

*2011 West Virginia  
Young Writers  
Anthology*

## *Introduction*

We proudly present the anthology of the 2011 West Virginia Young Writers contest. It showcases the stories of nineteen students who first won in their counties in their age divisions and then won at the state level. These Young Writers represent sixteen counties from around the state. Included are the winners of first, second, and third place in each age/grade category, plus the winner of the Barbara W. Walters Memorial College Scholarship.

The West Virginia Young Writers Contest has honored good writing by our state's students in grades one through twelve for over 25 years. The contest is an initiative of the West Virginia Department of Education, Central West Virginia and the Writing Project at Marshall University Graduate School of Education and Professional Development, Marshall University Writing Project in Huntington and Coalfield Writers, the National Writing Project at West Virginia University. The 2011 contest was co-directed by Dr. Barbara Holmes, director of Central West Virginia Writing Project, and Edwina Howard-Jack, English Language Arts Coordinator, Office of Instruction, West Virginia Department of Education.

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# Off-Day

By Emily DeVault

East Fairmont High School, Marion County  
2011 Barbara W. Walters Memorial College Scholarship Winner

Another chisel out of the cheek...perhaps a fleck of Sundance Yellow will do the trick.

No, no, no. What we need here is *personality*. These features all have such sharp outlines; maybe I could round off the tip of the nose, just...like—

—Oops! Oh, good grief! No nose that I've ever seen looks like this! I hope she didn't notice...oh, I'm praying she didn't notice!

It's ruined! My life's work is ruined! How sincerely I have poured my entire being into this masterpiece, only for my glory to be stolen from me with one slight spasm of the wrist! Surely God, when He set about forming the heavens and earth, would have wiped the slate of Creation clean in disgust had He erred so grievously.

But I can't panic. I can't *afford* to panic. My livelihood hinges on this portrait. I'll just scrape over my mistake with this knife...and I think if I add just a touch of—

—Whoa! There's no way *this* color came from *that* powder! Okay, um...stay calm, stay calm...it hasn't dried yet—maybe this burnt orange will give it a nice blend. I should mix a dab of violet in there, too...there we go. Nothing to worry about! I guess those summer lessons in Venice really helped me ou—Wait, where did the model go?

She was sitting right there! And here I am, buried in oils and canvas. I'm stuck. Considering we've been here all morning, she may have gone to refresh herself. I'll give her a few minutes.

...This is getting ridiculous. Has she fled the country? Why would she commission me to paint her face if she wasn't planning on sticking around long enough for me to even remember what color her hair was? Three hours! Three miserable hours of *waiting!* My paint is dry, my back is sore...

...I have a fairly general idea of the structure of her face. While I'm waiting I might as well...give it a little *rouge* here under the eye...

...a bit of *stippling* here next to the ear...

...didn't her hair frame her shoulders? It was rather flat...if I remember right. A dull sort of brown.

...About her mouth there was a certain suggestion—almost one of mischief. Although she may have been grimacing. Regardless, she has left me to my own dilapidated devices (this brush is reminiscent of a cat who has had his tail stomped on), so I will give her an expression that I associate with her character. Attractive, but oh-so-highly inconsiderate!

Well, I was never good at faces anyway. She may be more forgiving if I'm generous with her figure...my, this is a lovely shade of blue...

Oh! Hello, Madonna. Your purring is as loud as a waterfall. Did you happen to spot my model during your stroll about the house? What have you got in your...mouth...

Get that vile creature AWAY from my palette! *Madonna!* Take the rat outside!  
Madonna, no! No!

My paints—you've devastated my paints! Oh, heavens, this is unbearable! The face of my painting is a smudged mess; my model is missing; my paints have been smeared into a blackened glob by a dead rat! The woes of an artist are infinite and immeasurable—this is enough provocation to cut off my pathetic life!

This is the end! Madonna, you must bear witness to this tragic yet willing termination of a life so young, yet so overcome with woe! I hold this paint knife thus to my throat. I can picture it now: There will I be in the sweet afterlife, surrounded by beauty in a flowery meadow...all memory of my disastrous final portrait erased as I lie beside a tranquil river and watch with easy contentment a flock of birds glide by overhead...Farewell, Madonna!

*Arrivederci!*

Hold on, what's that noise? Those are footsteps—my model is returning. *My model is returning!* I must make progress! Quickly, quickly...her dress will have to be the color of this black stain...

...Earlier I spilt a measure of beige under my stool that I can use for her hands...and how should she be holding those hands? Think, think, *think*—she'll have them folded, in her lap, that's how the ladies usually sit, isn't it? It will have to do.

Thank the Lord I started the background before she arrived this morning! I was planning on fixing it; it's a bit asymmetrical. More than that, it's just plain *crooked*. But I've no time. I'll throw in a happy little tree...and *try* to even it out...

She's getting closer. What do I call this hideous, disgraceful piece of junk? Who am I kidding? She'll never fork over a *penny* for this! But I'll name it just the same! It is my final right as a painter! The name of my subject will suffice...

...What *was* her name? I'm picturing an 'L' in my head...possibly having to do with the lettuce I had for lunch...an 'L,' or was it an 'M?'

Oh, dash it to Saint Peter! I'll just give her some ridiculous moniker; she won't know the difference. Her enigmatic behavior was just a front for her natural air-headed-ness, I'm sure. Had I the colors at my disposal, I would paint over this hair with some shade of *blonde*...

Here she comes. I've got to sign this thing somewhere...there we go.

She seems to approve...she's left some money...and she's taken the portrait and gone.

Henceforth I vow to *never* agree to anything like that again! I might do a few more religious pieces to put bread on the table, but *that's it*. Today I have soiled my reputation—I have become nobody! No one will have the stomach to lay eyes upon that wretched portrait, let alone gaze upon it in admiration; I'm still struggling to believe that she actually paid *money* for it.

Ha! The *Mona Lisa*—what a joke!

# *The Day My Life Changed*

By Colt Adams

Wayne Elementary School, Wayne County  
1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner (Grades 1-2)

It was a beautiful, sunny day on June 10, 2010 as we headed to the hospital for my baby sister's birth! I was so happy she was being born today.

Her name was going to be Peyton and I couldn't wait to see her wonderful face today! That day was going to be the best day of my life!

Waiting was the hardest, so Nanny and I went to McDonald's. A little while later my mom texted Nanny and said, "It is almost time!" We hurried back to the room, but we weren't allowed in - I WAS FURIOUS. I stomped to the waiting room and waited and waited and waited. Finally, it was time to see my wonderful baby sister's face. I about cried my eyes out seeing her little face. I asked my mom if I could hold her and she said, "Gently."

When I took her, she looked at me and I looked at her. We stared at each other for a long time, making a connection. I could not stop looking at her beautiful face. Later, after Peyton was cleaned up and things settled down, it was time to go. I held her one last time and said goodbye. As I left, I knew my life had changed.

# *How the Turtle Got his Shell*

By Jasmine Crowe

Jumping Branch Elementary School, Summers County  
2<sup>nd</sup> Place Winner (Grades 1-2)

Many years ago turtles didn't have shells. Here is the story of how they got their shells.

One day a little turtle took a very, very long walk. He swam across the pond, tip-toed by the pesky guard dogs he lived next to, and walked across the flower garden.

He started to walk across the sidewalk when he came to a sign. It said, "Warning, Wet Cement." But the little turtle couldn't read.

He was very tired because he had been walking for fifteen hours. Then he tripped over a rock.

"Ouch!" he said. He flipped into the wet cement.

Then, in a flash of an eye, it was dried on his back. "Uh, oh!" he said. "I'm stuck! I don't like being stuck!"

Then he saw another turtle. "Hello. Can you help me?" he asked.

"Sure," said Shelly Turtle. So she pulled and pulled.

Finally, he popped out! "Hurray!" they both shouted.

"Hmmm," said Shelly. "Some of the cement dried on your back! It looks like a big, gray rock."

"Oh, no!" said the little turtle. "We have to get this off of me!"

Shelly tried to pull the cement off of his back, but it would not budge. “This is so ugly,” said the little turtle. “What am I going to do?”

Shelly said, “You could use some color and I know just how you can get some. Ok. Here’s what you do. See this stick? I’m going to put it behind you. Now walk backwards and you will trip over the stick. Then rub your back on the grass and you will get grass stains on the cement.” And he did.

He liked the new, green cement shell on his back. So, the little turtle went home. And this is how the turtle got his shell.

## *S.G. (Science Gerbil)*

By Kaden Cutlip

Hacker Valley School, Webster County  
3<sup>rd</sup> Place Winner (Grades 1-2)

Science Gerbil got picked as a pet from the New York animal shelter by a girl named Sara. S.G. was a very smart gerbil. Sara loved playing with S.G. Sara also had a very smart rat that became S.G.’s henchman.

One day S.G. and Henchy were playing in the park when the mean hummingbirds came down and said all together, “Hahahaha ha! You can’t fly!”

This made S.G. and Henchy very, very mad, so they came up with a plan to fly! They would make wings and soar high. They first made paper wings that weren’t strong enough when it rained. They couldn’t steer the wings.

They thought and thought. Then they got it! They could use waterproof wings with a gerbil ball to steer. They needed lightning arrestors too. It took a long time to build these new waterproof wings, but it was worth it.

The next Tuesday was a big thunderstorm. S.G. and Henchy were excited about new wings. The rain poured down. The pets were glad they had the waterproof wings. S.G. and Henchy soared into the air, but the hummingbirds were not in the sky! Hummingbirds can’t fly in thunderstorms, but S.G. and Henchy sure could. They did double loops and dives between the raindrops.

After the thunderstorm the hummingbirds went to visit S.G. and Henchy. They admired the waterproof wings and begged for a pair. “Please, please, will you make us some wings that will work in thunderstorms?”

From then on they all had waterproof wings and had fun playing tag together in storms. They would laugh every time one of them would get tagged. They were friends forever.

# *The Fishing Trip*

By Aden Funkhouser

East Hardy Early Middle School, Hardy County

1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner (Grades 3-4)

It was a warm summer day when my family decided to go fishing. We put on our old play clothes and grabbed our fishing gear. We eagerly drove away in our maroon explorer to our farm on the Lost River Valley where we started to fish.

My little sister and I fished for an hour and then decided to play tag. She was it first, so I raced into the lush green forest. As I ran through the forest, I saw an eagle soaring through the sapphire colored sky. Suddenly I heard a very soft noise to the north. Then I saw a Whitetail deer walking my way. The deer's fur was the color of light chestnut. I watched as the deer ate the succulent green leaves. After it slowly nibbled its meal, it trotted away deeper into the rich laurel forest. Then I turned and wandered back to the river. I found my sister fishing. She curiously asked, "Where did you go?"

I said, "Sorry, I got caught up in the beauty of the nature here." We returned to fishing in the clear, sparkling river.

As I fished in the river, I could hear the little waves smacking gently against the banks of the river. I was getting impatient when I felt something tugging my pole into the river. I yelled, "I got a fish, hurry!" When I finally got the fish into my hands, it felt slippery and slimy. My dad confirmed my thoughts. I had just caught my first large mouth bass. It was a brown colored fish with black stripes. As it squirmed in my hands, my dad worked on the hook, and finally we were able to return it to its habitat.

I began to notice that we were running low on worms. I shouted, "Mom, I'm going to get more worms." As I climbed down the riverbank, I could hear birds chirping cheerfully and the noise of the river gently flowing downstream. I picked up rocks and flipped over old logs, but I could not find any worms. I started to get frustrated, when I saw a hollow piece of an old rotten log. I flipped it over. There were so many worms scattering to find their holes. I picked up a handful of fat worms and trudged back to my fishing spot. I put them into our can of dirt and began to fish again.

After fishing for a while, the clouds changed to an angry black color. Then we heard the rumble of thunder echoing through the valley and saw the lightning flashed. I anxiously said, "Dad, it's time to go!" We packed our gear and quickly crossed the river. When we got on the main road, we talked about how awesome a day it had been. I watched the storm rage over the valley as we drove down the black road. When we got home, I tiredly went to bed to reflect on my fishing trip.



# *I've Been Around the World in my Daddy's Pocket*

By Savannah Hinton

Lenore K-8, Mingo County  
2<sup>nd</sup> Place Winner (Grades 3-4)

From 2002-2004 I traveled to many places around the world. I saw the Great Pyramids of Egypt, the Ishtar gate in Iraq, and many other amazing things on my adventures. I have been on a plane, a ferry, a Humvee, and even a camel. I've slept on everything from a cot in the desert to a hood of a truck. So in this story I will tell you all about my adventures around the world.

I hopped on a plane in 2002 and landed in Djibouti, Africa. While there I ate dinner with the ambassador, fished in the Gulf of Aden, and shared stories, gifts, and candy with the locals. But the most important thing I did in Africa was help give food, shelter, and medicine to children dying from HIV/Aids.

In 2003 after a very long boat ride, I ended up in Kuwait City. From there I traveled by Humvee to Talil Air Base. While in Iraq, I visited the Ishtar Gate in the city of Babylon. I watched CNN at the Baghdad International Airport when the locals pulled down the statue of Saddam Hussein.

In 2004 I took a long trip to Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan. I got to trade at a Bazaar with local vendors. I helped rebuild schools and hospitals. There were a lot of cool things to do while I was there, like to play soccer with Afghani kids, visit local rice farms, and learn sheep herding from a real shepherd.

So by now I guess you are wondering how I have been so many places and seen so many things. I have never set foot in any of the places in this story. But believe me, I was there. I was in a wrinkled-up picture tucked away in the pocket of my daddy's army uniform. He carried me with him everywhere he went, close to his heart.

## *Lizzie's Competition*

By Marina Wright

Gihon Elementary School, Wood County  
3<sup>rd</sup> Place Winner (Grades 3-4)

There I was, trying to be the best I could be! If you're asking what for, I'll start from the beginning. My name is Lizzie. I'm a Miniature Yorkie. I live in Los Angeles with my owner, Jessica.

One day Jessica went to get her mail.

She pulled out an envelope that read, "Prissy Pups!"

It was a contest for dogs, and Jessica wanted me to enter. She didn't even ask what I wanted. My thoughts were being ignored.

The next day we started practicing. Jessica set up obstacles around the yard for me to jump over, go under, climb up, and crawl through. She even wanted me to jump through a big hula hoop. It seemed ridiculous to me, but like a good dog, I did it. Later we went to the park and played my favorite game – Frisbee. I got to play with some of my dog friends while Jessica talked to her friends about the competition.

On the way home we stopped by the ice cream stand, and Jessica let me have a couple licks of her ice cream.

When I went to bed, I had a dream about the contest. Big poodles and Golden retrievers were telling me that I was too little to win. I couldn't let Jessica down. What was I going to do? Suddenly, I woke up to the sound of Jessica's voice. I couldn't believe it was morning.

I looked outside and saw Jessica putting out more obstacles. It was time to practice. I jumped through the hoop, ran through the tunnel, climbed ramps, and ran down. It was going well until I saw something new – a brightly painted, high, and frightening balance beam. I tried to hop up like Jessica wanted, but I fell down. I tried again and fell again. Finally, Jessica lifted me up. I tried to walk across it, but I couldn't. I just kept falling, and Jessica kept putting me back up. Surprisingly, Jessica wasn't mad. She just laughed. Finally I managed to walk across it, but it was hard! Sadly the contest was the next day. Jessica was very excited, but me . . . not so much.

When we arrived at the competition, I was shaking. Someone called us to the floor. There was a woman standing in front of me – the judge! She looked at my fur, rubbed my ears, and then asked Jessica to take me through the obstacles. I was doing very well until I came to the beam. I was scared, but I didn't want to let Jessica down. Determined, I jumped up and walked across! I jumped down! I had done it!

After everyone had competed, they announced the winner.

“The winner is Lizzie, the Miniature Yorkie.”

I had beaten the big dogs! On the way home I got more ice cream. When we got home, Jessica checked her mail and found another envelope. She was very excited, but I guess that will be a whole other story.

# *The Spirit of this Place*

By Taylor Paige Griffith

Madison Elementary School, Boone County  
1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner (Grades 5-6)

Although, the decision to close our family business had been made three months earlier, none of us dared to utter a word about it. It was if we were all convinced that the silence that engulfed us would somehow prolong the arrival of this day, our final day!!

Now, here we were three generations of a proud working class family huddled together under a cloak of sadness. A simple handwritten message taped to the store window read, "It is with very heavy hearts, that we announce that when we turn the lights off and lock the door tonight, Christmas Eve, it will be for the last time."

I looked over at the patriarch of our family, my grandfather, my heart ached for him. He was holding the original business license issued, September 12, 1949. A tear slowly ran down his cheek. He had spent most of the day sorting through fifty plus years of mementos, deciding what to keep or to discard. With every item he picked up, he had a story from the past to share. It soon became evident that nothing would be discarded today.

As I was helping my hero and my best friend pack up his life, we discovered a faded and worn photograph of the "original stand". It was just a slab of concrete with a very primitive roof and three walls attached. Even though later, a building had been constructed to us the business never changed from that humble beginning. We never once referred to it as anything other than "the stand." The doors were never locked and displays of produce, plants or gardening supplies were never brought inside. I know it seems impossible to believe but nothing in all those years was ever stolen. I always credited that to the admiration and respect the people of our little community had for my grandfather.

I loved this place as much as he did. I had literally been raised here. A cantaloupe crate served as a perfect play-pin for me when I was younger. Later, I occupied my time building castles and forts out of empty, wooden produce bins. I played hide-and-seek among fodder shucks and Christmas trees. My grandfather had taught me every aspect of the business. I could sort produce, unload a truck, build displays, and run a cash register by the time I was five years old.

The two of us spent countless hours talking about the day I would step in and take over for him. But time had a cruel way of altering our plans. It was painfully evident that his health would not hold up for our dreams and hopes to be fulfilled.

Hand in hand, we took one final walk-through of our place. We gazed into the now empty and barren greenhouse, where just weeks prior the laughter of hundreds of young school children, could be heard as they carved and decorated their special pumpkins. We looked at the display tables where hours earlier, we had completed the last of the holiday orders. He had checked and doubled checked each one making sure "Christmas Eve" treat bags were perfect for anxious children all over southern West Virginia.

I tried to grasp how my best friend must be feeling. It was too much for my young heart to comprehend! Four generations of memories flooding through his mind like the images on a kaleidoscope! I know in time that we will both come to realize that we are leaving behind mere

bricks and mortar. We are taking with us the “spirit of this place”, that will continue to flow in the hearts of all those who carry his name.

Neither of us could compose ourselves any longer. I conjured up every ounce of strength left in my body to calm myself, for I had one last job to compete here at our place. I placed my hand into his worn, rough, calloused hand and ever so gently whispered, “It’s time to go PaPa.”

## *Sporty Sensations*

By Erin Ferry

Vinson Middle School, Wayne County

2<sup>nd</sup> Place Winner (Grades 5-6)

Cheers and yells from the crowd echo off the gym walls at an earsplitting volume. The favored team just scored the winning goal! I desperately wish to be on the court now, instead of having to impatiently wait for the other teams to clear out. My number one hobby is indoor soccer and not only do I love the sport, but I also enjoy the sensations of the experience! Nothing can compare to the gleaming, metallic bleachers, the tantalizing aroma of freshly popped corn, or the feeling of delicate butterflies fluttering around in my stomach!

Goosebumps rise by the hundreds along my arms and legs as I anxiously wait for my game to begin. Eyes darting around the gym, I take in the brilliant light from the fluorescents shining on the glossy, golden floor. Sturdy metal bleachers are shining as brightly as a silver statue, while vividly colored candy wrappers lie under them like tarnished gems. Workers at the concession stand bustle about like bees, hurrying to prepare orders while carelessly shoving crumpled bills and coins into the worn-out cash register. Standing on the court, the players talk and laugh about their game and the goals they scored. As I ponder curiously about what they might be saying, a delightful aroma catches my attention...

I close my eyes and breathe a wistful sigh as the heavenly smell of buttered popcorn drifts into my nose. I battle the urge to purchase a bag, but I stand firm knowing it will give me painful cramps during the game. Ambling toward the bleachers, I begin gagging, and my nose crinkles in protest, as I force myself to breathe. The foul stench of perspiration takes over, destroying the fresh air around me. I hurry away in a desperate attempt to escape the sickening odor. I rush toward the crowd, hoping any smell they are exuding can relieve my nose of its torture. Thankfully, the person beside me has on an extra spritz of perfume, so her scent easily overpowers the sweat stench. I am able to breathe again! The loud and obnoxious buzz of the gym's buzzer reminds me it is time to start warming up for the game. I jog onto the court with my teammates and begin taking shots on the goal.

As soon as I reach the middle of the floor, it occurs to me everyone in the gym will be watching my every move, and that's when I panic. The butterflies in my stomach launch themselves into my throat, suffocating me. My body's temperature shoots up about thirty degrees; sweat pools forming in my armpits. The heat radiating off me feels like a heated room in the middle of summer, and my face is turning as red as a stop sign. My heart is racing rapidly and every strained breath feels as if it is coated heavily in lead. I realize this isn't going to help my performance during the game, so I gradually begin to relax and calm down. I swallow and send the butterflies spiraling downward into my gut, and imagine a chilled place, like the frigid North Pole, in order to decrease my body's temperature. I can do nothing about the sweat pools and have to face the fact they are going to remain there for the rest of the game.

Heat is no longer radiating off of me quite as powerfully, so my red face is no more than a rosy blush delicately painted on my cheeks. Finally, my heartbeat slows to its normal pace, and I am ready to crush and defeat anyone who dares to score a goal on my team's goalie!

Sooner or later the game will be over and my teammates and I will either leave the court with looks of disappointment, or with gloating cheers and yells of success! Nevertheless, I've taught myself to accept my team's victories and defeats, and to always walk off the court with dignity. My involvement in this game has taught me valuable lessons such as teamwork, motivation, and the all-important self-control; characteristics I will practice throughout life.

## *Death on Calf Drop Hill*

By Cora Hedrick

Green Bank Elementary/Middle School, Pocahontas County  
3<sup>rd</sup> Place Winner (Grades 5-6)

The friendly town of Slatyfork was home to a large farming family by the name of Gibson: four boys, five girls and two lovely dogs, Batista and Maggie. One morning two of the girls went outside and said, "What a great morning! The sun's 'arisin' and the cows are 'a bawlin' for their breakfast."

They hollered for their brother, Will, to come help them feed.

"But I haven't eaten my breakfast yet, and my stomach's a growlin'," he grumbled, as he got on his coveralls and went to the pig trough, yelling "Come and get it!" while waving the slop bucket. He moved on to the cows – yelling, "Sookey, sookey..."

As he walked through the gate, he wondered where all the cows were, for he only saw one heifer. She was calving. He dropped the feed bucket and ran over to her, comforting her with "you're alright, girl." His calm voice seemed to sooth her.

Will hollered for his sisters and mother. "Oh, she's having a calf!" mother cried joyfully as she approached. Then she gasped, "But papa's gone and he usually does the deliveries!"

One of the sisters, named Kynah, said "We can do it!"

Their mother suggested they get a halter and some hay. Will ran to the barn, but by the time he got back, the calf was out and struggling to get up. They took the cow and calf to the barn and put hay and straw all around her, knowing the summer night was going to be cool.

The next morning, Kynah and Abbie went to the barn to see the calf. It was up and walking around in the stall, trying to get out to run in the open pasture. They opened the door and the calf ran and ran until he collapsed at the top of Calf Drop Hill. This was where the calves were usually born.

The girls watched the calf struggle to stand up. He just stood there, wobbling back and forth and bawling. Abbie and Kynah called for their other sister, Chasity, to come and go with them to check it out. When they got to the top of Calf Drop Hill, they were devastated to see all of their cows either wounded or dead.

Kynah started crying as she tried to process the horrible sight. They ran back to get Mama. As they burst through the front door, Mama asked what was wrong. Chasity replied with one angry word – "Coyotes!"

Mama shared how she had heard something during the night, but had thought it was only the dogs barking and howling. “Well, let’s go.” She said. There was no escaping the job and horrible sight that awaited them in the field.

All Chasity could think of was killing the coyotes. They saw tracks in the fresh dew and realized the killings had just happened. “Let’s go get them,” Will said. They found a worn trail leading to the coyotes’ den. Chasity had her gun ready to shoot. Suddenly she heard the yelp of coyote pup. She eased into the den and saw a litter of coyote pups.

“We have to kill them,” said Will. “The mother will be back and may try to kill us!” Even though she was still angry at the coyotes, Chasity hated what had to be done.

As they were heading back home, they met the mother. She was the size of a dog and had gray and tan hair. Chasity was thinking how strangely beautiful she was when – “BOOM!” Will shot without warning, and the coyote rolled off the steep rock ledge it had been standing on.

Chasity looked down into the brown leaves at the dead coyote. She had mixed feelings. A farmer’s life is hard she thought as she turned and looked at Will. Will didn’t say anything. He didn’t need to. She knew that he was sharing her same feelings.

“Let’s go,” he said, as he put his arm around her.

“Yeah, let’s go home to a field of dead cows!” she murmured.

“Mama will need us,” Will said.

Chasity smiled. “Yes, and I need her!” “Let’s get out of here!”

## *Grandma’s Melody*

By Autumn White

Meadow Bridge High School, Fayette County

1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner (Grades 7-8)

Hanna started seeing the first of the Rosewood Nursing Home signs; she knew she must be getting close. She started to feel the tension creeping into her muscles. Hanna missed how she and her grandmother used to be best friends. Once, Hanna had gotten stuck in one of her grandma’s peach trees. She remembered yelling for her grandma to help get her down. Then, as her grandma attempted, climbing the spindly branches, became stuck too. These were the memories Hanna held onto, not the empty shell of a woman shuffling through life.

Finally, Hanna saw the first glimpse of the nursing home. Everything about the nursing home from the vibrant yellow and sage curtains, to the black and white checkered floor screamed happy. That was visual appearance though, the reality was different. It was like rotten fruit, it looked good until you cut it open and revealed the decay. Inside the nursing home smelled of dying flowers and too much cleaning solution trying to hide the urine smell. Hanna knew one thing, she didn’t like it here.

As she pulled in, she made sure to lock the doors of her Subaru, the last thing she needed was to have some scumbag breaking in. She was already having money troubles, the concert hall was barely paying her minimum wage, and she was trying to save money for a new violin. Hanna was still playing the one her grandma had passed down to her, after the arthritis made playing impossible. Hanna grabbed it out of the passenger seat and took it with her.

Walking into the nursing home was like walking into a morgue. She could see her grandma now, she was so beautiful. Her hair was the color of falling snow, and her skin, even etched with deep set wrinkles, reminded her of satin. Her eyes seemed lost though, never focusing on anything. She just ambled around, day dreaming. Hanna walked over to her grandma and sat down on the warm, fuzzy couch next to her. The sun was shining down through the many windows in the room, making Hanna conscience of the many dust moats dancing in the light. She admired them for a short time, watching as they carelessly rode the breeze. Hanna reluctantly looked away, and back up at her grandma, and discovered she was looking back.

“It’s a beautiful day isn’t it?” Hanna was astonished; never did her grandma start a conversation with anyone.

“Yes, yes it is, very pretty.”

“I remember being at my house on days like these.”

“Me too, they were the best, especially with my grandma around.”

“Do you play?”

“Yes, I do, I love it.”

“Ohh, I love to hear Pachelbel’s Canon, my granddaughter used to play that with me all the time. Would you play it for me?”

Hanna didn’t think twice, she pulled her violin out, and began the first note, quiet as a whisper. The melody lengthened, becoming louder until all she could hear was the melody. She closed her eyes, and let herself go. The music entered her mind; she could feel the passion of the song seeping through every pore. She must be glowing, that was the only explanation for the feeling she was having. It was as if everything else in the world had vanished, the only things left were she and the violin. When the last note came, Hanna drew it out, articulating every note until it came to an end. When she opened her eyes, the first thing she saw was her smiling grandmother. Then, Hanna said “How was it?”

“Beautiful, simply beautiful, it sounds just like my granddaughter plays it. Her name is Hanna, you two would get along wonderfully.”

“Yes, we probably would,” was Hanna’s reply. After about thirty seconds of just staring at each other, Hanna’s grandma rose and slowly drifted away, leaving Hanna alone to face reality. The realization hit her hard, and for the first few minutes she could do nothing but sit there. She evaluated the conversation over and over, trying to find her error, and she found it. She had let herself hope, hope for something that was never going to happen. Hanna stood and resolutely walked out of the building.

## *Old Blue Eyes*

By Maggie Lohmann

Bridgeport Middle School, Harrison County  
2<sup>nd</sup> Place Winner (Grades 7-8)

A twinkle appears in his pale blue eyes as I ask him to tell me about his childhood. Years melt away from his wise, perceptive face as he shares memories of a place and time I wish I could have known. Sitting in front of me is the physical form of my papaw, but suddenly he is much more—an ornery, little boy full of energy and mischief, ready to head out with his buddies

for that day's adventure. Sadly, he can only take me to the town where he grew up through his stories, since it physically no longer exists.

Ward, WV was once home to more than eight hundred houses, all owned by the coal company that employed my great-grandfather, but after coal production ceased, all buildings were destroyed. Now barely anything is left of Ward—except in my papaw's magical stories.

I can picture his joy as he unwraps the first toy he remembers from his childhood—a Mickey Mouse airplane, hear his cries as his tricycle breaks after hitting a rut in the road, and see his devilish grin as he jumps around the slate dumps while smoke gushes from the cracks.

I can't help but shake my head in disbelief as he recounts his dangerous deeds. He once jumped off the top of a barn onto a horse and lassoed it with wire to ride it. Until recently, I couldn't even ride my bike around my neighborhood without my parents' permission, but my papaw used to swim in the town's water tank, which towered thirty to forty feet above the ground. When he wasn't defying death, he was all boy, catching fish, searching for snakes and frogs, and sled riding over treacherous terrain.

Although I can tell he was a little rotten, he had a huge heart (that part is still the same). For Christmas one year, he received a metal, toy gun. Sadly, some of his friend's family's couldn't afford store-bought toys, so my papaw decided to make some for them. By pressing his gun into the hot sand of the railroad's sand house to make molds and pouring melted babbitt metal into the impressions, he created guns for all of the boys in his crew. I'm sure they were put to good use playing countless hours of "Cowboys vs. Indians."

After a long day playing with all of his friends, I'm sure he was ready for refreshments. He laughs out loud as he tells me about the time he charged ice cream for all of his friends at the company store because he had seen his mother charge groceries to their account and thought it meant he didn't have to pay. My great-grandma sure taught him otherwise!

My papaw has been blessed with many good friends in his life, but it seems as if the friends from his memories are still with him when he tells me about those carefree days. The boys whose fathers worked in administration for the company were called "Circle Sucks" because they "sucked up" to the company. The boys whose fathers worked in the mines and who lived back in the "hollers" were called "The Bad Bottom Boys." Since my great-grandfather was a company bookkeeper, my papaw was a Circle Suck. Even though their dads made different salaries, it didn't matter to a band of little boys whose bond was formed by secrets, dares, skinned knees, schemes, chores, and childhood innocence.

My papaw moved away when he was only eleven because his father wanted his own land and not to be indebted to the coal company. He left a priceless childhood behind. I can see him leaning out the car window, waving goodbye to his treasured friends, as he fights to hold back tears. Although those miles separated him from his hometown and his friends, they have never separated them from his memories.

So here I am, learning who my papaw was and what makes him the man I know today. I hope someday to tell his stories and my own to my grandchildren with the same twinkle in my eyes and smile on my face. I'm so glad to have him and these stories!



# *The Beach Goddess*

By Morgan Moss

Tucker Valley Elementary/Middle School, Tucker County  
3<sup>rd</sup> Place Winner (Grades 7-8)

The cool water slowly sloshed over my toes as they sank into the squishy sand. A slight ocean breeze blew my hair softly. Pure calmness settled over my entire body, making it a perfect morning for shell-searching.

My indigo pail was nearly full as the exquisite morning sun greeted me. I can hear the soft clank of shells with an occasional squawk of a seagull. People slowly start to arrive at this enchanting place. I must head back in to show Mama the alluring pieces of nature I've found.

"Mama!" I yelled gleefully, "look at all these magnificent shells I've collected!". Mama gracefully ran her finger over every shell, inspecting every centimeter.

"Oh, Mara, these are precisely what we need for our sculpture!" Mama said in pure admiration.

I beamed with pride. I pivoted out the screen door and leaped into the scorching fine grains of light auburn sand. Every year mama and I compete in Coco Beach's annual sand sculpture contest, and this year we were determined to win. The contest is tonight so were finally ready to build.

Mama lingered towards me arms full of fascinating supplies for the contest. My eyes boggled at all the supplies. Together we walked down to the beach. It was overwhelming because of all the people. Different smells filled my nose: sweet smell of cotton candy, salty ocean water, and fresh beach breeze.

Mama and I found the absolute perfect place to start creating our masterpiece. We ran our hands through the hot grains of sand. Instantly our nimble fingers started to build something beautiful. Mama builds amazingly. I took care of all the supplies to beautify our mermaid.

After my mother sculpted the mermaids head, I took breathtakingly gorgeous pieces of turquoise sea glass that shimmered when the sun hit them and set them down as eyes. For the teeth I used shiny little white pearls that made her smile perfect enough for a crest commercial!

Then the hair I used shiny strands of seaweed. I set the seaweed down every which way so it appeared as the ocean breeze was tugging at her locks.

After that I was already onto her body, my mother had angled her head so it appeared as if she were talking on the phone. I grabbed the largest conk shell I could find, and placed it where her hand should've been.

"Mama look!" I yelled blissfully. "She's listening to the ocean!"

"Great idea honey!" Mama spoke softly.

I then placed two coconuts for her top. I moved onto her tail. I sprinted inside and grabbed a huge jar of glitter. I took the whole jar and sprinkled it on the mermaid's tail.

"Ooh," my mother breathed out admiringly.

Our mermaid was breathtaking. I took every single shell I collected and spelled out "beach goddess". It was the absolute perfect touch. Suddenly the sharp piercing sound of a whistle frightened me. The beach was in chaos! A large great white had been spotted, scaring every ocean-goer onto the sand. People were everywhere. It was madness! They were running on the scorching sand, crushing all the magnificent sculptures.

In all the craziness, we ended up down by the pier. We quickly jogged back to our beach goddess. I was sure she was trampled. I then saw sparkles floating everywhere; my beach goddess was still there! My mother and I leaped up and down in unison. We were so relieved!

While my mother and I were so happy, we didn't even notice the other contestants sobbing. Everyone's sculptures had been completely ruined in all the commotion. I thought for a second and then jumped right on our beach goddess. I twirled and spun making sure she was completely wrecked.

A look of confusion flashed on Mama's face, followed by a look of knowing and approval. Mama sweetly smiled at me and we walked hand and hand towards the glowing orange sunset.

## *Beyond the Picket Fence*

By Nicole Lynn Sheaves

Meadow Bridge High School, Fayette County

1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner (Grades 9-10)

Alone in an empty house, he struggles to occupy his time. The tick of the clock echoes through the silent air as he watches the hand slowly progress around the numbers. His robe is loosely tied around his mid-section over flannel pajamas, and mismatched slippers accompany his feet. After a few failed attempts, he manages to rise from his easy chair and begins to shuffle back to his bedroom. He slides open the door to his closet and with a sigh brushes his hand along the clothes of his deceased wife. He pushes them aside to reveal the only shirt and pair of pants he owns, a faded blue-striped polo and beige khaki pants.

Delicately, he removes them from the rack and slowly changes into his daywear. Although he is fatigued from the struggle of getting dressed, he remains determined to get fresh air. He runs a comb through his thin, white hair and evenly parts it to one side. Satisfied, he makes his way towards the front door but not before grabbing a ragged fedora hat and a light jacket. He bothers not to lock the door behind him for he figures no one would want anything in his rickety, old house.

Sluggishly he scuffles along his block as joggers and cyclists rush by him without giving the elder a second look. He watches them and silently ponders the thought of why they are in such a hurry to go forward when he wishes so much that he could go back. Soon he comes to a front yard full of laughing children playing catch. He chuckles slightly and remembers the time he gave his brother a black eye while playing baseball as teenagers.

He and his brother played baseball often in the muggy summer evenings in a grassy meadow. The weeds tickled their bare legs as he and his brother bounded through the meadow to a clear spot. There he would toss his younger brother the dry rotted baseball their father bought at a garage sale. Its strings were frayed and pieces of the rawhide were missing but none the less, it was a baseball.

He opens his eyes and from a slight distance he stands, watching as the children romp and giggle. A young girl with blonde pigtails notices the old man smiling beyond the fence. She runs over and takes his hand in hers, leading him to the yard. He doesn't resist but follows her lead until they stop in front of the group of children who grow quiet at the sight of him.

She introduces the old man as her new friend, and the children all greet him with warm smiles which he gives in return. Before long he is their pitcher in a game of baseball. His weak arm was perfect for giving the ball a speed that the children could hit. With each throw he imagines his brother holding the bat, determined to hit the ball out of sight. Though he is silent, the smile stays unchanged on his face as he watches them run circles around him. The sun sinks, along with his smile, as the children begin their goodbyes. Lethargically, he begins the walk back home but as he turns to leave, he feels a slight tug on his hand. He looks down and the blue eyes of the pigtailed girl are staring back at him, wet with tears. He hides the pain from his weak bones and strained muscles, as he stoops down to her level.

Without a word she wraps her arms around his neck and gives a small squeeze. After a slight hesitation, he wraps his arms around her and closes his eyes tight in attempt not to let his own tears escape. Today the children temporarily took away his loneliness and filled the void his brother left in his heart many years ago. The little girl had introduced a new light into his life, but he knew it was only a few moments longer before he returned to his sadness. She turns around and heads up the steps of her house. He uses the ground to push himself upright as he stumbles back to his feet and once again begins his walk home. This time however, he is pulling his handkerchief from his pocket.

He awakes the next day with a stiff arm and an aching body. He doesn't care. Happiness surges through him as he remembers the children's laughter. He kneels down beside his bed and recovers a shoe box with a dense layer of dust on the lid. From inside he withdraws a tattered baseball glove with leather that is scratched and creased ubiquitously.

He runs his fingers around the scuffs of the glove and remembers those summer evenings with his brother. At the time his glove was too large for his hand and it slid vigorously with each brutal smack of the ball. It too, like their baseball, was acquired from a garage sale but was definitely his most prized possession. The glove was put into the shoebox the night his brother committed suicide without warning, and the box remained unopened until today.

Although the glove no longer fits his bulbous hand, he knows exactly what to do with it. He gets dressed and once again begins to hobble his way down the block with excitement as he anticipates seeing the children playing in the yard. As he draws nearer, he cranes his neck to see over the picket fence blocking sight of the yard and sees two pigtailed bunnies bouncing on the other side. He smiles as he quickens his pace.

## *Sweet Revenge*

By Joshua Rhudy

Shady Spring High School, Raleigh County  
2<sup>nd</sup> Place Winner (Grades 9-10)

"It's time you learn how to be a farm boy," Granny said as I entered the kitchen early one Saturday morning. "You need some chores to do."

I would much rather be back home in New York City, but my parents were spending the summer away on business, so Granny's farm in Virginia would be my home for the next few months.

Granny proceeded to give me instructions: "First, you'll slop the hogs. Take this bucket of slop, walk through the pen and put it in the trough. Make it quick because Boaris, the large, brown-spotted hog

with red eyes, does not like visitors, especially 10-year-olds." She handed me the bucket filled with the smelliest, most disgusting concoction.

She continued: "Next, you'll gather eggs from the chicken coop. Go into the coop quietly. Don't disturb the hens, especially Henrietta, the big brown hen in the middle. Just reach your hand gently under each hen and pull out the eggs. Put them in this basket."

I nodded in displeasure as I headed out the kitchen door carrying a bucket full of slop and an empty wicker egg basket. The odor coming from the pig pen was as disgusting as the smell from the slop. I opened the gate and stepped inside, slipping in mud and other gross substances. Standing between me and my destination was a mean-looking pig staring directly at me. It had to be Boaris, who stood in front of the other hogs like a general ready to lead his troops into battle. If I stepped to the right, he stepped to his left. If I stepped to the left, he stepped to his right. Nothing I tried worked. I decided my best bet was simply to try to toss the slop over the pigs' heads into the trough. As I grasped the bucket with both hands and prepared to launch the slop, Boaris and the others charged directly toward me as if they knew what I was going to do. I let loose a scream as high pitched as Justin Bieber's voice, dropped the bucket and ran, but before I could reach the exit, something huge brushed the backs of my legs and sent me flying face first into the muddy quagmire. I quickly rolled onto my back. Staring straight at me were Boaris's beady red eyes. My arms and legs began working furiously against the slippery muck. Finally, covered in mud and humiliation, I pushed my way through the gate.

I wiped myself as clean as I could with a nearby rag, picked up the egg basket and headed for the chicken coop. I hoped Henrietta was not as bad as my grandmother had said. I pulled open the entrance to the coop. I heard no clucking and saw no chickens in the pitch black interior. I walked a few paces forward and all at once, small heads containing yellow eyes turned in my direction. Eventually, my eyes adjusted, and I could see the hens sitting on their roosts along the far wall of the coop. Henrietta was directly in the middle watching my every move.

The first hen eyed me with suspicion, but she did not seem too agitated as I pulled out three perfectly shaped eggs from beneath her soft belly. I made my way down the line of hens, a sense of dread building inside as I got closer to Henrietta. I had successfully retrieved a total of six eggs from the three previous hens without too much difficulty, but there was something about the way Henrietta looked at me when I stood directly in front of her.

I thought about turning and leaving, but I did not want to disappoint Granny, especially after my escapade with Boaris. I looked Henrietta directly in the eye. As my hand began to maneuver its way beneath her belly, I suddenly felt her powerful beak peck at my arm. I screamed in pain. Henrietta squawked loudly and flapped her wings; her claws began to scratch at my face. Her actions set the other hens in motion, and soon the entire chicken coop was filled with flying feathers and cackling hens. My hands and arms flailed wildly in an attempt to defend myself. The basket of eggs fell from my arm, landing safely on a pile of straw in the corner.

I somehow managed to make my way to the exit. Once I was outside, the interior of the coop began to return to normal, but I again had failed in my quest. Instead, I now looked like a giant chicken covered in feathers stuck to the mud from my earlier adventure with Boaris. I hung my head in shame and headed toward the house. I twisted the golden knob on the kitchen door and stepped into the mud room. Now I knew why that was its name. I stood there dripping with mud, covered in feathers, bruised, scratched, and humiliated.

"How did it go?" my grandmother asked.

"Well," I replied, "on a scale from one to ten, it was really bad."

She looked at me with an expression of shock mixed with amusement. Handing me a wet paper towel to wipe my face and hands, she said in a kind voice, "Sit down." She led me to the circular kitchen table. "I can see I'm going to have to teach you how to be a farm boy this summer."

I sat down even though my clothes were still muddy. I definitely had a lot to learn.

"You need a nice, hot breakfast." She placed a plate of heaping food before me, and immediately a huge smile spread across my face. Although Boaris and Henrietta had gotten the best of me that morning, it was I who was going to have the last laugh. There on my plate was a plethora of crispy fried bacon and a huge pile of scrambled eggs.

As I began to eat the delicious breakfast, I smiled and thought: "Sweet revenge."

## *A Difference*

By Josh Crawford

Hampshire High School, Hampshire County  
3<sup>rd</sup> Place Winner (Grades 9-10)

Nobody ever noticed him just sitting in the back of the room. No one ever talked to him or made contact. Not a single person acknowledged him as far as I could remember. No one could even tell you his name or his hobbies or anything about him. But everyday he was there, listening to the lecture as if it meant the world to him. Who knows? Maybe it did. Maybe he took all of his troubles out on his studies. You see every kid in the class shunned him due to his appearance. His legs were bent out of shape, and his crooked arms ended with gnarled fingers. He looked like the Hunchback from Notre Dame when he stood up and eased across the room with his crutches. Everyone seemed to be oblivious to his pain. Even I didn't pay any attention to him.

One day in Mrs. Damon's science class she announced that she would be pairing students to complete and present a project that would be worth half the grade of the course. Naturally I was hoping to get one of my friends so I wouldn't have to go through the whole awkward thing of having a partner that you had never even met. As she called out the pairs, the anticipation began to build. Finally she called out my name. My eyes shot toward her as I watched her index finger scrolling down the page in her roll book. "You'll be working with Maxwell," she said as she went back to her pairing.

"Maxwell?" I thought to myself. "Who is Maxwell?" After pondering it over for a moment, I asked the girl sitting next to me. She quietly indicated it was the boy in the back of the room. Slowly turning, I began to dread the thought of the upcoming weeks. "Well, it's now or never," I thought to myself as I rose out of my seat and began the move to the back of the classroom.

My painfully slow walk seemed like eternity as I finally arrived at the lab table of my disfigured partner. I pulled the stool up directly across from him and cautiously sat down. I didn't look up at him. I just stared at his impairments fearing what my friends were going to say. "So are we going to do this, or are you just going to sit there?" He said in a seemingly annoyed voice.

"Umm," I said stuttering. "Do you have anything in mind that you want to do?" He smirked at me and began to name off ideas that seemed like he had been planning for months. We started to converse and at the end of the period I had a general idea of who my partner was,

Simon Frances Maxwell. Over the days to come our conversations began to stray off our projects and into our personal lives. We started out with our hobbies, foods and, etc. But soon we began telling jokes, laughing and kidding with each other. Every day I walked into science class I saw Simon sitting there with a big grin on his face. It almost felt strange to see him that way, but I was glad that we were becoming friends.

After our project was complete I still sat with Simon. The three weeks we were together just seemed like it was meant to be. When I saw him I didn't even notice his flaws anymore I just saw him for who he was. On a Parent Teacher night he introduced me to his mother. She reminded me so much of him. Quiet, shy, and a dry sense of humor that could make anyone laugh if you allowed yourself to open up. You could tell by looking at her that she loved Simon with all her heart. Simon began to invite me over to his house for meals and board games. Soon we started staying at each other's houses. My family took a quick liking to him and gladly opened our home to him whenever he was able to stay.

One evening things all changed. I was staying at the Maxwell's that night. To this day I still don't know what caused me to wake up, but when I did I heard something I had never heard in Simon's house. I quietly got up and warily made my way to the living room. I poked my head through the doorway to see Ms. Maxwell huddled up on the couch sobbing. She didn't notice me there for a long time. Finally she looked up and saw me. I eased the few steps forward and sat down on the couch beside her.

Without me asking, she began to tell me of Simon's condition. It was something that none of us had ever spoken about before. She told me of how the doctors had begun to notice his condition steadily worsening and, if he wasn't able to get the right type of help 24/7, his chance of survival would drop severely. After a long pause, she said in a small voice I was the best thing that had ever happened to Simon. I was the only person his age who had befriended him. Tears were streaming down my face as she went on to tell me that the doctors had ordered him to stay in a facility specialized for people who needed around-the-clock care. The worst part was that Simon only had one more week before he was to be taken to this place. I went back into the room with eyes watering. I just stood there and stared at Simon. How could I care about someone this much? Someone I had known for less than a year!

When the day came for him to leave, I was on the plane with him and his mom. Simon was his normal self the whole way there, not even once talking about what was to come. As visiting hours came to a close that day and I realized I wouldn't be seeing my friend easily anymore, tears began welling up in my eyes. I managed to get out a goodbye and a smile before having to leave.

On the way out Simon stopped me and gave me an envelope. He made me promise not to open it until I was home. The ride back was the lowest point in my life. My heart ached the entire trip home. When Simon's mom dropped me off at my home, I promised I would help her with whatever she needed done. I trudged into my house and went directly to my room. Reaching into my pocket, I pulled out the envelope Simon had given me. Inside there was a picture that his mom had taken of us. On the back he wrote, "You're the greatest friend I could've ever hoped to have. I will cherish every moment that we spent together for the rest of my life. Your friend, Simon Francis Maxwell."

Every single person in this world has the chance to make a difference in someone's life. Being willing to take that first step is up to you.

# *My Generation and America's Future*

By Katelynn A. Ball

Van Junior/Senior High School

1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner (Grades 11-12)

“Does my generation have a role in America’s future?” I am sure this question has been asked for many years and that each generation has affected America in both positive and negative ways. However, I feel that my generation will change the future of America in many positive ways. I believe that the twenty-first century is very unique, and that young adults like myself are being challenged to be creative, hard working, and focused. Some of the ways America’s future will be affected by my generation are new medical developments; harsher laws on abusive spouses or parents; a higher standard of education; stronger families; more political involvement; curtailed drug abuse and violence; and creation of more jobs.

Each day scientists are discovering new cures and treatment for diseases that have affected people for years. Many hospital programs offer students entering the medical field help with college tuition and job placement. This has encouraged many in my generation to consider a career in the medical field. This, with the escalation of needs in the medical field, will certainly require more participants. I believe my generation will work hard to discover cures for diseases, because so many of us have watched loved ones or friends suffer with terminal illnesses.

I think this generation will continue to create and enforce laws to protect children from abusive parents. In years past, children’s rights’ were often over looked or denied. Children are now educated in schools about abuse and offered places to seek help. Both children and mothers/fathers are now protected by many laws from living in abusive environments, yet my generation will see that in an effort to stop all abuse the laws will be written more effectively and harsher punishment will be enforced.

I believe that America realizes that in order to keep up with other countries’ technology and skills we must have a higher standard of education, technology and skills. The numbers of honors classes and college classes offered have already increased even in rural areas. I believe that we will continue to increase my generation, we will be among the first overall to enter into the work force with the skills and sagacity needed.

America had always had strong family values. It seems as if at one point families began to struggle to survive. I believe this may have occurred when mothers began to work and go to college, as a father either abandoned them or expense required it. However, as time has passed, the family has adapted to both parents working and both parents have learned to care for the children’s needs when the other one is working. In the future, my generation will continue to develop more day cares at the work places of parents and allow maternity leave for the nurturing of children. We will focus on the importance of a strong family and parenting, making the difference in the future of the children.

America’s leaders and politicians work hard each day to assure our safety, a balanced economy and growth in our country. It seems as if many Americans have refused their right to vote in the past and many are not even registered to vote. I believe my generation will take great effort in teaching and informing the entire population about the importance of politics and voting. I hope to see the number of voters increase within the century. America’s economy has

suffered great loss in recent years, but if everyone will cast their votes for candidates who truly have the people in mind, we could see positive effects.

Drug abuse has grown rapidly in our country over the last few decades. There must be a way to stop the drastic drug abuse and its effects and my generation will seek the way to bring it to an end. There must be laws written and enforced to penalize repeated drug users and offenders, as well as more programs to help drug offenders become clean and functional in society. Violent offenders must also be punished and reformed to pose no threat to the Americans who wish to live as peaceful law abiding citizens. I believe my generation will continue to seek a safe country, free from drug users and violent offenders by imposing stiffer penalties for those who break the laws. We will also continue to develop drug awareness programs making every attempt to stop these problems before they occur.

Finally, my generation will seek to create jobs in our country through more factories, industries, and technology. Americans' debt to other countries will continue to lessen and we will buy more American made products, circulating the cash flow within our country. We will seek to export more and import less.

The future of America depends on our generation. We are the future of America with more knowledge, better education, drug awareness, stronger families and more job opportunities. Our generation will unite and rebuild a strong and safe country that others can only dream about.

## *Running with Gypsies*

By Holly Flowers

Sissonville High School, Kanawha County

2<sup>nd</sup> Place Winner (Grades 11-12)

It was a mid October morning, and the sky was bland. A dreary rain had just fallen, leaving teardrop puddles in the soaking streets. I waited at home impatiently for my father to return from my grandma's house, possibly for the last time. He had gone to meet with his two older sisters, my aunts, Joan and Barb. However, the occasion was not a pleasant family affair. My grandmother had just passed away, and they gathered at their childhood home to collect their belongings left for them in her will.

My siblings and I each received a generous sum of money for college, which we will get when we turn eighteen. She left the car to my older sister and some toys and such for my younger brothers that they favored when they visited. For me, I inherited all of her jewelry, a lifetime of rare, precious keepsakes just for me. Each gem, jewel, and chain kept my grandmother's memory and spirit alive within their glow, and this was the greatest gift ever given to me.

I spent the majority of my childhood at my grandmother's house, and some of my favorite memories originated there. She lived about forty minutes away, and I always looked forward to the drive to DuPont. I can remember sitting on the front porch in the spring time, listening to my grandma read a Shel Silverstein book to me with her cheery voice. She had many bookshelves stocked with my favorite stories, like *The Roly Poly Spider*, *The House that had Enough*, and *How Does your Garden Grow?* I even learned how to read at her house. In the backyard, I had a little red swing set that I spent hours on, reaching for the bright blue sky. Near the swing, a large



apple tree towered overhead, providing a cool shade over the entire area. I liked to play jump rope in the drive way with my sister and go for leisurely walks around the neighborhood.

After a long afternoon of frivolous play, my grandmother would serve lunch in the kitchen. She had a lovely kitchen with a large round oak table in the center. On top of a blue, floral table cloth, a tea kettle and a plate of jelly filled pastries called to us. There is something about a grandmother's cooking that makes any other meal seem like a frozen dinner. My favorite dish she made would probably have been her chicken and dumplings, with creamy mashed potatoes and green beans from her vegetable garden. Her cooking was the best, but her baking was divine. I remember the smell of fresh baked cinnamon rolls, drizzled in sticky icing and the aroma of apple spiced cake that permeated through the whole house.

My grandmother was a remarkable woman and quite eccentric, and her house was a reflection of that. The two-story, mint green house was filled from floor to ceiling with shelves that displayed all of her treasures from the years past. Some of her hobbies included collecting jewelry, beanie babies, and porcelain dolls. Dolls with rosy, blushing cheeks and soft curly hair adorned the perimeter of the room, their silk skirts glistening in the light. She put my favorite dolls on the lower shelves within my reach, and I would admire their elaborate gowns and flawless features. The living room was cozy, with a soft armchair that hugged your body close. A small, striped, wool rug tickled your toes as you walked by. Grand bay windows with intricate, lace curtains smiled with the morning sun. On these window sills, a fluffy calico cat could be found snoozing quietly on any given day. A spectacular garden sat in view, dotted with forget-me-nots and tulips. Flowers of every type grew in this magical garden: beautiful bluebells, dancing daffodils, lovely lilacs, and marvelous marigolds, living together in a wonderfully fragrant harmony. Thick, dark green ivy wound around the fences, making its way up the side of the house like a docile snake basking in the sun. Rabbits could be seen scampering in and out of focus, eyeing the foliage curiously. The chirp of birds mingled with the clink of soft wind chimes, and this tune drifted through the yard riding on a breeze. These were the sights and sounds of happiness and peace that are now distant memories and recollections of the past.

When my dad arrived home with my treasures, they saddened me with their beauty that had been crowded into stuffy boxes where they did not belong, and for some time, I kept my eyes off of them for fear of tearing up. All these items and rarities had been given to me, and I cherished them dearly, but for some reason, they didn't seem at home scattered and mixed matched in the floor of my room. Topaz beads, candy colored gems, and even the purest of pearls seemed to have lost their luster. Every color of the rainbow twinkled up at me; citrine bracelets, gorgeous garnet charms, peridot earrings, and stunning opal pendants yearned to be worn again. I stared at a box of rings for some time when a sharp ring of the telephone brought me back to reality. I stumbled my way past the cumbersome boxes to answer the call. My aunt's voice answered my hello, and she began to chatter, but I didn't hear much until she mentioned the jewelry at which I had been gazing. She said there was enough there for me to wear a different piece every day for the next five years and never wear the same one twice. She also told me to take my jewels and run with the gypsies, care free and wild spirited, just like my grandmother. With all these trinkets left for me, I can create my own memories and add to the collection. Maybe someday I'll be giving my own granddaughter the gift of a lifetime.

# *Aeternus Eternus*

By Rachel Rudd

Petersburg High School, Grant County  
3<sup>rd</sup> Place Winner (Grades 11-12)

*Drosophila melanogaster*. Twenty-third generation to be exact. I survived four stages of life and in a moment of weakness it all ended. Being new to the world, as I was back then, I was a virgin of circumstance. Never once did I question my purpose. All I knew was the driving pulse of hunger that always lingered with me. Now I know how delicate the balance of life really is.

When I was born, I greeted the world with a voracious appetite, as did thirty others of my kind. At first I was alarmed that there were so many that looked as I did. Upon closer inspection I discovered that we had common traits- red eyes, brown body- but there were variations in each of us. Our lust for sweets was that of monumental proportions considering we were only about three millimeters long. Nevertheless, all of us had to satisfy our needs somehow.

Trying to walk is not easy, you see, especially when you are a newborn adult with six legs. Add a pair of wings in the mix, and you are a walking, flying creature of contradictions. That is not to say that I was not grateful for the numerous appendages, it's just that I would have liked to have had an instruction manual with those things. Being thrust into that foreign planet without any hint of where I was or how to use what I was given was frustrating. It seems that my comrades had a spat of trouble also, so I didn't think it such a bad thing to be utterly lost in this new world.

Among the sea of alike creatures I felt comfortable testing out my newfound abilities. After seemingly endless attempts to fly, I mastered the concept. Soaring to new heights was thrilling; my only comfort coming from the knowledge that stable ground was below and would never disappear. During a leisure flight, something took hold of my companions. Suddenly, all of them ventured toward something I immediately recognized as salvation.

Yellow. Fuzzy. Tauntingly overripe. I knew not the name, only the temptation that awaited. A feeling akin to primal need kicked in, causing my body to hum. Unaware of anything but the need to devour the feast, I descended upon the sweet fleshy terrain. Rapaciously, I devoured the nectar. Wave upon endless wave of joy and contentment washed over me as I drew in the heavenly aroma. Slurping that precious sugary elixir was comparable to seeing God. For that moment, I was a glutton and could care less.

After depleting the food source, I resolved to probe my new microcosm. I was delighted by the array of unfamiliar smells that greeted me. Floral and musky and rotting and synthetic. Each enticed my olfactory sense. In that new universe every surface I traipsed was cool and smooth. The only thing I couldn't get used to was the brightness. Hue after colorful hue was magnified ten fold by the fluorescent lighting.

I began to tire on my exploration. Out of nowhere, a compeer landed behind me. Before I realized what was happening, he was on top of me, inside of me. Shocked and addled, I writhed until he dismounted. Before I had the chance to exact revenge, he was airborne. This new horror sickened me. The utopia I had discovered was marred by that atrocity. Having ensured that I was in good condition, I decided to troll for my next delectation.

It was not long before I discovered something worth consuming. A clear container of some sort held a dark liquidy substance. Finding a place where I could enter wasn't easy given the enormous size of the container. Accordingly, my wings were put to good use. I hovered above the delectable bubbly

concoction. Slowly, I lowered myself onto the shiny plastic surface taking care not to slip into the vat of aqueous saccharine. I tested the carbonic novelty and was immediately hooked on the delicious syrup. I wished I could drink forever, but then it happened.

For some reason the light was blocked from overhead. Not quite alarmed, I ascended to the entrance. Some sort of blue cap had covered it. Nearing panic mode, I repeatedly hit the hard top to try and escape. Eventually I gave up and sank into the liquid ambrosia, relishing the sticky goodness that brought death.

Even though I met an untimely demise, I was glad I did so with dignity. Others of my kind are killed by the giants that we fear. My purpose was to reproduce, as I learned after the fact, and I am sorry that I can no longer continue my legacy. I am not bitter about my death, knowing that it was a miracle that I made it as far as I did. After all, I am just a fruit fly.