

Pierce County Library System celebrates the wonderful contributions from teenage writers in the Library's 12th annual teen poetry and fiction writing contest—Our Own Words. This year, 800 7th-12th grade students competed in the poetry and short story writing contest.

Nearly 70 volunteers, including library staff and Pierce County Library Foundation Board members, reviewed the entries. Noted young adult author Dia Calhoun and poet Michael Magee selected this year's winners. The judges reviewed the pieces for originality, style, general presentation, grammar, and spelling.

Pierce County Library Foundation awarded the winners with cash prizes and the winning entries are published in this book. Pierce County Library System gratefully acknowledges the support of the Pierce County Library Foundation, The News Tribune, Pierce County Arts Commission, and other community partners for continued support of the teen writing contest.

2008 WINNERS

Final Judges:
Dia Calhoun
Michael Magee

OUR OWN WORDS 2008

POETRY WINNERS

Grades 7 and 8

- 1st The Earth Forgets to Laugh**
by Skye Lewis 8th Charles Wright Academy
- 2nd Jade**
by Jack Chakerian 7th Home school
- 3rd If I Were a Drop of Rain**
by Delaney McCausland 7th North Tapps MS

Grades 9 and 10

- 1st Fever-induced Anxiety Attacks**
by Raven Briggs 10th Mount Tahoma HS
- 2nd Lost People**
by Samuel Becker 9th Gig Harbor HS
- 3rd No Longer**
by Ellen Elizabeth Grover 10th Home school

Grades 11 and 12

- 1st The Nature of New York City**
by Kendall Pepple 12th Emerald Ridge HS
- 2nd Breathless**
by Mary Cassio 11th Home school
- 3rd Hello World**
by Kristen Steenbeeke 11th Emerald Ridge HS

SHORT STORY WINNERS

Grades 7 and 8

1st Chef Margo French

by Rachael Robinson 7th Mountain View MS

2nd The Pearl

by Dirk Beck 8th Kopachuck MS

3rd Totems

by Mariah Bellamoroso 7th Home school

Grades 9 and 10

1st The Keeper of Words

by Catherine Niemela 9th Ballou Junior HS

2nd The Glass Wall

by Michelle Taylor 9th Lakes HS

3rd Something to Live For

by Juliana Chase 10th Covenant HS

Grades 11 and 12

1st Before Rome Fell

by Race DiLoreto 11th Curtis Senior HS

2nd Innocent Monster

by Rayna Mumbower 12th Bonney Lake HS

3rd Over the Edge

by Jacob Rodenbucher 12th Covenant HS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

POETRY

1st	The Earth Forgets to Laugh, by Skye Lewis	1
2nd	Jade, by Jack Chakerian	2
3rd	If I Were a Drop of Rain, by Delaney McCausland	3
1st	Fever-induced Anxiety Attacks, by Raven Briggs	5
2nd	Lost People, by Samuel Becker	6
3rd	No Longer, by Ellen Elizabeth Grover	7
1st	The Nature of New York City, by Kendall Pepple	9
2nd	Breathless, by Mary Cassio	10
3rd	Hello World, by Kristen Steenbeeke	11

SHORT STORIES

1st	Chef Margo French, by Rachael Robinson	13
2nd	The Pearl, by Dirk Beck	16
3rd	Totems, by Mariah Bellamoroso	20
1st	The Keeper of the Words, by Catherine Niemela	25
2nd	The Glass Wall, by Michelle Taylor	28
3rd	Something to Live For, by Juliana Chase	32
1st	Before Rome Fell, by Race DiLoreto	37
2nd	Innocent Monster, by Rayna Mumbower	41
3rd	Over the Edge, by Jacob Rodenbucher	45

POETRY

Grades 7 & 8

OUR OWN WORDS 2008

THE EARTH FORGETS TO LAUGH

The world is caught
in life's race with beads of
sweat tickling its dreary latitudes.

Unlike our child selves,
we suppress our tears and laughter,
return to our hamster wheels.

Without sleep, we push our
way to find the absent
finish line.

Searching for unachievable
happiness – then we'll laugh,
then we'll cry, when
success is in our midst.

Our emotions are bottled up
in the milk cartons of the past,
our cookie jars, and lunchboxes.

Now we open our doors
to return to the race. *Crash!*
Our childhood portrait! – Well,
it can wait.

Skye Lewis

Charles Wright Academy, 8th Grade

JADE

Although every spider would kill to be understood,
And we are, sometimes, without blustery success,
Although we barely inch ahead – like a thirsty vine,
Tonight the sky is jade.

It does not consist of clouds, moon, and stars,
Fighting each other for a place to be seen.
This sky is one lake of calm, accepting jade.
You can almost feel its glazed pane.

Although we spiders seldom thank that sky.
The sky atones for our earthly shade,
Helping us to find and share,
This solid, lenient land of jade.

Jack Chakerian

Home school, 7th Grade

IF I WERE A DROP OF RAIN

If I were a drop of rain, I would shimmy down to
the ground

from toppling from gentle clouds. I would fall on
to the windows of the speeding cars. I would

go down from the stormy grey sky and add

to the massive puddles. If I were
a drop of rain, I would splash

around from the boots of small
children upon me. I might carry

into the small eased rivers that flow into the

rocky waves of the

sea. I'd gaze upon the tallest mountain from the

highest darkest clouds. I have been seen and
danced in by people all over the world.

I drop swiftly like a leaf plummeting from a tree.

I would plunge with my family called hail,
rain and lightning.

Delaney McCausland

North Tapps MS, 7th Grade

POETRY

Grades 9 & 10

OUR OWN WORDS 2008

FEVER INDUCED ANXIETY ATTACKS

There you are,
enshrouded beneath blankets,
submerged in a daze of homemade remedies.

You in your ail, and there I am
sitting on your loveseat,
pouring juice into cup after cup for you,
handing you my love in materialized silhouette,
offering it to you in glass facades.

I am your cautious attendant,
perplexed by each pant, puff, murmur
that takes flight from your lips.

I watch you wheeze from within the cotton Acropolis,
I will be your Athena if you promise to get better.

A face emerges from the clutter of comforters;
there you are, my pre-eminent Hephaestus,
resuscitated, revitalized, rekindled.

I am in love with the way your hand reaches for mine.

Raven Briggs

Mount Tahoma HS, 10th Grade

LOST PEOPLE

Backward inside-outness
Like audible perversion
A shoe is often lost,
But here,
What is lost
Cannot be found.
For a human soul
Is irretrievable.
The shoes cry out
"Where is my master?
And his socks?
And his feet—so small?"
Another shoe answers
"Your master is gone, he is not coming back;
He is Smoke above Auschwitz, Dirt at Birkenau."
In Washington D.C.,
The shoes cry out
For all to hear
Do not forget their masters.

Samuel Becker

Gig Harbor HS, 9th Grade

NO LONGER

No longer a broken umbrella,
cracking with the gusts.
Now a red balloon,
rising upon dreams.

No longer a solitary tumbleweed,
careening down empty streets.
Now a golden blade,
sashaying with the prairie grasses.

No longer a dying dandelion,
flying to pieces at the lightest touch.
Now a bold daffodil,
blazing life.

Ellen Elizabeth Grover

Home school, 10th Grade

POETRY

Grades 11 & 12

OUR OWN WORDS 2008

THE NATURE OF NEW YORK CITY

Mammals trot freely, in and under maze-like
fields of asphalt; stalks of street signs sprout
around corners, labeling blocks of

leaders and founders, soldiers and saints.
The sidewalks are littered with lives;
a cluttered herd with no destination.

Trees have sprouted branches of
wide windows and Iron columns,
cultivating Titan-like steel that scrapes the sky

and divides the clouds, but fails to sink
a manhole hollowed island.
The hot glow of thousands of neon screens

ignites and engulfs the state
in the solar flares of a second sun.
The quondam of previous nature has

ripened into fruitful hands of the natural world;
a recycled breath has blown,
and saturated the wind abruptly...

Interfering the silence,
Seeding an industrial thumb.

Kendall Pepple

Emerald Ridge HS, 12th Grade

BREATHLESS

They do sparkle–twinkle, I guess is how
most people put it.
But if you look straight at them,
throw back your head, arms outstretched
bathe in them
you can feel the motion, and the spinning of
this endless darkness
juxtaposition of
earth and sea, fire, stone
ice
sweeping like a bird without breath.
Beautiful is the word, but it can't
capture the
heartbeat throbbing in my ears
or the catch in my throat
or the sound
white and cold
of their singing.

Mary Cassio

Home school, 11th Grade

HELLO WORLD

I live at the
miniscule point of a needle
and rarely
am I sewn through life-
living as though
secluded in a room with no doors.
I dream of suffocated images;
trodding the worn asphalt
of a foreign town,
dancing with gold
coins clinking 'round my ankles.
I shake hands
with the dry, cracked
fingers of a vagabond,
a rusty shopping cart behind him.
I run my fingers through
the silk and sequins
of a dress so expensive
it doesn't have a tag.
I wish to be a leech of life.

Kristen Steenbeeke

Emerald Ridge HS, 11th Grade

SHORT STORIES

Grades 7 & 8

OUR OWN WORDS 2008

CHEF MARGO FRENCH

It all started on June 3rd, 2001. The day my grandma Annie taught me how to bake a scone. That day, was the day my passion for baking was born. I was at the age of 8, and that was the age that I became a chef..Well in my mind at least.

My grandma Annie was the owner of the bakery shop at the end of the street. Every time I walked into that shop, I would smell the mouth watering odor of glazed donuts and rich dark chocolate.

This is horrible for me to say, but my grandma was once suffering from a disease that could only be cured with a \$10,000 surgery. A.K.A. the kind of money could never earn that quickly. You may think that it was impossible for me to get this kind of money...but not for me.

To have at least earned \$5,000 I entered the annual baking competition. All you had to do is cook a dessert of your own recipe. So what I cooked was a chocolate filled scone which I found out of my great grandma Julia's recipe book that was passed down to me from my mother. In this competition, you had one hour to bake your dish, not only that but it had to become at least two of the judges new favorite.

This competition was two weeks after I heard the news about Grandma Annie dieing. Right away, I practiced. My mother taught me how to drizzle just the right amount of chocolate sauce onto the scone for a wonderful appearance, and how to bake the scone just right so that it's crispy and chewy. Also I got taught how to insert the chocolate into the scone without leaving a sticky mess.

Then I had to some how get a chef's apron. Usually I would have Grandma Annie sew me one, but in this situation she wasn't able to. So instead I dug out Grandma Annie's old chef's apron from when she was my age that she has told me about.

When I found it, it had light pink frills at the trim and heart shaped pockets. It was beautiful.

The day of the competition was horrible...I woke up late. I rushed into my moms office, where she had ironed my apron for me, I slipped on my apron, grabbed my bag of cooking materials, then rushed out the door. I waited for the neighborhood bus. While waiting, I glanced at my watch, It was 12:20 pm. When the bus stopped it gave off an ear bleeding screech. The doors opened, and I walked up the moldy bus steps. The seat that I had to sit on was faded and looked like it was 200 years old. The walls were grimy and gross. Basically the worst bus there is.

When the bus stopped at a large glass building, it gave off that horrid screech. I grabbed my cooking materials and ran out the bus door then into the buildings glass sliding doors. When I entered into the large glass building doors, I instantly felt the pressure. All the chefs that I will be cooking against were much older than me and looked as if they have been cooking all their lives.

I found my counter; it had a large gold plate that stated "Chef Margo French". I started to set up my cooking materials and so did everybody else. All the other competitors had unique and sophisticated tools. By then my confidence level went down.

5..4..3..2..1..Begin. The timer started and so did my feet. I started to make the dough for the scones. When they came out, they were crispy and chewy just like I practiced them to be. While the judges walked to each counter examining everybody's technique, they wrote on small notepads. I tried to sneak a peek at it, but they move too quickly.

I was trying my best to blur out the audience so that I can focus on my work. After the scones cooled down, I whipped up some thick chocolate sauce to insert into the scone. I made no mess, just like my mom taught me to do.

Pressure and stress filled the air when it came down to the last two minutes. With the left over chocolate, I melted into a thin sauce for my dishes appearance. Gently, I drizzled thin chocolate sauce on top of the scone with a crisscross design.

The chefs all rushed their dishes to the judges to taste. BEEP. Times up and the judges took their first bites of the three chefs food. Mine was last for the judges to taste. And Judge Mathews, a chubby ol' man, was the first to try it. I could tell by the look in his eyes that he loved it. While thinking that though, Judge Mathews shot up in the air and shoved his finger in the other chefs' faces.

Then he hollered:

'Compared to this young lady's dish, it tastes like you fools can't even bake!

Instantly, he begged and begged me for the recipe. But my reply was "sorry sir, it's a secret family recipe"

With his glum look, Judge Mathews handed me the trophy and check for \$5,000.

Still this day, customers come into Grandma Annie's shop just for a chocolate filled scone made by Margo French.

Rachael Robinson

Mountain View MS, 7th Grade

THE PEARL

There was once a man who found a pearl while walking along a sandy beach. The pearl lay along the edge of the shoreline, in the milky foam. He knew at once that it was special among the billions of pebbles surrounding this vast sparkling ocean. At first he thought it was a marble, and he picked it up and examined it. It was mostly blue in color, with wisps and streaks and spirals of white covering the blue. Also, when he looked closely, he could see brown and green splotches beside the blue. He didn't know what it was, but it was very beautiful, so he put it in his pocket as a souvenir.

He almost forgot about the marble until he got home. His friend, Mr. Myers, said that the sphere was not a marble but a very expensive pearl.

The Man wanted to know the value of the pearl. So the next day, he visited a pearl specialist. He gave the specialist the pearl, and he waited in a dull waiting room while the specialist examined it. When the results came back, the Man was astounded.

The pearl was priceless. It was one of only three known pearls to have blue and white stripes and a perfect spherical shape. Somehow the priceless pearl had washed up on the beach where he had been walking, and he had been lucky enough to spot it. Feeling awed, the Man drove back home with his pearl. He felt like he must be the luckiest man alive.

The Man briefly debated selling the pearl, but after thinking about it, he decided he should keep it. He had been so lucky, it seemed wrong not to keep this souvenir. Also, he lived rather comfortably, so he did not really need the money.

On the way home from the jewelry shop, the Man called up Mr. Myers. The Man invited him over to help with the pearl. At the Man's house, Mr. Myers cleaned the pearl with a special

pearl cleaner, and then wiped it, so it was nice and shiny. He then set in an air-tight box that he had brought from his own house. Mr. Myers said the box was necessary. The protective box and the cleanings would cause the extinction of any microorganisms growing on the pearl. Only a clean surface would shine, and if the pearl wasn't cleaned regularly it would be ruined by a bacteria-like growth. There was a secure lock on the container, and the glass was very thick, so the pearl would not be stolen.

Mr. Myers reminded the Man that he had to clean the pearl every day very carefully with a special pearl cleaner. Then he gave a few other tips and left.

Word spread around quickly. Over the next two weeks, the Man had visitors almost nonstop. People drove miles to see this rare pearl. For two full weeks, all the Man did was show off the pearl. And every morning, he cleaned the pearl carefully.

But on the fourteenth day, the Man felt very tired. At first he thought that he was simply tired from all the action, but then in the evening he started to feel sick. He had gone to sleep and slept until noon the next day. When he woke up, he hadn't broken his fever, and he stayed in bed. All through the day, he rested in bed. He completely forgot to clean the pearl.

Later that day, Mr. Myers came to visit. He sat near the Man's bed for a while, talking to him. Before it was time to go, he asked if could examine the pearl for a second under his microscope. The Man gave him permission, and for the first time today, he got out of bed and unlocked the air-tight box.

Mr. Myers looked at the pearl closely for a few minutes. He set the pearl in the center of his palm and slowly rotated it. After a while, he set down his microscope and set the pearl back down in the box.

"Your pearl is infected," said Mr. Myers. He showed the Man a tiny brown spot on the surface of the pearl. "This brown spot is where the bacteria-like growth is centered, but actually

the whole pearl is infected now. This is a very bad type of bacteria you see here, the worst. It is the quickest growing type. Here, look through this." Mr. Myers handed the Man the microscope.

Peering through the microscope at the brown spot, the Man was horrified. He saw huge pillars stretching up into the sky, and also other, smaller structures, stretching on for miles. He could even see the bacteria growing as he watched. Many more structures were being created and new pillars were being created as he watched.

He tilted the microscope a fraction of an inch. Now he could see rows upon rows of smaller structures. Groups of these structures formed exact squares on the surface of the pearl. The bacteria-like growth was taking over his pearl.

"What you see is not the growth itself," said Mr. Myers. "The true growth would be too small to see, even through this microscope. What you see are the structures that the bacteria-like growth creates for itself, much like a barnacle's shell."

The Man peered through the microscope again. He saw a long strip of gray in between buildings, with tiny dots moving slowly along it. He thought that he had found the bacteria. But Mr. Myers said that even these were not the microorganisms.

"It is actually much smaller than even those small dots. Those dots are the creations of the bacteria. It travels around inside these dots. Everything you see here is only a creation of the bacteria-like growth. The bacterium is not bad in itself. It is what this growth creates that is so terrible."

After Mr. Myers left, the Man was feeling very sleepy, and he lay down on the couch, thinking that he would rest for a few minutes before he cleaned the pearl. But he felt very tired, and it was almost an hour before he got out of bed to clean the pearl. He thought that after only an hour's time, the spots on the pearl might have grown a little bit, but not much. When he looked at the pearl, he was shocked.

The pearl was covered in a thick brown slime. Its polar ice caps had melted. Its sea levels had risen thousands of feet. The ozone layer that used to surround the pearl was gone. The air had turned a dirty brown, instead of its once transparent color. Plants had almost died out from all the pollutants in the air. Skyscrapers covered every landmass. Everything was covered in a thick layer of brown. And even in the air outside the sphere the Man could see tiny pieces of bacteria-like growth floating, ready to take over the next thing it landed on. With immense sadness, he realized he was too late.

The pearl was ruined.

Dirk Beck

Kopachuck MS, 8th Grade

TOTEMS

Salt spray permeates the midsummer heat. From my perch on the dock, my eyes explore the dark emerald green water. Motes of sunlight swirl just beyond the reach of my toes. I long to swim through those golden flecks, the ocean's lovely coolness rippling over my body. My gaze travels down to my fine clothes. They would be quickly ruined by the salt and I would not have time to shower and change before the village celebration begins. So, I sit, while the sweat drips and the sun pounds ruthlessly on my back. I sigh, drawing the sound out with self-indulgent pity. The rough hewn boards scratch my half covered legs adding to my misery and disgruntlement. With another sigh, I lie down on the dock and observe the clouds pass by in the ever changing bright blue sky.

I am startled out of my reverie by the sharp crack of a breaking twig. I sit up and quickly turn my head causing a stabbing spasm of pain in my neck. I wince and start to rub the crick when I notice the tiny old man standing at the edge of the woods where the dock begins. His wrinkled skin hangs off his face in loose folds. His long, white hair floats softly about his face reminding me of freshly carted lamb's wool.

I am momentarily too stunned to do more than take in this strange vision. Before I can decide if he is real or if I should be afraid, he is walking slowly towards me, stooped against a gnarled walking stick. He smiles as he shuffles onto the dock. I jump up hastily. Just who is this old man? He looks harmless enough, but you never know with strangers. He stops and begins to speak.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?”

It takes me a moment to realize that he is talking about the ocean. Looking out at the expansive scene before me, I have to agree. The sea is calm today: water rippling gently away from the shore, seabirds soaring high on gentle air currents too far away for me to sense. In the distant haze that marks the mainland, I see tall old growth cedar, standing majestically, their tops shrouded in mysterious fog.

“You long to be a part of it, Seal.”

I resent the fact that he is stating my desire to be in the water as a fact, even though it is absolutely true.

I respond, slightly impudently, “My name isn’t Seal, and I’m not supposed to talk to strangers.”

“Oh, I am not a stranger, Seal. I know everyone,otter, bear, squirrel...all of my sisters and brothers. Many of your kind know me, too. Search your heart. You know me.”

I scrutinize his face carefully, but there is nothing remotely familiar about his features. Still, I do feel a connection with him, like a child being introduced for the first time to a great uncle or grandfather.

“You have lost touch with your ancestors. You do not listen to your elders who would teach you the true ways of your people. You are of the water. Do not resist and a great gift will be yours.”

I stifle my initial impulse to laugh out loud. I want to believe him. Though soft spoken, he is compelling and I find myself considering what he is saying. I begin to reply but am

distracted by a splash. My head turns towards the source of the sound and I am surprised to see a large harbor seal sticking its head out of the water. Its whiskers twitch as it scents the air. It swims boldly up to the dock and then, to my astonishment, propels itself halfway out of the water, whiskers brushing my knees, as huge eyes stare demurely up at me. In those liquid brown eyes I feel as if I am falling. All at once old memories, locked deep within, rush to the forefront of my mind. Something similar has happened before.

I was only nine then, and I didn't think there was anything unusual about a seal approaching me. I had been swimming in the ocean by our house, my mother on the beach watching. My mother turned her attention towards a magazine and did not see the seal that came up from the deep waters directly below me, appearing a few inches from my face. I recall stroking its head and playing with it for quite a while before my mother looked up and saw. She dropped the magazine and ran down to the water, a frightened look on her face, urging me to get away from the seal. The alarmed animal disappeared silently with only a ripple to betray her former presence.

Six years have passed and, until this day, I have not seen a seal up this close. Recalling my parent's stern cautions to stay away from wild animals, I begin to back away from the seal before me now. With some apprehension, however, I realize that my exit is blocked by the old man standing behind me.

"Seal comes to you because she is your totemic animal. She is your guide and will not hurt you. "

His words are reassuring. I turn back towards the silky, dark animal. Limpid eyes stare into mine. I look more deeply. I realize that I no longer see the sky reflected in the seal's dark orbs. The scene revealed before me now is a dark, murky green framed by softly undulating kelp fronds. From this

vantage I feel I am looking up from the seabed instead of down. I see silvery fish dart past. They seem to be avoiding me. When I look into the eyes of Seal, my totem, I see the world from her perspective. I am both exhilarated and frightened by this knowledge, as if I am suddenly aware that I am surrounded by a huge new universe and at the same time losing touch of my former self.

With great effort, I remove my gaze from the seal and turn to the old man. I am surprised to see that he has disappeared. I look up at the orange and red sky and realize, with a jolt, that the sun will soon be going down. The night mist is returning and though the warmth of the sun still remains I can feel the heat dwindling along with the light. I wonder how long I have been sitting here, staring into the seal's eyes. Suddenly, I remember the party and realize that I must be very late. I rush to gather and put on my shoes. While my hands busy with this mundane task my mind reflects on what I have experienced. I look up and note that the water is reflecting the last rays of the sun into my face. The seal is still with me, also watching the setting sun. She seems to know that I have to go and with what looks like sadness slowly turns and slips under the water. I wave goodbye to my totem and head home. My family will be waiting in the village.

Mariah Bellamoroso

Home school, 7th Grade.

SHORT STORIES

Grades 9 & 10

OUR OWN WORDS 2008

THE KEEPER OF THE WORDS

The words swirl across the page, spinning and turning out of control. They weave into patterns and back out of them; nothing but a smattering of black lines and dots. The girl's eyes race to follow them and her teeth dig into a bleeding bottom lip. Like an inky mess across the page, they torment her, laughing silently as she stutters in front of the class. She glances up and sees their eyes on her, amused, mocking eyes of children who don't care if she ever succeeds. They pass smug smiles and barely-heard snickers around the classroom, all of them landing before the girl as she draws the book closer to her face. She hopes that maybe- just maybe- the words will whisper themselves to her, and that for once, just once, she can be their keeper. The keeper of the words; to tell them what they mean and where they will go. To tell them how to arrange themselves, the building blocks of mountains, the singeing heat of a dragon's flame or the castle that surrounds a sleeping princess. She only wants to hold a key to the land where all her imaginings take flight, where the eyes of her peers soften forever, where those who have been pushed down are finally allowed to stand. She knows that if she can just understand the secret language of these words, she might have power over each one of them.

She looks up to the teacher, begging with her eyes, eagerly pleading for a morsel, a scrap, a syllable of these magical words. The teacher's stare is cold and hard, meeting the child's innocent plea with blunt cruelty. Ancient eyes that are pinpoints of shrewdness, squinting into tight ovals, hating and crushing all at once.

The girl's palms are sweating, the book ready to slide from her grasp as the air in her lungs grows thinner and thinner.

She knows she has to do it, she knows there is no other choice. She crosses her fingers and closes her eyes, remembering one perfect moment of her past. Mama's cool fingers touching the pale green cover of a book, her words floating over the children mixing with the scent of jasmine perfume. They were perfect words, rounded and crisp in mama's mouth, as though she had molded each one of them, whittling it away until it fit the space between the other words. Papa's laugh as mama reached the best part, his strong, warm hands brushing away stray hairs on mama's face, his loving gaze towards his wife and his children. His eyes sparkling with intoxication for the words.

The girl's mouth opens, trying to smooth out the corners of such old words, packed away into the furthest corner of her mind. They are dusty and threadbare, even though she has kept them tucked neatly in her memory, wrapped in packages of color and smell, tied with scraps of mama and papa, both of them gone now, but for the words they have left behind. And now, as they tumble uncertainly from the girl's mouth, they float upward, catching in the air, and filling her lungs and head. She can't even remember what they are about. To her, they are just words; perfect, wonderful, strong, courageous words.

The faces of her classmates tremble. *That's not what the books says*, they think, they whisper, but they don't dare chuckle. Because, when they stop and listen to her words, they hear a mama's fingers in the dark, sweet flowers and crying children. Brothers and sisters, tears and silence because papa is dead, and mama must leave. A child, a girl, unfurling mama's words and stroking her sisters, her brothers, her whole world. All painted in color, and children don't laugh at that.

The teacher's eyes relax. She doesn't see a past, a little girl collecting words from a shattered dream. Instead, she sees far

into the future, bright with possibility. She sees a young woman, sitting down with a pen and worn out words, hemming them, patching them, and putting them in order. She gives them back, not just hers anymore. Or mama's. Or anyone else's. Words belong to everyone, and the little writer gives them back.

Catherine Niemela

Ballou Junior HS, 9th Grade

THE GLASS WALL

There's all this pressure, black and heavy as smoke in my lungs. It squeezes me to sleep as the boa constrictor hugs its prey. It smothers my rage and builds so much that when I wake up my nose bleeds. All I can do is clean up and lace my shoes.

Step, step, step.

The rhythm of running is metronomic: 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3. I breathe the icy air and let my eyes adjust to the blue darkness.

Step, step, step.

I'm miles away. The constant cadence sweeps me off the planet. At least I don't have to think. Except, I do, and my thoughts are so like letters it stops my breath.

We regret to inform you...

Static closes my eyes, fills my ears and I coast down to the beach. Sunnyside stoutly refuses to live up to its name; the sky is hung with midnight clouds that don't look real. I jump over the train tracks and leap off the wall.

Plunked down in the sand I probably look like a crumpled wad of paper. I feel as fragile as one.

Chrys! 4 more days till we head home. God, I want to be out of this hellhole. Even when I'm sleeping it's terrible. You see things. I can see Jamie just lying there, eyes wide and gone...

I cried on that letter. The writing melted together, but the words are tattooed on my eyelids.

"Hey."

A long-legged boy breaks me from my reverie. He sits down on the wall and dangles his legs over, so his feet touch the

sand. He has a guitar slung over his back, but makes no move to play.

I think that maybe, if there wasn't a wall of glass separating me from the world, I would find him irritating. I just stare at the waves without seeing them and notice that he's started to sing inaudibly. As the words start to flit in and out of hearing they take on a rough sort of power. It bubbles around me and cuts my skin away in little strips. I can see inside myself.

Raw edges and pulsing black border on nothing. There are so many spider-web cracks and places where I have been erased. My heart looks infected and beats at random. He's picking out a familiar tune now, but all I can think of is how it carries me. I clench my teeth and push off the ground.

Step, step, step.

Thoughts collide.

I should've gone to college...

"Chrys? Chrys, please say something."

"They've gone and shot him," a whisper.

"Hon, I can't hear you. Chrys, look at me..."

Hot water touches me. My skin is numb and I'm floating and drowning at the same time. Why can't I face this? I get out of the shower and stare at my bloodless fingers curled around nothing.

I look up, catch myself in the mirror. My eyes are hazy. I have a sudden mad urge to drive a fist through my reflection. It's not me, the drawn face with an unfamiliar expression. It wouldn't hurt, really.

The shock of seeing myself cut open is all but gone. The rage and sorrow has gone and I feel empty, like I've run out of my soul.

Blank paper.

"...he will be remembered as a brave man, a brother, a son..."

The tide is coming in.

I sit on the wall and stretch, pulling my muscles as if they're elastic. It feels as if tiny stinging metal bugs are running the length of my legs. I don't know myself. I don't even know how I got this way.

"Chrys? Snap out of it-if you feel like crap, don't bother with school. You don't look like you could last another minute," Mike touches my wrist with her long fingers, "he doesn't want you to be-"

"I'm fine," I slap her hand back.

She flips her hair over her eyes to hide...

"Do you come here every morning?"

Slush, the grass sighs, bending. I nod and he sits down. Neither of us is wearing shoes, and I can see how easily his feet rest in the grey powder. The guitar bangs harmonically on the concrete but the tone sounds grey in my ears. Everything is washed out ash grey, soft enough to not be felt.

"Why were you crying?"

I tip my face to him, seeing him for the first time. He meets my eyes with his own deep blue-grey eyes. They probe into me and it hurts to know that he can see how empty I am. I don't even have an answer to his question. It feels as though I've never shed a tear in my life.

"My brother died."

The words fall out of my mouth.

Roadside bombing. Seven dead.

"They said he got bombed. They lied-he was killed in friendly fire. And we can't do anything about it. My mom blames herself, like she could have made him go to college. But if it wasn't him-"

My throat closes up and tears spill like blood. An animal sound escapes me. He folds a hand around mine. He's still listening.

“We shouldn’t even be fighting. War is ripping all these little holes in people-and we send over more troops,” It hurts to force out the words, hurts to try and breathe. I wish black would roll over my eyes and keep me.

He touches my hair, “Chrys,” he whispers. It echoes in my head, sounding real, an anchor. Something heavy settles inside me. I hear my name, over and over, in so many tones and tongues. I feel myself solidify. The glass bubble is gone.

I want to thank him, but nothing will stop my tears. He meets my eyes and tells me something bittersweet without words.

“It’s not our war,” he says quietly, “but we fight.”

I shake my head.

We watch the sun come up.

I fasten my shoes and he picks up his guitar. The light casts a warm golden glow over everything. “Thanks,” I say, before taking off.

Chrys, I’ll be home soon.

Welcome home

Michelle Taylor

Lakes HS, 9th Grade

SOMETHING TO LIVE FOR

The progression had been slow. It had started with small things like mandatory censuses once every other month, and the cancellation of all private schools or home-schooled programs. It lead to legalization and practically compulsory act of euthanasia, the mysterious disappearance of prominent figures that protested, ration cards, and the government reaching its ever-more powerful hands into every aspect of human life.

This process happened over a course of fifty years and it changed the American public from an opinionated, bright, independent people to human race that depended on the government to think, provide and act for them. There were, however, some that defied. They called themselves the Emerald Resistance. Meeting in basements and abandoned subways, they were a society of fighters. No one knew how many there were, and none of them even knew each others real names. They like everyone else who resisted lived in fear.

* * * * *

Snow drifted lazily down from a gray February sky and settled lightly on an empty playground in a suburb of Albany, New York. Where there had once been yells and laughter stood a skeletal reflection from that time, rusty from misuse. The snow slowly covered the field and piled up on a still form laying quiet in the dusk.

Blaring sirens sliced into the eerie silence and moments later five black police cars sped by, their lights blinding in the misty quiet. And just as soon as they had come, the noise faded into the distance. The white form twitched and in one fluid movement reared upward throwing off a camouflaged white covering and exposing the figure of a young teenager

shrouded in a black jacket encrusted with a dark green emblem. Instantly masses all around the playground rose up, discarding their white cloaks and revealing identical black jackets. Silently they rose to their feet and without as much as a glance at each other dispersed quickly in different directions by themselves or in pairs, stripping their jacket and becoming everyday businessmen, bored teenagers, or distracted mothers.

The teenager that had risen first, donning a hat and a sweatshirt, rushed off in a half jog his face clouded, his dark eyes troubled. A middle-aged man wearing an old down vest had to take a few running leaps to catch the boys arm.

“Hey.” The boy was swung around from the force and attempted futilely to wriggle away from his mentor’s vice-like grip.

“What?” He asked icily: being held so easily frustrated him. “All we ever do is hide...They took everything we have. *Everything!* And we just let them take it.” Feeling the man’s grip slacken, he gave a final yank freeing himself, gave a side skip and jogged away into a darkening side street.

“Devon!” Only cold and the flickering of a nearby street light in quickening snow answered him. He heaved a sigh and ran a scarred hand through his graying hair. Shaking his head sadly he vanished into the darkness.

Devon had heard his name called, but only turned his jog into a sprint. Feeling years of bitter tears welling in his eyes and choking them back he stopped to catch his breath. Straightening up he glanced around at his surroundings, unaware of where he had run and found himself staring at the old lot where the remains and ashes of his house now laid strewn in a blanket of white snow. Resting his frozen hand on the last standing fence post he stood staring into the darkness, tears flowing unrestrained. He wondered why he had ever questioned the way things were. Why he had join The Resistance, selfishly putting the rest of his family in danger. Why he was not burned alive along with them. Why he had

stood frozen from this exact spot hearing the terrified screams of his little sister and the yells of his parents reverberating in his helpless ears, and done nothing, said nothing, just ran.

Yelling anguishly, he kicked the post with all his might, destroying the last remaining evidence of the life he once knew. A light flickered in a neighboring house. He had forgotten the curfew. Swearing under his breath, Devon sprinted off into the snowy night.

He woke up frozen to the bone, lying on a bench in an abandoned subway. Rolling to his feet he ran in place to ease his numb toes and jogged up the main stairs to greet the early dawn, his stomach grumbling in complaint. Setting out to his mentor's apartment, he shut out the memories that he had so weakly allowed to control him that night before, sticking to the shadows so he wouldn't be seen by patrolling police. Arriving at the rundown apartment he knocked and was quickly let in silently by the man, still wearing the down vest and looking like he hadn't slept at all. It was a small one room apartment with wallpaper peeling off the walls, and sparsely furnished with a threadbare armchair and couch, a cot in the back and a fireplace in one corner. Large, black canvas bags littered the room, tangled wires, cameras, computers and guns peeking out. Devon sprawled out in front of the fireplace to warm his feet as his mentor sat in the armchair and absently looked at him.

"It's time." He said this quietly almost sadly, his eyes staring blankly out the window at the snowy suburban morning. Devon started, reigning in his thoughts, and glanced over at the his mentor noticing all at once how old he looked.

"For what?" It was barely a whisper.

"We lost Regina." He continued, ignoring the question, lost in his own thoughts.

"I never knew her..."

"That makes eleven...in just this month." Devon was getting impatient.

“Time for *what?*” Surprised at how loud his own voice sounded, he mumbled an apology to his feet and stole a glance at the man; but he seemed unalarmed at the outburst, his countenance thoughtful.

“For salvation. You were right we have been hiding much too long, but you weren’t the only one who thought so. We leave tonight.” He paused and stared at Devon’s expectant face, then sighed and stood.

“That’s all? What about –“

“Everything is taken care of. You must be hungry.” Devon nodded impulsively, the discussion was over.

Late that night, Devon found himself piled into the back of an armored truck, disguised as an army vehicle, along with maybe twenty or so others, he didn’t know for sure. All was deathly quiet with a sense of foreboding as they were jostled along.

And then they stopped. They got out and found that they weren’t alone. Shots went off in the pitch black as the Resistance fled for cover. Devon yelled in despair as his mentor died. They were captured but Devon escaped. He was once again alone. But now he something to live for.

Juliana Chase

Covenant HS, 10th Grade

SHORT STORIES

Grades 11 & 12

OUR OWN WORDS 2008

BEFORE ROME FELL

“Hello?” Sophie called as she opened the door and walked inside. “Anyone home?” Greeted only with the mewling of the cat, she said “Hi, Whiskers,” scratching him behind the ears.

Sophie walked to her room and dumped her backpack on her bed. She pulled out her planner and looked at her homework. She had to practice her viola and do -ick- History homework, which she hated. She loved music though. She threw her history textbook under her bed and opened her viola case. Sophie rosined her bow and carried her viola out to the back porch to practice. For a minute, she simply sat and breathed in the air and let the singing of the birds wash over her.

Sophie ran through her basic scales to warm up, and then began playing. In no time she was whirling through her sheets and making music, and, to her, it was beautiful. Sophie loved to play music; she loved the surreal and ethereal feeling of making the sound, the feeling that she had when the sounds combined into complex melodies that wove together into something much greater than she understood.

If Sophie had ever paid more attention in Physics, she would have understood how the steel strings of a specific tension stretched across an open gap of a specifically constructed resonance chamber made of carefully aged wood created a vibration of a specific frequency, which caused the air to compress in a wave pattern to make sound. If Sophie had paid more attention in Biology, she would have understood how the vibrations of the air moved a piece of skin in her ear, which caused the vibration of fluid that moved tiny hairs, which were interpreted by receptors and sent shooting to her brain by electric signals along the neurons, crossing each synapse by chemicals which moved to the dendrite of that neuron, and then to the brain, where her limbic system would

have found the sound to be pleasing because her proto hominid ancestors had acquired a mutation that make certain sound interpretations pleasing, and this had given them a better chance of surviving to pass on their genes than their kin. If Sophie had cared, she could have known all of this, but she did not care, because to her it was music; it was beautiful, and that was all that needed to be said.

Sophie finished practicing and put her viola back into the case. Her mother was still not home, so, to avoid history a bit longer, Sophie decided to watch some TV. She picked up the remote and started flicking through channels.

“Next on Nightly News - How Smart are Elephants?” blared the first channel Sophie flicked past.

“Do people pay too much attention to celebrities?” queried another.

“See the biggest concert of the year on TV – right from your own home!” yelled a commercial.

“The next national crisis – where will it come from?” asked another. Sophie moved on quickly.

“The newest political scandal, who’s resigning, and who got caught, tonight at 11,” Said the anchor on an ad for the nightly news.

“Savings in America - - the nation’s credit debt,” Began yet another news anchor. Sophie changed the channel quickly.

“Which celeb is pregnant AGAIN?!” shouted the over-exaggerated host of a tabloid program. Sophie watched this for a while, but moved on when it became clear that the story was built on guesses and rumors.

Sophie continued flipping, not even absorbing most of what she saw until she was broken from her trance by a clicking of the lock.

“Sophie, honey,” Sophie’s mother called as she opened the door.

“Hi, Mom,” Sophie replied. “How was your day?”

“Good,” her mom said. “Do you have any homework that still needs to be done?”

“Yeah,” replied Sophie, “I guess I should go finish my history.” She stood up and walked to her room. She had to go down on her knees to fish her history book out from under her bed. As she sat down in her chair, she flipped the text open to the assigned chapter.

“Chapter 47: End of the First Dynasty,” Sophie read aloud. As Sophie kept reading, her mind drifted to other subjects as she barely absorbed the information that was on the page.

“Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus was the fifth and last emperor of the first dynasty of Roman emperors, who began with Octavius Caesar.”

*What was that show Sophie had seen last week on TV?
What was its name?*

“The consolidation of power by Nero and previous emperors led to a general decline in the welfare of the people.”

Sophie’s thoughts wandered to that crisis the news had mentioned.

“People were crowded into more and more substandard housing; the crowds increased violence and led to greater fire risks.”

Sophie thought of the problems in the housing market her mom had talked about.

“To escape such living conditions, the Romans paid huge amounts to escape and see incredibly elaborate shows and other entertainment put on at the Circus Maximus and later the Coliseum, where huge shows sometimes even involved filling the entire structure with water and staging naval battles in it.”

Sophie wondered how much that rock concert on TV cost to make.

“Nero in particular was seen by many people as unstable, he kept a large harem- including his sisters-and, infamously,

executed his own mother because he felt she was too overbearing on his political power,”

Sophie thought of the power grabbing of the politicians, but none of them were murderers, were they?

“The housing problems eventually led to the great Roman Fire, which some sources say lasted five days. Popular legend states that Nero ‘fiddled while Rome burned’ but this could not be true because the violin was not invented for another thousand years. Furthermore, Nero was a lyre player, and several sources place Nero at various performances, either playing or acting, during the fire.”

Sophie thought of the trips of the politicians, and how little time they seemed to spend around the people. She thought about how much time she spent playing the viola, and not doing her homework.

“At the end of his reign, Nero committed suicide due to growing negative feelings toward him, and fear of assassination.”

Sophie thought of the politicians who resigned when their image faltered; was that the same as suicide?

Sophie raised her head and looked around her room. Sunlight was streaming through her window, her viola was lying in its case on her bed; her posters showed her favorite rock stars. Dust motes danced in the rays of light, and the furnace made a gentle rumble in the background. Sophie looked at her viola, and then back at her history book. Slowly, Sophie walked to her viola and closed the case and slid it underneath her bed.

Sophie opened up her History book. “Chapter 48: The Dawn of a New Age,” she read.

Race DiLoreto

Curtis Senior HS, 11th Grade

INNOCENT MONSTER

Looking onto his sister may have been pleasant, if she didn't happen to be the perfect vision of beauty. Maverick, still in awe, yet shaken with a deep sense of detest, stared at her flawless face that seemed innocent as she slept. The Syndicate had named her Noelle, the name visible by a golden notice that rested, bolted, against the glass surface of the tube she had been created in. She was held in very high regard in the various looming eyes of the Syndicate members; Noelle seemed to be their only creation that turned out so well. It made Maverick sick down to the pits of his stomach; he could practically taste the burning stomach acid on his tongue.

Venomous, his disease-ridden eyes never moved from her doll-like face. Her golden curls floated in the clear liquid about her face as though an unreal picture. It seemed a shame to hate something so fair that Maverick was having trouble standing the guilt of his revulsion. His face remained stern, hard as carved marble against the darkness of the room. This lab, to his great appreciation, happened to always be a very dark place. The light hurt his unprotected, black eyes. Maverick often stayed inside, opting to avoid the outside world and the other labs, whose light burned brightly at every crack and corner.

Lifting a white hand, Maverick gently placed his palm against the surface of the glass, allowing his eyes to finally lift from Noelle's face. He admitted she happened to be quite adorable. Her petite figure shower a young and more innocent appearance. Her face looked soft as though made of fine porcelain. Each hand featured long nails, faultless as they curved evenly off of each finger. The tubes in her back would be the only imperfection that would ruin her flawlessness, giving her scars against her sweet skin. All of the Syndicates' creations had them; they were simply part of the process,

much like a belly button would be to a human. It would only be a matter of time before that chain broke.

Maverick scowled darkly, his eyes, black from Aniridia, catching the light from the tube that showed the red flash of blood in the back of his eyes momentarily. The creation hardly paid attention to the smooth movement of the scientist behind him, and didn't even jump when the door suddenly opened somewhere behind him. Maverick was too busy gawking to be shaken by such familiar noise. He assumed it would be a Syndicate member who would brush past him as though he were a nonexistent ghost, and his thoughts proved true when a man dressed in a suit that looked fresh out of some package came straight by without saying a word.

He stood in silence, wanting to ask many questions to the man he had been forced to call a God. In a way, it made sense; he wouldn't exist without the Syndicate. Though, it was irritating to be so pushed aside. Maverick was worried, however, that if he said something, the man would force him from the room entirely. It wasn't something the albino was willing to sacrifice. Even if the suited men were irritating, they still had the power to control him. It was rather pathetic to be such a miserable toy, an experiment that happened to be a failure in the first place. Mocking innocence never struck Maverick's fancy anyway. He hated pretending to be clueless, but he was too afraid to have an opinion that he had just avoiding allowing the Syndicate to know he had thought. They would probably kill him if he talked back, as though a child.

Really, Maverick couldn't argue with that either. Though he looked much older, he had first come into the world about three years ago; ever since, he had been too mesmerized by the Syndicate and experimentation to flee. Besides, what human would look onto him and see something more than a white creature? Maverick knew he couldn't; hide in their society.

For a moment, Maverick, instead, watched the man examine the tube holding his little sister within. She looked helpless like her world could be crushed with a single drop of a penny. Maverick knew beyond her appearance, though. She could kill with the best of them, and she would, directed by the Syndicate that controlled him. Noelle hadn't even been born yet, and they were already dictating her life down to a fine wire. Maverick distantly wondered if it had been the same for him. He had, of course, been a foul experiment after many mutations of the genes, but he hadn't been half as decent as his little sister.

After the lingering silence, the man in the suit finally opened his mouth to speak as he pressed down a small, green button that shined brightly against the dark room. "She'll be born now," he muttered. He allowed his finger to slip away from the button, smirking slightly at his assumed success.

"Now," a voice asked, filling the room from a speaker that clung to the ceiling of the room.

"Yes," the man replied, once again pushing the button with his thin finger, "Get the staff down here."

"Yes, sir."

Maverick smiled carefully, sinking back away as people began to enter the room in a hurry; no one liked to keep the boss waiting. Once everyone had filtered to their spots, the process was started immediately. Maverick's eyes grew wide as he watched; noticing every small motion or action the people would take just to animate their creation. Again, he wondered if this was what it was like to be born. Perhaps they had done the process differently with him. Maverick smiled as the woman fell in a heap in the scientist's arms, coughing on the oxygen that suddenly filled her lungs. Noelle wasn't used to walking or breathing, but it wouldn't be long before the program in her head would finally adjust to life. "Maverick," the man in the suit commanded swiftly.

The earlier experiment responded quickly; Maverick found his way to his leader's side as if on instinct. "Yes, sir?" Noelle gasped like a fish suddenly, looking around at the scientists in white to the tables and computers before her eyes finally rested on Maverick.

"This is your sister," the man continued, "You will protect her...help her." The Syndicate member glanced over at the white man in front of him, staring into his black eyes. "Please, Maverick...don't let anything happen to her. This is your job now." Maverick watched him, nodding only after he was finished speaking. The man motioned to the others, who brought Noelle in front of the blank looking albino. "This is your brother," the man in the suit told her kindly, smiling to his experiment, "He'll be by your side, Noelle."

"Brother," Noelle questioned, her voice soft. Her eyes darted from the man to Maverick curiously. The program in her head sifted through information for a moment; Maverick could see it in her eyes. She finally grinned and lunged toward the failed experiment. Maverick caught her, glancing down at the woman as she wrapped her arms tightly around his waist.

Rayna Mumbower

Bonney Lake HS, 12th Grade

OVER THE EDGE

I'm not crazy... Just tired... John Sulkowsky thought to himself.

You don't have to do this... Get back in the car... Drive away... No... Go in... You're going to be late... Get back in the car... His conscience carried on in this manner for close to a minute before he realized that he was walking toward the office door.

The bored receptionist at the desk simply tapped her nails and chewed her gum impatiently. She had been watching him through the dusty window for close to a minute as he tried to park his car.

Freak...she thought to herself.

Finally walking through the door, his eyes shifted nervously around the empty waiting room as he approached the counter rigidly.

"I... believe I have an appointment... f-for two o'clock?" he stammered.

She impatiently picked up a few papers and shoved them in his hands.

"Fill these out and come back when you're done."

Frowning, he looked back at her.

"But... d-don't I need to sign in... I think I do..."

With a hint of agitation, she pulled up a file on her computer.

"Mr. Sulkowsky, right?"

“Y-yes...”

“Okay, well you’re the only scheduled appointment for a couple of hours.”

John waited for her to say more.

“Well, okay... I mean... these papers will be fine...” he said in the withdrawn voice of a boy who has just been scolded.

It took all of five minutes to complete the paperwork. This being his fourth evaluation of the year, he had practically memorized the questions; they were always the same.

The ring of the phone startled John.

He’s *calling* for me, John thought, *I’m ready...*

“Regina speaking...”

John stood up.

“Oh, hi!”

John sat down.

She carried on with whoever was on the other end with the jibber-jabbering of a school girl.

So *unprofessional*, John thought to himself, slightly relieved.

“Mr. Sulkowsky?”

Alarmed by the voice, John jumped up. The astute looking psychologist, most likely in his mid-thirties, extended his hand with a cold smile.

“I’m Dr. Anderson.”

“H-hello... I’m John Sulkowsky...”

“Yes, follow me, please.”

John followed him down a long hallway into the dimly-lit doctor’s office. He then walked behind a large, mahogany desk and sat down.

“Sit, please.”

John sat in a small chair, as a child would in front of the principal’s desk. The office smelled of leather bound books and was made to make the patient feel inferior. A large portrait of a crumpled old man with bushy eyebrows hung behind the desk.

“Now, John, as you know, this is just a check up of sorts. We’ll talk about any problems you might have, fears, and whatnot. Are you comfortable?”

“Y-yes, I’m f-fine.” John stuttered back.

“So how have things been? I see you have returned to work.”

“T-that’s right...”

“So, no voices or anything?”

“I’ve never heard voices!”

“But your folder says that you heard your... dog talking to you... among other things...”

“No, that’s not me...”

“I see.” Dr. Anderson replied skeptically.

John’s heart began to beat frantically. He was being accused of something that never happened. Sure, he would talk to his dog, but it would never talk back. Besides, it was right after his wife left him, who could blame him?

“Kill him John...”

John’s eyes sprang wide open with fear, staring intensely at the picture.

“What’s wrong, John?”

“Nothing, nothing at all...” John said awkwardly stumbling over the words.

He blinked.

“Well, you look like something is bothering you.”

“I’m fine... I d-don’t...”

“Kill him John, kill the doctor, do it now.”

John withdrew into the chair, and stared at the doctor with a look of utter fear on his face.

“Can I get you something to drink, John? Water? Juice? Coffee?”

All John could do was grip the armrests of his chair and try to shake it.

This couldn’t be happening. A temporary loss of control. He couldn’t be psychotic. No, this could not be happening.

“Kill him John... It’s the only way.”

“No!” John screamed. Dr. Anderson ran to the door and yelled.

“Regina!” A few seconds later the receptionist came running down the hallway.

“Yes, doctor?”

“I need you to call a unit to pick up Mr. Sulkowsky. Tell

them to send orderlies, especially Barnes. They may need to sedate him.”

“Right away, doctor.”

In a few minutes, the ambulance had arrived and was putting John in a straight jacket. Barnes, the largest of all, stayed behind as the other orderlies sedated John.

“Poor Mr. Sulkowsky.” The doctor said.

“All luck. He was already pretty close to going over. He was practically there already. Double or nothing says you can’t do it again.” Barnes dared the doctor.

“Okay, I’ll prove it to you. I have another appointment in a couple of hours. But you see, Barnes, the mark of a true ventriloquist is making one think his voice is coming from somewhere else by distracting the audience.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah, you say that every time...”

Jacob Rodenbucher

Covenant HS, 12th Grade