

2007 WINNERS

Final Judges:
Janet Wong
Brent Hartinger

Pierce County Library System celebrates the outstanding contributions of teenage writers in the Library System's 11th annual Teen Poetry and Fiction Writing Contest—Our Own Words. This year, 750 7th-12th grade students competed in the poetry and short story writing contest.

Nearly 50 volunteers including Library staff and Pierce County Library Foundation Board members reviewed the entries. Noted young adult author Brent Hartinger and poet Janet Wong chose this year's winners in three grade groupings (7th and 8th grade, 9th and 10th grade, and 11th and 12th grade). The judges reviewed the pieces for originality, style, general presentation, grammar, and spelling.

Pierce County Library Foundation awarded the winners with cash prizes and the winning entries are published in this book. Pierce County Library System gratefully acknowledged the support of the Pierce County Library Foundation, The News Tribune, Pierce County Arts Commission, and other community partners for continued support of the teen writing contest.

OUR OWN WORDS 2007

POETRY WINNERS

Grades 7 & 8

1st My Favorite Place

by Adria Olson

7th Edgemont JHS

2nd Bloody Sunday

by Chergai Castanza

7th Kopachuck MS

3rd My Green Cheetos Grandpa

by Marena Struttmann

8th Gault MS

Grades 9 & 10

1st Peter Pan Syndrome

by Kenna Clough

10th Mt. Rainier Lutheran HS

2nd Doll Man

by Kayley Rae

10th Spanaway Lake HS

3rd The End of Regret

by Tim Owen

10th Homeschool

Grades 11 & 12

1st Cadenza

by Katie Bunge

12th Stadium HS

2nd Malhumoured

by Stephanie Dering

12th Rogers HS

3rd Good Grammar

by Alyssa Win Christensen

11th Emerald Ridge HS

SHORT STORY WINNERS

Grades 7 & 8

1st Night of the Lions

by Sara Konu

7th Ford MS

2nd Fiddler's Tune

by Michelle Kester

8th Mason MS

3rd Sandpaper on Sandpaper

by Marissa Baker

8th Glacier MS

Grades 9 & 10

1st Skin Deep

by Katy Halone

9th White River HS

2nd Circus Tacoma

by Carolyn Anderson

9th Stadium HS

3rd Onward to Russia

by Christopher Adgar-Beal

10th Gig Harbor HS

Grades 11 & 12

1st Felo De Se

by Mia Mitchell

11th Sumner HS

2nd The Princess and the Ghost

by Jessie Roy

12th Emerald Ridge HS

3rd Mr. Fix-It

by Emily Anderson

11th Covenant HS

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POETRY

Grades 7 & 8

OUR OWN WORDS 2007

MY FAVORITE PLACE

Lights are out all around me and I pull the blanket closer to gain warmth.
I breathe in and out and watch my breath float away.
I lay back and look at the stars twinkling above me.
My heart does a flip when I hear a flower pot being tipped over
from my neighbor's driveway.
Just a cat.
I relax and look into the room underneath the skylight glass next to me.
I see darkness.
I hear silence.
The shingles underneath me are now so cold that I can barely stand it.
I crawl back through the window, into bed and fall into a dream.

Another rooftop night.

Adria Olson

Edgemont JHS, 7th Grade

BLOODY SUNDAY

They say
underneath Pettus bridge
that each and every camelia
spread its petals
to confine the blood
drops...
and the mucky Alabama river
sobbed and groaned.
They say
Flickers took flight
and gyred in the Alabama sky
and the earth cries out
but the only thing heard were whacks
of the batons, the crack of the broken bones
and screams and the noise of brutes
on a
Bloody Sunday

Chergai Castanza

Kopachuck MS, 7th Grade

MY GREEN CHEETOS GRANDPA

When Papa was alive,
I lived in Missouri and ate cheetos
that turned my tongue green,
as I sat in a big recliner chair.
Only 6 or 7,
I had diligently put my foot
smack dab in the middle of those cheetos,
and Grandpa had laughed
a deep belly laugh
that I still remember...

Marena Struttman

Gault MS, 8th Grade

POETRY

Grades 9 & 10

OUR OWN WORDS 2007

PETER PAN SYNDROME

The only thing left on a rainy day is an umbrella.
It won't take you anywhere itself, but you can use it to get
down the street.

Mary Poppins is dead – we mourn her when our eyes are
glued to the bed frame
As we sit in the corner by choice, not punishment.

Turn the lights out – there's no monsters,
No boogie-man, tooth fairy, Easter bunny, Santa Clause,
and everything else
They fed to us on cozy nights when all that mattered was
Lunchables vs. PB&J,
So turn them off; they just hurt our eyes now.

We're the next generation.
The wounded, the bled, the 90s kids with a taste for
self-pity.
It's just a scratch; we just fell down a few more times
than you did
And we wear it like an honor.

All the lies you fed us fuel us and drive us further than
we'd ever want to go.
We speed on like bullet trains with no brakes, no seatbelts,
no idea where we're taking us.
When we get there, we'll be sure to send you a postcard.
It should be lovely once we get this figured out.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

PETER PAN SYNDROME CONTINUED...

There's a light at the end of the tunnel? Sure, whatever
you say.

All we know is there was a light at the beginning that we
can't return to,

So we watch it sparkle and fade and fizzle out and we
don't dare forget;

It's all we've got for now, and it keeps us going for as long
as we let it.

Kenna Clough

Mt. Rainier Lutheran HS, 10th Grade

DOLL MAN

There is an ancient look to doll man
his leathery face sun-worn and beige
a gentle tone of focus
he walks among the brush and sage
he waits for the forgotten to be remembered once again
doll man i wait like you do, waiting for a distant friend
In the purple fields of jasmine
counting every tear they dry
in the summers long foresaken
basking in a sunny sky
from underneath the rowan
shading all the sin they hide
from the rivers still and frozen
waiting out their lives
there is a simple poise to doll man
wise beyond the knotting oak
patience in his painting
pleasure in the lifting smoke
he waits for silence broken, to become like murmers
of the wind
somedays i wait forever, hoping we can meet again

Kayley Rae

Spanaway Lake HS, 10th Grade

THE END OF REGRET

It's not about what you've done,
it's about what you can do.

This sound,
causes you to tremble.
This thought,
makes you remember.
And all the times
you said you'd never,
but instead
forgot forever,
and misinterpreted
the vows you made.
The easy way out
always seems to end in pain.
And all the times
you made a promise
and broke it again,
end today.

It's not about what you've done,
It's about what you will do.

Tim Owen

Homeschool, 10th Grade

POETRY

Grades 11 & 12

OUR OWN WORDS 2007

CADENZA

Dusk invades the nest
of my warm sheets
as a slink, as a slip,
as tender paw
and bony sway.

It settles on the same ratty blanket
and injects its claws into the
orifice between two cotton fibers
as a whisk, as a wisp,
as a whisper.

I burrow my nose into the
lavender hollow behind its
jawbone, listen to its pulse,
smell the musk, smell the moss,
smell the mouse.

And listen to its chanson,
sotto voce, sweet somnolence,
and surrender the nest
to exile in the cold
distant corner of the sheet.

Katie Bunge

Stadium HS, 12th Grade

MALHUMOURED

My nerves are larger than my veins.
Do you know what that means?
It means that my handwriting is not inherited,
That I look both ways twice before crossing the street.
That I go to the city to be excited,
That I want to vacation, not visit relatives.
When my mother speaks of intellectual arrogance, I feel
injured.
When I walk down the street, I listen and listen for music,
but it is swallowed in meaningless noise.

Stephanie Dering
Rogers HS, 12th Grade

GOOD GRAMMAR

You are the first and the last
sentence of my favorite novel,
innocent exclamation,
and comma kisses.

Don't make me imply a question mark,
Capitalize All Your Letters.
Let your words write themselves
on all my pages.

Alyssa Win Christensen

Emerald Ridge HS, 11th Grade

SHORT STORIES

Grades 7 & 8

OUR OWN WORDS 2007

NIGHT OF THE LIONS

Manyara Kaligari paced around the small wooden hut nervously. Outside, the African desert stretched for miles on endless mile in the dark, humid night. A scorpion scuttled across the huts earthen floor, its black shell glittered dangerously in the dim firelight. But even this ominous sign did not distract Manyara from her pacing.

On a small straw cot in the corner, her three sleeping siblings lay cuddled together, arms encircling one another. An hour before, Manyara had been sleeping as peacefully as they. Until her mother had woken her in the middle of the night, terrified. "Screaming. In the dark. Lions. Going to help," was the broken reply received when asked the problem.

So with that, her mother had rushed off into the night with a flaming torch held high above her head. Fear was etched into every line of her face.

In the wild untamed lands of Africa's deserts, lions prowled by even the busiest cities and towns, striking fear into everyone's hearts let alone a small family in a single hut, with no means of protection.

For the entire hour since her mother had gone, silence had reigned outside. Anxious looks through the cracks in the walls showed no sign of any life. Nor any signs of coming light. From sky or torch.

Manyara's sister, Yassar, stirred in her sleep and murmured something inaudible. Outside, the wind picked up the dust and howled mournfully into the room. Suddenly, Manyara's ears pricked as the wind brought an unwelcome sound. A long, drawn out scream pierced through the night like a blade. So terrified was the being making the sound that you could not tell whether it was man or woman, human or beast.

The youngest child, a boy named Jossu suddenly woke and

cried out, “Marmar! Where Marmar?” His older sister, Curi, whimpered with fright.

The two started to wail loudly and Manyara rushed to the pair, begging them to keep silent. Outside, the screams continued and the children could not be consoled. Finally, losing patience she snapped. “Hush, little ones! Let me listen!”

Another cry in the night, now more high pitched than before, sounded through the air, filling every space, every hollow of the room with dread, creeping into the very marrow of their bones and leaving them weighted down with their own fear. The children began to whimper again, but this time with self pity. But not Manyara, though she felt the drain as much as they did, she could only think of Mama.

Without thinking, she rushed to the door, undid the latch and ran off into the night, calling over her shoulder as she did so, “I’ll come back. Stay here and fasten the door behind me.”

And with that, she was enveloped into the swirling darkness and sand, much as her mother had an hour before.

Swiftly, Manyara padded across the cool sand, heading toward the place the screams had come from. She did not stop to think that a poisonous snake or scorpion could strike at her bare feet. Only thoughts of lions and her mother were on her mind.

After nearly 20 minutes of walking, more screams wailed through the night, this time, louder than before. With a sense of grim satisfaction, Manyara sped up, she was going the right way. But, fearing the worst, she broke into a run, sand flying in every direction. She ran like this for only 5 minutes before she smelled it.

It was a strong musty smell, overpowering, wild. It was the stench of a lion, coming ever closer. In her fear, Manyara’s legs suddenly stopped, her body paralyzed. Unable to stop herself in time, she was soon laying flat on her face in the sand. The smell of the lion grew stronger.

But then, as if some unseen force outside of her own, willed her to do so, she was up and running again. In the darkness she could dimly make out the shape of some barren trees and some poor excuses for bushes nestled beneath its dry and cracked branches. With the haste of one who knows fear, Manyara scrambled over to the thin undergrowth, her chest tightening with a prickling sense of panic that rose ever higher when the thud of animal pads beating the earth like Congo drums came closer.

Manyara, keeping her head, crouched into a ball at the foot of the bushes and managed to still her trembling body. As the thuds continued their approach, she felt sure that the sounds of her heart, beating heavily against her chest were leading the lion straight to her.

Or maybe not, even as she thought this, the steps grew fainter. After a few moments, she slowly unfolded her body and closed her eyes in relief. She was safe. There was no lion coming to get her.

Suddenly, something grabbed Manyara's arm in the darkness. Throughout the night air a shrill scream resounded. But it wasn't the same scream as before. No, this time it was her scream.

A voice yelled over her own, "Manyara! Hush! You will bring the lions!" She stopped and in the faint light of the stars, Manyara could make out her mothers shape. Such relief flooded into her body that it was all she could do to keep from crying.

"Mama?" she managed to choke out in a whisper.

"Yes." Came the weary reply.

"But...how? The screams..."

"Monkeys, Manyara, monkeys. The lions cornered them in that old tree that was struck by lightning. The lions kept snatching them down. Those screams..." her mother's voice broke as she shuddered uncontrollably.

“Manyara, please, I have lost my torch and the lions may still come. Let us go home and I will tell you the rest there.

Gladly, she nodded her assent and the pair walked swiftly and silently back to the hut. Three lions watched them reach the safe confines of four walls, before melting into the darkness.

Sara Konu

Ford MS, 7th Grade

FIDDLER'S TUNE

The little pauper stood at the corner of the street, fiddling many joyful tunes and smiling at the kindly townsfolk who walked by and occasionally dropped a small gold coin into the tin can that sat at his feet. As he played – as his long fingers danced along the finger board and his miniature bow skipped across the strings – the low notes would hum like that of a cooing pigeon and the high notes would sing out excitedly like that of the sweetest sparrow.

And every so often, as he played, a prestigious lord and his wife might stop by to inquire as to who had taught him to play so well. Yet when the boy would answer, his head held high and august, “I did!” he would receive a cynical look from the lord, who would then walk away, not stopping to drop a coin into the tin can. Undaunted, the boy would always smile, lift his fine instrument to his chin, and play a tune from the heavens.

The years passed by quickly, and soon the little pauper grew into a man, his instrument still singing like the angels. In fact, he still held his well-earned place at the corner of the street until, one chilly afternoon, when the sun was still gleaming brightly, another young boy walked up to the old fiddler and asked to be taught to play. Filled with pride as always, the fiddler grinned through his thick brown beard and handed the boy his instrument.

“Boy, I could teach anybody,” he said matter-of-factly.

With his new apprentice, the old fiddler spent less and less time outside, playing for the townsfolk. People began to wonder where he was. They even feared he had died, for although they were glad to be rid of his boastful nature, they had enjoyed his playing, and the streets felt empty without it. Still, the years continued to pass, and the fiddler's little apprentice learned quickly, determined to play just like his master. In fact, he

played so well, that soon he took the place of the old fiddler: standing at the corner of the street, playing cheerful melodies for the town, spreading happiness to all it's inhabitants.

Alas, the prideful old fiddler was forgotten, and he began to grow weary and jealous of the little pauper who had taken his place. Why should his apprentice receive so much more attention than he, the teacher? This question tugged at his thoughts unceasingly until the day came when he could not stand the sound of the boy's playing any longer.

Not bothering to retrieve his instrument or anything else, the fiddler left his apprentice and sat at the other side of the street to mope. There he sat for days, hands over his ears, not getting up even to eat. Now and then a person would walk by and, on seeing the pitiful, bygone old man, would reach out to him – sometimes with food, or drink – but he would just shoo them away, saying:

“What? You think I can't get along by myself?”

Then he would just slump back against the crooked, brick wall, empty-handed and starving.

Now the little pauper stood at the other side of the street and, having caught sight of his abating master, pale as bleach and starved nearly to death, set down his instrument and rushed hastily to the old fiddler's side.

That night, as he lay in his apprentice's arms, ill and quickly deteriorating, the old fiddler did not repulse the boy, for he had realized something: pride may keep him respectable, but it could never heal him.

The little apprentice dabbed a cool cloth on his master's forehead and whispered mournfully,

“Oh master, you mustn't go! You taught me everything! How will I ever learn to be as good as you?”

He struggled to hold in the well of tears that filled his eyes, but to the astonishment of the young apprentice, the fiddler

did not try to comfort the poor boy. Instead, he chuckled deeply and said with great effort,

“I don’t know how I ever let myself forget before. You don’t need me to teach you, boy. The Lord gave you a gift, and I have already taught you all I know. Just practice, and because of your humbleness, you will soon play better than I.”

Then he closed his eyes softly, letting himself go limp in the small arms of his apprentice.

For years to come, the new little fiddler stood at the corner of the street, fiddling many joyful tunes and smiling at the kindly townsfolk who walked by and occasionally dropped a small gold coin into the tin can that sat at his feet. As he played – as his long fingers danced along the finger board and his miniature bow skipped across the strings – the low notes would hum like that of a cooing pigeon, and the high notes would sing out excitedly like that of the sweetest sparrow.

And every so often, as he played, a prestigious lord and his wife might stop by to inquire as to who had taught him to play so well. Then, for a reason unknown to either the lord or his wife, the boy would not answer the same as the old fiddler had, but would stop playing and say, “my master did!” Satisfied, the lord and his wife would drop a small coin into the tin can and walk away as, again, the boy lifted the tiny fiddle to his chin and played a tune from the heavens.

Michelle Kester

Mason MS, 8th Grade

SANDPAPER ON SANDPAPER

Six-year-old Ben was riding his bike around the cul-de-sac. It was a blue bike, with black tires and Power Ranger on the sides and on the seat. He rode lazily around in a circle, then turned out of his cul-de-sac and peddled through the neighborhood, going faster and faster as he approached the highway. Ben turned onto the large, flat road. He was really going fast now. Wind whipped through Ben's hair and across his face as he soared past the other cars. There was a gigantic bike jump up ahead, the one his brothers used and that he couldn't. He steered towards it, grinning and gripping his handlebars tighter as he prepared to fly.

Ben's eyes opened.

He didn't know what it was that woke him up. It was in the middle of the night, judging by the color of the sky and by the fact there wasn't any light drifting in from the hallway. Daddy must have already gone to sleep. Ben stared around his room for a while then, deciding that he had nothing better to do, closed his eyes to go back to sleep.

A cold, soft wind brushed softly on Ben's face. He opened his eyes again. The window was open, and through it he could see snow on the pine trees, illuminated by the light of the full moon. Why was the window open? Daddy wouldn't open it in the middle of winter. But Ben was too tired to get up and close it, so again he let his eyes drift shut.

Something moved under his bed.

His eyes snapped open, adrenaline coursed through his veins. He pulled his blankets tighter around himself and turned over in his bed, trying his hardest not to let the mattress springs squeak.

He heard a soft hissing from beneath his bed, sounding at a

steady and slow tempo. A disgusting and sickly sweet smell curled out from beneath the bed, filling the room and Ben's nostrils. Panicked, Ben's breath came in short, animal-like gasps. He pulled his covers over his head and curled into the tightest ball that he could manage.

"Ben," rasped a voice from beneath the bed. He stifled a scream. His lungs burned from holding his breath, from trying to be quiet.

"Ben," repeated the mockingly sweet voice. "I know that you are up there."

"No I'm not," said Ben.

The voice laughed. "Come down here, Ben. I have a gift for you."

"I don't want your gift. Go away!"

"Why not? It is a very special gift. I got it just for you."

"I don't want it! Go away!"

The voice was silent. The minutes passed slowly, each one feeling like an eternity.

After what seemed like forever, Ben was positive that the thing had finally left him alone.

A few more moments of careful listening and Ben let his eyes drift shut.

"It's lonely down here."

Ben jumped. His eyes popped open.

"Will you come down and play with me?"

"No I won't." Go away and never come back!" Ben ordered.

"Go away?" Why would you want me to leave? I am your only friend."

"You're not my friend! I have lots of other friends! You're not one of them!"

"You are a liar. You do not have any friends. You are alone"

"I'm not alone!" stated Ben defiantly.

“You are not alone, Ben? Prove it. Name one of your so-called friends.”

“There’s...uh...”

“That proves it. I am your only friend.”

“You’re not my friend!” You’re not even real!” Ben smiled triumphantly. He got him now.

“I am not real, Ben? You can hear me. Who are you talking to if I am not real, hmm?”

“Daddy says you’re not real.”

“Your daddy didn’t mean it.”

“Yes he did.”

“Your daddy just told you that so that you would leave him alone. He wants to get rid of you. He does not like you.”

“Yes he does,” said Ben. He felt very small.

“He hates you.”

“Daddy loves me.” Ben’s voice was crackling. “He told me so.”

“Daddy lied.”

“No he didn’t. No he didn’t.” Hot tears welled up in Ben’s eyes. He wanted to scream, wanted Daddy to come and save him, but now he wasn’t so sure that Daddy would.

“No he didn’t, no he didn’t! mimicked the voice. It laughed, filling the room with a loud sound of sandpaper rubbing together. “Daddy hates you. You have no friends. You are alone.”

“Go away!” wailed Ben, “Leave me alone!”

The thing laughed louder, hurting his ears.

“Go away!” yelled Ben, “Go away, go away, go away, go away, GO AWAY, GO AWAY, GO AWAY!” Ben screamed, chanting the words over and over again.

Ben screamed until he felt as if his throat would catch on fire. He stopped, breathing heavily. He swallowed, trying to get

his sore, dry throat to stop burning.

After a few minutes, his breathing was back to normal and his throat was a little better.

Ben held his breath, straining to hear just the tiniest sound to confirm that the monster was still there. He allowed himself to breathe again and eased back down into his bed. He didn't remember sitting up or throwing his comforter off of himself.

Ben stayed rigid in his bed, eyes wide open and ears straining, for two long, terrifying hours. He didn't hear anything. No breathing, no talking, no moving. Just utter silence. He decided that he had to check to see if the thing was still there if he was to have any chance of sleeping again.

Ben slowly crawled out of his blankets. It was frigid in his room. The window was still open, letting in the cold winter air and a few lost snowflakes. He crawled to the edge of his bed and silently flopped down onto his stomach. Wiggling farther over the edge of the bed, Ben counted to three, then flipped his head down to look beneath him.

There was nothing there.

Ben let out a sigh of relief. It had finally gone. Smiling, he rolled back onto his bed, not bothering to be quiet. Yanking his comforter back over himself, he snuggled deeper into his blankets, glad to be out of the winter cold. He rolled over a few times, and, finding himself a comfortable sleeping position, closed his eyes to go back to sleep.

Something dripped onto Ben's face.

His eyes popped open and he stared in horror at the terrible monstrosity that clung, spider-like, to the ceiling above him.

It was a decaying, rotting, skinless corpse. Beads of blood were dripping off of the skinless figure like sweat onto Ben's Power Rangers comforter. It smiled, lipless mouth and exposed jaw muscles turning and twisting into something that could barely be qualifies as a grin. But the worst things were the eyes.

They were dark, obsidian-like, shiny orbs. There wasn't any white or any other color, just those piercing black eyes that made Ben feel like he was drowning. The eyes stared mercilessly down upon him, the mouth twisted into a more sinister smile. It laughed, filling the air with the loud sound of sandpaper on sandpaper

Marissa Baker

Glacier MS, 8th Grade.

SHORT STORIES

Grades 9 & 10

OUR OWN WORDS 2007

SKIN DEEP

Chloe Taylor picked up her Marc Jacobs handbag from her dresser and took one last look in the mirror before heading downstairs.

I'm ready for this, she thought to herself.

Chloe walked out the front door. She took out her Sidekick III, dialed a number and put the phone to her ears.

"Hi, Dr. Madison?"

"This is his receptionist. What can I do for you?"

"This is Chloe. Could you just tell him I'll be there in ten minutes?"

"I'll do that, Chloe. See you in a bit."

Chloe put her phone away and hopped into the brand new Nissan 350Z her parents got for her 16th birthday. Growing up affluently in California definitely had its perks.

Chloe took the 101 for five minutes, and then exited. She arrived at her doctor's office exactly 10 minutes later.

"Hi, Chloe." The receptionist greeted her when she walked in. "Whenever you're ready, Dr. Madison will see you."

"Thanks." Chloe bit her lower lip, then put a smile on to overpower her struggling emotions.

She made her way past a group of patients who were sitting – waiting – desperately for perfection in some form; patients didn't visit Doctor Madison in Beverly Hills for just any reason. He was the most elite facial re-constructive doctor in the world. Among his patients were celebs like Brooke Shields and Ashlee Simpson.

Chloe wasn't a bandwagon girl. She didn't do what other people did. Chloe was more like a trendsetter. Recently the sun-bleached blonde found herself unhappy when she looked

into the mirror, which had never happened to her before.

She wanted more – more than just ‘okay’. Chloe decided now was the time to accomplish the perfection she had wanted.

“Hi, Dr. Madison. I’m really happy you could get me in so soon.” Chloe said, taking the tall, 50-something doctor’s hand.

“Well, I’m happy to have you here, Chloe. Let’s step into the next room and get started.” His soft voice reassured her.

Chloe walked into the white operating room and took a seat.

“Rhinoplasty, the type of nose job you’re getting, isn’t too complicated of a procedure. First, I’m going to give you an anesthetic, along with a sleeping pill. This will keep you from feeling anything. Soon after that, you’ll be out.

“Next, I’m going to peel back the skin that separates your nostrils, called the columella. Then I’ll shave your cartilage to get the desired shape you want. It’s pretty simple.”

Chloe winced. The thought of it grossed her out.

“Sounds good,” she lied.

Dr. Madison put her chair back.

“I read the information packet. My friend Chelsea will be driving me home,” Chloe said.

“Good. Are you ready to get started then?”

Inside she battled with herself – Chloe had wanted this surgery so bad, but if she went through with it, it would be going against her parents’ wills. They had debated it for weeks. They told her she should be happy with herself. But they didn’t understand; growing up in Beverly Hills was tough. Everybody expected so much out of you. It was a Prada-eat-Prada handbag world; every girl wanting to be prettier than the next.

“Chloe?” Dr. Madison interrupted her thought process.

“Yes?”

“I said, ‘Are you ready to get started?’” Dr. Madison handed her two pills – one blue, one white. Chloe downed them both with water.

“I need to check up on something. I’ll be back in about 15 minutes. Push the red button on the chair if you need anything,” he said, and then left the room.

Two hours later, Chloe sat on Chelsea’s bed, her head on a pillow. She lifted her fingers to her nose, and wondered how she was going to get away with this. She wasn’t at home, simply because she had to avoid her parents. It wasn’t like you could pull off getting away with a nose job; not with a huge bandage over your nose for a few days.

Six days later, the sound of Hilary Duff’s voice woke Chloe up. It was finally time to go in and get the bandage removed.

Chloe hadn’t seen her parents for almost a week. They were corporate lawyers and interior designers with busy schedules.

Once again, Chloe got into her Nissan and drove to Dr. Madison’s.

Skipping the wait once again, she sat back down into the familiar chair.

“How did everything go? Did you feel any pain?” Doctor Madison asked, after some small talk.

“Actually, no – I thought it would really hurt, but it didn’t.”

“That’s good. I’m just going to take the bandage off now. It might hurt a tiny bit.”

“All right,” Chloe said, taking a deep breath.

Dr. Madison slowly peeled back the bandage. He held a mirror up for Chloe to see.

“Wow – it looks good! I love it!” Chloe finally made peace with the voice inside that told her she wasn’t good enough for Beverly Hill’s shallow standards.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. I really do like it.”

“Chloe. I didn’t do the surgery. You are too beautiful for that.”

Chloe stared.

“Your nose is perfect. It’s the epitome of why people get nose jobs,” he explained.

“Oh. Thank you, Dr. Madison. I truly mean it.” Chloe’s eyes watered. “I guess I just got too caught up in the whole beauty-rush thing.”

“You’re welcome, Chloe. Drive home safely.” Once again, Dr. Madison’s gentle voice reassured her.

Chloe exited Dr. Madison’s office and got into her car. She looked into the rearview mirror. Her parents were going to like her nose; they always had.

For once in a long time Chloe was happy. Happy with herself, inside and out.

Katy Halone

White River HS, 9th Grade

CIRCUS TACOMA

My city is shrinking. It began, I think, when Kate moved here. Her parents divorced this summer and as a result, Kate and her mom moved from her roomy house in Steilacoom to a townhouse just off of 6th Ave. I love Kate: she has been my best hooligan friend since we got out of diapers. I always knew that the city would disappear with the last traces of childhood. Kate and I have grown up in these past months, and we have become familiar with this city in a new way. Downtown has become a real place to me for the first time: navigable, non-mutable, the city will stick and remain where I pin it on a map. Kate and I drive home now, and in my mind the streets connect with each other for the first time.

When we are little, every time we step out of our home we land in a fairytale. At every aisle in the grocery store, we peer around for the place to trade our plastic money for the magic beans that will grow us the path to the goose that lays golden eggs. When a child steps out of the house, she has no way of telling whether this time she will wander into the misty forest at the edge of her imagination. For me as a child, downtown was not a place I visited regularly, and I associated it with mysterious New Year's festivals of dancing pigs and strange food. When I stepped out of the car in the city, I stumbled down a hill that might lead wherever I could imagine.

My city was a playground of glittering childhood reminiscings that flutter in the wind of my memory. Sometimes a corner of memory catches to the side of a building downtown; sometimes two squares come together for a quilt of reality. Kate and I shed quaint curiosities like dead skin as we move into a place vibrant with people, lives escaped from the mannequin zoos I recall. Shops are no longer the Far East but instead the vintage store down the street where we go to hear our guitar-playing peers on Friday nights. My magic

shops are immortalized with an address and a dot on Kate's mental map.

My rediscovery of the real city comes at the price of giving up forever how our car used to roll down the paved knees of giants into the dip-dyed skirt of the Sound where I curiously eyed the barges which carried mysterious treasures. My eyes now rove outside the school windows, bay windows in more than one sense. The word plays that once delighted me daily now rarely surprise me; they are afterthoughts in English assignments.

The New York that Holden Caulfield had in that teen classic was similar to my childhood dream. That was his problem: he couldn't give up the glittering city of his childhood...his red hunting hat sticks out like a beacon to me, one of the vivid details only the fairytale mind thinks of...red hat, red slippers, Kate's red hair. Teenagers come back to reread *The Catcher in the Rye* because they hope that time will stop on the carousel, that Holden and Phoebe will pause forever in their beautiful tableau. "The way she kept going round and round, her blue coat," was "just so damn nice." The colors in childhood books and dreams shine so brightly, so terribly, but they can't last. Let me go back to that wonderland again, with my wide wonder eyes restored. Let me view this city-maze with marvel once more before I plunge into my sunny, pop-song singing reality. Fairy godmother, cast your spell once more and summon me into my past, into the past of this city. Pick any spot you like. Throw up your roulette wheel tiara.

I wander into downtown, and I cannot believe this school is real. I stare at the jungle gym castle that Kate and I tramp so diligently and realistically around, up and down and up again, the stairs twist towards an unknown 4th floor, the blank space of dragons. Downstairs we escape from monsters on coffee breaks in the small sanctuaries Kate and I have found and claimed here, lining them with buttons and pencil shavings to keep them safe from irate teachers and fire-breathers alike.

I move on down unnamed, twisty streets. Space is irrelevant, irreverent, in this place where youth-giving fountains appear behind corners, in alleys and busy thoroughfares. The green things seem to be shattering concrete in their eagerness to tickle rain from the clouds, and I could stay here forever.

No, I can't. It's too late for me. No matter how much I try, I will never enjoy that particular city again. It's over now, and no matter how much Holden tries, he can never get back on that golden merry-go-round. "You ride once, too, this time," Phoebe offers, and he refuses, wisely. He'll only hurt himself if he reaches for the golden ring this time. Kate knows this, and I know this too, but it's difficult to resist trying once more. I will learn Kate's ease of communion with these new-old places, and her banter with shop owners and waitresses. At sixteen we must smash our handbags against the glassy fairy worlds of downtown and enter a world of traffic lights, mail-boxes, and regular customers. My fairy godmothers lie down again on the park bench, hair snarled artfully. Their plastic fingernails click together as they clutch their mangy grocery bags like sacks of golden eggs.

Comforting rain and bright farmer's market bouquets, they will lull the girl who remains splashing in the fountain of youth; they will lull her back into her nestled dreams of glass apples, pigeons, freedom. Better go to sleep, Carolyn, my mother used to warn me, or the tooth fairy will never come at all. Better not sleep too long in your memories, or they'll cling to your feet and trap you. If I linger here in this variety box of surprises, I may find out more than I want to about my pretty little place. Though enchanted forests make good locations for quests, they seem to resent settlers. A sea monster rises from the Sound, flips a Tall Ship over with the tip of his spiked tail. The snake-haired lady and her army of plaid-patterned school girls advance hostilely upon Kate and me as we step back into this world. The flowers and weeds that I admired as they grew begin to snarl around my feet. At the last minute, Kate reaches

out and pulls me away. We bow out and close the velvet-lined door softly behind ourselves, stepping into a new city of sunshine, where there are no godmothers or golden geese, and a mannequin is just a mannequin after all. As Kate and I climb into her car, however, I discover that the colors of this new city shine just as brightly as the nightmares I have left behind. The real downtown is exotic in its own right and our independence is intoxicating. I find that after all, there are still so many mysteries left to us.

Carolyn Anderson

Stadium HS, 9th Grade

ONWARD TO RUSSIA

The old German soldier placed his hand on his cold helmet as the explosion rocked the ground near him wildly, sending small chunks of frozen rock and plaster flying everywhere. Automatic gunfire whizzed overhead. It was late December 1944. The Russians had been pounding the small German town of Gleiwitz with artillery for days on end, and they did not seem to be letting up. The women and children had been evacuated, including the soldier's wife, Marie, and their three children. He knew they were safe, but he wasn't so sure about himself. The German defenses were beginning to break under the unrelenting assault, and he didn't know how long they were going to last. He clutched the smooth wood of the K98 Mauser in his right hand, the only thing in this entire town that seemed to be his friend. But just as he needed it, he loathed it as well. It was the reason he was here fighting, not safe with his family in their once-quiet home that now had a smoking crater for a bathroom. He, like many other Germans he knew, was skeptical of Hitler's war and the true reasons behind it. But he had to fight; he had no choice. As a retired officer, he had been reinstated in the military after the start of WWII. If he had refused, Hitler's SS would have come to his home and... well, it was best not to think about. In fact, it was a good idea not to think about anything else but survival at the time; because that was the thing he desired most. The soldier shook his head to return his mind to the fight at hand. He spotted a small group of Russians making a charge for cover to the south. He raised his rifle to his shoulder, aimed carefully, and fired. A white-clad Russian fell to the ground, but it didn't matter. It seemed that for every one that was killed, two more replaced him. The soldier knew it was only a matter of time before the weakening defenses crumbled completely and the town fell. He worked the bolt on his rifle; ejecting the bullet casing, and aimed again. BANG!! But it was not the report from

a rifle he heard. It was the explosion of an artillery shell just ten feet behind him. His ears rang. He turned in the direction of the explosion just in time to see a large rock flying at him. Then, everything went black.

The soldier awoke with a start to see a fierce bearded face looking him in the eye. He jolted upright with his hands in the air and yelled "Bitte!" He hoped that the Russian knew what it meant and didn't take his plea for mercy as a threat. But the Russian didn't flinch; he just made a sweeping hand motion that the soldier understood as a command to stand up. As soon as he got to his feet and looked around he saw many of his comrades lying on the ground near him. Some clearly dead, others wounded or unconscious. It seemed the shell that knocked him out had wreaked havoc on his squad as well. It was very quiet, offset only by his ringing ears and aching head. The soldier wondered why. He looked around and saw that on the street to his left handcuffed German soldiers were slowly walking, led by their Russian captors. The town had finally fallen. The Russian standing next to him quickly bound his hands with rope and led him to the line with the others. The soldier had no other choice but to walk. A Russian translator came down the line, explaining in intervals where they were going. They would be leaving the front lines to go to a train station that would transport them to a POW camp in Russia. The soldier's heart sank. He had heard horror stories of the occurrences in Russian camps: beatings, torture, and starvation. Why couldn't he have been captured by the Americans? At least they had some respect for their prisoners. To the Russians the soldier might as well have been dead already. He lowered his eyes to the snowy ground and put one foot in front of the other, step after heavy thudding step. He knew that he had a long, bleak trek ahead of him.

For five days the Russians forced their German captives to march through the frigid, snowy countryside. For five days they were hungry. For five days they were tired. For five days they hoped and prayed that the war would soon be over and

they would be allowed to go home. Then they arrived at the town with the train station and all hopes were lost. They knew that many of them would not be coming back. The soldier slowly stepped onto the train. It was cold. The soldier had never known real cold until now. Five days trekking through snow had given him the worst of fevers, and he knew the cold train would only make it worse. As the train started, none of the men talked. They were alone with their thoughts. Unfortunately, many of the soldier's thoughts failed to reach him through his feverish haze, so slowly, he fell asleep. It was a deep sleep. A comforting one. The first real sleep he had in weeks. He never woke up. My great grandfather, Adolph Erlin, passed away January of 1945 on a prison train headed to Russia. His wife and children remained in Germany after the end of the war. My grandmother, Annemie, moved to the United States after she met my American grandfather, who was stationed in Germany as a U.S. platoon leader after the war to prevent the Nazis from uprising again. My great grandfather can rest easily knowing that his family is safe and his beloved Germany did not succumb to Nazi rule after all.

Christopher Adgar-Beal

Gig Harbor HS, 10th Grade

SHORT STORIES

Grades 11 & 12

OUR OWN WORDS 2007

FELO DE SE

I used to be happy. Maybe not happy. But not like this. This is insanity.

“Spare a brother some change?” He asked, holding out a dirty tin can. He wore gloves that had once been green with the fingers cut out.

I didn't make eye-contact with him, but instead stepped over him. I knew I'd end up like him if I didn't get out of this lifestyle, get away from this city. If I had believed in karma, I would've given the guy something. But I tried not to believe in karma. I had wronged too many people.

I walked into a shady liquor store. The guy at the counter asked for ID before he would let me buy the bottle of vodka, so I took out my fake ID and slapped it down on the counter with a click. It said I was 21, but the guy knew I was 17. He handed me the vodka wrapped in a brown paper bag.

Out on the busy street, I dodged my way through the moving maze of yellow cars. I maneuvered around the mass of black plastic garbage bags that had been thrown out on the street. I accidentally kicked one of the bags and half a dozen glossy rats scurried out. They made me start a little, but that was all. I wasn't afraid of the rats.

I went up the fire escape of the crumbling apartment building and slipped once on a slimy patch. My hand gripped the rail to keep me from falling. The fire escape creaked and rust flaked off in my hand.

I knocked on the fourth floor window. She came over and unlocked it for me, sliding it up.

“Rent's due.” She said.

“Do we have it?” I asked.

“Half of it. Maybe less.” I handed over the vodka.

“What’s this?” She asked.

“Salvation in a bottle.”

I climbed into the bare room and sat on the torn up couch. She sat down next to me and opened the bottle. She took a deep swig.

“We’re friends, right?” She said, knowing my reply.

“Yep.” I took the bottle and had a drink myself.

“Nothing more. Just best friends.”

I took another drink. “Best friends ‘til the end.” I said. I spotted her heels and fishnet tights thrown into a corner of the room.

“You missed a spot.” I said, and taking my finger, I rubbed at the corner of her mouth where a smudge of bright red lipstick still lingered. She cursed and took another drink.

“It never completely comes off.” She stared blankly at where a TV used to be. Suddenly, she remembered something. “Oh, shit.” She got up and went into the bedroom, and came back a moment later. “I forgot to take my pill.” She flopped back down on the couch and put her birth control and another pill into her mouth and washed it down with a gulp of vodka.

We sat there and drank the bottle down in silence, watching the night fall on the city outside our dusty window. We shared a few cigarettes, feeling alone.

“I love you.” She said.

“You’re drunk.” I replied.

“I know, but I’ve loved you for a long time.”

“I try not to notice.”

“So.”

“So?”

“Do you love me?” She looked hopeful. I looked away.

I thought about this. I knew what the answer was, but I couldn't bring myself to say it. It would change everything. Admitting it would bring pain every time I saw her walk out the door for work. It would make it harder to pretend not to hear her cry at night. Harder to watch her waste away. Harder to watch her block out the city with pills, or vodka, or needles.

I couldn't tell her. Because once you admit something, you can never take it back. And in this life, you can't love anyone. Because loving will just kill you faster.

“It's dark. You better get ready for work.” I said finally. I couldn't look at her face.

She nodded and grabbed her shoes and tights from the corner and hurried into the bedroom. She had left the door open and I heard her taking more pills. She came out.

“We could be together you know.” She was swaying slightly as she spoke, teetering precariously on high heels. She stumbled and her skirt came up a little. She wasn't wearing underwear and I felt a familiar rush of blood.

She saw me close my eyes, and laughed.

“You did that on purpose, didn't you.” I said

She just giggled.

“We're better off that way.”

“What way?”

“Together.”

“How do you figure.”

She shrugged and walked into the bathroom and flicked on the light. Her voice echoed at me from the bathroom. “It'd be nice to have a companion in this big city.”

“I am your companion.”

She giggled. “You know what I mean.”

I settled back on the couch and thought about her offer, one that I had always contemplated on nights like these. Even through my happy alcohol buzz, I knew it would never work out. No matter how much I wished it would. Gawd. I needed to get out of this city.

I heard a loud crash in the bathroom. I ran in to find her passed out on the floor. I made sure she wasn't dead. Her lipstick was still clutched in her hand. It had made a bright red streak on her cheek, like a gash, when she fell.

I looked at her.

Gawd, I had to get out.

I took the lipstick from her hand and scrawled "goodbye" on her arm in messy, bright red letters.

I grabbed the rent money, and whatever other cash I could find lying around and went out the window and down the fire escape.

I hailed a yellow car and slumped in.

"Where to?"

"Out."

"Where's that?"

"I don't know."

"How 'bout the airport?"

"OK."

I rolled down the window and inhaled the night air like it was cocaine. It cleared my head a little. We passed through Time's Square. There were a lot of people around. You could tell which ones were the tourists because they walked and gazed at all the lights. The people that lived in the city just walked. I tried to look at the billboards but the bright lights made my head swim like a bad trip.

I saw a few rats scurry here and there amidst the piles and piles of black garbage bags that lined the square. They never showed you that part of the city on TV,

I thought the driver would complain about the smell or something what with the windows being rolled all the way down and all, but he didn't. He was a nice guy.

I saw a girl dressed like my ex-friend back at the apartment. I told the driver to pull over and he did. I paid him. He looked a little mournfully at me before pulling away.

I caught the attention of the girl and we went into a decent alley.

Happily ever after below the waist.

Mia Mitchell

Sumner HS, 11th Grade

THE PRINCESS AND THE GHOST

There was supposed to be a happy ending. Rose knows this, as surely as she knows the lore of the flower for which she is named. She knows her own story from start to finish, and remembers exactly what happened to make it all go wrong.

The ghost, on the other hand, remembers nothing, not even that he is a ghost. He smiles at her, and extends a gallant arm, like the prince he once was. *Care to come to the garden, Princess? The flowers are very beautiful today.*

Rose smiles back, and pretends to take the ghost's insubstantial arm, and with a practiced stride keeps pace with him to the garden. She will never tell.

“There once was a princess,” Rose says, “who was under a curse from the very day she was born. She grew to seventeen and was very beautiful, but the curse made her prick her finger on a – a funny spinning thing like a rose thorn, and fall asleep.

This is the beginning of her story, and it is always the same. The ghost asks it of her in the hope that, if he does not recall her rescue, perhaps she might. It is invariably a vain hope.

“When she woke up, she was trapped inside a tower with only a white rose for company – the only white rose in the world. So every day she watered it and waited for her prince to come. All around the tower grew hundreds of wild thorny rosebushes whose thorns killed anyone who tried to pass. But after a hundred years had passed, a prince with a heart as pure as a white rose came riding by. He, too, tried to reach the tower, and because his heart was so pure the roses bloomed for him and let him pass safely.”

She hesitates. And what then? the ghost pleads.

“I don't remember,” Rose lies. “I don't remember at all.

I wish I did.”

The ghost smiles, clearly disappointed. *It's all right*, he says, gently. *We'll give it time. I'm sure one of us will remember, someday.*

Someday. Rose walks in the garden, alone for once, and is careful not to look at the shriveled rosebush with its single cut stem. There are no white roses in this garden. There are no white roses anywhere. This is another thing the ghost does not know, and another thing Rose will not tell him.

“Tell who?” A small golden snake by the path raises its head and flickers its tongue at her. “Here, Princess, by the path.”

“Hello, little snake,” Rose says politely, only a little surprised. “Was I talking to myself? I’m sorry. I often-”

“Brood about your tragic fate? Yes, I know. I know a lot of things, Princess. I am a dragon, after all.”

Rose nearly smiles at the little snake’s blatant lie. “What would a snake – I mean, a dragon – know about tragic fates?”

“Plenty. My ancestors kept princesses as pets, you know, and most of them came to quite tragic ends. But in this case, I think it might be because I’ve been watching you play with your little ghost-Prince.” The snake eyes her slyly. “Hardly an intelligent thing to do, Princess.”

“No, I suppose a dragon wouldn’t understand kindness,” Rose retorts, stung.

“Kindness? Do you really believe that?” The snake’s eyes glitter bright black. “Do you love him, this ghost of yours? Would you die for him? Because you are dying, Princess, one slow day at a time, wearing your life away inside this tower.”

“The door is locked!” Rose protests. “I was never saved. How can I – ”

“Did you ever try it?”

Suddenly, Rose realizes she never has. The realization takes

her breath away like a bucket of cold water dumped over her head. "I...never. But that changes nothing. I deserve to die here, for killing him... and the rose..."

The snake sighs a hissing sigh. "There is one rose left, *Princess*, and her life you can still save."

Rose understands him perfectly, this strange, lying little reptile. "She will die for her sin, snake," she replies bitterly, and turns to walk inside. But then there is a sound of sudden thunder, and she whirls to see wings wide and golden and a serpentine tail already disappearing into the vast blue sky.

The ghost is quiet when she comes in, but he looks up and smiles. *Hello, Princess.*

"I found the ending," Rose says, nervous. "In the garden. Would... would you like to hear it now?"

Ah! The ghost pats the stone bench. *Yes, come, sit by me.* Rose does and he lays his hand over hers. Rose shivers a little; she can see the faint outline of his hand over hers, but she can't *feel* it.

"There once was a princess," she starts. "A princess who was locked in a tower, her only companion a single white rose. She waited a hundred years for someone to let her out, but no one came, for the tower was surrounded by thorny rosebushes that killed anyone who tried to enter. Finally, a prince tried to reach the tower, and because his heart was as pure as a rose, the real ones bloomed for him and let him pass."

She stops and takes a deep breath. She has never told this part of the story, before, and she wants to get it right.

"When the princess saw the prince coming, she was so happy that she wanted to give him a gift of the only thing she had. She took a knife and cut the white rose and ran out to give it to the prince. But he died because the rose was his heart and the princess had taken it away by accident. The princess ran back into the tower... and the ghost – the ghost of the prince followed her..."

Oh, the ghost says. *Oh, I remember now*. And even as Rose watches, he fades until he can hardly be seen. “I’m sorry,” she says helplessly. “It’s all my fault – I’m so, so sorry...”

Don’t be, the ghost says. He is almost entirely gone now, but if Rose looks hard she can still see him glimmering against the light. *It wasn’t your fault. I forgive you...*

And just like that, he is gone.

After that, there is nothing left to do but leave. Rose doesn’t have much to pack. She marches down to the tower door, and... stops, with her hand on the handle. How, she suddenly wonders, did she open the doors when the prince came? It seems the dragon was right, and that she could have left at any time. She’ll never know for sure, now.

She opens the doors, and light floods in. Instead of a blooming, thorny tangle, Rose can see plains, rolling green hills, a forest, and what might be the sea glittering far off in the distance. For a moment she stares at the empty sky and the vast expanse of land, so different from the tower she has known for a century. Then, gathering her courage, she finally steps out the door, and doesn’t look back.

THE END

Jessie Roy

Emerald Ridge HS, 12th Grade

MR. FIX-IT

“Come on...” Drew said with a wrinkled brow as he struggled to tighten a screw on the new baby crib. With the Jacobs’s baby coming in a couple weeks, Mandie and Michael needed the baby room ready.

“Blasted screw,” he muttered while coaxing the last screw into place.

“Come on...ah hah!” he patted the crib in triumph, “All done.” Standing up, his gray-blue eyes wandered around the room. The walls were covered with every animal imaginable, painted to match the curtains and bedding.

Placing his tools in his belt, he closed the door and headed to his forest green pickup truck. As Drew looked at his watch, he calculated now long it would be until he could stop at Fred’s ice cream shop for one of his famous banana splits drowning in Hershey’s syrup and whipped cream.

I need to fix the Finnley’s dryer and check out the Peterson’s sink. And who knows how long that will take. Their pipes are as old as Methuselah. Running his hands through his sandy brown hair, he tossed his things in the truck and headed for the Finnley’s.

**

Lifting the first bite of banana split into his mouth, he spotted Tammy walk into Fred’s. After making her order, she walked toward his booth.

“Hey, sis.” Drew said. She plopped her purse down next to her on the booth and flipped her long blonde hair behind her.

“Hi, Drew. Done for the day?” She questioned with a raised brow, pointing to his banana split.

“Yep, The Jacobs’s room is done, and I’ve finally convinced the Finnley’s to get new piping for their sink. I’ll install it

tomorrow." Tammy nodded, holding her head in her hand, elbow resting on the table.

Drew asked, "So what's going on with you?"

"I came to pick up some of the Peanut Butter Fudge ice cream for Molly's birthday on Tuesday." Tammy replied. Her eyelids drooped, veiling the worn look in her eyes.

"Have you still been getting those headaches?" he inquired with close drawn brows.

"Yes," she replied, "I've had a few on and off."

"When do you get the results back from the doctor?" Drew said.

"They should be done by tomorrow."

"Good." Drew asked, "Oh by the way, how is your furnace working now?"

"Like a charm," she said. "You're the ultimate Mr. Fix-it. It was really beginning to get cold the last week or so."

"*Tammy!*" Fred called, "Got your ice cream."

Tammy gave Drew an apologetic smile saying, "Well, I'd better go. I've got some other errands to do before tomorrow's party."

Drew said, "I've got to be getting home anyway. See you later, sis."

**

"How old are these pipes anyway?" Drew wondered as he pried them out from under the sink.

RING! RING! Drew jumped and hit his head on the sink cupboard.

"Ouch," he said as he touched his bruised head. He reached for his cell phone.

Tammy? She never called him this time of day. He gulped. She got her tests back today. Quickly, he called her back.

"Tammy?" Drew said.

"Drew, I need to talk to you. In person. Can you come by?"

Tammy's voice was scratchy and she sounded about ready to cry. Tammy never cried.

"I'm coming." Finishing the sink in record time, Drew hurried out the door.

**

Their faces said it all. Both Tammy and her father stood there with the saddest eyes he'd ever seen. Speaking around the lump in his throat, Dad broke the tense silence and said, "She has a rare kind of tumor."

The grief overwhelmed him. No. Not Tammy. "What did they suggest for treatment?"

"They are going to do radiation," Dad replied, "but..."

Drew held his breath. "But what?" he asked.

"With the kind of cancer she has, they don't think it will help."

Not help? What is she going to do? And what about Jack and the kids? Little Molly is only five- the same age I was when Mom died.

Drew's mother had died in a fire. There was a glitch in the stove and it started a fire that quickly spread throughout the whole house. She was the only one who didn't survive. From then on, he determined to learn how to fix anything so that would never happen again.

But how can someone do anything about cancer – especially if even the doctor's don't think they can help her? What could he do? Thinking of the pain it would cause – not just her but Jack, her husband and her kids and friends – it was too much.

And of all people, why Tammy? Pain and fear gripped his heart. He couldn't lose her! He couldn't! What could he do? It was completely out of his control. He hated it.

Tammy touched his shoulder, and as he raised his eyes to hers, he held her, trying to hold back the grief.

**

That night, Drew entered his house with a blank stare and a numb spirit. Dropping his stuff on the floor, he stumbled over to his armchair and sank into it with a weary sigh. He stared at the wall. A thought overwhelmed him. And consumed his thoughts.

I can't do anything!

Emily Anderson

Covenant HS, 11th Grade