

*2013 West Virginia
Young Writers Contest
Anthology*



Introduction

We proudly present the anthology of the 2013 West Virginia Young Writers contest. It showcases the stories of nineteen students who first won in their counties in their grade level divisions and then won at the state level, including one receiving a special award. These young writers represent counties from all around the state. Included are the winners of first, second, and third place in each grade level category.

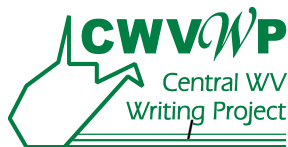
The West Virginia Young Writers Contest has honored excellent writing by our state's students in grades one through twelve for 30 years. The contest is an initiative of National Writing Project sites in West Virginia and supported by the West Virginia Department of Education and Marshall University Graduate College of Education and Professional Development. Funding is provided by the State of West Virginia, Earl Ray Tomblin, Governor. University of Charleston also provides invaluable support by hosting West Virginia Young Writers Day when we celebrate the winners. The 2013 contest was directed by Paul Epstein, Director of Central West Virginia Writing Project, with assistance from Alma Simpson, Coordinator of Instructional Resources, Office of Instruction, West Virginia Department of Education. A Steering Committee made up of volunteers named on the following page also offered invaluable support and advice.

The mission of National Writing Project sites in West Virginia is to improve the teaching of writing and learning in West Virginia schools. To learn more about their professional development programs, visit the websites listed below.

Central WV Writing Project: www.marshall.edu/cwvwp
National Writing Project at WVU: nwp.wvu.edu

Major Sponsors

*West Virginia Department of Education
Marshall University Graduate College of Education and Professional Development
University of Charleston*



Acknowledgements

WV Young Writers Contest Steering Committee

Dr. Elizabeth Campbell, Marshall University South Charleston Campus

Dr. Paige Carney, West Virginia State University

Paul Epstein, Director, Central WV Writing Project and WV Young Writers Contest

Dr. Calandra Lockhart, Interim Education Program Coordinator, University of Charleston

Alexis McConihay, Administrative Assistant, Education Program, University of Charleston

Alma Simpson, Coordinator of Instructional Resources, WV Department of Education

Dr. Letha Zook, Provost, University of Charleston

WV Young Writers Contest Judges* 2013

Jennifer Allen

Lisa Miller

Meredith Byrd

Emily Patterson

Theresa Dingess

Rebecca Ryder

Debbie Goff

Cyndi Smith

Anne Johnson

Brianne Vandal

Brenda McBrayer

Travis Vandal

*Judges are teachers associated with National Writing Project sites in West Virginia.

Editor of the 2013 WV Young Writers Anthology

Paul Epstein

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction and Sponsors | 2 |
| Acknowledgements | 3 |
| 1st-2nd grade winners | |
| The Ravenous Elephant – Aleecia Shelton | 5 |
| The Chicken – Elijah Williamson | 6 |
| A Nature Adventure – Jordan Niggemyer | 7 |
| Special Award | |
| Freedom! – Allie Hankins | 8 |
| 3rd-4th grade winners | |
| In a Stray Cat’s Heart – Danielle Carter | 10 |
| The Mystic Candy Battle – Seth Moore | 12 |
| Robotic Pencil – Levi Crider | 14 |
| 5th-6th grade winners | |
| 7 Seconds – Heather Wolford | 16 |
| Runaway Slave – Aden Funkhouser | 18 |
| The Lost Balloon – Emma Eisenbeiss | 20 |
| 7th-8th grade winners | |
| Strawberry Field of Dreams – Lauren Hopper | 22 |
| New York Times – Rylee Shahan | 24 |
| Indian Summer – Antwinette M. Fox | 26 |
| 9th-10th grade winners | |
| On Wings of Change – Emily Harrell | 28 |
| The Musician – Andrew Bohman | 31 |
| Butterfly Salvation – Brianna Maguire | 34 |
| 11th-12th grade winners | |
| Strong Roots – Adelina Lancianese | 36 |
| The Orange Drives Me Mad – Haley McCord | 39 |
| Amazing Grace – Myshna Napier | 41 |

The Ravenous Elephant

Aleecia Shelton

Flemington Elementary School, Taylor County

Teacher: Kathleen Jones

1st Place Winner (Grades 1-2)

GROWL...GRUMBLE...RUMBLE...ROAR! What a racket! Frank, the colossal pink elephant was starving! It had been a while since he last ate. He decided to call his friend, Lulu, the awesome green dog, to come to McDonald's with him. Frank was dreaming about their juicy chicken nuggets, delicious Big Mac, and yummy French fries.

When they got there, the famished elephant could not fit in the teeny tiny door. It was driving him crazy because he could smell all of the scrumptious burgers and the wonderful shakes. "What will I do?" wondered Frank. Lulu tried as hard as she could to push him in, but that did not work. Frank was just too enormous!

Next, they called May the mixed-up monkey, but she did not know what to do either. She was too busy eating plump yellow bananas to concentrate on the problem. So they called Carla the amazing red zebra to help them. Carla had an incredible idea! This is what she said, "You have to back up and run as fast as a cheetah through that door!"

So Frank backed up and sprinted toward McDonald's. CRASH! The glass on the door shattered into millions of tiny pieces. The pink elephant feels miserable now because he destroyed the door at McDonald's, but he is also joyful because he finally got his food! Now Frank is no longer hungry and all is peaceful!

The Chicken

Elijah Williamson

Wayne Elementary School, Wayne County

Teacher: Mrs. Lynn Ferguson

2nd Place Winner (Grades 1-2)

Never in my life did I ever think I would have a chicken for a pet, but I did. Here's how it happened.

Mamaw worked at the high school. Her class was incubating eggs for a class project. The experiment worked! The eggs hatched! My grandmother chose one for me, and that evening I met my new baby chick!

She was beautiful - black and white with a yellowish, blackish beak. I named her Caca.

Life with Caca was very exciting. She made me famous! Our Christmas cards were the talk of the town. Everyone wanted a picture of Caca and me sitting in front of the Christmas tree. During the picture taking, she kept jumping onto my lap. Dad was afraid she would roost in the tree.

During the day, Caca lived in the front yard in a big, black, dog cage. In the evening, Caca hung in the kitchen with us. I scattered special feed on the floor. She loved to eat off the smooth kitchen floor. At night, she slept in the kitchen in a grey, pet taxi. We kept her inside because Papaw told me foxes and dogs would get it. I looked at her through the little holes on the side. Sometimes when Mamaw came over, we bathed Caca in Lemon Joy and cut her toenails. She would dip her head in the water and shake and flap.

When we played outside, I pedaled my little green tractor and Caca followed me around the yard like a dog. She also came when I called her. Caca was a special pet. We spent our days together having fun. I will never forget my soft, fluffy, chicken, Caca. She was the best.

A Nature Adventure

Jordan Niggemyer

Pleasant Valley Elementary School, Marion County

Donna Ballas

3rd Place Winner (Grades 1-2)

My big brother Johnny was going on a balloon ride and asked me to go with him. I was so excited! It was going to be fun! My family was proud, but we would miss them. My little brother MJ would miss me, too. “Bye,” I said, and off we went!

We went so high, I got scared. And I never get scared! The people looked like tiny ants. I got really hungry. Luckily we brought a picnic basket for lunch. I ate a ham and cheese sandwich, chips, and fruit salad for dessert. Finally we got to the forest and it looked AMAZING!!! The water flowed calmly and looked dazzling. The rose bushes were pretty. The more I looked at the apple trees the hungrier I got. I saw a bear eating from a berry bush. A goldfish was jumping out of the water. Rocks were in the water, and green and red frogs were on them. I saw a corn snake about to eat a baby rabbit.

It turned night and an owl came out. I got my binoculars and camera. Johnny got a flashlight and we watched. The owl was very fast, but the mouse scurried off. I saw a fruit bat eating from a berry bush and a flying squirrel sleeping in an oak tree. I saw some hunters shooting a bear. They were sneaking up on frogs and rabbits and putting them over a fire to eat. They were also littering and tearing down trees, which means no more birds’ nests and animals’ homes.

We got back and our family was waiting. We stayed up all night showing pictures and telling stories, but MJ crashed at 1:09. It was awesome, but the best part was being home with my family.

Freedom!

Allie Hankins

Zela Elementary School, Nicholas County

*Special Award

It was a hot summer day. As usual I was working in the fields picking cotton. OUCH! Each little thorn poked my fingers as I picked. It was awful!

I worked hard washing clothes, baking breads, pies and getting water from the well for my master. If I did not work he would punish me.

I dreamed of being free. I knew it would NEVER happen though.

One evening I was getting firewood when a woman appeared.

“Good evening little lady.” She said. “My name is Moses.”

“My name is Alice.”

“Would you like to be free?” she asked.

“Yes!!!” I said.

“You will have to follow the drinking gourd.”

“Up there?” I asked.

“Yes” she said. “The one that looks like a pot.”

“OK.” I said. I wrapped my water bottle up in my blanket and lit my lantern.

I traveled through the Underground Railroad. When we saw a sign on a tree we knew the house was safe to stay at. I would crawl up in the hay and go to sleep.

One day we heard some men shouting.

“They’re coming to get us. Run!”

I jumped off the hay and ran as fast as I could. I ran past the men. They shot their guns at us. We leaped behind trees. The men rode past us. “We made it.” I said. I ran to the Ohio River and headed north for two whole days.

When I finally got out, wet and cold, I did not stop. We had to go into a dangerous town.

Slave catchers were everywhere. They had ropes, chains and guns. Just then the master's hound raised his head and barked! "Get them dogs!" he yelled.

I raced to the apple orchard and straight into Canada. I survived and now I am free!

*Allie's story was submitted in the 2012 WV Young Writers Contest when she was in 2nd grade, but because of an unfortunate series of errors, was overlooked. When this was discovered, we decided to give her a special award in this year's contest.

In a Stray Cat's Heart

Danielle Carter

Poca Elementary School, Putnam County

Teacher: Mrs. Karen Hackett

1st Place Winner (Grades 3-4)

Grey, thick fog rose around the roads of New York City as a black cat named Midnight passed over the moist asphalt. Her front leg had been broken from an accident she had with a car. It was the same accident where she lost her family. Now all she could do is limp on as the night passed by. Midnight had to find a place to sleep for the long, harsh winter night.

Midnight became tired, and her body started to feel sore. She glimpsed behind herself and saw the shining headlights of a car. Midnight tried to run but she couldn't. Forgetting about her aches she leaped out of the way, and was safe. She startled the driver, and the driver crashed into another car. A large crowd formed around the two wrecked cars. Midnight could hear phones dialing and people crying, shrieking in pain. She scurried over to an ally lit by a single dim streetlight so she wouldn't be seen. She was very exhausted as she lay down in a box lined with newspaper and slept until dawn.

The next morning Midnight lifted onto her tired feet and trudged on. Hunger began to make her stomach ache. The aroma of a Japanese restaurant filled her nostrils. She had not eaten in days. Midnight followed the scent until she got to her destination. She pounced through the window. Screams of customers shuddered around the room as Midnight hopped onto tables, stealing all the food she could get her paws on. Someone pulled out a phone and dialed the number for animal control.

Midnight continued her feast until the doors suddenly swung open. A large man with a gleaming steel cage walked through the door and started chasing her. She was terrified as she rushed through the middle of people's legs and jumped

over tables. She tried to think quickly but nothing would come to her. Midnight scurried left and right until she suddenly found herself in an iron cage. All she could do was hope.

Midnight was placed in a room filled with other cats. All of them, including her, were in steel cages. She didn't like it here; she didn't like to be kept in a cage. Scared and feeling alone, Midnight didn't think there was a way out. Then a boy in a wheelchair entered the room. He looked familiar to Midnight. "Mom look," exclaimed the boy. "That's my cat!" Sudden realization struck Midnight. The boy was her previous owner. The shelter manager opened the cage and gave Midnight to the boy. "You can have him free," stated the manager. The boy cheered gleefully.

Midnight couldn't wait to get home and eat fresh cat food, play with her favorite ball, and sleep in her warm bed. Though these things excited her, she was most excited to be safe in her guardian's arms. Midnight couldn't help but wonder if this was coincidence or it was really meant to be.

The Mystic Candy Battle

Seth Moore

Arthur I. Boreman Elementary School, Tyler County

Teacher: Cathy Boggs

2nd Place Winner (Grades 3-4)

Did I ever tell you that I was a war hero? I was a bit heroic, if I do say so myself. It all started one day when I was picking berries with my dog, Toby. We probably ate more than we picked. They were really good!

While we were eating them, a light started gleaming down upon us. A giant glowing portal started swirling around in the air. It was so bright that it knocked me out cold! When I woke up, I found myself lying on the ground in the same spot. When I went to eat a berry, I looked at it and realized... that it was pink! I looked at the other ones and realized they were all different colors! I pushed aside the bush and looked up. There was an entire kingdom of colorful candy!

I saw a candy bowl at the door, so I got a piece of peppermint candy. Then a peppermint soldier seized me, handcuffed me and threw me in the gumdrop jail. When he left, I ate a path right through the jail. I tried to run, but two guards chased me. I made it out of the castle, but then... someone pulled me into the berry bush!

I screamed, but he said they meant me no harm. He brought me back to his village. It was very colorful, but not like the candy kingdom. I realized everyone in the village were vegetables! They said the candy people attacked because they were against anything that wasn't sugary. I knew this was the beginning of a big battle.

The vegetables begged me to be their leader and I accepted. I figured I should try to make peace before it was all out war. I grabbed some villagers and

went to the castle to make peace. I marched from the Village of Yam to the Candy Castle. When we got there, the candy people wouldn't budge and declared war!

I knew I had better prepare my army of vegetables! When my army was just about to march, thousands of candy people rushed over the hill! My vegetables didn't stop! They kept on marching.

We shot our cannons, but they just kept coming. Finally, they retreated and we made it to their castle. Sure enough, they were waiting on us. They put up a pretty good fight. There were potato peelings flying everywhere!

We found the king and my guards wrestled him to the ground. We gave him the treaty that declared peace between Yam Village and Candy Castle. He signed it and apologized for causing so much trouble. He said things had been rough since he had lost his crown. We said we understood and made him a new crown from a tomato vine. He said he loved it and promised he would never let candy and vegetables fight again. To this day, his promise has not been broken.

Robotic Pencil

Levi Crider

Road Branch Elementary School, Wyoming County

Teacher: Ms. Zastawniak

3rd Place Winner (Grades 3-4)

Can you imagine a pencil that writes your homework? It would be the answer to every kid's prayer. Kids hate writing but love to talk. A robotic pencil would do the writing, and the kids would dictate the answers to the homework lessons. Everyone will be happy—students, parents, and teachers!

The robotic pencil would look and feel like a regular No. 2 pencil. However, unlike an ordinary pencil, this pencil has wires and chargers inside. The lead and eraser are made of special materials. The lead consists of orange crystals that write in pencil color and can grow back when they are broken. Can you just imagine a classroom without the sound of a pencil sharpener? The annoying sound of an electric pencil sharpener will be replaced by the sound of crystals rejuvenating. A laser replaces the ordinary rubber eraser and erases mistakes in one fast swipe. The robotic pencil can write in manuscript or cursive and includes a clock. The clock can tell you when it is time for gym or lunch. Also, when you are absent it can get messages from your teacher about school work.

In order for the robotic pencil to work correctly, the owner must first train the pencil to imitate his writing. This is an important step in making sure the pencil performs properly. The owner must train the pencil to write like him and take commands from him. He trains the pencil to duplicate his writing by scanning several copies of his writing into the pencil's memory chip. After the pencil learns the owner's writing, the owner then trains the pencil to recognize his voice commands. The pencil is voice-activated and only takes commands from the owner. To train the pencil to only take his commands, the owner must say "hello" repeatedly one hundred times in order for the pencil to recognize his voice.

This new robotic pencil is going to make everybody happy. First, the students will be happy because they will not have to do all the writing for assignments even though they still will have to do all the thinking. Next, parents will be happy because the kids won't complain about doing all that writing. Finally, teachers will be happy because the students will get all their school work finished and no pencils to sharpen!

7 Seconds

Heather Wolford

Romney Middle School, Hampshire County

Teacher: B. Scott Willhide

1st Place Winner (Grades 5-6)

Fear. It struck me like the point of a double edge blade. I stood there trembling in utter shock, as my fellow classmates fell to their knees at my feet. Though I could not comprehend the tragedy before me, my first instinct was to run. However, it seemed as though my limbs were not communicating with my brain. As though my mind had shut down.

My ears rang with the sound of a loud pop. Followed by excruciating screams that haunt me everyday. I thought of my mom and dad. Wondering if I'd ever see them again. Wondering if the man with the gun was going to take my life. I remembered the cool summer days, when we swam in the creek and ate peanut butter sandwiches on the bank. Would I ever feel that happy again? Or was it just a distant memory?

One thing, one thing I will always remember, is standing there, watching my lab partner, Marcus, bleed out on the cold hallway floor. Not even 15 minutes before, we had been arguing over something on our project. I had said mean things, things I will regret the rest of my life. As I watched him lie there in unbelievable pain, I managed to whisper these words through my sobs: I'm sorry. Those were the last words he heard before he was gone.

I recall feeling both hot and cold at the same time. I was sweating madly, yet my skin was like Braille from goose bumps. My stomach lurched with every pop. I could feel my eyes darting left and right, then left again. At that point, I thought what any young child would think. Is this my fault? Did I cause this tragic event to occur? Of course, the answer was no, but I didn't know that then, and it terrified me. As I stood there weeping in absolute disbelief and despair, I

came to grips with the world's one true enemy. Reality. We make ourselves believe that things like this don't exist. That people couldn't possibly be capable of causing so much devastation. By doing this, we are only making things worse. And when reality comes knocking at the door, you won't be prepared for what's coming.

The memories of this gruesome experience are burned in the back of my mind. I will never forget the heart rending images I saw that day. Nor will I forget the feelings of helplessness, despair, and fear. It has taken me years to process the entirety of my dilemma. I still do not fully understand why people do the things they do, and I probably never will. All I can say is that I am finally at peace. But I will always remember those final 7 seconds.

Runaway Slave

Aden Funkhouser

East Hardy Middle School, Hardy County

Teacher: Debra Hubbard

2nd Place Winner (Grades 5-6)

Silently, I creep around my room grabbing my most beloved possession. I know that I can't pack more than I can carry. When I am ready, I tip-toe softly down the steps, but as I reach the bottom, a step makes a loud creaking noise. I freeze with terror, for I know what happens when you're caught out of your room this early. Just the other week another slave was brutally whipped for going to get a drink of water. I scan the room before me, alert for any movements or signs of life. After it seemed safe, I continued down the stairs and out the door. I walked silently down the rocky road, oblivious to the pain of walking barefooted on rocks. I trotted down the road as the early lights of dawn began to stream down from the heavens. As I walked, I prayed that this would be the last time I ever walked down this old road. I veered off the road and into the fields beyond it, but never dared to look back at that dreadful house.

I had just made it into the woods located north of the plantation when I remembered that I had forgotten to pack food and water. I immediately went into a frenzied panic. Finally, I gain my composure once again and start to look for water and anything edible. About three miles into the woods, there was an abandoned cave that had a fresh water spring. Outside the cave, prospering raspberry bushes hid the entrance. I decided to pick some raspberries for dinner and get back in the shelter of the cave before the search parties reached my part of the woods. That night a horrible storm rolled in, and without the shelter of the cave I would have died of pneumonia. Around midnight I heard the sound of dogs howling, and the

sound of hooves clattering by the cave entrance. Luckily the blackness was impenetrable that night, and the rain drowned out any sounds I made as I slept. They rode right by the cave entrance, unable to see it through the extreme darkness. The next morning I was awakened by the chatter of morning birds and the light of the rising sun seeping into the cave. I quietly peeked out of the cave looking for any sign of danger, and when I was convinced it was safe, I walked out to my raspberry patch. After two hours of picking, I returned to the safety of my cave, but when I came to the entrance I saw a terrifying sight. Lying in the cave was a humongous black bear. Not daring to challenge the bear, I was forced to leave my temporary home and walk farther into the depths of the lush woods.

I walked through the woods listening as birds chirped happily, and the deer roamed quietly through the barren parts of the woods. I looked at the trees and their bright green leaves that grew all around them to form the dense forest. As I walked, I noted possible places where I could hide in emergencies. At last, as night came close, I flopped down on the damp ground. Defeated and tired, I lie quietly till I drift into an uncomfortable sleep. I did not hear the voices until it was too late. I jumped up and tried to sneak into the cover of the undergrowth. Just as I thought I was in the clear, I was roughly pushed into the ground. I fought as hard as I could, but finally gave up to exhaustion. The men were people who lived on the plantation, and I could tell they had been up all night searching for me. Their beards were unshaven and the breath smelled rotten. I saw one tie a rope to a tree and put a loop at the bottom. Fear leaped into my heart. I felt the coarse rope tightening around my neck. Just as the horse walked out from under me, I woke up to my mom's voice. "Bud wake up. It is time to go to school," she said. Relieved I thought to myself, it was just a dream.

The Lost Balloon

Emma Eisenbeiss

Frankford Elementary School, Greenbrier County

Teacher: Amber Workman

3rd Place Winner (Grades 5-6)

It was like any other day at the zoo. I was on the rack with all the other balloons. The zoo was about to open, and I couldn't wait to be sold. I was the best balloon out of the bunch. I was the biggest, reddest, shiniest balloon there was. All the other smaller balloons were jealous of my beautiful coating.

Not long after the zoo opened, a little boy with a bright green ball cap who was obviously taking a break with his mom came in and pointed to me. My head started rising as the boy picked up my string. All the other smaller balloons cheered me on as we went to the checkout counter and out the door to see the animals. It was my first time seeing all the animals, and I was excited. There were lions, and tigers, and pandas, and everything you could think of. After we looked at all the wonderful animals, we went to the car. When the little boy tried to open the door something terrible happened! The little boy let go of me! I went up, up, and away. I tried to get back down but I couldn't.

When I did come down, it was almost dark. I didn't know where I was, all I knew was that a giant forest surrounded me. I found myself stuck in a tree. I called out for someone or something but no one came. Finally, after the sun was gone and there was no light, I heard a scuttling noise. I called to whatever it was, and it started coming up the tree. It was a pack of big, fat, blue, beetles. Their eyes were still adjusting to my shiny, red coating when the biggest beetle made a noise and they all began pouncing on me! Bug after bug pounced on me, but not one could free me from my twisted jail. When they were about to give up, the tiniest bug gave one last heroic pounce and the branch broke. I went tumbling

down right through the forest canopy until I hit the ground in a giant puddle of mud.

My shiny, glossy coating was no longer shiny nor glossy. Instead it was an oozing, gooey, blackish coating, but I could do nothing. After my ordeal, I bounced over to a leaf and went to sleep. When I woke up, I found myself on top of the same big, fat, blue beetles that had helped me. As I thought about what they were doing, I was suddenly thrown into the river. All the bugs watched as I floated down the stream. As I floated away from shore, they just watched me wide-eyed waiting for something to happen. I gave the bugs an angry look. Why on earth would they do that to such a beautiful balloon? Just as I realized what the blue bugs were doing, I unexpectedly floated up! The bugs were cleaning the heavy mud off of me so that I would float again. I gave them a smile of gratitude and headed off to find the boy. I went floating out of the forest into the city.

It was early morning when I reached my town. I flew down to the zoo and waited for someone to open the door. When an employee did walk in, I flew down and flung myself into the other balloons. Everybody was excited that I was back, but I was still discouraged that I didn't find the boy.

Days went by and I hadn't slept, and I was losing helium. One employee noticed me and blew me back up. Right after that, I saw the boy with the green cap outside! I was overjoyed to see him standing there. Right at that moment, he walked in and pointed to me. He went outside to get his mother and dragged her over to me. She shrugged and nodded. The boy grabbed me and I went out the door with him. We got in the car and went home. Now every time my air goes out I just get blown back up and I never, ever got lost again.

Strawberry Field of Dreams

Lauren Hopper

Ripley Middle School, Jackson County
Teachers: Tiffany Billiter and Tarah Clark
1st Place Winner (Grades 7-8)

Caroline looked down at her sunbaked legs peaking from underneath her well-worn dirt stained overalls. With her head peering downward, it created a dapple of shade to protect her from the intense heat of the searing June sun. Her body was enveloped with sweat, making her every limb desperately long to be doused by the red watering hose held lazily in her arms. Caroline was already tired of gardening, but she knew that her Grandpa Henry would become very upset if she didn't take care of his precious garden. Since he'd grown elderly and brittle, Caroline had been forced to take care of his prized plants every summer. She strongly despised doing the work, so she spent most of her time loafing in the strawberry patch. Caroline loved to relax there while admiring the healthy vines that grow the sweetest red berries in all of West Virginia!

Today happened to be the day when the first succulent strawberry would be fully ripened and ready to devour. So, once Caroline finished her usual chore of watering the garden, she raced to the strawberry field to harvest the fruit. She ran at an alarmingly fast pace considering the murderous oven-like heat. Upon her arrival, she had already spotted a ripe strawberry. Almost instantaneously, Caroline picked a strawberry and plopped it into her mouth. To her surprise, something was wrong! Instead of having the usual sweetness that Caroline knew best, the strawberry was atrociously bitter and sour. Caroline was disgusted and started crying as she crumpled to the ground in a heap of disappointment and despair.

Then, after her exaggerated tantrum, Caroline suddenly heard a faint whisper coming from the corn rows behind her. The voice sounded extremely sarcastic while making some rather corny remarks. The voice was mocking the strawberries by telling them, "My face would be red too if I tasted like that! You're literally bursting with flavor, and I'm not talking about taste, I'm talking about your ego! That's why you taste

so sour, because you have such a sour attitude.” These rude comments puzzled Caroline greatly. Just who was talking?

Caroline came to the conclusion that the corn plants must be able to speak. Then, the corn plants began to speak directly to Caroline. “They just think they’re as sweet as sugar, but they’re as sour as lemons! Oh those stuck-up strawberries, they’re always disparaging us corn because they think we are corny!” Caroline did not know what to think at this point; she was seriously beginning to doubt her sanity. Why was she listening to plants talk?

Of course, the strawberries also heard the remarks of the corn. They arrogantly retorted that the corn was just jealous of all the special attention they receive. In the spring, Caroline covers them with blankets to protect them from the frost. Also, the luscious strawberries always get picked first during the harvesting season, and they are eaten immediately in plain view of all the other plants. You can see the happiness on peoples’ faces as they enjoy a fresh strawberry!

As the argument became more heated, Caroline decided to intervene. She told the strawberries and corn that she liked them both equally. She explained that the strawberries would die if they weren’t protected from the frost. Caroline also told the corn plants that the only reason she picked the strawberries first was because they ripened first. Caroline said, “You are both equally sweet, but corn tastes sweeter once it has been cooked. If you all don’t quit fighting, I will dig you both up!”

Suddenly, Caroline blacked out. She later awoke buried in the soft foliage of her strawberries in a state of bewilderment. Her whole body was lobster red and sore to the touch. So, Caroline realized that she must have passed out after running so frantically to the strawberries. Caroline’s parched throat cracked as she tried to speak to the plants. As she heard the echo of her hoarse words, followed by an empty reply, she soon realized that her whole adventure had been spent in her strawberry field of dreams. Finally, Caroline got to enjoy the first strawberry of the season!

New York Times

Rylee Shahan

Belington Middle School, Barbour County

Teacher: Ashley McCauley

2nd Place Winner (Grades 7-8)

It's amazing how life can simply twist an ordinary day into one that is life-altering. The sun was blinding me, gleaming through the window in my bedroom, and the smell of my dad's homemade buttermilk pancakes, sizzling in the skillet, was permeating the whole house. The car horns outside of our apartment were beeping every second on that Tuesday morning. I sluggishly managed to hop out of bed and lumbered down the narrow hallway following the sweet aroma. My father usually never got up this early to make me breakfast, but since today was a special day, I guess he could make an exception.

I was not only turning thirteen, but it was also my first birthday since my mother died of a four-year battle with breast cancer. She's in a better place now, and through that experience, I had learned to accept what is. Daddy had done everything he could to help me out and be the father I always wanted by my side, the one I had always needed.

Interrupting my long gaze back into time, I stood in the doorway leading to the kitchen when my father spoke to me and said, "Gotta head out early this morning, but I will be home as soon as I can for my little girl's special day. Pancakes are on the counter, Hun. Love you, and Happy Birthday!"

"Okay, Dad. Love you, too," I replied.

He picked up his coffee mug and his jacket and vanished through the front door. I was left with a heaping stack of pancakes and time to kill while he was gone for a few hours. Grabbing about two or three of them off the bar, I drowned them in maple syrup and butter, then plopped on the couch to find something worthy of my interest on a morning when I would generally be slogging through a day of classes.

Finally finishing my plate, I was too distended to get off of the sofa, so I put my plate on the coffee table and dozed off. Then, it seemed I was asleep no longer than a

half an hour before the telephone woke me up. Sliding the phone from its cradle, I answered to my best friend screaming and exclaiming, “Turn on the news to channel twelve! No questions! Just do it!” A resounding click alerted me that she was no longer on the line.

Startled, and a little puzzled, I changed the channel to twelve. Appearing before me was an anchorman covering a story. The screen displayed two airplanes hitting the World Trade Center, and one tower came tumbling down, blanketing the scene in chaos.

I sat there in shock about five minutes, compelled to look at the horrible disaster and thought, That’s the reason Dad got called in. That’s why he had to leave early. My mouth turned to cotton.

I had to do something to find my dad. Everything became blurry to me at first, and then I felt the tears streaming down my freckle-infested cheeks. I shot-up from the couch in anger and sadness, and a whole bunch of other jumbled emotions, and raced outside to grab my bike from the front yard. Seconds later, I was headed toward downtown. Trudging down the road, I prayed to God everything would be fine, and He would keep my father safe from harm.

I finally dropped my bike and saw the long yellow police tape in front of me, flickering in the wind. I slid underneath it very slyly and ran straight ahead. While passing the debris, the papers and ashes falling everywhere reminded me of snow in the winter. In the sea of confusion surrounding me, I felt peaceful for a moment.

It didn’t take long for me to come back to reality and determine I had to find him before time ran out. I tentatively approached a pile of rubble, unsure of how to start looking but certain that I must, when a gentle hand touched my left shoulder. A voice full of sandpaper spoke abruptly, “How ‘bout some birthday cake, Kiddo?”

Indian Summer

Anntwinette M. Fox

Long Drain School, Wetzel County

Teacher: Mrs. Juni Yoho

3rd Place Winner (Grades 7-8)

It was the summer after I turned fourteen, an Indian summer to be exact. I could still run barefoot in October and feel the sun on my face as I lay motionless in the meadow. I was wild, and free, and nothing in the world could stop me. Inside those familiar county lines, no pain or heartache could reach me. I can recall it well, because for that brief moment in time, I was invincible.

Fall was short, giving little time to prepare for the impending winter. We gathered every vegetable we could salvage from the virtually barren gardens, canning them to be set away safely in the cellar. As the daylight hours shortened, the workload only increased. We had so much to do and only three people to do it. We fought hard for those last two weeks, refusing to shirk the smallest responsibilities. That is one thing I have always admired about my family. We never give up, even if everything in the world is stacked against us. As the final leaves fell from the trees and the breeze lost its gentle warmth, fear of the unknown season to come became more intense.

Winter set on with a fierce grasp, whisking away our sixty degree weather, and replacing it with frigid single-digits. We had only a single wood-burning stove to heat our entire house, so in most rooms you could see your breath hanging in the air. We spent the coldest week of my life in that house with no electricity. Mine was not a rich family; we never had a lot, but we always had what we needed. However, what we had was usually on the verge of breaking down. We did have a generator, but it was ancient. Many days it was simply on the wings of a prayer that the old thing started up at all. With a little hope and a lot of grace, we made it through that week, but it altered my life forever. I had truly learned what it meant to not only live, but to survive.

Winter's grueling weather gave way to a late spring. Spring is the season for new life, and that was especially true on our farm. Baby goats arrived right on schedule, and

each with a clean bill of health. The gardens were planted in June, with an abundance of vegetables to be harvested in August. Everything was going according to plan... and then the rain began. The showers started in the morning, earlier than the rooster's crow. By noon, the creeks surrounding our farm were quickly raging out of their banks. Before night fall, we had lost everything. All of our seeds had washed away. Some of the animals, confused with the sudden rising water and too afraid to move, drowned. I had never been more scared in my life. As I fought outside with my family to save what animals we could, my salty tears mingled with the rain running down my face. I will never forget the horrifying bawls of the animals that we could not save.

Now spring's torment has given way to summer. There are no words to describe my hope that all goes well this season. I have spent the last year going through fear, pain, and near- death conditions; yearning only for that blissful summer so long ago. Time is a cruel comrade. Whether it is that first Indian summer, or the final moments of pain that year, time always runs out. I have come to know that few things are certain in this game we call life, and nothing is what it seems. I have learned to be a strong person, as circumstances have forced me to be. My spirit will never be broken, because no matter where life may take me, or when my time may end; in my mind I will always be running barefoot in October, marveling at the beauty of my own Indian summer.

On Wings of Change

Emily Harrell

Capital High School, Kanawha County

Teacher: M. Harrah

1st Place Winner (Grades 9-10)

A simple push was all she needed, and then the rocky ledge was no longer beneath her. The wind whipped around her as the ground approached, but she felt no fear. A moment later, she was shooting through the sky on wings strong with her heritage and unbound by the world she had always known. With an overpowering sense of wonder she rode the wild airstream far from her home nestled in the cliffs, and yet, she was home. The sky, infinite and everlasting, had called out to her, and in that leap with wings outstretched she had answered as all golden eagles eventually do, reveling in the wonder and bliss of flight.

With memories of that first daunting plummet from the aerie fading, she drifted effortlessly as the gentle mid-day heat flowed through her glistening feathers that matched the landscape painted in browns and greys. Harsh and wild the land below her seemed, but it was home to countless others. A great commotion of trampling hooves resonated from the plains below, and she descended from the pathless sky to where a mighty herd of wild horses galloped along the dry grassland. Majestic and fleet-footed they were, with eyes blazing and nostrils flared. The eagle marveled at the sight, having never before seen anything so chillingly beautiful, though many times she had heard stories about the wild horses that could outrun the wind. She angled back to the sky, but vowed never to forget the sight of the horses that ran that day.

The sun was waning as she turned back to her home in the cliffs. She flew with it to her left, the light casting bloody rays of scarlet across the land and dyeing it unnaturally bright colors that seemed to foreshadow something much darker than the upcoming night. The wind was still warm, but it had changed. The eagle felt as if something heavy and unwelcome had come to fly beside her, but there was not another bird in sight. She sped up a bit, though her energy was fading. She passed another small

herd of horses, but these were not the wild ones she had seen earlier in the day. In their mouths were bridles of sinew cord and on their backs rode tall, dark skinned men with feathers in their hair and red and white markings on their faces. In their hands were long bows, and on their backs there were quivers filled with feather-fletched arrows. The People, as they were referred to among the birds, were fierce creatures, but very respectful of the natural world, and especially the eagles. Now, however, they rode in a haste only seen in times of conflict.

Not long afterwards her mountain home drew close but there was a noise that was not caused by any creature that had ever walked through that land before. Shouts of People rose from the base of the rocky cliffs in which many eagles dwelled, but they were unlike any People she'd ever seen. Their skin was pale and their language was harsh, but clearly commanding. The eagle had not seen them when she first flew out, having left by a different path. Many of the strange People carried bundles of red sticks and rushed about the base of the mountain, insect-like, with their attention focused on one small crack.

She did not like their voices, the looks of them, or the crack in her mountain, and flew in the cooling air back to the precipice where her parents' huge aerie lay. She reached the cliff and anticipated a greeting, but none rested in the giant nest. She called out in cries of fear and loneliness but the only replies she received were the echoes of her own despair. As she prepared to fly off to search, there was an incomprehensibly loud boom, and the entire mountain shuddered. She screeched and launched into the air as rocks began falling, crushing the beautiful nest. Her wings were aching with weariness but she flew from her home and back over the valley of the white men. They were shouting even louder now and smoke was rising from the gaping hole in the face of the rock. Even as she stared in horror, more of the men came with carts and boxes full of the red bundles, which they took into the now gaping cavern. The young eagle took off at full speed before the next rounds of dynamite exploded in the mountain.

Despair and anguish were vices around her heart as she flew back to where she had last seen the good People, the ones with horses and face paint. They, too, were

moving away from the mountain as they spotted the lone eagle. In voices and gestures her heart understood, they told her how the other eagles had sought shelter in the cliffs along the river. Her spirits rose as she followed their guidance to her family's new home and where she was welcomed back joyously.

The explosions on that first day of flight were only the beginning. In time, the eagles' mountain was breached, trains rumbled and belched their way across the land and the balance and harmony of nature in the West was lost. But there were some who remembered when the wind whistled through the prairie grass unencumbered, wild horses thundered in savage beauty, and eagles lived peacefully in the mountains, and they clung to their stories and traditions for many years after the invasion. Until her dying day, when asked about her first flight, the eagle did not mention the chaos and destruction of her home or the horrors brought by the strange white People. She remembered the endless sky, the peace of being on wing, and wild horses running free. Racing the wind.

The Musician

Andrew Bohman

Bohman Home School, Upshur County

Teacher: Beth Bohman

2nd Place Winner (Grades 9-10)

Dawn's first light crept across the barren landscape, gently caressing its rough features before it began to burn with the searing heat of noon. Looming pillars of rock encrusted the terrain like jagged teeth rising from a scorched mouth, and the face of the earth was covered in a blanket of thick, coarse granules of sand. The land had not felt the merciful trickle of cool water for hundreds of years.

All across the desert, huts were huddled beneath tall sheltering boulders, intermixed with wells that sucked liquid life from the depths of the earth. Towering over the city was a large dome wrought of steel and glass, serving as an ark with everything needed to keep an entire civilization alive for ages.

As the light of day meandered its way into the settlement, its people began to stir. Out they climbed from their humble abodes, stretching and enjoying the gentle sunrise while it lasted. But deep inside, they were empty. Their hungry souls searched for meaning amidst their survival. To them, the only purpose was to keep breathing. However, there was one solace — one oasis in the desert of their lives.

Every day hordes of people came to visit the dome for its greatest attraction, a wonder spoken of throughout all the land: the Musician. If they were fortunate enough, the people could reach the dome to hear the rare phenomenon of music. Nobody heard music before seeing the Musician, because in all the world, his music was all that was left.

Among the pilgrims of that day was a small boy riding on his father's shoulders, his pale blue eyes full of wonder. The thought of the mysterious, glorious sounding figure sent a ripple of excitement through the boy. "Have you ever seen the Musician, Papa?"

His father, a strong middle aged man with a face worn by the sun, spoke softly in a deep voice, "Once."

"Tell me more."

"Legend says that before the world went dry, music was everywhere. Water was so abundant it fell from the skies. But then a Great War came, and all that was before was vanquished. Music was lost, all save the Instrument, which is kept by the Musician. Now, he uses it to make music for all to enjoy."

"What is music, Papa?"

He paused for a moment. "It's the sound feeling makes."

As the crowd continued to the great hall of the dome, the boy became more and more excited. "Look there," said the father. The sight made the boy's heart jump. There, on a platform above the throng of onlookers was the Instrument, a beautiful grand piano with milky white and deep black keys. It stood as a monument of all that was good in the world, and standing by its side was its owner. The Musician waved to the crowd with an aged, slender hand, causing titters of excitement to ripple through the room. When all had settled into place, the Musician took his seat in front of the piano, eliciting silence from the eager audience. The boy could hardly breathe.

In the quiet, the Musician extended his hands and rested them over the keys in a seemingly random position. Then he pressed down firmly, letting out a resounding, discordant series of notes. The people cheered wildly. Satisfied, he proceeded to throw his hands across the keyboard, spawning a shapeless, senseless melody of absolute chaos. But the crowd adored it nonetheless.

Most had never heard any form of music in their lives, so they absorbed the smallest trace of it hungrily, letting the sound wash through them and feed their starving souls. But the boy was different. Built within him was a seed with a deep understanding of music, and with that first note the seed was watered. The wheels of his mind spun in fascination as the performer thundered out a tempest of dissonant notes. Slowly, he began to understand how it worked.

The Musician ended his first song with a thunderous bang, and while the crowd cheered, the boy sat silently with focus and determination. The excitement died down and the pianist extended his spindly fingers over the keyboard once more. The boy took a

deep breath and grabbed his chance. Sliding down from the broad shoulders of his father, he pushed his way through the crowd and approached the stage.

His father's face reddened. "Son," he said under his breath, "don't—"

Unafraid, the boy climbed up onto the platform, inducing chuckles from the crowd. The Musician stopped. The young child before him asked in a small but confident voice, "Can I try?"

The mass of people roared with laughter, but the Musician hushed them with a wave of his hand. "The boy wants to try, so let him try."

The child took his place on the bench. Gently, he placed his fragile fingers on the keys and pushed one down. A single, clear note quietly resounded. Silence flooded the room. He pressed another, and then played them together. Then, with both his hands on the keyboard, he played.

What came forth was gentle and sincere. It was a simple melody with quiet harmony, flowing like the sound of a trickling brook. The small hands wrought the sound delicately, serving as the lip of a pitcher that poured out emotion. The keyboard conformed with him as his fingers slid easily across it.

Among the crowd, many began to weep. None of them had ever tasted music, and they drank in the young child's sweet, sincere melody and let it quench their thirst. The boy ended his melody with a clear chord, letting it ripple through the room with finality. A roar of thunderous cheering and applause burst forth from the crowd. With tears in his eyes, the Musician stepped down from the platform and motioned for him to start again. The boy outstretched his fingers and started to play once more, while outside rain fell softly from the sky.

Butterfly Salvation

Brianna Maguire

Paw Paw High School, Morgan County

Teacher: Melissa Huff Salvatore

3rd Place Winner (Grades 9-10)

It's a bright, sun-kissed day, the crystal water of the stream dancing with the light and rippling playfully as the three children toss stones into it. A sort of serenity accompanies the cloudless sky.

One of the children looks up into the endless blue and says, in a wise voice, "You know what's up there?"

One of the others, a red-headed girl painted with freckles, replies, "Of course. Don't you? That's heaven. That's where good people go when they die."

The boy who first spoke shakes his head, fluffy blond pieces of hair brushing his cheeks. "No, no...that can't be right. Or else the bad people would get real mad. And besides, the birds go up there, and they ain't dead."

The girl's eyes crinkle together, her expression resembling that of a teenager who's just been told she was adopted. "But...but of course that's heaven. 'Cause God sends all the good people there. Where else would they go?"

The boy, a plump, peach-colored child with flushed cheeks and a habit of snagging cookies, bites his bottom lip, "To the ocean. Maybe. After all, nobody knows what's way down there."

The third child, an insignificant little boy with ears too large for his head, speaks up. "I don't think that's it." A delicate butterfly lands on his fingers, shaking its wings out briefly before fluttering away. The boy gazes after it, smiling slightly at a sudden thought. "Maybe we turn into butterflies, so we can fly wherever we want to go. I bet butterflies see all kinds of stuff."

The first boy laughs. "What a thought. I bet we're the only ones in the whole wide world who think about that...Everyone else must think what Abby thinks, that it's heaven up there."

The red-headed Abby smacks the boy with a swift hand. "Now you listen here. Ezra Anderson, don't go making fun of God. Then you certainly won't be going to heaven, or the ocean, or even turn into a butterfly. You understand?"

The third boy, whose name is Byron, says, “No, I don’t think that’s right, either. I think that everybody turns into a butterfly...because when you’re a butterfly you can’t do bad things like lie or steal or hit kids. Everybody has to be a butterfly...so that everybody is good.”

Ezra only stares at Byron for a moment before he says, “You’re smart, Byron. I’ll bet you’ll be president one day. Then you can make a law that everybody has to be a butterfly.”

Abby, voice shaking in agitation, exclaims, “What about God? If everybody is a butterfly then what will He do?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” Byron asks, eyes wide. “He’ll help the people getting stole from or being lied to, the kids getting hit. But I think God gets real busy sometimes, 'cause he misses a few people.”

Abby, content in that her God has not been proven false, lies back in the breeze-cooled grass with a contented sigh. Ezra soon follows. From the ground he says, “Nobody answered my question, you know. About what’s up there.”

Softly, Byron says, “Butterflies.”

When Abby returns home she’ll tell her Christian parents about what she discovered today, and they’ll explain again that there is indeed a heaven in the sky, though the butterflies are a nice thought. Ezra’s single mother will pat his head and smile and whisper that God is what he makes him. And Byron’s father will slap him for thinking such thoughts, for being unfaithful to their God. The dark purple bruise will blend with the multitude of others that cascade over Byron’s skin, and Byron will cry in pain, but only in pain, for he knows that his father will be a butterfly one day, and won’t be able to hurt anyone anymore.

Before Byron goes to sleep that night, he’ll kiss the picture of his deceased mother, with the soft brown eyes that he shared. He’ll think that she must have made a beautiful butterfly, and he’ll wish that she was still here with him, to protect him from his father.

“I can’t wait until I’m a butterfly,” he whispers, and closes his eyes to sleep.

Strong Roots

Adelina Lancianese

Woodrow Wilson High School, Raleigh County

Teacher: MeriBeth Underwood

1st Place Winner (Grades 11-12)

My grandfather's garden stretches across his lush patch of West Virginia property. Sunflowers dream of reaching Heaven and juicy squash covet the plumpness of pumpkins. From the time they are carefully tucked into their snug, nutrient-rich beds to the dying kiss of crisp fall air, the vegetables take delight in being Poppie's seasonal pride and joy.

Short in stature but tall in wisdom, Poppie traded the destitute battlefields of South Korea for the vibrant patch of land he tills with care. A drooping tomato vine is a fallen comrade struck by the enemy, a blitzkrieg of beetles. The only bullets that fall now are fat drops of rain. The seasoned veteran does his best to protect his brigade.

I have always been the soldier's second-in-command, a pint-sized warrior ready to take on the garden after gulping down a heaping plate of spaghetti. One particular Sunday before our weekly Italian feast, I strolled with Poppie out to the garden. I must have been only six or seven years of age and eager to shadow my grandfather. Careful not to stain my church dress with earth, I ventured into the thicket and examined each fruit.

Poppie and I collected the ripest vegetables in a worn woven basket. I was selective in my work, gingerly inspecting each gourd and stalk and only plucking those without imperfections. I was surprised to discover that Poppie did not have the same methodic technique. His choices included scarred cucumbers and blemished peppers. Recognizing my disdain by my scrunched up nose, Poppie merely chuckled and said, "The sweetest vegetables have the most scars."

Within moments, we had assembled an organic rainbow of carrots, radishes, and onions. After our task was complete, he brushed his soil-caked hands on his corduroy trousers and smiled. I studied his movements and gaged the depths of his thoughts by the breadth his heels rocked.

Patting me on the head, Poppie inquired: "Marie, do you think the rain will hurt the rhubarb?" I knit my brow, scanning the area for the pinkish stalks. I knew the garden inventory by heart, and it did not include any rhubarb. Poppie repeated the question. "Will the rain hurt the

rhubarb?" After briefly contemplating the question, I shrugged my shoulders in bemusement. "Not if they're in cans," Poppie jovially replied.

Almost every Sunday since, my grandfather asks me the same question. Every Sunday I shrug my shoulders in feigned ignorance just to see the twinkle in his eye. This almost rhetorical paradox is a philosophy I have carried with me most of my life. I am a can of rhubarb. As bullets of rain devastate crops, the can of rhubarb remains safe. Synonymously, I weathered the most torrential downpour of my life: bullying.

As I progressed from child to young adult, my own garden began to bloom. My parents tilled fertile soil and nurtured my tender seedlings from inception. Just as my vibrant flowers began to blossom into womanhood, I sensed a storm on the horizon. The air tasted crisp with impending rainfall. God's pen inked the skies with charcoal. The rain began to pour.

It seemed as if this tempest lasted forty days and forty nights. Storm clouds disguised as manipulative adolescent girls battered and bruised me. These wicked clouds chased me through the monsoon, hurling both physical and mental injuries my way. Disparity choked my strong roots.

Careful not to lose my sense of self just as I was careful not to dirty my dress all those years ago, I hastily collected all my produce. I safeguarded myself by sealing everything inside an airtight container: the fragrance of my personality, the flavor of my laughter, the texture of my friendship. The remainder of my garden was a wasteland and I prayed for reprieve. Patiently, I acknowledged that storms are a necessary part of personal growth. Rain, after all, is just water.

One day, the rain unceremoniously ceased. The hoarse howl of the wind receded to a dull silence. Cautiously, I pried open the airtight container kept sealed for so long. Every characteristic was precisely as I left it, but somehow, the fragrance, flavor, and texture had all sweetened; the fruit within fermented and matured. I remembered Poppie's words almost ten years ago: the sweetest vegetables have the most scars. I also understood that although my coping mechanism left me feeling void, the storm ultimately shaped my character into the luscious fruit it is today. As I approach adulthood, my garden is still blossoming. I am a magnificent perennial that continues to learn about character and withstand frequent cloudbursts.

Over the years, Poppie's garden has grown in size, as well, swallowing more and more of the hillside. Poppie and I still stand together and admire his little slice of Heaven every Sunday. Now, I am the tallest person in the garden, but Poppie remains the wisest. We have always been

warriors, but I have come to realize that our crowning battle was never won with the fabrication of a scarecrow or the distribution of pesticide. Portly eggplants were never symbolic of Purple Hearts. The enemy was not a pesky beetle. Poppie is a champion of the battlefield that was South Korea and I am a champion of the battlefield that was my mind.

Poppie grips my shoulder with a calloused hand and rocks back and forth on his heels for a few precious moments. "Marie, do you think the rain will hurt the rhubarb?" he inquires.

"Never," I reply.

The Orange Drives Me Mad

Haley McCord

Lewis County High School, Lewis County

Teacher: Jena Pettit

2nd Place Winner (Grades 11-12)

I have this awful habit of repeating the same stories to the same people. However, nobody has ever heard any of this. You should feel special.

When I was a baby, somebody took a picture of me and my head spun around eight times. This is why my eyes are green around the black and white. My head spun so fast that my pale blue eyes were twisted forever. My mother shrieked and my father continued to smoke his cigarette as if a baby was not what I was. This is what I tell people when they try to photograph me. I hold my hand up, stare them straight in the face and say “the flash drives me mad.”

My hair was blonde before I found a match and burnt myself bald. My mother’s eyelids flung open, her lower lip dropped eleven feet, and a high pitched shriek in the form of my father’s name jumped out of her mouth. My tired father, sitting on the side of their bed, lit a cigarette and sucked a long drag off the end as if a baby was not what I was. For a long time, my mother believed that my hair would never grow back.

I refused to cook when I was tall enough to reach the stove. It wasn’t because I was scared or never hungry, but because of the heat. My grandma would say, “it was those matches that did this to her.” I would shake my head. I shook it so hard it flew off and landed in her arms. She chuckled and ran her fingers over my bald scalp. I remember feeling her long, red fingernails, but how?

This is what I would tell my husband if he ever tried to make me cook. I would point to the stove, stare him straight in the face and say “the heat drives me mad.”

I love tents and the word perhaps. I get a strange feeling in my guts when I smell gasoline. By the time I turned eleven, my hair was halfway down my back and there were pictures to prove it. My mother smiled wide when she sang to me, and my father only lit four cigarettes a day. There was a birthday cake with pink icing that read Happy Birthday, baby!

My mother left that night. I don’t remember why she was leaving, but I remember her leaving. She kissed my forehead and opened her umbrella before walking out the door. She said

nothing. The door to my parents' room creaked open and my father stood there, intoxicated and naked. A half smile ran across his face like a roach. Eleven years old.

My name is called and I make the mistake of hesitating. Long legs, heavy on the floor stumble towards me. Thick arms embrace me a little too hard and my feet are dangling. The door cries when my father pushes through and so do I. I'm thrown onto cigarette burnt sheets and my father closes the blinds faster than I can blink.

The leftover cake is still on the table. There are rough hands untying my shoes. The television is talking and flashes of color wash my skin. My shirt is on the floor beside my pants. I wonder where my mother could have gone. A dirty hand is over my mouth and my screams are muffled. Is the man on top of me really a father? I think of my party and the sun. He spreads my legs.

My mother never came home. The green around the black in my eyes turned bright red. The white around the red is cracked on both sides. I have new shades of blue and yellow on my skin that I didn't ask for. The insides of my thighs ache. My jaw is permanently clenched. I am eleven.

My father sits on the edge of their bed. His cigarette is lit and the bright orange burns a hole through my middle. He sucks hard and the ashes fall like snow. My hands are shaking. He asks me if I want one, as if his baby is not what I am.

This is what I tell people when they offer me a cigarette. I stare them straight in the face, point to the glowing end of their addiction and say "the orange drives me mad."

Amazing Graze

Myshna Napier

Magnolia High School, Wetzel County

Teacher: Patricia Jeffers

3rd Place Winner (Grades 11-12)

My Pa used to plow the corn fields of southern Kansas while humming or whistling the tune of Amazing Grace. He plowed his stout heart and soul under every furrow every day. He worked hard because he loved us and he wanted his baby girl to grow up without hardship, but hardship always seemed to come our way.

I don't remember when they took him. Pa just packed his sack, gave us a hug and kiss, and walked away without looking back. He marched down the rutted dirt road toward town and the train station. Ma and I stood on the splintering, gray porch and gazed after his fading figure. The crisp air chilled our tears. After he left, we listened every night to a talking box, trying to find out what was happening beyond our farm.

I was five and didn't understand the talking box when it said the Japanese were fighting us. Why should they fight us? At the moment, all I cared for was to play with my corn-husk doll. Pa had made it for me before he left those long two weeks ago. The only other things that kept me in touch with Pa were his letters.

Letters came in the mail maybe once a couple of weeks, an eternity. They were clean and crisp at first but started to become dirty and tattered. Sometimes a reddish powder managed to invade the inside and my Pa's precious words would be smudged into non-existence. Often, his letters told us of his friends and where he was, but, mostly, he wrote about how much he missed and loved us so much. He told us how he prayed the fighting would soon stop. To me, it seemed the fighting would never end, but, as long as my Pa was gone, I knew that the letters would always come.

One day, several years after Pa left, I ran to the leaning mail box where I saw Ma clutching her once white apron to her sun-tanned face. Her sandy hair clung to her clammy skin. She seemed so far, especially with the shadowed ground, dark clouds, and the muddy road casting shadows on my thoughts. The tall, yellowed grasses overgrowing the road grabbed at my legs, trying to stop me. Soaking wet, panting, and covered in the sandy soil of Kansas, I finally reached her.

“What is it, Mama?” I asked with a frightened gasp.

“Your Pa is going to an island, Iwo Jima, way out in the ocean - on the other side of the world,” she shakily replied.

As the sun was setting, the fading raspberry skies cast enough light for us to re-read Pa’s last letter. He said the sun was hot and the earth sandy and dry. It was not a good place for farming; our spread was much better—peaceful. Again, he said he prayed harder than ever before that he would come back soon. I didn’t understand. Pa would come back, and when he did, Ma wouldn’t cry anymore and we would all sit under the maple tree that stood guard over our small (cabin-like) house. We would look at the heavens and watch for shooting stars until I fell asleep in Ma’s and Pa’s arms. Then Pa would carry me inside and lay me on the small bed in the corner while he sings Amazing Grace to me. We would be a family again when he came back.

No letters came for a month.

While playing in the dry dirt and rolling sea of wildflowers and grasses, the robins cried in the breeze and a tall, gray cloud passed over the sun. The air smelled crisp and soothing like it did after a long and calm rain. Then, a black box with wheels came clanging and bumping up the road, disturbing the blissful scenery. It stopped near our shadowed house and sickly black clouds tumbled out of its back pipe. Two men came out in fancy, black clothes that looked like they were squeezing the life out of the men’s overfed bodies. Ma stopped her hoeing and quickly patted her frazzled hair down and straightened her dirt stained dress, once powder blue. The men talked softly with lowered heads and steady eyes. When they were done, the short, bearded men tipped their round black hats and left, bumping back up the road and smoke spewing out of the back of the box. Ma and I stood in the dust and the choking black clouds. Ma swayed a little, then fell weeping to the cracked ground clutching me tightly.

“Ma? What’s wrong? Why are you crying again,” I gasped after she eased her embrace.

“Your Pa’s ... not fighting anymore,” she sniffled, while wiping her puffed blue eyes.

“Pa’s coming home! He’s coming home,” I cried with overwhelming joy.

“No, honey. He’s not coming home. He won’t be coming home.” She broke into sobs.

The earth grew cold and damp. The sky dimmed and everything turned gray and lifeless. Pa wasn’t fighting anymore, but he wasn’t coming back. He would never come back, and my heart ached. It broke into pieces that only my Pa could fix, but he wouldn’t be fixing anything anymore. He had died in a strange place thousands of miles away – alone. Standing shocked

and not knowing whether to cry or run, I stared at Ma. To run over sloping green hills until I couldn't run anymore or the earth swallowed me up or ran out from under me seemed the only thing to do, but I couldn't move. Nothing would move. Only Ma's calloused hands moved as they rubbed and patted my head and face. Paralyzed, I stared at my mother's tear stained face, at her blue eyes, at her curved nose, at her soft lips. She kissed my cheeks and forehead trying to comfort me, but there was no comfort. I would never again see my father's loving, brown eyes, his straight nose, his tanned and smiling face, or his dark hair.

After an eternity, Ma and I dragged ourselves toward our tree. We sat beneath it for hours, waiting for darkness. We waited for the brilliant stars. Pa was up there somewhere, singing Amazing Grace to us. Now, only Ma carried me inside, and this time, Ma did the one thing that brought any comfort. She sang Amazing Grace.

Now, years later, Ma tells me that Pa had been very brave. She shows me a shiny medal and tells me how Pa had raised a tattered American flag high up on a hill and saved many lives. Holding the medal in my calloused hands, my thumbs traced its outline. Warm tears trickled down my tanned cheeks and pride patched my heart. Pa was never again coming home. Pa was never again going to plow his fields or walk through his straight furrows. Pa would never again sing to us Amazing Grace.