

April 14, 2008

# CREATIVE CW WRITING F FESTIVAL



Sponsored by:  
The Department of English and Journalism  
The College of Arts and Sciences



WESTERN  
ILLINOIS  
UNIVERSITY

# 2008 Creative Writing Festival Participants

## ***Glenwood High School***

Keith Kelley, Teacher  
Lauren Buchloh  
Melissa Kapitan  
Teri King  
Kate Klemaier  
Erich O'Connor

## ***Hartsburg-Emden High School***

Nicole Coers, Teacher  
Charlene Girod  
Colton Hays  
Kristina Homer  
Casey Kennett  
Robert Lolling  
Danielle Miller  
Drew Pieper  
Arica Sadler  
Devon Swart  
Jordan West

## ***Home School***

Alicia Richards, Teacher  
Tracie Fross  
Katherine Richards  
Amber Swanson

## ***Keokuk High School***

Barbara Edler, Teacher  
Rebecca Allerman  
Kimber Critser  
Autumn DePew  
Carlee Gibson  
Leah Maerz  
Derek Nash  
Brianna Walden

## ***Lincoln Community High School***

Jennifer Keith, Teacher  
Kristin Baker  
Michelle Brawdy  
James Brown  
Courtney Crowell  
Dalton DePoy  
Emily Harms  
Kelsey Jurgens  
Adam King  
Matthew Merreighn  
Jessica Miller  
Aleta Raymond  
Brianna Skaggs  
Robert Skeens

## ***Macomb High School***

Terry Krehbiel, Teacher  
Leesa Palmer, Teacher  
Amanda Axley  
Brenna Baker  
Jacy Billeter  
Jennica Danner

Michael Foster  
Jocelyn Hicks  
Katelyn Hillyer  
Josh Keck  
Erica Lawver  
Amanda Michelle Miller  
Danny Morlock  
Ali Morrison  
Meg Paisley  
Therese Pircon  
Kaitlyn Rigdon  
Cody Roberts  
Lizzy Standard  
Ben Streit  
Makayla Trotter  
Alice Ye

## ***Mediapolis***

Angela Kome, Teacher  
Kass Braby  
Casie Brockert  
Hannah Burgus  
Nina Earnest  
Samantha McElhinney  
Lishay Murphy  
Lindsey Oetken  
Colin Parry  
Alyssa Quinn  
Kayla Rhum  
Jordan Roelfs  
Rachel Weiss  
Amber Welcher  
Katelyn Ann Wyss

## ***Pekin Community High School***

Maureen Naughtin, Teacher  
Colin Abernathy  
Devan Abernathy  
Drew Ashley  
Theresa Bridges  
Wade Delzell  
Haley Downey  
Michelle Eggemeyer  
Jennifer Erickson  
Michelle Feicke  
Kailin Ford  
Griffin Glass  
Brandon Hudson  
Desiree Huskisson  
Austin Little  
Brooke Maas  
Lori Ann Neulinger  
Ashley Olsen  
Ashley Reynolds  
Whitney Sharp  
Victoria Tordoff

## ***Project READY***

Shawn Rice, Teacher  
Elizabeth Duncan

Annie Ibrahim  
Megan Kruger  
Logan Minnick-Heard  
Sarah Sanchez  
Dana Williams

## ***Riverton High School***

Casey Tester, Teacher  
James Toland, Teacher  
Christine Ankrom  
Rachelle Best  
Carly Davis  
Megan Jagodzinski  
Jake Jerome  
Thomas Kocis  
Katie Kueper  
Kelsey Miller  
Zachary Murray  
Sara Nielsen  
Evan Peterson  
Jeffrey Price  
Taylor Pulliam  
Amanda Terry  
Josh Trader  
Emily Tupy

## ***Southeastern High School***

Kathy Holst, Teacher  
Janet Hopper, Teacher  
Lauren Allen  
Laura Arnold  
Lasia Dunlap  
Ashton Dunlap  
Amber Farwell  
Dustin Friday  
Corey Hamilton  
Kyle Ippensen  
Cody Jefferson  
Kollin Kerker  
Jake Klingele  
Shelby Lanning  
Jordan Ringenberger  
Taylor Roberts  
Amanda Rosendale  
Christal Scofield  
Kaiti Taylor

## ***V.I.T.***

Karen Lafary, Teacher  
Shelby Adcock  
Sara Armstrong  
Colten Bradford  
Chey Carithers  
Devon DeMott  
Jody Hayes  
Elizabeth Howell  
Sarah Ritter  
Katlyn Selph  
Kerry Shawgo

# 2008 Creative Writing Festival Winners

## Poetry

### **1st Place**

Theresa Bridges  
Pekin Community High School  
*Who Knows*

### **2nd Place**

Alice Ye  
Macomb High School  
*Icarus Rising*

### **3rd Place**

Erica Lawver  
Macomb High School  
*For Your Consideration*

### **Honorable Mentions**

Theresa Bridges  
Pekin Community High School  
*Far Away*

Wade Delzell  
Pekin Community High School  
*One Special Girl*

Elizabeth Duncan  
Project READY  
*I AM*

Jennifer Erickson  
Pekin Community High School  
*Ode to My Beloved Character Shoes*

Melissa Kapitan  
Glenwood High School  
*Hephaestus*

Therese Pircon  
Macomb High School  
*Reconciliation*

Alice Ye  
Macomb High School  
*Before the Sun Sets and Sun Rises*

## Fiction

### **1st Place**

Kaitlyn Rigdon  
Macomb High School  
*Summer's Lesson*

### **2nd Place**

Colin Abernathy  
Pekin Community High School  
*A Soldier's Duty*

### **3rd Place**

Katlyn Selph  
V.I.T. High School  
*Night Stalker*

### **Honorable Mention**

Josh Keck  
Macomb High School  
*Persecution*

## Non-Fiction

### **1st Place**

Makayla Trotter  
Macomb High School  
*Little-Girl Shaped Holes*

### **2nd Place**

Ashley Reynolds  
Pekin Community High School  
*Hostage*

### **3rd Place**

Amanda Axley  
Macomb High School  
*To Every Season*

### **Honorable Mentions**

Colten Bradford  
V.I.T. High School  
*The Scramble*

Autumn DePew  
Keokuk High School  
*Grandma's House*

Leah Maerz  
Keokuk High School  
*Generation Gap*

Sarah Ritter  
V.I.T. High School  
*Nothing More, Nothing Less*

*The Creative Writing Festival  
in 2009 will be held on  
Monday, April 12*

<http://www.wiu.edu/english/cwf>

# *1st Place Poetry*

Theresa Bridges  
Pekin Community High School

## *Who Knows*

Someone once said  
Even though your heart is on the left,  
It's always right  
But maybe my heart didn't  
Skip a beat  
And maybe  
The twinkle in your eye  
Was the sun reflecting weird  
And maybe the feeling  
In my stomach  
Was not having enough for breakfast  
And maybe I just thought  
It was love

# *2nd Place Poetry*

Alice Ye  
Macomb High School

## *Icarus Rising*

Gabriel was dragged in from the War half-dead. We watched him sign the papers, his wings torn. We looked over the forms with our gloves skirting around worn edges, and we glanced at each other. His hair was matted, and his eyes were glazed, and we smiled. He was left alone then, with the IVs and the monitors, while we went to dust off our lab equipment.

# *3rd Place Poetry*

Erica Lawver  
Macomb High School

## *For Your Consideration*

She struts  
down halls supported by bones of pride,  
her healthy ego nourished daily with compliments and pretty words  
Lies  
Yet she ingests them like a starved leech on a succulent arm.  
Never can she get enough to fill her swelling belly.  
A change in status quo warps her mind even more.  
She has become an uncomprehending fool -  
a hypocrite ridden with lies .  
Her ears are deaf to any advice or criticism,  
she no longer hears her friends as they reach out for help.  
Who needs to be considerate when one is now perfect?  
If only.  
Finding it necessary to change when  
others bring confrontations is preposterous in her eyes.  
If an issue arises, the fault lies within others -- certainly not she  
This idea brings the demise of relationships around her,  
relationships that once held meaning.  
The broken camaraderie is brushed away,  
like a clumsy moth on a sweltering July evening.  
Her emotions are hollow as she flits, fishing for the attention  
she bases her existence on.  
The friend in her is lost. Return: unlikely.

# *Poetry (Honorable Mention)*

Theresa Bridges  
Pekin Community High School

## *Far Away*

Time will waste

He smokes

Like there's no tomorrow  
He says it makes him feel alive

She drinks her wine

Like water  
Because she feels dry inside

He drives his car

Like a bullet

She says that time's slipping away

He never thinks about his future  
To them, it's miles away

Wade Delzell  
Pekin Community High School

## *One Special Girl*

She is the itch you cannot scratch  
She is the cold only you catch  
She is the best girl you ever met  
But you can never get  
Her to come your way  
You try to talk to her every day  
But you don't know what to say  
You tell yourself it will be okay  
So you try to keep your feelings at bay  
You want to be wither 'til you die  
You know you can't, so you let out a sigh  
You know you need her  
But you can't get her  
Even though you keep trying  
The flowers you send keep dying  
You know you can show her love  
You need help from above  
You decide to stop 'til you know it is time  
To find the right person and bust another rhyme

Elizabeth Duncan  
Project READY

## *I AM*

I am your daughter fighting depression,  
I am your sister making a good impression,  
I am your friend thinking of suicide,  
I am a girl with anger to hide.

I am your daughter who is in love,  
I am your sister with something to prove,  
I am your friend who is always here for you  
I am the student sitting next to you.

I am a girl, who is lost and confused,  
And although I have lost, I will no longer lose.

Jennifer Erickson  
Pekin Community High School

## *Ode to My Beloved Character Shoes*

The scratches formed into your leather sides  
Are like the scars of an old war veteran  
Aged, deep and forever permanent  
Some hate you and squirm at the thought  
Of being with you for more than an hour  
Though to me you are an old friend

For the past four years we have performed together  
Dancing our way across the Midwest  
Slowly your treaded bottoms have worn down  
Becoming embedded with dust from Danville  
Hair from Herscher and Aussie Instant Freeze

# *Poetry (Honorable Mention)*

Melissa Kapitan  
Glenwood High School

## *Hephaestus*

Hot breath of Gods  
White, burning fire of Hell  
Disguises donned, hiding the desire.  
Venus in her naked glory  
Ares' triumphant cry  
And Hephaestus' growing rage.  
Revenge upon the traitors,  
He cries.  
From his deformed body, the  
Rods of metal breathe  
With the patterns of dusk and dawn.  
The rhythm of day and night  
Mimic his struggles.  
A metal net formed of anger  
Captures passion.  
Jealousy feeds Hephaestus,  
And he casts the betrayers to  
The judgment of Hades

Therese Pircon  
Macomb High School

## *Reconciliation*

Bless me Father, for I have sinned.  
The Roots you so deeply planted into my heart  
Have now withered.  
They lie in my hands,  
Pressuring me to take up the shovel  
And dig again within.

In the beginning, there was light.  
The jumpstart of my life.  
Musical dinosaurs and educational monsters,  
My babysitters for the early Morn.  
Groggy sisters, and the occasional cousin, in teddy bear footies,  
Sippy cups in hand,  
Mesmerized by images in a box.  
Squished wriggling bodies on Grandma's couch,  
Comfort in each ritual;  
Home.

Midmorning Sun.  
Cozy mornings gone, a parochial education begins  
with its multiplication tables, Apostles' Creeds,  
Acts of Contrition and Glory Be's.  
The naked awareness that Eve once felt  
overtakes her 10-year-old daughters.

Barbies exchanged for a sportsbras.  
The girl's bathroom legislates  
Death before a hand me.  
Ill equipped was I for the battles of puberty.  
Waves of the "middle school elite",  
Flow through the hallways.  
Never did I think I would have to swim  
Among them  
To survive,  
But I learned. I adjusted. I changed.

High Noon.  
I'm out of my territory.  
A foreign sun, smothering my world,  
is making me dizzy.  
Flames of passion and curiosity ignite  
And scorch the Little Flower within.  
Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy  
You taught me to believe such flames were the Chariots to  
damnation.  
Now, I am not so naïve.  
Some. But not as much.

The sun is moving overhead.  
Its scalding heat that once burned so deep  
Now softens.  
Burns from the past  
Scar as eternal reminders,  
Some may never heal.  
I am told to give up.  
I am labeled many things.  
I am pierced again and again  
From this sun, this life.

But  
I feel the Little Flower, growing from the ashes,  
More beautiful and Stronger than before.  
And I allow myself to fold my hands and bow my head once  
more.  
And I pray.

# *Poetry (Honorable Mention)*

Alice Ye

Macomb High School

## *Before the Sun Sets and Sun Rises*

Attention!

Today will be the yesterday of tomorrow.

So gut your pigs,

And spill your blood.

My ballroom partner,

Take care.

Broken legs would be bad.

You'll dance this last waltz with me?

HAGS

They'll wait in the streets,

Mindless of heat waves,

Trying to save their curls.

Adolescents,

Sitting on the kitchen counter,

Digging knives into their skin.

"Oh woe! Oh woe!"

Miss Rain,

Will cry for us.

In heaving clouds,

As we make the same slips.

# *1st Place Fiction*

Kaitlyn Rigdon  
Macomb High School

## *Summer's Lesson*

"It's so hot!" she whined as she threw herself on the refreshing tile floor. It felt so nice to lie there, with her cheek pressed against the cool ground, in the middle of the heat wave.

"Oh, Molly," her mother sighed, "it's not as hot as it has been, and I just cleaned that floor. Now get up."

"But it's so hot," she dragged out every word, appearing to use all the energy in her body. It was hot outside, however, not as boiling as young Molly made it out to be. Still, for some reason she thought this summer was going to kill her. "I walk outside and the heat sucks all the air away from my body, and I can't breathe. Worse, puddles of water that form on my head slowly drip to my feet, itching my body the whole way down."

"Well, your brother is waiting for you to walk to the pool with him. The pool always cools you down; besides once you get in the water you will feel better." Molly knew the pool was the one thing that would make her brother happy; at least if he was happy then he wasn't bugging her. Slowly, Molly pulled one leg off the ground at a time, stopping from time to time only to sigh as deeply as she could.

The walk to the pool wasn't long, but on a hot day it seemed to take forever. The sun was beating down on their heads, and the pool bags, weighing down their arms, slowed them to a sluggish pace. Molly had to constantly reach up and wipe the sweat from her brow so it didn't slide into her eyes, forcing her to squint. Nevertheless, the sun's rays were already making it hard to fully open her eyes. Her heart was pounding, probably from the draining walk, but also from the thought of her friend, confined to a bed in a white room with beeping machine, somewhere across the country. It was hard to focus on anything else, but she kept going. Neither of them dared to speak, for if they did, one was likely to snap at the other. Their heads pointed towards the ground, mouths not moving, legs barely able to muster enough energy to take the next step, they continued along.

They stopped at the beginning of the block and glanced towards the pool. It was quiet. They scanned the area for people and listened hard for shouts, but they heard none. Somehow, they managed to run the rest of the way to the pool. They ran until they reached the locked entrance. They pushed and pulled, but no matter what they did the door would not open.

"Maybe they made another entrance and this isn't even the right one." Her brother suggested. Molly glanced at him, disgusted. He always had to think everything would turn out fine. It wouldn't though, she knew. Life never just handed you what you wanted. No. It would hold it just outside your reach, so you had to jump for it like an idiot while all the other kids gathered in a circle and giggled. Today was too hot for jumping.

"Do you see another door?" she snapped. They both stood there for a few moments- stunned at what they had found.

"I don't know... it has to be open." He squealed in anger. He threw his bags to the ground, and his empty hands formed fists as he stood there breathing heavily. Molly couldn't tell if the sun or rage was making his face so red.

"Calm down. It's okay. Let's just go home." She assured him. But he turned and ran to the other side of the building. Molly took off after him and found him around the corner banging on the fence.

"Open the door!" he screamed. "I want to swim, it's hot."

"There's no one there. Let's just go home before it gets any hotter." He turned and stared at her, his eyes narrowed so she could barely make out the gray surrounding the pupil. His brow furrowed underneath the layer of wrinkles he forced upon his face.

"I hate summer," he sighed as he dragged his bag in the dust towards home.

She hated standing there, watching her brother try to comprehend the hardest lesson she had ever learned about reality. He looked younger than ever as he moved one foot by dragging it on the ground in front of the other. There was no effort to hold up his swim bag or his head. Molly's head began to fill with compassion for her innocent brother. Maybe her life wasn't perfect, but his day could be.

"Wait," she cried, running to catch up to him, "let's go find the ice cream man. I think I can hear the truck a block over." His little eyes instantly lit up, and she felt overcome with a smile herself. At that moment Molly realized that she was okay, and she could still fully live her life. She knew that he had forgotten all about the pool; she knew that he had forgotten that life wasn't perfect, at least for now.

# *2nd Place Fiction*

Colin Abernathy

Pekin Community High School

## *A Soldier's Duty*

I still remember the day my father left to fight in the war. Never before had he left the house to actually fight although he had always been involved in war business—whether it was done from the computer or not.

I sat alone on the sofa in the living room the day we received the phone call. I could tell that something was wrong from the moment my father hung up. Usually, he finished his conversations with a “Mmmhmmm, Bye,” but not this time. He immediately pulled my mother into the bedroom where they sat and talked for hours. Occasionally, I could hear bits and pieces of their conversation, but it was never enough to understand.

Finally, they both emerged from the room. My mother's eyes were reddened from crying. She said nothing as she returned to her housework. My father, however, left the house and did not return until late evening.

When my father reentered the house, he looked very upset.

“Hey soldier.” He said to me as he often did.

I hated everything about the nickname. I hated everything about the war. I hated everything about what I had seen in the news; about the suicides and fighting.

My father knew my name was Brian, there was no doubting it, but he never knew that I hated being called soldier. I guess he hoped that I would someday follow in his footsteps and become a war hero, though I never thought of him as one.

“Hi, Dad.” I said, not taking my eyes away from the television screen. He entered the kitchen and began peeling potatoes as my mother prepared a roast.

I sat there on the sofa until dinner. We gathered around the table as we had done every night. I lifted my fork from the folded napkin where it had been resting and was about to cut into my piece of meat when my father spoke.

“Hold on, son,” he said, folding his hands in his lap. “There is something I need to lay on the table.” He paused for a moment and began laughing. “Get it? On the table?”

My mother began making an awkward blubbing noise. I couldn't tell if she was laughing or crying. “What is it?” I said, still not knowing the seriousness of the issue.

“Well, I am going to be leaving for awhile. As you know, I have a duty to my country and they need me right now so...I'm leaving for the war this weekend.” He started as he began to pick at the food on his plate. “Don't worry, because I am only going to be there for a couple of weeks. It's not that I have to actually go kill anybody either. Just don't worry about it, okay?”

He was asking us both, but no one answered. It appeared as though he was hiding behind a confident shell that no one would be able to break through. It was like he believed his own lie that everything would be okay. Our table was quiet; no clinking of our forks on our plates, or the jingling of the ice against our glasses. There was just absolute silence. My father's eyes wandered around the kitchen as he began eating his meal. My mother and I did the same, hoping that the dinner would still taste good after hearing what we just heard.

After dinner, when we had all cleared our plates and retired to the sofa, I sat and looked at my mother who seemed to be deep in thought. I said nothing as I got up and went into my parents' bedroom where my father was packing his camouflage duffle bag. It had been sitting in their closet taking up space since he left the army at age twenty-one. I had always been proud of him for making that choice. Starting a family is more important in my eyes—probably because, if he hadn't, I wouldn't have been born.

“When are you leaving?” I asked as I stared at the family picture he had just placed in the side pocket.

“Saturday afternoon,” he stated.

“That's tomorrow,” I said, my words fading out slowly.

“I know. I'll be back as soon as I can. I'm not going to let anything happen.” There was anger in his voice, but I knew he didn't mean it. Deep inside, he was scared, and I don't think he knew what *was* going to happen. I know I didn't.

My father left that Saturday at twelve-seventeen. I watched as he and the other green shirted men drove away. My mother kept a happy face as we went inside. The rest of the day was unusually usual. I thought that everything would seem strange and I would be mad, but I wasn't. Maybe it was the weather because I felt happy. It was warm outside and the sun was shining. My father's assuring words may have also contributed. He helped me to feel better about him leaving. I knew he wanted me to take care of my mother while he was away, and to do that I had to be content with myself first.

For weeks, I took on my father's household duties. I took out the garbage, mowed the lawn, and even fixed the washing machine a couple of times. I wanted to make sure that I kept myself busy. That way, I wouldn't have any time to feel sad about him leaving.

I was emptying the dishwasher when the telephone rang. I didn't expect it to be bad news. After all, my father had just been deployed to war. I didn't think anything could be worse than that...but I was wrong. My mother hung up and immediately

grabbed her coat. She didn't even mention what had happened or where she was going as she got into the car. I instinctively followed her out the door and into the front seat. We drove for what seemed like hours.

Finally, we pulled up to our destination: the hospital. We entered through the emergency area. I looked around and saw a mass of injured men. They looked like soldiers...broken men who felt that they had failed though they had no reason to.

I sat alone again on a sofa in a waiting room among other family members of soldiers who were either too young or too scared to go into the room. I felt a horrible sense of impending doom as I tried to figure out what was going on. I listened closely to the conversations around me. To my left, I heard that there had been an explosion. On my right, I heard that eight men had died and that they were too disfigured to identify. I didn't know what to think. I just sat and started to tear up. I didn't want to imagine my father being one of the eight who had been mutilated.

Finally, my mother came out of the room with her hands over her mouth. She motioned me in and I looked in the bed centered in the room. It was my father. He was extremely bruised and battered, but alive; or so I was told. I couldn't tell. He did not move or speak, or even smile at us. As I sat down beside him, just happy that he was alive, a doctor walked in. He explained the critical condition that my father was in. He had gotten severe head trauma when a bomb exploded just feet away from him as he boarded the same hummer that carried him away. He was on his way home. He probably would not have even survived had it not been for the picture of our family in the front pocket of his bag, encased in a silver frame. Suddenly, I felt like everything was going to be just fine, and that we would all be together.

Unfortunately, I was again wrong. The doctor proceeded to tell us that he would likely never come out of the coma-like state that he was now in. My mother broke down in tears while I sat in shock. I looked at him. He was right there, breathing; just breathing. It wasn't much, but it was enough to fill me with hope. As long as I saw that chest moving up and down, I knew he was okay, and somehow I'd be okay, too.

Many months passed. My father spent everyday in the same room of that hospital. He missed my birthday party and my baseball games. He missed Father's Day and Mother's Day. I was angry at the world for what had happened. I questioned everyone, even myself. I wondered why I deserved this—why my mother deserved this—why all the other soldiers' families deserved this.

On July nineteenth, my questions were answered. As I sat in the room next to my father, his eyes slowly opened. I wanted to call for my mother who was outside talking to the doctor, but I didn't. I got as close as I could and leaned over him. I was praying that he would be able to recognize me. Then his eyes fluttered open and I saw them fully. I had even forgotten what color they were until that moment, but when I saw him, and he saw me. I felt calm. I felt happy and thankful—something I hadn't felt in a long time.

My father only smiled at me and I smiled back. Looking down at him, I felt relieved. I felt like everything that had happened before didn't matter now. I felt like I could finally cry, and that's what I did.

"Come on now," he said smiling. "Soldiers don't cry. Don't you want to be a soldier and serve your country?"

I looked up at the ceiling, amazed that he would even say that word: soldier. All I could do was tell him the truth.

"No." I said quietly.

I watched as the smile faded from his lips and he fell back into the pillow. My mother walked in at that moment, not noticing that he had just died. The doctors all rushed in with their needles and machines as I sat once again, crying. They attempted to revive him, but he was already gone.

That Saturday, I stood next to my father's grave after the funeral. I was so angry and upset at him for what he said and I knew he had felt the same way about me. With tears in my eyes, I started talking as if he was right there with me.

"Why? Why would I want to be a soldier? Can't I just be myself—just be Brian?" I began asking the mound of soil that was my father. "How can anyone be a soldier? Just look at you. You're gone and now we all have to live our lives without a father. Not just me, but all those other soldiers' families! Why would I want to be a soldier? What reason is there that makes it okay to die? How is your death for the greater good? I don't want to be a soldier. I don't want to die for my country! I don't want to end up like you."

I felt ashamed for saying the harsh words. But it was how I felt. I was entitled to my opinion, though it may have been wrong, or unfair, and though I may not have understood the true meaning of being a soldier, the opinion was still mine. Being the child of a fallen soldier, I didn't care. All I wanted was a father.

# *3rd Place Fiction*

Katlyn Selph  
V.I.T. High School

## *Night Stalker*

Nissa Vaughn's Story

Legend has it that a married woman found out that her husband was having an affair with a local woman. The wife was jealous, so to get back at him she drowned their two children in the bathtub. When she realized what she had done, she jumped off Crybaby Bridge into her watery grave. A few months after her death, people started to turn up missing. All of them were men, either married or in a relationship. They say that the Lady in White stands along the side of the road waiting to be picked up by any man who passes by. When they get to her house (which has been left abandoned for years) she tests their relationship by seeing if the man will cheat, and if he does she kills him for breaking that girl's heart.

October 28

The town of Apple Bottom, Maine held a festival every year from October 29 to midnight on Halloween night. Everyone in town dressed up as the Lady in White. Anyone in a relationship held a rose and wore a sign around their neck saying, "I was killed by the Lady in White."

Most of the town folks believed in the Lady in White, but some thought that it was just a story parents told the kids to scare them from getting in cars with strangers. There was a group of friends who thought the whole festival was ridiculous, so every year on the first day of the festival they would pull a prank to make it more fun for them. This year's prank went wrong on all accounts.

It was the day before the Lady In White festival, and Malich and his friends Tyson, Gordy, and Ivy were sitting in Malich's basement putting the finishing touches on their prank. Their plan this year was to have Ivy dress up like the Lady in White, and Gordy would be one of her victims. Gordy would look like he was hung from Crybaby Bridge and Ivy was going to stand about 20 ft. from the bridge. That way, she was the first thing you saw before you saw Gordy's dead body hanging from the bridge.

On the T.V., the news reporter discussed another missing man. "Nathan Watson was last seen leaving the bar around 11:30 two days ago. His truck was found 10 miles from the Lady in White's old house. There was no sign of a struggle and the police have yet to find any leads that will close these missing persons cases."

"Do you really think that the Lady in White would go through all the trouble just to stop men from cheating?" asked Gordy. Tyson looked at him like he was crazy.

"Are you serious? The Lady in White is just a story that parents tell little kids to scare them from goin' near the bridge and fallin' off. That, and they don't want the kids to go to Vaughn's house. People say the children were buried in the back yard."

Gordy looked at him puzzled. "Why would anyone want to go out there?"

"People go out there to get a scare out of it. Mr. Vaughn won't let anybody move anything on account of that there are too many painful memories in the house on the property. Besides, he goes up there every year on the day of his children's death."

"You mean he goes in the house where his kids were murdered?"

"No, he just places flowers outside the place and leaves. Then he goes to the bridge and throws a rose in the river," Tyson said, working on the noose they were going to use. Ivy and Malich were working on the dress Ivy would wear tomorrow.

October 29

First Night Of The Festival

There was always a hay rack ride on the first night of the festival, and it gave a tour of where the Lady in White lived, where she jumped off the bridge, and where her children were suppose to be buried. That afternoon, Malich and the others drove down to Crybaby Bridge to set everything up. They were setting up the platform that Gordy would stand on to make him look like he was hanging in mid air.

"Are you sure that there is no way for me to actually kill myself on this thing?" Gordy asked.

"For the hundredth time, Gordy, we tested it and it holds both me and Tyson with no problem," said Malich, tired of hearing Gordy complain about the platform.

"Will you relax, Gordy? If the platform breaks, we'll make sure to bury some ding-dongs with you so you don't get hungry in the after life," Tyson said, laughing. Tyson always made jokes about Gordy's ability to eat anything and not gain a pound.

"Yea, and when you die maybe we can have a nightlight installed," Gordy retorted back. Tyson wrapped his arm around Gordy's neck and they wrestled for a few minuets. Tyson got Gordy in a headlock until he finally cried uncle. Tyson let him fall to the ground. Gordy picked himself up and brushed the dirt off his pants.

"Oh, don't look so bummed. You'll win one of these days and when you do I'll kiss your shoes," Tyson said throwing Gordy a bottle of water.

Gordy caught it and looked at it as if he was going to throw it back at him. Instead, he opened it and took a swig. Ivy came up behind him, put an arm around his shoulders, and handed him a climbing harness. "What's this for?" he asked taking the harness from her, looking at it worried. "It's to help you get the noose around your neck and just in case something happens to the platform," she said.

Gordy looked from the harness to the platform and then at Ivy. "What are you gonna secure it to just in case something does go wrong?"

"We'll secure it to the bridge, that way if you do fall or something then all you have to do is swing to the bridge and pull yourself up."

Gordy still didn't seem to like this idea.

### Night of the Festival

#### Crybaby Bridge/Nissa Vaughn's House

Everything was in place for the prank. Malich, Tyson, and Ivy were headed to the bridge. Gordy was going to meet up with them before the tour started. Malich, Tyson, and Ivy went to the bridge to make sure everything was still in place and that nobody could see Malich and Tyson hiding on the other side of the bank. Ivy was in a white, knee length dress that was ripped a bit to make it look worn, and she was not wearing shoes.

"Where's Gordy? He should be here by now," said Tyson after about an hour.

"I don't know," said Ivy, shivering.

"Why don't you call him and see where he's at?"

Her teeth were chattering like crazy. Malich shrugged off his jacket and handed it to her. She took it with a smile, putting her arms through it.

"Thanks."

"No problem," he said, smiling.

Tyson rolled his eyes, pulled out his cell phone, and dialed Gordy's number. There was a pause as he waited for Gordy to answer.

"Hey where are you?"

"I'm getting ready to go past the bridge."

"What took you so long?"

"I couldn't get out of my house. My mom was yelling at me about my grades."

"Well hurry up. It's freezing out here."

"All right I'll be there in...hey I see Ivy."

"What do you mean you see Ivy? She's in the clearing with me and Malich."

"No, I'm serious. She's standing along the side of the road in that white dress."

"No, she's standing right next to me. You're seeing things."

"Well, whoever it is, I'm giving them a ride."

"Didn't your mother ever tell you not to pick up strangers? Besides, what's Amber gonna think when she hears you're picking up girls on the side of the road?"

Malich and Ivy looked at Tyson with a weird expression on their faces. Tyson just smiled and held up his index finger.

"What Amber doesn't know won't hurt her."

"Yea, you'll think that when she... Gordy? Hello? Gordy, I can't hear you; there's too much static. Gordy? Gordy?"

Tyson looked at his phone, shut it, and looked at Malich and Ivy.

"The call was lost," he said, looking at his service bars.

Tyson's phone rang. "Gordy? What happened..."

"TYSON HELP ME!!! IT'S HER! IT'S NISAA VAU.... AHHHHH!"

The phone went silent. They looked at each other.

"We have to go help him," said Malich.

They ran to the jeep and drove out of the clearing. When they got to the end of the road that leads to the bridge they found Gordy's car. The doors were open and there was no one inside.

Then Malich saw Gordy's cell phone on the floor. There was a voicemail and he checked the message. It was Gordy screaming. There was another voice that he didn't recognize. It was saying, "I can never go home."

# *Honorable Mention Fiction*

Josh Keck

Macomb High School

## *Persecution*

My tired eyes can no longer hold back the flow of tears now covering my face. These salty beads dripping off of my chin are not tears of joy. Nor are they tears of sadness. Those tears I pray for when my eyes pour out tears of unrelenting fear and unyielding hopelessness like they are now. These heavy drops drag on my weary body, as well as tear open my already jaded spirit.

I lift my heavy head. My eyes, now mere funnels for torrents of water, don't see the grey ceiling. They try to pierce through it, through the roof of the prison, and even the sky, hoping for a glimpse of God in this hellish nightmare. Not seeing what they want, my eyes gaze around the bare cell. For the past six weeks this cell has been the friendliest place in my life. As I look around my empty cell, disheartened, I begin to wonder if all of this was worth it. I am so different from the man that came here three years ago.

Three years ago, full of hope and so proud to be a new missionary, I took my first flight across thousands of miles to the city of La Flauradora. Since then, I have gotten a job, started a home church, and have been reaching the lost here. That was, until six weeks ago. During one of our weekly meetings, a new member of the church came in, trailing behind him the secret police. They then brought the twelve members of my church and me to this prison, where I have been ever since. During the first week, we were taken individually to a dark room where commanders of the secret police questioned us. Each time we said something they didn't like, they beat us. The second week, they started letting us go if we compromised with them. My dearest friend here, Mateo, had been told that if he denied Christ, spat on the Bible, and gave up all of his money, that he could go. After coming back and telling the rest of us the deal, he then left, doing exactly what the commander had asked of him. If I could only describe the look of pure disgrace on his face as they paraded him by our cell, taking him back out into the world of freedom.

Over the next three weeks, ten of the members gave in, including Mateo's brother, Marco. Then there was just one other man and me left in the cold cell. If I could have picked one man to be left alone in this cell with, other than my dear Mateo, it would have been Raul. He was at least a foot taller than me, and was extremely well built. His size alone was a small comfort in this dark place. But compared to his heart, his physical size was like comparing an ant to a human. He was the first member of the church here, and he hasn't missed a single service since the first time he came. He also opened up his house to the church for services. You see, we had to keep moving the services around so no one got suspicious of our activities. His love for the Lord was something not matched by anything this world had to offer him.

Four days ago, Raul and I were taken by a group of officers to a cathedral-sized room. They chained him up in the corner, both of his arms on two different walls. They then started building a wall out of bricks around him. Every half hour or so, the commander asked him if he would take the compromise. Each time he was asked this, he said no, and that the Lord would either deliver him, or take him from this world to heaven. After six hours, they had lowered a concrete slab over the walls with just a layer of bricks open. One last time they asked him, and once more, Raul defiantly said no. They put in the last layer of bricks, and Raul died inside the tomb he had watched them make for him. I cried and cried and cried over the loss for two days straight, half tears of sadness over the loss of Raul, half these tears for fear in knowing that if they could murder Raul like that, then I was probably next.

I have been alone in the cell for four days, and all there is for me to do is pray for strength and worry about it. How different I truly am from the man I was when I first came here. I look down at myself, noticing every bruise and scratch. My arms are heavily bruised, my legs torn in so many places, and my feet swollen. The pain hasn't stopped, but I've always been good at coping with it. I feel nothing but hatred for the men that did this to me, and pity for the other members of the church. I am scared out of my mind. Being here is dwindling my faith slowly down. I need hope. And just as I think this, a single verse comes into my head. Philippians 1:21. Paul is being persecuted, as I am now, possibly worse. And yet he writes: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." Paul was the most famous martyr aside from the Lord himself, and through his words, I am now finding strength to keep going.

"Lord, give me strength." My voice sounds fragile and weak, but I continue to pray. "I know what they will do to me, and I am scared to death. Jesus, even you were scared before your persecution and death. So Lord, I don't pray for life, unless by my life others come to you. Lord I just pray that I am able to face this trial like you did."

"Shut up!" A guard by my cell yells this at me, and walks over to my cell. "You are going to die, you fool, just give the commander what he wants and he'll let you go."

"I can't."

"Why not? All the others did. They all left, and the one who didn't is rotting in that brick crypt. You have the chance to save yourself."

“God’s own son died for me to have life, so why should I deny and abandon him, when I have a chance to die in his name?”

“That makes no sense.”

“Paul, a man who died for the Lord, says that to live would be Christ and to die would be gain. If he can stand in front of death that way, so can I.” Saying these things to this young man, I find, makes me believe that I can actually go through with this.

“You have so much faith in this God of yours, but everyone knows that only the weak believe in a higher being.”

“I’m sorry you believe that. God wants to do so much in your life, and all you have to do to get it is accept him as your savior.”

“How do I do that?”

Right after he says this, a lieutenant comes in front of him, opens my cell, and drags me behind him, going exactly where I fear: the cathedral room.

When we enter, I am taken to the corner opposite Raul’s tomb. They shackle me exactly as I had seen them do to Raul, and drag out carts of large bricks, three times the size of Raul’s. Thank the Lord this will be over soon. “You have seen what we did to the other man from your cell, so we don’t need to explain what is going on. You will either take the compromise I made for you, or you will find yourself mirroring your friend.” The commander is seated in a chair facing me.

I am silent as the commander says this, and remain silent as the first two layers of bricks are placed, completing a square with the walls. I can’t think through my fear, but I know that soon I will be rejoicing with Jesus. “So, will you take the offer? It’s not much for you to do.”

“I can’t do that. I love the Lord too much to betray and abandon him like that.”

The next three layers are placed and the cement ceiling is lowered over them. With just the one layer remaining, the commander asks once again.

“This is your last chance at life. Just take my offer, you fool.”

The only thing I can say through my fear is “No,” but it’s enough to decide my fate. The last layer is placed on, except for one large gap where the final brick would go. As they lift the brick to put it into place, I can’t help but yell a final proclamation.

“I FORGIVE YOU!”

The last brick is put in, and utter darkness falls on my life.

# *1st Place Non-Fiction*

Makayla Trotter

Macomb High School

## *Little-Girl Shaped Holes*

The moment I learned that Emily Vallillo had been hurt I was climbing over a fence, sneaking into my neighbor's horse corral to ride her 5-year-old gelding. I perched on the top rung and sat, incredulous, listening to the radio as it sifted heavily through the August heat and the open barn door. She had been riding her bicycle with her father, crashed, and received "severe head trauma." As I straddled the fence, I said a child-like prayer that was more like a spoken hope, and jumped down, my bare feet creating clouds in the barnyard dust. Minutes later I was riding Izzy bareback, circling the corral again and again, urging him to go faster so that the breeze would pick up my heavy hair from my hot neck. I rode until my legs became so sweaty, they were stained brown by Izzy's dirty coat. When I became bored I lay down on his back, my feet stretched up on his neck, arms limp at his side, completely trusting and carefree, as if daring someone to tell me that there was any danger at all in the world.

Emily died the next day. She was only 11 years old, just as I was. Although we had been in the same first grade class, I did not know her very well at all. Even at that young age, however, before children are considered capable of appreciating things that are divine and rare, her angelic beauty had been imprinted in my mind. This, coupled with the fact that in each memory I owned of Emily she was smiling, was enough, and I began to grieve. It was in witnessing this same grief felt in the lives of those around me, lives of those who had loved her unconditionally and lives also like mine, touched briefly by her presence, that I began to feel drawn to her in ways I did not know were possible. Emily's death shattered my little-girl perceptions and brought a mysterious heartache directly to my home.

I live on a farm near Pennington Point Cemetery. Central Illinois is generally flat, but my house sits atop of one of many rolling hills, the crevices of which have fashioned chilled streams and creeks shaded by miniature forests and neighbored by corn, soybean, alfalfa or livestock fields. My house is just 200 yards directly south of the cemetery. To the north of the cemetery is a valley and stream, northern still an untamed marshland. To the east and the west are my favorite sunrises and sunsets, cow pastures, and my father's apple orchards. In Sunday School I was taught that when you died you went to paradise, but I already knew that. It was here that Emily's parents chose to bury her, in a corner plot of heaven.

Before she was laid to rest, my father and I paid our respects at her public visitation. It was a closed casket. My father gently encouraged me to introduce myself to her mother and so, awkwardly and very quietly, I explained to her that I lived near the cemetery where she would bury her daughter. Her eyes were red and swollen but she seemed delighted to meet me.

"Well aren't you lucky to live somewhere so beautiful?" she said to me, smiling broadly. A discomforting silence ensued. Her words echoed heavily in my mind, circling through my ears again and again. "*Aren't you lucky to live? Lucky to live...lucky to live.*" The sin pressed heavy on my chest and rose slowly in my throat; I wanted to disappear, to weep. I looked up at Mrs. Vallillo, my eyes pleading with her to accept my unspoken apology, and she bit her lip.

She continued, asking me if the horse in the pasture next to the cemetery was mine. I said that his name was King Tut and since I was the only one in my family who cared much for horses, I supposed that made him mine. This answer was good enough for her. She asked what kind of treats he enjoyed.

"Oh you know, apples and carrots and pears. He'll eat just about anything, he's so fat."

The left side of her mouth stretched itself out slightly as if trying to grin, but the right side failed to follow suit, leaving her looking broken and lopsided. She took a piece of my hair and began twisting it with two fingers thoughtfully and then set it back on my shoulder. She sighed deeply. Suddenly she reached out and gripped my hands tightly, a damp Kleenex still stuck in her right hand.

"Does he like sugar cubes?" she asked in an urgent whisper. I had never given King Tut sugar cubes. We didn't even have sugar cubes in my house.

"Yes. Yes he loves sugar cubes," I said quietly. I felt as though we were having an important conversation and it was necessary for my voice to reflect this. Mrs. Vallillo's blue-green eyes began going back and forth across mine as if they could only look at one at a time, as if they were searching for something, and then they began swimming with tears.

"Do you... do you think if we put sugar cubes on the fence rows, would he find them?" Mrs. Vallillo was whispering now too. She was holding on to me like I was the only thing keeping her anchored to the floor. I felt like everything in that mortuary depended on my answer, it was that important. I didn't dare breathe.

"I think he would. And he would love that."

Mrs. Vallillo exhaled deeply and her grip on my wrists slackened. She seemed satisfied with this somehow.

"Good," she said, and nodded to herself. She hugged me tight and I felt my body mesh into hers. She was not wearing any perfume.

The next day after the last car of the funeral procession had pulled away I walked down my road to the cemetery, picking a handful of ditch daisies on the way.

When I sat down next to the mound of fresh flowers, flowers grander than mine, the silence pressed in all around me until I could not take it any longer and I started talking to Emily about nothing in particular. I talked and talked and talked. After a time I began to hear a tractor coming up the road somewhere behind me. I assumed it was my dad coming in from the fields but when I turned around I saw a small, unfamiliar tractor. I could scarcely believe it, but that tractor was pulling right in to Pennington Point Cemetery, just fitting under the arched gateway. I hurried to stand up and look for the flip-flops that I had kicked off somewhere. After parking the John Deere on the gravel roadway, a stranger stepped down from the open cab. He looked like he was my dad's age, was wearing a thin gray tee-shirt, and had little bits of alfalfa stuck all over his damp skin. I stood there like a dumb mute, one foot still padding the grass around me, looking for its sandal, as if it was important to not appear like the barefoot farm-girl that I was. The farmer looked me over once, looked at Emily's grave for a long moment, then back to me.

"You were her age, weren't you?" he asked me. I nodded. Suddenly he let loose a dry, choked sob and put a hand up to his eyes. The other dug into his hip and his broad shoulders became hunched. This man was crying.

"It's not natural, is it? Having to say goodbye. To someone. So young? Parents. Shouldn't have. To bury their babies. This isn't the way. It was supposed to be." He was barely making any noise, just standing there in front of me choking on his words and sweating in the summer heat, tears streaming down his face and watering the dry grass below. The man looked back at Emily's grave, wiped his face with his damp and dirty shirt, took a deep breath, and then squinted up at the sun.

He whispered, "These things sure do happen fast don't they? One minute your little girl is riding her bike and then..." he motioned vaguely at Emily's oval, rose colored tombstone. He stood there like that for another minute or so, silently taking in Emily's grave as if trying to memorize every flower laid there. Finally, he looked back to me.

"Do you mind if I give you a hug?" he asked quietly.

For some reason, I was not afraid of this man. I realized that he was just another father standing before two daughters, only one of which he could hold. I nodded and stepped towards him. He smelled like hay and summer and sweat; he smelled like my own father. When I stepped away I smiled up at him and he said goodbye. That was all.

In the years that have followed I often would sit and visit with Emily. I wonder what classes she would take, which boys she would date and where she would be today. I didn't know Emily very well, but we were both daughters who had mothers and fathers and in the face of tragedy, that alone is enough to tie you to a person. In her absence, I was honored to fill the little-girl shaped holes she left in the lives of parents whose only instincts were to love.

# *2nd Place Non-Fiction*

Ashley Reynolds

Pekin Community High School

## *Hostage*

It's the clink of metal on a ceramic dish, the short and demanding bark, the patter of paws on pristine carpet. It's the sparkle of sweet brown eyes, the wavy grey tail wagging joyfully, the pink collar holding a marked tag. It's the odor woven into the blankets, the reek of a bathroom after a torturous bath, the scent that follows such a cleansing.

It's the soft, downy feel of a long, winter coat, the warmth of a full and happy belly, the cool wetness of a small, searching nose.

The sense of loss permeates my every day. Waiting ears, eyes, nose, and hands search for a new captive to hold my ransom. I, a sympathetic kidnapper, gave in to the authorities too soon. I tried to hold on to my hostage, but a sense of right overcame. The ransom (my selfish happiness) wasn't enough anymore. Conclusions of her pain and suffering tugged at my chest like an asthma attack, complete with a restricted airway and a refusal of oxygen to move. Hesitantly, I reached for the inhaler, took a deep breath, and released the prisoner. My lungs still retched with agony.

Buttons was born on February thirteenth, 1994, and some six weeks later, I brought her home. Black and white, a small shih tzu puppy, she quickly became part of the family: both my sibling and my baby. Even at the age of four, I had no doubt that she and I would be the perfect companions.

I marveled at life's irony as I heard the words "congestive heart failure." No one that I knew had a bigger heart than she, and it was failing. Too much love had seeped through her veins, and the master muscle could no longer handle it. The veterinarian said we would have six months, but it went by awfully fast in twenty-four hours.

The first few nights Buttons spent with us were very interesting. Dad had set up my old crib in my room for her to sleep in, and it was saturated with several blankets for added comfort. Mom tucked me in on that first night, and I drifted into a youthful slumber. As I woke in the morning, I knew something was different. I heard Mom and Dad chuckling from just behind my closed bedroom door. I sat up in bed, swung my legs over the edge, and narrowly avoided a sleeping puppy. Buttons had somehow broken loose from my crib during the night to sleep next to my head on the floor. I childishly reached down to hold her and wish her a good morning, grinning at her early and eager loyalty.

The next night, Dad decided that a laundry basket padded with blankets might be a better choice for Buttons' bed. But Buttons was one step ahead: I woke the next morning to my new friend sleeping on the floor just as she had before. I giggled—she really was my puppy. Tired of fighting Buttons' determination, Mom and Dad decided to let her sleep on the bed with me, just as she seemed to want to. There was never another problem; I would rouse each morning with her small, lithe body curled next to mine, and a wave of peacefulness would wash over me as I heard her snoring softly.

What was I to do? How could I steal her life? Was it my place to take her last breath from her like a greedy thief? But the pain she must be going through came to the forefront of my mind. Her heart was pushing on her ribcage. Labored breaths hung in the air with a wheeze. Was her pain really worth my happiness?

Buttons' favorite time of day was mealtime. Her small tummy never revealed its true identity: a bottomless pit. Dog food was the bane of Buttons' existence. Her loyalties laid with people food, particularly spicy chicken wings and pancakes (as long as they were swimming in syrup). But her favorite meal of all time was Mom's homemade spaghetti. She devoured her own plate as well as Mom's and my leftovers. Her usually grey snout and mouth would be stained orange from the sauce and would require a thorough washing by me or the carpet, whichever she preferred that day.

Her nose was like a magnet for people food. If chicken wings or chocolate chip cookies were in the oven, Buttons would stealthily slink into the kitchen, sit by the stove, and wait for them to be done. One or two of Mom's chocolate chip cookies were expected to be in her dish whenever they were baked, but they had to be warm or else Buttons would not touch them. That's how Buttons was about her food; she wasn't particularly picky about what she ate, as long as it was made the way she liked.

I have never been scared of needles. That was the first day I felt fear puncture my façade. One prick and my baby would be gone forever. One small push and the medicine would enter her, stopping her oversized but tender heart. Her lungs would not expand, her eyes would not see. That needle would destroy everything my world revolved around; it would pierce my own heart as it slid through her skin.

Cuddling was a favorite pastime of hers. Buttons would curl up next to almost anyone, especially if they were willing to rub her ears or belly. We cuddled often, whether it was at nap time or when we watched a movie together. *101 Dalmatians* was Buttons' favorite movie. She would lay on my lap, curled into a tight ball, but her head would be raised to watch the mass of animated spots fly across the screen. Her ears perked every time she heard a bark from the television speakers, and I could feel a smile pull at my lips, her cute tendencies almost too much to bear.

I had reached a decision. I couldn't stand to put her through more pain. She deserved so much better than to fade into a robot on medication that she despised. I held her tightly in my arms as the vet reentered the room. Dad was out of town for work, but Mom, my grandma, and my (human) best friend were all there with me to say good-bye to her. I knew I wanted to hold her when they made the injection. I did not want her to die in the hands of a stranger. She seemed to know something was going to happen. I sat her on the cold, metal examination table and held her small head in my hands, rubbing her ears to sooth us both. I looked into her gentle eyes and saw a hint of fear. I repeated to her, "I love you, I love you..." It was the last thing she heard as the formidable needle poisoned her. Softly collapsing onto the table, she left me.

For one brief second, I denied my loss. Then it all hit me as I felt myself begin to sob harder than ever, falling to the floor and mourning the greatest loss of my life.

I didn't remember a day in my life that didn't include her. She was a constant, invariable and true. But now I faced an unimaginable reality: life without my best friend. I cried and cried over her small body, finally allowing Mom to drag me from the room, telling me that I had to let go. Arriving home was awful. I saw her all around me, smelled her, wrapped myself up in her blanket. I passed the couch in the living room that was concrete evidence of her life. An indentation was present on top of the back of the couch, showing where she laid (against Mom's wishes). We had tried so many times to fluff the couch back up, but it was impossible. Buttons had made her mark.

My life hasn't been the same since she left. Every day I face the memories of her, and I wonder if I could have, would have, done anything differently. It has taken so long to realize that prolonging her life would have just caused her pain, and that I gave her everything I could while she was alive. Her thirteen years were well-lived: full of car rides, spaghetti, and snuggles. Loving her was all I could do. She was not my hostage to hold; I was hers.

# *3rd Place Non-Fiction*

Amanda Axley

Macomb High School

## *To Every Season*

When I think about myself in nature, I imagine myself as one of many, yet unique. A snowflake maybe, although I've heard that snowflakes actually do repeat, even though nobody will ever live long enough to see the twin of the snowflake they've examined.

Sometimes when it's nice outside, I'll go and find a place to read or write. I like walking down our road to the woods between our house and our neighbors', and depending on what shoes I happen to be wearing, I might slip through the gap in the fence and walk through the woods. There are bushes with needle-sharp thorns and flowers and trees with spikes as long as my hand. I see deer sometimes, but mostly it's just the forest, the creek, and me.

The creek is beautiful; its banks are tall and steep, held together by tree roots. The stream itself is tiny and no deeper than a foot, but when it floods, the banks become steeper and wider. There are bridges where trees have fallen, but I don't walk over them because they died long before they fell, and would surely break if I were to step on any one of them.

Hanging from trees both live and dead is a frothy canopy of vines and tangled branches. Bright orange-red flowers shaped like little cornucopias creep up tree trunks, beautiful in their languorous decorum. They mingle with the sweet blooms of honeysuckle vines and the ironic elegance of poison ivy. I asked my mother one time what the orange flowers were, but she didn't know. For a while I felt like maybe I'd had the good fortune to discover a secret flower.

The woods smell like nature; earth, air, trees, and flowers. A rich, deep, loamy smell of leaves in fall and the sweet tang of grass in spring. On a clear autumn day, I can smell the leaves turning colors and the cold waiting to take over. Spring is rain and dew, and summer is heat and sunshine. Only in the woods can I smell these things.

When it rains, I sometimes go and walk in the thicket of maples and elderberries in my backyard. Drops fall on my skin and my hair becomes misty like a spider web in the morning before the sun burns off the dew. Spring rain is my favorite; I don't like the warm rains of summer, but cold rain doesn't suit me either. As for the spring rains, the ones that flood the creek, they are neither warm nor cold but something in between that calms my mind and makes me slow down and appreciate life that much more.

During the summer, I go and sit on our gas tank, which has been lonely since winter left, and I read. There's a crabapple tree next to the tank, and lilacs beside that, and butterfly bushes beside those. The bees and butterflies make their way through the flowers, and I watch them between pages. They're so bright, and the sun is so warm; I'm left with the feeling that maybe this is what life is really about.

# *Honorable Mention Non-Fiction*

Colten Bradford

V.I.T. High School

## *The Scramble*

I stood behind the chalk line with all of the other kids. My knees started to shake as I saw the stock trailers slowly backing up to the arena. I didn't know what I had gotten myself into. The trailer started to shudder and shake as a man came up to it and opened the door. Three muscular, sleek-black calves lunged out. They started to prance around the arena with their heads held high and their tails up in the air.

I knew I had to catch one of these energetic, wild-eyed animals, so I swallowed down my fear and tried my best to ignore the jeering crowd. I went through my game plan in my head. I was ready. The judge's voice then echoed in the arena as he counted down.

"Three, Two, One, Go!"

We were off. As mass confusion took over the arena, I quickly realized why this event is called a scramble. My competitors were running around everywhere as the calves zigzagged the best that they could to stay out of arms' reach.

All of my precious planning and practiced maneuvers were thrown out of the window. The bellows of the calves seemed thunderous in the arena as one kid after another tried their best to halter them, but just as soon as they got a hold of a calf, they were thrown off. I finally found myself in a position where a calf was charging right at me. I got my stick-like arms around its thick neck. Its muscular, powerful body almost ripped itself from my clutches, but I held on. The calf bucked and kicked and drug me all over the arena. I had to wear it down, or at least hang on until it got tired enough to stop for a moment. It was in that crucial moment that I would have to get my halter on it. I finally got the calf to calm down when the crowd erupted with cheers. I knew one calf was caught. One down, two to go.

The uproar of the crowd sent my calf into a frenzy again. With its tongue hanging out, slobber flying, and its eyes rolling to the back of its head, the calf bucked with all of its might. I managed to hold onto its neck as it ran up and down the arena trying to shake me off. My feet slammed on the ground with every step the calf took. I couldn't get the calf to stop. I could only hold on for dear life. When I thought the calf was about to give up, I looked up to see where we were. Unfortunately, the only thing I saw was a bright orange fence rushing toward me. I only had time to curse before I was ripped off the calf.

My face smashed against the fence and I fell to the ground. With my mouth full of dirt, I could hear the groan of the crowd. I knew that it had to have looked bad.

"Are you okay, bud?" a woman asked me from across the fence.

"Yeah, I'm fine." I replied as I hopped up from the ground, pretending that I was okay, but I knew that I wasn't. With my adrenaline pumping, I really couldn't feel the large bruise that was starting to swell on my right cheek. All I could feel at this point was my severely injured pride. With my best chance of haltering a calf gone, I knew that it was only a matter of time before the last two calves were caught. Sure enough, by the time I got up, the two remaining calves had already been wrestled to the ground and haltered.

I walked slowly out of the arena with my head facing the ground, disappointed that I would be going home empty-handed. Then I realized, so what if I had cow poop smeared all over my body, so what if my clothes were torn, and so what if I had a huge bruise growing on the side of my face. I faced my fears and tried my absolute best. What else can anyone ask for? As I kept replaying the scramble in my mind, I began planning more strategies for next year.

# *Honorable Mention Non-Fiction*

Autumn DePew

Keokuk High School

## *Grandma's House*

There is a place, tucked away in the corner of Maryland, which has always been an Eden for me. Outside the little town of Ridgely, lives my grandmother.

Her house is as square as a cereal box, and red like rust on metal. There is a barn with a sagging roof off to the right and a chicken pen that hasn't housed chickens since my mom was a teenager. There are several large trees in the front yard. One of them has a tire swing dangling from its lower branch and another is decorated with an array of wind chimes. Whenever the wind blows, a symphony plays.

Around the back there is a sun porch with an old fashioned, brick oven. Under the stone steps lives a dog named Butt Eye, who lost his tail fighting. On all sides there is corn, far as the eye can see. They stand tall and proud, as golden as the sun. Perfect for playing hide and go seek.

Inside, you can smell flour in the kitchen and musk in the living room. A parrot sits and talks about fish next to the TV. The windows don't have curtains, but welcome in the sunshine, pouring rainbow puddles on the couch and floor. There are pictures of Indian women all along the walls, as reminders of heritage, and figurines made of porcelain on the mantel above the fireplace.

The carpet is shag and tangles around your toes like coarse hair. A handmade rug lies in the hall, expanding the entire length, and leads up the stairs. The railing is old and the paint is curling and chipping. The walls have hundreds of pictures of family I have never even met.

On the second floor, my favorite room is on the left across from the bathroom. The bed is small but the shelves of books make it worth it. There are copies of novels that date back to WWI and beautiful portraits of sunsets in far away places. The smell is a mixture of dust and perfume, which I spray a couple times before going to bed. The windows are small but have a good view of the front yard. The button eyes of stuffed animals peer at you from the hammock they have been resting in since my uncle grew too old for them. His awards are tacked to the walls, mostly for 4H. I see his old prom picture on the nightstand with a girl I don't know, and only Grandma can remember her name. On the third floor there is a maze of rooms that are filled with decaying cardboard boxes of school papers and photo albums. The stairs leading upwards are narrow and steep. The windows are boarded up and there is a thick layer of dust on the floor that is not friendly to white socks. The air is filled with the scent of mothballs and urine, from all the cats that like to pee up there, marking their territory.

My second favorite room is the room my grandmother takes her naps in. There is a TV with all kinds of movies to choose from; movies like *Casablanca* and *My Other Wife*. There is a dress hanging in the corner that my grandmother wore on her wedding day. Its fabric is yellowed and the lace is rough, but I love to try it on nonetheless. Bumblebees seem to like sneaking in through the windows and burying in the carpet, making a walk across the room dangerous, but my grandmother never complains when one pokes her with its stinger.

I like to sit on the tire swing in the front, watching my family gather around the old picnic table, arguing over platters of seafood, and soak up the warm sun. Here in a little bit, we'll be leaving for the beach, and I can't wait to swim my little heart out. I know it will be years before I get to see this place again, so I take my time and try to memorize every little detail of this place. In my dreams, I will return to this little slice of heaven.

Here, I have felt the safest.

# *Honorable Mention Non-Fiction*

Leah Maerz

Keokuk High School

## *Generation Gap*

Unlike what I originally expected, comparing my generation to my dad's is like comparing night to day. I mean, let's get real! It sometimes seems as though the generation gap between us is so great, it is as though we are living a hundred years apart.

For example, I ask my dad if he has any CDs or special "pics" from his days at high school and he gives me this "are you kidding" kind of glare. "First of all," he retorts, in a matter of fact attitude, "CDs weren't even dreamed of back then, and by the way, the music I used to listen to doesn't even compare to the 'music' you listen to with your little MPV player, or whatever you call it," he finishes while giving me a glance that seems to say 'I'm better than you.'

I try not to giggle as I pull out my ear buds and prepare myself to really listen up to the 'back in my day...' speech that was already burned into my brain from hearing it a thousand times before.

"Back in my day," he says in a tone that is almost patronizing, "we didn't have computers, calculators, CDs or DDDs. We had pencil and paper and a brain!"

This time I couldn't control my laughter and let out a good laugh at my father's ill use of acronyms. I had to respond, "So, you think we don't have brains now because we have better technology than you had when you were in school?"

He was really quick to posit, "You have a brain, but you just don't have to use it anymore!" I really felt like getting defensive and mocking everything that he has said at this point, including his misuse of technologic jargon, but I figured I might not get the rest of this paper done without my dad's cooperation, so I calmed down and tried a different approach.

I asked about sports and surprisingly got the same kind of enthusiasm and school spirit feelings from him that is so consistent with our current athletic programs now. I was just beginning to almost feel a connection with generations past when my dad, out of nowhere, began to play the 'deprived' card. The conversation went from 'going' to a football game to 'walking' to a football game. "Why is it that everyone expects a ride everywhere they go, or a car to get them there?" he asked. "Back in my day," he went on again, "we actually knew how to walk or get a job so that we could afford a car!"

Talking about transportation and cars, of course, led to the price of gas and how ridiculous the prices are now. "I paid nineteen cents for a gallon of gas during a gas war," he went on again. "The gas prices right now would have given me a heart attack thirty years ago!"

The conversation then led to a discussion about how my generation is very sensitive about the brand of clothing that we wear. He noted that it seems as though it is a faux paux to wear anything without a designer label. I agreed with the observation, and asked him about the clothes that he wore when he was in high school. He continued and said that his mother used to make a lot of his clothing, and he had a lot of hand-me-downs. "I still remember the first pair of blue jeans that my mom bought me," he says. "It was like Christmas morning." When he said this, his face seemed to light up with that memory. "I remember I ripped a hole in the knee the first day I wore them," he exclaimed. "I had tears in my eyes when I had to tell my mom."

After he described his first run in with his very own pair of blue jeans, I felt almost guilty about the clothes that I was wearing. I realized then that I have never had to wear hand-me-downs or have my mother make my clothing. I then felt ashamed when I remembered how I thought I was being deprived when I was denied a pair of \$200 blue jeans last summer. This story seemed to touch a nerve; my father's generation didn't need expensive clothing or advanced technology to make them happy and they seemed to get along just fine without calculators and MP3 players. When I look at my generation, it seems as though we rely too much on technology and seem to forget the simple pleasures in life, such as enjoying time with family without the television or computer in the background.

Talking with my dad made me come to the realization that the generations that we grew up in were, actually, very different. His generation seemed to enjoy the simple things in life, such as a new pair of blue jeans, while my generation can't turn their cell phones off long enough to enjoy them. Although the generation gap is quite significant between my father and I, there is no reason that we can't get along; I'm learning how to enjoy the simple things in life, and he's getting a lesson in technology.

# *Honorable Mention Non-Fiction*

Sarah Ritter

V.I.T. High School

## *Nothing More, Nothing Less*

It was a typical Monday filled with mistakes and unaccomplished tasks. The entire day flew by like an eight-wheeler on an interstate, with no purposeful direction or occurrences worth mentioning. I had agreed to accompany my Mom to her appointment at the salon after an agonizing day as a typical high school student. She was scheduled for a highlight and an all-over color, which would amount up to about three hours of painting on color and bending foil. I had planned on spending the duration of the appointment sitting in a rock-hard chair, delaying my responsibilities for the evening. I began to examine my already familiar surroundings when it occurred to me that I must rescue myself from the ordinary and mundane.

I began to pace around the salon with anxiety. The monotonous schedule that I had been forced to follow throughout the day was really taking a toll on my patience. My mind had finally arrived at an intersection where I could do something, anything at all, or declare myself temporarily insane. It was at that moment when a flashing, neon sign advertising acrylic finger nails became my salvation. Well, it wasn't bungee jumping or sky diving but for the time being it would have to do.

I walked into the portion of the salon that I typically avoided as a symbol of oppression against peer pressure and excessive 'prissy' behavior. I had arrived at the conclusion some time ago, that fake fingernails were a shameful tool used to trick innocent and unsuspecting females into paying a lot of money for something that would only hinder their ability to execute everyday activities with ease. I thought out the situation and came to the conclusion that I was being rather capricious in my judgments, and that I was far too young to be dismissing something I had never experienced. I then forced myself to throw my inhibitions to the wind and try something new; as soon as I recovered from the overpowering stench of conformism I sat down and began the process.

The eccentric Asian man named Andy who worked in the salon sat down at the counter and asked to see my hands. I was already hesitant and asking myself what I had gotten into when Andy informed me that my fingernails were horrible. He stared at my nails with an expression of horror and disbelief.

"Oh my, you bite your nails," Andy said.

"Mmm----yes," I replied. In my mind I was screaming, "Could you have said that any louder!?"

Andy exclaimed, "You decide to get acrylics in nick of time----otherwise no man ever want to marry you. No man in right mind will marry girl with bad nails."

WOW, as if I hadn't had a bad enough day already! A perfect stranger is sitting here telling me that I not only need to worry about college applications, completing excessive amounts of homework, finding stylish clothing, and having fashionable hair, but now I also have to worry about what my fingernails look like! My new, outspoken friend then began to grind away the surface of my fingernails along with what was left of my dignity.

Before I blinked, my natural nails were ground to a thin layer of adhesive for the piece of plastic that would soon be another obstacle for me to overcome. The acrylics were glued on one at a time; with each added nail I felt my hands gradually become more awkward and uncomfortable. I then proceeded to soak my nails in some strong-smelling liquid that would create a permanent 'bond' between me and my new burden. The task of applying the acrylics was coming to an end just in time for the most difficult decision of all....the color. I approached a wall of shiny glass bottles filled with every color imaginable. Should I choose school bus yellow? No way! As if these giant, Dracula-like nails won't draw enough attention on their own. Maybe I should go with something darker and more seasonal...yes, that is definitely the way to go. I have already conformed to society; I might as well go all the way and conform to the seasons.

As I sat at a wooden counter with my hands resting under a group of small fans, I began to think about the decision that I had made so suddenly. Was I really conforming, or just acting on an idea that was truly appealing to me? So what if I had conformed? I came to the conclusion that it is O.K. to give in to the temptations of peer pressure, as long as you do not abandon your original self. Following the cool new trends and dressing for the times is all part of interacting with society, not conforming to it. People change with each new hairstyle and fashion trend; it is natural to take a little part of every experience with you as well as leaving something behind. I fought my negative, predetermined opinions of something I knew nothing about and in turn, I had some rather good-looking results. I looked down at my new appendages and realized that I hadn't made a colossal, life-altering decision; I acted on an impulse and was given shiny new nails as my reward. Nothing more, nothing less.



# *Department of English and Journalism*

## *Program Information*

### Major Programs

#### *English*

The department offers majors in English (literature and language) and English Education. Students in both options can take a variety of courses in areas reflecting the major approaches that define the study of language and literature today. The study of Forms provides students precise language and concepts to understand how the structures of literature inform its meaning. The study of Traditions emphasizes the historical development of literature, particularly in terms of British and American literatures. Language and Theory courses give students the tools to precisely understand language and reflect on how texts come to have meaning in a variety of discourses, cultural contexts, and philosophical perspectives. Social Justice courses encourage students to explore how literary studies address issues of cultural power and politics. Examples would include the role of literature in responding to racism, gender identities, class conflict, and disability.

Literature and language majors take an additional professional development course. English education majors additionally take courses in the teaching of language, literature, and writing. All majors complete their training in English with a senior seminar.

#### *Journalism*

The journalism major requires core courses in basic newswriting and reporting, communications law, and research methods. Students complete their journalism coursework by selecting news-editorial courses, such as editing, magazine writing, and editorial writing; public relations courses, including public relations writing and campaign strategy, and techniques and style; or advertising courses, such as advertising copy and layout, media planning, and creative strategy in advertising.

#### *English Education Teacher Certification*

The Department of English and Journalism in conjunction with the College of Education and Human Services offers a degree in English Education leading to certification that enables WIU graduates to teach in high schools and middle schools. The program is designed to provide our students with substantial content and pedagogical knowledge—knowledge that will prepare them for a life-long career in teaching. Our goal is to help students develop habits of critical, reflective, and creative thinking.

Students take a series of courses that cover a variety of genres and historical periods, as well as a diverse range of ethnicities and culture. Our program also gives students opportunities to become confident and skilled writers in traditional and non-traditional modes, and promotes a comprehensive language arts curriculum, which includes technology, visual arts, drama, and film. This progressive program also promotes the teaching and learning of 21st Century literacies.

English Department faculty are committed to establishing close relationships with teacher education candidates throughout the program. Candidates are paired with caring and knowledgeable faculty members who assist them regularly throughout their teacher preparation experience.

### Minors

#### *Creative Writing*

The Creative Writing minor allows students the opportunity to explore the craft of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction in an intensive manner—through a series of writing workshops in each of these genres. This is very much a hands-on minor. The emphasis is upon practice and critique. Students will write a great deal and have that work read by the workshop participants and teachers. In previous years, Creative Writing minors have gone on to publish their work, and many have gained admission and fellowships to some of the top graduate creative writing programs around the country. Others have gone on to work in publishing, primarily as editors and readers, and these students have reported that their experience in the workshops served as an excellent apprenticeship for such parallel careers.

While the core of the minor is the workshop experience, these courses are supplemented with course work in literature. Additionally, each semester the department hosts the The Fred Case & Lola Austin Case Writer-in-Residence who typically visits campus for a week of private conferencing with advanced students, public lectures, and readings. Minors are also invited to compete for cash prizes in the Eula Cordell Fiction and Poetry Award, and Lois Bruner Nonfiction Award, two creative writing competitions open to all Western Illinois University undergraduates. Students are also invited to participate as editors of the department's literary journal, *Elements*.

## ***Interdisciplinary Film Minor***

Film plays an increasingly important role in many disciplines. The Interdisciplinary Film Minor at Western Illinois University gives students the opportunity to explore multiple ways films can be viewed and the skills they need as they find themselves living in a world more and more defined by visual literacy.

The Interdisciplinary Film Minor combines aspects of critical and theoretical approaches to film with opportunities for production and performance experience. The Minor offers a broad range of courses including international cinemas, film theory and criticism, documentary, women in film and television, and production and acting techniques. Students will be taught by experienced faculty who are members of the Society for Media and Cinema Studies, have participated in national film festivals and conferences and have widely published in the field of film studies.

The Interdisciplinary Film Minor makes a valuable complement to a range of undergraduate majors. The Minor provides critical skills in visual literacy, and it prepares students for careers in film review, production, and performance, broadcasting, education, advertising, and graphic arts.

In addition to course work, Western Illinois University provides opportunities for students to participate in a number of film-related activities, including an International Film Series, the University Union Board's Cinema Showcase, and a Summer Film Series, as well as numerous screenings, workshops, and lectures by guest speakers throughout the academic year.

## ***Professional Writing Minor***

WIU offers an interdisciplinary minor in Professional Writing that is designed to provide training, experience, theoretical background, and credentialing for careers in editing, technical writing, or professional writing, as well as for positions in business and industry which require writing expertise. The minor offers advanced writing courses in a number of genres and a variety of practical writing and design skills. Since so many current job opportunities require evidence of writing ability, the minor in Professional Writing will enhance any major offered at WIU.

## ***Scholarships***

The department offers twelve scholarships for English majors and two journalism scholarships limited to students from designated geographical areas in west-central Illinois. The Department of English and Journalism "Scholar of the Year Award" honors the outstanding junior or senior in the department. Detailed information on scholarships is available from the department advising office (309/298-2189), Western's Scholarship office (309/298-2001), or on the web at [www.wiu.edu/Scholarship](http://www.wiu.edu/Scholarship).

## ***Student Activities***

The department offers two student societies for its English majors: (1) the Western chapter of Sigma Tau Delta is our national honorary society, and (2) the student chapter of the National Council of Teachers of English is for those English majors who are planning careers in teaching. Our majors are also active in publishing our annual literary magazine, *Elements*, featuring works of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction written by our students.

The journalism program provides three student organizations: (1) a chapter of the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA), (2) a chapter of the American Advertising Federation called the Western Advertising Federation (WAF), and (3) a chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ). Journalism students are encouraged to join the staff of the campus newspaper, the *Western Courier*, or to submit work to it. Students also have the opportunity to write for the University new service.

A wide variety of student activities and organizations are available to all Western students. Learn more at <http://osa.wiu.edu>.

## ***Higher Values in Higher Education***

The core values that are at the heart of the University are academic excellence, educational opportunity, personal growth, and social responsibility. Western's GradTrac and Cost programs guarantee that students can achieve their degrees within four years while paying a fixed rate for tuition, room, and board.

## ***For More Information please contact:***

Dr. David Boocker, Chair • [JD-Boocker@wiu.edu](mailto:JD-Boocker@wiu.edu)  
124 Simpkins Hall • 309/298-1103

Ellen Poulter, Academic Advisor • [E-Poulter@wiu.edu](mailto:E-Poulter@wiu.edu)  
130 Simpkins Hall • 309/298-2189