

CREATING SPACES

2016

**A collection of the winning writings of the 2016 writing
competition entitled *Creating Spaces: Giving Voice to the
Youth of Southwest and West Central Minnesota***

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Note to Readers: Some of the works in *Creating Spaces* may not be appropriate for a younger reading audience.

CONTENTS

GRADES 3 & 4

Poetry

Matthew Johansson	<i>Seasons</i>	11
Myah Johnson	<i>Ocean</i>	12
Brenna Wordes	<i>Ice is Nice</i>	13

Fiction

Muhammad Dhanani	<i>The Monkeys</i>	17
Alison Sarsland	<i>The Adventures of Kaly the Cat</i>	19
Sam Petersen	<i>Adventures from the Great Mind</i>	24

GRADES 5 & 6

Poetry

Logan Steinle	<i>Aurora Borealis</i>	29
Julia Nilles	<i>My Place</i>	30
Dayton Johnson	<i>A Poem for a Friend</i>	31

Fiction

Jennifer Fischer	<i>The Haunted Library</i>	35
Malachi Elmhorst	<i>The (Hilarious) Blunders of Pho B.</i>	40
Chloe Klassen	<i>Princess and the Carpenter</i>	44

Nonfiction

Isabelle Cordes	<i>Tohoku Tsunami and Earthquake</i>	51
Ciera Tutt	<i>I Believe in You</i>	53
Sophie Larson	<i>Black Hills</i>	55

GRADES 7 & 8

Poetry

Connor Solsrud	<i>Fall Breeze</i>	59
Samantha Jones	<i>Break the Wall</i>	60
Emma Petersen	<i>The Deer</i>	61

Fiction

Whitney Wordes	<i>Cleopatra, the Silver Leopard that Carried the Stars in her Fur</i>	65
Allyson Straub	<i>Faith of a Maiden</i>	68
Eleanor Schmitz	<i>A "Tail" of Two Friends</i>	73

Nonfiction		
Stella Depuydt	<i>Rain</i>	79
Molly Fischer	<i>Just Keep Swimming</i>	84
Marissa Marxhausen	<i>Zippel Bay</i>	87
GRADES 9 & 10		
Poetry		
Taylor Wolthuizen	<i>Columbines</i>	93
Cora Engels	<i>Sunbeam</i>	94
Taryn Bedow	<i>Addison</i>	95
Fiction		
Davis Moore	<i>The City of Treasure</i>	99
Rachel Sajban	<i>Maze of Life</i>	107
Rachel Engels	<i>The Wonderful Story of Two Lovely Aliens from Mars</i>	110
GRADES 11 & 12		
Poetry		
Madeleine Kennedy	<i>Burdened Soles</i>	115
James Hamm	<i>Growth of a Scientist</i>	116
Allison Wordes	<i>Awakening</i>	117
Fiction		
Abby Traxler	<i>Waterless Fish</i>	121
Abby Traxler	<i>A Step Out of Monochrome</i>	130
Melissa Lohrenz	<i>Love in a Coffee Shop</i>	136
Nonfiction		
James Hamm	<i>The Novel of Life</i>	141
Jackson Oltmans	<i>Training for Life</i>	143
Allison Wordes	<i>A Story of Clara Barton</i>	146
The History of the Annual Creative Writing Contest		149
Acknowledgments		151

POETRY
Grades 3 & 4

**Matthew Johansson
Hutchinson, MN
1st Place**

Seasons

Winter is here,
It's the first.
Fire is crackling,
It's not the worst.

Spring is here,
The birds are singing.
See the animals waking,
And the wind is softly whistling.

The sun is shining,
Summer is here.
It's warm and sunny,
Let's give a cheer.

Fall is here,
Leaves are falling.
We jump in the leaves,
Then we start raking.

Myah Johnson
Willmar, MN
2nd Place

Ocean

The Ocean.
Fresh as it can be.
The Ocean.
It's beautiful breeze.
The wind makes its waves crash onto the shore,
It's beautiful, but that's just my opinion.
Out my window, surfers are riding the waves.
They start calm, and then get harsher.
I wish I could see more,
So I go out and get some fresh air.
Then I see more surfers riding tough waves over there.
As I watch, I think of our beautiful world, and how lucky we are
To be in it.

Brenna Wordes
Renville, MN
3rd Place

Ice is Nice

Blue and white is all so nice and wise
So smooth and hard like a stone
Song of a whistling bird
Sparkly cold water floats to streams of beauty
So sweet and sparkly, and whistles away
Blue and white glistening, icy water everywhere

FICTION
Grades 3 & 4

Muhammad Dhanani
Hutchinson, MN
1st Place

The Monkeys

One bright and sunny day, dozens of very active tall black haired 14-16 year old monkeys were being sent to a special reserve in Nairobi, Kenya. They were being sent because monkeys were becoming extinct in Nairobi. So they were put on the plane to Nairobi. The monkeys were so scared of the plane ride because the plane was so, so cold and their ears were hurting.

After the plane the monkeys were on landed in Madagascar, the monkeys would be put on a different plane to Nairobi. Finally the plane landed in Madagascar's capital city of Antananarivo.

When the monkeys were being taken off of the plane, nobody was looking and one of the smarter monkeys found that the lock holding the cage was broken. So he gave all his might and kicked the cage door as hard as he could he used it like a battering ram. The big door gave a big WAM! So the monkeys poured out of the cage like water, except it was black and hairy. At some point, the people at the airport noticed that monkeys were running on the runway. Some people thought the airport was under attack, so somebody on a speaker had to calm the people: "The airport is not under attack."

Some of the monkeys noticed that a plane was coming in for a landing on one of the runways, so the monkeys squealed and ran onto the next runway. By that time, the airport had called animal control officers and they were just arriving. They were big men holding big rifle tranquilizer dart guns and around their shoulder to waist was a huge strip of bullets. The monkeys charged right into the officers and the officers just fell over like Styrofoam cups.

The monkeys headed to the water and swam, swam, swam until they found an island. There was a sign on the island that said, "Caution Hazardous Gases" with a biohazard symbol, but the monkeys could not read so they made their best guess. They thought it said, "Good Hospitality Home." But the monkeys were sadly mistaken as they inhaled the harsh fumes.

All of a sudden, one monkey fainted, then another and another. Then all of them fainted.

When the monkeys woke up, they ran extremely fast to a different part of the island, and again they found a sign. This one

said, "Human Homes." One of the monkeys knew how to spell human, and he knew that humans try to shoot them with those rifle like guns. So he translated that humans are the big enemies now. Right then, one of the monkeys saw a person, and they found big sticks and big rocks and charged! The humans were dark colored, black haired, tall and skinny men.

The monkeys were at a disadvantage since the humans had big pistols in hand, but the monkeys would not go down without a fight. The humans shot with guns; the monkeys hit with sticks. After two hours of cold blooded war, the monkeys had finally won. The monkeys had taken down all of the men and suffered only minor injuries. The monkeys partied all day and night for three days. Now all the monkeys had more artillery and armor so they could defend themselves from enemies such as military, S.W.A.T. and other people that were against the monkeys. So whenever some kind of enemy tried to strike, the monkeys would always win. They had no allies to partner with; they were all alone and were their own big tribe.

While the monkeys were fighting the humans, one of the humans had called in some kind of big combat force. When the Special Forces took boats to the island, they saw all the human carcasses. One of the men even fainted from the horrendous stench the carcasses were letting out. The Special Forces finally found the camp where the monkeys lived.

The monkeys had seen the Special Forces roll in, so they screamed like big banshees. Then the monkeys attacked the forces with the guns that the other humans had. The monkeys were shooting, and so were the humans. The monkeys were winning. Then the humans were winning the big battle. The monkeys had no chance after the humans were winning. So the battle went on for three hours straight. Finally, the forces won and the monkeys were all eliminated and done for. So the humans never had any more problems with the monkeys, and the monkey camp became part of a museum.

Alison Sarsland
New London, MN
2nd Place

The Adventures of Kaly the Cat

Chapter One: A New Kitten

One day we went to our Grandma's and Grandpa's camper for deer hunting. Who came was my crazy and disgusting brother named Troy, my sweet and nice but crazy Mom and I all rode in an awesome limo. When we got there, we stayed there two days. Mommy got a buck. She was the first one to get something.

When it was time to go, we went to my Aunt's farm that's only ten minutes away. My mom, brother and I walked out to the barn. My uncle yelled, "Here kitty, kitty!" and here came two cute kittens running. They ran right up to me and started purring. We saw one of the little kittens run into the barn and came out with a big mouse! She was white with orange patches. When we picked her up, she was the fattest cutest little thing. She was so nice, friendly, and cuddly, (and a bit shy) that mom couldn't say no.

After a bit we had to go home, and we got to take the kitty, too! Did I mention it's two hours to our house? That was a *LONG*, *LONG* way home, even in a limo! We stopped at the *DQ*, and our kitten wanted our fries! She would sit on the fast food bags until I snuck one to her. After a while it got annoying, and I handed her to my brother.

When we stopped for gas, we looked through the window, and there was that fluff ball watching us from the dash board inside the limo. She was wondering what we were doing. After we got going again, the kitten was wide awake, but I was not, at all. I wanted to take a nap so bad, but whenever I tried taking a little snooze, she would come up with her wet nose and get me good.

When we were two miles from our home, the kitten finally fell asleep.

Chapter Two: Dad Saw the Kitten

I have forgotten to tell you Dad stayed home hunting with Grandpa. When I called to Dad from the limo, the kitten meowed the longest, loudest meow. It was supposed to be a surprise for Dad, but she blew it! When we did get home, Dad was shocked that we actually, truly had one. He thought we were just faking it.

Dad wasn't too crazy about the new kitten, because we already have three other cats that are fat, lazy, not cuddly, and not friendly. We just keep them around for getting the mice once in a while. They stay outside, because Mom hates cleaning up after them. But after that little kitten crawled up on Dad's lap, he just fell in love with it.

Dad asked, "What's its name?"

We told him we don't have one yet; we are waiting for you. He came up with a bunch of boy names, such as Sea Bass, Skid Mark the Transformer, John, or Jeffrey. Then I got worried and thought maybe I should have picked out the name myself. My little brother wanted to name her Batman, Spider Man, or Hulk. I was like, "No, no, no, no, no!" Then Mom came up with a few horrible, just plain names. So, it was up to me. I had a bunch of other names in mind, such as Hannah, Jenny, and a million others, but I finally came up with Kaly. It fit so good!

I picked her up and carried her around over my head, shouting "Her name is Kaly! Kaly! Kaly!" When I called her name, "Kaly!" she looked at me in confusion but meowed. Her meow seemed to say, "It's awesome! It's the best name ever." Now we had a name for her.

Chapter Three: Trying to Give Kaly a Bath

So in Chapter 1 you notice that Kaly was on a farm, and farms are dirty, and smelly! Well...SHE WAS DIRTY!!!!!! AND SMELLY!!!!!! If she wanted to stay in this house, Mom said she had to get cleaned up. So I tried giving her a bath.

SHE HATED IT!! Kaly hissed at me, but P.U. she stunk! I needed some help, so I called for Dad. He came to the rescue. We gave her a bath with a little bit of bubbles. We scrubbed her from her pink little nose to the tip of her tail. After her bath, she smelled way, way, WAY better. Even though we think she smells better, whenever she hears water running in the bathroom, she *RUNS* for her life. She must prefer to smell like men's odor after the gym rather than the perfect smell of girls.

We learned that after a kitten gets a bath, they get full of energy! The next day she was CRAZY!!!!!! She climbed on the couch! She kept on spilling her water! She was climbing on our heads!! She started digging a hole in the couch by scratching and ripping and tearing. She wanted to jump on the kitchen chairs, so she backed up and ran—and doinked her head! She tried to be Superman, but she ended up being a fat cat and just dropped to the floor.

After a while it got quiet. We got nervous, so we started looking for her. We tried to find her. We were looking in the house, top to bottom, behind the couches, in my room; we searched everywhere! We even moved my bed! We moved Mom's bed! That was hard to do, and she wasn't there. I gave up, so I went to my room and grabbed one of my stuffed animals. When I grabbed one, I felt something furry and it meowed! I jumped back! There Kaly was, just smiling, half asleep.

Chapter Four: The Mouse Fight

The first night was horrible! She meowed and scratched and hissed! It kept Daddy up until twelve o'clock midnight. It kept me up for school. It was just awful! So she went in the bathroom where nobody could hear her. It was peace and quiet. Until one night we heard really loud meowing, really loud hissing, things falling, and Kaly sliding. We ignored it because we thought she was just playing with her fake toy mouse. We just put our pillows over our ears and ignored it.

The next morning, I was tired, exhausted. It was Friday, so I was happy. But I was so tired, my eyes were just burning; my arms were so tired they couldn't even lift. They were just dragging. Whenever my Mom called my name, I just whispered, "no...." and pulled my blankets up tighter. My mom thought I was getting ready for school, but I had fallen back to sleep. When she finally came in to say, "Your ride's almost here," I was just snoring away. Mom's face got a little red, and she helped me to the bathroom so I could get ready super-fast. She brushed my hair so fast that all the tangles pulled. Then Mom looked down and said, "You're still in your pajamas! You can't go to school in your pajamas! Hurry up or you're grounded for a week!" She pointed to my room and said, "Go!" So I went into fast gear.

As I was leaving, I went to say goodbye to Kaly, and I noticed she had something weird in her mouth. So I looked a lot closer, and there was a real mouse in her mouth! I screamed!! I about fainted. I got out of there as fast as I could. Dad came to the rescue, and flushed the dead mouse down the toilet.

Then my ride to school came, and I was HAPPY to not see that mouse again.

Chapter Five: The Snow Monster

A few days ago, when we still had sticky snow, we made a friendly looking snowman. It was HUGE. He had a hat, scarf, gloves, buttons, a carrot nose, eyes made out of rocks, and hair made

out of a wig I had from Halloween. So when it snowed, and the snow was fluffy, we wanted to bring Kaly outside for the very first time. Troy, Mom, Dad and I put our snow gear on. After we were ready, we grabbed Kaly and headed outside.

We brought her towards the friendly looking snowman. Kaly was terrified of it. Her tail got all poofy; she arched her back and hissed the biggest hiss she could. She poked at it—just a tiny little tiny poke at the giant snowman, and ran off as fast as she could. When she ran off, she ran in the direction of our three other cats.

If you remember, those cats HATE *Kaly*!! They growled and hissed at her, so Kaly ran back towards the snowman. She ran back and forth between the two, back and forth, back and forth. Finally, when I caught her, she was totally exhausted.

I brought her to the back yard. I set her back down. Just then a snow flake landed on her nose. She rolled over in the snow, onto her back. It was so cute! Kaly made her own snow angel! She was eating the snow. Then she started to shiver. Even her tail was shivering! So we went back inside. Mom made us hot cocoa with marshmallows. Then it was time for a nap. Kaly curled up with me in my lap and we fell asleep together.

Chapter Six: Rise and Shine

One night, at 2:00 in the morning, Kaly was up and at ‘em. However, I was not. Kaly wanted me to play with her, so.... She wrestled tangles in my hair, stuffed her whiskers up my nose, rubbed her wet nose all over my face, and bit my finger! I had to go play with her, so I brought her to the couch and wrestled a while.

Whenever I tried taking a little snooze, she would come and jump on me again. Finally, about two hours later, we came up with a terribly wicked idea: we ran and jumped on Mom and Dad’s bed. They said, “Dude! It’s 4:00 in the morning! Go back to bed!” I then put Kaly on their bed, shut the door and ran back to my bed. They did not appreciate that, but I had the best sleep of my life!

Chapter Seven: Kaly Turns One

Oh boy! Oh, man! Kaly turns one! She invited three friends over, and those kittens were everywhere in the house! Some wore tutus and sunglasses; some wore a head band and bows—anything you could think of. We had a fish cake for her with one little tiny chicken bone on top for a candle.

Those kittens were so busy! They were climbing the curtains, playing tag, jumping from couch to couch, and staring at my pet fish! They acted like they all drank a can of pop! They even jumped

on our old dog, Duke. Duke just wanted to gobble one up, but he was a good doggie. When I tried to lay down on the couch to take a rest, they each took a turn pouncing on me. Then they found the balloons, and every once in a while you would hear a loud, "Pop!" One of the kitties pounced on the balloon.

Presents! Awesome! Later she opened her presents. One gift was a robot mouse. Kaly LOVED that thing! Another friend gave her a car and matching sunglasses. Finally, the last shy kitten gave a little fuzzy ball she could claw and chew one. One friend would kick it, and they would all go chasing after it.

Next, they turned on the music and danced. They did the limbo. And finally they tried singing, but that just turned into a meowing contest to see who could meow the longest. That got annoying pretty fast. Eventually they wore themselves out, and one by one they climbed up into my bed, curled up into little balls, and took a nap.

Then it was time for them to go. Each one gave a little goodbye meow on their way out. That was the greatest year that we had with Kaly.

**Sam Petersen
Marshall, MN
3rd Place**

Adventures from the Great Mind

Once upon a time there was a 12 year old boy named Advar and his best friend, Saluna. They had been best friends since they were little. Their favorite thing to do together was to play in the barn on Advar's family's farm in Nebraska. They were playing in the barn one warm afternoon swinging on the rope swing and laughing loudly when suddenly, without warning, a tornado hit the barn and the kids. The kids were buried under the rubble of the broken barn.

Both knocked unconscious, Advar and Saluna woke up in a mysterious forest filled with willow trees. They were confused about how they got there. Then a human-sized eagle swept in and began to talk! Advar and Saluna were scared.

"I need your help. There is an ancient book called the *Mind Book* and it is filled with ancient secrets," said the eagle in a powerful voice. "It was meant to be used for good but if the Great Dragon finds it first, he will use it for evil. If you want to save the world, you must find the book before the dragon is released from the bottomless pit."

"Where do we find the *Mind Book*?" they asked.

"Here is a riddle to help you find your way: *When you find yourself in the desert heat, find the bell that rings of peace.*" And he added, "With the last clue, take 62 steps to the temple of stone to find the *Mind Book* in its home." Before they could ask any questions, the eagle flew away and the kids woke up to find themselves back in the rubble of the broken barn.

Right when they woke, Advar's parents rushed into the barn to find the kids who were badly hurt. Advar's mom stayed close to the children while his dad called the ambulance for help. He then called Saluna's parents to come quickly. As soon as Saluna's parents arrived, the kids were being loaded into the back of an ambulance. They were hurting so bad that they both passed out from the pain.

In an instant they found themselves back in the fantasy mind world wandering around the desert just like the eagle had told them. They got so hot from the sun beating down on them that they had to find camels to bring them to water. They rode the camels to the Nile River and walked along it as they searched for their first clue. They

saw a traveling salesman selling clay pots and asked if he knew what the clue meant. He knew the area well!

“I will take you there,” the salesman said to them.

He took them to Mount Sinai where Moses from the Bible found the Ten Commandments, and he left them there to explore a while. They came upon an old church built into the mountainside. They climbed the stairs of the bell tower only to find a bell with an inscription that read: “Peace on earth; goodwill to men.”

“The bell that rings of peace!” shouted Saluna.

“Look for the clue,” said Advar.

Inside the bell they found a carved message which said, “Follow what the eagle said. It will lead to the lion with the human head.”

Moments later, they woke up in the hospital and Advar’s mom said, “Are you okay, Sweetie? What are you feeling?”

Advar replied, “It hurts really bad, mom.”

His mom said, “You need your rest; lay back down and try to sleep.”

It wasn’t long until Advar was fast asleep. Again they awoke in the mind world.

Advar and Saluna looked around to figure out where they were. They saw the sphinx from a distance away and ran up to it.

“A lion with a human head!” cried Saluna.

Once they were directly in front of it, they took 62 steps like the eagle told them and found themselves in front of the pyramid temple of stone. They climbed the steep pyramid wall until they reached the top where they found the temple entrance. Saluna shook with fear because she was scared of heights and of the unknown (creepy sound effects here). Advar bravely took her hand and led her down the stairs to the inner chamber of the pyramid temple. They saw the *Mind Book* in a big empty room sitting closed on a pedestal.

“There it is!” said Advar.

The two friends ran toward the *Mind Book* but before they could reach it, the floor began to crumble beneath them. As the floor collapsed, Advar started to fall into the hole but grabbed onto the edge and held on tightly. Saluna tried to rescue him from above, but she was frozen with fear. Just then the great dragon flew out of the pit just as the eagle had warned would happen. When the dragon came up out of the bottomless pit, the eagle flew through the top of the temple pyramid and snatched Advar up and placed him safely next to Saluna. The eagle began to fight the great dragon. The dragon was breathing his red hot flames at the eagle. The eagle

fought back with sharp claws. They continued this bloody fight while the kids watched from below. The great dragon demanded that the eagle hand over the *Mind Book*. The eagle would not give in, so the dragon breathed fire down on the eagle who was badly burned and near death. With his last breath the eagle pushed the Great Dragon into the bottomless pit never to be seen again. The children rushed around the rim of the bottomless pit to the pedestal where the *Mind Book* rested. Advar reached out and snatched up the *Mind Book*.

He was instantly transported back to his hospital room with his parents by his side and Saluna in the hospital bed next to him. He began to remember all that had happened.

“It must have been a dream,” he thought. Just then he looked down and saw an ancient book still grasped tightly in his hand.

“What’s that in your hand?” his mom asked with a funny look on her face.

“You wouldn’t believe it if I told you,” said Advar.

“I might understand more than you think,” said his mom.

Advar told of the eagle and the Great Dragon and the desert and the Nile and most of all of the old book they had found.

“The *Mind Book*!” said Advar’s parents in unison, looking at each other in shock.

“How did you know?” said Advar.

With that, his parents began to tell Advar and Saluna of their own adventures with the *Mind Book*, and the kids realized that their adventure into a world of ancient secrets had just begun.

POETRY
Grades 5 & 6

Logan Steinle
Hadley, MN
1st Place

Aurora Borealis

As the Sun sleeps,
electrons battle gas in the sky,
then finish by decorating the night with
a palette of vivid greens, blues, and purples.

The curtain of hues echoes off the still water
as if there was a mirror on the ground,
and showing spotless symmetry.
Awaiting to the eye.

The painting
cracks the atmosphere
like a flashlight piercing through
darkness. The rainbow of the night sky.

The beacon illuminates, glows, and
shines, then starts to disappear.
The Sun has awakened.

Julia Nilles
Ruthton, MN
2nd Place

My Place

Out in the sun, I see a little spot,
To hide away, out of the hot.
The grass is very green,
And there is a little bird in a nest, being weaned.
A small, crude building in the corner,
Shows that someone has been here before.
The canopy of trees, all green and bright,
Gives me shade, a cool delight.
A little calf and its mother,
And there, beside them, hides another.
A nice hammock, up in the leaves,
So I go to lie in it, climbing the trees.
A few patches of light shower down from above,
Shining onto a branch with a peaceful dove.
I hate to leave this place alone,
But I push away my thought, and hurry home.

Dayton Johnson
Hadley, MN
3rd Place

A Poem for a Friend

A spindly peach tree, in a pink leafy gown,
With swaying fruit, fresh and whole,
Holds her slender hands up to pray.

Against her healing bark, a young red-crowned crane
nestles in the lush grass,
And rests. She knows hope breathes with the wind,
And leaves with it too.

A poet of many years, kind and wise,
Places a gentle hand against her olive skin,
And smiles contently.
Gently kneeling beside the bird.

Against a stone, he laid a scroll.
Within' the scroll, held a poem,
Which spoke of the tree's immortality,
And of the lovely crane's luck and fidelity.

Then with enlightenment, he flew.

FICTION
Grades 5 & 6

**Jennifer Fischer
Hutchinson, MN
1st Place**

The Haunted Library

ONE

It was that chilly day of September when Henry and I found the craziest thing—an *interesting* library.

Wait. We're not to that part of the story yet...

Hi. I'm Jack. I live in Minnesota. Yes, the state that's "so cold." I spent my summer inside—because it was so *hot*. Anyway, it was a regular day at school. Disgusting "lunches" of meatloaf and re-re-refried beans, boring math homework too hard for a computer, graphic organizers for reading (how I *hate* graphic organizers!), and dodgeball for gym. Just the usual. Just the perfect time to get some *real* fun into our day. And nothing's more fun than exploring! NOT!!!

I'm not the one who got us into that mess. It was my new school buddy, Henry, the only student in the school who wasn't bothered by my hideous birthmark. I was a new kid then, so I had no friends whatsoever. I don't care if he snuck his trash-talking parakeet Irene to school every day. He was a good friend, and that's all that matters.

It was this guy who found the library. We were walking down our usual school route home. Irene was chattering to her invisible friend. We were walking past the "creepy street" when he said he wanted to have some "fun." He turned around and walked backwards towards the "creepy street" and looked for a way to cause some major mischief. He looked around and found a big chain link fence that had a sign stating "KEEP OUT!" on it. Apparently this was like moths to a flame to Henry, because before I could say "NO!" he was up and over it.

And, being a good friend, I followed him.

That's where and when we found it.

It was a boarded-up gray building. Just your average creepy, abandoned old building, the kind little children would tell stories about on Halloween. A sign with faded, illegible words hung from one hinge. Henry had already gone ahead of me, and I dashed inside. Grumpy-looking, he trudged back out.

“There aren’t any zombies in there,” he said disdainfully. “It’s boring in there.”

“Are you kidding?” I just about screamed at him. “There might be some really good books in there! I know it’s a library. But since we’re here, we might as well look around.”

The library looked haunted, the kind you would see in a horror movie. I sneezed because of the dust all over the place. I continued on. Exploring the library, I scanned the dusty shelves. I spotted a strange book: *The Day the Penguins Attacked New York*. The cover was very graphic, and it showed a group of chinstrap penguins climbing up the Statue of Liberty. I stared, puzzled. I had never seen it before, and I had read many books in my life. There was no author on the spine of the book, or anywhere else. I opened it up for a quick sneak peek. Except I swear I heard a squawk.... To my complete surprise, a penguin jumped out of the book and onto me! I was knocked onto the floor, hard! I don’t know how. The library *must* be haunted. Books aren’t made to have characters jump out and attack you.

Henry flew over. “Cool!” he yelled down at me. “An actual, real live penguin!”

I struggled with the penguin pecking at my face. I finally got ahold of him.

Henry laughed. “I’m gonna tell *all* of my friends that a cute little penguin *hurt* you! You’re hilarious.”

“Yeah, yeah. HILARIOUS.” I had little peck marks on my cheeks. What a little brat that penguin had been! “What should I do with this little monster?” I asked, rising to my feet.

“Keep him!” Irene squaked.

“Hahahaha!” Henry laughed. “Isn’t Irene such a cute, funny little cockatoo? Yes you are! What a sweet, funny little birdie!”

While Henry played with his stupid parrot, I investigated the book. It was still open, sprawled out on the ground. I touched the smooth pages. They were papery and flimsy, like any regular book at a regular library. I watched as the penguin screeched at me, then jumped onto the pages and disappeared. I guess that the books here would have characters that come to life as you open them. I closed it shut. It made a *snap* sound. I placed it back on the shelf and looked around the library for any explanation. I then spotted one of my favorite books, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. I had to see this one! It was number ten in the series. Flipping open to the first page, I spotted nothing unusual. I read the whole thing without even remembering that we would be in deep poop if we didn’t get home. I urged Henry to stop looking for zombies and get home.

“All RIGHT!” he said. “We’ll come back tomorrow and look for zombies again. Then we can play here, adopt a pet penguin, and hurry on home. Then we’ll play video games until we fall asleep. It’ll be loads of fun!”

“WHAT?”

“Yeah! We’ll find a zombie and be world famous.”

I sighed. Sometimes my friend was such a ding-dong. “Let’s just get moving. I’ve got a major science test to study for. I want a good grade, and my parents have very high expectations for me. I CANNOT FAIL!”

So we moved on, unaware that Irene had opened up a book on dinosaurs.

TWO

School was great. I aced the science test. However, my parents were super mad at me for being late. I didn’t dare tell them about the penguin, the library, or that Henry brought Irene to school again. I told Mom that I played outside awhile, but she didn’t buy it because I rarely ever play outside. I therefore was on a 2-week suspension from playing with Henry. That was okay, because I did not want to go *near* the library as long as I lived.

But as I walked by the dark, shadowy road that Henry and I called “creepy street,” I remembered the strange library and wondered about its secrets. The strange books and cobwebbed walls made it all too tempting for me.

I climbed the fence. As I neared the library, I was about to open the dusty door when I heard a panicking voice from inside the building. Then another. The voices were followed by a bloodcurdling scream! It sounded like Henry’s! I had to go inside and see if he was in trouble.

As I flew through the doors, they somehow slammed shut, and *locked themselves*.

Now, that was just plain terrifying!

Slowly tiptoeing inside, I saw something that almost made my eyes pop out of my skull. It was a dinosaur! A raptor with large teeth and a green, scaly pattern on its back was sneaking toward Henry! I then saw a whole pack, surrounding him on all sides. The book lay flat on the floor. It was not far from me, but it was between me... and the raptors.

Approaching the reptiles, I bent down and grabbed the book. It was, obviously, about dinosaurs. It was another no-author book. A glossy green raptor was sprawled across the cover. Maybe it had

caused the raptors to appear. These books were deadly. I now knew that for a fact.

When I rose to my feet, I saw myself face-to-face with one of the scaly beasts. I grabbed the book and was about to yank it open when a raptor's tail lashed at the book! It was sprawled out on the floor next to Henry. I didn't dare yell to Henry to open it, fearing that the raptor pack would turn on me. Instead, I headed for the door.

That's when I remembered it was LOCKED.

Henry's screams reached me, and I saw that the raptors were only a few feet away from the place he was standing!

"Open the book!" I shouted.

He hesitated, and decided not to, maybe because that's how he got here in the first place.

"Just do it!" I screamed.

Henry finally listened and boldly tugged it open. A blinding flash filled the library, and when I could see again, the raptors were gone. Just like that!

"Why did you do this?" I demanded.

He defiantly stated, "It was NOT me! I don't even like reading. Or dinosaurs!"

"Then who did this?" I said again.

Then I saw the culprit—dumb ol' Irene.

THREE

When we got home, Irene was on my "Poop List," which was a list of people, animals, places, or things I despised. Like broccoli, my annoying six-year-old cousin named Pete, spiders, and now Irene. Stupid Irene the Parakeet, Maker of Chaos! I sighed. My life was so stressful.

Later that week, I decided to go back to the library one last time. However, when I got there, I saw a whole stinkin' demolition crew about to demolish the old grey building! For some reason, I did not want that old creepy building torn down. There were mysterious secrets in there. Such secrets should not be destroyed, but kept, so I knew I had to save the library. I sprinted down there to put a stop to them.

"Stop!" I yelled, waving my arms up and down. "This library has really good books in it!"

"Back away, kid," a gruff man snapped at me. "The foundation on the building is destroyed. The walls are cracked. The roof is nearly caved in. And I've heard that the books come to LIFE!" He threw his head back and laughed. "I know they're kidding. I'm just

getting rid of them because people are getting paranoid. Now get out! Didn't you see the sign? Keep out or else I'll call the cops!"

I hated being treated this way. I busted the doors open; they were just about disintegrated anyway.

"Hey! You can't do that! We're calling the authorities!" they screamed.

Ignoring them, I snatched a random book off the shelf. Yikes. *The Rabid, Hungry, Bloodthirsty 200-Foot-Tall Easter Bunny*. Sheesh! Were all of this author's books about horrific animals?

I tugged it open and nothing happened. Then a rumble filled the air. The book almost tore into shreds as the terrifying rabbit hopped out. Its face looked like a nuclear accident. Its nose was as big as a bowling ball. Its whiskers had to be at least six feet long each! Its obnoxious pink fur looked like a jungle of tall, grassy weeds.

The construction workers screamed in terror! Unfortunately, this just made the rabbit mad, who chased them around like a mad bull and sat on them. Amazingly, they were unharmed, probably because the rabbit just came out of a small book. After some (a lot) of coaxing, they finally decided not to destroy the deadly (yet amazing) library.

AFTERWORD

I was later invited to the grand opening of the library. The books were studied and did not have any answer to their strangeness. When detectives tried to track down the author, they did not find any clues or evidence. I was thanked many times over for saving the building. It was later used as a museum of the incredible books that summoned evil animals. I still had no clue how or why I saved that forbidden property of doom, but I figured that such mysterious secrets should be protected, forever.

Malachi Elmhorst
Willmar, MN
2nd Place

The (Hilarious) Blunders of Pho B.

Prologue

I'm Pho Barlow, but you can call me Pho. It's sort of funny that I ended up with this name because I'm afraid of everything. Well, I guess not everything, just pillow cases, tree stumps, the color purple (don't ask), black hoodies, large crowds, and old ladies who pretend they think you are their grandchildren (long story.) You may not think that's much, but those are only my least scary fears. But what I'm going to tell you is why these are scary things for me.

Chapter 1: Pillowcases and Stuff

Let's start with the pillowcases. I'm going to give you a little bit of background: I have a dad named Dad, and a mom named Mom. Or at least that's what they told me their names are. Anyways, I also have a big brother named Brian. Now back to you, Pillowcases.

Okay, this chapter (and the rest) makes my brother look stupid, so keep this book under lock and key. Also, I'm small. No, I mean tiny. And Brian? He's a teen of galactic proportions. In muscle. And no, his brain is not one of his big muscles.

My mom has this long pillow that helps with her bad neck. Well, it also has a large pillowcase. Large enough for a certain child who decided to make fun of his brother in front of his girlfriend (cough, me, cough.) And yet, that child was light enough to be stuffed in a closet while in that pillowcase.

It took my mom three hours to find me. No joke. I had a watch. Meanwhile, my brother was watching movies upstairs with his girlfriend. When confronted, he lied and said he had been watching movies all day. And of course, my mom believed him.

Chapter 2: The Attack of the Tree Stumps

When my brother and I weren't fighting, we were actually kind of nice to each other. But he still pranked me occasionally (just like any big brother would.)

One day, we were playing Marco Polo, and he saw a window for entertainment. We have a large property, and we cut down a lot

of trees last fall. So he decided to lead me to where I was facing directly at him, but there was a tree stump right smack in between us. And of course I was blindfolded.

“Marco!” I shouted.

“Polo!” he shouted back. He sounded so close. I ran as fast as I could until I, of course, ran into that tree stump. And what did I get? A broken nose.

Chapter 3: The Color Purple

You know what I’ve noticed about you? You are very nosy, Dear Reader. I thought I told you:

DON’T ASK!

Chapter 4: The Black Hoodie Conspiracy

Okay, this one is probably not going to make any sense to anybody. But bear with me, all right?

On Halloween, my brother decided to emphasize on the “trick” part of the holiday. He dressed in black shoes, black pants, a black mask, and (you guessed it,) a black hoodie. I dressed as a Storm Trooper.

When we went out trick-or-treating, Brian fell back. I didn’t notice at first, because I was having so much fun. It was hard for Brian to get candy because he was walking around like half-size Hulk. But for me, sweet, innocent little Pho, it was something like this:

“Now, what are you dressed up as?”

“I’m a Thorm Twooper. Tan I have thome tandy?”

“Awwwww.”

At this point, they were dumping their goodies into my little bag. Oh, yeah.

Meanwhile, I had walked most of the way home when I realized Brian was missing. Well, he must’ve already been home. Oh well.

I walked up to the front door and almost rang the doorbell when I was attacked. Brian was stealing my candy! I ripped off his mask, but he stopped and smiled wickedly. He scratched his face as hard as he could, drawing blood. He rang the doorbell. My mom opened the door. She gasped when she saw Brian’s face.

He started crying and he said, “Mom! Pho ripped my mask off and scratched me as hard as he could because I said I wouldn’t give him a piece of my candy!”

“Pho Barlow, go up to your room this instant!” Mom replied.

Sometimes I wish I was an only child.

Chapter 5: My History with Large Crowds

You know what? I don't even need to describe this one for you. You can guess that I've gotten lost in a big crowd before. I mean, it would be hard not to, as such a small kid. So, I guess I'll see you in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: The Curse of the Creepy Old Ladies

Okay, one day, my dad decided it was time to visit my grandma at the nursing home (in case you were wondering, her name is Grandma.) Mom, of course, was busy watching romantic comedies. And Brian? These are his exact words: "Um...I have...um...stuff." So Dad singled me out and said, "Hey, Pho. Listen, Grandma's getting really lonely up at the nursing home. So me and you are going to go drop in and say hi. Doesn't that sound great?"

By that, of course, he meant that no matter what I said, I was going with him. So I decided to do the most logical thing I could. I made a run for it. As soon as I could, I slipped out the back door and hid in the car. It was one of those places Dad would never look. But before long, he gave up searching and decided to go visit Grandma on his own. Uh oh. He opened the car door and drove to the nursing home. At first, he didn't notice me. Then, of course, I sneezed. He looked in the mirror and saw me. He had a wicked smile. Just like Brian's.

When we got to the nursing home, we noticed that everybody was acting sort of strange. I guess it was just because they were old people. We were almost to Grandma's room when an old lady saw me and shouted, "Joey!"

She wheeled over to me in her wheelchair and picked me up. This was a strong old lady. I was about to tell her I wasn't her grandson when she grabbed me and wouldn't let go until my dad fished a twenty dollar bill out of his pocket. And what have we learned today, kids? Don't trust creepy old ladies.

Chapter 7: Scary Central

I want to tell you guys about one more fear. It is called coulrophobia. That, Dear Reader, is the fear of clowns.

It all started on a dark, stormy night. My brother told me he had money for tickets to the new amusement park in town. He told me it was indoors and we wouldn't get soaked. It all sounded pretty good to me, so I agreed. When we arrived, I realized why he had been so nice to me. The park was called Scary Central. We walked in and everything was super creepy. But the one thing that freaked

me out was a clown riding on a unicycle while holding a chainsaw in motion, laughing maniacally. I wet my pants. No seriously, I did. I stood there, frozen with fear, until my flying monkey came to the rescue. I hopped on his back and flew home.

I woke up right about then. But I was still afraid of clowns, even if it was just a dream.

Well, it's time for me to go, but that just means next time I'm gonna have to tell you about my fear of red vegetables.

See you later!

Chloe Klassen
Mountain Lake, MN
3rd Place

Princess and the Carpenter

There once was a land far, far away, filled with both light and darkness. Yet neither knew of each other's existence. The light had great joy, while the darkness wallowed in pain. But the two did not know that someday their paths would cross and great chaos and love would enter into their lives and forever change them.

Elena's glamorous physique portrayed her life in the beautiful mountains of Lekkość, where everything was calm and full of wonder. Casimir, however, held his beauty within him, through kindness.

Here is the story of how they met. Elena was born into the royal family of the land of Lekkość. One day an evil warlock king killed the king and queen, and with their dying breath they begged Drakkendor to let their daughter live. Their wisdom had blessed their daughter with unfailing beauty and that same wisdom kept her alive. Drakkendor knew of the king and queen's wisdom and devised a plan to trap the princess, who was the rightful ruler of Lekkość, in a world from which she would never be able to escape. He sent her to the mountains where only elves lived and cursed it in a dome of beauty. Elena lost all of her past memories. Drakkendor also built a sky-high wall covered with lace next to her castle, so that she could never see to the other side, where fear ruled and toil came upon the people.

Casimir was a carpenter's son. He had great charm and was very clever. The people were bound by the evil Drakkendor, and were forbidden to speak of the former light and wonder of the sun. In fact, the memory of light faded from the people. To Casimir it was vague, yet still there. He worked hard for his family and his friends. Everyone had to work hard or the taxes would be raised higher than they already were. Sometimes Drakkendor would raise the taxes ten percent, simply to humor himself.

One day, during an elvish gathering, Elena decided to look around the forbidden attic of the castle, for she wanted to know why it was kept secret from her. She crept up the jeweled stairs. Marvelous furniture filled the attic to the rafters. It was very

organized, but all the designs were odd and dissimilar to the rest of the palace. All of a sudden something shined in her face.

“What was that?” she exclaimed!

There it was again. It startled her. She saw someone. She’d never seen anyone like that before. She tried talking to the girl, but only her lips moved when she did. So Elena decided to be brave and walk up to the girl, who moved at the same time she did, and Elena froze again. She moved again and repeated this cycle for a long time till she realized something powerful.

“I am looking at myself!” she said in awe. It only made sense.

Elena had never known what a mirror was for she had never seen one. Now that she had, she saw herself differently. She did not look like all the other female elves. She knew she was shorter, because she looked up all the time. But her hair and face were all shaped differently. And for the first time in all Elena’s life something felt wrong.

Back in the village, Casimir now owned his father’s business. Working hours were from five in the morning to ten at night. Everyone had to work long and hard, working the same hours for the same pay no matter what they did. Earning five pennies an hour, the people were barely eating. Every night Casimir would run down the tall wall, in the dark all alone, to revive himself before returning home. This is how he trained himself not to carry the weight of the day back to his family.

On a night not quite as dark as the others, Casimir decided to run even further. He wondered if the wall would ever end, and if there was anything different. For he greatly disliked routine.

Casimir was about to give up his hope and return home when something caught his eye. He backtracked and got a glimpse of that something again. It seemed familiar; a memory of light came back to him. He stared directly at this light through the rocks. Practically blinding himself, he stepped back and watched the hole in the wall from afar. It was just a tiny, little thing and he dared not touch it for he feared it would disappear. A strange feeling came over Casimir. He wanted so badly to rip the wall in half. Instead he ran as fast as he could back to the village, crying out to the people of the town, “I have seen a great wonder; come see for yourselves for it is impossible to describe.”

Engaged in Casimir’s wonder, the people eagerly followed hoping for something different.

At this same time Elena had been walking down the mountain, continually asking herself questions of the mirror she had earlier discovered about why she was so different. Nothing had ever

changed before; everything was always the same. She was wafting closer to the curtain when she heard a loud noise. Not knowing where it came from and realizing that it was very faint, she thought it was just her mind playing tricks on her. After all, she was still in shock, she told herself. Suddenly, she heard it again. A loud thud.

“No, my mind is not playing with me.”

She ran to the wall and pushed. The curtain was not as soft as it appeared but hard and solid as if there was something in it. She banged on the wall hoping that whatever was over on the other side would hear her just as she had heard them. She did it a second time, but nothing. Just emptiness. Elena started to contemplate harder. What if there were more “different hers” over there? Whatever she was, she was not an elf. Every day from that day on, at the same time of night, Elena would go to the wall and repeat the same steps. She would listen, pound on the wall, and wait.

After being mocked by the people, because Casimir could not find the light he had seen, he feared the thought of never finding it again. This gave him determination. Casimir was different, he told himself; he still had faith in what he had seen. He knew that there was a better life for him and for the people of the village somewhere, somewhere beyond the wall. He just needed the light again to guide him. So every night on his run he would journey far for hours, searching desperately for the little spec of light. In anger he pounded on the wall, when all of a sudden he heard an echo. Something pounded back.

Elena and Casimir did this for days. Knowing that something was out there and replying to each force upon the wall. By now the two knew where to find each other through the wall, but they still wanted to know who or what it was on the other side. Because of the curse, the wall could not be broken. Elena requested the tallest crane and longest rope from the elves and it was given to her. She climbed to the top and cast the rope over at the time that the two would normally meet. Casimir was there, tugged on the rope and started to climb. The light got brighter as he neared the sky. He got to the top and gazed down at Elena. She was the prettiest thing he had ever seen.

“Are you the one on the other side of the wall?” he asked her.

“That depends on if you are kind, sir,” Elena replied. “What are you?” she asked.

“Why I am just like you, dear maiden, a human from the other side of the wall.”

Every day, before and after his work, Casimir would climb the wall and visit Elena. She now knew about the people and the life

that Casimir lived. And slowly, the two felt deep feelings for each other, and grew to love one another. As soon as there was real love, the curse over the land of Lekkość was broken. The wall crumbled to pieces and Drakkendor lost all of his power. Elena's memories returned, memories of her parents and the position that she held as queen. The sun shone gallantly upon the land and color was revived in the earth. It turns out that Drakkendor had been living for hundreds of years under a spell to keep him at a good age and nothing had ever gone wrong for him before this. As soon as his first spell broke, all others broke as well.

Lekkość was now in its own renovation, getting back on its feet. Queen Elena ruled the land fairly and blessed the people. She gave them their money and families back, and she loved them like a real queen should. Her sweet husband also ruled with kindness, and Casimir and Elena lived happily ever after.

NONFICTION
Grades 5 & 6

Isabelle Cordes
Marshall, MN
1st Place

Tohoku Tsunami and Earthquake

It was March 11, 2011 in Sendai, Japan. It was a beautiful day, almost too beautiful. Luckily it just so happens that my job is to wreck things and today was the perfect day to do it. The people of Sendai were relaxing on the beach having a great time and I just got angry. I have my reasons for being angry—mainly because happy things are my absolute worst nightmare. Anyway, I was mad, and I wanted to teach the town of Sendai a lesson. One of the other times I released my waves was in 1933, and I loved teaching the people a lesson to not be happy. But that time wasn't my best tsunami ever. This time I would do better.

I started out with the earthquake. This didn't worry anyone too much because they had many earthquakes in the past. They started to worry though when I "accidentally" destroyed their airport. Whoops. I'm just kidding; it was totally intentional...and awesome! I made the ceiling collapse and wow those people ran out of there like their lives depended on it (which they did). The ground was shaking like never before. Buildings were either jumping up and down or just collapsing. The city was falling apart, and I hadn't even gotten to the exciting part yet.

Next in my master plan to destroy the city was the tsunami. This is the part that no one was expecting. I started out as a small wave; I didn't want anyone to be onto me. Then I started getting bigger and bigger. That was when people started fleeing. I'm not exaggerating. You could hear their screams from about five miles away. This gave me motivation, so I pushed myself even harder, and soon I was about 40 feet tall. I'm sure I looked pretty intimidating to those other puny little waves. Soon I was spilling on to the streets picking up every car in my sight. I flooded buildings—tore them to bits—started fires, and basically wrecked everything. The more I destroyed the more powerful I became and soon demolished Sendai.

There was a huge amount of wreckage. I destroyed nearly every building. Sure, Sendai doesn't look very pretty anymore, but what about me? My water doesn't even look like water anymore. It is full of house debris, cars, boats, people, trees, planes—you name

it—I bet I have it in my water. Anyway back to the city. It didn't really look like a city after I struck. It was sunny but now it's cloudy and gloomy. You don't see any happiness anymore which I am actually pretty satisfied with considering my dislike for happiness. I was very pleased with my accomplishment, and I believe that I did better than last time.

I am happy that I destroyed everything, but I did not intend for so many people to die. Sendai wasn't too fortunate, and about 15,891 people died (mainly by drowning) and more than 2,500 people are still missing in 2015. Some people are still homeless because I destroyed their houses. A lot of debris has been cleaned up, but much is still laying around, four years after I struck. I really hit it hard, didn't I?

Unfortunately for me, Japan has installed a tsunami warning system. How am I supposed to get past that? Sendai is probably going to be pretty happy that they are safe now. They still need to keep an eye out for me, because I'll come back and they won't even see me coming. This isn't over, Japan.

The lesson to be learned in this story is be happy, but not too happy, if you live by an ocean, because I might come get you at the moment you least expect it.

Ciera Tutt
Balaton, MN
2nd Place

I Believe in You

Karlye, a girl born on December 31, 2003. You would think she would be an ordinary girl. Well, guess what? You are wrong. Karlye has been given a special talent, and that is Gymnastics! Ever since Karlye was a little girl, she had this big dream to go to the Olympics at the age of 16. This is how she is going to make it happen.

“You may be excused Karlye,” said Mrs. Paisley. As Karlye gathered her homework, her mother waits outside to bring her to gymnastics practice. Karlye goes to gymnastics every Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturdays when there are not competitions or holiday breaks. It takes her about an hour and 15 minutes to get to practice, but whatever it takes to get to the Olympics, it is all worth it to her. Today at gymnastics Karlye is working on her floor routine and upper strength. She is on level six, and at the next competition she hopes she goes up a level. You have to be on level ten in order to try out for the Olympics. Karlye knows she has come so far, but still has a way to go.

Competition day is here!

“Karlye!” her mom Carol yells.

“What?” Karlye says.

“It’s time to get up. If you don’t get up now you will be late, and you know what happens when you are late. Also, let out Pepper,” said Carol. Pepper is a black lab that is very crazy if he doesn’t get outside.

After Karlye is done getting ready, she grabs something quick to eat and heads to the car. She double checks to make sure that she has everything, which she does. So, they hit the road. On the way to the competition, she goes over and over her routines in her head.

When they arrive she finds her team and stretches. She is very worried about her beam routine because her coaches showed her a new skill. First up for Karlye and her team is the beam. She gets up on the beam with confidence and comes off proud; she scores a 7.9. Next up is the floor. She knows that she’s got this because this is her favorite event. When she gets her scores, she’s surprised to see a 9.125 which gets her in 3rd place. Now vault; she ran up there and

stuck the landing, which also landed a grin on her face and a score of 8.75, which got her a 2nd place finish. Last was the bars. She swung and landed safely with a score of 7.65. Karlye's all-around score was a 33.725. She was very proud of herself.

When Karlye went to school the next day, everybody had heard and was cheering her on. Her friends were very, very proud of her. The newspaper did an article on her passion for gymnastics as well as her competition scores. All through that week Karlye felt loved and felt that people believed in her; so she didn't want to let anyone down, especially her coaches and family. Each day, whether or not there was gymnastics, she was always practicing. In two weeks Karlye would have another competition. Till then she was going to do whatever it took to get herself ready.

As Karlye gets excused again from Mrs. Paisley's class, her mom waits to bring her to practice. Now it is only three days from competition day; she is getting worried. Her mom doesn't know why she is worried, because she knows she'll do great.

On competition day, Karlye doesn't want to get up, but her mom makes her by dragging her out of her bed by her feet. She knows that she can't let her team down, so she finally gets ready and out to the car to leave. When she arrives, once again she finds her team and stretches. This competition is scheduled the same as last, so first up to bat is beam. Positively, Karlye hops up there, does a stunning job, and ends up with a score of 8.125, better than the last time, which she is very happy about. Next up is floor. Karlye is sure she's got this, so she does her lovely routine and scores a magnificent 9.3. She's on to bars next which she is super confident about, sticking the landing like the last competition. She scores a 8.950, and she knew she could do it. Karlye is worried for bars because her neck hurts from vault, but she doesn't know why. She tries her best, believing she can score better than the last competition, and she does! With a score of 7.9 she is speechless. Her all-around score is 34.275. Karlye felt so joyful at the end of the day.

This is the story of Karlye. It's a wonderful story, but as Karlye grows, it will be even more wonderful. Just know that people believe in you, and you should always believe in yourself. "If the sky is the limit, then why are there footsteps on the moon?" This is one of Karlye's favorite quotes. Let's all hope that when Karlye gets older she'll make it to the Olympics, because she believed in herself and I did, too!

Sophie Larson
Slayton, MN
3rd Place

Black Hills

It was summer of 2015, and my family was going to the Black Hills for a family vacation. I had a great time and want to go again. It took eight hours to get there, but it felt like fifteen hours. The people who went were Grandma, Grandpa, Jake, Mackenzie, Luke, Shannon, Ryan, Jackson, Jori, Janie, Nick, Mom and me. When we got there, we all got settled in and then went to a rodeo. It was amazing, and thank goodness no one got hurt.

The second day we went to The Caves, Cosmos, and Mt Rushmore. When we went into the cave, it was really cold. The people that walked us though told us not to touch anything. If we touched the crystals they would stop growing. When we were in the cave I started getting claustrophobia, and I usually don't get it, so it was weird.

After the caves, we went to Cosmos. The Cosmos is a place where everything is really weird. The trees are curved over almost touching the ground. When you're in the buildings, you are leaning forward, and when you set a ball on a slanted pole and put the ball in the middle it goes upward. There was this chair that I got to sit on, and if I was telling the truth the chair would go backward, but if I was lying the chair would go forward. First they had to ask me a lot of questions, and at the end, thank goodness, I fell backwards!

When we were at Mt. Rushmore, there was a type of ceremony for people in the army. While there, we took a family picture. It turned out great. There was also this really good ice cream shop at Mt. Rushmore, so we all went and got some. Afterwards, we went back to our rental house.

On our third day we went cliff jumping! It was really scary at first, but then I got the hang of it! The cliff I jumped off of was thirty feet tall. It was scary, and my eight year old cousin did it, too. To get to the cliffs, we had to go through this mud path, and we almost got stuck and didn't end pretty. My Uncle Ryan, daredevil that he is, jumped off the fifty-five foot one. They got it on tape so I could watch it and not be so scared to go off the thirty foot jump! I'm happy I didn't go off the fifty foot one, but now I'm brave enough to do it.

That night we went horseback riding. When we were horseback riding, we got to run, trot and walk. It was really fun! My cousin and I saw a snake but didn't tell anyone.

On our fourth day, we went to Harney Peak. Harney Peak is a place where you can go hiking. Needless to say, I sprained my ankle. I was walking, and there was a rock right where I was going to step. I stepped right on the side, and bam, I fell to the ground and started crying. When I got up I tried to walk, but it hurt too much. I just had to keep going to the top. When we finally got to the top, the view was so pretty. You could see for miles and miles.

Our fifth day we sat at home, then went go-carting and had some really good malts. When we went go-carting, we also played some other games like bumper boats, tag and then arcade games while it rained. After the rain stopped, they let us go go-carting again! After that we went to this place and had malts. I have to say they were the best malts I have ever had! When we were walking back to our cars, I stuck all of the straws in my mouth. I think there was about eleven straws; it was cool!

On our last day, we started heading home but stopped at Bear Country U.S.A! We drove through and, at the end, we got out of our cars, went to the gift shop, and looked at some other animals like the bear's cubs! They were so cute! At the gift shop, I got a sweat shirt and a Rubik's cube.

I have to say I had a blast with my family and loved going to the Black Hills. I think I would want to go again, but this time, not sprain my ankle.

POETRY
Grades 7 & 8

Connor Solsrud
New London, MN
1st Place

Fall Breeze

The fall breeze comes drifting lazily in, taking the place of the hot summer one. Children run outside jumping excitedly into piles of leaves while dressed in their hats and light jackets.

Conditioned, cross-country athletes run by, smiling and waving and talking amongst each other. At the football field aggressive players run, throw, catch, and run again in rhythmic patterns.

The humming noise of the last lawnmower is heard, mulching up the last of the fallen leaves... crunch, crunch, crunch. Everybody in our town is putting up Halloween decorations for the excited, sugar-crazed young ones.

Finally, the great time of feasting comes near, as mothers and grandmothers begin to prepare mouth-watering dishes. On Thanksgiving Day, families all around town feast with pleasure on turkey, yams, stuffing, corn, and pumpkin pie. Fall comes to a close when the first snowflakes begin to fall and the last stubborn leaves clinging to the trees relent. "On to winter," says Mother Nature.

Samantha Jones
Balaton, MN
2nd Place

Break the Wall

Things break down from time to time
That's a part of life
Our love will never die
We made it too strong
All we can do is keep on building
There's no stopping it now
It's past the point of no end
All we have done has made it
So strong
No one can break the wall

Emma Petersen
Marshall, MN
3rd Place

The Deer

The deer goes running through the night
Swiftly going and avoiding the light
And then it stops
You can almost touch
Before it runs over the glen again
You see it darting through the bare trees
Staying hidden well, at ease
And then suddenly it halts and listens keenly
Only thinking of someone else's safety
And they know just what to do

FICTION
Grades 7 & 8

Whitney Wordes
Renville, MN
1st Place

**Cleopatra, the Silver Leopard
that Carried the Stars in Her Fur**

Cleo was a small, sleek, spotless, silvery grey leopard. She slunk through the thick forest. She pricked up her ears as another of the hunters tripped on something. She quickly hid in a bush and waited as they crashed by.

“Thank goodness the dogs aren’t here,” she thought. “If they were it would be back to the cage and locks for me.”

Earlier that night the new keeper had carelessly left her door slightly open. The security cameras “saw” her on the way out, but she made it. Now she was out; however, the hounds would be on the hunt tomorrow. Trees were the only escape from them, but she couldn’t stay in a tree forever. They’d figure out where she was and wait for her to come down. She silently prowled over to the stream, and despite how she hated water, she slid in to lose the hounds. It was so cold! She heard a hunter crashing through the forest. She had to strike out into deep water or be caught. She went out, desperately hoping that the hunter wouldn’t see her. Her paws could no longer touch the bottom as the current swept her downstream. She felt dismay when she heard the pounding of water.

“A waterfall! Now of all times!” was her thought.

As she was swept over the waterfall what she saw was an island with the cliffs against the north side creating a calm, sheltered island. If she could get to the island she could live there and the hunters would probably never look there.

About halfway down, a rock jutting out of the waterfall suddenly came into her sight. She just barely managed to twist around and push off the rock aiming to land in a tall, ancient oak tree that stretched almost halfway up the waterfall. In the gigantic oak she took a better look at her surroundings (for cats are very observant). She found that some of the large oak’s branches stretched to a medium sized weeping willow tree whose branches stretched down to the water where she could get a drink and not have to deal with the dog, which seemed to be the only other predator there—besides the insects of course! Cleo nimbly climbed over to the weeping willow to get a drink. The water from the river

was plenty cool and refreshing. She attempted fishing, but they were too quick for her. All Cleo managed to catch was an old, slow, and fat fish. Cleo climbed back to the oak with her catch to find somewhere to eat and sleep. She found a little dip in a large branch right out of sight of anyone on the ground to sleep the rest of the night out.

The next morning Cleo explored the island and found a shallow pool with lots of fish. A small waterfall in the stream going to the pool stopped the fish from escaping, but still let them get in, so it was quite easy to catch them. By the oak that she had decided to call home, she found some flat rocks that caught the sun's heat and would make a great napping spot. In the center of these rocks she found a small pool that the rocks heated, where despite her hatred for water she would actually enjoy a swim. She was not worried about the dog. She could outrun it easily, so she explored without worry.

On the other side of the island, while she stayed hidden in the bushes, she found a man talking to the dog as if they were having a conversation. The dog was a whippet, and Cleo had always kind of respected whippet dogs. The thin, light-footed dogs were never as loud or annoying as the other kinds. They were fast and quiet—not as quiet as a cat but closer than most.

“Hey, Tammieth,” the man, Old Sam, said. “Do you think the leopard you found on this island is the same one they’re looking for up there?”

The dog, Tammieth, nodded his head as if to say yes.

Old Sam laughed, “Well, they won’t look on my island, and we won’t tell, will we?”

Cleo, who had panicked, calmed down a little bit. At that moment Tammieth looked straight at her hiding spot and nudged Old Sam who was still talking. Old Sam looked up and watched as Cleo, who had lost her nerve, ran across the far side of the clearing to the undergrowth.

That afternoon Cleo, in her tree, heard Tammieth talking—trying to get her to come down or at least show herself and talk back. Eventually Cleo slipped down to a lower branch and asked, “What do you want?”

Tammieth looked at her and said, “You.”

Cleo gave him a weird look.

“Race you to the...” Tammieth said, trying to think of a good place.

Cleo looked like she was going to say nothing, but just as Tammieth was about to say something, Cleo cried, “Sunning rocks pool!”

She jumped from the branch and raced to the pool.

“Hey!” Tammieth cried after her. “No fair!”

Cleo jumped into the pool before Tammieth even took off. Tammieth jumped in behind splashing her, and Cleo had to splash him back. After a heated water fight, Tammieth dashed off crying, “Can’t catch me!”

“You’ll regret the day you challenged a leopard’s speed!” Cleo yelled, running after him.

Tammieth’s idea was to get enough of a head start and lose her by swimming to a river just out of sight around the bend, but Cleo knew the river was there and that Tammieth was aiming for it. Cleo leapt through the branches of a pine tree that hung across the river to drop down on Tammieth, who was wondering why Cleo had not yet come around the bend.

“Still doubt me?” Cleo asked.

“No... where on earth did you come from?” Tammieth asked from underneath her.

The next day when Cleo went to go fishing, Old Sam was sitting a respectable distance away from the pool, having left a chunk of meat beside the pool. After about half an hour of sitting there staring at each other Cleo decided that if Old Sam didn’t move she’d ignore him. Then she suspiciously sniffed the meat he had left, often glancing up to see if he moved, which he never did. The meat was good, but it was small so she caught and ate two small salmon as well before settling into a crouch to have “a staring contest” with Old Sam.

After a while Cleo turned to go, and as she left, Old Sam called her name with the “c” and “l” low then whipping the “e” and the “o” up high. Cleo loved the sound it made and wanted him to do it again.

Cleo waited at the sunning rocks for Tammieth every afternoon, and every morning Old Sam would be a bit closer to the pool than the last. He had taken to tossing her a second piece of meat when she had finished the first chunk. Pretty soon he would be close enough to hand it to her.

Old Sam had bought her from the zoo, and now she could call herself a free cat. She had learned to trust Old Sam and Tammieth. Her favorite spot to sit was on the branch that she had landed on when coming down the waterfall. She liked sitting there under the full moon shimmering on her fur making it sparkle like the stars themselves lived there. Cleopatra, the silver leopard who carried the stars in her fur.

Allyson Straub
New London, MN
2nd Place

Faith of a Maiden

T*wang!* The arrow sped from the vibrating bowstring and into a target that already quivered with a dozen others. Aela Brookham took a deep breath as she redrew and once more fell into the steady, calming pattern of archery. It seemed to remain as the only stable corner of her life anymore.

With her father away on business for the king and rumors of pestilence overshadowing the village, the whole of Brookham manor felt on edge. *Twang!* Another arrow flew from Aela's bow, catching a petal from a nearby flower on its way. She frowned at the stiff, formal gardens surrounding her. Lately, her home had begun to feel like a cage. Would her father never return?

"Lady Aela!" an urgent voice called from behind. She recognized it at once.

"Ellyn, please don't call me that," she sighed, turning to face the girl. "A lady practices embroidery and enjoys stuffy gardens. I do *not*."

Ellyn Fyrnn stopped abruptly in front of the other girl. She stood just a little shorter than Aela, and had served at Brookham manor since the age of seven. Thus, she was considered more a family member than a servant; her own family lived in the village beyond the manor's grounds.

Now, her usually-rosy face was pale, and her laughing eyes were wide with fear.

"What's wrong?" Aela asked as she searched Ellyn's face worriedly.

"My brother—Henry—he's fallen ill. My sister visited this morning..." her voice cracked, "...he may not have much longer. Please, would you give me permission to visit them?"

"Well, you're not going without me," Aela declared as she tossed her bow and quiver upon a nearby bench and set off down the path.

Ellyn trotted to keep up pace with the taller, faster girl.

"I only ask for your permission to visit my family, m'l—Aela," she begged. "Your mother would be furious if you left the manor!" Lady Elizabeth's perfect manners and ideals had always clashed

with her daughter's adventurous spirit; seemingly, their only shared trait was a short temper.

Aela stopped abruptly and pivoted to face Ellyn; her eyes blazed in fury. "I won't sit idly around while people—my people—are dying! *I am coming with you!*" She turned and continued to march indignantly towards the village. Ellyn followed silently.

Although the gate was closed and guarded, one commanding word accompanied by an imperious glare sent the men-at-arms scurrying to open it. Aela was not a person to cross wills with.

As soon as the gate and stone wall surrounding the manor stood behind them, the two quickened their pace considerably. Aela knew her way through the dusty, narrow village streets well. (In truth, when her father was home she spent more time outside the manor walls than within them.) Soon they stood outside the cramped little Fyrnn cottage. Inside, the cottage was damp, dark, and smelt of illness and herbs. Mrs. Fyrnn gladly embraced her daughter and curtsied respectfully to Aela as the two entered. They anxiously approached the thin mattress where little Henry lay. Aela, who had acquired some knowledge in curing illnesses from her mother, knelt and began examining the sleeping boy. "How long has he been ill?"

"Three days."

Aela's heart sank. The little boy's face was pale as snow and sunken-in; multiple areas on his neck were swollen and bulging. His forehead could hardly have been hotter, yet he shivered and trembled as if he were freezing.

"What do you think?" asked Ellyn quietly. Aela closed her eyes for a moment before replying. "I don't think I can treat this," she admitted quietly; all of her confidence seemed to have vanished. She stood and continued, "My mother is the only person I know who can properly treat it. We... we'll have to take him to her."

Aela silently derided herself for her incompetence as they prepared a stretcher for Henry. She wasn't accustomed to asking for help, least of all from her mother, who would most likely refuse to try curing him anyway. Yet, what other choice did she have?

No one interrupted them as they carried the boy to the manor. The guards at the gate protested their entry, but Aela, now slightly sulky and even more determined, once more demanded passage.

"Your mother will not be pleased with you," whispered Ellyn as they entered.

"I know," Aela replied. Lady Elizabeth had evidently been watching out for her daughter's return and poised gracefully and patiently on the garden path. Aela strode forward to meet her mother.

“What is the meaning of this, Aela?” asked the woman in a tone that, however quiet and civilized, possessed an undertone of annoyance.

“Ellyn Fyrnn’s brother is ill. I left with her to visit their family and examine the boy.”

“You left the manor without permission?” It wasn’t really a question.

“Yes, Mother, and I’m sorry, but—”

“I was worried!”

Aela was startled to see concern in her mother’s eyes instead of anger. A wave of guilt overtook her. “I’m sorry, Mother,” she remarked genuinely. A short silence passed between them before Lady Elizabeth spoke again.

“Now, what were you saying about Ellyn Fyrnn’s brother?”

“He is ill, Mother. I went to their cottage to see if I could cure him, but he is too far gone for my skills to do any good. You are the only person I know who may be able to help him,” Aela confessed meekly. Her humility seemed to leave her mother taken aback; the lady stared at her daughter for a moment before stepping past her and approaching the Fyrnns. Compassion welled up in her eyes. They had set the stretcher down on the ground, and Lady Elizabeth knelt to scrutinize Henry.

Aela knelt at her mother’s side. She couldn’t bear to look at Ellyn, who was crying quietly, so she set her face with a calm expression that didn’t show how she was dying inside. Finally, her mother stood and said the last thing Aela was expecting.

“Take him into the guest bedchamber. Come along, Aela, we must prepare a remedy to bring his fever down.” Shock and gratitude flooded the faces of Ellyn and her mother, who immediately hoisted the boy up, and with the help of a nearby servant, carried him to the appointed room. Aela sprang up to her feet.

“Thank you, Mother!” she cried breathlessly.

Her mother smiled. “I have a feeling that, whether I had consented or not, you would have found a way to help him.”

Aela thought about her mother’s last statement as they entered the kitchen to find the supplies they needed. It was true; she most likely would have found another way to aid the Fyrnns. Ellyn was her closest, most loyal friend, and it would tear her apart to see the girl’s brother die without at least trying to cure him.

The next few days were long. Aela barely ever had the time to go outside, but she hardly noticed that. She spent her days at her mother’s side, learning more than she ever could have imagined in

the ways of healing and medicines. Lady Elizabeth allowed Ellyn extra time away from her duties, and she spent every moment by her brother's bedside, caring for him in any way she could while praying tirelessly.

Henry was not doing well. Despite their efforts, his fever seemed to persist, and he alternately roamed aimlessly through fitful sleep and bouts of delirium. They managed to feed him small amounts of foods that Lady Elizabeth deemed gentler on the stomach, such as bread and vegetables. He seemed to keep them down well enough, but remained weak.

On the fifth day of Henry's treatment, nothing appeared to have changed. Aela was beginning to lose hope that they could help the boy recover. If her mother felt that way, she never showed it for a moment. Ellyn seemed to cling to the hope that her little brother would recover.

Aela was relaxing for a moment in a nearby chair when, suddenly, Ellyn gave a sharp cry. Lady Elizabeth rushed in from an adjoining room, and Aela, who had a terrible feeling that something had gone wrong, jumped to her feet and raced to the bed.

What they saw was far different from what they had expected, yet everything they had hoped. Little Henry lay in the bed, his face very pale in comparison with his dark hair, but that was not what they were looking at: his eyes were open! They weren't clouded by fever, either; they were clear.

Ellyn stood with an exuberant, albeit quiet, joy spreading across her features. Aela's mother immediately called for food and water to be brought to the boy before reaching to delicately touch his forehead.

"His fever has subsided," she stated in relief, "but it is not altogether gone. Close your eyes now, little Henry. We don't want you to use up all of your energy now." He obeyed, and lay quietly there while the servants prepared a small lunch for them to feed him. Although he certainly still looked weak, there was something less sickly about his appearance now.

Lady Elizabeth pulled the two girls aside. "Now, remember, he looks better, but that does not mean he cannot get worse. We have only crossed the first obstacle; there may be many left." Still, her cautioning couldn't quench the spark of joyous hope that had ignited within both girls. They returned to their duties in caring for him with a new vigor. Meanwhile, Lady Elizabeth sent a message to Mrs. Fyrnn, who came anxiously to see her son.

In the matter of a few days, Henry was able to sit up in bed and talk quietly for short amounts of time. He continued to mend under

the wise supervision of his mother, who visited every day while he was recovering, Ellyn, Aela, and, most of all, Lady Elizabeth. The day that he finally got up with the girls' help and took a short walk outside, she pulled her daughter aside, her eyes beaming. "I'm proud of you, my daughter. You never gave up on this for one moment, and I daresay you learned a thing or two along the way." Aela smiled with pure joy at this compliment.

"And I'm proud of you, too," a deep voice spoke from behind. She turned, her mouth half-open.

"Father!" she gasped, racing into the loving arms of her father, who had returned not moments before from his long journey.

Later that night, both the Fyrnn and Brookham families shared a dinner together in the great hall of the manor, and I don't believe a happier event has ever been held since.

Eleanor Schmitz
Willmar, MN
3rd Place

A “Tail” of Two Friends

It was a nice sunny day in the forest, and Kaeska was playing with her friend Goldenheart. Suddenly Kaeska’s father, Acho, appeared and looked very displeased. Icefox, Goldenheart’s mother, came out as well, also unhappy. The two parents argued, and right before they started to fight, Kaeska woke up.

She was tired; she’d been having the same dream for weeks now. The dream was a memory of the past when the wolf clan and the fox clan worked together before the feud began. However, Kaeska never understood why they were fighting now, and every time she would ask someone they would ignore her. The sun was beginning to rise so she decided to go hunting. As Kaeska ran to her favorite hunting spot, she thought about her old friend Goldenheart and wondered if she even remembered her.

Kaeska was almost to her hunting spot when she saw a flash of golden orange in a thicket and soon caught the scent of a fox. She wondered what the fox was up to and followed it, making sure to stay hidden. The fox seemed to be hunting. Kaeska watched as the fox stalked her prey, prepared to leap, and tumbled down to the ground with a dull thud. Kaeska had a really hard time not laughing at this fox’s attempt to catch a rabbit.

Finally gathering some courage from watching that ridiculous show, she said, “You’re never going to catch anything like that. You are too heavy on your paws.”

The fox looked rather surprised but said, “Oh, sorry for hunting on your land, and thank you for the hint. My name is Goldenheart.”

“Goldenheart, I never thought I would see you again! I’m Kaeska,” she said, excitement ringing in her voice.

Goldenheart blinked, then jumped up. She then said, “No way—for real? What are the chances this could happen? Do you know why this whole war was started? Every time I ask, they turn away like I didn’t say anything.”

“No, I don’t. Why don’t we fix things up anyway,” Kaeska said brightly.

For the next two weeks they met in secret, planning a way to get the clans to coexist. One of the ideas was to get the two clan

leaders alone together, but they realized that they would probably fight or leave. They finally decided on a plan, which was to have each be saved by the other to show that the clans can work together. Kaeska said goodbye to Goldenheart and went home after they made the master plan.

When she got home, Acho asked, "Have you seen your little sister, Ferami? She disappeared just after you left to go hunting."

"No, I have not seen her, but I will go out again to go look for her," she replied, now very worried for the safety of Goldenheart and Ferami. Since the pack was out looking for her pup sister, she knew that Goldenheart was not safe in the woods. Kaeska ran to Goldenheart, and then told her what happened and warned her to get out of the woods.

"I will not leave! Now is the best time to get the clans to work together," Goldenheart said. Quickly, she bounded away without giving Kaeska a chance to speak again. Goldenheart, after running a good distance, stopped and sniffed the ground looking for the smell of wolf. She found a wolf scent and followed it until the smell stopped all of a sudden. Goldenheart also stopped, looked around, and sat wondering how that could happen. While she was thinking, three wolves sneaked up and pounced on her, then dragged her to the wolf den.

As this was happening, Kaeska caught the scent of Ferami. She followed the trail while calling Ferami's name, over and over. A little bit after finding the scent, Kaeska spotted Ferami and ran up to her. Ferami told Kaeska that she wanted to see her hunting, but she got terribly lost and couldn't find the way home.

After hearing this, Kaeska said, "Come on let's go home."

When she arrives home once more, she hears the news of a fox that they are going to drown in the river. Kaeska immediately knows who it is and runs to save Goldenheart. She ran as fast as she could, but it was too late. Goldenheart was already thrown into the river. She fought to stay afloat, but as Kaeska arrived, her head slowly sank, never to feel the sun again.

Grief stricken and exhausted, Kaeska almost screamed while revealing what had really happened. It took a moment to take it in. Then Acho, who was the one to cause her death, sank to the ground depressed since he could not bear having an innocent's death on his paws. After a little while he got up and ordered a messenger to ask to have a meeting at the edge of the woods with the fox leader.

Icefox agreed to come to the meeting. When everyone got to the woods' edge, Acho and Kaeska explained what happened.

Icefox was outraged and had a deadly look in her eyes. She prepared to pounce, but Kaeska jumped in front of her.

“If you must have revenge, just kill me. It was Goldenheart’s and my idea to put the clans together again,” Kaeska said with a sob.

Icefox’s eyes softened and said, “No, I will not kill you. Let us end this stupid war that has only caused us pain.” Acho agreed to end the fight that had started as a feud over hunting territory. Both clans went home to stop the fighting and bring peace.

From that point on, there was peace between the wolves and the foxes; they even helped each other when times were tough. Over the years both clans remember and are thankful for the lesson learned from Goldenheart and Kaeska’s tragic tale.

NONFICTION
Grades 7 & 8

Stella Depuydt
Spicer, MN
1st Place

Rain

It was the first week of summer vacation and I woke up later than usual. When I went downstairs, my mother informed me that we were going to have a visitor soon. I noticed her mischievous expression and asked her who was coming, but she refused to answer, saying that it was a surprise.

About half an hour later, a dark-colored pick-up pulled to a stop in front of our house. A woman got out, stretched and walked around to the passenger-side door. She reappeared moments later, walking—or rather being dragged—by a large German Shepherd. It was mostly black, with a cream colored belly, chest, and legs. I ran down the stairs to join my mom in the doorway. My mom opened the door even before the woman could knock and guided her up the stairs to the deck. She looped the dog's leash around the deck railing, so she couldn't run off. Apparently, my mom saw this dog online and started to talk with the dog's owner, who lived in the Stillwater area. Finally, they agreed that my mom would pay \$100 for the dog if the owner would drive her to us.

I had wanted a dog forever, and in the past couple of months, we had been seriously discussing the idea and visiting animal shelters, trying to find the perfect dog for our family. We got really close to adopting this little black and white Border Collie, but the shelter was reluctant to let us adopt him because we were planning to keep him outside. The next thing we knew, he had been adopted by someone else.

The woman started telling us about how she couldn't keep her dog because her dog and the neighbor's boxer were very aggressive towards one another. Her dog even destroyed a fence trying to get at the other dog. She said that the people who owned the boxer had threatened to sue her if she didn't get rid of her dog. This was rather concerning, but since we live in the country, we didn't think it would be an issue. She went on to explain that she was seven years old, up-to-date on her shots, and that she was fairly sure that she was spayed. When we asked her what she meant by that, she told us that when her dog was a puppy, she was spayed, but then she was stolen when she was three. A couple years after that, she got a call

from someone who thought they had found her dog and when her son went to see the dog, it greeted him enthusiastically, so they assumed it was the same dog. She told us that she had named her dog Rain because when she brought the puppy home, it was raining outside. As she was about to leave, the woman knelt in front of Rain and said goodbye before she walked to her truck, threw one last look at the dog over her shoulder, and drove away.

I took her for a walk almost immediately. I tried to run with her along a grassy strip of land that ran along our woods for about 100 yards or so, but she could only run for 30 seconds before lapsing into a sluggish trot, tongue hanging out and panting. She was grossly overweight, and I had to turn around and take her home after a few minutes.

I felt awful for her as I put her in the wire crate that we found for her in the garage. It was so small that she couldn't even turn around comfortably, much less sit up straight. As soon as the opportunity presented itself, we bought her a much larger crate. We also bought her a wireless fence, which would shock her once she got a certain distance from our house. As soon as I put the collar on and let her go, she made a bee-line for the chicken coop, but as soon as she passed the white flags that we had set up to mark her boundary, she got shocked and ran back yelping. She quickly learned that when her collar started beeping, it was time to turn around and head back to the house.

We quickly fell into a routine. My mom would walk Rain in the mornings since she got up early anyway, and when she got back, I would feed her. Then I would walk her in the evening. I usually took her through the woods behind my house to a large meadow and we would walk on the deer paths, though as summer advanced, and the grasses grew tall and thick, it became harder and harder to walk there. What finally put an end to walking in the meadow were the sticker-burrs. We would come back covered with them, and it took hours to pick them out of Rain's coat, and my clothes and sneakers. That is when we started walking on the road. It was so much easier. And it was still about the same distance as in the meadow. She loved our walks. You could see it in her face when I picked up the leash. When I held up the chain collar, she would eagerly push her head through the loop, patiently waiting until I was ready to go, and then leap forward, pulling me along until I got my footing and could run at her side. As the days shortened and night fell earlier, I began walking her later and later in the evening. She didn't mind and I loved feeling like I was the only one outside.

One hot day, we decided to take Rain down to the lake, so she could go swimming. On the way there, we walked by some people with another dog. Without warning, Rain jerked toward the other dog and started barking. My dad had to hold her down as they walked past. A few weeks later, we tried to introduce her to the neighbor's dogs, but it ended badly when they ganged up on her and a fight broke out. After that we tried to keep her away from other dogs.

About a month after we got her, as my brother was going into the house, he reached down to pet Rain while she was dozing. She jumped up and bit him on the arm. She didn't break the skin, but he was pretty scared. This happened every week or so with my dad, my brother, and a couple times with my little sister. She never bit me or my mom, but we were afraid that she might hurt a member of the family. That is when we knew that there had to be something wrong with her. My mom called a dog trainer and asked her if she thought we could train her to stop this behavior. When the dog trainer heard that Rain had bitten some of our family members, she gravely told us that since we didn't really know anything about Rain's past, it would be really hard to train her. The trainer recommended that we go through dog obedience training with her to see if we could work with her.

When we arrived at the dog obedience class, Rain lost it. She saw the other dogs and started barking her head off and lunging at them. It was all we could do to hold her back. The instructor helped us force a muzzle over her head and secure it behind her ears as an extra precaution. Now all she could do was emit high-pitched barks and squeaks. It took about five minutes to get her to sit down in the circle of other dogs. Rain was actually pretty good at the stuff we were being taught, but she couldn't think straight when surrounded by those other dogs. When the "heel" exercise began, and the dogs and their owners had to walk around the room, she went berserk. The instructor told us to control our dog, and finally took the leash from my mom and tried to demonstrate the correct way to lead a dog, but Rain was too strong and after a brief struggle, the instructor took us aside and told us it might be a good idea to have a one-on-one session because we were upsetting the other dogs. We took the walk of shame out to our car and went home. We decided that the main thing was to stop the aggression towards people. By this time, we had come to the conclusion that our dog was not the same dog her previous owner thought she was.

Now the dilemma of what to do with Rain over the Christmas weekend was on our minds. We could either find a neighbor who

wasn't traveling anywhere, or board her in a kennel. We finally decided on two different neighbors who would take turns coming over to feed Rain. We left a couple of days before Christmas and went to see our grandparents. We had a great first day and went to bed excited for Christmas Eve. After breakfast, when we were all hanging out in the living room playing board games, my mom got a phone call from our neighbor who was taking care of Rain. She answered it and after a few moments, her face fell. She said a few things to the person on the other end, and then hung up and started crying. I didn't catch what she said because the ringing in my ears drowned everything else out and my vision started going dark. I knelt down and then lay on my back to keep from fainting. The vivid image of one of the neighbor's small children lying motionless on the ground appeared in my head, and I prepared for the worst. Through her tears, my mom explained that when our neighbor walked to our house to feed Rain, her own dog followed her, and they started fighting. Our neighbor tried to intervene, but Rain turned on her and bit her deeply four times. Luckily a man who lived next door heard the commotion and was able to get Rain off our neighbor and back into her kennel. The phone call was from her husband, wanting to know if Rain was up to date on her rabies shots.

I hate people watching me cry. It makes me feel weak and vulnerable. But there I lay on the floor, crying my eyes out. My grandma came to sit next to me and brought me a Kleenex. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see my mom hugging my sister. Both were crying. Even my brother was crying and he didn't even like Rain that much. After some time, I got up and went upstairs to the air mattress I had slept on the night before. Moments later, my parents came up and told me that they were going to ask someone to come over and shoot Rain, but then they called the vet and asked him the normal protocol when a dog bit someone. He told them that it was customary to wait ten days to check the dog for signs of rabies. So that was it. I had ten more days with my dog. I don't remember much about Christmas. It all ran together into a huge lump of sorrow. As soon as I got home I went to Rain's kennel and started petting her.

The next ten days were a blur. I spent as much time as I could with Rain. The days flew by until Monday, the day we were taking her to the vet. School that day was awful. I was dreading the bus ride home and what would happen after that. Finally, I couldn't put it off any longer and I was sitting with Rain in the back of the car on the way to the vet. Rain used to get very excited during car trips

and this one was no exception. She even tried to lay on my lap. Any other time, this would have made me laugh, but I was just too sad.

Once we were at the vet clinic, the vet gave Rain three injections. The first one just made her sleepy, he explained. We then went outside to wait for the injection to kick in. We stood there in the snow, while Rain circled us smelling the other dogs that had been here before. That's when I started crying uncontrollably. My mom started crying too when Rain's front legs started shaking violently. Together, we picked her up and put her in the back of the car, where the vet gave her the second shot, so she would fall asleep. He went to go get the last injection while we eased Rain down into a sled my mom had brought.

Then the vet came back outside with the third and final injection. He told us to give her one last hug and we stroked her as he slipped the needle into a vein behind her foreleg. Her blood immediately welled up, bright and red, but disappeared as the vet depressed the plunger, injecting her with the liquid that would stop her heart. After about thirty seconds, the vet checked her heart and told us she was gone. We sat there in silence for a couple minutes after the vet left, until I pulled a blanket over her body. Then we drove home.

When I finally got out of the car, I found a shovel, and walked down to the place where my mom had started digging a grave the day before, and started to dig. My mom had already dug a one and a half foot hole and put a smoldering log and a pile of ash in the bottom to keep the ground from freezing. I flipped the log out of the hole and jumped in and started shoveling out the ash and dirt. I didn't think to bring a coat or gloves or anything, but I didn't feel cold. I felt like I owed it to Rain. It was the last thing I could do for her.

By the time I was done it was almost pitch black out and I couldn't see anything. My mom had called me asking where I was. When I told her she said that she and my dad would come down and help me bury her. My dad dragged the sled with Rain to the hole I had dug and helped me lower her into it and arrange her in a comfortable position with her favorite stuffed animal. Then we all helped bury her. As we walked up the hill to my house my dad offered to get me another dog, but I just shook my head. I don't think I ever want another dog.

Molly Fischer
Litchfield, MN
2nd Place

Just Keep Swimming

Not ever in my life before this summer would I have described myself as an athlete. I tried many different things—basketball, gymnastics, softball—but I wasn't good at any of them. Sometimes, a boost of confidence can change your whole perspective of the world around you. That is exactly what happened to me this summer. But if I'm going to tell this story, we have to start at the beginning.

I have old home videos of me and my dad when I was two. He and my mom used to bring me to "Little Swimmers" twice a week. As I got older, my mom started to sign me up for lessons. It started becoming a yearly thing, and I never thought much about them. I passed the first few lessons pretty easily. But as I got farther it started getting harder. There was one day when I had a panic attack in the pool and turned bright pale, later figuring out through lots of tests that I have acid reflex. That's why I was surprised this summer when my teacher told me I was in the wrong level. She pulled me aside saying that I have a really good front crawl and that she's boosting me up to the next level. I was super excited, and that's when I started realizing that this might be my thing.

The next day I joined in with all the other kids at level five. My teacher, Ashlee, used to be on the swim team. Her name appeared at least two times on the leaderboard for top times. I felt more at ease in that level. It was a challenge for me, unlike level four. As I headed toward the locker rooms to shower, she told me about a class I might like. Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday she directed a morning swim camp, where kids could come and swim laps. And sure enough, the next week at 6:00 a.m. I was in the pool.

The first couple of days were hard. I've never swum so many laps in a row before. I kept having to leave early because of numerous anxiety attacks, and because of those, I never got through a whole session. My mom sat me down a couple days later saying that if I enjoy this, then I should join the swim team. But if I keep getting stressed about it, then I should just stick to tennis. The next day, I stayed the whole time and realized that I really enjoy swimming. A couple months later I signed up for the swim team.

It was a pretty strenuous season filled with tough practices, aching muscles, and hard competition. I made a lot of memories during my first season, but there is one time that really stood out from the others. It was my last meet. The team was warming up and I was practicing backstroke, my least favorite, and hardest stroke (for me) to do. The meet was already halfway through, and we were watching the divers. Right after diving, there were a couple events and then I had to swim backstroke. They say that you should get ready to swim two events ahead. So when the time came, I put on my cap, grabbed my goggles, and walked to the blocks.

When I got there, I saw my friend Alexis, who was also waiting, and sat down next to her. As I did, the next group of girls were getting ready to start their race. The whistle blew and they got into their starting positions. But what I noticed was that they weren't doing a normal start. They were in the water doing a backstroke start. And that's when I realized I should be swimming right now. And sure enough, right after that, a woman with a clipboard was running around shouting my name.

I quickly hopped up saying, "I'm right here!"

She replied, "You're supposed to be swimming right now!"

I pulled my goggles on quickly and rushed for the pool. As I was doing that, the woman and some other guy were yelling, "Stop! Stop! Don't start yet!" but it was too late. There was a beep, and the girls were off. I couldn't believe it. I had missed my race.

The woman said, "Hun, you need to be over here and ready on time." I told her I was, and that I had two more races before it was my turn. She showed me the lineup and I was shocked. There were only two sets of breaststroke, not four, like I thought.

The woman said, "You're going to swim with varsity on the next race, okay? We just need a time for you." Those ten words sent a chill up my spine. Me? Swimming with varsity?

I sat back down by Alexis, trying to contain my terror. I'm surprised I wasn't shaking because I was nervous as heck. When the time came, I got up and walked over to the block. I scanned down the line to see who I was competing against. These girls were about twice the size of me.

I don't remember much about that race. I swam my hardest and fastest, and ended up taking last. I got out of the pool crying. I was so mad at myself for missing my race. I walked to the other end of the pool where the whole team was waiting. I thought someone had made it to sections of something and they were waiting to congratulate them, but I was wrong. I got over there, and the next thing I knew I was getting hugged by the team. They were all telling

me “good job,” showering me with hugs and high-fives. I sat down in my seat where my swim bag and lunch box were and started crying. That’s when Sydney Weires came over. She asked me why I was crying. I told her that I messed up big time, and I didn’t swim my best.

Then she said, “Molly, you just swam with varsity. That’s huge. And you weren’t even that far behind. You did really well, and you should be proud of yourself. Because what you did out there was pretty incredible.”

That meant a lot, especially coming from her, since she has gone to state twice for backstroke. I gave her a big squeeze. She and the whole team turned that dumb mistake into something I will never forget.

So that’s the story of the time I swam with varsity during my first season. This part in my life tells me, like the quote says, “You learn from your mistakes.” And now I can say that I am super stoked to see what next year will bring me.

Marissa Marxhausen
Spicer, MN
3rd Place

Zippel Bay

I woke from my nap to the sound of my brother and sister shouting, “Yeah, we’re here!” Bria cheered. Chase followed up with a, “To the lake!” Slowly regaining my bearings, I rolled my eyes as I spotted the source of their excitement.

Out the window of our truck there was a sign. A wooden sign to be exact, with the words **Zippel Bay** brushed on it in bold black paint. The large sign featured the silhouette of a fisherman casting his rod across a picturesque sunset and into the crashing waves of the Lake of the Woods. In the distance there was a lighthouse on a peninsula jutting out from unknown and unseen land. To top it all off there was a white seagull coasting across the bruised skyline.

“Relax peeps,” I said drowsily. “We still have to set up camp first.”

“I read somewhere that Zippel Bay has over nine miles of beach—the longest in Minnesota,” my Dad said. “It’s probably less than that though,” he added to himself.

After another mile or so of breathtaking scenery, including soft-eyed deer, towering forests, and teasing glimpses of the flooded Lake of the Woods, we arrived at the park office. Dad pulled over to the side of the road, and Mom jumped out to check in.

When she got back, we drove to a beach where you could swim, to test the water temp and see if we wanted to swim after we set up camp. My Dad parked and told us kids to go and check it out. My younger sister, Bria, scrambled to undo her seatbelt. Chase and I followed suit. About three seconds later, the two back doors of our dirty, black Chevy truck flew open, and we were off like a bullet from a gun to the lakeshore.

It was deserted, AND the lake was a gross olive green. “Oh no,” my dad said, slapping at mosquitoes with vigor as he and my mom strolled up from behind us. “This is probably from all of the flooding going on.” We all understood of course, as we ourselves had to postpone a trip to our grandparent’s because of flooding in the basement at home. But even so, our heads all drooped on the trek back to the truck.

“Seriously!” Chase said for the second time that hour. We were attempting to find a campground that would fit our bulk of camping supplies. We had brought along two tents, all our camping gear, plus our boat!

My dad sighed and then spoke, “I looked at the park map, and it looks like there’s one more place that we can try.”

When we arrived at our new destination we were relieved to find that these sites were much bigger than the previous ones, being made for campers with boats. Dad backed the truck into the campsite and we all got out to set up camp. Immediately, we began to slap at mosquitoes. Mom ran to the truck to get the bug spray, a maneuver that we were all familiar with by now. Zippel Bay was the last stop on our trip. Mom and Dad had decided that it was time to visit some of the more Northern state parks, and all of them had a major bug problem.

We each had a protective shield applied in a matter of minutes. Then we began to set up the tents. First, we set up the tent that Chase, Bria, and I slept in. Mom grabbed the back left corner and staked it into the ground. My siblings then seized the front left and front right corners and staked them, too. I took hold of the back right corner and checked to see if all the other corners were square. They looked good, so I nailed that stake in place, too. Next, we put together the poles that would hold the tent’s structure in place. Then, we laid the poles in place and fastened the loop at the top of the dark green tent that would keep the poles attached to the tent. Each of us, besides Dad who was unfolding the big blue tent that my parents slept in, took a corner of the green tent, and on the count of three, we lifted the poles, and struggled to put them over the metal stake that held them in place. After about ten seconds, we all had them in place and began to assemble the rainfly. By that time, Dad had finished unfolding the big tent, and called for Chase and Bria to come over and help.

After we had constructed the tents, my parents started to hand us things to put in the tents. For the next half-hour, we inflated air mattresses, unrolled sleeping bags, and fluffed pillows. While we did that my Dad made supper. When we were done, we sat down, exhausted, at the picnic table. As we ate our supper with unearthly hunger, I dropped my hot dog on my plate.

“OW, OW, OW, OW,” I said, holding my foot, and ripping off one of the thousands of ants we had noticed crawling all over the campsite that clung to my foot with its pincers. Almost immediately, my sister started to yell at an ant that bit her foot, too.

“Mommy, it hurts,” my sister whimpered. She showed my Mom a red spot on her foot that the ant had bitten. “I didn’t know that those ants bite!” Mom said, getting annoyed at the whole park now.

“Maybe we should just go home,” Dad said, dejectedly. “I mean, we couldn’t find a campsite, the lake is flooded, these ants are terrible, and mosquitoes are trying to take over the campground. Plus, they seem to be immune to our bug spray.” He enforced his point by swatting at several mosquitoes that were wanting to suck his blood.

I immediately rejected the idea. “But we just got here! And besides, you didn’t even put any bug spray on, remember?”

“Oh, yeah,” my Dad said, grinning.

We ended up staying for the whole three days planned. We just had a rough start. Our following days were filled with swimming, fishing (I was the only one that caught a fish—a walleye!), exploring, and even playing with baby snapping turtles! Maybe next year we can go again!

Poetry
Grades 9 & 10

Taylor Wolthuizen
Edgerton, MN
1st Place

Columbines

The plains and I never agree,
The crops sway a different way than me,
They do not talk of the sky,
But of the harvest passing by.

The Mountains call my name,
I call for them just the same,
We speak like old friends and care,
I will begin there so I can end there.

The sun fades fast
Like the shadows it cast
To the west I ride
With the sun as my guide.

The mountains call my name,
I call for them just the same,
We talk like old friends and care,
I will begin there so I can end there.

In the ground where the columbines grow,
I will be buried and come to know,
What lies beyond the skies,
From beneath the columbines.

The columbines call my name,
I call for them just the same,
We talk like old friends and care,
I will begin there so I can end there.

Cora Engels
Ivanhoe, MN
2nd Place

Sunbeam

Dazzling light shines
through the window
red, blue, yellow, orange
gems glittering in a graceful arc

I try to cup them in my hands,
but they spill through my fingers,
unwilling to be captured,
free

Taryn Bedow
Tyler, MN
3rd Place

Addison

she has such pretty eyes
they dance when she smiles
every night she
begs me to read a chapter
and I oblige because
i like it when her eyelids flutter
and she wants so badly to stay awake
but she drifts off to sleep
with her blankets
wrapped around her like a chrysalis
my little butterfly

i was nine years old
when she entered the world
six years have flown by
she's more beautiful every day
my baby sister
is going into first grade

she has such a pretty face
in a few years
she'll drive all the boys crazy
in a few years
i'll be in college
in a few years
i won't share a room with this
blue eyed, sassy princess
my one and only
my baby girl

she loves birthday parties
and dressing up
she's an angel
who steals my jewelry
she wants to be just like me

we have such incredible adventures
or—
she does
i like to sit back and watch
because i'm old enough now
i don't remember what it feels like
to be a Disney character
or to be rescued by a handsome prince
but when she forgets
i'll remind her of
the crazy places she went
without leaving our shared room
i hope she never loses
that spark she possesses

she has such a pretty soul
caring, sweet, intelligent
every day i tell her
she's so beautiful
i hope she never stops believing it
i love it when she dances with me
and i twirl her around the kitchen
protecting her
makes me feel so safe

when she grows up
she wants to be a princess
but she already is

she has such pretty eyes
and when she looks at me
they dance

Fiction
Grades 9 & 10

Davis Moore
Worthington, MN
1st Place

The City of Treasure

Part I. Discovery and Action

Duncan Johnston was a “different” lad. Not different in a bad sense, but different in the way he wished to live his life. Most Scottish boys of his family’s wealth would attend a university after finishing secondary school, but Duncan, an imaginative rebel, strongly protested sticking to the normal routine of young men his age. He claimed that he could learn more reading the countless books in his family’s extensive library than he ever would at school, and that he would decide on doing something later. So, with much protest from his parents, Duncan did just that—living at his family’s mansion and spending most of his time reading by candlelight in the library. Other than occasionally conversing with his family’s butler, a tall and lanky sandy-haired man in his late forties named Gibbs, Duncan had few friends, and was relatively shut off from the world. However, he had a yearning to travel the globe, and often spoke to Gibbs about marvelous locations described in the stories he read. Duncan especially loved historical accounts of the conquest of the Americas, so for his 18th birthday, Gibbs presented the curious boy with an autobiography written by a conquistador, titled *Aventuras en la Amazonia*. Unknown to Duncan or Gibbs, though, was the life-changing knowledge awaiting discovery beneath the yellowed pages of the old book.

The year was 1922, and all of Scotland was enduring a gloomy autumn, with downpours of cold rain that had been occurring off and on every day for the past three weeks. Roughly 30 kilometers north of Glasgow in his family’s Victorian-era mansion, Duncan Johnston reclined on a horsehair sofa, sipping a cup of coffee and paging through the book he’d received for his birthday. The late teen was of average height (about 1.7 meters), with a shock of red hair and dark green eyes. Gibbs, the family butler, stood nearby, looking through a book of his own.

Now Duncan, being of an adventurous nature, was naturally fascinated with the accounts of the conquistador. Reading about the flora and fauna, encounters with natives, and perils of the harsh jungle environment truly captivated him. Being a fast reader,

Duncan finished the book in just a few hours. He flipped to the back cover and encountered a folded piece of wrinkled paper, which slipped out of the pages and floated to the ground. Puzzled, Duncan picked it up off of the floor and unfolded it. The lad became excited right away, noticing that it was an old, handwritten map of South America, but he sighed in dismay as he realized that all of the directions were written in Spanish.

“Is everything alright, Mr. Johnston?” Gibbs asked in an inquisitive tone.

“Oh yes, Gibbs, the book was marvelous. The only dilemma is that I found a map hidden within its pages but have no way to read it since it’s inscribed in Spanish. Oh well.”

“I presume, then, that Mr. Johnston doesn’t know that Gibbs studied the language for eight years as a child?”

Duncan smiled and said, “Alas, I wasn’t aware of that, but I’m sure glad for it now.”

The boy stood up and handed Gibbs the wrinkled piece of parchment, watching the butler’s eyes scan the foreign text. Suddenly, a look of awe came upon Gibbs’ face, and he shrieked in astonishment.

“What is it Gibbs, what is it?” Duncan questioned excitedly.

“Something you’ll surely like, I imagine; it’s a map describing the location of a lost city deep within the Amazon, apparently named *Ciudad o Tesoro* by the conquistador; *City of Treasure*.”

“Wow, that’s spectacular, Gibbs! Any chance we could go look for it?”

“Yes, I think it would be a brilliant exploit, but you’ll have to inquire with Mr. and Mrs. Johnston for consent.”

“Okay, yes, I think they’d approve.”

It took a bit of prodding, but Duncan’s parents eventually agreed to let them journey to Brazil. Mr. Johnston bought them both tickets aboard a newly built ocean liner, the *SS Charles*, on its maiden voyage to Belem, Brazil. Roughly a week after discovering the map, Duncan and Gibbs loaded up their luggage into the family’s sleek, recently purchased Bentley automobile. They were driven across the rugged Scottish countryside to Edinburgh, where the ship was docked. After being dropped off at the port, Duncan and Gibbs carried their luggage over to the towering *SS Charles*, often considered one of the finest ocean liners of its time. The two Scotsmen boarded the grand ship, settled into their cabin, and laid down on their beds, resting and excitedly thinking about the trip ahead.

“City of Treasure, here we come,” thought Duncan.

Part II. Adventure and Hazards

In the morning, around 10 o'clock, Duncan awoke to a silent cabin. Gibbs was still fast asleep. He caught a whiff of some breakfast food and decided to go explore the ship. As Duncan walked through the hallway of the first class cabins, he was startled by a man dressed in a tan trench coat jumping around a corner. The strange figure abruptly pulled a blow dart gun out of a pocket in his coat.

"The city is for us to find. Boarding this ship set your fate in stone." The man said this in a thick, raspy Scottish accent and blew through the gun. A small dart came flying at Duncan, who moved just enough for it to glance off of his shoulder. The man, who must've intended to hit Duncan on his first try, fled down the hallway he had come from.

"Hey!" Duncan yelled as he sprinted after the enemy. He turned the corner at full speed but stopped in his tracks, realizing the guy had vanished down the corridor. While he caught his breath, Duncan thought to himself.

"What is it I've gotten myself into?" he pondered. "Who are these people, and why are they trying to stop us?"

Duncan continued to the dining hall. After arriving, he wolfed down an excessive amount of egg and sausage but cautiously gazed around the room between every bite. Once he had filled up his stomach, Duncan hurried back to the cabin, slammed the thick oak door, and locked it quickly behind him. Gibbs, irritated to have been awoken by the door slamming, asked in a sleepy voice, "Mr. Johnston, what's all the clatter for?"

"Oh, I'm sorry Gibbs, but I do have a question; where did you get that book with the map in it?"

Gibbs paused for a second. "Oh, just somewhere I guess." With his reluctant tone of voice, it was obvious he was holding back information. "Why do you ask?"

"Mainly because on my way to the breakfast area, a man confronted me, told me that the city was for 'them' to find, and attempted to kill me."

An alarmed expression appeared on Gibbs' slender face. "Oh dear, oh dear," he muttered. "We must keep a low profile for the rest of this voyage. You can only leave the cabin to eat, and when that is done, make sure you do it quickly and return here right away."

They kept to this system for the entire week of the trip. No more encounters occurred with the man in the trench coat or

anybody else attempting to hurt them, but even as the *SS Charles* arrived in the port city of Belem, Duncan and Gibbs couldn't help but feel slightly paranoid about the event on the ship. They disembarked the ocean liner and suddenly, it hit them that they were in a different country. The two Scotsmen were absorbed into the thousands of people moving around the bustling commercial city, most of them speaking rapid Portuguese. Never before had either of them felt so out of place.

"What now?" Duncan asked Gibbs as they moved through an open-air market filled with the aroma of fresh fruit. "Now," Gibbs explained, "We hitch a ride down the Amazon and hire a few guides." Neither of them knew Portuguese, but eventually, the Scotsmen located a few people who could speak English. Within an hour, they had purchased tickets to board a steamboat heading upstream, and also had hired two local guides to help them on their trip down the river; twin brothers Thiago and Bruno.

The steamboat itself was pretty small. Duncan thought it to be rather old and junky looking. Though it seemed pretty rundown, the two adventurers eagerly climbed aboard, excited and anxious for the next segment of their trip.

Thiago, wearing a dirty white t-shirt and cut-off shorts, saw how enthusiastic they looked, grinned at them, and said in a thick Brazilian accent, "Sorry to tell you, but traveling on the river can get tiring after a while. *Muito Aborrecido.*"

Duncan beamed back. "Oh, okay," he said, "I'm sure it will be fine."

After showing the captain the map and making sure they would get dropped off where they needed to (at a slight curve in the river about 2,700 miles upstream), they settled into their tiny, whitewashed quarters and went to sleep.

The next day, the two travelers learned that the trip was going to last about two-and-a-half weeks. The food on the boat was terrible. It included some bland porridge, stale bread, and old coffee with a peculiar taste to it. At first, Duncan and Gibbs had thought that Thiago was kidding about the boredom of the trip; unfortunately, he was telling the truth indeed. A week-and-a-half into the trip, they had become almost completely uninterested in the boat. Even when they stood on the deck and glanced over the railing, there was nothing much to see except water and the faint tree line of the shore.

Two weeks into the trip, Duncan was calmly pacing on the deck, daydreaming about the city he so longed to find. Abruptly, two burly men wearing trench coats that he hadn't seen on the boat

before came out from below deck. They approached him, slamming their fists together, and one of them snarled, "This is where the journey ends, boy." Duncan attempted to flee, but soon realized they had cornered him near some crates. He started screaming for help, yelling, "Thiago! Gibbs! I'm trapped!" The men growled and grabbed him. One of the guys stuffed his monstrous hand over Duncan's face, and the other one lifted him off the deck and walked over to the railing.

"No one's here to save you now, rich kid." As the men started to raise Duncan's body over the railing, they were both struck in the head by a large piece of wood. Knocked out right away, they fell to the deck and dropped Duncan. He yelled and grabbed the railing to stop his fall. Thiago rushed over to him and pulled him up onto the deck.

"There you go, *amigo*." Thiago said with a stern look on his face. "All safe."

The boat stopped at Manaus for two reasons: to refuel for the remainder of the trip, and to release the men who had tried to kill Duncan to the authorities. The other passengers on the ship disembarked, since the city was their desired destination. Past Manaus, the boat had about 320 kilometers to go until it would reach the point marked on the map. The part of the river west of Manaus became remoter and remoter until eventually, there were no more villages at all, and only trees dotted the shoreline. Five days after leaving Manaus, the steamboat arrived at the desired point.

"Remember," Bruno warned, "you paid us and the captain to stay here for a week. If you're in the forest any longer, we'll have to turn back."

"Yes, I know," Gibbs replied. "That should be plenty of time."

With that, Duncan and Gibbs set out into the humid forest. The map had shown how far upstream the conquistador had come, and the next part of their adventure included a three-day hike northwest of their spot of departure from the boat. The city was described as being so massive that as long as you were within several miles of the main route, you would still come across it.

Machetes were used by the Scotsmen to slice through the thick underbrush as they journeyed on toward the city. En route, many noises of birds and monkeys were heard in the canopy above, and several encounters with insects and other animals were made. At one point, they crossed the path of a female jaguar with two cubs and had to stand stock-still until the cats had passed. Their food supply was decent, but by no means did they have a surplus of food. Their stock consisted of a trail mix, some fruit, and a canteen of

water. At night, they slept on woolen blankets they had brought along. On midmorning of their third day of hiking, nothing in the dim landscape of the forest floor had changed.

“Was our direction of travel off too much from the city?” Duncan asked Gibbs worriedly.

“Aye, I’m afraid so, Mr. Johnston. Either that, or the map was a hoax.”

Duncan, suddenly overcome with anger, stomped off through the forest. Gibbs called out after him and started to follow him. Brusquely, Duncan yelped, and Gibbs ran toward the noise, concerned for the boy’s safety. When the butler reached him, Duncan turned around and smirked at him.

“Mr. Johnston, do you think it’s funny to run off into uncharted forest like that?” Gibbs huffed angrily.

“No sir, I’m sorry,” Duncan replied, “but I did just come across something. Come take a look.” Moving out of the trees, Duncan and Gibbs entered a clearing that stood on the edge of a massive valley below. The valley contained colossal buildings made of stone, as well as a large pyramid in the center that sparkled in the sunlight, for it was made entirely of gold.

“The City of Treasures,” Gibbs said in a flabbergasted tone of voice. “It’s really here.”

Part III. Treasure and Conclusion

They stood on the edge of the city for roughly an hour while Duncan sketched the remarkable landscape in his journal, and they rested from the long hike. After the brief rest, they made their way down into the valley and noticed something remarkable: the streets were paved with gold.

“That’s absolutely brilliant!” Gibbs exclaimed. “It’s like heaven on Earth!” Most of the structures in the city were deteriorating, if not completely collapsed. The buildings were constructed of stone and wood. It was clear to the outside viewer, though, that the civilization that had built the city so many years ago was highly advanced architecturally, and they had built at least one thing that had stood the tests of time completely. It was the tallest and most awesome structure of the city: the central pyramid. Not only did its height clearly surpass those of the great pyramids built by the Egyptians, but it was also constructed completely of solid gold.

Having made their way through the remarkable city, Duncan and Gibbs walked through its massive doorway and into an enormous chamber with a high ceiling, which kind of resembled a

large European cathedral. Duncan reasoned that it must've been a religious center for the city. Nothing of value was visible in the pyramid, but the Scotsmen examined the chamber anyway and found a staircase leading underground. They started to descend it, but heard voices at the bottom halfway down. They stopped tersely, but it was too late, for the people at the bottom had heard their footsteps. Three husky men suddenly came into view at the foot of the stairs. Duncan and Gibbs turned to each other with fearful looks. Wasting no time, they turned to flee, but one of the men said, "Not so fast!" and cocked a pistol, aiming it at them. The Scotsmen turned back around slowly. "You guys should've turned around earlier. Since apparently you thought nothing of our first attempts to stop you, your deaths will be a lot worse than getting thrown off a boat."

The two other men snickered and laughed oafishly. "We'll deal with you two after we've gathered the treasure. It'll give you some time to think about your stupidity." The men roughly grabbed Duncan and Gibbs and dragged them down the stairs. At the bottom, they were tied with thick ropes to a golden statue just outside the entrance to a large room. They were terrified for their lives, but they couldn't help feeling a sense of awe looking into the room. It housed a massive treasure trove, containing items made out of rubies, emeralds, sapphires, gold, and silver. The captive men watched as the thugs silently loaded artifact after artifact into brown sacks.

"Gibbs," Duncan whispered, "Do you have any plans for an escape?"

"Yes," Gibbs said, nodding to his hand, which held his knife that he had managed to wriggle out of his pocket. "I'm going to start working on the ropes."

Eventually, after a lot of the artifacts had been placed in the bags, a large section of the tiled floor had become visible. Most of the tiles were a sandy color, but one was black.

"We're getting close," the main thug said. "Just a few more bags."

"That's good," another one said breathlessly, "cause I'm getting tired from lifting all this stuff." The brutish man stepped back, and his foot came into contact with the seemingly out of place black tile. A deep rumbling sound could be heard throughout the whole room.

"What's that?" one of the thugs yelled over the din.

"I'm not sure," the head brute yelled back, "but grab the sacks and get out of here!"

Soon, it was clear what was causing the noise. At the entrance to the chamber, a gold panel started sliding out of the wall.

“They triggered a booby trap,” Gibbs said in awe to Duncan. “That panel’s going to close off the room.” The thugs could be seen inside the room, grunting and trying to lug their many bags full of treasure to the exit. Closer and closer they came to the door, but the panel was still sliding out.

“Nooooo!” The main thug screamed and dived for the exit right as the door was closing. As he dived, he dropped a sack he was lugging and a gold necklace adorned with rubies slid through the tiny crack of space remaining. The panel hit the opposite side with a loud and final thud, sealing the thugs inside the room forever with the very treasure that had doomed them.

Duncan and Gibbs glanced at each other with stunned expressions.

“Blimey, that was crazy,” Gibbs said as he finished cutting the ropes binding them to the statue.

“You’re right there,” Duncan responded, shaking his head. “But it was pretty awesome.”

The Scotsmen stood up shakily. Duncan walked over to the lone piece of treasure on the ground and picked it up. He examined it keenly.

“We came here to find a city filled with treasure,” Duncan said, “and we did, but this is all we have. For proof, I mean. A small necklace.”

“At least something good came out of this,” Gibbs said solemnly. “We could’ve ended up like those fellows.”

“Yes Gibbs, you’re right. We’re lucky to be alive. Let’s get out of here now.”

With that, Duncan placed the necklace in his knapsack, and the adventurers left the pyramid and continued on through the city, their journey complete but the long trek home just begun.

Four weeks later, Duncan and Gibbs laid down on their beds in a cabin on the *SS Victoria*, halfway back to Britain and reminiscing on their adventure.

“So Mr. Johnston,” Gibbs asked earnestly, “is there any consideration now for attending a university after going on this crazy escapade?”

“Not a chance, Gibbs; the only thing I’m considering is where we’re going to explore next. Any ideas?”

“Oh yes, Duncan. A friend of mine named Howard Carter invited me to go help unearth a tomb in Egypt. Any chance you’d want to investigate that with me?”

Duncan grinned widely. “Oh yes, Gibbs. Oh yes.”

Rachel Sajban
Windom, MN
2nd Place

Maze of life

In Genevieve's village there was a tradition: when the first-born child reached the age of ten they had their name placed in a raffle to begin a journey to the center of the maze. The maze was a natural phenomenon; no one knew how it had gotten there, but there had been many legends that those who reached the center were blessed with the most happy of lives. Families, assuming that they would be giving their children an opportunity to live a wonderfully blessed life, would enter their children into the raffle and pray that they would make it through to experience the greatness at its core. Genevieve just so happened to be the one chosen in her year, and she had been excited about what the journey over the next years would hold.

Her journey through the maze started out peaceful enough. There always seemed to be some sort of joy in her steps, a light pushing her through. But things changed for Genevieve around the age of fourteen when the light leading her on her path was down to a crepuscular, and the shadows seemed to be creeping into her sight. Her world was turning dark.

The darkness began when she took a wrong turn. Genevieve had made a mistake and turned left rather than right. She had turned into the dark forest, which at the time of her decision seemed to be radiant and filled with light, but was revealed to be a path of shadows laced with spider webs. Genevieve tried to turn back, but she could not. She had already chosen the path she wanted to go down. One mistake had marked her fate until the next intersection of the maze.

Spiders crawled around her feet and up her legs. They lowered themselves from trees, and landed in her hair. Genevieve was scared. She could hardly see the path in front of her, but she could feel the spiders and hear them scampering around her. She wished that it all would come to an end. But she kept pushing through, with something in her mind that told her she had to move along.

She came across an intersection in the path she was following; she was at the next turn of the maze. On one side a crepuscular glow was emitted, and on the other there seemed to be a luminescence

like none she had ever seen. She was tempted to go into that radiant light, but she could not forget how the last time she turned toward the light she ended up in darkness. She had been fooled once by a darkness disguised as light, and would not allow it to happen to her again. She headed down the dimly lit path and hoped that it would not turn out to be a dreadful decision.

So far, things had been calm along her current path; it seemed that she was in a good place. However, as she continued on the path she came upon another intersection. She was disappointed that she would not be able to continue on the tranquil path, but she knew she had to move on. She always had to keep moving forward in her journey through the maze.

This intersection was a strange one; she could either follow a trail through a very dense forest, or travel through a well-lit cave. The decision was a bit difficult, but Genevieve decided that the cave seemed to be the safer of the two options.

The cave was very quiet, with the only noises that could be heard being her footsteps and slow breaths. That is, up until she tripped. As she crashed to the ground with a shriek of surprise the cave began to fill with some sort of creatures. Genevieve wasn't sure what the creatures were, but upon closer inspection she saw they were bats. Genevieve hated bats, but even still she got up from the ground and pushed on, bats swarming around her. Genevieve felt like giving up once again. Would getting to the middle of the maze really be worth it?

It was; she could feel the answer in her heart. It was as if it had been placed there by someone. She trudged along, dodging hundreds, if not thousands of bats as they surged around her. After what seemed to be hours of dealing with the dreadful bats, she collapsed at the end of the cave, the point of a new intersection.

Brushing herself off as she stood up, Genevieve took a look left where there was a peaceful looking open path, and to her right where there was a bright beautiful forest. Both options seemed to be beautiful and peaceful in her opinion, and she felt that whichever way she went would be safe. Deciding that the open path seemed almost boring and had no scenery to amaze and attract her, Genevieve decided to head down the forest path. It all started out peaceful, much like the cave, and the first forest, but slowly the sounds of chirping birds and scampering woodland critters faded, as did the bright light guiding her path. It went from positive radiance to absolute blackness. Genevieve stumbled her way through, feeling as if she would never escape this dark hell. She kept pushing on though. Something in her mind told her this would all

be over soon; she could push through it. It began to feel as if someone was pulling her along now, and she was moving faster through the forest, stumbling less, and then finally she made it to the next intersection.

This intersection was particularly interesting to Genevieve. It didn't seem like any of the others from before. At this particular intersection one side had an orangey glow to it, and the other had a blinding white light. All that Genevieve could see on either side was the glow of the lights and nothing beyond. Something seemed to be pulling her toward the luminous white light, and before she knew it she had crossed over and was greeted by a man who seemed to glow like the light that drew her in.

"Welcome, to my kingdom of light," said the man gesturing around him.

"Who are you?" Genevieve asked.

"I am the Prince of Life. I have been watching you throughout your journey. I watched as you went through the thicks and thins of this maze and guided you when I saw the need."

"So all those times where I felt like someone was pulling me through or telling me to keep moving on, that was you?"

"Yes, not everyone chooses to follow where I lead them, but you kept on pushing through. And now you will be blessed with a life free from the hardship you had to deal with along the course of this journey. You have arrived at the center of the Maze."

Genevieve almost couldn't believe her ears. She had made it, and had accomplished what she set out for.

"Now then, child, there has been a place prepared for you in my kingdom. You have made it home."

His last sentence rang in her ears. "You have made it home." It hadn't occurred to her that she had been searching for home, but now she realized that she had been searching for "home" long before she even entered the maze. "Home," had always been in her vision, she just hadn't taken the time to notice before this moment. Now, she was truly "home."

Rachel Engels
Ivanhoe, MN
3rd Place

The Wonderful Story of Two Lovely Aliens from Mars

Once upon a time there were two aliens. One was named Boo and the other was named Bob. They had big heads with round noses. Their big ears stuck straight out. They had little mouths and two teeth. Their eyes were big, and they had two antennae. Their arms and legs were short and their bodies were little and round.

Then one day they decided to go to Earth because they had never been there before, and they wanted to know what it was like. They had studied Earth and wanted to experience it for themselves. They also wanted to know if the people on Earth ate mush and bugs like aliens did on Mars. On Mars it was very dry, and they lived in a dome-shaped house. They breathed carbon dioxide, so they could live on both Earth and Mars without air tanks.

Boo and Bob shoved everything they owned into their flying space vehicle (FSV). The FSV was powered by the sun, so they didn't have to worry about running out of gas. They got in the FSV and took off. Then, they realized that they had forgotten to preflight check the FSV before they left.

"Should we go back and check everything over?" Boo asked. He was afraid of everything that could possibly happen to them.

"No, you should just hope everything works," Bob replied.

"Well, don't you remember last time when we went to Jupiter without making sure everything was working?"

"Yeah, we made it to our destination safely, even though we almost broke down."

"What if we actually broke down and crashed?"

"Well, then we wouldn't be here to talk about it," Bob concluded.

They sat and discussed what they were excited about for their trip until they got close to Earth, hoping everything worked. They still needed to decide where they wanted to land. Bob thought that they should land in Mexico, because it is warm, but Boo thought that they should land in Canada, because it is cold like Mars. They decided to compromise and land in the United States of America. They wanted to land somewhere nice and flat, so they chose to land

in Nebraska. They also decided that they should visit each state in the U.S. while they were there.

Then, suddenly Boo saw something in the air that looked like a bomb.

“Look, there is a bomb over there,” said Boo.

“Oh, no. Maybe this is a bad idea,” replied Bob.

“There is another one,” said Boo and looked out the other way. “And there are a whole bunch over here, too.”

Then Bob looked out the window. “Those aren’t bombs; they are pretty colors!” he exclaimed.

“Maybe they are pretty colored bombs to trick people,” replied Boo.

“I don’t think so,” said Bob.

“Why not?”

“Because that would be dumb to make a bomb pretty colors.”

“I think we should go back home,” Boo said. He was extremely easy to scare.

“Well, I’m glad you are not the one driving.” Bob pushed the little levers around to steer. “We will go to the U.S.; I am not going to turn around.”

“Just make sure we don’t get hit by one of those bombs.”

Bob pushed the landing button and the two aliens safely floated down to Earth without being hit by any bombs. The whole trip only took 24 hours. They finally figured out that they weren’t bombs. It was actually the fourth day of July according to all of the people they talked to. It was the celebration of independence from the British, and the things they saw were fireworks.

The aliens decided to live on Earth instead of going back to Mars. They thought Earth was lots more fun than Mars, because it was different. They got jobs as hairstylists for people that like strange hairdos. They got enough money and bought a two bedroom one-and-one-half story house in Lincoln, Nebraska, because they thought the weather was very strange. It was wet, and it was a very flat land compared to Mars. They liked that the years were very short on Earth compared to Mars, because it made them get another year older faster. The aliens became celebrities after people got used to seeing them, and they lived happily ever after.

Poetry
Grades 11 & 12

Madeleine Kennedy
Pipestone, MN
1st Place

Burdened Soles

I was walking along a road one day when I noticed a stone
being kicked about by careless, nonobservant feet,
their owners too caught up in their own being to be bothered
by something so unassuming.
So I picked up the stone and slipped it into my pocket.
The road didn't care, nobody noticed.
I kept that stone close to me,
always in my pocket as a friendly reminder of the day I found it—
the day that I saved that curious pebble from the streets.
The summer breeze turned into winter wind and years passed
before I found myself back on that road.
Different faces, but the same old feet—
always in a hurry, always somewhere important to be.
And, as it was my last time on this road,
I took the stone out of my pocket,
rolling my fingers over its smooth surface one last time
before giving it back to the earth it came from.
It tumbled for a while and came to a rest,
its now worn exterior slowly blending
back into the chaotic background.
And as I left, I thought about that little stone and smiled.
The road didn't care, nobody noticed.
But at least it made someone's trip a little smoother.

James Hamm
St. James, MN
2nd Place

Growth of a Scientist

Sacrifices must be made,
When we support the ones we love,
With a sister she must aid,
Holding family above,
She sends her sister in her stead.

A governess she has become,
Showing her love for her sister,
From Warsaw she has come,
Teaching becoming a blister,
She remembers why she hangs on this thread.

The want to learn has returned,
She wishes to be free,
The will to learn in her head has burned,
From the Governess she wishes to flee,
And all of this sits on her head.

Three years of long waiting,
Finally she escapes,
Against her job, her will has been grating,
The future her destiny shapes,
To a place filled with pencil lead.

Paris the place of dreams,
In this place her fire is fueled,
Drinking from the knowledge streams,
The rust becomes jeweled,
The knowledge in her embed.

Driven from her sister's company,
She strives to learn on her own,
Herself she will accompany,
While she wills to be alone,
On 40 rubles a month she will tread.

Allison Wordes
Renville, MN
3rd Place

Awakening

An icicle of thought
Pierces unconsciousness
Like a crystal chandelier
Drawing me quickly out
Of deep darkness, slick
As a skate on a frozen
Pond, sharp light
Pricking my damp
Senses; a chilly
Transparency
Keeps me
From
Greeting a
Persistent
Day

Fiction
Grades 11 & 12

Abby Traxler
Madison, MN
1st Place

Waterless Fish

Since long before quills and parchment captured all that could be, prior to when matches were struck and candles set aflame, and preceding the first true metropolis of our world, the door to infinite life was one all wished to open. The first of our people felt it deep in their souls when their friends ceased to be. Upon the initial taste of loss and sorrow, they partook in the lifelong conquest all individuals perform: They sought answers.

As civilization began weaving into the expanse of barren nothingness, new creations came to life. Medicines were brewed to oppose disease, the sky became a luxurious domain to those who could afford it, and ingenious mechanisms removed a majority of life's tedious labor. Despite these synthetic miracles, the prospect of immortality continued to dance out of straining fingers, leaving a trail of bitter abandonment in its wake. It wasn't forgotten, simply cast aside for another soul with more dedication, or, as it so happens, someone with a good deal of desperation.

Blythe Scathefire was a man of many ideas, though some would claim too many and wish there was a way his mind could generate something useful. He was the kind of human being who hoarded old maps and fragile papers riddled with black scribbles passed off as writing. Every idea in his mind was jotted down on surfaces before him. The insides of books became home to many concepts of his, and the floorboards of his home looked more like old testaments than stained wood. An 'overworking mind' many would say, one that produces too much, but never what anyone is looking for, which was quite unfortunate for someone like Blythe Scathefire.

In the esteemed city of Alethena, where the multitudes of technological advancements were born, lived the souls who made it possible. Scholars poured their lives into creating objects that would better society, ever since Alethena's foundation. As the years went on, these scholars became the building blocks of civilization, redeemed and praised for their very existence. It was not until a scholar lost his valuable skills that he was viewed as unessential. These scholars, despite any attempts to try and regain admiration

for their abilities, usually descended from civilization's inner workings to the dust where people walked. A scholar unable to distribute ideas to a consumer had only an inescapable void awaiting him.

Regrettable to say, Blythe Scathefire was one of these men. Although his lack of ideas resulted in the unwavering image of his road's end, Scathefire believed, despite a few loose stones in life, he could set himself right once more. In his eyes, he needed only a single idea, one epiphany that would rework all the components of his existence. The scribbles in his dwelling and within his books, on his arms and etched into the fabric of his clothes, one of those had potential of being his creation. All he needed was time and patience; however, folk already glanced at him with disinterest and partial scorn. "What an unfortunate gentleman," they would say whilst shaking their heads. "Fixated on so many disappointments. How many years must pass before he realizes his mistake?" These words never deterred Scathefire, for he chose to think of each quiet whisper as the muttering of lesser individuals. What had they ever done in their lives to match up to the very notion toward which he strived? These mundane civilians could never hope to comprehend the beautiful disorder of his mind. He considered himself to be, in every fathomable way, superior to the fools who pitied him.

He'd been accustomed to this way of thinking since childhood and had never found a reason to change it. As time aged him, his view on humanity grew colder, and he distanced himself from them, not wanting his prodigy mind to be tainted by their insipid ways of thinking. He believed he would take this attitude to the grave where it would rot with him. He had yet to be graced with undeniable proof there was life after death, but he chose not to ponder such things. He couldn't tolerate the fools in life, so he grew weary at the thought of the ones residing in the afterlife. Those were tedious worries, so he settled for the troubles currently being dealt to him, one of which being the maddening goal he fought for, the single twisted key that wouldn't settle in its pristine lock. He couldn't dwell on death when life refused to mold to his liking.

When he needed inspiration for creation, Scathefire looked in the old workings of Alethena. The city never failed to grant him new angles to consider or multiple calculations to speculate. He listened to the soft breaths of the metropolis, wrote his ideas, and listened some more. This process continued, over and over, until he was left with significant phrases or words that sent him running home to unfurl the whole equation the city had given. Each journey deep within Alethena's interior provided new insight, so this day

was like any other and began with optimism in his intrepid step. Scathefire strode through the residents, around the stone buildings, over the networks of bridges and roads, through the market and all its topsy-turvy, in between more people, and ended in the heart of the city. The fountain of black travertine spat water into the cobblestone street where it trickled through the grooves until swallowed by thin grates. Hawthorn trees danced about the town square, tying themselves in knots that children would often weave through. Very few played here today, though, which was for the best. Today, the man who'd searched the city had arrived at its heart without any ideas. The city had granted him nothing, and the deep recesses of his mind were dry. The resentment consuming his entire being would not have fared well had it been mixed with the delighted cries of children.

Blythe Scathefire pivoted on his heel in a slow circle to gaze upon the city with fierce disappointment. He'd always unearthed ideas using this method before, so why was today any different? What had changed?

A thin trill pulled his angry glare from the looming bell tower and brought him back to the fountain and trees. A simple melody was twirling through the air, almost foreign to Alethena's atmosphere. Alethena was a settlement of numbers and concepts, science and scrollwork. Art played no major role here, and those with creative gifts were treated similarly to failed scholars.

Scathefire turned, narrowed eyes scanning the area until he saw the source of the noise. Behind the fountain, on one of the travertine seats, was a small girl with a maychord resting against her. She was nothing more than a child really, and her thin arms held the stringed instrument like a close friend while nimble fingers gently brushed the five strings. As each string stirred, notes trickled about the girl, pulling a wide smile from her face. She continued without flaw, tapping a bare foot against the cobblestone and letting her fingers do as they please, filling everything with its relentless sweet touch.

Scathefire's eyebrows pulled together in a look of indignation, and he waited for a hesitation in the song before calling over to the girl.

"Why is it you're so enthralled by that cacophonous pandemonium?"

The young girl raised her head and the last notes died on vibrating strings, fading out in a melancholic sigh. Her eyes were dark like the edges of a garnet rose just beginning to wilt. The expression within was hard to determine, but Scathefire glimpsed a touch of what he presumed to be confusion and repeated his inquiry.

“How are you able to tolerate such noise?”

The small child focused on her maychord as though trying to fathom why she took comfort in the soothing melody the instrument produced. Her eyes returned to Scathefire and she stated, “Why ever not? Are you not one for music, my respectable sir?” She spoke in a nonchalance as one might about the weather, leaving Scathefire taken aback as he’d expected a stung outburst.

The scholar shook his head, responding confidently, “I choose not to occupy myself with meaningless affairs. There is nothing music or other creative arts can grant me aside from the regret of time wasted.”

The girl laid her maychord on the cracked stone of her seat and stood, carefully pinching a fallen leaf from the deep green fabric of her dress. Pulling the hem clear of her bare toes, she approached Scathefire and bowed a wavy head of chestnut hair.

“A pleasure, my respectable sir, to meet one with such a bold opinion of music,” she said, voice lacking any trace of anger. “I am often referred to as Coby Mo. You may address me as such.”

Scathefire inclined his head in greeting as Coby Mo raised her own, replying in the same respectable fashion, “Many thanks, Coby Mo. I am Blythe Scathefire, a scholar of Alethena.”

The title pulled a look from Coby Mo that Scathefire found suspicious, but he simply frowned at the crooked smirk on the child’s face until it hastily vanished.

“I have heard talk about you,” Coby Mo explained. “Folk place you in the category of scholars nearing the end of their road. Is that true, sir?”

Scathefire scowled at the inquiry, quickly retorting, “What you’ve heard is nonsense. I am no different than the other scholars who are continuously adding to our society. It isn’t uncommon for men such as ourselves to take breaks from our work.”

“Begging your pardon, sir, but I assumed one *needed* to be doing work in order to take a break from it,” Coby Mo hummed, rolling her shoulders with a helpless shrug. “Folk say you are without any. I have also heard the term ‘waterless fish’ be used, so am I to understand you are like a trout in critical condition, choking on air while the waves leave you stranded?”

This wasn’t spoken with any malice or jeer, but rather with genuine curiosity. Scathefire would have countered with a vicious remark had it not been for the look of awe in Coby Mo’s eyes. He bit down his cruel words and uttered through pinched lips, “That is not entirely true. I have many ideas that I believe are worthwhile even when the populace thinks not.”

“Oh,” Coby Mo uttered the single noise and turned to collect her maychord, skipping to a stop before the glossy instrument and gathering it in her arms like a mother would a babe. Looking back at Scathefire, she said, “Your life is equations and calculations. You find it on old parchment and stamped into the bodies of books. Your brain lies in scrolls, your personality sits on scales, and your heart belongs to sciences and arithmetic.” She strummed the five strings of her instrument, producing a chime as gentle as her smile. “My brain, personality, and heart resides here, Blythe Scathefire. Listen for a moment, you’ll hear my heartbeat. Listen for a day, I’ll play you my life story.”

Scathefire cocked his head to the side, allowing his mind to tentatively embrace this new concept. He’d always scoffed at the artists of Alethna, the jesters who strived for entertainment. What achievements had they made worth celebrating? Why applaud the actors with faux expressions or the painters dyeing canvases with chemicals and pigments? He’d never found a reason, although he’d never actually sat down to speak with one either.

The quiet scholar made his way to the travertine bench and took a seat, folding his hands together and releasing a sigh.

“Is that so?” he asked, surprised that Coby Mo’s look of delight nearly had him smiling in return. He kept the expression at bay and listened as the young girl began to speak with rising enthusiasm.

“To me, music grants a freedom that no other endeavor can. I could be a scholar like yourself and concoct a serum able to end all our sickness, but it wouldn’t be the same as drawing out the last note of a concerto,” Coby Mo explained. “I’ve loved the beauty of music since I was born, and I fell for the maychord when I saw a man performing in the streets. He played an old ballad, and I knew in that moment I wanted to do the same, to dance in these streets with my friend of maple and strings.”

The enchantment in her deep eyes faded to an almost sorrowful longing, and Coby Mo stroked her maychord while softly murmuring, “Have you heard of Euphoria Millennia, my respectable sir?”

“I cannot say I have,” Scathefire answered after some hesitation. It wasn’t an often occurrence, him admitting to not knowing something. He didn’t particularly enjoy the experience, but the sudden change in Coby Mo’s voice made him file away the scorn for later.

“It was discovered long ago, back in the years of the Relentless Autumn buried beneath the ruins of Tarsha. It is a collection of old tomes, and within them is the longest musical piece ever written.”

Coby Mo glanced at Scathefire, blinking calmly. “No one is certain as to the purpose of its existence, only that its very being challenges all with a strong devotion to music. It stymies each and every one of us because this score of music, Euphoria Millenia, was composed to last four thousand six hundred twenty-five years when played. None shall ever hear the end of the journey, myself included. I have always wanted to play Euphoria Millenia, but if I am to begin, I never want to stop. Even if I were to bestow my last breath upon the final note of that masterpiece, I would greet Death with a kiss and be the happiest soul to have ever walked upon the world.”

Scathefire’s dislike for musicians and entertainers returned like a snake, carefully weaving around his wonder at Coby Mo’s words. It was for outrageous drama such as this that urged him to look down upon the creative class. For what reason would someone want a song to last four thousand six hundred twenty-five years? Why trouble anyone with an impossible task? There was no motive behind it, no reason, and above all, no scientific answer.

Curling his lips in an exasperated smile, Scathefire rose to his feet and performed a graceful bow for Coby Mo.

“An intriguing undertaking,” he said in a cool tone, letting slip a touch of dismissal. “I do, however, find the idea of Euphoria Millenia to be quite ridiculous, but I wish you luck in your quest to survive four thousand six hundred twenty-five years. If you claim you can express your life in a single day of playing your maychord, I am curious as to what four thousand can tell me.”

The young girl was motionless, peering into Scathefire’s glinting eyes and rolling various responses on her tongue. Finally, she produced a weary sigh and nodded. “As do I, Blythe Scathefire.”

Upon returning home, Scathefire hadn’t stopped pondering the wishes of Coby Mo. No matter how far he immersed himself in the pages of his books or the scrawled ramblings on his floorboards, her beliefs wouldn’t leave him. Did he pity her, the little child who desperately wanted to play a maddening tangle of never ending song? It was the foolish desires of a musician and nothing more. He had no role to play there, so he shoved aside all concern for the delusional girl and proceeded with his search for the creation that would save himself.

He lit candles late into the night to illuminate his work. He blanketed parchment in words, spilled ink over books, and devoured the contents of one volume after another, seeking ideas. He failed to design a mechanical device worth the time for assembly. Upon

adding together a chemical equation, he made a finger-numbing tonic and nothing more. He could feel his mind folding in on itself, ignoring his need to continue as it fell prisoner to exhaustion.

Wax trickled down the stout candle and pooled along the base, escaping onto the tabletop and bleeding into the skin of Scathefire's wrist. The scholar whipped his hand free, scowling at the distraction as it seeped into his notes. It smeared the wet ink and marred his thoughts, putting a very dismal conclusion into his brain: Try as he may to extend the path of his importance, the end had never looked more clear. Just as Coby Mo could never hope to start and complete Euphoria Millennia, he would never succeed in being the scholar for which he'd fought. When Death came for him, Scathefire would reflect upon a wasted lifetime. The grim reaper would release a merciless cackle and pry away his soul. Nothing would stop the hands of ice and bone and nothing would stop the torrent of regret.

Digging his fingers into his hair, Scathefire crushed his face into his palms while holding back a helpless sob. Perhaps all had been for naught, and he was just as deluded as the fools acting out their insignificant roles in the performance of the mundane. Perhaps he'd been eternally cursed from the start.

The scholar half expected to feel reality's sharp blade embed itself within his heart, but to his surprise, he instead received the prick of a needle. A needle of inspiration.

Scathefire raised his head and began to navigate his distraught mind. There had been the flicker of an idea, somewhere in the cluttered darkness. He'd uttered something to himself, a single word that had unlocked an expanse of possibilities, but what had it been? What had the needle been laced with? What was the idea coursing through him like an everlasting fire?

Everlasting. Perpetual. Eternal.

The prospect of eternal life.

Scathefire's breath caught. He let out a choked laugh that grew into a maniacal outburst as he discovered his answer. Immortality was a desire scholars had fought for since long ago, forever contributing effort and gaining nothing. No one had delved into its complexity since the Unforgiving Winter, but those long years had been without efficient science. From where Scathefire now stood, he believed eternal life could be more than a long awaited dream. He'd been called an insane fool for his past undertakings, but perhaps that's what it took for an accomplishment such as this—the gears of insanity never ceasing within an overworking mind.

The once sorrowful tears now ran for joy while the man continued to laugh. The road of his life disappeared into the horizon,

and he could sense Death withdrawing like an insecure shadow as he assembled his thoughts. He needed books and a wide variety of materials ranging from chemicals to equipment. Soon he would write formulas, jot down results, and shroud his living quarters in the blissful mess of his busy mind. He would begin this instant, just as the sun peeked between the heavy drapes over his windows.

Scathefire wavered before pinching the flame of a candle as another thought shoved its way between the more prominent, settling down on his ecstatic emotions. Coby Mo's wishes prodded at his guilty conscious, and he impatiently cast them aside. It didn't concern him in the least, but that mattered little to a small place in his heart.

Just as the candle's flame nipped his fingers, empathy won out over contempt, and he crushed the candle's wick, killing the light. He strode across tattered scrolls and withered books, throwing open his door with an air of determination and left his home.

Through the streets he traveled, his mind a whirlwind. He was already making plans for pursuing immortality, deciding to visit the city's archives when he finished his current business. Those ancient books would offer new perspective, but first he needed the insight of another.

The center of Alethena was just as it had been the previous morning. The fountain continued to gurgle contentedly and the trees bowed to one another as a polite breeze passed them. The only flaw was the lack of sound, the endless quiet suffocating Alethena's heart.

Scathefire's eyes flew everywhere, each window and doorway, and all the seats of travertine. Every location was empty, leaving him correspondently hollow. His inability to find Coby Mo made him realize just how important it was to tell her of his newfound quest. If it hadn't been for her insight, would he have unearthed the concept of eternal life?

He disliked people, truly, but there was an innocence about Coby Mo that left him bewildered. He had devoted his entire life to science and proving himself, and although she'd dedicated her life to music, it didn't appear as though she had anything to prove. She played her songs out of love, and she longed for Euphoria Millennia because it was like a breath of life to her. What was it that struck so much passion into one individual?

He heard the string quiver before he saw the familiar, green fabric floating in the breeze. The trill came from above, and he raised his eyes to the hawthorn branches overhead. Coby Mo sat in

the crooked network, her maychord perched on a bent knee as she smiled down at him.

Scathefire gazed back at the young child with hair so wild and eyes so bright before he spoke.

“Coby Mo,” the scholar began, allowing himself to return her smile with one of everlasting gratitude. “Would you like to be immortal?”

Abby Traxler
Madison, MN
2nd Place

A Step Out of Monochrome

To say Maitiu Orrin is weird would be the biggest understatement since my little brother claimed Mount Kilimanjaro was just a really big hill. The word doesn't fit, like an undesirable puzzle piece. However, if you were to attempt to pin a single word on him that described every trait, good and bad, believable and unbelievable, I'm afraid the task will join you in the grave.

One of the first words to come to mind is 'unique.' Maitiu Orrin is unique. Unfortunately, I despise that word for it can be said of anyone. Sickeningly ironic, isn't it? To use that word would be to lump Maitiu into the everyday, mundane populace, something I could never bring myself to do.

Another possible choice for an adjective would be 'inconceivable.' Although, as before, inconceivable can be said of any callow, big-mouthed fool with a flair for drama and a top hat with a white rabbit, so I withdraw that word as well.

Truth be told, I'd rather no word be used to describe Maitiu. Instead, I'm content with the never ending game of always pondering over the exact ones to use. That is the only way to describe him. With no words at all, only the feeble grasping at ones which can barely brush the marvel of his existence.

Maitiu Orrin was like any other child on your first day of school: A complete stranger, but potential best friend for life, a constant enemy, or a simple shade of the background portrait. Yet, like every other child, he was similar to me, analyzing everything around him and running through multiple scenarios of how a single action can form the rest of the day, the week, his life.

Maitiu was quiet and kept to himself, watching the other children with tranquil, sage-colored eyes. They followed the teacher, absorbing words and pictures as she read books to us. They trailed after every line his crayon produced on a blank sheet of paper.

Those eyes always watched, but like his mouth, never spoke.

It didn't take me long to decide I didn't care for school. I was solitary, the kind that worried my parents into thinking I might grow up to be a hermit. They would tend to overanalyze and, as a result, were constantly on edge. They fussed when I showed a particular love for oranges, worried I might become dependent on the fruit and need it for survival in later years. Other times, they rearranged large, advanced books out of reach just in case I dove into one like I did with *The Prince and the Pauper*. They didn't want me growing up too fast and preferred I stay well within my reading level. They also couldn't stand the fact I was attempting to teach myself words, and with *The Prince and the Pauper* no less.

Favoring silence over the chattering of company, school wasn't a warm environment for me. No one ever stopped talking to simply let us think about things. I had words, images, and colors thrown at me. Names were jumbled in my brain, scattered about and left to be picked up for the time I would be forced to socialize. It was all too busy for a young child like me who wanted nothing more than the simplicity only I could create.

'Everything is the same,' I had thought to myself the second week of school. The teachers were all smiles and compassionate eyes. The students were all jumpy and talkative. But just as time always does, it led every child to his or her place. Soon, almost all the children had their niche in that short time beginning school. They were pulled into rings of friends, made their places with the teachers, and owned important thoughts, as important as they get for kindergartners.

I, on the other hand, continued to stay distant, continued to concern teachers, and continued all thoughts alone in my head, right where they belonged.

Me, and Maitiu Orrin.

Playing outside was one upside I found in the boring, monotony of school. It allowed me to be free, provided the teachers didn't force their pupils into group activities or games that included everyone. When I was left to myself, I meandered around the playground with a curious gaze. I climbed on the equipment but never truly played. I creaked back and forth on the swings as a robotic pendulum, unlike the others who flew through the air with shrieks of delight. My classmates raced down the slide again and again, laughing all the while. I simply used it as convenient transportation to reach the ground when I found stairs or ladders tedious.

The day was Thursday and the weather was your average dose of cliché. The sun was warm and few clouds obscured it, blown around by a cool, pleasant breeze.

I sat atop the monkey bars, surveying the world around me like a king over his territory. I didn't consider myself higher than those around me; I simply didn't want much to do with them. I didn't think of them as peasants or I their ruler. To me, they were all part of the big picture, one that I looked at, and as an observer, I didn't see much reason to interact.

I leaned back, allowing myself to slip between two metal rungs before rocking back and forth with my knees hooked around one. The sky became my ground, and the tiny grains of sand stretched far above me, almost nauseatingly. I swung upside down, watching the other children slide across my field of vision. Unfortunately, I wasn't judging my speed, nor checking the security of my thin legs wrapped around the bar. In just an instant, as I flew forward, stomach to the ground, one leg unlatched itself, the other following in pursuit. A brief moment of panic flooded me, and I flailed like a helpless bird, desperate to fly, before striking the earth with a sickening *thud!*

My stomach lurched into my ribs, shoving my beating heart against bone and rattling my teeth. I couldn't have cried out if I wanted since all my air had been snatched by the wind, abandoning me and my frantic mind. I couldn't breathe. No matter how much I tried to expand my stiff lungs, oxygen refused to enter, and I gasped helplessly. My body was numb, refusing my every order, and I was truly alone. My usual lack of concern had been replaced by a painful horror and like any other child, I began fearing what I couldn't predict.

Footsteps were my salvation, a distant sound that urged my mind to focus for just a few moments. My gaze slid to the left, darting upwards to see who had come to my aid. Green eyes met mine, staring down at me with an emotionless detachment that couldn't be described as unconcern or contempt. They just lacked expression, the forest of green without life that was Maitiu Orrin.

I tried inhaling again, working the boy's name around my tongue so to ask him for help, but oxygen continued to be a cruel stranger. I hate saying I began to cry in that moment, small droplets that defied my wishes to keep behind dry lids, pouring down my cheeks. A lack of air kept me from wailing helplessly, which I consider both a curse and a blessing.

Beside me, Maitiu lowered himself onto his knees, stretching an arm out. Long fingers reached for me like thin blades of grass

being directed by a spring breeze. Very carefully, they came to rest on my forehead. His fingertips were flawless, and the touch was soothing.

An overall sense of calm enveloped me and, without warning, a rush of air exploded within me, filling my aching lungs and bringing feeling back to my body. I inhaled deeply, choking on the oxygen and urging myself to breathe deeply.

Maitiu pulled his hand back, a fraction of life in his unresponsive eyes. His mouth twisted in a grimace and his lips parted. For a moment, I thought he was going to scold me, but then I saw the child's body go tense. His chest heaved, and he braced a hand on the ground to steady himself. That's when I realized he couldn't breathe, just like me moments before.

I stared at the shuddering boy, unsure of what to make of the situation, but before I could consider fetching help, Maitiu's gaze met mine. The rush of oxygen from within me slowly trickled out and joined the wind that had awoken around us. Carefully, I inhaled and exhaled, grateful that the pain and immobile feeling had vanished. Bewildered, I blinked into Maitiu's calm eyes.

A glimmer of light flickered within, and I saw the beginning of a smile twitch on his lips. He rose to his feet, outstretching a hand to help me. I took it with minimal hesitation, gazing back at the boy with a sudden curiosity. With a nod, Maitiu turned and strode towards the swings, back straight like that of an adult and each step strong and full of purpose with which no child should yet be familiar.

I was awestruck after that, a fascinated kid unable to explain something yet wanting nothing more than the answer in my grasp. I worked that afternoon through my head repeatedly, taking every moment, every recollection and slowly disassembling it, reweaving it in a way that could make sense. However, no matter how many times I attempted tying reality into it, the answer was always the same: Maitiu Orrin wasn't like anyone else, easy as that.

Being a young child, I still didn't have a complete hold on what was truth and what was fantasy in our world. I had already debunked the obvious fictions, such as mythical creatures and jolly fat men celebrated during holidays. (Unveiling the truth of Christmas was yet another worrying setback for my parents.)

Despite knowing a broad range of both acceptable realities and lies for the ignorant, I couldn't help but feel Maitiu fell into the prior. It was impossible, wasn't it? For someone to take away pain with a single touch? Nothing like that could exist. Yet my young

mind kept convincing me otherwise, desperate for something exciting, a step out of monochrome.

The other students around me continued to stare up at their tutors, following each lesson closely. I, on the other hand, watched Maitiu. Silently, he would reside away from all the others, just like I did. He didn't speak to many, only nodded or shook his head when asked questions by teachers or classmates. If asked something that required more words, he would turn his head to the side, though not unkindly, and deny giving an answer. From everything I observed, I could tell he resembled me. He was secluded but didn't seem to care if that's the way it was. The teachers would murmur quietly to one another about the silent boy, and then their focus would turn back to me, another solitary child with nothing to say.

When playing outside, Maitiu wandered aimlessly, watching his classmates but never joining. He would sit in the shade of the giant maples beside the school or balance on a swing with his knees pulled to his chest. He didn't concern himself with others, and in return, they didn't notice him. Not once did I see him help out another as he'd helped me, and after a week of waiting for something out of this world, I couldn't any longer. There are times when you can't just wish for something extraordinary, you have to incite it.

Maitiu was trailing his shoe through the sand as he careened lazily on one of the swings beside the giant field of grass where the other children raced. A solemn gaze was fixated on the excited screams, darting about and following particular individuals as they chased each other.

I approached cautiously, as though Maitiu was an unsuspecting rabbit who would bolt at any time. However, he didn't turn in my direction, and encouraged, I slid into the swing next to his. A peaceful quiet rested over us, and it wasn't until I made a soft greeting that he turned to look in my direction.

"What are you doing?" I inquired, frowning curiously. "Do you want to play with them?"

The young boy stared at me, clear eyes looking me over before he shook his head.

I suppressed a disappointed sigh as the conversation was plunged to an irritating stop and tried again. "What's your name?"

It was something of a test. Almost every child in the grade had heard the names of their classmates once or twice, adding them to their memories or casting them aside as vague, seemingly useless information. I remembered this boy's name easily, especially after

he granted me air to breathe. I wanted to know if he'd wrapped himself in a silence so tight that he'd refuse such a simple request.

To my surprise, the corner of Maitiu's mouth formed an amused smirk for only a second before disappearing.

"You know," the boy answered quietly.

"Maitiu," I said, carefully sounding it out in my head so not to destroy the pronunciation. I followed it up with the mandatory phrases I'd been taught. "Nice to meet you. My name is Nikolaj."

The dark-haired boy blinked and turned his attention elsewhere, murmuring thoughtfully, "Niko."

"Nikolaj," I corrected swiftly, unsure of what to make of the impromptu nickname. Even my parents avoided nicknames, saying Nikolaj was a nice, sophisticated title. To shorten it would be such a waste.

"Niko is easier," Maitiu muttered without sparing me a glance.

For a complete stranger to take it upon themselves to grant someone a new name could easily miff some. It was an impulsive decision, especially for a soul like Maitiu who didn't seem intent on changing his choice of how he addressed me.

Oddly enough, his stubborn demeanor and self-appointed nickname didn't bother me in the slightest. In fact, I felt a tentative smile cross my bewildered countenance as I stared at the green-eyed boy. It was as though a quarantined room within me was slowly unlocking its door, creaking on unused hinges and opening up to this bewildering child. He wasn't like anyone else I'd ever met or promptly judged upon first encounter. He was like a riddle no one could comprehend, that few took the time to unlace the hidden meanings and unravel the secrets behind it. He was a novel with a twist at the end, a sudden detour that left most weary and confused.

So I sought to become a master of riddles, an open-minded child awaiting every story's end with curiosity burning within, regardless where any turn on the unpredictable path may lead.

Melissa Lohrenz
Mountain Lake, MN
3rd Place

Love in a Coffee Shop

It was a cold, blustery, winter's day; to Luke it felt like he was in the Arctic. The sun was gone and the snow made everything heavy. It was hard to keep going with day to day life...

In reality, it was a bright, sunny day in April. The flowers had started to bloom and there was no snow anywhere. Luke had never been, and desperately wanted to be, in love. He tried not to let this affect his work life; he was a cop. Luke was supposed to be the brave, strong man that children looked up to. He tried to be, but he felt empty without anybody to love. As he drove around the Denver streets, Luke kept snapping back into his policeman's mind, keeping it from wandering to what life would be like if he was in love.

Luke stuck to his routine, driving the streets until he would either see a violation of the law or get called as back-up to an accident, determined to keep his life busy and put on a happy face for the people around him. The only person who knew his secret was the barista at Triple Espresso, Chloe.

Chloe has been Luke's friend for three years, since the first day he came into the coffee shop. She's beautiful with long brown hair and is of medium height. Luke has been able to tell her his secrets and wishes, but he doesn't understand why he trusts her. *Maybe she is just a nice person*, was his final conclusion. Every day he goes into Triple Espresso and orders the same thing. Today was just like every other day. Once his work shift was over, Luke walked in the shop ready to talk.

Chloe smiled at Luke and he said, "My life is still gloomy! How is yours?"

"My life is just fine," she replied laughing.

Luke loved Chloe's laugh. It sounded like the laugh of an angel. He took pride in the moments he could make her laugh. *It is great to have a friend like her*, Luke thought. He sat at the counter for an hour making her laugh with his "terrible, gloomy life" stories.

She thought Luke was a great man. Chloe liked his bravery and his willingness to help anybody who was in need. They had a great friendship, both cherishing it deeply.

The next day, Luke had to work the mid-day shift, but life was good today. He had the big box of glazed donuts that Chloe had given him the day before. Luke, biting into his fourth donut, got the call to a car accident on 21st Street. He flipped on the switch and suddenly the sirens were blaring and lights were flashing. 21st Street was all the way across town causing him to race. He sped past apartment buildings, hotels and malls, but when he crossed an intersection, Luke heard the screeching of tires. Everything went dark.

Beep. Beep. Beep. Luke struggled to open his eyes to see where the loud *beep beep beep* was coming from. First he saw the bright florescent ceiling light and worked his way down the wall and eventually to the white sheets that covered him. Luke looked to his left and saw a plump, dark haired nurse.

“Well, it’s great to see you’re finally awake.”

Luke’s mouth was so dry it was hard for him to speak. His voice came out in a cracked whisper. “What happened?” he questioned.

“You were in a car accident... on your way to a car accident.”

Luke racked his brain to remember the accident, but nothing came to him. He was dumbfounded at the irony. He repeated, “I was in a car accident on the way to a car accident.”

“How long was I out?” His voice was still a scratchy whisper.

“About a day. You had lots of visitors stop by.”

“Who?”

“Your parents, some other policemen you must work with. Oh, and a beautiful young lady.” There was a pause and she continued, “I will leave you now to get your rest.”

And with that she was gone. Luke couldn’t believe that Chloe had come to visit him. *She must have come because she felt bad*, he thought, still trying to comprehend everything he learned.

In the next hour, Luke learned he had a broken arm, a fractured rib and a concussion. He had to stay for at least one more day to make sure no other problems arose. Luke used his time in the hospital to think. He thought about the accident, his job, his family, and of course his love life. Luke was lost for words as to why Chloe was on his mind and why she would come to see him. Then he realized as if a light bulb had gone on in his mind, that if the roles were reversed he would go to the hospital and visit her. Luke thought of her angelic laugh. She listened to him talk about how terrible his life was when in reality it wasn’t. That’s when it hit him... love.

After being released from the hospital, Luke powered through the pain of his injuries and hobbled into Triple Espresso. He was determined to talk to Chloe.

She saw him, smiled and said, “Hey! You’re out of the hospital. Do you want your coffee and donut?”

Luke stared at her not saying anything.

“What?” Chloe asked cautiously, wondering about his expression.

“My life is not terrible. I am a policeman. I get the privilege of protecting the innocent, but my life never felt full. Every day I would come in here and you would make everything better. I could tell you my secrets the first day I met you. I realize I never needed to search around for anyone to share my life with because three years ago, I had already found love. You, Chloe, are the love of my life.”

She smiled from ear to ear, knowing she felt the same.

On that exact day one year later, Luke asked the love of his life, Chloe, to be his wife. He had found love in a coffee shop, and it will continue to brew for the rest of their lives.

NonFiction
Grades 11 & 12

James Hamm
St. James, MN
1st Place

The Novel of Life

The process of writing a novel is a reflection of our real life journey, demonstrated through decision making, evaluating situations, and planning for the future. We constantly move through life as if characters in a novel. I am currently writing a novel, and I have seen a lot of similar themes in writing the novel and living life. A novel's character must react in certain ways to different situations, and I have realized I need to act in comparable ways.

In writing a novel, your character comes into contact with several different circumstances that he or she must react to. How are these any different than how we react in life? As I write, I draw inspiration from how I would react to situations like those and transfer that to my writing. You need to be funny sometimes in tense situations to help everyone calm down. You need to be focused in situations that require precise thinking. You need to adjust your mood or tone to match the situation that you are in. This also requires vast amounts of discernment and wisdom. When you are writing a book, you have a lot of time to think about how you want your character to react to these situations. In real life, it's a bit different; you have to make these decisions in seconds, if not less. When we think about daily encounters, it helps to be able to step back and consider all the possibilities that arise, especially when planning your life out, or developing a story outline.

In order to write a good novel, you need a well-structured plot. This involves making a general plot line which states who, what, when, why and how you want certain things to happen that are essential to the development of the storyline. When I was doing this in my own novel, the obvious comparisons to real life arose. I was surprised at how similar writing an outline was to planning what you wanted to do in real life, almost like using a personal planner. You know, or should know, the main things you want to accomplish in life, leaving margin for the small details to fill in the gaps. This can be applied to small issues as well as larger ones. It's helpful to make an outline for almost everything, from planning a trip to moving to a new house. Our whole lives are built off of outlines. When we make these, written or mental, we need to keep in mind

our worldviews, our morality and the situations we will encounter. When writing my novel I need to be sure to take into account problems where my story character is forced to make moral decisions affecting their overall character and also help the reader get to know him, the character, better. When you make those kind of moral, situational decisions, rash or calculated, in real life, it shows the world what you are like, and it also builds your character. As I mentioned before, structuring a storyline can also benefit your overall goals in life.

When I was figuring out the storyline for my novel, I came up with several things I wanted to happen in the story. I call these events major plot points. These events move along the story and/or build the overall character of my protagonist. Later I was thinking about what I wanted to do with my life. I plan on working a year after high school and going to college after that. That is one of my major plot points. Making major plot points in our lives can help us have a fixed guide to what we want to do in life, although we need to be flexible with our goals to allow different situations to help shape and mold our future achievements. The way I think of it is building the frame of a house with toothpicks, but leaving the walls, roof, and floor open to be filled with the wonderful things that life wants to fill in. Writing a novel gives a lot of third person perspective to my own life. It showed me how I should choose to look at situations in life.

When we go through the novel of life, we must keep in mind our ability to make decisions and how they affect our everyday circumstances, our talent for evaluating situations and then afterward discerning how to react to those situations, as well as how we should structure our plans for the future. We must keep in our minds at all times that we are walking in this life as a novel, and use that perspective to make better choices in the future.

Jackson Oltmans
Windom, MN
2nd Place

Training for Life

When people hear the phrase basic training, more often than not their minds travel off visualizing an angry Drill Sergeant yelling at them to drop and do 100 pushups. While this is a true scenario for the 1% of Americans that serve, this is not the whole picture. There is much more that our civilian counterparts cannot understand about basic training. While many of the lessons learned by privates at BCT (basic combat training) are rather common knowledge for the most part, these lessons are rarely valued by society.

Aside from common knowledge, we also learn to live a healthy, active lifestyle and learn to embrace the Army values. Basic training is much more than shooting a rifle, throwing grenades or puking your guts out in the gas chamber. It's about family and caring for them. It's about how to build a family out of complete strangers and not bat an eye at the thought of literally taking a bullet for them. It's about knowing that any single one of them would do the same for you...that's family.

That's basic training, but society doesn't see it like that. More often than not society sees a group of 17 and 18 year olds wearing camo running around like a bunch of chickens with their heads cut off. It is just too easy for outsiders to judge how and why those camo clad young men and women do what they do. It is too easy for outsiders to say, "I could never join the Army. If a Drill Sergeant got in my face I'd probably tell him to get lost." However, soldiers, from day one, have a different mindset and know training will be a long road ahead. I am one of these soldiers.

Our first obstacle to overcome, if we were ever going to defeat the seemingly evil drill sergeants, was each other. Living in close quarters with 155 men and women of every background imaginable can sometimes be stressful due to different ways of handling situations or personal beliefs. We were all too individual, and each one of us felt entitled to be in the Army. The sense of entitlement was a great divide. We all thought that our individual self was the best candidate at everything and that we could not be outdone by the man or woman next to us.

To “aid” us in the process of becoming a team, the drill sergeants beat us down physically and mentally. They did not see an OLTMANS, SMITH or McCAMPBELL, nor Asians, Blacks or Whites. We were all Green; every single Private was equal... equally worthless, that is. No Private was any better than another Private. If you could do 100 pushups in 2 minutes it still wasn't good enough, or if you could shoot every single target at 300 meters, it didn't matter. This mismatched, scared, and confused group of soldiers was like a puzzle. Once we found out each other's strengths and weaknesses we started to put the puzzle of our team together.

Teamwork is what the army is built on. We would do pushups and on the way down you would yell, “Attention to detail,” and on the way up you would yell, “Teamwork is key.” It is engrained in our brain. Everything you do, you do as a team. You sleep together, eat together, shower together; everything you do is together. Society works too hard on personal gain; however, the Army stresses that you either fail or succeed as a team.

Now confident and molded into a team, Privates finally start to learn crucial life skills for survival in the military and civilian workforce. Attention to detail is key to success, whether it be spotting a piece of trash on the side of the road in Iraq that turns out to be a roadside bomb, or noticing that your coworker's tire looks a little low. Every single thing that you can see must be observed in detail, from the slightest wrinkle on the sheets of our bunks to the minuteness that one walks down the hall.

I learned that if there's one thing the Army loves, it's competition. With weeks 1-4 of training completed, we were promoted to “white phase.” Now that we could get out of the classroom and didn't have to do pushups every 10 minutes, we could actually enjoy the training a little bit more. In white phase we would go to different obstacle courses nearly two times a week. Each obstacle course took the better part of a day to complete, and we were exhausted at the end of the day. These courses were physically demanding and were always timed so that the platoon that had the slowest time had to be the victim of the reigning Drill Sergeant's wrath.

Our Drill Sergeants would tell us that when you have fun at your job it's not really work at all, and that was especially true for them. That special moment when rage and happiness combine is quite accurately how a Drill Sergeant views his or her job.

While in white phase we were still subject to the Drill Sergeant's grueling harassment, it was less frequent. We were now able to assign leadership positions to Privates such as team, squad

and platoon leader. We were in charge of policing ourselves up and squaring ourselves away. About halfway through, something inside of us, something mental, snaps, and we are changed.

At week eight in training we transition to blue phase, the final most prestigious stage. We are issued our dress blues and start rehearsing graduation. Week nine, a favorite for all privates, is U.S. weapons training, which is instruction and application of all weapons other than the standard issue M16/M4 rifle. We fired AT-4 anti-tank rockets, M240 medium machine guns, M203 grenade launchers and the M249 SAW, a light machine gun. It's all fun and games shooting 750 rounds per minute all afternoon until you realize you have to pick up all the brass.

The final act of earning the title of United States Soldier is FTX 3. Field Training Exercise 3 is the culmination of all of your previous training. We lived in the field for several days on a simulated combat outpost with a simulated enemy well equipped to pose a significant threat against us. At the end of the exercise we marched back to the barracks at 2:00 a.m. and had a ceremony where we were presented with the black beret signifying we had earned the title of soldier.

The remaining week of basic was spent "humbling" ourselves. We cleaned from 0530 until 2200. We cleaned every single inch of our barracks from the ceiling to the floor over and over.

When the time finally came for family day and graduation, it was a day of mixed emotions. Yes, we were extremely happy to see our family and be done with basic, but after living with these people and knowing every single thing about them, it was a sad day. I felt closer to these people who I'd been with for three months than I did with my own family. I am thankful that the army is a small world and I'm bound to cross paths with my family again.

Allison Wordes
Renville, MN
3rd Place

A Story of Clara Barton

Clarissa “Clara” Harlowe Barton is a well-known figure in our American history textbooks, and is lauded for her efforts during the Civil War to selflessly march out onto the battlefield, and through her self-made organization to find missing persons. She was born on December 25, 1821, and lived her life restlessly, always working in some way to help others affected by war. Although one might primarily think of her as associated with American issues and concerns related to only American wars and conflicts, she also spent four years doing other things in countries such as France, England, and Switzerland. Certainly, Clara Barton felt the need to help people throughout Europe as well as America.

The Civil War had left Clara Barton, a national hero, quite exhausted and in need of a short rest. After the war was over, she sailed to Switzerland and spent some time in the Swiss community. Wars, however, were not completely out of range. There was friction between France and neighboring Prussia with its German allies, presumably caused by French insecurities over the changing power structure in Europe. Always alert, Clara kept watch on the news. Meanwhile, she came by a copy of the book *A Memory of Solferino* by Henry Dunant, who founded the European Red Cross in 1864. Reading it inspired her. The concept of a national relief organization sparked her interest, and she wanted to become involved in it. When France declared war in 1870, she wrote a letter to the Red Cross volunteering her services. Reluctantly, they took her up on her offer, with the agreement she would take a female companion with her. As a result, she found the company of 27-year-old Swiss Antoinette Margot. Since Clara’s French and German were somewhat lacking, her companion’s fluency was a great asset, and with Antoinette looking up to Clara, they came to admire each other. In all, they were a well-matched team. Unfortunately, they never quite made it onto the frontlines of battle, but even so, they kept themselves busy by helping those in need along the way. It was a dangerous job, and without luxury; however, Clara was always in the best of moods when hard at work. When the war was over, and

they reluctantly returned to their regular routines, Clara would not remain idle and looked for other ways to make herself useful.

In the aftermath of the French war, Clara partnered with Grand Duchess Louise to set up a dressmaking workshop for the common people, to provide them with some means of making a living while at the same time filling a need for clothing when much of the populace were in rags. It also kept them from being idle, which she saw as a despicable quality. She kept at her newest task with all her energy, replacing the ebbing funds to the best of her ability and praising the women who did their work well. In writing to her old dressmaker, Annie Childs, she said, “Wasn’t that the last thing you would have thought of, that I should come to Europe and set up dressmaking?” But she was also very proud of what was being accomplished, saying, “It was such a comfort to see them, week by week, grow better clothed.” However, once the funds ran so low as to not support the cause any longer, she decided it was time to move on to other areas—preferably back to helping those directly affected by the battlefield.

Paris was then at the center of the worst reports, with thousands being homeless and hungry. Of course, this was a call that Clara could not resist! As soon as she was able, she began the journey to Paris, by train. Along the way, she was spared from being robbed when a young Frenchman overheard two conspirators discussing among themselves about her relief funds. The would-be thieves were apprehended, and Clara was surprised to learn the hero was one of the soldiers she had befriended in a hospital. The train would only take its passengers so far, so when the line came to an end, she walked the last seven miles to Paris. After some time working there, she journeyed back to London where some friends gave her a place to stay and recover, especially since she was suffering more from plaguing pains and an oncoming blindness. Even then, she could not stay long in London, becoming restless and ready to be home in America.

Clara Barton was welcomed home to a proud community, who saw good in all she did and supported her eagerness to establish the Red Cross in her own country. Starting as primarily disaster relief, it soon became much more than just that—it became a symbol of loyal assistance and providence whenever and wherever it was needed. And Clara Barton is well-remembered down through history for establishing that—but those promising beginnings lead back to another continent, and to the people that inspired her to bring that hope home.

The History of the Annual Creative Writing Contest Sponsored by Southwest Minnesota State University & Southwest/West Central Service Cooperative

The Creative Writing Program at Southwest Minnesota State University, working in partnership with Southwest/West Central Service Cooperative, designed and conducted the first annual Creative Writing Contest in the spring of 2005.

The contest was subtitled *Giving Voice to the Youth of Southwest and West Central Minnesota* and was established to encourage a love of language and writing among the region's young people. We wanted to recognize gifted young writers in this area of Minnesota. That first annual contest unearthed a wealth of talent and demonstrated the desire of our young people to tell their stories and express their imaginations through writing. The endeavor was so successful that SMSU and SW/WC Service Cooperative have continued the contest on an annual basis.

The contest is open to all students in grades three through twelve. Students may enter the contest through a classroom assignment or on their own. The categories for submission are Fiction, Nonfiction and Poetry. Students are allowed to enter in more than one category.

Once submitted, the student's written work is first screened by SMSU creative writing students who score the submissions according to a rubric. Each submission is scored by multiple student judges. The works with the highest scores are submitted to the final judges, faculty in the SMSU English Department. Prizes are awarded for the top three winners in each category and grade group. The most coveted prize for the contest is one of the \$2,000 SMSU tuition scholarships awarded to the three first-place winners in the 11th/12th grade categories.

The highlight of the contest is the Annual Creating Spaces Awards Ceremony, hosted by the SMSU English Department in late April each year. At the awards ceremony, student writers gather with their families and teachers to be recognized for their achievements. They receive awards, medals, and the *Creating Spaces* anthology in which the winning pieces from every category and group are published. This celebration begins with a keynote address by a published writer followed by a reception where the student writers meet each other, the SMSU student and faculty judges, and the keynote author.

Keynote Speakers at the Creating Spaces Writing Contest

2005 – Larry Gavin
2006 – Rebecca Fjelland Davis
2007 – Bill Holm
2008 – Vincent Wixon
2009 – Mary Logue
2010 – Kristin Cronn-Mills
2011 – Rebecca Fjelland Davis
2012 – Nicole Helget and Nate LeBoutillier
2013 – Thomas Maltman
2014 – Saara Myrene Raappana
2015 – James A. Zarzana
2016 – Christine Stewart-Nuñez

Christine Stewart-Nuñez

Christine Stewart-Nuñez is the author of five volumes of poetry: *Untrussed* (University of New Mexico Press 2016), *Snow, Salt, Honey* (Red Dragonfly Press 2012), *Keeping Them Alive* (WordTech Editions, 2011), and *Postcard on Parchment* (ABZ Press 2008). Her poems, creative nonfiction, and book reviews have appeared in a variety of magazines, including *Prairie Schooner*, *Shenandoah*, *Calyx*, *Arts & Letters*, and *North American Review*. Her piece “An Archeology of Secrets” was a Notable Essay in *Best American Essays 2012*, and her essay “Disordered” won the 2014 Lyric Essay Contest at the *Lindenwood Review*. Originally from Des Moines, Iowa, she is currently an Associate Professor in the English Department at South Dakota State University.

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