

The Ohio State University at Lima

Creative Writing Competition

**for Allen County High
School Students**

2005



Thank you
to the sponsors of
The Ohio State University at Lima
Creative Writing Competition

The Lima Breakfast Optimists

The Lima Noon Optimists



Eligible High Schools for 2005 Competition

Allen East
Apollo Career Center
Bath
Bluffton
Delphos Jefferson
Delphos St. John's
Elida
Lima Central Catholic
Lima Senior
Perry
Shawnee
Spencerville
Temple Christian

Freshman/Sophomore Division

Poetry:

First: “The Queen’s Lament” by Ethan Ring, Bluffton	5
Second: “Land of Nod” by Hannah Solomon, Shawnee	7
Third: “Playing in the Sand” by Dusty Orndorff, Delphos Jefferson	9
Honorable Mentions	
“Place of Rest” by Bobby Cotrell, Shawnee	10
“Me” by Abby Courtney, Temple Christian	13
“Tortured” by Maggie Haiber, Delphos St. John’s	14
“Fever” by Lindsey Hunt, Bluffton	15
“Hate” by Doug Jones, Delphos Jefferson	16

Fiction:

First: “Family Treachery, McCarthy Style” by Leslie Newport, Lima Senior	19
Second: “Pas Seul” by Kacie Graham, Lima Senior	27
Third: “A Tale of Hope” by Amanda Hoersten, Delphos St. John’s	33
Honorable Mentions	
“The Yellow” by Taylor Andrews, Delphos Jefferson	41
“The Troubled Lawyer” by Danny L. Makara, Delphos Jefferson	45

Junior/Senior Division

Poetry:

First: “Monsters as Seen by an Angel” by Beth Sylak, Bluffton	49
Second: “The Sky” by Korie Gesler, Bluffton	51
Third: “Photography” by Krystal Long, Bath	52
Honorable Mentions	
“Winter” by Joel Gundy, Bluffton	53
“Rural Ohio” by Adam Marquart, Bluffton	54
“Pinocchio” by Brittany Neeley, Temple Christian	55
“Trees of Time” by Alex Raabe, Bluffton	56
“Creation of Love” by Brittany Ransom, Lima Central Catholic	57

Fiction:

First: “Changing Seasons” by Jennifer Martin, Temple Christian	59
Second: “California” by Anna Reddick, Bluffton	65
Third: “Final Surrender” by Angela Scott, Temple Christian	73
Honorable Mentions	
“My Life as an Unknowing Dollar Bill” by Megan Berelsman, Delphos Jefferson	79
“Better Days Ahead” by Rachel Young, Temple Christian	83

Ethan Ring
Bluffton High School
First Place

The Queen's Lament

Today I sold my magic mirror,
Vanity had taken too much of my life.
I gave the ribbon to a girl to twine in her hair,
The comb I placed back with my beads, wristlets and rings,
The apple I threw out the window into the orchard below,
Splitting in half when it landed.
There is too much to do, with all the
Tea parties,
Spring concerts,
Letter writing,
Embroidery,
That a whim to be “the fairest” seems a waste of time.

Why is it, then, when I am in the garden
I flee from her laugh
And at dinner veils protect me from her dark eyes?

I will be better after time
Winter turning to summer in my heart
Moving on with my duties
As queen.

Hannah Solomon
Shawnee High School
Second Place

Land of Nod

Flying dragons, talking bears
floating pixies and horn-ed mares
can be seen in the land of Nod
everything's abnormal, very odd.
Chickens dance and penguins fly
Cyclopes with more than one eye
ducks sink and witches float
the troll ate the billy goat.
But as you descend deeper
it may frighten the unwary sleeper
People, cannibals – they eat your head
you're only alive once you're dead
children smoke and adults wear diapers
toddlers behind furry pied pipers
Four legs good and two legs bad
'tis all from the dreams I've had
when dolls are real and humans fake
glass bounces and rubber shall break.
At the end of the rainbow, a dark abyss
waiting for you like Death's cold kiss.

Dusty Orndorff
Delphos Jefferson High School
Third Place

Playing in the Sand

sixty- seventy- eighty miles per hour in the one hundred degree heat
riding in a very beautiful, blue-sparkled fiberglass homemade sand rail
sand is flying through the air from the rooster tails
surging from the massive mud, sand, and paddle tires

up and down the sand dunes, soft but packed sand twenty to thirty feet high
pushing the unique homespun toys to the very breaking point
defying gravity as we gun the massive two and a half ton vehicle into the air
bottoming out the huge high performance coil over shocks

pressure on the homemade machines blows an expensive 38"- 44" inch Mickey
Thomson Baja tire completely off the rim
displeasing sounds of fiberglass breaking, tires blowing
engine belts and timing chains snapping, lexon windshields cracking

one hundred ten degrees during the day, below freezing at night
temperatures so extreme they would make any boy a man
dried out skin, broken equipment, family and friends around the camp fire
figuring out how to get parts for their fifteen hundred dollar beaters

but old Stevey has all the answers
like a MacGyver who knows how to fix everything
finding the parts that not all people would even think of using
generously spending with the wallet of Donald Trump

roars of the souped up Volkswagon engines
whining from being pushed to their very max
to the country music on the radio on the way back home

Bobby Cotrell
Shawnee High School
Honorable Mention

Place of Rest

I gaze upon that simple ledge,
'Tis but two foot high,
Covered by soft, forest green.

Here, I come to take a break,
From that chaotic mortal realm.

I come to settle,
On its softness,
To ponder hours away.

Here, I come to calm my mind,
Within a fuzzy cave,
Its walls, so cozy,
Hold my warmth,
On such a wintry day.

When the golden fury,
That is the Sun,
Drops below the horizon,
I retreat once more,
To this paramour,
Who wraps sweet arms about me.

And through the night,
Such sweet dreams, dream I,
Of this and that and the other.

As time has told,
The Sun returns,
To shower the land in gold.

Be attentive!
Listen closely!
Such judgement must I make.

The outward world calls,
To drop upon my shoulders,
Duty and Responsibility.

And yet,
If I but turn,
My sweet paramour will return,
And pull my head to her bosom,
And there will I lay,
In peaceful oblivion.

If only I could elect to go with my preference,
But the world calls,
And I cannot ignore its screech . . .

Abby Courtney
Temple Christian High School
Honorable Mention

Me

Hate looks like an empty, never-ending pit
Loneliness looks like a ragged girl huddled in a corner
Hate tastes like the bitterness of my heart
Loneliness tastes like a mouthful of your tears
Hate smells like rotting flesh in a dungeon
Loneliness smells like dried blood on a rusty knife
Hate feels like the emptiness that it is
Loneliness feels like no one cares whether you live or not
Hate sounds like the thousand agonizing screams of my soul
Loneliness sounds like the cry of a lonely, tortured soul

The things of which I speak are the things that are of me.

Maggie Halber
Delphos St. John's High School
Honorable Mention

Tortured

it is cold in the world
it is cold in his heart
he lies in the grass
looking up at the blue sky
his eyes begin to tear
the tears fall down his cheeks
he cries for all the pain he caused her
he cries because he knew he was wrong

it wasn't her fault she didn't love him
nor was it his
it was just fate
she believed in fate
fate did not give him to her
because fate is not kind
fate hurt their love
but it gave her joy when she found her own beloved beau
and it brought him so much pain
so much agony that he wanted revenge

he got his revenge
he stabbed her heart with his words
and sliced open her flesh with his tongue
he spread his rumors like wildfire

he hurt her so much with his gruesome lies
she hurt herself
she picked up her razor
began to cry
and let her soul float away

Lindsey Hunt
Bluffton High School
Honorable Mention

Fever

Here in the forest
Hiding in the trees,
My face shows by the moonlight,
Hair is blowing in the breeze
I can see you in your window,
Your appearance very clear
Hoping you might miss me,
In my head, your voice I hear,
I've caught the fever

I watch you from a distance
Getting near you when I can,
I know you know of my existence
You're unlike any other man.
I'll be camouflaged by fate
Before I let you go,
Save me from the injury
Of never letting my passion show,
I've caught the fever

Say goodnight
To the truth you once knew.
It drives me into madness,
When I'm unable to reach you
I have these feelings bottled up
I believe that you do, too
I've caught the fever,
The fever is you.

Doug Jones
Delphos Jefferson High School
Honorable Mention

Hate

All the Anger and Anguish. Storming out, I can no longer feel at all. I'm

Bleeding and bruising underneath my bare skin and broken bones.

Cats have nine lives, but all I can have is one. Catastrophe is at hand. Could this all be a lie?

Damn is all I have to say. I wish I could turn back time and stop all the dumb and dangerous things you've done to me.

Erratically I try to hide the excruciating pain inside. My emotions are elastic to you, but it all comes back in the

Fire in my eyes. My feelings burn a hole deep inside my organs; I'm not fine, I must find the truth behind your reasons. Why?

Good or bad, what is the difference? Good is measured on what you have to do but not on the gifts you possess. God help us all.

Hell is inside my mind. The hatred comes out every time I close my eyes and picture the ones I adore. I try to ignore the pain I hide deep inside my hard-shelled core

I am not immortal and I never will be. You ignore the way made me because you think you didn't cause this.

Just because I don't respect you doesn't mean there is something wrong with me. You

believe it was justice in what you did but you never had the right. You made me feel like a jigsaw puzzle scattered among a child's toys. I am jealous of others families they always look so perfect why can't mine. My

Knuckles bare the key to my changing will. They unlock the right door. Knives are

never the answer, so I don't try them. I only care for the ones I love. You are not one that is kind to and loving to me. Yet I will trust you again. I'm hot as a

Laser. I lash out for help but no one leaps to help me. I lust for love and I have yet to find it.

My smile is only a mask. You've done this to me, Mom. Now there is no turning back. The hatred is rising. I can't hold my own. Your anger has created me and it will be you biggest regret.

No one can help me. Do not even try. The hatred inside me was nourished to full strength. Knowing is believing. No you haven't seen my anger and you better hope you don't.

Ouch is all I hear when I lose control. Odin could never control me even if he tried. The odor of blood is all around. Agony is at hand. Oh God, you will never be able to control the anger that has grown inside my shell of skin. I'm

Paralyzed by my hatred my perception is erased and I go pale because of what I've done. The pain is gone; I no longer feel. My blows are

Quick and questionable. The question on everyone's mind is when I'm going to quit.

Rest assured that I am resident in my state of Redemption. My reflection only shows hatred.

Speed is not my strength but it has increased. My power is only for a short while I'm in this state I feel no pain inside. I

Tremble in my state of mind. It's like I have a talisman on me to give me my power but it's only my anger. People try to take me down, but they will not succeed. I'm

Unexpressive until you push. What happens is unheard of. The control has unimproved since I'm unsure why you have done this. I'm like a

Volcano going to explode. I'm like a vulture and will pick them off one by one. I don't want anyone to venture out to get me mad. My vengeance is what happens to us all.

Will you please run away? I wish to be alone for now. I'm willing to forget what has happened if you will. This

Xperience will not be xcellent for you. This emotion is not xciting. So please don't try. I've gotten an x-ray for my broken bones and so will you.

You will not like me. So yonder away from me before you will regret. You don't want to be my enemy.

Zeus may be the strongest Greek god, but I have the rage of something worse. You're zany for doing this to me. You were zealous for doing this. My anger is at it's zenith nothing good can come from this or me. WHY!

Leslie Newport
Lima Senior High School
First Place

Family Treachery, McCarthy Style

No one ever called Lawrence McCarthy by the name Lawrence. Most people forgot he even had a normal first name. The name most people knew him by was “Sharky” and most people thought it had to do with his canine teeth. His school friends had nicknamed him Sharky because, to put it simply, he was a predator. He was ruthless and devious, his best qualities which is, perhaps, saying a lot for his lack of affection and friendliness.

Sharky studied himself in the mirror with much scrutiny. He tried everything, from scowling to a grimace meant to be a smile, and his canines still looked dull. They were pointed, as if their owner was a vampire, but on this morning they were dull, not sharp as they might normally be. Turning back to a sneer, Sharky put on his tie. He was tying it as he grabbed a compact mirror and strode into the kitchen. He put the mirror on a table and dug through the closet. Finding his black blazer, he pulled it out and threw it at his wife. “Clean it up,” he said. “I have meetings all day and I have to meet with some of the other head accountants for lunch later.” Alex looked at him and nodded. He sat at the kitchen table and picked up the mirror. He dug around a nearby drawer and found the nail file.

It glinted as he placed it in the light by his mouth. He put it next to the duller of his canines and slowly filed. A few minutes later he grinned at himself in the mirror. No, the other one did need filed. He filed it down to a sharp point. He grinned at himself again, and was satisfied, they both showed nicely. Sharky wanted to make sure his teeth looked good.

Alex set his coffee in front of him and he glared at her. Brendan came in and Sharky looked pointedly at him. The boy scowled and gave Sharky his *New York Times*. Sharky drank his coffee and read the paper.

Fifteen minutes later Alex came in holding Sharky’s blazer. He looked at his watch and sat back down. No one spoke, not even to ask Sharky why he laughed, which was because of reading about several children and kittens drowning. Brendan looked up from his orange juice but didn’t speak.

Soon Sharky stood up, grabbed his blazer, and left without saying a word. Since the elevator was crowded he walked briskly down the stairs and went to his car. It started easily and he scowled. The snow had piled up the night before so he had to go out and sweep it off. He pulled out into the heavy New York traffic and had a few bouts of road rage before he pulled into his parking space.

“Idiots,” he muttered angrily, he locked his car and began walking towards his office. By the time he got there he was in good spirits; well, as good of spirits as Sharky could get in. He’d gotten to yell at several interns and one of his own because they were loafing. Sharky didn’t like loafing.

He got to the boardroom a few minutes later, fixed a cup of coffee, and ate a glazed donut. Before long, other department heads began walking in, most of them bleary eyed and yawning.

“You’re a nut,” said the head of sales, she was looking at him with a raised eyebrow. “What kind of person actually likes meetings and gets here *early*?”

“I do,” Sharky said shortly. He was obsessive about being punctual; so at least he wasn’t constantly late. He sat in the chair opposite the vice president. Maverick Industries soon began its bi monthly meeting.

“I’d like our head of accounting, Lawrence McCarthy to stand and present his materials.” the president said in his monotone. Sharky twitched slightly in anger.

“Yes. Mr. Maverick,” he said. He stood up and walked to the front of the room. The dry erase board was filled with diagrams of sales. He erased them. Too bad for them, they’d just gotten a lovely lecture from the head of sales but now it was math time. They all realized that and Sharky smirked as he saw them all inwardly groan. Ah, to torture someone with your own love, how sweet it could be.

An hour later, everyone in the boardroom came out sweaty and disgruntled. Sharky had kept them there for twenty minutes past the meeting’s scheduled end time to tell them that if they didn’t want to go bankrupt in ten years, they had to lay off fifty workers.

“Tell me something I don’t know,” one of them grumbled.

“I could torture you with your slow agonizing death, or at least tell you how it will be,” Sharky drawled. “That wouldn’t be fun though, and I have another meeting that starts soon and I don’t want to be late.” He turned away and walked down the hall, turning into a small conclave. He left the group behind him, confused and slightly fearful. One never knew if Sharky was kidding or not.

Sharky himself was relaxed and leaned against the wall. He sipped the last of his coffee and went to his office. He hated after meeting socializing, well, Sharky hated any kind of socializing and more so when he had work to do. He hadn’t been exactly lying, there wasn’t all that much time left for his next meeting but he decided to go to his office for a while and finish some statistics.

When he got to his office, his secretary told him Brendan’s school had called. He frowned, wondering why that would happen. He leaned back in his chair and dialed the school’s number.

“Hello,” the secretary said.

“This is Lawrence McCarthy,” Sharky said, he said his name distastefully. “My secretary said the school called.”

“Oh, yes,” she said, much more frosty. “Mr. O’Brien told me to connect you to him.” Sharky heard the beeps and tapped his fingers impatiently.

“Mr. McCarthy?” it was the counselor.

“Yes, if you’d hurry, I have a meeting soon.”

“We called your residence but your wife said to contact you but you see” - O’Brien paused-
“today your son had gym”-

“He always has gym.” Sharky interrupted viciously. “He hates gym.” “Well, you see, Mr. Fitzgerald, the gym teacher”-

“I know who the gym teacher is; I’ve had many conferences with him.”

“Today there was a fight in the locker room when the boys were changing into their street clothes”-

“Did he win?”

“No, Brendan wasn’t in the fight” Sharky smiled, he was enjoying annoying this man. “However, Mr. Fitzgerald noticed several bruises and old scars on Brendan when he went to investigate. Mr. McCarthy, apparently from what I was told Mr. Fitzgerald thinks Brendan is abused’ -

“My son is not abused”- Sharky said coldly. “If that is what you bothered about, you can hang up now. I have a meeting in half an hour.”

“Well,” O’Brien was suspicious, “why are you so defensive about it? I wasn’t suggesting you were the abuser.”

“I have been confronted about it previously,” Sharky said in the same cold tones. “Listen, the boy is a klutz”-

“Mr. Fitzgerald says Brendan is one of the most athletically talented boys in the class.”

“He is a klutz, at home. He trips over his own feet, and can barely manage to walk the stairs.”

“Well,” O’Brien was still doubtful “fine. Though, due to regulations, I had to call the state”- Sharky tensed up and a look of hatred passed over his face, the man had a tone of pride that irked him - “Thank you for your time. Good”- Sharky had already hung up.

“Stupid boy,” he spat.

“What did he do this time?” his secretary asked.

“He’s just stupid, that’s all,” Sharky said. He was in a bad mood for the rest of the day, unfortunately for those around him.

Sharky got off four hours earlier than usual and was home when Brendan got there. Brendan swallowed, nodded hello, and tried rushing to his room.

“Not so fast,” Sharky said. He smiled, his canine teeth showing through his lips. “Yeah, Dad?” Brendan said. Sharky smirked. He could hear the panic in his voice.

“I got an interesting call today,” Sharky said. His tongue ran out of his mouth and ran over one of his teeth. “Your counselor seemed a bit concerned.”

“My grades are good,” Brendan said. “Even in gym I’m getting a decent” -

“I’m not worried about your gym grade, boy,” Sharky snarled. “I’m worried about Fitzgerald snooping where he doesn’t belong.” Brendan froze from going towards the stairs.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said. “Mr. Fitzgerald stays away from me, and the locker room. The other guys never talk to me anyway, unless I lost a game.”

“You know exactly what I’m talking about,” Sharky said softly. He saw Brendan look away.

“I don’t,” he said flatly.

“You play dumb with me, boy,” Sharky said smiling like a cat, “and we’ll see how much your mother likes it.”

With his mouth hanging open, Brendan said, “you wouldn’t dare.”

“Are you willing to bet money on that?” Sharky said. He breathed in and bellowed. “Woman, get in here!”

“I’m coming, Sharky,” she said quietly. Alex walked down the stairs where she was met immediately by an angry Sharky. He grabbed her roughly by her upper arm and slammed her on the wall.

“Do you honestly think I won’t?” he sneered.

“Let her go,” Brendan said hoarsely. Sharky smiled again, his lips curling. He pushed her into one of the closets and locked the door before she had a chance to get away.

“OK.” Brendan said exhaling. “In gym, there was a fight in the locker room. I was getting back in my school clothes and Mr. Fitzgerald walked by me first. He stopped and asked me what happened. I told him I didn’t know but he didn’t leave. He was staring at my back, that’s where my old bruises and scars are. Then he frowned and walked away really fast. Later, Mrs. O’Malley called me outside English class and took me to the office. Mr. O’Brien was there, sitting with Mr. Fitzgerald and my biology teacher. They asked me to take my shirt off, but I told them I didn’t want to. Mr. Fitzgerald said all they wanted to do was see if I had scoliosis and that was why he’d been staring at me. So I took it off, I wasn’t think”-

“Obviously not,” Sharky snarled vehemently.

“They muttered to each other and stuff. Then they started asking me all kinds of questions, like how you act around me and how I get treated. They wanted to know if I got enough to eat. I told them I get treated well, and I get enough to eat. They wouldn’t stop asking me about you though. I said you could be snappy but you never beat me.”

Sharky looked at him.

“Idiot boy,” he snapped. “I told you; never listen to anyone but me. How many times do I have to beat that into you?” He was breathing rapidly and his face was contorted into hatred. Brendan backed up, as Sharky got closer and closer. He hit the paper shredder and kept going back. His hands touched the wall and he looked at Sharky with unadulterated tenor.

“You’ll learn,” he said softly. “You’ll learn, boy; I control you. I can make your life heaven or hell. It all depends on *you*.” Brendan wasn’t prepared for the first blow. Sharky’s fist hit his nose and blood sprouted on the couch. He sat in a ball against the wall and clutched it, tears of pain sprouting from his eyes. He looked up and saw Sharky towering above him as if he were a building.

I wonder what’s for supper, Brendan thought vaguely, almost laughing at the illogicality of his thought. Yd as he looked at his father, Brendan had a feeling he wouldn’t be having supper tonight, even if he could eat.

There was a manic look of accomplishment on Sharky’s face, like he’d snatched a prize from Brendan, which Brendan noted before he felt Sharky hitting him and then realizing he felt nothing.

Sharky wasn’t asleep. No, he was not guilty about the beating. Rather, he enjoyed replaying it in his mind. He loved the adrenaline. He was leaning against his cool pillows in the dark bedroom. Alex wasn’t with him. After he released her from the closet she saw Brendan and began crying. He also enjoyed when she cried. It made him feel better; after all, misery loves company. Sharky was a miserable man, whether or not anyone realized is a different story.

The door opened a crack and light came in. Thinking it was Alex; he braced himself against the pillows. He shut his eyes and heard someone creep in. They didn't move for a few minutes. Sharky didn't either. He opened his eyes and saw Brendan sitting there calmly, holding an aluminum baseball bat and observing him as he slept.

"I was hoping you were still awake," he whispered. "Maybe you'll know it now, this- this animalistic fear of someone, and of pain." Sharky pulled himself up but was too late and he felt more pain than he ever had a second before he tasted blood and blacked out.

"Sharky, damn it, man." Sharky knew that voice. It was his brother's best friend, an ER doctor named Joe Loden.

Sharky tried to say something but he felt like a semi truck had hit him. He put his hands on his head. With horror he put his tongue in a gap where one of his prized canines had been. "What happened, Joe?" he slurred.

"You were hit three times in the head, with an aluminum baseball bat," Joe answered. "By-well, Brendan. He called the paramedics, then, from what anyone can tell he and Alex went to her parents'. Wherever they are. They left, Sharky. He knocked one of your canines out, and apparently took it because it wasn't found anywhere in the house."

"I can tell" Sharky said angrily. He gently placed a finger in the gap.

"Sharky, listen, you're lucky enough to have survived what you did," Joe said. "I wouldn't go looking for him. He'd do it again. The police found his journal. You beat him, Sharky. They know. He hit you with a bat. They consider it self-defense, but they won't press charges against you. I imagine Maverick paid them off. He doesn't want to lose his best accountant. I used to think you were OK, now I realize, you're a disgusting human being."

"I know," Sharky said.

"Then why'd you do it?"

"I could, after all I am stronger than either of them, and I liked it. If that makes me even sicker so be it." Joe was quiet.

"Where'd he get the bat?"

"I gave it to him for Christmas. He played baseball; I thought it might do him some good to have such a good bat."

Joe laughed.

"Take a good look at your life, Sharky," he said. "It's rather ironic."

Then he looked at Sharky, shaking his head, and left. Sharky fell asleep a few minutes later; his head was pounding.

A week later, sitting on his apartment balcony in the rain, Sharky realized he was lonely. He drank his coffee. It was even bitterer than he was. He hadn't spoken to another human for a week; he'd taken one of his many vacation weeks.

"Maybe I should go out," he thought aloud. He smiled. A light glinted and showed the silver canine he'd gotten to replace the other one. It was filed exactly like his other one had been.

Still smiling, he got up and went to the sink. He washed his cup and went into his bedroom to change into his casual clothes. A black pocket T-shirt was tight on his muscles and shoulders. He'd tucked it into the dark blue jeans.

It took him fifteen minutes to get to a bar. He sat by a blonde woman.

"Good day," he said. Sharky held up his hand and called for tequila. He sipped it.

"I know."

"Can I buy you a drink?"

"If you want."

"Tell me about yourself."

She smiled at him. Sharky McCarthy smiled his sadistic smile and called for another drink.

Kacie Graham
Lima Senior High School
Second Place

Pas Seul

She sat, straddling the cold, hard floor. She flinched a little as she touched her nose to her knee, both arms extended to hold onto her pointed foot. She cocked her head to the side making it parallel to the smooth marble below her right ear. Her eyes began to really observe her surroundings. While there were at least 40 other teenage girls in the waiting room, and about 20 guys, there was no talking. The huge lobby was full chairs. All of which were being used, just not to sit in. Long legs sat on the tops of them, figures bent over them, delicate hands rested on the backs of them, just for a bit of stability. They were all leotard clad, in tights, their hair pulled back sharply. Every face was the same; nervous, uncertain.

Sunlight filtered through a half shaded window, beaming down on her back and warming her slightly. The girl welcomed it, gladly. Her muscles were cold and a bit tense. They had been through so much in the past year. *She* had been through so much.

The girl stretched to the high, vaulted, ceiling that made her feel like just a pinprick. This whole lobby was intimidating, from the expert auditioners to the gray and white, grand, archway. The girl felt slightly intimidated just being in this lobby that so many great dancers had sat in before her, stretching as she was now.

But now, there was a fresh group, each one hoping to become another legend. They were all well trained, all from the best schools across the country, the best in their own class. They were all aware of how much alike they were to the person beside them as well. But most importantly, they were all trying to find something to set themselves apart from everyone else. Leila knew she was different. She knew the obstacles in her life made her stronger-particularly the latest and hardest one ever. The memory of it would remain with her forever.

A light glared as it bowled towards her, the squeal of tires trying to stop too late. There was contact. Hard. Then she couldn't move. She wasn't sure how to even try. A combination of ringing in her head and so many other sounds were blaring. Maybe someone was yelling and was that a crunching noise? But the ringing in her head grew so loud she couldn't tell what else was happening, and all at once it quit. Another light, more long and not as round as before. Another one. And another. They were flying by her overhead; evenly spaced apart. An echo from far away came through to her brain. Finally, she could make out what it was. A voice.

“Leila. Leila, can you hear me?”

A face appeared over hers. /t was a woman with intense eyes. Leila tried She put all of the focus she could onto replying. Yes, she could hear her. Yes, I can. I can.

“Yeah. “ Whose voice was that? It couldn’t be hers; it was so cracked and far away.

Blood was sticking in her curls, adding another shade of red to the already scarlet hue. Her hair was sprawled all around her head; making her seem as if she’d stolen Medusa’s snakes for her own hair and set them on fire.

The lights were getting fuzzy.

“Okay, hon. Stay with us now. Leila?”

The woman’s voice was echoing again and then everything was gone.

“We will call you in by groups of ten, by your numbers. Please line up and be ready. Do not keep us waiting.” Madame Destrie gave one final, hard look at the room full of attentive hopefuls and walked into the room labeled Studio B.

*The whole room put their full attention back on themselves. Leila continued to stretch, contorting herself into strangely graceful poses. She could feel her muscles elongating, extending to their fullest. Her calf was a rubber band. Too much farther and maybe it would snap. No, she had worked too hard for this. Her body couldn’t give up on her. It hadn’t yet. She had too much time before that would happen, before it *could* happen. No, she had full confidence in her body. It had proved to her just what she could do already.*

“One step. It doesn’t even have to be big. Maybe just slide your foot. But move it”.

Leila was staring hard at her right foot. That was the one she wanted to walk with first. Move. Please, even a little she begged. All her weight was on the silver walker. The metal was shockingly cold at first to Leila’s uncalloused hands. But the intensity of finally standing on her own quickly warmed her support with the heat radiating from her pale skin. Move, foot!

She stared so hard at her shiny white tennies, willing them with her mind to take a step on their own, to take her foot with them. The Nike emblem blurred as crocodile tears sat on her eyelids. Just over a month ago, that foot moved without her mind even thinking about it into arched tendus, she could even stand on the tips of her toes without her pointe shoes. So many muscles were in her foot alone. Why couldn’t it just...

“Good, good, great! Leila, you’re doing it!” Jane exclaimed Jane’s hazel eyes were bright. Fireworks were bursting inside them and a stray lock of banana blonde hair fell out of her barrette.

Faith restored itself into Leila, settling in her stomach, warming her like a homemade quilt. It hadn’t given up on her; her body wanted to advance. It wasn’t ready to be still yet. She was born to move.

“Thirty through forty, please, enter.” The girl next to Leila took a deep breath and genuflected, then hurried in behind the other girls filing into the studio, while the assistant held the glass door open.

Leila noticed the glass was covered on the inside by a cloth, obstructing anyone's view into the audition room.

Leila stood and bounced from foot to foot, bending her feet in her pointe shoes, making sure they were ready to move. She briefly touched the piece of paper attached to her jet black leotard by a safety pin. The number forty-seven was neatly typed onto it. She was in the next group. Leila did a few steps from her audition piece, warming herself up, getting her blood to circulate faster throughout her body. It was time to get her adrenaline pumping.

It had been her dream to dance for the National Ballet Academy since she was eight. She had been dancing for six years at that point and being a helper backstage for an American Ballet performance sealed her mind. This was what she wanted. The hurrying from costume to costume, changing shoes because your first pair was already worn out, curtseying on stage in front of a roaring crowd, knowing that everything you'd just worked for had been a success...the feeling she just knew it would give her was the thing that kept her going for months. This was what she wanted so much.

“I don't care, Ethan! She's going to hurt herself again. After all this progress, I can't stand to watch her push herself like this. It's not healthy. She's just been walking for a month now, for God's sake, she's not ready to dance! And I don't think you should be encouraging her to hurt herself like this.”

Leila buried her head into her knees. The hardness of the wooden step she was leaning back on rubbed against her spine uncomfortably, but she didn't care. Her parents were around the corner arguing about her, about her future.

“Listen to me, Laura. Her love of the dance is what's pushing her. She won't give it up, no matter what we do. It's the only reason she's made this much progress in the first place. It's her dream.”

When her mom sighed heavily, Leila knew her father had won. She heard him walking towards her mom and knew by the way her mother's voice was muffled that he had embraced her, her face in his broad chest.

“I know. But as Gilda Radner said, dreams are like paper, they tear so easily.”

She noticed a boy with dark features doing changements, high into the air. His forehead was already beginning to glisten, after ten or so. While he was in excellent shape, she couldn't help but feel a bit smug. It would take more than that to break a sweat for her. With all the work she had been doing, it would be well into her audition piece before her body needed to cool itself down. She looked back on the time of rehearsal, hour after hour, night after night, and was happy she spent all that time working hard for so long.

Leila sweated profusely and spent time soaking her bleeding feet in water. That was the worst part, when you had to clean the cuts and sores caused by your pointe shoes. They never really hurt very much until they hit the water. She was so out of shape, and gaining the endurance was the hard part. At first it took only a couple minutes of simple exercises to send her huffing and puffing into a chair. Frustrated tears had built up inside her for so long. She knew she wasn't up to par...yet.

For months, Leila worked, thinking of nothing else but ballet. This was her life. Without it, what did she have? A sob story about a drunk driver hitting her, just an excuse in her book, that's what she had. She pushed onward. With the approval of her private teacher, she sent in an application to audition. And here she was.

Leila recognized the last few allegro measures of Josef Haydn's Gipsy Rondo and she subconsciously drew in a sharp breath and held it. The covered door opened without a sound and the assistant poked her head around it.

"Numbers forty through fifty, please."

Leila's hands began to tremble slightly as she stepped forward and walked into the room. The first thing she noticed was the faint smell of rosin, coming from one of the corners. Several formal looking people sat at a table covered with loose papers in the front of the room, studying everyone entering, their poker faces on. They obviously had been at this a while. An accompanist sat behind a shiny, black, baby grand piano, stretching her fingers and rolling her neck slowly from side to side. Mirrors covered the front wall, brightening the light that was already coming from the giant windows making up the back wall. Leila saw the nine other girls file beside each other, wordlessly getting in numerical order. Their numbers were backwards it seemed, but only because she studied them through one of the mirrors.

They were twins of each other, varying ever so slightly in height and race. Black leotards, light pink tights, soft rose colored satin pointe shoes, solemn faces. They were all so much alike; the best of the best, fighting to stay afloat in the world of ballet. What would it be that set them apart?

Renewed confidence surged throughout Leila's body, seeming to center at her heart. She knew her body more than she ever had before. Every scar from the cutting glass, every muscle, every patch of skin had been under her studious gaze. She was so aware of herself; she knew of her abilities and how to make up for any difference that may lie between her and the dancers on either of her sides.

Leila had been down the road of pain, angst, fear and immobility. She spent time without even doing a pirouette, when prior to the accident she couldn't take one step without doing a dance move in some form. She'd gone from doing tour jetes on her way to the fridge to wondering if she would ever be able to do a chassé again. She'd been there, done that. Not dancing wasn't an option anymore. It was this, no other choice. This was her life. Her dream. What almost killed her, instead gave her what she needed.

In this room full of dancers with so much talent, something set her apart from the other girls. The judges saw something different in this one. Her celery green eyes showed personal knowledge, serenity and passion. Yes, this one was definitely different.

When it was her turn, Leila glided across the floor, lost in the sweet, paced notes of Schubert's Serenade. She didn't have to think about what she was doing, her body moved seemingly of its own accord to the lovely melody. Every eye in that room couldn't bear to look away from this graceful creature that had no limit. At the final chord, Leila stood on pointe in arabesque, her back leg at a 90° angle to the floor, her arms stretched to their fullest. While it took every muscle to control her

body in this pose, it looked effortless as she did it.

Leila came out of her own world that she had entered somewhere at the beginning of her dance, relaxed from her pose, and curtsied. As she looked into the face of each judge, she saw approval and wonderment residing there. The awe saturating the faces of each judge was evident as they faltered to find something to say. Finally, the plump one, turned to the older man next to her and whispered something excitedly behind her sausage-like fingers as he nodded enthusiastically. Madame Destrie lost all pointedness of her boney features as she gave Leila a wide smile of approval. The last two were still fighting to regain their verbal abilities. With every poker face gone, all bets were off.

Leila nodded at each of them and walked back to her spot at the side of the room. She felt overwhelmed as she realized that was it. After all of that work-learning how to walk again, regaining her turnout and getting back to the level of dance it had previously taken fifteen years to get to, she had just done it. A year ago, this was hardly even a daydream, let alone a reality as it was now.

She exhibited a talent rarely seen in someone so young, with so little life experience, but instincts told the judges that this one was special. She was, in fact, divine.

Amanda Hoersten
Delphos St. John's High School
Third Place

A Tale of Hope

Long ago, in a hidden world lived a greedy, young king in the faraway land of Beleus. This king cared nothing for his people and let the once beautiful and wealthy nation dwindle to ruins before the eyes of his wary citizens, while he spent his inherited fortune as foolishly and often as possible. Not only was he greedy but also wicked. Evil King George, as he was known, held daily persecutions of the innocent and took enjoyment in their torture and fear. And still the king's mind was occupied with greed. He now longed for a wife: but not just any princess would do, he desired a marriage to the most beautiful and wealthy princess in all the land.

This princess, Princess Alexandria of Lordonias, came from a very affluent and Prestigious, Royal line. Not only was her family wealthy, but they were ten times as fair as they were rich. In those days everyone knew of her father King Richard of Lordonias. He was the most highly regarded king of the time, and his beautiful daughter, who had only just turned fifteen, was almost more popular than he. Her stunning looks had made her a legend throughout the land, and every eligible prince dreamt of making her his queen one day.

This was exactly the intent of King George. Scraping up the last of his wealth, he and a small company of guards prepared for a journey to Lordonias. His arrival was surprising to many there, including the royal family, but nevertheless he was welcomed as any traveler from afar would have been greeted.

After a large feast King George made known his intentions to King Richard, declaring, "King Richard, I have traveled from a distant, powerful, land. I have heard of your beautiful daughter, Alexandria, and I have come to ask for her hand in marriage!"

King Richard had suspected this was the reason for George's visit. Richard knew of his wicked deeds and was well aware of the hostility George was capable of generating. Yet King Richard still asked George politely, "Kind sir, I must think this over tonight before I may answer your request, but in the meantime, make yourself at home and enjoy the feast."

Presently, King Richard excused himself from the dining hall followed by his daughter. When they were out of earshot, she frantically implored "Father, you can't expect me to marry this horrible man!"

"I do not expect you to do anything against your will," he answered, "Nor would I ever ask

you to marry this unlikable man. You are my daughter; I treasure you more than anything in the world! Never forget that.”

Not knowing what to say, Alexandria embraced her father. After a moment had passed, she asked, “Father, may I excuse myself to the gardens this evening? It is a calming place to gather one’s thoughts when in need of direction.

“It could be foolish to walk the grounds unattended at night with our inconvenient guest about,” answered her father. After a moment’s hesitation he continued, “Yet I fear not,” he added with a smile, “I do believe that you were hoping to meet young Gregory there; and I judge he would protect you better than most other guards.” Good-night and do be careful, my daughter!” With that she bid her father farewell and hurried away to meet her companion.

Alexandria and Gregory were best friends. She had known him all her life. His father was a member of ‘The Brotherhood of Lordonias’ and one of her father’s closest friends. She and Gregory had spent much of their childhood together, but as they grew older they were not permitted to meet as often as they had before, for she was becoming a very eligible princess, and he was not of royal blood.

That evening, she met Gregory in a dim comer of the garden, and at once she began telling him everything she heard about King George. As the conversation progressed, Gregory seemed to drive away all of Alexandria’s fears. Gregory was so kind and very intelligent. Each moment her eyes met his she loved him a hundred times more.

Finally, after much discussion she halted and turned to gaze into his eyes, asking him, “Gregory, do you love anybody?”

“Well of course,” he said, a bit taken aback. “I love my mother and my father and. . . “
“No, I mean do you love a girl? Not your mother or sister, but a girl that you might marry one day?”

“Well, not really,” he said.

“So you don’t love anyone?” she asked with desperation in her voice.

“No, you see, you asked if I love a girl that I might marry one day, and I don’t, because I love a girl that I can’t marry.” After a moment of silence he added, “I love you!”

Alexandria’s eyes filled with tears as she told him how she felt about him. The next thing she knew, he put his strong arms around her and lovingly kissed her forehead. She was so surprised, but she felt happier and safer than she ever had before.

Soon they realized that they had stayed much longer in the garden than they had intended, and it was now nearing midnight. So Gregory escorted Alexandria back to the palace.

Meanwhile, after a long evening of drunken merriment, King George headed to his guest chamber, when suddenly a voice came from behind a pillar, “Honorable King George!” it squeaked out.

“Yes? He answered.

“Would you like to hear my plan that could allow you to marry Princess Alexandria?” asked the voice.

“Well, of course, but who are you, and why do you care about me?” At that moment Prince Charles, the princess’s older brother, stepped out from behind the pillar and told King George his depraved plan.

That night everyone in Lordonias, except for King George, slept with spitefulness in the pit of their stomachs praying that Richard would make a good decision and answer the evil king’s request with intelligence.

The next morning after breakfast, King Richard spoke with King George politely declining his offer, explaining that Alexandria was yet only a princess at the tender age of fifteen and that the two barely knew each other. Unexpectedly, George agreed that the princess was not yet ready to become a queen.

At noon, as King George left for his homeland, he exclaimed, “I will return awaiting an answer a year from now!” And with that he and his company disappeared into the distance.

Everyone in Lordonias knew that King George would not stand for anything other than the acceptance of his proposal. Yet they all feared what would happen if his wish was not granted.

Just as the people of Lordonias were getting back to their ordinary lives, King George and his armies led a sneak attack on Lordonias the night after he left. George’s men brought terror to all occupants of that land. Their instructions: to kill the entire royal family along with anyone loyal to them except for Alexandria and Charles. In less than one night the royal family was lost, leaving the land in chaos and panic. Not many loyal subjects to King Richard escaped with their lives, but now Lordonias had a new king: King Charles, who plotted against his own family and had them killed to suffice his own greed.

Alexandria and George were married the very first morning she had spent in her new country of Beleus. Though her dread only lasted a short while, for several hours after the ceremony King George had left to join up with Charles in the conquering of nearby nations.

Charles and George’s Kingdoms ruled with the help of one another in times of need. The two largest, most powerful and evil empires allied together and gained control of neighbor-

ing lands one by one.

Meanwhile, in George's absence, Queen Alexandria took control of the country in the king's leave. She was of good heart and honest soul, the kindest queen in all of history. She was loved by many with the exception of her husband: the one who should have held her dearest, but hated her most.

It seemed almost impossible for anyone to hate such a perfect being, but he did. Hate did not seem a strong enough word for how he felt towards her. If it hadn't been for the control she had over his kingdom, her almost angelic beauty, and the fact that she was the sister of his only ally, he would have killed her long before. The thought of her death entertained his mind quite often, yet he knew it was a dangerous thought, for she had many loyal subjects who would likely rise up against him and wage a very merciless war, if he had her murdered. The citizens of Beleus would do anything for their queen; even die for her, for she helped them rebuild their broken down cities and she comforted those who had lost loved-ones; she saved them from their king, her own husband.

Finally, when the king had returned from his journeying, he noticed all of the good deeds Queen Alexandria had done in his realm. He observed that she had restored almost acceptable living conditions in his kingdom; and he hated it! His fury was triggered by her superior leadership in ruling his country while he was away and also because he had not granted her permission to do so. Any caring for her that had remained in him had now vanished and turned to pure jealousy. He could not stand to look upon her loving and gorgeous face without loathing it. Although he didn't dare get rid of her, for she helped his country gain great wealth in which he could use for himself.

One day, as the king was trying to relax after returning from a long quest, he called for Frederick, his kindest and most loyal servant, to bring him a cup of wine. To his surprise it was not Frederick who had brought him his wine, but a servant that he didn't even know. Feeling a bit paranoid, he asked, "Who are you, and where is Frederick?"

"Oh, I'm sorry sir," answered the new servant, "No one told you, did they? Well Frederick passed away while you were gone!"

"Oh. . . Well, who hired you then?" he asked in a suspicious voice.

"The head servant did, sir, just yesterday since he heard you were coming back today!" answered the servant.

"So what's your name?" the king added again.

"My name is Gregorio of Vintoro," answered the servant boldly.

"Vintoro?" asked the king.

“Yes,” answered Gregorio the servant.

“Isn’t Vintoro a fantasy land in a child’s fairy tale?” asked the king more suspicious than ever. “Well, yes it is, but it is also a very small village far from here. I spent my younger years there.” answered Gregorio.

The king finally released Gregorio after naming him his new faithful servant.

As Gregorio wandered aimlessly through the large unfamiliar castle, he came upon Queen Alexandria in a dark Corridor. Just as they were about to pass each other, the queen stopped dead in her tracks and turned to face the man. Staring right into her eyes about a foot away was a very familiar face. She pulled the servant into the nearest vacant room, locked the door, and just stared at him for a few moments. When she finally caught her breath, she blurted out, “Gregory! Is that you?”

“Alexandria you ought to be quieter or someone will overhear.” The servant answered with bright, twinkling eyes. “Yes, I am Gregory,” he answered in a low whisper. “But the king knows me as Gregorio of Vintoro. I am his new, personal servant.”

“Gregory, if you have come here to deceive him, you must be extremely cautious. He is a very villainous man.” She whispered in reply “You must be careful!”

“I will,” he answered. “It seemed to me in our conversation earlier that the old fellow took quite a liking to me, and he seemed to trust me a great deal. He even called me friend and offered me a drink.”

“He must find you very charming because he doesn’t usually warm up to people that quickly.” responded Alexandria.

Their conversation lasted quite awhile, and in that time she discovered how Gregory had escaped Lordonias. He explained how he was very suspicious that morning about a year ago, when King George had left so simply. Gregory tried to warn his father against a possible attack, but by the time he took heed of Gregory’s premonition, it was too late. The enemy had already seized the country. Gregory grabbed his bow and sword and being exceptionally skilled and gifted in the use of both, he fought off anyone who proved to be an enemy to the throne of Lordonias. By the next morning, he came to the conclusion that he had to leave the once-fair country of Lordonias. Not only did he leave in search of the princess, but the land was crawling with burglars of ghastly intentions that he did not wish to cross paths with.

Alexandria was perplexed at the frightful descriptions of his appalling experiences in Lordonias, but Gregory kept his wanderings through the wilderness a secret from her. During this time he gathered together multitudes of stray, honorable men from Lordonias

and its surrounding areas. He assembled them into what he called “The Brotherhood of Vintoro”, named after the Fairytale land that was filled with hope, kindness, and peace, signifying his aspirations for the future. His men lived in the safe shelter of the huge forests along the outskirts of the bordering lands that the kings cared nothing about.

After their long talk, Alexandria and Gregory embraced each other tightly and bid one another good-bye. Gregory headed to the servants’ chambers where he would again become Gregorio of Vintoro. As for Alexandria, back to her chambers she trekked, to return to her duties of Queen of Beleus.

Within the next few weeks, Gregory held several, secret meetings with the citizens of Beleus. He revealed to them his concealed army, and he asked them to join in on his cause to rid the Kingdom of King George and to free themselves of his oppression. Many thought it was a worthy cause, but they were much too afraid of King George to do anything. So Gregory left these meetings and returned to the castle with a heavy heart. Though his sadness never lasted long, for Alexandria always lifted his spirits.

But one evening he was not greeted by Alexandria’s kind, loving words because she was nowhere to be found. He searched the whole castle until he met up with the king in his royal chambers.

“Hello Gregorio, have you lost something, or shall I say someone?” asked King George in a very sinister voice.

Gregory’s heart filled with terror as he asked, “What do you mean, my lord?”

“You know what I mean, Gregorio.” Replied George

Gregory did not reply, so the king continued, “It seemed to me that you and the queen were becoming much too close. And to ensure that nothing happens between the two of you, I have had her sheltered away for a while to straighten both of you out.” said the king.

“Sir, you could have gotten rid of me instead.” said Gregory.

“Yes, but to tell you the truth, Gregorio, I would much rather have you around than that woman!” After a moment of silence the king added, “You may leave now, Gregorio.” Without hesitation Gregory left the king’s chambers and immediately sent word out to his troops.

Within hours, Gregory’s army had arrived on the outskirts of Beleus. There he led another secret meeting with his soldiers and the citizens of Beleus, warning them that Queen Alexandria was in grave danger. At the meeting they all pledged their loyalty to the queen promising to die before betraying her. That night was spent devising a plan to rid the land of evil King George once and for all.

The following day, the king held a festival to celebrate the Queen's "vacation" as he called it. This was the opportune moment. All Gregory had to do was reveal his sign and his large army would pounce on the unsuspecting king and his troops. Everything was ready; Gregory had even discovered Alexandria's hidden prison when he stumbled over a loose board on a back staircase in the castle earlier in the week. On the underside of the board was a map of all of the secret rooms and dungeons hidden in the castle. It must've been there for centuries, because it didn't seem to have been removed for ages. Gregory secretly visited Alexandria several times that week, and finally told her of his plan.

At the appointed time, Gregory walked up to the king, commented on the festival, and shook his hand. At that moment the members of "The Brotherhood of Vintoro" and their supporters sprang from their hiding places and seized the kingdom.

Several days passed, and their battle seemed to be won, but at that moment King Charles of Lordonias and his troops came rolling into the city. Yet all hope was not lost; people from the nearby lands that had been seized by George and Charles had heard of the battle and traveled to Beleus to join the cause of "The Brotherhood of Vintoro".

Within a week, "The Brotherhood" had grown to a very large number and had completely defeated their enemies. Both King George and King Charles had been killed in the battle. Now the thrones of both kingdoms rightly belonged to Queen Alexandria.

After Alexandria was freed from her cell, she and Gregory were married and ruled their new realm together as King and Queen of Vintoro. Their kingdom functioned on the basic principles of hope, kindness, and peace that the fairytale place had held true to.

Taylor Andrews
Delphos Jefferson High School
Honorable Mention

The Yellow

Walking through the empty streets Darren found it strange that no one should be out at this time of night. It was a beautiful summer's night, with a warm breeze carrying the scent of fresh cut grass from the past mid-day's memory. He also noticed that the cicadas weren't singing their usual lullaby, leaving the warm breeze in ere silence, whistling occasionally through the leaves of the trees lining the road.

That's strange. He thought, and came very close to voicing these thoughts but found it impossible to break the peace of such a night as this. Suddenly he felt as if he couldn't speak at all. Shrugging it off as just his imagination, Darren continued walking. After a while, something else dawned on him, he had been walking, as strange as it seemed now, in the middle of the street for quite some time, but not a single car had driven past him and not a single traffic light was functioning properly.

It couldn't have been midnight yet, there was still a yellow hue to the western horizon, but the streetlights were emitting a strange yellow light and they weren't flashing in the normal fashion. Instead the light stayed solid and was only yellow. For some reason, a chill ran up Darren's spine, he could feel it, something was wrong. No matter how peaceful the night seemed to him, it was just a mask to hide some ugly truth. To make matters worse, he felt as if it had all happened before, like some kind of strange Déjà vu.

Something nagged at him as he walked down those empty streets, picking up the pace as he went, as if he were being followed by a strange car or an unfriendly glare. Letting this new analogy rollover in his mind, he froze, a feeling of terror clutching at his insides, turning his stomach and freezing his heart. Fear clouded his mind for a brief, leaving him immobilized. That was the problem, he now knew, some thing was watching him. The awkward feeling on the air was cast by the glaring eyes of some far off entity. Turning around slowly, he tried to recover his nerve only to have it shattered with the sight of the same yellow hue in the sky to his east. The whole town seemed to be trapped in the glow of a yellow stage light.

Now he could be certain that something wasn't right, the thing watching him was no friend of his, and this place was not his home town. Darren could feel them now, more eyes, glaring at him with such potent hatred and anger that it felt as if he'd been struck from behind. In every doorway, every window was inhabited with a seemingly endless void of inky blackness where the eyes could bear down upon. As he watched these shadows, stopping entirely in the middle of an intersection, they seemed to reach out and consume everything around them forcing him to look away before they could reach him. The intent of those eyes was clear as they searched deeper than the skin, burning into his heart, tearing through his soul, melting away all feeling, replacing the fear with a numb that traveled through his limbs, circulating through his veins into his head.

The feeling passed into his mind, leaving it blank to every impulse except the sudden desire to survive, to run as far and as fast as his legs could carry him. It was far too strong to fight, so he ran. Darren charged through the streets of the beautiful fake town, wishing he could remember its name, or even his name through the desperation. Everything flew by in a yellow blur until a movement caught his eye. The instinct that had forced him to run was beginning to wane, like adrenaline it was quickly fading losing its grip on his mind and body, slowly being replaced by curiosity and the hundreds of questions it wished to answer. With the last of its strength his mind pleaded him to continue running, but Darren didn't heed. Instead, he slowed his run to a jog as he strained his eyes into the black void of a door off to his right. Though Darren's curiosity was rewarded, his mind was not. The thing that emerged from the black prison of the doorway was of such ghastly and horrific proportions that the image would be scarred into his memory and mind for the remainder of his life.

The first of the things emerged with slow, deliberate steps, setting itself within the yellow ring of the streetlights, standing in perfect view. Revealing to Darren the waxy yellow skin covered in calluses and bumps from its head to its clawed feet, the emaciated frames and deformed heads. It stood in a stooping crouch with its arms held bent at the boney elbow, holding its long thin fingers at the ready, twitching them periodically.

Darren recognized the feelings those eyes instilled the feelings of terror and numb beginning to seep back into his body, winning the battle once more. The thing's head bobbed as it walked slowly forward, like some nightmarish raptor. The deep set eyes never left his terrified face, watching with envy the still human form of this intruder. The eyes didn't distract his eyes from the rest of the thing's features however, the light revealed perfectly the gouges leading down from the thing's eyes to its mouth, a haphazard arrangement of jagged teeth that stabbed painfully through the thin skin covering them. He watched in horror as the skin peeled back from the jagged teeth and the thing unleashed a torrent of screeching and howling that sounded as if the pits of hell had opened upon its call to allow the multitude to reach out.

Snapping back to reality with the ear splitting sound, Darren started again in his mad dash away from the deranged town and now the hideous creature. He noticed as he ran that several other things, much like the one he had first seen had responded to the call, giving chase as he ran past.

Forgotten were the feelings of terror, the inexplicable numbness, all that remained was the will to survive, the need to stay ahead of the things now swarming out of the houses all around him.

Buildings took no hold in his mind as he raced through the streets, barely one step ahead of the hellish creatures closing in their pursuit. His legs carried him from turn to turn, through street after street, and finally into the alleys spanning the city. His body was taking him somewhere, some place he felt he could be safe. Darren didn't realize where he was being taken until he realized he had run into the alley leading to the back of his house. His pace eased slightly as he felt the old feelings of safety and solace that he had lost on entering this place.

Those feelings of comfort drained away as one of the yellow things latched onto his back, digging its clawed toes in for balance as it reared its head up to strike at its victim's exposed throat. Darren knew he couldn't let himself die this close to home, acting quickly he slammed himself and the thing

backward against the old garage, sending flaking pain down in a shower as the entire structure shuddered with the force of the blow. The thing remained where Darren left it as he made the final sprint to his back door, almost tearing it off the hinges as he threw himself inside, slamming it shut behind him.

The things clawed at the windows and the wood of the door outside but did not break in or they could not break in. It suddenly occurred to Darren that his house seemed hazy, hazy like the horizon on a June morning. His thoughts were becoming hazy too, to the point where he couldn't think at all. Almost as if he had become numb to his own actions Darren found himself walking up the stairs to his room and, without even bothering to take off his shoes, crawled into bed and pulled the covers up around him.

The covers seemed too warm, the room too familiar, and the whole house, a little too safe. Then he noticed his mother in the corner, watching him, he knew it was odd, and he felt it more than a little creepy, but the strange aura surrounding the place prevented him from acting. All he could do was watch as he crossed to his bedside and sat down next to him.

Slowly she leaned over him, placing her face into the single shaft of light cast by the terrace above his door. To his horror Darren found he couldn't scream, even as the empty black holes of her eyes stared down at him, burning into his. He couldn't move, couldn't scream, the blankets were too heavy, they cut off his breathing suffocating him, binding his limbs in close to his sides. All he could do was watch as her face became a warped mass of flesh and her mouth opened wider than humanly possible, tearing the skin on either side of it all the way to the cheek bone. Through the opening emerged a second set of jaws, deformed like those of the yellow creatures.

Finally he could feel the spell of the house lift and he inhaled deeply to scream.

Darren Miller was found dead in his bed on the morning of July 19th 1990, born on April 15th 1975, Darren was the only son to Joan and Dave Miller. The details of his death remain undisclosed. . .

A night terror is a dream that is not really a dream, it is a sudden sensation of fear, adrenaline, and a need to survive nothing in particular, it occurs during deep sleep. The victim of a night terror will awake without remembering a thing of his dreams, only the *familiar sense of fear* that accompanied it.

An urban legend states that if you are falling in a dream and cannot regain consciousness before you reach the end of your fall, you will die. Many believe this to be nothing but a myth; others believe this to be *horrifyingly* true.

Danny L. Makara
Delphos Jefferson High School
Honorable Mention

The Troubled Lawyer

It has been almost two months since I first met her. Why does this have to happen to me?

“Are you okay?” my secretary asked as I tripped over her desk on the way out of the busy law forum.

“Yea, thanks for asking, Jane. I just have a bit of a headache,” I lied, not wanting to tell the truth, not wanting to even admit the truth to myself. I staggered out the glass door with what seemed to be about a pound of files and papers underneath my arm. In two months, I hadn’t been caught up on my work. I had two cases to defend for the following morning and I hadn’t even started on my research. I glanced down at the watch on my wrist. It was only noon. I was leaving work four hours early. Normally I was the very last one out of the forum but things had changed since I met her. I started the short stroll down New York’s busy sidewalks. I hoped the fresh air would clear her out of my head. I closed my eyes trying not to envision her beautiful smile, trying to block out the sound of her cheerful laughter. That’s when I bumped in to her.

Reeling backwards I stared at her. No, not her.

“Sorry ma’am.” I said apologetically and continued my walk.

“I’m losing my mind,” I thought to myself. Everywhere I looked, she was there. She was in every window waving to me, on every bill board watching me. I passed the old antique shop. I was almost to my apartment. I broke into a run, running as fast as I could, trying to escape those bright sky blue eyes. I had to get to my apartment. She wouldn’t be able to find me there amid the ton of books and records that filled the place. I finally reached the door, out of breath and panting, fumbling with the keys. A bead of sweat slid slowly down my brow like the first drop of rain before a storm. CLICK. The door opened, and I nearly fell into the apartment building. As I regained my balance, I raced up the stairs not daring to look behind me for fear she would be there, watching me. I threw open the door to apartment 201 and stumbled inside locking it behind me. I stormed in to my study slamming my books on the desk and next myself in to the chair, furious I would let a girl cause so many problems in my life. It was going to be a long night. I looked around my messy desk. Two months ago, I would have died had I seen my desk like this, but now I could care less. All I cared about was forgetting about her. I couldn’t get her out of my head.

“This isn’t me. This has to stop!” I screamed to myself. I reached for the phone.

“No. I can’t call her; I need to do this in person.” As I said this, I lifted myself from my desk and headed to bed for a nap mumbling my last words,

“I’ll sleep for awhile then tell her later tonight.”

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! I heard the alarm and groggily rolled out of bed, cursing at the annoying sound ringing in my head.

“Today, I finally become free.” With that thought, I headed to the bathroom to prepare myself for the confrontation. I sloppily combed my hair. As I did this, I stared into the mirror, realizing I didn’t know the person staring back at me. This wasn’t the me who had breezed through his law degree. This wasn’t the me who had been in the top 10% in his college law class!

“Time to tell her,” I said to myself and hastily rushed out the door. I walked out in to the busy streets of New York City, a soft breeze brushed my hair back the clouds black, drifting above me in the cool evening. It started to drizzle as I strolled toward the Cafe where I knew she’d be at this time. She was there at this time everyday. Why wouldn’t she be there now? As this thought occurred to me, I began to quicken my pace in hopes to catch her, afraid she wouldn’t be sitting in her usual booth.

The light drizzle of rain changed as I approached the cafe door, the soft drops of rain seeming to become hard bullets of water as it poured down over me. As I stopped at the door staring inside, lightning cracked behind me. She was there. I began to prepare my words at the door. I saw her sitting at her usual spot the very back booth in the corner, smiling that smile. How I loved that smile. I was wondering how I was going to tell her. I began to walk in the cafe, slowly making my way around the tables and chairs toward her. The rage at what she had done to me burned in my heart. I was going to tell her how miserable she had made me, how for months I hadn’t been able to get a single thing done. I was going to tell her how I never wanted to see those beautiful eyes or that precious smile of hers again, that I wanted the old me back, the old me who had everything under control. I stopped at the table of her booth, staring down at her.

“I need to tell you something.” I managed to say the words almost becoming stuck in my throat. She looked up at me and smiled and with a swift motion, she brushed her golden hair out of her eyes and tucked it safely behind her ear.

“Yes?” she asked. Her voice was soft and quiet, but even as she said it, it rung in my head. Now as I looked at her sitting there in front of me, I began to say

“I.” the words got caught in my throat again. Finally, I managed to get them out, but it didn’t sound how I had imagined it would sound. Staring into those eyes, I realized what I

had truly come to tell her.

“I Love you.”

-End

Beth Sylak
Bluffton High School
First Place

Monsters as Seen by an Angel

Can you tell me there aren't monsters
For I see them in your shattered dreams
As a rotting mass of yellow stars and numbers
And gas filled lungs that cannot scream

Smoke is rising from the crematorium
It fills my soul with dread
The fire burns hot with hatred
For no tears do demons shed

*“Blessed are the merciful.”
A dove once said and cried
But the soldiers didn't hear it
And so the Jews died.*

Can you tell me there aren't monsters
When on a mountain there is no dream
When a mob lynched a ten-year-old on Sunday
And now plan to murder the King

I hear angry shouts outside the door
They are burning a cross in the yard
A brick flies through the window
Shards of glass make skin scarred

*“Blessed are those who hunger for righteousness.”
A dove once said and cried
But equality was a myth
And so equality died*

Can you tell me there aren't monsters
When you're asleep but do not dream
Haunted by faces and your own bloody hands
You're a “warrior” at only eighteen

Then comes the sound of falling bombs
Calling you up and out to fight
But the captain has a bullet in his head
You can't take your eyes off the sight.

*"Blessed are the peacemakers."
A dove once said and cried
But the politicians didn't hear it
And so the soldiers died*

You pray to go to heaven
But I see now what horrors you do
If you can kill each other
What is Satan going to do?

Korie Gesler
Bluffton High School
Second Place

The Sky

There is a lady who walks the sky
During both the day and night
Her gown is made of gossamer
Her skin paler than moonlight

She'd walk above the world
Whilst breezes blew her hair
She knew the moon, and the sun too
And the stars that resided there

The sun was at her beck and call
She told her when to sleep and rise
And the lady would paint the sunset
With her brush upon the skies

She'd call the moon to join her then
When the sun had gone to bed
She spread a black silk tapestry
With stars of silver thread

She'd stand above the oceans blue
And where mountains rose and fell
She's smile at the wildflower meadows
And strode where none could tell

This lady would watch us as she stood
Surrounded by her charge
She'd listen as we'd wish upon
Her tapestry of stars

She knew our dreams and hopes and fears
And wove them into thread
And since she could grant no wish
She made them clouds instead

Krystal Long
Bath High School
Third Place

Photography

Focal - the distance traveled,
To lift light from the air,
And put onto the film.
Burning it in like a small memory.

Then imagine an intermezzo-
The sounds made by the ransacked color,
Washing into the film.
Becoming thoughts and memories.

The picture is my memory now.
Even though so distantly trapped on paper,
It is a shadow of my eyes.
My theory of life through a camera.

Memories are complex photographs.
The mind, a picture album.
Full but never full,
Just waiting to be browsed.

A picture is not worth a thousand words.
It is worth a thousand thoughts and a thousand feelings,
But only one word –
Beautiful.

Joel Gundy
Bluffton High School
Honorable Mention

Winter

I walk myself into the frigid cold.
There's nothing near me so I choose to stare.
I see a heav'nly cloud of wintry fog
As I exhale into the cool, crisp air.
The hazy orange glow of city night
Illuminates my vision as I gaze
Down to the grass and notice on the earth,
It has been tainted by a midnight freeze.

But no snow has yet come to rest near me
And so I cast my vision toward the sky,
Wanting something calm to soothe my soul,
A bit of nature's beauty for my eye
To give me peace before the night ahead.
And suddenly I see a snowflake fall,
As if a bit of down dropped from a dove.
It gracefully descends to ground's sweet call.

I try to stand still so I will not lose
The sight of such a perfect feath'ry flake.
The shivers slowly run up through my spine,
So much beauty only God could make.
Its path perfectly unpredictable,
The flake finally flutters to the ground
And disappears into the layer of silk,
A speck of whiteness that is all around.

That solitary flake's a memory,
And I return my gaze into the sky
In hopes of finding more of nature's grace,
But now the time of snow has passed me by.
Now someone calls me back into the house,
But I choose to pretend I didn't hear,
Unwilling to release this time of peace,
But now I know my end is growing near.

Adam Marquart
Bluffton High School
Honorable Mention

Rural Ohio

Subtle sunsets
give way to starry summer nights.

Cultivated fields
lie empty under the quiet sky.

Small farm towns
quietly wait for morning.

Happy families
sit in their houses watching TV and talking.

Best friends
laugh around a crackling campfire.

Gentle wind
blows warmly over the land.

Cold dew
settles on the thick grass.

A train whistles,
a dog barks,
a cricket creaks,
but everything else is silent.

The simple beauty of the land speaks for itself,
the wind blows gently,
and all is well in rural Ohio.

Brittany Neeley
Temple Christian School
Honorable Mention

Pinocchio

Just call me Pinocchio
This is where I stay
People come in and out
Wanting to play
The attention is caught
On the shiny new toys
They dance and sing
For the girls and the boys
But when they see me
They yank on my strings
They want me to dance
They want me to sing
When they ask me questions
My nose grows long
Because the answer I give them
Always is wrong
They tie me in knots
Put tape over my face
I feel lower than dirt
And completely disgraced
Only my Maker
Sees me as special and unique
All the other people
Think I'm some sort of freak
All I want to be
Is a real little boy
No more strings attached
And out of this store
No more poking fun
I can stand on my own
I'm no longer your puppet
My covers been blown

Alex Raabe
Bluffton High School
Honorable Mention

Trees of Time

At first in spring,
your hair is soft and new
with puffy buds textured like fresh snow.
Blankets of green tuck you in
are dotted with flowers in the sun.
You are still young with perfectly clear skin,
not a lichen or moss in sight.
You are beautiful, tall and steadfast.

As summer rolls along,
your hair turns bright and green.
It is full, and nice it has become.
Your blanket is quickly fading,
and slowly turning brown.
You reach out and look with wonder
at the moss creeping up your skin.
For you are that much older and wiser
and soon it will be getting frigid.

When autumn shows you all its colors,
your hair turns red and gold.
It's coarser now, and not as full
but it definitely still glows.
Your blanket is cracked and withered;
for now you are too old
to be tucked in and your roots stand bare.
Your skin has more moss and creeping lichens too,
but you are still proud to be you.

Frigid winter catches you off guard.
You've come to accept your changing self,
but now you change once more.
You've been stripped of all your hair,
and been left with a cracked and broken skin.
For you can barely see it,
all wrinkly and covered with plants.
A new blanket comes to tuck you in,
this time for good.
It is soft and pure and white.
You finally feel at peace.

Brittany Ransom
Lima Central Catholic High School
Honorable Mention

Creation of Love

Love multifaceted by fault
Through the exodus of my time
Tears of bitter heartaches exalt
Growth of common thyme
Pushing up against the soil
Tribulations always persist
Halting growth, tender toil
Budding runes of my do twist
For thy lips are green with splendor
As petals untie for you sun
And feelings I always render
Because my love you are the one
The wind that makes my garden sway
Tied my heart with a golden ring
Passion fixed within a bouquet
My floras adoringly sing
Untwisting now the heart's distress
Once caused by a dark clouded sky
Down-turning petals now egress
As I stare into your vivid eyes
For my affection grows strong
Like that of the first sprouting eve
Intoning love's ever sweet song
While garden and sun intertwine

Jennifer Martin
Temple Christian High School
First Place

Changing Seasons

The gusty wind blew the leaves fiercely around her ankles. Those leaves, with their bright array of oranges, reds, and yellows, covered the sidewalks and streets. The teenage girl walked with her eyes only half open, afraid to look up that she might be hit by the stinging raindrops that fell from the dark gray sky. The cloudy atmosphere was extremely damp because of the rain and also the lake nearby. She could even smell the moisture in the air. It was a very odd smell that made her wish she was inside by a pleasantly warm fire. She thought to herself what a miserable day it was to be walking alone in the cold, misty, autumn air.

Nevertheless, Jasmine continued on her way with her head down, noticing some mud on the toe of her tan leather boots. She was wearing a short brown skirt and a cream turtle-neck sweater. She wrapped her knee-length, tan suede coat tightly around her to keep out as much of the harsh, November wind as possible. Her long, jet black hair swirled around her pretty face, each silky strand flying in a different direction. Any passing stranger could not see her eyes as she stared at the ground, carefully watching every step she took. Her eyes were almond-shaped and had very long, thick lashes. If someone somehow had a chance to catch a glimpse into her mysterious, dark gray eyes, they would see a world of hurt and shattered dreams. Hopelessness and loss filled her eyes, each longing to see someone who would love her for who she truly was. Her eyes, if given a chance, could penetrate even to the depths of your soul. She had to hide her pain behind her beautiful smile. Her teeth sparkled like stars, they were so white. Her lips were just the perfect shade of pink. They accented her dark, olive skin quite well. She had a dark freckle just above the right corner of her upper lip. She was a petite girl, a little over five feet tall. She had a slender frame.

She walked at a brisk pace, but with such poise and dignity that some people passing by had to take a second glance her way. She finally reached her small apartment where she was greeted by her only friend, the chocolate Labrador her parents had gotten for her when she was nine years old. That was one year before both of her parents were killed in a plane crash over the Atlantic. They had planned on revisiting her mother's native land of India, but sadly, never made it there. She had only one relative in the States, an aunt living in downtown Chicago. Her aunt introduced her to art, the only thing in this world that she loves. She can express herself in her artwork, whether on a canvass or in a sketchbook. She can say things in her artwork that no words could say. She pours out all the feelings she holds, sometimes in such intensity, it pierces the heart to look too long at one of her works. Her apartment is embellished from wall to wall with all sorts of artwork, both hers and her aunt's. Sadly, her aunt committed suicide just two months ago. Now, at only age seventeen,

she was on her own. She had already graduated high school one year early and was ambitiously pursuing her art career. Her job at the downtown bookstore and coffee shop kept her extremely busy. In spite of her business, Jasmine always found time to soak in the peace she received when painting a boat on Lake Erie's waterfront or sketching an elderly couple sipping hot tea on a park bench. It was in those calm, quiet moments that she reflected on life. She felt whole and complete in only those moments. She could express herself, and all of herself, holding nothing back.

Several months passed. The crisp, autumn breeze had turned into a chilled, winter frost. Jasmine continued in her normal routine of things: art classes, work, and home. Her only escape from that lonely, hectic routine was at home where she painted, sketched, or sculpted her emotions into beautiful works of art. Little did she know that her everyday way of life would change dramatically in just a short amount of time. Nothing would ever be the same again.

She worked her regular afternoon/evening shift at the coffee shop that day. As she was serving hot muffins and cappuccino to a group of middle-aged women, she heard a sound she didn't recognize. It was a voice, someone singing inside the coffee shop. The shop would have different musical entertainers every weekend, but she had never seen nor heard this man before. She was greatly drawn to the sound of his voice. At the same moment that she turned to see who this stranger making such beautiful music was, he looked up from his guitar. He stopped playing for a short minute, astonished at the beauty of this woman who stood before him. He was intrigued by the look in her eyes. Immediately, he knew he would have to speak to her. He had absolutely no clue that she was thinking that same thing. As she gazed upon his face, she saw something incredibly familiar in him that didn't scare her from talking to someone new, as she too often was. For the next hour, she listened intently to the words in his songs. He sang songs that told of his story and his emotions. His music was a way for him to pour his heart out with extreme passion. Jasmine recognized this passion. Many of the feelings he portrayed through song went hand-in-hand with the feelings expressed in the unique artwork hanging on the walls of her quaint, Chicago apartment.

Never having spoken to this man before, Jasmine was unsure of what to say to him. He didn't give her long to worry about this before he approached her to introduce himself. His name was Michael. He had dark brown hair that was slightly tousled and messy looking. His soft, green eyes were filled with wonder and excitement. He looked as though he knew the deepest, darkest secret imaginable, and would share it with no one; but almost invited you to try to guess what it was. There was something surprisingly different about the way he looked at her. All other people dare not make direct eye contact too, long with her because the pain and anger held deep in her emotions shouted at them and struck some kind of odd fear into their hearts and minds. Michael, however, looked beyond the intense pain and suffering. He saw someone so incredibly wonderful, someone he wanted to spend time with, someone who would understand him. The one short conversation that February evening was only the first of many conversations those two would have with each other.

One cannot imagine a relationship beginning more beautifully than the way Michael and Jasmine's had begun. He made many more visits to the coffee shop to sit and talk and drink tea with her. She enjoyed every minute of his company. Her favorite part of the day was to see him in his black leather jacket, setting off his handsomely broad shoulders, and wearing the same old black shoes he always wore walking through that door. He smiled; and oh, did that ever make her heart melt. What started as a simple friendship day-by-day grew into so much more. She had finally made a friend. She could talk and relate to this person on a level that not many people reach, especially not in such a short period of time. He was never afraid to hear the story of her past, the hurt and loneliness she had experienced over the years. He grasped the deep meaning behind each work of art she had created. He alone understood her. What seemed like a mystery to everyone else was merely a reason to love her more. She had finally found someone to love her for who she truly was. She had accidentally stumbled across the one thing she had been hoping for and dreaming of most of her life.

Michael had found someone special to reveal the secrets of his songs with. He knew from the moment their eyes met that she could hear between the notes he sang and hear the sound of his heart beating to a rhythm much like that of her own, in fact. Michael's music inspired and encouraged her to reach beyond her past and embrace the future. She, in turn, was able to inspire and encourage him. Both of them knew that they would never have to be alone again.

Their friendship continued blossoming into a wonderfully romantic relationship. They had embarked on an amazing adventure together. All that mattered was that they had each other. Every moment they spent with each other was like another dream come true. Jasmine referred to him as her knight in shining armor, for he truly had rescued her. Without him, she would still be lost in a world of hurt and shattered hopes. She had found hope in Michael, hope of a better life, one away from loss. For she had found the most valuable treasure. She found love. Not only did she now have someone that loved her, but she also had someone special to love. She loved him with all her heart and more, as much as she knew how to love. He loved her the same. He would give anything for her. She was far too precious to ever lose. He cherished her more than anyone thought was possible to cherish just one person. They showed more care and concern for each other than society thought was necessary to show one another. Each of them was held ever so dear to the other's heart. Not a thing in this world could have separated them from each other. Their love was unfathomable by most. An undying love so unconditional, it didn't quite seem real. But it was so real, so true, so right.

As time progressed, Jasmine's outlook had completely changed. She no longer viewed her life as an awful experience, but was thankful for every breath God gave her for it was one more opportunity to live. She was no longer afraid to get close to another person because she found that not everyone will hurt her or leave her. Her world of pain and sadness turned into a world of love and rejoicing. Her heart had been mended and every broken area of her life healed. This all shone forth in her artwork. What was once portrayed with

intense grief was filled with extreme joy. All of Jasmine's new friends saw the change in every work of art that adorned her apartment.

Being a very talented, young artist, Jasmine thought about entering one of her paintings in an art show. With much encouragement from her friends, coworkers, and of course, Michael, she decided to enter. The next contest was an international art show with many world-renown artists entering one of their paintings there. Jasmine never thought she would even have the slightest chance at getting an award. Because of all the support the people closest to her gave her, she was able to do this with only mild nervousness and more confidence than she had ever had about anything before. Jasmine proved herself at that art show. She proved her talent and ability as an artist, and also proved that she had grown out of her diffidence and was no longer timid about presenting her art and her true self to people. She walked out of that art show not only with a third place monetary award but also with so much respect from herself and those around her. The judges were thoroughly impressed by her intricate display of emotions in just the one painting she had entered. So they asked her permission to see more of her artwork. She invited them to her apartment. After they arrived later that evening, she walked them through every piece of artwork, explaining what each one meant. The judges were ecstatic to see the excitement in her eyes as she explained the deep meaning behind each work of art. They saw some of the most beautiful and extravagant paintings and sketches that they had ever seen before. Her paintings and sketches seemed to come alive in ways that only the very best and most professional artists were capable of doing. The judges knew from that moment that her artwork deserved to be somewhere very special.

That day changed the course of her life forever. She signed contracts with several large, famous museums around the world and was no longer an unknown city girl. Other famous artists were coming to meet her and hear some of the stories behind her art. She made her national television debut on a talk show and continued getting calls to make other appearances. She was making hundreds of thousands of dollars selling her art, but she never let fame or fortune distract her from what was truly important to her. She didn't become cocky or arrogant like most celebrities do. Neither did she change from being a sweet, kind woman. Her new art career wasn't always easy or fun or as great as it sounded. So many more demands and expectations were placed on her. She never let that make her angry or get upset at the people who meant the most to her. And she still always gave Michael the love and attention from her that he deserved. He meant more to her than any amount of money someone could pay her for her art. She was grateful for his love and support but most of all, his friendship.

Michael had opened her eyes to a whole new way of life. He had stolen her heart. She knew she wanted to spend the rest of her life with him. He knew the same about her. No one else made him feel the way he did when he was with her. His heart leaped with excitement at the mere sound of her voice. His eyes filled with passion whenever he gazed into her eyes. He knew his love for her was real because he had loved her long before she became rich and famous. It didn't matter to him if she had all the wealth in the world or none of it. He saw a wonderful, amazing, spectacular woman. She was beautiful on the outside but more so on the inside. She was more

than he ever expected to find. They brought out the best in each other.

One warm summer night as Michael and Jasmine were taking a stroll in the park, they stopped talking about anything and everything under the sun, and just began to stare up at the clear, dark sky. They gazed up at the stars in all their wonder and brilliance. They marveled at the majesty of the heavens above that only the God of the universe could have spoken into existence. Michael began to speak in amazement about this glorious creation and the God who is in control. He told Jasmine that he firmly believes that she was made especially for him. He knew she was the one and only meant to be with him.

At that moment, underneath the stars so bright, Michael got down on one knee, took Jasmine's hand in his, and said compassionately, I love you so much, with all that I am. Will you marry me?"

Jasmine, with a single tear of joy falling down her cheek, said, "Yes, I'd be more than happy to."

They both smiled. He stood up and wrapped his arms around her. Both of their hearts were immensely overjoyed. That night, they laughed and they cried together. They cried tears of joy knowing that from now on, they would always have each other's love and companionship. They planned their future together. From that day forward, nothing would be able to separate them from the love they have for each other. Neither of them would ever again be alone.

The wedding ceremony was gorgeous. The chapel was elegantly decorated with sweet-smelling candles and lilies, Jasmine's favorite flower. The sun shone brightly on that cheerful June day. Michael looked extraordinarily handsome in his sleek, black tuxedo. However, Jasmine took all eyes off of him and caught everyone's attention. She looked absolutely stunning in her beautiful, pure white wedding dress. The halo of tiny, white flowers around her black hair, that was all curled and put up to look like a princess, glowed as if she was an angel just coming from the gates of heaven. She slowly made her walk down the aisle covered with fresh, pink and white rose petals. Everyone in that chapel held their breath, awaiting the moment this very special young lady would be swept off her feet by the man she loved, who stood at the alter in eager anticipation for his bride to be. She reached him. The music faded. The entire place fell silent except for Michael's soft, sweet voice whispering, "I love you," to her, and Jasmine repeating those same words to him. The minister began the ceremony. He had never heard a couple's marriage vows sound so sincere.

Michael and Jasmine walked happily down the aisle to the white limousine that was parked outside the church. They and all their guests II enjoyed a lovely reception. Smiles, joy, and laughter accompanied all of their activities. The young couple was able to find happiness in each other for the rest of their lives. Yes, they had their disagreements and arguments, but their love conquered all. They shared many wonderful years together, until the evening of their deaths. Even though it came to an end on this earth, their love continues to live on from the day they said, "I do."

Anna Reddick
Bluffton High School
Second Place

California

“Hello Mr. Mordel. How have you been since our last visit?” An aged well-tailored gentleman stood from his leather chair and produced a ballpoint from his jacket pocket. As he frequently did, he continued without a hiatus for reaction. “I expect you’ve been taking your medication twice a day...every day.” He glared indifferently at the young man seated across the office as he snapped the door closed, shutting away humanity as well as Sylas’s escape.

“Yeah.” Sylas picked at a loose stitch on the end of his sleeve with a callused, cigarette-tainted finger.

“You know if you don’t, we’ll have to put you under observation again, and I don’t want to have to do that.” The older man struck his pen to a pad of paper before scribbling down something in his illegible doctor cursive. “Sylas stifled a snort...’ *you’d love it if you had to put me back on observation, you get paid more money that way.*’

“So tell me, what have you been doing lately?” The Doctor rubbed his slight chin and returned to his oversized seat.

“Working.”

“Where do you work?”

“You already know where I work.” ‘*Moron.*’ Sylas’s subconscious raged.

The Doctor shifted to get comfortable and widened his already bulging eyes. “Remind me.” He sat back and scrawled more onto his manuscript.

“Fast-mart.” Sylas bounced his tennis shoe up and down on the floor apprehensively and stared dimly at the fish tank behind the Doctor’s shoulder. One of the occupants was floating belly-up in the far corner.

“Ah, yes. How is that going for you?”

Tap tap tap. Rubber impacted linoleum. “Dandy.”

“Care to elaborate, Mr. Mordel?” the Doctor sipped mineral water from a glass bottle.
Tap tap tap.

'Not really, moron.' He scoffed in his mind with a glare. Honestly he had never maintained any intention of spilling his psyche to the over-paid, over-educated, under-worked psychiatrist that sat slaughtering time in front of him. Therapy had been the only apt option in the end: this or back to De Moines, and the Doctor scarcely let Sylas fail to remember the alternative of returning there. Sylas sighed and massaged his temple. "It's been all right. It's a job..."

"It's just a job, Sylas." Rose ran her hand over her somnolent eyes before pouring herself a mug of stale coffee. "You work too hard for your well-being you know..."

"We need the money if we're going to move to California." He glanced musingly at the pot of steaming liquid that had been placed precariously close to his reach before turning back to slave over a mound of documents.

"What's the excitement of running away if we have enough money we can't even rough it? Honestly Sy, you've become obsessed." The brown-eyed girl perched on the chair across from him and dropped her chin onto the table.

"Maybe..."

"Mr. Mordel?" The Doctor stared inquisitively at the vacant expression the man held in front of him.

Tap tap tap. It was no longer Sylas's shoe on the floor, but flesh against manufactured wood.

"Doctor Burowski?"

A brunette managed to nudge her head through a sliver of the opened door while giving a timid cough. "The head of the board is outside...*ahem*...he wants a word with you."

The wrinkled man rose. "Now you stay put, Mr. Mordel. Your session is far from over. This will only take a minute, I assure you." He tucked his pen back into his pocket before striding from the room.

'Only a minute? Damn.' Sylas stretched his willowy legs and poked at a paperweight on the desk anxiously. Last time the Doctor had been interrupted by the head of the board during his time here, a half an hour of the appointment had been wasted. He only hoped for the same luck again.

"We were really lucky to get out without your family trying to find you..." Sylas adjusted his rearview mirror to deflect the glint of the open road behind him out of his eyes.

Rose tipped back her head as the wind whipped her flaxen hair about. An eternal stretch of road expanded to the darkening horizon nestled in between a silvery array of mountains. A smile panned out across her face as the car flew past an over-head sign. 'Welcome to California.'

“Lucky? Nah...fate.”

The Doctor’s large leather chair was just as comfortable as Sylas had expected. He leaned back and flipped through the pad of paper that had only moments ago been in fervent use.

“Borderline schizophrenic...inferiority complex...hallucinates often for long periods of time? Please...” He tossed the document back onto the desk with exasperation. It was then the juvenile noticed one of the table’s drawers ajar but a fragment, enough to reveal a small blue book. Ah, his hit *list*... Sylas grunted and began to skim through the time and hand tattered book. It was seemingly nothing more than that of family pictures, stages through the Doctor’s life Sylas would have rather not seen, but some bizarre grasp had come over him. His desire to read on was much too potent to be overcome by his distaste for the man, nor by his embarrassment for invading such a personal topic. The final picture ranged from some time in the Seventies, marked obviously by the hideous flowered shirt the Doctor was wearing and the dimming photo. The man in the picture could not possibly have been the Doctor, though. *Brothers, perhaps*, Sylas contemplated. This man was much too joyful, his arm lingering around a towering woman much of his age. The woman, however, was turned from the camera and was looking in awe upon a valley a behind them Sylas recognized as a part of the Rocky Mountain range he and Rose had ventured about not that long ago. He smiled a moment before sealing the volume back up. Two small slips of paper escaped the yellowed pages and drifted to the floor silently.

“And you’re sure *all* this *folding* is doing *anything* except *ruining* a piece of paper?” Sylas *squinted* at the *slender* hands that were *pressing* another *crease* into the *golden* parchment.

“Sy, *shush*, it’s *origami* so you have to fold it. I *followed* the *directions*. You’ll see.” Rose’s fingers *wiggled* among the *various* *rumpled* of the paper before *handing* the wad to her *companion*. “See, it’s a *flower*.”

“Well, I say you *just* pick one.” Sylas *reached* across the *blanket* they sat on and *uprooted* a tiny violet daisy. He *pecked* her on the cheek and *folded* it into her hand.

Rose *slump backwards* onto the bedspread and *breathed* in the *fresh* mountain air.

“Do you *think* they’re *looking* for us yet? It’s been a week...”

“Your family probably is, I have no *doubt* of that.” He *snapped* off another *flower* from the tundra and *plucked* the petals one by one. “I don’t *think* my father even *realizes* he has another *son*.” He *smiled* with bitter *comicalness* and *laid* down *beside* her.

Rose *propped* up on her *elbow* and *frowned* *crossly*. “He *just* doesn’t know what to do with you, I *think*. You and Danny are so different, Sylas, it *would* be *difficult* to adjust.”

He *fiddled* with the broken stem of a daisy *halfheartedly* before *lobbing* it back into the field.

Sylas's fingers brushed the hard floor as he gingerly scooped up the aged newspaper clippings. The print was so weathered on each it was nearly indecipherable and he strained to make out the words.

'Woman Dies in House Inferno.' He skimmed rapidly down the fragment, absorbing the information as quickly as he could with getting lightheaded. The pieces of the puzzle fell into place instantly and Sylas mulled over the second article from the past, an obituary. The woman in the Doctor's picture had died...perhaps explaining his animosity to the world.

Sylas bounced his leg restlessly as he waited for the phone resting beneath his hand to ring. Rose should have returned hours ago. With much encouragement, his mind stepped back to the conversation the couple had had the day before. A seed of remorse sprouted in his stomach and wrapped tightly around his heart. What could he do about her homesickness? They were here now, there was no turning back...for him at least. He gripped the phone tighter with the synthetic hope that it would be compelled to connect him to Rose. A flood of reasonings crashed through him to ebb off his uncertainties. It was her idea to do this, she had planned out the escape. She hadn't taken anything back with her, she wouldn't have just left. . . .

The wind chimes echoed like some eerie lamenting dirge as he paced up and down the apartment floorboards. The light draft from the open window rustled the papers on desk and blew an overlooked scrap into the corner of the room. He bent down slowly and enclosed it in his hand.

Sylas tucked the papers into the booklet and put it back into the drawer. Why *had* he been drawn to California in the first place? Strangely, he couldn't recall now if it had been he or Rose who had decided where they should run to, in fact, he couldn't even hear Rose ever saying 'California' now.

The man pushed himself from the chair and looked out the massive window that revealed the hilly metropolitan streets below. He hated taking his medication. It was like they were trying to make him forget Rose, like she wasn't the very reason he pushed on through all the days at Fast-mart. 'Doctors try to save people, not kill them' Sylas deliberated while drumming out some unknown beat onto the windowsill.

The paper had only a few words scrawled across it, but even those few words Sylas could not follow.

"I have to go home Sylas, it's not your fault, but I don't belong here. I wish I could stay with you forever...but I can't. I'm positive your father loves you and I think you should give him a second chance. Go home too, Sy. California has too much history.

*Love eternally,
Rose*

He blinked back tears and sat down into his seat. He should have been kinder to her about her

homesickness, he should have asked her confide in him about why she had been acting so strange lately. Maybe he should go home...

Sylas set the phone back onto the corner table and rested his hand over a photo that had been placed there. It was the only picture Sylas had of Rose, even after all the time they had spent together. For some reason it looked so old to him now, taken so long ago that it had faded, but it must have been from him looking at it too much. Her smiling face gazed at him without a fault.

The Doctor slowly opened the door while examining a stack of papers in his hand. He thrust his bifocals up farther on his nose and sighed. Muttered morosely under his breath, he burrowed back into his chair.

“Alright Mr. Mordel, Now that we’ve caught up on recent events, lets go back to where we left off in your past last session.” The Doctor flipped back through his notebook and took out his pen. “You were telling me about your family. Your father is Gregory Mordel, correct? Your brother is Daniel Mordel he is now attending De Moines University...?” He traced his handwriting with the tip of his craggy finger and continued on without hesitation. “What was your mother’s name?”

Sylas blinked. *His mother’s name?* “She died when I was two.”

“Yes, what was her name?”

Sylas took a crumpled picture from his pocket and peered at the woman in it. *No, that couldn’t be right...why couldn’t he remember her name? No, it wasn’t possible.*

“Sylas, her name was Rose, don’t you remember?” The Doctor exhaled noisily and handed the file to the young man. “We’ve been over this before, don’t you remember any of it? You were sent here by your father when you were 16.”

Sylas blinked in confusion and stood unsteadily from his chair. *No, Rose was his friend. She had run away with him to California. Rose was the woman in the picture.*

Rose was the woman in the picture...no, *Sylas was fine...it was the medication, the damn Doctor trying to confuse him, this damn state.*

Sylas peeled back the cover of the documents that were handed to him. His file was on top and under neither, his fathers and his mothers. He stared between the picture he held in his hand and the one imprinted upon the file in disbelief.

‘Name: Rose Anne Mordel, Maiden Name: Burowski’ Fresh tears blurred his vision as he closed the file and touched his aching forehead.

“But Rose...? Burowski?”

The Doctor had during Sylas's wave of realization taken out the small blue photo album from the drawer and had removed the final image. "Sylas," the Doctor spoke softly and slid the picture across the desk, "this is your mother and me on a vacation before you were born. I'm your uncle, on your mother's side of the family."

Sylas gazed down at the photograph in his hand. Rose was his mother all along? Had it really all been in his mind? Everything in his past suddenly seemed like a smudge of fabrication. It all seemed too real, all too strong for him to have pretended, but how could this be? His mind spun in a whirlwind of *confusion...all this could be my imagination, Rose must be true...*

"How long have I been taking therapy?" He picked a hole into his sleeve while in a state of limitless contemplation.

"You've been seeing me for two years Mr. Mordel" Doctor Burowski tapped an orange bottle down onto the table in front of Sylas. "I think its best if I put you back on II Ambien, Sylas. I want you to go home with Mr. Hosteller. He'll be staying with you for a while, ok? Now go and get some rest. Everything will be a bit clearer then."

"Hello, Sylas." Rose stooped next to the bed the teen had nuzzled into like a protective nest. She beamed warmly as he peeked up at her in bafflement. She appeared just as she always had in the picture, always smiling, young and blonde, loving and energetic. "They say a mother and her child holds a strong connection. Well, this is ours. I need to go back home now, but I wanted to say goodbye in person this time. I promise I'll keep watch over you, just as I have since I had to leave." Rose kissed Sylas as the affects of the medication began to slowly sink in, and before he could say goodbye, she was gone, finally gone.

Angela Scott
Temple Christian High School
Third Place

FINAL SURRENDER

Red, brown, orange, and yellow encompass the people as they walk to and from their busy workplaces. Scattered, fallen leaves cover the sidewalks. If it weren't raining, the crunch of trampled leaves would fill the air. Chipmunks and squirrels scurry about under the bushes collecting the food they will need during the next few months. Street vendors fill the air with their cries of fresh hot cocoa and cappuccino. Occasionally, homeless, elderly, or young can be seen huddled in a doorway, desperately trying to block out the chill and rain carried along by the autumn wind. This would be a beautiful day if only the rain would cease to fall. Still, it continues on. These are the things I observe as I stand in the doorway, sheltered from nature's cruelty.

I hold my steaming cup of cappuccino close. Are others studying me as intently as I examine them now? What is it they see in this darkly clad man standing silently in the doorway? Do they notice me, or am I just another face blending into the crowd?

The suit I wore to work is covered by my dark leather jacket, and my icy blue eyes take in all around me. My ordinarily tidy, light brown hair is now a victim of the autumn wind buffeting me. Perhaps I present myself as intimidating; my dark clothes and large, muscular frame could lead to that assumption, I suppose. And yet, the briefcase lying at my feet and the way I keep checking the time indicate the exact opposite. I'm just another successful businessman, pausing to take a break from the chaos of this dog-eat-dog world.

One by one, each person continues to rush by. Most never even pause to notice the beauty of their surroundings or the beggar huddled in a lonely corner. Nevertheless, there are those who do notice. Maybe they notice the ring on my left hand and wonder about the one waiting for me at home. Others may ponder why I stand here alone in the midst of all this busyness. Do they see the scar on my cheek, the final remnant of those moments from so long ago? They don't know what I've done.

The rain slows to a drizzle, and finally, it stops. Across the street, a man and a young boy exit the ice cream shop. Instinct tells me the boy must be his son. They begin to walk down the sidewalk, eating their ice cream as they go. The boy looks about five years old and is wearing an orange tee shirt under blue jean overalls. His dark hair hangs around his face and dances across his forehead in the wind.

As I continue to watch, the boy stumbles and chocolate smears across his nose. His father kneels down beside him and wipes the chocolate away. The child shrieks with delight as the man begins tickling him. His shrieks give way to laughter and soon the laughter of both father and son can be heard up and down the street. Involuntarily, a smile begins to spread

across my face, and I notice that those once caught in the rush of the crowd also smile indulgently at the sound. My heart aches, and I long to turn away, but against my will, I'm held captive by the scene unfolding before me.

Their laughter begins to fade away, and the man straightens the long sleeves of the boy's tee shirt while adjusting his overalls. He stands and with the motion of his hand, they begin to walk again.

"Look, Daddy!" the boy breathes with excitement as he points to the tall buildings. "They're so tall! I can't even see the top. Someday, I'm going to build a building way bigger than that. Do you think I can, Daddy?"

The father smiles and lifts his son high onto his shoulders. "I think you can do anything you want to, Tommy. Can you see the top, now?"

The little boy leans back as far as he can and looks at the building. "Whoa..." is all he says. The wonderment and awe that fill the one simple word bring tears to my eyes. The haunting memories come flooding back, but I can't allow myself to dwell on them. The guilt and the pain - it's all too fresh in my mind, too real. I know God has forgiven me, but forgiving myself... I can't do it.

Oblivious to my attention, the two keep walking down the leaf-covered sidewalk. Laughter and smiles bubble from the boy, and he is curious about everything he sees. He is so full of life. He continues to slowly eat his ice cream, trying to keep it from dripping off the cone. His father gladly answers all of his questions and laughs when ice cream runs down his chin. The love and admiration the boy feels for his father and the father's love for his son are obvious to all who watch them. Questions keep coming back to my mind, tormenting me. Did I love my son like that? Did he know how much he meant to me?

My eyes follow them as they come to a stop at the end of the sidewalk. The wind whips harshly around the corner, and the man's jacket billows in the wind. The boy is once again intently eating his ice cream and is oblivious to everything happening around him. Even the cars flying by fail to catch his attention.

The traffic light turns red, and the sign at the end of the sidewalk flashes "WALK" in bright orange letters. The man looks down at his son, and I can faintly hear the words "Come on, Tommy," coming from his lips. They begin to cross the street, and my heart clenches with fear.

"Grab his hand! Watch him; don't let him cross alone!" The scream wells up in me, but it never crosses my lips. My heart is racing, but I tell myself to relax. I can't allow this overwhelming fear to control me. What would this man think if I yelled these thoughts to him across the street? I don't doubt his ability as a father. I'm sure he has crossed the street with his son before. He doesn't need my fearful advice.

They're almost halfway across the street. The boy is still eating his ice cream and licking the drips off his cone and hands. The ice cream has melted so much it is now leaning

precariously off the edge of his cone. If he doesn't finish it soon, it will drop to the cold street.

"Hurry, Tommy," his father calls. Tommy tries to hurry and push his ice cream back onto his cone at the same time. He trips over his shoelace, and I smile remembering how my son used to do the same thing. The jolt of his near-fall is just enough to push the ice cream over the edge of the cone. From around the corner, a yellow taxicab comes careening right towards the boy. A horn blows; tires squeal on the wet pavement. I dash onto the sidewalk in front of me and yell as loud as I can. The little boy looks up, his eyes wide and fear etched on his young, innocent face. His father turns and yells; panic is engraved on his face, and he dives toward his little boy.

My eyes never leave the scene before me, but my mind flashes back to that dreadful day ten years ago. September 18, 1994 - I'll never be able to forget that date. It was an autumn day very similar to this. There was the same crisp breeze, only the sun shone brightly. I can still hear the birds singing, and the children laughing in the park. Crisp, colorful leaves covered the ground, and the children made a game of jumping into the freshly raked piles of leaves.

My wife left early that morning to go on a shopping trip with some women from our church. She squeezed my hand and kissed my cheek before she left. As she picked up her purse, she turned and smiled saying, "Don't worry; I'll be home in time to fix supper. You two just go out and have fun today. I love you! Be careful!" And with that, she walked out the door to the car.

Timmy came downstairs only a half-hour after she left. He was still wearing his Superman pajamas, and his dark brown hair was a mess. He yawned and rubbed his eyes as he walked into the kitchen. He didn't talk much until I set two bowls of Cocoa Puffs and two glasses of chocolate milk on the table for our breakfast. I explained that this was a special day, because we could do whatever we wanted since Mom was gone. After that, he talked non-stop about different plans for our day. It was a battle just to get him to finish his "special" breakfast; he was so excited.

We decided to go to the park for our first activity of the day. We also planned to eat lunch at McDonalds, his favorite restaurant. We left for the park after he got dressed. Timmy was so happy. Energy, smiles, and laughter were abundant all over the park. Our first stop was at the swing set, and Timmy insisted I push him as high as I could. He shrieked happily each time he was high enough to touch the tree branches with his toes. When he got bored with the swings, we explored the other areas of the park. We played in the leaves, climbed trees, slid down the slide, and built towers in the sandbox. All too soon, it was time to leave.

For a short adventure, we walked to McDonalds. Timmy rode on my shoulders over half of the walk there. He was brimming with questions, and I probably answered one hundred of them. He told me at least that many knock-knock jokes. The sky had begun to cloud over, and about a block away from the restaurant it began to rain. We hurried as fast as we could. Timmy giggled the whole time because he thought the rain tickled.

We had to cross the street to get to McDonalds. The traffic light turned red, and we began to make our way across. He was only half a step behind me; I knew exactly where he was. However, I didn't notice when he stooped to pick up a shiny, new quarter from the street. At the same time, a red dump truck ran the light. It was headed right toward my son and I. A woman screamed, and tires skidded on the wet pavement. I turned, and with a yell dove towards my son hoping to pull him out of the way. The last thing I remember is hitting the street and hearing loud, frantic voices.

The next thing I knew, I was lying on a stretcher in the hospital emergency room. Doctors and nurses surrounded me, and I could feel someone stitching up my cheek. I tried to ask about my son, but only one nurse would answer me. "Shhh, try to hold your face still, now," was all she would say. My mind raced, but my body was numb. I could only think of one thing: my son.

I ran out of the room as soon as they would let me go. My wife was standing in the hall waiting for me. I will never forget the look on her face. With tears streaming from her eyes, she ran to me and held me tight. I tried to speak, tried to ask about our son, but she shook her head. It was then I finally realized the truth. I had failed. I didn't save our son. Oh God, help me! I killed our little boy!

The pastor came; we had hundreds of visitors. Each one said the same thing: "It's not your fault. It was an accident." How do they know? Have they ever lost a son?! They don't understand the guilt. They don't hear the condemning voices when they try to sleep. The images don't flash before their eyes - a speeding vehicle, panic on a little boy's face, bright lights. The sound of squealing tires, frightened screams, and horns don't haunt them. These are the things from which I cannot escape.

Eventually, the people and the cards quit coming. Everyone returned to their normal lives and expected us to do the same. We tried, and structure gradually began to return to our home. Nevertheless, it has never been the same. The fear, the guilt, the memories - they are always there to haunt me.

My mind returns to the present. My eyes hesitantly search the scene of the accident. Did they make it? Are they okay? I slowly begin to make my way through the crowd. I push my way through, afraid of what I will see when I get there. I breathe a sigh of relief and send up a prayer of thanks. Holding his son in his arms, the man stands. Neither one seems to be injured. The excitement is over, and the crowd begins to disperse. I feel an urge to talk to this man, but something holds me back. "Is this your will, Lord? Is this what you have been calling me to do?" I pray.

As the man approaches me, I can sense the answer to my prayer. Everything happens for a reason. God is always in control, and He uses even tragic accidents for His glory. It is time for me to forgive myself and accept God's healing. I think I'm finally ready to move on. Perhaps my story can help others who are dealing with similar situations. At least it will

make them think about the blessings God has given them. We take too much for granted.

I will talk to this man. I'll tell him how blessed he is to have a son like Tommy. Maybe I'll share my story and what God has done for me. I feel so much lighter, now. The guilt and the haunting memories have stopped. I feel a peace, an unbelievable peace I haven't felt in years. This peace can only come from God. I have finally surrendered to His love.

I go back to the doorway I had been standing in and pause. I am not the same man I was when I first stood here. I smile and pick up my briefcase. After I talk with Tommy and his father, I think I'll call my wife at home. Today, I'm leaving work early. I have something I need to share with her. I run my hand along the doorway and silently praise my Father. I turn, and with my briefcase, I walk away without pausing to look back.

Megan Berelsman
Delphos Jefferson High School
Honorable Mention

My Life as an Unknowing Dollar Bill

The first thing that I can remember after I was born from an Epson Stylus 400 Printer, is being in a dark, gloomy basement with my nine identical brothers. We were all young, but from what we could see when other bills were being made we figured that we were made by two large humans that were very loathsome in sight and smell. They made us on their small printer in the corner of the basement. The printer was connected to a very big computer that trapped others bills for a long time. We could see them in there, but they couldn't get out until the humans would print them off.

My brothers and I all had the same name, C50054215D, and everything else on us was exactly the same too. It was great to have so many bills just like me to enjoy. Anytime I needed a friend, I could just call on one of my identical brothers. Whenever we were together we had fun, we were exactly alike in every way. We all thought something about being exactly the same just wasn't right, but none of us could put a corner on it.

After many days and nights of being in that cold basement, my brothers and I were picked off the pile to be cut apart. They laid us on the cold, wooden chopping block, and then this large metal arm came down and cut us into pieces. We were sliced and separated from each other. It took only minutes, but it felt like hours. We were now alone and on our own for the rest of our lives. We were finally put in a safe after the minutes of physical and emotional pain. In this so called safe or metal holding cell, as we liked to call it, the humans would store us until they needed some of us and then we would be taken away from everyone else. We never had time to say goodbye and no one knew who would be next to go. They came in and grabbed as many of us as they wanted and off they went with our friends and family members. They would be gone forever and we would only be left with a memory.

When my day came of getting out of that holding cell, I was picked up by the larger of the two humans and hastefully stuck in his black, filthy wallet to stay until I was brought out to be used for buying something. I waited my turn to be spent with the other bills in his wallet. We talked about where all of us had come from, everyone had a different story, but mine was different from all of the rest. I also saw that something was physically different between my paper body and all the other bills' bodies in the wallet. It could have been my paper or even my ink, but I just couldn't tell. They were all very nice and ignored that I was different; we all became friends, except the tens and twenties who thought they were better. All of us in the safe thought that the day we would get out would be amazing and fun, but when my day came I was scared and self-conscious.

My day of being spent finally came on a warm, spring afternoon. The human had gone to

the hardware store to buy a bolt. It was for a lock that he was putting on the door going to the basement, where I was born. I don't know what was down there that he wanted to keep hidden from people, but I didn't have a say in the situation. The total of the bolt with tax came to \$2.31 and the human gave exact change using my friend D46983015E, a quarter, a nickel, one penny from the bottom of his jean's pocket, and me. Finally, my days of waiting to be set free from that old, leather wallet were up, but right when freedom came I was then stuffed in the clerk's register drawer. There I was again with different bills and coins. Again, I had to make new friends. The tens and twenties were still stuck up and not very nice to me since I was the "new bill," and the cents were immature, but after a couple slams of the jerky, metal drawer we became priceless friends. This new group of bills and coins also talked of all of our histories and how we got to be here, again mine was different from all the rest, but they all accepted me.

Almost thirty opening and closings of the register drawer later I was chosen from all the other one dollar bills to go with the man from the hardware store to the bank to exchange me for two rolls of pennies. I was anxious because I didn't know what to expect at the bank. I didn't know if I was going to have to make all new friends again when I was exchanged, or if I would be put in the clerk's drawer and then quickly given to another customer. I just didn't know what was going to happen next.

When the man arrived at the bank with me in his pocket, I was handed to the bank clerk. She took me and before giving him the change and putting me in her drawer she used a strange marker to write on me. I didn't know what was happening, it all felt so wrong for them to just take me and write on me that way. I felt so violated! I had never heard of stories of people doing this to bills when I had talked to other bills. When I looked up at the clerk I could tell from the look on her face that something was wrong. I didn't know what she was so stunned about, but she was quick to call her manager to come and look at me. When he arrived and looked at me he too had that same strange look on his face. He took the same marker and wrote all over me. Now the clerk and her manager both looked stunned. I had no idea what was going on, and before I knew it they had me covered in that magic marker.

I was then taken to a back room and thrown in a sealed bag with other bills that had the same black mark on them. We were all covered in a black mark that showed our shame and embarrassment. Being with these bills was different from all the other times I was thrown in with strange bills. When we began to talk about our histories this time, some of the other's stories were like mine. I finally felt like I belonged with this group. I had no idea what happened to the man from the hardware store, but I prayed that he didn't have to go through the same humiliation I went through of being written all over with a magic marker.

I found out later that the reason we were sealed in a bag all alone and marked with our black line was because we were all counterfeit. We were supposed to turn yellow when they wrote on us but instead we turned black. The other bills and I were taken by truck to a bigger bank, and here we were to be disposed of! I had no clue what was going to happen there for sure, but I knew it was going to hurt.

When all the other counterfeit bills and I arrived at the big bank. All of us were then taken to a very large room and were shredded into small, insignificant pieces; it felt just like when I was separated from my identical brothers. Then the humans brought all of us, I mean, all the pieces of us to a big pot of hot liquid and inside were other pieces of old REAL bills that had just been shredded apart too.

They had come here to be disposed of because they were old and worn. All of us, real and counterfeit, were then pressed out and made into big rolls of paper to be used to make new bills, and these new bills would be REAL.

I was squashed in this tightly wound roll of paper for days. The man who took the rolls of paper and put them in the machines finally came and took our roll. We were put in the third machine and within seconds we were being made into new bills. The machine our roll was put in made twenties, so after my life of shame and punishment, I was lucky enough to be made into a twenty-dollar bill. I am not like all the other twenties I met throughout my counterfeit life. I'll be kind to all bills and coins, and I will not judge other bills just because they are worth less than I am. I hope to teach all twenty dollar bills this lesson so we all have a better reputation and begin treating others better.

I am currently sitting with my nine other brothers waiting to be cut apart. Our time is coming; we are rising higher on the pile of sheets of bills. This time the other bills and I on my sheet are not identical and who knows where each of us will end up.

Rachel Young
Temple Christian High School
Honorable Mention

Better Days Ahead

The silent night sky was full of mystery. It was a clear night and the stars twinkled billions of miles away. The darkness seemed to go on for eternity. The full moon cast an eerie glow, leaving shadows everywhere. Tonight, the moon had a hint of an orange color. Satellites and airplanes would occasionally light up the sky as they passed overhead with their lights flashing red and white. There were even a few falling stars.

Thoughtfully, Drew stared at the dark sky as he thought of his mother. His small, wiry body lay perfectly under the porch rocking chair. His small hands gently stroked the ears of his dog who lay under the chair beside him. Green eyes flecked with brown stared up at the orange moon, and he quietly began to hum a song. He pushed his brown bangs out of his eyes and let the hum turn into words. He smiled, which wrinkled his nose slightly and distorted the freckles that seemed to predominantly reside there. Drew stared silently out into the night and let the words of the song play through his head.

Caspian, the Black Lab, sighed and shifted his weight before relaxing again. Drew put his arm around the dog's neck and stared back out into the night. He came out to the back porch almost every night to sleep ever since his mother had died. He claimed that the sunroom porch still smelled like her. Drew closed his eyes and rested his head against the large dog. Caspian had been a gift to his mother four years before she had died in a riding accident, but was now Drew's companion.

Drew dozed off and on through out the night until Old Man Rooster crowed at six in the morning. Yawning, Drew crawled out from under his mother's rocking chair and stretched. He pulled on his sweatshirt which had been on the floor nearby and stared at the door that led into the house. He bit his lip.

"I guess I won't wake Dad." Drew told the dog. "He's been grumpy to me lately." Turning, he walked out the back porch door with Caspian on his heels. Drew went to the barn and slipped inside through a side door. He didn't bother to turn on the barn lights, but headed down the first aisle to the last stall on the right. He opened the door and sat down on the cold cement floor. Sighing, he closed his eyes and rested his head against the stall wall. This stall had belonged to his mother's horse Cloud, a gray Arabian Quarter horse mare. Drew smiled as he remembered how his mother had loved riding Cloud.

"A beautiful woman on a beautiful horse." His father had said one day when the three of them had gone riding together.

Suddenly, Drew was sidetracked from his thoughts when Caspian began barking.

“Caspian, leave the cats alone.” He called to the dog as he stood and left the empty stall. Caspian sat down on his haunches with a look of innocence on his face. Suddenly, the main barn door slid open and the early morning sunlight raced up the aisle. Michael Burns entered the barn and caught sight of his son. His wide unshaven jaw clenched as he caught sight of the open stall door at the end of the aisle. His deep blue eyes clouded over with pain. Even though it had been six months, the pain was still fresh. Swallowing hard, he ignored his son and headed down the second aisle. Drew chased after him.

“Dad, can I go riding?” He called.

“No.” Michael answered shortly. Drew waited for an explanation, but none was forthcoming.

“Why not?” Drew asked.

“I said no!” Michael exclaimed and slammed his fist against a stall door, rattling the boards. The horse inside whinnied in surprise. Drew flinched and turned, racing out of the barn. Caspian cocked his head and stared curiously at Michael before he turned and followed after Drew. *Caspian. Mary’s dog.* Michael groaned and ran one hand through his thick black hair.

“Oh, Mary,” He moaned. “When will it end?”

As Drew raced across the yard, he turned and headed up the path to the hills. He continued on until he reached the fork in the road. Drew stopped to catch his breath and turned around suddenly when he heard Caspian whining. The black dog stared uncertainly down the path that led to the valley. Drew closed his eyes and tried to stop the tears. His mother had been killed down in the valley. Drew gave Caspian a hug, more to comfort himself than the dog. Wiping away a tear that had begun to trickle down his face, Drew turned right onto the path that continued up to the hills and the dog reluctantly followed him after casting one last glance towards the valley.

Meanwhile, Michael sat in his office amongst the clutter and stared at the picture that hung on the wall. It had been taken at his mother’s house almost a year ago. Drew was wading in the pond, tossing bread crumbs to the ducks. Mary sat on the rocks several feet away, laughing as the ducks splashed her son. Caspian was in the water, hiding behind Drew. Michael smiled. The dog had been afraid of birds ever since Old Man Rooster had chased him out of the henhouse. Michael stood to his feet and walked over to the picture. He took in a deep breath and exhaled slowly, running his fingers through his already disheveled hair. He first stared at Drew and then let his eyes wander to Mary. His wife and son shared many physical features. Drew had his mother’s eyes, hair, and smile. The only thing that Michael had given Drew was his stubbornness. Michael stared at the picture for a long time as he tried to recall little details about Mary. He smiled as he remembered how she looked after she finished baking pies. The entire kitchen, Mary included, was always

covered with a layer of flour. He remembered how she liked to go bareback riding down to the valley to watch the wild horses. Before he could stop his thoughts, he cringed as he remembered the worst day of his life. He remembered Caspian running up the path, barking almost hysterically. The loyal dog had always joined Mary on her trail rides. Michael shuddered and closed his eyes. He remembered riding down to the valley and seeing his wife's crumpled body on the rocks. She had been killed instantly when she was thrown from Cloud. Even if Mary had put a saddle on Cloud, she wouldn't have made it. With her feet in the stirrups, Mary would have been crushed when Cloud went over backwards. Michael shook his head. Mary had been attempting to climb up one of the steeper hills to get a better view of the wild horses, but the ground had been slick from the rain they had received the night before. Once Cloud started to slide, she didn't stand a chance. Michael bit back a sob that threatened to escape. He hadn't seen the horse since the accident. She had probably joined up with the wild horses that wintered in the valley. Michael turned abruptly and left the office. He remembered little about what had happened after that. His mother had come to stay with them for awhile. Michael didn't think that he would have survived that first month if it hadn't been for her. Shaking his head, Michael opened the first stall and went inside to tack up his horse. He had a lot of work to do.

Slowing to a walk, Drew removed his sweatshirt and sat down at the top of the hill. The sun had come out and he was beginning to get warm. Panting, Caspian plopped down in the grass beside him. Drew put his arm around the dog and gave him an affectionate pat.

"You're warm." Drew said absentmindedly. Caspian lowered his head to the ground and sighed. They sat in silence for a few minutes, each one occupied with his own thoughts.

"We should go down to the river." Drew said and stood to his feet. "You'd enjoy a swim."

Taking off down the hill, Drew headed through a small thicket of trees and emerged onto the bank of the river. The river was always full this time of year as the snow from the mountains slowly melted. It had overflowed the banks slightly, making it almost forty feet across, but it was not moving as fast as it did at the end of spring. Drew watched in fascination as a large tree branch floated by. Suddenly, Caspian barked, leaped into the water, and swam across to the other side. Drew saw a startled rabbit take off through the brush.

"Caspian!" Drew called. "Come back, Caspian! Wait for me!" Drew eyed the river. He hadn't been down here since his mother had died. She had taught him to swim, and they used to come down to the river quite often when the weather was nice. There was even a place upstream where she had built a small bridge so that they could get to the other side when they didn't want to get wet. Because of the melting snow, it was underwater now. It was only two feet wide, but usually Drew had no trouble crossing it. He sat down and removed his boots and socks and rolled up the pant legs on his overalls. Walking upstream, he carefully stepped on the stump that marked where the bridge started and stared into the water. Jumping off the stump, Drew gasped as the water rose up past his knees. He dug his toes into the stones. He'd forgotten how cold the river was this early in the spring.

“Caspian!” He called. “Wait for me!” He stuck his hands out to the side to maintain his balance, wishing that his mother had taken the time to add a railing to the bridge. Drew pushed forward through the water. After he was halfway across, the dog appeared on the bank and barked in reply.

Relieved, Drew continued wading toward Caspian. His eyes darted from the dog to the water and back to the dog.

“Stay there, boy.” Drew called and took another step. Being contrary, Caspian leaped into the water. Clearly enjoying himself, Caspian swam around in circles before he climbed out on the other side. Drew watched the dog get out of the water and shake. With a sigh, he turned around and headed back. Suddenly, Caspian gave a warning growl and began barking. Drew looked around in surprise. A large tree branch was drifting downstream right towards him. With a yelp, Drew tried to get out of the way, but the branch caught him and he lost his balance and fell into the river. Drew rose to the surface, gasping for air. Caspian raced along the riverbank, barking at him.

“Help!” Drew screamed before he went underwater again. He came up coughing and waving his hands wildly. Suddenly, he felt a large object to his right. Drew grasped Caspian’s collar and let the dog pull him out of the water. Coughing, Drew crawled away from the river and collapsed. Whining, Caspian licked Drew’s face as he lay shaking on the ground. He barked and pushed against Drew with his head, but Drew wouldn’t get up.

Absentmindedly, Michael rested his hand on the neck of his horse and gave him a pat. A light breeze countered the sun’s warming rays, making it an ideal day to be outside. Taking off his Stetson, Michael rested his hand on the pommel and ran his fingers through his hair, enjoying the coolness of the air. He was looking forward to going out to check on the herd. He needed to see if they had any hay left. It was almost time to bring them in on a cattle drive. He smiled as Granite pulled at the bit. Michael was eager to get going too. A brisk ride always cleared his mind. Placing his Stetson back on his head, Michael wheeled his horse around. Suddenly, Caspian appeared at the fork in the road, barking furiously. Granite swerved in surprise and almost unseated his rider, but Michael pulled him up short.

As the wet dog stood there barking at him, he had a flashback to when Caspian had done the exact same thing when Mary had been killed.

“Oh, no.” He whispered under his breath as he took off after Caspian. Michael’s mind ran through half a dozen things that could have happened to his son. Caspian raced back to Drew, who by this time was sitting up and leaning against a tree.

“Andrew!” Michael cried as soon as he saw his son. He leaped off his horse and picked him up, hugging him to his chest.

“Drew, you’re freezing!” He cried as he set him down. Michael took off his jacket and

wrapped it around him.

“Are you okay? What happened? Why’d you come down here?” Michael questioned him.

“The river reminds me of Mom.” He said quietly through chattering teeth. Michael picked Drew up again and held him close.

“I thought I’d lost you.” He said. “I’d never have forgiven myself.” Michael stared at the river and realized how close he had come to losing his son.

“You remind me of your Mom, you know.” Michael said quietly.

“Really?” Drew asked, surprised that his father was willing to talk about his mom. Michael nodded.

“You reminded me of her so I tried to avoid you, but now I see that I was wrong. I should be trying to spend as much time with you as I can, especially since she’s gone. I’m sorry, Drew.”

Suddenly, on the other side of the river a small band of wild horses came out of the woods. In the middle of the group was a small gray mare. She lowered her head to drink.

“Cloud.” Drew said quietly. The mare raised her head quickly, water dripping from her muzzle. Pricked ears focused on them and she nickered quietly before turning and disappearing into the woods again. “You know, I don’t think Mom really left us after all.” Drew said quietly and rested his head on his father’s shoulder.

“Maybe so.” Michael said. “Maybe so.”

.



05/05