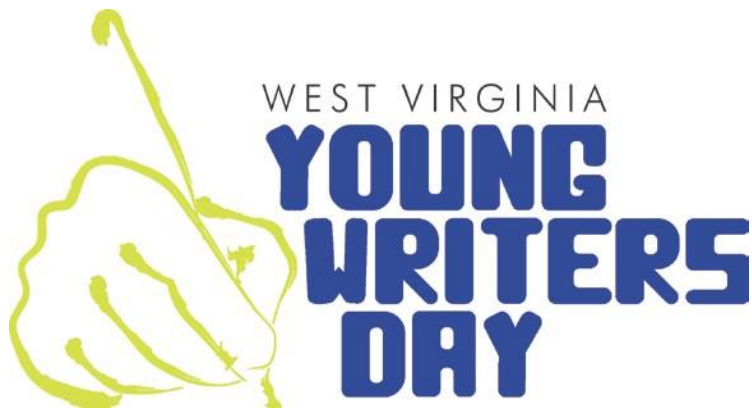


*2019 West Virginia  
Young Writers Contest  
Anthology*



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## *Introduction*

We proudly present the anthology of the 2019 West Virginia Young Writers contest. It displays the writing 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 West Virginia state 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 35 years. The contest is an initiative of the Central West Virginia Writing Project at Marshall University and the West Virginia Department of Education. The contest is supported with funds from the state of West Virginia. The University of Charleston preciously provides invaluable support by hosting Young Writers Day. A Steering Committee, under the leadership of Dr. Barbara O'Byrne, guides the contest and prepares the events of Young Writers Day.

*The mission of the central West Virginia Writing Project is to improve the teaching of writing and learning in West Virginia schools. To learn more about our professional development programs, visit the website listed below:*

[www.marshall.edu/cwvwp](http://www.marshall.edu/cwvwp)

### **Partners**

*Central West Virginia Writing Project  
West Virginia Department of Education  
Marshall University College of Education and Professional Development  
University of Charleston  
With assistance from West Virginia Books*

## **Acknowledgements**

### **WV Young Writers Contest Steering Committee**

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### **WV Young Writers Contest Judges 2019**

Tarah Clark

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Krystal Pennington

Cat Pleska

Carron Smith

## *My Winner*

**Kallie Keyser**

Franklin Elementary School, Pendleton County

Teacher: Donita Kimble

West Virginia State Winner

First Place, Grades 1-2

I live on a farm and my family and me raise lambs. It is an exciting time when the lambs are born. I love going to the barn and opening the wooden door to the sound of “baaa!”

I woke up one Easter morning and I was happy. We went to Pappaw and Gram’s and they surprised me with a baby lamb. She was white and had a speckled face. I named her after my favorite flower. Buttercup was adorable!

I brought her home and on the way Mommy let Buttercup ride on my lap. She was warm and soft. I fed her with a bottle and it looked like feeding a baby. Buttercup and I would cuddle in the barn and I talked to her. I knew she liked it because she would fall asleep on my lap. We would play tag in the field and she would climb on me like a mountain. Buttercup was like a shadow to me.

Buttercup and I loved to play together. She was a lawnmower for my backyard and that made Mom and Dad happy. She loved to eat dandelions! She nibbled on the green grass and when Buttercup drank her milk, her tail would wiggle. She looked so funny when her tail wiggled.

I had to train Buttercup for the fair. Each day I had to lead her in my backyard. I had to lead her with a halter. Buttercup didn’t like it. I had to wash Buttercup too and she would shake like a dog and I would get wet! I took Buttercup to the fair and I had to take her in the trailer because she was too big for my lap! Then it was show time! I led Buttercup around the ring in front of the judges and crowd. She did great!

Buttercup didn’t win the show, but she was a winner to me!

# ***Hopestone***

**Miriam Fitts**

Talcott Elementary School, Summers County

Teacher: John Ramsey

West Virginia State Winner

Second Place, Grades 1-2

One day, while scuba diving at the bottom of the sea, I discovered a new rock. It all began when I scuba dove off Tasmanian Coast with my family on a sunny Monday. I went to the bottom, and decided to investigate a dirty crevice in an underwater cliff.

I scooped out the sand and muck. “Whoa, what was that?” A gem! The gem was teardrop shaped, the size of a child’s pinky, feather light, and perfectly transparent, too. Also, it was very smooth. I broke the surface and called to Mom, “I’ll be right back!” “Okay!” she replied.

I ran to the old professor’s house down the road and knocked on his door. “Who’s there?” He opened the door. “Could I talk to you in private?” I asked. “Why?” he replied. I said, “I found a crystal-like stone.” He gestured for me to walk inside. We sat down over a cup of tea. I said, “What’s this?” showing him the rock I found. He gave me a very surprised look. “I have no idea! I’ll look it up.” Thirty minutes later, he looked up and turned around. “Congratulations! You have found a new type of rock! I looked it up. You can name it!” he exclaimed. I shouted, “Hopestone, Hopestone!” I hid the stone in a tiny golden chest. I ran to our hotel room and laid it next to my bed. I jogged back to the beach and resumed swimming. When I got home, I slipped my Hopestone under a loose floorboard, and it stayed there.

In the end, no one ever found out about my rock, and the professor died, taking the secret with him. I passed it down to my daughter, and she did the same. The Hopestone went mother to daughter, never ceasing.

# *Over at the Farm*

**Avery Tully**

Mt. Nebo Elementary School, Nicholas County

Teacher: Jessica Martin

West Virginia State Winner

Third Place, Grades 1-2

Far out in the country there was a little farm with lots of animals. One summer evening the farmer heard her animals arguing. She went to see what was wrong.

The farmer found Horse, Cow, and Dog arguing over who was the best singer. So the farmer needed to find a way to solve the problem. She decided that the animals would have a contest to see who the best singer on the farm was.

The farmer and the three animals made the instruments that they would need for the concert. They used pots, pans, sticks, and strings to make the drums and guitars. Now they were ready to begin.

Horse wanted to go first because he thought he was the bravest of the three in the contest. Horse began to sing the song "Little Red." It was a song about a horse named Little Red.

Next, it was Cows turn to sing. Cow decided to sing the famous song "The Farmer in the Dell." It was his favorite song because it reminded him of what it was like to grow up on the farm.

Last, Dog began to sing his song. He chose the song B-I-N-G-O. He picked that song because it was about the most famous dog he knew.

The farmer was the judge of the contest. She enjoyed all of their terrific songs. She couldn't pick a winner because all of the singers were so amazing. So the farmer came up with the idea that all three of the animals should become a singing group and all sing together.

# *Pretty Girl*

**Maddie Short**

Berlin McKinney Elementary School, Wyoming County  
Teacher: Rachael Bailey  
West Virginia State Winner  
First Place, Grades 3-4

My Pawpaw always called me pretty girl. He was one of the best Papaws in the world. I spent a lot of time at his farm in the summer visiting. It was the best place ever with rolling green hills for miles. When I would go to the farm to visit, my Mamaw and Papaw would always be sitting on the porch. Papaw in his favorite chair with a big smile, waiting to give me a huge hug.

My Pawpaw did not talk a lot, but I'd always hear him say, "Hi pretty girl," and, "I love you." Which was always accompanied by the most comfortable hugs ever.

Then one day my Pawpaw got dementia, it was so sad. Things slowly started to change a lot. Though I would still hear him say, "Hi pretty girl," with a hug but without the, "I love you." after.

Pretty soon the hugs from him started to stop too. I knew he had just forgotten, so I'd just go up to him and give him the fiercest hugs.

Then one Sunday when I walked into his house, he looked at me like he was lost. He hesitated, but it did not take long for him to look at me and say, "Hey pretty girl." I was relieved that he still could remember to say the words.

My Pawpaw had a fabulous smile, I miss it so much. Even when his dementia got worse, he kept up with the tradition of always building us fires and we would make s'mores every Sunday.

When we would go swimming in the river that summer, he would always walk down to watch over us. I can still picture him standing there the very last time, wearing his black and white checkered



shirt, and his farmer jeans holding his homemade walking stick in his hand. He smiled at us tenderly that day. Once again, I said, “Hey Papaw,” and as always, he replied back, “Hey pretty girl.”

That summer was the best ever. I will never forget it. The days flew by. Some days he looked at me like he didn’t even know who I was. It took some time, but he unfailingly still called me “pretty girl” every Sunday when we went to the farm.

I remember my Papaw holding the new babies in our family gently and saying, “My, my,” as he cuddled them on his lap.

Before we knew it, things started to change with him fast. He did not know who most of us were and he would forget a lot of things. It was pitiful to watch him change like that. But I knew my Pawpaw was still there even though he felt lost. He never forgot I was his pretty girl. I miss the way he always hugged me and smiled at me. Even though he is gone, he lives on in my heart.

# *The Queen's New Pet*

**Reece Sites**

Maysville Elementary School, Grant County

Teacher: Mrs. Jolley

West Virginia State Winner

Second Place, Grades 3-4

One sunny day, a cute, fuzzy little hamster sat in a pet store's glass window cage. He had been there a long time for advertisement, drawing the brief smiles and coos of passersby. He spent the day wishing he could get out because he had always wanted to find a place to call home. Every day, the little hamster tried so fervently to escape, but he could never find a way. On this particular day, he spotted a tiny hole in the glass, so he made it bigger by trying to stick his head through it. All of a sudden, the glass shattered, and he was finally free! The little fellow was so happy!

First, he explored inside the pet store. He was impressed with almost everything he saw. Next, he scattered away to the grocery store, where he helped himself to the fresh fruits and vegetables. He continued on his way through the shopping mall. He decided to stop by the food court, but changed his mind when a huge, angry man stomped toward him and shooed him away. The scared hamster bolted outside and didn't stop until he was out of town.

Finally, he came to the queen's castle. It was so beautiful and magnificent! He sneaked past the sleeping guard and entered the queen's chamber. There, he met the queen's pet schnauzer, Mr. Ruffy. The startled dog barked, "Who are you, and why are you here?" "I am here to see the queen," the hamster squeaked. In an effort to hold a friendly conversation, he quickly asked, "Did you just get groomed? You look splendid!" "Why, yes!" replied Mr. Ruffy. "Do you know where I can find the queen?" added the little hamster sweetly. "The queen is getting her hair done today, but she will return soon," replied Mr. Ruffy. Just then, they spied the glamorous queen coming down the hallway. She looked at the little hamster and instantly bent down to scoop him up into her arms. "Why, aren't you a fuzzy little peanut!" she laughed. "Mr. Ruffy," the queen inquired, "doesn't this little guy look like the hamster that spends all day in the

window at the pet store?” “Yes, he does,” barked Mr. Ruffy. “Well then, let's return him,” she said, “for the owner is probably worried about him.” The little hamster’s heart sank because he had hoped to stay with the queen.

The pet store owner was thankful to the queen for returning the hamster. “Would you like to keep him?” he asked. “We just got a new hamster.” The queen thought for a moment and then replied, “I would love to keep him!” The queen thanked the store owner, said good-bye and returned home with her new pet.

Back at the castle, the queen told the hamster, “Let’s call you Peanut.” She smooched the little hamster on the tip of his pink nose. Peanut was elated! He finally had a home.

## *Pappy's Reflection*

**Kylie Cline**

North Jefferson Elementary School, Jefferson County  
Teacher: Nikki Johnson  
West Virginia State Winner  
Third Place, Grades 3-4

Pappy Campbell used to come visit us at least once a week. After some time went by, we realized Pappy was repeating himself a lot. Then he started to forget to take his medicine.

Things kept getting worse and worse so we had to take Pappy to the doctor. The doctor told us Pappy had dementia. He said there was no cure and that Pappy would slowly become unable to perform a lot of basic tasks. Pappy had to move in with us.

One day we heard Pappy talking to someone when we knew there was no one there. When we looked to see who he was talking to he was looking in the mirror talking to his reflection.

Every few weeks the reflection would be someone different he remembered from his past. Things continued to get worse for Pappy. It happened a lot faster than we thought it would.

Some days were different than others, he had good days and he had bad days. Some days he would forget how to use his silverware to eat his food. Other days he couldn't remember how to walk.

One night, Pappy wandered outside along the road and later was found lying in a ditch. That's when we knew we could no longer continue to care for him safely in our home. Pappy had to go live in a nursing home. Everyone was upset but we knew it was what was best for Pappy.

At first Pappy didn't understand where he was or why he could never leave when we left. He slowly started to get used to staying there. He had to have his own room because he would see things that weren't there.

Pappy didn't get along with other roommates. After he got his own room we

could tell he felt happier, which made us feel happier. We would go visit Pappy as much as we could. One time he asked my mom if she was still, “milking those cows” when we knew he meant watching those kids. Another time he said, “he couldn’t wear his tires anymore because they cost too much money for gas.” We knew he was talking about his shoes.

One day when we went to visit Pappy we could hear him talking to someone like he used to do at our house. When we walked into his room he was standing in front of his mirror talking to his reflection. He introduced us to his buddy in the mirror. He was very happy talking to his buddy in the mirror. Every time after that, Pappy seemed happy to talk to his buddy in the mirror.

Pappy continues to have good days and bad days. Sometimes he makes us laugh and sometimes he makes us cry, but as long as Pappy has his reflection we know he will be okay.

# *My Best Friend*

## **Zane Wilkinson**

Clay County Middle School, Clay County

Teacher: L. Katie Stover

West Virginia State Winner

First Place, Grades 5-6

Corbin is the best friend a guy could have. He has shiny black hair, sad brown eyes, and is fourteen years old. He has a loud voice but can't sing a lick. When he tries, he sounds like a cat being forced to take a bath. Our preacher won't even let him sing in church.

On a sunny day, he likes to play baseball with my family in the back yard. Climbing up on a diving board, he enjoys plunging into the crystal, clear water making a giant splash; he swims to the other end, and then, he repeats it. When we have a pool party, Dad likes to barbecue on the patio. Waiting anxiously for food, Corbin hovers by the grill for a juicy hamburger with extra cheese. He always wants seconds, and I even have to share my burger with him, too.

Last summer, we went to Largo, Florida, to visit family, and Corbin went with us. His favorite things at Busch Gardens were the rides. On the Roaring Rapids, some kids got on the twisting, turning ride with us. While they got soaked, Corbin and I remained perfectly dry. He also went with us to Tennessee to attend the Lee University Honor Band performance to watch my brother play percussion. Corbin wore a black suit and bowtie, and I wore a vest with a tie; we looked pretty snazzy. After the concert, my parents took us to ride the Polar Express, which is a train that takes the passengers to the North Pole. On the way there, we looked at the wintry countryside and sipped hot cocoa.

Corbin and I share a love of food. Besides bacon and steak, my buddy's favorite snack is cookies. When my brother and I want a cookie, we have to spell it out because Corbin comes running. Besides eating, he likes to watch television shows about dogs, and he likes to be read to. His choice of books include: Old Yeller, Where the Red Fern Grows, and Shiloh.

Although Corbin is awesome, he has his share of faults. He does not like to take a bath or brush his teeth. Most days, Corbin stays home and sleeps since he is not enrolled in school. When he gets out toys, he never puts them away, mostly leaving them scattered around the house. He leaves hair all over the place and sometimes gets fleas. Although I love him, he licks himself, and then, tries to give me kisses.

Corbin is a black lab and is my service dog. He acts as my legs when I can't walk. When I stumble and waddle through the house due to the pain, Corbin steadies me and helps my balance. If I become sick with a fever, Corbin gets me in the floor and cools me down. During my chemotherapy infusions, he sits with me, holds my hand, and takes my mind off of the pain. His ears are always willing to listen, and he never plays "don't touch him; you will get sick" like the kids on the playground. Corbin is more than a friend; he's more like a brother. Even with his faults, more people should be like Corbin.

# *The Snow Day*

**Georgia Woolley**

Oak Glen Middle School, Hancock County

Teacher: Amanda Fisher  
West Virginia State Winner  
Second Place, Grades 5-6

BRRR!! There I am sitting on the couch bundled up in a fuzzy blanket when I hear the weatherman's husky voice crackling into the microphone. I feel as if the joy inside of me is about to shoot out of my ears; he has just announced that a blizzard of epic proportion is heading right towards us! The storm is going to be strong and is predicted to drop so much snow that it is almost certain that all area schools will be closed tomorrow! When those glorious words pass his frost bitten lips I explode out of my blanket cocoon with such excitement that my poor old dog nearly has an accident on mom's new rug!

In the midst of my jig of glee, I am interrupted by my mother's voice echoing through the hallway, calling my name, as she struggles to zip her coat with enormous hands swaddled in two pairs of gloves. She is shouting at me to hurry so we can get to the market before things start flying off the shelves. I rush to get myself bundled up as mom scrapes layers of solid ice off the car windshield.

After mom's near mental breakdown in the parking lot attempting to locate an empty spot big enough to park our old tank, we finally make our way into the brightly lit store. I can't help but immediately wish I had stayed home. This place is packed!! Everywhere I look shopping carts are rolling, women are shouting, babies are crying, and the employees look like they wish they had stayed home too! Mom zooms in and out of aisles like a pro, grabbing everything we need and ignoring the chaos as I follow along in a daze. After waiting in line for what seemed like hours, we finally head home with our stash of goodies and toilet paper!

After helping mom unload our haul, I head off to bed feeling like a kid on Christmas Eve; wishing it were morning already, yet way too excited to fall asleep. I lie awake and plot how I will spend every moment of my snow day. I imagine the morning spent with my best friend sledding



down Racer Hill on my brand new sleek red disc sled, snow crystals flying in our faces while we barrel our way past everyone else. After sledding, all the neighborhood kids will get together for an epic snowball battle! I can already see those perfectly packed fluffy white missiles slicing through the chilly air, nearly taking out our snowman's carrot nose as they whiz by! Only when our fingertips begin to feel like the icicles hanging off the rooftops will we go inside to warm up. Mom is waiting with a big steamy mug of rich, creamy, hot chocolate with tons of melty marshmallows! As I sip it my body seems to thaw out. The delicious, smooth chocolate runs through my body giving me energy for round two!

Suddenly I am ripped from my hot chocolate haze by a disturbing, yet familiar beeping noise. Instantly, my mother bursts into the room in a sickeningly cheerful manner chanting "Rise and shine, time for school." I couldn't help but believe this must be some sort of cruel joke. "Great news!" she says, "That awful snowstorm passed right by us!" I can't believe my ears so I rush to my window to see for myself. I pull my curtains open with such force I nearly rip them down. My heart sinks when I see not one single flake of snow!! How can this be???

Twenty dreadful minutes later there I am standing at the bus stop in the pouring down rain, all my snow day dreams crushed, knowing that tonight I will definitely skip the weather portion of the news!

## *Just Listen*

**Kallie McCutcheon**

Spencer Middle School, Roane County

Teacher: Rachel Heis

West Virginia State Winner

Third Place, Grades 5-6

Sometimes I imagine colors. They must be glorious and vibrant, filling your senses and describing every emotion there is to experience. Eventually I must stop, because what if one day, I really do see them, and they disappoint me? If they are bleak and inexpressive, I think that it might just break me. What is the point of hoping for sight when expectations could possibly be better than reality? Though I've learned to live with my disability, I can't help but picture the day I wake up and am gifted with my fifth sense. I've waited fifteen years. The day hasn't arrived yet.

Waking is the worst part, because of the shaky anticipation. I wait with bated breath, sending up prayers and wishes to who-knows-where, then I ease my eyes open. Like maybe if I do it slow enough, my visual perception will be there, waiting for me after all this time. This morning is no different. I slowly drag my eyes open...nothing. A breath I didn't realize I was holding escapes my lips. It's okay. I swing my legs carefully over the edge of my bed and when the bottoms of my feet brush the cold surface of my cedar floor, I stand. I tread carefully across the room, my hands outstretched. I arrive at my closet and reach a hand in, dragging my fingers over the fabrics hanging there, tugging a shirt out of its place. I slip it over my head and wiggle myself into a pair of sweatpants, my uniform. Then I'm out the door of the room I may never see. There is a faint rustling sound that comes from somewhere in front of me, and I know my mother has just looked up from her coffee and morning paper. She remains silent and I return the favor. I know she blames herself for my problem, and we've always gotten along just fine saying as little as possible. I reach for my backpack, in the spot it always waits for me in, like a faithful old dog, and within no time, I'm in the passenger seat of the rusty clunker we've had since I was tiny. The engine rumbles to life, growling with the effort, and the car begins to move. Not long after, the rain comes, a gentle thrum of percussion along the top of the roof, and I sink into my seat, relaxing. Rain is so humble,

oblivious to the life it brings. The sound of it so delicate, yet so powerful all at once. A sigh escapes my lungs.

Suddenly I was thrown forward in my seat, my seatbelt straining, as Mother slammed her foot on the brakes.

“What’s wrong?” I yelled in surprise. It had been so sudden, you would’ve thought someone threw themselves directly in the path of our car.

“Get out,” she muttered, her voice cracking. I obeyed, my heart pounding like a bass drum in my chest. The moment my sneakers touched the damp ground, she was there, taking my hand gently and tugging me into the droplets. I wasn’t sure how long we walked, but when our footsteps ceased, a cacophony of sounds echoed around us. Rustling foliage, and an orchestra of bird songs, each louder and more beautiful than the next, like they were all fighting for my attention. It was... the best thing I’d ever experienced. No man-made sounds, only pure noises reverberated through my head, and it smelled of damp earth and decaying leaves and clean air. My heart slowed and I was perfectly content for the first time in my life. Not having one sense sharpens the rest of them, and they were full, almost overflowing with the richness of nature and my own happiness. My mother’s hand was still clasped tightly around my own, and I knew she wouldn’t let go of me.

“I love you,” she said softly. And I knew she meant it. A single tear of happiness wound its way down my face. I didn’t need anything, vision right now would be a distraction. Closing your eyes and listening is the best way to enjoy life, as I am slowly discovering.

## *Puzzle Girl*

**Tiana Tauber**

Hamilton Middle School, Wood County

Teacher: Amy Ramsburg  
West Virginia State Winner  
First Place, Grades 7-8

Jenny slowly and deliberately walks into Mrs. Johnson's fifth grade classroom with her head down, white knuckling her purple backpack straps. She forces one foot in front of the other. Jenny looks up to find a seat and is met with the glaring eyes of her peers. Time stands still as Jenny scans the room. She can almost hear the thoughts behind each pair of eyes.

The crystal-blue eyes in the corner whisper, "Eww, gross."

The chestnut eyes by the whiteboard shout, "Is that Puzzle Girl?"

While the sky-blue eyes sitting by the door plead, "Don't sit by me!"

Innocent intended thoughts can change lives.

Jenny has a rare skin condition that enables everyone to see her as she sees herself, incomplete. Her innermost insecurity is on display for all to see. Her ailment makes her look like an unfinished puzzle lying on a jet-black tabletop with various sized blotches of endless darkness all over her otherwise fair skin. Hence her nickname, Puzzle Girl. Since the onset of the disease, like the tides of a tropical storm, her appearance has drastically changed; she doesn't remember her former beauty.

Jenny was a typical little girl. She used to love school, grilled cheese, and playing hopscotch. She was described as bubbly, sweet, and precocious. Jenny was on the shorter side of average with long, silky, chocolate-brown hair. Her eyes glimmered like honey spilled on blades of summer grass, but Jenny's best feature was her smile. She would smile from so deep within her soul that she could light up the darkest vacuums of space. Unfortunately, Jenny hadn't found a way to shine a light on the void within herself.

Jenny is still on the shorter side with long brown hair, but now she is diffident, despondent, and dim. Her eyes are still hazel, but somewhat hollow now. Jenny's smile is still radiant, but she

doesn't share it with the world anymore. Jenny hates school now, especially the first day, because it marks the anniversary of her illness's inception.

On the first day of third grade Jenny's self-identity changed. The teacher asked everyone to "draw your family." Jenny drew a house, her mom, brother, and herself all standing under an apple tree.

While Jenny was presenting her picture to the class, a boy in the back blurted out, "Look, Jenny doesn't have a dad."

Innocently intended statements can change lives.

Jenny's father left when she was three years old; and until that moment in class, she never thought it odd. Her face and arms turned beet-red. She was the only person she knew who didn't have a dad. The more she thought about it, the darker the red splotches on her arms grew until they were black. The insecurity of not knowing who she was stained her porcelain skin.

That night Jenny determined that her father left 1,789 days ago. However, it was what she did to herself over the next 730 days that left an impression on her skin. She would stare in the mirror and imagine what her father looks like. She longed to know what she inherited from him.

Ultimately, the more questions she asked the more incomplete she felt.

She would ask herself, "What does he look like? Sound like? Do we have the same favorite color? Animal? Since I don't know half of myself, who am I?"

The more she mourned over the not knowing, the more of herself vanished into negative thoughts, and the more her skin turned to negative space. The more marred she became; the more monstrous she felt.

Jenny wants to sit by the pleading sky-blue eyes just to spite them but sits by a pair of approachable, self-assured green eyes instead. The green eyes belong to a new student named Emma. Emma is wise beyond her years from her own encounters with an absent father. Emma knows that healing comes from connecting with others through shared experiences.

She turns to Jenny and reveals a tiny black blemish on her arm, "I started with the edges

instead of the full picture. I got nowhere focusing on the abyss."

With that Jenny smiles, because this is the innocent statement that changes her life.

# *Unholy*

**Amelia Cain**

Calhoun Middle/High School, Calhoun County

Teacher: Jessica Cook

West Virginia State Winner

Second Place Grades 7-8

Why didn't I run and scream in terror? What was I wearing? Why didn't I report it sooner? I can answer these questions, yes. But will you understand? Will you fathom the horror, the living nightmare that I could refer to as sleep paralysis, for I could not move a muscle; I was paralyzed. Dissociated. Almost as if I had dispersed into thin air. No, I do not expect you to understand; not the cops, not my mother, not anyone.

"Unholy!" my mother screams, as I'm blubbing in result of my tears. The Saint Christopher necklace, the crucifix, and the rosary blister my chest. *Unholy*, I say to myself. This is my label, for I am no longer my mother's little girl, only the thorn in her side; a disgrace. I have betrayed my Lord, for I was meant for Him. I was supposed to save myself, for Him.

"You were violated," my brother says. Yes! He understands! Until the chuckle, and the shake of the head. "If only you didn't dress like a harlot."

"Are you okay?" someone finally asks. *No*, I say to myself. *No*, as I sob into his chest. Ironic, nonetheless. Ironic, as I find comfort in the species that has violated me; scarred me to the marrow.

After all, all I can do is repeat the denial in my head until I've convinced myself that it's okay. The comforting words repeat in my head, like a prayer; like a mantra. Only I've been convinced that perhaps God wasn't a part of this. My prayer is useless. My guardian angel has failed her job. No longer am I a pure Lilly, but a rose, with thorns, symbolizing seduction. Symbolizing sin.

And we get back to the feeling, the paralyzing feeling. The feeling of the metal in my tiny hands once I reached into my purse. The knife was useless, *I didn't* have the heart to hurt someone. And the

tears, the blood curdling tears. I wanted to leave my skin, cover it in salt. Preserve it for when I'm finally ready to become clean. And the irrational fears; the irrational fears I've developed over time. The nudity, the music, the smell. I rather die than encounter bare skin. The commands play in my head like a broken record. Human skin sheds itself in 60 days and creates a new layer, but I cannot even scrub the feeling of your touch off my body. This is no romance, and there is no pacifier. Violated, molested, raped, *lying*, call it as you will.

There will be no boy touching me anytime soon, and I will not feel a warm embrace. The purest touch from my grandmother will make me shiver, goose bumps trickling my body. I won't feel comfort in my own wardrobe, only the same outfit every day. Once I believe I can go out of my haven, I think of you and get thrown back into my art of being a prude, like I'm taking refuge. I've only visited my place of assault a handful of times since the event, wanting a good time. But I swallow myself in fear anytime a car goes by, or anytime someone pulls to the curb. I cannot find my nirvana. You robbed me of my self-confidence and my stability, and thus I cannot forgive you.

But perhaps I can't put all the blame on you. Perhaps I can put some blame on the state trooper that pushed the case aside, the pool workers that called it 'asking for it', and the children that spread the rumors of prostitution. But ultimately, I'll never stop blaming myself. It's hard to blame yourself and the man who hurt you at the same time; quite a conundrum.

I've concluded that perhaps I don't fear you. I fear people like you. The salt of the earth, the nightmares of little girls. I had thought I'd seen the devil before, in movies that consisted of the lord, but I had never fathomed him being inside those who walk upon us. I don't fear you, I fear the monster inside you. The monster in people like you.

I fear your presence everywhere I go.



## *Welcome Home*

**Catherine Gerwig**

Braxton County Middle School, Braxton County

Teacher: Alice Smith

West Virginia State Winner

Third Place Grades 7-8

The sound of metal and silence. Dead silence. Sara's daughter Janet laid limply on the floor of her office, and her husband stood over the child with a hammer; his face filled with a drunken rage that she would never forget. His furious eyes met hers, and she went white as a sheet.

"The crowbar, Sara. Bring it to me," he growled commandingly.

Wordlessly, Sara went out into the hallway and into the closet, knowing that refusing to follow her husband's command may doom her to the same fate as her daughter. She retrieved the crowbar and hurried back to her husband. He grabbed the tool from her hands. All Sara could do was watch as her husband pulled up the office floorboards and put the body inside. He hammered the boards back with the very hammer he used to kill the child, his face twisted into a furious concentration.

After that, the happenings of the next month or so seemed to blur. There were divorce papers, criminal investigations, missing person posters. She remembered watching as her husband was taken away and put behind bars...

"Sara?"

Suddenly, she snapped back into reality. She was standing in front of an old house, no, *her* old house, her flip phone in hand.

"Y-yeah, sorry Kat, I zoned out." She stammered nervously, her eyes staring off into the distance.

“Look sis,” Kat began, her voice sympathetic. “I know this place brings back bad memories, but all you need to do is get in and get the deed. Then you’ll never have to think about that old place again. Deal?”

“Yeah. Talk to your later, Kat.” Sara let out a deep sigh and headed towards the door of the house.

The place was not what it used to be. Once, this property may have seemed charming. The lawn was always trimmed, the paint on the shingles was never chipped. Now, the yard looked like a forest of weeds, and the shingles, once a beautiful blue, were stripped to their base tone of dirt brown.

The interior of the home was almost as rough as the outside. The entry way was dusty and full of old clutter, the musty smell of mold filled the air, and cobwebs hung everywhere.

Sara cautiously stepped through the halls, careful not to trip. She thought for moment about where the deed might be. She decided that the office was a good place to start, no matter how much it pained her to think about being their again.

As she stepped into the old office, the floor boards creaked beneath her. Right here, under her feet, her daughter had been buried. She could remember that night clearly.

Beside her feet, she spotted a hammer. The metal was rusty and crusted with 10-year-old blood. Her daughter’s blood...

Amid her daydreaming, she heard her phone ring in her pocket, snapping her out of her trance. She answered.

“Hello?” she asked, slightly confused as to who would be calling her. For a moment, there was only static. Sara almost put her phone away, when suddenly-

“Hi Momma! Did you miss me? Dada said you’d never come back, but I knew you would, I knew it! Promise you won’t go away again Momma...”

Sara nearly dropped her phone in shock. That couldn't have been Janet, could it? That would be impossible. Janet's body had been found and buried by the police. She was gone.

Abruptly, Sara heard a slam and the click of a lock. She looked up, and was horrified to find that she was shut in. She rushed to the door and pounded on it, panicking, but it was no use. She was trapped.

For a moment, Sara thought about what she could do to get out, but her thoughts were interrupted by her phone ringing once more. She answered it.

"H-hello...?" she asked, stuttering nervously.

"Mommy, you aren't thinking about going, are you? Just play with me..."

Suddenly, the door slammed open. A little girl stood in the door way, her forehead running with blood. She had dark brown hair and blue eyes, just like her father. Sara couldn't believe what she was seeing.

"Janet?"

## *Stand in My Shoes*

**Abbie Lieving**

Wahama Jr Sr High School, Mason County

Teacher: Kristen Hussell

West Virginia State Winner

First Place, Grades 9-10

As I lay there, slowly falling apart, I think back to all the memories we've made. I look up into her aged, sad eyes, and see tears beginning to wet her glossy lids. I was her only friend and I was fading. Her name was called, and she turned to go, gasping for a final, saddening yelp. She left me there to decompose and I never saw her again.

I met Asha on a hot summer day. When I appeared in the village, she was nowhere to be found; some say she was trekking for water and others say she was playing a game of tag with her brothers. No one knew for sure. It was not until sunset when she reappeared in the village followed by four boys, who I'd imagine were her brothers, and she had a jug of water balanced perfectly on her head. Her impregnated mother took the water and directed her in my direction. She looked uneasy at first, instinctively thinking I was some foreign creature coming to invade her village. She eyed me with hesitation, and with a gentle nudge from her mother, she came closer. She reached out her trembling hand and touched me. She stood there for, four solid minutes letting me detail her features. She had long, dirt-infested black hair, that had never been cut, big brown eyes containing so much curiosity and age, and a circular chocolate face smeared with dust from the dry landscape. When she pulled her hand away, her head was tilted slightly to the right and a small grin was displayed upon her lips. Asha's demeanor changed from scared to excited; she finally had a friend.

The next couple of weeks were a whirlwind. I traveled everywhere with Asha; we were inseparable. I met her family, along with everyone else in the village. She took pride in me and allowed me to accompany her with everything she did. Every day was the same, however. We woke up at sunrise and cooked breakfast, cleaned the hut, trekked for water two miles away, and played a game with her brothers. It was not until her mother went into labor that the day's routines were altered. Asha's mother's water broke early one morning,

but she was expecting it. We, along with the rest of the women in the village, tended to Asha's mother. The experience was long and uncomfortable. The pushing lasted until sunset and the screams were becoming worse. You could see it in her mother's eyes that she was finding it hard to continue. Her face was white with fear, and before her final push, she took Asha's hand. She gave it a squeeze and screamed out in pain, then came another scream: the baby's. However, Asha's mother was not able to hear it. She died.

Asha spent the next few weeks completely closed off from her family and from me. We no longer spent every day together, and she no longer had that hint of curiosity in her eyes; it was only blankness. She was pulling herself closer and closer into her own thoughts and emotions. She was experiencing true loss, and I did not know what to do to comfort her. Asha spent every night crying, screaming out her mother's name. She always kept her back to me, but one night, she rolled over and looked at me, tears racing down her face. She whimpered out that I was the only friend she had left, and I was the friend given to her from her mother.

"Thank you, mom," whispered Asha to the heavens.

Weeks later, we were back in our normal routine, which meant chores. The walk for water was always my favorite because it was always just us. However, that day would be different. A mile from the stream, we encountered something we had never seen before, a camp filled with white men. Asha was confused but compelled. She raised up on her toes as if she wanted to get closer but something held her back. The instant I saw it was the instant I wanted to keep moving and we did, slowly. *Why were they here?* Every day for a week, we got closer and closer to the camp's edge, until one day one of the white men saw us. We ran.

Heart pounding, we raced through the dusty landscape back to the village. When we reached the spot where the village appeared in the horizon, we quit running. We slowed our pace and caught our breath, not wanting the rest of the people to see us in such a hustle. The breaths were quick, taking in as much air as they possibly could. When the breathing was back to normal and the heart pounding was not deafening, we

heard something else. It was horse hooves ricocheting off the sandy terrain. They were coming. Again, we ran.

When we arrived back to the village, it was too late; the strange men were right behind us. They began screaming out in this unusual language. The men took off, wanting to protect their homes and the women were grabbing their children and fleeing. Asha and I were standing in the middle of it all, and she was searching for her brothers. When she did not see them, she turned to flee with the rest of the village. However, I was grabbed from around her and thrown into the oblivion. Asha screamed out in horror and raced after me. As I laid there, slowly falling apart, I thought back to all the memories we'd made. I looked up into her aged, sad eyes, and saw tears beginning to wet her glossy lids. I was her only friend, and I was fading. Her name was called, and she turned to go, gasping for a final, saddening yelp. She left me there to decompose and I never saw her again but why would I? I was only a pair of shoes.

# *The Weight of Heartbreak*

**Adison Garavaglia**

Braxton County High School, Braxton County

Teacher: Janis Collins

West Virginia State Winner

Second Place, Grades 9-10

Walking into Hartford High School for the first day of her junior year, Maia couldn't help but notice the broken hearts around her. The mandatory city-issued necklaces around the necks of her peers seemed to weigh a lot of them down.

*They must have just had a rough summer,* thought Maia, shrugging off the obvious pain of her fellow students.

Most classes were a blur of introductions and syllabi that rocked Maia into a sluggish state. When conversations were allowed, they consisted of gossip about what had caused the necklaces around other peoples' necks to become so heavy and burdensome.

"I heard that Beth's parents got divorced. That's probably why she's so weighed down," said one girl.

"And Tony's grandma died two weeks ago. Some guy told me that he was crying in the bathroom," continued another girl, laughing at the thought of the lanky boy crying in a bathroom alone.

"Eva basically told him to suck it up and be a man. Except she used some choice words that I won't repeat," a third girl reported.

Maia had never had much bad happen to her before, so it was hard for her to empathize with the people the girls were speaking of. She had never had a boyfriend break up with her or a grandparent die or witnessed a fight between her parents, so how could she relate to them? She listened as kids being burdened by heartache were ridiculed behind their backs by kids who had never felt the same. Eva was the worst at that. She didn't care if she hurt their feelings or caused them to carry even more weight, she

just wanted someone to be angry at. Maia had once been her friend, but when Eva had changed and become hostile towards others, Maia hadn't wanted to be near her.

The morning blur was interrupted in English class, however, when Maia caught sight of someone she had never seen before. This was unusual for such a small town as Hartford, where Maia had gone to school with everyone in her class from the time she was in pre-school. She listened as the teacher took attendance and figured out his name, Jonah. As mysterious as the appearance of Jonah was to Maia, what interested her the most was the fact that he wore no weighted necklace.

The next day, her teacher announced that their first assignment would be a book project due at the end of the month, and she suggested that they start choosing partners. Within five minutes, almost everyone in the class, except for Maia, had paired up with a friend. Then, through the crowd of people talking with their partners, Maia saw Jonah sitting by himself. Seeing that he was the only person in the room that didn't have a partner, she walked over to him.

“Hey. Do you want to be my partner?” she asked him. He nodded.

Over the next few days, Maia and Jonah didn't talk much, just enough to start on the project. Then, after a week of almost complete silence, Jonah spoke.

“So, what's with the necklaces everyone has to wear?”

Maia had been playing with the round medallion that hung around her neck. He must've seen her messing with it.

“The city came across the technology and decided it might keep the teenagers in Hartford under control. They thought it would make us more hesitant to enter into relationships, but as you can see, it hasn't really worked.”



Maia looked up from her necklace, right into Jonah's blue eyes, and then over to a messy kid who was slouched over the desk he was seated in, trying to lessen the weight. She couldn't think of what else to say, so she just continued talking.

"The necklace interprets your emotions, and if it detects any of the symptoms of a broken heart, it becomes heavier. I'm not sure how the weight part works. I've never really experienced the feeling," she said, tossing the medallion in the air. "See? Light as a feather."

"Wow. Where I come from, we don't have those," Jonah replied.

The pair continued working, but the conversation was more open. Over the next two weeks, Jonah spoke about where he came from, his family, and what he thought of Hartford so far. Maia loved the way he spoke about where he came from. It was the way someone talked about something they were proud of. He was animated and funny, yet shy at the same time. Maia was starting to fall.

The fourth week back from school and the last week before the book project was due, Maia was getting off the bus and thought she saw Jonah sneaking around the corner of the school. She jogged towards where she'd seen him, trying to catch him so that she could ask if he wanted to sit with her at lunch. Ducking around the brick wall, Maia stopped in her tracks, turned around, and ran back towards the front of the school, and entered through the front door.

All day Maia thought about what she had seen. She couldn't get it out of her head. She suffered through English but couldn't look at Jonah the same way. Couldn't think about him without the thought being tainted by *her*. Arms wrapped around *her*. Kissing *her*. Eva. Her ex-best friend and the girl who hated people with heavy pendants the most.

That night, Maia cried and cried, until she could cry no more. She couldn't wrap her head around it. She liked Jonah and had assumed that he liked her back. She sat for hours, ignoring the stack of homework sitting on her desk, analyzing every minute that she was with Jonah and trying to figure out how she could have mistaken his feelings. *Maybe that smile was fake. Maybe his eyes were twinkling*

*because he was thinking about Eva. Maybe he only laughed because he felt bad for me.* The thoughts went on and on. They wouldn't stop coming. Nothing could make her feel less stupid, naïve, embarrassed, confused, hurt... heartbroken. This realization finally made Maia aware of her exhaustion, and she fell into a fitful sleep, broken periodically by her troubled murmurings.

But sleep could only keep Maia from reality for so long. She woke up disoriented and with a weird feeling radiating from her chest, causing her head to hurt and her heart to ache. *I'm sick*, was Maia's first thought, but as she pushed her blanket off her body, she felt something around her neck. The necklace. It no longer felt the same. It was no longer as light as a feather, like she had told Jonah. It was cold and heavy.

# ***Brio***

## **Jordan Brown**

Buckhannon Upshur High School, Upshur County

Teacher: Cheryl Cain

West Virginia State Winner

Third Place, Grades 9-10

At the beginning of time, there were only three elements idling in the infinite void we call space. Existence, Motivation, and Survivability were all prime factors in the balance of the space continuum. Unfortunately, these three elements were at odds with each other, despite their equal importance. However, every element saw themselves of greatest value ensuring conflict among them. After hundreds of years in war, Existence blindly attacked the boundaries of space in attempt to acquit their anger. This attack spawned a crack in space, and it formed the great Paradox! Paradox bended space and defied all rules of logic, so it understandably baffled the elements for years as they watched its great anomaly. After years of amazing awe, Paradox finally produced something of worth; two new elements entirely! Relationship confidently marched to the others and set a cool mist of peace in space. On its back, the more silent Love hung to the confines of the darkness and remained alienated from the others. At once, noticing how the other three properties continued their arguing over importance, Relationship got an idea. They stood each element beside the other and Relationship spoke their plea;

“Why do we fight, for space needs us, all of us! No one can rule space or run this grand show themselves. This is a vast plain of ideas waiting to sprawl into new breath, but it requires each of our unique abilities. Let me explain:

Without Motivation, there is no Survivability; one cannot live if they have no will to live. But without Survivability, there is no Existence! One shan't exist if they can't contribute themselves to our continuum. We need each other and thus there is no champion among us.”

Suddenly, with their remarkable powers, Relationship had bonded all the elements and they were at peace again.

Thus, the combined powers of the elements produced an entire world full of honorable subjects, happy towns, and sunny fields. Existence made life and Motivation gave it a reason to live, and Survivability gave this life wits and charm. This life excelled and split up into species, genus, race, gender, animal, and soon the smartest, the humans, became the subjects of this new world. The three elements named this realm they had created Earth, and it bore its name with pride. A castle was built, of no gaudiness but of protection and leading, and soon the royal throne to all life was built atop the known corners of the world held up by the relationships of others.

Whilst the others worked towards building new life Love was only concerned with working on an old one. The ancient idea of pride was now going to be put to the test; for Love hated Relationship. They hated how Relationship bonded others together and took all the fame for building this new world, because this fame should have been Love's. So, Love produced a disease so deadly it would tear Relationship's hold apart and end the friendships that built the kingdom to its glory.

Finally, after hours of grueling work Love administered their disease, named after itself, across the kingdom.

Lifelong friends began feeling undying affection for each other and wanted to be with their friends all the time and got jealous when others were around. They even resorted to violence against others so they could be with their chosen friend more. Love smiled as the kingdom turned to pure anarchy on the town streets.

Up in the castle, the 4 leading elements were getting worried, so Motivation and Survivability met Relationship in the Observatory. Motivation called for a swift end by ending the ones contracted with the disease. Relationship, however, enacted a much less bloody plan.

The elements shipped Love off with the infected to Heartbreak Island, hoping they would all recover from the blight when thinking alone in isolation.

As the weeks went on almost three quarters of the kingdom's population had gone to the island.

Eventually, Relationship was awakened to their servants screaming in terror. Motivation and Survivability had jumped into Paradox in the center of the castle chambers the night before. Their last known words to a servant was that they had fallen in love, and Motivation could no longer ensure the campaign against the disease and Survivability could no longer protect Earth's well-being.

Relationship's kingdom was in dire times, but Love didn't care. With two of the crucial elements out of their way, Love rounded up the disease-stricken subjects on the island and in determination swam through miles of deep ocean water on their journey to complete liberation.

Without Motivation people in the kingdom began committing mass suicide, and without Survivability they began to fear even leaving their homes. Therefore, Love and their mob made land and strode through the kingdom and to the castle gate, unhalting by the cowering guards.

They did however meet the fierce resistance of Existence, who planned to stop them before Paradox could be reached. The fighting was valiant but eventually Existence was killed, and Earth started to shake and its ground fade away, for it was losing any resemblance of being. Shortly after the castle doors faded away the entirety of Love's army faded out of reality, and Love made their way to the center of the castle.

Relationship was chipping and fading away; whilst crying on the chambers of the palace. Love only smiled as their face went into the infinite void of the torn space above them. Love looked around at their damage and it was severe!

And with that there was nothing else except Love with their vain pride fading into nothingness and Paradox which sat so idly and mysteriously by during Love's terrible reign. Love died as quickly as their valor did.

Much later primitive elements sit in space again, crowding around Paradox and occasionally seeing the remnants of society. Maybe something will come out of Paradox, something those elements cannot understand. Or, perhaps, they'll rebuild the endless and gloomy space, because it's all they ever needed.

## *Two Sides, Same Coin*

**Kayden Upton**

South Charleston High School, Kanawha County

Teacher: Linda Long

West Virginia State Winner

First Place, Grades 11-12

Ever since I was a young girl, I was acquainted with the man who lived in the shadows of my room. He rarely ventured into the light, afraid of the harsh sun rays that tore into his leathery skin and stole his raspy voice. I can't recall if he ever truly had an appearance. I could only briefly catch glimpses of his body on the darkest of nights. Whenever my parents were too busy with caring for my baby sister or working into the late hours of the night, he would sing me to sleep, tracing my body with cold claws that I could never quite see. I never named him because, as a child, only things that I acknowledged could hurt me.

As I grew older, he grew bolder. He wound the tendrils of his body into the gaps between my fingers. He lived in the pores of my skin. At night, we danced a tango until my eyes dropped and my feet burned. His tongue curled along my ear lobe, whispering sweet nothings as I strayed away from those that loved me. He convinced me that he was the only one I needed.

When I sang, he cradled my throat before he squeezed until I was gasping for breath. He loved to make me suffer. His words are warm, but his hands are cold. He was bitter sweet.

He was the razor in the filing cabinet that I was so tempted to use. He was the lock on my door that kept my family shut away. He was the hoodie that I draped over my shoulders in order to hide any imperfection I saw. He was the doubt in my mind that kept my jaw locked. He was the anger that dripped from my voice towards the ones I love most. He was the poison that seeped

through my veins. He was the math equation that slipped my mind. He was the laughter from the other children as I fell. He was streetlight that flickered during the night. He consumed me.

I was fourteen when I was led into a small room with a nice woman who asked me questions about my life. As I poured out my sorrows and concerns, I could see him in the corner of my eye. He was scared. He sunk into the walls, hiding his face from the light that seemed to seep from the woman's eyes. For the first time in year, I felt free, if only for thirty minutes.

When I was fourteen, he was given a name. The woman called him an illness that led me along tightropes and encouraged me to kick the chair out from under me. My parents called him a disorder that I didn't deserve.

He begged me to ignore them. He sung me sleep and danced with me in the dead of night. He used his nails as pencil lead, desperately showing me how useful he truly was. I didn't believe him. The woman handed me a prescription, and he shrieked in pain.

When I was fifteen, I met someone else. She existed as pure light. Her beauty was unmatched and she fueled my creativity in a way no one else had before. She entwined her hair into the gaps between my fingers. She lived in the pores of my skin. I refused to name her because, even as a teenager, only things that I named could hurt me. She convinced me that she was good; she was my angel. She used her nails as pencil lead. She strung her hair along music staves. She made me golden. I felt untouchable.

The woman called her an illness that led me along tightropes and encouraged me to kick the chair out from under me. My parents called her an illness I didn't deserve.

The two were friends. They lived among each other under my skin. She made his eyes shine and he made her hair curl.



I was acquainted with the man who lived among the skylines in my mind space. Echoes of off-key piano traveled through confusing corridors, scraping against the flesh and bone that twisted and cracked into shelves of memories. He whispered to me in the dead of night, asking how I liked his constant song. A melody that painted shadows across my subconscious. The silent nights were worse. The nights when his fingers ceased to play and the emptiness was filled with squeals and screams of a man I was a stranger to. Inky trails of rusted claws scratched poems on soft walls. A knock rapped from an unseen door. Icy fingers trailed across trembling thighs. Breathe in, breathe out. The room was dark. It was a silent night. I waited for the screams to start.

I was acquainted with the girl who hummed a quiet tune from my childhood. The melody lifted and fell in the same way I had always heard. The notes twisted around my mind and squeezed just ever so slightly. My entire body relaxed. My eyelashes fluttered against warm cheeks. The melody I heard was soft. There was whisper of wind from outside accompanying the little tune that drifted across my skin. Her voice was beautiful. A meadow was on her fingertips. Ocean waves curled against locks of blonde hair. I sighed. A breath of fresh air and music was louder. My body vibrates. My heart pulses. Music is swimming through my skin. I hum along. I am floating.

He showed me the darkest parts of my mind. He painted the pictures of horrors and he swam in the tears that fell from my eyes. She showed me the brightest parts of my heart. She sang songs I have never heard and she danced between the gaps in my smile.

Together, they are powerful.

They bend and twist my subconscious to fit the mold of their bodies. They pulled against my limbs, stretching me to the brink. They kissed me on my cheeks, whispering against my skin, leading me away from the relief of pills and therapy. They wanted me to trust them.

Alone, they are dangerous.

He screamed into my ears, pulling panic attacks from under my skin. He bit my fingernails and trashed my room. He failed my tests and pushed away my friends. He made me powerless.

She pulled my hair into a ponytail. She brushed eyeshadow across my lids. She handed me my dad's credit card and whispered me the numbers. She hissed threats to my sister and sang louder than the others in my choir. She pressed down on the gas pedal and made the brake disappear. She made me invincible.

I didn't want to name them. Only things that I name can hurt me.

They were called bipolar disorder.

To this day, I barely know what that means. I swallow pills and sit in therapy to keep them at bay. He still shouts, she still sings, but I survive. They tell me they love me, but I wholeheartedly disagree. We all know to feel is just another sin, if they don't know it hurts you, they never can win.

## *Logistics*

### **Hunter Jones**

Clay County High School, Clay County

Teacher: Tasha C. Pennington

West Virginia State Winner

Second Place, Grades 11-12

As many reasons as there are to kill yourself, there are just as many reasons to fake your own death. The reason is the easiest part. Pick one. Losing your job, losing your lover, losing the cap to the toothpaste; they're all extremely valid reasons to disappear. The why isn't the hard part, the hard part is the where, when, and how. Truly, planning how to kill yourself is certainly more difficult than actually killing yourself. Whether you're preparing for a wedding or a suicide, the logistics will always be the death of you.

For Ella, the where had already been determined. The pristine and fully-furnished beach house she purchased on impulse with her first check had been vacant for years and was just begging for a little drama. An hour drive in her cherry-red convertible brought Ella to the main entrance where she casually entered the gate code and coasted to the semi-circle driveway. The exterior had been repainted twice since she had bought the property. The semi-gloss coating went from powder-blue, to sun-kissed beige, and back to powder-blue, all at Ella's request, even though she had never physically been there. Often Ella wondered how she had ever managed to make her life so complicated, and furthermore, why anyone actually complied with her requests. The media called her high-maintenance, hard to work with, a disease.

The beds of her six-bedroom/four-bathroom playboy-style beach mansion had never been slept in. The nautical curtains still hung crisply from the ceiling to the floor and the windows and the hard wood was so polished her designer sandals squeaked on the chestnut flooring of the main foyer. The maid Ella paid to maintain the property had opened the crystal-clear sliding glass doors to let in the ocean air. A nice gesture, but Ella didn't plan to be around to accommodate the maid for her extra effort. The media called her a harlot, messy, washed up.

After shooting at a location in Ireland for nearly half a year the Pacific sea breeze was somewhere between refreshing and nauseating. Inhaling the natural sodium of the California air, Ella wondered if maybe her sudden unsettled stomach had less to do with her choice of setting and more to do with the half-stomach full of prescription pills she had popped like rainbow Skittles during her road-trip. The media would call her an addict, party-girl, a total mess.

She surveyed the individual rooms of the house. Having viewed them online from her laptop while she was in Europe, seeing their details in person was drastically less impressive than the guided video tour had led her to believe. Ella brought her pouty pink lips into a smirk. If there was anything she had learned from her experience in the entertainment industry, it was that video often lied. Talking pictures could be edited to tell any story. They could make any angel into a demon. Take herself for example, the media pronounced her ditsy, untalented, a walking disaster.

Coral lines formed in the sky as sunset approached like poetry. With the where set in stone, the when of Ella's plotted demise was still up for debate. The orange and pink in the sky was getting darker, and seemed to speak to the Ella like the kind of painting you would only see hanging above a toilet. Sunset it would be. The media labeled her repulsive, mad at the world, a failure.

The sand was colder than Ella had imagined it would be when squished between her toes at the bottom of the deck. With the when and where decided, it was really only a matter of how. There were still plenty of tropical colored pills in her bag upstairs, knives in the kitchen, fresh linens that could be twisted into navy-blue and off-white colored braids. The twin bed sheets with the little anchors in the spare bedroom would make quite a fashionable hanging rope, she thought. But no, Ella had chosen her private beach house for a very specific reason, and as she watched the strong waves pound furiously on the shore the 'how' became more and more clear. The media called her weak, unfit to work, stupid.

Ella had never been much of a writer. Her expertise was seeing the words on the page, memorizing them, and bringing them to life when the camera rolled. The right starlet, in the right

location, at the right time was the type of lightening in a bottle Ella knew how to capture. For her most recent scene, she just needed the perfect script; the right words to make her audience miss her when she was gone. She wanted tears. She wanted apologies. Then she would return. The media called her moody, full of herself, a complication.

The paper crinkled under her hands as the wind blew small tornadoes of sand over her bare feet. Ella could hardly believe herself that after the millions she has spent on footwear alone, she was about to pretend to die shoe-less. However, she had been told that the most worthy sacrifices were often made in the name of art. Pulling the pen from her dress pocket she scrawled in exaggerated bubble lettering. Her words were short enough to fit multiple mediums; the caption of a black and white picture or an inscription on a tombstone. The media named her useless, voiceless, a false image of acting.

With her final thoughts completed, Ella got to her feet and sunk into the moist grains for a few seconds before setting her sites on the ocean, prepared to create the illusion that it had swallowed her whole. Tucking the letter into an envelope, she wedged it between the railings of the wooden steps then walked slowly towards the roaring waves. This was about to be her finest theatrical moment. But somehow, in all her planning, the one thing Ella had not accounted for logistically was the unrelenting force of the ocean as it performed its duty. The media called her reckless, unbelievable, dead.

# *Hungering Cold*

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"Cold. A hungering cold was the best way I could describe this morning." The old trapper wiped the frothy ale from his mouth and scratched his chin. "I reckon deer ought to be out feeding. Why don't you go see what you can find?"

I was only sixteen. I was raised in the snowy void of the Rockies, so I was no stranger to the cold. I pulled a warm, furry coat around myself and slipped a knit cap over my short, black hair. I grabbed Pa's old rifle, which was almost as big as me, and threw on the warmest pair of moccasins I owned. "I won't be gone for too long. Hopefully, I can bring us something good to eat," I said.

"Be safe out there, Jack," my ma told me as she stoked the fireplace in our warm cabin.

I opened the door, and the cold wind smacked my face like needles. The cruel air froze my lungs with each inhale and clouded my vision with smoke every exhale. Early mornings like these always blow the coldest winds and hold the loneliest silence. I began marching through the icy snow. Each step seemed to echo loneliness as I was swallowed up by the forest. The thick, green pines were bearing heavy loads of fresh snow. The great forest was a quiet, dead blanket of white during the winter months.

After circling a few bushes that survived the frosty slaughter, I saw salvation. I hadn't seen a deer all day, and the sun had begun its descent. I saw movement out of the corner of my eye, and I raised my rifle. My heart began to pound as I followed the movement. From behind an old, dead pine tree, I saw a deer. Large and majestic, his antlers shone in the retreating sunlight. I raised my rifle and readied my aim. *Crack!* I heard the pop of tree fibers breaking. Before I had time to move, a large branch smacked the back of my head, and the world around me faded to black.

It was cold and dark when I opened my eyes. The only light came from the stars, shining an eerie, yet calming mix of blues, purples, and greens into the snow. I reached down and grabbed my

rifle. Although I knew it was cold, and the icy snow took a decent amount of force for my moccasins to crush it down, I felt fine. While I was out more snow must've fallen, because my tracks I had planned on following home were covered. Everything seemed like I had been there the whole time. I was lost.

I grew up in this area, yet everything looked so unfamiliar. It was as if I were in a dream, where my mind can form a resemblance to a place but not quite accurately portray it. The tall, lifeless trees stood like huddled giants around me, and the nearby lake glistened with dangerously thin ice concealing the water's surface. Tall, ominous mountains loomed around the frozen valley, protecting it from the warmth of faraway lands. I started walking towards what I felt to be my way home.

I followed the edge of the lake until I found a thin dark line of smoke rising above the tree line. My whole body teemed with excitement; the idea of a warm home sounded like heaven. I picked up my pace out of desperation to make it home. As I scrambled through dead bushes and pine needles, I was beginning to fatigue. I decided to stop and catch my breath.

Sitting on a flat rock that I had dusted the snow off of, I looked around. The smoke felt so close, I knew that within a burst of energy I could be safe and warm again. Although so close to salvation, I felt so exhausted. My hands and feet were numb with cold, and I wanted to relax for a moment. As I began to close my eyes, a twig snap electrocuted my senses. I quickly sat up and looked around. My whole body trembled with an eerie terror when I first saw it. The black, shiny fur had tiny chunks of ice, and the fangs hungered upon the wolf's gaunt face. The emaciated predator looked at me with ferocious desperation. I slowly grabbed my rifle and raised it to my shoulder. Within mere seconds, the beast lunged at me. I fired my shot, and the bullet made a crater in the icy snow next to it. I sprinted through the forest towards the smoke. I knew I couldn't outrun it forever, but I hoped I could at least make it home.

The wolf's sharp claws dug into the snow as it hunted me. Sliding under fallen trees and leaping over dead stumps, I ran for my life. I was starting to tire pretty fast, and the wolf was much faster. Within a few seconds of running, the wolf was right on me. Its sharp teeth grabbed at my legs. I

stumbled and slowed over a loose chunk of tree bark that had fallen, and the wolf finally closed the gap. However, the hungering beast wasn't ready for my abrupt stop and didn't take me down. Instead, it lost its footing and crashed into me, and we both lost our balance. I was struggling to get up when it bit me. A sharp pain followed by warm wetness running down my leg made everything much more surreal. I grabbed the barrel of my rifle and swung it like an ax at the predator. With a sharp thud, the wolf stumbled back, whimpering before coming back to its senses. The small moment it paused gave me just enough time to scramble to my feet. I stumbled over to a rock. The intense pain from the bite was shooting through my leg with each step. I readied another shot in my rifle, prepared to defend myself. The wolf had had its own time to recuperate and was now charging me. My heart was racing. The thump of the large heavy paws made every hair on my body rise. My shaky hands held a loose grip on the rifle, but all the while I was ready. The wolf jumped, and I closed my eyes and shot.

I was dizzy when I woke up. My head throbbed and my vision was blurry. "He's awake." I heard my pa say as he leaned over my bedside.

"We almost lost you, son. When I found you your leg was almost gone from frostbite. You're lucky I found you."

Over the next few days, I spent time recovering. My leg slowly started to feel better, and within a week, I was out hunting again.

"That wind blows cold out there, son." My pa handed me his old hunting rifle with a worried look in his eyes. As I stepped outside, the wind howled hard into the dawning sky.