

## Introduction

We are proud to present the anthology of the 2007 West Virginia Young Writers contest. It showcases the stories of 24 students who first won in their counties in their age divisions and then won in the state contest. These Young Writers represent 21 counties from around the state. The West Virginia Young Writers Contest has honored good writing by our state's students in grades one through twelve for 23 years. The contest is an initiative of the West Virginia Writing Project sites: The NWP at WVU, CWVWP, MUWP and satellite site, Coalfield Writers. The 2007 contest was directed by the Central West Virginia Writing Project, Barbara Holmes, Director, and by the West Virginia Department of Education, Terry Reale, Coordinator of English and Language Arts.

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## **The Beaver Dam**

1<sup>st</sup> Place

Friedrich Turner

Marlinton Elementary School, Pocahontas County

Grades 1& 2

Once there was a lonely beaver who had no friends because he was too shy to talk to anyone. He lived in a wide, quiet lake in the Appalachian Mountains. A group of eleven beavers were working with him on a dam.

One cold, misty winter morning while everyone else was sleeping, he crept out of his lodge and started working on the dam. Soon other beavers woke up and started working with him, but they didn't even say good morning. As the sun shimmered over the cold, deep lake, a bright orange fox trotted across the shore. As soon as the lonely beaver saw him, he smacked his heavy, hairless tail on the dam as a warning. Danger! Danger! All the beavers hurried to their warm, safe lodges.

The next day the fox was gone. The lonely beaver didn't work on the dam at all that whole day because his tail was wounded from smacking it on the spiky wood of the dam, but still not one beaver had said, "Are you ok?"

Months passed and it was summer. The dam was finished and everyone was sunbathing on the hot, dry shore. It soon was dark and the beavers went into their lodges for the night; all except the lonely beaver. The beaver heard a loud cracking sound. His ears stuck up with anticipation. He saw the dam was cracking! Water was pouring out! He quickly plugged up the rapidly spreading cracks. The other ten beavers were frozen with fright. After he plugged up the hole, everyone cluttered around him.

"Thanks for saving the dam," said the other beavers. The beaver was happy because they had finally talked to him. Now he had friends, and he wasn't lonely anymore.

## **Lefty and Righty**

2<sup>nd</sup> Place

Emily Bevins

Neale Elementary School, Wood County

Grades 1& 2

Lefty and Righty went for a ride in a woman's car. They were a pair of pretty blue sandals on their way to a new home and couldn't wait to get out of the bag that they were sharing with the other sandals, shoes, pants, and shirts. The woman got the bag out of the trunk of the car and took it into the house with her two little girls.

Once inside the little girls started taking the items out of the bag. They pulled out the shirts, pants, shoes, and sandals. All of the items landed in a pile on the carpet. The older girl, whose name was Emily, reached into the bag and pulled out a pretty blue sandal. That sandal was Lefty. Lefty was so happy to finally come out of the bag. Lefty didn't see Righty anywhere but thought that maybe he was mixed in with the shirts, pants, shoes, and other sandals. The little girls started trying on the shirts, pants, shoes, and sandals. Emily, the older girl, reached for Lefty to try the sandal on her left foot. She reached down to put the right sandal on but discovered that the sandal wasn't there. Lefty heard Emily ask her mom if she had seen the right sandal.

Her mom replied, "No."

Her mother started searching the pile. Her mother could not find the right sandal anywhere. Lefty became scared. How would he be able to do his job without Righty?

Meanwhile, Righty realized he was on the ground. He somehow had fallen out of the bag. He had landed under a tree near a trashcan. The family dog was smelling around the trashcan and spotted Righty. Righty was scared! The dog grabbed Righty with his mouth and carried him into the house through his doggie door. Everyone was asleep except Lefty. Lefty was so happy to see Righty.

When it was morning, Emily found Righty. Emily was so happy to have both sandals. Finally, Emily got to wear her pretty sandals.

## **The Missing Stripes Mystery**

3<sup>rd</sup> Place

Joey Gallo

Flemington Elementary School, Taylor County

Grades 1& 2

Doesn't everyone just love going to the colossal zoo filled with incredible animals? Zoey the zebra lives in the wildlife zoo. He enjoys watching the people walk by his cage and look at his magnificent black stripes.

One day while Zoey was asleep the friendly zookeeper repainted his filthy white fence. When Zoey awoke he rubbed against the wet fence because his back was itching. He looked at his back and all his stripes had vanished. He was terrified! Where could they have gone?

Zoey went to ask the majestic lion, the enormous horse, and the frolicking monkeys if they had seen his missing stripes. They each replied that they had not seen his disappearing stripes.

Next Zoey went to see the gigantic elephant to ask if he had found his lost stripes. The elephant's long nose began to tingle because he was allergic to paint. Suddenly he began to sneeze. Water shot out of the elephant's trunk like a speeding bullet! As he sneezed and sneezed, Zoey became drenched.

After the elephant had calmed down, he opened his eyes and was astonished! Zoey's stripes had returned.

"Elephant, elephant, my gorgeous stripes are back!" Zoey shouted. He was happier than a chimpanzee in a banana tree! Zoey thanked the elephant for helping him solve the mystery of the missing stripes.

## **How Coal Came to West Virginia: A Pourquoi Tale**

1<sup>st</sup> Place

Cody Osborne

Brushfork Elementary School, Mercer County

Grades 3 & 4

Many, many moons ago, when the earth was new, The Great One began admiring his beautiful handiwork. One of his favorite places in all the whole wide world was West Virginia. He loved the beautiful mountains, the sparkling clear streams, and the tall forests. Of course he was especially proud of all the animals that roamed the heavenly land. As he was walking up in the West Virginia hills one day, he came upon a family of bears. Those bears were grumbling about their bright white fur. “We love our thick, warm fur, but we can’t hide in the forests,” they complained to The Great One. He listened patiently and agreed to find a solution to their problem.

After thinking for a few minutes, The Great One said, “Bears, I have some leftover paint from coloring the night sky. Let’s give all of you a nice coat of pitch black paint, so you can hide in the shadows of the maple trees.” And before you could say mountaineer, the bears were a beautiful glossy black. But of course, being bears, they lumbered off to hunt for lunch before they were quite dry. As they bounded across the hills, black paint droplets fell from their backs and trickled across the land. The shiny black paint seeped into those West Virginia mountains – way, way down into the ground.

The Great One watched with a big smile on his face. He was pleased with the black bears and didn’t mind that paint was dripping into his hills. Who knew that millions of years later, those bits of dried black paint would be dug out of the mountains to help all of us West Virginians? To this day, The Great One and the bears are still smiling in the hills. Yes, that’s the almost heavenly tale of how coal came to West Virginia.

## **A Smart Mouse**

2<sup>nd</sup> Place

Morgan Smith

Midway Elementary School, Lincoln County

Grades 3 & 4

One cold, crisp, morning I came to school and walked into my classroom. I was trying to get warm when I glanced into my basket, “Yikes!” “What are you doing in there little fellow?” “Well, I was taking a nap until you woke me up.” “This is my house,” said the mouse. I couldn’t believe that I was having a conversation with a mouse.

“You can talk!” “Sure, I can.” “I should have a college degree from WVU, since I spent four years in Professor Chan’s desk drawer,” said the mouse. “The Westest is about one week, do you think that if I take care of you, that maybe you could help me,” I asked. “Sure,” replied Steve, the mouse.

One day before the Westest, I took Steve to my room. He saw that it was done in WVU colors. Steve said, “This brings back memories.” I decided to ask Steve about fifty questions to see how smart he was. He got all of them right. Mom and Dad didn’t know that I had a mouse in my room. I knew that if I got caught, I would be busted. While we were watching TV, Steve wanted some snacks. I asked him what he would like to have. He said, “A few cooking crumbs and some cheddar cheese would be good.”

The next day we went to school. Steve and I were ready to take the test. Mrs. Pauley gave us the Reading part of the test first. I didn’t need any help on it. Next, she gave us the Math part of the test. I needed some major help. Steve gave me the answers. Then on the next to the last problem, Steve sneezed. I looked down in my basket and told him to be quiet, but about that time, Mrs. Pauley looked in my basket and saw Steve. She asked me what a mouse was doing in my basket. I said, “Giving me answers, I guess.” Mrs. Pauley put Steve in a box. She let me keep him, but I had to take him home.

I had to take the test over. I did real well. I know now that it pays off not to cheat. I don’t know that I was thinking.

## **The Door of Magic**

3<sup>rd</sup> Place

Karlee Hinkle

North Fork Elementary School, Pendleton County

Grades 3 & 4

I was trying to find my favorite toy in my closet. I opened the door and began looking when I noticed something I had never seen before. In the back wall was a tiny door with a shining golden doorknob. Where had it come from and where would it lead?

I slowly opened the door. A bright light filled the room. I took one step inside but as I did I was sucked from my closet. I looked around frantically. Everything was dark. It took my breath away. I tried to find a way out. Hearing a screech, I jumped forward. I felt something dry beneath my foot. Then everything became bright again. What I saw was amazing!

A light blue sandy beach lay in front of me. “This is unbelievable!” I whispered. An ocean, purpled by the morning sun, lay ahead of me. A bird flew by overhead. I couldn’t figure out what kind it was. I walked up to the ocean water. The sun was rising quickly. A forest of pal trees lay to my right, and the beach was as far as I could see to the left.

I went into the forest first. There were exotic plants everywhere. I went deeper into the palms and saw the weirdest creatures. I saw a bright purple lizard with orange spots and a red owl with green streaks sat in the tree above me. A yellow, dog-looking thing zigzagged through the trees. Ahead, I saw a tree bent over like a door. I walked through it and stepped on some twigs. The ground cracked and gave way. I tumbled onto the ground landing on my back. It took a moment to regain my breath, and I sat up.

Around me were ice glaciers reaching up to the sky. I realized I was wobbling and looked down. I was on a boat. It was quiet until beside the boat, bubbles were floating to the surface. Suddenly, a flash of black appeared beneath my boat. I flew into the air. I realized after I passed the first glacier that I was back in the forest again. I didn’t land until I was back on the beach. I stepped into the waves. The water was warm

beneath my feet. I stood back then, ran, and jumped into the water. I swam out a little way started floating on my back. It was peaceful.

I started to swim back but my foot felt stuck in something. I pulled myself forward but I was pushed downward. It felt like weights were on my shoulders. I sunk down, down, down. I couldn't breathe. I saw a bright light and closed my eyes. I felt strange.

I felt ground beneath my feet. When I looked around, I was back in my room. I jumped for joy! My clothes were still wet from the adventure. I changed my clothes.

Now, what had I been looking for? My game. Where could it be?

## Paw-Print Notes

1<sup>st</sup> Place

Sage Smith

John Adams Middle School, Kanawha County

Grade 5 & 6

“Sit!” Molly yelled at her border collie, Sky. But she just stared up at her with big, brown, clueless eyes and wagged her tail. “Dumb dog,” Molly mumbled. It was useless. She had done everything she could all week to teach this dog one simple command, but the dog didn’t give her the time of day.

It was now 10:00 pm. Molly yawned and crept into bed. She was so frustrated with Sky that she couldn’t fall asleep. She had never liked Sky, from the moment her dad had brought the puppy home. Molly wanted a cat, not a dog.

What had her father told her to do when she was angry? Write it down on paper. Yes, that was it. Molly crawled out of bed and sat down at her desk. She scribbled down on a piece of paper these words:

*Why is Sky not listening? Why doesn’t she understand?*

Then Molly went back into her bed, put the note on the nightstand, and fell asleep. But a cool wind blew through the crack in the window, and the note floated down next to Sky’s bed.

The next day, Molly climbed out of bed and stepped on something that crackled. She bent down and picked it up. It was a note – to her. It said:

*Dear Molly,*

*I’m sorry that I made you mad, but I didn’t understand the command.*

*You see, my previous owner used hand signals. If you lift your right hand, I’ll sit.*

*Your dog,*

*Sky*

Molly stared at it in disbelief. Sky had written her back? It wasn’t possible. But there was the evidence, right in her hand.

Molly thought about it all day, and she got in trouble at school because she wasn't listening. When she got home, she went straight to Sky. She raised her shaky right hand. Sky sat.

That night Molly wrote a note that said this:

*Dear Sky,*

*What do you do during the day while I'm gone?*

*Your owner,*

*Molly*

She laid it down right next to Sky's bed and fell asleep. When she woke up, there was a new piece of paper. . . . Her eyes scanned the words:

*Dear Molly,*

*I usually roam the town, have a daily chat with the lab across the street, and stop by the butcher's shop to have some leftovers. Then I go back home. Every week the town dogs have a meeting to discuss certain things. Sometimes I'll chase a car, but that's only when I feel energetic.*

*Your dog,*

*Sky*

*P.S. Could you walk me soon? Then I wouldn't feel so energetic.*

Molly grabbed the leash and hooked it onto Sky's collar. She always knew Sky wanted to walk, but for some reason seeing it make her do it. She walked Sky and had a lot of fun.

Slowly Molly and Sky became closer. Molly wrote notes to Sky every night, and Sky always wrote back. They took daily walks and spent more than half the day together on weekends. Soon Molly loved dogs, but most of all, she loved Sky.

One cold, winter night, Molly had just written a note and gotten into her bed. In about fifteen minutes she was asleep. Five minutes later, the door creaked open and her dad stepped in. He tip-toed toward the sleeping dog and read the note. Then he stuck it in his pocket, wrote a response, and tip-toed out, closing the door behind him.

Molly never knew.

## **Three Wishes for Our World**

2<sup>nd</sup> Place

Addie Lancianese

Beckley Stratton Middle School, Raleigh County

Grade 5 & 6

Great Uncle Reed could tell I was disappointed as he handed me a rusty golden lamp with a curved spout and looped handle. This was my birthday gift?

“I thought you might like this,” Uncle Reed said. “I bought it at a bazaar in the Middle East when I fought in the Sinai War over forty-five years ago.”

I tugged at the grimy, golden lid. “Thank you,” I mumbled. Uncle Reed just winked mysteriously and took a bite of cake.

The next day before school, I excused myself from the breakfast table and crept upstairs to my bedroom. I sat on my bed with a tattered, old t-shirt I found in my closet. Maybe if I cleaned the dirty lamp up a bit it would look better. I began to scrub my gift vigorously with the old shirt.

Suddenly, the lamp began to shake violently. An orange glow erupted from the spout and I dropped it in terror. The lid burst off, hitting the wall with a thump. It was like an earthquake! I let out a scream as I covered my head with my hands. What was going on?

As suddenly as it came, the shaking stopped. My hands were still atop my head when I felt a gentle tap on the shoulder. Expecting to see my mother or father, I looked up to see a tall man with baggy red pants and a purple vest. He was bald except for one long ponytail on the back of his head. His arms were crossed in front of him.

“Hello,” said the man. “I am the genie, your genie. My duty is to grant you three wishes for rubbing the lamp and setting me free.” I was astounded. This was just like a fairytale! “Any wish?” I asked. “Any wish,” the man replied.

What could I wish for? There were lots of things I wanted: money, toys, or clothes. How would I choose? I told the genie I had to go to school and I would rub the lamp and tell him my wishes when I got home. He poofed back into the lamp as I headed out the door and onto my school bus.

The day passed by slowly. On the school bus home I sat in front of two pretty girls. I overheard their conversation by accident.

“I wish my daddy would come home,” said one girl. “Where is he?” asked the other. “He is fighting in Iraq,” answered the first. “I’m so scared.” I couldn’t hear any more. The bus stopped in front of my house so I leapt off and ran to the door.

When I entered the house, I saw my mother and father watching television in the living room. I heard sounds of gunshots coming from the speakers. My mother turned off the set. “I just wish the world was more peaceful,” she told my father. That gave me an idea... I ran upstairs and eagerly rubbed the lamp. Soon, the genie was standing in front of me. “Your wishes?” he asked. “First,” I said, “I wish for all of the soldiers to come back from Iraq. They are mommies and daddies and sons and daughters. They need to be with their families.” “Wish granted,” said the genie. “My second wish is to have world peace. There is too much violence and crime in this world.” “Wish granted,” replied the genie. “And your third wish?” “Oh, I’ve got something in mind!” I said thoughtfully. An hour later I carried the wiggling lamp to the post office with the genie by my side. Mumbles and shouts of Arabic came from inside as I dropped the lamp in a box addressed:

Mr. President  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20500

I then popped the gift in the mailbox. Let’s just say Osama Bin Laden was never seen again!

I may not have wished for the material things I would have liked, but I certainly gave the world everything it needed; everything we needed. Soldiers were sent home, the world was forever peaceful, and the bad guy was trapped forever. At that moment, the air had never tasted sweeter!

## **Nobody Cared**

3<sup>rd</sup> Place

Nathan Spencer

Cheat Lake Middle School, Monongalia County

Grade 5 & 6

The sun rose in Blueclaw Forest. Life sprung from everywhere, just like it always did. Trees, bushes, and flowers burst into magnificent colors. Everything awakened – everything except the bats. The forest’s colony of bats was a shy, gentle group, only taking what they needed. Unfortunately, they needed more than the forest could supply.

“Sarkin wake up,” uttered bat council member, “It’s time for another raid.”

“Why do we have to steal,” moaned Sarkin.

“Because we can’t survive on just the forest bugs,”

That’s how it started, more times than not, as Sarkin strongly disagreed with the thievery of his colony, both because his claws were too weak to hold fruit, and because he knew that they couldn’t rely on it forever. But every morning, Sarkin gave in and soared with the rest of the colony to Mr.Thack’s farm.

They blazed through the air like knives, bolting from side to side, looking for ripe fruit. As always, they all grabbed a few pieces, digging their claws through the tough flesh of the plant, and carried the food back to the colony. Sarkin, though, was always laughed at and mocked, for he had fleshy claws, rather than the hard, sharp talons that the other bats had.

“This time I have to do it,” thought Sarkin, diving for a fruit at break- neck speed, “Then they won’t make fun of me.” His claws sank into the skin, and then rose out. He tried time after time, now crying. Why couldn’t he be like them? He left the fruit, just to get away, though he knew what awaited him back home. Hurt both physically and mentally, he soared.

“No this time I *have* to do it!”

He turned around, slicing through the wind. Sarkin’s claws crippled as they broke through the skin, weighing themselves down into the pulpy core of the fruit. His claws

bled and a bolt of sharp pain ran through his body. He thrashed wildly, but kept his claws, now caked in blood, in the fruit. Sarkin pulled himself through the endless farmland. He looked into the sky, his eyes blurred by tears. Nobody seemed to care. His parents had abandoned him at birth, leaving him to be torn apart by the pain of his differences. His vision blackened – and Sarkin collapsed.

Sarkin was wrong. People did care. Though his body was never found, Sarkin was given a proper funeral. The colony wept for him, remembering how they had treated him. The funeral was held near Mr.Thack's farm, just off from where Sarkin's body lay, invisible under the grainy dirt.

Sarkin's loss showed the colony how cruel they had been. No longer were young bats allowed to be left alone. The colony grew, both in maturity and in population. The Blueclaw colony had learned something that day – a little love can save a life. And though he didn't know, Sarkin had made a difference, which was just what he had always wanted to do.

## **Definition of a Hero**

1<sup>st</sup> Place

Chase Cain

New Martinsville School, Wetzel County

Grades 7 & 8

He passed away in the spring of 2006 after a twenty-five year battle with an incurable disease. He lives on in my memory as a remarkable hero and a terrific role model. It all started on a bright, warm Saturday morning. I asked my mom to take me and my batting net to practice. Baseball season was just around the corner, and I needed to loosen up. I was glad to see the deserted field, which would help with my concentration. Well, it was almost deserted. Sitting in the sun at the edge of the field was a man in a wheelchair. I could tell even from a distance that he was not only old but also very sick.

After practicing awhile, I sat down to rest on a bench near him. He looked at me, smiled, and said, “You know, if you dropped your left shoulder a bit and widened your stance a little, you might get more power on the ball.” I smiled back and trotted out to try it. It worked! I said, “Thanks,” and then my mom pulled up to take me home.

The next day I went back. I found myself hoping the old guy would be there. He was, and so began a friendship I will never forget. He asked me what I’d like to improve before the baseball season started. I said, “I sure wish I’d hurry up and get bigger and stronger.”

The next time I saw him at the field, he had a picture of a skinny kid in a football uniform and an old high school annual. The picture was of him in ninth grade. He said, “It’s not the size of the kid that counts most; it’s the size of the determination to do your best.” Then he showed me his annual. He had been first team in baseball, basketball, and football all through his high school years! He said more important than anything was his academic record: all A’s and B’s!

I kept on practicing, but I was more interested in talking. I found out he had been born in a small coalmining community. After high school, he served two years in the

Army during WW II. His unit was stationed in Iwo Jima ready to attack Japan when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima ending the war.

The next time I saw him, he had his college annual. He had graduated with a degree in chemistry. As I turned the pages, I saw that in addition to his challenging course of study, he had been on the starting team in baseball, football, and basketball all four years!

I could hardly wait for our next conversation. Many times he asked if he was boring me, and just as many times I assured him he was not. I learned that he had worked for forty-one years as an industrial chemist before he was forced to retire due to his illness. During this time he had coached Grasshopper basketball and took his team to the winner's circle many times. He had become an avid and excellent golfer also. Without emotion, he told me he had been diagnosed years earlier with an incurable, progressive, neurological condition.

At our last meeting before the first ballgame, I handed him a schedule. I tried to tell him how much his friendship meant to me. To my surprise, he said, "Would you mind if I came to some of your games?" Mind? I was beyond happy!

With what I knew was tremendous effort, he attended every home game on the schedule. When I would look across the field, he was always there in his wheelchair. Afterwards I would run over to him to ask what he thought about the game.

Eventually, he could no longer get around. He will never be recognized in textbooks or newspapers, but his efforts to be there for me make him my own personal hero. He showed me what it takes to succeed, not only in sports but also in life.

Thank you, my unforgettable friend.

## **My Home, My West Virginia**

2<sup>nd</sup> Place

Kristen Rose

Huff Consolidated School, Wyoming County

Grades 7 & 8

Coming home from school, I thought I might take the long way. Today was a beautiful spring day, and it was perfect for a walk through the trees. I found my secret dirt path, the one that was hidden between two bushy pine trees, and I only knew where its long, winding road led. I climbed up the hill where the road began, and I was on my way.

Many times before, I had come here to enjoy the day. Sometimes, I would just come here to sit and watch the wildlife roam by. Bluebirds and maybe a radiant red cardinal would fly into a nearby tree and sing a clear and crisp song, while I sat on my sitting rock, as I called it, and would drift off into my imagination. Sometimes, a deer would roam by, timidly eating the greenery around me. Many times, a squirrel or a chipmunk clambered into a nearby tree and watched me. Yes, this place is truly a beautiful place, with its many wildflowers blanketing the ground, its trees with their emerald leaves shadowing the path, and the sounds of wildlife all around me. This is my home, my West Virginia.

I began to cry when I stepped onto the path. Tomorrow would be the day that I would move away from West Virginia, and sorrow filled my heart. I thought one last walk would bring back the memories of my wonderful days here. I walked down the little dirt path that was barely visible to the naked eye, but I knew this place like the back of my hand. I traveled down the path until I came to my sitting rock. A tall willow hung its branches over top of my rock, its long, tentacle-like leaves hugging me all around. A mallard duck and a female were swimming in the pond nearby, quacking for their little yellow-tinted ducklings to come join them. All of the babies jumped in excitedly, except for one. The duckling would dip his webbed foot in the water, but he didn't seem to get the courage to dive into the pond. I laughed when he finally dove down into the water, so clear and as blue as the skies overhead. I walked to the edge of the pond and dipped my

feet into the mirror-like pond. Minnows were swimming all around and a beautiful bluegill was out near a log. The sun's warm rays kissed my face, and the cool breeze whipped my hair. I loved this place, so calm and soothing, and I was glad this was my home, my West Virginia.

I walked further down the path until I came to a meadow, so rich and green with life. A beautiful red tail hawk was circling above me, screeching to the sky. It finally landed in an oak tree, and I could see through his amber eyes, so beautiful and wise. I laid down in the soft grass, and butterflies flew all around me when I fell, fluttering their long, steady wings until they found a flower to rest upon. The grasses tickled at my face, and yellow bees were flying through the sky. I didn't want to leave this place, this little piece of heaven on Earth, but I was expected to be home by six. Tears began to fall from my eyes. I knew that tomorrow would be horrible. I was leaving this beautiful place, and I was never to come back. We were moving away, and this would be my last time on this path, the one place no one but I knew about. As I walked home that day, I looked up to the sky and saw the most beautiful sight. A sunset was slowly sinking into the Appalachian Mountains, and the sky looked like a rainbow, fading from blue into yellow into orange. Not a cloud was in the sky, and my heart filled with wonder. My mind went back to the baby duckling. I realized that all humans are like that, afraid of something new and unknown, but it all works out in a special way. I'll miss this wonderful place.

## **Revenge of the Numbers**

3<sup>rd</sup> Place

Jonathan Scott Rhudy

Shady Spring Middle School, Raleigh County

Grades 7 & 8

Anxiously waiting for the winning Powerball numbers to appear, Harry stared at the television screen hanging above the checkout counter in a Little General BP Station. He glanced down at his ticket; his first and second numbers matched the ones on the bright screen. He felt a twinge in his heart.

He watched as his third and fourth numbers popped up next. After having purchased a single Powerball ticket every week for the past twenty years, he never had four numbers come up. His heart began to beat faster.

The screen flashed and 32 jumped up as the fifth number. He did a double take at his ticket. He thought his heart was going to burst. It seemed like an eternity before the red Powerball popped into place in the lottery machine.

“And the Powerball number is 48,” the announcer said.

Harry closed his eyes. He couldn't even remember what his Powerball number was. He had let the machine do a quick pick. Slowly he opened his eyes to look at the final number on his ticket. The number 48 was now as clear as a supermodel's face. He was the \$350 million dollar winner.

He wanted to scream, but fear suddenly gripped him. At 78, he wouldn't be able to defend himself from an attacker. The cashier was totaling an elderly lady's groceries and the only other person in the store was a businessman in line to buy a newspaper. Harry finally relaxed, yet he still didn't want anyone to know he held the winning ticket in his brown-spotted hands.

Suddenly, images of wealth came rushing in. He envisioned himself on a Royal Caribbean cruise ship sailing south of Jamaica. He was eating medium rare prime ribs with tons of A1 steak sauce, escargot, and a layered cake covered with chocolate mousse. He saw himself lying next to the pool sipping lemonade and watching scantily-clad young ladies splashing in the chlorine-filled water.

The clang of the cash register snapped him out of his trance. Harry's heart rate began to increase rapidly before he tried to imagine what else he could do with his massive fortune.

Next he saw himself traveling around the world, visiting the Seven Wonders. His first stop led him to the Great Pyramids of Egypt. He then traveled to Olympia, Greece, to see the Statue of Zeus. His third stop was the Hanging Gardens of Babylon in Baghdad. Next, he became engrossed by the magnificent Mausoleum at Halicarnassus. He wound up at the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus, Turkey. He sailed across the ocean to see the Lighthouse of Alexandria and finally stopped at the Colossus of Rhodes.

"Sir, are you all right?"

Harry slowly looked up at the cashier. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw that the other customers had left. What he didn't realize was that his right hand, the one that held the winning ticket, was clutching tightly against his chest. His breathing had become shallow. He couldn't speak. The young girl moved as quickly as a gazelle from behind the counter and wrapped her thin arms around Harry. "Are you OK?" she asked again. He looked into her eyes but could not speak. Another worker came from the stock room.

"Call 911!" the young cashier shouted. "I think he's having a heart attack."

The girl was not strong enough, and Harry slumped to the floor, the Powerball ticket still in his hand. He watched through a haze as the paramedics finally arrived and began their work. He wanted to tell them all the things he wanted to do, but the words would not come. Finally, the EMTs placed Harry on the stretcher and began to roll him out the double glass doors to the awaiting ambulance.

The last thing he saw was the bright stars in the dark sky, and slowly his dreams faded to black. As the paramedics rolled his now lifeless body across a bump on the sidewalk, Harry's arm fell to the side. The tight grip released and a sudden gust of wind picked up the tiny slip of paper he held in his hand and carried it off into the chilly night air.

## **The Promise**

1<sup>st</sup> Place

Casey Pifer

Jefferson High School, Jefferson County

Grades 9 & 10

*“I met God’s Will on a Halloween night. He was dressed as a bag of leaves.”*

The last few notes of the woman’s voice rang through the small ‘hunk of junk’ I called my car as the song ended. My body shook heavily with sobs, and I struggled to keep control over the wheel of my car. A few tears fell into my lap, and I looked away from the rain pounding and splattering on the windshield to switch off the radio. The song playing had been about a little boy with muscular dystrophy who had changed somebody’s life. This reminded me of somebody so much that my heart ached. *My brother.*

The words floated in the air like humidity in the hot summer sun.

*Carson.*

His name hung in my mind. I sucked in a deep breath of air and held it inside. Now that his name was there, memories of my little brother flooded uncontrollably to me.

*“Jackie!” The tiny boy ran into my room with a smile as bright as the sun itself; the only things hindering him were the heavy braces on his legs. Struggling to get atop my bed, he pulled breathlessly on my pant leg. “Jackie, Jackie, JACKIE!” He screeched joyfully.*

*I picked him up, “Whatty? Whatty? WHATTY?” I shouted back jokingly.*

*“Come here,” he demanded, already struggling out of my lap and off the bed. “I got something to show you,” he said matter-of-factly as he pulled persistently on my hand.*

*Grinning, I followed the four year old little boy out of my room, down the stairs and out of the back door. My brother stopped short and pointed to the sky, his dark curls falling away from his face as he tilted his head back. I followed the direction of his finger and realized his excitement. A rainbow. “It’s beautiful, baby,” I whispered, my smile as big as his own.*

*“See?” he panted. “I knew you would like it,” he said, looking up at me, thrilled with my pleasure. His eyes sparkled with a question. “But what is it?”*

*Remembering what our grandfather had told me when I was little, I answered him. “It’s a rainbow,” setting him on the rail of the deck and giving him a little squeeze. “It’s God’s way of telling us he loves us.”*

A roll of thunder broke above me and brought me back to my senses. Ahead of me, a black hearse was slowly driving, and behind me there was a long funeral procession of cars. I glanced into my rearview mirror just long enough to see my tear soaked face. I smacked the palm of my hand onto the steering wheel, trying to somehow chase the memories away from me. It was useless. Memories of my little brother poured through my head like sand through a sift. The day he was born. The first time he said my name. Finding out about the muscular dystrophy. Helping him learn to swim. The day he died.

I was slowly moving toward the cemetery, and as the memories finally passed, my tears slowed. When we came to a stop in the driveway I slumped down in my seat and took a breath. I quickly swept my hand across my cheeks, trying to erase the traces down my face. Sighing in defeat, I opened the car door to get out. Alaina was standing outside of my car with an outstretched hand. My best friend pulled me from my car and into a sympathetic embrace. She slipped her arm through the crook of mine, and we walked silently, heads down, to the grave.

As we quietly sang every verse of Amazing Grace, I became aware of the rain slowing and finally coming to a stop. Obviously noticing this too, Alaina lowered the umbrella, and I felt the sun above me. Puzzled by the sudden halt of the three day downpour, I blinked. Still mumbling the words of the song, I searched the sky. There it was. It was the brightest rainbow I had ever seen, brilliant against the pale sky. Drawing in a sharp breath, I recalled the last minutes I had shared with my brother.

*“Jack?” He had whispered when I walked into the tiny white hospital room.*

*“What is it, Ace?” Nearly choking on my words, but managing to make them sound normal.*

*“Do you think...” he stopped and struggled for enough breath. “Do you think God will let me send you a rainbow? You know...so I can tell you how much I love*

*you?” My eyes filled with tears as I tried to answer this remarkable little boy, my brother.*

*“I’m sure it won’t...be a problem.” I swallowed hard and felt the first tear roll down my cheek. Shaking my head, “All you have to do is ask.”*

*“Okay then... I will. I promise.” The faint glimmer of a smile played at his lips as he closed his sparkling green eyes for the last time.*

Now, staring at the shimmering rainbow, I smiled for the first time in what felt like ages. A warm happiness spread through me as I realized that everything was going to be okay. I knew it would be. It had to be. If Carson could send me this miracle, I could make it through this short lifetime and make the most of it. Of course, I would miss my brother. But never again did I cry about him leaving us. I knew he was in a better place, and I would just have to be patient until I could see him again.

## **A Life Taking Sickness**

2<sup>nd</sup> Place

Samantha Simmons

Cameron High School, Marshall County

Grades 9 & 10

I was 12 years old, sitting in my cousins' house playing Play Station. Nothing was bothering me other than the fact my dad was still in ICU and wasn't getting any better. I rarely got to see him; I was lucky enough to stay with him one night, but he was unresponsive, and the only reason we got to stay was because his temperature was really high, and something was wrong.

As I sat thinking about him, how I never got to talk to him since he was on all these machines, I couldn't think of the last time I heard him say, "I love you" to me. He was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin's Disease when I was about nine or ten years old, and since then it had been like a roller coaster with his health. While he was in the hospital, we sometimes had to wear masks because his immune system was, well, practically gone. About two years later, he had come down with Leukemia which took a lot out of him, the chemotherapy, blood transfusions and just being sick all the time. I always visited him in the hospital. I called it my second home because I was up there almost every day. We actually spent birthdays, Christmases, Thanksgivings and any other holiday you could think of in his room. Even though it wasn't the best place to celebrate these things, I didn't care; I loved being with my dad. I was always the one to cheer him up and make him laugh, and I wouldn't leave until I had given him a hug and a kiss. Just the sound of his voice made me feel so happy, hearing him call me Sissyboogers which was a little nickname he gave me. I was the happiest girl, I was a daddy's girl, and he was my life. I finally came back from my little trance and went to jump into the shower, but before that, my life changed...and I didn't even know it.

After my shower, I got my nightclothes on and walked out into my uncle's living room. I just stopped and stared at everyone's bloodshot eyes and the tissues they were holding; I knew something was wrong. As I sat down beside my mom, I turned and asked her, "What's wrong, Mom?"

She just smiled and choked out the words, “Your dad was a great man...”

I couldn't hear anymore. I ran back to where my cousin Megan was still playing Play Station with her boyfriend, Trevor. I was trying to brush my hair, but I couldn't stop crying. Finally Megan asked me what was wrong. I couldn't get myself to say it, but somehow I managed.

“My dad...he...passed away today,” I said as I started to fall to the floor. Trevor came over and picked me up and just held me there, tight in his arms as we both cried. Trevor was like my brother, and he loved my dad just as much as I did, and I knew he was hurting. All we did that night was stay close to each other and cry or think of memories of my father, but I knew one thing for sure, I didn't think I was going to make it.

I lay there wide-awake as everyone else slept. I could not even force myself to sleep. All I could think of is the one time I walked in and said, “I love you, Dad.” He couldn't respond, of course, but his heart rate jumped up, and a smile appeared on his face. Reality was setting in. I couldn't hug, say I love you, or even hear my father's voice anymore. I was on the verge of just giving up, laying there, hoping I would die so I could be up in heaven with him.

Two days went by, and I still hadn't been able to sleep. I couldn't concentrate, and it was the night before the funeral. I was staying at my aunt's, so I was lying on the floor. Somehow I finally cried myself asleep at six in the morning when I had to wake up at seven. I had the strangest dream, but it would make my grieving so much easier...

I dreamed I was at a skating party, which was the weirdest part, but I was skating to the bathroom. I looked, and there was my dad! I starting freaking out, because I knew he hadn't come back to life, so I followed him.

Finally he stopped and turned around and said to me, “I love you, Sissyboogers; trust me, everything will be fine. I know you will miss me, and I'll miss you, but I have to go. Goodbye now.” Then he hugged me, and I felt someone shaking me to wake up. I wanted to stay in that embrace forever and just leave the world behind me, but I knew it wouldn't happen. That was the last time I ever heard his voice, the last time I felt his hug. I will always remember that dream.

After that one dream, I could easily fall asleep at night. I kept thinking that the dream had brought a type of closure for me. It's amazing how we get to say goodbye to our loved ones, sometimes in person, and in my case, I got to say it through a dream. It was something I never heard of, but I'm glad I had that dream. Of course, I will always miss my father, but I will never forget how I got to say goodbye and the last time I got to hug my father.

## **Accident**

3<sup>rd</sup> Place

Ashley Kennedy

Big Creek High School, McDowell County

Grades 9 & 10

My eyes open, but it takes a few minutes before they can focus on my surroundings. This place doesn't look familiar; I don't believe I've been here before. I attempt to recall how I ended up here, but I can't remember; furthermore, I can't remember anything. "Where am I? How did I get here? Who am I?" I ask myself these questions with no response. Then I glance down and almost scream at the sight of my blood-covered hands. I begin to panic. What's going on here? What's happening to me? I attempt to clean my hands using my t-shirt, but it doesn't help much. Then I realize I have blood all over me. There's a lot of it, and it's beginning to dry. I guess that whatever happened, happened last night, and from the looks of things it seems to be about noon right now. After taking a few moments to try and clam down and think rationally I realize I'm in an alley. I can see the busy, noisy, city street filled with cars and people, but still none of it rings a bell. The alley is beginning to frighten me, so I dart onto the street. I don't know where I belong, where to go, or even where to start to try to figure this mess out. Wandering down the street, weaving back and forth through people, nothing seems to jog my memory. As I walk by a store window, I notice my reflection and realize that my head is bleeding, but it doesn't seem to be hurting. It's shocking to see the amount of blood on me and having no one on the street care, or even look at me in a suspicious manner, but then again in the middle of New York City that isn't unusual. As I'm studying my reflection, I see something behind me that catches my eye. It's a newspaper dispenser, and the front page headline is startling, it reads, "Crash Leaves Two Dead, One Hospitalized; Driver Still Missing." I rush over, struggling to take it all in. Urgently searching my pockets, I finally find enough quarters to purchase the paper. I begin to read the article. "Last night two vehicles collided following one driver's failure to stop at a traffic light. The truck slammed into the side of a car carrying a mother and her teenage son. The occupants of the truck included two females. The boy was rushed to the

hospital and is in critical condition. The mother and the female passenger of the truck died instantly. The female who was driving the truck was not at the scene when paramedics arrived. The witness who called 911 reportedly saw the driver flee the scene of the crash. Thus far, the police have not located the missing driver. The police believe that the driver was drinking because of the beer cans found in the floor of the truck. The police have a warrant for the arrest of the missing female; at this time her name is not being released...”

The utter shock that is washing over me causes me to almost drop the newspaper. “Is this the type of person I am, getting drunk, killing people, and just walking away?” Again I have no logical answer, at least not one that is comforting. It must be me, which is the only explanation I can come up with. It would explain everything. I think to myself, “I have to turn myself in; no matter what kind of person I was before, I can change now and the way to do that is to go to the police and tell them who I am.” I begin thinking of what I did to that poor boy, his mother, and to the woman in the truck with me. Thinking about them caused me to flip to the obituary section of the newspaper. Then I find what I am looking for. “Services for Miranda Miller, age 33, will be held tomorrow night at Thompson’s Funeral Home.” “Miranda Miller,” I say aloud. “She’s the mother that was driving the car, according to the article.” In my mind I have already decided to wait until after I stop by the funeral tomorrow before turning myself in. Although the newspaper gave me her name, it offered no help in figuring out my own. With every minute that passes I grow more frustrated with myself as I attempt to remember something, anything about my life. I continue to wander the streets desperately praying to come across something to trigger even the slightest memory. It continues to get later. My mind is heavy, thinking about the events and consequences tomorrow will bring.

It occurs to me that I’m planning to attend the funeral of this woman who I apparently killed, and I’m still covered in all this dried blood. Spotting a convenience store just down the street, it dawns on me that I could use their restroom to clean myself up and make myself presentable. I walk in and head straight toward the restroom. I close the wooden door behind me and progress toward the mirror. I splash cool water onto my face and try to wash the blood from my head. It seems to take forever, but finally most of the blood is washed down the drain. After getting as clean as I can, I unlock the door and

make my way toward the glass door that leads to the street. By the time I walk outside, it is completely dark. I find an alley to spend the night in. I wake up to find that I had slept through the night and most of the day; I need to get going. I quickly find the funeral home and walk in unnoticed before everyone arrives. When I get to the front of the room I brace myself and stare into the coffin. Something seems odd about her. She looks familiar for some reason. Then I realize that she is me.

## **RETURN**

1<sup>st</sup> Place

Stephanie Branham

Petersburg High School, Grant County

Grades 11 & 12

Honorable Mention Recipient of the  
2007 Barbara W. Walters Memorial College Scholarship

How quiet is Silence? In the darkness I can hear Silence as I've never imagined it. The sounds are powerful and thunderous, a constant ringing. As Silence becomes quieter, it grows ever louder. It is an oddity to me how intense no noise can torture the ears. It has never brought me to the point of insanity before this moment, a moment of Silent loneliness.

In the void of blackness in which I now stand, alone and thoughtful; my mind quakes as the mud of the earth trembles in times of chaos. In the Silence a stampede has overtaken my thoughts, forming whispers of unvoiced questions. My consciousness can supply no answers to their unknown entity.

Where am I? What is this darkness? What is this Silence? Why am I alone?

At last, I hear my footsteps crunching on the ground, and I feel my body move forward. If it is not that I stir to discover my whereabouts, then it is that I walk to end the lunacy of Silence. Though, I do not wish to answer the whispers that ask, "What is it underneath me?" I do not want to know what my feet are crushing. The very feel of the uneven ground makes my empty stomach churn and my numb fingers quiver. All I know is that I know nothing.

I am lost, I fear. Escape is unattainable. A path does not exist. Searching for a way out is likely impossible, for how can I find a road out of a place that I do not understand? How was I swallowed into such an abyss? Why am I here, where no mortal eye can distinguish the sky?

Peace has escaped my soul. In this netherworld such a word has no definition. Peace exists on a plain where all evil has faded into the past, into the darkness. Light embodies the wonders of such a fantasy; shadow is its opposite, its malice and

confinement. One essence cannot exist without its mirror form. But why have I become a part of light's cruel counterpart? Is evil embodied within my heart? The only evil I do possess is greed, but it is that which lusts only for some sprinkle of smiling brightness.

I walk on. My footsteps echo. With my mind having been congested of thoughts, it is now I realize that I have scared Silence away. But if I stop ... it will consume me once more.

And so I walk on.

Ah, still I cannot deduce how I came to be in such a state of weariness, in such a foreboding place that seems to consume my energy. My life had been pure once; I was a glowing star amid savages of treachery. I spoke out when no other had voice. I listened when all else in the world seemed deaf to the cries of help.

But suddenly my pace dies. I feel weak. Fall do I to the ground. Silence deafens me, strangles me. I cannot breathe. Oh, how now did I come to this? What sickness is it that ails me here?

It is the darkness, the abyss that suffocates me. Within it I cannot speak. Yet what does that even matter? There is no soul with whom I may hold conversation. It is only I. Alone. Frightened.

I buckle in pain. The darkness distorts all thought, but above me shines a light, the grinning brightness for which I've waited so long. It is my escort, a ray to spread knowing of my condition into my now blinded sockets. So powerful an entity is the light that I must close my eyes, but in this moment, warmth courses throughout my body, breathing hope into my lifeless veins once more.

It is in this restoring moment that I pull myself back up, and my eyes peek from behind their membranes. The light is a constant throb, and as I walk toward it, I no longer hear footsteps. The echoes of my feet are heard as heartbeats. I had not realized the absence of breathing before now, how the rise and fall of my chest had not existed until now.

Life flows through my body once more, attacking the darkness as the light spread to eliminate the shadows. A rushing waterfall of warmth engulfs my bones, and movement becomes as simple as a pinning waterwheel. The prickling numbness that once harassed my extremities now recedes within the clutches of the darkness.

I walk on, and my ears are once again vessels that detect every slightest sound. A murmur calls out from the orb of light, its hands as if reaching out to me. A familiar voice within the whisper beckons to me, makes my heart swirl with new hope.

“James, come back.”

I run on.

“Don’t leave me, James.”

That voice. Oh, without knowing how, I know that voice. It comforts me, veils me in a mantle of security, envelops me in a shroud of bliss.

From out of the shadows behind me, my memories return in a flood of pulsing liberation, freedom from this nonexistence. I leap into the light and it swallows me up. For an instant I am an arctic wind, chilled yet howling to be alive.

When I next open my eyes, blurred faces and alien objects crowd me. A distracting beep thuds in my ear at a consistent rate. The haze soon fades and the countenances that I encounter all wear smiles across their lips and joyous tears streaking down their cheeks.

I feel a hand clasping my fingers. I look through a jungle of monitors and tubes to see a woman’s face. She laughs despite the numerous droplets smearing her visage. Tears shed in sorrow and fear.

“Oh, James.”

At last the doctors leave us, but the maddening Silence returns.

“Roxanne,” my voice crackles. “Please, it’s too loud in here. Say something.”

Her lips coil anew, and she begins to speak.

Peace.

I had gone to the Netherworld ... and returned.

## **My Grandpa, the Savior**

2<sup>nd</sup> Place

Shana Mounts

Chapmanville High School, Logan County

Grades 11 & 12

Honorable Mention Recipient of the  
2007 Barbara W. Walters Memorial College Scholarship

Food had piled in and more was coming. That's the silver lining of every funeral, I guess. Roast beef, peach cobbler, cherry cordials. Cherry cordials, those were his favorite. He would have the ones with the gel, not the cream. Maybe that's why I loved cherry cordials so much, because I loved him so much.

December 25, 1989, baby's first Christmas. It was my first Christmas. We weren't the wealthiest family in the world. As a matter of fact, I don't know that anyone in Dingess was very wealthy at that time. We lived on a hill in my grandparent's old, drafty house. Meg, a year older than I, was able to sleep with my mother in the front bedroom. I was too young to sleep in the bed with the two of them, and it was far too cold to sleep in my playpen away from the heat. With those things considered I was placed in the living room next to our little gas heater. A bright green "1:27 AM" glowed from the VCR, as I lay cold and shivering in my makeshift bed. Being our only source of heat, the little heater wasn't much help to that drafty, old house, and it wasn't much help to me. Cold, hard plastic is no place for a baby, so I decided to let the world know. Hearing my heartbroken cry, Grandpa came and lifted me from the cold and into his warm, white, cotton t-shirt. Knowing I couldn't take the iciness of my playpen and knowing he couldn't make it any better, he laid me in between him and my grandmother. I nestled into what would become my refuge for the few cold months that followed.

The drive to Dingess is terribly long. I hadn't made this journey since September. The leaves were beginning to fall, making it a bit more scenic and a bit more tolerable. At almost any other time this trip would be near unbearable. This particular trip was unbearable. It was now November, and the only thing bringing me back was the death of my grandfather. It is sad how time flies and it's sad how much I had hated this trip.

Grandpa always made the long drive tolerable. He would always have me captivated by stories of travel and adventure, most of which I figured he had made up. As he would talk he would slowly decelerate. He never noticed, but it always made me laugh quietly to myself. I remember, he'd be in the middle of some tall tale and then a sneeze would come on. You always had to be prepared for moments like these. He'd slowly start to suck in air and then in one quick forward motion he'd release the sneeze and accelerate by at least 10 miles per hour. The sudden force would shove me back into my seat and my Grandpa would let out a loud burst of laughter. I never knew how much I'd miss that laughter.

We slowly rounded the "never-ending curve" and I realized how far we had actually come. Right past the chickens and across from the cows sat my Aunt's little mobile home. I walked in and was nearly knocked over by the noise and overwhelming smell of cigarettes. The musky atmosphere hinted travel. I was greeted with hugs, kisses, and what seemed to be millions of condolences. While greeting my relatives, I spotted my grandmother at the kitchen table smoking her USA Gold's. I bent down to hug her and she looked up at me through tear-soaked eyes and said, "He didn't mean to leave us, Bug, he really didn't." I softly told her I knew, and she held me there for a few moments as we both gained our composure, ready to face the masses.

Grandpa was my savior throughout the early years of my childhood. I was quite possibly the clumsiest child in our family. Every time I attempted something, the result was always the same. I was bruised, broken, and scarred on more than one occasion. Being a mountain girl, I was always running around without shoes. My heels could take it; I was tough. I was proved wrong one summer afternoon, when my heels decided to fail me. I remember being chased, and then I remember a sudden sharp pain hitting my foot and shooting straight into my leg. I fell over and in tears cried out for help. Hearing my cry, Grandpa ran over and lifted me into that same warm, white, cotton t-shirt and away from the pain. This wouldn't be the last time he rescued me, or anyone else for that matter.

The days that followed his death were terribly painful. I've never been good at saying goodbye, and this goodbye was final. Family members sorted my grandfather's belongings. He had managed to pack tons of useless objects in that tiny little trailer of

theirs. It actually made me very angry to see these people messing with his things. In my eyes, everything needed to stay where it was. But, the truth of the matter was, he wasn't coming back to claim any of it. My mother had asked me what I wanted, if anything. At first I said nothing, but then I realized I couldn't let anyone else have the baseball game my grandfather and I had held so dear. That was the only thing I asked for and the only thing I received.

Every few days or so I'd walk to Grandpa's after he got off of work and we'd play baseball. He had a Super Nintendo, the second best game system in my opinion. We would always argue over who would play on the Braves' team and who would play on the other, slightly less cool, team. He would usually give in and I'd select the "A", and the game would begin. He was the best baseball player in the world, even if it was just electronic.

The wake and funeral went by in a flash. I kept busy and my best friends kept me strong. At the funeral my aunt told of a phone call she had received a few days before. A lady had called to offer her condolences and told my aunt a little story. The lady's five-year-old son had called her on the first of November in tears. Through sobs he told his mother that the mail-man had died. The lady then told my aunt that about a week before his passing, my grandfather, in the words of her tiny little boy, had saved his life. The little boy was riding his bicycle and hit a rough patch of gravel. He wrecked and slid into the middle of the road. My grandfather jumped from his mail truck, ran to the little boy and lifted him into that same comforting, warm, white, cotton t-shirt and out of harms way. As my aunt told this story, tears rolled down my cheeks. My grandfather, the savior.

I watched them lower him into the ground. I said my goodbyes, all the while my heart was ready to break through my chest. I'll never be able to really let go. I know that for sure. He was my rock, my hope, my inspiration. He was everything I had ever needed. He filled in for everything I had ever lost. He was the most brilliant and passionate man I have ever known. He'll always be the thing I miss the most.

**God's Gifts**

3<sup>rd</sup> Place

Kyrstin Myers

Hampshire High School, Hampshire County

Grades 11 & 12

Honorable Mention Recipient of the  
2007 Barbara W. Walters Memorial College Scholarship

“Ma! Ma, come ‘ere quick!

I felt my heart leap into my throat at the sound of my son’s frantic voice. My book dropped to the floor as I lurched to my feet and ran to the front door.

“What?” I cried. I slid to a halting stop on the front porch, nearly hitting him. “What, Seth?” My hand found its way to my chest, trying to still my racing heart.

“Look, Ma! It’s snowin’!” He all but shouted, jumping and pointing at the sky. I looked up and felt something cold and wet rest on my cheek. I smiled and looked back at my son.

His flaming red hair was dusted white, and his freckled cheeks were tinted a rosy pink.

“He takes after his father,” I mused in my thoughts. “Not only in his looks, but the way he speaks as well.”

“...He must dream a lot, huh, Ma?” I heard him say, bringing back reality.

“Who, honey?” I questioned curiously.

“God, Ma. He must dream a lot to think up such purty things.” He said with a smile.

My eyes widened in surprise as I stared down at my eight-year-old son. I couldn’t comprehend what had just happened. In the beat of a heart, my son had grown before my eyes.

I watched in awe as Seth took off running and jumping for joy when Toby, our dog, went bounding out to meet him. I backed up a few steps and sat down on the wooden porch swing.

“Seth! Be careful!” I called absentmindedly. My mind drifted back to last Sunday’s sermon at church. Father Nightroad had talked about the many ways in which God

worked. He claimed that most instances of God's work came through our very own children, but many were too busy to notice.

I focused on Seth as he tackled Toby and rolled around on the ground with him. I felt my brow furrow as I slipped back into thought. Seth was dyslexic, which pulled him from regular classes. However, it never kept him from trying. Every day he would come home from school and ask for help. He wanted to learn. He wanted to learn so he could be back with his friends.

Reading and writing were my favorite past times; of course, I agreed to help him. His father, Tim, always sat with us, helping where he could. Tim had been raised on a farm and had dropped out of school to help his own father. We were an odd couple, Tim and I, but we connected.

It was a year ago today that Tim was called out to serve our country. I had been devastated when Tim received the letter informing him that his service was needed. He had only one week before he was to leave in preparation for his turn in the war being fought overseas.

The week didn't last nearly long enough to satisfy any woman whose husband was leaving. The fear of losing Tim gripped me tighter than I would have imagined.

Before he was to leave, Tim and I stood together, Seth asleep in my arms, at the bus station. Neither of us said a word, for fear the other would cry. My lip was trembling as I looked up at my husband. He smiled gently and leaned forward, placing a kiss on my cheek.

"Don' worry. I'll be back before ya know it. Nothin's gonna happ'n to me, so don' be upset. You hafta be strong for Seth. Please. If you're sad, then I'll be sad. People shouldn' be sad when they know they'll see each other again."

I had nodded and blinked back tears, a smile forming. I knew he was right. We would see each other again; I had to be strong for Seth. I watched as Tim bent and kissed Seth on his head and then picked up his luggage. With a small wave, I watched my husband walk proudly forward to help keep us safe.

"Ma, what're ya smilin' fer?" I blinked and focused my eyes on the bright blue ones in front of me. They danced about in joy, which seemed to be radiating from him. I

couldn't help but let my smile broaden as I opened my arms.

"Nothing, honey. Mommy's just thinking about something, that's all. Come here a second. I want to ask you something." I said, shifting slightly on the swing. Seth smiled broadly and bounded onto my lap, curling into my arms. He leaned his head backwards onto my arm and looked up at me, eyes shining.

"Seth, where did you hear that God makes pretty things?" I questioned. My guess was that he learned it in his Sunday school class, but I was curious all the same. His smile broadened, dimples forming.

"Pa, told me." He said, looking away into the yard. My eyes widened slightly at the mention of Tim.

"Daddy told you that?" I asked, wanting to make sure. Seth turned his gaze back to me and nodded.

"Yeah, Ma. Pa told me that God made everythin' nice'n purty. An' that's why I have you, Ma. Pa told me that God made you nice'n special so that you could love me an' Pa lots'n lots. He also said that he couldn't thank God enough fer it."

I felt the tears spill down my cheeks before I had the chance to stop them. I pulled Seth close to me, burying my face into his unruly hair.

"Daddy's right, Seth. I do love you both lots and lots. And I can't thank God enough either for giving you both to me." I pulled Seth back to look at him. His brow was furrowed slightly into a look of puzzlement.

"Why ya cryin', Ma? Are ya sad 'bout somethin'?" He asked, reaching up and touching my cheek. I smiled and tilted my head into his hand.

"No, I'm not sad. I'm happy. I'm happy that I have so many wonderful gifts in my life."

## **The Seeds of Fate**

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Preston High School, Preston County

Honorable Mention Recipient of the

2007 Barbara W. Walters Memorial College Scholarship

Hundreds of dandelions spotted the wide open field that characterized the peaceful community. This field was conveniently placed between two houses in which a young girl, Maryanne, and a young boy, Timothy, resided. The two children would often play together, enjoying one another's company and finding comfort in their similarities. They both felt at home outdoors and had an equal taste for adventure—probably more adventure than was possible for the typical eight-year-old. Every day they would meet in their special spot where the grass seemed to be taller and easy to hide behind. Their imaginations controlled the day and sometimes even the night. Summer hours were spent chasing and catching lightning bugs until pure exhaustion took its toll. When bedtime called, they parted ways but were not separated for long, for when morning came, they would meet again.

One particular morning, Timothy arose a little earlier than normal. He had a plan in mind. He ventured out into the field on his own allowing himself time before Maryanne would arrive. He meticulously scoured the field in search of the perfect yellow dandelion. He caught a glimpse of one about 50 feet away and immediately began running toward it. When Timothy had his mind set on something, he got it. So Timothy carefully picked the dandelion and headed to the special spot.

“Good morning Maryanne; I picked this for you,” he said, handing her his premier choice dandelion.

“Wow,” Maryanne replied. “It's so pretty. Thank you. I'll have to tell Mom to put it in a vase for me,” she said with a smile. The two continued on with their usual routine. They skipped over to the tree house where they had a spectacular view of the blue sky scattered with birds. Even when a sudden downpour forced the children to run back to their homes, they giggled and played a game of tag along the way. Saying their goodbyes, they again parted ways. Maryanne had protected the dandelion from the rain and instantly

presented it to her mother with pride as she entered her home. She proudly displayed the lone dandelion on top of her dresser in a sparkling glass vase that she borrowed from her grandmother. She placed it in the sunlight in hopes that the dandelion would survive.

In a lot of ways, their young relationship was similar to the dandelion Timothy had picked for Maryanne. It was fresh and ripe, not too serious, but still beautiful in its own way. As they got older, their relationship continued to grow. Their bond was unbreakable, and they shared even more unforgettable memories. Every Fourth of July they would sit in their special spot and watch the neighborhood fireworks flashing in the sky. They were each other's first kiss, and even better, they were best friends.

When fall came, the once vivid yellow dandelions began to wither and turn to seed. This transformation of the dandelion seemed to directly coincide with a transformation taking place between Maryanne and Timothy. Suddenly, outside influences began to play a role in their relationship. School, friends, family, and tricks of the mind all seemed to affect them. Their bond had once been so unique and strong. Nothing else ever mattered, just as long as they could confide in one another then everything was good. Everything was right. But things aren't always that simple. Complexities love to work their way in where they just don't belong. And as much as a person can try, sometimes it's just too difficult to give these complexities the cold shoulder.

Time crawled by as the weeds in their relationship grew. They went their own ways, and started new lives filled with responsibility and maturity. Timothy began painting houses to fill his pockets. In the yard of his next home project was a seeded dandelion. He picked it up, slowly twirling it between his paint covered fingers. Memories of Maryanne came rushing back, as tears and a smile simultaneously came over his face. Taking a deep breath and closing his eyes, Timothy made a wish and released his breath—scattering the seeds and memories into the fall air.

The next summer, Timothy was traveling back home to visit his friends and family. Parts of the once open field had been taken over by new homes and landscaping. Still, the special spot remained. In an attempt to relive his warmest memories, the new, older version of Timothy revisited the patch of tall grass. He sat there for a few hours and began to doze off as dozens of thoughts ran wildly through his mind.

“Come here often?” asked a familiar voice.

Timothy jumped up from his comfortable spot in the grass and turned to see the familiar face that matched the voice. His eyes lit up with delight.

“Hey, Mom! I’ve missed you so much, so what did you fix for dinner tonight?” he asked jokingly.

“How about you stroll back over to the house with me, and we’ll see what I can do,” she replied.

Timothy opened the door ready to get to work on supper, but that would easily be delayed.

“Hi Timothy; I picked this for you,” Maryanne said, rising from the couch to hand him a yellow dandelion.

“Maryanne! How are you? How have you been? Are you doing alright? What are you doing back here?” The questions kept rolling, and Maryanne giggled.

Timothy and Maryanne spent the following hours discussing their lives and fond memories. Eventually, they inadvertently reached a sudden destination—their special spot. The years of walking that path had become so comfortable that their minds and legs easily guided them there. The weeds that had once grown in their relationship appeared to have only made them that much stronger. It was the Fourth of July. Maryanne and Timothy sat together fully content as the fireworks dazzled before them.

## **The Pawn**

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As I gaze down on the ruins of the town I once knew, I can't help but contemplate what would have happened if I'd acted sooner. I grasp my daughter's teddy bear, and my wife's locket. Tears weave pathways through the grit on my face. I would have orchestrated a stronger World Order, to govern the flaring tempers of aristocrats that had taken hold of their countries' respective seats of power. They bickered incessantly, in spite of the paper tiger that was supposed to unify us all. I would implore from this, that governments had been more forceful in their tactics to stop wealthy citizens from seizing the three countries through civil conflicts. I would have banned the weapons sales by opportunistic regimes. It's no matter; the thoughts and feelings of the pawn are never considered.

All of this started eight years ago. A small petroleum drilling firm was surveying at a spot where the three countries' borders met, when they struck black gold. Unbeknownst at the time, a multi-nation, semi-civil conflict would invariably ensue. Satellite imagery showed us all what lay unseen beneath the desert sands. A massive sea of crude oil sat underneath the ground, nearly half a mile deep and a thousand miles long. In their everlasting quest for wealth, aristocrats saw it fit that they should stake claim to the vast underground ocean of gold. They bought weapons stockpiles and employed their own armies, storming their countries' governments and overrunning the newly pacifistic states. The world had just tried to unite in pacifism, but in vain. If only the World Order had been better prepared for this unseen inevitability, innocent people would still be alive. It was then that the chess game was set.

I was a freelance special operatives agent, and began working for the mock head of my country, a man named Brailent Jordainian. I received good pay for my respectable position, and my name grew in notoriety. On one assignment, to take hostage an advisor to another country's leader, I overheard another soldier in my unit. My home city had

been stormed; buildings and homes had been destroyed. My family... I could only hope they were all right.

Inside the compound where we were to subdue and extract the man, paranoia clouded my thoughts; I hope... Anger welled inside me for even having to consider the idea. In a haze, I missed a simple motion sensor trip, and the alarm sounded. My unit was separated, and I was away from them at the moment. I was better trained than they, and quickly crawled up into a ventilation duct. I heard gunshots, and navigated the variable labyrinth of tubes leading to the place from which the shots had emanated. My unit lay bloodied and dying, slain without regret. The alarm stopped, and I slipped away into the brutal night. In this moment, I realized the ultimate futility of my situation. I no longer felt loyal to the façade of my country; righteousness seeped into my veins. The greed of man can destroy almost anything. I felt it due time for revenge. The pawn moves to contention.

I flung my rope down from a skylight on the roof of a military warehouse, landing silently upon a crate. I took ample amounts of explosives out through a loading dock, and commandeered a vehicle to carry them, but not before activating a few charge timers. As I rode off into the lucid desert sunset, I saw in the rear view mirror an explosion, and a rare smirk graced my dry, cracked lips. I crisscrossed the lands, untouchable in my moral stealth. A high ransom went up for me, and I found amusement in watching it rise weekly. The pawn strikes rooks, knights, and bishops.

I took an old mountain pass back to my hometown to elude detection. The anguish took its position again in the pit of my stomach, incessantly pounding at my gut. Many buildings lay in ruin, and the town was a shadow of how it once was. The bustling metropolis was reduced to rubble. The place I used to work at was still smoldering. My house and neighborhood in the suburbs seemed saved from the attack. On arrival though, my house lay empty, no sign of anyone. My daughter's favorite doll lay on her bed. I knew but one thing to do... take the aristocrat's headquarters who was guilty of this act of blatant terrorism. Jordainian.

The full moon shone bright onto the topless jeep I drove. I saw the massive edifice in the distance, and was sure of exactly where I would take it out. Like some phallic symbol, it stood in singularity against the flat desert, perched upon the belly of the

beast. It existed in duality, both a massive skyscraper, and a concealed petroleum derivative. I knew that the wretched old man dwelt in the top of his tower day and night, and the thought of his judgment comforted me. I snuck into the building from a window ten feet above the ground, first lowering my explosives onto the cold granite floor, then myself. The three guards were just a formality. I traversed the room quietly, reaching a brass elevator door. The elevators were drawn to the top floor to prevent invasion, and the staircases were locked. I pried a shaft open with much force, and tied my rope off. I plummeted into the compound's innards, with only a tiny light and my intuition. It was easy to discern the four giant support columns and I drilled tubes of high explosives into their very cores. For good measure, I planted peripheral charges on a few other support structures. Once I wired the charges to detonate in unison, I left the way I had come. The button was pushed. There rose a massive column of smoke and flame, then a thunderous roar.

Checkmate.

## **Red Bird**

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I never realized until recently how life so subtly foreshadows itself. Scattered throughout life are tiny bits of breadcrumbs that lead us on a path of enlightenment. Those crumbs are little pieces of puzzle that so annoyingly don't fit in the expected spots. Over time those pieces put themselves together and we see the full picture. What if we never asked to see the end result?

My story begins with a song. I was probably thirteen years old when I first heard the tune "Red Bird". I had just begun learning fiddle, and my father and I were attending a music workshop at a summer camp. Being the economical father that he is, we decided to camp at a nearby campground with our RV instead of staying in a hotel.

As we settled into our camping spot, barren of human contact for several miles, another family came rolling into the spot beside of us. I was excited to find that in this family were two girls about my age, full-blooded teenage girls! While this news excited me, I soon found that these girls would become lifelong friends.

One night after class, my friends and I, along with our dads, headed back to our campsites to share songs we had learned. While we laughed and played our dads built a fire, creating an inviting, almost magical atmosphere. It was as if I could see the notes jump from the fiddle and dance around the fireplace. The girls began playing a tune that immediately caught my attention. My eyes watched every note they pressed with their fingers, and my mind filled with sounds so beautiful, I was on the verge of tears. I stood in amazement as the bow hopped over the strings, tossing back and forth. The song ended and I immediately asked the name of it. The reply was "Red Bird". That song followed me throughout the rest of my fiddling career, helping me win contests and remaining a crowd favorite everywhere I played.

When you're from a small town and one person finds out you have a hidden talent, everyone eventually finds out. I was asked to play at parties, weddings, family

reunions, nursing homes, and even my friend's houses for their parents. You name it, I've played it. Though reluctant to play at all these events, I really didn't mind in the least. Music makes people happy, and there's nothing like seeing a face light up when they hear the "Tennessee Waltz".

A face I never minded seeing light up was my grandma's. Every Sunday would be a day spent at her home, fixing a good home-cooked meal. With amazing food and continuous laughter, a day at my grandma's was never boring, especially during the holiday season. During these extra-special occasions, I was always asked to bring my fiddle and play for everyone my grandma knew, literally everyone. She always wanted me to play "Red Bird" for all of her friends because it was simply her favorite song that I played. I'll never forget the look on her face and how happy she was when I played it for her.

This last holiday, Thanksgiving, was not so happy though. We had some close friends, who were musicians, spend the holiday with us. Even my aunt had come in this time, the first time anyone had seen her in probably five years. We were cooking up a storm in the kitchen, as always, when my brother walked in the door with my grandma trailing right behind. She had a picture in her hand, and immediately handed it to my mother telling her she wanted her to have it. I didn't really pay attention to what it was, though, and went on setting up the table.

The food was great as always. Following the meal, our guests and I started playing music in the family room for everyone, and of course my grandma asked us to play her favorite song. Later on that night, she and I talked about me coming and spending the night with her sometime soon. We promised each other it would happen, but something was unusual in the way my grandma walked away. She just looked toward the ground, went to the couch, and sat by herself as if she didn't feel good. I thought she was tired because it was a busy day; I only wish I could have really seen what was wrong.

The next night we received a phone call from my grandma. She told me she was at a friend's house and that her chest was hurting. Panicked, I told my parents right away. They immediately got in the car and rushed to the house while I stayed on the

phone trying to comfort her. She told me that she was going to the porch to sit and put the phone down.

I drove to the hospital not knowing how serious everything was. When I got out of the car, my brother came to me and held on to me for what seemed like forever crying. That was the last time I would ever speak to my grandma; I knew right then she had passed away.

When we got home that night; I looked at the picture my grandma had given my mom. I held in my hands a picture of a cardinal, a red cardinal that had hung in her house for many years. I don't know exactly why my grandma felt the need to give that picture to my mom, but I have a feeling she knew what was going to happen before anyone even noticed. The Thanksgiving night we were playing music, my mom told everybody about this red bird that kept trying to get in the window of our house. Every day it would knock repeatedly on the window trying to get in. I later learned of the old wives' tale that states "when a bird is trying to get in your house, someone close in your family will pass away." The pieces were all there, but I just couldn't see them.

A few days ago I was walking by myself, and a gust of wind shook a tree beside me. A red cardinal flew right in front of me, spreading its wings proudly and flying away high into the sky until I couldn't see it anymore. I know that when we lose someone we dearly love, we look for things that remind us of them, but I don't believe we're the only ones looking out for our loved ones.

## **The Accident**

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2007 Barbara W. Walters Memorial College Scholarship

It was a hot summer day in Milboro Springs, Virginia; to be exact, it was the day before Mother's Day. My sister Alayna and I had been visiting with my grandma over the weekend. At this time, I was in the sixth grade while my sister was in the second. I still remember the day like it was yesterday.

My grandma, sister, and I were on our way home from Wal-Mart. I was sitting in the front seat with my legs crossed Indian-style while my sister was lying down in the backseat. Alayna had her seatbelt on but had loosened it so she could lie comfortably in the seat. My grandma had her huge, black sunglasses on with a bright yellow top and light brown spandex shorts. We were on our way to my other grandma's house to eat dinner. All I could think about was what we were going to eat for dinner.

As the car moved on, I began to become very sleepy. I was almost asleep when I felt the car hit the ditch; I bounced up and down for what seemed like an eternity. We rode the ditch for at least a quarter of a mile when, "Bam," we hit a tree. When I finally opened my eyes to realize what had happened, I found my sister in the middle between my grandma and me. Her face was covered with blood; she had hit the windshield. I looked at her, then my grandma; my grandma began to panic and scream, "Help!"

All of a sudden a strange man appeared and opened up the car door and said, "Are you all ok?" My grandma shouted that we needed an ambulance for my sister. He told us we needed to get out of the car, for it was smoking and might blow up. Then another car pulled up, and a woman named Mrs. Deeds called 911.

When I got out of the car, I became very dizzy and almost fainted, until the strange man handed me a blue raspberry Gatorade out of his vehicle. The next person to arrive on the scene was my grandpa, my grandma's ex husband. When he saw me, he hugged me and asked me if I was ok. I told him yes but my neck was sore. He told me to

lie down until the ambulance arrived. When he saw my sister, tears rolled down his face. He began yelling at my grandmother, asking her what she did. He did not even wait for a reply; he started towards his truck to get his first aid kit. When he got to my sister, he started to bandage up her face with gauze to control the excessive amount of bleeding.

The ambulance finally arrived. When they saw my sister, they called for a helicopter to take her to the hospital, for they did not think she was going to make it. Then a paramedic named Karen came over to me and asked me quite a few questions such as what had happened, if I was ok, where my body hurt.

The helicopter arrived, and the other set of paramedics rushed over to my sister and put her on a stretcher and carried her back to the helicopter. When the helicopter flew off, all I remember thinking was if my sister was going to make it. Then I was put on a stretcher and taken to the hospital, a different one from my sister; the ride seemed like it lasted forever. My grandma was also put on a stretcher and taken to the same hospital as me.

When I got to the hospital, I was taken into the emergency room and admitted into my own room. My Aunt Debbie had been called and came to be with me, for my parents and grandparents had to be with my sister. When the doctor arrived, he told me that they would need to take an x-ray of my collar bone to see if I had broken it. It seemed like days went by before my x-ray results came back, but when they did, the news was good; luckily I had not broken my collar bone. I only came out of the car accident with a seat belt burn on my neck and two scars on my knees. The doctor told my aunt that she could take me home. Before I left though I had to see my grandma, when I walked into her room she started to cry and tell me how sorry she was. Seeing her cry made me cry, I told her that everything was going to be fine, even though I was unsure. She ended up breaking her sternum and her pinky toe.

When I got in the car, I was afraid to ask about Alayna, but I finally asked, “Is Alayna ok?”

My aunt replied “Yes, but her face is cut up a lot and has quite a few stitches in her face.” When I heard those words come out of my aunt’s mouth a feeling of relief came over me. My sister’s ok, I thought, my sister’s ok.

Debbie took me to my grandfather's house, for he was finally back from the hospital. When I entered, he hugged me and told me that Alayna was doing fine but she would have to spend the night in the hospital. That night I could not sleep because of the pain in my neck, and I just thought about my sister.

The following morning Alayna and my parents pulled in my grandpa's driveway. When my sister entered the room, I was speechless, she had stitches all up the right side of her face and her left eyeball had blood in it. I did not even want to go near her; I was scared of the way she looked. My mom told me to go say hello to her, but I could not. It took me the rest of the day to cope after seeing my sister, but finally that night, I went to talk to her and gave her a hug. At that moment, I had never been so thankful.

Today I can still remember the car accident very vividly. I can still smell antifreeze leaking out of the car and see the way my sister's face looked. I believe that we had a guardian angel watching over us that day because if I had not had my legs crossed Indian-style, I would have lost my legs because the engine was pushed up under my feet. I am so thankful for that strange man, whose name I have now learned is Timmy Yules, for if he had not been there, my sister probably would have died. The lesson that I have learned from the car accident is to always wear your seatbelt correctly, never loosen it or not wear it, for if my sister had not had her seatbelt on at all, I know she would not be here today, nor would I. Another lesson I have learned is to not take people for granted because in that very second, I could have lost my sister. That day is a day I will never forget.

## **Charity Begins At Home – Or Does It?**

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America is the richest country on the face of the earth, yet has one of the lowest rates of charitable giving in the world. Why is this true? Are Americans naturally stingy – while other cultures naturally generous?

Certainly not! Americans believe everyone is equal – and equality demands that everyone be given the chance to achieve success on their own. From the earliest American settlers, success was determined by a willingness to work. Benjamin Franklin started out as a poor man yet ended life as one of the most respected and wealthy men of his time. Americans still subconsciously adhere to this belief and feel donations to charity hinder individuals from reaching his or her own potential.

How often have cultures that adopted the “dole” wound up with a generation unwilling to work? Why do immigrants do so well in cultures such as the United States? It all comes back to the American work ethic. People willing to take jobs – sometimes hard and dirty jobs – eventually achieve success. It is true that success doesn’t always come immediately. It is the responsibility of each generation to push the next generation a little further up the economic ladder.

The immigrant coming to America today is often willing to take jobs that Americans refuse. Yet look at the parade of winners at the Intel Science Talent Search each year. A large proportion of America’s “best and brightest” is a first generation American. Where are the children of prosperity? Why are they no longer willing to work as hard as the children from working class homes? It’s simple – giving someone everything denies him or her the impetus to work hard and achieve on their own merit. Charity isn’t kindness – charity is pity – and a way of rewarding the underachievers of the world.

How can the pity aspect be removed from charitable giving? Should all charities be closed down and children starve? Of course not! Give a man his dignity and you give him a future. Give him a handout and you condemn him to a life of poverty and hopelessness. Money comes to those who work – not to those who are idle. America is the land of opportunity and jobs are the right of every citizen. Why can't we re-institute the programs such as the Civilian Conservation Core or the Workers Progress Administration? The jobs provided by these programs during the Depression allowed many a man to feed his family while retaining his pride. His children learned that no matter how bad times were their father worked and brought home the necessities of life.

Let's teach our children to differentiate between "wants" and "needs" and make sure everyone can work to fulfill their needs. No one need starve and no one need accept charity. Let's return to the American that equated hard work and success and bring back the pride felt in "doing a good day's work for a good day's pay."

## **The War At Home**

Jad Sleiman

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2007 Barbara W. Walters Memorial College Scholarship

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“Support Our Troops.” Over the past few years, I have read and heard these words repeatedly, plastered on banners and signs in large unrelenting fonts of all colors. Both the conservative and liberal political factions struggle to convince us of their conviction underlying those three simple words. But in reality, there is a gross and not altogether blatant hypocrisy in them. Though never a supporter of the current war in Iraq, I do believe in obligation, and more importantly, in honor.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has always had a tenuous budget, and the “War on Terror” has only made things worse. In the over-taxed clinics of VA hospitals across the country, it is easy for some returning soldiers to simply fall through the cracks. The sad truth is that for every soldier killed overseas, several more are injured; and these “heroes”, nevertheless, are considered “damaged goods” and are often discarded by the offices of the Veterans Affairs. I have seen those who many like to pretend do not exist: I have seen the *forgotten*.

On an unusually cool, clear July night in the summer of 2006, a couple of friends and I were walking the barren streets of 2:00 a.m., Charleston, West Virginia. Passing an outdoor fountain, we stopped to admire it. A man in his mid-twenties wearing an old gray T-shirt and a pair of jeans worn thin at the knees approached us saying, “I wouldn’t try swimming in there. It’s filthy”. When he walked into the glow of a nearby streetlight, I noticed a deep scar running across the side of his face. He seemed eager to speak with anyone who would listen. During the course of our small talk, we mentioned that we were in Charleston for the Democratic Youth Leadership Academy and told him about a protest against the war in which we had participated. At this comment, his face dropped. He then told us he had just gotten back from Iraq. None of us knew quite what to say, so our new acquaintance took it upon himself to break the silence: “I was injured.”

As we walked with him, he introduced himself as Vincent. Vincent then began to

relate his experience in Iraq and his subsequent injuries. In a tone heavy and rough with bitter resentment, he told us how his job had been to enter a newly bombed area and “clean up” as he called it. Born from his trembling voice, scenes of sheer senselessness and violence began to carve their way into our minds. Through shakes and stutters, he told us of children that lay dead by their mothers and of whole apartment buildings flattened with unknown casualties buried underneath the rubble. Then, without prompting, he grabbed his left arm with his right hand, and with a quick turn, he dislocated it from his shoulder. “Grenade,” he mumbled. I hadn’t noticed it beforehand, but as Vincent walked, his entire body leaned to the left, and he took great effort in stepping from his left foot. A former United States Marine, Vincent is now the proud owner of 7.9 pounds of metal, permanently implanted in his left shoulder and leg. Along with his traumatic memories, his irons weigh upon him wherever he goes.

Eventually, our directionless wandering came to a stop, and Vincent, noting the awkward silence, invited us all to take a look at his artwork. We tentatively decided to accept his invitation. Intrigued, but slightly uneasy, we followed our mysterious companion off the safety of the paved streets that course through uptown Charleston and down a steep incline of dirt and rocks that led us underneath a bridge. We had left the realm of street signs and regulation far behind. Schedules, appointments, the passage of time, all became distant memories. We seemed to dissolve into the darkness Vincent had led us into. Through the feeble lights of our cell phones, we gazed at the beauty and horror Vincent had rendered upon the concrete supporting walls of the bridge. Haunting images of men, standing shoulder to shoulder, wearing misshapen helmets that obscured their soulless and empty eyes stared back into our own eyes with shameful accusation. Creatures of fire and hell animated the once lifeless slabs of rock and steel surrounding us: an entire world of Vincent’s creation.

The stagnant smell of the chemical laden Kanawha River filled my nostrils, reminding me where I was standing. I noticed a patch of scorched earth beside a tattered old mattress, its springs escaping one by one. Bottles of water, some half full and some, empty, were strewn across the earthen floor, many covered in filthy blankets and jackets. A cold wind lashed across my face and penetrated deep beneath my defenseless black dress shirt. This was Vincent’s *home*.

Below our busy feet, men struggle and die. Tragically, their scuffling feet and hurried breath go unheard. People like Vincent are disgracefully occulted from view. While the proud “Mission Accomplished” banners censor his art, his voice is silenced by the repetition of such empty slogans. In order for the American people to understand the true nature of their government and consequently make a change, the “Vincent’s” of this country must be brought into the light. Unfortunately, stories like his are often too sordid for public view, and due to the paranoia associated with many like him, the spotlight might present a fearful place to those who need to be seen. A change is demanded: a government that cares more about blood and bones than about bullets and bombs, a public willing to search for what may not be readily seen--compassion. All these things are needed in order for this nation to grow and develop into the beautiful idea we have always been told it was. As for me, I have seen the *forgotten* -- and *he* has been forever burned into my memory.

Jad Sleiman was awarded the 2007 Barbara W. Walters Memorial College Scholarship and was recognized by the Charleston Daily Mail for his winning essay. He will receive a college scholarship check for \$750 for fall semester, 2007. He may use the scholarship at the college of his choice.