

# CREATING SPACES

2017

**A collection of the winning writings of the 2017 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

|               |                                    |    |
|---------------|------------------------------------|----|
| Brenna Wordes | <i>Fish in the Washing Machine</i> | 11 |
| Keegan Dennis | <i>Tongue Twister Poems</i>        | 12 |
| Ana Wambeke   | <i>My Teddy Bear</i>               | 13 |

#### Fiction

|                 |  |    |
|-----------------|--|----|
| Ethan Schroeder | <i>The Mystery of the Hidden Cave</i>                    | 17 |
| Mazzi Moore     | <i>The Traveling Tradesman and the<br/>Animal Potion</i> | 21 |
| Sam Petersen    | <i>The Rapa Nui Treasure</i>                             | 25 |

### GRADES 5 & 6

#### Poetry

|                    |                           |    |
|--------------------|---------------------------|----|
| Madeleine Lamb     | <i>Movie Night</i>        | 31 |
| Tanner Graphenteen | <i>My Top Ten Animals</i> | 32 |
| Kiera Lafferty     | <i>Loneliness</i>         | 33 |

#### Fiction

|                |                                  |    |
|----------------|----------------------------------|----|
| Anna DeHaan    | <i>Night and Day: A Fox Tale</i> | 37 |
| Lydia Depuydt  | <i>A Rock's Tale</i>             | 43 |
| Georgia Rabaey | <i>Christmas Catastrophe</i>     | 48 |

#### Nonfiction

|                    |                                     |    |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------|----|
| Tanner Graphenteen | <i>The Tree</i>                     | 61 |
| Derek Kluis        | <i>A Place I Love to Go</i>         | 62 |
| Nina Hendrickson   | <i>The Flag Raising on Iwo Jima</i> | 63 |

### GRADES 7 & 8

#### Poetry

|                |                              |    |
|----------------|------------------------------|----|
| Whitney Wordes | <i>The Sparrow's Song</i>    | 71 |
| Whitney Wordes | <i>Popcorn and the Finch</i> | 72 |
| Tessa Gannott  | <i>Best Volleyball Game</i>  | 73 |

#### Fiction

|               |                                |    |
|---------------|--------------------------------|----|
| Clara Holm    | <i>Look Behind You</i>         | 77 |
| Kate Janzen   | <i>Snowstorm</i>               | 81 |
| Shelby Hauser | <i>Planet of the Red Trees</i> | 86 |

|                   |                                |    |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|----|
| <b>Nonfiction</b> |                                |    |
| Casey Swanson     | <i>All Flowers Wilt</i>        | 95 |
| Molly Fischer     | <i>All the World's a Stage</i> | 99 |

## **GRADES 9 & 10**

|                    |                     |     |
|--------------------|---------------------|-----|
| <b>Poetry</b>      |                     |     |
| Savannah Dobrenski | <i>Fathomless</i>   | 107 |
| Brynn Cherveney    | <i>Of Blue Eyes</i> | 109 |
| Savannah Dobrenski | <i>Reminisce</i>    | 113 |

|                |                               |     |
|----------------|-------------------------------|-----|
| <b>Fiction</b> |                               |     |
| Summer Janzen  | <i>Amazing Grace</i>          | 117 |
| Regan James    | <i>The Childhood He Needs</i> | 124 |
| Kylie Klassen  | <i>Finding Her Voice</i>      | 128 |

## **GRADES 11 & 12**

|                  |                           |     |
|------------------|---------------------------|-----|
| <b>Poetry</b>    |                           |     |
| Clara Abrahamson | <i>To the Empty Chair</i> | 135 |
| Isaiah Streblov  | <i>Digits</i>             | 137 |
| Rachel Sajban    | <i>Like Snow Haiku</i>    | 138 |

|                   |                             |     |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|-----|
| <b>Nonfiction</b> |                             |     |
| Anahi Rodriguez   | <i>Infinite</i>             | 141 |
| Thalia Gonzalez   | <i>Bittersweet</i>          | 142 |
| Danica Dick       | <i>Finding the Symphony</i> | 143 |

|   |  |     |
|---|--|-----|
| <b>The History of the Annual Creative Writing Contest</b> |  | 147 |
|---|--|-----|

|                        |  |     |
|------------------------|--|-----|
| <b>Acknowledgments</b> |  | 149 |
|------------------------|--|-----|







**POETRY**  
**Grades 3 & 4**



**Brenna Wordes**  
**Renville, MN**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Place**

### **Fish in the Washing Machine**

The Fishes are wishing the washing  
to wisp them away day to day  
it is to say two fish or a  
few were  
washed clean that day  
and smelled a bit better I  
must say but the so-small fish  
had fishers fishing for them. The  
washer was clogged to wish a wash  
of washing! Maybe the fish are  
wishing of washing in a  
washing mach-  
ine.

**Keegan Dennis  
Hutchinson, MN  
2<sup>nd</sup> Place**

### **Tongue Twister Poems**

Purple people panic picking purple panic peppers.  
Tongue twisters try to twist tongues trying to play table  
tennis.

Most men manufacture many mannequins' meals.  
Bugs bite babies but babies bite back while bailing big bales.  
When will Will wander with William while waiting for  
Wally?

Families fetch fudge for families feeding Freddy.  
Canned carrots can catch carriages for Cameron.  
Axel, an awesome apple, ate eight animals after answering  
another answer.

Vans vacuum the vast Vanderbijl Park very fast.

**Ana Wambeke**  
**Marshall, MN**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Place**

### **My Teddy Bear**

I love my teddy bear.  
My teddy bear does not have hair,  
but is stuffed with fluff.  
We like to pretend to huff and puff.

Oh, I love my teddy bear so.  
When I see him, I say, "hello."  
And he says, "hi."  
But sometimes we need to say, "Goodbye."



**FICTION**  
**Grades 3 & 4**





**Ethan Schroeder**  
**Mountain Lake, MN**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Place**

### **The Mystery of the Hidden Cave**

Once there was a girl of seven named Kerala. She had one sister who was twelve named Karli and one brother who was fourteen named Kyle. Kyle was very adventurous. The family names always started with K, even the parents' names. The family lived in a very old house on the edge of town. The kids spent many hours playing in the woods out back.

Kerala's parents were on a weekend trip so Kyle watched the younger kids. One night Kerala had a bad dream. She woke up immediately, terribly frightened, and ran to Karli's bedroom. She shook her sister to wake her up.

Finally, Karli woke up and asked, "What are you doing?"

When Karli heard the details of Kerala's dream she gasped, "I had the same dream."

"WOW!" exclaimed Kerala. "Let's see if Kyle had the same dream. That would be so weird."

"Yeah," agreed Karli. They raced quietly to Kyle's bedroom. They shook him awake.

"Yep. I had that dream, too."

In the dream, they all went downstairs into their unfinished basement where they found a secret cave. They ventured in, with Kyle leading the way. They found clues written on the stone walls and tried to follow them. They had some trouble and mixed up some clues. The ground rumbled beneath their feet and opened up to a pit. All three kids fell into the dark pit. The girls screamed and Kyle tried to grab the side of the pit, but had no success and continued to fall to the bottom.

After comparing their dreams, they stayed up late into the night and talked about this mysterious dream and the hidden cave and what they meant. They decided to be brave and together they grabbed flashlights and walked quietly down the basement stairs, living out the dream. Kyle tried to remember

where the opening to the cave was. He finally found it and called to the girls. They ran over and peered inside the dark mysterious cave.

“Let’s go in. I can’t wait to venture inside to see what we can find,” said Kerala.

“I’ll go first,” said Kyle, bravely shining his flashlight into the darkness.

The girls followed him in. It had a stone floor and words on the back wall, just like in their dream.

Kerala said, “What’s that on the wall?”

“It’s a clue!” shouted Kyle.

“What does it say?”

The clue said: *You will be given a stone and a strong stick. Use them to make the shape of a brick. If you place it in the slot on the floor, the way will be opened to you.*

“Let’s look for the stone and stick,” said Kyle. “It must be around here somewhere.”

They searched around the cave for a few minutes before...

“I found them!” exclaimed Kerala. Kyle and Karli rushed over to her.

“Now we need to carve this stone into the shape of a brick,” said Kyle as he grabbed the stick and stone from Kerala.

The stick was really sharp, but it took quite a while to get it looking like a brick. While Kyle carved, the girls searched for the place where the brick would fit.

Karli found the slot in the floor of the cave just as Kyle was finished with the carving. He popped it into the slot and the floor began to shake. The three kids were startled by the rumbling they heard as the wall in front of them opened slowly.

Kyle said, “Wow, that was cool,” as they coughed from the dust escaping from the secret chamber.

They shone their flashlights into the darkness and peered inside. They were all a little frightened, but Kyle was the first one to gain courage and venture into the secret space. Hesitantly, the girls crept in after him. They felt along the walls, which felt damp. They found some torches mounted on the side walls. Kyle had some matches in his pocket and he

lit them up. The room was aglow and they could see that the floor was made of rock. The kids were creeping forward and about to fall off the edge of a cliff when Kerala saw a door on the other side.

Karli noticed a clue on the wall which said: *You made it past the first clue. This next one will be harder for you. On the right, you will find a slot that a coin will fit through. Drop it in and a lever will pop out. Pull the lever, and a bridge will appear.*

“I have a coin,” said Karli. *Plop.* She dropped it in.

Kyle grabbed for the lever, and they heard another rumbling sound and a rope bridge came up from the bottom of the ravine. They all crossed safely, then went through the door and entered another secret room. It was crazy to think that these rooms and tunnels were under their own house.

In the secret room, they found what looked like a dead end, but Kyle found another clue. It said: *This is not the end of your adventure. Look for a latch on the floor. Pull it up and a key will appear. Step down into the tunnel and use the key to open a trapdoor on the wall.*

Kerala pulled up the latch and found the key. They jumped down onto the floor below. Karli found the trapdoor and tugged with all her might, but the door would not budge. It took the strength of all three kids to get that creaky old trapdoor open. Kyle shone his flashlight into the darkness. It was a really big room. On the side of the gigantic room, Kyle saw a trail of gunpowder. He took one of his matches and set the trail on fire. It burned quickly throughout the room. They could now see that the entire room was filled with treasure. There were gold coins and statues, silver pieces, and gems piled all around the room.

The kids were stunned, and all three gasped loudly.

Kerala said, “Treasure!” and she started running toward one pile of gold.

The other two followed her, tossing gold coins into the air and dancing around the room with joy. Finally, they reminded each other to look for a way out. Kyle was near one wall and he felt a cool breeze.

“There must be an outside opening here,” he thought out loud.

The girls ran over to him. They hunted for the opening. There was a long crack in the ceiling. They noticed several rock footholds on the wall leading up. Before climbing up and out, they placed a few gold coins in their pockets to show their parents. Karli led the way climbing up the wall. She was followed by Kerala and Kyle. They had to push their way through moss and vines. They came out in the woods behind their house; no wonder they had never seen the crack before. They ran home and were exhausted and dirty. After recapping their adventure, they drifted off to sleep.

The three kids woke up early the next morning and laid their coins out on the table. Their parents arrived at home around 10:30 and were surprised by the story the kids had to tell. Dad called the local museum and the director rushed over to their house. The kids took him through the basement and tunnels and finally to the treasure room. His eyes got huge. He asked some more questions, and the kids told him about their incredible dreams. He was surprised and said that there had been a myth about a great treasure in the area. Even though they didn't get to keep the treasure, they would get a \$3,000,000 finders' fee.

They were so excited. They ran to tell their parents the awesome news. They were going to be rich. It turned out that Kyle wasn't the only adventuresome one in the family.

After the treasure was removed, they cleaned out the tunnels and made them part of their house. The three kids spent many days playing down there.

**Mazzi Moore**  
**Hills, MN**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Place**

### **The Traveling Tradesman and the Animal Potion**

**A** long time ago, before Earth was a planet, people lived elsewhere in the galaxy. The older the planet the more unusual the people and creatures were. The planet Calypso was dotted with small villages, and most people lived in crowded huts or shacks.

In an especially small hut lived an old tradesman. The tradesman would go to abandoned planets on his flying mule seeking information and powerful artifacts to sell in the market. Though business wasn't the best, he enjoyed what he did.

On a misty morning, the tradesman arose from his makeshift bed of straw and wooden boards. Today he was going to search the planet Azul for the animal potion of Azul the Great. The legend says the potion enables you to change into any animal you desire and to change it at any time you want. The planet Azul is known for its extraordinary animals and varied weather and climate.

The tradesman and his trusty flying mule took off to Azul that morning. Where they had landed, a sign from Azul the Great was set up. On the sign in spidery penmanship was a riddle that said, "Under the ocean, you will find a wise crab. He will lead you to a big clam shell, and that's all I'll tell."

The tradesman decided that the best sea to look in was the Dellosae Sea because of all its varied sea creatures. He got back on his mule and took to the sky. They landed on the coast of the Dellosae Sea, and the tradesman changed into his swimsuit and snorkel gear. He was starting to walk toward the ocean when a big wave knocked him into the foaming waters.

In seconds, the tradesman was being pushed out to sea. He bobbed up and down in the water. On the horizon, he could see a gigantic wave coming toward him.

There was no way to avoid it, so the tradesman clenched his teeth and braced himself against the wave. In less than a minute, gallons upon gallons of water were crashing on top of him. The tradesman was flailing like an angry baby. He was being turned in somersaults by the huge force of the wave. In the middle of a somersault, he decided he could dive straight down out of the churning water. With all of his strength, he pushed himself out of the wave's reach.

For the first time, the tradesman looked at his surroundings. There were fish of all sizes, crustaceans, small sharks, and every other sea creature you could imagine.

The tradesman had heard of the wise crab in old myths. It was said that he could be found in a big sea cave off of the coast. If you found the Dellosae Current, it would take you to the cave. The problem was that the tradesman had been pushed far out to sea and the closer to shore you got, the more hungry creatures there were. His best chance would be to swim near the bottom and hope that there weren't any hungry sharks awaiting him.

The tradesman had also been told that the crab's cave was made of jagged rocks and if the current pushed you in the wrong way, you might as well call it a funeral. He was hoping that the current would find him instead of him finding it. A school of striped blue snapper was blocking his way. The tradesman noticed that all of the snapper and fish surrounding him were swimming quicker than before.

Quickly, the tradesman saw the cause of the commotion. There was a huge, bloody snog creeper fish that had the same hunting patterns as a grey reef shark swimming toward him. Thankfully, he had conserved some energy for this race. The tradesman knew he could never outswim the shark but decided to put up a fight. He didn't know it, but he was heading toward the coast. The shark was closing in on the tradesman and was about to chomp down his jaws and eat him. When the tradesman was certain he was about to be eaten, a ginormous wave pulled him out of the shark's reach. The pressure of the wave was huge. It felt like his skin was squeezing into his body.

The tradesman was whipped through the water as fast as light. In seconds, he was thrown onto the rocky floor of an ocean cave and landed in an unconscious pile. When the tradesman woke up, a little blue hermit crab scuttled across the cave floor. He found out that a seaweed blanket and pillow were laying on top of him.

The tradesman thought, “Is he going to help me get to that clam sometime?” He was really getting impatient. Finally, the crab came over to him and whispered into the tradesman’s ear. It sounded like a Spanish or Italian accent, but was it Greek?

The tradesman was lifted into a vortex of starry clouds. It felt like he was laying on a fluffy pillow. As quick as he was in, he was back in open waters. Surprisingly, he was able to breathe underwater without his oxygen tank. He could see a murky purple colored clamshell in the distance. That had to be the one in the riddle.

The tradesman swam as fast as he could to the clamshell. He climbed on a huge boulder to reach the clam. KNOCK!! KNOCK!! The tradesman’s knocks could be heard from miles away.

In one scraping motion, the top of the shell opened up to reveal a long pink tongue and a crystal clear pearl, or was it? When the tradesman looked closely, a bottle with bubbling purple liquid was inside. It must be the potion.

The tradesman reached out to grab the gorgeous pearl, but the long tongue pulled him away and into the shell. The inside of the shell reeked like rotten shellfish and was covered in slime. How could he get out? What could he do? He started pacing and heard a shrill laugh coming from the clamshell.

The tradesman paced faster and faster, all the time the laugh getting bigger. His plan was working but not enough. He started to tickle the clam’s tongue, and the clam let out the biggest laugh ever heard in the ocean. It probably would have broken a world record, too. In a split second, the tradesman was hurtled into the water.

On his way out, the tradesman had forgotten to grab the pearl. He was heading back to the surface when a bullet-like force hit him. It was the pearl! The tradesman was so excited!

He grabbed a hammer out of his bag and cracked open the pearl.

The tradesman downed the potion not knowing that it first turned you into the lowest animal in the food chain in that region—a type of krill. He felt his body change. Then a sudden noise startled him. It was the sound of a blue whale. But? What was that other sound? It was kind of like a cry in pain. The tradesman was swooshed up into the mouth of the whale and was digested.



**Sam Petersen**  
**Mountain Lake, MN**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Place**

### **The Rapa Nui Treasure**

Once upon a time in the Western part of South America lived two kids named Phoenix and Paisley. They loved to go on adventures all over their home country in Chile. Phoenix and Paisley's parents had to go on a trip for a few weeks so they were sent to their Uncle Advar. Phoenix and Paisley arrived at Advar's house, which was only twenty miles from their home. Advar had to deliver food and other grain products for his business, so Phoenix and Paisley went with him. Advar and the kids boarded the boat and set sail on the Pacific Ocean to travel North to Peru. The waters that day were very rough and eventually the sail began to break in the violent winds. Because of this, they could no longer steer the boat. As night fell, the kids went to sleep on the boat, and Uncle Advar stayed awake to try to fix the boat. He climbed the sail, but the wind blew the cross beam off which hit him on the head and knocked him unconscious.

When Phoenix and Paisley woke up at sunrise, they had washed up on the shore in their boat. They were amazed when they saw giant statues of heads lined up on the island. Out of the corner of Phoenix's eye, he saw a native Polynesian man. Phoenix waved his arms in the air to get the man's attention. The Polynesian saw that Uncle Advar was still unconscious and ran to get something. He returned with a bottle filled with liquid that Phoenix assumed was medicine. Phoenix explained what happened and that his Uncle Advar needed help. The Polynesian man promised that he would help and introduced himself as Kasion. Kasion poured the medicine into Advar's mouth, and Advar slowly began to wake up. The kids were so happy that their uncle was waking up. They realized that they could trust Kasion.

"Rapa Nui," said Kasion, as he motioned towards the statues. He helped Advar to his feet and explained that the

villagers call these statues Rapa Nui as the four began walking towards the statues. Kasion and his family lived within one of the largest ones that had been hollowed out to make into a home. As they entered the statue, they saw that the home was bigger than just the size of the statue; it also extended underground. Kasion told them the statues were made between the years 1200 to 1500 and that other natives inhabited some of the other statues as well. The kids found the stories that Kasion told to be very interesting. Suddenly they heard the engine of a boat that was approaching the beach outside of Kasion's place. They instantly ran out and saw the huge boat filled with officials from Chile. The officials got off their boat and asked Kasion and his friends what they were doing there.

Kasion said, "We live on this island. This is our home that belonged to our ancestors long ago."

One of the officials said, "We are officials from Chile and we own this island. We plan to turn the island into a place for tourists to come and visit. You may stay here for the rest of the month but after that, we will find you a home in Chile so that we can begin building on the island. If you do not leave, we will have to charge you 60 million dollars, the cost of the island."

When Kasion heard this, he felt scared and sad. After that, the officials left the island to go back to Chile. Kasion, his new friends and his family went inside Kasion's house.

He said, "I cannot believe that they are taking our island."

Word spread around the island that officials were going to take control of the island if they were not given the money. The oldest man on the island, named Rakucha, went to Kasion and told him, "When I was young, there was a legend that told of great treasure on our island. Now that the island is in danger, we should find out if it is true. The legend told of a map that would lead us to the treasure."

Kasion told everyone to search his or her home and land for the treasure map, but nobody could find it. Phoenix and Paisley were excited to stumble on this adventure, and they searched Kasion's house for him, but they also did not find a map. As night fell, everyone stopped searching and returned

to their homes determined to search more in the morning. That night Rakutcha was in his kitchen getting a drink of water when he bumped a vase on the counter, causing it to fall and shatter. He was sad to have broken the vase, which had been in his family for as long as he could remember. He bent down to pick up the pieces of the broken vase, and he noticed that on the back side of one of the large broken pieces there were ancient carvings. Rakutcha was very excited. He took the piece to Kasion's house to get his opinion. Kasion was sure it was the map they had been looking for. He said, "Tomorrow at sunrise we will get the whole village to search for the treasure together."

The next day they went out to find the treasure. The map pointed west, so they began their search on the west end of the Island. The map also showed a strange symbol by the Rapa Nui statue that was located closest to the shore. Uncle Advar began digging there and eventually he uncovered the entrance to a cave. He yelled for help so Phoenix, Paisley, Kasion and Rakucha all came running to help their friend. They began to journey deep into the cave together. The cave had two different paths they could choose from. Phoenix, Rakutcha and Advar searched the left path, and Kasion and Paisley took the right path. Paisley and Kasion saw something shining by lantern light and picked it up. It was a key! Kasion placed the key in his pocket for safekeeping. Meanwhile, on the other path, Phoenix, Rakutcha and Advar didn't find anything, and they began to realize their path must be a decoy so they decided to find the others to see if they had found anything on the other side of the cave. They all met up and continued farther down the path together. Advar saw a large wooden box from a distance and ran toward it.

"This must be the treasure," he said loudly.

Kasion came running with the key in hand and tried the lock. To his surprise, it opened. The box was filled to the top with shimmering gold bricks! The gold was too heavy to move, so the group left the cave and gathered the villagers to help. The whole village worked together to carry out the gold bricks one at a time. Finally, when all of the gold was out they agreed to use it to buy the island from the officials. After the

officials were paid, they were surprised to find they still had money left over. They used the money to build a small history center to help preserve the artifacts of their ancestors and allow visitors to learn about the culture of their island.

Kasion and Rakutchka both thanked the three visitors for their help. As a thank you gift, all the villagers chipped in to repair Advar's broken boat. Uncle Advar, being responsible, remembered that he still had a job to do. So he gathered the food and grain that had washed up on shore and replenished the lost product, being sure to deliver all the goods. Later, the three sailed home and left the village with promises to come visit again. Phoenix and Paisley were excited to go home and see their parents again but would never forget the adventures they had with their Uncle Advar on Easter Island.

**POETRY**  
**Grades 5 & 6**



**Madeleine Lamb**  
**Ortonville, MN**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Place**

### **Movie Night**

Oh no! It's time for a movie night.  
These nights give me quite a fright!  
I'll be eaten, eaten up!  
By the children or the pup.  
The pup with fur of brown.  
The children always looking down,  
down into the popcorn bowl,  
their mouth is a huge black hole.  
Their teeth like boulders crashing.  
Their tongues are fiery whips lashing.  
Oh it's time for a movie night!

**Tanner Graphenteen**  
**Hadley, MN**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Place**

### **My Top Ten Animals**

My top ten animals that I think are fun  
are listed below from 10 to 1.

#10 is a wolf 'cause they travel in packs.

If a wolf beats the alpha, the alpha gets sacked.

#9 is a beluga; it has a lump on its head,  
but at night it sleeps in a big water bed.

#8 is an otter because they're really cute to cuddle,  
but if you try to hug one it will probably be befuddled.

#7 is a turtle; it has a really hard shell.

They live in the ocean; it's like a giant well.

#6 is a chicken. I have three,  
Al, Gerald, Fitzgerald, none of them are a he.

#5 is a cat. I have one.

His name is Thunder, and he can really run.

#4 is a dog; my favorite one was named Baylee.

But really sadly she passed away when I was three.

#3 is a giraffe; they have a really long neck.

It has brown sides, and it was a mammal last time I checked.

#2 is a black panther the color of the night.

If you see one in the wild, it will probably give you a fright.

#1 is a panda; they are black and white,  
very calm and peaceful, but not so light.



**Kiera Lafferty**  
**Comfrey, MN**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Place**

**Loneliness**

She is alone in the dark.  
The only light was her little spark.  
It left such a scar.  
That lonely little star.



**FICTION**  
**Grades 5 & 6**



**Anna DeHaan**  
**New London, MN**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Place**

### **Night and Day: A Fox Tale**

**A**s my mind cleared, I looked down at the body in front of me. The once pure white fur now stained a dirty blood red. What had I done? I was a murderer.

In the distance, I heard a cub whisper to his mother: “Mum why is Night killing that fox?”

“Shh, little one. You don’t want her to hear you. She might do the same to you,” her mother answered.

“I wouldn’t do that. Would I?” I looked down at the bleeding body before me. “Maybe I would. I’m sorry,” I whispered into the ear of my dying victim. “I didn’t mean it, sis.”

#### **The First Year**

I woke up from my nap and I tried once again to open my eyes. Blinding light filled my vision. I yelped with surprise. “Mum, mum, I think I can see!” Soon the bright light faded, and I looked around. In the middle of our den was a huge red monster! I looked around and found another one sitting at the end of the den. **THERE WAS NO ESCAPE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!** I sat down and with nothing left to do, I called out. “Mum, help me! Help me!”

The monster in the den turned to face me and opened its mouth to speak. “It’s alright little one, I’m here.”

That sounded like mum, but how?

“Mum, is that you? Why are you so big?”

“I’m not big. You’re small, but you’ll grow, my little girl. Now come and meet your Dud and sis.”

“Okay,” and with that I started my life as a fox.

Over the next few weeks I played with my sis and learned from my dud. Sun and I would run around and chase each

other's tails. I would jump on top of her, and she would whimper. Then I would make her say that I was the best fox in the world, and she would do whatever I told her to. My Dud was the best though. He would take me out of our den and teach me things that were fun and helped me learn.

One day Mum made an announcement: we were moving to a Kamp! A Kamp was a place where foxes lived together and helped one another. I couldn't believe what Mum had said—a real live Kamp with other foxes to play and live with!

The next day we moved out of the den and began our journey. We walked for two days before we arrived at the Kamp. We were greeted with warm welcomes for my Dud, Red, who was from this Kamp before he left with Mum.

We lived with the other Mums and Pups in the Birth Den. I had many friends and ruled the "Kamp" we had within the Den. Life was good and I grew and prospered under the Kamp's care. Sis and I grew apart as the days went on. She was the Weaker and was at the bottom of our ranks in "Kamp." Soon I was big enough to start my training as a small-claw.

I waited for my trainer by the big rock, as was tradition. I waited and waited, all the while wondering who I would get. I guess I wasn't paying attention enough because suddenly he was behind me, greeting me as though I hadn't just wheeled around and bared my teeth at him in the most rude fashion. It was Fang. He was the oldest big-claw in the Kamp and the most laid back, too. He was always joking around but was a good listener and always understood the pups' problems. I was happy to have him as my trainer.

Fang turned out not to be as easy-going as I thought he was. He insisted on getting up before sunrise to check for pesky Kats and Badgers. It was very tiring but that was how he was, and it made me like that, too.

That was how my first year went. That was the year I was truly happy. That was the year before the incident.

\* \* \*

## The Incident

The incident is the thing that changed my future. My father's death is what I will tell you about now.

Fang and I were coming back from a hunting trip. I was in a great mood. I had caught a rabbit and a mouse, and Fang might tell the leader that I was ready to become a big-claw. I entered the camp and dropped my catch in the feed-place.

Suddenly a fox burst in frothing at the mouth! He was rampaging around the Kamp lunging at anything that moved. My father rushed to protect my mum who was wounded from a kat. The fox didn't seem to care that our best big-claws were ripping off its fur in places. It seemed only concerned in reaching my mum who was struggling to get to safety. He leaped into the air, and my dud leaped, too. They clashed midair, and the mad fox finally stopped chasing the wounded fox and took after my dud instead. The battle was a bad one, but no one dared interfere.

In the end the mad fox lay dead beneath the feet of my dud. All was not well though. My father stumbled over to the safe den where all the injured foxes went. He then called me and sis and mum to his side. We could all tell what was coming, but the only one who spoke of it was Sun. "Dud, please don't leave us."

"Please, dud, don't. I still need you. Who will teach me to be the best hunter?" I said as tears fell from my eyes.

He leaned over to my ear and whispered his last words: "I think that you were the one teaching me little one." Then he died, and I don't remember what happened after that, for my vision and hearing were clouded over in grief.

For a few weeks I didn't speak or train or eat or even leave my den. My mum tried to comfort me, but I just snapped at her and turned away to grieve. I eventually left the den but still wouldn't speak, and if I did it was with a growl and a snap at the face.

One day I was able to return to my training and was soon ready to become a big-claw. The leader called everyone together and gave the greeting, "I call all foxes to a meeting here in the Kamp of Rose." When everyone had arrived, he began the ceremony. "Today Night has come of age and skill

to become a big-claw. Any fox who objects step forward.” He paused for objections and hearing none continued. “Night has been known during her training for her bravery and hunting skills. She has gone through many trials including the death of her beloved father. Now I name Night, daughter of Red, a big-claw!”

The cheering wasn’t as loud as it had been in my mind when I had been a pup. The congratulations were not as meaningful as I imagined. I don’t think that I even said thank you to Fang. I walked over to my new bed and laid down to sleep, but the leader wasn’t done with the announcements. “As you all know, I have served as leader for many moons, and it is time for me to retire to the dull-claw den. As is tradition, the battle to take my place will be this No Moon. Does anyone want to become leader?”

One fox stepped forward; it was Sun, my sis. As I had gained rank, she had lost rank. She was not yet a Weaker but just above. When she stepped up, a few foxes had to cover their laughs. No one else stepped forward to volunteer. “That means she’ll win and the Kamp will be run by a Weaker,” I thought and with that, I padded out of my den and stood beside Sun. The leader clearly was happy that I had stepped up, and I guessed he was just as worried as I was. As I stepped up, I felt a new desire, a desire to be leader and to rule my Kamp. I felt the desire burn into my heart and fill my body with new strength. “I will fight, Leader,” I said with a new tone, not an angry tone but a determined one.

### The Fight

The leader stepped into the clearing and a hush grew over the crowd. No moon shone in the sky, and it was dark except for the glow of the strangely bright stars. I stood on one side of the clearing staring at Sun on the other side. The leader stood in the middle, head high. He gave the greeting, and then, yelling “Fight,” stepped out of the clearing. Sun and I started circling each other. Suddenly she rushed forward. I barely jumped out of the way in time.



Now it was my turn to attack. She had run past me, and I was in range of her hind leg. I leaped at her, but it was too late. She wheeled around and bit me on the muzzle. I yipped in pain and scrambled back away from her. Sun didn't stop at that though; she ran at me and hit me with such force that I was knocked to the ground in an instant. She stood over me pinning me in the dirt. I was about to give in when she said something: "Father would be disappointed in you, Night." She said it in her high-pitched, sweet, little voice, but it came out in growls to me.

My vision clouded over in pain of loss and anger. How dare she accuse me of not living up to my father's expectations! I jumped up and ripped her stomach open. Now she was the one to yip. I attacked again, anger controlling my movements and blinding my judgement. I didn't pin her down and wait for surrender. I attacked her more. I didn't realize; I was too busy grieving for my father.

As my mind cleared, I looked down at the body in front of me, the once pure white fur now stained a dirty blood red. What had I done? I'm a murderer.

In the distance I heard a cub whisper to his mother, "Mum, why is Night killing that fox?"

"Shhh, little one. You don't want her to hear you. She might do the same to you," her mother answered.

"I wouldn't do that. Would I?" I looked down at the bleeding body before me. Maybe I would. "I'm sorry," I whispered into the ear of my dying victim. "I didn't mean it, sis."

I turned around to look at the people that had watched me just kill my own sis. Many were looking at me with a mixture of hate and fear. The leader looked at me like I was a Kat who had just turned itself into a wolf and back again. My mother stared at me with a look of pure hatred in her eyes. I tried to tell her, to explain why I had done it, but she was already walking away.

I didn't go to the sharp-claw den that night. I ran through the forest looking for prey. Maybe they would not exile me if I made it up to them. I hoped, I wished, and I caught prey.

I wandered, looking for a decent place to sleep when I picked out the stench of human. I started to run towards the Kamp, where I knew I would be safe. The humans had thought of that and blocked my path. A loud noise broke the quiet of dusk and a searing pain erupted at my shoulder and spread throughout my body. I had been shot, and there was no hope for me now. I closed my eyes and waited as the calm darkness of death dragged me to my end.

I woke up and looked around. I was dead. I then remembered. In front of me stood my father, his fur as red as blood. Then I thought of Sun: where was she? My answer walked up to me and looked me straight in the eyes.

“Welcome to the Kamp of those who are no more.” She looked at my face covered in guilt. “It has been forgotten, sis. Now come hunt with us.”

I, a black fox, stood between a white and a red fox. My life was done, but my journey was not.

Acknowledgement:

*Dedicated to my dog, Pepper, who is as cute and rambunctious as they come.*

**Lydia Depuydt**  
**Spicer, MN**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Place**

## **A Rock's Tale**

### Part 1

**G**reetings, I am a rock. You might be thinking, that is a bad sentence to start a story, but I am a rock. What do I know about sentences?

I would tell you my life's story, but it's too sad. So, I guess I'll make up a life's story. Okay, here I go.

I am a rock that has always wanted to be a flower. Every morning I wake up and think, "I wish I was a flower." But, every morning I wake up, and I'm not. So, I mope about it all day. And cry. Wait, that is also way too sad. So I guess I'll tell you what I do every day.

Okay, I'll start with the morning. I wake up, and stay in bed. All day. Every day. Then I think about how nice it would be to actually live and have a life. That's also extremely sad.

Arg. I can't think of anything interesting about me, so I'll write about something else.

One day a wolf came home to his pups. Motherless pups. He shook his head sadly as they crowded around his empty jaws, whimpering. Darn too sad again.

Well, if I can't write anything happy, I'll just write a sad story. Here goes nothing. No, here goes something. What I'm about to write is going to be something, even if it's a very bad something. Why do we say, "Here goes nothing" when whatever we are going to do will always be something? Well then, here goes something.

I felt around feebly in the darkness and found another chick in the egg. It was much bigger but so light.

I then explored in the other direction and found a warm egg shell. I beat my tiny wings against it experimentally, and it shifted. I used my sharp egg-tooth to chip through the shell. I was blinded by the light, so I stuck my beak through the hole I made and drew in my first breath of air.

It felt good in my lungs so I took some more deep breaths before I was pushed away by my brother so he could have his first breath of air, too. We then worked together to demolish the rest of the eggshell.

My eyes took a moment to adjust to the light. I then had my first good look at my brother. He was very... fluffy. And yellow.

I looked up at the brown feathers of our mother. She looked surprised; she had two sons instead of one. She clucked and nestled us further under her warm belly.

I heard a shrill gasp and looked up, startled.

A huge brown head was settled next to the nest. It jerked up and kept rising, higher and higher!

Pretty soon, I was looking at a giant! It had two enormously thick legs with big, flat things at the ends. I looked incredulously at my own feet with the spreading toes. It had a huge torso as wide as my mother is long. It had long, and I mean long, things instead of wings with big spreading things on the ends.

It had no beak! Just some pink floppy things. It had no feathers! Just skin. It rushed out.

I looked up at my mother and peeped questioningly. She looked at me and said, "That was a human."

I clucked, "What is that?"

My brother piped up, "Yeah, momma, why didn't it have feathers? Where are its wings?"

"They don't have feathers or wings," she said. "They give us food and water but take our eggs."

We gasped. "Did they take our egg?!" my brother asked. She hesitated. "Yes."

"But," she said quickly, "they gave your eggs back."

"Why do they take your eggs?" I asked.

"Well, I think they eat them," she said.

We gasped, "That's awful!"

"Yes, I heard that once a hen was so hungry, she ate her own egg. After that, she couldn't get enough of them. Eventually, she was butchered."

"What does butchered mean?" my brother asked.

"Killed," she replied.

“AHHHHHHH!!!” we screamed running about in a frenzy.

“Shh, it’s okay,” she soothed.

Just then, the human rushed back in with two others bigger than the first! They made some high-pitched gabbling noises, pointing at my brother and me.

Then, with one of the spreading things, it began to reach for us! I had no time to think before it scooped us up and held us with strong pink stick things! I screamed as loud as I could for our mother. I kicked and pecked. But it practically dropped me as soon as it picked me up.

More gurgling noises and all the humans were clamoring for my brother. He beat his tiny wings, and in one motion, flapped up and glided down to us. The humans started and all rushed out.

Our mother stared at him and whispered, “Why, he is so light! He must have hollow bones! That’s not normal for a chicken. When he grows he might actually be able to fly!”

My brother ran over and pressed against me, shivering. I felt something in my heart harden. Whatever the humans do, I will always hate them and try to escape.

## Part 2

Six months later...

I woke up and stretched. I looked up and was startled by a large mass of brown feathers.

“Get off, you great lump!” I said indignantly.

He clicked his beak but stayed on my back. I shook him off and strutted outside into the growing daylight. He squawked and gathered himself to follow me.

He flew up onto the coop to show off to the growing crowd of humans that came every day just to watch him.

“GET DOWN, RIGHT NOW!” I crowed at him.

“OKAY!” he crowed back. He left his perch and glided down to me. “What do you want?”

“I want you to stop showing off and just take a walk with me,” I said, then winked at him. Recognition lit up his eyes, and he winked back.

We strutted around to a huge oak tree at the corner of our fence, away from the view of both the humans and other chickens. He grasped me with his talons and flew me up to the highest branch.

“Alright,” he said once we had reached the top. “Show me what you have learned and fly to the opposite corner.”

And I did just that. I spread my wings and took off. It wasn’t flying as much as gliding, but oh, did I enjoy it. He flew underneath me to give me a boost upwards with his wind.

After we had landed, I ran into the coop to tell mother.

“Mother, I flew all the way to the other side of th—” I cut off when I saw what was happening to mother. The humans were taking her to butcher.

I ran at them screaming, then pecked and beat their legs. They just pushed me away, so I went to mother.

“MOTHER!” I shrieked. “DON’T GO!!!”

“Goodbye, my precious son,” she said. And she was gone. Taken away, never to be seen again.

I ran out to meet my brother, and for a moment it seemed as if our minds were fused. We must escape. I nodded, and he grabbed me, just like he did when he was giving me flying lessons. And he flew over the fence.

The crowd of humans went wild and gave chase, though they dropped back farther and farther until they were just specks in the distance. I looked up to see my brother panting heavily.

“We must rest,” I said. “We can travel more in the morning.”

We found a huge cedar tree with a rotten trunk. We pecked out a hollow big enough for the both of us. As we nestled down to sleep, I began to wonder. What would happen to us without the protection of humans? What fate would befall us? Then I was pulled into a sweet, dreamless sleep.

I nudged my brother awake. “Wake up sleepy-head,” I said. “It’s time for some breakfast.”

He raised his head. “Breakfast? Where?”

“Not here, silly,” I said. “Down there.” I motioned to the ground.

He cocked his head at me, obviously perplexed.

“Bugs. Grubs, inchworms, worms, beetles. Ring a bell?” I said and turned away. I went to the end of the branch and jumped, spreading my wings. I glided down and landed with perfection. He landed next to me and immediately began pecking for bugs.

After about an hour of eating, I looked up, saw the sun well above the horizon, and nudged my brother.

“It’s about time to go,” I said. “It’s too close to our old home for comfort.”

He nodded, and just as he was about to grab me, something grabbed him. He twisted to see what and screamed.

“RUN MY BROTHER AND DON’T LOOK BACK!!” he shrieked at me, but I stood my ground, ready to fight.

The wolf started shaking him, but I flew at it, pecking at its eyes. It howled in pain and dropped my brother. He scrambled up and tried to fly but was dragged back by the crazed wolf. It bit down, and with a snap, my brother’s life was ended right before my very eyes.

I screamed and flew at the wolf with a red haze in my vision. I clocked it right on the side of the head. It snarled and turned on me. I knew my life was over, so I had nothing to lose. As it opened its mouth, I flew right in aiming for the tongue. I bit down and tasted blood. It yelped and bit down, too.

Everything was in slow motion. I thought of my brother, my dedicated friend, who didn’t shun me because he had an ability I didn’t. Who kept me warm at night and lighthearted in the day. I thought of my mother who had brought me up, making me feel special even though I wasn’t.

Well, none of that mattered now. There was a crack, a blinding pain, and darkness.

Wow. That story turned out pretty well. And now the wolf can come home to his pups triumphantly! With prey hanging from his jaws.

**Georgia Rabaey**  
**Marshall, MN**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Place**

### **Christmas Catastrophe**

| Characters          | Number of scenes | Number of lines |
|---------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Fred Chinstrom      | 6                | 31              |
| Mr. Chinstrom       | 4                | 21              |
| Mrs. Chinstrom      | 4                | 13              |
| Ochurla             | 3                | 6               |
| Santa               | 2                | 6               |
| Peter               | 2                | 4               |
| Thomas              | 2                | 3               |
| Teacher             | 1                | 7               |
| Storekeeper 1       | 1                | 3               |
| Storekeeper 2       | 1                | 4               |
| Assistant Kidnapper | 1                | 0               |
| Librarian           | 1                | 0               |
| Schoolchildren      | 1                | 0               |
| Townspeople         | 1                | 0               |
| Darcy Family        | 1                | 0               |

#### Scene 1.

*The curtain opens on a schoolroom. Schoolchildren are seated in lines. Fred is seated near the audience. Thomas enters stage right.*

THOMAS: I apologize for being late, Miss Crawford.

TEACHER: Sit down. Now!

*Thomas holds out his hand, and the teacher whacks it with a ruler. He turns and knocks over a chair.*

TEACHER: (*shouts*) Be quiet!

*Santa's hat appears through a window.*



SANTA: (*offstage*) Ouch! You hurt me!

OCHURLA: (*also offstage*) Ssssshhhh! Keep going.

*Fred looks up. Then he stands up in alarm.*

TEACHER: Do your work, kid.

FRED: But—

TEACHER: Kid, you listen to me. Behave!

*Class studies silently. Peter runs in stage right.*

PETER: I'm sorry I was late. I forgot my books.

TEACHER: Kid, sit down here. If you come late one more time, you get expelled.

PETER: (*excited*) Really!

*Peter sits on the dunce chair in the corner of the schoolroom and studies a book. Children start whispering and giggling.*

TEACHER: What is the moral of the fable, Peter?

*Peter stands and faces the audience.*

PETER: Expect no reward for serving the wicked.

TEACHER: Class is dismissed.

*All children except Fred and Thomas get up and skip off stage right. The teacher gathers up her books and walks off stage left. Curtains close until there is a gap of four feet. Fred and Thomas walk to the gap.*

FRED: I'm going to come late next time

THOMAS: Me, too.

*Curtains close*

Scene 2.

*Curtains open on a bedroom. Fred is examining a rubber duck.*

FRED: It has ‘elf made’ on it. I suppose that means that it is one of Santa’s toys. I hope that doesn’t mean Santa’s captured. But it must! The person who said, “Keep going,” sounded like a woman. I’ll ask Dad. (*He calls*) Daaaaaaa-aad!

*Mr. Chinstrom enters stage left. He sits down on the bed.*

MR. CHINSTROM: Fred, I just read that Santa Clause is missing. He didn’t show up for his annual visit with the President yesterday.

FRED: Dad?

MR. CHINSTROM: Yes?

FRED: When I was at school today, I saw a red hat with a white pom-pom on the top outside the window. I heard someone—a man—say that someone was hurting him, and someone—it sounded like a woman—said to keep going and be quiet. After school, I went outside and I found this.

*He shows his dad the duck. His father holds it and examines it carefully.*

MR. CHINSTROM: (*exited*) It can only mean one thing! Santa has been captured! Fred, this will ruin everything about Christmas for everyone! Well, what are you going to do about it?

FRED: Well, I guess we need to find him.

MR. CHINSTROM: This afternoon, if possible. Do you think we can make it without your mother noticing?

FRED: Try to look as innocent as you can.

MR. CHINSTROM: I'll meet you here at 2:00. We'll need a backpack full of stuff: a first aid kit, food, water, a magnifying glass, a knife to cut any ropes, and a flashlight.

*They both leave the room and return with a loaded backpack each. They are both wearing sunglasses.*

MR. CHINSTROM: Let's quietly slip out the back door, then run to the little woods and head for the school.

*Mrs. Chinstrom enters with the twins. They are all wearing sunglasses.*

MRS. CHINSTROM: That sounds like a good idea, but can you please go slowly so that the twins and I can keep up? *Fred and Mr. Chinstrom look surprised, then disappointed.* I brought a few things you forgot. A sledgehammer—for knocking out the villain, some handcuffs, two sippy cups, some diapers—

FRED: For the villain?!?

MRS. CHINSTROM: No! For the twins of course!

MR. CHINSTROM: *(glumly)* We'd better get started if they're coming.

*Curtain closes.*

### Scene 3.

*Curtain opens. Mr. Chinstrom and Fred are kneeling in the snow examining something with a magnifying glass. Mrs. Chinstrom and the twins are standing off to the side.*

MR. CHINSTROM: There are footprints in the snow; they lead this way. They do not stay so distinct, but they are visible.

MRS. CHINSTROM: You lead the way. The twins and I will follow. Oh! I forgot my thread!

MR. CHINSTROM: Wait, I brought some thin rope. Will that work?

MRS. CHINSTROM: That should work.

FRED: Let's get going then.

*They exit stage left and then re-enter stage left. They stop in front of an old abandoned prison.*

MR. CHINSTROM: This is where the footprints end.

FRED: They must be in there. It looks so gloomy.

MRS. CHINSTROM: The twins and I will stay in here to guard the entrance. You two go on in.

FRED: Well, Dad, what are we waiting for?

MR. CHINSTROM: Wait, Fred, can I see that toy again? I just want to make sure it really is Santa Claus.

FRED: You mean the rubber duck? Sure, I brought it in my backpack.

*Fred takes the toy out of his backpack and hands it to his dad.*

MR. CHINSTROM: It must be Santa.

MRS. CHINSTROM: You aren't going to find him standing around like this. Let's get going. Wait! You should take the sledgehammer with you.

MR. CHINSTROM: Fine!

*Mr. Chinstrom puts the toy away in Fred's backpack, and he and Fred enter the prison (stage left).*

*Curtains close.*

Scene 4.

*Curtains open. Mr. Chinstrom and Fred enter stage right.*

FRED: This is sure gloomy.

MR. CHINSTROM: Be quiet.

*They creep across the stage. Assistant Kidnapper sneaks in and hides by the curtain.*

MR. CHINSTROM: What was that?

FRED: Sssshhhhh!!

MR. CHINSTROM: I see someone in the shadows over there!

FRED: Where? Oh! I see her too! Quick! The sledgehammer!

*Mr. Chinstrom knocks out the assistant kidnapper and drags her off stage right.*

MR. CHINSTROM: Your mother was smart. That was really smooth.

FRED: I wonder where Santa is.

MR. CHINSTROM: We'll find him eventually.

SANTA: (*offstage*) Let go! I'll never tell you!

OCHURLA: (*also offstage*) Oh yes you will!

FRED: Dad, there must be another villain in the room with Santa Claus! This way!

*They exit stage left. Santa and Ochurla enter stage left. Santa tries to hit Ochurla, but she dodges. They continue fighting until Ochurla ties Santa up.*

OCHURLA: All I want you to do is to tell me the secret passwords that open your house and workshop and then----

SANTA: You will be told nothing.

*Mr. Chinstrom and Fred enter stage left.*

MR. CHINSTROM: Let go of him right now!

*Ochurla runs off stage left.*

SANTA: She kidnapped me on the way to the White House. I was tied by her. She wanted me to tell her all my secrets. Imagine! I have walked for two days straight, and somewhere I dropped the toy that I brought for Donald Trump. I always bring the president a rubber duck. Thank you for rescuing me.

FRED: I found a rubber duck outside the school. Is this it?

*He holds up the toy. Santa nods and puts it in his sack.*

SANTA: I have lost *so* much time. I suppose I will have to cancel Christmas. I still have to check my list of boys and girls. I will add you to the list of Outstanding Boys. I still need to make five million, four hundred ninety-four thousand, three hundred twenty-seven presents. I need to check the reindeer harness and go for practice flights with the reindeer. I have a new team. Rudolph's son, Wolfgang, is in the lead so that should go smoothly.

FRED: If a store donated the toys, do you think you could still make it in time for Christmas?

SANTA: Unfortunately, I do not have a fast way to get back to the North Pole, but if I did, I would most certainly have enough time.

FRED: Dad, you take Santa to get a plane ticket. I'll go talk to a storekeeper about getting enough toys. How much did you say you needed?

SANTA: About 6,000,000.

*Fred exits stage left. Mr. Chinstrom and Santa exit stage right. Curtain closes.*

#### Scene 5.

*Curtain opens. Mrs. Chinstrom and the twins are waiting outside the prison. They hear footsteps, and Mrs. Chinstrom quickly ties a thread to each side of the door. Then she stands behind the door with the handcuffs. Ochurla trips on the string and goes flying headfirst. Mrs. Chinstrom quickly handcuffs her.*

MRS. CHINSTROM: That was not a good idea, was it? Did you see my husband and my son? I've got you now, and you aren't going to escape.

OCHURLA: I don't care that you've got me, because I am going to get away.

MRS. CHINSTROM: You will never get away. Grace, Ted, go find your father.

*Twins exit stage left.*

MRS. CHINSTROM: Get up, villain. We are going to take you to jail.

OCHURLA: My name is Ochurla.

MRS. CHINSTROM: Ochurla?

OCHURLA: Actually, my name is Ruth Perry, but I call myself Ochurla to scare people.

MRS. CHINSTROM: I see. Anyway, let's go.

*They exit stage left. Curtain closes.*

Scene 6.

*Curtain opens. Storekeeper 1 is sitting at a table with MINSTER'S TOYS written on a sign. Storekeeper 2 is sitting at another table with ELFLAND TOY CO. written on a sign. Librarian is seated at a table with LIBRARY written on a sign. Townspeople enter and buy toys and read books. Fred enters and approaches Storekeeper 1.*

FRED: Ma'am?

STOREKEEPER 1: What?

FRED: My family has learned that Santa is behind on presents and is looking for a store that will donate toys fo—

STOREKEEPER 1: That's a lie. And even if it were true, we would not help him. If we did, then people would not have to buy presents from us. Goodbye.

FRED: You wouldn't help?

STOREKEEPER 1: Goodbye!

*Fred turns away, and approaches Storekeeper 2.*

FRED: Ma'am?

STOREKEEPER 2: Why hello! Is there anything I can do for you?



FRED: My family has learned that Santa is behind on presents, and he's looking for a store to donate toys.

STOREKEEPER 2: Why, of course! How many toys do you need?

FRED: A-a-about six million.

STOREKEEPER 2: (*falls over in her chair*) O-o-oh! That many! Well, we have friends who might help us. When and where do you need them?

FRED: If you could arrange to have them in a truck at 212 Main Street on Christmas Eve that would work.

STOREKEEPER 2: All right.

FRED: Thank you.

*Fred exits stage left. The storekeepers exit stage right. Fred enters stage left, and starts writing a letter.*

FRED: Dear Santa, I have talked to a storekeeper who will leave six million toys at 212 Main Street in a truck on Christmas Eve. Your friend, Fred Chinstrom. P.S. I want a BB gun for Christmas.

Scene 7.

*Curtain opens. Mr. and Mrs. Chinstrom, Fred, and the twins are gathered around their stockings.*

FRED: I got a BB gun!

MRS. CHINSTROM: I got a brand new crock-pot!

MR. CHINSTROM: I got wool socks!

MRS. CHINSTROM: The twins got Legos.

FRED: Can I go over to Peter and Thomas's house to see what they got?

MR. CHINSTROM: Sure.

MRS. CHINSTROM: Be back soon for breakfast.

*Fred exits stage left. Everyone else on stage exits stage right. The Darcy family, Peter, and Thomas enter stage right and gather around their stockings. They give cries of excitement and pleasure. Fred enters stage left.*

FRED: Hi, I got a BB gun. What did you get?

PETER: I got a drawing kit!

THOMAS: *(disappointed)* I got a rubber duck.

FRED: Maybe you are going to be president someday!

*Curtains Close.*

#### Curtain Call

School children, town children, Darcy Family  
Storekeepers, Teacher, Librarian, and Assistant Kidnapper  
Peter and Thomas  
Grace and Ted  
Santa Claus and Ochurla  
Mr. and Mrs. Chinstrom  
Fred  
Backstage help  
Entire cast

The End

**NONFICTION**  
**Grades 5 & 6**



**Tanner Graphenteen**  
**Hadley, MN**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Place**

### **The Tree**

**M**y favorite place isn't very special. It isn't a roller coaster or a football field. It's simply a plant. When I'm at the tree I'm alone and it's peaceful. This short story is about my favorite place, The Tree.

Deep in the green infested woods grows a tree. Surrounded by a pool of cocklebur the tree stands. The Tree, being one of the tallest in the grove, stands tall above the rest. At the middle of the tree, there is a hole. This is home to a squirrel.

When I was eight my sister and I were playing in the woods. We were playing tag when we stumbled upon the biggest tree. Being kids, our first instinct was to climb it. The snow banks were like waves on a sea. As I finally reached the top, I looked up. After seeing the view from up high, I knew this would be my favorite place.

If I'm feeling stressed all I have to do is head out to the tree. When I get to the tree, all I have to do is clamber up the trunk to the biggest branch. Then I just lay down and shut my eyes and listen to the calls of the birds. Other times I watch the tiny squirrel go into her home. When I return home, I'm covered in cocklebur, but it's worth it.

Nobody really knows about the tree, or how I go there when I'm stressed. When I go to the tree, I just don't have to think about anything. I don't have to think about that test tomorrow or the big game. When I'm at the tree, I can just loosen up. And that's why The Tree is my favorite place.

**Derek Kluis**  
**Chandler, MN**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Place**

### **A Place I Love to Go**

**B**ack to the baseball diamonds for a brand new baseball season. I can't wait to sniff the fresh mowed grass. I'll be able to grip the sappy handle tape on my brand new Easton bat. Off to the majestic baseball diamonds.

Time for the vast outfield, the light green grass and to be as amazing as you wish to be. The morning is the absolute best time to play the sweet game. If you dive, the dew in the grass soaks your jersey and lawn clippings stick to the wet part of your jersey. The swaying grass also leaves large green stains on your sliding pants. Most often, the stains and wet jersey make your mother furious, even though it's by far the most spectacular thing to do on the baseball diamond.

Infield is my favorite part of the massive field. While I'm most often at shortstop, second base is truly my favorite spot. When a runner is on first, I've got to conceal second base if the ball is struck to the left side of the diamond. I can imagine that I'm creating spectacular plays to save the most important games. I'm always surrounded by the greatest friends in the universe. I just seem to feel the best when I'm at second base. Maybe second base is my favorite place.

When I'm on deck, I can time the pitcher driving off the snow white rubber, delivering the small, white ball across the plate that's covered with tan dirt. I can step in the batter box with muddy cleats, and man do I feel great. I can see the white lines up the baselines and surrounding the batter box. The tan dirt is all around, and then crack, the ball soars.

I can dream that I'm playing Major League Baseball. I think the batter box is my favorite place. Well, between the batter box, second base, and the outfield. I really can't make a choice. Hey, the baseball diamond is my favorite place!

**Nina Hendrickson**  
**Kimball, MN**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Place**

### **The Flag Raising on Iwo Jima**

**T**hat famous picture around the United States of America in 1945 where those strong, patriotic men who had fought for our lives raised the flag on that island on the top of Mt. Suribachi in the Pacific Ocean. The picture that many Americans thought meant the end of the war was here, but unfortunately, it was not. The print that was immensely popular and won the Pulitzer Prize for Photography that same exact year. The photo that is observed as one of the most symbolic and recognizable images of the war. The photograph that is now known as *Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima*.

To these men that anchored their feet into the ground and planted the flag of the "The land of the free and the home of the brave," they were just doing their job. They had no choice to be spread all over of the headlines in newspapers and magazines across the U.S. and in many other regions of the world. People swarmed around the newspaper stands to tackle down that photo that everybody was ranting on and on about. What a frenzie this image brought to the U. S.

When the Americans found out who the flag-raisers were, the Marine Corps sent the three that were still living back to the United States. These well-known stars from Iwo Jima were to be sent on a Bond Tour to help raise money to make military supplies and to support the troops that were in the war. The three traveled along the railway all across the United States. They traveled up and down and all around the states, making a zigzag pattern from the top to the bottom.

Five Marines and one Navy Corpsman clutched onto the pole that was securing the Stars and Stripes on top of the mount. Those men were, from left to right, front, Ira Hayes of Gila River Indian Reservation in south central Arizona, Franklin Sousley of Hilltop, Kentucky, John Bradley of Antigo, Wisconsin, and Harlan Block of Yorktown, Texas.

The two in the back from left to right are Michael Strank of Franklin Borough, Pennsylvania and Rene Gagnon of Manchester, New Hampshire. Three of these men were not to return home to see their family and friends again, or to say, "I love you" every day to their girlfriends, leaving those girls with such a heavy burden knowing that that one boy that had loved them was now gone to rest. They were Harlan Block, Franklin Sousley, and Mike Strank.

Ira Hamilton Hayes was a Pima Indian that lived on the Gila River Indian Reservation in Arizona. He was born on January 12, 1923 in Sacaton, Arizona to Joseph Hayes and Nancy Hamilton Hayes. This baby boy was the first child of six children to come. This boy was very self-conscious and very shy. He liked to be all alone with nobody around and answered very concisely when asked about things. As people who knew him would say, "He wouldn't talk unless somebody talked to him." Ira attended grade school at Sacaton and high school at the Phoenix Indian School. Hayes enlisted in the United States Marine Corps Reserve on August 26, 1942. He died at the age of 32 on January 24, 1955 of exposure and alcohol poisoning.

John Henry "Jack" "Doc" Bradley was born July 10, 1923 in Antigo, Wisconsin to James and Kathryn Bradley. He was the second of five children. He grew up in Appleton, Wisconsin, and graduated from Appleton Senior High School in 1941. He took and completed an 18-month apprenticeship course with a nearby funeral director before he entered military service. Bradley enlisted in the U.S. Navy on January 13, 1943. In March of 1943, he was assigned to the Hospital Corps School at Farragut, Idaho. He finished or completed the hospital corpsman course, married Betty Van Grop, then settled his family in Antigo. They had eight children together, one of whom wrote, "Flags of Our Fathers," and purchased and managed a funeral home. He died of a stroke on January 11, 1994 at 70 years of age.

Franklin Runyon Sousley, the second child of Merle and Goldie Mitchell Sousley, was born September 19, 1925 in Hilltop, Kentucky. Franklin went to a two-room schoolhouse in nearby Elizaville, and attended Fleming County High



School in nearby Flemingsburg. Sousley graduated from Fleming High School in May 1943. He received his draft notice, and he chose to join the United States Marine Corps on January 4, 1944. Franklin Sousley was killed in action at the age of 19 on March 21, 1945 leaving behind his mother and brother.

Harlan Henry Block, the third of six children, was born in Yorktown, Texas on November 6, 1924 to Edward and Ada Belle Brantley Block. The family moved to Weslaco, Texas, and the children went to school at the Seventh-day Adventist private school. Block was expelled from school his freshman year because he wouldn't tell the principal who had vandalized the school, and so he was transferred to Weslaco High School. Being a natural athlete, Block led the Weslaco Panther Football Team to the Conference Championship. He and some of his buddies decided to join the Marine Corps before they graduated and the school held a special early graduation ceremony for them in January of 1943. Block and seven of his football buddies enlisted together in the Marine Corps on February 18, 1943. Harlan Block was killed in action at the age of 20 on March 1, 1945.

Rene Arthur Gagnon, Sr. was born March 7, 1925 in Manchester, New Hampshire to Henri Gagnon and Irene Marcotte. He was raised by only his mother because his parents separated when he was a tiny babe. His mother worked in the factories, and when he was old enough he got a job there, too, right beside his mother. He was drafted May 6, 1943 to join the United Marine Corps Reserve. When he got back from the war, he married Pauline Georgette Harnois in Baltimore, Maryland on July 7, 1945. They had one child, a boy by the name on Rene Arthur Gagnon, Jr. He died October 12, 1979 at the age of 54 in Manchester, New Hampshire of a heart attack.

Michael Strank was born in Jarabina, Czechoslovakia (now Slovakia) on November 10, 1919. He was one of two children of Vasil and Marta Strank. Strank went to the public schools of Franklin Borough after the family moved to America. He graduated from Franklin Borough High School in 1937. Strank enlisted in the Marine Corps for four years of

service on October 6, 1939. On March 1, 1945, Michael Strank was killed in action at the age of 25.

Most would never know that this much-publicized photograph taken by Joe Rosenthal was actually the second flag raising on the mountain. The first flag had so much history behind it that they needed to take it down and save it for the future generations of American history. That first flag was the first American flag to be seated in Japanese soil. How would you have ever guessed that that was indeed the second flag raising on that mountain?

Many people would ask, "Was that photo posed?" But no. Joe the photographer would say, "If I had them pose for that photo it wouldn't have turned out right," or something along those words. That photograph that was captured at 1/400 second shutter speed. The photo that made Iwo Jima known round the world. Six men hoisting up a flag into the air and then thrusting the bottom of the pole into the rubble of "Sulfur Island."

Iwo Jima is an island in the Pacific Ocean that is a part of the Japanese Volcano Islands. This island's real name is Iwo To, but it is known by Iwo Jima in the English Language. The highest point on this island is Mount Suribachi at 160 meters (528 feet.) The U.S. military occupied this island until 1968 when it was given to Japan again. The area of this land is approximately 21 km<sup>2</sup> (8 square miles). The island is usually flat with not much on it for a volcanic island. The mount is the only obvious volcanic feature of this small volcano island.

The Battle of Iwo Jima was fought for 36 days starting on February 19, 1945 and ending on March 27, 1945. The battle was between the United States Marine Corps and the Imperial Japanese Army. It was as if the United States Marine Corps had been fighting an unseen enemy because they hardly ever saw a Japanese soldier. Sometimes when a Japanese soldier was to pull in one of his buddies from the outer layer of the island, they would see a Japanese soldier. The Japanese positions were underneath the ground. They had tunnels and secret passageways beneath the surface of the earth. There were blockhouses above ground and heavily secured bunkers half beneath the ground. It was like they had a hidden city

down there. They had food supplies for many months, bullets to last them for a huge period of time, and tons of hidden artillery hidden within the sand. As a matter of fact, everything was camouflaged to look like the sand. The Japanese wouldn't give up. They kept on going until the very end. There were 21,000 Japanese soldiers at the beginning of the battle. Over 19,000 were killed and only 1,083 were taken prisoner. After the island was declared secure, about 3,000 Japanese soldiers were still alive in the island's caves and tunnels. The ones who couldn't bring themselves to commit suicide hid in the day and came out at night to prowl around to collect provisions. Some of these men did eventually surrender to the Americans.

One of the main goals for the United States Marine Corps was to take or get ahold of Mount Suribachi. They accomplished just that on the fourth day of the battle on February 23, 1945. There were two flag-raising on that day, but the second one looks very intense and is the powerful print that I am speaking about right now. According to the United States Navy, the Battle of Iwo Jima resulted in more than 26,000 American wounded, including 6,800 dead. Among those fallen soldiers were Harlan Block of Weslaco, Texas, Franklin Sousey of Hilltop, Kentucky, and Michael Strank of Franklin Borough, Pennsylvania. The night of March 25, 1945, 300 men from the Japanese force launched the last, final counter attack. The island was declared "secure" the next morning.

The image was used late by Felix de Weldon to sculpt the Marine Corps War Memorial that was dedicated in 1954 to all of the Marines who have died for their country, both past and present. The memorial is located adjacent to Arlington National Cemetery just outside of Washington, D.C. The original mold is located on the Marine Academy grounds, a private college preliminary academy located in Harlingen, Texas. It took de Weldon and hundreds of his assistants three years to finish it.

Rosenthal's photo appeared on 3.5 million posters for the seventh war bond drive. It has been reproduced with many unconventional media such as Lego bricks, butter, ice, Etch A Sketch, and corn mazes. The flag raising has been in films,

such as 1949's *Sands of Iwo Jima* and 1961's *The Outsider*, a biography of Ira Hayes. In July 1945, the United States Postal Service released a postage stamp with the image on it. The U.S. issued another stamp in 1995 showing the flag-raising as part of its ten stamp series marking the 50th Anniversary of World War II. The United States Mint released a commemorative silver dollar bearing the image in 2005.

In June of 2016, Harold Henry Schultz was identified as the sixth flag-raiser and not Navy Corpsman John H. Bradley. It was after a three-month investigation that this was figured out.

*Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima* has been and always will be very symbolic to the United States.

**POETRY**  
**Grades 7 & 8**



**Whitney Wordes**  
**Renville, MN**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Place**

### **The Sparrow's Song**

Perched on a branch,  
In Moon's glowing light  
A silver sparrow shone,  
Bringing beauty to night's casting shadows  
She perched there all alone  
Singing out her mournful song  
To any who heard her voice.  
The trees swayed in the breeze's gale  
With a rustle in the silence.  
Leaves came fluttering down  
In their slow and twirling dance,  
While owls echoed softly  
The sparrow's mournful song.  
Nocturnal flowers opened  
Their petals to the moon.  
Stars twinkled from the shining sky,  
Silently joining together  
With the sparrow's mournful song.  
Prairie grass picked up their blades  
And waltzed with the unseen wind.  
The glittering stream's crystal waters  
Flowed over the gemstone pebbles.  
Even dawn's first rays,  
Driving away mist's trailing wisps,  
Sang and danced along  
To the sparrow's mournful song.

**Whitney Wordes**  
**Renville, MN**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Place**

**Popcorn and the Finch**

Nestled in a little egg,  
Squeezed into a shell  
Adding but a tiny crack  
To hatch in golden light.

Dancing and leaping,  
Explosion of gold,  
Feather burst forth  
Like the sun  
Into flight.

Awakening  
Opening first seeing eyes,  
Jumping into the world  
With new wings wide open.

A sunflower opened  
Glowing like the sun  
Petals unfolded  
In glorious bloom.

Snuggled down with her brothers  
In a bowl  
Or a nest  
All resting together,  
A golden  
Piece of sunshine.



**Tessa Gannott**  
**Marshall, MN**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Place**

**Best Volleyball Game**

I'm sitting on the bench  
And all I can say  
Is that I want to play  
I've been working hard at practice  
But it seems like the coaches don't notice  
I can hit, pass and set  
And I never accidentally touch the net  
I am a great team player  
But the coaches always put her in  
But today is different, I saw them take her off  
Then I heard her scoff  
But I'm too excited to take that to heart  
I even almost ran into the ball cart  
As I go in I hear the cheering crowd  
I saw my mom and she looks very proud  
I refocused when I heard the whistle beckoning for the serve  
When the ball was hit it started to curve  
It came right to me  
I had a great pass and the setter called for a C  
That meant it was my turn to hit  
It was a perfect set and I crushed it  
It was my turn to serve and it could be the last point of the game  
The serve went in and they passed, set and hit it  
Then I did the same  
But when I hit it they missed it  
We won, I was so excited but I think I needed to sit  
I went and shook the other team's players' hands  
I went to my coaches and thanked them for letting me play  
Even though I wanted to stay  
I went with my team to take a picture  
Then I went to hug and kiss my mom  
and everyone else did the same  
couldn't have asked for a better game



**FICTION**  
**Grades 7 & 8**



**Clara Holm  
Willmar, MN  
1<sup>st</sup> Place**

## **Look Behind You**

*My life will change forever.*

### 1 Vacation

“Why is this so important? I mean, I don’t even like chickens.” I sit in the passenger seat in my mom’s Chevy, looking out the back window, seeing a dirt road and plumes of dust and debris being thrown up by the back tires.

My dad was finally coming home from the war, and he and my mother were divorced. She didn’t want to be widowed for the third time. Isn’t it ironic, that the two guys she previously decided to marry both died in Iraq?

The third time she married, after my stepdad Steve got shipped off to war, she wasn’t going to take any chances. So, the next day, she got a divorce. I tried to stop her, but that wasn’t to be the case.

My stepdad bought a chicken farm to get some pay, y’know? Mom is bringing me here to work a bit and to maybe reconnect with dad. But the thing is, she isn’t going to stay. Maybe she holds grudges? For the amount of time I have been around her, I think I would have known by now...but for some strange reason, she never opens up. She never shows her feelings. Almost like a statue, she looks forward and hardly sheds a tear in times of misery. That’s how she was now: a statue, staring out the front windshield of the car, eyes locked on the road.

“Mom...Mom! Wake up!” Silence. I give up and stare out the other window. The rolling hills of golden wheat meet smoothly with the blue sky, but where there is light, there is always a shadow. Along the horizon behind us towers a wall of cumulus very low to the ground. Underneath, it appears as

dark as the night itself. It's almost as if we're running away, running away from the storm. The weather can be shifty in Iowa.

## 2 Footprints

The car pulls to a stop as mom closes her eyes. "Get out." *Jeez! What did I do!?* I shrug and sling my backpack over my shoulder. I open the car door and step outside.

"You coming mom? You know, in case he isn't here?"

She is silent, then "no." Something feels wrong about her today...something feels...off. I slam the door shut and look around. It's...well... your standard farm. A silo, a small barn-like tool shed, a white two-story farmhouse, and a chicken coop with some chicken wire all the way around. The farm smelled of mulch and chicken feces. The air was electric, the sign of an approaching storm.

"Hey mom, I was wondering, if—" I turn around...she's gone! Vanished! No tire tread marks to even tell of her being here. "Well that's...normal..." But honestly, this past week has not been normal. *No turning back now.*

I walk through the overgrown lawn up to the doorstep of the house. The door is made of solid unfinished oak with a corroded brass knocker shaped like a roaring lion's head. It looked so real, like it might bite.

I raise the knocker, then pause. Memories flash through my head, memories of my life as a seventh grader. I had a girlfriend...but I won't tell her name at this point. There was also this other person...uh, I forget her name, but...she has a crush on me, seriously. From what she *told* me, she had admired me since the third grade. I thought that was pretty flattering, but...I couldn't say anything back, because my girlfriend doesn't want me talking to, or even seeing, other girls. It's okay, though. I like my girlfriend just fine. She is very nice, pretty and blonde...and honestly, that other girl is just plain annoying. I don't want to be mean, but... how do you say "no, get out of my life," *nicely*? I sigh as thunder booms in the distance, I knock...three times.

### 3 Knocks

I wait for a response, but none comes. I grab the knocker and pound again. Same result. I grab the doorknob and twist, but it is locked. *There has to be another door to the house. Better get to looking.*

I walk around the house. I notice the grass is overgrown, and there are cobblestone pavers every two feet to step on. I reach the back door and wrench the knob; it is also locked. Thunder booms in the distance. I look over my shoulder as the storm is approaching fast. I needed a shelter, and I didn't fancy sleeping in a chicken coop. I violently pound on the door. "Hey! Open up!" Silence.

I think better of it; maybe...a window was unlocked. I take some steps back, and start scanning the house for an opened window. Sure enough, there is a window left open! The only problem? It's on the second floor.

I look around for a ladder, and for once, I get lucky and spot one lying in the dewy grass. I lift it up; it's an old wooden one, rather rotten-looking. A red flag goes up in the back of my mind, but it was the only ladder I had.

I lean the ladder up against the house. It was about five feet short of the window, but I knew I could climb the house the rest of the way. I put my foot on the first rotten rung of the ladder. My gut tries to warn me, but I don't listen. I start to climb. I am around halfway up when I start to feel dizzy. I shut my eyes and take a deep breath. *Okay, you got this,* I tell myself. I continue climbing, and my hand reaches the top rung. It's soaked and rotten. *You can still turn back...* Nah, have to keep going. I put one hand on the windowsill, then the other, as I pull myself up. I put my right foot on the rung. I worry about putting my weight on it. *What choice do I have?* I breathe out and push down on the rung. It bends under my weight, but doesn't snap. I lift my other foot onto the rung. Good, almost there.

I start to pull up when the ladder falls away from under my feet, and I am left dangling off the side of the house! *Okay, don't panic...it's just like the jungle-gym, pull up...* I look down and see the ground far below me. My stomach clenches.

*No looking down...* After much pulling, I yank myself into the window. I throw myself on the corkwood floor in what seems to be a storage room. I close my eyes and sigh a sigh of relief.

I open my eyes and sit up, looking at the window sill. Four gashes are engraved deep into the beech wood. *Not gashes, claw marks!*

#### 4 Claw Marks

I place my fingers on the gashes in the windowpane. My fingers fit in the marks, four sharp clean-cut slashes. *This was not normal.* I close the window and walk downstairs. The stairs are worn and scratched, battered and stained. With each step I take, the steps creak. When I set my foot on each step, a small cloud of dust takes air, swirling, revealed by the last ray of sunlight shining from above through the old window through which I had entered this eerie house. The ray of light slowly disappears...as the darkened clouds above consume the last patch of blue sky.



**Kate Janzen**  
**Mountain Lake, MN**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Place**

### **Snowstorm**

**H**er mother had passed away unexpectedly. She was just a half mile out of the village when the polar bear beast had come behind her and put an end to her life. Although Yuka knew polar bear attacks happened often to a strayed Inuit, she never expected it to happen to her own mama.

#### *Six Months Later*

“How dare you! You must go back home! No, wait, that would be dangerous, and I don’t have time to bring you back. What were you thinking?” Muktuk put his head in his mittened hands, but then stopped and straightened his shoulders. He must act like a man; he was thirteen after all. Muktuk took a deep breath and began again, “Yuka, my little sister, it was wrong of you to stow away in my sled. This hunting trip was for Tikaani and me. Hunting is not for young girls. Do you have an explanation, Yuka?”

Yuka’s bottom lip quivered underneath layers of scarves. The young girl began to speak, “I - I just wanted to help you with your hunting and protect you. I’m - I’m so sorry, Muktuk.” She looked down, ashamed by her own actions.

Muktuk looked at his little sister’s hurt expression and big, brown downcast eyes. “Oh Yuka,” he said sympathetically. “Of course I’ll forgive you.” He knelt down and gave her a hug. There was no way anyone could stay mad at that sweet nine-year-old girl.

Yuka sighed, “But now this hunting trip is ruined for you and Tikaani. What am I supposed to do?”

Muktuk remembered his best friend, Tikaani, suddenly. He surveyed the area and noticed him at the front of the sled by the dogs, squatting in the cold, white powder. After Muktuk called Tikaani, he explained to both of them, “We will

just have to go on with this hunting trip with Yuka along. It might be cut a couple days short because we may not have enough food for the three of us.”

The three soon began again on their trek through the snow. Yuka contemplated once more her reason for stowing away in her big brother’s sled. Ever since their mother died six months earlier, Yuka had been protective of her father and big brother. When she heard that Muktuk was going on a week-long hunting trip, Yuka had to decide who she was going to watch over. She decided Papa could take care of himself for a little while, so Yuka hopped onto the back of the dogsled, hid in some blankets, and chose to keep track of Muktuk for a bit. It had all gone wrong about an hour into the trip when she had sneezed, and her brother had heard her.

Suddenly, Tikaani’s low voice shattered her thoughts, “Do you want to set up camp soon, Muktuk? We’ve gone quite a long ways. I think we can find a suitable place to settle.”

Muktuk’s dark brown eyes looked at the surrounding landscape. The ball of fire that hung high in the sky shone on the hummocks of bright snow. As far as the eye could see, it was a white winter wonderland. He shivered as a gust of wind blew snow and icy air into their faces.

“Yes, that sounds good. Let’s set up right behind that bank.”

The clan hiked over and began to cut blocks for a small igloo. After about an hour, they were settled in.

Muktuk laid out their plan, “Today we won’t do any hunting, but tomorrow most of the day we will. Yuka, will you be able to stay here alone with one of the dogs? Tikaani and I will bring Koko and Siluk hunting, but Miki can stay here with you. Is that alright?”

“Yeah, I guess so. Just be careful while you are hunting, okay?” Yuka reminded her big brother earnestly.

“Of course we will be careful,” Muktuk agreed as he reached down to squeeze his little sister’s hand.

For the rest of the day they played with the dogs. Later in the evening, the three kids were lounging around their fire with the dogs when Tikaani spoke.

“Muktuk, I don’t like the look of those clouds,” he said as he pointed to a mass of gray storm clouds.

Muktuk took a quick breath. He shuddered at the thought of a storm. This could make it really difficult to hunt or go anywhere.

Yuka let out a wail, “Oh, I hate storms! Especially snow storms.”

Muktuk took over, “Alright, I know you don’t like storms, but there is nothing we can do about it. Tikaani, please go into the igloo and start a fire. We need it warm in there. Yuka, you help me get these dogs in there. Hurry!”

The storm seemed to be coming quickly, and they worked faster. After they made sure everything was inside, they snuggled into their igloo. They could hear the wind blowing outside and the snow swirling against the ice walls of their makeshift home.

Suddenly, Koko and Siluk got up and bounded out of the igloo. Muktuk shouted after them, but they kept going without hesitation. Everyone knew that they could not go out in this storm, even though they did love their dogs.

Yuka began to cry softly. Her tears ran down her cheeks onto her scarves and coat. She pulled some of them off. Muktuk reached over and gave her a hug, “It will be okay, Yuka,” he comforted.

“I want Mama.” Yuka sobbed longingly.

“Oh, Yuka. Mama is right here,” her brother said, pointing to her heart.

“But I want her here! Hugging me, holding me!” Yuka began to cry louder.

“I want her too. But we both know that she was attacked by that polar bear, and we won’t be seeing her until we pass away, too.”

“I know. But I still want her,” Yuka’s voice softened.

“Have I ever told you about why Mama named you Yuka?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“Well, when she was pregnant with you, she would always go outside to look at the stars when she was not feeling well. But after she did that every day for almost a week, the

stars suddenly disappeared. Every night, she would look for the stars, but she never found them in the sky. After several months of her doing this, Papa asked her why she kept looking even though she knew there would be no stars. Mama told him that on the day she sees a single star in the sky, that would be when she would have her child. A few days later, she went outside, and there was one single star. It was the brightest star anyone in the village had ever seen. And just as Mama had said, she had you on that night. A beautiful baby girl. She named you Yuka, which means bright star.”

Yuka smiled, comforted by the thought that she was so special to her mother. “Thank you for telling me that story, Muktuk.”

“You are welcome, Yuka. Now we should go to bed.” They snuggled into their coats and blankets and fell fast asleep.

They woke up early the next morning and went outside. There were hills and mountains of snow as far as the eye could see. There was no sign of Koko and Siluk.

“There is no way we are getting anywhere in this snow without snowshoes. We have two pairs, but none for Yuka, and neither of us are strong enough to carry her and our packs,” Tikaani pointed out.

“And the dogs ran away! This day is just full of bad luck,” Yuka whined as she flopped down in the snow.

Muktuk reached down to pull her up. “Hey, no moping around. We need to figure out what to do. No giving up.”

“But we are stranded in the middle of nowhere! What are we supposed to do?”

“We are not it too bad of a state. At least we have some food, a fire, and a shelter.”

“But Papa will never find us, and we can’t get anywhere in this snow!”

“Papa is a great tracker! He could find us in a heartbeat.”

“But there was just a big snowstorm. Not even the best trackers can find people after a big snowstorm!”

“Oh, yeah.” Muktuk agreed in disappointment.

Tikaani interrupted them, “Hey, guys, I wouldn’t be so sure about that.”

“There was a huge snowstorm! There wouldn’t be any tracks. No one could find us after that,” Muktuk replied.

“No, someone *can* track through a big snow storm! Look!” Tikaani said eagerly as he pointed behind them.

Muktuk pivoted on his heel to see what he was pointing at. There was their Papa, being led by the two run away dogs, Koko and Siluk.

“Of course!” Muktuk exclaimed, “The dogs can track through the snow!”

“Papa! Over here! Papa!” Yuka shrieked and shouted as she jumped up and down, waving her arms in a frenzy.

“Yuka, Muktuk! You’re okay! We thought something terrible had happened to you when Koko and Siluk came to the village unattended. I followed them here,” Papa said as he embraced them in a bear hug.

“Papa,” Muktuk said, “we would have come home, but Yuka didn’t have snowshoes, and we aren’t strong enough to carry her.”

“It’s quite alright. Let’s get you home.” Papa said as they began on their trek to the village.

**Shelby Hauser**  
**Marshall, MN**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Place**

## **Planet of the Red Trees**

Prologue:

There once was a planet called Earth. Some people would say it was an extravagant place, full of life. Creatures of all shapes and sizes roamed on the surface. The sea was magnificent; all types of animals and fish swam in the glistening waters. All was right in the world, until humans came. Humans destroyed forests for houses, businesses, and factories that polluted the air with harmful chemicals.

The humans made farms on the golden plains. They planted crops that would be sprayed with pesticides that would stream into rivers making the water unsafe to drink. Eventually the polluted waters would reach the ocean and be harmful to the creatures of the sea. Fish would be caught and sold in markets where humans would consume their contaminated bodies. Plastic bottles made in factories would end up in the ocean where animals would consume them. Animals started dying off as waters were getting more polluted. Humans were doing nothing.

March 26, 2125: The Earth could take no more. This day will go down in history as The Destruction Day, the day the earth shook. The ground crumbled, like a perfect piece of coffee cake. You could hear the piercing screams all around the Earth as it split in half. An elite group called Blossom suspected this would happen. They had worked on a plan for years, and on this day they were ready to put it into action.

They had chosen 28 people to be part of their plan, all from different towns, but all the same age. There were an equal amount of men and women. These 28 people would be boarded on a spaceship, where they would be flown to Mars to live out their lives. On the ship, there would be enough

supplies for them to live two years in the spacecraft, plus supplies for two more years to live on the planet, including food sources as seeds for vegetables, fruits, and livestock. The ship left at 12:00, only one hour before the Earth would split in two. On the ship, all of the members cried as they saw all of what they knew disappear.

## Chapter 1 - Max

March 26, 2125

Today Earth was destroyed. My family, friends, and my cat are all gone. Words cannot even describe how I feel. I am part of the group Blossom Mission to Mars. There are a total of 28 of us. We will be on this spaceship for two years. I can't believe I am in space; it feels like I am just in my room writing, but really I am flying through the stars.

As far back as I can remember I have always wanted to be an astronaut. In some ways, this is a dream come true from my childhood, but in the back of my mind I know why we are here. We are on the spaceship to save our species, to start a new civilization. We are here to blossom.

## Chapter 2 - Susan

March 26, 2125

Today was a very bad day. I lost everything. Earth has been split in two because of mankind. In some ways, I think we should be punished for doing our bad ways until the end. In other ways, we have been working all these years to save our species in this way. I like to focus on the positives; all we can do know is think how lucky we are to still be alive.

I am in space right now, flying to Mars to start a new life with 27 other people. We are all part of the Blossom campaign. I will be stuck on this ship for two years, but the journey will be worth it. We all get to start a new life, away from all the bad we have done, to make a new world that will thrive on honesty. That will blossom.

### Chapter 3 - Through the Stars

As all of the passengers went into their rooms to unpack, Noah dropped his bags and went to look around. He wandered through the hallways, picking up every gadget and finding its purpose. Going into every room seeing what was inside, he decided to go into the anti-gravity room. As he floated through the room, he thought about what was out there in the great unknown. What would happen to him and his fellow passengers as they flew through the stars?

### Chapter 4 - Max

April 14, 2125

It's been awhile since I have written. I have been so busy with my shifts. Ally has made a schedule for who will do dishes, cook, fly the ship, or vacuum the main seating area. I think it is really helpful for me personally. I need to have a set plan and then do it. We also have to go to the gym four times a week to keep in good shape. Otherwise, when we get on Mars we won't even have enough strength to lift our heads up.

I have been spending most of my time in the kitchen. I have always had a really good knack for cooking, even if it's just making snacks for me and the crew. Everyone loves my fruit cups. I take apples and coat them in cinnamon and sugar. Then I put them at the bottom of a bowl with yogurt and granola on top. It still has some healthy components, but it is still sweet.

Susan especially loves my snacks. Since we have gotten here, I have gotten very close to her, but she is so sweet and funny. I feel so connected to her in this way I can't describe. We have a lot of similar qualities. They are little but it means a lot to me. I didn't think that I would ever find someone like her. Sometimes I wish that I had found her earlier; she is such a great friend.

### Chapter 5 - Susan

December 25, 2125

Today is my first Christmas away from home. We played white elephant, and we had to make homemade gifts. I got Ally's gift. It was freeze-dried strawberries. She has been



maintaining our little garden, and she grows all sorts of fruits and vegetables. I love any type of fruit, but I love strawberries especially. My gift was a mug that I had found in the storage rooms. I repainted a sunflower on it and hopefully Daisy will use it!

It was really funny when Max got a roll of toilet paper, which Noah gave for a gift. Everyone laughed! I think everyone was upset, because we were all without our families, but in a way, we are a family. This was the most fun I have had since we got here. I don't think anything could have been better than my new family and I sitting together, enjoying just the presence of each other.

## Chapter 6 - May-Day

June 30, 2126- 11:45

All of the crew was fast asleep when piercing alarms started to ring throughout the rooms and halls. Everyone jumped out of bed and rushed to the control room with their pajamas on to see what was setting off the alarm. A huge red blinking button read, "Oxygen Levels Dropping." The button was blinking a red color that looked like blood. Everyone stared at the button, and no one said anything. There was a moment when everyone just stood there in shock, but then the terror sunk in. Everyone burst out screaming in a panic as they thought of all the scenarios that could have led to this event.

Isabelle burst out, "Everyone please shut up! We all need to think about this calmly and rationally. We can all solve this problem as long as we work together to solve it."

Everyone was silent as they all looked at each other with this scared and frantic look in their eyes, like when a person is being dragged down into the depths of the ocean by a shark, and they know they will not make it out of the water alive. On the control panel, Max pulled up the map of the interior of the ship.

They all observed as Max guided them through all of the air ducts in the ship. There was a gaping hole where air was being sucked out into the great unknown. They had to find someone who was small enough to crawl through the ventilation vents, but could do what was needed. Amy was the

shortest member of the crew at 5'1". She would have to crawl through the vents with an air mask to get to the hole and fix it. Zach would navigate her through the tunnels with an earpiece. They had one hour to perform this procedure or all of them would die.

While Zach was navigating Amy through the tunnels, Max, Susan, Ann, Mary, and Tucker were showing him a visual of where she was. Megan, Leah, Taylor, Billy, and Masen all went to gather air tanks in case their plan went terribly wrong. Everyone else was sent to gather up all of the space suits for an even more precautionary procedure. Five minutes later, everyone was sitting watching the camera as Amy crawled through the air ducts.

As Amy crawled through the air ducts, she was full of fear; she never thought she would ever do this, that one action would ever be so important to save 28 people including herself. She had finally reached the hole where air was escaping.

"Okay, you are going to want to take the piece of venting and start screwing it down," Zach said very calmly and slowly.

Amy did as she was told, doing the tasks very carefully but going at a good speed. She had just finished screwing the vent down when the red button stopped blinking. Everyone started screaming and hugging, some even crying for joy at how lucky they were to be alive.

## Chapter 7 - Mars

After two long years, they had finally made it to Mars. They made their own civilization over the next year that would blossom on honesty. They all had children that had children that would help them make the foundations of their customs. They tried to avoid all of the mistakes Earth made, and tried to make their customs better. They used the same time systems and used both metric and customary systems, but their demeanor would always be different from what they had seen on Earth. The 28 leaders made a book with all of the guidelines of their new planet.

*The Book of Mars* consists of some of these aspects. They built six factions that would all be run by four leaders. Each

of the factions would have a different role in their society: honesty, wisdom, business, factories, crops, and livestock. When children reached the age of 18, they could leave their homes and venture out to work in their professions. In school, they would be trained in every part of the society, and hopefully they would be good at one of the skills. If they couldn't work proficiently in any of the factions, they would be placed in a homing facility where they would think of ideas to help the society.

When they reached Mars they were surprised to find that it was full of secrets. Minerals that they thought they would never find were on the surface of its lands. Gemstones, crystals, and diamonds were the only materials they would have to go into their vast caves to find.

The strangest thing is that Mars isn't really red all across its surface. It appears to be red, but it is the treetops of towering trees that can reach up to 100 feet tall. Their leaves are red and stay on the trees all year long. Max made a nickname for the planet; he called it the Planet of the Red Trees.



**NONFICTION**  
**Grades 7 & 8**



**Casey Swanson**  
**Lynd, MN**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Place**

### **All Flowers Wilt**

I wake to my mother's scream. As I run to her room I see my father laying lifeless on the floor. My mother is doing CPR and on the phone with 911. In a few more minutes, the first responder and ambulance arrive. I get rushed downstairs and am told to comfort my sisters as my mom and the paramedics go upstairs. Meanwhile my sisters and I are downstairs praying to God that our father will be okay. Then we hear a shriek. My mom and the first responders come downstairs and say, "I am sorry, there's nothing else we can do. He is gone." I watch my mother crumble to pieces as my own heart is breaking. I am in utter shock. I can't believe what has happened. Yesterday he was perfectly fine and today he joined God in heaven. My life has just fallen apart. As people rush in, I notice the flowers on the table that my father gave my mom for Mother's Day the day before. There were five flowers—one for each of us kids and one for dad. I notice the one in remembrance of dad is wilted.

People come and go, and I see my life being shattered as I see people from my dad's past. It is like an unbearable pain that won't go away. It feels like you just got your heart ripped out of your chest, but then you realize this is no dream. This is your life now. Later on, the funeral home comes to talk to us. They say my father has to be taken to the Cities for an autopsy to see why he died. As he is being taken away to the Cities, we try to make funeral arrangements. I lay in bed that night trying to sleep, but it's no use. My mind and tears have taken over. I think of how I wish I would've spent more time with my father. I miss his scent, his voice, his hugs. I don't know how I'm going to do this. As I say my prayers, I think of why God took him. He was so young and had so much more to live for. He never even got to see me graduate or walk me down the aisle. I guess heaven was needing a hero.

The next morning when I get up, I go eat breakfast and talk with my mom and aunts. We get the autopsy reports back this morning. As we look them over, the bottom says everything was perfect. "He looked like a very healthy man. He died of unknown causes." Only one percent of cases go unknown. I guess we're that tiny one percent. That day me, my mom, and sister have to go to the funeral home to pick out a casket. We pick out a steel one for him. When I go home, I look at my iPod and see I have been tagged in a photo. I open my iPod and look. I see pictures of my classmates all wearing green and yellow hearts that say "Chuck." The whole school was wearing them! It was amazing!

The next couple days go by in a blur. Before I know it, it is Friday the thirteenth. My dad's funeral. The funeral starts and we walk in. As the funeral is going on, I look outside and I see little flakes of snow are falling. A blessing from heaven above. Dad looking down telling us it's all going to be okay. Next we go to the cemetery, and there we bury dad and tell him goodbye. As we say our goodbyes, we let go of green and yellow balloons for him. "We love you, Chuck." Then we say good bye to our beloved father, friend, husband, and neighbor.

I am living with no father and it's hell sometimes, but it is my life. When something like this happens in your life, you can't believe it's happened. It feels like just a bad dream and you're waiting, praying, to wake up soon. But you never do. This new "dream" has become your life. You have to learn to accept it. It's hard, I know. You cry yourself to sleep every night and it hurts. It hurts like you never thought you could even hurt. Then soon enough your eyes are as dry as the desert and you can't cry anymore tears. You shudder with pain as you recall all the memories you've made together. Then you realize you can't ever make any more memories with him.

Death is like someone on a vacation forever. I keep waiting for him to come walking in the door for supper. This pain is so heartbreaking. Some days I can be fine, but other days I feel like I'm being drowned in an ocean that's so deep I can't find the surface. Death leaves a scar no one can heal. It's so painful to lose a loved one. I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy.



I am not the same person I was before my dad died. That day was the worst day of my life. It also taught me so much. It made me so thankful for the family and friends I have. I am so thankful for the life I have, so blessed to wake up every morning. For everyone who has lost a parent, I encourage you to keep fighting. I know you may want to just give up, but don't; please keep fighting. This life is no walk in the park. It's hell sometimes, but in the end it's worth it. God has a plan for you. It may not seem clear now that anything good can come out of this, but there can. God has a plan for you. Jeremiah 29:11 says, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not evil, to give you a future and a hope." God is there. Pray to him.

Everyone with parents out there, I hope you cherish your moments with your parents. They can be taken away from you in an instant! When you say, "I hate my parents," the kid without parents thinks, "I wish I had parents; be thankful you have parents. You only get one each." Be thankful for the parents you have. They love you more than you know.

This world is so full of people who will judge you for your mistakes, but they don't even know what battle you're facing. Be kind to all, everyone is fighting their own battle. They may decide to put on a fake smile and be strong, but when they need a shoulder to cry on, be there for them.

Your story is so great and so brave. Dwell for a while on your loved one but don't forget to live. Your loved one is watching over you, wanting you to love, laugh and live again. We don't get a say in when or how we're going to die. But we do get a say in how we're going to live. So live. Live this life you've been given. You only get this one; make it a great one. So take a breath for the one you have lost and let this make you stronger.

### Eight Months Later

I have learned so much from my father's death. I've learned to cherish life, and not to worry what others think or say. Life's too short to worry about that stuff. Treat everyone with kindness, because everyone is fighting their own battle. I

also learned that true friends won't judge or spread rumors about you when you're a mess. They'll offer a shoulder to cry on and support. Also, be thankful for everything, like that hug you give your parents every night. Be thankful; not all kids can do that. Cherish it. I learned that we're all going to die someday. We might as well make life worth it while we're here. Life's just a short intermission between birth and death. Live it up. You never know when your time's up!

**Molly Fischer**  
**Litchfield, MN**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Place**

### **All the World's a Stage**

**Y**ou hear the same catchy musical song from the green room backstage. You put on your last couple of small costume items and check your makeup in the full body mirror sitting against the wall. You check the list of scenes on the door, figuring out what part is next. You walk into the darkness of backstage, lit up by only a dim red light hanging from the ceiling. You wander over to the prop table and grab anything you need for your upcoming scene, passing by several cast members in a variety of different costumes. You stand in the wings by your entrance, butterflies forming in your stomach. You hear your cue... and then you walk onto the stage, the bright lights blinding you from seeing hundreds of people observing your every move.

I've repeated this process several times. It's the thing I look forward to throughout the day when I know I have a performance that night, and the thing I miss as I'm in between shows. It's a process that makes me happy, one that I've become obsessed with over the years.

In my last five years of doing theater, I've made several memories. But to keep this short, I'm going to talk about only two. Two experiences that stand out compared to the others.

The show the summer of 2015 was called "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang," which is about a impecunious inventor who ends up creating something extraordinary. I first got assigned as chorus, playing the part of a random citizen. It was normal for me. And I was sick of it. I wanted a challenge, something that will make me better.

About a month into rehearsals, somebody quit which left a gaping hole in the play. The director pulled me over during rehearsal a few days later and told me I was going to fill her place in the big musical numbers, but not as her character, since she was part of the chorus as well. The next couple of

minutes consisted of her running around backstage informing me on all I had to do. I was in two dance routines and was cut out from some scenes that I was originally in. It was a lot of information to grasp in a short period of time.

I remember coming out from backstage to see the rest of the girls I would be dancing with. All of them were in high school and older, all were more mature, and most of them had more experience. I also remember how nervous I was, not just about the routine, but having to fit in. I recall their stares, looking at me as if I was a new kid at school.

The first couple days were very difficult for me. They already knew most of the first musical number and were stuck teaching me the steps. The song was called “Me Ole Bamboo,” and so, because of that, the director insisted we have bamboo sticks as a part of our routine. She showed us videos from YouTube at rehearsal one day. They were doing all these phenomenal leaps and flips. When the video ended, we were all looking at her, dumbfounded. Of course, she didn’t want us to copy the routine step by step, but she wanted something similar to it, something just as unique and out-there.

It frustrated me, this dance, which rarely happens. It seemed like whenever we got a part nailed down, something would be added, or we would have to work on another part of the song.

It was three weeks into practicing “Me Ole Bamboo,” and I was still struggling. We were all getting better, but there were still those spots that needed major work. The director pulled us over one day at rehearsal, which I was grateful for because my feet were sore and achy. She told us that we would be performing this number at the Coronation, and I swear my heart stopped.

The Coronation is a reception on the last day of Watercade, a week of activities and fun planned all around town. During the Coronation, they crown our new town’s royalty, and most of the time, while the judges are making their final decision, the theater group comes up with something to entertain the audience. In my town, the coronation is a big deal. The whole auditorium fills with

people, which adds up to about 700-800 faces staring at you. Just the thought of it sent chills down my spine.

We all went into crunch-time mode, putting all our focus and assessment towards this lively routine. Practices slowly got easier, which let a lot of stress come off my shoulders.

Time flew, and suddenly it was performance night. We arrive at the theater a couple hours early to execute our dance a few times before the real thing. An hour later, people start filing in the auditorium, slowly filling it up before it's packed. Right before the show begins, we get on our last few costume pieces and head out from backstage to our reserved seats.

The show is very amusing, each candidate showing much talent in different categories. When it's only one event before our performance, we get up and head out the back doors, catching a few stares from a variety of people.

Our costumes consist of several different clothing items. We all wear a long, white sleeve shirt, and on top of that, a black vest. We also dress in bright blue capris that have elastic on the top and bottom and complement the vivid blue vest the male lead wears. Finally, to top it off, we wear sparkling gold hats and matching gold ribbons tied around our elbows and knees. Also, to add the effect that we are males and not females, we wear big stick-on mustaches, that itch and fall off with ease.

I find my father backstage and give him a great big hug. My father started helping out with the theater right around when I began. He builds most of our sets with the help of a few other companions. He wishes me good luck, and I thank him as I quietly speed up to the other dancers, who are already on the distant side of backstage. We all stand their inaudibly, the only sound coming from our hearts beating quickly through our chests. My grip on my bamboo stick, which is really just a lengthy piece of wood, tightens as my anxiety increases.

I take a look around at everyone, and remember my first day of this. I've grown a lot in the past couple weeks. My fellow group of dancers have become like family to me. I can now feel secure around them, as if they're people I've known my entire life.

My thoughts are interrupted by the girls in front of me walking out on stage. I wave to a pair of dancers on the other side of the stage, wishing them the best of luck. I take one final breath, and I roam out from backstage.

The first thing I notice is the lights, how blinding and bright they are compared to the pitch-black darkness of backstage. Then, when my eyes finally adjust, the people. So many of them, by far the biggest crowd I've ever performed in front of. I can feel my palms getting sweaty, my heart racing even faster than before. I plant my feet in my spot, looking to make sure I'm lined up with the girl on the opposite side of the stage. I do my normal things before I perform: go over my scene in my head and scan the audience several times to get comfortable with them. Then the music begins.

We all do very well, not making any immense blunders. I keep a smile on my face the whole time, which is another thing that helps calm my nerves. We do our final pose, and the audience roars with delight. I remember my heart stopping, not wanting this moment to end. I recall my smile getting wider as I was relieved it was over, and it all went properly.

We dashed off stage, proud of ourselves and each other. Lots of hugs were given, many excited cheers as well, and lots of shushing to remind each other we're still backstage. I'll never forget that moment. It challenged me in ways I never thought I'd be able to do.

My last memory is from the summer of 2016. Unlike normal years, where I'd audition for the summer show in my community, things got switched up a bit.

There was a new director, and for her summer show, she put age limits, age limits I didn't apply to. My family was stumped. My parents threw out several ideas of different theaters I could audition for, but none of them felt right. That is, until my mom brought up the summer play in Dassel-Cokato, a ten minute drive from where I live. The show was "Fiddler on the Roof," my very first community show I was in. It was directed by someone who administrated me several years back, and who I was once good friends with.

I decided to go for it, even though every time the thought came to mind I became horrified. I started practicing a song

from the musical, and finally, after many hours of stressing out over my audition, the day came. My mother and I rode out to the high school where the auditorium was one summer afternoon. When we walked in, I recall seeing dozens of people of all different ages lounged around. We got signed up, and I was handed a form to fill out. I sat there for about two hours, before it was my turn to tryout. By that time, my anxiety was skyrocketing, and I was nervous as heck.

When it was my turn, I was called down by a woman in a fancy get-up. She escorted me to the stage, where I was asked my age and where I was from. The auditorium was much larger than I expected, and just like that, my anxiety doubles. I see the director there. He hasn't changed a bit in the past four years, but apparently I have, because it takes him a few minutes to identify me. We have a bit of small talk, and then, it's my turn to sing. My shaking is now visible, in both my body and voice. My first mistake happens when I start my song too early, and then I sing. My eyes are glued to the script in my hands, my body shaking and my heart racing. I'm very thankful when he raises his hand. "I think we've heard enough. Thank you for auditioning for us today, Molly. Oh, and tell your father I say hello." And that's the end of it. I thank him and walk offstage, back through the crowds of people.

I keep my focus straight ahead, blinking away the tears forming in my eyes. I return the script, grab my coat, and dash out of there as quickly as possible. It's now dark out, and my mom is having a hard time keeping up with me. The moment my face hits fresh air, I let the tears start flowing down my cheeks and onto the hard ground beneath me.

When we reach the car, it's dead silent until my mom asks me about it. I spill everything that happened in the past fifteen minutes to her, now bawling. We start driving back home. The whole way she's trying to keep my head up, telling me it's not my fault and there's nothing I can do about it, but I don't listen. I continue to think of his last words, and as they echo in the back of my head, the tears start to roll even more. It was by far the longest ten-minute drive of my life.

A few days later, the cast list was posted without my name on it. I cried, but only for a short moment. Then I went back up and told my mom we needed to find another path to take this summer. I just wanted to keep the whole thing behind me, even though I still look back on it as a valuable lesson.

I signed up for two smaller plays that summer, realizing that I need to act. It's part of me. It's who I am. It doesn't matter what stage it's on, as long as I get to do the thing I love.

I will continue to keep doing theater. I will continue to play different characters, to make more memories. This is only the beginning, and I cannot wait to see what these next couple of years have in store for me.



**POETRY**  
**Grades 9 & 10**



**Savannah Dobrenski**  
**Marshall, MN**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Place**

**Fathomless**

I am the ocean  
You tell me all  
But it isn't so  
I marvel at my seashells  
And at the beautiful pearls they protect  
I am the predator  
And I am the prey  
I am the marvel  
The notorious sea  
Here I still am  
Hiding treasures at the bottom  
Bidding the masses  
To run screaming  
To hide  
With my great moody hurricanes  
And my gentle seaboat breeze  
Hordes know me so well  
Yet not at all  
Whole ruins lie beneath the surface  
Poets write of travels lost  
Like the sea,  
Dream-tossed  
Countless lives  
No matter what the cost  
Mighty I murder; yet as a beggar I weep  
Beneath my surface, still bodies sleep  
With mirth my waves crest  
I lap the shore at tide  
Many don't know me  
Not at all  
Mysterious nightmare, I abide  
When the Sun sees my surface,

It only sees itself  
Vain and admiring in my shallow pools  
It attempts to warm me, but it cannot even warm my surface  
It even consumes itself  
At night, my creatures sleep  
And I am left alone to ponder  
The magnificent monstrosity that I am  
How I am happy in the hurricanes  
I am high at both high tide and low  
I am anything but sick,  
Delirious at sea.

**Brynn Cherveney**  
**Granite Falls, MN**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Place**

### **Of Blue Eyes**

Dear sweet child of blue eyes  
You make my heart dance with glee  
Your crystal eyes sparkling at my jokes saves me  
Your laugh flutters in melody even the birds can't compare too  
Your smile might be the reason the sun comes up each morning

Dear sweet child of blue eyes  
The sky is dark and it's rain falls heavy  
Your eyes are dark like the weather holding swirling clouds  
    of emotion dark and unknown  
You haven't laughed with me today

Dear sweet child of blue eyes  
Why won't you talk with me  
Your body is uncaring and your eyes dark like the blue water  
    in the darkest of nights  
Tell me what I have done to upset you  
Please forgive me, let me make you smile again

Dear sweet child of blue eyes  
I see you smile but it doesn't reach anything but your lips  
I hear your laugh ringing with a complex hardness instead of  
    the light cloud it once was  
I am worried for more than you, I have started to think things  
    like before  
Why won't you save me again?  
Why won't you let me save us both?  
Your eyes remind me of a whirling tornado  
You pretend we can't see it, the black, and try to add light  
You can't hide whatever you are feeling, show me

Dear sweet child of blue eyes  
Your eyes are black and smiles fake if even present  
You won't let anyone close, but lately I wouldn't even know  
I don't know the storm that rages in your mind I fear I never will

Dear sweet child of blue eyes  
I am walking up to church today...

Dear sweet child of blue eyes  
Were your eyes red and thoughts dark  
Did your hands shake and try to stop  
Now I can't see you but I think of your eyes that were blue  
and sparkling even in the rain  
I think of a laugh that floats on air  
I'm getting so bad again, how am I supposed to breathe  
knowing you can't  
Did you think of me before you had to go?

Dear sweet child of blue eyes  
My hands are shaking  
My eyes are blurry with tears  
I think of what I can do to be with you and cry through the night  
The wall that's black in the night staring at me from across  
the room, daring me to think  
Is this how you felt when you wouldn't let me in? Were you  
scared I would feel this way if you told me

Dear sweet child of blue eyes  
I've never felt so low

Dear sweet child of blue eyes  
I remember all the times you told me no, so why did you say yes  
I hold my thoughts in until they pour and nobody can stop them  
Why aren't you here to stop them?

Dear sweet child of blue eyes  
My hands shake my eyes are red  
The gun is heavy in my hand  
I'm outside in our spot so nobody will worry about cleaning

me up  
I look at the trees around me and think of you  
Maybe this will finally be our forever hello  
Because I miss you

Dear sweet child of blue eyes  
How does someone miss such an easy target  
How does someone reach constant supervision and white walls  
How did I get here, a prison only reminding me of my failure  
Dear sweet child of blue eyes  
I still cry  
Yet I understand now  
You held me and told me the things you needed to hear,  
things you told yourself for years  
I can't go out to see you until I'm old, until I do what we  
planned  
I'm being sent back because they now deemed me okay

Dear sweet child of blue eyes  
We were young and naive  
I think about you all the time  
Yet I look into his eyes and see only joy and warmth that I need  
You would love him, I wish we could talk like we would  
have before

Dear sweet child of blue eyes  
Today is the day  
I kissed your picture before walking to the altar and  
marrying the love of my life  
I wanted to have you here, I figured you would have been

Dear sweet child of blue eyes  
As I cradle her in my arms, her small figure awake and calm  
I think of the blue eyes staring at me  
Sparkling blue eyes that shine

Dear sweet child of blue eyes  
Sometimes I'm still bad

Sometimes everything comes back to hit me  
Yet I save myself and look for the good, remember your words

Dear sweet child of blue eyes  
I will see you soon  
My skin is gray and soft  
My wrinkles deep  
I smiled and lived  
I left the world with something great  
I worked hard and made everything the best I could  
Now as I lay here sleep knocking I think of the sweet girls  
    we were  
I'll see you soon sweet child of blue eyes



**Savannah Dobrenski**  
**Marshall, MN**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Place**

**Reminisce**

Every morning when I awake alone, I reminisce of the  
beginnings had with you  
Every midnight I curl up around my pillow, but it is a poor,  
cold substitute for you  
In the dead of night I clutch at the air, the invisible and  
unexisting hand of you  
As I lay with my ear to our bed of nights past, I seem to hear  
your heartbeat  
I seem to feel your breath upon my eyelashes  
I open my hopeful eyes, but don't see you  
All I see are the shadows cast across my bedroom wall  
Desolate and alone, disconsolate  
They sway, mocking me of when we slow danced  
Those branches would shed their glory  
Just to see me cry  
Why do you betray me, heart?  
Why do you torture me, soul?  
Do the fates not take pity on my abstinence  
And resurrect my love back into my arms?  
I don't silence my soul, with its devout, steady thrum,  
Yet I don't silence my heart,  
With its stubbornness  
And passion.



**FICTION**  
**Grades 9 & 10**



**Summer Janzen  
Mountain Lake, MN  
1<sup>st</sup> Place**

**Amazing Grace**

A giggle escaped Jane's lips as her soft fingers popped a sparkling soap bubble that had floated onto the chestnut haired stray. Mangy knots had buried themselves deep into the mutt's fur. This dog had obviously gone days without food and shelter. Seven-year-old Jane Brown's kind spirit was repulsed by the thought of making this dog stay outside her doorstep, unloved and unwanted. Ignoring his stench and appearance, Jane was determined to take him under her small wing and provide abounding amounts of love and forgiveness. This much-needed bath, however, would be an essential part of making him presentable for Mother. Jane knew that her mother would likely turn up her nose at the sight of a stray wandering around her clean homestead.

The only other person who knew of Jane's pup was Joe. He had tried to seem uninterested in the actions of his younger sister, but failed because of his love for all animals. It was Joe who helped Jane haul some water for a bath and swipe some of their mother's homemade soap from the cellar. And it was with Joe's help that Jane persuaded Mother to allow Pete to stay. Jane hadn't had any trouble in getting Pa to say yes, for she was nearly impossible for him to say "no" to.

Jane had a beautiful voice and sang her pa to sleep in his old, wooden rocking chair every night. She would giggle when she heard him start to snore and plant her gentle kiss on his bearded cheek. Then she would tip-toe up to the loft and snuggle under her mother's homemade quilt, and Pete would follow her up and guard her dainty feet. Pete was ever loyal to Jane, and he was Jane's prized possession. Of course, Jane never considered him a possession, but a friend, her best friend.

### *Two Years Later*

“He’s gone, Pa! He’s gone!” Jane wailed as she burst into the family’s well-used barn. “There was just one rumble of thunder, Pa, but Pete ran away when he heard it, just like he always does!”

“Don’t cry, my songbird, don’t cry. It is going to be all right,” Pa handed the horse’s rope to Joe and knelt down on one knee, embracing Jane in a hug. “Pete’s tried to run away from storms before, and he always comes back. Pete loves you too much to stay away from you, Jane.”

“Come on. I’ll take you back inside out of the rain. I’m sure that Mother has supper ready anyway,” reassured Joe as he finished tying Ben, the horse, to his post and escorted Jane back to the house. Jane’s rush of tears immediately subsided when she smelled the sweet fragrance of her mother’s apple dumplings.

The next morning, the air was still damp from the sky’s tears, and humidity hung heavily in the air as Jane peeled the quilt away from her sweaty body. She waited for Pete to come and lick her hand, reminding her that this was a day with new adventures ahead. However, Pete didn’t come. Jane felt the unexpected tears trickle down her face. “What time is it? Why didn’t Mother wake me up?” Jane wondered to herself as she scurried down the ladder.

Joe, Pa, and Mother all sat around the kitchen table in silence. Jane couldn’t recall a time when her whole family looked so gloomy, and why weren’t Pa and Joe out working?

“Something must be wrong,” she thought. It only seemed right to walk quietly towards the table and take a seat in silence.

Once she did this, Joe finally spoke up, “Pete’s dead.”

“Joe!” Mother snapped. “This is not how we were going to tell her.”

“Wait, what?” Jane’s face showed sheer confusion. “Pete’s not dead.”

“Yeah, he is. Old Mr. Finik shot him last night in the storm. Brought his body by this morning, didn’t say a word. He just dropped it by the doorstep and shook his old head.”

“Joe!” Mother snapped again. “Jane, honey, I’m sure it was an accident. We tried to save him, but there wasn’t anything we could do.”

But Jane was no longer listening. Pete couldn’t be dead. How was this possible? Joe said that Mr. Finik shot him, but could he be lying? He had to be.

Jane had only seen Mr. Finik a few times. He lived about a quarter mile down the creek, all alone, in a shabby excuse for a house. Once in a while he would visit the church, but Jane noted that he always came in late and would leave the minute the music started playing. She didn’t think that he would be one to shoot a dog, but who knew? He never spoke a word to anyone, and some thought he was mute.

Suddenly, Jane was aware that her family was staring at her tear-stained face in silence, and she tried to think of something to say; however, a new thought instantly clouded her mind with a deeper grief. “Oh, poor Mr. Finik!” Jane burst out in horror. “Pa! He must feel so bad about shooting Pete!”

Joe stared at her in surprise. “Jane, what did you just say? You need to be angry at Mr. Finik! He shot Pete!”

More tears gushed from Jane’s eyes and she added, “I know Joe, but I’m sure it was an accident. Mr. Finik must feel terrible for shooting him! Pa, please take me over there now! I have to tell him not to feel bad; that he doesn’t need to be sad, because I forgive him.”

“But he killed Pete!” Joe’s angry spurt of words startled Jane, and she sat straight up in her chair. “You can’t just forgive him, what’s wrong with you? He killed your dog! I mean, Pete was your best friend!”

Jane burst out the kitchen door in two seconds flat, and when she stopped running, she found herself further down the creek than she’d ever wandered with Pete before. She plopped down on a damp rock and cried for a long while. Pete was dead. Joe was angry. Mr. Finik must feel terrible about what he’d done, and Pa hadn’t said a word to Jane all day. After some time, a damp figure loomed out of the mist. It was Pa. He silently embraced Jane in his arms and rocked her back and forth.

“Sing me a song, my little bird,” Pa gently kissed the top of her blond curls.

“I don’t feel like singing, Pa,” Jane said limply.

“Alright angel, but promise that you’ll sing for me soon. I don’t want grief to swallow up my little girl.”

“Pa?” Jane asked. “Can you take me to Mr. Finik’s house? I need to tell him that I forgive him.”

A sigh escaped Pa’s lips, “Listen Jane, I’d love to take you, but I promised your mother I’d make a run to town today. I’ll get Joe to take you.”

*Clip clop. Clip clop.* Ben’s hooves plodded down the rarely used path that led to Mr. Finik’s place. Joe sat in silence as he directed the tiny cart away from a place where the creek had flooded during the storm. Jane held the warm loaf of bread that she had baked for Mr. Finik carefully in her lap. The trip went too quickly, however, and soon the humidity revealed a weathered farmhouse, a broken chicken coop, and what must have been an old shack of sorts before the storm. Several chickens pecked at Jane’s bare feet as her toes settled themselves in the muddy earth.

Joe gazed upon Jane’s muddy feet and determination, “You go ahead. I’ll wait here. If I look at him I don’t know how I’ll keep myself from socking him.”

Jane sighed. Suddenly the house seemed a mile away, but Mr. Finik was in there, and he needed to know that she had forgiven him. “Alright then, Joe,” Jane said with confidence. “I’ll be right back.” She picked up her skirt with one hand, and cradled the loaf in the other. Then she took the first step towards forgiveness.

By the time Jane reached the door, her toes were so caked in mud that she couldn’t see them. Jane looked back at Joe, hoping for a reassuring glance, but he’d draped his hat over his eyes, pretending to take a nap. “One knock is all it takes,” Jane told herself. “Just one knock.”

The cracked wood came to Jane’s hand before she realized it, and she jumped at the noise it made. The door eased open. Uninviting, grey eyes peered down at Jane’s



gentle, brown ones. “Um, Mr. Finik?” Jane started uncertainly. She waited for a response but continued when she didn’t get one. “My name is Jane Brown, and I came to let you know that, well, that I forgive you for shooting Pete.”

A flicker of life leaped into the dead eyes of Mr. Finik, but only for a moment. The door shut suddenly. Jane blinked in surprise then took a step back toward the cart. Mr. Finik had closed her out of his life, just as he had done with the rest of the world.

“Mother?” Jane asked, once they’d finished doing the supper dishes. “Why is Mr. Finik so gloomy? How come he never speaks?”

“Well, Jane, it’s a rather sad story,” Mother began. “Mr. Finik once had a wife who would bear no children, but one day they had a daughter. Her name was Jane, just like you. Jane was in my grade at school and we were great friends. Jane also had a beautiful voice, just like you. Her favorite song was “Amazing Grace” because it was her father’s favorite song also. Mr. Finik would beam with joy when she would sing. One day, Jane and Mrs. Finik were riding a train and it derailed. Many passengers were killed in the crash including Mr. Finik’s wife and daughter. He’s never been the same since.”

“So, Mr. Finik used to talk? He used to be a happy man? Like Pa?”

“Yes,” Mother sighed. “It’s such a shame what happened.”

“Where’s my little song bird?” Jane heard Pa call from his old rocker.

“I’m coming, Pa!” Jane sang out. She trotted over and knelt beside him. Jane sang “Amazing Grace” until she heard his long snores. Then she left a kiss on his beard and silently crept up the ladder.

*Clip clop. Clip clop.* Ben’s hooves poked along the stream’s edge. Again, Joe and Jane were headed to Mr. Finik’s house.

Jane had made a new loaf of bread, and was now fully prepared to be shut out if it were to happen a second time.

“You do know he’s not going to invite you inside,” Joe warned.

“I know, but there’s no point in giving up. How come you can’t forgive him for what he did?” Jane questioned. “What if you’d accidentally run over my favorite doll with your cart and I never forgave you. How would you feel then?”

“Pretty awful, I guess,” Joe contemplated.

“And I bet you feel pretty awful inside right now. I know I feel terrible when I don’t forgive someone. Then your heart starts to get hard, and you’re just very angry,” concluded Jane.

Joe pondered this until they reached Mr. Finik’s place. Chickens simultaneously crowded in on Jane and Joe’s cart and clucked as if they were guarding the homestead. Jane stepped down, and the hens anxiously scattered in different directions. She took several steps towards the weathered house and was surprised to find Joe’s feet making time with hers. She looked up at him, expecting him to say something. Instead, he simply took her small hand in his and became the brother he hadn’t been before.

This time, Jane brought her hand to the wooden door with confidence. She heard Mr. Finik’s heavy footsteps approach, then pause in front of the door. The door groaned, and those lifeless grey eyes gazed hesitantly at Jane.

“Mr. Finik,” Jane began. “My name is Jane Brown. I came by yesterday, and I’m here again. I want you to know that I forgive you for what happened with Pete. I just don’t want you to feel bad anymore.”

The door didn’t slam shut this time. Mr. Finik’s gaze collided with Jane’s, and she gave him a timid smile. To Jane’s utter disappointment, the door closed with a slow groan, leaving the cracked wood in place of her smile. Jane listened. She didn’t hear Mr. Finik’s footfalls retreating from the door, but silence. This was a void that Jane knew needed to be filled, and in a sweet, clear voice came the familiar tune of “Amazing Grace.”

Once Jane had completed singing the first verse, she glanced up to find Mr. Finik standing with the wood door wide

open. Sunshine shone on his tears turning each drop into a small diamond. Happiness, or perhaps it was joy, glowed on Jane's face. She handed Mr. Finik the loaf of bread.

His voice was raspy when he spoke, but the words couldn't have been any clearer to Jane. "I didn't mean to shoot your dog. I thought he was a coyote. I'm sorry."

Jane's heart overflowed with relief as she walked toward the cart with Joe by her side. The tune of "Amazing Grace" flowed from Mr. Finik's whistling lips.

**Regan James**  
**Mountain Lake, MN**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Place**

### **The Childhood He Needs**

I remember it like it was yesterday, going to sleep wondering if in the morning I would be lying in the debris of my house or my neighbors'. Waking up to the sound of bombs getting closer and wondering when they would be too close to make it out alive. My dad, bless his heart, had worked so hard to get me a one-way ticket to America. He wanted to give me the childhood I needed in order to pursue my career as an author; he always put everyone else's needs before his own. I was seventeen when I heard the news that turned my life upside down. I was watching my younger brother Daniel when my mom got the call. All I could hear was her crying; I knew something was wrong with my dad.

My father worked at the Embassy, and our country was at war, which put a target on his back, but he still woke up and went to work to support his family every morning. The hours were terrible. He was supposed to work from six in the morning to midnight, but most nights it would be later than that. He got up early that particular morning to cover the shift right before his for a friend who was hospitalized because of a leg wound caused by a piece of flying debris. He would be fine in less than a month, but we felt bad for the family. Times were tough back then especially for money.

My mom walked into the room trying to hold herself together for Daniel. She sent him to play in the backyard, which was covered with debris. My mom sat down and sobbed, trying to explain what happened, but I couldn't understand her through the sobs. I could make out only a few words: bomb, dead, and evil. My heart sank and I sat down next to my mom and cried, never having felt so numb before. My family was the only thing I had that the war hadn't already taken away from me. Being the oldest son, I felt like I had let my family down. Was there something I could have done to

save him? I never stopped blaming myself. To this day, I don't know exactly what happened, but I know he is gone.

My mom could not talk about it. The news hit hard for her especially when she found out that she was pregnant with her third baby. My mom was the toughest woman I had ever met, but after that call, she was as delicate as a flower that any small breeze could blow around. Daniel was too young at the time to understand death, so we just told him daddy went away for a while.

The embassy offered me the same job as my dad so I could make a living for my now smaller family, and, of course, I accepted. The next couple of months were hard, but I was providing for my family and I felt like I was honoring my father's death and making him proud. Days went by and my mother got closer to her due date; it was a high-risk pregnancy, and she had complications early on. The day rolled around and my mom was in labor. Syria didn't have good equipment or hospitals during this time. About five hours into labor, the baby's heartbeat started to drop. I could see the terror in my mom's eyes. The doctors were more concerned about keeping the baby alive and didn't notice my mother's falling blood pressure. I don't know if the doctors really did all that they could that day, but it wasn't enough. They lost my mom and the baby. Then it was just me and my brother in the world, alone.

Only being seventeen, I wasn't old enough to take care of Daniel, so they put him in foster care. That day, I lost the only other three people in my life that I had left. I tried for weeks to get my brother back, but it was too late. He was already adopted by new parents and a new brother. It killed me inside to know that in a year or two he was going to completely forget who I was.

The embassy gave me a new job, loading cargo for military planes. I realized this was my chance to go to America and make my father proud and finish what he started. For the next two weeks, I watched for the best time to get in the cargo and hide. It took me a couple of tries, but I finally got the perfect hiding spot. I almost backed out of my plan many times, but I needed to do it for my dad. He always believed in

me as an author. I missed him so much and just thinking about him made me teary-eyed.

When the plane took off, I heard someone walk in the door. They were whistling the same song my mother would sing to my brother at night just before he went to bed. I wondered if he could sleep without the song and if he knew how much I loved him. As the plane leveled out in the air, I heard the mystery man's soothing whistle get closer. I tried to hold the tears back, but the song made me think of my mom and brother. I never had time to cry and mourn my mother's death and the loss of my brother. I broke down and started to cry. The man stopped whistling, and I realized he knew I was there now, but I couldn't stop crying; I missed them. The man found me, and I thought he would tell everyone that I climbed on board, and they would throw me off the plane. But he didn't. I wondered why.

"H-hi?" The man said in a cautious tone.

"Please don't throw me off the plane! I'm sorry! I just wanted to make my father proud."

I broke down and told the mystery man everything, about my family, about the war, and about the baby. The man must have felt sorry for me, because he didn't tell anyone. Instead, he introduced himself.

"Well, I'm sorry that happened to you. My name is Marlin, by the way," he said with a southern accent that made me not scared of him as he held out his hand for me to shake.

"M-my name is Sam. Aren't you going to tell your captain and throw me out of the plane?" I asked, confused and a little uneasy.

"Now, why would I do that? It's an eight-hour plane ride, and I could use the company. Plus it seems like you have been through enough," he said with a chuckle and a kind-hearted smile that made me feel safe again.

We both heard a rattling coming from the door. Marlin shoved me back into my hiding spot and sprinted over to his workstation. I peeked over all the boxes, and I saw a man and Marlin arguing. I couldn't hear what they were saying, but the man was angry. The man pounded on the table, startling me, and I let out a squeal. I held my breath as best as I could as the

man started to walk toward me. Marlin tried to bring his attention away from the sound, but the man was intent on finding the noise. He moved some boxes, pressing me against the wall. The man gave up searching and left, but not before slapping Marlin. Marlin seemed shocked and ashamed. He came to move the boxes and let me free.

“Sorry about that, Champ,” Marlin whispered as he playfully punched my arm like my dad would do when we would play catch in the backyard before the war. Those were simpler times.

“That was the chef; I’m in charge of bringing the food from the loading dock to the kitchen, but I guess I missed the salad,” he muttered feeling embarrassed but laughing it off.

“I’m sorry to distract you from your work, and I hate to bother, but would it be too much to ask if you could bring me some table scraps, if there are any? I haven’t eaten in days,” I asked hesitantly.

“Why of course! You would die if I didn’t, and I don’t know about you, but I wouldn’t enjoy carrying a corpse around and then throwing it out of the plane,” he said with an eerie smile and a chuckle.

After Marlin brought me table scraps, we talked about life for the rest of the flight. Once the plane landed, he snuck me off base and to his apartment where he helped me publish my autobiography about my life in Syria. Marlin was the best thing that could have ever happened to me and ended up being the only person I could trust. Now looking back as a 25-year-old husband with a newborn daughter, I have to think about what life would be like without the courage my dad passed along to me. Marlin is still a big part of my life and a great godfather to my daughter. He is now helping reach out to my baby brother. I can’t thank him enough for the impact he has had on my life.

**Kylie Klassen**  
**Windom, MN**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Place**

### **Finding Her Voice**

**H**ow does one survive without someone significant in their life? No family, no friends, no one there to look out for them? Well, it's not easy, I can tell you that much. It's like trying to live in the jungle with nobody around but the animals. That's what my life felt like. My parents died in a car accident several years ago. I was in the car with them, and it was two months after my ninth birthday. As an orphan, I was considered a social parasite. I never talked to anyone, not the teachers or my classmates. I didn't talk to my foster family. But one day, that all changed, when *he* walked in the classroom door.

No one had ever met him before, but from the look of him, he was going to be one of those popular kids. I had the special ability to analyze a person's personality and determine who their group of friends was going to be. He was going to be another one of the people who were jerks to me. He walked in during third period social studies, then stood and waited while the teacher read the note he was carrying with him.

"Okay, class, this is Christopher Mays. He is going to be here with us for the rest of the year, so let's do our best to make him feel welcome."

The whole class murmured a halfhearted welcome to Christopher. He waited until the teacher told him to find an empty seat. There were two in the room. One was right next to me at my table, and the other was next to the most popular girl in the school, Lisa Naples. I think everyone expected him to sit next to Lisa, but he came and sat next to me. I slid as far away from him as I could.

"Hi, I'm Chris," he said, facing me. "What's your name?"

I didn't give him an answer, and that made him only more persistent.

"Come on, what's your name?"



“Oh, just give up, Chris. She doesn’t talk, ever. At least never when we can hear her,” Lisa said with a haughty tone.

Chris just turned and looked at me, not even responding to Lisa. He didn’t even voice the question I could see swirling on his face. I nodded at him and then turned to the front of the class. Everyone’s eyes were on our table.

The beauty of being the person who never talks is that I could make anyone turn away from me simply by glaring. I glared at everyone who was looking until they turned around. They all turned to the front of the class again, except for Chris. He just continued to look at me. I glared at him, but he only smiled. That was infuriating. After a few more minutes, he turned to the front of the class again, with a smirk on his face.

As soon as the bell rang, releasing us from class, I was up out of my seat and gone before Chris had a chance to even attempt to talk to me. I was standing next to my locker getting my books for the next class when Chris suddenly appeared next to me.

“So, you don’t talk, huh? Why?” I’m not sure how he expected me to answer. I looked at him silently, waiting for it to dawn on him. His eyes suddenly widened a little bit, and his cheeks flushed bright red.

“Oh, shoot. I’m sorry. That’s really rude of me.”

I shut my locker door and started toward my next class. I shook my head, indicating that it was okay, just this once. Unfortunately for me, he had the exact same schedule as me and headed toward the same class.

I silently suffered through the next class with Chris beside me again. The bell rang, indicating lunch, which was a relief. He would probably leave me alone and go eat with everyone else. But much to my dismay, he followed me into the lunchroom and sat beside me. Was it impossible to escape this young man for even a few minutes? I don’t know what his infatuation with me was, but it had to stop.

When I finished my lunch, I got up to throw away my trash, and, lo and behold, he followed. He was like a puppy who wanted you to take him home. I finally had had enough. I wrote him a note telling him to leave me alone. I handed the note to him, turned and walked away without a second glance.

When I walked into the next class after stopping at my locker, I saw him sitting in the chair right next to mine, again. He was so aggravating. I glared at him as I sat down.

“Nope, not gonna happen,” was all Chris said in response to my note.

I gave him the cold shoulder for the rest of the day. When I left the school, he was still following me. I whirled around to face him. I pointed away from me, indicating that he should walk in the other direction of me. He just smiled and walked past me. Now it was my turn to follow him. He walked past my house and to the house next door. He pointed at the house and calmly said, “That’s my house, so I wasn’t following you after all.”

Chris had a smug look on his face as he looked at me. I tried so hard not to let him see how frustrated I was with him. If the smirk on his face was any indication, I wasn’t doing a very good job. Well, I wasn’t going to let him enjoy this any longer. I whirled around and walked to the front door.

We kept up this little game for a few days. He’d follow me and bug me, and I’d get mad. But that all changed one day...

We were walking home from school when Chris suddenly stopped and looked at me. “Why don’t you talk? I know it’s not my place to pry, but I want to know. I don’t even know what your name is. Does anyone know what your name is?”

All of Chris’s questions came as a surprise to me. He had never asked me a question like that; we actually almost never communicated in any way. He was right. He didn’t know my name, no one did. My foster family never said my name; they had probably forgotten it. I signed my papers with my initials. My name was something I had almost never heard in seven years.

I dug in my notebook for a sheet of paper so that I could write it for Chris. My hand felt unsteady as I wrote the name that I hadn’t heard in years. I handed it to him and turned and walked away. He stood there reading that piece of paper for several moments. He slowly started to follow me. We arrived in front of my house, and before I walked in, he said something.

“Glad you told me, Macaya Charlotte Milsap.” I paused in the doorway, looked back and smiled. “But I wish you would tell me why you won’t talk.”

I turned away and walked into the house. I would tell him soon, I decided. I might not be able to tell him with words, but I could write it out. I thought about this for a while. I think somewhere in the back of my mind I knew that it wouldn’t be possible to write it out.

I walked with him to school the next day. There was something different about him today. He wasn’t his normal self, constantly wanting to make me mad. No, this was a different version of him. He looked...thoughtful, like he was trying to figure out what was going on now.

Chris was like this the whole day. On the way home, I finally stopped and looked at him. I gave him a signature look, one that said what is going on with you? I waited for a few minutes before he finally answered, “I thought knowing your name was going to be different, but I guess not. I still feel like you are shutting me out. No one knows your story. Can you at least tell me why you don’t talk?”

His eyes pleaded with me to tell him. I could feel those little strings on my heart, pulling me out, pulling my voice out of its cage. He stood there for several moments.

“Because they died.” My voice was like the whisper on the wind, barely reaching his ears. It was a foreign feeling to talk, but the look on his face when he heard my voice for the first time ever was like a kid on Christmas day.

“You just talked! Talked for the first time in how long?”

“Seven years.” I was still adjusting to using my voice, even hearing my own voice.

“Why so long? If you have been able to talk this whole time, then why didn’t you talk? Everyone was waiting for you to finally speak. They have been waiting this whole time.”

“I didn’t talk for all those years because my parents died in a crash, and only I survived. They didn’t get to have more kids. They didn’t get to see their parents again. The car was engulfed in flames. They didn’t have a chance to get out before they died. They died because they were taking me to a park. A park that I didn’t need to go to but begged them to

anyway, because I was a selfish little girl who got her parents killed.” With those final words I fell to the ground, sobbing.

Chris came and sat beside me on the ground. He rubbed my back and whispered soft comforts as I cried enough tears for the seven years I was silent. For the seven years I put up with all of the issues of the world and ignored my own. When I was done, I looked up at him and gave him a weak smile. “Thanks. You probably think I’m a psychopath.”

Chris started laughing and said, “I don’t think you are a psychopath. I think you are a girl who has been hurt a lot in her life and finally caught a break.”

That was the start of a great friendship that would last forever. Chris and I remained best friends, in every sense of the word. We got married three years out of high school, and now we have three kids and two dogs. We have another two kids on the way. That’s going to be another adventure in our lives. We survived being sixteen. Together, we will survive the rest of our lives.

**POETRY**  
**Grades 11 & 12**



**Clara Abrahamson**  
**Clara City, MN**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Place**

**To the Empty Chair**

Many weeks go by  
between the times I hear your voice.  
I can't help but to miss you.  
It seems I have no choice.

It's such a frequent feeling  
that makes me recollect  
all our treasured memories  
and treat them with respect.

Once, so long ago it seems,  
I had you by my side —  
the one to whom I could retreat,  
in whom I would confide.

I long to feel you next to me —  
to hear your every breath.  
I know that you will fight for me  
until I meet my death.

I thank you for your service  
in great humility.  
You make this land a safer place —  
this Land of Liberty.

As I think of what you do  
with fear and dignity  
I learn appreciation;  
for freedom is not free.

For what you do, I swell with pride  
and yet uncertainty.

I fear the day that I may find  
you won't come home to me.

Even if that day shall come  
we still will meet again;  
for the Lord takes everyone in their time,  
and I shall see you then.



**Isaiah Streblov**  
**Granite Falls, MN**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Place**

### **Digits**

Digits, numbers, whirring, snicking,  
Clockwork making endless clicking.  
    Marching to a steady beat  
Of fives and tens where units meet.  
    Infinitely bounded, they  
    Stand in soldierly array.  
Yet these numbers still remain  
    Symbols; they cannot explain  
Ten black hens, who each rejoice  
Over eggs with querulous voice.  
    Nine flat sunfish in the lake,  
Shimmering water in their wake.  
    Eight grey geese, flying where  
    They fight battles with the air.  
    Seven children in the lawn,  
Asking where the snow has gone.  
Six-foot saplings soft and small,  
    Straining vainly to be tall.  
Five red termites, dwelling deep;  
Down inside old wood they creep.  
    Four young cats high in a birch,  
Lying, like sultans, in their perch.  
Three flames leaping in the grass,  
    Licking at the reeds they pass.  
    Two coyotes in the slough,  
Crying when the moon is new.  
    One great God above us all,  
    Holding worlds in his thrall.  
Numbers, then, are just a sign,  
    Pointing to a great design.

**Rachel Sajban**  
**Windom, MN**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Place**

**Like Snow Haiku**

He was like snow  
Arrogant, bitter, cold, and  
Truly breathtaking

**NONFICTION**  
**Grades 11 & 12**



**Anahi Rodriguez**  
**Worthington, MN**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Place**

### **Infinite**

I was young. Younger than I'll ever be again. Younger than I have ever been since. That day felt almost picture perfect. Almost, because it had to end. That day I remember having this smile plastered on my face. Looking back, I realize I looked like the Cheshire cat. I was (and still am) dad's little girl. Everywhere my dad went, I went. Even if it seemed impossible, my dad always made it possible for me to tag along.

Summer. The best time because kids are free; the worst time because it has to end. My brother loved to go on long bike rides. I did, too. I didn't know how to ride a bike, being three years old. But I still loved them.

I cried and cried to my mom to let me go. She said no. No. So low, so stern, it made me think that she was the most evil person I had ever met. I remember just plopping on the floor. Plop. Silently. I just lay there staring at the ceiling. Silently. My mom got uncomfortable. She sighed. Go, she said. I remember jumping and bolting out the door faster than a barefoot jackrabbit on a hot greasy griddle in the middle of August!

There was no way for me to tag along because I didn't know how to ride a bike. So my dad picked me up and held me the entire bike ride. My dad's arms felt like a security blanket around me. I felt infinite. Since then, I can't recall a happier time in my life. Coming home, my mom was standing outside with a camera. Snap! Perfect.

**Thalia Gonzalez**  
**Worthington, MN**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Place**

### **Bittersweet**

All I could remember was that sunset. Nothing else. I could remember nothing else. The sky was a palette of colors arranged by a bi-polar artist. A mix of warm, loving colors and then suddenly cool and depressed colors. Kind of like me. I guess that's why the sunset resonated with me so much. But I was okay with that. They say you shouldn't fix something that doesn't need to be fixed. The dash marks on the road seemed to be my pedometer. The road was like fresh clay that bent and curved along the wheels. It's crazy how I remember those things so vividly, but nothing I did that day stained my memory.

Hawaiian breeze. That vent clip permeated the entire car. Its smell was overwhelmingly tropical. I also remember how comfortable the seatbelt was. I almost forgot I had one. I could only hear the wheels beat the concrete at unbelievable rates. Cloth seats. Fresh air conditioner. It was a relaxing car ride, but what topped it off was that sunset. It was so beautiful. 'Beautiful' doesn't even come close to how it looked. I admired its colors most. The way the colors moved around the sky as the sun was slowly setting right before my eyes was so mesmerizing. Its warm and impeccable display saddened me because it was so untroubled—something I felt was impossible for me. The dark colors that flooded the sky saddened me too. Until I saw the stars. That's when I truly realized life will always be bittersweet.

**Danica Dick**  
**Mountain Lake, MN**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Place**

### **Finding the Symphony**

**O**ne, two, three; one, two three. Is it three/fourths time? Maybe it's four/four time? I can't seem to get it right. Wrong, always wrong. I can't seem to get it. They keep telling me to slow down, or speed up. But I can't seem to get it. "Try it," they said. "It will be fun," they said. This isn't fun, and it isn't what I intended to get myself into. Stuck, always stuck. Life keeps getting me stuck. MY life, keeps getting me stuck. Is it that I just can't hear the rhythm yet? They say that the rhythm of the future is exciting, wonderful, adventurous, and with your God-given strengths, you will make it! I believe that, so why am I always wrong? They say that I'm going too fast, so I cut down on activities. But then my inner self tells me to keep going, to push myself, to strive to be the best that I can be. My frustration comes and goes, but this is my story, and it's a story about finding the finishing movement of my high school symphony.

Diary – August 21<sup>st</sup> – I'm Swimming...

*School starts in three days, and I feel that I'm already over committed. All my friends graduated, so I joined volleyball as a manager to hang out with some of my new friends. But that requires me to spend every day after school at the gym. I also committed to be a leader for my Youth Group while all my new friends go to different youth groups. I can hear myself drowning. Not in stress but in pain. I'm not one to complain about how my life is going, but this is pulling on a different string in my heart, making a painful sound. How do you let go of friends and a way of living that was so dear to your heart in the past? Last year was easy. I had great friends, and was staying on top of my schoolwork. Over the*

summer though, the rhythm changed and I hadn't been watching the notes close enough.

Diary – September 10<sup>th</sup> – Nothingness

*School started. As I walked across the school parking lot to my car, I noticed something. I hadn't looked up. I had blindly watched my shoes hit the coarse and jagged gravel without even glancing up. This isn't me. I love life and I love my school. I even love my school parking lot because of the glowing fall trees. This isn't me. God help me keep my chin up another day...* Numb, why so numb? I have heard of those people who don't feel anything. No laughter, no joy, not even sadness. Their symphony consists of a single heartbeat—just holding on—stuck on that one note. They hold on from day to day, dismal, melancholy, and brokenhearted, just waiting to rain on someone else's parade.

Diary – September 29<sup>th</sup> – I wish

*I'm hungry, but I can't eat. I feel disgusting. Something about today, this month, has got me down. I wish I would sit at the piano and practice. I wish I could take art lessons. I wish I could dance. I wish I wasn't overweight. I wish I could have my friends back. I wish I wasn't so confused. I wish I would stop wishing and just trust God. I wish I could get my priorities right. I wish the noise in the back of my head would stop. I wish I could concentrate on one talent and not feel stressed by them all. I wish that someone would hold me. I wish I wasn't so depressed. I wish I didn't own so much stuff so I wouldn't feel so cluttered. I wish that I wouldn't wake up tomorrow.* I have met so many people my age who wish they were dead. I heard a statistic that 83% of all teens in this generation have suicidal thoughts. Well, isn't that encouraging! Whether this is true or not, we feel the pressure and it leaks into our hearts and brains. The pressure is like a minor chord making us cringe and close our ears. I never really felt “depressed” until this year. Maybe a little in previous years, when there was a paper or presentation.



Sometimes I would just stay in my bed a couple minutes longer because of the dread of messing up and making the teacher mad at me. But never like this. This isn't the sort of depression where I would want to kill myself; it's an ache in the deepest part of my heart, feeling like I'm never enough. The competition in our generation is so hidden; it's subtle like a diminished 7<sup>th</sup> note. Yes, you are special, unique, and free to be you. But you need to have money, a good job, fab friends, pretty looks, chic fashion, healthy diet, go to the best college, find your hidden talent, and, on top of all that, be authentic so people will like you. DO YOU SEE THE IRONY, or should I say the unbalanced measure?

Diary – October 14<sup>th</sup> – Months

*God help me, she's getting on my nerves again. I might break, I might yell, I might pull her hair out... BREATH. Exhale, inhale, just breath. Be still. I trust that my anger will stifle out in the next ten seconds. Why is it that until this year she's never gotten on my nerves? Always questioning, always wondering, always hoping for someone to come and rescue me. Nothing seems to be getting better. I've been trying to be a better person, but I still end up fake smiling at people. My brain sounds like the tuning orchestra; a little flat—a little sharp. Why can't I just fall asleep to a peaceful melody?*

Diary – November 17<sup>th</sup> – Hope

*Finally, an afternoon to myself. I journal every day, but I love it when I have an extra hour to spill everything. School is getting easier and so is the social situation, but I still feel strange. My life changed when they graduated last year. I will never be in the same places, with the same people, doing life together like we did. But it's going to be okay. Just trust and look up. Remember, that if your head is down for too long, your crown is going to slip. Adagissimo means very, very slow. Even though the tempo of my emotions are moving, they are still going Adagissimo. But hey, at least, I can sleep at night now. I can feel the hope rising, the tune is changing poco*

a poco and even though my situation hasn't changed, I know I will be okay.

Diary – December 5<sup>th</sup> – Clarity

*The sun just broke through the clouds. Wait, WAIT! I just noticed that the sun broke through the clouds! Pushing through the cruel darkness and the murky night sky, hope is on the horizon. God help me see the world like you see it! Knock and the door will be opened; I knocked alright! I can see now that I am dark but still lovely. Even though I don't know what college I'm going to or what my major will be, I can hear the music of my heart playing loud and clear. This isn't just positivity, this is hope. Positivity is simply being happy during bad circumstances, but hope fights the darkness and finds a new rhythm during the chaos of changing keys. Positivity survives; hope thrives. Even though I still haven't been able to get on top of my bad habits or make better friends, the symphony is playing loud and clear. My circumstances haven't gotten any better, but we are coming to the finishing measures of my high school symphony. I have a few months left until the final measure where the final chord will resolve and then a new song, *Change and Adventure*, will begin. I will be ready for the next symphony, and it's certain to be a masterpiece.*

## **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 SWWC Service Cooperative have continued the contest on an annual basis.

The contest is open to all students in grades 3-12 attending public, private or home schools within the 18-county area of southwest and west central Minnesota. 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 Program. 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 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> grade categories.

The highlight of the contest is the Annual Creating Spaces Awards Ceremony, hosted by the SMSU English Program on the last Sunday of April each year. At the awards ceremony, student writers gather with their families and teachers to be recognized for their achievements. They receive medals and the *Creating Spaces* anthology in which the winning pieces from every category and group are published. The first-place winners in the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade category for fiction, nonfiction and poetry each receive an SMSU First-year Tuition Scholarship. This celebration begins with a keynote address by a published Midwest 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 Awards Ceremony**

- 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
- 2017 – James Autio

#### **James Autio Minneapolis, Minnesota**

James Autio is a poet and visual artist in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Autio works in multiple formats, including charcoal on paper bags, paint, traditional pipe-making, and digital video/poetry. His art and writing have appeared in *Yellow Medicine Review*, *Ditch*, *Drunken Boat*, *Poemeleon*, and *North American Review*.

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Finally, to all the teachers, parents, friends, and relatives who encourage children to read, write, and submit their best work to the Creating Spaces Writing Contest each year. We owe you our most heartfelt thanks.

