe you could go shopping there.

There’s another fun place called Six Flags in Massachusetts. There are fun rides there.  
You could also visit Vermont. I am pretty sure you could go canoeing. You could visit Colombia. There’s a farm where you can feed the animals and go on a real-life camel carousel. Or how about France? There’s this nice city called Paris. You could visit the Eiffel Tower.

Send me a note later. Tell me where you went. Have fun!  
I’ll probably be sleeping, waiting for your letter ...



**“Box #1” – Elliott Moberly-LaChance, Kelly Lane Intermediate School, Grade 3**

Shouting, cleaning,  
spelling,  
hopping, hoping,  
saving,  
writing.

If my calculations  
are correct, that’s my day.

Let me check.

Ah, yes, it’s true.



**“Summer” – Aidan DeBrincat, Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade 3**

It’s Summer, It’s Summer.  
The bees buzz,  
The sun heat rises,  
The ice cream truck hustles.  
Honey is made from June to September.  
No snow, just beautiful blossoms and sky blue sky.  
Squirrels playing with their friends.  
It’s summer!



**“Rain Forest” – Alexis Klimaszewski, Elizabeth Shelton Elementary School, Grade 4**

Lush, dense trees reaching up to the canopy.  
Heavy, humid air adhering my tank to my sticky back.  
Adjusting to the blistering sun and sizzling heat.  
The blaring sounds of marmosets screeching,  
macaws shrieking, trumpeting through the air.  
Wee, colorful frogs of bright hues, resting momentarily,  
in the refreshing shade of a blossoming passionflower.  
Playful lemurs springing merrily through kapok trees.  
My satisfied senses bubbling over with delight.  
Drained ... dripping ... scorched ... parched ...  
Restless to discover fresh, calming shade.



**“My Mother and Yours” – Shermeen Khan, West District School, Grade 4**

I was born here.  
So was my mother,  
And her mother,  
She is their mother and now,  
She is my mother Earth,  
And yours.

She keeps me warm when I'm cold,  
She keeps me cool when I'm warm.  
She gives me shelter through the rain.  
She gives me something to drink,  
When I'm thirsty.  
She is my mother Earth,  
And yours.

She allows us all,  
To live on her without  
Difference.  
She does not know color, religion, height,  
Size and more.  
She is just like my mother,  
And yours.

But still, we burn her, we hurt her,  
And we damage her skin,  
Without a second thought.  
Do I do it to my mother,  
Or yours?

We should stop and think,  
How we hurt her.  
Should we do this to my mother,  
And yours?

When you do a good deed for your mother,  
You make her happy.  
Imagine how happy we could make our mother,  
If we did something good  
For her.  
Because, remember, she is my mother,  
And yours.



**“I'd Like To” – Rebecca McCord, Kelly Lane Intermediate School, Grade 4**

I'd like to soar like a bird,  
Over the valley so low,  
With beautiful wings, silent, unheard.  
I'd like to roar like a lion,  
To be heard o'er miles,  
And my mane, oh my mane, would be glowin'.  
I'd like to run like a greyhound,  
To race through the land,  
And I'd always favor the talent I'd found.  
And I'd hold all these talents,  
These gifts in my hand,  
But really I'm happy whatever I am.



**“Brook” – Rachylle Hart, Washington Montessori School, Grade 5**

The Brook drips his small tears when his throat is dry,  
He runs when he is full, dragging all that gathers in him behind,  
His soft voice trickles out his words slowly,  
He accepts the gifts nature throws into his clutches,  
He hardly rests until he feels old man winter creep into him,  
He feels his body freeze over in the winter, so he drifts into a long, still sleep,  
When he awakens he runs free once more,  
Rocks block his path, so he leaps over them,  
A sizeable drop confronts him, and he falls the distance before him,  
When he reaches his path again he is unharmed,  
So he continues a mad rush along his well-worn trail.



**“Awakening” – Julianna Pestretto, Kelly Lane Intermediate School, Grade 5**

Slowly and imperceptibly,  
The white blanket inches away  
And the warming presence of the sun replaces it  
This uncovers a picturesque sight of curious flower buds,  
Taking in the sincerity of the sun.  
The world is now filled with affection,  
The world is now awake.



**“Thought” – Emma Sammons, Regional Multicultural Magnet School, Grade 5**

She sits there  
Motionless,  
Staring at the dreams  
She never had.  
They float among the clouds,  
Taunting  
Thought.  
Tormenting her.  
Forcing her  
To remember  
The dreams she  
Carelessly  
Gave up on.

She hurts  
But she deserves it.  
Foolishly  
Throwing away  
Dreams like yesterday's  
Trash.  
Indolent.  
Lazy.  
She returns back  
From her own thought.  
The kind we are  
Terrified of.  
Teased by dreams  
Till the world awakes.



# ***Elementary School, Grades K-5 Prose***

## **“What I saw on a Walk” – Alexander Semenza, Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade K**

When I was eleven, mom and dad let me walk in the woods by myself. Then I saw something scary. It was square with a head, two legs, and nothing else. He had slanted eyes with eyeballs like half circles. He was really creepy. All of a sudden another monster showed up. I saw there was a whole family of monsters. One of the monsters exploded and turned into ... A volcano! All of a sudden, there was another volcano. Lava was pouring everywhere. I had to run. I ran and ran until I reached my house. I was safe with mom and dad.



## **“First Time Swimming” – Priyanka Sapkota, North Street Elementary School, Grade K**

I learned how to swim with my brother and my sister. We were at the beach! (Speech bubble: Are you two sure?)

I was going to go in the water. The water was warm! I was EXCITED! (Speech bubble: I am sure.)

I got in the water. It was up to my belly. I had a floaty. I moved my hands and feet! I was floating with my head above the water! (Speech bubble: See.)



## **“If You Eat a Color” – Brendan Raynor, Annie E. Vinton Elementary School, Grade K**

Daddy ate a blue muffin and turned blue. Mom ate a strawberry muffin and turned red. Dad ate an orange and he turned orange. Mom ate green beans and she turned green. I want my mom and dad never to change color again.



## **“My Trip to the Ice Age” – Alexander Viar, Philip R. Smith Elementary School, Grade 1**

I started exploring in my time machine when I was six. The first place I traveled in my time machine was the Ice Age. When I landed there was a snow storm coming, so I put on my winter clothes and ran into a cave. I heard a roar. I turned and saw a cave lion. We stared at each other. He opened his mouth wide and tried to eat me. I started running because I was scared of him, and he started chasing me. He almost caught up with me, so I jumped backwards over him and ran a different direction. The cave lion didn't realize what had happened, so he kept running into the snow storm, thinking that I was kicking up snow.

I ran up a mountain and saw a saber tooth tiger at the top, so I changed directions again. The tiger started chasing me. I ran towards a tree; jumping really fast I jumped to a branch. I was wearing brown, so I made perfect camouflage in the tree. The saber tooth didn't see me jump into the tree, so he ran into the snow storm because he thought the same thing that the cave lion thought. The saber tooth and the cave lion are enemies, but they can't see each other in the storm.

Then I was cold so I went into a cave. I made a fire in the cave with two sticks. Then I hunted a woolly mammoth with a spear because I was hungry and I had to eat to survive. Then I searched the cave and saw cave paintings like things that the Cro-Magnons hunted. I discovered a secret passage and saw animal bones. I started getting tired. I jumped into my time machine and went home. I told my mother, father, and my sister about my adventure, and then I took a nap.



### **“Santa’s Naughty List” – Mackenzie Farquhar, Killingly Memorial Elementary School, Grade 1**

It was December because we built a gingerbread house. Then my dad was eating the chimney without asking. Now Dad is on the naughty list. Dad was sad. We said, “It’s okay you can go on the good list soon.” I told Daddy to cook dinner. “I will help you!” Daddy and I made waffles. My mom said, “I will help you clean the house.” First Daddy put the toys away. Next Dad washed the floors. “Wow!” “The floors look glossy.” Quick, Dad went to work. He used compliments to all his friends at work. “Good work,” he said. “Thank you,” they said. Then Laura said, “I will help you feed the cats and dog.” So Dad put the dog food in Jake’s bowl. So Laura put the cat food in Sophie and Charlie’s bowl. Now Dad is wondering if he is on the good list. When he woke up on Christmas day, he was happy. Because he was so good all the time he got presents!



### **“My Own Pet” – Natalie Williams, Colebrook Consolidated School, Grade 1**

Last Christmas night when my mom came home from work she was carrying a white box. It had white cats and dogs on it with red outlines. Then my sister, Amelia, said, “What is that?” “It’s Natalie’s Christmas present,” said Mommy. Mommy put the box down. Amelia and I opened the box. There was my furry, cute, gray, orange, white, and black little kitten. Amelia said, “I want to name her Princess.” “I want to name her Charlotte,” I said. “How about Princess Charlotte?” I said. “Yeah!” said Amelia. “That’s a good name!” we both said. “O.K.,” Mom and Dad said. “Can we pet her?” I asked. “Sure,” Mommy said. “She’s so cute,” I said. “Can we show her to Ike?” I asked. “Not yet,” Daddy said. “When can we?” Amelia asked. “After we get her in her bed,” Mommy said. “O.K.,” I said. “Amelia, let’s go get her bed.” We went into the living room and got the cat bed off the couch. We brought it back near the bookshelf. Mommy picked up Princess Charlotte and put her in her bed. Then Daddy went in his bedroom and led Ike out by the collar. But when Princess Charlotte saw Ike she hissed and hissed again. I was scared. Ike growled; Charlotte hissed again. I got even more scared. Then Charlotte reached out and batted Ike on the nose.



### **“The Crash” – Tiago Frazao, Tashua School, Grade 2**

On a snowy day I went sledding, when I was three years old. I got dressed, and I went downstairs and got my snowboard. And I went outside. It was fun. I walked to the hill, and I went and put my snowboard on the edge of the hill. I felt excited and got on the snowboard and went down the hill. The wind and the snow blew hard, and my brother, Miguel, watched me and I hit a tree. And I cracked the tree open. I heard the tree went *crack*. My brother, Miguel, ran up the stairs and called my dad. My dad freaked out. My dad jumped up in the air. And my dad ran outside barefoot and in his pajamas. And my dad picked me up and put me on the couch. I was knocked out for fifteen minutes. Later, I woke up and I had to go get stitches at the hospital. I felt like I was going to die, I told my mom. When I felt better my mom told me I was a survivor!



## **“The Hurricane” – Amanda Rodrigues, East Farms School, Grade 2**

The clouds look like puffy smoke, I thought to myself. My stomach flip-flopped. I was afraid of thunderstorms, and it looked like one was soon going to happen—a bad one. Tears swelled in my eyes just like the rain that started to fall. As the rain fell, clouds whizzed by.

I ran away from the window so I wouldn't have to think about a storm.

Suddenly, BANG! Thousands of crunched up pieces of hail rammed the roof of my house. I burst out crying, I was so scared.

“I'm scared!” I cried out.

Tears dripped to the white tiled floor. I looked around the room. It was a blurry view, but I could see through my tears.

Toys were scattered everywhere. It looked like a hurricane passed by in the toy room too.

My sister was jumping on the huge peach sofa.

Mommy patted my back and said, “Don't worry, it's just a storm.”

I sniffled and hugged Mommy from the side of her. She brought me to the red door. I looked outside. A smile formed on my face. I started to giggle.

“The puddles look like waves,” I giggled.

My sister heard me. She galloped over and asked, “Can I see?”

“Of course!” Mommy replied. She picked my sister up and showed her what I saw. Then Mommy brought her down.

Suddenly, a loud thunder—BOOM, BOOM, BOOM—rattled my eardrums. My eyes got watery again. Then I hugged Mommy and started crying again.

She rolled her eyes and said, “huh.”

My baby brother ran his little run into the shady living room.

Now, I know Mommy was trying to cheer me up, but I could tell that she was now starting to get worried too. Hail was still falling.

Suddenly, lightning STREAKED across the sky and a loud BOOM followed it. My watery eyes turned into sinks, pouring water.

All of a sudden, Mommy's eyes burst out looking like watermelons. “I forgot to close the windows upstairs!” she screamed at the top of her lungs.

She scurried up the stairs. I followed. I slipped. I laughed and said, “I'm OK.”

Mommy asked me if I was OK, as if she didn't hear me. “Anyway, go down in the basement before you get hurt,” she said.

“What about Matthew?” I yelled back.

“Try hypnotizing him to come down with you!” she answered.

“I'll try!” I yelled and ran down the stairs.

Finally, I reached the bottom of the stairs. “But Mommy, what about yo-?”

Mommy cut me off, “I'll be right there! Just go!”

“OK, OK!” I screamed. I screamed to my brother and sister, “Olivia, go! I'll get Matthew!”

“Why do we have to go to the basement?” Olivia asked.

“For our safety!” I yelled quickly. “Now go!”

Olivia scampered down the dirty stairs. “Eww,” I heard her say.

“Just be glad you're not barefoot!” I yelled. (What I mean by that is our family's basement is dirty; and when I mean dirty, I mean the basement is disgusting!)

“Come on, buddy. Come on,” I said to my brother. I was pushing him slightly. He followed.

Finally, we made it down the stairs.

I looked out the soggy window. I saw a tree fall. I backed away from the window.

I heard the door creak open. I heard footsteps coming down the stairs. I whirled around. It was Mommy!

She ran over and scooped Matthew up. "Is everyone OK?" she said nervously. Tears swelled in her eyes. I could tell she was happy. Finally, she burst out crying and hugged me, and my sister and brother. I looked outside. It looked like the storm had stopped.

"Hey, Mommy!" I said. "I think the storm stopped."

Mommy turned to the window. "I think you're right, Amanda," she said. "Let's go back upstairs and see all the damage that happened outside."

Instead of just going outside, we decided to go for a walk, since it was safe. As soon as I walked onto the porch, the word "wow" came out of my mouth.

Three houses up we asked my neighbors, my best friend, to come with us on our walk.

Every time there's a storm I think of this day. I hope to NEVER be in a storm like that again!



### **"A Small Moment" – Nolan Ward, South School, Grade 2**

In the distance I heard an orange fall off an orange tree. I looked and there were a lot of oranges and flowers right there next to the tree. Some colors of the flowers were yellow, orange, red, and pink. I like the colors of the flowers. The oranges smell fresh. The tree was right next to the flowers behind a big wall.

To the other side was a house. It was white and small, and in the front were beautiful trees. They were shiny and green. There were two of these trees. Then I started to pick oranges, and there were good ones. I thought to myself, "We have jobs." My job is to catch the oranges when they fall down to me. We get a lot, and sometimes our cousins come and help us pick more, and more, and more. It is much easier with lots of hands helping. The jobs of picking the oranges go so quick that it seems like it only takes two minutes to pick lots of oranges.

After, we rest under the orange tree for a little bit and see if our cousins come. If they don't me and my sister and brothers might play around the tree for a little bit. We play a game called roof ball and tag.

After resting under the tree and playing games, we eat some oranges. Sometimes there are only enough oranges for each of us to have a few. Other times there are lots of oranges and we make orange juice. Or every person in the house gets some of their own, and we put them in a bowl on the dinner table. They taste so sweet and are really good.

My family thinks that my grandparents in California have the best oranges ever. This is something I will do with my brothers and sisters every year that we go to Grandma and Grandpa Ward's house. This activity I do at my grandparents' house gives me a big smile every time I think about picking oranges, and makes me want to go visit them.



### **"My Journey" – Olivia LaRosa, Philip R. Smith Elementary School, Grade 3**

Boom, Bang! What was that? I think the sound came from the basement, so I am going to look there. Whoa! Crash! All of a sudden, I feel a tapping on my cheek. I open my eyes, and I see a man beside me with tan skin and eyes as dark as midnight. He has black hair with colorful feathers weaved through it. The colors remind me of a rainbow. This stranger calls me Red Rose. I tell him my name is Olivia, but he insists on calling me Red Rose. I get up and look at my feet, and my sneakers are gone. My feet are covered in big knots of yarn. My shirt and jeans are gone too. I am wearing a deerskin dress. Oh my, I am in the past with an American Indian!

The man who woke me up says his name is Chief White Wolf. He takes me by the hand and shows me all around. It is really hot! There are hills covered in green grass. I see women collecting water by the river and men training to hunt. I see little boys practicing with bows and arrows and little girls picking berries by the dozen.

Chief White Wolf brings me to a pretty young woman who says her name is Yellow Sunflower. She invites me into a house that looks like it's made of hay. I think this is her home because I see a wood carved bed and animal skins all around. Yellow Sunflower asks me if I would like something to eat. She must have heard my stomach growling. I tell her, "yes." As she makes my food, I notice all of the beautiful river cane baskets and beadwork around her home. I bite into the bread, and it tastes gritty like raw corn. It is very plain tasting, but filling. Yellow Sunflower does not say much. She is very nice and fills a river cane basket with more bread. She hands it to me, so I say thank you.

Chief White Wolf is waiting for me. I am feeling very homesick. My hands are jittery, and my stomach is tight. He takes my hand and brings me to a little girl who is beading something. She looks like one of the girls who were picking berries earlier. Chief White Wolf says her name is Bluebird. She looks like she is about my age. I sit down beside her and ask if I can help. She shows me how to use her beads to tell a story. Bluebird then hands me some beads and suddenly disappears.

As I am holding these beads, I start to sniffle, and my eyes start to get watery. I start crying and screaming for my mom and dad. Chief White Wolf embraces me and says, "Red Rose, why are you sad?" I tell him I just want to go home. He says to use the beads to tell the story of home. I sit up and wipe my eyes. I follow his advice and begin to use the beads to tell my story. I take the beads and arrange them. The blue beads to resemble my mom and dad, orange to resemble the respect we have for each other, and red beads for love.

The next thing I know, my mom is waking me up. She says that she needs to get some ice for my head because I fell on the basement stairs. My mom goes upstairs, and I am alone in my basement. As I sit up, I see the beads arranged in my story of home at my feet. Suddenly, the words I read in a book at school on American Indians hit me: "never judge a person unless you have walked two mountains in their moccasins." I may have done just that today in my journey!



### **"Snow Day" – Taylor Armstrong, Roaring Brook School, Grade 3**

You should know I don't usually have an easy time getting up in the morning. Daily, it is the same routine. I lay in my warm, cozy bed with my favorite blanket and snuggle while mom is shouting, "Come on Taylor, you are going to be late." Lying there, I stretch and beg for just five more minutes, and then mom comes in, tickles me and politely asks that I get going ... now!

This morning, I didn't hear my mom. In fact, I didn't hear anything. It was a cold autumn morning, and it seemed as if the world was standing still. To everyone's surprise, including my own, I leaped out of bed without a second thought, and for some reason ran to the window. Outside was a blanket of pure, white, delicate snow covering the lawn. Through the chilly window, the outdoors looked so peaceful. Then, I noticed animal footprints in the snow.

I ran down the hallway into my parents' bedroom. Mom was the one lying in bed. "Taylor," she gasped. "Why are you awake? Today is a snow day. Today, you can rest in bed, read a good book, and be as snug as a bug in a rug." "No mom, I can't!" I exclaimed. "I need to get dressed, have a belly-filling breakfast, and get outside." Mom looked at me strangely. "Taylor, is that really you?" I replied, "Yes, it is me. I noticed small footprints in the snow and I wondered if all the little animals living in our woods will have enough food to get through the winter. I want to go outside and make sure I can help them." My mother listened to me go on and on about what an early snow this was and how the squirrels and other small creatures may not be ready for winter. She gave in to my need for a big breakfast and made me scrumptious scrambled eggs, perfectly toasted bread, and poured a tall glass of milk.

With my stomach full and my warmest winter clothes on, I was headed out the door. When I walked out into the back yard, I was surprised by how quiet everything was. The air was still. I felt alone. There weren't any birds to chirp; the trees had all lost their leaves and could no longer rattle in the wind. I was alone and a little frightened. I thought of the little footprints and how if I was a little squirrel how afraid I

would be. I got to work. I started gathering what berries I could find from the bushes that weren't covered in snow. I dug through the snow that covered the ground and searched for acorns.

As the day went on, I could hear my neighborhood friends playing. They were throwing snowballs, building snowmen, sledding, and having a fun time. After all, this was a treat, a snow day in the fall! I wanted to join them, but my thoughts turned back to the tiny, scared animals living in the woods. Suddenly, one by one, my friends walked into my back yard. They asked what I was doing. I thought they would laugh at me, telling me that animals living in the woods can provide for themselves, but they didn't. Instead, each friend asked if they could help.

We worked for hours, walking from one yard to another gathering acorns, twigs, and berries. We carried all our findings in pails that we would normally use at the beach. It was fun to work together. We decided we would be called the "Berkshire Nature Club."

After many hours outside on this chilly, snowy day, my mom called us to the house. We shook the snow off our boots, and slowly took the wet gloves off our hands. As we walked into the house, the heated air was so inviting. My mother had places set for all of us around the kitchen table. We sipped on hot chocolate with tiny marshmallows and stuffed our hungry bellies with warm cookies.

That night, after a long hot shower, I climbed into my warm, cozy bed. I snuggled with my favorite blanket and waited for my mom to come in and say goodnight. Mom came in, told me how proud she was of my work, and reminded me that it is our responsibility to care for those who are smaller than us. I knew she meant just as I enjoyed caring for the small outdoor animals, my mom enjoys caring for me. As I drifted off to sleep, I wondered what the next morning would be like. Would I jump right out of bed, or wait for mom to come in a tickle me and help get my day started? Either way, I fell asleep knowing that today was a really great day. I love snow days!



### **"A Horse Show to Remember" – Jenny Wadhwa, West District School, Grade 3**

Nicolette was in the car, "Are we there yet?" she said.

"No, but we'll be at the big red barn soon," mom said.

"Finally, we're here," said Cayla, Nicolette's sister.

Nicolette had been doing horseback riding for six years. Now she was eight and knew a ton about riding. It was her absolute favorite thing to do every day after school. Her instructor, Miss Haily, had known her for a real, real long time. Miss Haily had been riding for sixteen years (ten more than Nicolette). She taught her how to do everything (on a horse).

Nicolette flung herself out the door and into the trailer where her brown and white Appaloosa pony, Penny, was kept. "Penny, have you noticed how messy it is in here? There's hay everywhere; your water's spilled; your grain is who knows where! It is truly a mess. But no time," said Nicolette, looking at her watch. "There's only two minutes till Charlotte goes on." Charlotte was Nicolette's best friend. She also rode Penny. First, Nicolette brushed Penny furiously. Then she picked Penny's hoofs, which didn't work that well because Penny didn't cooperate. After her fight with Penny, she put on her saddle pads. Then she put on the saddle itself. "Done," Nicolette said. Then she walked down to the arena and gave Penny to Charlotte.

A couple minutes later it was Charlotte's turn. She started to canter around. "So far so good," Nicolette thought. Then the first jump, "Oh no, Charlotte made a tiny mistake, and Penny made it big. One jump, not tooooo terrible," said Nicolette, not sure of herself. There are three jumps. One Penny didn't jump. Two more. Second jump wasn't jumped. One more. Third jump not jumped. Zero more. "Oh no, all of her jumps weren't jumped. I am so not gonna win this," said Nicolette.

Then Nicolette saw her opponent. She had long brown hair. He face was covered with freckles. "This is going to be easy," the freckled girl said. Her horse was huuuuuge. He was a beautiful black stallion, with a white star on his forehead. Nicolette's eyes widened; her mouth dropped; she felt like she was going to win. Nicolette couldn't hold her sadness and anger in any longer. She burst into tears.

“You know you’re making a huge scene,” mom said.

“I know, it’s just so disappointing.” Then she stopped. She realized the other girl was not good. The huge girl went first. And guess what? She didn’t jump the first jump. Nicolette knew she might win. Her opponent came up to the second jump. “Woah,” she said, stopping her horse short. Nicolette could hear her instructor saying, “What was that for?” The girl almost started to cry. She thought it would be interesting to see a sixteen-year-old cry, but she went back to where she started and tried again. This time when she tried she still didn’t do it.

“Your turn,” said the judge. Nicolette got on. She started to canter around.

“You can do this,” she said to herself. She shut her eyes, and Penny jumped. “I did it,” she said, “I really did it.” Next jump. She came closer and closer. Then, suddenly, Penny jumped. This time she knew she would jump the last jump, and she did. Nicolette finished with her circle, and she thought “Wow, I did it. I really did it.” Nicolette jumped off.

She led Penny back to the trailer, and she thought about how well she did. Nicolette first pulled off her saddle. “Maybe we won,” she thought out loud. “You know it was all you,” she said to Penny.

“Neigh,” Penny snorted. Then Nicolette took off her saddle pads and brushed Penny. Nicolette left Penny in the trailer to cool off and eat. Then Nicolette went to the arena to see how she did.

The judge said, “First place goes to ... Nicolette Peterson!”

“I won, I won!” Nicolette filled with joy and happiness. She snatched her prize. It was a huge trophy saying “number one” on it and a stuffed animal horse that looked exactly like Penny! Everyone said, “Good job!” But Nicolette couldn’t hear them. She was too happy to hear anything.



#### **“A Cold Adventure” – John Targowski, Tashua Elementary School, Grade 4**

The cold breeze swept my cold ears and nose, making me feel regret about hiking up this mountain. Mint green pine trees had crystal clear icicles, which hung above my head making me feel as if I was about to be swallowed by a sharp-toothed shark. Icy blasts of unforgiving snow swept my face every time I dared to take a step. I heard squirrels chattering in the nearby trees. They were my only company in this cold, lonely world. Suddenly, a terrible thought popped into my head. “Will I ever get out of this snow-covered tragedy?” As I was thinking about the answer, I painfully trudged on, heading up the steep terrain.

As I was walking, feeling as if doom was near, I heard something. I ignored it, thinking it was the wind echoing through nearby caves. I heard the sound again. A weird moaning which came from behind my back echoed in my ears. I decided to see what was making such a noise, still thinking it was only an echo. I whirled around and headed toward the sound. The first thing I saw was a looming shadow above me. Yellow bloodshot eyes with dark green pupils seemed to stare right through me from a neckless head. It was as if they didn’t see me. White blade-like teeth hung from his upper and lower jaws. His expression was fierce and angry, as if he was mad at the world. I knew I didn’t want to disturb him. The creature’s height was three times the size of Michael Jordan. Snow white fur covered his entire body, except for the middle of his chest, which was a light pale color. Rounded horns stuck up on his head, shaped like Viking helmets I’d seen in movies. The creature walked silently and swiftly with a trudging motion around an icicle-hung pine tree, banging on it with meaty hands every few minutes. I watched the icicles fall like knives into a deep blanket of snow.

“Ah!” I gasped; the creature caught a glimpse of me. He stopped, turned his head, and took a step toward me. I gulped hard and began to run for my life. “Ahhhhh!” I yelled, as I ran down the giant mountain. “How do I get out of here?” I whispered to myself.

I was on the biggest mountain in my town, and had been hiking for several hours. The mountain had to be at least 9,000 feet high and mostly covered in trees. I kept running, not really looking where I was going, until my legs couldn’t carry me anymore. I stopped to catch my breath and heard a loud growl behind me.

“How am I going to lose this guy?” I asked myself, as I stood motionless on shaking legs. As if by magic, I looked to my left and saw a small hole in the snow. It was a cave. I jumped inside the tiny opening at the same time the snow monster took a lunge toward me. As I leapt into the cave, icicles fell, blocking the entrance. I was safe from the monster, but I was also blocked in! I ran over to the entrance and tried to pull away a few icicles. Nothing budged. I looked around and realized I was in a small igloo-shaped area. Smooth snow lay under my boots as if nobody but me had ever been here before. Kelly green moss hung all over the ceiling. I wondered if this would be all I would see for the rest of my life. I wasn’t as cold as I was when I was outside the cave, and I seemed to be safe from the monster. But I was still trapped.

Then I saw it, a gleaming speck of silver. I looked left and saw there was a small object in the corner. I trudged over to get a closer look at the gleaming object. I just stared. The weird object I had caught a glimpse of out of the corner of my eye had a smooth wooden torso with ancient drawings on it. Sleek silver blades stuck underneath the object, covered with cobwebs left over from years past. A red cord was coiled on the heart of the wood. It was a sled!

Shocked that such a beautiful thing would be hidden in a cave for this long without anybody noticing, I grabbed the perfectly coiled rope and walked it over to the entrance. I raised the sled over my head and swung. I didn’t want to break the sled, but I wanted to get out of the cave more than I wanted the sled. SMASH! I swung the sled at the entrance to try to break the ice. Nothing? Again, I swung. Again, nothing. The third time I swung, *woosh!* Before the sled hit the wall of ice, icicles started rushing toward me in the air like jets soaring through the blue sky. I ducked and curled up in a ball. The icicles seemed to hit the area in which I had found the sled. I stayed in a ball until a beam of light shined through my gloves. I looked up. I saw a line of light shining through the entrance. I was free. Sled in hand, I ran out of the cave forgetting I had run in the cave to get away from the snow monster.

Crash! I ran right into the snow monster who was sitting near the mouth of the cave. He jumped forward and landed with a thud.

I was too shocked to be scared, so I ran and then belly-flopped on the sled. Blllllshhh! The shiny, gray skis of the sled hit the deep blanket of snow as if being ridden for the first time.

Grrrr! The snow monster was right on my tail. Twisting to dodge trees as I slid down the steep mountain, I wondered how or if I would make it home alive, without being hit by a tree or eaten by a monster. Magically, the trees cleared, letting me suddenly see my house in the distance. Now I only had one problem on my hands—the snow monster! “What should I do to get this guy off my tail?” I thought.

Again, as if by magic, my wish came true. Somehow the sled picked up speed until I was going so fast that everything was a blur. I felt like I was going the speed of light when instantly the sled slowed to a normal sled speed.

The first thing I saw when the blur stopped was a snow bunker. Crash! I felt the snow rush into my jacket. The frigid frost in my jacket got to my body, painfully stinging it. I thought, coldly, about the snow monster, and as I did I dared to turn my head. When I looked back all I saw was my house a couple of steps away. Where the snow monster had been were deer prancing around looking for food. The monster had vanished! “Phew ... wait ... was this all a dream?” I said as I walked back to my house.

Then I remembered the sled! I quickly whirled around looking for it. All I saw were my footprints leading from the bunker to where I stood. The sled had vanished too! Now I knew it had to be a dream. I walked inside my house thinking about what an awesome dream it was.

I got to my kitchen and saw two packages addressed to me. I opened the first one; it was a sled! THE sled! My face was completely blank.

“H-how-how did it get here?” I murmured in surprise.

I opened the nest one. This one put a shock on my face. Inside was one extra large snow monster costume!

“Is this all a joke?” I asked myself quietly.

Even if it was a gag, I didn’t care; I was just happy that I was warm at home with no cold mountain or real snow monster in sight.



### **“The Man Who Painted the Sky” – Taalia Morgan, Long Lots School, Grade 4**

At sunset, perhaps you have wondered why the sky becomes pink, orange, and red. Well, it is simply the work of the man who painted the sky.

The man who painted the sky was never upset nor angry, but he had no talent. One day, he learned that he was capable of an amazing thing. He learned how to paint the sky. Once when he was lost in the woods he found a giant ladder; three paint brushes; and three buckets full of pink, orange, and red paint. It was sunset, but it had no color at all. He climbed the ladder with the orange paint and one brush, and he began to paint the sky. He decided to paint the sky every afternoon, so he would secretly bring color to the world.

Before long, the word was out that the sky had been painted by one man. Everyone was talking about the man who painted the sky, but no one knew anything else about him. He began to get nervous about how he could continue to paint the sky without drawing attention to himself. Once he became more aware that the townspeople wanted to know more about him, he became more confident. So much so that he decided to paint the sky in public. He made fliers that invited all the people of the town to watch him paint the sky in Central Park at dusk.

As the time approached, he got out all of his materials to paint the sky and anxiously waited until sunset. As the sun began to set, all of the people had gathered to witness the painting of the sky. Although there was a lightning storm, he did not want to upset all of his fans. So he grabbed the red paint and his favorite paint brush. He stared up at the ladder, took a deep breath, and started to climb. All of his fans cheered as he climbed the tall ladder, but he could only focus on the stormy dark clouds. He was worried, but he knew his fans were counting on him. He stared at the sky and as he was painting ... a lightning bolt hit the ladder, flinging him into the air!

The audience gasped, but luckily a little orphan girl and her three brothers were watching intently. As it so happened, this girl remembered that she had a blanket. She and her three siblings each grabbed a corner, held the blanket taut, and caught the man. Eventually, the man who painted the sky adopted the four children. This man brought happiness and sunshine into their lives.

Now, we all have the sunshine in our lives as the sun sets and shows us the beautiful colors the man painted in the sky. The sunset beams with happiness.



### **“Under the 18.5 Hole” – Will Zawilinski, Kelly Lane Intermediate School, Grade 5**

The one sound that actually brought some joy to my day was the clattering of the last bell corrupting my head. "All right kids, remember we have a te--." Before Mr. McKinley could even finish his sentence, I had bolted out of the room as if someone had dropped a \$100 bill in the hall. I gathered my possessions from my undersized, overstuffed aqua blue locker. The typical cacophony of dismissal was absent. Boy, Mrs. Jordan would be delighted to hear me use that in a sentence, I thought. Another thing that was definitely overstuffed was my backpack. It weighed me down, and in a few years, I will probably need a chiropractor. I blame the teachers.

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Already out of the building before the buses were called, I fastened my helmet on, unlocked my fiery red Trek, and zoomed off. I had been fantasizing about this day for weeks. It was the day Game Place was unveiling Super Assault II. My room contained sixty bucks, and I was prepared to buy it. I continued down the suburban road, worry free, as the blistering wind crashed into my face. Gaining speed down Fifth Street, I bore right preparing for my first sharp turn. Rows of houses stood to my right as they did to my left. Once in a while a car would pass by leaving a trail of smog behind. I made the sharp turn I was bearing right for. But my worry-free feeling didn't last long. I grasped both brake handles with such force that I catapulted off the bike and into the air like Apollo Twelve. I had screeched to a stop because the old lady from down the street was in the middle of the sidewalk blocking it. The result of my highflying brouhaha was a pretty

ugly face full of sidewalk. Gathering myself, I shakily stood up massaging my face. The hot remains of a shed stood to my right, and a pissed off old lady stood to my left. It's like she had been waiting for me. She towered over me and smelled of peaches – not the good kind, though. Her hair was neatly in a bun, and she wore clothes you could have found in a time capsule. "Wha ... Wh ... What happened?" I nervously stuttered.

"Like you don't know," the old bag spat. "I told you to unplug the nail gun when you were done or it would overload the circuit—but you didn't. You'll pay for this you little brat!"

I had been working on making a birdhouse for Mrs. Fudge as a way to earn money for Super Assault II. Though, when I finished, I had apparently left the nail gun plugged in.

She grabbed me by the collar and dragged me inside her ancient crumbling house like I was a sack of potatoes. I uncomfortably sat on her holey couch with a cinderblock-sized lump in my stomach. My mom walked into the house with a disgusted look on her face. After a long punishment-related talk with Mrs. Fudge (the old bag), my mom walked out of the kitchen, grabbed me by the collar the same way Mrs. Fudge did, and pulled me into the car. After a long lecture that I cannot repeat because it contains words not appropriate for kids under the age of eleven, I was one kid with blistering fury surging inside him. I was also a kid with a red Trek and who was sixty bucks short.

The next day, I came to a conclusion. I needed some money, and fast. After school, I spent the rest of the day wandering aimlessly around downtown looking for shops with a help wanted sign in the window. Two hours went by with no luck whatsoever. Though Tommy's Taco Hut was hiring, the pay was as if you were working a paper route. I called it a day and went home with such low hope of finding a job; a hobo had a better chance of getting one.

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That night, I decided to examine the newspaper to see what it had to offer. It had almost the same outcome as wandering downtown had. There was one job that seemed decent enough. Glipfield Country Club was offering eight dollars per hour for a part-time golf ball picker upper. It suited my needs, plus you get to actually play golf during your break. I frolicked upstairs, jittery with excitement, knowing Super Assault II was a week or so away. As lay in bed, I thought maybe today wasn't such a bummer after all.

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The following day I headed to the country club. Hoping to make a good impression, I straightened my tie as I approached the stiff-necked manager.

"It's a pleasure," I spoke before he rudely interrupted.

"Listen kid," the smelly, obese manager said, "you got the job. Now follow me."

The man guided me through all the necessary steps of how to operate the ball-picker-upper thing. He told me I had a twenty-minute break at 11:15, 2:05, and at four o'clock, which, if I was correct, was an hour of golf. I started immediately, only to find that the engine of the ball-picker-upper aggressively shook my butt, making cleaning the driving range two times harder. The pounding of the golf balls as I emptied the bins into the "golf ball vending machine" rung around in my head.

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I let out a huge sigh of relief, noticing the clock as it turned to 11:15. I dashed to the ball-picker-upper, parked it in the garage, and grabbed my set of golf clubs. Golf carts were also available to employees, so I took advantage of it. As I loaded my clubs into the back of the cart, I examined a map of the course. It seemed peculiar because the map showed eighteen holes, but it also showed a hole between the seventeenth and eighteenth, but it was crossed out. I took to completing each hole, but decided I would investigate the 18.5th hole mystery.

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I concentrated on the hole putting all my focus on it as a bead of sweat navigated down my face. I locked my arms, extended back, and put a tiny bit of force on the ball. Hopefully not too much force, though. The ball, which was specially printed with my name on it, glided across the perfectly cut grass, and suspense started to build up in me. It continued rolling until ... Plunk! It plopped right into the hole. I shot seventy-two, which is par for the course. Now that I was finished with the eighteen holes, I was prepared to

find out what was up with that 18.5th hole. The map showed the 18.5th hole in the forest to the far left. I hopped back in the golf cart and ventured towards the woods. As I entered through the clearing, an eerie feeling was set upon me. The trees slouched over blocking all sunlight. The dirt trail I was traveling on contained dead branches and was scattered with leaves. The crows shrieked a horrible opera.

As I continued on, I caught a glimpse of what looked like a putting green, and of course, curiosity led me to it. I got out of the cart and walked cautiously towards the green. As I approached the green, everything seemed normal enough. I still had mixed feelings, though, of this area of the country club. I continued searching around, only to arrive at the conclusion that the putting green was perfectly normal. I still wasn't sure why it was crossed out on the map. Given the fact it was a putting green, I went to retrieve my putter.

I positioned myself, placed the ball on the ground, and took a nice, easy stroke. The ball sailed across the green just as it had on the eighteenth hole and plopped right in. I walked over to retrieve my ball. I shot a glance into the hole. But what lay in the hole wasn't my golf ball, but pure nothing. The hole led straight into the ground, who knows how deep. I figured out that the 18.5th hole wasn't really a golf hole (with a cup to catch the ball) but a real hole, and I was now missing a golf ball.

I decided to head back to the country club, seeing as how my break was up. On the way back, thoughts danced in my mind about where that hole led. I approached the garage preparing to set down my clubs and get back to work. I placed the clubs alongside the wall and was surprised to look up and see my boss facing me. He had an enormous grimace on his face, as if he had just gotten away with robbing a bank.

"Can I help you?" I asked. Instead of answering, he held out his hand. A golf ball was in his palm. It wasn't just any golf ball, but a golf ball with words on it. It was my golf ball.



### **"A Good Dog" – Daniel Schenk, Tootin' Hills Elementary School, Grade 5**

Though many sounds bounced around on the outside of the glass windows of my family's silver car like a runaway freight train, the inside was silent, except for a page in a book turning occasionally.

I sat next to my big sister, and my parents were in the seats in front of me. We were hardly five minutes away from my grandparents' house, where we would be staying for three days. But there wasn't the usual squirming impatiently in our seats coming from me and my sister. Confused thoughts haunted my brain. I tried to concentrate on my book, but Adam Story's close encounters weren't enough to stop me thinking about Casey. That was how it was for some of the remainder of the ride—no one quietly peeking out the windows or making conversation. I felt lonely, like I was alone in a creepy cemetery.

I finally looked up and saw the usually happy sight of my grandparents' white house with the big tree in the middle of the lawn and the wooden tree in the backyard. We turned into the driveway, and I unbuckled my seatbelt. When the car was turned off, my sister and I started the usual scurry to the back door. But today, the race to the garage door felt even slower. I didn't know what was holding me back, the air or myself.

As I opened the door, I saw my grandparents sitting at the kitchen table. They seemed to be waiting for us. "Hey, Gram! Hey, Grandpa!" Ellen cried from behind me. We ran in and gave them each a hug. We had always done this, but today it felt different.

I dared to look at the family room and saw that Casey's dog bed was still there. Could this be a joke? I wondered. I didn't hear the soft pitter-patter of curious paws calmly coming to investigate who was at the door. A big black lab was nowhere to be seen. It was hard to hide my feelings. A lump formed in my throat, and I had to accept what my parents had told me at home was true. I knew that I could stop believing what I wanted to be true. I needed to accept that Casey had been put to sleep and ... at that exact moment I had to accept that Casey had passed away.

Then my emotions—happy and sad, angry, and depressed, fragile and broken—were about to spill. Feeling defeated, I went outside to help my parents unpack our bags from the back of the car, without saying anything to anyone in the room.

The next day, after we were settled, after Gram was dressed in a bright pink shirt and decorative tan pants, we went out to the backyard so I could see where Casey was buried. The spot was on the chocolate brown, flat earth, just in front of the fence that separated the neighborhood and the building that I never had the courage to ask about, between two trees.

I could imagine Casey motionless. It was a ... a different feeling, hard to describe, but powerful—the kind that you can almost never hide, almost. I reached out my hand slightly as if to touch Casey's thin layer of black fur. I looked back at the spot across the street where there was a field of tall grass, and a memory came to mind. When my Grandpa and I were walking Casey once, we came across some deer in the distance. Casey barked at them until they sprinted away. I looked back through the glass door into the house and saw that cushion chair. I remembered how once when there was company over I accidentally left my hot dog there and Casey just happened to come across it. I looked way over at that break in the fence that led into the neighbor's yard. We would always walk Casey and turn right into that parking lot, duck under a tree branch or two, and then sneak through the opening.

After I was back to the present, I murmured so quietly that only I could hear. "I'll miss you Casey. You were a good dog." And I do. And she was.



### **"A Heart the Size of the Sun" – Collin Sitz, Charles Barnum Elementary School, Grade 5**

Hi! My name is Patrick, Patrick Hughes. There are a lot of lessons to learn in life, but there is one that I've learned as a kid that has changed me—how to enjoy the little things in life, how to show love and feel it. It's a feeling like no other. And I learned it from a woman. A woman that had lost all she had to give. But through all her challenges, she still had a heart the size of the sun.

It all started one day when I was bounding down the street to the toy shop. I was so excited, I lost track of all of my senses. I was blinded by excitement, so I unexpectedly tripped. I brushed myself off and glanced to my side to find what I tripped over. It wasn't a rock, nor was it a crack. It was a leg that I quickly traced to a woman. Her eyes were dreary and endless. I squeezed my hand into my pocket. Her plentiful tears dripped down her quivering arms. I squeezed my hand into my pocket. "Just enough," I whispered. I changed directions. I dashed towards the grocery store; toys didn't matter anymore. I just wanted to help. I snatched away the few snacks that I could afford and ran back to the lady.

"I thought you could use some food," I whispered, looking into her eyes.

"Thank you," she managed to say.

Over the next few days, I visited with the woman and learned more about her. Her name, I discovered, was Meredith. Every time I saw her, a spark of hope ignited the flame of joy. And she seemed to enjoy seeing me just as much. She was a poor woman with a curb for a home and bruises for jewelry. But for some reason, as I got to know her, she was still happy. I was puzzled at this thought, but was delighted to have such a grateful person as a friend. We would walk through the park and have this peaceful time to share our thoughts. I liked this because she would always be positive and never complain. Yet, when we'd return to her "home," all the negativity in the world crushed back in. "It's a shame everybody can't get along," I sighed as I watched the sun slide down the sky like sweat on a forehead. I rushed home for supper and the day came to an end.

I would see Meredith more and more each day, but one day I saw her too many times. My mom was dragging me around the corner to the clothes store, and every kid knows that means trouble—hours and hours of picking out clothes and outfits. This problem was interrupted when out of the corner of my eye I spotted Meredith. She started waving hello to me, and I managed to squeak out a high-pitched, girlish sounding "hi." My mother gave me a fiendish look.

"Don't say 'hi' to strangers," she gasped in a booming voice.

I stood, stunned, but I knew what to do. I got ready for the big push. "I will because well ... well, she's my friend," I shouted, just as loudly as my mother. My mom stood, staring at me with her metal piercing eyes.

Then Meredith stood up behind me and held her hand on my shoulder reassuringly. "This boy is the nicest kid on the planet, and you shouldn't shun him for being a friend."

"Wait," whispered my mom. "Meredith Crosby!"

"That's my name," Meredith replied.

"I used to work with you! Come on Patrick! We're having dinner for three!" As mom made this offer, I felt a huge weight was suddenly lifted off my shoulders. Thank goodness!

At dinner, my mom would frequently buzz by questions to Meredith. After some time, one of the questions she asked caught my attention: "Do you want to stay with us?"

"That ..." Meredith hesitated, "would be so nice," and smiled. It was like the Fourth of July in my head. We brought her home, and she was so excited when she saw all of the things that she had gone without. When I went to bed, I peeked out the window, and it felt like the billions of shining stars were smiling at me. I just helped someone that had nothing but the clothes on her back.

The days passed by, and Meredith was always happy, but she never took advantage of anything we owned. One morning I asked her how she could always be so happy when she didn't even have a home. She replied in a calm voice, "I am always happy because I have a life, and I have a friend. That is all you need for true happiness."

I carried that lesson throughout my entire life. I made sure I didn't complain and never got greedy. On the day of Meredith's funeral, I stood in front of the crowd of people and said, "I am not going to shed a single tear because I know she led a happy life, and I know that she had a heart the size of the sun".



### **"East Haven Beach Waves" – Gianna Michaelson, Buttonball Elementary School, Grade 5**

Huge waves thrashed up against the beach's textured shore and faded away just as quickly. The shore was covered in shards of colorful shells and millions of tiny pebbles that scraped and cut my feet when I scrambled past. Once I reached to the water's edge, the waves seemed to increase in size as I got closer. They were coaxing me to jump in, even though I knew that I couldn't. My parents would never let me do anything like that. My cousins trailed behind me, racing each other toward the waves.

All different forms of seaweed were carried in with the current. There was green, red, black, and white seaweed. Some of the seaweed was floating and some was attached to the sea bottom, anchored by layers of rocks and sand, rapidly swaying back and forth from the strength of the waves. The seaweed that wasn't attached to the sea bottom was in clumps, moving as one as each wave rocked forward, coming near to the shore. The seaweed around my feet swirled and twirled whenever a wave scurried by.

Some poppers trailed behind. I picked up a bunch and twirled them around in my fingertips. Studying the shore around me, I noticed that the tide must be going out because pieces of seaweed were sprawled all over the part of the shore where the tide has marked its trail.

The waves tore up the air and towered up over three feet high then crashed down and spread out in a thick, sticky, green bubbly foam. The foam slithered across our feet and slipped through our toes. It was soothing, so, so soothing, that it made me plead for more. I wanted to jump in so badly that I couldn't stand it. Even if I was allowed to go in the water, I couldn't. I was wearing jeans! I would get out of the water and my legs would chafe from the air blowing on them during the walk home.

Again, the waves towered higher, now up to about four feet high. I reluctantly resisted the urge to jump into the waves. My cousins had the same idea as I did. We asked our parents if we could jump in. A chorus of laughter sprung from our parents. My Aunt Karen suggested that we stand by the edge of the water and let the waves splash us. Cheerful and excited, we ran for the shoreline, ready to have a blast.



# *Middle School, Grades 6-8 Poetry*

**“Running” – Celine LaTona, Kelly Lane Intermediate School, Grade 6**

The sound of feet on hot pavement  
The feel of sweat as it trickles down my forehead  
I taste the after-a-thunderstorm-air as it makes its journey to my lungs  
I see but a blur as I speed past the meadows  
My feet tingle with anticipation as I reach full out speed  
A shock of freedom wraps its warmth around my body  
A breeze blows small wisps of my cinnamon brown hair in my face  
In throw my arms out wide and capture the wind



**“Frightened, Worried, Alone” – Ambria Capson, Memorial Middle School, Grade 6**

Stars scattered here and there, and twinkled as if winking.  
The sky was an endless sea of black.  
Darkness loomed around me.  
The sliver of moon shone on the western sky.  
Towering trees casting eerie shadows.  
I shuddered, held my lantern higher.  
The light was dim, and flickering weakly.  
As I wandered, a gentle breeze drifted in. But my struggling light couldn't make it.  
My guide, my light had disappeared. I sat, frightened, worried, alone.

Aggressive, rough, and mean were their taunting laughs and whispers.  
Pairs of slanted eyebrows and that gleam of their eyes,  
showed that they disliked me.  
Their actions, words, and expressions offended me.  
It was as if the whole world were shut away.  
I sat, frightened, worried, alone.

But then ...  
Another stood up for me, became my light, comforted and directed me.  
The dark, gloomy night turned to a bright, sunny day.  
And I did too.  
My lantern now shone brightly; I wasn't afraid.  
I looked at my life in a whole new perspective.  
The world was new again.  
And I was too.



**“Fly Fishing” – Natalie Paiano, West Woods Upper Elementary School, Grade 6**

So much depends upon  
The skinny long rod  
The w h i p p i n g in the air  
As my dad throws a cast  
And the s t i l l n e s s of the line  
With those early morning car rides  
Besides those  
Hungry, shiny trout  
That glide in the water like a soaring eagle scouting for its prey  
The trout grasping the fly  
And the thrill of the catch  
I love those days, said I love those days  
As we drive home from the r u s h of the stream to our faraway home  
The c l a c k i n g of the tires running on the road  
Keeps me from my  
Sweet dreams  
Like a flowing river I have miles to go before I sleep  
I mean, miles to go before WE sleep

**ZZZZ ...**



**“CT River Expedition” – Matthew DelMastro, Smith Middle School, Grade 7**

I see golden rays of sunlight beam down onto Earth  
from the sun which rests high in the baby blue sky.  
I see the cold, cobalt blue water  
ripple to the shore  
Filled with animal tracks and footprints.  
I look out to the changing leaves  
in the distance, like an autumn quilt.  
I look down to see the roots tower up from the ground  
Like fingers clenching the sand.  
As I look back up

I see the shadows dance across the driftwood  
as the wind takes them away.  
Above me the lush green leaves hang limply  
awaiting their fall to the ground.  
In the distance I hear the rocks skip across the deep water  
With a splash as they lazily submit to the bottom.  
As I sit in utter fascination as the birds chirp and chatter  
In a language we will never understand.  
I feel the solid driftwood as I sit on top of it  
Enjoying the scenery.  
I feel the veins of a fallen leaf stick up from the rest reaching out begging for air.  
I rub the turquoise moss as it grows on  
An abandoned log like a coral reef.  
The river sets a blanket of indescribable peace over everyone.



**“Wonders Unfolding” – Serena Lotreck, Tolland Middle School, Grade 7**

Red velvet,  
cascading down  
a waterfall  
of scarlet.

Receding red  
reveals  
colors as bright as day,  
flowers opening in the light.

Silk stilts  
slide and leap  
across the gray plateau.

Liquid emotion slips through ears,  
listening with close attention.  
Eyes glued, never wavering  
from the picturesque movements above.



From that  
beautiful fluidity,  
like serpents, yet not,  
delicate yet strong,  
the story unfolds  
as the hours move on.  
Artificial becomes living, moving, breathing.

On top of toes,  
candies wave hello,  
showing gratitude to their savior—  
the one with curls, who  
rescued their prince.

**“Still in My Heart” – Christian Santa Maria, Memorial Middle School, Grade 7**

A fateful day of grief and despair,  
My name called to the office  
The echoing voice radiates from the intercom,  
I am scared  
I am trying to find out what happened  
I see my mom waiting for me through the glass door  
I ask her what happened  
She has tears in her eyes  
She tells me that we will talk at home  
I ask her if my dad is ok  
She replies that he is at Grandma’s house  
We pull into the garage  
Sullenly she walks me into the basement  
I can see the sadness in her eyes  
A warm hug and she says the words no kid wants to  
hear,  
Grandma Tootsie had a heart attack this morning  
And passed away

My eyes tear up  
And a million emotions fill my brain  
A fierce tsunami of agony  
My heart has been sliced in half  
By a sharp silver dagger  
By the blade of grief,  
Torn to shreds  
Never to heal  
Because now one of the most important people in  
my life  
Has died unexpectedly  
Never to come back to this earth  
Never

We get back into the car  
To go to Grandma’s house  
The drive is painful  
Not physically  
But emotionally  
A deep sorrow  
I whimper like a whining puppy that doesn’t get his  
way  
I am that puppy,  
A nine-year-old kid  
Who if he had it his way  
Death would not have taken away his loving  
Grandma  
I cry enough to fill a million rivers  
Enough to flood the planet

It is doomsday in my heart and soul  
  
My dad gives me a huge hug  
I wish that embrace could make all the pain go away  
All the suffering  
All the grief  
Just disappear  
Be gone forever  
Vanish from causing me pain and desolation  
  
My dad walks me into the house  
My legs are rubber  
My heart weak  
My desolation a ticking time bomb,  
On the way to destruction of  
My soul,  
Something is missing

I gaze at my family  
The grief and despair in their glimmering eyes  
My cousin Thomas rests his head on the banister  
Looking more depressed than I  
For he knew her for fourteen years instead of just  
nine  
My cousin Amber sips her tea  
Quietly thinking  
Long and hard  
About coping with this immense grief  
A teardrop trickles from her brown eye to her rosy  
cheek  
My cousins seem lifeless  
Staring off into space  
Looking for a better place  
Where no sadness or pain can hurt them  
They appear to be in a trance,  
Never to be the same again

As I sit down next to Amber  
That tiny drop  
Turns into a wave of salty tears,  
Drenching her face  
In vein-like trickles  
Like her soul is bleeding  
Embrace  
We hug and comfort each other for a while  
Then we grieve and cope on our own

The pain is agonizing  
Tear jerking  
We all feel the same pain  
We all had an equal place in her heart

My aunts, uncles, dad, and grandparents all leave  
To make funeral arrangements  
We stay at the house  
The rest of us  
Not even able to move  
She always made our days special  
She always wore a bright smile  
She always gave the best hugs and kisses  
Changed our lives,  
Made them better than they ever could have been

Cry  
All we do  
For every minute  
Is cry  
We stay at the house until 9 o'clock  
Go into her room  
Cry on her bed  
Feeling helpless  
And distressed  
I do not want to leave,  
Yet I do not want to stay  
I am dying inside  
Slowly, but surely  
Dying  
Trying to cope with disaster

I can barely sleep  
Knowing that when I awake  
Grandma will still be dead  
I wish this was all just a terrible nightmare  
Where I can wake up and have no recollection of it  
Weeping  
Pitifully  
I cry myself to sleep.  
I know Grandma would not want me to cry  
But I do

We go shopping the next morning  
For funeral clothes  
I pick out a heart of flowers as well  
The vibrant colors  
Red  
White

And Blue  
Make the flowers just as patriotic as Grandma was  
The ribbon on the flowers reads "Grandma"  
In golden letters  
To pick out funeral flowers  
And to buy my first suit for such a tragedy  
I just cannot deal with the fact that she is actually  
gone  
Gone forever  
Never  
To smile at me again  
Never to hug me again  
Never to watch "The Price Is Right" with me again  
Her favorite show

When we get to the funeral home that night  
I head into the main room  
The casket is closed for a few moments  
Then I quickly go to the children's room  
Where all my cousins are  
We all try to watch the mini-television  
To take our minds off the pain  
But we just cannot forget  
We try to hold back tears as we talk about the  
wonderful memories  
But they flow anyway  
Little waterfalls  
Exploding from our eyes  
We wait  
Until we finally decide to go  
Into the main room again

We walk slowly down the marble hallway  
Holding each other so close  
The casket is open now  
We all go up together  
Clutching hands  
So tight  
We all say a prayer  
I cannot stand to see my grandma  
Lying there  
Dead  
But then I realize that only her body is in the casket  
I place a letter to my grandma in the casket  
I also place a teddy bear holding a heart  
My cousin Amber places teabags  
My grandma loved tea

I take my seat in a cozy chair

In the mob of grieving souls  
I wait like that for a while  
And then  
The wake is over  
We all go back to my house after  
The whole family  
All branches of the tree,  
Even some close friends  
All dressed in fancy clothes  
We have things to eat and drink set out on the table  
Nobody can seem to eat, though  
We are all too sad  
I go to sleep that night  
In a bone-chilling blizzard of sadness  
I am mad  
Mad at the world  
Mad at everyone  
Why  
I ask myself  
Why  
Why did she have to die  
Why so unexpectedly  
These "Why" questions popped into my head and  
haunted my dreams,  
When I finally drifted off into a glum sleep

The next morning I get dressed in the same clothes  
Teardrops had made little marks on the tie and shirt  
We go back to the funeral home  
Still the feeling of sadness and hopelessness dwells in  
our hearts,  
The funeral director calls up names of family and  
friends  
To pay their respects  
I cannot bear to go up again  
So many people  
Who cared about her  
All my family  
Many generations  
Gathered together  
For such a sad event  
People I never met before

Finally, I find the strength to go up again,  
Say another prayer  
To say goodbye  
One last time  
Then they lock the casket

Carry it out  
My dad and uncles are the pallbearers  
They carry it to the long black hearse  
I can see the sadness in my dad's eyes,  
Having to put his mother into the back of a hearse

My many cousins and I squeeze into a black limousine  
My mom is also there  
The driver's face is motionless,  
But I can see a look of sympathy in his eyes  
Finally, my cousin Taylor can bear it no longer  
She bursts into tears and lays her head on my  
shoulder  
The procession is just a row of cars,  
Black cars and black limousines  
Carrying people in depression,  
I begin to weep along with Taylor  
We go to the church  
The church my Grandma and Grandpa got married in  
The church my Grandma was baptized in  
The church where we would say our final goodbyes  
to a great woman  
That touched many lives and whose passing stabbed a  
hole in my heart

We sing  
And all of the grandchildren go up  
Say a prayer  
A prayer about eternal life  
We then depart to the cemetery  
I am mad at myself because  
The Sunday before  
I chose to play with my cousin Erica over  
Visiting my grandma

We all see the white coffin  
I throw a red rose into the hole  
And then I realize  
That my grief  
Will stay with me forever  
Along with the memory of  
Grandma Tootsie

*It has been three years since Grandma died and the  
memory of her,  
And the great times we shared are,  
Still in my heart*



**“Facades” – Andre Caldwell, Windham Middle School, Grade 8**

His house sinks down to death,  
And his course leads to the shades.  
All who go to him cannot return  
And find again the paths of life

Masks of stone and masks of jade  
Masks of tongues that persuade  
The devil in his throne of fire  
To give in to his own desire  
And destroy the masks of all you know  
With everything but face to show  
Giving birth to honest plain  
Where lying people still remain  
Thoughts and feelings all will hide  
Behind facades that won't subside  
With apathy towards the soul  
Sacrifice for self-control  
Masks of gold and masks of steel

Some masks never made to peel  
But slowly give in to erosion  
Or outburst of your self-emotion  
And for a time would give away  
The things that flee from light of day  
Against the will of mask and wearer  
Now an honest problem bearer.

And then there's that without a  
cover  
A face that grown to discover  
It's not the mask of a fiction stare  
But solely what is under there  
A man that can finally show his face  
Without fear of taunts or self disgrace  
And be proud of what was born with him  
Not a sinless self in a world of sin  
But one that knows he's bound for wrong  
But lifts his head an struggles on



**“My Life, by Teddy Roosevelt” – Hannah Hudson, Rochambeau Middle School, Grade 8**

I stop  
and reflect  
on life.  
A curious thing.  
Unclassifiable.  
Like that argumentative specimen  
that sits (to my wife's dismay)  
in the icebox.

I should know  
by now.  
I, who have gained the insight of the eagle  
that life cannot be controlled.  
Yet  
I still long to shoot it down  
tie it up  
and mount it neatly on a plaque  
like the game I so often slay.

Then again  
life is a difficult, if impossible quarry.  
It leads you up mountains  
down valleys  
and across desolate stretches of sand

while flitting,  
tantalizingly,  
within reach.

I only know this for certain:  
I have lived a life fit for three men.  
Grateful  
am I.

I began my journey  
as a babe  
sick and weak,  
a scrawny calf  
abandoned by the cow.

Nature pitied me  
and tucked me under  
a warm wing.  
I drank in the sunshine  
and flourished.  
Grow sturdy  
whispered the night wind.

"I feel as strong as a bull moose," I said  
It was true.  
Time had worked its magic...  
Gone was the sickly calf.

My father  
tall and proud  
"The best man I ever knew"  
saw my progress,  
sent me off to Harvard.  
"Learn," he said.  
I did.

Focused, was I  
Studious, was I  
Serious, was I  
And then...  
Well, love can addle  
Even the greatest of minds.

Alice.  
Her name held the delicateness  
of a spider's silk web,  
the softness  
of a gentle morning mist.  
With eyes as blue and wide  
as the wheeling sky,  
I was captivated.

Married, we were  
in the stillness of a cathedral.  
Bound by a kiss and a shining band  
her soft hand in mine, she grinned  
Radiant.

Then her soft hand in mine, she died  
Ghostly.  
Our first daughter  
born but a day before.

Grief,  
raw and ugly  
chased me away  
into Nature's familiar embrace.  
In the haunting Dakota Badlands  
I fought the memory  
of those cerulean eyes.  
I don't look to the wheeling sky  
for comfort anymore.

With a book under one arm  
and a strong horse beneath me  
I rode  
and rode  
and rode.

Let the cowboys scoff, said I.  
The wind agreed.  
*Ride*  
it whistled  
*Heal yourself.*  
*Ride...*

And ride I did!  
Across plains  
through deserts  
and  
finally, (with a stomp of my dusty boots)  
back toward civilization.  
The cowboys whistled  
admiringly  
as I galloped off.  
No longer did they laugh.

War followed.  
I watched  
disgusted  
From over the top of  
my new Assistant Secretary of the Navy desk.  
Men turned up their noses  
at their duty to fight,  
cowards, all of them.  
I leaped from my desk  
and charged West  
to join the turmoil.

Racing up San Juan Hill  
along with my Rough Riders  
I smiled briefly at a familiar chorus  
*Ride, Teddy!*  
screamed the wind.  
*RIDE!*

Home again  
I returned a hero  
with a new purpose,  
new support,  
a new romance,  
and a new light in my eyes.  
I let life lead me on, smiling.

Two years passed,  
a flurry of activity.  
I was asked (to my delight)  
to be Vice President  
under McKinley.  
Words did no justice to my joy.

Suddenly,  
like a cold northern wind,  
things changed.  
Ice slid down my spine  
as I read the morning paper.  
*McKinley Shot!*  
screamed the black headline.  
Outside my window  
the wind agonized,  
not knowing what to say.

The country watched  
with bated breath  
as McKinley's coffin  
was swallowed by  
the dank, black earth.  
I ascended the podium with heavy steps,  
and solemnly swore  
to accept my duties  
as President.  
"Is it wrong to be eager?"  
I questioned the wind.

Then...  
Reporters! Media! Requests!  
The public roared its approval  
at my first act  
of breaking up trusts.  
"Trustbuster Teddy"  
they called me.

I watched my world  
in a whirlwind of bliss  
like a gaggle of downy ducklings  
my life followed a tumbling pattern of successes.  
Elected again  
in 1904  
no longer did I hide under McKinley's fading shadow.

A chance to succeed.  
My slogan.  
Farmer to become a millionaire?  
Why not?  
Sickly babe to become the President?  
Yes.

Push, I did  
with my well-muscled shoulders  
Dig, I did  
with sharp, shiny hooves  
Prod, I did  
with a solid antler.  
My insistence  
helped to pass  
the Meat Inspection Act  
and  
the Pure Food and Drug Act.

Committed was I to the reformation of the  
American society  
Committed was I to the faces of the American public  
Committed was I to touching eight-thousand one  
hundred and fifty hands that farmed our fields, built  
our railroads, ran our factories, dug our mines

*Mr. President*, beckoned the wind.  
*Teddy*, it called.  
*Ride...*

And I did.



## "I Am From" – Kathryn Shafer, Irving Robbins Middle School, Grade 8

### **I am from...**

Paperback and hardcover Warriors books lined by series on my little black shelf. I am from pencils and markers and used crayons lying on my black desk, next to my purple curtain-covered windows. I am from the several sketchbooks that might be closed along shelves and cubbies and stacked on my desk, but they are always open in my thoughts. I am from the virtual world of Halo 3, where I battle my way through alien traitors, frightening parasites, and near-death experiences as I fight my way to demolish the Prophet of Truth. I am from Mindfreak, the everyday mystifying show of magic and illusion. I am from CSI: NY, the crime investigating team.

### **I am from...**

The uphill trail that leads to places hidden by mortal eyes, like a snake might be hidden from a mouse, waiting to strike. I am from the continuous trails that lead off to the sides of the uphill trail; just the sight of those trails that lead into the deep forest was an adventure at my control. I am from the apple-red hammock in my backyard, brightly standing out against the forest pallet. I am from the pile of chopped wood sleeping against the side of my house, where chipmunks, spiders, and small insects make their homes out of them. I am from the white painted gazebo, that rests quietly as it sits in the middle of Devonwood, waiting for the first creamy, peachy-orange ribbon of dawn, after scribbling through the frosted leaves, to touch its light, charcoal-gray, castle-like rooftop.

### **I am from...**

The loving Doberman Piper and the loving Pit-bull Ellie next door, where the spirit of the loving Doberman Marley roams near his very own road, Marley Way. I am from the wood-and-rock covered-gravelly road that allows me to walk on its black glory to my 'waiting rock', which is also known to be my bus stop. I am from the light, dirty-green, zombie-like weeds, that take hold of my ankle and pull on it, dragging me down to the underworld.

### **I am from...**

"Time to turn off the computer!" whenever I've been on it too long. I am from "Kathryn, what are you drawing?" whenever I have a notebook or sketchbook out, with my hand scribbling back and forth on the pages. I am from, "Wow, Kathryn, you are such a good artist! How did you learn to draw like that?" and the answer is always, "I taught myself..."

### **I am from...**

The homemade salsa, filled with delicious, secret ingredients, where the recipe lies beneath only my mom and Aunt Sherry. I am from the gooey, warm brownies from my grandma's oven, made from a box but tastes like magic. I am from my Aunt Carla's doughy, homemade cookies, filled with giant chocolate chips that almost seem like you would need a miracle to make them with such perfection!

### **I am from...**

Three very energetic cousins who always have the time to play a new game or go on a new adventure. I am from a very over-healthy grandma, who talks as if she memorized an entire health book before our arrival. I am from a great dad, whose first love would be his job as a firefighter! I am from a mom, with aunts, a grandma and cousins who talk about their jobs and a lot of girly stuff; I keep my distance whenever that horse race begins! I am from uncles, a loving grandpa, and their cousins, who also talk about their jobs, and other things that I just can't figure out; I stay clear of that old path when it begins!

### **I am from...**

A brightly decorative box that is filled with things I might find as treasures, but nobody else would. I am from an old, brown box that has special findings inside it, that others would not think are special; they prefer I throw them out with the trash, but I just say no. I am from a closet, lined and boxed with cubbies, big and small, turning my messy, pig-sty-of-a-closet, to a clean, organized beauty. I am from secret trails in the forest which I live, but only I can see them; maybe you could too, if you believe hard enough.



# *Middle School, Grades 6-8 Prose*

## **“Memories and Preparation” – Hannah Beilinson, Rochambeau Middle School, Grade 6**

Death. It's a hard, terrible thing. Not just for the one who's dying but for everyone involved. Their family, their friends, and who knows, maybe even an angel somewhere who has to deliver the person to heaven. It's easiest for the one who's dying. A split second, then it's over. For everyone else it lasts a lifetime.

But that's not what it's like for me, for us. We know when death is coming. We wait for it for months, and when winter finally arrives we're up and ready.

“Here we are Sir Death, come and take us.”

For us there is no split second, just months of weakening. But unlike humans we do not shrivel up, deteriorate. In fact I think we're prettiest at our deaths. I stare down into the pond every day and think. Because, really, it's a shame I'm so pretty now, right at the end.

I feel one of my prettiest leaves drop from its branch. The surface of the pond below me ripples as the leaf kisses it goodbye before being blown away. Another one of my leaves detaches. It's a colorful one I rather liked. I think again. My prettiest leaves always seem to fall off first. I can't help but miss them. The older trees tell me not to get attached to certain leaves, but it's hard. They're as much a part of you as your branches or your trunk.

“Child,” the other trees whisper. “Child, leaves will come and go. They will get blown away. In the spring new ones will grow. They're all the same. There's nothing you can do about it. They will fall off. You will die.”

The only joys in this time of year are the children. The older trees say they are annoying and loud. “Humans,” they scoff, “all they ever do is chop us down and build things with us.”

But I like the children. Sometimes they do take parts of me to build things, but never enough to harm me. I remember just last summer they took a piece out of my trunk. It stung a little, but nothing compared to the joy in watching them play with it. First they took it away, and then a few days later they brought it back. The wood was now smooth, shiny, and perfectly rectangular. The oldest boy laid it down next to the river and secured it with rocks. The other boys cheered when he was done. After that they came almost every day it was sunny out to jump off the wood into the pond. There were girls too. Sometimes they stared wistfully at the pond and the piece of wood, but they never went in.

Once, I think the boys caught them looking because soon after they took one of my branches that had fallen off and stuck it in the ground. Then they had a ceremony proclaiming the pond and board as theirs.

But today they are here earlier than usual. The girls are wearing fancy dresses and they don't even glance at the pond as they pass. I wave to them before they disappear around the bend, but they don't notice. The boys stop for a moment to stare wistfully at the pond. They're dressed in long sleeves and pants instead of the shorts and t-shirts of summer. Their dog, Scott, is with them as always, but they're continuously scolding him and telling him to go home. I wonder why; a long time ago he wasn't allowed, but for the past few months he's come every day.

A cold blast of wind shakes me, and the boys hurry away. The cold reminds me of death. Thinking about it now I guess it might be okay. The older trees say that if you're prepared enough you will be reborn in the spring. I don't remember this, because last winter I was nothing but a seed, but they're usually right. I straighten myself up against the wind and take a deep breath.

“Here I am Sir Death, come and take me.”



## **“Reflections on Being Cinderella’s Daughter” – Alyssa Grimaldi, Kelly Lane Intermediate School, Grade 6**

My mother is the one in that tale; you know, the story where that girl loses her glass slipper at midnight? Do you know just how much teasing has been done to me just because my mom was sort of absentminded and lost her shoe? “Oh, Natalie, don’t lose your shoe!” “Natalie, where’s that fairy godmother of yours; I need her to help me get an A on my test!” I can’t even go to parties without someone thinking it’s funny to steal one of my shoes.

Then there was that time when my mom just *had* to come to career day. And she brought in that stupid shoe that’s the cause of all my problems. It’s not even real glass; it’s clear plastic. And then on top of all this, I’m not even a real princess. This is just fine with me, because I would rather skateboard than curtsy any day; but at least if I were, the other kids might have some respect for me. The rumor of me being a princess got started in second grade when the kids in my class came to my birthday party and saw the turret my room is located in. And I’ll admit it; I also had some plastic tiara that I always wore. So kids still torture me about how I’m not really a princess.

Something else that goes along with being Cinderella’s daughter is the wicked step-sisters. And evil step-cousins. Just my luck that they have to be real. They hate my family even more than they used to hate my mom because of the fact they always wanted to marry my dad. I think it probably also has something to do with the fact that my family is rich. My dad was an actor for a while, and he happened to be in a couple of major movies. The guys my step-aunts married both work as janitors—one at Walmart, the other at McDonalds. But even though my cousins take after their mothers and are not too nice (hence the word evil) my mom seems to think it will strengthen her relationship with her step-sisters if I have little “playdates” with my cousins. They’re more like who-can-push-Natalie-into-the-pool-first dates. Rubella and Dalairé (more like delirious) are not the friendliest cousins you could possibly have. Somehow it’s my fault that my dad used to be an actor and their dads dropped out of middle school. Or, they just might be mad that I got a normal name, and their names are probably in the top ten list for witches’ names.

Then there was that time when my parents planned a “ball” at my house. Kids made sure I remembered how my parents made everyone wear suits and gowns to it for years. They taped the invitations talking about the “ball” to all the bulletin boards in the school until the janitor did me a favor by ripping them down. And there’s this science geek kid in my school named Davey. He still believes I’m a princess, minus the crown, so he stalks me around the school sometimes, asking me how the king and queen are. He doesn’t get that if my mom and dad are queen and king, they would have to be the queen and king of somewhere. So I ask him, “Where the heck is the place I’m apparently princess of?” And he just gets this dreamy look on his face and says, “It’s probably some paradise in the Caribbean Sea.” You do not want to know how many times I have wanted to strangle that boy, or at least get some kid to stuff him in a locker for me.

So, by now, you hopefully realize that being “Shoe Girl’s” daughter is not the “Cinderella Story” most people think it must be. And speaking of fairy tales, where is that fairy godmother when you need her to “Bippity Boppity Boo” you a bigger allowance?



## **“The Chocolate Thief” – Michael Doyle, Reed Intermediate School, Grade 6**

“Michael,” I thought I heard. I stood up and looked around the old, moaning bus. I always thought one day it would break down and fall apart on the spot, but I didn’t see anyone that seemed to be calling me.

I sat back down in my beat up seat and looked at the driver, Mrs. Cash. She was old, probably sixty, but was like a grandma to all of us. Why would she call my name? She wouldn’t. I’m not good or bad.

“Michael, come on up here!” I heard again. And this time there was no doubt it was Mrs. Cash. I nervously ran my foot across the sand-filled crevices of the bus floor and stood up. I pushed through the crowded aisle of back packs and knees, and it felt like time slowed for me to take my time going up to the front to get scolded by the nicest driver in the world. “I have to be getting in trouble,” I thought. “That’s how Mrs. Cash always calls the big kids when they’re in trouble.” I swallowed hard and gathered up my courage to finally make it up to the front. As I arrived I looked back to see Jeremy, my friend I’d been sitting with, looking right at me. In fact, everyone was looking right at me. I closed my eyes and willed myself to believe I wasn’t in trouble, and finally asked Ms. Cash, “Yes?”

“One, two, three!” I heard her announce and suddenly my nerves were drowned in a thundering chorus of voices singing me happy birthday. My face flushed red, and I must have looked like a slightly overgrown tomato.

Mrs. Cash turned to me and personally said, “Happy birthday!” and stuck a huge chocolate bar into my arms. My eyes popped out; it was huge. It weighed down my arms just holding it. “Whoa!” escaped me, and I ran back down the aisle smiling.

“Jeremy,” I bragged. “look at this!” and shoved the chocolate in his face. “Whoa,” he complimented, and quickly added, “you’re gonna give me some, right?”

“Wrong,” I smirked back, and swiftly hid it in the safety of my backpack. The rest of the ride we spent fantasizing about eating a whole chocolate bar, that big, and making remarks about the awesomeness of my own candy bar. But, finally, we got to my stop, and I skipped home, wearing happiness on my face. I strode through the brisk winter air, and got to my front steps. This had to be a surprise for my mom, so I carefully uncovered the candy, and held it across my flat palm like a waiter. “Mommy, Mommy,” I hollered, “you’ll never guess what I got—a king size chocolate bar!” not giving her time to answer my question.

“Really?” she remarked. “Was it from Mrs. Cash?” she asked, knowing that it was.

“Yup,” I answered back. And at that moment, I shredded the wrapper and sunk my teeth into heaven. My taste buds seemed to giggle with delight; it was delicious. My mom didn’t let me have candy very much, and I thought this was a big treat. I savored every small nibble of the sweetness, before finally feeling like my stomach would burst. I had hardly finished the first of five glamorous rows, and thought that this would be a delicious week.

I ran back into the house, patting my belly. “Mmmm, mmmm! It’s good!” I boasted to my mom, but mostly to aggravate my sister. “Well,” my mom said in a suspicious tone, “you should share some with us.”

“No WAY!” I replied thoughtlessly, not thinking it could lead to further consequences. “I’m going to hide it so I’ll be the only one who can ever have any of it.” And with that statement, I hurried into the kitchen to hide it.

I had no idea where I could possibly put it. The kitchen was chock full of great little nooks and crannies, just waiting to be filled with a little secret. There was a countless amount of cabinets—all would work—a nice ledge concealed by antiques on display, and of course, I could always rely on hiding it in the oven, like my mom always does after making cookies or brownies. I picked a trusty cabinet. Quietly, I swung it open. It was the one we kept all the sweets in. And I nestled the bar under a bag of chocolate chips. This was perfect. My mom always said she was going to try to stay away from the chocolate chips, so she would never check here. After I was finally satisfied, I dropped down from the granite counter. I swung to face the entrance to the kitchen and met my mom walking in. “Uh oh!” I muttered. My heart thudded hard like it was threatening to smash through my chest. I stood still; I had been caught in action, terrible. I pointed an accusing finger at her, and claimed, “You saw where I hid it.”

“No I did not,” she denied. “Honestly.” It was good enough for me. I turned away, and a devious smile came to my face. I had just gotten away that time—just like a professional would—and felt proud.

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That night at dinner I couldn’t resist glancing at my ingenious hiding spot, and could have sworn my mom caught my eye. After that small incident I had to be more careful, and decided not take any more chances. However, this was a task easier said than done. My mind urged me to just go over there and let everyone admire how perfect my hiding spot had been, but that would be foolish. I rushed through my

dinner and quickly excused myself as an excuse to get my mind off the tempting chocolate. As I got upstairs, my mind immediately went to the candy. I adjusted my blankets and was lulled to sleep by a wave of candy filled dreams crashing over me. I was rushed into a galaxy of chocolate bars, floating as perfectly as if they were clouds, meant to be there. My arm automatically shot out, grasping for some candy. My hands got nothing, and suddenly a black hole opened up. I struggled, swimming through space as easily as if the air was water, and escaped. The chocolate had a different fate. It was all sucked up, gone. My heart stuttered and threatened to fail. This felt real. My mind collapsed, and I was heart broken. *What if this was real?* My mind asked me. I dismissed the idea. It was impossible, but what if? I shuddered at the thought, too scary for me to hold on to, and it slipped away. Just as soon, the black whole contracted and exploded, rocketing candy. My demeanor settled, and I was calm again.

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The next morning, I woke up suddenly, and a smile crawled up my face. I rolled out of bed, and scampered down the stairs. Finally, after a long night, I could actually have some chocolate. I crept through the kitchen and approached my hiding spot. I pulled myself up to the cabinet and uncovered my candy.

*I swear I hid it here. I thought, it must be somewhere in here. It could definitely not be gone, could it?* I destroyed the cabinet, wrecked through it, showing no mercy to anything, and it ... was ... gone! Speechless, I ran up the steps, two at a time, and woke my mom. "Mommy, mommymy chocolate is gone. GONE!" I choked out as fast as I could. Somehow, my mom understood what I said, and comforted me, saying, "Michael, it's not all gone, is it?"

"YES, it is!" I hollered. "Nowhere to be found," I replied in a dead, flat voice. "Oh Michael, I'm so sorry; I ate it. I did," she admitted, as if I had her pinned against a wall. "WHATTTTTTTTTT!" My ears must have been clogged. But sure as day, she had said it. I tried to hold in the tears, but they broke through me, crushing me. This could not be happening. I helplessly ran back to the comfort of my bed, bawling my eyes out. It was as if I was crying away my worries, only to have them come back fiercer than ever. It had been mine, all mine, I thought, and pounded my fists against my pillow until they were red. *I will never forgive her!* I vowed to myself, and moaned myself back to sleep.

When I woke up, matters got worse. I thundered into my mom's room and said, "Mommy, I had this terrible dream." I sniffled, "You ate my chocolate bar ... WAIT! IT WAS TRUE!" I was fuming now. My throat hurt from yelling, and I didn't know what to do with myself. What I decided was the best choice I could think of, ignoring my mom, hating her forever.

After I calmed down, she asked, "Michael, are you sure you don't wanna talk?"

"NO, be quiet," I scolded her. Her face went red, and was shocked

"What did you just say?" she questioned. But all I could answer was "nananana," mocking her. And I ran downstairs.

I figured that she was getting back at me for not sharing, in a cruel way, and I didn't like it.

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For three whole days, my anger controlled me. At school, I was in a "shallow" mood, grouchy. When I got home, I ignored everyone. But one day I thought, *How hard would it have been to share?* This puzzled me, and the angel and devil went to war on my shoulder. I told them off, and realized that none of this would have happened if I had just shared a little. Maybe, just maybe, I deserved it. *This whole thing may have been my fault?*

Now, of course, I couldn't admit defeat now, but maybe I could call it a draw.

That afternoon, I talked to my mom. It was hard. But, finally, I realized that it was sensible. I wouldn't go so far as to apologize. That would be over the top. But just making things better with actions would be fine, I decided, and broke my personal vow. And in my mind my mom was forgiven, even if she may never know it.



## “Semper Fi” – Conor Ellis, Henry James Memorial Middle School, Grade7

There it was, the letter that was going to fill him with hate, hurt, and sadness. Sam stared at it, the only thing that stood out on the dark brown desk. The envelope was bright white, with the Marine Corps seal. The eagle, the globe, and the anchor, polished to the point that the golden color seemed to give a small glow inside the dreary tent.

Sam slowly peeled back the seal, opening the envelope. He started to read the heart-ripping letter which had been officially signed by the loyal General Thomas G. Kurk. What was actually five minutes felt like hours to Sam. Although he had known what the letter contained, it was still painful to read, like tearing open a wound that had not yet healed.

Sam stood and pinned the letter to the wall along with the seal. He turned around and ceremoniously marched forward. He sharply turned again and saluted. He barely held back the tears. “He should be here!” Sam snapped aloud, as he stared at his brother Frank's empty bunk. Overwhelmed, he ran out of the dark tent that ached of death. He was blinded for a few seconds as his eyes adjusted to the bright sunlight. Their tent seemed duller than the rest. “Duller from loss of life,” Sam muttered to himself, his voice now soft.

The trucks behind him were dropping off the men from their company who'd survived D-Day. It was like watching families reunite, “brothers in arms.” Private Mike Pedowski stumbled from a truck, his face smug and proud, like that of a war hero awaiting his parade. Sam knew Pedowski had left his brother on that beach, helpless. He navigated his way through the men, ready to burst out of his shy shell. He wanted to swear, beat, and tear at the man. Around him there were several men holding similar letters to the one pinned on his wall. All were stunned. His temper cooled, but for only a moment.

Pedowski was talking to his buddies when Sam reached him and overheard the conversation. “I wouldn't have left Miller there if he'd given me some ammo,” he gloated. “Now look at what he got himself into because he was a selfish brat!” Pedowski sneered, showing no care for the man's life, or death for that matter. His buddies looked at Sam. Embarrassed, they stared at the ground.

In an instant, Sam exploded with colorful descriptives that he had never before allowed himself to utter. These were followed by a spine crunching punch to Pedowski's gut. As fists flew between Sam and Private Pedowski, groups of men looked on, unwilling to interfere. Sam fell to the ground, his face flushed with anger. He held in the tears from all the pain, which only rose as the blood and sweat streamed down his face.

Pedowski raised his hands triumphantly. He then looked down at Sam. Snarling, he gave another skull-cracking jab to the face. He hadn't noticed Captain Williams, who now stood directly behind him. The large group was silent, unmoving. Captain Williams stepped up to Pedowski, grabbed his rank, and ripped it from his bloody uniform. “Pack up, you're leaving this base.” Captain Williams said disgustedly, “You are a disgrace to the Corps.”

Captain Williams helped Sam up off of the ground, using his own jacket to wipe the blood from his eyes. “Son, your brother was a hero.” The Captain smiled knowingly at Sam, and turned to the men. Loudly he told the tale of how Private Frank Miller had saved the lives of nine men. They had been trapped inside a Higgins Boat as the ramp stuck, when landing on the beach at Normandy. Sam listened with pride. He could feel his brother close to him once again, and no longer held back his tears.

As Sam packed Frank's belongings, he looked at the seal and smiled. “Semper Fi, baby brother,” he whispered, “Semper Fi.”



## **“The Survivor” – Savannah Higgins, Elizabeth C. Adams School, Grade 7**

*Based on a true story.*

It was a beautiful day in Paradise Valley, Arizona. They called it paradise for a reason, because nothing bad ever occurred. But on one particular day everything changed. It was July 16, 2006 when the first incident happened. His name was Michael Higgins; he was only eight-years-old. And he is my little brother.

Michael and our family decided to go for a swim on that fateful day, while my mom was at the grocery store, and would be back in an hour. Michael and our twenty-three-year-old sister, Lyndsay, were neck and neck, when all of a sudden Lyndsay ended up reaching her arm out and won the race.

Michael was furious and started bawling his eyes out, screaming, “That’s not fair! You have longer arms than I do. You cheated!”

I can remember him having a hard time breathing, and my dad trying to calm him down by speaking in his most gentle voice and putting his hands on his shoulders. Michael’s heart was pumping so hard that you could almost hear it through his bare chest. When he stopped crying, my dad let go of his shoulders and he fell back in the pool, hitting his head on the step.

I can remember everyone saying, “Michael, come on, get up! I know you’re faking it.”

Michael had faked fainting before to get attention. This time my dad looked into his eyes and saw them rolled back and knew it was the real thing. He carried Michael out of the pool, and Lyndsay, who was a life guard, started performing CPR. My dad told me to rush into the house and call 911. I did as I was told, and can remember crying so hard I couldn’t speak.

I then called my mom at the grocery store. I kept saying, “Michael, Michael, Mom, it’s Michael!”

My mom couldn’t understand, and thought that Michael had dropped my new pet rabbit, Pearl.

When she asked if the ambulance was there I replied, “yes.”

Right then and there my mom hung up the phone, left her cart full of groceries with the manager, and rushed to the house.

After what seemed like an eternity, Lyndsay got him breathing on his own, but he was still unconscious. Michael woke up in the middle of the fire fighters putting an oxygen mask on him. He was so scared that he was crying hysterically. He punched the firefighter in the face and tried to get away. They had to hold him down on the ground and continue treatment. Michael would not go on the stretcher alone, so they had to strap dad on it and put Michael on top of him. The poor firefighters had to carry Michael and my dad up a flight of stairs and into the ambulance. Finally, Mom came home, just in time, crying, and jumped into the ambulance with Michael.

When they got to the hospital, they had to run all these tests on his brain because they thought he had a seizure. They could not figure out what went wrong. My mom took him to a different hospital and found out he had a heart condition called CPVT, which stands for catecholaminergic polymorphic ventricular tachycardia. Or in plain English, exercise arrhythmias, which means when he exercises his heart beats too fast and causes him to go into sudden cardiac arrest.

We had to be very careful with him, and he had to go on heart medication. Every day mom would drop Michael off at school, and then drop me and my twin brother Daniel off at our school. We had to wait until he reached his class room before we could head off.

Nearly a year later, on April 16, 2007, we did the normal routine, but Michael was late for school. He started running to his classroom. Mom, Daniel, and I were not looking for just one second. When we looked back over, we saw a group of people surrounding what we thought was a basket or craft project the students were working on. So Mom had driven on to our school. In the middle of class Daniel and I saw fire trucks go past our school on the way to Michael’s. That was normal since we always heard fire trucks, but never near us.

When Daniel and I had got home from school, we saw my dad crying. He pulled us into the other room and told us that Michael had fainted, but this time was worse. He told us that his heart stopped for several minutes. The heroic school nurse got there carrying an external defibrillator with less than seconds

to spare; she shocked his heart back into rhythm. It was a miracle that he was still alive. Daniel and I were so upset with ourselves because that had not been a project; that was our little brother, Michael. Dad also told us that Michael had to have surgery immediately; the doctors will have to implant an internal defibrillator in his chest, so that if anything like this happens again the defibrillator will shock the electric current in his heart, and he will survive. We were very lucky that a doctor had donated a defibrillator to his school two weeks before the incident.

The same day Michael's story was in the newspaper and on TV. When we would go on walks around town, people would stop and ask if he was Michael Higgins, the miracle child. Michael liked all the attention he was getting, and told all the kids at school that he had been truly dead before. It was really the nurse who got all the publicity.

Nurse Donna Musser had said that he was clinically dead.

Police officer Rick Cookemboo said, "If it wasn't for her, that kid would have been gone." Officer Cookemboo also said that "before he was shocked he was in ventricular fibrillation, which can cause sudden death ..."

Michael told me, and the reporters that all he could remember was seeing pitch black and hearing a voice saying, "Michael, Michael, it's not your time yet. It's not your time to go." Then he woke up in the hospital.

My family is very lucky and grateful to have survived not one but two sudden cardiac arrests and lived to tell about it. Due to Michael's story, the community and our family helped donate fifty defibrillators to under-privileged schools in Arizona. You should love and cherish every moment you spend with your family, because you never know when it may be your last.



### **"A Soft Muzzle To Kiss" – Tessa Teardo, Memorial Middle School, Grade 7**

Passing exit sign after exit sign, my mother, father, and I drove seemingly endless miles in our rented Nissan X-terra. I tried to set my mind to something—reading a book, watching a movie, even the license plate game. But nothing would make me stop saying, "Are we there yet?" It seemed the more I thought about getting there, the longer the hours were. On top of it all, we hit traffic, adding an extra hour! But, when we finally did arrive, I was too delighted to even speak. "Welcome to West Virginia, Wild and Wonderful," the sign proclaimed. We'd planned to visit Meadowcove Farm in the morning, so I had to wait even longer! Tossing and turning in that unbearable hotel room bed, I lay awake, staring at the ceiling. In just hours, I would meet Pearl.

In the morning, I immediately dressed. After a sumptuous breakfast, we took the short drive around narrow and winding roads to the Poes' farm. My father turned into the driveway to reveal their country home, barn, and endless acres of gorgeous mountainside. Outside, the thundering hooves in the distance grew nearer as horses scrambled down the mountain. Six huge Friesians galloped willingly to the fence to welcome us, and Susannah and Steve met us in their driveway. Throwing my arms around Susannah's torso, I gave her a mammoth hug. Pointing to the barn, she said with the moisture of a tear growing in the corner of her eye (but these were tears of pure joy), "First stall on the left." Whipping around, I bolted to the barn.

Eyes fixed on that stall, I heard a neigh truly straight from heaven calling for me. That was music to my ears, a peaceful sound, the most wonderful sound ever heard. Pearl. My girl had awakened my soul. Pearl peeked her head out of the stall casually, and I gazed at her face. She was gray with black dots, a muzzle, and a long head. Her ears were very unique, curving inward at the tip, and had a little ball in the shape and color of a pearl. I reached out and touched her silky nose, embracing every second. I was awestruck by her beauty. Coming through the doorway, my parents, Susannah, and Steve followed me in, all with enormous smiles on their faces.

Opening the door, I began to brush Pearl. Her mane was sleek and thick, with never-ending waves. She had black legs, but they gradually grew gray as they went toward her body. Her eyes glistened in the sunlight, which was beaming through the window. The whole time I was with her in the stall, those eyes

never left me. Leading her out of the barn, we brought her into the ring and let her run loose. She was a firework just set off, and she danced across the meadow as if floating on a cloud. Power. Grace. Kindness. Pearl was everything you'd want in a horse. After a while, Susannah held Pearl and told me to lie over her back. With the help of Steve lifting me, I lay over Pearl's back, lovingly stroking her coat. "Now go ahead and swing your leg over," Susannah instructed. Carefully, I managed to do just that and was sitting on a two-year-old horse, bareback, and she was a perfect angel. This was very uncommon. "Congratulations. You're the first person on Pearl's back, Tessa. How does it feel?" Susannah asked. Speechless, all I could sputter out was, "awesome," as I wrapped my arms around her neck, taking in her perfume. The perfume of my dream horse. This extraordinary moment was a huge milestone in my relationship with Pearl.

Dr. Henderson, Meadowcove's veterinarian, was coming to provide seasonal shots. After doing this, he gave Pearl a complete checkup for us. Pearl was walked and trotted, her hooves tested and joints stretched. Following a two-hour examination, Dr. Henderson concluded Pearl was perfect. After Pearl received her vaccinations, the vet left, and we all huddled around Pearl's stall. "Ok, that's it, then. Pearl, welcome to the family," my father announced to the young filly, as he patted her sleek neck. "You mean we're getting her? She's mine?" I pleaded hopefully. Tearing the check from the checkbook, my father handed it to Susannah and said, "She's yours." Leaping for joy, I slid the stall door open and stuck my nose in her mane and breathed in deeply. Kissing her soft muzzle and giving her a bear hug, I couldn't contain my happiness. I could've jumped the moon ten times. It all seemed like a dream, but after coming back to reality, I realized I had a horse—but not any horse. I had Pearl, the Crabbet-Arabian/Friesian Cross I'd known and followed by photo updates from Susannah since she was born.

We traveled back to Connecticut, and Pearl started training with local horse trainer Larry Floyd to be "broke" to ride the following week. She was taught to walk forward, halt, trot, and canter—basic training for young horses. Susannah went to see Pearl often and videotaped her for me, sending the videos to us. I couldn't believe how my girl was improving. Around Thanksgiving, we drove the long ten hours back to West Virginia to visit Pearl and see first hand how she was progressing. Actually riding her for the first time, Pearl's stride was incredible. She was very calm and understood commands, a job well done for such a young filly. Pearl learned many valuable things during her training, and was soon ready to come home to Connecticut.



### **"Mistaken by Imagination" – Brett Fox, RHAM Middle School, Grade 8**

"Sam," my mother hollered from the kitchen. "Do you want your toast on white bread or wheat?" It was a tough selection to make this early in the morning, but I was tired of her making it on wheat bread. "I guess I'll have white bread this time," I replied from beneath my covers. This was the beginning of a typical weekend morning—me sleeping in late, my mother making me breakfast, and dragging my body down the stairs while still half-asleep. "Gee, Samuel," my mother boomed. I could tell she was frustrated by the way she used my full name. "Don't you think it would be a smart idea if you began to get your own breakfast rather than snoozing in bed all morning until your WAITRESS makes your breakfast?" There was a long, bashful pause. But then she proceeded, "I think it's time for you to ...." Our conversation ceased right then and there. Willie was calling.

I was in complete shock! Why had my mother all of a sudden gone insane on me? Maybe she hadn't had her coffee yet, or she was depressed because of a distressing thing that had happened. Either way, I knew not to get on her irritable side today. Oh yeah ... the phone. Better pick it up before it's too late. I swiftly grasped the phone in my hand and clicked the TALK button.

"Top of the mornin' to ya laddy!" I announced into the phone as I snatched my orange juice from the counter.

"Don't be such a buffoon," hissed my mother in the background.

"G'day mate!" Willie responded with an Australian accent. We always babbled on the phone with clever voices. "So you want to come over soon and tear up some dirt on my track?"

“That sounds like a great idea, except my mother is acting all crabby this morning and ordered me to clean my room before I do anything else.”

“Well, what time do you think you’ll be able to come over?”

“I’ll be done by 10:30 the latest, so you can expect me by then.”

“Sounds like a plan. See you in a few ... MATE!”

Cleaning my room was going to be a job full of hard work and dedication. If you were one of those neat freaks, you wouldn’t last a minute in my room. It contains a boatload of smelly clothes lying around, numerous snack bags and wrappers, and baseball cards strewn about. I scurried up the stairs like a chipmunk and down the hall into my bedroom. I was so used to the stench coming from my room that I had no trouble cleaning it. My mother, on the other hand, was so appalled by the smell that she vowed never to go in there again. I guess that’s why it hasn’t been cleaned in such a long time. Ten minutes had gone by, and I was left with one more task—to vacuum up the carcasses of the poor bugs who got trapped between the screen and the window.

Then I sprinted downstairs and out the door with my Redline, nearly colliding with my mom’s car.

As I zoomed down Elm Street, I could hear Willy’s Kawasaki 250F starting up its engine. The motor sounded like the smashing of a soda can, since he’s had it for four years and the bike was starting to wear down. I approached his driveway and observed him fly off his twenty-foot tabletop. He made it look as easy as pie.

“How’d you like that one?” he muffled through his helmet.

“Not bad, not bad. But I’d like to see a tail-whip first.”

“One tail-whip coming right up!” shouted Willy, mimicking a waiter. As he prepared for the daring trick, I perceived the creepy house that existed right next to Willy’s. The lawn was terribly overgrown and looked like it hadn’t been touched for years. Vines had started to wrap around the house, and weeds sprouted from every little crack. No one has ever seen the person who actually lives there. We’ve only seen a rusty van parked in the rutted driveway once in awhile.

“Hey Willie, what do you know about your neighbor, other than the ever-popular vampire theory?”

“Well, at night I’ve heard strange animal noises coming from somewhere inside the house. The scariest sighting I had was one night when I saw that a light was on and the shadow of a figure appeared to have mammoth arms and a giant head, like an ogre. That’s also when I heard the animal cries.”

“Do you have any ideas of why there would be animal cries?” I asked.

“Animal abuser!” we shouted simultaneously, imagining diabolical experiments on small critters.

“That’s exactly what I tried to tell my mom, but she didn’t believe me.” Right then and there, I changed the subject because he tends to spit when he gets nervous. I learned that the hard way.

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“Sammy, it’s time for you to go to the movie now,” said my mother.

“I’m on my way out the door right now.” Instead of taking my Redline, I took my brand new Pocket Rocket. It has a shiny red coat and a stunning pattern on the tires. The other parts on the bike are lustrous, and the motor sounds like a damaged chainsaw. As I whizzed down the street toward Willy’s house, I could hear the hooting of some owls, the scratching of branches, and the howling of the night wind. In the distance I saw the headlight of a car coming this way. All of a sudden, the car screeched to a stop. To see what had happened, I raced toward the scene. The car, not aware of what it hit, kept driving on. It was hard to see at this time of night, but it was clear to me that a mother fox had been killed. Her babies were ready to cross the street right behind her, but were so startled they scampered back into the woods. At this point, I didn’t know what to do. Willie apparently heard the noise too and rushed to my side.

“Poor little thing,” muttered Willy.

“It’s even worse that the driver just kept going,” I replied.

“Well ... what should we do?”

“Leave it to me, boys,” assured a woman who had snuck up behind us. Her voice startled us so badly I screamed like a little girl. She had a frail, wrinkly face sitting atop a sturdy frame. She smiled at us with her crooked teeth.

“Who ... who are you?” trembled Will.

“I’m here to help. Now let’s get these foxes in to my lab before they all get killed.” Right then I didn’t really care what her name was. I just wanted to follow the instructions she had given us. At this moment, Willy and I became nervous with each step toward the ominous house. We assumed she was the Creepy Man’s wife. She led us into a dim room in the basement full of beady eyes peering from inside their cages. I figured this must be where the unfortunate critters are kept for sinister experiments. We flipped on a light switch and gazed at a majestic hawk, a jittery raccoon, and a cowering rabbit. Suddenly the floorboards creaked and we spun around to see the lumbering shadow of the Creepy Man fast approaching.

“AAAGGGGGHHHHH!” we bellowed in unison, louder than the kid from *Home Alone*.

“Sheesh, you two really need to lay off the Skittles! Haven’t you guys ever heard of a wildlife rehabilitator?” She stood in the doorway wearing full protective gear: thick oversized gloves, a face shield, tall boots, and a leather apron. To our surprise, the myth of the creepy man was busted! She expertly handled the litter of foxes and settled them into their temporary den.

“Thank you for all your help, but we really need to get going or else we’ll miss the movie,” I kindly imparted as we sidestepped toward the door.

“But I insist you stay for some tea,” she cackled. Then she turned on one foot and called down the hall, “Honeeeey, can you please put on the kettle for ...” But before she could finish, we were already halfway down the road.



### **“Ms. Grayson” – Tatiana Varanko, Woodbury Middle School, Grade 8**

I can remember getting my last report card of the third grade year as if it were yesterday. I had been dreading it for a while. I wanted so badly to have Mrs. Amille as my fourth grade teacher, but she refused to have anyone who lived in my neighborhood in her class. I knew that since the school never put you with the same teacher as a sibling, I wouldn’t have Mrs. Marigold. This left me with one option. I didn’t want to believe it. She was hard, and mean. She yelled at kids for talking in the hallways and gave you the evil eye if you took too long at the water fountain. Everyone I knew who had her said that she was horribly mean.

I remember looking at my report card that day and having to hold back the tears that were welling up in my eyes. I had Ms. Grayson. The old hag made me cringe and run when I saw her in the hall. She was hunchbacked monster that made me afraid to go to the water fountain for a drink. It was too horrible to be true. Why me?

I can remember getting off the bus on the first day of school and seeing all of the other teachers in the sun, waving and welcoming, asking their new students how their summer was. I looked all around for Ms. Grayson. The witch was standing with the rest of my class against the cold brick school, her salon dyed red ponytail hanging limp and lifeless down the back of her ancient, wrinkled neck. Her sharp blue eyes had a kind of death glare to them that warned me to be quiet. I stood there beside her, wondering what I should do. Should I get in line? Should I introduce myself? Before I had time to decide, she snapped her head around and pierced me with her eyes.

“Name?”

She spoke in a tone so bland that it could put a person to sleep. I worked up my courage and in a small voice responded,

“Tatiana Varanko?”

It was more of a question than an answer.

“Okay. Welcome. Please get in line. If you would be so kind as not to talk, that would be great.”

Her voice sounded so monotone. I walked over to the line and saw my friend Megan. She looked positively petrified.

About fifteen minutes later, we were marching down the dim carpeted hallway towards the classroom. As I walked through the door, I began taking in my surroundings. On the left side of the classroom was a wooden shell of cubbies and the teacher’s desk.

At the front was a whiteboard and chalkboard. The right side of the room had shelves of books and many cabinets. To our surprise, she let us sit where we wanted. I took a seat in the back corner next to my friends, Emma and Megan. I stuck my shaking hand inside my chilled desk and found a box of crayons, a glue stick, and some pencils. I turned to show Megan what the school had given us this year and practically jumped out of my skin. There, on top of a bookshelf, sat a glass case with three snakes slithering around inside. Nearby were four slimy green frogs and two small turtles. Above them was a poster with a list of things not to do in the classroom. I hadn't even heard of most of them; they were so long!

The first day of school was mostly rules, so I really didn't get a taste of Ms. Grayson's teaching. I went home that day, still dreading the year to come. The second day, however, we began the learning process. The work was easier than I had anticipated, and we were allowed to whisper while we did our work. I began to think that maybe I was wrong about Ms. Grayson.

I sure was right about that! By the second week of school I began to actually like the shriveled old teacher and her class. She was strict, but in a good way. She controlled the class well, and was the kind of person that you would do anything to impress. She would tell us stories about when she started teaching. There was a big tree with nuts outside by the playground, and she would tell us how she used to take her students out there when the nuts had fallen, and how they would crack them open and eat the contents. That wasn't allowed anymore. One story she told us was about how she used to have her students ride their bikes to school on a scorching hot day and then ride bikes with them to a nearby ice cream shop to have a cool, creamy dessert after lunch.

In the winter time, when she had come outside during our recess time to watch us, she saw my friends and me playing in the snow. She came across the field and started to play with us. She taught us this game that she used to play when she was a child called fox and geese. We carved a giant wagon wheel in the snow with our feet, spokes and all. It was a game much like tag, the fox chasing the geese around the wheel. If you stepped off the lines or were tagged you became the fox for the next round. The center where the lines crossed was base. I can still remember the bell ringing and walking back to class with rosy red stinging cheeks, but at the same time wishing we were still playing. That is one of my favorite memories.

That winter we also studied the Iditarod, a sled dog race in Alaska. We were the only fourth grade class that studied it. Ms. Grayson loved the Iditarod and Huskies. We were all given a person to follow through the race, and did research on them, their team of dogs, and where they were in the competition. I enjoyed that unit and really got into it because I love dogs and though that the Iditarod was an interesting topic. In the end, my musher (racer) won, and I won a stuffed Husky from Ms. Grayson. I still have that doll today.

Around March, I started to have a hard time at home. My dog, Bentley, was getting more and more aggressive as the weeks passed, snapping and lunging at you when you tried to pet him. My parents decided that he was too dangerous to have with kids in the house, and decided to give him up for rescue. We would have a couple more weeks with him, so I focused on the time we had together, rather than what it would be like when he was gone. However, my mom came home one night, and his eyes glazed over. He bared his teeth, which were sharp as razors, and sprung at her. His teeth caught onto her arm. Luckily, she was wearing a really thick sweater, so her skin wasn't pierced. Regardless, we had the man come and get him the next day. I sobbed all that day, and when I got to school the next day my eyes were red and bloodshot. Ms. Grayson asked me what was wrong. I told her what had happened, and she comforted me. She told me that the same thing had happened to her. It felt good to be able to vent to someone who understood what I was going through.

Ms. Grayson wasn't very good with computers and technology, so my friend Megan and I helped her out. She loved the singer Norah Jones, so we set up her Windows Media Player and downloaded Megan's Norah Jones CD to the computer. When she found out she was so happy. When she smiled you could see it in her eyes. The happiness danced across her face, and her whole face glowed. We came back early from recess one day and found her dancing around the room singing along with it. I think she really loved it.

Although she retired at the end of my seventh grade year, I will never forget Ms. Grayson and my fourth grade experience. I learned a lot from her, and not just math and science. I learned about values, life

lessons, and how you should not judge a book by its cover. What is inside that book is what really counts. It could be something really special right in front of your eyes, and you will never know unless you take the time to look inside. No matter how hard and deep you have to look, you will find good in everyone. Ms. Grayson is the best teacher that I ever had, who really loved teaching and reaching out to students. She made my fourth grade year truly something to remember!



### **“My Valentine” – Jessica Lipponen, Henry James Memorial School, Grade 8**

As I walked to the empty stall where my horse Val had once stood, the harsh reality of his death set in. It was only at this moment when I realized he was really gone that it hit me just how much he had meant to me. I knew the loss of this magnificent horse would affect me forever and there would never be another horse that could fill the hole that had been torn in my heart by our separation. However, thinking about him also made me appreciate the opportunity I had to enjoy such a wonderful horse.

The sun rose on the morning of our first horse show together. I could see the sun’s reflection cast out on the cold concrete floor of the stable. The smell of horses filled the air, and the breeze gently blew through the barn. Val came out of his stall quite willingly, sensing that something special was happening because he normally wouldn’t see me until later in the day. I slowly brushed his red-brown fur that was sleek, shiny, and soft to the touch. I carefully ran a comb through his black, flowing mane and breathtaking, bushy tail. His eyes stared into mine, filled with the willingness to work that he always had. At the show, I placed my saddle upon his broad back and stroked his sweet face. The announcements echoed through the air along with summer birds chirping. I could almost taste the freshness of the air as I listened to the clip-clop of his hooves along the rough gravel road. We entered the ring, and I felt very nervous because I had never shown him before. His step stretched out below me, his neck rounded. My ears rung with the sound of spectators commenting on the majestic presence he carried into the ring that was unlike that of any other horse. His canter stride was smooth, like gliding, as usual. The dust of the ring rose and made my mouth feel dry and taste like dirt. My heartbeat accelerated as we sailed over the first jump. Before I knew it, I had gone around the whole course with every jump feeling as powerful as the first. I was relieved to have finished the course successfully, and marveled by this unique experience of jumping Val. We ended up going home with an exquisite champion ribbon and an unforgettable sense of excitement and pride.

It was days like this that filled my life with happiness and appreciation to have such a powerful bond with such a special horse. However, as I stood before his empty stall, I realized that those days would be no more. I remembered sadly that the clip-clop of hooves and cheerful whinnies would no longer be Val’s. It occurred to me that I would never feel his soft, silky fur again, and that I would never again look into those eyes that held such a joy and willingness to work and please. Soon I felt the tears stinging at my eyes and rolling down my cheeks to create a sorrowful taste on my lips. I reached my hand out to touch the cold latch I had once opened to get Val out for a ride, and the tears began to flow. His stall seemed so dark and large without his handsome body to fill its walls with warmth. The wind billowed through the four empty walls, carrying with it the haunting whinnies of the horses around. A feeling of sadness unlike any other I’ve ever felt before imbued me, and my heart felt broken. I wished to see his body there again; I wished I hadn’t had to say goodbye so soon. His memories will always make him alive in my heart, and I will always be grateful for the time I did get to spend with him. I knew I couldn’t have held onto something so special and beautiful forever, but I just wasn’t ready to let go of him so soon.



# *High School, Grades 9-12 Poetry*

## **"Gray of Memory" – Sarah Jacinto, Arts at the Capitol Theater, Grade 9**

Tapered threads thrust  
To soot cap  
Gold that pours itself to darkness,  
Leaves a mouth to feed on shadow  
Bright headstone teeth  
Open in awe.  
Insect soldiers of the deep green  
Sing straight their bentward blades.  
The god with light for eyes  
Looking through his cover of safety  
Strikes impassioned grief—  
Giant's ribbons burst apart  
To ancients nodding  
Angel caught in grays of time.

As darkened shroud glides away,  
Drop of yellow roused  
Revealing a marble stone  
Etched with memory  
Soaking words in Death's color,  
Pulled from day's awkward fingers,  
A refusal to be consoled.  
The breathless form it crushed  
Awaits decay  
From careless time.



## **"Shot Through the Soul, Scarred Through the Heart" – Victoria Bilcik, Brookfield High School, Grade 9**

She's scared,  
scared to death,  
scared to face the truth,  
scared to face the darkness that surrounds her,  
the black walls closing in on her heart,  
and the unending, unforgiving emptiness  
that's held her captive for so long.

Black walls, closing in,  
tighter, tighter,  
mocking every move she makes  
because what she does is always flawed,  
and what she says  
is always wrong,  
and who she is  
will never be good enough.

And what's a broken girl supposed to do  
during times like these,  
when she's running full speed  
in the wrong direction?  
And all she needs is a shoulder to cry on,  
but there's no one left to hold on to.  
When the one who's supposed to be there  
just isn't,  
and the one who's supposed to care  
just doesn't,  
do you understand how empty that feels?

Show down,  
I'm fading out, falling apart,  
as an innocent heart's shattered  
into millions of unrepairable pieces,  
and you still don't, can't,  
won't understand  
what you've done to me.



**“Battle on the Turf” – Maddi Nicholson, Simsbury High School, Grade 9**

Showers  
Of cheers, and tears.  
All together, a mixed palette  
Of color, waiting to see the art,  
Us, the painters create.  
The pounding of all hearts and feet alike. Spikes  
Drilling against our numbered land.  
They're stamping their name onto our territory.  
We All thirst for the same  
Goal,  
Two goals.  
100 perfect-green yards apart. Reflecting the  
Bright suns on posts  
Shedding light on our battle, yet providing no clarity.  
They  
Are the impartial refs. The  
Wings of Hope Driving,  
Hindering, while  
Whistling through our reddened legs.  
Standing on the Tewnty-Five I'm clenching my  
k  
c  
s i  
t

As if all would be reached by the  
Hope of one Freshman. And although  
My legs clad in black and blue, feel  
Isolated,

The  
Two,  
Are aching to Rush onto the glossy Green.  
But that is only a dream, for I am only a freshman.  
Us vs. Them.  
Blue-Gold vs. Red.  
Talent vs. Luck. Which will prevail?  
Six Sixties left in overtime, they  
Have the Apple of our eyes. It  
Echoes against all wood as it  
Breaks down Time.  
Five-Thirty Sixties remain,  
The apple is called back  
To Its tree, Its home. Our farmer  
Denies Its Reentry.  
I burst into joy, adding to the eruption—  
Feeling fervor in my fingers and toes.  
One hope might just mean victory! I grasp  
k  
c  
s i tighter.  
t  
Five Sixties left,  
Feet once light, become laden with  
themselves.  
A Corner is ruled; all line up.  
Only the suns are whispering and making  
noise.  
The Gun is fired. All Rush. All are low. All  
is gone. 2-1.



**“Matriarch” – Laura Salvatore, Bacon Academy, Grade 10**

I wrap myself in her worn coat,  
this crazy woman  
who gave birth to my mother.  
  
What was she before I knew her?  
  
I see a young blonde woman  
walking down the sidewalk  
of a black and white world.  
  
The man that was her brother

died in that green uniform,  
the one that hangs forever in the dusty attic.

Sometimes, she says his ghost walks behind her,  
and that she can hear leaves  
crunching under his boots

Then she looks away,  
and I see the pictures behind her eyes;  
her and her brother,  
laughing as they swung arms around each other's  
shoulders.



**“The Carolinian in Me” – Hailey Aguero [a.k.a. Kit Kat Watson], Newington High School, Grade 10**

I found that spring time is usually when I write best.  
When I walk among the flowers just budding,  
pursing their petals to whisper secrets to each  
other.

They'll sing about each other:  
about the lazy daisies  
and the shy violets;

the yawning morning glories  
and the rainbow assort of tulips.

I'll write what they say so that the world may hear  
them.

I'll walk through the forest and look for no-one  
because he is just as lost as I am.

No-one will write about me  
just like I will write about him.

It's a common artistic exchange,  
contrariwise.

I'll walk by the beach, letting my feet submerge in  
hot sand.

While others my age let their skin catch cancer

and gossip about the latest he said she said,  
I'll kneel down by the shore and write about  
the boat beneath a sunny sky,  
lingering onward dreamily  
in an evening in July.

I'll also make mention how the poor little oysters  
were curiouser than the cat—  
the cat that grins and makes sure to warn you  
that if it really doesn't matter where you want to get  
to,

then it really doesn't matter which way you go.

Likewise, I'll muse about spending time sipping tea  
while the Hatter and the Mad March Hare both  
ponder

at who has it now that I've spent it.

If you, by chance, happen to find time,  
don't scare it away.

Be sure to make a good use of it  
and be sure not to waste it.



**“Sustained Living” – Thomas Hart, The Gunnery School, Grade 10**

His pen glides across  
The paper, aided by the  
Ball point. It stains  
With machine-like accuracy  
Imaginary sentences spill out  
A flood breaking over the  
Levee, tearing down all walls  
The writer is now pensive.  
In full swing he must not stray  
Far from his theme.  
Words unwritten, fictions still  
Yet to be conceived. All  
This for sure, waiting.

In his mind imagining a  
Lone elk or deer, on the  
Outside of the herd  
The clever wolves, only  
Clever to survive, planning  
The creature's demise, and for  
Themselves, a feast.  
The writer sees the four-legged  
Prey, rigid with fear, its

Ears perked up, nose twitching.  
The writer can see his prey  
But cannot move. The imaginary  
Pen, the imaginary sentences, all imagined

The paralysis is unnerving  
For the writer knows he will  
Not survive, if the pen neglects  
The paper, and a harmony of  
Flowing words is not achieved

Yet he waits for days for  
Words to come within reach. For  
Ideas to stretch their necks  
Out of holes in the ground, where  
He may snatch them up in his  
Salivating jaws, and lives on.

Such is the hide and seek nature  
Of inspiration, a furtive thing  
A shy component at the most  
Yet he claws at his mind with  
Fingers bleeding and nails braking,

Desperate, trying to find sustenance.  
And they do not come. The  
Thoughts so cleverly thought of,  
The ideas clinging for dear life  
To whatever they can hold on to  
Paragraphs and verses run by  
But the writer is too busy  
Digging with bloodied fingers  
And broken fingernails.

The hawk may seek the rabbit  
As the lion may seek the gazelle  
The poet a poem, and the  
Musician a sound. Something,  
To sustain life.

Hours, days, months spent writing  
Eyes staring off in space, the  
Predator's always alert, the student's  
Half closed. Fishing for a hook,  
to arm an essay, a barb to sink  
into the soft roof of a reader's  
Mouth, then reeled in.

in rabid frenzy, dogs tear at  
the bodies, those who could  
not find the things,  
So necessary to life.  
Dante shivers at the thought,  
A hell far worse than his own  
For he has not imagined this  
Inferno. An empty space filled  
With nothing. The wall reached  
And never mounted by philosophers

Waving their flags, of rationality  
And irrationality.

He relaxes, his prey caught  
Trapped, on paper, for all to see.  
Stuffed and mounted, the severed heads  
Stare lifelessly; they know when it is over.

But does the writer?  
When all thoughts exhausted  
The traveler comes to the  
Destination, weary souls stare  
Upon his heavenly gates, only  
To be torn away  
Looking back down their traveled  
Path, the eyes watching and  
So, the hunter became the hunted

The oh-so-clever wolves,  
Encircling, backing him into a corner  
Chest rising and falling rapidly,  
His heart intent on stealing as  
Many last heartbeats as it can,  
For it knows it will be torn  
Forth, ripped out of his chest  
Cavity, and crushed in the jaws of the hungry.

The powerful, stripped bare  
The feared, overcome  
The unknown, known  
The bodies of the fallen burned  
And so the words were written  
The writer allowed for the time,  
To continue.



### **“Music of the Earth” – Lily Fleisher, Granby Memorial High School, Grade 11**

In the center of the Universe,  
In the soft, virescent grass,  
amidst the dry wind of Indian summer,  
I lie,  
and I listen  
to the music of the Earth,  
and to the beating pulse  
of my antique soul.  
I feel the drum beat of the tribal chief,  
resonating through the hills,  
beckoning the melody  
of an autumn rain.

I hear the song of a blithe child,  
marveling at the beauty  
of a fantastic new world.  
I see the larks above me,  
spreading russet wings,  
and chirping the tune  
of a spring still young.  
I hear the working ditty of the diligent woodpecker,  
the subversive slither of the rebellious adder,  
the melodious mirth of a laughing brook.  
In the shifting winds,  
I feel the hushed murmurs of my ancestors,

mouthed mystifying hymns of the Old World,  
the shadows of what has once been.

In this tall, sweet grass,  
I lend my ear to the carols of humanity,  
as the businessman whistles on the way to the office,  
as the mother warbles a lullaby to a sleeping babe,  
as the poet inscribes lyrics that the world will never hear.

I hear the muezzin's call from the mosque's minaret,  
the angelic refrain of the gospel choir,  
the rabbi's chants in a silent synagogue,  
the meditative "Om" of Tibetan monks.

I catch the wail of a saxophone  
in the midnight subway station,  
the twang of a guitar  
on a rustic front porch,  
the sultry tones of a jazz singer  
in the deserted cafe,  
the rock band's throng of fans,  
in the crowded arena.

I listen to the legato murmurs of dotting lovers,  
to the staccato pangs of warring soldiers,  
to the growth pains of a population.

I feel the crescendo and decrescendo of civilizations,  
the key change of a shifting Universe,  
the green sunlight upon crimson valleys.

I hear the silent sound of words unspoken,  
of songs unsung,

of choices too deft to be noticed.

I feel the binding tie

between all these sounds,  
harmonies,  
melodies,  
sharps and flats.

For the song is one,

In the soft, green grass,  
between the vibrant city  
and the dull sprawl of Suburbia,  
between the rowdy nightclub  
and the empty cafe,

between mauve nights  
the citrus-tinted mornings,  
in the center of the meadow,  
in the center of the nation,  
in the center of the world,  
in the center of the soul of the Universe.

And we are bound as one,  
by the shifting seasons,  
by the rhythmic tide,  
by the heartbeat of the Earth.

And so as I lie

in the virescent grass,

I am nothing,

and yet I am everything.

for my voice is a note  
in the symphony of the Earth.



### "Ferns" – Cara Dorris, Glastonbury High School, Grade 11

School taught you they're sad plants,  
the only tissue ones  
to never seed or flower,  
never bloom.

When spring began,  
in all its fast and surging urgency,  
you watched that girl who sang by the pool.  
You waited for your stem to spore longing.  
For you spiny-leaved chest  
to heave against the rock  
inside it.

In spring  
you tried to love him less.

You waited for the fern flower every year.

On *Ivan Kupala Day*, your Russian grandmother  
told you to search with her.

You fell into the soil still wet with rain.  
Your fingers rose and dug  
in their broken chord arpeggio,  
but your arms were left dirt-spattered.  
Cold fingers shook  
for what you couldn't find.

You waited, you waited,  
you waited for your fingertips  
to itch for breasts  
and mouth to crave  
pink lips.  
The tongue like burnt honey  
or guilt.



**“Song of Myself” (Inspired by “Song of Myself” by Walt Whitman) – Nakia Jones,  
Cooperative Arts & Humanities Magnet High School, Grade 11**

**Section 1 & Section 2**

“I am there,”  
you are there,  
we are here.

One mind,  
one heart,  
one plain,

two electric bolts of energy  
wrapped up in one another.  
Feeling each other.  
Loving each other.  
One with each other .....

“I felt its soft jolt”

Run through my being,  
touch my soul,  
ignite the fire  
within me;  
Spark my creativity.

The works of great writers embedded  
in my DNA; Creating one powerful  
Artist: giving sustenance to a world  
Malnourished.

Feed them the works of Whitman, Frost, Angelou,  
and more;  
Go deep into their souls,  
their minds,  
their beings,  
Let them feel the hands of poetry through me .....

**Section 3**

“The clear light plays”  
on the panes of my window.

Light penetrating the blinds.  
light so warm,  
light so bright,  
light so overpowering that  
It drives the darkness

away.

Dust particles intertwining,  
Dancing, f l o w i n g.  
Filling the room with new organisms,  
New life  
New insight.

**4. Interview with a Campfire**

We should go into the woods, journals in hand and we should  
write until we have squeezed out all the fairy juice  
in our beings, pages soaked with the ink of creativity, d

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down to the dusty forest floor, giving it life. The fire flares  
and the smoke of burning wood fills the air; dancing mixing with  
the fragrance of the howling wind tossing and turning  
above  
our heads.

Fire singing, *crackling*, fluttering,  
igniting the inspiration in us all. Heat beating against the trees,  
smoldering them with the essence of our writings,  
    leaving our mark on the earth.  
Forever there waiting to be ignited once again.  
Generations of us will                      pass and more  
of us will come; Setting the trees ablaze once again, wetting  
the earth with our words, bringing life to it!  
Raising the words of the past from  
the dead: New writers growing old words and growing new sprouts of poetry,  
beginning the journey.

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### 5. A Writer's Sonnet

What makes a writer write? Inspiration,  
Coming from all over the universe.  
Words intertwining across the nation  
Make movies; putting flow in a cool verse

Using keyboards, papers, pencils, pens; Kat  
Teaching poems of Walt that will not end  
Songs of Ourselves; our book will be called that  
Teacher teaching poems that will transcend

Rappers, poets, artists, leaving their mark  
Rhymes left in this place of infinite time  
Taking you to a place of sublime art  
Blank pages waiting for words; all mine

For generations to come; forever  
Available now to you whenever ...

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### 6. The Last Poem

My mind is an enigma of creativeness  
One page at a time  
Weaving words from the  
Past to the present

This poem is not for me to entertain you  
It was not created to take away your free thought  
This, the last poem, is to evoke thought in and of itself

Thoughts of new creative, of outlet, of change, of a new distinction  
Thoughts of the words of the wise, thoughts of your own  
Not corrupted but counterfeit words but sprouted by  
Ideas of archaic, gifted, nuance: grown from the last poem



**“Where She Stands” (after Van Gogh’s 1882 “Girl Under Trees”) – Victoria Chen,  
E. O. Smith High School, Grade 12**

he stands before the easel,  
shuts his eyes, listens.  
he hears the silence of a golden clearing,  
feels the moss creep at the roots of trees,  
takes note of the footsteps of glowing yellow  
strangers,  
he sees people in the shadows.

the sky holds yellow, black, green, blue, orange.  
the forest floor murky, dainty,  
a compilation of rotting corpses,  
ruminants of oak leaves, bark, mice, deer.  
dear.  
he holds the woman dear,  
calls her darling,  
dresses her in a bright white frock,  
covers her hair with a yellow red bonnet,  
adds light to keep her warm.

her warm hands exude orange,

leave prints on living logs,  
she stands before him while he,  
paintbrush in hand,  
cannot stand the distance between them.  
him and the girl under the trees,  
she stands where he may not stand,  
she stands under trees, the girl under trees.

he plants faces in the shadows,  
keeps the landscape spare, clean.  
the ground beneath where she stands writhes,  
rough strokes,  
blotches of oil on canvas.  
She stands  
with one orange hand on bark,  
his hand, paintbrush in hand,  
moves towards her hand where she stands,  
and for one moment,  
they meet.



**“The Vigil” – Nicolle Hill, E.O. Smith High School, Grade 12**

I ran downward so quickly  
That I was running on top

of the frozen water that coated  
the frost-bitten ground and created jewels

upon the windows, where you  
stood, watching.

Pieces fell, torn away from  
the white cotton candy above

and into my mouth, the watery sweetness  
dissolving on my tongue.

I looked down and saw how perfectly  
the powder stuck together

and I began to roll, swirled paths  
followed behind me filling

the emptiness of the open field.  
Three balls more oval than round

were stacked, one on top of the other,  
two sticks gathered from the barren trees.

I stood back to acknowledge my creation  
but found myself frowning,

because it had no eyes, no mouth, no sign  
of warmth. It was just a frigid body

in the middle of nowhere. I climbed  
up the hill and saw you were no longer

at the window. I made it to the glass door  
and there you were,

A scarf, eight pieces of coal and a carrot.  
You were always watching.



**“Guardian” – Annie Settle, Watertown High School, Grade 12**

there is a man who sits in the back of your car  
with his scruff and dark eyes  
he reminds you of that tough guy actor  
with the big heart  
he smells like beer and cinnamon  
like your uncle's house on Christmas  
he smokes, and he scowls  
grunts when you run a red light  
laughs gruffly at your parking jobs  
he's always there

he's there when the girls pile in  
for Friday night fun  
he grumbles but climbs into the trunk unseen  
to make room for the laughing crew  
you feel his dark eyes glaring  
at the back of your head  
you laugh and sing along  
but keep your eyes on the road

he's there when that boy slips in at 3 a.m.  
whose longing gaze burns your cheek and neck  
and lips whisper empty promises  
and leave smoldering kisses on your skin  
wanting hands pull you toward the backseat  
but the scowling figure sits there, unyielding  
you say you can't, and bring him home

he's there coming home from work one day  
exhaustion weighs on your shoulders  
like a hundred chains  
one heavy tear slowly rolls  
from eyes straining to stay open  
headlights approach  
gleaming like a mad cat  
who's failing out of school  
whose mom failed out of rehab  
whose dad failed its mom  
who's failing—  
suddenly strong hands grip your own  
swiftly turn the wheel back into the right lane  
out of the path of the angry, roaring cat  
one shaking hand held by two strong ones



# High School, Grades 9-12 Prose

“A Wrinkle in Life” – Sarah Wiegert, Bristol Eastern School, Grade 9

As I walked into the book store, smelling the clean, crisp pages of the newly printed books and coffee sitting on the table at the café, hearing the tap of people typing around me and seeing the sight of little kids sitting in the corner reading, I ran my fingers over the books and stopped. There it was—*A Wrinkle in Time*. I opened its hard cover and immediately remembered the grief that caused me to pick up that book.

“We’re getting divorced.” She said it in a way like it wasn’t a big deal, but it was. My whole world was crashing down around me, and all I could do was watch. My sister instantly began sobbing. I’ve always hated watching others cry, and I didn’t want to be there, so I left. I ran to my room without letting my mom finish, pretty much slamming the door in her face. I sat there for a while just thinking.

Then I saw it collecting dust in the bookshelf. I was a really good reader, but I never got into it. The books our school assigned for us always seemed so useless, but the teacher said this was a really good book. She told me it was a kind of getaway, and that’s what I needed—an escape.

**“It was a dark and stormy night.**

***In her attic bedroom Margaret Murry, wrapped in an old patchwork quilt, sat on the foot of her bed and watched the trees tossing in a frenzied lashing of the wind.”***

I was there with her, experiencing her feelings and thoughts. I didn’t have to worry about my problems, only helping Meg solve hers, watching her brother get made fun of for being different, meeting Calvin and Mrs. Whatsit. The book took me to the world of *A Wrinkle in Time*. I read for what seemed like days, really merely only hours. It felt amazing to be able to get away from my own sorrow and see that maybe I wasn’t the only one with a messed up family.

**“Her heart tried to beat; it gave a knife-like, sideways movement, but it could not expand.”**

That’s what it was like, like my heart wasn’t working properly. I had reached rock bottom. Every day was a struggle to get out of bed. At such a young age my parents didn’t expect it to hit me as hard as it did. They were more worried about my sister, but I knew everything that was going on, could hear them fighting quietly, and didn’t want to be home. For the next couple of days, it was like a hammer pounding at my head. It seemed as though my head was pounding harder than my heart. These headaches would last all day and night, simply from stress and anxiety.

**“And we’re not alone, you know children,’ came Mrs. Whatsit, the comforter.”**

But that’s what I felt, completely alone. There was no Mrs. Whatsit. I had no one to confide in other than my books. They let me be someone I wasn’t, someone happy. As I read more and more, the actual world seemed more of a bad dream than what it really was—reality. My books became my truth. I would spend hours at a time locked in my room, away from the noise and anger. It was like a sanctuary for me, knowing as soon as I got home I could go and break away from this nightmare called life.

**“They were talking and laughing all at once ...”**

I missed it so much, the pure joy of knowing my family was whole and happy. I knew, unlike Meg and her family, my parents wouldn’t find each other once more, that it was over. I still miss it today, but I understand why. And I’ve overcome the grief. I am happy.

Seeing this book today reminds me of why I read. It’s my escape; it always has been. Although I don’t read to escape now, I know that it’s there. Yes, I may be running, but sometimes a little running can do some good.



## “Runner’s High” – Hayley Kolding, Canton High School, Grade 9

Kate leers at the curly-haired girl who currently occupies seventy percent of my beanbag chair. “You’re up, Emma. Truth or dare?”

Emma raises her eyebrows and grins. “Dare.”

Kate snickers as she reaches into her pocket and pulls out a cell phone, presenting it to Emma with a flourish.

Emma’s still smiling, but her face turns a seriously nasty color. How can a girl who uses that much blush turn that *gray*?

“We dare you,” Kate crows, “to call Chris. And sing. As soon as he picks up. We don’t really care what. Something ABBA should do.”

God, they’re bad. Poor Emma. Having to turn down a dare is almost as bad as ... as what? As bad as riding to school with your parents. As walking out of the bathroom with a piece of toilet paper stuck to your shoe. As bending over so that everyone can see that your underwear is printed with frolicking kittens and stars.

She swallows. “Okay. How about ‘Honey Honey’?”

Wait, *what*?

They all start laughing as Emma picks up the phone and scrolls through Kate’s contact list, then hits a button.

A tinny voice emanates from the speaker.

“Hullo?” Oh, God, this is it. It’s Chris. What’s she going to do? There’s still time. Just say you’re wondering about the algebra homework. That’s all. No embarrassment. No regrets.

Emma opens her mouth. “*Honey honey, how you thrill me, a-ha, honey honey ....*”

I turn bright red, and I’m not even the one singing to a *boy* on the phone.

“*Honey honey, nearly kill me, a-ha, honey honey ....*”

Chris’ whoop is loud enough for us to hear in crystal clarity. “Do I *really*?”

Emma hits the “end” button and all of the girls assembled here on Kate’s bedroom floor throw their heads back in laughter. I laugh too, but not quite so hard. I wouldn’t want my new teammates to hear me snort.

Eventually, the cackling dies down and Emma rounds on me. “I sang, Freshman. What are you gonna do? Truth or dare?”

I bend my head down as everyone else turns to look at me. This is it: time for the newbie to make a fool of herself.

“Pass,” I whisper.

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I can’t believe I’m doing this. Why on earth did I sign up for cross-country in the first place? Did I seriously think this would be *fun*? Because this is *so* not the barrel of monkeys Mom promised it would be. If anything, it’s a barrel of rabid lemurs with bad breath and fangs. Nope, no Curious George here.

I swear I’m going to quit as soon as this race is over.

I’ve never been in so much pain in my life. My feet hurt; my legs kill; my lungs are bursting. I swear I’ve been running for at least an hour, but somehow, I’m only a mile in. Two-point-one to go. Two-point-one miles of agony.

I just don’t understand it. How can people *want* to do this? Why would anyone *choose* to feel this way, like I’m going to die and now it’s just a question of whether my lungs will explode or my heart will fail first?

For the record, I’m betting it will be my lungs.

I can’t do this.

People say that running feels like flying, but if this is flying, it’s a wonder birds ever leave the nest. No, I’m not flying; I’m dying. I’ll just black out here on the side of the trail. Coach will find my body after the

race, and she'll have to tell my parents I'm dead. *Then* they'll be sorry. *Then* they'll be sorry they didn't let me do chess club as my sport.

One mile left. A whole *mile*. There is *no way* that I can finish this. I'm dead already, and everyone knows that zombies can't run.

But they can dance ....

Wait, *what is this?* I'm *smiling!* I can feel it! I'm running a race and my head hurts and my legs hurt and my lungs hurt and I can't even see the finish line, but I'm *smiling!*

About dancing zombies!

God, I'm twisted.

But now I've got *Thriller* playing on a loop in my head, and somehow, I don't feel so absolutely horrid.

Terrible, but not *horrid*.

... *Cause this is thriller, thriller night ... ba-da-ba-da-ba-da-dum, ba-dum ba-dum, ba-dum ....*

I don't even know all the words.

... *toniiiiight ...*

I'm rounding a corner now and—OH, MY GOODNESS! No way! I can actually see someone! I'm catching up! *What is this? I'm catching up!*

She's wearing a blue uniform, with a black streak of sweat running between her shoulder blades. I'm close enough now to hear her huffing and puffing laboriously. And she's going so slowly ....

Five more strides and I'll pass her.

C'mon, don't speed up, girl ....

YES! I PASSED HER! I actually *passed* somebody!

I'm so happy I could sing.

Maybe the zombies will be up for karaoke after I finish.

*Which should be soon, because now I can see the FINISH LINE!*

So close ... Almost there ...

There's a clock on the side of the straightaway; the seconds flying by faster than I can register. The minutes, though, are clear. Twenty-nine something. I might actually break thirty. My body is dying, but I don't care anymore. I'm going to push this. I can do it.

I sprint. I sprint the straightaway and look up as I cross the finish line: 30:01. But really, so what? It's over.

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*It's over.* I can't believe I did that. I ran a race. *I finished.* Second to last, but who cares? Diane *won* the race, but now she's the first to come over to hug me.

"Did you hear that girl behind you?" she asks excitedly. "She was all, 'I would've done better if I'd known that stupid *witch* was gonna *beast* it at the end!'"

She thought I *beasted* it?

I laugh. "She meant 'stupid zombie.'"

Okay, I know it isn't a funny comment. I mean seriously, I am usually capable of telling a joke that's actually amusing. But for some reason, it sounds hilarious to me just now, what with my lovely new zombie fixation. And even though the others don't know how I've spent the last third of the race with *Thriller* looping on some internal track, they laugh too. And then now that we're laughing, we can't stop. It's uncontrollable. I actually snort.

Oddly enough, I'm not even embarrassed.

-----  
I am covered in dirt. Absolutely filthy. My uniform will never be maroon again. I'm not even going to begin to describe my lovely new hair-do. And my teeth? I'll bet even they have mud on them now, because I spent the whole ride down that hill with my mouth wide open in laughter.

Yeah, I know it's bad form to roll down hills when you're a fourteen-year-old girl, a high-schooler, perfectly respectable.

Heehee. Nobody that saw me just now is ever going to call me respectable again. And I don't give a flying fig. Why should I? I've never had so much fun in my life.

I've got to admit, there's something to be said for running if it can lead to this much whoa-there-Tonto-I'm-feeling-kind-of-crazy-and-I-like-it-ness.

When I started laughing back there at the finish line, something in me kind of snapped. That little part that makes me want to look normal and proper? Gone. It died. Maybe I'll have a funeral later, say some nice words. At that moment, though, I was just too busy celebrating.

Diane noticed. She got all excited and said, "Alice! You're like ... CRAZY! Yeah! C'mon, we've got to *celebrate!*" Then she grabbed my hand in one of hers and tugged me away from the finish line, waving at the others to follow. I was still laughing, stumbling as I ran along in my happy stupor. At the top of a steep rise, we stopped. Diane gestured dramatically down the hill and grinned.

"Lie down!" she commanded, smiling broadly.

I was too bubbly from the leftover adrenaline to ask why. Our teammates followed suit, all giggling.

"And ... *let's roll!*"

Someone shoved me, and suddenly I was rolling, flying, spinning, turning—the teacup ride and ballet rolled into one, minus the safety bar and the toe shoes. Half the time I saw the sky and the clouds and the trees; half the time everything was dark and sweetly smelling as my face was pressed into the damp green grass. The whole time I was laughing, any inhibitions I'd clung to fizzing up and away like the bubbles in a freshly-opened can of ginger ale.

At the bottom of the hill the grass gave way to a pile of arms and legs and muddy sneakers and I ended up jumbled in with the rest of my team. Maybe they saw the dirt on my teeth when I opened my mouth and laughed. Or maybe they just saw an uptight freshman finally discovering the meaning of a "runner's high."



### **"Real Make-Believe" – Emily Barger, Canton High School, Grade 9**

"How about we draw with markers?" Jill suggested, raising her eyebrows. I shook my head, pony tail swishing from side to side. I tucked a sweaty clump of hair behind my ear, sighing.

"We already drew with markers. What about crayons?" Now it was Jill's turn to sigh. We both sat silently for a while, the fan whirring in the background, blowing hot air into our discouraged faces. It was only the fourth week into my cousin's stay and we were already out of ideas. Jill, who was a year younger and much tanner, was staying with my family for the summer. She'd come all the way from California, and I liked to think that it was because of me. After all, I was the only other girl cousin on the entire Sullivan side of the family. I knew that wasn't the real reason, though I wasn't exactly sure what the reality of the situation was. My parents had told me part of the truth—that my aunt and uncle needed to work on their marriage—but it wasn't until later that I learned the entire story.

"I know! We could play make-believe!" I cried at last, pleased with myself for a new idea.

"Yes!" Jill agreed, and soon we were digging through my closet, pulling out the box of dress-up costumes, also known as my mom's old clothes. We splayed the contents of the box on the purple carpet, grouping clothes by type. After trying on a half dozen outfits, we each settled on one.

"Now we have to pick what to make-believe," Jill said, reminding me of the entire concept of the game.

I thought for a moment. "I know!" I said, jumping up and down. I bent over to pull the slip I'd fashioned into a skirt back up to my waist. "We can play Mommy."

"Okay," Jill said. "But I want to be the mommy. You have to be the baby."

I wanted to be the mommy, but, remembering what my own mother had said about being patient, I obliged. I let her dress me in a bonnet and boss me around. I pretended to cry when she told me, and sucked my thumb when she directed. It wasn't as fun as being the mom, but I didn't want Jill to cry again.

She did this a lot, and I couldn't understand why. The slightest thing would set her off. My mom would ask her to pick up her puzzle, and when the requests were ignored, my mom asked Jill firmly and she would cry. When my dad asked her to clear her plate and she ignored him, he used a stern voice, and Jill hid under the table, sobbing.

Looking back, I realize that on that sweltering day in July, when she claimed her role as the mother, it was because she was afraid of being told what to do. She wanted someone to understand her pain. She didn't want to be the odd one out. The difference between my comprehension of that day and now is that I know the whole truth. At six, I figured the reason Jill wanted to be the mommy was the same reason I did: it's more fun. It never occurred to me that there could be a deeper meaning behind something as simple as playing make-believe.

After Jill decided she was done playing mommy, I asked her if I could have a turn. She just brushed me off, saying that we should play a different game. I persisted, saying it was only fair, and lo and behold, she started to snifle. I didn't know if she was really crying or not, but I told her we could play a new game. Much to my relief, the tears stopped as quickly as they had begun.

When Jill arrived in June she was a stranger, a small, fragile-looking, dark-haired five-year-old with greenish brown eyes and a scared look. I remember being excited when my parents told me she was coming; I'd even salvaged a few pieces of damp chalk from the garage to draw pictures on the driveway especially for my cousin. I was really eager to sleep in the top bunk my dad had put on my bed, to share a room with someone else, to knock secret codes on the wall like I'd seen in movies. To be an older sister. But when Jill arrived, she was terrified. The green grass and tall pine trees were foreign to her. And so was my family; her parents had moved when she was a toddler, so she didn't remember us.

The first week wasn't at all what I expected. She barely spoke, and the few times she made a noise at all was when she was under the bed or the kitchen table, crying. I was confused, but I wouldn't give up. I was determined to form a relationship with the strange girl from California. Whether we became cousins or sisters or friends or a combination of the three really didn't matter. But I wanted to understand her, to help her, and to love her. Because when you're six years old, not much is complicated. It's either black or white; there is no gray area when you're in first grade. So I knew that I had one choice: I would be welcoming or insensitive. Keeping in mind what my parents had told me about making sure Jill felt like she was part of the family, I set aside a dresser drawer and my favorite Beanie Baby for my new roomie.

I distinctly remember showing Jill my room for the first time: I was most excited about the bunk bed.

"This is your bed," I told her. "I'll sleep on top so you don't have to bump your head."

"Okay."

Later that night, at dinner, when everyone was pestering her with questions, Jill sat quietly, twirling spaghetti on her fork, over and over. After about twenty minutes, when everyone but Jill was done, my mom said, "Jill? Please finish your dinner before we have dessert." She looked up from her plate, confused.

"But I don't have to at home."

"Okay, but when you're here, there's a rule that you can't have dessert until you finish your dinner."

That was the first time she cried. She started out whimpering, and then little by little, her crying progressed until tears were streaming down her cheeks, dripping onto her untouched spaghetti. No one knew how to react to this, and I still don't remember what it was that got her to stop crying.

There are many possibilities for why Jill cried incessantly, but I think it was because she needed an excuse. At home, she couldn't cry. She was scared of what might happen if she did. She felt that if she cried here, with strangers, she wouldn't be punished. After she got to know us better, the crying became more infrequent. But before she visited us, she was a witness to things a five-year-old shouldn't have to see. The crying had been bottled up until her summer with us.

My aunt and uncle were addicted to crystal meth. They didn't hurt Jill, but how they treated each other is another story. It wasn't discussed in detail because my parents only knew bits and pieces. When Jill's parents put her on a plane to Massachusetts to stay with us that summer, they were supposed to get

help—find a rehab center and stay until they were clean, go to marriage counseling. But that never happened.

I didn't know until years later, but my parents were ready to adopt Jill if they had to. They'd already enrolled her in kindergarten, and she was going to go until my aunt and uncle drove across country, accused my parents of kidnapping her, and took Jill back. At the time, I thought that they were all better, they'd worked out their problems and they were coming back to get Jill to live together as a happy family. But that never happened, and it never will.

But there's still hope for a happy ending. Jill lives in San Diego with my aunt, who divorced my uncle, got off drugs, and worked her way up to managing the front desk of a hotel. My uncle remarried and lives in Colorado, and Jill sees him occasionally. It's not a story-book ending, but he and my aunt (technically ex-aunt) have been off drugs for many years. Jill is now an average teenager and one of my best friends. We have the best time in the summer when she comes to visit all my relatives for a month. She may live thousands of miles away, but because of that summer eight years ago, we have a close relationship now. I love Jill, and she'll always be the sister I never had.



### **“Liar” – Aminah Muhammad, Rockville High School, Grade 10**

Saturday—pancake morning. I wake up every Saturday to my mom's most famous pancakes, drenched in her special syrup that no one else in the family knows how to make. My dad is already sitting at the table with his reading glasses on, reading a new book. I sit in my normal seat next to him.

“Good morning, Dad.”

“Morning, Sugarplum,” he responded with the usual nickname and a smile.

My mom brought a big plate piled with golden brown pancakes over to the kitchen table. None of us hesitated to dig in. It's moments like these that make me feel like I'm the luckiest kid in the world.

### **Three Weeks Later...**

Sometimes I wish my mother would die, only sometimes though. I think I hate her, but, truthfully, I don't even know enough about hate to say that. But it just seems like the right thing to say, you know? My name is Riley and I'm thirteen. My dad says I act like a thirty year old. That's like our little joke between him and me, but I've always been that way, serious about everything since I was a baby. I didn't smile much, and I still don't smile much now unless it's something worth smiling for. Like when I'm with my dad and he takes me out for ice cream every Wednesday, just because. Or how he still reads me my favorite book from when I was three, sending me to sleep with a smile on my face as I have dreams of me losing my glass slipper instead of Cinderella, even though I turn fourteen in two months. My mom makes me smile too, sometimes, but I don't let her make me smile anymore, not after what I found out about her.

My mother and father have been together for as long as forever and I could never see them leaving each other for anyone else in this big world, but my mom has other thoughts about that subject. My mom is beautiful and caring and sweet and anything else a mother wants to be, and I know that's why my dad loves her, for being so perfect. There's no such thing as perfect, right? And my mom is definitely not it.

Even though I act mature for my age, it doesn't mean that I'm still not a kid. Yes, I rummage. I usually get home from school before my mom and dad do, which gives me time to lie in their bed right in the middle, pretending that both of them are on either of my sides lying next to me peacefully. Or I might go into their bathroom on my mom's side and try on every shade of lipstick that she has. But this particular day, I skipped all of that and decided to explore their night stands. I thought that maybe I would find something interesting inside that I might like and eventually convince them to let me keep it. I went on the side of the bed where my dad usually sleeps and opened the drawer, only finding books, eye glasses, some handcuffs, and pens. Pretty boring, but my dad isn't a police officer, so I wondered why he had those handcuffs. I let that thought go, though. I went over to my mom's side to open her drawer and she had a

bunch of books like my dad, but there was a light pink book on the side that caught my eye. It was small and very pretty. I picked it up and opened it, finding that it was a journal. This was the kind of interesting something that I had hoped to find.

I sat on the ground and found a page to start.

November 11, 2003

10:30pm

*Oh my! What a night: I went out with Chris again—Christopher Taylor actually. He's so handsome and funny and so affectionate. We went to Houston's and it was great. He ordered the same thing Brian orders whenever we go. That stuck with me in the back of my mind the whole time, not that it really mattered, but it just made me a bit uneasy. Anyways, Chris was such a gentleman; he paid for the dinner and even got us a desert to share—**CHOCOLATE!** He knows exactly what I like ... I feel like such a schoolgirl saying this, but we kissed; and it was magical. Its thrilling being with him; I feel so much younger, just because he's younger ... by five years.*

I closed the book, realizing there were tears in my eyes. I couldn't believe what I had just read. So much went through my mind at the moment that all I could do was sit there, motionless. I didn't even know what to do that day.

So, now it's been about three weeks since I read my mom's journal and I still don't know what to do. I couldn't tell my dad because he'd probably break down in tears. I couldn't talk to my mom about it because she'd probably kill me for even reading it in the first place, so I had to keep the words that I had read to myself in my head, swearing not to speak of it to anyone. But that only made things worse, making me not speak to my mother. She doesn't know why. She thinks there's something wrong with me; I know she does. But the truth is there's nothing wrong with me. I just wonder how my mom can possibly go through her day knowing that she's a liar. Making my dad kiss her after she's already kissed another man's lips. My dad doesn't deserve that at all. All he does is love her. He can't help that he's not young anymore.

We were all sitting down at the dinner table in our usual seats. My mom set the table with red placemats instead of gold tonight. It's so quiet. I was stirring my fork in my mashed potatoes, and every two seconds I took a jab at my chicken with my knife. It's a good thing this is plastic ware. My mom was chewing rapidly, trying to block the silence with the constant sound of food moving inside her mouth. She hates it when I don't talk to her. She doesn't deserve to talk to either me or my dad. It's sad to see the way my dad looks at her with those brown eyes every time she sits across from him at the head of the table, smiling that smile that he has in their wedding day photo. He stuffed a mouthful of mashed potatoes into his mouth, still looking at my mother with those eyes. Why can't she look back at him the same way? It's killing me.

"Ry, you haven't touched your mashed potatoes," my mom said.

"I'm not hungry."

"You didn't eat breakfast this morning; now it's dinner? Are you okay honey?"

"I'm just fine," I replied sarcastically. I was obviously not okay. Mashed potatoes are my favorite side dish with my mom's fried chicken, but tonight I had no appetite of any sort for anything made by her.

"What is your problem?" She was getting upset.

"You."

"Excuse me?"

"You! I think I was pretty clear the first time!" I shouted at her standing up in my chair. My dad stared helpless, glancing back and forth at his two favorite girls.

"RILEY ANN, YOU WATCH WHAT YOU SAY TO ME!"

"I'll watch what I say when SOMEBODY in this house admits that they're a liar!" I had to let it out. A hush went over the room. Both my mom and I were standing up, her angry at me for disrespecting her,

me angry at her for lying. Then my dad stood up next. I looked at him confused. My mom looked at him annoyed.

“I’m sorry, Robin.” He had tears in his eyes now. What was he sorry for?

“Sugarplum, no matter what, you know that daddy will always love you, okay?” I nodded yes, becoming overwhelmed by my father’s tears.

“I’ve been cheating on you.”

“For how long?” my mom said calmly, giving a weird stare, sort of like a gaze in my dad’s direction.

“For a little over a year.” I sat down, feeling exhausted all of a sudden. Like I had no more energy left. All this time, I was defending my father, feeling sorry for him and he’s the one in the wrong. My mom left the table and shut herself in their bedroom.

Now it was just me and him at the dinner table, tears in both of our eyes. Two weeks ago we were all happy, and there were no lies revealed. But once they are, everything goes wrong. Both of my parents are liars, cheats. What does that make me? I don’t want to be like them.

“Why, dad?”

“Because she reminded me of what your mom used to be; she loves me.”

“But, Dad, I love you. You know that. Don’t do this.” I grabbed his hand and stared straight into his eyes, trying to make him feel sorry for what he had done. Surely he would stop for his daughter.

“I’m sorry, Sugarplum.” And so he got up and left the house, leaving my hand without his.



### **“Prosperity Comes in Small, Brown Cubes” – Willem Dorff, Griswold High School, Grade 10**

It’s Christmas Day, and I wake up earlier than a teenage boy should. I walk downstairs where my family waits with piles of presents strewn about and dog acting like she’s a puppy once again. The family opens all our presents together and proceeds with our little Christmas Day tradition by hopping into the car and driving through rain or snow to meet with my grandparents and cousins. As I walk in the door with an armful of presents, I am greeted with a friendly, “Hello Mr. Handsome,” or, “Haven’t you gotten tall!” from my grandmother and a, “Hello, Willy!” from my grandfather, or Grampy as my cousins and I call him. Shortly after the greetings, I’m sure to set eyes on a big bowl of nearly-overflowing fudge covered with aluminum foil to preserve its lusciousness. I pop one into my mouth, and it instantly begins to dissolve, making my mouth water, but I don’t dare chew and exhaust its rich sweet taste of the holidays. Christmas is truly a time of prosperity, and Grampy’s fudge never lets me forget my multiannual visits.

It isn’t just Christmas, though, that he makes this indulgence out of the family recipe. Cooking fudge would be Grampy’s calling, if it weren’t for the number of other great things he has done, like fishing, golfing, being in the Navy, owning a diner, and being the vice president of a company called Chemical Products. Grampy makes fudge for the whole family every holiday from New Year’s Day to New Year’s Eve and lots of times in between. After all the fudge eating, it becomes difficult to forget about Grampy and Grandma, and I’m sure that the whole family constantly thinks of them while devouring the creation. In fact, his recipe is so successful that he once sold endless boxes to Montville High School for a fundraiser. He even had a website that showcased his candy under the business name, Roaring Brook Farm. After months of boxes of fudge being shipped off, my grandmother, whose medical conditions don’t allow her to have anything chocolate, later told us, “I was tempted, but I didn’t have one piece of fudge.” To me, that is astonishing, especially since the constant smell of fresh fudge must have been calling to her every single day like the sirens would call to Odysseus in *The Odyssey*, and only a rope that bound him to his ship could contain his desire.

So, maybe you’re wondering what this fudge is really like. If that’s the case, here is what I experienced the first time I tasted the chocolate delight: I saw the bowl filled with nearly a hundred small brown rectangles. They were loitering humbly in the giant dish, covered by aluminum foil, but their brilliance was still unable to hide. An illustrious aroma surrounded them. They were made of the ideal mix of hot butter, melted chocolate, and sugar all blended by heat, then poured onto a pan to be cooled, and later

chopped up into the perfect shape, all done in my grandfather's kitchen. So, which piece should I choose first? Should it be the smaller, ripply corner piece coated with chocolate shavings that provide an instantaneous chocolate eruption? No, first I pick the biggest, squarest piece of fudge that was smooth on five out of its six sides; the sixth providing a smooth and unique shape to complement its fine-grain texture, which makes it so mouthwatering. Now that I had the biggest piece, it was time to enjoy. I placed the cube of fudge on my tongue and savored it by lightly mashing it against the roof of my mouth. For a second, I thought, "What? It just feels like something square is in my mouth. I don't get it." But I waited two more seconds and then was unable to complain, since I truly couldn't resist the taste of the soft chocolate sugar slowly melting, getting warmer as it molded into my mouth and provided the divine taste that I have described before. So, I savored this for as long as I could, which was a long time. Now I was very glad I took the biggest piece. Oh no, it was almost gone! The body of its sweetness had somehow disappeared while I must have been distracted by something else. And next came a slight bitter aftertaste because of a very small proportion of unmelted cooking chocolate. So, what to do about this bitter taste? I wasn't sure, so I copied my older cousins' strategy by taking another piece.

Now that you know how much fulfillment these brown cubes provides, it is clear how easily they have made an imprint on my childhood to this day. When I think of or eat the fudge, I think of my grandfather, much like when I hear a song and think of the artist or band and think about their personality and history in order to enhance my enjoyment of the song. If you can understand this, you can understand why I like Grampy's fudge so much. But to understand and think of him like I do, it is necessary to hear a little bit of his history. My grandfather became an adult during a rough time. He went into the Navy, and when he had served his time there, he eventually was able to land a job at the top of the ladder as vice president of Chemical Products, after starting from the bottom as an office boy. It was a great achievement, but, in the end, it was much more short-lived than expected, as the company decided to downsize in the rough economy. Despite his flawless history with the company and the strong background he developed from the Navy, Chemical Products chose to fire him. The economy made it harder, too, for Grampy. He searched for jobs, even buying and running a diner for some time. However he did it, he managed to provide for his family of five, including my mom, her sister, and her brother. After working so hard to get to the top of Chemical Products, only to be thrown away like a rotten piece of bread, I don't know how he bounced back so quickly afterwards. But he did, and he allowed prosperity for his family, including me in the secondary sense. He has truly lived a hard-fought life.

When I visit my grandparents' house on Christmas Day and see the heaping bowls of fudge he has prepared, it is not too difficult to realize what I think of my grandfather, and how proud I am to be his grandson. The presents on Christmas day are nice, but what is truly special about Christmas for me is seeing my family, especially my grandfather. He works so much toward every one of his goals, which is one of the reasons why it is so hard to see him in his elderly status. His body and hearing may be fading, but his spirit is always eager to prosper. I have watched him build a fence all by himself, and tear down enormous trees singlehandedly. More than once, his body has proved unable to stand up to the will of his mind, resulting in back pains for life, and even the loss of a finger. The way he is willing to put all his effort into everything he does is purely astounding. Every time I think about quitting or cutting corners because I don't want to put in the work, I eat a piece of fudge, then think about my grampy, and I simply don't cut corners anymore.



## **“Under the Streetlight” – Zoryana Bilohan, Bristol Eastern High School, Grade 10**

As soon as I saw the glowing red numbers turn to 8:00, I knew it was time to act.

“Bye, mom, I’m going to bed!” I hoped my voice didn’t sound too fake—the slightest mistake, and I knew my mother would figure out that I was up to something.

“That soon? On a Friday night?” She seemed confused, but not suspicious.

“I’m really tired; I got almost no sleep this week.” Would she really fall for that?

“Well, okay then,” she decided.

After I turned around, I breathed a sigh of relief. Now I had one less part of the plan to mess up on. I was startled when I saw that my brother was standing right behind me.

“Have fun tonight,” he said.

“What?” He knew? And he was saying it right in front of my mom? The puke-green tablecloth suddenly made me sick as everything that was supposed to happen tonight fell apart because of the three words my brother had spoken.

“Yeah, have fun having no life,” he clarified. “You can’t even get plans on a Friday night? There’s no way you can be my sister.”

“Whatever.” I noted that there was a snow globe on the table, and observed how much I felt like I was surrounded by one tonight. His obliviousness to what was really going on made me impervious to his insult. An insult that wasn’t even true, because as a matter of fact, I did have plans.

I heard the front door slam as my brother went out when I was going up the stairs. Good. Now that I thought about it, the less people there were in the house, the better. It meant there was less of a chance that someone would hear me. When I got to the top, I looked down the spiral staircase. The butterflies in my stomach were flying at top speed, sustained by the thought of what I was about to do.

It was a struggle to get through my normal bedtime routine. Everything was so ordinary. I walked into the bathroom and started brushing my teeth. The sink and walls were a mundane shade of peach, the kind that says, “I don’t know exactly how I want to decorate my bathroom, and I’m too scared to try a color that I’m not 100% sure will work. So I’ll just go with this one.” It matched the cream towels. This provided a sharp contrast to the butterflies, which seemed to be sprouting wings in every color of the rainbow.

When this was done, I snuck back into my room. The many posters taped to my walls were a relief after the bland bathroom. I quickly arranged my pillows under the blanket in a shape that hopefully resembled me sleeping, and placed a wig where my head was supposed to be. That should keep my mother deluded just in case she decided to check on me during the night. Then I cautiously opened the window, making sure it didn’t squeak. I climbed outside, grateful that my house had only one floor, careful to leave the window open a crack so I could get back in. The thick August air greeted me, unwelcoming. It still hadn’t cooled down enough since daytime.

As I stood there, facing the dark night, the realization of exactly what I was doing dawned on me. Now it just seemed ridiculous. So what if doing this was the only way I could go to that college party? If I got caught, which I surely would, I would get grounded until I was in college myself. But I could still turn back. It wasn’t too late. Sure, some of my friends might make fun of my cowardice if I changed my mind, but they’d get over it. I could make up an excuse. It was nothing compared to what could happen if I went through with this.

But somehow, I managed to tame my rational side, and went further into the dark. The tree branches turned into hands and grabbed for my neck, but I ignored these shadows. A police siren in the distance made me jump, but I managed to convince myself to stay calm. I glimpsed the full moon overhead, and the image of a werewolf popped into my mind, complete with long yellow fangs and bloodshot eyes.

*This is ridiculous*, I thought to myself. Going off to a college party, and I was getting spooked by apparitions that only elementary school kids would be scared of? Next thing I know, I’ll be saying that there are monsters under my bed. I tried to calm down and ignore the strange shadows. I had only a block and a half left to go to my friend’s house; from there we would go straight to the party. Her parents didn’t mind

about the party, so she could actually drive there without worrying about them noticing that her car was gone. I just had to distract myself with party thoughts.

That's when I first heard the footsteps. They sounded soft, and far behind me. I told myself I didn't have a reason to worry. I wasn't the only one who had the right to walk the streets of my neighborhood.

But the footsteps kept getting closer and firmer. I tried speeding up my pace, to the point where I was almost jogging. *Ugh, that meant I would start sweating, and right before the party.* It was strange how I could think of matters like that when there could be an ax murderer following me. My mind flashed back to the crime drama I had seen only the night before. Would I end up like that woman, murdered and stuffed into a dark alley, with no one to find my decomposing body until days later?

*No, I assured myself. Those things only happen in the movies.*

The hot August night turned from comforting to oppressive. The footsteps couldn't have been more than ten feet away now. I felt like I was in one of those dreams where no matter how hard I tried to run I stayed in one place, while the danger kept getting closer.

It would have been logical to just turn around and look at who was following me, but I was scared of what I might see. I tried to picture the face of my worst nightmare. The footsteps must have been five feet away, and there was still a block to go. I wouldn't make it.

The suspense was killing me. I decided to just look behind me. Just a glimpse of the face of whoever was following me—that was all I needed.

But just before I had the chance to rotate my head I felt a coldness on my back, so unnatural in the hot night that it seemed to pierce my skin. The empty street echoed my scream. There was nothing behind me but gray pavement under a lonely streetlight between the two usual rows of suburban houses.

It would be rational to conclude that the incident consisted of nothing but my imagination. Yet the coldness stayed with me. It wasn't in a patch on my back, where I had felt it first. Instead, it moved into a region that couldn't be physically pinpointed. It became a part of me. In time, I wondered if it had always been there.



### **“Blankness Within” – Indira Jiménez, Conard High School, Grade 11**

Black. Silence. As he opens his sleep-dusted eyes, this is what he knows. His toes encased in the clean linen sheets, his head indulged in the goose feather down pillow. More silence. The melancholy aura of the dark and bleak motel room consumes him with thoughts of his current state. A supposed luxury, when in reality it has an uncertainty that lingers, making the luxury vanish. His long black eye lashes merge together as he remembers his dream.

An oasis. An oasis of green lilt. Illumination. Leaves from the trees above create a dancing kaleidoscope, adding a more mysterious, even eerie, familiarity he couldn't place in time. A case of déjà vu. Songs of the oasis tease his mind like harp strings heard in the distance.

Back again, he sits at the foot of the disheveled bed. Stillness. His bare body, inhabiting only his white boxers, is still. His back only exposed to the dim light and the swift breeze from the ceiling fan. His nakedness wasn't just present in his skin but his mind. A blank canvas, only painted with memories of this dream the night before and the memories of his past. He stands up and makes it his mission to get out of this empty luxury. He struggles putting on an old but soft tee shirt and stumbles through the crisp playing cards, strewn glasses still decorated with red, faded lipstick and champagne, and the smells of cigarettes and cologne. He puts on his favorite pair of Converse sneakers. In the midst of a pounding headache—most likely due to alcohol—he can't remember what took place the night before, and he doesn't want to remember. All he wants is to escape.

Our stranger finds himself on the sidewalk with no name and an unidentified city. Just blank streets and places, and people with blank expressions. Almost like masks to any emotion or acknowledgement of the world. The November air is chilled and unforgiving to his cheeks, leaving them raw and flushed with pink. Whizzing cars pass by, people yelling. Ah, the sounds of civilization. Musty exhaust clings to his nostrils,

and the sight of everything in rapid motion makes him nauseated. *Is this what we've become? We, as beings of this earth, have evolved into slaves of industrialization?* His disgust towards technology started when he was just a boy. A child of the concrete jungles all around the world, all he was accustomed to was technology, a culture mostly familiar to him from his parents. But one memory differs from the rest that he always revisits. When he was barely the age of eleven, his parents went on business for a while and left him in the care of his grandparents. Their house, quaint and quiet, sat upon a hill in Maine above the ocean. He would take daily walks by the shore with his grandfather and the family dog, a Scottish Terrier with a coat as black as night named Duke Ellington II (an ode to the grandfather's favorite musician). A tedious ritual, yes; however, he found a peculiar pleasure in being pushed by the breeze and smelling the sweet and soft perfume of the sea. A nature of euphoria that he yearned would last forever. Once he got back to the cities, he never found the same pleasure in the technological hindrances of the cities. All he wanted was to be surrounded by nature and, most importantly, the same feeling that he experienced in that little beach town of Maine.

He then starts to walk, not intending to go to any particular place, just wherever fate takes his feet.

He finds himself in a forest. He's caught off guard for a moment, noticing how his surroundings shift in a matter of a few footsteps. The croaking tunes of smooth amphibians are heard, along with the wilderness and solitude. He looks up. Leaves for a dancing kaleidoscope. He looks forward. Green light. Rebirth and reassurance fill the air. He steps deeper in the thick arms of the forest. He closes his green eyes and takes a deep breath. The fragrance of fresh rain and firewood encircle him. His Converse sneakers grow comfortable in the lonely soft mud. Lily pads mask the mist-laden creek, filled with youth and virtue. More mud seeps in his wool socks. He takes off the sneakers, one by one, placing them delicately on the ground, and neatly folds his socks in them as well. He waits a moment. The chill rushes up his nerves as his unsheltered feet are exposed. His toes feel safer in the mud than in the lifeless sheets from before. He then realizes something. *So it's true*, he thought. *It's really true; this is where I'm meant to be.* This was his true luxury—alone, yet beautiful. Where he could ponder all the blankness he has, or better yet *had*. Now the blank canvas has been painted. Our stranger has his sanctuary, his real luxury, at last.



### **“The Lunch Room” – Rob Dei Dolori, Granby Memorial High School, Grade 11**

I already regret the words that just left my mouth.

It isn't that I don't believe them, or that I'm ashamed to let my opinion be known. But lunch is a treasured break from the school day, and it's generally better to avoid saying anything that could be interpreted as too profound for the casual setting. Sure enough, the words are received with uncomfortable seat shifting, some forced laughs, and uncertain eyes.

Moments before, Larry had recounted for the lunch table a day last week when he witnessed Sean Thompson, a sophomore, kiss his boyfriend before getting on the bus after school:

“... I could barely watch, it was so disgusting,” he said.

“On the lips?” someone snickered.

“Oh yeah,” said Travis, who had been walking beside Larry, and who wanted some credit for the hilarious story too. “That's when Larry yelled to me, ‘Hey Travis, did you know that God hates fags?’ I burst out laughing.”

That's when I had heard enough, and the ill-advised words forced themselves out of my mouth. “There is nothing wrong with being gay.” Perhaps it wasn't the words themselves that were so shocking, but the tone with which they were delivered. There was a certain conviction to them that ruled out the possibility that I was merely being sarcastic. There was a strong emphasis on “nothing.” I now found myself as surprised as anyone by my own audacity.

“Oh, is this a personal topic for you?” asks Larry with a smirk.

“Shut up. I just don't think that it should matter if someone is gay.”

“Is there something you would like to tell us about yourself, Shane?” Travis asks me mockingly, knowing perfectly well that I have had girlfriends in the past.

“Come on guys, it’s not a big deal. It’s a personal choice,” said Sid. Although I cringe at the glaring error, I admire Sid for trying to defend me. I wonder whether he would be as bold if we weren’t best friends.

After a few similar wisecracks, the conversation moves on, but I can tell that my outburst has temporarily alienated me from the others, especially Larry. Since transferring to Westfield High a month ago, he has quickly gained a fair amount of popularity. His blonde hair, distinguished face, and athletic build made many girls turn their heads for a second peak at the newcomer. And his keen, however tactless, sense of humor has made him accepted by the guys. His outfits often reflect his outgoing personality, and today he has on a baby blue t-shirt with pink polka dots. For reasons I cannot quite name, I am not totally comfortable around him. I study him closely for the next few minutes and listen to him hoot about a mole on the lunch lady’s chin (“It’s so big it practically touches the food!”). It occurs to me that many of the things he says are insensitive, at times even cruel, and are often meant to point out the flaws in others.

Suddenly my focus shifts and I notice Sean Thompson sitting at a table some fifteen feet away. He is chatting quietly with a girl beside him, engrossed in a deep conversation. In the moment of hilarity, we had not even realized that Sean was so close by. Does he know that he had been the subject of ridicule at our table just moments ago? Considering Larry’s blaring tone, he had almost certainly overheard what was said. And yet he seems wholly unaffected by the derogatory slander against him. He even seems to be enjoying himself, laughing cheerfully without a care in the world. Come to think of it, I cannot remember a single occasion when Sean has looked *unhappy*. That’s no small feat for someone who is the subject of many awkward glances and occasional outright mockery on a regular basis. The few times that I’ve conversed with him, I couldn’t help from feeling somewhat uncomfortable. But to my surprise, he seemed—well—normal. Except unlike the average teen roaming the halls of Westfield, he has a genuine concern for others, even for someone like me who hangs around some of the very kids that make his life difficult.

I consider the brave statement I just made in his defense. If I truly believed my own words then the next thought seems logical: Why was I so surprised to learn that Sean was a normal human being? Even as I had scolded Larry, I must have still retained some prejudice against gays in my own mind. It’s as if I could only see Sean through the veil of a label before, expecting him to act like the stereotypes depicted in the media. While Sean spoke to me openly and without pretense, I was unable to see past the image I had made of him. The conversation at our table, which has somehow shifted back to Sean, momentarily catches my attention.

“... that notebook of his is filled with drawings of trees and plants. Typical. I bet he spends his time sitting in the woods talking to animals ...”

Once, I saw Sean walking his dog on a trail near my house, and observed that he appeared totally at ease alone in the woods. His eyes shone with awe at the nature around him, and his pleasant smile seemed to radiate peace. At the time, I too had simply dismissed this behavior as a peculiarity related to his homosexuality; but can you really attribute the aspects of one’s personality to some arbitrary thing like sexual preference?

As I reflect, I alter my gaze between Larry, who is interrupting Sid to tell a story about his old school, and Sean, who is calmly eating his lunch. For the first time, I clearly see both of them on the same level. Sean is condemned for a characteristic he has had since birth, while his uncommon generosity goes overlooked. Larry’s unpleasantness is received with praise because he is handsome and occasionally funny.

“You’re awfully quiet there, Shane. Been daydreaming about your boyfriend?” Larry’s voice sounds more malicious than playful, and a devilish smirk is plastered to his face.

After few moments, I flash him a wide grin. “You’re pretty loud there, Larry. Are you trying to drown out your shirt?” I stand up and, without thinking, walk directly over to the table where Sean is seated. “Do you mind if I sit here today?”



## “Rollerblading in Autumn” – Lauren Dundon, Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts, Grade 11

The sidewalk in front of your house is littered with fallen leaves. As we walk to your car, I kick them with the toe of my shoe. Brittle and wilted, they scatter across the ground, revealing deep brown imprints on the light gray concrete from drained pigment. I look at the markings, filled with sadness. I admire autumn’s attempts to cling in the air, but the contrast between the pigment and concrete speaks too much of what has become of us.

Before you could drive, we had our own sets of wheels. You would sit and help me wiggle my feet, one at a time, into rollerblades with neon pink decals and green Velcro, which you would then fasten after lacing up your own. Although they were the same, yours were three sizes bigger. Four years older, you were always ahead of me in everything. Four years younger, I wanted to fit into your shoes.

We would leave the garage, skating off smooth concrete and onto rocky pavement, leaving our troubles behind—as many troubles as an eight- and twelve-year-old could possibly have. Then we would skate endlessly around the block, making up various games for our own entertainment on each trip around. One round, we would keep track of the number of concrete slabs of sidewalk we had passed. With eyes glued to the ground, we would chant out loud, “one hundred, one hundred one, one hundred two,” counting in unison as we went from street to street. On the next lap, with adrenaline pumping through our veins, we would race down the street. Your long, wavy blonde hair still streaked with summer sun would flow in the wind as you raced beside me. We’d exchange glances, giggles escaping us, and try to propel ourselves in front of each other, always wanting to win. As we reached the bottom of the hill, you’d extend your arms, fading tan stretching across them, trying to stop before reaching the curb. But no matter the game, as we entered each road, you would stop, point your small fingers with chipping pink sparkly nail polish at the signs. You’d repeat the street names, engraving them into my memory, teaching me to navigate.

I remember how the mist wrapped through the trees that bleak November day, chilling the air and blending my pale skin into a delicate shade of rose as we skated down the sidewalk, side by side. After racing down Summerwind Drive, the last leg of our journey, you took my hand and led me past the familiar block, setting new limits. We skated, then stopped where pavement met grass, unable to go any further. Instead of turning back, you stepped over the curb of the cul-de-sac and onto the grass, buried under leaves. I followed, struggling in your wake.

As we explored the outskirts of your neighborhood, I saw your adventurous side. You made a path for us, weaving in between trees, branches swaying as we trudged past them. “Kristine, where are we going?” I asked, continuing to follow. “Just trust me,” you said, going deeper into the forest of strategically landscaped trees bordering your housing development. And I did trust you, trusted that you would choose the right path, trusted that I could follow you. You led us to a lake, kept out of sight by houses and shrubs. I remember how the fog rested on the surface of the water and how, despite the gray stillness of the scene, a pile of abandoned pumpkins stuck out in the distance. However, I cannot recall how far the water stretched, if it was truly a lake or a small pond, and how long it took us to reach the pumpkins as we scrambled around the banks of the water in our skates. Maybe I was too young and disregarded the details of the pond, or maybe I can’t recall specifics because you only brought me there once. Although the lake is a distant memory, I do remember when we reached the pile of rotting pumpkins; you picked one up, carelessly, not fazed by the soft patches where your fingers sunk beneath the orange skin. “Ready, set, kick!” you shouted as you tossed the lumpy ball into the air. Following your instruction, I punted the vegetable. Rather than sending it into the air and landing it in the water, breaking the surface with rippled and waves, the pumpkin encased itself around my foot, its insides clinging to the grooves of my rollerblades. We decided kickball practice wasn’t the best idea, and began scraping off the mess with our hands. Once our chests hurt with laughter, our fingernails were tinged orange, and my wheels freed enough of pumpkin to roll, we started to turn back. We emerged from the forest, skates caked with mud and pumpkin guts, and proceeded to glide our way home.

We were overwhelmed with an aroma of turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, and other foods waiting to be served for our Thanksgiving dinner when we burst through the door, corduroy pants crusted with

drying mud, hands filthy and faces dirt-speckled. Our eyes met and we laughed with each other as our family gawked at our appearances. We were rushed by our mothers upstairs to tidy up and to throw on a clean set of clothes before saying grace and sharing the meal with our family.

After dinner was finished and our mothers were no longer embarrassed, we began hunting through the circulars, making dark bold lines, squiggles, and stars around anything that we wanted to add to our lists for Santa. My list, written out in messy first grader handwriting, included any flashy toy I happened to glance at in the Toys R Us catalog. Yours, on the other hand, written in the neat cursive of a fifth grader, listed carefully-chosen makeup kits and Barbie dolls. As I looked from list to list, I couldn't understand why you weren't asking for the same toys and games I was.

You lost your sense of adventure when you discovered 'beauty.' Soon after our Thanksgiving Day adventure, you learned to primp and prime yourself. That Christmas, you got the makeup and manicure kits you asked for. You learned how to apply blush to ripen the apples of your cheeks, how much glue to drip on your nails to make the fake manicured ones stick, and how to accent the blue rings of your eyes using different powders and shadows. You began to abandon your natural self. You no longer wanted to wander into the woods; I still thrived for adventure. I'd still lace up my skates and travel around the block alone, while you sat at home picking out outfits and making plans to go to the mall with friends. I watched as materialism and appearances began to consume you, and for the first time I strayed from your path.

Now as we drive, headlights pour onto the street. They cut through the fog and reflect off the green metal of SUMMERWIND DRIVE. This Thanksgiving, instead of skating around the block, I sit behind the wheel. Like when I was eight, you teach me, guide me. Yet this time, you don't create your own path through the woods; you instead instruct me to follow the paved paths, traveled by so many others, dotted and dashed with rules and restrictions, no longer full of freedom and adventure. I look at each sign as we pass by, listing streets off in my head. I glance over at you quickly, attempting to catch your gaze in the rearview mirror, trying to see if you're doing the same. You instead lip sync to some overplayed song on the radio, catch glimpses of yourself in the mirror, and check your pristine appearance. You look for an out-of-place strand of hair, now dyed chestnut, straightened and shortened, or a smudge of lip gloss against your skin, tanned by artificial rays. You tap your manicured nails on the dashboard, following the rhythm rather than creating your own beat. While you once taught me how to navigate using these signs, you have lost your way. In the driver's seat, I diverged from your path, making one of my own.



### **"On My Way to Chapel Hill" – Meg O'Connor, Miss Porter's School, Grade 12**

As the airplane began speeding down the runway, I clasped my hands together and tried not to panic. I was seventeen, and it was my first time flying alone. As the airplane took off, I watched the houses and cars below us grow tinier and tried not to imagine what would happen if we crashed. My efforts were unsuccessful, and I found myself determining whether or not we would survive if we fell from each height. I finally closed my eyes tightly and prayed that the peaceful looking Asian man next to me would not try to make conversation.

He didn't try to talk to me until the last half hour of the flight, when he asked why I had been in Hartford. "That's where I live," I said. "I'm flying to Chapel Hill to visit a friend at the University. Do you live in Connecticut?"

"No," the calm man said. He didn't expand upon his answer.

"Oh ... why were you in Hartford?"

"Business." His response was curt, and I noticed a bead of sweat forming on his forehead.

I swallowed hard and opened my book, assuming from the man's one-word answers that he didn't want to talk. He continued to ask me questions.

"Are you in high school? Applying to the University of North Carolina?" He asked.

"Yeah ... I am. That's part of the reason I'm visiting Chapel Hill," I responded.

"Where else are you applying?"

I rattled off my list, which ranged from New England Ivies to obscure Western liberal arts colleges. Very few New Englanders recognized the name Pomona, despite the school's selectivity and academic rigor. However, the man nodded and said, "Ah, Pomona. Occidental. Very good schools."

I considered for a moment that he was an academic. Perhaps studying at a graduate school, or even teaching at a university. His manner was certainly introspective and philosophical enough. Finally, I asked, "For what sort of business were you doing in Hartford?"

The man paused shyly for a moment. "I'm a pastor." He looked earnestly at my face to see how I would respond.

Although not religious myself, I did not want the man to feel judged for finally sharing his mysterious 'business' with me. I smiled supportively and said, "Okay, cool." Then I promptly decided to bury myself in my book, which was far less interesting than I was making it seem.

The man seemed fueled by my tolerant response. "I'm a pastor because I love Jesus. Do you love Jesus?"

I stared at him for a second, unsure of what to do. I was mildly spiritual, but I was certainly not religious, and not even a little reverent. I opened my mouth and closed it again. Finally, I decided on the most vague and least controversial answer I could think of. "I was raised a Catholic." I hoped he would pick up on the past tense and the lack of personal belief in my statement.

"Really?" He sounded thrilled. "Do you still go to church?"

"Sometimes," I lied. "But I go to boarding school, so it's difficult. I live there, and I don't drive." I didn't feel the need to mention that there was a Catholic church half a mile away.

"What is your church like?"

I faltered. "Small," I said. "There are beautiful statues and we have a chorus that sings sometimes." I exhaled and felt a little smug about my response. It seemed believable and not really a lie. It described every church I had ever been to, even during my days of church hopping with my mother, as we searched for a parish we liked.

The man didn't seem to notice how generic my church was. Instead, he began to talk about liturgy and being a good person.

Before we knew it, the plane hit the ground and the cabin lights turned back on. "Nice to meet you!" I shouted behind me as I grabbed my bag and ran off the plane.

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I searched desperately for something to eat at Dulles, where I had my layover. I felt tethered as I lugged my two large carry-ons. And when I finally found a Sbarro and ordered a piece of pizza, I balanced it awkwardly on top of my rolling suitcase and did not take my eyes off the plate as I searched for a seat. I bit my lip when I realized every table was occupied. Two young men, probably college-aged, were wandering around with a similar look of lost confusion.

"Have a seat. Join the party!" said a jovial voice right in front of me. A middle-aged man eating a slice of pizza was sitting alone at a table that could fit four. I exchanged worried looks with the young men, and then we all sat down. The boys were heading home from Emerson College for Thanksgiving break, and the man at the table was a professor at McGill University in Canada. He spoke with an accent that sounded far more British than French Canadian, but I supposed it could have been either. When I asked him how his food was, he exclaimed, "Oh, brilliant! Just brilliant." The overwhelming eccentricity of my morning motivated me to scarf down my pizza and excuse myself from the table, saying my flight would be boarding soon. I had plenty of time, but I was eager to have a moment alone in the terminal with my iPod and my less than fascinating book.

"What flight are you on?" one of the boys asked.

"I'm heading to Raleigh/Durham."

"Me too! What a coincidence!" He jumped up and followed me as I put my tray away. We said goodbye to the other college guy and the amusing (possibly British) professor and then headed toward our gate.

"What's your name?" he asked with keen interest.

“Meg,” I said quietly.

“Hey! I’m Dan. That means we both have shortened names!”

“Actually, Meg isn’t short for anything. It’s my full name. Everyone calls me Megan by accident, though.”

“Oh,” Dan said gravely. “Well I won’t. I won’t call you anything but Meg.” He gave me a solemn nod of his head.

I sighed. “Thanks.”

We reached the gate and sat down. We continued to make flirtatious small talk for the twenty minutes before we boarded, and he offered to give me a ride back to the airport from the University, saying he lived about five minutes away. He handed me his email address, telling me I could email him if I needed help.

*I am so cool, I thought sarcastically. I just exchanged email addresses with a guy I had lunch with at an airport. Not phone numbers. Email addresses.*

Despite the fact that I had enjoyed my conversation with Dan, I prayed with every fiber of my being that the seat next to me on the flight to Chapel Hill would be empty. It wasn’t.

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“Why are you flying to North Carolina?” I asked the dark-skinned man next to me.

He stared at me for a moment and quickly said, “Business.”

I exhaled and almost decided not to bother. This man didn’t *look* like a pastor, but you could never tell. He was too muscular and intimidating, it seemed, to be a priest. But at the same time, there was no rule saying that pastors couldn’t work out.

I decided to cut to the chase. “What kind of business?”

He looked at me nervously, and then said, “I’m a Marine.”

I stared with surprise, once again not completely sure how to react. I decided to take a similarly supportive approach as with the pastor. “Wow,” I said. “That’s really important work.” Although I did not want to get into a political discussion with the Marine, I meant every word of support very sincerely.

The man looked a little upset by my response. I recoiled a little in my seat.

“Someone needs to do it,” he said, “but that’s not why I do. It puts bread on the table, and I have a little girl and a wife at home who’ve gotta be fed. It’s a paycheck. Just like busing dishes or balancing checkbooks, it’s a paycheck. I don’t wanna do it. But it’s my job.”

I had no idea what to say. “You don’t ... you don’t ... like it?” I stammered finally.

“Like it?” The man laughed cynically. “I’m tired. I don’t get to go home for Thanksgiving. Never get to see my babies at home.”

“What would you rather do?” I asked with genuine curiosity.

“I have a dream,” he began, “of openin’ a restaurant. In the South, where I grew up. The people are pleasant there, you know? I have all sorts of recipes I’m dyin’ to try out and serve to people. Some day, I’m gonna do it.” His conviction was impressive.

I nodded with support.

“I will!” he said, as if I hadn’t believed him. “Honest to God, I’m gonna open a restaurant some day.”

“That’s awesome!” I said. “I know you will.”

After a while, we began to talk about his eight-year-old daughter. “I sure hope she doesn’t go into the military. But I’m not going to tell her what to do. Your parents tell you what to do?”

Now it was my turn to be nervous. “Um ... no. They don’t.”

He looked at me suspiciously, with good reason. “You get along with them?” he asked.

I bit my lip and fiddled with my ring. My mother’s ring. “... uh ... I lost my parents last year.”

“Lost them?” The man seemed to think they had been misplaced.

“They ... uh, died.”

“Holy crap,” he said. “Both of them?”

“... yeah.” I said hesitantly. The reticence didn’t come from pain in telling my story. It came from the unbearable awkwardness and the way people looked at me after they found out. I laughed nervously, which just made it seem like I was making the whole thing up. Unfortunately, I wasn’t.

“Car accident?” he asked with unexpected gentleness.

“No. Two random freak accidents. Pneumonia and cardiac arrest. Six months apart.”

“Boy, I’m sorry.”

“Thanks,” I said, hoping the awkwardness would go away. “So I kind of get it. I mean, I can’t even imagine what it must be like to be a Marine. But I get what it’s like to move around all the time. To be tired and just want to go home.”

He looked at his feet. “Yeah. It sucks.”

The plane descended, and I was startled as it hit the runway. I had been so absorbed in our conversation that I hadn’t noticed how much time had passed.

“I agree,” I said. “It sucks. But it’ll be fine.”

“Yeah,” the Marine said. “I’m gonna open me a restaurant. I’m tellin’ you, I’m gonna do it.”

As we exited the plane, I shook his hand. “It was so interesting talking to you,” I said. I meant every word.

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My life would not be interesting were it not for the people within it. The events that occur are *almost* normal; they are merely a stone’s throw away from commonality. However, it’s the cast of people—the family, the friends, the professors, the employers, the screaming children on the airplane, the jaded Marine, the Asian pastor, the awkwardly endearing college kids, the straight-laced great aunt, the hippie brother, the friend who finishes your sentences, and the teacher who loves to cook but never does—*those* are the people who make life interesting. I will never know how the five people I met on my way to Chapel Hill changed me. Perhaps they didn’t. Perhaps they merely amused me, tickled my brain, and then sent me on my way. But perhaps one day I will walk into a restaurant in the South that is owned by a cynical ex-Marine, and I will remember that moment thirty thousand feet in the air when two human beings connected through a loneliness so universal that it unites us all.



### **“Damn, It Feels Good To Be A Wizard” – Lindsey Pellino, Rockville High School, Grade 12**

“Dad?”

No response. I could only hear the gears of the stationary bike circling around themselves.

“Dad?” I accompanied this attempt with a knock at the door. Still nothing.

“DAD?”

Louder knock. Finally, the non-moving treats slowed as the ticking timer still chimed in the remainder to pedal.

“What is it?”

I regained my composure, after trying to conjure him from the lure of cycling.

“Tonight ... the last Harry Potter book comes out.”

Silence.

“Do you think we could go to one of the midnight parties at a book store to pick up a copy?”

A second silence.

“Didn’t Mom already order a copy?”

The dreaded response. I knew it was coming, but I thought in some slim fragment of hope, it’d be overlooked. My reaction was calculated.

*“Father, let me propose to you this alternative. I don’t want to do this for the sole purpose of procuring the novel. In fact, the ritual of travel to the book store to purchase it is part of a larger, more global theme. This once-in-a-lifetime opportunity of uniting with fellow enthusiasts would serve as a wonderful liaison to the community. The*

memory would live on with me through adulthood, and would remind me of a fine evening with my father, sharing interests.”

My wonderfully prepared statement sounded more like:

“Yeah, but ... come on, please?”

Close enough.

A third and final silence.

“There will be a bunch of nerds dressed up like wizards ...”

Foolproof!

“All right. Go ask Claire if she wants to go.”

I held my tongue about my sister. She was a Squib. A horrible, grotesque abomination to true fans: she’s only seen the movies. She didn’t deserve to be among the brave Gryffindors, the loyal Hufflepuffs, the witty Ravenclaws, and the cunning Slytherins! No. She belonged with Filch, toiling away at grimy trophy rooms and pursuing Peeves with packs of Dungbombs.

But alas, if I got to be a part of this event I would gladly drag Mrs. Norris with me, let alone my own sister.

I was frantically churning the scenario in my head. Opening the doors at Barnes and Noble would be like Peter welcoming me graciously into heaven, and then handing me the keys to Jesus’s Lamborghini. Looking back, not only did I think that Jesus would definitely not drive a Lamborghini, but I realized that I was ignoring a crucial problem that my dad was about to address.

“What store should we go to?”

“Let’s try Barnes & Noble.”

“Now Lindsey, don’t feel bad if they don’t have any books.”

My heart suddenly weighed about forty pounds heavier, and gravity’s nine-point-eight-one meters per second squared reacted accordingly. I was about to collapse.

“... What?” was all I could manage to say.

“Well, the people who go to these things reserve copies. They might not have any left for people who just show up.”

Reserved copy. Reserved copy. Oh shit. I didn’t have one of those. My idealism and spontaneity would be my downfall. This was the obvious course of action; why didn’t I take it? Why hadn’t I reserved a copy the moment it was an option? What the hell was wrong with me?

“Uhm ... let’s ... go ... anyway. To Barnes & Noble. Just to check.”

Peter had put me on his wait list. Damn it.

We arrived at Barnes & Noble. It was packed. A sample from every walk of life was present, but they were all dressed up in Hogwarts cloaks and archetypal witch costumes. There was what I assumed to be Professor Trelawny, but she was about as wide as Hagrid. Dozens of miniature Harry Potters whirled around each other, casting spells with plastic lit-up wands. Four Weasley clans walked by, and one had Draco among their midst. A female Dumbledore chatted with a blonde Snape. A Sirius Black reenacted his tragic end, laughing. It was hectic madness. We found an available cashier, and my dad asked the question I was too afraid to ask myself.

“Excuse me, do you think there will be any copies left for people who didn’t reserve one?” She conferred with a co-worker.

“Probably. But you’ll have to wait quite a while.”

Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God. It could still happen.

“You might be here until one.”

It’s going to happen.

“Okay, thank you. Let’s go home now.”

*Hahaha, Dad, you’re so funny. Come on, let’s get in line.*

But I knew he wasn’t kidding. The accumulated joys of nights staying up late reading and speculating about characters, about Snape’s (obvious) alliances—everything. It was hanging in the balance for the last hour. Now the scale was tipped, and it crashed. I will not be part of this event. I will not celebrate with the

world. I will not get to say, years from now, to whomever would listen, that I was there. That I was a part of it. It will never be a part of my history.

“Dad ... please.”

I knew it was futile, but I could not let it go. My confidante has let me down. He’s no better than Pettigrew.

“No, it’s too late. You’re getting a copy in the mail soon. You can wait.”

No, I can’t.

“You guys can buy something that would cost as much as the book.”

Great. Consolation prizes. I snatched a fake plastic Snitch and a book predicting what would happen, who would die, etc. It meant nothing to me. I was defeated and lamenting the lost chance of being part of something bigger than myself. He didn’t understand how much this meant to me.

The car ride home was silent for about five minutes. He then started scrambling for excuses.

“You’ll get to read it tomorrow. What difference does it make?”

Eyes watered.

“The book will be just as good if you got it from the mail.”

Crying.

“It’s just too late.”

More profuse tears.

“Lindsey, talk to me! It’s not the end of the world.”

Deep breath.

“It’s the end of his world. Harry’s world. This is it. This is all there will ever be. And I’m missing it. I grew up with this book, these characters. It’ll all be over tonight at midnight. I’m missing my chance to be a part of it. I can never have this moment back.”

We pulled into the driveway. Claire hopped out of the car and darted inside. I was still crying.

“Okay, let’s go.”

...

“Seriously?”

...

“Yes. I didn’t realize that aspect of it. The experience is equal to the book. Let’s hurry to the bank to get more money.”

Turns out, Jesus *does* drive a Lamborghini.

Barnes & Noble was still just as crowded as it came closer to midnight. We were issued paper hand bracelets, color-coded and numbered. We waited outside of the store, but still inside the mall. The line sprawled and overflowed, filled with Muggles and wizards alike. A chubby man in a green robe and hat was bellowing on top of a stage.

“Okay, when it’s midnight, we’ll start calling you up by bracelet to get a book. So pay attention.”

It was comical. A bunch of Harry Potter nerds gathered and clumped together, including me. I couldn’t thank my father enough.

A short woman with even shorter hair and a girl with really big boots stood in front of me. We started talking about the book, what we thought was going to happen, how we started liking the series. Harry Potter had been such a big part of my life; I was astounded when it dawned on me that it meant the same to other people. I finally felt that universal coherence.

After what seemed like agonizing days, midnight arrived, greeted by cheers and clapping. I was literally jumping for joy at this point. It was happening. The accumulated joys of nights staying up late reading and speculating about characters, about Snape’s alliances—everything. It was hanging in the balance for the last hour. And here it was.

Two hours later, we were some of the last people there. The woman behind the counter handed me a copy as my dad paid for it. The final piece. The final book. The end of the legacy. I held one of the millions; it was in my hands. It was about to end. As we walked out of the store, they clapped.

This story and these people, I have known since I was eight. At age fifteen, they were drawn to a close. I read the books by myself, and on my own time. A private journey into this constructed universe. While taking that trek to the store, every other private adventurer was brought into the light to experience the final journey together. There may be no more books, and the movies will eventually stop. But for the moment, we all read together, and experienced the last bit of magic. Separate, but together.



**“Untitled” – Evangeline Vournazos, Griswold High School, Grade 12**

In life there is only one thing no one can completely understand; it's the one thing that cannot be manipulated or controlled. It gives as it takes and erases as it brings. It's always there, yet it has a way of creeping up and taking people by surprise. It's eternal, yet it always runs out. In reality, it's the one thing everyone fears; not matter what particular dimension they've formed it into, or how they've tried to overcome it. It governs everything. It's time.

And everyone learns time's lesson sooner or later: you can't turn back its dials or move them forward, no matter how much effort you put into it. You have to go with it, understanding that you cannot understand or control it and accepting that what it's taken is gone. And once you learn, you never forget.

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*We are on our way to Disney World. My parents are in the front singing with a funny song on the radio. My sister and I are laughing at them; they're not very good. Christi is leaning against me. Everyone is smiling. Everyone is so happy. The smell of grease and fast food fills the car; we're in a car. It's sunny outside. It's so bright and sunny outside.*

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Children are the only ones immune to the effects and reality of time. That is the way it is supposed to be. They get that short fragment of their life where they are supposed to be carefree; they are supposed to be carefree, and naïve, and *childlike*. There are no shadows in life, and everything is beautiful.

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*My sister and I are trading fries. We're singing along with our parents. We don't know any of the words, but it doesn't matter. Christi can't stop laughing. We're counting the pretty wild orange bushes on the roadside. Christi keeps saying how she can't wait to get there. She's so excited.*

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But childhood ends, and children are forced to grow. Time steals innocence—the most defining aspect of childhood. For some children, the break into maturity happens gradually; but for others, it comes too abruptly.

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*Something's happening. The music ended, there's no sound. The only noise is pounding in my ears. I'm trying to answer my sister. I'm excited too. But my teeth are gritted together. I can't see the sun anymore. I can't see anything. My eyes are squeezed shut. I open them and everything spins into view, and suddenly I feel everything, everything. I'm being crushed. I'm spinning. I'm blown back against my seat by a whirl of sound, air, noise. Is that what's pushing me back? Spinning, spinning. I hear shrieking. My sister's name. Over and over again. Someone's baby. Whose baby? Who is screaming? Everyone's gone. Where is my sister? Where is she? I'm covered in glass. The car is mangled. Why did they leave me here like this? Why would they leave me? I can't breathe. And then I'm screaming, screaming, screaming.*

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On January 18, 1997 my sister died in a car accident. My mind has managed to erase many details, but it wasn't able to erase everything. Memories don't just fade, and experiences don't just disappear. I am still haunted by the most horrifying memories. And even when I manage to push them away, the worst remnants are always still there. What may seem to be a forgotten experience simply impacts you differently than recalled images.

I lost my innocence when I was four years old. My sister was gone. This person I spent every day with, whom I loved most, was simply gone, and I had neither any idea why nor anyone who could explain it to me. Life formed darker edges. Things weren't so beautiful anymore. And the worst part is I couldn't be ignorant or carefree anymore. It was impossible for me; everything had meaning. From that point on, I became what doctors called "advanced beyond her years." And however people take that, it is not a compliment or anything to wish for. It isn't a gift, but a realization of the flaws and realities of life too soon.

Children are not meant to undergo tragedy. They can't even understand the concept. Now I see time in its true form. I constantly feel like I don't have enough of it. To know that I have no control and that the next moment I may have nothing. No matter how hard I try, the moment itself does not matter because it could just end at any instant. I just don't know when.

I never would've imagined anything good could come from something so terrible. Now I realize the good comes from how you respond to challenges and how you choose to continue through your life. I am wiser from this experience in all aspects, ready to learn and absorb available lessons completely. I appreciate loved ones and show them this because they may not be around as long as expected. I am also stronger, for I am not crushed in overwhelming situations. It is always possible to make a brighter future, and I conquer my obstacles. Most of all, I appreciate every moment God has given me, and I utilize every opportunity entirely. I may not have control of a lot of things. But for those I am in control of, I will not waste them or let them pass me by.

I have accepted time for what it is, and because of this I am able to use every moment I have in life. And I will always be thankful for this, even if it is only because I am always remembering.

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*We're on our way to Disney World. The four of us are. My parents are in the front singing a funny song on the radio really loudly. It's "Bye Bye Miss American Pie." My sister and I are laughing at them; they're not very good. Christi is leaning against me. Everyone is smiling. Everyone is so happy. The smell of grease and fast food fills the car; we're in a car. And I can feel the warmth of my hamburger seeping through the thin paper bag on my lap. It's sunny outside. It's so bright and sunny outside.*



# ***Honorable Mentions***

## **Poetry Honorable Mentions**

Max Drzewiecki, Grade K  
Annie E. Vinton  
Elementary School

Brendan Raynor, Grade K  
Annie E. Vinton  
Elementary School

Alexander Semenza, Grade K  
Annie E. Vinton  
Elementary School

Jack Marlor , Grade I  
Frank M. Kearns Primary School

Morgan Yeager, Grade I  
Frank M. Kearns Primary School

Shea Devanney, Grade 2  
Anna M. Reynolds  
Elementary School

Elise D'Addio, Grade 3  
Clover Street School

Theresa Marciano, Grade 3  
South Elementary School

Emmalee Richards, Grade 3  
Tootin' Hills Elementary School

Radu Costache, Grade 4  
Squadron Lime School

Eliza Douglas, Grade 4  
West District Elementary School

Katie Somosky, Grade 4  
Eastbury School

Thad Allen, Grade 5  
Regional Multicultural  
Magnet School

Sage Connors, Grade 5  
Regional Multicultural  
Magnet School

Paul Saraceno, Grade 5  
Louise Duffy Elementary School

Leiah Cutkomp, Grade 6  
Samuel B. Webb  
Elementary School

Catherine Ingersoll, Grade 6  
Reed Intermediate School

Lizzie Schorsch, Grade 6  
Memorial Middle School

Marina Barrus, Grade 7  
Two Rivers Magnet Middle School

Kyra Norlund, Grade 7  
Smith Middle School

Kristen Onorato, Grade 7  
Coleytown Middle School

Elizabeth Alonzo, Grade 8  
Henry James Middle School

Sandra Carpenter, Grade 8  
Scotts Ridge Middle School

Michael Mei, Grade 8  
Scotts Ridge Middle School

Jacqueline Bickley, Grade 9  
Chase Collegiate High School

Hallie Smith, Grade 9  
Simsbury High School

Leticia Rosario, Grade 10  
Windham High School

Alyssa Hamilton, Grade 10  
Pomperaug Regional High School

Caitlin Meuser, Grade 10  
Simsbury High School

Lizzi Ta, Grade 10  
Rockville High School

Ashley Veilleux-Bonneau,  
Grade 10  
Howell Cheney Technical School

Louis Bousquet, Grade 11  
Killingly High School

Audrey Gidman, Grade 11  
Arts at the Capitol Theater

Stephanie Schloss, Grade 11  
Farmington High School

Jennifer Johnson, Grade 12  
Rockville High School

Nathan Lannan, Grade 12  
Rockville High School

Elizabeth Nutt, Grade 12  
Rockville High School

## Prose Honorable Mentions

Claire Greene, Grade K Annie E. Vinton Elementary School	Sophie Hart, Grade K Annie E. Vinton Elementary School	Sergei Moscardelli, Grade K Annie E. Vinton Elementary School
Lucy Lyttle, Grade 1 Tootin' Hills Elementary School	Chase McGee, Grade 1 Frank M. Kearns Primary School	William Pagliaro, Grade 1 Frank M. Kearns Primary School
Ashley Cohen, Grade 2 Tashua School	Ashley Dearborn, Grade 2 North Street School	Jalil Rincon, Grade 2 Anna M. Reynolds Elementary School
Varsha Irvathraya, Grade 3 Anna M. Reynolds Elementary School	Katelyn Sparks, Grade 3 South Elementary School	Brigid Stoll, Grade 3 Roaring Brook School
Jackie Grimaldi, Grade 4 Kelly Lane Intermediate School	Saige Tapper-Young, Grade 4 Kelly Lane Intermediate School	Kate Werle, Grade 4 Tootin' Hills Elementary School
Abigail McMillan, Grade 5 Kelly Lane Intermediate School	Julia Meehan, Grade 5 West Woods Upper Elementary School	Adrienne Parkinson, Grade 5 Coleytown Elementary School
Leiah Cutkomp, Grade 6 Samuel B. Webb Elementary School	Kathleen Ferrie, Grade 6 Juliet W. Long School	Walter Manuel, Grade 6 Memorial Middle School
Emily Betterton, Grade 7 Granby Memorial Middle School	Suki Hyman, Grade 7 Coleytown Middle School	Olivia Montesi, Grade 7 Elizabeth C. Adams Middle School
Shauna Clifford, Grade 8 Woodbury Middle School	Tara Debek, Grade 8 Fairfield Woods Middle School	Melinda Sonido, Grade 8 Memorial Middle School
Kristin Giorgio, Grade 9 Simsbury High School	Benjamin Hoff, Grade 9 Arts at the Capitol Theater	Kelly Salina, Grade 9 Simsbury High School
Kaylee Cifone, Grade 10 Bristol Eastern High School	Estelle Franck, Grade 10 Bristol Eastern High School	Gabrielle Rosa, Grade 10 Canton High School
Giulia Caterini, Grade 11 Greenwich Academy	Kyle Provost, Grade 11 Rockville High School	Chelsea Melanson, Grade 12 The Morgan School
	Michelle Scanlon, Grade 12 St. Joseph High School	

# *Teachers of Published Authors*

Denise Abercrombie  
E. O. Smith High School

Rick Abrams  
Miss Porter's School

Joe Anastasio  
Bacon Academy

Gail Balavender  
Roaring Brook School

Karen Barton  
Tootin' Hills Elementary School

Nick Benson  
The Gunnery School

Marita Berry  
Windham Middle School

Russ Bombard  
Kelly Lane Intermediate School

Paula Bromley  
Killingly Memorial  
Elementary School

Elizabeth Burdelski  
Bristol Eastern High School

Amy Cahrron  
East Farms School

Sue Canfield  
Colebrook Consolidated School

Marianne Casavant  
Philip R. Smith Elementary School

Amy Congdon  
Tashua School

Christine Dembishack  
Woodbury Middle School

Linde Duckstein  
Annie E. Vinton  
Elementary School

Carol Duggan  
Anna Reynolds School

Caitlin Eckler  
West District School

Carolyn Fink  
West District Elementary School

Deborah Frost  
Rochambeau Middle School

Olive Gianakos  
Kelly Lane Intermediate School

Jessica Gillespie  
Griswold High School

Jan Gioia  
Kelly Lane Intermediate School

Cynthia Gordon  
Kelly Lane Intermediate School

Remi Grunow  
Tashua Elementary School

Deborah Haffner  
Philip R. Smith Elementary School

Joan Hijek  
North Street Elementary School

Donna Horbochuck  
Memorial Middle School

Diane Johnson  
South School

Judith Katz  
Cooperative Arts & Humanities  
Magnet High School

Nadine Keane  
Griswold High School

Heather Keenan  
Annie E. Vinton  
Elementary School

Morgan King  
Kelly Lane Intermediate School

Kathleen Kortis  
Frank M. Kearns Primary School

Kristian Kuegler  
Watertown High School

Kristin LaFlamme  
Kelly Lane Intermediate School

Linda Latimer  
Rochambeau Middle School

Maryann Lindquist  
Latimer Lane Elementary School

Alexander Martino  
Charles Barnum  
Elementary School

**Ann F. McFee**  
Buttonball Elementary School

**Tim Napolitano**  
Reed Intermediate School

**Mary Pat Noonan**  
Memorial Middle School

**Joanne Peluso**  
Bristol Eastern High School

**Paulie Reed**  
Regional Multicultural  
Magnet School

**Lisa Scarola**  
Glastonbury High School

**Betsy Sullivan**  
Long Lots School

**Tricia Troxell**  
Irving A. Robbins Middle School

**Dawn Medve**  
Henry James Memorial  
Middle School

**Meghan Neville**  
West Woods Upper  
Elementary School

**Victoria Norlund**  
Rockville High School

**Candice S. Price**  
Conard High School

**Paula Robinson**  
Simsbury High School

**Amanda Soresino**  
Elizabeth Shelton  
Elementary School

**Lisa Taylor**  
Arts at the Capitol Theater

**Linda Wagner**  
Newington High School

**Susan Zarbo**  
RHAM Middle School

**Anna Moberly**  
Canton High School

**Eugene Newell**  
Brookfield High School

**Rafaek Oses**  
Greater Hartford  
Academy of the Arts

**Kelly Price**  
Granby Memorial High School

**Marcy Rudge**  
Annie E. Vinton  
Elementary School

**Sara Steinnecker**  
Henry James Memorial School

**Lisa Thomas**  
Clover Street School

**Any Yarborough**  
Washington Montessori School