

*2015 West Virginia
Young Writers Contest
Anthology*



Introduction

We proudly present the anthology of the 2015 West Virginia Young Writers Contest. It showcases the stories of eighteen students who first won in their counties in their grade level divisions and then won at the state level. 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 over 30 years. The contest is an initiative of West Virginia's National Writing Projects and supported by the West Virginia Department of Education. University of Charleston also provides invaluable support by hosting Young Writers Day. The 2015 contest was directed by Dr. Barbara O'Byrne, Central West Virginia Writing Project, with assistance from the West Virginia Department of Education. A Steering Committee contributed invaluable support and advice.

West Virginia Young Writers Contest and Young Writers Day are initiatives of West Virginia's National Writing Project sites whose mission 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:
NWP at WVU:

www.marshall.edu/cwvwp
nwp.wvu.edu

Sponsors

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Acknowledgements

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

Editor of the 2015 WV Young Writers Anthology

Barbara Norvell

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My Special Gift

Isaac McCloy

Flemington Elementary School, Taylor County

Teacher: Kathleen Jones

1st Place Winner (Grades 1-2)

On January 2, 2006, I received the best gift of all! I know this sounds weird since I was not born until April 5, 2007, almost 15 months later. I am the son of Randal McCloy, Jr., the only man to come out of the Sago Mine accident alive after being trapped for 43 hours. My mom says it was a miracle!

My dad is always thinking of others and trying to help them. When Dad and his friends were trapped in the mine, he shared his oxygen self-rescuer with others when theirs did not work. He even wrote a goodbye letter to my mom telling her how much he loved her, my brother Randal and sister Isabel. Mom and Dad also adopted my two cousins, Nicole and Dustin, so we now have six kids in our house. Even though it's really noisy, I know Mom and Dad love us all!

The doctors told Mom he would be in the hospital for a year because of his brain injury, but he only stayed three months. He is a strong man!

I am glad that God saved my dad that day. My sister Shelby and I would not be here if my dad had died. My mom said if dad died she would not have her freckle face boy.

Now my dad spends his time around the house. He likes to go to church, work out in the woods, and fix things with my grandpa. He also sleeps a lot! I am so happy I have him in my life!

My dad and I are a lot alike. When my mom was pregnant with me, the doctor told my parents that I probably would not be born, so I am a miracle just like my daddy!

Grandpa's Gift

Gavin Miller

Road Branch Elementary/Middle School, Wyoming County

Teacher: Christie Dameron

2nd Place Winner (Grades 1-2)

When I was seven, I was given a very special gift from the greatest man ever, my grandpa. The reason that my grandfather gave me this gift was so I could filet fish just like my daddy always does.

My most prized treasure is my fileting board. It is a long wooden board and has a dull silver clamp to hold the fish down. Now it smells like fish guts.

I remember the day my grandpa took me to Oceana to buy it. We went to Magic Mart where my grandpa and I made the purchase. He also bought me two king sized Fast Break candy bars and a Mountain Dew that day. It was the best day ever!

My fileting board is special to me because it was the last thing my grandpa bought me before he passed away. He could not wait for me to catch him some catfish, his favorite kind of fish, and filet them out for him to eat. Unfortunately, I never had the opportunity to catch him any fish because he passed away just ten days after buying me the gift I'll always cherish.

This is why my fileting board will always be my treasure. It was the last thing my grandpa was ever able to buy me.

My Trip to the Hospital

Grace Terry

West Hamlin Elementary School, Lincoln County

Teacher: Jo Shelton

3rd Place Winner (Grades 1-2)

It was a Friday and I wasn't feeling very well. My Daddy wanted to take me to the hospital really bad. I said, "No!" I coughed and coughed. I thought I was going to cough my head off. Even though I felt really bad, I didn't want to go see the doctor. Daddy said, "You really need to go to the doctor!" I said, "Nope, I am not going!" Daddy said, "Oh yes you are young lady!" I said, "But Daddy!" He told me that I would not have to get out of my pajamas, hoping that this would sweeten the deal. Well it worked, I agreed to go. We were in the car having a short conversation. I asked Daddy over and over, "Are we there yet?" Finally I saw the hospital sign. I was so scared but, I knew I had to go in.

I had been at the hospital for 8 hours when the nurse came in and told me that I had the flu. I said, "Oh no, cough, cough!" Suddenly we hear big footsteps. I asked, "What is that?" The nurse answered in a scared voice, "I don't know!" The door creaked open and a big, magenta, spikey monster jumped into the room. I screamed, "Ahhhhhh!" Daddy fainted. The nurse fainted. I shook them to try to wake them up. I yelled, "Wake up, wake up!" It didn't work. I was on my own! I tried to run away to get help, but everywhere I went the magenta monster was still there. I heard the big footsteps coming my way. Before I knew it the monster and I were talking. It turns out that the monster was really nice, and all she wanted was some Tamiflu. Cough, cough!

Goldy the Chicken

Jaden Poore

Maysville Elementary School, Grant County

Teacher: Cheryl Jolley

1st Place Winner (Grades 3-4)

Once upon a time there was a chicken named Goldy. She was different from all the other chickens. She laid golden eggs and she could talk. One day, Farmer Blue went to the chicken barn to collect eggs. When he came to Goldy's nest, she snapped, "You better not take my golden eggs!" Farmer Blue was in shock. "The...the...chicken...can...T...T...talk!" he exclaimed. He ran out of the barn, spilling eggs all over the place. He dashed into the house as quick as lightning and said to himself, "A chicken can talk!"

The next day, he went back to Goldy's nest again. With his hand shaking, he reached into the nest and pulled out a golden egg. "Hey! Give that back!" yelled Goldy. "I am going to be rich!" bragged Farmer Blue.

The next day Farmer Blue packed Goldy in a cage and put her on the back of the truck. "Let me out!" cried Goldy. "No! You're a rich chicken!" replied Farmer Blue. "Uhhg," groaned Goldy. They were on their way to the national pet show in Ohio, where the winning pet would receive one thousand dollars.

They finally arrived at the contest. Farmer Blue got out of the truck. He grabbed Goldy and ran to check in. Farmer Blue let Goldy out with the other chickens. A hen named Rocksey sat beside Goldy. "Hi Rocksey!" said Goldy. "Bock, Bock!" replied Rocksey. Goldy then remembered that she was speaking in human, so she said, "Bock, Bock!" That means "Hi!" in chicken language. "Bo-o-ock," replied Rocksey, which means "You lay golden eggs....Not cool!"

Goldy walked away with shame. “Why can’t I be like the other chickens?” she wondered.

Goldy sat in the corner all alone until Farmer Blue came to get her for her turn in the show. “Now Goldy, I want you to lay a golden egg on the stage and then say, ‘My egg’,” coaxed Farmer Blue. Goldy laid her egg and spoke. The judge just smiled.

Goldy felt unhappy. She didn’t think she was special – she thought she was a stupid little chicken that hatched by accident. “Oh how I wish I could be normal,” she sighed. She sat in the corner and wished she could go home.

Finally, Farmer Blue came to get Goldy for the chicken category awards. The judge announced, “Third place winner is Mrs. Cluckers, and second place winner is Rocksey.” Goldy was hoping she could beat Rocksey because she knew Rocksey couldn’t talk or lay golden eggs. As the judge prepared to announce the first place winner, Goldy was shaking and so was Farmer Blue. “The first place winner is Goldy!” said the judge. He awarded her with a blue ribbon, and Farmer Blue received one thousand dollars! “Thank you!” they both cried.

Goldy got on the back of the truck and thought, “I guess I am special!” She and Farmer Blue went home and spent their money on a nice new barn. They lived happily ever after!

The Spelling Bee

Liv Meador

Jumping Branch Elementary School, Summers County

Teacher: Vivian Meador

2nd Place Winner (Grades 3-4)

Ok, so next Friday is the Spelling Bee and this time I'm going to win it. Last year "Miss Perfect," Isabelle won, and let me tell you, she is going down this year. Isabelle was spelling cinnamon and I swear I heard her spell it c.i.n.a.m.o.n.

It is almost Friday and I am so excited! I've been studying all day because I just want a first place trophy for a Spelling Bee. All of the trophies in my room have first place on them except the Spelling Bee Trophy. I need to win that trophy, just have to have it! Rumors say that if you win you get \$500.00. It is probably not true because it came from "Lying Norma." (We call her that because she lies all the time).

I walked home and while I was walking I practiced the spelling words I had to do to for the spelling bee. I didn't even look up. There was the word Colorado on the sheet, this is going to be easy. When I got home I ate then I went straight to my room to study. I studied all evening. While I was studying I fell asleep, a girl has to get some sleep, sometime.

It's finally Friday. This year I'll play nice because I was really competitive last year. We couldn't go straight to the Spelling Bee because we have to get, "Education First," That's Miss Huffleberry's rules. I finally made it out of math, I don't like math at all not one little inch!

Finally, everyone was in the auditorium. The Spelling Bee was starting. I never felt so nervous in my life, and when I get nervous it gets yucky. I'm number 764. Isabella is first. She had the word Atlantic. I had

to wait through the boring other contestants to get through. Then it was just me and Isabella. I had the word. Uh oh, cinnamon! Ok, now I am really scared, I really want to win that trophy.

"Ok, C.I.N.N.A.M.O.N," I said nervously. "That's correct". Yes! It's Isabelle's turn. She got the word sophisticated. It seems pretty hard. She is going down. "S.O.P.I.S.T.I.C.A.T.E.D," spelled Isabelle. "That's-wrong," said Misses Huffleberry sadly. Isabella ran out of the room and started crying.

I went to the bathroom where Isabella was. All I heard when I walked in the bathroom was Isabelle's loud sobs. "Isabella," I said. She didn't say anything. "I'm sorry that you lost," I said. "I just really wanted to win," she said. "Umm... I'll give my trophy to you if you want," I said. She came out of the stall and said, "Really, you would do that for me, even though I've been really mean to you?" "Yeah, I mean you've earned it. You've made it this far." "

Thanks," she blurted out. I had this weird funny feeling in my stomach. It felt kind of good. I'm glad that I did a good thing.

Nameless

Sybil Willis

Glen Dale Elementary School, Marshall County

Teacher: Kristen Loy

3rd Place Winner (Grades 3-4)

Hello, my name is... well, I don't have a name. I am an eleven month old Yorkie puppy who nobody wants. Well, when they see me they want me, but when they take me home I guess they change their mind. I don't understand why they don't want me. All I understand is that every time someone adopts me, they take me back before they get the chance to name me. The humans at the pound all have different names for me. The really nice lady that smells like lilac flowers calls me Sunshine, but it doesn't sound right. I have been in the pound for a while since my last owner adopted me. I guess he thought I was too much to handle. Just like it is too much for me to handle being nameless.

“Hi there Sunshine, how has your morning been?” the nice lady asks me as she hangs her purple, fur coat into the dark hall closet. “My morning has been such a rush. First, I had to take my children to school. Then, I was going to come to work, but I noticed that I had forgotten my silver purse which has my wallet in it, and my wallet has my license in it,” she rambles on and on. She sits down in her big, black swivel chair. Suddenly, I hear the loud bell which means a customer has walked into the pound. The lady gets up and goes to the front desk. I can hear them talking. “My daughter has been begging for a dog, and we have finally agreed.” A little girl with curly blonde hair and a pink tutu walks in with some adults. She runs right over to Max, a giant, tan St. Bernard. “No, we told you to pick out a small dog,” her mother states. The girl stands up and looks around at all of dogs in the room. Guess what dog she came to next? Me!

“Hi there girl, I can’t wait for you to see your new home,” the little girl tells me while she softly pets me over and over. “Now you need to name her, Nia,” her father says. “What about Flower. No, I like Daisy. Actually, I think I will name her April, since that was when I was born,” the little girl announces. “I think that is a great idea!” her mother exclaims. When I hear what she says I can’t believe it. I actually have a name!

We arrived at her house five minutes later. It was a big white house with lots of windows. It had a small porch with plants hanging from the grey roof. “Welcome to your new home April!” the little girl screams. As much as I hate thinking about how many times I have been sent back to the pound, it was worth actually finding the perfect home. I was sent back for a reason. I was returned so that I would no longer be nameless.

Autobiography of a Giraffe

Willa Gibson

Frankford Elementary School, Greenbrier County

Teacher: Amber Workman

1st Place Winner (Grades 5-6)

Hello down there! I am a giraffe. I live in a zoo. I eat lots of plants. All the animals tease me. They say things like, “How’s the weather up there?” That’s not even the worst part. They won’t invite me to play limbo because, “I’m too tall.”

You may think living in a zoo would be fun. Well, it’s not. The elephants run everywhere because they thought they saw a mouse. The monkeys scratch places you wouldn’t want to know about. The zookeeper- don’t get me started with the zookeeper! First, he never waters my tree, and he always gives me meat. I’m an herbivore for goodness sake! He thinks he’s a good dancer. Reality check-He’s NOT!

Still think the zoo is fun? This will change your mind. Little kids with grubby little hands always try to touch me. Then the parents go, “Oh, honey! Don’t touch that.....it may bite!” That’s very offensive, thank you very much! I have lived here since I was born. I won’t live in the jungle. I hear the frogs are very aggressive. Also, the tadpoles will eat you whole. The trees are dead. The water isn’t sparkling. I can go on for a long time, if you like. Let’s just say I’d rather live in the zoo, and that’s a lot coming from me!

I just received some news. I am getting moved to the San Francisco Zoo, the most wonderful place ever! I’ll see lots of exotic animals like goats-the kind that waddles, zebras, antelope, and lots more! So, I’m packing my bag, putting some leaves in my carry-on pillow, and some toothpaste-a girl always has to brush her teeth!

Here comes the zookeeper! Eek! I'm going to San Francisco! I'm going to San Francisco!! I walk on the plane and I have to bend my neck. I better be in first class. When I got to the zoo, it was better than I thought it would be. I took a deep breath and stepped off the plane and into the bright sunshine. When I got settled, I quickly realized these animals were classier than the animals at my old zoo. A friendly giraffe quickly welcomed me. Her name was Spots. I restrained from giggling at her name. She showed me the mineral-enhanced food, sparkling water, and the most luxurious sleeping quarters I have ever seen. I quickly fell asleep. When I woke up, I was being stared at. All the other giraffes were walking around like super models, so I gave it a try. I pranced around like everybody else. I got lots of camera flashes and applause. I was famous.

Nine Seconds

Perry Grace Whetzel

East Hardy Early/Middle School, Hardy County

Teacher: Mrs. Debbie Hubbard

2nd Place Winner (Grades 5-6)

Nine seconds, my dad yelled, “Get the ball.” I raced in front of the inbound pass, blocking and grabbing the ball.

Eight seconds, my heart pounded in my ears. I was at half court, it seemed miles from the basket.

Seven seconds, I shoved the ball to the floor and took off. How could a perfect season end with a loss.

Six seconds, I was ahead of everyone but they were closing fast.

Five seconds, just one basket. Tie the game, go to overtime, there would be a chance.

Four seconds, I could hear the pounding footsteps running me down. I dribbled hard.

Three seconds, I stopped short of the paint and squared up. I could barely breathe.

Two seconds, what if I missed? I held my breath, vaguely aware of the shouts. I could feel the nubby bumps of the ball as it left my hands. It was if the ball spun through the air in slow motion. It touched the glass, bounced on the rim and fell through the net. Overtime, there was a chance. With less than a second left, the buzzer sounded.

The gym was deafening. My team mates hugged me as we reached the side line. Looking back, I saw my dad at half court yelling and clapping. Instinctively, I turned and raced across the gym floor jumping into his arms, wrapping him in a monkey hug. The evening was almost perfect.

It was my last year of recreational league basketball. My team mates were all friends from school. We were having a great year being undefeated. We were confident, maybe over confident, going into the championship game.

It wasn't that we didn't play well, we just couldn't seem to get our heads in the game. We battled back and forth for what seemed to be an eternity. The entire game I could hear my dad say, "You have to keep your head up and fight hard. You have to push hard and make things happen." That is a hard thing to make your head believe when you are down eight points with three minutes to go.

It is difficult to describe how defeat takes over so quickly, even before it happens. How one can fail to see success is possible in such a short amount of time. How impatient we are and how little effort we put into working hard to succeed and win. It is also unbelievable to see the shift in that emotion turn to elation when victory can once again be attained.

My dad tells me that sports help to grow character, team work and self-confidence. My mom says that no matter what you do, you give it your absolute best. I have found that it takes just as much effort to fail as it does to succeed.

I watched that evening as emotions shifted as fast as the score. Up and down, both from the teams and the crowd. Just like the dribble of the ball, up and down. Just like life experiences, some victories some defeats. I feel very fortunate to have had many opportunities and experiences. I have learned from these opportunities that success is earned and not given.

Yes, we went on to win the game, but I won so much more. Nine short seconds taught me to never give up. It taught me to keep my eyes on the goal and to work diligently to achieve whatever I have set out to do. It taught me

that hope is uplifting and hard work is rewarding. While I may never have another buzzer beating shot, I will never forget that amazing evening. Who would ever believe that so much can be learned in just nine seconds.

The Magic Watch

James Mohr

Normantown Elementary School, Gilmer County

Teacher: Vada Woodford

3rd Place Winner (Grades 5-6)

Long ago in Normantown, West Virginia, a young boy named Sean held his grandpa's hand in the hospital. His grandfather was very sick, and the doctor said he wouldn't make it through the night. Sean's grandpa handed him something, a pocket watch. Sean asked him what it was, but there was no answer. Sean's grandpa had passed away.

Sean cried and cried as he walked out of the room to his mother. His mother asked him what was wrong, but he just walked outside and got into the car. His mom came out to the car. In the car an intense conversation sprang up. "WHY ARE YOU SO UPSET?" asked his mom. Sean didn't answer. "Well, at least he wasn't in pain." They rode in silence the rest of the way home. When they got home, Sean went straight to the woods to find comfort.

Sean opened up the watch and was amazed! He saw his father's picture, and his grandmother's picture. Both had died long ago, and now his grandfather. As he stared at the pictures of his elderly grandma and young dad he started sobbing. He had never seen this picture before.

The time had stopped on the watch, so Sean reset it and something amazing happened! Suddenly, he was back at the hospital and his grandpa was still alive. He saw his grandpa hand him the watch and couldn't believe he was experiencing the pain of his grandpa's death again. He watched in horror as his grandpa died. As quickly as possible he reset the watch and suddenly he was back in the woods at his house. He couldn't believe he had relived that pain again.

Sean couldn't get his grandpa out of his head. Even when he was about to sleep he was thinking about him. He knew the watch he gave him was magic and it could help him see his grandpa. He planned to get up the next morning, go back to the woods, and travel back in time to when he played with his grandpa.

Sean woke up early the next morning, as planned. It was a cold, foggy, and wet morning. It was so foggy Sean could barely see. He took a path beside his house into the woods. He was halfway in the woods when he came to a clearing. Sean thought this would be the best place.

Sean stopped, pulled out the pocket watch, and opened it. He was amazed! Inside the watch, pictures flashed by of all the good times Sean and his grandpa had together. Sean stopped the watch at a picture of his grandpa and him playing baseball. Sean remembered he loved this time with his grandpa.

Sean closed his eyes and when he opened them he was there, playing baseball with his grandpa, just like before. His mom and dad were making hamburgers on the grill, and his grandma was sitting in the shade. This was the first time they had all been together in years.

As he was playing, Sean thought this was a good idea until he remembered his real life. His grandpa had died so why tease himself with this? As soon as he realized this he reset the watch and returned back to his original spot, in the woods.

Sean knew he had to destroy the watch no matter how much he loved it. He took the old trail back to his house crying. When he got home it was almost dark. He grabbed an old shovel and ran to his backyard. Exhausted, he started to dig. When he was about half-a-foot deep, he tossed the watch in. Weeping and crying, he covered it back up.

Sean told himself he would forget about his grandpa and the watch. It was for the best. Sean knew he had to love his grandpa enough to let him go.

Painting the Impossible

Madeline Warnick

Central Preston Middle School, Preston County

Teacher: Brandy Childs

1st Place Winner (Grades 7-8)

Painting anything was impossible at this point.

While other students shared the water-color pallets with their partners and chatted amongst themselves, I slouched in my assigned seat next to the only “*Special Ed*” kid in class. My ‘partner’ was hogging all the paint, not even using any of the colors our Art teacher instructed us to use. A clear blue sky above a sunny beach, that’s what we were supposed to be painting. The shades of his water color weren’t even close. He quickly swished his brush into dark blues, blacks, and even purples. Nothing like the bright sky I was painting.

I knew the teacher had noticed this, but she ignored it, brushing it off to the side. Everyone in the class knew a simple command could set him off. He didn’t like a lot of simple things. The ticking of a clock, the song “Happy Birthday,” but especially he hated being told what to do. And since this was just painting, no one was going to say anything to him.

“Should I use red?” A slurred and quick speaking voice spoke out of nowhere, causing me to jump in my seat. He spoke so quickly that it almost was hard to make out what he first said.

“We aren’t even supposed to be using red,” I grumbled in response with an eyebrow raised. He stared at me for a slight second. Not exactly at *me* though, almost past me, like at an object in the distance. He never really made eye contact.

He quickly looked back down to his paper, not replying but using the red paint anyway. Honestly, at this point, who knows what he’s painting. I glanced

down to my half-finished blobs of unrealistic light blue waves that made my art look pathetic. I was actually trying and this blur of water pastel looked horrible. What was supposed to be a glowing yellow beach looked more like a moldy slice of bread. But hey, I had to at least be doing better than Mr. Weirdo beside me, right?

Wrong.

His paper stained with clear blends of purple and dark indigo stretched across the background to make the shining solar system sky pop. A half-finished tall red and white barber-shop-pole light house lit the night brightly with its golden beam. It sat built on top of a mass of large, jagged rocks. Waves of sparkling green and teal crashed into the bottom of the structure. It made the painted seem photographed. He didn't even notice me gawking at his masterpiece as he finished painting the lighthouse. He pinched a small amount of salt given to us from our teacher and flicked it onto the still wet paints of the ocean, making the colors blend together even more beautifully.

My eyes switched back and forth between the thoughts glued on paper as I sat back in my seat and froze in time for a moment. This is the kid that people were nice to, but tended to avoid. He often repeated things that he found funny, and had an interest in sitcom TV shows. I always found him weird, incapable to do anything really amazing or original. He constantly lived inside his own head, basically making him anti-social. If this was his true mindset that made him an amazing artist, then I could only imagine all of the other things he could really accomplish by himself. And as I wondered all the things he could do, I began to feel like a total jerk for my thoughts about him from before.

“That’s really good,” I said to him. He only looked up at me, nodded, and then returned to his work of art.

The Worse Kind of Fear

Molly Pennington

Ravenswood Middle School, Jackson County

Teacher: Kayla Smith

2nd Place Winner (Grades 7-8)

Fright. Not as terrible as fear, but it's a fine line separating the two. It gripped me suddenly, like a knife piercing through my veil of security, convincing me that all of my self-confidence was worth nothing. It paralyzed me to the point where my legs could no longer tremble and my palms could no longer sweat. This type of fear is the worst. It rips away all of your assurance that you will be the brightest one out there, that the focus will be on you only and the applause will be in your honor. It is a little voice in the back of your head telling you that you can't do it, that you will utterly and most transparently mess the whole thing up and everyone will laugh at you. I listen to that voice every time. I know I can't do this.

Just as my nervousness starts to subside, a lady in dark clothing comes over to me and holds up five fingers, a gesture I know all too well. I have five minutes. My thoughts become scattered and frantic. Inside my head is an insane mixture of combinations, anxiety, and painted pointe shoes. When the ramblings of my mind start to settle, I start thinking about my family. I can see my mom, her video camera on standby, with my stepdad beside of her and my grandparents asking her when I come on. My dad is probably here too. And I'm willing to bet that my Aunt Penny, who drove all the way from Ohio, is sitting somewhere in those blue plastic seats. If I don't do this, all of their efforts to get here and get me ready will be worth nothing. If I don't do this, I'll disappoint them.

My friends from school are here. I won't hear the end of it if I chicken out now. The leather shoes on my feet squeak as I pace the cold tile floor. My 4-H club is here too. They were so excited to see me yesterday. Strangely, I was excited to perform for them.

The lady in the dark clothing comes back and tells me that I have to go up now, and tells me to break a leg. I nod and thank her, my voice shaking with uneasiness. I turn to the staircase and look up towards the top. This is the first time I will be climbing this staircase alone. I grip the handrail tightly, so tightly that my knuckles are white, as I start to climb up. That little voice comes back. "You'll trip and fall," it told me. "You'll mess up and every single person will laugh at you, even the ones who promised that they wouldn't." I mentally tell it to shut up and go up into the wings of the old wooden stage. I've performed here since I was in kindergarten. Memories of my first dance come flooding back, and I smile. Before I know it, the dancer before me is done, and she bounds off of the stage gracefully. She smiles at me, silently wishing me good luck. I take a deep breath and inch closer to the stage.

There is silence. The chairs aren't squeaking, the audience isn't applauding, and no music is playing. This agonizing silence gives me time to think about all of the horrible possibilities I hadn't thought of before. I could sprain my ankle, I could fall flat on my face, I could miss a step. I shake off the thoughts and grip my thin, stiff tutu tightly. I can see my family from the wings. Sure enough, my mom has her video camera out. I can see the crimson light blinking, piercing the darkness of the auditorium. I can just barely make out their proud expressions and beaming smiles. My song starts. I do it.

Shayna's Death

Hailey Baker

Short Line School, Wetzel County

Teacher: Judith Hughan

3rd Place Winner (Grades 7-8)

It was painful for the family; it was painful for her friends. The most painful part for me was going down to the Pittsburg Park and hearing my dad say "Your sister died at 3:00 am this morning." It's weird how I can remember this so clearly. I can remember my body going numb and just falling into my dad's arms, my ears were ringing, my brain not even located. I felt everything, but nothing and that was the worst feeling ever. All I could do was let the pain take over.

Shayna was an amazing person; she could turn your worst days around. She knew how to make you laugh uncontrollably and grin ear to ear. She was mischievous person as well, she would love to get in small trouble once in a blue moon, but was always respectful to her teachers and adults. She was a very caring person; she would try her best to love everyone like a brother or sister. Shayna had the brightest hazel eyes and a highly contagious smile. One day, Shayna grew very sick and our mother took her to the hospital; they didn't have a diagnosis or an explanation for my mother. They really didn't know how to help Shayna, but they had to keep her overnight. The next day, my sister's heart kept stopping and they figured if they gave her a shot, she would be okay; when actually they made it worse. Once they gave her the medicine she had an allergic reaction and they had to rush her to Ruby Memorial in Pittsburgh. They gave her a breathing tube and multiple IV's. I didn't get to see my sister for weeks; I stayed with a babysitter until my mother sent someone to get me.

The smell of depression lingered in the hallways. I held back my tears thinking I had to stay strong, but I couldn't keep it together once I saw her lying there, helpless, IV's all over her cold, pale arms. I stood there, in the doorway, wishing I didn't have to see this. Wishing I could turn around and run, but I couldn't even move until my dad tugged on my hand. As I walked toward the bed, I saw all the other patients; all needing hope, all feeling different.

As I grabbed her hand, I didn't realize it was my last time touching her. I guess the doctor didn't either or maybe he would have let us stay in the room longer. Maybe he wouldn't have said, "It has been long enough." Because it wasn't long enough, eternity wasn't. He just didn't understand the pain, no one did.

It was hard to face the fact she was gone. I just didn't get why she had to go. Seeing her asleep in the casket was awful. I remember walking into the funeral home and seeing her laying inside a casket, while my dad mourned beside her. I continued walking down the aisle, making my way to her. Running my fingers down her face, how will I get through life without her? When will I hear her laugh again? Will I ever? Then the tears reappeared and at that moment, I had gained a sorrow that will last for eternity.

Eight years have passed, my sorrow remains yet I don't cry as much. Maybe the thought of her being in a better place relieves me, but I just don't quite understand why she had to leave so soon. I often wonder, how life would be if she survived. I feel that I wouldn't be who I am today, that I wouldn't hold what needed held, close. That I wouldn't be depressed all the time, or maybe I wouldn't hate to live. It just drives me crazy, how I get to wake up and see another day and she does not.

What I Was Wearing When They Destroyed the Universe

Antonella Blanco

James Monroe High School, Monroe County

Teacher: Amy Young

1st Place Winner (Grades 9-10)

May 13th, 1943

Rain was the sound that I missed most. The rain that collected on my windows was always paired with the sound. I opened my eyes and I looked into the same ribs that I had woken up to everyday for the past 3 months. He slept in the same position, and his breathing was always even. His eyelashes were brittle, but long; and his skin was dry, and textured with numbers on his forearm. His head rose suddenly, his mouth gaped, and he stared at the west wing of the room. I could see rising shadows from the west, and I knew it was time for the afternoon counting. The white, circular patches were easily seen in the dark; but they weren't stars. Stars were yellow and dull. One of those things stood in front of my sight, and I could no longer see those ribs that I had counted every night. There were 24 ribs. I felt the room shake when two more of the things entered the room, and I felt my bed shake when they slammed his skull against my bed post. He lay still on the floor; like a painting. The red liquid poured out of his hair like wine, and I thought about how I could sip wine from his collarbones; they protruded, even on the ground. The things each grabbed a side of him, and I felt the warm drops on my cheeks. They were not rain drops, and that silence was not rain.

May 17th, 1943

Musty cologne was a norm for my nostrils. My nose was being suffocated by the neck and droplets of sweat of one of the things.

These droplets were not rain, either.

The thing carried me, and the women behind me would nod their heads, and they would kick until the color left their cheeks. The women must have admired Van Gogh, because they were determined to swallow the happy in the form of human flesh when they bit the necks of those who carried them. But, the happy came instead when they were dropped into fire; because I swear they all smiled behind the flame. It was hard to believe that there was happy inside the flesh of the things, but, they all brought happy to those women. I decided that there were two reasons to be happy here:

1. Because you must be.
2. Because you shouldn't be.

May 28th, 1943

It's been 3 days since they gave the little boy a meal. He's sitting drawing stars on the floor, and I still don't understand why, when he has the reflection of a yellow star in his eyes. I know he can see it, because I can. Why does he want more stars? He already has the star in his eyes and the stars on his floor. He uses his fingers as paintbrushes, and he uses the earth as paint. The dirt moves cyclically, as he moves in the same motions. If there was anything that I wanted more, was method, and cycle. All there was around me was catastrophe, and I just wanted to swallow the happy. I wanted the happy to engulf me, and to take me wherever happy takes you.

I swear if there is anything after happy, it's going to have to beg for my forgiveness; because they just took the boy into the happy flames.

June 10th, 1943

10 people remain in my bedding area, and I can count their ribs now. A little girl has eleven sets of ribs, rather than 12, and it is the greatest treasure I have found in my 4 months here. She moves like rain, and sounds like rain. She does not sound like the rest, she sounds like rain. She looks like rain. Why does she sound like rain? I haven't heard the rain since January. Why can I recognize the silence of rain? Why is it different than the silence that I hear when the things walk?

She is rain. She is rain and I know it.

October 7th, 1943

There has been nothing worth noting these last few months. The occurrences have been similar, the deaths practically identical, and the emptiness still filled me.

A few hours ago, I was screaming at the top of my lungs. They dragged me against the wall, and I clawed and shrieked desperately. It was the rain, the rain was leaving, I could see the reflection of light leaving the raindrops, and I wanted to carry it. I wanted to hear its silence; but, its silence was deafening when the rain didn't move. I just cried out of misunderstanding, and lack of virtue. I cried out of awe, and longing. Just couldn't believe that they had destroyed the universe right in front of me. How could such horrible, powerless things hurt the universe, and then end it? She was rain, and the universe; and the

only thing worth caring about, because she had eleven sets of ribs, and she had clouded judgment and a short life.

I looked down at her clothing, and I looked at mine. They were the same, as the few moments ago when the rain was weak, but still its silent and tangible presence.

How could I? How could *I*? How could I still be wearing the same thing, when the universe is gone?

How could I still have the same star? How could we still have stars on our chests?

How could I be wearing the same thing when the universe has ended?

How could I still have a star on my chest when they have destroyed the universe?

The Family of Chasong

Myya Helm

Doddridge County High School, Doddridge County

Teacher: Victoria Ashcraft

2nd Place Winner (Grades 9-10)

My family had resided in Chasong, North Korea for as long as I can remember. A place directly south of the Chinese border, the population was generally poor and my family and I earned most of our money from our farm. Life was always rough for us. Living in a household with three kids, having a military father who was never home, and not much money to spare on anything, we were sometimes barely managing to pass the days.

Lee Jae-hwa, my father, had been enrolled in the military for nearly seventeen years. He returned home every once in a while on leave, but even then I didn't see him much as a child. My mother, Lee Yoon, was a strict housewife and was constantly making sure everything was clean and in place. Especially the portraits of our previous leaders, Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il, which hung in our front room. That's when the glorification of the Kim family still meant everything to my parents.

My eldest sister, Kyung, had worked on the farm since she had learned to walk. She was basically a spitting image of our mother. Her flowing, ebony black hair and her deep chocolate brown eyes always managed to make me jealous. I also had a brother, Chung-hee, who was a couple years younger than me. He was quite brave, and sometimes dangerously curious.

We've never had electric in Chasong and seeing the lights across the border in China were an awe inspiring sight. Whenever Chung-hee first noticed them, he immediately froze his body, like a rabbit within sight of a hunter.

"Hae-won?" he mumbled. I glanced down to him, his gaze locked on the lights.

I responded just as quiet as he had asked, "Yes?" He slowly raised his finger and pointed towards the border, "I want to live where those bright things are." My eyes widened and I quickly bent down on my knees until our eyes met, then placed my hand over his mouth. "Don't say that Chung-hee, we can't go there. If anyone ever hears you say that, we'll be arrested and taken away." I looked over my shoulder towards two officers patrolling behind. They hadn't seemed to notice us. "Chung-hee? Do you understand?" A puzzled look came across his face, but he nodded. Afterwards, he never said anything about them again, but every now and then, I catch him peeking in their direction.

A year later, my father returned home. He had finally retired from the military, and began helping us on the farm. Then the pigs-for-presents order began. The order claimed that every farmer in the country must give an animal that is at least eighty kilograms to the military since they were running low on supplies. We were being forced to give them our biggest pig, but my parents didn't mind. They felt obligated to help however they could. They left my brother to care for the pig, but it soon acquired disease, which eventually spread to the rest of our swine. In a matter of days, they passed away one by one. Now, without a pig, my parents didn't have any option but to spend most of our money on an overpriced one. After all, the law was that if you couldn't give the military an animal, you would be taken away. My father slapped Chung-hee for not being able to care for them, and my mother broke down in tears. We no longer had enough money for the upcoming winter.

That winter ended up being one of the worst in Chasong, and the food shortage began. At some point in the winter, my parents lost hope in the government. All of our crops died and my father started buying from the black market with the little money we had. Buying from the black market was

dangerous, and once I even witnessed a seller's home being raided by the military. They shot him in the street for resisting, and then took his family. On edge and becoming even more cautious, we were forced to buy less and less. This meant we had less food to share, and my sister Kyung ended up starving. We were lucky though, most families lost close to everyone.

After the winter, the food shortage kept on. My parents began talking about leaving the country, which was possibly the biggest crime of all. One night they argued about it for hours, and someone must have heard them. The next morning, when Chung-hee and I were out cultivating the farm, we came back home to find them dead. The military received word of their plans, and shot them while we were out. As I stood in the doorway frozen in shock, watching my brother break down in tears on my mother's lifeless body, it all became clear. That was when I finally realized, this country was no place for us. My brother and I would leave for China.

Late in the summer, we no longer had a home, since we couldn't afford the taxes. We lived on the street, the same street where Chung-hee first saw across the border, and begged for money and food. Keeping the money away and living off of the little bits of food given to us, we finally had collected enough money to leave and possibly live in China. That evening, as the twilight faded to black, we gathered what little belongings we had and I put the money in my bag. "Are you ready?" I asked him as I gently placed my hand on his shoulder. He answered me with a nod. "I love you, Hae-won." I smiled, "I love you too." Then we headed towards the border, the lights guiding our way.

Five Seconds

Hannah Eshelman

Buckhannon Upshur High School, Upshur County

Teacher: Melissa Cupp

3rd Place Winner (Grades 9-10)

The fog snaked its way around my car, making it hard to see from my already droopy eyes. I had let out a groan when I realized that I was still ten agonizing miles from my house. All I had wanted to do was hurry home and crawl under a mountain of blankets after a long night of partying at Melissa's. My Phone buzzed from somewhere in the abyss of my purse, but I didn't know it was a call from death itself. I kept one hand on the wheel of my Ford as I reached across the console for my purse just out of my reach. I cursed under my breath as the persistent humming of my cell bounced around in my skull like a million bouncy-balls. I took my eyes off the road for six seconds; my last five seconds.

My eyes drifted back to the road, but were blinded by the oncoming car. During the first second my scream was silenced by the stomach-turning sound of metal concaving on itself. The airbag pounded against me, and the crunch of my own facial bones breaking soon followed. The glass of my windshield shattered, causing the free shards to fly all around me. I couldn't help but to notice how beautiful the light reflected off the debris as it nicked my pristine skin. I could already feel the red rivers of blood pouring down my face and smell the iron taint.

By the next second, the front of my car was pinning me against my seat like the frog I dissected in Biology last week. Violent pain erupted throughout my entire body. One by one like old dilapidated pencils my bones snapped. I knew that if I lived, my life would never be the same.

In the third second every thought, every memory, and all my regrets flashed before my eyes. I could hear my mother singing a lullaby to me in a hushed voice as she tucked me into bed. The soothing smell of my father's cologne, dutifully sprayed every morning just before breakfast, filled the air and replaced the stench of blood. The sun burnt bright and hot as my boyfriend took my hand and pulled me into the cool summer water. When I resurfaced, he planted a soft kiss on my forehead. I couldn't help but to lose myself in his hypnotic sea-blue eyes and feel the love that radiated from him to me. My last memory was nothing but the sound of my cell phone.

It was during the fourth second I could feel the life I clung so dearly to begin to slip away. I cursed myself for jeopardizing it in the first place by reaching for my phone, and hated myself more for not taking full advantage of the life I was given. I wasted too much time the last several years partying, drinking, and trying to be cool, when I should have been doing what was right. I should have been with my family, working hard, and showing love to those who mattered to me. A new wave of agony ripped through me as I reflected over all my missed opportunities. I would never graduate high school, get married, and have children of my own to watch grow up and worry over like a mother-hen. What hurt more than feeling my own bones crush under the weight of a two-ton car, was knowing that my father, mother, and boyfriend were going to feel even more pain than I. Never again would I have the chance to tell them that I love them.

My vision started to fade and blur at the beginning of the fifth second. I looked at the damage that I had left in my wake. I saw the driver of the other car, a woman with bright yellow hair tainted with crimson blood, sprawled limply across her wheel. In the passenger seat, a girl around the age of twelve

cried out to her mother's lifeless corpse as blood flowed from the crown of her head. I knew her life would never be the same, and it was my fault. I planted the seed of misery into the girl's life, and I knew that like all seeds it would germinate and grow. The sorrow had just begun for her, and mine was coming to an end.

My body felt as though it was incased in a sheath of ice. I suppose that was how mammoths felt when their bodies were forever preserved in the snow and ice. I knew that unlike them, I would be forgotten as time went on. The peers, who I thought were my friends, would continue partying, drinking, and trying to text and drive. My family and boyfriend would miss me surely, but their lives would continue. I heard the sirens of the ambulance, fire trucks, and police cars rush towards me as I lost a grip on the one last thread that connected me to the living world. I was then plunged into a world of darkness, and the pain that radiated through me only moments ago was finally gone.

This was not how I imagined myself dying, at such a young age and not in such a horrid way. I had always pictured myself old, wrinkly, and peacefully lying in a stark-white casket with a single crimson rose weaved through my bony fingers. I never pictured my own parents would be holding a closed casket funeral for me before my eighteenth birthday.

The only positive thing about losing my life is that another teenager might hear my sorrowful tale, and think twice before trying to make a phone call or send a text while trying to drive. If I could just get teens to understand how precious and fragile their lives are, then my death will not be in vain. I fear that more teens will die like me, because no one listens to the words of a dead girl.

Somewhere in Appalachia

Rachael Kesecker

Berkeley Springs High School, Morgan County

Teacher: Heather Lorigan

1st Place Winner (Grades 11-12)

Ira creaked open the rickety old door with one hand while the other gently rested on his grandfather's bone-handled knife hanging at his waist. His worn hiking boots crossed the threshold of the homely little cabin with a familiar certainty. You never knew what you would find in the few cabins that were scattered along that particular stretch of the Appalachian Trail, so it was always a good idea to be cautious. Ira glanced around the mudroom at the sunlight struggling against the dingy windowpanes and breaking through the wood stacked against the walls. The sun was just beginning to set, which left a lovely golden haze hanging in the air. Ira kicked off his boots and continued into the rest of the cabin.

It was small, but beautiful. The red oak floors, walls, and loft greeted Ira with a serene familiarity that made him sigh with contentment. His maroon wool socks padded gently across the smooth floor into the living room. A giant, colorful woven rug stretched beautifully underneath the handmade furniture. His great grandmother Wyatt who had been a member of the Cherokee tribe living south of the Kanawha River made the rug with her mother and grandmother when she was just a child. Most of the old cabin was furnished with artifacts of the tribe from which his mother descended. Ira liked it that way, he was always looking forward to when the weather warmed and the hikers started trickling through the trails again so he could come back to this place.

Ira was a survivalist, trail guide, and licensed medic for a rugged 45-mile span of the most stunning mountains of the Appalachian Trail. They overlooked the Kanawha River, reaching heights far above city skyscrapers and diving into deep, gorgeous gorges and waterfalls. The beauty of Appalachia never ceased to take Ira's breath away. He lived in the old cabin from early spring to late fall, hauling supplies across the trails and searching for lost or struggling hikers. In the winter months he worked as an environmentalist forestry park ranger in a town roughly 50 miles out. Ira only felt at home if he was outside, free of the confining walls of society's poisonous ways. The only walls he wanted to be confined by were the ones of his grandfather's cabin.

After loading the first round of supplies into the kitchen's tiny pantry, cupboards, and root cellar, Ira unpacked his belongings to be settled in for the wonderfully long summer ahead. Soon after arriving, he decided to take a hike to his favorite spot along the outskirts of the Wyatt-Thompson property line. So Ira packed a knapsack of dried meat, fruit, and bread, grabbed his ancient canteen from when his father's grandfather fought in the Civil War, and his tall, smooth, speckled sycamore walking stick and headed out into the cool, late spring afternoon.

With each step he took, the damp March leaves squished deeper into the saturated earth. His walking stick plunged several inches into particularly muddy areas of the mountainside. Higher and higher Ira trekked, the sun quickly fading on his strong back while beautiful wisps of early dogwood breeze ruffled through his curls. He soon reached the rocky outcrop not far from his destination and stopped briefly for a drink of perpetually cool stream water. The muddy terrain gave way to rocky cliffs and caves ready to be explored, but Ira only went for the view.

While hoisting himself onto the highest ledge, Ira saw something he had never seen before in all his days of exploring the mountains: A mountain lion. Cougar, puma, mountain screamer, Indian devil, Caracajou, Nittany lion, the names for the imperial king of the mountain go on forever. Nothing could have prepared Ira for seeing such a magnificent beast in the wild. His grandmother had once told him of a time when she was a little girl and her grandmother shared a legend of the Appalachian Mountains.

It is said that once, an Indian Princess named Nit-A-Nee fell in love with a brave Indian warrior from the Lion's Paw tribe. When her love was killed by fierce winds of the North, Nit-A-Nee carried his body to the center of a deep valley and buried him standing upright, building a mound around him in honor of his strength. Legend has it that on the last night of the full moon, right after Nit-A-Nee had placed the final stone atop the mound, an atrocious storm broke out across the sky, unleashing all the thunder and lightning of the spirit world. The princess climbed her lover's grave and stood with her arms outstretched to receive all the lightening in the sky. The Indians in the valley watched through the night as the mound grew and grew into an entire mountain. When the storm finally broke, the natives found that standing on the great mountain was a lion. This lion possessed all the fearlessness and love of both the fallen Indian brave of the Lion's Paw tribe and of Princess Nit-A-Nee. From that day on, the mountain lion has been considered the most sacred creature of the mountain.

Ira stood frozen, hearing the legend in the back of his mind and seeing his grandmother with her wrinkled, leathery hands gesturing across the horizon to all the land the mountain lions possessed. His heart was beating through his chest with excitement and anxiety from seeing the king of the mountain lounging gracefully on the edge of the cliff; a lion overlooking his Pride. Ira

stared at the beast until the sun finished setting and the sweet, chilly spring breeze blew over the trees of Appalachia. The two men of the mountain then parted ways, knowing it would not be the last time they met.

The Memories

Laura Morris

Fairmont Senior High School, Marion County

Teacher: Toni Poling

2nd Place Winner (Grades 11-12)

The wind was filled with feeling, with emotion and remembrance. The leaves of the many trees shivered and tremored, breathing in the memories. It was a wind rich with the past, the men that had tread upon the soil and the men buried beneath it. The voices of the past hovered on the gusts of wind, there but unseen, empty but full. Memory was a tangible thing in that hidden forest, composed of the breath of the green and growing trees.

It was spring then, and the limbs were sturdy and budding with bright green. Soft sunlight filtered through the leaves and cast a mosaic of shadows on the thick forest floor. The trees were waking up from a cold and bitter winter, coming alive from their yearly sleep. Spring was sacred time, the time of the recovery of memories. The memories once frozen in the ground would enter the hearts of the trees, rising through the deep roots. Then the visions would come.

Darkness, desolation, an empty stretch of land. Then, a seed, a single seed, falling on the hopeless soil. But then the rain came, falling, pouring, and the parched earth swallowed the rushing waters from the sky. The rains brought health to the earth, and thus a tree grew, tall and sturdy.

And then the travelers came. Just men at first; thick, broad, working men, coming to dig and plow. When they had worked the land and grown fields of corn, their wives arrived, and many homes were built. Soon, babies were born, and to protect the young children, a forest of trees grew, tall and

strong. The trees were the guardians of the people that dwelled beneath them, and they watched with many an observant eye.

Yes, the trees were watching and thinking all the while, when the kingdom began and when it faded. The people grew larger in number, and they set a king at their head. They built a castle for him and gave him gold jewels. The peasants farmed the fields and the artisans crafted and built, all for the king, all for the good of the kingdom.

The trees watched and did not interfere, but their gazes became keener and more intense. The trees were wise; they were observers. They were as all-seeing eyes. They watched and learned, never distracted by the need to move, to talk, or to interfere. Watching made them wise, and their limbs shivered with warning, but the people did not listen.

And so the king gave orders to build a wall of stone surrounding the kingdom, isolating its people from the forest. Boulder on boulder was hauled and stacked, and a wall was constructed. The wall severed the relationship between men and the trees, yet the trees still served the kingdom, the breath of the trees filling up the peoples' lungs and their branches constructing homes and houses. But the guidance of the tree was lost, and so faded the wisdom of men.

Some forgot the forest, its whispering winds and falling leaves, its sturdy trunks and branches, always growing, yet some remembered. Some managed to escape the wall for only a moment and breathe in the forest.

On a gray and misty dawn, a little girl tread upon the dew-covered forest floor with a satchel full of books. She lay against the trunk of a tree and read of greater and more beautiful times. The leaves tremored in approval.

A pair of young lovers tiptoed beneath the lowest branches. He told her poems and made her laugh, and she smiled at him.

“You are beautiful,” he told her, “as you dance in the forest.”

She smiled and kissed him, and the trees looked down warmly and gently.

At amber twilight, an old man stepped into the dark green of the wood, leaning on an old cane. He looked up and smiled, but his eyes revealed his melancholy spirit. The tree limbs shook with a gust of wind, for they knew what he had come to do.

“Spirits of the forest,” he said, “I have come to die. I have lived for many years in a land that is not my own, but I wish to die in the land of my fathers. I want green grass and trees, oh, glorious trees! to grow from my body. I want to sleep in winter and come alive in spring and wave my branches in the western wind. Leaves above, grant me peace.”

Peace was granted to him, and his time ended. Years passed, an age followed another, and the old man’s grave remained unseen. Not far from his grave, the wall still stood, crumbling and falling, a deathly stillness all around. Abandoning the wisdom of the trees, the people had relied on their own wisdom, and it failed them. The kingdom fell into ruin. Darkness grew and fears arose, the people fled, but the wall stood, grim and ominous. And the trees watched it all, gazing and growing, guarding the unmarked graves of both men and creatures. These were graves marked only by the sullen branches that grew and the winds that blew and the peeps of sunlight on the forest floor. The roots of the trees were deep and strong, fearless, and did not easily forget. By them we will be remembered, all of us, for the trees are always watching, always guarding silently.

A wet wind whistled with phantoms of the past, rising and falling in pitch and intensity. Sometimes it moaned, sometimes it sang in languages unknown to men, but the trees understood. The forest remembered.

With the warmth of spring would come the once forgotten memories. With the breath of new life in the land and the trees, the old and the fading, the faintest of times, the unmarked graves, are brought to light, if only by the splotches of sun on the forest floor.

Do the trees know of the future? Can such a thing be known? Is eternal wisdom of the past enough to foresee the dawn of a new day, the birth of new life? The trees are creatures of knowledge, but not of decision; no, decision rests in the hands of mortal men.

Dog Days

Sarah Shia

Wheeling Park High School, Ohio County

Teacher: Heidi Frazier

3rd Place Winner (Grades 11-12)

The doctors were so skeptical about bringing me home from the hospital with my dad's dog, Jack, in the house. They said the only way we could know how he was going to react to me was to set my crib in the middle of the living room and see where it went. My dad carried me because he was the dominant figure in the house. Tensions were high. He placed me in my crib and released Jack. As soon as Jack saw me, he immediately laid right next to me and didn't move the rest of the night. When most people think of Rottweilers they think of vicious, man eating dogs. Well I'm lucky to know that is all a stereotype, my first best friend was a Rottweiler.

As Jack and I grew older, our bond grew stronger. My mom used to bring home gravy from work and put it on Jack's food. He didn't get too much of that gravy. I used to sit and lick each piece of his food clean of gravy and then place it back in his bowl. All the while Jack would just sit there and wait for me to be finished. Most dogs would snarl or snap at you when you even got close to their food bowl, but not Jack. He did not once bark or growl as I reached my little hands into his bowl.

Jack and I would play together outside for hours. We would venture into the wild and run from the "beasts" that chased after us. The wild was my backyard and the "beasts" were all in my head, but Jack played along anyway. When we tired out, we would sit and play in the dirt together. I remember piling mounds of grass and dirt all over his back until you couldn't see a strand of his shiny fur. He even stayed still until I was done making a mess of him. On hot

summer days, we'd both cram into my baby pool which was only about four feet wide as we shared a popsicle that was melting blue and red syrup down my arms. Those moments spent with him are some of the happiest memories I have. I knew he was happy too. Even though he didn't have a whole tail, his nub was always shaking vigorously.

Jack was so protective over my family. At night he would sit at the top of the steps and make sure not even a mouse got by. Jack was always my security. He not only saved me from pure boredom, but from a crazy raccoon too. One fall day we were outside and Jack and I were sitting under the pear tree when a rabid raccoon came out of the nearby woods. His mouth was frothing, the way your mouth looks right when your toothpaste starts to foam. At first he was walking like a zombie, but then he darted. Before I knew it, I was in my dad's arms. The only thought that was running through my head though was Jack. My dad yelled his name over and over, "Jack, come on boy!" The next thing I knew, Jack was off and running with a mission. He scooped up the raccoon and shook it like a rag doll. Once he was sure it was dead, he set it on the ground and ran back to me like he had just won a gold medal. My dad carefully checked him over for bites. There wasn't a scratch on him.

One night Jack really was a savior, you could even call him my dad's guardian angel. I'll never forget the week before Halloween my kindergarten year. My mom, brother, and I were all coming home from costume shopping. I was staring out my car window until a screech from my mom brought my head out of the clouds. I looked up fearfully, as our house was being engulfed in flames. There were sirens and fire trucks coming from every direction. I spotted my dad with Jack and headed straight toward him. He explained to my mom that without a bark from Jack he would be in those flames. He saved my dad. A

few weeks later we moved into a rental home. I hated it mostly because we were told we couldn't keep Jack. My world felt like it was crashing down on me. I will never forget the day my dad took my best friend away in the back of his truck. Tears streamed down my face as I tried to run for the truck, but my mom grabbed my arm as soon as I took my first step. My heart was broken. My best friend was gone.

To this day, I believe I still have some sort of connection with Jack. Although his head was bigger than a boulder and his body was bulging with muscles, Jack was the perfect definition of a gentle giant. His big heart is what made most of my childhood years. I would love to have another dog as great as him, but dogs that awesome are hard to come by. He was the best dog anyone could ask for. No, he was the best friend anyone could ever imagine. It's not about the type of dog, it's about the heart of the dog.