

Hays Arts Council 2017 Poetry & Prose



Creative Writing Awards



**THE HAYS ARTS COUNCIL
CREATIVE WRITING AWARDS
IN POETRY AND PROSE ~ 2017**

Dear Friends,

The following student works represent a broad range of subjects and genres; they are also representative of how art springs from not just the extraordinary but also the ordinary. What some view as mundane, writers can transform into something special.

Writer Raymond Carver once said, "They are significant moments in everyone's day that can make literature. That's what you ought to write about." Students from around the county have done precisely that this year.

As always, a debt of gratitude is necessary to contest coordinator Brenda Meder at the Hays Arts Council and to the judges in the Fort Hays State University English Department: Dr. Carl Singleton, Dr. Eric Leuschner, Morgan Chalfant, Paulia Bailey, Linda McHenry, Sharon Wilson, Brenda Craven, and Dr. James Austin.

Sincerely,

Paulia Bailey, MFA, MA
Fort Hays State University
Department of English

The 2017 Creative Writing Project was made possible through the funding support of



The Hays Optimist Club
Friend of Youth

The Hays Arts Council is supported, in part, through funding from the
City of Hays and Ellis County

2017 Creative Writing Awards ~ Poetry

Gr.	Award	Student	Title of Work	School	Instructor
K	1st	Aubree Scheele-Creek	<i>If I had a Dog...</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Stacy Befort
K	2nd	Makayla Brown	<i>Grandpa</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Stacy Befort
K	3rd	Logan Hook	<i>Basketball</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Stacy Befort
K	HM	Rowan Bader	<i>Dinosaurs</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Stacy Befort
1	1st	Cidnee Werth	<i>My Baby Sister</i>	Wilson	Lisa Schreck
1	2nd	Arien LaDuke	<i>Beautiful Horse</i>	St. Mary's	Megan Everett
1	3rd	Shiloh Gaschler	<i>My Fish</i>	St. Mary's	Megan Everett
1	HM	Kinley Pfannenstiel	<i>My Calf</i>	Wilson	Lisa Schreck
1	HM	Jade Harmon	<i>Star</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Ashley Crump
2	1st	Madeline Pembleton	<i>Thanksgiving</i>	Holy Family	Paula Beck
2	2nd	Kennedy Normandin	<i>At My House</i>	Roosevelt	Jan Burkholder
2	3rd	Kenlee Vehige	<i>Lurking</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Kelly Hansen
2	HM	Camden Luck	<i>Fish Conversation</i>	O'Loughlin	Joan Steinkuhler
2	HM	Cate Rackaway	<i>Butterfly</i>	Roosevelt	Dawn Keil
2	HM	Jakob Sloan	<i>Paper</i>	Wilson	Candace Sage
3	1st	Jacob Schaffer	<i>Yellow</i>	Holy Family	Jennie Helget
3	2nd	Derek Becker	<i>Church</i>	Holy Family	Jennie Helget
3	3rd	Kia Mader	<i>Winter Fun</i>	St. Mary's	Patty Meagher
4	1st	Grace Glover	<i>Heading Home</i>	O'Loughlin	Sonya Herl & Kristy Oborny
4	2nd	Sophie Miller	<i>One Crazy Teacher</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker (Amy Haskell)
4	3rd (t)	Journey Rohleder	<i>The Magic Box</i>	O'Loughlin	Sonya Herl & Kristy Oborny
4	3rd (t)	Breana Seiler	<i>One Day</i>	Holy Family	Teresa Schrant
4	HM	Lauren Klein	<i>Softball</i>	Victoria	Jeanne Brungardt
5	1st	Nate Henderson	<i>Me and My Drum</i>	Wilson	Leslie Karlin
5	2nd	Lacey Jacobs	<i>Colors of Me</i>	Wilson	Leslie Karlin
5	3rd	Leonardo Hernandez	<i>The Ancient Giants of the Seas</i>	O'Loughlin	Henry Armknecht (Karen Smith)
5	HM	Elijah McCullough	<i>An Ode to Star Wars</i>	Wilson	Leslie Karlin
6	1st	Joy Glover	<i>A Wishing Star</i>	Hays Middle School	Sydney Niernberger
6	2nd	Dakota Metzler	<i>Winners</i>	St. Mary's	Jackie Baxter
6	3rd	William Crawford	<i>Baseball</i>	St. Mary's	Jackie Baxter
7	1st	Ryan Schuckman	<i>Snowstorm</i>	Hays Middle School	Brenda Rose
7	2nd	Lance Lang	<i>The Warrior of Alborior</i>	TMP-Marian JH	Carol Brull
7	3rd	Kristen Kuhl	<i>Poetry is Not My Thing</i>	Hays Middle School	Brenda Rose
7	HM	Chris Goodale	<i>All Eyes on Me</i>	Hays Middle School	Brenda Rose
8	1st	Hannah Flynn	<i>Grief</i>	TMP-Marian JH	Carol Brull
8	2nd	Annie Wasinger	<i>An Ode to Fries</i>	TMP-Marian JH	Carol Brull
8	3rd	Monique William	<i>The Big Red Barn</i>	TMP-Marian JH	Carol Brull

9	1st	Zachary Eck	<i>Wise Old Buck</i>	Ellis High	Matthew Spurlock
9	2nd	Natalie Kelsey	<i>New House, Old Home</i>	Ellis High	Matthew Spurlock
9	3rd	Noah Lohrmeyer	<i>Space</i>	Ellis High	Matthew Spurlock
9	HM	Tanner Diehl	<i>Dandelion</i>	TMP-Marian	Vanessa Schumacher
10	1st	Cori Isbell	<i>Purposeful Journeys</i>	Hays High	Kathy Wagoner
10	2nd	Emily Schulte	<i>Canvas of Color</i>	TMP-Marian	Joe Hertel
10	3rd	Kallie Leiker	<i>The Real Me</i>	Hays High	Kathy Wagoner
10	HM	Kaitlyn Lindberg	<i>Untitled</i>	Ellis High	Sheri Bedore
11	1st	Anna Speno	<i>Painted Hands</i>	TMP-Marian	Joe Hertel
11	2nd	Elly Lang	<i>Oblivious Beauty</i>	TMP-Marian	Joe Hertel
11	3rd	Elly Lang	<i>Pre-Performance Panic</i>	TMP-Marian	Joe Hertel
11	HM	Chase Werth	<i>The Unknown Grandma</i>	TMP-Marian	Joe Hertel
12	1st	Madison Crees	<i>I'm Messy</i>	Hays High	Kathy Wagoner
12	2nd	Madison Crees	<i>It's OK.</i>	Hays High	Kathy Wagoner
12	3rd	Rachelle Lumpkins	<i>The Calm has Left the Storm</i>	Hays High	Kathy Wagoner
12	HM	Peyton Augustine	<i>I Told Your Secret</i>	Hays High	Kathy Wagoner

2017 Creative Writing Winning Entries ~ *Poetry*

If I Had a Dog. . .

I would feed her
Take her for a walk
Give her lots of kisses
Fetch some sticks and jump off logs
If I had a dog

Aubree Scheele-Creek
Washington Grade School
Kindergarten, 1st Place

Grandpa

He called me funny names
Would run and tickle me
Gave me pop and candy
I rode his red cycle
I sure miss my Grandpa

Makayla Brown
Washington Grade School
Kindergarten, 2nd Place

Basketball

Blow the whistle
Pass the ball
Dribble and shoot
Rebound don't fall

Logan Hook
Washington Grade School
Kindergarten, 3rd Place

Dinosaurs

Big and Small
Short and Tall
Loud and Roar
Let's Explore

Rowan Bader
Washington Grade School
Kindergarten, Hon. Men.

My Baby Sister

Cashlyn
She is funny
She cries in her bedroom
She plays with me everyday
She cries

Cidnee Werth
Wilson Elementary
1st Grade, 1st Place

Beautiful Horse

Horses can jump
They can run
and are beautiful creatures.
You can ride them
and some have beautiful hair.
I love horses
and they love me!

Arien LaDuke
St. Mary's Grade School
1st Grade, 2nd Place

My Fish

I use to have some fish,
from my 5th birthday
We kept their food in a cabinet
next to the tank.
There were many kinds of fish.
Gold, yellow, red, orange, and brown too.
One was a suckerfish,
who spent his time sucking
keeping it clean.
We liked playing with him
and his friends
They would swish around in the tank
while we traced where they swished.

Shiloh Gaschler

St. Mary's Grade School
1st Grade, 3rd Place

Star

Super bright as the sun.
Tiny as a crumb.
A little light.
Really small.

Jade Harman

Washington Grade School
1st Grade, Honorable Mention

At My House

When I'm bored at my house
I feel like a mouse trapped in his house.
When I'm bored at my house
I feel like an umbrella not pushed out for shelter.
When I'm bored at my house
I feel like a messy room that's left for days and days.
When I'm bored at my house
I feel like a start that no one sees.
But. . . when I'm happy at my house
I feel like a bird chirping on a new spring day!

Kennedy Normandin

Roosevelt Elementary
2nd Grade, 2nd Place

My Calf

Cow has a cute baby
Alfalfa is his favorite food
Licks me when I get close
Follows me in the yard

Kinley Pfannenstiel

Wilson Elementary School
1st Grade, Honorable Mention

Thanksgiving

The candlelight is so sweet.
The peas and corn are so petite.
Everybody's on the ball.
Everybody loves the fall.
The turkey is so big.
We also have a roasted pig.
We're having a party.
Don't wear a wig!
Everybody is at peace and feels just nice.
We also have some buttery rice.
The children are having so much fun.
This is awesome,
Thanksgiving has just begun!
The chicken is roasted,
It smells so fine.
Hurrah everybody!
It's Thanksgiving time!

Madeline Pembleton

Holy Family Elementary
2nd grade, 1st place

Lurking

Most everyone
Has a secret
Even me
I am
A spy
That lurks in the shadows
Slowly I creep
I've seen things
That are top secret
Private things
But I must be careful
There are people
That seek me
But I remain
Hid
I
Could
Be
East
West
South
Or North
I could be anywhere
I could be everywhere
But right now I am hiding
With the other spies

Kenlee Vehige

Washington Grade School
2nd Grade, 3rd Place

Paper

I'm a piece of paper.
Sometimes I cut people.
I have a predator called scissors.
People write on me.
It hurts a lot.
Shredders are also my predators.
I get turned into shreds of paper.
I am not whole anymore.
I guess, I can be used for a craft?

Jakob Sloan

Wilson Elementary
2nd Grade, Honorable Mention

Fish Conversation

Oh no, seagulls.
Seagulls coming for dinner,
HIDE!
Seagulls diving in.
SWIM!
Seagulls catching us one at a time.
HELP!
They got me!
HELP!
Seagulls pulling on me with all their might.
Left
To
Right
Seagulls drop me from midair.
SWIM! SWIM!
Seagulls coming back.
SWIM!
Let's hide.
Seagulls coming for another attack.
Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

Camden Luck

O'Loughlin Elementary
2nd Grade, Honorable Mention

Butterfly

Flap, flap
You fly in the sky
I feel your feathers
As the sun shines bright
Zoom, zoom
I watch you fly
Like a remote control
In the sky
Look at your wings
Sparkle in the light!

Cate Rackaway

Roosevelt Elementary
2nd Grade, Honorable Mention

Yellow

Yellow is like the bright and beautiful sun in the sky.
Yellow tastes like a soft, ripe banana from a tree.
Yellow smells like the Sharpie marker that you just opened.
Yellow feels like smooth, creamy lotion going across my skin.
Yellow sounds like the warm fire crackling in the fire place.

Jacob Schaffer
Holy Family Elementary
3rd Grade, 1st Place

Church

I hear the priest say the Our Father before Communion.
I smell the fire of the candle burning the wax.
I see the Stations of the Cross.
I taste the Body of Christ and
I touch the cup as I take a sip of the Blood of Christ.

Derek Becker
Holy Family Elementary
3rd Grade, 2nd Place

Winter Fun

Snow! Snowflakes! Snow Days!
O how I love snow!
Making snow angels,
Singing carols,
Drinking hot cocoa,
And eating cookies.
I wish it would keep snowing,
Because now I have to go to school!

Kia Mader
St Mary's Grade School
3rd Grade, 3rd Place

One Crazy Teacher

It was bring your pet to show and tell,
No one wanted to bring a skunk with a smell. . .
Other than the crazy teacher!

They prepared for a game of charades,
Nobody wanted to be the everglades. . .
Other than the crazy teacher!

They were going to play with Lego blocks,
Nobody wanted to make smelly socks. . .
Other than the crazy teacher!

Each person had four books to read,
Nobody wanted to learn about types of chicken feed. . .
Other than the crazy teacher!

Even if the teacher's unusually odd,
Everybody's a little flawed. . .
Including the students AND the teacher!

Sophie Miller
O'Loughlin Elementary
4th Grade, 2nd Place

The Magic Box

I will put in my lovely box an ocean breeze,
a smell that is fresh

I will put in my big box sea turtles,
flashy fish
and dolphins swimming in cool Caribbean waters

I will put in my warm box
sun and palm trees all around

I will put in my beach box
white sand and pink water

I will put in my box a reversed world
where the sun grows and the flowers make sunlight

My box is made of jewels
and is black with shining stars

In my box, I shall surf on the land,
and build sand castles in the water
swim in the sand
and sit on the water

Most importantly you will never die there
and it will be Saturday and Sunday everyday
There will be pop music playing all the time
and you can sing as loud as you want in my box
you will always have money in the box

I will put in my box a koala bear
that is so soft and fluffy

Finally, I will put my friends and family in the box
I love my box.

Journey Rohleder
O'Loughlin Elementary
4th Grade, 3rd Place (tie)

An Ode to Star Wars

Star Wars is great,
Though there are only eight,
But the books are more,
You can go through characters galore,
Starships and a super weapon,
Lightsabers are out and in,

From Kylo Ren to Yoda,
Sith and Jedi have a quota,
From the Old Republic,
To Jedi who are telepathic,
From the Sith Order,
To the galaxies border,

From turning heroes,
To exploring grottos,
When Rogue One came,
It gained much fame,
They have \$1,000 billion,
Then they reached the top pavilion.

When heroes change,
Their roles exchange,
After turning points,
They don't disappoint,
I have a bad feeling about this,
To their last perils.

Elijah McCullough
Wilson Elementary
5th Grade, Hon. Mention

Colors of Me

Some people think I'm light blue calm like the ocean water,
but really I'm neon pink wanting to make waves.

Some people think I'm orange wanting to burst out of a flame filled with excitement,
but really I'm black as coal just sitting there burning up.

Some people think I'm gray like the sky after it rains,
but really I'm yellow wanting to pull out the sun.

Lacey Jacobs
Wilson Elementary
5th Grade,, 2nd Place

The Ancient Giants of the Seas

The mosasaur a monster to say the least
Who would find fish to make a feast
And even though it was a beast
It now lies in the sea deceased

Then there is the megalodon
Who was anything but a small fawn
And who would fight on and on
But who now lies in the ocean's lawn

And now we go the the pliosaur
Who had fins of four
That stayed away from the shore
But who now swims no more

Now we go to the livyatan
A giant who weighed a ton
And would attack anyone
But whose time is now done

And now as we finish we see
These monsters were quite lordly
Now dead lay their bodies

So I ask you, what ever happened to The Giants of the Sea?

Leonardo Hernandez
O'Loughlin Elementary
5th Grade, 3rd Place

Baseball

Bubble Gum
At Bat
Steal
Error
Batter Up
Athlete
Line Drive
Lose or Win!

William Crawford
St. Mary's Grade School
6th Grade, 3rd Place

A Wishing Star

If I could have just one wish
I don't know what it would be
I could wish for a jar of sunshine
Like one or two or three
Or I could wish for a never-ending fairytale
To follow Jack Sparrow on his fun
Adventurous sail
Or to run away from all my troubles at last
And loving every moment
As the time ticks past
Or to wish for a giant pizza today
And eat it all without
A single delay
Or something just for me
Like immortality
But that would be no fun
With nothing yet none
Or I guess to know through it all
That someone will catch me
If I fall

Joy Glover
Hays Middle School
6th Grade, 1st Place

Me and My Drum

Paradiddle, paradiddle, eighth note, rest.
Me and my drum, aren't we just the best?
Bang, bang, pow, pow, ad a little wow wow,
Me and my drum playing for the crowd.
Now let's have ding, ding,
and of course the extra ring, ring.
We play all day just for fun,
running a little late I think I have to run.
One, two, three, four, tom, tom, high hat too.
I really like tohit those symbols shining red and blue.
Time is flying by.
My head is in the sky.
Me and my drum along for the ride.
Singing, shouting all day and all night.
Me and my drum shining bright.
We are not done yet no reason to fright.
Me and my drum what a wonderful sight.
If you think we're good you are quite right.
I beat the beat, my drum shines the light.
Now my show's over. I played with all might.
Me and my drum wish you a good night.

Nate Henderson
Wilson Elementary
5th Grade., 1st Place

Poetry is Not my Thing

Poetry is having terrible tongue twisters that thick-throated people
cannot properly pronounce
Poetry is having abnormal atrocities aligned in a row
Poetry is not my thing

Poetry is yellow on a perfectly perfect purple paper
Poetry is marker on a wonderfully white whiteboard
Poetry is an uncrossed 't'
Poetry is an un-dotted 'i'
Poetry is an out-of-tune note on a cello
Poetry is absolutely not my thing

Poetry is having no outlandish imagination
Poetry is a sound in the silence
Poetry is a write who can't write
Poetry is a poet who can't write proper poetry
Maybe poetry is my thing...

Kristin Kuhl
Hays Middle School
7th Grade, 3rd Place

The Warrior of Alborior

There once was a warrior
From the far kingdom of Alborior
He was going to lead the people to victory
Against the evil king's tyranny
He rode his white steed through the land
Slaying monsters and man with only one hand
One day he came across Herald the fool
Who challenged him to a valiant duel
Then would come clashing and slashing of steel
As Herald ran in filled with zeal
But with one slash at his knee
The fool turned and began to flee
The warrior was again back on the road
To the evil wretched land of Baload
Where he'd fight his way to the king
Who would try to take him under his wing
Then he arrived at the castle and kicked open the door
And fought his way across the blood stained floor
After killing all the king's men, he was tired of the fight
But he would not take flight for he knew what was right
So he began the fight with the first swing
And the king countered and the swords struck which caused the air to ring
But after the sun rose up over the trees, the warrior struck with his steel blade
And the king's life began to fade
Mustering his remaining strength, he then cut off the king's head
And then the tyrannical king was **DEAD**

Lance Lang
TMP-Marian Jr. High
7th Grade, 2nd Place

Winners

Nine seconds more, ahead by four,
five on five, look at that dive,
playing stout, that's five fouls you're out,
another win goes in the books,
but we still got our good looks.

Dakota Metzler
St. Mary's Grade School
6th Grade, 2nd Place

Snowstorm

A light, crisp breeze swept across the snow,
On its way to the very small city.
It blowed fast, it blowed slow.
Until it hit the trees, oh, so mighty!
The big, tall trees might stop the wind,
But the wind was agile and could dodge their limbs.

It was a battle! It was a fight!
The wind spread out,
While the trees stayed tight.
One was going to win; there was no doubt.
The trees swayed back and forth,
But the wind kept up its attack!

The wind was dying!
It just had to find a way!
The wind picked up the snow and sent it flying.
A CRACK! and a THUD! and on the ground, a tree lay.
The fight was now coming to a close.
One opponent had fallen, while the other had rose.

As the wall of white disappeared,
The giant trees showed.
The snow had fallen and the wind had cleared.
Under the weight of the snow, the trees bowed;
The white fluff weighed a ton.
Luckily the snowstorm was done.

Ryan Schuckman
Hays Middle School
7th Grade, 1st Place

Grief

All Eyes On Me

I stand here
All eyes on me
Everybody waiting
For me to start
I shift my feet and spin the pedals
And take off down the hill
Getting faster and faster
All eyes on me
I hit the ramp
And take off in the air
All eyes on me
I twist and turn
Try and land
I crash
I fail
All the eyes on me grow wide with worry
Waiting for me to get up
All eyes on me

Chris Goodale

Hays Middle School

7th Grade, Honorable Mention

An Ode to Fries

Boy! Do I enjoy picking up yummy fries at my local drive through,
The salty, waffle fries make my mouth water with anticipation,
My stomach rumbles with eager joy,
Perfect plates piled high with potatoes are placed before me,
My fries are a beautiful yellow like the midday sun,
They come in all shapes and sizes from shoestring to curly,
Piping hot fries waiting to be gobbled up,
Sizzling, scalloped slices of splendor make my day,
They're as crunchy as leaves on the sidewalk,
The frozen fries from the store simply can't compare,
Fry after fry, my joy rises,
The curly fries are like the golden locks of a toddler,
Flavorful bursts fill my mouth as I chew,
My friends munch away with me,
The glorious, fresh treat fills my heart with gratitude,
Boy! Do I love fries

Annie Wasinger

TMP-Marian Jr. High

8th Grade, 2nd Place

Grief is a dying plant
Shriveling up over time as it bakes under the sun
Grasping for water

Grief is a lonely widow
With no one to stand by her side
And hold her hand

Grief is a stray animal
Lost and searching for its loving master

Grief is the surprise of a pop quiz
As you sit at your desk
Unprepared and panic stricken

Grief is a shipwreck
With no life preservers
Or safety boats to rescue you

Grief is a wave
That completely swallows you up
To the point of no escape

Grief is like the kicker of a football team
Missing the championship winning field goal

Grief is like an orphan
Wondering why his parents abandoned him

Grief is like an unemployed father
Unable to purchase a gift for his child at Christmas

Grief is like the child yearning to play soccer
But bound to his wheelchair

Hannah Flynn

TMP-Marian Jr. High

8th Grade, 1st Place

The Big Red Barn

The big, old barn was quite a sight.
It stood with great strength and beauty,
but it will not always stand with great might.
For the great barn has served its duty.
Now the barn sits empty.
It has nothing to hold,
but it still stands so bold.
And creaks and squeaks a great symphony.

Monique William

TMP-Marian Jr. High

8th Grade, 3rd Place

Wise Old Buck

The wise old buck that skirted my tree stand
Setting my alarm clock the night before, I can't wait to go
It takes me forever to fall asleep
I toss and turn and continue being restless forever
I wake up and hurry to get dressed
So I can get there early to make my chances the best
I climb in my tree stand and get settled in
Sometimes I feel like I'm the coldest I've ever been
I watch the sun rise and then watch the wild life
I see a deer coming unfortunately it's just a doe
I'm waiting for a wise old buck it's just a matter of time until he shows
I see him coming so I grab my bow
Then knock an arrow and stand as a statue
He hits a fork in the trail
One leading him away from me
The other into the chance of death
Two steps and he will have to decide
The wise old buck lucked out this time as he steps aside
My hunt is over but I'll be out again
After that wise old buck that skirted my tree stand

Zachary Eck

Ellis High School
9th Grade, 1st Place

Dandelion

Bright yellow flower
Pushing through the concrete
Never giving up

Tanner Diehl

TMP-Marian High School
9th Grade, Honorable Mention

New House, Old home

Imagine living in a home for 14 years
Growing up with the same wallpaper
All the dents in the walls from playing around with your siblings
The old furniture in the basement that your mom insists on keeping
Every corner there is a memory of some sort
Now imagine losing that house that you call home
You have to pack up everything you own
Find toys that you forgot about from years ago
Your mom finally decides to get rid of that old furniture
Your little sister complaining because she doesn't want to throw those old toys away
In the night you hear your mom's cries through the walls
They haven't told you but yet you know that they are already have problems
So now they have to try and find a house with the little money
You try and tell your little sister that the next house will be just as good
But it isn't and you won't go back to the one you grew up in
You just have to get used to the next one and make new memories

Natalie Kelsey

Ellis High School
9th Grade, 2nd Place

Space

Space, it's so beautiful
Dark, empty vast of nothingness
Stars, bright suns of plasma
Planets, round shapes of beauty and color
Black holes that disturb the light
Gravity, no pull, lightness
Constellations, characters of the sky
Asteroids, the remnants of old planets
Comets, flying ice of light and color
Moon, welcoming of darkness
Super nova, a stars last goodbye
Milky Way, band of pale light across the night sky
North Star, star that leads the way
Shooting star, a wish being made
Galaxy, each mysterious in its own way
Sun, brightness and warmth
Astronauts, a child's dream

Noah Lohrmeyer
Ellis High School
9th Grade, 3rd Place

Purposeful Journeys

Without knowledge of this you are
As lost as a dog with no owner,
Determination and integrity gone.
But answer this in all honesty,
What is your why?

The impossibility of succeeding in life
Without the fear of failure
makes us realize failure
Does not act as our biggest foe—
That would be ourselves.

We may face what we call obstacles,
But as we approach them,
we realize our perception of the world remains our own.
Obstacles are not a bad thing to overcome,
For the sole purpose of them enables change.

Traveling onward in our journey,
As we learn and grow;
We grasp the concept that
Perfection is a figment of our imagination.
Perfection is creation made by humans that hinder us.

We find ourselves living in this world of chaos—
A world we cannot control.
Trapped in a world of judgment and labels.
Through the chaos, we must find our light in this darkness—
We must find our why.

Cori Isbell
Hays High School
10 Grade, 1st Place

The Real Me

Some people think I'm as tan as the faded out fence blending into the background,
But really, I'm as orange as the sun awaiting to rise each morning to open a new day.

Some people think I'm as blue as the peaceful, flowing waters of a small river,
But really, I'm as white as the rolling, crashing rapids competing until the end.

Some people think I'm as black as the tough, grooved tire tread pressing over the uneven, rocky gravel,
But really, I'm as yellow as the frail, transparent onion, layered with sensitivity and purpose.

Some people think I'm as red as the wild, grass fire burning across the dry plains on a mission,
But really, I'm as gray as the unknown thoughts that are trapped inside my encircling mind.

People can think what they want to think,
But really, I'm a blended shade of many colors to form the real me.

Kallie Leiker
Hays High School
10th Grade, 3rd Place

The Unknown Grandma

The most fragile woman I've ever seen
Her working hands are quite unclean
With a car so old windows won't retract,
She rolls up to the window with children in the back
With only change and small bills in hand
She receives her food without demand
Struggling to stand up
She barely grasps her warm cup
Never have I received anything but a smile
She stands in the cold all the while
Children's faces showing hunger
The older one comforts the younger
With a sparkle in her eye,
She ducks back in and says goodbye
The only thing left to say
Is we call her grandma to this day

Chase Werth

TMP-Marian High School

11th Grade, Honorable Mention

Canvas of Color

The sun bent down
A dot
In a sea
Of cerulean blue.

The trees craned their necks
A blanket of velvet green
In a meadow
Subtly serene

Bees ceased their bustling work
And grasshoppers grew with curious acquisition

Mischievous clouds
lay still in repose

To glimpse a sight
Of blossoming life

A baby girl
not yet three
With rose-blushed cheeks
And gentle knees

Stopped to play
In a flower-filled meadow
Soaked in sun
Fragile and young
Her white bonnet
An erase mark
in a canvas
of color

Emily Schulte

TMP-Marian High School

10th Grade, 2nd Place

Untitled

When its cover is opened, it causes an adventure.
It takes you far in your imagination.
Whether it be the thin pages of paper between your fingers,
Or the musty smell, it brings you to a new world.
You are friends with the character, and against the enemy.
You feel every emotion, think every thought.
Do you even know what is going on around you?
Or are you lost in your new world?
The words are sinking in your soul.
They leave you feeling brand new.
You keep running through the pages,
Leaping on every word.
You can't stop.
But then,
Those two little words appear.
The
End.

Kaitlyn Lindberg

Ellis High School

10th Grade, Honorable Mention

Painted Hands

Dark eyes
Eyes glazed over
From tears coaxed into the open
By the harshness of wind and sun
Dark skin
Skin hardened from nights spent on
The hard, dry earth
And blistered from days
Under the piercing stare of sunlight
Mouth cracked and scabbed
He licks his lips in an attempt
To replace the absence of moisture
A cruel gift from the dry, Haitian land
The boy speaks to me
A raspy voice
Too sad to dwell in a child's body
Too knowing
He winces with each word
His body rejecting the effort
He speaks an exotic language
Each word perfectly formed
Syllables crafted from
An inner voice too raw
Too painful to be spoken

He looks up at me
Eyes cradling feelings
That haunt
That whisper
Emotions too unearthly to decipher
His hands hold up to me
A simple painted shell
His hands stained with wet paint
Red streaked fingernails
Palms kissed blue
Green splattered wrists
His skin a painting
Too wild to frame
"Mèsi"
I whispered
He nodded
A smile dancing quickly
Upon his rugged features
It was then when
His youth radiated from his eyes
And I recognized the child hiding
Beneath the consequences of his reality

Anna Speno
TMP-Marian High School
11th Grade, 1st Place

I Told Your Secret

there was something indescribable about having my head pushed between your shoulder blades.
like two puzzle pieces fitting together.
barely able to wrap my arm over your side to reach down and hold your hand the way you
wanted to hold mine
bodies tucked so close together
i'd give anything to lie with you like that forever
please don't be mad that i've just told your secret
there is nothing emasculating about wanting to be held
you are still big and strong
but i'm very glad you chose me to lean on

Peyton Augustine
Hays High School
12th Grade, Honorable Mention

I'm Messy

I'm Messy.
I'm messy.
I lose things a lot.
keys,
headphones,
my mind.

I'm clumsy.
I break things a lot.
glasses,
pencils,
hearts.

I'm anxious.
I worry a lot.
grades,
jobs,
you.

yes,
you.

I worry you'll hate my mess
and disarray.
I worry you'll hate that I say
vestibular sense
instead of balance.
I worry you'll hate that I worry,
that I talk too much
that I'm too
loud,
too,
political,
weird,
smart,
dark,
light.

I worry you'll hate me
when I love you.

Madison Crees
Hays High School
12th Grade, 1st Place

Oblivious Beauty

Entangled disaster of auburn locks,
Short, husky build and hunched posture,
Petite rosy lips settled between plump cheeks,
Crinkled, smiling eyes dilated with wonder and ambition
A beautiful flaw in the system of conformity she is.
The egregious stepchild of accepted society,
Oblivious she is to the genuine beauty within her,
Listening instead to the clatter, chaos, commotion of machines
They prod and poke at her with branding irons and tools.
Entrapping her in its matrix, molding her into a perfect product
Go to college
Get a degree
No, not that degree
What are you going to do with an art major?
How about marketing? Communications?
Get a husband
Yes, you need a husband
Settle down
Europe? No, settle down here in a small town
Find a job
No, not that job
Something more stable and practical
Courageous attempts to resist conformity slightly falter.
With each intermittent blow of the machine.
The luminous dreams in her eyes fade one by one.
Through these dull, hazy eyes she sees not the life she desired.
Although we are not closely acquainted,
Merely being near her,
I'm encompassed by the fog of insecurity and defeat seeping from her.
If only I could tell her that all is not lost.
All is not hopeless.
However forceful the machine of society,
Her effervescent personality and flaming locks,
In all their exclusive beauty,
Power through the restraints of societal invariability.

Elly Lang
TMP-Marian High School
11th Grade, 2nd Place

Pre-Performance Panic

Five minutes until show

My strained ears distinguish the condemnatory audience shift and stir in anticipation.
Hovering just beyond the curtain, I deeply inhale the apprehension in the auditorium,
A static, silent terror seizes the cast members with its lethal hold,
Perturbation seethes in the floorboards, in these final, utterly unnerving moments,
Before the curtain parts and blinding white light takes its place,

Four minutes

Stagnant in the air, sultry, sticky anxiety chokes to death all remaining confidence,
In my throat it settles, causing my unsteady voice to hitch with any attempt to rehearse.
Tremors snake the length of my spine through my trembling legs into my toes,
Frothing in my depth of my stomach, the nerves gingerly churn.

Three minutes

Thick, gaudy makeup cloaks my face and morphs with the sweat perspiring on my brow.
On the hollow, wooden stage, frantic heels click-clack and richly embellished dresses swish,
Blinded by the blackness, a panicked cast finds its places.

Two minutes

Lines uttered hundreds of times rebound off the insides of my head,
Pounding ruts in my skull, until there is no meaning left to them.

One minute

Breathe... in... out... in... out...

LIGHTS UP

Elly Lang

TMP-Marian High School

11th Grade, 3rd Place

(over)

It's ok.

It's ok to let go.

It's ok to not be ok.

It's ok to miss someone
who you barely got
to know.

It's ok to ask for help
when you've got all
you can carry
and there's more to unload.

It's ok to put your faith
in a god
or a face
on the street.

It's ok to admit to your defeat.

It's ok to not know
or
to not answer your phone.

It's ok to be alone,
and also to admit
that you don't want to be.

Madison Crees
Hays High School
12th Grade, 2nd Place

The Calm has Left the Storm

BOOM!
Thunder shook the windows.
ZAP!
Lightning hit the ground.

We ran for cover,
Slipping and sliding in the mud.
Throwing ourselves down the stairs,
Barely making it safely to the shelter.

Dad locked the doors,
Mom assured us we were safe.
The wind screamed outside,
The doors threatened to open.

We lay huddled together,
With no bathroom or electricity.
Crying was the only thing the youngest did,
While I was determined to stay strong.

Dad said it was safe to go back outside.
We stepped out, one by one.
Our home was scattered everywhere,
And with it, our hopes and dreams.

Rachelle Lumpkins
Hays High School
12th Grade, 3rd Place

2017 Creative Writing Awards ~ Prose

Gr.	Award	Student	Title of Work	School	Instructor
K	1st	Jack Reed	<i>Deer and His Friends</i>	St. Mary's	Susan Henrickson
K	2nd	Emilie Priest	<i>The Day Red Monkey Got Lost</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Kristen Gaschler
K	3rd	Colt McCoy	<i>The Three Little Wolves</i>	St. Mary's	Susan Henrickson
K	HM	Faythe Rummel	<i>Laura the Fairy Queen</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Stacy Befort
1	1st	Harmony Demoret	<i>Haunted House</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Ashley Crump
1	2nd	Kori Whited	<i>My Two Sisters</i>	St. Mary's	Megan Everett
1	3rd	Asher Haag	<i>A Scary Dream</i>	St. Mary's	Megan Everett
1	HM	Libby Schiel	<i>Mickey Mouse</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Ashley Crump
2	1st	Mattias Marintzer	<i>Super Dogs</i>	Holy Family	Paula Beck
2	2nd	Lucas Dreher	<i>The Paintball Surprise</i>	O'Loughlin	Joan Steinkuhler
2	3rd	John Walters	<i>The Survivor</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker (Beth Simon)
2	HM	Jocelyn Eck	<i>Super Baby</i>	St. Mary's	Amber Deutscher
2	HM	Jersee Fabrizio	<i>Creepy Shopper</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Kelly Hansen
3	1st	Afton Froelich	<i>Pots of Gold</i>	Holy Family	Jennie Helget
3	2nd	Carson Liles	<i>The Flying Car</i>	Holy Family	Jennie Helget
3	3rd	Brody Fischer	<i>The Coyote Hunt</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Kay Poland
3	HM	Jenna Brull	<i>The Hot Air Balloon</i>	Holy Family	Jennie Helget
4	1st	Kritin Sharma	<i>Fighting for Life</i>	O'Loughlin	Sarah Smith
4	2nd	Marisa Wasinger	<i>Hide and Seek</i>	O'Loughlin	Amy Haskell
4	3rd	Kritin Sharma	<i>King of Chess</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker (Sarah Smith)
4	HM	Kolynn Denning	<i>Milton and the Rabbit</i>	O'Loughlin	Kenda Leiker (Amy Haskell)
5	1st	Austin Carroll	<i>Everest</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Holly Lang
5	2nd	Addison Otte	<i>Not so Ordinary</i>	Lincoln	Henry Armknecht (Kerri Lacy)
5	3rd (t)	Kyzer Fox	<i>The Boy from the Other Side</i>	Holy Family	Henry Armknecht (Brenda Stoecklein)
5	3rd (t)	Hope Jones	<i>My Furry Friend Series: Me and My Ferret</i>	Washington (Ellis)	Holly Lang
5	HM	Hailey Klein	<i>The Hay Bale Fall</i>	Roosevelt	Michaela Gower
6	1st	Natalie Loftus	<i>My Hero</i>	Holy Family	Shirley Dinkel
6	2nd	Delaney Staab	<i>The Naughty Nutcracker</i>	Holy Family	Chris Dinkel
6	3rd	Emily Eck	<i>Flipped Upside Down</i>	St. Mary's	Jackie Baxter
6	HM	Tanner Werth	<i>Be Generous With Your Time</i>	Holy Family	Shirley Dinkel
7	1st	Ryan Schuckman	<i>I Have Your Back</i>	Hays Middle School	Brenda Rose
7	2nd	Brooklyn Lewallen	<i>23 on Top</i>	Hays Middle School	Brenda Rose
7	3rd	Willow Arnold	<i>Gone</i>	Hays Middle School	Brenda Rose
8	1st	Anna Brull	<i>Always Second</i>	Hays Middle School	Mary Jo Chambers
8	2nd	Makinsey Schlautmann	<i>The Princess Who Smelled of Fresh Peaches</i>	TMP-Marian JH	Carol Brull
8	3rd	Kalyssa Boyle	<i>Sunrise Plaza</i>	Hays Middle School	Mary Jo Chambers
8	HM	Leah Mages	<i>Chased</i>	TMP-Marian JH	Carol Brull

9	1st	Trinity Bollig	<i>The Great Mush</i>	Ellis High	Matthew Spurlock
9	2nd	Brady Kreutzer	<i>The Envious Flower</i>	TMP-Marian	Vanessa Schumacher
9	3rd	Lauryn Becker	<i>Jury Duty</i>	Ellis High	Matthew Spurlock
10	1st (t)	Trey Hudson	<i>The Trenches</i>	Ellis High	Sheri Bedore
10	1st (t)	Lane Fischer	<i>SSHHHHH!</i>	Ellis High	Sheri Bedore
10	2nd	Dylan Brown	<i>Sahara</i>	Ellis High	Sheri Bedore
10	3rd	Alexandria Hagerman	<i>Them</i>	Hays High	Kathy Wagoner
11	1st	Trae Megaffin	<i>Spy-ders From Hell</i>	TMP-Marian	Joe Hertel
11	2nd	Abby Burton	<i>Mom and Dad</i>	Ellis High	Alyssa Dawson
11	3rd	Elly Lang	<i>Irregular Irritations</i>	TMP-Marian	Joe Hertel
12	1st	Alayna Arnhold	<i>My Eternal Race</i>	Hays High	Kathy Wagoner

2017 Creative Writing Winning Entries ~ *Prose*

Deer and His Friends

Deer and his friends made a tree house out of wood and metal that they found. His friends were Fox, Raccoon, and Squirrel. Bald Eagle wasn't there because he was getting worms for his babies. Deer liked playing in the tree house, but one day their tree house was ruined. They wanted to find out who did it.

The metal was bent, the wood was broken, the window was shattered, and the door was kicked down. They looked up at the fence and there was Cat. He had dark red eyes. He looked mean and wanted to scratch them. Deer and his friends jumped over the lake and Cat followed them. Cat fell in the lake. Cat said, "You can't get away from me. I mean you can because I'm falling down a waterfall."

Then they all ate beef jerky and lived happily ever after in the tree house that they built back up again. They had put a big metal door on it and a lock so no one could get in ever again.

Jack Reed

St. Mary's Elementary
Kindergarten, 1st place

The Day Red Monkey Got Lost

It was the day before Christmas, when Red Monkey woke up, but he wasn't in his house. He felt sad and scared. All he could see was grass and sun. He didn't know where he was at. He thought he should go this way, but it wasn't the right way to go. He ended up in a desert instead of his house. He tried to keep walking but it was too hot for a monkey. He had no water and was thirsty, but somehow kept walking.

After he kept walking he ended up in a world he had never seen before. It looked pretty and there were lots of people and pretty paintings. Colors were everywhere. A girl named, Callie knew how to make monkey noises and talk to Red Monkey. She found out he was thirsty, and gave him some water.

Feeling much better, he started walking again. This time he ended up in a classroom. The teacher thought the monkey was a new student. The kids were all excited to have a silly monkey. Red Monkey decided to turn around. He went back through the rainbow world and into the desert. There he met a magic genie who took him home on his magic carpet just in time for Christmas.

Emilie Priest

Washington (Ellis) Elementary
Kindergarten, 2nd place

The Three Little Wolves

The three little wolves took a nap. After their nap they went hunting for animals to eat. They found a deer at the end of the day. Before they went to bed, they howled.

When they woke up in the morning, they went to a cupcake shop for breakfast. They ran outside like the wind to get to their house. They went to play with their friends. They made a tree house. They played pirates with their plastic swords. They got their dress-up box out and took it in the tree house. They made a pretend boat out of wood. They got in it and pretended that they were sailing the Atlantic Ocean. They found treasure (it was really quarters painted yellow). Then they went inside and went to sleep.

Colt McCoy

St. Mary's Elementary
Kindergarten, 3rd Place

Laura the Fairy Queen

Once upon a time a fairy whose name is Laura lived in the woods. Laura was a very little fairy with pink and red hair. Her skin was white and her dress was pink and purple sparkly. She had green pants which matched her green wings. Her blue eyes sparkled when she smiled. She had a butterfly wand that only fairy queens get. She got this because she was always polite and helped her friends in the forest. Laura loved to play with the animals in the forest. They would sing with her and she would dance.

She loved watching the rainbows appear each night after it rained. One day there was a new animal in the forest. A big, brown, wolf was looking right at her with mean green dotted eyes! The animals were not singing and Laura did not know why. When Laura got close to the wolf he licked his tongue and smacked his teeth together. With her butterfly wand she tapped him on his head and said, "That is not polite, mind your manners out in the forest and be nice to all my friends." The wolf opened his mouth and tried to swallow the fairy queen. The fairy made him go away by twisting her wand around him. He disappeared instantly and never came back to the forest ever again.

Faythe Rummel

Washington (Ellis) Elementary

Kindergarten, Honorable Mention

Haunted House

Once there was a tooth fairy that was in a haunted house. There was a clown chasing her. The clown tripped and fell and he lost his tooth. The tooth fairy got the tooth. The tooth fairy gives the clown money. Then they became friends.

Harmony Demoret

Washington (Ellis) Elementary

First Grade, 1st Place

My Two Sisters

My two sisters are like friends. The littlest one is two years old, her birthday is January 28th. She is my favorite sister when my mom and my other sister are gone. Just dad, me, and my sister. I get tucked in her bed. Her name is Kat. Riley is my other sister. She is four years old, her birthday is August 8th. She is also my favorite sister. In the fall we go out and make a huge pile of leaves and jump in them. We love to play in the leaves. In the summer we go to my Nana's and play in her pool. Kat learns to play in her pool there. We like it there. In the spring we go play with my cousins. In the winter I go to Christmas at Nana's and get to play with all my cousins and my sisters. I love my sisters!

Kori Whited

St. Mary's Elementary

First Grade, 2nd Place

A Scary Dream

I was sleeping in my bed when all the sudden I heard a knock on my door. It tried to break through my window. When I opened the door I saw a Zombie. I slammed the door before he could get in. Soon I heard another knock, it wasn't as hard as a Zombie knock. When I opened the door I saw something that was ghostly and creepy. I closed the door faster than the wink of an eye. I heard another knock louder than a Zombie. My door had holes in it now. I opened my door to see a person, or should I say vampire standing there. It was so creepy that I woke up and it had all been a dream.

Asher Haag

St. Mary's Grade School

First Grade, 3rd Place

Mickey Mouse

Once upon a time Mickey Mouse sailed to Disney World. He got stranded on an island. He did not know where to go so he pushed his boat back in the water. He went one way and found Disney World. Then he went on a roller coaster. He went on all the roller coasters then he sailed home and lived happily ever after.

Libby Schiel

Washington (Ellis) Elementary

First Grade, Honorable Mention

Super Dogs

Once upon a time there lived two dogs in a space. Their names were Scuff and Bacon. They were playing a game they had made up. You had to have a ball to play. They were having a great time. But then Bacon kicked the ball too hard and since they were in space, it didn't fall down. It flew onto Jupiter!

"Oh no!" they said.

"We need to get our ball back," said Scuff. So they flew to Jupiter with their jetpacks. When they got there, they looked around for their ball but they didn't find it.

All of a sudden Scuff heard something. "Did you hear that?" asked Scuff.

"No," said Bacon.

"Shh," said Scuff. "There it is again."

Bacon heard it that time. "Maybe its bacon," said Bacon. They saw something.

"I don't think that's bacon," Scuff said. "That's an alien spaceship."

"Run!" They ran and hid until the spaceship landed. The aliens ran out.

"While they're out of the spaceship, let's see if our ball is in there," said Scuff.

"Maybe there's bacon in there," said Bacon. They snuck inside the spaceship and looked around. They were about to give up but then they found a secret door. They went inside. Their ball was hooked up to wires.

"Look," said Scuff. "There's our ball and it's making the spaceship stronger! We need to destroy the spaceship." They tried everything but the spaceship was too strong.

"Hey," said Scuff. "Look!"

Bacon looked. "What is it?" asked Bacon. "Is it bacon?" asked Bacon.

"No," said Scuff. "It's super power juice! If we drink it, maybe we can defeat the spaceship," said Bacon. They drank the juice. Then they fought the spaceship. They almost defeated the spaceship but it was still too strong.

"Oh no!" shouted Scuff. "It's too strong and I don't have any more plans!"

"We're doomed!" said Bacon.

"Wait!" said Scuff. "I have one more plan."

"What is it?" said Bacon. "Eat a ton of bacon?"

"No, no," said Scuff. "We need to use all of our powers and work together. So Scuff and Bacon worked together and defeated the ship. Then they rushed inside and got the ball back.

Then they went home. They decided that they would only use their powers for good. They lived happily ever after.

Mattias Marintzer

Holy Family Elementary

Second grade, 1st place

The Paintball Surprise

Splat! Splat! Paintballs were going everywhere. They went left, right, and in every direction. Thirteen-year-old Jason Rollins was in one of the most important paintball games of his life, The Goliath Games. Jason peeked in front of the inflatables checking for other players. He didn't have a clear view, so he decided to ask his best friend Owen who was right beside him for help. "Owen" Jason whispered. "I need your help. Will you lift my feet above the inflatable so I can mark those two players so some our players can come into the game?" "Sure," said Owen. He held two hands just above the ground to hoist him up. Jason put one of his grip shoes on one of Owen's hands and his other shoe on Owen's opposite hand. Owen lifted Jason up over the inflatable. Jason shoved his head into the inflatable so no one would see him. Jason lifted his marker up to shoot and pulled the trigger. Splat! Splat! Jason had shot two paintballs directly at one of the other opponents.

Sam and Cody were also on Jason's team. Sam was on one side of the inflatable and Cody was on the other side. They pulled their triggers. Splat! Splat! Splat! Splat! Splat! Splat! Sam and Cody had marked two players at the same time.

"JASON!" Owen yelled. "Can you come down now? You are getting HEAVY!" "All right, Owen" Jason said. "Pull me down, Owen. QUICK!" Owen let go of Jason and he tumbled to the ground. A paintball went blazing through the air right above the inflatable. "I didn't say let go, Owen!" yelled Jason. "I said PULL me down!"

Quickly, Jason pulled himself up and ran to the other side of Owen. Then he ran across some dirt to a colored cargo net. Jason gave Sam a hand-sign to shoot at the count of three. "One, two, three" Jason yelled. Sam pulled his trigger two times and Jason pulled his once. Splat! Splat! Splat! Three paintballs went soaring though the air at two of the opponents. "RUN!" Jason screamed to his teammates. Everyone charged at the other team including Jason. While running, their markers were hitting their targets one by one. Splat! Splat!

Players on both teams were very quickly eliminated. More paintballs came out of their markers. Jason pulled his trigger at the last player. Splat! "Eliminated!" said Miles, Jason's coach. "The Red Team wins!" Miles shouted. Jason started to do a little dance in front of Owen. "Show-off" mumbled Owen under his breath. "What did you say?" Jason snapped back. "Nothing." Owen replied. "NO, what did you say?" asked Jason in a sly voice. "All right I said Yea to myself." Owen replied. "You did not, you said SHOW-OFF!" Jason was furious. He stomped back to the observation area and met up with his teammates. The only thing remaining in the paintball was zone was Owen staring at the ground.

Several days later, Jason and Owen went racing back to the paintball field for the finals of the Goliath Games. As the last team exited the course, Jason's team jogged onto the field. "We're going to crush the green team guys!" Jason yelled. "Yea!" yelled the team. "Three minutes until the game starts." Miles yelled. "Positions!" Jason called out. Everyone got behind nets, inflatables, and signs. "START!" Miles announced. Jason was in a stack of tires hiding inside of them and Owen was in another tire stack on the other end of the field. Splat! A paintball went blazing out of Owen's marker. Owen ducked so no one could see him. However, it was too late. The green team players were already firing at Owen's tire. Jason thought fast. He aimed at the players shooting at Owen. Splat! Splat! Splat! Jason had marked two of the players. The third player was now shooting at Jason. Jason ducked and thought to himself, I'm in big TROUBLE. Suddenly Cody and Sam came rushing out of an inflatable shooting. Splat! Splat! Paintballs were flying everywhere. The person shooting at Jason was now marked. There were only two opponents remaining to mark. Jason jumped out of his tire forgetting about the combo. He shot a paintball. Splat! He marked his first player out of two. He fired again. Splat! Splat! Fired the last player on the green team. Cody and Sam were both eliminated and now covered in green paint. Splat! A paintball came whizzing out of Jason's marker. He marked the last player!

"Jason Rollins has won the Goliath Games!" Coach Miles hollered. Jason held the trophy in the air and yelled "This is a TEAM trophy!" He grabbed his best friend, Owen. Then they all left the paintball zone shouting in big cluster. "Friendship is more important than any game." whispered Jason.

Lucas Dreher
O'Loughlin Elementary
Second grade, 2nd place

The Survivor

What a great day for a motorcycle ride through the canyon! The weather is perfect out and there is little breeze. It is nice and warm and Joe is just cruising down the highway when suddenly, a big deer jumps out on to the road. Joe is so shocked that he can't react and gets thrown off his motorcycle!! Everything goes silent and several hours pass. He must have been unconscious, but then he wakes up on the ground. Joe feels disoriented and his bones and muscles ache. Taking all the energy he has, he gets up and starts walking. He looks back at his motorcycle and quickly realizes that the wheels are off and the handlebars are broken. There is no way that he will be able to ride it to get back on the road. That's when Joe decides to grab his backpack and try to survive on his own until help arrives.

Joe begins walking down a steep, wooded path when he spots a bear. Before Joe can hide, the bear glares at Joe. It is too late! The bear immediately lunges toward Joe. At this point, Joe only has enough time to get out his gun and aim. BAM!! He hits the bear, then runs over to skin it. When he gets over there, the bear gets up and runs after Joe. YIKES! Joe runs as fast as he can and then he shoots the bear repeatedly. Finally, the bear falls!! This time Joe tip-toes over to the bear to make certain that the bear is dead. Then he begins to skin it. When he has completed the task, Joe stuffs the skin and meat in his survival bag and goes to collect wood for a shelter. Even though Joe is feeling wiped out from the bear hunt, he feels confident that he can accomplish the rest of his tasks.

Building a shelter is necessary and Joe knows it is essential for his survival. He gets a few sticks and a sharp piece of wood to make an axe. He starts to chop down a big tree. When it is chopped down, he starts to cut it into logs and then uses some of it for a fire; but most of it will be used for his shelter. Before he begins the shelter; Joe starts a nice, crackling, hot fire to cook the bear. Then he reaches in his survival bag and finds the skinned bear, pulls it out, and sets it on the fire. To begin the slow building process, Joe starts to build the shape of the shelter by making a big square, and then he starts to repeatedly do that until he gets it high enough for a roof. Then he takes off his shoelaces and wraps the sticks around the logs. He did the roof the same way he did the walls. Finally, he has a shelter to keep him safe. Next, he makes a torch for light, lays out his sleeping bag, and gets out his empty thermos. Taking his thermos, he quietly walks out of the shelter. He fills his thermos with water and goes back in the shelter and tastes a bite of the cooked bear. It tasted surprisingly good. Then he realized he needed to boil the water to get all the germs out of it. While he was outside, he remembered that the bear skin could be a carpet. He put the bear skin down on the ground inside the shelter. It was just big enough for a carpet. Finally, he could get some sleep.

The next day he woke up and realized he was going to need a bit of food for the day. Joe quietly creeps through the forest and spots a big juicy deer. He takes aim with his gun, shoots the gun, and hits the deer. Joe is relieved that he would have food for the day. After dragging the deer back to camp, Joe is very calm and hungry so he decides to cook the deer the same way as the bear. As the sun was setting, he spotted something shining in the grass. He slowly got up to examine it. It was a scrap of metal. Yea! This is just what he needs to signal for help. The next morning, he heard a helicopter and immediately started to signal the helicopter with the piece of scrap metal he had found!! The helicopter started to hover down, and Joe was overjoyed. He was finally going to be rescued.

John Walters

O'Loughlin Elementary

2nd Grade, 3rd Place

Super Baby

There once lived a baby that was super. His name was Oliver. He lived with a lovely family. His mother, father, and big sister. They didn't know that he had super powers, but he could time travel, fly, and be incredibly strong. Then one day, Boom! he disappeared from his crib. His mother walked into check on him, but when she looked, she screamed, "He is gone!" His father and big sister walked in.

"Who's gone?" asked Oliver's father.

His father and sister looked into the crib and started crying along with Oliver's mother. They went out to look for him everywhere. They looked at the baby shop, they looked at the lake, and they looked at every single place in town except for the water tower.

"We looked everywhere," said Oliver's father but Oliver's big sister was smart.

"Well, we haven't looked at the water tower." Oliver's sister commented.

"Yes," said mother, "You are correct, let's go look."

When they got to the water tower, nothing could be seen. They went back home and turned on the TV and couldn't believe what they were watching. They were talking about a flying baby at the water tower and he was waving a person from falling off of it. They didn't know that it was Oliver for a second, until his sister said, "Wait a minute, there is something familiar about that baby! That is Oliver!"

They hopped into the car and drove as fast as they could. All of a sudden they heard the cop's sirens, so they had to pull over.

"Why are you speeding?" asked the police officer.

"It is kind of a family emergency," replied Oliver's father.

"What kind of an emergency would you need to be speeding for?" the cop asked.

"Did you see the news a few minutes ago?"

"Yes," he replied.

"Well, that is out son and we need to get to him."

Finally the police office let them go. When they got there, Oliver was flying up to save a little girl. When the saving was done, people came to take pictures of Oliver, and Oliver's mom and dad said, "That's our son."

Jocelyn Eck

St. Mary's Elementary

2nd grade, Honorable Mention

Creepy Shopper

One winter day a very strange old man made a trip to the mall. He made some interesting purchases. At the shoe store he bought bright pink and sparkly high heels. He picked out a necklace, bracelet, and a matching ring from the jewelry store. I followed him to Justice where he bought a purple purse and a very girly outfit. What a strange purchase for a grown man! I was curious so I continued to follow him. At the clothing store he bought a dress. It was pink and had Shopkins all over it. I followed him to the toy store where he got a basket full of girls' toys. There was Shopkins, Barbies, and all kinds of girl Lego Sets. I was a little freaked out, but still very curious. I tiptoed behind him. He finally went to a suit shop. I hid behind the front desk as he asked for bright red pants, a black belt, and a fluffy red coat. "What kind of shopper is this?" I wondered. Then to my surprise, out comes Santa! No wonder he was picking out so many girl things! He was picking out someone's gifts. What a fun surprise!

Jersee Fabrizius

Washington (Ellis) Elementary

2nd grade, Honorable Mention

Pots of Gold

Some people tell me there is a pot of gold at the end of every rainbow. I do not believe them. Today it rained and it cooled me off. I looked outside and saw some of my friends riding their bikes in the rain. I sat and watched a little TV. Then I went to my room and took a little nap. I dreamed about gold.

When I woke up it was 3:30 p.m. I finally got up and decided to ride my bike to the end of the rainbow. When I got there...there was GOLD! I screamed! I thought it wasn't real, but I took a piece and it was real!

I stuffed some in my pockets and rode home. I got all the bags I could find and went right back to pack up all the gold. I took the heavy load of gold home. I told my friends to come to my house so I could show them something.

When my friends got to my house. We went upstairs to my room and they said “WOW! That’s real?!” We decided to go and buy anything we wanted. We bought books, journals, and Shopkins. We were all very happy.

Afton Froelich
Holy Family Elementary
3rd Grade, 1st Place

The Flying Car

The scientist...

It all started with a key that a scientist built for a flying car. He was wondering what to invent...and then it hit him...he was going to build the first flying car!**

He went to a restaurant one night with his friend. When he was on his way home, he dropped his keys. He got home and was going to take his car for a test drive, but the key was missing.

The high school kids...

A kid was walking home with his friends that same night. They came upon a key. The key was very strange; it had an eye at the top and the rest looked like a regular key. They wondered what it was for. The friends decided to get together the next day.

The scientist...

He was very angry about what he did. The next day he was going to go back and look everywhere. He was very tired because he had been working on the flying car all that day.

The high school kids and the scientist...

It was the next day and the friends decided to go to the scientist for help. They knocked on his door and he came to the door. They asked, “Have you ever seen a key like this before?”

“YES! That is my key!”

“What is it for? It looks very strange.” the kids asked.

The scientist started to answer, “I invented the key for ...um...well, can you keep a secret?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, it is for a flying car that I invented!”

The kids went to the scientist’s house every day. When he passed away, the kids got the flying car and they all grew up to be scientists too.

Carson Liles
Holy Family Elementary
3rd Grade, 2nd Place

The Coyote Hunt

Daniel and George have been hunting buddies for a long time. They enjoy spending time together. Today Daniel is driving as they head off. They are both good hunters, but they do not have smart common sense.

On a Saturday afternoon, out of nowhere, they kicked up a coyote, going west! They turned out the dogs, which were named, Waylon, Cash, Alex and Mabel. Daniel and George did not know that there were other people deer hunting in the same area. The deer hunters came flying up the road and into the milo stalks. They skidded to a stop, waved and pointed at the no trespassing sign.

The deer hunters called the sheriff to report that Daniel and George were trespassing. Daniel and George had not seen the trespassing sign!

Daniel and George were nervous while they waited for the game warden to arrive. When the game warden got out of his truck he was carrying his ticket book. He wrote them a ticket.

Daniel and George had to go to court. They explained to the judge that they did not mean to trespass. They told how they had seen a coyote and were excited to start the run, but they didn't see the no trespassing sign. The judge understood, but still fined them \$152. The good news was they got to keep their hunting licenses, their dogs, and their truck.

Brody Fischer

Washington (Ellis) Elementary

3rd Grade, 3rd place

The Hot Air Balloon

The Holy Family Chili Supper is one of my favorite events every year. My whole family goes to do all the exciting activities. We always look to see what we could bid on at the Silent Auction.

We were excited when we saw a hot air balloon. We decided to bid on it. We had to hurry, the silent auction was closing in two minutes. We hoped we would win. If we did, we'd know tomorrow.

WE WON THE HOT AIR BALLOON! We decided to ride it tomorrow. The next day...ding-dong, our hot air balloon arrived. It took forever just to inflate it. It was time to ride so we went to the park to set it free.

3...2...1...Blast Off! In two seconds we were back on the ground. But then we were touching the clouds! The sky was so blue and the clouds were...well, they were super gray. It was probably going to rain!

We needed to go. Faster, faster—quick, hurry! BOOM! Lightening flashed in front of my eyes. Suddenly we touched the ground. We were relieved and hurried home to where we were safe. Next time we want to ride, I think we will look at the weather **before** we go!

Jenna Brull

Holy Family Elementary

3rd Grade, Honorable Mention

Fighting for Life

I'm a nice boy, a brave boy too. And living on a cramped up farm in New York is my life. At least that's what I think it is and what it'll be. My name is Charles, Charles Oleson, and living with 5 of the most annoying brothers you've ever seen is just the worst. We're poor, very poor with barely enough money to survive. And this is my poor, striving family's dangerous, and adventurous trip of crossing almost the whole country just for a risk, a risk of finding gold.

"Ma, I'm bored, can't we do something exciting?" I asked from over in the crop fields, doing my morning duties, watering and plowing our crops.

I hated working in this field, I wanted to go somewhere amazing.

"For the last time Charles, we can't. We can barely even afford food! Your father is working as hard as he can to keep us alive! Now will you stop asking and get back to your work." I'm like a fish in a tree. My house is the tree, and the rest of my family are leaves, but I'm a fish because I don't belong. I just don't like farm work, while the rest of the family loves it. But later on, that very evening, my life changed just by hearing the words from my father's mouth. My pa came home late that night with some of the greatest news ever.

"Pack your bags, 'cause we're going to Sacramento, California," he whispered into my ear with a little chuckle. Those words sent a shiver down my spine, and I woke up suddenly. Following the mysterious voice, not knowing it was my father, I packed everything I would need for a long journey. Just then when I was going back to sleep that I realized that soon enough, this farm life was going to be junk and I was going to have a new life, a better life.

The next morning when I woke up, my bags all packed and my clothes folded neatly on my old, rickety table. It was early morning, barely 5:00, so I took a bath using the early light of the blazing morning sun. After cleaning up my room, I walked down the creaky stairs in my ragged up leather shoes. I ate my breakfast with mom and dad watching me eagerly, obviously excited for whatever the trip was for. Not before long, the rest of my brothers came rushing down the wooden staircase, making a lot of racket. The bread I was eating was so hard, I could barely bite. While everyone was busy eating their bread and milk, me and pa went out to feed our horses, Twinduction and Dusty. After they were all full, we packed all the bags in the back of our wooded buggy. Then the rest of my family came hurrying out of our house. The moment my dad pulled the reins, the horses took off. We rode away, away from our home, and away from all the farming.

As we bumped along the dirt path, the wind blew in my face, which made me shiver. I could see the corn fields blowing on either side of me. We were in Colorado now, after stopping many times. But this was the hardest part of this whole trip – facing the harsh Rocky Mountains.

“W-w-why is it so cold out here,” I asked my mom in a shivered whisper.

“We’ve reached the Rocky Mountains, but don’t worry, we will be out soon,” she replied in a firm voice. Soon enough, we had drove out of the mountains and had entered Utah. We stopped once more, and we were ready to continue. Our horses took us down that path lickety-split.

Day after day passed as we got closer to our destination, the capital of California. Finally, one warm and sunny day, I saw the sign, the sign that would change my life. It read Welcome to California, in big brown, bold letters. Underneath it was a sticker saying – Gold Found Here. Dad saw the excitement on my face and said

“That’s why we’re here and we’re going to get gold!” My jaw dropped and my mouth hung open for quite a while, letting the chill of the low winter breeze blow against my face. I turn to my mom but she just nodded, with sort of a half smile on her face.

“This place is breathtaking, and I just want to live here,” I whispered as we rumbled to a stop in front of a giant dirt pit, with hundreds and thousands of gold hungry miners were hard at work digging, digging for gold.

“I suppose we should get down there and join’em.” We walked our way down the dirty and muddy path. After we spotted a clearing in the dirt, we walked over to it and set up our tiny campsite. Then we started toward another clearing near the back of our campsite. I reached into my ripped up duffel bag and pulled out my pan and shovel. I started out panning, but soon enough, the sky turned dark and most of the miners went into their camps.

The next morning, I was up before any other miners, digging. When just enough miners were waking up and starting, I hit something in the ground. It was metallic, I could tell by the sound. When I dug around it just enough so I could reach in and grab it. When I curled my fingers around it, the object felt warm in my hand but cold at the same time. I curled my fist tighter around it and yanked it out.

“It’s gold” I whispered to myself.

“IT’S GOLD!!!!!!!!!!!!!!” I shouted! I think I shouted too loud. Every single miner stared at me. Then my father came over to me and said,

“Be qui – w-what is that?” He looked straight into my hand. The one with the gold. Then suddenly, an urge came up to me, an urge to keep digging and find more gold. I just started to dig like mad. Soon, the rest of my family figured out what I was up to and started digging with me. By now, all the minders were looking at us like we were a pair of wild and crazy horses. But then they stared at what we were collecting in our hand. They whispered to what seemed like family members, and then they all came rushing forward toward us. They started reaching into the holes we had created, and now they were grabbing all the gold we had dug up.

“Back off!” yelled my mother.

“Scram!” my father shouted. They took over almost all of our area so we had to pack everything up. But we packed all our gold up. It was a plenty good amount, what we had collected. We slept in our tent for that last night. When I woke up early the next morning, ma and pa were talking with happy smiles on their faces.

“Charles will love this,” I heard them say. Love what? I thought.

Then dad saw me and stopped talking, I felt like this was a bad thing, but then he came over to me and said, “I made some arrangements with my client, and we deposited some of our gold to buy a new house, a house here.”

“What?” I said. We all packed up our bags and started off to the buggy, which dad would guide to the new location of our house. Living in that house in Sacramento was a life, a better life, just like I had hoped for. It was Californian life. The far west life.

Kriten Sharma
O’Loughlin Elementary
4th Grade, 1st Place

Hide and Seek

I looked out the window as mama was reading me one of her old poems that I love. As I looked out the window, I saw something that lit up the sky, and you could barely see the sliver of sun left. Then mama looked out she and I could see trucks from the distance. They were coming closer. Very fast.

Mama jumped up. With wide eyes she gasped, “Tommy get your stuff fast.”

So I scurried and grabbed three things and threw them into my blanket. I ran only because mama said fast. And mama *never* says fast.

When I got outside we started to run. As we were running I asked, “What’s going on?”

There was no reply. Not even papa who always answers me.

That made me so scared I ran ten times faster. Mama and papa caught up in a snap; I guess they were scared too. We dove down in to some rocks. Right before I jumped I looked back at our farm as troops busted in.

Mama pulled me down just as a big truck passed by with a bigger spotlight. She poked me and it made me put my face down. Right then it swept over us. They almost saw us.

To get away from them mama signaled to go across the corn fields. I remembered mama said “If we ever have to run it will be dangerous.” Then she said something I didn’t get, “The ones that chase us are the ones that hate. The ones they hate should not be hated by any. The ones they hate are Jewish no doubt. But sadly we are the hated; not just us but many.”

And as we ran I thought about that long and hard, but still did not know what it meant.

As we ran papa looked at the corn stalks. I guess to see if someone was following us. We ran carefully. We also ran silently. About half way through the first field mama started to look around.

Mama shifted to be next to papa. Then, so quietly I almost couldn’t hear her, she whispered, “Be on the look out for a tall tree.” Papa simply nodded his head yes.

Finally we came across some trees. All of a sudden we all started to sprint for them. When we finally got to the trees I plopped down and leaned against one. Mama came over and whispered to me, “Get up, we’re almost there.”

So I stumbled to my feet. We started to go through the small forest. Now mama and papa, with their heads opposite of each other, were looking so carefully for a tall tree that I don’t think they blinked.

We came to stop in the middle of the trees. Mama and papa spun around. Papa whispered, “That one.”

Papa went over to the tree and started to climb. He was up there for one or two minutes. Then he looked down and nodded. Mama and I went up.

Mama found two big branches and put a lot of leaves on them.

I leaned against mama as she covers me up with my blanket and tells me a beautiful poem, “We all lay silent while the world is loud. We all are in the dark as the world is bright. We are the hiders but we will defeat the seeker only if we are together. Together is the only thing strong enough to defeat the seeker.”

And I fell asleep.

Marisa Wasinger
O’Loughlin Elementary
4th Grade, 2nd Place

King of Chess

It's down to the board, my mind, and my moves. My rook is gone, my bishops are gone, and four of my pawns are gone. I take a deep breath and try to concentrate, but tiny voices inside my head keep telling me to make stupid moves. I push those voices away and try to think. Think in my head. I close my eyes and imagine my friends and I as the pieces. Jordy would definitely be a bishop, for he was so little, but he could take the longest steps and plow down the biggest threats. Montreal could easily take down the powerful, but even though he was so big and powerful, he could only take the littlest steps, like the king. And me, well let's just say I'm a rook, who can only travel front, back, and side to side, but can't travel diagonal, so no outside the box thinking. I'm just a plain boy, with not much more knowledge than just chess. I snapped out of my thought, and then out of the corner of my eye, I saw a move I had never even bothered to make before. My pieces were all lined up so that if I just moved my queen forward, and Dad's king took him, my bishop could then take him. If he didn't move in that spot, my knight could take him. So, with bravery I pushed my queen forward; hoping for a checkmate.

"Checkmate!" I yelled as I pulled my hand of the queen's head.

"Good Job, Riley!" said my dad proudly as he got out of his chair and brushed out the door. I cleaned up the chess board and packed it all away deep into my closet. I went downstairs ready for dinner. After I stuffed myself with the best homemade pizza, I rushed upstairs, changed into my PJs, and jumped into my bed. It felt like something was pulling me into its furry body. It felt nice snuggling up in the covers after one heck of a chess game.

The next morning, I woke up with the sound of the birds whistling through the open window; their shadows lying on my ruffed-up bed. It was an early, nice, breezy Saturday morning; and I was ready for visiting my friend. The week had been rough with all the school and after school activities. I was ready for the weekend, and had planned to go over to my friends. I climbed out of bed and walked lazily downstairs. The morning sunshine poured through the screen door while I ate breakfast. Then I went to the bathroom and took a shower. The water felt nice, but I wasn't there for long. After I was dressed, I headed out to the garage for a while to ride my bike.

"I headed for Jordy's and I'm taking Drake," I shouted as I rolled my bike out onto the driveway. Drake, my dog, panted out from outside the screen door; he was filthy. He needed a bath. I climbed off my bike and went over to the hose, "Come on boy," I said as he trotted over to me. I turned up the water and sprayed him all over. Soon enough, all the dirt was off, and he was ready to go for a little run. I climbed onto my bike and started off down the block with Drake close on my tail. At Jordy's, we ran around outside and played on his Wii while Drake chased Cody around.

As soon as the sky began to turn dark, my mom hollered for me, "Come back home, we need to talk." I climbed onto my bike and started down the block with Drake trailing closely behind.

We arrived home and I could smell the scent of the greatest sandwiches. I put my bike into the garage and jogged into the house. "What's up?" I said as I pulled off my shoes and sat down in my seat. The sandwiches smelled so good. I was eagerly awaiting.

"Your dad thought that you played really good yesterday in the chess game so he wanted to see if you could handle a state tournament on Thursday. If you decide to do this, we leave tomorrow." My jaw dropped wide open. I was nervous and anxious at the same time. After eating, I walked up to my room and got ready for bed. I had a lot to think about. My dreams were horrible that night; probably because I was thinking about the competition too much. The next morning, I woke up early and I started packing.

The morning was bright and sunny, and it was a good day to drive. We stuck all our bags into our Toyota Land Cruiser, checked our house for any last-minute things, and got into the car. We were heading off to Philadelphia. Now that we were on the road, I was looking for excuses not to go. I couldn't find any. My nerves were getting the best of me.

As soon as we reached Philadelphia, we rented a hotel for a week and then got some dinner. It was late, so we had to get something quick. The tournament was four days from now, so I thought I should begin practicing. The next three days went by fast.

The day of the tournament had arrived. I got ready and went off to the university. There were a lot of chess players there. The tournament had clearly already started. As soon as they said my name, I slowly got up from my seat and walked to the stage. My opponent was huge! His size intimidated me. I had to block it

out, though. The game began, and I made my first move. This helped me to gain some confidence. We made several other moves as the game continued. Then my opponent made a poor move, so in return I made a strategic one. He was now in check...then checkmate. I did it! I won the chess match.

The next thing I heard over the loud speaker was, "Riley Roberson is our champion player and will be competing in the Nationals with some of the best in the country!" If I thought I was nervous before, now I was really going to be nervous. I would have to step up my game to compete at this level.

Later, I got an award, and then we left the tournament. We drove back to the hotel and I got ready for bed. Before going to bed, I looked in the mirror. I told myself, "I am ready! I can do this! I'm ready for the finals!"

Kritin Sharma
O'Loughlin Elementary
4th Grade, 3rd Place

Milton and the Rabbit

One day as Milton Hershey woke up, he walked into the kitchen. "What should I have for breakfast?" he asked himself. As he walked over to the cupboard, he looked out the window. There were rabbits and birds everywhere he glanced. He quickly made a bowl of cereal and ran out the door with the cereal bowl in his hand.

"Got to get to work!": he said as he opened the car door and then proceeded to drive to work. Once he arrived, he grabbed his keys that opened the doors to the factory, opened the large metal doors, and walked in. His employees were already busy at work boxing the chocolate bars that they made the previous day.

"We need more chocolate! Where is all our product?" questioned Milton. Milton continued hollering about how sales were down and the company was not producing enough. That's when one of the employees pointed out that ever since the labeler machine broke down, the employees had to hand stamp everything. This is what was bogging them down from getting shipments sent out. Milton was frustrated, yet he wasn't sure what they would do about this. His company was losing money fast.

Just then, he looked over at a random box of chocolate bars and noticed that something underneath the chocolate was moving. He walked over to the box and lifted the top layer of chocolate bars. As he glanced in the box, he spotted something strange and furry. It was a rabbit!!!

"AAAAHHHHH" Milton screamed. The rabbit hopped out of the box and darted across the factory equipment. Milton started to chase the rabbit as it hopped here and there. The rabbit leaped into another box and started scratching at the wrappers.

"**STOP THAT YOU RABBIT!**" Milton yelled. Milton crept over to the rabbit carefully to not spook it away and quickly grabbed it. That's when the strangest thing ever happened...

"I'm sorry!" apologized the rabbit. Milton's eyes grew big in total shock. The rabbit just spoke to him, or was he hearing things? The rabbit continued, "I got locked in here last night and there was no way out! I got hungry after a little while so I ate some chocolate. It is delicious, by the way. After I ate, I was tired so I nestled in the box of chocolate and kept warm overnight!" said the rabbit. Milton felt the guilt building up in his stomach. Milton felt the muscles in his arms release and he carefully set down the rabbit.

"It's okay" said Milton sympathetically. "It's not your fault that you got locked in here, Milton confessed. He looked around at the huge boxes of chocolate. "Would you possibly like a job here at the Hershey Chocolate Factory?" Milton asked the rabbit.

"Of course, I would!" said the rabbit in excitement. Milton walked over to his costume cabinet and got out a small apron that said "Hershey Chocolate Factory" on it. He looked deeper into the cabinet to see what he could find. That's when he saw a hand stamper and pulled it out.

"Hey Mr. Rabbit!" Milton screeched with excitement. The rabbit came hopping over. He gently lifted the bunny off the ground. He slipped the apron onto the bunny and tied the back strings together.

"Would you like to be the chocolate bar labeler?" asked Milton.

"Of course, I would!" said the rabbit. The rabbit hopped onto the table next to the cabinet. Milton gently put the hand stamper onto the rabbit's paw. He strapped the stamper onto the rabbit's paw with a rubber band. Milton then carried the rabbit over to a large box of chocolate that had not been stamped yet. He pulled

chocolate from the large box and put it in a long row. The rabbit started hopping down the long row of candy bars and stamped them. This new plan was going to work just great. Milton and the rabbit knew that this was a good start to a new friendship and a good business!

Kolynn Denning
O'Loughlin Elementary
4th Grade, Honorable Mention

Everest

I awoke at 4:30 a.m. on Saturday, April 12, 2016. Today is the day that I take my flight from Fairbanks, Alaska, to Denver, Colorado. From Denver I fly to Kathmandu, Nepal and from Kathmandu I drive the last hundred miles of my journey in a rental truck. I am going to climb the last of the seven summits I have to climb. I am going to Mount Everest.

After packing my bags, I hopped into my brand new 2017 Ford Super Duty and headed to the airport in Fairbanks. As I looked to my left I could see Mount Denali, the first of the seven summits I'd climbed, towering over the road. When I arrived in Fairbanks, there was a crowd cheering me on, for they knew where I was headed. I got to the airport and waited for my flight. I waited for a few hours until finally they announced my flight. I got up and boarded the plane.

The flight was nice and smooth. When we landed in Denver, I had to wait another hour for my next flight to be called. The flight from Denver was not near as nice as the one from Fairbanks. There was turbulence for most of the ride, but the landing was smooth. I called a taxi and rode to my hotel, for it was 11:30 at night because of the wait at the airports.

The next morning I awoke to the sound of busy streets below me. I looked out the window to see my rental truck sitting in front of the entrance. I got dressed, ate breakfast, and went down to start my hundred mile drive to Everest. When I got in the truck, it wouldn't start. I had to try it five times to get it to start. After I got it started, I set off for Everest.

When you see Everest in pictures, it doesn't show how big it really is. You can't even see the top from the ground level. It was raining when I pulled into Base Camp at Ground Zero. The storm looked nasty up at higher altitudes, but I didn't have time to worry about the storm. I had a safety meeting with other climbers that I was late to.

After the meeting, I went straight to bed, for I had to wake up at 3:00 a.m. We were setting off for Camp Two at 4:30, and I had a lot of packing to do. When we set off, there was a loud boom! An avalanche had been triggered at higher altitude, but it was high enough that it didn't affect us. The journey to Camp Two was easy, but it was going to get harder.

We spent two days at Camp Two before heading to Camp Three. On the journey to Camp Three, we had to cross three ravines on ladders that had been laid down over them. They were unstable, but were the only way to cross the ravines. When it was my turn to cross the first ravine, I almost fell off and had to have another person pull me up. There was a hundred foot drop to the bottom! The last two ravines went fine.

We stayed at Camp Three for another two days before setting off for Camp Four. The journey to Camp Four was very steep. It took us longer than any other leg of the climb. It was grueling. I was so happy to make it to Camp Four and take a three day rest before climbing the final leg to the top.

The three days at Camp Four were relaxing, but when it was time to set off for the summit, I was scared. The area above Camp Four is called, "The Death Zone." Even with oxygen, your body starts to shut down because of the altitude. At the meeting at Ground Zero, they said that the summit is the same height as the cruising altitude of a Boeing 747 commercial jet. I was anxious, but I was ready.

The wind was blowing hard when we set off, and some clouds were forming. We were making a steady climb to the top. "The last leg was going to be easy," I thought, but it didn't turn out so. Halfway to the top I could feel my body become weaker. It was starting to shut down. This worried me, but luckily the climb was successful.

When I got to the top, I pulled a small American flag out of my backpack, stuck it in the snow, stood up, and yelled, "Seven Summits!" It was the happiest day of my life. But as we started to descend the

mountain, a huge cluster of dark clouds coming from the lower altitude came and covered us, bringing a strong wind with it. "This is where I die," I thought, for this storm looked like it was never going to let up. The storm was nasty. 80 mile an hour winds, hail, and rain. I fell over, couldn't get up, and passed out.

When I awoke the storm still hadn't given up, and it had to have been hours later. I felt a massive pain in my right leg, and couldn't feel my left arm or right hand. I reached for my walkie-talkie, but it wasn't there. I looked around but couldn't see it. When I looked behind me, I saw a horrific sight. Three of the other climbers were laying on the ground, dead. I threw up, and passed out again.

When I awoke the second time, the storm had let up. I got up, and hopped on one leg for about a half mile until I found a walkie-talkie laying in the snow. I picked it up and radioed Camp Four. I told them I needed help, and they said they were sending people in to get me. When I told them that three were dead and I couldn't find the other four, the lady on the other side of the radio started crying. One of those men was her husband.

When the help came, I told them that the three dead were about a half mile up the trail. A few went to get them, two stayed with me, and the last three went to look for the lost ones. The two who stayed with me put me on a stretcher and carried me to Camp Four. They ordered a helicopter from Ground Zero. The helicopter was barely able to fly high enough to get to Camp Four. Once I was aboard the chopper, they gave me a sedative.

When I awoke, I was in the hospital in Kathmandu. They said that I had a broken left leg, lost my left arm, and right foot. They said I was lucky to be alive. I was planning on going home right away, but they said I had to stay here for three more months.

When my family arrived, they asked how it happened. I said, "Everest, that's what happened."

Austin Carroll

Washington (Ellis) Elementary

5th Grade, 1st Place

Not So Ordinary

Ordinary, that's about how you could sum up my life, until a week ago. It was my twelfth birthday. We only had family over, because we had just moved, and I knew absolutely no one. My mother's side of the family was the only one that came. I hadn't seen my father's side since he went missing. I was only eight at the time of his disappearance. My father worked at a restaurant. He always came home at five o'clock. But that night was different, by six my mother had called his boss, and as it turned out he never showed up for work. In the police report it stated the last place he had been seen was at an intersection by the restaurant. Now that I think about it, he had been acting weird that morning. He had insisted I stay home from school.

Okay, back to the present, so when I had thought that all the presents had been opened, mom pulled out one more and told me that it was from my father. Apparently he had planned to give it to me for my twelfth birthday. It was his favorite book "Earth Bender". Along the sides of the pages were notes. After every one had left I sat down and began to read. By the end of the day I had gotten to the part where the main character figures out his powers. Right at that time the doorbell rang, and a man in a suit walked in. He claimed to be part of the police department and said "we have found new evidence in your father's disappearance." My mother and I sat there stunned. Then he got up and walked out. As I lay in my bed that night, I wondered how they had found the new evidence and what it was.

The next day at school a strange man walked on to the playground and started calling my name. The school went on lock down immediately. He eventually left. The school had to send a letter home about the incident. My mother was very nervous about this. Later we were called down to the police station. They explained that we needed to be very cautious around strangers. The next day I saw that strange man again. He seemed to be in an argument with another man. I could make out a few words. "He just escaped" and "if he gets to the police we're all in big trouble". Then I heard a name that startled me, "Travis" that was my father's name.

I decided to follow them to see what they were doing. Could it be possible that they were talking about my father? I didn't know, but I was about to find out. I followed them to a big warehouse. I managed to get

inside just before the doors closed. It was all empty inside except for one cage and sitting inside it was my father! He looked skinny and weak. The men began to interrogate him. Apparently he had escaped once before but was caught before he could get far. After all the men left I decided to go to my father and break him out. When he first saw me his face lit up. Then he looked worried. He asked me why I was here. I told him that I was breaking him out. I looked at the cage he was in. It was glass but had a door. I tried to open it, but it was locked. It had metal hinges. Then I remembered the screwdriver in my bag from wood shop. So, as quick as I could I unscrewed the screws. It took me a minute, but I got them all undone.

As soon as he stepped out, he gave me a big hug. It got cut short by the alarm that was set off. We ran as quick as we could to the door and just managed to slip out. I could still feel my adrenaline pumping. After a quick break we ran to the next block. I called my mom to come pick us up. When she got there she jumped out of the car and just stared at my father. Then she ran up and gave him a big hug. We all drove to the police station to tell them what happened. They were stunned as my father told them the story. Apparently he had suspected that something was going on in that warehouse and went to investigate. He was captured and held there for four years. After we left the station we drove home as a family for the first time in four years.

Addison Otte

Lincoln Elementary

5th Grade, 2nd place

The Boy from the Other Side

Epilogue: World War III had just ended in 2024. It started in 2021. The war started because there was a whole lot of fighting over land in countries. Now the countries were all mixed up border wise. But one part in particular was Mexico. Over the time of the war the US took over a part of Mexico. The US and the part of Mexico they captured made an agreement. US would help Mexico and Mexico would help US. Well the other side of Mexico that wasn't captured became very poor and the US and upper Mexico didn't like people from the south. They called them Southies. Many tried to escape the southern side but failed.

Bryce Willis: (from upper Mexico and US side) Hey there, I'm Bryce, and I will tell you about a person that changed my life. I was walking home from a good day of school on Friday. I had passed the spelling test and won the dodge ball fight in PE. I saw my friend Sam walking and caught up with him. "Where you going?" I asked. "Just walking to the Soda Shop. Wanna come?" "Sure, why not." We walked a few blocks before we came upon an alley way. "I think it's a shortcut." I said "Let's go through." Sam suggested. We walked through, but on the way we spotted a little kid in ragged clothes looking in the garbage can. I tried just to ignore him but Sam thought different. "What are you doing over here you little chum bucket? Go back to where you came from you SOUTHIE! And just like that the poor little kid ran off crying. But where could he go? He was in northern part of the country. But then just like that he stopped at the end of the alley and leaned against the wall. We continued on walking as I asked him. For him "Why did you do that?" Do what?" he replied in a nasty snarl. "You just yelled at a kid for doing nothing." "He's a Southie and that's all he'll ever be!" he yelled. "You know what I'm not hungry anymore Bryce, you can eat by yourself!" He walked away from me with anger in his footsteps. *What a jerk* I thought as I walked in the Soda Shop. Sam was one of my best friends, but his parents were rich and arrogant. He got everything he wanted.

It was my turn in line to order ice creams, one for me and one for the kid in the alley. I exited the building and walked straight to the alley. But he wasn't there. So I laid down the ice cream for him and walked off wondering where he could have gone.

I went to bed and woke up the next morning thinking about the kid. Does he have a house or even a bed to sleep on? I woke up and sprang up the stairs to get breakfast. Just as I got to the top of the stairs I realized it was still very early for a Saturday morning. I tried to be as quiet as possible. I wrote a note saying I'd be around the neighborhood and off I went on my electric scooter to the alley by the Soda Shop. As I reached the end of my street, I realized I should bring him some extra food. I entered the house and saw my mom and dad sitting at the table, watching news and drinking coffee. "Hey kiddo," greeted my dad. "What's the rush?" asked my mom. "Oh you know, things to do, stuff to see," I replied acting as normal as possible. "OK, but be back by lunch" she said sternly. "OK bye." I said quickly and off I was again. I let out a sigh of relief. I didn't want my mom and dad getting suspicious and asking where I was going. If they find out I'm

talking to a Southie, who knows what punishment I'll get. As I rode up on the alley, I was hoping I wouldn't be seen. I was lucky. I got into the alley without getting recognized. I looked around a little bit and found the kid. He looked frightened. "Hey. What's our name?" I asked trying to sound calm. He didn't reply. "Hey, you want some food?" I asked reaching into my back pocket. "Dang it I forgot my money." But just as I finished my sentence he reached behind the trash can and brought out \$3.57. "I'm not allowed in stores. Can you get me one?" he asked kindly. "Sure." So I walked in and bought him a chocolate ice cream cone. I brought it out to him and handed it to him saying, "Your food, sir," in a fancy accent. He laughed at the accent and grabbed the ice cream cone saying "Thank you." I sat down and talked with him about everything we could think of. I came back after lunch to hang out with him. I also showed him a few games like how to skip a rock down the alley. He was actually very good at it and beat me three times. It was getting late and I had to leave. "See you tomorrow. Um, wait I didn't get your name." I said. "Rico" he replied. "OK. Well, see you tomorrow Rico." And off I was on my scooter. We had learned about a lot of different things from each other like games they play back at his hometown. But that all changed when the countries divided. We had a really good time and hung out the whole day. We didn't care if somebody saw us or not we were just having fun.

I came to see Rico every day after school and bought him ice cream. We also hung out almost every day during the summer and had loads of fun. I bought him shoes and sunglasses. One day I stayed too late and my mom and dad found me with him in the alley. When we got in the car they asked what I was doing. I said "He's just a kid that his parents got taken away from him he's lonely and I just thought I could spend time with him and make him happy." I replied sounding as desperate as possible. "Son, we are so proud of you" replied my parents with tears in their eyes. We hugged and made up. "Mom and Dad, I will never be late again." Well you won't have to anymore, because we're adopting him."

That day changed my life.

Kyzer Fox
Holy Family Elementary
5th Grade, 3rd Place (t)

My Furry Friends Series: Me and My Ferret

As I walked home from school in the pouring rain I heard a trash can wobble. I glanced at the trash can seeing nothing, so I figured it was just the water droplets hitting the can. I continued walking and a second later I heard the trash can fall. I whirled around looking in the spot where the trash can was but instead of finding a trash can I saw a white weasel-like thing in its place. It was cute I thought. I sat down on the sidewalk staring at the ferret. As soon as the ferret noticed me it backed up and went into the trash can. As the ferret backed up deeper in to the trash can, the trash can started to wobble. I looked inside and saw the ferret pushing the bottom of the can by putting its paw on it.

The trash can flew back up. I heard the small ferret scratching the can with its sharp claws. I got up and went to the trash can that the ferret was in. I looked down at the ferret which was licking its paw. It finally saw me and looked at me with sorrowful eyes. I opened up my lunch bag and poured some sunflower seeds into my hand. I put the bag down and lowered my hand with the seeds for the ferret to eat. The ferret sniffed it and started to nibble on the seeds. With my other hand I slowly petted it. I picked the ferret up and lifted her on to the sidewalk.

The next day I walked home from school and I heard rustling in the trash cans. I turned and saw the same ferret walking towards me. I let it have some of the ham sandwich that I forgot to eat. I petted it and went home but when I opened my lunch bag not only was my food there, but also a ferret that jumped out when it saw me. It chirped at me when it saw where it was. No wonder my lunch bag was heavy! I petted the ferret and tried to chirp back but never achieved my goal, and the ferret would teasingly chirp back at me. "Little show off," I said. Then I got to thinking that I should name the little fellow. I thought to myself about the name Star. Then finally I came up with the name Aka which means star. "Aka" I whispered to the ferret. She stood up on her back legs and then jumped up on my lap and started licking my hand. I finally realized Mom couldn't find out about Aka.

I picked Aka and went to my room. I got some of my clothes that were too small and pushed them under my desk to make a good bed for Aka. I grabbed a small plastic container and filled it half way full with

water. I then went to get another plastic container. I filled it up with some sunflower seeds, almonds, peanuts with salt, and some ham. I picked up the containers and went to my room. I sat the containers down right next to the clothes. I chirped at Aka to get her attention and when I got it I tapped the floor next to the food. She just looked at me with unblinking eyes. I then said “come” and she jumped onto my lap and licked my face. Then I pointed at the food. She ran around in a circle and finally ran to the bed I made for her.

The next morning I got my chores done and took care of Aka. I was just about to leave when my mom wanted me to clean my room. I rushed in and forgot about Aka. She was checking my room and pulled out my desk chair and looked under it. When she saw the little ferret she was furious. “Go to school, we will talk about this later young lady.” I knew what that meant... and it wasn’t good.

When I got home I waited for my mom and was going to feed Aka and Tricksey, my rabbit. I called for Aka to come to me. When my mom can back I was brushing Aka with Tricksey’s brush. My mom sat down next to me on the couch. She cautiously spoke to me, “I can see you have a big bond with that ferret but we can’t afford it. We don’t have the food, the brush, and the type of environment for it.” I quietly sat there brushing Aka’s fur. “I know it’s hard to say goodbye but I found a young capable pair who will be happy to have a ferret” my mom said. “They are almost here.” I told Aka to stay with my mom and I went to my room.

A few weeks later the couple gave Aka back. She was mean supposedly. I was so glad to see her because I was depressed when she was gone. I ran towards Aka and she jumped onto my shoulder and started licking my ears. It tickled. My mom said “Everything’s ok now.” My mom even gave me some presents, however most were Aka’s. Some of the gifts were food, treats, and a ball. Of course happiness doesn’t last forever. And the happiness broke when I found out a wild guinea pig chewed on my phone. I figured it was just an abandoned pet that went through a hole in the basement.

Hope Jones

Washington (Ellis) Elementary

5th Grade, 3rd Place (t)

The Hay Bale Fall

The chilling fall breeze brushed against my skin. My eyes were glued on the end of the golden field of hay bales. Glancing around I turned to see all of my cousins, lined up to the right of me, staring at the end, ready to race. I took a deep breath, breathing in the smell of the dirty animals and my uncle’s farm around me. “Yuck!” I said mumbling under my breath and making a disgusted face. Taking a deep breath out, the words of my uncle floated through the air, “Ready, Set, Go!” The sound of his scratchy voice ended as my feet began to dart along the hay bales. I was going to win. I was as confident as a super hero going into battle.

The pointy straw scratched at my legs. It hurt but was too late now to stop. I wanted to win so badly. Thud, thud, thud, the sound of *footsteps* behind me grew louder and louder, closer and closer. My legs began to move faster as they grew tired.

I looked forward to see a deep, dark gap. Using all of my might, I took a giant leap from hay bale to hay bale. My first foot hit followed by the second foot. Stumbling and toppling over, straw poked at my legs creating bloody scabs that covered my knees. Standing up, I brushed the dirt off my knees and began to sprinting across the bales again.

A couple seconds later, the much hated sound of footsteps sounded behind me again. Glancing back to catch a glimpse of who it was, the big brown eyes of my cousin met mine. The evil smile on her face read, *I will win*. Not looking ahead of myself, I felt my feet stumble under me. Immediately turning around as fast as I could, I saw a deep, dark hole directly under my feet. So badly I wanted to save myself from the fall, but it was already too late. The ground had disappeared beneath my feet as hay zoomed past my eyes before hitting the ground with a big *thud*.

Inspecting my body, my knees were not the only place covered with bloody scabs now. Small specks of blood flooded my arms. I blinked as my eyes adjusted to the dim light of the hole. My eyes hit the icy, gray, clouded sky above me.

I closed my eyes as my mind drifted off remembering the time Hannah had gotten stuck in a hole while racing. The small moment played like a movie inside my head. My dad was there lifting her out of the hole. I quickly glanced around, my dad wasn't there, just my cousins still racing and my uncle scrolling through his phone. No one even saw me or wondered where I was.

After about two minutes I am still without an idea of what to do. While trying to think of an idea, a whole five minutes pass. Finally, an idea crosses my mind, *what if I climbed up a hay bale or tried to pull myself up?* Attempt number one falls into action. My hands firmly gasped around the skinny strings that were holding the bale together, I tried to pull myself up. Almost there, almost there, almost there repeated in my head like a broken record. A smile beamed across my face from cheek to cheek. Then, thud! My knees were back in the dirt again.

After three minutes of trying and failing, I am on attempt 1,002, or at least I feel like I am. My hope has definitely faded, but I am not quite ready to give up yet.

Plan B. Deeply hoping this would work, I cleared my throat and yelled out, "Someone help!" But no sound came out, just a small cloud of smoke hitting the icy air. The freezing cold breeze bit at my skin as goosebumps sprang from my arms. Then I saw a glimpse of my jacket sitting on the end of the hay bales, all alone.

I groaned as a horrifying thought crossed my mind. *Would anyone ever find me?* My face got red and I buried my face deep into my knees. Worry grew in my head, I was trying to not give up.

Two minutes later, I was awoken from all of my thoughts by a sweet voice floating through the air, "Hailey, do you want help up?" "No one ever noticed you were down there." I shook my head and looked up at the eyes of my cousin Lauren. I began to stand up with a bright smile on my face. Overjoyed, I said, "Yes, I have been down here for twelve minutes!"

She used all of her might to lift me up out of the hole. As soon as I got up, I smiled and took a deep breath of fresh air. Someone had come to save me. I knew then that everything would be okay.

Hailey Klein

Roosevelt Elementary

5th Grade, Honorable Mention

My Hero

I walk in the room, and I see it. I can't believe my eyes. I bite my tongue to make sure I'm awake. *Yes, I'm definitely awake*, I think, as I stare in awe. Happiness fills up inside me. Tears fill my eyes, to the point it seems as if I'm looking through a kaleidoscope. Words can't express what I am feeling.

I haven't been this happy for years. It has been two years since I looked into those shimmering, gray-blue eyes, which have now been reduced to slits, for there is now a large, glittering grin across his face. I can tell he is experiencing the same joy I am.

My heart is beating up a storm. I'm shaking like a little Chihuahua. I am feeling so many emotions at this single moment. I am feeling so many emotions, except for one. One that I have felt nonstop for the past few years. *Fear*. Fear that we would not be able to have this moment. Fear that he would not return.

All of this rushes through me over the course of a few seconds. But it was all over now because I am now running up to him to give him a big bear hug.

My dad. I'm hugging him for the first time in a long time. He's my hero in green, returning from the battlefield.

"I missed you so much! I was so worried!" I cry as I hugged him.

"I missed you, too!" he says.

"This is the best day of my life!" I say, enthusiastically.

My dad will stay with us for the next month, and leave after that for I don't know how long. All I can do is pray for him. Pray that he is safe.

I want to be a soldier when I am older so that I can, like my dad, be a superhero.

Natalie Loftus

Holy Family Elementary

6th Grade, 1st Place

The Naughty Nutcracker

Once upon a time, there was a reindeer. But not just any ordinary reindeer. No, this reindeer was named Blinker. Blinker had been trying for years to make it onto Santa's sleigh team. Every year at sleigh try-outs he was never good enough. Every year he walked home in the snow, dismayed, and cried himself all the way to his best friend, Caramel's house. It was good that it was a gingerbread house, because when Blinker was dismal he nibbled on the candy the house was made of.

He decided to go see Caramel to cheer himself up. She usually could be found in the kitchen.

Caramel was the head elf at Santa's workshop, a position she had held for over 300 years. She came up with toy ideas, gave out orders, and made Santa his special cocoa and sugar cookies.

But just as Blinker trotted into the kitchen, he realized that something was very wrong.

Caramel was nowhere to be seen!! The only trace that showed where she might be was a note left on the table:

Mwahahahahahah!!!!!! I've taken the head elf!!! Christmas will be ruined!!!!!! Also, I stole some candy. Money's on the table.

***No regrets,
The Naughty Nutcracker***

"Oh no!" Blinker exclaimed. He rushed out to the stable with the paper in his mouth.

"M&M!!!!!!!" he cried.

His best friend, M&M, was also a reindeer. However, she and Blinker were just a little bit different. For one thing, M&M was a girl. But the biggest thing was, M&M was on the sleigh team.

"WHAT'S WRONG?????" M&M yelled.

"Help M&M!!!! Caramel has been taken!!! We have to go save her!!!"

"Where is she???"

"I don't know. The only clue I have is this note." Blinker said glumly. He showed M&M the note.

"Wait! Where's the money?"

"Clearly, on the table." Blinker gestured with his hoof, slightly annoyed.

Suddenly, M&M raced toward the gingerbread house and into the kitchen. She picked the money up and gazed at it as a small smile spread on her face.

"Blinker, read the fine print!"

Because there in tiny....tiny...tiny print were the simple words:

PROPERTY OF THE NORTH POLE

"Blinker, do you know what this means?"

"This Naughty Nutcracker..... Whoever he is..... is at the North Pole?"

"Yup! I'll go get my things!!!!" M&M called behind her as she raced off to the stables. Blinker decided to wait for her by the door, but then, from the stables, he heard "BLINKER!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! SAVE ME!!!"

Blinker ran as fast as his little legs could carry him towards the scream. But, just as Blinker reached the inside of the stables, he found *another* note.

Yes!!!! I've even kidnapped a member of Santa's sleigh team!!! Two down, one to go!!!! Nobody can stop me now!!!! Also, this place stinks!!! Do you even own a vacuum!!!!?????

***Sorry-not-sorry,
The naughty nutcracker***

Blinker raced out of the stables and flew into the sky.

But see, here's the problem. Blinker always failed sleigh team tryouts because he could never fly long enough. And now, he had to fly all the way from Soda Pop Springs to the North Pole without getting tired..... and falling.

Somehow, he had to make it there before midnight when Santa would set off to deliver the gifts! It seemed impossible. It was already 8:00!

Just as Blinker was starting to get into a rhythm, he spotted something in the sky, waving and fluttering around like a butterfly. Blinker flew up and caught it in his mouth. It was a checklist!

- 1. Kidnap head Elf***
- 2. Kidnap member of Sleigh Team***

3. Santa!!!!
Mwahahahahaha!!!!
Property of: The Naughty Nutcracker

“Oh No!!!!” Blinker thought. “He’s going to kidnap SANTA!!”

Blinker raced as fast as his reindeer legs could carry him until, finally, he touched down on the snowy ground of the North Pole. When he got there, he saw the most horrible sight! Caramel, M&M, and Santa were all locked up tight in a huge cage, with Mrs. Claus and a couple elves there too to keep them company! Pacing in front of them, was the *ugliest* Nutcracker Blinker had ever seen! He was completely brown, with no jewels, paint, or sparkles on him like most nutcrackers had.

“Release my friends!!” Blinker shouted.

The nutcracker spun around! “MAKE ME!!!” he said tauntingly.

“Why did you kidnap them anyway?” Blinker yelled back as the Naughty Nutcracker charged at him.

“None of *your* beeswax!”

The Nutcracker tackled Blinker while Blinker fought him off with his hooves.

“There must be some reason!”

At this the Naughty Nutcracker stopped. There was a reason.

“Because I’m not beautiful!” he shouted angrily. Then he started to cry. “All the children of the world will get beautiful toys tonight, but I’ll never get to ride with Santa, because nobody wants me! I don’t look pretty like other toys!” the Naughty Nutcracker explained as he continued to wail.

“But that still doesn’t explain why you kidnapped *us!*”

“I thought that without the Head Elf, a reindeer, and Santa Claus, Christmas would be canceled! Then I wouldn’t have to watch other toys get owners!”

“Nutcracker, please let us out.” Santa said gently.

The nutcracker sniffled as he walked over to the cage and unlocked it. Santa gazed at the Nutcracker thoughtfully before saying, “Naughty Nutcracker you do know that beauty comes from within, correct?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, it doesn’t matter what you look like on the outside. If you’re a good person then you’re already beautiful.”

“*Really?*” the Nutcracker said giddily.

“Yes.” Caramel said laying a hand on his shoulder as a warm smile spread across her face.

“Tell you what, how about I let you ride with me in my sleigh tonight and deliver you to some happy boy or girl?”

“YES! YES! YES!” he said jumping up and down.

An hour later, the Naughty Nutcracker was all loaded up in the back of Santa’s sleigh.

“Goodbye!” The Nutcracker called as the sleigh lifted up into the night.

“And Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night!” called Santa as he rose up into the night.

Delaney Staab
Holy Family Elementary
6th Grade, 2nd Place

Flipped Upside Down

Olivia Marcus was sitting on her front porch watching the bright yellow sun rise and listening to the meadowlark birds chirp, announcing that a new day has come. Her old, brown diary and pink feathery pen were in her pale white hand. She opened her diary to the page she had left off last night and started to write.

Dear Diary, I woke this morning to the stars and moon finally going down to rest. I saw through my clear window, horses in the meadow arising to the warm and bright sun. The rooster was awaking the brood and their clutch. With all arising, Mother is still in bed, sick and sleeping. Dad is milking the cow, Petunia, in the big red barn, feeding the pigs their breakfast, and letting the dogs out to run free. To me, it feels like he’s never around. Aunt Jamie just pulled in. She’s been taking care of Mother for the past two weeks since the doctors at the hospital can’t care for her an more and we can’t afford in-home care. I must go now. Till then.

Aunt Jamie was already in and out of my mother’s bedroom cooking pancakes when I got into the house.

“Good morning Olivia. Writing again? How many pancakes?”

“Good morning to you and yes. Oh, and I’ll take 3.”

Aunt Jamie put the plate with the golden brown, fluffy pancakes in front of me and drowned the pancakes in maple syrup.

“So how is Mom doing today?”

“She’s doing a bit better. She needs more medicine.”

“Alright, I’m going to go play in my treehouse.”

I stuffed the last bite of pancake into my mouth and ran off to the treehouse. I plopped down on a bean bag and telephoned my best friend Mia.

“Hello, this is Mia.”

“Hi Mia. Are you busy?”

“No, I was just reading. Do you want to come and hang at my house?”

“Of course, I just have to tell my dad.”

I ran out to the barn to find Dad feeding Petunia.

“Hey Dad!” I yelled. “I’m going over to Mia’s.”

I grabbed my baby blue bike and sped towards Mia’s beige house.

When I got there Mia was on her patio playing solitaire.

“Hi Mia!” I said excitedly.

Mia looked up from her game and hopped up. She tagged me quickly and we started a game of tag. We played tag, checkers, and hide and seek until lunch. We went for a walk afterwards.

“So how’s your Mom?” questioned Mia.

“She’s fine. I really don’t want to talk about it if you don’t mind.” I replied. I quickly changed the subject. “You ready for school?”

“No! Don’t even mention it!” Mia screamed.

“I am!”

“What? I can’t believe you’re my friend!” Mia said sarcastically.

We both laughed and turned to walk another way.

“I need to tell you something, Olivia. You know how I said I’m not ready for school? Well I’m not ready because,” she stuttered and blurt out, “I’m moving next week to Florida to live with my grandmother! I’m sorry I didn’t tell you sooner.”

I stood there stunned.

“I think I should go home.” I finally said.

We stopped in front of Mia’s house, and I grabbed my bike. I pedaled all the way home, crying. I slowly climbed to my treehouse and started to write in my diary with teardrops falling onto the dry pages.

Dear Diary, I just found out that Mia, my best friend since Kindergarten, is moving to Florida to live with her grandmother. She is moving in one week (2 weeks before school!). My life is being flipped upside down. Mia’s moving, Mom’s sick (and NOT at the hospital), Dad’s never around. I don’t know what to do. I am s . . .

I got so mad that I threw my diary across the treehouse floor. I started crying into my hands and eventually fell asleep.

I woke up in my bed at midnight with the moon’s rays shining on my bedsheets. I saw my diary on my nightstand and it all came back to me. I grabbed my diary, crept downstairs, and went out the locked back door. I walked to the flowing river about eight-hundred meters from the house and mumbled to myself, “I’m done with you!” and threw my old brown diary and a pink feathery pen into the water.

The next morning I sat in my bedroom depressed, while Aunt Jamie came in and out with food, even though I never ate it. Then when the Sunday paper came, I couldn’t believe my eyes. The front page showed someone had found my diary and a publishing company wanted to publish it. It also said that if anyone knew who it belonged to please call 785-348-9372.

The week after that it was in the paper again and no one had called. I decided to pick up my phone and call the number in the newspaper.

“Hello, this is Madison’s Publishing. How can I help you?”

“Uh, yes. I’m Olivia Marcus. I’m the owner of the diary you found.”

“Let me get the boss.” The boss came to the phone and said in a deep, stubborn voice, “I’m Barry Moore. We would like to meet you today at 3:00. Would that work?”

“Of course.” I said timidly.

I then hung up the phone, told Aunt Jamie, and cleaned myself and my room up. Before I knew it, Barry Moore was there.

“So, tell me. How did you lose your diary?”

“It’s a long story.” I then attempted to tell Barry Moore about my mother being sick, Mia moving, Dad and how he was never around, and how I felt about it all.

“I’m so sorry Olivia. Now, would you like your diary published? If so you will be paid \$5,000.” Barry replied.

I thought to myself. That would be enough to pay for in-home care for my mom, and it would really flip my life upside down. I raised my voice like a confident author and said, “Yes.”

“Okay that’s great! You’ll need to sign a contract. Here are the papers, and as soon as you sign you’ll get a check.”

I signed the papers with shaky hands and was handed a \$5,000 check. My diary was later published and the company sold over 12,000 copies worldwide. My mother had in-home care and was healed of her sickness. Aunt Jamie still comes over to cook and talk. My father is around a lot more since the money has kept coming every time a diary sells. Mia moved, but we talk over the phone every Friday. I also bought another diary and write in it everyday. That is how my life was flipped upside down.

Emily Eck

St. Mary’s Grade School

6th Grade, 3rd Place

Be Generous With Your Time

My grandpa had a pocket watch that he received from his father. I asked if I could have his pocket watch someday when he decided to give it away. Last week, he said he shined the pocket watch up just for me. He said, “Be generous with your time when using this watch.” I didn’t understand what Grandpa meant until one day I put the watch in my pocket, and I wanted to see if it really made a difference.

My family and I were on our way to church that day. When we entered the gathering space, a lady walked over to me and asked me if I could serve mass. I said, “Yes,” and got dressed. Sitting at the altar, I realized that I was doing something for God. I gave my time.

When we came home from church, my dog was barking and I went to check on him. He kept jumping on my leg where my pocket watch was in my jean. I kept moving him off my leg. I realized he was hungry and wanted to play with me. I decided to spend some time with him and stay outside a little longer. I gave a lot of attention to my dog that day,

Later that day, my dad asked if I wanted to build a workbench with him. I said I would help, but I needed to change clothes. When I changed my jeans, my pocket watch fell out. I noticed that I was giving my time to my dad.

Later that night when I was getting ready for bed, I noticed my pocket watch was on my dresser and I picked it up and looked it over. My grandpa knows me very well because it was easy to follow his advice.

Giving my time to others. I just needed this little reminder to keep me thinking about it all day.

Tanner Werth

Holy Family Elementary

6th Grade, Honorable Mention

I Have Your Back

Michael stretched out on the wooden floor. He threw off his blanket, then rubbed his eyes. He staggered to a little wooden desk and pulled out from one of the drawers a water bottle and beef jerky. It was the cheapest “meal” he could find at the store.

Michael didn’t have parents. He didn’t have a home. He lived in an old, stone, waterwheel shed by the river.

* * *

Four years ago, when Michael was nine, he was riding home in the back of his parents’ car. It was January, and they were riding back from a Christmas trip. The sky was gloomy and looked as if it wanted to release more snow.

Suddenly, a young deer jumped on the road. Michael's father swerved. The back end of the car slid to the left as the car fell off the road into the ditch. Time seemed to move in slow motion. Finally, the car flipped over and over down the ditch. A giant, old tree stopped the car, smashing the driver's door. Michael laid in the back. He was bleeding and hurting.

He crawled out his door, which was facing to the sky. He stood on the side of the car looking down through the passenger window. It was a horrible sight. Michael knew that they weren't alive. In that moment, his life changed.

After the crash, he walked down the road to a small town. He found this shed by the river and has lived here since.

* * *

Once dressed, Michael walked out of the shed with his backpack. He grabbed his bike and rode to school. Inside, he was immediately surrounded by his friends. Michael was taller than most of the kids, and he recognized the spiky blond hair of Calvin. He pushed through the crowd to his friend.

"Hey, Michael!" Calvin greeted. "Did your parents say you could come to my house?"

"Yeah," Michael lied, "but I'll be ten minutes late. I've gotta do my paper route."

Michael enjoyed talking to his friends at school. This was the only place where he could get his mind off his parents. He quickly found it was easier to forget about his parents than remember them. It sounded bad, but it helped.

Once school was over, Michael did his paper route and rode to Calvin's. Michael wished he'd brought a coat because it was getting chilly. It would be freezing by the time he left.

Michael stepped off his bike, walked up the large, wooden steps, and opened the door. He went up to Calvin's room. There were five of Michael's friends sitting around the room. They talked about football until Calvin's mom stepped into the room.

"Are your parents picking you up, Michael?" she asked. "It's getting really cold out."

"No," Michael replied.

"Do you want a ride home?" she asked.

"I'll be fine," he said.

She nodded and left.

"Why can't your parents pick you up?" Rick asked.

"They're both at a meeting," Michael lied. It was the first thing he could think of.

"Seems like they're at meetings a lot," someone whispered.

Michael stood up. "I never get to see my parents!" he yelled. "You guys don't know how lucky you are. You have no idea what my life is like."

Michael grabbed the door and threw it open. He ran down the stairs and outside where he grabbed his bike. He furiously pedaled away, not bothering to make sure his friends weren't following him.

Despite the cold, Michael was burning. Why couldn't they just leave him alone? Michael never asked about their families. Why did they have to ask about his? If they were real friends, they would know by now that Michael didn't want to talk about his family.

Michael stormed through the forest around the shed. He threw his bike down on the ground and went inside. He collapsed on the floor and cried and cried until he finally fell asleep.

* * *

Michael walked up the stone steps of the school. He grabbed the door handle and swung it open. The hallway was filled with chatting friends. When Michael walked in, he sensed a change in the mood. None of the students came up to Michael and greeted him.

"Weird," Michael thought.

Michael walked down the hallway trying to pretend the mood change wasn't because of him. He put his backpack in his locker and walked to first hour. Calvin was standing by Rick and Jessie talking to them. Jessie noticed Michael and told Calvin. He left them and walked to Michael.

"What are Rick and Jessie talking about?" Michael asked.

"Nothing," Calvin said quickly.

The teacher opened the door and all the students filed into the classroom. As the class went on, he didn't only receive weird looks from Rick and Jessie, but the entire class. How everyone was acting made Michael on edge.

Classes weren't any better. Even in the hallways, nobody said anything to Michael. Michael was stumped as to why. Luckily, it was time for lunch.

He sat down at a nearly empty table. Three kids sat down around Michael. He didn't know their names.

Michael wasn't even sure if he had a class with them.

"What?" Michael asked, a little more harshly than intended.

"Well," the kid across from him said, "I don't think anybody else will sit by you."

"Why wouldn't they?" Michael asked.

The kid sitting beside Michael answered. "None of your other friends want to sit by someone who pretends they're cool."

Michael choked on his food, "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Everybody knows where you live—in that brick shed by the river," the kid said.

"How could you possibly know that?" Michael yelled, face red.

"You didn't hear?" the kid on Michael's right asked. "Rick and Jessie followed you home when you left Calvin's house. They told everyone about it. How does it feel like at the bottom of the totem pole?"

Michael slammed his fist on the table. He got up and stormed out of the cafeteria. How could have this happened? Yesterday he had all of his friends. He was still considered normal. Today, though, everything he had tried to keep a secret for so long had been torn to shreds. Nobody would ever be friends with Michael again.

After school, Michael rode back to the shed as fast as he could. He didn't care about his paper route, homework, or anything. He needed to be alone.

Michael trudged through the forest surrounding the shed. He pulled the door out of the way and went inside. When he went inside he was shocked. Calvin was sitting on the floor, waiting.

"What are you doing here?" Michael yelled.

"Calm down, Michael," he said. "I just want to talk."

"About what?" Michael replied coldly.

"I still want to be friends with you," Calvin said. "I don't care about where you live. Rick, Jessie, and the others think you can only be friends with them if you're cool enough. That doesn't matter. I'd still be friends with you even if I would've known where you live."

Michael sat down beside Calvin, so Calvin wouldn't see his eyes watering.

"If you need anything, like blankets maybe," Calvin smiled and looked at Michael who was also smiling, "you can ask."

Calvin stood up, so Michael did, too. Michael couldn't help himself. He knew he had someone he could count on. He hugged Calvin. It was his first hug in nearly five years.

Ryan Schuckman
Hays Middle School
7th Grade, 1st Place

23 On Top

The sun was beating down on my tomato red face as my cousin Alexa and I rounded the corner of an old, run-down building. We saw what looked to be thousands of people. Alexa and I had no clue why all these people were here. We started to think they were here for the same reason we were, to see our Papa Shorty's war campsite.

As we neared the campsite, I could feel my blood boiling. I was nervous; the building was run-down and dirty. A lot must have gone on in here. By looking around the campsite, you could tell it was old, but my Papa Shorty grew up on a farm, so he was always getting dirty.

"This way," said Alexa sounding like she knew where she was going. She sped around the corner trying to find Papa Shorty's room.

We walked in and couldn't believe what we saw. Again, everything looked old and run-down, which wasn't a surprise to us. I found a book full of aged pictures and postcards laying on the ground. While I was looking through the book trying to read every little word, Alexa was rummaging through an old box full of different war related things.

It was dead silent all around except for the occasional sound of ground squirrels playing around. All of the sudden, I found something very intriguing and interesting.

"Alexa," I yelled, "look what I found!"

"What is it?" Alexa asked excitedly.

I was so focused on what I was doing that I wasn't paying any attention to what Alexa had been saying.

“What is it?” Alexa yelled again, this time sounding like she was mad.

I suddenly realized she was talking to me, considering there was nobody even close to the same room as us. Since I still hadn't answered her question, she quickly stomped over to see what I had discovered. When she approached, I heard a very obnoxious screeching sound, which seemed to come from her direction.

“What? What happened?” I called.

No answer.

We both just sat there on the hard, rocky ground staring at the beautiful sight of an old military journal. The dusty journal looked to be about our grandpa's every day ideas and interactions in, around, and out of camp.

“Well, are you going to open it?” whispered Alexa.

I didn't answer.

As we both just sat there flipping through the first few pages of the journal, something caught my eye. I slowly looked over toward the box by where I had found the journal. Something shiny laid inside glistening by the bright sunlight. I slowly crept toward the box to reach in a grab what looked to be an I.D. bracelet.

“What is it?” Alexa stuttered.

“I-I-I don't know,” I said.

Alexa slowly put out her hand to grab the bracelet from my trembling hands. While she pulled the bracelet toward her, I saw something engraved into the underside of the bracelet.

“WAIT, LOOK!” I yelled. “LOOK AT THE BOTTOM!”

As she flipped over the bracelet, I asked if she saw anything. Alexa read aloud, “Shorty Teeter, May 23, 1923.”

“Holy cow!” I murmured, “THAT'S PAPA'S!” I joyfully grabbed the bracelet and went to sit in the beautiful mid-day sunlight.

“Alexa, are you coming?” I asked.

“No, I will keep looking through the box,” said Alexa.

I said, “Okay,” and continued on.

I examined the bracelet and started to clean off the dirt and dust when I heard Alexa scream joyfully. I rushed over to see what she had screamed about when all of the sudden, I tripped over a rock and completely face-planted.

As she came over, she was laughing and said, “Here, use this.”

I looked over and saw an old medical kit from when Papa was in the war. I started to laugh along with Alexa while she helped me up.

“I'm going to keep looking; I will be back,” Alexa said. “Go ahead and look through the medical kit.”

I opened the kit and saw two band-aid wrappers and a half-full bottle of water. As I dug deeper, I found a picture of my Papa Shorty. I didn't think this was too interesting; it was the same one I had seen before when I was little, except in color. I decided to go and look in the box with Alexa.

“There's nothing exciting, just old books and paper,” Alexa stated.

“Okay, I guess I'll go walk around the camp,” I responded.

As I started to stroll around camp, a whiff of air brushed across my neck. It felt as if someone was hovering over my shoulder. I looked behind me slowly to see if there really was somebody there. I quickly realized it was Alexa. I got a better focus on her facial expression, and she didn't look to be that excited.

“Are you okay?” I asked.

Alexa quickly responded, “Yes, I'm fine, just something I found back at camp.”

Without question, we both started on with a sprint toward the campsite. We got to the room, and scattered all around were many notes saying Papa was done with his service term. There were notes Papa wrote back saying he didn't want to end, he thought he was doing well, and that he wanted and needed to help the country.

An hour had passed by the time we were done reading all the notes. By the end of the whole conversation, Alexa and I were very confused about the whole thing. A gentle breeze blew across the ground whipping up all the papers, but one specifically caught my eye. Instead of a note written in black pen ink, this note was written in a bold, red color.

The note read:

Shorty Teeter, your service term has ended; you are done. If you don't choose to pack up and move out, you WILL be sorry.

Signed, _____

“Wait, this doesn't seem right,” I stated

“Yea, why would Papa’s general tell him to leave and not even sign his name at the end?” asked Alexa. We both sat in silence and wondered if this is how Papa Shorty died, notes threatening him to leave or troops from Germany would attack the U.S. troops.

Brooklyn Lewallen
Hays Middle School
7th Grade, 2nd Place

Gone

It started when I was at school with my best friend Michele. We were on our way to next period, and before we knew it, it was already time to go home. Michele and I walked home together every day, so we walked and talked until I got home.

As she turned away, I walked inside. I greeted my family as I always did and asked my mom for a snack. I got my snack, stuffed my face, and went upstairs.

I sat on my bed and played on my phone for a while; I enjoyed talking to my friends. Before I even knew it, it was time to eat. My mom called me down. We all talked about how our day was. After supper, it was time for dreaded homework. Luckily I always got it done in class.

I went upstairs to grab my backpack, and on my way back down, I fell and twisted my ankle. I put ice on it and laid on the couch. It felt like I had crushed it with a sledge hammer. To make it all better, my dad came through the big, white door and stepped onto the white fluffy carpet. I loved my dad so much, every time I saw him my day got a lot better.

I was so happy he brought popsicles. I loved popsicles, and it was my favorite kind, strawberry. He was supposed to be working late, but they let him off early. He had just enough time to go to the store and get popsicles.

He walked over to me and said, “You had better stop falling down those stairs, missy, or you will get seriously hurt.”

Then he handed me a popsicle, and we both just laughed. Then my mom walked over and gave him a kiss on the cheek.

My dad got out a popsicle and gave it to me and said, “Here you go, Squirt!” That was my nickname; he always called me that.

Sydney, my sister, came over and took the whole box and brought it over to the table. Everyone dug into it like wild cougars, I was glad I even got one.

My dad said, “Hey, wait a minute. I bought those, so I at least want one!” He went over, grabbed one, and put the box away.

I yelled, “Hey, Dad! While you’re up, will you grab me a pencil?”

He went over to the drawer and grabbed one, then pretended it was a magic wand.

He handed it to me saying, “You’re a wizard now, Harry!” We all just laughed.

It was a great evening, but now it was time for bed. On my way up the stairs, I fell again, but my dad was there to catch me. He helped me to my room and tucked me in. My sister Sydney and I shared a room, so she came in shortly after and went to bed.

It was now the next day, and it was time to get ready for school. I did my hair, brushed my teeth, and got dressed. My mom wrapped my foot, then we went out to the car.

I was at school on my way to 6th hour when my name was called to the office. My name was never called to the office. It was my mom, and it looked like she had been crying, I was worried.

She hugged me and said, “Hey, we are going to get the other kids, ok?”

I just said, “Okay,” and we left.

When we got home from getting the other kids, we all played together because that was what we always did. We were having a pillow fight because my mom had said she would be gone for about an hour. We played until she got home, and when she did, she was crying. We all ran to her and just hugged her as tight as we could.

We all came to the living room and she said, “Kids, your father has been...” She swallowed hard and said, “In an accident, and he...”

She waited for a minute, and before she had the opportunity to talk, my younger brother said, “Well, let’s go see him!”

She said, “No, he is gone.”

We were all in shock; everything went silent for me, as if my life was over. I could see my family crying, but I could not hear it. I fell to the floor and laid there for several hours. I did not move or make a sound. All that happened was tears rolled down my face. My brother and sister had gone and locked themselves in their rooms. My mom had gone outside and sat on the step with my younger brothers. I had not moved not an inch. I prayed and prayed that he would still be here, but he wasn't.

It had been a few weeks, and we had gotten used to him not coming home. We all had started going back to school and being ourselves, but it wasn't the same. We all came home and did things we usually did.

That night, as I lay in my bed, I realized, "He isn't coming back; he's gone. I have to get used to this."

That night was the worst night of sleep I had ever had. He's gone. I had taken it all in.

Willow Arnold
Hays Middle School
7th Grade, 3rd Place

Always Second

I walked through the hallways in between third and fourth period. Signs were posted on several bulletin boards. Finally, I stopped to briefly read one.

Novel writing contest for 8th-10th graders. No word limit. Prize is one-thousand dollars and a published book. Must be submitted by January 22nd.

Should I enter the contest? Could I enter the contest? I loved writing, but the thought of other people reading my writing was terrifying. The only other time I had entered a writing contest I had lost to Madison Abbott. She was the most popular girl in school, and won absolutely everything.

"Natalie! You have to enter the contest!" My best friend, Amanda, yelled in the hallway.

"I can't. Madison is going to enter!" I yelled back.

"You have to stop letting Madison ruin your life!"

I contemplated that thought through fourth period. It was the longest hour and a half of my life! Maybe I could enter the contest. What if I won? That would be amazing! Then I could finally buy a new laptop! Wait. The flier said the winner's book was published. I can't have my book published! So many people would read it! I didn't even like the thought of my teachers reading my essays.

Once fourth hour got over I bolted out of the classroom. My dad was waiting in the car to pick me up.

"Where's your sister?" he asked me.

"Step-sister," I snapped, "I don't know where she is, nor do I care."

He sighed. I could hear the disappointment. Over the summer he had married Madison's mother and destroyed everything. I understood that he wanted to be happy, but I didn't understand why he had to marry my arch-enemy's mother.

"Here she is!" Dad said happily.

She had a friend on each side of her. Nicole and Brooklyn. They went wherever Madison did, and did whatever Madison did. I didn't understand. *Didn't they have their own lives?*

"Can you just drop me off at the library?" I begged my dad.

"Sure, honey, I'll see you at five," he responded.

I heard Madison and her friends snicker.

The second the car stopped, I jumped out. I couldn't stand being around Madison and her friends. Quickly, I ran up the stairs into the young adult department. Quietly, I pulled Madison's old laptop out of my book bag and sat down on a bean bag chair. I was going to enter this contest, and I was going to beat Madison. For almost an hour, I tried to start my book. Every time I tried to write, I ended up deleting it. Everything sounded stupid.

At five my dad pulled up. Without saying anything, I got into the car.

"How was it?" he asked.

"Awful," I replied.

"I'm sure it couldn't have been that bad."

"Trust me. It was."

"Is it about that stupid writing contest?"

"It's not stupid," I whispered.

“Why is it that big of a deal?”

“Madison probably already has half of her book finished.”

He looked at me, disapprovingly. We rode home in silence. Once we got home we were still silent. Madison was sitting on the couch with her brand new laptop. I had wanted a new one for Christmas, but Dad said we couldn't afford one. Under the Christmas tree there was one for Madison, but not for me. That is why I have to win the contest. If I win I can buy a better laptop than Madison has. Maybe than she will actually accept me.

Dinner was quiet, like always. Dad and Melissa, Madison's mother, talked, but Madison and I were silent. When dinner was over, I went up to my room and tried to write. Again, no ideas came. I fell asleep with my laptop on top of me. I only had eighteen days to finish the novel that I hadn't even started.

The next day, my English teacher called me to his desk.

“I hear you're entering the novel contest,” he said.

“Indeed,” I responded.

“Well, I think you have an excellent chance of winning.”

Another person who thinks I have a chance of winning. That's what all of the librarians said. Everyone had faith in me, except me. I cannot write this novel. I cannot enter this contest. I'm setting myself up for failure, and I'm setting a lot of people up for disappointment. Again, I laid on my bed with a blank mind. Everyone always says, “Write about something you know.”

I knew about always coming in second, and I knew about being too scared to do anything. People say I am a good author, but I'm too scared to let anyone read my papers. That is what I would write about. At about two in the morning, I heard someone crying. I got out of bed, and wandered over to Madison's room.

“Are you okay?” I asked.

“Yes, I'm fine,” she snapped, “Well, not really.”

“What's wrong?”

“I am so tired of always trying to impress people. I try so hard to impress my dad, but he doesn't care.”

“I'm sure he does.”

“He doesn't. That's why I enter absolutely everything. I just want him to care about me the way your dad cares about you.”

“Madison, I'm sure he loves you just as much as my dad loves me.”

“Whatever,” she said crying.

I think I was starting to understand why Madison was so cruel, and I even felt sorry for her.

The next day at school things were different. Instead of sitting alone at lunch, since Amanda had a different lunch period, Madison invited me to sit with her. I listened to her and her friends talk about everything that was going on at school. They seemed to know everything about everyone. Then, in English, I was able to present my essay over *The Grapes of Wrath*, without any nerves, since I could hear Madison telling me to be confident.

At home that night we impressed my father and Melissa, by getting along and talking at dinner. That night, I worked on my book. In a few days I had most of it done. It was surprising, how easily the words flowed. Tomorrow I would turn my book into my English teacher. Madison had decided to enter, but we agreed it didn't matter who won. I finished the book and proofread it, before falling asleep.

The following morning, I turned my book into my English teacher. He said he would try to read it during his plan period. I nodded, before running off to science. Once I got to English he called me up to the front desk.

“Your book was amazing!” he commended.

“Thank you,” I said shyly, returning to my seat.

Madison and I continued to get along. With my help she contacted her dad for the first time in years. With her help I was able to talk in front of large crowds without fear. Also, I was never lonely at lunch, as she continued to invite me to sit with her. Later in the year Amanda moved away, but it was a lot easier to deal with, since Madison invited me to hang out with her and her friends. Madison and I both had a lot of positive effects on each other, and for the first time, I was glad our parents got married.

Four months later, I walked into English class.

“Hannah! Congratulations!” my English teacher said.

“What?” I asked confused.

“Hannah, you won!”

Anna Brull
Hays Middle School
8th Grade, 1st Place

The Princess Who Smelled of Fresh Peaches

“Quick! She’s sleeping, put her in the wagon and get out of here,” Bertha cried to the wooly sisters. They raced Princess Camilla outside the kingdom walls. They traveled all night just to find their destination right before dawn. The wooly sisters -twin human like sheep- leaned a 100 foot ladder up against the tall, stone castle wall. Bertha rudely awoke the princess, who was confused at what was going on, but did what she was told. She climbed the tall, shaky ladder, followed closely by the wooly sisters. Bertha observed from below before she brought up a bag of nonperishable food items, along with some fresh ones.

When they reached the top, they stood on the balcony for a moment, but quickly moved inside while it started to rain. The wooly sisters explained that they would provide her with food, for an exchange of her power of creating peaches. The princesses power enabled her to say a certain phrase in an unknown language, and fresh peaches would appear. She was then told not to leave the castle under any circumstance. The wooly sisters then promised her they would be back to check on her.

Soon after they left her with food, paint, a bed, and some books they slipped out the balcony doors. “How am I to live with very little! I don’t even know how to cook,” Princess Camilla said to herself as she lit up the room with hundreds of scented candles. The scented candles smelled like almond vanilla, which reminded her of the lovely castle she once lived in. That night she tried to cook, but it would take some time to learn. Camilla then gave up and ate a loaf of bread and a banana. She then stared out the balcony wishing on every star in the sky that someone would come and save her from this nightmare. But with no luck she blew out her candles and cried herself to sleep.

She woke up right at dawn when the sun came shining through the windows. She crankily yelled, “Someone draw the curtains!”, but when nobody came to her call, she realized she was on her own. She quickly changed her clothes into a raggedy dress she had found the day before. When she was done getting ready, she drank a glass of water along with some burnt eggs. “I guess that’s a start,” she murmured to herself.

This went on for a couple of weeks. She learned to paint, hand stitched curtains, and cook to a certain extent. She was getting her paints out one day when she heard some loud noises outside. She quickly opened the balcony doors to find Prince Patrick from the next kingdom over. He was sitting on his horse, Shelly down below. The second he saw the princess he cried out, “Come down here, I am here to rescue you!” She then replied, “I am not allowed to leave, but maybe if i come quickly!” She then let down a long curtain and slide down ever so gracefully. When she reached where he was standing she looked him in the eyes and said, “Where shall we go? Can I trust you? Do you only want me because of my powers?” He looked offended so she asked no more questions and hopped on the back of Shelly.

They rode off deep into the woods. The prince and the princess soon stopped to eat and rest. During that time, Prince Patrick asked, “What are these powers you speak of?” Princess Camilla paused for a moment, then replied, “I can make peaches appear. Also my hair and skin permanently smells of fresh peaches. I have also been told that I find the Golden Peach, my curse will be lifted.” Patrick said in return, “For that does not seem to be a curse. Your gift smells amazing,” he chuckled, “How do you find this a curse?” “I find it a curse because everybody wants to take me for themselves. So they can make money off my delicious peaches.” Princess Camilla answered. The night grew silent as they both drifted off to sleep.

Early that morning, the prince and the princess woke up to Shelly kicking a bush. They looked closer and found that she was pointing to a tunnel hidden below the bushes leaves. They decided to crawl in the bushes and climb into the tunnel. When they got inside they saw it was decently kept. They were guided only by the light of Prince Patrick’s torch.

They walked on and on in tunnel when Princess Camilla asked, “Why did you save me?” The prince calmly said, “I-I-I really like and your parents declared anyone who found you and brought you home safely would have your hand in marriage. I have admired you for quite some time now, and never had the guts to ask your father for your hand in marriage.” He blushed and so did the princess. They both looked at each other for a second, smiled, then laughed hysterically about nothing in general. They truly were the perfect couple, until later that night, Camilla awoke to see the prince was gone! He had only left her a note reading, “I have gone to get help. This tunnel will keep you safe. The wooly sisters will most likely travel down this tunnel, so you need to hurry and run when you read this letter. Sincerely, Prince Patrick.”

The princess had no idea where to go, what to do, or to leave the tunnel or not. She sat down again to think and finally came to the conclusion that she would turn around and get out of the tunnel. She slowly walked on and on until she could just see the opening. But just as Camilla saw the opening, she heard the wooly sisters asking Bertha, “Where could she have gone?” She then ran out as fast as she could, and kept running until she got to a

small stream. Princess Camilla quickly scooped up some water and splashed her face. She began walking a while longer and then decided to climb a thick tree and rest her eyes.

She must have slept longer than planned because when she woke up it was early the next morning! The princess then followed the path that she had just the day before. She began to see an odd little town. She kept coming closer out of curiosity. When she arrived, she was met by 3 ½ foot men, women, and children. She looked at them in confusion as they did the same. One of the men stepped forward and asked, "Fair lady, where do you come from and whom do you wish to find?" Princess Camilla replied, "I am Princess Camilla of Clamamania. I have been captured by the wooly sisters and wish to return home." A group of little children took her hands and led her to the middle of town. She sat down while the women kindly offered her some vegetable soup. When the princess finished the creamy soup, she thanked them and asked for directions to her kingdom. Their leader brought her a map of the entire kingdom and then said, "Lucky for you, it isn't far, but you will have to go back in the direction you came from." Camilla instantly replied, "For the wooly sisters and Bertha are back there, and close on my heels." One of the women looked at her for a moment-paused-and then gave her, her hooded cloak. It was a bit snug on the princess, but she gratefully accepted. She also put on some obnoxious make-up along with some tiny slippers.

She was only a couple miles out of town, when she heard the wooly sisters grumbling about how they are so hungry because they haven't been making money on Princess Camilla. When they came only about 100 meters away, Camilla sat down and unpacked her picnic. When they walked by her she offered them a loaf of bread. They immediately answered by saying, "No, but have you seen a young girl, in royal clothing, in search of a kingdom?" The princess kindly answered, "I have, and I believe she went that way not to long ago." She pointed in the direction away from the village, and not on the path she was taking. When they were out of sight Camilla quickly packed up her picnic and raced toward the kingdom.

It took only 45 minutes until she could just make out the windows high in the castle wall. She raced through the village as fast as she could. When she arrived to the castle doors, the guards didn't recognize her. She claimed she was the princess over and over until the guard motioned to another to get the king and queen. It took only a few minutes for the king and queen to arrive. When they did, the king instantly said, "She isn't the one!" Princess Camilla then argued and said, "Smell my skin," as she stuck her hand in the king's face! He smelled her hand and a tear rolled down his face as he said, "She is my daughter." Soon after she married Prince Patrick, and got the wooly sister and Bertha thrown in jail! And she lived happily ever after.

Makinsey Schlautmann
TMP-Marian Jr. High
8th Grade, 2nd Place

Sunrise Plaza

Stretching, pulsing, pushing. His stress reliever, his drug, his reason to get up in the morning. Sunrise Plaza. More specifically, the running route painted throughout the network of neighborhoods.

Sunrise Plaza looked over the waterfront of Virginia, salty sea air rising into action at the slightest breeze. Due to such purified and healthy air, it was the thriving point of a well put together neighborhood consisting of exactly thirty-two houses and thirteen small businesses. Mica Li, the head surgeon of Sunrise Hospital, had fallen in love with the place. Kind residents, exquisite residents, and a private beach area.

Mica never expected to move to Virginia. He never expected to become a surgeon. Mica never even expected to live past twenty.

His usual Tuesday morning consisted of oatmeal, a banana, and a small three mile run. He began transit to work at 8:23 and never arrived a tick after 8:30.

Today, he would be late.

The run took him past Kaitlyn, Alexander, Ben, and Jack's houses. He always grinned and waved as his friends saluted him in a similar fashion.

They all worked at their own respective places, earning vastly different amounts yet able to afford Sunrise Plaza. All of the friends and their partners would barbecue on Saturday afternoons and drink on Saturday nights.

The other residents were very generous, never calling in noise complaints and even lending plates and cups.

That Monday afternoon, he had a heavy urge to make more of his lemon doused exercise drink and set his alarm for thirty minutes before the original time. He was extremely anxious for the next morning and decided he

would do five miles rather than three. The route would dip him into the Western side of Sunrise Plaza.

His sleep was jumbled with flashing images. Bright clothes, colorful lights, and blood. A lot of blood.

Mica breathed a sigh of relief when the clock struck 5:30 a.m. He pulled on his jogging clothes and snapped a headband onto his forehead.

He remembered to lock his house and toss the Tuesday paper into the recycling bin. He remembered to tie his laces and click on his speedometer. Unfortunately, he forgot his drink.

Mica ran. Stretching, pulsing, pushing. He glanced upon the sunrise, the pallet of colors painting the sky as a true work of art. He gazed at houses as he passed, noticing beautiful flowers and trees. Until they stopped.

Black, white, grey. Almost indistinguishable against each other. Black flowers, grey branches, white house. Until the red appeared.

A trail of it. Blooming against the stark grey sidewalk.

A window. Spatters of blood, splashes of life.

A ghostly white face.

Mica blinked.

Black, white, grey. Pulsing, throbbing, pushing.

And Mica ran.

Kalyssa Boyle

Hays Middle School

8th Grade, 3rd Place

Chased

My hands trembled as I punched the number into the phone. I didn't understand; one minute we were walking and talking, the next I was split and frightened. The phone rang three times in my ear then shut off. My phone died.

I was alone in an alley at night. Isabella must have been freaking out. She was terrified of being alone, even in plain daylight. I couldn't decide if I should keep walking or wait to see if Isabella would show up. Never in a million years would I have pictured myself here, after basketball practice, at this time. It was my idea to go down the alley, but Bella didn't have to agree. I just about cried when I thought of what my mom would say when or if I got back home. I knew I couldn't leave Isabella wherever she went, but I changed my mind when I saw a figure behind me.

I ran. I was pretty sure Isabella ran the other way but, right at that moment, I didn't care where she went. We ran hard at practice, and I was running again; I was so exhausted! I looked behind me praying the figure was gone. I had never been so wrong. It looked as if Slender Man himself was chasing me.

I could run no longer. I tried to find a trash can or a bush to hide in, but there was nothing. I stood there thinking of what my last words should be when I heard deep breaths. Deep breaths like someone was tired, but it wasn't me. I looked around, saw nobody, and looked back at the figure. I could just barely make out hair in a ponytail blowing in the wind. The figure took a few steps. It was Isabella.

"Why did you run?" asked Isabella.

"I don't know," I admitted. "I guess I was scared."

"I thought I saw a stray cat in the bush, so I crawled halfway in when I noticed you kept walking. I stood up and you started running," addressed Isabella.

"Sorry," I mumbled, "My phone died when I tried calling you."

"It's O.K.," Isabella replied.

"Let's get out of this alley," I suggested.

"Good idea!" agreed Isabella.

Leah Mages

TMP-Marian Jr. High

8th Grade, Honorable Mention

The Great Mush

I could feel the excitement racing through my body as I stepped out into the cold Alaskan snow. The bitter wind nipping at my pointed ears as I paced back and forth, unable to contain my anticipation. I, Togo, was finally ready to begin my training, to become a sled dog of course! I know all of the musher's commands and today was going to be my first day being included with the team. I had been waiting for this day for so long!

I felt a sense of completion as my owner hooked me by my harness towards the back of team of dogs. I was a little saddened by the fact that I didn't get to be closer towards the front, but I didn't let that faze me, this was my day to show them what I'm made of!

I'd grown up around the older huskies and had always looked up to them. I'd watched them jog around the outskirts of our small Alaskan town hooked up to a sled more times than I could count. I'd always dreamt of being a part of their team.

Finally, at the musher's command, we took off.

My long awaited first day of training wasn't as amazing and thrilling as I had anticipated for it to be. Since it was most of the dogs first day of training, we only pulled the sled a few miles before turning around and heading home. But I had still felt as if I could go on for hours!

We had been put back in the kennel house after training and most of the other dogs had begun to fall asleep, but I just laid my head on my paws and let out a large sigh. My littermate, Nova, lied down next to me.

"Well that was a very uneventful first day of training," I mumble to Nova.

"Well it was only the first day, our route will probably gradually get longer," reasons Nova.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, Akira decided to put her opinion into our conversation.

"Togo it's only the first day of the season, you can't expect everyone to be able to run the Iditarod!" Akira snapped. "We haven't trained for weeks!"

Akira is the type of dog who always butts into others conversations. She always feels the need to correct opinions she doesn't like, mostly mine. We always get into quarrels that the other team members don't seem to appreciate.

"Can't you just keep your muzzle out of places where it doesn't belong," I snapped back.

"Well I'm entitled to state my own opinion," She protests.

The other dogs in the kennel house sigh because they know our arguments are never ending once they begin.

Suddenly I hear the noise of the kennel house door opening. I turn my head towards it. I wag my tail, hopping to my feet, when a little boy walks in.

"Togo, Akira let's go!" calls out the young boy. A huge smile was plastered onto his face.

My owner's son, ever since we were born, had taken a liking to Akira and me. We usually go out into the forest to mess around and the boy mostly comes around the same time every day. I don't know why anyone would like Akira though.

I once again step outside into the bitter Alaskan wind, even though I'm not as excited as I was this morning, I still feel the same burst of energy when my padded paws touch the cold snow.

Akira and I lead the way into the huge forest on the outskirts of our town. Our paws bounding in rhythm across the huge Alaskan landscape, the twelve year old boy directly behind us. We made sure to be cautious of our speed, wary not to go too fast so the young boy could keep up with us.

We had been running for quite a while, when suddenly we began to hear a cracking noise. Unknowingly Akira and I had lead the boy out onto a frozen lake, and we turned around just in time to see the young boy falling into the deathly cold waters.

"Well I never remembered a lake being here," I mumbled.

"Oh no!" Akira cried. "What do we do, Togo, what do we do!"

The boy began to try to pull himself out, he tried to grasp onto anything, but his hands only slid against the slick surface of the ice.

Akira and I walk up to him and begin to whine. Akira nudged him and grasped his coat between her teeth, making an effort to pull him out, but with little to no success.

Akira began to whine frantically as she paced back and forth.

"Stop!" I cried out frantically. "Be careful, you may fall in too!"

"No I won't!" She protested. That's when we heard another crack. The ice had begun to break beneath Akira's feet.

"You sure?" I questioned sarcastically.

“What are we going to do Togo!?” Akira rambled, beginning to pace again. “We are all going to die here on this lake, and we’ll never get to participate in a race because we are going to fall in and freeze to death....”

“Just listen to me for once in your life,” I yelled, interrupting her. “Stop freaking out, we need to do something quickly or else he’ll freeze to death!”

Surprisingly, for once, Akira was quiet.

“Okay,” Akira whispered dejectedly.

“Well we need to go get someone to get him out, quickly because I don’t know how much longer he can last in there.”

“Well we can’t just leave him here and walking back across the lake is really risky, we could fall in,” Akira stated.

“Well we don’t really have many options,” I stated “I’ll go across and get help,”

“But what if you fall in!” she says worriedly. “I won’t be able to save you,”

“It’s a risk I’ll have to take,” I said.

I carefully made my way across the frozen lake and once my paws hit the cold snow, I busted out into a sprint, hoping to find help as soon as possible.

At the speed I was going it didn’t take very long for me to reach the kennel house where my owner was relaxing on the porch.

“Togo!” He exclaimed. “What are you doing out of the kennels?”

I started to bark rapidly.

“Togo what’s the matter?” he asks worriedly.

I began to jog in the direction of the lake and luckily my owner began to follow me.

Once the lake was in sight I could hear Akira barking loudly and I saw that she had already attracted the attention of another man, who I could see was talking on the phone. The boy was still trapped in the icy waters of the lake.

“Oh no!” my owner cried out. “My son!”

“Everything is going to be alright,” the other man said calmly. “I already called the police,”

The police arrived in no time and luckily were able to very quickly get the boy out of the lake. They took him away in this big white vehicle with flashing lights on top of it. My owner didn’t ride along with him. He knelt down next to Akira and me, and patted our heads out of gratitude.

“Thanks you two,” He said gratefully. “Without you two my son would’ve died today,”

I felt very proud.

Hey, you never know, maybe he’ll let me lead the team in training tomorrow.

Trinity Bollig

Ellis High School

9th Grade, 1st Place

The Envious Flower

Ande was a wishful little dandelion, he wished the he’d be growing instead of wilting, mesmerizing instead of hideous. So the years have come and gone each passing slower than the last, but Ande stayed in the same place as person after person happily skipped to the playground, cars zoomed by as if they were late to work, whereas Ande is still in the concrete as if he’s been reliving the same day over and over again.

Ande doesn’t see the weather change, the night to day, the people that come and go, all he sees is if that everlasting day changed him. The answer has grown from hopeful and has just drifted farther and farther from his, though it has ever-so-more crept upon the deathly feeling of loneliness.

Trying to find some hope in his life Ande tries and tries to overcome the feeling of sadness and feeling that he has no purpose. All Ande wants is so be a rose or any type of flower that is picked out to give to that special someone, that has been his wish for these never ending years. While he was wishing to be a wanted and adored flower, the wanted and adored flowers wished to be him.

Brady Kreutzer

TMP-Marian High School

9th Grade, 2nd Place

Jury Duty

“Jury” asks the Judge.

I look down at my hands and rub them on my pants, my hands are so sweaty. I’m shaking so much, I refuse to look up. The woman next to me nudges me. I look up at everyone. They stare blankly at me.

“Yes, your honor?” After a minute I finally answer. I could see the Judge getting impatient.

“What have you decided?”

Why was I chosen to say this guy’s fate? *But no one knows what happened. Don’t let them be suspicious. Just say it, send him to jail.* The Judge looked impatient again.

“Your honor, the jury finds Mr. Miles...”

My life was perfect. Well, until that night. But nobody knew. I was too smart for them. I completely covered it up. But it didn’t stop me from feeling bad about that night. I, Jordan Bentley, killed a guy, and I still couldn’t believe I did it.

I grew up in Seattle, Washington. My dad was a dentist and my mom was a doctor. I was an only child, deemed to be just as successful as my parents, and I was. Until that night.

I was going to college to become an Anesthesiologist. I had my whole life planned out. Go to college, get married, have children, and overall become successful. Those plans were unfolding perfectly. Until that night.

That night I was acting so stupid. Why did I even go to that party? I had never really been to a party, besides the upscale parties my parents dragged me to when I was younger. But I’m 20 years old and this was a college party. I should’ve said no; told them I was too busy studying for midterms or something. But for once in my life, I’d made a decision that I would regret until the day I die. Sure, I had made other unintelligent mistakes, but this one...there was no way to fix this mess.

That night, I talked to my best friend Jeremy, and he told me there was going to be a small party at his friend’s apartment. I wasn’t doing anything so I said I would go. That was my first mistake. But I showed up at his friend’s house. I got a funny feeling when I walked in, like something bad was going to happen. But I shook it off; I figured I was just nervous about finally going to an actual party for the first time. I entered the room and there was some music playing and people dancing.

“I thought this was supposed to be a small party,” I said to Jeremy.

“Me too. Oh well,” Jeremy replied.

I could’ve turned around and left. But I didn’t, I decided to go anyways. We walked back to the kitchen and Jeremy’s friend was talking to someone. He immediately stopped and looked us over.

“Oh, hey Jeremy. And you must be Jordan. I didn’t know if you were going to make it or not.” He stuck out his hand and I shook it.

“It’s great to be here. Sorry, but I don’t know your name,” I told him.

“I thought Jeremy told you. I’m Dylan Myers.”

After we discussed our college majors, he told me he was big into hunting and pulled out a rifle. I was from Seattle and I had never been hunting, let alone ever held a gun. That’s when everything fell apart.

Dylan told me that it wasn’t loaded, but to be careful just in case. I told him I’d be careful. I picked up the gun, not even thinking about everyone in the room. I asked him how to hold it.

“Just put the butt of the gun back to your shoulder, then look right down the barrel straight at your target, and then pull the trigger.”

I thought maybe one day I would go hunting and my target would be a deer or a rabbit, but little did I know that it would be a 19 year old man.

I did everything he said, acting as if I was actually hunting, then I stupidly pulled the trigger.

BANG

He fell. Everyone screamed. Blood rained on the wall. I ran.

I ran to the bathroom. I searched the medicine cabinets for something, anything. And then I found it. Anesthetics. *You’re going to college to become an anesthesiologist for God’s sake. You know what to do.*

I did know what to do. I knew I should confess the accident. But instead I dissolved the anesthetics into the lemonade and gave everyone some.

“Everyone calm down, here drink something.” I handed everyone a glass.

I made sure everyone drank it. Nobody left. I grabbed the gun and remembered from something in high school of how murderers covered evidence. *Murderer.* That’s who I was.

After everyone had pretty much passed out from the anesthetics, I made it seem as if some random guy did it, I think his name was Carson. About 45 minutes later, everyone was awake and didn't remember anything. All they knew is that a friend was dead and it was in someone else's hands, who didn't even do it.

After the police interrogated me, I left. I had to get away from the scene.

They say that boys shouldn't cry.

But that night, that's all I did. I cried until I couldn't cry anymore. I cried until it hurt to breathe. I cried because I accidentally killed someone and I blamed it on someone else.

ONE YEAR LATER

I woke up from another nightmare. The fifth one this week. I would tell my therapist about it and move on.

I rolled out of bed and went to the mail box. I pulled out all the bills, newspapers, and ads. But in the midst of the bills, newspapers, and ads, an envelope labeled JURY DUTY in big, red bold letters was there. My hands shook. I had never gotten picked before. I read through it and got to the last page that was brief about the case I had to serve.

"CASE 11680: 19 year old victim, Mr. Cole Martin, was shot and killed by 20 year old, Mr. Carson Miles with a gun at a college party. Potential homicide. Please show up for jury duty in 14 days. Location of the court and other information located on the first page."

This couldn't be happening. This was the man I accidentally shot, and instead of sitting in jail, I'm serving jury duty for the case that should be mine. I should be the one sitting in the orange jumpsuit. Not Carson.

14 DAYS LATER

I got up that morning and went to the court. There was no way I was getting out of this.

After hearing the testimonies from both sides, us the jury, gathered in a small room to decide Carson's fate.

After three days of discussion, we decided. We entered the court room. I stared sadly at Carson. *I can't do this anymore, this is awful, I need to confess what I did, please Jor-*

"Sir, what is the verdict? We need to know what the Jury has decided."

The judge stared down at me. *Just say it Jordan. Please.*

"Sorry, your honor, the jury finds him..."

I looked at my hands, the hands that shot Cole.

"The jury finds him...guilty."

I'm sorry Carson. But someone had to be blamed.

Lauryn Becker
Ellis High School
9th Grade, 3rd Place

The Trenches

The night was freezing. The cold wind blew on our face as we made our way to the trenches. We all knew our chance of surviving was very slim. But we were not going to just turn around because of a swamp. We had to push until we had defeated the Mongolians for what they have done. We have marched all day and reached the point where we needed to take a break. The Mongolians have had control over my men and my people for far too long and it was time to end this for once and for all. But with my men in this shape, feeling death on their shoulders every second was no way to win this. As we set up our own areas I look around me a see the already broken faces a once saw as happy and realized how much war could change a man and his country. I wanted to push to keep going be it would make us weaker. Even with the Mongolians not modernized, at this point, it was the perfect time to strike them from behind and get the advantage. We needed the advantage because even though they are not modernized they do have very big numbers that could take us down.

After a night of rest we couldn't stick around forever. We had to make our way through the deep swamp, but we knew it would give us a very good advantage over the hill if we did this successfully. When we finally reached the final and deepest part of the swamp. Shoulder high in the muck holding our rifles in the air keeping them from getting the wet, when out of the blink of an eye, we get ambushed by the Mongolians. We were lucky though. Whit there forces not modernized, we managed to escape with barley any lives takin.

Again we had shed blood in these parts and it was starting to look like it was just the beginning of a new hell just over the hill. Climbing the hill we could smell the burnt power in the air and at this point wasn't the most pleasant smell. The swampy hill didn't make it any easier making it up to the top. But when we did, it was like a whole new world.

You could feel death's hand on your shoulder. Seeing the footsteps of a bomber and its trails that it had left on the land. The deep holes in the earth where many people had died in the shadows of the smoke. As we made our way into the trenches we hear the cries of a man. A man that had seen and had felt the presents of the bomber, and under his last breath he said "It's a trap".

Thousands of feet marching into the trenches began to shake the ground. We had no choice but to attack first. Get them a surprise of a life time. All I had to do was give the word "ATTACK!" and thousands of us were running toward the army of men. We ran with our bayonets out and our heads held high. The battle had begun. Blood was being shed and there was no turning back now. All of the desperate men running into battle were ready for the war that would capture the main city and gain back our land. But we were in for a fight.

Slipping and sliding through the mud, the Mongolians had trouble. From everything for guns jamming, to getting stuck knee deep in mud and not having a single thing to do about it. The Mongolians had no chance against us. We had already brought their numbers down below half of what they already had it was looking promising. Our rifles had a very big advantage range wise and reloading wise. While they had to reload for about a minute just to fire one. While we had clips, very easy to reload and take about five seconds if you get good at it. But through all of the fighting we heard death fly above the mountains. Seeing a big plane carrying bombs. We knew it was over. The shadow of death had found us.

Trey Hudson
Ellis High School
10th Grade, 1st Place (tie)

SSHHHHH!

Peace and quiet, is it too much to ask for? As the Librarian of the Brownsville Public Library, I have pledged to keep my library still, silent and tranquil, all while holding myself to a certain level of decorum. I like to say I run a tight ship. No food, drinks, cats, board games, dogs, loud music, flash photography, unpacified babies, rodents, undeodorized teenagers, anything typed in Comic Sans font, and the final, most important rule of all, NO NOISE! I would be lying if I said I didn't love my occupation. Being able to show up to a job where it feels as if you are wearing an expensive set of noise canceling headphones for free, is a true gift from God. Aisle after aisle of fermented books, releasing an aroma so impeccable. The perfect formula of fresh cut grass with a hint of sweet vanilla escaping from the pages and rejuvenating my soul. Each story bound in a unique, stunning pattern, some faded red diamonds, others vibrant yellow stripes, my personal favorite, a dark orange background with the most beautiful intricate purple detailing guarding an amazing adventure that lies within. There are also these other books that contain the most wonder—SSHHHHH!

Carl, Crazy Carl the kids call him. I can attest that this nickname is nothing short of perfect to describe such a monstrous little creature. This vicious weasel is the destructor of all things peaceful. My precious silence is broken at precisely 3:30pm, every afternoon, of every weekday, of every week, of every month. Carl barges through my crystal clear glass doors, not using the handle, but smudging his grimy little fingers determinedly across the entire door. Ripping books from the shelf, aggressively flipping through the pages, and leaving them strewn all throughout my precision placed library, completely upsetting up my habitual Feng Sui! Don't even get me started on his restroom etiquette. Did his mother not teach him to put the toilet seat down when he is done? I purposefully placed that bottle of cherry blossom Febreze air freshener in the room for a reason, not because I think it looks cute sitting on top of the stool, which honestly, it doesn't.

By the way, if any Febreze associate is pay attention, please consider redesigning your packaging. Let me tell you, your current design does not tickle my fancy.

"Bland. Boring. Unimaginative." I've heard many people describe the generic container.

Might I suggest a simple, yet sophisticated navy blue and white lattice pattern? I can send you a link of something I have my eye on. It's a wonder your company is still in business. If I were you I would act upon my gracious offer with haste.

Oh, excuse my tangent rant. Let's get back to the miniature demon. This child's voice is the worst of it all. It's not that his voice sounds strange or anything, it is just the volume he attains in my library. His ear-splitting shrieks of laughter bellow through the library as he reads something "funny" from a child's book. On a completely unrelated side note, remind me to accidentally misplace the complete series of *The Adventures of Captain Underpants* in the near future. Day in and day out of unnecessary ruckus has led me one conclusion, this boy has got to go!

Things have just gotten so out of hand with that heathen lately, so I have decided to use the ultimate superpower of a librarian. I banned that snot-nosed, page ripper from the Brownsville Public Library! Oh happy day!

I finally just sink back into my office chair and relax for what feels like the first time in ages. Just me and the books and silence. The books and silence. Silence. Silence. The books! Oh, I haven't went and smelled the books in forever. I grab my favorite orange and purple book from the shelf, the cover seems duller than I remember. I take in a big old whiff.

"Hmmm." I say to myself.

I try again, searching hard for the glorious smell. All I can smell is dust, boring, lonely, dust. I swear I've never smelt loneliness before, but I'm pretty sure I just have. I pace over to the tables to put the books away that people have left out. Oh...everything's clean, just the way I left it, exactly how I want it. Clean tables, tidy aisles, chairs tucked in.

"Nothing for me to do I suppose." I think.

I go back to my office and slump down into my chair. Something is missing, I don't know what it is, but I don't feel right. Everything is in order, nothing is out of place, but something isn't right. How can everything be so perfect, but imperfect at the same time? I nearly fall off of my seat. Carl! How can that pint-size buzzard be the thing that I'm missing? Then I realize, he is my purpose! The part I love the most about my job is reprimanding the patrons of my library. Without people like Carl my job has no meaning. People like Carl are the reason for librarians. I have to get Carl back!

The next day, I stand outside of the door at 3:30. He should be walking past any time now on his route home. I wait by the door for 10 minutes, soon turning into 30. Just as I was about to turn and trudge back to my office, I see a bright green dot barreling down the sidewalk, as the dot gets closer, it's features begin to look more like a goblinessque little boy.

"Carl!" I exclaim as he crosses in front of the door.

"What?" he questions, taken aback from the irregular level of my voice.

I backpedal, trying not to look like too desperate.

"I just wanted to let you know that your ban has been lifted, and you can now come back to the library whenever you want," I say trying to sound casual.

"Well okie dokes, thanks Lady!"

He rushes up to me and squeezes tight around my torso, I pat back, enjoying the rare act of kindness towards a grumpy old lady like myself. He releases his grip and scrambles over to his typical spot, throws off his coat and back pack, and gets down to business. I stroll over to my desk and take my seat. A high yelp rings through the room, one that could have only escaped from the mouth of Crazy Carl.

I roll my eyes and try to hide my grin. "SSHHHHH!"

Lane Fischer

Ellis High School

10th Grade, 1st Place (tie)

Sahara

It is challenging to form a precise idea of a desert without having seen one. It is a vast plain of sands and stones, scattered with mountains of various sizes and heights, usually without roads or sanctuary. They sometimes bare springs of water, which burst forth, and create lush vegetative spots.

The most remarkable of deserts is the Sahara. This is a vast plain, but little elevated above the level of the ocean, and covered with sand and gravel, with a mixture of sea shells, and appears like the basin of an evaporated sea. This ocean has very little life.

Amid the desert, there are springs of water, which burst forth and create verdant spots, called oases. There are thirty two of these that contain fountains, and date and palm trees grow. Twenty of them are inhabited. They serve as stopping places for the caravans, and often contain villages.

Were it not for these, no human being could cross this waste of burning sand. So violent, sometimes, is the burning wind that the scorching heat dries up the water of these springs, and then frequently, the most disastrous consequences follow.

In 1805, a caravan consisting of 2,000 persons and 1,800 camels, not finding water at the usual resting place, died of thirst, both men and animals. Storms of wind are more terrible in this desert than on the ocean. Vast surges and clouds of red sand are raised and rolled forward, burying everything in its way, and it is said that whole tribes have thus been swallowed up.

There is one main smell in the desert. It is the smell of your own death and it follows you everywhere. It's ungodly and it's as virulent as the heat itself. It wafts and wallows, billows and blows all around you, your only ever-present companion besides hopelessness. There are more smells to be detected in this hub of death.

Fear pervades from every pore and its smell is nearly as fetid and pungent. Blended in amongst them is the noxious swirl of body odor. It is rancid and rank and makes you want to vomit with disgust. Around you, the flimsy scrub-bushes smell flamed and fried. An unhealthy fume of burning sand, as stuffy as old car exhausts, rises up like a fog and fluctuates just below your nose. It never seems to go away, so much so that you think that the gaseous emanations are part of the landscape. The smells seem as if they are chained inside your nostrils.

The situation of such is dreadful, and admits of no resource. Many perish, victims of the most horrible thirst. It is then that the value of a cup of water is truly felt. Even one drop of water is treasured.

To be thirsty in a desert, without water, exposed to the burning sun, without shelter, is the most terrible situation that a human being can be placed in, and one of the greatest sufferings that a human being can sustain; the tongue and lips swell, a hollow sound is heard in the ears, which brings on deafness, and the brain appears to grow thick and inflamed. This is probably one of the most unfortunate, if not the most unfortunate way to die.

There is nothing appetizing about the tastes of the desert. Defeat is the last taste on your plate. The only thing over-the-top or extravagant is the cause of your death. There's nothing mouth-watering as there's no water to be drunk. There's nothing rich or tantalizing to be had. There's nothing at all for you to do except to bow down to the ungodly desire of the desert to kill you. I'm tired now. I'm sick of the stumbling and the staggering, the tottering and the trembling. I'm sick of the cracked lips and the kidney-skewering pain of dehydration. Most of all, I'm sick of life. The sand is burning my head now for I have fallen for the last time. My large, Berber-brown eyes can feel the tears. I've had enough of survival in Satan's domain. Seventeen years as a camel in this inferno of fire and fumes was just too much to ask of me. Goodbye sweet life.

Dylan Brown
Ellis High School
10th Grade, 2nd Place

Them

Run... Stop... Listen...

I had been doing the same thing for hours now. Waiting and running, hoping and wishing that the fate given to the other chosen wouldn't be the one given to me. I had to be extremely quiet, even the slightest shift of metal against the hard tile could give me away. A slightly louder draw of breath could attract too much attention. A small swoosh of my hair could expose me.

My heart was racing in my chest, urging to be set free, letting me know that I needed to start running again. Silently moving past the motionless civilians in the mall who couldn't help me in any way, I dashed between racks trying to find my next hide out. I had never thought that they would pick me. I have always been in the background of the world, like a single grain of sand of a wide beach. I had been window shopping in Blue Cloud, my favorite boutique, when suddenly everyone around me stopped moving. I knew then that it was Them. This had happened before; they had taken someone every week at random places and times since the May of last summer.

Suddenly I heard a loud crash on the other side of the store where I had hidden just a few minutes ago. They were getting closer, too close for comfort. I peeked around the cool metal of the display rack, then immediately bolted from behind the rack of vibrantly colored clothing and ran into the center of the mall. There, I found the run-down food court where I had eaten so many times before. I hastily ran behind the old pretzel shop counter that used

to sell sour cheese sauce. Perhaps that was the reason they had previously shut down and left many boxes and metal racks in the store room. This made the perfect place for me to temporarily hide. I silently crept farther into the shop until I reached the storage room. I then crawled under numerous empty cardboard boxes into a small dusty corner. Here the room smelled strongly of mold and mildew.

I sat for what seemed like hours, listening, and waiting for the time they would find me. I was very cautious and made sure that I left no traces of my path. There were no echoes of footsteps, or whispers of near or distant people. I finally made the decision to slowly crawl out of my cardboard hiding spot. With light steps and soft breaths, I crept toward the old front counter of the pretzel shop. Seeing that everyone was gone in the mall eased my nerves. The only reason this would happen was if they had finally given up on finding me. Still being cautious, I slowly crept toward the food court and out of the pretzel shop. One foot over the threshold, then the next. I couldn't believe what was happening. I was the first known person to successfully get away from Them.

Suddenly I felt a slight prick on my neck and the bite of cold hard linoleum tiles against my cheek...

Alexandria Hagerman

Hays High School

10th Grade, 3rd Place

Spy-ders from Hell

"Ya see that spider there?" asked Granddad Art. "Sure, Granddad," I responded

"They're some strange creatures, dontcha think?" "Okay, I guess, but why?" I ask.

"They have too many damn eyes, that's why."

"Well, what do you mean?" I say chuckling to myself.

"I'm sayin' all those extra eyes must be used to see their fellow demons from Hell, that's all," Granddad stated as fact.

Whether a person is 9 years old or in their 90's, spiders captivate and terrify. I've been told every line in the book, "Spiders eat nasty bugs and flies!" and "Oh they're harmless!" However, I can't shake my instinct to jump like Michael Jordan at the sight of one and find something to smash that tiny creature into oblivion with the might of Thor. "Why?" I ask myself, "Why do I react so strongly to these tiny creatures? It must be their stupid faces..."

In all reality, this is true. Spiders are gross. They're hairy, dart around on "bony" legs, and have too many eyes. It's not only the number of eyes that's bothersome, but the darkness of a spider's eye is creepy and dehumanizing. It sounds silly to humanize an animal, but dogs are adorable because we look into their gorgeous "puppy-dog eyes" and see a loving creature. The same can't be said for a spider's cold, dark, dead eyes. Their body size is also terrifying. Now I know what most would say to this,

"C'mon! You're ridiculous! Spiders are tiny, and you're like a bajillion times their size!"

"Exactly! That's the most terrifying part!" I would respond

"How? They're so small! They couldn't hurt a fly!"

"Well actually, they spend most their lives specifically hurting flies, but their size is so scary because you never know where they are. They're like hellish ninjas of the night."

"Okay, but it's not like there's so many of them anyways..." the figment of my imaginations replies, notably less confident.

"Gotcha there too, pal, with an estimated 1 million spiders per acre, there's about 36,465,000,000,000,000 spiders in the world. I don't know about you, but that's about 45 quadrillion 465 million too many for me."

Not to mention, some spiders, such as the Goliath Birdeater Tarantula, can grow to be a foot long. All in all, spiders look truly terrifying in every aspect of the word.

Although spiders may look the same to every one of us, each person's level of fear towards spiders is different. Even "macho" men freak out a little inside when they see those spindly legs climbing towards them. I'm truly convinced Rambo and the Terminator would scream like little girls if presented with a spider bigger than their faces. However, while Rambo may have pulled a gun on such a spider, my mother, for instance, reacts quite differently.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAGH!" screamed my mother.

"Mom! What's wrong? Are you okay?" I asked worriedly.

“Spider! Kill it! Kill it! Gross! Get it away from me!” She squeals as she jumps around the kitchen.

“Okay, okay! I’ll grab a shoe!” I say as I promptly squish an arachnid half the size of a penny.

“Oh gosh, thank you Trae!” Mom said as she gave a bear hug.

“No problem, Mom, my pleasure! I say, feeling 10 feet tall.

I experienced a more aggressive approach to taking care of a spider from a summer day with my brothers.

“Hey Trae! Come check this out!” Holden yelled.

“Oh what’s up? Whoa.” I said as I stared in awe at a massive black widow spider clinging to a large web in our window well.

“See what’s next to it?”

“Oh no. Is that what I think it is?”

“Yep. A sack full of black widow babies,” Holden said.

“Welp. I think this is my cue to leave...”

“Hey! No, we need to kill it!”

“But how? I’m not crawling down in there I said knowing that was on his mind.

“Well, how about we wash it out with the hose? Spiders drown right?”

“I know they wash down the ‘water spout’ as the song says. . . “

“Close enough for me!” Holden says as we walk outside to grab the hose. After several minutes of washing the spider is still alive and found shelter from the spray.

“Okay this isn’t working,” I state.

“Fine. Does Dad have some insecticide in the garage?” Holden asks.

“I think so, but aren’t spiders arachnids?”

“Yes, but rat poison is for rats, and it would still kill you, wouldn’t it?”

“I guess that’s fair, go get the insecticide!” I say with hope. After several minutes of dousing the spider nest with poison Holden says, “You know, I think it’s hurting them, but I sorta want them to die faster...can I say that without sounding evil?”

“What if before they actually die, the swarm of them finds a crack and gets in the house?” I say. “Maybe Kade would know a better way to kill ‘em?”

“Hey Kade! We have a bit of a situation...” Holden says to Kade before relaying our predicament.

“Well. What’s keeping us from setting them on fire? That’ll definitely kill ‘em.” Kade says with a little pyromaniac sparkle in his eye.

“Uhhhh, Kade we don’t want to burn the whole house down...” I say cautiously.

“Oh come on! We’ll be careful and all, but we gotta kill ‘em!”

While keeping the welfare of the house in mind, Holden says, “I don’t know Kade, I think Trae and I will just go downstairs and take another look at the spiders before we decide anything.”

While downstairs looking through the window at the web, a sudden slosh of liquid hits the web and surrounding area.

“Oh no! Kade! Gasoline is NOT a good idea!” I try to tell Kade through the window well.

“He’s definitely gonna burn the whole house down... I guess we should go up and try to stop him.” Holden says.

“Well it’s too late for that! Look! He’s already lit the match!” I say as Kade tosses the lit match into the web, and Holden and I race outside laughing at the hilarity of the situation.

“Okay Kade we brought the hose to put the fire out!” Holden says as we sprint outside to the top-side of the window well.

“Ok, but just douse the edges and the house so it doesn’t catch fire,” Kade reasons. “But we’re gonna see that som’bitch burn!”

Although gasoline and fire may not be the best way for everyone to rid themselves of spiders, it’s safe to say a majority of people wouldn’t mind lighting the match. Spiders are creepy, crawly nightmares from Hell that happened to sneak their way into our world. I plan to send them back whenever possible, after a small girlish scream of course, one match at a time.

Trae Megaffin

TMP-Marian High School

11th Grade, 1st Place

Mom and Dad

Splashed across the T.V. screen was a close-up picture of a young, teenage boy. His dimples cut into his reddened cheeks, and his dark, curly hair was messy from the wind. His blue eyes seemed to come to life, like he was standing right in front of you, close enough to touch.

“Isn’t that just sad?” my mother exclaims from the kitchen. “That’s the third teen this year to be murdered. You would think this monstrous person would be caught by now!” she says angrily. She gets really worked up like that. If a person or animal is hurt, or if politics is brought up, she definitely always has something to say about it.

I’m not like her. I’m not even hers. I don’t think my parents were ever going to tell me I was adopted. I asked them a few years ago when I was eleven, after I noticed all my siblings had stick-straight, blonde hair—the exact opposite of mine. I was also tall and thin, towering over my short family, even my dad. I still bring up my birth parents, but they refuse to say more than, “You were taken away from them as a baby.” They won’t tell me what they look like, how old they are, or if I have any siblings. But I’m guessing it’s because they don’t know.

“Hey mom, I’m going to see Liv,” I yell above the commotion of a cat toy commercial and my mom clanking around in the kitchen. “Okay Emma, be—” I’m out the door and walking down the driveway before my mom can finish saying, “home before supper.” I regret not grabbing my jacket before I left. The wind picks up, shaking the trees and making the red leaves scatter away and flutter to a halt on the ground. The freshly shed leaves crunch under my sneakers as I trudge along the sidewalk, carefully placing my foot in the center of the concrete square with each step. I stuff my hands in my skinny jean pockets to keep them warmer. The rips in my denim cascade down my legs and don’t protect my skin from the autumn weather.

I keep walking until I reach the park. I see my favorite bench is open and take a seat on the far left, making sure to avoid the smudged bird poop on the right. I shift my weight to one butt cheek to pull three dollars and forty-eight cents out of my back pocket. Then I wait for my favorite sound: big tires rolling slowly on the asphalt with faint 90s music playing from an old static radio. The food truck pulls up, displaying a bright pink, bubbly sign that reads, “Carrie’s Culinary Cupcakes!” I am the first in line when Carrie opens her window, bearing the biggest smile like always. “Oh hi Emma! I was hoping you’d stop by today!” I look up at her longer than I should have, wondering how someone can be so happy all the time. “Uh yeah. I’ll take a peanut butter truffle,” I say in my annoyed and exasperated tone. “I should’ve guessed!” she laughs and winks at me, then she whips her long auburn hair as she goes to fetch my cupcake. I turn around to view the park; a woman takes her place behind me in line, and I smile “hi” to her. “Here ya go honey.” I turn back around, hand Carrie my money, and carry my cupcake back to my bench. This is where I always come when I don’t want to be at home. I tell my parents I am seeing “Liv” then come to the park to be alone. I like being alone.

I am mid-bite when a woman comes and sits next to me. I was about to warn her about the poop but she was already starting to sit, so I decided it wasn’t worth it. Old weathered jeans cover her long skinny legs, and she’s wearing a maroon t-shirt with the logo starting to peel away from the cotton—a middle-aged women dressed like a teenager. I look up at her face, and she shyly smiles at me. Her blue eyes have crinkles in the corners and her dark, wavy bob hangs over her shoulders. It is the woman that was behind me in line. She starts to speak, “Hi, I’m Rachel.” She takes a nibble of her cupcake, the exact same flavor as mine. I just gawk at her. “I see you’re not very talkative,” she chuckles. She continues to talk about random things along with my occasional inserts of “mhm’s” and “yeah’s.” But she is similar to me and very funny. I start to enjoy her company and eventually let down the wall that has been up for so long.

“What are you staring at me for?” she inquires jokingly.

“I—I don’t know. You just look...”

“Like you?” she finishes my sentence. I don’t know what I was going to say, but she was right. We looked alike. We were both tall and thin, with our dark, wavy hair and shockingly blue eyes. It almost seemed like she was...

“Your mother.” she says bluntly. “I’m your mother.” My body goes stiff with disbelief. “I know you shouldn’t have to find out this way, but when I saw you today in the park, I decided you should know.” She continues to explain everything to me. I was taken away from her and my father because they were addicted to cocaine, but they’re sober now. I have three older siblings, and my real name is Taylor (That’s a lot better than Emma. I hate my name, it’s too girly.)

“I’d like to get to know you, Emma. How about you meet me back here tomorrow. Two-o-clock? We can venture out and try a new cupcake, like pistachio.” She looks at me with hopeful eyes. I see the best opportunity ever presented to me, and I take it.

“Yeah, I’d like that.” Her smile widens and she leans in to hug me.

She whispers in my ear, “Don’t tell anyone. I don’t want the court to find out and keep me away from you, just because of the one mistake I made years ago.” I pull away from her embrace, look her dead in the eye, and nod in understanding. I then leave to go home, and I finally feel like my missing puzzle piece has been put back, snug in its place.

The next day I am racing to get out the door. It is 1:50 pm, and I don’t want to be late. “Mom, I’m leaving!” I shout. I swing open the door and jump back, startled. A police officer stands in front of me, paused like a statue, ready to ring our doorbell. His uniform fits him snugly, trying to hold in his premature beer belly. His forehead is sprinkled with sweat and his chubby face is flush.

“Hi, are you Emma?” he questions. My mom joins me in the doorway.

“Yes I am,” I respond slowly.

“I came by to tell you that your birth mother and father were arrested today. I’m sorry to tell you that those three teens that were killed earlier, well... they’re your siblings. And you’re mother and father are the perpetrators. I doubt you had any idea, but we’ve learned that they have been stalking you for the past six months. You were going to be their next victim.”

Abby Burton

Ellis High School

11th Grade, 2nd Place

Irregular Irritations

My family silently ate their food at the dining room table. A hint of annoyance in her eyes, my mom looked up from her plate. “Eleanor, “ she said.

“Yes, Mom?” I called from across the house at the kitchen counter.

“Are you done making a huge deal out of nothing?”

“Are you done scraping your teeth against your fork?”

“Do we have to do this every time we eat dinner?” she asked.

“Do you have to scrape your teeth against your fork every time we eat dinner?”

She craned her neck around the dining room wall to look at me. “Don’t sass me young lady.”

“Mom, you know I can’t help it! That sound makes my skin crawl.”

“Please come back in here and eat with your family,” she said definitively. This was not a suggestion. I took a deep breath, carried my plate back to the dining room and set it next to my brother’s plate.

“Thank you,” she said. After a few glorious minutes of no teeth scraping against forks, my brother turns to look at me.

“Hey Elly,” he said. Mischievous in his eyes, he slowly lifted his fork and put it between his teeth.

“SSHHHHHHHIINK”

“Lucas!!” I screeched. Chills ran the length of my spine as I tried to ignore the awful sound reverberating in my skull.

Pet peeves are nuisances that we put up with daily. As if regular annoyances aren't enough, pet peeves are customized to fit each person’s specific dislikes. No matter how acceptable or normal something may seem to one person, to another it might be the single most irritating thing on the planet. However, since pet peeves are often an everyday occurrence, they are something we are forced to put up with.

Pet peeves are different for each person, but some people experience more extreme pet peeves. For example, a friend of mine hates when other people have dirt beneath their fingernails. She also hates the scratchy sound of nails being filed and papers that are wrinkled. Another friend hates when doors in a room are open. She will close every door in the area to satisfy her pet peeve. Along with a closed doors fetish, she can’t stand when hairbrushes have hair in them. I personally get irritated when someone’s typing is loud and aggressive or when teachers answer questions with more questions.

Although some pet peeves are very unique, some are fairly common and affect a lot of people. For example, loud chewing or talking with food in one’s mouth annoys and disgusts most people. I experienced an extreme case of annoyance due to this at NCYC last year.

The mall food court in Indianapolis was flooded with NCYC kids. Setting my plate down, I positioned myself near a sweet looking girl who I didn’t know. She averted her eyes toward me. “Hi! Nice to meet you. My name is Rebecca,” she said.

“Hi! I’m Elly. Where are you from?”

“Ohio. What about you?”

“I’m from Kansas,” I replied.

“Oh, that’s cool!” she picked up her chicken sandwich and took a large bite. “Haf yuh been hafing fun so fah? Her obnoxious chewing distracted me from answering right away.

“Uhhh yeah, the drive was long, but definitely worth it.” I said slowly, unable to look away from her mouth.

“Oh tha’ shucks. Our drife washn’t tha’ bah.” I attempted to ignore her loud smacking sounds. Looking down at my food, I realized my appetite had disappeared. This was not going to work. I quickly picked up my food and coat.

“Sorry I promised some friends I would sit with them,” I mumbled and fled the scene. Back into the flood of NCYC kids I went, the irritating smacking noises fading with every step.

Other common pet peeves include scraping nails on a chalkboard, taking up more than one parking space, and not using a turning signal. One common pet peeve I put up with regularly is people bouncing their legs in class. No matter how focused I am on my homework, my attention is automatically switched to the student’s leg. This is especially infuriating when the person’s shoe or the floor underneath is creaking repeatedly. Everyone else in the room is conscious of the noisy, bouncing leg except the person controlling it. Another common pet peeve I experience often is when someone steps on the back of my shoe and my whole shoe comes off. It may be an accident. It may not be an accident. Whatever the case, that person is my worst enemy for all of thirty seconds while I attempt to put my shoe back on.

Once the annoyance to these pet peeves has set in, a variety of reactions can take place. Tolerant people or those experience minor annoyances close their eyes while the peeve passes or attempt to ignore the irritation knocking on their sanity. They may take an extended, deep breath while the obnoxious pet peeve passes. Those who are less tolerant or who are experiencing worse pet peeves fall into a state of passive aggressive anger. Easily angered and frighteningly silent, passive aggressive people are hard to read and the cause of the anger is often misconstrued. Finally, when all patience has run out or when a person with extremely low tolerance experiences a pet peeve, the outcome is utter rage. Road rage is one of the most extreme reactions to pet peeves. Pet peeves such as cutting someone off, not using a turning signal and taking up more than one parking space trigger an alarmingly intense reaction from certain drivers. Rolling down a car window in a big city opens one’s ears to a world of trash talk and offensive gestures.

“HEY!” someone screams from his car. Who taught you how to drive??”

“Maybe if you would stop tailgating me I could pay attention to driving instead of having to worry about imbeciles like you rear ending me!”

“I don’t have time to wait on your dragging ten miles below the speed limit!” the instigator persisted. “Get off the road!!

“Lay off,” the man replied, followed by an obscene hand gesture.

“Whoa buddy, you wanna go??”

“You crazy son of a-”

HONK HONK

We all experience pet peeves. We all hate them. However, the sad truth is that they are unpreventable and inevitable. The only option is to suffer through the pain and hope that go away before our patience runs out.

Elly Lang

TMP-Marian High School

11th Grade, 3rd Place

My Eternal Race

Run. Run, and run and run.

That’s all I seem to do anymore. Run in an endless race against time and space. The darkness around me seeps through my clothes, turning my skin to ice and stealing the color from me. The only things I have left are being taken from me; slowly drained away by time and its evil grip. Through the darkness, I see nothing. Not the path in front of my feet, not what is behind me, nor do I see where I am. The blood in my veins suddenly feels cold, and is thinner than the thinnest water. My heart beats faster as the temperature drops, turning my breath to mist. I hate when the temperature dips, because not only can I not see, but I slowly begin to freeze. The cold, bitter, and

harsh words I hear every day surround me and pelt my skin like sleet. Through the blackness of the void, I cannot see where it is coming from, nor can I predict when it will hit me the hardest.

With the puffs of air that I manage to take in, I barely make out the lines of mist in the air; little clouds of water vapor that are created from my parted lips. A wince covers my face as a searing pain takes over my side, and I feel the throbbing of pain throughout my entire body. Wrapping an arm around my side, I continue on my blind journey; knowing if I stop, I can never start again. Once you quit the race, you aren't allowed back in. You only get one chance, and sometimes, that meant pushing through even the worst pain.

Cringing as the pain continues, I make sure my feet are pounding on the ground and are nowhere near stopping. My left foot hits a bump in my path, and nearly sends me airborne. Stumbling about for a moment or two, I attempt to regain my balance as my heart thumps inside my chest even faster. If you trip, correct yourself. If you stumble and fall, stand up and keep going. Why even bother dusting yourself off when it will only happen again and again? Until your body is black and blue from getting hurt? Although the constant, heaving pains in my chest have faded; I know that the pain will only continue, the obstacles become more common, the more problems I would face.

Hearing something distantly in the darkness, my ears try to zero in on the noise, but it seems to come from everywhere. Whether behind me, or in front of me. I cannot determine even if it is from my left, or my right. I cannot stop running my race. I cannot dwell in the past. If you spend too much time in history, you become it. You are left there, and lost with no present, or future. Although I have gotten lost down the path many times, tempted by the noises and empty promises of straying from the path. Once I was even so lost, I thought I could never find my way back. Many times have I wanted to give up, to just stop my race and lay there as my eyes slowly closed for the last time. Still, I continue on running through inky blackness.

I was told to run. Run to stay alive. To never dwell in the past, and look to the present and future. But what good does it do if I cannot see it? Perhaps it is better that I run blindly, than to avoid all the obstacles and change the route that I continue to run on. I suppose that is how people cheat fate. It does not matter how fast or how skilled you are as a runner, only that you keep running. When you are no longer able to continue, Death's icy fingers lock you in its cold grasp forever. As much as my heart and soul long for this race to never end, I know that someday, someday it will. Someday I will find the truth through this madness, and through this race. If I only knew.

This is all in my head.

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