



OUR OWN PRESSIONS

20th Anniversary

TEEN

Writing & Art Contest

2016 Winners

Pierce County Library System

POETRY
WRITING
ART
PHOTOGRAPHY

Congratulations to more than 1,000 talented students who participated in the 20th annual Our Own Expressions Teen Writing & Art Contest.

Volunteers, including Pierce County Library System staff and Pierce County Library Foundation Board members, reviewed the entries. Writers Kathryn O. Galbraith and Travis Prothro selected this year's writing winners, evaluating originality, style, general presentation, grammar and spelling. Photographer Dane Gregory Meyer and graphic artist Ken Murphy selected the art winners based on composition, artistic skills, creativity and effective use of media.

Pierce County Library Foundation awarded the winners with cash prizes, and the winning entries are published in this book.

Pierce County Library gratefully acknowledges the support of Pierce County Library Foundation, The News Tribune, Pacific Lutheran University and Print NW to help fund the contest.

2016 Winners

POETRY
WRITING
ART
PHOTOGRAPHY

OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS

Poetry Winners

Grades 7 and 8

1st A Day in the Park

Olivia Simmons

Other

2nd Whistle

Claire Wing

St. Patrick School

3rd Ways to Dodge Chores

Will Seley

St. Patrick School

Grades 9 and 10

1st The Amaranth and the Rose

Allyson Chiou

Covenant High School

2nd Remember You

Hannah Sheil

Steilacoom High School

3rd A Lament of Renowned Poets

Nathan Lawty

Covenant High School

Grades 11 and 12

1st The Ordinary Woman

Bao Nguyen

Curtis Senior High School

2nd Ode to the Beach

Sarah Shaffer

Henderson Bay High School

3rd Tuning to Eternity

Rachel Quick

Covenant High School

Drawing Winners

Grades 7 and 8

1st Ray

Mirym Roscoe

Home School

2nd Prey

Amelia Day

Lakeridge Middle School

3rd The Dragon Rider

Mary Brownell

Pioneer Middle School

Grades 9 and 10

1st Luhan

Colleen Faber

Harrison Preparatory

2nd Union Pacific

Trevor Kvinsland

Gig Harbor High School

3rd Daughter of Mirkwood

Rosalie Roscoe

Home School

Grades 11 and 12

1st Dmitri

Penny Rhines

Home School

2nd Lucky Smith Model

Sara Huff

Mount Tahoma High School

3rd Me

Sydney Paulsen

Home School

Photography Winners

Grades 7 and 8

1st **Me**

Bobbi Worden

Key Peninsula Middle School

2nd **On the Wild Side**

Henry Stelle

Lighthouse Christian School

3rd **Falling Water**

Aiyanna Kilgore

Ford Middle School

Grades 9 and 10

1st **Rite of the Birds**

Maleah Bishop

Bellarmino Preparatory

2nd **Where Dreams Lie**

Megan Lynn

Kalles Junior High School

3rd **Jumping for Joy**

Payton Schneider

Bellarmino Preparatory

Grades 11 and 12

1st **1855**

Sydney Paulsen

Home School

2nd **Rippled Surface**

Cameron LaBorn

Rogers High School

3rd **Bubbles**

Erin Williams

Rogers High School

Short Story Winners

Grades 7 and 8

1st **Alone**

Joey Boyle

Kopachuck Middle School

2nd **A.I.**

Amelia Day

Lakeridge Middle School

3rd **Reaching the Other Side**

Halla Mannering

Harrison Preparatory

Grades 9 and 10

1st **The Colors of Roses**

Angela Le

Covenant High School

2nd **Numb**

Sarah Hull

Bethel High School

3rd **A Job Well Done**

Finlay Adamson

Gig Harbor High School

Grades 11 and 12

1st **Blood Brothers**

Philip Darby

Covenant High School

2nd **The Cure**

Kalyn Jones

Lakes High School

3rd **Left Behind**

William Lewellen

Covenant High School

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Poetry

Grades 7 & 8

POETRY
WRITING ART
PHOTOGRAPHY

OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS

A Day in the Park

by Olivia Simmons

First Place

Little hands, stubby fingers
With pudgy around the edges
Discover toys on the playground
Cling to bars and ledges

Rough hands, worn with time
Veiny wrists and browned knuckles
Watch the girl with little hands
With elder eyes and a mouth that chuckles

Holding hands, big and little
One envelops the other
Little feet skip, big feet follow
A day in the park, tomorrow another

Whistle

by Claire Wing

Second Place

I walk through the colorless city.
My jacket is soaked, as useless as a
towel in a pool.
I whistle, suddenly people are visible.
The sun peaks, and lights turn on.
The sky turns from colorless, to a cool green.
I whistled.

Ways to Dodge Chores

by Will Seley

Third Place

My mom asks me to do chores a lot.

If you are like me, you hate chores too.

Here are some ways to get out of doing chores.

You can say that your dusty room made you sick.

You could say you have too much homework.

Maybe you could say you were riding a llama and hurt your back. You could just run away from home.

Crying until your mom leaves also works sometimes.

Act like you've gone deaf and don't listen.

You could simply burn down your house.

Sometimes the best way is hiding until the whole thing blows over.

Never say, "No" because that is an endless conversation you do not want to get into. If these things did not help you get out of chores, I don't know what will.

Poetry

Grades 9 & 10

POETRY
WRITING ART
PHOTOGRAPHY

OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS

The Amaranth and the Rose

by Allyson Chiou

First Place

An amaranth bloomed fully crowned
Beside a flawless rose
Who's splendor outshone all around.
The former, so morose
For sake of Rose's handsome face,
Expressed in instant bold
Her fierce envy of foretold grace.
"But envy not," said old
Sad Rose in her doleful tones,
"My darling dearest friend,
I beg you stop your sad'ning moans.
Your beauty finds no end,
While beauty that is mine is lost.
All glory comes with cost."

Remember You

by Hannah Sheil

Second Place

The warm weather, hot sun
and cool breezes
are how I remember you

The steaming rice, juicy beef
and eating dinner on the ground
are how I remember you

The way you brushed my hair
and helped me dress
in brightly colored silk dresses
are how I remember you

Long days spent sitting
in the shade of a palm tree
and korean food market trips
are how I remember you

But now, here we are
In this hot church
and all I can think about
is how the fans look just like
yours

And now I have to remember you.

A Lament of Renowned Poets

by Nathan Lawty

Third Place

What Shakespeare, Poe, Longfellow and Surrey
Have all in common: poetry so fine,
Which causes thoughts like this to come my way:
“If only all their poetry was mine.”
My anger grows with every line I read.
“How did they write such thought-provoking things?”
Their only role is to my envy feed,
For envy and contempt is all this brings.
But I have skills I’m sure they wished they had.
For instance, I doubt Poe could dance like me.
Though smart and learned, Shakespeare’s math was bad.
Perhaps I should a bit more grateful be.
Since I have talents I must not forget,
My lack of other skills I won’t regret.

Poetry

Grades 11 & 12

POETRY
WRITING ART
PHOTOGRAPHY


OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS

The Ordinary Woman

by Bao Nguyen

First Place

Mundane is going to grocery store;
Everyone can do it, so is my Aunt;
But it makes one very special indeed.

What shall we have for lunch, dinner, and breakfast?
Plans she ahead for the day, for the week.
Mundane is going to grocery store.

Costco and Winco, Hong Kong then H-mart;
Meat, lettuce, fish, the forgettable salt.
They make a person so special indeed.

Take the rice paper, for Uncle likes spring rolls;
Also, buy veggie food for Full Moon day.
Mundane is going to grocery store.

Early Sunday morning: boiled meat smell filled,
Clunking utensils, sink full, hurried steps.
They make a person so special indeed.

"No big deal," says Aunt, "just ordinary."
True: mundane is go to grocery store;
But it makes one very special indeed.

Ode to the Beach

by Sarah Shaffer

Second Place

Your calm, relaxing melody,
the immediate peace you bring to me,
the ability to be stress free for a period of time.
Your many beautiful color combinations,
the mellow earth tones on your sandy base,
the vibrant colors growing taller and taller,
as I look up to the calm blue sky.
The crisp cooling breeze,
bringing total relaxation over one's body,
bringing in the salty air from the ocean,
just as it slowly marches itself in and out.
The un-wound sounds of your calm blue
abyss marching itself back and forth,
toward me and away from me,
without you my life would be hectic.
The sound of your rocky base,
as I walk relieves me of all tensions,
as well as clears my mind of any negativity,
from today, or the day prior.

Tuning to Eternity

by Rachel Quick

Third Place

I've tried to find my melody
Inside these hallowed keys.
The dissonance still echoes strong
From wrecks of harmonies.

My ears are full of discontent.
My fingers faint at last
To hear a song beyond my room
That peals out from the past.

I hear my note inside that tune.
It rings alone to me.
So fully does it harmonize
Within eternity.

Drawing

Grades 7 & 8

POETRY
WRITING ART
PHOTOGRAPHY


**OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS**

Ray

by Mirym Roscoe

First Place





Prey

by Amelia Day

Second Place



The Dragon Rider

by Mary Brownell

Third Place



Drawing

Grades 9 & 10

POETRY
WRITING ART
PHOTOGRAPHY


OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS

Luhan

by Colleen Faber

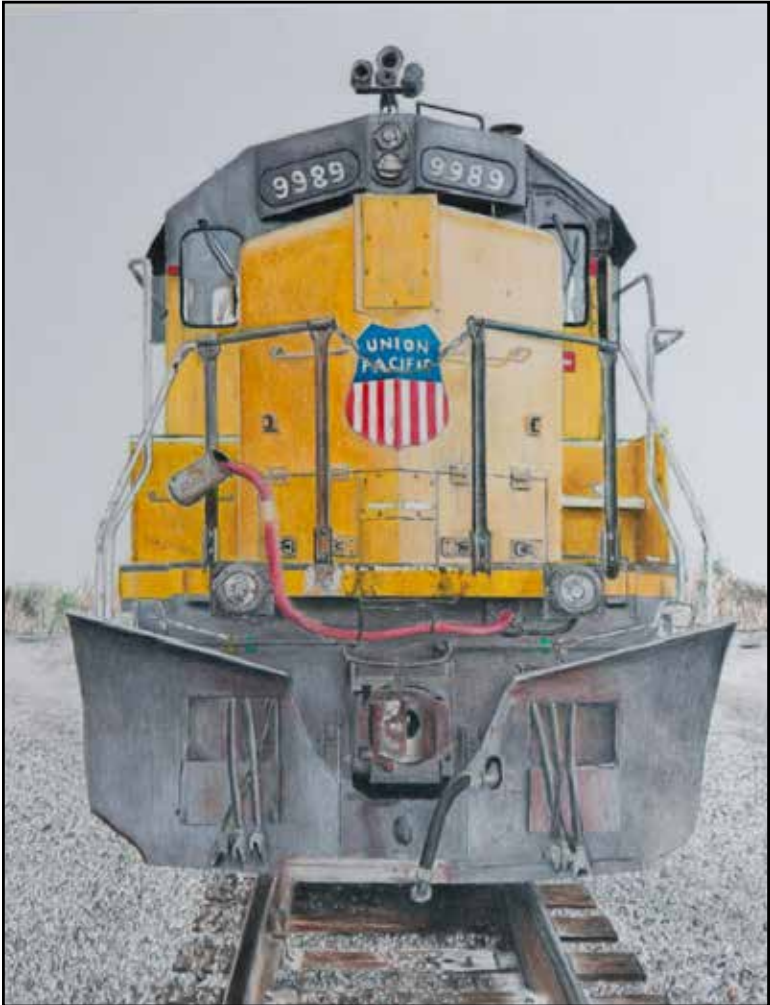
First Place



Union Pacific

by Trevor Kvinsland

Second Place



Daughter of Mirkwod

by Rosalie Roscoe

Third Place



Drawing

Grades 11 & 12

POETRY
WRITING ART
PHOTOGRAPHY


**OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS**

Dmitri

by Penny Rhines

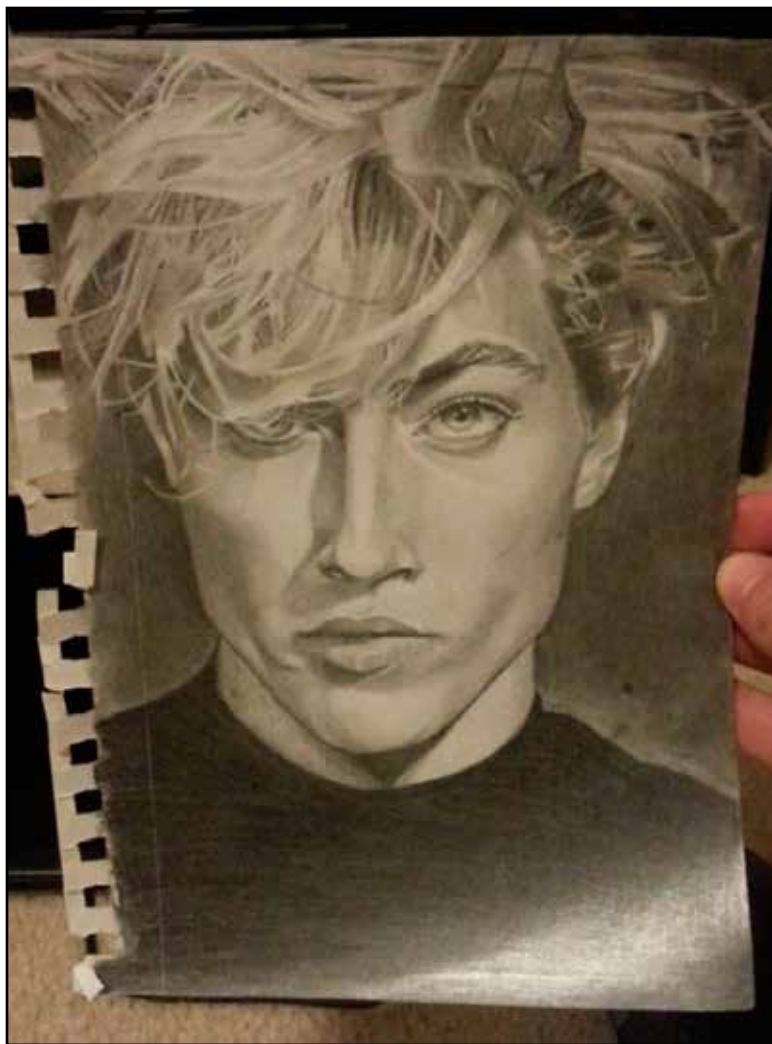
First Place



Lucky Smith Model

by Sara Huff

Second Place



Me

by Sydney Paulsen

Third Place



Photography

Grades 7 & 8

POETRY
WRITING ART
PHOTOGRAPHY


**OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS**



Me

by Bobbi Worden

First Place



On the Wild Side

by Henry Stelle

Second Place



Falling Water

by Aiyanna Kilgore

Third Place



Photography

Grades 9 & 10

POETRY
WRITING ART
PHOTOGRAPHY


**OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS**

Rite of the Birds

by Maleah Bishop

First Place



Where Dreams Lie

by Megan Lynn

Second Place



Jumping for Joy

by Payton Schneider

Third Place



Photography

Grades 11 & 12

POETRY
WRITING ART
PHOTOGRAPHY

**OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS**

1855

by Sydney Paulsen

First Place



Rippled Surface

by Cameron LaBorn

Second Place



Bubbles

by Erin Williams

Third Place



Short Story

Grades 7 & 8

POETRY
WRITING ART
PHOTOGRAPHY


**OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS**

Alone

by Joey Boyle

First Place

The room was empty, devoid of any signs of life other than my own. The floor consisted of a gray linoleum material, slightly green with age, and the walls were made of worn metal. A single light bulb hung from the ceiling, poorly illuminating my stark surroundings. The only other object besides the bed I was on was a small computer terminal built into the wall, glowing green and flickering. Swinging my legs over the side of the bed, I realized how weak they were and how I was unable to walk more than a few steps before falling. Each stumble strangely seemed to taunt me, reminding me of a past that I once took part in, although I have no memory of any event of my life except my name. The Computer terminal itself was as worn and faded as everything else, even the type on the screen looked dated. Greetings subject 2121, if you are reading this you have completed the hibernation phase of the test. If the test was executed correctly, the year should be 2965; please refer to the clock located in this terminal to assure that the date is correct. If it is, please move to the room next to this, there should be a letter regarding what you should do next. Good luck Subject, 2121, and best wishes for the future! Signed, Luxury corp. I looked at the screen, confused as to what it meant. Subject? Test? Hibernation? the use of diction was very puzzling to say the least, and had me very worried about my current situation. At this point I did notice the clock at the bottom of the screen, as the message had said, but something was startlingly wrong. The year was not 2965, but 3200, 300 years longer than what had been originally scheduled. Even more concerning was the fact that I didn't know if anyone else was even alive, and, for all it was worth, I could be alone. Looking to the far wall away from the terminal, I did notice the faint outline of a door, warranting a further look. It was as worn and corroded as everything

else, fingers of green licking its front like vines. It was difficult to open, not surprisingly though, considering its age. The room it lead into was considerably larger than the one I had previously been in, this one containing a few crates that looked like storage containers and lights flush with the ceiling. The area also contained a table with an envelope, presumably the letter the message had described, and a small machine in the corner that looked like that some sort of dispenser. Walking over to the table, I realized that the decision to use a letter to communicate was strange, considering how modern my surroundings appeared. When I tried to examine the letter, it promptly disintegrated into tiny particles of dust, leaving me clueless as of what to do next. This only increased my anxieties that something had gone terribly wrong, and my feeling of being in some horrible nightmare. The dispenser in the corner was in fact a food dispenser, containing some sort of grey powder which, when mixed with water formed a grey paste. The paste tasted alright but was still unsettling to eat, and I took a pouch of it just in case I needed it. It was then I noticed yet another door hiding inconspicuously on in the corner adjacent to the dispenser, and based on the light emitted from the cracks, seemed to lead to the outside. Quickly examining the storage crates for anything of interest or use, I decide to head outside and face the unknown. The crates contain nothing but extra clothing, similar to the strange protective suit I was wearing, and took a few extra pieces for good measure. The door leading to the outside was markedly harder to open than the previous doors, which is understandable considering the corrosion that is associated with the outdoors. When I stepped outside, I was soon met by extremely bright light and choking dust that stung my eyes and face. I reeled backwards and shut the door, astonished by the hostility of the environment and how it differed from how I remembered it. Ripping one of the extra suits, I tied the fragment around my lower face to protect me from the swirling dust and hot air, preparing to go outside once again. This time I was prepared for what was to come, lowering my head to protect against the dust and wind and slowly trudging forward. It soon became apparent that this was just a passing storm, but I still didn't know what to expect when the dust cleared or

what dangers I might face. Through the thinning clouds I could see a faint trace of what appeared to be a dark grey sky, the sun barely illuminating my surroundings. Something felt very strange, Although it was hard to determine the cause of my apprehension; that is until I saw it. It was a tall building leaning and on the verge of collapse, its windows grime coated and concrete cracked. It was about 300 yards away and seemed like it warranted a further look, and I marched towards it still aware of the dangers involved. The dust had cleared by now and made traveling the decrepit landscape much easier, but only just, as large chunks of what appeared to be road blocked much of my path. Throughout the area I could still see remnants of past habitation, an unobstructed stop sign, pieces of sidewalk, an abandoned hot dog cart, but it was all just a chilling reminder of how life here used to be. With the building coming closer and closer, I looked for a safe entryway and found one in the shape of a gaping hole where a window pane once was, being careful not to cut myself with shards of glass when I climbed through it. The interior was in about the same shape as the outside, with concrete dust and glass littering the faded carpet. The floor I was on seemed to be a sort of workspace, With rows of desks and tables still littered with paper. Wherever I was, it appeared very old and dilapidated, and whomever used to occupy the building must have been gone a long time. I did notice a staircase leading up to the next floor and, deeming it worthwhile, ascended to the next level. This seemed to be a sort of bookkeeping room, containing many filing cabinets filled with folders, each ordered alphabetically. This seemed strange enough, but that was until I realized another, disturbing fact. Each cabinet was also labeled Luxury Corp. Test Subjects, the name of the company I had read on the computer screen earlier. I quickly looked for my name, David Brown and found it after rifling through much of the cabinet labeled B. David Brown, Final Test Subject (2121), Bunker 247, Cannot be recovered and is presumed dead due to faulty timer, will not survive End. I slumped back in my chair with the realization that despite Their efforts, Luxury Corp. was unsuccessful and I was utterly alone.

A.I.

by Amelia Day

Second Place

Grey walls, grey floor, grey faces. I survey everything as always, from my seat at the back of the classroom, never missing a detail. I suppose they put me here to not distract the rest of the kids (if I can even qualify as part of their group), but to me it feels like they've sentenced me to solitary confinement.

As Teacher ends her final statement with a final, regal sweep of her arm, her harsh gaze casts around the room until she locks eyes with me. I know what this means.

"A.I.!" she calls out across the classroom. I flinch. Why can't they ever call me by my real name? She stares coldly at me from the front of the classroom, her lips pulling into a taut line. I only sit straighter, hold her gaze with an equally frigid glare of my own. "We need an incentive, do we?" she says, walking down the aisle of desks, her heels clicking sharply against the concrete ground. "Need I remind you what happened last time?" She stops at my chair, her arms folded tight against her chest. I say nothing in return.

Teacher doesn't hesitate in pulling me up by my hair, ignoring my cries of pain and protest. She proceeds to drag me up to the front of the class, sit me on a brown stool, the pyre of classroom 301, and return to her desk.

"Speak the oath," she drawls in monotone as I rub my scalp, feeling embarrassment crawl up my neck. As I stare into the mass of students, I search for a solitary beam of pity, but find none. They're all here for the show, and compassion's not the ticket in. I clench my fists again and again, my knuckles white, trying to let all of my anger just drain away, but I know it never will. I grit my teeth, and start the oath, trying not to give Teacher the satisfaction of a tear.

"I am an abomination," I begin slowly, my jaw tense, sweat beading my brow. My voice comes out cracked, gravelly, but I don't care. They've humiliated me enough already.

"I am shameful," I continue. "I am just programming. I am not

human. I am fake. I am an image." I am human, I repeat again and again in my head. It's the only thing that keeps me from throttling someone in moments like this. I know if I harm anyone, my punishment will be much greater than this. It has been much greater.

"I am not deserving of the hospitality I receive. I am nothing." As I finish, I drop my head, not wishing to hold anyone's gaze, my body trembling with both embarrassment and rage.

"Thank you, Anton Ives," Teacher whispers in my ear as she stalks by, a hint of sarcasm gracing her tone. As her skeletal figure reaches the doorway, the bell rings, signaling the end of this torture, and my "quality time" with Teacher. No matter how many times I have to undergo this ritual, I will never become used to it. I file out in line with the other students, keeping my head down as I pass Teacher, not wanting to meet her piercing blue eyes yet again.

As soon as I reach the open corridor, I walk straight to The Old Spinster, our meeting spot, trying to ignore the pointed revulsion from all of the other students. Her cheek is cracked as always, the one familiar blemish running down her otherwise flawless, marble face. Standing, watching The Old Spinster, I jump at a sharp tap on my shoulder, and spin around flustered, half expecting Teacher to be standing there next to me, but it's just Rider.

"Hey," he says, laughing at my surprised expression. "What's up? Admiring the architectural beauty of The Old Spinster?"

"Oh yes!" I say, in mock enthusiasm, smiling with relief. "Right before I write an essay about the sound structure of Teacher's hair. I'm sure that'll count as an ancient relic too, right?" I start laughing, but stop abruptly, noticing a large group of assorted students watching our conversation with suspicion.

"Rider, sorry, but we might need to be more discreet," I whisper in his ear, subtly gesturing to the set of kids listening in. If Teacher or any of the other Educators caught word of me talking to another student, I'd be sent to The Room in an instant.

"Oh, sorry Anton," he whispers back apologetically, pushing his overgrown hair out of his eyes, a nervous tic. "I'd completely forgotten. Let's just go get lunch." As we start walking steadily down the hall, he leans over and asks me, "How was the oath today, everything go all right?" genuine concern painting his face. Rider's being taught a few classes over, a fact I despise, so he doesn't often know what goes

on in the other classrooms. I look down at my feet. "As well as it ever goes," I mumble.

"Did Teacher's face go ten shades of red this time, or only five?" he asks, cocking a mock inquisitive eyebrow.

"Only two this time, but I'm predicting eight for tomorrow!" I laugh back, glad to be joking again. "I'm onl-" Suddenly a rough hand grabs me from behind and turns me around.

"You're Anton Ives?" a man whispers, keeping his grip on my shoulder.

"Um...yes, uh, why...I mean, what are you...?" I stutter, glancing around the room, hoping one of the students is watching, but the hall is empty.

"Special Services," he says tersely. "And if you want to live, you're coming with me. We need you for a special mission, A.I."

"What...what do you mean?" I choke out, trying to understand.

"Yeah, what do you mean?" Rider counters, his eyes sparking as he shoves the man's arm off my shoulder and steps between us. "If you're taking him anywhere, you're going to have to get through me." The man's lips curl into a sneer. "Oh, the best friend, ever the hero." Quick as lightning, his fist knocks Rider to the floor, a sickening crunch. "And ever the one to fall first." I yell, trying to reach out for Rider as the man wraps his burly arms around me, and pulls me down to the ground.

"That boy is nothing to you now, you hear me?" he spits in my face. I shake my head violently, desperately trying to free myself from the man's grasp.

"No!" I cry out.

"Well, he's going to have to be," the man says, gruffly. "You've been training for this from the moment you were born." I drown him out, staring at Rider. His lips are moving, repeating the same word over and over again. I watch him for a minute, trying to figure out what he could possibly be saying, until it hits me. Anton. He's saying Anton. Despite the man holding me down, berating me, and my uncertain future looming in the distance, this small, mouthed word makes me feel strangely powerful. No matter what they put me through wherever I'm going, no matter what I have to do in the future, I'll always be Anton. Not A.I.

Reaching the Other Side

by Halla Mannering

Third Place

May 15, 1944 – Day 10

I long to fill my lungs with fresh air or sing as loud as my voice will go, both things that I previously took for granted. Every night when I close my eyes I am grateful for another day of hiding, and though it is glum, I always hope for many more days. Life in our attic is of better quality than life in the camps where many of my friends are sentenced to. Recalling all the havoc this war has brought upon my people replaces the pangs of hunger with those of hate. I must learn to push those thoughts away, though, hate started this war and I must not allow myself to become a victim of it. Still, when I look out my tiny window and see the encampment where many of my friends are banished to living a life of suffering, it's hard not to hate the people who would carry out such inhumane deeds. Still, I am able to see the silver linings within the storm clouds of war. There is beauty in this, something good is going to come; that's the only thought that pushes me forward. There is good left in the world, whether or not I can see it, I must believe it is still there; if that flame of hope inside me is blown out I shall have no reason to continue living this life hidden in the fleeting shadows.

May 20, 1944 – Day 14

The early morning sun is now streaming through my partially covered window, making the specs of dust in the air more visible. I've never enjoyed writing, but the activities in this confined space are few and writing is an easy way to convey my soul's thoughts. I have a new appreciation for this journal my grandmother gave me on my fifteenth birthday. Inside the cover she inscribed the words, "To my dearest Esther, May your sails of courage survive the storms of life, and may you reach the other side safely." When not writing in these crumpled pages, I find myself staring at my little oak tree. I have no clue why I am so captivated by it. I think I spend so many hours staring at its pitiful branches because Mama and I planted it before we were reduced to hiding our days away. I remember pushing the dirt around its frail roots and feeling the cold

hands of the rain wrap around my hair as we turned our faces to the heavens. I wonder if I shall every feel the warmth of the sun again.

May 30, 1944 – Day 24

Since every stroke of sunlight the rain allows through its heavy defense is about to disappear, this entry will be short. Clouds have permanently set in and the rain beats down, threatening to uproot my precious tree. How did I develop such strong feelings for a plant? I have unspeakable amounts of time to think, in which I find my mind wandering as far as I wish my feet could. I never realized how much I had to be grateful for, then all my freedom was taken from me by people that don't have any respect for others unlike themselves. Time away from the everyday comforts I once neglectfully enjoyed has taught me much about the value and sanctity of life. How much longer can my sails of courage withstand this weathering?

June 6, 1944 - Day 27

Last night I stayed awake for hours, simply gazing at the stars. I would like to go up there someday and explore the vast skies. However, I'd be overjoyed to simply step outside the attic. Are free girls staring up at the same stars? Do they know about all of the people doomed to death, or the lone survivors hiding, only waiting for the dreaded day when we are discovered? Do others hear our silent plea for help?

June 10, 1944 - Day 31

A month has been spent in refuge hiding. How much longer can we continue to live in these conditions? I wish soldiers would knock on the attic door I so painstakingly tried to disguise a month ago. I wish this would end, whether that is my days or my misery. As soon as I write down these dark desires I want to erase them. I wish I could erase how awful and untrue they are. However, there are lots of things I wish I could erase. Pain, suffering, death, war. If I could erase these tragedies, would the joyful things be as bright? If clouds didn't block the sun, would we realize its full brilliance? So I wonder if happiness would be as enjoyable if sadness didn't exist.

June 20, 1944 - Day 40

My heart grows increasingly sick with worry. I saw a soldier pacing outside my window. Are people growing suspicious about our hiding place? Every time I open this journal I am greeted by the words my grandmother

wrote to me, and I wonder if it will be the last time I am privileged with flipping through its tattered pages. I seem to be steadily forgetting what life before hiding was like. What does it sound like to laugh with friends? What does a new pair of shoes feel like? Is cake as sweet as I remember? Grandma, I may not make it to the other side.

June 23, 1944 - Day 43

There was a knock on our door. The first thing I did was grab my journal, which has become a sort of treasure to me. The knock was our neighbor, coming to replenish our supplies for the first time. Papa says with the new abundance we can, theoretically, survive for months.

June 28, 1944 - Day 44

I sit here gazing at my tree; it's grown quite a bit, which means the storms haven't uprooted it yet. I suppose it's my only connection to the outside world — a world unknowing of the danger my family has experienced. I used to feel like an actual person, now I just feel like a ghost inhabiting a skeleton's frame. Writing, however, gives me authentication, a purpose. I hope to look back on these words in my old age, but I fear that may never come. Life is slipping out of my fingers as I waste away in this attic. I wonder if peop

December 12, 1970

It's been twenty-six years since I wrote in this journal; twenty-six precious years since the soldiers dragged me away to the Majdanek camp. I didn't even get to finish my last sentence. I am overwhelmed reading through these entries and sickened reliving my past nightmares. I am so happy to tell you that I am writing this entry, my last entry, sitting on branch of my oak tree. The rainstorms I described helped my sapling grow into a strong tree. The storms of war also helped me grow up strong.

I made it. I survived. My sails are weathered, grandma, but they are intact. I had courage.

I have reached the other side, and I am safe.

I love you, Grandma,

Your "dearest" Esther

Short Story

Grades 9 & 10

POETRY
WRITING ART
PHOTOGRAPHY


**OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS**

The Colors of Roses

by Angela Le

First Place

I can count every flower on my dress. It is a pretty dress, white with specially embroidered roses decorating the skirt, but it doesn't fit the occasion. In the background of my rapidly whirling mind, the pastor's monotone voice drones on about finding joy in tragedy, and to appreciate life while we have it, knowing that the man in the coffin is in a better place. Like that means anything after all I've seen. My doctor said to cope, I must remember the happy times in my life, no matter how hard they may seem to find. My hands slowly caress each flower, feeling the petals beneath my pale fingers, giving a memory to each.

One, the black roses surrounding the waistband of my dress. Black, like the darkness of my room, seemingly enhanced by the nightmares I used to have when I was little. Black is my father's silhouette outlined in the light of the hallway as he came into my room to calm me down. Black was the color of our cat, Misty. When he died, my father conducted a whole funeral for him, just to make me feel better. Black is the color of the preacher's suit, as he continues to speak over the open coffin. Black is the color of my father's favorite suit, the one he is wearing now.

Two, a yellow rose, reminding me of the sun, and the days in my old backyard with the beat-up tire swing, rusty slide, and rotting tree house that we still played in. My two younger brothers would race my father and I to our woods. We would play hide and seek for hours, my father always letting my youngest brother find him. Yellow is the color of our new house, and my brother Andrew's favorite color. Yellow is the color of my father's nicest tie, the one Andrew is wearing now.

Three, an orange rose, reminding me of my October birthday, and how my father always took me to the park, to our special tree, and

we would simply lay underneath it until it got dark. Orange is the color of my favorite ice cream. My father always said I had a sweet tooth that would never be cured. Orange is the color of the gem in the ring my father gave me for my thirteenth birthday, the one I've worn every day for three years, the one I'm wearing now.

Four, a blue rose that matched the color of my father's eyes. My father was the funniest man alive. He could make anyone smile, even on the worst day. His sandy brown hair and twinkling blue eyes always were up for a joke. The only time they didn't twinkle was the day he had to say goodbye. Blue was the color of the airplane he boarded for the Middle East. Blue was the sky that day, seemingly mocking our sadness.

Five, a red rose, my mother's smile. Watching her love for my father, and watching her heart break when he went to war. Red means love; an appropriate color for a rose, which is beauty with thorns. Red was the hair color of the man who greeted us at the hospital when my father was injured in battle. Red means trying to find a blood donor with my father's type. Red is the color of my blood as I watched it flow into my father's body. Red is nothing to me but pain.

Six, a green rose, reminding me of springtime, and how we would go to the greenest field in the whole state of North Carolina just to run around. Green is the color of my father's uniform, and the color of his favorite shirt. Green is the color of how sick I felt when I learned about my father's injury. Green is the color of the leaves that decorated his hospital room, and of all the stems on my flowers.

Seven, a purple rose, the same shade as a plum, my father's favorite fruit. Purple means the purple heart presented to my father as he lay in the hospital bed. Purple was the color of the waiting room that my brothers and I had to stay in as we waited for the inevitable. Purple was the color of my mother's dress, the last night that she danced with my father, the one she's wearing now. Purple was the bruises on my knuckles as I hit things trying to contemplate the unfairness of it all.

When the pastor is finally done speaking, I raise my head. Is that pity in his eyes? He hands my mother, my two younger brothers, and me each a white rose. White, like the color of my mother's face when she found out about my father. White, like the hospital walls. White, like the clouds in the sky that I can see out of the window. White, like my father's last smile. White, like the wedding dress my father will never see me wear. I ball my fists and walk stiffly to the coffin to say my last goodbye. I place the white rose on my father's lifeless body. His eyes no longer twinkled.

Numb

by Sarah Hull

Second Place

The man sat at the back of the dark prison cell. His head pressed against the cold stone of the wall, chilling him even though his hair had grown long, far surpassing the strict military standards he once had to follow. His torn uniform stank, the fabric stiff from old sweat. Even the spot where his captain's bars used to be was smudged and sad, like they'd never been there.

His dirt stained fingers traced the outlines of the cobblestone floor. Flynt. Captain Henry Flynt. That's what they used to call him, but that's before he had been captured. His velcro name tag had been replaced with a six digit identification code and his dog tags had been taken and destroyed.

Only tears cut lines in the dirt that caked his face. His left eye was swollen shut and blood was dried on his cracked lips. He ran his tongue across them, but it made no difference. He blinked slowly, his one good eye only remaining half open.

Almost lazily, his hand reached up to his breast pocket and fumbled with the button, his thick fingers rendering his hands nearly useless on such small, tedious tasks. Finally, he managed, the button came undone, the soft noise loud in the cell. He slipped two fingers pulling out a wrinkled photo, smudged with dirt from too many handlings (or something). He held it close to his eye and stared at it in the dim light. A woman stood, holding small boys, one on each hip, her arms squeezing them close. The children grinned out at him, their sandy hair a complete mess. A flicker of recognition lit his face and he smiled back, but the fog of numbness quickly fell back over his mind and he dropped his arm, dropping the photo in the process. A lump of sadness settled in his stomach, weighing it down like a stone. A few

more tears ran down his face. He missed them so much.

He used to have cell mates, but he couldn't remember them much. Every once in awhile a man in a cleaner uniform would come in with a black bag, pull it over one of their heads and fasten it tightly around their necks before dragging them off. No one put up much struggle. There was no point. He saw them as lucky. For them, it was over.

One day had blurred into the next until Flynt had lost all sense of time. There was no longer night or day, just a never ending extent of darkness. The darkness became a comfort. The light only brought a new array of terrors.

A new light bobbed on the wall, forever growing closer. The light stopped in front of his cell door and a guard stared in. After only a moment, the cell door swung open and he stepped inside, his chest full of medals jangling with every small movement. The guard's uniform was fine, crisp and clean. A black silk bag dangled loosely from his fist.

Despite himself, Flynt burst out in a fit of laughter. Not fazed, the finely dressed guard slipped the bag over the prisoner's head. He was still laughing as the string tightened, causing him to choke. His head pounded. He was pulled from the floor and his wrists shackled behind his back.

At least today will be different from the last, he thought before the numbness returned and he was dragged from his cell.

Flynt laughed.

Hysterically.

Insanely.

The darkness was endless and the string around his neck was growing ever tighter. With every labored breath, he sucked cloth into his mouth and nose, making consuming oxygen even tougher. His grinned between breaths, splitting his chapped lips, causing blood to dribble down his chin and drip onto the black silk covering his face.

The guard yanked suddenly on the strings and it cinched tighter, losing his windpipe. His one good eye widened and he choked, tripping

forward and falling to his knees. He tried to free his hands from the shackles to relieve the pressure, but the rusted irons were far too strong. Instead, he rubbed his neck against his shoulder in a futile attempt to loosen the string.

It was the other man's turn to laugh. "I don't think anyone would throw a fit if I accidentally choked an insane prisoner to death." The man's hot breath on his ear. His accent was thick.

For the first time in what seemed like an eternity, Flynt felt a flicker of fear deep within him. But as suddenly as the feeling had arrived, it vanished like a small match lit in a windstorm and the dull numbness settled back over his dreary consciousness.

"You done?" He growled.

After a small nod, the broken soldier was hauled to his feet and the cord around his neck loosened, allowing him to choke some air down. The slow blind trudge down the long hallway continued.

"Dead man walking." The guard laughed.

The darkness of the black bag still remained.

The too-tight leather bindings dug into the skin at his wrists and ankles, numbing his feet and hands. There was indistinct whispering all around him, filling his head like a swarm of bees and rattling off the inside of his skull. Then everything fell silent and the ominous buzzing of fluorescent lights was the only thing filling the void.

A sudden cold, suffocating weight bore down upon his face. He yanked on his restraints, sucking air in through the water soaked silk bag, but getting none. More water poured onto his face, dripping down his cloth covered cheeks and rolling down his neck. He choked and coughed as freezing cold water ran down his esophagus, his lungs burning like they had been turned inside out, soaked in seawater, doused in kerosene, and set ablaze.

It continued for hours, one bucket of ice-cold liquid after another, always sending him to the edge of death, but never allowing him to pass over. Flashes of color danced behind his eyelids in mesmerizing

patterns- the only thing that kept the terrors at hand from taking over the only piece of his mind that he had left.

He heard a soft click of a pistol.

The distant throaty chuckle of the guard.

A sharp bang.

Then blessedly, there was nothing.

It was only a matter of weeks before treaties were signed and the war came to a close and the bodies of the fallen were turned over to their rightful countries for honorable burials. Victims were identified and buried, but some were never found.

The man's body was returned, bruised and broken, a harsh and painful reminder of the sheer brutality and inhumanity of war. He was unidentifiable.

The man was laid to rest beneath a large headstone of bright white marble in Virginia. He was guarded day and night by three fellow soldiers who stood, stoic and silent all year long, through rain, snow, and storm. All that was inscribed on the stone were a few simple words:

Here rests in honored glory an American soldier known but to God.

A Job Well Done

by Finlay Adamson

Third Place

The weather outside was unforgiving on this particular November morning, but it didn't bother Robert Blackwell in the slightest. He was important, and important people hardly had time to worry themselves with such mundane matters.

Reaching for his grey rainjacket, his mind was preoccupied with the tasks he would be expected to complete once arriving at his workplace. Robert's job was difficult, but nevertheless vital to the operation of society. He greatly enjoyed the satisfaction he received from his work, especially considering the prestige it held. International Technical Manager was a highly coveted position, and he felt fortunate to have been entrusted with the title.

Robert's small apartment was relatively empty, although he preferred to think of it as uncluttered. The neutral white walls of the complex seemed to fuse with the gray tiled linoleum to produce an efficient and clean, though rather industrial, impression. Built through robotic labor, it was designed to be as methodical as possible. As with any important person's living space, the centerpiece of the room was Robert's award shelf, which was placed prominently above his fireplace. Numerous medals, trophies and plaques lined the mantelpiece, taking up a considerable amount of area and inadvertently compensating for the otherwise lack of decor. Robert often enjoyed spending time viewing the shelf and revisiting his past achievements, but the laurels were left unnoticed as he prepared to leave for work.

Forcing the door shut, the powerful man began his short walk to the office building where he was expected. Though his pace was quick, Robert did not fail to note the perfect symmetry of each robotically designed residential unit he passed. Each was equipped with the same

rectangular sky-blue door, the same set of large paned windows, and the same row of deep green hedges. The sameness of his world was duly noted and appreciated, as it ensured equality in a mathematically precise fashion. Four hedges, two windows, one door, these were the natural laws of the world. Even the outbursts of rain seemed to follow a delicate pattern, with each drop spaced evenly from the next.

It was in this mood of harmony that Robert entered the lobby of his work building. Standing within were two of his associates: Stephen Townsend and Howard Williams.

“Mr. Blackwell!” Stephen greeted him warmly, his lanky frame and excitable temperament creating a slightly overbearing atmosphere. “I heard you’ve won another award. The Seal of Mechanical Superiority, correct?”

Robert nodded proudly. “Yes, it was quite an honor.” It certainly was. Only the most important and skilled workers received this award.

Howard grinned and voiced his agreement. Smaller than the two other men, he made up for his stature with arresting orange hair and an assertive nature.

“Very impressive! Congratulations, Robert.”

“I’m sure you’ve heard of Howard’s new accolade as well. He’s been given the Medallion of Technical Capability!” Stephen remarked brightly, feeling fortunate to be around such important members of society.

“Incredible, Howard!” Robert commended his co-worker.

Howard smiled slightly. “An incredible award, yes, but no more amazing than your achievement. I also believe Stephen has been hiding something from us. You were given the Trophy of Scientific Aptitude last week, correct?”

Pleased that his accomplishments had not gone unnoticed, Stephen responded to his friends.

“Yes, I was! I got it as a reward for my hard work over the past

couple of weeks.”

“Well, gentlemen, it looks like we’ve all got something to be proud of today.” Robert replied. “But if we want to keep up the good work, we’d better go upstairs.”

The men said farewell, and proceeded towards their offices, each thoroughly motivated with the idea of further awards. Robert, Stephen and Howard were all extremely important and respected workers, and therefore had no qualms about working diligently.

As Robert approached his workplace, he noticed a single crisp sheet of paper on his desk. The paper itself was unusual, as technology had long superseded its historical purpose. No regular business was ever conducted using it anymore. However, for important reasons regarding important people, it was occasionally utilized.

Immediately, Robert knew its purpose. The paper contained his technologically calculated performance report. Every few months, the report would arrive and inform him of his career progress. He always enjoyed viewing the evaluation, and so was enthused to see its presence.

The first detail Robert noticed about the paper was a single word printed in large font at the top of the page: EXCEPTIONAL. He immediately grinned, knowing that his performance had once again been outstanding. Moving down the paper, he viewed several statistics regarding his work. Hours worked: 522. Puzzles solved: 2192. Promotions received: 7. These numbers truly reflected Robert’s skill, and so the man was pleased to be able to use them as justification for his significance. There was no doubt in his mind that this letter would be framed and become the centerpiece of his awards shelf, but for now, he focused on his work.

Once entering his computer, Robert noticed there were several mechanical problems that had to be dealt with. The technology that caused the world to function was never completely reliable, and it was only due to hard working people like Robert that it was fixed.

In this way, Robert liked to think that he was superior to any robotic or mechanical component.

Robert selected the first task to be done. A short description popped onto the screen which he quickly read.

“Solve the following problem to advance.”

A simple graphic soon appeared on the screen. Small, blank squares arranged in a seemingly random pattern, it soon became clear that this was a crossword puzzle. Robert had completed many problems similar to this one, and relaxed in his chair as the first command appeared.

“1 DOWN: RIVER EMBANKMENT.”

The high ranking man considered the words on his computer as he attempted to formulate an answer. The on-screen graphic provided only five squares to fill, so Robert knew the answer would contain five letters. His years of study had competently educated him on this endeavour. He thought deeply for several moments, then quickly typed the answer into the keyboard.

“LEVEE.” The word spurred an anecdotal story from his mind, something about a monarch and his subjects, but he quickly ignored the thought. There was work to be done.

The five squares quickly filled with the letters, and Robert inwardly praised himself. All squares would soon be filled, the problems would soon be fixed, and it would be fixed solely because of his talents. The machines and technologies that provided him with everything were helpless, and only functioned because of him.

Yet, as Robert sat, satisfied, the machines and technologies of his world continued to process and design and build by themselves, neither helped nor hindered by his efforts. His work and worth were no more substantial than a thin sheet of paper, and yet, he was still no less important than any other man or woman on the planet. Just as every piece of technology before him, Robert and his companions had outlived their use.

Short Story

Grades 11 & 12

POETRY
WRITING ART
PHOTOGRAPHY


**OUR OWN
EXPRESSIONS**

Blood Brothers

by Philip Darby

First Place

I awoke. My watch indicated that I'd only been dozing off for about ten minutes. It was hard to get real sleep as the walls of this plane seemed thinner than our bedsheets back at base. Craning my neck, I looked around the crowded cabin which was full of nervous men who hoped they'd see their next meal. A sharp voice rang from the front, ordering us to stand in formation. We were close to our target. Single file, we strapped on our parachutes and prepared to jump. Bronco, the biggest guy in the division, stood in front of me, his large figure blocking my view of the jumpmaster. This didn't matter; however, as an artillery shell ripped through the fuselage of our craft at that instant.

It would be wrong to say I fell out of the plane as it had technically fallen out from under me. The explosion was numbing, and now I, plummeting towards the pitch black ground, groped for the pull cord. Within seconds I found it and jolted up as my parachute deployed. I had nothing to base my altitude of off except the increasing volume of German artillery. Looking up, I saw the sky filled with flashes of light and burst of flame. Plane after plane soared over, abandoning their contents and veering around, hoping to escape the barrage unscathed.

My feet hit the ground and I tumbled into an empty field. The brisk sea air communicated to me my close proximity to the coast, where my objective lay. Hurrying across the field, I drew nearing to a ridge which obstructed my view of the water. An explosion shattered the silence as I dropped to the ground. Most other people in this situation would try to leave the area as fast as possible, but I crawled towards it.

As part of the 101st Airborne Division of the US Army, my objective was to ready the beaches for a massive invasion the next day. Part of this entailed disabling a large German gun placement near the coastline. As I crested the ridge, the menacing construction came into view. It

was bigger than I expected, its ominous silhouette lit up by moonlight. Edging closer, I heard footsteps coming my way.

Expecting part of my squad, I raised my head to see the unwelcome sight of a German soldier. Before I could un-holster my sidearm he recognized a threat and yelled something in German while he pounced on me, wresting the pistol out of my hand. Suddenly, two hands reached from behind and grabbed my jacket collar, pulling me into the nearby fortification as I kicked and screamed for my comrades. The heavy door shut, echoing through the structure, and I felt myself being dragged deeper into the heart of the building.

My hand reached out and grasped a metal stair rail until a heavy foot came down on my wrist. Pain shot through my arm and I recoiled. The soldier dragging me spoke quietly to his fellow German, they were arguing about something, probably whether to kill me or not. We stopped moving and a light flickered on. I was in a small, damp room with concrete walls and no visible windows; however, the door leading outside was in view at the top of a flight of stairs. I began to formulate an escape plan until the German who had been dragging me let me go, removed his pistol from his side and promptly shot me in the leg. This took the attention off my broken hand as I screamed in agony from the pain. The shot echoed in the small space, deafening any other sound.

"Sollten wir ihn hier lassen?" one soldier asked the other. I knew only a few German words; part of our basic training. He was asking where I should be left. This put me at ease as I knew killing me was out of the picture. My leg throbbed in pain and I tried to hide my wincing.

"Ja. I erhalten Hans, ihn zu beobachten." This time I didn't understand the words, but both soldiers left. I sat myself up against the wall and examined my leg. The shot hit my calf, and the bone was still intact, but blood was now soaking my pant leg. Soon, I heard running footsteps echo down a hallway and a young German appeared. His red cheeks admitted to the cold inside the dark pathways, but his stature and appearance were those of a handsome young man, no older than me. He approached, bandage in hand, and knelt down beside me to dress my wounds. I watched him for a moment, examining his mannerisms. He seemed like a boy, not a soldier trained to kill.

"Do you speak English?" I asked, wincing as he tightened the now crimson cloth. He looked up at me and I could see fear in his eyes. This put me at ease; I wasn't the only one afraid.

"Yes," he replied, "but not good." he quickly shifted his gaze back to my wound. The artillery gun above us fired and the whole structure vibrated. The German was frightened by this and pulled hard on the bandage which hurt, but I made no sound.

"What is your name?" I inquired. He looked at me, as though he misunderstood my question, until realization swept over his face.

"Hans. My name is Hans." Again, he returned to his work. This seemed like an interrogation except I was asking all the questions.

"Have you been fighting for a long time?" I asked. This time he did not look up.

"No, I don't want it. I don't like war." His hands trembled as he answered.

"Don't we all," I said, sitting more relaxed, hoping to lighten the mood. But he continued.

"I want to go home. I want to be away from this place. I want to see my mother." His head rose and I thought I saw tears welling in his eyes, but it was hard to see in the room. Quickly he snapped back to the present. His head shot down, he wiped his eyes, and finished dressing my leg. Standing up, he looked at the ground.

"It's done." He then turned around, without looking at me, and walked towards the main hallway. Suddenly, the door I had been dragged through earlier burst open, and three American soldiers entered. Before the young German was able to take cover, two bullets ripped through his chest, and he fell lifeless to the ground.

"He's here!" one of the soldiers yelled, presumably speaking about me. The three men rushed down the stairway and hall as more gunshots erupted. A medic entered and came to my side, helping me to my feet. As I limped towards the stairs, I looked back at the body of my German captor. His blood pooled with mine on the floor, his lifeless eyes looking straight through me. I saw myself in them. I hated war. I didn't want to be here. I wanted to go home.

The Cure

by Kalyn Jones

Second Place

It was done. It was finally done. After five years of painstaking research, development, and testing, the cure was finally finished. Dr. Imogen Black had finally created a cure for Lumio Vibriocosis; the fatal disease that had already claimed the lives of about 2.63 billion people worldwide.

Dr. Black, looked at the little white lab rat wriggling in her hands. Wagging its tail back and forth, pink nose sniffing furiously, its tiny paws slapping at the air. It was the first living thing to be cured of the disease, and it had no idea. Its small mind couldn't comprehend the magnitude of the scientific breakthrough that had just occurred within it. She placed it back in its small glass cage and took out the 1 liter bottle of serum that had cured it: #7859.

Imogen sat down in a swivel chair and looked around the lab. She had spent countless hours in this lab, and had memorized the layout. The east wall was filled top-to-bottom and end-to-end with square glass lab rat cages. On the west wall, there was a ten foot by ten foot refrigerator/freezer where serums and specimens were kept. The south wall was where all of the lab equipment (beakers, test tubes, Bunsen burners, pipettes, centrifuges, etc.) was kept. In the middle of the lab were islands where experiments were conducted and formulas were made.

Dr. Imogen had lost at least two hundred nights of sleep trying to create the cure, and the heavy dark circles under eyes showed it. She had gone through several thousand lab rats testing previous serums and vaccines only to watch as they all succumbed to the disease in the same slow, painful, grotesque way. First, they would develop a high fever. Then, their veins would light up purple, blue,

and finally green from the bioluminescent bacteria within them. And finally, their luminescent blood would stream from their eyes, nose, and mouth and they would writhe in agony as they slowly bled to death. And infected rats would infect more by coughing and contact with the blood. The death of each rat seemed to mock her and plunge her into a hopeless despair.

“Never again,” Imogen thought “Never again would people have to watch their loved ones bleed out, or report them to the Diseased Persons Removal Team and watch as men in green HAZMAT suits carried them away, never to be seen again. Never again would diseased, bloody bodies, be piled high in mass graves and burned to prevent the spread of infection.”

Dr. Black grabbed the one Liter bottle of serum #7859, exited the lab, took off her HAZMAT suit in the decontamination chamber and took a quick shower. She rushed to her office with the serum in hand and locked the door. She booted up her Apple Air Desktop Pro 16 and printed off all of her research and the formula used to make serum #7859. She also saved the notes and formula to her external hard drive. She was still ecstatic about her discovery. She had single handedly cured a rat of Lumio Vibriocosis. She had created the very thing that could save humanity from extinction!

Imogen looked around her office, while she was waiting for her files to save. Her office was very sparsely decorated. Two white leather chairs, an entire wall was lined with white book shelves overflowing with books about medical and scientific discoveries, and books about various diseases and ailments. She had a small 5-gallon fish tank with a beta fish that had its own castle to sleep in. Her white mahogany desk was very tidy and organized.

She heard a knock at her office door. Acting on impulse, she hid her serum and research. She closed her research on her computer. She hit a button on her desk that remotely unlocked her office door.

“Come in,” she chimed.

Her colleague Matthew White strode in. “What are you doing here so

late?" he said "As if I have to ask."

"Oh, nothing."

"I think you should go home and get some sleep. I know you want to beat this epidemic: to save humanity and you will. But working yourself into the ground isn't helping anyone. And even if you don't find a cure, if we don't find a cure, at least we tried. Am I right? It's not our job to fix this. I mean it is our job, but it's not our responsibility. We shouldn't exhaust ourselves. Besides, it's not like we're the only ones looking for a cure. There are pharmacologists and biologists all over the globe."

"Okay, I get it. I'll get some sleep. But what are you doing here at 3am?" Imogen interrupted.

"Just came to check on my lab rats. They're all glowing, bleeding and dying. We'll have to reorder some more soon. Well, good night," Matthew said and strolled out of her office.

Imogen sat in her swivel chair, thinking. Why hadn't she told him about the cure? Why hasn't she tweeted to the world that she had created their salvation? Why hadn't she emailed her research and formula to every pharmaceutical company in the world so they could start production? Wasn't this her goal for the past 5 years?

"Do I want to save them?" she asked herself quietly.

Imogen gathered her research, and the serum, and put it in her satchel. Dr. Black wiped every trace of the cure off her computer and shut it down. She fed her fish, turned out the lights in her office, locked the door and left the building.

She got in her car and started to drive home.

Just then, her phone started blaring 'Uptown Funk'. "Incoming call from 'The Monkey who Signs my Paycheck' her Bluetooth said.

"Answer call," Imogen said.

"Hey Imogen, it's me Alvin. I've got some bad news. Matthew's cracked; he locked himself in the lab and injected himself with Vibriocosis. That lab is being quarantined. You won't be able to work in the lab for a

while; I hope you didn't leave anything important in there. I know you two were close. We need to get into his computer. His password hint is: Imogen's favorite restaurant."

Imogen thought back to Friday night dinners with Matthew. They'd always go to Kuro Neko Sushi.

"Kuro Neko Sushi," Imogen said flatly. She gripped the steering wheel tightly.

"Thanks that worked. See you tomorrow--"

"No you won't," Imogen said, cutting him off. "I quit. I'll be back for my things."

"What?!" Alvin's voice was shocked. "What do you mean you qui--"

Imogen hung up. "I'm sorry Matthew," she whispered to herself. "But I've made my decision." A tear rolled down her cheek as she continued to drive home.

When Imogen got home to her apartment she went straight to the wall safe in her closet. She entered the password and opened it. She placed in it, her research, hard drive, the serum, and the locket Patrick had given her for Christmas. She locked the safe. Imogen decided to keep these things for the memories. She exited the closet and climbed into bed and drifted off into a fitful slumber.

Left Behind

by William Lewellen

Third Place

The water moved below me, swirling, switching from blue to black and far below, I saw the fear and agony reflected in my eyes. I'd visited this same spot every night for the past two months, and finally I had found one spot where I felt peace in this God-forsaken world. I'm surprised more people don't come out here. In my opinion it's the most beautiful place in the world. Then again I'm glad I'm alone. Still I wish he were here to see this with me. Wearing one of those sad smiles you use when you have to do something so you don't cry, I think of his broken promises I'd long forgiven as I light a cigarette and disappear into my mind.

Flashes of green shoot past as we sprint headlong into the forest running from something that we can't hear or see but we feel it right behind us all the same. We go faster and faster as we feel it catching up, knowing that if it catches us there is nothing more we can do. And then my vision clears as I see him sprawled in the dirt, laughing right in my face.

It's funny how the times I remember best are the times when I'm not supposed to be able to remember anything. When I'm already 3-4 glasses through whatever makes my demons disappear and gives me some sense of peace. The times where we laughed the hardest over nothing and avoided thinking about anything too serious. But without him getting through those glasses isn't fun anymore, it's a necessity. a necessity to keep whatever sanity I have left in my mind. He said he was doing better and I didn't need to worry anymore. He was smiling more that week but I could still see the pain behind his dark brown eyes. As he left that Monday I warned him not to do anything stupid and I still shudder at his reply, "It's only stupid to those who can't feel the pain that I do." I understood. I really did. I feel that same pain.

But still before he left I made him promise to live for me at least one more night. And so I went home hoping for a miracle to destroy the fear and pain he felt. Making pleas for staying alive sound much better when you tell them to others than when you tell them to yourself though. You always think the other person has so much to live for and to hope for. I checked my phone when I got home that afternoon and he had sent me a text saying that he was going to be all right that night. I wish I hadn't believed him. You see we had made an agreement. I would live for him and he would live for me. We had promised to grow up together, to go see the world, but now it seemed all he could see was the darkness that had poisoned his head.

That early January evening is still my clearest memory. I got in the shower hoping that water will cleanse my mind as well as my blood. I took longer than usual, wondering as the water poured down my face, how miserable drowning could really be? Even before I checked my phone a sense of deep foreboding hung over me. Almost a premonition where I knew something bad was going to happen before it did. And there in my mind I see the last words he wrote me, "I'm sorry. I slashed my wrists open. I love you bro."

The message had been sent an hour earlier and even as I called the police I already believed it was too late.

I didn't even go to the funeral. I didn't want to see all those people crying that didn't care until it was too late. They didn't want to help him get better until he was too far gone. I paid my respects in my own way pouring a bottle of his favorite whiskey right down to the deep. But I wish he could have seen more than his own pain. I wish he could see what he had meant to all those people that loved him. I don't think his mom has had a day she hasn't begun and ended crying yet. His youngest sister just can't understand. He was always so sweet and caring. She hadn't known anything was wrong. His father was in shock. He had no idea his son was going through any of this. Everything had looked fine on the outside. But then again he hadn't really taken the time to get to know his son had he. And then there is me, living

everyday trying to die. Hoping that if I smoke and drink enough that by itself will kill me. But not suicide no. I won't consider that. If he had seen the effects it had, I don't think he would have either. You see when you kill yourself, you aren't the only one who dies. Your mother who watched her baby boy laugh for the first time and take his first steps, now only sees him in pictures and in dreams. She dies as well only slower. Everybody who loves you, they die as well, the light and life you brought to them will never be lit again.

And so to you I say, "I forgive you," but I won't follow you. I love you and I hate you. I understand, but I hate what you have done to me. I won't say I'm better than you, your demons just ran faster than mine did. And so for now I'll keep my demons company, and keep hoping for the day they decide to pack up and leave. I'll carry on without you and live life as a dream, a nightmare from which I never wake up.

I stamp out the cigarette and give one more glance upward where I know you are looking down on me as I head home.

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