

**The Writers' Slate**, published by The Writing Conference, Inc., features some of the nation's top quality writing by students, kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The national journal is published three times a year, including one issue filled with award-winning prose and poetry. The publication is now available online.

The editor of **The Writers' Slate** invites original, creative and expository writing by students in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The editor also invites submissions of book reviews of children's or young adult literature, written by students. Educators are also encouraged to submit article ideas for consideration.

The deadline for the fall issue each year is June 15. The deadline for the spring issue is December 15.

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Submissions, including electronic submissions, **should clearly indicate the writer's name, school, grade, school and home addresses, and the teacher's name.** Due to the number of submissions and mailing costs involved, the editor will only respond to a student author's submission if a self-addressed stamped envelope is included. Submissions will not be returned.

The editor reserves the right to edit manuscripts for clarity, style, and according to space limitations.

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Shelly McNerney  
Editor

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## **An interview with author Kate Morgenroth**

Kate Morgenroth is the author of four novels. She writes for both young adult and adult audiences, describing the main difference among the genres as the difference in the ages of the protagonists. Her adult novels are *Saved* and *Kill Me First*. Her first young adult novel, *Jude*, was an honor nominee for the 2006 Heartland Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature. Her latest young adult novel, *Echo*, will be released this spring. Ms. Morgenroth graciously answered some questions about her writing process via email. □

**Slate: You have written novels for both young adults and adults. At what point in the writing process do you decide on the audience?**

My first young adult book I wrote not knowing it was going to be a young adult book. But since then, I have known at the start of the book which audience it is going to be for. The way I can tell... well, the answer to that is in the next question.

**Is your writing process any different for the two audiences?**

The only difference for me in writing a young adult novel is the age of the protagonist. My favorite books are the ones where the feelings underneath are universal—the books where it doesn't matter whether the main character is 18 or 80. So that's what I shoot for in writing.

**Do you have any plans/goals to branch out further into books for children, or non-fiction?**

I have another adult book—a mystery—coming out next spring, and right now I'm working on the screenplay for JUDE. When it was optioned, and I decided to try my hand at the screenplay and the producer said okay. So with my history, I wouldn't be surprised if in a few years I try my hand at one (or all) of the different genres you mentioned.

**I have a high school sophomore right now who is very interested in how writers get their ideas. Do you have a particular place or method that you use for inspiration?**

This is the million dollar question (though maybe with inflation maybe now it should be the billion dollar question). I think how you get ideas for books is very personal. Some

people start with an image. Some people start with a character. Some people start with a question. It may sound strange, but most of my books have started out with a sort of philosophical question that I wanted to investigate and a story grew out of that.

**Do you ever get writer's block?**

I have what I have come to call “sticking points”. Those are those unfortunately unavoidable places in the writing where it starts to get tough. It’s like the difference between running on the sand (which if you’ve tried it, is hard and tiring, but still running) and running through water (which feels unnatural and as if you’re not getting anywhere). But I’ve found that even though it doesn’t feel like you’re getting anywhere, keep at it and eventually you reach the beach and your back on the sand again.

**Do you have any tricks to helping get past it?**

I’ve written a couple of articles for my website in the “For Writers” section. One is called “On Getting Started” and the other “On Getting Stuck” and they expand on getting past writers block. But to condense it, I once found a quote from Norman Mailer that said, “There is a little bit of writers block in every day.” I loved that because I think it’s true. So what is the solution? I think the answer is in another quote, “The art of writing is the art of applying the seat of the pants to the seat of the chair.” Which is the just sit there until something comes approach. It doesn’t feel so good, but I promise if you sit there long enough, something will come.

**I noticed that you are also designing your own website. It currently has sections designed specifically with students and teachers in mind. How do you think creating your own website has influenced the interactions you have with your readers?**

I think that my website (at least hopefully) comes across as more personal because I put it together. When I go to an author’s website, I go because I want to get a sense of who they are as a person, so that was my goal in designing my website (and will remain my goal when I tackle the re-design and the sections which have read “Coming Soon” for way too long). I get very frustrated with the websites that feel very commercial and seem

geared just toward marketing.

**In creating your website how do you decide how much personal information to share? I know people sometimes have funny questions for authors, like what their favorite foods are, or if they have any pets, etc. What types of information do you want to make available to people through the website?**

I don't mind sharing anything on my website that I would tell someone I was meeting for the first time. Because that's kind of what it is—a first meeting. I'm open to any questions that fit with the idea of getting to know someone. And questions about favorite foods and pets fit perfectly in that category. In fact, I think they're really fun. So to answer the questions, I like pizza. A lot. And I would love to have a dog, but I can't quite bring myself to get one in New York City. But I feel like I have part ownership in the dog my parents have. Her name is Berni.

**Do you have any writing tips for people who would like to try to become published authors?**

I'm planning on adding a whole frequently asked question section about getting published to answer all the specific questions that relate to this because it is something that people want to know. But the biggest thing is that in order to get published, you need to write a book. I know that sounds silly, but it really is the most important part of the process. And if you write a good book (my definition of a good book is something that evokes emotion in the reader and that they have a hard time putting down) it will get published. It might not be an easy road, but once you have written that book, you will get there. The writing is the hard part. And there is no short cut. I've never written a book in under two years. My old advisor, Toni Morrison, said you can't write a truly good book in under six. So that should give an idea of the kind of time you need to invest in that first step of the process. Writing books isn't a sprint. It's a marathon.

Learn more about Ms. Morgenroth's books and her writing process on her website:  
<http://www.katemorgenroth.com>

## MISSING DAYS

When once just wasting days away,  
was all we ever needed.  
But we've  
fallen into a ditch of deadlines,  
with frayed endings that never would align.

Can you catch the scent of dying autumn—  
between thin fingertips?  
Or upon your lips, smeared with perspiration,  
as heavens cry in fury  
for the missing days.

We've dealt the deck of cards before  
with far less masqueraded grace.  
So let the ace of spades slip from calloused thumbs,  
once silvering through those mastered scales  
that proved worth before the talent,  
though you had it all along.

We rival angels in fights,  
with wind whistling in our ears,  
with skills set aflame,  
and out of tune crescendos.  
That cut through peace,  
and carve out bestiality.

It pierces the paling skies,  
trill notes begin,  
screech of a grim violin.  
Orchestrate the violence  
in that silence of rest and pause.

We've been crushed by those accented deadlines;  
a dash of black above a letter;  
a spiral of sharpened notes in just one measure;  
a whole without an end.

And for once,  
I cry, as loud as thunder that now streaks the winter sky,  
where are our missing days?

Stacie Duffey  
8<sup>th</sup> Grade  
Lake Worth, Florida

## Expectations

expectations  
placed on me  
clothes I should wear  
who I should be  
like iron shackles  
they weigh me down  
drag me  
tug me  
smile or frown  
laugh or cry  
live or die  
hate or love  
steam or fry  
twist me  
turn me  
cut me  
burn me  
save me  
steal me  
bill me  
teach me  
who to trust or fear  
who to push away  
who to pull near  
be my instruction book  
my cheat sheet  
my all-in-all  
my hands  
my feet  
show me  
what is right  
or wrong  
teach me how  
to sing this song  
the melody of life  
this ballad of truth  
issues we face  
in adulthood  
and youth  
boyfriends  
girlfriends  
money  
pets

spouses  
jobs  
Marlins  
Mets  
miniscule details  
hair  
nails  
that won't matter  
tomorrow  
no matter who fails  
or lies  
or cheats  
or laughs  
or cries  
eventually  
is forgotten

Chloe P. Kovacs  
7<sup>th</sup> Grade  
Lake Worth, Florida

Give me the Gift!

Open window!

Close door!

Can you give me the gift to trust?

The window!

The door!

The gift, to trust

Please!

I need it, I want it

Trust

Give me the gift

Oh, the window!

The door!

The gift, to trust

Oh, I need it

Please

Give me the trust to love, to hate, to care, to be free.

Cassie Jo Fitzgerald

5<sup>th</sup> Grade

Lambs Grove, Iowa

## Hues of Blue

As I stood in the deep sea of grass,  
Wildflowers nestled around my bare ankles  
I gazed into the endless green  
With the wind whipping through my hair.

Wildflowers nestled around my bare ankles,  
Their hues of blue make waves in the green.  
With the wind whipping through my hair,  
I ran to meet the tide.

Their hues of blue make waves in the green  
Like the color of your eyes.  
I ran to meet the tide;  
All I ever find is your crashing waves.

Like the color of your eyes,  
My life was full of hues of blue.  
All I ever find is your crashing waves,  
Full of salty despair.

My life was full of hues of blue,  
Until one day I found:  
Full of salty despair,  
Those waves of yours I hold so dear.

Until one day I found  
That I've never actually understood;  
Those waves of your I hold so dear,  
Were always full of love.

Kelli Neumann  
10<sup>th</sup> Grade  
Fort Wayne, Indiana

## Shea Stadium

The breathtaking at-bats in which the game might be decided

The noise like a rocked when a homerun is whipped

The silence of the stadium when the pitched whips the ball at his opponent

The crack of the bat when the ball is being launched from it

The hungriness of my stomach before food gets inside it

The groaning of the fans when a walk is given up in a tight situation

The screaming ump when a strikeout has been issued

The sorrow of a painful loss

The joy of a golden victory at hand

Eli Slamovitz

4<sup>th</sup> Grade

Centerport, New York

## One Step Further

Leaping out of the white rental car  
blown away by majesty.  
A bold white church stands, placed in front  
of a heaven lit path with trees on either side.

We ran to be swept away by silence.

With words ripped from our mouths,  
we slowly stumbled our way down  
the hard cold cement stairs.  
Breathing in the cool scent of fresh rain  
laying on the leaves of the trees  
that touched the clouds in the sky.

The leaves showing off their brilliant  
colors of yellow, orange, and faded reds.  
With us staring down the never ending path.

Me, holding my dad's hand.  
Soft and caring yet so powerful, holding on  
to my helpless fingers.

Guiding me one step further.

Kaelin Stone  
9<sup>th</sup> Grade  
Denver, Colorado

## My First Hole in One

The weather was beautiful outside and the course was in really good condition, but I was playing terrible golf. I knew it had to get better because the first hole was awful and I had to get my head in the game. I was playing at Big Spring Country Club with my father and Cooper Musselman, who is a great golfer.

I walked up to the second hole which was a 117 yard par 3. I decided to use a six iron because I thought I could get it to the front of the green. I hit the ball really well and it landed on the front of the green, rolled right at the flag, and just dropped right in the cup. My dad yelled, "Did it drop?" We didn't know if it had gone in or not so we took the cart up to the hole. I thought I saw the ball on the back of the green. Cooper and I ran to the cup and there it was. I yelled at my father and I held up the ball in my hand and screamed "It's in!!!" We all started screaming and couldn't believe it. I went on to finish my round of golf with a 51 which was not very good for me. I was able to get over it because I knew how special a hole in one was. My dad told me that most golfers go their whole life without getting a hole in one and I got one when I was ten years old. It was really cool because they gave me a certificate that said I got a hole in one. The manager of the club put it up in the pro shop so everyone that came in could see it. It was also in the newsletter that they send out every month to all of the members of our club. It's funny because it happened last summer and people are still asking me about it and how it felt. I really hope I get to be a really good golfer someday and make my high school team. I will keep working hard at it and practicing in the summer and fall.

I will never forget the day that I made my first hole in one. I may never have another one, but you just never know.

Bryan Schwartz

6<sup>th</sup> Grade

Louisville, KY

## "Good Morning Daddy"

"Good night my little prince," the widow mother said to her 10 year old son, Michael. She always had a talking time with her son every night to talk about his day, his worries, his troubles, and his dreams. His father passed away a year earlier and his adventurous mind was full of questions about him and their life they had and could have had.

Michael loved to sleep because that meant he could dream. His imagination always made up good dreams. This night was like all the others. He had the most amazing dream!! This dream seemed SO REAL-like it really happened.

His house began to shake and rumble and before you know it, it shot right up into the air. Man, did it travel fast! Past the clouds, past the asteroid belt, past every planet big and small.

"Was this really happening?" Michael wondered.

The darkness turned to light-a bright light. As Michael opened his eyes he saw this HUGE golden gate as tall as ten sky scrapers. The sign said, "Welcome to Heaven: The Only Utopia Place."

"What? I'm in Heaven?" Michael murmured in disbelief.

Angels were sitting at the gate and they embraced Michael with open arms. They said, "Welcome to Heaven. Would you like to go to a tour of Heaven or visit a soul who already lives here? Let me explain to you that during the day, our souls are human-like; you can actually see, touch, and talk as if you were humans. At night, they turn back into souls."

Without even thinking about it, Michael knew exactly who he wanted to see. He said, "I would like to see my dad, Wes Lewis."

The angel walked Michael over to a machine. Michael typed in "Wes Lewis." Instantly, a hover-craft appeared. The angels lifted Michael into the hover-craft. The angels typed in a code and the hover-craft glided Michael over the clouds-straight to an enormous mansion! It was pearly white, the size of the White House (actually even bigger!)

An angel escorted Michael to the tall door. As they entered Michael said, "Daddy? Are you here?"

Wes, who was in the downstairs game room, heard this angelic boyish voice. He knew that voice like no other. Immediately, Wes ran as fast as a lightning bolt-straight up the stairs. "Michael? Is that you?"

As soon as their eyes met,, Michael jumped into his daddy's arms. Oh, how long he had wished he could do that. He felt so real- his arms were as strong as he remembered them. His smile as bright as the sun's rays in the morning. His laugh as contagious as the flu. His hug felt warm and tight. Michael felt so safe. This heavenly hug was better than any hug on Earth. "I have missed you soooo much!" Michael cried, tears running down his cheeks.

"How's mommy? How's Morgan? Are they doing OK?" Daddy asked.

"We cried a lot last year, and we miss you a lot but we're all doing OK," replied Michael.

When they finished hugging, Wes said, "Want to see this Heavenly house?"

"Sure!" Michael replied.

They marched up the stairs and Michael saw a room that said, "Wes Lewis." Beside it was a room named, "Michael Lewis." And another room that said, "Morgan Lewis" and still another "Elizabeth Lewis" Michael gasped because he couldn't believe that they were going to get to live together in Heaven.

Wes said, "Pretty neat, huh?"

"How much did this house cost you?" Michael asked.

Wes explained, "Nothing costs anything in Heaven. God made these rooms for us to live with Him. He knows how much we love each other, so we're all in the same house. Mamaw Mary and Grandma Galloway live here, too. We get to see each other every day."

"Daddy, before I go, I want to tell you some exciting things. Morgan made the Crosby basketball team 2 weeks after you died. A month later, I also made the Bowen basketball team," Michael said proudly.

"I already know that you made those teams because I can see you from up here. You are awesome on the court (and on the soccer field). I want to show you where I go 24- 7 every day," Wes explained to his son.

Wes walked Michael outside and showed him the glass floor of Heaven. It can zoom in on our house and neighborhood.

" I can watch you play with your sister, see you in school, see you at home doing homework, see you helping at church-everything. I'm proud of the way you're helping your mother and the way you treat your friends. Keep it up buddy!"

"It looks like you have to go. You have to wake up now because it's almost 6:00 a.m.," daddy said.

"But daddy, I want to stay with you," Michael whimpered.

"I know it, son. But I enjoyed our time together. Let's make a deal. Let's not tell your mother about this dream until we all get to Heaven. We'll take her (and your sister) on a tour of this Heavenly house, and tell her all about this dream, OK?" Wes said.

"OK daddy. I love you so much and I miss you dearly. I won't ever forget the awesome dad you were to me on Earth and I'll try to be the best kid I can be..... until we meet again."

"Beep, beep, beep," the alarm clock rang. Michael's mom came in and said, "Good morning sunshine. Did you have a good night sleep?"

"Oh, yes. I had a GREAT night's sleep," Michael beamed.

After Michael got dressed, and packed his lunch for school, he said, "Mommy, would you like me to go and get the newspaper for you?" "Sure," mom said.

Michael ran outside, the sun was not up yet. As Michael looked up to the sky, he whispered, "Good morning daddy!" As he was walking back inside, a star winked back as if to say, "Good morning, Michael."

Michael Lewis

Age 10

Louisville, Kentucky

## The Mouse and the Donut Hole

In a land far, far away there once lived a mouse and a goat. The mouse's name was Henry, and boy did he love to eat! The goat's name was Billy, and he owned the yummiest donut shop ever imagined. Henry loved Billy's donuts. Everyday he would in and stay there for awhile, eating donut... after donut..... after donut.... until Billy said " That is enough! All you do is come in my shop and eat all my donuts. I have other customers now will you just go and stop eating all my donuts!" The customers left with fear in their eyes, and for poor Henry just sat there and cried. Billy realized that he had hurt one of his best customers and friends. He wanted to give him anything to make it up to him, but Henry's feelings were too hurt. Henry left the store with a rain cloud over his head. Billy was sad too. He had no more customers; his place was like a ghost town. All he did was bake donuts, and no one came to buy them so he had donuts everywhere. Finally he thought of something he could do to apologize to Henry. He thought he could make a different type of donut, a donut with a hole. So Billy hurried over to Miceville where he found Henry. Nothing in Miceville looked normal; it was so small and cute! Billy finally found Henry's mousehole home. Billy put the donut by the opening and then he heard a quiet thump. Henry opened the door and said, "Haha! I knew it was you. And I did not steal anymore donuts!" Billy got on his knees and started to cry. "Oh, please come back my little friend. I miss you so much. I have no more customers, and I am really sorry. I didn't mean to be so mean. I am sorry. "Will you accept my apology?" "Yes, I, will," Henry said, and Billy gave him the special donut. Henry was amazed, and said "These are great! You have to make more!". So from that day on, Billy made donuts with a hole in the middle.

Olivia Farmer

7<sup>th</sup> Grade

Tampa, Florida

## Time Warp

On the third second, of the third minute, of the third hour, on the third day, of the third month in 3333, something happened that would change the world forever.

"Ahh, that feels better." A man said to himself as he exited the restroom. A baby drops his rattle on the floor. The mother who retrieves the toy has an 18 karat gold necklace around her neck. An elderly man rushes by to get to his terminal, but he has a limp because of a steel plate that was inserted in his hip.

These are the kinds of things that Mark Alston notices on an everyday basis. Mark Alston is not an ordinary person.

Raised in a corrupt family, he is not one to be messed with. While he was growing up he put four people into intensive care for picking on him on the playground. His parents both died of drug overdoses when he was still young, so it was just him and his younger sister, Mattie, living in a foster home. During high school Mark succeeded in scoring highest in math and science, but he was careful who knew, he had a reputation to keep. When Mark decided to join the Marines, the government saw it fit for them to place him in a new kind of training. Because he was so smart and very athletic they trained him on a new computer based combat and intelligence system, known as ATON. The system altered the way he thought about things, little things. He always thought that he could do anything, but then he saw that he was really an imperfect human. With the help of ATON Mark grew stronger, gained wisdom, and became the most perfect spy ever known to man. His knowledge surpassed many geniuses, and his strength was more powerful than anyone he met.

When Mark graduated from ATON, the government called him on his first assignment. It was a very tricky assignment indeed, but the government needed to see if Mark was ready to become a full time spy. Let's just say that the mission involved: a gold spoon, 8 feet of rock wall, a fire hydrant, Japanese intelligence, and a woman named Yokajama. When the task was completed with ease, Mark was moved up. He then started

to get more difficult assignments and problems to resolve, but nothing ever really challenged him, until the day of his 24<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The day started normally, a 10 mile run, a 2 hour power lifting session and a light breakfast. He then took a shower and got ready for what was to be a special day. It was a cold chilly morning in the month of March, as it is everyday in the frigid air of Russia. He planned to take a plane to New York City, his hometown, to meet his sister and some of his buddies from high school. He arrived at the airport two hours before his plane would depart, plenty of time for security and customs. He was cleared from these things in 30 minutes, and had time to spare. He decided to take a look at some of the stores inside the airport. Many of them were newsstands with magazines and candy. Only a few stores weren't selling food of one form or the other. But one caught the eye of Mark Alston, "Spy Gear". He couldn't resist but to enter and see what was inside.

It was a musty dark store that was fogged up by a smoke machine puffing away in the back corner. A portly man sat at the counter with a New York Times newspaper in his hands. He looked to be about 45 years old and was definitely not caring about his weight. He smelled of pizzas and sardines and had lost most all of his hair. His nametag read Earl, but that seemed to be a strange name for a Russian storekeeper. Mark walked around the store, and soon found that the "Spy Gadgets" were really just cheap plastic toys. Most of them looked like if you would pick them up and hold them, they would break. Earl then called to Mark, speaking Russian. Mark replied back fluently.

The man asked, "Do you speak English?"

Mark replied, "Yes I do."

"Good," said the man in a thick Russian accent. The man then came around from the counter and told him to follow him to the back of the store. Through all the junk in the store, the two finally made it to a thick metal door that had an electronic combination lock. The man punched the correct numbers into the lock, and the heavy door swung open revealing another heavy metal door, again the man opened the door with a few numbers. The door opened slowly, Mark and Earl then proceeded into an enormous room.

"Why have you taken me here?" asked Mark.

"This is a U.S. Military warehouse."

"In the middle of a Russian airport?"

"Ahh yes, we like to say that it is hidden in plain sight."

"But why here?" Mark asked

"Well the Russian Mafia was beginning to become a little hard to control. The government of the U.S. decided that we needed a base in Russia to take down the Mafia, but the word slipped out that the U.S. was taking action, so the Mafia split apart and left Russia. And now we have a warehouse full of the top military devices, with no one to go after."

Mark then started to walk down the stairs and into the warehouse. The room was an enormous concrete box underground that held thousands of guns, ammunition boxes, and even jet planes. There were also many odd things that Mark had never seen before. Various gadgets and gizmos were lying on shelves, and guns were in cabinets at the back corner of the building. Mark reached the bottom of the stairway and began to wander along the rows of shelves admiring the things that were held in them. Many of them he was well acquainted with, through ATON.

Earl then reappeared around the corner and was in a very professional suit.

"As you may know," Earl began, " I am not a salesperson, my name is Daniel Vacula, and I have worked for the U.S. Embassy for 24 years. Keeping this place a secret has been one tough assignment, I recognized you from the training center. Alston right?"

"I'm your guy."

"Well, I've heard good things about you Alston, very good things."

It became clear to Mark that more people knew about him than he previously thought.

"Well, if you see anything you like, go ahead and take it."

"That won't be necessary Mr. Vacula, but I do have one question." "What's that?"

"Well, could you tell me what this thing does, I've never seen anything like it!"

Mark then pointed at a dome shaped pod.

"One of my favorites, it's a time warp. It was used for redoing missions that failed, interesting little thing that is.

"Thank you for letting me in here, but I really must be on my way. I don't want to miss my flight."

"Okay let me lead you out then." The two of them started to retreat toward the stairway. They climbed the stairs only to find that they had been locked inside. "Well that's odd, I don't remember shutting this door", exclaimed Mr. Vacula. Mark then understood the quandary they were in. Someone else was there. A loud, sharp crack echoed in the massive room. Mr. Vacula fell to the ground with his glassy eyes staring blankly. Mark had to get out of there.

He jumped the railing of the stairs and sprinted along the aisles of gadgets, heading for the guns section. Mark made it halfway there when he heard two other cracks. Bullets were spraying passed his head. He had to find cover. Just then, a man of Russian heritage ran around the corner behind Mark. Mark dove for cover as a machine gun unloaded projectiles toward his body. He ran through the aisle and found himself facing the Time Warp. He ran for it and opened the thin door. Bullets rained into the machine barely missing Mark. He could see the burly man charging at him. This thing isn't bullet proof Mark thought to himself, just as he was stuck in the thigh with a bullet, and was thrown back onto the control panel. His arm landed on the numbers. The screen opened up and three's began to pour out onto it. Mark looked at his arm it had landed so that his elbow was constantly pushing three. He slid down onto the floor and his arm fell off the panel. The machine started to hum and a voice said,

"Destination programmed, launching now!"

In a flash of light he was gone.

Stephen Hill  
9<sup>th</sup> Grade  
Highland, Utah

## Awaken to Namelessness

*Where were you last night?* I bet if I were to be at home, that someone that loves me and cares for me would have asked me where I was. Where was I last night? That same question rung in my brain. That same question that I have been asking myself since Hellos drove across the heavens a couple of hours ago. That same question that might haunt me for the rest of my life.

*Who am I? Where am I? What am I doing?* Questions overfilled my brain. Where am I? I at least knew a part of that answer. I am in a city, maybe, in a subway station, most likely. Nevertheless, what am I doing there? What am I, a teenage girl, with no money, food, clothing, other than, what's on my back, or any resources at all, doing at a subway station? What am I doing? Actually, what *was* I doing? My legs are sore, and my whole body is aching. I am wet from head to toe. On the left side of my temple, I have a slight bump and freshly dried blood molting onto my eye. Both of my palms are scraped and cut, but they are not dirty, it seems as though they have been nursed only a short while earlier, I could still feel the sting left over from the alcohol.

Who am I, the question I was most curious about, but if I knew the answer would it make any difference? Would it matter whether my name is Rolanda McDonald or Sarah Sam Scroogle? It puzzled me as to why I cared so much. Knowing the answer would not change the situation at all, nor will it make it any better. So what if I know my own name? Tons of people know their name but it has not gotten them anywhere at all. Why are names so important as if they alone give us our identity?

I suddenly became aware of my surroundings. The station was crowded with bums and backpackers, but what caught my eye, was the bulletin board clear across the room. From where I am, I could see the words "Missing People". Missing People. Am I a missing person?

I attempted arising from my seat but my right ankle clasped under my weight. I guess I was in worse shape than I thought. I looked down at my feet and realized I only have one shoe on and that my bare foot was as swollen as a mushroom after rain. My big toe was purple and distorted, and the bottom of my foot was dirty black and scraped all over.

A young man, probably in his late teens, maybe a little older than me, came up to me holding a bag that gave off the most beautiful aroma. I did not realize how hungry I was. It was as if I had not eaten in days, and I could not wait one second longer to eat. The boy opened his mouth and out came the words, "Sorry I'm late. Finally you're up. How are you feeling?"

I just stared at him. I did not know who he was and how he knew me or if I knew him. I just stared at him; he didn't seem to mind my silence, and kept going with his conversation as if I answered.

"So let me see..." he held my chin and tilted my head to the right staring at my open wound. "Mmph, it seems it finally stopped bleeding. I was a little worried there; I thought you might have had a concussion. Let me see your palms."

He grabbed my wrists gently to see my palms, but I still flinched. It seems a twisted wrist, was another thing I have to add to my list of injuries. He noticed this flinch.

"Yeah I guess you fractured your wrist, too, when you fell." He worked his way down. He noticed injuries that my brain had not yet processed into pain.

"Your knees aren't that bad. I was worried about them, but it doesn't look like you are going to need stitches or crutches or anything. Wow, I didn't know your ankle was that bad. I guess I better get working." I was utterly confused. Was this guy just a good citizen and helping out a person in need, or do I know him and he know me?

"Oh hold up," he said. "I almost forgot. I picked you up some breakfast." He handed me a warm oatmeal muffin, and a water bottle of ice-cold water. It was then that I realized that I was thirsty, too. I have not spoken a single word since my arousing. I took the water bottle into my stinging hands, opened it and gulped down half the serving. I opened my mouth to express gratitude but I found out that no understandable words would come out. The only thing I managed to squeak was "thanks," barely audible, with huge chances that he did not hear a thing.

He gave a chuckle and patted my head tenderly. "You didn't change at all, kid, you're still a quiet little mouse. So, I bet your not going to tell me what happened, are you... hmmm?" I just stared at him. I guess he obviously knew me and I probably

should know him. He might not be a guardian angel, helping a stranger, but he was my guardian angel, I felt a bit of warmth fill my soul.

"I don't know," I replied.

"Ha-ha, very funny. I'm serious, what happened? Come on, you can't say you don't know or 'nothing', seriously tell me what happened, what were you doing out so late? Where did you go?"

"I don't remember." He gave me a strange look. It's weird. I felt as though he really must have known me and that he could read my mind. What's sad though is that he truly thinks that I know what happened, but won't tell him. What's even sadder is that even though it seems that I am quiet and do not speak much, he knows me more than I know myself, perhaps he could give me a few clues on who I am. "Honestly, I don't remember anything. I don't know what happened, what I was doing, where I was, or even who I am. I don't remember anything," I murmured.

"Wow, okay. I guess this is serious this time." He looked me squarely in the face, his eyes staring me down trying to grasp the situation. "Okay ...hmmm. I probably am not the best person to be telling you who you are and all that, but let's see..." He searched the station for answers; his eyes touched every wall, his mind entered every corner. I guess he is as lost as I am on who I am or anything on that sort. I don't think I am the emotional type, but then again how would I know? My lip started quivering and my mind seemed to start closing off. I was getting depressed. I was entering the state of depression. He noticed. "I'm sorry. It's not that I don't know ...well I don't know what happened and all that ...but I know who you are ...for the most part at least ...I always wanted to get to know you and now I'm supposed to let you know yourself. It's really weird. No, but please don't get upset. That'll break me. Okay, let me just go cancel my ticket and I'll tell you about yourself as I treat your wounds, you like that?" With the most sincere eyes, he looked at me. I nodded my head. He smiled and gave me a pat. "Okay just hold tight. I'll be back in no time, okay." I nodded again and watched as he walked away into the crowd of a line.

While he was gone, I couldn't help but think about how great he is. I wish to the end of my heart that I can remember him, just a little, at least. If a genie were to appear right now, I would not wish for gold, or eternity, or to know my whole life story (I don't

think I ever want to know everything, it seems sad); I would wish to know how I knew him, how he knows me. From the bottom of my deepest desires, I, literally, don't know if I ever wanted anything else more than how I wanted to know him. My soul craved for regaining of forgotten knowledge and great memories of my forgotten past.

He returned. "Sorry, I took long," he said.

I nodded. I don't care how long he took to return. I would have missed him all the same, I'm just glad he returned. Now we can talk and now he can tell me about himself and myself included.

"Okay, let's see. I don't know where to start ...how about when I first met you? Is that good?"

I nodded. It was perfect.

"Okay, you just sit tight and eat the muffin I brought you. I think it is cold now, but hopefully you can still enjoy it ...or better yet, how `bout I take you back to my place. Relax," he quickly added, "you have been there plenty of times. But, really I don't mean it in a bad way, it's just that in your condition you need someone to take care of you, possibly even a professional's touch, and as you know, I am a pro when it comes to caring for wounds, I'm a nurse you know."

He looked at me with a questioning gaze, searching beyond my eyes for his answer. "Okay, sure," I replied, "I guess I have nowhere else to go." I wondered if two days ago I would have replied the same to him. I wondered if I would have made the same choice.

"Are you not surprised by me saying I'm a nurse, or did you already know that?" he asked me with a look of deep question and doubt. I hated his gaze right then, it was as if again, he was trying to look deeper than my physical features, he was trying to look into my soul and then devour it with his stone eyelids.

I shook my head, "No I didn't know, that's cool." I could not understand why he was asking that, he knew my memory was completely gone, perhaps he was just bragging. To feed his ego I asked him how he became a nurse.

"I'll tell you that on the way. Let's just get you out of here. Come on, I'll carry you." He started reaching to pick me up but then paused. "Better yet, I'll call a taxi. Sit tight and eat the muffin, it's not even warm now but your probably starving." He took

the muffin from me, unwrapped it and then placed it back in my hand, "I'll be back," he whispered, and walked away from me throwing the muffin wrapper in his track.

I took a bite of the now room temperature oatmeal muffin, it was delicious; I took another and then another bite. I was hungry; who knows when was the last time I ate. My eyelids began to feel heavy, I don't know if I ever did finish that muffin, but at that point I began to doze off. I no longer felt the searing pain from my ankle, or palm, I felt my body closing in and the chair I was sitting on growing further away from me as if I was floating or being lifted by a gentle soul. Rain surrounded every corner. It was heavy rain. The kind of rain that shows up at the end of summer. I stood right in the middle of the rain, but I didn't get wet, not a single drop fell on my skin. I saw a girl in the midst of the rain. She was soaking wet, running. She looked as if she had been running forever and still had not yet reached her destination and had a distance to go. One of her shoes fell off, but she didn't even bother to look back. Instantly, I looked at my own feet. Was she me? I don't know, how but I felt a connection between her and I, she is me; but then...who am I? A young man was running after her, screaming words I could not understand. He looked oddly familiar. I knew him. He was the guy at the station. What was his name? Did he ever tell me? Did I ever ask?

All of a sudden, the girl slips on to the wet gravel landing right on her head, with a thump that even I heard, twenty-feet away, and her ankle twisting in a shape that was beyond normal. She no longer stirred; she was unconscious, soaking in all of the rain that dared fall upon her.

The guy running after her grabbed her shoe and stuck it in his pocket then ran to her, took off his jacket, wrapped her in it, picked her up and continued to run.

I awoke. My head felt heavy and foggy. It was like DeJaVu all over again. DeJaVu...DeJaVu. That's right; I woke up just a little while earlier at a subway station feeling just like this. Subway station ...the muffin ...the boy. I suddenly arose as if waking up from a nightmare. Almost instantly, I wished I hadn't, because my head bumped into something and I went right back down. At least this time I was still conscious and didn't hit my head on the ground, it was just another head.

I opened my eyes and the guy from the station and dream was staring at me, rubbing his forehead.

"I'm sorry did I wake you?" he asked, "I was just bandaging your head."

I looked at myself I had bandages in everyplace that was previously cleaned, revealing the flesh underneath.

"Did you have a good sleep," he asked obviously not enjoying the silence. I didn't want to answer, I didn't know if I could trust him or not. Just as before, he continued to talk as if I answered. I don't know if he noticed or not, but I had a look of complete fear on my face. He probably did notice, because the next thing that came out of his mouth was, "Relax, I didn't do anything. All I did was, change your clothes because I didn't want you to catch a cold, okay?"

I smiled and relaxed a little. That was the last thing on my mind. I did not even notice that I was now wearing an overly large football team jersey, or that I now sported an equally large pair of jeans. All I could concentrate on was the dream I just had. Was it real? Did that actually happen and was I the girl in the dream that was running? But then, how did I see the boy (possibly the one right in front of me), pocket my shoe? Was it my shoe? Did he have my shoe?

I tried to raise myself a little off the couch so I could see if there indeed was a bulge in his pocket. My efforts were in vain. As soon as I tried to rise a little, he put his hand on my shoulder to prevent it. "You probably shouldn't be getting up anytime soon," he said, "You seemed pretty exhausted at the station. You just passed out and never even finished your muffin."

I looked at him bewildered. "You drugged that muffin, and you know it. And, how can you pretend that you don't know what happened; you were there, plus you have my shoe in your pocket. Don't think I don't know your evil plan. Oh, I know. I am not stupid, I know you know what happened, but I do not know why you are pretending you do not know and --"

"Whoa there," he cut in. "First off I didn't drug no muffin, okay. I bought it from a guy that was selling them outside the station, and I thought it would be a nice gesture, okay. I was getting you water in hope that it will make you stir. For the shoe part, yeah I got your shoe in my pocket. I forgot to give it to you because I was so worried about making you better. How you knew about the shoe is beyond me; but I guess that means

you're regaining some of your memory and that's good. For the last part about me knowing what happened, I don't know the whole story.

"You just came running in here from someplace saying 'they're after me' and 'we have to get to the station and get away.' It was raining, and you were all wet. After you said that you started running off to the station. I had no choice but to go after you, because obviously, something was wrong to have shaken you up like that. That's why you woke up at the station; otherwise, I would have just brought you back here. But, again, you looked really shaken up, and I knew there was no point in even trying to calm you down. I never saw you like that before. Yeah, so now that you gained your memory back, mind telling me what happened?"

The whole thing was like a puzzle. At the start, you have nothing, and you have to start finding the edges so you can get started. Once you got the edges connected, then you got to work on the middle. That's the most important part of the whole puzzle, without it there is no picture. When that is done then the puzzle is complete and you can look at it with great appreciation and pride knowing that you just completed a puzzle. If you are missing even one piece, then the puzzle is a failure and you might as well be back to having only the edges done, and it doesn't matter how much effort and time you put into it, it will never be complete. I felt like I was the incomplete puzzle. I just got a lot of information but it is useless unless I have all of it.

"Really, I don't know what happened. How about you tell me what you know about me first, maybe that will trigger something." I was still not willing to trust him. I needed to hear his side of the story before anything. Not that I knew my side, but that was not the point.

"Okay, well I guess that's fair. I met you at the hospital. You got yourself in a little mix up, probably similar to the one you're in now, you didn't give me much details but all I knew is that you wanted out. You had an olecranon fracture, so you had to keep coming back for regular check-ups and we got to seeing each other. Yeah, I remember your first visit. You were all quiet and depressed like, but by your last visit, you were actually enjoying yourself and laughing. It's like, not only did your elbow heal, but your heart did as well.

"Yeah, well after you healed and didn't need progression check-ups anymore, we continued to see each other. I mean it's practically as if you live here now. I always wondered what happened but you were never straightforward. You were always such a private person. I was fine with it, you can open up whenever you're ready, but lately you started getting distant, too, until finally this happens, and you lose your memory and might even have your life endangered." He looked away from my eyes and started staring off at the wall. Guys do not like crying, especially in front of a girl, they like to feel strong. Of course, he was no exception, he didn't cry and showed no traces that he wanted to, but I could feel it. All of this hurt him deep down, and it tore him apart.

All of a sudden, there was a startling knock on the door. He got up and went to answer the door. From the couch, I had a perfect view of the door, and could see everything. He opened the door without asking or even peeping to see who it is. The person behind the door was rugged middle-aged, anything but groomed, man. He instantly stated yelling in a vulgarly foreign tongue. I recognized him immediately, and instantly attempted to run, forgetting about my injuries. Not even being able to take a step, I ended up completely down on the ground in the man's view. He became aware of my presence and advanced toward me. However, my friend noticed my attempts to flee and understood that, that man was the reason I was running.

He gave the man a punch right in the nose causing bones to crush and blood to splatter all over the man's face. He punched him again, this time right in the gut, shouting, "This is for the drugged muffin you sold me." A third punch landed in his eye socket, with a shout of, "For stalking us." A series of punches followed. "For hurting my girl, for causing her fear, for making her feel threatened, for causing grief, for now, for what you did, for anything that you will do, this is for that." He sat on the floor panting, watching as the big man lay beat up, and unconscious.

While the man was still unconscious, my friend got a new roll of duck-tape and used it all up tying up the man's arms, legs, and mouth. We went back to the subway that night, and rode it all the way to the big city.

He finished off his medical schooling in three years with the highest achievement, and found a job as a pediatrician. He rented out a nice loft where we now both share.

In return for saving my life, he made me promise to be completely open to him, and tell him when something huge is happening ...like someone wanting to kill me, although I never had to worry about that again.

To say that we lived happily ever after would be a complete lie, for there is no such thing as "happily ever after". What I can say though is that we promised to be more open to each other. Or at least that was my promise, he promised to love me no matter what the past holds. So we lived comfortable and exquisitely, for the many years after as Mr. and Mrs....

Afifa Tawil

11<sup>th</sup> Grade

Phoenix, Arizona

## 2007 Heartland Award Nominees

Al Capone Does My Shirts by Gennifer Choldenko □

Code Orange by Caroline B. Cooney □

Just Listen by Sarah Dessen □

Copper Sun by Sharon Draper □

The Christopher Killer by Alane Ferguson □

The Old Willis Place by Mary Downing Hahn □

Shug by Jenny Han □

Sleeping Freshmen Never Lie by David Lubar □

Forbidden by Judy Waite □

Sandpiper by Ellen Wittlinger □ □

Students in grades 6-12 may vote for one nominee. They must have read at least three (3) of the books on the list.

Students may vote by online ballot at

<http://www.writingconference.com/ballot.htm>

or by mailing ballots to:

The Writing Conference, Inc. □ P.O. Box 664 □ Ottawa, KS  
66067-0664

**Deadline for ballots to be returned: April 15.**

For information about each of the 10 finalists, go to:

<http://teachers.olathe.k12.ks.us/~snightingale>