

Introduction

We proudly present the anthology of the 2008 West Virginia Young Writers contest. It showcases the stories of 19 students who first won in their counties in their age divisions and then won in the state contest. These Young Writers represent 26 counties from around the state. Included are the winners of first, second, and third place in each age/grade category, plus the winner of the Barbara W. Walters Memorial College Scholarship. The work of grade 12 writers who were awarded honorable mention for this scholarship will be published online:

www.marshall.edu/mugc/cwvwp

The West Virginia Young Writers Contest has honored good writing by our state's students in grades one through twelve for 24 years. The contest is an initiative of West Virginia's writing project sites: NWP@West Virginia University, Central West Virginia Writing Project at Marshall University, South Charleston campus, and Marshall University Writing Project in Huntington which includes satellite site Coalfield Writers. The 2008 contest was co-directed by Barbara Holmes, director of the Central West Virginia Writing Project, and by Terry Reale, coordinator of English and language arts, West Virginia Department of Education.

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Granny Gloria's Lemonade
Aaron Hinzman
Ritchie County High School, Ritchie County
Grade 12
Recipient of the
2008 Barbara W. Walters Memorial College Scholarship

She made the best lemonade of anyone on the block, and she always served it with a bendable straw. She kept her antique candy dish filled with pink lozenges, the kind elderly persons love. On summer days, while neighborhood children sipped her cool lemonade and nibbled snack crackers, she gladly told stories of bygone days. Listening to her tales of farm life, hard work and incredible morals served to teach eager young minds.

When asked about her younger days, she would immediately get a twinkle in her eyes and begin spinning tales that spanned 84 years. She told of her first love and of her son, of the pride she felt when he graduated college at a time few had the opportunity to finish high school. She chuckled as she recalled stories of her favorite pets and farm animals.

Her name was Gloria, and she had knack for growing enormous tomato plants. Each night, about sundown, she carried her water jug and an old battered saucepan to her porch garden to quench the thirst of her plants. The vines clung to the railing with worn-out panty hose; a technique she said was gentler to the tender vines than rope or string. Although her methods of gardening seemed rugged, it might have been her singing and talking that caused the vines to flourish. One summer in particular, her only vine produced over 100 ripe, juicy tomatoes. Gloria counted her "crops" and beamed with pride while telling her neighbors of her success as she shared the fruits of her labor. It took little in life to bring joy and pleasure to this uncomplicated woman. She spent untold hours rocking in her mother's old, oaken chair. She sang and hummed while she rocked, even when she was alone. It was as if the rhythm of

the chair coupled with the rhythm of her songs brought comforting memories to her mind. She kept inspirational books on her coffee table and referred to them daily. Gloria seldom displayed a poor mood or attitude. She attributed this to the fact that she faced much adversity in the past and yet each struggle made her wiser and stronger.

She committed poetry to memory and recited verses upon request. When asked to speak at church, she would gladly say, "Oh dear, I'll have to pick a good one. Give me a day to look through my books."

She was very particular about the right poem or limerick for the occasion. When she stood behind the pulpit, she commonly said, "Excuse my shaky voice, I'm not as young as I used to be. But pray for me, and God will guide me through as I recite these words." One could see the faith in her eyes, and almost everyone would be in tears by the time she finished.

Although her walk had become feeble and her hands shaky, her mind remained sharp allowing a strong grasp on reality. Gloria lived through numerous changes and witnessed many inventions, but remained steadfast in the belief that all she needed was a good book and a comfortable chair to be truly content. She was proud of her country and its progress, and yet she never allowed herself to become engulfed by the world and all the conveniences that it offered.

Most days, her freshly washed laundry hung on the line in her back yard, and she continued to pull the weeds along her sidewalks. She seemed to get the most pleasure from a hard day's work. The children in the neighborhood watched in awe, saying, "GEEZ, does she ever take a break?" Most of them had never seen such work ethic.

Never complaining of the heat or sun beating on her back, never depending on air conditioning to comfort her, she continued to labor. While wiping her brow with a ragged handkerchief, she sang, "What a day that will be, when my Jesus I shall see..."

Gloria was from a different time: a time when nothing was taken for granted, a time before soda pop, electronics and fast food. She never experienced a date to the movies or shopping at the mall. She did not mind, for she was content to walk down a country path, to hoe in her garden, or to rake leaves in the fall. She was happy rocking, watching the sunset, listening to the birds sing, and sipping lemonade.

Because she showed them true love and respect, all the children on the block began to call her "Granny Gloria." It did not matter that her meager income did not allow her to lavish them with gifts on holidays ... her homemade fudge held love for each child. They did not mind that birthday cards only held a dollar or two; it was Granny Gloria's' hugs that were priceless. She rarely had the slightest sniffle, but one day Gloria became quite ill. Begrudgingly she allowed a neighbor to take her to the hospital. No one knew exactly what happened, other than she never came home again. Some of the children in the neighborhood asked their parents questions, but no one had an answer. She grew weaker and weaker, and after some time, she simply stopped breathing. Her long, laborious life was over.

That was many years ago. The children on her block have grown and moved away. Her small home is filled with the love and laughter of a new family. Her sidewalk is now trimmed with a weed eater; her porch garden where tomatoes once grew is filled with colorful flowers. On hot summer days, it is said that if one listens closely, one can hear her voice softly singing in the breeze: a breeze that hints of freshly washed laundry.

Gloria may have left this earth, but she left behind a lasting impression on uncountable lives and memories of simpler times. Anyone who knew and loved her would admit... lemonade has never tasted the same since Gloria left home.

Minsoo the Fearless Monkey

1st Place

Maguire Glass

West Liberty Elementary School, Ohio County

Grade Levels 1-2

One day in China, Minsoo lived happily with his grandfather Mackey, a great retired warrior. Mackey trained Minsoo. The only day to relax was Sunday. Talk about overworking. One day Mackey's crystal ball glowed. He quickly sat down and looked inside. It sensed trouble! X-Zing the dragon was back! One thousand years ago Mackey's ancestors forced X-Zing to leave but he refused. So they tied him to a rocket with chains and he got lost in the Milky Way. Somehow X-Zing must have gotten loose! Mackey rushed toward the door. Minsoo rushed after him. Where are you going? There is no time to talk. I am going up to the mountains where X-Zing is. Hey! I wanna go! No you cannot go. You are too excited. We are going to fight him with our minds. No, I'm calm.

In seconds they rushed outside but X-Zing was no longer in the mountains. He was above the house shooting a blaze of fire straight toward them. Fire! Fire! Stop, drop and roll. I know what to do. Crawl Mackey crawl! Do it for your life. We're all gonna die! Mackey said that's real calm sarcastically.

Mackey and the whole village fought for hours. Most of them were hurt or killed. X-Zing burnt Mackey's leg but he wasn't seriously injured. He was trapped standing against the Great Wall. Minsoo was putting out the fire and saw injured monkeys everywhere. He rushed over to his grandfather. Minsoo knew exactly what to do. He started dancing. X-Zing was confused but he wanted to kill all of them. X-Zing rammed straight ahead toward Minsoo. He darted out of the way. BOOM! X-Zing ran head first into the Great Wall. Minsoo was the hero. He was crowned savior of the year.

The Magical Forest

2nd Place

Beth Reed

Jumping Branch Elementary School, Summers County

Grades 1-2

Once upon a time there lived a girl named Rose. She loved playing with beautiful dolls in the forest among the tall grass. One day she was playing as usual when her eye caught something sparkling in the tall grass. She started walking over to it. When she got closer, it started to look like a brown, glowing door. It turned out to be a real door! She opened it slowly. Inside was a long, bright staircase. She slowly walked down the staircase.

When she reached the bottom, she was surprised because she had walked into a magical castle. Rose had on a lovely dress with pretty pink flowers on it, and she danced around and around. She felt happy. Then she tripped on a rock and fell!

When she got up, she saw people. They didn't look very nice, and they grabbed her. The people put her in a cage. She was trapped! Then she saw a key. She reached for the key and got it. She unlocked the door to the cage.

After unlocking the door, she stepped out. She hid behind a tree. She saw someone or something coming toward her. When it got closer, she saw it was a boy! She started to tip-toe away from him. Then she heard someone say, "Stop!"

It was the boy. She turned around. The boy said hello to her. Rose was shocked that the boy was nice. Rose asked the boy his name. He said his name was Tommy. Then, Tommy and Rose saw the unnice people coming. The unnice people started running and chasing Tommy and Rose. The two children hid out of sight. Once they were out of sight, Tommy told Rose about how he got there. Earlier that evening, it happened that Tommy was at Rose's neighbor's house. Later, Tommy went to the ballpark with Rose's neighbor. At the ballpark, the two watched the

game and ate popcorn. After the game, they were waiting at the ballpark for Tommy's parents. Tommy's parents were supposed to pick him up. But when the game was over, his parents were not there. So, Tommy went down into the dugout. In the dugout, he saw a brown, glowing door. It was the same door that Rose had seen while she was playing in the tall grass. Just like Rose, he, too, opened the door. He walked slowly down the staircase and saw a castle. He had been walking around in the castle. He had been playing and hiding in the castle. So, that is how Tommy got there to the same place as Rose.

Together, they hid behind a curtain. Then, they heard the people coming again. After they passed, they stepped out of hiding. Tommy and Rose ran through the castle. They found some steps and ran up the steps. At the top of the steps, they discovered a door. They opened the door and found that it opened to the outside. Tommy and Rose were back in the forest where Rose had been playing. Tired but happy, they were relieved to be back in the familiar forest with the tall grass. They smiled at each other. Not only had they discovered the secret castle, they found friendship. Tommy and Rose grew up and lived happily ever after. Some say that they married and lived in a magical castle hidden in a forest among the tall grass.

My Bus Driver Was a Dog

3rd Place

Tyler Martin

Brookhaven Elementary School, Monongalia County

Grades 1-2

One night I had a scary dream. After I woke up, it seemed that it was not a dream. Let me tell you about this dream. I got up one day and walked to the bus stop with my sister. When I got on the bus, my bus driver was a dog. We said, "Hi!" and he just barked at us. No one else seemed to realize that our bus driver was a dog. He didn't mind if we talked and played on the bus. I was afraid that he might wreck, but we arrived at school safely. Before we got off the bus, he gave everyone a dog biscuit. We said, "Thanks." He just said, "Ruff Ruff!"

When I got to school, things got a little scarier. I got off the bus and walked to my classroom. What a surprise! My teacher was a cat. I said, "Good morning." She said, "Meow, Meow!" Then she jumped on the chalkboard ledge. We didn't learn much that day. For math, we played with yarn and for reading we learned how to say meow. We napped in the reading corner on pillows and had fish and milk for lunch. At recess we ran around the trail with dogs chasing us. No one realized that the teacher was a cat. I slept peacefully for a while and then I woke up. I found myself thinking about that dream all day. What if the reading teacher was a fish; the principal was a hamster; the art teacher was a raccoon; the music teacher was a bird; the secretary was a bear; the P.E. teacher was a deer? Well, you get the idea. I am glad it is just a dream, but sometimes I wish I was in the dream again.

Ruby and Me
1st Place
Justin Crockett
Wayne Elementary School, Wayne County
Grades 3-4

When I was four years old, I had a dog named Ruby. She was the best coon dog you could ever ask for. She was my best friend. We would take long walks together. We would run and chase deer, coons, cats, and other dogs. She and I were like two peas in a pod. We had a lot of people who wanted to buy her, but I would have never sold her. She was too special to me.

I loved spending time with her. I adored reading to her in her doghouse. I did not mind the odor of her dog lot because I just loved Ruby that much. I also used to enter her into different competitions at the local coon club. Ruby won first place every time we competed. I owe a lot to Ruby. She showed me what true friendship was.

When we would go camping, I would beg and beg my parents to let her go with us. They thought about it and discussed for a couple of days. They had to say no because the campground rules wouldn't allow it. I had to say goodbye to my dog. "I love you Ruby, and don't ever forget it!" I gently kissed her on the head and waved good-bye. She licked me on the cheek and barked sadly. It was the way of telling me, "I will miss you friend."

Ruby celebrated her fourth birthday just three days after we came home from camping. A few months later, she became ill with cancer. My dad spent five hundred dollars to try to keep her alive. A month later, she went blind. It must have been scary for her.

After a couple of months had gone by, Ruby passed away. My heart was broken that day. No dog could ever replace her. I still love her. She was more than a friend to me—she was family. I did not want to bury her. I tried and tried to bring her back to life, but she was gone! I cried uncontrollably and I told myself it was not my fault. It was just one of those things. So I

buried her and thought of all the wonderful times we shared. I covered her up with dirt and said,
“Good-bye, Friend.”

A few years later, I got another Red bone coon dog and I named her Ruby “Too”
Because I thought Ruby would like that.

Bubble Park
2nd Place
Sophie Neubauer
North Jefferson Elementary School, Jefferson County
Grades 3-4

I heard the crowds cheering as I heard my name called to come up. Suddenly, the crowd's cheering seemed to quiet down as I strolled slowly to the front. There in front of me stood the one, the only, Mischief El Raccoonia, and beside that mischievous mister stood his most prized possession- the possession that held wonderful possibilities of wondrous things- The Wheel of Mischief! It was a dream come true.

I was eighty-five at the time, and very sick. I knew this would be my last day on Earth, because of my awful disease. If I could only land on the yellow panel of that colorful wheel that read, "You deserve one extra day." I could only hope as my frail arms reached out to spin the famous wheel. I shut my eyes tight and whispered a quick prayer. Then I heard the wheel stop spinning. I heard El Raccoonia announce, "This lady deserved one extra day!" I couldn't believe my ears. El Raccoonia told me I'd be able to choose where I'd go and how old I'd be. I chose to be twenty and to go to Bubble Park. Soon, a giant yellow and purple portal opened up under my feet sucking me in before I could even say thanks.

As fast as you could say, "Mischief Raccoonia," I had disappeared to the jovial land of bubbles. At first, I was totally speechless. I kept wondering if I was just dreaming. Around me, I could see nothing but celery green grass and lots and lots of bubbles! Green, purple, yellow, red, any color you could possible imagine was made into those wonderful bubbles. There were deep piles of bubbles everywhere, bubble cars, bubble planes and trains, and somewhere among all those piles of bubbles, I heard the best noise on the planet-bubble music. There was so much to do here!

The first thing I did, of course, was jump into the bubble piles. I'd take a running start and dive into the bubbles as if I were diving in a swimming pool. When I hit the first bubbles, I felt this cool feeling like when you're freezing and a warm blanket covers your chilly body. The bubbles fly in every direction possible, but they don't pop. Instead after you're out of the pile, they float back to form the same pile. You could dive gracefully in about ten times.

Next, I practically shoved people out of my way so I could be first on one of the bubble planes. I succeeded at that. I loved the whole ride so much... being lifted into the air and blown peacefully away like a dandelion seed. The view was breath taking. I could see the snow white, puffy clouds up close. They were most significant for Bubble Park because they produced the bubbles. I glided through a shower of bubbles and told myself that I must discover how they are made. It was then that I realized my extra day had become my eternity as a bubble.

Why Crocodiles Have Sharp Teeth

3rd Place

Rachel Martin

Buffalo Elementary School, Putnam County

Grades 3-4

A long time ago, in the Lagoon of Animals where the water shimmers and has that blue-green look, all the great animals lived in peace. The monkeys swung, the birds flew, and the animals lived near the gleaming waters. All was calm; all was peaceful.

One day, it seemed to be the sunniest, most gorgeous day in all the lagoon. Crocodile was swimming and eating the luscious green moss off rocks. You may ask why a crocodile is eating the moss, but before something incredible happened that's how it was. Right near the edge of the waters Crocodile saw Bird. So, Crocodile scampered up on land like a little mouse after leftover cheese. He went up to Bird, opened his mouth and said, "Hello there Bird. How are you today?"

"Hello. I'm fine, but..."

"What is it, Bird?"

"Well, we need more vicious animals. As you know, we are so peaceful. The Water God is as sweet as a peach and doesn't make violence. Not to mess up the order of things, but we are growing so rapidly!"

"I'm sorry to hear that. I wish I could help."

"Maybe you can," Bird whispered in a mischievous voice.

The next day, the sky seemed dull and discouraging. The clouds looked as if they were going to cry. Bird thought it was very peculiar, but he also knew that the peaceful paradise had never had animals use other animals for their own being.

"I mean, why should I suffer while Crocodile can just lie on his back without a care in the world?" mumbled Bird.

Bird went to The Great Water God and said in the most pitiful voice “Great Water God, we need vicious animals because we are multiplying. If you need a volunteer, Crocodile said he would do it.” The Great Water God knew what Bird was up to. He also knew Crocodile did not say what Bird had said, so he devised a plan.

One day as Crocodile was swimming he came upon a rock that had the greenest moss he had ever seen. He opened his mouth wide and CHOMP!! It was gone. Some of Crocodile’s teeth were hurting, so he looked in the shimmering waters. Half of his teeth were jagged! He thought it would be fine, but as time went on it didn’t—it got worse. By the end of the week all his teeth were sharp and he couldn’t eat any moss.

Crocodile was starved and had to eat something. When he saw Bird he didn’t say, “Hi!” He didn’t say, “How do you do?” he dashed on shore and gobbled Bird up.

The Great Water God’s plan worked. He taught Bird a lesson, and the animals never became over populated again. The Great Water God knew it would work.

Today we know this story is true because crocodiles do have sharp teeth, they do dart up on land and eat animals at the water’s edge.

Peace
1st Place
Skyler Malone
Frankfort Middle School, Mineral County
Grades 5-6

Rock was spending the last day with his only daughter, Star Raine, before being deployed to Iraq. They had spent the day tubing at The Wisp Ski Resort. The weather was brutal and the wind was howling, but Rock only felt warmth in his heart as he looked at the expression on his daughter's face as she flew down the snowy mountain. He knew he would hold this memory close to his heart because he would not see her over the next year. He asked a fellow tuber to take a few pictures of his daughter and him, with his camera. After they finished tubing, Rock dropped off Star Raine at her mother's house.

He went home to his one bedroom apartment and printed the pictures with his camera of them tubing. There was one of them laughing. He had gotten one of them drinking hot cocoa also, but there was one picture of Star Raine and Rock hugging good-bye. He noticed that Star Raine's big brown eyes were filled up with tears. A thought came to Rock's mind. He went out to the jewelry store and bought a heart shaped locket. Then he put pictures of them in the tiny necklace. He had the jeweler wrap it and send it to his ex-wife's address for Star Raine. He enclosed the following letter:

Every time I look at the night sky I will think of you Star. When I hear raindrops they will be like your baby steps pattering down the hall. Please wear this locket and keep it close to your heart. Stay brave and I will be brave until I see you again.

Love Daddy

The next day Rock boarded the plane to Iraq. He arrived hot, sweaty, and tired. At the base he chose a lower bunk and pasted Star Raine's pictures above his head. Every night she was the last thing he thought about and the first smile he saw. (On some days the only smile he saw.)

Several days later Star Raine received her package and wore the locket every day. Every week she sent a letter to her daddy, telling him about everything. She told him about the daisies growing in her yard that spring. She sent him a package of daisies and grass seed so he could enjoy them too. She told him about how she was starting to cook and sent him a care package of chocolate-chip cookies. She told him about her love of shopping and sent him a dog tag that she made him while at the mall. It said, "I love my Daddy." She sent him a calendar and said to count down the days until they could see each other. Rock looked forward to getting his daughter's packages and letters. He planted his grass and daisies. He savored the taste of her chocolate-chip cookies. Everyday he wore his dog tag. Rock marked down the days with a big peace sign.

When Rock fought in the war he saw death, destruction, and sadness. But Rock could not write about these things. Instead he wrote to Star Raine about wisdom; he encouraged her to learn from her mistakes. He wrote to her about living the truth, and being honest. He wrote to her about showing love to all people regardless of age, race, gender, or religious beliefs. He wrote to her about peace. He said that people should try talking and work things out instead of fighting.

Finally, the day had arrived for Rock's departure home. As the plane landed, he searched the crowd for his daughter. There she was a little taller, braces on her teeth. She wore a peace tee shirt, and her locket was shining in the sunshine. In one hand she was holding a bunch of daisies and in the other hand she was holding a welcome home sign. As Rock stepped off the plane he realized even though the war was not over, he had found his own peace as his daughter looked up at him with tears in her eyes and said, "You're my hero."

Laughter and Apple Trees

2nd Place

Sarah Craft

Moorefield Middle School Hardy County

Grades 5-6

My name is Roxi. I grew up in Washington State. When you think of the state of Washington you think of a northern state. When I think of Washington I think of three things; rain, rain, and more rain. I hadn't been home in four years because I was away at college in England. On the Olympic Peninsula is a town called Forks. My family lived outside of this town since the town was founded. My family owns a large estate with a few horses and an apple orchard, but none of the family is ever there. Mr. Harvey, the caretaker of the estate, is the only resident.

As I drove up the slope to the house I remembered my childhood here. I parked in the driveway and walked up the steps to open the door. As I entered the house, I remembered sliding down the tall marble banister, and twirling in front of the mirrors in the foyer. I could still smell my mother's apple pie baking at Christmas with all the family joking and laughing together. I was twelve and my sister Lizzy was a newborn when an outbreak of scarlet fever hit Washington. The fever took most of my family including my parents. After the fever I went into a deep depression. Needless to say all the well wishers and white carnations didn't help me forget my loss. My Aunt Bee took Lizzy to live with her and cousin Charlie in Arizona. Aunt Bee sent me to a private school in New Hampshire. When I was sixteen I found that the pain of my loss dwindled to dull ache in my heart as I remembered all the good times with my family. I remembered Dad's laugh, loud and booming. I remembered my mother's perfume sweet and musky. Now as I walked the hallway of my childhood home I realized that Lizzy now must

grieve over her own loss. My reasoning for coming here after so many years was because Aunt Bee, who had taken care of Lizzy since a baby, had died. We were burying her that evening.

Those who remained of our family were there; my cousin Charlie, Uncle Fred and Lizzy. We followed the priest to the family cemetery behind the house. While we were waiting for the hearse my uncle told me with tears in his eyes that Aunt Bee had died quietly in her sleep. Our family was wealthy and could afford the home care that Bee had needed, but her frail body couldn't take it anymore.

The hearse came and the priest said some prayers and talked about her life and death. Lizzy had not spoken a word. As I looked at Lizzy I saw the same vacant face I had had during all those years of lonely depression. I know that I had never really been there for my little sister. But that would change. I planned for us to live together now. I walked over to her and took her hand. She followed me when I pulled her towards the labyrinth made of apple trees.

"I know that right now all you can see of Aunt Bee is her lying in bed being sick. But you have to think of all the happy times together and all that she has taught you," I told her as we walked through the little drizzle. "Well, I remember when we would come here in the summer and walk down this path whenever we were feeling blue," she said.

"Yeah, she and Mom had a saying. They said that a little laughter and an apple tree could cure any case of the blues," I said.

Right after I said this, the rain stopped and a beam of light shown on the path and an apple hanging on a tree overhead dropped down and hit me on the head. Lizzy and I toppled over on each other with laughter. As I looked at Lizzy smile, I knew that Mom and Aunt Bee were looking after us. "Well, I guess it's true," said Lizzy as we walked back to the house still giggling and smiling.

The Cows That Lost Their Moo

3rd Place

Savannah Hill

Taylor County Middle School, Taylor County

Grades 5-6

One day, three cows walked outside their dark red barn. “I’m tellin’ ya, this grass needs a little salt!” said Marty the cow.

“Really, I think it needs ranch dressing!” Eggo said.

“Well, I think it needs maple syrup and some butter!” Toaster exclaimed.

“Okay, you just ruined my appetite,” Marty said seriously. So these cows went on and on until they had nothing left to say.

In the morning, the cows were still drooling and snoring. These cows were lazy! They usually slept in until lunchtime. Today they got up a little bit early.

“I have an itch in my throat and I think it will stop at nothing!” Eggo said painfully.

“Me too!” Marty declared.

“What is Toaster doing?” Eggo asked, watching Toaster roll around on the ground.

“Help me! There is a spider in my throat!” Toaster screamed.

Marty and Eggo ran over to Toaster. Marty threw himself on top of Toaster while grabbing his “handy dandy flashlight.”

“Open up!” Marty said.

Toaster opened his mouth and Marty saw nothing crawling through his throat. Marty did see something that caught his eye.

“TOASTER! Your moo is gone!” Marty yelled.

“It’s gone? It can’t be!” Toaster cried. “What do you mean it’s gone?” Toaster tried mooing. “Haeoy!”

“What did he say?” Eggo wondered.

“I think he is trying to say moo,” Marty declared.

“Well, at least I can still say cuckoo for cocoa puffs!” Eggo stated.

“Cuckoo for cocoa puffs?” Marty wondered.

“I think I lost my moo too!” Eggo sadly declared.

“I can’t believe that I am the only cow in this barn that actually sounds like a cow,” said Marty. Marty was secretly joyful that he was the only mooing cow in this barn. Now that he was the only “mooing cow” he was going to show it off. “Moo, moo, tooey, m... okay what did I just say? Guys, this isn’t funny anymore!” Marty cried.

“It was never funny,” Eggo replied.

“I have one thing to say to you, let’s catch those moos!” Eggo confidentially said.

“Yaaahhhh!!”, everyone shouted.

The cows packed up their haycases and walked out the door with their determination following. First, the cows went to the chicken coop to investigate.

“Bucky, I need to ask you a question!” Eggo said.

“What do you want?” Bucky the chicken asked.

“Have you seen any moos around these parts?” Toaster questioned.

“The only thing that I have seen is that deeeeelicious apple pie the farmer’s wife made!”

Bucky replied, starting to drool.

“Snap out of it!” Eggo yelled. “WE ARE HERE TO FIND OUR MOOS AND THAT IS WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO!!” Eggo angrily screamed.

“Okay,okay,okay! I think I saw moos behind the coop!” Bucky nervously said.

The cows secretly tiptoed behind the coop.

“GOTCHA!” Toaster exclaimed.

“Did you get ‘em?” Eggo questioned.

“Duh! They’re in my hands!” Toaster said.

Toaster slowly opened his hands.

“Aahh!” They all screamed.

There sat a tiny chick, shaking its feathers off.

“Oh, sorry, wrong thing!” Marty said.

“Mooooo, moo,” the chick said.

“My moo!” Marty exclaimed.

“No, my moo!” Eggo said.

“It’s my moo!” Toaster screamed.

“Little chick, give the moo to Uncle Marty!” Marty said.

“No, give the moo to Grandpa Eggo!” Eggo said.

“Give the moo to Cousin Toaster!” Toaster declared.

“Ahhhh! Just take it” The little chick said, throwing the moo onto the ground.

The cows dove into the mud, tackling each other for the moo.

“Hey, guys, here’s two more moos that I found,” the little chick said, trying not to shake.

“Oh yeah, that’s what I’m talking about!” Eggo said.

The chick handed them their moos. The cows got a drink of water and swallowed their moos.

“Moo, moo, moo, the cows happily mooed.

“We should do this again tomorrow!” Toaster said.

“You’ve got to be kidding me!” Eggo said.

A Look at Life from a Deer Stand

1st Place

Josh Crawford

Romney Middle School, Hampshire County

Grades 7-8

The air was brisk as he walked through the woods that morning. The frostbitten leaves slightly crunched underneath his middle-aged feet, as he walked the familiar trail to his deer stand before daylight. He had walked this path many times over the years. As he climbed the old wooden ladder his thoughts traveled back a few years to when it seemed he had a problem free life. He and his wife had been fighting a lot in recent years, and she had finally left him a few months back, taking the children with her. There was also something else but just as he was about to think about it he noticed the sun beginning to rise. Its rays magically found their way through the trees. He glanced at the sunrise and a few moments later looked back allowing the full colors to sink in and feeling the warmth of the sun's rays falling upon his cheeks melting his stress. The sun's rays glinted off the scope of his rifle. He looked at the sunrise in amazement as he did every year then slowly turned his head and mumbled something about memories. There was sadness in his eyes as a tear rolled down his cheek and was gone. The minutes crawled by slowly as he forced himself not to think, but it was hard to bear. He possessed neither physical nor mental pain, but emotional pain cut him like a knife.

All of a sudden a stick snapped behind him shattering his thoughts. His heart started to pound as it always did when there were deer around him. Maybe it was a buck he thought. He peered behind the tree his stand was hanging on. At first he didn't see anything except the forest floor, but he had been on this stand too many times for that. He eyed the forest floor piece-by-piece. Then he saw the flick of a deer's tail. He didn't dare move. He stayed focused on that piece of the woods. Deer, especially bucks, are real fidgety on the first day of the season. He

examined where the deer was and soon found the curve of its back. He saw where the neck went up but disappeared behind a tree along with its head. He searched to see if there were any more deer in the area but did not see any. This deer was alone and wouldn't show its head. It had to be a buck and probably a nice one. As he raised his gun, the strap caught on his chair making a noise the deer heard. It took *off*. The man groaned as he saw the wide rack on the deer's head. He got the strap unstuck, but the deer was out of sight before he could get a shot off. The man mentally kicked himself. How could he have been so careless?

Reaching to his left he got a cup of coffee out of his thermos. Angry that he let the buck get away, he thought about leaving but decided against it. As the hours passed his thoughts wandered back to the news he had received the other day. Every year he and his father had always enjoyed a week at deer camp. It was the only time they could be together for any amount of time. This year his father's stand was empty. Just a few days ago his father had been diagnosed with cancer having a 1 in 50 chance of survival.

The hours passed very slowly and darkness started to fall. Finally he climbed down the ladder and walked to where he always parked his truck. He drove to the cabin and walked inside to feel the warmth of the fire. Adding wood, he remembered some of the conversations he and his father had had about the big ones that got away. Thinking like that made him miss his father more. He would give anything for his father to be with him right now. Finally he lay down and dreamed of what tomorrow might bring him.

Deer hunting is a lot like life. Excitement and warmth can be around you a long while, but then can be gone before you know it like the flick of a deer's tail. Yet you still go on with hope.

The Secret Journal
2nd Place
Megan Justice
Summers Middle School, Summers County
Grades 7-8

The roar of bulldozers filled the dusty air. The fat, sweaty construction worker readied the two-ton wrecking ball. He pressed the rusty lever forward, and the ball swung along with it. Much of the old building fell to the ground with a loud crash. He repeated the action several times before stopping the machine. When he had stopped, the cleaning crew slowly walked onto the pile of rubble. They began to clean up the moss-covered bricks when one of the men shouted, “Hey guys, I think I found something!”

The other men rushed over. “What is it Carl? You think it could be worth something?”

Carl held up an old tattered brown journal. He flipped through. He stopped on one page in particular. “June 12, 1939: Today they started building a brick wall onto our house. Father won’t tell me what it is. ‘It’s not important,’ he says. I say if it is attached to my house, I deserve to know what it is. I aced my history project today. Freddy is so cute...” He stopped there.

“What do you think this is about? It says this journal belonged to...” he flipped to the front page, “Sera Muscovitz, age 13.”

He read on. “June 13, 1939: The wall is done, and the Germans have begun to load people into the area that has been fenced in. Just today, I saw 12 people in the area! I saw about five old people, four adults, and three children. They looked so sad...I wonder why. Father still won’t tell me why they are out there. Someone at school told me that the sick and poor had been sent there so that they do not spread germs. That was Suzie. I don’t trust her. She tells lies all day long and makes up stories like a young child would. Why, just the other day, she told me, ‘Sera,

I'm going to the moon for my vacation. What are you doing?' She makes me so mad that I could just pop her! Oh well, I'm going to bed now." -Sera-

"June 19th 1939: I found out what the bricks are for, and, as I suspected, Suzie lied again. Mrs. Merrill says they are called "ghettos," and gypsies, Jews, and people who are against Hitler are sent there to live alone. It is very sad. Each day I see more and more people in the ghettos. Some of them look like they have given up on living. People in the ghettos wear tattered clothing and are as thin as poles. Father and Mother think they deserve to be there, but I cannot see what they did wrong. I'll have to investigate more." -Sera

"June 25, 1939: I have continued my ongoing investigation into the ghettos and Hitler. He speaks in such large words that I can hardly understand them, but, from what I can tell, he is racist. Father and Mother follow his words like they are law. Perhaps they are the law. I don't really understand what is going on. It seems the only good thing that happened this week was running into David, a Jewish boy from down the street. He is incredibly charming and very cute. He talks all the time about being worried about his family and not being able to go to school. I try to comfort him, but he doesn't seem to listen to me. I wish he would smile once in a while. I bet his smile is beautiful." -Sera-

"July 4, 1939: Today was wonderful! David asked me to go to dinner with him tomorrow night! I didn't think he liked me in that way! Oh, isn't it wonderful? It truly has been the best week ever." -Sera-

"July 30, 1939: This is definitely not the best week ever. David and his family were sent to the ghetto. We have only been able to communicate by throwing notes on paper out of my window and into the ghetto. What kind of relationship can we have if we can't speak to one another? That is what I want to know! I am so concerned about David." -Sera-

Carl turned the page and found it to be especially stained although he could not tell whether with food or water. He read on:

“August 2, 1939: David was killed in the ghettos today. I don’t know how much more of this war I can take. It has claimed so many lives, and I fear there is no end to it. That is why my family is moving from this terrible town to the United States where there is no war, and perhaps my mind can be taken off of David. I will leave this diary here for it reminds me too much of David. Perhaps someone will find it. And so it is goodbye for ever.” Sera-

“That’s the end of it,” Carl said quietly.

“Hey, get back to work!” the boss yelled from the sidelines. As the boss approached, Carl quickly stuffed the journal into his pocket and again began to pick up debris, but he knew that he would not be able to take his mind off of the young girl and her journal.

Three Times but Then No More
3rd Place
Sam Michael
Warm Springs Middle School, Morgan County
Grades 7-8

I felt my feet pounding against the slimy ground of the ghettos. Darkness was my only company as it gently rained. Death and disease chased me down the streets as I gingerly carried two pieces of bread I “liberated” from a local looted and destroyed store. The 1941 breeze pushed against my face and annoyingly placed a strand of hair across my eyes. The alarm for curfew sounded as I spotted the dirty house in which I lived. I moved around the wooden door and slowly shut it.

I turned around to see Jakob, my brother, excitedly watching Mr. Jones, a fifty-year-old man who lived with us, taking his pills. I let out a small laugh. He quickly turned to me and all of the animation in his seven-year-old body seemed to fade. He raced to me and, only coming to my chest, started to pound fiercely against my abdomen. I tried not to laugh for he thought that I must have been killed or captured. I shrugged him off and pushed a piece of bread into his still waving arms, then crossed the room and gave the other to Mr. Jones. Before they could fight about how I had nothing to eat, I ran to the stairs and bounded up them two at a time to where I would sleep.

Mother and farther had died at the camps, but that doesn’t say I can’t still talk to them, or to myself. I tried not to cry for I had to be strong near Jakob. It was hard but I had to sleep, so I looked up at the stars and drifted to sleep. I woke up in a cold sweat, gasping for air. The Green Police were coming I could feel it. I shuttered as I let a breath roll over my lips. That’s when I heard the screams. I watched out the upstairs window as people were thrown out into the streets from their own doorsteps. I shook. My worst nightmare was about to come true.

“Jakob”, I said shaking him awake, “C’mon get up.” He twisted awake and looked at the room in which he lay. “I need you to get Mr. Jones and take him down to the cellar, stay down there no matter...”

“No.” He said cutting me off coldly, and crossing his little arms across his chest. “Not until you tell me what’s going on.” I couldn’t believe he had the nerve to argue with a fifteen-year-old. I took a deep breath and let it out softly.

“The Green Police are coming.”

My hand tightened around the metal pole I hoped I wouldn’t have to use. The cellar came straight up from the floor, which made it terribly convenient. My stomach lunged and I felt sick deep in my chest. Jakob and Mr. Jones clumsily went down the stairs to the cellar beneath the house. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw him about to argue with me, but I shook my head before he could speak. Reluctantly, he walked slowly down the stairs and closed the door. I sighed knowing what I had to do. I looked at the table next to the doors. I moved it over the double doors and let out a breath. A tear ran down the side of my face as I tightened my grip on the pole. I heard the door fly open but I did not turn. Then, with rage, I turned and swung as hard as I could. I hit one of them in the chest, and he fell, hard. Tears covered my face. Then there was a laugh, a crash, and then everything went blank.

Six other Jewish people and I trudged out to the woods. We had misbehaved and needed to be punished. I looked back at the fence where Jakob screamed for me as a tear rolled down his tiny face. We stopped as they loaded their guns. One tear rolled down my face as a shot of pain hit my abdomen and his screams faded away. I hit the ground, then I blinked three times... but then no more.

Fear and Courage
1st Place
Nicholas Underwood
Shady Springs High School, Raleigh County
Grades 9-10

He awakes. Not from slumber, but from a daze. He stands in the beaming sunlight of a humid summer day. As he stands, a gentle, cool breeze blows against his cheek. The breeze serves an important purpose to him, for it calms him. Fear, he feels, fear of the beast that lay before him. This beast is not of flesh and bone, but of steel. Pure, cold steel cast from the iron taken from the bosom of the earth. What a monster man has created.

He takes a step. The beast roars and sends a gust of wind that forces him back. The fear he feels, lies deep within him and grows larger with each passing second. He ponders the possible perilous partaking he is possibly about to perform. It haunts him, the roar of the beast. It strikes pure terror into his soul that no average man could withstand. But he must obtain courage, to progress forward and confront the beast. Somewhere, lost in the sea of his mind is the courage to face the beast.

He takes yet another step. The beast, enraged, sends another roar from the fiery pits that are its lungs. But he does not tarry. The courage that was lost within him now finds an opening. Now, hastily, he moves forward. The cool breeze returns to comfort him. It extinguishes the fear he once felt. With the breeze at his back, he proceeds into the beast lair. What a wretched place the lair is. Garbage from times long past is strewn everywhere. The air is foul and filled with stenches that would make even swine keel over and perish. The air fills his lungs and begins to smother him. Gasping, he longs for the fresh air he had just moments before.

The gentle summer breeze, astoundingly finds its way into the lair. It softly brushed against him. As he breathes, it rushes into his lungs like a river flooding into a valley. It relieves him, the breeze does. The breeze has utterly eliminated the foul air that was filled the lair. He presses on

quickly, for he has little time. The beast roars on. Completely enraged, it begins to feel fear. Fear that it may not be able to stop him from completing his goal. Fear that by sundown it shall be defeated and he will rise from the ashes victorious.

The best wonders. How could it possibly bring man to his knees? What act could force so much fear and terror into the tiny souls of man that he never return to face the beast again? An idea arises within the beast's mind. An idea so sinister and wicked that on thinking it the beast shudders from fear. But would it work? Would it be so effective as to send man home with tears in his eyes? Time grows slim for the beast. It must act now if it is to drive man away.

He steps forward now quicker than ever, the beast still roaring in rage. Out of sheer desperation, the beast grabs him. He struggles to break free as the fear that once left him now fills his soul again. His struggles are in vain for the beast's grip is strong. There is no escape once the beast grabs hold, its grip so strong that it turns rocks to dust. The beast raises him high into the air. The beast sees terror in the man's eyes, smiles, and then jerks the man towards the earth.

He screams as the beast twists and turns him in every direction. The force the beast exerts on the man pushes him to speeds at which not even light can keep up. Vigorously the beast tosses him from one direction to another. His body cannot take much more. It was not designed to withstand forces of this magnitude. Within seconds, the beast grows tired. It lowers the man gently back to earth. As the beast sets him down, it falls into a slumber. It waits for the next unlucky soul to awaken it again.

As he steps away from the lair of the beast victorious and back out into the gleaming sunlight of that summer day, the breeze returns to him and softly brushes his cheek as it once did so long ago. He looks up to the blue sky, covering his eyes from the sunlight, and sighs. He turns to his left, and sees his friend. As he looks at his friend, his friend whispers, "See? The rollercoaster wasn't that bad." Smiling, he replies, "I guess not. What to go again?"

Finding Stories and How to Catch Them

2nd Place

Sarah Teter

Pendleton County High School, Pendleton County

Grades 9-10

I glared down at the paper that seemed to be glaring back at me. Neatly typed in black ink, every word had been spell checked and every comma was in its place. Rough drafts had been written and discarded, written again and revised, and now the final copy was before me. Now that I was done with the story, I despised it, yet I had no alternatives. The story wouldn't be improved either: I think it resented being ill written. It was now 12:00 a.m. and I had school the next day.

I flipped off the light, but it hardly made a difference because the moon was full and bright in the sky. It peeked in my window and seemed to stare at me as I lay there thinking about my flop of a story. Why in the world did I have to care so much about a stinking story? Why couldn't I enjoy rock collecting, or organizing my sock drawer, or something requires no creativity whatsoever? I closed my eyes for a moment, but then they opened (almost against my will) and I was wide-awake. I started back at the moon and suddenly decided to do something absolutely crazy: I would go outside and find a story. I knew it was out there just waiting to be written, and I could write it, I just had to find it first.

I went quickly through the house and out the door. The air was warm and smelled of that deep, earthy smell that seems to belong in forests, deep valleys, near streams, and is always in the air on gorgeous nights. I breathed it in deeply as I headed for the forest, which I figured would be the most likely place for a story to be lurking. As I entered the forest, stepping carefully in my bare feet, I felt like Alice in Wonderland and fully expected a rabbit with a waistcoat and watch to hop out of the trees. The moon sent shoots of silver through the branches and made everything look like something magical just quivering to burst into magic.

I came to a sort of clearing and stopped short in shock. I may have been expecting a rabbit, but I certainly wasn't expecting this. There were hundreds of glowing "things" whisking around in the air, like impish fragments of light. In the middle of the clearing was a very short, curious looking person. He looked like a very old gnome with huge glasses, giving him owl-like eyes, and he had long, wild hair. He saw me and beckoned me over. I went, staring at him as I made my way through the moving imps. I had no idea what to say, so I just said the first thing that popped into my mind.

"Are you ... human?" I asked hesitantly.

"Ish," was his reply. I took this to mean somewhat.

"Do you have gnome in you?" I asked again, guessing from his appearance.

"Ness," he replied. This left me confused, but I figured he might have meant he had "gnomeness" in him.

"What do they call you?" I asked once more, feeling slightly rude.

"*They* have nothing to do with it," he said sharply. "I call me Ishness and I think it suits whether you do or not. And frankly I don't care," he added. "I'm a story catcher," he offered abruptly.

"A story catcher? What do story catchers do?"

"Catch stories, dimwit."

"But how do you catch stories?"

"Well, it's a pretty difficult business I can tell you," he said professionally. "First you have to locate them, which you've done, then you have to be more clever than they are in order to catch them." I was incredibly confused at this point and had to ask where they were if I had located them. "Why, they're all around you! The stories are the Poltergeists in this clearing."

I looked in shock at the little lights that had been bobbing around the clearing ever since I came. Ishness ran, weaving here and there with amazing agility, and then caught one in his hand. He brought it over and showed it to me. It was a sort of translucent blob and inside I saw the words, “There stood a wall through which nothing could pass but the imagination.” Evidently Ishness was rather philosophical.

“Now you try,” he encouraged. I started to run, then stopped and looked back at him.

“What on earth is the matter?” he asked.

“Well, it just seems kind of like ... cheating almost, to catch a story instead of thinking of it,” I said sheepishly.

“Cheating! Didn’t I say you had to be cleverer than the story you catch? It’s not easy to capture a good one.”

I ran off again, satisfied with his answer. It took me a while, but finally I found one that prompted my imagination and I chased it until I caught it. I raced back to Ishness, excited about my success and anxious to see what I caught. Before I had time to read the small sentence, Ishness distracted me by saying, “Now eat it quick while it’s still fresh.”

“Eat it?” I replied, surprised.

“Well, it’s not exactly like eating, but you do stick it in your mouth and swallow. Sometimes it has curious effects, but it always work. Go on now, while it’s still fresh,” he urged.

“What effects?” I wondered, but it never entered my mind to distrust him. I opened my mouth and put the story in.

I woke with a jolt, back in my own bed. Wait – was I beck, or had I never been? I really couldn’t be sure. It seemed too outrageous to possibly be true, yet it was so vivid – and now I had a story. I decided to write it “while it was still fresh.” And I did.

Solace Plant

3rd Place

Emily Biggs

Pickens High School, Randolph County

Grades 9-10

The boy had been running for almost an hour through the dense forest. His heart was racing, and he feared that it might beat out of his chest. He came to a halt when he met a small mountain stream trickling delicately through the woods. He squatted down by the creek for a much needed rest. Gathering water into his cupped hands, he quenched his thirst and washed his dirty, sweaty face.

Although he was exhausted, he continued his trek through the lonely forest. His body begged him to rest, but he knew time was of the essence. If he lingered by the stream much longer, his mother would surely die. She and the rest of his tribe were counting on him to retrieve the Solace Plant that would save her from the clutches of death.

He was quick and nimble and knew the forest well. He jumped like the deer and ran like the wolf. Over the logs he leapt and darted through the thin gaps between the colossal oak trees. He ran in this manner for many miles, resisting the urge to rest, until suddenly, he stopped. Looking straight ahead, he realized he had never seen this part of the forest before. The chief had warned him of this and had told him of a path that had once led to the patch of the reviving Solace Plant. He also told the boy to be cautious for the forest on each side of it was filled with terrifying beasts that patiently waited for someone to drift from the path.

The boy looked around him and at first could find nothing that even slightly resembled a path. Finally he discovered the trail that led silently through the dense, dark forest. He inhaled a deep, long breath and proceeded on the desolate path. He no longer ran but walked at a fast pace. The trail was overgrown by brambles and was invaded by immense tree roots that projected up from the ground, forcing the boy to watch his every step. The forest canopy trapped

the hot humidity and cast a faint green light upon everything below it. Tiny creatures that remained invisible to the boy scuttled near the path, but did not dare let themselves be seen. The boy grew tense when he heard the skulking little feet on the edges of the woods but soon grew accustomed to them.

His skin was hot and sticky, and his entire body ached. He pushed through the pain and continued down the solitary path. Finally the trail opened into a semicircle and in its middle grew a massive tree towering above him. Long vines clung to the tree and on the tips of these vines blossomed flowers that his chief had described as the Solace Plant. The boy carefully reached out and plucked a flower. He felt a sharp pain on the tip of his finger as a thorn attempted to protect the vital blossom. A bead of blood slowly trickled from the wound and sparkled in the green forest light.

With flower in hand, he turned back to the path that led to his mother. He walked the trail silently; hoping no beast within the forest would be stirred by his presence. As he proceeded, he had a strange feeling that something was watching him closely. He heard a slight rustle of leaves and a sharp snap of a twig to his left. He clutched his hands into tight fists and hesitantly cast his eyes in the direction of the noise. For an instant he saw bright yellow eyes staring at him but suddenly disappeared as the beast retreated into the dark forest. He gulped and quickened his step, praying that the creature was not a threat.

He still sensed those piercing yellow eyes observing his every move. Knowing that the beast would not leave the hallow confines of the forest lining the path; he set his pace to almost a jog. This sudden change in speed was a horrible mistake. The creature sensed the fear and vulnerability of the boy and seized the opportunity to pounce.

The boy's instincts were excellent as he spun around, reaching for his bow. Stringing an arrow onto the bow, the boy shakily lined his eye with the arrow and took aim at the beast

rapidly emerging from the forest. The boy identified the charging creature as a panther, larger than any he had ever seen. The massive cat stormed at the boy with his mouth open, revealing razor-sharp teeth ready to devour its prey. The boy released the bow string, sending the arrow flying rapidly through the air, hitting the panther directly in its jugular. The beast ran a few more strides and collapsed onto the forest floor. The immense cat let out a low, helpless moan; then its head hit the ground never to be lifted again.

The boy's head grew light, and he could hardly comprehend what had happened. He suddenly remembered the flower and the urgency to get back to his mother. He seemed to fly through the forest, but he felt cold and empty. Time did not seem to exist during his journey back to his tribe. Finally he caught a glimpse of his village through the thick forest. His legs began to tremble, and his vision became blurred. His head was cloudy, yet he pushed onward. His long journey and the energy he exerted had finally taken its toll over the boy's body.

He awoke to find himself in his own hut in his own cot with his mother sitting beside him. She was pale, but the boy knew the plant had defeated her illness. He attempted to sit up but an acute pain pulsed throughout his body.

"You must rest, Son," his mother ordered with a weak smile. The boy laid his head back onto his cot, knowing his mother was now safe and thus began his road to recovery.

The Violin Man
1st Place
Jacqueline Trumbull
Morgantown High School, Monongalia County
Grades 11-12

A cool wind in late October gathered up the fallen leaves in Gallway and brushed them against the weathered cobble stone street. They floated in confusion around the corner of the famous Opera House, and down an adjacent street. The breeze died down around a man's feet as some of the leaves tumbled delicately into his open violin case. The air was crisp and it felt clean as he breathed in; the sharpness of the cold in his lungs vitalized him as he hit a higher string.

His shoes spoke of too much standing, but his brown suit was pressed. Coarse gray hair was slicked back into the formal hairstyle worn twenty years ago, and his chin was cleanly shaven. Wrinkles formed around his eyes and mouth, which was puzzling because he hadn't smiled in a long time. As he slid his bow against the violin strings, his eyes brightened for a moment before remembering their sadness.

“That's my favorite.”

The violin nearly jolted out of his hand as his mind frantically processed the sound of being spoken to. Gray eyes fastened nervously on a little boy holding a bag of cheap postcards.

“What're yeh sayin'?” His Irish accent revealed the middle class, and was audibly tempered.

“That's my favorite. Yeh play it sometimes when the weather turns. Seamus, eh, my friend Seamus, likes the faster one yeh played jest a couple days ago. He sells candy.” The little boy looked earnestly into his face, and he frowned.

“Who are yeh? Yeh listen to me?”

“I'm Colin. We all of us listen to yeh. You're the only one that plays around here, so close to the Opera House. Rest of us sell things- to the tourists, see. What's yer name sir?” His

voice was high, and the old man tried to, match the note on his violin. He absentmindedly pushed the bow back and forth, lightly, enjoying the odd tone.

“Ballard...Ardan Ballard.” He gazed bitterly at the Opera House. It stood giant, imposing its grandeur and dripping ornamentation on the humble subtlety of his street corner. His face twisted momentarily into a look of betrayal, before quietly settling for disappointment. He swallowed, and nodded towards the House. “I was supposed to be there. I was supposed to play there.” He looked down at the boy again. “Yeh’re sellin postcards? Does that work for yeh?”

“Yes sir, I got the hill, Blarney Castle, Ring o’ Kerry...Yeh want one?” Colin shuffled through his cards, proudly displaying them in front of Ardan’s face. They were thin and revoltingly colorful, as though accusing the green in Ireland of mediocrity.

“Ah... I don’t... have any coins.”

Colin pocketed his postcards, only mildly phased by the rejection. Ardan was studying the Opera House again; studying the beacon of failure that he had never managed to move more than a street away from- a street whose distance couldn’t block the pain of unfulfillment that bound him to his ruined dream. And it was growing before his eyes, emerging from a sea of ordinary buildings, encompassing the entire world, but halting before it reached his feet. He blinked and it was back in its square, set apart from other buildings as is requiring space to unleash its cloud of extraordinary, wrenching talent. It faced straight ahead, innocently averting his gaze, and he hated that it couldn’t see him.

“Yeh, that’s okay- they aren’t very good cards anyway,” Colin said, “but I sell ‘em, cause tourists like buyin’ from kids, see, makes ‘em feel good about themselves.” They stood quietly for a moment, Ardan lingering in the thickness of silence.

“It’s getting late kid... Yeh got somewhere to be?” He watched his bow glide up and down, piercing a gray sky that was beginning to darken around the edges of the clouds.

Movements were slower when darkness first appeared, as though patiently awaiting the liberality of night. His mind stilled, finding the shadows crawling amidst the purple light hypnotic.

“Actually... I was supposed to ask yeh if yeh’d mind playin the song from... umm... it would be three days ago, and Seamus says it was... Vivaldi. That sounds right I think.” He crinkled his nose, which Ardan saw was scrubbed clean under a mass of tangled black hair. “That’s what they wanted to hear, and yeh don’t play it often, so they made me ask. I picked the short straw, see.”

“Listen kid, yeh don’t want to listen to me, because I’m not any good. If I was I’d be playing at the Opera House, see, like I was supposed to.” He didn’t want to play Vivaldi; he wanted to resume his ballad, and force his violin to cry- make it shed the tears of high notes.

“Yeh didn’t make it in then. Well, I s’pose I’m glad about that.”

Ardan squinted down at the boy, not sure if he’d heard correctly.

“What was that?” His mind had forgotten the softness of emerging night, and was concentrated on the imp in front of him who had dared to rejoice in his ruin.

“Wellsir,” he said nervously, “Who would play for us?”

Ardan stared at him for a long time, and when he looked up he saw expectant faces, each belonging to a child holding bundles of unwanted goods. They gazed at him, begging to find solace in a beautiful song, and he stared back, letting amazement creep into his head.

He turned to the Opera House, and it was small. Its carvings were as superficial as the postcards in Colin’s hands, and the music radiating from inside that he could faintly hear was hollow. The applause sounded like the tinkering of china, not the heavy, appreciative sound of tired hands. But he had a real audience. He was the Mozart of the underworld, the Chopin of the over-looked. The last wisps of light frittered away under the leaves in his violin case as he lifted his bow to Vivaldi.

The Instrument
2nd Place
Elizabeth Roth
Greenbrier East High School, Greenbrier County
Grades 11-12

Micah trudged down the dank subway stairwell for probably the seventh time that day. The bottoms of his khakis were cold and wet against his ankles. They were turning gray from wet road dust, as if, starting at his feet, the grayness of the city would devour him. It was freezing. At home there would be snow, pristine and heavy. But here, steam and footsteps turned it to slush and puddles faster than it could fall.

He was shivering now, standing at the terminal where those putrid underground trains slid by on their metal tracks. That smell. He's taken off his jacket to protect the case he held on one hand. God forbid anything mar its leather perfection. He carefully lifted the sopping, heavy jacket, checking that the place where the lid met the base was sealed tightly against the raindrops. The rich aroma of earthly leather wasn't noticeable to the mass of commuters waiting for the subway, but he sensed it. As exquisite as the case was, what lay inside was a pure masterpiece. The subway screeched up on time, and Micah turned his thoughts once more to studying the map on the wall of the car.

After yet another descent to another subway terminal, another peek beneath the coat, and another look at the map, Micah finally arrived at the instructor's home. It was clear that this was a nice part of the city, as almost every home had what would have been a garden had it not been January. Micah noticed the vines in the small courtyards, intertwined in such a way that they were abundant yet controlled. They looked as if they were on the verge of complete and utter wilderness when winter squelched their efforts. Suddenly he was nervous. The instructor had been his mentor for almost eleven years now, but never had he imagined the rough-hewn man to reside in such a haughty neighborhood. He'd only known him amidst the trees and the cabin.

Twice a week he had ridden his bike-and after upgrading his instrument, driven his station wagon-up the gravel slope to be greeted by wood smoke and salted deer meat. The smell permeated the little hill of the instructor's home. The instructor would stand on the porch with the dog, Bill, to greet him. The whole scene had become as much a part of what they did there as the instrument in the case, and its absence, anxiety set in. The images seemed like boyish fantasies now, in the presence of such grandeur. Micah walked up the stairs to the house, and its great red door swung open.

"Micah!" The instructor stood, arms wide, in his usual garb of wool vest and jeans, glasses a little smudged, hair at his shoulders. Had he expected the man to be any different? The almost hostile environment seemed to have no effect on the instructor, and Micah grinned as he noticed Bill. His fur was matted with burrs, and he sniffed the city wind with an air of distaste. He stepped onto the threshold; the instructor slapped his back and taking the case from his cold, chapped hand.

"Come in, come in." The instructor prodded in along. "How was old Canada when you left her last? Only a few days ago wasn't it?" The two stepped into the house, which was somewhat dimly lit, especially after the instructor closed the door on the white-gray winter sky.

"Thank you. Yes, two. She's cold as ever. Last week it iced, left a nice coat on the trees around your cabin. That was a site. Froze over the port, too. Boats were still able to get through, though not as good of a haul as they would have liked." The instructor nodded, imagining no doubt the exquisiteness of the ice encrusted branches on his little hill.

"And Jim?" At this the instructor paused, as he had been placing Micah's case beside a chair and motioning for him to make himself comfortable.

"Oh, I, he's been working a lot lately you know." Micah gazed at the floorboards. Was it mahogany?

After a moment the instructor seemed to deem it best to revert to the former topic. “Too cold even for the fish I suppose.” He made for a doorway to what could only be the kitchen. “Well let’s warm up a bit before we start and then we’ll get right to it.”

“Yes, thank you.” Micah took a seat in a nearby armchair and rubbed together his freezing hands. Opposite him was a large bookcase, filled to the utmost with books and pictures, precariously perched atop stacks of books, and even other photographs. One wrong move and all the achievements, all the memories of a lifetime could come crashing down. Micah didn’t recognize anyone occupying the frames except his uncle. He posed with what Micah knew to be his old band, in front of the small theater back home. Micah thought of the parallels between this band and the band he had, formerly, been a part of. They too had played at the theater, quite recently, before the end of it all of course. Success doesn’t have a universal definition. Maybe that is what had driven Micah to be standing in this place on this day.

The instructor reappeared from the kitchen, two mugs in hand, Bill at his heels. He handed one to Micah.

“So how’s the city treating you so far?”

“Well it’s been different, haven’t seen that much yet. Had a little trouble with the subway.” The instructor chuckled, but knew there was more than that. He saw the discontent in the student’s deportment; he sat tensely in the chair, eyes fixed, almost glazed, bring his heel upward and back down in a slow repetitive movement. And he knew what the student bore. He knew what a struggle it was to leave his home, to leave the place where his passion for music had its birth. He had endured it too, and the scares were plain to all, but time had of course eased their sting. He was a solo act.

The man and boy gulped their hot coffee, eager to begin their lesson, comfortable in their mutual silence. The cups drained quickly. The instructor stood and cleared his throat, moving

to a door. Which when opened revealed a jumble of stands, cloths, and a pile of papers. He withdrew a stand and ran his finger down the stack of papers, and, though it was unmarked, pulled five pieces from the heap. Micah took this as his cue, and bent to the case at his feet. He slid the jacket to the floor, feeling in its pocket the letter he'd received last week. He couldn't drive it from his thoughts, and his mind reeled as its contents raced through his head. Jim had written in anger, sadness, and jealousy. His band mate, his favorite friend, abandoning their humble roots for city stardom? Talent wasn't the issue; he had assured Micah of that. No, he was glad that his friend had been given such a musical gift, but would he not find greater joy in the harmony of his band? Need he not some companion to share with his melodies? Micah had no answer. His heart was a jumble of ambitions. But now he was on his own. And no matter how forcibly he told himself otherwise, his instrument was more a part of him than a companion.

The instructor stood patiently, watching the student's hesitating hands. Micah touched the cold metal clasp of the case, bringing him back to his senses. The gold clasp reflected the lamplight like sun on water. Laying the base of the case on the floor, Micah ran his hand down the smooth leather, clicking each clasp open, until he could life the lid. The interior was plush and velvety brown. Wood smoke had seeped into the fibers, as had pine, from the many outdoor shows where the case had remained open for charity. The smell was tantalizingly rustic. He carefully lifted the instrument from its niche. A violin. It was astoundingly beautiful in its simple design; smooth curves of delicate wood, finished to perfection. The emotion of its workmanship, as well as its purpose, emanated from it. Three taut strings stretched across the ebony neck, strong and regal, Micah touched each one before lifting the violin to his shoulder. It rested under his chin in such a way that it was obvious he had been made for this instrument, carefully crafted for this violin only. He delicately picked up its matching bow. It was slender and magnificent, and he moved it as if it were an extension of his own arm, bringing it to hover above the strings.

Micah paused and lifted his eyes to the instructor, who nodded in return and sat on the edge of a nearby stool to listen. The air had an eerie yet familiar quality of anticipation. Slowly, deliberately, Micah put the bow to the strings, and closes his eyes. He took a breath and pulled out the first note, a wailing mournful call to the weight of decision.

College Quest
3rd Place
Julia Barry
Hampshire High School, Hampshire County
Grades 11-12

As my senior year of high school approaches, it's time to embark on the most daunting of odysseys: the quest for the right college. I'll be the second child in the family to depart for the dorm life, so I hope my parents, Mom in particular, have expended most of their unwarranted concern on my older brother, Mark.

It seemed Mark's saga would be short and uncomplicated; he would simply attend West Virginia University. As Mom pragmatically pointed out he'd be relatively close, so if he missed home, got sick, had a panic attack, or was hit in the head by a meteorite, he could come home anytime. Mom viewed Mark as the star running back sprinting down the open field to the WVU end zone. In arguably the greatest quarterback sneak of all time, Dad slipped through Mom's defenses, mailed some of Mark's applications to other schools, and scored a touchdown for a southern university. Coach Mom nearly had a stroke. She raged about deadly tornadoes, vicious insects, and the harmful effects of too much deep-fried food. She then packed Mark a first aid kit complete with finger splints, a stomach pump, eighty-four different medications, and Chigger-X. (Chiggers are tiny southern parasites that deliver a flea-like itch raised to an exponential power of ten.)

Now, after two years, Mark is thriving down south and hasn't gotten chiggers even once. Figuring Mom's overdeveloped worry gene may have switched off, I decide to discuss college choices with Dad.

"How about Louisiana State University," I suggest. Mom appears so suddenly that she might have sprouted from the floor boards like some mutant flower—an angry mutant flower.

Her hands are welded to her hips and the fierce expression on her face would intimidate the toughest gridiron competitor.

“Hurricanes,” she snarls.

“The University of Oklahoma?” I propose.

“Tornado Alley,” Mom snaps.

I start to realize that my biggest problem in choosing a college will not be financial.

“Arizona,” I throw out desperately, “I like warm climates.”

Mom’s eyebrows hike all the way to her hairline. “You never drink enough water; you’d dehydrate and have to be hospitalized every other week.” I sigh and massage my temples. This ordeal may be enough to *make* me start drinking.

“You could have a doctor insert a central IV line and she could pack lots of refill bags,” Dad quips sarcastically

“And,” Mom adds, “your cousin, Chris, got stung by a scorpion in Arizona.”

“While camping in the desert,” I point out.

“Arizona *is* a desert!” Mom retorts.

“Florida,” I offer.

“Not only does Florida have mosquitoes carrying malaria and West Nile Virus, it also has the most lightning strikes of any state,” Mom deftly counters.

“And retirees with golf clubs,” Dad says in a mock horrified voice.

I groan. “Washington State?”

“Mount St. Helens!” Mom parries.

I try again. “What about California?”

Mom responds, “What about the San Andreas Fault and earthquakes? Wildfires, too!”

“Why don’t you just petition the governor of West Virginia to establish a university in the underground compound at the Greenbrier? It was built to withstand nuclear warfare,” Dad drawls sardonically.

I try to motion him into silence, but it’s too late. I see Mom’s protective-mode gears grind to a halt and her idea cogs begin to spin.

“Well,” Mom ponders, “the compound does have dormitories, a cafeteria, a hospital, a lab, and an operating room. The congressional meeting chambers could be used as lecture rooms.”

“The mascot could be a mole; go mighty Moles!” Dad exclaims.

Ignoring Dad’s comments, as she has done for more years than I can remember, Mom continues, “Maybe I should petition the governor and the State Board. There are bound to be other parents who are worried about their children’s safety and would support the idea.”

“Well, speaking of children’s safety, did you know that Mark was applying to study in Germany this summer?” Dad asks innocently. I can tell by the gleam in his eye that he’s just found a zinger of a plan in the back of his play book. I sense another quarterback sneak.

Mom snaps to attention. “Germany? They just recently thwarted a terrorist plot there. I’ve got to call Mark right now!”

Wearing an expression befitting a Spartan facing invading Persian soldiers, Mom whips out her cell phone and marches outside, where cell service exists, to convince Mark that he will never make it back from Germany alive.

Dad winks and clicks his laptop mouse several times. “Here are the online applications for your top four choices. Let’s finish and e-file them before Mom comes back.” As we work frenziedly, we hear snatches of Mom’s loud, long lecture to Mark, “...terrorist

plot...transatlantic flight...engine failure..." Soon my applications are swiftly and surreptitiously sent into cyberspace.

A few minutes later, Mom storms in and fixes Dad with a scorching glare that could melt the hard drive of his laptop and cause his person to spontaneously combust. "Mark said that I was being 'excessively paranoid,' and that you've known about the Germany application for a month," Mom growls. Dad's survival instinct kicks in and he wisely takes the "Fifth," refusing to further incriminate himself. Mom then suspiciously checks the outgoing mail stack to make sure Dad didn't slip in any "unapproved" applications while she was outside. When she is satisfied that none exist she says, "I'm going to draft that letter to suggest using the Greenbrier facilities for a new state college now. Don't try anything deceitful while I'm out of the room."

Dad nods his solemn consent, but when Mom's back is turned he shoots me a sly grin, certain that he's scored a touchdown for the opposing team again. I myself silently pray that some vicious internet virus won't sabotage my applications. Otherwise, my college quest might end with Coach Mom making sure that I'm a member of the first class of West Virginia's Greenbrier Underground University. Go Moles