

**THEODORE GARRISON CREATIVE WRITING AWARDS
WESTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CREATIVE WRITING FESTIVAL 2005**

POETRY

First place:

Casey Johnson, Macomb High School – “O, Vulgar Camaraderie, (rise up and take action)”

Second place:

Kara Brown, Pekin High School – “Civil Rights Movement, Chapter 27”

Third place:

Desiree Craig, Pleasant Valley High School – “Deceiving Mirror”

Honorable Mention:

Cody Morris, Pleasant Valley High School – “Dream Catcher”

Doug Addy, Pekin Community High School – “Slave to Society”

Phillip Schissler, Pleasant Valley High School – “Telephone Poles”

Christina Richards, Macomb High School – “Evening Roses”

Michael Bloom, Macomb High School – “Liberation?”

Jessica Miller, Southeastern High School – “The Darkness”

Stacy Hankins, Rochester High School – “Makeup”

Rita Trentadue, Pekin Community High School – “Shattered Inside”

Megan Christianson, Pekin Community High School – “Love Chromatics”

Steve Long, V.I.T. High School – “Change of a Number”

FICTION

First Place:

Angela Pham, Pekin Community High School – “Water, Water, Everywhere”

Second Place:

Katie Gettinger, Macomb High School – “Sins of Omission”

Third Place:

Julia Mindeman, Macomb High School – “The Beach Family”

FICTION

Honorable Mention:

Shea Sims, Rochester High School – “Two-Dozen Eggs”
Phillip Schissler, Pleasant Valley High School – “Talking to Telephone Poles”
Georgia Leake, Macomb High School – “Through the Bathroom Door”
Christen Bradford, V.I.T. High School – “The Contest”
Allison McDaniel, Macomb High School – “My Mamma”
Jacob Upchurch, Rochester High School – “A Break into Reality”
Kyle Glaser, Macomb High School – “Ghosts of Summer”
Kara Brown, Pekin Community High School – “A Night Visitor”

CREATIVE NON-FICTION

First Place:

Christen Bradford, V.I.T. High School – “A Double Scoop”

Second Place:

Lauren Samuel, Rochester High School – “Average Joe, or Sneaky Pete
Extraordinaire?”

Third Place:

Lindsey Leach, Rochester High School – “A Tree from my Past”

Honorable Mention:

Nick Heller, V.I.T. High School – “Memories”
Makayla Trotter, Macomb High School – “What I Need to Know”
Alexis Wood, Southeastern High School – “Golden Years”

First Place Fiction

“Water, water, everywhere”

**Angela Pham
Pekin Community High School**

I can easily imagine dying of thirst; I am thirsty every day. I will do anything to feel a splash of pristine liquid against every inch of my flesh again, to smell the crispness of water and be able to do more than just quickly slide it past my parched lips and into my throat. I crave the feeling of water running down my bare body again, how clean and pure and fluid it would feel. I thirst for more.

Water is a necessity for life, and always will be, but it’s different now. As vital as it is for humans’ internal functions, we cannot let it touch our skin anymore. Nobody has really given a direct, factual explanation on why this occurred, but it happened overnight several years ago, and it seems there is still nothing we can do to change it.

It was almost humorous to witness, at first. It happened when I was about ten, and I remember is as clearly as everyone else. Every television station frantically reported millions of incidents in which water was suddenly reacting with skin like an acid. Apparently, we could still safely consume the water, but it couldn’t contact our outer skin. If water even briefly brushed the epidermis layer of the skin, it would induce an instant burning sensation; excessive water contact for as little as an hour or less could prove lethal. It was the most ridiculous, science-fiction idea to ever hit reality, and so it was several weeks before the entire population succumbed to the concept that their fountain of youth was now a dose of death.

Everyone was defiant, angry and helpless. Some people were in denial for months. Mothers would nonchalantly bathe their infants in little baby bathtubs and watch numbly as their children dissolved into the bubbles. Children would insist on swimming like normal kids would in the summer in inflatable wading pools that their parents would sheepishly blow up into deluxe polylatex coffins that sat dimly in the moist backyards, cradling a mass of liquid human and water. Beach junkies still rose at dawn to ride their last waves, eyeing the surf as though they honestly thought they’d make it far enough into the ocean to be able to stand atop a shark-shaped board and transcend the most glorious of the crashing waves. They would paddle out a few feet and let their board take over the slapping waves as they sank and melted into oneness with the water.

But we’ve all learned now, I guess, to accept and adapt and move on and persevere like good citizens of whatever country we may occupy because we’re all plagued by this. But I can’t move on, and I can’t forget how it was before. I will always thirst for more.

Now kids can’t sip at the water fountain without parental supervision, car washes have gone out of business, and I have to wash my hair and my body and my teeth with gritty powders instead of liquids. I wake up every morning to hear the local Seattle meteorologist announce the rising humidity rate with a glum sigh, and report the forty-four percent chance of rain followed by a list of “Don’t do this or you’ll die” type warnings. Our weatherman may as well be the Surgeon General.

Every day I slip on my raincoat “just in case” and smear my pallid skin with Rainscreen 15, which only minimally protects you from the rain for 5 hours, no 15. I go to school and watch my former group of friends continue their lives like happy naïve imbeciles, as though they, like everyone else, have risen past this water-deprivation trauma. Every once in a while one of them will tentatively have a talk

with me and explain patiently to me that I need to get over it because it's just water and they're doing fine without it and why can't I get over it, why can't I move on. And I will nod and smirk and shrug and wait equally patiently for them to let me be because I know I will never accept the fact that water is forbidden for my skin, and all I want to do is swim in it.

I am just an angsty adolescent girl, I suppose. My mom thinks I'm still in some phase that I'll recover from by the time I'm 18 because she's heard about hyper-depressive, anxiety-stricken girls just like me on Dateline before and they're fine now. I tell her that they're only fine now because they killed themselves, and she can't argue because it's true. The suicide rates have never been higher, and here in Seattle it's become so common that the weatherman is also a sort of psychic death predictor. A rainstorm calls for a hundred-percent chance of at least one suicide per day, it seems, as people run out of their houses into flash flood streets and dive off of bridges into polluted waters. And a snow flurry can be worse because humans of assorted ages roll around in the standing snow until they too are frozen snowflakes of crystallized skin. Just more excuses for people to complain about the weather or any thing else, for that matter.

But I don't really want to end my life by drowning. If I every dive into water again, I want it to last forever.

I remember the last time I really felt water on my skin. It was during the period when nobody wanted to believe in the possibility of killer water, and so they didn't. I had run my fingers underneath the spout of the skin in that form of rebellion, defiantly but silently informing "the system" that I, too, did not believe them and would not deprive myself of the sensation of running water streaming between my fingers. Then the transparent liquid began burning and melting my skin like molten putty, and my only option was my reflex, jerking me away and never letting me contact it again. And then I became like everyone else, this bewildered and overwhelmed human that thought only to save her skin from the newly lethal water every day. But I never forgot, and I will never forget, that last touch of water.

Years continue on and this city of Seattle may as well be a drowning desert. There is all this lovely water being emptied from the sky so often and all we can do is hide from it. Sometimes it will just thunder and no rain will appear and the entire city will breathe a unison sigh of relief except me. I still think it feels empty and hollow without the accompanying rain, that redeeming cleansing downpour. And I feel empty without it.

Daily I return from school and sit in my room and quietly watch my pet iguana lull around his aquarium environment. He will stick his entire head into his plastic water dishes while I watch, then turn around and swipe the tips of his tail into it, only because he knows I am jealous. My days consist of this and only this: dwelling on the past and how it used to be, and envying my iguana's reptilian, water-resistant scales.

My brother, I think, suffers as much as I do, although we never talk about it. He is two years my elder and although we are not close, I know he feels the same way sometimes. I catch him looking out the front window while it rains, sullenly watching the droplets race each other down the glass. He will waste as many hours in front of the window as I waste in front of my iguana's aquarium, just remembering. He always loved to swim, and now he can only just hypnotize himself with the trail of tears the rain produces on the foggy windows. I want to talk to him and relate and console and understand but I never approach him. I suppose I don't want to interfere with his thoughts, and I let him remain as I trudge back to my room, my footsteps masked by the muted sound of softly falling rain from outside.

My iguana stares at me with trance-like eyes – not unlike my brother's actually. I imagine my eyes are now as green as the lizards' scales, as he creeps around the shallow water of his aquarium of waterfalls in cadence with the rain, spilling life into grass and death onto human skin.

I hear the front door open and I look up in a daze. The rain seems to close in and I open my bedroom door in time to see my mother rush to the front door. I blindly follow. She's softly but urgently calling my brother's name, but he's rushing out the door, barefoot and clothed only in a clear white shirt and shorts. He isn't walking or jogging or running but he is flying, his naked soles leaping into puddles and eagerly soaking in every drop of rain that clambers for his skin.

My mom and I both freeze at the entrance of the door, and we are aware that we are helpless victims once again, forced to accept this choice of fate. Instinctively I want to stop him, but I understand him more than ever now, as he plunges haphazardly into the rain. His determination is beautiful. To witness a suicide is so beautiful, I realize now, because it is the most elaborately courageous and bold death there is.

They say that you should always dance like nobody is watching you. My brother is dancing in the rain like death isn't even hugging his thighs. It seeps into his pores, scorches every portion of his skin, and the agony becomes evident in his eyes. Yet he is still joyous in his death, as his limbs melt and fall beneath him, letting his entire body sink into the water and soil and become muddy with it. He bathes in the glory of his death, thrusting his hands into the air with the last amount of strength he has, as though the sky is his savior and its rain is the blood of the Lamb. I watch numbly as he dissolves away into a fantastic bloody mosaic of lifeless, flesh-colored liquid.

My mom, standing next to me, has water in her own eyes, and she fumbles in her pocket for her tear suppressant pills before she starts crying and destroying her skin. She hands me one as well, but I don't need them. I feel no urge to cry, but I wish I did. I want to know what it feels like to cry again.

Days pass by in blur of sympathy cards and syrupy phone calls and I am bitter all over again. I no longer look at the lingering puddles outside and yearn to jump in them, but I like to glance inside them and see myself reflected and wonder if my brother's liquid skin is in there too. I still like to think I understand him.

On the way to his funeral it begins raining, and my mother curses as she flicks the windshield wipers on. Somehow they console me, the monotone slap, slap as they slick their squeegee blades rhythmically against the glass. They seem in as much of a trance as my mom and me.

Voices as monotone as the windshield wipers drone on at the funeral, and I ignore them as I walk to my brother's gravestone, where there is nothing beneath it except rain-drenched soil. It is simply tradition carried on to soothe the mourners' souls. Already there are flowers planted in the dirt, drinking the rainwater like nursing babies. I resist the temptation to uproot the plants, and I walk back to the car, waiting for it all to end.

From then on I visit the faux burial site with dutiful regularity, tending to it daily because mom feels it will help me move on. Nobody wants me to just sit and think; I must be constantly moving.

Daily I water his flowers, belligerently, punishing them with their drink of life by drowning them in it. I dump garden cans of water onto them until their stems are wilted and they flower no more, and their seeds die before they can re-plant themselves into the dead, empty soil.

Then I once again return home, to where rainstorms are massacres and water guns take more lives than pistols.

Second Place Fiction

“Sins of Omission”

**Katie Gettinger
Macomb High School**

I impatiently glanced down at my watch, desperately hoping that the hands might have moved on to some larger numbers since the last time I had checked. Unfortunately, only three minutes had past and I was still ten minutes early for the city bus. I took a seat on a bench near the bus stop, a little leery about the thought of having to stall until my transportation arrived. A pleasant looking young man on the bench looked up from his novel and smiled as I sat down, graciously scooting himself over to allow some room for me. He seemed warm and friendly, but I still felt uncomfortable having to sit and kill time while waiting for the bus. I had always been fond of punctuality, and patience was not one of my strongest virtues.

I heard a rustling of papers and I looked across the street, a poor sight awaiting me. An older man sat with his back against the decaying brick front of a building, taking his place amongst a pile of waste. With delicate, deliberate and concentrated motions, he stuffed wads of old, dirty newspaper into his stained and worn out garments in an attempt to insulate himself for the coming winter. A small shoebox sat on the sidewalk in front of him along with a tattered corner of cardboard that read, “Please be kind. I have to eat.” Looking at him gave me a sense of displeasure, so for the moment I turned away.

Like a creeping fog, several young boys appeared, slowly drifting towards the homeless man as he continued to concentrate upon his task. The boys were lean with finely chiseled faces, and a chilling look of evil mischief sparkled in their stony eyes and played upon their lips. They circled their prey like hyenas, cackling and snickering softly to each other as they closed in. Every motion was slow, casual, and precise, and soon the old man took notice of the slithering company and he halted in his work, his eyes darting to and fro as he surveyed each of his foes. He set down his papers and frowned in confusion, finally pointing to his handmade sign after several long seconds of silence, thinking perhaps the boys would be kind enough to leave some spare change.

In an instant they were upon him ripping at his clothes and pummeling his frail body. Hollow thuds and muffled shouts seeped into the air as fists rained down upon the old man’s back. For a second I looked around, wondering if anyone would put a stop to these young hooligans and save the poor man. However, I realized that the only people in the general vicinity were the young man sitting next to me and myself.

I have to do something, I thought to myself, I have to go save him. I repeated it over and over in my head until suddenly I realized that I was still sitting on the bench, watching the fight with a drooping jaw. While half of my body screamed at me to go help my fellow man and to rescue this innocent soul who just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, the other half of me stayed firmly planted to the park bench.

I need to step up. That man is in trouble, and I am the only one who can save him right now. What if his life depends on me? Perhaps the boys will beat him until his heart goes out, and his only chance of survival will be my intervention. No, I think to myself, more likely the boys would let him live. They would let him live out of spite, just to let the old man be forever ashamed of himself and perhaps even traumatized. Couldn’t I put an end to it right here? I could simply yell, “Hey, you there!

Cut that out! Leave him alone!” and perhaps the boys would scatter. It would be the right thing to do, wouldn't it? Then why am I still sitting here, my mouth dry and buttoned shut?

Doubt raced within my mind like freight train, plowing through any thought that stood in its way and cutting all the cohesiveness out of my plans. The boys could have reasons for attacking the man, I supposed, trying to rationalize the situation. Perhaps he had stolen their money or he is some sort of criminal, and those boys are attempting a citizen's arrest. No, I think to myself, the only citizen's arrest that should be taking place here is one I would make through my intervention into the fight. Those boys have no reason to attack the homeless man; they're simply hooligans who are out looking for a cheap thrill and a rush of adrenaline. Someone should put them in their place; what they're doing is immoral.

Someone, but why me? Though I see myself strongly disagreeing with the fight, I can't convince my body to move. It isn't any of my business, so I shouldn't interrupt, even if the boys are wrong. Though my heart wails “Go! Go! Help him! Save him!” my mind says “Stay put, this has nothing to do with you; this is not your fight.” Perhaps my mind is correct and my heart is merely being irrational and quick to judge. Besides, do I really want to extend myself out to someone like him? Sure, what the boys are doing is unlawful, but does the man really deserve to be saved?

The question is whether I should really risk my own neck to try to help someone of his standings. If I tried to get out there and stop the fight, who's to say that they boys won't turn on me like a pack of wild dogs? I would have to be a fool to take a risk like that. Why should I try to race back into the burning building to try to save the complete stranger, and only end up killing myself? This isn't my fight.

Wait, I thought, what about the man next to me? I wondered why he wasn't leaping up to the rescue of the homeless man. My bench mate outweighed me by at least thirty pounds, and he was, after all, a testosterone filled male. Shouldn't he be the one to break up the fight? He would be much more efficient than me. I watched as he just sat there, staring at the fight with a look of pity gleaming in his eyes. He made no motions to get up and help or to reprimand the boys.

Once more I thought of shouting, perhaps just to distract the attackers long enough for the old man to crawl to safety. But then what would happen? Once they discovered that they had lost their prey, would they then descend upon me? Would my bench mate then perhaps try to defend me, or would he simply stare, his jaw slack, as I was beaten to a bloody pulp? Was my worth to him anymore than the homeless man on the street? Whatever the case, I couldn't break the silence that hovered over the bench. Still, I couldn't stand watching it go on.

I turned my head and began to read the front page of the newspaper in the dispenser next to the bench. I listened as the struggle wended down, and by the time I had read the first column of the paper it sounded like the boys had dispersed. The city bus groggily pulled up, and with a hiss it came to a stop and opened its doors. As I made my way to the bus and began to enter, I heard a soft, muffled sound. I looked across the street and saw the old man, his scraggly face buried in his hands. He was softly weeping to himself. I heard his whimpers and I swallowed hard, about to walk over and comfort him when suddenly my thoughts were interrupted.

“Hey, buddy, you getting' on or what?” The bus driver leaned over the door lever and stared at me as I paused with one foot inside and one foot outside the bus. I came to my senses and remembered how long I had been waiting for the bus, and slowly, hesitantly, I climbed the stairs and found myself a seat. I sank down and sighed heavily, and finally my heart and mind agreed with each other and let my entire body feel the heavy impression of guilt.

Third Place Fiction

“The Beach Family”

**Julia Mindeman
Macomb High School**

Mommy took us to the beach because, the night before, Frank with the greasy hair had stayed the night in Mommy’s room and left her some money.

So, the next morning she pulled us into the swimsuits some kind soul from the Lutheran Ministries for the Underprivileged had brought over and made up her face.

My suit was too small and too flowered and Bethy’s ruffled skirt sagged down around her behind.

“Come on honeys!” cried Mommy, “We’re going to drive to the beach. Madeline, get your sister in the car.”

I picked Beth up around her waist and dragged her outside to the Anglia.

“It’s okay Bethy,” I whispered, “We’re going to the beach.” Bethy just growled at me and crawled to the backseat floor, hitching up her ruffled skirt. I slid in on top of her and slammed the door while Mommy put on more lipstick. I guess the heat was getting to her.

“Won’t this be fun darlings!” she yelped.

“Yes Mommy,” I said and put my hand over Beth’s mouth’ I could feel her brewing up another growl. I picked up the barf bucket and held it to my chest tightly, just in case, and Mommy pulled the car out of the driveway.

Bethy clutched my leg, and I clutched the bucket, staring at the giraffes that tottered around on its white paint. They looked as carsick as I. For twenty minutes, my stomach lurched with the car as Mommy managed to drag it, limping, to the beach parking lot.

She put on more lipstick and said, “Madeline, bring the splash bucket. We can make sand castles!”

She was using the fake happy voice that didn’t even fool Bethy. Bethy looked at me and I took her hand, keeping a firm grip on the barf bucket. We crawled out of the car and careened down to the beach the way you have to when you’re holding hands with a little kid. Beth collapsed at the foot of a palm tree and Mommy came rushing out of a little store I hadn’t realized she’d entered.

“Girls, look! I bought you something.”

She kneeled in the sand beside us and laid a paper bag in the shade. I knew she wanted me to ask.

“What is it?” I asked.

She froze dramatically and then pulled out a big paper fish.

“A fish?” I said “A fish?”

“It’s a kite.” She said uncomfortably and pulled out her lipstick. I suppose I ruined the surprise.

“There’s no wind,” I said, “It’s not going to fly.”

“Don’t be silly!” Mommy said quickly. “Of course it will!”

It was too late. Beth scrunched up her face and began to cry softly like she does.

“No,” I said, “It won’t.”

Mommy gave up and sat back against the tree. I shook Beth off of my arm and walked down the beach just a little. My eyes were cast down and I didn’t see the apple flying at my shins until it hit me. I looked up sharply with my fighting face and saw a family instantly stop laughing. There was a father at a grill with a jolly expression. There was a blond mother with a wrinkleless forehead and a perfectly made up face. There were three children, two boys and a girl, lounging on the sand with their hands full of fruit. Their swimsuits shone with newness.

“Be careful Patrick,” said the mother with a small smile. To me, she said, “You okay?”

I didn’t answer.

The father turned back to the grill and the mother to laughing and romping about with the children, but I stood there for a long time, staring, until the kids started to stare back.

I sighed and turned to walk back but tripped over a large ruffled lump that sobbed in the sand. Beth looked up at me through her tears and her snot-covered face.

“All right.” I said softly and took her hand. We walked back to Mommy’s tree where she sat looking flustered and digging through her makeup bag.

“Darlings,” she said fake-happily, “How would you like it if Frank and I got married and we all became a real family?”

I was about to answer “Yes, Mommy,” when Beth growled.

I closed my mouth and took Beth’s hand and we turned away. Mommy kept blathering on about Frank, but I wasn’t listening anymore. I was hiking up Beth’s skirt and looking down, where the tiniest breeze had caught the corner of the fish kite’s tail and made it flutter over the sand.

Honorable Mention Fiction

“Two-Dozen Eggs”

**Shea Sims
Rochester High School**

The road seemed to boil in the hot, eastern Kentucky sun. Dirt and dust flew into the air, provoked by small breaths of wind, a cruel taunt since they barely provided relief from the dog days of August. Summer had been particularly nasty that year, ushering in a whole new meaning to the word uncomfortable, and as Anna Brown put one foot in front of the other, feeling the hot grit between her toes, she was certain she now knew what it would feel like to be in Hell.

Not that Anna would have gone to Hell, that is. She had always prided herself on being a good girl. She went to church every Sunday, helped out around the house, and, unlike most of the children in Lindsey, she refused to giggle at the minister’s ugly mole that stuck out from the side of his face like an ear of corn and waggled every time he got worked up preaching about the “heathen scum!” and “blazing inferno of damnation!” No. Not Willie Brown’s girl. She was a gem.

Anna smiled to herself, feeling a great sense of pride well up in her chest, pushing pleasantly against her rib cage. It trickled down to her fingers and toes, filling them with a buzz of cool self-confidence. Her daddy had even entrusted her with a week’s worth of eggs and a day’s worth of milk. Her family’s income was nestled safely under her arm and slapping against her thigh, creating an angry welt through her thin, cotton dress. She didn’t mind the pain, though. The Adam’s boy wasn’t even allowed to drive his daddy’s tractor, and he was sixteen! She was only twelve, and until the crop came in those two-dozen eggs and carefully sealed bucket of milk was what her mamma used to buy groceries and animal feed with.

The road suddenly groaned, sending up puffs of dust long before the tell tale cloud of debris from a wagon was seen in the distance. On a normal day Anna would have kept walking and enjoyed the burst of air that went by, ignoring the dirt that was kicked into her eyes and mouth by the wheels, but with such precious cargo she stepped off the road and onto the dry, thirsty grass along the edge, cradling the eggs in her arms like a babe.

The wagon stopped long before she thought it would, sitting back on its hunches with dust billowing out from under it like some medieval monster. The wood creaked and moaned its annoyance at the sudden jolt, but the master of the cart let out such a whoop that the wagon stilled.

“Aye!” he yelled again. “Is that you, Anna Brown?” An old, lean face finally sprang from the dirt as Anna moved closer. Mr. McFay smiled down on her, his gnarled fingers flexing around the reins. “Ah, so it is. Goin’ into town?”

Anna nodded eagerly, eggs still clutched to her breast.

“I’d give you a ride, Girl, but I just came from town and my horse needs a-waterin’,” said Mr. McFay. “I can’t believe your papa’s lettin’ you go alone, anyways. Some unsavory fellas came in not too long ago. Awful lookin’, they were.” Beady, gray eyes sucked back into his wrinkled brow. “Depression driven, ya’ know. Desperate.”

“Aw, com’on,” Anna said. “My daddy knows who to trust, and he trusts me. Got no brothers. I’m as good as a boy. I can take care of myself.”

Honorable Mention Fiction

“Talking to Telephone Poles

**Phillip Schissler
Pleasant Valley High School**

It’s an early spring morning out in the country, and everything looks clear and focused. I’m walking down a gravel road, surrounded by ground that will give birth to some kind of plant in the next few months. The air feels a little cold, making me aware that I’m walking through it.

The telephone poles on the side of the road walk beside me. They look like big humans, with their backs straight and their arms outstretched, reaching for my hand. Some of the poles stand tall, looking forwards and backwards, sending beauty and filth (or beautiful filth) along their black cables. Further down the road a pole stands snapped in half at the middle, disconnected and curtsying to its own apathy. The rest stand, but their black cables send nothing but static and butter knives.

I hear the roar of a vehicle approaching from behind, and turn to see a white telephone repair truck driving towards me, polluting the air with dust and hope. The repairman pulls up next to me. On the side of the door “*Solutions Inc.*” is printed in dark red. He rolls down the passenger side window, turns his head and asks, “Do ya’ need a ride?” I reply, “That would be nice, I’m going into town to get some things.” He replies, “Alright. I can drop ya’ off. I need to stop and do a few repairs though.” I say, “That’s fine. Thanks.” The repairman radiates a comforting, secure presence. I open the door, and climb in. The interior closes in on me, an overwhelming brown. It smells hot and musty. I turn to look at the repairman. He meets my gaze and, and says, “My name’s Theo. Glad I could help you out.” I reply, “I appreciate it, my name is Paul.” I star mindlessly out the window for a few moments, then turn again to absolve my pilot, Theo. Looking into his eyes I can see magnificent galaxies exploding with calculated bursts of light, and time before time existed. Looking at his muscular arm, I can see one million years of evolution squirming and growing under his tight sleeve. A harmonica peeks curiously out of his shirt pocket. On his shirt there is a picture of model, parked outside the mall in her Mercedes Benz convertible. An outline of a handgun stares at me from his right jeans pocket. Paint stains boldly dot his jeans like stars from the pockets down. Books populate the floor of his truck like lily pads on a pond of brown carpet.

We pull up to the first pole. I cautiously say, “Nothing looks wrong with it.” Theo replies, “This one has some internal problems goin’ on.” He opens the truck door, and walks around the front of the truck towards the pole. I notice his eyes again. He walks up to the pole; leaning slightly forward he bows his head, and puts his right hand against the pole. My window is still down, and I can hear him mumbling some words. It looks like he’s praying. I start to feel a little uncomfortable, and wonder if he’s actually fixing anything. He takes his hand off the pole and slowly walks back to the truck, and we drive to the next pole in silence.

Honorable Mention Fiction

“Through the Bathroom Door”

**Georgia Leake
Macomb High School**

Dan woke the next morning feeling empty. His hands were still clenched tightly to the pillow that he held close to his body. His eyes felt tight, and when he shut them they felt thick. He must have cried himself to sleep. Rolling over, Dan looked around his bedroom; this was the room that he had grown up in his whole entire life. He began to remember everything, so many memories in this house. He looked at his closet door partially open, a hooded sweatshirt hung from the doorknob. He remembered the many nights as a 5 year old when he would be waiting in his bed for his mom to tuck him. Hearing something rustle in the closet, he would scream and cover his head. A figure would jump out.

“Go to sleep silly!!” she would yell, jumping on the tiny screaming mound of sheets, kissing him all over. She would sit on the edge of his bed and say,

“I love you a million.”

“I love you a million and one.”

“I love you a million gazillion.”

Dan smiled remembering how they would keep going back and forth until he finally would get tired and say,

“We love each other equal!”

As Dan lay there in bed, he thought of how fast she went; how for 17 years of his life, she had been the best mom that she could be. Everything he was, everything he had grown up to be was because of her. He wondered if she knew that when she went, if she knew how much she had meant to him.

Honorable Mention Fiction

“The Contest”

**Christen Bradford
V.I.T. High School**

Betty is her best friend, and her biggest competition. She is my grandmother, and I, well, I am just a pawn in one of their many battles. The reason they get along so poorly is the same reason the positive end of a magnet repels another positive. Both women are in their early sixties, loud, obnoxious, and lazy. They have tried to outdo each other for as long as I have know them; always complaining about the other one, but acting disgustingly sweet as they show off a new kitchen, or trinket. They specialize in

offering put-downs that drip with honey from their voices such as, “My, you are such a trooper for living in this house,” or, “Your children make up for their lack of education by working so hard.”

To put how serious these on-going competitions are to these ladies into perspective, my grandma once spent over \$200 on an antique pickle jar, with the sole intent of making Betty jealous. Except, she would never tell Betty she bought it. No, that simply wouldn't do. She told her that it was a gift from her mother-in-law. Free. If there is anything that gets to Betty, it's money. When I, in my ignorant common sense, once asked grandma why she spent so much time with Betty when they couldn't stand each other, she could not answer. Of course, she spoke for a long time about their relationship, but she never really answered my question. Looking back, I see that they needed each other, not for reasons of fulfillment or any of those analytical explanations, but simply because no one else wanted to be around them.

Honorable Mention Fiction

“My Mama”

**Allison McDaniel
Macomb High School**

My English teacher, Mr. Hannigan, asked us to write a story about the happenings over the weekend. I ain't so good at writing about myself. Catalina wrote about her trip to the mall and new scarlet dress, and Charlie wrote about his team the Tigers winning Saturday's Little League Baseball game, but what could I write about? I could write how I woke up at 3:00 a.m. to find my mama passed out on the front porch Friday night with scratches on her legs from stumbling into the bushes and with vomit dripping down her stringy hair. I could write about how Mama forgot to get us dinner before she left with her newest loser date, so Tommy and me ate Fritos from Casey's vending machine. I could even write about how when that loser didn't return her call on Sunday, she took it out on me. She said she seen me kissing the seventeen year old jock next door and called me, little 93 pound me, a fat whore. My face still stings when I think about how she slapped me, throwing her whole arm into it without spilling a single drop of the Budweiser she held in the other hand. Them are the stories from my weekend.

Instead, I wrote about sneaking out into the old cow pasture behind our shack when Mama wasn't watching. I wrote about how I followed the sloppy creek down to a water hole and climbed up a dead tree to watch them silly cardinals bathe and ruffle their feathers dry. I belong in that old tree, with them birds and by the creek, with soft pasture grass and the sky. There I'm free. There I'm real, and Mama ain't around to tell me I ain't good enough to be nobody. I wrote about how I climbed down the tree limb that's all bleached white like a bone and sprawled out on the velvet grass with the wind dancin' over me. I wrote about how Tommy came a looking for me when it started raining, but I didn't care none. Nature was my true mama protecting me, loving me.

Honorable Mention Fiction

“A Break into Reality”

**Jacob Upchurch
Rochester High School**

Craig parks his pick-up in the parking lot outside the Piggly Wiggly. He notices my reluctance to step out of the truck and jokes around with me about it. “I just never saw us being the guys who sit and drink beers in front of the Piggly Wiggly,” I explained. Not long after our arrival about every guy I went to high school with was there, so it seemed. They all reeked like fish and were all there for the same reason. It seemed like just about all of them at some point in the night, sometimes more than once, came up to me and said “Zach, man! What’s up? I haven’t seen you in like, a long time, man.” This reminder of why I wanted something better than what Harrodsburg offered me was all too much. “I have to go inside. I have to go to the bathroom,” I said to no one in particular. “Nonsense,” implied Craig, “Just go out here, its no big deal.” I stepped around several puddles of urine before I got inside the grocery store.

“Karen?” “Yes?” Maybe it was just the memory of the old feelings I felt for her, but seeing Karen made me feel something inside for the first time, and it felt great. “Karen?” “Yes?” After a few more rounds of the confrontation between my shock and her confusion, it hit her. “Zach! Wow! Is that really you? What are you doing back in town? I thought the big city kept you and you were never coming back.” Bluntly I stated, “My dad died in a car wreck.” She was sorry and gave her condolences. Once the shock of seeing her subsided, I remembered that she was the reason I had left. As she talked about what she had been doing recently I thought about my past with her. We were so close growing up. Friends forever, it seemed, but when I wanted more I couldn’t find a way out of the “Friend zone.” As I saw her choose all the wrong guys, I felt determined not to remain her plutonic friend any longer. Inspired by a quote I found, “Hearts are often broken by words left unspoken” or some other Hallmark material line, I just told her. I thought it would be worse to never truly have her at all than to lose her as a friend, so I just went for it. Pain and regret on the plane to Philadelphia were the last emotions I had felt in eight years. “I’m sorry,” I told her, “I have to take care of some things.” I sat in the parking lot of the Piggly Wiggly for two and a half hours.

Honorable Mention Fiction

“Ghosts of Summer”

**Kyle Glaser
Macomb High School**

The streets were empty; desolate would probably sum it up pretty well. I’d woken up to the buzzing of my cell phone against my wooden cabinet, the screen flashing with his name. I’d answered it, “Hello.”

“Hey,” he said.

“You all right?”

“Yeah. You wanna come over, though?”

“Um...” I’d glanced at the clock, 1:00 in the morning. “O.K., I’ll be right there.”

I’d had to put my car in neutral and push it a little ways down the road so I wouldn’t wake up my parents. Now I was driving across town, in the dead of the night, sharing the road only with drunken college students. It was strangely cold for a night in the middle of a hot Illinois summer. No wind blew, not even the hint of a breeze. The streetlights and dim neon signs shone over the road, casting an eerie glow into the darkness. I drove in silence, with my mind and my radio turned off. I pulled up in front of his house. He was sitting there on his porch steps; hunched over, hugging his knees close to his chest. I closed my car door, walked up, and sat down on the step next to him. He didn’t look me in the face; his eyes stared only at his feet.

“So how are you doin’?”

He paused for some time, and then sighed. “I’m fine,” he replied.

I nodded, pretending I believed him.

We sat in silence for a moment. My mind raced, searching for something to say. He made it easy for me when he whispered,

“You know...I just wish there was something I could’ve done.”

<p style="text-align:center">Honorable Mention Fiction</p> <p style="text-align:center">“A Night Visitor”</p> <p style="text-align:center">Kara Brown Pekin Community High School</p>

God showed me how creation happened, once. I was sitting in my living room, and God walked right by me. I didn’t think it was polite to walk into my house like that. I thought God ought to know better.

I knew it was God right away because God has a special look, like motorcycle riders do. You just know.

God went all the way to the attic, and I thought it was funny because God didn’t know what steps to stand on, and God creaked all the way up, but me, I was as quiet as a mouse.

Now, they don’t tell you this, but God is one of the queer folks who you can never remember exactly what color his hair is or what color his eyes are. You recognize God, of course; God really stands out, but you can never quite remember the color of God’s eyes.

I followed God to a corner of the attic and we hunkered down on our haunches in the dust, and I sneezed and God smiled.

God held out a fist, and there was just enough light to see it wasn’t really a fist, but God’s hand was closed like when you get a lightning bug.

Then God showed me what was in that hand. It was full of something that made all the little sparkle pieces in your skin turn shiny and the colors in your eyes look like stained glass.

I would tell you what it was because it was so simple and pretty and it smelled nice, but God put a finger on my lips, so I don't think I am supposed to tell.

When it caught God's eye again, it glowed real soft and gentle and happy-like, and God smiled, and away the light-thing went into God's pocket, and then there we were in the dusty attic.

The God stood up and pulled me to my feet because God has a nice strong grip, and I smacked my hands on my jeans to get the dust off of them and God did it too, even though there wasn't a speck of dust on those hands or jeans. I wondered if the nice thing was going to be okay in those jeans, but this was God, after all, so I thought it most likely so.

And I was all sweaty and hot, but God was fine. I went back downstairs and sat in my chair again and God went right out the front door and didn't catch the screen so it banged, just like it always does for anyone who doesn't know better.

**First Place
Nonfiction**

"A Double Scoop"

**Christen Bradford
VIT High School**

*"Twenty years from now;
You will feel more regret by
The things that you didn't do
Than by the things that you did do."
--Mark Twain*

My grandfather had always been a hard man to love. It's not that I *disliked* him; he just never acted the way most grandpas do. He never lavished gifts upon my brother or me (he was, in fact, the most frugal person I ever met), he never gave bear hugs or had an empty place on his lap reserved for his lovely little grandkids, and he lacked patience. He never made an effort to enjoy the same things we liked, but he and I coincidentally shared a passion for softball. He spent two years as my jr. high softball coach. An expert in all areas of athletics, he knew the game forwards and backwards. Don't think for a second that he favored me above the other girls. On the contrary, he was harsher with me than with them, if such a thing were possible. Compliments were rare, and his communication skills were not tactful but embarrassingly to the point. He probably just expected more from me, but that didn't make a difference in my mind.

Chuck, as everyone called him (myself included by this time; somehow I felt that the amputation of the title "grandpa" was a just punishment for his incapability to fulfill the role), had worked as the high school janitor for as long as I could remember. He decided to retire, which apparently caused him to mellow, because not long after his retirement took affect, he wanted to take my brother and I for a day trip. He, who had never offered to do anything with us for the entire seventeen years of my life, suddenly felt it was crucial that we experience the state fair. Not only was I surprised at his offer, but also a little resentful. As you can probably tell, affection was an emotion that the old man had rarely shared, and, as a result, it was one that I had given up trying to push onto him. After all, I was going to leave for college in

one year, I had long ago stopped offering him the chance of complete forgiveness to redeem himself as children will endlessly do for adults.

Early on the morning of our trip, Chuck pulled his green van into our gravel driveway. Chuck always felt a need to be ridiculously early to every event. The drive was fairly uneventful and quiet. I remember thinking of how distant the two of us were, even in the confines of a vehicle. The fair ground, in my opinion was over-rated and over-priced. I was unimpressed with the animals, the politicians, and the crafts. The bulk of the day was spent walking and sweating. It was one of those hot, humid days that are famous in an Illinois summer. Before the horse races started, Chuck took my brother and me to get some lunch. I don't remember what I ate, but as I did not have the privilege of being absorbed in conversation, I let my eyes wander around the picnic area. I saw an older gentleman, in particular.

He was dressed as most men from that era are. He has fat, cushy brown shoes, brown slacks (probably with an elastic waist), and a brown and off-white plaid button-up shirt. The odd-looking cane he held in his hand was meant to support his gnarled body. Even though he held the stick, he walked with a determined, yet grotesque limp. The entire left side of his body was virtually useless.

The gentleman was carrying something, despite his obvious handicap. I shifted in my seat so that I could see what it was. I finally caught a glimpse. It was an ice cream cone: a chocolate, double-scoop, with the top scoop starting to topple. I hoped that the man would notice, so he would stop and lick the ice cream until the twin scoops were bonded and it was safe to continue. He didn't. He kept walking, focused only on the journey to his seat. I knew I should go offer to help him. My heart actually hurt for him, but my weight remained on the bench. I looked around. Maybe someone older than me would stand up to help him. No one did. Whatever was holding the two scoops together was starting to give. Still, no one made a move. The old man inched on. It was not too late for me to help, but I had already begun to formulate excuses in my mind. *I might offend him. Someone else will help. The people who sold him the ice cream should have offered to help. If he wants help, he can just ask one of the people walking near him.* He continued to shuffle, the ice cream continued to slide. *He should have known better than to ask for two scoops. I don't even know this man, why should I care?* Then, the inevitable happened, the top scoop fell off, losing its perfect spherical shape when it hit the cement. Realizing the sudden loss of weight he was carrying, the gentleman slowly looked downward, knowing what had happened before he saw it. A look of complete defeat crossed his face. I don't believe that he was particularly sad over the loss; it was only ice cream after all. The problem was more than that. It could have been a compilation of everything he had been through. Yet another example of the dependence and motor skills he had lost that I'm sure had once come to him with ease. I turned my eyes downward. If anyone else had noticed this incident, they did not show it.

We went on to watch the horse races, but I was not really paying attention to them. All I could think about was the old man, and the look on his face. Actions speak louder than words, and I felt that my inaction screamed volumes about my character. My stomach was in knots; I wanted to cry. I yearned for forgiveness for my outward indifference towards the man. It hit me. Forgiveness? *Outward* indifference? I finally understood what this trip was about. I looked at my grandpa, sitting to my left. He turned his head toward me. "Are you having a good time?" he asked with a tone a little less formal than usual. I just smiled and offered him my hand. He held it in his. I told him that I loved him. A small, barely noticeable smile turned up the corners of his mouth, and even the thick lenses of his glasses could not hide the tears that had started to form in his eyes.

**Second Place
Nonfiction**

**"Average Joe,
or
Sneaky Pete Extraordinaire?"**

**Lauren Samuel
Rochester High School**

It is easy to overlook the average member of society. What is there to attract attention? There is nothing but average: no long legs to get that second glance, no remarkable intelligence to impress the intellectuals, nothing of *anything* striking. She is that student who sits in the middle of the classroom, not the slacker in the back, nor the overachiever in the front. And he is the man who works that nine to five day along with the rest of the world. These average members of society suffer from middle child syndrome; they go unnoticed, being outdone by more notable people. But do they mind? Not at all. The average person is glad to just fit in. Finding the happy medium in life, average people have succeeded in making the best of what's around.

Average people are like a mullet: business in front, but a party in the back. All work and no play may make Jack a dull boy, and idle hands may be the devil's playground, but ordinary people have evaded both of these existences. With average people, both productivity and a level of fun exist. They know when something needs to be done, and when there is room for things to be enjoyed. There is no tight schedule due to the demand that comes along with that "above average" status. Instead of attending the boss's party Friday night, an ordinary person could kick back at a bar with a couple of friends and make bets on how long it will take for Johnny Brownnoser to get fired due to his overbearing personality. The presence of the ordinary person won't be missed at the party; they are just average anyway. On the other hand, the average person is not the lazy one who doesn't contribute anything but an empty gut to a BYOB party. The "average Joe" won't throw a party, but he certainly won't neglect his duty as a guest. Average people mean business, but when the day is done do not doubt that there is a party up their sleeve just waiting to bust a move or two.

Average people are not concerned with being ahead of their obligations. They can take a nap on a Saturday afternoon. Christmas shopping doesn't need to be done in July. Their calendars are organized by pencil, not pen. The ordinary person lives a life stressed less on the value of a minute. With a schedule subject to change and always room for unscheduled events, the life of an ordinary person is more comfortable and realistic. The above average person works overtime Saturday afternoons, gets their Christmas shopping done by Thanksgiving, and presses so hard with their pens that the words are embedded in the paper. These sticklers for structure have no room for change and absolutely no unscheduled events, not realizing that flexibility does have its advantages. The average person will embrace this flexibility wholeheartedly, realizing that it is their lifeline to keeping sane. On the other hand, the average person knows not to let this flexible schedule interfere with obligations. The regular person strives to keep obligations balanced with flexibility; the lazy person totally neglects the importance of obligations. This tentative-schedule approach combined with an understanding of obligation gives an ordinary person the upper-hand in living and living well.

The average person knows that being stuck in the crowd is not as bad as it is made out to be. To be at the top is to run out of rungs to climb to get to the top of that ladder. To be at the bottom is to smell the feet of those gathered above you. To be in the crowd--to be content on that one rung with the rest of everyone else. Not lonely or pressured to stay on top like those tottering on that last step, nor idle and grumbling at the bottom, the average person is satisfied with this middle ground. Crowd surfing may be

exhilarating, but no one gets up without some help from the crowd. When the surfer falls, it will be that crowd that makes sure no one steps on him. Average people recognize that the crowd is more welcoming than the elite group that the above average person exists in, and more rewarding than that lackadaisical cluster that the lazy form. There is more room in the crowd; room to mess up, room to grow, room to simply make room. Ordinary people know that to be in "the crowd" is not something they need to break away from, but something that allows the freedom to make room for satisfaction in life.

Average people have everyone fooled. Since they go unnoticed, they have been able to sneak around living life how they choose, not to fit the mold of some expectation, and not off of the accomplishments of others like a bottom-feeder. The joke is on everyone else, and the ordinary person is having the biggest laugh. But not so loud as to be heard; the laughter gets lost in the crowd.

**Third Place
Nonfiction**

"A Tree from My Past"

**Lindsey Leach
Rochester High School**

The year is 2004. I peek through the window panes and see a slender rainbow dogwood. The size has probably doubled during the past year. As I look at the tree, I wonder if it could ever spread the same distance as the old occupant of the land. The previous tree--a magnificent oak that stretched to the heavens--had seen many years. It suffered terminal damages when a lightning bolt struck through the middle of the thick trunk. The oak was eventually cut down and carried off in the fall of '96.

The year is 1991. This is the whimsical dream summer for any four-year-old. In just two days, I get to experience the magic of Mickey Mouse, Cinderella, and Dumbo. I am going to Disney World.

To deal with the anxiety of waiting, Adam, Andrew, and I venture outside to play. Cops and robbers was played yesterday, and hide-and-go-seek was our fun the day before. Today we are conquering the oak tree. Contrary to the other trees in our yard that are more suitable for beginning climbers, this one requires a ladder just to get to the first branch. My brothers decide to build one.

The construction has to be carefully assembled. Safety is an extreme concern for Adam, so I am not allowed to contribute. It is built from a pipe and connector set. This particular Christmas present came from a box that read, "Caution: Not intended to bear the weight of a child." They inform me that the warning is just for the sake of fat kids.

If I have not mentioned it already, my brothers are tremendously considerate toward me--their baby sister. Together, they decide to let me have the first climb up the ladder. Adam props it against the tree and supports it with all of the strength of a six-year-old. In two months and three days, he will celebrate his seventh birthday. From a distance, Andrew bubbles with pride as he admires the structure that he helped build.

Being a slightly apprehensive child, it is only natural that I am timid at first. Adam is reassuring and promises to catch me if I fall. I decide there is nothing to lose. I am four, and contrary to my previous feelings, I am now invincible.

I dart up the ladder and perch myself on a branch. No problem. After gazing at the beauty of our front yard, I make a mistake. I look down. My big brothers now appear miniscule. They are miles away. My original pang of apprehension has evolved into extreme terror. Realizing that Adam and Andrew could be of no help to my current situation, I call for my daddy.

My shrill screeching is not enough to get his attention. His leaf blower overpowers my cries. It looks like I'll have to handle the problem myself.

Courage comes roaring back into my mind, and I am once again the invincible four-year-old. I start to descend--facing Adam, not the tree. Once I am two prongs down, something goes wrong. I'm not sure if the ladder buckles or if I try to fly. I am suddenly sailing head-first toward the ground...

Andrew approaches our dad first. Adam is only slightly behind, juggling the pressure of guilt on his shoulders. Either from the fear in their eyes or from the absence of their tag-along sister, our dad assumes the worst. He is certain that his little girl is in trouble.

It is just approaching noon on a Thursday in August. While contemplating what to buy my wife for our twenty-year anniversary, my secretary informs me that my assistance is needed. I choke down the remainder of my soggy turkey sandwich, take a swig of Diet Pepsi, and am on my way to save the world. I am the residing physician at Prompt Care.

I can see the dismay in the little girl's eyes. For a moment I feel guilty as I restrain her silent arms and legs. The still limbs may be innocent now, but I don't want any disruptions while sewing her chin back together. Six stitches and twenty minutes later, they are leaving; the girl looks up at me with her big blue eyes and utters, "Thank you."

As we exit through the gates at Magic Kingdom, my mom informs me that I have to get the stitches removed from my chin. I don't mind. How could any child not be carefree when she is in Disney World?

When the doctor is finished, she tells me that I am *almost* as good as new.

After being flooded with memories, I back away from the window and enter the bathroom. I shower, brush my teeth, and scrub my face. As the water drips off my chin, I catch a glimpse of my scar. It's hard to believe that thirteen years have passed.

**Honorable Mention
Nonfiction**

"Memories"

**Nick Heller
VIT High School**

...Without knowing it I had been creating memories to remember my senior year by. It wasn't something I'd really considered. It's not like I woke up every morning and said to myself, "Well Nick, you better get

up and go to school today so you can make some memories to remember your friends by!" But, I realize now that it had been at least part of my motivation all along. It's part of everyone's motivation. Everyone wants to remember, and be remembered for their positive characteristics. For example, I would hate to be remembered because I always got picked on and beat up in junior high, but I would love to be remembered for being an all-around nice guy with a good sense of humor.

With this knowledge in mind I believe that life can be defined in very simple terms. It is nothing more than a process that involves the creation and storage of memories over an uncertain span of years. Notice that the key word in this definition is *uncertain*. No one knows how long he/she will have the capacity to go out and create new memories. In other words, get out and live life while you still can, because the clock never stops ticking. When I reach the age when my bones are so brittle that I can't move around too much without breaking something, then I want to be able to lie in a hammock in my backyard on sunny, summer afternoons and stare off into space. My only wish is that an occasional smile crosses my wrinkled, toothless features, as I reminisce over days long gone.

**Honorable Mention
Nonfiction**

"What I Need Her to Know"

**Makayla Trotter
Macomb High School**

...It's hard giving up a part of yourself. It's so hard to let go and forget. Even though she's not an active part of my life anymore, I still think of her often. Something will happen, something amusing or fascinating that she would enjoy, and I will want to tell her, but I never do.

Sarah wasn't the only *friend* who left me. A few others couldn't handle my depression, and I couldn't stand their ignorance any more. I set off on my own and started anew. I used to look back on those old times and wonder what it was that got me through. I was completely alone and dependent on myself. I realize now that I can stand without Sarah.

Occasionally, I sink again into the dark abyss of my lonely pain, pain brought on by loss, by abuse, by neglect, and by hatred. Sometimes I am drawn again to those shattered bits of glass. I am drawn not to the pain they create, but rather to the false numbing peace they leave with me. I always stop, however, and picture Sarah's broken expression of betrayal. That's what I want to tell her most...

**Honorable Mention
Nonfiction**

"Golden Years"

**Alexis Wood
Southeastern High School**

...She had experienced so much. She had started out so young and fresh-faced, and this was what her life had finally come to. All those frustrating years of so-called "growing pains," to working her way through life to hopefully enjoy those "golden years." Yet there she was, sitting in the dark half of a nursing home room on the Alzheimer's unit. She was sitting there not realizing that her family was there with her. How long would it be before anyone visited again? That was how we had to leave her, confused, frustrated, and listening to these strange kids tell her that they loved her and would be back to visit again sometime. Her parting words haunted our exit, "Uhh...who did you say you were?"