Award Winning
Poetry, Short Stories
&
Personal Essays

2013 – 2014

Seeking to encourage and recognize excellence in creative writing among students at Wayne College and in area High Schools.
Instead, I turn around and drop the rock on the pile with all the others. I don’t even try to follow the path back. I know where it will inevitably lead; in this labyrinth there is no beginning nor, seemingly, an end. As I walk back to my clearing I wonder if I should even bother trying anymore. I feel more and more tired each moment.

Wait.

There is something wrong.

I stop walking. I notice how strikingly quiet it is. The usual whisper of the wind is missing. I clap my hands and hear nothing. I try to speak and I feel my lips moving but my ears register nothing. A sense of dread overwhelms me. Then, before I can even think of what to do, a long, piercing note slices through the silence, vibrating down to my core. It’s urgent, frightening. I am apprehensive of what is to happen to me next. Alongside this alarming sound I notice the air has developed a sharp and tangy taste. It feels thicker and I find it hard to breathe.

A sense of dread overwhelms me. Then, before I can even think of what to do, a long, piercing note slices through the silence, vibrating down to my core. It’s urgent, frightening. I am apprehensive of what is to happen to me next. Alongside this alarming sound I notice the air has developed a sharp and tangy taste. It feels thicker and I find it hard to breathe. Then the first tremor happens. It is abrupt, like an explosion, only massive, taking down trees and cracking zigzags through the mossy floor. The next tremble is longer, resonating deep within the ground. The crevices that form are like large hungry mouths, devouring rocks and trees, sucking away the air. All around me it seems as if the trees are weeping, calling out to me as they slip into the gaping holes that the quake has formed.

“Come back to me John! Don’t leave me, come back!”

My head is blinded by a searing pain, my arms and legs constrict, I can’t move. Her voice, Margarette’s voice, gets louder and louder pleading for me to stay, and I don’t get it. If only I could find her, could go to her, to ease her pain. Images start to flash through my brain, memories of cocktails, steak dinners, and laughter. Margarette in a lovely blue dress, her smile turning to a panic, her scream, “John! Watch out!” Then the screech of metal against metal, blaring horns, squealing tires. Panic overwhelms me and an intense red light erupts across the sky, shattering this strange world. I slip into a crevice, and the earthquake and The Tunnel don’t matter any more as I try to hold on to the last shred of a life I have. I float in a dark abyss watching the last of the trees fade away to nothingness. I feel lost. Then, that long monotonous tone that had fallen to the back of my mind slowly comes back into focus, breaking into a series of ups and downs. I feel relief wash over me as I close my eyes and let my body drop. I slam into something hard.

I take a deep gasping breath as my eyes flutter open and my vision blurs, trying to focus on my surroundings. I cough and I am suddenly aware that every bone in my body is aching, every breath is taxing. I look to my left and to my delight, my dear Margarette sits next to me, her eyes wide and full of disbelief. She murmurs my name softly as she starts to move near me. A woman in white stops her reaching to take my pulse and my temperature. I try to brush her away as I reach out to Margarette but my arms are weak. I lift my head as far as my strength will allow and gaze upon Margarette’s beautiful face. I feel her tentative touch on my cheek.

“Are you awake?” She asks, not daring to believe it.

“Yes,” I whisper, my voice raspy. “I think I really am.”
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COLLEGE STUDENT Writing Awards 2013-2014

Wayne College – Short Story

Awake (1st Place) by ROXANA RATHBUN .......................................................... 28

First Place Short Story - College Division

Awake

A canopy of birch trees hover over me as I sleep, occasionally letting loose a drop of dew from their pale green leaves. It hits me softly and I sigh, using the back of my hand to brush the cool water off of my forehead. I sit up sluggishly, shaking my head and wiping the sand from my eyes, begging myself to wake up. I’m never fully awake here; my eyes are so heavy it is almost a chore to keep them open.

I rest my head on my knees and try to remember how I got to this strange place. I am alone here. The only other living presence is the greenery. I try to remember how I came to be here. I don’t come up with much, only quick flashes of images that I don’t understand. I do know my name however, John.

There is no solid food, only plentiful, nourishing fluid, whether from the trees or a rushing brook I have discovered nearby. When I first found myself in this odd forest, the earth had been rumbling with what I can only describe as earthquakes. They have long since stopped and only a slight breeze whisks through occasionally. If I listen hard enough, the wind seems to carry soft murmurs of voices that I can never seem to pinpoint no matter how hard I try. It’s lonely, this place.

I force myself to stand up, still rubbing my eyes. I stare into the bottomless brook as I drink to quench my hunger. There are no stones, no dirt, just this bright flowing liquid. I contemplate jumping in to see where it will carry me but I lose my nerve at the last moment. I get a feeling that it is something that shouldn’t be done. I decide to try once more to find my way out of this eerie place.

I pick a tree, and taking a rock from the ground, I mark the smooth white trunk with the letter ‘r’ to signify a new trail. Sometimes in my travels I come across a different letter from the alphabet and I know my path has intersected an earlier attempt. Though I am discouraged, I keep forcing myself forward wanting desperately to find an exit from this world. This task has helped the days go by, and as I walk I try to recollect anything that would clue me in to my predicament. The only memory I can find is a face that swims tauntingly in the forefront of my thoughts. My Margarette. She is the last person I remember seeing before waking up in this lush forest. Her face is etched clear in my mind although I often picture it tear-stained and wistful.

My head jerks upward toward the white sky and I swear I can hear her voice whispering with the wind, rustling the leaves.

“Come back to me, please, my love, come back!” My heart twists painfully. I sob, fall to the ground and beat my fists against soft moss. “Why am I here?” I shout aloud. There is no answer, not even an echo. I feel like I have been in this world for weeks, maybe even months, I don’t know for sure. I just want to be home, in my bed, in her arms. I am breathing fast, I lay on my back and stare up into the trees. I give in to the pull of my eyelids and let them slide closed.

I lay there for a moment waiting for the pounding in my heart to stop, for my breaths to calm. I make myself stand back up, and walk forward. After what feels like hours have passed, I am not surprised to find myself at The Tunnel again. I stare at it in defeat, feeling like I have been in this world for weeks, maybe even months, and as I walk I try to recollect anything that would clue me in to my predicament. The only memory I can find is a face that swims tauntingly in the forefront of my thoughts. My Margarette. She is the last person I remember seeing before waking up in this lush forest. Her face is etched clear in my mind although I often picture it tear-stained and wistful.

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I lay there for a moment waiting for the pounding in my heart to stop, for my breaths to calm. I make myself stand back up, and walk forward. After what feels like hours have passed, I am not surprised to find myself at The Tunnel again. I stare at it in defeat, hanging my head. The Tunnel is perfectly round, constructed from glistening white stones. It is wide enough for two people to walk down side by side, and it looks safe enough, but the end of it is what frightens me. At the end of The Tunnel is a bright white light, so bright it looks like it could dissolve the flesh from my bones. I don’t want to find out what the light at the end belongs to, I am just not ready.
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The Colors of Love
You stole me out of my bed and we danced yellow on the blue-grey grass and sang songs orange at the top of our lungs. I listened for the sound of your colors. We had an imaginary green snowball fight and we went running. You smiled at me when we stopped, stopped to catch our breath. I collapsed on the playground and threw wood chips at you until you joined me and we breathed purple into a red sky.

Or maybe an honorable mention ribbon for my efforts. You know, like the ones kids get during the science fair when their project sucks and no one has the heart to tell them. My mom kept urging me to call them. And being the sassy girl I am always came back with, "If they don't want to hire me, then they won't call!"
But then one day I had a change of heart and before I knew it, I was listening to the ringing of my phone. Then my palms got sweaty and my knees got weak. What was happening to me? Then a voice came on the phone.

"Hello, thank you for calling Bob Evans, would you like to place a carry-out order?"
I was so confused. A carry-out order? "No," I said bluntly. I didn't really mean to say no and especially in such a harsh tone, but that's what came out. So I came back with, "Can I speak with the manager please?"
Then she put me on hold. The advertisement blared in my ear as it tried to up-sell its pumpkin bread and warm soups. It was only about 2 minutes but it felt like an eternity.

"Hello, this is Mandy, how may I help you?"
I got choked up right as I tried to speak. I coughed loudly into the phone and said, "Hi Mandy, this is Becca. I dropped off an application about two weeks and I was wond--"
I got cut off and Mandy said, "I'll see you October 19th for your interview at 3:30. Is that okay with you?"
"Sure," I said.
"Okay, see you then. Bye." And she hung up. Just like that. This whole growing up and dealing with people really sucks.

The morning of October 19 I had to job shadow for the dumbest class in the world. So that meant no school for me! That put me in such a good mood. I job shadowed my cousin, who is a freshman English teacher at Black River. Just being there for one day showed me how much I didn't want to look into that profession.

As soon as 2:30 hit, I was out the door. I didn't want to be late for my interview. I was all dressed up for my shadowing, so lucky for me I could go straight to Bob Evans. I was so nervous driving there that I had to blast the radio in order to keep myself focused on the road.
When I got there, I saw Jamie. I don't know if he recognized me or not. But I told him I had an interview and he sat me at the counter. A long few minutes later, a slender man with red hair came out of the back. I had never seen him before but he was quite attractive. He introduced himself as Curt, the manager. Holy freaking cow, was he attractive. We sat down and talked and talked for what seemed like forever. Finally he said that he wanted to hire me! I had never been so happy in my life! The following week I started.
After working there for like 3 weeks, everything started to go downhill. Curt transferred stores, Mandy got meaner, my trainer blamed everything on me and I just hated my life.
My trainer’s name was Ofelia, she was foreign and you could barely understand her. But what you could understand, you didn't want to hear. She was mean, old, and only cared about herself. I was always nice to her but that didn’t really seem to matter. She’d tell my tables that I was a bad waitress and if they ever needed anything, she’d be happy to help them. I thought that was the rudest thing. I watched her steal my tips more than once. I hated her. She made me want to quit. But as time went on, I learned to deal with people and stick up for myself. That’s one thing I learned from this job. People will knock you down, but getting up and showing them you’ll never quit is the best part.
The Fabulous Life of a Waitress

Everyone works sometime in their life. That's the reason we get an education, so we can be the best we can be in our profession. But what about those very first jobs we had? The ones that earned us small amounts of cash to spend on Chapstick and Starbucks. We all have those first jobs we don't ever really want to relive.

It was a weekday afternoon in mid-October. Mom and I were on our way home from my grandma's house. For some odd reason we drove separately and met at Bob Evans on 83. I don't remember why, but we did. As we got off the exit to pick up my truck, I accidentally thought out loud.

"Being a waitress would be so cool," I said.

"Go in and get an application!" my mom said, "I'll wait for you out here!"

My mom raised such an ambitious girl. So being the go-getter I am, I ran inside, all smiles. Now if there was ever anytime I could go back into my past and slap myself in the face, this would be one of those times. Or maybe my last "job" where I agreed to babysit the Devil herself for the whole summer. I'll never be too sure as to why I agreed to that.

I just turned 17 so a job was becoming necessary for my shopping addiction because I know my parents weren't going to support it forever. As I opened the front door to Bob Evans I could already taste the money. The heavenly aroma of all the wonderful breakfast foods surrounded me and I was on Cloud 9. The whole thing was like a dream, this could be my first real job. I now know that getting an application isn't hard but back then I had no clue. It was the biggest accomplishment I had ever made. I felt empowered.

As soon as I got home I sat down at the kitchen table and forced my mom to sit down with me. I made her look it over and make sure everything was perfect. I didn't want to walk in there and look like the fool I actually was. I turned the application back in less than a week after I got it. When I went in there, Jamie wasn't there. I felt really uncomfortable. So I looked around and walked over to the counter and sat down. A nice waitress came over to me and asked if I wanted a drink but I told her I just wanted a manager. She got a really worried look on her face like she did something wrong. Then I pulled the application from my lap and said,

"I want to turn this in."

I cracked her a little smile and she smiled back and mouthed the word "okay." Then she took off into the back. About 5 minutes later, a mean looking lady came out of the swinging door and grabbed my application off the counter. This should have been my first hint to snatch it back and run out of there as fast as my little legs could carry me, but I didn't. I stayed there glued to my seat with a stupid grin on my face. She looked at me, not pleased, and said,

"We'll call you."

And she walked right back into the abyss from where she came. I then felt a sudden sense of amazement and confusion. I wanted to be interviewed right then and there. I wanted the job. But my dream world came crashing down on me and reality bit me hard in the butt. It was time to go home and wait for the call.

Two weeks had gone by with no phone calls. I was pretty much devastated. I didn't think they wouldn't call. I thought maybe I'd get a courtesy call.

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“Get a phone that texts and sends pictures. One that your parents won’t look at.”
He tells me he wants me and will never want anyone else.
“But why won’t you ask me to be your girlfriend?” I think. “Why won’t you make me your princess?”
He tells me I’m beautiful and I’m not like other girls. I want to be like everyone else though. Or do I? I want to be a part of this fast world full of high speed communication and technological advancement, but that nagging voice in my head tells me that maybe fast isn’t always good.
They tell me I’m strange. It is because I like to knit and create simple beauty. It is because I love the smell of old books and the feel of a pen in my hand. It is because I like to watch BBC miniseries on DVD while I drink tea. It is because my parents are so different and Dad always yells for hours if I don’t let him get the door for me. It is because I think in a different way and always try to be honest and speak my mind. As John Green said, “I’m not in the business of denying myself the simple pleasure of saying true things” (Green, 153). It is because it took me seventeen years to obtain a real cell phone with texting and pictures. Even when you think you are strong, judgment can sting.
Here I am, a senior in a small town high school, wondering how I fit into this world. I sit here on a high speed computer with my Facebook and Tumblr pulled up while my Spotify shuffles through everything from Johnny Cash, to Mayday Parade, to Blake Shelton, to the Pride and Prejudice soundtrack. Meanwhile I pour out all these thoughts and epiphanies. I read John Green like an addict absorbs heroin. I am as alone as ever; no one has conquered my heart. I’m still not a princess like I was when I was five-years-old. But I am on the journey to my pot of gold. College and a nursing career is the next great adventure. My heart still bleeds William Shakespeare and Jane Austen and Charles Dickens. My journal is marked with proverbial bloodstains that replace real scars marking my skin. Even though I’m not a nurse yet, I’ve already healed so many people with simple love and words, just like I’d always dreamt. The next is finding a way to heal myself: finding love and happiness, working around Dad’s decisions and expectations, and following my dream of fixing broken people.
The girl between worlds. I am the girl who loves and longs for technology and the social culture, yet revels in the beauty and power of the written word. I find myself in the sound of music and the scratch of a pen; from the beat of a drum to the turn of a page. I may have many of the social connections that culture demands, like a real “telephone that makes noise” and a blog. But I remain connected to my love for old-fashioned habits and my love for people and art more than robots and technology. I tried to fit into the culture itself, conforming to the social ideal is believed to define every girl: one who lives to be a boy-pleasing, social clone; however it was a fruitless endeavor, because I am a dreamer who longs to be her own person. I am the lone piece that connects two puzzles. “The world wasn’t made for us, we were made for the world” (Green, 312). Or in my case, both worlds.

Works Cited

Mary Hope Ozbolt
Senior
Chippewa High School
Beth Pavkov
I am a sheltered child. Homeschooled and reading books aloud at five-years-old. No battery-operated toys for me. Veggie Tales and saint cartoons are the only movies Dad lets me watch. Cinderella, Blues Clues, and Thomas the Train Engine are a novelty for when it’s just me and Mom. All I want is a pretend telephone that will make noise and shoes that light up when I walk. But Mom spends hours reading aloud to me and I am happy. I sit on the steps outside breathing the summer air in my corduroys, composing and singing ditties to my cat. Because Princesses sing to animals about their lives right? With my books, my songs, my Mom, and my cat, the tidal wave of technology manages to pass me over for the time being. I am the girl between worlds.

I am a twelve-year-old of the new age, but do I even realize it? Am I really present? With my once-a-week Girls Club, my Tuesdays are spent with little Catholic girls my age. I only catch tidbits of Rihanna and Chris Brown, but now I’m hungry for more. I sneak Jonas Brothers CDs away from Mom’s eyes at the library. Little do I know how much she pretends not to see. My afternoons are spent drawing and reading next to my CD player, soaking up pop culture as I ignite my imagination with old-fashioned habits. All I want for Christmas is an iPod. Flipping through People magazines at Walmart and picking up juicy gossip about superficial celebrities makes me feel a part of the culture. Dad wants to hide me from it. And Mom goes along with him because that’s how a “good wife” behaves, right? All I want is cable TV. And to wear makeup and look like Taylor Swift. I want to feel like a princess.

I read and read; Eragon, Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter, and Pride and Prejudice are all dancing realities in my mind. Dickens and Shakespeare and Alcott only encourage my ambitious book appetite. I am never fully present – always trying to become the people I idolize. Hermione Granger and Taylor Swift are smart and beautiful with curly hair just like me. She reads and she writes songs; they dream and dream, just like me. All I want is to be a writer and a singer and to make people happy. I want to love like Lizzy Bennet. My heart aches to be conquered and won. Lonely and dream-filled I write, and write, and write. Poems become songs and my Mom gets me an old, beat-up guitar. Because she understands what it feels like to need to feel love and passion in a trapped life. Dad finds the Harry Potter books and burns them in the back yard. Why can’t he understand that it’s not the witchcraft that attracts me but the magic of the story itself? Quiet whispers hush each other as my mind fills with the illegal music and books that try to escape the flames.

I am a sixteen-year-old of everything is changing. I have thrown myself into the depths of secular culture: public high school. It’s all different and new. Music and words are everywhere. There is choir, and English, and Human Science, and Chemistry. I dream of making people happy. I want to heal them with love and words. A nurse who is a writer. Is that possible? I can make it possible. Nonetheless, my heart begins to wear because my hands are tired of writing and my eyes close before I can read my books or try to write more stories. I make a Facebook page even though Dad hates the outside world. It is all bright and new and beautiful, but it sucks me in. Even when I have time to read I’m busy chatting with the wrong guy and sneakily updating my status. Even though I can wear make-up and start to feel like everyone else, I don’t feel like a princess.

I have big brown eyes and mischievous smile. He makes me laugh and blush. “Why don’t you have a phone,” he says. All he wants is for me to get a phone because he wants to tell me he loves me.
Where Does Writing Hide?

Poems are not just thrown out in the open for everyone to see
Like a yard sale sign.
They’re not on billboards for speeding cars to glance at, and they’re
Certainly not posted on fluorescent flyers - the kind people jot numbers on
Then crumple up later.

You’re the seeker while poetry is the hider.
Of course, that is a trick considering you can’t look for poetry or
Sniff out poetry or physically feel poetry or hear it coming.
It comes and goes through the dog door,
Brilliantly sweeping through your soul.
Only making an appearance when the mind is open and free.
Many can’t taste all the flavors poetry has cooked into it.

Poetry seems to camouflage itself into places people don’t think to look
Like the prologue of a novel that book worms generally skim over.
When the reader realizes they’re missing a piece of information,
They scurry back to the beginning
To find the missing puzzle piece.
Poetry hides in places that are overlooked.
Such a complex piece of literature
is really so simple.
Instead of bending over backwards and losing sleep
over an analysis of a poem,
try letting poetry find you.

Elizabeth Wagner
Senior
Orrville High School
Amy Duxbury
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teacher from the ER, “You may not see it today,
and you may not see it tomorrow, but God gave you this disease for a purpose. I truly believe you were chosen to have this disease for a very, very special reason.”

It’s been worth all that’s been lost…the hope
in hurt…the joy in tears.
Not long ago, I met a ten
year old who dropped a bed frame on her foot,
a fifteen year old who snapped her leg in half on
the bar of a trampoline, a thirteen year old who
kicked a football…and a sophomore, now junior
and my best friend…we’ve all been bitten by the
CRPS bug, the suicide disease. I can run a mile,
when not long ago walking across the room was
an accomplishment; pick up a textbook or two
without stiffening my back lopsided; clap without
my hands clawing and piercing through my palm.
Some chose to be hopeless, but some of us chose
to embrace the trials everyday brings. And that’s
why I write, to show those who give in to their pain,
that life can be a “you know what” sometimes,
but God doesn’t close one door without opening
another.

Veterans Day was just the other day. For over
a year, I have been juggling in my head as I decide
what I want to do for the next 30+ years. The many
Marines, Swabbies, Puddle Pirates, and Airmen I
have long since known have been my role models.
That is what I want to do with the rest of my life:
Proudly serve my country, the first girl in my family
to do so.

The Cleveland Clinic doctors I’ve seen
probably a hundred times, not long ago told me
they never want to see me again, but if I do decide
to come back, I made one solemn promise: I’d be
in uniform. Through my writing, I have found a
spark that ignited that dreadful morning I drained
out my life in the ER. Never

Elizabeth Wagner
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Amy Duxbury
cont’d from page 21

tomorrow…because today’s tears you just can’t
seem to let go…every bend in the road, every tear
shed…may just be tomorrow’s triumph. And that…
is my purpose.
Purpose.

Why do I write? Why am I still here? When I was little, I wanted to be a dog, a vet, a star for the Cleveland Indians, a meteorologist, and yes, at one point I even wanted to be Amish. I've been writing short stories for a long as I can remember...from preschool characters wreaking havoc on society to how someday I'd raise a hundred kids without electricity, running water, or a car...for some reason that sounded fun, I don’t know why, but I was what you’d call “quite the dreamer” in those days. I never thought writing would ever save my life, but that early morning of April 5, 2011, five hundred miles away from home, as I drained out my life half paralyzed, my body overtaken with bruises, with my science teacher next to me, the reason why I write was born. I thought for certain I was going to die any second those three horrific days...and I wasn’t the only one. Mom and Dad, five hundred miles away, said they’d never see me again, my best friend feared I’d never be that ornery, barefooted heathen again, and my advisors watched helplessly as I convulsed in that bus seat, fearing this was it. When I wanted to laugh, I was too weak; when I wanted to smile, I was too numb. I welcomed death, as crazy as it may seem. I preferred death to the pain, to the tears and fears of drugs, ticks, blood clots, brain tumors, Leukemia...

“Why do I write? Why am I still here? When I was little, I wanted to be a dog, a vet, a star for the Cleveland Indians, a meteorologist, and yes, at one point I even wanted to be Amish. I've been writing short stories for a long as I can remember...from preschool characters wreaking havoc on society to how someday I’d raise a hundred kids without electricity, running water, or a car...for some reason that sounded fun, I don’t know why, but I was what you’d call “quite the dreamer” in those days. I never thought writing would ever save my life, but that early morning of April 5, 2011, five hundred miles away from home, as I drained out my life half paralyzed, my body overtaken with bruises, with my science teacher next to me, the reason why I write was born. I thought for certain I was going to die any second those three horrific days...and I wasn’t the only one. Mom and Dad, five hundred miles away, said they’d never see me again, my best friend feared I’d never be that ornery, barefooted heathen again, and my advisors watched helplessly as I convulsed in that bus seat, fearing this was it. When I wanted to laugh, I was too weak; when I wanted to smile, I was too numb. I welcomed death, as crazy as it may seem. I preferred death to the pain, to the tears and fears of drugs, ticks, blood clots, brain tumors, Leukemia...

“You have a viscous nerve disease in your legs,” the middle-aged doctor at Akron Children’s said bluntly. “I’ve seen this once in residency…Your legs, even real?” Nobody understands my pain but quite frankly, I don’t understand it all myself. But this I know… I’ve hit rock bottom countless times, punched myself until the bruises, like the painful memories, over took my angered body. The stares…the mocking…the bullying…knives cold against my bruised skin, ready to end this madness. I had no purpose in this world…just a freak.

“Can I walk like you?” I turned to face the nameless teacher and we met eye to eye. His viscous grin brought tears…he thought he was pretty funny. When I close my eyes, I can still so clearly see the faces of those who laughed and those who just stared. The laughter still burns as everybody just stared…they stared and they laughed.

Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “We gain strength, and courage, and confidence by each experience in which we really stop to look fear in the face...we must do that which we think we cannot.”

So that’s what I did, I welled up my tears and faced my fears. Through this hell, I have found hope and healing at rock bottom, because when the strength runs out and faith is no more, that is when the foundation of healing and triumph is laid out. What has stuck out most in my mind is a simple word of advice from that same science teacher.
The shelf finally stays and I move more quickly to the restroom doors. I called out names of the soldiers that I knew worked in the village. It was nothing but rubble. It wasn’t possible that they would be alive, but I didn’t want to think about that. My feet scraped across the dirt as I got closer. A gun sat at my feet and I kicked it aside and tried to forget any thoughts that came to my head. I maneuvered around the destroyed houses to get to the only one standing thinking that my troop had retreated to the village.

“Guys,” I called pushing open a door with the cloth on my burned finger tips. The door gently fell to the ground and created a cloud of dust. I began to cough in the dark as I moved forward.

My hand ripped the backpack straps off my shoulder. As I set it down with a groan, another cloud of dust lifted. I reached into one of the many pockets and searched. The backpack was hardly together. There were many pockets that lead nowhere, only a hole appeared. The explosion did a number on it.

A cold piece of metal hit my glove and I pulled it out. A click echoed and light spread across the room through the flashlight's glass.

“You couldn’t protect us,” Flinching, I turned the light towards the little voice in the back.

There in the light, sat a little boy who looked about five years old. He didn’t have all ten fingers and wasn’t wearing anything to protect himself. The little boy had dirt all covering his face making him hard to see in the dark. The only thing visible was his dark brown eyes that shined in the flashlight. He was scared as he just kept staring right at the center of the flashlight like he was mesmerized.

“You only bring pain,” he said.

Tripping, I place my hand on the bathroom door and rush inside. The door swings behind me as I rush to the stall.

“We’re here to help,” I told him and he backed up into the wall. It wasn’t the flashlight he was afraid of, it was me.

I lean on the stall door and look down at the floor. I breathe in and out trying to calm myself down. What is wrong with you, Nate? Why can’t you stop having these visions? My hand reaches for the toilet paper. Shaking, it rips a piece off and I dab my wet forehead trying to remove the sweat that feels like it won’t disappear.

“You said you actually talked to one of them?” I sat in a white chair in an interview on live television.

“Yes,” I said nodding my head in agreement.

“Well, what did he say?” The news anchor leaned in closer as I kept my head to the floor.

I sighed and scratched my head while speaking. “He said he was scared … and … and wanted me to help him,” I stated.

“And did you?” he asked again.

I flashed out and looked at the boy sitting there. “Please let me help you,” I said to him.

He got to his feet and ran out of the house. I started to run after the little boy. I got there and in his hand was the gun that I kicked to the side. He started to run after the little boy. I got there and in his hand was the gun that I kicked to the side. He raised the gun up and pointed it at his head. His hand was the gun that I kicked to the side. He raised the gun up and pointed it at his head. His little boney finger was sitting gently on the trigger.

“No!” I yelled as the body fell lifeless to the floor.

I zoned back to the interview and stared at the anchor. “Yes, but sadly we were ambushed,” I stated.

“That’s too bad,” he said quickly trying to sound sympathetic.

I move to the sink and turn the water on. I dive my hands under the cold water and sigh. My eyes catch a glance of the burn marks still engraved in my skin. My hands come out of the water and I slowly clench them into a gentle fist.

“It’s sad to hear that you were the last one standing beside his semi-truck. On top of that truck, a silver swan. This man is my Uncle Randall, Randy for short. He died just months before I was born. At first it was hard for my mom to understand how something like this could happen, how her two year old daughter was having full conversations with someone who wasn’t even alive.

After a few months these conversations became scarce. I would talk to my friend Randy less and less. In fact the last time my mom heard me talking to Randy was four months after showing me the picture. As my mom stood in the doorway for the last time she listened, “Why do you have to go? What happens when I miss you and want to visit you?” My mom saw that I was really upset so she walked over to me, “What’s wrong, Erica?”

“My friend Randy said he has to go now. I don’t want him to, Mommy.” My mom had a really hard time seeing me try to understand this, so she tried to explain, “Sweetie, sometimes when we have friends, they can’t hang out with us every day. They come into our lives to be there when we need them. You know how your blanket is there at night when you need it? Your friend Randy will be there when you need him.” My mom said this not being sure why I would need his help.

“Mom, he told me he would always be watching me to make sure I’m okay and to keep me safe. How will he do that from home?” It was then that my mom knew that my friend Randy came to me to help her. Knowing that her brother would forever be watching over me gave her comfort and peace of mind.
My Friend Randy

When kids are young they tend to have imaginary friends. A lot of kids feel as if they need this friend there with them to feel safe. Imaginary friends usually go along on road trips, sit at the dinner table, and have sleepovers. Kids will usually go looking for an imaginary friend but in rare cases, this friend comes looking for them. Sometimes this so-called “imaginary friend” isn’t imaginary at all.

My mom would stand in the kitchen doorway and listen as I talked and played with someone, or something that was not really there. It was a normal thing for me to do I have now been told. Every time I was asked who I was talking to my answer remained the same, “My friend Randy.” The thought of me talking to what seemed like thin air was really strange to my mom. Not thinking too much into it, she tried to shake it off. Being only two years old, it was normal to have an imaginary friend. What was not normal was how in depth the conversations I was having were.

My mom would try not to let too many things run through her mind. She wanted to believe that it was, in fact, just an imaginary friend. At work, she would ask her coworkers if their children my age had imaginary friends. Some of them did but none talked to their “friends” the way I did mine. My mom started to feel a little uneasy about the whole situation as time progressed.

Weeks would pass and I would continue to sit in the middle of the living room floor and talk about anything and everything. “You have a goldfish? What’s his name? Does he swim fast? Why is he on your shirt?” My mom would occasionally ask how my friend Randy was doing but nothing more than that. Until one day, in the midst of my babbling, I started talking about “big trucks.” Trucks are not a normal thing for a two year old girl to talk about so my mom thought she would listen a little closer.

“You drive one of doze big trucks? With a birdie on it?” This bird being the hood ornament on Peterbilt semi-trucks, looking like a silver swan flying against the wind. When my mom heard me ask about the “big truck” she gasped. She could no longer shake this off anymore. Realizing something was wrong, I look over, “What’s wrong, mommy?”

“Nothing sweetie. I’m just listening to you.”

“Ohay. My friend Randy drives a big truck. It has a pretty birdie on top of it.”

“Well how do you know this?”

“He told me and then showed me the bird in his hand. Mommy can we get a bird?”

“We’ll see. I’ll be right back, okay?” My mom went into the other room and called my grandma. When she came back in she told me to get my shoes on because we were going to visit her.

“What’s wrong, mom? Are you mad at me? Are you mad at my friend Randy? Why are we going to visit grandma?” My mom just tried to tell me that everything was fine.

When we arrived at my grandma’s house, my mom took me out of my car seat and ran with me to the door. She sat me down on the couch and disappeared for a few minutes. When she returned she had a photograph with her.

“Erica, who is this?”

“I dunno ma, but it looks like my friend Randy.”

My mom was flooded with emotions ranging from fear to a sense of comfort when she heard my answer. After all this time and confusion she could no longer shake this off anymore. Realizing something was wrong, I look over, “What’s wrong, mommy?”

“My friend Randy drives a big truck. It has a pretty birdie on top of it.”

“Well how do you know this?”

“He told me and then showed me the bird in his hand. Mommy can we get a bird?”

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“Erica, who is this?”

“I dunno ma, but it looks like my friend Randy.”

My mom was flooded with emotions ranging from fear to a sense of comfort when she heard my answer. After all this time and confusion she finally knew what was happening. She finally knew who I was talking to, no matter how hard it was to believe.

Now, 15 years later, I have been told who was in that picture. In the picture there is a man of your troop to make it out,” the anchor’s voice echoes in my head as I continue to stare at the burn marks. “I guess you were one lucky young man.”

“Yeah,” I answer his comment to myself and dive my hands back under the water to hide the scars.

My memory flashes and I’m walking along the rubble of houses. I turned my head and saw the jets again. I picked up my running and headed back to the safety of the forest. The bombs dropped and I fell to my knees with my hand over my head.

I splash water on my face and stare in the mirror. I’m not that man anymore. I’m not him. I’ll never be him again.

“Nate! Get up!” I turn around to the sound of my friend’s voice.

I jump and slam my hand on the sink. I turn back and hold it close to my body as the pain increases. I gently move my swollen fingers under the cold water. I throw my head back as the water begins to calm me down.

“And that ends our interview with Nate Range. He was one of the survivors from the bombing that left us all heartbroken,” his voice echoed in my head again as I splash water on my face.

I stare into my broken soul and then turn my head, afraid of the reflection. I just want things to go back to normal. I look back up and see my friend smiling back at me.

“Tyler,” I say with a shaky voice. I gently touch my finger to the mirror and he does the same. My whole palm touches next and he just keeps smiling. “You’re dead.” I pull my hand back and then send it into the glass.

Warm blood drips down from where my knuckle hit. Three drops slide into the sink and I watch them fade in with the water. The water hints red and then disappears down the drain. I pull my knuckle back and slide it under the water.
“Big Brother?”
Andrew glanced up from the textbook he was poring over, trying to cram for a huge test the next day. His little brother, Luke, stood silhouetted against the light from the doorway, clutching a small wooden box in his tiny hands.
“Big Brother, will you play chess with me?”
Andrew sighed. “I’m kinda busy right now, Luke.”
“Please?” Luke begged in the annoyingly high-pitched way all little brothers seemed to have perfected. “Just one game?”
Knowing Luke wouldn’t stop pestering him until he said yes, Andrew closed his textbook and moved off toward the edge of his bed.
“Fine, but just one game. Ok?”
“Yaaaaay!” Luke ran in and immediately began to set up his old chess set on a somewhat clear table in the corner of the room.
“I’ll be the black, and you’ll be the white, okay, Big Brother?”
“Sure.”
Each piece touched down on its marble square with a decisive clack.
Banners flapped and armor clanked as the chill wind blew through the silent battlefield. The standards of both armies flew haughtily above; a cream rose gleamed on a background of silver while a bleached white serpent danced amid fabric of deepest black. As the final phalanxes joined the collective, the old, wizened king stood. Age had not diminished his regal bearing and his icy eyes gleamed with cunning. Across the field, his youthful counterpart also rose, his own eyes hidden beneath a fringe of raven hair.
They raised their right arms simultaneously, robes flaring, stalwart against the moaning wind.
“CHARGE!” they cried.

The anticipatory still shattered; men took to their horses, grabbed up their spears, and sprinted headlong to victory.

Andrew hovered over his rows of pieces before finally selecting a pawn, two in from the left side of the board.
“Pawn to B4.”
The boy panted, whipping his white horse to a froth as he pushed ahead of the more experienced riders. He’d been the best in training on horseback, and his quick judgements didn’t fail him now. A speck of black barreled towards him; the young rider grinned maliciously when he noticed him. The black rider spurred his horse faster. The boy in white inhaled and prayed that God and his thin mail shirt would protect him.

They met in a blaze of sparking steel, the strength of the blows driving them from their frightened horses.
Leaping from the ground, they struck again while the melee raged around them.
Another pawn.
A rook.
The pieces abandoned their orderliness and took their stand in the tiny world of squares.
Luke probed the inside of his cheek with his tongue and moved out his knight, snagging one of Andrew’s pawns in the process. The horse figures gleamed dully under the fluorescent light.
Armor-clad, the knights dismounted, surrounded on all sides by warping figures. In one motion, they removed their helmets; identical faces were revealed, one fervent in its hope, the other coldly furious.
The woman in white stepped forward, her...
of the empty seat beside me. “Now yer eyes are open...”

Even if it was to cover up their fear; even if there wasn’t a hint of truth in those ear to ear grins, this was the very thing I wanted to see, Dux and Mr. Shonk smiling.

I saw Mr. Duxbury smiled and whispered to me, but I heard no more words. My world began to spin as their gentle words grew to a hush. It felt as if time had slowed down almost to a halt. The thought of death had overtaken me, welcoming it. My eyes closed. I was ready to die now; ready to be freed of this wretched, miserable torture life had thrown in my face.

Back home, my mom and dad, after a phone call from Mr. Duxbury, prepared for the worst, just as I in that bus seat five hundred miles away. They both agreed it was time for my dad to head for Tennessee.

I felt for sure I wouldn’t be going back to Ohio that day, but where I was destined to in the end: to the skies...home for good. I was ready to go, ready to be freed from the living nightmare I was going through.

Mr. Shonk and Dux, though, overlooked that and told me time after time that I’d somehow pull through, to convince me I was going to pull through...but it didn’t work.

I was too weak to move, but Mr. Shonk still kept a tight grip on my limp hands. I stared off into space as he whispered to me when the bus fell into any eerie silence. With my mom worried sick at home and my dad driving as fast as he could, both of them had the same thing on their minds: We won’t ever see her again...

With each minute that passed, it felt as if time just stood still and had no intentions of even dragging on anymore. As I told myself countless times that I was going to die...that I was going home and I should somehow rest easy because shining silver armor catching the dying light.

“Sister, we don’t have to fight,” she implored, her midnight hair drifting unbound over her shoulders.

“Wrong,” spat her twin. “That’s all we ever do.”

With a decisive flick, she replaced her helmet.

“En garde, sister mine.”

Luke tried to remain stoic, though inside he rejoiced! His brother’s knight was wide open.

“Up one, over two,” he thought as he moved. Too late, he saw his brother’s look of triumph; As soon as his fingers left the piece, the net of the trap closed around him.

They circled, yin to yang, meeting thrust for parry, riposte for balestra. They surged close, their guards nearly touching. White gasped as she felt a sharp pain in the back of her knee; she collapsed to the ground, her saber flying off into the fray. She looked up, horrified, into her younger sister’s face. The point of her sword hung suspended over White’s exposed throat.

“End game.”

The black knight raised her sword, looking for all the world like an avenging angel from hell. White moved, all thoughts of remorse fleeing her mind as she drew her dagger from her boot and stabbed upward. Silver blood cascaded out her sister’s mouth and chest as she stutered, then fell. White stood up shakily, wiping her blade on the now-dead grass.

“I’m so sorry, sister,” she murmured, tears trickling down her pale cheeks.

Andrew grinned at the look of despair on her face. He drew his claymore, the steel blade whispering its sins against the dark leather. “I warned you,” he said as he swung the great blade at the man.

THUNK.

All the knight’s momentum ground to a halt when his sword stuck in the bishop’s quarterstaff. He looked at the old man, stunned. Muscles heaving, the bishop tore the sword from the staff as the light was snuffed from her eyes, the boy rode her corpse to the ground.

“Sneaky, aren’t you?”

Luke smirked. “You taught me everything I know, Big Brother. Especially how to use my pawns.”

Maybe I taught you too well...”

The bishop stood praying near the top of the battlefield when the black knight stumbled up the stony path that led to the white king’s court. The knight smiled when he saw the ancient man standing in his way.

“I don’t wish to spill your blood this eve, Father,” he said. “Move aside and live to watch over your sheep another day.”

The bishop continued his communion with God.

“Did you hear me, old man? Move!” Nothing.

The knight grew annoyed at the other man’s reticence. How dare he stand before him! He drew his claymore, the steel blade whispering its sins against the dark leather.

“I warned you,” he said as he swung the great blade at the man.

The knight fell, eyes unseeing, silver blood flowed down the front of her robes, and as the light was snuffed from her eyes, the boy rode her corpse to the ground.


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Three blows, delivered with skilful precision.


The knight fell, eyes unseeing, silvered...
bruses forming on his skin.

“Amén,” the priest said as he resumed his post.

Each player fell silent; the game board had become their sole focus. Neither would acquiesce until there was no hope left. Their fingers danced atop their chosen pieces in a flurry of moves.

The archer took aim, safely ensconced on a farmhouse rooftop in the black camp. The breeze carried the sounds of battle to his ears along with the cries of the carrion birds that eagerly awaited the leftovers. Already there were so many dead...

He sighted his targets, ghostly apparitions from this far away. Breathe in.

Breathe out.

Twang.

His crow-fletched arrows flew true; three hearts beat no more.

The pieces fell into the box, the sound hollow and heavy as desiccated bone.

Rising from his crouch, the peasant boy turned and faced the archer. His mail was intact, but the rest of his clothes were stained with all manner of offal.

Andrew began to sweat. The board blurred, his pieces shining stars amidst a forest of night.

He sighted his targets, ghostly apparitions from this far away. Breathe in.

Breathe out.

No.

The king slumped in his chair, unable to cry out. Resting my head against the window, I stared blankly through the top of the seat, “we’re gonna move you over into the isle.”

I made my way across the aisle and sat up. “She’s shaking again…” a voice called.

“Do you feel sick?” he asked.

“She’s still shaking…” seat buddy said.

“She’s shaking again…” a voice called.

“Do you feel sick?” he asked.

“Do you feel sick?” he asked.

“Do you feel sick?” he asked.

“I gasped, my breath becoming soft. Suddenly, I couldn’t breathe! I started to gag, harder and harder each time. My throat felt like it was closing; a ton of bricks had fallen on my chest!”

But Mr. Shonk wasn’t smiling anymore. “No…” I whispered.

I turned around and asked, “You cold?”

“Do you feel sick?” he asked.

Never…

“My hands…my hands…” I gasped quietly. “What’s wrong with me…what’s wrong with me…? I’m gonna die…gonna die…gonna die…”

“No!” Mr. Shonk bellowed as loud as I ever heard him before, holding my hands tighter. “WE’RE GONNA GET YOU SOME HELP! YER NOT GONNA DIE!”

I wheezed loud enough Sierra could hear me from the back of the bus.

I nodded, and he left. Things were starting to get hairy again. He didn’t let me see the bug now resting in his ear, but he and Mr. Shonk saw more red flags.

I sat down in the front of the bus. Somebody had taken my seat in the back beside Sierra, which, in time, was a blessing. I leaned my head back and closed my eyes.

I heard a coat rustling, so I opened my eyes halfway. That look on Dux’s face still burns in my mind: A look speaking volumes of terror louder than gunfire.

I started to feel that weird feeling again, and began to shiver. The heat was escaping my body. I ignored it and fell asleep.

“She’s shaking again…” a voice called.

“Do you feel sick?” he asked.

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“I gasped, my breath becoming soft. Suddenly, I couldn’t breathe! I started to gag, harder and harder each time. My throat felt like it was closing; a ton of bricks had fallen on my chest!”

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“Do you feel sick?” he asked.

Never…

“My hands…my hands…” I gasped quietly. “What’s wrong with me…what’s wrong with me…? I’m gonna die…gonna die…gonna die…”

“Why?” Mr. Shonk bellowed as loud as I ever heard him before, holding my hands tighter. “WE’RE GONNA GET YOU SOME HELP! YER NOT GONNA DIE!”

I wheezed loud enough Sierra could hear me from the back of the bus.

She refused them all.

Luke twirled a surviving pawn and smashed it atop his brother’s queen’s crown. It skittered over the edge of the table, slipping into darkness.

Cold fire burned through the queen’s spine as it was severed between her shoulder blades. She fell face first into the moon-streaked mud, gasping for air. The little boy behind her held his dagger at the ready as he walked toward her face.

She was close enough to kiss his boots if she so desired.

“Please…” she scraped out, her throat burning with the bile of the word. She refused them all.
Chapter 5: “We won’t ever see her again…”

Psalm 46:1-2: God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.

Home: a word filled with mixed feelings. Oddly, in a way, I didn’t want to go home. It would be so hard to part with those mountains. I felt one with it all, but my life was quickly turning upside-down and because not a soul on earth knew how sick I was becoming, it was time.

I was walking blindly across an old beaten path, timeworn from the fierce, bitter winds of past winters and the summers that carried in roaring thunderstorms. All I could hold fast to now was God’s promise never to leave my side, even in moments of fear, when the weight of the world was falling onto my shoulders.

The next morning, I had awoken more than ever feeling badly. Shonk and Duxbury were still fixated on the idea I had some sort of bizarre flu. I can’t explain the feeling, but I wasn’t too sure about that anymore. It couldn’t be!

Through it all, I refused to speak up. That strong, Wagner gene of stubbornness in me had to show itself even less time to cram.

As we finished packing everything, a knock fell away.

“Help her!” Dux breathed to Sierra.

“Are you gonna eat?” Dux approached our table and said in my ear, “You hurt your leg. Don’t worry about it!”

We sat down and looked through the menus. I really wasn’t hungry and debated with myself over whether I should eat or not.

“Dux! You girls need to start…wrapping it up,” he said.

“Yeah, I guess so…”

Dux and I drug, through the restaurant. “Does it look like somethin’s wrong with me?”

“No,” she retorted. “You hurt your leg. Don’t worry about it!”

I slouched down in my chair, making a split decision to eat. “Are you gonna eat?”

I louched down in my chair, making a split second decision, and then replied with a simple, “Yeah, I guess so…”

The rule at mealtime was that we could get anything we wanted, but had to finish all of it. I had a decision to make: Eat, throw up, and upset Shonk and Duxbury or just leave it and upset them even more because I just wasted money. Either way, I was really wasn’t hungry and debated with myself over whether I should eat or not.

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The rule at mealtime was that we could get anything we wanted, but had to finish all of it. I had a decision to make: Eat, throw up, and upset Shonk and Duxbury or just leave it and upset them even more because I just wasted money. Either way, I was convinced they’d be angry, not even taking anything into consideration.

“Do ya want me to go talk to Dux?” Sierra asked quietly in my ear. “Shut my head.

I looked around at the other kids. Not two days ago, this had been me: carefree. Now I was scared, starving, and not a word wanted to be spoken, which was rare for me. I could be a real chatterbox!

“Kid,” Dux said in my ear. “You don’t have ta’ eat if you don’t want to.”

As he returned to his textbook, the pain of losing to his little brother was already fading. “I’ll beat him next game,” he thought before turning the page.

Banners flapped and armor clankned as the chill wind blew through the silent battlefield. The standards of both armies flew haughtily above; a cream rose gleamed on a background of silver while a bleached white serpent danced amid fabric of deepest black.......... THE END
Truth

If I actually told you the truth, you would hate me.

That is the only thing I can think of when I look at her.

She would hate me and hate me forever and I would let her. Only because I deserve it.

She is wearing those stupid high-heels again today. She can barely walk in them. Shiny lips, fake eyelashes, short hair are the only things I see when I look at her. Her locker door slams and I flinch.

“Dana, are you even listening to me?”

“Yeah,” I mumble. “Yes, of course. He’s a jerk.”

“Dana, are you even listening to me?”

“I gulp. Him? Cute? Doesn’t he have black eyes and sharp fangs?”

“I don’t want to, really.

I don’t want to relive it again.

I’m not telling anyone.

My brother was nominated for Homecoming King. I didn’t even know that was actually a thing.

My family celebrates by taking him to the Mexican restaurant in the middle of town. I used to love their salsa. I don’t really like it anymore.

My parents asked me if I’m going to the dance. I don’t bother telling them I’m not going. It’s easier to smile and nod and act like everything is okay.

The dance is going to be soo000 much fun. I can’t wait to see my brother with a fake, plastic crown on his head. I think Stacy might have a chance at being the princess. Yes, I have already got my dress and it makes me feel beautiful, but you can’t see it. It will definitely be one of the best nights of my life.

Stacy hasn’t talked to me in three days.

I haven’t actually talked to her in fourteen. Stacy has to walk up three staircases to make it to Bio II. I wonder if she will make it without falling.

I like to watch talk shows when I get home from school, old ones, which my mom recorded on our DVR from a year ago. I microwave popcorn, slap some extra butter in it, and watch it melt. Then I sit on the sofa for an hour, alone, eyes glued to someone else’s problems.

Today, it’s about a girl, a young girl with red hair and millions of freckles. Her stepfather took advantage of her when she was only seven years old. This brave girl is finally talking about it.

I wonder what it feels like to talk about it.

I think the girl’s name is Cynthia. Then again, I don’t really care. She and a woman with graying hair, refrigerator. I hid in my room all day, under five blankets that will never keep me warm. My mom asked me if I was sick, and I said yes. I almost told her.

Almost.

I feel like I’m drowning in mud.

He is going to Homecoming with Stacy.

I could stop them.

I could, maybe, tell someone.

And.

Always.

Be.

Your.

Fault.

Stacy is wearing a blue dress today with black upside-down triangles on it. It reminds me of the talk show host from yesterday. I finger the floppy pages of the romance novel I’m holding. I’ve been trying to read it for the last five weeks; I’ve been staring at the same page for the last five days.

“Itn’s Aaron cute?”

“I think so.”

“Dana,” Stacy snapped. “Just because he’s your brother’s best friend, doesn’t mean you own him.”

“I couldn’t do anything.”

“Get over yourself.”

He was sitting on his bed, headphones in, a speech that would never come true. I think Stacy might have a chance at being the princess. Yes, I have already got my dress. I'm not telling anyone.

I’m scared.

Some girls say they heard Stacy saying my name.

I’m scared.

I’m really scared now.

I didn’t bother knocking on my brother’s bedroom door. He was sitting on his bed, headphones in, a magazine on his lap.

“I’m sorry you’re not the Homecoming King,” I blurted.

“I’m sorry you didn’t even go to the dance at all,” my brother said.

“We really?”

“Yeah.” It was funny how we could finish each other’s sentences, read each other’s minds. “Why?”

“You’re her best friend.”

“I don’t think so.”

He smells like cigarette smoke.

“She said her dress is blue.”

In my living room, on my couch, in my house.

“I don’t know what color matches that. I’m not telling anyone.

“I’m really scared now.

“I want… I really…”

“I trust my brother. I trust my brother. I trust my brother.

I love him.

He’ll love me anyway.

“I need to tell you something.”

Ellie Zumbach
Junior
Garaway High School
Charles Zobel

Third Place Short Story – High School Division

I’m not telling anyone.

I’m really scared now.

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Ellie Zumbach
Junior
Garaway High School
Charles Zobel
Truth

If I actually told you the truth, you would hate me.
That is the only thing I can think of when I look at her. She would hate me and hate me forever and I would let her. Only because I deserve it.
She is wearing those stupid high-heels again today. She can barely walk in them. Shiny lips, fake eyelashes, short hair are the only things I see when I look at her. Her locker door slams and I flinch.
“Dana, are you even listening to me?”
“Yeah,” I mumble. “Yes, of course. He’s a jerk.”

“I didn’t mean…”

“Yeah.” It was funny how we could finish each other’s sentences, read each other’s minds. “Why?”

“Because he’s your brother’s best friend, doesn’t mean you own him.”

“You can’t…He…He’s…”

Why can’t I breathe?

“Dana,” Stacy snapped. “Just because he’s your brother’s best friend, doesn’t mean you own him.”

“I didn’t mean…”

“Get over yourself.”

Stacy was walking over to him. She was walking over to HIM. I ran the other way.

He was at my house today, playing video games with my brother, eating the pizza rolls out of our refrigerator. I hid in my room all day, under five blankets that will never keep me warm. My mom asked me if I was sick, and I said yes. I almost told her.

Almost.

I feel like I’m drowning in mud. He is going to Homecoming with Stacy. I could stop them. I could, maybe, tell someone.

I don’t want to, really.
I don’t want to relive it again.
I’m not telling anyone.

My brother was nominated for Homecoming King. I didn’t even know that was actually a thing.
My family celebrates by taking him to the Mexican restaurant in the middle of town. I used to love their salsa. I don’t really like it anymore.

My parents asked me if I’m going to the dance. I don’t bother telling them I’m not going to the dance.

“I’m scared.”
I tried calling Stacy.
She won’t answer her cell phone.

Homecoming.
Our football team won. Go Black Bears!

Garaway High School
Junior
Ellie Zumbach
Charles Zobel
A Life So Lived

Chapter 5: “We won’t ever see her again…”

Psalm 46:1-2: God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the sea.

Home: a word filled with mixed feelings. Oddly, in a way, I didn’t want to go home. It would be so hard to part with those mountains. I felt one with it all, but my life was quickly turning upside-down and because not a soul on earth knew how sick I was becoming, it was time.

I was walking blindly across an old beaten path, timeworn from the fierce, bitter winds of past winters and the summers that carried in roaring thunderstorms. All I could hold fast to now was God’s promise never to leave my side, even in moments of fear, when the weight of the world was falling onto my shoulders.

The next morning, I had awoken more than ever feeling badly. Shonk and Duxbury were still fixed on the idea I had some sort of bizarre flu. I can’t explain the feeling, but I wasn’t too sure about that anymore. It couldn’t be!

Through it all, I refused to speak up. That strong, Wagner gene of stubbornness in me had to show itself in one of the worst days possible.

As we finished packing everything, a knock came from the door. I went to answer it, but Sierra passed me and swung open the door. Dux stood in the doorway.

“Help her!” Dux breathed to Sierra.

“Do ya want me to go talk to Dux?” Sierra asked into my ear.

“No,” she retorted. “You hurt your leg. Don’t worry about it!”

We sat down and looked through the menus. I really wasn’t hungry and debated with myself over and over whether I should eat or not.

Dux approached our table and said in my ear, “Are you gonna eat?”

“I slouched down in my chair, making a split second decision, and then replied with a simple, ‘Yeah, I guess so….’”

The rule at mealtime was that we could get anything we wanted, but had to finish all of it. I had a decision to make: Eat, throw up, and upset Shonk and Duxbury or just leave it and upset them even more because I just wasted money. Either way, I was really wasn’t hungry and debated with myself over eating.

We sat down and looked through the menus. I really wasn’t hungry and debated with myself over and over whether I should eat or not.

“I’m not hungry…”

“I need no coddling, boy.”

The king laughed dryly.

“Do the deed.”

But he failed.

The boy tried to hold on to his hard-won power for as long as he could.

But he failed.

With a final gust, he crumbled and the crown fell away.

The world was empty once more.

The last of the pieces clattered into the wooden box before Luke sealed them inside.

“I’ll beat him next game,” he thought before turning the page.

Banners flapped and armor clanked as the chill wind blew through the silent battlefield. The standards of both armies flew haughtily above; a cream rose gleamed on a background of silver while a bleached white serpent danced amid fabric of deepest black.............

THE END
bruises forming on his skin.

"Amen," the priest said as he resumed his post.

Each player fell silent; the game board had become their sole focus. Neither would acquiesce until there was no hope left. Their fingers danced atop their chosen pieces in a flurry of moves.

The archer took aim, safely ensconced on a farmhouse rooftop in the black camp. The breeze carried the sounds of battle to his ears along with the cries of the carrion birds that eagerly awaited the leftovers. Already there were so many dead...

He sighted his targets, ghostly apparitions from this far away. Breathe in.

Breathe out.

Twang.

His crow-fletched arrows flew true; three hearts beat no more.

The pieces fell into the box, the sound hollow and heavy as desiccated bone.

Rising from his crouch, the peasant boy approached the throne. His mail was intact, iron bands held him securely in his place.

Andrew began to sweat. The board blured, his pieces shining stars amidst a forest of night.

I heard a coat rustling, so I opened my eyes halfway. That look on Dux's face still burns in my mind: A look speaking volumes of terror louder than gunfire.

I started to feel that weird feeling again, and began to shiver. The heat was escaping my body. I ignored it and fell asleep.

"You fought well. A better death could not be ready as he walked toward her face.

"Do you feel sick?" he asked.

"No…" I whispered.

He put his jacket over me, but it didn't help. Somebody put their blanket over Dux's jacket, but I shook harder and harder violently.

"She's still shaking again…" a voice called.

He turned around and asked, "You cold?"

"No…" I whispered.

He put his jacket over me, but it didn't help. Somebody put their blanket over Dux's jacket, but I shook harder and harder violently.

"She's still shaking again…" a voice called.

"Alright, Kid," Dux said, standing up and clutching the top of the seat, "we're gonna move you over into the sun."

I made my way across the aisle and sat up.

"Do you feel sick?" he asked.

"No…" I gasped, my breath becoming soft.

Suddenly, I couldn't breathe! I started to gag, harder and harder each time. My throat felt like it had taken my seat in the back beside Sierra, which, in time, was a blessing. I leaned my head back and closed my eyes.

I wheezed loud enough Sierra could hear me, but Mr. Shonk wasn't smiling anymore. He turned around and asked, "What's wrong with me…what's wrong with me…"

"I'm gonna die…gonna die…gonna die…"

"You..." he said, holding my hands tighter.

"Do you feel sick?" he asked.

"No…" I gasped, my breathing becoming soft.

Suddenly, I couldn't breathe! I started to gag, harder and harder each time. My throat felt like it was closing; a ton of bricks had fallen on my chest! What was going on?! What was happening to me? I began to gag louder and louder! Mr. Shonk did a spin move and held the trash bag to my face; the same one Dux had given me on Tuesday night. I was going to be sick, but it was too late; I was too weak. I had no more strength left. All I could do was wheeze.

I sat back down, but kept his eyes fixed firmly on me. Like Dux, the petrified look on his face spoke a million words. In the fifteen years I had known him, I had never seen him without that warm, familiar smile, but Mr. Shonk wasn't smiling anymore.

I closed my eyes, searching for any peace I could find out of this gruesome morning.

THUMP, THUMP, THUMP, THUMP…

My arm slammed against the side of the bus. Shonk whirled back around, taking my shaking hands in his. He couldn't even control my hands, but it was then the symbol of the journey ahead of me was born:

"No matter how hard this gets, no matter if the next moment puts you on top of the world or crushes you the next as the weight of the world drops onto your shoulders, no matter what bend in the road may lie ahead or storm cloud on the horizon, never think for even a second that you're alone! You'll have many times in this life when it feels as if the world begins to crumble right before your very eyes, but whatever this world throws at you, you can rest assured in the promise that I will never leave you as we stand tall together through every storm. Never live life in fear, nor feel the need to give into defeat, for I will always be right here by your side and never, ever let go.

"My hands…my hands…" I gasped quietly. "What's wrong with me…what's wrong with me…I'm gonna die…gonna die…gonna die…"

"No!" Mr. Shonk bellowed as loud as I ever heard him before, holding my hands tighter.

"WE'RE GONNA GET YOU SOME HELP! YER NOT GONNA DIE!"

I wheezed loud enough Sierra could hear me from the back of the bus.
Though he didn’t tell me until much later, with all the trouble I had breathing, Dux feared my windpipes were closing up.

Just then, a searing pain rushed up my leg, a pain unlike any other. I clenched my teeth and squeezed my eyes shut. My foot began to slam against the isle, a million miles away, overcome by terror was still all over both of their smiling faces.

In those few moments I was at peace; it was the only time I wanted to smile, but was too weak.

There was no rhyme or reason to it but the frantic shaking turned into paralysis. I choked. I gagged. I shook. I stopped… What had seemed to be a nasty seizure just quit. It was at this moment I began to fear for my life. All at once, not just my right side, but my whole body this time, just quit.

With the last bit of strength I had left, I opened my eyes, to see Shonk trying to hide the fear by smiling at me again.

Dux leaned again the seat on the other side of the isle, a million miles away, overcome by the horrid chaos. He let out a quick sigh, quickly glanced over at me, looked away for a split second, and then back at me. He smiled ear to ear when he saw I had my eyes open. Even though both of them were smiling, a nervous look that screamed terror was still all over both of their smiling faces.

In those few moments I was at peace; it seemed like the pain and fear disappeared when I saw them both smiling down at me.

“Where you go,” Mr. Shonk whispered, smiling even bigger.

“There…” Dux whispered, leaning onto the top of the empty seat beside me. “Now yer eyes are open…”

Even if it was to cover up their fear; even if there wasn’t a hint of truth in those ear to ear grins, this was the very thing I wanted to see, Dux and Mr. Shonk smiling.

I saw Mr. Duxbury smiled and whispered to me, but I heard no more words. My world began to spin as their gentle words grew to a hush. It felt as if time had slowed down almost to a halt. The thought of death had overtaken me, welcoming it. My eyes closed. I was ready to die now; ready to be freed of this wretched, miserable torture life had thrown in my face.

Back home, my mom and dad, after a phone call from Mr. Duxbury, prepared for the worst, just as I in that bus seat five hundred miles away. They both agreed it was time for my dad to head for Tennessee.

I felt for sure I wouldn’t be going back to Ohio that day, but where I was destined to in the end: to the skies…home for good. I was ready to go, ready to be freed from the living nightmare I was going through.

Mr. Shonk and Dux, though, overlooked that and told me time after time that I’d somehow pull through, to convince me I was going to pull through…but it didn’t work.

I was too weak to move, but Mr. Shonk still kept a tight grip on my limp hands. I stared off into the fray. He looked at the old man, stunned. Muscles were closing up. White stood up shakily, wiping her blade on her robes, and as the light was snuffed from her eyes, he boy rode her corpse to the ground.

“I warned you,” he said as he swung the great blade at the man.

THUNK.

All the knight’s momentum ground to a halt when the black knight stumbled up the stony path that led to the white king’s court. The knight fell, eyes unseeing, silvered over your sheep another day.”

The black knight raised her sword, looking for all the world like an avenging angel from hell. White moved, all thoughts of remorse fleeting her mind as she drew her dagger from her boot and stabbed upward. Silver blood cascaded out her younger sister’s mouth and chest as she stuttered, then fell. White stood up shakily, wiping her blade on the now-dead grass.

“I’m so sorry, sister,” she murmured, tears trickling down her pale cheeks.

Andrew grinned at the look of despair on his younger brother’s face. That had been a beginner’s mistake. Suddenly, Luke stiffled, eyes seeking out a lonely piece on the game board.

“Damn!” Andrew cursed internally.

White picked up her fallen helm, solemn and bent-backed in her grief.

She didn’t hear the susurrant sound of boots on the grass. The young peasant grabbed her from behind, slitting her throat from ear to ear. Tarnished silver blood flowed down the front of her robes, and as the light was snuffed from her eyes, the boy rode her corpse to the ground.

“We won’t ever see her again…”

Mr. Shonk smiled. “You taught me everything I know, Big Brother. Especially how to use my pawns.”

“No!”

“Maybe I taught you too well…"

The bishop stood praying near the top of the battlefield when the black knight stumbled up the stony path that led to the white king’s court. The bishop, still smirking when he saw the ancient man standing in his way.

“Do you wish to spill your blood this eve, Father,” he said. “Move aside and live to watch over your sheep another day.”

The bishop continued his communion with God.

“Did you hear me, old man? Move!”

Nothing.

The knight grew annoyed at the other man’s reticence. How dare he stand before him!

He drew his claymore, the steel blade whispering its sins against the dark leather.

“I warned you,” he said as he swung the great blade at the man.

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THUNK.

All the knight’s momentum ground to a halt when his sword stuck in the bishop’s quarterstaff.

He looked at the old man, stunned. Muscles heaving, the bishop tore the sword from the staff, sending the knight reeling backward. Spinning the staff in a circle above his head, the bishop met the knight’s newly terrified gaze with his own.

“Sneaky, aren’t you?”

The bishop, still smirking when he saw the ancient man standing in his way.

“I do not wish to spill your blood this eve, Father,” he said. “Move aside and live to watch over your sheep another day.”

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The bishop continued his communion with God.
C’est un Reve
(This is a Dream)

“Big Brother?”
Andrew glanced up from the textbook he was poring over, trying to cram for a huge test the next day. His little brother, Luke, stood silhouetted against the light from the doorway, clutching a small wooden box in his tiny hands.

“Big Brother, will you play chess with me?”
Andrew sighed. “I’m kinda busy right now, Luke.”

“Please?” Luke begged in the annoyingly high-pitched way all little brothers seemed to have perfected. “Just one game?”
Knowing Luke wouldn’t stop pestering him until he said yes, Andrew closed his textbook and moved off toward the edge of his bed.

“Fine, but just one game. Ok?”
“Yaaaaay!” Luke ran in and immediately began to set up his old chess set on a somewhat clear table in the corner of the room.

“I’ll be the black, and you’ll be the white, okay, Big Brother?”
“Sure.” Each piece touched down on its marble square with a decisive clack.

Banners flapped and armor clanked as the chill wind blew through the silent battlefield. The standards of both armies flew haughtily above; a cream rose gleamed on a background of silver while a bleached white serpent danced amid fabric of deepest black. As the final phalanxes joined the collective, the old, wizened king stood. Age had not diminished his regal bearing and his icy eyes gleamed with cunning. Across the field, his youthful counterpart also rose, his own eyes hidden beneath a fringe of raven hair.

They met in a blaze of sparking steel, the strength of the blows driving them from their frightened horses.

Leaping from the ground, they struck again while the melee raged around them.

Another pawn.
A rook.

The pieces abandoned their orderliness and took their stand in the tiny world of squares.

The anticipatory still shattered; men took to their horses, grabbed up their spears, and sprinted headlong to victory.

Andrew hovered over his rows of pieces before finally selecting a pawn, two in from the left side of the board.

“Pawn to B4.”
“Theantipatory still shattered; men took to their horses, grabbed up their spears, and sprinted headlong to victory.

Andrew hovered over his rows of pieces before finally selecting a pawn, two in from the left side of the board.

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My Friend Randy

When kids are young they tend to have imaginary friends. A lot of kids feel as if they need this friend there with them to feel safe. Imaginary friends usually go along on road trips, sit at the dinner table, and have sleepovers. Kids will usually go looking for an imaginary friend but in rare cases, this friend comes looking for them. Sometimes this so called “imaginary friend” isn’t imaginary at all. My mom would stand in the kitchen doorway and listen as I talked and played with someone, or something that was not really there. It was a normal thing for me to do I have now been told. Every time I was asked who I was talking to my answer remained the same, “My friend Randy.” The thought of me talking to what seemed like thin air was really strange to my mom. Not thinking too much into it, she tried to shake it off. Being only two years old, it was normal to have an imaginary friend. What was not normal was how in depth the conversations I was having were.

My mom would try not to let too many things run through her mind. She wanted to believe that it was, in fact, just an imaginary friend. At work, she would ask her coworkers if their children my age had imaginary friends. Some of them did but none talked to their “friends” the way I did mine. My mom started to feel a little uneasy about the friend. What was not normal was how in depth the answers remained the same, “My friend Randy.” Every time I was asked who I was talking to my answer. After all this time and confusion she finally knew what was happening. She finally knew who I was talking to, no matter how hard it was to believe.

Now, 15 years later, I have been told who was in that picture. In the picture there is a man of your troop to make it out,” the anchor’s voice echoes in my head as I continue to stare at the burn marks. “I guess you were one lucky young man.”

“Well how do you know this?”

“Okay. My friend Randy drives a big truck. It has a pretty birdie on top of it.”

“Nothing sweetie. I’m just listening to you.”

“Okay. “What’s wrong, mommy?”

“Nothing sweetie. I’m just listening to you.”

Okay. My friend Randy drives a big truck. It has a pretty birdie on top of it.

When we arrived at my grandma’s house, my mom took me out of my car seat and ran with me to the door. She sat me down on the couch and disappeared for a few minutes. When she returned she had a photograph with her.

“Erica, who is this?”

“I dunno ma, but it looks like my friend Randy.”

“My mom was flooded with emotions ranging from fear to a sense of comfort when she heard my answer. After all this time and confusion she finally knew what was happening. She finally knew who I was talking to, no matter how hard it was to believe.

Now, 15 years later, I have been told who was in that picture. In the picture there is a man.

Ignoring the pain, I let the water run the rest of the blood down the drain.

My face changes in the broken glass. I stare in it and then turn away. “I should have died in that forest,” My vision goes and I shut my eyes as tight as I can, trying to stop my mind.

The fire stopped for a moment. I took a deep breath and stood on my feet. I stared into the sky and the enemy still swirling in the sky above me. I clenched my fists and waved them in the air.

“Everyone’s already dead! I’m the only one left! Just end it already!” I screamed at the top of my lungs.

My eyes followed as they slowly disappeared from the battle scene. They were gone and I was left. I sat down in the rubble and took a deep breath. They didn’t kill me and they weren’t coming back.

“Why didn’t I just die there? Why am I the lucky one?” I say staring in the mirror.

I gather myself and leave the bathroom. Without thinking it over, I walk out of the store. All I want to do is escape the nightmare that was my life.

Warm blood drips down from where my knuckle hit. Three drops slide into the sink and I watch them fade in with the water. The water hints red and then disappears down the drain. I pull my knuckle back and slide it under the water.
The shelf finally stays and I move more quickly to the restroom doors. I called out names of the soldiers that I knew worked in the village. It was nothing but rubble. It wasn’t possible that they would be alive, but I didn’t want to think about that. My feet scraped across the dirt as I got closer. A gun sat at my feet and I kicked it aside and tried to forget any thoughts that came to my head. I maneuvered around the destroyed houses to get to the only one standing thinking that my troop had retreated to the village.

“Guys,” I called pushing open a door with the cloth on my burned finger tips. The door gently fell to the ground and created a cloud of dust. I began to cough in the dark as I moved forward.

My hand ripped the backpack straps off my shoulder. As I set it down with a groan, another cloud of dust lifted. I reached into one of the many pockets and searched. The backpack was hardly together. There were many pockets that lead nowhere, only a hole appeared. The explosion did a number on it.

A cold piece of metal hit my glove and I pulled it out. A click echoed and light spread across the room through the flashlight’s glass.

“You couldn’t protect us,” Flinching, I turned the light towards the little voice in the back.

There in the light, sat a little boy who looked about five years old. He didn’t have all ten fingers. He didn’t want to think about that. My feet scraped across the dirt as I got closer. A gun sat at my feet and I kicked it aside and tried to forget any thoughts that came to my head. I maneuvered around the destroyed houses to get to the only one standing thinking that my troop had retreated to the village.

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There in the light, sat a little boy who looked about five years old. He didn’t have all ten fingers and wasn’t wearing anything to protect himself. The little boy had dirt all covering his face making it hard to see in the dark. The only thing visible was his dark brown eyes that shined in the flashlight. He was scared as he just kept staring right at the center of the flashlight like he was mesmerized.

“You only bring pain,” he said.

Tripping, I place my hand on the bathroom door and rush inside. The door swings behind me as I rush to the stall.

“We’re here to help,” I told him and he backed up into the wall. It wasn’t the flashlight he was afraid of, it was me.

I lean on the stall door and look down at the floor. I breathe in and out trying to calm myself down. What is wrong with you, Nate? Why can’t you stop having these visions? My hand reaches for the toilet paper. Shaking, it rips a piece off and I dab my wet forehead trying to remove the sweat that feels like it won’t disappear.

“You said you actually talked to one of them?” I sat in a white chair in an interview on live television.

“Yes,” I said nodding my head in agreement.

“Well, what did he say?” The news anchor leaned in closer as I kept my head to the floor.

I sighed and scratched my head while speaking. “He said he was scared … and … and wanted me to help him,” I stated.

“And did you?” he asked again.

I flashed out and looked at the boy sitting there. “Please let me help you,” I said to him.

He got to his feet and ran out of the house. I started to run after the little boy. I got there and in his hand was the gun that I kicked to the side. He started to run after the little boy. I got there and in his hand was the gun that I kicked to the side. He raised the gun up and pointed it at his head. His little boney finger was sitting gently on the trigger.

“No!” I yelled as the body fell lifeless to the floor.

I zoned back to the interview and stared at the anchor. “Yes, but sadly we were ambushed,” I stated.

“That’s too bad,” he said quickly trying to sound sympathetic.

I move to the sink and turn the water on. I dive my hands under the cold water and sigh. My eyes catch a glance of the burn marks still engraved in my skin. My hands come out of the water and I slowly clench them into a gentle fist.

“It’s sad to hear that you were the last one standing beside his semi-truck. On top of that truck, a silver swan. This man is my Uncle Randall, Randy for short. He died just months before I was born. At first it was hard for my mom to understand how something like this could happen, how her two year old daughter was having full conversations with someone who wasn’t even alive.

After a few months these conversations became scarce. I would talk to my friend Randy less and less. In fact the last time my mom heard me talking to Randy was four months after showing me the picture. As my mom stood in the doorway for the last time she listened, “Why do you have to go? What happens when I miss you and want to visit you?” My mom saw that I was really upset so she walked over to me, “What’s wrong, Erica?”

“My friend Randy said he has to go now. I don’t want him to, Mommy.” My mom had a really hard time seeing me try to understand this, so she tried to explain, “Sweetie, sometimes when we have friends, they can’t hang out with us every day. They come into our lives to be there when we need them. You know how your blankie is there at night when you need it? Your friend Randy will be there when you need him.” My mom said this not being sure why I would need his help.

“Mom, he told me he would always be watching me to make sure I’m okay and to keep me safe. How will he do that from home?” It was then that my mom knew that my friend Randy came to me to help her. Knowing that her brother would forever be watching over me gave her comfort and peace of mind.

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Purpose.

Why do I write? Why am I still here? When I was little, I wanted to be a dog, a vet, a star for the Cleveland Indians, a meteorologist, and yes, at one point I even wanted to be Amish. I’ve been writing short stories for a long as I can remember...from preschool characters wreaking havoc on society to how someday I’d raise a hundred kids without electricity, running water, or a car...for some reason that sounded fun, I don’t know why, but I was what you’d call “quite the dreamer” in those days. I never thought writing would ever save my life, but that early morning of April 5, 2011, five hundred miles away from home, as I drained out my life half paralyzed, my body overtaken with bruises, with my science teacher next to me, the reason why I write was born. I thought for certain I was going to die any second those three horrific days...and I wasn’t the only one. Mom and Dad, five hundred miles away, said they’d never see me again, my best friend feared I’d never be that ornerary, barefooted heathen again, and my advisors watched helplessly as I convulsed in that bus seat, fearing this was it. When I wanted to laugh, I was too weak; when I wanted to smile, I was too numb. I welcomed death, as crazy as it may seem. I preferred death to the cold against my bruised skin, ready to end this madness. I had no purpose in this world...just a freak.

“Can I walk like you?” I turned to face the nameless teacher and we met eye to eye. His viscous grin brought tears...he thought he was pretty funny. When I close my eyes, I can still so clearly see the faces of those who laughed and those who just stared. The laughter still burns as everybody just stared...they stared and they laughed.

Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “We gain strength, and courage, and confidence by each experience in which we really stop to look fear in the face...we must do that which we think we cannot.”

So that’s what I did, I welled up my tears and faced my fears. Through this hell, I have found hope and healing at rock bottom, because when the strength runs out and faith is no more, that is when the foundation of healing and triumph is laid out. What has stuck out most in my mind is a simple word of advice from that same science teacher next to me, the reason why I write was born. My hand leaned against the tree as I saw the target village was in front of me, but I just couldn’t reach it. A large wave of fire appeared and I dragged him to his feet. He fell limp back in the dirt shortly after I got him walking.

He began to cough, causing dirt to jump off and on his face. “Get to...”

“They are going to love you here,” Tyler fades and I’m walking with the manager once again. I watch as his pen moves while he talks on and on. I fade back into the conversation, “It may seem hard, but a strong young man like you can handle a little weight.”

He turns to me and his smile slowly disappears. “I need to use your restroom,” I state and begin to move back up the hall we came from.

“Don’t be long,” he calls after me. My eyes quickly blink and my breathing becomes heavy. My hand leaned against the tree as I saw the village. I don’t turn my head back to look at my dead friend. This popping noise filled my mind as I continued running. I wasn’t going to turn back around to watch another one of my men die out there.

The target village was in front of me, but I just couldn’t reach it. A large wave of fire appeared blocking my path. I stumbled backwards on my back and lay there for a moment moaning in pain. My fingers were burning and the tip of the bone was in my sight. I screamed as the heat sizzled on my pale skin.

My body hits a rack in the store and I catch myself. It begins to topple over, but I grab it just in time. Come on Nate, keep your head together.
Where Does Writing Hide?
Poems are not just thrown out in the open for everyone to see
Like a yard sale sign.
They’re not on billboards for speeding cars to glance at, and they’re
Certainly not posted on fluorescent flyers- the kind people jot numbers on
Then crumble up later.

You’re the seeker while poetry is the hider.
Of course, that is a trick considering you can’t look for poetry or
Sniff out poetry or physically feel poetry or hear it coming.
It comes and goes through the dog door,
Brilliantly sweeping through your soul.
Only making an appearance when the mind is open and free.
Many can’t taste all the flavors poetry has cooked into it.

Poetry seems to camouflage itself into places people don’t think to look
Like the prologue of a novel that book worms generally skim over.
When the reader realizes they’re missing a piece of information,
They scurry back to the beginning
To find the missing puzzle piece.
Poetry hides in places that are overlooked.
Such a complex piece of literature
is really so simple.
Instead of bending over backwards and losing sleep
over an analysis of a poem,
try letting poetry find you.

Morgan Lesher
Sophomore
Wadsworth High School
Scott Callaghan

Honorable Mention Poetry – High School Division

Elizabeth Wagner
Senior
Orrville High School
Amy Duxbury

cont’d from page 21

teacher from the ER, “You may not see it today, and you may not see it tomorrow, but God gave
you this disease for a purpose. I truly believe you were chosen to have this disease for a very, very
special reason.”

It’s been worth all that’s been lost…the hope
in hurt…the joy in tears. Not long ago, I met a ten
year old who dropped a bed frame on her foot, a
ten year old who snapped her leg in half on the
bar of a trampoline, a thirteen year old who
kicked a football…and a sophomore, now junior and my best friend…we’ve all been bitten by the
CRPS bug, the suicide disease. I can run a mile, when not long ago walking across the room was
an accomplishment; pick up a textbook or two without stiffening my back lopsided; clap without
my hands clawing and piercing through my palm.
Some chose to be hopeless, but some of us chose
to embrace the trials everyday brings. And that’s
why I write, to show those who give in to their pain,
that life can be a “you know what” sometimes,
but God doesn’t close one door without opening
another.

Veterans Day was just the other day. For over
a year, I have been juggling in my head as I decide
what I want to do for the next 30+ years. The many
Marines, Swabbies, Puddle Pirates, and Airmen I
have long since known have been my role models.
That is what I want to do with the rest of my life:
Proudly serve my country, the first girl in my family
to do so.

The Cleveland Clinic doctors I’ve seen
probably a hundred times, not long ago told me
they never want to see me again, but if I do decide
to come back, I made one solemn promise: I’d be
in uniform. Through my writing, I have found a
spark that ignited that dreadful morning I drained
out my life in the ER. Never
ever
settle for second
best, don’t let the trials of yesterday dictate your
tomorrow…because today’s tears you just can’t
seem to let go…every bend in the road, every tear
shed…may just be tomorrow’s triumph. And that…
is my purpose.
**Third Place Personal Essay – High School Division**

I am a sheltered child. Homeschooled and reading books aloud at five-years-old. No battery-operated toys for me. Veggie Tales and saint cartoons are the only movies Dad lets me watch. *Cinderella, Blues Clues, and Thomas the Train Engine* are a novelty for when it's just me and Mom. All I want is a pretend telephone that will make noise and shoes that light up when I walk. But Mom spends hours reading aloud to me and I am happy. I sit on the steps outside breathing the summer air in my corduroys, composing and singing ditties to my cat. Because Princesses sing to animals about their lives right? With my books, my songs, my Mom, and my cat, the tidal wave of technology manages to pass me over for the time being. I am the girl between worlds.

I am a twelve-year-old of the new age, but do I even realize it? Am I really present? With my once-a-week Girls Club, my Tuesdays are spent with little Catholic girls my age. I only catch tidbits of Rihanna and Chris Brown, but now I'm hungry for more. I sneak Jonas Brothers CDs away from Mom's eyes at the library. Little do I know how much she pretends not to see. My afternoons are spent drawing and reading next to my CD player, soaking up pop culture as I ignite my imagination with old-fashioned habits. All I want for Christmas is an iPod. Flipping through *People* magazines at Walmart and picking up juicy gossip about superficial celebrities makes me feel a part of the culture. Dad wants to hide me from it. And Mom goes along with him because that's how a "good wife" behaves, right? All I want is cable TV. And to wear makeup and look like Taylor Swift. I want to feel like a princess.

I read and read; *Eragon, Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter,* and *Pride and Prejudice* are all dancing realities in my mind. Dickens and Shakespeare and Alcott only encourage my ambitious book appetite. I am never fully present – always trying to become the people I idolize. Hermione Granger and Taylor Swift are smart and beautiful with curly hair just like me. She reads, and she writes songs; they dream and dream, just like me. All I want is to be a writer and a singer and to make people happy. I want to love like Lizzy Bennet. My heart aches to be conquered and won. Lonely and dream-filled I write, and write, and write. Poems become songs and my Mom gets me an old, beat-up guitar. Because she understands what it feels like to need to feel love and passion in a trapped life. Dad finds the *Harry Potter* books and burns them in the back yard. Why can't he understand that it's not the witchcraft that attracts me but the magic of the story itself? Quiet whispers hush each other as my mind fills with the illegal music and books that try to escape the flames.

I am sixteen-years-old and everything is changing. I have thrown myself into the depths of secular culture: public high school. It's all different and new. Music and words are everywhere. There is choir, and English, and Human Science, and Chemistry. I dream of making people happy. I want to heal them with love and words. A nurse who is a writer. Is that possible? I can make it possible. Nonetheless, my heart begins to wear because my hands are tired of writing and my eyes close before I can read my books or try to write more stories. I make a Facebook page even though Dad hates the outside world. It is all bright and new and beautiful, but it sucks me in. Even when I have time to read I'm busy chatting with the wrong guy and sneakily updating my status. Even though I can wear make-up and start to feel like everyone else, I don't feel like a princess.

He has big brown eyes and mischievous smile. He makes me laugh and blush. "Why don't you have a phone," he says. All he wants is for me to get a phone because he wants to tell me he loves me.

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**Honorable Mention Poetry – High School Division**

**Fire and Ice**

I love to love how your eyes go ablaze
By the turn of the yellowing pages.

To gaze would mean to be lost in the waves
While the eye of the hurricane rages.

For God be a sinner were you to wilt
At Death's scythe not by flesh but bravado.

Willful ignorance adamantly built
The serene mountains of Colorado.

Your lips pale blue but thee tongue flickers fire
That burns mesmeric words into dry ice.

One magnetic stare calls me to the pyre
That consumes my whole, your cage will suffice.

Basilisk, you cannot fathom my grave,
All you see is two wide eyes, not your slave.

---

**Aley Lind**

Sophomore

Wadsworth High School

Scott Callaghan
“Get a phone that texts and sends pictures. One that your parents won’t look at.”
He tells me he wants me and will never want anyone else.
“But why won’t you ask me to be your girlfriend?” I think. “Why won’t you make me your princess?”
He tells me I’m beautiful and I’m not like other girls. I want to be like everyone else though. Or do I? I want to be a part of this fast world full of high speed communication and technological advancement, but that nagging voice in my head tells me that maybe fast isn’t always good.
They tell me I’m strange. It is because I like to knit and create simple beauty. It is because I love the smell of old books and the feel of a pen in my hand. It is because I like to watch BBC miniseries on DVD while I drink tea. It is because my parents are so different and Dad always yells for hours if I don’t let him get the door for me. It is because I think in a different way and always try to be honest and speak my mind. As John Green said, “I’m not in the business of denying myself the simple pleasure of saying true things” (Green, 153). It is because it took me seventeen years to obtain a real cell phone with texting and pictures. Even when you think you are strong, judgment can sting.
Here I am, a senior in a small town high school, wondering how I fit into this world. I sit here on a high speed computer with my Facebook and Tumblir pulled up while my Spotify shuffles through everything from Johnny Cash, to Mayday Parade, to Blake Shelton, to the Pride and Prejudice soundtrack. Meanwhile I pour out all these thoughts and epiphanies. I read John Green like an addict absorbs heroin. I am as alone as ever; no one has conquered my heart. I’m still not a princess like I was when I was five-years-old. But I am on the journey to my pot of gold. College and a nursing career is the next great adventure. My heart still bleeds William Shakespeare and Jane Austen and Charles Dickens. My journal is marked with proverbial bloodstains that replace real scars marking my skin. Even though I’m not a nurse yet, I’ve already healed so many people with simple love and words, just like I’d always dreamt. The next is finding a way to heal myself: finding love and happiness, working around Dad’s decisions and expectations, and following my dream of fixing broken people.
The girl between worlds. I am the girl who loves and longs for technology and the social culture, yet revels in the beauty and power of the written word. I find myself in the sound of music and the scratch of a pen; from the beat of a drum to the turn of a page. I may have many of the social connections that culture demands, like a real “telephone that makes noise” and a blog. But I remain connected to my love for old-fashioned habits and my love for people and art more than robots and technology. I tried to fit into the culture itself, conforming to the social ideal is believed to define every girl: one who lives to be a boy-pleasing, social clone; however it was a fruitless endeavor, because I am a dreamer who longs to be her own person. I am the lone piece that connects two puzzles. “The world wasn’t made for us, we were made for the world” (Green, 312). Or in my case, both worlds.

Works Cited
Jennifer Reynolds
Sophomore
Wadsworth High School
Scott Callaghan

Second Place Poetry – High School Division

Kidnapping

Ever been kidnapped
by a dancer
if I were a dancer
I’d kidnap you

Put you in my numbers
and take you to the performance
or maybe the dressing room
or maybe just the rehearsal

Drown you in my flowers
wrap you in the thick curtains
try on all my costumes
make you feel unique

Play the slow songs for you
and the fast ones too
Dance my best dance
anything to win you
I’d show you off to my audience
yeah if I were
a dancer I’d kidnap you

The Fabulous Life of a Waitress

Everyone works sometime in their life. That’s the reason we get an education, so we can be the best we can be in our profession. But what about those very first jobs we had? The ones that earned us small amounts of cash to spend on Chapstick and Starbucks. We all have those first jobs we don’t ever really want to relive.

It was a weekday afternoon in mid-October. Mom and I were on our way home from my grandma’s house. For some odd reason we drove separately and met at Bob Evans on 83. I don’t remember why, but we did. As we got off the exit to pick up my truck, I accidentally thought out loud.

“Being a waitress would be so cool,” I said.

“So in and get an application!” my mom said, “I’ll wait for you out here!”

My mom raised such an ambitious girl. So being the go-getter I am, I ran inside, all smiles. Now if there was ever anytime I could go back into my past and slap myself in the face, this would be one of those times. Or maybe my last ‘job’ where I agreed to babysit the Devil herself for the whole summer. I’ll never be too sure as to why I agreed to that.

I had just turned 17 so a job was becoming necessary for my shopping addiction because I know my parents weren’t going to support it forever. As I opened the front door to Bob Evans I could already taste the money. The heavenly aroma of all the wonderful breakfast foods surrounded me and I was on Cloud 9. The whole thing was like a dream, this could be my first real job. I snapped back to reality when I saw a tall, slender, gray haired man come up to me with a huge smile and said,

“Hello, welcome to Bob Evans! Booth or table?”

“I want to turn this in.”

I nodded and swiftly turned around and walked out awkwardly. As soon as I hit the door I felt the cool October breeze on my cheeks. I sprinted to my mom’s car and flashed my application in her face. I could barely contain my excitement. I now know that getting an application isn’t hard but back then I had no clue. It was the biggest accomplishment I had ever made. I felt empowered.

As soon as I got home I sat down at the kitchen table and forced my mom to sit down with me. I made her look it over and make sure everything was perfect. I didn’t want to walk in there and look like the fool I actually was. I turned the application back in less than a week after I got it. When I went in there, Jamie wasn’t there. I felt really uncomfortable. So I looked around and walked over to the counter and sat down. A nice waitress came over to me and asked if I wanted a drink but I told her I just wanted a manager. She got a really worried look on her face like she did something wrong. Then I pulled the application from my lap and said,

“We’ll call you.”

And she walked right back into the abyss from where she came. I then felt a sudden sense of amazement and confusion. I wanted to be interviewed right then and there. I wanted the job. But my dream world came crashing down on me and reality bit me hard in the butt. It was time to go home and wait for the call.

Two weeks had gone by with no phone calls. I was pretty much devastated. I didn’t think they wouldn’t call. I thought maybe I’d get a courtesy call.

cont’d on page 26
The Colors of Love

You stole me out of my bed and we danced yellow on the blue-grey grass and sang songs orange at the top of our lungs. I listened for the sound of your colors. We had an imaginary green snowball fight and we went running. You smiled at me when we stopped, stopped to catch our breath. I collapsed on the playground and threw wood chips at you until you joined me and we breathed purple into a red sky.

Andrew Niehus
Sophomore
Wadsworth High School
Scott Callaghan

As soon as 2:30 hit, I was out the door. I didn’t want to be late for my interview. I was all dressed up for my shadowing, so lucky for me I could go straight to Bob Evans. I was so nervous driving there that I had to blast the radio in order to keep myself focused on the road.

When I got there, I saw Jamie. I don’t know if he recognized me or not. But I told him I had an interview and he sat me at the counter. A long few minutes later, a slender man with red hair came out of the back. I had never seen him before but he was quite attractive. He introduced himself as Curt, the manager. Holy freaking cow, was he attractive. We sat down and talked and talked for what seemed like forever. Finally he said that he wanted to hire me! I had never been so happy in my life! The following week I started.

After working there for like 3 weeks, everything started to go downhill. Curt transferred stores, Mandy got meaner, my trainer blamed everything on me and I just hated my life.

My trainer’s name was Ofelia, she was foreign and you could barely understand her. But what you could understand, you didn’t want to hear. She was mean, old, and only cared about herself. I was always nice to her but that didn’t really seem to matter. She’d tell my tables that I was a bad waitress and if they ever needed anything, she’d be happy to help them. I thought that was the rudest thing. I watched her steal my tips more than once. I hated her. She made me want to quit. But as time went on, I learned to deal with people and stick up for myself. That’s one thing I learned from this job. People will knock you down, but getting up and showing them you’ll never quit is the best part.
Award Winning
COLLEGE
Short Stories
2013 - 2014

Award Winning
HIGH SCHOOL
Poetry, Short Stories & Personal Essays
2013 - 2014
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First Place Short Story - College Division

*Awake*

A canopy of birch trees hover over me as I sleep, occasionally letting loose a drop of dew from their pale green leaves. It hits me softly and I sigh, using the back of my hand to brush the cool water off of my forehead. I sit up sluggishly, shaking my head and wiping the sand from my eyes, begging myself to wake up. I’m never fully awake here; my eyes are so heavy it is almost a chore to keep them open.

I rest my head on my knees and try to remember how I got to this strange place. I am alone here. The only other living presence is the greenery. I try to remember how I came to be here. I don’t come up with much, only quick flashes of images that I don’t understand. I do know my name however, John.

There is no solid food, only plentiful, nourishing fluid, whether from the trees or a rushing brook I have discovered nearby. When I first found myself in this odd forest, the earth had been rumbling with what I can only describe as earthquakes. They have long since stopped and only a slight breeze whisks through occasionally. If I listen hard enough, the wind seems to carry soft murmurs of voices that I can never seem to pinpoint no matter how hard I try. It’s lonely, this place.

I lay there for a moment waiting for the pounding in my heart to stop, for my breaths to calm. I make myself stand back up, and walk forward. After what feels like hours have passed, I am not surprised to find myself at The Tunnel again. I stare at it in defeat, my eyes are so heavy it is almost a chore to keep them open. I make myself stand up, still rubbing my eyes. I stare into the bottomless brook as I drink to quench my hunger. There are no stones, no dirt, just this bright flowing liquid. I contemplate jumping in to see where it will carry me but I lose my nerve at the last moment. I get a feeling that it is something that shouldn’t be done. I decide to try once more to find my way out of this eerie place.

I pick a tree, and taking a rock from the ground, I mark the smooth white trunk with the letter ‘r’ to signify a new trail. Sometimes in my travels I come across a different letter from the alphabet and I know my path has intersected an earlier attempt. Though I am discouraged, I keep forcing myself forward wanting desperately to find an exit from this world. This task has helped the days go by, and as I walk I try to recollect anything that would clue me in to my predicament. The only memory I can find is a face that swims tauntingly in the forefront of my thoughts. My Margarette. She is the last person I remember seeing before waking up in this lush forest. Her face is etched clear in my mind although I often picture it tear-stained and wistful.

I lay there and stare up into the trees. I give in to the pull of my eyelids and let them slide closed.

“You come back to me, please, my love, come back!”

My heart twists painfully. I sob, fall to the ground and beat my fists against soft moss. “Why am I here?” I shout aloud. There is no answer, not even an echo. I feel like I have been in this world for weeks, maybe even months, I don’t know for sure. I just want to be home, in my bed, in her arms. I am breathing fast, I lay on my back and stare up into the trees. I give in to the pull of my eyelids and let them slide closed.

At the end of The Tunnel is a bright white light, so bright it looks like it could dissolve the ground. The Tunnel is perfectly round, constructed from glistening white stones. It is wide enough for two people to walk down side by side, and it looks safe enough, but the end of it is what frightens me. At the end of The Tunnel is a bright white light, so bright it looks like it could dissolve the flesh from my bones. I don’t want to find out what the light at the end belongs to, I am just not ready.

First Place Short Story - College Division

*Awake*

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Instead, I turn around and drop the rock on the pile with all the others. I don’t even try to follow the path back. I know where it will inevitably lead; in this labyrinth there is no beginning nor, seemingly, an end. As I walk back to my clearing I wonder if I should even bother trying anymore. I feel more and more tired each moment.

Wait.

There is something wrong.

I stop walking. I notice how strikingly quiet it is. The usual whisper of the wind is missing. I clap my hands and hear nothing. I try to speak and I feel my lips moving but my ears register nothing. A sense of dread overwhelms me. Then, before I can even think of what to do, a long, piercing note slices through the silence, vibrating down to my core. It’s urgent, frightening. I am apprehensive of what is to happen to me next. Alongside this alarming sound I notice the air has developed a sharp and tangy taste. It feels thicker and I find it hard to breathe. Then the first tremor happens. It is abrupt, like an explosion, only massive, taking down trees and cracking zigzags through the mossy floor. The next tremble is longer, resonating deep within the ground. The crevices that form are like large hungry mouths, devouring rocks and trees, sucking away the air. All around me it seems as if the trees are weeping, calling out to me as they slip into the gaping holes that the quake has formed.

“Come back to me John! Don’t leave me, come back!”

My head is blinded by a searing pain, my arms and legs constrict, I can’t move. Her voice, Margarette’s voice, gets louder and louder pleading for me to stay, and I don’t get it. If only I could find her, could go to her, to ease her pain. Images start to flash through my brain, memories of cocktails, steak dinners, and laughter. Margarette in a lovely blue dress, her smile turning to a panic, her scream, “John! Watch out!” Then the screech of metal against metal, blaring horns, squealing tires. Panic overwhelms me and an intense red light erupts across the sky, shattering this strange world. I slip into a crevice, and the earthquake and The Tunnel don’t matter any more as I try to hold on to the last shred of a life I have. I float in a dark abyss watching the last of the trees fade away to nothingness. I feel lost. Then, that long monotonous tone that had fallen to the back of my mind slowly comes back into focus, breaking into a series of ups and downs. I feel relief wash over me as I close my eyes and let my body drop. I slam into something hard.

I take a deep gasping breath as my eyes flutter open and my vision blurs, trying to focus on my surroundings. I cough and I am suddenly aware that every bone in my body is aching, every breath is taxing. I look to my left and to my delight, my dear Margarette sits next to me, her eyes wide and full of disbelief. She murmurs my name softly as she starts to move near me. A woman in white stops her reaching to take my pulse and my temperature. I try to brush her away as I reach out to Margarette but my arms are weak. I lift my head as far as my strength will allow and gaze upon Margarette’s beautiful face. I feel her tentative touch on my cheek.

“Are you awake?” She asks, not daring to believe it.

“Yes,” I whisper, my voice raspy. “I think I really am.”
Award Winning
Poetry, Short Stories
&
Personal Essays
2013 – 2014

Seeking to encourage and recognize excellence in creative writing among students at Wayne College and in area High Schools.