

From the Director

It is, indeed, a pleasure to present this special issue of *The Writers' Slate* because it contains the winning entries of those young people who entered the 2007-2008 writing contest. This is one way that teachers can support writing in the schools by encouraging students to enter contests. We at TheWriting Conference, Inc., hope that we can contribute to that effort by publishing the winning entries.

These winners were chosen from a total of 264 entries -- 64 elementary school students, 130 junior high/middle school students, and 70 high school students. The elementary school entries included the following categories: 15 poetry, 20 narration, and 29 exposition; at the middle level we had 64 in poetry, 29 in narration and 37 in exposition; at the high school level we had 35 in poetry, 12 in narration, and 23 in exposition. We had entries from across the United States.

The Writing Conference, Inc., is very proud of those students who write and of those teachers who encourage their students to write.

Congratulations to the winners and to all who entered. May you continue to have success in writing!

We also want to thank the judges who gave of their time and talent to assess these entries: Judy Bakalar, Mission Valley Middle School, Shawnee Mission, Kansas; Amanda Witty, Leawood Middle, Leawood, Kansas; Shelly Todd, Olathe, Kansas; Heather Reilly, Ruskin High School, Kansas City, Missouri; Jennifer Gooding, Mill Creek Elementary, Belton, Missouri; Megan Gearhart, Overland Park, Kansas; Becky Hart, Tomahawk Elementary, Shawnee Mission, Kansas; Shelly McNerney, Lee's Summit North High School; Charlie Huette, Blue Valley North High School; April Hawkins, Wheatridge Middle School, Gardner, Kansas; Kristen Worthington, Olathe, Kansas; Angela O'Kane, Pioneer Ridge Middle School, Gardner, Kansas; Rachael Buckley, Baldwin High School, Baldwin, Kansas; and Amy Brown, Overland Park, Kansas.

Partial support for this publication comes from the Kansas Arts Commission, a state agency, and the National Endowment for the Arts, a Federal Agency.

John H Bushman

Writing Contest Winners

2007-2008

Elementary School Division

Poetry

First Place

Morgan Goldsberry
Central Elementary
Bellevue, Nebraska

Second Place

Siara Marquez
Niagara Elementary
Henderson, Kentucky

Third Place

Natalie Figueroa
Bloomer Elementary
Council Bluffs, Iowa

Narration

First Place

Brandon Spicer
Home School
Selah, Washington

Second Place

Henry Cheng
Lynn Gross Discovery School
Rego Park, New York

Third Place

Michael Sullivan II
Avery Elementary
Bellevue, Nebraska

Exposition

First Place

No Winner

Second Place

Marshall Anema
Hidden Hills Elementary
Phoenix, Arizona

Third Place

Andrew Seliskar
Haycock Elementary
Falls Church, Virginia

Jr. High/Middle School Division

Poetry

First Place

Kathryn Kennedy
Charlotte Country Day School
Charlotte, North Carolina

Second Place

Adam Bowles
Princeton Middle
Princeton, West Virginia

Third Place

Rae Oakley
Charlotte Country Day School
Charlotte, North Carolina

Narration

First Place

Hannah Richard
Home School
Surprise, Arizona

Second Place

Carah Austin
Clark Pleasant Middle
Whiteland, Indiana

Third Place

Marshall Weisiger
Charlotte Country Day School
Charlotte, North Carolina

Exposition

First Place

Max Sopher
Home School
North Hampton, New Hampshire

Second Place

Ryan Scarpelli
Sagamore Middle School
Holtsville, New York

Third Place

Kiki Sykes
Indian Hills Middle School
Prairie Village, Kansas

Senior High School Division

Poetry

First Place

Hannah Rogers
Goshen High School
Goshen, Ohio

Second Place

Shawna Hite
Home School
Marion, Ohio

Third Place

Janice Chen
Troy High School
Troy, Michigan

Narration

First Place

Emily Xia
The Pingry School
Martinsville, New Jersey

Second Place

Samantha Sgourakes
Old Rochester Regional High
Mattapoisset, MA

Third Place

No Winner

Exposition

First Place

No Winner

Second Place

Emily Cunningham
Buckhannon-Upshur High
Buckhannon, West Virginia

Third Place

Yiren Lu
Maria Carrillo High School
Santa Rosa, California

The Writers' Slate, published by The Writing Conference, Inc., features some of the nation's top quality writing by students, kindergarten through 12th 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 12th 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 winter issue is December 15. The spring issue contains winning entries of the writing contests.

With this issue Ms McNerney's tenure of Editor of Slate comes to a close. We thank her so much for her contribution to the success of the Writers' Slate. We welcome our new editor Jill Adams of Metro State College -- Denver.

Send submissions to: Jill Adams, Editor
The Writers' Slate
Metro State College Denver, Campus Box 32
PO Box 173362 402 King Center
Denver, CO 80217-3362

OR submit electronically: jilladams@writingconference.com

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.

This program is presented in part by the Kansas Arts Commission, a state agency, and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

John H. Bushman
Director
The Writing Conference, Inc.

The Writers' Slate proudly presents the 2008 Contest Winners

Elementary Poetry

First Place	Morgan Goldsberry	Courage	2
Second Place	Siara Marquez	You Are Always My Hero	3
Third Place	Natalie Figueroa	Untitled	4

Elementary Narrative

First Place	Brandon Spicer	The Knights of Winterguard	5
Second Place	Henry Cheng	The Flag Leaves my Heart	13
Third Place	Mike Sullivan	Courage	14

Elementary Expository

Second Place	Marshall Anema	Courage	15
Third Place	Andrew Seliskar	The Finest Ingredient of Life	16

Middle School Poetry

First Place	Kathryn Kennedy	Hero of Life	17
Second Place	Adam Bowles	Untitled	19
Third Place	Rae Oakley	The Quiet Courage	20

Middle School Narrative

First Place	Hannah Richard	Courage	22
Second Place	Carah Austin	Walking the Beat	30
Third Place	Marshall Weisigner	Untitled	33

Middle School Expository

First Place	Max Sopher	Untitled	34
Second Place	Ryan Scarpelli	Courage	36
Third Place	Kiki Sykes	Undiscovered Courage	38

High School Poetry

First Place	Hannah Rogers	The Boy in the Corner	39
Second Place	Shawna Hite	Untitled	43
Third Place	Janice Chen	An Unspoken Courage	45

High School Narrative

First Place	Emily Xia	Simple as That	48
Second Place	Samantha Sgourakes	The Old Music Teacher	51

High School Expository

Second Place	Emily Cunningham	Untitled	61
--------------	------------------	----------	----

Third Place Yiren Lu

The Courage to Live 62

Elementary Poetry
First Place

Courage

You may feel scared when you first learn to ride your bike.
You may panic when you think you saw a frightful monster in your closet.

But remember little guy,

Don't be scared.

Courage is always bottled inside waiting to burst out!

So go speed down the street on your bike like a rocket in space,
Open that closet door and scare that repulsive monster back to where it came from.

But remember forever,

Courage is always there for you.

Morgan Goldsberry
6th Grade
Bellevue, Nebraska

Elementary Poetry Second Place

You're Always My Hero

You help me with my homework because you're good at math...
 You are my hero,
You're always by my side when I get in trouble because we're buddies...
 You are my hero,
You had courage to go in the haunted house with me because I was scared...
 You are my hero,
 You are always my hero...
 You are always there...
 We always help each other...
 And I know you really do care...
 You are my hero.

Siara Marquez
3rd Grade
Henderson, Kentucky

Elementary Poetry Third Place

Courage is standing up for what
you believe in.

Courage is being able to go
to the army and fight for our
freedom.

Courage is what you get when
you help someone who's being bullied.

Courage is going in first to
A "scary" barn when everybody else
is too scared to go.

Courage is putting your life on
the line everyday of your life,
just to save someone else's.

Courage is doing the right thing
even if everyone is doing the
opposite.

Natalie Figueroa
6th Grade
Council Bluffs, Iowa

Elementary Narrative

First Place

The Knights of Winterguard

It was a restless night. The ever-present swirling wind, taking command over the snowflakes, caused them to spiral around in dizzy circles. Soon, it lost interest, and let them fall and feed the growing sheet of snow piling on the ramparts of Castle Winterguard.

From the distance, thundering hoof beats became audible. A lone rider appeared, silhouetted against the low moon, riding east at a break-neck pace. Seeing the castle towers rearing majestically over the snow covered land, he averted his course. Trotting close to the high stone walls, he pressed on. But, he soon collapsed clean out of his saddle.

He lay there unconscious, until the watch spotted his horse wandering among the fringe of the western forest, nibbling the thin shoots of grass that protruded from the white snow. The portcullis was raised, and three infantrymen ran out, with torches in hands. They approached the dark form lying on the ground some yards from the edge of the forest. Lieutenant Ryan Sidney shook the prone figure awake, taking a canteen of water from his side and emptying the contents down the man's throat.

"Kardynites," the man said weakly.

"Where?" Ryan persisted.

"Coming through the forest." The man's voice was so quiet that the lieutenant had to lean closer to hear. "They killed my family. I.."

The effort of speech was too much for him, and with a final groan, he slumped over and said nothing more.

"What is it?" one of the men-at-arms said impatiently. "What did he say?"

"He's dead," Ryan said softly. And then he noticed the blood staining the side of the man's dirty tunic.

Castle Winterguard was named for the way it stood like a sentry against the tall evergreen trees of the forests. The northern most castle in the barony of Whitefield, it proudly served as headquarters to Baron Taylor himself. Its tall stone towers serving as a beacon, it has guided many a lost traveler in search of refuge from the freezing elements. On this particular day, however, the castle showed signs of the worry its inhabitants felt. A fear hung about the place. The Kardynites were coming. Kardynites were a group of semi-united tribes scattered around the northern border of the kingdom. They were savage and frequently raided the kingdom's outposts and villages. Attacking Castle Winterguard itself would be a major stroke. If Baron Taylor were killed, Whitefield would be in political disarray and its defense weakened. And the Kardynites were known for their cruelty toward prisoners.

From a darkly lit corridor, a shape materialized slowly out of the shadow. It was a small boy, Daniel Veers by name, the son of Sir Derrin. He tiptoed to the closed doorway of Baron Taylor's office. His dark brown eyes glinted with the energetic sense of fun that all boys possess at his age. His matching brown hair was straight and sleek. He was small for his age, which had served well on occasions. Earlier that day, he had filched an apple tart that had been cooling on the kitchen windowsill. He narrowly escaped being caught by the chef who swore he would "skin the culprit alive."

As the son of Sir Derrin Veers, he had a natural interest in war tactics. Of course, he was never allowed to attend a council meeting... officially. But he had his ways. He pressed his ear to the door in time to hear Sir Robert saying, "We'll have to hold out as long as we can, my lord. We'll never get reinforcements from the king in time." Daniel's grin faded as he heard his father, Sir Derrin, speak of the sacrifices that would have to be made. "We must ration supplies and double the watch. This is not going to be easy." Suddenly, his thoughts were interrupted by the yell of an angry guard. As he rounded the corner, catching him in the act, he grunted. "You get away from there, or I'll tan the hide of you with my spear haft!"

When Daniel was a safe distance away, he looked back to see if anyone had come out of the room to check on the commotion. The door remained closed. He shrugged, and, looking around first, took the apple tart from his belt pouch. It was still warm.

The Winterguard Tavern was crowded that afternoon with soldiers. At each table, the talk was the same: The upcoming battle. Daniel strode through the old oak door into the cheerful interior of the brightly-lit tavern. It was Saturday, so he was free of chores, or studies. He saw Kyle sitting at a table by the fire. Kyle was the son of Lieutenant Ryan, one of the men who had brought back the disturbing news of the Kardynite's raid. The boys were good friends and shared an interest in war and strategy.

Daniel sat down in a chair across from Kyle who looked up and smiled distractedly at him.

"Oh, hi Daniel," he said. "Want me to get you a drink?"

"No thanks," Daniel answered. "Did you hear the news?"

"Heard it?" Kyle scoffed. "I've more than heard it. I'm down right sick of it by now." "But Kyle, have you ever considered that the Kardynites could overrun the castle?" "Not a chance," the other boy replied confidently. "We're perfectly safe in Winterguard.

By the way, did you see the ballistas they were hauling up to the walls? I'll bet they..."

"That's just it," Daniel cut in. "Don't you think the Kardynites have ballistas? They're not as stupid as they look."

"Neither are we," Kyle put in stubbornly.

Daniel gave up with a sigh. His friend just didn't grasp his point of view.

The boys sat silently for a while, their attention diverted by a gangly man who had brought out a lute, and was putting on a dramatic show of singing and playing.

In winter on a foggy day
In Bluemount castle all did freeze.
The men, they heard Sir Johnson say,
"I need to put my mind at ease."
And so he went out for a ride
Into the dark and dreary wood.
And thus he rode for many hours
Not knowing that he really should

He should have stayed at home that fateful day.
For in the east a dragon woke
With thoughts of hunger and lust for gold.
He spread his wings and blew forth smoke.

The story told of how he met this very dragon, on his way back to Bluemount castle. He realized the great danger the monster posed, and taking up his sword and shield, he slew the beast. But as the brute thrashed in its agony, Sir Johnson was struck by its heavy, flailing tail and fell, mortally wounded. He died with a sense of satisfaction, knowing that he had saved the lives of many. The song ended with:

Such courage in few men you'll find.
Rare are the fearless hearts that give
Without reward or thought of pay,
And part with life so you may live.

Daniel sat, entranced by the beautiful music. For deep down inside, he wished he could be like Sir Johnson, killing dragons and having bards write songs about him... of course, without the dying part.

An ominous crack broke the silence. Ryan crouched painfully on the wall-walk, grabbing at the pain in his shoulder. A moment later, he realized what had happened. Gritting his teeth, he tugged at the shaft of the arrow. In agony, he fell against a battlement. His hand drenched in blood as he raised a ram's horn to his lips. With the last of his strength, he blew one resounding blast, and then fainted.

In the tavern there was chaos. The soldiers started shouting, and Kyle instinctively yelled in fright.

"That's the alarm!" Daniel cried. "The Kardynites are here..."

He was cut short by a thundering crash that shook the roof above them. Through the commotion, Daniel managed to grab hold of Kyle's arm.

"We have to get back to the castle!" Kyle cried. They made a mad dash for the door. Daniel could feel his heart pounding through his chest. He closed his hand around his dirk. He saw the door looming nearer. And then... Daniel never quite remembered what happened next. All he recalled was Kyle's drawn-out scream, and then the world was a blur of pain and flying rubble. Faintly, he wondered if the rest of the castle was fairsing this badly. Perhaps, he thought, the Kardynites would capture the castle. As the thought struck him, he decided he must go and help the Baron. But, he realized he could no longer move. He was buried under a pile of rubble and thatch from the tavern roof.

Grunting with effort, Daniel heaved the heavy load, and staggered to his feet. But standing, let alone walking, was beyond him. With a groan of pain, he slumped back to the earth. In the distance, he heard the cries of fighting men. His mind was a whirl of confusion, but he knew he must find Kyle. But he was too tired. He would rest first; yes, he would rest...

The West wall gate slid easily on its oiled hinges. A small party of stealthily moving men filed through the open door. At their head was a tall figure in thick leather armor. Around his shoulders was a short otter skin cloak clasped with a silver chain. In his hand he held a broadsword, and at his waist a long black whip was curled.

They came upon a boy lying exhausted among the wreckage. In the middle of what remained of the tavern walls, sat a large ballista bolt. On the other side of the castle, the Kardynites were attacking the main gate, and faint sounds of shouting and crashing drifted to them on the breeze.

"Sir," a voice whispered. "We found another!"

The tall man looked up and saw one of his men dragging Kyle's unconscious form towards him. A thin, evil smile creased his lips.

"Take them both," he said. "I have need of personal slaves. And you there, send a few volleys of arrows at the castle to confuse them."

Suddenly, he noticed Daniel's red pommel-stoned dirk and Kyle's expensive gold trimmed cloak. But, what really caught his eye was Daniel's tunic, bearing a black dragon. His smile widened.

"I wonder..." he said to himself.

The tall Kardynite in the otter-skin cloak pushed through the rear lines of his army, dragging Daniel and Kyle to an officer carrying a banner.

"Look," he said, thrusting the two boys forward. "Our problem is solved. I have Sir Derrin's son. If we say we have hostages, you know how these people are about their brats."

He noticed his slow-witted officer was still in the dark. With an impatient gesture, he explained further. "We take a score of soldiers and we ride back to Ran Tiar. Sir Derrin misses his whelp and comes looking for him. We kill him, and claim the prize for getting rid of the kingdoms most accomplished knight."

The first thing Daniel became aware of was a throbbing ache in his head. Suddenly, and without warning, he felt the sting of a jarring pain across his shoulders, and he sprawled forward. Furiously, he looked up, and saw a snarling Kardynite foot soldier wielding a thin willow rod.

"Get up," he said harshly. "You're holding up the line, ya lazy slug."

Daniel rose swiftly to his feet; his face flushed with rage. No one had ever treated him like this before.

"Watch your tongue, you..." Daniel stared dumbly down at the manacle and chain that clanked with his every move.

The soldier sneered, and raised the rod, but before he could strike, a voice called, "Move!" and the man who held the end of the chain that joined the five boys together, started forward.

Daniel stumbled forward into someone, and he heard Kyle's grunt of annoyance. "Sorry," Daniel mumbled. He was still in a blur of confusion, and his head hurt abominably.

"Are you all right?" a voice from behind him said softly.

Daniel chanced a look back and saw George, a friend of his from the castle. "George!" Daniel hissed. "How'd you get here? What's going on?"

"To tell the truth," George said in an unusually calm voice, "I don't have a clue. One minute I was walking into the tavern. I hear a loud bang. Then, I feel like my head's been cracked open. And then next thing I know, I'm here!"

Despite George's optimistic mood, Daniel could see he was tired. His green eyes were somewhat dull, and his light blond hair was stained dark with blood.

"George... Daniel! You know," Kyle groaned, "we're going to be sold as slaves in Ran Tiar! We'll never see Winterguard again!"

"Kyle!" Daniel said suddenly. "Did you realize there are only about twenty soldiers with us? And where did their..."

"Another word and I'll flay you all to worthless rags." The tall Kardynite strode along beside them. They were going through thick forest, where the light barely penetrated through the lush

over-head foliage. They walked in silent confusion for another half hour or so, when the line suddenly stopped.

Kyle had halted in his tracks! He stood firmly, staring at the tall Kardynite.

"That's enough," he said boldly. "Who are you, and what do you think you're doing?" Daniel shoved him impatiently from behind.

"No, Kyle," Daniel hissed, "not now!"

But Kyle shoved Daniel right back. Daniel clenched his fists, enraged at his friend's stubbornness.

The tall man looked down at Kyle and smiled evilly.

"I," he said, as if to savor the moment, "am Rupert Kadan!"

Kyle's mouth literally fell open. Rupert Kadan was a legend in his own time. In Winterguard, mothers told rowdy children that, if they did not behave, Rupert Kadan of the Kardynites would come and take them away to be sold as slaves.

Without any sign of emotion, Rupert Kadan drew his black whip and raised it slightly. Kyle had had enough experience in life to know when a man with a whip was going to strike. Instinctively, he turned to avoid the blow. The Kardynite leader's whip lashed across the back of his cloak, ripping through it. Under the layers of ripped cloth, a thin, red line appeared on Kyle's skin.

The cruel Kardynite nodded in mock approval.

"You are smart for a young brat of your age," he said. "What is your name?" "Kyle Sidney," Kyle sobbed.

Daniel looked on in terror. He could tell that Rupert Kadan had held back on the blow. And, even so, Kyle was in great pain. He knew there were to be many a hard day before them. He dearly wished his father would come and save them.

Sir Derrin galloped madly across the courtyard to the wreckage of the tavern, followed by Sir Robert and Cavalry Lieutenant Ryan.

"Tell me again," Sir Derrin called back to his comrades. "You saw Kyle go into the tavern. Then you saw Daniel walk in how much later?"

"About half an hour later," Ryan yelled back. "He was..."

His voice trailed off as they came upon the remains of the castle tavern. Three walls still stood, and most of the bar, along with a few tables. In the middle of it all, sat a smoldering round bolder. It had apparently been heated in fire, and then launched over the side of the wall. Without a word, the three men dismounted, and began frantically searching the piles of broken wood and roofing. Some of the thatch had alighted and was burning. Finally, Sir Derrin came upon a broken lute, and found the gangly entertainer, half conscious and buried under a mound of rubble.

"Saw him," the man babbled. "Saw him with me own eyes, I did. Worse than the devil himself, he is."

"Who?" Ryan asked, suddenly taking interest in him.

"Rupert Kadan! I've seen him before, and he hasn't changed a bit. Oh no, he hasn't! He came in just a while ago. Took three young boys with him, he did. He's a right old devil, that one."

The man's babbling stopped, and his jaw fell open as he saw the remains of his lute.

"Bless my soul," he said. "My poor old lute!"

He gave the remaining strings a swipe, and an eerie "twing" emitted from the broken instrument.

The four men sat in solemn silence, all brooding over their losses. Finally, Sir Derrin came to a decision.

"Well, fm not sitting around all day. We've got to go. You, bard, tell the Baron what we are doing, and get yourself some rest."

"Rest, my foot!" the bard cried indignantly. "I'm not letting Big Rufy Kadawatshisname get away with breaking my poor old lute like that! No siree! I'm comin' with you three buff pony riders! I'll show..."

He noticed that the three warriors were staring impatiently at him.

"Right, let's get a move on. We have to rescue those poor old ...I mean young lads!"

Daniel stumbled to his feet, fighting against the cold wind. Now that they had been heading south for about a week, the snow had softened to rain... which didn't make it any easier to cope with. The wind-swept trees, glistening in the heavy rain, would have been quite picturesque on a different occasion. But now the only feeling in Daniel's mind was hatred. He glanced sidelong at Rupert Kadan, the big, bullying Kardynite who had put them through all their misery. They had traveled over fifty miles on foot. Daniel had been wondering how Rupert Kadan expected to get anything out of them as slaves.

Sir Robert, George's father, was an average knight. He was tall, handsome, and courteous. He presented a magnificent figure, riding at the head of the party. Sir Derrin, on the other hand, made no effort to prove his reputation. Many enemies had challenged Sir Derrin and found out about his uncanny skill too late. He was short by the knight's standards, and preferred the use of a short, thin sword, not quite a broadsword. Lieutenant Ryan was a skilled cavalry commander, and his lance bore a small banner with the Winterguard crest. Lastly, the bard, formerly a man-at-arms from castle Loxley in Summerdale fief, rode proudly at the rear. In his hand was a short recurve bow, and on his back was his ruined lute. He carried it, he said, for "Good luck."

All carried hunting knives. All carried bucklers at their sides, and all carried, in their chests, hearts of molten iron.

"Where do you think we are?" Daniel whispered to George, who was in front of him.

"I don't know," he answered, in a slightly louder voice. Rupert Kadan stepped forward angrily, pulling his black whip from his belt. When the evil warlord drew that whip, the boys knew from bitter experiences that there was blood to be shed.

Daniel saw George cringe, raising his arms above his head. A small whimper escaped his mouth. Then his mind was made.

What happened next is an event much spoken of thereafter as an act of friendship and courage.

Daniel stepped in front of George, shielding him from the murderous overhead slash.

"Crack!"

Daniel swayed slightly, closing his eyes momentarily. Other than that, he did not flinch. Daniel knew that the blow would be struck. He had been afraid. But he still did it; and that was that, pure courage. The prisoner's line had stopped and the weary, tear stained faces of the two other boys stared wide eyed at the scene before them. A long gash ran down the left side of

Daniel's face. Painfully wiping away the blood that flowed down his open collar, he stared Rupert straight in the eyes. This was something that no one had ever dared to do before... he usually broke their neck first.

Daniel's manacled hand rose slowly, and pointed a forefinger at his dirk, which was sheathed at the warlord's waist.

"That is mine," Daniel said firmly. "Give it to me and you can say you killed me fairly."

"Daniel Veers, isn't it?" he said, his scarred face twisting into that evil smile. "I'm going to thrash the skin off you. And, if you're still alive, I'll throw you in a ditch with your hands tied behind your back so your cowardly swine of a father will never find you."

Suddenly, he had an idea. Slowly, he drew Daniel's dirk from his belt and pointed it at Daniel's neck.

Instantly, there was a flash as something flew out of the foliage. It struck Rupert in the face with a satisfying, metallic "Clang!"

"Rupert Kadan!" Sir Derrin roared, "I challenge you to single combat!"

Rupert sat up slowly, stunned by the sudden turn of events. A slim crimson trickle ran down his face from the ritual blow that officialized a challenge.

"I have no horse," he said awkwardly, looking sheepishly up at Sable, Sir Derrin's black warhorse.

"Fool," Sir Derrin spat. "My horse is too noble to engage in a battle with a Kardynite oaf! "

Although stung by the knight's insolent words, Rupert could not suppress a sneer. That stupid thing called honor, the knight's code of chivalry, what a pointless waste! "Then," he said with a twisted grin, "I accept."

Daniel could do nothing but watch helplessly as Rupert Kadan took up his long whip and charged at his father. Sir Derrin jumped down from Sable with practiced ease. Drawing his sword and charging forward, he bellowed his war cry.

" Winterguaaaaaaaard! ! "

As the two contestants met with a deafening crash, twelve mounted warriors thundered out of the surrounding trees. Two of them Daniel recognized as Lieutenant Ryan, with his long lance, and Sir Robert, who bore a dazzling gold eagle as his mark.

The third was a somewhat comical figure. He was a thin man in a green jerkin. With one hand holding the reins and another holding a bow, he screamed berserk war-cries at the top of his lungs. But none were nearly as impressive as Sir Derrin, his kite shaped shield emblazoned with a black dragon on a field of scarlet. His short sword battered at Rupert's longer broadsword.

Ryan, whipping his sword out, severed the lead-chain with one quick stroke.

"Get behind me! All of you!" Ryan ordered the boys. "There's still fighting to be done!"

Rupert Kadan's whip lay slashed in two on the frosty grass. His broadsword cut deep into Sir Derrin's shield, but not deep enough. Sir Derrin's sword was perfectly balanced, and what it lacked in leverage, it made up in weight and its razor sharp edge. With one mighty stroke, Sir Derrin sent his adversary to his knees. The warlord raised his hands above his head, readying for the blow he knew would end his dreams.

"Get up!" Sir Derrin snapped.

Rupert actually winced at his words. Taking advantage of Sir Derrin's act of chivalry, the warlord swung his long blade in a wide arc at the knight's head. Sir Derrin saw it coming. With

the speed of a leopard, he swung his shield in an intercepting swipe at the side of Rupert's sword. Surprised by the lack of impact, Rupert Kadan fell forward ...and onto the expecting point of Sir Darrin's thin blade.

As they approached the castle, Daniel saw, from the back of his father's horse, three towering ballistas. They stood in lonely silence on the white ground. Snow had melted around five dying bonfires. The siege of Winterguard was over. The Kardynites had fled into the forest.

"That sure takes a load off my mind," Sir Darrin expressed with great relief.

The great hall of Baron Taylor glittered with the silk gowns of ladies, and the colorful surcoats of knights and nobles. The ceiling rose high into the heavens, and at the far end, on a raised platform, Ryan knelt before the Baron.

"Ryan Sidney," the Baron said, his voice carrying without effort to the far corners of the massive room. "You have proven yourself worthy of a far higher position than Lieutenant of the Cavalry. Therefore, in the name of God, His Majesty the King, and the Barony of Whitefield, I, Taylor Garson of Winterguard, dub you knight of this fief." A thunder of applause arose from the crowd, rising high and loud.

"Rise, Sir Ryan, knight of Castle Winterguard," said Baron Taylor, sliding his sword back in its scabbard.

At a nod from his Lord, the Baron's secretary stepped forward and called over the racket. "Sir Derrin Veers, knight of Castle Winterguard, come forth and kneel before his Excellency." From the group of knights, a tall figure clad in a striking red and black surcoat over a thin chain mail shirt emerged.

"Derrin, my trusted companion," Baron Taylor said warmly. "You have rid the land of yet another evil presence. We are eternally grateful and award you the Silver Cross of Winterguard, our highest tribute."

"Thank you, my lord," Sir Darrin said, bowing his head slightly.

When the applause had died down, Baron Taylor moved his gaze slowly through the crowd in attendance.

"And now, lords and ladies," he said, as an expectant hush fell on the audience. "I must congratulate an act of friendship and courage by Daniel Veers, son of Sir Darrin." Daniel's stomach twisted into a square knot and he nearly burst with nervousness and surprise.

"Come up here, Daniel," the Baron said, scanning the crowd for the boy.

Daniel was especially annoyed at his two friends. With grins plastered on their faces, they made a big show of pushing him forward.

"This is Daniel Veers," Baron Taylor said, placing a hand on Daniel's shaking shoulder, and turning him to face the crowd, "He has proven himself worthy of our notice with his courage and determination. It is one thing to stand up for yourself, but another to stand up for a friend. Sir Ryan has told me of your actions. Courage is not about being fearless in the face of danger. It is about being afraid and still doing what you believe is best. You leave this stage with my thanks and praise. Rise now, Daniel Veers. We shall be watching your career with much interest. Go now with honor for your courage."

Daniel watched in amazement as the knights drew their swords, and the ladies waved their scarves above their heads. That word was still ringing in his head: Courage. He remembered when he had been afraid. He remembered the icy terror that had gripped his heart. Still, deep

down inside, he wished he could be like Sir Johnson from the song in the tavern, and not be afraid of anything. Then, he realized that even Sir Johnson must have been a little afraid.

The End

Brandon Spicer
6th Grade
Selah, Washington

Elementary Narrative Second Place

The Flag Leaves My Heart

My grandmother's hand felt like soap when she tapped on my back. I woke with a yawn and knew something was different. As slow as a turtle, my grandmother told me that we are leaving the country I loved. I felt solemn and sad. I will live some place unknown to me. I knew I would never want to leave my country; I got up and walked gloomily to get dressed. I had my last sad glance at my room when I was packing. I would be leaving everything I owned. I walked downstairs with a flop. I didn't feel like eating. I was the only person that was the saddest. I couldn't help but cry. I would all but lose the flag in my heart.

The one large star on my country's flag, that represents the heavens and goodness, seemed to be miles away. My grandmother tried to calm me down, but nothing can calm me. My grandmother asked me to sit. I didn't move a muscle. My head drooped. Her soap-like hand held mine as she stared at me. I met her gaze. I knew that gaze. She's trying to tell me that we need to leave our country for freedom. I now understood that I must have courage for my family. My hand slipped out of hers and I turned to face the other way. Slowly, I put a foot on the first step of the staircase. I realized for the first time that it was for my own good. I turned to face my wrinkle-faced grandmother. Tears began to fill her eyes. She felt the same way. I stared at her. Finally, I rushed towards her. I jumped onto her and hugged her with hope and smiled. She gave me that gaze again, but this time her eyes were twinkling. When we got to the harbor I glanced at my country's flag. A tear trickled down my cheek, but nothing stopped me from smiling.

When we arrived in America, I realized immigrants need courage to face their new language, their new culture and their new life.

Henry Cheng
Third Grade
Rego Park, New York

Elementary Narrative

Third Place

Courage

A tremendously courageous person I knew was a great lady named Dorothy Sullivan, my grandma. Grandma was a very happy lady, always going to movies with my family. She would also come over to play Rummicube with my mom. My sister and I would be in the other room watching T.V. until Grandma would come in to give good-bye hugs. I was very close to her.

Actually Grandma is the reason I'm still around. She helped save my life. I was very young and I, somehow, had a quarter in my mouth. It shined when my mom and she were sitting down. Grandma said she saw something shiny in my mouth, so my mom and she rushed over and pried it out of my mouth. If I had swallowed that quarter it would have been big trouble for me.

Grandma and I would wrap gifts and go shopping together. We liked to go to new places to eat, shop, and play. She used to play Bingo too. I couldn't go, but she would tell me about it. I spent the night at her house often.

She went in to get a colonoscopy (getting a part of your large intestine, called the colon, scanned) and they found cancer. Grandma was put into chemotherapy in '03. The treatments would make her very sick most of the time. This didn't stop her from doing the nicest of things. She fought for about four and a half long and sorrowful years. She fought off the terrible disease with surgery, shots, and extremely depressing rounds of chemotherapy. Grandma knew that cancer would take her life, but she never truly quit. Never ever quitting. That's what got me. She died an extremely courageous and brave person on November 23, 2007. She was strong for us; we have to be strong for her. I need courage.

Mike Sullivan
6th Grade
Bellevue, Nebraska

Elementary Expository

Second Place

COURAGE

Courage is in a lot of places, but I found it at school. I see courage in the quiet, respectful kids. I also see courage when some kids stand up for each other. School is a good place to find courage because kids have to face challenges every day. The most courageous student is the one who stands up to bullies, does the right thing, and is a leader.

When kids stand up to bullies, they need to have courage and self-restraint. Sometimes bullies take advantage of kids who are scared of them. Courageous kids avoid fighting with bullies, but they still stand up for the most timid kids. Self-restraint requires courageous kids to be able to think clearly in a tense situation.

Doing the right thing includes having integrity and steadfastness. Courageous kids show their integrity when they are friendly to new students, follow the rules, and when they show respect to teachers. Standing up to peer pressure takes steadfastness to resist your friends when they want to break the rules and do things they know are wrong.

Kids who have courage are natural leaders. Younger kids will admire the courageous kids and follow them. Other kids can learn to be courageous by watching the leaders. Then those kids can have courage when they are in a challenging situation.

School has situations that require courage every day. These situations happen when kids face bullies and peer pressure. Any time a kid is confronted with a challenge, they have to have courage to face being afraid and making difficult choices. If he or she has courage, they will make the right choice and feel good about it. I want to be courageous myself, and will be looking for courage in my friends.

Marshall Anema
5th Grade
Cave Creek, Arizona

Elementary Expository Third Place

The Finest Ingredient of Life

Courage is one of the things a person needs to be successful in life. Many people believe they have courage, but they really do not. I believe people can never truly have courage until they truly have found themselves.

To find in yourself the means of courage is like trying to find a needle in a haystack. You may want to follow many things in your lifetime, trying to be the best in many passions, but in all that commotion you take away what you truly love.

Each person has their own form of courage, and each person has their own way of using it. Your love, or passion you might call it, may be something completely unexpected! You may be almost certain on what you want to follow in life. Then, BANG!!! a certain turn of events may change your whole perspective on your entire situation! So be strong and be very flexible

For example, if an athlete suddenly learned his family member had a major heart attack, it might change his outlook on life. His heart would skip a beat and he would think, *What if this could happen to other people? What if there is a way to cure it?*

In this type of situation, he might realize that he could devote his life to making sure other people don't suffer the same terrible fate of his poor family member. He could decide to give up on being an athlete and have a career change and become a doctor, so to help others that are like his poor family member.

With these choices come great responsibilities. You will have times where it seems as if your devoted work to help others is going absolutely nowhere. Your responsibility is to stick with it, such it up and work. That is another form of courage- the ability to persevere. So if you harness that, your efforts should pull off to bring you a breakthrough!

Now the finest ingredient of your chemistry of your life: the actual courage itself! While you have found your real passion, people may ask "why" or "what for". But don't lose hope! As an independent individual you must be confident in your decision for your passion. So stick to your unique affinity, follow your dreams and that, my friend, is the true meaning of courage. •n other words, it is sticking up for what you believe, and following your dreams to become the best that you can be! So remember to be successful in life, you not only have to be willing to fight but you also have to be willing to keep going even during the bleakest of times. Buckle down and persevere!

THE END

Andrew Seliskar
5th Grade
McLean, Virginia

Middle School Poetry

First Place

Hero of Life

The door is open ever so slightly
Her family name is her welcome sign

I knock lightly to announce my arrival
My mind wonders what stories she will share with me

I greet her with a sweet smile
I know she is touched
Her wonderful personality shines brightly on her face

She lives alone
No family by her side
She bravely cares for herself
With a few helping hands

As we begin to share
I can only imagine how much she has encountered in her life

She has seen the outcome of wars
Felt the hardships of the Depression
Married
Raised sons
Lost loved ones
But has gained a hope chest of memories

Her heart today is filled with many thoughts
Joy from the little things in life
Hurt from her lonely soul
Fear of what is ahead of her

The feeling I receive when I leave her room
Is what I treasure the most

I could sit with her forever
Be inspired for hours
Be a friend
A listener

She is a hero of life

The smile on her face
The courage to share her past
The courage to be ninety years old
Her future that only God holds in his hands

Kathryn Kennedy
8th Grade
Charlotte, North Carolina

Middle School Poetry
Second Place

Courage is lonely
Look at how he walks
Hanging his head
As if it were a sin
Life's greatest taboo
Sometimes I wonder

Adam Bowles
7th Grade
Princeton, West Virginia

Middle School Poetry

Third Place

The Quiet Courage

As he walks down the street
With a grocery bag in hand
He is fraught with remorse
For he doesn't know what to do
He has no where to go

As he walks down the street
He thinks about his children
Smiling faces hiding sorrow and hunger
For a mother to love them
He has no where to go

As he walks down the street
He pictures his desk
Piled high with bills
He knows he cannot pay
He has no where to go

As he walks down the street
He thinks to himself
I have nothing to live for
I feel empty
He has no where to go

As he walks down the street
Soaking wet
He feels a change
The sun comes out
He finally has somewhere to go

As he walks down the street
He lives with a quiet courage
Knowing he makes others live for something
His work and love goes to his children
He knows where to go

As he walks down the street
He regrets nothing
For he will move forward

He can live with the difficulties of his life
He is on a journey

As he walks runs down the street
A new man arises
He no longer feels pain
He only feels a way to love more
He is going places
As he walks into heaven
He has a sense of satisfaction
He know what real bravery is
It is being able to overcome fears and get through hard times
He is home.

Rae Oakley
8th Grade
Charlotte, North Carolina

Middle School Narrative First Place

"What is Courage?" Miss Witherspoon said to my class one day. I wasn't paying attention much, though, I was kind of in the middle of another issue of my favorite comic book *We Were Meant to Live*, it's really cool, I think. The good guys are fighting against the dictator in the book, all of them were raised in a world where either you were royal or you were a slave. One of the leaders of the team was actually the Prince who turned against his dictating father and formed the rebels who, as I afore mentioned, are trying to stop his tyranny. I started paying attention when Miss Witherspoon said, "What makes someone a hero?"

Standing against the dictator, even if he's your dad, who forces everyone into slavery, I thought looking down at the pages of my comic.

"What adversities do they face in becoming a hero? What truly shows that they have courage?" She was asking the class. She was pacing in front of her desk. She seemed really into this questioning, and her eyes seemed focused, serious. It made me want to listen to her. English teachers don't always try to teach you about dead poets who speak in metaphors, after all. "I want you to tell me." She said, she stopped pacing and faced my class.

I could see Jim Wheeler, my school's biggest bully, snoring away. Jerk.

Miss Witherspoon then said to us, "I want you to write a three-page essay or story that explains what courage is and how people show it. Your story may be fictional or nonfiction. It must be turned in next week."

Cool! I like writing stories. They're mostly fan stories about *We Were Meant to Live*, though, but, what did that matter? All one must do is change names. I like writing stories, but apparently, not a lot of other kids in the class did, they groaned away like babies as usual.

The bell to go to lunch rang and I didn't see my classroom move faster, their speed average must increase every school week.

I put the bookmark my brother got me in my comic and got up.

"Don't think I didn't see you reading that comic book, miss Hayes." Miss Witherspoon said to me with a smile, she pointed her index finger at me. I knew I wasn't in trouble, I get straight A's in English, so I don't think she's worried.

"I wasn't ignoring you, ma'am." I started. "I was doing research for my Courage essay. There are a lot of heroic people in the comics, you know."

"There are also many heroes outside the comic books." Miss Witherspoon said.

"Well, I don't know." I said. Not anyone can be a hero.

We didn't get much farther because Jim Wheeler then hit my back with his huge shoulder.

"Hey!" I said, nearly hitting Miss Witherspoon in the chest with my chin.

"Mr. Wheeler." Miss Witherspoon braced my shoulders and helped me to my feet, I like her a little more each day, but she spoke to Jim Wheeler with a stern voice.

"Wha?" He dropped the 'T' in a way that sounded stupid.

"You ran into me, ya big stupid jerk!" I wanted to scream, I didn't, however, because Miss Witherspoon said, "You bumped miss Molly Hayes in the back when you were passing, we would both appreciate if you apologized, James."

Hee, hee, hee, maniacal laugh. Jim Wheeler hates his real name. I'm kind of cynical, aren't I?

"Sorry, Molly." He said insincerely in a mumbled way that made it sound like he said, "surry, Moddy."

He left the classroom ahead of me and I didn't mind. Had to navigate to the cafeteria in the noisy hallways while simultaneously seeing what happens to AI, my favorite character in *We Were Meant to Live*, now that he had come face-to-face with a squad of baddies, what makes it worse is the bad guys had captured Tommy, AI's kid brother! They knew his weakness well ...

"Um, I didn't realize girls read comic books." I heard Nick Anthony say from somewhere around me. He was like Jim Wheeler; total jerk. Difference; he was a smart jerk. Hate those smart jerks.

"This girl does." I told him, trying to keep concentration.

The bad guys didn't know AI was watching them, and they were beating up Tommy. No, they didn't just capture Tommy. There was a whole bunch of people surrounding them now. They were the slaves, and there was a ton of them and only a squad of bad guys. Wasn't anyone going to do anything to save Tommy? It was up to AI, I hate people who do nothing.

"This girl does," I heard Nick repeat me, I could also hear his goons chuckling at his imitation of me. "This girl is a geek."

"Geek?" I said. I was smiling. "If geek means you read comics, write comics turn them into screenplays and make millions of dollars - - then, sounds like being a geek is a lot of fun to me."

"Think you're so good, Molly?" I heard him say as AI pushed through the crowd of slaves toward the beating party the bad guys were having on Tommy. Then, that jerk Nick pulled the comic from my hands and lifted it above my five-foot-two head. "Think you're better than the rest of us?"

"Hey!" I jumped up to grab the comic. He was five-feet-ten inches tall. "That's mine! I bought it! Give it back!"

Since when does anyone care if you bought it or not? If they cared about what you cherished, they wouldn't steal it in the first place.

"I bought it!" One goon imitated me and the others chuckled at it.

"So, you gonna turn this into a screenplay?" Nick asked me with a wicked smile on his face.

"Just give it back!" I had lost my breath jumping up and down.

"I'll make sure you won't." Nick pushed my nose, which made me mad.

"Give it back or else!" I threatened. I didn't think I was ever going to see if AI saved Tommy.

"Chad, please give me your water bottle." Nick smiled at his goon.

I felt a tingle of rage go up my back and I thought about hitting him. Then, I thought about juvenile hall.

"Give it back to me now!" I lunged at him. He pushed me down to my butt.

"What are you going to do, little Molly? You're just a girl. A geek and a girl." Nick said to me as he unscrewed the cap of the water bottle.

"No!" I screamed and my voice squeaked in fear for my beautiful copy of *We Were Meant to Live* number thirty-two.

I climbed back to my feet as I watched the water hit the comic book, the book wouldn't even be readable after this! I spent all my money at my last trip to the comic's store! I was NEVER, EVER going to find out how it ended! Was AI going to save Tommy?! I felt tears coming to my eyes when I heard someone else scream from behind me, "NO!"

It was a boy's voice, but it squeaked in fear the way mine did. My head spun around, despite the danger my comic was in. I wanted to see what was happening. Jim Wheeler and his friend Jack Alistair were gripping Cody Armstrong's arm's tightly and dragging him toward the boys' bathroom. Another swirly situation. Kids followed, not wanting to miss the show, I suppose. Not even other bullies, just other kids. Kids who were doing nothing to help Cody, though he was begging for it.

"What did I ever do to you?" Cody had never been given a swirly before this.

"Crossed my path, math nerd." I heard Jack say.

"Help!" Cody screamed to the other kids. They still stood in silence on their way into the bathroom. I heard Cody scream, "somebody!" They pulled him into the bathroom and I was doing nothing, too. I just turned back around to face Nick and his goons.

All I found was a wet wad of what used to be my comic. I wasn't even paying attention to the wet wad of paper. I was too disturbed about what was happening to Cody and all those kids just watching. Just like the crowd of slaves surrounding only five bad guys, no one would help Tommy. No one would help Cody. What could I do? I was just a girl. A geek and a girl. Little Molly Hayes. I didn't even know if AI saved Tommy. I picked up the wet wad of paper and looked at it. I heard the stall door slam open and I knew Cody was about to go in. Those kids who did nothing REALLY ticked me off and I was one of them. That's when I remembered what the Prince said to the slaves when they didn't want to fight his dictator father; "My people, there are two and only two things we can do in an unfortunate position. We can spend either our whole lives hating it and complaining and wishing someone would fix it, or we could be the one to fix it. We are not supposed to be separated the way we are. We, as a people, should be whole, united. None of us deserve the way you've lived. We Are Meant to Live."

Well, I figured, us underdogs in this school are meant to live, too. Guess what Tommy, you're going to get rescued by AI. Then, I took off running.

I pushed the boys' bathroom door open and charged toward that crowd of nothing doers. I pushed them out of the way, the wet wad still in my left hand, I needed it.

"Hey, James!" I called at the front of the crowd. Jim Wheeler froze in anger, Jack stopped, too. Cody looked terrified. But, I had made it, just barely, I made it.

"No one calls me by my real name!" Jim Wheeler shouted as he let go of Cody's arm and turned at me furiously. Then, he stopped and smiled when he saw it was I.

"You're the calvary?" He asked me.

"Darn straight," I told him. I had to be brave. But really, inside, I wanted to pee my pants when Jim Wheeler screamed.

"What are you gonna do, little girl?" Jim Wheeler asked me. "All I had to do was barely bump ya and you were sent sprawling."

Jack laughed at that, no one else did, though, I think they were shocked I stood up to him.

"I was merely off guard, mate." I said to quote the Prince in a fight. My voice squeaked in mid-sentence, but I still sounded pretty cocky.

"Do you know who I am?" Jim Wheeler asked with nostrils flaring. So, he didn't appreciate my talking back, eh?

"James Theodor Wheeler. Height; six foot freaky. Weight? Dear, boy, there is no such number to measure your mass." I said to him studying my nails.

"That's it! Jack! Give me some help!" Jim Wheeler went to push me but I threw the wad of wet comic at him, I felt my eyes bulging out of my head as Jack ran at me and knocked me down. My back hurt so much! Jack was almost as big as Jim Wheeler, STILL, no one came to rescue (well now it's me getting bullied) Cody.

"Stay down!" Jack shouted to me after he got his big butt off of me. He turned to Jim Wheeler, who was still taking wet paper off his face, "I got her, Jim."

I got up. I tapped on Jack's shoulder.

"I told you to stay down!" Jack yelled at me angrily.

"I didn't know if you meant `stay laying down', or `stay down on Earth entirely'." I told him.
"Wondering if you could clarify that for me?"

My Mom says in school boys like Jim Wheeler don't care if you're a girl when they're hitting you. Boy, was she right. Jim Wheeler nearly knocked me out cold with the fist he gave me in the cheek bone. Major ow. How do the Prince and AI and everyone jump back to their feet and fight back?

But, there was one boy who cared if you were a girl when you got hit. His name was Albert Garcia and he just exited a stall when I got punched. And he tackled that Jim Wheeler and pinned him to the ground. Cody was still in the stall, I noticed.

"Get off of me!" Jim Wheeler yelled.

"No way!" Albert argued. "Tony, get Mr. Waters."

The Principal.

"Sure, man!" Tony left the crowd and ran fast from the bathroom.

Jack swore and said, "I'm out of here, man!"

He bailed Jim Wheeler completely. Lou, another of Albert's friends helped me to my feet.

"Not so tough now, are ya?" Cody asked the pinned down Jim Wheeler.

"I'll kill you, Albert!" Jim Wheeler yelled at Albert.

"Just try." Albert taunted his pinned prey.

"Are you okay, Molly Hayes?" Lou asked me.

"I am no thanks to you, you slow mo." I told him with my hand over my face.

Kids ran out of the bathroom, they knew the principal was coming after all. Mr. Waters came, Tony just behind.

"What on earth was going on in here!?" Mr. Waters shouted.

Cody and I both tried to explain, but Albert started talking and he said, "Jim Wheeler here and his friend were trying to dunk my friend, Cody when this lightening bolt came in, I mean Molly Hayes came in, and stopped it all. She held them off while I was busy in my office. Bad time to go to the bathroom, huh?"

I liked being compared to a lightening bolt, Cody seemed to like being referred to as Albert's friend.

"You did well, Miss Hayes." Mr. Waters nodded approvingly at me. His eyebrows furrowed, "did Mr. Wheeler attack you, Miss Hayes?"

I nodded. Lou had his arm around my shoulders defensively.

"Mr. Garcia, you may get off Jim Wheeler. Mr. Wheeler, I want to have a talk with you in my office right now." Mr. Waters looked furious from the thought of a fight in his school. Jim Wheeler followed him out. Albert and Albert's boys and Cody and I (mouthful, isn't it?) were the only ones left in there.

"You saved me." I looked at Albert.

"You saved me!" Cody pointed at me and then himself.

"You guys did nothing" Albert glared at his friends who looked guilty. Well, Tony did.

"How could we do anything? Molly came in and stupefied us with her amazing ... ness. Lou said laughingly.

"Thank you, Molly. Thank you so much." Cody grabbed my hand and shook it.

"Don't mind being saved by a girl?" I said jokingly.

"Don't mind being my new best friend?" Cody asked me. "Who cares if you're a girl? You saved me."

"Even though there were capable, but stupefied, brick walls of dudes just watching." Again Albert glared at his friends. Okay, now Lou looked guilty.

Albert looked back at me, "you're pretty cool, Molly."

"Pretty and cool." I said smiling a wide smile.

Lou looked at the paper bits on the floor and picked up two chunks, "what the heck did you throw at Jim?"

"What previously was, quite possibly, the greatest issue of *We Were Meant to Live* I had ever read. Well, reading." I answered looking to the soaked wad longingly.

"You read comic books?" Tony asked me. "A girl?"

"Yeah." I raised my eyebrow at him. "A girl."

I hate being labeled.

"That's so awesome!" Tony shouted. "My other girlfriend's never EVER were interested!"

He leaned on his hip and said in a snob-girl voice, "I don't like comics. They're stupid."

I had to laugh at that, so did Cody. Albert and Lou smiled, they probably heard this joke a million times.

"But you," Tony stood up straight again and pointed his arms at me. "You'd probably say, 'dude, when's the next comic convention? We got to get back issues!'"

I laughed again.

The bell rang again. There goes lunch, thought my stomach.

"Mind if I walk you to class, new best friend?" Cody put his arm out to me.

I put my arm through his, "let's go, Cody."

"Mind if I and my stupefied squad tag, Lightning Lass?" Albert looped his arm through my other arm. Lightning Lass, another reference to my speed.

"Let's go, Albert, Cody, Stupefied Squad." I said to them. Together we walked to class proud, brave and strong. I had triumphed. I had faced scary odds, proved to Jim Wheeler that a girl could so stand up if she wanted to. Anyone can. Because I stood up, so did Albert, because he was brave enough, his friends backed him up. Because of us, Cody didn't get the swirly of his life.

We opened the classroom door proudly, we smiled proudly, we took our tardy slips the proudest of all and slumped into our desk seats and thought of how we were going to explain this detention trip to our mothers'. Stinky rotten tardy slips.

I opened my notebook and started on my courage paper next. It said;

What is Courage? By: Molly Hayes

What is courage? If you look in the dictionary, it will tell you that courage is the ability to do something that frightens one. There are many things that frighten people. And, like Miss Witherspoon told me, courage is in many people outside of comic book heroes.

There is courage inside the Mother who battles breast cancer so that she may see her children grow up. There is courage in the war hero who flies off in his plane so that his family can live without fear in their country. There is courage in the one in the many who faces overwhelming odds.

Yes, there are many types of heroes, indeed. Are the heroes no longer filled with courage because they are scared? No, they are not. Courage is the ability to do something that frightens one.

Yes, you have courage if you face the fear of rejection and tell your crush you love them. Yes, you are filled with courage if you stand on stage and sing or talk to an audience. Like Miss Witherspoon said, anyone can be a hero.

I didn't believe it at first, but then again, doesn't everyone doubt sometimes how far courage can stretch? I did, but, when push comes to shove, you have to stand up and use your courage. To save a life or save a love, to illustrate, I'll tell you a story about a comic book geek who didn't believe anyone could be a courageous hero.

"What is courage?" A teacher said to her class. The comic book geek wasn't paying attention that much. This regular comic book geek was far too interested in the story she was reading. The teacher said to her class, "I want you to tell me."

The comic book geek considered her comic book and thought to herself, I think courage is just doing the right thing and believing you'll make it through no matter what the odds are against you.'

The End

Hannah Richard
8th Grade
Surprise, Arizona

Middle School Narrative Second Place

Walking the Beat

While sitting in my grandfather's car, listening to his favorite singer, Dolly Parton, I began to wonder about his life before I was born. What it was like during his time of being a sheriff, and a father to two teenagers? I never really thought about it that much; to me my grandfather is the man who I see every couple weeks, working on the farm, and taking care of his family. I never think about whom he might have been 30 or 40 years ago. I knew that he was the sheriff of Madison, Indiana, and I was sure that there had to be some interesting stories behind that job. Once I asked him about it, his face lit up with the memories of the "good ole' days".

"I hadn't been on the force very long, it was only about 1958," he started. "when a call came in about a woman in distress at the 900 block, 2nd Street, in Madison, Indiana. When I arrived I was the only person there. The woman was screaming as I approached her, and it didn't take long to realize what the problem was. She was in labor. I tried to call for help, but there was no time. I was not trained on how to deliver a baby, but thankfully my experiences on the farm as a child came in handy. What seemed like an eternity, actually only 30 minutes, when we finally heard the sweet innocent cry of a baby girl finally arrived. I had been very worried that this child could have been a Thalidomide baby since I had just read about all the birth defects that were caused by Thalidomide given to women during pregnancy, but this baby was truly beautiful. We had no ambulance or EMTS back then, so the hearse came and picked up the mother and child and took them on to the hospital. I saw them upon occasion when I was out on patrol. She would be playing on the sidewalk with a Slinky or a Hula Hoop which were popular toys back then."

He took a long deep breath, and stared straight ahead, remembering what had come next. "Five years later, I received another call to the same area, but this time it was not to be the night of a miracle, but instead it was something so horrid that it gave me nightmares for years to come. When I arrived, we found a father standing over his five year old daughter who lay lifeless upon the ground. A broken whisky bottle was smashed on the sidewalk. He was drunk and had forced the little girl to drink the whiskey until she died of alcohol poisoning. One look at the girl, and I realized it was the same little girl that I had delivered on that dark night five years ago. The next morning I looked at my own two children who were watching Captain Kangaroo on T.V. and I gave a silent prayer for the new little angel that heaven had received the night before."

As I waited for him to continue his stories, I thought about the story that he had just told and it made me admire my grandpa's strength and compassion.

"Another call that I received that I will never forget was a little while after I had delivered the baby. We were in the station looking at the wanted posters of the teenage murdering fugitives Charles Starkweather and Caril Fugate when a call came in that there was a burglary in progress at the Moose Lodge. When my partner and I arrived we could see signs of a break in. but no one in sight. We went out around the building and we could see where the grate to the crawl space under the building had been removed. There was only about 20 inches of height in the crawl space and with flashlights in our hands we both scooted under the building. It was pitch dark and hard to maneuver, but then we heard something rustling in the corner and sure

enough it was the burglar. It took a great deal of energy as we struggled to get him handcuffed and drag ourselves plus him back out from under the building, but in the end, we got our man.”

While he was remembering his great success, I thought about what a fearless man my grandfather must have been. Unlike the officers of today, my grandfather recalled how they had to share the patrol car with each changing shift. He said that he would drive his 57 Chevy down to the station and he would listen to the news on the radio to give him things to talk to people about that he met on the street as he walked his beat. He recalled things that were big news back then like Castro taking over Cuba, Elvis Presley going into the Vietnam War, and whether it was safe to get the new polio vaccine.

“A few months later we got a call to the east side of town about a domestic violence call. We had to walk down between a smokehouse and a porch to get to the door. There in the doorway was a woman all covered in blood. She was dazed and crying. Out of the corner of my eye, I caught a slight movement. What I was able to see was a double barrel shotgun protruding through a knothole in the smokehouse. The gun was pointed at mine and my partner’s head. I told my partner that there was nothing that could be done here, and that we should just leave. My partner didn’t know why I would say such a thing, but as we began to walk away, I pushed my partner from the porch and slammed into the door on the smokehouse and knocked the husband with the gun off his feet. We were able to subdue him and take him off to jail,” Grandpa said with a strong voice.

“After a major incident like that you really had to take a break and try to get yourself back together. You went to Hinkel’s, a small local dinner and would get a cup of coffee, like the advertisement you saw everywhere back then, Maxwell House Coffee, (Good to the last drop). You would talk general talk to try to get your mind off of what had just happened. We talked about the new fangled Xerox machine at the station or the fact that stamps were going up to 4 cents. You talked about strange things like the fact that a man was giving the Smithsonian the Hope Diamond because he was afraid of the curse that it had brought on anyone who had owned it. You just tried to make it seem like a normal day”

“There was a call to a personal injury accident that gave me a great deal of unrest for months to come. I was the only officer there along with a tow truck driver. A steel truck had gone over the hill. We got down to where it was after a slow climb having to hold on to trees and vines as we made our descent. When we got to the cab of the truck, we found that a steel bar had decapitated the driver. We climbed back up the hill and waited for the coroner. He said he was too old to climb down the hill so we would have to bring the body to him, so back down the hill, the tow truck driver and I went. I took the body by the jacket and also had to carry the head while the other man helped carry the body by the legs. It was very hard getting back up the hill and it seemed like it took hours. Of course, the coroner pronounced the man dead and then left and we had to sit along the road for another hour until the hearse came to take the remains. These are the kind of jobs that no one wants to have to deal with, but police have to deal with terrible kinds of things a lot.”

After another long pause from my grandfather, I told him I never knew how he had to see all of those horrible things, and how I thought that he was extremely brave and strong.

“That’s not even the end of the stories,” he continued. “In this case it was someone who I did not know, but a few months later that was not the case when I was the officer at the accident of a 16 year old girl. Her car had rolled over and she was pinned under it. I had to ride with her to the hospital in the hearse. It was very busy at the hospital emergency room. All of their LV. Poles

were in use, so I had to stand there and hold the LV. Bag up in the air. I knew her parents well and I had to watch as they held her and her body started to turn black. Then an hour later she was gone. It is bad enough coming upon an accident when someone is already dead, but it is very hard to watch them die and know you can't do anything to help them, especially when it is a child."

"I remember working a sting operation where people were gambling. Back in those days that was illegal. The worst part of it was that the gamblers were allowing people to use their food stamps to play and they would give them fifty cents on the dollar. We went to one woman's house that was using her food stamps to gamble. She was not home but her four small children were. They were trying to get some beans up on the counter that they could not reach. I got the pot down and it was full of maggots. There was no other food for the kids. We got social service to step in. Next we planted a wire on an undercover officer who got in the game. We recorded the fact the gamblers would accept the use of food stamps which is a federal offence and we busted them. There was no gambling problem in town for the next ten years."

"I remember when the movie company came to town to film Some Come Running. I acted as security for Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, and Shirley McClain. The movie stars treated me very nicely and they sat around and talked to us just like regular people did. It was great being a policeman at that time and getting a chance to do something fun for once even though I really liked being a police officer and all of the work it entailed. My favorite show back then was "Gunsmoke" and "Rio Bravo" starring John Wayne. He went on to point out, that unlike the movie stars playing the role of a lawman, that real officers do not have stuntmen who jump in and take over when things get difficult or dangerous.

"I am going to tell you one last story" said Grandpa. "It is about the time someone was trying to break into the hospital. My partner and I went around to the back of the hospital. It was getting dark. We saw someone off to the side who then started to run but he tripped and came rolling down the hill. They caught him and handcuffed him and then we went to see what he could have tripped over in the weeds. To our surprise there was a man laying there dead with an apple in his mouth. The coroner was summoned and the man was taken for an autopsy. It seems that he must have been walking home eating the apple and he had a heart attack, and had been dead for a couple of days. The weeds were just high enough that no one could see him. If it had not been for the runaway burglar who knows how long it may have been before we found the man's body."

After hearing all of the stories from my grandpa, I realized that he was a strong leader and compassionate person, and still is. I think the town of Madison was very lucky to have him protecting them for over 26 years, but I think I am the luckiest of all because I get to call him my grandpa.

Carah Austin
8th Grade
Whiteland, Indiana

Middle School Narrative

Third Place

Two summers ago, my father and I went on a parent/ child camping trip in Colorado. To be honest, I was not very excited to take a week out of my summer holiday for hiking and backpacking.

The first few days were not as bad as I expected. We hiked most of the day and right before dark we came back to a warm fire at our campsite. Toward the end of the trip our group was on a long hike in a direction we had not gone before. Instead of wasting my breath, yet again, by asking where were going and getting a "you will see soon enough" type of answer, I decided to wait for the surprise.

When we finally arrived at our destination, I was looking down at the biggest cliff I had ever seen. I wanted to run back to the campsite as fast as I could to hide in my tent. Instead, my dad says, " Are you excited? You are going to be the first one down!" I looked at the 200-yard cliff. If you ask my friends, they would say my greatest fear was the fear of heights.

After some coaxing, I was buckled up into my harness with my heart racing. Little did I know tears were about to stream down my face. As I proceeded to the cliff, I was taking tiny step by even finer step to the edge. Before I knew it, I was hanging on the cliff trying to listen to the leader give me last minute instruction on how to rappel down.

From crying at the top of the cliff to having the biggest smile on my face one has ever seen at the bottom, I finally made it to the bottom and faced my greatest fear and showed myself with a little courage anything is possible. After having dealt with this fear, my next greatest fear is snakes. That one may take a while!

Marshall Weisiger
8th Grade
Charlotte, North Carolina

Middle School Expository

First Place

What is courage? The way I see it, there are two different kinds of courage: ordinary and extraordinary. Extraordinary courage is the type shown when someone saves a life, or overcomes some spectacular obstacle. However, extraordinary courage is unusual, and the situation in which it is needed occurs infrequently. Extraordinary courage is often inspiring and amazing, but it can be hard to relate to. Easier to relate to is ordinary courage, the kind that is needed in everyday circumstances. Even though it might be less impressive than the extraordinary kind, sometimes ordinary courage can be just as difficult to muster. Let us examine extraordinary courage first.

We hear about extraordinary courage all the time from the media. On the radio, on the television, in the newspaper, there are stories of people who risked their own lives to save someone else. Recently we heard about Wesley Autrey, the "Subway Hero", who jumped onto the tracks to save a man having a seizure from being hit by the oncoming subway. In 2001, of course, there was 9/11, when firemen leaped into a burning and highly dangerous skyscraper to save the hundreds of workers trapped inside. For years, so many young men and women have risked their lives to fight for their country in Iraq. Besides in real life, there is the extraordinary kind of courage found in fictional books: In *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo Baggins perseveres through all his hardships and difficulties and finally casts Sauron's evil ring into the flames of Mount Doom; Harry Potter, in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, walks towards his own death in order for Lord Voldemort to be destroyed. I greatly respect these extraordinarily courageous people and characters and find their feats to be incredible and moving, but these accomplishments can sometimes seem unreal if they do not directly affect us. Let me now give an example of ordinary courage that happened in my own life that was very much real.

When I was ten years old, my family moved from Vermont to New Hampshire, making me the new kid at school. I had a difficult time transitioning from my old school to my new one. This transition was not made easier by the behavior of one specific kid in my new class, whom I will call "Todd". Todd bullied me and teased me throughout the whole of fifth grade. He treated me as an outcast. Also, Todd's friends eventually caught on, and helped Todd in alienating me. There is an example of ordinary courage and one of cowardice in this situation. The cowardice was on Todd's friends' parts. None of them had the guts to stand up to Todd, or to be nice to me. I am sure that none of them wanted to stick out because they feared that Todd would bully them, too. The courage was on my part. Throughout the year of bullying, though it was difficult, I tried my best not to let them get to me. I found other friends. Actually, I did such a good job with it that today in seventh grade, ironically, Todd considers himself rather a friend of mine. I do not feel the same.

One more example of ordinary courage can be extricated from this situation. Todd still has not yet learned his lesson, and I have witnessed him "bullying" other new kids every year since fifth grade. It would take a kind of extraordinary ordinary courage for me to stand up to Todd and tell him what he is doing to those people and to cut it out. This instance is a perfect model of how ordinary courage can sometimes be just as difficult to possess as extraordinary courage. In standing up for the new kids whom Todd targets, I would risk being shunted back to where I was in Todd's spectrum in fifth grade. It would be a difficult thing to do, but it would be the right thing to do.

Though we may not ever have the opportunity to display extraordinary courage, we all certainly will have many opportunities to demonstrate ordinary courage.

Extraordinary courage, like saving someone's life, is truly remarkable, but it is only needed rarely and in extreme situations. Ordinary courage, though less impressive, is courage all the same and can be as simple as trying a new sport that you have never played before or as challenging as standing up to the bully, like I hope to do. Or perhaps the most difficult kind of ordinary courage is forgiving-will I ever have the courage to forgive Todd?

Max Sopher
7th Grade
North Hampton, New Hampshire

Middle School Expository

Second Place

Courage

Courage. Courage is a word commonly associated with valiant knights and fearless warriors. On the contrary, however, courage can be used to describe anyone, from the common man to the hardened marine. For example, the common man would display courage if he has to make a presentation in front of many of his peers. As defined by Wikipedia.org, courage is " the ability to confront fear, pain, danger, uncertainty or intimidation." To me, courage is taking the course of action that you think is right, without giving thought to the resulting criticism or consequence.

Courage, however, shouldn't be confused with heroism. Heroism is a word used to imply that the person (or animal) did something to save someone else or something else. Courage is entirely different because when someone acts with courage, it doesn't necessarily make them a hero. Nevertheless, however, courage and heroism are often used hand-in-hand when describing a hero or heroine.

A prime example of courage and heroism would be former Solid Mechanics teacher named Liviu Librescu, a Holocaust survivor and a victim of the Virginia Tech shooting. Mr. Librescu held his classroom door shut when an enraged Sueng-Hui Cho attempted to enter his classroom with a gun. Librescu proceeded to barricade the door with his body while yelling to his students to escape the room through the windows. He was shot five times, once in the head which proved fatal. He will be fondly remembered by the survivors of the Virginia Tech massacre to be a man of intrepidity and valor.

Another fine example of a man who displays courage would be United States Marine Rafael Peralta, a 25 year old man who was known for his selfless and lionhearted nature. Rafael Peralta was an honorable man with an outstanding work ethic and an excellent willingness to participate beyond the call of duty. Peralta lived his final day when he and his squad were called for an assault mission in Fallujah, Iraq in 2004. Peralta was injured early on by rifle fire from near the entry door. Later on, an insurgent rolled a fragmentation grenade in the room where a hurt but still conscious Peralta and his squad were positioned. Peralta grabbed the grenade, cradled it in his body, and saved his fellow U.S. marines. Rafael Peralta received the prestigious Purple Heart award and is currently under consideration for the Medal of Honor, the highest military honor which is presented by the United States President in the name of Congress. Giving one's life for your comrades to me is the highest and most unsurpassable act of courage and valor.

Ultimately, it doesn't matter whether courage is being used to describe the common working class man or the veteran soldier, it is an honor when the word is associated with your name. As seen from the above examples, showing true courage sometimes takes heroism and valor, but it could be shown in much more subtle instances.

Ryan Scarpelli
8th Grade
Holtsville, New York

Middle School Expository

Third Place

Undiscovered Courage

Courage: the quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face difficulty, danger, or pain without fear. But, really what is courage? What do you think of when you think of courage: Superman, Spiderman, or Batman? Most people assume that there is only one type of courage--the courage all of the super heroes or famous stars have. But I disagree, for I have met someone who showed me there is courage in your typical eighth grader. She shines with bravery and courage, and she goes through circumstances unimaginable to me every single day. My friend Maggie has diabetes.

Maggie was first diagnosed when she was four years old. She was riding in the car on a family trip and began showing symptoms of diabetes. She was very thirsty and had to go to the bathroom way too frequently. She ended up being hospitalized. That day her glucose count skyrocketed into the 800s, nearly ten times higher than it should be! Many people have diabetes but it was not until I investigated that I realized how much bravery and courage a diabetic person must have. Before every snack or meal, my friend has to check her glucose count and dose. When she doses, insulin will be injected into her body to accommodate the amount of food she is eating. First, she has to figure out how many carbohydrates she will be eating and then use a ratio given by her doctor to calculate the units of insulin required. To dose she must program that number into her pump which will feed the insulin into a tube that is inside of her. Her body has a number of grams of sugar in her bloodstream and by checking the blood it will tell her what that number is and whether or not her insulin is working. To check, she pricks herself with a lancet (a needle type device). She takes the blood drop that comes out and puts it on the meter to find her number. To make things harder, Maggie must aim for a number between 80 and 120 to be on target. This is actually much harder than it looks. It all seems like so much work and, on top of that, she must repeat this process usually six or more times every day.

If Maggie's number falls below 70, she begins to get cranky and tired. Sometimes, you have to ask her if she is low because she may not even notice it. Also, if she goes over 200 she could be damaging her heart, liver, kidney or lungs, or her legs, feet, and eyes. I never really thought about this before. One wrong dose and her number could get way off. All of a sudden she could be damaging vital organs in her body. Also, if Maggie's number gets high enough, she may have to be hospitalized and could potentially go into a coma. The hospital will monitor the amount of sugars in her body. I never understood how responsible and meticulous a diabetic person must be when dealing with devices that affect the protection of that person's body.

Furthermore, Maggie is able to check, dose, and worry about her numbers while being a straight-A student, an amazing soccer player and an extraordinary singer. On top of that, Maggie is one of the nicest people I know. She is funny, energetic, and always has a smile on her face that shines like the sun. Maggie knows how to cheer me up, even in the toughest situations, with her soothing words and radiant smile. Her laugh fills a dark room with

sunshine and joy. She wouldn't even dream of letting diabetes get in her way or her dreams. Diabetes used to sometimes affect Maggie and she used to feel self-conscious about it. At lunch, people would often wonder why she was pricking herself or why she had to always carry around a test kit. Now, Maggie isn't as insecure about it and she realizes it is just part of her life. Many people get comfortable with her daily process, so there are fewer questions about it. Maggie also is unable to do certain sports like swimming because she has to take her pump off to swim. Exercise causes her number to go down. Maggie goes on a roller coaster while swimming because exercise is bringing her number down and there is no insulin helping to monitor her number. However, she overcomes these obstacles and finds other sports on which to focus. Also, Maggie works hard to find a cure for diabetes. Every year, Maggie goes to a diabetes fundraiser Gala. This fundraiser raises money for JDRF (Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation). In the past few years, Maggie has raised tons of money to find the cure for diabetes and to help other kids just like her.

Maggie is brimming with life and love and she shares this with everyone around her. Maggie has taught me to live life to the fullest because the moments only last so long. She has taught me not to care about what others say and to always have first things come first. Maggie is a strong fighter for what she believes in and takes firm stands. She is so brave and courageous. Every day she fights diabetes with a smile on her glowing face. Maggie has the undiscovered courage you don't really think about every day. She stands up to diabetes. Although, one mistake could lead to life long injuries, or even be fatal, Maggie lives in the present and doesn't worry about what could happen. The phrase, "What if..." isn't in the dictionary for Maggie. We can all learn a little life lesson from her. Maybe Maggie isn't Superman or Batman, but, to me, she is the bravest superhero there is. I am proud to call her one of my best friends.

Kiki Sykes
8th Grade
Prairie Village, Kansas

High School Poetry First Place

“The boy in the corner”

He was always in the background
Ever present
In our peripheral fog
Moving
Breathing
Living.
He had no name
Merely a face
Often a smile.
We were so contented to forget.
The boy in the corner.

If he spoke I didn't hear
But perhaps
I just wasn't listening
Perceiving
Heeding
Caring.
He had no words
Merely a face
Often a smile
It was second-nature to forget
The boy in the corner.

As the days floated into months
Then years
We believed in futures
Planning
Preparing
Dreaming.
He had no beyond
Merely a face
Often a smile
Who know time would forget
The boy in the corner?

We thought we were invincible
Immortal beings
Drowning in false security

Smiling
Laughing
Unknowing.
He had no warning
Merely a face
Often a smile
Fate's hands could not forget
The boy in the corner.

Like fragile glass our illusions
Were shattered
By inequity's masked face
Shooting
Rampaging
Slaying.
He had no preparation
Merely a face
Often a smile
Could bullets spare and forget
The boy in the corner?

He raced to the front
Taking charge
Holding the door closed
Defending
Protecting
Stalling.
He had no panic
Merely a face
Often a smile.
Dependent souls could not forget
The boy in the corner.

When strength no more withheld
Death entered
Looming over the boy
Threatening
Menacing
Unforgiving.
He had no plan
Merely a face
Often a smile.
The killer would not forget
The boy in the corner.

He knocked the gun from
Wicked hands
Bidding us to flee
Urging
Pleading
Insisting.
He had no hesitation
Merely a face
Often a smile.
But fortune would indeed forget
The boy in the corner.

A shot erupted behind our
Escaping forms.
I glimpsed his body
Crumpling
Falling
Bleeding.
He had no pulse
Merely a face
Often a smile.
Our survival demanded we forget
The boy in the corner.

On we raced until safety
Was attained
Though none could cease
Sobbing
Trembling
Panicking.
He had no respite.
Merely a face
Often a smile.
Our thoughts refused to forget
The boy in the corner.

I wonder why it was
Him alone
Who dared to stand
Challenging
Defying
Sacrificing.
He had no incentive
Merely a face
Often a smile.

Dying for those who'd forget
The boy in the corner.

Now he's always in the foreground
Ever present
In our wounded memories
Moving
Breathing
Living.
He had no name
Merely a face
Often a smile
And courage that saved us all.
We will never forget
The boy in the corner.

Hannah Rogers
11th Grade
Goshen, Ohio

High School Poetry Second Place

You were my hero today
And you probably didn't even know
You were my hero today
And you don't even know who I am
(But I wanted you to know)
You were my hero today.

You were my hero
When you reached out your hand
To wave down that speeding cab
And opened the cab door for me
While I climbed safely inside.

You were my hero
When you left and then came back
Into my puny little store
And handed me the extra change
I had mistakenly handed to you.

You were my hero
When you saw me and stepped in front
Of a closing elevator door
And waved for me to step on too
So I wouldn't be late for work.

You were my hero
When you tripped, stumbled, and fell
Into me as I walked by
And got to your hands and knees
To pick up the scattered papers on the street.

You were my hero
When you alone caught my eyes
For a brief moment in time
And didn't quickly turn your head
But genuinely smiled as you waved.

You were my hero
When you stood behind me in a long line
As I fumbled with my cash
And you laid down the last dollar

That I couldn't seem to find.

You were my hero
When you dialed my number of the phone
To simply ask about my work
And let the conversation drift
If only for a few minutes.

You were my hero
When you gave a helping hand
To just show that you care
And do what you know is right
For in that moment, you encouraged me today.

You were my hero today
And you probably didn't even know
You were my hero today
And you don't even know who I am
(But I wanted you to know)
You were my hero today.

Shawna Hite
11th Grade
Marion, Ohio

High School Poetry Third Place

An Unspoken Courage

Her idyllic world shattered on that day.
That breezy spring day, when the dandelions first
Popped up from the moist, warm earth.

The ashen faces, the forlorn stares
Of her returning parents filled her
With curiosity, with dread, with unbearable fear.

Her mother cried at night,
The anguished wails piercing through a canopy of darkness.
Muffled only by lonely pillows.

Her father's eyes lost their twinkle.
The starry gaze replaced with a beleaguered hollowness.
A grime slash was all that remained
Of his smiling mouth.

Sometimes they talked in frantic whispers.
In the kitchen, in the shadowing stairwell.
Always, always out of sight.

She caught a few hushed words.
Here and there, snatching them out
From the gust of furtive dialogue.
Leukemia....Transplants....Donors
These terms were alien to her.
Unfathomable, unyielding
To her seven-year-old mind.

Yet, she knew somehow, Laura was sick.
Laura, yes, her gurgling baby sister,
Whose fat, round cheeks, whose rosy skin,
Have turned into a ghostly, gray pallor.
Her dear Laura, whose soft, fleecy hair,
Have become matted wisps on a sunken head.

Then there were the visits. To
Hospitals, to seminars, to
Funny-smelling office rooms,

Where doctors talked with her parents
Behind closed doors.

Desperate to help, she prayed
Long and hard at night, every single night.
Day's tricked by, the dewy spring
Crystallized to a dry, acrid summer.
Sometimes she wondered,
How could the fiery sun continue its blaze?
How could the azure skies remain so clear
If her precious, dear Laura, is about to die?

Watching the glorious sunset fade
Into the silent night, she choked back tears
Of frustration, of sadness, of impending loss.
Only the fireflies gave her hope.
Those tiny flickering lanterns always seemed
Magical to her, almost too ethereal for this world.

Her mother came to her one day
Speaking in a low voice, she told her
About Laura's illness- things beyond
What she had already guessed.
There's only one way to save her now...
Your sister...she needs a donation from you.

She thought of the infant Laura.
Her sweet, endearing laugh.
She thought of her sister's faint, milky scent.
She thought of those wide, trusting eyes.
Then, meeting her mother's pleading gaze,
She nodded--- just once.

Laura will live, and it's all because of you.
That's what they told her.
Repeatedly, from the time she woke again
In that strange, cramped hospital bed.

From her window she could hear crickets
Chirping, singing their hearts out on that midsummer's night.
Their revelry gradually faded in the back
Of her conscious thought.

Finally,
Unable to contain herself anymore,

She broke out in a hoarse whisper,
“When will I ...die?
No one had told her that the donation,
That donation of bone marrow for her sister, would not require
A sacrifice of her own life.

Janice Chen
12th Grade
Troy, Michigan

High School Narrative First Place

Simple as That

Look: here is a hero. He is twenty years old, studying at UCLA for a degree in architecture. His best friends are an African American boy and a girl of Anglo-Saxon descent, studying pre-med and Literature respectively. He is a Dean's List student. He plays football. He enjoys long walks on the beach and curling up with a good book in his free time.

And he saved a girl's life last night.

It was ten o'clock. She was seventeen years old and returning home from a visit to her father, only she tripped over an inconvenient rock and fell onto the train tracks, spraining her ankle exactly twenty-six seconds before the next train from Seattle to Los Angeles was scheduled to arrive. Aided by his considerable athletic training, our hero dashed out, grasped her by the shoulders, and rolled the two of them onto the other side of the tracks just in time to avoid the two hundred and forty tons of metal hurtling towards them.

In the aftermath, he called 911 and got her to a hospital. It turned out she was fine except for a sprained ankle and a bit of bruising. She was eternally grateful, and he ended up with his picture on the front page of the county newspaper.

It is as simple as that.

Look: here is a boy. His name is Michael Johnson. He happens to be twenty, studying architecture at UCLA and friends with a boy going pre-med and a girl who wants to be a writer. Let us add to the picture: let him have untidy mouse-brown hair and a permanent slouch, as if he is trying always to make himself as small as possible. At the particular moment we are interested in, his contacts are broken from a particularly ugly fall during a recent football game and he is wearing purple-rimmed glasses that belong to his sister.

He is at King Street Station in Seattle, Washington, returning to school from visiting his family in the city for winter break. Due to such mundane difficulties with his parents such as money, grades, and what they've perceived as a distinct disinclination towards returning home during break, happy is exactly the wrong way to describe him. Eager-to-return-to-school and quite-a-bit-more-non-confrontational-than-usual are somewhat closer to the mark.

He slumps down onto a bench. He is the sort of person who likes to arrive exactly on time, but he is ten minutes early today due to his overestimating Seattle traffic. (Such a miscalculation is not incomprehensible when one remembers that Los Angeles is often considered to have the worst traffic in America.)

It is amazing how many people happen to be interested in traveling between the two cities today. On the bench to his left there is an elderly couple, apparently on their way to visit their pregnant daughter. "*Watch it, you,*" the woman is grumbling, and pushing her husband towards the one seat left on that bench. "*You're going to trip and fall and it's not like your leg has ever been the same since Vietnam.*"

The man snorts in reply, but doesn't fight her. "You're one to talk! Who's the one who's got arthritis in the knees, huh? Anyways, I'm fine enough to hunt down the good-for-nothing father once I get there."

She rolls her eyes. "He's thirty-something. You're sixty-nine and crippled, and obviously also delusional. Now sit properly, none of this leg-crossing nonsense, can't you see..."

To Michael's right is a boy, seven years old or so, doing his best imitation of Superman. "Vroom!" he's shrieking. *The boy runs back and forth between the benches, holding his arms out in front of him like two battering rams and stopping periodically to puff out his chest and put his hands on his hips. "I'm Superman! I'm Superman!" It doesn't seem like his knowledge of comic book canon extends beyond the name and the trademark poses, and if it does the obvious conclusion to be drawn is that the name and the poses are all he cares about.*

"Hey." The girl in front of him could be any age between sixteen and twenty-eight, give or take a few years. It's something about the starchy white blouse she's wearing in conjunction with the way her weight is shifted just left of center, something between the fusty brown briefcase she's carrying in one hand and the bright purple duffel bag she carries in her other.

"Hey," she repeats, "Spacey! Can I sit here?"

He nods blankly and scoots over to the right. As he does so, he manages a quick glance at the clock. Eight minutes until the train.

She doesn't sit: she *plops* instead, drops her weight onto the bench the same way cartoon heroes drop Acme anvils over cliffs. Michael half-expects the bench to become a teeter-totter to rival that of his elementary school days in potential and let inertia carry her through to the ground while Newton's third law springs him up into the sky. But she does not sink and he does not fly; the bench beneath them is perfectly level.

"So," she says, once she's sorted out her luggage (briefcase on the floor, duffel bag between her and the bench's left armrest. "I'm Sarah. Nice to meet you." Her voice is not urgent per se, but it sounds impatient and oddly enough, dense. She doesn't seem comfortable sitting: her torso is twisted at maybe an eighty-eight degree angle from her waist, she's kicking an innocent piece of concrete the way some people drum their fingers, and she is offering him her right hand, presumably for shaking.

"Michael," he says, shaking said hand. He pauses to think about what to say next, but apparently he doesn't think quickly enough because she gives him a moment he finds too short and then assumes he won't answer.

"So," she says, "Strong, silent sort, are you? The purple glasses look good at you."

Michael raises his eyebrow. "No, not really. I don't think so, I mean. Thank you, I think." His silence is entirely dependent on his surroundings, in truth, and he's never really considered himself a strong person at all. And he doesn't know if she's joking or not about the glasses.

"Well then," she replies, "*Say* something. Are people afraid to talk or something? Really!" She exhales and doesn't wait for a response. "Sorry about that. Pent-up frustration, stupid family, stupid classmates, blah-blah-blah-blah-blah."

"Stupid classmates?" he echoes blankly.

Apparently she wants to talk, because without further ado she finishes trampling whatever regulations there may be about things-you-say-to-complete-strangers.

"So my dad. Has pancreatic cancer. And I mean, it doesn't make me happy or anything, but I've been dealing with it for like four years and my mom too. And then what happens is my friend, she comes over and *finds out* and *tells* everyone and now at school I'm 'the girl whose dad is dying'. And I don't need that. And then they go ahead with the fundraiser..."

Her voice has gotten even denser. Michael thinks he can hear her sniffing, but she's turned her head in the other direction and he can't tell if she's so far as tears or not.

She stands up.

“Train’ll be here soon,” she explains curtly. Michael stands up too. There’s a minute and a half left, more or less.

“So,” she continues, more for the sake of completeness than anything. “Six months and I can’t do anything about it. That’s basically it. I don’t need pity. I don’t need money, either.” She stands up and starts staring him down. He nods.

She’s pacing back and forth now, looking at the floor. She might have, by now, noticed exactly how awkward catharsis can be for bystanders. She might not have. But Michael’s brain has more or less shut down, and what remains is attempting to think something like this:

Every afternoon after his friend Lindsay’s class on twentieth-century American literature, she used to come home and complain about stoic, graceful-under-pressure, self-reliant heroes. How annoying they were, because they were so damn heroic.

He’d probably get further than that, but then Sarah trips on a stray piece of something. Michael doesn’t even know what, but that’s got to be the reason she is now sitting on the rails clutching her ankle *and oh god that’s the train coming right now* and time stops.

Michael isn’t a brilliant architect. He’s a good runner, but nothing special on the college level. He’s never been the sort to bear things without unnecessary complaint, never been the sort to visit family and help out at home when he’s not feeling well, never even *looked* especially much like a person who might be a hero. He doesn’t think he’s brave at all. If he had time, he would be pondering this.

As he doesn’t have time, he dashes forward, grabs her by the shoulders, and rolls her onto the other side of the tracks just in time to avoid the two hundred and forty tons of metal hurtling towards them.

It is as simple as that.

Emily Xia
10th Grade
Martinsville, New Jersey

High School Narrative

Second Place

The Old Music Teacher

As the rain drummed on the rusty gutters and fluted through the wind, the old music teacher motioned his conductor-like finger as he stood listening to nature's sharps and flats.

Rain seems like the only thing capable of producing any sort of tolerable music these days, thought the old man.

A door slamming two floors below him disrupted the concert and the old music teacher reluctantly slid his baton back into his pocket.

"When I say 5:25, I mean 5:25," said the old man to the pitter-patter of wet boots and a dripping coat.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Sartori, my mom was..."

"Am I here to listen to your pitiful excuses?! I think not. Sit down and play the required piece before you waste anymore of my time."

Fingers shaking, the young music student approached the piano bench and quickly reviewed the selected song.

G sharp, C sharp, E, G sharp...

"God Damnit, Matthew! Play the damn piece."

Trembling, Matthew placed his nervous fingers on the keys, swallowed his fear, and began to majestically glide his fingers across the piano. Every note was played correctly, every flat was a flat, every sixteenth note was a sixteenth note, and every repeat was repeated. After finishing the piece with a triumphant G sharp, Matthew sat silently awaiting his tutor's response.

Saturated with anxiety and uncertainty, Matthew could sense the old man's peering gaze. Although the darkness of the corner hid the old man's face, his piercing stare penetrated through the darkness and destroyed the already withering confidence of the young boy.

"How old are you, Matthew?" said the seemingly stoic music teacher.

"Eleven, I mean twelve; I'm twelve, sir."

"Did you know that by twelve, Mozart was composing piano pieces and writing operas for some of the most prestigious people in Europe?"

"No, sir, no I did not."

"Answer me this, Matthew. Do you think that Mozart would have played the selected piano piece as emotionless and heartless as you just played now?"

"But, sir, I, I didn't make any mistakes."

Motionless and disturbingly calm in his wooden rocking chair, the old man was about ready to transform carbon dioxide into lancinating words of criticism known to either break or utterly destroy a hopeful musician.

"Well as long as you hit every note then you must have played the piece correctly. Do you honestly think that Beethoven intended his beautiful composition to be played by an uptight hopeful whose pores emanate such a fear of failure that he is incapable of showing the slightest emotion? What you have just played for me was as far from Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" as "Chopsticks" is from "Mozart's Symphony Number 41." Your playing completely lacked

emotion, passion, heart, and any semblance of personality.” Turning toward the window, the old man began to listen to his favorite musicians and with a calming voice stated, “I heard the triangle is growing in popularity.”

Heartbroken, the young boy collected his things, trudged down the two spiral staircases, and let the sheets of rain drown his embarrassment and pain.

Resuming his front row seat to the concert, the old man closed his eyes and entered some unknown world comprised of memories from a time long ago.

“Goooooooood morning, Bronx, this is Danny T. wakin’ all you cool cats up this chilly January morning. Today is the day folks. In case any of you guys forgot, it is January 15, 1962 and tonight is the night that our very own Harry Williams and Charlie Sartori will be doin’ their thing at Center Stage! I heard they’ve got some new stuff that will.....”

“They’re talking about you, you know.”

“How am I going to pull this off, Jen...how, how am I supposed to perform in front of hundreds of politicians, critics, musicians...”

“Charlie? Charlie Sartori? Is this the same man who when first laid eyes on me said ‘one day you, my darling, will marry me?’ Is this the same man who goes around telling his son that one day his daddy’s going to be the next Mozart?”

“Hahaha. Our son agrees with me you know.”

“Yes he does. And so do I. Honey, you will be great tonight. And if you aren’t, well...I wouldn’t mind living at that fancy mansion of Harry Williams’.”

“Haha. Oooo woman, you can’t run away from me on that one.”

“Ahhhh. Ahaha.”

“You can run but you can’t hide.”

“Daddy, mommy’s in here!”

“Oh, you little devil. You better not tell him where I’m hiding.”

“Hehe. Sorry, mommy. I won’t say a thing, I promise.”

“Shhh, Jakey. Here he comes.”

“Okay, Jacob. I know she’s in here.”

“Mom didn’t come in here. She...she’s in the kitchen!”

“You know, if you don’t tell me where mommy is, I might just have to pull out the spider.”

“Not the spider!”

“Oh yes, Jacob. And we all know how much Mr. Spider loves you.”

“I’m not ticklish anymore, Daddy. Plus I, I already told you. Mommy’s in the bathro...I mean the kitchen.”

“Okay, Jacob, you left me with no choice. Here he comes!”

“Ahhahhaa. Stop it, daddy. Ahaha. Mommy’s ahaha in the...”

As the above storm clouds blew down their final drops of rain, the old man shook his head and quickly distanced himself from the window.

Why did the rain have to stop, thought the old music teacher as he solemnly walked away from the window and into his bed.

That night, like every other night, the old man dreamed of nothing but rain.

There was something about the rain that triggered the old man's memories. Not once did a bright summer day or a snowstorm incite his reflections on the past. Not once did his memories find their way into the old man's dreams. When alone listening to the rain and visualizing clips from the past, the cold calcified front melts away and a somber man appears. His dark lifeless eyes transform into clouds of tears. His pursed lips unglue themselves and open the gates for bellowing sighs. His timeless wrinkles come to represent deep scars of adversity and misfortune. His white curly hair and beard become more than distinguishable features, but walls: walls designed to hide the slightest emotion that may slip past the heavily guarded barricade and offer anyone a window into the old man's soul. The rain, whatever magical power it may possess, allowed the old man, even for a brief moment, to feel again.

Unfortunately, the next day's weather was ignorant of the old man's dreams. The sun's glowing beams of light enwrapped the city with their warmth, while the raindrops hid behind the few visible clouds left lingering in the sky.

I only hope the music today is not as foul as the weather, thought the old man as he lifted his eyelids to a somewhat too brightly illuminated room.

After scrubbing his face red with mint-scented soap and combing his long flowing beard and curly hair, the old man prepared for the day ahead. Expecting a somewhat disastrous day of music, the old music teacher placed his infamous rocking chair in the even more infamous dark corner and dusted off the musically abused instruments.

At seven o'clock, the first trembling student appeared in the doorway. Ten minutes later, the music room was empty again. At eight o'clock, a second student, with his mom parked at the 'fifteen minute parking only' space, appeared in the doorway. Eight minutes later, the old music teacher sat alone awaiting his next victim. That day, like every other day, the old man received many young musicians and offered his ear to their "music" for as long as his heart could bear to listen to the missed flats, sharps, and measures. With not a single student appearing at his doorway for the past three hours and with the clock striking six, the old music teacher arose from his rocking chair and emerged from the darkness of the corner.

Finally, this torturous day has met its end, thought the old man shaking his head.

After inserting a TV dinner into his 1970 Carousel microwave, the old man released an echoing groan as he heard a delicate tapping at the door.

"No lessons after six!"

"Please, sir, I know you are busy, but I heard you had a piano, sir. Please let me at least play for a few moments. I promise not to bother you, sir, I promise," said a quiet childish voice emerging from the hallway.

"No exceptions. Before six or hit the road."

"Sir, please. I have to practice my piano *today*, sir; I just have to."

God has punished me, I am certain, thought the old music teacher as he returned to his microwaveable delicacy.

"If you must play, then you must play. You have exactly five minutes, but one wrong note and you can see yourself out. As long as I am still breathing on this earth, I will not tolerate any mistakes by lazy half-interested musicians. You now have *four* minutes, boy."

For exactly four minutes an unknown boy's fingers created magic and for exactly four minutes the world stood still. Not once did the old music teacher raise his eyes from the microwaveable dinner to give the boy his all too infamous stare. Not once did the old man

interrupt the boy's four minutes of music with poignant words of criticism and sarcasm. Not once did the old man's heart break when hearing an unemotionally played measure or a missed chord because there were no unemotionally played measures or missed chords to hear.

At exactly 6:06 the boy's fingers curled away from the keys, and, with no intention to disrespect the old man's wishes or to encroach further upon his time, the boy silently slid the piano bench backward, stood up, and walked out of the door of which he came.

The next night at 6:00 the nameless boy again appeared in the doorway of the old music teacher's studio and again the old man, though less reluctantly than before, lent him his piano for five minutes. Again, the old man was silent and motionless and again the young boy, showing more character in two nights than any student who had ever spent a lifetime in the old man's studio, quietly left.

For the next two weeks the old man, besides continuing to listen to and complain about his "beloved" students during the day, left his oak door open for a nameless young phantom who religiously appeared at 6:00 and who even more religiously left at 6:05.

On the fifteenth day of this phenomenon, the young boy, while playing an infamously dreaded piece by Mozart, hit a G sharp rather than a G flat and, at 6:03, instantly prepared to leave.

"Where do you think you're going, boy? According to my clock, you still have two more minutes left of practice."

With these words the boy was utterly shocked. Not once had the old man acknowledged his existence since their first encounter two weeks ago. Although briefly stunned, the young boy quickly collected himself and stepped back into the studio.

"I made a foolish mistake, sir; an inexcusable mistake. I do not deserve to play this beautiful instrument, sir...not today."

Then, unexpectedly, the old man exhibited, in his own subtle nearly undetectable way, an interest in this mysterious boy.

"What's your name, boy?"

"Jack, sir. And what should I call you, sir?"

"Sir, will do for now."

"Yes, sir."

"Now, boy, I'm not blind. I can see your love for this instrument," pointing to the piano "but what I do not understand is why you only commit five minutes toward practice. You are kidding yourself if you think a great musician is formed from a mere five minute practice per day."

"I work, sir. I work from 6:00 in the morning to 5:30 at night, and I don't own a piano, sir. And I can only practice for five minutes a day because, well, you only gave me five minutes. Besides, I have to be home, sir, to make dinner by 7:00 anyways. The trains have gotten faster, sir, but it still takes thirty minutes to get from one side of the Bronx to the other."

"If your tiny mind has not realized yet, I have not given you one instruction. There are hundreds of music teachers closer to your home, boy. Go there."

"I have done my research, sir. I know the studios near my house: "Bev's music fun and easy" and "Patricia Park's Perfect Piano." *Haha*, those aren't for me, sir. Then, I saw your name in the yellow book, sir. You are the instructor I want. Whether you never give an instruction to me in your life, I would rather play in your studio for five minutes than play nursery rhyme songs at "Bev's music fun and easy" for two hours. To play for someone who represents your dream is

quite the honor. Yes, I know of your past, sir. I know you used to be, and I am sure still are, a great pianist... ‘The next Mozart’ so I’ve read. I know you used to play at every theater in New York, sir. I know that you were on your way to the top. I also know, sir, if you don’t mind me saying, that you never performed after your Center stage concert only because...”

“Boy! I believe it is now 6:05.”

The next day, the old man’s dreams came true: it rained. With only one music student arriving earlier that morning, the old man devoted his attention toward the rain for the remainder of the day. Again, with the rain came the old man’s memories.

“Remember Jacob, you must play the piano with emotion. You cannot just play from the sheet music; you must play from your heart as well.”

“Okay, daddy. Like this...”

“Very good, Jacob. Can you hear it, Jen? Can you hear our little boy?”

“He is quite the little pianist.”

“I’m not little, mommy. I can play with the best of ‘em.”

“Haha. He’s certainly your son, Charlie. Haha.”

“One day, I am going to play just like daddy. I’m going to perform at all of the stages in New York. I’m going to be called ‘Jacob the great’ and everyone will come to see me play.”

“Come on, son. You must practice to become a great pianist.”

“Mommy, I have to get back to practicing now.”

“Haha. Well okay ‘Jacob the great.’ I will be in the kitchen listening.”

“Jacob, now play the piece again with the same emotion you added earlier.”

“Okay Daddy. ... Oh No!”

“What’s wrong, son?”

“I misplayed the F flat. I always do that!”

“Don’t worry, Jacob. You were playing beautifully. Plus, a wise woman once told me that mistakes are the key to perfection.”

“Haha. I do believe I told you that, Mr. Sartori.”

“Indeed you did, Jen. As I said, a very wise woman.”

“Now son, start at the F flat and continue through the end. And, son, make as many mistakes as you wish.”

“Hehe. Okay daddy. ...”

“Very good, Jake...the most beautiful sound ever heard from that piano.”

“Did you hear that, mom?!”

“Haha. I sure did, son. I sure did.”

“What are you looking at, sir?” said the young boy already sitting at the piano bench.

Jumping out of his seat, the old man was so entranced by his memories that he did not hear Jack enter the studio.

“Well you have quite the nerve. Coming into my house without knocking...quite the nerve.”

“I’m sorry, sir. It’s 6:00 so I thought you’d be in the kitchen. Honestly, sir, I didn’t even see you there until just now.”

“It’s okay, boy.”

“What were you doing by that window anyways, sir? There’s not much of a sight out there but rain and mud.”

“You have no fear, do you, boy? I believe you are the first child who has ever stepped foot into my studio to not be in trembling fear of me. *Haha*. I believe you are also the first person to express his opinions openly as well. And for that, I thank you.”

“Now, you better start playing that piano, boy. I intend on instructing you today for thirty minutes. That should leave enough time for you to get home and make dinner.”

“Sir, I can’t accept this. I have no money to pay for any lessons, sir. It would truly be an honor, sir, but I must refuse.”

“Boy, it wasn’t a question. Sit down on that bench and play for me the piece that you have brought with you.”

“Yes, sir! Thank you, sir!”

As the boy played his piece, the old man was not hiding in the corner and his heart was certainly not close to breaking. The old music teacher came to life, or at least something like it.

“Oh! Sorry, sir. I made a mistake, sir. It’s always that G flat.”

“Stop thinking so much Jake...”

“Jack, sir.”

“What?”

“My name is Jack, sir.”

“Sorry, boy, common mistake. Anyways, as I was saying before, stop thinking so much. As of now, you are thinking the emotions instead of feeling them. To tell you the truth, if you were one of my daytime students, I would have closed the door on you already. Don’t make me take back my offer, boy.”

“I am sorry, sir. I know I can do better.”

“Then do it.”

“Yes, sir. ...”

“There it is!” cried the old man with an intense look of excitement.

“Did I do it, sir?! Did I really do it?”

“Damn right you did it. You missed a few notes here and there, but you did it. You captured it...you captured the emotion beautifully, boy.”

“Thank you, sir. I had no idea tha...”

“Jack.”

“Yes, sir.”

“You told me earlier that you do not own a piano.”

“I can’t afford one, sir.”

“Then how did you become interested in playing this instrument, boy? How did you ever learn the basics? From my experience, you need a piano to play a piano.”

“Well, sir, I actually never touched a piano until I came here. But since I was little, I loved my dad’s old records of Mozart and Beethoven. And, ever since he passed away, I suppose the piano was the one thing that reminded me of him. So, I created a floor piano made of paper and black marker. I even made sure the keys were the right length and everything. Then, I got some sheet music from my elementary school teacher and began to phantom play a couple of notes, which turned into a couple of measures, which turned into a couple of chords, and which eventually turned into a few compositions here and there.”

“You certainly are one of a kind boy, one of a kind.”

“Oh, shoot! It’s 6:35, sir. I better be going! Thank you, sir. See you tomorrow!”

Once the boy darted out of the room, the old man, with rosier cheeks than usual, returned to his window seat. He remained there until 7:00 of the following night. Among these hours, the old man again entered a world of the past.

“Have you seen my family, Tom?”

“Sorry, Charlie, I’ve been ushering all night. Don’t worry, Sartori, they’re probably just running a little late. Your wife probably couldn’t decide which color dress to wear.”

“Haha. Very likely. Thanks, Tom.”

“Hey, Charlie.”

“Yeah.”

“It’s the big one tonight. It’s center stage. Knock ‘em dead out there.”

“I’ll try my best.”

As the old man’s memory played this specific scene in his mind, the old music teacher’s eyes could no longer hold back the tears that had been constrained for so many years.

“You were great out there, Charlie.”

“I’m your biggest fan.”

“Marry me, Sartori.”

“Harry who?”

“Tom?”

“Follow my voice, Charlie.”

“Tom?”

“Right here, Charlie. Sorry for the crowds.”

“Tom, was that not my best performance yet?!”

“You were great, Charlie. Listen, I...”

“I have never felt so alive out there, Tom. My fingers had a mind of their own.”

“Ya, I know. Charlie, I have to tell you...”

“Tom, where’s my family. I just have to see my family. Oh man, I can’t wait to see their faces. You know, we have to go celebrate after this. What time do you get off, Tom?”

“I don’t think we can do that, Charlie.”

“Why, what’s wrong?”

“I have...I have to tell you something.”

“After we celebrate, Tom.”

“Charlie!”

“What?”

“I don’t know how to tell you this.”

“Fine, what is it?”

“Your...your wife and...your family was...”

“What happened, Tom? Tom, what’s wrong?”

“Just come with me for a second, Charlie?”

“Tom, where is my family?!”

“Just come in here with me Charlie, away from all the cameras.”

“What happened, Tom?! What the hell happened?! Answer me!”

“Mr. Sartori.”

“Who are you? What’s the head of police doing here, Tom? What the hell is the head of police doing here?”

“Mr. Sartori, I deeply regret to tell you that...”

“Oh God! Please God, no!”

“Mr. Sartori, I deeply regret to tell you that your family was in a fatal car crash. Both your son and wife were instantly...”

“Don’t tell me that! Don’t you dare tell me that! Tom, tell this bastard it’s not true. Tell him, Tom. Tell him!”

“I’m sorry, Charlie.”

“I’m sorry, Mr. Sartori, there was nothing anyone could do.”

As tears streamed down the old man’s face, young Jack promptly appeared in the doorway at exactly 6:00.

“Jeez, sir. What is it with you and the rain?”

Quickly wiping away his tears, the old man turned away from the window to face his young student.

“Can’t you hear it, Jake?”

“Jack, sir.”

“What?”

“Sir, my name is Jack.”

“Oh, right, right. Well, can you here it, Jack? Can you hear the music of the rain?”

Pressing his ear against the window, the young boy strained himself to hear the music so praised by his music teacher.

“Sorry, sir. I can’t.”

“Well I’m sorry, too. It is the only beautiful music left in this world.”

“Speaking of beautiful music, sir, I’ve been practicing the assigned piece.”

“*Haha*. Beautiful, huh? Let’s hear it.”

With a boyish grin on his face, Jack sat down to the piano and, from his heart, played the selected piece.

“What do you think about that, sir?” said the wide-eyed boy.

“Well, you certainly didn’t play from just your memory this time. You beautifully portrayed the emotion of the piece...”

“Thank you, sir. Thank you.”

“I’m not finished. Although you portrayed the emotion of the piece, you still must play the piece. You skipped at least two measures during the second repeat, boy.”

“Sorry, sir.”

“Play it again, boy. Play it until you *finally* get it right.”

“Sir?”

“What?”

“If I play the song perfectly in one try, will you promise to answer three of my questions?”

“I don’t make promises, boy. But make it two and I’ll at least tell you the truth.”

“Okay, sir.”

“Now play the piece.”

“Yes, sir. . . .”

“*Haha*. You are very cunning, boy. You could have easily played this piece perfectly the first time.”

“*Haha*. Now *you* have to answer my questions. My first question is why do you love the rain so much, sir? I saw your tears when I walked in today. I know you did not want me to see them, sir, but I did.”

“I’m sorry, boy. I can’t answer that question today.”

“Well, one day then, sir; one day you will tell me. My second question is why do you keep calling me Jake, sir?”

“Well, I once knew someone by that name, boy. You sometimes remind me of him.”

“Is that a good thing, sir?”

“It’s a very good thing, son, a *very* good thing.”

“Oh no! I’m late again, sir. I better be going. Thanks for everything sir, see you tomorrow!”

As the old man watched the final half hour of rainfall from the window, his memories failed to replay themselves. In that half hour next to the window, the old man could think of nothing but Jack. Jack had made the old man laugh for the first time in twenty years. Color now appeared on his usual pale skin, a twinkle now shined in his eye, and a smile had replaced his twenty year old grimace. Jack had changed the old man’s life. Because of Jack, the old man had emerged from the darkness of the corner and had come to enjoy the music that had once been such an intrinsic part of him. Although not forgetting the past, the old man certainly did not dwell in it anymore.

One week later, after the young boy continuously tried and failed to enter the old man’s studio, Jack received a telephone call from the police station.

“Hello, is this Jack?”

“Yes.”

“This is Sergeant Lowe. I am calling to regretfully inform you that an acquaintance of yours, named Charlie Sartori, has passed away in his sleep about a week ago. I know this is hard, but I believe we found something in Mr. Sartori’s pocket that he may have wanted you to have. So, if you don’t mind, we would like you to come down to the station in about an hour or so.”

“Oh...sure...of course.”

The young boy, stunned by the news, was numb. He felt nothing. He did not blink. He did not move. But in about an hour, he arrived at the station and received a white envelope entitled, “Boy.”

Sitting down in the police station, the young boy opened the envelope and discovered a letter. It read:

Dear boy,

By now I have passed away and I am sorry that I could not say goodbye. Hopefully, this letter will suffice.

I am sorry to have left you, boy. But I am very thankful to have known you. You, my friend, have changed my life. To explain how, I think I must answer your two questions of which one I refused to answer and the other I gave a misleading response.

You are right, boy. I love the rain. But not just because of the beautiful music it creates but because of the sound it muffles. In the 1960s, my wife and child

died in a car crash on their way to my concert at Center Stage. Ever since then, the sound of cars has haunted me. Whenever I hear an alarm or the screeching of a brake, my mind recreates that horrible day in my head. The only element, boy, which drives away these feelings and images is the rain. It muffles the sound of the city so all I hear is water and all I visualize in my mind are the pleasant memories of a time long ago.

Referring to the second question, Jake was my son. Your hard work, free spirit, and pleasant persona reminded me of him. At first, boy, I taught you because it was like traveling back to a pleasanter time and teaching my son again. But later, I taught you because of you. You made me laugh and, because of you, I could enjoy the last days of my life. Because of you, I became a better person. Because of you, I died, I assure you, in peace. And for that, my son, I thank you.

In this envelope you will also find a business card. At the address on the card you will find a grand piano. This piano, boy, is yours. You once said to me that I represented your dream, but boy, you represent mine. You have natural talent and a musical mind. You have all the potential in the world. And boy, it is you, not I, who will become 'the next Mozart.'

Although I am not physically with you, Jack, I will still listen to and applaud your music. Remember, play with emotion; play with heart.

*Thank you boy,
Sir*

Samantha Sgourakes
12th Grade
Mattapoisett, Massachusetts

High School Expository Second Place

Two score and four years ago, a courageous man spoke the resounding phrase, "I have a dream." His lack of fear and his constant determination proved his commitment and courage to people across the nation. Gaining civil rights for African Americans was an extremely controversial issue, but Dr. King was willing to risk his life to ensure the freedom and unity of all races. Courage is only one of the pronounced characteristics Martin Luther King, Jr. possessed making him a hero to numerous Americans.

The tasks and obstacles Dr. King faced proved the good nature of his personality. After the well-respected Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to move to the back of the bus, Dr. King led the bus boycott starting in Montgomery, Alabama. African Americans banded together and boycotted the bus company for more than a year. Without the leadership Martin Luther King, Jr. demonstrated, many civil rights movements would have gone without recognition. African Americans had to face harmful chastisement when they chose to disobey the law, no matter how peaceful they were. The police officers and general public used various forms of harassment to torture the African Americans. Police dogs, fire hoses, and brutal fights are all outcomes of peaceful protesting. Only with the promise of a courageous leader could they crusade on to win the fight. On August 28, 1963, Dr. King stood in front of an enormous crowd, and proclaimed his dream of a new nation. His eloquently delivered speech made Americans across the nation shiver with the determination of African Americans.

Although African Americans were deeply determined, nonviolence was the key philosophy to the civil rights movements. There is no better display of courage than a man asking his followers to accept the persecutions against them without violent reactions. Dr. King knew it would be difficult for everyone to be non-responsive towards the hate, but he strongly believed it was the only way to accomplish his goal. African American rights were not the only goal Dr. King was hoping to achieve. In his "I Have A Dream," speech he clearly stated that he hopes one day all nations can be unified. His dream to unify the nations reiterated his self-expectations. To lead millions in such a journey requires immense courage.

Martin Luther King, Jr. is a perfect example of a role model. He exhibits perseverance, leadership, and most of all courage. Acceptance is also an important characteristic Dr. King exuded. Witnessing Dr. King's accomplishments instilled greater qualities in many people. Today people learn about Dr. King and are still moved by all he did for his country. There are many tributes to Martin Luther King, Jr. due to his amazing contributions to the nation. People need to benefit from King's courage by taking charge of any discrimination in their own life. Dr. King faced discrimination and was persecuted for his beliefs, but he continued to fight for the cause that he believed in.

Throughout Dr. King's life he never quit fighting for his beliefs and dreams no matter how hard the journey was. He continually inspires generations of children, and illustrates how to treat other people. Heroes are those who are never forgotten, and we can be sure Dr. Martin Luther King will always be remembered. Courageous, strong willed, and compassionate, Dr. King will forever be a hero.

Emily Cunningham

12th Grade Buckhannon, West Virginia

High School Expository

Third Place

The Courage to Live

I knock, and I hear her voice: "the door's open,"

It's a to-bedroom apartment in Rohnert Park, California and she's a little lady, sitting in the corner by the window, watching kids scream outside.

I call her Eva, though she could be my grandmother. I set the tape recorder down, and without prompting, she speaks. She is ready to tell her story.

Eva Hirschel was born in Breslau, Germany to Jewish parents less than five years before Hitler became chancellor in 1933. They were ordinary people, who watched with a mixture of fear, disbelief, and awe as a madman came to power. As a child, her family suffered through *Kristallnacht* (the night of the broken glass). Her brother was beaten up in school and she was humiliated and spit upon by the Hitler Youth.

She was eleven years old in 1940, when after her father spent six weeks in Buchenwald concentration camp, she and her parents along with her younger brother set sail for Shanghai by way of Genoa, Italy.

Shanghai, China was the only place that would take them, an open port city ruled jointly by the Chinese and an international municipal council which required no visa for entry. Eva would later discover that their Italian liner, the *Conte Verde*, was the last one out of Europe. Italy Joined Germany in W WII midway through the voyage, and the rest of her family was trapped.

Eva spent her teenage years in Shanghai, living in conditions that were impossibly cramped and disease-ridden. The Japanese occupiers bayoneted Chinese for the slightest infractions, and in 1943, Jews were herded into the poverty-stricken Hongkew "ghetto", where corpses wrapped in newspapers appeared on the streets every morning, dead from starvation or illness.

Eva quit school at fifteen to support her family: her mother was an invalid, her father a drunkard, and her brother a mere boy. She recalled that "[her] family lived in a house shared by 24 other people with one bathtub, cold water and two small toilets. [They] lived in one room, which was separated in half by a tiny plywood wall in order to accommodate another couple."

Yet not all the memories of Shanghai were bleak. Eva, like millions of pre-teens around the world in 1930s, idolized Shirley Temple, and saw the American child star as a reflection of herself- a German Jewish girl.

"I had been in Shanghai only a few weeks when one day, walking down Wayside Road, I happened to pass a cinema and there to my utter joy and delight was a large poster from which Shirley's eyes smiled at me. I could have hugged her. I was so happy and relieved."

Eva ran home and told her mother about the news.

"Shirley. Shirley Temple. Isn't that wonderful? She got out of Germany. She is safe and living right here in Shanghai. I know. I saw her picture."

The Jews of Shanghai knew nothing of what happened to their families in Europe, as all information was censored by the Japanese. It was not until after the war that images of Eisenhower inspecting the death camps came through, and they were given knowledge of the horrors that had come to pass.

"Who could have imagined? It was so quiet in our ghetto that you could have heard a pin drop. There wasn't a single person who hadn't lost somebody. In 1940? In Germany, the country of Goethe and Nietzsche and Brahms and Beethoven? I can never understand it." Every member of Eva's extended clan left in Europe was lost to the Holocaust, if not in body, then in mind. In the 1970's, she traveled to Berlin to see the lone survivor, her mother's sister, who had been in a concentration camp_ "My aunt, who I knew since I was a little girl; I always spent my vacations with them, she didn't know who I was. What was I doing there?"

She has never since gone back to Europe.

After the end of the WWII, most Jews looked towards new lives in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Israel. A few stayed behind to weather three more years of Chinese civil war, and the early days of Mao. But by the late 1950s, the once thriving Jewish ghetto in Shanghai had all but vanished.

Despite the hardship and the starvation, Eva thinks of her experiences in Shanghai as overwhelmingly positive: "We grew up so fast -- we learned responsibility; we learned to help each other. I don't envy the kids here [in US] at all. I wouldn't have traded it for the world." Eva also recalled the can-do determination in which the Shanghai Jews faced their new lives: "Can you drive a truck? Of course we can. Can you do shorthand? Of course we can. We can do anything!"

Eva's life is as ordinary as it is extraordinary. She pulls out her dusty photo albums, and from the yellowed pages peers out a vivacious young woman, drinking at a bar with friends, perched on the wing-tip of a B-29 bomber, giggling on the arm of a New Mexico sweetheart in an American army uniform. Behind her smile, her demeanor, her utter vibrancy was the quiet defiance and resilience that characterized the Jewish people.

When I first met her at a conference at the Ner Shalom synagogue in Cotati, California these were the things that defined Eva the most. I have read many books on the Holocaust, heard many speakers, watched many videos. But Eva was the first survivor I interviewed. And despite her denial, she is a survivor.

Eva Hirschel was certainly no war hero. But she was every bit as courageous. It took real courage to stare at death in the eye; it took real courage to traverse thousands of miles of uncertain sea to reach a crime-infested, chaos-accustomed city; it took real courage to overcome incredible odds to live, armed with only the will-power.

Shanghai, China, could not have been further from home, geographically and culturally. Yet ultimately, it was this leap of faith Eva and her fellow Shanghai Jews took in stepping onto the Bund that allowed them to triumph over immense tragedy - and cheat Hitler out of 20,000 lives.

Yiren Lu
11th Grade
Santa Rosa, California